

# Education in the Republic of Moldova

## Context

While the Republic of Moldova has many educational challenges, its effort to improve the quality of and access to early childhood education has yielded notable success. An increased focus on marginalized groups, drop-out rates and basic education enrolment will continue to move the Republic of Moldova's educational system forward.

## Impact of the economic crisis

The global financial crisis has had a significant impact on the Republic of Moldova. Political instability has compounded the economic hardship. These realities have affected the economic and social sectors. The Government of the Republic of Moldova adopted an economic Stabilization and Recovery Plan for 2009–2011. The plan has three major priorities: to stabilize public finances, to reinvigorate economic activity and to ensure efficient and fair social protection for the Moldovan people.

The Republic of Moldova has the third lowest GNP per capita in the CEECIS region, at US\$2,800 (see Figure 1). Throughout the past decade, the Republic of Moldova's annual economic growth has been unstable. The global financial downturn caused the GDP to drop 7.8 per cent during the first half of 2009. Remittances fell by 34.5 per cent, straining social protection and the public budget.

The economic crisis has had a significant impact on the most vulnerable Moldovan citizens. Approximately 26.3 per cent of Moldovans live below the poverty line. Absolute poverty rates have de-



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creased slightly in recent years, going from 30.2 per cent in 2006 to 26.3 per cent in 2009, according to the Moldovan Ministry of Economy. Rural and southern families with three or more children have been most affected by the economic downturn. Child poverty in urban areas is around 14 per cent, but in rural areas it rises to 35 per cent. Unemployment has also increased to 3.1 per cent. The national Gini coefficient is 0.33, which is about average for the CEECIS region. The Republic of Moldova ranks 117 out of 182 countries on the UN Development Programme Human Development Index, with an overall HDI of 0.72.

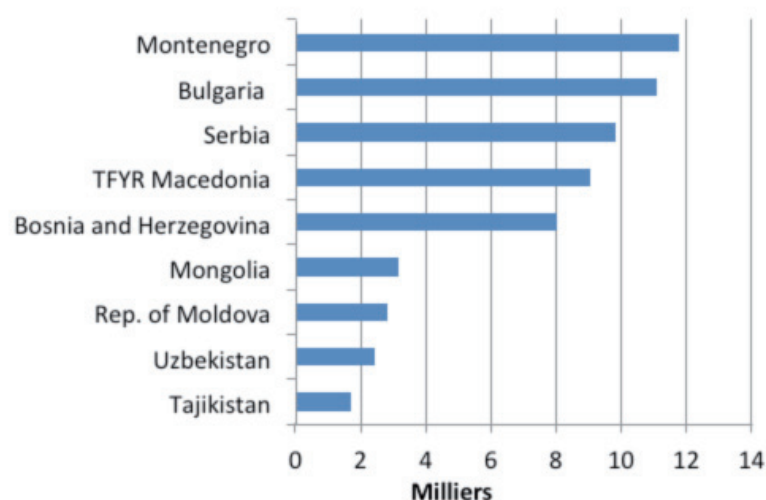
The Republic of Moldova faces several challenges in the social sector, especially with regard to child safety. The government has made efforts to address trafficking, but has not fully complied with the minimum international standards. A greater commitment to punish government officials who are complicit in trafficking is necessary. Some children enlist with traffickers on their own, while others are left alone by parents who leave the country for work or who are themselves trafficked. Many of these children remain with foster parents or in institutional care, which often magnifies the impact of poverty on their lives. The number of children residing in institutions, while decreasing, continues to be one of the highest in the region.

## Education reforms

The government is focusing its reform agenda on increasing access to all educational services and improving quality at all levels.

There have been a series of reform initiatives targeted at priority areas, including:

Figure 1. GNP (PPP) per capita (\$USD) in CEECIS, 2007



Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010

- The government launched a project to improve the secondary school curriculum
- A pilot project started to implement a child-friendly schools model, which will be replicated around the nation
- Policy documents supporting the child-friendly school initiative were developed and implemented
- The Ministry of Education developed the first outline of a consolidated strategy on education and a midterm action plan

While these reforms are initial steps, greater efforts are urgently needed to move the Moldovan education system forward.

### Access

The Republic of Moldova stands as one of the few countries in the CEECIS region judged unlikely to achieve Millennium Development Goal Two (MDG2) – universal primary school completion by 2015. Notwithstanding efforts by the government, Moldovan education faces many challenges with regard to school access, quality and financing.

#### *Early childhood education*

The Republic of Moldova dedicated its Education for All (EFA) Fast-track Initiative (FTI) funds to early childhood development, which has resulted in significant progress in access to preschool education. Net preschool enrolment figures continue to increase, from 70.7 per cent of children ages 3–6 years old in 2005, to 75.5 per cent of children in 2009. This is greatly increasing children's readiness for primary school and sets the stage for positive improvements in learning outcomes. However, a wide disparity remains between rural (66.1 per cent) and urban (91.9 per cent) enrolment.

#### *Basic education*

Primary school enrolment is on the decline. Primary school net enrolment rates (NER) in the Republic of Moldova are the lowest in the CEECIS region and third lowest in Central Asia, after Armenia and Kyrgyz Republic. According to the *Global Monitoring Report 2010*, only 88 per cent of children of primary-school age are enrolled and the net primary intake is 73 per cent. Access to secondary school is also decreasing. At 81 per cent, the Republic of Moldova's secondary NER is the lowest in the region, tied with TFYR Macedonia.

Out-of-school children are estimated to be around 17,000. The Republic of Moldova's tertiary education enrolment (34 per cent) is far below the regional and subregional average and less than half of the average enrolment rate in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

#### *Educational challenges facing youth and adolescents*

Compared to peers in neighbouring nations, Moldovan youth are unique, since high numbers of their parents travel abroad or migrate for work. In



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the past 10 years, one third of the working population has left in search of better-paying jobs. As a result, many adolescents are left without parental care and take on adult responsibilities, such as caring for siblings and the family household.

High youth unemployment rates and minimal economic advantage gained from graduating, further deters youth from finishing schooling. Adolescents are further isolated by their low access to computers, minimal participation in youth activities and limited community involvement. Crime, drugs and alcoholism are common problems among youth, particularly those not in school.

#### *Children affected by emergencies*

Transnistria, a breakaway territory that declared independence from the Republic of Moldova in 1990, continues to experience social unrest. As of 2009, no resolution for the frozen conflict had been reached between the modern Republic of Moldova and the separatist region.

In 2004, separatists raided four schools in Transnistria that taught the Moldovan language using the Latin script (which was aligned to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova) as opposed to Cyrillic script, which is taught in Transnistrian schools. The schools eventually reopened as private institutions before being granted legal status in 2005. As of 2008, threats of persecution of parents who elected Latin-script schooling had not been completely resolved. There are 33 Transnistrian schools that teach using Cyrillic script, but these institutions are believed to use outdated curricula and have limited access to textbooks. Russian-language schools are the only other option.

### Equity

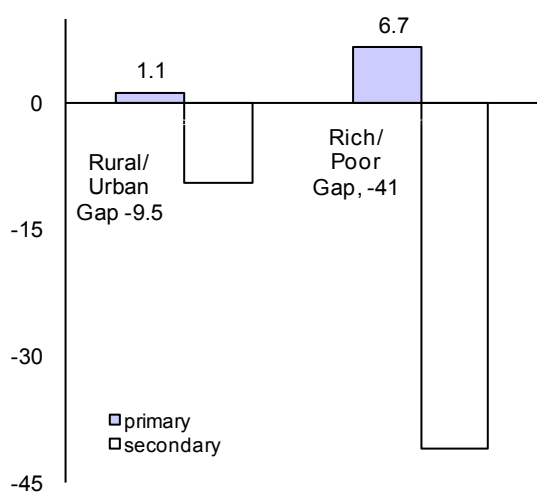
Disaggregating data reveals inequalities between genders, rich and poor, and urban and rural populations in the Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, institutionalized children, boys and girls with disabilities or HIV/AIDS, and Roma continue to be marginalized.

The Republic of Moldova has achieved gender parity in primary school and made significant gains in secondary school. In primary school, the gender

ratio is 0.99; in secondary school, a small gender gap favours girls (1.03) but this is a noted improvement over just five years ago, when boys trailed 7.5 points behind girls.

Attendance gaps between rich/poor and rural/urban students merit attention. Most concerning is the difference in attendance rates between the richest and poorest income groups, which is greatest in primary and secondary school: 6.7 per cent more students from the richest quintile attend primary school than students from the poorest quintile, while 41 per cent more of the richest students attend secondary school than the poorest students. In secondary school the gap is almost seven times that in primary school. This indicates that the poorest children in the country are more likely to drop 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 have an attendance rate that is 9.5 per cent lower than that of urban children (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Absolute percentage point differences of parity gaps in education attendance rates by geographic location and income level**



Source: UNICEF Moldova

#### Children with disabilities

Approximately 1 in every 100 children in the Republic of Moldova has a disability. Officially, these children are to be included in regular schools; in reality, social stereotypes and stigmas restrict their integration and participation in mainstream society. Children with disabilities continue to be predominantly put in institutions (34 per cent), and those who live with families are often kept home or denied access to mainstream schools. Only 10 per cent of families with disabled children are able to send them to specialized kindergarten programmes. Drop-out rates are notably higher among these students and merit immediate attention.

A few municipal governments have teamed up with UNICEF and other NGOs to form schools or centres that aim to mix children with disabilities with their non-disabled peers. For instance, in Chisinau, the Botanica Centre offers rehabilitation programmes, counselling, and educational /vocational activities for all children. There is optimism that more centres such as Botanica will emerge.

#### Roma education

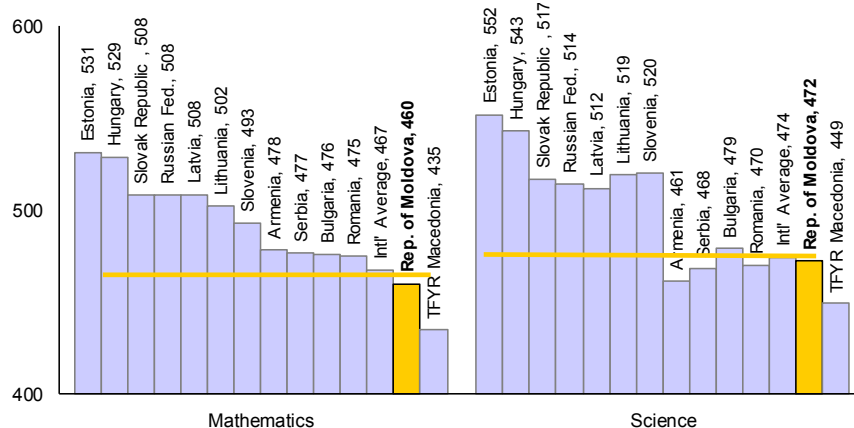
Equity in education is at its worst for some ethnic and linguistic minorities. The Roma population in the Republic of Moldova is comprised of approximately 15,000 people, according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Among this group, poverty is endemic and educational participation at all levels continues to be below the national averages. Ethnic discrimination in schools is one of many reasons this subpopulation is marginalized. One Roma leader stated in a 2007 UNDP report, "If you are Roma, people are not receptive to you just because you are Roma, and because there are stereotypes... takes some time, several years for you to prove you are not bad." Roma children have higher drop-out rates, lower enrolment statistics and higher illiteracy rates than their non-Roma peers.

#### Quality and learning outcomes

The Republic of Moldova took part in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1999 and 2003, and participated in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2001 and 2006. The Republic of Moldova scored second to last in mathematics in the CEECIS region, just above the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; in science, it scored fifth from the bottom. In both science and mathematics, the Republic of Moldova scored well below the international and regional averages. In reading, the Republic of Moldova scored third from last in the region, above the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Romania, and on par with the PIRLS scale average. Over time, between tests, the Republic of Moldova's average scores increased slightly in both reading and science; however, between 1999 and 2003, the average mathematics score of Moldovan students decreased by 9 points (see Figure 3).

These results point to low learning outcomes at the national level. Four per cent of children do not make it to the last year of primary school, and about 5 per cent, most of whom are boys, drop out in secondary school, according to UNICEF Moldova. Yet only 0.1 per cent of children repeat a grade, indicating that children are moving through the system without repeating and without achieving minimal learning outcomes. Teachers earn a low salary, so that even those trained in teaching often seek out other employment or leave the profession after a few years. In some schools, positions have to be filled by retired teachers, since young graduates are not attracted to teaching.

**Figure 3. Trends in international mathematics and science study (TIMSS) 2003 and results in mathematics in the CEECIS Region, Grade 8**



Data collection and the monitoring of educational strategies continues to be questionable. The tracking of students is weak, and gaps remain in the implementation of educational strategies. In 2009, the monitoring of national strategies – particularly the 2008–2011 National Development Strategy – was moved to the State Chancellery. Strengthening the government’s capacity and ensuring data accountability will yield greater validity.

### Moving Moldova’s schools forward

Education in the Republic of Moldova depends on the living standards of the population. From 1990 to the present, agricultural workers and employees of the education sector have been among the most affected by the economic crisis. The recession, poverty, unemployment and corruption affect the quality of education and stifle access to education. Families with many children are most vulnerable. Many of them lack a well-paying job and/or adequate qualification. Under these circumstances, many families live under the poverty line and in conditions that are not supportive of early childhood development.

The current investment in early childhood education and the increasing enrolment suggest potential improvements in child readiness and parental understanding of the benefits of early education. The reduction in institutionalization and new funding available for the poorest families is a start towards reversing trends. A stabilized government that prioritizes national employment growth will reduce parental migration and ultimately contribute to student retention and enrolment in primary and secondary school.

Source: UNICEF Moldova, 2008.

The government launched a reform of the curriculum and related materials. According to an analysis of data from the conventional schools, all mainstream students in primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Moldova now have the textbooks required for the school curricula. Regrettably, children with special educational needs still lack sufficient textbooks.

The state adopted Moldovan as the national language of instruction in 1989. Schools that offer instruction in minority languages such as Russian, Gagauzian and Ukrainian have also emerged.

### Education financing

The Republic of Moldova is a struggling transitional economy. Despite limited resources, it spends 7.6 per cent of its GNP on education. This is a small decrease from 2008, when it spent 8.2 per cent, which was 19.8 per cent of overall government spending. Within the education budget, 57 per cent is spent on primary and secondary education, 18 per cent on pre-primary, and about 18 per cent on university education. The Republic of Moldova has decentralized more than other countries in the region, with 63 per cent of its funds coming from local budgets; however this leads to inequality in resources for education between rich and poor districts.

Teacher salaries are low compared to the average national wage. As of 2009, teachers’ average monthly salaries were 183.71 USD (77.7 per cent of the national average salary). This is a notable increase from 2005, when teacher salaries were only 65 per cent of the national average salary. With low salaries and tight spending, few resources are left over for expenditure increases in scholarships, minority education, addressing supply shortages and providing support for 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
- High quality, inclusive education must be made available to all children, especially those of hard-to-reach populations and minority groups
- Resources must be used more efficiently to ensure they reach marginalized groups
- Greater efforts are required to increase enrolment and reduce the number of school dropouts, especially at the secondary level