

NGOs submission for the 40th Universal Periodic Review of
the Republic of Moldova
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INTRODUCTION

1. The Alternative Report has been developed by HelpAge International Moldova, on behalf of the Platform on Active Ageing¹. HelpAge International Moldova is a rights-based organisation tasked to defend and protect the human rights of older persons. Since the beginning of its mandate in Moldova in 2005, it has been monitoring implementation of the national and local public policies relevant to older people and ageing while at the same time doing practical programmes on upholding the rights of older persons, implementing projects on promoting active and healthy ageing, economic empowerment of older women and men, advocating for improved quality of life and secure access to public services for older persons, especially to health, care and social assistance across the whole of Moldova.
2. Despite a number of actions taken at national level to ensure older people's human rights are respected, the older people remain invisible in the Republic of Moldova's reports to the treaty bodies and international human rights instruments. Although, the Republic of Moldova has received recommendations for improving the quality of life and ensuring the respect of the rights of other social groups disadvantaged in certain areas (children, youth, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and others), the Republic of Moldova hasn't received specific recommendations for ensuring the observance of the rights of the older people in particular.
3. In this context, this Alternative Report provides an independent analysis of the situation of older women and men in the Republic of Moldova regarding the right to an adequate standard of living, in terms of measures taken by the Government for eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity for all, with a special focus on measures taken for the support and social protection of older persons during the last 5 years. Also, the Alternative Report focuses on the main challenges and threats that older people face in the struggle to realise their rights to work and health in Moldova.
4. Also, the Alternative Report contains 6 recommendations for the Government in addressing inequalities faced by older people regarding the issue of coping with poverty, and ensuring realisation of older persons' human rights to an adequate standard of living, work and health.

KEY WORDS: older persons, human rights, adequate standard of living, poverty, right to work, right to health

RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING WITH FOCUS OLDER PERSONS

5. The main source of income for older people is their pension. Although the Government reports that pension reform has been successfully completed, in 2020 the amount of the minimum old-age pension still covers only 64% of the subsistence minimum for old-age pensioners².
6. Taking account of living standards of households with the older persons, these predominate in rural areas and are most often made up of a single older person, with incomes 75% lower than the

¹ The Platform for Active Ageing is made up of 18 member organisations, the mission of which is to defend the interests of the older persons and to ensure integration of the needs of older population group in public policies documents in the Republic of Moldova. The platform was created in 2015 by HelpAge International Moldova, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, with the financial support of the United Nations Population Fund.

² National Bureau of Statistics, "The older persons in the Republic of Moldova in 2019", published on October 1, 2020

households with the older persons in urban areas³. The households with the older persons are one of the most deprived households for access to community services and even for older people that have access to services, these are unaffordable. Different studies show⁴ that the standard of living of a large number of older people, regardless of urban or rural living environment, is low, manifested by poor nutrition, poor living conditions, and lack of access to basic hygiene in some situations. In 2019, about 16.8% of the households made up only of the older persons could not afford to include meat or fish in their diet every other day, and 10.3% of these households did not have sufficient means to procure necessary medicines prescribed by the doctor. In the context of Republic of Moldova's alignment to the principle and the pledge of leaving no one behind, the Government fails to report any measures taken to ensure an adequate standard of living for older persons.

7. As a large part of income of the older persons is represented by a pension that does not cover basic needs for an adequate standard of living, and the rate of poverty among the older persons is still high (see more below), this indicates that the pension reform did not represent a radical transformation of the legislative framework for ensuring an adequate standard of living for older persons.
8. Decision no. 476/2019⁵ adopted the Regulation on granting subsidies for improving the standard of living and working in rural areas. The purpose of this action was to promote steady economic development to further improve living standards for all people of Moldova, but this is still insufficient for tackling issues related to living and working standards for the older population in rural areas.
9. The measures provided by the Regulation do not effectively address the most relevant inequalities that face older persons in the concerned areas. The older persons don't have equal opportunities compared to their younger professional counterparts in accessing grant resources, subsidies and other facilities for creating and developing small businesses as sources for supplementary income. At the same time, the programmes developed over the past 5 years by the national institutions such as the Agency for Interventions and Payments in Agriculture (AIPA) or the Organisation for the Development of Small and Medium size Enterprises Sector (ODIMM) for facilitating access to financing and crediting the start-ups or small and medium businesses, initiated for economic empowerment of disadvantaged social groups, exclude older persons as targeted beneficiaries. For improving living standards of the older persons, programmes of businesses financing and finance education programmes should target specifically disadvantaged older persons as unemployed older persons, older women in particular or older persons from rural and remote localities as beneficiaries.
10. The Government should ensure income security for the ageing population through decent pensions and review the pension reforms as to better target the poverty levels in Moldova.

OLDER PERSON'S HUMAN RIGHTS & POVERTY

11. Even though the Government reported that some major interventions had been made to reduce poverty and promote the social inclusion of people from the disadvantaged groups, the national report fails to mention any measures taken to combat extreme poverty among the older people.
12. In the context in which the international indicators of poverty (used by the World Bank) as well as the national ones indicate a decreasing trend, for example, in 2018, the absolute poverty rate in the Republic of Moldova was 23.0%, decreasing by 6.5 percentage points compared to 2014, we notice a worrying trend related to the share of older people living in poverty among the general population. In 2018, the poverty rate among people over 60 years of age was 25.4%, decreasing by 8 percentage

³ National Bureau of Statistics, "Structure of disposable income and consumption expenditure for households of older persons", 2019

⁴ https://www.eef.md/media/files/files/nota_analitica-proiectul_sns_2030_3536841.pdf

⁵ Decision no. 476/2019: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=123858&lang=ro#

points compared to 2014. At the same time, in 2018, the share of the population living in poverty over 60 years of age among the general population was 22.7%, growing with 2.6 percentage points compared to 2014. This is partially explained by a high level of migration of the working and reproductive age population (annual net migration is 41.3 thousand people⁶, compared to a population with a habitual residence of 2,597.1 thousand⁷) that has conditioned a high level of demographic ageing. The rate of demographic dependence on January 1, 2019 was 65.8 people up to 14 years and over 60 years per 100 people aged between 15 and 59 years⁸. The lack of a pension and social insurance system connected to the requirements of demographic ageing causes the impoverishment of the older population, which occupies an increasing share every year of the total population structure⁹.

13. At the same time, recent independent studies show that income of those with the highest poverty levels continue to grow, although the growth rate has slowed in recent years. Their income has increased, to a large extent, from remittances and social benefits. However, their share of income from productive sources has decreased or remained unchanged over the years which clearly indicates that economic growth is not inclusive enough. In 2020, the main source of income for households with older persons were social benefits, which accounted for 48.6% of the household's monthly income. At the same time, the average salary payments constituted 27.3% of the incomes of this category of households, and the individual agricultural activity - 10.0%. Transfers from abroad contributed to the formation of the income of households with older persons in a proportion of 7.6%¹⁰.
14. The diversity of poverty and social exclusion for older people is often disregarded. Among the groups of older people at high risk of poverty and high risk of social exclusion are older women, older people from rural and remote areas, older people who worked in agricultural sector all their life, older people with disabilities. For example, in 2020, the gender disparity in the case of old-age pensions was 20.7%, compared to 17.8% at the beginning of 2016¹¹. As the share of older women exceeds the share of older men in the number of retirees and their incomes are lower, the older women are more exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion. At the same time, the old-age pension covers the value of the subsistence minimum for pensioners, but not in the case of pension beneficiaries in the agricultural sector. In some cases, older people in remote areas do not benefit from social and medical services, or they do not have the opportunity to buy food or medicine near the house due to lack of physical and social infrastructure. Of note is the fact that Moldova has not ratified the Optional Protocol and has only partially ratified the Charter with 63 of 98 articles. As for rights of older persons, Moldova has not ratified article 14 on the right to social services, article 23 on rights of older people to social protection and article 30 on the right to protection from poverty and social exclusion. In this way, existing human rights mechanisms fail to adequately protect and promote the rights of older people and the Government is not fully prepared to face all challenges associated with ageing.
15. The Government should also take strong measures for eliminating discrimination on the basis of older age in its economic growth strategies by creating opportunities for formal, non-discriminatory and productive employment for all disadvantaged groups of people, especially older people, but also by ensuring access of older people to financing and crediting programmes for entrepreneurial activities to enable older persons to generate additional income.

RIGHT OF OLDER PEOPLE TO WORK

⁶ National Bureau of Statistics, „Revised number of the population of the Republic of Moldova and the data on international migration”, 2019

⁷ National Bureau of Statistics, “Number of the population with habitual residence by sex and age groups on 1 January 2021”, 2021

⁸ National Bureau of Statistics, “Number of the population with habitual residence on 1 January 2019”, Infographics, 2019

⁹ National Bureau of Statistics, „Revised number of the population of the Republic of Moldova and the data on international migration”, 2019

¹⁰ National Bureau of Statistics, „Structure of disposable income and consumption expenditure for households of the older persons”, 2020

¹¹ National Bureau of Statistics, „The older persons in the Republic of Moldova in 2019”, published on October 1, 2020

16. The Government adopted Law no. 105/2018 on the promotion of employment and unemployment insurance (in force on 10/02/2019) and Governmental Decision no. 1276/2018 on access to employment measures. One of the adopted provisions includes people aged 50 and over in the group of people who need employment assistance, and who can benefit from a series of active and passive measures on the labour market.
17. Monitoring annually¹² the Government's National Action Plans for implementation of the Employment Strategy for 2017-2021, findings showed that no significant progress has been made in creating opportunities for formal, non-discriminatory and productive employment of pre-retirees (people aged 50 and over) and the older people (people aged 60 and over): a) People aged 50 and over occupied a fairly high share of unemployed people registered at the territorial employment structures, and a large part of them risk being unemployed for a longer period of time than younger unemployed people. Out of the total number of unemployed people, officially registered in 2019, about 29.4% were people aged 50 and over; b) Pre-retirement and retired people continue to be a group with limited opportunities in terms of access to lifelong learning. Out of the total number of unemployed beneficiaries of education and training services, only 6% was from the age group over 50 years; c) Discrimination on the basis of age in the labour market is quite common, affecting not only the youngest, newcomers to the labour market, but also the oldest, from the age of 50 and even earlier. The main form of discrimination that older employees experience is that regarding the right to work (incentive to leave voluntarily, more difficult access to training, difficulties in finding a job, etc.).
18. In 2020, from the total number of decisions made by the Council for preventing and eliminating discrimination and ensuring equality, 30% were in the field of labour and employment which has been ranked in the top of the areas where the most acts of discrimination have been found¹³: 8% of them were on the basis of age and 8% on the basis of holding the status of an old age pensioner.
19. Since 2018, the Council identified a significant growth in the cases of discrimination in the area of employment. One of the causes of such growth is the arbitrary application by the employers of the provisions of art. 86 para. (1) letter y1) of the Labour Code on dismissal and on the employee's status of an old age pensioner. The Council observed that the employers apply the respective provisions in an abusive manner, avoiding the application of the rules on the reduction of the number of staff or of payrolls, which provides for guarantees in the case of a dismissal, thus acting to the detriment of the employees. Moreover, the provisions of art. 86 para. (1) letter y1) of the Labour Code are in contradiction with the national policy documents, whose objective consists of the extension of professional life and of the maintaining of the dignity and autonomy of older persons¹⁴.
20. To be mentioned in this context, that at the beginning of 2020, about 23.4% of old-age retirees were employed at the time they established their pension¹⁵. In the context of Covid-19 pandemic, a large part of them still lives with job insecurity - the fear of losing their job – which can be more harmful to older person's health than actually loss of it.¹⁶
21. The Government should review the employment public policy priorities for encouraging the retention of older people (people aged 60 and over) in employment and the labour market overall, especially through developing national programs for requalification and retraining older people for adapting to the new requirements of the labour market (as remote work and digital skills) and

¹² Monitoring report of actions targeting the older persons included in National Action Plan FOR 2019 for the implementation of the Strategy National Report on Employment for the years 2017-2021, drafted by HelpAge International Moldova, 2020

¹³ General report on the situation in preventing and combating discrimination in the Republic of Moldova, 2020: http://egalitate.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/cpedae_raport_2020_revfin-1.pdf

¹⁴ General report on the situation in preventing and combating discrimination in the Republic of Moldova, 2019: http://egalitate.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Raport_CPEDAE_2019_-English-1.pdf

¹⁵ National Bureau of Statistics, "The older persons in the Republic of Moldova in 2019", published on October 1, 2020

¹⁶ Sarah A. Burgard, Jennie E. Brand, James S. House, Perceived job insecurity and worker health in the United States, Social Science & Medicine Volume 69, Issue 5, September 2009, Pages 777-785

implementation at national level of the concept of age-friendly workplace.

RIGHT OF OLDER PEOPLE TO HEALTH

22. The Government reported a series of actions taken to improve free medical facilities for targeted groups such as children and girls, with no description of actions taken for older persons. In the context in which the prevalence rate of chronic diseases increases with age, and in the conditions of demographic ageing actions plans to improve access to health services do not consider adequately older persons' specific needs and the medical system isn't prepared for an increased demand from older people with health requirements.
23. Assessing the situation regarding the observance of the rights of older persons to health services, from the perspective of standards in the field of equality and non-discrimination, there are a number of shortcomings and barriers in the accessibility, availability, acceptability and quality of health services provided to the older persons, which are overlooked when the right to health for all in the Republic of Moldova is adequately addressed.
24. Firstly, even if older persons visit medical institutions more often than younger population groups, they are less informed about existing options for free access to services and the purchase of reimbursable medicines. The highest share of respondents who do not know about the range of services covered by the health insurance policy is in the category of persons over 65 years of age - 27.0%, compared to the category of persons aged between 26-35 years - 17.6%¹⁷.
25. Age discrimination still persists in the healthcare system, manifested by the ageist attitude of some of the medical staff, poor communication with the older persons about their medical diagnosis and prescribed treatment, insufficient information about different options for a healthier life in general.
26. Based on the findings of the analysis of access to services for older persons, the district hospitals and other healthcare services provide standard package of services without assessing the needs of the older population. Geriatric and home care services do not fully meet the older persons' demand for healthcare services. In 2019, the prevalence of chronic diseases among people over 65 years of age registered a share of 90.3%¹⁸. Requiring medical care and continuous treatment, the unmet need for health services of older persons increased during the pandemic, with about 40% having difficulty in obtaining NCD services. The insufficiency of geriatricians and geriatric beds, the lack of systematic training of specialists on communication and treatment of older patients, the need to bear the full cost of services and medicines not covered by the health insurance policy and informal payments are just some aspects which are considered problematic by older persons in the medical system.
27. On the other hand, health status, as well as all other aspects of the lives of older persons are influenced by low living standards. Lack of financial resources (low pension or other insufficient income), poor nutrition, poor living conditions, lack of access to basic hygiene conditions due to low access to water and sanitation, expensive maintenance of housing, poor working conditions throughout the life, a lifelong negligent attitude to one's own health, all of these enumerated aspects are preconditions for poor health of people in the old age in Republic of Moldova¹⁹.
28. The Government should adapt the healthcare system to projected demographic changes, developing and implementing training programmes that adequately include geriatrics, improve future health system workforce capacity planning and assure adequate funding for national healthcare programmes, including prevention programmes, based on cross-sectoral actions at any age.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL & CULTURAL RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

¹⁷ Population Health Barometer of the Republic of Moldova, conducted by the Centre for Health Policies and Studies (PAS Centre), 2019

¹⁸ Ibidem

¹⁹ Discrimination, Abuse and Violence against older people, drafted by HelpAge International Moldova, 2016

29. Proceeding from the recommendations received in this thematic area, the Government reports a series of measures taken for increasing the quality of people's lives and ensuring respect for their economic, social and cultural rights, but fails to report measures taken to expand programmes of targeted social assistance to provide population with education and medical services.
30. In this context, the Government reports that a multifunctional social services network has been developed, which helped to improve the access of disadvantaged groups to relevant needs-based services. Despite this, a large number of multifunctional centres don't provide social services for older people, being focused on other targeted groups and providing services as temporary placement for women and children, non-formal training of young, psychological and legal counselling for young women victims of violence, etc. At the same time, older people are less informed about their rights to social services provided by the territorial structures of social assistance and other private providers, and their needs are poorly assessed and addressed by the existing range of social services²⁰.
31. In the context of the Government's commitment to guaranteeing quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all²¹, the Government fails to report actions taken to promote lifelong learning at any age, including old age, by providing education services. In the Republic of Moldova, the participation rate of the population in non-formal studies is below the European average. Moldova ranks among the countries with the lowest participation rate in non-formal education, along with other developing countries, with a rate of about 36%. Out of the total population participating in non-formal studies, the lowest level of participation in self-education is reported in the case of the age group 60+ years - about 4%²².
32. The Government should assess and adapt the social services to ensure their functionality on the basis of actual needs of older people, including during public health emergency situations and review the criteria for providing services to cover a larger group of older people, particularly during crisis situations.
33. The Government should ensure non-formal learning opportunities for the development of professional and general skills or the development of key skills for older persons, useful for vocational training depending on the demands of employers and learning needs for older persons, being accessible to them by content offers of educational programmes and by area (urban vs. rural).

RECOMMENDATION 1

34. The Government should ensure income security for the ageing population through decent pensions and review the pension reforms as to better target the poverty levels in Moldova.

RECOMMENDATION 2

35. The Government should take strong measures for eliminating discrimination on the basis of older age in its economic growth strategies by creating opportunities for formal, non-discriminatory and productive employment for all disadvantaged groups of people, especially older people, but also by ensuring access of older people to financing and crediting programmes for entrepreneurial activities to enable older persons to generate additional income.

RECOMMENDATION 3

²⁰ Findings from Monitoring Report of measures taken by competent public authorities for prevention, preparedness planning and management actions during COVID-19 pandemic, from the perspective of impact on older persons, drafted by HelpAge International Moldova, 2020: https://www.eef.md/media/files/files/monitoring_report-covid-19_case_tudy_3_districts_eng_1203158.pdf

²¹ Nationalization of the Sustainable Development Goals and Government approval of the National Strategy for development "Moldova 2030", Government Decision no. 377 from 10-06-2020

²² The Uncertain Path to Adult Qualification, developed by the Partnership Centre for Development, 2020

36. The Government should review the employment public policy priorities for encouraging the retention of older people (people aged 60 and over) in employment and the labour market overall, especially through developing national programs for requalification and retraining older people for adapting to the new requirements of the labour market (as remote work and digital skills) and implementation at national level of the concept of age-friendly workplace.

RECOMMENDATION 4

37. The Government should adapt the healthcare system to projected demographic changes, developing and implementing training programmes that adequately include geriatrics, improve future health system workforce capacity planning and assure adequate funding for national healthcare programmes, including prevention programmes, based on cross-sectoral actions at any age.

RECOMMENDATION 5

38. The Government should assess and adapt the social services to ensure their functionality on the basis of actual needs of older people, including during public health emergency situations and review the criteria for providing services to cover a larger group of older people, particularly during crisis situations.

RECOMMENDATION 6

39. The Government should ensure non-formal learning opportunities for the development of professional and general skills or the development of key skills for older persons, useful for vocational training depending on the demands of employers and learning needs for older persons, being accessible to them by content offers of educational programmes and by area (urban vs. rural).

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