

# Education in Romania

## Context

### *Impact of the economic crisis*

The global financial crisis and political instability resulted in budgetary restraints, programme delays and the postponement of a number of national policies and projects in Romania. Ending nearly a decade of rapid growth, Romania's GDP declined by 7.2 per cent in 2009. The country's per capita GNP (PPP) is US\$14,460.

Despite these economic realities, Romania remains a middle-income country. UNDP ranks Romania 63 out of 182 countries on the Human Development Index, with a value of 0.837. The government reduced poverty during the economic boom, but poverty is once again on the rise. For many Romanian families, poverty is an ongoing challenge. Young people are most vulnerable, with 24.7 per cent of children (0–15 years) and 20.4 per cent of young adults (16–24 years) living in poverty. Rural poverty continues to be the major concern: Children in rural areas are three times more likely to be in poverty. With the downturn of the economy, however, urban poverty has begun to rise at a fast pace as well. Youth unemployment is a major challenge in the country. As of 2005, 21 per cent of young people were unemployed, compared to 7.1 per cent of the general population. The lack of job opportunities is causing income inequality to rise for the next generation. Romania's Gini coefficient (0.315), a measure of inequality, is one of the highest in the region.

Reversing the trend of the 1960s and 1970s – when Romania's child population was one of the largest in Europe – the number of Romanian children is dramatically decreasing, from about 6.6 million children below 18 years of age in 1990 to about 4.4 million in 2005; experts predict this figure may fall to 3.7 million by 2015. The infant and under-five mortality rates are still far above those found in



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the European Union and all other Central and Eastern European countries.

### *EU status*

As an EU member state since 2007, Romania has made progress toward achieving universal primary school completion and has taken strides toward achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals. However, there is still more work to be done, which is not made easier by the economic downturn.

### Education reform

Romania has made enormous efforts towards improving education for all its children. The important reforms include:

- In 2008, at the initiative of the president, a National Pact on Education was signed by all parties represented in the parliament in order to boost sustainable reform. It included eight objectives: the modernization of the education system by 2013; increasing the portion of GDP spent on education to 6 per cent; declaring early education a national asset; the decentralization of education finances, curriculum and human re-

## Quick Facts about education in Romania

Total population	21.4 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education	6%
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2007 [Gender Parity Index (GPI) (girls/boys)]	71% (1.02)
Net enrolment in primary school, 2007 (GPI)	94% (1.00)
Net enrolment in secondary school, 2007 (GPI)	73% (0.97)
Gross enrolment in tertiary education, 2007 (GPI)	58% (1.33)
Student/teacher Ratio, 2007	17:1
Out-of-school children (per cent girls)	30,000 (46%)
PISA score, mathematics, reading, science(regional rank/17)	415 (14), 396 (14), 418 (14)

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010; Innocenti Research Centre

sources; the adoption of a 'funding follows the student' plan; a charter of rights in education; establishing education priority areas; and an extension of the lifelong education base (promoting lifelong learning) to 2013.

- The Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport (MoERYS), in partnership with UNICEF, developed a set of Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) to monitor and expand early childhood programs. The MoERYS has subsequently adopted the ELDS and developed a curriculum for early education based on them.
- The MoERYS is prioritizing the development of a National Strategy on Parenting and is developing a General Strategy for Mainstreaming Children with Disabilities in the Educational System.
- In 2011, as a result of the new education law, compulsory education was extended to 10 years (one preparatory year, four years of primary education, and five years of lower secondary education).

### Access

There is relatively good access to education in Romania. However, efforts to increase Roma children's access to education at all levels must remain an urgent priority.

#### Early childhood education

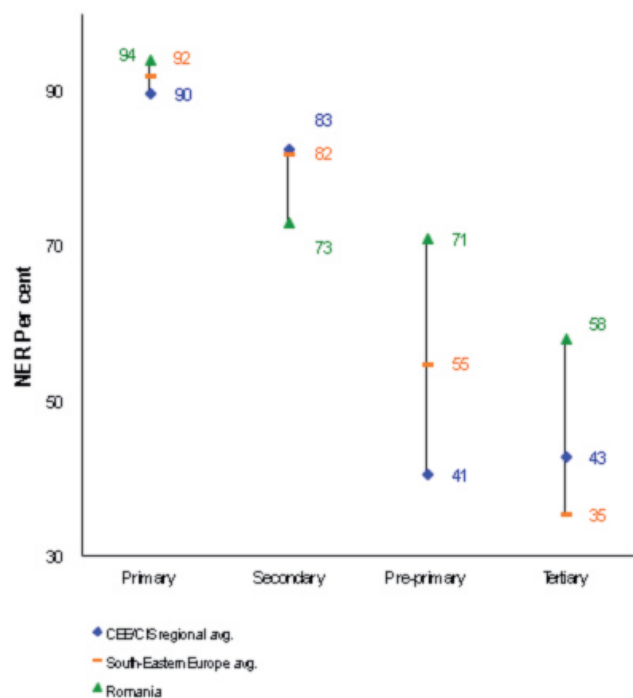
Preschool enrolment rates for children 3 to 6 years old have continued to increase in recent years. As of 2007, the preschool net enrolment rate (NER) in Romania was 71 per cent. The number of firstgraders who attended preschool education programming in 2007 was 91.2 per cent, a notable increase over 85.5 per cent in 2001. However, within disadvantaged communities, the preschool NER is predicted to be significantly lower.

Further improvements are still being made to early childhood education. An early childhood education curriculum and best-practice guide for early learners has been produced in Romania. Seven in-service training modules for a national kindergarten-based training programme have also been established. The model includes master mentors and modules that target different student populations.

Primary net enrolment rates are 94 per cent, which is on par with regional and subregional averages. The gross enrolment rate in primary school, however, reveals a slight decline from 2003, when it was 10.9 per cent. The gross enrolment rate is currently 97.8 per cent. Drop-out rates are also increasing. In 2003, 8.1 per cent of primary school students dropped out; by 2007, the primary school drop-out rate increased to 9.8 per cent.

The secondary school NER is declining in Romania, falling from 80 per cent in 2005 to 73 per cent in 2007. This is the lowest NER in Central and South-Eastern Europe (see Figure 1). Since the global financial crisis, the government has delayed the payment of subsidies for transportation of high school students to schools in rural areas.

**Figure 1. Education net enrolment rates (NER) in Romania, South-Eastern Europe and the CEE/CIS Region**



As a result, student attendance in rural areas has dropped. There are an estimated 30,000 out-of-school children in Romania.

#### Educational challenges facing adolescents and youth

Since 2008, the Government of Romania has prioritized new policies to focus on youth. Efforts include improving the treatment of adolescents, monitoring educational access, incorporating healthy lifestyle education courses into schools and combating organized crime. Despite these improvements, as child and youth poverty rates rise, trafficking and child labour remain ongoing problems. Violence and drugs, both within schools and among the general youth population, are also a concern.

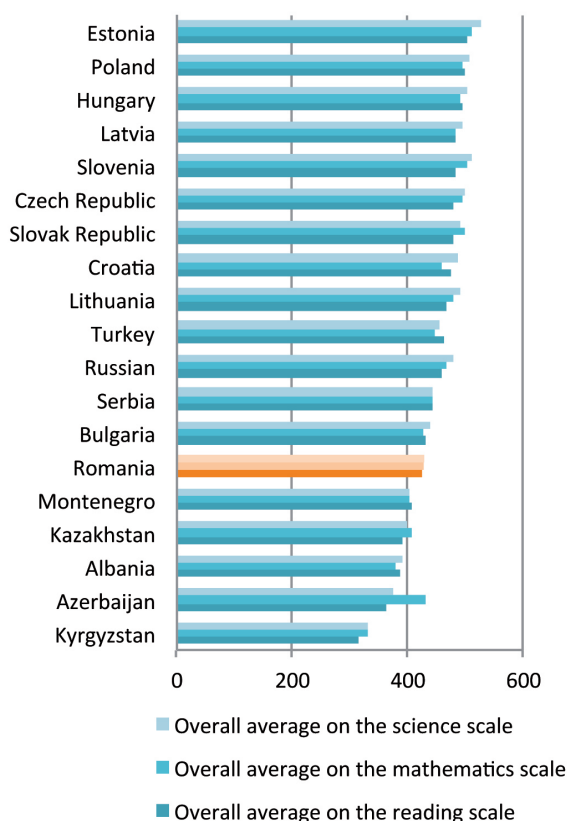
Increasing numbers of adolescents are living and working on the streets. Also, secondary education enrolment is declining, suggesting that youth are more attracted to employment than to the long-term benefit of continuing their education. Improving the curriculum to better connect learning to real-life applications and monitoring the quality of education at the secondary level is necessary to increase retention.

### Equity

Romania's biggest challenge is to reduce subnational inequities and extend access to those who are currently marginalized at all levels. The government and the MoERYS are aware of the gaps and are working to reduce inequities in schools, but this is a major task and gaps persist.

The equity gaps mirror those in other transition countries. The rural/urban gap in educational

**Figure 2. Comparing performance in reading, mathematics and science on PISA 2009**



access and quality is a growing feature of Romania’s education system, with children from remote areas having lower access to education, especially in pre-primary and secondary education.

#### Roma education

Romania has the largest Roma population in the CEECIS region, with an estimated 2 million Roma, comprising about 10 per cent of the country’s total population. Roma enrolment and completion rates are far below the national average for non-Roma children. In primary school, only an estimated 40 per cent of Roma children enrol, compared with the national average of 93 per cent. Additionally, only about 30 per cent of those Roma who enrol complete primary school. By secondary school, enrolment estimates drop to about 25 per cent.

Low enrolment rates among the Roma are further exacerbated by the poor quality of segregated schools. When Roma are sent to separate schools, they often receive a poorer quality education than the non-Roma population. ‘Roma school’ buildings are older and more overcrowded than other schools, and often lack a library. Such schools also have fewer qualified teachers and significantly higher teacher transfer rates, especially in grades one through four. According to UNICEF Romania, 67 per cent of Roma schools had a deficit of qualified teachers; among schools with half or more Roma students, the deficit was over 80 per cent. Romania is one of only two nations participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion Initiative that reported official data on its progress monitoring and evaluating Roma education.

#### Children with disabilities

As a result of new policies, children with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages (DDD) have rapidly been integrated into Romania’s mainstream schools. The transfer between specialized and mainstream schools was well intended, but the speed of the transition caused challenges, as teachers felt unprepared and students felt ostracized. Boarding schools were transformed into ‘placement centres’ and institutionalized children were enrolled in public schools overnight. Drop-out rates of DDD students increased. Follow-up on this transition is still in process.

#### School quality and learning outcomes

As in other transition countries, educational quality is a major challenge facing policymakers, especially with growing pressure to match the learning standards of other EU countries. Romania has taken part in all three international learning assessments – TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS. Results show that Romania lags behind the majority of countries in the region and falls within the bottom quartile of all countries participating in the test (see Figure 2).

On TIMSS 2003, Romania’s performance in the region was similar: it ranked fourth to last in mathematics out of participating CEECIS countries (see Figure 3). However, Romania scored just below the international average, ranking 27<sup>th</sup> out of 46 participating countries. In mathematics, Romania’s performance declined between 1999 and 2003. In science, Romania ranked third to last in the CEECIS region, scoring just ahead of the Republic of Moldova and the former

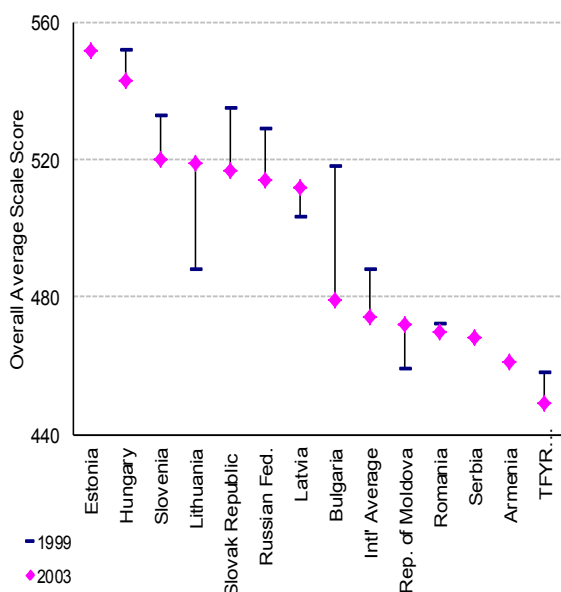
#### Romania’s commitment to Roma

The Government of Romania was a leading signatory of the Decade of Roma Inclusion and has carried out a Statistical Baseline for Monitoring Roma Inclusion in cooperation with the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program. The government is in the process of creating a more coherent and unified Roma inclusion strategy.

According to UNICEF Romania, “There are a number of social, economic, cultural and systemic causes resulting in non-enrolment, non-attendance and school drop-out rates among Roma children. Poverty and discrimination are two of the most important barriers to access for Roma children. Some child-related causes include: precarious health conditions, gender-based differences (according to which girls get married early, and their social role is to raise children and take care of the family) and poor self image. The combination of these factors leads to high drop-out rates among Roma children. Roma children who have dropped out report having negative school experiences, which serve to exacerbate drop-out rates.”

Source: Roma Children Participation in Education, 2002, cited in UNICEF Romania Web site.

**Figure 3. Distribution of overall science achievement on TIMSS, 1999–2003, grade 8**



Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In science, Romania placed just above the international average. Its performance in science stayed relatively stable over time, increasing slightly (see Figure 4).

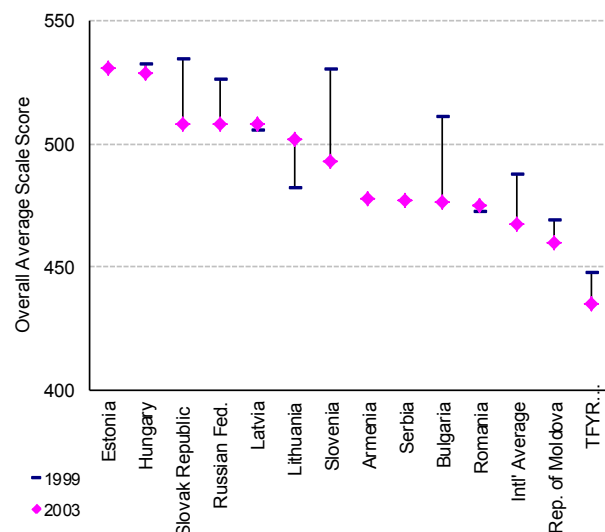
Results from all three tests show that Romania will require much work to improve learning outcomes to be on par with Central and Western Europe.

On PISA 2009, Romania scored 14<sup>th</sup> out of 19 countries from the region in reading, mathematics and science, which is not a significant change from its ranking in 2006. Romania ranked 59<sup>th</sup> out of the 75 countries participating in PISA.



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**Figure 4. Distribution of overall mathematics achievement on TIMSS, 1999–2001, grade 8**



Proxy indicators confirm that education quality in Romania needs greater attention. Drop-out rates are increasing in primary school, and are higher still in secondary school. About 9.4 per cent of students dropout before grade five, the majority of whom dropout after the first grade. Another 3 per cent do not complete primary school. Poor teacher training and low salaries contribute to the quality and motivation of educators.

School violence is a formidable threat to students' safety in Romanian schools. Incidental findings indicate a worrying trend of violence in schools, with perpetrators being either teachers or other children. Research also indicates the presence of sexual abuse and drugs in schools.

#### Education financing

Following the provisions of the National Pact on Education, the Government of Romania has since 2008 annually allocated 6 per cent of its GDP to education.

#### Education priorities in Romania

While many educational challenges remain for Romania, its priorities lie in the following initiatives:

- To continue developments in early childhood education
- To improve education coverage for Roma children at all levels of schooling
- To decrease the number of dropouts at the secondary school level, especially among Roma children
- To enhance the learning outcomes of its primary and secondary school students
- To raise education standards in Romania to meet those laid out in the EU's Lisbon Strategy