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Model of non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova (MNFE)

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Abstract

In this paper, we outline the model of non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova, starting from the framework of national normative regulations, as well as from the theoretical and methodological approaches of structuralist research. Our objective is to identify and systematize the main components, relationships and conditions that define the functioning of non-formal education in the Moldovan context, with a focus on the interaction between the actors involved (institutions, non-governmental organizations, family, community), the types of activities carried out and the forms of participation of the beneficiaries.

Keywords

non-formal education; children; youth; model; Republic of Moldova

Introduction

Non-formal phenomena have constituted, throughout history, the generating nucleus and foundation of institutionalized and formalized forms of social life. Before norms, practices, or institutions were codified and formalized, they existed in a spontaneous, informal form of rituals and practices, traditions, and collective experiences. Thus, the non-formal preceded the formal, it generated ideas, behav-

iors and organizational patterns, which society selected, shaped and institutionalized according to needs, values and historical contexts.

On the other hand, the non-formal manifestation is dichotomous: an expression of individual and collective freedom, but it can also be perceived as a form of rebellion, of going out of the norm, of contesting institutional conventions, often being labeled as atypical or nonconformist.

This ambivalence causes non-formal phenomena to be received differently depending on the cultural, social or historical context. In contemporary society, we are witnessing a tendency to stigmatize some forms of non-formal manifestation, especially when they escape institutional control or do not correspond to dominant values. Thus, certain practices – such as informal work, alternative non-accredited education, street artistic expressions or spontaneous forms of civic organization – are often negatively perceived, being associated with evasion, precariousness, instability or even illegality.

Finally, digitalization contributes to the diversification and amplification of the non-formal as a form of social, educational, cultural, economic manifestation and expression.

Methodology

We outline in this paper the model of non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova, based on the analysis of national normative regulations. The analysis is carried out through the prism of the theoretical-methodological approaches of structuralist research, allowing us to overcome the fragmented character of the normative framework and to conceptualize non-formal education as a coherent system.

Legal regulations and public policies on non-formal education provide a formal framework that is divided into education, youth and insufficiently integrated into the architecture of the education system. From this perspective, the structuralist approach allows us to analyze non-formal education as a coherent system, structured around essential dimensions – educational purposes, resources, institutions, norms, quality, mechanisms for recognizing learning outcomes.

In the research we apply the theoretical and normative strategy of analysis of non-formal education. On a theoretical level, we specify the concept of model, applied to non-formal education, used to explain the structure and functions of this form of education. From a normative and regulatory point of view, the notions of system or activity are rather used, which reflects differences in approach between the scientific and the legal-administrative level.

From a methodological perspective, our approach includes the following steps:

1. Analysis of the normative framework;
2. Application of the structuralist grid;
3. Identification of dysfunctions;
4. Conceptual modeling.

Through this approach, the paper aims not only to describe the existing situation, but also to build a unitary methodological perspective, enabling coherent understanding and evaluation of non-formal education and its role in complementarity with formal education.

Result and Discussions

Formally, the phrase “non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova” is invalid, because there is no legal framework in the Republic of Moldova clearly defining the non-formal education of children and integrates, in a unitary conception, the non-formal education intended for both children and young people.

The researchers drew attention to the fact that the lack of a consensus of terminological convergence, at national level, on the notions of extracurricular education, complementary education, extracurricular education/activities, non-formal education, *constitutes a major challenge*:

- “Several historically or contextually developed terms coexist within the education system to define non-formal education, including: extracurricular education, supplementary education, extracurricular education/activities, and informal education. Each of these terms reflects specific characteristics of the educational phenomenon developed and implemented within the institutionalized extracurricular system, which serves as a link between knowledge acquired in classrooms and knowledge accumulated in the context of non-formal education. However, some argue for the adoption of the term »non-formal education« as a general term.”¹
- “The issue of non-formal (extracurricular) education is complex, and the attempt to define it have generated several approaches and concepts. Internationally, including in the Republic of Moldova, several terms are applied with reference to education outside the classroom and official institutions:

¹ L. Poștan, *Educație nonformală: Note de curs* [Non-formal education. Lecture notes], Chișinău: Tipografia UST, 2019, p. 15, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DvUNvYmaEDZ-M4xOcMwIRgX_p_QADmj7 [accessed: 2.06.2025].

»non-formal education«, »extracurricular education«, »extracurricular learning«, »complementary education«, »leisure education«, »education outside the classroom« etc.”²

- “The lack of explicit definitions of the terms »extracurricular education«, »extracurricular learning«, »extracurricular activities«, »school activities« and »activities outside the classroom«, inconsistencies in the use of these terms in the regulatory acts regulating the provision of extracurricular education services in primary, secondary and high school educational institutions.”³

Meantime, the progressive integration of non-formal education of children and young people into the normative and policy framework – the Education Code,⁴ the Law on Youth,⁵ the Development Strategy “Education 2030”,⁶ the Youth Sector Development Strategy “Youth 2030”⁷ is a major opportunity for the non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova. This process creates solid premises for consolidating a comprehensive and effective model of non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova.

The concept of model, applied to non-formal education, is attested in research and theoretical sources, and in normative and regulatory aspects, the concept of system or activity is used.

The Education Code states the concepts of non-formal education and extracurricular education. Non-formal education is included in the regulations on

² Vl. Guțu (coord. șt.), *Cadrul de referință al educației și învățământului extrașcolar din Republica Moldova* [Reference Framework for Education and Extracurricular Teaching in the Republic of Moldova]. Chișinău: CEP USM, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, 2021, p. 24.

³ L. Poștan, *Adultul universal și adultul generațional: reflecții asupra unui plan de educație și învățare* [The universal adult and the generational adult. Reflections on an education and learning plan], [in:] *Integrare prin cercetare și inovare: Științe sociale* [Integration through Research and Innovation: Social Sciences], 7–8 November 2024, Chișinău. Chișinău: CEP USM, 2024, pp. 546–553.

⁴ Republica Moldova, *Codul educației al Republicii Moldova* [Education Code of the Republic of Moldova], No. 152 of 17 July 2014, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=146666&lang=ro [accessed: 10.07.2025].

⁵ Republica Moldova, *Legea cu privire la tineret* [Law on Youth], No. 215 of 29 July 2016. Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=138532&lang=ro [accessed: 5.06.2025].

⁶ Republica Moldova, *Hotărârea Nr. 114 din 7 martie 2023 cu privire la aprobarea Strategiei de dezvoltare „Educația 2030” și a Programului de implementare a acesteia pentru anii 2023–2025* [Government Decision No. 114 of 7 March 2023 on the approval of the Development Strategy “Education 2030” and its Implementation Programme for 2023–2025], https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=136600&lang=ro; https://ibn.idsi.md/project_articles/17280 [accessed: 5.06.2025].

⁷ Republica Moldova, *Strategia de dezvoltare a sectorului de tineret „Tineret 2030” și a Programului privind implementarea acesteia pentru anii 2023–2026* [Youth Development Strategy “Youth 2030” and the Implementation Programme for 2023–2026]. Government Decision No. 168 of 29 March 2023, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=137226&lang=ro [accessed: 5.06.2025].

lifelong learning, and extracurricular education is included in the regulations on general education.⁸

Under the Education Code on non-formal education, we have summarized the variables and the description of the NFE normative model (Table 1) The non-formal education model contains the following three variables:

1. Component of the education system;
2. Distinct Form of Education;
3. Way to achieve lifelong learning.

Table 1. Variables and description of the non-formal education model⁹

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA	
Variables	Description
Education system	All (educational, economic, political, scientific, cultural, public) institutions and organizations, as well as communities (family, people, nation, professional groups, mass-media), directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, performing educational functions, ensuring the process of formation and development of the personality within formal, non-formal and informal education; Lifelong learning
Non-formal education	Validation; Adult education; Qualifications; Recognition of prior learning outcomes from a lifelong learning perspective
Lifelong learning	Contexts of formal, non-formal and informal education; In the context of non-formal education, it is integrated learning within planned activities, with learning objectives that do not explicitly follow a curriculum; In the context of non-formal education, it can be different in duration, and life-long learning in the context of informal education depends on the intention of the learner and does not automatically lead to the certification of the knowledge and skills acquired; In the context of non-formal education, it can be carried out in the following institutions or organizations: b) extracurricular institutions c) child care and protection centers d) enterprises e) cultural institutions f) professional, cultural, trade union associations g) non-governmental organizations g1) community educational centers of public or private law h) other organizations

⁸ Republica Moldova, *Codul educației...*, op. cit.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

According to the Youth Act, non-formal education is the basis of youth work: “Youth activity – any activity with and for young people, of a social, cultural, educational or civic nature, based on non-formal learning processes and voluntary participation, coordinated by a youth worker.”¹⁰

The model of non-formal education, according to the Youth Law, contains the following six variables, presented in Table 2.

1. Youth activity, which includes people aged between 14 and 35 years;
2. State support;
3. Organization of non-formal education activities;
4. The role of youth organizations;
5. Recognition of competences;
6. Economic opportunities.

Table 2. Variables and description of the non-formal education model¹¹

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA	
Variables	Description
Youth activity	Non-formal learning processes and voluntary participation
State support	Develop mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal and informal education Financially supports non-formal and informal education activities within the limits of available budgets Develop a national system for quality assurance of non-formal and informal education programs
Organization of non-formal education activities	It is based on the principles of working with youth, training needs and skills acquisition
Role of youth organizations	Promoting and carrying out non-formal education and volunteering activities Creation of centers for the development of skills acquired through non-formal and informal education
Recognition of competences	Certification and validation of skills obtained through non-formal and informal education
Economic opportunities	Supporting non-formal education programs for young entrepreneurs in the field of business

Upon synthesis of the relevant normative provisions,^{12, 13} based on the analyzed variables, an organization and functioning model of non-formal education

¹⁰ Republica Moldova, *Legea cu privire la tineret, op. cit.*

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹² Republica Moldova, *Codul educației..., op. cit.*

¹³ Republica Moldova, *Legea cu privire la tineret, op. cit.*

in the Republic of Moldova is outlined. We will integrate below the variables of tables 1, 2 in order to develop an integrated non-formal education model of children and young people (Table 3):

Table 3. Integrated model of non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova

Education Code Non-formal/extracurricular education	Youth Act Non-formal education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General education component • Set of extracurricular educational institutions with mission, principles, functions, specific organization for all applicants aged between 5 and 21 years • Education system component • Distinct Education Form • Achieving lifelong learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth activity aiming people aged between 14 and 35 years • State support • Organization of non-formal education activities • The role of youth organizations • Recognition of competences • Economic opportunity

Age of beneficiaries:

- Extracurricular education: 5–21 years old;
- Non-formal education: 14–35 years old, lifetime.

Application scope:

- At the system level;
- At the intersystem level.

Specific institutions:

- All extracurricular educational institutions;
- All institutions or organizations for lifelong learning;
- Youth organizations.

Financing:

- The priority source of financing extracurricular education as a component of the public education system is the transfers for special purpose from the state budget to the local budgets;
- The financing of extracurricular education is also made from the budgets of the second-level administrative-territorial units and of Gagauzia ATU, from study fees, sponsorships, donations and other legal sources;
- Educational institutions can also benefit from other sources of financing;
- Financing lifelong learning: from public and/or private sources, based on public-private partnership, through financing and co-financing by employers, non-governmental organizations, from non-reimbursable funds within international programs, as well as through the contribution of beneficiaries;
- The state financially supports non-formal and informal education activities within the limits of the available budgets;

- The local public administration authorities organize grant programs, intended for youth organizations, in order to support the projects and initiatives of young people in the community through competition; create and financially support youth centers in the administered community, within the limits of the available budget.

Human Resources:

- The teaching functions within extracurricular educational institutions are: circle leader, foreman-instructor, conductor, choir master, ballet master, director, accompanist, artistic leader, psychologist, Methodist;
- In non-formal lifelong education – trainers;
- In non-formal education for young people – peer educators, trainers, youth workers.

The non-formal education model for young people, in the Republic of Moldova, takes into account the interference of young age with childhood and adulthood. According to the Youth Law, “a young person is a person aged between 14 and 35”,¹⁴ according to the Family Code, “A child is considered to be a person who has not reached the age of 18 – the age of majority”,¹⁵ and “adults are between 17 and 65 years old (Moers, Correll, Bergler, Lowe, Levinson)”.¹⁶ Thus, the non-formal education model of young people is determined by extensive normative, methodological, organizational provisions, specific to children and adults, but also to those that explicitly target young people.

The model of non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova can be analyzed from several perspectives, depending on the objectives of the research and the chosen methodological paradigm:

- Legislative and normative perspective;
- Theoretical and conceptual perspective;
- Pedagogical and psychological perspective;
- Sociological perspective;
- Institutional and managerial perspective;
- Political and economic perspective.

The legislative and normative perspective of the non-formal education model of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova is based on a well-defined legislative framework, which regulates educational activities and programs aimed at them. National legislation recognizes non-formal education as a complement to formal education, stressing its importance in the development of young people.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Codul Familiei al Republicii Moldova* [Family Code of the Republic of Moldova], No. 1316 of 26 October 2000, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=148507&lang=ro [accessed: 10.07.2025].

¹⁶ L. Poștan, *Adultul universal și adultul generațional...*, *op. cit.*, p. 547.

Non-formal education projects are accessible to all children, promoting inclusion and active participation. There are norms and standards ensuring the quality of non-formal education, and collaboration between government institutions and non-governmental organizations is essential for the development of this sector. The legislation also provides for some funding mechanisms to support non-formal educational programs, contributing to the formation of young people's identity and social responsibility.

The theoretical-conceptual perspective of the non-formal education model of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova is based on the definition of non-formal education and its delimitation from formal and informal education, extracurricular education, extracurricular activities; determining the theoretical aspects of non-formal education, on which the model, normative framework and educational policies in the Republic of Moldova on non-formal education are based.

The pedagogical and psychological or curricular perspective of the model reflects the key aspects of the planning-conduct-evaluation of non-formal education; highlights the role of non-formal education in the formation of key competences (critical thinking, creativity, leadership, collaboration), determines the NFE organization forms; the strategies and methods used in non-formal education; establishes the methodology for evaluating the impact of non-formal education on cognitive development, social and emotional and moral aspects of children and young people.

The sociological perspective determines the NFE target groups, specifies the degree and ways of ensuring the accessibility and participation of children and young people in non-formal education programs, activities; specifies the role of the community and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the development of non-formal education, takes into account other social and economic and cultural actors influencing the involvement in non-formal activities.

The institutional and managerial perspective of the model of non-formal education of children and young people in the Republic of Moldova specifies the practices of organization and functioning of non-formal education structures (creation centers, camps, youth centers, clubs, libraries, NGOs, etc.),^{17, 18} determines the place of non-formal education/out-of-school education in educational institutions, partnerships between formal education institutions and non-formal education structures, funding models and sustainability of non-formal education/out-of-school education.

The political and economic perspective of the model focuses on the role of the state and public policies in supporting non-formal education, the economic im-

¹⁷ Republica Moldova, *Codul educației...*, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Republica Moldova, *Legea cu privire la tineret*, *op. cit.*

pect of non-formal education on the labor market and social development, the resources of non-formal education as a factor in reducing social inequalities.

In 2020, the extracurricular education subsystem, part of general education, was the object of concern of education experts, administration and specialists in the field, with the following documents being developed: “Reference framework for education and extracurricular education in the Republic of Moldova” and “Basic curriculum: competences for extracurricular education and learning”. The documents captured the status quo of extracurricular education, insisting on the localization of education and extracurricular education at the core of the concept of non-formal education (NFE). At the same time, the documents tend to increase the degree of institutionalization of education and extracurricular education, capitalizing especially on the concepts and methodology of general education. Education and school education, education and extracurricular education have different values of their perception by providers and beneficiaries, given the position of the type of educational institution on the general-vocational and compulsory-optional, optional axes. The challenge is to harmonize the need for a certain degree of formalization of the competences formed and developed by NFE and the non-formal character of NFE itself, characterized by a certain spontaneity.¹⁹

The aforementioned documents determine the model of non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova, from the perspective of the Ministry of Education and Research: “The reference framework for extracurricular education and learning in the Republic of Moldova (CREIE) is the expression of national educational policies, in general, and of policies in the field of extracurricular (non-formal) education, in particular. This document represents the set of conceptual, methodological and praxiological approaches for the development of extracurricular education and learning in the Republic of Moldova”.²⁰ And, the document “Basic Curriculum: Competences for Extracurricular Education and Learning” is an educational policy document and clearly sets out the aims for extracurricular (non-formal) education.

According to CREIE, extracurricular (non-formal) education is:

- component part of the education system in the Republic of Moldova;
- the form of education regulated by national and international documents;^{21, 22, 23}

¹⁹ L. Poștan, L. Botnar, *Educația extrașcolară: principii ale instituționalizării din perspectiva educației nonformale* [Extracurricular education. Principles of institutionalisation from the perspective of non-formal education], [in:] *Integrare prin cercetare și inovare: Științe sociale* [Integration through Research and Innovation: Social Sciences], 10–11 November 2021, Chișinău. Chișinău: Centrul Editorial-Poligrafic al Universității de Stat din Moldova, 2021, p. 123.

²⁰ Vl. Guțu (coord. șt.), *Cadrul de referință al educației și învățământului extrașcolar...*, op. cit., p. 24.

²¹ Republica Moldova, *Codul educației...*, op. cit.

²² Council of Europe, *Non-formal education. Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1437 (2000), CM/Del/Dec (2000)698/3.1*, <https://rm.coe.int/16804f3584> [accessed: 12.07.2025].

²³ Comisia Europeană [European Commission], *Recomandarea CE privind validarea învățării nonformale și informale* [Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Infor-

– priority and a strategic direction for ensuring the quality of education.

According to the Reference Framework for Extracurricular Education and Learning in the Republic of Moldova (CREIE), **the Non-Formal Education Model of Children and Young People in the Republic of Moldova (NFEM)** is a component of non-formal education throughout life presented in Figure 1.

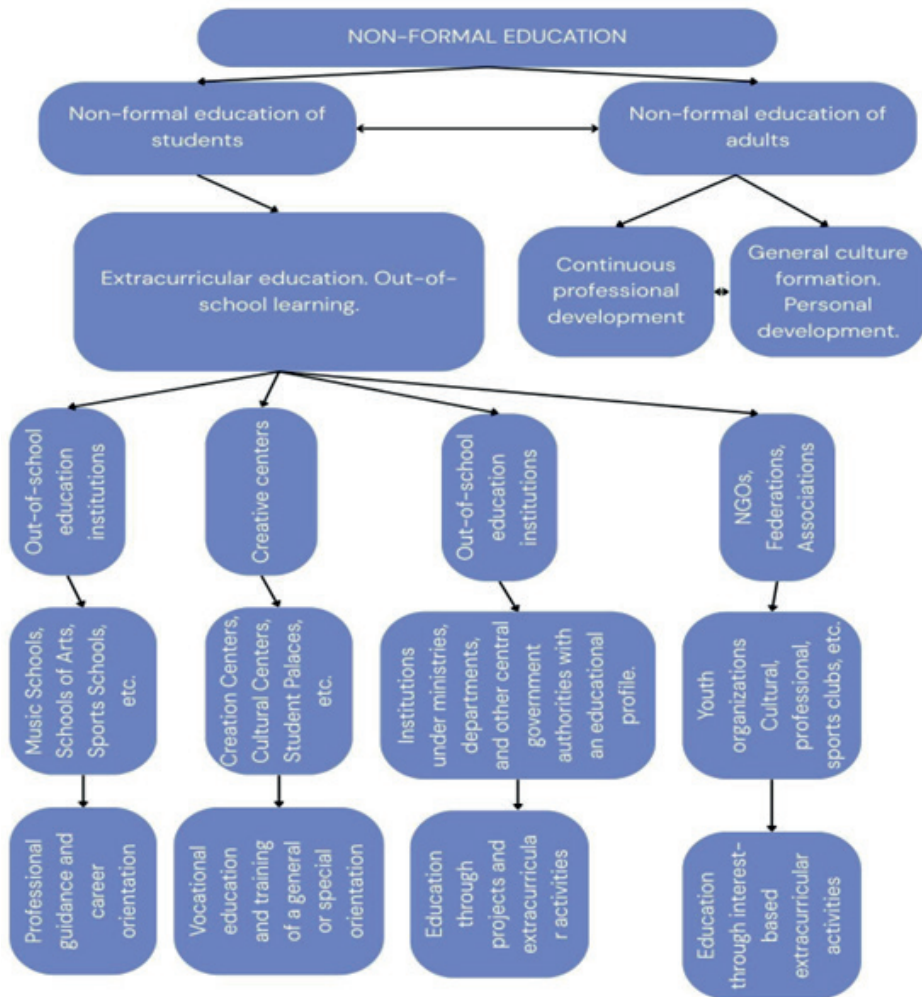


Figure 1. Non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova²⁴

mal Learning]. Brussels: COM, 20 December 2012, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=celex:32012H1222\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=celex:32012H1222(01)) [accessed: 12.07.2025].

²⁴ Vl. Guțu (coord. șt.), *Cadrul de referință al educației și învățământului extrașcolar...*, op. cit., p. 39.

The first level of construction of the model, proposed in CREIE, is based on two areas:

- 1) non-formal education of pupils;
- 2) non-formal adult education.

The second level of the model, for non-formal education of pupils, reflects the institutionalized forms of Extracurricular Education and Learning, the third and fourth levels comprise the institutions of extracurricular education. And, level five of the non-formal education of pupils' domain includes the content and organizational options of the NFE.

We mention that the non-formal education of young people is not targeted by the NFE model, proposed by CREIE, but the institutions, the content and organizational options for this age category, are included by the level of institutions (NGOs, Federations, Associations) and content (Formation of general culture. Personal development).

Several views of Moldovan researchers on the Model of Non-Formal Education of Children and Young People in the Republic of Moldova are reflected in the results of the National Project "Conceptual, Methodological and Managerial Framework of Non-Formal Education in the Republic of Moldova (2020-2023)", which can be publicly consulted.²⁵

Conclusions

Non-formal education of children and youth in the Republic of Moldova is regulated by a set of normative documents that belong to both the education sector and the youth policy sector. And, according to the Development Strategy "Education 2030", the non-formal education system (subsystem) in the Republic of Moldova does not provide, to a large extent, the needs and options of students, youth and adults due to several problems, including the lack of clear policies in the field of extracurricular education, relevant and coherent with the formal education of students; the absence of a modern concept of non-formal education management; the insufficient level of interaction of different sectors that have non-formal education institutions subordinated to them; the low level of professionalization of teachers in the respective system.

Thus, we conclude that, at present, we can only outline a model of non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova viewed from two perspectives: non-formal education of students, achieved through extracurricular education, and

²⁵ *Integrare prin cercetare și inovare* [Integration through Research and Innovation], https://ibn.idsi.md/project_articles/17280 [accessed: 12.07.2025].

non-formal education of youth and adults, achieved through continuing and general vocational training. However, this is still unconsolidated and does not respond well to the needs, interests and options of a large number of students (children and youth).

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Republica Moldova, *Legea cu privire la tineret* [Law on Youth], No. 215 of 29 July 2016. Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=138532&lang=ro [accessed: 5.06.2025].

Republica Moldova, *Strategia de dezvoltare a sectorului de tineret “Tineret 2030” și a Programului privind implementarea acesteia pentru anii 2023–2026* [Youth Development Strategy “Youth 2030” and the Implementation Programme for 2023–2026]. Government Decision No. 168 of 29 March 2023, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=137226&lang=ro [accessed: 5.06.2025].