THEMATIC REVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICIES FOR EDUCATION - ROMANIA

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

Table 1
Task Force on Education
FOREWORD

This report on education in Romania has been prepared within the framework of the Centre for Co-operation with Non-Members (CCNM) of the OECD as part of its programme of co-operation with the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The Secretariat, as Co-ordinator for General Education Policy and System Change of the Task Force for Education on Table 1 of the Stability Pact, has carried out a Thematic Review of Education Policy of the region with sections on Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYRoM, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and a chapter on regional issues. The themes covered are teachers, curriculum, governance, and early childhood education and care. Each section provides an overview of the education system, issues and barriers to reform, and recommendations. The recommendations are designed to be of use for national policy makers and to assist Stability Pact donor countries and institutions target regional assistance. In addition, the reports can serve as the basis for more detailed analysis of individual education sectors.

The transition of the region towards a pluralistic democracy and a market economy has been marked by economic, social and political changes of extraordinary breadth and depth. The talents, skills and knowledge of the population are crucial in this process; hence the ambitious scale and urgency of the reforms being advanced for education which led the members of Table 1 of the Stability Pact to designate education as one of the four priority areas.

On the basis of background material prepared by the education authorities in the region, existing reports and information supplied in meetings in the course of site visits, this Thematic Review provides an analysis of the education system in light of the social and political context of the region and priority issues of access and equity, quality, efficiency and governance.

The Thematic Reviews of Education Policy of South Eastern Europe were made possible by grants from Austria, Finland, Greece, Switzerland and UNICEF. Additional assistance was provided by New Zealand, the British Council, Bureau CROSS (The Netherlands), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the World Bank, the Open Society Foundation and the Centre for Education Policy Studies (CEPS, University of Ljubljana).

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The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the government of Romania, the OECD or the governments of its Member countries.
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ROMANIA

General Data

Area: 237 500 sq. km.

Population: 22 455 485 (2000 estimate); a rapid decline of the birth rate (10.5 live births per 1 000) which is only 63.5% of the 1989 level.

Population density: 94.2 per sq. km. Urban/rural distribution is 54.8% / 45.2% (1999 estimate), with an increasing migration between regions but also from urban to rural areas.

Age distribution: 0 – 17: 24.6% (down from 33.1% in 1980) of the total population. Population of working age 16-65: 67.8%.

Ethnic composition: Data from the last census (1992) indicate the major ethnic groups: Romanians (89.4%), Hungarians (7.1%), Roma (2%)\(^1\), Germans (0.5%), Ukrainians (0.3%), and other ethnic groups (0.7%). The major religion is Christian: Orthodox (86.7%), Roman Catholic (5%), Greek Catholic (3%), other Christian cults (4.3%). Muslim and Jewish (1%).

Languages of instruction: Romanian (95.6%), Hungarian (4%), German (0.3%), other language (0.1%).

GDP: A decline in the real GDP over the past years. The economy of Romania is still to a large extent based on agriculture and industry. GDP per capita was estimated in 1999 at USD 6 000 (PPP\(^2\)). The private sector is expanding rapidly, but its contribution to GDP (61.5% in 1999) is larger than to employment. By contrast, agriculture’s share in total employment has increased although its share in GDP has remained relatively unchanged.

Employment: Workforce participation: women 55%, men 70.1% (1999 estimate). The overall unemployment rate is estimated at 11.5% (December 1999). There remains a relatively substantial level of hidden unemployment in some low productivity activities. Youth unemployment is particularly high: 39% of registered unemployed were under 25 years old (1999 estimate). 44.32% of all unemployed remain unemployed for more than 12 months. The average length of youth unemployment after leaving school is approximately 12.5 months. Only 3% of unemployed take part in re-training programmes (1999).

1. It is accepted that the percentage of Roma is inaccurate because many Roma did not identify themselves as such in the census. Other sources indicate that the percentage could be 4% or as high as 9%.
**Inflation:**

In 1999 the annual rate was 45.8%, with significant differences in the increasing price of commodities: 27.9% for food products and 84% for services.

**Introduction and Political Context**

Ten years after the collapse of the Ceausescu regime, Romania is a democracy with solid institutions, democratic laws and a market-oriented economy. The process of change began against a background quite different from other ex-communist countries. In the absence of a legislative framework and democratic institutions, the gradual transfer of power that characterised the fall of communism in the region was not possible in Romania. During the first two years of transition, some basic steps were taken towards a real democracy: a new Constitution was passed in a referendum in 1991, providing a new legal framework for political pluralism and private initiative.

After being in power from the early 1990s, the Social Democrats were defeated in 1996 by a Christian-Democratic coalition. In the 2000 elections, the Social Democrats were returned to power and formed a new Government.

In the early 1990s, one of the strategic goals of the reform process was structural reform of the economy by reducing the role of the State and stimulating private initiative. Such an objective is still far from being attained, although new financial mechanisms have begun to stimulate economic growth. The pace of democratic reforms has been faster than that of economic ones. Romania has reached European standards with regard to human rights; minorities have access to education in their mother tongue at primary, secondary and tertiary levels and are entitled to use it within educational settings. Most Romanians believe in democracy and the market economy, as well as in the benefits associated with joining the European Union.

**Legal Framework and Policy Objectives**

Romania was among the first countries in Europe to make education free and compulsory for all children, and education of the people has always represented a national priority. The difficulties met by the education system under the budgetary constraints that have affected public spending patterns have left the government open to the criticism that this principle has been abandoned and has consequently had limited effects on government policy.

The strategic principles outlined in the policy documents address both general and specific issues, aimed at reforming the school system by taking into consideration demographic trends, economic and social backgrounds of students and respect for human rights by expanding programmes for ethnic minorities and the socially excluded.

The right to education is laid down in the 1991 Constitution, which stipulates that Romanian citizens have equal access to all levels and types of education, “irrespective of their social or material background, sex, race nationality, political and religious beliefs”. A governmental decision made in May 1990 was the beginning of a new education system until 1995 when the Education Law was passed. A New Education Law (in fact the amended 1995 law) came into force in 1999. In addition to the 1999 law, the

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3. Compulsory public schooling was first introduced in Europe in Lutheran German states in the late 16th century, followed by Calvinist Switzerland and Holland, then by Sweden (1686) and Scotland (1696). Although the enforcement of these laws was weak and uneven, the principle of compulsory education was well established on both sides of the Atlantic (Massachusetts, 1647) by the end of the 17th century.
new policy seeks to restructure the educational system to meet economic, social, and political requirements and challenges.

Observing the right to cultural and linguistic heritage is an important issue in light of recent conflicts in the region. In Romania, the legal framework gives the right to persons belonging to national minorities to study in their mother tongue within faculties, school units, classes and study groups. Education at all levels is provided in the Romanian language, but may be taken in mother tongue for schools, classes, or specific studies where instruction is most appropriately provided in mother tongue. The amendments made in 1999 to the Law on Education made possible the establishment of universities with teaching in minorities’ mother tongue, such as language courses, programmes that reflect each minority’s history and traditions in the contents of education, provision of textbooks, and necessary material support as well as training of personnel in the minority language.

Structure of the Education System

Under the new law, the compulsory cycle of education includes 4 years of primary education and 5 years of lower secondary education.

**Education system structure:**

- Pre-school 1-4 years; primary classes 1-4; *gimnazium* (lower secondary) classes 5-9; upper secondary classes 10-12 or 13 (69.4% of age cohort; 26% in general and 43.4% in vocational secondary); tertiary and post-tertiary. See Figure 1.

**Total no. of pupils in school system:** 4,279,855 and declining (down from 4,550,000 in 1994-95).

**Pre-school education:**


**Structure of vocational education:**

- Complex (approx. ISCED 3C). Special vocational schools (2-3 years); lower vocational (2-3 years); secondary vocational, following lower vocational for 1, 2 or 3 years; technical schools (3 or 4 years); general secondary for 2 years, followed by secondary vocational education.

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4. The most important lines of education policy are set out in: *Education Reform in Romania: Conditions and Perspectives* (Cezar Birzea, Co-ordinator, Institute for Educational Sciences (1993); the Romanian Pre-university Education Reform Program (World Bank, 1994); VET Reform Program, Ministry of National Education (1998); and the educational policy papers of Andrei Marga, former Romanian Minister of Education (1997, 1998).

5. Law no. 151/1999 changed the Education Act of 1995 and made grade 9 compulsory from school year 2003/04. Until then, pupils now in lower secondary will end their compulsory studies at the end of grade 8. Basic (compulsory) education covered 96.8% of the age group 7-15 in 1999/2000.


Special features
Falls in enrolment. Romania’s child population is decreasing sharply. In 1980, there were 7 349 000 children between the ages of 0-17; in 1997, there were 5 553 000. The trend is even more clear from the number of children in the 0-4 age group: 1 998 000 in 1980, compared with 1 191 000 in 1997. Therefore the demand for school places is less, even on purely demographic grounds. General enrolment rates have dropped at all levels, except basic compulsory education where – after a drop of up to 5% between 1990 and 1995 – rates are again roughly equal to those of 1989 (93.6% then vs. 93.9% now).

Drop-out rates. About 17% of the cohort entering grade 1 drop out before the end of grade 8 (analysis of figures 1988/89 through 1995/96); that is, 83% of the original cohort graduate from grade 8. To this drop-out figure, add 2-3% for children who never entered school at all (many of them Roma). No reliable data were available about reasons for dropping out of basic compulsory schooling, but anecdotal evidence is that drop-out is higher in rural areas where family income depends more on subsistence agriculture on family plots than on modern-sector paid employment where qualifications matter. Roma children also rarely reach upper secondary school (see section on Access and Participation for Minorities).

Levels of Governance
There are 4 levels of governance:

- Central: Ministry of Education and Research (Ministerul Educației și Cercetării).

- Regional: Inspectorate (Inspectorat scolar Județean) has administrative responsibilities for pre-tertiary education. There are 42 județs and 3 different types of local authorities usually classified by number of inhabitants: communes (comune), up to 5 000; towns (orase) up to 20 000; and municipalities (municipii) over 20 000 inhabitants. In each region a Department

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6. This remarkable expansion is across the board: university full-time from 182 000 in 1990/91 to 391 000 in 1999/2000; part-time university 11 000 to 61 000, non-university full- and part-time 29 000 to 95 000. The number of state institutions is 91, and of private institutions 120 (univ. and non-univ.) in 2000.

7. This last percentage (2-3%) includes mortality, i.e. children who did not reach school age.

8. This name was adopted in 2001 to replace the former Ministry of National Education (MoE). In this text, the terms Ministry of Education or MER will be used to indicate the central level.
of Education (Directia pentru Educatie) makes technical recommendations and monitors funds allocated from the local budget. The largest one is Bucharest.

- Municipalities: play a role in relation to the headmasters and principals, and with the school-boards, in managing the schools.

- Local: School Units (Unitati scolare), at present there are 29 128 school units. The Ministry reports that the number has been around 29 000 for the past 20 years, with only small variations from year to year.

Levels of Education

Pre-school education (învatamânt prescolar) is designed for 3-7 year-old children, the last year of pre-school education being compulsory. Its goal is to provide both day care and nursery services and experience to prepare children for formal schooling. It is provided mainly in public institutions, but there are some private nursery schools in urban areas. The pre-schools are organised by the județ Inspectorates. With their approval, local or private associations can create and finance such institutions on a non-profit basis. As in the other former socialist countries, access to pre-school used to be rather high, by international standards, mainly because of the importance of women in the labour force. After a sharp decline at the beginning of the 1990s, the participation rate of 3-6 year-olds increased from 53% in 1992 to about 64% in 1999.

Compulsory basic education (învatamânt obligatoriu) includes the first 4 grades of primary school (primar) and 4 years of lower secondary school (gimnaziu), grades 5 to 8. Current revisions extend compulsory education to grade 9, starting with the cohort of grade 5 in the school year 1999/2000, which will make the current structure 9+3.

Upper secondary education includes 4 and 5-year academic high schools (liceu), 4-year technical high schools, and 2 and 3-year vocational schools (scoala profesionala). Thus there are 3 main tracks: academic, technological and vocational. There are also apprenticeship schools (scoala de ucenici) which offer 1-2 year vocational training.

Academic high schools offer majors (profiles) in mathematics, humanities or languages, for example. An Integrated School Unit (Grup Scolar) is a common cluster specialising in one or two technical areas, such as textiles or industrial chemistry, and provides technical, vocational and sometimes academic secondary schooling. Current revisions include three streams (filiere): theoretical (teoretică), technological (tehnologică) and vocational (vocatională).

Post-high school education (scoala postliceală) is a 3-year special form of education offered at the request of a body (i.e. ministry) to high school graduates.

Post-secondary education includes a short-term form of 3 years (învatamânt superior de scurtă durată) leading to a diploma (diplomà de absolvire) and a long-term form of 4 to 6 years (învatamânt superior de lungă durată) ending in licence diploma (diplomà de licentà). Short-term education is organised in colleges (colegii). Universities may offer short-term as well as long-term studies. They can also offer continuing education courses (up to 1 year and focused on specific employment skills), advanced studies for university graduates (1 to 2 year masters degree programmes), postgraduate studies (2-3 years) and Doctoral studies (4-6 years).
Special education: children with special needs are the responsibility of the State, either in specialised institutions or in regular classrooms. A new law has set out new provisions and a special body has been established to promote the national strategy in this area. Roma children, however, are still less likely to attend school and, even if they do, to complete the compulsory cycle.

Examinations/Transition Points:

There are no formal exams at the end of grade 5. At the end of grade 8, there is a compulsory national examination (capacitate), necessary for entering upper secondary education, in mathematics, mother tongue, history or geography. At the end of 1999/2000, 260 780 candidates took this examination.

In 1998/99, 85% of grade 8 students continued into upper secondary schooling. Most of them (59.6%) went on to academic high schools (liceu) with selective entrance exams based on results at capacitate and specific criteria set by each high school. 24.1% entered 2-3 year vocational schools (scoală profesională) or 4-year technical high schools, with admission based on results at capacitate and on specific skills tests. Only 9.5% went to 1-2 year vocational schools (scoală de ucenici) with admission based on specific skills tests.

At the end of liceu there is another national examination (bacalaureat). At the end of 1999/2000, 169 130 candidates took this exam. The 4-year technical high schools lead to a degree called diploma de absolvire (high school graduation diploma) and the shorter courses to a certificat de absolvire (high school graduation certificate).

Higher education – both types (short-term and long-term) – requires selective entrance exams based on specific criteria set by each university (i.e. results at bacalaureat and/or specific tests), the short-term studies leading to the diplomă de absolvire (university graduation diploma) and long-term studies leading to the diplomă de licență (first-level degree).

Distribution of Management Responsibilities

As in some other countries of the region, the Romanian education system is still rather centralised. At the national level the Ministry of Education and Research (Ministerul Educației și Cercetării) or MER, is ultimately responsible for school governance. It ensures general education administration and sets national education policy: main goals, national curriculum, national statute of teachers, etc.

Its regional administration or judet includes a School Inspectorate (Inspectorat scolar Judetean) which focuses upon quality assurance, personnel and compliance with national guidelines and standards. In each judet a Department of Education (Directia pentru Educatie) makes technical recommendations to the local council, which uses financial resources provided by Local Public Authorities (Autorități Publice Locale). The department monitors funds allocated from the local budget and initiates and implements programmes to develop education at municipal level.

The School Units (Unitatea școlară) are increasingly self-managed in order to meet local needs and are required to define and publish their development plans, worked out with the local administration and used as the basis of inspections. A School Board (Consiliu școlar) including parents, local authorities, trade union and business representatives, and sometimes religious representatives, is responsible for strategic planning and management.
Stages and Status of Education Reform

Education reform in Romania is a long-term process, started in earnest in 1993/94 but with initial efforts beginning much earlier. In late 1989, Romania began to undergo a number of major political changes that affected education. The years 1990-1992 were a period of radical change. Efforts were made to reform the education system although no clear alternatives were offered. The changes were primarily attempts to satisfy education stakeholders. Compulsory schooling was reduced to 8 years, secondary education was diversified, academic liceu received renewed attention, class size and teaching loads were reduced, minority language education was permitted, and education finance was reorganised. In 1992 the Ministry of Education needed to revise curriculum and eliminate the highly ideological orientation of school programmes (elimination of the ideological orientation of the curriculum and textbooks had already started in 1990). It soon became clear that a thoroughgoing reform required a systemic overhaul. Romania’s tradition of a highly centralised political system had created a totalitarian mentality that had been functional for the first decades of the Communist era, but was no longer so. On the contrary, this tradition and the cultural attitudes it spawned were true obstacles to change and impeded legislation for reform.

A comprehensive reform was started in 1993-94 when several major decisions were adopted and negotiations with external donors (the World Bank and the European Commission) began to gain support within Romania. In 1993 the first drafts of a new Law on Education were also elaborated. The reforms have been described as “comprehensive and accelerated”. Their design was based on national and international expertise and on concepts of education reform in South East Europe. The reform touches upon the entire education system, its programmes, actors, underlying philosophy, and educational governance. It should link the education system within a society based on a market economy, the rule of law, and individual freedom. It should also contribute, the sooner the better, to the economic development of the country, by making schools a source of moral, cognitive and technological innovation compatible with European standards. The reform is truly comprehensive; it touches on curriculum, teachers, textbooks, admission policies, financing, staff policies and nearly all other aspects of the educational enterprise. The reform is both ambitious and challenging, but grounded in the recognition that such reform is necessary for Romania to face the challenges of the transition to a market economy and a democratic society. However, the present political, bureaucratic and financial realities will constrain many of these efforts and possibly delay or defeat some of the reform’s goals, but the long-term commitment to reform is one of the most positive aspects of education in Romania today. What is most needed now is continuity – improving many aspects, correcting earlier errors, but promoting and sustaining the spirit and the general lines of the reforms begun nearly a decade ago.

The basic goals of the reform include:

- to drastically reduce illiteracy, and increase vocational qualifications;
- to increase enrolment in upper secondary and tertiary education;
- to develop non-traditional forms of education (distance, continuing and alternative) using new technologies;
- to introduce more active learning and problem-solving activities in schools;
- to improve career guidance for students;
- to expand the programmes for social and ethnic minorities;
to introduce local components within the curriculum;

- to improve school and university funding through extra-budgetary and local resources;

- to set up a modern assessment system of student achievement and of schools.

Other Issues

- **Demographics.** Romania’s child population is decreasing sharply. In 1980, there were 7,349,000 children between the ages of 0-17; in 1997, there were 5,553,000. The trend is even clearer from the number of children in the 0-4 age group: 1,998,000 in 1980, compared with 1,191,000 in 1997. Therefore the demand for school places is declining, even on purely demographic grounds.

- **Falling enrolments at the pre-tertiary level.** In 1979, the enrolment rate was higher in primary (98%) and secondary education (83%) but much lower at the tertiary level (11%). After 1990, except at the tertiary level, where the increase in the number of students was constant (from 164,000 in 1990 to 408,000 in 1999), the gross enrolment rate in pre-tertiary education (ISCED 1-3) dropped, with certain fluctuations in all age groups and regions. The most significant decrease is at the secondary level (ISCED 3) where the gross enrolment rate has fallen to 69.4%. The critical point here is that the reduced cohort size offers a period of time in which access and quality issues can be dealt with more easily because of the reduced demographic pressure on the system. Failure to take advantage of this opportunity would be a serious policy error. The next five to ten years will offer a window of opportunity for the future reform of policies and practices in education.

- **Low internal efficiency, high drop-out rate.** Fewer students in a cohort reach the next level of education. About 17% of the cohort entering grade 1 drop out before the end of grade 8 (analysis of figures 1988/89 through 1995/96); that is, 83% of the original cohort graduated from grade 8. Roma students are particularly vulnerable. The indicator is different by gender with significantly lower values for boys, and modification along a schooling cycle, and descending trends in the terminal grades of compulsory education (grades 5 and 8). Between 1994-1998, school drop-out in secondary education varied by 4% to 6% (in vocational education) and from 6% to 8% [in apprenticeship (ucenic) schools] but over 70% of the pupils that left school in secondary education came from vocational education. The situation in post-high school education is similar.

- **Low external efficiency.** In 1999 over 40% of unemployed were high school graduates. Effective planning of education requires information on potential labour demand for various specialisations. The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity is the appropriate agency to engage in recurrent tracer studies of graduates’ employability and economic success and to share this information with planners within MER and with institutional personnel in schools, colleges and universities responsible for advising students and designing curricula. However, a rapidly evolving economy such as that of Romania is likely to undergo frequent and dramatic changes in the structure of labour demand.
Statistical Data

Data on education are made available through different sources (National Commission for Statistics, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Finance). There is an inconsistency in the methodology as well as a lack of important data about the system. The present situation indicates that important information does not exist at all while many other data are not shared and/or used. For the compilation of this report, the authors have drawn on Romanian sources as well as on statistics gathered specifically for the Thematic Reviews of Education Policy in South Eastern Europe by the Centre for Educational Policy and Statistics (CEPS) in Ljubljana.

Table 1. **Schools by type and population (1999/2000)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>No. of schools</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
<th>No. of teachers</th>
<th>Pupil:Teacher ratio (P:TR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL TYPES</td>
<td>27 533</td>
<td>4 578 383</td>
<td>301 416</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school</td>
<td>12 761</td>
<td>616 313</td>
<td>35 619</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory</td>
<td>13 154</td>
<td>2 498 139</td>
<td>166 332</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary general</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>343 500</td>
<td>21 429</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary VET</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>573 110</td>
<td>49 655</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-high school</td>
<td>90 (57 private)</td>
<td>94 700</td>
<td>...1 404</td>
<td>...68...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>121 (63 private)</td>
<td>452 621</td>
<td>26 977</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: CEPS, Ljubljana, 2001.*

Governance, Management Tools and Practices

At the central level, the mechanisms through which the resources are reallocated (i.e. using a cost-effectiveness model that allows policy simulation exercises) are not frequently used as instruments of education policy. The MER is not routinely using detailed data analyses for designing its policies and for decision-making. This is partly due to old management practices and partly to lack of timely and accurate data. Thus, policy and decision-making that are not substantiated by real data and feedback from the system may become detrimental. Dialogue about reforms may not always be well connected with analysis of potential costs and the cost-effectiveness of previous decisions or initiatives. Therefore, prioritisation of existing reform policies and analysis of the opportunity costs for alternatives is necessary.

Therefore, there is a need for further reform of the information system, in order to obtain relevant and reliable statistics on inputs and outputs, as well as on the functioning of the schools. Some new indicators are needed, of the type proposed by the OECD INES (International Indicators of Education Systems) activity and for monitoring school development plans. Romania has decided to join the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which will help to satisfy this need.\(^7\)

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9. Non-university post-high school education usually takes place in VET high schools, and the teachers are the same in high and post-high school classes. The school tends to report all teachers as high school teachers, so this high ratio is questionable, and has not been used to calculate the overall P:TR for the system.

10. The international overheads of joining PISA have been covered by a grant from Finland within the framework of the Task Force for Education of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.
Another point is the lack of short and medium-term forecasting models, which would estimate student numbers at different levels and the requirements for teachers and financial resources. There is also a need for more communication from the top to the field but also from the schools and the teachers to the regional and central administration.

Inspectorates

Another crucial point is the need for initial and in-service management training for school principals, headmasters, inspectors and administrators at all levels.

The reform in the field of school management through decentralisation and institutional autonomy of the school units is currently underway in Romania. Following this principle, the school unit is becoming more and more an active element within the public education system, by developing an educational plan and being managed locally. It also has to act in a concrete manner and respond autonomously to current education demands. Many steps have already been taken in the way of obtaining institutional autonomy for schools by mobilising and using extra-budgetary resources, strengthening school autonomy in selecting, appointing and training staff and solving student mobility problems.

The new connections between schools, high schools and universities, on the one hand, and the environment (economic, administrative and cultural) on the other hand, require a new vision of the school-community partnership. The structure of the school system depends on the local development, so that local budgets can ensure the maintenance of buildings and the investments, while high schools, post-secondary schools and universities can organise continuing and distance education. Also, local authorities can offer contractual scholarships to pupils and students who promise to return to the respective localities after graduation. Most parties in the regions are not well prepared for these changes; some counties or municipalities will be much better able to cope with the financial changes than others.

Another major step towards the greater efficiency and effectiveness of a more decentralised education system is the implementation of a new model for school inspection. The bureaucratic control mechanism must be substituted by an *a posteriori* type of control based upon objective indicators and external audits.

In this respect, the new model of inspection for schools which was designed in 1998 is quite remarkable. Its purpose is twofold: first, to help the school in its self-assessment and thus to improve; and second, to report to the various stakeholders about the performance achieved by the school (accountancy principle). Hence, the aim of inspection is as much formative as summative.

The inspectors are expected to analyse 9 different aspects of schools’ activities:

- the performance of students,
- the way the school supports students’ personal achievement,
- the quality of teaching and of teachers,
- the quality of school management,
- the quality of the curriculum and of extra-curricular activities, and the way they are implemented,
− the quality of the relationship with parents,
− the quality of the relationship with the local community (including business),
− the extent to which the school carries out its legal responsibilities,
− the attitude of students towards the education provided by the school and their motivation to learn.

This is a very comprehensive approach. It could be further improved by requiring the inspectors to look at the overall consistency of school policy, given its specific context (economic local environment, social and cultural background of the students, etc.). Moreover, the inspection (or audit) would be much more efficient if the school had built up a real development plan with measurable targets, priorities, an implementation time schedule and relevant indicators.

The new model for inspection also defines some standards of conduct for inspectors (teams of two to eight according to the size of the school), including a professional code of ethics. This is very important as effective inspection requires trust from those being inspected. It allows for real co-operation in the auditing process, and a greater probability of acceptance by the school community of the final outcomes and recommendations.

Within the auditing team, a majority of inspectors should have real teaching experience and good knowledge of the subjects taught in the school, while others should be more specialised in management (including budget and finance) procedures. The new Romanian model of inspection is also quite relevant in the way it describes the pre-inspection and post-inspection (feedback) stages of the process. It also provides a very precise methodological guide for a comprehensive audit, inspired by the new theories of participative management and the main principles of quality management and assurance.

However, there are a few obstacles which should be taken into account in order to implement such an innovative model of inspection. First, most of the inspectors are specialists in academic subjects and in teaching (with limited knowledge of cross-curricular activities and interdisciplinary complementarity). They have little experience and knowledge in management. Thus, the issue of relevant in-service training of inspectors and the recruitment of new inspectors with different backgrounds and professional experiences is very important. It is particularly crucial to develop their knowledge in modern human resources management techniques.

Given such conditions, and some precautions in adapting rather than adopting business procedures in the culturally different world of educators, the general provisions made for a new model of inspection for schools are certainly an important step towards improving the managerial capacity of the school units. This is crucial at a time when schools have to make new decisions. School autonomy requires a new steering and monitoring capacity, and the support of managerial expertise.

**Finance**

Fierce competition for public funds has put education finance under scrutiny, particularly given the changing demand for education, and the system’s evolving relationship with public and private institutions, non-governmental organisations and local public authorities.

The new policies in education finance need to address issues such as: the implementation of a new education cost-effectiveness; explicit consideration of the opportunity costs of alternative policies and
actions and setting priorities of reform steps; designing a reliable educational management information system (MIS); and increasing the Ministry’s ability to design longer term policies and its capacity to monitor, assess and co-ordinate externally-financed activities in education.

The MER receives almost all resources allocated to education from the State Budget for most budget lines. The budget law establishes the legislative framework of the education finance process and provides annual financial resources. In 1999, 3.16% of GDP (2.76% from the State Budget) was allocated to education; the estimate for 2000 was 3.66% (2.86% from the State Budget) but the education system remains under-funded.

The Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Finance negotiate a total budget and allocate funds to budget lines on the basis of: student numbers, average teaching staff salary, equipment needs, scholarship students, et al. When ministerial proposals differ, the Government decides before the budget is submitted to the Parliament. Expenditures are broken down on the basis of transfers to the school Inspectorates for each of the two budget lines: current expenditures (i.e. salaries of teachers, expenditures for textbooks, etc.) and capital expenditures. School Inspectorates also collect revenues from sponsoring activities, donations, and third parties. In 1999, their own revenues will cover about 12.5% of the total funds allocated for education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Shares of sources of funding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total 3.20 3.10 3.47 3.65 3.66 3.64 3.16 3.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Budget 96.1 96.7 82.6 82.0 79.7 81.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Budget - - 13.4 14.7 11.5 9.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other 3.9 3.3 4.0 3.3 8.8 9.2</td>
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</table>

Source: Ministry of Finance.

Regional policy has recently become a priority since regional disparities are partly related to the political issues of public finance and intergovernmental transfers. The current system transfers money as a percentage of total local taxes, up to 50% of the amount transferred. This has primarily benefited the wealthier counties, but the system has become obsolete as populations become more mobile. The spending pattern at the national level is almost the same in each region (that is, the Local Public Authorities tend to spend about 10% of the revenues collected locally on education). The new legislative framework on local budgets established a new spending pattern by changing the structure of financing from public funds. The State budget will remain the main source of funding, with 61.5% of expenditures, but the share of Local Public Authorities will increase to about 24% of the total.

A series of decentralising measures are currently being implemented in financing (costs regarding the school infrastructure are now undertaken by local councils) and co-financing domains (schools obtained financial autonomy and may use their own extra-budgetary resources for the teaching personnel, hostels and boarding schools, extracurricular activities). The State, however, remains involved in transportation services, meals and boarding, school libraries, clubs, scholarships, bank credits for students and the possibility of sponsoring some activities.

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11. A budget line (heading) groups the credits opened according to the Budget Law to cover the expenditure of a public institution (i.e. ministry). The financial resources must have the same characteristics in terms of source and destination of the funds.
Another measure, implemented in 2000, is the global financing (local resources allocation depends on the number of students) also envisaged for the pre-university education system, the implementation method being established by a Pre-university Education Financing Council. The new legal framework introduces advanced budgetary allocation mechanisms based on number of students. It also introduces the need-based allocation mechanisms and incentives for private and non-state financing.

**Issues and barriers related to finance**

- **Centralised financing.** The current financial system is plagued by largely centralised decision-making process and allocation criteria. School unit needs are largely ignored by the central government and there seem to be no clear-cut options for correcting this.

- **Lack of transparency.** There is a lack of transparency in the current budget structure as a result of registering external contributions as part of the State’s regular budget. The budget also includes the so-called “transfers to children”, which are payments made directly to households; in other countries, these are usually classified as social protection and not education. The inclusion of “transfers” artificially inflates the total of the education budget, giving the impression that the true budget for education is larger than it is in reality.

- **Budgetary allocation rules remain too rigid.** Funds may be re-routed within the current expenditure line but the law does not allow increasing the funds for other budget lines such as salaries and investments. Savings are not encouraged: at the end of the financial year, unspent money is transferred back to the State Budget.

- **High pressure on recurrent expenses,** especially on teachers’ salaries, the largest portion of the budget (approximately 85%). The actual structure of the budget does not allow policy simulation exercises.

- **Regional disparities.** The interest in education is higher in some regions but this does not make up for the lack of locally raised financial resources. There are no data to show that, when there is a shortage of resources from the central level, the Local Public Authority will cover the deficit. A comparative analysis of local educational expenditures would undoubtedly reveal major discrepancies among regions, depending on their economic development.

**Equity in Access, Attainment and Achievement**

According to the Constitution, state education is to be free for all educational levels, and access to education is guaranteed to all regardless of ethnic or social category, gender, or religious beliefs.

In Romania, as in other former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, access to pre-school education was traditionally high by international standards, because of the political and economic priorities of the socialist state (especially those emphasising employment of women). Access to pre-school education has now become dependent on the family possibilities of supporting its share of the meals and other costs. The economic background, changes in employment patterns, and demographic patterns have been the main reasons for the decrease in enrolment rates at the pre-school level. At the same time, the increasing gap between the public pre-school education supply and the private one (focused on foreign language study, individualised and active learning), access to which is restricted by costs that go far beyond the possibilities of a common family, also contributes to reducing equal opportunities and equitable access. However, further compounding the inequity in access to pre-school experiences can hardly be an acceptable operating procedure, especially in the public sector.
Traditionally seen as a public service, the education system has become more and more open to private initiatives and educational alternatives. After 1990, the private education sector developed mainly at the tertiary and secondary level, but also at primary level in the alternative education domains (i.e. Freinet, Petersen, Waldorf, Montessori). This trend is seen by educationalists as ways to facilitate access to higher levels of education, and increase equity, especially for higher levels of education. Public confidence in state education is high, however, and the emergence and development of the private system do not affect the equity in access to education.

Primary education is nearly universally available within the nation, and there is no gender difference of access. One determinant of this success in achieving broad participation is the policy of providing child allowances (through schools) for school age-children. The next most important objective concerning compulsory education should be to aim at a 100% participation rate of pupils; this will require specific measures with respect to families in rural areas, and to Roma pupils. In some areas, transportation should be improved and the capacity of school boards increased.

A disturbing finding in terms of school funding was that a parent’s ability to assist a school financially (through “gifts” of computers or other items) increased the ability of a child to gain access to certain public pre-schools which had greater demand for pupil places than their capacity could handle. While government policy does not allow exclusion of pupils on economic grounds, this situation is a natural result of an imbalance of demand and supply (especially in schools where teaching is done in a foreign language). Both the parent’s motivation to help their child and the school director’s motivation to supplement inadequate resource allocations to provide better learning conditions for pupils are easily understandable. Whether these conditions are exceptions or more usual behaviour, the Ministry needs to examine how it can assure that admission decisions are separated from appropriate and inappropriate attempts by schools to mobilise supplementary resources. Another example, mostly at secondary education (college) level, is that families may pay for some of the smaller costs of building reparation and auxiliary teaching materials acquisition.

Some documents regret that widespread private tutoring contributes to the polarisation of education according to social criteria, and narrows access to education of children from families with small incomes. Others speak of the “undermining” of schools, and believe that public education should provide a sufficient base for access to high schools and universities. The existence of this private, supplementary type of education is mostly caused by inertia; it continues to be “fed” by old elements in the system that persist in using the old curriculum focus on transmission and reproduction of a large quantity of knowledge. Moreover, as long as the old system of university access through faculty-based entrance examinations persists, it will be difficult to persuade parents to abandon the private tutoring system.

During the 1980s, Romania faced major discrepancies within the system, higher enrolment rates at the pre-tertiary level and lower at the tertiary level. The years after 1990 showed a different situation; the number of students enrolled in the tertiary level tripled, whereas the number of pupils decreased elsewhere, mainly at the secondary level, and demand for school places also decreased.

**Equity in access, attainment and achievement for disadvantaged children**

**Access and participation for minorities.** The Constitution and the Education Laws define and protect minority (language) rights in education. Since Romanian is a required subject in all state schools, children belonging to ethnic minority groups generally learn enough of the majority language for them not to be seriously disadvantaged in either access to tertiary education or employment, although other (socially discriminatory) factors can and do come into play, for example in employment, housing etc. Moreover, Romania is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is thereby obliged to ensure that these rights are promoted and protected for all.
The situation of Roma children is a special case. As elsewhere in the region, the proportion of Roma children of compulsory schooling age actually attending school is unacceptably low, although accurate statistical data are difficult to find. Moreover, if ‘access’ is taken in all its dimensions (initial access to, survival in, treatment during, and empowerment as a result of, education), Roma children do a great deal worse than their non-Roma counterparts, especially in terms of equal access to jobs and social opportunities.

The Council of Europe estimates that 5 525 000 Roma live in Central Europe, with significant numbers in other countries e.g. 700 000 in Spain, 300 000 in France and 300 000 in the Russian Federation. The Council also estimates that one-half of the European Roma population is of compulsory school age. Half of these (one-quarter of the total) never go to school at all, and of those who do, very few reach secondary school. Adult illiteracy is estimated at over 50%, and in some communities reaches 80%. Social and economic exclusion, of course, further exacerbate the position of Roma families throughout the region.

It is difficult to get an accurate reading of the educational situation of Romanian Roma. Statistics are hard to find, or cannot be extracted from general tables showing, for example, ‘the number of ethnic minority students studying in their mother tongue’ because most Romanian Roma study (if they do so at all!) in Romanian majority-language classrooms. However, 1994 data from the Council of Europe indicate that Romania’s Roma population (‘best estimate’) 1991-94 was 2 150 000 or 9.4% of the total population 1994-95.\(^{12}\) This is several times higher than the official figures given in Romania where the census gives a figure of only about 2%. Regardless of the percentage, however, in absolute terms Romania has by far the largest number of Roma people in the region.

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<tr>
<th>Table 3. Roma population, 1991-94 (thousands)</th>
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<td>FYRoM</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
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<td><strong>Romania</strong></td>
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<td>Slovak Republic</td>
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<td>Slovenia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
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<td>Yugoslavia</td>
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In areas with a high Roma population, Roma children are in classrooms, although they are still not well-accepted everywhere and there are still few Roma teachers to serve as motivators or role models, although this latter situation has improved in the last few years. There now are inspectors for “Roma issues” in the MER and in each of the judets. There are special “positive discrimination” programmes that

\(^{12}\) Liegeois, J-P., Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 1994, p. 34. Only FYRoM has a higher percentage (10.9% in 1994). Slovakia (9.4%) and Bulgaria (8.9%) are close; Hungary (5.6%) and Serbia/Montenegro (4%) are next, other C/EE countries are below 3%. In absolute terms, Romania has by far the largest Roma population.
are attracting Roma youngsters to the teaching profession. There is a special “distance learning” programme, carried out by CREDIS – the distance learning unit of the University of Bucharest. Fifty percent of the students – all of them currently teaching in Roma communities – are given grants by the “Center Education 2000+”, member of Soros Open Network (SON) Romania, the new organisational structure of the former Soros Foundation for an Open Society. The Center supports publication of university handbooks for students, who then have the obligation to continue working in their communities for a certain number of years. A “positive discrimination” system allocates special places for Roma in all universities.

Center Education 2000+ operates a “Second Chance” pilot project, started in 1999, as well as another project within the framework of the Stability Pact (Working Table II – Vocational Education), together with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This offers a second chance for older drop-outs: youngsters between 14-25 years who did not complete compulsory education. Students are offered a ‘basic education recovery’ programme in parallel with an apprenticeship type of training. In order to motivate students, the project encourages traditional Roma professions as well as other, more “modern” professions that are preferred by students. The project is the first of this type in Romania, and is developed in partnership with the MER. The Ministry intends to generalise the model. NGOs are now asking for an amendment to the Law (whereby students will receive a certificate of graduation of compulsory education, so that they will be allowed to enter an apprenticeship-type of vocational education). Such a change in the law, permitting children to enter vocational training without the ‘capacitate certificate’ (but with a ‘certificate of graduating compulsory education’) would indeed be helpful. In fact, the present Law already permits special placement for children who reach the age of 14 without completing primary (grade 4); but the reality is that ‘special placement’ here often means placement in programmes for mentally disabled pupils, while most Roma children are of normal intelligence and ‘merely’ educationally disadvantaged.

The Open Society Foundation/Soros in Bucharest – through its new centres, “Center Education 2000+”, and the “Center of Resources for Roma Communities” – has Roma programmes in collaboration with various Romanian institutions. One key principle is not to treat the issue as simply a ‘poverty’ problem but to enhance, for example, the role of Roma through capacity building in education, attracting Roma as civil servants in public administration, etc., and to work with other NGOs (for example in health protection, and the protection of human rights).

Issues and barriers in access

- **Insufficient access to pre-school education:** About one third of children do not attend preschools, mainly among the most economically disadvantaged, with less educated parents. In many OECD countries, one major aim of developing pre-schooling is to use it to offset social and cultural disadvantages in order to provide equal opportunities for all children. It is for this reason that the Romanian public authorities planned to expand pre-school facilities. The Education Act of 1995 proposed the gradual establishment of compulsory pre-school at ages 5 and 6.

- **Lack of finance for policy implementation:** The provision of the amendments to Education Act of 1995, concerning an expanded compulsory education, starting with 5- to 6-year-olds, has already been implemented. The corresponding proportion of the budget devoted to pre-school education will need to increase as the private sector needs to absorb some of the demand.

- **Children excluded from compulsory schooling:** If access to compulsory schooling is nearly universal without gender discrimination, the fact that about 3% of children do not attend school at this early age remains an important issue. The modern economy and the
“knowledge society” require a basic survival kit in terms of knowledge and skills. These children will have more difficulties finding jobs and living normally within society. Moreover, despite recent progress, the proportion of early drop-outs remains too high.

- **The high drop-out rate before the end of grade 8.** The nature of the participation issue (including questions of initial access, retention and transition) may vary, and there are no data to indicate the reasons for dropping out. The result of this will be increased social exclusion not just from education but from a wide range of economic and social activities.

- **Upper secondary financing.** A special financial concern in upper secondary education is financing the development and dissemination of textbooks and other support materials. Parental responsibility for textbook purchase must be accompanied by an effective programme of assistance to those families who cannot afford these expenses. Otherwise, a discriminatory barrier will be reinforced and the government subsidy of teachers and facilities will only be accessible to those families who can afford the complementary textbooks required at the secondary level.

- **Free education.** Education is free at all levels; but lately equity of access to education has been affected by the transfer of a series of educational costs to the parents. This reduces the possibility of equal access to pre-school, secondary, and university education. Introducing fees to cover the costs of various types of examination (i.e. application to admission examinations at high schools, vocational schools and universities, delivery of study certificates, etc.) was not always seen as a way to supplement financing sources.

- **Lack of planning at the central level.** The rising demand for education has major enrolment policy implications. For example, in 1999 ad-hoc decisions of the Ministry were taken under pressure from parents to supplement the number of places available in upper secondary public education. These decisions were not well thought out and created problems for schools.

- **Private tutoring for pay.** As a consequence of spontaneous regulations and very severe selection procedures, private coaching may interfere with the issue of equity. Training the students privately and offering them additional tuition provided by teachers or persons with higher qualifications, paid directly by the family, may become detrimental in the long run. Whether these conditions be exceptional or more usual behaviour, the Ministry needs to examine how it can ensure that admission decisions are transparent.

- **Exclusion of Roma children and children with special educational needs (SEN), if not de jure then certainly de facto.** Educational opportunities for Roma children and SEN children are still unacceptably low. If ‘equality’ is taken in its wider sense – of equal access to, equal survival in, equal treatment during, and equal (employment, social participation) opportunities as a result of education – then Roma and SEN children in Romania are not getting their fair share on any of these counts. Some NGOs are addressing these issues, and good progress is being made in “de-institutionalising” SEN children and integrating them into mainstream schools and society; but much more is needed, especially in public awareness and in strict adherence to laws protecting every child’s educational and human rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights. The attitudes of people within the education system itself also need to be challenged and changed; the Ministry must take a clear leadership role in this.

- **Low internal efficiency, high drop-out.** Fewer students within a cohort progress to the next level of education. Over the period 1988-1996, 17% of the cohort enrolled in the grade 1 did
not complete compulsory (8-year) education. The indicator is different by gender with significantly lower values for boys. Rural areas are much more affected by drop-outs, but there are inequalities even between rural areas.

- **Low external efficiency.** In 1999, over 40% of unemployed were high school graduates. Even though school is not the main factor in unemployment, there is an issue of better adapting qualifications to those needed by the employers. There is a shortage in some needed qualifications and a surplus in other obsolete ones.

**Resources, Buildings, Equipment**

In the 1998/99 school year, there were more than 115 000 classrooms at the pre-tertiary level and more than 25 000 (including laboratories) at the tertiary level. Given the general state of buildings and equipment of schools, there is an obvious shortage of financial resources. The poor physical condition of many schools which need urgent rehabilitation remains a problem: insufficient heating, lack of public transportation in rural areas, lack of educational equipment, obsolete books and documentation, lack of computers and software, etc.

The fact that some schools (including some private ones) are much better equipped than others is an important factor of inequity. The decentralisation process, which started in 1995 and was accelerated in 2000, may increase this inequity if the Ministry does not take measures to equalise or compensate for regional and local differences. In 1995, the responsibility for maintenance was transferred to local authorities, while in 2000 this was extended to investments and current expenditures. According to the law, the MER continues to be responsible for the salaries of personnel, textbooks, scholarships, in-service training of teachers, etc. This new organisation introduces institutional contracts with local authorities and schools on a need-based allocation of resources: funding is based on the number of students and an estimated average cost of students at different levels of education. The structural distribution of resources – 85% for current expenditure and 15% for capital investment – and the high pressure on current expenditures because of the claims to improve salaries, do not leave much room to rehabilitate schools and invest in educational equipment. Increasing education’s low share of GDP to a more acceptable level, and/or attracting additional external funding, would help.

**A new curriculum**

In Romania, it took quite a long time to reform (rather than merely “change”) the curriculum. Between 1992 and 1997 an “interim” curriculum was developed that offered a sound basis not only for initial textbook reform, but also for the further development of a new National Curriculum. In fact, in 1997 a new coherent and flexible methodology for planning, developing, implementing, evaluating and reviewing the new curriculum was designed. Within it, a balance between traditional and modern approaches was considered desirable but hard to achieve. A thoroughly new approach was adopted in January 1998, when the National Board of Curriculum was re-structured and the Minister of Education appointed a Commission to define a coherent curricular framework.

The priorities were the design of a broadly consistent national curriculum, integrating the different subjects allowing for the first time an “independent” pedagogical policy for each school, according to the specific needs of its pupils, and the regional/local economic and social environment. The design included the specification of a suitable balance between compulsory and elective courses, the

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13 Up to 1 000 schools are, however, being rehabilitated through a World Bank loan.
development of national standards of content and of pupil performance, and more intensive training of the teachers involved in the process.

In a long-term perspective, the objective of the curriculum reform is the development, validation and implementation of a new pre-university curriculum. Between 1998 and 2001 the new curriculum was implemented for grades 1 to 10, and in the next school year (2001/02) it will be extended to grade 11. The traditional syllabi (almost exclusively based on accumulation of information) are being replaced by new syllabi allowing more active learning, focusing on the complexity of knowledge, on methodological skills and intellectual capacities and on attitudes and values. New curricula for VET secondary education were introduced in 1999/00, with full implementation for vocational high schools (grades 10-12) by 2002/03. At the time of this report, 100% of students in basic education, 50% in general secondary grades 9 and 10, 100% in professional schools, and 50% in VET high schools were working with the new curricula.

Such changes in the curriculum were not easy to design and implement. At first, the national model addressed general issues such as inter-disciplinary and cross-curricular consistency. In the short term, the accent was put on the adoption of an implementation strategy (initially on a pilot basis and eventually for the whole education system). The optimal level for decentralisation through a suitable balance between a national core curriculum and a school-based curriculum, as well as the structure of the curriculum, soon followed, when the general framework National Curriculum (Planuri-Cadru pentru Învățământul Preuniversitar) was published in 1998, with supporting timetables and subject-specific programmes and objectives (see References: three important documents published by the Ministry of National Education in 1998). This was a major achievement, an innovative approach that attracted a great deal of professional and public attention.

Table 4 shows the general curriculum framework.

The new Law on Education formally established a National Council for Curriculum as the coordinating body for developing and disseminating the new curriculum in Romania. Teams of subject matter and pedagogical experts and teachers developed the first revised curricula. Alternative textbooks have been produced based on these curricula, under an innovative competitive bidding system financed through the WB project. Teams of specialists also developed an assessment and examination system to parallel the new curricula. The link between curriculum and assessment functions is good, but relevant training of teachers in the use of the new curricula and assessment standards is needed. In order to attain the objectives of the reform, two sets of documents were elaborated – conceptual and practical. The conceptual documents included:

1) A document concerning the educational policy in the field of curriculum (one for compulsory education, another one for upper secondary level);

2) A document describing the new curriculum framework in order to clarify the national debate about possible alternatives;

3) A guide for curriculum developers (coherent reference for all the working groups); and

4) General guidelines of the national curriculum: main principles and goals, objectives of the main stages of the education process and of the subjects.
Table 4. **General framework for compulsory education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Areas/Subjects</th>
<th>I</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly maximal instructional time</strong></td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Source: National Council for Curriculum, 2000. (Some changes have been made in the Spring of 2001, but no information was available to the OECD team.*)
Documents 1 (for compulsory education) and 3 were the first to be completed; then Document 4 for compulsory education. In 1998, the framework for compulsory education was designed and approved for the first five grades and the new curriculum was supposed to begin implementation during the 1998/99 academic year. The practical documents were written for the different levels of the pre-university education to facilitate the actual implementation of the new curriculum within the schools.

The curriculum is operationalised through an education plan covering seven curriculum areas (streams, strands) of study (humanities, arts, science, physical education and religious education – see Table 4). Half of the instructional time per week is allocated to humanities (including Romanian language, foreign languages, Romanian history and civics). Science accounts for another quarter of the curriculum; the remainder is art and physical education with religious education taking only one hour per week.

There is a focus on an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to the curriculum. The curriculum for lower secondary education covers six major fields of study: humanities and social education, basic science, art, technology, physical education and open discussion. Humanities and social account for 30 to 40% of total instructional time per week, increasing from 10 out of 25 hours in year 5 to 13 of 32 hours in year 8. Within this category of the curriculum, almost half of the time is dedicated to the study of the Romanian language and literature. Basic science instruction increases from 8 out of 25 hours to 12 out of 31 hours over the lower secondary cycle. Within the science category, the most important topic is mathematics. Instruction in biology, geography, physics, and chemistry is also stressed at this level. The other four content areas of the curriculum vary from one to two hours per week at the lower secondary level.

It became clear that evaluation should be introduced by reforming the examination system. A special emphasis is now put on sustainable knowledge as well as on making students familiar with new electronic means of collecting scientific information. The students’ knowledge and skills are to be used later on in a continuing learning process. Students should make good use of their capacity to integrate into the new social economic environment and this will facilitate access to higher levels of education. The improvements in school infrastructure as well as the connection to world-wide electronic communication has been realised through computerising education by implementing a programme of equipping schools and high schools with computers and extending the educational information network ROEDUNET.

The curriculum reform aims at building up programmes tailored to pupils’ interests and to the pace of continuous progress in knowledge fields. It takes into account the requirement of shaping personalities within the context of a rapidly changing world. The National Curriculum Framework which was recently put in place tried to meet the criteria of decentralisation as well as of flexibility, and is school-oriented. Although it addresses priorities and needs relevant to Romanian society, it may serve as an example for other countries in the region. The new curriculum appears to be a positive step for Romanian education; it deserves support from the nation and its international partners, and it should be considered an essential step toward viable systemic reform.

Textbooks

The formal and informal frameworks for responsibilities at all educational levels for textbooks and materials show that in theory all levels of the education system are involved in the decision-making process. The Ministry of Education and Research makes decisions and approves curricula which are the basis for new textbooks and materials. The Ministry covers these costs and provides materials for general compulsory education. For non-compulsory education, the government and schools themselves, through their own or external sources, provide materials.
The results of the reform initiated in the field of textbooks are already visible. In compulsory education, teachers now have a choice of more than one textbook per subject (textbooks were based on the first round of the new curricula) and a flourishing private textbook publishing industry has developed.14

At present, however, the long-term policy of textbook production is unclear and the means for assuring textbooks to disadvantaged students at the post-compulsory levels has not been resolved. Under the Education Law, textbooks are given free of charge to students in compulsory education, but disadvantaged students in liceu have no such ensured subsidy.

Also, once the externally financed project ends, will the Government be prepared to take over the subsidy of books and the monitoring of textbook availability? The MER should prepare, in consultation with teachers, parents and publishers, a sustainable strategy in the field of textbooks. This strategy should include a detailed cost analysis, consideration of textbook vouchers for needy students, and delegation to schools of the responsibility of purchasing textbooks for compulsory education (subject to some effective decentralisation of financing resources to the level of schools). Finally, evaluation of textbooks in terms of learning effectiveness should become the foundation for revision and continued use of the present generation of materials.

**Issues and barriers in curriculum and textbooks**

− *Resources to support curriculum reform.* The reform will not be complete without an institutional placement of the curriculum function, and a permanent professional staff. Under the present circumstances the role of the NCC has become very important and a Curriculum Development Centre has been established under the MER. However, its status and level of authority should be more clearly defined. In the short term, decisions will need to be made about its level of authority. An unresolved issue is where the financing will come from to support the development and dissemination to schools of this new curriculum structure after the end of the WB project. Disadvantaged regions and localities may need special assistance from the Ministry to fulfil their role under this plan. The relevance of the curriculum has been increased through the recent reforms, and it is hoped that this will be reinforced at a lower level by allowing local authorities to contribute specific local and regional content to the new curriculum. This will depend on the resources (both human and financial) available at the local level.

− *Dissemination of information on textbooks.* Information on alternative textbooks and materials is not well circulated, and there are no binding guidelines for displaying books, collecting data, and sending orders to publishing houses in a timely manner. While teachers and schools choose other materials, financial restrictions may confound orders and, on occasion, school principals or inspectors might intervene. The ability of Romania to sustain the current textbook structure is not certain. This is a matter of great concern, given the continuing need to update texts and other classroom instructional materials to match the emerging curriculum and the changing social environment.

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14. As of April 2001, 56 publishers had taken part in national competitive bidding according to strict requirements overseen by the Textbook Approvals Board (TAB), 25 of them successfully. More than 90 contracts for textbook provision were being managed under the GoR/World Bank loan, only 12 of these with the previous State publisher (EDP) which used to have a monopoly on textbook publishing and distribution.
Evaluation of Learning Outcomes, Assessment and Examinations

Evaluation of educational quality has been a weak point in Romanian education. There were few mechanisms for systematic quality monitoring, either of *inputs* (curricula, textbooks, school buildings and equipment etc.), or *processes* (teaching, school and classroom organisation, time-tabling, etc.), and only recently has some attention been paid to learner achievement or educational *outcomes*. A well-ordered educational system is able to monitor quality at all three of these points.

It is encouraging that the issue of quality is now being addressed, *e.g.* through the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework; the piloting of a new Model for Inspection aimed more at advice and support and less at ‘inspection’; and the introduction of new, national approaches to the monitoring and measurement of educational outcomes in terms of student learning. All three of these initiatives are still in their early stages, but the beginnings of a comprehensive quality monitoring system now seem to be in place.

The relatively poor performance of Romania in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) for 13-year olds in 1995 has been an added factor in bringing the quality of Romanian education into focus. The mythology of the ‘Olympiads’, widespread throughout the region, holds that national education is demonstrably of high quality if teams of well-coached students win international academic competitions (called ‘Olympiads’). However, out of the 41 countries participating in TIMMS in 1995, Romania came 34th in Mathematics and 31st in Science. Other countries in the region did a great deal better (the Czech Republic came 2nd in Science and 6th in Mathematics; Hungary came 9th in Science and 14th in Mathematics; Bulgaria came 5th in Science and 11th in Mathematics); thus the speculation that the tests were biased in favour of OECD countries does not hold.

These findings have been a “wake-up call” for many Romanian educators. Clearly, while the Romanian system continues to do well by its high-ability pupils, the performance of children *in the system as a whole* is less than satisfactory. Since 1995, the Ministry has carried out its own sample-based national assessments in Maths and Romanian language for grade 4 children, and this practice has been continued and expanded by the SNEE (see below) to give better and more timely feedback to the Ministry on learning outcomes.

No official assessment system exists for pre-elementary education, although assessment models from such educational alternative approaches as the “Step-by-Step” programme are being used more and more by teachers. Physical and mental development are being monitored at the classroom level with individual teachers having the main responsibility for identification of intellectual, psychological or social difficulties, and for any remedial programme. Pupils are not required to repeat a grade, whatever their performance, but teachers may refer children with major learning problems to psycho-medical commissions which may refer some of these pupils to special forms of education.

In primary education, pupils are assessed continuously by their teacher. Regular school examinations occur, focused on the basic subjects of the curriculum. Pupils may be required to repeat a class. No final examination is given at the end of the 4-year primary cycle.

In lower secondary education, in addition to continuous assessment by the teacher, a new (1999) examination (*examen de capacitate*) is given to all pupils at the end of the grade 8. This is a national examination, covering Romanian language and literature, mathematics, history or geography.

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supplementary exam is taken by pupils studying in a minority language in the respective mother tongue. Pupils who pass the exam receive a school-leaving certificate, which is necessary (but not sufficient) for going on to upper secondary schools.

Indeed, a striking feature of the Romanian education system is the traditionally high number of ‘double’ examinations. After passing the *capacitate* at the end of compulsory schooling, students almost immediately take a second, competitive, entrance examination\(^\text{16}\) when applying to a *liceu* or a vocational school. Then, at the end of *liceu*, the students must take the “*baccalaureat*” or, at the end of vocational school, obtain a “school leaving certificate”. Then – again immediately afterwards – another competitive faculty-based examination may be required for entering some tertiary education institutions.

The systemic reform of curriculum includes a strong assessment dimension: the definition of achievement standards, and the national assessment of student progress in relation to these standards. The National Assessment and Evaluation Service – *Serviciul National de Evaluare și Examinare* (SNEE) – was established in May 1998. It published a brochure in 1999 giving a new framework for assessing pupils at primary and secondary levels: “How to assess? How to score? How to communicate pupils’ achievements?” (*Cum Evaluăm? Cum notăm? Cum comunicăm rezultatele școlare?*). Other documents proposed criteria for assessing achievement at different levels. A quite new “culture of evaluation” has emerged within the education system, with regard to performance standards and attainment targets.

Establishment of the *Serviciul National de Evaluare și Examinare* (SNEE) in May 1998 has been an important stimulus for quality. It now has a staff of approximately 40 trained specialists in educational measurement; it conducts not only the grade 4 national assessments but also the new *capacitate* examination, modernised versions of the *liceu* entrance and the *baccalaureat* exams, and a number of other initiatives aimed at measuring student learning against Romanian and (increasingly) international standards. SNEE co-ordinates participation in international studies such as the IEA studies and the new OECD/PISA study, publishes a wide range of support materials for teachers and conducts assessment training and seminars.

Such importance given to summative and certification assessment, through traditional types of examinations, has been questioned. It is true that the *liceu* and *baccalaureat* exams have existed for many years, and, in their modernised and far more professional forms, they are now a valuable means to ensure that national standards are being met and that access to higher levels of education is fairer and transparent. However, national ‘gatekeeper’ exams are an expensive process for the government budget, and put a great deal of pressure on students. It can be particularly discouraging for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, for example, if the exams create a private market for intensive preparation and coaching.

The accumulation of so many ‘double’ exams appears to create a series of redundant filters. Any educational Malthusianism must be suppressed in a country which needs to improve the overall level of educational attainment in order to meet the demands of the world “knowledge economy”. Assessment of national standards and (some) selection are, of course, necessary, but education must not become a steeple race with a few lucky survivors. Again, more importance should be given instead to formative types of assessment.

In the same way, the traditional method of many students repeating grades has been questioned on the basis of education research, which shows that it is an inefficient method both in financial and

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\(^{16}\) One of the objectives of the GoR/WB Education Reform Project (see References) is to abolish the *liceu* entrance exam and to use the results of the new *capacitate* as the sole basis for upper secondary entrance, thereby removing the unnecessary burden of double exams. The same objective applies to the *baccalaureat* and university entrance.
educational terms. The recent trend is to encourage schools to reduce the proportion of students repeating grades, and to finance instead special pedagogical support to students who have difficulties in learning.

A main priority now is to develop the diagnostic and formative dimensions of assessment by training teachers how to assess in a more systematic and scientific way, and to enhance interdisciplinary co-ordination on standards, criteria and score grids.

**Teachers and Teacher Training**

Most of the instructors in nursery schools are called *educatori*. They have completed a minimum of 5 years of study in an upper secondary teacher training school. Some other teachers are more qualified: the *instititori*, who have completed either a 2-year course in a teacher training college (graduates of an upper secondary teacher training school) or a 3-year course in college (graduates of other types of upper secondary school). Over time, the proportion of *instititori* is increasing.

In 1998/99 the total number of primary school teachers was 64,710 and the average pupil/teacher ratio was about 19:6, very close to the average pupil/teacher ratio among OECD countries. Such a ratio, and the demographic context, offer a good opportunity to organise the necessary in-service training of teachers required by the implementation of the new curriculum.

In lower secondary education, the teachers called *profesori* must have completed a specialised “long” higher education course, the length of which depends on the subjects taught. All subjects are taught by specialists. The open discussion sessions (components of the curriculum) are supervised by a teacher who is also responsible for the management of the educational activities of the class, as well as relations with parents. New regulations again allow initial training of pre-school and primary teachers to be offered in pedagogical high schools, starting in 2001/02.

In 1998/99 there were 100,045 lower secondary teachers and 66,101 teachers in upper secondary education. The average pupil/teacher ratio was 12.5 (lower secondary) and 10.8 (upper secondary), lower than the average ratio among OECD countries (respectively 14.8 and 13.7). However, the under-qualification of many teachers is an issue in the context of implementing the new curriculum.

Some teachers are still unfamiliar with the new teaching and assessing practices required by the conceptual framework of the new curriculum, and not only with the contents of the new syllabi. However, intensive teacher training carried out under the EC-Phare VET RO 9405 Project and the World Bank Education Reform Project has had an important impact. All teachers in the pre-university system participated, during 1998 and 1999, in a 40-hour training programme based on the reforms. Moreover, in 1999 and 2000 the Ministry developed a cascade programme whereby 60 National Trainers were trained and certificated; they in turn trained 1,370 trainers at județ level, who then conducted training for 30,000 local trainers who work in schools. With regard to the curriculum, in the school year 2000/01 about 7,300 teachers were trained by inspectors and by specialists from the National Board of Curriculum. At the same time, 50,000 teachers were receiving training in new forms of student assessment and evaluation. Teacher training remains a serious issue, but improvements are now becoming visible in schools. A comprehensive impact study of Romania’s educational reforms since 1991 is planned for the autumn of 2001.

Many NGOs are involved in supporting the reform efforts; their work has been of significant importance, and is well appreciated not only in the MER but also by the education community as a whole (especially teachers), and by the public at large.
Concerning vocational education and training (VET), in 1997/98, there were about 11 000 teaching staff (vocational, apprentice, post-high schools and foremen schools): teachers and instructors. The teaching staff in technical high schools equalled 36 661 with a pupil/teacher ratio of 9 (as compared with 12:3 in academic high schools). A teacher of a vocational school must have completed a course of at least one and a half years in a higher education institution. A foremen-instructor will normally hold a post-secondary school leaving certificate in the specific field taught, as well as having at least three years of on-the-job practical experience.

Table 5. **Pupil/Teacher ratio in urban and rural areas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil/teacher ratio</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school education</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary education</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary education</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary education</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: MER and CEPS.*

At the tertiary level, as a result of the increased number of students, the teaching staff has almost doubled over the last few years, consisting now of 22 139 teachers, of which 18% are professors. Many teachers at public institutions also teach at private institutions (especially in evening and extra-mural courses). This provides the private institutions with a higher-level faculty and greater prestige than they could afford if they had to pay a full competitive salary.

Teacher training is now clearly the ‘engine’ of reform. Unfortunately, it is also one of the weakest links, with much of the reform-related training delayed for several years due to lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of key ‘players’ such as universities, the regional training centres called Casa Corpului Didactic (CCDs) and Inspectorates; lack of clarity on the law; lack of resources; and a long delay (due to a complex taxation question) in the arrival of foreign technical assistance. The arrival of the National Curriculum Framework, and its introduction into schools, have powerfully focused the attention of the MER and other institutions on getting teacher training on track without further delay.

A ‘New Model for Inspection’, drawn up under the GoR/World Bank Reform Project’s Finance and Management component, has been piloted and introduced. Under this new model, inspectors have a stronger advisory and supportive role in schools. The mentoring system for probationary teachers is also being strengthened.

Teachers’ salaries are low (see Table 6), and for some years were *falling* in real terms as salary increases were well below the rate of inflation. For example, teachers received a 5% monthly increase in March and April 1998, and a 2.5% monthly increase for the months May-December 1998, but this worked out at considerably *less* (at roughly 36%) than the 45% inflation in 1998. Moreover, since inflation in 1997 was as high as 150% and came down only gradually over 1998, the actual inflation rate over 1998 as a whole was nearer 67%, leaving teachers’ salaries well behind. The present level of inflation is more stable, but teachers’ salaries have still some catching-up to do.
Table 6. **Teacher salary levels, May 1998**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of pre-service training</th>
<th>Level I by seniority in lei per month</th>
<th>Level II by seniority in lei per month</th>
<th>Level III ('definitive') by seniority, in lei per month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>772 700 (6-10 years seniority) to 1 040 000 (&gt;40 years)</td>
<td>640 800 (2-6 years) to 847 800 (&gt;40 years)</td>
<td>593 700 (0-14 years) to 720 500 (&gt;40 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Institute</td>
<td>640 800 (6-10 years) to 863 500 (&gt;40 years)</td>
<td>574 800 (2-6 years) to 762 500 (&gt;40 years)</td>
<td>565 400 (0-14 years) to 699 200 (&gt;40 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Ministry of Education, Bucharest, June 1998. Lei exchange rate was USD 1 = 8,500 lei. Teachers salaries ranged from a low of USD 66.52 per month for a newly graduated pedagogical institute teacher to a high of USD122.35 for a university graduate with more than 40 years' experience. Note that these figures are straight lei/dollar conversions and do not represent purchasing power parity with dollar incomes e.g. in the US.

There are a considerable number of unqualified teachers in the system.17 ['Unqualified’ can mean either that a teacher has a university degree but no teaching qualification, or that a teacher is a liceu (high school) graduate only.] It is also difficult to attract qualified young people to teaching jobs in rural areas, and to teaching jobs in certain specialties, such as foreign languages. Taken as a whole, however, there is a surplus of teaching staff: the total number of teachers has risen since 1990 at the same time that birth rates have dwindled and school attendance rates have dropped in some sectors. Pupil:teacher ratios (P:TRs) are still low (at 17.7 in urban areas and 14.7 in rural ones), and 18 contact hours per week is considered a full-time teaching job - low by international standards, where the average is between 24 and 30 contact hours per week (see Table 5). Such inefficiencies in the system help keep salaries low; large scale teacher layoffs or dismissals, however, would create social and political problems, and swell the ranks of the unemployed. Any significant contraction of the teaching force is therefore unlikely.

Table 7. **The proportion of qualified teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Qualified teachers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school</td>
<td>36 555</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>64 710</td>
<td>84.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>100 045</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>66 101</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Vocational</td>
<td>9 898</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>22 139</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>79.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** MER and CEPS, 2001.

A particularly important programme of training courses was organised for VET teachers and principals in the following subjects: training standards and curricular developments, information technology, specific teaching subjects, vocational guidance, entrepreneurial skills, evaluation and assessment, school partnerships and school management.

In each school a Teachers’ Board (Consiliul Profesoral) makes decisions concerning all teaching staff, including work plans, which teachers are to participate in teacher training, validating student grades

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17. According to data provided by CEPS, 31 706 teachers out of a total of 166 332 (about 20%) were un- or under-qualified in 1999/00, and about 80% qualified (see Table 7), but significant differences exist by level.
and assessment, and career counselling. The Board involves all teachers in its processes, so that the teaching staff is actively involved in every pedagogical aspect of School Unit activity. It advises and validates the director’s decisions on curriculum, student relations, and academic staff development. Teacher’s Boards participate in establishing annual teaching staff incentives, using a “marking (point)” system based on teachers’ self-evaluation. These incentives, which total less than 10% of the School Unit salary fund, are questioned by teachers who reject the appraisal system.

In Romania, teachers’ unions are non-governmental organisations established by the 1991 law on syndicates (trade unions) to defend the economic, social, professional, and cultural rights of its 200 000 members in more than 10 unions. This represents one-half of the nation’s teaching and non-teaching staff. Teachers’ unions have no decision-making responsibilities but have created a wide local institutional network and play a consultative role to the administration. They are accredited observers of the decision-making process at central, regional, and local levels and try to influence the legislative process, policymaking, education management and funding. They are on the periphery of the school system but have a major impact on implementing educational innovation through their programme for teacher advancement. Their marginality could allow them to link school and society and facilitate the reform process, but since unions concentrate on promoting teachers’ economic well-being, they avoid responsibility for development and reform.

**Issues and barriers related to teachers and teacher training**

- **Urgent need for a national strategy to improve initial (pre-service) teacher training.** While there were some activities in the last few years (a National Seminar of pre-service, a Survey Report and proposals for change submitted to the Ministry that resulted in a Ministerial order redesigning content of teacher education and time allocated for practical pedagogical practice as part of training), real restructuring did not take place until 2000/01. A plan to revise initial training to enrich initial academic training with school practice by incorporating into the formal training the two years of initial teacher’s induction in the classroom is being developed. A mentor teacher, who will be part of the University staff, will guide students’ pedagogical practice. Probationary teachers will be supervised by a guiding teacher; and the definitivat exam will require a portfolio review of the two years of work. The decision to again offer initial training for pre-school and primary school teachers in pedagogical high schools (starting in 2001/02) is significant, but the quality of training (and of supervision of practice teaching) in these high schools will need to be watched closely.

- **Need for professional standards for teachers that will provide a basis for a new definitivat examination.** It is hoped that the new definitivat will place more emphasis on pedagogy and school-based practical experience, and less on theoretical and subject knowledge, especially at primary and lower secondary levels.

- **Need to co-ordinate and improve in-service training.** In June 2001 the National Centre for Teacher Training was created by Government Ordinance, as an institution subordinated to the Ministry. The Centre is expected to ensure the sustainability of reforms in in-service teacher training. It will be essential for this Centre to be aware of, and work with, NGOs and other in-service teacher training providers, in order to ensure that training is in line with the spirit and objectives of education reforms in general.

- **Need to provide opportunities for unqualified teachers to become qualified without having to return to full-time university studies.** Seven “Distance Education Centres” (in the județs of Hunedoara, Bihor, Calarasi, Salaj, Botosani, Arad and Valcea) have been equipped since
1997 as part of an initiative to create a Distance Education Centre in the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES). The intention was that teachers would receive training in a series of modules, and provided with tutoring. These activities were never implemented, due to lack of staff at the IES and support staff. There are now plans to develop materials for distance in-service learning; this is a highly specialised task for which expert technical assistance will be required from countries that have distance education for serving teachers.

- Need to make optimum use of the training capacity developed under the GoR/World Bank Education Reform Project. The Government of Romania has invested a great deal in the equipment of 42 Casa Corpului Didactic (CCDs), the training and certification of a cadre of National Trainers, and the work with 1 400 local trainers to work directly with teachers in schools. Any strategy for in-service teacher training must take account of these important resources, which would be very difficult (and needlessly expensive!) to replace.

Early Childhood Development and Pre-school Education

**Early childhood education and care (ECEC)**

There are many players within the Government that are responsible for policy making in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC). Among them: Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Justice, and State Secretariat for the Handicapped. These institutions and their corresponding regional structures (i.e. regional school Inspectorates, local councils, mayors, etc.) have clear responsibilities in budget planning and management. Some other institutions develop activities targeted on childhood education and care. The need for a coherent view across government of the future strategy in this field was the reason to set up a new institution with clearer responsibilities. The National Authority for Child Protection (Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Copilului), set up in 2000 under responsibility of the Government, seems to be much better articulated with the specific needs and actions at the national and regional level.

Most of the institutions operating in this field are public institutions, but there are also many private ones. Their activity is regulated by specific legislation issued by the Department for Child Protection within the Government. The main categories of institutions are:

- Social institutions for child protection and care (i.e. nurseries, nursery schools, pre-school foster homes, juvenile centres);

- Medical institutions such as residential hospitals for children with serious deficiencies requiring specialised medical assistance;

- Educational institutions – kindergartens;

- Institutions for special education (i.e. special pre-school child homes or kindergartens);

Nursery schools are subordinated to the Ministry of Health, caring for children with normal psycho-physical development between the ages of two months and three years. Children attending crèches have their own families, but the family cannot provide the time required for child protection and education. Depending on the situation of both parents, children may be placed with these institutions for day or weekly care.
Table 8. **Number of nursery schools and available places (1989 – 1998)**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of nursery homes</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of beds</td>
<td>Total (thou)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The scarcity of funds is the main cause of the decrease in the number of nursery schools from 847 units in 1989 to 425 units in 1998. During the same period, the number of children attending *crèches* decreased from 49,342 to 14,625. Other causes are related to: a low birth rate, decreasing from 16% (1989) to 10.8% (1998); high unemployment rate for female workers; new maternity facilities, including paid maternity leave until the child is 2 years old, and a decrease in income, as parents have to pay a part of the cost of their child’s daily attendance.

Although the number of children attending *crèches* has diminished, the teaching staff is not sufficient. At the same time, the staff, most of it medical, lacks the required psycho-pedagogical training. This fact reduces the activity in nurseries to the supervision and medical assistance of the children, and no age-adjusted educational programmes are developed. Recently, the MER initiated a training programme for paediatric nurses. Some non-governmental initiatives are focused on the training of specialised staff and development of educational programmes in nurseries. The quality of staff has also been improved due to training programmes initiated by the Department for Child Protection, the Ministry of Health, or through EC-Phare pilot projects aimed at facilitating family links, reducing the child-abandonment phenomenon, and organising individualised care programmes.

Nurseries are also social institutions caring for children aged 0-3 years who are orphans and infants from dysfunctional, poor, or large families. According to a census of institutionalised children made in 1997 by the Department for Child Protection, the main reasons for infant abandonment are: social causes (68.7%), economic causes (21.5%), medical reasons (5.3%), and mental and psycho-motor deficiencies in the child (2.3%). The care system in nursery homes has an excessively medical nature and ignores child socialisation and education. This issue has an influence on the social and affective development of the child and may hinder his/her first steps within the system of formal education. Some nursery schools have medical sections for premature infants or infants requiring permanent specialised care.

Hospital homes take care of children and adolescents aged between 3-18 with motor handicaps and serious mental deficiency. The County Commission for Juvenile Protection makes the decision for institutionalisation in such homes. Most of the children in these homes come from nurseries. In 1997, there were 33 hospital homes caring for 4,473 children, of which 6.5% were under 6 years old. A small percentage (about 6.8%) per year leave the institution: some return to their natural family (8.9%), 80% leave for another care institution, and the others (10%) are left outside the protection system, often ending up as socially at-risk or street children.

Juvenile placement centres have a transitory purpose and are designed for children aged 3 to 18 with behavioural and social adjustment difficulties. In 1997, there were 40 such centres sheltering 379 children. The centres place their children with families or other protection institutions.

Homes for pre-schoolers, subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Research, are designed for children aged 3-6 years, orphans, abandoned children, or children from “problem” or poor families.

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18. Website: http://crips.digiro.net/statrpom.htm
Most of the children come from nursery schools. After 1990, children’s homes were restructured: their capacity was reduced (from an average of 400-500 children to a maximum of 200 children per nursery), the number of children per team fell from 20-30 to 10-15, while the number of nurses/educators increased from one to three per group of children. When they leave, about 30% of the children are directed toward similar institutions. Each year, about 9% of the institutionalised children leave the protection system. Many of them, again, become so-called “street children”. A survey conducted in 1995 by “Save the Children” indicated that 23% of these were children who had left protection institutions.

Special kindergartens operate for children with special needs, both in public education network and in pre-school child homes. Inter-school logopaedic centres employing specialised teachers are organised as structures of integrated special education. A systematic monitoring process of the evolution of special needs children is carried out, and proposals can be made for their reorientation from a specialised to a mainstream school. A teacher and a school psychologist, who has dealt with the child, subject to the family or legal tutor’s agreement, can make such proposals. Children with special educational needs (SEN) who could not be re-oriented toward regular school by the time they complete their primary education will continue their schooling in special education units – gymnasiums, vocational and post-higher secondary schools – according to the type and degree of their handicap.

In Romania, most children with special educational needs, those with less serious disabilities, as well as socially at-risk children, attend regular schools. Recent trends indicate some specific co-operative measures, such as common activities run by the regular education system together with the assistance and education system dedicated to children with special needs or with serious health problems. Children who recover from their disabilities, as well as those with less severe disabilities, living with the family or under public care, may continue to study in both special and regular vocational schools, high schools and post secondary schools. At each level of care, the child may return to his family, if the family can guarantee the appropriate conditions to raise and educate her/him or, according to the legal provisions, the child can be adopted or placed in a foster family.

In Romania the categories of “children at risk” are: institutionalised children; children in foster families; adopted children; “street children”; abandoned children; delinquent children; and children partially deprived of a family environment. A large majority of these children (aged 0-15) live with their families and only a small percentage is now institutionalised under legal conditions. New legislation introduced foster care or professional maternal assistance as an innovation and a better alternative to the child protection system. All persons who agree to receive children in trust or foster care are entitled to receive financial support.

Along with the issue of children in difficulty, special attention has been given to the improvement of the situation of children with physical and mental disabilities. The institutionalised system of protection is now in the process of an important reform that aims at ensuring a gradual approach between special schooling for disabled children and regular school. The objective is to ensure progressive improvement of living and educational conditions in child-care institutions by opening residential institutions to the community, and encouraging interaction of orphaned, abandoned or disabled children with other children of the same age. In fact, the protection of children with special needs has been a priority since 1990 and the Government continues to show a special concern in this respect. In 1991, the Government created a State Secretariat for Disabled Persons that sets policy in this field, and co-ordinates the activities of all institutions serving children with special needs.

The policy objectives are clearly stipulated in the new Law on Education and the Regulations for the Organisation and Functioning of Special Education. As a consequence of this strategy, in 1999, the process of decentralisation, through transferring the child-protection residential institutions (crèches and children’s homes) from the Ministry of Health and the MER to specialised public offices at county level,
has been finalised by offering them the instruments for accomplishing their new obligations under the new legislation, and ensuring an efficient management of resources at county level.

In many cases, a child’s “institutionalisation” extends until the age of 11, which limits access to pre-school and school education for such children. To avoid these negative effects, since 1991, some nursery homes have limited institutionalisation to the age of 5, with corresponding adjustment in their education. After this age, the child is transferred to a foster home. In 1997, out of a total of 9,309 institutionalised children in 57 nursery homes, 78.3% were 0-3 year old infants, 8.3% were 3-5 year olds, and 3.4% were children aged between 6 and 11. With respect to children’s destination when leaving the nursery home: in the course of one year, 27.8% of the infants return to their families, around 28% enter other families (adopted: 25.5%, family placement: 0.45%, entrusted: 2%), 40% go to another care institution, and the others (4.2%) remain outside the protection system. (This still means that 391 children under the age of 11 leave “the protection system” long before they can fend for themselves.)

The reform of the institutionalised care system is leading to the development of “policies of de-institutionalisation”, finding an alternative so that children with special needs can be raised in a family or community environment. This policy is based upon the premise that families provide the optimal environment for child development, and that, when children cannot be placed in families, an environment as close as possible to a family one must be created for them. For this purpose, placement centres have been set up within institutions to create the best solution for each child’s protection and care. This policy developed following the public reaction to the conditions existing in the crèches, orphanages and hospital-homes during the first years after 1990, but also due to the costs of placing children in residential institutions. It should be noted that the cost of the alternatives to placement centres represent less than half the cost of raising children in these centres.

Following this new policy, schools, regional Inspectorates and the MER took action to support inclusive education:

− Participation of some groups of pre-school children, classes, groups of pupils from special institutions in common activities together with children from regular kindergartens and schools (drawing classes, physical education, sports, etc.).

− Adjustment of the teaching process of some of the special schools (for the partially blind, partially deaf and motor-disabled children) to the curriculum of the regular schools.

− Assessment under regular conditions, giving to disabled children the feeling of being treated in a non-discriminatory way; mainstreaming of some disabled children within regular vocational schools and centres by doing practical activities together.

− Creation of special classes and groups (with specific programmes) within regular kindergartens and schools, enrolling, where possible, children from special schools.

− Creation of new teaching positions which better meet the requirements of qualified teaching staff: support-schoolmaster, support-teacher, teacher of special education; psychodiagnostician; psychologist teacher et al.

There has been some evidence of more involvement of local communities in projects run by state institutions and various governmental institutions. For instance, the “Project of Reform of the Child Protection System 1999-2001” run by the Romanian Government (Department for Child Protection) in partnership with public local authorities and the participation of several international organisations (World Bank, FDSCE, UNICEF, USAID, EC-Phare, The Spanish and Swiss Governments, SERA Foundation).
The first component of this project refers to the establishment and development, in Romania, of a system of child-protection services based on the growing involvement of local communities in the organisation of inclusive education.

Table 9. **Number of pre-school institutions, enrolled children, and available places (1998)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Kindergarten</th>
<th>Kindergartens</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Available places</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Programmes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5 873</td>
<td>6 520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Programmes</td>
<td>1 223</td>
<td>128 928</td>
<td>148 431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal Programme</td>
<td>11 361</td>
<td>485 301</td>
<td>500 525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped Children</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2 340</td>
<td>2 786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes for Able Pre-schoolers</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1 869</td>
<td>2 722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes for Deficient Pre-schoolers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12 760</td>
<td>624 778</td>
<td>661 717</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: National Commission for Statistics. See also Table 1, 1999/2000.*

According to the new law on local public finance, allocation of funds and resource management is decentralised in the field of child protection and education. Thus, local funds are spent on maintenance, current and capital repairs and investments in public services specialised in child education and protection. After 1989, in addition to public financing, important additional financial support from international organisations was made available by: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, UNICEF, the European Union, Council of Europe, UNDP, etc. Budgets are further supplemented by the financial and material contributions obtained through charitable donations, sponsoring by enterprises and the civic society.

The evolution, in terms of number of units, enrolled children and quality of teaching in pre-school education, reveals improved service quality and educational activities. The children/educator ratio decreased from 28 to 17 in the 1997/98 and 1998/99 school years. However, while the ratio is only 14.5 in urban areas, it is 20.5 in rural areas. Thus, in rural areas, the number of children in a group (20) exceeds the legal maximum. However, these values are sometimes higher in large cities and lower in rural areas with a reduced school population, where groups bring together children aged from 3 to 6 years. Educators and teachers employed in pre-school education are graduates of the pedagogical high schools, colleges, or a higher-education institution, and of a training course in psycho-pedagogy. For some activities (foreign languages, drawing, music and dance), teachers holding higher education qualifications are employed.

The restructuring of the curriculum and activity programme in pre-school education was carried out by the Directorate for Pre-school Education of the MER. Aiming at a better articulation between pre-school and primary education, it is planned to place the restructuring of the pre-school curriculum within the purview of the National Council for the Curriculum. The revision of the pre-school curriculum is based on the new concept of educational objectives promoted by the reform of Romanian education and by a series of studies and analyses undertaken by the Institute for Sciences of Education since 1990. The issues researched were:

- The introduction of educational alternatives in pre-school education and assessment of their impact on the psycho-social development of the young child;
- The assessment of pre-school education in Romania (an international IEA project);
− The development of a democratic culture in school;
− Language development of the young child;
− child preparation for school;
− Psychoanalysis and education of the pre-schooler; and
− Training of the teaching staff employed in pre-school education.

The training-educational programme in pre-school education includes common and optional activities.

The main curriculum areas of pre-school education include: language education (communication and written language elements), education for science (maths and environmental activities), education for society (moral, civic and religious education, practical activities), aesthetics education (music and arts), psychomotor education (physical education, *eurhythms*). The teaching plan also provides for a series of optional activities: foreign languages, initiation to computer science, ballet, drama, vocal, and instrumental arts, ecology, etc. The total number of common activities varies from five per week (younger group), to seven per week in the intermediate and older groups. Also, children may select at least one of the optional activities in the teaching plan. With respect to children with special needs, curricula, programmes, textbooks and teaching methodologies are designed according to the type and degree of handicap.

The new curriculum was prepared from the perspective of dividing schooling into curriculum cycles, which involves changes in the teaching plan in terms of school subjects and their relative weight in syllabi, textbooks, and teaching strategies. The acquisition of basic competencies and school-readiness (for primary school) are seen as the major objectives of preparatory education. The new programme provides for an increased number of mandatory weekly activities, from seven in the senior group to nine in the preparatory group.

Working with the Government, local authorities, and non-governmental organisations through its office in Bucharest, UNICEF develops programmes to support children and families in vulnerable situations. Among the programmes that have been developed are: *Child and Woman Health Care* (main objectives: support of medical services granted to young mothers and promote a national strategy against HIV/AIDS infection), *Family Education* (community development and parental resource centres), *Children in Highly Difficult Situations* (services for families at risk and support for the integration in normal schools of children with special needs), *Planning and Development of Social Policies* (support for the reform of child protection).

Other programmes include:

− Programme for early education by areas of incentives (PETAS), for children from 1 to 6 years old, organised by the MER in co-operation with the Ministry of Health Care and UNICEF. The programme started through a pilot-project developed in 10 nurseries and kindergartens for the period 1991-1994. PETAS proposes a pattern of individualised education of the young child by using specific tools and procedures in the study of each child’s personality and by organising educational activities by areas of incentives. Currently, a project is under elaboration to extend the programme to rural kindergartens.

− The Soros Foundation for an Open Society initiated the Step-by-Step programme in Romania in 1994 under its Head Start activity. In 1995, the programme was accredited by the MER as
an alternative to public education. Started in 1998, the programme is continued by the Step-by-Step Centre for Vocational Education and Development. During the 1998/99 school year, the Step-by-Step programme was developed in 5 crèche groups and 192 kindergarten groups in 24 counties.

- The Institute for Educational Sciences initiated its own project for the implementation of the Montessori Pedagogy for Sciences of Education in co-operation with the Montessori Association in Romania. At present, an urban kindergarten group is in full operation and training courses for educators are underway with a view to founding 4 more groups in Turnu-Severin.

- The Jena Plan educational alternative was an experiment in Roma education. The Plan began in 1994, operating with 8 groups of pre-school education in urban areas and one group in a rural area. The methodology uses education/instruction of children in combined age groups, interdisciplinary educational content, and an emphasis on social development.

- The Waldorf programme started in 1990 in over 20 counties. The programme is based on the principles of Waldorf pedagogy founded by Rudolf Steiner: age heterogeneity of the children in a pre-school group, imitation as main method of education, activities carried out in rhythmical structures, repeated teaching content for one or several weeks.

**Issues and barriers in ECEC**

- *No coherent strategy* supported by adequate legislation exists yet in terms of community involvement in solving family and child education problems. But there is a trend toward the decentralisation of the management of financial resources, and delegation of administrative responsibilities to the level of local community.

- *Insufficient financial support from the Government*. Although many donors are involved, some important areas are not covered.

- *Uneven co-operation between Government and “players”*. The reform of child-care institutions can raise problems, especially in the case of units with more than 200 children. In some counties, the detached units of the various ministries involved are less collaborative. In fact, teachers strongly oppose their detachment from the administration of the MER.

- *There are still very serious social problems*. Many families continue to live in very poor economic conditions. Child support allowances are low in real terms, and other forms of financial aid are insufficient. The fact that allowances are subject to the child’s school attendance has led to a higher school attendance, but the school drop-out rate remains high.

- *New social phenomena*. The emergence of a new at-risk categories must be taken into account; higher divorce rates, and increasing unemployment, especially among women and young adults, create new difficulties in raising children, and have increased the number of single-parent households.

**Vocational Education and Training**

Vocational and technical education and training (VET) has a long tradition in Romania, going back more than 100 years. During the period between the World Wars, the system – because of its
structure and content – was considered quite prestigious. After the 1970s, inspired by models adopted by other communist regimes, the tendency was to reduce the number of enrolments in classical high schools in favour of technical and vocational schools; by the end of the Ceaucescu period, less than 8% of secondary school students were in theoretical (academic) education, by far the lowest percentage in any post-communist country. The remaining 92% were in different types of vocational programmes. Schools were classified on the basis of sectors and profiles. Students failing the entrance examination of one institution were directed to another school whose quotas had not been met.

Firms and co-operatives played an important role as “sponsors” for the VET system. The enterprises not only helped by supporting the school budget, but also helped to define the number of enrolments and the structure of the programmes. Lessons for practical training sometimes took place in the enterprise itself or in the workshops of the school, but organised with equipment and trainers provided by the enterprises in accordance with the production standards. The relationship between the school and the enterprise was often based on a contract, through which the company had to provide employment after graduation. Employers also frequently provided teachers for practical skills, and scholarships which were not far below the future initial salary of a young worker.

There was a steady and rapid decline in the enrolment rates at secondary level as the size of the cohort entering the first year of compulsory education decreased throughout the 1980s (reaching its lowest point in 1990/91). The rate increased in the following three years but decreased again after 1995 under the influence of the drop in the birth rate which has occurred since the 1980s. VET enrolment for the school year 1998/99 represented 58.21% of total secondary education. In 1998, approximately 64% of the students attended vocational schools (special profile schools, vocational and apprenticeship schools).


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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission rate in secondary education</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment rate in secondary education</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students enrolled in vocational education</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Commission for Statistics

Between 1990 and 1998 the Ministry made a substantial investment effort in improving school infrastructure; however, the total number of school units of all types has remained relatively steady at around 29 000, and now (2001) stands at 29 128. In the absence of a real partnership between school units and companies, the major part of education expenses remained the State’s responsibility and this situation was convenient to employers. Attempts made to transfer some educational costs to employers frequently failed because of their lack of financial resources.

The reform of vocational and technical education was carried out with the support of the EC-Phare programme. In the school year 1999/2000 the results of this programme were generalised within the entire VET system in Romania. The decision was based on the conclusions of the final evaluation of the reform programme, carried out under the responsibility of the European Training Foundation (ETF). In the 2000/01 school year the new curriculum for high school was implemented after the end of the EC-Phare programme. The principles are those proposed in the programme for the technological stream.

19. MER, 2001. This figure, however, differs from the CEPS data reflected in Table 1, which show that there were 27 533 schools in 1999/2000. The definition of ‘unit’ may be the cause.
In the case of vocational schools, the MER approves the framework educational study plan and compulsory syllabi at the national level. The development of these documents is co-ordinated by the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and must be approved by the National Commissions which are organised by subject. The school Inspectorate, with the authorisation of the Local Committee for Social Partnership Development, approves the local component of the curriculum, developed by school representatives with the participation of social partners. Generally speaking, curriculum restructuring was aimed at adopting a multi-level structure ranging from a broad to a specialised, modular-type training and based on a “tree-and-branch” structure that ensures connections and horizontal mobility within the system. Pupils themselves decide, in the last year of study, on a particular trade or specialisation in the case of vocational and high school education. Apprenticeship, post-high school, and foremen education represent forms of specialisation; they therefore have a curriculum where occupational skills prevail.

Social partners play an advisory role in the following areas: designing development policies and strategies for vocational and technical education, the school network, approval of compulsory curriculum for high schools, vocational schools and post-high school units, specific specialisations, teacher training, establishing types of continuing training programmes in which the school may participate on its own, in association with other schools and economic agents or non-governmental organisations, establishing the occupations, trades, specialisations for which training is organised and certifying pupils’ training through specific examinations. At the level of the educational unit, social partners take part in identifying the school mission and its fulfilment. Apprenticeship schools, established according to the Law on Education, are locally administered and controlled, and the social partners, together with the local public authority, are responsible for the entire organisation. The outline education plan is established with the approval of the MER.

The consistency of technical and vocational education with continuing vocational training continues to be a priority from the legal and institutional points of view. The capacity of schools to become resource centres for community development needs to be enhanced in order to improve the training provision, both from qualitative and quantitative approaches. The National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education carried out an evaluation through the regional Inspectorates. One of the main purposes of the evaluation was to assess the principal results of the first year of generalisation of the programme and to identify potential corrective actions. A major concern is the insufficient practice included in the educational study plan, which could endanger the achievement of the planned qualification level.

**Issues and barriers in vocational education**

- **Misjudgment of vocational education.** The current problems of employability of vocational graduates and the reduced demand for this training should not be seen as a failure of vocational education and training itself, but rather as a failure of the previous form of education and training to adapt to the requirements of the new society.

- **Drop-outs.** Between 1994 and 1998 the school drop-out rate in secondary education ranged from 4% to 6% (in vocational education) and from 6% to 8% (in apprenticeship schools) but over 70% of the pupils who dropped out of secondary education came from vocational schools. The situation in post-high school education does not differ significantly.

- **Maintaining development.** With the exception of externally financed technical assistance on training projects which have had an impact at national-level institutions, lack of resources (public and private) have caused vocational education to stagnate.
− **Constraints imposed by the present budget structure.** High pressure on recurrent costs against a background of budgetary austerity exacerbates the rapid decrease in capital expenditures. The legislative framework recently passed (i.e. a Special Education Fund) has not had an impact, at least for the moment, on the level of investments.

− **Low external efficiency of the VET system.** Matching vocational qualifications to the expectations of the labour market is still a problem; in 1999, more than 40% of the total number of unemployed were high school graduates, and 20% of this group remained unemployed for more than two years. The average length of unemployment after leaving school was 13.9 months in 1999.

− **Demoralised teaching force in VET.** Too many teachers have operated within a system where neither market nor student interests have played a role in determining teaching content or style. The vast majority of teachers can adapt but need help to do so. The problem of teacher adaptation is made more difficult by the salary and recruitment systems for VET teachers. The pay (poor and especially unattractive for those teachers who have the most marketable skills) and failure to recruit and retain the best teachers are problems that nearly all VET systems face, but the difficulties are especially severe in Romania because of the current fiscal crisis.

− **Lack of modern textbooks for VET.** Because of financial constraints in updating the equipment and in providing the necessary training to teachers for implementing the new curricula, the reforms have had little influence on the VET sector. Unfortunately, there was no financial provision for the production of textbooks during the project implementation. Therefore, the textbooks used in the schools do not match the curricula, and are frequently outdated, in particular for vocational subjects.

### Higher Education

During the 1980s, Romania faced a major discrepancy inside the system: high enrolment rates at the pre-tertiary level, but one of the lowest rates at the tertiary level. The years after 1990 showed a different situation. The number of students enrolled at the tertiary level tripled, while the number of pre-university pupils decreased, mainly at the secondary level. Moreover, the general economic and budgetary context of Romania implies the need to establish some priorities. Through 1999, increases in population, participation rates, and availability of new places have been rather low, each constraining the potential growth of new higher education enrolments. However, at the beginning of the first year of the new century, participation rates began to increase rapidly and, by 2002, the age cohort will again begin to increase. The result will be a dramatic change in aggregate participation in higher education, from 13.1% of the age cohort in 1996/97 to over 30% in 2002/03. The private share of higher education will increase from 26.2 to 29.9% and the private institutions’ share of first year students will increase from 22.5 to 29.9%.


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-year-old cohort</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total upper secondary pupils</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>8812</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>1035</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils in grade 12</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total public higher education students</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>505</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total private higher education students</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total all higher education students</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>721</td>
</tr>
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</table>
With the end of communist rule in 1989, the institutions themselves established major reforms in programmes and management, within the framework of new education legislation which continues to evolve. An explosion of private higher education institutions led to the creation of an Accreditation Council, under the Parliament. In 1996, under the higher education reform project, the implementation of the accreditation system began. New “buffer” councils were created, block grant financing was developed, and a competitive system of incentive grants for research and development activities was introduced.

In its structure, the tertiary education sector consists of both private and public institutions of six types:

- *Universitate* (University) – The largest tertiary institutions include a broad number of faculties and programmes and award advanced scientific and professional degrees while combining teaching and research responsibilities.

- *Academie* (Academy) – A higher education institution training specialists, normally in a single general field (*e.g.* Academy of Music).

- *Universitate Politehnică* (Polytechnic University) – This name was given to former polytechnic institutions after 1990 (programmes emphasising technical and practical fields of study).

- *Institut* (Institute) – An institution that awards professional degrees based on study and professional experience in limited fields of specialisation.

- *Colegiu Universitar* (University College) – Institutions offering 2 to 3-year courses leading to a diploma but which do not qualify graduates for admission to postgraduate study (may either be part of a university or operate autonomously).

- Postgraduate schools independent from the universities.

The legislative framework for reform, established in 1990, has the following broad objectives:

- Changing the relationship between the Government and the institutions by enhancing university autonomy.

- Modernising and improving the quality of education.

- Creating mechanisms and procedures for academic assessment and accreditation of institutions.

- Introducing new financing mechanisms.

- Establishing centres of excellence and of technological and innovation transfer.
From its origins in 1990 and with increasing effect from 1997, there were some areas in which progress has been visible:

- Further elaboration of diversified, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary study programmes; increased market orientation of the curriculum and of institutional services.
- Development of information technology and quality management systems.
- Accreditation and transferability among institutions and programmes through a credit transfer system.
- Promotion of scientific research in universities; additional decentralisation of budgetary funds and creation of a new perspective on finance and social services for students.
- Development of additional opportunities for postgraduate studies, including the organisation of new schools for advanced studies.

On the basis of the authority granted by Act 10/1991, the MER establishes the amount of state funding to be allocated to each institution, with advice from the National Council for the Financing of Higher Education. Institutions may decide for themselves the internal allocation of the funds they are given, have complete autonomy over expenditure of their own resources and have the right to ask for fees from students. Internal institutional resources include incomes from services and research activities, contributions from individuals and economic agencies and fees paid by students. External resources for tertiary education have increased in recent years, the World Bank Project, the EC-Tempus Programme, bilateral assistance and the Soros Foundation being the major sources of funds.

The new relationship will be one in which the MER plays a facilitating and regulating role but where individual institutions and the tertiary education sector in general take greater responsibility for planning, management, and finance. With autonomy of administration must come accountability for effectiveness. The new legislation and the current institution-based reforms are designed to promote this balance of authority and responsiveness to social and individual needs. Specifically, the Ministry has the responsibility of co-ordinating the development of the education system (including tertiary institutions), establishing a framework for institutional competence through the evaluation of quality and through performance-based funding and the prevention of blockages and distortions created by inefficient institutions. For the future, the MER will have an increasing role in information provision in response to the needs of institutions and students and to employers as well as the public demand for accountability.

The major financial reform in tertiary education is the shift to “global” financing. This means that the funds provided by the State will not be dedicated to highly detailed uses, which allow little if any discretion on the part of the institution. Instead, institutions will qualify, according to a common formula, for a certain level of funds and will be held accountable for the effectiveness with which these funds are used, but not for a detailed accounting of how each amount of funds is spent. While normal accounting and auditing procedures will be maintained to protect against misuse of funds, the institution will be the primary decision maker on expenditure of resources.

**Issues and barriers in tertiary education**

- Government will face two profound but distinct challenges. First, financing partnerships (including student fees and loan systems) will be necessary if the expansion of public higher education is to happen as anticipated. Second, the Ministry must improve its assessment and
information/dissemination capacity if it is to protect the interests of private (and public) students in the new market for higher education.

− *Some shortcomings of the current formula funding.* The formula funding system will retain the benefit of greater predictability for the institution, link funds to students more than to faculty (thus introducing a market test for programmes) and will provide a more transparent budget mechanism than has been the case heretofore. The formulas remain in part subjective (and potentially arbitrary depending on the parties recommending weights and unit costs) and do not take into account the need to develop new or innovative programmes, which may have initially high costs and few students.

− *The impact of multiple jobs on quality.* Many teachers of public institutions teach also in private institutions (especially in evening and for extra-mural courses). This provides the private institutions with a higher quality faculty and greater prestige than they could afford if they had to pay a full competitive salary. Similarly, without the supplemental earnings from private colleges and universities, some public institution teachers would not be able to make ends meet. The danger, of course, is for students (who may have less access to faculty outside normal class times) and to research which may be foregone or postponed because the teacher is engaged in two sets of teaching responsibilities.

− *Equity and flexibility.* The approach to higher education emphasising market relevance, internal competition for state resources and support for entrepreneurial efforts requires also a focus on student interests, including equity issues. The one caveat to be given that applies to the entire education sector: planning and implementation is not to create a new rigidity to replace the old one but to create a fluid and adaptable process that can adjust to the expected and the unexpected in Romania’s future.

− *Colleges.* Existing colleges are sometimes perceived, often incorrectly, as institutions inferior to universities, not as distinct institutions offering a different type of quality education. Many such institutions, while they may not receive full accreditation as universities, could evolve into colleges, able to offer short-cycle higher education linked to regional needs and appropriate to local conditions.

− *The number of university specialisations does not reflect the market needs.* A rapidly evolving economy such as that of Romania is likely to undergo frequent and dramatic changes in the structure of labour demand. Attempts to improve the predictability of manpower supply and demand estimates should be secondary with respect to the training of more adaptable graduates (based on broader curricular structures or multiple-fields specialisation).

**Recommendations**

A first basic and general recommendation is to maintain the goal of a systemic and sustainable process of change, taking into account the demographic and economic context of the country, the main challenges of a fast changing world and the consequences of globalisation, as well as the interdependence of the various components of an educational system: basic educational goals, curricula, assessment and evaluation tools and procedures, teaching technology and practices, teachers’ professionalism and management capacity at all levels of responsibility from national to class level.
Recommendations: Governance, management and finance

− Information system. A first priority is to improve the information system of basic data on pupils/students (enrolment at different levels and social background), teachers and their qualification, pupil/teacher ratios, financial resources, real full costs, educational equipment and materials, student and teacher absenteeism, drop-outs, number of qualifications delivered, etc. A good statistical system is a major tool for steering at all levels of decision-making. Some standards and controlling procedures for checking the reliability of data must also be defined and implemented.

− Education and assessment. A second major tool for steering or monitoring the whole system or school units is evaluation and assessment. It is all the more necessary as school units and higher education institutions are given more autonomy for reasons of accountability and of overall consistency with respect to the general objectives set up by the Government and the Parliament in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and equity.

− The evaluation function can be more effective if some basic indicators are defined at national, judet and school levels. They will be tools for self-evaluation at all levels of responsibility and will help the audits of the Inspectorate for external evaluation. The new model for the Inspectorate must be implemented as fast as possible, as it is very relevant in all respects. Evaluation of outcomes implies that assessment of students’ achievement relies partly on national standardised tests, in particular to check the evolution over time of student outcomes and to limit as much as possible discrepancies between regions and schools. The evaluation function should also include assessment of teachers and other educational staff, including headmasters and principals. This requires an official document that states precisely the functions and tasks of the personnel.

− The process of reform itself must be continuously assessed so that the feedback from the field can show the shortcomings or the unforeseen effects of the decisions made. More generally, the forecasting tools must be developed in order to estimate the future flows of enrolment at different levels and the future qualifications required by the labour market.

− There must be tight co-operation between the statistical offices of the Ministry of Education and the Ministries of Finance and of Labour. It is particularly important to know the transition process between school and the first job, the average time to find a first job after leaving school according to the level of attainment and the type of qualification achieved, where there is a shortage or an excess of qualifications, and even the wages and salaries corresponding to different levels and types of qualifications. At regional level, a forecasting and planning body should be created, establishing priorities for technological and vocational types of qualifications, given some strategic priorities of economic and social development.

− Another major tool for monitoring is strategic communication at all levels. It requires first a clear explanation of the set of objectives and their purpose, as well as what exactly is expected from each teacher or principal. This communication must not overlook the teachers’ unions, the associations of parents and the different stakeholders: municipalities, local authorities, employers and the media. Strategic communication must not be limited to information of the top-down variety but also include bottom-up information. It must also facilitate exchanges of experiences and ideas at all levels and enhance cross-fertilisation of innovations throughout the educational system. Networks of schools with the participation of
economic, social and cultural partners should be created at local level (sub-regional) and monitored by a judet inspector.

− **Managerial capacity.** Upgrading the managerial capacity of all administrators of school units and tertiary institutions is necessary. This requires to set as a priority the initial and in-service training of these administrators. An important part of this capacity-building programme should be about human resources management and the specificity of management in the field of education.

**Recommendations: Equity and access**

− *Appoint a special inspector at MER with specific responsibility for ensuring equity for Roma children.* Equity should be understood in the widest sense: not only access to school, but survival in school (i.e. drop-out prevention strategies), equal treatment and opportunity of choice during school, and support for children and their families in taking a full part in school life. It would also help if a similar inspector could be assigned to each judet Inspectorate, at least in those judets with large Roma populations.

− *Continue to improve high-quality access and equity for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).* It is particularly important to review and widen the definition of ‘special needs’ to include not only physical and mental handicaps but less obvious learning disabilities like dyslexia and Attention Deficit Syndrome, and psychological, social, and behavioural problems. This will require training and awareness raising among teachers and school directors, as well as Inspectorates and methodologists.

− *Scrutinise existing laws, regulations and practices to identify and eliminate unnecessary barriers.* For example, it may be necessary to remove the pre-requisite of a capacitate certificate for access to basic vocational education – this requirement acts as a barrier to children who, for reasons beyond their control, are unable to complete 8 or 9 years of basic education, but who still need to be able to earn a living. Likewise, eliminate unnecessary ‘double’ exams that do not add any useful information about a student’s ability, may block her/his progress, and place a great deal of stress on students, parents and teachers.

**Recommendations: Curriculum, materials and assessment**

− *Implementation of the new curriculum.* The actual implementation of the new curriculum will require some time and cannot be expected to appear by magic. Because of financial and practical constraints, a time-schedule is necessary, establishing priorities. It seems consistent to start with insisting first on pre-primary and primary education. Education is a cumulative process and the school career of a child is largely determined at an early age. Both for efficiency and equity reasons, it would be rational to implement thoroughly the new curriculum at an early stage. It is relevant to prepare as from pre-primary education the mindsets of the children to live in a rapidly changing world requiring adaptive and innovative skills. For equity reasons it would be relevant to enrol disadvantaged children earlier, for example at the age of four. The initial marginal cost of doing so would save social and unemployment costs later on.

− *Education for citizenship.* The general framework of the new curriculum is quite relevant in its systemic approach and in its focus on skills and competencies as well as on
interdisciplinary studies and activities. However, it does not focus enough on the important issue of education for citizenship and private life. The qualities required to be a good citizen are similar to those asked by the employers, i.e. those which allow for good professionalism. Education for citizenship cannot be restricted to “civic education” alone. It implies a complementary approach between civic education, the attitudes and expectations of teachers in all subjects, and the rules of life within the school. Some formal democratic rules should be set up within the schools, defining the rights and the duties of pupils and students, and some participative bodies must allow for students to learn to be responsible by participating in some decision-making processes concerning school life.

− **Content of curriculum.** More effort could be made to identify the basic knowledge and skills that all students should have acquired by the end of compulsory education. This should be the primary goal of schools, it being critical for social cohesion as well as for economic efficiency. Economic health relies more and more on the qualifications of the entire labour force.

− **Regulation of textbook market.** Although competition among publishers has brought about progress in terms of choice, regulations must be put in place to control not only content, quality and relevance to the curriculum, but also as regards marketplace practice. Competition must be preserved in order to stimulate innovation and allow choice, but it must function within well-defined limits.

− **National, standardised forms of assessment must be designed,** to be used for diagnostic and information purposes. With better national examinations, some redundant examinations could be dispensed with. It is vital that information obtained from national assessments be used to improve the quality of teaching in classrooms. The measurement of learning outcomes is not an end in itself, but a means of raising teaching standards, and motivating students.

**Recommendations: Teachers**

− **Standards for teachers.** Create a national task force to design a national standard stating the tasks, duties and qualifications of teachers and principals, as well as a code of ethics. It should be used as a basic reference for initial training, recruitment, in-service training, inspection and assessment of teachers and principals.

− **Training.** Give a higher priority to initial training of all teachers and to in-service training of teachers in compulsory education for the implementation of the new curriculum; and in certain subjects for a relevant and efficient use of IT.

− **Mentors.** Ask the inspectors to select mentors among the best teachers and organise intensive training courses for them. They could be given a financial bonus and asked to become local co-ordinators for the implementation of the new curriculum, while continuing to teach part-time.

− **Active learning.** Organise at least one short training session a year in each school, focusing on the articulation between subjects and how to monitor active learning of small groups of students (methodological tools for concrete projects rather than theoretical issues).
− **Teamwork.** Facilitate team work of teachers by subject with an interdisciplinary approach. Focus on the issue of assessment of students by building up common tests and discussing performance standards, criteria of assessment and scoring grids.

− **Distance education.** Implement, strengthen and accredit high-quality distance education for serving teachers, so that unqualified or under-qualified teachers can gain full qualifications without having to leave their jobs and return to university. Since most unqualified teachers are found in rural or underprivileged areas, it would be disruptive to schools if they left their classrooms, as well as inconvenient (or simply impossible) for the teachers themselves.

### Recommendations: Pre-primary education

− **Give priority of early access to school to disadvantaged areas and children.**

− **Develop links between teachers of pre-primary and of first grade of primary schools.**

− **Develop, as much as possible, specific and individual support to disadvantaged or handicapped children while integrating them into regular schooling.**

### Recommendations: Vocational and technical education and training

− **Design, in close co-operation with employers, attainment targets – including transversal skills and competencies.**

− **Design larger domains of competencies for most of the qualifications and develop a flexible system of units/credits for obtaining the diploma.**

− **Improve communication between classes/lectures within the school and training sessions within the enterprise.**

− **Design a regional map of courses offered in different specific domains which should be revised each year for the following three to five years.**

− **Improve career and vocational guidance at school and judet levels.**

### Recommendations: Tertiary education

Institutions must be prepared to successfully exploit the new financial autonomy promised by MER. Autonomy brings with it a new responsibility for decision making; too many institutional administrators have developed as implementers rather than true managers of their institutions.

− **Management.** Institutions must select and train a new generation of managers who can take advantage of the opportunities inherent in the new funding schemes.

− **Core skills versus specialisation.** In the new environment of Romania there are still too many specialisations in tertiary education. Students need to be trained to adapt to new occupational demands over their career.
− *Public/private balance.* Attaining a proper “balance” between the public and private sectors is not a matter solely of how many students are in each type of institution, but rather the creation of appropriate incentives and information so that both sectors operate effectively (and perhaps even in co-operation with one another).

− *Increased accountability* to government by providing evidence that tertiary institutions have used state funds in a manner which matches the intent of government.

− *Improved data collection.* Tertiary institutions must collect and assimilate effectiveness data to show the benefits being generated through investment in tertiary education.
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Figure 1. Education system in Romania

- **Primary Education**
  - 1st grade: Group for age 3 children
  - 2nd grade: Group for age 4 children (middle age)
  - 3rd grade: Group for age 5 children

- **Compulsory Education**
  - 1st grade: Primary Education (lower secondary)
  - 2nd grade: GYMNASIUM (Lower Secondary)
  - 3rd grade: Secondary education (middle secondary)
  - 4th grade: Short term higher education
  - 5th grade: Short term higher education
  - 6th grade: Short term higher education

- **Post-secondary Education**
  - Diploma de absolvire (Diploma)
  - Graduation Certificate
  - High school (Liceu – upper secondary)
  - Vocational schools
  - Apprenticeship schools

- **Post-graduate Education**
  - Doctorate (Ph.D.)
  - Academic Graduation Certificate

- **Education system in Romania**
  - PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION
  - Group for age 5 children
  - Group for age 4 children (middle age)
  - Group for age 3 children