



MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI ȘI TINERETULUI
AL REPUBLICII MOLDOVA



Baseline Study
on Basic Education in the Republic of Moldova
from the perspective of Child-Friendly Schools

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AL REPUBLICII MOLDOVA**

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen years, the Moldovan educational system has undergone a number of reforms intended to modernize and democratize education, as well as to establish the appropriate conditions for making full use of each child's potential, regardless of their family's material standing, place of residence, ethnicity, spoken language, or religious beliefs. The major intervention areas of the reform were the doctrine of the educational system, the educational system structure, the written curriculum, taught curriculum and learned curriculum, evaluation concepts and methods, and management and financing of education.

To what extent have these reforms made school attractive to children and opened up new horizons for them? Is the impact of these reforms an essential or rather an image-related one? Are the changes that occurred in the educational system irreversible? Do these changes really guarantee social equity and inclusion? Do the changes in the educational system over the past fifteen years really provide equal chances to all children? Do the teaching, learning and evaluation methods meet the requirements of a modern education? Are the knowledge and skills of graduates of the educational system consistent with the personal aspirations of each child and the requirements of a constantly changing modern society?

The further reformation of the educational system in order to ensure the right of every child to a quality education implies a relevant and truthful evaluation of education from the perspective of requirements set out for child-friendly schools. Promoted at the international level, the concept of the child-friendly school focuses on five dimensions: inclusion and equity; efficiency of learning; safety, protection and health of pupils; gender equality; and involvement of pupils, families and communities in the life of the school.

The study's goal is to evaluate primary and lower secondary education in the Republic of Moldova in terms of the five dimensions of child-friendly schools and formulate recommendations for potential public policies in the area of education, oriented towards promoting and expanding this type of schools in our country.

The study aims to answer the following questions: What is the state of education in Moldova and what are its strengths and weaknesses? To what extent do Moldovan schools meet the requirements set out for child-friendly schools? What else must be done, both at central and local levels, for our schools to become friendly to all the children in this country?

Official documents on educational policies, analytical studies developed by national and international experts, data from educational institutions' mapping system and the results of sociological surveys were used during the evaluation process. The evaluation criteria used in this study are relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the educational system. The study included primary and secondary education, both in the conventional schools and those for children with special educational needs.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Basic education was evaluated on the basis of regulatory and legislative acts that regulate the functioning of the educational system: the policy documents developed by the central public authorities; the implementation reports of the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper; reports on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the Republic of Moldova; progress reports of the line ministry; analytical studies developed by experts in this area; and the statistical data published both by the line ministries and the National Bureau of Statistics. The data provided by the Educational Institutions Mapping System and the results of the national Representative Survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of Moldova' had an essential role in the development of this study.

The evaluation criteria were established in accordance with the OECD-DAC evaluation methodology: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

The system's relevance was analyzed by confronting the educational needs of students and parents with the opportunities provided by the educational system and by establishing the level of compliance between the results of education and the main expectations of all the parties involved in the training process: pupils, parents, teaching and managerial staff, and decision makers.

The system's effectiveness was analyzed based on data related to the financing of educational institutions, breakdown of expenditures by categories, data on the endowment of educational entities and the balance between the changes from the primary and secondary education and the expenditures made.

The efficiency of primary and secondary education was examined on the basis of the data on training outputs, assessed at national and international levels and the changes that occurred as a result of the reformation of the education system. The indicators used in departmental statistics (Ministry of Education and Youth, Ministry of Economy and Trade, Ministry of Finance), national statistics (National Bureau of Statistics) and the international statistics (UNICEF, UNESCO, OECD, WB) were applied.

The impact of education system reforms was analyzed based on the data related to the changes that occurred in primary and secondary education: gross and net enrolment rates, school abandonment and absenteeism, children's access to primary and secondary education, staffing and the level of professional qualification of the teaching staff, and the availability of textbooks and didactic materials, etc. in the schools.

The sustainability of reforms was examined by identifying the factors that would ensure the sustainability of positive outputs and, at the same time, the expansion of these results at the nation-wide level of the educational system.

MAPPING OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In order to collect information on basic education in the Republic of Moldova, data was collected with the support of the Mapping System of the Ministry of Education and Youth. The data were organized in three categories: endowment, staff and pupils.

The endowment category includes 85 indicators that describe the school facilities (year of construction, area, conveniences, etc.); the adjacent area; the condition and endowment level of laboratories; the number of computers; the number of seats in classrooms; the condition of sports halls, if any; the possibility to create facilities for the access of physically disabled children; the functioning of health offices; the condition of canteens, etc.

The staff category includes 85 indicators that describe the structure of teaching and technical staff of each school: the number of employees; distribution by gender and age categories; qualification of the teaching staff; the subjects taught, etc.

The pupils category includes 105 indicators that depict the structure of the school-aged population in each educational entity: total number of pupils; pupils' number by forms; the number of girls and boys in each form; the ethnicity of pupils and teaching language; enrolment, absenteeism and school abandonment, etc.

In total, 1,505 educational institutions, including residential educational institutions, were mapped.

THE QUANTITATIVE SOCIOLOGIC SURVEY

The quantitative component of the study comprised:

- a public opinion poll among teaching staff, with a sample size of 400 people;
- a public opinion poll among the headmasters of educational entities, with a sample size of 84 people;
- a public opinion poll among pupils, with a sample size of 576 people;
- a public opinion poll among parents, with a size of sample of 521 people.

Selection of teaching staff In the absence of centralized statistical data on the number of teaching staff, disaggregated by place of residence and educational levels, the combined data on the number of students and educational institutions were used for the sample stratification.

The primary distribution by educational levels was performed proportionally to the number of pupils. The distribution by place of residence of the number of interviews for each educational level was performed proportionally to the distribution of schools by places of residence.

The schools were selected randomly, the sample being adjusted to ensure a uniform geographical coverage of territorial-administrative units. The participants in the sociological survey were selected randomly from the list of teaching staff (separate lists according to educational stages) using a statistical step obtained by dividing the total number of people from the list by the number of interviews to be held with teachers of this educational level.

Selection of headmasters As a larger number of schools was needed than those included in the sample for the teaching staff, all the previous schools were incorporated in the sample and the

additional number of schools was supplemented through a random selection. The sample was adapted so as to ensure uniform geographical coverage of the territorial-administrative units.

Selection of pupils The survey of pupils was carried out in educational institutions that offer secondary education. The students of 6th-9th forms were interviewed in each school. The total number of interviews was distributed equally between forms. The students were selected randomly, based on the list contained in the school registers.

Selection of parents The quantitative research was carried out on a stratified, probabilistic and multistage sample. The stratification criteria were the 13 geographical regions (the previous counties), the place of residence, and the size of localities. In order to select the households with school-aged children the screening procedure was applied. In this method, the households selected in accordance with the statistical step, but without school-aged children, were registered by the operator in the route sheet as 'non-contacted households'. Therefore, school authorities and teaching staff had no involvement in the selection of children and did not know that they were interviewed.

THE QUALITATIVE SOCIOLOGIC SURVEY

The qualitative component of the study comprised:

- in-depth interviews with the key people (Mayors, heads of Raion Education Divisions, headmasters), 15 interviews in total;
- focus groups with pupils, 32 groups in total.

When selecting the educational institutions where focus groups were held, the following criteria were taken into account: the geographical distribution (centre, north, south), the living area (urban, rural), the type of school (secondary or high school). The schools were selected randomly.

Pupils in 6th-9th and 12th forms were selected for discussions. On average, eight-ten pupils participated in each group discussion. The pupils were selected according to the number of groups for each form, ensuring the participation of pupils from each group. The students were selected from the student register, using a statistical step. In the schools with a small number of pupils and fewer than three classes, the pupils from the 6th-7th forms and 8th-9th forms respectively were merged into a single group and then pupils were selected in accordance with the same principles.

The detailed methodology of the sociological studies is presented in the *Annex*.

DIMENSION 1: INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN THE SCHOOL

1.1. ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

APPROACHES IN TERMS OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Social equity and access to quality education in the Republic of Moldova are quite significant challenges. The key for successful, efficient implementation of educational policies lies in settling these two major issues: social equity and access to quality education. These two issues are interrelated: social equity is part of guaranteed access to quality education, while quality education is available only by respecting the social equity principle.

From the point of view of education, when education is treated as a public asset the social equity issue is addressed in terms of access to education and special educational services that create the opportunities to ensure that the entire population of pupils has access to and benefits from the same curriculum and the same extracurricular activities. The social equity concept influences and changes the legal, pedagogical and social basis of the educational system.

Generally, access to education is influenced in the medium and long term by the social and economic situation of pupils and parents, expressed in:

- State education policies;
- standard of living and quality of life;
- demographic evolution, immigration and emigration;
- employment and issues related to unemployment;
- issues from education, culture and health.

The official documents of the Republic of Moldova, where the issues of the educational system are regulated, fully comply with the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Concordant with international documents, the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova in Article 35 asserts the right to education and sets out the ways to enforce this right. The Law on Education in the Republic of Moldova, adopted in 1995, defines the State education policy and regulates the organization and functioning of the educational system.

The educational principles are formulated in Article 4. In accordance with the declared principles, the state educational policy "is based on the principles of humanization, accessibility, adjustment, creativity and diversity. The education is democratic and humanistic, open and flexible, formative and developing and is based on national and universal cultural values. The State education is secular and free from ideological and Party, political, racial and national discrimination. The State

education is free.” Articles 4 and 5, laying down the requirements towards the content of education, form the legal framework of a quality education.

Article 6 from the Law on Education guarantees each individual’s right to education, regardless of nationality, sex, age, social status and origin, political or religious affiliation and criminal record. At the same time, the State commits itself to ensure equal chances of access to State institutions of high, vocational, specialized secondary and higher education, depending on skills and capacities.

The policy of ensuring general access to education, stipulated in the Constitution and the Law on Education, is expressed in various relevant laws and regulations. Article 13 “Equal Access to Education” of the Law on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Men and Women from the Chapter IV “Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Men and Women to Education and Health” stipulates that educational institutions shall ensure gender equality a) through access to education and/or training; b) during the educational and/or training process, including during the evaluation of the acquired knowledge; c) during didactic and scientific-didactic activity; d) through the development of didactic materials and curricula in accordance with the gender equality principle, by including gender education in the educational system; f) through education of girls and boys in the spirit of partnership and mutual respect. (2) Educational institutions cannot establish admission principles based on direct or indirect restrictions for gender reasons, except for the situations stipulated herein.

Point (2) of Article 6, Chapter III “Prevention Activities in Underprivileged Groups” from the Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention provides for equal rights for children and young people affected by HIV/AIDS to education and prevention programs: “The children and young people affected by HIV/AIDS have rights equal to their fellows, benefit from legal and social assistance, access to education and prevention programs, as well as to the treatment and care services required due to their status”.

The access to quality education is promoted in the following policy documents, implemented in the educational system:

- The Moldovan Educational System Modernization Program (Government Decision No. 863 dated 16 August 2005);
- “Education for Everybody” National Strategy (Government Decision No. 410 as of 2003) and the respective Actions Plan (Government Decision No. 527 as of 21. 05. 2004);
- “SALT” Program;
- Youth Strategy (Government Decision No. 1541 as of 22. 12. 2003).

The 2008–2011 National Development Strategy, adopted in December 2007 by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, stipulates the improvement of the quality of education and increased access as shown by the indicators of access to education, developed by international bodies.

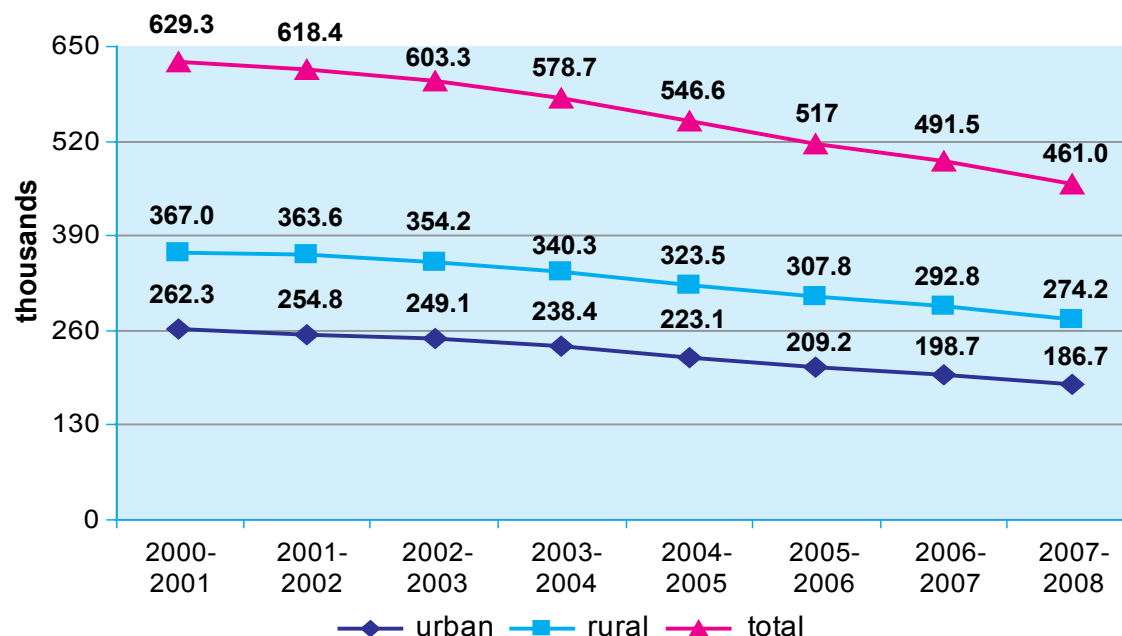
The analysis of the legal framework and structure of pre-university studies reveals the existence of political, legal and structural preconditions for quality education and access of every child to quality education.

THE EVOLUTION IN THE NUMBER OF PUPILS AND ENROLMENT RATES

Nowadays, the pre-university educational institutions network (except for the school - kindergartens and evening schools) counts 461,000 pupils. If compared with the 2000-2001 academic year, the school-age population has decreased by 168,300 students or 26.7 per cent; in rural areas by 92,800 or 25.3 per cent and in urban areas by 75,600 or 28.8 per cent (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1.

The evolution in the number of pupils in general primary and secondary education (except for the school-kindergartens and evening schools)



Source: 'The Report of the Division for Policy Analysis', Monitoring and Evaluation, Ministry of Education and Youth, 2007

Over the last eight academic years a significant decrease in the school-age population is noted; primary school enrolment decreased by 33,725 pupils or 35.6 per cent and secondary schools by 86,642 pupils or 26.3 per cent. The number of pupils in the 10th-12th forms have increased by 1,959 or 12 per cent. During the last eight years the share of pupils from primary, lower secondary and general secondary school has decreased and the share of high school pupils has increased.

The drop in the number of children in the country has led to the reduction of average number of pupils in a class. During the 2007-2008 academic year, in those 1,534 pre-university educational institutions (except for the kindergartens and evening schools), the average number of pupils in a class decreased to 19 pupils, compared to 22 pupils in the 2004-2005 academic year. In urban areas, the average class size was 22 pupils and in rural areas 18 pupils. There are many classes consisting of only 8-15 pupils.

Respectively, the number of pupils per teacher has diminished: on average, from a student/teacher ratio of 15:1 in the 2001-2002 academic year down to a student/teacher ratio of 12:1 in the 2007-2008 academic year. In terms of educational stages the situation is the following: 16 pupils in forms 1-4, 12 pupils in forms 5-9, and 14 pupils in forms 10-11(12).

The school-age population is also changing from the demographic point of view. In four years the school-age population of the 5th form will diminish by about 8,565 pupils or by 16.7 per cent, while in nine years the school-age population of the 9th form will decrease by about 14,782 pupils or 28.8 per cent in comparison with the current academic year.

The decrease in the number of pupils has led to issues concerning the capacities of educational institutions. The data of the Division for Policy Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation of MEY shows that 12,591 pupils study in 116 schools with populations of up to 100 pupils (on the average, 14 pupils in a class) and a total capacity of 30,758 places; 56,355 pupils study in 414 schools with a population from 101 to 200 pupils (on the average, 18 pupils in a class) and a total capacity of these institutions, taken as a whole, of 115,501 places. Currently the pre-university educational institutions have 730,198 places, though the total number of pupils attending is 491,482. These institutions are only operating at 67.3 per cent capacity. In about one third of raions, this level falls under 60 per cent and in Donduseni and Ocnita raions the levels are 45.0 per cent and 50.1 per cent, respectively. As a result, about one third of school capacities remain unused.

Thus, the statistical analysis of the school networks reveals certain issues related to the access to quality pre-university education. At first sight, the decrease in the number of pupils seems to improve the situation of those remaining. But the financing per pupil, approved by the Ministry of Finance, causes very serious problems related to the maintenance of schools and related facilities, employment of teaching staff and the opening of new classes. The conclusion in this respect of the Division for Policy Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation is unequivocal: "During the last seven years the school-age population decreased by 22 per cent and brought about an essential downfall in the reasonable use of the educational facilities and areas, educational institutions being used at only 67.3 per cent capacity". Localities with a small number of inhabitants face the risk of school closures, and in cases where there are an insufficient number of pupils to create two classes, only one overcrowded class is established or the alternative of mixed classes is adopted, with neither solution improving the situation.

An indicator of access to quality education is the enrolment rate in pre-school institutions. The Report of the Division for Policy Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation of MEY does not contain data on the pre-school system. However, during the development of the 2008-2011 National Development Plan statistical research was carried out and issues were identified. Limited access to pre-school education was identified; the enrolment rate in pre-school institutions being 55.37 per cent for children aged 1-7 years and 85 per cent for children aged five-seven years. A lack of pre-school institutions was found in 270 localities, and in most rural localities the school facilities are in need of repairs and there are not enough educational supplies.

The number of extra-school institutions has decreased substantially (by 65 units or 46.4 per cent if compared to 1992 figures) and the number of children involved in their activities diminished accordingly. Sports schools, private clubs, and various hobby groups in private schools financed by parents have appeared in urban localities as alternatives. In villages, alternatives to extracurricular activities do not exist, which contributes to the increase in the number of children at risk and the threat of increase in the school dropout rate.

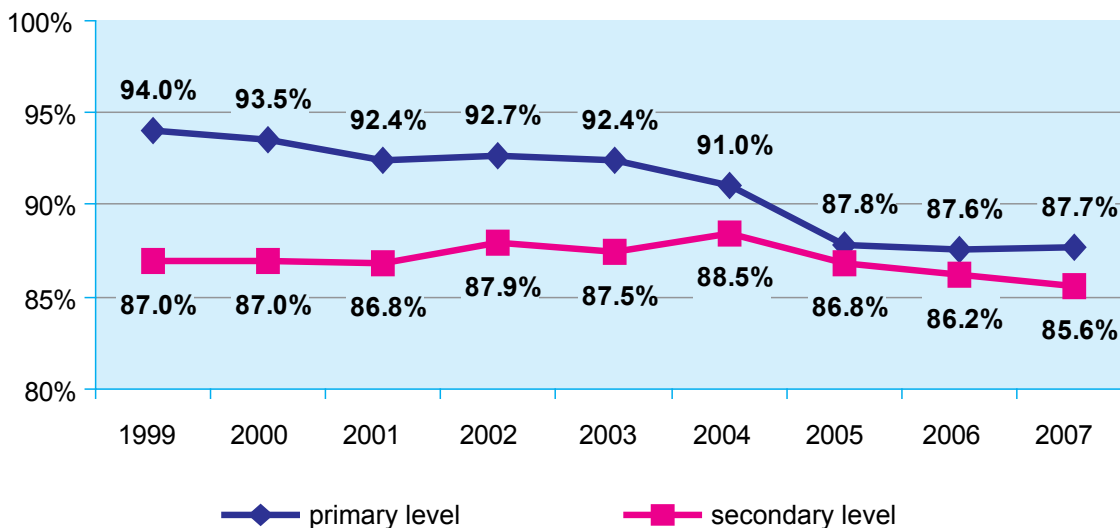
Analysis of the development of the net enrolment rate in primary education (*Figure 2*) shows a descendent trend during 1999-2006. Enrolment in primary classes declined during the reference period by 6.4 per cent. From 1999-2004 the enrolment rate in secondary education institutions increased, but in 2006 this rate diminished from 86.2 per cent by 2.3 percentage points in comparison with 2004.

A similar trend is registered as regards the gross enrolment rate, which during 2004-2006 manifested a constant decreasing trend (*Figure 2*). Thus, during these years the gross enrolment

rate in primary education fell from 97.9 per cent down to 94.4 per cent, while the gross enrolment rate in lower secondary education fell from 88.5 per cent to 86.2 per cent. Simultaneously, significant discrepancies can be noticed between the number of children graduating from the primary school and the number of children enrolling in the secondary school.

Figure 2.

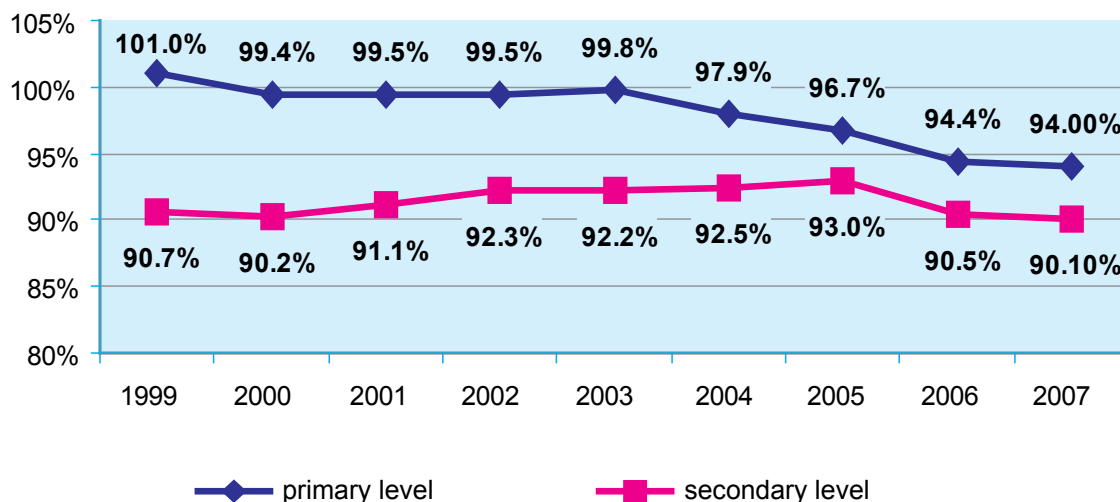
Evolution of the net enrolment rate



Source: 'Children of Moldova'. The National Bureau of Statistics, 2008; Ministry of Education and Youth, 2008

Figure 3.

Evolution of the gross enrolment rate



Source: 'Children of Moldova'. National Bureau of Statistics, 2008; Ministry of Education and Youth, 2008

According to annual reports provided by the Ministry of Education and Youth, the number of non-enrolled children has significantly decreased: from 3,980 in the 2000/2001 academic year down to 28 children in 2007/2008 academic year. The number of children that abandoned school in the last two years decreased as well: from 438 in the 2006/2007 academic year down to 28 children

in the 2007/2008 academic year. We mention that these figures do not correlate with the relative low enrolment rates in primary and secondary education, a fact that indicates the lack of efficient mechanisms for detecting and preventing non-enrolment and school abandonment.

Obviously, lacking such a mechanism, a significant number of children still remain unenrolled, failing to exercise their right to education offered by the political and legal documents in the area of education.

1.2. THE MATERIAL STANDING OF THE POPULATION AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON THE POPULATION

Education in the Republic of Moldova, including access to education, is indissolubly related to living standards. Since 1990 the most affected social categories were the people employed in agriculture and education. The long economic crisis, poverty, unemployment and corruption have deeply affected the quality of education and whether people exercise their right to education. The most vulnerable families in the Republic of Moldova are families with children, which are most affected by poverty. The recent data on poverty are not at all encouraging and the situation continues to worsen.

Thus, according to the data of the National Development Strategy, approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova in December 2007, in 2005 the poverty rate rose for the first time since 1999. This regression sets the risk of absolute poverty at the level registered in 2003 and the risk of extreme poverty above this year's level. In 2005 every third Moldovan citizen (29 per cent) lived in absolute poverty, estimated through the comparison of consumption expenditures per adult equivalent to the absolute poverty threshold (MDL 353.87). Every sixth citizen (16 per cent) lives in extreme poverty (comparing the consumption expenditures per adult equivalent to the poverty threshold based on food consumption (MDL 278.52)). If comparing 2005 with 2004 it can be noted that the share of people whose consumption per adult equivalent is lower than both the absolute poverty threshold and the relative poverty threshold rose by about three percentage points. This increase is mostly due to the increase in the poverty rate in rural areas.

The statistical research shows that the general poverty rate is higher in rural areas than in large towns. In 2005, the risk of poverty in rural areas was six times higher than in large towns (Chisinau and Balti) and two percentage points higher than in small towns.

The access to quality education in the existing conditions of the Republic of Moldova depends in most cases upon the number of children in the family. The poverty risk goes up with the increase in the number of household members, from small households to those with five and more members. Persons living in large households (five or more members) represent 17 per cent of the total of population, while these households represent 25 per cent of poor households. People living in smaller households have a lower share among the poor than the national average. One-person households make up the lowest share (nine per cent) of poor households, and two-person households have a poverty rate of 23 per cent. The higher rates of absolute poverty are recorded in cases of households with four members (34 per cent), five members (38 per cent), and six or more members (57per cent).

It is important to mention that families with children under 18 years of age, i.e. school-aged children, together with other households with children under 18 years of age, represent 60 per cent of the number of poor households and 52 per cent of the total number of households, having a level of absolute poverty rate of 34 per cent on average and the extreme poverty level of 20 per cent.

According to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, made public at the end of 2007, in 2006 the total poverty threshold was MDL 747, and the extreme poverty threshold MDL 404. The total poverty rate was 30.2 per cent and the extreme poverty rate 4.5 per cent. Regrettably, this data cannot be compared with the 2005 data because the computation methodology was changed. Nevertheless, we can firmly assert that poverty predominates mostly in rural areas (34.1 per cent of households compared with 24.8 per cent in urban areas) and the poorest are:

- people living in large households (five and more persons), with a poverty rate of 39 per cent;
- people living in households with three or more children, with a poverty rate of 48 per cent;
- people living in households with three or more children, and with people of different generations, with a poverty rate of 35 per cent;
- households consisting of farmers and pensioners, with a poverty rate of 42 per cent.

Education expenditures are the lowest among all expenditure categories (1.5 per cent); expenditures for foodstuffs have the largest share (44.4 per cent). Rural inhabitants spend only 1.9 per cent of their total consumption expenditures on education, while the inhabitants of large towns spent 4.4 per cent and those of small towns spent 3.1 per cent.

At the same time, according to the data provided by the Ministry of Economy and Trade, in 2006 the volume of expenditures on education varied significantly between quintiles and place of residence. Thus, wealthy families spend about four times more on these services than poor families and people living in cities spend about 2.7 times more than people living in villages. But if the analysis focuses on the expenditures of families from the lower quintile it is evident that foodstuffs, housing and public utilities take the largest share of the family budget (about 73 per cent) with expenditures on education representing only 0.4 per cent. This data shows once more the limited possibilities of poor families to afford to keep their children within the educational system.

Families with many children face the greatest difficulties. In addition to having many children to support, many also lack well-paid jobs or adequate qualifications. A large number of these families live under the poverty line, in conditions that are harmful to children's development.

FINANCING OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The problems caused by poverty are aggravated by the fact that during the past ten years the educational system of the Republic of the Moldova has faced a critical lack of money. In 2007 the expenditures on education increased in absolute figures almost five times in comparison with 1997 (*Table 1*), while in relation to Gross Domestic Product they decreased by about two percentage points. Still, even in these conditions, the share of expenditures on education in the general consolidated budget of the Republic of Moldova is comparable to the share allocated by the majority of European and Central Asian states.

Table 1.
Public expenditures on education

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
GDP (million MDL, in current prices)	8,917	9,122	12,322	16,020	19,052	22,556	27,619	32,032	37,652	44,754	53,354
Expenditures on education (million MDL)	883	639	579	721	934	1,241	1,491	2,178	2,711	3,625	4,268
Share of GDP, %	9.9	7.0	4.7	4.5	4.9	5.5	5.4	6.8	7.2	8.1	8.0
Share in the general consolidated budget, %	24.7	21.2	16.4	16.8	21.4	23.9	24.3	19.3	19.4	20.1	19.0

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2008

A detailed analysis by expenditure categories (*Tables 2 and 3*) indicates that the financial means allocated for education are used with relatively low efficiency. The main causes of this phenomenon are the following:

- imperfect school financing mechanisms, based on indicators centred on institutions and not on pupils;
- imperfect mechanisms for the remuneration of the teaching staff, based mainly on the seniority of staff and not on performance, leading to the exodus of young teaching staff from the educational system;
- low wages of the teaching staff, leading to the employment of teachers for 1.5-2.0 standard work loads, with immediate consequences on the quality of education;
- disproportion in the distribution of financial means by different expenditure categories, the share of expenditures that are not directly related to the teaching-learning process being exaggerated;
- the decrease in the number of pupils per teacher and in the number of students per non-teaching staff;
- the high share of non-teaching staff in the total number of employees of the educational system.

Table 2.
The monthly average nominal wage in education

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
The monthly average nominal wage in all professions, MDL	304.6	407.9	543.7	691.5	890.8	1,103.1	1,318.7	1,697.1
Minimum living wage (monthly average per person), MDL	–	–	468.7	538.4	628.1	679.9	766.1	935.1
The monthly average nominal wage in education, MDL	193.0	247.7	336.9	463.3	610.2	710.7	881.8	1,209.3

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
The monthly average nominal wage in education, in % compared to the minimum average wage	63.4%	60.7%	62.0%	67.0%	68.5%	64.4%	66.9%	71.3%
The monthly average nominal wage in education, in % compared to the minimum living wage	–	–	71.9%	86.1%	97.2%	104.5%	115.1%	129.3%

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2007

Table 3.

Public expenditures for general primary and lower secondary education

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Basic expenditures (budget), million MDL	379	483	666	784	899	1,131	1,552	1,668
Wage costs, teaching staff: - in million MDL	192	221	308	404	461	572	782	787
-in % against the basic expenditures	50.7%	45.5%	46.2%	51.5%	51.3%	50.6%	50.4%	47.2%
Wage costs, non-didactic staff: - in million MDL	63	77	107	148	168	217	296	298
- in % against the basic expenditures	16.6%	15.9%	16.1%	18.9%	18.7%	19.2%	19.1%	17.9%
Other expenditures: - in million MDL	124	186	251	232	270	342	474	583
- in % against the basic expenditures	32.7%	38.6%	37.7%	29.6%	30.0%	30.2%	30.5%	34.9%
The student/teacher ratio:	15.0	15.0	14.9	14.5	14.1	13.8	13.3	13.1
The student/non-didactic staff ratio	-	-	21.0	19.7	18.9	17.6	16.7	18.0
Public expenditures per pupil, MDL	615	802	1131	1378	1647	2197	3197	3510

Source: Ministry of Finance, 2007

Therefore, the educational financing system needs to be fundamentally streamlined, especially in primary and secondary education. The new financing mechanism must be based on indicators related to pupils, in accordance with the principle 'the money follows the child'. This mechanism will also offer opportunities for public authorities to encourage school managers and educational institutions to produce good results in ensuring access to education, including pupils with special educational requirements, and improving the quality of the teaching-learning process. Obviously, school managers must also have possibilities to motivate teaching staff and, namely, to have a certain autonomy in establishing the wages of their educational institutions' employees, depending on individual performance.

INFORMAL PAYMENTS IN EDUCATION

The shortage of financing is partially compensated by the contribution of parents through informal payments. The IPP Study 'Informal Payments in Pre-University Education and Equal Access to Education' provides relevant data on the way schools currently try to settle the issues related to the lack of financial means.

The data collected from a representative sample consisting of parents, teachers and headmasters during December 2006 to February 2007 shows that additional payments made by parents during one academic year amount to MDL 209 million, which is 13.3 per cent of the financial means allocated by the State for the respective academic year. Parents pay for tutorials, additional lessons (in groups), the school fund, security services, repairs to classrooms and heating systems, exams, processing of graduation certificates, gifts for teachers, school events and better marks for students (*Table 4*).

Table 4.
Additional payments made by parents during one academic year (estimation at national level)

Expenditure categories	million MDL
Tutorials (private)	92.5
Additional lessons (in groups)	26.0
Gifts to teachers	25.0
Payments for Parents' Committee (School Fund)	20.0
Repairs to school/classroom	14.6
School events	13.0
Exams	6.0
Heating of school (technical assistance and repairs)	5.5
Payment for a better mark	3.7
Security service in school	1.7
Processing of graduation certificates	1.5

Source: Sociological research 'Informal Payments in Education', Institute for Public Policy, 2007

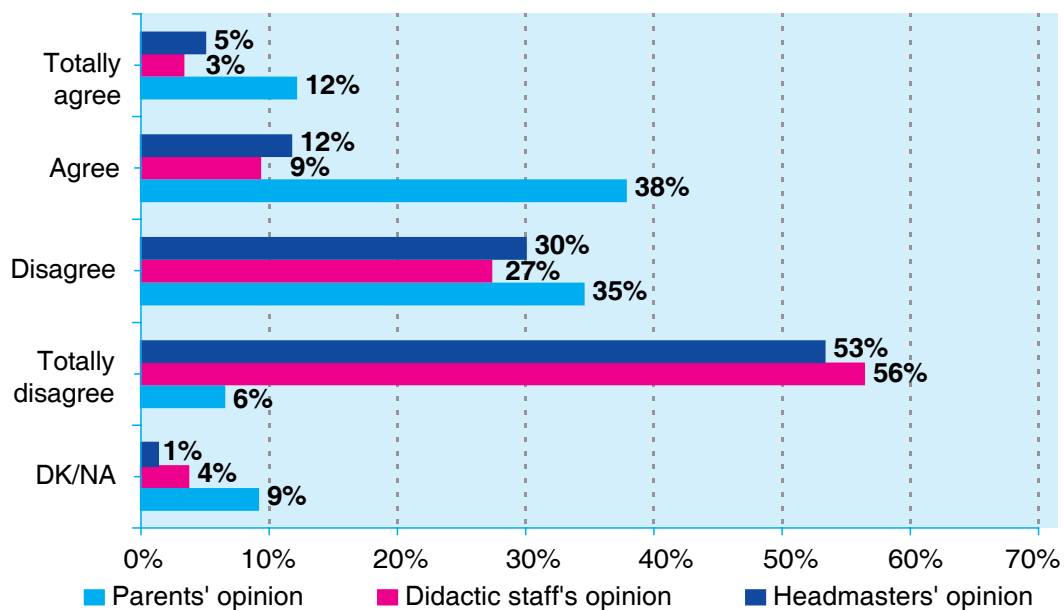
In the opinion of most parents, it is impossible for their children to obtain a quality education without contributions on their part. One in seven teachers and headmasters support the parents' opinion. Many parents (48.6 per cent) say that teachers dedicate more time and efforts to children whose parents contribute more to the school's needs. At the same time, parents and a number of teachers acknowledge that in these conditions some pupils from poor families are disadvantaged, and do not receive the teacher's attention because their parents cannot afford additional payments to the school, a fact quoted by almost half of the interviewed parents (49.9 per cent) and some of the teachers and headmasters (12.6 per cent and 16.7 per cent respectively). In some cases, a child's dignity is also affected when his or her parents cannot manage to make the required payments.

The negative impact of informal payments on the educational process is recognized by 35 per cent of parents, 25 per cent of headmasters and 25 per cent of teachers. At the same time, 80-90 per

cent of teachers and headmasters deny that pupils from poor families are underprivileged, whilst 50 per cent of the parents affirm the contrary (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Pupils from poor families are disadvantaged because their parents cannot afford to make additional payments for school



Source: Sociological research 'Informal Payments in Education', Institute for Public Policy, 2007

The relatively low wages of teaching staff force them to wait for and even ask for money from parents. Obviously, the attitude of teaching staff and parents with respect to this phenomenon varies, but both parents and teaching staff and headmasters think that this phenomenon is adverse to a child-friendly atmosphere.

Box 1. Who are the persons most affected by the informal payments in education (parents' viewpoint)?

- Family, because money is taken from the family's budget ("from the parents' purse"), the low-income families being the most affected.
- Teachers, who "are forced to beg" because of low wages.
- Children, because:
 - qualified teachers choose other better-paid jobs,
 - even if the family pays, the child does not always learn and if it does not pay, the child can be punished and debased.
- Parents, because:
 - the State does not acknowledge their contribution to help schools to work in decent conditions ("schools exist on parents' backs");
 - rather than create the necessary conditions in school and develop the needed policies, the State representatives "fight against the corruption in schools".

Source: Sociological research 'Informal Payments in Education', Institute for Public Policy, 2007

Box 2. Who are the beneficiaries of informal payments made by the parents (parents' viewpoint)?

- The State, which allocates insufficient resources for the primary and secondary education:
 - “got rid of a burden”;
 - “saves money in the wrong place”;
 - “with the money for education they change cars every month”.
- Children, because conditions for study are thus created:
 - “they stay at school all day long”;
 - “they go to school with pleasure; have activities there”.
- Teachers, because they:
 - “line their pockets a bit”;
 - “raise money”;
 - “sell and make money off this”.

Source: Sociological research 'Informal Payments in Education', Institute for Public Policy, 2007

Thus, we ascertain that the complicated economic situation in the Republic of Moldova, coupled with the inappropriate attitude towards the area of education, expressed through decisions that limit the education budget, create conditions within the educational system that negatively influence the educational process and limit the access of children from underprivileged families to a quality education.

1.3. SCHOOL ABANDONMENT

From the economic and social points of view, school attendance is the first indicator of a quality education and the efficiency of an educational system. The higher the abandonment rate, the more inefficient the respective educational system.

CAUSES OF SCHOOL ABANDONMENT

As mentioned above, according to the data of the Ministry of Education and Youth, the number of unenrolled children decreased from 3,980 in the 2000/2001 academic year down to 28 children in the 2007/2008 academic year. Also, the number of children that dropped out of school decreased from 438 in the 2006/2007 academic year to 28 children in the 2007/2008 academic year. Even if the number of children who do not go to school is low, at the same time it was concluded that the number of children who only sometimes or rarely attend school is far greater.

A recent study carried out in the Institute of Educational Sciences involving teachers, professors and headmasters from 128 rural localities of the Republic of Moldova ascertains that the phenomenon of non-attendance continues, creating complicated relations with the quality of education. There is a hidden form of non-attendance: under pressure from school and authorities, the child is sent to school by his or her parents from time to time. While these children are not counted as having abandoned school, they nevertheless miss a significant number of classes. The results referring to the causes of school absenteeism are the most telling (*Table 5*).

Table 5.

Causes of non-attendance in rural areas of the Republic of Moldova

Causes of non-attendance	%
Work alongside with parents	11.4
Do not have necessary clothes or other school supplies	25.4
Parents went to work abroad and do not supervise their children	35.1
Parents are here, but neglect the children's education	28.1
Total	100.0

Source: Institute of Educational Sciences, 2007

Analyzing the data from *Table 5*, we can see a change in importance with respect to the causes of the school absence: together with the evident lack of some material means, causes dependant on the attitudes of parents and community are present. The parents' attitude, adopted by the children, is evident: whether the parents are near their children or work abroad, the education of daughters and sons is neglected. The picture is further painted in the details revealed by the reasons indicated by the participants in the 'Other causes' column:

- the parents do not see education as beneficial to the child's future;
- parents and children drink alcoholic beverages;
- the child ran away from the village;
- the child just remains for a second/third/fourth/etc. year in the same class;
- the child cannot assimilate the minimum knowledge;
- lack of interest towards studying;
- the refusal of parents to send the child to school;
- education is not perceived as prestigious;
- mental disability;
- because of an illness in the family.

In our opinion, the identified causes reflect all the acute problems of rural schools, starting with the lack of the suitable schools and materials and continuing with the devaluing of education or more severely, with the harm to students' personalities.

We also concluded that the situation differs greatly between localities. While some respondents indicated one (or even zero) pupil(s) that does not attend the school, others wrote about six, 10 and up to 15 children that do not attend school. The number of school abandoners is low in the localities where the school interacts intensely with the community and with the local authorities, especially the Mayor's Office. The involvement of the community, including the promotion of the value of education's, intransigence towards parents who do not take care of their children and support for the efforts of underprivileged persons represent one of the most efficient ways to reduce school abandonment.

ATTITUDE OF SOME TEACHING STAFF TOWARDS THE CHILDREN THAT RETURN TO SCHOOL

Another study carried out by the same institution confirms abandonment and absenteeism and presents new data on the causes of these phenomena. One cause, less well-known until the respective study and not identified by the participants in the previous study, is the attitude

of teachers and professors towards the pupils that return to school and try to study alongside with other children. The receptivity of teaching staff to the child's learning difficulties, obviously associated with the absenteeism, is manifested through excessive lecturing, punishments, contemptuous attitudes and other such reactions. Of course, the tense psychological atmosphere around the pupil, the teachers' attitudes, adopted by the classmates of such children, and the failures in learning do not encourage a love for studying, school, teachers and classmates. The next stage is recurrent abandonment, when it is more complicated to convince the pupil that the school holds something interesting and useful for his life and development.

Thus, non-attendance and school abandonment are not only preconditions of a low quality of education, but also its consequences, reflecting the maximum decline in the value of school education, the failure to adapt the pupil to the requirements of school life, as well as to adapt the school to the individual learning requirements of the pupil.

1.4. ACCESS TO EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

In case of the Republic of Moldova, the issue of ensuring access of children with special educational needs to a quality education is very acute, because the number of these children is continuously increasing.

Thus, according to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of disabled children under 15 years of age increased from 12,200 in 1995 up to 13,200 in 2006. The share of this category in the total number of children rose almost two times from 10.5 persons per 1000 children in 1995, up to 18.3 persons per 1000 children in 2006.

Generally, the Law on Education and other official documents stipulate the access of children with special educational needs to quality education. Pursuant to this law, at present in the Republic of Moldova the education of children with special educational needs is carried out in the following ways:

- education in specialized institutions;
- home education;
- education in mainstream schools.

The first two ways have been used for a long time and are familiar both to the teaching staff and children. Most children with special educational needs study in special schools and the number of these schools remained essentially the same from 1995 to 2006. In the Republic of Moldova, there were 42 schools for mentally or physically disabled children operating in 1995 and 37 such institutions in 2006. Although the number of pupils in such schools fell from 5,679 children in 1995 to 4,310 children in 2006, this reduction is mostly due to the general trend of a decrease in the overall number of children in the population.

Being aware of the need to fundamentally change the approach to issues related to the education of children with special needs as early as the 1990s, the Ministry of Education and Youth has adopted appropriate policy documents that guide policy makers towards integration of children with special educational needs in conventional schools. The first such experiences were implemented by non-governmental organizations. In general, the issue remains unsettled; the main factors impeding the integration of these children is the lack of suitable physical conditions,

as well as the reluctance to change, manifested by some school managers and a number of teaching staff.

According to the data of the Educational Institutions Mapping System, 280 educational units (18.6 per cent of the total number of schools) have spaces to create rehabilitation rooms; only 775 institutions (51.5 per cent) can provide rooms for health offices, where there are not already such offices; in only 22 units (1.5 per cent) can elevators be installed elevators for physically disabled pupils.

The reluctance of the teaching staff from conventional schools towards the integration of children with special educational needs is caused mainly by the real or imaginary difficulties that the teaching staff could face in trying to use traditional methods with these special students. The results of a questionnaire distributed among primary, secondary and high school teachers during the ongoing training courses at the Institute of Educational Sciences reveals that a large part of the teaching staff and several managerial teams from mainstream schools reject the idea of integration.

A part the of teaching staff consider that the integration of children with special educational needs in a mainstream school would be a disadvantage for the rest of children, because the latter will be deprived of teachers' attention, could not study enough at school, the class will be noisy, etc. In these teachers' point of view, the children with special educational needs will also be disadvantaged, because they would be isolated, discriminated against and deprived of proper attention. In the opinion of respondents, additional financial resources will be required to educate the children with special educational needs in mainstream schools, which could generate some problems in the community. The teaching staff also mention the negative attitude of some parents with respect to the presence of disabled children in the class. From the discussions held with teaching staff and the parents of children with special educational needs it can also be concluded that when the parents of children with special educational needs want to enrol their children in a mainstream school, many headmasters, form masters and teachers try to convince them not to do so.

At the same time, in the opinion of several respondents, integration of children with special educational needs in the mainstream school has advantages for the other children, as an opportunity for bringing out human qualities, developing a sense of friendship, compassion, kindness, caring attitudes and tolerance. The children with special educational needs develop their abilities to integrate into society, do not feel humiliated, make full use of their personalities, develop normally and are not isolated. Teaching staff that share this opinion see certain advantages for society, too: more self-respecting citizens, increased acceptance, reduced expenditures and more kindness.

Most of the people from conventional schools interviewed (64 per cent of the teaching staff) claim that there is not enough information about integrated education, while the respondents from special schools are fully informed.

About 73 per cent of teachers, including 67 per cent of educators from conventional schools, declare that they do not have knowledge about psycho-pedagogical teaching strategies for different categories of children with special educational needs. All the respondents from special schools consider themselves well-informed.

The views of employees from special schools on the integration of their pupils in conventional schools are divided. Only 32 per cent of educators, 46 per cent of teachers and 10 per cent of professors from special schools think that conventional schools provide optimal conditions for the education of children with special educational needs. The rest of the employees consider that such conditions can be offered only by the special schools. Only 11 per cent of educators, 15 per cent of teachers and 10 per cent of professors from special schools admit that children with special educational needs can be also educated at home.

It was concluded that the concept of integrated education is known by 100 per cent of the teaching staff from special schools, by 42.7 per cent of the teaching staff from conventional schools and by 46.4 per cent of mentors or other educational staff.

About 91 per cent of teachers from mainstream schools, 100 per cent of teachers from special schools and 100 per cent of mentors or teaching assistants believe that it is not necessary to undertake specific activities to initiate and support programs for the integration of children with special educational needs in the current conditions of our educational system.

In the opinion of teachers and assistants from mainstream schools and of the teaching staff from special schools, to promote integrated education in mainstream schools it is necessary to change the school curriculum (adjusted curriculum, differentiated curriculum), train all teaching staff on this issue, create suitable conditions for children, supply the schools with all needed materials and change the grading scale.

On the whole, the responses of the teaching staff on the real situation in conventional schools reveal their low qualification level for the integration of children with special educational needs. Nevertheless, even though most of the teaching staff consider that the conditions of mainstream schools are inappropriate for children with special educational needs, many of them (75.3 per cent of teachers and 64.3 per cent of professors) have declared that there are children with special educational needs in their class or school.

As a result, conventional schools do not currently have the basic conditions needed for the integration of children with special educational needs: specially fitted areas, adapted textbooks, equipment, etc. The qualification of the teaching staff from conventional schools is insufficient for work with these categories of children and their motivation is based more on enthusiasm rather than on an efficient mechanism for carrying out these activities. The teaching staff from urban localities indicate that a major obstacle for the integration of children with special educational needs is the large number of pupils in each class, which does not allow separate attention be paid to each child with special educational needs. As a consequence, only a small number of children benefit from educational services in conventional schools.

Obviously, local communities and local opinion leaders can, and should, make a significant contribution to the integration of children with special educational needs in conventional schools.

Box 3. Inclusive education in the “Pro Succes” Lower Secondary School

‘Pro Succes’ Secondary School of Chisinau was founded in 2002 to create new educational opportunities for children that have graduated the primary classes within the ‘Pas cu Pas’ (‘Step by Step’) Project. Starting with the first activity year, the teaching staff, in collaboration with parents, managed to establish in the secondary school an open and democratic educational environment, which contributed to the creation of favourable conditions for the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs. The first child with special educational needs was enrolled in 2003. Currently there are 12 such pupils. Discovering the joy of these children to be along with their fellows in the same environment, the teaching staff and parents have decided to extend the practices of inclusive education.

Due to the support provided by various organizations and donors, the secondary school created appropriate physical conditions for children with special needs even in the buildings that were not meant for such activities.

Following the call “Let’s help them more than love them”, the teaching staff of the secondary school use their best efforts to maintain and develop the individuality and personality of each pupil. ‘A school for each and every person’ is the motto that has mobilized the teaching staff to adjust the curriculum to each child’s requirements and not the child to the school requirements. Promoting the competitive spirit, respect for individual value, creativity and initiatives, the teachers of the ‘Pro Succes’ lower secondary school took upon themselves the task to offer to all children equal chances for education and integration in accordance with the skills and interests of each pupil.

According to the affirmations of the secondary school teaching staff, the path chosen by them is difficult because our society is not fully prepared for social inclusion and many stereotypes still persist in the collective mentality that call for segregation of persons with special educational needs, and the trends to get rid of the obligations and responsibilities towards them.

This mentality also manifests itself through the lack of a legal framework that would regulate the training of specialists, the inflexibility of the curriculum, the rigidity of evaluation methods, lack of appropriate didactic materials and low remuneration of employees.

Nevertheless, despite all these drawbacks, the staff of the 145-pupil, eight-class secondary school has managed to entirely involve all children in the educational process, regardless of their physical, intellectual, linguistic, ethnic or other conditions.

Source: Sociological survey ‘Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova’, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

1.5. SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION OF INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN THE SCHOOL

HOW CHILDREN ARE TREATED IN THE SCHOOL

Both teachers (82 per cent) and pupils (85 per cent) think that children are treated equally at school, but the same opinion is shared by fewer parents (70 per cent). One in three parents from urban areas and one in four parents from rural areas feel that not all children are treated in the

same way. The same trend remains with reference to equal access of pupils to school resources. Pupils (84 per cent) and teachers (83 per cent) share the same idea, while parents (77 per cent) are less enthusiastic. Eighty-eight per cent of pupils declare that they are paid the same attention during classes, this view being supported by teachers (86 per cent). However, parents are more sceptical, with only 53 per cent of them believing that children receive equal attention during classes. Nevertheless, with respect to the privilege shown to some pupils at school, the children's and parents' opinions coincide, half of them considering that some children are really advantaged at school, while only 26 per cent of the teaching staff recognizes this phenomenon.

ATTITUDES OF CHILDREN TOWARDS THE SCHOOL

In general, pupils have positive attitudes towards school. Most of them are attached to their classmates and friends and given that they spend a large amount of time at school they identify it as their "second home". Along with the positive feelings related to school, there is a range of less pleasant feelings. Stress is frequently associated with school. Pupils' greatest frustration is concerned with coming to school without having their homework done and being afraid to be called on. One in ten children sometimes misses classes because they failed to do their homework. There are also cases of pupils refused entry to school because they do not have a school uniform (eight per cent) or because they were late (ten per cent).

Conflict relationships with classmates and especially with teachers create feelings of discomfort and a lack of desire to attend school. There are children who miss classes because they are afraid of the teacher or dissatisfied with the organization of the lesson.

Box 4. The Stress and the School

- *"Twice a week I do not want to come to school because I have English class. My relationship with the teacher is not very good and when I dislike the teacher I cannot prepare myself well for that class"* (F., 9th form, urban).
- *"Last year we had a math teacher whose classes were boring for me; I went to school, but I was didn't go to his class because you cannot be at ease during his class. We had to sit with our heads up, hands on the school desk, and we had to understand the topic; if you do not know he embarasses you"* (M., 7th form, rural).

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

Another frustration for pupils is the fact that they cannot leave the school building until they classes are finished. Sixteen per cent of all pupils face this situation, even more in the Balti and Chisinau, where every third pupil reports a similar situation.

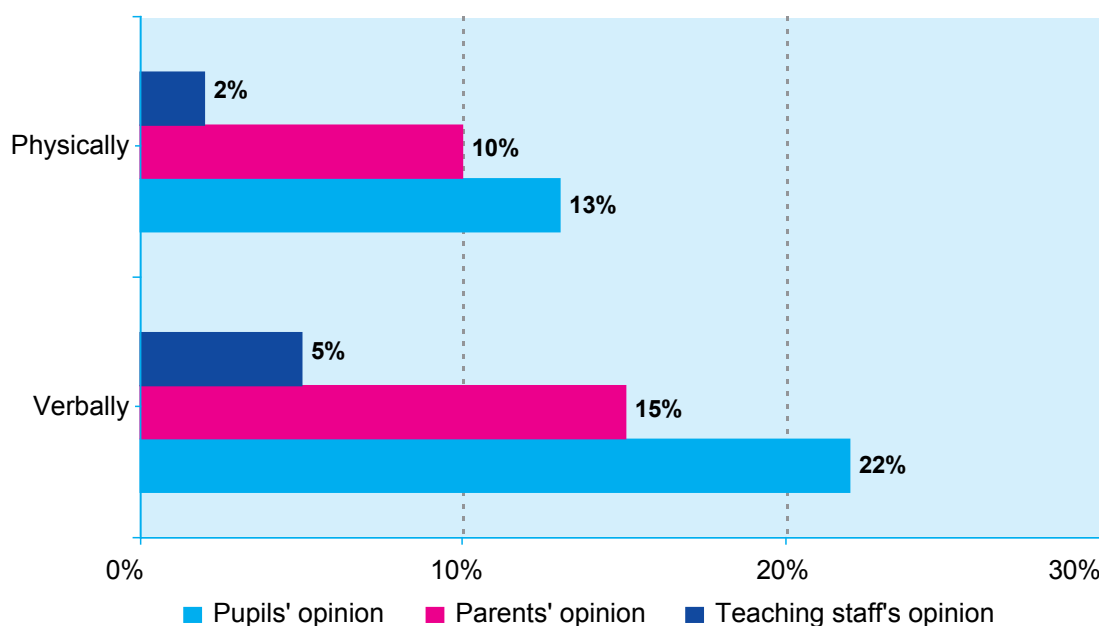
ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS OF SOME TEACHING STAFF TOWARDS PUPILS

In most cases, teaching staff do not recognize the infliction of physical punishments upon children. Only two per cent of teachers asserted that such punishments are applied, while 16 per cent of pupils say that teachers punish them physically often or sometimes. During all focus groups the

pupils mentioned situations when they or their classmates were physically abused. Children have such experiences more often in the lower forms than in the higher forms. The study revealed that boys are more often physically punished, while the girls undergo such experiences very seldom, but during the focus groups it was established that girls find these punishments much more difficult to endure psychologically. When the pupils were asked if they were hit by teachers, 25 per cent of boys gave an affirmative response, in comparison with eight per cent of girls.

Figure 5.

How often and in what manner pupils are punished



Source: Sociological survey ‘Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova’, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

Some teaching staff use an inappropriate manner of speaking; the words most frequently used to address the pupils include the names of animals (“sheep”, “cows”, “bulls”, “donkeys”), words that characterize the person from the point of view of intellectual development (“feather-brained”, “stupid”), and words that describe behaviour (“spoiled”, “vagabonds”). Usually, such words are shouted. Sometimes, verbal offences are addressed to the entire class, regardless of whether, in the teacher’s opinion, one pupil or a group of pupils is responsible.

The pupils are mainly punished in the primary classes; practically every pupil interviewed had recollections about severe physical abuse against themselves or their classmates. Some teachers punish children by grabbing their hair or ears, others hit or pinch them, while others, throw objects at hand, which pupils consider the most dangerous.

As punishment for noisy behaviour during classes or arguments with the teacher, some teachers send pupils out of the class. Obviously, in addition to the fact that this is a restriction on their access to education, the issue of what the child does during this period arises. In the best case scenarios, the pupil waits in the hall or goes to the library, but usually most of them prefer the street, the bar, etc. More alarming is the fact that some children, knowing how a teacher reacts in these situations, purposely adopt such behaviour “to get out of classes”.

ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS OF SOME PUPILS TOWARDS THE TEACHING STAFF

As the teacher's social status and image was affected during the transition period, in the perception of many children, the teacher's authority is decreasing. The most important factor in adopting an attitude and behaviour by the pupils during classes is the age of teaching staff. The respondents' answers reveal that the behaviour of pupils, starting with the 6th-7th forms, becomes inappropriate with respect to very young or very aged teachers. The issues related to the advanced age of teaching staff were mentioned during all focus groups. Pupils start to poke fun at teachers and lessons become amusements on them.

Box 5. Inappropriate attitudes of pupils

- *"The maths teacher in secondary school was old and with weak sight and slow movements; there were situation when we covered up her eyeglasses; she sometimes had dirty clothes... I've learnt little maths"* (F., 12th form, urban).
- *"There was no teacher for Romanian language and they called a retired lady, but she was old and had poor sight. Pupils put pieces of paper on her head, drew her on the blackboard... even intended to set fire to her hair"* (M., 12th form, urban, the same situation in a rural secondary school).

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

ISOLATED PUPILS: FEATURES AND CAUSES

Isolated pupils exist in practically in all school communities The main evidence of isolation is lack of communication with classmates and avoidance of both organized and spontaneous activities. Oftentimes this behaviour manifests itself through self-exclusion, which brings about mocking attitudes and ill-natured jokes on the part of other classmates.

The causes are generally of two types, surmised by the fellow pupils of isolated pupils or even by the pupils undergoing such experiences:

- marginalization because of the family's precarious situation or certain physical deficiencies;
- self-exclusion because of character, unconventional behaviour.

Box 6. Frustrations of isolated pupils

- *"I was alone for a year. I was shocked; in the class where I came from I was an excellent pupil, but when I came here I didn't know anything, nor how to behave myself..."* (F., 12th form, rural).
- *"I lived in my classmate's house and at home, in her own space, she was an absolutely different person; at school I did not recognize her. I asked why she acts like this and she told me that she feels ashamed when there a lot of people."* (M., 12th form, rural high school).
- *"Teachers' children sit in the front desks, while I, who has weak sight, was shifted to another desk, because the daughter of a teacher had to sit with her friend"* (F., 7th form, rural).
- *"If good pupils receive a demerit mark, teachers do not record it, while for the weak pupils they record them all."* (F., 6th form, rural).
- *"You can raise your hand sometimes and the teacher does not ask you because he knows that the answer will be correct"* (F., 6th form, rural).

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

Regretfully, only a few 'isolated children' manage to overcome this condition if they remain in the same class. They may become communicative and sociable within a group of friends or if transferred to another class. Moreover, the excellent pupils who do their homework and meet all the requirements of teachers are sometimes the ones feeling isolated, especially in secondary school. In cases when the number of such pupils is low, they are viewed as "odd birds". Perceived as 'against the group', they are excluded from certain extracurricular activities, are blamed by other classmates as being selfish and they are always under a certain pressure. It is worth noting that this phenomenon decreases in high school.

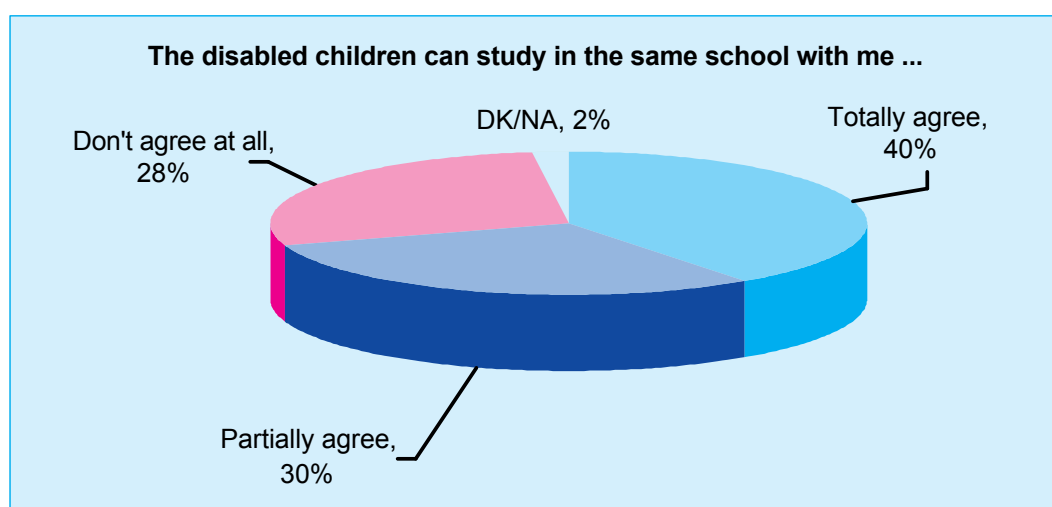
ACCEPTANCE AND INCLUSION OF DISABLED PUPILS

School managers consider that inclusion of children with special needs or disabled children in school depends a great deal on the parents of these children. At the same time, 69 per cent of the teaching staff pointed out that in the school where they work there are disabled children, but only half of teachers think that these children must study in conventional schools. Under these circumstances, a complex approach is needed for the successful integration of disabled children in conventional education, which, alongside with the establishment of appropriate teaching conditions, would aim at training teaching staff to work with these children together with the other pupils. At present, we can conclude that only a few disabled children attend conventional schools and there is no real integration of these children in the class community.

In contrast to the school managers and teaching staff, the pupils are more responsive towards the integration of disabled children in conventional educational institutions. Thus, 40 per cent of students agree completely and 30 per cent of them agree partially with disabled children studying at their schools. Still, we would like to note that a significant share of interviewed pupils (28 per cent) reject this idea (*Figure 6*).

Figure 6.

Pupils' opinion on the education of disabled children in conventional schools



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

If the children from conventional schools accept the children with physical disabilities, when it comes to the integration of mentally disabled children the situation is different. More children who took part in focus groups think that it would be much better if the mentally disabled children study in special schools, “where there are children like them”. The pupils’ argue that mentally disabled children will undergo hardship in integration and participation in games that “are quite tiresome for those mentally disabled”. The pupils from conventional schools fear that the mentally disabled children will not be able to do the same schoolwork as their classmates and that teachers would give them unearned marks.

INCLUSION OF CHILDREN INFECTED WITH HIV/AIDS

The opinions against the inclusion in conventional schools of HIV-infected children are divided and greatly depend on the level of awareness about HIV/AIDS. The more pupils are informed about how HIV/AIDS is spread and protection methods, the higher the level of tolerance towards the children infected with HIV. Although the majority of pupils think that HIV-infected children should study in conventional schools, they declare that would be more prudent with them and many pupils would even avoid them. Therefore, there is still the risk that the pupils infected with HIV/AIDS would be isolated.

Pupils from rural areas are less tolerant towards children infected with HIV/AIDS and few of them would accept such classmates. Those who declare that they would accept such a classmate consider that this disease could happen to them as well and that they should act more empathetically. Most pupils mentioned that they would be discontented to have a classmate infected with HIV, even knowing that the virus cannot be transmitted through the air or a handshake, etc.: “...even if I know how it is transmitted, I am afraid to go near him anyway...”.

In general, pupils are more tolerant towards HIV-infected children than adults. Teaching staff accept the presence of HIV-infected children in the classroom to a lesser extent than pupils, while the parents of healthy pupils are even more reserved, their reason being the need to protect their own children.

1.6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1.1. On the whole, the regulatory and legal framework regulating the functioning of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova fully complies with the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The laws and regulations adopted by the Government and the regulatory acts approved by the line ministries contain explicit provisions on ensuring the general access to quality education for all children, regardless of sex, social origin, maternal language, ethnicity, religious options or disabilities.

At the same time, we would like to mention that various ideas related to making school more attractive to children and creating a child-friendly school environment become reality more through practice and tradition than explicit legal regulations, especially at the level of school documents, including school operational regulations, headmaster’s job descriptions, teacher’s job descriptions, reporting methods, etc.

Recommendations. The regulatory and legal framework should be improved in order to legalize all aspects related to making school more attractive to children and creating a child-friendly

environment. First of all, the standard school operational regulations and job descriptions for all school managers and teaching staff must be updated. An update of the reporting methods referring to the activities of schools, including clear procedures about non-attendance and school abandonment, replacement of the teaching staff absent from school, repetition of missed classes, etc. is needed. Special attention should be paid to the precise definition of procedures related to the monitoring and prevention of non-attendance and school abandonment, including clear delimitation of the responsibilities of parents, teaching staff, school managers and local public authorities.

Finding 1.2. A decrease in the school-age population and the pupil to teacher ratio was noted during the transition period. These changes led to inefficient use of school buildings and the reduction of jobs available in schools. Localities with small populations face the risk of school closures and in cases where there is an insufficient number of pupils to create two classes, only one overcrowded class is established or the alternative of mixed classes is adopted; these practices do not improve the situation.

Recommendations. The need to streamline the school network, imposed by the decline of the school-age population and reduction of the pupil to teacher ratio must be analyzed very carefully; the futures of pupils from small localities are the primary concern and not only the efficient use of buildings. Some innovative schemes of school transport must be implemented, but only after two-three years of testing in several pilot raions.

Finding 1.3. A decrease in the net enrolment rate in primary education was registered from 2000 to 2006. In primary and lower secondary education the net enrolment rate had a sinuous evolution, increasing in the 2004/2005 academic year and decreasing in the 2005/2006 academic year. This fact challenges the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, committed to by the Government in the area of primary and secondary education.

We consider as improper the replacement in official documents of the net enrolment rate indicator with the gross enrolment rate indicator, which reflects to a lesser degree the number of children of relevant age in primary and secondary education. We point out that even this indicator is on the decline, as in the case of primary education.

Recommendations. In order to have a relevant and valid image of the situation in primary and lower secondary education, measures need to be undertaken to improve the statistical data on education. Exact definitions, computation methodologies, and procedures for collection and processing of data are needed regarding pupils' absenteeism and school abandonment, teachers' absences from classes, replacement of teaching staff who cannot teach the planned lessons, and making up missed classes.

Line ministries and other bodies of central public authorities will revise the framework of statistical indicators in the area of education, harmonizing it with European and global indicators. For valid monitoring of developments in the education field, net enrolment rates will be used again, this data being available to all stakeholders: parents, central and local authorities, local communities, teaching staff, professional associations and civil society.

Finding 1.4. Access to education is directly related to the material standing of families. The poorer the family, the higher the risk that their children do not attend school. Large families, especially those from rural areas, face significant difficulties. At present there are no efficient mechanisms to help such families, and the small allowances granted are insufficient to provide for the children.

Recommendations. A mechanism for providing benefits to poor families that have school-aged children, based on a direct relationship between the amount of allowance and the level of educational institution attendance, must be developed. A first solution would be to establish scholarships that are paid only on condition of school attendance. These expenditures must be introduced as a distinct item of the education budget at the levels of school unit, Mayor's office, raion/municipality, State.

Finding 1.5. Though in the Republic of Moldova the expenditures for education per pupil are higher than the European average, the use of these funds is inefficient. The analysis of public expenditures for education reveals that a great part of them are oriented towards the maintenance of buildings and payments of current utilities fees and less for the development of human potential. The schools do not have financial autonomy, and the finances are managed, de jure and de facto, by the local public authorities.

Recommendations. The mechanism for school financing should be changed, stressing the relationship between the funding and performance indicators: education coverage, sound execution of the educational process, availability of textbooks and didactic materials, the results of external evaluations, inclusion of children with special educational needs, etc. Educational institutions should receive the status of full-fledged legal entities, have financial autonomy, and full control of decision-making in the area of using the allocated resources.

Finding 1.6. In the Moldovan schools there exist informal payments, paid by parents, for tutorials, additional group lessons, school funds, security service, repair of classrooms and heating systems, exams, processing of graduation certificates, gifts to teachers, school events and better marks. The amounts paid by parents are significant and, in accordance with the estimations, exceed 13 per cent of the financial means appropriated by the State.

Even though the informal payments help somewhat at improving the physical condition of school buildings, they also can represent disadvantages for children coming from poor families and do not contribute to the establishment of a child-friendly school environment. Further, the informal payments create preconditions for corruption and dehumanize the educational process.

Recommendations. Some normative and legal acts to explicitly regulate what school services and facilities are provided for free by the State and which of them can be provided by parents should be developed. The contributions made by parents could be depersonalized by creating funds of anonymous payments, funds that would be managed by external tutorial committees. Provisions oriented towards combating informal payments should be included in the school regulations, job descriptions, and activity guidelines. As well, a system of reporting the instances of informal payments within educational institutions should be created, as well as establishing responsibilities of managerial and didactic staff for receiving such payments.

Finding 1.7. Despite the endeavours to reduce non-attendance, school abandonment and missed classes, these phenomena still exist in the educational system of the Republic of Moldova. There is a special, hidden form of non-attendance, when, under pressure from the school and authorities, the child is sent to school by his or her parents from time to time, but overall, they are absent a great deal. The causes of non-attendance are various, the most usual being the lack of

supervision on the part of parents working abroad, irresponsible attitude of parents, and poverty. The mechanisms for detecting and reporting cases of non-attendance are deficient from the legal point of view, are slow to react and fail to orient the pedagogic opinion towards retaining children in school. Sometimes, neither the teaching staff nor the school managers invest enough effort to help the children that do not attend the school.

Recommendations. Improvements to the legal framework are needed to clearly establish the accountability of all stakeholders – parents, educational units, and local public authorities – to combat non-enrolment, abandonment and non-attendance. The activity regulations of educational units and job descriptions of school managers should include certain exact provisions on the reporting and combating of such phenomena. A system of scholarships for underprivileged families should be established, with payment directly related to the school attendance of the child(ren).

Finding 1.8. Due to some social stereotypes and inappropriate physical conditions, only a small number of children with special educational requirements or physically disabled children attend conventional schools. Pedagogic opinion, pupils, parents and local and central decision makers support the idea of integration of these children in conventional schools. A more reserved attitude is manifested by some parents and teachers in cases of children infected with HIV/AIDS.

Recommendations. Evaluation of the physical condition of school buildings is needed, especially of those from localities with residential institutions, to identify the buildings that need reconstruction work in order to create appropriate conditions for physically disabled children. Pilot projects in the area of integration of these children in conventional educational units should take place. Public opinion needs to change in order to raise the level of tolerance towards disabled children and those with special educational needs, including children infected with HIV/AIDS; didactic materials are needed for teachers, professors and parents.



Si tu e omul
sa nu fi secret
o persoana care
vede-ti viata ca

DIMENSION 2: THE EFFICIENCY OF LEARNING

2.1. IMPACT OF THE CURRICULAR REFORM

The curricular reform, which started in the late 1990s in the Republic of Moldova, has an important role in reorienting schools towards the needs of children and their parents. The following priorities were established as strategic reference points in the development of school curriculum for primary, secondary and high school education:

- build a safe environment in schools and, at the same time, to rely only on external general ideas, on social and economic, ecological and cultural transformations, and on essential changes of the society's values and beliefs for the fulfilment of internal objectives;
- align the curriculum with modern trends and the perspective outcomes of education development worldwide, so as to view it as an educational standard in a broader sense;
- refer the educational policy to national and universal human values and traditions of the local educational system, which are suitable for the curricular reform.
- In developing the improved instructive-educational programs in curricular terms, the following were taken into account:
 - the requirements for the development of the pupils' personalities in a democratic, dynamic, flexible society;
 - the variety, level, and complexity of personal, social and educational interests of pupils;
 - alignment with the new structures of the educational system and their transmitting of information;
 - the satisfactory fulfilment of vertical and horizontal, and intra- and trans-disciplinary consistency.

THE BASIC CURRICULUM

The basic curriculum was designed as a regulatory document, which includes the instructions determining the relationship between the educational process and its outcomes. The other components of the curricular paradigm were developed within these directions.

On the whole, the basic curriculum contains the general objectives of education, the trans-disciplinary general objectives, the objectives by stages and levels, the objectives of curricular areas, the general objectives of the school subjects, the educational framework plan and the curricular standards. On the basis of this document new school textbooks, the concept on the evaluation of school results, and guidelines for the design and implementation of modern didactic strategies were developed.

THE CURRICULUM BY EDUCATIONAL STAGES

In the Republic of Moldova the national curriculum is developed by educational stages: early and pre-school education, primary education, secondary and high school education.

The Curriculum for early and pre-school education was developed and approved in the form of two distinct documents: 'The Curriculum for Children's Education in Pre-School Institutions of Different Types' and 'The Pre-School Curriculum (Education and training of children aged between 5 and 7 years in the preparatory groups)'. Both documents are currently being implemented in the pre-school institutions of the Republic of Moldova.

The Curriculum for primary education is provided in the curricula for the following school subjects: teaching language (Romanian/Russian, and/or the languages of national minorities, which are Ukrainian, Gagauz, and Bulgarian), mathematics, foreign language, history, science, musical Education, technological training, sports, drawing, and moral and spiritual education.

The Curriculum for secondary school education is provided through the curricula for the following school subjects: teaching language (Romanian/Russian, and/or the languages of national minorities, which are Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian), Russian, mathematics, foreign language, history, geography, musical education, technological training, sports, fine arts, computer science, chemistry, biology, and physics.

The Curriculum for high school education is provided through the curricula for the following school subjects: teaching language (Romanian/Russian, and/or the languages of national minorities, which are Ukrainian, Gagauz, and Bulgarian), mathematics, foreign language, history, geography, sports, computer science, chemistry, biology, and physics.

Gradual development and approval of the curricular documents for all educational stages has ensured a unitary approach to all methodological and didactic aspects, an adjustment of training objectives to the needs of pupils and society, and a clear orientation of school managers, teaching staff and parents towards the outcomes of education.

THE CURRICULUM OF SCHOOL SUBJECTS

The curriculum by school subjects specifies the main goals of educational policies and applies a certain structure of the curriculum to a school subject. As a result, the curriculum by school subjects correlates with the regulatory elements of the basic curriculum.

The curriculum of a school subject has the following components: the conceptual framework of the subject, general objectives or framework objectives, reference objectives, learning activities, recommendable content, methodological suggestions, and evaluation suggestions.

The general objectives of subjects stem from the educational ideal of personality development and the objectives of curricular areas and refer to the main categories of knowledge, capacities, and attitudes structured when learning a certain subject. They have a certain degree of abstraction, are followed up during subsequent years and serve for the formulation of reference objectives.

The reference objectives stem from the general objectives of the subject, are expressed in terms of concrete actions and denote partial and successive stages in achieving the general objectives.

These objectives define what pupils must understand and apply at the end of a period stipulated in the school curriculum, and follow up the progress in acquiring knowledge and competencies from one school year to another.

Usually, two to three learning activities are defined for each reference objective. These activities are learning experiences and constitute the core of an educational institution.

The contents are recommended, units for learning, and aimed at achieving the intended objectives of the formation of a complex personality. The contents are developed in full correlation with the reference objectives, taking into account the logical structure of science, national and universal culture, social attitudes and religious beliefs, the child's age and potential, and his or her individual and social interests.

The structuring of contents is organized either through a unitary complex of knowledge, capacities and attitudes or are proposed in thematic way by establishing a didactic model for the concrete school subject, meant for certain types of learning in order to help the child to study effectively.

The methodological suggestions are recommendations on the long-term and short-term didactic planning, on the didactic strategies and technologies, didactic activities, on the form or methods of learning, etc.

The evaluation suggestions are recommendations on the general strategies for evaluation, formative/summative evaluation, on evaluation methods and techniques, on feedback and concrete examples of tests.

During the implementation of the curricular reform, 200 curricula were developed for all school subjects and all educational stages. These documents were translated into Russian and the languages of national minorities, Ukrainian, Gagauz, and Bulgarian, and made available both to teaching staff and parents.

THE EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN

The educational Framework Plan was developed and approved as a strategic regulatory document, whose main function is the formal structuring of the educational system with respect to the relationships between its components: levels, curricular areas, study subjects, timetables, etc.

The Framework Plan for primary, secondary and high school education has the following objectives:

- ensures the development of personality in relation to the pupil's potential and the requirements of a democratic society;
- refers to the establishment of education in terms of permanent education, inter-disciplinarity and the curriculum as a concept;
- ensures curricular consistency between educational levels and stages and establishes a minimum number of subjects and hours per week for each grade;
- establishes the core curriculum (the minimum number of subjects and hours) and the optional curriculum that the school decides (the maximum number of subjects and hours);
- provides the opportunity to balance the share of school subjects within the educational system and to integrate the school subjects vertically and horizontally (the principle of complexity);

- aligns the school subjects to educational objectives and the physiological, psychological and cognitive characteristics of pupils (primary and secondary education);
- involves the establishment of a balanced number of school subjects and time units, to create a more productive learning environment at the level of pupils' potential (the principle of curriculum streamlining);
- refers to the exercise of each pupil's right to make full use of his or her own potential at their own pace (the principle of equal opportunities);
- includes the minimum and maximum number of hours for each subject, school type, and year of study (the principle of flexibility and centralization), ensuring the institution's freedom to develop its own timetable.

Thus, the framework plan implemented in general secondary education includes:

- the invariant core – the number of compulsory hours and subjects for all pupils and all types of pre-university schools, intended to ensure the minimum compulsory standard;
- the curricular areas – sets of school subjects, classified on the basis of the knowledge area and the type of 'related' activities;
- the curriculum at the school level – selection of subjects and the number of hours for each up to the maximum level;
- the optional curriculum – the number of optional subjects provided, as decided by the school;
- the timetable scheme - sample educational framework plans defined for each form.

The Framework Plan proposes approximately 70 optional subjects that can be selected in addition to the invariant core, provided that the maximum number of hours per week for each grade is not exceeded. The optional subjects are oriented towards creating capacities that cannot be developed through the study of only one subject. These subjects will enlarge the knowledge areas, create new situations to deepen knowledge in the curricular areas, accomplish pupils' interests and attitudes, and ensure the gradual orientation of teachers to implement inter-disciplinarity within the learning process. When selected, the optional subjects became compulsory subjects.

The methodology for implementing the Framework Plan in primary and secondary education is also new. The timetable scheme is developed on the basis of the Framework Plan for the 1st-9th forms in order to organize the educational process of each form.

The timetable schemes from each school are developed by the School Administrative Council based on evaluation of their human and material resources and consulting the teaching staff, ensuring the observance of teachers', parents' and pupils' preferences. The timetable schemes must contain at least one optional subject.

There are many approaches for arranging the optional classes:

- optional classes derived from one school subject, as a thorough study of this subject, adding hours to the maximum number of hours allowed so as to achieve some additional objectives of the compulsory curriculum;
- optional classes as topics or chapters of a subject, which are not included in the compulsory curricula (enlargements);
- optional subjects recommended for each curricular area;
- optional subjects proposed by the school.

The optional subjects are indicated for each curricular area as an orientation; the schools can suggest optional classes, with the approval of Raion/Municipal Education Divisions, without exceeding the number of hours approved in the educational Framework Plan. The optional subjects can be studied during an academic year, a curricular cycle and/or an educational stage. The optional classes can be run for entire classes or groups of 10-15 pupils, depending on the schools' possibilities and pupils' options.

We underline the fact that the implementation of new approaches to the design and implementation of the Framework Plan for primary and secondary education is only the first step in making school more attractive to children, adapting the training process to the individual characteristics of each pupil, decentralizing the educational system and increasing the school's role in the decision-making process. Though the 'margin of liberty' of the framework plan is relatively low (the schools can choose from a number of hours which amount only 10-15 per cent of the total number of hours), these approaches stimulate the initiative of pupils, parents and local communities and strengthen the trends of change-over to the formative education focused on the children's needs.

SUPPLY OF DIDACTIC MATERIALS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

The School Curriculum was implemented together with the implementation of school textbooks and guidelines for teachers. Thus, 113 titles of basic textbooks and 86 Teacher's Guidelines for the primary and secondary education were published. Along with supplying educational institutions with new textbooks, a new mechanism for the republishing of these textbooks was created. Under these circumstances, the textbook rental scheme, designed as a sustainable process for accumulation of financial means for the recovery of the cost of textbooks in three to four years, was developed and implemented.

Thus, the Republic of Moldova has established for the first time its own market for school textbooks on the basis of the contest and competition principle, professional teams of textbook authors have been created, and national publishers have had positive experiences producing school textbooks.

We point out that the initial concept of the textbook rental scheme built upon that belief that the parents, except for those whose children attend residential institutions, will cover all the expenditures related to the development, publishing and distribution of textbooks. According to the scheme, the State only selects the textbooks offered by publishers, manages the funds raised from parents, and manages the process of textbook distribution in schools. Obviously, such an approach did not fully comply with the principle of free basic education and raised difficulties in providing textbooks to children from underprivileged families.

To facilitate access to basic education by children from underprivileged families, the rental scheme was modified, allowing local authorities to exempt underprivileged or large families from the payment for rental of textbooks. Subsequently, the authorities have suggested the stepped annulment of payments for the rental of textbooks and this process has even started in the case of primary education textbooks.

The analysis of the statistical data on the provision of the conventional schools in the Republic of Moldova with textbooks and guidelines for teaching staff demonstrates that all pupils of primary and secondary schools currently have the textbooks needed according to the school curriculum in force.

Regretfully, the situation is different for children with special educational needs. So far, this issue of providing textbooks has not been explicitly formulated in the educational policy documents, and the budgets of educational systems do not even stipulate appropriations for the development, publishing and distribution of such textbooks.

WHAT PREVENTS US FROM DEVELOPING A CHILD-FRIENDLY CURRICULUM

The implementation of the new school curriculum from the point of view of the requirements set out for child-friendly schools was accompanied by certain difficulties, arising mainly from its excessively theoretical character. The main difficulties and constraints of the school curriculum currently in place in the Moldovan educational system, are the following:

- uncertainty related to distribution of the subjects by the ‘general compulsory’, ‘optional’, and ‘at the decision of the school’ categories, that limits the freedom of pupils and parents to choose certain subjects;
- disproportion between the size of subjects to be learned and the time allotted for the teaching-learning process, leading to the exhaustion of children, especially for those who encounter difficulties in studying certain subjects;
- over-segmentation of school subjects, their great number, and an overloaded timetable;
- limited opportunities for pupils and parents to choose their own subjects, contents and forms of evaluation;
- the school curricula and evaluation methods contain a large amount of information that children are expected to simply memorize, to the detriment of other activities that would develop their capacities and attitudes and the values needed for children’s education;
- sometimes, large amounts of information taught are not relevant in terms of the school-age population’s interests and the future needs of the labour market, nor for the long-term education of young people, this being a reproach of the authors of the Curriculum;
- academic, theoretical knowledge is still preponderant and functional learning has suffered as a result; there are still few elements of procedural ‘knowledge’ in the curriculum;
- the correlation between the study subjects is very weak and from this reason the pupils and teaching staff face inconsistencies that are difficult to overcome with the scarce resources of schools;
- there are clear divergences between what is written in the school curricula and what actually happens in the classroom;
- sometimes despite modern curricula, clear objectives, and sound and didactic guidelines the implementation in the class is centred only on content, largely due to conservatism and the low qualification level of teaching staff.

2.2. SCHOOL EVALUATION

Introduction of the curriculum, as a normative document and basic didactic-educational instrument, has shifted the educational process from the communication and assimilation of values to the formation of personality traits, the curricular objectives being mainly formulated in terms of competencies. The school evaluation has effects in the area of education outcomes, but also contributes to their formation.

It is not intended that the modern school evaluation frighten students. Instead, evaluations should test what was taught and learnt, help the pupils to discover what they know, their formation and development possibilities, and help them develop their own identities, which is always important for adolescents. These outcomes are a defining factor for liberty in education.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SCHOOL EVALUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Democratization of education, rethinking of the interrelation between pupil and teacher, educational reforms, a new vision on the place of the evaluation in education, lack of some integral documents on evaluation, and, on the other hand, the theoretical and field studies that have developed the issues of evaluation practice, all have contributed to the development of an important document for the Republic of Moldova, '*The Concept on the Evaluation of School Results*'.

This document contains the general conceptual framework for the establishment of a new national system for school evaluation: for the development of regulatory and normative acts on school evaluation; for a rethinking about evaluation by school subjects; for the development, selection, combination, and application of general and specific evaluation instruments and methodologies, as well as for the diverse activities of school evaluation in general education; for the provision of suggestions for the integration of the national evaluation system in the world system for school evaluation; and also proposes reference points for the initial and continuous professional training of the teaching staff, and for studies and further theoretical and experimental developments of the school evaluation area. This document is valuable because it provides some epistemological guidelines that allow theoreticians and practitioners to communicate using the same terminology.

The defining idea of the Concept Paper is in line with modern pedagogy, a holistic approach focused on the pupil and their participation in their own development. The Concept Paper insists on the transition from evaluation as a sanction "appraising the pupils' level of knowledge and skills", understood as final, static acquisitions (socializing, sometimes disparate, irrelevant for the pupils' lives and doctrinally interpreted), to a formative-productive evaluation, integrated in teleological, axiological and technological terms, meeting the individual requirements of the self-identity and formation/development (cognitive, professional and cultural-spiritual) of pupils and the social-economic and cultural-spiritual requirements of national and world communities, evaluation in which the pupil is an active participant in their own learning and self-evaluation. We conclude that the major argument of the Concept Paper coincides with the principles of child-friendly schools. The document promotes a new vision of the function of evaluation through the relation between the normative and formative evaluation.

According to the Concept Paper, the evaluation of school results will take into account three complementary pedagogic indicators:

- school progress, obtained by reporting the achievements of individual pupils, classes, and/or school units compared with established educational benchmarks and the results recorded at the last evaluation;
- educational efficiency, determined by comparing school results to general and specific educational objectives established in the school curricula and operational objectives, established by the teaching professionals;

- school efficiency, certified through relating the school results to the educational resources of the class, family, community, and/or society.

The Concept Paper is currently the only document where the evaluation of school results is included in the system of the school evaluation in the general education (evaluation of curriculum, teaching staff, didactic-educational process, and the educational institution) and is considered the central sub-system, because the evaluations in other sub-systems refer to data, information, recommendations and decisions developed/obtained through the evaluation of school results.

The analysis of the Concept Paper on the evaluation of school results in terms of a child-friendly school has revealed the consistency of this document with the requirements of child-friendly schools, modern views of educational sciences on the functions of evaluation, and the promoted principles and methodology and its role in supporting the development of children's personalities. The implementation of the Concept Paper would generate positive systemic changes in education in the Republic of Moldova.

EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS: PROS AND CONS

The data provided by final examinations has an important role in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the training process. During the reformation of the educational system, a new system for the evaluation of school results, in line with international experience in this area, was implemented in the Republic of Moldova. This system differs from the previous forms of school evaluation by developing quality evaluation instruments and methods of external evaluation. According to the authorities' intentions, the new system will guarantee that these evaluations are:

- correct for all the candidates to ensure equal participation and success opportunities for all pupils;
- appropriate to school programs, i.e. in line with the curricula provisions;
- true and fair (consequent);
- informative for all stakeholders: pupils, parents, teaching and managerial staff, and the key people from the Raion/Municipal Education Divisions and Ministry;
- efficient in using the time, human and financial resources.

In the opinion of decision makers in the area of education, the reformation of the organization and performance of the final evaluation will ensure the achievement of the three main goals of examinations: certification, selection, and provision of information on the quality of education.

At the national level, the major goals of the external evaluations, organized by the Ministry of Education and Youth, are:

- to diagnose the situation in the educational system and create awareness on to what extent objectives stipulated in the school curriculum have been achieved, identifying the factors and causes that led to the situation;
- to predict the level of performances by pupils in the next educational stage;
- streamline the teaching-learning process as a result of the obtained feedback;
- identify the factors that socially and macro-economically influence the efficiency and effectiveness of education, enabling decision makers to develop policies on the development and improvement of educational processes;
- use the results obtained in the external evaluations to enrol students in the following educational stage.

At the international level, the goals of the educational authorities refer to the international recognition of the acts of scientific qualification obtained in our country and facilitation of the processes for comparing the results of national evaluations with the results of international evaluations.

The new methodology is based on the evaluation objectives derived from the curricular objectives. Also, the authorities have started procedures for developing evaluation standards, meant to ensure a single framework for all institutions involved in school evaluation.

We point out that the introduction of external forms of evaluation provoked contradictory reactions in society; many pupils, parents and teaching staff disagreed with the reforms promoted by authorities. The main objections against external school evaluations are the following:

- external evaluations involve the transfer of children to other educational institutions, which creates psychological discomfort, and subjects many children to stress;
- the teaching staff that have taught the children for many years know better their potential and can give objective marks, while the external evaluations involve a significant factor of luck;
- organization of external evaluations expresses in a hidden form the mistrust of the State of its own teaching staff by "eliminating" them from the most important activity, the assignment of marks;
- domination of written examinations does not fully contribute to making use of each child's potential and reorients them from creative activities to those of mechanical 'checking off' of some conventional response choices;
- the centralized development and duplication of tests means that only one type of test exists for the entire country and creates preconditions for their 'marketing';
- central grading and correction of all written tests by one committee, appointed by the Ministry, excludes the parents from the process of examination monitoring and encourages corruption.

RELEVANCE OF THE EVALUATION: DESIRES AND REALITIES

Society, represented through public authorities, teaching staff, parents and children, has the need and right to be truthfully informed about the relevance of school results in relation to the invested human and financial efforts. Thus, in point of fact, the evaluation activities shall establish:

- the extent to which the educational objectives were achieved (general, reference, operational, etc.);
- the extent to which the curricular objectives were achieved at the general or individual level;
- the scope of objectives insufficiently realized, the area (qualitative and quantitative) of institutions or/and pupils with issues related to the achievement of these objectives;
- the causes of failure to achieve certain objectives;
- the ways to overcome the issues related to the achievement of educational objectives;
- informing the public opinion on the efficiency of education.

It is known that in the Republic of Moldova education efficiency is measured, primarily through the results obtained by pupils during the final evaluation upon graduation from primary, secondary and high schools. Obviously, the most important problem of evaluation is its relevance or, in other words, if the evaluation results indicate exactly the extent to which educational objectives were achieved.

According to the legal acts in force that regulate the organization and conduct of final evaluations, the evaluation itself consists of the following stages:

- development of tests;
- management of tests;
- correction and scoring of tests;
- conversion of the score achieved by each pupil into a relevant mark.

The assessment tests are developed centrally by the ministry and “must have an average degree of difficulty”. The score given for each item is established by the developers of the tests. The scheme for the conversion of the score achieved by each pupil into a relevant mark is established by the ministry.

From analyzing the evaluation method it appears that the results of the final evaluations or the resulting marks do not fully reflect the extent to which educational objectives are achieved because:

- the test itself is developed with an average degree of difficulty, which does not allow the successful pupils to show their knowledge and capacities as they could by on tests of higher difficulty;
- a clear methodology to develop the scoring grid does not exist. The grids used during each evaluation process are “adjusted” to the current results that characterize the distribution of scores accumulated during the examination.

Consequently, the mark as it is given currently does not entirely reflect the success or failure of pupils in relation with certain assessment objectives. For example, what does the mark ‘8’, received at a final evaluation, mean? Is it an achievement of all objectives on ‘8’ or is it an average between ‘10’ at certain objectives and ‘6’ at others? If so, which are the ‘others’?

In the same context, if the maximum test score is 100 points and the assessment grid provides that for 80-100 points accumulated a pupil must be given the mark ‘10’, which is the degree of achievement of educational objectives? Who took the decision to give the mark ‘10’ for 80-100 accumulated points? What would happen if the deciding body wishes that educational appear to be a “resounding” success and establishes that 50-100 accumulated points are enough for the mark ‘10’?

Therefore, an essential change to the assessment system of school results is required, focusing on the relevance and validity of the obtained data.

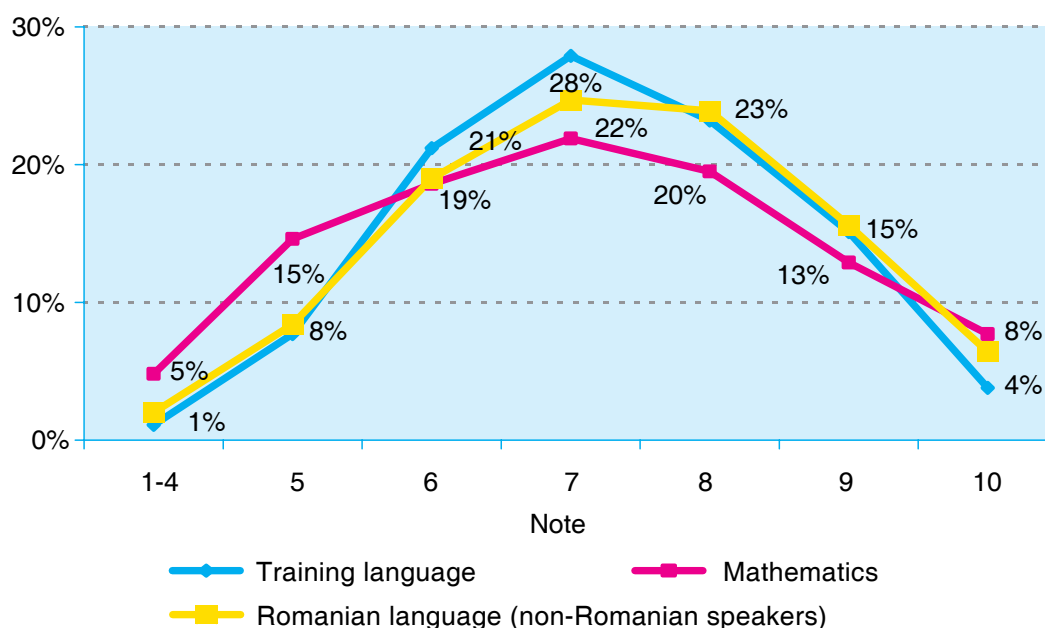
THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EFFICIENCY OF LEARNING

On the whole, in accordance with the results of the final examinations, the absolute majority of pupils successfully graduated from secondary education, the number of failures being between one and five per cent. Thus, at the graduation examinations from the secondary school in the 2007 session the passing rate was 99 per cent in the teaching language, 95 per cent in mathematics and 97 per cent in physics.

However, the quality of education, expressed in terms of marks acquired by pupils, is much lower, the average marks varying between 6.9 and 7.4 (*Figure 7*). The lowest average mark was recorded in physics (6.9), and the highest mark in teaching language (7.3). We underline that in the cases of mathematics and sciences curricular areas, the share of low marks is higher, which requires the review of the teaching-learning method of these school subjects.

Figure 7.

The results of the final examinations for graduation from the secondary school (2007 session)



Source: The Evaluation and Examination Agency, 2007

It is known that the quality of education depends on various factors: the type of educational institution (primary, secondary, middle, high schools), the place of residence of the pupils (rural, urban), and the qualifications of teaching staff (high didactic degree, first or the second degree, without didactic degree). The importance of the above-mentioned factors on the quality of education derives from the data presented in *Table 6*.

Table 6.

The extent to which the pupils passed evaluation tests (final evaluation, 2007)

	Romanian language, 4th form	Mathematics, 4th form	Mathematics, 9th form
Pupils from schools in rural areas	73.1%	69.8%	59.2%
Pupils from schools in urban areas	82.8%	83.7%	63.3%
High school pupils	78.6%	80.1%	62.2%
Middle school pupils	74.4%	72.3%	60.2%
Secondary school pupils	72.3%	69.0%	57.3%
Primary schools pupils	81.0%	82.1%	...
Pupils from residential institutions	71.4%	68.1%	...
Pupils taught by a teacher with higher didactic degree	86.1%	93.4%	70.3%
Pupils taught by a teacher with the first didactic degree	83.6%	86.4%	65.5%

	Romanian language, 4th form	Mathematics, 4th form	Mathematics, 9th form
Pupils taught by a teacher with the second didactic degree	75.8%	75.3%	61.9%
Pupils taught by a teacher without didactic degree	74.7%	72.3%	55.2%
Average	75.7%	75.3%	60.0%

Source: The Study 'The Evaluation of School Results', the Institute for Public Policy, 2007

The data provided in *Table 6* reveal that in primary classes the extent to which pupils pass the tests varies significantly depending on their place of residence (by a difference of 13.9 percentage points). In case of secondary schools this difference is lower (only 4.1 percentage points).

Certain variations are also ascertained depending on the type of educational institution. Better performances are registered in 1st-4th forms in primary schools than in educational institutions also offering higher levels. The extent to which pupils pass the mathematics test at graduation from the 4th form in primary schools is 13 percentage points higher than for students taking this class in secondary schools; this result is a forceful argument in favour of the division of educational management by educational stages and levels.

As expected, the qualification of the teaching staff conducting the lessons has a significant influence on the extent to which tests are passed. Thus, in case of primary classes, the extent to which the tests are passed by pupils taught by a teacher with high didactic degree is 11.4 percentage points higher than for students taught by teachers without a didactic degree. In case of secondary education, this difference is even higher: up to 15.1 percentage points.

We point out that in the case of primary education, the number of children from residential institutions passing the tests is lower than that of children from conventional educational institutions.

THE LEARNING EFFICIENCY IN TERMS OF INTERNATIONAL EVALUATIONS

During the independence years, the Republic of Moldova took part in the following international evaluations:

TIMSS 1999 and *TIMSS 2003* – The Third International Mathematics and Science Study/Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, where performances in mathematics and science of pupils from the 4th and 8th forms were assessed. We mention that due to lack of financial means, the Republic of Moldova did not participate in the TIMSS 1999 pilot testing and the tests of the 4th form, which could have affected the results of the assessment itself;

PIRLS 2001 and *PIRLS 2006* – Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, where the abilities of the 4th form pupils to read and understand a text were evaluated.

Participation of our country in international evaluations opens up new opportunities for:

- implementation of new evaluation methods, approved at the international level;

- raising the relevance and validity of the evaluation results, which are compared to the attainment of pupils from all the countries participating in the project;
- carrying out comparative studies of educational standards and, especially, of those related to evaluation, with the same standards from other countries;
- knowledge and implementation of testing technologies, oriented towards the needs of children;
- joining an international evaluation system, which offers modern methodologies and relevant statistical data from all the states participating in the project;
- development and strengthening of human potential and institutional framework related to the evaluation of school performances.

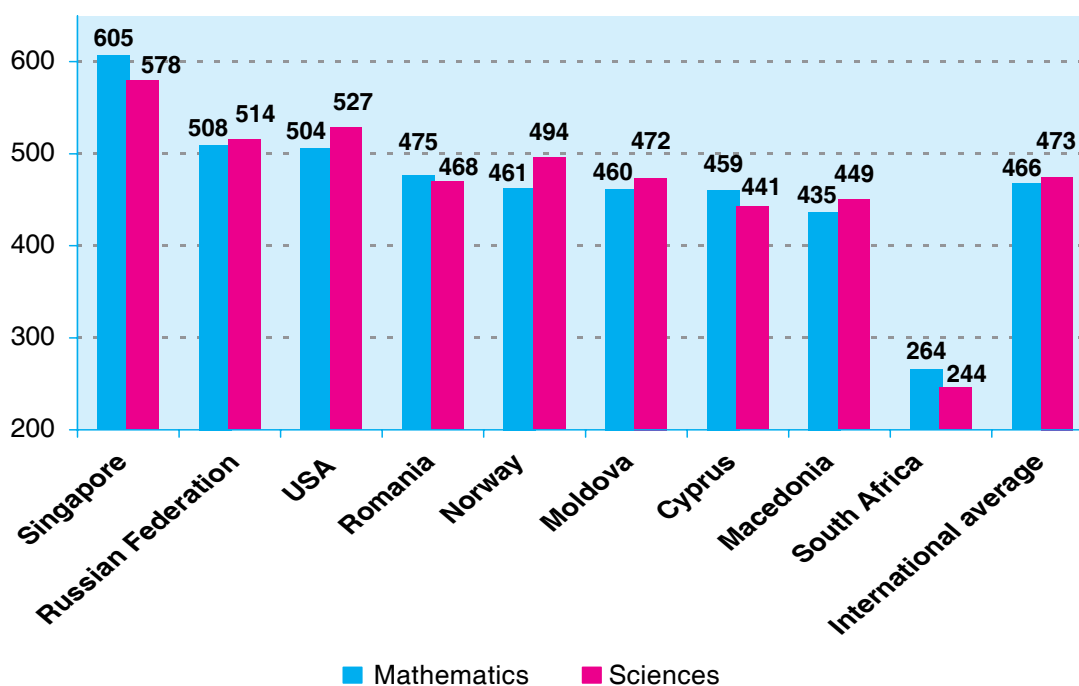
The results of 8th form Moldovan pupils (460 points) in mathematics obtained in the *TIMSS 2003* evaluation (*Figure 8*) are close to the international average (466 points). Countries with similar scores to the Republic of Moldova in this category are Cyprus (459 points) and Norway (461 points). The first place in mathematics was achieved by Singapore, with 605 points, and South Africa occupied last place, with 264 points.

The results of 8th form Moldovan pupils (472 points) in sciences were also very close to the international average (473 points); countries with similar scores in this subject were Romania (468 points) and Jordan (475 points). First place in science was again taken by Singapore, with 578 points, and last place by South Africa with 244 points.

We highlight that in comparison with 1999, during the 2003 evaluation the Republic of Moldova scored nine points lower in mathematics and 13 points higher in sciences. These trends show us that the results of reforms in the area of education in our country are not yet sustainable.

Figure 8.

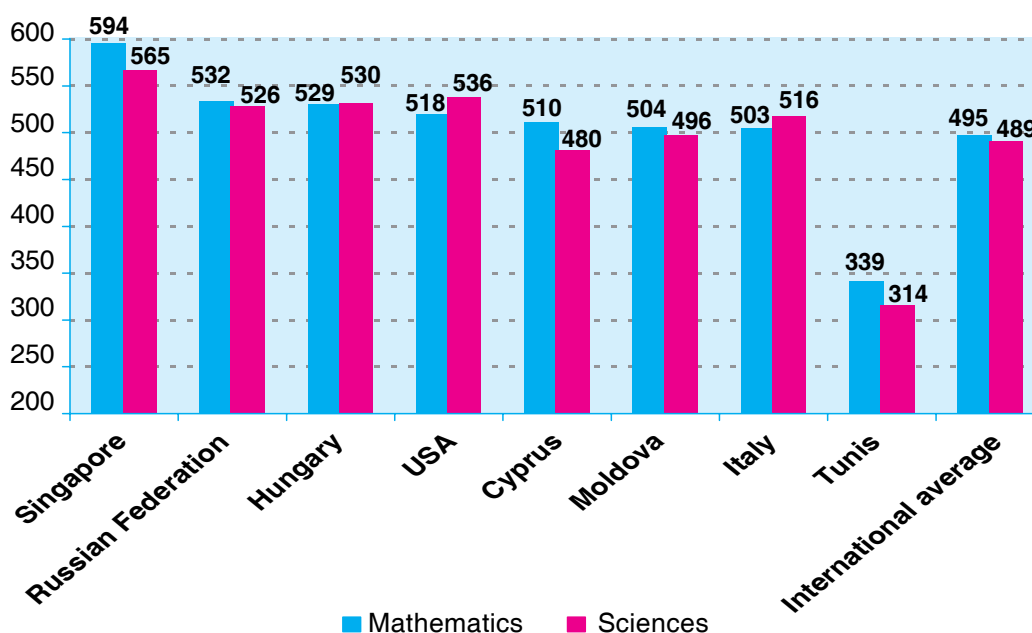
The results of TIMSS 2003 international evaluations, 9th form



Source: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2004

Figure 9.

The results of TIMSS 2003 international evaluations, 4th form



Source: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2004

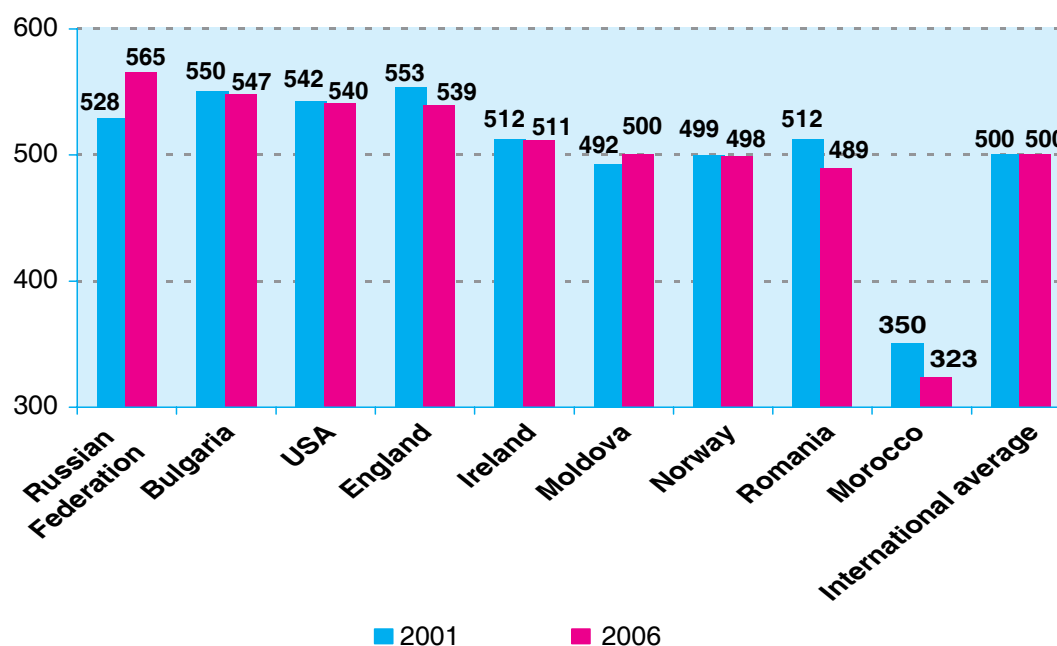
A similar situation was also registered in *TIMSS 2003* evaluations for the 4th forms (*Figure 9*), but trends cannot be established, because these forms from the Republic of Moldova did not take part in the 1999 testing.

PIRLS 2001 and *PIRLS 2006* international evaluations examined the capacity of children to acquire information through reading and use it successfully in day-to-day practice. During the process of a child's intellectual development, reading is considered a fundamental skill, which offers him the possibility to learn and progress. The classifications of *PIRLS 2001* and *PIRLS 2006* international evaluations (*Figure 10*) do not differ very much from the *TIMSS 1999* and *TIMSS 2003* classifications, with the Moldovan scores close to the international average.

Even if the score obtained by the Republic of Moldova in 2006 is eight points higher than in 2001, this rise is statistically insignificant, a fact that strengthens the hypothesis that the results of reforms from the area of education in our country are not yet sustainable.

Figure 10.

The results of PIRLS 2001 and PIRLS 2006 international evaluations



Source: PIRLS 2006 International Report

We mention that it is impossible to make a direct comparison of the results of international evaluations with the results of national evaluations because:

- in the case of TIMSS evaluations the testing is done at the end of the 8th form, while in the Republic of Moldova the national evaluations are conducted at the end of the 9th form;
- the subjects proposed for international evaluations are generally easier than those used during the current and final evaluations in the educational system of the Republic of Moldova.

At the first glance, it seems that given easier evaluation subjects in international tests and the high pass rates in the primary and lower secondary education in the Republic of Moldova (95-99 per cent), Moldovan students should post good results in international assessments. However, the actual situation is different.

According to the PIRLS 2006 evaluations, only three per cent of Moldovan pupils reach the “advanced level” reading performance, 20 per cent reach “high level” performance, 41 per cent reach “intermediary level” performance and 24 per cent reach the “low level” performance. Nine per cent of pupils score below the “low level” performance.

A similar situation is also acknowledged in case of TIMSS 2003. Twelve per cent of pupils from the 4th form and 23 per cent of pupils from the 8th form fall below the standard for the “low level” reference point at Mathematics, while in Sciences the share of these pupils is 14 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively.

As a result, the line ministry, in close cooperation with specialists in curricular development and assessment of school attainment, will have to determine the causes of these discrepancies and harmonize the assessment procedures of the Republic of Moldova with the international methods.

2.3. PROFESSIONAL FORMATION OF THE TEACHING STAFF

Since educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova are not organized as distinct entities for each educational level, obtaining statistical data about only primary and secondary education is practically impossible. As a consequence, the professional training of teaching staff will be analyzed based on the statistical data with reference to the primary schools (1st–4th forms), secondary schools (1st–9th forms), general secondary schools (1st–11th forms) and high schools (1st–12th forms).

TEACHING STAFF FROM GENERAL EDUCATION

In educational institutions the activity of teachers at the school level is regulated by the following acts: the Law on Education, the Standard Regulation of the General Educational Institution, the Regulation on Organization and Functioning of High Schools, and the Regulation on the Attestation of Teaching and Managerial Staff.

To create a child-friendly environment in educational institutions, the normative acts in force explicitly stipulate the obligations of the teaching staff. Thus, the teacher must:

- study the educational curricula, analytical programs, school textbooks and specialized literature;
- draft the quarterly schedule planning;
- develop didactic drafts or design lesson plans;
- conduct lessons for the class;
- ensure the efficiency of the training and educational process;
- stimulate independent activity, initiative and creative capabilities of children;
- ensure the security of pupils' lives and health during classes and extra curricular activities;
- organize and carry out school contests;
- take part in the activities of subject departments and teachers' council;
- take part in the meetings and activities of the administrative council, when required to do so;
- organize and conduct the lessons as a form master;
- provide consultations and tutorials to pupils on the subject taught;
- collaborate with the pupils' families;
- permanently enrich the training in their specialty area, psycho-pedagogy, the subject teaching methodology;
- participate in the advanced training activities held in school or outside the school;
- honour all the obligations stipulated in their job description.

In order to be promoted, teaching staff must confirm their teaching appointments and can apply to higher positions or grades. The assignment to position and conferring of didactic degrees is performed in accordance with Regulations, approved by the Ministry of Education and Youth. Over the years, these regulations have undergone several amendments (versions of 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006), which reflects both the reforms implemented in the educational system and the interference of political factors. Notwithstanding the changes imposed by political circumstances, the regulations in force stipulate the assignment to position and conferring of didactic degrees based on the professional background, quality of didactic activities, and the methodical-pedagogical and psychological qualification.

The statistical data characterizing the structure of teaching staff in general secondary education can be found in *Table 7*.

Table 7.
Teaching staff from the general education
(2006/2007 academic year)

Total number of teaching staff	41005	100%
Disaggregated by didactic degrees:		
– high didactic degree	373	0.91%
– first didactic degree	2,268	5.53%
– second didactic degree	16,510	40.26%
– without didactic degree	21,854	53.30%
Disaggregated by educational stages:		
– pre-school	676	1.65 %
– I–IV forms	9,268	22.60%
– V–IX forms	15,877	38.72%
– X–XII forms	4,864	11.86%
Teachers of music, arts and sports	4,867	11.87%
Headmasters of school units	1,494	2.91%
– deputy directors	1,810	4.41%
– deputy directors for education	1,008	2.46%
– teachers in auxiliary schools	1,141	2.78%
Disaggregated by the level of initial professional training:		
– higher education	33,222	81.02%
– incomplete higher education	1,295	3.16%
– specialized secondary education	6,488	15.82%
Disaggregated by seniority:		
– up to 3 years' experience	3,442	8.39%
– between 3 and 8 years experience	3,687	8.99%
– between 8 and 13 years' experience	3,968	9.68%
– between 13 and 18 years' experience	5,809	14.17%
– over 18 years' experience	24,099	58.77%

Source: Institute of Education Sciences, 2007

The qualitative analysis of the level of training of Moldovan teaching staff reveals that most teaching staff (81.02 per cent) in pre-university education have a university degree. At the same time, we mention that young specialists comprise only 8.34 per cent of the total teaching staff. Most

of the teaching staff (58.77 per cent) are teachers with more than 18 years', but the 'maturity' of the didactic-teaching staff is not accompanied by a growth in qualifications; the proportion of teachers with the first didactic degree and high didactic degree being rather low (6.64 per cent).

Only 0.91 per cent of the total number of the teaching staff in pre-school, primary and general secondary education have the high didactic degree, while 53.30 per cent are without a didactic degree.

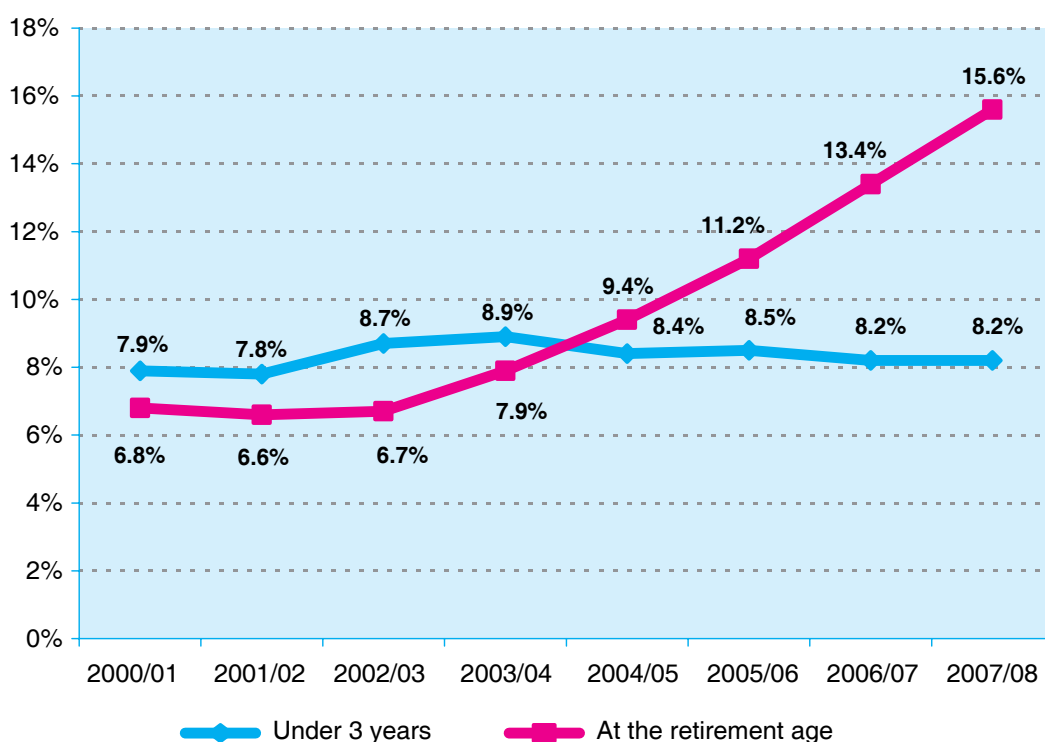
In the opinion of the study's authors, the cause of this phenomenon is the shortage of efficient mechanisms that would encourage the teachers to continue their training and earn higher qualifications, lack of professional standards, which would require ongoing training, and commitment of didactic staff to obtain relevant and measurable results.

The analysis of the results of the survey carried out among teaching staff from schools and high schools shows us that about 40 per cent of them graduated from college or university about 20-30 years ago, this percentage being higher in rural localities. Obviously, this state of affairs requires the organization of continuing education courses focused on modern teaching-learning methods, widespread use of informational technologies and computer-assisted training.

Without doubt, the sustainability of the educational system largely depends on more young teachers entering the profession. It is known that the enrolment in pedagogic departments and colleges is increasing, and central authorities are trying hard to attract these graduates to the profession, especially to work in rural schools. Regrettably, despite all these efforts, the number of teaching staff of retirement age is increasing and that of persons with less than three years' seniority is decreasing (*Figure 11*).

Figure 11.

Teaching staff by pedagogic seniority



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, Explanatory Note No. 08-01/136 as of 26.12.2007

In accordance with the Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education and Youth, only about 50 per cent of the graduates of pedagogic faculties and colleges embark on a teaching career. Therefore, sustainable staffing of the educational system with young teaching personnel cannot occur just by increasing the enrolment in pedagogic departments and colleges, but also by implementing some effective policies for maintaining the teaching staff in schools.

INITIAL TRAINING OF TEACHING STAFF

The goal of professional training of teaching staff in the Republic of Moldova is to develop a professional and cultural personality that can respond efficiently to the present day educational and cultural challenges of the individual, nation and humanity.

The existing system for the initial training of teaching staff includes:

- *colleges* (specialized secondary educational institutions), which only train educators for pre-school institutions and teachers for primary education;
- *universities* (higher educational institutions), which train both educators and teachers for primary education, and didactic and managerial staff for secondary, high school and specialized secondary education.

We underline that, from a historical point of view, practically all higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova were first organized precisely for the training of teaching staff. In time, the institutions have enlarged their activity areas and the training of teaching staff has become a complementary activity. Due to the flaws of the regulatory-normative framework on the classifier of specialties, the delimitations between pedagogic and scientific profiles became very vague, and pedagogic training was maintained only at the level of pre-school and primary education.

Thus, in the case of pre-school and primary education, the current classifier and the practice of educational institutions clearly indicate specialties meant for the training of teaching staff: Pre-school Pedagogy, Primary Education Pedagogy, Pre-school Pedagogy and a foreign language, Primary Education Pedagogy and a foreign language, Primary Education Pedagogy and choreography, etc.

However, in case of general secondary education, the specialties dedicated to the training of teaching staff are no longer clearly expressed in the classifier and in the common course offerings of many universities: mathematics and computer science, chemistry and chemical technology, biology and baedology, law, languages, foreign languages and literature, to name but a few. In these courses the psycho-pedagogical aspects and perspectives of a didactic career are secondary.

In order to redress the situation, the Ministry of Education and Youth has developed and the Parliament has adopted a new “classifier of the areas of professional formation and specialties for training the staff in the higher educational institutions (cycle I)”, where a general training area, entitled ‘Educational Sciences’, also appears. This area includes two sub-areas of professional formation: ‘Education and training of teachers’ and ‘Educational Sciences’. The ‘Education and training of teachers’ professional formation section consists of fifteen specialties corresponding to the subjects taught in secondary educational institutions. ‘Educational Sciences’ includes pedagogical, psychological and psycho-pedagogical specialties.

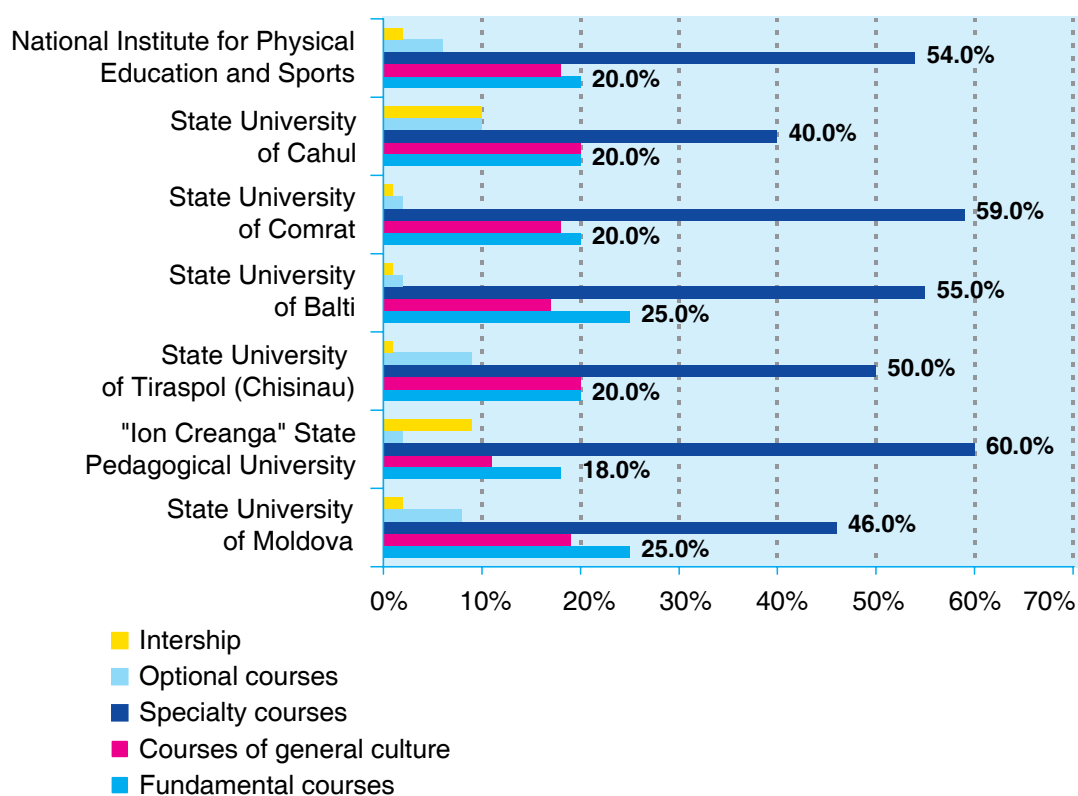
This classifier has been applied since 1 September 2005 and the graduates from these specialties will conduct their first lessons in 2008 and 2009, depending on the number of specialties they studied.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of data gathered during the sociological survey allows us to assert that most universities provide initial training of teaching staff as a complementary activity when training specialists in sciences and national economy. Thus, from the seven surveyed universities¹, only three of them indicated that the main area of activity is the training and formation of teachers, with another four focusing on education as part of other subject areas.

The curricula for initial formation of teaching staff of each university is partially developed in accordance with the Framework Plan for higher educational institutions, which contains the cycle of fundamental subjects, the cycle of social-humanistic general subjects and the cycle of specialized subjects. The share of these subjects is indicated in *Figure 12*.

Figure 12.

Distribution of the time allocated for the formation of the teaching staff



Source: Institute of Education Sciences, 2007

In general, the curricula of universities that train teaching staff do not differ greatly. At the same time, we note that the State University Ion Creanga offers the most hours for the training of specialists in psycho-pedagogy; 60 per cent of their course offerings are for pedagogy of primary

¹ The State University of the Republic of Moldova, State University "Aleco Russo" of Balti, State Pedagogical University "Ion Creanga", State University of Tiraspol (Chisinau), National Institute for Physical Education and Sports, State University of Cahul, State University of Comrat

education. Similarly, the State University in Comrat offers a specialty in Primary Education, with about 59 per cent of their total course offerings related to this degree, and at the National Institute for Physical Education and Sports, about 54 per cent of total course offerings relate to sports teacher training.

The subjects related to the educational sciences (for the departments with a pedagogic profile), included in the curriculum of institutions for the initial formation of teaching staff, are oriented towards establishment of knowledge and competencies in the design and performance of educational processes and provision of cognitive and applicative instruments that allow students the rigorous, objective, exigent and critical approach to the educational phenomenon.

During the survey, it was established that Moldovan universities have different views on teacher training methods. The authors of the study think that the diversity of opinions held by the higher educational institutions reveals the current contradictions within higher pedagogical education: on one hand, the need to train the teaching staff within an unitary professional system and, on the other hand, the existing practice, according to which the formation of teaching staff has a fragmentary character, the students attend both courses in the area of educational sciences and courses for the practice of a certain profession that differs from the didactic one. Therefore, the formation of teaching staff within an integrated professional module that would signify a well-balanced system of theory and practice is required. This could provide to students the possibility to obtain an education based on classroom learning, observation and experiments. In this context, in the opinion of respondents from pedagogic faculties, it is necessary to implement a comprehensive reform of the curriculum for higher education that would ensure an essential modernization of the national system of the ongoing training of teaching staff and its compliance with trends in the European educational field.

ONGOING TRAINING OF THE TEACHING STAFF

The institutions providing ongoing training in the Republic of Moldova offer the training activities in various forms: courses in the training centre, part-time courses, self-taught courses, retraining courses, courses on request, contract-based courses and seminars. The training activity during courses or internships ends with the development of a formation portfolio, which is evaluated and is kept by the student, who can use it in their teaching practice. The heads of the training centres for teaching and managerial staff certify the quality of the ongoing professional training. The Section for Attestation and Advanced Training of Teaching Staff from the Ministry of Education and Youth coordinates and monitors the activity of ongoing professional training of teaching and managerial staff in the training centres.

Unlike the initial training, for which many classes are offered by many educational institutions, in the case of advanced training of teaching staff, the number of relevant institutions offering the courses, and the class capacity, is much lower. We point out that in the case of advanced training of teaching staff, non-governmental organizations organized as public associations or private educational institutions also play an important role.

In the opinion of the teaching staff surveyed (347 respondents), the courses, seminars, and workshops conducted by the institutions specialized in ongoing training of teaching staff made the most important contribution to their professional growth (31 per cent of respondents), followed

by those offered by non-governmental organizations (25 per cent), the institution where they are working (21 per cent), higher educational institutions (20 per cent) and private educational institutions (three per cent).

An analysis of the data obtained during the survey shows that the opinions of higher educational institutions and the advanced training institutions on the efficiency of the existing system for ongoing training of teaching staff are contradictory; about a half of respondents consider it inefficient and obsolete. In the opinion of many respondents, several essential changes are necessary: system decentralization, diversification of the training methods, implementation of a credit system, enlarging the autonomy of the training centres and greater use of interactive teaching-learning methods.

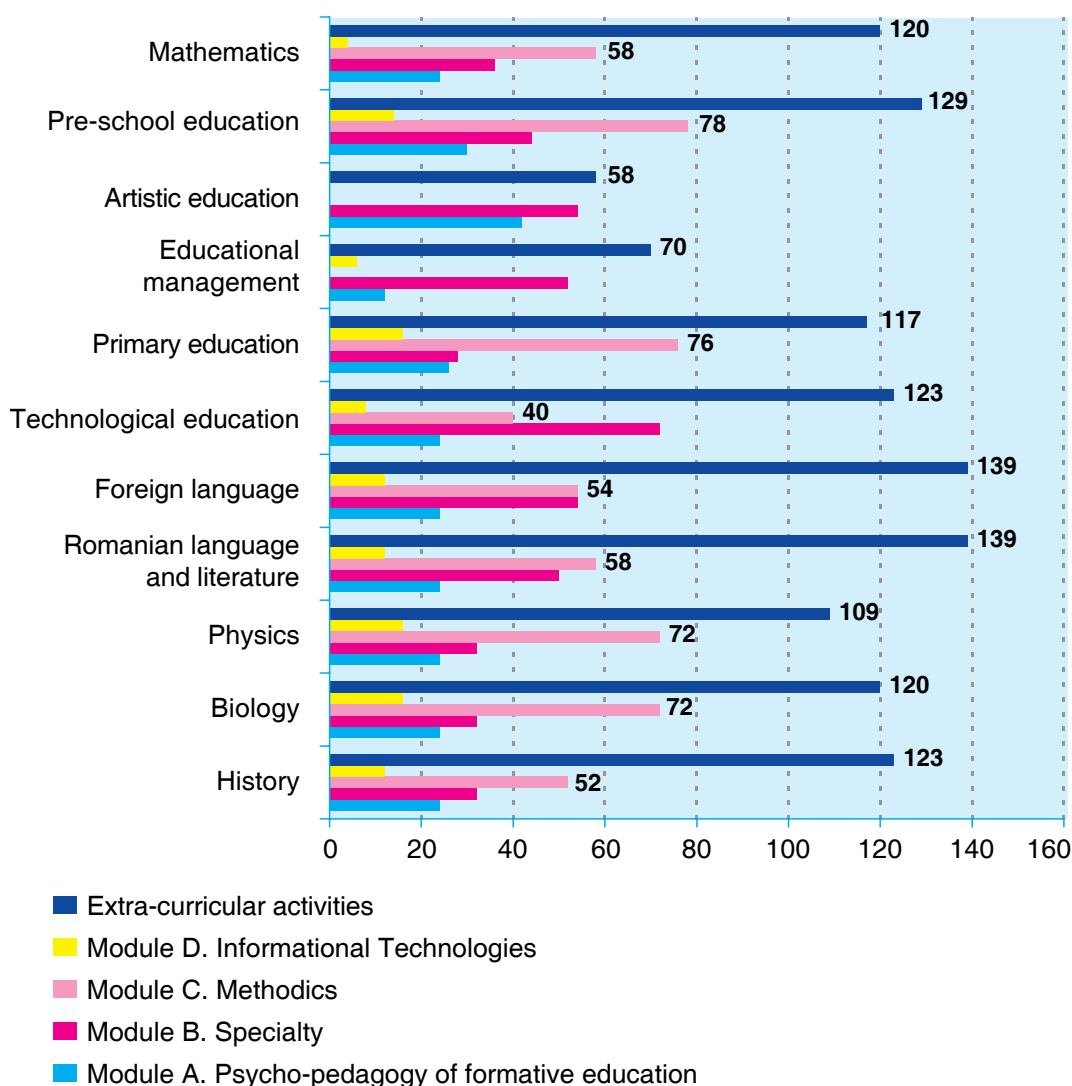
Among the bottlenecks that hamper the development of ongoing training for teaching staff, the respondents indicate the frequent and sudden changes of the regulatory and normative framework in this area, lack of some articulate financing mechanisms of these activities at central and local levels, the differences between rural and urban localities, and inappropriate institutional framework.

The activity of ongoing training of teaching staff within the ongoing training institutions is carried out on the basis of framework-curricula, developed by modules in accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of Education, which stipulate the need to upgrade knowledge in the specialty, didactic and psycho-pedagogical areas, with their harmonization to the conceptual, curricular, technological and educational assessment renewal. The peculiarity of these curricula lies in the current trend to ensure a relative balance in the specialized formation and the professional training of the teacher. In all the cases, the framework programs provide trainees with the opportunity to establish their own program and their educational route, depending on their interests and options, which encourages the advanced training activity, the general efficiency of this action of major importance. During the development of curricula, the institutions of ongoing training ensure the flexibility of the training programs' contents, taking into account individual options and interests of the trainees.

The distribution of hours by subjects during the courses provided by the Institute of Educational Sciences is shown in *Figure 13*. Since the Institute of Educational Sciences is appointed as the national coordinator, the Framework Plans of other institutions that are active in the field of ongoing training of teaching staff have a similar structure.

Figure 13.

Distribution of hours in the Framework Plans of ongoing training of teaching staff



Source: Institute of Education Sciences, 2008

The analysis of survey data obtained from teaching staff demonstrates that the curriculum for ongoing training needs substantial improvement. About 57.1 per cent of respondents think that the training programs must be extended. Another 27.3 per cent of respondents consider that the supply and quality of programs should be considerably improved, while only 7.35 per cent of respondents feel that radical changes are inappropriate.

To promote a policy for motivation of teaching staff in terms of performance and competitiveness the Concept and Strategy of Ongoing Training of Teaching Staff were developed and approved by the Ministry of Education and Youth in 2007. The Concept Paper calls for of several actions, chiefly:

1. Certify various educational institutions such as universities, institutions providing ongoing training, non-governmental organizations specialized in the area of education, and centres for ongoing formation.

2. Diversify ongoing training activities for teaching staff and develop new education curricula to include a wide spectrum of activities: life-long training programs at the university level, seminars, workshops, conferences, international courses, experience exchanges, etc.
3. Establish a National Agency or Centre to manage the ongoing training of teaching staff in the Republic of Moldova in terms of policy development, accreditation of training curricula, quality monitoring and assessment.
4. Implement a training system that will include the four main components of ongoing training – learn to know, learn to do, learn to live together with others, learn to be – based on the principles of democratization and decentralization.
5. Define the professional competencies in accordance with the four components, develop the teaching staff's competencies in accordance with international experience in this area, while taking into account the realities of the Republic of Moldova.
6. Establish the mechanisms for development and accreditation of programs for ongoing training as basic instruments, which ensure the quality of advanced training of teaching staff in a decentralized and liberalized environment, which will include the local service providers for ongoing training of teaching staff.
7. Support the process of training program development, aimed at developing the competencies of teaching staff.
8. Monitor the quality of the ongoing training for teaching staff in a continuous and systematic way, especially with regard to the impact of quality over the development of the basic components of the teaching staff activity.

In order to streamline the efficiency and effectiveness of the system of ongoing training of teaching staff, the new policies in this area should be oriented towards the motivation of teachers to participate in ongoing training and to use the skills and knowledge obtained in their daily activities.

In order to promote an efficient policy for teaching staff development that would ensure the observance of each teacher's rights to professional development, the 'Standards for Ongoing Training of the Teaching Staff from the General Secondary Education' were developed and approved by the National Council for Curriculum, aimed at developing the professional competencies of existing teaching staff, introducing the professional credits system and designing the ongoing training curricula with a view of ensuring the quality of education.

The professional development and ongoing training will be performed by using a system of professional credits. This system involves the accumulation of a certain number of credits within the system of ongoing training that will be taken into consideration for the obtainment of didactic degree or a certificate of professional ongoing training, as well as for the evaluation of teaching staff at the school level. In this respect, each teacher will have a portfolio that will include the documents that certify their participation in ongoing training activities. The portfolios will be assessed by the institutions empowered with this right by the Ministry of Education and Youth.

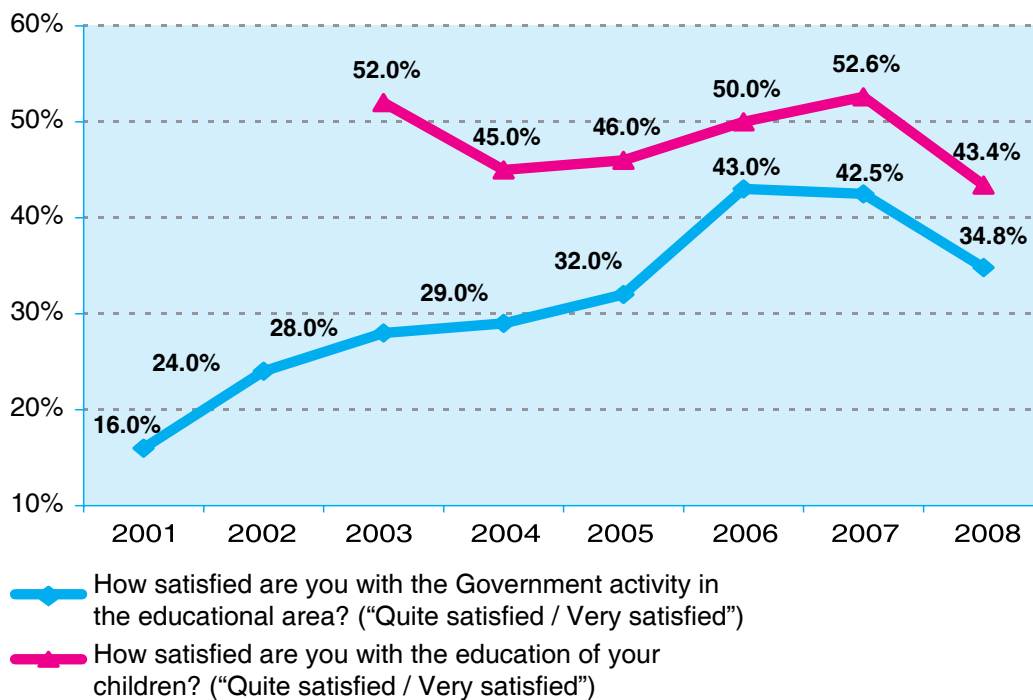
2.4. SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION OF THE LEARNING EFFICIENCY

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Education, in the opinion of Moldovan citizens, is one of the few areas which improved during the last ten years, except for 2008 (Figure 14).

Figure 14.

Citizens' opinions on education



Source: The Survey 'Public Opinion Barometer', Institute for Public Policy, 2000-2008

Thus, the share of citizens that are quite and very content with what the Government does in the area of education has increased from 16 per cent in 2001 to 43 per cent in 2006. In the period before the examinations in 2007 and 2008, the share of quite and very content citizens fell to 42.5 per cent and 43.4 per cent, respectively. To a certain extent, this fact can be explained by the disapproval shown by pupils, parents, teaching staff and school managers towards the external evaluations.

We underline that the higher degree of citizens' contentment with the action undertaken by the Government only applies to education (34.8 per cent in 2008). Approval was not so high in other areas: 25.8 per cent for culture, 24 per cent for health care, and 15.8 per cent for agriculture. According to these results the severity of problems in education are not as great as those in other areas.

Though 43-53 per cent of citizens are satisfied with the education of their children, one of the greater concerns of parents still remains their children's futures. Between 38 and 53 per cent of

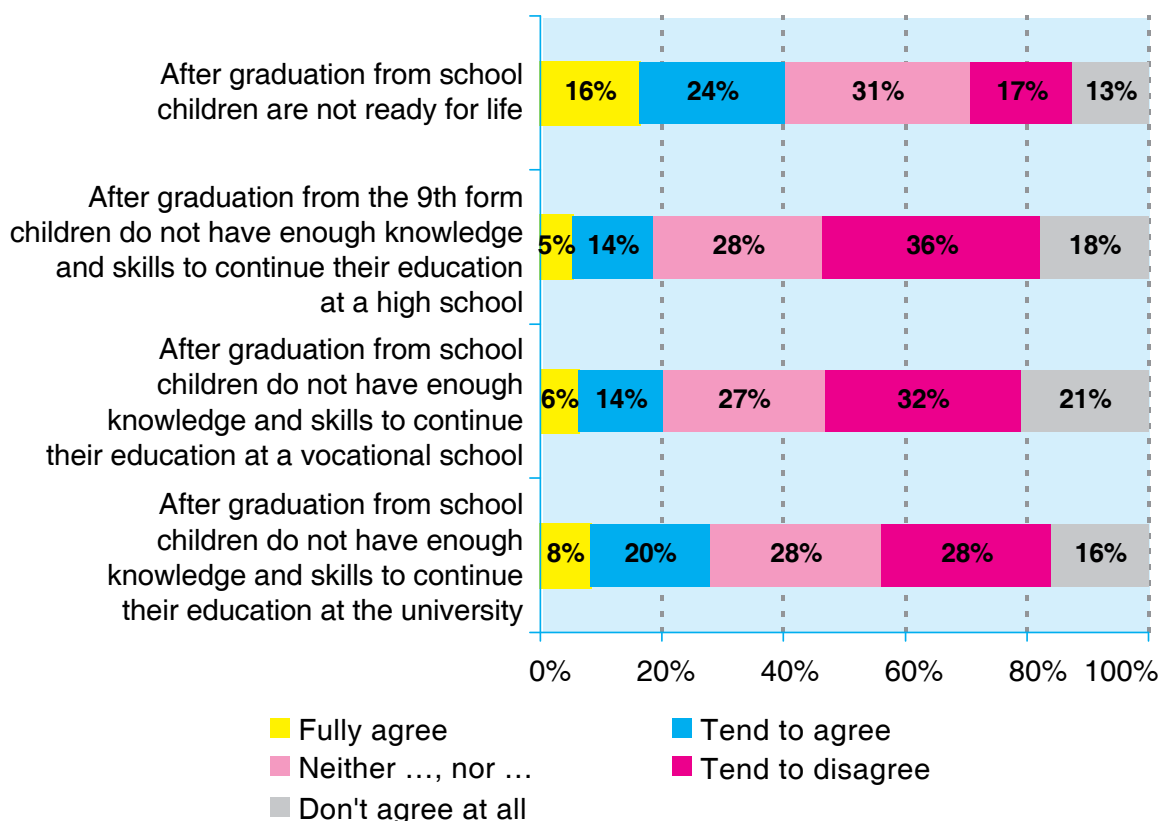
parents indicated such preoccupation. As a result, many parents do not see a direct link between the quality of education and the future of their children.

The results of general surveys are confirmed to a certain extent by the surveys carried out among pupils, parents and teaching staff. As in the case of general surveys, both pupils and parents are satisfied with the quality of education; 90.4 per cent of pupils ranked the quality of education in the school where they are studying as good or very good. While opinions of parents are more judicatory, the share of those considering the quality of studies as good or very good was 70.2 per cent and those considering the quality of studies as satisfactory 25.3 per cent. The share of parents that think their children’s education is poor or very poor is statistically insignificant.

It is, therefore, paradoxical that although generally satisfied with their children’s education the same parents consider it irrelevant for their future (*Figure 15*). A statistically significant number of parents (up to 30 per cent) think that after graduation children are not prepared for life, or even to continue their studies in a high school, vocational school or university.

Figure 15.

Relevance of education in the parents’ viewpoint

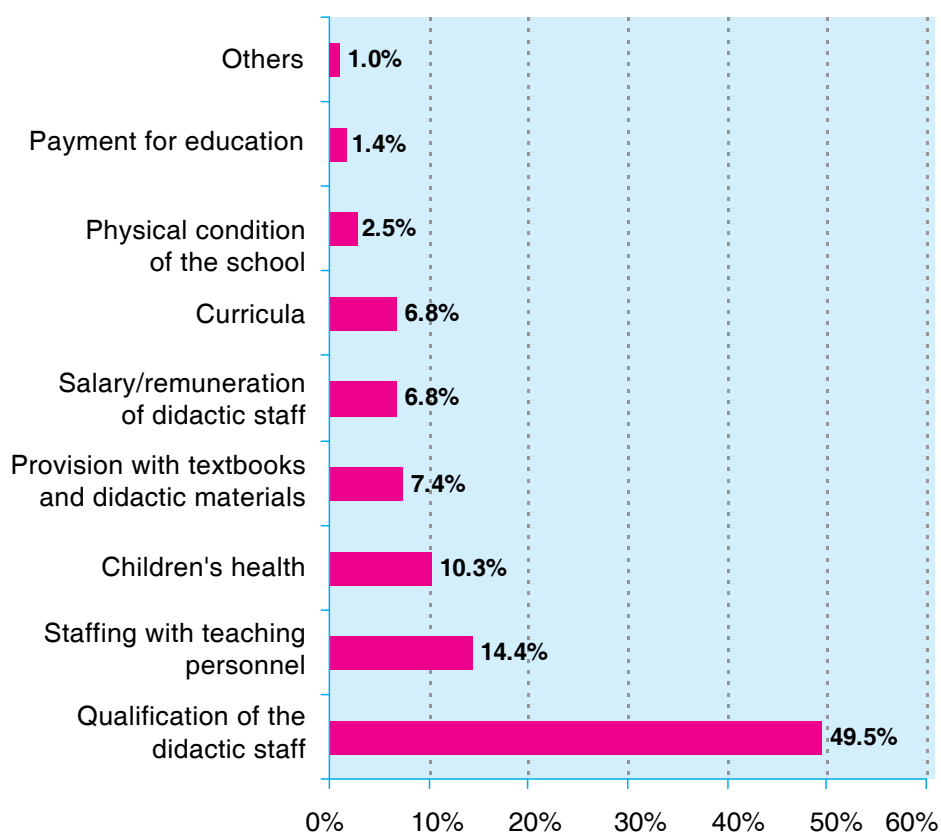


Source: Sociological survey ‘Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova’, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

In the parents’ viewpoint, the quality of education depends primarily on the qualifications of the teaching staff (49.5 per cent of respondents), staffing with didactic personnel (14.4 per cent) and the children’s health (10.3 per cent) and less on the physical state of the school (2.5 per cent) or payment for education (1.4 per cent).

Figure 16.

What the quality of education mainly depends on (parents' viewpoint)



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

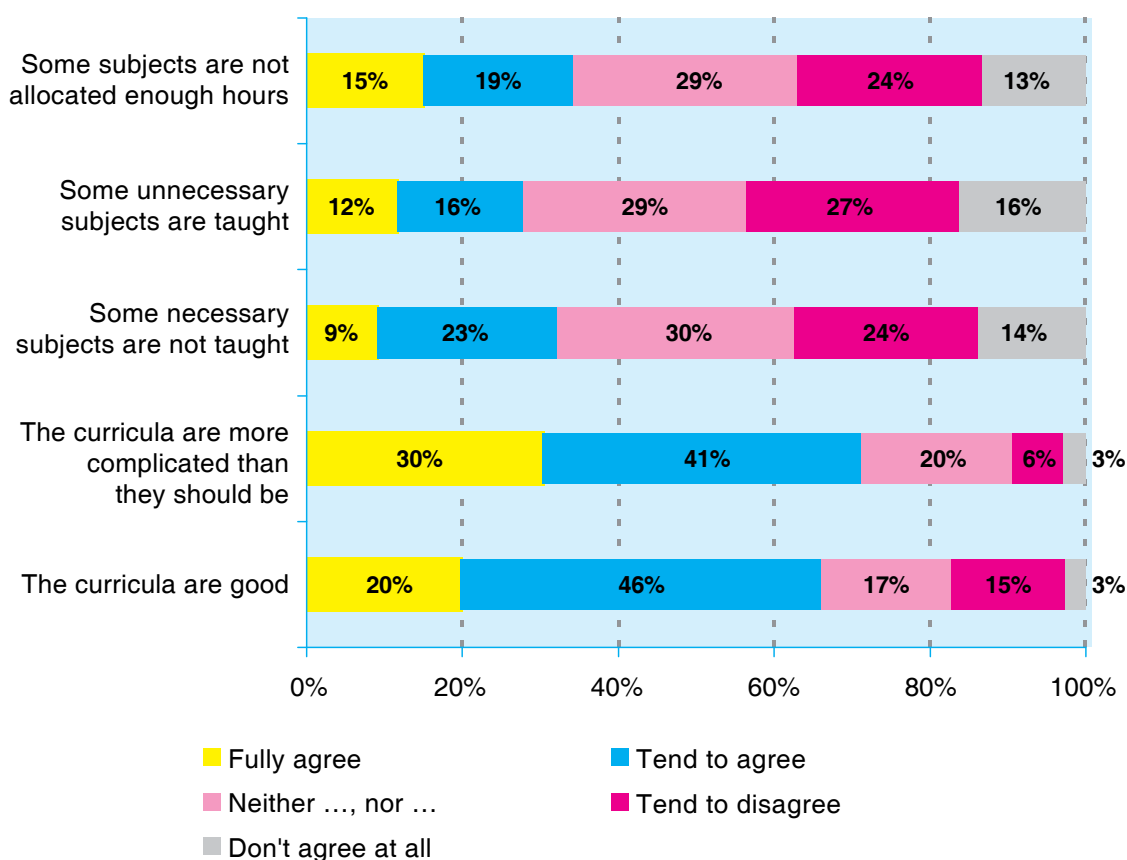
The parents underestimate their role in improving the quality of their children's education. Only 9.8 per cent of the respondents (parents) indicated that the quality of learning depends primarily on them, while 44.1 per cent of parents have said that the quality of education depends on the teaching staff and 44 per cent asserted that it depends on the children themselves.

THE COMPLEXITY OF CURRICULUM

The opinion of all subjects involved in the sociological survey converge on the fact that the school curriculum is overloaded and much of the information taught in school is useless and too complicated in relation with the age-related abilities of the children (*Figure 17*). A significant number of interviewed pupils (54 per cent) partially agree with the assertion that "what we learn at school is very complicated", while 16 per cent of children totally agree with this statement. Nevertheless, 30 per cent disagree with the fact that the school curriculum is too complicated. During the focus groups the children stated that they try hard when studying because the material is voluminous and hard to learn since sometimes the teachers recommend they consult several sources, and they need time to cover all the material. More than half of the teaching staff (52 per cent) stated that the curriculum of subjects that they are teaching is overloaded.

Figure 17.

The complexity of the curriculum from the parents' viewpoint



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

The headmasters and representatives of the Education Divisions believe that the curriculum is overloaded, difficult to be fully understood by all the children and that the amount of information that must be covered in a relatively short period of time has a negative effect upon the quality of education and its outcomes. Some school managers pointed out that the school curriculum is developed only for pupils with excellent skills and exceeds the possibilities of many children of the respective age.

Box 7. The complexity of curriculum from headmasters' viewpoint

- *“Firstly, the curriculum is overloaded. Since in many subjects the curriculum is designed for above-average pupils, we have to focus on the average pupils in order to promote them”* (M., deputy director for education, urban).
- *“For the age abilities of students from the 1st-4th forms the curriculum is quite complicated; it is applied, but could be applied better, but the Ministry of Education wants it like this, i.e. to teach them advanced things...”* (M., headmaster, rural)
- *“Very few, let’s say 20-25% or maybe 30%, of pupils get to the heart of the matter and understand all the material, but a large part still do not understand it”* (M., headmaster, urban)

Source: Sociologic survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING METHODS

With reference to teaching methods, the data of the sociological survey reveals that traditional methods prevail in basic education, the main cause likely being the lack of an efficient mechanism for the motivation of performance and the large number of older teaching staff. Many teachers have indicated that do not have time to improve their teaching methods because, to support their families they also have to hold down another job or work on the farm. According to the survey data, eight per cent of the interviewed teaching staff, most of them from urban areas, teach in other schools as well; 74 per cent of them mention that the low remuneration has forced them to take a second job.

The most commonly used teaching method is dictation. The inefficiency of this method is not understood by the most of pupils, who declare that this is a good thing, because they are provided a summary of “the most important things” and they do not have to do additional reading. Moreover, certain pupils state that the dictated information is memorized more easily and even if they do not learn anything at home they can still answer some questions when they are evaluated. Other pupils disapprove of the dictation method and hate the teaching staff who force them to take notes in their notebooks when teaching new material. These pupils prefer to listen for better understanding of the new topic, especially when referring to the exact sciences: mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc.

A positive sign came from the heads of education divisions and headmasters that also teach in schools. They think that teaching methods in the secondary cycle cannot be limited to taking notes during lessons, underlining that taking notes is in contrary to modern teaching-learning methods. At the same time, it was highlighted that the amount of information from certain textbooks, history texts, for example, is insufficient to ensure a comprehensive expertise and teachers require that pupils independently study the specialized literature and search the Internet.

A worrying fact is that 71 per cent of pupils agreed with the statement that they are encouraged by the teaching staff to learn by rote. One in three parents also supports this statement and one in four teachers recognizes that they use this method. The majority of pupils enjoy the group-based teaching methods, asserting that they better understand the material and it is easier for them to grasp it. But such teaching techniques are used rarely and only for certain school subjects. Pupils declare that lessons would be more interesting if the teacher would organize more “contests, rebuses and team games”.

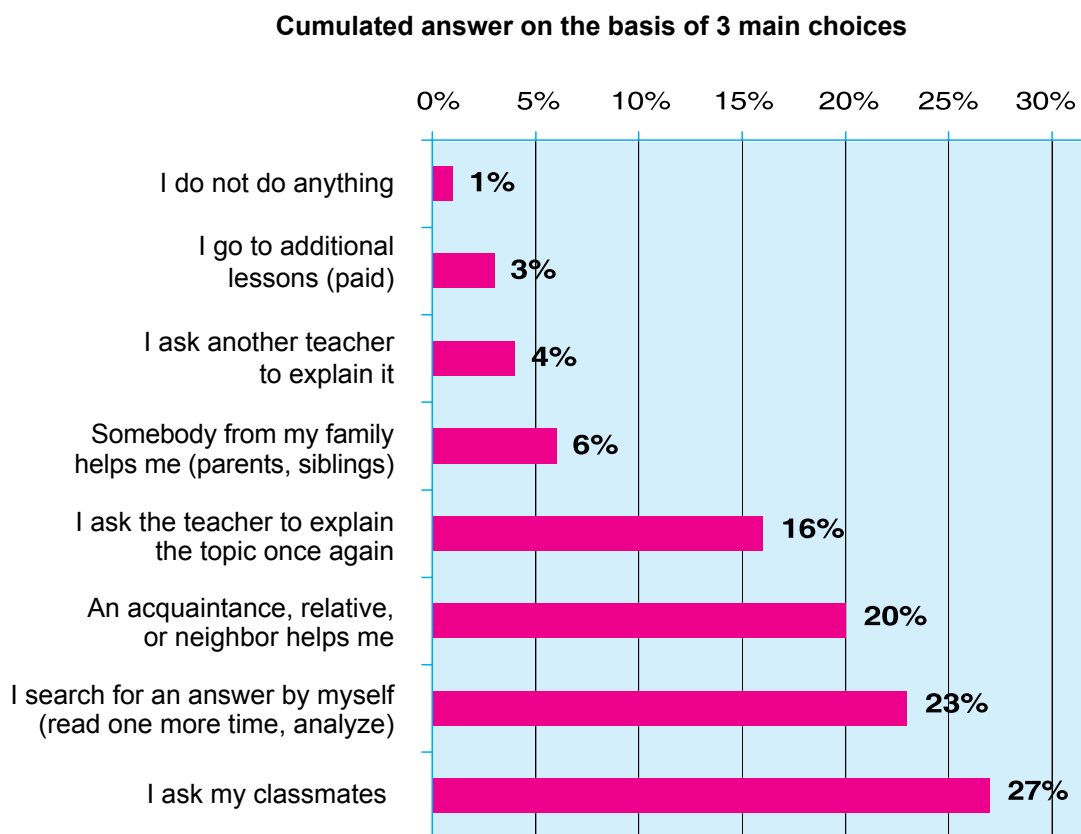
The qualitative and quantitative data of the sociological survey shows that many teachers are focusing on the ‘observance of curriculum’ and not on the achievement of planned educational outcomes. Thus, in order to make up lost time, sometimes several topics are taught during one lesson. While teaching new topics some teaching staff do not allow to pupils to ask questions, reproaching them that they were not attentive during the previous lessons or that they have to know these things from the previous forms. Sometimes, rather than answering the questions asked by pupils, teaching staff admonish them or “reprove” them for not knowing “elementary things”. In such cases the children are bored during the lessons and feel that the lessons are too monotonous. The qualitative study shows that if the pupils are bored, which is normal for such

situations, they lose their interest for the subject. Under these circumstances, some pupils try to find other things to do, disturbing the lessons and impeding the other pupils to learn.

Under the influence of a set of factors unfavourable to learning, many pupils do not understand the taught topics: seven per cent of pupils declare that this is oftentimes the case, while 72 per cent of them say that sometimes this happens. When they fail to understand a new topic, the pupils usually appeal to their classmates (27 per cent). The focus groups have highlighted this phenomenon, that pupils claim that they understand much better from their studious classmates than from teachers. The classmates explain the complicated concepts in simpler words than those used by teachers and they can ask about anything without being ashamed. A significant number of pupils (23 per cent) look for the responses by themselves in textbooks, specialized literature, Internet, etc. (Figure 18). Only 16 per cent of pupils appeal to the teaching staff to explain a topic which was not understood, and this only happens if the group pupils is large and includes pupils successful at the subject. In certain classes, there are 'why' pupils that ask too many questions and make their classmates angry for abusing of the chance to ask questions. The share of children that appeal to somebody in the family to explain topics that he or she does not understand is very low (six per cent), the main causes being that the parents and grandparents studied other curricula, while some of them do not even know to read Roman characters.

Figure 18.

What the students do when they have not understood the topic during the lesson



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

Even if the number of children doing nothing when they fail to understand the taught material is low, these children declare that they are unconcerned about this: *“I do not ask anyone at all and do not want to understand; I come to school only because I have to”*. (M., rural, 6th form) Alternatively, they think that they will not need this information in the future: *“I will leave to work abroad and much knowledge is not needed there”* (M., rural, 9th form).

USE OF TIME ALLOCATED FOR TRAINING

The efficient use of the time allocated for training depends mainly on the quality of the timetable and its observance. Many pupils dislike the lesson timetable because:

- distribution of subjects in the schedule is made without taking in consideration their complexity, and as a result there are some days when the pupils have to do a lot of homework, while on other days the timetable is less busy;
- the timetable includes too many subjects per day and the pupils have work for five to seven subjects to do for the following day;
- the order of subjects in the schedule, even during one day, creates hindrances to the good performance of lessons.

Most of the pupils' complaints appear in case of scheduling the sports lessons. The children state that after these lessons they are tired, sweaty, and have difficulties concentrating on the subsequent lessons that require an additional intellectual effort, such as mathematics, Romanian language, etc. The same assertions were made by some pupils about the scheduling the lessons of technological education at the end of the daily timetable.

One of the factors impeding the development of an optimal schedule, centred on the needs of children, is the overloading of teaching staff, who usually have many hours and/or subjects to teach.

The practice of teaching various subjects by the same teacher is widespread. Thus, 75 per cent of pupils declare that in their school a single teacher runs several courses. The situation worsens when the subjects belong to distinct curricular areas, a fact mentioned by 22 per cent of pupils. In the Balti and Chisinau municipalities the situation is better (12 per cent) in comparison with the other towns of the country (16 per cent) and rural areas (26 per cent).

Due to the low number of hours allotted to certain subjects, the school administration cannot hire a specialist, as the respective work load is insufficient to create a teaching position. Consequently, the teaching of subjects with a low number of hours per week is taken upon by teaching staff with a different pedagogic specialty. Moreover, sometimes when there are enough hours, these are used to increase the didactic load of teachers already working in the school. Thus, in many cases, the hours for technological education, drawing, music, geography, etc. are distributed based on the need to increase the wages of certain individuals. More serious is that some teachers do not observe the curricula of subjects outside their area of specialty, preferring to teach the subjects that they consider “basic”.

Box 8. Cases of inefficient use of the time allocated for training

- “We had a teacher who was conducting lessons in geography, technological education and Russian language...I do not know when she had time to prepare and give us the information we need” (M., 12th form, rural secondary school).
- “In the 9th form, chemistry was scheduled in our timetable, but we did mathematics and later these lessons weren’t recovered – we didn’t have chemistry lessons for one year” (F., 9th form, rural secondary school).
- “While the biology teacher was sick, we had the lessons with the kindergarten educator... she didn’t know anything and told us to read and not to make noise.” (F., 9th form, rural secondary school).

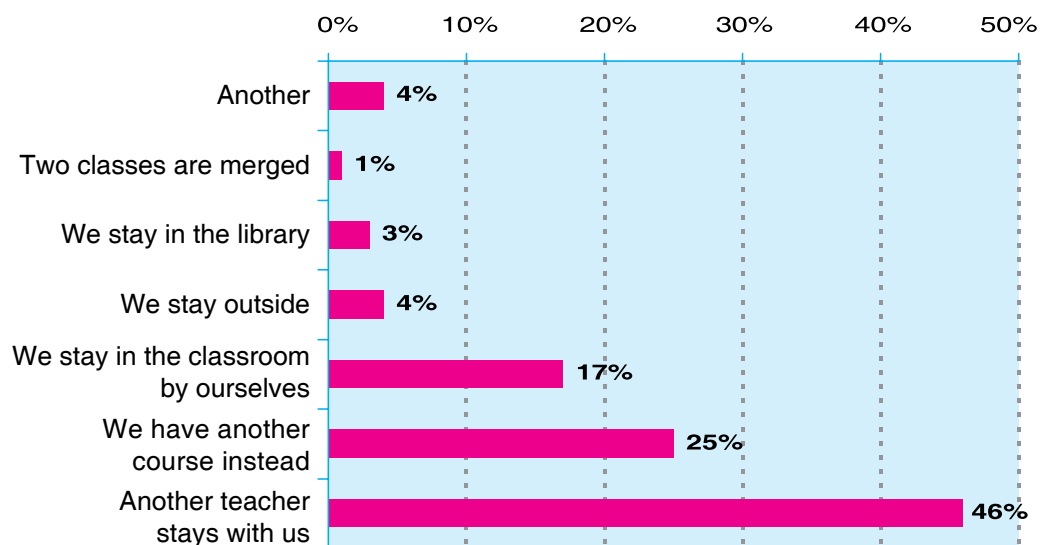
Source: Sociological survey ‘Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova’, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

Training time is also used inefficiently when the school board cannot ensure the replacement of teaching staff on medical leave. If we take into account that most of the teaching staff have more than one didactic load, and in rural schools teachers from other localities cannot be invited in as replacements, the teaching of these classes becomes a formality.

Despite the fact that the school boards strive to minimize the negative effects absent teaching staff in the classroom, efficient use of the training time remains more a wish than a reality. In order to retain the children in school and ensure that they attend the subsequent lessons, in many cases other activities that cannot fully recoup the lost time are organized for children (Figure 19). Most of the time (46 per cent) when the relevant teacher is absent, the children are supervised by another teacher. One fourth of children state that the lessons are replaced. There are cases (4 per cent) when the children go to canteen, bar or park. Some of them ask leave for the subsequent lessons and go home. Only few of those interviewed declared that they learn the respective topic by themselves or prepare for the lessons that follow.

Figure 19.

What pupils do when the teacher/professor misses classes?



Source: Sociological survey ‘Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova’, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

Under these unfavourable circumstances, the number of missed lessons increases. Thus, four in ten children mentioned that classes have been missed at their school. More than half the interviewed children declared that in the last month at least one of their lessons was cancelled, while 12 per cent of children stated that in the last month more than six lessons were cancelled (Table 8).

Table 8.

The number of lessons included in the timetable that were not held (pupils' estimations)

	On the average per a week	During the past month
All the lessons were held	34%	23%
Was not/were not held:		
- one lesson	27%	8%
- two lessons	15%	14%
- three lessons	5%	13%
- four lessons	3%	9%
- five lessons	1%	9%
- six or more lessons	5%	12%
DK/NA	10%	12%

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

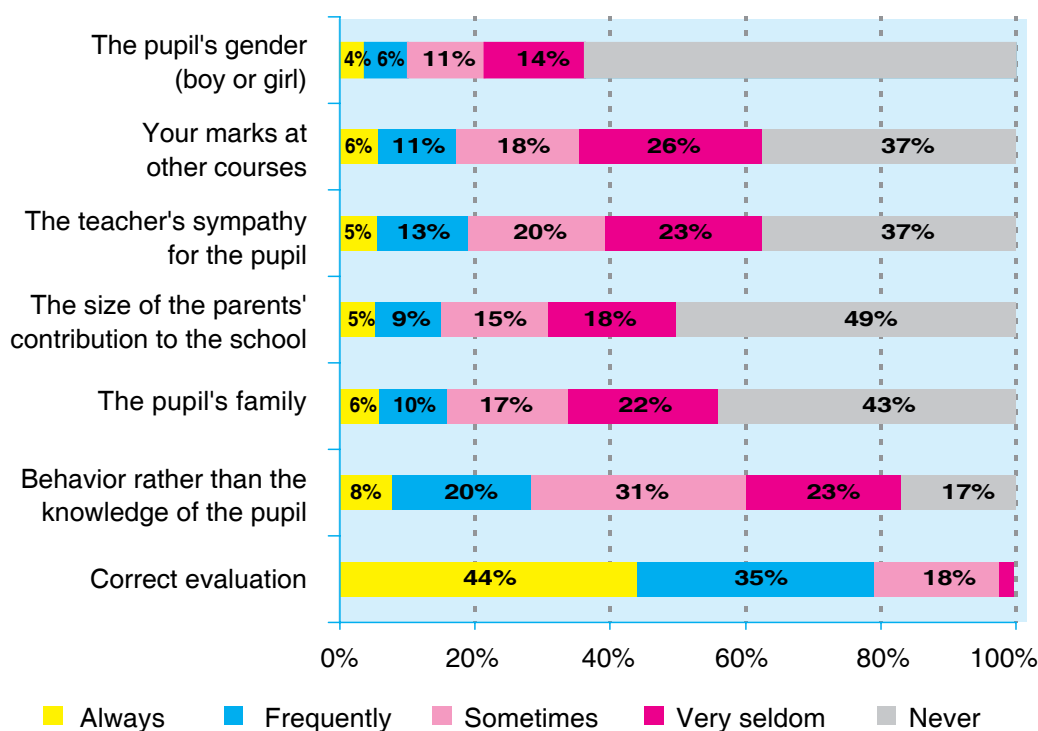
OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EVALUATION SYSTEM

All parties involved in the educational process – teaching staff and school managers, pupils and parents – believe evaluation is essential. The evaluation results are expected both by the pupils and parents. In accordance with the sociological survey, the criteria used by teaching staff to evaluate the achievements of pupils are mostly subjective, unknown and not understood by the pupils and parents. The pupils do not know the assessment grid and the marks that they receive are not explained by the evaluators. Many pupils feel ashamed and some of them even are afraid to ask for details from the teaching staff, presuming that this will negatively affect the results of future evaluations.

On the whole, 44 per cent of pupils declare that they are evaluated correctly and 35 per cent say that this happens oftentimes. About 20 per cent of pupils assert that sound evaluations happen to be only sometimes or very seldom. In the pupils' viewpoint, the factors influencing the fairness of assessments are the pupil's behaviour, the family he or she comes from and their marks recorded in other subjects (Figure 20). We point out that a significant number of pupils (14 per cent) think that the amount of parents' contribution for the school always or oftentimes influences the fairness of evaluations.

Figure 20.

The factors that influence the fairness of assessment (pupils' viewpoint)



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

The opinion of parents do not differ substantially from those of pupils, the parents being a little more sceptical on the absolute fairness of evaluations, preferring instead of the term 'always' the less categorical term 'often'.

The focus group discussions revealed that that pupils understand very well the discrimination criteria used by some teaching staff during the evaluation:

- pupils' performances: in some cases the pupils with good marks are favoured;
- pupils' behaviour: some teaching staff use demerit marks as punishment;
- the social group to which the pupil belongs: in the opinion of many children, the teaching staff are more indulgent with the children of teachers or of people with a certain social status in the respective locality (mayor, director, physician, prosecutor, judge, etc.)
- financial standing of the family: the children from wealthy families are provided with more attention, while those from underprivileged families are neglected;
- attendance of tutorials (for an extra fee): the marks of pupils that attend tutorials are groundlessly increased, a fact mentioned during almost all focus group discussions. At the same time, the pupils mention that sometimes they are pressured to attend such tutorials in order that their marks are not decreased.

During practically all focus group discussions it was mentioned that the results of evaluation are mainly influenced by the phenomenon of plagiarism. The pupils think that those that plagiarize have better results and some teachers tolerate such behaviour, especially in the case of high-level examinations.

2.5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 2.1 On the whole, the curricular reform had a positive impact on basic education in the Republic of Moldova. The implementation of the new curriculum ensured the streamlining of the educational process, its availability for children's needs and the harmonization of Moldovan education with the best international practices. An important step towards creating a child-friendly educational environment is to empower schools to decide for themselves about curriculum, which sets proper conditions to make full use of each child's potential and reflects the peculiarities of the respective localities in the learning process.

At the same time, despite the trends to upgrade the curriculum for basic education, streamlining the contents and reducing the number of educational objectives, a number of teaching staff, pupils, parents and school managers consider the current curriculum too difficult in relation to the age-related abilities of children. Perhaps these subjective perceptions are fostered by the fact that educational decision makers did not launch a campaign to promote the new curriculum; instead, in many cases the parties involved in the educational process were presented with a new curriculum as a *fait accompli*.

Recommendations. Independent pedagogic studies should be carried out, aimed at assessing the degree of curriculum complexity in relation with the age-related abilities of children, its compliance with the needs of the future citizens and international trends in the field. Update the curriculum in light of requirements for child-friendly schools.

Finding 2.2. The didactic support of the educational process in basic education had a sinuous evolution. Largely because of financial contributions from parents, each pupil in primary and lower secondary institutions was supplied with textbooks. In order to ensure access to education by children from underprivileged families, in the last two years the state has started the process for publishing the textbooks for primary education on its account.

Regretfully, the situation is completely different in the case of textbooks for children with special educational needs. So far, this issue has not been explicitly addressed in the educational policy documents, and the budgets of educational systems do not even stipulate funds for the development, publishing and distribution of such textbooks.

Recommendations. Streamline the process of supplying the basic education with didactic materials by decentralizing the mechanisms for selection of textbooks and allow schools, teaching staff and parents to make their own decisions on this issue. Introduce alternative textbooks in the rental scheme and increase the number of categories of children that can use the textbooks free of charge. Reorient the vision of the decision makers towards supplying basic education, which is compulsory, with textbooks published on the State's account.

Finding 2.3. During the process of education reformation in the Republic of Moldova, the need to supply educational institutions with didactic materials was omitted from the agenda of educational policies, and no provision was made for providing supplementary reading recommended for the school curricula, reference publications, dictionaries, maps, map-boards, test books, textbooks

for practical occupations, laboratory sets, musical instruments, etc. Although lately the shortage of these materials is partially redressed through the provision of educational institutions with computers and their connection to Internet, the number of pupils per computer remains high and many children do not have the possibility to consult the newest informational sources.

Recommendations. The policies for development, publishing and supply of educational institutions with didactic materials needs to be reviewed. Enlarge the categories of published materials, focusing not only on textbooks themselves, but also on intuitive and reference materials. Start some projects to provide all schools with laboratory sets for all the subjects from the school curricula. Continue the process of providing educational institutions with computers and implement programs of computer-assisted training.

Finding 2.4. In order to ensure the relevance and truthfulness of the system for the evaluation of school results, the educational authorities have undertaken drastic measures in choosing the external examination procedures for the final evaluation. Despite some shortcomings, unavoidable for any innovations in this sensitive area, during recent years a more objective evaluation of the training outcomes was ensured, the evaluation methods being closer to those used in international practice. An analysis of the new Concept Paper on Evaluation reveals that it is closer to the pupils' needs.

Nevertheless, the evaluation system is not yet immune to administrative and political interferences, the results of national evaluations being to a certain extent more 'glowing!' than those registered in international evaluations. Despite the fact that the results of school evaluations are rather high, a reluctance to adopt new evaluation methods is registered on the part of students, parents, teaching staff and school managers, who choose the previous evaluation methods.

Recommendations. Align the evaluation system with the teaching system, national curriculum and international practice in this area and truly implement the Concept Paper on Evaluation. Ensure the real independence of the existing evaluation and examination bodies. Strengthen the institutional framework of school results evaluation, eliminating administrative and political factors from the evaluation process. Establish bodies for external evaluation of school results at the raion/ municipality level that would ensure the unitary implementation of the educational policies on the entire country, thus offering children equal opportunities.

Begin a campaign for informing pupils, parents and teaching staff about the meaning of reforms of the assessment system, in order to explain the impact of this reform on basic education in general and for each individual pupil. Provide advanced training to teaching staff on how to implement the new evaluation methods of school results, publish evaluation guidelines and strengthen the psychopedagogical component of the evaluation process.

Finding 2.5. Regrettably, despite all the efforts of central and local public authorities, the proportion of teaching staff of retirement age is increasing and that of persons with seniority of less than three years is decreasing. The number of graduates from pedagogical colleges and universities that pursue a teaching career is quite low.

Recommendations Sustainable staffing of the educational system with young teaching personnel must be made, not only by increasing the enrolment in pedagogic departments and colleges, but also by implementing some effective policies for maintaining the teaching staff in schools. Young teaching staff should be trained to teach several subjects in the same curricular areas.

Finding 2.6. The qualitative analysis of the professionalism of Moldovan teaching staff reveals that most of the teaching staff in pre-university education have a university degree. At the same time, the share of young specialists in basic education is relatively low. Most of the teaching staff have high work seniority, but this maturity among the teaching staff is not accompanied by a growth in qualification, the share of teachers with the first didactic degree and high didactic degree being rather low.

In the higher education system the initial formation of teaching staff is viewed more as a complementary activity in training specialists for certain scientific and technical professions. Areas of professional formation oriented towards a pedagogical career have appeared in the classifier of specialties only recently.

Recommendations. Implement a new, unitary system for teaching staff training and separate the profession of teacher from those oriented towards activities in other areas. Update the curriculum for initial formation of the teaching staff, focusing on psycho-pedagogical aspects of the educational process, educational management, working with children in difficulty, etc. Extend the components of professional training related to communication with parents and the community, allow teachers to teach several subjects from the same curricular area, implement new evaluation and teaching methods focused on the child, and introduce computer-assisted training.

Finding 2.7. The analysis of regulations and guidelines in force in the educational system shows that most of them are oriented on the process rather than on the efficiency of learning. The system for reporting the activities of educational institutions and the educational system taken as a whole does not contain clear indicators, which would express the marks earned by pupils during learning. The mechanisms for correction of the instructive-educational process against the performances established during evaluations are lacking. Promotion of the teaching staff is made based largely on seniority rather than on performance. The acute shortage of teaching staff forces school managers to sometimes ignore teacher absences and often organize only formal recovery of the missed classes.

Recommendations. Revise the system for promotion of teaching staff and link the remuneration of teaching staff to performance. Update the regulations and guidelines in force by including some monitoring indicators that would reflect the efficiency of learning and the progress recorded by each pupil. Encourage schools that create appropriate conditions for child-focused education, including for children with special educational needs, children with limited physical possibilities and children from underprivileged families.



DIMENSION 3: SAFETY, PROTECTION AND HEALTH OF PUPILS

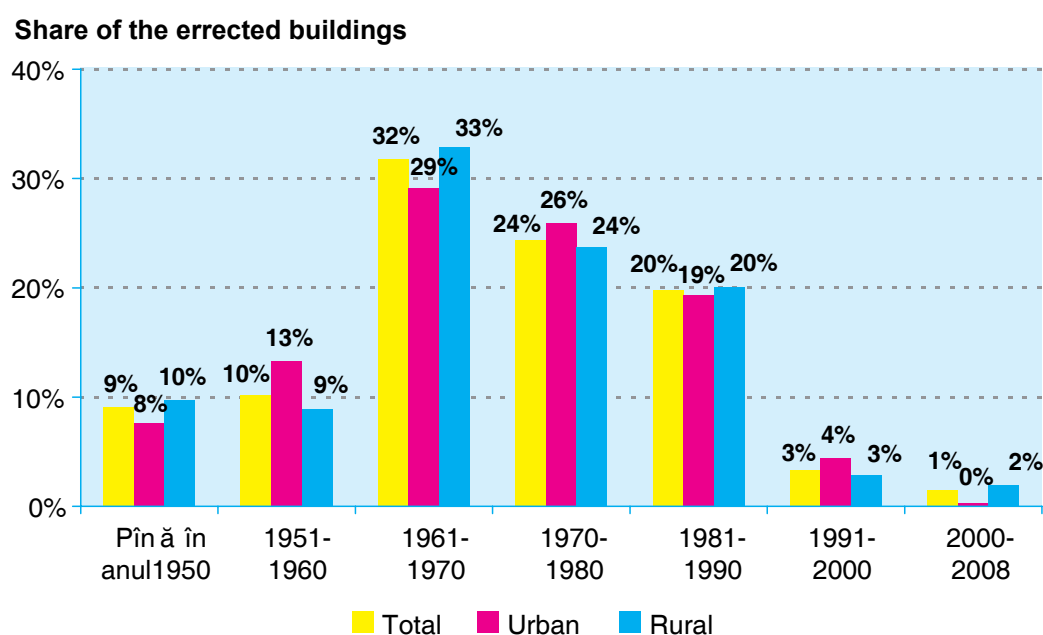
3.1. CONDITIONS IN WHICH THE PUPILS STUDY

THE STATE OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS

Safety, protection and health of pupils mainly depend on the condition of school buildings and the facilities these provide to children. The data of the educational institutions mapping system reveal that almost all school buildings were constructed before independence (*Figure 21*). Moreover, about 60 per cent of buildings are more than 30 years old. Obviously, under these circumstances it is very difficult to hold classes at the level of current requirements and to ensure the integration of physically disabled children in the conventional educational units. Thus, in accordance with the data of the mapping system, 41 per cent of all school buildings require thorough repairs and in only 11.2 per cent of them can ramps be built for the access by children with physical disabilities. In multi-storey schools it will be necessary to install elevators, but only after specialized examination of the technical possibilities to carry out such works.

Figure 21.

The years when the educational institutions were built



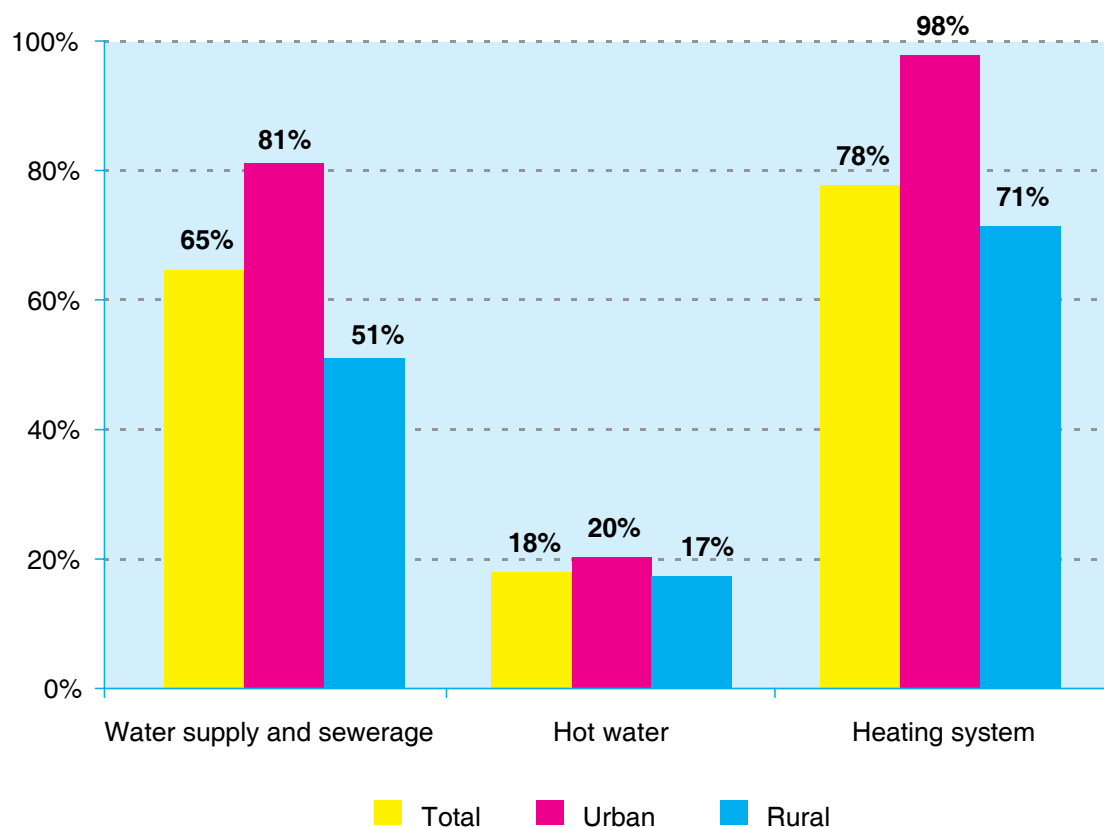
Source: The computations made by the Institute for Public Policy based on the data of the mapping system, 2008

The vast majority of schools from Balti and Chisinau municipalities have water and sewerage pipelines, compared with only 61 per cent of schools in other localities (*Figure 22*). Most of the schools in rural areas do not have water and sewerage pipelines and, consequently, the lavatories are placed in the school yard, making full observance of sanitary and individual hygiene requirements practically impossible.

An acute issue remains the heating of school buildings, especially of those in rural localities. About 29 per cent of such schools do not have modern heating systems, with severe consequences to the educational process and the health of the children during the cold months of the year.

Figure 22.

The endowment of schools with water, sewerage and heating systems



Source: The computations made by the Institute for Public Policy based on the data of the mapping system, 2008

We mention that, on the whole, the number of seats in educational institutions is sufficient for the schooling of all children with the lessons held in one shift. Yet, there are localities where classes are held in two shifts, with 3.2 per cent of children studying in the second shift.

Since a great amount of expenditure in the area of education is intended for the maintenance of school buildings, during the last ten years the authorities have proposed various plans to streamline the network of educational institutions. The last strategy, proposed for public discussions, stipulates the merging of small schools and creation of a specialized system to transport the children to bigger schools. It is important that all the stages for a possible

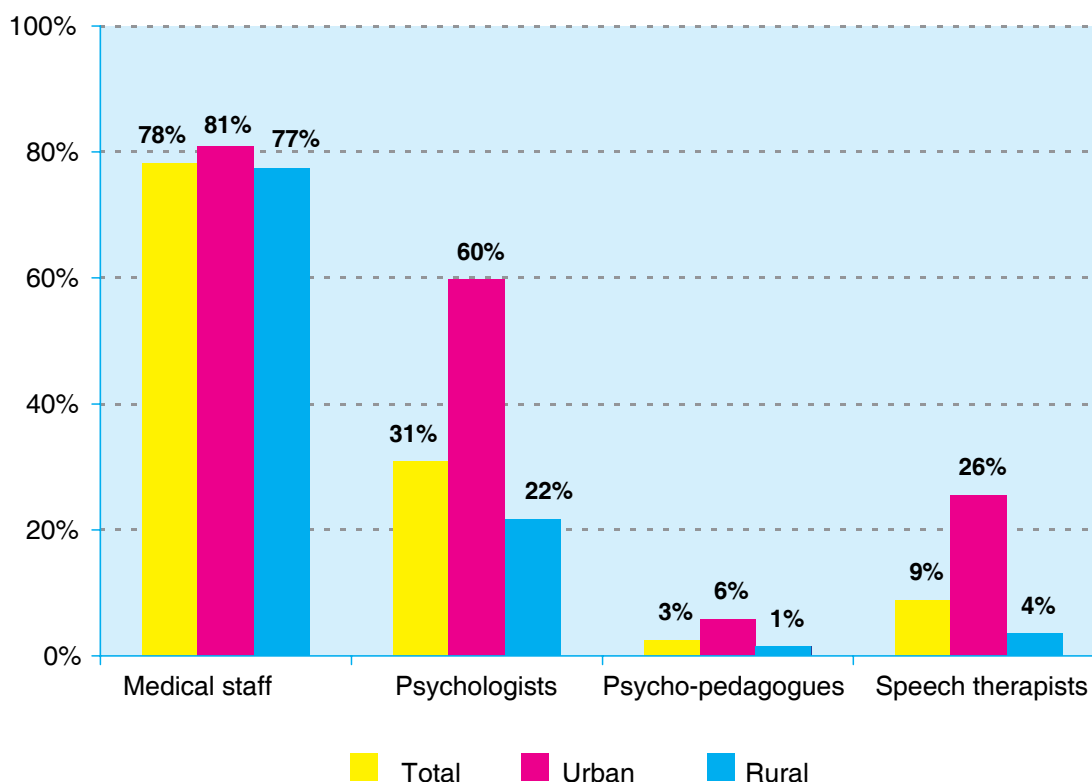
streamlining of the school network will not negatively influence the efficiency of the training process and the safety and health of children.

CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT SERVICES

In the urban localities about 81 per cent of schools are staffed with medical personnel (*Figure 23*), these specialists working in the school on either a part-time or full-time basis. In rural localities the situation is worse and the share of schools that do not have medical staff is 23 per cent.

Figure 23.

Staffing of schools with medical personnel, psychologists, psycho-pedagogical staff and speech therapists



Source: The computations made by the Institute for Public Policy based on the data of the mapping system, 2008

Practically all the schools from Chisinau and Balti municipalities have psychologists and psycho-pedagogical staff. In the other towns of the country the situation is not as good; just 59 per cent of schools have psychologists and psycho-pedagogical staff. Regrettably, in the rural localities the situation is much worse; only 23 per cent of the respective schools have psychologists and psycho-pedagogical staff. Obviously, actions are required on the part of central and local authorities for the improvement of the situation.

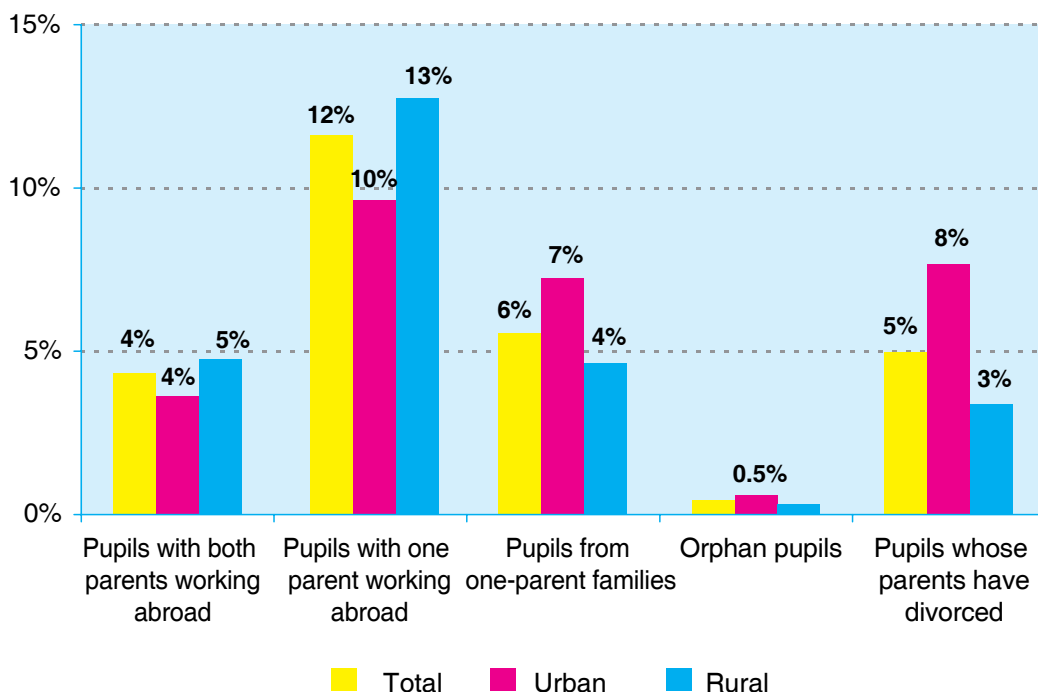
THE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION

According to the official data of the National Bureau of Statistics, about 360,000 people were working abroad in 2007. The vast majority of these are able-bodied people with school-aged children at home.

The analysis of data provided by the General Educational Institutions Mapping System (*Figure 24*) reveals that 4 per cent of children attending school have their both parents abroad, and 12 per cent of them have one parent who has gone abroad in search of work. In rural localities 17 per cent of students have one parent abroad.

Figure 24.

Pupils' family situations



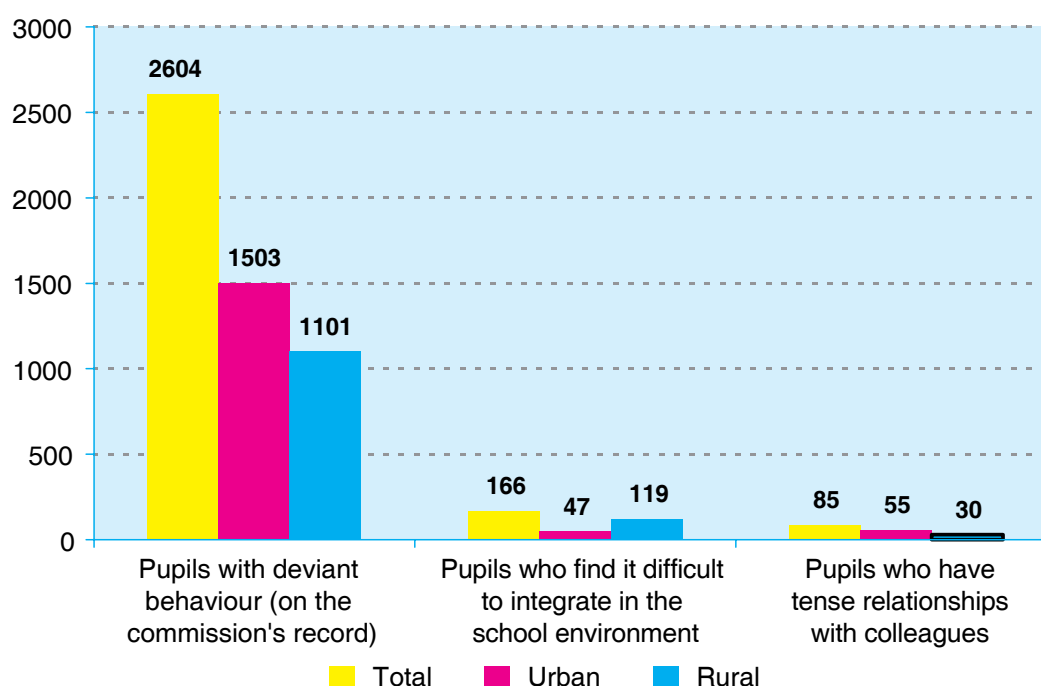
Source: The computations made by the Institute for Public Policy based on the data of the mapping system, 2008

Obviously, the absence of one or both parents is difficult for these children. If in rural schools every fifth child has one or both parents abroad and the psycho-pedagogical services are lacking in these schools, the need of some drastic interventions aimed at training the teaching staff in specific methods for working with these children are required.

In the absence of specialized services and teaching staff specially trained to cope with this situation, the issues of children whose parents have left for other countries remain outside the educational system. Thus, if the recording of children with deviant behaviour is appropriately organized (*Figure 25*), the mechanisms for recording children with difficulties in integrating into the school environment or who have strained relations with their classmates do not work, the reported data being irrelevant.

Figure 25.

The number of pupils with deviant behaviour



Source: The computations made by the Institute for Public Policy based on the data of the mapping system, 2008

3.2. THE SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION OF SAFETY, PROTECTION AND HEALTH CARE

SCHOOLING CAPACITIES

Most of the respondents reported their discontent with the conditions for studying, including the state of buildings, poor heating, poor lighting, old furniture, and/or the substandard endowment of laboratories.

In nearly all localities the building capacities do not correspond to the number of pupils attending school. Thus, according to many managers of rural schools, maintenance issues arise when large-capacity buildings house a small number of children, since the school is financed in accordance with the current number of pupils.

In some raions there are villages with a small number of school-age children and teaching staff. The representatives of the Education Divisions think it is appropriate to establish school circumscriptions. It is proposed that the children from small villages study in the neighboring larger villages, thus having access to better study conditions.

To create school circumscriptions, free transportation of pupils is needed, but the Mayor's offices cannot pay for this service. Representatives of Mayor's offices and Raion Divisions focus only on the financial matters and the need for a complex approach to the issues of school transportation (safety of children, transport options when classes end earlier, supervision of the children in the embarkation and debarkation stations, alternatives if the vehicle breaks down, etc.) are not yet realized.

Contrary to the situation in rural areas, pupils from towns, especially those from Balti and Chisinau municipalities, noted that they face issues related to the shortage of classrooms. They have to study in two shifts and, for some subjects, even sit three pupils at one desk. Some headmasters say that their schools do not have a sufficient number of classrooms, necessitating the primary classes being placed in kindergartens.

HEATING AND ILLUMINATION OF CLASSROOMS

Although the parents and headmasters recognize that significant progress was made during the last year's installation of some modern heating systems, there are still some schools with no heating systems at all. In the country as a whole, six per cent of pupils declare that they are dissatisfied and another three per cent very dissatisfied with their school's heating. We underline that in schools without heating systems many parents contribute financially or with fuel (wood, coal) to run the furnaces. Obviously, this method of heating does not meet the current requirements and represents a potential danger for the children's health.

Box 9. Inappropriate study conditions in some schools

- *"We have furnaces, but they're quite problematic...it is practically impossible to stay in the classroom because of the smoke... the chairs are muddy. The first thing we do in the morning is to clean up the table..."* (M., rural, 6th form).
- *"There are insufficient lamps in the classrooms; parents wanted to buy more, but we didn't get permission. They said that the existing lighting is enough"* (F., 9th form, rural).
- *"Now we really feel the lack of drinking water. The school building was built in 1974 and we do not have water. The staff usually bring the water from 500 m away. But this year we were forced to bring our own, so next year the school will not work if we do not guarantee the school's water supply. We need money to drill an artesian well; we have pure water here in the forest, one kilometre away from here, but we do not have money for this"* (Headmaster, rural)

Source: Sociologic survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

Insufficient illumination of classrooms is a problem for 15 per cent of pupils. In some schools, in order to save money, the classrooms are only partially lit. Some pupils report that in the morning, in order to save electricity, some teachers turn off the lights in classrooms, telling children that it is bright enough even if the students claim the contrary.

WATER SUPPLY

The perception of pupils with regard to their school's water supply is shown in *Table 9*. The results indicate that a significant number of water supply systems do not work or work poorly (according to 28 per cent of respondents). Also, the vast majority of pupils (97 per cent) do not have the possibility to take a shower after sports classes and extracurricular sports activities.

Table 9.**Water supply of school in pupils' opinion**

	There is, but it does not work		There is, but it runs very poorly		There is and it works very well		There is none		I do not know	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Running water	4.4%	12.3%	24.1%	16.9%	67.7%	37.6%	3.8%	32.5%	0.0%	0.8%
Hot water	6.9%	8.3%	4.6%	8.9%	21.6%	12.3%	66.9%	69.5%	0.0%	1.0%
Place for hand washing	3.5%	8.7%	21.0%	19.7%	64.1%	51.6%	11.0%	18.0%	0.6%	1.9%
Common shower in the sports hall	7.1%	2.0%	0.3%	1.1%	2.0%	0.5%	90.0%	94.8%	0.6%	1.6%
Shower for girls in the sports hall	5.6%	2.0%	1.8%	1.4%	3.0%	1.5%	89.1%	93.2%	0.6%	1.9%
Shower for boys in the sports hall	7.4%	2.3%	1.3%	0.4%	3.0%	3.2%	86.8%	91.9%	1.5%	2.2%

Source: Sociologic survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

During the focus group discussions pupils from schools without a water supply mentioned that the drinking water brought to the school runs out quickly and sometimes they suffer thirst.

The lack of water, combined with the strict requirements of the school administration, forces some pupils to miss school on rainy days, because "anything that touches the ground becomes muddy", "my shoes are torn", and "at the school they force me to wash my shoes, but there is only a little water, and it is cold and dirty".

THE CONDITION OF LAVATORIES

In all the schools included in the study, there are separate lavatories for girls and boys. In rural localities, the pupils use the yard toilets exclusively; even if there are toilets in these school buildings, they are closed or used only by the teaching staff.

Table 10.**The condition of lavatories in the perception of pupils**

	There are, but do not work		There are, but in a very bad state		There are and work very well		There are none		I do not know	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Common lavatory inside the school	0.9%	6.9%	9.6%	5.5%	29.2%	11.6%	74.0%	58.2%	2.0%	2.0%
Lavatory for girls inside the school	0.9%	6.3%	0.9%	4.4%	59.6%	11.1%	29.2%	76.0%	0.9%	2.2%
Lavatory for boys inside the school	0.9%	6.2%	7.9%	5.5%	56.2%	11.5%	32.7%	72.9%	2.4%	3.9%

	There are, but do not work		There are, but in a very bad state		There are and work very well		There are none		I do not know	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Common lavatory outside	1.4%	1.7%	9.4%	18.5%	16.5%	41.4%	71.3%	35.4%	1.3%	3.0%
Lavatory for girls outside	1.4%	1.7%	14.1%	29.2%	24.2%	61.4%	58.8%	6.1%	1.5%	1.6%
Lavatory for boys outside	1.4%	1.4%	12.7%	29.0%	24.2%	58.8%	59.7%	8.6%	2.0%	2.2%

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

The condition of some lavatories in rural schools is so poor that some pupils are afraid to go to toilet because the floor is flimsy, the roof is broken, there are holes in the walls, and/or the lavatory is extremely dirty. The distance between the school building and lavatories and the queues that form, mostly at the lavatories for girls, cause children to be late to classes. Some girls say that they prefer to go to lavatories during lessons because it is not so crowded. Except for the Chisinau and Balti municipalities, similar cases are also reported in urban localities.

The answers of children indicate that they generally avoid using the toilet rooms inside the schools because of the intolerable smells. The sociological survey identified a school with an unusable lavatory, the students coping with this situation as best they can. The parents even raised money, but at the time the study was conducted the toilet rooms had not yet been repaired.

It is also bewildering that in certain schools, which have benefited from grants or that have collected money from parents and made expensive repairs, the toilet rooms are still closed to children. In some urban schools where money is collected from parents each month for proper maintenance of toilet rooms, the technical staff close them immediately after the end of lessons and the children remaining in the school for extracurricular activities cannot use them.

FURNITURE

Every fifth teacher states that in the school where he or she teaches there are not enough desks and chairs; the same is asserted by 12 per cent of pupils. In the viewpoint of staff from rural areas, the lack of furniture is much worse, with 23 per cent of them declaring that there are not enough desks and chairs in classrooms. The same thing was noted by the pupils during focus group discussions, highlighting also that the furniture is old, unsightly, and/or does not correspond to their age, making them sit bent in the desks. Instances when children have been hurt falling from broken chairs were also recorded.

SPORTS HALLS

Half of pupils mentioned that do not have enough sports facilities, while 15 per cent of them said that the school where they study does not have a sports hall at all. The pupils assert that in the

absence of sports equipment, during the sports lessons they are required to run or to do the same simple exercises that bore them. The pupils remarked that in order to procure the simplest equipment they have to collect money, but they cannot afford the procurement of expensive equipment required by the school curricula.

The majority of headmasters said that for many years the schools did not receive money for the procurement of sports equipment. They think that sports classes and the athletics hobby groups organized in the schools are absolutely necessary for the physical development of pupils. The headmasters underlined the issue of sports halls that, to a great extent, do not comply with the conditions necessary for sports classes.

THE ADJACENT SCHOOL AREA

The teaching staff from Balti and Chisinau municipalities (58 per cent) are concerned that children do not have playgrounds or recreational yards. The pupils' point of view largely coincides with that of the teaching staff; 31 per cent of pupils highlighted that do not have a special place where to play at their school and 46 per cent of them said that they are dissatisfied with the playground of their school.

MEDICAL SERVICES IN THE SCHOOL

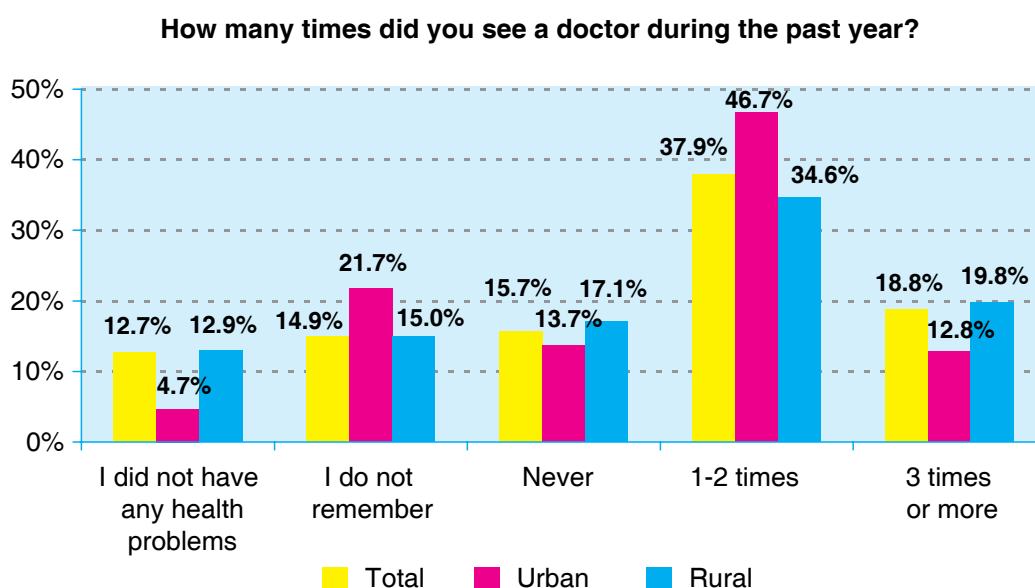
A significant share of pupils (37 per cent) declared that they had never sought the assistance of the doctor/medical assistant at school. At the same time, 67 per cent of pupils noted that the doctor/medical assistant from school helped them at least once. It is surprising that six out of ten children do not know the work schedule of the doctor/medical assistant who works in their school. Some participants in the focus groups mentioned that the school health office is oftentimes closed. From the discussions held with pupils, the qualitative study ascertained that the presence of medical workers in school is rather formal. In many cases the medical assistant/doctor does not have the most basic supplies to provide first aid. In some schools the medical worker is employed only for a certain number of hours or days per week.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

At this age children do not think of health very much; 18 per cent do not even remember if they have visited a doctor during the last year, while 12.7 per cent say that they do not have any health problems (*Figure 26*). The share of children that have visited a doctor during the past year is very large, this indicating the negative influence of several factors, primarily exhaustion, unbalanced nutrition and in case of children from towns, the insufficiency of physical activities.

Figure 26.

The frequency of pupils' visiting a doctor during the past year



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008.

When they feel sick, only 19.4 per cent of pupils go to the doctor on their own initiative, 27.7 per cent of pupils visit the doctor/medical assistant at school, while most of them (47.4 per cent) decide together with their parents what should be done. Even if statistically insignificant, there are cases when the children treat themselves or consult their friends (0.8 per cent).

CHILDREN'S NUTRITION

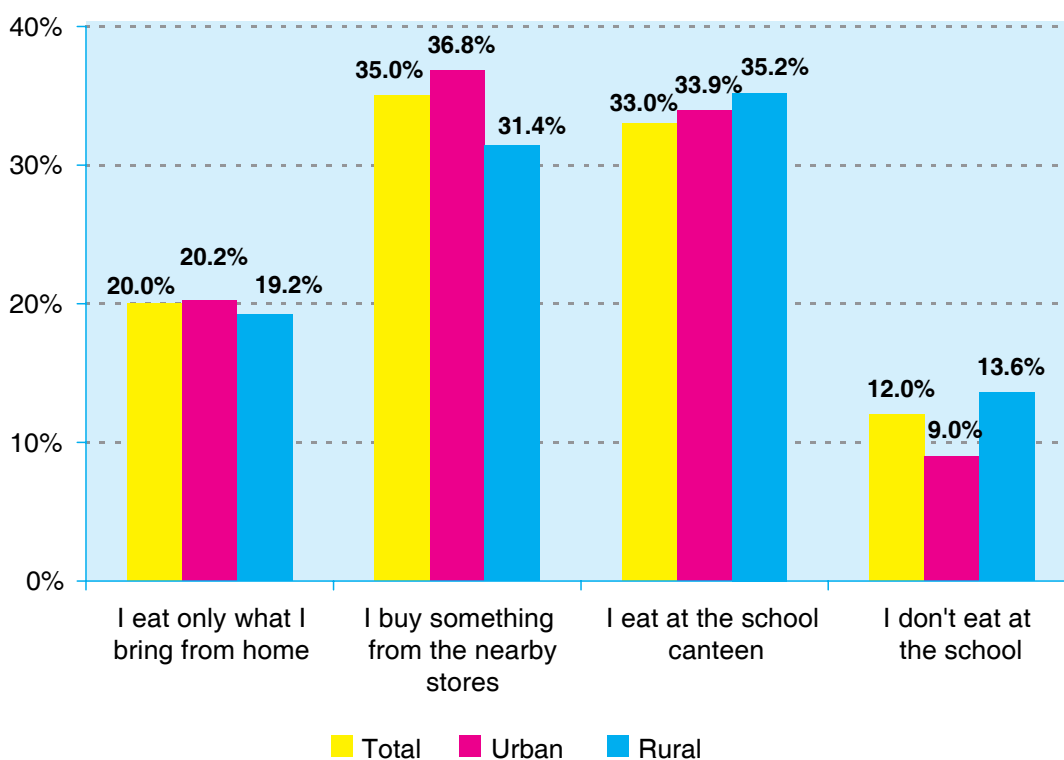
According to their own opinions, a large share of children (72 per cent) thinks that they eat well. Nevertheless, ten per cent of children say that sometimes their family does not have enough food, while another four per cent have pointed out that they never have enough food. The parents are more reserved in making such declarations and only two per cent of them think that they never have sufficient food, while another six per cent say that they sometimes do not have enough food. Regretfully, three per cent of the interviewed children have remarked that there were days when they went to sleep hungry because they did not have enough to eat.

In general, most children (56.6 per cent) eat at their homes three times a day, while other 28.7 per cent eat at home more than three times a day. The qualitative study reveals that there are children who do not eat in the morning, either because of lack of time or force of habit. Another 10.9 per cent belong to the category of those who declared that they eat only two times a day at home. It is concerning that every third pupil declares that there were days when they came to school hungry, while six per cent of the total sample say that this happens to them frequently.

NUTRITION AT THE SCHOOL UNITS

While they are at school nutrition is at the children’s discretion. Thus, the largest share of pupils (35 per cent) eat food procured in the markets or/and booths nearby the educational institutions. These foods include baked rolls, sweets, chips and other foodstuffs not meant to be eaten daily (Figure 27). One fifth of children eat food brought from home, while 12 per cent of children do not eat at all while at school. Given that 64 per cent of children spend, on average, six to seven hours per day at school, and nine per cent of them even more than seven hours, such eating habits cannot be healthy.

Figure 27.
Children’s nutrition at school



Source: Sociological survey ‘Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova’, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

According to the pupils’ responses, seven per cent of them said that their school does not have a canteen and 14 per cent of them said that their school has a canteen, but it works poorly or does not work at all. About 77 per cent of children declared that their canteen is good. These statements do not correlate with the share of pupils eating at school canteens (33 per cent), which can be explained either by the high cost of the products offered by canteens, or by the pupils’ or parents’ preferences.

In a number of educational institutions, certain categories of pupils and especially those from poor and/or large families, are provided with free food. Of the country as a whole, the share of these pupils is about 18 per cent, which is lower than the share of children below the official poverty threshold. We remember that of families with school-aged children the absolute poverty rate is 34 per cent and the extreme poverty rate is 20 per cent.

We point out that among pupils, especially those from urban areas, there exists the opinion that the school canteen is intended for children from underprivileged families and it is shameful to visit it.

Regardless of whether they do or do not eat at school, the children were asked about the quality of food prepared in the school canteen. In general, the pupils think of the food offered by the school canteen as good or acceptable.

Pupils that are not included in the list of those who can eat for free can still eat in the canteens, but have to pay a monthly fee. Some pupils have declared that they would like to eat at the canteen, “but not everybody has the possibility to pay”.

From the analysis of data obtained during the focus groups it was determined that there are a certain category of pupils whose parents are employed and, therefore, are not considered poor. However, because of low wages, these parents cannot pay the monthly canteen fees, this leading to the increase in the number of children that do not eat anything at school. We mention the fact that many of these children, even if they can bring some food from home, feel ashamed to do this.

PROTECTION AND SAFETY OF PUPILS

Generally, the vast majority of pupils state that they feel safe at school. Elements of insecurity appear in situations related to the physical state of school buildings and unfixed yard lavatories, strangers entering the school grounds, the unfriendly behaviour of some pupils from higher forms towards younger pupils, etc.

Box 10. Pupils' feelings of uncertainty at school

- *“We risk every minute – the stairs are in very poor condition and are ready to split, there is a big hole and it is widening each day, and the floor is unstable.”* (F., 9th form, urban).
- *“The school is old; it leaves much to be desired. Lime falls from the ceiling and it seems like it is snowing in the classroom.”* (M., 9th form, urban).
- *“There are cases when strangers enter the school and bother pupils and steal. This is why I think that a guard should stay at the entrance and record who enters and leaves the school”* (F., 8th form, urban).
- *“I was at the sports lesson and put my bag in the changing room. The teacher forgot to lock it and my money was stolen...”* (F., 7th form, rural).

Source: Sociological survey ‘Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova’, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

In some urban schools, especially in the Balti and Chisinau municipalities, security services were hired and paid for by the parents. The presence of guards at the school entrance or on the school grounds gives pupils and parents a certain feeling of safety.

Uncertain feelings appear mostly among pupils from primary classes that are afraid of students from the higher forms. There are cases when the children from lower forms are treated rudely, hit, blocked from entering the lavatories, threatened or have their pocket money stolen by pupils from higher forms.

PUNISHMENTS IN THE SCHOOL

In order to maintain order, the teaching staff often issue reprimands and lectures. In many cases, the pupils feel the lectures single them out, especially when it is made in public, is humiliating or they feel they are innocent (*Table 11*). More serious is teaching staff that apply corporal punishments, including “slaps in the face”, “flicks” or “grabbing by the hair”, and sometimes even more serious punishments that have medical consequences. About 56 per cent of the interviewed pupils said that teachers yell at them, about 22 per cent said that teachers call them names, and 15.4 per cent of pupils reported sometimes receiving corporal punishments.

According to the surveys, the stress factors are more common in rural schools. Even if in the rural schools the percentage of pupils that do not feel stressed at school is higher (53 per cent) than in urban schools (49.5 per cent), the cases when teaching staff yell, call students names and even apply corporal punishments are more frequently encountered in rural schools. It is also in rural schools where pupils most frequently come to school hungry.

Characteristic for urban areas, especially for the Chisinau and Balti municipalities, is the stress of pupils because they are denied entrance in school if they do not have a school uniform. This was mentioned by about 25 per cent of pupils from Chisinau and Balti municipalities, by 18 per cent of pupils from other towns and four per cent of pupils from rural localities.

In general, the great majority of pupils know that the teacher does not have the right to punish them physically. Some of them claim that their parents allow the teaching staff to do this within certain limits, because “in their generation this was permitted and that is why they grew up properly”. Still, the vast majority of pupils think that physical punishments do not have to be applied in school.

Table 11.
The frequency of stress factors in schools

How often it happened to you	Oftentimes		Sometimes		Never	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Feeling stressed at school	2.0%	3.3%	48.5%	41.6%	49.5%	53.0%
That teachers yell at you	2.0%	3.9%	50.5%	53.5%	47.5%	41.6%
That teachers call you names	1.8%	1.6%	18.1%	21.2%	80.0%	76.3%
To be hit/receive corporal punishment by teachers	0.9%	1.4%	10.7%	15.7%	88.4%	82.4%
To shout at classmates	7.5%	7.0%	72.7%	76.9%	19.9%	14.8%
To see pupils swearing at school	17.3%	20.9%	69.2%	67.1%	13.5%	10.3%
To see pupils fighting at school	9.2%	9.7%	54.5%	56.7%	34.9%	32.3%
To fight with classmates	1.3%	2.2%	13.8%	23.8%	85.0%	73.2%
To strike/to be struck by older classmates	0.6%	1.6%	13.3%	16.7%	86.1%	81.1%
To be afraid to ask the teacher when you did not understand the topic	4.5%	7.1%	38.1%	36.0%	56.9%	55.9%
To be forced by teachers to attend tutorials (paid)	0.9%	0.7%	15.3%	5.9%	83.8%	92.2%

How often it happened to you	Oftentimes		Sometimes		Never	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
To fail to do your homework	4.9%	5.0%	69.3%	66.0%	25.4%	28.5%
To not understand the topic	4.4%	8.6%	75.8%	69.6%	19.8%	21.0%
Be beaten by parents for low/demerit marks	0.3%	2.5%	18.2%	15.2%	81.4%	81.4%
To leave/run away from a class because you fail to learn	0.9%	1.1%	14.6%	7.3%	84.6%	91.1%
To be denied the entrance to school because you are late	0.9%	1.4%	13.2%	8.1%	85.9%	89.9%
To be denied the entrance to school because you did not have a school uniform	1.8%	0.4%	15.0%	3.6%	82.2%	93.6%
To be forbidden to leave school until the lessons are finished	6.5%	4.8%	13.6%	11.2%	79.9%	82.2%
To come to school hungry	1.1%	7.5%	32.1%	31.0%	66.9%	60.1%

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

In order to prevent inappropriate behaviour or to punish certain pupils, many teaching staff punish students by decreasing the marks assigned to pupils during the current evaluations. Pupils can unexpectedly learn that they have failing marks of 1-4 (out of a possible 10 marks) because they spoke out of turn, distracted their classmates or misbehaved. This method of punishment is considered by most pupils as incorrect, causing them deep negative emotions.

In the case of more severe infractions, the form master or the school administration calls the parents or even the police to school. Pupils think that teachers should instead first speak "one-on-one" with them when certain issues arise. Pupils claim that they respond better to the teachers who respect students when handling such situations. Pupils hope that when they make a false step they will be invited by teachers to have a discrete discussion, offered the opportunity to correct the mistakes, discuss the situation, or be punished by doing additional exercises.

We point out that during the focus groups a number of children were self-critical, saying that many times the children themselves provoke the teachers. In cases of obvious insolence, some teachers get nervous and their reactions amuse the pupils.

CONFLICTS AND VIOLENT ACTS

Regretfully, aggressive behaviour and violence amongst pupils still exists in schools and, in the opinion of the interviewees, the intensity and gravity is increasing. Usually, conflicts appear in a group of pupils when some of them try to assert their authority as they understand it. Use of strong language for some groups of pupils has become commonplace, but this bothers others. In general, verbal aggression and insults are frequently used in conflicts between pupils. As a rule, only boys settle their issues through fighting, but fights between girls are recorded in increasing frequency, which, in the respondents' viewpoint are even more violent and difficult to stop.

Box 11. Violent acts in school

- *“The teacher hit my head off the blackboard...afterwards, I was bleeding...I lost consciousness and was brought by ambulance to Ungheni...ever since I feel dizzy if I run around...”* (F., 6th form, rural).
- *“So what if an older pupil mocks you? Do you go to the pupil on duty? No, you go to the headmaster and he says, “What is the problem, can’t you fight?...”* (M., 7th form, urban).
- *“Let’s go fight after class...and even if he gives up, they do not have any pity, they beat him until the blood runs...they fight for money, whoever wins takes the money”* (F., 7th form, rural).
- *“If the teacher saw that you were slapped across the face or kicked he can pass by... but if he sees that you are bleeding, he calls for the headmaster and parents and the scandal begins.”* (M., 9th form, urban).

Source: Sociological survey ‘Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova’, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

There are schools where the conflicts amongst pupils are very frequent, which disturbs the educational process, psychologically affects many children, and makes some children not want to go to school anymore. There are situations when the less confident children do not publicly express their opinions during lessons for fear of the more confident students. Unfortunately, due to the lack of experience of some teaching staff who are trying to implement the new teaching-learning methods, the conflicts among pupils appear as a result of group activities, which, because they are poorly organized, provoke aggressive behaviour instead of strengthening partnerships between the pupils. The more timid pupils or those considered by their classmates as being weak are teased, held up to ridicule and humiliated by those who want to assert themselves as leaders of the group.

Violence between pupils from different forms is mainly found among boys. The rivalry between the forms caused by certain contests can lead to conflicts that degenerate into physical fights. The conflicts between the boys from different forms appear because of “self-importance”, “disputes for girls”, “protectionism”, etc. The pupils from lower forms declare that they are harassed by the pupils from higher forms. Some pupils from higher forms force the younger pupils to accept paid “protectionism” to be “defended” from “aggressors”.

Even if in many schools violent conflicts are settled by the teaching staff, there are schools where the school administration prefers to remain uninvolved. There were recorded conflict situations between pupils that ended with fights during the classes and the teaching staff could hardly stop the violence.

During the focus groups the pupils said that the efforts of teachers and school management to discipline some pupils are useless. The pupils also claim that the teaching staff do not even react to minor deeds of violence, interfering only in instances thought of as serious.

Some children mentioned that the bad behaviour and conflicts during breaks happen because of the shortage of time; they want to be able to go outside to the lavatory and do more things during the break without being punished for being late to classes. Many children declare that they are tired of the rivalry between classmates and the tension in class. The noise during the breaks and the strong language affect them and sometimes even stop them from focusing on their classes because they are preoccupied with what will happen during the following break.

3.3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 3.1. About 60 per cent of school buildings are older than 30 years and 41 per cent of them need thorough repairs. The maintenance of buildings, whose capacity in many cases is not fully used, requires significant financial means that do not have a direct impact on the physical study conditions. Technical possibilities to build ramps for access by children with limited physical mobility exist only in 11.2 per cent of buildings. The multi-storied standard schools do not have elevators and require additional technical inspections to determine whether it is possible to install them.

Recommendations. A full review of the technical condition of each school building and identification of solutions for streamlining the maintenance expenditures, especially in cases of unused spaces, is needed. In order to create suitable study conditions for physically disabled children it is required to estimate the cost of building access ramps, installing elevators, if needed, and reequipping the lavatories. To begin, it would be appropriate to start pilot projects, especially in the localities where there are residential institutions.

Finding 3.2. Except for the large towns, most of the schools do not have water supply and sewerage systems. Only ten per cent of schools have hot water. In rural localities the lavatories are placed in the schoolyard, many of them being unequipped. As a consequence, the full observance of requirements related to sanitation and individual hygiene becomes practically impossible.

An acute issue remains the heating of school buildings, especially of those in rural localities. About 28 per cent of such schools do not have modern heating systems, which severely impacts the educational process and the children's health during the cold months of the year.

Recommendations. Channel the finances earmarked for the future maintenance of unused spaces towards the improvement of water, sewerage and heating systems. Connect the school buildings into gas pipelines and expand the practice of installing autonomous heating systems. Change the attitude of certain school managers towards the issues related to the sanitary and hygiene conditions in school and the fitting of lavatories, works that do not require many financial resources.

In case of schools where the children from primary, secondary and high school classes study in the same building, a clear delimitation of areas for each age category is required, including separate toilets for the children of lower grades. School administrations should undertake additional measures for training technical personnel and raise the degree of their responsibility.

Finding 3.3. The planned improvement of the network of schools by merging certain schools, creating school circumscriptions and introducing school transport prompted strong reactions among the parents, teaching staff and school managers. Even understanding that a quality education can be provided only in educational institutions with well-equipped classrooms, competent teaching staff, etc., most of parents prefer their children attend school as near to their homes as possible. Naturally, the main concern of parents is their children's safety.

We mention that the Draft Strategy for streamlining the school network, proposed by the line ministry for public discussions, does not provide answers to all the concerns of parents, including: What the children will do if their classes end earlier? Where will the children stay if the school vehicle is late or breaks down? What the children will do if the weather conditions make driving difficult?, etc.

Recommendations. It is necessary to start public discussions on the planned streamlining of the network of schools. Since this streamlining will be performed only in the rural areas, where children's access to quality education is already difficult, all the components of the strategy for the streamlining of the school network must be tested through pilot projects in two or three raions over several years, with compulsory analysis of its impact on the efficiency of training, protection, safety and health of children.

At the same time, in the case of small schools, in addition to simple merging, the development of alternatives that could ensure the efficient operation of rural schools faced with a small school-age population are required. One of the potential variants would be the maintenance of small schools through a drastic change in the organization of the educational process: circulation of the teaching staff and not of children; teaching of related subjects by a single teacher, who must be first trained accordingly; procurement of portable/compact laboratory sets that can be used in the conventional classrooms; computerization of classrooms and implementation of educational software that would allow the simulation of experiences within the school subjects; creation of movable laboratories that would provide services to all small schools within a given area etc. Further, the existing facilities of these schools could be used for the implementation of certain social projects and hosting of various services in these localities

Finding 3.4. Practically all the big schools, irrespective of the geographical area, are staffed with medical personnel. The schools from small rural localities, which are serviced by the specialists of health centres, are the exceptions. Health offices exist in most schools, but a large number of pupils, especially those from towns, prefer to consult their parents before addressing a medical worker from the school. In the pupils' opinion, the health offices in schools do not fully meet their needs; in some cases the offices are closed or cannot provide help to pupils because the needed medicines are lacking.

We mention that the Standard Regulations of General Secondary Educational Institutions does not contain explicit provisions on the health care provided to pupils in educational institutions.

Recommendations. Although the regulations related to the proper functioning of health offices in educational institutions also fall under the jurisdiction of health authorities, the school administrations must ensure the access of pupils to health services. First of all, to this end, the standard regulations of educational institutions must contain a separate chapter on how to provide health care services, the responsibilities of school administration, the responsibilities of medical staff working in educational institutions, etc. At the same time, in the case of small rural schools where health offices cannot be established, the possibility to create some mechanisms to ensure the access of children to health services by establishing some clear procedures of interaction with health offices from the locality, the schedule of medical assistant in school, etc. will be analyzed.

Finding 3.5. If the staffing of schools from Chisinau and Balti municipalities with psychologists, psycho-pedagogical personnel and speech therapists is relatively good, an acute shortage of such specialists exists in other localities. As a consequence, these services are provided to pupils by people without specialized training or are not provided at all.

Recommendations. Carry out a detailed assessment of the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of psychological services in schools, enlarge the set of services provided to pupils and parents, identify more precisely their needs and strengthen the components of psycho-pedagogical

counseling. Since nowadays, for financial and economical reasons, it is unlikely that all schools, especially of those from rural localities, will be staffed with psychologists, psycho-pedagogical personnel and speech therapists, it is necessary to organize advanced training courses in these areas for the existing teaching staff. Another solution would be to employ these specialists by the Raion Education Divisions and establish a timetable of visits in schools where there are pupils that need specialized assistance.

Finding 3.6. In rural schools every fifth child has one or both parents abroad. In the absence of specialized services and teaching staff specially trained to cope with this situation, the issues of children with parents left abroad remains outside the educational system. The mechanisms for identifying children with difficulties integrating into the school environment or of children who have strained relationships with their classmates do not work, the reported data being irrelevant.

Recommendations. Update the curricula for pedagogic education by enlarging the components referring to the work with children who are temporarily without one or both parents and who have difficulties integrating into the school environment. Organize courses of advanced training for teaching staff in schools, mostly in those where the number of children whose parent(s) is/are abroad is significant. Develop and distribute in all schools special guidelines on these issues for teaching staff and school managers. Create a mechanism for support and counselling of these children, appoint teaching staff who will mentor the children temporarily without both parents, with the appropriate remuneration for this activity.

Finding 3.7. The services for feeding children while they are at school have proved their utility and efficiency, but some social categories remain outside the free nutrition scheme. There are schools that do not have canteens, and other operate poorly or do not work at all. Depending on if their meals are free or paid, sometimes children, are divided into 'poor' and 'rich' categories, causing tension among the pupils. The 'poor' are derided or humiliated, thus refusing the meals offered in school.

Recommendations. Establish conditions for the effective operation of school canteens in all educational units. Enlarge the number of social categories that can benefit from free food in the school canteens. Depersonalize the payment method and/or exemption from payment for the meals in school canteens by introducing vouchers, issued by the school administrations under confidential conditions.

Finding 3.8. In some schools there are instances of punishments applied by the teaching staff as slaps in the face, flicks, and grabbing by the hair, a fact declared by 15.4 per cent of pupils. Some parents allow such punishments, wrongly believing in their utility. Some teaching staff take the liberty to yell, use inappropriate words, make improper observations on the pupils' appearance, and poke fun at their clothes.

Recommendations. Introduce in the curricula for initial formation and ongoing training of teaching staff instructions on working with pupils in situations requiring discipline, the behaviour of teaching staff in such situations, and interaction with parents. Inform parents of methods for children's education based on the latest research in the psycho-pedagogical sciences. Establish in school units some efficient mechanisms of reducing the instances of verbal or physical aggression of pupils, their reporting and punishment of all guilty parties. Raise the degree of responsibility of the teaching staff and create in pedagogic bodies an atmosphere of intolerance to the application of verbal or physical violence towards children.

Eliminate the practice of decreasing pupils' marks in cases of inappropriate behaviour. Extend the work with children that deviate from the rules on behaviour. Train the teaching staff in how to act when the pupils behave inappropriately or defiantly.

Finding 3.9. In many schools there are cases of violence and their intensity and severity is increasing. In schools where the pupils of primary forms study together with the pupils of higher forms, especially in the large urban localities, cases of humiliation, thefts of money, blocking the access to lavatories, imposing "protection" on younger children and other negative situations are registered.

Some teaching staff and school managers do not interfere or even recommend to children to settle their issues on their own in cases of what they consider minor violence.

Recommendations. Carry out comprehensive pedagogical studies on the causes and forms of school violence and methods of its prevention. Implement in schools some modern methods of education and promotion of tolerance, and counselling in response to conflict situations. Introduce topics on the prevention of school violence in the curricula of initial formation ongoing training of teaching staff. Update the regulatory and legal acts governing the activity of educational units aimed at raising the responsibility, both of teaching staff for reporting and stopping the violent situations and of the pupils that exhibit violent behaviour.

Establish mechanisms for reporting violence. Organize for pupils, during the classes conducted by the form master, some training and exercises on how to act in conflict situations, when they are threatened by other pupils, etc. Develop some guidelines for pupils, parents and teaching staff that contain advice and methodical instructions about combating the violence in schools.

Finding 3.10. A great number of factors that negatively influence the efficiency and effectiveness of learning and the degree of protection and children's safety are caused by the way units schools are organized. Inclusion within one institution of all the educational levels and stages (primary, secondary, high school) leads to crowding, neglecting the needs specific to each age, ungrounded homogenization of teaching-learning methods and those of organizing the extracurricular activities, and "domination" by the older of the younger.

Recommendations. Examine the possibilities, when the social, economic and demographic conditions allow, of school units' reorganization in accordance with educational levels and stages: primary schools (1st–4th forms), secondary schools (5th–9th forms) and high schools (10th–12th forms).

The primary schools should be small and placed as near to the pupils' homes as possible. The secondary schools, being larger, could serve an area of reasonable dimensions that would exclude the long and tiresome trips of pupils. Both types of schools, pertaining to the compulsory education, would have clearly established coverage areas, thus eliminating the unofficial selection of children and overcrowding of the 'prestige' schools.

DIMENSION 4: GENDER EQUALITY IN SCHOOL

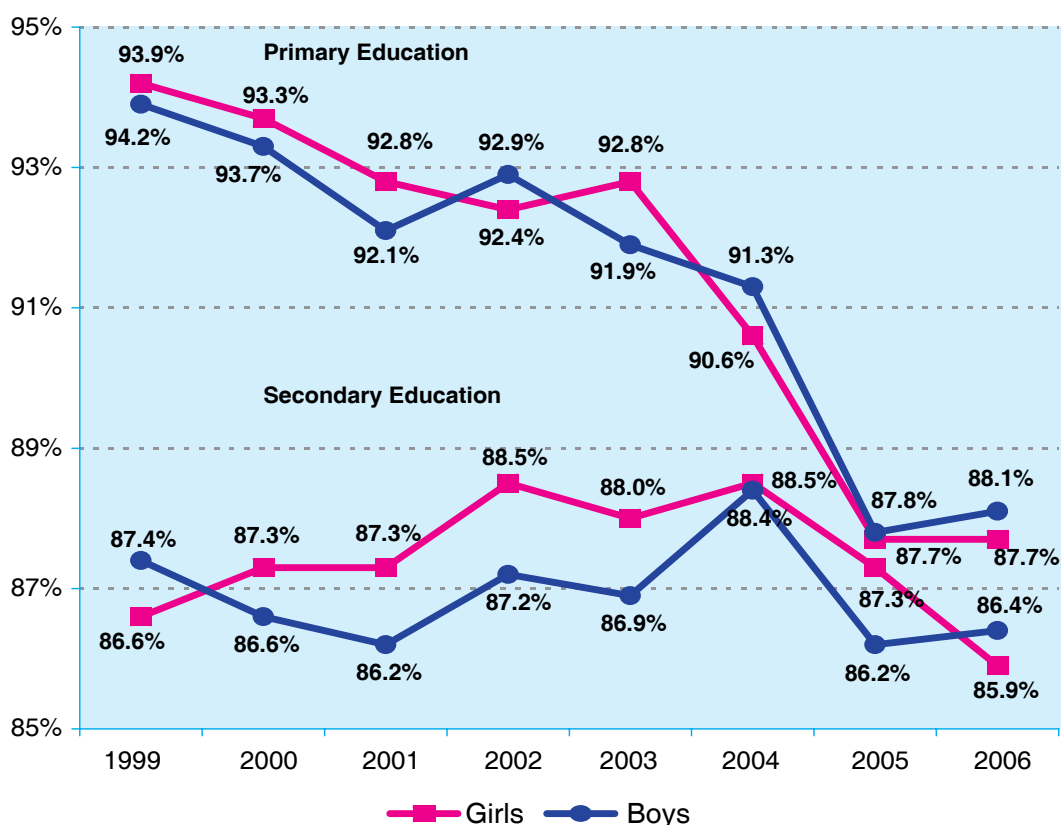
4.1. GENDER ISSUES IN THE BASIC EDUCATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Evaluation of the access to basic education in terms of gender is a difficult task, since the official data on net and gross enrolment rates for 2007, disaggregated by gender and educational levels and stages, have not been yet published. Certain conclusions can be drawn from the statistics available for 1999-2006 (Figure 28).

Figure 28.

Net enrolment rates in primary and lower secondary education



Source: 'Children of Moldova'. The National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, 2008

The data available for 1999–2006 reveal that in primary education the net enrolment rate of girls and boys differs, at most, by 0.9 percentage points. In some years more girls are enrolled, in other years there are more boys. In secondary education, except during 2006, there are consistently more girls enrolled, the differences reaching up to 1.3 percentage points.

We point out that from 1999-2005 the net enrolment rate in primary education declined and there was no significant progress in enrolment in lower secondary education; these trends have negative consequences for both boys and girls and challenges the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the Republic of Moldova. We consider it regrettable to exclude this indicator from the official policy documents and that the authorities have not yet published the net enrolment rates for 2007.

It is possible to get a general perspective about the access to education in terms of gender for 2006-2007 by analyzing the data on the school-age population and the proportions of girls and boys in the primary and secondary schools. According to the data of the educational institutions mapping system, this proportion varies between 48 per cent and 52 per cent, the differences being statistically insignificant.

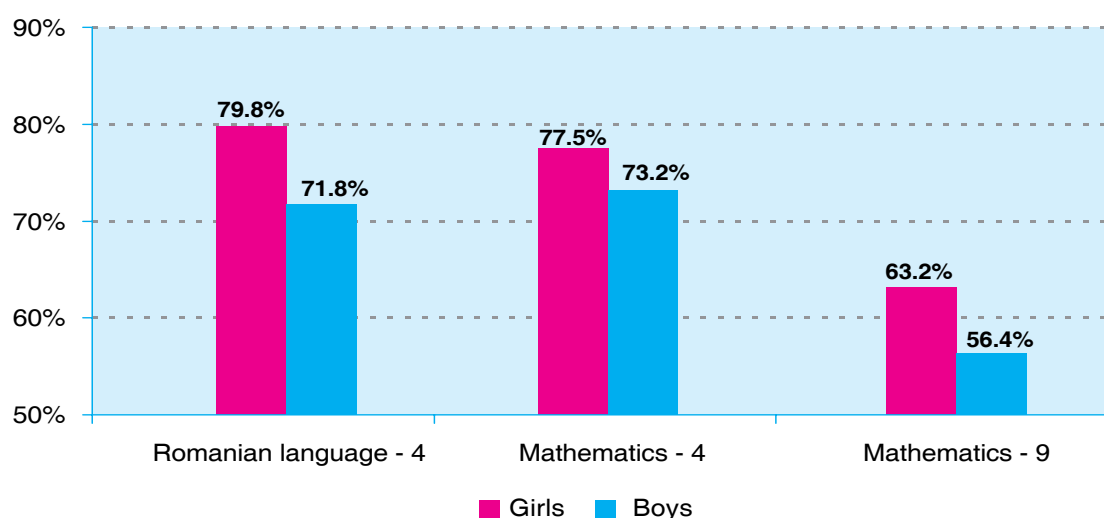
Therefore, substantial differences on the enrolment of girls and boys in basic educational institutions of the Republic of Moldova do not exist.

THE EFFICIENCY OF EDUCATION IN TERMS OF GENDER ISSUES

According to the representative data at the national level, in both primary and secondary education, the girls score better than the boys (*Figure 29*). According to the results, 79.8 per cent girls and 71.8 per cent boys passed the Romanian language tests. A similar situation is also revealed in mathematics tests, both at the end of primary education (girls – 77.5 per cent passing rate; boys – 73.2 per cent passing rate), and secondary education (girls – 63.2 per cent; boys – 56.4 per cent).

Figure 29.

The level of passing the national tests in terms of gender (final evaluation, 2007, in %)



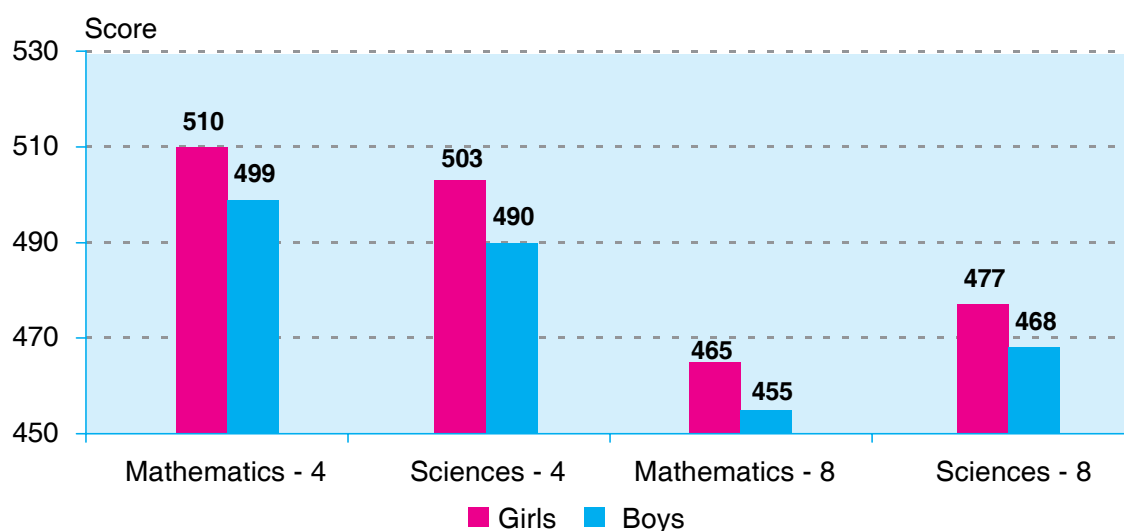
Source: The study 'The Evaluation of School Results', the Institute for Public Policy, 2007

In gender terms, the results of the national assessments correspond to international results (Figure 29). Thus, during the TIMSS 2003 international evaluation of mathematics and sciences, the girls from primary classes obtained 11 and 13 more points, respectively, than boys. In lower secondary education, the girls scored ten points higher in mathematics and nine points higher in sciences.

We point out that the average scores accumulated by girls and boys from all the participating countries differs by a single point, while in the Republic of Moldova this difference is nine to ten points. Further, this difference was an increase from the 1999 evaluations.

Figure 30.

The results of international evaluation of Moldovan pupils in terms of gender (TIMSS 2003)



Source: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, TIMSS 2004

A similar situation is revealed in the PIRLS 2006 evaluations. The average score for boys was 493 points, while girls scored 507 points, 14 points more.

The differences of 4.3–8.0 percentage points in national evaluations and of 9–14 points in international evaluations are statistically significant and show that the teaching-learning methods, both in the primary education and secondary education, do not take into account all gender-related aspects.

GENDER PATTERNS AND VALUES IN EDUCATION

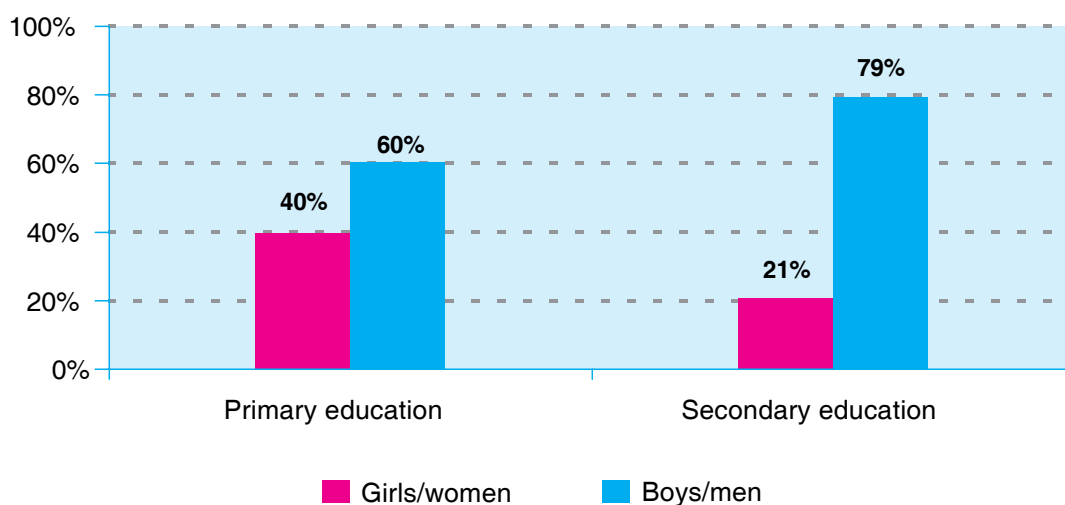
It is generally accepted that the educational system is a crucial factor in the formation of gender values. The messages, teaching staff, school curriculum, textbooks and didactic materials contribute to the transmission and strengthening of behavioural rules, including those related to gender.

One of the main issues of the primary and secondary educational systems is the prevalence of women as teaching staff, the share of women teachers varying during 2000-2007 within the range

of 78-81 per cent. Another issue refers to the gender dimension of the curricula in general and of school textbooks in particular, which, in the opinion of various experts, are not gender-sensitive. Thus, an evaluation of the textbooks' illustrations reveals that the depiction of girls/women compared to that of boys/men is lower in the primary texts and much lower in the lower secondary textbooks (Figure 31). A greater imbalance is seen terms of the personalities featured in those textbooks (Figure 32).

Figure 31.

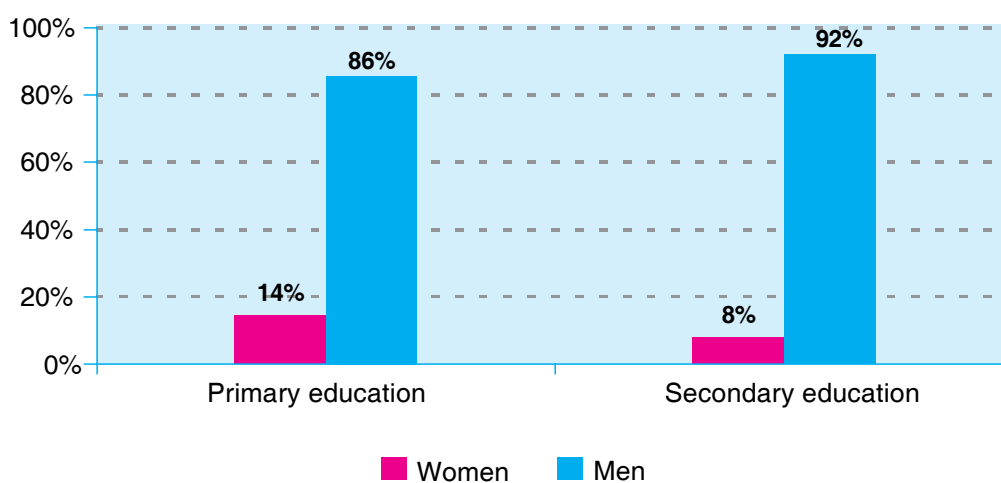
Distribution by gender of people who appear in the textbooks' illustrations



Source: 'Gender patterns and values in the public education of the Republic of Moldova', 2007

Figure 32.

Distribution by gender of personalities featured in the textbooks



Source: 'Gender patterns and values in the public education of the Republic of Moldova', 2007

According to experts, the unequal selection of pictures, illustrations and personalities appearing in various textbooks for primary and lower secondary education can build a world dominated by men, which contributes to the maintenance of gender inequalities that exists in society. We also highlight

that the list of authors (87 women, 50 men) and reviewers (163 women, 73 men) reveals a certain gender disequilibrium, the women being in majority.

If we take into consideration that the enrolment rates characterize the access of genders to education, it can be stated that this aspect is not a current issue of the primary and secondary education in the Republic of Moldova. Most likely, the existing issues in basic education on the promotion of gender equality can be attributed to the quality aspect of education: indifference towards or disregard of gender issues, promotion of stereotypes on the gender relationships, and the lack of didactic materials on these issues.

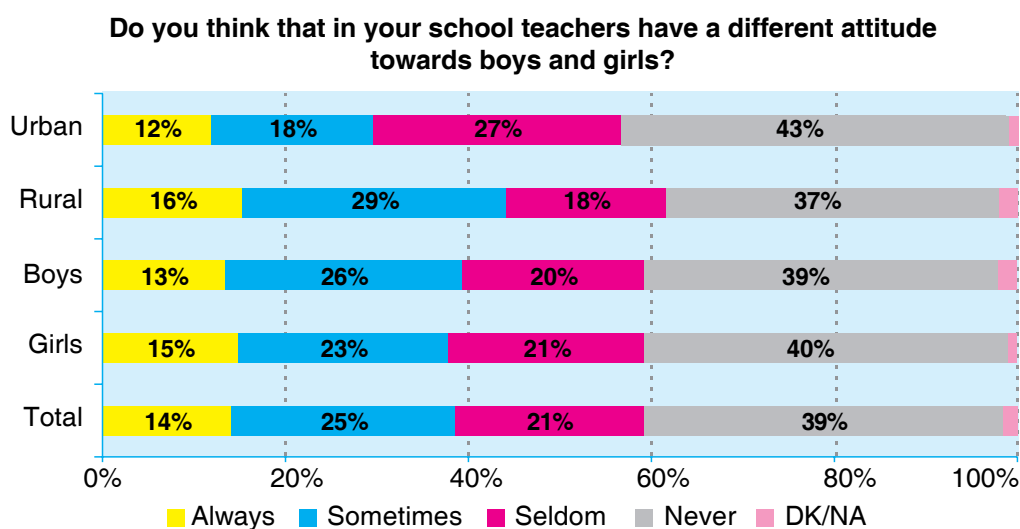
4.2. SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION OF GENDER ISSUES

SKILLS DEPENDING ON GENDER

To the direct question of whether teaching staff treats boys and girls differently, most of the children answered that such differences rarely exist (21 per cent) or do not exist at all (39 per cent). Nevertheless, a significant number of pupils said that these differences exist sometimes (25 per cent) or always (14 per cent). We mention that this perception is held by both girls and boys (*Figure 33*). In geographical terms, these differences are perceived more by the children from rural localities.

Figure 33.

Attitudes based on gender (pupils' perceptions)

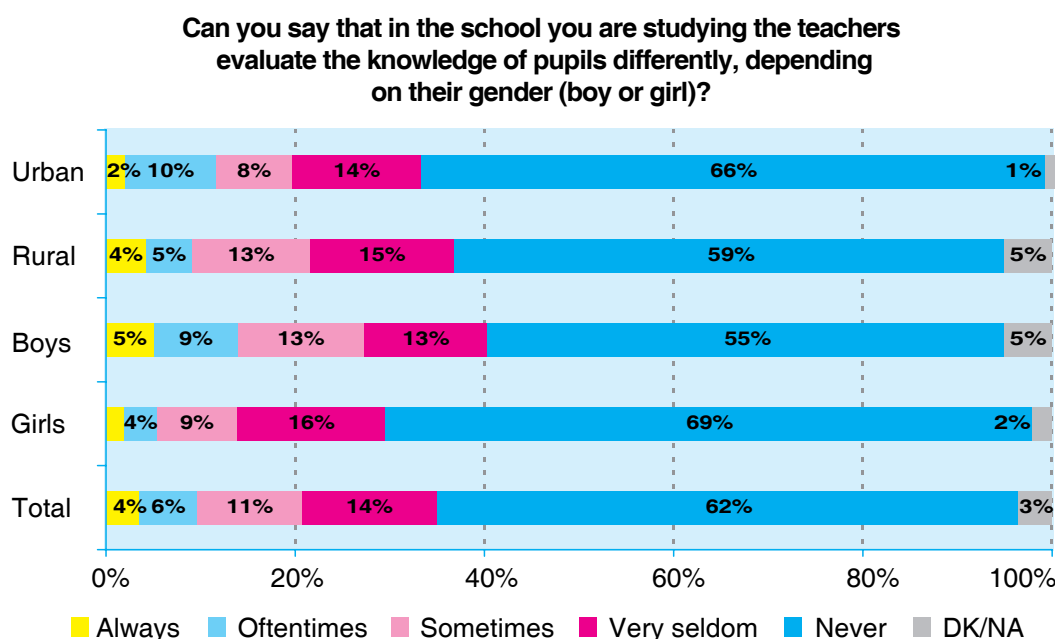


Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

The main area where the pupils perceive a gender-based bias is that of evaluation (*Figure 34*). Thus, only 55 per cent of boys deny that the teaching staff evaluate based on the pupil's gender, while the share of girls denying this claim is much larger (69 per cent). In geographical terms, these differences are perceived more by children from rural localities.

Figure 34.

The gender factor in the assessment of knowledge (pupils' perceptions)



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

In general, the boys feel more dissatisfied in other areas of school life; they reported having less access to the school resources (61.1 per cent of boys and 67.3 per cent of girls reported that they 'always have access'), are less content with the attitude of teaching staff (21.3 per cent of boys and 36.2 per cent of girls reported that they are 'very content'), and are more often unjustly penalized with lower marks (10.6 per cent of boys and 4.4 per cent of girls reported they feel this way often or very often).

During the focus group discussions, both the boys and girls indicated various instances in the attitudes of teaching staff towards pupils depending on their gender. Most children said that "girls are viewed better by the teachers, because they are more obedient and diligent", and in cases of discipline breaches "boys are punished more harshly than girls".

Box 12. Cases of gender-based attitude, perceived by pupils

- "The girls are more diligent than boys and the boys can be also physically punished by the teachers"
(F., 7th form, rural).
- "The girls are always asked to water the plants..., to help the teacher to hang something on the wall"
(M., 6th form, urban).
- "The boys are better than us, because if they fail to do their homework, they copy it from us..."
(F., 7th form, rural).

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

We point out that the pupils' perceptions correlate to a certain degree with the perceptions of parents; 68.5 per cent of parents think that the boys and girls are treated equally at school, 19.5 per cent have no opinion, while 12.1 per cent disagree or somewhat disagree with this statement. With

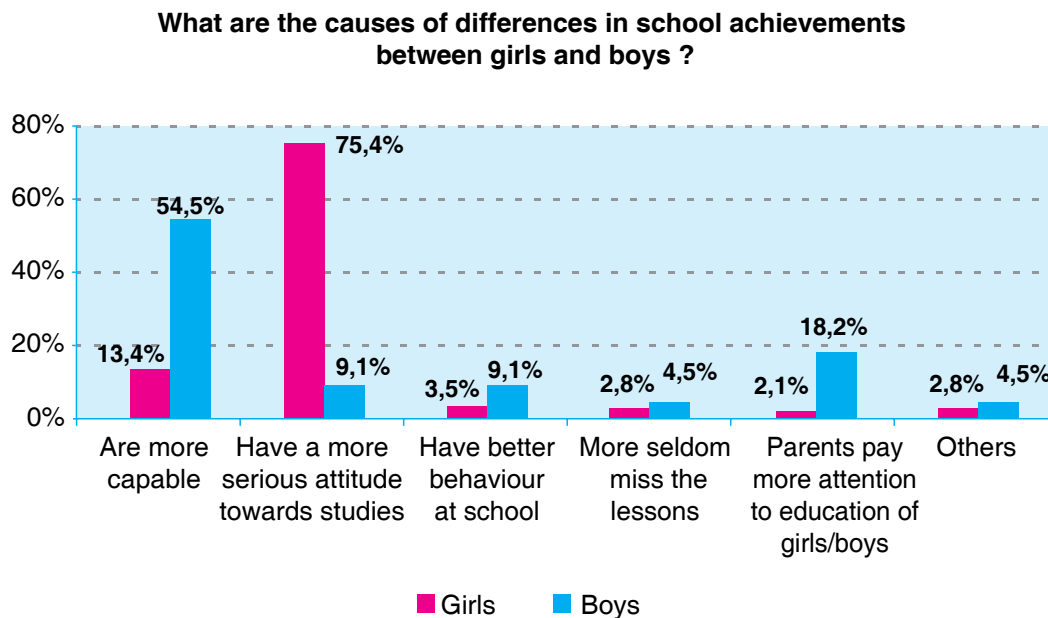
respect to evaluation, only 48 per cent of parents agree that evaluations are made without taking into account the pupil's gender.

STEREOTYPED THINKING OF SOME TEACHING STAFF

The perceptions of pupils on the gender issues are created to a certain extent by the stereotyped thinking of the teaching staff. Thus, when asked about the differences between the school attainments of girls and boys, a large number of teaching staff said that the girls have a more serious attitude towards their studies, while the boys are more capable (*Figure 35*).

Figure 35.

Causes leading to distinct attainment in learning (the viewpoint of teaching staff)



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

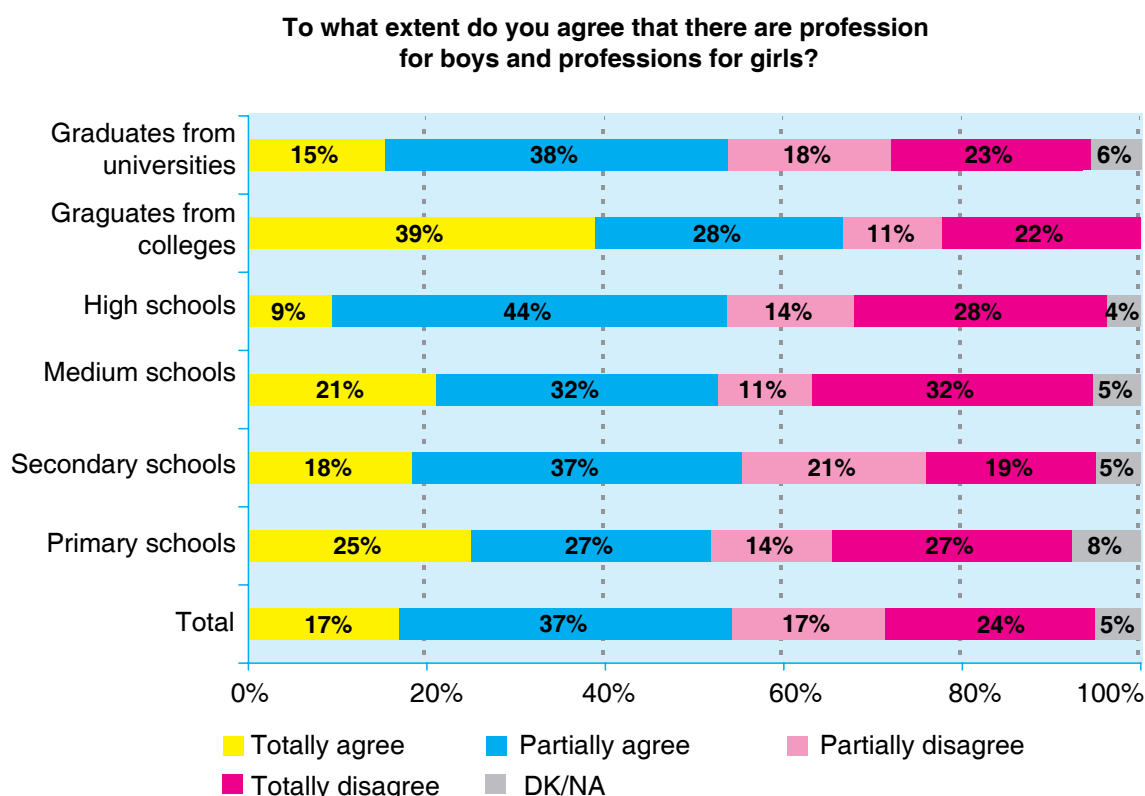
The analysis of responses in geographical terms shows that the largest number of teaching staff who think that boys are more capable and girls have a more serious attitude towards studies are from towns; the teachers from rural areas have a more balanced view on the differences between girls and boys in terms of school achievement. When the responses are examined in terms of the teachers' level of education, most supporters of this opinion are the teaching staff who graduated from pedagogic colleges.

To the specific question 'To what extent do you agree with the opinion that watering of classroom plants is an activity more suitable for girls?', about 23 per cent of interviewed teaching staff said that they agreed fully while another 39.6 per cent partially agreed with this statement. Only 15.4 per cent of the interviewed teaching staff said that they partially disagreed and 18.3 per cent totally disagreed with this statement.

Regrettably, this perception of gender-related issues persists in the general thinking, a large part of the teaching staff also believing that there are professions suitable for boys and professions suitable for girls (Figure 36). Thus, 52 per cent of the teaching staff interviewed in the primary, secondary, middle and high schools partially or fully agreed with this idea. When viewed in terms of the teachers' level of education, the largest share of teaching staff who believe that boys and girls are better suited to specific professions are those who graduated the college (67 per cent), followed by the university graduates (53 per cent).

Figure 36.

**Professions suited to boys and professions suited to girls
(opinion of the teaching staff)**



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova' Institute for Public Policy, 2008

Undoubtedly, these data indicate the existence of some gaps in approaching gender issues both during the initial formation (training in colleges and universities) and during the ongoing training (advanced training courses, re-training courses, etc.) of the teaching staff.

We are forced to conclude that the educational system, through its traditional conservatism, still reproduces patriarchal stereotypes with respect to gender issues, remaining to a certain extent opposed to the modern development trends of civilized societies.

PERCEPTION OF THE DEGREE OF PROTECTION AND SAFETY BY GENDER

Generally, girls feel less safe than boys. Thus, 72.6 per cent of girls declared that they are never afraid on their way to school, while the share of boys who feel this way is larger, at 85.2 per cent.

Girls more often reported being stressed at school (Table 12); 51.2 per cent of girls said that they feel stressed at school sometimes or oftentimes, compared to 41.6 per cent of boys. The number of girls who sometimes or oftentimes do not understand the topics (80.8 per cent) is higher than that of boys (76.8 per cent). Moreover, the number of girls who are afraid to be asked by teachers when they did not understand the topic is also higher: 46.6 per cent of girls and 39.8 per cent of boys.

Table 12.

The frequency of stress factors depending on gender

How often it happened to you	Oftentimes		Sometimes		Never	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Feel stressed at school	3.2%	2.8%	38.4%	48.4%	57.4%	46.9%
That teachers yell at you	5.6%	0.9%	60.2%	44.3%	33.8%	53.8%
That teachers call you names	2.8%	0.6%	24.1%	15.7%	72.7%	83.0%
To be hit by/receive corporal punishment from teachers	1.4%	0.9%	19.9%	7.2%	78.2%	91.5%
To shout at classmates	7.4%	6.3%	75.0%	76.4%	16.2%	17.0%
To see pupils swearing at school	16.7%	22.6%	69.4%	66.4%	13.4%	9.1%
To see pupils fighting at school	6.9%	11.7%	56.0%	57.7%	35.2%	30.0%
To fight with classmates	2.8%	0.9%	25.5%	14.8%	71.3%	83.6%
To strike/to be struck by older classmates	1.9%	0.6%	21.8%	7.9%	75.9%	91.2%
To be afraid to ask the teacher when you did not understand the topic	6.9%	5.7%	32.9%	40.9%	59.3%	52.8%
To be forced by teachers to attend tutorials (paid)	0.9%	0.6%	10.2%	6.3%	88.0%	92.5%
To fail to do your homework	4.6%	5.0%	73.1%	60.4%	21.8%	34.0%
To not understand the topic	9.7%	4.4%	67.1%	76.4%	22.7%	18.6%
To be beaten by parents for low/derogatory marks	3.2%	0.3%	19.0%	12.6%	76.9%	86.8%
To leave/run away from a class because you failed to learn it	1.9%	0.0%	12.5%	6.0%	85.2%	93.7%
To be denied the entrance to school because you are late	2.3%	0.0%	9.7%	8.8%	87.5%	90.9%
To be denied the entrance to school because you did not have a school uniform	1.4%	0.0%	5.6%	8.2%	91.7%	89.3%
To be forbidden to leave school until the lessons are finished	7.9%	2.2%	13.4%	9.1%	77.8%	87.1%
To come to school hungry	2.3%	8.8%	31.0%	31.4%	65.7%	58.8%

Source: Sociological survey Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova, Institute for Public Policy, 2008

The girls are less afraid that they will be physically or verbally punished than boys. But, as mentioned in the previous chapters, during the group discussions it was revealed that psychologically, the girls find these punishments much more difficult. Also, girls are more sensitive to conflicts, especially those containing violence.

We mention that the negative effects of the stress could be aggravated by the fact that the share of girls coming to school hungry is higher than that of boys: 40.2 per cent in case of girls and 33.3 per cent of boys.

The results of the sociological survey show that the gender differences clearly manifest in cases of physical punishments applied by parents and verbal and physical aggression of teachers, the boys being subject to such actions more often than the girls. Also, in comparison with the girls, boys are involved more often in the violent acts between children, either as aggressors or as victims.

4.3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 4.1. A reduction in the net enrolment rate in primary education was registered during 1999-2005. In the case of lower secondary education, an increase in the net enrolment rate was recorded during 2000-2004, but in 2005 this indicator decreased, becoming even lower than in 2000. In 2006, only an increase of the net enrolment rate of boys in lower secondary education was registered.

In primary education, the net enrolment rates of boys and girls have approximate values, the differences being, at most, 0.9 percentage points, while in lower secondary education the net enrolment rate of girls is higher than that of boys by 1.3 percentage points. According to the data of the educational institutions mapping system, in 2006-2007 the share of girls and the share of boys in the primary and secondary education varied from grade to grade between 48 per cent and 52 per cent, the differences being statistically insignificant.

Therefore, significant differences on the enrolment of girls and boys in educational institutions do not exist in the basic education of the Republic of Moldova.

Finding 4.2. The reduction of the net enrolment rate in primary education during 2000-2005 has negative consequences both for boys and girls and challenges the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the Republic of Moldova. It is not appropriate that the net enrolment rate indicator was excluded from the official educational policy documents and that this indicator has not yet been published for 2007.

Recommendations. Include in public policy documents and official statistics the net enrolment rate indicator, disaggregated by educational levels and stages, gender, place of residence, ethnicity and material standing of families. Harmonize the national methods for collecting and processing data on educational indicators with the international methods.

Identify the factors that caused the reduction in net enrolment rates in basic education during 2000-2005, determine how this indicator has changed for 2006-2007 and adjust the educational policies to the real situation in education.

Finding 4.3. The analysis of data on the efficiency of the educational system in terms of gender-related aspects reveals that in both national and international evaluations girls show better results

than boys. The differences of 4.3-8.0 percentage points in national evaluations and 9-14 points in international evaluations are statistically significant and show that the teaching-learning methods, both in the primary education and lower secondary education do not take into account all the gender-related issues.

Recommendations. Identify the factors causing the differences between girls' and boys' achievements and revise the written, taught and learned curricula from a gender perspective.

Finding 4.4. A number of experts state that the indicators used in the analysis of gender issues (net enrolment rates of girls and boys, the level of test passing, the results of national and international evaluations) do not fully reflect gender differences that persist in the educational system. In the opinion of these experts, although the values of these indicators show a situation a little more favourable to girls, the chances of promotion and achievement for girls/women in adult life are lower than those of boys/men.

The data of the sociological survey reveal that such a situation may be caused to a certain extent both by the persistence in education of some subtle factors that form and maintain the gender stereotypes and the irrelevance of some curriculum subjects for real life.

Recommendations. Analyze the written, taught and learned curricula in terms of gender. Harmonize the curricula with the short, medium and long term development needs of girls/women and boys/men. Develop a set of more detailed indicators that would allow the study of gender-related aspects in education in terms of promoting and making the girls/women more capable in their adult life and ensuring equal opportunities for girls/women and boys/men.

Finding 4.5. One of the main issues of the primary and secondary educational systems is the prevalence of women as teaching staff, the share of women teachers varying during 2000-2007 between 78-81 per cent. Another issue refers to the gender dimension of the curricula, which contributes to a certain degree to the retention of stereotypes on gender.

Recommendations. Create conditions to attract young teachers to basic education, especially men. Update the school curricula through a more careful approach to gender issues, future promotion of the modern views on the roles of women and men in history, in social and economic development, in creating and establishing the family.

Finding 4.6. In the subjective perception of pupils, parents and the teaching staff, gender stereotypes still exist, with girls/women being subordinated or having less prestigious roles. Attitudes of teaching staff conditioned by gender are seen both during the teaching and evaluation processes and the involvement of pupils in certain extracurricular activities.

The behaviour and attitudes of all educational professionals indicate the existence of some gaps in approaching gender issues both during the initial formation (training in colleges and universities) and the ongoing training (advanced training courses, re-training courses, etc.) of the teaching staff.

Recommendations. Update the written, taught and learned curricula for the specialized secondary pedagogic and higher education through an explicit approach to gender and expand the sections referring to gender issues in children's education. Include gender-related aspects in the curricula for advanced training and re-training of teaching staff and school managers and in the programs and practices for assignment to position and attestation of teachers.



DIMENSION 5: INVOLVEMENT OF PUPILS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

THE REGULATORY AND NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

With the democratization of Moldovan society, there is a trend to leave behind the rigid and strictly centralized system that took into account neither the particularities and needs of each child, nor the wishes and traditions of entire social groups, whether ethnic, religious or cultural. Obviously, under the former system, the involvement of pupils, families and communities was more informal, ruled by numerous guidelines and subordinated to certain ideological aims. This type of involvement or, more precisely, non-involvement of the main actors of the educational system have, to a certain extent, estranged pupils, parents and communities from school life and has left a lasting impression in the collective mentality. Schools continue to be seen by some parents and decision makers, both at local and central levels, as an institution belonging exclusively to the State.

The first step made towards ensuring real involvement of pupils, parents and communities in school life was the adoption in 1995 of the Law on Education that established the targets, method and forms of such involvement. The Law on Education stipulates:

- inclusion, at the local level, of parent representatives on the advisory boards of the Raion/ Municipal Education Divisions;
- inclusion on the educational institutions' Boards of Administration of parents, local public authorities and pupils (only in high schools and vocational schools) as representatives;
- the possibility to establish in educational institutions pupils' and parents' councils, which operate in accordance with the regulations of the educational institution;
- the right of pupils to be elected to Administration and Advisory Boards of educational institutions;
- the right of parents to be informed about the educational process and the results of pupils' assessments at their children's schools.

Regrettably, during 1995-2007, the Law on Education was subject to numerous amendments, some of them oriented towards regenerating centralization of the educational system. The power to appoint the heads of Raion/Municipal Education Divisions, appoint high school headmasters, coordinate the employment of teaching staff in high schools, etc. was transferred from the second-level local public administrative authorities to the line ministry. We point out that the legislation in the area of education does not explicitly stipulate what areas of school life are managed directly by pupils, parents or communities, establishing only the right of pupils and parents to be represented in the structure of some administration and advisory bodies of the educational institution and the Raion/Municipal Education Divisions. Obviously, even if the parents are represented in the respective bodies, they can only formulate certain proposals and do not have decision-making power. Moreover, this legislation does not stipulate the right of parents and local communities to

be consulted in the evaluation and accreditation of school institutions, and the development and evaluation of training curricula, textbooks and didactic materials. The procedures for evaluation and accreditation of school institutions do not include clear references on the responsibilities of educational institutions to ensure a certain degree of involvement by parents and local communities in school life.

The excessive centralized regulation of school life does not provide efficient instruments to interest parents and local communities in organizing and conducting educational activities. Though the Law on Education clearly stipulates (art. 61, p. 13) that “Educational institutions independently manage the appropriated and available financial means, and have bank settlement accounts and other types of accounts, including those in foreign currencies”, this is not necessarily the case. Often, neither the parents nor the school authorities can manage the available financial means in relation to the current needs, at their discretion.

Obviously, the involvement of pupils, parents and local communities in school life also greatly depends on how the activity of the educational institution is regulated. According to the standard regulations of the general secondary educational institutions, the institutional framework offered to parents for participation in school life is structured at the form level (the parents’ meeting and the Parents’ Committee of the class) and at the school level (Representative Board of Parents). These regulations set up the establishment, responsibilities and rights of these entities, which to a great extent are expressed in terms such as ‘supports’, ‘helps’, ‘encourages’ and ‘proposes’, without indicating clearly the areas of school life where the parents have the right of decision.

We underline that if at the level of school unit the representation rules and the method of parents’ selection to the Advisory and Administration Bodies are formulated explicitly, at the level of Raion/ Municipal Education Divisions and at the central level there are no such rules. Consequently, there is a danger that the voice of parents will not be heard by the leading educational bodies at raion/ municipal and central levels.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

According to the results of the qualitative study, 70 per cent of pupils live with both parents, 16 per cent live with only their mother, four per cent live with only their father and two per cent with older brothers and/or sisters. Grandparents take care of five per cent of interviewed pupils, while one per cent of them live with other relatives. Two per cent of children live with someone else (neighbours, parents’ friends, etc.). We remark that none of the pupils that participated in the study declared that they live on their own, although the headmasters say that such situations do occur, the number of children living alone being lower in the secondary classes and higher in the high school classes.

The qualitative study reveals that children communicate rather poorly with their parents about what happens at school, the most frequently discussed subject being the marks received by pupils (Table 13). In some cases, because of marks that parents consider poor, the pupils are punished physically. Eighteen per cent of children reported being physically punished, while another two per cent declared that they are often subject to such punishments. Many children mentioned the fact that they discuss with parents not only their marks, but also the events and activities carried out in the school, for example, open lessons, thematic activities, meeting with noted people from the areas of culture and art, etc. The quantitative data reveal that girls discuss more with their parents than do boys, but as all children get older the communication with parents decreases.

Table 13.

School-related topics in communication with parents

How often You ...	Daily	Weekly	Several times a month	Once a month	Once a quarter	More seldom
Find out at school about the achievements of your child/children	40.5%	27.4%	13.7%	10.0%	4.7%	3.7%
Ask the children to tell you how things are at school	73.3%	18.9%	4.1%	1.2%	0.4%	2.1%
Revise the diary(ies) of the child/children	53.4%	34.5%	4.9%	2.5%	1.2%	3.5%
Help children to do their homework	50.1%	21.1%	9.2%	3.7%	2.0%	13.9%
Help the child/children to prepare for different extracurricular activities	26.3%	15.4%	11.9%	12.1%	9.9%	24.4%

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN ORGANIZING THE EDUCATIONAL-INSTRUCTIVE PROCESS

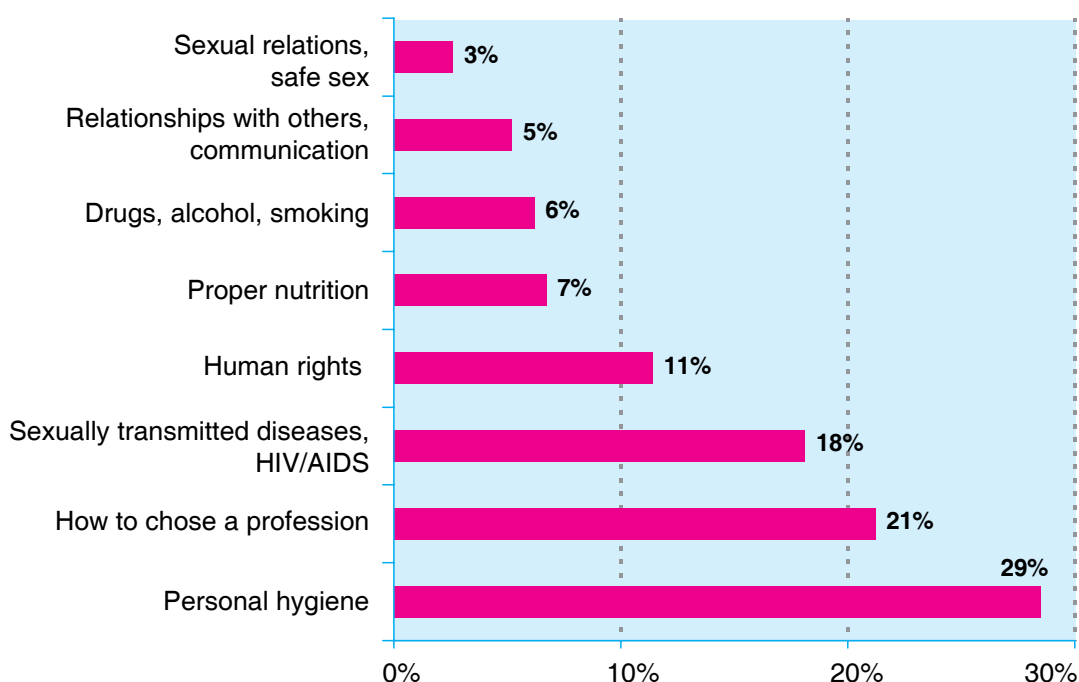
The children participate actively and their opinion is taken into consideration when cultural and artistic activities are organized. The pupils' councils make decisions on the organization of festivities, sports games and entertaining activities, but are not involved in decisions referring to the educational-instructive process.

Thus, the pupils' expectations of the educational-instructive process do not correlate to those promoted by the school curricula and the regulatory and normative acts in force, in the opinions and views of many teaching staff. The children want an easier timetable with fewer hours of class per week; many pupils expressed dissatisfaction with the school timetable. The absolute majority of children want an easier curriculum, covering less information, taught by young and competent teaching staff.

Obviously, both the development of the training curriculum and the organization of school life as a whole falls under the responsibilities of adults, but the children's wishes must be taken into account, especially when doing so would contribute substantially to the improvement of learning efficiency. In the children's opinion, school would be more attractive if it addressed topics on interpersonal communication, combating the use of drugs, smoking and alcoholism, career guidance, etc. during classes, as well as the classes conducted by the form masters and during the extracurricular activities (*Figure 37*). Issues related to their health, protection from sexually transmitted diseases and selection of a future profession are the most interesting topics for children, but, in their opinion, this interest is not fully supported by the curriculum taught in the schools of the Republic of Moldova.

Figure 37.

The main subjects that pupils would like to discuss at school



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

During the focus group discussions, the children expressed a desire to have as many hobby groups as possible in school: dance, sports, driving lessons, the in-depth study of foreign languages, etc. They like contests and cultural activities, as these help them to interact as much as possible and to develop their abilities for teamwork.

During the sociological study it was ascertained that the children want to communicate, to be informed about topics related to their daily life, families, and health. Therefore, schools should expand the possibilities to study psychology, life skills, and aspects of family life.

Also, during the focus groups it was concluded that many children do not even think about their future profession, cannot evaluate their skills and interests and do not have a plan for the future. Obviously, to correct this state of affairs the system for career counselling of pupils must be revived and a close link between the taught curriculum and real life must be ensured.

In the pupils' viewpoint, the young teaching staff are more open to proposals and suggestions about the teaching of lessons, the older teachers being more unbending. The pupils remark that some older teaching staff feel upset when pupils suggest things that do not correspond to their views and opinions, and react by raising their voice and making moral and unjustified criticisms.

The sociological study shows that the practice of suppressing and inhibiting children's initiatives is widespread in schools in the Republic of Moldova. Many children declared that their opinions are not taken into consideration and some of them said that only opinions of certain categories of pupils are taken into account: those who study well, those who come from families with a higher social and economic status, those who are "good in teachers' eyes". As a consequence,

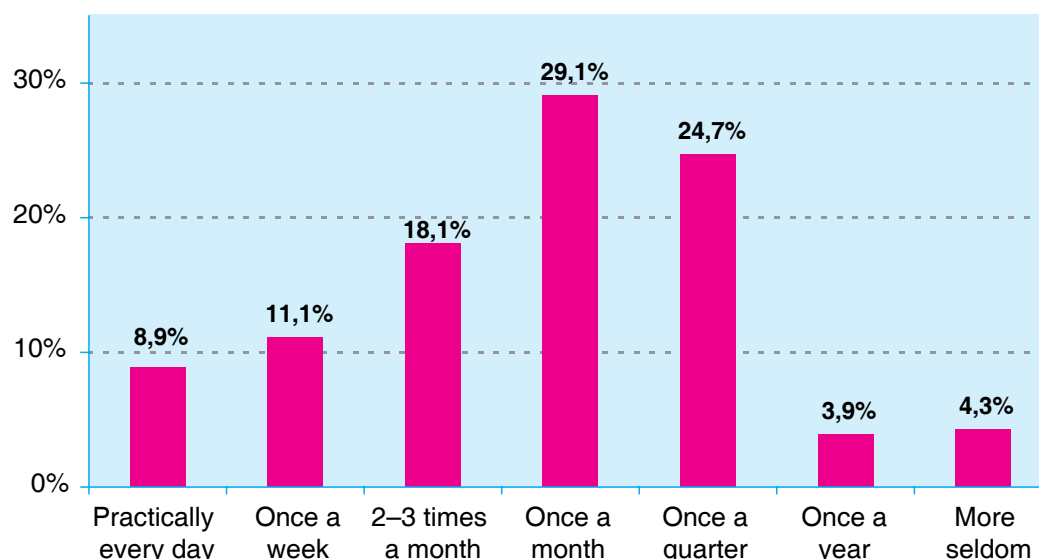
the children whose opinion is neglected by the teaching staff become introverted, do not continue to offer ideas and avoid participating in school activities.

PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL-INSTRUCTIVE PROCESS

Generally, the level of parents' participation in school life is low; about 53.8 per cent of parents visiting the school once per month or once per quarter (*Figure 38*). Only 18.1 per cent of parents say that they visit the school two-three times per month, while 11.1 per cent visit weekly. The parents of pupils from the primary classes visit the school most often, but with the increase of children's age, the visits at school become rarer. Obviously, in the absence of a close relationship between the school and families, their involvement in the educational-instructive process remains only sporadic and insufficient.

Figure 38.

How often do the parents visit the school where their children study



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

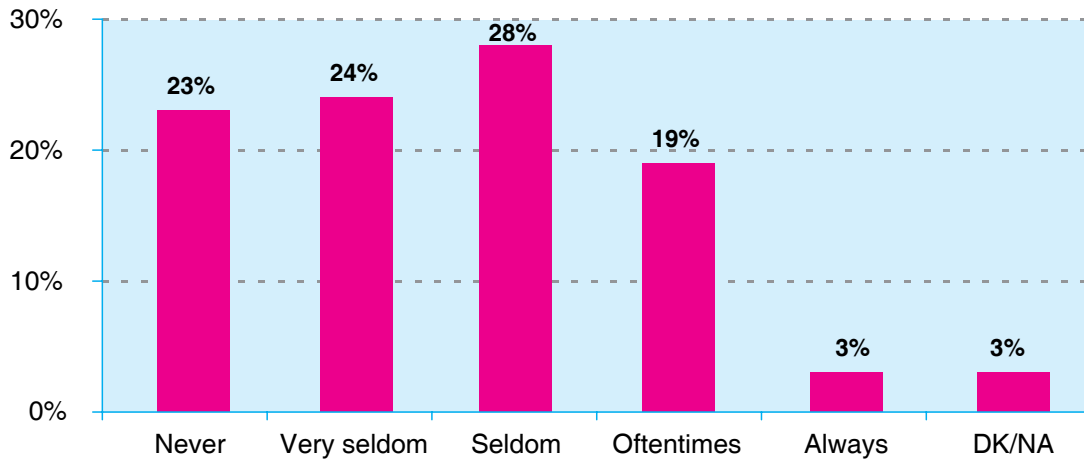
Generally, parents state that they are welcome at school any time they want to get information or to discuss diverse aspects related to their children; they think that are well informed about the school and school activities. At the same time, many parents recognize that they are less involved in making decisions with regard to school life.

Most of the parents declared that they communicate with the representatives of the educational institution only when they are invited to the parents' meetings or face extraordinary situations: conflicts between pupils or between pupils and teaching staff, flagrant breaches of school discipline, etc. Most often, the parents are required to come to school to organize fundraising activities intended for the repair and furnishing of classrooms, procurements for holidays, gifts for teaching staff, etc. Usually the aim of such invitations is not announced beforehand; instead, the parents are invited to discuss "class affairs", "the school success of pupils", etc.

About 22 per cent of the interviewed parents said that they are always or oftentimes asked their opinion on the organization of the educational process or school management. Approximately the same number of parents (23 per cent) state that their opinion was never asked (*Figure 39*).

Figure 39.

How often is the parents' opinion on the organization of the educational process asked



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

We point out that the answers given by parents to the questions about their involvement in the educational process vary significantly by those given by teaching staff and headmasters, who consider the parents' involvement insufficient (*Table 14*).

Table 14.

Involvement of parents in the educational process (point of view of headmasters)

How often the parents ...	Daily	Weekly	Several times a month	Once a month	Once a quarter	More seldom
Ask at school about the attainments of children	1.5%	6.0%	25.4%	23.9%	32.8%	10.4%
Verify the child's diary	6.2%	41.5%	27.7%	16.9%	1.5%	6.2%
Help children to do their homework	12.5%	20.3%	28.1%	9.4%	3.1%	26.6%
Help the child to prepare for different extracurricular activities	1.5%	7.7%	18.5%	24.6%	12.3%	35.4%
Provide certain services for the school	-	-	6.3%	9.5%	20.6%	63.5%
Participate in an event (New Years day, carnival, concert, etc.)	-	1.5%	-	12.3%	60.0%	26.2%

Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE ASSOCIATIONS OF PARENTS

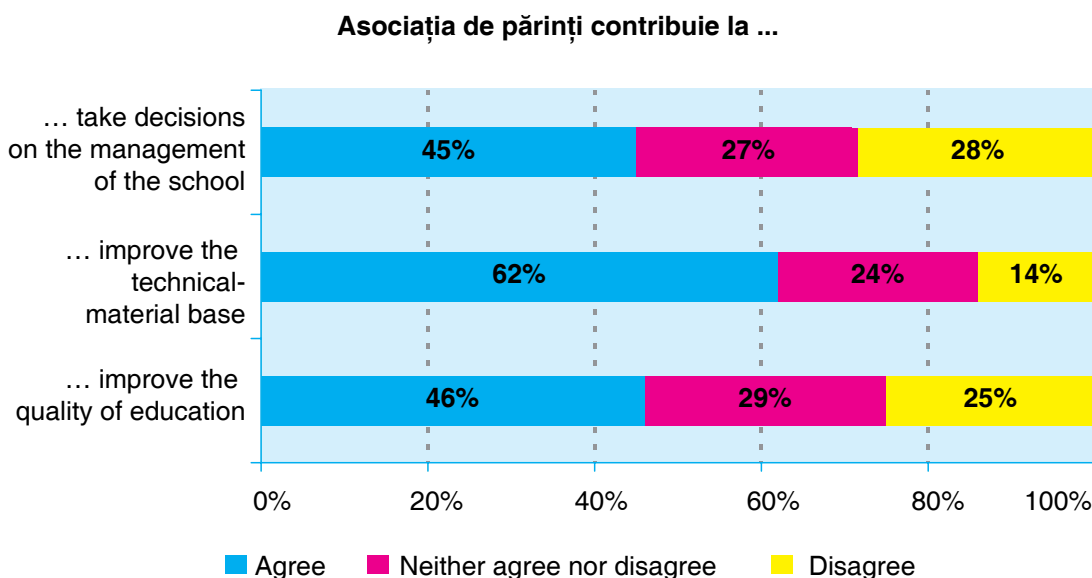
About 70.4 per cent of the parents questioned said that parents' associations exist in the school where their children study, 16.4 per cent indicated that such an association is lacking and 13.2 per cent of parents did not know or did not want to answer this question. All the parents whose schools have such an association pay certain amounts of money to it, but the payments are not perceived by the parents as membership in this association. Consequently, they do not think that the parents' associations could involve them in school life, not just with the financial contributions, but also with the right to promote or influence certain decisions.

From the legal point of view, membership in parents' associations is voluntary, but many parents declare that those who do not belong to such groups are subject to certain direct or indirect pressure from teaching staff and/or school administration. About 33 per cent of parents said that they were forced to become members of these associations, precisely to pay the contributions. Most people who do not belong to the parents' associations are from underprivileged families. Sometimes, some non-participants declare that they refuse "on principle" to become members, since education in the Republic of Moldova is financed by State and is, therefore, free of charge.

Although a significant number of parents say that they are dissatisfied because they are forced to join the parents' associations, many of them consider the activity of these association as useful for their children (*Figure 40*).

Figure 40.

The usefulness of associations in parents' view



Source: Sociological survey 'Basic Education in the Republic of the Moldova', Institute for Public Policy, 2008

On the whole, the opinions of the teaching staff, headmasters and parents on the role and potential of parents' associations to influence the educational process varies; parents assert that the associations are managed mainly by the teaching staff and headmasters, while the latter feel the contrary.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 5.1. The regulatory and normative framework in force provides to pupils, families and communities certain opportunities to get involved in school life: as representatives to the Administration and Advisory Bodies, through pupils' and parents' councils, and for parents to be informed about the achievements and content of the educational process. Nevertheless, in spite of the trends to democratize the educational system, it remains excessively centralized and the legislation in force does not explicitly formulate which areas of school life could be managed directly by the pupils, parents and communities.

Thus, the legislation in force does not stipulate the right of parents and local communities to be consulted and to decide on the evaluation and accreditation of schools, development and evaluation of the school curriculum and plans, textbooks and didactic materials, and the selection and promotion of teaching staff and headmasters of educational institutions.

Recommendations. Update the regulatory and normative framework by clearly indicating the aspects or areas that fall under the competence of pupils, families and local communities. Create an institutional framework that would mobilize families and communities to participate in school life, ensure an efficient representation of these groups in the Advisory and Administration Bodies of the educational system, and encourage the delegation of various functions related to the school life organization to the pupils, families and communities.

Finding 5.2. The efficient and effective participation of pupils, families and communities in school life is possible only when the school units have real autonomy that allows them to choose their teaching staff based on performance and parents' preferences, to plan and manage their own budget, to select the textbooks and didactic materials and to have greater liberty in developing and implementing the curriculum at the school level. Regretfully, the existing regulatory and normative framework and the traditions and patterns of the educational system administration does not provide such autonomy to the school units, which substantially diminishes the level of participation of parents and local communities in school life.

Finding 5.3. The relatively low level of participation of pupils and families in school life is also caused by the unilateral communication between pupils and parents, the parents being interested foremost in the marks of their children, with other aspects of school life remaining in the shadows. Regretfully, there are instances when children who have received demerit marks are physically punished and this estranges both the children and their parents from the school. The number of children living in temporarily or permanently incomplete families is quite large, this leading sometimes to the non-participation of these children in extracurricular activities, pupils' and parents' meetings with the teaching staff, collection of some charity funds, etc.

Recommendations. Develop a set of materials for the teaching staff and parents to improve the communication process between the teaching staff and the parents and children, and between parents and their children. Organize activities to familiarize parents with the latest findings of educational sciences in the area of communication with children facing problems at school and help parents establish partnership relationships with their children instead of those of domination/subordination.

Further development of the regulatory and normative framework designed to eliminate family violence and establishment of efficient mechanisms to implement these rules is needed. Raise the

responsibility of school administrations and teaching staff in the area of identifying children who are subject to physical punishments by their parents and extend the activities to prevent such cases.

Finding 5.4. Although the organization of school life falls under the competence of adults, the children's wishes must be taken into account, especially when they contribute substantially to the improvement of learning efficiency. In the pupils' opinion, their voices are not heard when the contents of training and the topics of extracurricular activities are selected. They wish that the subjects related to their own health, sexual development, protection against sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, the harm of alcohol and smoking, the selection of a future profession, etc. would be included more often during lessons, lessons conducted by their form masters and extracurricular activities.

The school occupies an important place in the children's lives and they have expressed a desire for having in school as many hobby groups as possible: dance, sports, driving lessons, the in-depth study of foreign languages, etc. These activities enhance, to a large extent, the feeling of pupils' involvement in school life.

Recommendations. Improve the methods to identify the pupils' wishes and strengthen the mechanism for orientation and counselling of pupils to help them develop good morals and values. Extend the optional components of the school curricula, include optional topics in the curricula for all school subjects and include in the thematic planning of each school subject a certain number of hours which can be filled according to the wishes of the pupils.

Institute, through clear provisions in the Standard Regulations of educational units, periodic feedback from pupils about all aspects of school life, including delegation of planning responsibilities and organization of certain extracurricular activities. Reshape the methods for planning and execution of extracurricular activities in schools, ensuring a higher degree of pupils' participation in the decision making process.

Finding 5.5. The opinions of parents, teaching staff and headmasters of educational institutions on the level of participation of parents in the school life do not differ significantly. The teachers and headmasters feel that parents could participate more in school life, while the parents feel their participation is quite high. However, the parents' answers show that over half of them visit the school only once per month or once per quarter and they are less involved in decision making about school life.

Most of the parents declared that they communicate with the representatives of the educational institution only when invited to the parents' meetings or in case of extraordinary situations. Most often, the parents are invited to school for fundraising. Only one in four parents stated that his or her opinion is oftentimes or always required in the decision making process on the organization of the educational process.

Recommendations. Institute, by clear provisions in the Standard Regulations of educational units, a mechanism for periodical feedback from parents about all the aspects of school life and delegate to parents some responsibilities for evaluation and selection of the teaching and managerial staff.

Create an institutional framework that would ensure the real participation of parents in the management of the educational-instructive process, their involvement in decision making, the translation of the decisions into actions and monitoring the results of the implementation of these decisions.

Finding 5.6. If at the level of school unit the existing legal acts in force contain clear provisions on ensuring the representation of parents in the Administration and Advisory Bodies, these provisions are lacking at the raion/municipal and at central level.

Recommendations. Update the regulatory and normative framework by indicating precisely the rates of parent representation within each Administration or Advisory Body, the methods for selecting these representatives and the areas in which the consultation of parents' opinion is compulsory. Certain responsibilities that refer to the management of the educational system should be accorded to parents' associations, represented at national level.

Finding 5.7. That the role of parents' associations in schools in expanding the participation of families in school life is unequivocal, but teaching staff, school managers and parents all recognize that the main contribution of these associations is monetary. Some parents see these associations only as way to raise money, without acknowledging that these groups also could serve as framework for efficient participation in the life of the school.

The parents say that de facto the associations are controlled by the teaching staff and headmasters and the refusal or inability to pay the fees established by the association can have grave consequences for children from underprivileged families.

Recommendations. Update the regulatory and normative framework on the activity of parents' associations by strictly delimiting the educational services provided by the schools on the budgetary basis and those that can be contributed by parents. School managers and teaching staff should be more responsible in their collection of informal payments and financial discipline is needed to manage the money collected from parents.

Reorient the parents' associations from the activities related to the financing of the schools to activities related to the improvement of the quality of the instructive-educational process, organizing extracurricular activities for pupils, and monitoring the training, selection and promotion of teaching staff. Extend the role of parents' associations in the enrolment of all the children from the relevant localities to reduce absenteeism and school abandonment, and decrease the school exclusion phenomena.

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Annex: Methodology of the Sociological Survey

QUANTITATIVE STUDY

The quantitative study involved four categories of actors in the educational system:

- the headmasters of primary and general secondary educational institutions with lower secondary classes;
- the teaching staff from the primary and lower secondary education;
- parents with children between 6 and 15 years of age;
- the pupils from lower secondary education, except for the 5th grade pupils, who do not yet have the abilities to independently answer the questionnaires.

Opinion polls were conducted in each category and their results are representative at the national level.

THE OPINION POLL AMONG HEADMASTERS

The sample for headmasters was established based on the distribution of educational institutions by territorial level (places of residence, territorial-administrative units) and the type of school.

The statistical data from the Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, 2006 were used for sampling purposes.

The development of the sampling scheme included the following stages:

- establishment of a proportionate distribution of the sample by types of educational institutions;
- proportionate distribution of schools by places of residence;
- random selection of schools from each pre-established group from the table.

The groups of schools were set up according to the type of educational institution (primary school, secondary school, general secondary school, school for disabled children) and the place of residence (urban or rural).

Weighted flow sheet of the sample distribution for interviewing of headmasters

The type of school unit	Schools, total	Schools (headmasters) included in the sample		
		Total	Urban	Rural
Primary schools	104	6	2	4
Secondary schools	664	36	3	33

The type of school unit	Schools, total	Schools (headmasters) included in the sample		
		Total	Urban	Rural
High schools / General secondary schools	746	40	26	14
Schools for disabled children	37	2	1	1
Total	1551	84	32	52

THE OPINION POLL AMONG TEACHING STAFF

The selection of educational units. The study was carried out in the schools where the headmasters were interviewed.

The sample distribution in the selected educational units. In order to perform the sample distribution in the educational units proportionately with the number of teaching staff from each institution, all the selected institutions were contacted in advance and asked the number of teachers working within the institution at that moment. The proportionate distribution was carried out in accordance with the following formula:

$$n_c = \frac{p_c}{N} \times 400,$$

where n_c is the number of the teaching staff that will be interviewed in the educational institution; p_c is the total number of teaching staff at the respective institution; and N is the total number of teaching staff.

The selection of respondents In the schools, the teachers were selected randomly from the list of teachers using a statistical step. This step was established in accordance with the formula:

$$p_s = \frac{n}{n_r},$$

where p_s is the statistical step; n is the total number of teachers from the list; and n_r is the number of people that will be interviewed in the institution and the relevant educational stage.

Then, the step was applied for the entire list of the teaching staff, selected in alphabetical order, the numbering starting with the second position on the list.

The rate of refusals on the part of teaching staff was six per cent.

THE OPINION POLL AMONG PUPILS

Regarding pupils, the study was carried out in the schools where secondary classes exist. These schools were selected from the large number of institutions included in the sample for the interviews with the headmasters.

Stratification. The sample for pupils was established on the basis of their distribution by place of residence.

Weighted flow sheet of the sample distribution for interviewing the pupils

Total pupils in the secondary classes	267493	100.0%
Of them:		
- in the urban area	100896	37.7%
- in the rural area	166597	62.3%
Total pupils included in the sample	576	100.0%
Of them:		
- in the urban area	217	37.7%
- in the rural area	359	62.3%

The selection of respondents. In educational institutions, the number of questioned pupils was established depending on the total number of pupils from the secondary classes of the school in accordance with the following formula:

$$n_e = \frac{p_e}{n_{te}} \times 600 ,$$

where n_e is the number of pupils to be interviewed within the institution included in the study; p_e is the total number of pupils from lower secondary classes of the institution included in the study; and n_{te} the total number of pupils from lower secondary classes from all the schools included in the sample.

Only the students from the 6th-9th forms were interviewed in each school. The total number of interviews was distributed equally between the years of study. If this was not possible, the pupils were selected as follows:

- for the schools where seven pupils were to be interviewed, any year of study was randomly selected and one pupil of this year was interviewed; while for the rest, two pupils from each year of study were interviewed;
- for schools where six pupils were to be interviewed, two years of study were randomly selected and one pupil from each were interviewed; while for the rest, 2 pupils from each year of study were interviewed.

Selection of the classes. If there were several classes of the same year of study in the school, the class was selected by the same method as the years of study, from which only one pupil was interviewed.

The selection of pupils from the classes The pupil, whose number in the register was obtained by the quotient of the total number of pupils from the class list divided by two, was interviewed.

The second pupil from the class, if two pupils needed to be interviewed from the same class, was the one whose number was obtained by the quotient of the total number of pupils from the class list divided by three.

If the selected pupil was absent or that quotient was not a full number, the next pupil on the list was interviewed.

Although no child refused to take part in the study, during the processing of data about six percent of the completed questionnaires were invalidated. The causes of invalidation were the absence of demographic data on the questionnaire and/or a large number of unanswered questions.

OPINION POLL AMONG PARENTS

The survey among parents was conducted by a methodology typical for a representative survey at the national level.

The research was carried out on a stratified, probabilistic and multistage sample.

Stratification criteria: 13 geographical regions (on the basis of the former counties), the place of residence, the size of localities depending on the number of inhabitants (two types of urban localities and four types of rural localities).

The stratification was made as follows:

1. Distribution of the sample by geographical regions depending on the distribution of the total number of households where the children aged 6 to 15 years live. Data of the 2004 Population Census were used for this purpose.

The first-level sampling scheme

Geographical regions	The number of respondents
Chisinau municipality	91
Balti municipality	17
Balti	38
Cahul	22
Chisinau	35
Dubasari	3
Edinet	36
Lapusna	28
Orhei	39
Soroca	33
Taraclia	4
Tighina	15
Ungheni	25
GATU	15

2. Localities involved in this study were selected with the help of a table with random numbers.

3. Localities were distributed in approximately equal zones, from which the sampling points were randomly selected. The number of the selected areas was computed depending on the total number of interviews to be held in the locality, divided by six. Therefore, a maximum of six interviews were held in each sampling point .

4. Through the random route method the addresses of households to be interviewed were selected.

5. In each household, the interviewed parent was selected based on the answer to the question "Who most often deals with the children's school activity?". If both parents were away, the person who takes care of children was interviewed.

The research was conducted in 69 localities, including Chisinau and Balti municipalities. There were 128 sampling points.

The screening procedure was applied in order to eliminate the households with no school-aged children. Pursuant to this procedure, the households selected in accordance with the sampling interval, but without school-aged children were registered in the route sheet by the operator as 'non-contacted households'. The same procedure was applied in the case of households with school-age children not enrolled in the educational system.

The rate of refusals among parents was three per cent, with a great majority of refusals registered in the rural areas.

THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

The qualitative component of the study comprised:

- comprehensive interviews with the key people (five mayors, three heads of Raion Education Divisions, and seven headmasters), 15 interviews in total;
- group discussions with pupils, 32 groups in total, including four focus groups in the lower secondary boarding schools.

In selecting the educational institutions where the group discussions were held, the following was taken into account: the geographical distribution (centre, north, or south), the living area (urban or rural) and the type of school (secondary school or high school). The schools were selected randomly, in accordance with the snowball sampling technique.

The pupils in the 6th-9th and 12th forms were selected for focus groups. On average, eight to ten pupils participated in each focus group. The selection of pupils was made depending on the number of groups for each year of study, ensuring the participation of pupils from each class. The pupils were selected from the list of pupils in the register, using the statistical step of five. In the schools with a small number of pupils and fewer than three classes, the pupils from the 6th-7th and 8th-9th forms were merged and were selected by the same principles.

The number of focus groups

The living environment	6th-7th forms	8th-9th forms	12th form
Rural	5	5	2
Urban, outside Chisinau	5	5	2
Chisinau	3	3	2