



Project Information Document (PID)

Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 06-Nov-2022 | Report No: PIDC34626

**BASIC INFORMATION****A. Basic Project Data**

Country Moldova	Project ID P179363	Parent Project ID (if any)	Project Name Education Quality Improvement Project (P179363)
Region EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	Estimated Appraisal Date Mar 15, 2023	Estimated Board Date May 31, 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)

The Project Development Objective is to improve quality of education service delivery in Moldova, with an emphasis on disadvantaged students.

PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)**SUMMARY**

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

DETAILS**World Bank Group Financing**

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	40.00
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Environmental and Social Risk Classification
Moderate

Concept Review Decision
Track I-The review did authorize the preparation to continue



B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

1. Moldova is at a historic moment having gained EU candidate status since June 2022, but its path toward a better future is paved with multiple concurrent crises. It is an upper-middle-income country in a state of economic transition. Despite a solid economic performance and strong poverty reduction over the past two decades, Moldova remains among the poorest countries in Europe.¹ The country is undergoing a significant demographic decline, with permanent emigration being a key reason behind the demographic contraction. The pandemic and a severe drought in 2020 have revealed the intrinsic vulnerabilities of the country's economic growth model, which suffers from limited resilience to shocks. The war in neighboring Ukraine caused the refugee crisis and intensified inflation and the energy crisis, negatively affecting the purchasing power of Moldovan households and squeezing 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. Through convergence with economic, judicial, 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 GoM's National Development Strategy 'European Moldova 2030' (NDS),² aligned with EU integration, has an ambitious, forward-looking reform agenda. NDS calls for a shift from the current consumption-based growth model toward a growth model based on raising investment, increasing productivity and competitiveness, developing export industries, and promoting a knowledge-based society. An updated NDS prioritizes the following areas: (a) sustainable and inclusive economic development, (b) long-term human and social capital, (c) honest and efficient institutions, and (d) a healthy environment. It aims to improve the institutional and governance environment, strengthen competition, improve the business environment, stimulate foreign direct investment in export-oriented sectors, and invest in human capital to create jobs and reduce labor emigration.

3. The NDS recognizes that investments in human capital development of Moldova are critical for reaching the economic development objectives of the GoM. The country has made some progress on human development. Between 2010 and 2020, the Human Capital Index (HCI) value increased from 0.56 to 0.58.³ This means 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. Moldova ranks 75 out of 157 countries on HCI so there is significant room for improvement to reach the human capital levels of more advanced high-income countries, which have an average HCI of 71 percent. 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.

4. Moldova has a continued need to strengthen its service delivery systems to reduce inequality in opportunities in the face of numerous challenges. Inequality of opportunity in Moldova is among the highest in the ECA region, with access

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 the COVID-19 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>.

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.



to services that are important for human capital accumulation and productivity substantially lower in rural areas and among lower-income households (World Bank, 2021). Large urban-rural disparities in living standards⁵ and a high degree of inequality of opportunity persist,⁶ mainly across the spatial dimension. 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 rural 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 currently housing around 80,000 Ukrainian refugees. The estimated 90 percent of refugees from Ukraine are women and children, concentrated predominantly in urban areas. Forced displacement significantly increases the likelihood of being multidimensionally poor: gender has an important impact on individual deprivations within households, especially when family structures are disrupted. The large number of refugees also puts additional pressure on service delivery systems.

5. The impacts of climate change also pose an increasing vulnerability to Moldova. The 2020 drought was 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, and this is expected to more than double to US\$1.3 billion by 2050. Flooding also poses a high cost on Moldova's economy, estimated to be at least US\$62 million annually. Similarly, droughts have large impacts, as agriculture continues to rely mostly on rainfall. 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, and Vulnerable segments of the 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 country also has the opportunity to take advantage of the EU accession process, to increase efficiency and diversification of energy sources including renewables, and in turn improve Moldova's overall competitiveness and resilience, considering the EU Green Deal initiative.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

6. Education is a national priority for Moldova in the National Development Strategy 'European Moldova 2030'⁷. Relevant quality education for all is the top priority of the 'European Moldova 2030' Strategy centered on the quality of life. 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 EU. Education is a powerful driver of human capital development and one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty, improving health and gender equality, and bringing peace and stability, thereby contributing to improvements in the quality of life. Education delivers large, consistent returns in terms of income (8.7 percent increase in earnings is associated with an increase in one year of schooling in Moldova)⁸ and is one of the most important factors to ensure equality of opportunities.

7. Under the Moldova Education Strategy 2014-2020, the GoM implemented comprehensive reforms to improve learning and value for money in education. The student assessment and examination systems were strengthened through:

⁵ Poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon, with over 82 percent of the poor being less educated and older, and self-employed in agriculture.

⁶ The gap in access to opportunities as measured by the Human Opportunity Index is 34 and 52 percent for urban and rural areas, respectively.

⁷ The main objectives of the new Moldova Education Strategy and Action Plan 2030 (under development) are: adapting education to the requirements and needs of the labor market, ensuring access for all to quality education throughout life, strengthening socio-educational cohesion for quality education, effective implementation of digital technologies, creating opportunities for lifelong learning and education in the formal, non-formal and informal contexts, promoting innovation and change in education including through the development of scientific research.

⁸ <https://hpatrinos.com/returns-to-education/>.



(i) overhaul of baccalaureate examination administration process which helped tackle cheating and corruption, (ii) country's participation in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and (iii) revision of 4th and 9th grade national assessments. When released, PISA results are analyzed, publicly disseminated, and are used to improve curriculum and education process. 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 gradually implemented. In-service training programs for teachers and school managers on professional standards were developed and rolled out. Over 50 percent of school managers and 20 percent of teachers have already successfully completed these programs. The GoM also took critical steps to improve resource allocation and increase efficiency and transparency of education spending by adopting per-student financing of schools (instead of traditional, inputs-based system). The GoM also opened data on school budgets and performance of schools. As a result, parents now have better ability to hold schools accountable for the quality of education services provided, which is particularly important in the context of increased autonomy of school in managing financial and human resources. Furthermore, Education Management Information System (EMIS) was re-engineered to provide data at school, teacher and student levels, thus supporting evidence-based decision-making. Many of these reforms were supported by the ongoing World Bank-finance Moldova Education Reform Project.

8. As a result, Moldova made significant progress on education outcomes over the last decades, but further improvements are needed. Moldova demonstrated one of the strongest improvements in performance among PISA-participating countries and economies in 2009–2018 in all three assessed subjects: reading, math, and science. The country's performance is above what is expected considering its GDP per capita. At the same time, in the 2018 round, Moldova made progress only in reading. The country needs to continue advancing toward performance levels of the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which are ahead by over 2 years of schooling. According to 2020 HCI data, a child who starts school at age 4 in Moldova can expect to complete 11.8 years of school by her/his 18th birthday. However, factoring in what children learn, expected years of schooling is only 8.3 years, representing a learning gap of 3.5 years.

9. Continued efforts are also important to improve equity and inclusion. According to PISA 2018 results performance gap between students in urban and rural areas represents 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 students, especially disadvantaged students, hold lower ambitions than would be expected given their academic achievement. 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). In addition, gender disparities such as in enrollment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and subsequently in employment and asset ownership, represent barriers to better economic opportunities for women of Moldova. Despite robust progress on inclusion, disability continues to be a cause of educational disadvantage and exclusion. The GoM ensured a fourfold increase in the number of children with disabilities or special needs attending mainstream schools since 2012 but about 700 children with disabilities still attend segregated special schools. For those in mainstream schools, the major challenges for successful inclusion and quality learning outcomes are teachers' limited capacities to provide efficient individualized support and lack of related technology-enabled support systems in schools.

10. The GoM recognizes that early years represent a unique opportunity for investing in human capital. 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 notably hovered above 90 percent. Despite the progress made, lack of access to preschool education is a persistent challenge for disadvantaged children and younger cohorts. There are insufficient places: in 2021, almost 1,400 children ages 6–7 years were on the waiting list for a place in preschools. The situation is aggravated by the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which triggered a massive influx



of refugees. As a share of its population, Moldova has hosted more Ukrainian refugees than any other country. Over 86,000 Ukrainian refugees remain currently in Moldova, of which 53 percent are children and around 11,500 are between 0 and 4 years. The lack of preschool places is no longer only a barrier to the development of Moldovan children and the employment of women but also to the Ukrainian refugees. Amendments to labor and education legislation have attempted to remedy the situation, including by enabling private employers to provide preschool facilities for employees, but it requires further support for it to materialize. The GoM has also recently committed to support ECD services for 2-year-olds. Over 20,000 seats need to be created according to this commitment, necessitating creation and capacitation of at least 1,000 new groups and classrooms for these children with appropriate learning environment and trained educators. While this is a tremendous step in the right direction to help tackle the low enrollment rates of the younger cohorts, the capacity and financing need to be worked out for this to materialize. In addition, kindergartens act more as daycare centers than learning centers, and lack learning materials and support for refugees from Ukraine.

11. The pandemic, the refugee crisis, the energy crisis and inflation pressures have revealed the fragility of the country's education system. Due to the COVID-19 school closures, learning is estimated to have dropped by an equivalent of 8 PISA points, eroding about 20 percent of learning gains made by Moldova over the last decade. The gaps between the better-off and disadvantaged students also tend to deepen, due to differential access to technologies among others. Assuming that a student gains 40 PISA points of learning during an academic year, and that schools have been closed for around four months on average, and that remote learning is about half as effective as face-to-face learning, reading scores may have decreased from 424 points to 416 points post-COVID. The effect of school closures is also expected to generate significant losses in future earnings. The estimated loss in Moldova's future earnings due to school closures is estimated at about 0.8 percent of GDP annually. Without accelerated learning, this could translate into an aggregated lifetime loss in earnings of US\$2.1 billion. Moreover, new challenges may aggravate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on learning if schools are to close in winter due to issues with heating. Learning losses must be recovered and further losses prevented to avoid the erosion of human capital and long-term damage to Moldovan children's future well-being and productivity.

12. The COVID pandemic has also disproportionately affected 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. However, access to the internet was much lower in other parts of the country, with only about half of the students living in the north and central parts of Moldova able to access the internet. 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 four years of schooling. However, the system lacks the rapid assessment tools and support systems (tutoring, remedial, or other catch-up programs) to identify and support the lagging students.

13. While challenges unleashed by COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis amplified and widened the learning inequities in Moldova, these developments have also presented a unique opportunity to transform the education system. The school closures due to COVID-19, the energy crisis, and the refugee crisis clearly demonstrate the need to continue strong policy responses, smart use of technologies and innovative solutions, while improving service delivery and strengthening institutions and systems for human capital development with a focus on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable students. To harness this opportunity, it is important to embrace systemic changes in education that make digitalization practices habitual, so these become part of the daily experience of teachers and students.

14. Advancing the digital transition of Moldova's education system requires a coordinated, comprehensive, and coherent approach to human capital development to consolidate its benefits. The Moldova - Digital Education Readiness Assessment 2021–22, conducted by the WB team using an evidence-based, comprehensive, system-level assessment, identified the key barriers and opportunities to digitalization in Moldova's education system. It determined that the



education system is at an emerging stage of readiness for digital transformation. The enabling environment at the level of the economy is more advanced and can be suitably leveraged. It identified implementation and monitoring with effective data governance as the biggest roadblock in Moldova's education reform efforts and that the education system needs to be both a rapid consumer and avid producer of digital and data skills. The study suggested that four strategic policy areas for improving learning are necessary, which will benefit from greater digital readiness: (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. This should be considered in tandem with the support from various development partners in the area of digital transformation of the education sector.

15. Teachers are the key element for a quality education, yet there are many challenges related to teaching in Moldova. Entry requirements, salaries, and career and professional development opportunities are not appealing for talented candidates. Graduates of education programs are not entering teaching professions after graduation, preferring other better paid jobs. Nearly 50 percent of teachers are above 50 years compared to the OECD average of 30 percent. The distribution of teachers by age group reveals that nearly 26.7 percent of teachers are between 50 and 59 years and 20 percent are over 60 years. Administrative systems are in place to identify teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools and across subject areas (concentrated in mathematics, physics, and chemistry), but mechanisms and incentives to address those shortages do not always work. New teachers have opportunities to develop practical teaching skills but only for a limited period before they are expected to teach without guidance, and while there are professional development opportunities, teachers need to pay for some programs.

16. Moldova also lacks adequate mechanisms to motivate teachers, make the teaching career attractive to competent individuals, and reward good performance. A new remuneration program needs to be designed and piloted to attract, develop, and retain teachers and school leaders efficiently and effectively and to improve teaching quality and staff performance. Teachers should be recognized and rewarded for investing time and effort into activities related to instructional improvement by making the latter a prominent part of the teacher standards and of the criteria for performance appraisal. It is also important to improve the motivation of teachers, including young teachers and those working with disadvantaged students and in hard-to-staff schools and subject areas.

17. The existing large between-school inequities in learning environments and the poor state of existing infrastructure call for a new approach, especially for upper secondary students. Inequitable access to quality upper secondary education (grades 10–12) between urban and rural areas represents a persistent challenge to raising human capital outcomes. Public schools offer education from grade 1 to grade 12 in the same school. Under this approach, schools struggle to find teachers in specific subjects like science and math and are unable to provide strong learning environments or well-equipped laboratories, as well as offer alternative courses and extra-curricular activities for high school students. Larger high schools as hubs for students from urban and rural areas are required to support equitable access to quality learning opportunities. Students' performance is enhanced in schools with better physical and digital learning environments⁹. New technologies and emerging pedagogical practices create new requirements for school buildings. As a result, new approaches evolve to building learning environments that create better learning spaces for children and increase the efficiency of investments in educational infrastructure. Countries around the world take actions to have better school infrastructure with modern, clean, energy-efficient facilities, with advanced solutions such as energy efficiency retrofits and resilient design. In contrast, the average school in Moldova was built in 1971. Many still lack proper water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities; and some schools are too old to allow rehabilitation to create a conducive learning environment, limiting accessibility for children with disabilities.

⁹ 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.



Relationship to CPF

18. The proposed project is fully aligned with the current FY18–21 Country Partnership Framework (CPF),¹⁰ which supports the country's transition toward a new, more sustainable, and inclusive development and growth model, by focusing on the following priority areas: economic governance, service governance, and skills development, complemented as a cross-cutting theme by climate change adaptation and mitigation—a World Bank Group corporate priority. While the current CPF is in draft form, the human development agenda is an ongoing pillar of the GoM and the World Bank's partnership, requiring constant efforts to build a productive and resilient human capital. The proposed project is fully aligned with the draft FY23–27 CPF anchored in the GoM's National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030".

19. The proposed project will support the attainment of high-level outcome 2 (HLO 2): Improved Human Capital, Objective 2.1: Increase the quality and relevance of educational services, helping the Government reduce inequalities in access to education services, improve the quality of education services, with the focus on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in Moldova including refugees from the war in Ukraine. The proposed project will aim to improve the quality of education service delivery by supporting learning recovery and accelerated learning, enhancing teacher effectiveness, and strengthening the system capacity and resilience. The current project would build on and enhance the results of the MERP and its Additional Financing (P156657) closing on December 31, 2022. The project would also complement the ongoing MHEP in pedagogical field. In relation to the CPF's climate change cross-cutting theme, the proposed project will aim to maximize the climate adaptation and mitigation co-benefits through improved infrastructure and strengthened climate change education. The project will also include the Contingent Emergency Response Component to support the country's future response if a natural or manmade disaster or emergency arises.

C. Proposed Development Objective

20. The Project Development Objective is to improve quality of education service delivery in Moldova, with an emphasis on disadvantaged students.

21. The project will cover preprimary, primary and secondary education service delivery in project supported schools and kindergartens. Disadvantaged students include poor rural students, girls, children with disabilities and special needs, refugees and students lagging academically.

D. Concept Description

22. Selection of areas for support in the proposed project is made in coordination with education stakeholders. The scale and interconnected nature of the challenges Moldova faces, in comparison with the fiscal space afforded by public finances and development partner allocations, requires careful choice of focus to maximize the development impact of the new project. To do this, the proposed project would provide targeted support to the most disadvantaged students while addressing the challenges in the sector, also considering the projects and programs of other development partners. The project will be financed by IBRD and potentially by multi-donor trust funds.

23. The proposed financing instrument is Investment Project Financing (IPF) with Performance-Based Conditions (PBCs). The MoER already has experience with IPF with disbursement-linked conditions (DLRs), predecessor to PBCs. All PBCs will be identified during project preparation. The extent and applicability of the PBC approach will be examined during project preparation.

¹⁰ Report #115716-MD.



24. The proposed Education Quality Improvement Project (P179363) will aim 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 for improved student learning, including innovations in teaching, learning loss recovery, and accelerated learning for disadvantaged students. This component will also pilot new teacher motivation approaches to improve the attractiveness of teaching as a profession. 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 in urban and rural areas, with the focus on upper secondary level. The third component will support improving access of disadvantaged children including refugees from Ukraine to quality early childhood development (ECD) services within the current network of state-owned kindergartens and also by piloting a model of private sector provision. The aim is to harness the potential of the private sector to close the gap in ECD service provision in Moldova, in an inclusive manner, while increasing access for refugee children from Ukraine to ECD services and their mothers to the labor market, thereby reducing their economic and social vulnerability. The fourth 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. 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 fifth 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 Screening of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts	

25. The Project's environmental risks are anticipated to be moderate. The moderate risk rating will be reassessed during project preparation, once more information on the scale of construction becomes available, as construction works could result in generation of significant waste and occupational health and safety (OHS) related risks. Although the long-term impacts of the Project are likely to be positive, its activities carry several risks that are mainly generated by the activities under Component 2. The potential environmental risks are mainly associated with civil works for the construction of the high school (model hub schools), with site-contained pollution and controlled flows of construction waste. The environmental risks associated with these works are classified as moderate under the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF). The moderate risk rating is proposed because the likely impacts will be site specific, limited to the immediate surroundings and can be managed through the implementation of cost-effective mitigation measures.

26. At this stage of preparation, the specific locations where physical works will take place are yet to be identified, but based on the project description of the possible 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 the construction phase, (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, (vi) handling of dangerous substances during operation of science/chemistry labs which need to be carefully monitored in respect to all OHS and good laboratory practices etc.



However, no large scale and/or irreversible adverse impact, direct or indirect, is expected to occur from activities under the proposed project. No adverse impacts such as impacts on biodiversity and habitats are expected.

27. The Client has 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 new Environmental and Social Standards (ESS). The above specified environmental risks will be managed through robust and well-implemented mitigation measures, which will be outlined in the Project's Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) that will be prepared by MoER and National Office for Regional and Local Development (NORLD). The ESMF will clearly set out the environmental and social assessment requirements of the activities under component two and provide guidance on the preparation of site-specific Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs) and/or checklists, as well as the Contractors' Codes of Conduct. ESMF will refer to activities that can be addressed with good engineering and construction practices, as well as by preparing and implementing adequate mitigation measures and applying the adequate work-related health and safety practices (OHS aspects) during construction both for the construction workers and the related communities. As the project will also include Contingent Emergency Response Component (CERC), the ESMF will respectively provide for environmental and social guidelines for such emergency cases.

28. The project's social risk rating is assessed as moderate. The project 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. Despite this, there are some social risks involved including the potential for minor land acquisition that needs to be confirmed by further screening during preparation once already available state lands are selected. Construction would likely be limited to two to three specific sites and involve common and manageable community and worker health and safety issues associated with building, movement and use of machinery and interactions with local road traffic and population movements. The creation and implementation of new high school hubs and potentially use of dormitory accommodation brings vulnerable students together posing child protection, social inclusion, and gender-based violence risks especially for refugee children, those with disabilities, and those from poor rural settings but with available measures these are likely to be preventable. 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 in order to ensure inclusion and safety of persons with disabilities.

29. Alternative teacher motivation actions will require a well-functioning grievance mechanism and engagement with teacher associations. Early education child protection risks also need to be considered in the promotion of private sector engagement. Cases of violence against children in Moldova are reported by teachers and school managers, and are registered by police. Violence between children at school is also reportedly fueled by social norms and prejudices and involves bullying, cyber-bullying and gender-based violence. Assessment of GBV risk will be undertaken and preventative actions along with awareness raising activities, identification of relevant GBV services, a procedure for reporting allegations and an accountability and response framework will be described in the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse/Sexual Harassment (SEA/SH) Action Plan to be included as part of the ESMF.



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