

Youth policy in Moldova



Youth policy in Moldova

An international review

**Conclusions of the Council of Europe
international review team**

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Contents

Executive summary	5
Preface	9
Methodology	11
Research for and structure of the report	13
1. Introduction to Moldova	17
2. Youth and youth policy in Moldova	23
2.1 Legislation	23
2.2 Youth policy	26
2.3 Institutions for delivery of youth policy	28
Vertical delivery	28
National youth organisations	29
The National Youth Council	30
International NGOs and donors	31
Horizontal structure	31
Reflection	31
2.4 Public budget for the Youth Year activities	32
3. Youth organisations and political representation	35
3.1 Rural and urban youth NGOs	38
3.2 Regional youth organisations	41
4. Key domains of youth policy	45
4.1 Non-formal learning	45
4.2 Transition to the labour market (education, training and employment)	49
4.3 Entrepreneurship	55



5. Other youth policy domains	61
5.1 Health issues.....	61
5.2 Social protection and social security issues.....	64
5.3 Criminal situation and youth justice.....	66
5.4 Sport and leisure.....	68
6. Transversal issues	73
6.1 Transnistriar egion.....	73
6.2 Migration	75
6.3 Urban–rural division	77
7. Cross-cutting issues	79
7.1 Participation and citizenship.....	79
7.2 Social inclusion	81
7.3 Youth information	84
8. Supporting mechanisms for youth policy	87
8.1 Research	87
8.2 Professional training.....	88
8.3 The dissemination of good practice.....	90
8.4 Evaluation and monitoring criteria	91
9. Conclusion	93
Recommendations.....	94
Bibliography	103
Appendix 1 – Programme of the first visit to Moldova	107
Appendix 2 – Programme of the second visit to Moldova	109





Executive summary

The international review of youth policy in Moldova is part of the Council of Europe's series of youth policy reviews; Moldova is the 16th country to have been reviewed since 1997. The report is thus based on the experience gained from the previous reviews undertaken in several countries in both eastern and western Europe, including one country from the Commonwealth of Independent States (Armenia). Since these reviews were published they have, over the past decade, become an important part of the body of knowledge that is needed in order to further develop the thinking behind youth policy in an evidence-based and informed way and to develop implementation strategies for the policy. Two synthesis reports, prepared after the seventh and 14th reviews respectively, highlighted both common topics and significant differences in the thinking behind and approaches to national youth policy in Europe (see Williamson 2002; 2008). The review process consists of the production of a national report, followed by an international report prepared by a delegation of experts on the basis of two visits to the country. The first visit to Moldova took place in June 2008, when the team visited the capital city and areas outside of Chişinău. The second visit took place in November 2008. It included contact with youth policy actors in some southern and western regions situated a considerable distance from the capital, as well as some in Chişinău itself.

This report is based on a cross-sectoral understanding of youth policy. The focus lies on youth policy structures, youth education (formal and especially non-formal), youth transition to the labour market and entrepreneurship. There is also an overview of policy related to social security (health and social protection, childcare), youth justice and sport, while the areas of values and religion, leisure time, housing and military service have been dealt with in less detail or omitted altogether. In terms of transversal issues, attention has been paid to migration, urban–rural division and the Transnistria issue. A special chapter is dedicated to cross-cutting issues (youth information, youth participation, and social inclusion).

It is important to mention some particularities related to Moldova as an independent state.

First, the Republic of Moldova is a member state of the Council of Europe. Therefore, all the recommendations resulting from the research and observation undertaken by the international team can be of significant value for the Moldovan





Government, which is striving for good and productive relationships with other Council of Europe countries. It also means that all the decisions taken by the Council of Europe in the sphere of youth policy are of relevance for Moldova's commitment to the development of its own youth policy.

Second, 2008 was proclaimed as the “Year of Youth” in Moldova by Presidential Decree No. 1451-IV on 26 December 2007.¹ The government therefore established a special programme of youth activities for 2008 and invited the Council of Europe team to share their European experience and contribute to the improvement of the youth policy in the country. Indeed, the younger generation represents hope and great potential for the future of Moldova; investing in youth means securing the very existence of the country. Youth policy is undoubtedly viewed by the Government of the Republic of Moldova as one of the most important governmental activities. It has visible strategic importance because of the extremely difficult situation in respect of migration. If the government fails to create the appropriate legal, economic and social conditions and to provide secure foundations for the all-round development of young people, the country is likely to remain “the poorest in Europe”, as it is often depicted, for a long time to come. That is why providing youth with the values that are common to the younger generation in other European countries can literally help to safeguard and enhance the future of the Republic of Moldova.

Third, in 2009 Moldova is to hold both parliamentary and presidential elections. It is therefore important for the country to receive support from the Council of Europe to ensure that the direction of policy making selected by the Moldovan Government in respect of youth is reasonably on track, purposeful and effective (the team tried to check whether this was indeed the case, and in what respects). The international review team (IRT) was not, however, conducting the review to “rubber stamp” current orientations and developments in Moldovan youth policy. It is quite possible that some critical remarks made by the international team will not be welcome. However, it is part of the mission of the IRT to identify the controversial issues in the process of youth policy implementation in Moldova and to openly discuss them with the interested parties.

Fourth, the Republic of Moldova is not yet on the shortlist of countries to be accepted as candidates for the European Union (EU), but it is fully committed to achieving the goals and prerequisites necessary for European integration. Some recommendations can therefore be viewed as supporting that aim for the future and not necessarily as urgent or immediate priorities for youth policy. Moldova is already open to both EU and Council of Europe initiatives related to its youth policy. That is why the international report on the youth policy in Moldova initiated by the Moldovan Government will show both the Moldovan authorities and representatives of the EU how far Moldova is pursuing a European youth agenda and how successfully the government is implementing programmes and plans similar to those already adopted by its European neighbours.

1. This detail was provided by the Ministry of Education and Youth as part of its response to the final draft of the international report.



There were several steps leading up to the international review of youth policy in Moldova. First, the Council of Europe (Directorate of Youth and Sport) was asked by the Ministry of Education and Youth (MEY) of the Republic of Moldova to establish an “advisory mission” to Chişinău. An advisory mission undertaken by the Directorate of Youth and Sport within the Council of Europe is a confidential arrangement between the inviting ministry and a team assembled by the Council of Europe. The mission had a very specific focus and function: to advise on the issue within a short space of time in order to assist the inviting ministry to clarify its “direction of travel” and to move with more confidence in that direction. The advisory mission took place from 5-7 December 2007. This mission also served as a preparatory visit for the Council of Europe international review, by agreeing some of the youth policy priorities that should be focused on during the review itself. The focus of the advisory mission was specifically on out-of-school learning and development; recommendations on that issue were made to the MEY before the end of 2007.

Second, the Ministry of Education and Youth prepared a draft national report on youth policy, which was distributed in early June 2008. This text is used extensively in the international report as one of the main sources of official information related to youth policy and its implementation in Moldova.

Third, the IRT, made up of five team members, was assembled by the Directorate of Youth and Sport within the Council of Europe. The first trip to Moldova took place from 9-14 June 2008. Some important issues were covered during the first visit, while further issues were addressed during the second visit from 3-7 November 2008. During these visits, several important meetings with key governmental and non-governmental institutions concerned with youth policy, as well as with youth practitioners and young people, were held in Chişinău, Ungheni, Comrat and other smaller cities and villages.

In addition to the National Report, several official and non-official documents on youth policy were provided for the team (leaflets and brochures, handouts, protocols of meetings, and specially prepared information from several ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and Youth, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child, and the Ministry of Health). The rest of the information was acquired by the team members through observation, interviews, websites and visits to the local and national organisations connected with the issue.

Overall, the main sources of information for this report included the following:

- the draft national report on youth policy in Moldova prepared by the Ministry of Education and Youth;
- two one-week visits to Moldova by the international review team in June and November 2008;
- a complete protocol of the meetings and discussions of the IRT during the two country visits;



- documents and handouts provided by the Moldovan authorities and partners during the review process;
- official websites of the Republic of Moldova and other Internet sources;
- research findings of an INTAS² project on Moldovan youth run by the Independent Sociology and Information Service “Opinia”, under the direction of Professor P. Abbot and presented to the MEY in November 2008 during the meeting with the IRT; and
- additional documents and sources consulted in the course of the preparation of the international review.

All the above-mentioned sources made it possible to produce an overview of the current state of the youth policy and to provide some recommendations for the particular organisations involved in the implementation of youth policy in Moldova. These recommendations were presented at a national hearing in Chişinău on 5 February 2009 and led to a vigorous discussion. The feedback from key stakeholders in youth policy, together with a more formal response from the Ministry of Education and Youth, has been incorporated by way of footnotes in this text.

The dedication and involvement of the Moldovan partners, the openness of the Moldovan youth workers and effectiveness of their presentations, as well as their hospitality and generosity, were crucial to the review process. The IRT wants to express its gratitude to all the parties and individuals involved.

The IRT also expresses its sincere thanks to the staff of the Ministry of Education and Youth: its careful work and devotion helped the team a great deal in learning about the situation of youth in Moldova, and it helped by arranging several visits and meetings with youth activists. Special thanks are expressed to the Minister, Ms Şavga, whose support, involvement and hospitality also helped the IRT to learn about Moldova and its younger generation.

2. The International Association for the promotion of cooperation with scientists from the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS).





Preface

The framework of youth policy used in this report has its foundations in two books: volumes 1 and 2 of *Supporting Young People in Europe* by Howard Williamson (Williamson 2002; 2008). According to these texts, youth policy includes (but is not restricted to) such policy domains as education, training and employment, health, values and religion, leisure and culture, military service, youth justice, family policy and childcare.

As for the Report on Youth Policy in the Republic of Moldova (2008),³ for the time being, the term “youth policy” lacks a clear definition in this document. At the same time, there is an operational understanding of youth policy that makes it possible to elaborate the policy and then deliver it to the youth. In many cases, the National Report refers to the youth policy as the “state policy in the youth field” and describes this policy as “a system of measures for ensuring the social, economic, political and juridical-social guarantees for the development of a multilateral developed personality” (National Report, p. 24).

The legal system for the youth policy in Moldova has been developed during the last decade and has made it possible to orient the national youth policy of Moldova to the standards that have been defined in European documents.

The National Report (p. 13) also defines the National Youth Strategy that helps to construct a precise view of the youth policy in Moldova.

The National Youth Strategy foresees the development of young people’s capacities to understand and make use of their rights, the adoption of an institutional framework for improving participation of young people in all social processes, as well as the creation of a favourable environment for the development and affirmation of young people.

The strategy establishes the following priorities for the youth sector:

1. Access of young people to information and services;
2. Increased participation of young people in public life and active citizenship;

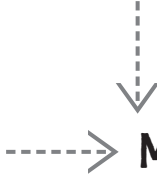
3. This report is referred to as the National Report elsewhere in the text.



3. Opportunities for employment of young people;
4. Development of human and institutional capacities in the youth field.

In this international report, the IRT will make use of the above-mentioned documentary information in order to compare the officially constructed model of youth policy in Moldova (as presented in the legal and other official documents) with the empirical implementation of the youth policy as observed during its visits. The IRT will also consider to what extent the Moldovan youth policy matches the “European standards” of youth policy, which was one of the declared aspirations of the Moldovan officials in the youth field.





Methodology

The Council of Europe established an embryonic process for reviewing national youth policy over a decade ago. Finland was the first country to volunteer for the process. Since then the process has been refined but the initial objectives have remained the same. These are the following (Reiter et al. 2008, p. 5):

- to provide an external reflection on a country’s youth policy;
- to offer ideas from that country to the other member states of the Council of Europe;
- to build a framework for thinking about youth policy across Europe.

The methodology of the reviews is as follows (after a country has requested that such a review takes place):

- a preparatory visit to establish key issues and priorities;
- the composition of an international review team, usually comprising three youth researchers (one of whom is designated as rapporteur), one representative from each of the statutory bodies of the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe (the CDEJ), composed of senior officials in the youth field from member governments, and the Advisory Council on Youth, which represents non-governmental youth organisations) and a member of the Secretariat;
- the production of a national report on youth policy by the country concerned;
- a first visit by the international review team – usually focused on the central administration and youth policy objectives and aspirations;
- a second visit by the international review team – usually involving visits beyond the capital city and exploring issues of youth policy implementation and practice;
- the preparation of a draft international report;
- a national hearing in the country concerned;
- the completion of the international report;



- an international hearing before the Joint Council on Youth of the Council of Europe;
- a follow-up meeting with the country concerned, ideally taking place about two years later.

The process is public and transparent. Both the objectives and the nature of the review process have been defined and elaborated in a number of publications (for further details see Williamson 2002; 2008).

However, depending on the particular country and its priorities in the area of youth policy, as well as on other contextual conditions (such as the level of economic development of the country and the amount of finance the government can invest in youth policy, the political status of the country, the relationship between the national government and the European structures), the focus of the review can be more on the issues that indicate the achievements of a particular country in the sphere of youth policy or, on the contrary, on some concerns about a proper understanding of the goals of youth policy at a national level.





Research for and structure of the report

Many domains of the Moldovan youth policy can be viewed as key ones. In this report we mainly followed the grid of youth policy domains as defined by Howard Williamson (2008, pp. 22-28): education, training and employment, health, values and religion, leisure and culture, family and childcare, housing, and youth justice. During our work in Moldova, the IRT members tried to cover as many spheres as possible within the above-mentioned youth policy framework. In cases when the information was not available to the IRT, our understanding was consequently minimal, and therefore these domains are only briefly discussed in this report. For these reasons there are no special sub-chapters on religion, housing, military service or youth justice; these issues are only mentioned briefly in other parts of the report.

At the beginning of the discussion of each issue, the report describes the information on the particular domain that was received from Moldovan sources during the IRT's two visits. The analysis that follows the description indicates the IRT's views: those actions and events that can be considered as being successful and going in the right direction within the framework of the European concept of youth policy; those actions that are only the starting points for further development; and those activities that are currently missing but that arguably need to be introduced. On the basis of such analysis, the international review team makes recommendations suggesting further directions for development and – where necessary – the introduction and/or improvement of actions in several domains of youth policy.

It is clear that not all domains of youth policy have equal importance for the country. During the complex modernisation of Moldova's youth policy during Youth Year, some domains were selected as having priority. These issues are directly related to the general process of reform in several spheres of the national economy and culture (including education), with the goal of adjusting them to the market. Education-related issues that are affected by the Moldovan transition to the market are also the crucial ones in terms of youth policy. However, many aspects of this transition (such as changes in non-formal education, vocational training, or in the distribution of information on an equal basis in a diverse environment) are not yet entirely clear. Officials from the different ministries expressed their understanding that, regardless of what has been already accomplished, Moldova



needs to pay more attention to teaching styles, place stronger emphasis on information systems, and make a serious appraisal of the role of non-formal education in the learning pathways of its young people. Within the labour market, the current focus on enterprise support is also worthy of further development.

- The main priority areas in youth policy development were indicated in the draft national report of the Republic of Moldova as follows (National Report, pp. 24, 27, 28, 33-37): (a) vocational education; (b) youth employment; (c) non-formal education; (d) voluntary work; (e) capacity building; (f) access to information; and (g) participation.

Some of these key priorities were indeed central themes in the European Commission’s White Paper on “A new impetus for European youth” (COM(2001) 681 final) – information, participation, voluntary service and better knowledge about youth – while the others reflect the new challenges related to the market transition of the country and the necessity to adjust to the new conditions.

Additionally, the Moldovan officials focused their attention on three issues of paramount importance for the economic survival of the country during the transition period:

- transition to the labour market;
- entrepreneurship; and
- non-formal learning.

The international report therefore pays particular attention to these aspects of youth policy development and implementation in Moldova. They are considered to be essential prerequisites when attempting to ameliorate contemporary youth challenges for Moldova, such as emigration, trafficking, widespread social exclusion and health risk behaviour.

The structure of this report consists of general information on the situation in Moldova and the conditions provided by the Moldovan Government for its young generation. The legal basis for the youth policy in the Republic of Moldova is also discussed and the key spheres for the selected youth policy are then described. Next, we analyse the youth organisations that exist in Moldova and that contribute to the implementation of youth policy there.

Some attention is then paid to issues of particular importance in the existing social and economic conditions and which affect the practical implementation of youth policy in Moldova. The three most prominent are:

- the Transnistria region;
- migration; and
- urban–rural division.

Other transversal questions and issues are also addressed, before concluding with some of the areas that previous international reviews have suggested are



important foundations for the development of youth policy: research, training and the dissemination of good practice.

The report seeks to distinguish between what has already been done in Moldova and what can be done to develop its youth policy in the future. The report highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of national youth policy in Moldova in order to help its policy makers reflect on their current practices and consider a range of recommendations that may benefit youth policy development in the country.

A note on timescale

The international report was finalised in the middle of June 2009, following feedback and comments from both the national hearing (February 2009) and the Ministry of Education and Youth (June 2009). Readers will be aware that, following its national elections, Moldova figured prominently in the international news in the early part of 2009. However, the formal review of national youth policy in Moldova was concluded prior to the end of 2008 – subject only to factual corrections and consideration of alternative perspectives from the national hearing and from the ministry – and any developments since that time are an internal matter for the authorities in Moldova and not a matter for comment by the international review team.





1. introduction to Moldova

Formerly part of Romania, Moldova was incorporated into the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. During the period of struggle between the two world ideological camps, the communist and the capitalist, Moldova was one of the 15 Soviet republics of the USSR. It was primarily an agricultural region: the majority of the population lived in villages and were employed on collective farms. However, after World War II, new industrial enterprises were created and Moldova became partly industrialised. It was a great achievement, even though the majority of the population still lived in rural areas. The second achievement of Moldova's Soviet past was the universal literacy of the Moldovan population.

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moldova became an independent state. During its first years of independence, the Republic of Moldova did not achieve any significant positive economic progress. As a result of the military conflict in the Transnistria region, where the most developed industrial enterprises were situated, there was a high level of out-migration. The rapid reforms in the agricultural sector meant that agricultural production deteriorated, and many people lost their jobs. According to official data, the Moldovan economy returned to positive growth only in 2000. Since then it has shown a small but constant level of annual growth. However, being strongly dependent on Russian energy resources (like many other former Soviet republics), the economy of the Republic of Moldova is vulnerable and therefore needs further reform and investment. As one official explained, the Moldovan economy needs much more investment than the government can currently provide. Moldova has been ranked 111 in the Human Development Index.

Currently, the major problem for Moldova is poverty. At the beginning of the 21st century, Moldova was one of the poorest nations in Europe (according to the CIA World Factbook, almost 30% of the population lived below the poverty line). Currently, only one fifth of the Moldovan gross domestic product (GDP) accrues from agriculture, although 20 years ago the republic was primarily agricultural. Another fifth of the GDP comes from industry and the remainder from services. Moldova has close trading relations with the Russian Federation and that greatly influences its economy; the Russian financial crisis of 1998 severely affected Moldova causing, according to official data, an exodus of some 600 000 Moldovans. It is expected that the current Russian financial crisis that began



in 2008 will also negatively affect the Moldovan economy. Additionally, many migrants from Moldova (primarily men) work in Russia.

The Republic of Moldova is a parliamentary democracy with a president as head of state and a prime minister as head of government. The Constitution of Moldova (adopted in 1994) sets the framework for the government of the country. In 2001, Moldova became the first former Soviet state to democratically elect a communist, Vladimir Voronin, as its president. The Republic of Moldova is a member of the Council of Europe. As a result, the authorities are oriented to meeting European criteria in many spheres, including that of youth policy. Moldova is also a member state of the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (ODED), also known as GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and other international organisations. Since its independence, Moldova has officially been a neutral country; it became a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace programme at an early stage. Moldova currently aspires to joining the European Union and is implementing its first three-year action plan within the framework of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The Constitution of Moldova declares the Moldovan language to be the sole state language. However, it is officially acknowledged that Moldovan and Romanian “use a common literary form” (National Report, p. 3). In Moldova’s declaration of independence, the state language is called Romanian. Use of the term “Moldovan language” is mainly limited to the political sphere, whereas “Romanian” is used on other occasions – in schools and in part of the media. As in all the CIS states, Russian is also widely spoken and it is the native language of 11% of the population.

Moldova is a multi-ethnic state, though one ethnic group dominates the population. The last census in 2004 indicates that more than three quarters of the population are ethnic Moldovans/Romanians (76.1%), less than 10% are ethnic Ukrainians (8.4%) and 5.8% are ethnic Russians. The remainder consists of some smaller minorities: Gagauz (4.4%), Bulgarians, Roma/Gypsy and Jewish. In order to provide equal opportunities in primary education, the government has established a department for the education of national minorities; the tasks of this department are to train teachers capable of teaching children in their native languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, and other languages).

The religious affiliation of 98% of the people of Moldova is Eastern Orthodox. This is in contrast to neighbouring Ukraine, where almost one quarter of the population indicates their non-religiosity. The religious situation in Moldova is similar to that in Romania, with its high level of religious affiliation with the Orthodox Church. This is in line with the mostly traditional national culture and lifestyle of the majority of the population, more than half of which lives in the countryside.

On a European scale, the Republic of Moldova has a relatively small population. According to the latest official statistics provided on the website of the National



Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (www.statistica.md), the total population as at 1 January 2008 was 3 572 700.

The proportion of youth in the population is rather significant. According to two tables in the National Report (p. 6), Moldova had a population of young people aged 16-30 of between 1.1 and 1.45 million as at 1 January 2008. The reason for this variation is probably the enormous and partly temporary migration, so that accurate figures for the youth population and for the total population are not available in practice (ibid.).⁴ Nevertheless, the website of the National Bureau of Statistics shows statistics for different age groups for 2007. Simple calculations show that the population aged between 16 and 30 was 1 029 280 – a little less than one third of the country's population. In comparison with other parts of Europe, this is not an ageing nation, although the birth rate is not high.

It is no secret that the Republic of Moldova has an extremely serious problem with migration of the population. This problem greatly influences the situation of the younger generation: they either go abroad themselves or lose their parents who go abroad to seek employment in Italy, Portugal, Russia and other countries (see UNICEF Study Report 2006). As for the number of out-migrants, it was close to 2 million in 2006 (among them 71 000 young people under 16), while the ratio between men and women was 2:1. Only around 100 000 migrants did not have at least a high school level of education, while 600 000 migrants had a university degree, and the rest (more than a million) had completed high school or a higher level of education. Hence, migration leads to the loss of an educated stratum of the Moldovan population. Another aspect of out-migration is the huge number of abandoned children and young people left without parental care.

As estimated in the National Report, the number of young people is approximately equal to one third of the total population. With the high level of migration already mentioned,⁵ and with, according to some estimates, at least half of migrants being young people under 30, the country greatly depends on the willingness of its younger generation to “stay at home”. In order to realise this, the country has to improve the social and economic conditions for youth in the context of a general improvement in the economic situation in Moldova. Only through this will the country will be able to meet the current global challenges, complete the

4. In order to determine the number of youth more precisely we can use other sources of information. Thus, according to the United States Census Bureau, in 2005 Moldova had a population of some 4.3 million, 820 000 (19%) of whom were young people aged 15-24. According to the National Report, in 2008 the population aged between 16 and 30 comprised approximately one third of the country's total population. This number is close to the 800 000 that was mentioned by the official representative of the Ministry of Education and Youth during the ITR's first visit to Moldova in June 2008.

5. Official estimates suggest between a third and half a million Moldovans are, at any time, working abroad. However, it is difficult to prove any particular figure. According to some other estimates, at least 25% of the working age population work abroad; the amount of money they earn and bring home is estimated to be 30% of the country's GDP. This means that the economy of Moldova broadly depends on the migrants' contributions.



economic and social modernisation, establish a knowledge-based economy and create a basis for its future economic growth. These radical changes are necessary if Moldova wants to fight the high level of poverty and unemployment that the country is currently facing.

For these reasons, the idea of a “youth policy” has become the main priority for the Government of the Republic of Moldova. Within the wide scope of youth policies, the issues of youth education (both formal and non-formal) and the related issues of training and employment have become paramount under the new market conditions. These issues are directly connected with the process of a successful transformation of Moldova into a market economy and democracy. In the long-term perspective, they are also connected with the full inclusion of Moldova in the enlarged European economic space.

According to the main goals on the current Moldovan political agenda, the Republic of Moldova is orientated towards the further development of its close ties with the European Union. This political direction is viewed as a way to achieve prosperity. However, in order to move in this direction, Moldova needs to quickly develop its human resources, that is, educate its youth for the needs of the current market, provide the young people with life management skills, create new jobs at home, as well as totally reconstruct its national economy and find new sources of investment. If it does not, the proclaimed political goals may remain unrealistic and will never be implemented.

To a great extent, the realisation of state strategic goals depends on the political regime of a country and the structure of its main political institutions. Moldova meets the legal and political requirements to move in the “European direction”. Moldova is a presidential republic. The Moldovan central legislative body is the unicameral parliament, which has 101 seats; its members are elected by popular vote every four years. The president, as head of state, is elected by the parliament and in order to be elected, a candidate must win the support of three fifths of the deputies (a minimum of 61 votes). The president appoints a prime minister who functions as the head of government, and who in turn assembles a cabinet, both appointments being subject to parliamentary approval. The constitution also establishes an independent Constitutional Court, which has the power of judicial review over all acts of parliament, presidential decrees and international treaties. The Constitutional Court is composed of six judges: two are appointed by the president, two by the parliament, and the remaining two by the Higher Magistrates’ Council. The judges serve for a term of six years, during which time they are not subordinate to any other power and cannot be removed from their positions.

The Republic of Moldova has several political parties; among them are the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (it currently holds a majority of seats in the parliament (55)), the Party Alliance Our Moldova, the Democratic Party of Moldova, the Social Liberal Party, and the Christian-Democratic People’s Party. There are also 17 independent deputies in the parliament. The next parliamentary election is scheduled for 2009.



The territory of Moldova is divided into 32 districts (rayons) with two autonomous regions (Găgăuzia and Transnistria). The status of Transnistria is, however, under dispute. Although it is de jure part of Moldova and is recognised as such by the international community, Transnistria is not de facto under the control of the central Government of Moldova. The real administration there is an unrecognised breakaway authority under the name of the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic. The solution to this problem is one of the priorities declared by President Voronin (see wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldova).

Currently, the status of Transnistria is restricting the economic development of the region and the functioning of the youth NGOs conducting youth programmes there, as well as hindering the organisation of joint actions with NGOs from the other parts of Moldova.

Another serious problem for Moldova is unemployment. In general, it relates to the poor economic progress of Moldova in the world economy and to the country's limited financial resources. Although the unemployment rate in 2006 was only just over 7%, this is one of the major reasons for migration of the workforce, although the low level of wages is an even more important reason for the outflow of young people from Moldova. Therefore, in order to find a solution, youth policy must reflect this situation and provide young people with new opportunities in the labour market, including giving them an education that will enable them to develop the skills they need to obtain a well-paid job.

Youth policy in Moldova also has to meet the current global challenges related to the construction of civil society; young people must learn how to be active citizens and find opportunities for self-realisation in different spheres of life. The modern system of education can provide the younger generation with the high-level knowledge and skills that they need in today's world. Therefore, key areas of youth policy must include several patterns of non-formal and informal education that can help young people to prepare themselves for the uncertainties of adult life in contemporary society. It is a priority for state institutions to provide young people with the opportunities to receive proper vocational training, learn the skills needed for personal life management, and obtain the information required for active participation in society.

It is important to mention one more economic problem that makes the Moldovan situation uncertain and not sustainable. According to the statistical information available and observations made by the IRT, Moldova remains a donor-driven country. The Republic of Moldova does not have the financial means necessary in order to develop the country from within. This is true for all spheres of the Moldovan national economy and its social welfare programmes. That is why outsiders, rather than Moldovan citizens and/or the state institutions offer many of the important activities and programmes for youth. The lack of state financing creates additional problems for delivery of youth policy. However, this does not mean that the youth policy has to be dramatically curtailed: on the contrary, this situation makes it necessary to seek alternative sources of finance and to develop youth initiatives probably on a greater scale than in more economically stable and less dependent countries.





2. Youth and youth policy in Moldova

The authorities in the Republic of Moldova have constructed a legal basis for the development and implementation of youth policy. During recent years, special state laws have been established and adopted by the government in which youth and youth policy were defined. A youth strategy, as well as several programmes and action plans have been elaborated based on this legal framework. A structure for action has been created in order to support the implementation of these strategies and plans.

The Moldovan Government has declared the alignment of its youth policy with European standards to be a national priority. According to the National Report, the European dimension of Moldovan youth policy means “the integration of youth movement from the Republic of Moldova in European structures through development of a relationship between countries” (National Report, p. 20). The development of Moldovan youth policy, with all its strengths and weaknesses, can therefore be considered in relation to this important governmental decision.



2.1 Legislation

The main goals of the legal documents in this sphere are to clearly define the targets of youth policy (the social groups which are considered to be within the category of “youth”), to describe the set of organisations involved in the delivery of youth policy (institutional structure), and to demonstrate the official basis for practical action.

In the 1990s, Moldova broke with its Soviet past. In order to demonstrate the new values in the sphere of youth development, a special law on youth was elaborated. The Youth Law No. 279-XIV, adopted on 11 February 1999, is viewed as the framework legislation for youth policy in Moldova. It is basically the starting point for the development of the current youth policy.

According to this law, the term “youth” applies to “young people, citizens of the Republic of Moldova, aged 16 to 30” (National Report, p. 6). Additionally, the definition of youth as a special social category includes “foreign young residents of Moldova, young families and youth NGOs”. Summarising this definition, we can differentiate three different targets of youth policy: individuals (young people



between 16 and 30), young families, and youth NGOs (in this case we assume that, regardless of the age of NGO members, their activities are centred around people aged 16-30). From what the IRT learned from the Ministry of Education and Youth, the main focus of the government is first on individual needs and then on youth NGOs. As for the needs of young families, they were reflected to a lesser degree (the housing and childcare programmes come under the umbrella of other ministries).

In the practical work of youth organisations, it is now commonly accepted that “the life and prospects of a university student in the capital are going to be very different from the young farm labourer in the countryside” (Williamson 2008, p. 16). In other words, the concept of “youth” is based on age (between 14 and 30), as well as on status according to certain activities and responsibilities. The youth category may include the age group between 16 and 25, between 14 and 25 or between 16 and 30. Likewise, in rural areas, an 18-year-old individual who has a job and earns a living may be considered to be an adult, while in the big city, a 30-year-old student is still seen as a “young person”. Therefore, it might be reasonable for the MEY to divide the social-demographic profile of youth into at least two categories: rural and urban. Such a research-based approach can help elaborate more specific activities for each youth group and help define specific delivery mechanisms.

A differentiated approach to the definition of youth can help to understand whether youth is viewed more as a “social problem” or as a “resource of a society”. In the case of Moldova, there is no single answer: when the issues of health or employment were discussed with professionals, youth was often considered more as a problem. At the same time, in relation to sport or cultural activities, youth was often considered to be a fruitful resource.

Recommendation 1

The IRT suggests using a differentiated approach to the definition of youth that can help to stratify youth into several social groups, understand the differences in their needs and elaborate a specific youth policy for each group.

The existing Youth Law has defined a set of basic principles for any activities related to youth in Moldova: (National Report, p. 6):

1. Respect and promotion of human rights;
2. Participation of young people in the development, promotion and implementation of policies and programmes oriented towards the development of all aspects of young people’s lives;
3. Free access for each young person to social services; and
4. Creation of adequate conditions for the harmonious development and full affirmation of youngsters.



This Youth Law clearly determines certain social conditions that the state guarantees for youth development, such as the right to study, the right to social protection, the right to participate in public life, job opportunities and the right to personal development. In fact, the Youth Law expresses social concern and recognises the social need for the creation of the conditions (socio-economic, legal, political, spiritual, cultural and organisational) under which young people may realise their potential and thereby benefit their society.

Besides the Youth Law, there are other instructions and documents approved by the government officials from the MEY. Thus, the National Report mentions a whole list of such documents, the majority of which regulate specific issues such as youth centres and local youth councils. Only a draft law on volunteering, which has been publicly discussed with the representatives of civil society (but not yet adopted at the time of the review), was agreed to have the same level of importance as the Youth Law.⁶ The majority of instructions were adopted by the MEY itself (or its collegiums);⁷ they had probably not always been discussed with representatives of civil society. The IRT was informed that not all the actors involved in the implementation of youth policy were even aware of these documents.

The information obtained from the meetings with several actors involved in youth policy formulation (both individuals and organisations) indicated some concerns about the absence of new laws related to youth activities (or indeed detailed discussions of the draft documents). Some youth actors think that new laws are “necessary for regulation of particular youth activities” (for example, volunteers), because such activities have to be undertaken on a legal basis. These points suggest to the IRT that the MEY and other state institutions involved in the building of a legal platform for youth policy need to co-operate more actively with youth NGOs in discussing the relevant legal issues. Such co-operation can be mutually beneficial for the MEY and NGOs, both in the elaboration of legal documents on youth policy and in discussions about their delivery.

Another law that is badly needed in the area of youth policy, at least according to some NGOs, is related to the regulations on discrimination against minorities. This law was also under preparation and youth NGOs expected it to be adopted in

6. During the national hearing in Chişinău in February 2009, representatives of youth NGOs expressed some concerns that the draft law on volunteering had still not been enacted and said that this law was necessary for their practical activities. In its own response to the draft international report (in June 2009), the Ministry of Education and Youth confirmed that although this law had been approved by the government in December 2008, it had not yet been adopted in parliament due to insufficient parliamentary time.

7. The collegium of the Ministry of Education and Youth includes the ministry’s top-level officials (heads of departments). Its members approve the important decisions and documents at its regular meetings. As for youth issues, they are also discussed at the joint gatherings of the officials from the ministries involved in youth policy implementation: besides the MEY, these include the ministries of health, social protection, family and child, finance, domestic affairs, economy and commerce, culture and tourism, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration.



the near future, although the IRT did not receive confirmation that this law was in the process of being adopted.

Recommendation 2

Although the legal basis for youth policy exists, some new laws related to youth activities are needed. The IRT suggests making discussion of them absolutely transparent for all youth organisations and the public.

The lack of transparency (or information) in the discussion of the laws caused additional concerns and dissatisfaction amongst some youth activists, as they felt they were not seeing any results of their efforts to promote a stronger legislative basis for youth policy. Nevertheless, according to the National Report, a range of youth policy legislation and development has been enacted:

Some benchmarks in the development of youth policy in the Republic of Moldova

1. Law No. 837, of 17 May 1996, regarding public associations, as a legal basis for the registration of youth NGOs.
2. Youth Law No. 279 -XIV, of 11 February 1999, adopted as a step in the development of a legal basis for youth policy.
3. National Youth Council registered (1999).
4. Government Decisions Nos. 688 and 689, of 10 June 2003, defining youth issues as the responsibility of rayon (municipal) departments for education, youth and sport.
5. National Youth Resource Centre created on 27 May 2003, with the mission to offer logistical support to youth workers, youth initiative groups, and members of youth NGOs.
6. Youth Forum in action (2006, 2008) – evaluation of youth policy progress.
7. National action plans (2004-2006, 2007-2009) to implement national youth strategies.
8. Youth Year declared in accordance with the National Action Plan for 2008, which included several youth policies and events, such as different youth forums, an international students' symposium and congress, a youth festival, a day of youth government, etc. (National Report, p. 23).

A National Youth Strategy for 2009-2013 has therefore been adopted.⁸

-----> **2.2 Youth Policy**

The Youth Year combined youth policy with some important political events that were oriented towards increasing youth participation and youth involvement in civil society. Youth policy was the focus of public attention in Moldova in 2008.

⁸ The IRT was informed by MEY officials after the national hearing that the National Youth Strategy for 2009-2013 had finally been approved in early February 2009.



As for the very term “youth policy”, there is also no single, officially adopted definition in the relevant Moldovan documents. However, many official documents describe youth policy as everything related to bringing about the proper conditions for the development of personality in young people. For example, in the National Report (p. 24), the following explanation of youth policy (as part of state policy) can be found:

State policy in the youth field is a system of measures for ensuring the social, economic, political and juridical-social guarantees for the development of a multilateral developed personality.

In accordance with this approach to youth policy, several governmental and non-governmental bodies are working jointly to provide the younger generation with life skills, information, and other services, in order to deliver this youth policy at national, regional and local levels.

There are, however, internal contradictions between the institutional and more substantive levels of understanding of youth policy in Moldova. As with other former Soviet republics, the Republic of Moldova could not immediately discard its communist legacy, including its former traditions in the sphere of youth policy. In particular, the youth policy field was understood, on the one hand, as lying at the intersection of traditional interests originating in the communist past, and, on the other, as new ideas originating in Moldovan participation in Council of Europe and other European activities. Moldovan youth policy is at the crossroads: it contains both old and new components. For example, much attention is still paid to structured leisure-time activities (i.e. “hobby- and interest-education”), similar to those in the former communist structures of youth management. Such structured leisure-time activities remain an important element of youth policy in Moldova (National Report, p. 28). However, the IRT met some youth activists and NGO members with a very different understanding of youth policy structure and practice. Further active involvement by Moldovan youth in European youth activities will help overcome more out-of-date notions of youth policy and help meet the challenges currently facing Moldova.

Recommendation 3

In the discussions and development of the legal framework for youth policy and related legal issues, the IRT proposes more active and structured co-operation between, on the one hand, the MEY and other state institutions involved in the building of the legal platform of youth policy and, on the other, representative bodies of youth NGOs in Moldova.

Increasing international co-operation and engagement in youth policy development introduces new, modern concepts into the Moldovan context (such as youth participation, youth autonomy, and non-formal methodologies of youth education and training). However, it will still take time and demand more resources to shed more out-of-date elements of youth policy and practice, while preserving elements on which to build new approaches and practice.



Recommendation 4

In order to discard more out-of-date standards in the development of youth policy in Moldova, the IRT recommendation is to continue broad public discussion of youth policy with representatives of youth organisations that can help develop new forms of voluntary youth activities and therefore contribute to changes in the whole design of youth policy.

2.3 Institutions for delivery of youth policy

Vertical delivery

The parliamentary Committee for Culture, Science, Education, Youth, Sports and Media is the top legislative body monitoring and evaluating the practical implementation of the legislation on youth policy (www.parlament.md). At governmental level there exists a Youth Consultative Council which includes 15 representatives of various ministries and youth NGOs. The role of this council is to discuss the major issues regarding youth policy development and delivery. However, it only has advisory powers and can only recommend ideas to the Council of Ministers or the parliament. The whole structure for the delivery of youth policy is broad, and it is not always clear what are the relationships and hierarchies between its constituent parts.

The Youth Law names the institutions that are responsible for youth policy (Articles 13-16). The network of these institutions appears to be complicated and it includes several governmental organisations, primarily the ministries. The MEY (its Youth Department) has the legal power and thus the major responsibility for youth policy. Several other ministries are also involved: the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Domestic Affairs, the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their responsibilities are not always clearly divided and sometimes two ministries are responsible for the same policy (see “Moldovan ministries responsibility in relation to youth policy”, 2008). For example, promoting entrepreneurship among youth is a joint responsibility of the Ministry of Economy and the MEY. However, as far as the IRT could learn, there is not enough co-ordination and collaboration between them in youth policy delivery. Taking into account the small number of staff in the Youth Department within the MEY, it is not realistic to impose such a heavy workload and responsibilities on so few people. This structure may require some changes if youth policy development is to be managed effectively.

The ministries constitute the peak of the vertical structure in delivering youth policy. Thus, the Ministry of Health is responsible for providing national, youth-friendly, health-care services. This ministry provides compulsory medical insurance for most young people. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism supports creation centres where children and young people can develop their artistic abilities. The Ministry of Domestic Affairs provides prevention programmes for



children and groups of youth at risk, and delivers programmes for the social inclusion of delinquent youth. Additionally, other state institutions are partly responsible for the implementation of some aspects of youth policy – for example, the National Agency for Employment (NAE).

Recommendation 5

The Youth Consultative Council might benefit from being given more authority and a clearer division of responsibilities. Confirming the leading role of the MEY within the inter-ministerial council on youth affairs could make the whole structure of youth policy delivery more transparent and better co-ordinated.

National youth organisations

The vertical structure includes some national and regional youth organisations, such as the National Youth Resource Centre, 12 regional youth resource centres and the Republican Centre for Children and Youth. These organisations have been created by the government and they receive some state funding, although they are considered to be independent (National Report, p. 8). The National Youth Resource Centre was opened in 2003 with the mission “to support young people and non-governmental youth sector participation in the development of a sustainable civil society in Moldova” (www.youth.md). The main functions of the National Youth Resource Centre include providing logistics, fundraising, training, and networking activities within the network of regional youth resource centres (YRCs) in Moldova. Many youth resource centres have great potential; they provide young people with access to information, documentation, IT training and computer rooms; they have a consultancy service, organise vocational training and seminars and offer activities related to non-formal education. The creation of the youth resource centres has established an excellent platform for youth development. The successful functioning and proper financial support of these centres are examples of how youth policy is moving in a positive direction.

The Republican Centre for Children and Youth also provides young people with opportunities to develop the modern skills and knowledge that can be useful for active participation in community life; it supports training and many other activities. It is very important that this centre should be developed in the future as an organisation that is able to support other youth NGOs in their own development, delivery and expertise. From what the IRT heard, this centre could become a mechanism for youth development in the future. As a national youth agency, it could serve as the platform for co-ordination between the state and youth NGOs, provision of youth-worker training and information, provision of information to youth generally, promotion of youth participation, and international work. Another goal of this centre is the development of extra-curricular education for children and youth. It is hoped that it will provide a full range of extra-curricular and non-formal educational services for different age groups.



The National Youth Council

The National Youth Council (NYC) is an umbrella organisation for national youth NGOs in Moldova – their representative forum. It was registered in 1999 and 32 youth NGOs and two regional youth councils are currently members. The NYC is a member of the European Youth Forum, and therefore follows the European standards in the area of youth policy development. It actively participates in many international programmes (for example, Global Action Local Empowerment, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida). The NYC is actively involved in youth policy development and delivery; its members organise several training courses and offer young people non-formal education activities. The NYC’s work is focused on the following activities related to youth policy: capacity building of youth NGOs and the youth sector; youth policy and youth rights; the participation and mobility of young people; and health issues facing young people.

The IRT commends NYC members for their high level of knowledge and their desire to work according to European best practice. The NYC is a leading example of this commitment, which is common to many NGOs. The role of the NYC in the development of youth policy in Moldova is significant; however, its involvement in legislative activity could be increased. The youth leaders working in the NYC represent a well-educated, elite group with a good understanding of youth interests and a knowledge of youth policy that reflects the European standard. These individuals are an important resource for the country’s future. The MEY and other governmental organisations need to ensure appropriate lines of communication and co-operation with the NYC in discussing both youth policy development and its delivery.

The NYC does experience financial problems, especially in relation to high rental payments for its premises. This is a common problem for NGOs in Moldova: virtually all of them are frustrated by the fact that they constantly have to search for new grants simply to finance their existence, rather than being able to use funds to develop and deliver their practical expertise. It would therefore make sense for the government to strengthen the baseline support for the NYC and other national youth NGOs.

Recommendation 6

Elaboration and delivery of youth policy demands a high level of consolidation of the efforts of all the actors involved in this process, as well as a clear division of their responsibilities. The MEY needs to retain its political authority in this process, while working closely with other responsible ministries, and international, national, regional and local youth organisations. The National Youth Council is a pivotal conduit within this structure and should be recognised and supported accordingly.



International NGOs and donors

Donor organisations (mainly international organisations such as UNICEF, the World Bank, Sida) also take an active part in the development and realisation of youth policy. They are active agents in the delivery of youth policy in Moldova and international donors provide financial support for many projects and their implementation. These donor organisations sometimes have much more experience in youth-related issues than officials from the MEY. UNICEF, for example, made a particular commitment to the development of the youth resource centres, their legal basis, activities and staff training. The local youth councils were also originally supported by UNICEF projects and UNICEF has elaborated the framework for the Republican Centre for Children and Youth and currently runs some programmes on child protection. The World Bank supports the project Capacity Building for Moldovan Youth NGOs. Some foreign embassies provide financial support for networking between Moldovan and international NGOs. The MEY will benefit from working together with international organisations in the future and by focusing on the implementation of youth policy in co-operation with them. Yet it needs to retain its strategic leadership in accordance with its democratic political mandate.

Horizontal structure

The horizontal structure of youth policy in Moldova includes social services for youth, 82 local youth resource centres and more than 350 local youth councils (LYCs). According to the National Report (p. 8), there are 1 500 local youth organisations involved in the delivery of youth policy. Among them, the local youth councils provide a platform for youth representation, association and empowerment. They facilitate the dialogue between young people and adults by ensuring that the voice of youth is heard. All the members of LYCs are elected, and they contribute to the thinking of municipal councils on youth issues. The IRT views the existence of the LYCs as having positive potential for the social inclusion and participation of youth.

Overall, the local network of youth organisations involved in the delivery of services to young people includes (National Report, pp. 11-12):

- Local youth parliaments, elected by youth in the settlements, representing their interests and organising everyday programmes and projects;
- Local student self-governments, representing secondary school pupils and university students with regard to the related issues;
- Local youth resource centres and youth councils that deal with youth issues and provide dialogue between local authorities and young people.

Reflection

There is no doubt that the government is working hard to manage youth policy issues. It provides some resources with the goal of incorporating the younger generation into social life and educating it for the future. The slogan “Youth is our future” is repeated quite often in government offices. On a practical level,



however, sufficient human and financial resources are clearly needed in order to elaborate up-to-date programmes, construct an action plan, ensure that the activities are well publicised, and then implement them at different levels. Such resources are difficult to obtain and sustain in Moldova, despite the fact that the resource base for youth issues has increased significantly in recent years.

A further reason why the MEY has not been able to develop and deliver a youth policy with a long-term strategy is the non-involvement of other important actors with an interest in youth policy. Though some youth NGOs have been involved, others that could have been have not. Youth policy is broadly discussed with youth activists at youth forums (as it was the case in 2006 and 2008). However, the members of some local and regional youth organisations claimed they did not know about these forums and experienced a lack of information from the MEY. Some potentially important actors (including youth researchers) were apparently ignored and therefore did not participate in discussing and potentially intensifying the development of youth policy. The media could also play a more important role in raising awareness of the most urgent youth problems and openly discussing possible strategies for their resolution.

It is quite possible that after broader discussion of youth policy with a wider public, there will be a need to re-assess some existing policies and to evaluate the list of the actors involved in youth policy development and delivery. The division of the duties and responsibilities of the actors (institutions, other organisations) in the process of implementing youth policy has already become more transparent, but a more encompassing and inclusive approach has still to be fully and formally established.

Recommendation 7

The process of elaborating youth policy needs to be open for broad discussion by all the actors involved in youth issues (all NGOs and interested individuals, youth media). The MEY is endeavouring to broaden this platform and is appropriately placed to do so. The IRT supports this aim.

-----> **2.4 Public budget for the Youth Year activities**

In order to consider the scale of youth policy activities co-ordinated by the MEY and the possibilities for their implementation, it is instructive to analyse the budget that was available for the activities planned for 2008. An additional amount of money was allocated for 2008, which was designated as Youth Year and given explicit presidential support, one year ahead of the presidential election. As one ministerial official explained, the budget for 2008 was approximately 10% more than in 2007. Despite this significant increase, the budget was still not sufficient for all planned actions to be financed in full.

The GDP of the Republic of Moldova is relatively small and therefore the state budget of the Youth Department in the MEY is also moderate. In the National



Report (p. 19) it was indicated as being €211 000. If we compare this budget with other financial resources (€541 000) that were allocated for the 2008 Youth Year from donor sources (the so-called “grant money” from UNICEF and the World Bank), the proportion is approximately 1:2.5.

The total financial resources allocated for Youth Year were €752 000, out of which at least two grants (one from the World Bank equal to €244 000 and another from UNICEF equal to €47 000) were directed entirely towards the development of youth policy in Moldova and towards capacity building for youth policy implementation. With such resources to supplement the annual state budget of the Youth Department, the policy makers were able to achieve significant results. Indeed, as far as the IRT could learn, the legal frameworks and instructions for several youth organisations (YRCs, LYCs and “youth-friendly clinics”), and the concept of non-formal education were elaborated using these funds. Some quality standards for activities were also developed and strategies for the modernisation of non-formal education and the general youth strategy for the next five years (2009-2013) were established.

Recommendation 8

State resources in Moldova are heavily constrained and the contributions of international NGO donors to youth policy formulation and development are to be welcomed. However, the IRT believes that the MEY and other government departments need to identify some core sustainable areas, within their strategic thinking, that merit some financial investment and guarantees, as the basis on which more grant funding for the development of youth policy and for special projects may be provided by international NGOs and other donors.

In addition to the budget of the MEY and grants from foreign donors, other ministries were allocated their own resources for the 2008 Youth Year. These resources were distributed according to the activities described in the action plan that was elaborated on the basis of the National Programmes on Youth.

The IRT understands that tensions surround such commitments to youth policy in Moldova, and that these derive from the profound pressures and challenges facing the country. The government has to meet these challenges with adequate strategies. Otherwise, Moldova will continue to be, as it is so often depicted in other parts of Europe, the “poorest country in Europe”, with a diminishing youth population and a lack of hope and opportunities for the young people who remain there.

Recommendation 9

It is reasonable to keep some direct allocation of resources (however symbolic) at all levels of youth policy governance in order to support the strategic priorities of youth policy on a regular and sustainable basis. This support may include some competitive grants for national, regional and local NGOs where they are considered to be essential stakeholders in the infrastructure of youth policy development.



Finally, given Moldova's very recent experience of focusing on youth through its dedicated Youth Year, it may very well be able to influence the youth agenda across the CIS, which has collectively declared 2009 to be a youth year. Furthermore, the establishment of the Eastern Regional Programme of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument offers the prospect for Moldova to explore additional forms of support for youth activities and co-operation with the European Union. The IRT is extremely aware of the resource challenges facing Moldova, both within and beyond the youth field, but maintains that the rather tired cliché so often invoked, that "young people are the future", is especially apposite to the Moldovan context and therefore demands priority attention and a strategic vision, both for resource generation and resource application.





3. Youth organisations and political representation

The participation of young people in social and political life through their membership of youth organisations is one of the main issues of youth policy. Amongst other things, involving young people and eliciting their views complies with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, supports the experience of active citizenship, and arguably makes for better youth policy and practice. This kind of activity provides young people with opportunities to express their opinions and get them heard in public. Therefore, youth participation in social and political activities is a significant way of influencing the living conditions of this social group, of lobbying their interests in society, and of training youth activists for political leadership at the regional, national and international levels.

Participation and the representation of youth has been a significant issue in Europe for several decades. It has become even more significant for the post-communist countries in transition to democracy since the 1990s. Currently, the issue of active democratic citizenship and the involvement of young people in political life are among the leading topics in any post-Soviet country. In Moldova, too, the political participation and representation of youth is an essential aspect of youth policy and its implementation. The IRT was told by many officials that it is a declared aim of youth policy makers to involve young people in the decision-making process in the country. However, it is not mandatory for the municipal authorities to involve youth organisations in the decision-making process: it depends mainly on their political will.

A democratic state usually provides the political space for youth participation. It is a goal of youth policy to create the appropriate conditions for the political participation of young citizens, as well as to provide them (as individuals and as NGO members) with learning opportunities for democratic methods of political participation. However, there is sometimes concern at state level that youth activities and political participation can tend in an extremist direction or perhaps go beyond state control over the political situation. Unlike “old” western democracies, the post-communist states try to avoid any possibility that political participation can somehow imply a low level of trust in the authorities. Lack of



trust is an extremely sensitive issue for the power structures. That is why the state usually tries to “keep an eye” on the political activities of youth. Youth activists consider the prohibition of any youth activities to be a violation of their rights. Thus, one youth activist expressed his opinion that the prohibition of a youth minorities march in the capital city in spring 2008 had led to an increase in the distance between the younger generation and the political institutions of the state and, therefore, to political dissatisfaction with the possibilities for democratic participation.⁹ This fact demonstrates the need for Moldovan NGO members to develop greater confidence and understanding of how to be constructively engaged in joint actions with the government, and how to co-operate with rather than confront state representatives in the youth policy field. There are almost certainly some international NGOs that can provide the necessary training on these issues, so as to help activists to become more equipped to promote their agendas through existing structures, as well as to increase their capacity to influence change in those structures.

The IRT discovered a few cases of controversial relationships between some youth NGOs and the MEY. The IRT also learned that some NGOs have critical views on the realities of youth participation. According to some NYC members, there is no sustainability in the way youth NGOs function, no long-term vision and therefore limited possibilities for them to participate fully in public life in Moldova. This situation is not, however, unique: a similar situation exists in many countries, especially the transitional ones, where the old and new forces embodied in individuals meet face-to-face on a daily basis. However, in almost all cases, the IRT detected a positive desire on the part of youth NGO activists to work in co-operation with the MEY.

Recommendation 10

Youth NGOs need to develop more confidence and understanding, through training, of how to co-operate with the state institutions in order to promote their own agendas, as well as to contribute to those of others.

The formal arrangements for supporting youth representation appear to be plentiful at the local level and they include governmental units (at the municipal level, there are departments for education, youth and sport, although in Chişinău, Bălţi, and Găgăuzia, the youth sections are separate from those of sport). These departments work in collaboration with both national governmental structures (primarily the MEY) and with local youth organisations. As noted above, there are well over 1 000 non-governmental organisations that are associated with children and young people to different degrees (including 500 NGOs, 354 local youth councils, 82 local and regional youth resource centres and 12 youth-friendly clinics). Overall, there are approximately 500 non-governmental youth organisations

9. This statement of an NGO leader is consistent with research survey data: a majority of respondents expressed their distrust of political and public institutions. As a result, they feel excluded from political life and do not think they can influence the future.



registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova (a database of these organisations is available at www.youth.md). Their existence proves that the procedure for registration is relatively simple – a fact that was mentioned frequently by both government officials and youth activists. Registration is almost free and is open for all who wish to do so.

However, it is felt by some Moldovan youth activists that young people are not involved enough in the organised forms of participation – which are understood by some people to be the only possible forms of participation. Some young people would prefer alternative forms that could give them more influence on the power structures. Thus, according to sociological findings, only 20% of young respondents (aged 18-30) feel that politicians are eager to listen seriously to young people and therefore understand their concerns (*Young people in Moldova*, 2008). That is probably why they don't rely so much upon participation in youth NGOs, but would rather try to find other ways of influencing the authorities and raising youth issues. The same survey confirms that 60% of young people participate in the voting process (and anticipate participating in the future), regardless of their satisfaction with politics and the authorities. This is a significant level of youth participation and one that shows a potentially high level of youth commitment in Moldova, in comparison with neighbouring countries.

Recommendation 11

Youth NGOs are significant institutions in youth development and youth policy implementation (see recommendations 3, 4, 7, 9 and 10 above). However, it is necessary to assess young people's involvement in many different fields, not only through their participation in institutional structures such as NGOs, in order to get an insight into the nature of youth participation and the challenges it faces.

Levels of youth representation differ. Local, regional and national youth organisations clearly provide support to their members and provide representation for young people. The problem is one of how to provide the constant possibility for participation in the decision-making process through these different NGOs. For this reason, they need to undertake more joint actions in order to promote their agendas. The IRT met some small but effective NGOs promoting the youth agenda, training youth in non-formal education and helping to develop their knowledge, talents and abilities. Those NGOs visited by the IRT provided excellent examples of youth initiatives and good models of youth NGO activity. At the same time, the IRT noted that some youth categories (such as young workers) appeared to be under-represented by NGOs.

Recommendation 12

A broad base of models for youth representation – in order to maximise the engagement of the youth population – needs to be established.



From what the IRT learned, one of the controversies between the national and regional youth NGOs is that of “competing for leadership”. This problem was clearly visible during the IRT meeting in one of the regions of Moldova: representatives of the regional youth councils expressed their concern regarding the difficulty (or even impossibility) for their organisations to be given the status of NYC members. Later on, this situation was interpreted by NYC members as an attempt by some “local” youth organisations (not even regional, from the NYC point of view) to be given equal status with national NGOs. These were reasonable arguments from both sides. The point is, however, not to sustain the arguments but to find a solution that would help strengthen youth organisations, their public status, and their influence on the overall power structure. Such controversial problems between youth organisations prevent them from focusing on the broader issues facing and affecting young people; instead, they are concentrating on their inter-relationships and an internal struggle for power. The IRT understands that youth organisations are different and have different priorities. However, their leaders have to establish some kind of working relationship in order to agree on some common (corporate) youth interests and goals, such as active participation in legislative activities, fund raising, and youth representation in the international arena. The level of tolerance between youth NGOs has to be improved if a greater level of social and political engagement by youth at an institutional level is to be achieved. It has to be clear for youth NGOs that any controversies between them may contribute to the gap between several youth groups and thus negatively affect political youth representation. Therefore, good communication, mutual respect and tolerance have to be the basis of their relationships. A harmonisation of relationships between youth NGOs could help the youth organisations to participate more actively in the political life of Moldova and to better represent their own interests in dialogue with the state authorities. The existing internal conflicts between youth NGOs, although in some respects both predictable and inevitable, may lead to a further deterioration in their relationship and discredit their image in the eyes of the government (which may not matter to some of them) and, indeed, amongst the wider public (which should be of concern to all of them).

Recommendation 13

The number of youth organisations (of various kinds) in Moldova is considerable. There needs to be more co-operation in their activities at national, regional and local levels. The IRT recommends an open, tolerant discussion of all the issues that constitute the clash of interests amongst youth NGOs, including the “division of power” between them.

-----> **3.1 Rural and urban youth NGOs**

One of the areas of paramount concern with respect to youth is the wide gap between cities and villages.¹⁰ This is an issue that affects many European countries

10. At a meeting following the national hearing, the IRT was informed by the deputy prime minister that the Moldovan Government shares this view and recognises the rural–urban gap to be a dominant factor influencing youth development.



but it is especially pronounced in Moldova, for the gap reflects the problem of poverty that, according to the findings of the INTAS project – Through the Looking-Glass: Young people’s perception of the individual and societal well-being in Moldova – is recognised as being most apparent among young people (Abbot 2008).

Many respondents to the INTAS survey painted a clear picture that youth problems, and therefore the requirements of youth policy in the urban and rural areas, are totally different. In other words, there are two different problems needing different solutions. For example, urban youth is overloaded with information (theoretically, at least, information is everywhere – how to learn, where to study, what to buy), and its problem is a lack of knowledge of how best to use this information for the benefit of self and society (to study the “proper” courses, to know in advance what kinds of job opportunities will be available, where to earn more money and how to start a private business with donor support).

In striking contrast, rural youth suffers from a lack of information and lack of free access to the necessary information. Local youth centres can help, but these cannot be found everywhere. Symbolically speaking, rural youth lives in a different universe. Rural youth tends to be more conservative and traditional. The majority of young people – almost two thirds – live in rural areas. That is why it should be the state’s priority to work with rural youth and provide it with some badly needed possibilities and opportunities for a better life.

If there were enough political will and financial resources to focus on the problems of rural youth, there would be a positive response: research suggests that young people in rural areas are eager to participate in any programme that gives them the chance of a better life (finding employment, having a better salary on which to support their families, and better education – including through the non-formal sector). As one programme manager working with rural youth observed, a relatively small level of resources would be needed to improve the situation. The expectations and aspirations of young people in rural areas are realistic and modest. However, as a first step, it is necessary to make them more aware and to cajole them into action. The more talented young people will then continue to develop on their own, as their own confidence increases and they become persuaded of their own capacity to effect change.

The IRT was told by all representatives from the rural youth NGOs that rural young people have to become a core element in the future youth policy of Moldova. Not only are they in the majority, they are strongly attached to their houses and land and have fewer ambitions. They want to stay. They are eager to implement vocational education programmes and to start private businesses. According to the survey findings, rural youth feel much closer to their roots than urban youth. They are not willing to leave the country unless there is absolutely no possibility of earning a living at home.

Rural youth wants decent employment and does not expect much more from society. In contrast, urban young people feel far more discontent because they



tend to compare their own quality of life with that of young people abroad. As a result, they are less happy and are more inclined to emigrate.

Recommendation 14

Youth policy makers have to distinguish between youth problems, challenges and issues in the rural and urban areas. There is a need for more initiatives and more active support of youth NGOs in rural areas. There is a strong case for “positive discrimination” on behalf of rural youth (providing more places in colleges and technical schools, opening training courses and providing employment for rural youth) in order to improve the skills base and prospects for social and economic development in the countryside.

There is an enormous difference between NGOs working with urban youth and NGOs working in rural areas (that is, outside of the three big cities in Moldova). This difference reflects the significant cultural and social diversity of the country, which needs to be clearly recognised in the making of youth policy. Thus, there are many youth NGOs in Chişinău that express liberal and democratic views, actively participate in public life and know the ways in which they can be more visible in society. The IRT met several activists from such NGOs and attended a number of meetings organised by them. The IRT’s general impression is that these NGOs are rather small in size, but that their members are well trained, well educated and connected to western partners, such as the Council of Europe and donor organisations. They usually have a clear agenda for their activities.

When NGOs are formed by professionals in the youth field they manifest a high level of co-operation with other young representatives from a similar specialist area in other eastern European countries (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus), the Caucasus republics (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), and at least some NGOs from the EU countries. In most cases, youth NGOs from Chişinău have good contacts with the Council of Europe and members have often attended its training courses. As a result, they try to introduce models of youth organisation into Moldova that are based on the values of the Council of Europe (human rights, democracy and the rule of law) and the principles of youth policy that flow from them (such as participation, co-management, intercultural learning, tolerance and understanding). Consequently, as a rule, such NGOs are focused on two aspects of youth activities: international co-operation and professional activity through which they can provide youth with a wide range of information, distribute the latest news and draw attention to the involvement of young people in democratic participation. For such NGOs, western relationships between the state and NGOs, which are based on a strong legal foundation, are an absolute norm and an “ideal model”. That is why such NGOs often restrict their “democratic” youth activities to promoting new legislative initiatives; they are not so interested in working together with state institutions on the basis of existing rules and laws.

Many NGOs are established for students and by students or school pupils. These NGOs are usually very active. It is relatively straightforward for the MEY to co-operate with such NGOs; the students are usually open to new initiatives, very



knowledgeable and have high expectations for their future careers. They view NGOs as a means to promote themselves and develop their competencies and credentials. Such NGOs are ideal vehicles for non-formal education, as well as for participation in and promotion of active citizenship. There are, for example, several so-called “clubs” of young leaders (ministers, prime ministers, deputies, directors). These NGOs are small, elite youth organisations that focus on the facilitation of dialogue between young people and government institutions. The goals of such clubs include many important issues – the establishment of good ties between youth NGOs and the authorities (individuals or state institutions), the sharing of knowledge about decision making in the political sphere, and the promotion of dialogue between the state and young people through a variety of activities. These youth organisations usually strongly support the activities undertaken by the state, and seek to motivate other young organisations to participate in the National Development Plan. Unlike the liberal youth NGOs, the elitist, pro-government clubs positively support co-operation between the authorities and young people: they participated in the key events held during Youth Year (National Youth Day, National Youth Forum), for example. They organise meetings between youth and the authorities, they take part in some cultural activities and provide young people with a great deal of useful information from the state institutions. This is a powerful human resource for the state.

Recommendation 15

The MEY should continue to work closely with the students’ NGOs and create a database of student activists throughout the whole country, thereby developing what is a powerful resource for the future leadership of Moldova (in politics, business and civil society).

However, as young city dwellers are not only students, other groups of young people also have to be kept within the sights of the MEY and youth activists.

Recommendation 16

The MEY should pay more attention to urban NGOs that function on behalf of other groups of urban youth in order to maintain a proper balance between the interests of students and those of other youth groups.

-----> **3.2 Regional youth organisations**

Regional youth NGOs (primarily operating in small cities and villages) are much more traditional and are oriented towards the resolution of the problems of youth in everyday life: employment, salaries, cultural diversity, ethnic needs and access to information.

Some regional NGOs are focused on cultural and ethnic issues. In many cases, they serve as umbrella organisations for several rural youth NGOs that unite ethnic minority groups, groups of young business people or simply youth living in



the same village or town. As Moldova is a multi-ethnic state, regional NGOs often work with ethnic minority issues.

The successful model of a regional NGO working in a rural region of Moldova assumes that this NGO will perform a consultative role and promote the diverse cultural heritage of young people living in all regions of Moldova. Regional NGOs are usually positively oriented towards co-operation with state institutions, mainly the MEY. Thus, in 2008, several regional projects received funds from the MEY because of the special opportunity presented by it being Youth Year.

Recommendation 17

Regional youth NGOs appear to play a critical role in work on human rights, cultural diversity, minority issues, youth information and youth participation. They are thus a pivotal part of the agenda for democratic modernisation and should be fully recognised and supported in exercising these responsibilities.

From its meetings with regional youth NGOs, the IRT gained the impression that their activists are mature, successful young people with experience in small businesses, or within a profession, or they have at least a sustainable job and earn enough money for their own needs. NGO activities are de facto their hobby (or, more precisely, their vocation), and they work in NGOs because they have a strong motivation to do so. They often invest their own funds in NGOs because of the attachment and commitment they feel towards this activity.

These regional youth NGO activists, who live outside of Chişinău, clearly understand the rural–urban differences yet consider themselves to be rural. As such, they feel a responsibility to work on the key issues relevant for young people living in the villages. They arrange training and seminars on human rights and cultural diversity. They view Moldova as a multicultural society that benefits from a wealth of cultural diversity. These NGOs represent a good model for youth policy in the countryside.

The IRT met some regional NGOs and learned about their agendas, which usually included issues such as equal access to information regardless of the native language of different youth groups, ethnic minority rights (anti-discrimination), equal rights to education, access to youth programmes inside and outside of Moldova, and intercultural youth dialogue for mutual understanding. These NGOs are concerned about freedom of expression, democracy and involvement of youth in decision making at the local level.

As these activists clearly explained to the IRT, the ethnic diversity issues are more contentious in the countryside. The regional NGOs are therefore very sensitive to and tolerant of these issues. On the basis of the IRT’s meetings with the regional NGOs, a general impression is that they work in many, often remote districts of Moldova and do not have problems with the local authorities. According to the views of their leaders, as expressed to the IRT, they are very involved with the government and the parliament, so that they have tools to lobby the power structures directly in support of their interests.



Recommendation 18

The IRT recommends discussing successful regional NGO activities as a possible model for replication in all other regions of Moldova. The positive experience of such multicultural and multi-ethnic NGOs can be useful for all regions in which ethnic minorities live.





4. Key domains of youth policy

In terms of the range of prospective youth policy challenges across numerous policy domains, the IRT commends the fact that in most policy areas concerning young people in Moldova, the key actors (both state institutions and youth NGOs) have already identified the main problems and have already undertaken or are in the process of taking steps towards addressing them. Recent sociological research (*Young People in Moldova, 2008*) suggests that 85% of young Moldovans consider obtaining a decent job as their main priority: the young people want a job that can provide enough income. So the main problem is not unemployment itself, it is finding a job that is well paid enough.

From this point of view it is clear why, among all the youth policy domains, the MEY indicated the transition to the labour market, entrepreneurship and non-formal learning as three major priorities. All three priorities are interconnected in some way; all can contribute to improving the quality of life and to creating chances for the younger generation.



4.1 Non-formal learning

At the practical level, the IRT visited several universities and colleges, youth resource centres, youth councils, the Republican Centre for Children and Youth, as well as a sports school, creation centres, schools for the arts and a youth-friendly clinic. The issue of “non-formal education” (NFE) was raised almost everywhere, as formal education is no longer enough to prepare young people for the challenges of modern market societies.

According to the National Report, the concept of non-formal education was developed and updated as a result of the activities of a special inter-sectoral working group established by the Ministry of Education and Youth in 2007. In 2008, the strategies for modernisation of non-formal education were foreseen as part of the action plan for Youth Year. A broad explanation of what non-formal education is can be found in the National Report, pp. 29-30.

First, NFE is viewed as extra-curricular activities outside of the formal school day. Second, many diverse activities are considered to be part of NFE. Third, the goals of NFE are very broad and include almost everything that is necessary for youth



development: forming good habits, learning “correct behaviour” for personal development, social self-protection, and developing the habit of earning enough to live on. Arguably, from this perspective, relevant elements of non-formal education need to be adapted for inclusion in the formal curriculum, as they can help to build personal development and equip young people with aptitudes relevant to later employment.

The IRT was frequently told that NFE was of paramount importance in Moldova. This attitude reflects the general understanding of the MEY and other institutions involved in youth policy that non-formal education is a current priority everywhere in Europe. Therefore, stressing its importance would confirm the fact that Moldova is eager to fall in with and follow European practices and standards. Moldovan youth policy makers view the institutions involved in NFE as primarily those under state control (or those that are state-financed): creation centres, sports schools, youth resource centres, the Republican Centre for Children and Youth, local youth councils and youth-friendly clinics. In some cases these institutions are run partly by NGO projects. However, in most cases in these particular contexts, the people involved in providing so-called NFE are teachers, sports trainers, youth workers and volunteers. In other words, the staff are often close in profile to the specialists providing formal education; the difference is little more than that “NFE” activities are extra-curricular.

The question is whether such an understanding of the nature of non-formal education is relevant or not. The IRT was concerned about the ways in which NFE is understood in Moldova. The enormous volume of literature on NFE issues (philosophy, principles and practice) produced by the Council of Europe suggests a different understanding of NFE at the European level. First (according to Fennes and Otten 2008, p. 11), NFE is “learning that is not provided by an educator or training institution and typically does not lead to certification”, but provides learning opportunities under market conditions. It is voluntary, depends on the national context, and may include a variety of learning fields: youth work, youth clubs, sports associations, voluntary service, and the like. It always responds to the personal, social and professional needs of an individual. It is oriented to social and professional inclusion, as well as to active participation in society. Therefore, NFE helps to create social skills and responds to individual aspirations in a market-oriented society.

In summary, any non-formal learning has to be:

- voluntary, with personal motivation;
- conducted outside an institutional context (out-of-school);
- not working towards a certificate, but intentional;
- structured or non-structured, but goal-oriented;
- “learning by doing” (interactive methodology).

The European Youth Forum (“Mini-compendium on non-formal education” 2007, p. 26) has emphasised the increasing importance of NFE in contributing to the



personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability of young people.

If we juxtapose the declared goals of NFE in the National Report with the institutions tasked with implementing them, it is clear that these institutions are not enough. In the best case, they can provide extra-curricular activities for children during their after-school hours; they can help develop the physical and cultural abilities of children and youth, as well as improve their health. However, they have little to do with preparation of the younger generation for competitive employment, social inclusion, or active citizenship.

Recommendation 19

There is an urgent need to redefine the concept of non-formal education as methodology and practice beyond school learning. Moldovan society should understand that under market conditions, formal education alone cannot provide life-long decent employment for young people, so that non-formal education has to be viewed as a worthy new asset capable of offering young people the highly needed flexible, “soft” or “transversal” skills and benefits that are less likely to be cultivated through the formal education system.

What is currently missing in the MEY concept of NFE is the broad understanding that NFE is more of an approach to planning and organising youth activities. It can take place in many contexts, but it is the methodology of youth participation, experimentation, and experience that defines the context. Therefore, it seems necessary for the staff involved in NFE to build a clear strategy for non-formal education with the goal of socialising young people as active citizens and active participants in social life. From this point of view, the current forms of so-called NFE are not sufficient. In order to improve NFE activities, some additional steps can be taken, both at the local and the national levels, within different contexts:

- a. Further development of the creation centres. In Moldova as a whole, around 75 centres were opened which help young people to develop their personality. The current use of creation centres' facilities for art and craft activities and for teaching new skills can be built upon; involving young people in deciding on the areas to be covered, using a peer mentoring approach, ensuring a co-management structure, etc., would all strengthen the non-formal learning components of such provision.
- b. Further development of the network of schools for the arts. Currently, they function for the personal growth of individual young people. The IRT observed an excellent performance in a village where young members of such a school gave a concert for the team. According to the school authorities, this school was very popular in the village because the young people were protected from becoming involved in criminal activities. The school functioned as a tool for creating a youth network and for social inclusion. The IRT was impressed with such provision as there is renewed interest in many parts of western Europe in providing “positive



activities” for young people. But, once again, there is great unrealised potential in the management, organisation and programmes of such schools, which could place young people much more firmly at the heart of their governance, administration and activity.

- c. Further development of the regional and local youth centres in which some sports facilities are available. Young people who are motivated to play sport and to become regularly involved in sporting activities can better prepare themselves for future adult life; this model teaches youth how to behave in other spheres of life and how to compete.
- d. Further development of YRCs and youth-friendly clinics where young people can acquire practical knowledge and receive information on the practical issues of life. In such centres and clinics, youth can learn how to take personal responsibility for their behaviour, communicate with other people, work in groups, and can therefore prepare themselves for adulthood.
- e. Appropriate use of the national facilities for the personal development of young people (one example being the Republican Centre for Children and Youth). The MEY supposes that this centre will support new curricula for NFE. This centre can also provide life-long programmes for drop-outs, the unemployed, and other groups of young people who need support. Such practice would be exactly in line with the ideas of NFE.

The establishment of effective NFE would be accelerated by involving youth NGOs (both national and international), which, in the eyes of the IRT, have a better understanding of the concept of NFE than state institutions. These NGOs are familiar with the promise, methodology and results of NFE and can therefore easily deliver NFE activities on a practical level, such as those involving “learning by doing” (“doing” can involve both real and simulated activities, those which are contemporaneous or which have been undertaken in the past and can be subject to further reflection and discussion). It seems that the MEY could easily involve NGOs in NFE policy making and thereby build on the international experience gained through training and exchange visits.

Recommendation 20

The involvement of NGOs (both national and international) is an essential element of the successful implementation of NFE. NGOs provide more space for youth initiative and organise training for civil society in accordance with modern methods. All existing NGOs can be involved in NFE if they contribute to preparing youth for the labour market, engagement with civil society and active participation.

The IRT met NGOs that have run NFE projects using foreign grants and which have trained Moldovan youth for civil society. For example, the IRT met a small NGO in Chişinău that had adopted a European model for training young people to communicate and undertake projects together. As its leader said, “when we first



started we wanted to show that young people from different groups of society had their own needs and interests, but also had much in common”.

Moldovan youth has great potential that can be developed by NFE. According to the sociological survey already quoted, almost 80% of young respondents expressed their interest in the future of Moldovan society and their desire to contribute to its development (it has to be conceded, however, that other reported research data have often pointed in a very different direction, sometimes suggesting that a similar percentage of young people have no interest in staying in the country any longer). A proper understanding of NFE can play on this potential and develop it in order to address the serious problems that Moldova is facing.

Recommendation 21

The MEY can assist youth NGOs with relevant experience and expertise in the dissemination of their knowledge of NFE principles and practice. We therefore suggest using existing instruments such as the European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers, and Europass, etc.

-----> **4.2 Transition to the labour market (education, training and employment)**

The second priority declared by the MEY was transition to the labour market. This is exactly in line with the European priorities in the implementation of the European Youth Pact (see “Communication from the Commission to the Council on European policies concerning youth” 2005, p. 4). There are two major criteria by which to measure success: a proper salary and proper qualifications that have to be guaranteed by the system of education and the employment institutions. Under market conditions, young people need a proper job matching their qualifications and have to earn enough money to live on. This means that young people need an adequate education and a sufficiently well-paid job.

For youth, salary is a simple indicator of success in the market; an attractive salary is more important for youth than a job per se. The IRT was told many times by different officials that young people want to earn several times more than they do now. According to the information received by the IRT, this attitude seems reasonable: after graduation young specialists with a university degree can obtain a monthly salary that varies from US\$100 (school teachers) to US\$200-300 (economists, engineers). Therefore, when the IRT met a group of students in one college and asked about their desired salary, their answer was also reasonable. Only those who planned to go abroad “for experience” or work for a foreign company in Moldova were expecting to earn up to €1 000 per month. On average, a decent salary was viewed by young people as 3 000 lei, that is, not dramatically more than the average income in Moldova.¹¹

11. €1 = 14.7 lei, \$1 = 10.4 lei, according to the official exchange rate of the National Bank of Moldova as at 7 January 2009. The average salary in January-November 2008 was 2 489.5 lei (www.statistica.md).



Of course, in a poor country with a high level of unemployment (where the youth constitute 40% of the population) it is usually not realistic for a young specialist to command such a high starting salary. However, this average income should be borne in mind by the policy makers and the government when designing any reforms in this field. If university graduates earn a salary equal to the subsistence level (1 245 lei in the third quarter of 2008 according to www.statistica.md), the value of formal university education diminishes. It is therefore not surprising that university and lyceum graduates accounted for more than 60% of all unemployed youth in 2008. If the authorities are to develop a workable strategy for keeping the young people employed in Moldova (rather than “enabling” them to leave the country), they have to provide them with more attractive salaries and career prospects. It is not realistic to expect that young people who have worked towards qualifications will be satisfied with a standard of living that is close to the poverty line (840 lei).

Within both labour market and youth transition theories there has always been much talk about “unrealistic” youth aspirations, but this does not mean that youth expectations can be ignored. On the contrary, it is imperative that they are accorded serious consideration, for they can significantly influence the choices made and paths taken by young people. Policy development has, therefore, to build these subjectivities (as well as the “objective” realities of the labour market, the economy and government resources) into the equation when shaping policy if effective practice is to be established.

Even during the current recession and financial crisis, it is possible to create conditions that would allow well-trained and skilled young specialists to “earn” more (through combinations of direct income, benefits in kind and other incentives). The competitive situation will be viewed by youth as fairer and more beneficial if there is a closer link between educational achievement and employment prospects. The system of payment has to be more flexible, so that the possibility to earn more can motivate young people to work harder and compete with each other. From what the IRT was told, young graduates are ready for such conditions.

Recommendation 22

Policy makers should seek to create conditions for more competitive starting salaries or income “packages” for young specialists to induce them to stay in Moldova. Because decent salaries are viewed as the main youth priority, youth policy should be oriented to ensuring proportionate remuneration in relation to the skills and qualifications acquired and the levels of market demand.

The housing programme for young specialists (teachers and doctors) in rural areas that was started in 2008 is an innovative development to improve their quality of life. It is designed to encourage them to return to their original communities. In order to achieve this, the Moldovan Government must make sure that this programme is well advertised in the media and must actually implement it, so that young specialists have an incentive to return to, and then stay in rural areas



even if their starting salary is not at a decent level. Although the IRT did hear some criticism of this programme (for its alleged tokenism, insufficient incentivisation and limited professional coverage), it does appear to have some potential and is worth persisting with; it offers the prospect of addressing both labour market issues and the challenge of the rural–urban divide.

Recommendation 23

The Moldovan Government should persevere with the programme “Housing for Young People” for rural specialists, as it appears to have potential as a tool to improve the quality of life in rural areas and encourage specialists to return to their communities of origin.

Other steps in this direction are also possible. In some cases, a salary can probably be designed as part of a package with fringe benefits, such as free sports and/or cultural facilities, free bus tickets, extra money for professional needs, extra facilities for children/family holidays, and the like. Policy makers can learn about such programmes, as they exist in many countries. Such a strategy can be recommended for any region, but would be especially appropriate for rural areas as it would offer young specialists there an “incentive package” that would encourage them not to leave.

Recommendation 24

Designing salaries for specialists as part of a package including some fringe benefits (such as sports and cultural facilities, free tickets, etc.) might be a worthwhile experimental addition to the housing for specialists programme.

A second aspect of the market transition is training. An extremely important issue is training young people for the demands of the new labour market, as well as training them for specific sectors in accordance with market needs. As in other countries, the Moldovan market needs more specialists with particular vocational skills (college or vocational school level) than professionals with university diplomas. Improving the match between labour market needs and vocational qualifications requires scrutiny of education, training and employment as a whole.

Market needs do not, however, seem to be well understood by state officials: the country offers more places for young people at universities than in vocational and technical schools that provide vocational education and training (VET). As the National Report (p. 24) states, there are 116 vocational schools with 55 000 students, and 38 universities and institutions of the same level, where around 123 000 students study. This means that Moldova will produce more than twice as many specialists with university diplomas as people such as technicians, nurses and trade managers. This inconsistency clearly shows that current policy in formal education and training does not meet market demands: the country produces specialists with considerable aptitude but few of them will be hired. This is not necessarily a matter of the quality of education (indeed, one respondent from



a ministry was “delighted” that so many other countries were now “benefiting” from Moldovan expertise produced through the high quality Moldovan education system); it is all about overall internal market demand.

Recommendation 25

State educational policy should explore and adjust the balance between university and VET graduates in accordance with market needs, as well as improving the quality of the VET system to make it attractive and advantageous for youth.

One issue the IRT sought to grapple with was why Moldovan young people still want to study at the universities even without the guarantee of a commensurate job after graduation. To some extent, this can be due to a historical and cultural attitude that persists in Moldova: parents often continue to believe that a university degree will offer their children a better future. However, under market conditions this is clearly not necessarily the case. Currently the broader European approach is that education has to be more in line with the needs of the labour market and civil society. Young people have to realise that higher education for its own sake may still be a valued commodity for their families, but it is a commodity with limited value for their future. The Moldovan authorities and the public have to recognise that if graduate-level education becomes increasingly disconnected from any probable future professional career, then this path is not appropriate for young people. Alternative pathways need to be considered, including lower levels of vocational education that offer greater prospects of regular employment. Otherwise, the present direction of educational policy is misplaced and ineffective, even if it reflects the traditional mentality of the Moldovan population.

Survey data indicate that the Moldovan population traditionally follows the old stereotype that formal education will guarantee better employment for young people in the future. That is why middle class and even lower class families want to place their children in universities and not in vocational schools. Sometimes parents save up money abroad in order to place their children in a university in Chişinău and thereby ensure that they obtain a degree certificate. This attitude is in line with what one NGO leader reported: over 50% of young people go to university (it used to be 80% in some regions of Moldova) – “without a university degree, you are nothing in Moldova”. However, if the eventual employment does not coincide with the certificate, the value of the latter diminishes.

Some universities are now trying to develop their practice in terms of their responsibility towards the market. The IRT visited such institutions and learned of their practice to offer career guidance, job advice and job fairs. Thus, a special Centre for Information and Professional Orientation was opened for the very task of preparing students for the labour market. This centre collects and distributes information about jobs and advises individuals on how to evaluate job offers and select the proper opportunities.



One possible model reflecting a change in formal education that meets the market demands was found in a college where students openly explained that after graduation they intended to go abroad, save up money there and then return home and open their own businesses. Both staff and students acknowledged, however, that they might stay abroad for a long time or perhaps forever. Nevertheless, the attitude “first save, then invest” may be a necessary tactic for a country like Moldova. That is why opening new or developing established vocational schools and technical colleges, which provide good training for “professions in demand” both in Moldova and abroad is good, market-oriented policy.

The IRT was concerned that some VET institutions did not appear to be interested in the results of their professional training, that is, in the employment destinations of their graduates. From their viewpoint, this was not their duty or responsibility. However, from the standpoint of strategy policy making, “employability” is an essential part of delivering policies related to market transition. For example, in the case of the vocational preparation of workers and managers for employment in particular spheres, possible options may include monitoring (or researching) and destination analysis, for example:

- how many students found relevant employment abroad after graduation, and how quickly;
- how many students found similar professional employment in Moldova;
- how many graduates were employed as managers;
- how many started their own businesses; and
- how many are abroad doing non-professional jobs.

Such data are important for VET establishments and policy makers in general. There is no other way of checking the effectiveness of vocational training if VET institutions are not keeping track of the salaries and status of their graduates. If all of them collected such information (within a year or two after graduation), then the governmental office working on youth transition to the labour market could make a national assessment of these important issues. The results could help the country to reflect on whether the national system of education and training prepares labour for the situation in the country itself, taking into account the country’s needs, or whether it trains Moldovan youth to get any job abroad because of the better pay there.

Recommendation 26

Education institutions should maintain a database on their graduates so that within a year they could accumulate information about the employment of their former students. This database could help evaluate the “marketable link” between the level of skills and the field of training received in a particular educational institution, and eventual employment.

In general, if the Moldovan system of formal education has to meet market demands, then it needs some reform: feedback from the first job is necessary



to re-assess the effectiveness of the educational system, students' professional/vocational skills and competitiveness (what is in demand, and what not), and teaching methods.

If we compare Moldova with other countries in transition, its vocational education and training system is not well developed. Young Moldovans are not oriented towards the VET schools. Youth policy makers may need to promote VET schools for unemployed young people and for secondary school graduates, even when public opinion does not see them as “good” for the market. According to one senior official, there is no special training for youth – training serves all people (from 16 to 60). This is probably part of the reason why such training is not targeted and not popular among young people. Even some new and positive data released by the government at the end of 2008 cannot be taken as a measure of successful training: the data may reflect the “campaigning” organised for Youth Year).¹² According to European standards, the quality of VET refers to the quality of structures and context, input and output (Fennes and Otten 2008, p. 39). It cannot be measured by the number of initiatives or the number of employed people.

The National Action Plan for Youth Year included some commendable programmes, such as support for graduate employment and housing for young families (National Report, p. 15). Such programmes have, however, to be stable and long-lasting, so that young people can rely upon them when making their long-term plans. Additionally, in 2008, consultancies were performed for 7 153 unemployed people, while 201 young people under 16 received help, and 30 got individual placements.

The IRT learned that the state provides loans and micro-credits for economic agents and unemployed young people. Unemployment aid and small grants for professional integration are also available. Training courses, job fairs and vocational guidance services are intended to help young people to find a job and to encourage them to make use of the training courses and services on offer. Thus, 72 fairs were organised involving more than 13 500 people (this does not mean that all of them found employment or that they then kept the jobs). As a model, this strategy looks both impressive and appropriate. Yet such praise needs to be tempered. Many young people do not often actively use these opportunities for finding employment and the strategy does not always match market needs nor the expectations of young people seeking a job. Young people are often unable to get decent salaries after attending the training courses and, as the IRT learned, courses may provide professional skills, but they do not necessarily meet market conditions.

12. As the National Agency for Employment informed us, more than 60% of those who attended their training courses were young people. More than half of the registered unemployed youth in 2007-2008 found employment through the training courses, job fairs and information services, etc. The creation of the National Information Centre within the framework of the Swedish grant “Public Employment Service” (2008) will also help to reduce youth unemployment.



It is probably more important to provide incentives, such as fiscal and other benefits, to employers willing to take on young people with no professional experience. It may also be worthwhile to set up vocational orientation centres in schools, so that students can have some idea of their educational and market prospects. Another possible step is to establish a relationship between VET schools and universities, on the one hand, and possible work placements in enterprises, on the other. This practice is well known to be reasonably successful in many European countries; it is worth trying it in Moldova.

Recommendation 27

Consideration should be given to the provision of special benefits or incentives to employers who are willing to hire young graduates or to provide work placements, so that employers become more willing to take on young specialists without experience.

-----> **4.3 Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship is an essential part of a youth policy oriented to the labour market. This strategy is designed to encourage young people to consider running their own businesses. Typically, only a small proportion of all young people are motivated to do so, and even fewer are likely to run their own business successfully. Such young people usually need financial and practical support in their enterprise aspirations.

Entrepreneurship support for young people in Moldova includes policy related to business incubators, educational programmes for young managers, and small grants programmes. Thus, in 2005-2008, as part of a project financed by foreign donors, 145 new youth businesses and 355 workplaces were opened in 17 rayons (and for the time being, almost all still exist). A good example is the Internet cafe that the IRT visited: it was opened with grant money and provides services for youth in the local area. According to the second step of this project, 400 young people will be trained and 60 new businesses will be opened. In late 2008, some young people had already received small loans for their businesses. Young entrepreneurs also receive “post-creation assistance” for two years after the launch of their businesses. The resources to support these activities are limited, demand is much higher than supply and many applications remain unfinanced. The grants only provide infrastructure for young people (office space, advice, training and communication tools).

Despite the limited resources available, the models of enterprise support merit perseverance and development.

1. Business incubators have long been an established form of promoting enterprise and supporting entrepreneurship. There are a variety of them in Moldova, mostly run by NGOs, though financed from different sources, such as foreign private grants and Moldovan educational institutions. One model looks especially useful for Moldova because the incubator’s projects were designed for rural youth. The manager of this



incubator understood perfectly that this was the priority audience to work with. This project is an example of good practice in Moldova and can be replicated.

Incubators are the friendly, “tough love” space for new businesses, which are judged to be worth supporting and which are seeking to take root. The IRT saw the beneficiaries of one selection process working at their allocated workplaces. The enthusiasm was infectious, despite the tough climate in which they were operating. Those who use the incubators have to repay half of the money allocated to them, while the other half is a start-up grant. If they are successful, they can easily repay the money. The incubators bear a heavy responsibility, not only for attempting to predict the most successful businesses and then guide them towards success, but also because demonstrable success is likely to motivate other young people to enter more confidently into entrepreneurial activity.

Recommendation 28

It is reasonable and necessary to extend the use of business incubators for promising innovative businesses, especially in the new market sectors, but it will be important to resist the temptation to support segments of the market that are already becoming “saturated” through over-enthusiasm and interest.

2. The possibility of promoting the idea of enterprise and entrepreneurship also exists within the education sector. Some universities aim to provide their students with managerial skills. One educational institution that the IRT visited runs its own business incubator. Its goals are training young people in business ideas and planning, providing business support and mentoring. This is to the point and may stimulate the students’ motivation for entrepreneurship. At the same time, this initiative has to be long-term in order to demonstrate stable and sustainable success.

Another good idea is to establish programmes in high schools for the provision of knowledge and understanding about business planning and development.¹³ There are models elsewhere in Europe and there is a long tradition of debate around the distinctions between education for enterprise, education through enterprise, and education about enterprise. All are relevant and purposeful but they have different implications for the processes of teaching and learning, including the use of non-formal learning as an appropriate methodology.

Recommendation 29

Stronger links should be established between the educational institutions, business incubators and successful business people so as to teach students about entrepreneurship and provide some business skills.

13. After the national hearing, the IRT learned from ministerial officials that on lyceum in Chişinău has an economic focus and therefore systematically passes on economic knowledge to its students. This is evidence to support the IRT’s recommendation on entrepreneurial or “enterprise” education at school.



3. There are some grant-based activities financed by international donors which are intended to support private businesses for the “empowerment” of young people. Grants from international NGOs make a significant contribution to assisting entrepreneurship (though the model for youth economic empowerment has been adopted for wider encouragement of entrepreneurship using resources from the state budget). The programme for youth socio-economic empowerment (through a grant from the World Bank and UNICEF) began earlier in Moldova, but was fully implemented in 2008 (see below). Some domestic NGOs are also running interesting economic projects directed towards young people.

Small and medium-sized grants can have considerable value in a context such as Moldova and they can make all the difference between the success and failure of a new enterprise. However, when the IRT asked about the procedure for obtaining such grants, the method of selecting the youth projects to be supported and financed was not clear. The IRT received information from the grant manager that the business mentors usually use interviews as the main part of the selection process. The IRT felt that this was probably an insufficient basis on which to judge whether or not a particular business idea would be good enough to merit support. The IRT was also concerned at the huge level of bureaucracy that young people must face if they wish to start an enterprise; it did not always seem proportionate to the level of support that successful applicants might eventually secure. A third weak point, beyond the direct control of those allocating grants, but in part within the remit of the government (in terms of bureaucratic, legislative and fiscal arrangements), is the adverse climate for business development in Moldova; many young entrepreneurs complained about it, as did the international donors. The general position was that despite the rhetoric in support of business enterprise, there are myriad obstacles in the way, which serve as disincentives to prospective entrepreneurs, even when start-up grants may be available.

Some programmes to support youth-run businesses are financed or managed by the national government (sometimes together with donors). Thus, in 2008, the government developed and approved a programme of socio-economic empowerment for youth in 2008-2010: 75 young people have already been trained to establish their own enterprises and have received a loan (40% of this loan is a grant). In general, it is expected to provide 1 000 loans for new businesses, especially in the rural areas. It is important to mention that this programme assumes business education and counselling for those who receive the loans, and that the monitoring of their business activity will continue beyond the period of their support through the programme. During 2008, the government spent 46.4 million lei on the programme, 18.63 million lei of which was the grant component (“Moldovan ministries responsibility in relation to youth policy” 2008). Local youth resource centres have been actively involved in the implementation of this programme; they organise training and consultancy support for potential young businesses, help with the application process, and provide legal and fiscal consultancy services.





Recommendation 30

Developments such as the youth socio-economic empowerment programme are moving in the right direction, but there could be stronger ties between the local public administration, foreign and local NGOs, and youth resource centres in the process of implementing the programmes. Local knowledge is critical for local success.

The MEY is involved in managing the foreign grant funds and activities related to these grants, so that government officials are always involved in policy implementation. The idea behind the socio-economic empowerment programme was to extend the reach of both enterprise support and youth empowerment far beyond the country's capital and into remote rural areas. As one official said, the country “can no longer sustain 70% of the economy just in one place”. The strategy is promising, despite the relatively limited resources available.

Recommendation 31

Small grants for the socio-economic empowerment of rural youth remain critical, and the promising programme delivering this support needs, if possible, to be not only sustained but expanded.

Significant amounts of money flow into Moldova from the Moldovan diaspora, especially those who are currently working in other parts of the former Soviet Union and within the European Union.¹⁴ However, these funds do not yet contribute a great deal to the support and development of entrepreneurship because – according to some estimates – 93% of the money from abroad goes on consumption, and only 7% on investment, saving and entrepreneurship, taken together. The only industrial sphere that benefits from this money is construction. Many new houses have been built; however, only 20% of youth labour is employed in this industry. A better investment climate would certainly attract more money from abroad for entrepreneurial ventures and help reduce youth unemployment – both directly and indirectly – in the process.

As noted above, local youth resource centres already play a useful role in the socio-economic empowerment of youth. Beyond that, they can also provide professional counselling and orientation services for young people (including vulnerable groups of young people), and teach them the skills that may potentially be profitable for their future self-employment, such as how to open a business, run a small enterprise, or start an Internet cafe. The IRT visited a well-developed youth resource centre in a rural area that runs several programmes for vulnerable groups of young people (such as those without parents). Some volunteers from

14. The term “diaspora” is widely accepted in scientific literature and has been the preferred terminology in previous reports on youth policy prepared by the Council of Europe. It is considered to be both neutral and appropriate. Its meaning is clear and correct in this context: “people of Moldovan origin living abroad” (for work or for any other reason).



international NGOs were involved in the implementation of youth programmes there, and the centre received strong support from the local public administration. This centre can be viewed as a model of strong co-operation between the local administration, donors and youth NGOs that provide the necessary programmes of socio-economic empowerment. Overall, some positive steps forward in the development of entrepreneurship have been taken; currently Moldova has to develop them further.

Recommendation 32

The IRT supports the provision of financial assistance to the local youth resource centres in their work with vulnerable groups of young people who want to improve their skills, find employment and start their own businesses (the centres help by hiring trainers and practitioners, as well as by providing facilities and consultancy support). This approach needs consolidation and development, for it is critical to agendas aiming at equality and social inclusion for the most disadvantaged groups of young people in Moldovan society.





5. Other youth policy domains

5.1 Health issues

Survey data suggest that health is the third most important issue for young people (*Young People in Moldova*, 2008). Young people think they are not provided with the necessary medical services and in many cases they feel they do not have special services or the necessary information. Sometimes they do not know where to go, what to learn and how to cope with existing problems. Indeed, as the National Report (p. 32) indicates, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV/Aids, unplanned pregnancies and abortions, as well as an unhealthy general lifestyle among young people badly influence the health of the young (*Young People's Health and Development*, 2005).

The IRT received some controversial information related to prostitution and human trafficking in Moldova. While international organisations still view prostitution and human trafficking as very serious problems that need to be addressed and confronted (see *Life skills education for prevention of trafficking in human beings*, 2004), some young activists expressed the view that this is “an individual issue”, in that everybody should personally decide what to do. The IRT does not subscribe to this view: neither prostitution nor trafficking is a personal issue but a serious social issue related to young people in particular. Therefore, the government has to attend to this issue within both its youth policy and its policy generally and provide accurate and clear information for youth on the dangers and risks of prostitution and trafficking. Specially targeted groups should be children without parental control and those in poor families.

The government has to be the major player in providing youth with the necessary conditions and opportunities to learn how to establish a healthy lifestyle. Young people should be able to access appropriate knowledge on relevant issues at school, and then know how to deal with any subsequent problems. From this perspective, the recent banning of sexual education in schools is a retrograde step. Research evidence is unequivocal that sex education in schools has a preventative effect on both early and unsafe sexual activity. Given that almost one third of Moldovan youth live without parental control, the school may sometimes



be the only place where young people can have access to accurate and age-appropriate personal, social and health education.

A very positive step from the Ministry of Health is the preparation of an action plan for the recognition of youth health as a cross-sectoral domain that includes the activities of other actors. This is in accordance with the EU-recommended inter-sectoral approach related to such spheres as health, sport and education, which have a major public sector component: “It is only possible to reach the set targets through inter-ministerial, inter-agency and inter-professional collaboration, including at all levels of government (national, regional and local), and in collaboration with the private and voluntary sectors” (“EU Physical Activity Guidelines”, p. 9).

Other ministries may be less adventurous (and courageous) in pioneering innovative health strategies, but their contributions are essential in order to tackle the range of significant health challenges facing young people. There is a strong case for a concerted and unified voice throughout government in order to secure the resources necessary for developing the system of youth health services that needs to be actively promoted and clearly understood, both by young people and by the wider public.

The second positive step in youth health policy is the establishment of a network of youth-friendly clinics (YFCs). The IRT was particularly impressed by the YFC it visited, concluding that it was a model of best practice, drawing on thinking and expertise from across the world. The challenge is to have enough funds to keep these clinics functioning and, indeed, expanding. Before 2007, this service was funded by foreign and international donors. Now the YFCs have a modest state budget, which is to be welcomed, since this puts their future on a more secure, though by no means an assured, footing. As one medical specialist explained, “the capacity of the clinics is very high, but their resources are very limited. That is more secure now because they have a state budget”. Funding YFCs is a state priority, as they fulfil basic youth health needs related to sexual relationships, parenting and general health.

Recommendation 33

The IRT supports the aspiration of the Ministry of Health to establish a more all-encompassing strategic framework to address and respond to the variety of significant youth health challenges in Moldova. At the heart of this strategy must be the work of the youth-friendly clinics; the IRT commends the explicit government support for their consolidation and development.

The YFCs are still relatively new for Moldova and are considered, according to one respondent, as “a big challenge to traditions”. They provide a new type of service – they offer a multidisciplinary approach (with psychologists, gynaecologists, nurses, doctors, social workers, dermatologists and volunteers). YFCs work with individuals and with couples; they also try to solve challenges regarding teenage couples. Additionally, clinics provide consultation and information activities. In



the YFC that the IRT visited, during one year almost 7 000 young patients received consultation services and around 10 000 were involved in the information activities. The latter is especially critical in the current environment where sexual education in schools is in question.¹⁵ It is worth mentioning here that, according to UNICEF data, almost three quarters of Moldovan young people support the idea of sexual education at school (*Young People's Health and Development 2005*, p. 57).

Recommendation 34

The IRT recognises the political and religious sensitivities that surround the issue of sexual health education in schools. However, there is an urgent need to incorporate this within a broader framework of personal, social and health education that would also include family education (parenting) and life skills.

The policy initiatives observed within the youth health domain were positive and useful. However, it is not clear whether the health policy measures are really accessible for all young people, especially in rural areas. There are centres for reproductive health in rural areas that operate within the framework of family doctors. For the last two years, the youth medical insurance companies have covered “home-friendly services” (that is, services that can be delivered at home). State insurance coverage makes this service available for rural youth. However, it is still questionable whether young people living in rural regions without parental care can easily use this service: to do so, they need to know how to call for a home doctor, they need to communicate with him or her, and then cope with the innuendo within a rural community that might well be curious about the young person’s sickness and treatment.

Another issue related to youth health is free medical insurance. The state provides medical insurance for various groups of young people and for all vulnerable groups, but there are nevertheless still some young adults outside of the vulnerable groups who are excluded from the medical insurance scheme. However, all groups of young people need free medical insurance, as it is (and should be) a state priority to have a healthy young generation. No exceptions should be permissible on such an important issue.

A big challenge for youth health is HIV/Aids. With 700-800 new cases of HIV/Aids every year, Moldova is in third place (after Russia and Ukraine) on the list of the most infected countries in Europe. According to some estimates, almost half of HIV-infected people in Moldova are under 30 (see www.aids.moldova), most of these, according to UNICEF, having become infected through sexual contact.

15. During the national hearing, some medical specialists raised the question of mandatory sexual education and strongly recommended its restoration into the school curriculum, combining it with the issues of family education and life skills. The IRT concurred with this view, which appeared to be strongly supported by most participants at the national hearing.



Like in other countries, many NGOs operate within this sphere in Moldova and they usually work on the basis of grant-funded projects. Thus, in 2007-2008, there were two projects called Young people preventing HIV/Aids, both of which had mixed funding – through the MEY, UNICEF and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). The primary goals included disseminating information among young people and training young volunteers (in how to talk to peers or how to decide what kind of information to provide, for example). Both projects were targeted at several regions and run in collaboration with either regional youth resource centres (in 2007) or with the regional departments of education, youth and sport (in 2008).

The IRT observed some of the NGOs working on HIV/Aids information and education issues. They are providing a professional service for people in need. These NGOs have strong ties with the international NGOs and donors and their activities usually include some volunteers (both from Moldova and abroad). Depending on the age of the youth groups targeted, they deliver leaflets, brochures, and handouts. The problem for some of them is complying strictly with the proclaimed goals of their activities (namely youth health risk prevention) and not overstepping the boundaries and dealing with other (related) issues that are not permitted within their legal frameworks. There should perhaps be some flexibility that allows for a greater level of professional discretion on this front.

Recommendation 35

The authorities should provide medical insurance for all groups of young people and increase the distribution of information on drugs, sexual relationships and the prevention of HIV/Aids and STDs. Many pressing youth health issues are interlinked and overlap, and professional discretion at the “coal face” is essential if effective practice is to be established. Legislative prescription within the health field needs to be alert to this fact.

-----> **5.2 Social protection and social security issues**

This complex domain may include elements of the health issues discussed above, as well as social protection (mainly protection for orphans and youth groups with different disabilities), social defence for groups at risk, social assistance for all, social insurance, legal services for children and young delinquents, monitoring and protection from violence at all levels, protection for minors (especially in criminal issues), and fighting human trafficking (the latter includes childcare and care of minors).

Some of these youth policies have already been described; this section gives a brief overview of what the IRT has learned in addition on some of these important social issues. Different ministries work on these issues, though currently the lead ministry is clearly the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child. However, this ministry was founded only recently (at the end of 2006) and before this almost all the issues of social protection came under the umbrella of the Ministry



of Health. These two ministries still share the main responsibility for social protection of children and youth, although there is a greater emphasis on the social and psychological aspects rather than on a medical approach. Some other governmental departments, such as the Ministry of Domestic Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, are also involved.

Several international organisations are also involved in monitoring issues related to the social protection of children and young adults. In particular, they provide grants for NGOs to run projects related to social protection and violence prevention. The IRT was informed that the biggest problem is the co-ordination of their activities – both between themselves and with the authorities. Good communication is especially important because both the state and the civil society (NGOs) participate in providing social protection and security to children and youth. Many small NGOs offer care and facilities for all groups of youth in need, so that state recognition of the important role of NGOs is critical. Such relationships are relatively new for Moldova and the division of roles and responsibilities between the state and the “third sector” is something that still has to be worked out.

Recommendation 36

Strong state recognition of the role of NGOs working in this sphere and close co-operation between the state institutions and NGOs are needed. Boundaries, roles and responsibilities between the state and this “third sector” demand reflection and clarification.

The IRT visited a centre working with children and young people who need help and temporary placement for a variety of reasons (such as domestic violence, criminal behaviour, a lack of parents at home, or being lost and alone in the city). The structure of this centre is complex: as well as police officers, the staff include doctors, lawyers, psychologists and social workers, all of whom provide different kinds of assistance and intervention for the young people who come to their attention. This is significant progress compared to the previous situation when only police officers worked with the children and young people who were brought to the centre. The IRT learned that there are several placement and community centres in Moldova that provide some protection and social assistance for minors. These centres have the right to monitor children for two years after they have returned home (or been adopted or placed in other social institutions).

However, the legal basis for placing young people in such placement centres and keeping them there is not very clear. Although the local authorities are always informed about such cases, this information does not appear to constitute a proper legal basis for dealing with issues of social protection. Taking into account the fact that there are more than 105 000 children, or almost one third, according to UNICEF estimates (*Migration and the rights of children in Moldova, 2007*), whose parents (one or both) are working abroad, it is quite possible that many children need social assistance.



There are numerous cases of child abuse in Moldova, according to information from international organisations (*State responsiveness to violence against children*, 2007). When the IRT inquired whether Moldova has an ombudsperson for children, who is responsible for the monitoring and assessment of child safety, child protection and child rights, the answer was affirmative. Unfortunately, during the review itself and even at the national hearing, the IRT failed to establish the identity of this individual.¹⁶ However, the activities of an ombudsperson and other special advocates for children are important in overseeing the quality (and failings) of social protection work with children and should therefore be well known to the public: every child and parent needs to know how to find and get in contact with them.

Recommendation 37

There needs to be higher visibility of the ombudsperson for children and his or her staff in the sphere of social protection, thereby ensuring compliance with child rights and with safeguarding procedures that minimise, where possible, the need for institutional intervention and promote a more social and family-based approach in policy development.

-----> **5.3 Criminal situation and youth justice**

Criminality is a significant problem in Moldova and juvenile criminality is only a small part of this problem. The most risky age, as the IRT was officially informed, is between 14 and 15. The at-risk groups include those children who live in poverty, as well as children whose parents are abroad (these children have less care at home and therefore need more social care from schools, youth centres and the like). However, almost 40% of young offenders are from families with two parents at home and a decent standard of living. So crime is not just an issue for poor families: children from other families are also involved, though the root causes may be different.

The most typical crimes are shop lifting, robbery and theft. However, young offenders are also involved in more serious offences: one in 10 is a drug user. According to statistics provided by the Moldovan state officials (www.statistica.md), the level of youth crime in 2008 decreased by 5% in comparison with 2007. However, the number of young people who were released without criminal proceedings being pursued increased by 17% (primarily those who committed petty crimes). This reflects a policy not to place young offenders in closed institutions unnecessarily, though a commitment to more robust preventative practices is just emerging. The number of young offenders in the penitentiary system decreased from 143 in 2007 to 24 at the end of 2008.

16. The Ministry of Education and Youth finally provided a name in its response to the final draft of the international report (June 2009). The children's ombudsperson for Moldova is Tamara Plamadeala, advocate for children's rights.



Drug abuse is a serious law enforcement problem. According to some survey data, 27% of young people know somebody who takes drugs (*Young People's Health and Development* 2005, p. 46). Most drug users live in the urban areas. In Chişinău, young drug users detained by police are registered with the Centre for Preventing Drug Abuse funded by the municipality. The centre's staff can also take young drug users through referrals and then treat them at the centre.

Young people and children, as well as adults, are victims of human trafficking in Moldova. There is therefore a special department for minors within the Chişinău Protection and Assistance Centre for victims and potential victims of trafficking. The centre offers temporary residence if referral is the best solution in a given case; other services include psychological counselling, social and legal support and medical assistance ("Chişinău Protection and Assistance Centre" 2008).

One issue that concerned the IRT was the absence of clear and dedicated legislation to deal with young people who break the law. Moldova does not have a special criminal law for juvenile crime. However, a juvenile element is reflected in the criminal code: there is a special procedure and one special prison (only for boys). There is no capital punishment for youth under 18; however, in extreme cases young criminals can receive life imprisonment. Most convicted juveniles receive half of the sentence given to adults. Outside of this system, there are negotiation procedures regarding sexual crime and other offences. No community sentences, such as probation, are currently available.

Moldovan legislation provides some additional protection for minors. According to Moldovan penal procedure, while a minor is being interviewed when suspected of committing an offence, a teacher or psychologist has to be present. However, there is no possibility of community supervision for less serious offenders, as is the practice in some western European countries and an emergent practice in other parts of central and eastern Europe. There is also little by way of prevention, though of course those young people at greater risk of criminal behaviour should be the target of special attention from social workers, psychologists, police officers and others at the local level.

Recommendation 38

More attention should be given to preventative work at the local level, especially for those people at greater risk of criminal behaviour: there could be more "targeting" in order to involve them in sport, non-formal education and social programmes to provide them with new directions, horizons and aspirations and to promote a stronger sense of social inclusion.

One more problem of prevention activities in this sphere relates to the stereotypes conferred on some ethnic minorities, such as the Roma population. Public opinion views them as "more criminal". Social workers and police officers should therefore pay more attention to those ethnic minorities that are considered to be "more criminal" and that therefore need more help for social inclusion (such as the provision of jobs for adults, schools and medical services for children, and the like). An improved balance needs to be struck between enforcement, support and prevention.



Recommendation 39

Prevention activities and interventions with youth at risk, especially those subjected to discriminatory stereotypes, should involve both the police and youth/social workers, endeavouring to balance law enforcement with a broader set of more positive interventions in the areas of learning, lifestyle and leisure activities.

The weak points of current policies on social protection and current legislation in Moldova are the following: (a) some youth groups are not targeted and not involved in “positive” youth activities to improve their lifestyle such as sport and non-formal education; (b) there is a lack of money for all groups in need (social orphans whose parents are abroad need much more protection); (c) an absence of, or apparent inconsistencies in special laws for young offenders; and (d) a dearth of “good practice” experience and examples of effective measures for combating youth crime and organising constructive prevention activity.

Recommendation 40

A more strategic framework for addressing youth deviance and crime, incorporating prevention, community intervention, family support and leisure programmes, as well as more punitive responses, is in urgent need of formulation and implementation.

-----> **5.4 Sport and leisure**

The sport domain of youth policy helps to focus attention on building the capacity of young people to participate in social life and to be included in civil society at the municipal level. Sporting activities help to encourage youth to spend their leisure time in a healthy manner together with friends, or to develop their abilities under the guidance of trainers.

In Moldova, youth policy developed in the sport domain allows youth workers and trainers to work with particular youth groups. These groups are usually either for talented young athletes or for all youth interested in sporting activity and self-development. In Chişinău, for example, the Municipal Department of Science, Youth and Sport established a Centre for Adolescents aimed at involving this age group, with the objective of not only promoting sport but also of addressing ecological, administrative and leisure problems. Such facilities are open to all young city dwellers. However, a significant focus of its work is on the cultivation of young sporting champions and their “production of excellence” through competitions. The centre has a budget (from the state and from donors) to reimburse talented sports performers for their travel expenses and to provide them with financial awards. This is a good stimulus for young people.



Sports policy should be viewed as a part of youth policy, with a “sport for all” approach, aimed at ensuring access for all young people to both non-competitive and competitive sporting activities in safe environments. Sports policy could be an important addition to the existing youth policy and one that would help to achieve an important policy priority of social inclusion.¹⁷

Sport can contribute significantly to the personal development of young people. It helps young people to forge their character, develop competitiveness and acquire the skills necessary for coping in challenging conditions.

Recommendation 41

Sport should be firmly connected to broader youth policy and considered as an important component of health promotion, social inclusion and the promotion of equal opportunities for all, as well as one of a variety of forms of prevention.

In the countryside, sport is often only available to young people through traditional extra-curricular activities provided by creation centres and sports schools. Sports facilities in the rural areas are very limited. However, all sports facilities in the state-financed youth centres and youth resource centres have to be available for all. Currently, there are only nine centres for sport and physical culture in Moldova that provide a range of services for young people.

The IRT visited a regional youth centre which was equipped with newly renovated facilities and offered sports activities such as gym training and dancing, and which was open to all young people. This centre serves as one example of good practice. However, the IRT was told that there are other centres in the country where the sports facilities are reserved for more elite, sport-oriented youth groups and which are not accessible for other young people, and that often sports facilities are completely lacking. Indeed, many of the sports facilities that do exist are in a poor condition and do not encourage young people to be physically active. At least those who are motivated to make use of sports facilities can do so and, as a result, they are often in better physical shape as they prepare for the challenges of transition to adulthood.

Recommendation 42

The IRT was reassured that sports facilities provided by the youth centres are accessible to all young people, but there needs to be a more concerted effort to engage with young people at risk and encourage their involvement in sport.

Sport and physical activity were rarely mentioned to the IRT as health-related topics. However, sporting activities are an important vehicle for promoting a healthy lifestyle and as a tool to enhance, for example, self-knowledge and self-

17. One objective of the Moldova Youth Programme for 2009, according to the response of the Ministry of Education and Youth to the final draft of the international report (June 2009), is the development of sports infrastructure.



confidence, in addition to physical fitness. According to the EU-recommended approach, “the promotion of physical activity is potentially one of the most effective and efficient – and hence cost-effective – ways of preventing disease and promoting well-being” (“EU Physical Activity Guidelines”, p. 20). Sport can also be used as a tool for enhancing mental health and can help to prevent or reduce risk behaviour. Those who are not involved in sport often remain excluded from and outside of socially approved activities. In Moldova, where mental health problems and wider psycho-social disorders amongst young people appear to be increasing, sport can be a relatively cheap policy option; not all sport requires sophisticated equipment and kit. The media has a key role to play in advocating healthy lifestyles through sport.

Recommendation 43

The media should be more active in promoting sport as part of a healthy lifestyle and a tool to prevent risk behaviour and enhance mental health.

The infrastructure available for young people’s leisure time differs considerably between urban and rural contexts. Creation centres in the rural areas are often in poor condition and therefore do not serve young people as well as they might in supporting their self-efficacy and self-development. Poor cultural conditions may be one catalyst for rural youth who can do so to move to urban contexts, where they can satisfy their cultural needs to a higher degree, find space for self-education, relaxation and fun, improve their knowledge, and have at least theoretical access to a much wider range, and better quality, of leisure options. Leisure has sometimes been described as the “weak link in the chain of socialisation”, offering freedom to young people away from the more disciplined environments of family, school and work. It can provide both positive and negative opportunities and possibilities. Within leisure, young people can be either creators or consumers or both; supporting them as creators contributes both to individual self-development and potentially to future enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Recommendation 44

Leisure time, appropriately supported and provided for, can be a space for informal and non-formal learning and an arena for creativity and active contribution, rather than passive consumption and sometimes negative behaviour. A suitable leisure environment, however, needs to be actively forged if the aforementioned outcomes of youth leisure activity are to be realised.

However, the availability of broader cultural conditions in urban areas does not necessarily always produce positive outcomes, especially in terms of maintaining links with cultural heritage and national identity. Quite often, young city dwellers appear to care about their cultural development even less than their rural counterparts. The IRT was told by young city dwellers that “they do not have leisure time”, as they have to work or study all the time. When they do have free



time, young people apparently prefer to surf the Internet, play computer games, or watch TV. Arguably, these are forms of passive consumption of mass culture that do not greatly contribute to young people's development and wider engagement in social life and civil society. This also corroborates the concerns of youth activists that too many young people are not participating in the very varied work of youth organisations.

Youth NGOs and youth creation centres have to help different groups of young people to spend their free time in a variety of constructive ways that contribute to their personal development and competences, improve their skills and physical abilities, and prepare them for their personal and professional futures.

Recommendation 45

Youth NGOs and youth creation centres have a key role to play in shaping the framework for the constructive leisure-time pursuits engaged in by young people by balancing production and consumption, the personal and the social, and self-interest and commitment to others.





6. Transversal issues

Some of the issues mentioned below have already been partly discussed in earlier chapters. They are approached from a different angle, but repetition will be avoided unless there is a very intentional need for reinforcement.



6.1 Transnistria region

On the one hand, Transnistria is an inalienable part of Moldova, so that the government has to treat its people as citizens of Moldova and as having the same rights as all other citizens. On the other hand, because of all the political problems of post-communist transition, communication between Transnistria as an autonomous region and the rest of Moldova is not easy. The situation has an adverse effect on youth policy.

First, there is a lack of regular contact between youth organisations in Transnistria and other parts of Moldova. Many young people, including NGO leaders from Transnistria, referred to this issue as a sensitive problem and one with practical implications. For example, one young woman was concerned that although she had been an NGO leader for several years, she had only recently been invited to a youth national meeting in Chişinău (a youth forum) for the first time (as she said, she was one of two “lucky” youth leaders from Transnistria who were invited). The lack of working contacts generally makes it difficult to co-ordinate youth policy and activities.¹⁸

One of the possible solutions to this difficult situation has been identified by those youth NGOs from Transnistria that are registered in Chişinău. This registration has made it possible for them to apply for foreign grants as a legal youth organisation and to keep the grant money in their bank accounts in Chişinău, while trying to function practically in Transnistria. The IRT met one Transnistrian youth NGO leader

18. In its response to the final draft of the international report, the Ministry of Education and Youth was keen to assert that “the Moldovan youth and Transnistrian youth have equal access to social rights: access to education, employment, etc.”. This may be the formal juridical position, but such theoretical equality is not reflected in the practical inequalities experienced by young people in these two different parts of Moldova.



who had adopted this approach; the NGO has well-established connections with the MEY and other youth organisations. However, this NGO always experiences legal and financial problems in Transnistria when dealing with the local administration.

Second, there is a problem of language, since information is not always available in the native languages of young people. Historically, a large proportion of people in Transnistria are ethnic Ukrainians and Russians and do not speak the Moldovan language very well. Given the quality of formal education in Transnistria, they also have a limited practical knowledge of foreign languages. They therefore cannot learn from websites, such as those of the European institutions or other organisations worldwide, that are written in Moldovan and English (or French) and that provide information on youth activities in Moldova. Youth organisations have clearly expressed their need for translation of the official information from Chişinău on the official website of the MEY into Russian. They were also concerned that the Russian version of the NYC website is incomplete and rarely up to date. As a result of the language barrier, youth in Transnistria cannot keep up with news about the country as a whole and feel excluded.

A similar concern was also expressed by young people from another autonomous region, Găgăuzia, where Russian is also in use. Youth leaders and students with whom the IRT met were concerned about the same problems: lack of translation and limited information about youth activities in Russian.

Recommendation 46

Not least for reasons of equal opportunity, youth policy must recognise the right of minority groups of young people to use their native language and be able to access relevant information in that language.

Young people from across Moldova, including those from the autonomous regions, share many similar characteristics. The MEY should actively work on the problem of social inclusion of young people from the autonomous regions. There are already some programmes for Transnistrian youth at universities in Moldova (such as a fixed quota for Transnistrian students, special stipends, etc.). It would be helpful to expand such programmes in order to increase social inclusion, as well as to provide regular translation of state documents into Russian for practical needs, for as long as is necessary.

Recommendation 47

Youth policy needs to recognise the specific situation of young people in the autonomous regions of Moldova, respond to particular issues, and help to establish working contacts between youth organisations in Transnistria and those elsewhere in Moldova.



-----> 6.2 Migration

One of the main concerns of policy makers is migration, both the massive out-migration from the country and the internal migration from rural areas to the cities. Young people are leaving their families and going abroad in the hope of finding better jobs and earning more money. As they cannot get satisfactory jobs and housing in their communities, their options if they stay at home are limited. In one region, 50% of recent university graduates were out of work, only one third found employment in their region, and the rest left home and went abroad. Regional and local municipalities cannot offer decent jobs and housing for young people. They are not competitive in terms of employment opportunities, even compared with young people in Chişinău, let alone in Italy, Romania or Russia (which are typical destinations for young migrants).

Recommendation 48

Urgent policy is required to promote employment opportunities “at home”, support employers in providing jobs, and establish social programmes for unemployed youth. Consideration may need to be given to forms of “community economic development” that have proved successful in economically disadvantaged areas elsewhere in Europe and in the USA in order to stall the out-migration of young people. “Growth centre” models, providing business support proportionate to the size of population clusters (villages, small towns, larger towns), would constitute another approach. A third strategy might incorporate vocational training initiatives such as those that allow young people to build their own housing, perhaps in addition to improving or constructing local sports, cultural or youth resource centres.

A significant proportion of migrants have a university education but are still unable to find work abroad that is commensurate with their qualifications. For the IRT this situation seems strange: too many Moldovans have a university education, and too many emigrate for lack of hope of finding work commensurate with their degree-level education.¹⁹ How can this phenomenon be explained?

One of the reasons for migration, the IRT suggests, is connected to the lack of effective youth policy for the prevention of youth migration. It is critical to ensure that this sensitive issue remains a primary concern in state youth policy. However, different approaches are needed in relation to talented youth going abroad, to “basic workers” seeking any job abroad and to children abandoned at home but whose parents have left to work abroad.

19. Although Moldova is a signatory to the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities (ETS No. 15) and the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165), in practice, graduates of Moldovan universities cannot count on finding work anywhere abroad that is commensurate with their qualifications, including in Russia.



Recommendation 49

Multifaceted preventative intervention is needed to create a framework of opportunity and aspiration for young people within Moldova, and to provide special assistance for young people whose parents have already left the country.

Different perspectives on migration currently exist, but all the views that were conveyed to the IRT tended to be rather positive or neutral (in stark contrast to views typically expressed from outside the country, which are invariably negative and linked to poverty, naivety and desperation). They included remarks such as “a good chance for youth experience”, “a contribution to the state and family budget”, and “a chance to earn money for the education of their children”.²⁰ Only a few respondents had a clear view of the negative social consequences of migration for an individual and society, such as social exclusion and disintegration, divorce, alcoholism and prostitution. In one university, there was even a proposal to evaluate educational success on the basis of the number of graduates who found a job abroad. If Moldova wants to educate a labour force for foreign countries, this might be reasonable; otherwise it is a waste of state money spent on education and a loss of human capital if young people leave Moldova as soon as they receive a diploma. Youth policy cannot ignore out-migration when half of all migrants fall within the youth age group. The imperative for policy makers is to improve employment structures and the wider social infrastructure for youth in order to help motivate young people to stay in Moldova.²¹

Without such steps, the future of Moldova is in question. The country cannot forever depend on money from its citizens living abroad, however much this currently shores up the economy. The social effects of migration are probably more dramatic than Moldovan officials now imagine. It is possible that in a few years, people who live abroad will cut their ties with Moldova, bring their families over to their new countries of citizenship or residence, and therefore stop sending money to Moldova. It is unclear what will be left for Moldova if such a scenario materialises. It is now time for the government to foresee all possible positive and negative consequences of migration.

20. These views are supported in the media. A UK journalist mentioned in *The Guardian* that Moldovan migrants send home more than €1 billion annually, which is equal to 38% of Moldova’s economic output. According to an OSCE calculation, this is the highest per capita level in the world.

21. During an informal dinner the IRT noted that many of the diners in the restaurant were well-known young members of the “intelligentsia”. A cryptic remark was made that there were enough brains there to solve Moldova’s entrenched problems. A Moldovan colleague agreed and then noted rather sadly that not one of them lived in Chişinău any longer. They were back in Moldova on holiday but all worked for multinational and international organisations in Brussels, London, New York and Milan.



Recommendation 50

A special youth policy for reintegration is needed for those citizens who return home from abroad and would like to find a job in Moldova.

-----> **6.3 Urban–rural division**

Successful youth policy on rural–urban division will depend on overall social-economic success in Moldova. With regard to youth policy, the spatial dimension is one of the most crucial: it is perhaps the most critical dimension with regard to the social inclusion or exclusion of young people. Additionally, urban–rural aspects of youth policy sit (un)comfortably on the horizontal spectrum of the socio-economic dimension of youth citizenship: urbanity largely defines inclusion and citizenship. For Moldova, the urban–rural division means everything, as life is altogether different in the cities and the countryside. In rural communities, the availability of most youth amenities depends entirely on tax revenues and then the goodwill of the authorities to support youth policy. In some regions, the IRT saw a willingness on the part of the authorities to co-operate on youth issues.

The National Report (p. 11) mentions that the “regional and local level is represented by 354 local youth councils and 82 local and regional youth resource centres. These structures represent an institutional framework through which young people are actively involved in their community’s social life.” This is a reasonable and positive take on what youth policy is aspiring to do, but the hard truth is that the life of rural youth remains bleak: there are limited sports, information and cultural facilities, a much higher level of unemployment, problems of human trafficking and emigration, and an enormous problem of children living without parental care because their parents are abroad. These problems lead to a disproportionate risk of social exclusion for rural youth. Survey data provided by “Opinia” support this statement: many respondents from rural areas worried about their exclusion from social and political life. Additionally, as a youth activist in a remote region said, far fewer NGOs are really active in rural areas than in the cities.

Rural–urban division exacerbates almost all of the major problems in Moldova. Though the IRT cannot be wholly certain, it surmises that this division is almost certainly more important than age or gender, which are – alongside ethnicity in many contexts – the traditional “grand narratives” of social stratification and social inequality. In the next section, the subdivision of this rural–urban gap will be described through subordinate cross-cutting issues. In fact, participation and citizenship, social inclusion and youth information – three of the most significant “cross-cutting” themes to have emerged from previous Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy – are sub-themes of the stark urban–rural division in Moldova.



Recommendation 51

Moldova needs a rural youth strategy encompassing training and employment programmes, support for returning graduates, housing and infrastructure development, and sport and leisure provision – in order to renew hope and establish a framework for opportunity and experience.

7. Cross-cutting issues

-----> 7.1 Participation and citizenship

This theme primarily refers to the horizontal dimension of youth opportunities and youth policy. However, as was clearly shown in the report on Latvian youth policy, both horizontal and vertical dimensions of youth opportunities are strongly related to the issue of social inclusion, namely, the opportunity for young people to participate regardless of their abilities, age, income, place of residence or ethnicity (see Reiter et al. 2008, pp. 75-81). In Moldova, there is an enormous amount of rhetoric on the subject of young people; the National Report and other official documents are testament to this. According to such documents, it is clear that many structures and opportunities have been recently constructed during Youth Year, so that it will take some years before an objective assessment can be made of which initiatives are working well and which may have had a shorter “shelf life”.

There was less mention in the National Report of the “youth voice” and the influence of youth on social change or political life. Some youth organisations certainly suggested that real opportunities for youth to be heard were limited – both because of out-of-date legislation and due to the actions of particular political or public figures. This view was especially strong amongst young people who had been linked to minority rights demonstrations, or who had experienced discrimination against liberal youth groups. Further, a sociological survey confirmed that young Moldovans are politically passive because they do not trust politicians and do not believe they can influence their own lives through political participation.

Some youth leaders expressed the opinion that, even if they were very critical of it, nothing in the official youth policy would change. They also said that young people are not engaged in active political life because the political conditions are not “comfortable” for youth generally. According to these views, sometimes those at the “top” of society can provide political space for those at the top of national youth activities; however, civil participation is not supported or secured for those young people further down the hierarchy of policy making and youth involvement.



In the National Report (pp. 20-23) different dimensions of youth participation are described: European, national, and regional/local. For an ordinary young person, local participation in community life is the most relevant and important. However, not many youth activists confirm that youth feel eager or ready to really participate. They may wish to participate in the local area, but the very existence of local activities depends on the goodwill of individuals, including those in power structures. It seems that many activities are created on paper and for practical reasons (in order to make grant applications, for example), while in everyday life young people are not involved in them. As one youth activist told the IRT, perhaps only 10% of existing youth NGOs are active, and almost all of them are small. Overall, it means that young people are not participating in many activities developed for or directed at youth. The elitist division of youth is real: young activists are closely connected to the authorities at the local, regional or national levels; other young activists (usually more liberal and critical) are more connected to the international structures, while almost none of them are connected to the daily reality of the vast majority of ordinary young people.

The question is whether the youth elite is socially responsible. What can this elite do for the younger generation? How can it reflect the interests of youth in its activities? Put another way, the IRT noted that there appeared to be some scepticism as to whether those young people leading the youth agenda in Moldova are doing so as the vanguard of the interests of a wider population of young people, or whether they are doing so for less noble reasons of self-interest.

According to the sociological data provided by the “Opinia” service, only a small percentage of young people are members of any organisation, and less than 5% participate in any activities (apart from the elections, where they are traditionally more active than youth in many western European countries). New strategies to reach less advantaged youth groups are therefore needed.

Recommendation 52

The state authorities need to analyse the elite–outsider issues that surround youth representation, consider how current “out-groups” may be more fully included in dialogue, and debate how they can be given the capacity to contribute to youth policy development.

Currently, the most active youth groups are students. However, Moldova needs more active young people in local and regional settings. Instead, there appears to be a trend towards the construction of a “youth activist aristocracy”, as well as an “intellectual aristocracy” of small groups who mostly live in Chişinău and who are able to participate in prestigious elitist activities, while the majority of youth in the small towns and the countryside remain passive.

Recommendation 53

The state institutions need to think harder about mechanisms for youth engagement through representational and categorical participation, and about the “youth voice” on social and political as well as leisure-time issues.



-----> 7.2 Social inclusion

This is primarily the vertical dimension of youth policy within a rural–urban framework. The major reason for the enormous level of economic exclusion in Moldova is the poor economic situation in general. This situation directly leads to poverty for thousands of Moldovan families (economic exclusion) and pushes thousands more to find a job abroad (which in turn produces a social dimension of exclusion for young people). Although youth policy alone cannot fight the economic and social exclusion resulting from poverty, unemployment and migration (which have to be the major targets of other state policy), it has in any case to reflect on these types of exclusion with regard to youth. So although youth policy cannot contribute significantly to the improvement of the situation with regard to youth economic and social exclusion (which are overwhelming, apparently almost intractable problems in Moldova), it can improve the situation of some specific groups of young people through carefully targeted intervention and support.

The IRT gained the impression that the issues that are part of social exclusion are very relevant and critical and at the same time very sensitive. They encapsulate a whole range of policy domains such as employment, housing, health, childcare, crime, sport, participation and families. Some of these issues have been addressed elsewhere in this report; others are not covered because the IRT did not receive sufficient information about them.

Recommendation 54

The economic basis of social exclusion is not in dispute, but stronger social inclusion can be forged through positive community development strategies that draw on local human resources, including by encouraging the engagement of young people.

Although the National Report did not focus directly on social exclusion, the problem itself was clearly evident during our visits. A critical understanding of the importance and scale of social exclusion was not generally apparent; social exclusion was described primarily as a problem limited to so-called “at-risk groups”, such as people with disabilities, children without parental care, young criminals and people with HIV/Aids. Even the problem of gender inequality that indirectly leads to the issue of prostitution (not necessarily forced) among young women is not clearly recognised as one specific feature of social exclusion and disadvantage.

Strategies for social inclusion in Moldova tend to be understood as social work with disabled people, plus prevention of and fighting against juvenile crime.²² These two domains were well presented to the IRT. The respective ministries

22. Though they are not mentioned in the National Report, the Ministry of Education and Youth, in its response to the final draft of the international report (June 2009), was keen to mention a number of apparently new strategies relevant to broader child and youth policy – strategies for inclusive education, the development of social services for children with disabilities, the development of community action for children in difficulties and a programme for the protection, recovery and social integration of children with disabilities.



have established their particular structures to deal with these issues. There is no doubt, of course, that some subsections of the youth population do face disproportionate exclusionary challenges, and young people with disabilities or those who come to the attention of the criminal justice system are two prominent examples. It is in this context that it is important to remember that young people are young people first and something else (disabled, offenders, without parents) second; the conceptual framework is that of a continuum, not a separate categorisation. Many youth policy initiatives can apply to all young people, irrespective of circumstances, though additional, more targeted provision may be very significant to order to deal with particular challenges.

The treatment of people with mental and physical disabilities in special institutions is part of this wider debate about social exclusion. Currently, however, the core activities and services provided by social workers can be understood more as social care for these groups than promoting their inclusion in society. There are 65 residential institutions for people with mental and physical disabilities, where these groups are treated and where they receive medical care. But, in effect, the same institutions totally isolate and exclude individuals with disabilities from the rest of society. Staying in such institutions for a long time makes it impossible (or extremely difficult) for the young adults who leave them to be integrated into society. Only some NGOs working with young people with disabilities can be considered as “the bridges” to social integration and inclusion. At least young people with disabilities may often feel more comfortable and more satisfied when they are connected to such NGOs, than when they are at home or in a special institution.

Children under the age of 14 who have disabilities are the targets of social work for many NGOs, but such children need still more attention if they are to find a more inclusive place within the wider society. Certainly, special attention is needed for the group of adolescents who are beyond the threshold for the children’s programmes (valid until age 14) and who are capable of living more independently – with appropriate levels of support, encouragement and “occupation” (whether paid work or unpaid activity). Some youth workers expressed their concern about this group, which can become the prime source of young criminals because of the lack of social inclusion.

Some methods of treatment of at-risk groups used by the police may inadvertently lead to further social exclusion (the classic “labelling theory”, advanced as far back as the 1950s by American criminologists). In recognition of this fact, the prevailing view expressed to the IRT by those working in the criminal justice system was that police activities should be directed at keeping “risky children” away from crime, but that there was limited advocacy for involving them in positive activities aimed at more long-term social inclusion. In practice, there are, of course, very significant financial and human resource issues here that make the latter course of action unlikely in the immediate future (though it should not be ruled out in the medium term). Police officers do not work with drop-outs from schools, their



staffing levels are limited, and some positions are vacant for a long time (as one official explained in private, “it’s a lot of work for a not very decent salary”). Nor are communities and local public administrations sufficiently resourced to reflect on the contribution they might make to more “upstream” youth crime prevention.

Since 2006, the position of youth workers has been established at local and regional levels, and training courses have been organised with the support of international donors. Currently these individuals work in the domains of youth and sports activities, but their number is small: 0.5 units in a community with a population of between 5 500 and 9 500 people, and 1 unit if the population is over 9 500. Nevertheless, it is a first step. Throughout Europe, there are different models of youth work, from social pedagogy to community organisation. Some youth workers are engaged in direct contact and practice with young people, others harness resources and maximise their deployment at the local level. Moldova may be wise to scrutinise different approaches elsewhere in Europe and decide what is best for its particular circumstances and challenges.

A visible sphere of social exclusion is related to migration and to children living without parents. It is difficult to accurately assess the level of social exclusion of children and young adolescents whose parents have left Moldova and who only send money back to support their families there. On the one hand, these children live with grandparents or other relatives (or even alone) and they live mostly without adult or parental control and care. On the other hand, they have more money to spend on themselves and do not care much about school, the respect of their peers, or their own future. As they have more money to spend on food, consumer products and fashionable clothes, they differ from those children whose parents remain in Moldova on small salaries and who are not able to provide the necessities for their families. According to research data from “Opinia” (*Young people in Moldova*, 2008), 33% of respondents could afford only real necessities and sometimes even less, and 71% admitted that they could never afford such luxuries as going on holiday. The perverse social exclusion of migrants’ children may therefore lead inexorably to the erosion of local community bonds and perhaps, over time the erosion of the wider social structure in Moldova. As the IRT was told informally, when observing young people who were enjoying a night out at a relatively expensive location in Chişinău, most of them were probably only able to afford such leisure activities due to the funds they were receiving from parents living and working abroad.

Recommendation 55

There is a need for a dedicated supplementary youth policy for more vulnerable young people, such as those with disabilities or those at risk, who have little prospect of finding work in the private labour market or of going abroad. It should be constructed within, and not separately from, a broader vision of social inclusion for all young people.



Recommendation 56

Young people with disabilities require specific forms of support that are probably best delivered through the work of dedicated NGOs, which can determine the appropriate balance of individualised support needed. Financial support from the state or from international donors is needed to anchor this provision through the allocation of “core” funding for basic service delivery, especially for young people over the age of 14 capable of living more independently.

-----> **7.3 Youth information**

Young people need information in order to make choices, judgments and decisions. Today, there is no shortage of information for most young people, and it is channelled through various media; the challenge for youth policy is to assist young people in making sense of it. Distinguishing between reliable and “neutral” information and what is essentially marketing can be extremely difficult. Young people are not only consumers but also producers of information. All in all, youth information has ceased to be a static “hard copy” issue, but has become a fluid and dynamic process. Moldova is fortunate to have the National Media Centre, which was opened in 2003 in partnership with UNICEF, to co-ordinate the youth media network and train young media professionals. It also has an energetic Young Journalists’ Centre (a youth NGO) that has promoted school newspapers in order to encourage young people to set out their views and engage in critical discussion, something that clearly was not encouraged under the former regime and about which many young people still appear to be reticent, as if trapped by the culture inherited from their parents.

Two different views on the availability of information in Moldova were expressed to the IRT by young activists. Some maintained that there was insufficient information for young people, while others argued that young people were overloaded with information. Both views have some validity. The point is that only rural youth experiences a deficit of necessary information and has limited access to sources of information, while young people from urban areas sometimes do not know how to use information for their own benefit. Information is readily available for youth in the cities through the network of youth centres (their information points) and resource centres, NGOs and Internet cafes. There are media resources, special books and brochures that address several issues that are useful for young people. Young people in the urban areas are therefore potentially well informed. However, even this category of privileged youth can be divided into smaller subgroups, with different levels of information and access. Some youth groups do not use the Internet: they need first-hand information from their peer groups, parents, teachers and youth workers. Other groups are too passive to do regular individual research, even if they have access. There are also many young people who do not know where they can find the information they require, or how they can use it in practice. So even urban youth cannot always be considered as “well informed”. The “information divide” is a significant element of the broader “youth divide”,



which, as noted above, is characterised in Moldova largely by an urban–rural division. Yet even where information is plentiful, it may not be accessible. Young people need support in finding relevant material and interpreting it before they can make use of it in relation to their needs.

Recommendation 57

Given very diverse access to new technologies, youth information has to be disseminated not only through the Internet, but through a variety of media – printed material, youth NGO networks and face-to-face.

Rural youth have limited access to information; Internet connection is poor, there are fewer information points, libraries and points of contact. They also have difficulty in using websites in foreign languages. As a result, rural youth is less well informed and less participative in the production of information.

The most relevant information for the majority of young people is local or regional. Even in this sphere, some activists from remote rural areas worry about the lack of information in their native (non-Moldovan) languages. There is certainly not enough appropriate information in rural areas and in the autonomous regions to meet youth needs.

The issue of information is among the important youth strategic priorities (National Report, p. 13). The MEY actively tries to increase the level of information available for youth and to ensure that it is open to all. During Youth Year, important events with a strong informative focus were organised in order to increase the level of youth information available. New technical and organisational facilities were constructed with the support of international donors. Youth NGOs in this sphere provide access to the Internet, including access to online journals, thus promoting access to a broader base and range of information. They also organise information campaigns, support NGO publications and provide useful material for education and training.

The network of YRCs has great opportunities for developing youth information strategies. However, there is not yet enough understanding among the staff that youth information is a continuing process (not a one-off campaign or action, or provision of the Internet). The range of topics about which young people may seek information is almost infinite, but there are clusters that have been identified in the development of youth information systems elsewhere in Europe (notably Cyprus, Finland and the UK). It would be beneficial to focus attention on such models.

Recommendation 58

There is already a basis for a strong youth information network. This needs to be both technical and human, and should cover all youth interests. State information should be available in all relevant native languages. Young people need to receive appropriate support in digesting, interpreting (making sense of) and applying the information at their disposal.



8. Supporting mechanisms for youth policy

Successful youth policy development needs support mechanisms that help youth policy makers to properly design youth policy, create the strategy for its practical elaboration, and then carefully assess its effectiveness.

The accumulated experience in this field shows that relevant and effective youth policies are usually experience-based and research-based, up to date with societal processes, and carefully attuned to the current youth needs in the country (Williamson 2008). In order to meet these standards, youth policy has to incorporate a framework for continuous self-evaluation and development.

Although the field of youth policy is relatively new in the Republic of Moldova, during the last few years it has nevertheless become as an important part of the state policy. Its further development presupposes paying more attention to the supporting mechanisms of youth policy.

-----> 8.1 Research

The National Report does not contain any evidence of research that has been done in Moldova related to youth policy. There are some data on youth taken from the national statistical sources of information; there are a few references to some global research on HIV/Aids and migration from reports prepared by international organisations (mainly UNICEF). However, there is no trace of youth research being done in Moldova with the practical goal of developing youth policy. Even when the National Report (p. 15) describes a special national project for Youth Year that was financed by UNICEF and which aimed at developing youth policy in Moldova, no research in the youth field is mentioned. It seems that the role of research in informing and contributing to the development and delivery of youth policy is definitely underestimated by MEY officials.

Recommendation 59

The MEY should recognise and accord greater importance to dialogue and networks between research-based knowledge and the government policy-making process when selecting research priorities and monitoring the policy delivery process.

Although there was apparently no youth research conducted or commissioned by the MEY, other youth research has been carried out in Moldova. The IRT attended a meeting with well-established youth researchers from a private sociological service at which some concerns were expressed about the lack of interest in research data by the authorities. In order to improve this situation, it is necessary to establish a working relationship between the MEY and youth researchers in Moldova. The goal should be to involve researchers in youth policy development,



implementation and monitoring. The implementation of this idea would need some goodwill from both sides. However, the possible benefits that can be achieved for both sides and for the field of youth policy almost certainly outweigh the inevitable frictions that arise when policy and research come face-to-face!

Recommendation 60

It is important to establish a working relationship between the MEY and youth researchers, invite youth researchers into the process of youth policy elaboration and evaluation, and use sociological data as a basis for thinking through the formulation and implementation of any new policy directed towards young people.

In Europe over the past decade, there has been increasing use of youth research to inform youth policy elaboration, implementation and evaluation. Research may still be the poor relation, but it is now recognised as one corner of what is sometimes referred to as the “magic triangle” in youth policy: government, youth organisations and researchers (policy, practice and research). During the years of the Soviet Union, the central government established special research units in all 15 republics in order to collect data on youth development, elaborate youth policy, and then actively implement it. Whatever the ideological problems with those data and the fact that the information is now considerably out of date, it remains a significant reference point and starting point for considering the contemporary condition of young people’s lives in post-Soviet countries. The IRT did not find any trace of this previous research. Nor was it informed of some very useful current research until it pressed for such information. It then transpired that Moldovan youth researchers have, on a number of occasions, been presenting useful data – such as the INTAS project’s results, conference presentations and publications in international fora (see Abbot 2008; Third All-Russian Sociological Congress 2008). The IRT was perplexed as to why such data has not been more closely linked to youth policy formulation within the MEY in recent times.

Recommendation 61

Youth research needs to become more visible in youth forums and platforms where debates about youth policy take place; in youth media, the MEY and on the web pages of NGOs.

-----> **8.2 Professional training**

According to official documents, the profession of youth worker has recently been accorded official recognition. The National Report (p. 34) pays significant attention to the status of youth workers: “The Statute of youth worker activity was elaborated according to Youth Law, Article 16 in which are stipulated the attributions, competences and job conditions. There is also a job paper that specifies conditions of the youth worker. The paper contains the conditions which



must apply to the youth worker, such as: studies, experience, communication skills, etc.”. However, it is not very clear from this message what the special qualifications for a youth worker actually are, and whether they are important only for people who are hired by the authorities to work with young people, or also important for NGO practitioners. It is important to distinguish between youth worker competencies and responsibilities and those of related professions, such as social workers, formal educators (teachers), counsellors, youth health professionals and others.

As the practical work with youth demonstrates, there are different types of youth workers: those who work with groups of disabled youth, groups at risk, minors and young adults, students and rural dwellers, all of whom are involved in formal and non-formal learning processes. These issues will need more detailed elaboration in the future. The IRT had the opportunity to meet various types of youth practitioners: (a) official youth workers employed at the ministries and municipalities, whose functions include co-ordination of youth policy, implementation of youth strategy, and monitoring of youth NGOs; (b) youth NGO leaders; (c) those who work at sports and arts schools involved in NFE activities; (d) individuals working on a professional basis with children and young people from at-risk groups; (e) voluntary youth workers using their experience and commitment to work with disabled youth; and (f) other individuals working at youth resource centres and local youth councils. All of them qualified for the label of “youth worker” according to their expertise and their approach. Some of them were not particularly aware of their status, while others were perfectly informed and well prepared for their professional and/or voluntary work with youth. From an external perspective, it was clear that all these individuals shared a common platform of understanding and commitment, despite the specialist activities they performed.

Recommendation 62

Some common standards and procedures for the training system have to be elaborated in order to establish a clear and up-to-date understanding of the essence and tasks of youth work and to create the conditions for the professional training of all youth workers.

On the practical level, it is important to create a system of professional training that adheres to a core set of values and philosophy, but that connects with all the forms of practice outlined above, so that the very diverse categories of youth work practitioners can learn new methods of youth work, new strategies and can exchange experience with others.

The existing training system for youth workers in Moldova was organised through the NGOs and financed by international donors. For example, within the structure of the UNICEF-financed project devoted to the development of youth policy in Moldova in 2008, special funds were allocated for the training of MEY staff, as well as some other officials and NGO members involved in youth policy (National



Report, p. 15). Such training can be viewed as the first step towards meeting the particular needs of different groups of youth workers at different levels of society.

Recommendation 63

There are merits in elaborating a training curriculum for youth workers containing core modules and supplementary training courses for particular specialist areas of youth work. There are also advantages in considering different stages of training, which would have national recognition – from essential foundation/basic training (concerned with, for example, health and safety or child protection issues), through to intermediate and advanced levels.

Clearly, the human resources available to provide such training and to formulate the institutional framework are limited in Moldova. Yet, like the “trainers’ pools” across Europe, it would be possible to identify and register those with experience and expertise in the youth field who are willing to contribute to shaping and delivering a youth workers’ training strategy for the country.

Recommendation 64

It would be useful to establish a database of skilled and experienced professionals involved in the field of youth work who might contribute to developing youth worker training and the needs of the MEY and youth NGOs.

-----> **8.3 The dissemination of good practice**

The dissemination of good practice is an essential part of the process of successful implementation of youth policy. However, despite the evident quality, in pockets, of different forms of practice, there does not appear to be an active strategy for sharing this knowledge and experience with a view to applying it more generally. The MEY usually relies upon the official events through which good practice can be learned (youth forums, youth conferences, meetings with government officials, etc.). To its credit, however, during Youth Year there were many such events held at national, regional and local levels, where practitioners could learn patterns of good practice. There is, worldwide, a current preoccupation with “evidence-based” practice, but this is often extremely hard to define in many parts of the youth field. So much depends on the context in which the practice is taking place. Nevertheless, it can be useful to have platforms (sometimes called “practitioner forums”) where individuals share what they consider to be “experimental”, “promising” or “proven” approaches. In Moldova, the IRT would place a number of community initiatives in the first or second category, whereas some of the health practice at the youth-friendly clinics clearly falls into the latter category. The critical point is that it is not for the MEY to assess and validate forms of practice (though it may wish to do so for other reasons), but for practitioners to have the opportunity to explore their own experiences and actions. This makes for



what youth work training recurrently refers to as the “reflective practitioner” and equips those working with young people with more options and ideas.

Recommendation 65

The IRT believes that Moldova would benefit from the establishment of actual or virtual “practitioner forums” where what is believed to be “good practice” (whether experimental, promising or proven) can be shared and debated. The MEY might facilitate this process or delegate the responsibility to a relevant NGO.

At the local level, youth workers expressed concern about the poor distribution of MEY materials to local youth organisations, such as information about events taking place and about national development. In the case of autonomous regions, youth workers there were concerned about a lack of materials in their native languages. From their point of view, they needed more examples of good practice to be available in different forms: electronically, in hard copy, through seminars, and in face-to-face meetings. As they said, they would need to be shown models and “ideal types” in order to understand what good practice might be and to be able to compare such models with their own practice, within the financial and human resources at their disposal.

-----> **8.4 Evaluation and monitoring criteria**

Moldova is in the early stages of a process of youth policy formulation, development and implementation. The fourth step that requires attention throughout the process and that should not be left until the end, is the monitoring and evaluation of that process: inputs, procedures, outputs and outcomes.

There is no single formula for evaluating and monitoring the youth strategy in a country. The criteria may depend on the stage of development of the youth policy, on the financial possibilities to invest in the field, and on the people involved. The Moldovan Government has to select the way in which it would like to organise this process.

Recommendation 66

The IRT is insistent that there is no “best set of criteria” available against which a country can evaluate its youth policy. A careful and precise assessment of any possible criteria for policy evaluation is needed, which would take into account the allocated economic resources, the time for implementation, and professional and institutional capacities.

Within a host of constraints (economic, political and professional), the critical issues are those of precision and proportionality: whatever the object of evaluation is, the measures used to evaluate the policy have to be in line with the resources (material and human) invested in the development and implementation of this



policy. For example, when evaluating the success of the youth-friendly clinics, we may take into account that they have only received state funds since 2007, that many components of their structure are still in the process of development and that there is no similar experience in the past to offer a point of comparison. For such a unique policy, the tools for evaluation also have to be rather unique. The alternative is often an unacceptable level of patience, requiring the establishment of benchmarks, the impact and effect of which can only be evaluated in some years' time.

Recommendation 67

The weight and complexity of the evaluation measures should be proportional to the support and resources given.


Time is, indeed, an important aspect to take into account during the evaluation of youth policy. It is not realistic, for example, to measure the success of a small business one or two years after it has been started up. Under complex global and national economic conditions, any success in the implementation of such policy can only be measured by a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools and over a long period of time (in the case of business development, the minimum is usually three years and a preferred timescale for evaluating success is five to seven years or more).

Evaluation criteria and benchmarks can be drawn from many sources. The Council of Europe's synthesis reports of its international reviews over the past decade suggest a number that have been utilised in different contexts (see Williamson 2008). But these are not exclusive and it is always for the country concerned to construct its own evaluation framework. Reference to international standards is, of course, always useful, but sometimes judgments made according to internal aspirations and past history are equally compelling.

Recommendation 68

Evaluation processes should include both qualitative and quantitative measures. They should also consider reference points and "tests" against both external international standards and more subjectively constructed internal markers.





9. Conclusion

An international review of youth policy development and implementation can be undertaken in many ways. The review presented in this report was based on the guidelines on youth policy identified by the Council of Europe and several other international documents. The review process took more than a year, from the advisory mission that doubled as a “preliminary visit” for the policy review in December 2007, to the national hearing in February 2009. During this period, the international team studied the situation in the major domains of youth policy in Moldova, as reflected in the National Report, as expressed and explained at the level of government and as observed in practice.

The report concludes by reflecting on actual or potential policy trends found during the youth policy review.

1. The international review team wishes to express its recognition of the fact that in most policy areas concerning young people, key actors have already identified the main problems and have already undertaken or are in the process of taking steps towards addressing them. The international review team met many actors in the field of youth policy development and delivery who are committed to providing young people with better (and equal) opportunities for their future. These actors are themselves an invaluable human resource for addressing the challenges for youth policy in Moldova.
2. The international review team would like to stress that such profound problems as poverty, economic and social inequality, social exclusion, and migration, which greatly impact on young people and are major concerns for youth policy, cannot be addressed in the youth sphere alone. They require a comprehensive approach. The youth domain is only one aspect of these overarching issues endemic to Moldova; these huge problems must be attacked across the board before they can be successfully addressed in the youth sphere through youth strategies and youth policy. An analysis of these key, serious issues reflects the conditions under which young people in Moldova live.
3. The international review team understands that the above-mentioned problems influence the whole structure of youth domains and youth policy.



Many different actors are involved in efforts to solve them, most notably the government and NGOs. However, we looked for issues and actors that are specific to youth domains and for ways to deal with problems through different kinds of youth policy. From this point of view, we can conclude that the successful implementation of youth policy presumes the active participation of all partners and especially the existence of strong partners from civil society. Currently, there are many NGOs in Moldova. The majority, however, do not appear to be very active, and even the position of those that are does not appear to be very strong.

4. The international review team examined youth policy and practice in many domains. Some of these policies and their practical operation (youth friendly clinics, for example) were very impressive, while in other areas (such as non-formal education) there was still a need for some baseline knowledge and development. The international review team advocates the creation of a knowledge base for further development. This base may include sociological research data, other scientific knowledge and professional expertise, as well as local and grass-roots knowledge. This knowledge is also needed for the development of effective delivery mechanisms that can involve several actors at the local, regional and national levels: youth councils, youth resource centres, institutions and public authorities, the state (ministries and agencies) and a broad spectrum of youth organisations. There may be a case for the creation of a cross-sectoral working party on the future direction of youth policy in Moldova, involving actors from all these spheres. A sufficiently resourced MEY would appear to be the cornerstone of such a development.

In this report, we have concentrated on challenges in the areas where we see potential for development and improvement. This approach by no means denigrates or devalues the political will and the commitment of those working with young people in Moldova, or the variety of measures that are already in place. An integrated vision of youth policy, it is hoped, will contribute to further reflection on the concept of youth and youth policy, including identification of the main youth domains needing attention. Our report combines both matters needing urgent attention and issues that demand priority in the future.

We hope that all the interested parties that are involved in youth policy can use these observations and view them as our “critical contribution” to the development and implementation of youth policy in Moldova. In the words of the late Peter Lauritzen, who guided many of these international reviews of national youth policy on behalf of the Council of Europe, the international review team has worked with “critical complicity” with the Ministry of Education and Youth in the Republic of Moldova. We share a commitment to the direction of its youth policy, but we have not shied away from expressing concern and criticism where we believe it is necessary and justified. Striking that balance is rarely easy and we ask those in Moldova to forgive our mistakes but to give serious attention to our concerns.



-----> Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The IRT suggests using a differentiated approach to the definition of youth that can help to stratify youth into several social groups, understand the differences in their needs and elaborate a specific youth policy for each group.

Recommendation 2

Although the legal basis for youth policy exists, some new laws related to youth activities are needed. The IRT suggests making discussion of them absolutely transparent for all youth organisations and the public.

Recommendation 3

In the discussions and development of the legal framework for youth policy and related legal issues, the IRT proposes more active and structured co-operation between, on the one hand, the MEY and other state institutions involved in the building of the legal platform of youth policy and, on the other, representative bodies of youth NGOs in Moldova.

Recommendation 4

In order to discard more out-of-date standards in the development of youth policy in Moldova, the IRT recommendation is to continue broad public discussion of youth policy with representatives of youth organisations that can help develop new forms of voluntary youth activities and therefore contribute to changes in the whole design of youth policy.

Recommendation 5

The Youth Consultative Council activities might benefit from being given more authority and a clearer division of responsibilities. Confirming the leading role of the MEY within the inter-ministerial council on youth affairs could make the whole structure of youth policy delivery more transparent and better co-ordinated.

Recommendation 6

Elaboration and delivery of youth policy demands a high level of consolidation of the efforts of all the actors involved in this process, as well as a clear division of their responsibilities. The MEY needs to retain its political authority in this process, while working closely with other responsible ministries, and international, national, regional and local youth organisations. The National Youth Council is a pivotal conduit within this structure and should be recognised and supported accordingly.

Recommendation 7

The process of elaborating youth policy needs to be open for broad discussion by all the actors involved in youth issues (all NGOs and interested individuals, youth media). The MEY is endeavouring to broaden this platform and is appropriately placed to do so. The IRT supports this aim.

Recommendation 8

State resources in Moldova are heavily constrained and the contributions of international NGO donors to youth policy formulation and development are to



be welcomed. However, the IRT believes that the MEY and other government departments need to identify some core sustainable areas, within their strategic thinking, that merit some financial investment and guarantees, as the basis on which more grant funding for the development of youth policy and for special projects may be provided by international NGOs and other donors.

Recommendation 9

It is reasonable to keep some direct allocation of resources (however symbolic) at all levels of youth policy governance in order to support the strategic priorities of youth policy on a regular and sustainable basis. This support may include some competitive grants for national, regional and local NGOs where they are considered to be essential stakeholders in the infrastructure of youth policy development.

Recommendation 10

Youth NGOs need to develop more confidence and understanding, through training, of how to co-operate with the state institutions in order to promote their own agendas, as well as to contribute to those of others.

Recommendation 11

Youth NGOs are significant institutions in youth development and youth policy implementation (see recommendations 3, 4, 7, 9 and 10 above). However, it is necessary to assess young people’s involvement in many different fields, not only through their participation in institutional structures such as NGOs, in order to get an insight into the nature of youth participation and the challenges it faces.

Recommendation 12

A broad base of models for youth representation – in order to maximise the engagement of the youth population – needs to be established.

Recommendation 13

The number of youth organisations (of various kinds) in Moldova is considerable. There needs to be more co-operation in their activities at national, regional and local levels. The IRT recommends an open, tolerant discussion of all the issues that constitute the clash of interests amongst youth NGOs, including the “division of power” between them.

Recommendation 14

Youth policy makers have to distinguish between youth problems, challenges and issues in the rural and urban areas. There is a need for more initiatives and more active support of youth NGOs in rural areas. There is a strong case for “positive discrimination” on behalf of rural youth (providing more places in colleges and technical schools, opening training courses and providing employment for rural youth) in order to improve the skills base and prospects for social and economic development in the countryside.



Recommendation 15

The MEY should continue to work closely with the students' NGOs and create a database of student activists throughout the whole country, thereby developing what is a powerful human resource for the future leadership of Moldova (in politics, business and civil society).

Recommendation 16

The MEY should pay more attention to urban NGOs that function on behalf of other groups of urban youth in order to maintain a proper balance between the interests of students and those of other youth groups.

Recommendation 17

Regional youth NGOs appear to play a critical role in work on human rights, cultural diversity, minority issues, youth information and youth participation. They are thus a pivotal part of the agenda for democratic modernisation and should be fully recognised and supported in exercising these responsibilities.

Recommendation 18

The IRT recommends discussing successful regional NGO activities as a possible model for replication in all other regions of Moldova. The positive experience of such multicultural and multi-ethnic NGOs can be useful for all regions in which ethnic minorities live.

Recommendation 19

There is an urgent need to redefine the concept of non-formal education as methodology and practice beyond school learning. Moldovan society should understand that under market conditions, formal education alone cannot provide life-long decent employment for young people, so that non-formal education has to be viewed as a worthy new asset capable of offering young people the highly needed flexible, "soft" or "transversal" skills and benefits that are less likely to be cultivated through the formal education system.

Recommendation 20

The involvement of NGOs (both national and international) is an essential element of the successful implementation of NFE. NGOs provide more space for youth initiative and organise training for civil society in accordance with modern methods. All existing NGOs can be involved in NFE if they contribute to preparing youth for the labour market, engagement with civil society and active participation.

Recommendation 21

The MEY can assist youth NGOs with relevant experience and expertise in the dissemination of their knowledge of NFE principles and practice. We therefore suggest using existing instruments such as the European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers, and Europass, etc.

Recommendation 22

Policy makers should seek to create conditions for more competitive starting salaries or income "packages" for young specialists to induce them to stay in



Moldova. Because decent salaries are viewed as the main youth priority, youth policy should be oriented to ensuring proportionate remuneration in relation to the skills and qualifications acquired and the levels of market demand.

Recommendation 23

The Moldovan Government should persevere with the programme “Housing for Young People” for rural specialists, as it appears to have potential as a tool to improve the quality of life in rural areas and encourage specialists to return to their communities of origin.

Recommendation 24

Designing salaries for specialists as part of a package including some fringe benefits (such as sports and cultural facilities, free tickets, etc.) might be a worthwhile experimental addition to the housing for specialists programme.

Recommendation 25

State educational policy should explore and adjust the balance between university and VET graduates in accordance with market needs, as well as improving the quality of the VET system to make it attractive and advantageous for youth.

Recommendation 26

Education institutions should maintain a database on their graduates so that within a year they could accumulate information about the employment of their former students. This database could help evaluate the “marketable link” between the level of skills and the field of training received in a particular educational institution, and eventual employment.

Recommendation 27

Consideration should be given to the provision of special benefits or incentives to employers who are willing to hire young graduates or to provide work placements, so that employers become more willing to take on young specialists without experience.

Recommendation 28

It is reasonable and necessary to extend the use of business incubators for promising innovative businesses, especially in the new market sectors, but it will be important to resist the temptation to support segments of the market that are already becoming “saturated” through over-enthusiasm and interest.

Recommendation 29

Stronger links should be established between the educational institutions, business incubators and successful business people so as to teach students about entrepreneurship and provide some business skills.

Recommendation 30

Developments such as the youth socio-economic empowerment programme are moving in the right direction, but there could be stronger ties between the local public administration, foreign and local NGOs, and youth resource centres in the



process of implementing the programmes. Local knowledge is critical for local success.

Recommendation 31

Small grants for the socio-economic empowerment of rural youth remain critical, and the promising programme delivering this support needs, if possible, to be not only sustained, but expanded.

Recommendation 32

The IRT supports the provision of financial assistance to the local youth resource centres in their work with vulnerable groups of young people who want to improve their skills, find employment and start their own businesses (the centres help by hiring trainers and practitioners, as well as by providing facilities and consultancy support). This approach needs consolidation and development, for it is critical to agendas aiming at equality and social inclusion for the most disadvantaged groups of young people in Moldovan society.

Recommendation 33

The IRT supports the aspiration of the Ministry of Health to establish a more all-encompassing strategic framework to address and respond to the variety of significant youth health challenges in Moldova. At the heart of this strategy must be the work of the youth-friendly clinics; the IRT commends the explicit government support for their consolidation and development.

Recommendation 34

The IRT recognises the political and religious sensitivities that surround the issue of sexual health education in schools. However, there is an urgent need to incorporate this within a broader framework of personal, social and health education that would also include family education (parenting) and life skills.

Recommendation 35

The authorities should provide medical insurance for all groups of young people and increase the distribution of information on drugs, sexual relationships and the prevention of HIV/Aids and STDs. Many pressing youth health issues are interlinked and overlap, and professional discretion at the “coal face” is essential if effective practice is to be established. Legislative prescription within the health field needs to be alert to this fact.

Recommendation 36

Strong state recognition of the role of NGOs working in this sphere and close co-operation between the state institutions and NGOs are needed. Boundaries, roles and responsibilities between the state and this “third sector” demand reflection and clarification.

Recommendation 37

There needs to be higher visibility of the ombudsperson for children and his or her staff in the sphere of social protection, thereby ensuring compliance with child rights and with safeguarding procedures that minimise, where possible, the



need for institutional intervention and promote a more social and family-based approach in policy development.

Recommendation 38

More attention should be given to preventative work at the local level, especially for those people at greater risk of criminal behaviour: there could be more “targeting” in order to involve them in sport, non-formal education and social programmes to provide them with new directions, horizons and aspirations and to promote a stronger sense of social inclusion.

Recommendation 39

Prevention activities and interventions with youth at risk, especially those subjected to discriminatory stereotypes, should involve both the police and youth/social workers, endeavouring to balance law enforcement with a broader set of more positive interventions in the areas of learning, lifestyle and leisure activities.

Recommendation 40

A more strategic framework for addressing youth deviance and crime, incorporating prevention, community intervention, family support and leisure programmes, as well as more punitive responses, is in urgent need of formulation and implementation.

Recommendation 41

Sport should be firmly connected to broader youth policy and considered as an important component of health promotion, social inclusion and the promotion of equal opportunities for all, as well as one of a variety of forms of prevention.

Recommendation 42

The IRT was reassured that sports facilities provided by the youth centres are accessible to all young people, but there needs to be a more concerted effort to engage with young people at risk and encourage their involvement in sport.

Recommendation 43

The media should be more active in promoting sport as part of a healthy lifestyle and a tool to prevent risk behaviour and enhance mental health.

Recommendation 44

Leisure time, appropriately supported and provided for, can be a space for informal and non-formal learning and an arena for creativity and active contribution, rather than passive consumption and sometimes negative behaviour. A suitable leisure environment, however, needs to be actively forged if the aforementioned outcomes of youth leisure activity are to be realised.

Recommendation 45

Youth NGOs and youth creation centres have a key role to play in shaping the framework for the constructive leisure-time pursuits engaged in by young people



by balancing production and consumption, the personal and the social, and self-interest and commitment to others.

Recommendation 46

Not least for reasons of equal opportunity, youth policy must recognise the right of minority groups of young people to use their native language and be able to access relevant information in that language.

Recommendation 47

Youth policy needs to recognise the specific situation of young people in the autonomous regions of Moldova, respond to particular issues, and help to establish working contacts between youth organisations in Transnistria and those elsewhere in Moldova.

Recommendation 48

Urgent policy is required to promote employment opportunities “at home”, support employers in providing jobs, and establish social programmes for unemployed youth. Consideration may need to be given to forms of “community economic development” that have proved successful in economically disadvantaged areas elsewhere in Europe and in the USA in order to stall the out-migration of young people. “Growth centre” models, providing business support proportionate to the size of population clusters (villages, small towns, larger towns), would constitute another approach. A third strategy might incorporate vocational training initiatives such as those that allow young people to build their own housing, perhaps in addition to improving or constructing local sports, cultural or youth resource centres.

Recommendation 49

Multifaceted preventative intervention is needed to create a framework of opportunity and aspiration for young people within Moldova, and to provide special assistance for young people whose parents have already left the country.

Recommendation 50

A special youth policy for reintegration is needed for those citizens who return home from abroad and would like to find a job in Moldova.

Recommendation 51

Moldova needs a rural youth strategy encompassing training and employment programmes, support for returning graduates, housing and infrastructure development, and sport and leisure provision – in order to renew hope and establish a framework for opportunity and experience.

Recommendation 52

The state authorities need to analyse the elite–outsider issues that surround youth representation, consider how current “out-groups” may be more fully included in dialogue and debate how they can be given the capacity to contribute to youth policy development.



Recommendation 53

The state institutions need to think harder about mechanisms for youth engagement through representational and categorical participation, and about the “youth voice” on social and political as well as leisure-time issues.

Recommendation 54

54. The economic basis of social exclusion is not in dispute, but stronger social inclusion can be forged through positive community development strategies that draw on local human resources, including by encouraging the engagement of young people.

Recommendation 55

There is a need for a dedicated supplementary youth policy for more vulnerable young people, such as those with disabilities or those at risk, who have little prospect of finding work in the private labour market or of going abroad. It should be constructed within, and not separately from, a broader vision of social inclusion for all young people.

Recommendation 56

Young people with disabilities require specific forms of support that are probably best delivered through the work of dedicated NGOs, which can determine the appropriate balance of individualised support needed. Financial support from the state or from international donors is needed to anchor this provision through the allocation of “core” funding for basic service delivery, especially for young people over the age of 14 capable of living more independently.

Recommendation 57

Given very diverse access to new technologies, youth information has to be disseminated not only through the Internet, but through a variety of media – printed material, youth NGO networks and face-to-face.

Recommendation 58

There is already a basis for a strong youth information network. This needs to be both technical and human, and should cover all youth interests. State information should be available in all relevant native languages. Young people need to receive appropriate support in digesting, interpreting (making sense of) and applying the information at their disposal.

Recommendation 59

The MEY should recognise and accord greater importance to dialogue and networks between research-based knowledge and the government policy-making process when selecting research priorities and monitoring the policy delivery process.

Recommendation 60

It is important to establish a working relationship between the MEY and youth researchers, invite youth researchers into the process of youth policy elaboration



and evaluation, and use sociological data as a basis for thinking through the formulation and implementation of any new policy directed towards young people.

Recommendation 61

Youth research needs to become more visible in youth forums and platforms where debates about youth policy take place; in youth media, the MEY and on the web pages of NGOs.

Recommendation 62

Some common standards and procedures for the training system have to be elaborated in order to establish a clear and up-to-date understanding of the essence and tasks of youth work and to create the conditions for the professional training of all youth workers.

Recommendation 63

There are merits in elaborating a training curriculum for youth workers containing core modules and supplementary training courses for particular specialist areas of youth work. There are also advantages in considering different stages of training, which would have national recognition – from essential foundation/basic training (concerned with, for example, health and safety or child protection issues), through to intermediate and advanced levels.

Recommendation 64

It would be useful to establish a database of skilled and experienced professionals involved in the field of youth work who might contribute to developing youth worker training and the needs of the MEY and youth NGOs.

Recommendation 65

The IRT believes that Moldova would benefit from the establishment of actual or virtual “practitioner forums” where what is believed to be “good practice” (whether experimental, promising or proven) can be shared and debated. The MEY might facilitate this process or delegate the responsibility to a relevant NGO.

Recommendation 66

The IRT is insistent that there is no “best set of criteria” available against which a country can evaluate its youth policy. A careful and precise assessment of any possible criteria for policy evaluation is needed, which would take into account the allocated economic resources, the time for implementation, and professional and institutional capacities.

Recommendation 67

The weight and complexity of the evaluation measures should be proportional to the support and resources given.

Recommendation 68

Evaluation processes should include both qualitative and quantitative measures. They should also consider reference points and “tests” against both external international standards and more subjectively constructed internal markers.





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Appendix 1 — Programme of the first visit to Moldova

Tuesday 10 June	10.00	Meeting with Youth Department, Ministry of Education and Youth
	11.00	Meeting with the Minister of Education and Youth
	11.30	Meeting with the Deputy Minister of Economy and Commerce
	14.00	Meeting with a representative of the National Agency of Employment
	14.30	Presentation by Ministry of Education and Youth-Projects Programme of socio-economic empowerment of youth Italian grant UNICEF project
	16.00	Round table: Student Alliance from Moldova AISEEC Moldova ASTRA (Transnistrian Students' Association)
	17:00	Meeting with the National Youth Council
Wednesday 11 June	9.30	Visit to the Regional Youth Centre of Ungheni, (northern part of the country)
	14.30	Visit to the Republican Centre for Children and Youth in Chişinău
	15.30.	Visit to the organisation "Youth for the right to live"
	16.30	Round table: Youth in Action programme National High-School Debate League Club of intellectual games
Thursday 12 June	9.30	Visit to Centrul Neovita
	11.00	Visit to centre of young entrepreneurs "Ctam Steaua"
	15.00	Round table: Co-ordinating Council of Youth Ethno-Cultural Organizations Club of young prime ministers Youth Journalists' Centre
Friday 13 June	10.00	Visit to Media Centre for Children
	14.30	Intercultural programme. Tourist complex "Orheiul Vechi"

Appendix 2 — Programme of the second visit to Moldova

Monday 3 November	9.00	Centre of Information and Professional Orientation, Mr I. Negru, Dean of Professional Orientation, Technical University of Moldova
	10.00	Meetings with representatives from ministries:
	11.00	Ministry of Economy and Commerce, Ms Maria Stucalov, Chief of Human Resources Development
	11.30	Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child, Ms Viorica Dumbrăveanu, Chief of Family and Child Protection Department Ministry of Health, Ms Maria Tarus, Chief of Family Health and Child Department
	14.15	Visit to a Centre of Minors' Recovery (security of young people, juvenile delinquency)
	15.30	Ministry of Domestic Affairs, Ms Maria Popovici, Chief of Department
	16.00	Research in the youth field Mr Valeriu Ciorbă, Director of the Association of Young Researchers of Moldova "PRO Science", Independent Sociology and Information Service "Opinia", Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance, State University of Moldova
Tuesday 4 November	9.00	Visit to a vocational training institution 1. Visit and discussion with the management 2. Exchange of views with students
	10.30	Business Incubator, Academy of Economic Sciences. Ms Larisa Rusanov Meetings with representatives from ministries:
	11.30	Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ms Eugenia Balachi, Chief of Foreign Affairs Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Mr Efim Chilari, Ambassador with special missions
	15.00	Centre of Child and Youth Development (non-formal education aspects), Anenii Noi

Wednesday 5 November	7.30	Departure from Chişinău to Găgăuzia
	10.00	Comrat, meeting with Mr Nikolay Macarovich Stoianov, Vice-Governor of Găgăuzia
	11.45	Ceadir Lunga, meeting with youth trainers
	12.45	Ceadir Lunga, visit to Women's and Children's Centre
	15.30	Comrat, meeting with representatives of students, youth councils, and youth NGOs
Thursday 6 November	8.30	Meeting with representative of UNICEF
	9.30	Meeting with representative of World Bank
	11.00	Meeting with NGO representatives from Transnistria
	14.30	Meeting with National Youth Council representatives
	15.30	Visit to the Youth Employment Centre "YEC Star"
	15.30	Meeting with representatives of IOM
19.00	Meeting with Mrs Larisa Şavga, Minister of Education and Youth	



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