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Project Information Document (PID)

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BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Country Moldova	Project ID P179363	Project Name Education Quality Improvement Project	Parent Project ID (if any)
Region EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	Estimated Appraisal Date 30-Mar-2023	Estimated Board Date 31-May-2023	Practice Area (Lead) Education
Financing Instrument Investment Project Financing	Borrower(s) Republic of Moldova	Implementing Agency Ministry of Education and Research, National Office for Regional and Local Development (NORLD)	

Proposed Development Objective(s)

Project Development Objectives are to: (i) improve the learning environment in participating institutions, with an emphasis on support of disadvantaged students, and (ii) strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Research for sector management and refugee response.

Components

- Improve teaching practices
- Improve the quality of learning environments in selected educational institutions
- Strengthen capacity for education sector management and refugee response
- Contingent Emergency Response Component

PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)

SUMMARY

Total Project Cost	58.90
Total Financing	58.90
of which IBRD/IDA	40.00
Financing Gap	0.00

DETAILS

World Bank Group Financing



International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	40.00
Non-World Bank Group Financing	
Trust Funds	18.90
Concessional Financing Facility	9.20
Early Learning Partnership	5.00
Global Partnership for Education Fund	4.70

Environmental and Social Risk Classification

Moderate

Decision

The review did authorize the team to appraise and negotiate

B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

1. Moldova, one of the two newest candidate countries of the European Union (EU), currently faces multiple crises. Despite a solid economic performance and strong poverty reduction over the past two decades, Moldova remains among the poorest countries in Europe.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic and a severe drought in 2020 and 2022 have revealed the intrinsic vulnerabilities of the country’s economic growth model, which suffers from limited resilience to shocks. The Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has created a protracted and intensified inflation and the energy crisis, negatively affected the purchasing power of households, and squeezed resources available to the Government of Moldova (GoM) to address service delivery challenges and long-term development priorities. The GoM is committed to transforming the economy and has set out an ambitious reform agenda in the National Development Strategy ‘European Moldova 2030’ (NDS)² aimed to improve the institutional, governance and business environment, strengthen competition, stimulate foreign direct investment, invest in human capital, and create jobs to reduce labor emigration. With EU candidate status, gained in June 2022, through convergence with economic, social, digital, and environmental standards of the EU, the accession process can open more opportunities to unlock growth potential and bring greater prosperity to the people of Moldova.

2. The NDS recognizes that investments in human capital development of Moldova are critical for economic growth. Over the last decade, Moldova has made progress on human development. Between

¹ Poverty declined from around 90 percent in the late 1990s to 15 percent in 2019, bouncing back to 18 percent in 2020 due to pandemic. Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2014–2021.

² <https://gov.md/ro/content/strategia-nationala-de-dezvoltare-moldova-europeana-2030-fost-aprobata-de-guvern>.



2010 and 2020, the Human Capital Index (HCI) value increased from 0.56 to 0.58³ suggesting that a child born in Moldova today will be 58 percent as productive when he or she grows up compared to what could have been achieved with a full complement of education and health inputs. Nevertheless, the country's HCI is still far below the average for the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region (0.69). There is also significant room for improvement to reach the human capital levels of more advanced high-income countries, which have an average HCI of 0.71. Human capital accumulation, through more and better education, leads to higher rates of return to the individuals and society. Even relatively small improvements in the skills of a nation's labor force can have large impacts on future economic development of countries, as measured by gains in gross domestic product (GDP)⁴. Investments in human capital development are, therefore, critical for effective and sustained growth and poverty reduction in Moldova. This is even more important in the context of the country's large demographic decline driven by emigration and low birth rate.

3. In the face of these numerous challenges, strengthening the public service delivery systems is critical to reduce inequality in opportunities. Inequality of opportunity in Moldova is among the highest in the ECA region. The access to public services is substantially lower in rural areas and among lower-income households (World Bank, 2021)⁵. Rural versus urban location explains the largest part of inequity in access to water and sanitation services, quality preschool, upper secondary and tertiary education. Poor service delivery, mainly in disadvantaged areas, results in lagging human development outcomes and a lower chance for disadvantaged children to acquire the skills necessary for productive employment and upward mobility (World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, Moldova is currently housing around 80,000 Ukrainian refugees. An estimated 90 percent of them are women and children, concentrated predominantly in urban areas. Forced displacement significantly increases the likelihood of being multidimensionally poor. A large number of refugees also puts additional pressure on the country's already weak and unequal public service delivery system.

4. Limited institutional capacity remains one of the most serious constraints to a well-functioning public sector and to inclusive and sustainable development⁶. The Moldova Systematic Country Diagnostic Update (2021) and Digital Education Readiness Assessment (2021–22) identified that Moldova's development continues to be hampered by poor governance, political pressure from vested interests, and the politicization of regulatory mandates. Governance is a challenge not only at the national level as to the main state institutions and functions, but also at sector levels, where the delivery of essential public services is hampered by sub-optimal performance of key institutions. Strengthening systems and institutions, including through capacity-building and digitalization, is a key priority for the government

³ 2020 HCI Brief for Moldova: https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/data/download/hci/HCI_2pager_MDA.pdf.

⁴ Hanushek, E.A., Woessmann, L. 2010. The High Cost of Low Educational Performance: The Long-Run Economic Impact of Improving PISA Outcomes. Paris: OECD.

⁵ Poverty is predominantly rural, with over 82 percent of the poor being less educated, older and self-employed in agriculture. The gap in access to opportunities is 34 and 52 percent for urban and rural areas, respectively (Human Opportunity Index).

⁶ World Bank. 2021. Moldova - Systematic Country Diagnostic Update: Building Resilience and Enhancing Competitiveness. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.



and critical for the implementation of its reform agenda. In addition, efforts are needed to build systems and institutions that align with the requirements of the EU.

5. The impacts of climate change pose increasing vulnerabilities. The 2020 and 2022 droughts were just the latest in a long and increasingly frequent series of weather-related events exacerbated by climate change. Since 2000, Moldova has witnessed, on average, one major climate-related event occurring every three years. The total cost of inaction on climate adaptation is currently estimated at US\$600 million, equivalent to 6.5 percent of GDP. This is expected to more than double by 2050. Flooding also poses a high cost to economy, estimated to be at least US\$62 million annually. While less frequent, the average annual losses due to earthquakes exceed US\$35 million a year. Major earthquakes could affect up to 62 percent of the country's GDP in the future. Wildfires, extreme heat, and droughts also pose significant risks. Vulnerable groups of population, including females, children, people with disabilities, and refugees, bear the brunt of the impacts from climate-induced hazards. Given Moldova's inherent vulnerability to an increasing frequency of natural disasters, there is a need to build resilience, particularly with reference to climate change and energy security. The GoM is committed to the Paris Agreement objectives to address climate change and undertook appropriate measures including the update of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) with an ambitious target of reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by 70 percent by 2030 compared to 1990. The country also aims to take advantage of the EU accession process and increase efficiency and diversification of energy sources including use of renewables, thereby improving overall competitiveness and resilience in line with the EU Green Deal initiative.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

6. Education has been set in the NDS as a national priority⁷. Relevant quality education for all is the top priority of the NDS, which is anchored in the concept of a higher quality of life for all citizens. Toward 2030, the GoM aspires to achieve tangible and sustainable improvements in all dimensions of quality of life, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals and the European aspirations established in the Association Agreement with the EU. Compulsory education in Moldova starts with one year of preschool followed by 9 years of general education up to age 15. The students are then tracked into three different educational streams: (i) a three-year lyceum (high school within the general academic stream); (ii) professional schools; and (iii) colleges (vocational stream with access to higher education)⁸.

7. Moldova made significant progress on learning outcomes over the last decades. Under the Moldova Education Strategy 2014-2020, the GoM implemented comprehensive reforms to improve learning and value for money in primary and secondary education⁹. First, the student assessment and

⁷ Major objectives of the Moldova Education Strategy and Action Plan 2030 include alignment of education to the labor market needs, ensuring access to quality education for all, strengthening social cohesion, promoting effective implementation of digital technologies, creating opportunities for lifelong learning, and promoting innovation and change in education including through the relevant scientific research.

⁸ Currently, gross enrollment rate is 108 percent in primary education and 110 percent in secondary education (World Bank data). There is no recent reliable data on the net enrollment rates in primary and secondary levels. Earlier rates dating back to 2018 show low net enrollment rates of around 86 percent, which could be the result of an overestimation of the size of the resident school-age population due to outmigration, thus meriting further study.

⁹ The Education Management Information System (EMIS) was re-engineered to provide data at school, teacher and student levels. Many of these advancements were supported by the World Bank (WB) financed Moldova Education Reform Project.



examination systems were strengthened through: (i) the overhaul of the administration of the nationwide baccalaureate exam, which minimized cheating and corruption, (ii) participation in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), (iii) revision of national assessments to improve their quality and robustness (in grades 4, 9, and 12), and (iv) extensive professional development of staff involved in students assessments. When released, the results of the student assessment tend to be analyzed, publicly disseminated, and are regularly used to improve curriculum and education process. Second, Quality assurance standards for schools (covering school organization, teaching, and learning, school infrastructure and equipment, curriculum and evaluation, and school governance) were developed and are being gradually implemented. Third, there were improvements in the allocation of public resources and increased efficiency and transparency of education spending by adopting per-student financing of schools¹⁰. In addition, open data on school budgets and performance was made available to the public for greater school accountability. This is particularly important in the context of increased autonomy of schools in managing financial and human resources. As a result, the country demonstrated one of the strongest improvements in performance among PISA-participating countries and economies over 2009–2018 in all three assessed subjects: reading, math, and science. Moldova’s performance is above what is expected considering its GDP per capita.

8. Pandemic-related school closures had negative impacts on learning of students, threatening their future well-being, and productivity in the workplace. The COVID-related school closures are estimated to have impacted learning by an equivalent of 8 PISA points, eroding about 20 percent of learning gains made over the last decade. The learning loss in Moldova’s future earnings due to school closures is estimated at about 0.8 percent of GDP annually. This translates into an aggregated lifetime loss in earnings of US\$2.1 billion. Learning losses caused by the pandemic must be recovered to avoid the erosion of human capital and long-term damage to Moldovan children’s future well-being and productivity. This could be supported by ensuring teachers have tools and supports to conduct rapid assessments to identify students’ real learning levels and take remedial actions. Further improvements in learning outcomes are also needed since the performance levels of countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are ahead by about two years of schooling. Also, a child who starts school at age 4 in Moldova can expect to complete 11.8 years of school by her/his 18th birthday¹¹. However, factoring in what children learn, the expected years of schooling in Moldova is only 8.3 years, representing a learning gap of 3.5 years.

9. In addition, the influx of refugees caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is overwhelming for Moldova. As a share of its population, the country has hosted more Ukrainian refugees than any other country. Most of the refugees from Ukraine entering Moldova are women, of which 33 percent are reported to be travelling with children aged 0–5, 59 percent travelling with children aged 6–18, and up to 10 percent with elderly people, with 5 percent comprising people with disabilities. More than 80,000 refugees have remained in Moldova, of which more than 48,000 are children. The refugees who have decided to remain represent about 4 percent of the total population, the adults represent 6 percent of the active labor force; 2 and school-age refugees represent about 9 percent of the students that regularly attend pre-kindergarten to secondary schools. Moreover, while the capital, Chişinău, remains the main refugee-hosting area, some smaller cities with very limited capacity are also hosting substantial numbers

¹⁰ changing from the traditional, subjective allocation scheme.

¹¹ according to 2020 HCI data.



of refugees relative to their populations. The GoM acted promptly in declaring a State of Emergency and providing shelter, food, medical and educational services, livelihoods, and information to the refugees. The GoM also approved emergency measures aimed at: (i) facilitating entry for Ukrainian citizens and third-country nationals in Ukraine fleeing the war; (ii) facilitating integration into the labor market for those who opt to stay in Moldova; and (iii) granting access to educational services to school-age refugees. The education system, however, lacks the capacity to integrate the refugee students promptly and properly to schools and preschools.

A Targeted approach

10. Significant inequality in learning opportunities, especially between the students from wealthiest and poorest households persists. While learning outcomes had been improving in Moldova prior to the pandemic, there was significant inequality, especially between the wealthiest and poorest households. The pandemic only increased these inequalities. It disproportionately affects disadvantaged students including due to differential access to learning technologies across student groups. In 2021, approximately 80 percent of students living in Chisinau were able to access the internet, but only about half of the students could continue remote learning in the north and south parts of Moldova. According to the estimates, the performance gap between rich and poor students has deepened, increasing the differences in PISA reading scores from 115 points to 123 points, equivalent to over three years of schooling and performance gaps will only widen over time if remain unaddressed. Inequality in learning outcomes leads to inequality in human capital, which in turn abets intergenerational transmission of poverty and poverty traps.

11. Focusing learning recovery and acceleration among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable students is urgent and important to improve equity and inclusion. Despite robust progress on inclusion, the performance gap between students in urban and rural areas represents over one year of schooling). Moreover, the variation in reading performance explained by student and school socioeconomic status is one of the largest among PISA-participating countries. Many disadvantaged students hold lower ambitions than would be expected given their level of academic achievement¹². In addition, there are large gender disparities. Examples include enrollment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and subsequently in employment, or asset ownership. These all represent barriers to better economic opportunities for women¹³. Disability continues to be a cause of educational disadvantage and exclusion¹⁴. Teachers' limited capacities to provide efficient individualized support and lack of relevant technology-enabled systems in schools remain key constraints. Hence, better targeted, and more focused interventions for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable students are essential to enable the path to recovery, to protect and promote the existing human capital, and to build the strong foundational skills and knowledge in preparation for future labor market needs.

¹² PISA 2018 data. About one in three high-achieving disadvantaged students do not expect to complete tertiary education compared to one in ten high-achieving better-off students.

¹³ Moldova Comprehensive Gender Assessment. 2022. [UNDP](#).

¹⁴ despite the fourfold increase in the number of children with disabilities attending mainstream schools over the last decade.



12. School consolidation and the quality of the learning environment are inextricably linked, affecting more students from disadvantaged areas. Education in Moldova is largely publicly financed, with falling or stagnant student numbers in all sub-sectors except for preschool. In recent years, the general education system has been optimized in response to the declining demographic trends (largely through reduction of number of classes and teachers)¹⁵. As a result of the school network consolidation, students are transported to receiving schools when the institution in their locality is closed or downsized. However, these receiving schools offer learning environments that are generally outdated and lack quality educational inputs. While the financial savings from the school consolidation are creating a more efficient education system, more can be done to foster a higher quality of education, particularly for affected students from these disadvantaged areas. True efficiency in the sector can only be realized when fiscal savings are complemented with investments in quality enhancing inputs for the most vulnerable (qualified teachers, modern facilities, appropriate information technology and laboratory equipment). Research increasingly points to positive relationships between the physical conditions of the school and student learning. Students attending schools with an appropriate learning environment (including modern infrastructure, equipment, technology, and learning materials) have shown improvements in learning achievement of 5-10 percent¹⁶, leading to higher earnings throughout their lifetime and faster economic growth at the national level. Without investment in better facilities and modern learning inputs, the impact of the efficiency measures from the school optimization program will not be fully realized in terms of better learning outcomes and long-term economic benefits.

13. The large between-school inequities in learning environments in the upper secondary education provision call for ensuring equitable learning opportunities at this level. Inequitable access to quality upper secondary education (grades 10–12) between urban and rural areas represents a persistent challenge to access to tertiary education. Currently, there are 1,230 public schools that offer grade 1-12 education in the same school building. Of the students in these schools, 36,475 are in upper secondary level (approximately 11 percent). Currently there are 331 schools with students in upper secondary levels, of which 90 percent have less than 75 students in each grade, and almost half of all the schools with upper secondary levels having less than 100 students. Small municipal grade 1-12 schools are unable to offer diverse and high-quality learning opportunities. They are unable to attract quality teachers, ensure strong learning environments or offer alternative courses and extra-curricular activities for high school students. Larger modern schools would offer greater cost efficiency in line with school network optimization efforts through scale, which can in turn ensure greater quality and diversity of learning opportunities for students from both urban and rural areas. This will especially benefit the disadvantaged who will otherwise miss out on access to equitable learning opportunities.

14. Low access to quality of preschool education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds is also a persistent challenge. Without access to quality preschool education, poor children often fall behind their more advantaged peers before they even begin school. Since 2014/15, the gross enrollment rate in preschool education has hovered above 90 percent. Nevertheless, there is lack of access to early

¹⁵ World Bank. 2013. Moldova Public Expenditure Review: Capital Expenditures - Making Public Investment Work for Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth in Moldova. Washington, DC.

¹⁶ World Bank. 2019. The Impact of School Infrastructure on Learning; The Impact of School Infrastructure on Learning: A Synthesis of the Evidence: A Synthesis of the Evidence. International Development in Focus. Washington, DC: World Bank.



childhood education and care (ECEC) services¹⁷ for disadvantaged students. In 2021, almost 1,400 children ages 6–7 years were on the waiting list for a place in preschools. The situation was aggravated by the Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which triggered a massive influx of refugees. Over 80,000 Ukrainian refugees remain currently in Moldova, of which 53 percent are children and around 11,500 are between 0 and 4 years of age. The lack of places in the kindergarten is not only an issue for children, but also for parents, particularly mothers¹⁸. The GoM committed to expand ECEC coverage for younger cohorts for 2-year-olds, particularly for disadvantaged children. Over 20,000 seats need to be created in 1,000 new classrooms with appropriate learning environment and trained educators. The GoM is working to incentivize the private sector participation in the ECEC provision, which is currently in the nascent stage, through revisions of regulatory environment and financing mechanism.

Resilient and high-quality teaching and learning environment

15. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of having a resilient, high-quality learning environment, but schools in Moldova appear to be weak in resilience to external shocks. Resilience of schools is defined as the ability and capacity to withstand natural and manmade hazards, featuring teaching, and learning environment that both protects the fundamental safety of students and ensures continuity of instruction in the face of pandemic-like shocks or natural hazards. About 60 percent of the schools’ buildings in Moldova are more than 50 years old, built between 1950 and 1980, and 55 percent of all schools need major repairs (765 educational institutions). Many schools lack proper water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities. While most schools in the municipalities of Chisinau and Balti have water supply, 31 percent of rural schools do not have access to running water. This has a direct impact on availability of proper WASH facilities in schools. While in the municipalities of Chisinau and Balti 92 percent of the educational institutions have a toilet in the building, this is true only for 45 percent of schools in rural areas. Also, 83 percent of the educational institutions do not have the adapted sanitary facilities for students with disabilities. Most schools and many preschools do not comply with safety and resilience requirements stipulated by the national regulations including the MoER’s minimum quality assurance standards for schools covering requirements to teaching, infrastructure and equipment. In many schools and preschools, investments typically deal with a single issue—for example, energy efficiency, addition of WASH facilities, or interior repairs—and do not provide a comprehensive and integrated solution for safer, inclusive, and sustainable schools that meet safety and functionality requirements. Quality and safety of school infrastructure is an important determinant in educational outcomes. Students’ performance is enhanced in schools with quality physical and digital teaching and learning environments¹⁹.

¹⁷ ECEC is the term used in Moldova refers to care for young children aged 0-7. Some centers offer only partial care, while others offer full day care and fulfill a childcare function to enable parents to work.

¹⁸ Despite a large influx of women into the main jobs in the service sector, they continue to be underrepresented in the workforce and earn less than men. The main cause of the differences is related to the greater responsibilities of women in raising their children and housework. The data for the year 2019 prove that the existence of a preschool-aged child in the family significantly influences the presence of men and women on the labor market. In the urban area, the employment rate of men with at least one child is 76.2 percent, while for women it is only 41 percent, representing a gender gap of 35.1 percentage points.

¹⁹ Barrett, P.; Treves, A.; Shmis, T.; Ambasz, D.; Ustinova, M. 2019. The Impact of School Infrastructure on Learning: A Synthesis of the Evidence. International Development in Focus. Washington, DC: World Bank. New technologies and emerging pedagogical practices create new requirements for school buildings.



16. Capacity for resilient teaching²⁰ is also low. A shift to using modern, digital, student-centered, gender-sensitive teaching approaches, which according to research have a positive impact on student motivation, requires securing teachers' access to continuous professional development in their subject area, pedagogy, and digital skills. At the same time, in Moldova traditional lecture-based teaching pedagogies prevail. The teacher professional standards do not incorporate digital competences and hence digital pedagogy is not yet fully embedded into teacher development programs. Moreover, low teacher capacity to manage and use digital devices in classrooms is also a significant constraint. Learning of STEM subjects, among others, is also theoretical and disconnected. Finally, professional development opportunities are quite limited (World Bank Group 2014).

System-level transformations and institutional capacity building

17. While the pandemic amplified learning inequities, it also presented an opportunity to modernize the education system. The crisis revealed the fragility of the country's education system and demonstrated the need to continue pursuing strong education policy reforms, fostering the use of technologies and innovative solutions in the classroom, while strengthening institutions and systems with a focus on the most disadvantaged groups including refugee students from Ukraine. The Moldova Digital Education Readiness Assessment (2021–22) identified four strategic policy areas for pre-university education, namely: (a) supporting learning recovery, (b) improving effectiveness of teaching and learning as well as pedagogic and administrative management, (c) improving equity and inclusion, and (d) improving resilience. Institutional capacity to plan, implement and evaluate forward-looking education reforms also needs strengthening to ensure transformational changes and improved sector performance. The assessment proposed a list of priority actions for Moldova's education sector, many of which on the digital readiness agenda are supported by development partners.

18. A system wide reform embracing a competency-based teaching and learning requires significant changes in pedagogical practices. Despite the efforts of the education authorities and school leaders to promote student-centered 'active learning' and improve teacher effectiveness in classrooms, currently a direct instruction and lecture-based teaching still dominates in the classroom. Digital competence is also a key competence that teachers should possess. Teacher professional standards need to be revised to incorporate digital pedagogy. The standards establish a foundation upon which all aspects of teacher development from teacher education to induction and ongoing professional development is aligned. The standards also aim to help teachers in reflecting on their teaching practice and its impact on student learning, guiding the development of teachers throughout their careers as they work to improve teaching practices. It is also important to ensure the system of yearly continuous professional development, including in digitalization of teacher practices.

19. Strengthening better planning, managing, and evaluating education reforms should help ensure smarter investments in the education sector. The global spread of COVID-19 has led to unprecedented disruptions in schooling requiring understanding of how students' learning has changed. Moldova's participation in PISA 2025 and the analysis of PISA 2022 results are important for managing learning recovery from the pandemic. The MoER consolidated and strengthened the student-level EMIS to support

²⁰ Resilient teaching is the ability to continue instruction and facilitate learning of students in the face of external disruptions.



evidence-based decision-making²¹. EMIS now covers preschool, primary, general secondary and vocational education data, which are regularly collected by the system. Reports on the performance of each school are produced and disclosed annually. However, significant differences exist between data reported in the EMIS open data portal and data published by the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova. A single integrated EMIS capable of linking information on students with population register data and financing data of the Ministry of Finance is currently lacking. The existence of the current EMIS and established data reporting practices makes for a solid foundation for the development of an integrated EMIS in line with international best practices. The need for data-informed, evidence-based decision-making is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of resource use and improving the quality of education. The assessment and EMIS data should help identify constraints to learning, to iteratively adapt school conditions through smarter investments in the education sector.

C. Proposed Development Objectives

20. Project Development Objectives are to: (i) improve teaching practices of participating teachers and physical learning environments of selected educational institutions; (ii) strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Research for sector management and refugee response; and (iii) in case of an Eligible Crisis or Emergency, respond promptly and effectively to it.

Key Results

- Improved teaching practices of participating teachers (percentage)
- Students benefiting from improved learning environment under the project (girls/boys, urban/rural, refugee students, vulnerability status, education level) (number)
- Annual statistics reports produced using data generated by the integrated EMIS (text)

²¹ Under support of the completed World Bank-financed Moldova Education Reform Project.



D. Project Description

21 The proposed Project aims to improve the quality of education service delivery in Moldova, with an emphasis on disadvantaged students. The first component will focus on enhancing teacher effectiveness through innovations in teaching practices to support learning recovery especially for disadvantaged students. The second component, improving the quality and resilience of physical and digital learning environments in targeted schools, will address critical issues of between-school inequities in learning environments across urban and rural areas. The third component will support the development of institutional capacity to design, pilot, evaluate, and scale up the envisaged reforms, while strengthening project management, implementation, and monitoring capacity, and, in particular to support national and subnational capacity to lead ECEC and basic education reforms to improve access of disadvantaged children including refugees from Ukraine to quality education services. To harness the opportunities of digital transformation, the project will support as a cross-cutting area efforts to embrace systemic changes that promote digitalization practices in education. The fourth Contingent Emergency Response Component (CERC) will support the country's future response in the event of a natural or manmade disaster or emergency.

Component 1: Improve teaching practices (US\$8.6 million IBRD; US\$2.7 million ELP; US\$4.7 million GPE)

21. The objective of this component is to improve teaching practices in the classroom as a major element driving student learning. The Project will help equip teachers with the skills required to succeed in the classroom including raising the awareness and knowledge of teacher professional standards, and improving teacher's digital skills and classroom management skills. This component will finance: (a) nationwide implementation of national teachers' and managers' professional standards; (b) nationwide rollout of teacher quality assessment; (c) development and implementation of in-service teacher training for ECE teachers and educators; (d) periodic assessment of quality of ECEC service delivery; (e) provision of indoor and outdoor teaching and learning and play materials; (f) development, piloting and implementation of the rapid student assessments to identify students who are falling behind; and (g) development and implementation of tutoring or other learning recovery program; (h) decentralized approach to teacher professional development and innovative instructional practices. Activities under this component will support Pillar 4 of the GCRF through strengthening the education sector in Moldova to be more resilient to future crises. This will be achieved through training of teachers and managers on the revised professional standards, which will include standards related to digital skills in schools to help students continue to learn uninterrupted. The component will provide capacity building to staff across prioritized educational institutions to implement the new professional standards, support energy efficiency in schools, focus on equitable access to quality education, and enhance digital skills and the use of digital technology in schools. Teachers and managers from schools with the larger share of disadvantaged students will be prioritized for the in-service training on the revised teacher professional standards, and effective classroom management strategies. This targeting strategy will ensure convergence among project activities envisaged under components 1 and 2.

Component 2: Improve the quality and resilience of learning environment in selected educational institutions (US\$24.7 million IBRD; US\$2.3 million ELP)

22. The objective of this component is to improve the quality and resilience of (physical and digital) learning environments in targeted schools (grades 1-12) and preschools aligned to the quality standards for infrastructure and equipment. This component will finance: (i) the physical and digital modernization of learning environments in around 200 selected schools including equipping them with the necessary laboratory and IT equipment; (ii) rehabilitation in about 15 schools and 15 preschools to improve access for children in Moldova and refugee children from Ukraine, and (iii) construction of three new high schools as part of the upper secondary education reform. The proposed Project aims



to comprehensively address development challenges related to safety, resilience, inclusion, and sustainability of infrastructure.

Component 3: Strengthen education sector management, project management, and M&E (US\$6.7 million IBRD)

Subcomponent 3.1: Support nationwide education sector management and refugee response

23. This subcomponent will support improved planning, management, and evaluation of education reforms in the following areas: (i) improvement of the existing EMIS and making better use of data to support management decisions at all levels; (ii) national and international student assessments; (iii) revision of the teacher and managers professional standards; (iv) improved nationwide education infrastructure investments planning for modern and resilient school infrastructure and climate change adaptation of the education system; and (v) national and subnational capacity to lead ECEC and upper secondary education reforms. The project will support critical sectoral studies, capacity building, and evidence-based policy planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of reforms, refugee response, and project interventions. Under activity (iii), professional standards for teachers and managers—which define the pedagogical and other professional knowledge and skills required of all educators—will be revised to include digital pedagogy.

Subcomponent 3.2: Project management, monitoring, and evaluation

24. This subcomponent will provide support for project management activities including project supervision, procurement, and financial management (FM), environmental and social (E&S) management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), verifications, and essential communications strategy. It will support the MoER/PMT and National Office for Regional and Local Development (NORLD) team with staff responsible for fiduciary responsibilities, adherence to environmental and social standards, technical oversight, monitoring and evaluation, annual audits, stakeholder engagement and consultations, and services of the verification agency. Support will also focus on strengthening the institutional capacity of the MoER and NORLD to carry out project implementation.

Component 4: Contingent Emergency Response Component (US\$0)

25. This component is included with the objective to support the country’s future response if a natural or manmade disaster or emergency arises, in line with the procedures governed by paragraph 12, Section III of the Bank Policy, Investment Project Financing (IPF) on Projects in Situations of Urgent Need of Assistance or Capacity Constraints.

Legal Operational Policies

Triggered?

Projects on International Waterways OP 7.50

No

Projects in Disputed Areas OP 7.60

No

Summary of Assessment of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts



26. The project is processed under the new ESF and is classified as Moderate for both environmental and social risks. The potential environmental risks are mainly generated by the activities under Component 2 as associated with civil works for the construction of the high schools, with site-contained pollution and controlled flows of construction waste. At this stage, the specific locations where physical works will take place are yet to be identified, but based on the description of project activities, key environmental and social issues will be related to: (i) waste management related to the new construction, (ii) health and safety of workers during construction, (iii) discomfort of neighbors (to be identified) as a result of air and noise pollution during construction, (iv) erosion from earth works and run-off, (v) impacts on water quality and quantity, and (vi) handling of dangerous substances during operation of science/chemistry labs which need to be carefully monitored to respect all occupational health and safety, and good laboratory practices etc.

27. On social considerations, the project's interventions are designed to involve substantial contributions to equity in access and quality improvements to education for the most underserved and vulnerable segments of the population, specifically poor rural children, persons with disabilities, and refugee children. Indirect benefits include enabling women who would otherwise be unpaid caregivers to participate in the labor market. MoER has confirmed that land acquisition is not required, and that all construction activities will occur on available state land and within the confines of existing school premises. Principles of universal access will inform the design and operation of these new high schools in terms of physical access, safety and emergency egress, and access to learning opportunities to ensure inclusion and safety of persons with disabilities.

28. The MoER and NORLD have good experience with the previous projects on the Bank's safeguards and ESF potential training could be further required to build the capacity on the application of the Environmental and Social Standards. The above specified environmental and social risks will be managed through robust and well-implemented mitigation measures, which are outlined in the Project's ESMF prepared by MoER and NORLD. The ESMF clearly sets out the environmental and social assessment requirements of the activities under component two and provide guidance on the preparation of site-specific ESMPs and/or checklists, as well as the Contractors' Codes of Conduct.

E. Implementation

Institutional and Implementation Arrangements

29. the proposed project would be implemented by (a) the MoER for Components 1, 3, and 4, as well as Subcomponent 2.1 and (b) National Office for Regional and Local Development (NORLD) for Subcomponent 2.2 and 2.3. (civil works and related consulting services).

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APPROVAL

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