

INTEGRATING YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES INTO PUBLIC POLICIES IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract

Youth sector is the subject of a special attitude on the national level, as well as on European Union's level. This can be confirmed by all strategic plans that promote young people's participation, social involvement and development of economic opportunities.

Generally, young people refer to those with age up to 30 years old. In the Republic of Moldova, the new law has changed the concept of youth: from 16-30 years old to 14-35 years old. This change makes it more difficult to understand how to meet the different priorities of young people, which vary depending on the age.

This research paper aims to analyse the concept, legal and institutional framework of youth in the Republic of Moldova, as well as how the strategy for youth has integrated the young people's priorities.

Keywords: youth, rights and priorities of young people, youth strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, young people represent a special category of the population aged between 14 and 35, for which the state develops policies and strategies designed to create an environment conducive to the personal and professional life of each young person, including those with reduced possibilities.

In the European Union's vision, the strategy for the development of the youth sector must stimulate the participation of young people in democratic life, also support social involvement and civic engagement, and ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to participate in the life of society [3].

The strategic vision of the Republic of Moldova regarding youth focuses on achieving the following objectives:

- Promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes in the development of the youth sector, so that policies and actions aimed at them are as friendly as possible and adapted to the real needs of young people, including those in low-income groups.
- Diversification and consolidation of services for young people, which would represent an effective tool for maximum development of the potential of each young person and the achievement of a fulfilled life in the Republic of Moldova.
- Development of economic opportunities for young people in order to ensure a decent living by expanding employment opportunities, adequate salary income and economic prospects as varied as possible in the Republic of Moldova.
- Consolidation of the youth sector by strengthening the legal framework for the establishment and functioning of the mechanisms for regulating the activity of the institutions in the youth sector, so that they provide quality and institutionally recognized services for young people.

In this context, the main goal of this research paper is analysing the situation of young people in the Republic of Moldova, as well as how the strategy for youth has integrated the young people's priorities.

2. YOUTH SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: CONCEPT AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

European practice shows that people up to the age of 30 are considered young, in countries with a rich experience in the youth sector - Lithuania (14-29 years old), Sweden (13-30 years old), Finland (up to 29 years old), Poland (15-25 years old), Croatia (15-29 years old), Czech Republic (15-30 years old), Belgium (up to 30 years old). Both the Council of Europe and the European Union place the category of young people between 15 and 29 years old. According to the old law on youth (1999), young people in the Republic of Moldova were considered citizens aged 16-30 years. With the entry into force of the new law on youth (2016), young people are considered citizens aged 14-35 [1].

The legislative framework on youth in the Republic of Moldova includes, first of all, the law on youth from 2016, the law on volunteering from 2010, as well as a series of government decisions.

Law on youth no. 215 of 29.07.2016 establishes the principles of the policy based on intersectoral cooperation, equality, information, participation, transversality. The category of persons falling under this law is extended, the youth being considered population between the age limits of 14 and 35 years. Economic opportunities, participation and multilateral development, healthy living, social services and programs are the areas of action of the state in order to support young people. Thus, the state is committed to stimulating the entrepreneurial activity of young people and has to provide the necessary assistance to help young people to get employed. Unemployment among young people is a problem described in the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2020", and which is covered by the provisions of this law. The active involvement of young people in the decision-making process through the development and support of participation structures and non-formal and informal education must ensure the participation and multilateral development of young people. The development of institutions for the provision of youth services is another important element of the Law on Youth [9].

The Law on Volunteering 121 of 18.06.2010 regulates the areas that benefit from programs to stimulate volunteering, the manner and conditions of voluntary participation of individuals in volunteer activities in favour of the community. To stimulate volunteering, the law provides for several measures such as the volunteer certificate, the volunteer card, the volunteer contract and letters of recommendation confirming the existence of volunteering. The law also provides for the granting of transferable credits for students of higher education institutions who have completed internships in areas of public utility. Thus, young people who have reached the age of 16 can conclude a volunteer contract, and those who have reached the age of 14 need the written consent of their legal representative to conclude a volunteer contract. With the adoption in 2010 of the Law on Volunteering, there has been an increase in awareness of the importance of young people's participation and direct involvement in solving the problems of the community in which they live and of society as a whole [10].

Government Decision no. 1006 of 10.12.2014 on the approval of the National Strategy for the development of the youth sector 2020 and the Action Plan on its implementation aims to strengthen the youth sector and ensure the involvement of young people in the social life of the country. The strategy sets out 4 priority areas for the development of the youth sector: youth participation, youth services, economic opportunities for young people and the strengthening of the youth sector. The action plan regarding the implementation of the National Strategy for the development of the youth sector 2020 provides for the implementation of 128 actions in the period 2015-2020 for the implementation of the priorities of the Strategy with a budget of 53,505.0 thousand lei [8].

Government Decision no. 1213 of 27.12.2010 on the approval of measures to support youth activities establishes the method of financing actions for youth from financial resources from the state budget. Annex no. 1 of this document establishes the conditions for financing and organizing activities, programs and projects for youth. The funding instruments aim to contribute to the implementation of the objectives set out in the Law on Youth and in the National Strategy for the Development of the Youth Sector 2020 [5].

Government Decision no. 733 of 29.09.2011 on the creation of the Governmental Commission for Youth Policies stipulates that this Commission operates on a parity basis between the representatives of the executive and those of the non-governmental youth association sector. Given that the youth sector is an intersectoral area, the Commission must ensure the coordination of the youth policies of state institutions in this sector [6].

Government Decision no. 158 of 12.03.2012 regarding the implementation of the Volunteering Law no. 121 of 18 June 2010 sets out the conditions for carrying out volunteering, including working tools for volunteering [7].

Government Decision no. 552 of 07.10.1996 on the establishment of the holiday "National Youth Day" establishes the day of celebration of the event and the institutions involved in the organization process [4].

The institutional framework is cross-sectoral, that relies on efficient collaboration between different ministries and committees.

Parliament's Committee on Culture, Science, Education, Youth and Sport is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of national legislation on youth policy. It has the power to adopt, amend and supplement youth legislation at national level. The government commission for youth policies must ensure the process of inter-ministerial cooperation. The objective of the Commission is to develop youth policy and to improve cooperation between state institutions, civil society by formulating priorities, researching solutions and promoting issues related to youth policy in Moldova at the Government level.

The Government's Commission for Youth Policy is composed of representatives of civil society and ministries with competences in the field of youth. The meetings of the Commission shall take place every 6 months or more often in extraordinary cases. The Commission's decisions have the character of a recommendation for the central public authorities, and the initiative for discussions / decisions can be taken by the members of the Commission (ministries, youth NGOs). The problem is that this Commission practically does not meet, which affects the process of developing and implementing youth policies. The government commission for youth policies was not convened during 2018 in meetings to discuss issues in the field of youth policies.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research is the most important institution at the executive level responsible for implementing youth policies. It also has a mandate to provide educational programs and create appropriate conditions for the intellectual and physical development of children and young people and to support creative centres where children and young people acquire artistic skills. This Ministry develops and implements the national policy in the field of youth, determines the strategic and continuous orientation, modernizes the institutional system in the field, creates conditions for the participation of young people in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country. The Ministry cooperates with other ministries as well as with civil society organizations in working groups, commissions, or in programs and in the development of policy documents. The Ministry also cooperates with the youth subdivisions of district or municipal councils, in particular provides recommendations on the implementation of youth policies on local level, provides methodological support in the development of youth policies, presents activity reports on some programs and activities carried out.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research took over the youth field with the abolition of the Ministry of Youth and Sports following the reform of the central public administration in 2017. This negatively affected the process of developing and implementing youth policies due to the reduction of staff with skills in this field. In fact, one of the major problems faced by the former Ministry of Sport and Youth was the low number of staff and the increased flow of staff working in this institution. Given the cross-sectoral nature of this area, a large number of institutions have expertise in the field of youth policy.

The Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure is responsible for projects and programs aimed at financially supporting youth initiatives, such as the national "Start for Youth", PARE 1 + 1 and "First Home" programs.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection is responsible for promoting programs and actions aimed at monitoring the health of the population and programs for social inclusion and social protection for young people.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research is not subordinated to regional territorial units in the field of youth. Within the local public administration, responsible for the implementation of youth policies are the education departments. The youth subdivisions of the district or municipal councils provide methodological (and in some cases financial) support to town halls for carrying out youth activities at the community level. At the same time, they work with ministries, especially the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. The respective subdivisions include the service for youth and sports, an exception in this respect being the municipalities of Chisinau and Balti, as well as the ATU where there are separate sections for youth. These sections develop and implement programs that address the interests and needs of young people and support the creation and development of local youth associations. Thus, youth centres and the network of youth-friendly services are subordinated to the local public administration or function as civil society organizations.

Law no. 215 of 29.07.2016 on youth establishes that the National Agency for the Development of Youth Programs and Activities will be responsible for the accreditation of youth services and to coordinate and exercise functions in several areas related to the youth sector. This institution was established only in 2020, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research on August 12, the International Youth Day. The purpose of the agency is to implement the youth policies of the state, to ensure the training and improvement of youth workers and specialists, the development and implementation of youth programs, services and activities, as well as their monitoring and evaluation. The basic functions of the agency are: development of methodologies and application of the necessary working tools on the implementation of national policies and programs in the field of youth; organizing and coordinating the process of monitoring and evaluating services for young people provided by youth centres and youth work institutions; participation in the process of elaboration of the training and professional development curriculum of the youth workers as well as the management of their training activity; the development of the support infrastructure of the youth sector, and the facilitation of the development of the network of youth service providers, including in partnership with the local public administration and the associative youth sector, etc [2].

3. APPRECIATING THE SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Young people in the Republic of Moldova make up a third of the country's population, the same structure is observed in both urban and rural areas. At the same time, we notice that, in the analysed period, the share of young people in the total population registers a reduction tendency, especially in the urban environment (fig.1.).

The analysis of the structure of young people reveals that over half of young people (57%) come from rural areas, and the structure by sex shows prevalence among men of about 1% (Fig. 2).

The reduction of the share of young people in the total population is explained by the fact that young people represent a very mobile category of the population; they are significantly involved both in internal migration (especially rural-urban, small towns, big cities) and in external migration.

In the Republic of Moldova there are no clear mechanisms for registering the internal mobility of the population, and a large part of young people live in urban areas with a residence visa in rural areas. The urban environment is more attractive for young people who come to cities to continue their studies, to get a job, to spend their free time, etc. In rural areas, employment and / or employment opportunities are low and infrastructure and services are poorly developed.

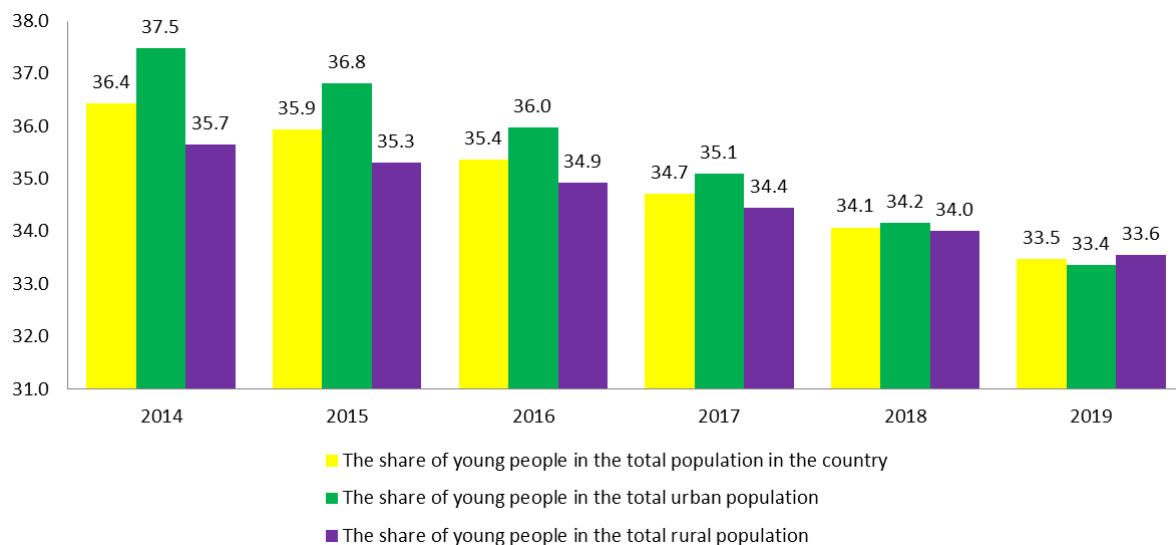


Fig. 1. The evolution of the share of young people in total population of Republic of Moldova, %

Source: developed by the author based on data provided by National Bureau of Statistics
<https://statistica.gov.md/>

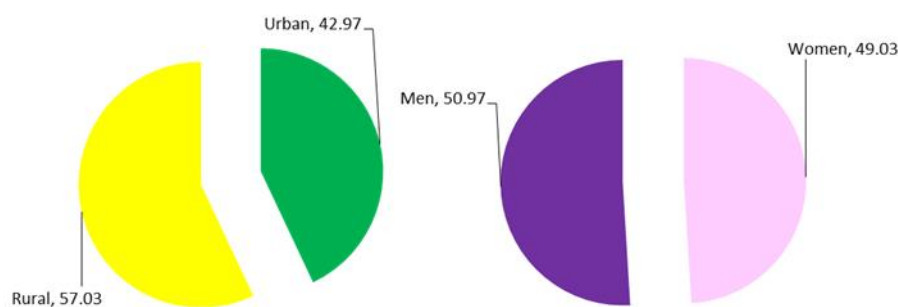


Fig. 2. The structure of young population in Republic of Moldova, %

Source: developed by the author based on data provided by National Bureau of Statistics
<https://statistica.gov.md/>

In terms of external migration, a third of migrants living in other countries are young, while cross-border evidence shows that about 45% of those who cross the border are young, which reflects another trend among young people in the Republic of Moldova - a large part goes abroad to work, without changing their permanent life. In this sense, we identify several categories of young emigrants:

- Young people studying abroad, their share is difficult to estimate, but we can certainly speak of tens of thousands (30-40 thousand young people, according to unofficial estimates based on scholarships offered by host countries and young people enrolled in different universities abroad);
- Young people working abroad - they represent 14.6% of all young people in the Republic of Moldova. The average age of migrants in the Republic of Moldova is around 35 years. So, the share of young people in the total number of people working abroad is significant, accounting for about 41% of all migrants. Most young people go to work in the Russian Federation, about 80% of young migrants had worked in this country.
- Young people who have emigrated for permanent residence in the host country. In this regard, several countries (Canada, USA, Russia) have attractive immigration government programs for

young people in the Republic of Moldova. Their share is also difficult to estimate, given that there is no mechanism for quantifying them.

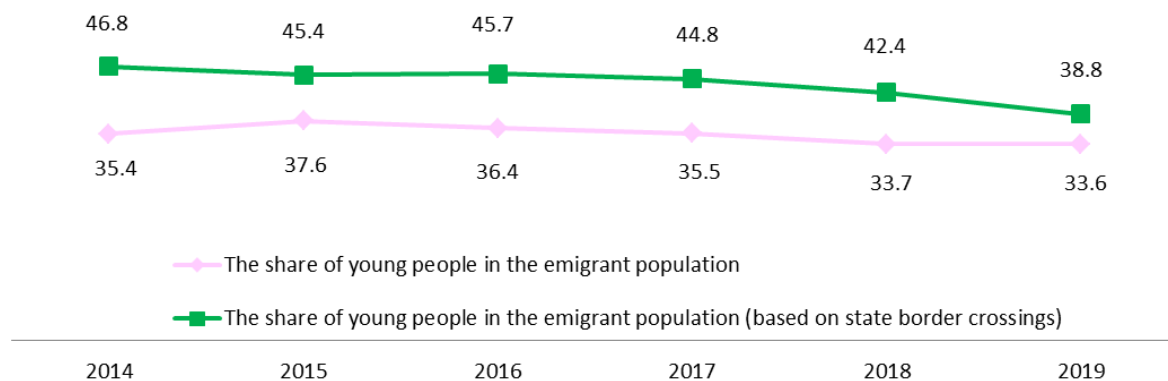


Fig. 3. The evolution of the share of young people in emigrated population of Republic of Moldova, %

Source: developed by the author based on data provided by National Bureau of Statistics
<https://statistica.gov.md/>

Three out of ten young people from the Republic of Moldova are part of the category of economically active people. The share of the population aged 15-34 in total employed population was 29.7% in 2020 compared to the level of 31.8% in 2014 (fig.3).

The share of young people in the total unemployed was 13.4%, being 6.1 % less than in 2014 (fig.4).

Four out of ten unemployed are young. The most disadvantaged on the labor market are young people aged 15-24, the unemployment rate among them in 2013 was 12.1%.

At the same time, the youth unemployment rate is 13.4%, the highest level of unemployment (2.5%) is observed among young people aged 25-34 with higher education and high school. Often, young people with higher education and training cannot find a job due to lack of work experience. Only 22% of young people found a job immediately after leaving the education system. However, more than a quarter left their first job due to low wages, and 17.7% of young people went to work abroad.

In the Republic of Moldova, the average age of entrepreneurs is 45 years. Although there are programs to support young entrepreneurs, their share is relatively small - 2.4% aged up to 24 years and 20.3% are aged 25-34 years.

Although the birth rate among adolescents has decreased in the last three decades (from 12.6% in women aged 15 to 19 in 1990 to 6.73% in 2018), it remains high compared to with some European countries, such as Sweden (5.9%), Switzerland (4.1%), Denmark (5.5%). The data show that 85% of adolescents who gave birth in 2018 are from rural areas, which can be explained by the increased inequality in access to information and services.

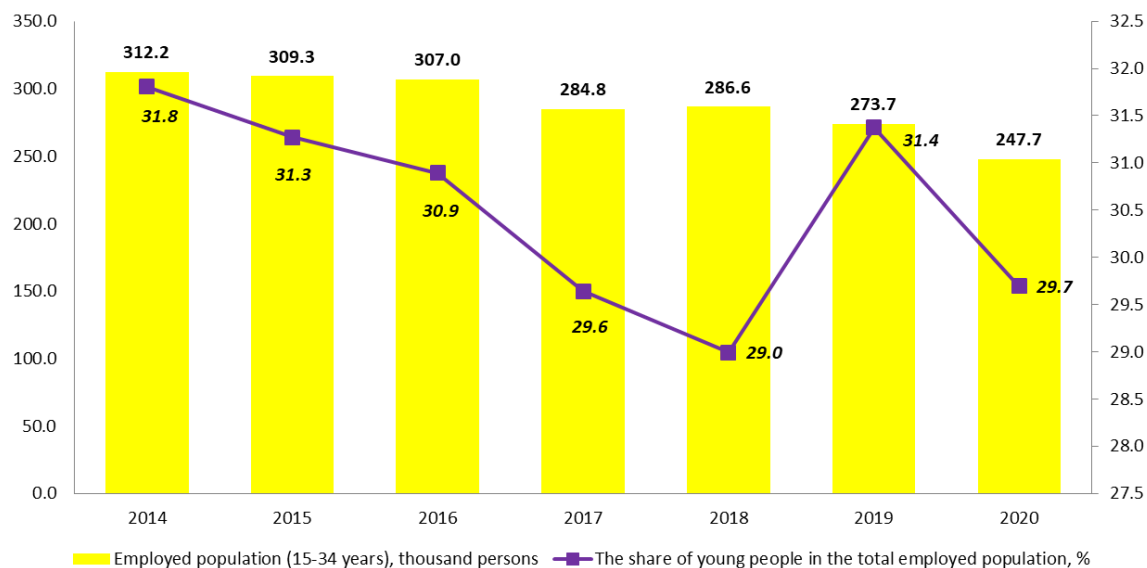


Fig. 4. The evolution of young employed population of Republic of Moldova

Source: developed by the author based on data provided by National Bureau of Statistics
<https://statistica.gov.md/>

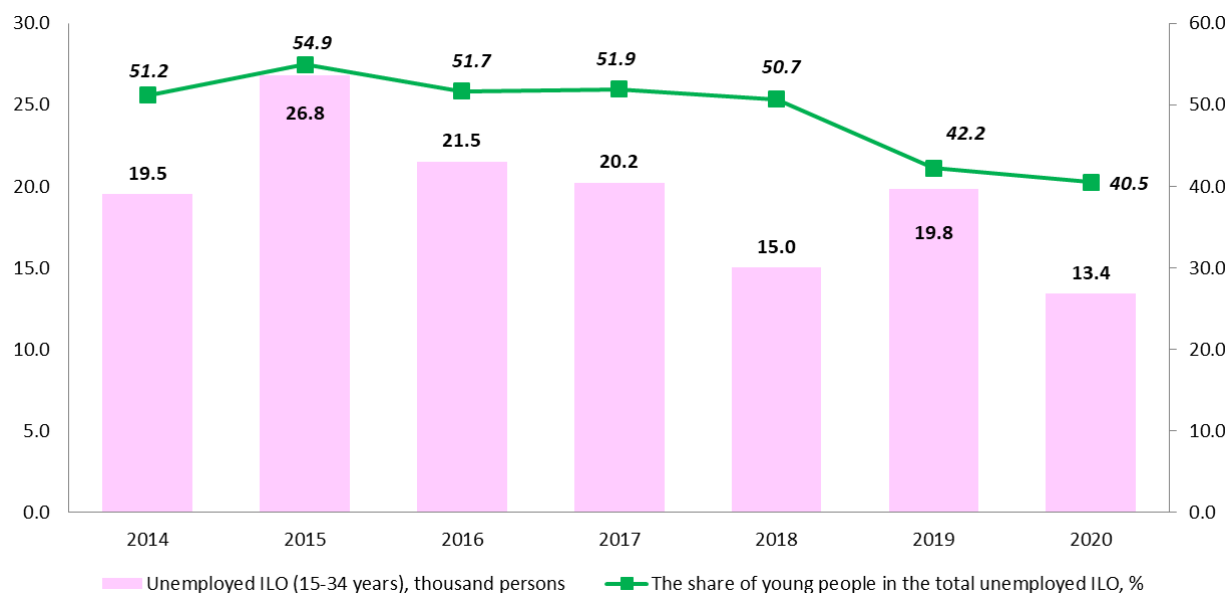


Fig. 5. The evolution of young unemployed population of Republic of Moldova

Source: developed by the author based on data provided by National Bureau of Statistics
<https://statistica.gov.md/>

The civic participation of young people, expressed by voting, but also active political participation, shows that the share of young people in elections is lower than those of older age, while the representation of young people in local public administration (mayors) has increased considerably. In 2015, only 30 young people obtained the mayoral mandate, in the 2019 elections we registered 97 young people (table 1).

No.	Indicator	Value	Reference year	Comments
1	Voting rate in national elections	31,06	2021	Data are collected for the age category 18-40 years
2	Voting rate in local elections	27,52	2019	Data are collected for the age category 18-40 years
3	Representation of young people in Parliament	13 young people (12, 87 %)	2021	Data are collected for the age group up to 35 years
4	Representation of young people in the Local Public Administration	97 young people (10, 8 %)	2019	Data are collected for the age group up to 35 years

Table 1. The civic participation of young people in Republic of Moldova

Source: developed by the author based on data provided by Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova

4. ANALYSING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH STRATEGY IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes. In order to promote the participation of young people in the public decision-making process, several Youth Councils from various localities were involved in the budget planning process, presenting proposals for costly actions on developing action plans on the youth component at each district level.

Through the Assistance Program for the development and institutional consolidation of the District / Municipal Youth Councils, financial and methodological support was provided for the organization and development of information campaigns on the importance of youth participation in decision-making. Thus, as a result of the information campaigns, the District Youth Councils were completed with new members. The information campaigns were carried out through local news portals, local newspapers, televisions, radios, as well as the Facebook pages of the Youth Councils. Communication campaigns on the importance of young people's participation in voting also took place.

Another aspect in increasing the participation of young people is the promotion of volunteering. Thus, the following actions were organized and financed:

- The national event for the promotion of volunteering and civic activism "Good Day", in which 68 civic actions were organized, where a considerable number of volunteers from all over the Republic of Moldova were involved;
- Carrying out the information campaigns about the importance of volunteering and mobilizing volunteers;
- The annual development of the National Volunteer Week;

Attention was also drawn to the empowerment of young people through the following:

- Organizing training courses for young leaders;
- Formation of a civic culture among young people in the Republic of Moldova, by creating practical opportunities to practice democracy in a rule of law. Thus, several young people from the Republic of Moldova, aged 14-21, were empowered with civic skills and knowledge: electoral, administrative, entrepreneurial, lobbying, advocacy, civil society through summer schools in which young people have simulated the functioning of state structures.
- Conducting the contest "The best innovative idea in order to support and promote innovative ideas of young people who want to open their own business;

- Conducting the “Youth Speak Forum” event, during which young people were trained to discuss sustainable development goals in the Republic of Moldova.

Diversification and consolidation of services for young people. In this regard, youth-friendly service providers are involved in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating public policies targeting young people. Exchanges of experiences of youth-friendly service providers are facilitated both within the national network and internationally.

Within the law no. 215 of 29.07.2016 on youth, it is established that the accreditation of youth services will be performed by the National Agency for the Development of Youth Programs and Activities. This agency was opened in August 2020, so the accreditation of youth service providers will be initiated soon.

At the same time, the Development Program of the Youth Centers for the years 2017 -2022 was approved, and the LPA of level II received invitations to access the support and to join the program. Within the program, the ministry organizes and carries out professional development activities on three levels (specialists working with young people, managers of youth centers and civil servants within the LPA authorities responsible for youth). The second component of the program is the provision of support in the form of IT equipment and furniture for the endowment of Youth Centers. At the same time, the program provides financial support worth up to 100 thousand lei for the launch and development of district / municipal grant programs for competition funding of youth initiatives / projects of youth organizations and youth initiative groups. The program is designed to support all territorial administrative units in the Republic of Moldova in which the second level LPA authorities are interested and is committed to developing and expanding the territorial coverage of youth services.

Development of economic opportunities for young people. The implementation of this strategic direction was achieved through the development of entrepreneurship among young people, career guidance, as well as the consolidation of the associative sector of young people.

The Organization for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises (ODIMM), an institution in the field of competence of the Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, fulfills the function of promoter of entrepreneurship among young people, carrying out the following:

- Informing young people, students in the first cycle of studies within educational institutions about Business Support Programs, implemented by ODIMM;
- Organizing the national forum of young entrepreneurs "Youth Entrepreneurship in a Modern Society". The forum addressed several issues and included: 12 training sessions and information seminars, parallel panels and inspirational speeches; the presentation of the DCFTA (EU-Moldova trade relations) and the chance for interaction for young entrepreneurs from the countries that have signed this agreement; informing participants about European programs and funds that support entrepreneurship among young people in its various forms; the business exhibition which aims to promote and share national and international products and services, provide a meeting space with potential customers, establish cooperation and expand business beyond national borders.
- Providing consultations both in the ODIMM office and in the Business Incubators in the country's districts.
- Implementation of the Pilot Program "Women in Business", which encourages the development of female entrepreneurship, including young entrepreneurs, based on the need to support women in business by: accessing funds, educational opportunities to obtain entrepreneurial skills, integration into business networks, the development of growing businesses, the principle of equal pay, balancing the challenges between professional and private activities and confronting prejudices.

Regarding the career guidance of young people, the role of promoter belongs to the National Employment Agency and its territorial subdivisions, which organize the following during the year:

- Vocational training courses for young people registered as unemployed at the territorial employment agencies;

- Youth job fairs;
- Providing career guidance services in educational institutions and youth resource centers;

At the same time, we mention that in order to adopt policies to stimulate the employment of young graduates in employment, the Government approved the National Employment Strategy for 2017-2021.

For the development of the youth association sector, the following measures were taken: informing and training NGOs on accessing European funds, promoting positive experiences in the youth association sector, training representatives of youth NGOs in the field of organizational development.

Finally, we find that the youth workers also benefited from support, manifested by the elaboration and implementation of a mobility program for the youth worker, as well as the development of programs for the continuous training of the youth worker.

Consolidation of the youth sector by strengthening the legal framework. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research was represented in all inter-ministerial commissions aimed at introducing normative changes that directly or tangentially targeted the youth sector. At the same time, the following acts were drafted, supplemented or amended, as appropriate, and approved:

- Framework Regulation on the organization and development of the Grants Program for youth organizations and the national / local project competition for youth initiative groups;
- In order to include the youth component in intersectoral public policies, we mention that the budget classification has been revised and supplemented with new codes for youth programs;
- The component of providing support from the state budget for LPA level II (amounting to up to 100 thousand lei) was developed for the launch and development of district grant programs for youth projects and initiatives;
- The relevant central public authority submitted recommendations in the process of elaboration and adjustment of the intersectoral normative framework on youth to the approval of the National Employment Strategy for 2017-2021 and to the approval of the Civil Society Development Strategy of the Republic of Moldova and Action Plan (2017 - 2020).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Youth Sector is a cross-sectoral field, which determines the need for a complex approach, based on public policy records, in order to ensure the most effective reflection of young people's priorities in sectoral policies with an impact on young people. It is remarkable and necessary to have a strategic planning document that would address the problems of the youth sector. In this sense, the National Strategy for the Development of the Youth Sector 2020 is an important document for the youth sector.

This strategy refers to a fraction of the population whose needs change rapidly with the evolution of society. Policy evaluation is done to avoid a major obstacle to success: it prevents the correction or reformulation of programs so that mistakes are not repeated. It is important that these strong mechanisms create responsible bodies that guarantee the regular evaluation of national youth policies and programs.

The major challenge of monitoring and evaluation processes is developed by tools to measure both the quantitative and qualitative aspect of the effectiveness of the youth policy initiative. Establishing a set of key indicators for youth development can help us understand the quality of young people's social life and serves to identify "policy gaps", it detects discrepancies between targeted outcomes and actual outcomes.

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