DISABILITY MOBILITY & ROADRISK IN MOLDOVA

AUTOMOBIL CLUB DIN MOLDOVA

United Nations
MOLDOVA

east
Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport

Disability, Mobility, and Roadrisk in Moldova

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FOREWARD

Safe means of transport and accessibility of roads is first and foremost a human rights issue. International law, codified under UN auspices, imposes obligations on every State to provide safe and accessible infrastructure for all people – regardless of the country's level of development.

During a visit to the country in 2014, the former UN Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development, Mr. Shuaib Chalklen, characterized Moldova as one of the least accessible countries he had ever visited. His statement should be a wake-up call to society, because lack of accessibility has dramatic consequences for every one of us. This translates into girls and boys with disabilities living in rural areas missing school because of the lack of safe and accessible transport, persons with disabilities giving up job offers because of the inability to commute to work, and the elderly with mobility impairments being unable to access essential healthcare services. This is detrimental not only for the affected individuals but also for Moldova's social inclusion and cohesion and the country's strive for sustainable development.

The new Sustainable Development Goals, which were adopted by all UN Member States in September 2015, emphasise the obvious link between the right to development, accessibility and road safety, and set an ambitious target to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020, and by 2030 to provide safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all – including persons with disabilities.

The Sustainable Development Goals have given us a sense of direction and a roadmap for the way ahead and we can achieve this ambitious agenda through practical steps and targeted actions on the ground. The UN in Moldova has

therefore taken a comprehensive approach to improving accessibility in Moldova. Leading by example, we are renovating the UN premises internally and externally to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. We provide technical support to Government institutions and private business across the country to enhance the accessibility and safety of their own premises. UN Moldova's work also focuses on empowering communities to be actively engaged in managing public affairs and influencing policy decisions making sure that no one is left behind.

Moreover, we strive to advance full implementation of the country recommendations provided by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguila, as presented at the meeting of the Human Rights Council in March this year. A good part of these recommendations is related to the accessibility of roads, transport, and other public services, as well as to the involvement of persons with disabilities into consultations and decision making, especially on issues of their direct concern.

The UN normative and operational work is underpinned by a human rights-based approach and is guided by the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, inclusiveness and empowerment. Together with our partners in the Government, civil society, private sector and international community, we will continue our efforts towards the goal of making infrastructure and transport services in Moldova safe and accessible to everyone.

Dafina Gercheva
UN Resident Coordinator
UNDP Resident Representative

BACKGROUND

Disability and road risk are closely interlinked. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), every year 20 to 50 million people are injured and 1.24 million are killed on the world's roads. Road crashes are the primary cause of head injuries, and it is estimated that some 30% of those injured on the roads remain permanently disabled. [1] [2]

Road injury is not just a major cause of permanent disability – people with disabilities are also more at risk on the roads. The WHO World Report on Disability points out that "People with disabilities are at a higher risk of non-fatal unintentional injury from road traffic crashes" and other causes.[3] A number of studies have shown greater risks faced by people with different disabling conditions – for example, an injury rate over two times higher for children with autism than for other children.[4]

Little statistical data exists, however, on the specific road risks faced by people with disabilities and the impact on their lives. Road casualty databases do not routinely collect information on the exposure of people with disabilities to road risk even in countries with well-developed data collection systems such as the UK.[5]

The extent to which people with disabilities may avoid traveling due to the road safety environment and poor access to transport is also not generally recorded. However sources such as the UK National Travel Survey[6] show that people facing mobility challenges – in particular those who have difficulty traveling on foot or by bus – make fewer trips, on average, than others in their age groups. An analysis of data from the National Household Travel Survey in the US concluded that:

> **Concerns about getting into an accident, congestion, price of travel, aggressive or distracted drivers, access to transit, and lack of walkways are important issues for a large percentage of the population, but they tend to be more important for people with disabilities or medical conditions…[7]**

1. Opinion of the Committee on the Rehabilitation and Integration of People with Disabilties (CD-P-RR) on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1597 (2003) on Fifty years of the ECMT (European Conference of Ministers of Transport): transport policies for greater Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Communication from the Committee of Ministers Doc. 10007 – 1 December 2003, Appendix.
2. The WHO and World Bank noted that estimates of post-crash disability vary from 2-87%, World Report on Disability, 2011, p.34.
3. WHO and World Bank, Ibid., p.60.
4. BK Lee et al, Increased Risk of Injury and Accident in Children, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and CADDE, 2008.

The same study found that people with disabilities make fewer trips a day than others in the population, though not necessarily by choice. Among those surveyed who had not made a trip at all during the past week, people with medical conditions or disabilities were more likely to want to get out more often – indicating that for many people, a lack of mobility reduces their quality of life.

The new framework of UN Sustainable Development Goals has set a tough target of 50% road fatality and injury reduction by 2020. It also makes a commitment to people with disabilities that governments should:

By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.[8]

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises:

The importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.[9]

If an individual's mobility choices are so severely limited that they are unable to participate fully in society or fulfil their own potential, their rights are being denied.

5. See K.Williams, T.Savill and A.Wheeler, Review of the Road Safety of Disabled Children and Adults, Prepared for Road Safety Division, Department of Transport, TRL Report TRL559, 2002.
6. Department for Transport, National Travel Survey England 2013, Statistical Release, 29 July 2014 p.11.
7. Jeremy Mattson, Travel Behavior and Mobility of Transportation – Disadvantaged Populations: Evidence from the National Household Travel Survey, Small Urban & Rural Transit Center, North Dakota State University, 2012, p.47.
8. United Nations, Transforming Our World: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development, Outcome Document for the UN Summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda, August 2015, goal 3.6, p. 16 and Goal 11.2, p. 20.
9. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, preamble, (v).

INTRODUCTION

THE SURVEY IN MOLDOVA

Today visually impaired and other categories of persons with disabilities are unseen (in Moldova): after primary education in the few special schools, 93% of the young blind children disappear in society.[10]

An estimated 183,000 people with disabilities live in Moldova (5.2% of the population), of which some 30,000 live with a severe disability.[11] Around 15,000 Moldovans with disabilities are children. In Moldova, as in every country of the world, people with disabilities face discrimination and obstacles to their economic and social involvement. An unsafe road environment and lack of adequate transport may, however, present additional severe impediments to their mobility and participation.

This paper is based on a survey of 100 individuals with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova. The aim of the survey has been to record the types of issues faced by people with different disabilities living in Moldova and whether they report specific challenges related to road safety. The survey was designed to gather information on how easily people with disabilities can use Moldovan roads, what they think of the road safety environment, and what issues they face as road users. This information is important for effective road safety management, and our report makes a number of recommendations for public policy makers in Moldova.

The survey is a joint project by the Automobile Club of Moldova (ACM) and Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport (EASST). The survey was carried out and questionnaires developed and completed with huge help from the following organizations:

- Tony Hawks Center in Chisinau
- "Motivație" Association
- Alliance of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities in Moldova
- Community Center for Children and Youth with physical disabilities in Chisinau
- Association of Blind Persons of Moldova
- "Speranța" Center in Chisinau
- Salvation Army
- Association "Woman and Child – Protection and Support"
- Association of supporting children and youth with disabilities "Dorința" in Calarasi
- Association for Support of Children with Physical Disabilities in Peresecina.

10. L.Dobiani et al, Handbook: Employment and Self-Employment Services for Visually Impaired Persons, Moldova 2010-2012, p.6.
11. National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, Situation of Persons with Disabilities, 28.11.2013

The UN Office in the Republic of Moldova provided helpful contacts for organizations and individuals who work with and for people with disabilities. The ACM and EASST express special gratitude and thanks to the UNDP for their support for this project, and in particular HE Dafina Gercheva, the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Moldova.

We would also like to thank the former UN Resident Coordinator Nicola Harrington-Buhay, the Executive Director of "Motivație" Association Igor Meriacre, Diana Covalciuc of the Tony Hawks Center, Mr Serghei Afanasenko of the Center for Children and Youth ARTICO (former Minister of Youth and Sports and wheelchair user) and many others who have made this report possible.

THE SURVEY GROUP

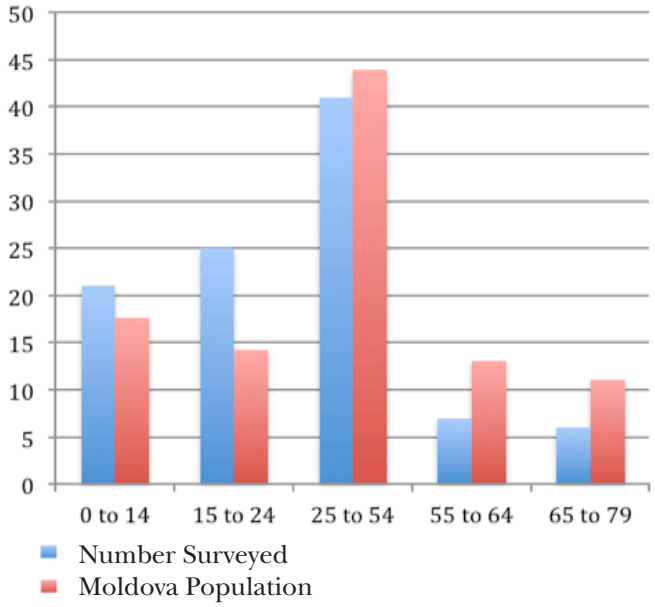
This survey records the views and circumstances of 100 people living in Moldova. The 100 participating individuals are not necessarily a representative sample of the population of people with disabilities. They are, however, representative of the many members of active organisations of and for people with disabilities in Moldova. The sample may therefore contain a bias towards those who are better able to access services and engage in public life. Our survey results may therefore underestimate the mobility challenges faced by people with disabilities in Moldova.

The survey was developed by EASST and the ACM in cooperation with the "Motivație" Association. Surveys were conducted between September 2014 and March 2015, with care taken to reach out to respondents in rural areas. Survey participants came from Chisinau (55 individuals), but also from Orhei, Calarasi, Criuleni, Ungheni, Hincesti, Comrat, Edinet cities and towns, Bender and Bessarabeasca raions.

The ages of the survey participants range from 3 to 73. A third of those surveyed were children and young people aged 3 to 19 (21% were aged 14 and under). Over half were aged 20 to 55, and 13 over 55's were interviewed. Compared to the Moldovan age demographic,[12] children and young people were somewhat over-represented. Women and girls were also over-represented: over two-thirds of those surveyed were female. For young children and some older survey participants with special needs, the parents or primary carers of the individual helped to fill in the questionnaire: a total of 35 questionnaires were completed with assistance from a carer or helper.

12. Index Mundi, Moldovan Demographics Profile 2014.

Age of Participants



People with mobility disabilities made up the majority of those surveyed. Three quarters of those with locomotor difficulties used a wheelchair, while the rest relied on other walking aids or assistance from a carer. In all, four out of five people surveyed were either reliant on a wheelchair or had other physical difficulties with walking.

Other survey participants included five visually impaired individuals, thirteen with some type of mental impairment or illness, one person with hearing loss and one with mutism. Out of the total group surveyed, seventy-six used mobility aids – including wheelchairs, canes, white sticks, walking frames or a child's buggy. Although legislation in Moldova provides a special allowance for people with severe locomotor difficulties to procure special vehicles, only one person surveyed had a specially adapted car.

None of the individuals surveyed were residents of a care home or other institution. Just over half lived in an apartment (53), while the rest lived in houses. Nearly half (49) said they were in employment, twenty-eight were students or in school, and the rest were small children or were retired, homemakers or not working. In all nineteen of the sixty-one survey participants of working age (age 19 to 64) - nearly one third - described themselves as unemployed. Although our sample is small, this compares badly with the overall unemployment rate in Moldova of 5.1% in 2014 (6.03% for men, 4.14% for women).[13]

13. National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, Labour Force of the Republic of Moldova, Employment and Unemployment 2014.

CASE STUDY

Nicolae is a lawyer and talented musician, playing several musical instruments. He works as Head of Communications and PR for the "Association of Blind Persons in Moldova," organizing social, cultural and sporting events throughout Moldova including the National Braille Literature Contest.

He is Professor and Chair of Special Education in Braille techniques at the Pedagogical University of Moldova "Ion Creanga." He has had an impressive career since 1969, including him time as Director of the Republican Sound Recording Studio where he developed talking books for blind people and in 1989 published the first audio book in Romanian - "Birds of our youth."

Blind from birth, Nicolae and his wife (who has been blind since aged 11) use trolleybuses for transport. They have had some unpleasant experiences. In Albisoara sector going home Nicolae and his wife fell into a street pit; going down Alecsandri Street he tripped over stone beds being installed; trying to enter a trolleybus at TV Center sector he and his wife stepped into an open street lattice without a grid, hurting themselves and staining their clothes.

Nicolae points to many road safety issues that create difficulties for people who are visually impaired: for example, the sidewalks full of cars that block the way; the military garrison fenced with chains on Tighina street making it easy to trip; kiosks in illegal places; unnecessary advertising posters and signs that can be bumped into. He is frustrated by the indifferent attitude of the authorities, something he feels has got worse over the past ten years.

Nicolae would like to see improved pavements and sidewalks, and action taken against illegal car parking. The introduction of audio/voiced and large and bright announcements in public transport would make things much easier for visually impaired people. There should be more voiced and audio traffic lights at crossings, as well as warning signs for road users in areas and near buildings frequented by blind people. Nicolae would like to see seat belts and hand-rails in maxi-taxis and buses, and less overcrowding so that there are seats for each passenger. He is upset that the State does not provide white sticks or aid for all visually impaired people in Moldova. He has written to the authorities calling for special assistance for visually impaired travelers at the Airport and railway stations, but so far has had no reply.

He is frustrated by the indifferent attitude of the authorities, something he feels has got worse over the past ten years.

SURVEY RESULTS

GETTING TO WORK & SCHOOL

In addition to discrimination in the labour market, difficulties getting to work may act as a barrier to employment and would certainly pose a disincentive to work. Of the fifty-eight individuals who said they travelled at least once a month to work, 20 reported problems getting there. The issues they faced included: aggressive drivers, poor visibility of zebra crossings and poor road markings, a lack of zebra crossings and not enough safe crossing points, poor quality of pavements, pavements blocked by illegal parking, areas with no pavements, inaccessible public transport, steep inclines on a road and, for ten of the nineteen wheelchair users in employment, a lack of - or poor-quality - ramps making access to buildings difficult. Other problems mentioned included, for one blind person, not having a white stick to aid mobility, and for others with mental impairment the need for assistance in traveling.

People traveling to school or educational establishments faced similar obstacles. Thirteen schoolchildren or students with disabilities experienced problems traveling to classes. Difficulties mentioned included dangerous road crossings, a lack of access ramps, inaccessible public transport, the need for assisted travel and (for parents) the challenges of transporting a child in a wheelchair.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION & TRAVEL

A difficult road environment can also create barriers to social participation. Sixteen people surveyed said they found it difficult to visit friends or go out for entertainment, and twelve said they had problems going shopping. In addition to the variety of complaints already given (poor crossings, blocked pavements, lack of ramps, aggressive drivers and inaccessible public transport) mention was made of the intensity of traffic, dangerous driver behaviour, the difficulty of using maxi-taxis, the lack of braille signs or information for people with visual impairment, and stairs or narrow passageways cutting off access for wheelchair users.

Participation in social and economic life also includes the ability to travel to other cities and other countries for work or pleasure. Twenty-four of those surveyed – one in four – reported specific problems traveling outside their hometown. Sixteen, all of them wheelchair users, said they never travelled. Overall nearly half the survey group (49%) said they would experience moderate to severe transport difficulties traveling to other cities or countries (scoring 6 to 10 on a scale of 1=not a problem; and 10=impossible). Reasons cited were overloaded public transport, dangerous road conditions, and

inaccessible, unavailable or unassisted transport services between towns and cities.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES & MEDICAL CARE

For those somehow able to access transport, a lack of access to public buildings and social institutions also poses problems. A 2014 report by the Ministry of Regional Development and Construction found that 70% of public buildings did not have wheelchair access, while information supplied by civil society organisations suggested the figure was closer to 99%.[14] An August 2015 survey in Chisinau found just 10 out of 131 public and commercial buildings to be accessible.[15] Of course, private residences may be even less likely to have adequate adaptations. Out of our survey group, 34% reported moderate to severe difficulties leaving their place of residence.

A particular need for all those in our survey group was the ability to visit a doctor or specialist. Twenty-one people surveyed experienced difficulties visiting medical specialists. The mobility challenges were the same as mentioned for all other transport needs. In addition three carers mentioned the difficulty of having to carry children who normally use wheelchairs up stairs, into inaccessible medical facilities and onto unadapted public transport.

MEANS OF TRANSPORT

Participants in our survey were asked what modes of transport they used on a regular basis. Few had access to cars – just 15 people out of the hundred surveyed were car users, including the one survey participant with an adapted vehicle. They had specific complaints about the small number of disabled parking places limiting the viability of travel by car. Taxis were also less frequently used, perhaps because they are excluded from eligibility for travel allowances from local budgets for people with severe disabilities. The most used modes of transport were:

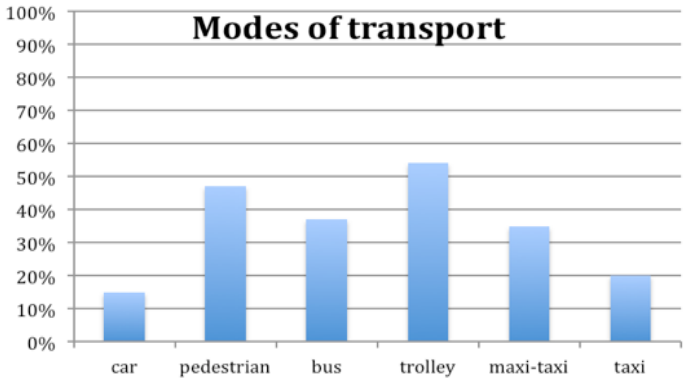
- trolleybuses (54% of survey group: 52% of wheelchair users);
- pedestrian travel by foot or wheel chair (47%);
- buses (37%);
- maxi-taxis (35%).

The popularity of trolleybuses and buses may be due to adaptations in some newer vehicles to enable wheelchair access. The Trolleybus Company, RTEC, have 349 new trolleys bought with a strong requirement to be accessible: at least 120 in Chisinau and 32 in Balti are adapted for people with disabilities.[16] Buses operated by private companies are generally not adapted apart from the doors. Some NGOs also offer their own mini-buses, but these are used for particular programmes and projects and are not for public transport.

14. IPN, 'Persons with disabilities have limited access to institutions and public transport,' 10 July 2015, http://www.ipn.md/en/societate/70605

15. IM Fair Trade, "Moldova fails the 'accessibility' test," 19 August 2015, http://global.manniskohjalp.se/news/2015/08/moldova-fails-accessibility-test

Just over half – 51% - of people surveyed reported moderate to severe difficulties in using public transport, including 13% who said it was impossible for them. They described a number of difficulties experienced in using public transport including: no adaptations in many vehicles to allow access; overcrowding; no possibility of seating; the length of time needed to wait for adapted vehicles; the need for special child restraints; the lack of special signage; and no assisted transport for people with mobility needs. Sadly, overt discrimination by public transport drivers, who sometimes refuse to pick up people with disabilities, and the disrespect of other public transport users were also mentioned.



MEANS OF TRANSPORT

Nearly half of all people surveyed travelled regularly by foot or wheelchair as pedestrians. Aggressive drivers, illegal parking and poor zebra crossings are a nuisance and danger to all pedestrians. Their impact is worse, however, for people with disabilities. Poor and blocked pavements could be a trip hazard for anyone, but are a greater obstacle for people with visual impairment or mobility disabilities. Dangerous road crossings are certainly a problem for all pedestrians, but the problem is greater for those unable to cross quickly, including elderly people and those using walking frames or white sticks as mobility aids. Of our survey respondents, 40% reported having moderate to severe difficulties simply crossing the road.

16. Information from Chisinau transport department and Motivatie NGO.

CASE STUDY

Maxim is a very sociable and capable young student of the Faculty of Journalism, State University, aged 20. He lives in an apartment with his mother and sister. Because of his Cerebral Palsy, he uses a crab-cane to help him get around.

Maxim is often frustrated trying to reach his University from home using maxi-taxis, because the drivers do not stop when they see him and his cane. In the University the lift is often broken, but Maxim does not consider that as a problem and he uses the stairs.

When Maxim had a Summer job, he had particular problems reaching his office. He set out very early, but no maxi-taxi drivers would stop for him. One day a taxi driver saw his difficulties and tried to help by flagging down a maxi-taxi. One stopped, but when the driver understood whom the intended passenger was he became angry and refused to take Maxim. A fierce argument broke out and Maxim, feeling terrible, was forced to take another maxi-taxi. He wrote a letter of complaint to the police about the discrimination he experienced, but eventually was told it was “not a police case to investigate or impose sanctions.” He took his case to the Council for Non-Discrimination and won, but there has been an appeal to the Supreme Chamber of Moldova. A decision is awaited.

The drivers do not stop when they see him and his cane.

ISSUES FOR IMPROVING MOBILITY

GETTING TO WORK & SCHOOL

Survey participants were asked what changes would make the most difference to them personally to improve their mobility and access. Their answers reflected their particular needs and circumstances.

Respondents with visual impairments identified a number of improvements that would make their mobility easier. These included handholds and ramps at the entrance to their homes; better quality pavements; more and better road crossing signals, adapted to the needs of blind pedestrians; better-quality roads; announcements of all stations on public transport, with trolley and bus entrances more closely aligned with the pavement; better attention to the needs of visually-impaired passengers and better attitudes from drivers, particularly maxi-taxi drivers; and generally more care and respect shown by all drivers towards disabled road users.

Wheelchair users also mentioned home entrance adaptations to make their own mobility easier. Nearly a third – 19 out of 60 people in wheelchairs – said that ramps and wider pavements with handrails outside their homes would improve things. Over half called for more and better protected pavements and ramps in public spaces, allowing adequate space, and many mentioned the problem of parked cars obstructing pavements. Inaccessible pavements with no dropped kerbs also posed problems. Safer road crossings were an important issue, along with the need for better signage and other improvements to get the attention of drivers to ensure they stop. Many wheelchair users complained of the poor quality of roads, with road surfaces being difficult and painful for disabled road users. They also pointed to the lack of adequate adaptations in all modes of public transport – including the need for special seats, more taxis adapted for wheelchair use and special transport services, including adapted cars and more disabled parking places. Finally, the behaviour of other drivers on the road was mentioned by many, including speeding; drunk-driving; aggressive attitudes; and a lack of attention, patience or respect for vulnerable road users.

Responses by people with other mobility difficulties (not in a wheelchair) were very similar. Just under a third (6 out of 20 people) said that adaptations to their home entrances would improve their mobility, including shallower steps, railings and ramps. They also complained of poor pavements and the danger of falling in holes; of dangerous and invisible road crossings; of poor lighting and inadequate road signage; and called for more adapted public transport.

Respondents with mental health issues

(or psycho-social disability) also cited the need for better and safer road crossings. Speeding, aggressive driving and a general lack of respect for pedestrians made crossing dangerous for them. Overcrowded public transport was also seen to be a problem. Most called for more public transport to be made available and for better-quality roads.

IMPACT OF POOR MOBILITY

Nearly half of those surveyed, 48 people, felt that attitudes to disability in Moldova were adversely affected by the lack of mobility for people with disabilities. Of the 100 people surveyed, 41 felt that opportunities for people with disabilities were reduced and 28 said their own life opportunities had been limited as a consequence of problems with mobility. They mentioned their reduced opportunities to socialise and interact with others; the lack of care or respect from the general public; the general neglect for their potential and their rights; psychological stress, a lack of confidence and a feeling of being "outsiders" in society; poor communication with the rest of the community; poor support from other passengers (with some giving them the "bad eye" or wondering why they go out at all); a lack of understanding by authorities and poor community awareness. One participant summarised this view by saying there is "no opportunity to be a normal person."

This situation has an impact not only on individuals, but on society as a whole. One in every twenty people in Moldova lives with a disability. In our survey, about one third of those of working age were unemployed – a proportion six times higher than that of the general population. Other studies have also shown a higher unemployment rate for people with disabilities in Moldova, suggesting that disabled adults are 60% less likely to be in employment than other adults – a higher rate than in many countries.[17] As set out in the WHO World Report on Disability, equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities are important in order to:

- Maximise human resources – contributing to individual well-being and economic output;
- Promote human dignity and social cohesion – allowing people to develop their capabilities in full and contribute to society;
- Accommodate the increasing numbers of people with disabilities in the working age population – particularly as global populations age.[18]

A hard-hearted analyst might argue that encouraging active participation by people with disabilities in all areas of society will help to reduce the 'dependency ratio' of people who rely on the state for their income. Moreover, studies of employers' experience of using workers with disabilities have found they have

17. Michael Morris, "Disability and Economics: The nexus between disability, education and employment," DESA Briefing Seminar Series, 1 July 2011, UN Headquarters.
18. WHO and World Bank, "World Report on Disability," 2011, p. 236.
19. Ibid.

appropriate skills, strong loyalty and low rates of absenteeism.[19]

Moldova rightly celebrates the phenomenal abilities of Moldovan Paralympic athletes such as Serhgei Afanasenko and Oxana Spataru. But Serhgei, as Head of the Moldovan Paralympic Committee, is a keen proponent of the need for better mobility in order to reduce barriers to full participation in society.[20] A survey of over 1,000 people with disabilities from 83 localities in Moldova found that around half (49.2%) faced difficulties in getting to a polling station due to the inaccessibility of the route from their home. Despite this, nearly four out of five (79.9%) voted in the local elections in June 2015 – showing a very high degree of public spirit and commitment to using their electoral voice.[21] A strong message from the individuals who participated in our survey was the desire to live fulfilling lives as part of the community, being allowed to use and develop their talents to the full.

CASE STUDY

Raisa is a kind and caring mother with two lovely, 5 year-old twins. One of her boys, Gheorghe, was born with malformations that make him unable to walk.

He uses a special carriage for children with disabilities, and relies on his mother to take him where he needs to go. Road safety is a big problem for them. Crossing the road is very difficult; pavements are full of holes and hard to negotiate, crossings are unsafe, and the aggressive attitude of drivers often makes things worse.

Every day Raisa and her child have problems entering and leaving their apartment. Georghe's carriage is heavy and complicated to move on the stairs or in the lift. Raisa walks to many local places, pushing Georghe's carriage to the Tony Hawks Center for physiotherapy and exercises, to the shops or to visit nearby relatives. When she needs to travel further she only uses trolleybuses – for example, to see the doctor once a month. But because not all trolleybuses are adapted for use, Raisa and Georghe often miss three before a new, adapted trolleybus arrives.

Raisa and her children do not visit other cities or villages. She would love to go to the seaside for holidays, but she cannot afford a taxi to take the children and there is no other means of transport she can use. Raisa is unable to work because of Gheorghe's needs, while her husband works in the Russian Federation and sends money home to support the family.

- What would Raisa like to see to improve Gheorge's mobility?

- Safer road crossings and more adapted transport.

RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report has been to highlight the particular road safety and mobility issues faced by people with disabilities in Moldova. Many of these issues are challenging for all road users – such as poor road surfaces, overcrowding in public transport, or dangerous driver behaviour. However the discomfort, danger and difficulties are accentuated for people with special needs, including disabled or elderly people.

As a member of the UNECE, the Republic of Moldova is a party to the Amsterdam Declaration, a priority of which is to:

> **Promote policies and actions conducive to healthy and safe modes of transport by designing and modernizing human settlements to improve the conidions for safe and physically active mobility, including infrastructure for walking and cycling, and efficient and accessible public transport, particularly focused on vulnerable groups such as children and persons with reduced mobility.**[22]

Moldova ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 30th March 2007. The focal point for the UN Convention is the Secretariat, housed within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN. UNDESA have published a comprehensive 'Design Manual for a Barrier Free Environment' for people with disabilities containing detailed information on improving accessibility of pavements, buildings, roads and crossings.[23]

Our survey report is not intended as a comprehensive guide to engineering improvements needed to promote better mobility for people with disabilities in Moldova. The subsequent areas raised by our survey participants are intended as basic list of issues requiring more attention from policy makers:

ACCESSIBLE BUILDINGS

People travel in order to reach a destination. If they are unable to exit their homes easily or gain access to other buildings and sites, their participation will be impaired.

In Moldova, there are building codes that now require accessibility, but there is no strong system of control or penalties for non-compliance with these conditions.[24] The law requiring disabled access for public buildings and all new construction should be enforced as a matter of high priority. However many buildings are old and not subject to inspection, so steps need to be taken to make these accessible too.

Barriers to access are taken more seriously when there is representation from people

20. See: http://www.realitatea.md/dizabilitatea-o-povara-grea-in-moldova-sute-de-oameni-imobiliza-i-in-scaunul-cu-rotile-0nevoi-i-sa-lupte-cu-sistemul_12782.html
21. Vitor Koroli, "Participation of people with disability from Moldova in Political Life," http://www.unite-it.eu/profiles/blogs/participation-of-people-with-disability-from-moldova-in-political

with disabilities in the planning process. It should be compulsory for commissions responsible for giving permission, approval and certification for buildings and developments to include a person representing the interests of people with disabilities. This is currently the case in Bender, and this system should be extended throughout Moldova.

PAVEMENTS

Uneven, inaccessible and broken pavements are a particular hazard for people with disabilities – sometimes forcing them into the road itself, creating even greater danger. Attention needs to be given to:

- Constructing safe walkways along all urban roads to encourage safe pedestrian mobility;
- Repairing uneven surfaces and damaged walkways, and filling in gaps, potholes and other hazards;
- Ensuring wheelchair access to pavements, and making passageways sufficiently wide to allow manoeuvrability;
- Putting in tactile pavements and colour contrasting pavements to assist blind and visually impaired pedestrians wherever possible;
- Putting in fences and guardrails where there is a danger of people running off into the street or falling;
- Properly protecting any street works to prevent people falling into holes or bumping into scaffolding;
- Putting in ramps where needed or, if this is not possible, lifts to enable full access to important services;
- Carrying out pedestrian safety audits to identify priority areas for attention.

ROAD CROSSINGS

The difficulty of crossing roads safely was a common concern of our survey group. Many factors contribute to this problem, including road design, signage and driver behaviour. This is an area where the risk of injury and death can be greatly reduced. There is a need for:

- Better signage to alert drivers to pedestrian crossings;
- Good quality paint on roads to make zebra crossings more visible;
- Dropped kerbs at crossing points for people with mobility difficulties;
- Tactile pavements at crossings and, wherever possible, sound-assisted crossing lights;
- Giving consideration to schemes - as resources allow - enabling extra time for crossing for elderly people and people with locomotor difficulties;[25]
- Good speed enforcement - particularly at dangerous road crossings and areas of high risk (for example, near medical facilities, care homes or schools);

22. UNECE/WHO, "Amsterdam Declaration: Transport choices for health, environment and prosperity," 22-23 January 2009.
23. See: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/index.html

- Action against illegal parking to reduce the problems of vehicles blocking pavements;
- Driver awareness campaigns to build better understanding of the challenges faced by pedestrians with special needs.

SAFER ROADS

The Republic of Moldova has been giving more consideration to safe road design in recent years, helped greatly by the donor agencies. The M2 motorway is an example of state-of-the-art infrastructure that has helped connect communities without compromising safety, and new roads are being constructed or old ones rehabilitated with increased attention to safe road design. There is still much to do, however, particularly in urban areas and village settlements. Improvements in road design are important for all Moldovans, but particularly for disabled road users. Attention is needed to:

- Road surfaces - removing trip hazards at crossings and reducing danger and discomfort for passengers;
- Visible road signage - complying with UNECE standards and ensuring clear directions for all road users;
- Good road markings, particularly at crossing points;
- Regular road safety audits.

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT

The need for more accessible public transport was a strong message from our survey participants. While many newer trolley buses and buses have been adapted for use by passengers with special needs, these are still a minority of the transport fleet.

In Moldova all taxi companies are required to have a fleet of cars equipped to transport people in wheelchairs. In practice this law is not followed, and though the Ministry of Transport obliged all taxi companies to buy adapted vehicles before 2016, so far the results are not visible. Other support programs or free/discounted transport are limited.[26]

Moldova also lacks a technical center for installing special controls and accessories for cars, and which could conduct a technical examination of such equipment. This means that some people with mobility difficulties make use of vehicles adapted with improvised driving mechanisms that put them and other road users at risk. There is a clear need for a specialized service for vehicle adaptations for people with disabilities. In addition, a driving school for people with disabilities would enable more to make use of properly adapted vehicles.

The costs of renewing and adapting all types of public transport may mean that progress takes time. As resources allow

24. The standards can be found in electronic form at www.ednc.gov.md:
a) NCM C.01.06-2014 - http://ednc.gov.md/default.aspx?id=556#breadcrumbs
b) CP C.01.02-2014 - http://ednc.gov.md/default.aspx?id=556#breadcrumbs

and as fleets are renewed, the needs of disabled passengers must be a priority. In the meantime much can be done to improve the transport experience for people with special needs:

- Action to reduce overcrowding on public transport will make it easier for people with disabilities, in particular those with wheelchairs or buggies;
- Specific disability awareness training for drivers on understanding and meeting the needs of passengers with disabilities;
- Announcements of all stops along transport routes;
- Safe and accessible stopping places for public transport;
- More disabled parking places;
- Ensuring taxi companies meet their obligation to provide services for people who use wheelchairs;
- Special schemes allowing taxi journeys for people with mobility needs should be considered;
- Development of a plan for accessible inter-city travel and for accessible tourism in Moldova.

DRIVER BEHAVIOUR & PUBLIC AWARENESS

Poor driver behaviour was identified by many of our survey participants as an obstacle to their mobility. Speeding vehicles and drunk or aggressive drivers are a risk to all road users, but vulnerable pedestrians – including people with disabilities, elderly people, children and parents with pushchairs – are less able to get out of the way quickly and are often less visible on the road.

The introduction of speed cameras, the 'White Nights' drink-drive enforcement programme and regular road safety awareness campaigning by public authorities and NGOs has been helping to reduce road casualties throughout Moldova. Our survey results show that more is needed, however, to keep up the momentum to improve poor driver behaviour. Full support should be given by all Moldovan authorities to programmes to reduce road casualties. This should include specific awareness-raising about the needs of vulnerable road users, particularly those with disabilities.

In Chisinau the efforts of the voluntary Working Party on Occupational Road Safety have also helped to reduce casualties in public transport. We recommend that local authorities throughout Moldova should prepare casualty reduction and accessible mobility plans, starting with improved training and management for all public

25. See this example from Singapore: http://www.lta.gov.sg/apps/news/page.aspx?c=2&id=830c5cd6-f3cf-4624-b35b-f0f84dbb441d

26. As an exceptional example - Edinet City Hall has allocated one of their cars as a social taxi, but the car can only be used by people able to sit independently in a small seat, so many wheelchair users do not fit.

transport providers and major commercial fleets. Voluntary incentive schemes for good practice could play a beneficial role, giving preference for public contracts to commercial companies that meet the highest standards of accessibility and road safety management.[27] Such plans should be drawn up in consultation with organisations representing people with different disabilities.

PARTICIPATION IN POLICY-MAKING

Mention has been made of the high proportion of people with disabilities who voted in the local elections in 2015. One in twenty people in Moldova have a disability, yet this is not reflected in the Moldovan parliament. Poor mobility is likely to be one reason for the lack of adequate representation of disabled people in public life. This is not only a waste of talent and intelligence – it means that public policy issues affecting people with disabilities cannot be discussed effectively. Public authorities, including the Moldovan parliament and political parties, should examine their employment policies and do more to encourage recruitment of people with disabilities to ensure their views are better represented in policy making.

In the short term, government ministers and party leaders should accept the challenge of traveling on public transport or as a pedestrian in Moldova by means of a wheelchair or white cane. Disability awareness training would be beneficial for policy makers in key areas in order to build understanding of the importance of accessible mobility. Without this understanding, the steps needed to be taken to improve mobility will not be treated with sufficient priority.

27. See for example the FORS Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme in London: http://www.fors-online.org.uk/cms/

CONCLUSION

This report has focussed on the mobility needs of people with disabilities in Moldova. The results of our survey of 100 Moldovan citizens with different disabilities have shown a wide variety of serious obstacles to full mobility.

Overcrowded public transport, dangerous crossings and poor roads are hazardous for anyone. For disabled Moldovans, these dangers are accentuated. Many of our survey participants reported that public transport is often inaccessible or impossible in practice. This has impeded their full participation in social and economic life, and prevented them from playing an active role in their communities.

Ensuring accessible mobility is a challenge for all countries. It will be argued that the changes needed in Moldova are expensive and not possible at the current time. It should not be forgotten that Moldova has legal and moral responsibilities under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Our survey indicates that the mobility choices of people with disabilities in Moldova are still severely constrained. The evidence of people with disabilities must be taken more seriously by policy makers to ensure adequate priority is given to these important issues.

Overcrowded public transport, dangerous crossings and poor roads are hazardous for anyone.

For disabled Moldovans, these dangers are accentuated.

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