



**The project is funded by the European Union and
Co-funded and implemented by the UNDP**



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

Support to Confidence Building Measures
Susținerea Măsurilor de Promovare a Încrederii
Поддержка мер по укреплению доверия

**Civil Society Initiative on Confidence Building Measures in the
Area of Social Issues/Humanitarian Aid:
A Blueprint for Project Ideas on Both Banks of the Nistru River**

Tomas Baranovas, consultant (Team Leader)

Iuliana Abramova, consultant

Serghei Neicovcen, consultant

The opinions expressed in this study do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the European Union or the United Nations Development Programme.

April 2014

Table of Contents

I. Overview of social and humanitarian situation on both banks of the Nistru river. Main challenges and trends3

II. Capacity of civil society on both banks of the Nistru river14

III. Experience of implementation of joint social and humanitarian projects17

IV. Project Ideas for Confidence Building in Social/Humanitarian Area22

The “Support to Confidence Building Measures” Programme (SCBM Programme) is funded by the European Union and co-funded and implemented by the UNDP Moldova. The overall objective of the Programme is to build confidence between Chisinau and Tiraspol by involving local authorities, civil society organizations, business community and other stakeholders in joint work to stimulate economic and social development on both sides.

This Initiative falls under the Civil Society component of the SCBM Programme. It is a key mechanism to convene actors from both banks of the Nistru river, promote cooperation and encourage the development of joint solutions. This Initiative focused on dialogue between experts from both banks in order to work out two Blueprints for development projects, one on social and one on economic issues. The Blueprints aim at providing an analytical tool for elaboration of projects that may later be implemented on the ground.

This Blueprint for project ideas in the area of social issues/humanitarian aid was produced through a 1-year process (from spring 2013 to spring 2014) of extensive consultations with civil society representatives from both banks of the Nistru river¹. In particular, the process included an initial working meeting on social and humanitarian issues, which was held on 10-11 July 2013 in Chisinau; a study visit to Lithuania and Poland on 2-6 December 2013, which included getting acquainted with EU-supported regional development projects; focus group meetings on 3-4 February 2014 to discuss possible project ideas in more detail; a validation meeting, held in Vadul lui Voda on 1-2 April 2014; and extensive consultations by the project experts in-between these events.

During this process, ideas of possible joint projects focusing on social issues were collected, discussed, most viable ideas selected, elaborated and validated for presentation to the donor community and relevant authorities. This has been an inclusive, civil society-driven process. The role of the consultants and the Team Leader was to organise and support the process of informal cooperation through the working meetings to identify, analyze and research the problems, organize the joint study visit to Lithuania and Poland for civil society representatives from both banks of the Nistru river, and develop the Blueprints for project ideas.

The description of commonly-generated joint project ideas is preceded by an analytical introduction: an overview of the relevant context, an assessment of capacities of civil society organisations, an overview of previously implemented projects and some insights into the current state of partnerships between NGOs from both banks of the river. This analysis was produced by the team of consultants, in close cooperation with civil society representatives from both banks of the Nistru river.

1. Overview of social and humanitarian situation on both banks of the Nistru river. Main challenges and trends

After more than twenty years of its independence, the Republic of Moldova still remains among the poorest countries in Europe. This long transition creates many social and economic challenges for each

¹ For the purposes of this document, “the right bank” will refer to the territory of the Republic of Moldova controlled by the Government, while “the left bank” will refer to the Transnistrian region controlled by its *de facto* authorities.

citizen and for the country development in general. The Transnistrian region faces a number of similar social and economic problems and challenges.

The social and economic development of the whole region has been impeded by a frozen conflict. In 1990-1992, a military confrontation occurred between forces in the Transnistrian region, and Moldovan forces, until a Russian-mediated ceasefire was signed in July 1992. Since late 1990, the Transnistrian region, which formed part of the former Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, has been governed by its own *de facto* administration. Thus, social and economic development has been carried out in parallel, uncoordinated directions, with a high degree of mistrust between authorities and people on the two banks of the Nistru river. The frozen conflict has had a negative impact on the living standards of the whole region².

Social and humanitarian situation on the right bank

Poverty and social exclusion still affect people's lives on the right bank, despite efforts made by the national authorities and the international community for their mitigation.

Poverty and social exclusion are complex and multidimensional phenomena and controlling them requires an integrated approach through consolidation of efforts of different actors at different levels. Exclusion from economic life marginalizes individuals in the distribution of economic resources and limits their human development opportunities in other areas – namely, having access to high-quality education, receiving adequate healthcare services and participating in the cultural and social life of society. Social exclusion and access inequality are relatively new concepts for the Republic of Moldova that were not addressed until recently by the Government through its anti-poverty policies³.

The economic growth in the post-2008 economic crisis period has allowed Moldova to slightly converge with the Central and Eastern European countries in terms of income per capita. However, the domestic economic growth remains too volatile and remittances-driven. Low labour productivity in a few large sectors of the economy (such as agriculture) explains how the relatively high economic growth had limited impact on the peoples' income.

Absolute poverty on the right bank has fallen swiftly from 67.8% in 2000 to 26.3% in 2009⁴ and 16.6 in 2012⁵ but the decline was far from sustainable because it was largely due to remittances inflow. The unsustainable nature of poverty reduction is reflected in the employment trends. The employment rate on the right bank has declined from 54.8% in 2000 to 40.0% in 2009 to 39.3% in 2013. People employed in the informal economy (about 30% of the total employed population) are particularly vulnerable to economic exclusion. The official unemployment rate was 4.1% in the last quarter of 2013.

Age emerges as an important factor increasing the risk of social exclusion. Young people with a good education and training background often cannot find a job because of the lack of work experience or

² "Costs of the Transnistrian conflict and benefits of its resolution" (<http://www.cisr-md.org/pdf/Report%20ENG%20Master%20Draft%20vGS.pdf>).

³ National Human Development Report 2010–2011 "Republic of Moldova – from Social Exclusion towards Inclusive Human Development" (<http://www.undp.md/publications/NHDRs.shtml>).

⁴ Statistics presented in this section are quoted from the National Human Development Report 2010–2011 (<http://www.undp.md/publications/NHDRs.shtml>), "European Aspirations and Human Development of the Republic of Moldova" (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/european-aspirations-and-human-development-republic-moldova>), hdr.undp.org/en/data/explorer/ and www.statistica.md.

⁵ <http://www.md.undp.org/content/moldova/en/home/mdgoverview/overview/mdg1/>

limited available vacancies. Elderly people (65 years of age and older) are exposed to the risk of economic exclusion. Poverty incidence in households of elderly people is about 10 percentage points higher than the average for the country. People with HIV/AIDS are not supported through policy and institutional measures to ease their integration into the labour market.

The share of social expenditures in the state budget was on the rise and in 2009 made up 70.2% of the total budget (or 32% of GDP). The most significant share of the overall social sector expenditures was allocated for social protection and this share grew by one third in the period between 2000 and 2009 (from 10% to 15.1% of GDP, respectively). Education expenditures, which increased from 5.7% of GDP in 2000 to 9.4% in 2009, came second in terms of total budget allocations. Healthcare spending rose from 3% of GDP in 2000 to 4.7% in 2006 and 6.4% in 2009. Still, despite the increasing financial allocations, exclusion from social services remains a challenge.

Significant number of Moldovan citizens relies on the social protection system—the total number of its beneficiaries exceeds 1 million people, of which 53% are pensioners. Thus, the way the social protection system works largely determines this group's risk of social exclusion. Low pensions make old age population dependent on social assistance.

Over the last decade, the Human Development Index (HDI) of the Republic of Moldova has grown faster than the world average, but still not enough to significantly reduce the gap with the new EU member states and the candidate countries. With an HDI of 0.66 in 2012, Moldova ranks 113th in the global human development ranking.

The Republic of Moldova is by 56 positions lower than the lowest placed member state of the European Union, and the key constraints that hinder the convergence of Moldova with the new EU member countries are the low income, the health status of the population and the poor quality of education.

With a life expectancy of 69.6 years at birth, Moldova is closer to the lower limit of the group of new EU member states and the countries of the Western Balkans and has one of the largest disparities in terms of gender, men living 8 years less than women.

Despite the positive impact in addressing poverty, the social policy maintains a functional approach by providing the necessary means for survival, while no real support is provided for the integration of vulnerable groups into society through better access to education, health and to other services⁶.

Labour migration plays an important role both in economic and demographic development. According to the National Human Development report 2010-2011⁷, more than 23% of the active population in 2009 worked abroad. This phenomenon has negative social and economic impacts. Children from migrant families, especially those who have both parents who left to work abroad, are particularly vulnerable. They often remain in care of their family members, neighbours, and sometimes without any care. Migration often leads to the breaking of family ties. Another negative social impact of migration is the fact that most migrants do not make any contributions to the public insurance budget.

Trends in Government policies

⁶ "European Aspirations and Human Development of the Republic of Moldova" (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/european-aspirations-and-human-development-republic-moldova>)

⁷ <http://www.undp.md/publications/NHDRs.shtml>

The Strategy 2020 is the main document of government policies on the right bank⁸. The main objective of the Strategy is to ensure sustainable economic development and, as a consequence, lower poverty level.

From the point of view of social aspects of the strategy, the focus is on the pension reform, which has a fair and sustainable pension system as a stated priority. Reform of the pension system should contribute to a lower poverty level. Although this depends on many factors, the rapid growth of pensions owing to the reform should decrease absolute poverty rate among pensioners to a greater extent than in case the current conditions of the pension system are maintained.

Concerning the trends in the social sector, adoption of the following important laws should be mentioned:

- Law on Preventing and Combatting Family Violence, adopted in 2008,
- Law on Social integration of disabled persons, adopted in 2012,
- Law on Social services, adopted in 2010,
- Law on Accreditation of social service providers, adopted in 2012,
- Law on Special measures of protection to children in risky situations, separated from their parents, adopted in 2013.

Integration of persons with disabilities

In 2010, Moldova ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and approved a Strategy of Social Integration of People with Disabilities (2010–2013). In 2012, the Parliament approved the Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, which regulates the rights of people with disabilities to ensure their social integration and guarantee them participation in all domains of life without any discrimination, equal to other members of society, based on observance of the main human rights and freedoms.

In 2013, there were approximately 183,693 persons with disabilities on the right bank, including 14,753 children, a large number of whom often faced discrimination, social exclusion, poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to public services⁹.

According to data of the Ministry of Education, most of the 4400 children living in state boarding schools are disabled. Poor access to education remains a challenge to disabled children. According to Amnesty International, only one fifth of all disabled children received any kind of education in 2010-2011¹⁰.

Official regulations mandate access to buildings for persons with disabilities, and most government buildings provided such access. While many newly built or reconstructed private buildings were accessible, older buildings often were not.

⁸ http://www.gov.md/public/files/Moldova_2020_ENG.pdf

⁹ U.S. State department, Moldova report on Human rights practices in 2013 (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220308>)

¹⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/moldova-amend-laws-tackle-rampant-discrimination-2012-09-10>

The network of social services was expanded to include specialized services, such as social assistance, support, and counselling to foster the beneficiaries' social inclusion. There are 102 community service centres for persons with disabilities on the right bank. In 2013, there were nine mobile support groups providing social assistance, medical and psychological support to 614 beneficiaries, and family support services for 155 persons with disabilities¹¹.

Limited economic opportunities usually contribute to personal vulnerability of persons with disability. Although the law provides for equal employment opportunities and prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities (with the exception of jobs requiring specific health standards), many employers either fail to accommodate or avoid employing such persons. The Law on Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities requires that 5 percent of the workforce in companies with 20 or more employees must be persons with disabilities. Its provision that persons with disabilities are entitled to two months of paid annual leave and a six-hour workday can make it more difficult for persons with disabilities to find employment. In 2008, only 28.6% of the total number of people with disabilities managed to find a job, while in 2009 only 11.4% could do so¹².

Deinstitutionalization of children

According to information obtained from the Ministry of Education, in 2012, compared with 2007, the number of children in state boarding institutions dropped by 62%, as a result of implementation of the National action plan on the reform of childcare residential institutions. Most of the children returned to their biological families or started living with foster families. Still, around 4400 children remain in state institutions.

The government actively develops alternative services of family-type childcare. In early 2013, there were 206 families with professional parents registered on the right bank, who cared about 314 children. In addition, there were 84 family-type orphanages with 346 children on the right bank. Regardless of such measures, the situation is still grave, because family-type foster care involves only 15% of all children in foster care.

Gender policy and prevention of domestic violence

The Equal Opportunities law, renewed since January 2013, provides that women enjoy the same legal status as men under family law, labour law, property law, inheritance law, and in the judicial system. The National Bureau of Statistics reported that a higher proportion of women than men were employed.

Despite enshrining equal rights in national legislation, many challenges remain in ensuring gender equality. The greatest disparities relate to horizontal and vertical gender segregation: women are mostly employed in low-paying jobs and occupy lower positions in the job hierarchy where they are employed. Thus, even though all women benefit from the same employment rights as men, they are still considered as a relatively vulnerable group on the labour market¹³.

¹¹ U.S. State department, Moldova report on Human rights practices in 2013 (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220308>)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <http://www.undp.md/mdg/MDG3/gender.shtml>

A Law on Preventing and Combatting Family Violence was adopted in 2008. A National Bureau of Statistics report in 2013, based on a joint study supported by UN Women, the Embassy of Sweden, the UNDP, and the UN Population Fund, described domestic violence as widespread¹⁴. The study found that 63.4 percent of women over the age of 14 experienced some form of domestic abuse in their lifetime, including 40 percent who had been physically abused. Rural women experienced violence in significantly higher proportions than urban women. In the first eight months of 2013, police registered 818 cases of domestic violence, double the number registered during the same period in 2012.

Public perception of domestic violence as a private problem persists. Authorities generally rely on civil society to raise awareness. The government supports educational efforts, usually undertaken with foreign assistance, to increase public awareness of domestic violence and to instruct the public and law enforcement officials on how to address the problem. Private organizations operate services for abused spouses, including a hotline for battered women. Access to such assistance remained difficult for some.

Social and humanitarian situation on the left bank

According to the statistical office of the left bank, there were 505 thousand inhabitants in the region as of 1 January 2014 (compared with 3.56 million on the right bank), 69% of them live in towns, and the remaining 31% are rural inhabitants. This proportion is different from the right bank, where rural population prevails.

There is a trend of shrinking population over the past two decades. The last population census conducted in the Soviet Union in 1989 found 750 thousand inhabitants in the region. During the last 8 years, official figures show a decline of 46 thousand people, or 8.3% of the total population. Some consulted experts believe that the actual number of inhabitants of the left bank is even lower. Official unemployment figure is almost 3%, and the number of economically active people of working age is 321 thousand¹⁵.

Social policy budget expenditures on the left bank amounted to 11.9% of the total budget in 2012. The terms “poverty” and “social exclusion” are not used in official documents on the left bank. A minimal living standard is used to assess the living conditions of families and individuals. The minimal living standard is composed of a consumption basket as well as mandatory payments and levies. In 2013, the average minimal living standard was the equivalent of 110 US dollars. According to a report of social and economic development of the left bank in 2013¹⁶, the average nominal monthly salary is approximately 3 times bigger than the minimal living standard.

Overall, according to official data, approximately 200 thousand people require social support and assistance on the left bank. Pensioners constitute 27% of the total population, 69% of them are women and 31% are men¹⁷. According to official statistics, 97% of pensioners receive pensions which are 23% bigger than the minimal living standard.

¹⁴ U.S. State department, Moldova report on Human rights practices in 2013 (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220308>)

¹⁵ <http://www.mepmr.org/gosudarstvennaya-statistika/informaciya>

¹⁶ <http://www.mepmr.org/gosudarstvennaya-statistika/informaciya/62-o-soczialno-ekonomicheskopolozhenii-pmr/2051-soczialno-ekonomicheskoe-razvitie-pmr-za-2013-god-okonchatelnye-dannye>

¹⁷ http://minsoctrud.org/otcheti_za_2013_god/

According to the report of the statistical office, there are 20 thousand persons receiving disability pensions on the left bank. According to consulted NGOs working with disabled persons, their actual number is closer to 25 thousand. Regulation on the social protection of disabled persons was adopted in 2006. According to the UN Senior Expert on Human Right Thomas Hammarberg, there should be more awareness of the rights of the disabled persons among the population and authorities on the left bank¹⁸. There is a lack of infrastructure (ramps, rails) to access public buildings.

There were 1353 children with disabilities on the left bank at the beginning of 2012. Although a programme for prevention and rehabilitation of disabilities among children was adopted by the authorities, a number of social, economic, educational and medical problems remain unsolved. There is a shortage of rehabilitation centres for children.

In 2010, development of family-type childcare started on the left bank. As of 2010, 4,305 children on the left bank were placed in special institutions (according to the report of the UN Senior Human Rights Expert Thomas Hammarberg). Of the total number of these children, 1,715 were physically disabled children, 408 were orphans and 1,586 were abandoned children due to various reasons, while 596 children were removed from dysfunctional families. As of 1 January 2014, there are 13 child institutions on the left bank for children requiring care: 10 large state and municipal institutions of the so called "old" type, capable to house a hundred and more children, and 3 family-type institutions with 4-8 children.

There is a lack of complex analyses and reports about the situation in social area on the left bank. Only some public agencies produce reports about social issues in their domain of responsibility. Thus, it is difficult to draw objective conclusions about the situation of vulnerable groups and their access to social services.

Institutional component

As of 1 January 2013, issues of social welfare and social protection were distinguished from other issues dealt with by the *de facto* Ministry of Healthcare and Social Protection to establish a separate *de facto* government agency – Ministry of Social Protection and Labour.

Competences of the newly created body include some issues previously covered by its predecessor (pensions, social protection and social services, social insurance, family rights, motherhood and childhood), as well as other issues earlier covered by other public bodies (guardianship and wardship – these were earlier covered by *de facto* Ministry of Education, social and labour relations and employment policies – earlier covered by the *de facto* Ministry of Economic Development). This new entity includes 13 subordinate institutions: state institutions for children (abandoned children, orphans, children with special needs) and adults (persons with psycho-neurological deviations, veterans of war), rehabilitation centres for people with disabilities (including children), and the Centre of Prosthetics and Orthopaedics.

As of 1 January 2014, the structure of this *de facto* Ministry was reorganized to set up a separate State Service of Guardianship and Wardship and Support to Families in Risk Groups, which unites all functions concerning guardianship and wardship within the same body, and is tasked to continue deinstitutionalization of state institutions for children and to elaborate a single methodology to work with families in the risk group.

¹⁸ <http://www.un.md/publicdocget/41/>

New possibilities for upgrading human rights standards

In February 2013, the United Nations Senior Human Rights Expert Thomas Hammarberg presented his Report on Human Rights in Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, which was the result of a deep study of the situation and a detailed review of human rights observance in the region undertaken during three one-week visits in 2012. The report contains a study of compliance of human rights observance on the left bank with international standards, including with the situation of some vulnerable groups (convicts, religious and ethnic minorities, elderly people, persons with disabilities, children, women, HIV-positive persons).

During 2013, authorities on the left bank developed and approved an Action Plan on implementation of recommendations made by the UN Senior Human Rights Expert. Representatives of civil society were not invited to participate in the working group which developed the Action Plan, although they actively assisted the UN Senior Human Rights Expert in the collection of information about the situation on the left bank. The Action Plan defined nine areas requiring urgent change in order to improve the situation with human rights observance, in particular:

- 1) conditions of detention of convicts, provision of medical assistance and social rehabilitation;
- 2) detention in remand facilities;
- 3) development of health care services to the population;
- 4) social inclusion of persons with disabilities;
- 5) deinstitutionalization of guardianship and wardship of children;
- 6) pensions and the process of their allocation;
- 7) development of justice system;
- 8) domestic violence;
- 9) human trafficking.

Participation of international organizations in solving of social problems on the left bank

The Support to Confidence Building Measures Programme, funded by the European Union, co-funded and implemented by the UNDP Moldova since 2009, covers economic development, civil society, infrastructure, healthcare and environment.

A project supported by the Russian Federation was launched in May 2013 aiming to build 12 social facilities, such as kindergartens, schools and healthcare institutions¹⁹. Remarkably, this Russian initiative focuses mainly on building new facilities in healthcare and education, paying little attention either to teaching modern methods of diagnostics and treatment of most common diseases in the region to the staff of the new institutions, or targeting the most vulnerable and poorly protected groups of population, or applying new methods of training and education of children, or focusing on implementation of gender sensitive components.

Authorities on the left bank, in April 2014, publicly expressed their appreciation for social and educational projects implemented by the UNDP and the Russian NGO "Eurasian Integration"²⁰.

¹⁹ <http://www.vz.ru/news/2013/5/24/634143.html>

²⁰ <http://president.gospmr.ru/ru/news/ezhegodnoe-poslanie-prezidenta-pmr-k-narodu-organam-gosvlasti-i-upravleniya>

Social reforms on the left bank

The social sphere on the left bank has not undergone any major transformations over the last 15-20 years. Although in the last three years two strategic documents were developed on the left bank (Government plan 2500 and Strategies of social and economic development until 2025), their main focus is on development, capacity building and changes in approaches to economic management, and only a small fragment in them deals with the reform of the pension system, social services, demography, education and healthcare.

Among the most important transformations in the social sphere was the separation of the issues of social welfare and social protection from the structure of the *de facto* Ministry of Healthcare and Social Protection, and establishing a separate *de facto* Ministry of Social Protection and Labour in 2013, as well as a pension reform project drafted by this new *de facto* Ministry, which is planned to be implemented in the middle run. This pension reform project, so far, has not been released to the public, and its nature and content is only known from statements made by authorities in mass media²¹. The main features of this pension reform seem to be the increase in retirement age (today it is 55 years for women and 60 years for men) and reduced privileges to pensioners. The necessity of this reform is explained by a large deficit of the pension fund on the left bank in the course of the last five years and a rapidly growing number of pensioners – according to official sources, there are 2 pensioners per 1 person of working age on the left bank.

NGO leaders from the left bank, consulted during this Initiative, expressed the opinion that social protection on the left bank does not meet modern challenges and needs. Regulations on the left bank lack such legal statuses as “migrant”, “refugee”, “victim of domestic violence” and others; accordingly, there are no special services to these groups.

Social Protection and Humanitarian Aid Working Group agenda

In 2007, within the process of negotiations on the settlement of the frozen conflict, a decision was made to set up expert Working Groups to support implementation of confidence measures²². Confidence building expert Working Groups were established as a tool to develop solutions to identified problems, harmonize positions and enable a favourable climate for conflict settlement. One of the ten working groups operating in the field of social issues is named the Social Protection and Humanitarian Aid Working Group.

Participants of this Working Group are representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family of the Republic of Moldova, led by this Ministry’s vice-minister Sergiu Sainciuc from the right bank, and representatives from the *de facto* Ministry for Social Protection and Labour and the *de facto* Ministry of Education of the Transnistrian region, led by the Chairperson of the Commission for humanitarian aid Galina Sanduta (composition of this Working Group changes depending on the agenda).

²¹ <http://www.nr2.ru/pmr/428462.html>

²² Moldova Government Decree no. 1178 “On Implementation of Moldova President’s Initiatives to enhance confidence and security in the context of Transnistrian settlement”, 31.10.2007, MO no. 175-177, 09.11.2007

Seven meetings of the Working Group were held since its establishment in 2009, and the following topics and items were discussed:

1. situation of orphans, abandoned children, children from families in difficult situation, regulations of alternative family-type services for children, adoption of standards from experience of the right bank, children with special needs and requirements (including children with disabilities);
2. new challenges of human trafficking and repatriation of children found on the territory of other countries without guardians or accompanying persons;
3. legislative and practical aspects of prevention and combatting of domestic violence;
4. cooperation in matters of physical culture and sports of disabled persons;
5. interaction between agencies of social protection in order to avoid duplication of pensions, allowances and other social benefits in some parts of the Security Zone, and discussion of the protocol "On provision of pensions to citizens in connection with their move from Moldova to Transnistria for permanent residence (and vice versa)";
6. capacity building trainings of specialists (providers of social services) in dealing with domestic violence, human trafficking, including service standards to HIV-positive persons;
7. indexation of citizens' deposits;
8. cooperation in matters of humanitarian shipments to the left bank.

One of the tangible results achieved by the Working Group in November 2013 was the signing of the protocol decision on the provision of pensions to citizens in connection with their move from Moldova to Transnistria for permanent residence (and vice versa). This matter had been on the agenda of the Working group since early 2012.

Reviewing the activities of this Working Group, it is worth noting that most of its meetings take the form of examination of various social aspects of legislation, enforced on the right and/or left bank of the Nistru and practices of its application, as well as reviewing of projects implemented predominantly by authorities from the right bank. So far, the Working Group has not achieved any tangible results in improving the situation in the social sphere, except for the signing of the above mentioned protocol in 2013. In part, this can be explained by a higher degree of importance given to supporting the dialogue and communication between experts as a short-term objective, rather to achieving results. Moreover, according to observations of consulted experts, there are problems with the implementation of previously achieved agreements of the Working Group and with communication between the group members in periods between its meetings.

Conclusions of the overview of social and humanitarian situation on both banks of the Nistru river

As the overview suggests, people on both banks of the Nistru face a number of similar social challenges, such as domestic violence (the lack of means to reduce its scale and to assist the victims), difficult situation of vulnerable children (children in state institutions, children victims of violence, disabled children), lack of integration of disabled people into society, age-related social exclusion, and others.

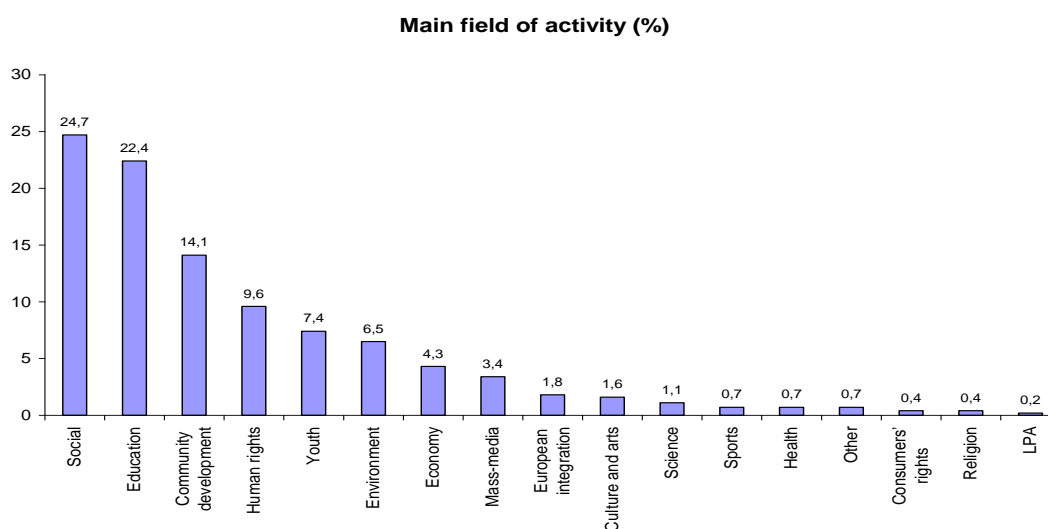
Regarding some social challenges, situation on both banks is difficult to compare due to the lack of official data and shortage of detailed analyses. However, as consultations with civil society representatives showed, in many cases there is a strong potential for joint NGO action to tackle the social issues on both banks in a professional, non-politicised way.

II. Capacity of civil society on both banks of the Nistru river

Social NGOs on the right bank

According to the data of the Registry of non-commercial organizations, there are more than 9500 non-governmental organizations registered on the right bank. Only about 25% of all NGOs are actively engaged in various projects and initiatives²³. Among the reasons of the relatively small proportion of active NGOs is the absence of public or private sources of funding from within the country as well as the lack of mechanisms of income generation through provision of services.

A UNDP study on NGOs development in Moldova (2007) states that over 24% of all NGOs are involved in the social area, as illustrated by the diagram below, showing the main fields of activity of NGOs.



Source: UNDP study on NGOs development in Moldova (2007)

Main activities of social organizations on the right bank are:

- social protection of family and child;
- social protection of disabled persons;
- social protection of elderly people;
- work with persons with HIV/AIDS, drug addicts;
- medical and social services;
- participation of women.

There is a growing trend in social nongovernmental sector since 2000 to unite organizations into alliances, networks and coalitions. Thus, a study conducted by ACASA²⁴ shows that the following NGO networks are currently active on the right bank:

²³ The 2012 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia
<http://www.usaid.gov/europe-urasia-civil-society/cso-sustainability-2012/moldova>

²⁴ <http://acasarm.net/en/acasa/6/>

- Women Organizations Forum (FOR), uniting 184 NGOs,
- NGO Alliance focusing on social protection of families and children (APSCF) – 138 NGOs,
- NGO Network focusing on HIV/AIDS, STI and drug use (Rețea SIDA) – 39 NGOs,
- NGO Alliance focusing on social protection of elderly people (APSPE) – 48 NGOs,
- NGO Alliance focusing on social protection of disabled persons (APD) – 13 NGOs,
- NGO Alliance focusing on medical and social area (AMS) – 6 NGOs,
- NGO Alliance focusing on professional groups (AGP) – 12 NGOs.

In spite of their big number, various data, most often subjectively, show that social NGOs are still not able to render a wide range of services and thus cannot replace public services. On the other hand, the NGOs actively promote themselves as providers of social services and alternative services to vulnerable groups of population, offering them innovative services of better quality at usually lower price than the public services, owing to voluntary labour. Yet, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the impact of social NGOs on the overall situation, because no data or reports on these matters are available.

Institutional and organizational framework of many NGOs is not sufficiently developed²⁵, and their activities totally depend on external funding, which has a significant impact on their financial sustainability and performance.

Unification of organizations into coalitions and alliances allows them to solve some of their organizational problems, as well as to influence public policies in the social sector. Adoption of the Law on Social services in 2010, which defines NGOs as potential service providers, is also an achievement of civil society. Yet, while this law allows NGOs to provide social services, their capacities as service providers are still limited²⁶.

Social NGOs on the left bank

As of December 2013, according to the data provided by the *de facto* Ministry of Justice, there were 1,080 non-profit organizations registered on the left bank, whose activities implicitly or explicitly can qualify them as NGOs. It is difficult to identify the exact share of social NGOs in the total number of NGOs due to the absence of a special public register of social non-profit organizations as well as due to a common practice among NGOs to carry out activities in several, often disconnected programme areas within the same organization. A specific feature of NGOs on the left bank is the fact that their charters often state diverse and broad goals.

According to the registration agencies on the left bank, about 25% of the total number of registered NGOs qualified their activities as “social protection” in late 2012.

Some NGOs have acquired positive experience of cooperation with *de facto* public authorities and even managed to formalize their relations by setting up agreements of cooperation and interaction (“Detstvo detyam” – *Childhood to children*, “Zdorovoe budushee” – *Healthy Future*, “Rezonans”, “Vzaimodeistvie” – *Interaction*, Independent Institute of Law and Civil Society). The capacity to render social services by majority of NGOs on the left bank, just like their colleagues from the right bank,

²⁵ The 2012 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia
<http://www.usaid.gov/europe-eurasia-civil-society/cso-sustainability-2012/moldova>

²⁶ Ibid.

totally depends on external funding, which has a negative impact on their financial sustainability and viability in general.

Social NGOs on the left bank are mainly engaged in the following activities:

- services to victims of human trafficking and domestic violence;
- social protection of persons with disabilities (including children);
- social and psychological counselling to people living with HIV and TB-infected persons;
- activities with vulnerable and dependent groups, including in crisis situations;
- assistance to orphans and abandoned children.

The tendency for NGO networking, uniting into platforms by sectors in order to bring the problems and challenges faced by target groups to the decision-making levels, to lobby for adoption and implementation of international and regional standards applicable in a certain area and some joint initiatives, so pronounced on the right bank, is not common on the left bank.

A number of attempts were undertaken within different project activities to create a common network of the most active independent NGOs (under the umbrella of “Okno v mir” – *Window into the World* in 2004-2006, under the umbrella of Tiraspol Association of Families with Disabled Children in 2006, under the umbrella of the Bulgarian Culture Centre “Rodolyubets” in 2011), or to establish sectorial platforms (Tiraspol Association of Families with Disabled Children initiated collection of information about all active organizations involved in activities with disabled people in 2006-2007; NGO “Social aspect” organizes monthly round tables for NGOs to discuss the existing social problems and to learn from experience of other regions and states). Still, activities of such networks tend to only focus on discussion of sectorial problems on an *ad hoc* basis.

In autumn of 2012, the Rezonans Centre initiated the setting up of a platform to counteract domestic violence, which includes regional NGOs (Centre for development and support to civil initiatives Rezonans, Women Initiatives, Perspectiva and Apriori) and community-based NGOs (mainly from different villages of Grigoriopol raion). Although this network is informal, it has already achieved some results, such as sending a letter to the local parliament advocating for the adoption of a law on domestic violence; preparation of a first Alternative Report on observance of Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination of Women on the left bank; and running the first campaign “16 Days to Prevent Violence against Women”, whose direct beneficiaries were over 4,000 rural and urban inhabitants on the left bank.

Involvement of left bank NGOs in social networks and alliances of the right bank

One of the largest social networks on the right bank – the NGO Alliance focusing on social protection of families and children – has just one NGO member from the left bank. The National Council of Moldova Youth Organizations has just 1 member organization from the left bank. There is no NGO from the left bank represented in the National Council of NGOs or the Participatory Council, while a maximum of 3-4 left bank NGOs take part in other NGO Forums. On the other hand, as consultations with NGOs during this Initiative confirmed, right bank NGOs do not show much interest to involve left bank NGOs in their activities. Some reasons for this situation, and recommendations for its improvement, are described in the following section.

III. Experience of implementation of joint social and humanitarian projects

Starting from 1990, civil society on both banks has been developing separately of each other. There were some attempts to unite efforts, but they were mostly sporadic and short-term. Some of the factors obstructing cooperation were the different regulations on activities of NGOs, different capacities of NGOs, the difficult conditions in which left bank NGOs have to work, and the lack of a clear strategy for development of civil society on the left bank from the donors and authorities.

Despite many obstacles, NGOs on both banks were regularly involved in implementation of partnership initiatives. Given the complexity, and sometimes the impossibility to implement projects related to democracy, human rights and advocacy, such joint projects were mostly of non-political nature. It is necessary to mention that such partnerships did not give priority to social projects. The projects mainly focused on organization of different joint activities (summer camps, forums, workshops) for youth and NGOs from both banks. Later on, some social partnership initiatives occurred in such areas as human trafficking, domestic violence, support and assistance to children from dysfunctional families, and participation of women.

Many projects supported different initiatives aimed at the development of rural communities. Soros Foundation Moldova was among the first to be engaged in this area of activities: in 2008-2010, it supported the project “Wider Participation of Citizens in Public Life at the Local and Regional Level in Transnistria”, which was implemented by the CONTACT Centre. The project included 39 miniprojects in 30 localities on the left bank, focusing on water supply, site development, better conditions in kindergartens, initiatives in healthcare, culture, sports, and others. Under the project, 60 representatives of initiative groups took part in study visits to the right bank, where they could learn from right bank NGOs’ successful experience in implementation of local development projects.

In 2011-2012, the Joint UN Women and UNDP Programme of Integrated Local Development successfully implemented projects aimed at community mobilization by involving vulnerable groups into decision-making at the local level, development and implementation of gender-oriented projects and gender-oriented approaches to local development strategy.

The Support to Confidence Building Measure Programme, funded by the European Union, co-funded and implemented by the UNDP, has been playing a leading role in support to partnership projects in the course of the last three years. A big advantage of this Programme is its possibility to submit partnership projects both on behalf of the left-bank and the right-bank NGOs. The Programme supported several social projects:

- Youth: development of voluntary activities among youth and a wide awareness campaign on risks of adolescent age by peer-to-peer method (implemented by the Family Planning Association from Chisinau together with the Rezonans Centre from Bender);
- Convicted persons: better access to healthcare services for the convicts from both banks (PA Carlux);
- Disabled persons: inclusive education for young people with disabilities, support to disabled persons (NGO “World of Equal Opportunities” together with NGO “Invasport”, NGO “Motivatsia” and NGO “Miloserdie”, NGO OSORTs in partnership with NGO CASMED and COMATO from Balti);

- Children and mothers: protection of child rights and social support to single mothers (NGO Apriori together with NGO Shag navstrechu); promotion of services to foster families on the left bank (NGO Childhood to Children with NGO Everychild Moldova); experience sharing and training for specialists providing services to mothers and children in crisis situations (NGO Artemida from Drochia together with Reproductive Health Centre from Tiraspol); protection of rights and repatriation of children (Terre des Hommes Lausanne, Moldova Office, together with NGO Care and Attention to Childhood from Tiraspol);
- Participation of women: improved participation of rural women in community life (CONTACT Centre in partnership with the Institute of Law and Civil Society);
- Community development: capacity building for 5 local public authorities from the left bank (Congress of Local Authorities from the right bank with the Agency for Regional Development from the left bank);
- Human rights: human rights trainings for community leaders (Human Rights Information Centre from Chisinau with Choice of Youth from the left bank); legal consultations and trainings for vulnerable people in rural areas of the left bank (NGO Centre for Legal Initiatives from Tiraspol with Lawyers for Human Rights Chisinau);
- Media: trainings for TV, radio and on-line journalists (Association for Development and Cooperation from Chisinau with Publika TV); training for young journalists (Independent Journalism Centre from Chisinau with “Media Center” and “Stels-Tera” from Tiraspol); radio and TV programmes sharing and broadcasting between Cimislia and Rybnitsa (Prospect NGO from Cimislia in partnership with Local Public Administration of Cimislia and Rybnitsa towns, Media TV and Radio Media from Cimislia, Radio Jelanoe and Lik TV from Rybnitsa, “Gazeta de Sud” newspaper from Cimislia, “Novosti” newspaper from Rybnitsa, “Lia Cimislia” NGO from Cimislia).

The “Transnistrian Dialogues” Project, implemented by the Association of Foreign Policy in 2006-2011, gathered active people and experts in different fields (NGO, media, education, and politics) at one table, where participants could discuss different topics, exchange opinions and experience on equal terms.

Another example is the Project “One Moldova – One World”, run by NGO “Integration in partnership” with Debate club from Criuleni and NGO “Eikumena” from Bendery, which has been gathering young people from both banks for several years. According to participants of this project, it is characterized, first of all, by a friendly atmosphere, which encourages young people to talk and discuss common problems.

IDIS VIITORUL from Chisinau and Information and Resource Centre “Common House” from Tiraspol, supported by the National empowerment for democracy, implemented a project in 2012 to train professional experts in public politics from among young leaders from both banks, with a number of formal and informal meetings with experts, whereas the young people could discuss situation in education, economy, ethnic minorities, features of social protection on both banks. Starting from 2009, “Common House” organizes study tours between the banks for NGO representatives, youth leaders and future politicians.

Another example is a project of short-term internships for the third-sector leaders from the left bank, implemented by CONTACT Centre in 2006-2010. Within this project, NGO leaders from the left bank

could have an internship in one of the right-bank NGOs (most often specializing in the same field), during which they could learn about the activities of this NGO. This project provided internship opportunities to more than 50 NGO leaders from the left bank.

Such projects have an important mission – they eliminate stereotypes and barriers, bring people from both banks together, destroy the image of enemy and build confidence.

According to consultations with NGOs during this Initiative, right bank NGOs prefer to assume the leading role in implementation of projects. In such cases, left bank NGOs take part in projects as beneficiaries rather than equal partners. This situation gradually changes with left bank NGOs building their capacities and improving their abilities. However, the trend is still there.

As per observations of the consultants, international nongovernmental organizations become more active in the region, rendering direct support to beneficiaries and to NGOs. Among the most active international agencies, besides the UNDP, are such agencies as the International Organization for Migration, Terre Des Hommes, La Strada, Hilfswerk Austria, OSCE Mission to Moldova, and others.

In the course of meetings with representatives of NGOs from both banks, some positive and negative aspects and tendencies that have a direct influence on establishment of partnerships could be noted.

Positive aspects of bilateral partnership:

1. possibility to exchange experience, techniques and approaches, ideas and effective solutions, information on matters of professional interest to NGOs and in the area of institutional development of NGOs;
2. possibility to study capacity of organizations from the other bank and build one's own capacity;
3. stronger mechanisms of influence at decision-making level for compliance with international standards (participants from the left bank brought the example of Law on Protection of Reproductive Health approved in 2012, including owing to efforts of NGOs);
4. partnership and participation of several NGOs in the project improve coverage of project events in the media;
5. attraction of resources from different sources;
6. implementation of innovation technologies and new social services;
7. wider coverage of target groups, especially from rural areas;
8. changing stereotypic models and concepts about population from the other bank of the Nistru, cross-cultural exchange, development of tolerance;
9. healthy competition among NGOs of the two banks as an element of constructive development.

Among **the negative aspects**, it should be mentioned that the interest of right-bank NGOs in the left bank is generally low. Many NGOs in Chisinau are concerned with problems they and their beneficiaries have to face, and they are not ready to spend additional efforts on activities in the “problematic” region. Some are stopped by the linguistic barrier. Some claim that it is impossible to work on the left bank and that there are no capable NGOs to establish partnerships with on the left bank.

NGO representatives from the left bank note some negative factors of bilateral partnership, such as: complex and time-consuming process of arranging documentation for a project, previous experience of ineffective and formal partnerships, low level of professional competence of the partner NGOs, linguistic barrier, leading role in decision-making played by the right-bank NGOs and, respectively, suppressed role of the partner from the left bank (the role of a left bank NGO is thus reduced to just ensuring logistics of project events), a very limited set of “admissible” areas of activity on the left bank

directly depending on the political factor, unequal opportunities of left bank and right bank NGOs at the stage of project evaluation and selection of grantees, where the role of left bank NGOs is suppressed.

Among the **preconditions to sustainable partnership** between organizations from the two banks, NGO representatives noted the need for higher motivation of both political authorities to interact and implement joint projects.

Main findings:

- According to the NGOs consulted during this Initiative, there is little information about partner projects implemented by NGOs. Both NGOs and societies on both banks know very little about outcomes of joint projects. This information is not published and is not properly disseminated. Mass media do not show much interest in such information. At the same time, NGOs do not provide this information to mass media out of precaution and specifics of work on the left bank.
- According to consultations with NGOs during this Initiative, right bank NGOs have strong stereotypes about difficulties of project implementation on the left bank, which are largely based on some subjective opinions of different opinion-makers.
- There is a general indifference of Moldovan NGOs towards activities on the left bank, which partly follows from the general indifference of Moldovan citizens to the Transnistrian conflict.
- Right bank NGOs also pay attention to the big difference – as they see it – between capacities of the NGOs on both banks, as well as the absence of organizations active in the same area, which reduces their interest in partnership.
- Right bank NGOs try to assume leading roles in partnership projects due to various reasons, among which the lack of confidence, difficulties with financial management, monitoring and control of project implementation on the left bank.
- Right bank NGOs prefer to implement such projects that are based on ‘experience and knowledge sharing’ approach, and use left bank NGOs as local coordinators.
- Left bank NGOs prefer the tactics of waiting and do not take an active approach to looking for partners on the right bank, hoping that right bank NGOs will be the first ones to show initiative. At the same time, over the last 2 years, this trend starts changing owing to the UNDP/EU SCBM Programme.

Recommendations:

- Creation of a common information platform on partnership initiatives and projects already implemented and being implemented on both banks.
- Inviting mass media to cover partnership projects through implementation of targeted media campaigns. In addition, the media should be involved by presenting them tangible results and core outcomes from the joint implemented projects, organizing special educational training programme for journalists on the issue of professional coverage of non-political events and social sphere projects, conducting different competitions among journalists.
- Organization of joint communication platforms (work meetings, workshops, conferences, round tables, summer camps, etc.) to enable exchanging of experience, knowledge and information, as well as reducing stereotypes between NGOs from both banks.

IV. Project Ideas for Confidence Building in Social/Humanitarian Area

In the view of civil society representatives, there is a need to tackle common social problems on both banks of the Nistru. In many areas, the social challenges are similar, and numerous opportunities exist for learning from experiences of NGOs from the opposite bank. The overall political situation is impeding constructive cooperation between the sides in many fields. However, every opportunity should be used to design and implement mutually acceptable development projects which would benefit people on both banks of the river.

In the course of implementation of this Initiative, it was identified that the biggest potential for cooperation in the social field lies in the following areas: combatting domestic violence, development of rural communities, helping vulnerable children (preventing and reacting to sexual violence, deinstitutionalisation), providing services to young people, improving the provision of social services, developing continuous professional training and social entrepreneurship, and supporting integration of the disabled and elderly people into society. In all of these areas, challenges are similar on both banks, and there is good potential for learning from experience of each other as well as from other countries.

The civil society representatives, who were involved in this Initiative, after a lengthy process of generating, selecting, elaborating and validating project ideas, have come up with the following project proposals:

1. [Establishing a shelter for women and children suffering from domestic violence on the left bank;](#)
2. [Developing communities according to the needs of vulnerable groups of population;](#)
3. [Enabling favourable conditions to support deinstitutionalization of state institutions for children;](#)
4. [Better conditions for development of youth by establishing regional youth centers;](#)
5. [Development of programmes to identify and react to cases of violence against children;](#)
6. [Building a Social Services Center;](#)
7. [Development of continuous professional training for youth and adults;](#)
8. [Reintegration of elderly people into society;](#)
9. [Development of social entrepreneurship on both banks of the Nistru river;](#)
10. [Ensuring an accessible environment for disabled people.](#)

In some cases, it was considered that a new organizational unit should be established to catalyse joint development in a particular field (shelter for women and children suffering from domestic violence, regional youth centres, Social services centre). It is important that these centres will be required to maintain strong cooperative ties with organizations from the opposite bank. In addition, an active strategy of reaching out to potential clients from the opposite bank will be used.

Many project ideas generated and elaborated through this Initiative are mutually reinforcing. In most cases, they have the potential of complementing development assistance provided by other projects, by extending the experience accumulated in donor-supported projects on the right bank to the left bank. If implemented, the proposed projects would make a significant impact on the improvement of social situation on both banks.

The social issues tend to be less politically sensitive than issues in some other areas (e.g. economy and trade). However, the risk of political authorities not endorsing some of the projects still exists. This risk

should be mitigated by consulting with political authorities (and involving the interested stakeholders, NGOs in this process), as well as sticking to the non-political, development-focused nature of the project ideas.

To identify possible ideas for social projects, a number of meetings with NGO leaders were organized and an overview of on-going and previously implemented projects was conducted. Extensive consultations with civil society representatives from both banks were organized in 1-year period from spring 2013 to spring 2014. In particular, the process included an initial working meeting on social and humanitarian issues, which was held on 10-11 July 2013 in Chisinau; a study visit to Lithuania and Poland on 2-6 December 2013, which included getting acquainted with EU-supported regional development projects; focus group meetings on 5-6 February 2014 to discuss possible project ideas in more detail; a validation meeting, held in Vadul lui Voda on 1-2 April 2014; and consultations by the project experts in-between these events.

During this process, ideas of possible joint projects focusing on social issues were collected, discussed, ten most viable ideas selected, elaborated and validated for presentation to the donor community and relevant authorities.

Each project idea was elaborated by analysing its rationale, target group, support from international partners in that area, mechanism for project implementation, relevance of the project to confidence building measures, gender mainstreaming, sustainability and potential risks.

In addition, an analysis was made of the main approaches to implementation of partner projects aimed at confidence building. Important elements in such projects were active communication, exchange of information, knowledge, experience and skills. It is possible to list some recommendable activities in all such projects:

- Study tours;
- Short-term or long-term internships;
- Joint conferences, round tables;
- Joint training;
- Joint publications;
- Joint studies.