

EQUITABLE ACCESS COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Section I: Country setting

Basic information

POPULATION	3.5 million
AREA	33,846 km ²
GDP	US\$ 9.6 billion
GDP PER CAPITA	US\$ 2,692
ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER (2018)	Total: 68.4% Urban: 97.3% Rural: 45.1%
ACCESS TO SANITATION (2018)	Total: 74% Urban: 88% Rural: 70%

Protocol on Water and Health. The Republic of Moldova ratified the Protocol in July 2005 and has since progressively worked on implementing the treaty's provisions, with the Government officially approving the first National Programme to implement national targets for 2016–2025.

Water and sanitation sector. The key public authority responsible for the development and implementation of national policy in the water and sanitation sector of the Republic of Moldova is the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment. Other ministries involved include the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection, in charge, among other things, of monitoring hygiene practices and public access to improved water and sanitation systems, and the Ministry of Finance for mobilizing and allocating budgetary resources. The National Agency for Energy Regulation regulates tariffs for water supply and sanitation services. Overall, the implementation of government programmes by the relevant ministries is overseen by the State Chancellery.

Section II: Self-assessment of equitable access to water and sanitation

II.A. Key findings²⁷

Governance framework. At the regulatory level, the Republic of Moldova found that its national framework does not have a strong duty-bearers/rights-holders perspective; the obligations of the former are not sufficiently clear, while mechanisms for the latter to claim their rights are weak.

Vulnerable and marginalized groups. Rural communities and vulnerable groups face systemic barriers in access to and enjoyment of water and sanitation. For people in rural areas, the Republic of Moldova highlighted in particular that almost no progress has been made in connecting the rural population to clean sanitation. As for vulnerable groups, the special needs of some categories of users are not recognized in the regulatory framework, notably people with disabilities, elderly people (particularly elderly women), and the Roma population. The 2018 National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030" discussed vulnerable groups, including causal factors, and defined a policy response in terms of strategic vision, specific objectives and priority actions. One priority was the expansion of the water supply and sanitation infrastructure.

Affordability. In the country, the responsibility of ensuring affordable water and sanitation is not assigned at the national level, but rather it is delegated to the Local Public Administration, water utilities and water users' associations. The existing system of incentives, however, is insufficient for them to prioritize the affordability of services. As a result, according to country statistics, the lowest income households can spend is up to 15 per cent of their income for minimum access to water and sanitation, i.e. the consumer contribution to the construction of water supply and sanitation (WSS) systems. There are also no social protection measures or social payments for the most vulnerable households. These findings prompted the Republic of Moldova to identify affordability as a key area where action must be taken in order to promote equitable access to water and sanitation.

²⁷ For more information on the findings of the self-assessment of equitable access to water and sanitation, see the country report available at <https://bit.ly/2beTMWz>

II.B. Self-assessment process

Brief description. The decision to undergo self-assessment in the Republic of Moldova was driven by various factors. Political authorities recognized the significance of an equitable access approach to water and sanitation given the difficulties faced by the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. Furthermore, NGOs were active in advocating for the use of the Equitable Access Score-card and provided part of the budget to implement the project. The self-assessment exercise was performed at the national, regional and local levels and was carried out in nine months from April to December 2015. The project was mainly executed by a national consultant, supported by the Moldovan Ministry of Environment²⁸. Other stakeholders also took part in the process, including representatives of initiatives supported by international organizations, for example, the OECD project in the Republic of Moldova, the UNDP/ART initiative and NGOs.

Key lessons learned from the process:

- It is crucial to raise public awareness and education about human rights to water and sanitation in order to promote civil participation.
- The Republic of Moldova identified the need to institute training programmes for operators and other professionals involved in water and sanitation management.
- Exchange of experiences on the right to safe water and sanitation is important for policymaking and institutional capacity-building.

Section III: Actions taken to improve equitable access to water and sanitation

Although the Republic of Moldova has not yet developed a specific action plan, the equitable access perspective has been considered in subsequent national actions on water and sanitation. Equitable access was incorporated into the process of target-setting under the Protocol. The country has indeed developed the following target indicators under the area of access to drinking water (Art 6.2 (c)) and access to improved sanitation (Art 6.2 (c)):

- Providing access to drinking water and to improved sanitation.
- Ensuring children's access to improved water sources and sanitation systems in kindergartens and schools.
- Ensuring a legal and institutional framework for providing equitable access to water for vulnerable and marginalized groups²⁹.

By 2020, the objective is not only to increase access to water and sanitation for the urban and rural population and for institutions, but also to implement financial mechanisms for ensuring equitable access.³⁰

Furthermore, the equitable access perspective has been considered within the National Programme for Implementation of the Protocol (2016–2025). The latter enshrines as objectives:

- to ensure access to sustainable drinking water systems in 100 per cent of institutions for children and increase access for the general population to these systems by 10 per cent by 2025, and
- to ensure by 2025 that 100 per cent of the population have access to improved sanitation systems, including up to 50 per cent to sewage systems.

Within the specific actions to be taken in order to reach these objectives, the programme lists: i) the establishment of a legal and institutional framework to provide equitable access to water for vulnerable and marginalized groups; ii) the creation of solidarity funds to provide equitable access to water for vulnerable and marginalized groups; iii) the creation of regional services by expanding water and sewerage services in urban areas to rural areas; and iv) the construction/reconstruction of sanitation systems in pre-schools and pre-university institutions to ensure that 100 per cent of institutions are provided with sanitation systems.

²⁸ Now the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment.

²⁹ Annex 1 to the National Programme for Implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health for 2016–2025, Target indicators for the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health, p.54.

³⁰ Ibidem.

Section IV: Financing equitable access to water and sanitation

In the Republic of Moldova, the most important national sources of funding for water and sanitation are two funds managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment:

- The National Ecological Fund, of which 84 per cent of funds (242 million leu or ~US\$ 13.6 million) in 2016 were allocated to water supply and sewerage projects.
- The National Regional Development Fund, of which 39 per cent of funds (73 million leu or ~US\$ 4.1 million) in 2017 were allocated to the water supply and sanitation sector.

Investment in the water and sanitation sector is also provided by external sources, including international financial institutions and development partners. Between 2008 and 2012 for instance, 68 per cent of investment in the sector benefited from external support.

As for future activities, the National Programme for Implementation of the Protocol (2016–2025) provides cost estimates to achieve its objectives and for specific actions to be taken, including those relevant to promote equitable access to water and sanitation. By way of illustration, for the establishment of a legal and institutional framework to provide equitable access to water for vulnerable and marginalized groups, the total estimated cost is 0.29 million leu (~US\$ 16,300), whereas it is 0.37 million leu (~US\$ 20,800) for the creation of solidarity funds. As for sanitation-related action, the construction/reconstruction of sanitation systems in pre-school and pre-university institutions is expected to cost 164,664 leu (~US\$ 9,250).³¹

For 2019, support of the external investment projects will be mobilized to update the National Programme for Implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health and to establish the legal framework to encompass the human rights to water and the possibility of creating mechanisms for solidarity and the support of vulnerable and marginalized groups.



³¹ For more exhaustive information, see the National Programme for Implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health 2016–2025 (2016), Annex 2.