



Country strategy paper:

Moldova country programme 2023 – 2027

Introduction

With a population of 2.6 million, the Republic of Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe, ranking 80 out of 191 on the 2021 Human Development Index. The commitment of the current government for European Union integration has positively influenced various political, social, and economic reforms, increased external funding as well as civil society space.

Despite ratifying all the main conventions focusing on human rights and having adequate legislation and institutions in place, Moldova struggles with actual implementation of children's rights, including by inadequate public funding. For the right to education and leisure, the most pressing issues are connected with access to education for children in families with low income, and quality of education, including obsolete teaching practices, not fostering gender equality and meaningful child participation. The state of children's mental health is a growing subject of concern, while efforts

on education about sexual and reproductive health and rights and school infrastructure are still insufficient, resulting in a high rate of early pregnancies among adolescent girls, poor hygiene and challenges related to menstrual health. The right to protection is undermined by the poor response from guardianship authorities to identify and assist girls and boys deprived of parental care. Violence against children, including sexual abuse and bullying is another area of concern, as the authorities lack adequate resources to develop prevention and rehabilitation services for children. The war in Ukraine poses additional difficulties in addressing poverty, including increased political and social tensions, high inflation, rising energy and food prices and influx of refugees from Ukraine seeking protection. These factors increase the risks for the most marginalized children and the fulfilment of their rights, requiring humanitarian and gap-filling development interventions.

ERIKS has been supporting projects together with partner organisations in Moldova since 2004, working on three thematic areas, with education and protection being more prominent, while health was emphasized to a lesser extent. During the country programme 2018-2021, nine different projects have been implemented by seven partner organisations. Before 2021, there were no humanitarian interventions supported or anticipated in Moldova, as the risk of humanitarian emergencies was considered low.

This country strategy has been developed by ERIKS' Regional Office team, using as sources of information recent research, reports and consultations with ERIKS' current partners, as well as representatives of different government institutions. The perspectives of boys and girls have been integrated in the strategy through partners' reports and the available child-led reports. The context analysis, strategic choices and country outcomes have been validated with an external consultant. The work on the strategy started in 2021 and was finalized during 2022, the process being delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges in organising consultations with the partners.

ERIKS will continue to focus on the areas covered in the previous country strategy as part of education, health, and protection. The rights to protection, as well as mental health will be prioritised during this strategic period in order to respond to the emerging issues. Right to assistance during humanitarian crisis is included as a new thematic area, both for Ukrainian refugee children and Moldovan children affected by the recession. Both rights holders and duty bearers will be targeted by the strategy. Adolescents will remain a strategic choice and so will the school setting as a platform to influence the thematic areas from different perspectives. Parents have been added as a strategic target group for their potential



to influence in their different roles the fulfilment of children's rights. ERIKS' ambition is to expand its work in Moldova and look for new partners, well-acquainted with child rights, who can complement the current interventions and contribute to the achievement of the country outcomes. Gender equality as a crosscutter will be emphasized in all interventions and capacity building of partners.

Strategic orientation

The role and contribution of ERIKS

With a long-term presence in Moldova, ERIKS is a predictable and consistent donor and partner to local and national level stakeholders working for the children's rights agenda. The most important added value that ERIKS brings to Moldova is its expertise and focus on child rights programming and a strategic view on sustainable changes.

Through capacity development of civil society actors and supporting advocacy initiatives, ERIKS will contribute to increased engagement and accountability from government institutions on children's rights fulfilment.

Having a constant presence in the country, ERIKS and its partners builds progressively a larger awareness among the population of Moldova regarding the rights of the child and the changes in mentality that need to take place.

One other important aspect that ERIKS brings forward is the investment in building and developing resilience for children

in all contexts. Resilience and children's participation are core preoccupations for ERIKS.

Another added value is ERIKS' approach to development, where local agenda is supported, based on the needs identified by the local partners. ERIKS encourages partners to be alert and adapt their interventions to the changes in the context and contributes to their learning processes related to different thematic and cross-cutting issues.

Various factors related to the economic or geo-political situation in Moldova, as well as increased workload in the refugee crisis, result in challenges for the non-governmental organisations, including ERIKS' partners, in maintaining their human resources. ERIKS encourages partners to add in their projects components related to the human resources capacity and motivation.

ERIKS facilitates cooperation among partner organisations, making networking a key objective for ERIKS and the current strategy.

Main learnings from Moldova country programme 2018-2021

As annual country reports have shown so far, all thematic priorities included in the previous ERIKS country strategy for Moldova have been highly relevant for the child rights context development. Important impact has been achieved so far by implementing partners on education, health, protection, and participation rights fulfilment. However, further work is needed in making sure that policies and mechanisms that have been created are also transferred in practice and that duty bearers become more aware on their responsibilities in the fulfilment of children's rights. This is valid for all thematic objectives targeted by ERIKS' strategy.

During the previous strategic period, two important context developments have affected the interventions supported by ERIKS: the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, Moldova's neighbouring country. The non-governmental organisations' capacity to continue working, despite hardship, and their readiness to use resources and expertise for emergency response, have offered tremendous learning opportunities for both ERIKS and its partners. Other important learnings include:

- Transition to a rights-based approach for many organisations is a longer-term process, that requires gradual changes in understanding and practices, beyond organisational policies.
- A diverse portfolio of partners who operate in more areas of child rights and who have a significant capacity to advocate, provide peer support to other partners, and contribute to the achievement of the ERIKS' objectives for Moldova is a highly valuable asset.
- Peer-to-peer learning is one of the most efficient instruments in developing the capacity of partner organisations. Given the expansion of the portfolio with two new partners with good capacities both in terms of service delivery and advocacy, ERIKS Regional Office has placed an increased focus on encouraging and fostering peer collaboration and exchanges between the partners in Moldova, but also with organisations from Romania.

ERIKS' strategic choices for Moldova country programme 2023-2027

A. Geographical focus

ERIKS 2023-2027 strategy refers to the entire territory of Moldova, as issues presented in the child rights situation analysis are valid for children all over the country. Similar to the previous strategy, ERIKS will continue working in settings where risks of poverty and marginalization are higher, in both rural and urban areas. The most important changes expected during this period compared with previous years are related to the influx of children refugees from Ukraine and the expansion of the economic crisis and both issues will affect more areas of Moldova where poverty is already at a high level. Therefore, ERIKS will consult with existing partners on options available for incorporating these most affected areas in the interventions or will include these geographic parameters in the selection of the new partners.

B. Thematic focus

ERIKS will continue to focus on **education, health, and protection**. There will also be continuation in areas covered in the previous country strategy (e.g. sexual and reproductive health rights for adolescents, menstrual health and awareness, prevention and response to abuse, neglect and exploitation, access to qualitative and inclusive education for all children, equal opportunities for boys and girls, access to qualitative support services etc.). At the same time, during this strategic period, **the protection rights** will be prioritized, as well as the **mental health** for children of all ages. This is a new development from the previous country strategy, and it responds to the evolution in the larger child rights context in Moldova. Right to assistance during **humanitarian crisis** will also be included as a new thematic area in the strategy, tackling both Ukrainian refugee children and Moldovan children affected by the economic recession.

C. Targeted rights holders/duty bearers

Both rights holders and duty bearers will be targeted by the strategy. On some specific subjects (i.e. bullying, mental health, sexual and reproductive health and rights) **adolescents** will remain a strategic choice.

The focus on **parents** will be emphasized during the coming strategy period. Being the closest ring around the child in the child rights ecology, parents are the first to provide a safe and enabling environment for the child to enjoy all the rights. Parents also act as moral duty bearers, supporting children to claim their rights and facilitating their interaction with other legal duty bearers. Working with parents contributes to the sustainability of the interventions, including by developing the resilience of children and communities, especially important in the context of social and economic crises.

D. Partners

ERIKS' ambition is to expand its work in Moldova and develop partnerships to complement the current portfolio of projects and contribute to the achievement of the country outcomes, by including new partners that are well-acquainted with child rights and experienced in working towards duty bearers. To respond to the risks connected with economic and energy crisis, ERIKS will assess the capacity of existing partners and potentially identify new organisations that can work with legal duty bearers in monitoring and addressing the child labour. Given the insufficient capacity of state



institutions to provide proper case management and services to children with complex social and behavioural problems, ERIKS will assess the potential expansion of the partners' portfolio with a new organisation able to tackle this issue and to contribute through its expertise to the capacity development of the existing partners.

No major phase-out processes are expected for the up-coming strategic period. However, this aspect is highly dependent on the willingness of some of the partners to continue their capacity development and inclusion of more rights-based elements in their intervention.

The majority of existing partners have a strong regional and national presence, with contribution to national advocacy campaigns. This will be balanced in the up-coming period with organisations that have a larger grass-root reach, especially valuable to directly supporting children affected by different crises. Partners that have been newly added to ERIKS' portfolio as part of the emergency response for the Ukrainian refugee crisis are expected to continue their humanitarian interventions and will be considered for longer term partnership in the development work as well.

E. Aid efficiency

Partners in Moldova have so far received project support. However, most interventions in ERIKS portfolio are longer term, programme based. Only a small number of partners are implementing projects limited in timeframe and scope. During 2023-2027 period, ERIKS will evaluate the opportunity of transitioning at least one of the longer-term partners with constant work in targeted thematic areas to core support.

F. Implementation strategies and approach

ERIKS' strategic approaches are already strongly present in all interventions supported in Moldova and represent core values for partner organisations as well. Gender equality will be prioritised during the strategic period both within all the interventions supported by ERIKS, as well as in the capacity development of the partners.

Considering the evolving social and geopolitical context in Moldova and its surroundings, ERIKS will increase its atten-

tion on developing partners' capacity to plan and **respond to major changes** in their areas of intervention. Some of these expected/potential developments in context are described in the risk assessment: deepening poverty and lack of access to basic needs for children and families caused by the energy and economic crisis, political instability and social unrest fed by Russian propaganda and differences of opinion between majority of the population leaning towards European Union and the pro-Russian minority.

ERIKS and its partners in Moldova will prepare for answering and adapting to these changes by including more **direct actions** to address gaps in provision and violations of children's rights. This approach will be coupled with empowerment of rights holders and strengthening of duty-bearers, and will support the advocacy efforts for sustainable changes. Additionally, working with civic engagement, critical thinking, digital citizenship and media awareness should be part of the interventions involving children and the school setting.

All the developments described above will also impact the capacity of public authorities in Moldova to reach sustainable changes in implementing children's rights. Reduced local budgets will heavily affect social services that ensure children's rights to protection and health. This will in turn influence the level of achievements that the partners are targeting. ERIKS will work with its partners in adapting the expectations for the interventions and planning in a realistic way.

G. Sustainability

ERIKS' country priorities are very much in line with the objectives set by the National Programme for Child Protection for 2022-2026, adopted by the Moldovan Government in June 2022. However, ERIKS, together with its partners, will monitor the developments in the country and raise government's attention on areas which are not covered by the strategy. The majority of programmes implemented in Moldova with ERIKS' support are rights based and focus on long term changes in behaviours and beliefs, including an increased awareness on their own rights among children of all ages.





Country outcomes

The following outcomes have been defined for ERIKS' work in Moldova during this strategic period, based on the country analysis and ERIKS' role and contribution:

- **1.1:1** Partner organisations adhere to the Child Rights Based Approach. They integrate in a contextualized manner, gradually and organically elements of the **Child Rights Based Approach and the UNCRC principles** at the level of their organisational strategies, staffing policies (institutional ownership) and programme development.
 - **1.1:2** Partner organisations are continuously open to **learning** from their own and others' experiences, as well as from new approaches. This allows them to be sensitive to the context, emerging risks and changes, plan and adapt their strategies accordingly.
 - **1.1.3** Partner organisations integrate elements of **gender transformative approach** in their organisational strategies and programmatic work.
 - **1.1.4** ERIKS and partner organisations have appropriate **governance** structures and systems for **management and internal control**.
 - **1.1.5** ERIKS and partner organisations participate in relevant **networks** and have skills and opportunity to **advocate** for the rights of the child.
 - **2.1.1** **Girls and boys** enjoy access to an inclusive and qualitative **education**, in a safe school environment.
 - **2.1.2** **Girls and boys** are empowered to claim and advocate for their rights, while **participating** in a meaningful way to all matters concerning them, including peacebuilding, community development and positive environment impact.
 - **2.1.3** **Girls and boys** access information, education and specialized services that ensure their **physical and mental health**.
 - **2.1.4** **Girls and boys** in Moldova are **protected** from abuse, violence, neglect, and exploitation.
 - **2.1.5** **Girls and boys** in Moldova and refugees from **Ukraine** seeking shelter in Moldova **enjoy** their rights to **assistance in the humanitarian** context.
 - **2.2.1** **Local and national public authorities** base their policies on UNCRC principles and strive to **provide** adequate **social, health and educational services** to girls and boys, meeting quality standards on all levels.
 - **2.2.2** **Local and national public authorities** ensure meaningful and ethical **participation** of girls and boys in policies and practices at all levels.
 - **2.2.3** **Local and national public authorities** **acknowledge the role of parents** in child development, work on their capacities to ensure children's rights and involve parents as partners in policy and services development.
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- **2.3.1** **Parents understand their role and act responsively** in ensuring an adequate environment for children's development in accordance with children's rights.
 - **2.3.2** Civil society organisations, civic groups and community members actively participate in creating peaceful, resilient, and **inclusive communities** where girls and boys can thrive.

ERIKS

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