



SUMMARY OF THE ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN 2024

In 2024, the People's Advocate Office (PAO) continued to be a key actor in the defence and promotion of fundamental rights in the Republic of Moldova, strengthening the efforts to promote international and European standards. The active participation of the PAO in the screening process to the accession to the European Union was an important part to providing support in assessing the progress and challenges in the field of human rights. Furthermore, efforts were carried out for the creation of an independent mechanism to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, an initiative that marks a major step forward in protecting vulnerable groups.

One alarming aspect in 2024 was the attempted interference in the work of the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), a situation that unfortunately continued in 2025. Such interference violates not only the Paris Principles but also the Council of Europe's recommendations, undermining the institution's essential role of monitoring and reporting human rights abuses. This not only calls into question the autonomy and effectiveness of the NHRI but also sets a dangerous precedent that may undermine the whole system of fundamental rights protection.

Alongside these challenges, human rights education remained a priority, with information campaigns aimed at raising awareness among the population. The focus is on promoting a more inclusive society where everyone is aware of their rights and can defend them. In **Chapter I** of this Report, it is emphasised that, although numerous reforms have been implemented to strengthen human rights and freedoms, certain gaps persist that limit their full realisation. Regarding **the right to the highest attainable standard of health**, the Ombudsperson notes that the national plans and programmes adopted in 2024, including the National Development Plan 2024 - 2026 and the National Programme to Combat Viral Hepatitis 2024-2028, focus on prevention, accessibility and the improvement of the health infrastructure. However, their implementation relies on the allocation of adequate funding and the equitable distribution of resources, particularly for vulnerable groups. Mental health has been recognised as a priority through new regulations introducing the concept of 'mental wellbeing', emphasising prevention and community support. Nevertheless, the lack of community services, an adequate support system, and appropriate treatment remains a significant issue. These problems have contributed to serious incidents, including offences committed by people with mental disorders. Access to services for patients with rare diseases has improved through the National Programme on Rare Diseases 2024-2028, but challenges related to early diagnosis, treatment



and social inclusion remain on the Ombudsperson's agenda. Patient protection was strengthened through new safety standards and hospital accreditation, and public health regulations focused on banning the sale of nicotine products outside authorised premises. Simplifying medical examination procedures for seriously ill prisoners was also an important step in ensuring fair treatment for all patients. However, structural problems persist. Delays in treatment, corruption and informal payments, discriminatory treatment of patients and lack of palliative care are just some of the difficulties reported. In addition, the lack of a law on medical malpractice and the delayed implementation of the National e-Health Strategy hamper the modernisation and efficiency of the healthcare system.

In the field of **justice**, the Ombudsperson notes several important developments, such as the adoption of important laws, among which: the revision of the judicial map, the introduction of the electronic form of the lawyer's mandate and the improvement of mechanisms for sanctioning offences. Moreover, the Ombudsperson provided key recommendations in the consultation process on relevant draft legislation, including the new Law on the Constitutional Court and the mechanism for confiscating criminal assets. One controversial matter was the State tax act, which initially imposed non-exempt stamp duties on vulnerable groups. The Ombudsperson's intervention in this matter contributed to the declaration of these provisions as unconstitutional. The Ombudsperson also criticised the removal, after one year, of applications for judicial protection measures, which limited free access to justice. The justice reform process also included measures to strengthen judicial integrity, the appointment of a new General Prosecutor and the implementation of the vetting mechanism, a complex and publicly debated process. At the same time, the justice system remains central to Moldova's European integration, with the European Commission issuing six specific recommendations in this regard. Despite the reforms, the Ombudsperson identified certain shortcomings in the right to a fair trial, including non-execution of judgements, delays in trials, passivity of appointed lawyers, and barriers faced by people with disabilities.

In the area of **ensuring the right to social assistance and social protection**, the Ombudsperson welcomes the ratification of some provisions of the (revised) European Social Charter but recommends the extension of international commitments and the ratification of the Additional Protocol on collective complaints. With reference to the 6% indexation of pensions, this increase was considered insufficient to cover the real living costs in the context of high inflation rates. Although measures to support citizens through the 'Ajutor la contor' energy compensation programme have been introduced, these measures do not fully cover the actual increase in energy prices, leaving many households vulnerable. Furthermore, the Ombudsperson emphasised the need to extend social assistance for people with disabilities and to ensure a fair mechanism to access benefits for people in the Transnistrian region, supporting the amendment of the legislation on social assistance and the elimination of differential



treatment of people without a stable residence. The Ombudsperson also intervened in the case of the suspension of social payments for disabled persons in detention, emphasising the disproportionate impact such a measure would have on them.

Regarding **labour protection**, the Ombudsperson welcomed the increase of the minimum wage to 5,000 MDL but emphasised that this remains insufficient for a decent standard of living. The partial ratification of the (revised) European Social Charter also leaves unresolved the issue of guaranteeing an adequate income. Undeclared work continues to be a serious problem. Although authorities have stepped up efforts to carry out inspections, the effectiveness of these measures is hindered by legislative changes that may limit the powers of labour inspectors. Similarly, the Ombudsperson welcomes the expansion of the paid traineeship programme in the public sector, providing more opportunities for young people; however, making such programmes attractive to youth remains a challenge. Higher employment rates among women have been noted, but this increase remains concentrated in sectors such as education and health, while men continue to dominate technical fields. Despite the implementation of the ILO convention on violence and harassment at work, discrimination and unequal treatment persist.

In the area of the **right to security and liberty**, the Ombudsperson highlighted numerous systemic problems persisting in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and placement centres for people with disabilities, emphasising the urgent need for protective measures. In 2024, the Ombudsperson's institution received 181 complaints, most concerning poor prison conditions, lack of hygiene, overcrowding and inadequate access to medical services. The influence of the criminal subculture remains a serious threat, resulting in intimidation, violence and blackmail among prisoners. People with disabilities in prisons also face discrimination, with no access to reasonable accommodations or social benefits that could improve their economic situation.

A worrying aspect is the violation of the right to petition and communication of prisoners, who often face unjustified restrictions on correspondence and a lack of response from the prison administration. Reprisals against prisoners who report abuses also remains a concern for the Office of the Ombudsperson. In this regard, the PAO has developed a Guide on Preventing Reprisals for employees and members of the Council for the Prevention of Torture and has organised training sessions for over 100 prison staff. In addition, prisoners were informed about their rights and available protection mechanisms through public lectures.

Another major problem identified by the People's Advocate in 2024 was the **conscription process**, where serious irregularities were found. One documented case shows how a young man was conscripted before completing his studies, despite court's decision suspending his conscription. Moreover, he was subjected to degrading treatment and physical assault in the military unit. In this respect, the



Ombudsperson called for the creation of effective mechanisms to protect the right to education for recruits and the adoption of stricter measures to prevent abuses in the army.

In the context of **whistleblowers' rights**, the Ombudsperson emphasises that the adoption of the Law No. 165/2023 on whistleblowers marked a significant step forward in protecting whistleblowers who report law violations, bringing the national regulatory framework in line with European standards. However, effective implementation of these provisions remains a challenge. In 2024, the People's Advocate Institution received seven requests for protection, from individuals who identified as whistleblowers. These cases revealed practices of retaliation and intimidation, such as unlawful dismissal, interference in professional activities and pressure on whistleblowers. Unfortunately, the regulatory framework in force poses problems of interpretation and application, making it difficult for the Ombudsperson to actually intervene in certain situations. One problem identified to this regard is that the protection of the whistleblower depends on the decision of the competent authority - in this case, the National Anti-Corruption Centre (NAC). Another common problem is that, even if reprisals formally cease, their effects continue to impact the whistleblower. For example, a person who has been unlawfully dismissed and is litigating for reinstatement may no longer face direct retaliation but still suffers the adverse consequences of the original sanction.

In the field of **ensuring access to information of public interest**, the Ombudsperson points out that the entry into force of the Law No.148/2023 on access to information of public interest represents a significant step forward in ensuring the transparency in public institutions, but its implementation faces major challenges, especially at local level. The Ombudsperson, appointed as the monitoring authority, identified difficulties in the implementation of the new regulations related to limited resources, lack of adequate training of local authorities and uneven application of the law throughout the country. Another problem repeatedly identified last year concerns the wording of Article 21 of the current law, which restricts access to information in languages other than the language in which the documents are available. Such wording hinders the principle of equal access to public information, in particular when it comes to minority groups of people.

Regarding **the rights of people living on the left bank of the Nistru**, the People's Advocate notes a continuous increase in human rights violations in the Transnistrian region, where the *de facto* authorities not only ignore international recommendations, but also impose arbitrary rules that restrict the fundamental freedoms of the inhabitants. The Ombudsperson's access to the cities on the left bank of the Nistru and the municipality of Bender remains restricted, making direct monitoring impossible. Under these circumstances, investigations rely on individual complaints, reports by international organisations, and data collected by the Varnita Representative Office. Although dialogue with the *de facto* entities is conducted



strictly according to international standards, it remains an essential tool for protecting fundamental rights and preventing abuses against illegally detained persons. One notable breakthrough was the release of Moldovan citizen Vladimir Dudnic after two years of illegal detention, a result achieved through co-operation between the People's Advocate, the Bureau for Reintegration Policies, the OSCE Mission and international partners. However, many other cases of arbitrary detention continue to be monitored. In this regard, the Varnita Representative Office maintains an active dialogue with state institutions and civil society organisations, such as Promo-LEX, to identify effective solutions.

At the same time, the Moldovan authorities have taken measures to facilitate access to public services for the region's inhabitants. These include simplifying documentation procedures, increasing the number of driving licences issued and funding development projects in the Security Zone. However, the lack of a clear legal framework for the protection of internally displaced persons remains a serious problem, and young people who refuse forced recruitment into Transnistrian military structures are at risk of persecution. The Ombudsperson therefore emphasises the need for legislative changes to provide protection for those forced to leave the region because of the repression of the Tiraspol regime. Another major concern is the limited access to justice for the inhabitants of the Transnistrian region, and the reorganisation of the judicial system could further restrict their ability to defend their rights. Following the Ombudsperson's interventions, the Parliament decided to maintain the seat of the Causeni Court in Varnița until 2030, an essential step to ensure access to justice for the citizens of this region.

In **Chapter II, concerning children's rights**, the Children's Ombudsperson highlighted both progress and challenges in the implementation of children's rights in the Republic of Moldova.

Children's right to life, survival and development is a fundamental obligation of the Moldovan state, and in this regard, the People's Advocate for Children's Rights has monitored and intervened in situations that jeopardise the safety of children in public spaces. In 2023 and 2024, several tragic cases highlighted negligence in the management and safety of children's playgrounds, parks and recreational spaces, leading to serious incidents, including trauma, severe injuries, and fatalities.

Among the most alarming incidents investigated were football goals collapsing on children, cases of electrocution in parks, and accidents in recreational areas such as inflatable slides. Monitoring revealed that in many public areas, children's equipment is worn, unsafe and insufficiently inspected, while accident prevention measures are either ineffective or absent.

To remedy these problems, the People's Advocate for Children's Rights organised consultations with national and local authorities, involving the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, the Ministry of Education and Research,



the Ministry of Health, the National Inspectorate for Technical Supervision and the Moldovan Football Federation, among others. The discussions highlighted the lack of clear regulations on the safety of sports fields and equipment used, making it difficult to prevent accidents. The Code of practice in construction (CP C.01.09:2017 - 'Civil Buildings. Open flat buildings for physical culture and sport'¹) does not provide strict requirements for the safety of football pitches and football gates, and the international standards recommended by FIFA and UEFA are not systematically implemented.

In the context of ensuring the right to health, the People's Advocate for Children's Rights emphasises the need to ensure equitable access to quality healthcare services for all children, without discrimination, and an integrated approach that includes adequate nutrition, access to clean water, hygiene and a healthy environment. According to General Comment No.15 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, states must remove any barriers to this right and ensure sufficient resources for the implementation of effective health policies.

The People's Advocate for Children's Rights also emphasises that the state must provide preventive, curative and rehabilitative health services at high standards and in a timely manner. In this regard, Law No. 370/2023 on the Rights of the Child sets out State's obligation to ensure prioritised access for children at all levels of healthcare. In addition, Article 3 of the UN Convention requires that the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them.

Regarding children with rare diseases, the Children's Ombudsperson draws attention to the difficulties by them and their families in accessing necessary treatments. Access to essential medicines, special foodstuffs, and nutritional supplements is limited due to high costs and the absence of compensation mechanisms. To improve access to treatment and prevent severe complications, the Ombudsperson advocates for the need of dedicated funding for children diagnosed with rare diseases. In addition, nutritional supplements and medical diets should be available in pharmacies accredited by the National Health Insurance Company and treated in the same way as compensated medicines. These measures are essential for the survival and optimal development of these children and to reduce the financial pressure on affected families. Therefore, The People's Advocate for Children's Rights recommends the inclusion of these products in the list of those compensated from the funds under the compulsory healthcare insurance, in accordance with Law No.1585/1998.

In the context of the right to education, the People's Advocate for Children's Rights notes that such a right must be guaranteed to every child, regardless of their socio-economic status, special needs or related challenges. In the Republic of Moldova, although national and international legislation recognises this right, reality shows that many children face obstacles in accessing inclusive and qualitative education.

¹ <https://ednc.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/CP-C.01.09-2017.pdf>



A key aspect in ensuring an inclusive education system, is the integration of children with special educational needs (SEN). Although there is a programme to develop inclusive education, children with specific needs, such as children with disabilities, are not fully integrated and accepted due to social attitudes.

Accurately assessing the development of a child is another challenge, as many schools do not initiate such assessments, either due to lack of information or parents' refusal. This prevents the provision of ensuring appropriate educational support and undermines in the end the best interest of the child.

Violence against children remains of the most alarming phenomenon in Moldova. Children are exposed to various forms of violence, including bullying in schools. Moreover, the lack of specific knowledge to support the child or failure to apply existing reporting and intervention mechanisms means that many of these cases remain unsolved. Of particular concern is the sexual abuse of minors, which in many cases is perpetrated by persons close to the child. Teachers, who should recognise signs of abuse, are not always equipped to do so.

Another significant issue is the poor condition of educational infrastructure, particularly sanitary facilities. In some schools, children lack access to indoor toilets, and hygiene conditions are inadequate. Although the government has a plan to modernise these facilities, progress remains slow, and many pupils continue to suffer from the lack of proper sanitation and hygiene.

Additionally, child-friendly justice remains a key area of intervention for the People's Advocate for Children's Rights. The 2024 special report by the Council for the Prevention of Torture highlighted multiple shortcomings in the prison system when it comes to the detention conditions for minors, including the lack of adequate safe and security measures for detained children, poor detention conditions, insufficient rehabilitation and reintegration programmes and the lack of an adequate approach for minors with mental health problems.

The Children's Ombudsperson highlighted existing shortcomings in the enforcement of court judgments on establishing the child's domicile, compliance with the programme of interviews, removal of the parent living separately. The Ombudsperson reiterated the proposed solutions based on the best interests of the child, guided by principles from the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding respect for the right to family life, as well as the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

When it comes to social protection and assistance, the People's Advocate for Children's Rights points out that child poverty rates in the Republic of Moldova remain high, affecting in particular children living in rural areas (44.6% compared to 14.4% in urban areas). To combat social exclusion, the Ministry of Labour and Social



Protection, with the support of UNICEF, initiated the development of a public policy, in line with the European Child Guarantee and has introduced a Child Protection Information System (CPIS), which optimises case management.

At the same time, the RESTART reform, launched in 2023, transferred the management of social services to the Territorial Social Assistance Agencies; however, underfunding of personal assistance persists, resulting in waiting lists. In Chişinău, administrative measures have adversely affected the rights of beneficiaries and employees, prompting intervention by the People's Advocate and the Children's Rights Ombudsperson, who requested the cancellation of these measures and the restoration of the rights of those affected. Meanwhile, the de-institutionalisation process continues, reducing the number of children in institutions and promoting alternative services such as Professional Parental Assistance (PPA), including for children with severe disabilities, those in conflict with the law, or at risk of offending.

As regards allowances for families with children, a case of refusal by the NOSI revealed problems in data interoperability, affecting access to benefits. The People's Advocate for Children's Rights intervened to correct the error and recommended measures to prevent such situations in the future.

Regarding the mechanism and procedures for child support, the Children's Ombudsperson, with the support of UNICEF and the National Union of Court Bailiffs, has published a thematic report. The report highlights the difficulties enforcing child support decisions, due to legislative shortcomings and debtors' practices of avoiding payment. Statistics reveal a drastic decline in the enforcement success, from over 50% in 2012 to less than 20% today. The report also makes recommendations to improve the regulatory framework, enhance transparency, increase the efficiency of enforcement measures, and adjust the maintenance amounts to reflect economic realities.

At the same time, during the reporting year, the People's Advocate for Children's Rights, with the support of UNICEF, produced a report on the mechanisms through which children can lodge complaints in cases of violations of their rights. Although national legislation guarantees this right, there are gaps in regulating procedures and informing children, including those in rural areas and from vulnerable groups (Roma children, children with disabilities, migrant children). Written mechanisms are rarely used, with children preferring to report by calling 112 or 116 111. Recommendations aim at adapting procedures to children's needs, improving accessibility and increasing children's awareness of their rights.

In the context of ensuring civil rights and freedoms, the Children's Ombudsperson notes the holding of the National Forum on Children's Rights, which provided a platform for children to express themselves and engage in dialogue with the authorities. Participants addressed issues such as student involvement in decision-making processes, violence in schools and protection of privacy. They also discussed



the poor quality of education in areas such as personal development and sexual education. The need for children to be consulted in the legislative process was emphasised, and children's human rights defender groups (CHRDs) highlighted challenges including lack of recognition, discrimination and bullying.

When it comes to the respect for children's rights in the Transnistrian region, the Children's Ombudsperson highlights similar issues as reflected in previous reports, concerning the right to education, the risk of children left without parental care being trafficked through so-called 'adoptions', but also the lack of Romanian language courses available for bilingual children from the left bank of the Nistru and Bender municipality, considering the increased number of native Russian-speaking children wishing to enrol in Romanian-language schools.

Chapter III on Prevention of Torture highlights **58 preventive, thematic and monitoring visits** to places of deprivation of liberty carried out in 2024 (in 2023 - 28 visits, in 2022 - 72 visits). As a result of such visits, **17 visit reports with 152 recommendations** were prepared (in 2023 - 23 visit reports with 356 recommendations; in 2022 - 29 visit reports with 570 recommendations), as well as **seven complex thematic reports with 130 recommendations**. **PAO intervened in two cases of increased social interest** with **two special reports** (in 2023 - four special reports; in 2022 - seven special reports) and drafted **eight regular thematic semi-annual reports** on safety in places of deprivation of liberty.

For the first time, the PAO monitored six **readmission operations of Moldovan citizens from EU countries conducted aboard aircraft**, by the General Inspectorate of Migration, with the support of the European Agency FRONTEX. Overall, the rate of implementation of recommendations stands at 33% in the medium term and 10-15% in the long term (concerning resources and policies) at 10-15%. Most of the recommendations remain repetitive.

From 26 to 30 June 2024, the 6th edition of the Ombudsperson's Campaign 'EuNUaplic166/1' was carried out. The PAO in partnership with Promo-LEX and the European Prison Litigation Network submitted a joint communication to the Committee of Ministers in the *case of I.D. v. Republic of Moldova*. When it comes to work on prevention of torture through training of duty-bearers and right-holders, 42 training activities were carried out for 658 prison staff, 61 police staff, 29 carabinieri, 40 employees of the judiciary and prosecution, 43 employees of the border police, 120 persons deprived of their liberty and 138 students.

From 22 to 25 July 2024, PAO hosted a study visit of the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture from Ukraine. Access to places of deprivation of liberty in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova by the Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture remains limited.



Chapter IV on the protection of refugees and asylum seekers in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine highlights that during the reporting year, the People's Advocate Office continued to monitor the situation of refugees, identifying existing problems and making recommendations to improve the legislative framework and administrative practices.

When it comes to the legal and institutional framework, the Ombudsperson notes that the Republic of Moldova regulates the status of refugees through the Asylum Law No.270/2008 and the Law on the Integration of Foreigners No.274/2011. Even though such legislation exists, there are still legislative gaps that hinder access to work, education and health. Among the problems identified include difficulties in recognising professional qualifications, barriers in obtaining an entrepreneur's permit and legislative discrepancies that hinder economic integration. The legislative changes adopted in 2024 aimed at improving refugees' access to healthcare and social protection, but some vulnerable groups remain unprotected.

In discussing access to temporary and international protection, the Ombudsperson highlights that administrative requirement, such as the obligation to present a valid identity document or the rule allowing individuals to exit and re-enter Ukraine only once, can restrict such a right. Furthermore, the absence of General Inspectorate for Migration representatives at all border crossing points hampers the application process for temporary protection. It should be noted that the number of refugees has been steadily rising, and temporary placement centres are currently operating at full capacity. In 2024, the implementation of the EXIT Strategy, designed to gradually close these centres, faced criticism for being discriminatory and lacking transparency.

Additional restrictive measures have also impeded the right to international protection. These include denying entry to certain vulnerable groups of people and initiating criminal proceedings against asylum seekers crossing the border illegally.

In Chapter V, which focuses on the promotion of human rights, the People's Advocate presents the institution's initiatives and activities in 2024, dedicated to strengthening the respect for and protection of fundamental rights in the Republic of Moldova. PAO carried out extensive activities to educate, raise awareness and sensitise the public, involving public authorities, civil society and international partners.

Recognising education as a fundamental means of preventing human rights violations, PAO has prioritised this component in its Strategic Development Programme 2023 - 2030. Through carrying out information sessions and educational campaigns, the institution has focused on eight key areas including health, justice, social protection and children's rights. The institution engaged extensively with the media to make information more accessible to citizens.



In 2024, PAO conducted outreach activities, training over 7,500 people. The majority of these sessions concentrated on torture prevention, human rights education and children's rights. Beyond these efforts, the institution also organised thematic events and awareness-raising campaigns, including the Human Rights Caravan and the Human Rights Festival, which attracted thousands of participants.

Among the most significant events organised by the PAO were national and international round tables and conferences, that brought together officials, experts and civil society representatives. For instance, the National Forum on Children's Rights enabled direct dialogue between children and authorities, while the Human Rights and Equality Forum served as a key platform for discussing issues of equality and social inclusion.

A key aspect of the PAO's work in 2024 was national and international co-operation. The institution strengthened its relationships with international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe, and the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI). Additionally, the PAO also actively participated in international conferences and exchanges of experience and signed cooperation agreements with organisations both within the Republic of Moldova and abroad, focusing on the protection of vulnerable groups and the promotion of human rights.

Similarly, the PAO maintained an active media presence, with hundreds of appearances on various platforms, including press releases, social media posts, TV and radio programmes and interviews. It also produced podcasts and educational videos, broadening access to human rights information.