

*TENDENCIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF
CHILDREN IN THE REPUBLIC OF
MOLDOVA*

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Abstract

In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic was announced and in 2023 the pandemic emergency was declared ended. The policies that were applied in this period, including the restrictive ones had influenced the socioeconomic development, especially of vulnerable groups of population. One of the most vulnerable category of people are children and their socioeconomic situation also underwent changes. Like other countries, Republic of Moldova also was affected, so in this paper based on the socioeconomic indicators we try to identify and highlight the tendencies in the development of social and economic situation of children in the Republic of Moldova, taking into consideration demographical aspects related to children, children education, the main characteristics of the households with children, social protection of children, children health, culture and sport for children and children in contact with the law.

Key words: *tendencies, children, children in difficulty, youth, Republic of Moldova.*

JEL: *D13, D14, J13, I15, I21, I31, K36.*

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Introduction

From 2020 to 2023 there was public health emergency of international concern due to the COVID-19 pandemic [1-6][26]. The socioeconomic growth of welfare, particularly of vulnerable groups of the population, has been impacted by the policies that were implemented during this time, including the restrictive ones [9-16]. Children are among the most vulnerable groups of individuals, and their socioeconomic circumstances have changed. Like other countries, the Republic of Moldova was impacted as well [7-8][17-24]. To identify trends in the development of social and economic situation of children in the Republic of Moldova were taken into consideration the following areas for which relevant indicators were analyzed: demographical aspects related to children, children education, the main characteristics of the households with children, social protection of children, children health, culture and sport for children and children in contact with the law.

1. Demographical aspects related to children

According to National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova [25] at January 1, 2022 the total number of children with an age of 0-17 years was 558289 persons, from which 49% - girls (more by 0.2 p.p. compared to 2020 year) and 51% - boys (less by 0.2 p.p. compared to 2020 year). The share of children in total number of population decreased (by 0.2 p.p., from 21.6% at January 1, 2020 to 21.4% at January 1, 2022). The number of born alive children decreased as well (by 8.7%, from 32022 in 2019 to 29230 persons in 2021), from which 48.4% - girls (-0,3 p.p. compared to 2019 year) and 51.6% - boys (+0,3 p.p. compared to 2019 year). Each fifth child was born outside the marriage (21.7% in rural area and 13.6% in urban area). The number of

children born to a woman during her lifetime has reduced from 1.8 children in 2019 to 1.7 children in 2021. The majority of children were born with medical assistance (88.9% in 2021, less by 2.5 p.p. compared to 2019). The mean age of the mother at first birth was 25.1 years in 2021. The number of women that gave birth aged under 20 years reduced (from 6.4% in 2017 to 6.0% in 2021). By the rank of the born alive in 2021 a third were firstborns (31.5%, less by 2.9 p.p. compared to 2019 year), another third – secondborns (32.1%, less by 2.8 p.p. compared to 2019 year), a fourth – thirdborn and further (26.1%, more by 2.3 p.p. compared to 2019 year) and undeclared rank had 10.3% of born alive children. The infant mortality rate has decreased by 0.7 p.p. (from 9.2‰ in 2017 to 8.5‰ in 2021), being in 2021 less for girls – 8.0‰ and more – for boys – 8.9‰. Mortality of children under 5 years also reduced (by 0.9 p.p., from 10.7‰ in 2017 to 9.8‰ in 2021), being in 2021 less for girls – 9.2‰ and more – for boys – 10.4‰. Unfortunately, the life expectancy at birth also decreased (from 70.9 years in 2019 to 69.0 years in 2021), in 2021 much bigger for girls – 73.0 years than for boys – 65.2 years.

2. Children education

From 2017 to 2021 the number of early education institutions increased by 25 units or by 1.7% (from 1458 to 1483 units), $\frac{3}{4}$ in rural area – 1131 units (in 2021), $\frac{1}{4}$ - in urban area – 352 units (in 2021). The number of children in early education institutions has decreased by 12 thousands or by 8.1% (from 149 thousands in 2017 to 137 thousands in 2021). The gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education was 93% in 2021. The number of primary and general secondary education institutions has reduced by 12 units or by 1.0% (from 1243 units in 2017/2018 to 1231 units in 2021/2022), $\frac{1}{4}$ being in urban area (317 in 2021/2022) and $\frac{3}{4}$ being in urban area (317 in 2021/2022). The number of pupils has increased a bit – by 2.3 thousands or by 0.7% (from 334.4 thousands in 2017/2018 to 336.7 thousands in 2021/2022). The number of children with special educational needs (SEN) has increased from 9.8 thousands in 2019/2020 to 10.1 thousands in 2021/2022 or by 0.3 thousands or by 3.1%. In 2021 in the grades 1-9 boys were 52%, while girls – 48%. In the same year in general education institutions studied 94% of children with SEN, while 6% - in institutions of special education. After graduating from gymnasium education to lyceums continued their studies 45% of pupils in 2021/2022 (by 3.0 p.p. more than in 2019/2020), to secondary vocational education institutions continued their

studies 17% of pupils in 2021/2022 (by 2.0 p.p. less than in 2019/2020), to postsecondary vocational education institutions continued their studies 27% of pupils in 2021/2022 (by 3.0 p.p. more than in 2019/2020), did not continue any studies 11% of pupils in 2021/2022 (by 4.0 p.p. less than in 2019/2020).

3. Main characteristics of the households with children

In Republic of Moldova in 2021 from all households 30% were with children, by 2.0 p.p. less compared to 2019 year. From households with children in 2021 with 1 child were 49% (+2.0 p.p. compared to 2019 year), with 2 children – 37% (-2.0 p.p. compared to 2019 year), with 3 and more children – 14% (+1.0 p.p. compared to 2019 year). The share of households with children with migrants increased by 3.0 p.p. from 2019 to 2021, reaching 19%. The share of households with children with migrants increased in the urban area – by 6.0 p.p. (from 25.0% in 2019 to 31.0% in 2021), while in rural area it decreased – by 6.0 p.p. (from 75.0% in 2019 to 69.0% in 2021). The share of single parent households decreased by 1.0 p.p. (from 8% in 2019 to 7% in 2021). The disposable income per person, in the households with children accounted 3005.0 MDL in 2021, increased compared to 2019 by 555.9 MDL or by 22.7% or by 12.5% in real terms. In 2021 from the total income of a household with children 55.0% was from employment (+2.0 p.p. from 2019), 15.0% - from remittances (-2.0 p.p. from 2019), 10.0% - from social payments (+1.0 p.p. from 2019), 9.0% - from agricultural sector (+1.0 p.p. from 2019), 8.0% - non-agricultural sector (same as in 2019) and 3.0% - other income sources (-2.0 p.p. from 2019). The contribution of children allowances in total income of the household increased from 2% in 2019 to 3% in 2021. From 2019 to 2021 the share of households with children with access facilities: with water closet in the house grew up from 62% to 70%, with bathroom or shower grew up from 68% to 74%, with sewerage system increased from 79% to 86%, with aqueduct grew up from 85% to 90%. In case of households with children from 2019 to 2021 in urban areas the food ratio monthly per one person reduced for bread and bakery products (from 8.3 kgs to 8.0 kgs), grew up for meat and meat products (from 4.1 kgs to 4.3 kgs), reduced for milk and dairy products (from 19.2 litres to 17.7 litres), increased for vegetables and potatoes (from 11.1 kgs to 12.4 kgs), decreased for eggs (from 16.2 pieces to 16.0 pieces), reduced for fruits (from 5.8 kgs to 5.7 kgs).

In case of households with children from 2019 to 2021 in rural areas the food ratio monthly per one person decreased for bread and bakery

products (from 9.8 kgs to 9.5 kgs), remained the same for meat and meat products (3.8 kgs), decreased for milk and dairy products (from 16.4 litres to 15.3 litres), increased for vegetables and potatoes (from 11.8 kgs to 12.0 kgs), increased for eggs (from 15.2 pieces to 15.5 pieces), decreased for fruits (from 5.1 kgs to 4.9 kgs).

From 2019 to 2021 the indicators have increased for the most main durable goods in units per 100 households with children: TV set (from 121 to 122), refrigerator (from 105 to 108), washing machine (remained the same - 100), computer (from 95 to 99), vacuum cleaner (from 81 to 87), microwave (from 57 to 63), car (from 42 to 46).

4. Social protection of children

The number of children left without parental care, including temporarily that were registered increased from 1150 children in 2019 to 1161 children in 2021. From all these children in 2021 girls were 50.8% (less by 1.2 p.p. compared to 2019) and boys – 49.2% (more by 1.2 p.p. compared to 2019). In 2021 from those children 71.0% were from rural areas (more by 1.5 p.p. than in 2019), from urban areas – 29.0% (less by 1.5 p.p. than in 2019). Half of these children are 7-15 years old – 55.6% in 2021 (54.9% in 2019), a fifth – 18.1% - 16-17 years old (12.9% in 2019), another fifth – 18.3% - 3-6 years old (20.9% in 2019) and 8.0% - 0-2 years old (11.3% in 2019). The number of children in residential institutions has reduced from 1536 children to 828 children or by 46.1%. The number of uninsured beneficiaries of monthly childcare indemnity, as of 1st January decreased from 38066 persons in 2020 to 33614 persons in 2022 or by 11.7%, in case of insured persons the number increased by 1.8%, from 46929 persons to 47788 persons. From uninsured persons 99.0% in 2022 were mothers (99.4% in 2020), while 1.0% - fathers (0.6% in 2020). From insured persons 76.5% in 2022 were mothers (84.1% in 2020), 22.9% - fathers (15.2% in 2020), 0.6% - other persons (0.7% in 2020). The subsistence level for children aged 0-17 years increased from 1927.0 MDL in 2019 to 2074.6 MDL in 2021 or by 7.7% (-1.2% in real terms). In case of children aged up to 1 year – from 771.7 MDL to 835.4 MDL or by 8.2% (-0.7% in real terms). In case of children aged 1-6 years – from 1682.9 MDL to 1803.2 MDL or by 7.1% (-1.8% in real terms). In case of children aged 7-17 years – from 2197.8 MDL to 2342.5 MDL or by 6.6% (-2.3% in real terms). The ratio of subsistence level and monthly childcare indemnity, as of 1st January has increased by 36.0 p.p., from 105% in 2020 to

141% in 2022 for insured persons and by 6.0 p.p., from 83% to 89% for uninsured persons.

5. Children health

The share of preterm live-born children increased from 4.8% in 2016 to 5.7% in 2020. The share of adolescent births under 19 years old increased from 4.5% to 4.8%. The share of abortions in adolescents under 19 years old decreased from 6.3% to 5.3%. The share of breastfed children under one year of age decreased from 69.3% in 2019 to 69.1% in 2021. The share of breastfed children under the age of 2 years increased from 20.5% to 21.8%. The number of low birth weight infants up to 1500 grams increased from 258 in 2016 to 268 persons in 2020. The general incidence of disease in children during the first year of life, per 1000 has decreased by 1.5 times (from 1561 persons in 2017 to 957 persons in 2021), the incidence of malnutrition decreased by 1.4 times, from 15 to 11 persons, the incidence of anemia decreased by 2.0 times, from 178 to 91 persons, the incidence of respiratory diseases decreased by 1.6 times, from 960 to 592 persons. The incidence of syphilis in children aged 15-17 years, per 100000 has decreased by 1.3 times (from 60 persons in 2016 to 76 persons in 2020), incidence of gonorrhea has decreased by 1.6 times (from 41 persons to 26 persons), incidence of chlamydia infections has increased by 1.4 times (from 11 persons to 15 persons). The share of incidence of psychological development disorders increased from 23% in 2019 to 33% in 2021, in case of mental retards it decreased from 35% to 30%, in case of organic mental disorders it decreased from 23% to 16%, in case of behavioral and emotional disorders it decreased from 11% to 10%, in case of neurotic disorders it increased from 3% to 5%, in case of other mental disorders it increased from 5% to 6%. The total number of children with disabilities (under 18 years old) at the evidence of medical institutions decreased from 12.3 thousands in 2019 to 11.9 thousands in 2021. The number of children for which the disability has been primarily determined has increased from 1.4 thousands in 2019 to 1.5 thousands in 2021. From children of disabilities in 2021 the share of the ones aged 7-15 years amounted to 40.0% (same as in 2019), the share of the ones aged 3-6 years amounted to 33.0% (more by 7.0 p.p. than in 2019), the share of the ones aged 16-17 years amounted to 4.0% (less by 2.0 p.p. than in 2019), the share of the ones aged 0-2 years amounted to 23.0% (less by 5.0 p.p. than in 2019). The share of MMR vaccine coverage among 1-year-olds decreased from 88.1% in 2017 to 84.3% in 2021.

6. Culture and sport for children

There are 2 specialized theaters for children in Republic of Moldova. The number of theater performances decreased by 2.3 times (from 775 in 2017 to 335 in 2021). The number of theater visitors reduced by 3.3 times, from 75.5 thousands in 2017 to 23.1 thousands to 2021. The number of libraries for children reduced from 114 in 2017 to 105 in 2021. The number of active users of children's libraries reduced by 1.6 times, from 101 thousands in 2017 to 65 thousands in 2021. The number of sport schools grew up from 94 in 2017 to 101 in 2021. The number of pupils increased from 37.0 thousands in 2019 to 38.0 thousands in 2021. Every 5th pupil was a girl in 2017, while in 2021 – every 4th. By level of sport qualification, the share of beginners reduced from 54.0% in 2019 to 51.0% in 2021, the share of the ones with advanced level grew up from 43.0% to 46.0%, the share of qualified ones was the same (3.0%). The number of extracurricular educational institutions grew up from 181 in 2019 to 183 units in 2021. The number of children in extracurricular educational institutions reduced from 63.0 thousands in 2019 to 61.0 thousands units in 2021. The number of children in centers of young tourists grew up from 1.0 thousands in 2019 to 2.0 thousands in 2021. The number of children in centers of young naturalists decreased from 2.0 thousands to 1.0 thousands. The number of children in centers of young technicians reduced from 6.0 thousands to 5.0 thousands. The number of children in creation centers reduced from 32.0 thousands to 31.0 thousands. The number of children in music, arts schools and schools of fine arts was the same (22.0 thousands). The number of centers of young tourists was the same – 3 units. The number of centers of young naturalists also remained the same – 2 units. The number of centers of young technicians reduced from 9 to 8. The number of creation centers grew up from 49 to 50. The number of music, arts schools and schools of fine arts grew up from 118 to 120.

7. Children in contact with the law

The number of offences committed by children reduced from 798 in 2017 to 695 in 2021 or by 12.9%. The juvenile delinquency rate, per 100000 reduced from 134 in 2017 to 124 in 2021. The share of offences committed by children in the total number of offences grew up from 2.2% in 2017 to 2.6% in 2021. The total number of children who committed offences reduced from 1215 in 2019 to 1163 in 2021. Almost every 3rd child who committed offences is aged 14-15 years old (in 2021 as in 2019). Almost every 2nd child who

committed offences is aged 16-17 years old (in 2021 as in 2019). The number of convicted children grew up from 377 in 2017 to 330 in 2021. In the main punishment measures the share of prison sentences grew up from 42.0% to 53.0%, the share of conditional sentencings grew up from 25.0% to 34.0%, the share of fines reduced from 15% to 8%, the share of community service works reduced from 18.0% to 5.0%. The share of convicted children for theft reduced from 55.0% in 2017 to 44.0% in 2021, the share of those convicted for hooliganism grew up from 10.0% to 12.0%, in case of robberies and burglaries it increased from 8.0% to 12.0%, in case of rape it decreased from 3.0% to 2.0%, for drug related offences it remained the same (2.0%), the share of convicted children for other offences increased from 22.0% to 28.0%. The number of offences committed against children decreased from 1401 in 2017 to 921 in 2021. The number of sexual intercourses committed against children grew up from 125 in 2017 to 153 cases in 2021, the number of perverse actions decreased from 56 to 50, also the number of hooliganism cases committed against children decreased from 89 to 57. The share of offences committed against children was more against girls (63.0% in 2021, +16.0 p.p. from 2019) than for boys (37.0% in 2021, -16.0 p.p. from 2019). The number of children who suffered in road accidents grew up from 349 children in 2017 to 459 children in 2021. Boys suffered in road accidents more – 306 in 2021 (+33.0% since 2017) compared to 153 girls (+37.0% since 2017). During 2017-2021 1993 children have suffered (84 died and 1909 were injured).

Conclusions

The analysis of the indicators relevant to: demographical aspects related to children, children education, the main characteristics of the households with children, social protection of children, children health, culture and sport for children and children in contact with the law in order to identify the tendencies in the development of social and economic situation of children in the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated the following changes:

- The decreases in many demographic indicators: number of born alive children, share of them in the total population, number of women that gave birth aged under 20 years, number of children born to a woman during her lifetime, number of children born with medical assistance, infant mortality, mortality of children under 5 years, life expectancy;

- The reduction of the number of children in early education institutions on the background of growth of number of early education institutions; the decrease of the number of primary and general secondary education institutions, while the number of pupils had a slight increase, including the ones with special educational needs; after graduating from gymnasium education to lyceums continued their studies more pupils and also to postsecondary vocational education institutions;
- Reduction of the share of households with children in total number of households; increase of those, especially with 1 child, with migrants in urban area; decrease of the share of single parent households; an increase of real disposable income (due to the income from employment, social payments (including children allowances) and due to the income from economic activity in the agricultural sector); increases of the share of households with children with water closet in the house, with bathroom or shower, with sewerage system, with aqueduct; the decrease of food ratio monthly per one person in households with children for: bread and bakery products, milk and dairy products, eggs, fruits and increase for meat and meat products, vegetables and potatoes; the increase of the share of households with children with main durable goods: TV set, refrigerator, computer, vacuum cleaner, microwave, car;
- The increase in the number of children left without parental care, including temporarily that were registered; the reduction in the number of children in residential institutions; the decrease of the number of uninsured beneficiaries of monthly childcare indemnity, as of 1st January and the increase in case of insured persons; the increase of the ratio of subsistence level and monthly childcare indemnity, as of 1st January for insured persons and also for uninsured persons;
- The increase in: the share of preterm live-born children, the share of adolescent births under 19 years old, the share of breastfed children under the age of 2 years, the number of low birth weight infants up to 1500 grams, incidence of chlamydia infections, the share of incidence of psychological development disorders, the share of incidence for some mental retards (neurotic disorders, other mental disorders), the number of children for which the disability has been primarily determined and the decrease in: the share of abortions in adolescents under 19 years old, the share of breastfed children under one year of age, the general incidence of disease in children during the first year of life per 1000, the incidence of malnutrition, the incidence of

anemia, the incidence of respiratory diseases, the incidence of syphilis in children aged 15-17 years per 100000, incidence of gonorrhea, the share of incidence for some mental retards (organic mental disorders, behavioral and emotional disorders), the total number of children with disabilities (under 18 years old) at the evidence of medical institutions, the share of MMR vaccine coverage among 1-year-olds;

- The increase in: the number of sport schools, the number of pupils, the share of the ones with advanced level, the number of extracurricular educational institutions, the number of children in centers of young tourists, the number of creation centers, the number of music, arts schools and schools of fine arts and the decrease in: the number of theater performances; the number of theater visitors; the number of libraries for children; the number of active users of children's libraries; the share of beginners (by level of sports qualification); the number of children in extracurricular educational institutions; the number of children in centers of young naturalists, of young technicians; the number of children in creation centers; the number of centers of young technicians;

- The increase in: the share of offences committed by children in the total number of offences, the number of convicted children, the share of conditional sentencings, the share of those convicted for hooliganism, the share of those convicted for robberies and burglaries, the share of convicted children for other offences, the number of sexual intercourses committed against children, the number of children who suffered in road accidents, the share of prison sentences and the decrease in: the number of offences committed by children; the juvenile delinquency rate per 100000; the total number of children who committed offences; the share of fines; the share of community service works; the share of convicted children for theft, for rape; the number of offences committed against children; the number of perverse actions; the number of hooliganism cases committed against children.

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