

Education in Moldova

Context

The Republic of Moldova has faced much economic hardship since its independence in 1991 and now stands as one of the three countries in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) region judged unlikely to achieve MDG2 – universal primary school completion by 2015. Notwithstanding efforts by the government, education in Moldova faces many challenges with regard to school access, quality and financing.

Moldova has the third lowest GNP per capita in the region of CEE/CIS at \$2,360 USD (PPP), which is just more than that of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.¹ On par with the poorest countries in Central Asia, this is about a sixth of the average per capita GNP in Central and Eastern Europe and about half of the average GNP in the Caucasus.² Its annual economic growth has been unstable through the past decade, declining sharply during Russia's economic crisis in the late nineties. Since then its annual economic growth has fluctuated, rising from 2.1% in 2000 to 7.5% in 2005 and then dropping to 4.1% in 2006.³ About half of the country lives below the national poverty line. The national gini coefficient is .33, which is about on par with the region's average.⁴ The government of Moldova spends 3.8% of its GNP on education, which is the second lowest rate in the Western CIS sub-region after Russia.⁵ It is on par with the average for countries in transition, which is 3.6%.⁶

On the UNDP's Human Development Index, Moldova is ranked 111th out of 177 countries, between Egypt and Nicaragua.⁷ Moldova faces several challenges in the sector of human development, especially with regard to child safety. Moldova has one of the highest rates of human trafficking in the world. While some children fall victim to traffickers themselves, many children are left alone by parents who leave the country for work or who are trafficked.⁸ Many of these children remain under the care of foster parents or institutional care, which often magnifies the impact of poverty on their lives. Moldova has the fourth highest rate of institutionalized children in the region after Russia, Czech Republic and Lithuania with 850 out of every 100,000 children living in an institution.⁹

Education Reforms

The government is focusing its reform agenda on increasing access to all educational services and improving quality at all levels. As of yet, there has been little comprehensive reform in education. Instead, there have been a series of scattered pilot projects targeted at priority areas. For example,



Source: UNICEF Moldova

the government launched a project to improve the secondary school curriculum. Yet to roundly improve education for all children in Moldova, attention must be given to developing a holistic approach.

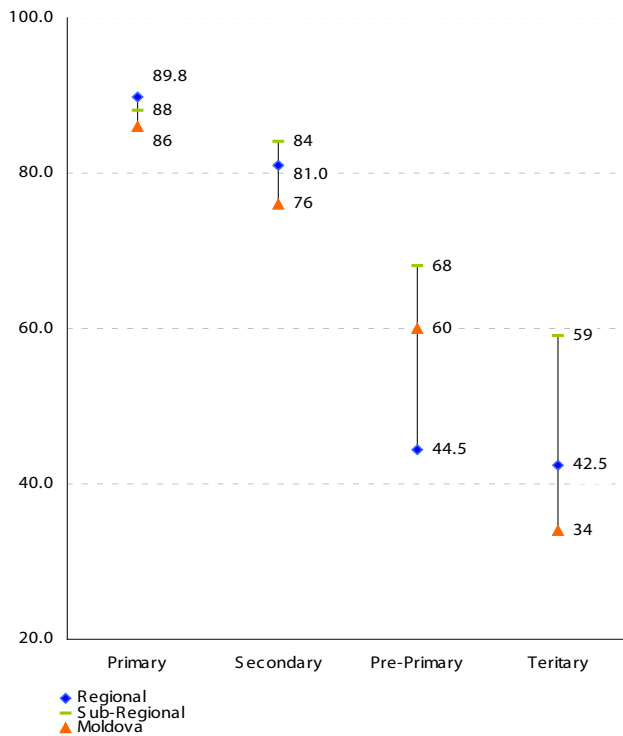
Access

Moldova's primary school net enrolment rates are the second lowest in the CEE/CIS region, after Azerbaijan. Only 87.7% of children of primary school age are enrolled and the net primary intake is 73%, making the country 'off track' or unlikely to achieve MDG2 and the EFA goals (See Figure 1). Moldova's primary school enrolment rates increased little between 1999 and 2004 and actually experienced periods of decline, which is unusual in the sub-region.¹⁰ In 2005, enrolment rates made an upward turn, largely as a result of the government's focus on increasing access.¹¹

Access to secondary school is the third lowest in the region, after Albania and Turkey, at 76%. Secondary school rates only started to increase noticeably in 2005, with rates remaining relatively stable at 68% between 1999 and 2005.¹² Similarly, Moldova's tertiary education enrolment - 34% - is far below the regional and sub-regional average and less than half of the average enrolment rate in OECD countries. With high youth unemployment rates and little domestic job opportunities, especially during the economic crisis of the late nineties, the returns to secondary school may be perceived as low to potential secondary school enrollees.

Exciting progress has been made with pre-primary enrolments. Sixty per cent of Moldovan pre-school aged children are enrolled, which is higher than the regional average - 44% - and almost comparable to the sub-regional average of 68%. Net enrolment figures almost doubled between 1999, when only 35% of 3-6 year olds were enrolled, and 2005.

Figure 1. Comparison of Moldova's Net Enrolment Rates to Averages in the Region and Sub-Region



This is largely increasing children's readiness for primary school and sets the stage for positive improvements in learning outcomes.

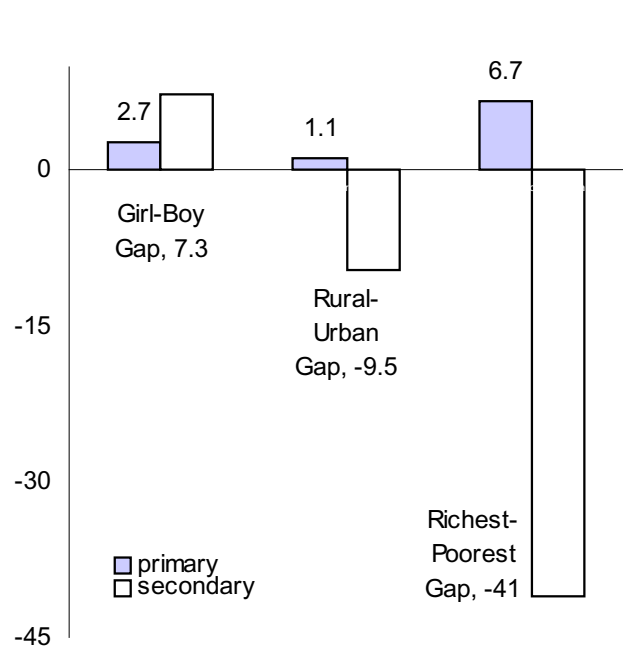
Equity

Moldova has made significant strides to achieving parity of access in primary school but faces large challenges to doing the same in secondary school. Moldova dedicated its FTI funds to early childhood development. The gender gap in primary enrolments in Moldova, with a gender parity index of .97, is not significant.¹³ However, by secondary school there is a significant gap in attendance rates by gender. In Moldova boys gross enrolment in secondary school is 7.5 percentage points lower than girls enrolment (103.4-95.9%). More attention is needed to bringing up boys participation in secondary school. See Figure 2.

The most concerning gap in Moldova is that between the richest and poorest income quintiles. This is the largest gap in primary and secondary school; 6.7 percentage points and 41 percentage points respectively. However, in secondary school the gap is almost seven times that in primary school, where the poorest children actually are more likely to attend school. This indicates that the poorest children in the country are dropping out of school after completing primary school.

There also exists a rural-urban gap in both primary and secondary school. The gap is most serious in secondary school, where rural children's attendance rates are 9.5 percentage points higher than urban children's.

Figure 2. Absolute percentage point differences of parity gaps in education attendance rates by gender, region and income level



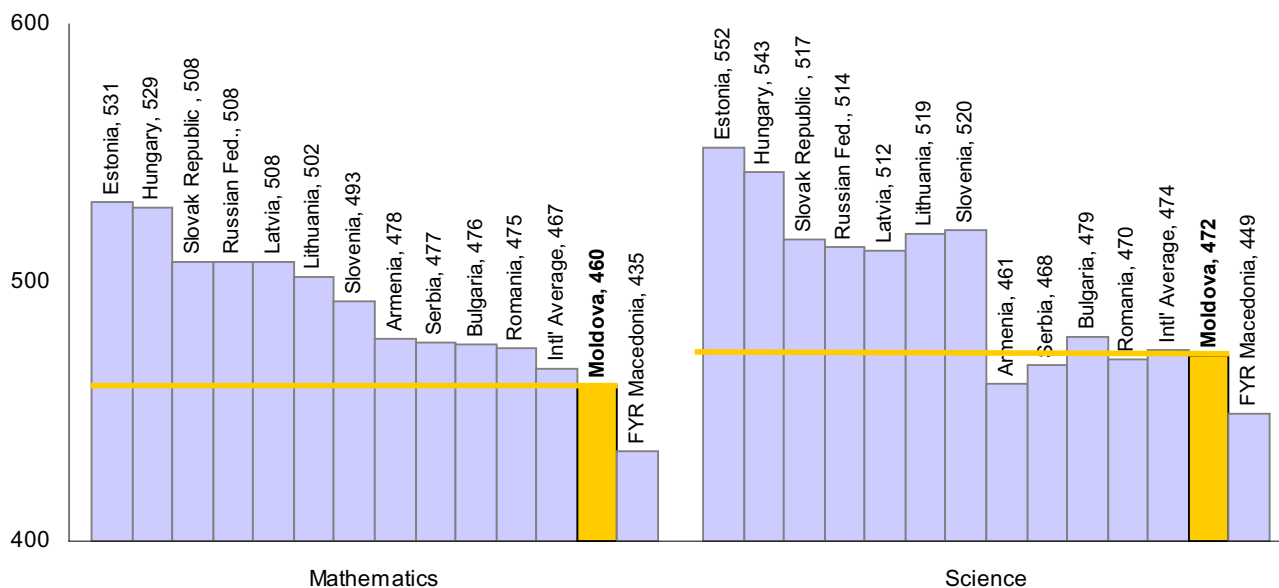
Equity in education is at its worst for some ethnic and linguistic minorities. The Roma population in Moldova is approximately 12,500 people. Among

Box 1. Reverse Gender Gap in Moldova

While in much of the world, girls' enrolment, completion and performance in school lags behind that of their boy peers, in Moldova an opposite trend is emerging. Boys' attendance lags behind girls by 2.7 percentage points in primary school and by secondary school this has grown to 7.3 percentage points. Boys are more likely to drop out of both primary and secondary school. In tertiary education, the gender parity index is at 1.48, which is the third highest in the region, meaning that the male:female ratio at the university level is 10:15.

Furthermore, on TIMSS 2003 girls outperformed boys by ten points in mathematics, which is the largest gender differential in the region, and by nine points in science, which is the fifth largest differential in the region. In reading, girls also outperformed boys by 14 points on the PIRLS 2006 test. Furthermore, approximately 60% of unemployed youth are men. While not intending to undermine the challenges that girls face in education, these gender differentials in both performance on measures of learning outcomes and participation in school, are of concern, indicating that boys' education needs attention.

Figure 3. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003 Results in mathematics in the CEE/CIS Region, Grade 8



this group, poverty is endemic and educational participation at all levels is much below the national averages. No schools offer the Roma languages as language of instruction. The state adopted Moldovan as the national language of instruction in 1989, replacing Russian, which is still recognized as an official language. Today schools exist in minority languages, such as Russian, Gagauzian and Ukrainian. However, many Roma children and children of other linguistic minority groups are sent to 'special' schools, as per the law declaring that any child who fails two years in a row be sent to a special school. Inequities in quality of education also exist for linguistic minorities. These schools have low expectations of students and are often more under-resourced than traditional public schools.

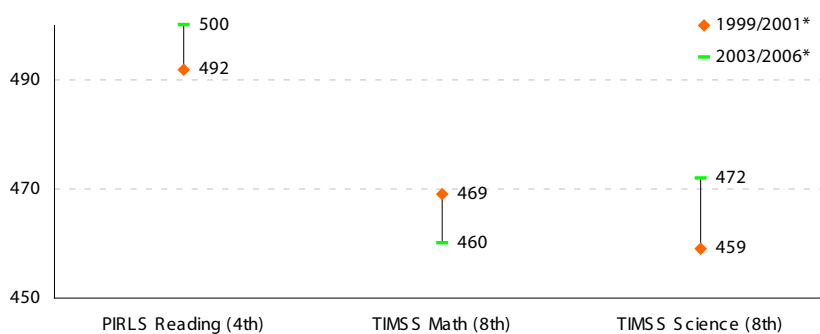
Quality

Moldova took part in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1999 and 2003, and participated in Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2001 and 2003. In mathematics, Moldova scored second to

last in the CEE/CIS region, just above FYR Macedonia, and in science, it scored fifth to last (See Figure 3). In both science and mathematics, Moldova scored well below the international and regional average. In reading, Moldova scored third from last in the region, above FYR Macedonia and Romania, and on par with the PIRLS scale average. Overtime, between tests, Moldova's average scores increased slightly in both Reading and Science, however between 1999 and 2003 its average mathematics score decreased by nine points.

These results point to low learning outcomes at the national level. Nine percent of children do not survive to the last year of primary school and about 5% drop out in secondary school, most of whom are boys. Yet only a total of 0.3% of children repeat a grade, indicating that children are moving through the system without repeating and without achieving high learning outcomes. Teachers earn a low salary so that even those trained in teaching often seek out higher employment.

Figure 4. Overtime Trends in PIRLS and TIMSS scores in Moldova



*PIRLS took place in 2001 and 2006 and TIMSS took place in 1999 and 2003.

There is a severe shortage of textbooks, teachers' guides and supplementary materials; they are essentially non-existent.¹⁴ An experimental textbook rental scheme was severely undermined by the Russian economic crash. Since the government has launched a reform of the curriculum and related materials.

Education Financing

Moldova is a struggling transition economy. As one of the highest labor exporters in Eastern Europe, its domestic economic growth is inconsistently growing, having experienced few periods of stability since

the Russian crisis in the late nineties. Resources being limited, it spends only 3.8% of its GNP on education.¹⁵ Its' real public expenditure on education actually decreased by 20% between 1996 and 2004.¹⁶ Of the budget allocation to education, about 64% is spent on primary and secondary education, 16% on pre-primary, which is the second biggest sector and about 6% on tertiary. As in the other countries in the region, the largest sector of public expenditure on education is personnel costs, making up over 60% of the budget allocation. Moldova has decentralized more than other countries in the region, with 63% of its funds coming from local budgets, however this leads to inequality in resources for education between richer and poorer districts

Little resources are left over for expenditure increases. Teacher salaries are low compared to the average national wage. In 2005 teachers' average monthly wage as percent of the national average is only 65%. This percentage actually decreased between 1993 and 2005. With such low salaries and

Box 2. Poverty and Education in Moldova

Education in the Republic of Moldova depends on the living standards of the population. Since 1990 to the present, agricultural workers, and employees of the education sector have been among the most affected social categories of the population. The prolonged economic crisis, poverty, unemployment and corruption affected even more the quality of education and the realization of the right to education. Most vulnerable are the families with children. The general poverty rate was higher in rural area than in large cities.

Families with children under the age of 18 make up 60% of poor families and 52% of households. The rate of absolute poverty is 34%, and the level of extreme poverty is 20%. Poverty is more predominant in rural areas – 34,1% against the 24,8% in urban areas.

The share of expenditures for education from the total expenditures of the population is the smallest of all expenditure categories (1,5%), the biggest share representing expenditures for food (44,4%). People from rural areas spend for education only 1,9% of all consumption expenditures, while those in big cities - 4,4 % and those in small towns – 3,1 %.

Families with many children are most affected. Many of them lack a well paid job and/or adequate qualification. Under these circumstances, most of them live under the poverty line and in conditions that are not supportive of early childhood development.

Source: UNICEF Moldova. 2008.

tight expenditures, little resources are left over for scholarships, minority education, supply shortages and high needs students.

Priority Challenges in Moldovan Education

While the Moldovan education system has many challenges ahead, there are some that receive more urgent attention on UNICEF's agenda.

- Access to basic education must be extended for all children.
- Gender equality must be pursued at all levels of education.
- High quality, inclusive education must be made available to all children, especially those of hard-to-reach populations and minority groups.
- Resources for education must be increased, especially those allocated to hard-to-reach groups.

- 1 EFA Global Monitoring Report. 2008.
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