Reforming School Education in Romania: Strengthening Governance, Evaluation and Support Systems

Romania's education system is at a turning point. In 2023, the Romanian parliament adopted a new law on pre-university education that sets out significant changes to how schooling is provided, governed and resourced. These changes come at a critical time for the country's development. While Romania is one of Europe's fastest-growing economies, its education outcomes remain among the lowest in the European Union. The measures in the new law are crucial for ensuring quality education, fostering economic growth and enhancing inclusivity.

This policy perspective offers recommendations on how to take forward planned reforms. It focuses on four specific sets of policies that will be instrumental in improving school quality and equity: school evaluation and support; resources for education; the teaching profession; and the data and monitoring system. At the centre of these are proposals to make teaching a highly skilled and rewarding profession by better connecting performance, promotion and pay, and progressively strengthening schools' pedagogical leadership through developmental school evaluations and support. At a strategic level, Romania will need a step change in how education policies are funded and evaluated. This implies more strategic planning and budgeting to align resources with long-term policy priorities, and much-expanded analytical capacities to monitor and evaluate implementation and outcomes and hold institutions accountable.

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1. Introduction

On 4 July 2023, the Romanian Parliament passed a new law on pre-university education[1] (the 2023 Law hereafter) that sets out significant changes to how schooling is provided, governed and resourced. The law comes at a critical time for the country's development. While Romania is one of Europe's fastest-growing economies, its education outcomes remain among the lowest within the European Union. A large share of Romanian students lacks basic skills; rates of early school leaving are high; and disparities between rural and urban schools are growing. The measures introduced in the new law are therefore important, both to provide quality education for all students and to sustain the country's economic growth and make it more inclusive.

This policy perspective offers guidance on how to take forward this reform. While the law is comprehensive, this paper focuses on four specific sets of policies that will be instrumental in improving school quality and equity. At the centre of these are policies intended to make teaching a highly skilled profession by better connecting performance, promotion and pay, and to transform how schools are supported and held accountable. The paper also examines plans to strengthen the Ministry of Education's capacities to monitor and evaluate reform and provides guidance on how to use planned increases in education spending efficiently.

This policy perspective was undertaken by the OECD as part of a Technical Support Instrument project funded by the European Union's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) and produced at the request of, and in close collaboration with, Romania's Ministry of Education (see Box 1). It is structured in six sections: 1) this introduction; 2) a summary of OECD recommendations and an in-depth analysis of four key areas of the reform, which are detailed in subsequent sections, as follows; 3) school evaluation and support; 4) resources for education; 5) the teaching profession; and 6) the data and monitoring system.

> **Box 1. Overview of the project and methodology**
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> This publication is the final output of a project designed to generate evidence and advice for the Romanian Ministry of Education on the implementation of the 2023 Law. It proposes measures to take forward planned changes in the law and offers longer-term recommendations. The Technical Support Instrument project, "Support for Strengthening the Governance Model in Pre-tertiary Education in Romania", was undertaken from September 2022 to May 2024. It had three main outputs:
>
> - A **diagnostic report** that analysed major issues of Romania's school system and the strengths and challenges of the reforms. It highlighted critical questions for the country to ensure that planned changes translate into improvements in education quality, equity and efficiency. It also described possible approaches and international examples. The report drew on a comprehensive background questionnaire completed by Romania's Ministry of Education, desk research and a fact-finding mission to the country.
> - A **workshop series** with different education stakeholders in Romania and invited OECD countries. The objectives were to learn from the OECD evidence base and to present and discuss the considerations outlined in the diagnostic report. The discussions provided the basis for formulating recommendations on the measures to take forward planned changes.
> - This **policy perspective**, which provides concrete recommendations on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2023 Law.

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[1] Official Gazette of Romania, no. 613 of 5 July 2023, Law 198 04/07/2023

The 2023 pre-university education law and the "Educated Romania" initiative

The 2023 Law provides a new overarching national framework for establishing and delivering school education in Romania. It introduces standards, higher salaries and job-embedded professional development to support effective teaching. It reorganises responsibilities for school evaluation and support to give schools consistent guidance on what matters most for their improvement. It also increases public expenditure in education to invest in the professional capabilities, teaching resources and data systems needed to deliver reform objectives and allocates more resources to disadvantaged schools and students. Figure 1 provides an overview of the planned changes analysed in this policy perspective and their intended impact.

While Romania has introduced several major legislative changes to education since transitioning to democracy, this new reform stands out for two reasons. First, it is the first to be informed by a long-term vision for the sector, drawing on the analysis and extensive national consultations of the presidential initiative, "Educated Romania".[2] Second, the reform takes place against the backdrop of a significant increase in European funding made available to Romania through the country's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) 2021-2026. Investments in the plan directly support some of the measures outlined in the 2023 Law and the "Educated Romania" report (European Commission, 2022[1]). This includes funding to help schools reduce early school leaving, develop school leadership and evaluation capacity, and strengthen strategic budgeting and planning (European Parliament, 2023[2]).

Figure 1. Planned changes brought by the 2023 pre-university education law

ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS	PLANNED CHANGES	INTENDED IMPACT
Clear mandates	**Reorganising responsibilities for school evaluation and support** • Consolidating the Agency for Quality Assurance and Inspection in Pre-university Education (ARACIIP) as the main external evaluator • Giving counties a more explicit support role	"Make Romania a resilient and high-performing country, where access to quality education is provided to every learner and where teachers are mentors and professionals who are continuously upskilling themselves to meet emerging national and global curriculum needs" Educated Romania, 14 July 2021
Capabilities and resources	**Effectively using increased public investments in education** • Increasing public spending in education • Allocating more funds and qualified teachers to disadvantaged schools **Making teaching a rewarding, highly skilled career** • Introducing new professional standards • Increasing teacher salaries • Introducing mentorship and professional learning communities in schools	
Data and evidence	**Building a strong monitoring system for accountability and results** • Introducing an integrated education data management system • Defining a methodology to monitor and report on progress under the Educated Romania strategy	

Source: Authors

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[2] The Educated Romania initiative aimed to build a shared understanding of the challenges of the education system and measures needed to overcome them. It was launched by the Presidential Administration and ran from 2016 to 2021. It involved extensive consultations with stakeholders, including teacher unions, student unions, universities, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), among others. Findings from these consultations are summarised in the Educated Romania Report, which includes ten policy areas and, for each, a vision, measures and targets to reach by 2030.

Reforms aim to address quality and equity challenges in schooling

Investing in the system's professional bodies, schools, and teachers, the new reform agenda seeks to address many of the quality and equity challenges in Romania's school education system. Learning and participation outcomes fall far below EU targets for 2030. These targets aim for the average share of low-achieving 15-year-olds to be less than 15% and for early leavers from education and training to be less than 9% (Council of the European Union, 2021[3]).

According to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a large percentage of students are not acquiring basic skills in reading, science and mathematics. While the share of low achievers in all three subjects (below Level 2) has seen a lower increase between 2018 and 2022 than the EU countries on average, it remains significantly higher. Approximately 49% of Romanian students scored below level 2 in mathematics, 42% in reading, and 44% in science, far more than in the EU on average (see Figure 2). Transitions into upper-secondary education represent another major challenge. Despite progress, Romania still has the highest rate of early school leaving in the European Union: 15.6% of 18-24 year-olds have not completed upper-secondary education and are not involved in any education or training (Eurostat, 2022[5]).

Figure 2. A high share of students in Romania underperform in at least one PISA subject

Percentage of 15-year-old students performing below Level 2 in reading, mathematics and science, 2022
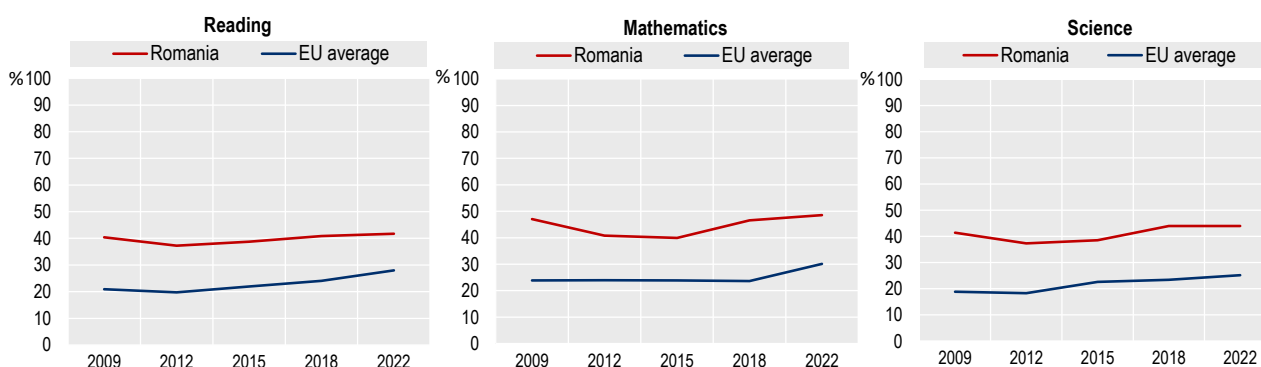
Note: In PISA, proficiency Level 2 is considered the baseline level of proficiency students need to participate fully in society.
Source: OECD (2023[6]), *PISA 2022 database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2022database/.

Inequalities in participation and learning are also large. Students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those from rural communities and ethnic minorities, face a higher risk of experiencing lower educational outcomes and dropping out of school. For instance, 84% of students in rural schools were low achievers in mathematics (below Level 2), compared to 34% in urban schools (OECD, 2023[4]). Early school leaving is also particularly high in rural areas (see Figure 3). Similarly, in a recent survey, only 22% of young Roma between 18 and 24 reported completing upper-secondary education, against 83% of the total population (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023[7]).

Figure 3. Early school leaving is high in Romania by international comparison and is concentrated in rural areas

Percentage of early school leavers in rural and urban areas in CEE countries, 2022
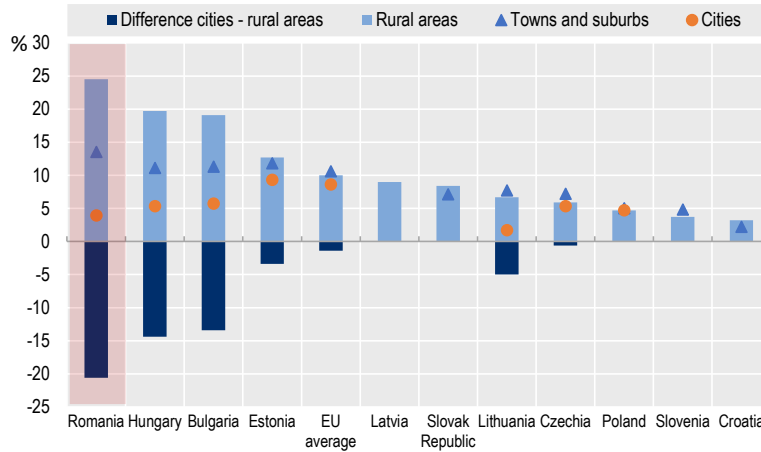
Note: Early leavers are defined as individuals aged 18-24 who have completed, at most, a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training during the four weeks preceding the labour force survey (LFS).
Source: Eurostat (2022[5]), *Education and training database*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/database.

Reforms introduce governance changes to strengthen specialised teams within the Ministry of Education and in affiliated agencies

The 2023 Law changes the organisation of Romania's education system. It restructures and establishes new specialised agencies to support school evaluation and improvement, quality teaching, and data and evidence use in policy making. For instance, it consolidates the Agency for Quality Assurance and Inspection in Pre-University Education (ARACIIP) as the main national school evaluator. It introduces a new National Centre for Training and Professional Development for the Teaching Career (hereafter the "National Centre for Teachers") to ensure greater coherence across different teacher policies and promote and maintain high standards in the profession. Reforms also re-establish the National Centre for Curriculum and Evaluation (NCCE) and the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) as separate entities. These bodies will be respectively responsible for developing the curriculum, as well as reliable national examinations and assessments to monitor student learning and providing independent research to design and evaluate policies.

Within the Ministry of Education, reforms create new teams to support the co-ordination, delivery and monitoring of planned policies. The Directorate-General for the Implementation of the Educated Romania Project (DGIPRE) was established to make Educated Romania a reality by co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluating reform efforts. The DGIPRE will receive support from a new unit that will host and develop the Ministry of Education's education data management system. The Ministry of Education also plans to create a new National Centre for Inclusive Education to design policies that integrate and support students with special needs. Together, and if adequately staffed and resourced, these governance changes have the potential to develop specialised professional functions and reinforce essential planning, co-ordination and monitoring capacities within the Ministry of Education. Figure 4 provides an overview of how specialised professional bodies could support the Ministry of Education in delivering reforms. Some of these agencies would benefit from operating independently from the ministry to ensure their work is informed by specialised expertise and transcends national politics.

Figure 4. Newly established or reorganised bodies can provide technical expertise in key areas of education reform in Romania

	Ministry of Education	
School evaluation and improvement (ARACIIP)	**Reform co-ordination and monitoring** (DGIPRE) — **Equity and inclusion policies** (National Centre for Inclusive Education) — **Education data system management and capacity development** (UESMATD)	**Independent research and policy evaluations** (Institute of Education Sciences)
Teacher policies (National Centre for Teachers)	**School administration and support** (County Directorates of Pre-University Education)	**National examinations and assessments** (National Centre for Curriculum and Evaluation)

Note: The figure highlights newly established or reorganised bodies that will be instrumental in delivering planned changes analysed in this policy perspective. UESMATD stands for Executive Unit for Support, Maintenance and Technical Assistance for Digitisation.
Source: Authors.

2. Summary of OECD recommendations

This policy perspective provides recommendations to implement planned changes and address barriers that have stalled past educational reforms:

Reorganising responsibilities for school evaluation and support

1	Further develop the school evaluation framework to highlight national priorities and make it more useful to evaluators, counties and schools
2	Build a team of permanent evaluators that work with external experts and assure the quality of evaluations
3	Build strong and active links between the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance and Inspection in Education (ARACIIP), county quality support teams and the Ministry of Education
4	Review how evaluations are scheduled and funded and remove remaining duplications and conflicts of interest
5	Clarify the school support model at county level and develop a national ecosystem of resources

Effectively using increased public investments in education

6	Strengthen capacities to adopt a more strategic approach to budgeting so that increased spending supports long-term goals
7	Review the organisation of the school network and of schools' administrative processes to make a more efficient use of public spending
8	Revise school funding and support mechanisms so they help advance policy priorities
9	Define protocols to target schools and students in greater need and provide them with comprehensive support

Making teaching a rewarding, highly skilled career

10	Finalise new teacher standards and use them to clarify expectations for different stages and roles within the teacher career structure
11	Review the teacher pay system to strengthen the link between performance and reward and improve transparency
12	Review planned reforms to teacher certification and promotion appraisals to focus more centrally on teaching practice
13	Determine how teachers will be moved onto the new career paths and how performance and career progress will be managed over time
14	Strengthen and scale the national teacher mentorship scheme
15	Develop a more systemic approach to embed a culture of teacher-led professional learning within schools

Building a strong monitoring system for accountability and results

16	Establish the Integrated School Management System (SIMS) as Romania's authoritative source for national education data and plan for its long-term sustainability
17	Ensure the design and use of national assessments are fit for purpose and clarify plans for their implementation
18	Further develop the monitoring and evaluation system by identifying key performance indicators, improving reporting practices and investing in staff capacity

3. School evaluation and support

Overview of context

The 2023 Law aims to strengthen school evaluation and support policies. The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP) will be consolidated as the main school evaluator, and County School Inspectorates will be reconfigured to focus on school support. These positive steps promise to eliminate the current duplication of evaluation and inspection in Romania, enhance the quality of the evaluation process and offer schools more guidance and support. This section provides recommendations to advance these reforms so that school evaluation moves from an administrative process to a resource that schools and counties can use to improve student outcomes.

Key findings from the diagnostic review

Key features of the education system prior to the reform include:

- **Overall, school outcomes in Romania are poor, with low learning standards and high dropout levels.** In 2021-22, out of 5 901 public schools, 22 % were low performers in the Grade 8 examination (i.e. students had an average mark below 5 out of 10). Approximately 83% of low-performing schools were located in rural areas, while most high-performing schools were concentrated in Bucharest and Cluj (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]). Romania also has the highest rate of early school leaving in the European Union, with an average of 15.6% of 18-24 year-olds not having completed upper-secondary education (Eurostat, 2022[5]).

- **Until recently, schools have been subject to multiple forms of evaluation and inspection.** To date, external school evaluations have been conducted by ARACIP and the County School Inspectorates (CSIs). The CSIs and ARACIP have implemented their school evaluations in parallel, each using their own evaluation framework (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). This results in an inconsistent understanding of what constitutes a "good school" and unnecessarily burdens schools and the system at large.

- **CSIs' capacity to support school improvement is limited.** CSIs and their affiliated Teachers' Training Houses are the main institutions responsible for supporting schools and teachers. However, a number of factors undermine this support function. Inspectors face an inherent tension in fulfilling both inspection and support roles. They are not trained to help schools undertake self-evaluation and plan improvement, nor do they have access to the necessary data to monitor school performance and target their support (Section 6. The data and monitoring system provides recommendations on improving education data in Romania). Unlike many EU countries, Romania lacks a nationwide programme for school improvement. Such programmes can take various forms –such as coaching, special teaching and learning resources, networking and additional resources – but usually involve external support combined with an emphasis on developing schools' internal capabilities and leadership. Existing local school improvement initiatives tend to be fragmented, under-resourced and usually concentrated in the wealthiest counties (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]).

- **Inspectors are not concentrated to support counties with the greatest needs**. Inspectors are distributed based on the number of schools in each county rather than on need, such as counties' gross domestic product (GDP) per capita or the number of low-performing schools (see Figure 5). This results in a county like Ialomița, with 35% of low-performing schools in the Grade 8 examination, having as many inspectors as Brăila, with only 7% of low-performing schools (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]).

- **School principals play a limited role in leading instructional improvement.** Most of Romania's principals currently play a predominantly administrative role. This contrasts with the expectations for school leaders across most OECD countries, who are increasingly required to lead not just school self-evaluation and improvement planning but also teacher development and the application of the curriculum (OECD, 2020[10]). Reforms aim to strengthen principals' leadership in these areas.

Figure 5. The distribution of inspectors in Romania does not align with counties having the most low-performing schools or the lowest GDP per capita

Number of inspectors by county, 2020
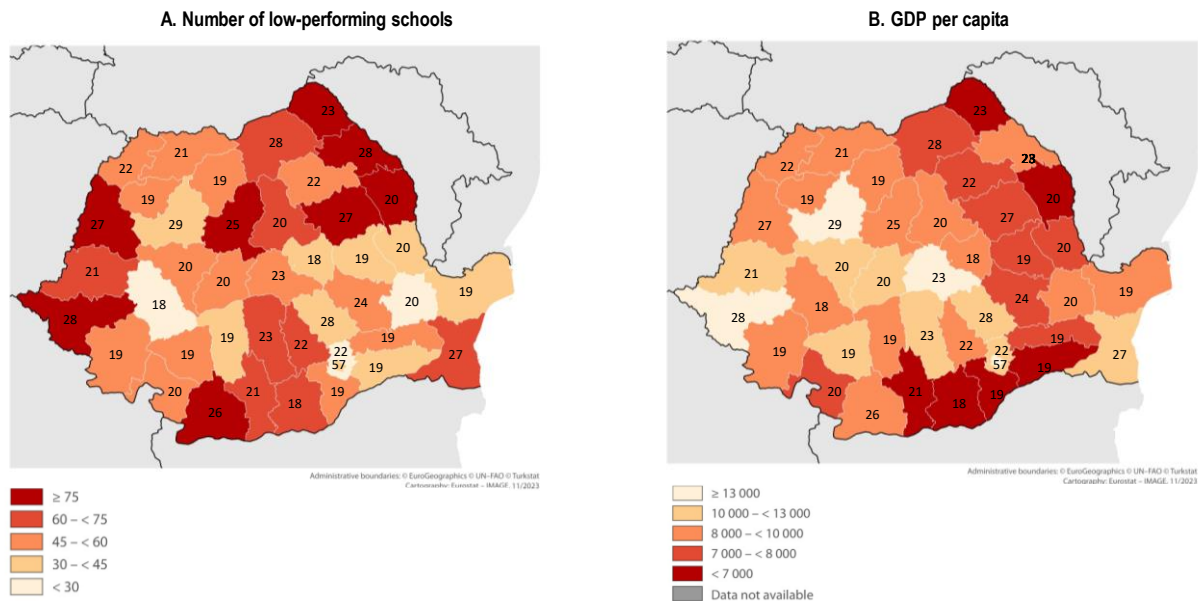
Note: Darker counties have a higher number of low-performing schools, based on results in Grade 8 examination (Panel A), and lower GDP per capita in EUR, 2020 (Panel B).
Source: Eurostat (2020[11]), *Economy and finance*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/ (accessed 1 November 2023); Ministry of Education (2023[8]), *Background Questionnaire: Support for Strengthening the Governance Model in Pre-tertiary Education in Romania*.

Analysis of planned changes in the legislative package

Romania's new law intends to strengthen school evaluation and support policies and enable schools to progressively assume greater leadership in their quality assurance and improvement (see Infographic 1). The strengths and challenges of the main policies are analysed below.

Infographic 1. Planned changes to reorganise responsibilities for school evaluation and support in Romania

Consolidates ARACIIP as the main national agency with school evaluation and inspection functions

- Continues to carry out the provisional authorisation, accreditation and recurrent evaluation of schools. In addition, it takes over the responsibility for general, thematic and specialty inspections, which were previously conducted by CSIs.
- Opens offices in each county.
- Increases the number of permanent staff in ARACIIP central and county offices, primarily for administrative and inspection roles.

Reorganises CSIs into County Directorates for pre-university education with an explicit supportive role

- Lose most of their inspection functions. While they no longer take part in general or thematic inspections, they can participate in specialty inspections.
- Have a more explicit school support role. Specific support functions include: helping schools access and manage national and EU grants and coaching schools on how to input data into the data management system.

Source: Authors, based on Ministry of Education (2023[12]), *Legea Învățământului Preuniversitar "România Educată" [The pre-university education law].*

A single national school evaluation framework promotes a shared understanding of quality teaching and learning

The reform establishes ARACIIP (the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance and Inspection in Education, former ARACIP) as the main national agency for school evaluation. ARACIIP will continue to carry out the provisional authorisation, accreditation and recurrent evaluation of schools. In addition, it will take over the responsibility for general, thematic and specialty inspections, which were previously conducted by CSIs. Concentrating these responsibilities within a single national agency provides an opportunity to improve the quality, independence and efficiency of school evaluation in Romania. Notable aspects of these reforms include:

- **ARACIP recently introduced a new evaluation framework that places a stronger focus on school improvement.** In the 2021-22 academic year, ARACIP introduced a new quality indicator framework that is less bureaucratic and compliance-oriented and more focused on generating evidence that can help schools improve. There are fewer quality standards, which reduces the reporting burden on schools and enables evaluators and schools to reflect more deeply on the practices that contribute to education quality (OECD, 2013[13]). The new standards also provide a more holistic, contextualised perspective on quality, covering inputs and processes – such as the quality of teaching and assessment methods – that schools can act upon to improve.
- **While more balanced, the new framework could better exemplify good practice in areas where schools in Romania are weak, in particular: learning, equity and inclusion, and instructional leadership.** Teaching, assessment, and outcomes are combined in one domain of the school evaluation framework. However, separating teacher practice from student outcomes – as is more common in school evaluation frameworks in OECD countries – would orient schools to monitor overall learner results and reflect on how learning is assessed and enabled through

assessment. The framework and reporting also pay insufficient attention to school leadership, equity and inclusion. There is no explicit focus on instructional leadership (in the form of a dedicated standard that outlines how leadership teams can steer the planning, evaluation, co-ordination and improvement of teaching and learning), even though strengthening school leadership is a government priority. In addition, the statements on equity and inclusion are presented in broad terms and do not offer enough guidance to schools on adapting to the needs of diverse and disadvantaged learners. ARACIP's evaluation reporting template also lacks a dedicated section on how well schools support disadvantaged students.

- **The evaluation framework could be presented in a more accessible format.** Descriptors for each standard provide a list of requirements rather than statements of practice that would help evaluators and schools visualise and understand good practice. Standards are also provided in a long matrix combining all school stages, from early years to vocational education, and all evaluation types (authorisation, accreditation, recurrent evaluations). A simpler framework with common standards and bespoke manuals with differentiated standards would be more useful.

- **A unified framework for external and internal evaluation can help promote a common understanding of school quality, but only if schools know how to use it.** ARACIIP standards will guide both external and school self-evaluation, and ARACIIP evaluators will draw on school self-evaluation as a central source of evidence in their own reviews. This is positive and critical for any evaluation that seeks to strengthen school agency and capacity (OECD, 2013[13]). However, ARACIIP has yet to develop resources to help schools fully use the standards. Principals and school Commissions for Quality Assurance and Evaluation require continuous training, practical tools to evaluate quality and user-friendly data on key quality indicators (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system). The funding now available from NRRP to train 10 000 principals, school managers and inspectors can be instrumental in addressing these capacity gaps.

ARACIIP is well placed to ensure the independence of evaluations; however, without a permanent cadre of evaluators, it can struggle to maintain quality and consistency

ARACIP has already adopted many practices that are important for the trust and integrity of external school evaluation. The procedures, criteria and instruments ARACIIP uses are publicly accessible on its website. ARACIP also requires that evaluators do not reside in the same county as the evaluated school to keep an objective distance (Eurydice, 2022[14]). However, future efforts should adequately address one of the most critical factors determining the quality of school evaluation: the competencies of evaluators. Notable considerations include:

- **ARACIIP plans to develop a cadre of permanent evaluators to work alongside contracted experts.** ARACIP has applied for EU funding to develop a cadre of permanent evaluators that will work alongside contracted experts. A permanent team of evaluators, hired and paid by the agency, will help build an in-depth understanding of national school quality standards and train and oversee external experts. This can enhance the quality and consistency of the evaluation process.

- **There are clear criteria for selecting evaluation experts, yet attractive salaries and continuous training will be important to support their role**. Romania has set out comprehensive criteria to ensure that applicants for ARACIIP evaluator roles have relevant experience and skills (Ministry of Education, n.d.[15]). However, it will be challenging for ARACIIP to develop a strong cadre of permanent evaluators if salaries for internal staff remain low and training opportunities are limited. The salaries of ARACIP's own staff are lower than teachers' starting salaries, making it difficult to hire from among the most qualified professionals (ARACIP, 2023[16]). Training on how to apply the new standards for existing evaluators has also been limited (ARACIP, 2020[17]). As a result, evaluators still tend to focus primarily on conformity with administrative procedures and do not always provide feedback that can help schools improve.

ARACIIP evaluations provide information that can be used to target school support and monitor the implementation of national policies

The 2023 Law establishes ARACIIP as the primary independent source of qualitative information on school quality in Romania. Its evaluations can help the Ministry of Education and counties understand how schools are implementing national policies. They can also inform the design and targeting of school improvement support. However, Romania will need to set clearer expectations for the use of ARACIIP evaluation evidence if government support to schools is to become more effective. Notable issues include:

- **Clear requirements for counties to use school evaluation results would promote the use of evidence from evaluations.** Setting this expectation will be important for counties to target schools in greater need of support, as historically, counties have focused on schools that their own inspectors have considered important rather than schools judged by ARACIIP as weak. While some degree of local responsiveness is necessary, politics has often distorted this in Romania. The new County Directorates for Pre-university Education (hereafter "County Directorates") will need government direction to ensure they use the evidence produced by ARACIIP to inform decisions on how and where to prioritise county support.

- **ARACIP's efficiency index can help identify high -and low-performing schools but needs to provide a more accessible and robust measure of school quality.** First introduced in 2009, ARACIP's efficiency index presents a snapshot of school quality that considers student outcomes in relation to contextual factors (both school- and student-related). It identifies schools that make a larger-than-average contribution to students' learning, including effective schools in disadvantaged contexts (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]). Such a tool is valuable in the Romanian context, where the Ministry of Education has traditionally ranked schools based on their raw Grade 8 examination results (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). However, the index relies heavily on self-reported school data, resulting in frequent reporting errors (ARACIP, 2015[18]). Perhaps because of this and a lack of explanatory information on the index, its use by the Ministry of Education, counties and schools remains limited.

- **There is little secondary analysis of ARACIP evidence to inform national policy priorities.** ARACIP produces a range of reports, including school evaluation reports, an annual activity report and thematic studies, that provide analysis and recommendations on school quality. However, the different policy, planning and evaluation units in the Ministry of Education do not seem to sufficiently use these reports to inform their work. Closer collaboration between ARACIIP and the Ministry of Education to identify priority themes for national studies, as well as greater clarity regarding how ARACIIP reports will contribute to system monitoring would encourage their use. While the Ministry of Education has recently developed a monitoring and evaluation framework to feed more evidence into system monitoring and policy design, the latter do not yet recognise the central role of ARACIIP in monitoring reform objectives for school quality (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system).

ARACIIP will have a local presence, bringing evaluation expertise closer to schools, but more attention needs to be given to efficiency and equity if this model is to raise standards

The government intends to locate most of ARACIIP's permanent staff in counties (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]). In a large and diverse country such as Romania, locating ARACIIP staff closer to schools – whether at county or regional level (see Recommendation 2) – can improve the responsiveness of evaluation to the different contexts and needs facing schools and facilitate collaboration with local school support services. However, ARACIIP's effectiveness on the ground will require changes to the evaluation model to make it more efficient and focused on addressing inequities. Important issues include:

- **Romania needs to review ARACIP's current census-based, on-demand model to prioritise schools in greatest need**. Romania will continue with its aim of evaluating all schools in the country every five years. This approach, while valid in theory and common to many EU countries (see Table), has so far proved impossible in practice. Since its creation 18 years ago, ARACIP has only been able to evaluate two-thirds of all schools (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]). Current reforms intend to provide ARACIIP with more resources and staff, yet even if these materialise, delivering regular, quality census evaluations will remain challenging. ARACIIP also intends to continue evaluating schools on a demand basis (from schools and/or counties) rather than on objective criteria designed to improve quality nationally. This risks ARACIIP being drawn to more advantaged schools and localities rather than those in greatest need of support.

- **ARACIIP's effective functioning will require a more predictable budget, commensurate to its work.** ARACIP's funding model is distinct in two respects. First, schools pay an evaluation fee to ARACIIP, covered by funds allocated to counties by the Ministry of Education (see Section 4. Resources for education). While this arrangement has provided the agency with some financial autonomy and operational independence from the Ministry of Education, it has significant drawbacks in terms of unpredictability and inequity. Most OECD and EU countries allocate central funds directly to their inspectorate to cover school evaluations rather than relying on school fees. Second, ARACIP's annual budget is very low compared to inspectorates in other European countries with smaller education systems (see Table). While there is clearly scope for greater efficiency, it is difficult to imagine how ARACIIP can fulfil its functions without more resources.

Table 1. ARACIP's annual budget is low relative to that of other OECD and EU inspectorates

	Annual budget (EUR)	Approximate no. of institutions	Scheduling of evaluations
Dutch Inspectorate	74 900 000	7 737	At least once every four years, following a risk-based approach
Estyn (Wales, United Kingdom)	9 951 323	2 192	At least once every eight years, following a risk-based approach
Educational Authority (Hungary)	22 252 416	9 352	All schools within a five-year cycle
Ofsted (England, United Kingdom)	135 717 273	109 322	Between three to five years following a risk-based approach
ARACIP (Romania)	952 078	6 796	All schools within a five-year cycle
National Inspectorate of Education (Bulgaria)	444 146	4 581	At least once every five years, following a risk-based approach

Note: In order from largest to smallest relative budget. Budgets are estimated for the last available year and cover all activities under the inspectorate's purview (not only evaluations). The budget year is different: 2022 for the Netherlands and Hungary, 2021-22 for Wales (United Kingdom), 2020-21 for England (United Kingdom) and 2020 for Romania and Bulgaria. The year for the number of institutions also varies: 2022 Wales, 2021 England and Hungary, 2019 Romania, and 2018-19 Bulgaria. For the Netherlands, estimates of the number of schools are based on different sources and years (2020, 2021 and 2022).
Source: ARACIP (2021[19]), *Raport de activitate – Perioada de raportare: 01.01.2020 –31.12.2020*; Estyn (2022[20]), *HMCI Annual Report 2021-2022*; Ofsted (2022[21]), *Annual Report and Accounts 2021-22*; SICI Inspectorates (2021[22]), *Inspection Profiles. Country Profile England*; Onderwijsinspectie (2023[23]), *Jaarverslag 2022*; Oktatasi Hivatal (2022[24]), *Beszámolók, költségvetés. Éves költségvetések, 2022*; Oktatasi Hivatal (2023[25]), *2022 évi tanfelügyeleti látogatások*; SICI Inspectorate (2020[26]), *Inspection profiles. Country Profile Bulgaria*; NIO Government (2022[27]), *ОБОБЩЕНА ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ЗА ОЦЕНКИ И НАСОКИ ЗА от извършените инспекции през 2021/2022 учебна година*; European Commission/Eurydice (n.d.[28]), *Statistics on educational institutions*.

- **Legislation does not yet fully address the duplication between general inspections and recurrent evaluations.** Even if the reform ends the parallel management of evaluation and inspection, schools will still be subject to redundant evaluations. While Romania's general inspection model differs in emphasis and approach from that of recurrent school evaluation, both serve the same function of assessing the structures, processes and student outcomes within schools (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). Removing this duplication will be essential to optimise resources, improve evaluation quality and reduce the burden on schools.

- **The function of appraising individual teachers differs from evaluating school quality and requires specific professional expertise.** Under the new legislation, ARACIIP will take over responsibility for speciality inspections, which in Romania serve to appraise individual teachers. However, appraising individual teachers differs from evaluating school quality and requires specialised professional expertise. As discussed in Section 5. The teaching , separating responsibilities for school evaluation and teacher appraisal is a means to establish the difference between the two processes and develop the specific forms of expertise that they entail. Many OECD and EU countries have made a clear functional distinction between individual teacher appraisals and the evaluation of the overall quality and instructional leadership in schools (see Table).

Table 2. In several OECD and EU countries, teacher appraisals are not within the purview of the national school evaluation agency

	External school evaluators	External teacher appraisers
Romania	ARACIIP	ARACIIP (with County Directorates for Pre-university Education and the Mentoring and Licensing Corp)
Bulgaria	National Inspectorate of Education (NIE)	Regional Departments of Education (REDs)
Czechia	Czech School Inspectorate	No external appraisers
Estonia	Ministry of Education and Research	No external appraisers
Hungary	Educational Authority	Appraisal Committee made up of public education experts included in the National Register of Experts
Netherlands	The Dutch Inspectorate	No external appraisers
Poland	Regional Education Authorities (REAs)	Exam board, including a representative of REA and experts from a register of experts
Scotland (United Kingdom)	Education Scotland	General Teaching Council for Scotland and local education authorities
Slovak Republic	Inspectorate of the Slovak Republic	Certification committee made up of organisations responsible for continuous teacher education

Note: Schools in Czechia, Estonia and the Netherlands have autonomy in performing teacher appraisal without involving external actors.
Source: Eurydice (n.d.[29]), *National Education Systems*, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/

County Directorates will be charged with helping schools meet national quality standards; this is a positive reform and one that could go further

CSIs will be reorganised into County Directorates for Pre-university Education. They will relinquish most of their inspection responsibilities and instead become centres for school monitoring and support. This positive step promises to free schools from burdensome administrative controls, reduce the scope for political interference in school management and redirect counties' focus to help schools improve. However, if County Directorates are to become hubs of school support, changes in function will need to be matched with other measures. Important considerations include:

- **The reform refocuses County Directorates' roles on school monitoring and support but does not fully remove their involvement in summative functions.** According to the pre-university education law, staff in County Directorates may still be involved in the appraisal (specialty inspections) of teachers for certification and promotion. As discussed in Section 5. The teaching this risks undermining the support function of counties and the integrity of teacher appraisal. In addition, secondary legislation still needs to clarify how counties will participate in identifying schools at risk for urgent evaluation and follow-up actions for schools deemed below standard.

- **County Directorates will inherit staff with limited experience in school support, and few have the skills to monitor quality using data.** In the initial phase of the reform, County Directorates will operate largely with existing CSI staff, who have been trained and worked as inspectors, often for several decades. County staff will require significant training and support to assist schools' self-evaluation, planning and improvement efforts. This is both a question of technical skills and mindset. Schools will need to see a significant change of approach if they are to engage with county staff as coaches and not as inspectors. Notably, few counties have staff qualified to help schools enter data into the Integrated School Management System (SIMS), Romania's future data management system (currently SIIIR; see Section 6. The data and monitoring system), or to interpret and use this data to monitor quality across their county.

- **More cross-county collaboration can help improve the technical competencies of County Directorates.** Creating sufficient expertise for school monitoring and support within each of Romania's 42 counties will be challenging. Indeed, the risk is that larger, better-resourced counties will concentrate expertise and additional funds (as they already do) while smaller, more isolated counties remain understaffed and unable to apply for financial and technical help. Other jurisdictions, such as Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom), have put local government consolidation or collaboration at the centre of reforms intended to strengthen support for schools.

- **At the central level, the Ministry of Education will need to adapt its own functions and competencies to develop the County Directorates**. The General Directorate of Pre-university Education (DGIP) currently oversees CSIs. It develops the regulatory framework for schools and counties, advises counties on applying regulations and monitors their compliance (Ministry of Education, n.d.[30]). Its functions have been largely focused on administration and control. In the future, the Ministry of Education will need to develop dedicated teams with specialised expertise to oversee new county structures focused on school improvement and monitoring.

- **The reform identifies policy priorities for school improvement but has yet to define a school support model, with counties acting as networkers and the Ministry of Education establishing centres of professional expertise counties can draw on**. The new law highlights policy priorities for school improvement, such as raising participation in education, particularly for the most vulnerable students (e.g. through second-chance and remedial education programmes), strengthening students' functional literacy, as well as promoting equity, notably by eliminating school segregation. In addition, the pre-university education law introduces the concept of "priority investment areas" in education, which are geographical areas that concentrate socio-economic disadvantage and will receive additional resources (see Section 4. Resources for education). In developing a school support model the Ministry of Education could further outline how county teams will target their support, how they will broker specialised services (e.g. from county structures, mentors and network of practicum schools) and how they will collaborate with other counties to pool expertise and resources.

- **Secondary legislation will need to clarify the process of transferring inspection responsibilities to ARACIIP and reconfiguring CSIs**. Implementing reforms is about redesigning the institutional landscape as well as reshaping how evaluation and support actors perceive their roles within the system and how schools interact with them. Transforming these long-standing perceptions, developed over decades of interaction, will be challenging and will require time. Reforms will also need to reassign the existing workforce into new roles. These changes offer an opportunity for Romania to take stock of the competencies at a national level and relocate qualified staff to the counties facing greater need. However, plans should not be limited to relocating individuals across ARACIIP local offices and county structures within the same county, as this can potentially perpetuate cross-county inequities in capabilities and resources.

Policy recommendations

The recommendations below provide direction on how Romania can advance with the implementation of its reforms to school evaluation and support. Figure 6 provides an overview of a more streamlined, integrated and professional ecosystem for school quality assurance in the future.

Figure 6. Planned reforms have the potential to strengthen Romania's school evaluation and support policies
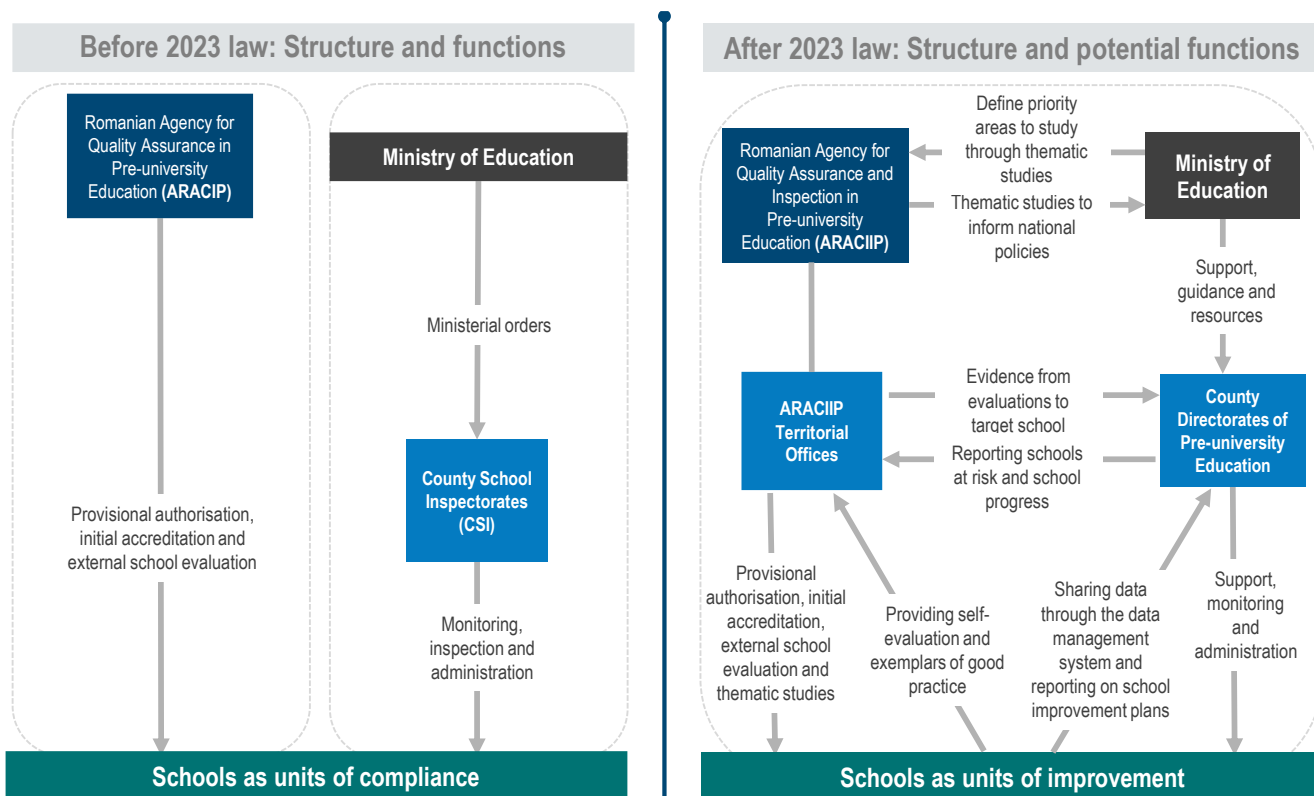
Source: Authors.

> *Recommendation 1. Further develop the school evaluation framework to highlight national priorities and make it more useful to evaluators, counties and schools*

To make the national school evaluation framework a more powerful tool for improving the quality and equity of education, Romania should:

Action 1 **Create a dedicated domain on student outcomes within the school quality indicator framework, with standards for learning achievement, participation and equity.** This domain should comprise a minimum of two standards that capture the core aims of schooling: one on the overall level of student learning, achievement and completion, and another on the differences in outcomes among specific student groups (e.g. students from minority ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and those with special educational needs).

Action 2 **Add standards on school leadership and further develop standards on inclusive teaching practices.** Educated Romania aims to develop school agency in improving education quality. It strongly emphasises the need to transform instructional practices to address students' different learning needs and styles. To support these important goals, the school quality indicator framework should have specific standards that assess schools' leadership and provide concrete guidance to schools on adapting to the needs of diverse and disadvantaged learners. The school quality indicator frameworks in Ireland, New Zealand and Scotland (United Kingdom) provide examples of standards in these two areas (see Annex. Country examples). They have been designed to reflect research evidence on the hallmarks of effective practice. They also deliberately focus on national policy priorities. In Romania, this would imply, for example, that the standard on leadership includes indicators of how school principals facilitate learning communities and promote new standards of teaching practice (see Section 5. The teaching).

Action 3 **Develop descriptors to show a scale of progression that helps evaluators and schools visualise good practice**. There are several ways in which Romania could make the school quality indicator framework a more useful resource for schools. First, descriptors could be differentiated by level of performance to help schools situate themselves on a scale of progression. To begin, Romania might describe "adequate" performance to set basic expectations for all schools and "very good" performance to show what higher levels of quality would look like in each domain. Descriptors that exemplify adequate and very good practice in terms that evaluators and schools can visualise would make the framework more instructional. Aspects of the framework could also be simplified. For example, "authorisation" and "accreditation and recurrent evaluation" standards – currently presented in separate columns – could be combined into a unified set of standards for all types of school evaluation. The more user-friendly the framework, the more effective ARACIIP will be in changing the mindset of schools from compliance to improvement.

Action 4 **Further develop and publish evaluator handbooks that explain how general standards can be applied to different school levels and contexts**. ARACIIP should develop and make a suite of sector-specific external evaluation handbooks publicly available. The handbooks should set out how ARACIIP will conduct external evaluations in different settings (e.g. which standards and indicators should be applied and how) and how it will report results to schools. The handbooks should include descriptors that illustrate what "adequate" and "very good" practice look like in specific levels or contexts (e.g. for pre-primary levels or vocational education and training [VET] high schools). ARACIIP should design these handbooks in collaboration with experienced school leaders so the content is user-friendly and applicable in real-life settings. Education Scotland used this approach to develop the school self-evaluation handbook "How Good is our School?".

Action 5 **Orient evaluators on how to provide feedback to schools**. Evaluator handbooks and training should explain to evaluators how to provide feedback to schools during and following an external school evaluation. Helpful feedback focuses on educational outcomes and practices rather than on administrative processes. It concentrates on a select number of priority issues, with examples of what works well and less well. To maintain open communication, evaluators should introduce emerging issues gradually throughout the evaluation process, promoting dialogue with school teams. Finally, before preparing a written report, ARACIIP should continue encouraging evaluators to schedule oral feedback sessions with the school leadership team to ensure schools can discuss, seek clarification and better understand recommendations.

Action 6 **Review ARACIIP evaluation reporting templates so they highlight equity and inclusion and are developmental for schools**. ARACIIP should review the current evaluation reporting template to include a dedicated section on how schools integrate and support vulnerable

students, both from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and with special educational needs. This section would summarise findings from the new domain on student learning outcomes disaggregated by student group (see Action 1 above) and the new indicators on inclusive teaching practices (Action 2). By systematically reporting on these aspects, evaluations can encourage schools to prioritise and take action to address disparities in student outcomes, which is a national priority. ARACIIP could also consider developing two different templates to report on evaluation results: a longer, more nuanced report internal to the school and a summary version for the school community and the broader public. The detailed report would primarily serve as a guide for school improvement and would not be made public. It would allow the school to receive comprehensive feedback, recommendations and areas for growth while reinforcing the idea that its content is for school development purposes. To help maintain accountability, ARACIIP could make public a user-friendly report summary highlighting key findings and outcomes. It will be important that in both reports, ARACIIP continues to provide a narrative judgment of quality by domain instead of providing a single summative score for the school.

Action 7   **Increase support to school leaders to help them understand and use the framework.** If evaluation is to be more than a compliance exercise, schools – and school leaders in particular – need to understand the school evaluation framework and how it can be used to inform their work. Given the generalised low level of evaluation literacy among principals, a multi-tiered approach would be most effective: a centrally funded programme of large-scale workshops run by ARACIIP for principals across the country; training led by ARACIIP for staff in County Directorates to help them support schools with both self-evaluation and improvement planning; and, in the longer term, dedicated courses on school evaluation within the initial and ongoing professional education provided to principals and members of the School Quality Assurance and Evaluation Commissions.

Action 8   **Develop data dashboards to help schools monitor and benchmark their performance.** By sharing administrative data with schools in an accessible format, Romania would help schools monitor their own progress over time and benchmark how they compare to similar schools. This could be a dashboard that compiles school-level data into a simple, user-friendly interface that provides a visual overview of performance across key quality indicators over time and in relation to similar schools (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system). Estonia's "New Performance View for Schools" and Scotland's School Information Dashboard offer good examples of how this can be done.

Action 9   **Develop and upload resources onto ARACIIP's online platform to support school self-evaluation and improvement planning.** As for external evaluators, ARACIIP can develop and make accessible in its online platform *Calitate* school self-evaluation handbooks tailored to practitioners in different school sectors. Handbooks can be accompanied by data collection tools in the form of sample questionnaires, evaluative questions, and observation protocols to encourage school actors to think critically about the quality of the education they provide. ARACIIP can also use the platform to disseminate case studies or videos that explain good practices, facilitating learning across schools. For instance, France's school evaluation council (*Conseil d'évaluation de l'École* in French), Ireland's Department of Education and Education Scotland each have a dedicated webpage where schools can download resources for gathering evidence and, in the case of Scotland, explore examples of good classroom practices.

Recommendation 2. Hire a team of permanent evaluators who work with external experts and ensure the quality of evaluations

To strengthen the quality assurance and consistency of school evaluations, ARACIIP's top priority will be to attract, select and train a team of highly qualified professionals. Measures to consider include:

Action 1   **Establish an internal cadre of permanent evaluators to support contracted experts during the evaluation process.** An internal team of permanent evaluators would help ARACIIP build a consistent understanding of national school quality standards and train and oversee external experts. Clear expectations for the role, in the form of an evaluator competency profile, will be essential to guide recruitment, regular appraisals and professional development. Pay should also be increased to reflect evaluators' advanced competencies. The Annex provides examples of evaluator profiles in Ireland and England (United Kingdom). These profiles require expertise in a sector or subject area; a track record of successful leadership in quality improvement; skills in communication and relationship management in stressful situations; and the ability to analyse and synthesise data and evidence into clear conclusions. ARACIIP will need to provide extensive training and mentoring to evaluators to develop these skills. This includes all CSI inspectors who join the agency, as ARACIIP's evaluation framework and the formative approach it entails differs significantly from the inspection methodology (see Recommendation 4. Review how evaluations are scheduled and funded and remove remaining duplications and conflicts of interest below).

Action 2   **Ensure permanent evaluators work with contracted experts to guarantee evaluation quality and consistency**. Permanent evaluators play a central role in the quality assurance of evaluations at different stages of the evaluation process. By requiring at least one permanent evaluator to lead each evaluation team and review the evaluation report, ARACIIP can oversee and guide external experts during the evaluation process and validate the quality of feedback provided to schools. Defining a process for schools to challenge evaluations when guidelines have not been followed can help assure quality and foster mutual accountability in the system. In such cases, permanent evaluators could follow up with schools to determine whether there was an issue with how the evaluation was conducted. Professional development is another important means to support quality assurance. Senior permanent evaluators can conduct regular analyses of individual evaluators' grading profiles to identify evaluators who consistently award higher or lower grades than their colleagues and feed this analysis into regular appraisals and individual development plans to help staff consistently apply evaluation standards.

Action 3   **Base permanent evaluators at the supra-county level to promote the integrity and consistency of evaluations**. One option to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of evaluations is to base ARACIIP local offices and permanent evaluators at the supra-county level rather than in individual counties. By working across several counties, permanent evaluators would help ensure consistency in applying standards nationwide. Supra-county offices would also allow evaluators to keep an objective distance from the schools they evaluate. While some evaluators might be based in counties, e.g. because they are retrained inspectors, they should not evaluate schools in their county. This is important to maintain integrity.

Recommendation 3. Build strong and active links between ARACIIP, county quality support teams and the Ministry of Education

To ensure effective collaboration between ARACIIP, local school support teams and the Ministry of Education, Romania will need to:

Action 1   **Define the core functions of local school support teams and clarify their working relationship with national evaluators.** The secondary legislation under development should specify how County Directorates and ARACIIP will work together to promote school improvement. Figure 7 illustrates how the functions of County Directorates could complement those of ARACIIP and how to strengthen the link between evaluation and school improvement. Counties' core role would comprise following up with schools after an ARACIIP evaluation to help them meet quality standards (see Actions 2 and 3 below); monitoring the quality of schools using available data and evidence; developing school capacities, including in self-evaluation, improvement planning and data use; and identifying schools at risk for urgent evaluation.

Figure 7. ARACIIP and County Directorates should play complementary roles in school evaluation and support

	Monitoring school performance	**Scheduling school evaluations**	**Conducting school evaluations**	**Follow-up evaluations** (for schools that performed poorly on some indicators)	**Follow-up support after an evaluation** (for schools that performed poorly on some indicators)
ARACIIP		Schedule evaluations following a differentiated approach, with inputs from County Directorates, SIMS and school self-evaluations	Conduct all forms of school evaluation	Request progress report from County Directorates and conduct a follow-up evaluation	
County Directorates	Collate and verify school data in SIMS to identify signals of risk, orient support and request resources from Ministry	Share with ARACIIP the schools where there are strong signals of risks to schedule an evaluation			Help schools develop improvement planning, strengthen their self-evaluation capacity, connect them with the support they need, and share progress report of individual schools with ARACIIP

School improvement

Note: The figure only covers County Directorates' support and monitoring functions.
Source: Authors.

Action 2   **Establish the role of "link evaluator" to strengthen connections between ARACIIP and County Directorates.** In addition to managing evaluation teams and developing local evaluation capacities, one of the core functions of these deconcentrated entities will be to create links between ARACIIP evaluations and school support. The "link evaluators" would liaise with County Directorates to help them use evidence from evaluations in their work and develop their understanding of issues facing schools in their county, bringing in a wider, national perspective. The "link evaluators" would also help county staff form a better understanding of risks to target evaluations towards schools most in need. Other OECD and EU countries have sought to establish similar links between the national inspectorate and local education authorities; one example is that of District Inspectors in Scotland (United Kingdom).

Action 3   **Define a standard process for how ARACIIP and County Directorates will follow up with schools after an evaluation.** Romania needs to ensure that both ARACIIP and County Directorates follow consistent, co-ordinated steps to support schools after an evaluation. This

approach should be differentiated according to school performance, based on the conclusions of the external evaluation. Box 2 provides an example of how such a differentiated approach might work.

Box 2. Example of how Romania might differentiate follow-up actions to external evaluations

Follow-up will be determined based on the outcomes of school evaluations. Categories of follow-up might include:

- **No follow-up visits:** This would apply when the external evaluation concludes that the school is performing well and evaluators are confident that a school can maintain its quality standards until the subsequent external evaluation (e.g. ten years for a school performing very well in all domains and five to seven years for a school performing well but with some areas requiring improvement; see Recommendation 4). In this intervening period, schools will be expected to follow up on the recommendations of the external evaluation in their improvement plans and assume responsibility for ongoing quality assurance through self-evaluation. External accountability would be provided by counties, through their monitoring of core quality indicators in the data managing system, and by parents and school boards, through scrutiny of school self-evaluation reports and improvement plans.

- **Additional support**: This would apply to schools that are judged poor in some core domains. In this case, County Directorates will create a local support team to work with schools to develop and implement their annual improvement plan and provide a progress report to ARACIIP after a given period of time (e.g. two years). Based on the report, ARACIIP will determine when to schedule the next evaluation (within the next five years).

- **Additional support, direct monitoring and further evaluation**: This applies when evaluators judge that the school is poor in most domains and does not have the internal capacity to improve without considerable oversight and support. In this case, the County Directorate provides the school with a dedicated coach, establishes a support team and monitors the school directly, with structured visits to check that the school acts upon recommendations. ACRACIIP conducts a follow-up evaluation after a specified period of time (e.g. two years). If the follow-up evaluation concludes that the school is on an improvement track, the support and oversight continue as for schools in the "Additional support" category.

Source: Authors, based on European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, (2015[31]), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*.

Action 4 **Develop the ARACIIP efficiency index to make it more reliable and accessible for ARACIIP, counties and schools**. Romania needs to improve the reliability of the data used to calculate the index and share findings in a format accessible to actors across the system. Plans for a single, integrated education data management system (SIMS) will help streamline data collection from schools and improve the quality of reported data, as long as this is accompanied by measures to develop data entry capacities in schools and robust data quality checks (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system). Providing more guidelines to explain what the index is and how it can be used would also be beneficial.

Action 5 **Set the expectation that Country Directorates use external evaluation results to pair good/very good schools with schools needing improvement.** Promoting peer learning among schools effectively supports school improvement (OECD, 2013[13]). A national school networking initiative across all counties would help pair high-performing schools with those needing improvement in specific areas and promote sharing ideas and best practices. Local support teams in County Directorates could facilitate this initiative and use ARACIIP's efficiency index and evaluation reports to pair schools (see Recommendation 5). These efforts would be part of the

overall redefinition of the school support model, with counties acting as networkers and brokers – rather than seeking to provide most of the support via their own staff – and the Ministry of Education establishing centres of professional expertise that counties and schools can draw on (e.g. a network of practicum schools and County Centres for Educational Resources and Assistance). For example, Serbia has piloted a school networking initiative that pairs schools based on external evaluation results (see Annex. Country examples).

Action 6   **Make better use of evidence from ARACIIP to monitor and inform national policy priorities.** ARACIIP evaluations are a valuable resource for policy making and government accountability and should be used much more as such. There are practices common in other OECD and EU countries that Romania could adopt. For instance, ARACIIP can target its thematic inspections to evaluate priority policies (e.g. how schools are reducing segregation or improving students' functional literacy); the Ministry of Education can also commission thematic studies from ARACIIP on subjects of concern. The Ministry of Education might wish to systematically discuss findings from ARACIIP reports with the central government, counties and the parliament and draw on these findings as a source of evidence for the annual *State of Education Report* (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system).

Recommendation 4. Review how evaluations are scheduled and funded and remove remaining duplications and conflicts of interest

To introduce an efficient evaluation model focused on addressing inequities, Romania will need to:

Action 1   **Establish a more realistic and useful school evaluation schedule.** A regular census evaluation of schools is not feasible for ARACIIP, as experience over the past 18 years has shown. Instead, ARACIIP should design an evaluation schedule that enables it to achieve the different purposes of evaluation within its resource constraints. This might involve a three-pronged approach:

- o *A risk-based approach* that targets the majority of ARACIIP's resources towards evaluating and providing feedback to schools that do not meet basic standards of quality. This is the primary purpose of ARACIIP and the most equitable use of public resources in a context where the quality gap between schools in rich and poor communities is widening. The Annex. Country examples provides an overview of the variables used by different European inspectorates to identify and target schools at risk.

- o *A sample approach*, whereby ARACIIP evaluates a representative sample of schools every one or two years. This would enable ARACIIP to gain a comprehensive understanding of school performance across the country and identify good practices for system learning and improvement.

- o *A differentiated approach*, whereby ARACIIP sets the expectation that every school will be evaluated at least once within a set period, depending on the previous evaluation judgment – for example, once every ten years for a school that is performing very well across all domains, and every five to seven years for a school that is performing well but with some areas requiring improvement. ARACIIP would need to establish the regularity of re-evaluation based on its capacity, the evidence it has on the quality of schools, and the extent to which the regular monitoring of school quality can be assured through the Ministry of Education's data management system.

Action 2   **Provide ARACIIP with central funding commensurate to a multi-year programme of work.** Rather than relying on school fees and ad hoc grants, which have resulted in insufficient and

unpredictable financing, ARACIIP should receive central funding from the government that is commensurate with its workload. This is how other European countries commonly fund their inspectorates (see Annex. Country examples) (van Bruggen, 2010[32]). A move to block funding will require ARACIIP to develop an integrated budget that includes the costs of permanent staff (actual and planned) and the operational costs needed to pay for contracted experts, as well as implement a multi-year programme of work. It will also require changes to the Ministry of Education's budgeting process (see Section 4. Resources for education), notably a shift to a multi-year budgeting cycle that includes scenarios so that ARACIIP can plan investments in development in relation to projected increases in spending.

Action 3 **Reduce redundancy in evaluation efforts and ensure teacher appraisals are overseen by a body with expertise in teaching.** While new legislation addresses many of the long-standing concerns with the legacy inspection regimen, two functions require further attention. First, are general inspections. By strengthening County Directorate's capacity to monitor the quality of schools and identify those at risk (see Recommendation 3), additional general inspections would become redundant. Second, are teacher appraisals. Appraising individual teachers differs from evaluating school quality and requires specific professional expertise. As discussed in Section 5. The teaching profession, responsibility for teacher appraisal and promotion should be assigned to a body at national level with the relevant professional expertise.

Recommendation 5. Clarify the school support model at county level and develop a national ecosystem of resources

To enable County Directorates to become hubs of school support, Romania will need to consider the following:

Action 1 **Develop a county school support model based on coaching, connections and collaboration.** The reconfiguration of counties provides an opportunity for Romania to create a more effective model for school support built around the following principles:

o The weakest schools in Romania will require close, intensive support to improve. County Directorates are located close to schools and well-positioned to house a team of experts to directly advise and coach the weakest schools over several years. Other jurisdictions, such as Wales (United Kingdom), have put similar local support positions in place and seen positive effects (see Annex. Country examples). In Romania, many experienced school inspectors would have relevant knowledge for this role. They could be retrained to serve as school improvement coaches or "Challenge Advisors", as they are called in Wales.

o Schools require specialised support in a range of areas where counties do not have expertise, such as education for special educational needs (SEN) students, differentiated instruction and formative assessment. Here, counties would act as brokers, connecting schools to specialised resources such as the network of practicum schools, the new Mentoring and Licensing Corp, or the County Centres for Educational Resources. In many instances, the resource might be another school, as part of the school networking initiative (see Recommendation 3. Build strong and active links between ARACIIP, county quality support teams and the Ministry).

o Many of Romania's 42 County Directorates lack the staff and expertise to support the schools in their territory, making greater county collaboration a priority. While some counties are already collaborating on an ad hoc basis, the Ministry of Education should encourage this practice by providing central funding for cross-county activities and creating functions that explicitly entail working across County Directorates (e.g. consortia of staff with expertise on specific issues, such as leadership development, whose role is to work with schools in several counties). The Ministry of Education could focus first on creating consortia to support counties with the largest concentration of low-performing schools, such as Ialomița and Mureș, and ensure counties

have access to up-to-date data on school quality in their area (Section 6. The data and monitoring system provides additional recommendations to improve the reporting of data back to actors from across the education system, including County Directorates) (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]).

Action 2 **Strengthen the Ministry of Education's stewardship for school improvement**. The Ministry of Education will need to provide disadvantaged counties with more support in the form of investment and targeted resources. Defining priority investment areas is a positive step, as it will enable Romania to earmark resources for underprivileged schools (see Section 4. Resources for education). To ensure these investments improve teaching and learning quality, not just infrastructure, the Ministry of Education should direct a substantial portion of the funds toward strengthening expert teams within and across County Directorates that collaborate with schools in these areas. Defining how the central ministry supports counties and the resources needed will be important to materialise these efforts.

Action 3 **Deliver a ministry-led training and communication campaign to explain and model evaluation and support roles.** Changing how new county structures see their roles and how schools perceive counties' support teams and ARACIIP evaluators will not be easy. It will require clear role definitions, reflected in new job titles, and extensive professional development designed to help staff understand their new roles. Experience in other OECD countries points to the importance of complementing these measures with a national communications campaign that clearly conveys the rationale and nature of planned changes. For instance, in 2009, Poland changed its school inspection system to focus on teaching quality and giving schools more responsibility for evaluation and improvement. An analysis of the reform suggests that the lack of a national communication strategy held back implementation (Mazurkiewicz, Walczak and Jewdokimow, 2014[33]). Identifying local "champions" or early adopters who understand and can model the new coaching responsibilities can support communication efforts and make it easier for peers and schools to embrace new expectations.

Action 4 **Develop a plan to match staff to new roles and relocate them where they are most needed.** Planned reforms need to reassign the existing workforce in CSIs and ARACIIP into new roles. Public sector reforms in other OECD countries have been supported by the following:

o *A competency mapping* to assess the skills and competencies available in the system, at a national and county level, to match staff to new roles and identify gaps that need to be addressed through professional development. This could be done through an independent external assessment or a more bottom-up approach. In Brazil, for example, in partnership with the National School of Public Administration, the Ministry of Planning developed an online database, or "talent bank", where civil servants can voluntarily upload information about their professional competencies. While information is self-declared and, therefore, does not provide an objective assessment of competencies and gaps in the system, the platform has helped match active staff with job offers (OECD, 2019[34]).

o *Incentives for ARACIIP and County Directorate staff to relocate to the areas in greater need*: Financial incentives (such as financial bonuses and housing allowances) and non-monetary incentives, such as opportunities for career advancement and professional development, could help attract staff to these areas.

o *A voluntary exit scheme:* A voluntary exit scheme offers a way out for those reluctant to transition into a new role. Scotland's experience highlights the importance of this scheme (Education Scotland, 2016[35]). Education Scotland was created in 2011 by bringing together the Learning and Teaching Scotland and HM Inspectorate of Education, as well as some

functions of the Scottish government. The exit scheme provided an option for staff uncomfortable with switching to a new role and enabled newcomers to join and bring fresh perspectives to the position.

4. Resources for education

Overview of context

Romania's new legislative package aims to increase national public spending for education and allocate more financial resources and qualified teachers to disadvantaged schools. The per-student funding formula includes new equity weighting for disadvantaged schools, students with SEN and school consortia involving rural and urban schools. Schools in priority investment areas will receive targeted resources and support, while teachers in disadvantaged or isolated areas and vulnerable and academically outstanding students will benefit from individual financial support. This section analyses intended policy changes and provides recommendations to align resources with planned reforms, address inefficiencies in the system and offer targeted support to the most disadvantaged schools.

Key findings from the diagnostic review

Key features of the education system prior to the reform include:

- **Public spending for education is very low, particularly for pre-tertiary education.** Public spending in primary and secondary education is well below the OECD, EU and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) averages (see Figure 8). The levels of per-student spending in Romania are less than one-third of the OECD average for primary education (USD 3 150 in Romania compared to the OECD average of USD 10 562) and approximately half for secondary education (USD 6 474 in Romania compared to the OECD average of USD 11 597) (OECD, 2023[36]).

- **Redistribution and equalisation policies to support poorer parts of the country are underdeveloped.** The funding formula, which accounts for an estimated 90% of total funds received by schools, has improved over time to better reflect need (World Bank, 2018[37]). However, concerns remain as to its design and adequacy. In particular, the formula is complex, which makes allocations less transparent and potentially less efficient, and the coefficients used in its calculation are defined by law rather than through costing exercises. With most central funding absorbed by staff salaries, schools depend largely on local authorities or their own fundraising efforts to cover other costs, and no central mechanisms exist to offset disparities in local revenue-raising capacity.

- **Demographic changes have challenged the efficiency of the school network, making quality improvements more challenging.** Despite efforts to rationalise the school network in the past, possible inefficiencies and quality challenges remain. For instance, in 2022-23, 45% of public schools had fewer than 50 students, predominantly in rural areas, and 32% of localities had more than 2 small schools within a short distance (World Bank, forthcoming[38]). Students in small, rural schools tend to have lower learning outcomes than those in larger urban schools (see Figure 9).

- **Small, rural schools typically offer more demanding working conditions for teachers.** Romania provides a number of incentives to attract teachers to rural and remote schools – including a 20% top-up to their basic salary, an extension of the contract duration for teachers employed on a fixed-term contract and reduced teaching hours for secondary school teachers (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]). However, rural schools still face greater challenges in attracting and retaining more qualified teachers and supporting them to deliver effective teaching than urban schools (see Figure 10).

- **Mainstream schools need better preparation to integrate students with special educational needs.** Although there has been a notable increase in the percentage of lower secondary teachers

receiving continuous professional development in special education, SEN remains the primary area where teachers express the highest need for training (OECD, 2019[39]).

- **Romania has a range of student scholarships, primarily rewarding academic performance.** In 2020-21, the number of students who received a merit and performance scholarship was more than three times that of students who benefited from social scholarships. Providing student support solely based on merit raises some concerns. Academically gifted students are more likely to come from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds and to succeed in their education, even without a merit-based scholarship. As a result, merit-based scholarships can result in an inefficient use of public resources and are inadequate in addressing systemic inequities.

Figure 8. Government expenditure in education in Romania is very low by international comparison
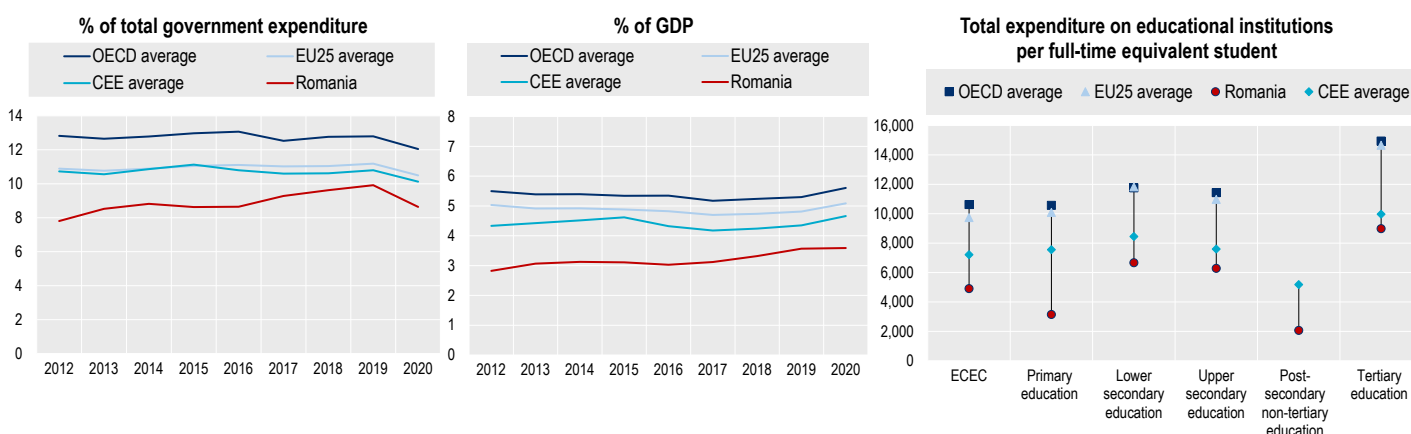
Source: OECD (2023[40]), *Education at a Glance - Education Finance Indicators*, https://stats.oecd.org.

Figure 9. Rural schools in Romania are smaller than those in urban areas and perform worse
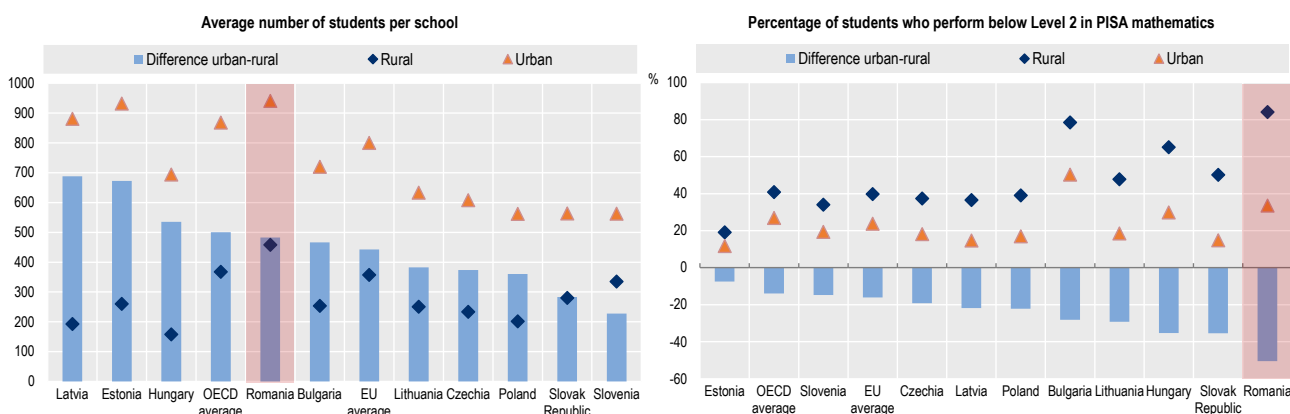
Note: Croatia is omitted because there were too few observations to provide reliable estimates (i.e. there were fewer than 30 students or fewer than 5 schools with valid data) for rural schools. Caution is required when interpreting the EU and OECD averages as they include countries that have not met one or more PISA sampling standards.
Source: OECD (2023[6]), *PISA 2022 database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2022database/.

Figure 10. Rural schools in Romania have a lower percentage of teachers with at least a master's degree

Percentage of teachers with at least a masters' degree, by schools' location, 2022
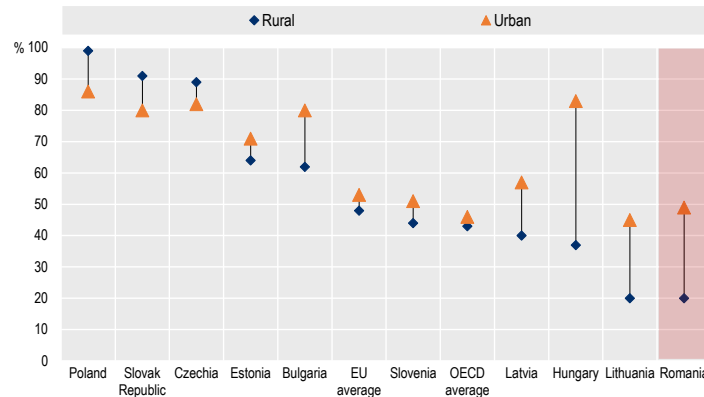
Note: Croatia is omitted because there were too few observations to provide reliable estimates (i.e. there were fewer than 30 students or fewer than 5 schools with valid data) for rural schools. Caution is required when interpreting the EU and OECD averages as they include countries that have not met one or more PISA sampling standards.
Source: OECD (2023[6]), *PISA 2022 database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2022database/.

Analysis of planned changes in the legislative package

Romania's new legislative package intends to increase public expenditure on education and support disadvantaged schools with additional funding, targeted grants for teachers and scholarships for students. Infographic 2 highlights the changes to education funding policies introduced by the 2023 pre-university education law.

> *Increasing public expenditure in education is essential to progressively reach adequate per-student spending levels*
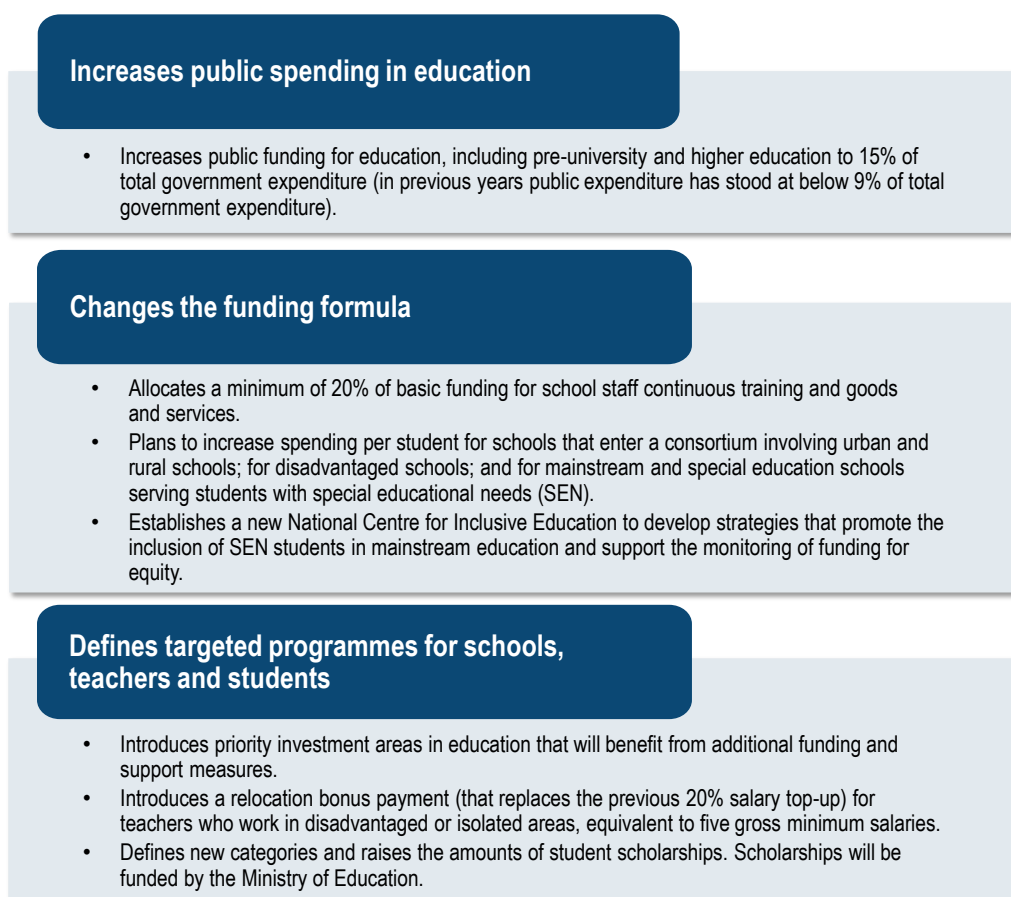
The 2023 law aims to progressively raise annual public spending for education to reach at least 15% of total government expenditure by 2027 (Ministry of Education, 2023[12]). This represents a notable increase compared to previous years, when education funding has been consistently below 9% of total government expenditure (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]). Increased public spending on education is essential to ensure basic provision and is a long-term investment that benefits both individuals and society (OECD, 2017[41]). Notable aspects of new resourcing and budgeting policies are:

- **Plans to increase funding will enable Romania to progressively reach the per-student spending levels needed to ensure basic education quality**. While larger education budgets do not automatically translate into better student results, a minimum level of spending is necessary to provide education of basic quality. The funding target of 15% of total government expenditure aligns with international benchmarks for government expenditure on education and would bring per-student spending in Romania closer to average levels of expenditure in the CEE and the EU (USD 9 295 and USD 12 271, respectively) (UNESCO, 2015[42]; OECD, 2023[40]).

- **There is a need to increase the capacity for strategic budgeting to align resources with policy priorities**. As part of the country's milestones in the NRRP, all line ministries, including the Ministry of Education, will be required to develop an Institutional Strategic Plan (ISP)[3] following

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[3] ISPs outline policy objectives, programmes, activities and expected results during a four-year period. They connect policy objectives, medium-term budgetary resources and a monitoring framework for implementation.

new national methodologies for strategic planning and programme-based budgeting (World Bank, 2022[43]). The General Economic Directorate (GED) will lead the strategic budgeting process, while the Public Policy Unit (PPU) will co-ordinate the preparation of the ISP. These are positive measures to align funding with medium-term policy priorities. However, they represent a significant departure from current practices and capacities within the Ministry of Education and will require substantial investments in capacity building. The GED has limited experience with programme-based, multi-annual budgeting. Most of its capacity has been taken up by the annual budgeting process, centred on covering annual costs and avoiding deficits. Similarly, the PPU has primarily focused on co-ordinating and monitoring EU strategies and has limited expertise in strategic planning and ISP development.

Infographic 2. **Planned changes to increase and distribute funding for education in Romania**

Increases public spending in education

- Increases public funding for education, including pre-university and higher education to 15% of total government expenditure (in previous years public expenditure has stood at below 9% of total government expenditure).

Changes the funding formula

- Allocates a minimum of 20% of basic funding for school staff continuous training and goods and services.
- Plans to increase spending per student for schools that enter a consortium involving urban and rural schools; for disadvantaged schools; and for mainstream and special education schools serving students with special educational needs (SEN).
- Establishes a new National Centre for Inclusive Education to develop strategies that promote the inclusion of SEN students in mainstream education and support the monitoring of funding for equity.

Defines targeted programmes for schools, teachers and students

- Introduces priority investment areas in education that will benefit from additional funding and support measures.
- Introduces a relocation bonus payment (that replaces the previous 20% salary top-up) for teachers who work in disadvantaged or isolated areas, equivalent to five gross minimum salaries.
- Defines new categories and raises the amounts of student scholarships. Scholarships will be funded by the Ministry of Education.

Source: Authors, based on Ministry of Education (2023[12]), *Legea Învățământului Preuniversitar "România Educată" [The pre-university education law].*

Addressing inefficiencies in the system will help ensure additional resources are utilised to achieve Educated Romania's objectives

Romania has implemented measures to improve efficiency in public spending. For instance, in 2016, the Ministry of Finance established a new Spending Review Unit that developed pilot spending reviews in education and health. As part of its commitments in the NRRP, Romania will complete these pilots and conduct future reviews on a regular basis (World Bank, 2022[43]). Planned reforms will also increase

spending per student for urban and rural schools that enter a consortium. By promoting the mobility of specialised teaching staff, shared facilities and a joint provision of courses, these consortia can expand the curricular diversity and resources available to students, particularly those attending small rural schools. Notably, the pre-university education law highlights a number of national programmes to reduce dropout rates, affecting individuals, communities and the economy and resulting in a suboptimal use of school resources. Despite these positive measures, there are remaining inefficiencies in the system. National data suggest that the school network has many small schools that struggle to deliver high-quality education. In addition, a heavy administrative burden on schools absorbs resources and diverts the attention of principals and teachers from their core tasks. Notable features of the policy changes related to the efficiency of spending are:

- **A national strategy to optimise the school network could help improve efficiency, equity and educational quality.** Romania's school network has a high prevalence of small, rural and satellite schools[4] (see Table 3). Proposals to reorganise the network will continue to be undertaken by local authorities (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]). While local actors might better understand the specific needs of their communities, they do not have clear guidelines or rules to follow, sufficient incentives or platforms to exchange information, or collaborative plans for an efficient network. For instance, while the 2023 law provides extensive regulations on minimum school and class sizes, clearer and simpler guiding principles are still needed . This is particularly the case for schools and classes that do not meet the minimum size, where legislation defines multiple cases for exceptions but does not specify any process to determine whether an exception is necessary or desirable. Similarly, the funding formula contains several corrective coefficients, including for small and isolated schools. While they may be necessary, they may also undermine incentives to rationalise the network.

- **School bureaucracy absorbs resources and detracts principals' and teachers' attention away from their core responsibilities.** A high administrative workload was signalled as one of the main factors hindering effective school leadership in Romania (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). The reforms plan steps to reduce schools' administrative burden, such as creating an integrated data management system to streamline school data requests (Section 6. The data and monitoring system). However, additional efforts are needed to reduce other bureaucratic processes and structures in the school that take principal and teacher attention away from teaching and learning. For instance, most of school principals' time is dedicated to administrative tasks, such as staying abreast of legislation and organising and overseeing several school commissions, some of which have overlapping functions (World Bank, forthcoming[44]).

Table 3. Satellite, rural and small schools are predominant in Romania's public school network

	School units	No. of students
Total schools	16 507	2 760 158
Of which are satellite schools	10 561 (64%)	524 391 (19%)
Of which are rural schools	11 378 (69%)	944 904 (34%)
Of which are schools with fewer than 50 students	7 386 (45%)	166 808 (6%)

Source: World Bank (forthcoming[38]), *Deliverable 3 Functional Analysis of the Pre-university System, Reimbursable Advisory Services Agreement on Assistance for Education Recovery in Romania (P178400).*

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[4] Satellite schools are educational institutions without a legal personality, affiliated with a larger main school or institution.

Targeting additional resources to disadvantaged schools and students with special educational needs can help redress inequities

Planned reforms introduce greater equity weighting for schools classified as disadvantaged and students with SEN. In addition, the basic per-capita funding will allocate a minimum of 20% of total funding to the continuous training of school staff and for goods and services – two areas that have been underfunded (World Bank, forthcoming[38]). If adequately designed and implemented, these changes represent a positive step to enhance fairness in funding and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Notable features of planned changes to school funding include:

- **Plans to introduce new corrective coefficients to the funding formula can address equity but potentially create a more complex and less efficient formula**. The funding formula will include new adjustments to provide additional funding to disadvantaged schools and schools enrolling SEN students. In addition to these changes, the formula already accounts for factors like rural locations, small student populations, minority language of instruction and increased maintenance costs related to local climate conditions. While new and existing adjustments recognise genuine differences in unit costs beyond a school's control, they also introduce complexity to the formula. A funding formula with too many corrective coefficients can make it difficult to anticipate how much funding each school or locality will receive and complicate medium-term budgeting. It may also require extensive data collection and analysis, reduce transparency and hinder stakeholders' ability to understand how funding decisions are made.

- **The capacity and oversight that would enable schools to make good use of SEN funds need to be developed.** The new legislative package offers greater clarity on how to design educational services for students with SEN[5] and provides resources to accommodate them, to the greatest extent possible, in mainstream schools. The law introduces a multi-tier support model to provide four different levels of support according to student need and establishes a new National Centre for Inclusive Education to professionalise special education in the country. These are all positive changes that can improve the educational experience of SEN students and reduce their marginalisation. However, as with other institutions created by the reform, secondary legislation still needs to clarify the structure and resourcing for the new National Centre for Inclusive Education. In addition, the Ministry of Education will need to define protocols to consistently identify students with SEN, prepare school staff to implement a multi-tier inclusion approach, and monitor schools' use of equity funding (see below).

- **Despite widespread concerns about unequal spending across counties, localities and schools, there is no active monitoring of school funding**. Addressing the funding disparities that result – both through the funding formula and through stronger fiscal equalisation policies – will require data, analysis and reporting of school budgets and needs. While Romania collects data on school budgets and their execution through the Ministry of Finance's data management system (Forexebug), the platform is not connected to the Ministry of Education's own data management system. As a result, the Ministry of Education is not monitoring or reporting funding across different schools, locations or student population groups. What analysis that does exist has been conducted

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[5] Special education is defined as "the form of education for students with special needs who, due to specific mental, intellectual and/or sensory disabilities, physical, motor and intellectual disabilities, as well as neuromotor, emotional, neurodevelopmental disabilities, social maladjustment or any other disease, disorder or chronic, genetic condition, are in need of resources and specialised support." Students with SEN needs are identified by multidisciplinary commissions for child protection in each county, which include doctors, psychologists, pedagogues, teachers, sociologists, social assistants, etc. County Centres for Educational Resources and Assistance, and special education schools will act as resource hubs and hire multi-disciplinary specialist teams that schools can draw on.

by external partners and only on an ad hoc basis. Plans to develop an interoperable and integrated data management system are a positive step to improve access to financial data and strengthen the monitoring of school funding (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system).

Targeted programmes for communities, schools and students can help address multifaceted barriers to participation and learning

The 2023 Law identifies a set of targeted programmes to support the most disadvantaged schools and students in the system. It introduces the concept of priority investment areas in education to provide additional funding and support to schools located in areas that concentrate socio-economic disadvantage. Planned reforms also redefine the monetary bonus to encourage teachers to relocate to a disadvantaged or isolated school and expand scholarships for disadvantaged students. Notable features of policies related to targeted grants for schools, teachers and students include:

- **Priority investment areas in education can help concentrate resources in specific geographical communities and schools**. Improving student learning in disadvantaged schools will require an integrated support package for schools, students and their families. Priority investment areas are one step towards this. They can enable Romania to concentrate sizeable resources and integrate social and educational services in the most disadvantaged communities. Secondary legislation will provide further clarity regarding the methodology to identify priority areas and schools. This methodology should include a balanced selection of area-based and student indicators to ensure a more accurate targeting of resources. For instance, since not all students attend a school near their home, area-based indicators alone may lead to a misallocation of resources. Only considering a school's location – and not its student population – risks missing schools in wealthy areas with large shares of disadvantaged children, or, conversely, benefit schools in poor areas serving advantaged students. In addition, while the pre-university education law says priority investment areas will help align educational and social services, Romania still needs to define how and at which level services will be integrated and delivered.

- **Monetary bonuses may not suffice to attract, retain and equip teachers to work in difficult environments.** The pre-university education law aims to provide a bonus payment for teachers working in disadvantaged or isolated areas in the form of a lump sum equivalent to five gross minimum salaries, under the condition that they stay in the same school for five years. The pre-university education law also aims to cover commuting costs for teachers who reside in a different locality than that of their school (Ministry of Education, 2023[12]). However, in Romania, salary bonuses, contract extensions and reduced teaching hours have not been sufficient to attract and retain more qualified teachers in rural or isolated schools. One reason is that while these schools typically offer more difficult working conditions, the support available for those willing to teach in these settings remains limited (Ares Abalde, 2014[45]). For instance, teachers in small rural or isolated schools tend to have limited opportunities to collaborate and learn from peers, often teach multigrade classes, cover multiple subjects, and assume different roles, such as leadership and teaching. Many of the planned additional measures to motivate and support teachers, such as mentorship and learning communities in schools, will be important to help small rural and isolated schools attract and retain more qualified professionals and deliver education of good quality.

- **Expanding scholarships to support disadvantaged students can help address inequities in participation and achievement.** Reforms expand the number, share and size of social scholarships and transfer funding responsibilities from local authorities to the Ministry of Education to guarantee consistent scholarship funding across the country (see Figure 11). Reforms also aim to give disadvantaged students a fairer chance at competing for merit scholarships by awarding these scholarships to the top 30% of students in each class. While these are promising measures, reforms do not go as far as they might to direct financial support to disadvantaged students. For example, merit scholarships are considerably more generous than social scholarships, even

though merit scholarships are still likely to disproportionately benefit students from wealthier families. These advantaged students are likely to progress in the education system without the scholarship, resulting in an inefficient use of limited public resources. Redirecting these funds to financially disadvantaged yet academically talented students would better serve the goal of reducing the very high rates of early school leaving in pre-tertiary education. In addition, while scholarships can help address some of the cost barriers to education, their effectiveness might be limited without stronger safety nets for disadvantaged school-age children and their families. Recent OECD analysis has highlighted that direct cash transfers to poor households are insufficient to protect them from poverty, especially for rural households and families with children (OECD, 2022[46]).

Figure 11. The number, share and monthly amounts of social scholarships in Romania increased between 2020 and 2023

Number of scholarships awarded, by type of scholarship, 2020 and 2023
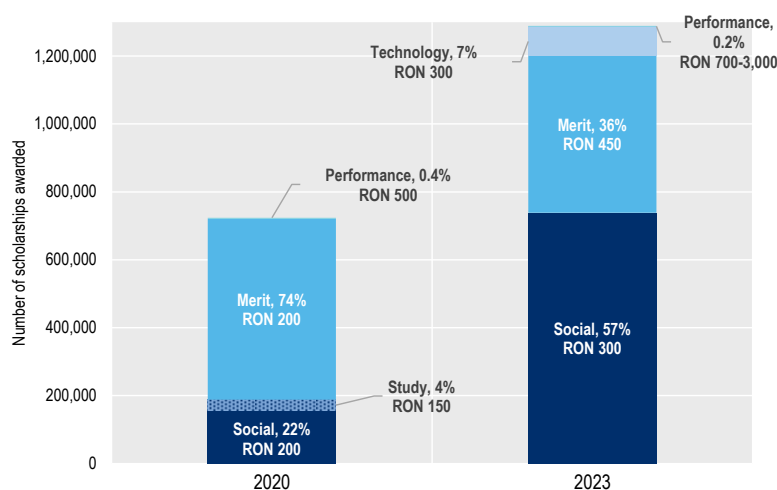
Note: Dark blue represents social scholarships, and light blue academic scholarships (rewarding academic performance). Study scholarships are a mix of academic and social scholarships, as they are directed to students from low-income families and have good academic performance.
Source: Ministry of Education (2023[8]), *Background Questionnaire: Support for Strengthening the Governance Model in Pre-tertiary Education in Romania*; Ministry of Education (2023[12]), *Legea Învățământului Preuniversitar "România Educată" [The pre-university education law]*; Ministry of Education (2023[47]), "Situația burselor școlare la 31 octombrie 2023" [Scholarship status as of 31 October 2023], https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Centralizare_situatie_burse_scolare_31_octombrie_2023.pdf.

Policy recommendations

> *Recommendation 6. Strengthen capacities to adopt a more strategic approach to budgeting so that increased spending supports long-term goals*

To shift towards a more strategic approach to budgeting that connects policy priorities to medium-term budgeting, Romania should:

Action 1   **Invest in the Ministry of Education's institutional capacity for strategic budgeting.** The Ministry of Education needs to build the relevant expertise to project budgetary needs over a multi-year period, structure budgets through programmes and define and report on performance indicators. To do so, the Ministry of Education might need to expand the teams and resources in the GED. The Annex. Country examples provides examples of the functions and staff roles of

established finance units in select EU and OECD partner countries. They host experienced professional teams capable of undertaking the specialised tasks important to strategic budgeting, such as revenue projections, expenditure forecasts and *ex ante* cost-benefit analyses. In many of these countries, finance units are housed within wider departments that also encompass planning and monitoring for priority reforms. This allows for more direct communication and collaboration between the teams responsible for formulating strategic policies and those managing the financial resources needed to implement them.

Action 2   **Provide on-the-job training to apply the new national methodologies for strategic planning and programme-based budgeting.** The GED and the PPU will require considerable support if they are to apply a multi-annual, programme-based planning and budgeting approach. To start, the Ministry of Finance and the General Secretariat of the Government will need to provide more training and oversight than is currently available to help line ministry staff understand and use the new national methodologies for strategic planning and budgeting. Temporary staff exchanges with ministries experienced in programme-based budgeting can also enhance professional capabilities. For instance, the Ministry of Investment and European Projects has well-established processes to manage programme and performance-based budgeting, with regular financial reporting linked to performance indicators and milestone information (Mathot and Park, 2022[48]). Seconding staff from and to the Ministry of Education would provide them with hands-on experience with these budgeting processes.

Recommendation 7. Review the organisation of the school network and schools' administrative processes to make more efficient use of public spending

If increased spending is to make a difference in the quality of schooling, Romania will need to address existing inefficiencies in the system, starting with its school network and the bureaucratic workload of schools. Measures to consider include:

Action 1   **Conduct regular studies to analyse the opportunities to rationalise the school network while safeguarding student access to schools.** The benefits of smaller schools in terms of accessibility appear to be counteracted by the difficulties of providing enough qualified teachers and ensuring that school clusters improve teaching quality. The Ministry of Education will need to analyse the school network's current inefficiencies and quality challenges and assess the cost and benefits of different options to reorganise the network. Box 3 outlines the steps and data that could feed into these studies. By comparing current capacity against expected demand, the Ministry of Education will be able to identify the stages of educational provision and specific schools and services within schools where supply greatly exceeds future need. At the same time, simulation of students' commuting distances to schools, transportation needs and associated costs can help identify cases where closing a school is possible without precluding students' access to education. These analyses would serve as a basis to develop national principles and rules to reorganise the network and guide investments in school infrastructure (see Action 2 below). Estonia and Portugal have conducted similar studies to inform their school network planning and organisation (see Annex. Country examples).

Box 3. A study to reorganise the school network in Romania

A study on options to reorganise the school network could consider the following:

- **The network's current capacity considering each major education stage** at the municipal/commune and county level. This analysis requires high-quality inventories with information on individual schools, including location, staffing, and availability and capacity of school facilities.

- **Forecasted demand** for each major stage of education in each municipality/commune and county (in the next one to five years; next six to ten years). This analysis can be performed through simulation models that project expected student numbers, classrooms, personnel and facilities needed for different stages of education. When conducting these forecasts, the Ministry of Education will need to define a number of assumptions concerning student enrolment and flow rates, student-teacher ratios, utilisation rates of facilities, and policy choices, such as class sizes, maximum commuting time to schools and curricular choices. For instance, a greater focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects might require the expansion of computer and science laboratories in the network.

- **Simulations of the impact of reorganisation on students' commuting distances to schools**. These simulations require geospatial data on school locations, student enrolment, and student home address data, along with data on transportation options available and traffic patterns. This information will be important for the Ministry of Education to map the transportation offer, identify unmet needs and estimate the budget needed to guarantee adequate provision.

Action 2   **Develop national guidelines to reorganise the school network.** The Ministry of Education can help rationalise the school network by developing an authoritative framework to initiate the review of small schools, engage communities and provide incentives to consolidate schools or services. By communicating to stakeholders that optimising the network involves a range of options beyond closing schools, the Ministry of Education can also build support for these efforts. OECD countries that have rationalised their network have developed the following:

o *A process and criteria to initiate the review of small schools:* Romania needs to focus more attention on how decisions to review small schools for potential closure or consolidation are taken. A nationally defined process and criteria to initiate the review of small schools could help in this respect. The Ministry can develop these process and criteria through consultations with local authorities, County Directorates, ARACIIP and other important actors in the system. For instance, in Scotland, criteria include a low projected student enrolment, high operating costs relative to the average for the authority, low occupancy levels, a significant decline in student performance and an urgent need for investment that is deemed disproportionate. While such reviews do not automatically translate into school closure or consolidation, they provide an objective basis for decision making and exert pressure for closure when repeated reviews of the same school occur (Ares Abalde, 2014[45]).

o *Guidance on the options to reorganise the network:* Counties and local authorities will benefit from clear guidance on when closures, clustering, consortia or mergers (such as combining schools or specific services) are appropriate options. For instance, school consortia between rural and urban schools might need to respect a minimum distance, have adequate transportation options and impose explicit requirements on schools to allocate additional

funding to support student learning. In Romania, it will be essential that the Ministry of Education works closely with County councils to guarantee student transportation to schools, as while the government already offers free transportation for students, transportation services are not always available, particularly in rural areas. Lithuania provides an example of how the Ministry of Education can develop guidelines to support local network planning (see Annex. Country examples).

o *Clear expectations to conduct stakeholder consultations*: When considering different options, the Ministry of Education will need to ensure that reorganisation efforts are not driven primarily by potential cost savings but also by the prospect of improving students' learning environments. This will imply establishing clear processes to consult and engage with stakeholders to address concerns within the local community and reach a consensus on proposed plans to reorganise the network. The Ministry of Education could also have the authority to review and potentially intervene in proposals made by local authorities in instances where a closure or merger faces substantial opposition from the local community or does not clearly demonstrate educational benefits to affected students. For instance, in Scotland, reorganisation decisions are taken by local authorities, but in some instances, the Scottish ministers can review proposals and potentially overturn them (Government of Scotland, 2022[49]). This mechanism intends to increase public confidence in the fact that decisions are made fairly and consistently across the country. It also encourages local authorities to be very proactive in consulting local communities and demonstrating the potential benefits to the students of the affected school(s).

o *Incentives to steer network reorganisation*: Incentives to reorganise the network can be monetary and in-kind. As Romania reviews its funding formula, authorities will need to carefully analyse the merits of including some of the corrective coefficients in the formula compared to other options (see Recommendation 8). In-kind-incentives, such as investments in new school infrastructure, are equally important. For instance, in Portugal, decisions to consolidate schools were matched with financial support to improve the infrastructure of host schools and guarantee school transport for students (Ares Abalde, 2014[45]). Romania could strategically direct NRRP investments in school infrastructure to support consolidation efforts and make visible improvements to host school premises.

Action 3 **Reduce schools' administrative workload and reporting requirements.** A reduced administrative workload would enable schools to focus on their primary goal of ensuring a quality teaching and learning process. Conclusions from a World Bank study emphasise that most of school principals' time is dedicated to administrative tasks, such as staying abreast of legislation and responding to multiple, often duplicative data requests. In addition, school principals and staff are required to organise and participate in various school commissions, placing an additional burden on their time (World Bank, forthcoming[44]). Other OECD countries have simplified the bureaucracy of schools (see Annex. Country examples). These examples share some common features: high-level civil servants championed and oversaw measures to reduce paperwork, and consultations with schools and local education authorities helped identify redundant or unnecessary administrative processes and come up with proposals. Romania's plan to develop an integrated education data management system and invest in schools' digital skills is also an important step to reduce schools' reporting burden. However, to be effective, all actors should be required to use the new system as the sole platform for collecting data from schools. For this to happen, the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) will need to agree, use the same indicators, and implement robust quality checks for the data collected (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system).

Recommendation 8. Revise school funding and support mechanisms, so they help advance policy priorities

To address funding disparities between schools, and support inclusion in education, Romania can consider the following:

Action 1 **Conduct a review of the funding formula to ensure it meets its policy objectives.** Planned changes to the funding formula provide an opportunity to clarify the functions of the formula and identify required data. Some of the key questions Romania will need to address when reviewing its funding formula include:

  o *What will be the primary policy objectives of the formula?* The funding formula can fulfil different policy objectives. For instance, the formula can promote vertical equity by assigning higher weights to specific student categories (e.g. SEN). This fosters the expansion of specific educational services in contexts of unmet demand. The formula can also support policy objectives, such as consolidating the school network. This is the case when strict per-capita funding places larger schools with a higher number of students at an advantage. In Romania's context, where both equity and consolidation might be important goals, the Ministry of Education could consider greater use of direct grants to address the additional costs and challenges faced by small schools. While this would require stronger capacity within the GED to manage an additional funding stream and a commitment to provide funding over time, it could simplify the formula and ensure it helps steer network consolidation efforts.

  o *What data will be needed to compute the formula?* As Romania introduces new variables into its funding formula, it must carefully consider available data sources, their reliability, and trade-offs. For example, census-based data may be less up-to-date and precise at the individual student level than school-reported data, but it can be more objective. In contrast, school-reported data provides more detailed, timely information for individual students but may contain reporting errors and bias. Many school funding systems aim to strike a balance between using census-based and school-based indicators. Defining an objective process to identify disadvantaged schools (see Recommendation 9. Define protocols to identify schools and students in greater need and provide them with comprehensive support) and ensuring that multidisciplinary commissions for child protection in each county identify and report SEN students using consistent protocols will be important steps to operationalise changes in the formula.

Action 2 **Support schools in developing educational environments that are responsive to students' different educational needs.** Teachers, school leaders and school support teams in Romania will require guidance to implement the new multi-tiered system of support for students with SEN. The Ministry of Education will need to expand professional development opportunities available to schools on special education and ensure other measures analysed in this policy perspective, such as school support teams, school networks, mentorship and professional learning communities, include a focus on equitable and inclusive teaching (see Section 5. The teaching). Building capacity for inclusive education across the system will need considerable funding from the Ministry of Education, starting with a well-resourced National Centre for Inclusive Education. It will also require investing in the County Centres for Educational Resources and Assistance and special education schools that act as resource hubs on inclusive education for other schools. The success of well-established multi-tier models, such as that of Finland, hinges on the existence of strong multidisciplinary support teams that work closely with teachers and school leaders, as well as specialised teacher training programmes, quality guidance for schools and dedicated funding from the Ministry of Education (Eurydice, 2023[50]).

Action 3   **Regularly monitor, analyse and report school funding data.** If equity is a priority for Romania, then the data and tools available to track spending according to equity criteria should be enhanced. By closely monitoring total funding per student by locality, county and for each level of education, the Ministry of Education would be able to determine whether there is a fair provision of resources and uncover existing inequities. In addition, the Ministry of Education can also monitor whether disadvantaged groups of students effectively receive additional resources. This will require school-level data on budgets and budget execution, as well as demographic data describing the area where schools are located and the student population they serve. Plans to develop Romania's education data management system provide an opportunity for the Ministry of Education to connect its integrated data management system to the Forexebug database on school financial data and create interactive dashboards to report data in an accessible way (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system). Commissioning thematic ARACIIP inspections is another option to monitor the use of resources for equity. The Annex. Country examples provides examples of how the United States, England (United Kingdom) and the Netherlands keep track of and report on school funding for equity and inclusion.

Recommendation 9. Define protocols to identify schools and students in greater need and provide them with comprehensive support

Romania still needs to develop the methodologies to target support to the schools and students in greater need. Measures to consider include:

Action 1   **Combine area-based indicators with schools' student intake to identify priority schools.** To take into account geographical disparities, as well as a student's individual risk of disadvantage, the Ministry of Education could combine census data and school-level data in a three-pronged approach:

   o   *Use census data to estimate the relative affluence or disadvantage in small geographical areas.* Such data could be aggregated into an index of deprivation for each small area, considering variables such as education levels, single-parent rates, occupation and employment rates, and dependency ratios in the zone.

   o   *Match the index of deprivation in each area to student home addresses.* School actors should be trained and supported to enter each student's reliable home address information. To capture in greater breadth individual student disadvantage, a student score can be estimated by considering the index of deprivation in their area of residency and additional weighted individual variables, such as Roma background.

   o   *Estimate schools' deprivation scores by aggregating the individual scores of all students in a school.* Schools above a predefined threshold of disadvantage would be targeted for additional funding and support. The total resources available to support disadvantaged schools will be critical to determining the number of beneficiary schools.

   Despite the potential drawback of excluding schools just below the designated threshold of deprivation or individual vulnerable students in advantaged schools, this approach provides an objective methodology to identify and target limited resources. The list of beneficiary schools should be regularly revised after a given period (e.g. five years) to ensure schools that no longer need targeted support can exit the programme and leave room for new ones to join. Several OECD systems, including Ireland, the Flemish Community of Belgium, France and England (United Kingdom), use a mix of area-based and individual student indicators to target additional funding to schools in need (see Annex. Country examples).

Action 2   **Develop an integrated service delivery model.** As Romania continues strengthening inclusive education, further attention should be paid to integrating services across education and other sectors to support vulnerable students and their families. Romania will need to define the

level at which services will be integrated (e.g. at the level of counties or the smaller level of local authorities, such as municipalities and towns) and schools' role in helping students access these services. Romania will also need to define how services will be co-ordinated across agencies. Different options exist, such as having a unified case management system (when a single contact person co-ordinates the different services provided to students or their families); one-stop-shop provision (by providing services through a single point of access); or multidisciplinary team co-ordination (when teams across agencies work together to co-ordinate service provision). Lessons from pilot projects to integrate social, health and education services in disadvantaged communities in Bacău County, for example, can inform the expansion of integrated services across the country (OECD, 2022[46]).

Action 3 **Ensure mentorship and school improvement support to help attract, retain and support teachers in disadvantaged, rural and isolated schools.** While planned reforms provide monetary incentives for teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools, teachers will need sustained professional support to provide a supportive learning environment for their students. This is why this policy perspective suggests ensuring mentors are assigned to work in disadvantaged schools, including small, rural and isolated schools (see Section 5. The teaching) and have relevant experience to mentor in these specific contexts (e.g. multigrade teaching; high shares of Roma students). Experience from OECD countries shows how mentorship, combined with other school improvement initiatives such as school networking initiatives, can support small, rural schools (see Annex. Country examples).

Action 4 **Continue to prioritise disadvantaged students in the allocation of scholarships.** Continuing to earmark a high share of resources for social scholarships will be important to address high dropout rates in the system. In addition, Romania could consider incorporating social eligibility criteria for merit scholarships, so these benefit academically gifted socio-economically disadvantaged students who need economic support to continue progressing in their education. These measures should be taken alongside a comprehensive review of the safety nets available to socio-economically disadvantaged families with school-aged children.

5. The teaching profession

Overview of context

Romania's new legislative package aims to modernise instruction and make teaching a more attractive and rewarding career. It includes plans to create teacher standards, increase teacher salaries and introduce structured mentorship and professional learning opportunities within schools. This section provides directions for how Romania can move forward with these positive reforms. It identifies how policies can be clarified and aligned for greater impact. It also suggests ways to address obstacles that have held back previous teacher reforms, such as the lack of adequate teacher engagement, capacity and sustained investment.

Key findings from the diagnostic review

Key features of the education system prior to the reform include:

- **Teaching practice does not yet reflect the learning goals of the national curriculum and Educated Romania**. Teacher education in Romania has traditionally focused on content knowledge, paying less attention to pedagogy and the types of student-centred practices (e.g. feedback and differentiation) that encourage learning and inclusion. Teachers in lower

secondary education have recently benefited from training to apply the new competency-based curriculum through the Relevant Curriculum, Open Education for All (CRED) project. Providing similar support and training to all teachers in the system will be important to roll out the country's new curriculum and inclusive vision of Educated Romania.
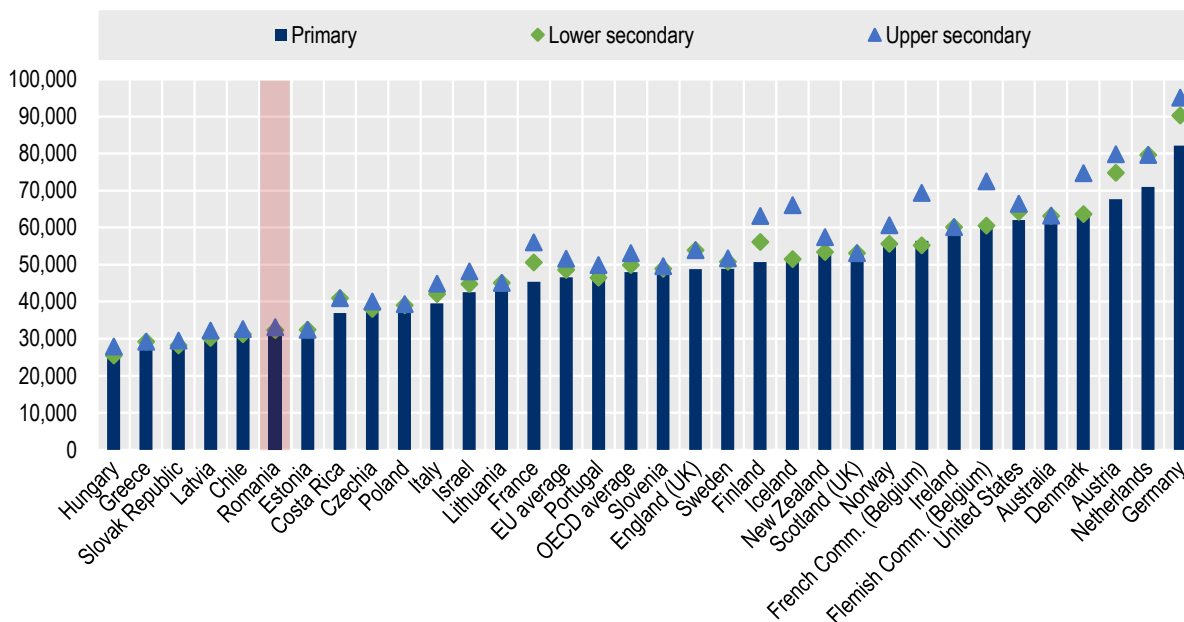
- **The teaching career lacks many of the hallmarks of a skilled profession, with no common standards of practice and weak links between performance, promotion and pay**. While Romania has established teacher career grades[6] and competency profiles, there could be stronger connections between professional growth, competence and pay. Certification to become a teacher and promotion to a higher grade are based primarily on teacher exams and appraisals that do not sufficiently consider evidence of teaching practice. No standards spell out how teaching competencies and roles evolve, which further limits the development of teaching as a professional career. Romania also lacks a defined approach to managing underperformance, and teachers who do not take or pass the *Titularizare* exam (which grants a permanent post and other benefits) can continue to teach.

- **Low wages and slow salary progression have made the teaching profession less attractive**. Teacher salaries in Romania are low compared to international peers (see Figure 12) and nationally compared to other tertiary-educated workers (see Figure 13). Salary progression is also slow: while it is possible for teachers to reach the top of the pay scale in at least 25 years, on average it takes primary teachers 40 years to do so, reflecting the weight of seniority in determining pay increases (Eurydice, 2022[51]). The teacher pay system in Romania also stands out for its complexity. Teachers are eligible for a large number of additional allocations, the most significant of which – the merit-based pay bonus – raises concerns in terms of effectiveness and integrity (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]).

- **Practising teachers have limited opportunities for job-embedded professional development**. While there has been progress in improving initial teacher education, reflected in the new master's in teaching,[7] the quality of learning opportunities for in-service teachers is poor. Teacher professional development mainly consists of accumulating training credits through participation in lectures outside the school and is often disconnected from teachers' learning needs (OECD, 2020[10]). Practical school-based and job-embedded learning opportunities remain limited, and attempts to introduce valuable functions, such as mentorship, have had little impact until now, in part because of a lack of support for the role in terms of selection, training and reduced teaching hours for mentors and mentees. The way in which teachers are appraised within schools is also relatively weak from a developmental perspective, with an emphasis on procedural compliance and limited focus on feedback and professional learning (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]).

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[6] Romania's teacher career pathway includes three progressive levels: Beginning Teacher, Didactical Qualification Level II and Didactical Qualification Level I. Teachers can also compete for "professor emeritus" status 15 years after earning their last didactic degree, which provides additional benefits.

[7] The 2011 Education Law upgraded the qualification requirement to become a teacher to a two-year master's. As part of the EU-funded programme "Career start through a teaching masters", Romania piloted the new master's in teaching for the first time in 2020-21 in eight universities and in collaboration with a network of practicum schools. The master's comprises four semesters and includes pedagogical practice under the co-ordination of a mentor teacher (Ministry of Education, 2017[114]; 2020[115]).

Figure 12. Teacher salaries are low in Romania by international comparison

Annual average salaries (including bonuses and allowances) of teachers (general programmes) in public institutions, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for private consumption, 2022

Source: OECD (2023[36]), *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en.

Figure 13. Teacher salaries are below that of tertiary-educated workers in Romania

Ratio of salary, using annual average actual salaries of upper-secondary teachers (in general programmes) relative to earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education aged 25-64, 2022
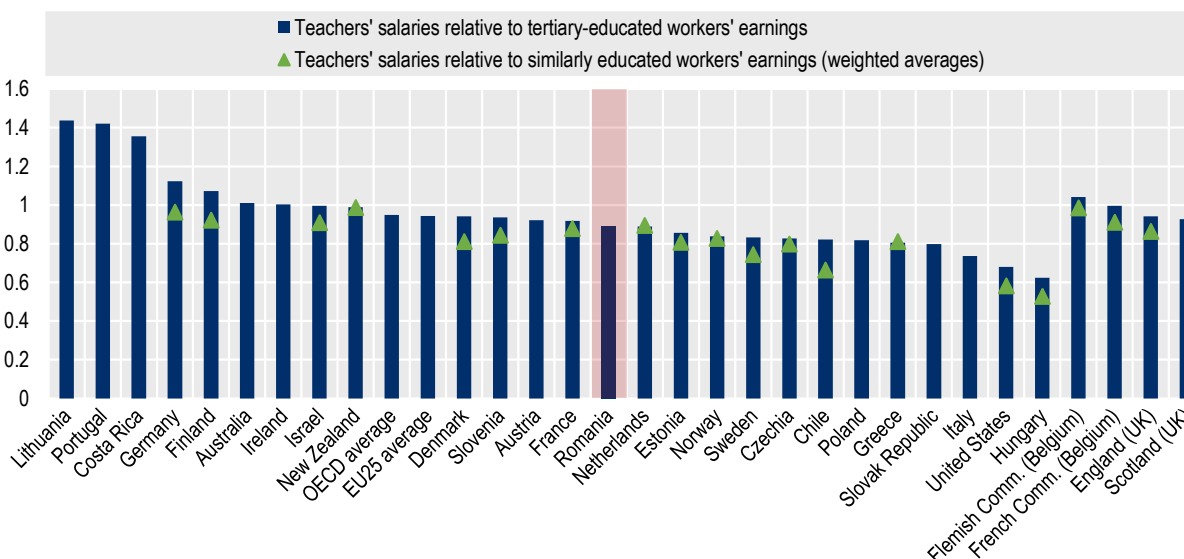
Note: Year of reference for teacher salaries might differ from 2022. Refer to the source table (Table D3.3) for more information. See also Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes at https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en.
Source: OECD (2023[36]), *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, Table D3.3, https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en.

Analysis of planned changes in the legislative package

Romania's new legislative package introduces a set of measures to develop a high-quality, modern and motivated teaching workforce (see Infographic 3). The strengths and challenges of these policies are analysed below.

New professional teacher standards define what teachers should know and be able to do

In 2023, Romania drafted new professional teacher standards as part of the EU Professionalisation of the Teaching Career (hereafter "PROF") project. The new standards describe a basic set of core competencies, which the government plans to develop for different career stages and roles (Ministry of Education, 2023[12]). Importantly, Educated Romania and the 2023 pre-university education law state that the standards should guide all policies related to initial teacher preparation, continuous professional development and career advancement in the future. The legislative package also created a new institution – the National Centre for Training and Development of the Teaching Career (the "National Centre for Teachers") – to lead and ensure coherence across these reforms (Ministry of Education, 2023[12]). Notable aspects include:

- **The Ministry of Education is developing standards in partnership with teachers, which is important for their relevance and adoption.** The decision to place the development of standards in the hands of a new, dedicated centre for teaching (the National Centre for Teachers), staffed primarily by experienced teachers, will help ensure that the profession owns this work and reflects classroom needs.

Infographic 3. Planned changes to Romania's teaching workforce

Introduces new professional teacher standards and career structure

- Plans to set expectations for different career stages and roles.
- Plans to inform teacher education and training, certification and promotion processes.
- Establishes the National Centre for Teachers to oversee national teacher policies and co-ordinate the County Centres for the Teaching Career.
- Replaces the *Definitivat* exam with a new teacher licensing exam.

Develops a new teacher pay scale

- Raises teacher salaries by an average of 25% (31.7% for Beginner Level teachers).
- Does not change salary calculations, which remain largely based on seniority.
- Continues the merit-pay bonus scheme.

Develops teacher mentorship and professional learning in schools

- Provides pre-requisites to become a teacher mentor.
- Creates a new Mentoring and Career Licensing Corps to help scale mentorship nationally.
- Includes mentors in decisions on teacher promotion appraisals.
- Establishes new school commissions to support professional learning in schools.

Source: Authors, based on Ministry of Education (2023[12]), *Legea Învățământului Preuniversitar "România Educată" [The pre-university education law].*

- **The standards capture core aspects of effective teaching but still emphasise compliance over agency.** Romania's new teacher standards reflect what academic literature and international practice suggest are critical aspects of teachers' work, covering knowledge, skills, attitudes and ethics (Government of Romania/European Union, 2023[51]). Important in the Romanian context is the emphasis the standards place on teachers working collaboratively and on student-centred practices, such as active learning strategies, differentiated instruction and providing feedback to students. However, the standards could clarify how teachers can promote equity and inclusion in the classroom, a national goal. Many of the descriptors could also be improved by replacing instructions with descriptions of practice. Statements of practice build understanding and strengthen teacher agency, whereas requirements for teachers to comply with official documents can restrict their development of autonomy and self-efficacy.

- **Differentiated standards will set expectations for different career stages and roles.** The 2023 pre-university education law signals that the basic competencies produced under the PROF project will be developed to set expectations by career stage, education level and teacher role. This is an important reform. An increasing number of EU and OECD countries use such "Roadmap" standards to define expectations for teachers at different points in their careers (Guerriero, 2017[52]). In Romania, this has the potential to provide impetus to teachers' ongoing professional development. Differentiating standards is also a means to formalise important roles, such as teacher mentors and inclusion specialists. This matters from a system transformation perspective (teachers in these roles are expected to lead improvements in teaching practice) and from the perspective of individual teacher motivation to assume higher levels of responsibility. If there remains a limited pay difference between teacher grades, then it is the professional attributes of these roles (the competencies, tasks and purpose) that will make them attractive and give them status.

- **Standards will serve as a guiding reference for other teacher policies**. The 2023 pre-university education law states that the new professional teacher standards will be the main reference for all policies designed to improve teaching quality and gives the National Centre for Teachers the mandate for ensuring this alignment. This renewed commitment to using a common set of standards to provide coherent direction to teacher policies is important in Romania, where policies related to pay, promotion and training send conflicting messages about what good teaching means. However, there are some areas, notably with respect to initial teacher education (ITE), where further clarity is necessary. For example, while it is well understood that the National Centre for Teachers will be engaged in the delivery of the new practicum, its role in other policies is less clear, e.g. how the National Centre for Teachers will work with the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to develop new ITE quality assurance requirements, or with the NCCE to revise the teachers licensing exam. Ministry leadership in ensuring such inter-agency co-operation will be crucial if ITE graduates are to meet new standards for teaching.

The new teacher pay scale can provide a more transparent, effective way to recognise and reward effective teachers

As part of the reform, and following a generalised teacher strike in May 2023, the Romanian government has committed to increasing the base pay for teachers to bring salaries in line with the national average. At the time of drafting this report, the government was discussing potential changes to the criteria that will be used for calculating the new teacher pay scale (Ministry of Education, 2023[53]). Notable aspects are:

- **The overall reform goal is to make the teacher pay system more equitable and performance-based.** There is a clear intention in Romania to use the planned pay increases to create stronger links between teaching performance and pay on the one hand and between pay and promotion on

the other. There is also recognition of the need to use objective criteria grounded in evidence of teaching practice when making decisions related to pay, promotion and contract status. This change is vital in a context where the pay reward and promotion systems remain exceedingly complex.

- **The pay changes will improve the starting salary and reduce the time it takes to reach the top of the salary scale, but the relation between pay and performance could be strengthened.** The decision to prioritise higher starting salaries aligns with the increased qualification requirements for becoming a teacher and the government's emphasis on attracting more high-performing graduates into the profession. However, additional measures could be considered to ensure increase in pay is more closely related to performance and career progression. For example, moderating automatic annual pay increases would help ensure that pay better reflects performance, and not just seniority, especially if the difference in pay between grades remains unchanged. Additional measures could also strengthen the relationship between performance and promotion – such as a fast track for talented teachers to apply for higher grades and special roles. At present, all teachers must wait a fixed number of years before applying for promotion.[8]

- **As new standards are introduced, the merit pay scheme should be reviewed.** The OECD has already identified concerns with the merit-pay scheme in Romania (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). While education systems in OECD countries sometimes provide a variable salary component (e.g. an end-of-year bonus or extra salary step) based on teachers' performance or other factors, these rewards are rarely allocated as a significant percentage of teachers' base salary, as they are in Romania (see Figure 14). Moreover, while the criteria for determining Romania's merit-pay reward have improved, they remain focused on raw test scores rather than teaching practice and contextualised student achievement data. The involvement of CSIs in this process also makes it hard to ensure objectivity and consistency. It would be more efficient to spend the considerable financial resources invested in the merit-pay reward – and the significant time and capacity lost to reward negotiations – on strengthening the overall career structure.

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[8] Teachers wishing to advance to higher career stages (i.e. Didactic Grades II and I) need at least 4 years of experience in their current position to be eligible to apply for promotion, and at least 15 years after obtaining their last didactic degree to compete for "professor emeritus" status.

Figure 14. In OECD countries, rewards are rarely allocated as a percentage of teachers' base salary

Criteria for awarding additional compensation to teachers (ISCED 1-3), 2018
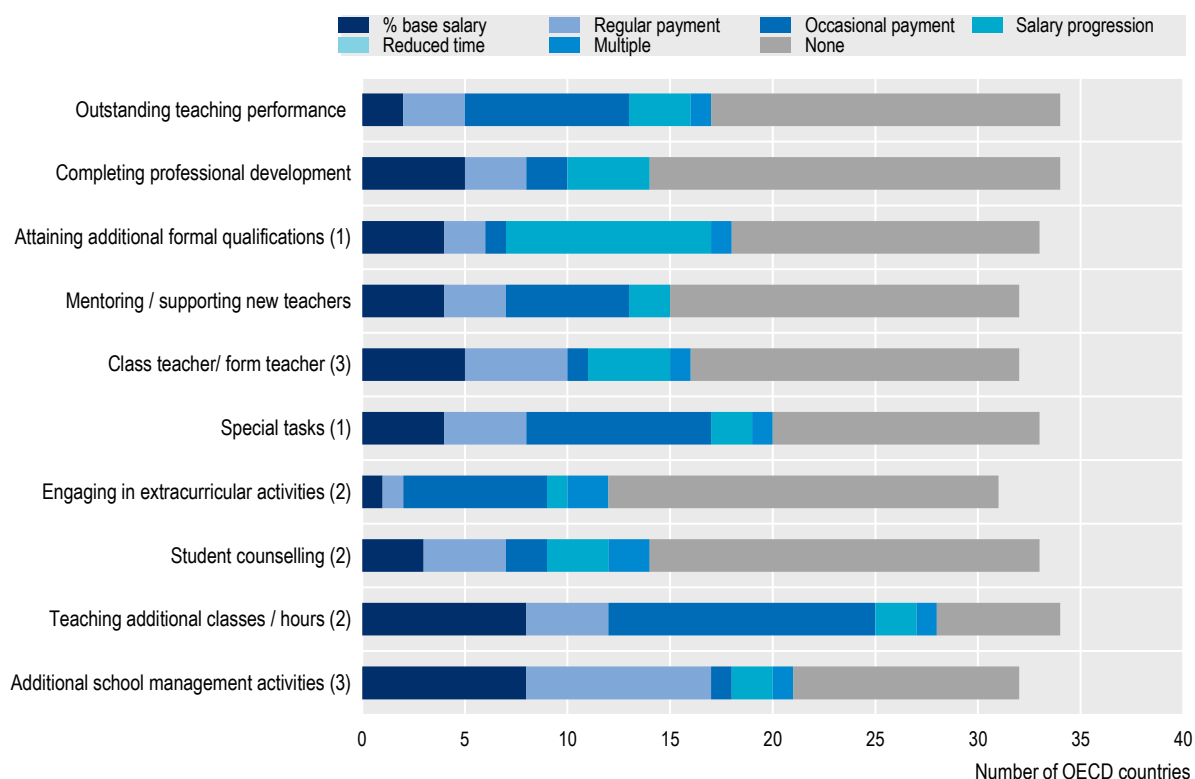
Note: 1. Refers to lower secondary and primary. 2. Refers to lower and upper secondary. 3. Refers to lower secondary.
Source: OECD (2019[54]), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, Table D3.7 (web only), https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en.

Planned changes to teacher certification and promotion create an opportunity to improve the evidence base on which these decisions are based

Romania's 2023 pre-university education law sets out changes to teacher certification and promotion. First, it places responsibility for these key decisions in the hands of the new, specialised National Centre for Teachers, which is also developing the standards that will guide these appraisals. The National Centre for Teachers will house a dedicated Mentoring and Career Licensing Corps, comprising of experienced teachers[9] who will support trainee teachers during their practicum and take part in promotion appraisals (i.e. specialty inspections) alongside county inspectors (Ministry of Education, 2023[12]). The 2023 pre-university education law also makes changes to the methodology for certifying and promoting teachers, placing increased emphasis on authentic measures of teaching practice (e.g. interviews, classroom observation and teacher portfolios). Notable aspects of these changes are that:

- **Secondary legislation needs to clarify the responsibilities and resourcing of the new National Centre for Teachers**. In particular, further clarity is needed regarding the role of county inspectors in promotion appraisals, as their continued involvement in this process conflicts with their role to support schools. In addition, measures to develop mentorship and licensing as two

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[9] To be a part of the Mentoring and Career Licensing Corps, teachers must have achieved the career stage of Didactical Level II and have a minimum of five years of work experience (Ministry of Education, 2023[8]).

distinct functions will also be necessary. This entails clarifying the involvement of mentors in promotion decisions, which risks undermining their formative function. This also requires planning for the time and resources needed to train teacher licensers and develop the tools they will need to maintain the overall integrity of the certification and promotion processes and make valid, reliable and trusted recommendations.

- **Despite positive changes to the evidence used in promotion appraisals, teacher examinations will continue to determine decisions**. The 2023 pre-university education law improves the appraisal methodology for teacher promotion in several respects. For one, it adds teacher interviews to the existing practice of classroom observation and increases the weight of teacher portfolios. If well-designed, the latter can provide rich, authentic evidence of teaching practice. The pre-university education law also recognises the importance of using evidence of student learning when evaluating teaching quality and announces reforms to Romania's national assessment that will improve the quality of student learning data (see Section 6. The data and monitoring system). However, Romania plans to continue using teacher examinations, especially written tests of pedagogy, as one of the main determinants of promotion. While written exams can assess aspects of teacher content and pedagogical knowledge, it is hard to design exams that evaluate the applied understanding and psycho-social attributes that make for good teaching. Beyond initial teacher certification, exams are rarely used among EU countries as part of teacher promotion decisions (Eurydice, n.d.[29]).

- **Introducing a new licensing exam provides an opportunity to update the exam's content in line with the new expectations for teachers.** The 2023 pre-university education law intends to transform Romania's long-standing *Definitivat* exam into a new teacher licensing exam. This provides an opportunity to update the exam's content in line with the new teacher standards, changes to ITE and the school curriculum. However, Romania does not seem to be considering other sources of evidence for licensing beyond the exam and teacher portfolio. For example, including a practicum appraisal would enable Romania to assess the classroom competencies of candidate teachers. It would also encourage ITE providers to invest in developing the practicum component of the new master's in teaching programme. It also appears that Romania intends to fully license teachers at the end of their ITE, whereas previously, licensing was confirmed at the end of a probation period in schools. The latter gives teachers time to develop and demonstrate important competencies gained on the job.

Reforms aim to improve teaching quality through stronger accountability for performance

Romania's plans to strengthen the link between teacher performance, promotion and pay can potentially increase incentives for teachers to grow professionally and improve the quality of their practice. However, this approach to performance management is predicated on teachers applying for promotion and does not provide the government with adequate tools to ensure teaching quality. Several OECD and EU countries have introduced additional measures, such as recertification, to manage teacher performance, and the vast majority have specific policies to manage teachers who do not meet minimum standards (OECD, 2018[55]). At present, Romania is still exploring different options. Notable aspects include:

- **The new teacher career structure represents the central pillar of Romania's performance management system, but it will be important to clarify how it will be implemented.** Romania still needs to clarify when and how it will introduce the new grade standards and profiles – for example, whether the government will automatically transfer teachers to an equivalent grade in the new career structure or if teachers must apply for positions to join the new system. How these questions are addressed will significantly determine whether the new career structure improves teaching practice.

- **Stronger requirements for external appraisal are under consideration, which, if well-designed, could encourage the adoption of new standards of practice**. Many of the policies

discussed in this report, from mentorship to changes to school evaluation, are designed to encourage teachers to engage with the new teaching standards. However, given the current weakness of pedagogical leadership in schools, some form of external accountability – such as a requirement for recertification – might be necessary to ensure teachers are working towards the new standards. This matters if teaching practice and student outcomes are to improve. A requirement for re-certification also provides accountability for the use of public funds at a time when salaries have just been increased for all teachers. At present, teachers undergo external appraisal voluntarily when they apply for promotion or permanent teaching status. As of the 2022-23 school year, over 25% of mid-career teachers had not advanced beyond the Beginner Level of the teacher career ladder (Ministry data set; see Figure 15), either because they have not applied or did not pass the appraisal.

- **The lack of clear policies to manage teachers who do not meet expected standards of practice remains a significant gap**. At present, principals and the school teacher council can request that teachers whose performance is judged "unsatisfactory" participate in training. However, previous OECD analysis found that schools had no authority to compel teachers to undertake training and that the process for managing non-performance was not clearly defined (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). The 2023 pre-university education law does not provide direction on how the government will clarify these aspects. This is a notable gap in the teacher policy framework compared to most OECD countries, where there are both clearly defined steps to address unsatisfactory performance and consequences in the event of inadequate progress. Figure 16 presents the most recent comparative data available (from 2015) on how OECD countries address unsatisfactory performance.

Figure 15. Over 25% of mid-career teachers in Romania had not advanced beyond the Beginner Level of the teacher career ladder in 2022-23

Percentage of teachers by certification level and age group, 2022-23
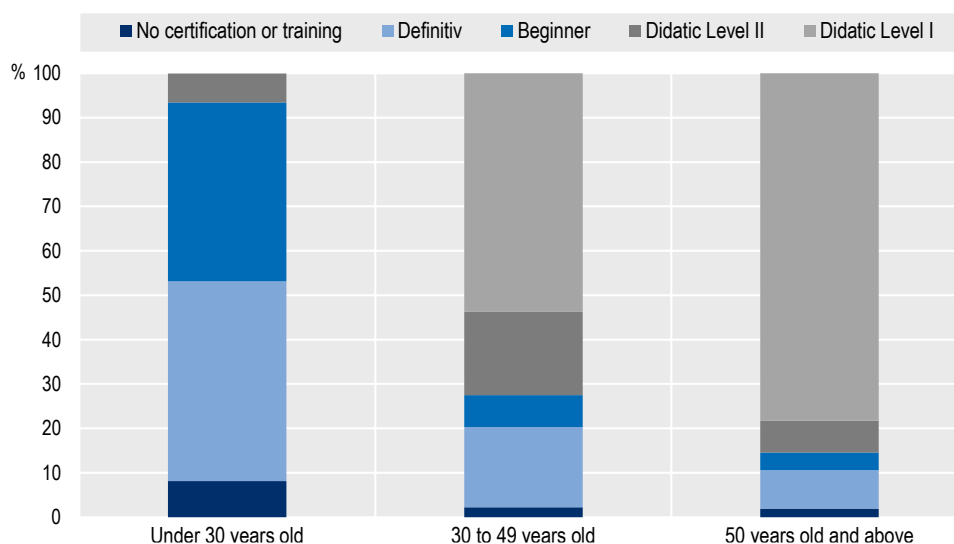
Source: Authors, based on teacher data from the Ministry of Education.

Figure 16. Many OECD countries have policies to discourage and address unsatisfactory performance

Responses/disincentives to underperformance for regular teacher appraisals in lower secondary general education, 2015
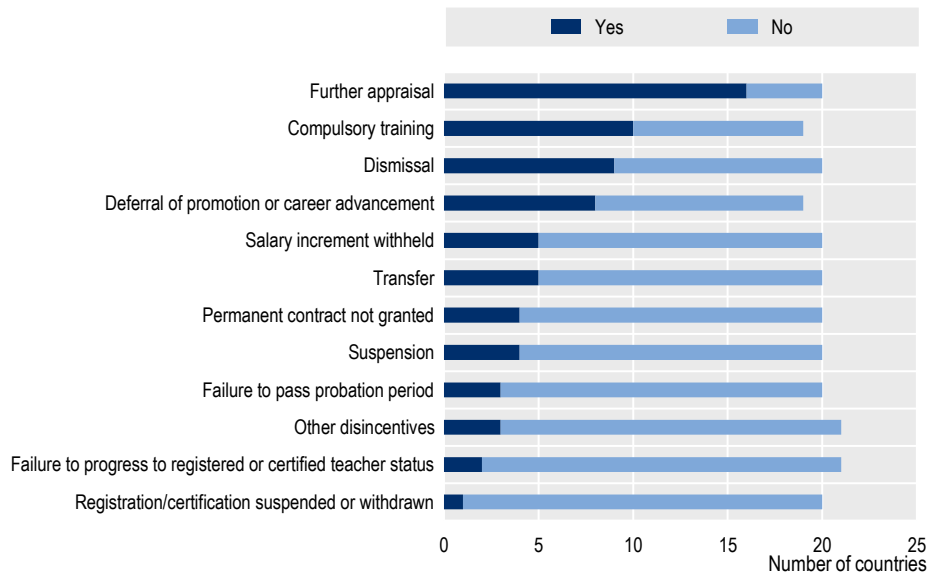
Source: OECD (2015[56]), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en.

Mentorship is considered a critical tool to modernise teaching

Romania's reforms aim to develop more structured teacher-to-teacher mentorship throughout the teaching career. At present, not all trainee teachers in Romania receive sustained mentorship during their one-year practicum. There is also a lack of in-school support for teachers who lack core knowledge and skills. Past efforts to scale mentorship have stalled because of insufficient training and support for mentors, as well as a lack of resources for reducing their teaching hours. The 2023 Law aims to overcome these challenges and provide a qualified mentor for all trainee teachers. In the longer term, the government intends to have mentors available to work with teachers in need in all schools. The new Mentoring and Licensing Corps will assign mentors from the national registry to work with trainee teachers through a consortium of practicum schools[10] (Ministry of Education, 2022[57]). In addition, a new National Body for Training Mentors will operate in each county to help develop effective mentorship practices. Notable features of the policy changes related to teacher mentorship are:

- **Prerequisites to become a mentor exist and future legislation will clarify the expectations of the competencies required for the role.** Planned reforms outline broad criteria that most experienced teachers can meet to become mentors.[11] They also encourage teachers to volunteer for this role. This is positive since mentorship schemes tend to be more effective when they rely on highly motivated mentors who clearly understand their role. In subsequent legislation, Romania plans to define the specific competencies expected of mentors and the distinct roles they may have

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[10] Established in 2022 as part of the EU-funded PROF project, the consortium includes 529 practicum schools that work with initial teacher training universities to deliver pedagogical activities for trainee teachers across the country.

[11] Teachers that receive the Emeritus title automatically acquire the status of mentor, and teachers with Didactical Qualifications Level II and at least five years of teaching experience can apply for the role (Ministry of Education, 2023[12]).

(e.g. based on level of experience and contexts like mentoring teachers of Roma students). This is a crucial step to set clear expectations for teachers in this role and avoid inconsistencies in how mentors are included and/or retained in the national mentor registry.[12]

- **Mentors' continuous training and support will be essential to ensure they appropriate new teaching standards and support teachers effectively**. While Romania has provided short training sessions to over 4 400 mentors through the EU-funded PROF project, mentors will require ongoing training and guidance to adapt to the new standards. Positively, continuous training modules for mentors have been developed and are currently delivered by Teachers' Training Houses. However, planning for the resources needed to sustain this professional support at a large scale will be crucial, especially after EU funding expires.

- **The government has addressed many of the practical considerations of a national mentorship scheme, but questions remain as to its long-term financial sustainability.** Romania has addressed many of the important practical concerns around mentorship. Under the planned reforms, mentors will have at least four hours per week to conduct mentorship activities, will have reduced teaching hours and will receive additional pay on an hourly basis. However, Romania would benefit from an analysis of the financial resources and broader capacities needed to implement these positive measures at scale. For example, securing substitute teachers to enable mentor teachers to leave the classroom will be crucial to the scheme's success. However, it might be logistically challenging and costly to do on a national scale.

- **Prioritising the schools and teachers that can benefit the most from mentorship can help enhance the mentorship scheme's effectiveness.** In stakeholder interviews, the Ministry of Education expressed ambitious plans to assign mentors to all new teachers and eventually have at least one mentor in every school. While these plans are positive, in practice, they will need to be implemented gradually, even if there are resources to deploy and train mentors. Research shows that it is difficult to identify, train and manage enough highly qualified mentors, making mentorship schemes more effective when delivered on a smaller scale (Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, 2020[58]). However, there does not seem to be reflection on which teachers and schools will be prioritised.

*Reforms encourage teachers to learn together throughout their careers*

Romania's legislative package encourages more teacher-led and collaborative development. The establishment of the National Centre for Teachers, for example, clearly illustrates its potential to mirror the role of similar institutions in other OECD and EU countries. This involves fostering a stronger professional identity among the teacher workforce beyond political affiliations (see Annex. Country examples). Other examples include the school consortia, which are helping to share expertise among networks of practicum schools, as well as the new expectations for each school to establish a learning community that promotes collaborative learning among teachers (Ministry of Education, 2023[12]). These changes represent an important shift away from relying on external training as the primary means of professional development for teachers towards job-embedded and teacher-led professional learning, which research shows to be the most effective (Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner, 2017[59]). While many of the structural factors (e.g. the competitive merit-pay scheme and high-stakes appraisal processes) that have hindered similar efforts in the past will need to be addressed, measures to actively develop these new ways of working will also be required. Notable features of the policy changes in this area are:

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[12] For example, some mentors in the national mentor registry were selected by the PROF project in 2021, while others were selected by CSIs more than ten years ago.

- **Reforms aim to encourage teachers' professional learning communities within and across schools but to work effectively, they will require a fundamental change in school leadership.** Reforms set clear expectations for schools to promote collaborative learning between teachers and create a new school commission to facilitate this goal. However, for these formal efforts to mature into genuine communities of practice, schools will need to undergo a more profound transformation, starting with the capabilities of their leadership teams (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). While there are positive planned measures to strengthen the school principal role, such as developing new professional standards to inform their selection, training and appraisal and assigning them to mentors, it is not yet clear how broader leadership teams – e.g. including but not limited to principals – will facilitate professional learning.

- **School governance and evaluation can support collaborative learning within schools**. The planned reforms to school governance and evaluation discussed in Sections 3. School evaluation and support and 4. Resources for education will be critical to introducing a culture of collaborative learning. For instance, changes to school evaluation will provide more feedback on how school leaders can improve their pedagogical leadership, while the reconfiguration of counties will provide more hands-on support to leadership teams on how to encourage school-based learning. However, Romania could further remove some bureaucratic processes and structures in schools that take time and attention away from professional learning. Moreover, issues previously identified by the OECD with respect to how schools manage regular teacher appraisal have not been addressed (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). The evidence schools draw on when monitoring teaching quality appears to be well-balanced and similar to other OECD and EU countries (Figure 17). However, reforms do not yet address the factors that prevent this evidence from being used developmentally. This includes the role of the school board in leading teacher appraisal; the focus on grading rather than formative feedback; and the absence of any established practice – such as a professional learning plan – that would connect appraisal to development.

Figure 17. Romanian schools draw on different sources of evidence when monitoring teaching quality, like other OECD and EU countries

Percentage of students in schools where the following methods were used to monitor the practice of teachers during the previous academic year (based on principal reports), 2022
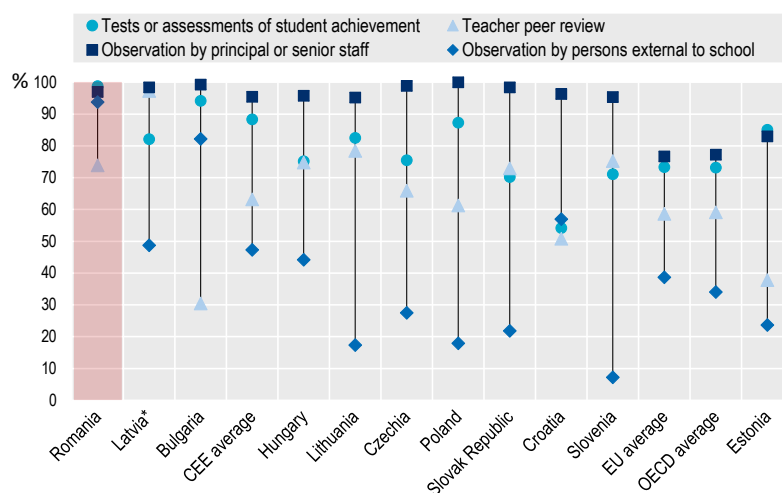
Note: Countries are ordered from highest to lowest total use of sources of the different sources of evidence. *Caution is required when interpreting estimates because one or more PISA sampling standards were not met.
Source: OECD (2023[6]), *PISA 2022 database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2022database/.

- **The National Centre for Teachers has the potential to transform the way teachers and government collaborate, but only if supported by the right governance structure**. The Ministry of Education is yet to define plans for structuring and resourcing the National Centre for Teachers. Important questions to consider with respect to the overall governance include the extent to which teachers and other important stakeholders will be represented in its steering body; the criteria that will be used to appoint senior managers with the right professional expertise; and the mechanisms that the Ministry of Education will put in place to enable the National Centre for Teachers to collaborate with other important bodies, both horizontally, with other parts of the Ministry of Education and its specialised agencies, and vertically, with counties, schools and universities. Planning will also need to address the financial resourcing of the National Centre for Teachers. As explained in this report, Romania's specialised institutions face considerable financial constraints that prevent them from fulfilling their core functions.

Policy recommendations

The recommendations below provide directions clarifying, further aligning and addressing potential obstacles that have hindered the success of previous teacher reforms in Romania. Figure 18 provides an overview of how the different bodies involved in designing and delivering teacher policies might work together in the future.

Figure 18. Different bodies can help strengthen the teaching profession in Romania
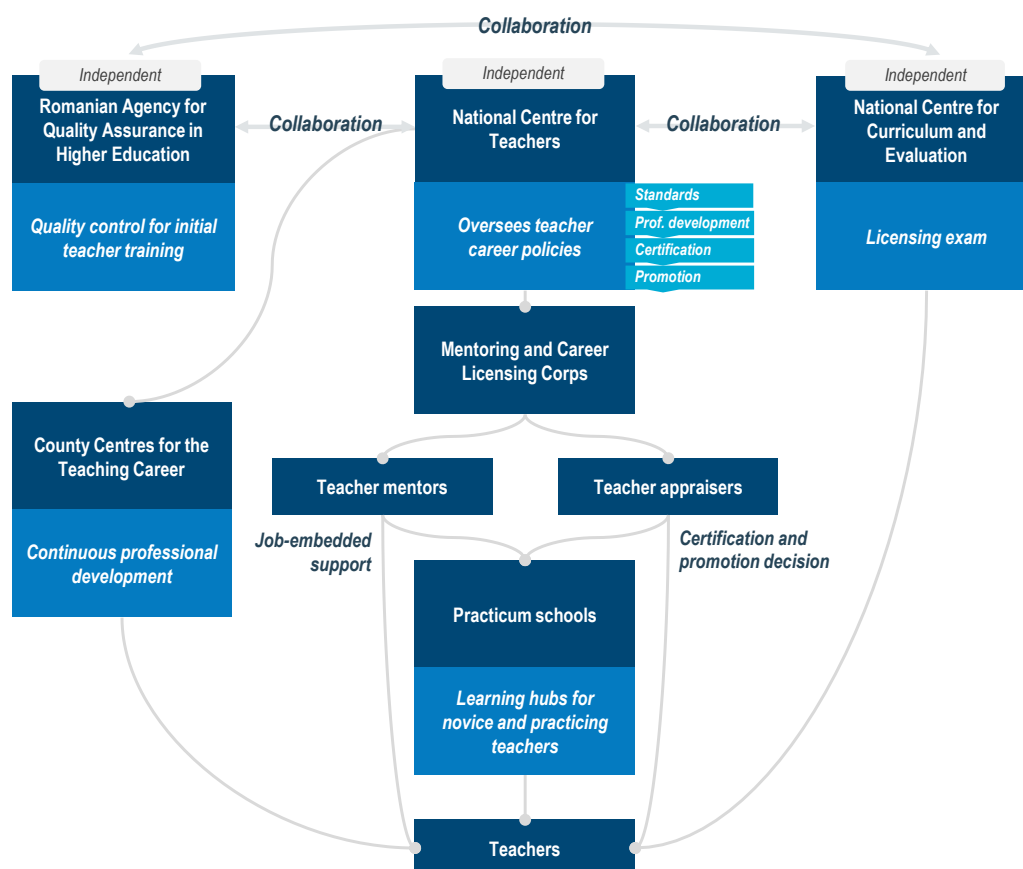
Source: Authors.

Recommendation 10. Finalise new teacher standards and use them to clarify expectations for different stages and roles within the teacher career structure

To finalise the new teacher standards and create a career structure that offers teachers a range of opportunities for professional growth, Romania might consider:

Action 1 **Advance plans to differentiate teacher standards based on career stages**. Standards for each career stage should correspond with progressively increasing responsibilities and expectations (see Table 4). The differentiated standards should use simplified language that is easy to understand and communicate. The National Centre for Teachers should ensure that the differentiated standards reflect national education goals – particularly regarding inclusion – and work closely with teachers to reframe descriptors to reflect teaching practice, not policy compliance. If Romania retains three career stages, changing the existing titles (Beginner Level, Didactic Level II and Didactic Level I) could help signal the new expectations for practice.

Action 2 **Formalise the mentor role and diversify career pathways for teachers to apply higher-level competencies and experience without having to move out of the classroom**. Given the importance of mentorship, Romania's priority should be developing a clear mentor competency profile that sets out the expectations for teachers in this role (see Recommendation 14). This profile should communicate the formative, educational function of mentorship, marking a clear break with the legacy system of teacher inspection and control. Other profiles should also be developed for functions that align with national priorities, such as special education or formative assessment experts. The Annex. Country examples provides examples of diversified career structures from Norway and the Slovak Republic.

Table 4. Example of how Romania might differentiate PROF Standard 3 by career stage

Romania's current teacher competence profile		
Competence area 3: Conducting the educational process		
Standard: Carrying out a quality educational process		
S3.1. Creates interactive, varied learning situations that cultivate co-operative learning relationships between children/students		

How Romania might differentiate the core teacher competence profile under the reform		
Competence area 3: Conducting the educational process		
Standard: Carrying out a quality educational process		
	Graduate/Beginner	Didactical Level II	Didactical Level I
S3.1	Demonstrates knowledge of interactive, varied learning situations that cultivate co-operative learning relationships between children/students	Creates interactive, varied learning situations that cultivate co-operative learning relationships between children/students	Leads colleagues on how to create interactive, varied learning situations that cultivate co-operative learning relationships between children/students

Source: Authors, based on an example from Australia's professional teacher standards, available at www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/national-policy-framework/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers.pdf.

Recommendation 11. Review the teacher pay system to strengthen the link between performance and reward and improve transparency

Romania will need to connect advancement in career stages, pay and performance more closely if the new career structure and planned increases in teacher salaries are to improve teaching quality and teacher professional growth. In revising the pay system, Romania could:

Action 1 **Consider limiting automatic salary increases and reviewing salaries for different grades once teachers' pay is aligned with the national average**. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the design of effective salary scales, important basic principles include linking increases in pay to increases in responsibility and performance. In Romania, salaries currently reflect seniority more than professional competence. Moving towards a performance and role-based pay system will require modifications to several current pay policies. First is the practice of providing annual pay increases with no upper limit or conditions, which can limit the incentives for teachers to develop professionally, seek promotion, and absorb resources that could be invested more strategically – for example, in increasing pay for leadership roles. Austria, which, like Romania, has slow salary progression for teachers, streamlined its salary scale and ended automatic increments, freeing up resources to provide more attractive starting salaries for new teachers (see Annex. Country examples) (OECD, 2019[60]). Second, while Romania's priority has been to increase teachers' baseline salary, with the greatest pay increases being for new teachers, in the future, the government might want to introduce greater differences in pay between grades to reflect the increases in responsibility and competence that roles at these higher levels entail.

Action 2 **Reconsider the merit-pay scheme and reduce the complexity of other reward policies**. The merit-pay scheme incentivises practices that undermine aspects of Romania's new teacher standards, such as the emphasis on student-centred pedagogy. It also hinders greater teacher collaboration and makes pay rewards for critical functions like mentorship less attractive. Using the significant public resources currently spent on the merit-pay scheme to increase pay at higher stages of the career ladder and for teachers in roles that serve essential functions would support a fairer, more transparent and more effective teacher reward system. The number of extra payments for which teachers are eligible also needs to be reviewed. While flexibility is necessary in any pay scheme, the complexity of the system in Romania creates inefficiencies and more opportunities for integrity breaches. The nominal extra "stage" and financial bonus associated with being an "Emeritus" teacher should likewise be integrated within the formal career structure, either as an additional career stage or part of the redefinition of expectations for Didactic Level I.

Recommendation 12. Review planned reforms to teacher certification and promotion appraisals to focus more centrally on teaching practice

While many of the planned changes to teacher certification and promotion appraisals are positive, Romania should take the following steps to further improve the quality and integrity of these high-stakes judgments:

Action 1 **Clarify responsibilities for teacher appraisal to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure qualified, independent evaluators make high-stakes decisions.** Responsibility for teacher appraisal and promotion should be assigned to a body at national level with the relevant professional expertise. This body should oversee the individuals who are responsible for reviewing evidence on eligibility for promotion (see Action 2) and making recommendations. Actors involved in supporting schools and teachers' professional development should not be directly involved in promotion decisions in order to preserve their formative role and prevent conflicts of interest. One way to maintain this separation in Romania, would be to specify that any appraisers based at the county level should only be able to conduct promotion appraisals outside their own county. Referring to "promotion appraisals" rather than "speciality inspections" may also help communicate this shift towards independent, standards-based evaluations of teaching practice.

Action 2   **Review the evidence used to appraise teachers for promotion.** The evidence used to inform decisions on promotion needs to capture the range of competencies set out in Romania's teacher standards as far as possible. Subsequent guidance and legislation will, therefore, need to:

o   *Provide guidance on how the main qualitative sources of evidence will be structured, and quality judgments will be made in relation to the standards.* It will be particularly important to provide new guidance on the portfolio, which is currently a collection of documents rather than an exercise where teachers demonstrate and reflect critically upon the competencies they have acquired.

o   *Determine whether teacher exams should be used.* While exams can play a role in initial teacher certification and might be part of a recertification requirement, they are not well suited to appraise the competencies of experienced teachers applying for promotion to higher grades and roles. If Romania decides to maintain an exam, the current format would need to be revised to reflect the standards. For instance, in Chile, decisions regarding teachers' promotions take into account both the outcomes of a written examination, which assesses their subject knowledge and evidence of teaching practice collected through in-school appraisals. In Colombia, there was a transition in 2015 from a written examination to an evaluation based on qualitative evidence of teaching practices (see Annex. Country examples).

o   *Explain how student assessment data will be used.* How teachers work with students to meet learning standards is a core aspect of teaching. Most EU and OECD countries take student achievement data into account in high-stakes decisions through indirect means (e.g. the data are discussed by the teacher in their self-evaluation or portfolio), given the documented problems of using student achievement data as a direct measure of teacher quality (Smith and Kubacka, 2017[61]). The Annex. Country examples provides an example of how England draws on assessment data in teacher appraisals.

o   *Clarify how input from regular in-school appraisal will be used.* The legislation does not mention how probation appraisals will take into account information from a teacher's in-school appraisals. Clarity here will be important to ensure that such information is included and that the different nature and purpose of the two processes are well understood.

Action 3   **Modify new licensing plans for graduate teachers.** The secondary legislation under development should specify that teacher licensing decisions include evidence from the ITE practicum and establish plans to develop guidelines on how to conduct this appraisal. Romania should also strongly consider making licensing dependent on completing a probation appraisal, as was previously the case. Scotland provides a good example of how this type of provisional licensing system might be structured (see Annex. Country examples). While retaining a centralised exam in the licensing process is probably necessary in the short term to maintain standards given the need to strengthen quality assurance in ITE, once the new master's in teaching programme is well established, Romania should review whether it is still necessary. Figure 19 illustrates how the teacher standards can be used to give coherence to policies related to the education and licensing of new teachers in Romania.

Figure 19. Standards can give coherence to policies aimed at improving initial teacher education and licensing in Romania
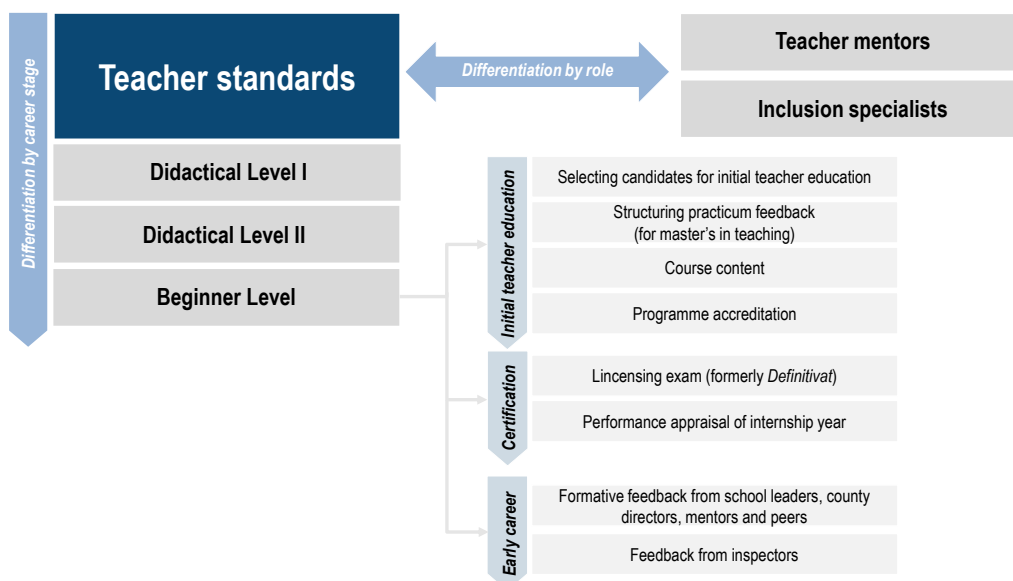
Source: Authors.

Action 4   **Provide more flexibility for teachers to apply for promotion.** The government should consider relaxing the requirement that teachers work for a specific number of years at one career stage before being eligible for promotion. This would enable motivated and effective younger teachers to progress more rapidly in their careers, contributing to pedagogical renewal and retention.

Recommendation 13. Determine how teachers will be moved onto new career paths and how performance and career progress will be managed over time

Romania's teacher reforms are complex, and careful planning of the transition to the new career system will be crucial to their success. It will be important to:

Action 1   **Take the time to build and sustain trust in the reform.** Structural reforms to Romania's teacher career will take time, from developing new standards and appraisal tools to including all members of the profession in the new system. The timeline for similar reforms took more than six years to fully implement in Austria and around a decade in Scotland (Crehan, 2019[62]; OECD, 2019[63]).

Action 2   **Determine the arrangements for transitioning the teacher career system.** There are several options for transitioning the career system. One is setting a date when the new structure comes into effect for all teachers, which has the advantage of consistency and clarity but can destabilise teachers and risks generating conflict. There are also more sequenced approaches. For example, a "grandfathering" approach, where only newly hired teachers enter the new system, can ease the transition period but may create difficulties in terms of management and cohesion. A voluntary approach, where teachers "opt in", can increase the likelihood of successful implementation over the long term but may require setting a deadline to ensure that all teachers are eventually incorporated into the new system. Austria, for example, allowed teachers to

gradually opt into its new career system for four years before making it mandatory for all teachers (OECD, 2019[60]).

Action 3 **Consider introducing a recertification requirement to encourage continuous professional growth.** At present, teachers can remain in their positions without undergoing any formal external appraisal. Teachers who do not pass the *Definitivat* or *Titularizare* exams can continue to teach. Such a lack of accountability undermines both the value of standards and the attractiveness of teaching for motivated professionals. One way to address this gap would be for the government to introduce a recertification requirement. If Romania moves in this direction, the first decision will be one of purpose – for example, whether the main aim of recertification is to ensure all teachers meet minimum standards or to recognise excellence at the top of the career ladder. This purpose will shape other decisions. If the aim is to guarantee basic standards, which appears to be the main concern in Romania, then the government might set a general requirement (e.g. all teachers need to apply for recertification after ten years if they have not passed a promotion appraisal in this period). Subsequent recertification would then be based on performance (e.g. teachers who perform poorly would be required to undertake training to address identified shortcomings and reapply for certification after two years; consistent poor performance would trigger consequences outlined in Action 4). The evidence used to determine recertification would likewise reflect this focus on guaranteeing minimum teaching standards. As for promotion appraisals, Romania will want to draw on a range of sources. National assessment data should be reviewed within the appraisal. However, such data should not be used in isolation to determine performance, which is one of the scenarios under consideration. If the focus of recertification is to ensure minimum standards of basic content and pedagogical knowledge, then Romania might want to consider an examined component. A standardised test might also build trust in the independence of the process. If Romania does proceed to introduce a recertification appraisal, the *Titularizare* exam should be discontinued.

Action 4 **Define a standardised process for managing teachers who do not meet minimum expectations.** It will be important for the government to work with teachers and teachers' unions to establish a fair process for identifying and responding to instances when teachers do not meet minimum standards. Countries often use a multi-step approach to address unsatisfactory performance, which includes: developing an improvement plan; additional appraisals to confirm standards are met; and, if concerns remain, the involvement of an external evaluator to determine, through a standard procedure, whether a teacher should be dismissed (OECD, 2013[64]). England sets out a framework for appraising teacher performance that includes clear procedures for addressing competence issues (UK Department of Education, 2019[65]).

Recommendation 14. Strengthen and scale the national teacher mentorship scheme

To scale the teacher mentorship scheme, and through this progressively transform teaching practices across the country, Romania could:

Action 1 **Develop a mentor competency profile and selection criteria.** As suggested above, Romania should develop a new competence profile for mentors (see Recommendation 10). The profile would serve as a basis for defining selection criteria and training candidates that join the Mentoring and Career Licensing Corps' list of registered mentors. Examples from the United States highlight how mentoring standards can support more consistent and effective mentoring practices (see Annex. Country examples). Important criteria for selecting mentors include: a successful record of effectiveness in their own classrooms; a deep understanding of pedagogy and pedagogical practice; and a willingness and ability to work with adults. Romania could consider additional criteria to recruit mentors to support national priorities, such as experience working in

disadvantaged environments (e.g. schools with a high share of Roma students) and specialised pedagogical knowledge (e.g. education for SEN students or formative assessment).

Action 2 **Develop and mandate continuous training for mentors**. The new Mentoring and Career Licensing Corps should develop a set of core initial and ongoing training modules for mentors to be delivered by the National Body for Training Mentors. All mentors need to understand the new teacher standards (see Recommendation 10) and develop real professional expertise. Retraining and supporting all 4 400 mentors will be costly and challenging, so Romania might initially focus on training and deploying a smaller group to priority schools and teachers – for example, mentors who can work with teachers of specific subjects or grade levels or have experience working with Roma students or in disadvantaged rural schools (see Action 3 below).

Action 3 **Target mentorship to priority schools and teachers**. Deploying a smaller group of mentors in the short term means that the Ministry of Education will need to identify and target the schools and teachers that would benefit most. For instance, Romania might prioritise providing mentors to practicum schools, new teachers working in disadvantaged schools, or teachers who do not meet minimum standards on an external appraisal. Across EU countries participating in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), prioritising the schools and teachers that stand to gain the most from mentorship is a more common approach than assigning a mentor to every teacher (OECD, 2019[39]).

Action 4 **Intentionally match mentors with trainee teachers.** Mentors who have shared experiences with their mentees, in terms of the grade level or subject specialisation, can be more effective as they can connect content in the curriculum with relevant teaching strategies. Romania already pairs mentors and teachers based on their subjects or fields of expertise as part of the new network of practicum schools (Ministry of Education, 2022[57]). This could be expanded by considering additional criteria, such as experience in a similar instructional environment or expertise in a pedagogical area that interests the teacher.

Recommendation 15. Develop a more systemic approach to embed a culture of teacher-led professional learning within schools

Creating a culture of collaborative professional development in Romanian schools will require fundamental changes to school leadership and governance. Romania could:

Action 1 **Define expectations for how leadership teams, including principals, will drive collaborative learning and professional development in their schools.** Moving ahead with the new principal standards and mentorship scheme is important to redefine new expectations for the role, with greater emphasis on instructional leadership. However, Romania will need to define expectations for how wider leadership teams – e.g. including but not limited to principals – will support collaborative professional development within the school and give them ongoing training and support to do so effectively. An assessment of Romania's new plans in this regard is provided in the World Bank's functional analysis of Romania's pre-university system (World Bank, forthcoming[44]). Findings stress the need to establish clear and distributed pedagogical leadership roles within a school and invest in school staff capacity to fulfil these roles. This involves clarifying the responsibility of school commissions in charge of teacher professional development, curriculum design and implementation, and defining the competencies required to be part of such commissions.

Action 2   **Make school-based appraisal a more authentic learning exercise**. Several aspects of the appraisal process will need to change if it is to encourage professional development. While the school board has a role in overseeing the overall appraisal process, individual teacher appraisals should be led by the school principal and/or staff from their leadership team. Teacher standards should guide the way evidence is assessed, and the approach to grading should be reviewed to emphasise formative feedback on strengths and weaknesses in different competence domains. The introduction of the expectation that teachers develop a learning plan based on the appraisal would help orient both mentorship and other forms of professional development.

Action 3   **Ensure that the way schools are evaluated, supported and governed promotes collaborative learning within schools.** Measures recommended in Section 3. School evaluation and support of this brief will be instrumental to developing a culture of instructional leadership and collaboration in Romanian schools. School self-evaluation and external evaluation should encourage schools to reflect on how they encourage teacher learning and collaboration to improve education quality. County support teams should work with schools to strengthen instructional leadership and broker support to help schools establish forms of collaborative practice that improve teaching and student learning. Reducing the bureaucratic burden on schools and the complexity of their internal governance will be equally important to give school staff the time to work together on instructional improvement (see Section 4. Resources for education).

Action 4   **Establish governance arrangements for the National Centre for Teachers that allow teachers to shape policies related to their profession.** Romania should take steps to support the National Centre for Teachers in becoming a respected, standards-led institution that provides teacher input into policies that affect them. The National Centre for Teachers should not only be responsible for developing the standards and related materials (e.g. appraisal guidelines) but also have a voice in all policies related to teacher education. This will require leadership from the Ministry of Education to manage collaboration between the National Centre for Teachers and other bodies involved in teacher policy, from specialised institutions such as ARACIS and NCCE to the Ministry of Education's own departments and ITE providers. Within the National Centre for Teachers, a governing council should be created that includes representatives from practising teachers, school principals, unions and counties. This will help to ensure that the National Centre for Teachers is led by professional, experienced teachers and has buy-in from stakeholders. The recruitment of staff to senior positions within the National Centre for Teachers should be merit-based and guided by criteria that prioritise teaching expertise. As recommended in 3. School evaluation and support, the National Centre for Teachers and its staff should remain separate from the national school evaluation agency (ARACIIP). While ARACIIP would continue to work with the National Centre for Teachers to make sure expectations for quality teaching in schools reflect the new teacher standards, the responsibility for determining whether individual teachers meet these standards and are eligible for promotion would remain with the National Centre for Teachers.

6. The data and monitoring system

Overview of context

Romania's new legislative package can potentially improve the use of evidence in education policy making. It includes plans to develop an integrated data management system for the education sector, digitalise and standardise national assessments of student learning, and create a monitoring and evaluation framework to monitor and report on progress under the Educated Romania strategy. This section provides recommendations for how Romania can advance these positive reforms, drawing attention to remaining policy gaps and areas for strengthening staff capacity and strategic planning.

Key findings from the diagnostic review

Key features of the education system prior to the reform include:

- **The Integrated Information System of Education** (**SIIIR) has improved the quality of education data in Romania, yet staff and funding shortages have limited its development.** Romania's current data management system, the SIIIR, has helped make education data more accessible by using a unique student identifier, consolidating some key data from different databases into a single platform and generating standard reports according to selected parameters. However, the lack of national investment and shortage of dedicated staff – including quality assurance specialists, information technology (IT) developers and data analysts – have made it difficult to maintain and expand the platform, leaving Romania with one of the least developed education data management systems in the European Union.

- **Discrepancies and inefficiencies in Romania's education data systems remain.** While Romania has developed protocols to co-ordinate education data collection efforts and standardise the definition of key indicators, these protocols still need to be enforced.[13] Several government databases remain disconnected, with actors continuing to collect their own data in parallel. This creates inefficiencies and burdens school staff, who are sometimes asked to insert the same (or similar) data multiple times. Discrepancies also exist in the reporting of some critical indicators like student dropout since there are no requirements for actors to follow common data definitions.

- **Standardised national data on student learning outcomes would support Romania's ability to monitor key national goals and design policies to advance their achievement**. The overarching aim of Educated Romania is to improve the quality and equity of student outcomes. Yet, unlike most OECD and EU countries, Romania does not have reliable data on the extent to which learners meet national standards. While the country has three census-based national assessments in Grades 2, 4 and 6, their paper-based administration, lengthy delays in reporting and lack of standardised marking do not align with the tests' stated purposes of supporting individual student learning plans and monitoring system performance over time. The national assessment centre, NCCE, also lacks the technical capacities – in item design, psychometric modelling, analysis and reporting – to provide good quality data in useful formats.

- **Entities involved in system monitoring and evaluation face pressures due to understaffing and governance changes**. In the last four years, Romania has made several changes to the organisation of its evaluation agencies and their respective responsibilities. These changes, combined with chronic resource challenges, create a lack of clarity about actors' roles and sometimes result in the duplication of work. This context also impacts the quality of data and evidence available to policy makers.

- **Romania's culture of evaluation and accountability in education could be further developed**. Several system monitoring resources are underdeveloped in Romania. For instance, SIIIR does not allow for comparisons across schools and/or counties; nor does it facilitate correlations across different indicators. It includes very limited data visualisation components and presents information in the standardised reports in a very basic, tabular form. This makes it difficult for stakeholders to access and use the data to inform their work. In addition, the annual *State of Education Report* lacks contextual information and provides a narrow view of system performance (i.e. based on descriptive data and national examination results). For instance, it does not discuss ARACIP's

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[13] In 2016, Romania's main education data managers, the Ministry of Education and NIS, signed a protocol for data access collaboration that established SIIIR as the main hub for education data in Romania. Prior to this, the Ministry of Education had also created the National System of Education Indicators (SNIE) in 2005 to align its definitions of education indicators with those of international education data systems, including Eurostat and the OECD databases.

efficiency index, findings from school evaluations, or contextual factors that influence learning or instructional processes. The report is not presented in engaging and accessible ways and often goes unnoticed. As a result, the government does not systematically embed monitoring and evaluation practices in its policy-making cycles, and the public has limited information to hold the government accountable.

Analysis of planned changes in the legislative package

Romania's new legislative package intends to develop an integrated education data management system, address data gaps and improve education monitoring and evaluation practices overall (see Infographic 4). The strengths and challenges of these policies are analysed below.

Infographic 4. Planned changes to Romania's education monitoring system

Builds an integrated data management system

- Aims to connect Romania's various education databases and IT platforms to the future Integrated School Management System (SIMS).
- Streamlines education data collection and access.
- Establishes the Executive Unit for Support, Maintenance and Technical Assistance for Digitisation (UESMATD), which will provide IT support and strengthen the capacity of SIMS users.
- Plans to standardise student learning assessments in Grades 2, 4 and 6 and shift to a fully digital format starting in 2027.

Defines a new framework for system monitoring and evaluation

- Introduces the Unitary Framework for the Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Educated Romania 2022-2030 Project, which is accompanied by several supporting documents to:
  - identify a methodology
  - allocate responsibilities
  - provide templates for monitoring and evaluation activities

Source: Authors, based on Ministry of Education (2023[12]), *Legea Învățământului Preuniversitar "România Educată" [The pre-university education law]*.

Planned changes to the data management system can bring several improvements to Romania's education data infrastructure

Romania's new legislative package establishes the Integrated School Management System (SIMS) to connect different education databases and IT platforms to a centralised data management system. The SIMS also plans to use cloud technology to collect, transmit and aggregate real-time data from schools, streamlining data collection and access. The Ministry plans to establish a new Executive Unit for Support, Maintenance and Technical Assistance for Digitisation (UESMATD) to manage SIMS and build the capacity of actors to use the platform. Notable features of this policy change are:

- **Current reforms provide an opportunity to establish a modern, integrated data management system that can serve as Romania's official source for education data**. The planned SIMS platform intends to enhance Romania's existing data management infrastructure and achieve what

the SIIIR platform was unable to do: connect various education databases and improve the system's analytical functions to better facilitate the collection, access and use of data. For instance, the new SIMS platform will be interoperable and integrated,[14] enabling analyses that draw on different education data sources and connecting them to a single platform. It also aims to reduce the time schools spend reporting their data by removing duplication in current data requests.

- **The development of the SIMS builds on existing efforts to align education data with national education goals**. Romania is taking steps to ensure data are collected and available to help monitor and evaluate national education goals. For example, the legislative package aims to standardise national assessments in Grades 2, 4 and 6 to monitor the implementation of the new curriculum and student learning outcomes in relation to national standards. The Ministry of Education is also developing new data modules on early school leaving and school segregation to monitor and evaluate national education goals for equity and inclusion.

- **Reforms still need to clarify which modules will be developed in the new system or which databases will be connected or integrated into SIMS.** The Ministry of Education still needs to develop a detailed plan specifying the modules it will expand or create as a priority or which databases will become interoperable or fully integrated with SIMS. For instance, during stakeholder interviews, the Ministry of Education's Education Financing Unit (UFIP) expressed plans to create its own digital platform for school financing data called EDUFIN. This would potentially duplicate the Ministry of Finance's Forexebug database, which could become connected and accessible through the integrated SIMS platform. Without a shared understanding of the rationale for SIMS, priority data needs and clear plans to integrate parallel databases, Romania risks missing yet another opportunity to reduce inefficiencies and establish an authoritative source for education data.

- **It will be important for upgrades to the data management system to adequately address user interface design**. Romania plans to update its data infrastructure (e.g. to allow real-time data collection and transmission) as part of the development of the SIMS platform. This can help reduce technical errors and service interruptions, which are common issues with the existing platform. In addition to planned changes, developing accessible portals and dashboards that respond to different users' needs will be essential since providing data in tabular, PDF form – as SIIIR does – makes it difficult for actors to access and use the data to inform their work.

- **Reliance on external funding creates some risks to the long-term sustainability of SIMS**. Like past efforts to improve its data management system, Romania will rely on funding from international partners[15] to develop SIMS. This funding is secured for three years; however, it is unclear how the government will sustain investment after this period. It is also unclear if UESMATD, which has a broad mandate to provide IT support and digital training across the education system, will have the staff capacity to manage the platform.

- **UESMATD will develop SIMS in close collaboration with the stakeholders who need to shape it.** There are positive plans to ensure UESMATD develops the SIMS platform in close collaboration with other actors whose needs should shape its design (i.e. the new directorate to co-ordinate and monitor Educated Romania, DGIPRE; NIS; and the national school evaluation agency, ARACIIP). Such collaboration will be important to prevent stakeholders from conducting parallel data collections and instead rely on SIMS for their data needs.

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[14] Data interoperability refers to the basic ability of information systems to exchange and share data. Data integration consists of bringing data from different sources together into a unified view.

[15] The European Regional Development Fund and the EU NRRP.

Plans to standardise national assessments will generate reliable information that can help improve education quality and support system monitoring and evaluation

The 2023 pre-university education law introduces several changes to Romania's three national assessments in Grades 2, 4 and 6. According to the pre-university education law, the assessments will be standardised and, from 2027, move to a fully digital format. The assessments will also be made more inclusive, with greater adaptation for students with SEN. Importantly, the pre-university education law clarifies the purposes of national assessments. In addition to monitoring system quality and helping teachers develop individual student learning plans, the pre-university education law states that assessments will be used to evaluate teaching staff and the quality of schools. The NCCE, which has been re-established as a semi-independent body, will lead this work. Notable features of the policy changes related to Romania's national assessment framework include:

- **Changes to national assessments can potentially address data gaps in student learning outcomes**. Since improving the quality of teaching and learning and promoting equity in education are among Educated Romania's key objectives, it is positive that the Ministry plans to standardise national assessments. This approach will facilitate generating comparable data to effectively monitor these goals. This will fill an important gap in Romania's system monitoring and evaluation framework. The assessments will focus on the core areas of language and communication, mathematics and science, which likewise aligns well with Educated Romania's emphasis on strengthening foundational competencies.

- **The national assessments will have multiple purposes, not all of which are easily compatible.** The pre-university education law implies that each assessment is intended to serve several purposes: system monitoring, instructional improvement and teacher and school accountability. Using a single assessment for multiple purposes is difficult and, if not done well, can undermine the assessment's credibility and the constructive use of results (OECD, 2013[13]). This is particularly true when an assessment is used for high-stakes accountability functions, as Romania intends. While it is important to take student outcomes into account when evaluating teaching and school quality, how this is done is not easy. Current legislation does not provide enough clarity on how Romania will manage the risks of using assessment data for accountability decisions. Such risks include unfair, uncontextualised judgments of the teacher or the school and potential distortions to the learning environment, such as "teaching to the test" and the marginalisation or "off-rolling" of low-performing students. The OECD has documented that such risks are present with respect to the use of data from the Grade 8 and 12 exams in Romania (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]).

- **An overarching framework for national assessments could help explain how they relate to other learning assessments.** Having such an overall framework is vital to ensure that assessment promotes national learning goals, that there is a balance between central and classroom assessments, and to avoid duplication. Table 5 shows the overlap between national assessments and other test instruments in Romania until 2023. For example, some students in Grade 4 will have to take both a national and international assessment (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study/Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [TIMSS/PIRLS]) for system monitoring purposes, which may not be a good use of learning time or the NCCE's limited resources. Romania also has a large number of census assessments and examinations, at the same time as a shortage of resources to improve classroom assessment. Other forms of assessment, such as diagnostic tests, could balance standardised data from centralised tests with more granular information on individual students that can be used to determine learning plans and adapt instruction. There is also the question of the cost-effectiveness of running three census assessments in addition to two national exams. Census-based assessments are more costly to implement than sample-based tests. Even if digital delivery reduces costs over time, it is hard to

see how NCCE can ensure the quality of test design and administration while also investing in the analysis, reporting and user guides that make any assessment worthwhile.

Table 5. Romania administers a large number of education assessments

Schooling level	Grades	Assessment	Frequency	Population	Is system monitoring one of the stated purposes?
Primary	Grade 2	National assessment	Annual	Census	Yes
	Grade 4	National assessment	Annual	Census	Yes
	Grade 4	TIMSS and PIRLS (International assessment)	Varies (five-year cycle for PIRLS; four-year cycle for TIMSS)	Sample	Yes
Lower secondary	Grade 6	National assessment	Annual	Census	Yes
	Grade 8	TIMSS (International assessment)	Varies (four-year cycle)	Sample	Yes
	Grade 8	National examination	Annual	Census	
Upper secondary	Grade 9 (Age 15)	PISA (International assessment)	Three-year cycle	Sample	Yes
	Grade 12	National examination	Annual	Census	

Source: Authors based on Ministry of Education (2023[12]), *Legea Învăţământului Preuniversitar "România Educată" [The pre-university education law]*.

- **Reviewing background questionnaires could help collect valuable data to inform policy making**. Romania's current national assessments collect some background information on students and schools (e.g. gender and type of school environment). However, the 2023 pre-university education law does not envisage a review of the assessment's background questionnaires. Future efforts could focus on collecting additional information to help policymakers and the public better identify and understand potential performance gaps faced by vulnerable groups, such as Roma students.

- **Reconsidering how results from national assessments are reported will be important to ensure the information is actionable for schools, policy makers and the broader public.** Romania currently reports national assessment results as the share of students who responded correctly to individual questions, with each item linked to learning objectives (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). While this information can help understand student performance across the curriculum, it does not provide schools, policy makers or the public with information on Educated Romania's goals (e.g. share of students who have achieved functional literacy).

- **Plans to strengthen the NCCE's capacity are positive but require further clarity.** Re-establishing the NCCE as a semi-independent body provides an opportunity to develop the centre's capacity so it can deliver on its important mandate. The legislative package plans to expand the NCCE's staffing levels. Subsequent planning will need to specify details such as the number of staff that need to be recruited and their profiles. This clarity on staffing will be important to promote innovation since current staff do not have expertise in psychometric modelling, such as item response theory (IRT) methods. The centre will also need to develop a multi-year budget to enhance its ability to operate as an independent technical agency and to facilitate long-term planning – a necessity for assessment reform.

The new monitoring and evaluation framework is crucial to sustaining reform momentum and increasing accountability for results

To provide a coherent strategy for measuring reform progress, Romania created the Unitary Framework for the Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Educated Romania 2022-30 Project (hereafter the "Framework"). The Framework and supporting documents outline the methodology, allocate responsibilities, and provide templates for monitoring and evaluation activities. The 2023 pre-university education law also established the Ministry of Education's new DGIPRE to co-ordinate the implementation and evaluation of education reforms. Together, these changes can help focus actors on developing and implementing policies to support Educated Romania's goals. Notable features of the new monitoring and evaluation framework are:

- **The 2023 pre-university education law restates the need for the Ministry of Education to present the *State of Education Report* to parliament annually, which is an opportunity to increase transparency**. This is a positive measure that has the potential to raise attention to the report's findings with a wider audience, including education stakeholders outside of the Ministry of Education and the public. If implemented yearly, this can improve system accountability in the long run.

- **Strategic indicators exist but need more consistency and alignment with Educated Romania's goals**. Romania needs greater clarity on the key reform goals and performance indicators, as these are the metrics for which the government will be held accountable and will help orient future policy and resource decisions. Educated Romania has a very extensive agenda, with over 100 strategic reform objectives, accompanied by more than 300 measures and 500 planned actions. While strategic indicators have been identified to measure reform progress, they are not consistently communicated across policy documents and can lead to confusion about what is most important. In addition, strategic indicators are not systematically linked to Educated Romania's goals, as the list does not include any explicit measures of equity despite having "quality inclusive education for all children" as one of the reform's priority areas. Romania risks losing reform momentum or diverting focus from current plans if the prioritisation of key policies and indicators is not clarified.

- **Without a national evaluation plan, Romania risks continuing a project-based approach to evaluation.** Romania's approach to monitoring and evaluation focuses on project-based outputs (e.g. to comply with EU reporting requirements), with limited policy evaluations that can help inform policy making. For instance, while the Framework requires DGIPRE to produce several monitoring and evaluation reports, further clarity is needed regarding which policies will be evaluated and included in these reports. In addition, there is no clear plan for conducting independent external evaluations. Providing impartial and independent evaluation at critical moments will be vital to strengthening the delivery and management of reforms.

- **A new body is responsible for monitoring and evaluating Educated Romania reforms, but the role of existing entities needs further clarification**. While the framework assigns responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation, it does not acknowledge the potential contribution of ARACIIP's school efficiency index and external school evaluations. It also overlooks the role of the Institute of Education Sciences (Romania's educational research agency) and the NCCE, which are currently operating under the National Centre for Policies and Evaluation in Education (NCPEE) but will be re-established as separate bodies. These bodies have all signalled that a lack of funding and staffing have made it difficult to conduct their work. Without greater clarity on the roles of these key actors and how their work should contribute to overall monitoring and evaluation activities, Romania risks duplicating work and further stretching the already limited capacity of these bodies.

Policy recommendations

This section outlines measures Romania can consider to keep reform momentum and create more accountability in its education system. Figure 20 provides an overview of the actors and tools that could be involved in the reform's monitoring system.

Figure 20. Actors that could support the monitoring, evaluation and reporting of Romania's education system
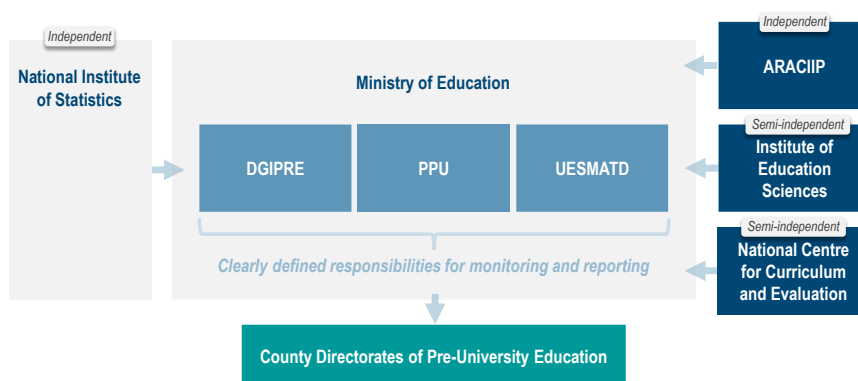
Source: Authors.

Recommendation 16. Establish the SIMS as Romania's authoritative source for national education data and plan for its long-term sustainability

To establish a modern, integrated data management system in Romania, the Ministry of Education could:

Action 1 **Decide which data modules are most important to expand upon or create and ensure the integration of different education databases into SIMS.** The 2023 pre-university education law requires the development of an interconnection plan and an operationalisation calendar for SIMS. These documents are urgently needed to clarify which modules will be developed or expanded as a priority, which databases will be fully integrated into the SIMS platform (e.g. Ministry of Education databases like EduSal), and which need to be interconnected but will continue operating separately (e.g. NCCE's standardised testing data, ARACIIP's Calitate database, and the Ministry of Finance's Forexebug database).[16] To concentrate capacity and resources for populating and managing the data management system, the Ministry of Education should consolidate parallel databases and develop any future data modules as part of the SIMS.

Action 2 **Improve the accessibility and usability of data by developing user-friendly interfaces that allow for custom analyses, visualisations and reports**. The new cloud platform and integrated design of SIMS will enable Romania to create automated data analysis and reporting features, such as dashboards, that are much more user-friendly and informative than Romania's current data system. The main SIMS dashboard could be designed to reflect key performance indicators for the Educated Romania strategy (see Recommendation 3), with interfaces developed for different users. For example, to help schools self-evaluate and plan their development, dashboards could provide a summary of their performance on key quantitative

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[16] EduSal is the Ministry of Education's platform for teacher salary management; Calitate is ARACIIP's platform containing data on schools (evaluations, population structure, etc.); Forexebug is Romania's single-window IT system for public institutions' financial reporting.

indicators aligned to ARACIIP's school evaluation framework over time for different student populations and in comparison to other similar schools. At the county level, data on both individual schools and the average school profile in the county can help local support teams target their efforts where there is the greatest need. In developing such interfaces, Romania can look at examples from different OECD countries. For instance, Denmark and Estonia have developed user-friendly interfaces linked to their education data management system to make data accessible for different users (see Annex. Country examples).

Action 3   **Plan for the long-term sustainability of SIMS after EU funding expires.** The long-term functioning of SIMS will require multi-year investments to develop, maintain and use the platform. Initial investments in the physical infrastructure (e.g. hardware and software) and the platform architecture (e.g. designing processes for implementing and managing data) will require significant resources. However, Romania also needs to allocate resources to cover staffing and to develop and maintain data reporting tools, such as a dedicated website, dashboards and publications. The Ministry of Education needs staff with the range of skill profiles needed to collect and manage data, perform quality checks, guarantee privacy standards, and report data in a way that is accessible to policy makers, schools and the public. This includes basic information and communication technology (ICT) and data skills for users who enter data into the system, as well as more advanced skills, such as data management and analysis and technical IT skills, for staff in the Ministry of Education's data management team. Developing these professional capabilities will require long-term planning and investment.

Action 4   **Consider placing SIMS close to the Ministry of Education's teams responsible for implementing, monitoring and evaluating education policy.** For the SIMS platform to serve as a valuable tool for system monitoring and evaluation – rather than just Romania's newest digital data management platform – the managing unit will require staff with digital and quantitative expertise and staff with experience in using evidence to inform and deliver education policy. For example, ensuring close collaboration between the new DGIPRE and UESMATD in the design of SIMS could help prioritise the development and maintenance of the data modules that are most relevant for policy making.

Action 5   **Enhance data reporting by strengthening school capacity to enter key data into SIMS.** To enhance the quality and completeness of reported data and reduce the risk of human error, UESMATD, together with County Directorates, could work with school teams to improve their data literacy and understanding of how to report on key indicators. Regular monitoring of data completeness can then help the Ministry of Education identify under-reported indicators, allowing for targeted assistance to schools in entering all essential information.

Recommendation 17. Ensure the design and use of national assessments are fit for purpose and clarify plans for their implementation

To ensure Romania's national assessment system helps monitor and evaluate current reforms and generates data to support system improvement and accountability, the government will need to:

Action 1   **Review national assessment plans in relation to the wider assessment framework in order to ensure a balanced range of tests that aligns with Educated Romania's key objectives.** Romania should differentiate more clearly between its three national assessments, making sure that the primary purpose of each assessment is clear and that other uses do not distract from this primary aim. In doing so, Romania should examine the range of assessment resources that NCCE will need to develop to improve student learning and the trade-offs between investing in biannual national assessments and developing better quality resources for classroom assessment. The review should also address any duplication in testing. For example, since

Romania plans to rejoin TIMSS and PIRLS (which students take in Grade 4[17]), having a national assessment for system monitoring in the same year may be redundant.

Action 2 **Consider which design options are the best fit for purpose and make the most of the NCCE's limited capacity and resources**. After clarifying the primary purpose for each national assessment, Romania will need to ensure the assessments' design features reflect their purpose. For example, if the primary purpose is to help teachers assess individual learning needs or monitor learning outcomes at the school level, the test will need to be census-based, whereas if the primary purpose is to monitor the national curriculum or overall system-level progress, a sample-based assessment will suffice. There is a strong case for retaining a census-based assessment of foundational skills in primary school, given the emphasis on improving early literacy and reducing inequalities between schools and student groups. Changes to the design of national assessments should take into account the NCCE's available capacity and resources, including the need for much more investment in the analysis and dissemination of results (see Action 7).

Action 3 **Provide more clarity on how data on student learning outcomes will be used to evaluate teachers**. While the new pre-university education law plans to use results from student assessments as an evaluation criterion in teacher appraisals, it does not specify how it will do so. Section 5. The teaching of this report makes recommendations on how to advance reforms to teacher appraisal in Romania. It highlights the importance of basing appraisal judgments on a range of evidence sources, including evidence of a teacher's ability to engage critically with assessment data and demonstrate how they are working to improve student achievement results.

Action 4 **Clarify how school-level results will be used to support school accountability and communicate this to actors across the system.** The provision of standardised, school-level data on student learning outcomes has the potential to advance reforms on school accountability and improvement discussed in Section 3. School evaluation and support. For example, such data will improve the quality of ARACIIP's efficiency index, which uses student outcomes alongside other indicators to provide a contextualised measure of school performance. ARACIIP could use these results to prioritise at-risk schools for external evaluation. National assessment data will also introduce more reliable, comparative data into the school evaluation process, enabling schools to monitor and benchmark overall levels of achievement and differences between student groups. ARACIIP and NCCE will need to work together to determine how the data are shared with schools and the public in order to go beyond simple rankings and encourage a more holistic, contextualised discussion of school quality (see Action 6).

Action 5 **Review background questionnaires to support evidence-informed policy making**. Romania should review the background questionnaires associated with the national assessments to better understand contextual factors that influence performance across different categories of students and schools**.** The contextual data collected should align with national education goals and could include, for example, information on students' socio-economic, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

Action 6 **Develop a comprehensive reporting plan for assessment data.** Romania should develop a comprehensive reporting plan that targets results and information to students, teachers, school leaders and policy makers. For example, Norway supports policy makers by using national assessment results to compare counties and different student groups in its annual report on education, the Education Mirror (see Annex. Country examples). In Romania, the government might focus, for example, on the share of students who have achieved functional literacy or on

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[17] Students also take TIMSS in Grade 8.

performance differences according to student background. National assessment data should also feature centrally in the annual *State of Education Report* (see Recommendation 18).

Action 7 **Clarify plans to strengthen the NCCE's capacity and leadership.** The Ministry of Education should provide the NCCE with multi-year budgets so it can plan its work and offer more predictable and competitive contracts to attract and retain experienced staff. The NCCE should also build more partnerships with actors outside of the government (e.g. universities) that have expertise in areas central to its work, such as psychometrics. Some of these actors could be hired as external contractors to work with the NCCE on specific tasks (e.g. using IRT methods). The leadership of the NCCE should also be strengthened by introducing a merit-based process for appointing the director and creating an independent board to steer and review its work. Romania could look at the governance arrangements of the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the United States (see Annex. Country examples).

Recommendation 18. Further develop the monitoring and evaluation system by identifying key performance indicators, improving reporting practices and investing in staff capacity

While Romania has taken positive steps in defining a monitoring and evaluation framework, it still needs to clarify and streamline responsibility for relevant activities and address chronic capacity issues, such as understaffing and a lack of relevant skills in key bodies. Communicating the country's shared goals for education – and reporting on progress towards them – will also be needed in the years ahead, both for accountability and for sustaining momentum and trust in the direction of reforms. The Ministry of Education may consider the following actions:

Action 1 **Identify key performance indicators (KPIs) to guide policy priorities.** Identifying KPIs would help the Ministry of Education focus interventions, prioritise key policies and direct resources to the most important areas. The Ministry's ISP can be a central tool to connect policy objectives, medium-term budgetary resources and KPIs (see Section 4. Resources for education). As the Ministry updates its ISP, it should ensure it includes a strong focus on equity across different dimensions. For example, an indicator that measures graduation rates among Roma students could help signal the importance of ensuring students in this marginalised group complete pre-university education.

Action 2 **Strengthen the capacity of key evaluation bodies through a well-funded, multi-year evaluation plan.** The Ministry of Education should invest in the Institute of Educational Sciences so it develops into a strong hub for external evaluation in the education sector (Kitchen et al., 2017[9]). Having a multi-year action plan together with a corresponding budget would help ensure the body's technical independence and reinforce its capacity in areas of quantitative and qualitative analysis. A costed work plan would also help the Institute of Educational Sciences stick to planned activities and reduce the number of additional evaluation and research requests made by the Ministry of Education. For instance, in Finland, the Ministry of Education developed an evaluation plan with the primary policy questions it seeks to address and the specific independent evaluations it intends to commission to answer these questions (see Annex. Country examples).

Action 3 **Introduce systemic policy evaluations and focus evaluation cycles on education priorities**. Romania should move away from project-based monitoring and introduce policy evaluations to assess specific policies according to explicit criteria. Evaluation cycles should be cross-cutting, focus on main themes linked to Romania's education KPIs (see Action 1) and include independent external evaluations (see Action 2).

Action 4 **Improve the content and dissemination of the *State of Education Report*.** Romania should link the report's content to key national priorities in education, making results from standardised student assessments a key report component. In doing so, the report should include

more nuanced analyses of the work of other entities outside of the Ministry of Education, in particular ARACIIP and the Institute of Educational Sciences. To make it more accessible, the Ministry of Education could consider developing the report as an interactive platform where parents and the wider public can access comparative results or publish a report summary with key findings. Its annual launch should align with policy cycles to ensure policy makers are familiar with the report.

Action 5 **Develop institutional capacity for monitoring and evaluation.** The Ministry of Education should clearly define the roles of existing institutions in monitoring and evaluation activities and strengthen their capacity. To monitor reform progress and conduct regular evaluations, staff need to develop statistical and broader policy analysis skills. France provides an example of a country that has invested in developing internal statistical capacity, having set up the Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance Department, which monitors and evaluates education performance and oversees the national data management system (see Annex. Country examples).

Annex. Country examples

Country examples

Recommendation 1, Action 2

Looking at our school: A quality evaluation framework for schools in Ireland

Ireland's school evaluation framework provides a set of indicators that define what constitutes effective and exceptionally effective learning, teaching, leadership and management practices in schools. The framework covers different domains and their respective standards that define the behaviours and attributes characteristic of good practice. These are described in greater detail in the statements of practice, which distinguish between effective practice and highly effective practice. The framework places a particular emphasis on responding to students' individual needs and well-being as well as on quality teaching and school leadership. Below is an example of some of the standards included.

Dimension: Learning and teaching	
Domain: Learner outcomes	
Standard: Pupils enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn and expect to achieve as learners	
Statement of effective practice	**Statement of highly effective practice**
Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding of concepts for each area of the curriculum are developed to a high standard. The values, learning dispositions and attitudes for each curriculum area are promoted appropriately.	Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding of concepts for each area of the curriculum are developed to a very high standard. The values, learning dispositions and attitudes for each curriculum area are promoted appropriately.
Dimension: Learning and teaching	
Domain: Teachers' individual practice	
Standard: The teacher responds to individual learning needs and differentiates learning and teaching activities as necessary	
Statement of effective practice	**Statement of highly effective practice**
Teachers are aware of pupils' individual learning needs, interests and abilities, and adapt learning and teaching practices accordingly.	Teachers are aware of pupils' individual learning needs, interests and abilities, and design and implement personalised interventions accordingly.
Dimension: Leadership and management	
Domain: Leading learning and teaching	
Standard: Foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil	
Statement of effective practice	**Statement of highly effective practice**
The board of management and principal ensure the provision of a broad curriculum and a variety of learning opportunities.	The board of management and principal foster pupils' holistic development by providing a very broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular learning opportunities.

Source: Department of Education (2022[66]), *Looking at our school 2022: A quality framework for primary schools and special schools*, https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b1bb3-looking-at-our-school-2022/#.

How good is our school? Inspection framework in Scotland (United Kingdom)

How good is our school? has become a nationally and internationally recognised framework for self-evaluation focused on school improvement. The framework consists of a set of 15 quality indicators on leadership and management, learning provision and successes and achievements. Each quality indicator is defined by a series of themes, which are activities that support the indicator and include an illustration of what an evaluation of a "very good" school might look like, a series of exemplar features of highly effective practice and challenge questions to guide schools' reflection (see below for an example of these features and challenge questions).

Country examples

Features of highly-effective practice	Challenge questions
Raising attainment and achievement	
Very good progress is demonstrated through robust tracking of attainment over time in all curriculum areas and at all stages.	How well do we use evidence from tracking meetings, professional dialogue and assessments to measure progress over time and in particular at points of transition?
Ensuring well-being, equality and inclusion	
All staff engage in regular professional learning to ensure they are fully up-to-date with local, national and, where appropriate, international legislation affecting the rights, wellbeing and inclusion of all children and young people.	How well does our school ensure that the curriculum is designed to develop and promote equality and diversity, eliminate discrimination?
Leadership of change	
All staff are involved in the process of change and in evaluating the impact of improvements. This is supported by carefully planned individual and collective career-long professional learning.	What strategies do we employ to translate our vision, values and aims into daily practice within our school? How effective are these?

Source: Education Scotland (2015[67]), *How good is our school?*, https://education.gov.scot/media/2swjmnbs/frwk2_hgios4.pdf.

New Zealand's school evaluation indicators

In 2016, the Education Review Office published a framework of indicators for internal and external school evaluation. The framework puts an emphasis on school improvement and on considering cultural diversity when assessing outcomes. The indicators are guided by the principles of equity and excellence in student outcomes. There are two types of indicators: outcome indicators, which assess students' achievement and progress as well as their confidence in identity, language and culture; and process indicators, which describe practices and processes that contribute to school effectiveness and improvement. Examples of outcomes and process indicators are below.

Outcome indicators	Process indicators
Confident in their identity, language and culture as citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand	**Domain 1: Stewardship**
> Students value diversity and difference: cultural, linguistic, gender, special needs and abilities.	**The board actively represents and serves the school and education community in its stewardship role**
Socially and emotionally competent, resilient and optimistic about the future	> The board proactively develops networks that enable the school to extend and enrich the curriculum and increase the learning opportunities and pathways available to students and contributes to other schools' capacity to do so.
> Students establish and maintain positive relationships, respect others' needs and show empathy.	**Domain 2: Leadership for equity and excellence**
A successful lifelong learner	**Leadership ensures effective planning, co-ordination and evaluation of the school's curriculum and teaching**
> Students are technologically fluent and take a discerning approach to the use of technology.	> Leadership actively involves students, parents and whänau in the development, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum.
Participates and contributes confidently in a range of contexts	
> Students are critical, informed, active and responsible citizens.	

Source: Education Review Office (2016[68]), *School evaluation indicators: effective practice for improvement and learner success*, https://ero.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-04/School%20Evaluation%20Indicators%202016_0.pdf.

Recommendation 2, Action 1

Evaluator competency profiles

Code of Practice for the Department of Education's Inspectorate, Ireland

The Code of Practice sets out the general principles and standards that should guide the inspectorate's work. It includes criteria to guide and assess the quality of professional performance. The four key principles that underpin their work are: a focus on learners; development and improvement; respectful engagement; and responsibility and accountability.

Country examples

For each of these principles there are definitions or standards for what is expected of the inspectorate. For example, "we focus on the learning experiences and on the educational outcomes and standards that learners achieve when evaluating and reporting on the work of educational practitioners and education settings."

Source: Department of Education (2022[69]), *Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate*, https://assets.gov.ie/25265/d819973f5ed1418e8ae76f9f8fcffe10.pdf.

Qualifications, experience and standards for Ofsted inspectors, England (United Kingdom)

In general, Ofsted inspectors must hold a relevant degree and/or teaching qualification; a minimum of five years of successful teaching experience; credibility and up-to-date professional knowledge within the relevant area; competence in the use of information technology (IT); and a clear criminal record. Additional desired but not necessary criteria include a minimum of two years' successful and substantial management experience in the relevant area. Besides this, inspectors should possess knowledge, skills and abilities in five essential competencies (see below). A description of the roles and expectations for inspectors (during and after inspection) is also available.

Examples of standards for each competency
Gather, analyse and interpret relevant evidence
Inspectors must identify and pursue further sources of relevant evidence and test out assertions.
Make judgements that are objective, fair and based securely on evidence
Inspectors must understand and use evaluation criteria reliably to make judgements.
Communicate clearly, convincingly and succinctly, both orally and in writing
Inspectors must adapt their oral and written communication styles to the audience.
Display high levels of professional conduct
Inspectors must comply with Ofsted's policy and procedures on equality and diversity.
Lead others and manage their work effectively to achieve high quality outcomes
Inspectors must recognise and build on the strengths and expertise of team members, giving regular feedback and recognition.

Source: Ofsted (2015[70]), Qualifications, experience and standards required of additional inspectors undertaking inspections on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-additional-inspectors-qualifications-and-standards.

Recommendation 3, Action 5

School networks in Serbia

The SHARE project in Serbia (2015-2017) aimed to improve the quality of teaching and learning through teacher networking between schools.

Based on external evaluation results, the project matched schools that did not obtain satisfactory levels in teaching and learning ("SHARE" schools) with high-performing schools ("model" schools). SHARE schools benefitted from:

- **Peer learning** by enabling teachers, school principals and other school support staff from low-performing schools to visit and exchange with model schools. Staff in model schools received training on how to document and share constructive feedback with their colleagues in SHARE schools. Paired schools were also encouraged to share their own examples of good practice.

- **A network of trained advisers** in which 100 practitioners received training to better support quality improvement in low-performing schools. Advisers were hired by the Ministry of Education and connected to local education authorities nationwide.

Country examples

- **A learning portal** was also created and shared with school staff to guarantee the sustainability and long-term benefits of the programme.

The project gave schools hands-on experience in horizontal learning and encouraged teachers to work together. External evaluations conducted after the SHARE project suggest quality improvements in participating schools.

Source: Maghnouj, S. et al. (2019[71]), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Serbia*, https://doi.org/10.1787/225350d9-en; European Commission (2018[72]), *Networks for Learning and Development across School Education*, https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/downloads/Governance/2018-wgs5-networks-learning_en.pdf.

Recommendation 4, Action 1

Variables to identify schools at risk

External evaluation body	Approach to scheduling evaluation	Variables used to identify schools
Ofsted (England)	Every three to five years, based on risk assessment approach	Stage 1: Assessment of each school based on analysis of school-level performance and contextual data • School's contextual data • Performance and subject entry data • School workforce census data • Qualifying complaints about schools • Data collected from Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire Stage 2 involves a review of a wider range of available information, such as outcomes of the last routine inspection
Flemish Inspectorate of Education (Belgium)	Annual performance and risk analysis and four-year inspection, but some schools are subject to more frequent and intensive inspection	Risk-based inspections are carried out based on the annual performance analysis (which analyses financial data, data on staff, safety at schools, pupils' results and how quickly those were achieved) and other reports or signals received
Irish Inspectorate	Risk-based approach, but schools at all levels of quality performance are also included to guarantee the identification of best practices	School characteristics and performance: • Results from unannounced inspections and stand-alone curriculum evaluations or subject inspections • School size • Medium of instruction in the school • Length of time since the previous published report Student performance: • Performance in state certificate examinations • Student attendance • Student retention data
Swedish Schools Inspectorate	Risk-based approach but inspect all schools for children with disabilities and independent schools every three-year cycle of inspection	• National statistics at municipal/school owner and school level • Findings from previous inspections • Complaints Survey results • Other documentation/information about the municipality and the schools

Source: SICI (n.d.[73]), *Inspection profiles*, https://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Members/Inspection-Profiles/; and Authors.

Recommendation 4, Action 2

Funding evaluation agencies in Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom)

Education Scotland

Education Scotland, the country's agency for supporting education quality and improvement, is funded by the Scottish Government through its Education and Skills Portfolio. Budget plans generally cover a three-year period, but allocations

are annual. A total initial allocation is transferred to Education Scotland at the start of the year. However, extra funds can be relocated from the Scottish Government when the institution assumes additional responsibilities. Similarly, the budget and costs can be reviewed and reduced during the year, in which case Education Scotland has to return the difference to the government.

Source: Education Scotland Foghlam Alba (2022[74]), *Annual report and accounts 2021-2022*.

Estyn, Wales

Estyn, the Welsh body responsible for inspecting schools, is independent of but funded by the National Assembly for Wales. The Inspectorate receives a three-year indicative budget from the government, allowing for longer-term resource planning. To prepare the delegated annual budget, the inspectorate's senior management boards review the approaches to emerging budget scenarios, assess options and evaluate impact.

Source: Estyn (2022[20]), *HMCI Annual Report 2021-2022*; Estyn (2023[75]), *Corporate governance framework.*

Recommendation 5, Action 1

Challenge advisers in Wales (United Kingdom)

In Wales, local authorities and regional education consortia employ a diverse range of staff, including specialists in various teaching and learning areas and a considerable number of "challenge advisers". These advisers have been specifically designated to provide support to principals in developing in-school capacity to meet school quality standards.

Although the specific duties and titles assigned to challenge advisers may vary, their typical responsibilities include supporting school self-evaluation and improvement (e.g. coaching school principals on the techniques of classroom observation, improvement objective setting and strategic planning); monitoring, supporting and challenging schools while implementing suitable interventions whenever performance falls below the required standards; and promoting school pairing and peer-learning initiatives.

Challenge advisers need a bachelor's degree, a teaching qualification, prior experience as a teacher, and a minimum of five years of experience in a school leadership position (such as a headteacher or senior leader). They should demonstrate proficiency in analysing and utilising data for school improvement, practical knowledge and experience in implementing school improvement strategies, and excellent interpersonal skills.

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, (2015[31]), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*; Welsh Government (2014[76]), *National standards for challenge advisers*, https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/national-standards-for-challenge-advisers.pdf.

Recommendation 6, Action 1

Government capacity for strategic planning and budgeting

Unit	Sub-units	Management profiles
Lithuania – Ministry of Education, Science and Sport		
Finance Department	Divisions for: (1) Education and sport financing (2) Financing research and higher education (3) Investment	Approximately 15 management roles: director of the department, heads of divisions, advisers and chief specialists. Among other tasks, they carry out financial analysis for efficient budget planning and advise municipalities about budget planning and implementation.
France – Ministry of National Education and Youth		
Financial Affairs Directorate	Sub-directorates for: (1) Budget of school education and sport, youth and community life (2) Budget of research and higher education	Approximately 27 management roles: director, deputy directors and heads of office. The directorate co-ordinates the preparation of the different budgets (research and higher education, schooling and sports, youth and

Country examples		
	(3) Statutory expertise, payroll, jobs and remuneration (4) Private education (5) National education pensions service	community life). It analyses the costs of actions and conducts financial studies to define the budget, monitor it and provide expertise to decentralised units.
Singapore – Ministry of Education		
Finance and Procurement Department	Finance Division, includes branches of: (1) Student finance and policy (2) Budget (3) Financial management (4) Finance policy and planning (5) Financial schemes, systems and services (6) Higher education and skills finance	Over 90 management and senior roles: chief financial officer, branch directors, deputy directors, lead manager, senior manager/executive/assistant, manager, and special project officer, among others. Among other tasks, the ministry carries out budget projections that are annually published.

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (n.d.[77]), *Struktūra ir kontaktinė informacija [Structure and contacts]*, https://smsm.lrv.lt/en/structure-and-contacts/contacts-1 (accessed 9 November 2023); Directorate of Financial Affairs (n.d.[78]), *Directorate of Financial Affairs [CFO]*, https://www.education.gouv.fr/direction-des-affaires-financieres-daf-3671 (accessed 9 November 2023); Government of Singapore (n.d.[79]), *Singapore Government Directory*, https://www.sgdi.gov.sg/ministries/moe/departments/fpd/departments/fd (accessed 13 November 2023).

Recommendation 7, Action 1

Estonian School Network Forecast 2020

The organisation of the school network was subject to thorough analysis by the Praxis Centre for Policy Analysis, with a first study in 2005 and a second one in 2014. The second study included an analysis of the evolution of the school network since 2005 and a forecast of the optimal primary and secondary school networks. The forecast included data on population, student population, area of each municipality and predefined criteria for designing the school network (mainly school size). The study concluded that the changes recommended by the 2005 analysis had fallen short and that by 2020, Estonia should reduce the number of basic and upper-secondary schools.

Source: Santiago, P. et al. (2016[80]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Estonia 2016*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264251731-en.

Education charter for the future planning of the school network in Portugal

In Portugal, every municipality develops a plan for its school network (called an "educational charter") using data on current capacity and forecasts. In 2021, the Ministry of Education published a guide for preparation that mandated charters should include: an evaluation of the previous education charters; a diagnosis of the current municipal network, including population and socio-economic scenarios and needs assessment; as well as a proposal for intervention.

Source: Ministry of Education (2021[81]), *Carta: Guião para Elaboração [Educational Charter: Guide for preparation]*, https://www.igefe.mec.pt/files/downloaddocument/17

Recommendation 7, Action 2

Lithuania's Rules for the Development of the Network of Schools Implementing Formal Education

The Ministry of Education in Lithuania provides local authorities with guidelines to manage their school network. The rules clearly define:

- **The characteristics the school network should follow and how it can be organised**. For instance, it states that areas with an insufficient student population (fewer than 60 students) can have a department or branch operating in the territory or that two or more schools can operate in one building.

Country examples

- **The requirements for each type of school and the criteria for class organisation**. For example, primary education programmes should have between 8 and 24 students per class. Besides this, only two classes can be combined, and it is recommended to combine adjacent classes.

- **The steps municipalities are expected to take to advance a reform of their school networks**. First, the municipality prepares a plan for establishing, reorganising and consolidating schools. The document should outline how planned measures can enhance social inclusion, improve the quality of education, advance educational achievements and promote efficiency. When necessary, a teacher qualification update, employment plan, and transportation assurance plan are prepared. Municipalities must also consult with stakeholders on this plan and allow the school community to comment on the proposal.

Source: The Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2011[82]), *Resolution on the network of schools running formal education programmes. Approval of development rules*, https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalActEditions/TAR.471E5D64413E?faces-redirect=tru (accessed 14 November 2023).

Recommendation 7, Action 3

Costa Rica's Ministry of Education's proposals to reduce paperwork

In 2012, the Ministry of Education in Costa Rica initiated the plan "More education, less paperwork" *(Más educación, menos papeleo)* to reduce the administrative burden in the education system. The plan identified the administrative requirements to be followed by principals, teachers, inspectors and subnational authorities that could be simplified or eliminated. Some were, for example, substituting the daily reporting of class activities with a quarterly report on learning results or determining the frequency of school inspections on a risk-based assessment. With these measures, the Ministry of Education simplified the monitoring and control measures to serve strategic rather than bureaucratic purposes.

Source: Ministry of Education of the Republic of Costa Rica (2012[83]), *Más educación, menos papeleo [More education, less paperwork]*, http://mep-cr.blogspot.com/2012/01/mas-educacion-menos-papeleo.html.

Expert committee to reduce school bureaucracy in Chile

In 2018, the Ministry of Education in Chile launched the initiative "Everyone to the classroom" (*Todos al aula*) to simplify and co-ordinate the administrative and regulatory pressures on schools. The Ministry of Educationcreated an expert committee formed by education experts from the government, civil society and academia, which worked for 3 months on the elaboration of a document which included 46 proposals to reduce bureaucracy at the school level.

The proposals sought to: 1) foster greater school autonomy in the use of resources, by for instance unifying the accountability procedures for all the resources received through different grants; 2) modernise the processes and interactions between education providers and state institutions; 3) improve the process of collection and request of information between education providers and the Ministry of Education; and 4) simplify the management and administrative instruments at the school level, e.g. by implementing the Advanced Electronic Signature System for schools.

Source: Ministry of Education (2018[84]), *Todos al aula. Propuestas comisión. [Everyone to the classroom. Committee proposals]*, https://www.mineduc.cl/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/propuestas-todos-al-aula.pdf;

Recommendation 8, Action 3

Reporting for equity in the United States

Until recently, data on school-level expenditure in the United States was not available to the public, and schools were not obliged to report it. Since the 2018-19 school year, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has required states to keep

Country examples

track of and disclose spending data per student for federal, state and local funds. The data should include personnel and non-personnel expenditures for each district and each school in the state.

In 2020, the Department of Education created an interactive map displaying the data on per-pupil expenditure, which is publicly reported on state websites. To go further and report the data in a way that is more accessible and enables equity-focused comparisons, the non-profit Education Trust created the "State of Funding Equity Data Tool".

Source: Office of Elementary and Secondary Evaluation (2020[85]), *Per-pupil expenditure transparency*, https://oese.ed.gov/ppe/ (accessed 13 November 2023); The Education Trust (n.d.[86]), *The State of Education Funding*, https://stateofeducationfunding.org/ (accessed 13 November 2023).

Schools' financial benchmarking in England (United Kingdom)

Schools in England report data on income and expenditure, guided by the Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) framework. The CFR provides a standard template for schools to collect financial information every year. Schools, local authorities and the Department of Education use the COLLECT portal (Collections On-Line for Learning, Education, Children and Teachers) to process the data. This information enables governors and local authorities to produce simple reports. A financial benchmarking website also allows comparisons of school income and expenditure profiles between similar schools.

Source: Department for Education (2023[87]), *COLLECT guides for schools and local authorities,* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/collect-guides-for-schools-and-local-authorities

State of Education Report in the Netherlands

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*) reports yearly on the state of education, outlining main developments and key themes. The State of Education Report 2022 (*De Staat van het Onderwijs*) has a section that addresses the financial management of school governing boards. The inspectorate analysed the financial developments at the school level, detailed the main challenges faced by school governing boards and provided recommendations or steps to follow. For instance, there is a specific analysis of funds for inclusive education that concludes the use of these funds is changing and that the effects remain unclear; and thus, the inspectorate planned to carry out a study on the effective spending of funds for inclusive education.

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2022[88]), *The State of Education 2022*, https://english.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documents/annual-reports/2022/04/28/state-of-education-2022.

Recommendation 9, Action 1

Targeted funding initiatives

Level of analysis	Identification process	Frequency of identification/updates
Ireland – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS programme)		
Indicators estimated for individual schools based on area-based indicators and students' socio-economic variables	DEIS refined its identification model in 2022 to capture a greater breadth of disadvantage and to account for severity of disadvantage through the application of a weighted process. It considers: • HP index (Haase and Pratschke, 2017) (relative affluence or disadvantage of a small geographical area using national census data) matched to each student address (based on school enrolment data) • concentration of traveller and Roma learners • concentration of students residing in direct provision or emergency homelessness accommodation.	The DEIS programme was extended to new schools in 2017 and 2022.

Country examples		
Flemish Community of Belgium – Socio-economic Index		
Indicators estimated for individual schools based on students' socio-economic variables	School leaders report the school population (as of January) every year to the central level, which attributes a socio-economic index value to every student according to their residential area. The index of the residential area is based on individual characteristics such as income, qualification level and unemployment rate. Schools are then ranked according to their average socio-economic index value, and 25% of schools with the lowest values qualify for additional teaching periods or funding allocations (at primary and secondary levels).	The index is reviewed every five years.
France – Priority Education Networks (*Réseaux d'Éducation Prioritaire*)		
Indicators estimated for individual schools based on students' outcomes and socio-economic variables	France's priority education areas (*Zones d'Éducation Prioritaires*) have been progressively substituted by priority education networks (*Réseaux d'Éducation Prioritare,* REP). There are two types of networks: REP + (cover neighbourhoods or isolated areas with the highest concentration of social problems) and REPs (more socially mixed but with a significant concentration of social problems). Schools are classified according to a social index that considers: • the percentage of students from households belonging to disadvantaged socio-professional categories • students who benefit from scholarships • students residing in priority neighbourhoods (*quartier prioritaire de la politique de la ville*, QPV) • students who repeated a grade before the sixth grade.	In recent years, the number of schools has been revised annually.
United Kingdom – Education Investment Areas (EIAs)		
Indicators estimated for a geographical zone (currently 55 EIAs) covering all schools in the area	Student outcomes at the local authority level: • At the end of Stage 2 (ISCED 1): Considering the proportion of students reaching the expected standard in all of reading, writing and mathematics in national curriculum assessments • At the end of Stage 4 (ISCED 3.2): Comparing students' results progress to other students with similar prior attainment	The selection approach uses average performance data from the most recent three years of complete data. The last update was made in 2022 using data from 2017-19.

Source: Department of Education (2022[89]), *The Refined DEIS Identification Model*, https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/220043/d6b98002-a904-427f-b48a-0fa0af756ea7.pdf#page=null; OECD (2021[90]), *Towards equity in school funding policies*, https://doi.org/10.1787/6a3d127a-en, Raffo, Dyson and Kerr (2014[91]), *Lessons from area-based initiatives in education and training*, https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/LessonsfromareabasedinitiativesJuly2014.pdf, DEPP (2022[92]), *L'éducation prioritaire [Priority education]*, https://eduscol.education.fr/document/42376/download; Department for Education (2022[93]), *Education Investment Areas: Selection Methodology*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-investment-areas-selection-methodology.

Recommendation 9, Action 3

Programa Todos a Aprender, Colombia

Let's All Learn (*Programa Todos a Aprender,* PTA) is a large-scale programme implemented since 2012 by the Ministry of Education in Colombia with the support of territorial entities. Annually, approximately 89 000 teachers throughout the country are trained and supported by the PTA. Most of the centres receiving assistance from the PTA are in rural areas (74% in 2021) due to their prioritisation in the school selection process.

The programme's main objective is to build teachers' skills and competencies and improve their practices in the classroom through coaching and mentoring. Tutors are selected from across the country and trained for this purpose. Once they complete the training, tutors organise individual and group sessions in the PTA schools. To provide individual support, they work directly as peers with each teacher in the classroom. Tutors observe their teaching practices and provide feedback on pedagogical and didactic strategies. Tutors also work with groups of teachers and organise peer-learning activities and discussions around pedagogical topics within schools. For instance, they might provide support in the

Country examples

development and implementation of student assessments, the use of curricular guidelines, and the selection and use of materials and textbooks, among others.

Source: Ministry of National Education (2022[94]), Programa Todos a Aprender del Ministerio de Educación Nacional (Colombia): nota técnica [Programme Let's All Learn of the Colombian Ministry of National Education: technical note], https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1780/articles-363488_recurso_2.pdf; OECD (2019[95]), "Promoting powerful professional learning for school staff", https://doi.org/10.1787/3f8c06df-en.

Recommendation 9, Action 3

Fostering peer learning in Chilean rural schools

The Ministry of Education in Chile has a programme for rural education that includes different initiatives. One of them is the Microcentre (*El Microcentro*), a space where teachers from rural multigrade schools within the same territory can share their experiences and reflect on their teaching practices. The exchange aims to improve student outcomes by helping teachers define teaching and learning strategies, as well as reinforce their teaching skills.

On an annual basis, each microcentre prepares the annual schedule of meetings, specifying the content and objectives of each session. Teachers from rural multigrade schools are to devote approximately eight hours a month to these meetings. Besides the regular gatherings, a regional co-ordinator, selected by the microcentres, also attends national workshops with rural teachers from across the country.

Source: Ministry of Education (2021[96]), *Ministerio de Educatión. Educación Rural. [Ministry of Education. Rural Education]*, https://rural.mineduc.cl/el-microcentro/.
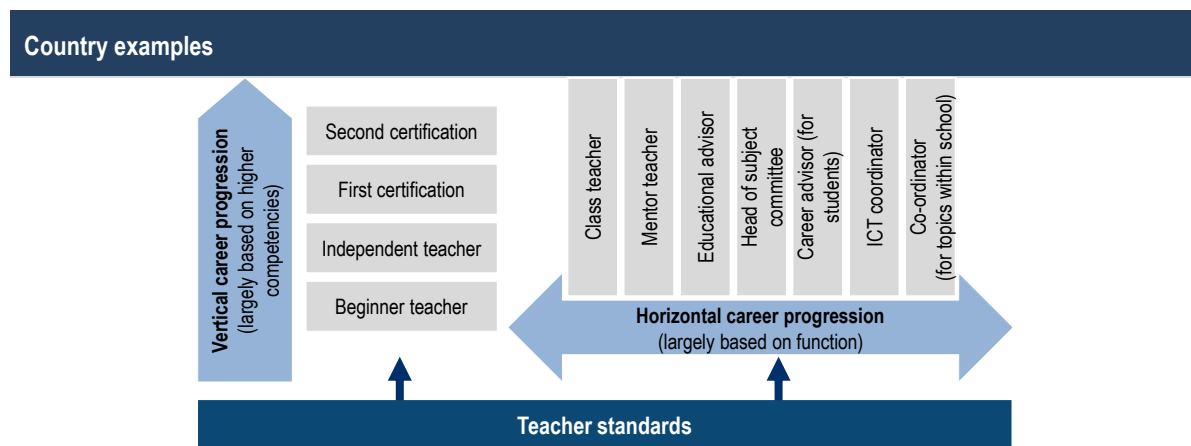
Recommendation 10, Action 2

Norway's diversified career structure

Norway launched a two-year pilot starting in 2015, which involved training 205 teachers as specialists in mathematics and Norwegian. To diversify teachers' career pathways, the specialists were given responsibility for their colleagues' professional learning and keeping them up to date on subject didactics, teaching practices and classroom management. An evaluation of the pilot concluded that the specialist role constituted an attractive career path for teachers, but that it needed a deeper anchoring in the profession and in each school's development plan for specialists to become an effective resource for their colleagues and for their schools' improvement. The pilot has since been extended for another two years and expanded to include other subjects.

Source: Seland, I. et al. (2017[97]), Sluttrapport fra evaluering av pilotering av laererspesialistordningen i norsk [report from evaluation of the pilot of the teacher specialist arrangement in Norwegian and science subjects], The Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU), http://www.nifu.no/; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2018[98]), Teacher Education 2025: National Strategy for Quality and Cooperation in Teacher Education, https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/d0c1da83bce94e2da21d5f631bbae817/kd_teacher-education-2025_uu.pdf; OECD (2019[99]), "Raising the attractiveness of a career in schools", https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccea428-en.

Slovak Republic's mixed approach to diversifying the teacher career structure

The Slovak Republic has a clear career structure for teachers that involves four vertical steps that reflect increasing levels of knowledge and experience, as well as the completion of professional development activities. Progression through the vertical career grades is associated with different roles and responsibilities, as well as salary increases. In addition to this vertical career progression, the Slovak Republic also has horizontal differentiation, which is largely based on a range of specialised career positions. These different functions allow teachers to develop their expertise in certain areas. The diagram below includes examples of typical roles available to teachers.

Country examples

Source: OECD (2019[99]), "Raising the attractiveness of a career in schools", https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccea428-en.

Recommendation 11, Action 1

Austria's teacher pay reform

In 2013, Austria introduced a federal law targeting educators' working conditions, *Dienstrechts-Novelle 2013 – Pädagogischer Dienst*. This legislation, implemented in 2015 and applicable to all new educators from the 2019-20 academic year onwards, introduced a redesigned compensation framework. The reform redefined teacher salaries, incorporating a more generous statutory starting salary and a trajectory of seven salary increments over the course of a teacher's career, replacing the previous system of biennial salary adjustments. The law streamlined the salary structure by offering enhanced initial salaries while moderating upper-tier earnings, preserving teachers' anticipated lifetime income at an equitable level. These changes were paralleled by elevated qualification prerequisites for prospective teachers in provincial schools and a heightened teaching workload in federal schools.

Source: Nusche, D. et al. (2016[100]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Austria 2016*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264256729-en.

Recommendation 12, Action 2

The use of standardised tests for advancement in Chile's teaching career path

Chile uses a certification process to regulate teachers' progression across the five stages of their career structure based on competencies specified in the national teaching standards. The certification includes self-evaluation, peer evaluation and principal evaluation, as well as an external component comprising a standardised written assessment and external markers evaluating a professional portfolio. The standardised test (*Evaluación de Conocimientos Específicos y Pedagógicos*, ECEP) aims to assess the teacher's knowledge in a discipline based on the curriculum and the Framework of Good Teaching. The test is conducted annually and is based on a specific syllabus posted on the Center for Professional Development, Experimentation, and Pedagogical Research's website.

Source: OECD (2019[60]), "Raising the attractiveness of a career in schools", https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccea428-en.

Diagnostic and formative evaluation for teacher promotion in Colombia

Colombia's teacher career structure, introduced in 2002 and applicable for teachers appointed following its introduction, illustrates how to establish indirect links between appraisal and compensation. In contrast to the seniority-based system

in place for teachers appointed prior to 2002, teachers with a given qualification need to undergo a diagnostic and formative evaluation (*Evaluación de Carácter Diagnóstico Formativo*, ECDF) to advance in their careers and to the next step of the salary scale. While initially based on a written assignment, the evaluation process was reformed in 2015 to more closely measure teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. The process now includes videos on teacher practices, self-evaluation, surveys of different education stakeholders (peers, students and parents) and results from the annual teacher appraisal.

Source: "Raising the attractiveness of a career in schools", https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccea428-en; MINEDUC (n.d.[102]), *Ayuda MINEDUC, Sistema de Reconocimiento del Desarrollo Profesional Docente*, https://www.ayudamineduc.cl/ficha/sistema-de-reconocimiento-del-desarrollo-profesional-docente.

England's (United Kingdom) use of student assessment data in teacher appraisal

England has a "Teacher appraisal and capability model" that defines how to assess the overall performance of teachers. The appraisal period runs for 12 months and includes an assessment of performance and a recommendation on pay progression. Before the appraisal period starts, the appraiser and the teacher meet to define their objectives for the year. The objectives must be set such that they will contribute to the improvement of a school's educational provision and performance. These objectives can be related to student assessment data. However, they must not solely be based on this since it is acknowledged that the educational progress of an individual or a group of students is not solely the responsibility of teachers. In the appraisal process, evidence is gathered to monitor students' progress in learning and other outcomes, improvement in teachers' practice (e.g. lesson planning), and teachers' contribution to work at school. The evidence gathered may include classroom observations, task observations, reviews of assessment results, reviews of lesson-planning records, and students' and parent's voices, among others. At the end of the cycle, a written appraisal report recording the overall performance assessment and pay recommendation is provided.

Source: NAHT (2022[103]), *Model staff appraisal and capability policy (2023/24)*, https://www.egfl.org.uk/sites/default/files/Human_resources/Appraisal_and_performance_management/NAHT%20Model%20staff%20appraisal%20and%20capability%20policy%202023-24.pdf.

Recommendation 12, Action 3

Teacher licensing and re-licensing in the General Teaching Council for Scotland

In Scotland, every teacher needs to be registered with the General Teaching Council (GTC) to be able to teach. The GTC is the teaching profession's independent registration and regulation body, independent from the government and fully funded by teachers through an annual fee. The GTC keeps a public register of teachers and sets up the standards for entering and remaining in the teaching profession.

There are different stages teachers should follow in the GTC registration process. First, once initial teacher education is completed, recent graduates have to apply for a Provisional Registration to the GTC. This registration allows them to pursue the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) or, alternatively the Flexible Route, which allows probationer teachers to be considered for Full Registration within one school year (190 teaching days). Every five years, teachers must apply for reaccreditation, presenting a portfolio of activity that shows their professional development in accredited training. To go through the re-licensing process, teachers need to have the support of their principal.

Besides registration, teachers are annually appraised in their school following the methodology set out by the local authority. This methodology has to be approved by the GTC and is implemented by schools. Only in rare cases when teachers are unable to improve their performance or are charged with criminal offences, the GTC might withdraw their license through a formal process.

Country examples

Source: General Teaching Council for Scotland (n.d.[104]), *GTC Scotland*, https://www.gtcs.org.uk/.

Recommendation 14, Action 1

Mentoring standards in the United States

In the United States, several states have established mentoring standards to ensure the quality of mentoring. The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has established six standards that identify the skill set and dispositions needed for effective mentoring. The standards are meant to provide a shared vision and be used as a tool of self-reflection for mentors. According to these standards, an accomplished mentor should have a learning-focused relationship with mentees; promote mentee's reflective practices; focus on mentor professional growth and ethics; build on mentees' knowledge and skills in curriculum, instruction and assessment; connect mentees with organisational systems and learning communities; and foster equitable thinking, practices and outcomes. Each standard describes effective mentor actions by listing multiple descriptors and examples of excellence in mentoring for each category.

Similarly, New York State has published a set of standards to guide the design and implementation of teacher mentoring programmes. There are 13 standards grouped under 4 categories: qualities and dispositions of an effective mentor; professional practice; knowledge of mentee; and knowledge and skills of mentoring in practice. Each standard includes a definition and a set of performance indicators of qualities and activities to fulfil.

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2020[105]), *Washington State Standards for Mentoring*, https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/best/pubdocs/Standards_for_Mentoring_2020.pdf; New York State Professional Standards and Practices Board (2022[106]), *Mentoring Standards and Program Guidance*, https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/nysed-mentoring-standards-and-program-guidance_0523.pdf.


Recommendation 16, Action 2

Estonia's education data information system

The Estonian Education Information System (*Eesti hariduse infosüsteem*, EHIS) is a state-run and financed system based on real-time data. EHIS connects all the databases of the education system into one platform, linking over 20 different information systems and collecting inputs from approximately 2 000 agencies and 5 000 users. For example, data from the population register are used to complete information on students' residences, without requiring schools to enter already available data. EHIS has six target user groups (see the figure below).

Schools can connect their online school management system to EHIS, so information inputted into their own systems is automatically reported to EHIS. They can also use the EHIS to compare their performance to other schools. Importantly, EHIS data also form the basis for all education policy decisions across the country, ensuring policy making is evidence-based.

To make education data easily accessible by the public, Estonia has also developed an interactive database (*HaridusSilm*, the Education Eye), which contains anonymised and aggregated data from the EHIS. Users can monitor education goals and quantify progress towards them and dynamically create their own statistical reports.

Country examples
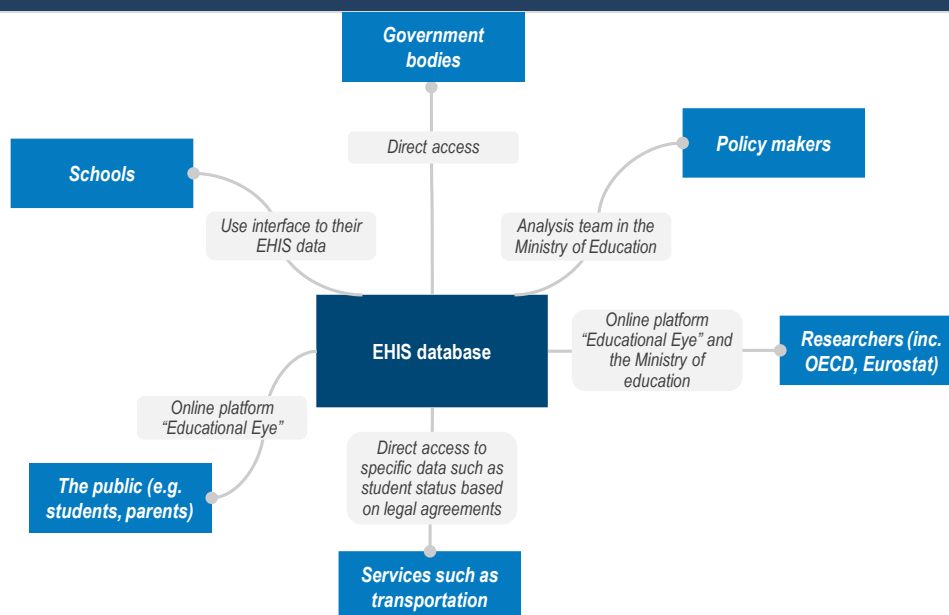
Source: EHIS (n.d.[107]), *Estonian Education Information System (EHIS)*, https://www.ehis.ee/ (accessed 1 June 2023).

Denmark's education data warehouse

Denmark's Data Warehouse (*Data Varehuset*) is an open, dynamic analytical tool and Denmark's primary statistical interface for education data. It links data to the country's educational goals and provides a wide range of data on student well-being, grades, attendance, etc. The warehouse provides institutions, regions, municipalities and the public with predefined reports, graphs and interactive dashboards with user-friendly statistical information. It is designed for a wide range of education stakeholders:

- for parents, to help them choose schools for their children
- for school leaders, to compare their schools' performance to similar schools, identify strengths and weaknesses and take necessary measures for school improvement
- for local authorities, as a management information tool to monitor quality across schools.

The platform includes key performance indicator views in dashboards, which allow users to access a wide range of reports and visualisations based on the country's key priority topics.

Source: Danish Ministry of Children and Education (2023[108]), *Education Statistics*, https://www.stil.dk/uddannelsesdata/uddannelsesstatistik.

Recommendation 17, Action 6

The Norwegian annual report on the state of education

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training publishes an annual summative report on education, the *Education Mirror*. The report is one of the primary vehicles for system monitoring in the country and draws, among others, on data from Norway's different student tests and assessments, including its full-cohort assessments in Grades 5, 8 and 9. To support policy makers, the report provides comparisons across counties and different student groups.

Country examples

Source: Nusche, D. et al. (2011[109]), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Norway 2011*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264117006-en; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR) (2022[110]), *The Norwegian Education Mirror 2022*, https://www.udir.no/in-english/the-education-mirror-2022/compulsory-education2/learning-outcomes/.

Recommendation 17, Action 7

The governance of the national assessment system in the United States

Responsibility for administering the national assessment system (the National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP) in the United States is shared by the National Centre for Education Sciences, within the US Department of Education, and the Institute of Education Sciences. Legislation describes the roles of each agency involved in implementing the assessment system. In particular, an independent governing board, whose members are appointed by the Secretary of Education and represent a range of backgrounds, sets NAEP policy. This governing board has regular meetings to set the assessment schedule; develop assessment frameworks; monitor external contracts; set achievement levels; and manage other tasks related to the assessment process. Decisions taken by the governing board are published on line to promote transparency.

Source: Institute of Education Sciences (n.d.[111]), *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*, https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/.

Recommendation 18, Action 2

Evaluation of education policies in Finland

Every four years, Finland's Ministry of Education develops an education evaluation plan that determines the themes, activities and timeline for the country's policy evaluations. It includes the primary policy questions it seeks to address and the specific independent evaluations it intends to commission to answer them. The plan covers all levels, from early childhood education and care to higher education.

For example, for the 2020-23 period, the focus areas of the evaluation activities are:

- learning and competence development
- promoting equity
- improving the effectiveness of the education system
- supporting continuous improvement.

While the plans are developed every four years, they are updated when needed by reforms or exceptional circumstances.

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), an independent entity that works as a separate unit of the Finnish National Agency for Education, carries out all evaluations. FINEEC comprises about 50 staff members organised into 4 different units: General Education; Vocational Education and Early Childhood Education; Higher Education and Liberal Adult Education; and Development Services. In addition, the centre also works with approximately 200 external experts to carry out the evaluations.

Source: Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (2023[112]), *Plan for Education Evaluation 2020-2023*, https://www.karvi.fi/en/about-us/about-our-evaluations/plan-education-evaluation-2020-2023.

Recommendation 18, Action 5

France's statistical service for education data

Country examples

The Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance Department (*Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance,* DEPP) acts as both the statistical service of France's Ministry of Education and a ministerial department. Its official mission is to design and produce data and indicators on the state of the French education system, disseminate data and analyse information based on the data produced. As such, the DEPP monitors education performance and contributes to research and policy evaluations by providing expertise and assistance. The DEPP also oversees the ministry's education data management system and is responsible for the repositories and nomenclatures used in the ministry's information systems, which helps guarantee consistency for data produced by various ministry departments.

The DEPP is composed of staff with a diverse set of skills organised across three main sub-entities:

- the sub-directorate for Statistics and Synthesis, which comprises teams focused on key thematic areas that include educational inequalities, adult education, student statistics, education staff and funding
- the sub-directorate for Evaluations and Academic Performance, which includes specialists in youth and adult competencies, public policy evaluation, design and management of student assessment, psychometrics, priority education and teaching practices
- the division for Quality and Statistical Support Services, which comprises specialist teams for data quality and valorisation, statistical computing and publications.

Source: French Ministry of Education and Youth (n.d.[113]), *Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance [DEPP]*, https://www.education.gouv.fr/direction-de-l-evaluation-de-la-prospective-et-de-la-performance-depp-12389.

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