

Reform of the Education System

„The education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”

(Convention on the Rights of the Child, art.29)

Reconsidering Education in the Republic of Moldova

The ongoing education reform is a law of the contemporary world. However, education in Moldova, just as in other former Soviet states, has not followed the general course of human civilization and history, as it had been integrated, until the end of the '80s, in the Soviet education and management system, for which social laws and patterns were set out only in the ideological offices of the Communist Party. Therefore, the Soviet education paradigm was, in fact, isolated from the 20th century cultural development evolution. The Soviet schools have followed the educational paradigm of *Comenius*, for over seventy years, i.e. was stuck - as a social educational paradigm - in the 17th century, thus, also performing the function of fully isolating education from the cultural growth in Europe and all over the world.

Since the declaration of independence history gave us one more chance to re-gain our national identity, also through education following modern global principles and priorities.

The focus of the 2000-2001 education reform is the pupil, the exploring and enriching of his creative potential by optimising training and education, by adopting the differentiated individual approach based on interdisciplinarity, and by using/challenging divergent thinking. It is set out that education is free of charge, ensured by the State, non-discriminatory either on the basis of ideology, political affiliation, religious belief, race, or ethnicity.

The strategic component of the reform sets out democratisation, humanisation of education, the unity, diversity, accessibility and adaptability of the educational system, the use of formative training; it declares the secularity of education in State institutions. The teleological component of the reform sets out the promotion of the respect for human rights and freedoms, irrespective of a person's ethnicity, social background, religious affiliation – i.e. the principles included in the UN Charter; it also sets out the education of the respect for one's parents, identity, language and the cultural values of the Romanian people, as well as for the national values of the country he lives in, the country where he comes from, and the values of the civilisations that differ from his.

The shift to the formative education paradigm, generated by the post-industrial society and adequate to it, has prompted the development of new concepts for all school subjects included in the curriculum. They served as important conceptual landmarks for developing the *Main Curriculum*¹ and the curricula for specific subjects, for developing new manuals and methodological guides, for conducting professional development trainings, for developing a new concept for evaluating performance.

The main concept, as well as the specific concept have re-channelled effectively education from the Soviet command system to the European democratic model, i.e. national education, meaning that it contributes to keeping and upbringing the identity of the trained, the respect of national, social, cultural, religious values of the individual and of the nation he belongs to, of the society, culture, religion, geographical area, etc., which all form the

¹ *Main Curriculum de bază. Documente reglatoare (Main Curriculum. Regulatory Papers) /* Vl. Guțu, Vl. Pâslaru, V. Goraș et al., TipCim Publishing House, Cimișlia, 1997

framework within which education is carried out, being an open channel for the general human values. Each subject needs specific planning that is adequate for the system of objectives and expected outputs, to be used to select and structure the educational contents, as well as to select and combine effectively educational techniques. A school subject strategy is an interaction of the concepts of the science/literature and art/technology to be taught/learnt and the didactical and educational principles.

The development and updating of the *curriculum* held an important place in the educational system reform. By definition, the curriculum is a “transposition” into pedagogical language of the educational policy, of the general human and specific national values whose promoter is the school. The curriculum, unlike the traditional training programs, sets out the focus of education on the training/development needs of the pupil/student. It offers unlimited access to any contents/values, technological resourcefulness of teachers and lecturers, freedom of education for pupils/students, greater commitment and reliability of the parents’ participation in education, education management decentralisation, etc., i.e. a wide range of human and professional freedoms that could not have been offered by the indoctrinated Soviet command system.

The development of the national curriculum was a required outcome of the global reform of the society, as changes in the society require changes at the level of education, as well as the shift to a new educational paradigm that benefits the trend to focus education on the one who is educated rather than on sharing materials to be taught/learnt as it used to be in an industrial society. The Main Curriculum for school education, as well as the curricula for primary, secondary and high schools were developed. Once the curriculum was put into place the development of new types of schoolbooks started.

The development of curricula and manuals, special training for the teaching staff on how to use new documents and manuals, the development and implementation of a new evaluation concept are the four components of the project funded jointly by the Government of the Republic of Moldova and World Bank “*Development of the General (Compulsory) Education System*”. The rethinking of the four areas is considered by experts mandatory for any school reform and eventually able to ensure its success.

During 2000-2001 institutions subordinated to the Government carried out a number of studies on the impact of the educational system reform. Such studies pointed out new facets, phenomena, causes, etc. that influence reforms in the education system. It became clear that there are three types of problems related to forming the reform actors in schools: environmental, motivational, knowledge, skills and attitude-building.

The *strengths* of the education system in the Republic of Moldova were identified: the awareness of the role of professional management in all areas; enthusiasm, the patience of the teachers; human resources; the shift to curricula-based education; alternative education; World Bank support; the desire of the masses to make changes.

The *weaknesses* of the education system are: issues and difficulties caused by transition – the need to adapt, the need for stability, the unexpectedness of the social situation; the human, material, financial, informational resources issues; available means for motivating the staff are very limited, especially when it comes to finance; the excessive focus on current issues rather than on strategic ones; the excessive focus on material resources rather than on informational ones, decreased interest for education; the withdrawal of support to schools from higher authorities; the insufficient involvement of the graduates in teaching, which causes the ageing of the teaching staff in secondary schools; poor functioning of the law (e.g. the provision that teacher re-training should be conducted at least one every five years is complied with only in part, as local budgets have no available funds); the lack of a well-thought-of management system; the lack of national standards for educational management; the powers and duties of school principals and their deputies are not specified clearly; the powers and duties of collective management bodies (Administrative Board and Teaching Board) are partially overlapping those of the school management; excessive dependence on

local public administration authorities; inappropriate treatment of the teachers, of the interests and rights of the children from rural areas; the lack of methodological and didactical literature, teaching aids; poor teaching in pre-schools (especially in rural areas); inappropriate inefficient attestation of teachers; school principals are more of administrators rather than managers; disagreements regarding the way to carry out one's duties; low morals; the inefficient school management mechanism.

The most critical of the *major objectives* are: change motivations, aspirations regarding the role education has to play now and in future; give the principals the status of public officers; ensure school independence; ensure the efficiency of the current legislation; increase the prestige of the teachers; organize and conduct workshops, study tours and trainings at all levels to overview others' experience; provide material, financial and informational inputs for educational institutions.

Thus, one can see that Moldova has the conceptual and didactical foundation of education in place and the reform depends mainly on the success of changing the mentality of the teaching staff and the political elite that would make it possible that the declared principle of education as a national priority comes true.

Obviously, during reform implementation some contradictory factors occurred, related to the old school paradigm. Such contradictions have a deep philosophical meaning and concern certain dualist views, are actual and inevitable for any educational system aiming at setting up a new educational paradigm. Discovered dualisms should be eliminated gradually by ensuring reform continuity, which is a fundamental principle for human organisational systems, first of all. The Ministry of Education and Science aims at responding to this principle by setting priority objectives for 2000-2001. Such objectives have been identified for the first time during the last 55 years as a strategy for the Ministry of Education and Science with a solid experience and scientific background, and the strategy has been aligned to the current educational issues in the European culture area. The objectives are:

- Redistribute powers and duties in education at the central educational management level (among ministries and departments)
- Stop the decline and stabilise the situation at all levels and stages of education
- Optimise rather than reduce, as it has been done so far, costs; improve budget planning, attract extra-budgetary resources, change the personnel policy
- De-centralise educational management as a component of the territorial-administrative reform; distribute powers and duties vertically: Ministry – county directorates – educational institutions
- Collaborate with social partners to establish an active learning system; education flexibility, the meeting of local needs, the involvement of communities will contribute to solving many problems in education
- Continue establishing and strengthening new institutional and organisational structure; develop an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework
- Implement and monitor the National Education Development Plan for 2000–2005
- Develop local education development programs. Such programs will be based on the *National Education Development Plan* and will aim at meeting local needs, and will be agreed upon at all local management levels.

It is planned to achieve identified objectives through a number of actions agreed upon both vertically and horizontally, within specific timelines, by identified persons in charge, following measurable evaluation indicators for each implementation stage; re-think the educational mission of the educational institutions at all levels and of all types, bearing in mind national and European values; improve the quality of education, which implies a wider definition of quality and includes physical qualities of the pupils/students, the quality of the education contents and the quality of teaching (pupil-centred, depending on the type, focused

on health and safety), develop and implement educational standards for all stages of education, which will increase evaluation and certification objectivity, will allow for the equal value of local certificates and the integration in the system of European values; for county directorates of educations, as well as for schools they will play the part of clear specific objectives that must be achieved by every subject of education; the establishing of a national system for the complex evaluation of the educational system: the lack of a complex review leads to wrong decisions and sometimes encourages the promotion of authoritarian principles of education management; establish bodies that will evaluate the qualifications and skills of the teaching staff, the quality and the conformity with the curriculum and manuals to the new requirements of the society and the building of school competencies; the due quality of the premises, equipment, furniture, sanitary and hygienic requirements in schools, the improvement of the institutional capacity at all levels of educational management².

The principles declared in the *Concept of Educational System Development in the Republic of Moldova* are further developed in the *Concept of Education in the Republic of Moldova*³, whose authors aim at separating the education during the formal instructive-educational process and informal education out of class or school. The *Concept* reiterates the values related to the human being, life, culture, labour, Motherland – stated in the *Concept of Educational System Development in the Republic of Moldova* – that must be inculcated into pupils during childhood and adolescence.

The spiritual revival of the society has prompted the amending of the *Law on Education* and the adding to the compulsory curriculum for primary schools and to the optional curriculum for other levels the subject *Moral and Spiritual Education*, i.e. a subject aiming at recovering the integrity of moral and religious values that had been separated unnaturally by the Communist ideology by means of militant atheism and the prohibition of religion at school and in the society. However, from the didactical point of view the subject *Moral and Spiritual Education*, in conformity with the *Constitution* that separates the church from the State, separates spiritual values of the religion from its dogmatic facet, the latter pertaining exclusively to the church⁴. Given the political blend in the Parliament and the society in the Republic of Moldova such a solution for bringing religion back into schools is the only option for this stage of the development of the educational system.

It should be pointed out that, although some changes have been made in education, the Republic of Moldova has not developed yet a *political education doctrine*, as a legally binding organic act that would be in place irrespective of the changes of the power balance in the Parliament, i.e. a doctrine that would provide for the stability and irreversibility of the reforms. The main reason for this situation is the uncertainty about the political strategy of the Government and of the people that is far from homogenous:

Ethnicity: most natives either reject their Romanian identity or do not care about their national identity, while inhabitants of different origin are pro-Russian and/or pro-Soviet;

Culture: the majority of the population consists of the people educated mostly by the Soviet version of the Russian culture;

Religious affiliation: Moldova has two metropolitan's dioceses – Bessarabia's – established during the period between the two World Wars, subordinated by tradition to the Romanian Orthodox Church, and Chisinau and the Whole of Moldova Metropolitan's

² *Orientările prioritare ale Ministerului Educației și Științei pentru anul 2000 și perspectivă (Priority Guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Science for 2000 and on)* // Buletinul învățământului (Education Bulletin), 2000, # 1-2

³ *Concepția educației în Republica Moldova (The Concept of Education in the Republic of Moldova)* // Ministry of Education and Science, Chișinău, 2000

⁴ *Concepția educației moral-spirituale a elevilor (The Concept of the Moral and Spiritual development of Pupils)* // Ministry of Education and Science / Vl. Pâslaru, A. Cara, V. Palaria, 2001

Diocese, established not so long ago by the Russian Orthodox Church in the Republic of Moldova in order to undermine the affiliation unity and integrity in the country, as well as a large number of cults that compete with the two major dioceses;

Economy: no professional estimation so far has stated that the illicit economy had a share of less than 60%; from the ethnical viewpoint, the share of native owners of wealth is quite small; almost a million of the people fit for work – of the total population of 4 million, are employed illegally abroad and are not protected at all and – which is very important! – do not participate in the political life of Moldova;

Ideology: older people are dissatisfied with the present and hope for the turning back to socialism; a large share of the people who have fought for the national liberation were disappointed with what is happening and abandoned their cause, complying with the tough rules of a society regulated less and less by the state; there is hope for changes among the people who have finished school after 1987, but, due to the reign of corruption and lawlessness, cannot impose an overwhelming strong political will.

Despite problems and obstacles, the reform of education in the Republic of Moldova is the only social reform that succeeded to achieve all objectives, which is the contribution of the intellectuals rather than of the political decision-makers and management, as the intellectuals have acted as martyrs for over 15 years now, with no equivalent in Western Europe, in order to offer to the younger a chance to overcome the condition of their parents, as it is the only hope for reviving national identity of the people of this country.

Table*. Education Level Indicators

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Primary education coverage (%)	93.7	92.3	93.1	92.7	92.5	92.7	95.4	96.6	96.5
High school education coverage (%)	24.8	25.3	25.6	27.3	29.3	31.7	28.8	30.5	33.6
Total share of coverage by both high school education and vocational schools (%)	48.5	47.7	44.6	45.4	46.2	48.3	39.7	41.1	44.4
Pupil/teacher ratio in primary schools	12.5	18.1	18.7	19.2	19.2	19.3	20.9	20.8	19.9
Education expenses' share in GDP (%)	8.75	8.89	10.25	9.97	7.02	4.67	4.50	4.86	

Source: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy. Monitorul Oficial, #65(950), 18 May 2002, page

Traditionally, in the Republic of Moldova the access to educational programs by children of age 0–7 was granted through the system of pre-school educational institutions: nurseries for children of 1.5-3 years of age and kindergartens for children of 3–6(7) years of age. The lack of political will and of a national strategy regarding this category of children have decreased significantly the access of pre-school children to early development and educational programs and have reduced the quality of such services.

During the last six years the number of pre-school institutions in the Republic of Moldova decreased by 36%: from 1680 in 1995 to 1135 in 2000-2001. Most rural kindergartens that are still operating stop working during 3-4-6 months in winter, the reason being the inappropriate heating, as well as the irresponsibility of the local public authorities. Once closed, some kindergartens do not open for months or even years, thus reducing sharply the access to early education of a large number of children. Premises, material assets, didactical and methodological aids of the kindergartens that have been closed down wear away. Many premises are sold or leased for an unspecified period of time and are used for goals other than educational: as storehouses, dormitories, business premises. In order to be saved, some pre-school institutions were turned into primary schools or educational complexes of the “kindergarten – primary school” type.

*Table**. Pre-School Educational Institutions

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2001
Number of pre-school educational institutions	1680	1596	1497	1399	1201	1135
Attending children, <i>ths.</i>	161.3	146.9	138.8	126.0	101.0	93.7
Their share in total children of age 1-6	45	43	43	40	33	30
Teaching staff, <i>ths.</i>	17.6	15.0	14.7	13.2	9.8	8.9

Source: Department of Statistics and Sociology, 2000, Report of the Conference “Education for Everyone”, Chişinău, 2001

It should be pointed out that according to the Law on Education pre-school education is compulsory only for children aged 5. When it comes to this category of children, the situation is better, the global share of children undergoing pre-school education is 77%. The remaining children do not attend kindergartens or pre-school groups for various reasons, the most frequent reason is the unavailability of funds: parents have no money to pay kindergarten fees, to buy clothes and footwear for the cold season; besides, in many small villages no such groups are available.

The Condition of Institutionalized Children

The child is a fragile human being who needs ongoing support and protection to ensure complex development during its evolution and growing. The child who lives under extremely difficult conditions or who has difficulties because of development problems must be paid special attention. The support and education of children under difficult conditions is, obviously, a prerogative of the state and of the society.

In the Republic of Moldova the institutional system of supporting and educating children under difficult conditions is a complex structure subordinated to three ministries: the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Education and Science. The institutions providing support and education to children in difficulty are funded from various sources: some get funds from the state budget, while others are funded from local budgets.

The Ministry of Health is in charge of managing the operation of specialised schools for children of 0–6 years of age who have various maladies and psycho-physical deficiencies, as well as orphans and abandoned children. Such institutions are ensuring the achieving of a number of objectives: childcare, treatment and rehabilitation of children. Once such children turn 7 they are transferred to special boarding schools subordinated to the Ministry of Education, while children with severe psychical or neuro-physical deficiencies are transferred to the institutions under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Currently, the Ministry of Health is in charge of three orphanages with a total capacity of 410 places, and the total number of institutionalised children is 385. The National Orphanage is funded from the state budget and the Chişinău and Bălţi orphanages – from the local budget.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family is in charge of the boarding schools for children with severe psycho-physical deficiencies (infant cerebral paralysis, epilepsy, schizophrenia, medium and severe mental retardation, etc.), where they are taken care of, and are provided general and medical assistance. Such institutions provide assistance to children aged 6–18. Once they turn 18 they are placed in adult institutions that are subordinated to the same ministry. The Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family runs two boarding schools – Orhei Boarding School with a capacity of 340 places for boys and Hînceşti Boarding School with 200 places for girls. Children from all the country are placed in such institutions and they have various sources of funding – Orhei Boarding School is funded from the state budget, while Hînceşti Boarding School is funded from the local budget.

The Ministry of Education and Science is in charge of boarding schools for orphans, children left without parents' care, children with chronic diseases, with motor, sensorial and mental deficiencies, as well as for children with various anomalies in their psychical and physical development. The objectives of such institutions are: to provide decent conditions for children's living, education and treatment, to protect their life and health. Children are kept in such institutions from the age of 6 until the age of 16–17. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Science is in charge of 62 such boarding schools, where about 12500 children are educated and taken care of. These institutions are funded from the state budget (37) and local budgets (25).

In the three orphanages subordinated to the Ministry of Education are institutionalised 140 children. Priority directions of activity in such institutions are to provide appropriate conditions close to those ensured by a family, to identify ways of placing children in families (by adoption, wardship), to prepare children for social integration.

About 6000 children who come from socially vulnerable families or have been left without parents' support for a limited period of time are taken care of and educated in 18 boarding schools where they can study in secondary schools of gymnasium type. As a rule, such children come from families that cannot afford ensuring suitable conditions for sustenance and education: poor families with many children, one-parent families (with one deceased parent, single mothers, and divorced parents), families with unemployed parents, families with alcoholic or drug-addicted parents, etc. The state, based on the decisions of local public administration authorities, undertake temporarily the responsibility for the free support and education of such children. The period for which children are kept in boarding schools may be influenced by the increased income of the family or the overall improvement of the psychological environment within the family.

Special schools provide care, treatment and education for children with physical and sensorial deficiencies, with inadequate behaviour, with neurological and orthopaedic deficiencies, deficiencies of hearing and sight. Currently, these boarding schools include about 1250 children with physical and sensorial deficiencies (blind and with sight impairments, deaf and with hearing impairments, with locomotory deficiencies, etc.). The aim of such institutions is to educate, correct the behaviour, provide medical assistance and rehabilitate children in order to ensure their psychical and physical development and their further integration in the society.

Sanatoria, a total of 3 secondary schools (gymnasia), include children with chronic diseases of the cardio-vascular system, children with neurological diseases between 7 and 16 years of age. Children are placed in such institutions pursuant to extensive medical examinations and are released after their rehabilitation within 6-12 months. Sanatoria aim at providing medical assistance, ensure physical and physical rehabilitation and provide education to sick children.

The 28 auxiliary schools are the largest group of boarding schools where children with mild and medium mental deficiencies are taken care of and educated. Such institutions include about 4000 children. Most children – about 85% - are from socially vulnerable families. Children are kept in such institutions until they complete their 9-year compulsory education.

The analysis of the current situation shows that children institutionalisation is imposed by a number of factors, the main reason being poverty and related issues. Main reasons for institutionalisation vary from one type of institution to another. For children in auxiliary schools, children with sensorial deficiencies, motor deficiencies and chronic diseases poverty is a major factor, but it is still an adjacent one, the main factor being the deficiencies of the psychical or motor development of the child. Children in general institutions (boarding schools, orphanages) are placed there due to family problems and poverty, obviously, is a primary factor.

Unfortunately, the Republic of Moldova has no mechanisms in place for helping children in difficulty without using the least desirable means – their institutionalisation. 2000 statistic data show that of the assistance provided to children prior to institutionalisation only 35.10% benefited from specialised medical assistance and 28.75% benefited from pedagogical assistance (attended pre-school institutions or/and school), 8.08% received social assistance (pensions), no information is available for 22.96%. It shows clearly that psycho-pedagogical, medical, and social assistance the child benefits from prior to institutionalisation is inefficient and the unavailability of such services in the community makes institutionalisation a need. Thus, in most cases institutionalisation of children is performed at the initiative of parents and pedagogic councils of local educational institutions. It should be pointed out that parents initiate the procedure of institutionalisation (51.02% of all institutionalisation cases) at the suggestion of the pedagogic councils and/or medical staff. Moreover, in 43.69% of institutionalisation cases the procedure was initiated by several local bodies, which confirms that the trained staff in local institutions are not yet aware of the beneficial role of integrating such children in the community life. Certainly, it will make it more difficult to de-institutionalise children who might benefit from adequate care and education in their family or in their community.

By and large, living conditions of institutionalised children are hard. The causes are well known – insufficient funding and inappropriate use of the modest money received from the state, the local community and charity organisations. Yearly funding covers only 54.8% of needs. Thus, the management of such institutions can afford only paying for food, utilities, clothes and some goods for daily use. The money shortage does not allow for buying food appropriate for the physiologic needs of developing bodies or for providing dietary food. Chronic malnutrition is a major risk factor for the psychical and physical development of

children, as it leads to decreased stamina, deficiencies in intellectual development. Also, because of insufficient funding, in 80% of boarding houses there are no needed drugs and medicine chests and prophylaxis medical examinations have been carried out only in 50% of institutions. Most medical staff from such institutions has no due qualifications and has not undergone during the last 5 years any professional training.

Thus, at this stage it is needed that all bodies in charge of the care and education of children in difficulty work to improve the legislative, legal and social protection level, re-evaluate the organisation and functioning of the institutional system, establish and develop alternate tasks. Given the multitude of factors affecting institutionalisation, it would be efficient to prevent it by working actively on the reasons for institutionalisation:

At the family level – through social protection measures, through medical and psycho-pedagogical assistance to children in difficulty, through financial support, legal support, counselling, etc.;

At the school level – through developing efficient programs for the development, education and recovering of children in difficulty, through establishing exclusive schools for children with problems related to development or social problems, through organising entertainment for children from socially vulnerable groups, from one-parent families, from families with relationship difficulties, etc.;

At the community level – by involving local authorities in providing alternate services for taking care of, educating and recovering children in difficulty, by changing the attitude and mentality of the authorities and the society regarding children in difficulty, by facilitating the access of children in difficulty and their families to alternate care and education services;

At the national level – by restructuring the current institutionalisation model, by developing programs on professional training of the staff in charge of the education, recovering and integration of children in difficulty, by providing alternative solutions to institutionalisation in rural areas. It is critical to promote social assistance programs as monthly fees to children in difficulty, the disabled, families with many children, etc.

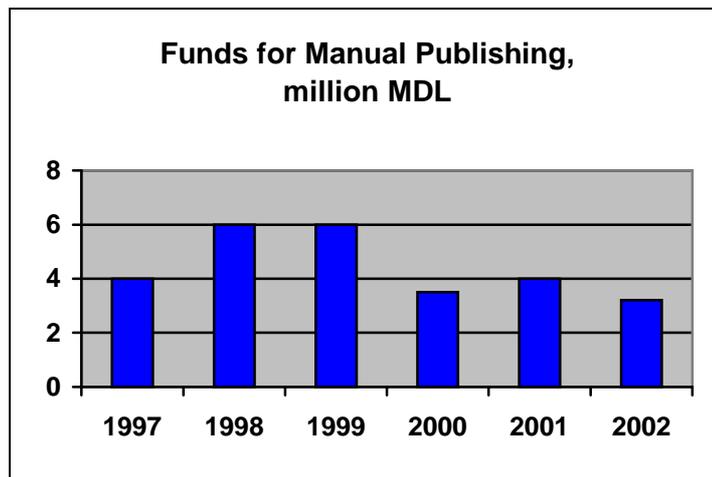
Manuals Availability

Previously, until 1998 manuals were distributed to pupils free of charge through school libraries. In fact, funding received from the Ministry of Education and Science was absolutely insufficient and manuals came mostly from external donations rather than from local publishing. For instance, the budget for 1996 set out the equivalent of 2.5 million \$US for manual publishing, however the poor financial condition of that period allowed for spending only 10% of this amount. Funding manual publishing for compulsory education became during 1996-1997 an issue that could not longer be solved through traditional methods inherited from the former command system.

*Table**. Funds for manual publishing included in the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Funds for manual publishing, million MDL	4.0	6.0	6.0	3.5	4.0	3.2

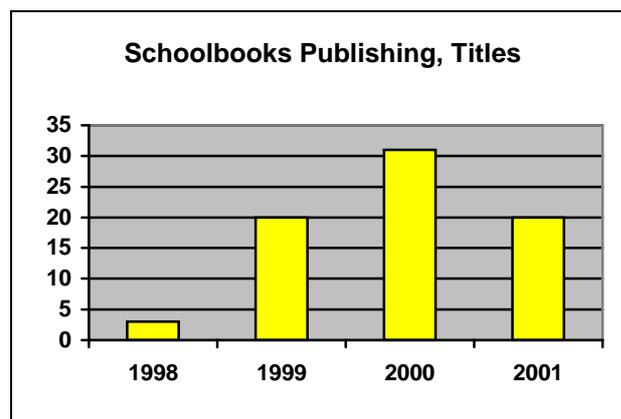
Source: Ministry of Education and Science

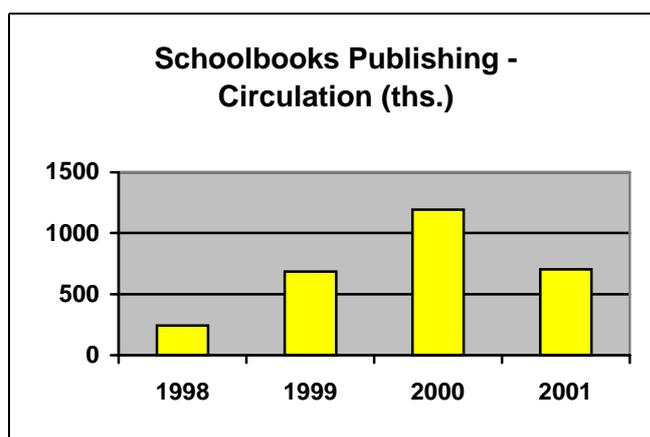


The lack of a sustainable mechanism of funding manual publishing made the management of the ministry of education and science and the Ministry of Finance request the assistance of international financial organisations, with their support was developed and – since 1998 – implemented the *Manual Loan Scheme*. According to the new mechanism, schoolbooks are published using a loan from World Bank and then are distributed to pupils for a yearly fee. The financial sustainability of the *Manual Loan Scheme* is ensured by the fact that after used schoolbooks are taken away from the circuit, they will be republished using the money received as yearly fees. During 1998-2001 74 schoolbooks were published with a total circulation of 2.8 million copies.

*Table**. Manual Publishing by the General Education Reform Project in the Republic of Moldova

	1998	1999	2000	2001
Titles	3	20	31	20
Circulation	242 <i>ths.</i>	685 <i>ths.</i>	1193 <i>ths.</i>	702 <i>ths.</i>



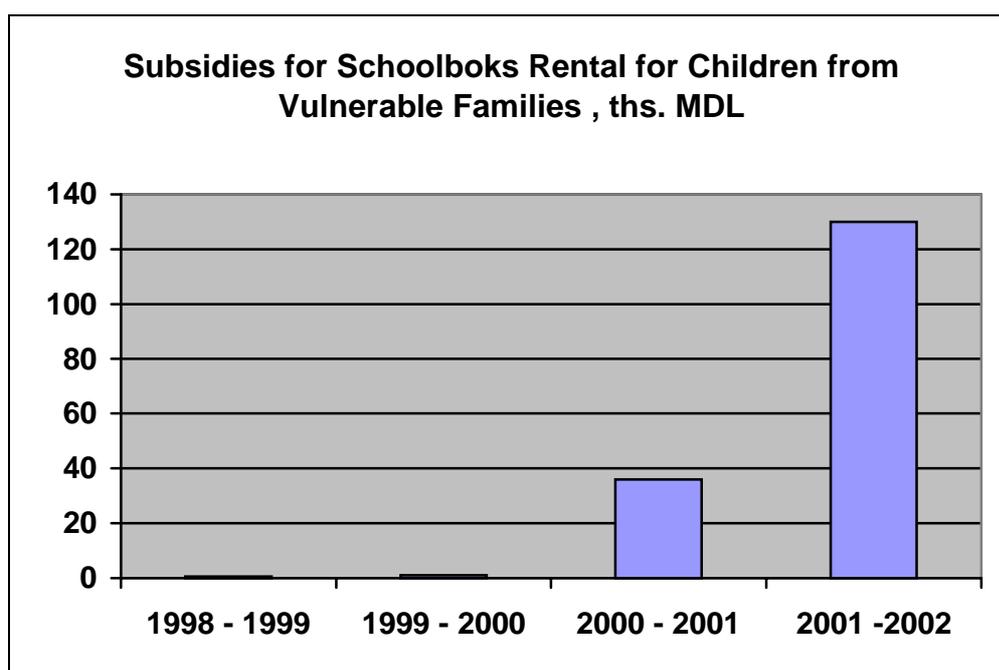


Some of the major benefits of the *Manual Loan Scheme* are:

- Schools are provided with modern schoolbooks that meet the requirements of the curriculum and new teaching/learning technologies;
- Pupils from poor families have access to studies, as their fees are paid from the budget of the local public administration authorities;
- The publishing services and schoolbook market was established and strengthened;
- Financial stability that allows for republishing schoolbooks according to the needs of every educational institution.

*Table **. Subsidies for Paying Taxes for Schoolbooks Rental for Children from Vulnerable Social Groups, Provided by Local Public Administration Authorities

Schoolyear	1998 - 1999	1999 - 2000	2000 - 2001	2001 -2002
Subsidies, ths. MDL	0.6	1.01	36.0	130.0



The flaws of the schoolbooks provision mechanism became obvious once implementation started:

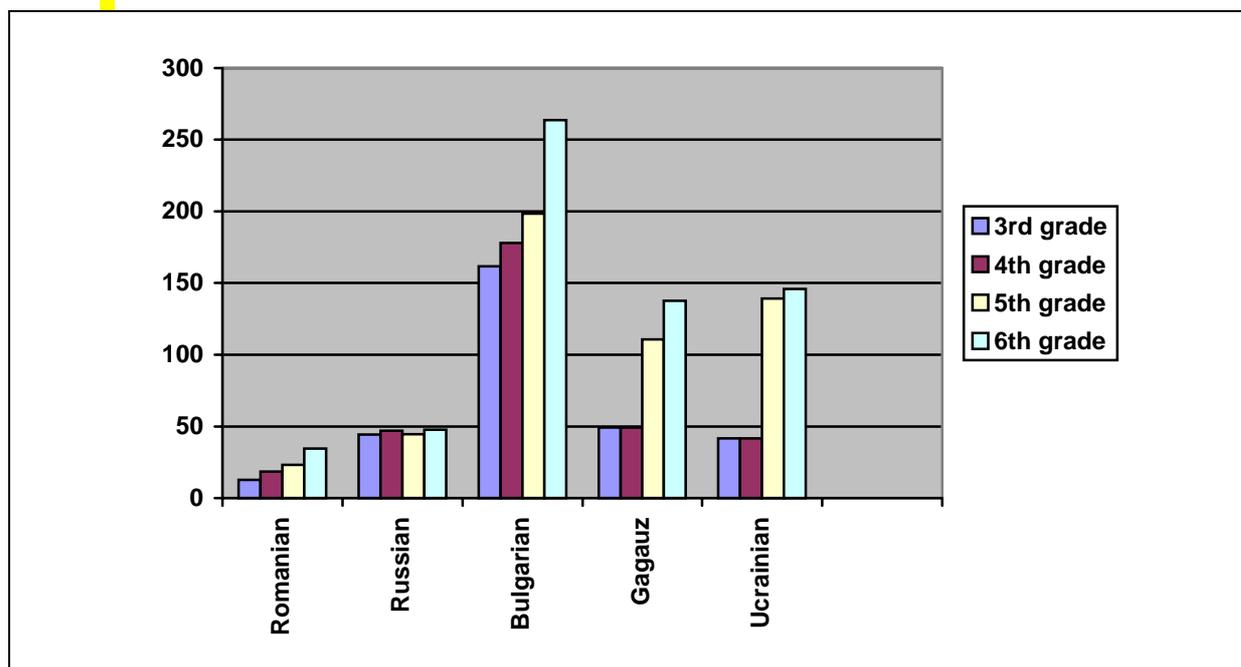
The project set out publishing of all schoolbooks for ethnical minorities, except for those in Romanian, only in Russian, which encourages further forced russification of pupils that come from non-Russian families;

Although the cost of schoolbooks in Ukrainian, Gagauz and Bulgarian is very high, the scheme does not set out an equitable mechanism of covering publishing and distribution costs.

Table *. Cost of Manuals for Mother Tongue Classes

	Romanian	Russian	Bulgarian	Gagauz	Ukrainian
3rd grade	12.71	44.28	161.64	49.27	41.59
4th grade	18.48	46.97	177.97	49.27	41.59
5th grade	23.1	44.66	198.26	110.61	138.99
6th grade	34.65	47.74	263.69	137.57	145.72

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, Extra-Budgetary Fund for Manuals



Small Rural Schools during Transition

According to the estimations of the Ministry of Education and Science⁵, in Moldova the average number of pupils in a secondary school class is 24. Thus, a *small rural schools* will be defined as primary and secondary schools located in villages where there are 1-9 classes

⁵ Gh. Gîrneș. Starea actuală a învățămîntului general din Republica Moldova // Reformarea sistemului educațional, Institutul de Politici Publice, Editura Arc, Chișinău, 2001

and the average number of pupils in a class is less than 15. During the school year 2000-2001 in Moldova were 115 primary schools, of which 55 were small primary schools. During the same school year of the 661 secondary schools 219 were small rural schools.

Table *. Small Rural Schools

County	Primary Schools		Secondary Schools	
	# of Schools	# of Pupils	# of Schools	# of Pupils
Bălți	11	344	43	4529
Cahul	8	279	8	807
Chișinău	3	100	17	1854
Edineț	2	65	35	4015
Lăpușna	3	102	14	1376
Orhei	7	190	32	3593
Soroca	20	482	36	4153
Tighina	-	-	10	998
Taraclia	-	-	-	-
Ungheni	1	60	24	2429
TAU Găgăuzia	-	-	-	-
Total	55	1622	219	23754

Source: Ministry of Education and Science

At 38 secondary schools and 50 primary schools there are classes with simultaneous teaching sessions. Most small rural schools with such classes are located in the counties of Soroca and Orhei. The need for classes with simultaneous teaching sessions is conditioned by the small number of attending pupils. In addition, of the small number of children in such villages some parents send their children to school to other communities, for various reasons. When school principals do not wish to open classes with simultaneous teaching sessions children are invited to join the 1st grade every second year. Thus, half of the children start attending school either a year later or sooner. As a rule, parents have to face a dilemma. They cannot make up their minds what variant to opt for, as their opportunity to choose is very limited.

At small schools there are not enough teachers. Only 30% of teachers have didactical degrees, 50% do not have special training, 65% teach three various subjects. Most small rural schools are located in adapted premises and do not have needed areas: classrooms, IT rooms, indoor sportsgrounds, physics and chemistry labs, workshops, canteens, festivity halls, etc. and therefore they operate in two shifts or in several smaller buildings in different areas. As a rule, most school premises are very old and have not been repaired for decades; mayoralities do not have funds for that. In many cases local public administration have to fund within a community several small schools located in different communities and do not have enough funds for that. Obviously, under such conditions is it impossible to open and maintain in good condition physics and chemistry labs, IT rooms, gyms.

One of the conditions for appropriate education by means of educational institutions is to have a library with reference materials, methodological materials for teachers, reading for pupils, and schoolbooks. Unfortunately, the libraries of small primary schools store only compulsory schoolbooks. Such libraries have no dictionaries and encyclopaedias; they have a limited scope of children's books for reading, especially for 6-9-year-olds. Available reading books are mostly in Russian or in Romanian printed in Cyrillic alphabet. Many such libraries are not subscribed to any periodicals.

Thus, the Government of Moldova and local public administration do not ensure the access of children from small villages to quality education and do not promote efficient educational policies that would provide equal learning opportunities to all children, irrespective of their birthplace and place of living.

Recommendations for Eventual Educational Policies

1. Establish in Moldova a unitary educational space to integrate ethnical, linguistic, and religious minorities into the society, de-fragment the educational system, decentralise powers, increase the independence of educational institutions, involve parents more actively in school management.
2. Develop and implement a sustainable funding mechanism for the system of education based on the shift from institutional funding to funding by pupil/student. Separate responsibilities for funding educational institutions, and plan funding for various levels of training according to the standards of developed countries.
3. Increase the efficiency of the education system, implement modern methods of evaluating knowledge and institutions, and improve education quality by increasing the attendance rate and adapting curricula to the needs of the modern economy.
4. Ensure equal learning opportunities for all children by updating the educational institutions network, by supporting children from poor families, children under extremely difficult circumstances.
5. Establish a board independent from politics, consisting of representatives of scholar circles, teachers and parents that would make decisions regarding curricula, promote scientific truth, civic peace and tolerance in the society.