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Principles and general objectives of education

Article 2 of the new Education Law, adopted on 1 January 2011 and effective 9 February 2011, stipulates that education is a national priority and pursues the free, integral and harmonious development of the individual and the development of an autonomous personality for active citizen participation in society, social inclusion and employability. The state ensures equal access to all levels and forms of education without any discrimination. Article 3 lists the main principles governing education and lifelong learning, namely: equity, quality, relevance, efficiency, decentralization, public accountability, intercultural dialogue, preservation of the Romanian national identity and cultural values, equality of chances, university autonomy and academic freedom, transparency, social inclusion, learner-centered education, parental participation and accountability, and recognition of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Article 4 specifies that the ultimate aim of education of children, youth and adults is the development of competences, understood as multifunctional and transferable knowledge, skills and abilities needed for: i) the fulfillment of personal development according to interests and everyone's aspirations and the desire to learn throughout life; ii) social integration and active participation in society; iii) employment and participation in the development of a sustainable economy; iv) developing a conception of life based on humanistic and scientific values, the national and universal culture fostering intercultural dialogue; v) fostering respect for the fundamental human rights and freedoms, and a sense of dignity and tolerance; and vi) cultivating sensitivity to human problems and ethical-civic values, as well as care for the natural, social and cultural environment.

The vision of the *National Development Plan 2007-2013* (published in 2005), is a competitive, dynamic and prosperous Romania. One of the overall objectives is the development of human capital and the increase of its competitiveness on the labour market, by providing equal lifelong learning opportunities and the development of a modern, flexible and inclusive labour market. As stated in the Plan, human resources development and sustainable integration of the labour market are possible when lifelong learning is promoted as a principle and a general framework for the restructuring and developing of education and training systems, ensuring key skills and the coherence between formal, non-formal and informal learning frameworks. The *Education and Research for the Knowledge Society Strategy 2009-2015* aims at building through education and research a knowledge society in Romania, the only one that can bring prosperity, sustainable development and personal development for each citizen. The Strategy specifies that promoting the four pillars of a knowledge society (i.e. education, research, development and innovation) does not only involve a priority support of these social activities; it involves, first of all, promoting the social, real acceptance of a new set of values necessary for the consequent achievement of options corresponding to a knowledge economy.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The **Education Law No. 84**, promulgated on 24 July 1995 and amended among others by Law No. 131 of 29 December 1995, Law No. 268/2003 and Law No. 354/2004, regulates the organization and functioning of the national education system at all levels. The new **National Education Law No. 1/2011** was adopted on 1 January 2011 and took effect on 9 February 2011. The new Law defines the concept of lifelong learning education and vocational education and training in an integrated and coherent manner and sets the recognition and certification of skills acquired through formal, non-formal and informal education contexts. Moreover, the Law provides for the establishment by local authorities of Community Centres for Lifelong Learning designed to implement lifelong learning policies and strategies at community level. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

The **Law No. 288** of June 2004 on the organization of universities studies complemented by **Law No. 346** of November 2005, as well as a number of ministerial orders, government's decisions and ordinances issued in 2004-2006, established a new three-cycle structure of higher education in line with the implementation of the Bologna process.

The **Law on Adult Training No. 375/2002** regulates the accreditation of the vocational training providers, with a view to improving the quality of both public and private training programmes. The Law also provides for the evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, and the introduction of credit transfer based on alternative training forms.

The **Teaching Staff Statute (Law No. 128)**, promulgated in June 1997 and complemented by Law No. 349/2004, regulates the teaching profession, the required qualifications, the in-service teacher training, the evaluation of teachers, etc.

The **Law on Education Quality Assurance No. 87/2006**, approving the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 75 of 12 July 2005 regarding quality assurance in education, provided for the establishment of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education as a public autonomous institution and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (under the Ministry of Education).

Article 6 of the **Constitution**, approved by referendum on 8 December 1991, stipulates that the State recognizes and guarantees the right of persons belonging to national minorities to the preservation, development and expression of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity. According to Article 32, public education shall be free and the right of persons belonging to national minorities to learn their mother tongue, and their right to be educated in this language are guaranteed; the ways to exercise these rights shall be regulated by law.

Education is free at all levels and until 1999 compulsory education comprised eight years (i.e. eight-year primary and lower secondary programme) on a full-time basis. The **Law No. 151** of July 1999 introduced a nine-year compulsory education programme consisting of primary (grades 1 to 4) and lower secondary education



(grades 5 to 9). (Ministry of National Education, 1999). The **Law No. 268/2003** introduced a ten-year compulsory education programme consisting of four years of primary education, and two phases of lower secondary education, i.e. four-year gymnasium (grades 5 to 8) and two additional years either in the lower cycle of the lyceum (grades 9 and 10) or in arts and trades schools providing vocational education. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2004). Arts and trades schools have replaced the vocational schools and apprenticeship schools. They offer training programmes at different levels and also provide access to higher education; the first level of the arts and trades schools (grades 9 and 10) is part of compulsory education.

Administration and management of the education system

The national education system is under the overall responsibility of the **Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports** (MECTS, formerly the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation). Pre-university education is subordinated to the Ministry of Education through school inspectorates, while higher education is coordinated by the Ministry with due respect for university autonomy. Educational institutions are legal entities, except for grades 1-4 schools.

Among other functions, the Ministry of Education: formulates and implements the general education strategy in consultation with other institutions and ministries concerned; sets the objectives of the education system in general, and of each separate level and field of education; coordinates and monitors the national education system and organizes the public education schools network; approves the establishment of secondary and postsecondary schools, colleges and faculties; and coordinates research activities in education. The MECTS has also overall responsibility for vocational education and training (VET) within the formal education system and develops strategies, policies and legislation, approves curricula and the national assessment standards as well as the school network.

In the fulfilment of its functions the MECTS can establish specialized bodies and rely on national consultative bodies, such as the **National Assessment and Examination Centre**, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, the **National Council for Higher Education Financing**, and the **National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education**. The main tasks of the **National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment** (ACPART) include: to elaborate, manage and update the national framework for higher education qualifications; to establish, maintain and update the methodology for elaborating and certifying higher education qualifications; and to design and review, based on best practices, the national reference standards and descriptive elements of higher education qualifications.

The preparation and implementation of the curricular policies have been ensured by the National Centre for Curriculum and Assessment in Pre-university Education, established by the Government Resolution No. 231 of 7 March 2007, following the reorganization and merging of other public institutions involved in the field (i.e. the National Council for Curriculum, the National Assessment and Examination Service, the National Centre for Excellence). The Government Resolution No. 1401 of 18 November 2009 transferred its attributions in terms of assessment to the National Assessment and Examination Centre.



The **National Centre for In-service Training of the Pre-university Education Staff**, established in 2001 and subordinated to the MECTS, organizes in-service training and professional development activities for teachers and educators. Following the Government Decision No. 2191/2004, 16 **Regional Centres** have been created in order to evaluate, monitor and approve in-service teacher training activities at the regional level.

The national strategy for quality assurance in (pre-university) education is implemented by the **Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education** (ARACIP). This agency is responsible for the external evaluation of the quality of education in pre-university schools, and for licensing, accreditation and evaluation of pre-university schools in order to certify that they meet quality standards. The **Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education** (ARACIS), a public autonomous institution established in October 2005 replacing the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation, is responsible for the evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes, ensuring the full implementation of the three-cycle structure the higher education system according to the Bologna process.

Vocational education and training and especially VET for adults were under the regulatory authority of the National Adult Training Board. The **National Authority for Qualifications**, established under the 2011 National Education Law and operating as specialized body of the Ministry of Education, is responsible for developing the National Qualifications Framework in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and managing the National Register of Qualifications and the National Register of Adult Training Providers. The Authority was created by reorganizing the National Adult Training Board and the Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education. The **National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development**, subordinated to the MECTS, contributes to the development of TVET policies and strategies. It plays a major role in quality assurance and has developed the National Quality Assurance Framework. Its main functions include among others: the design, elaboration, implementation and revision of the curriculum for initial VET (IVET); the design of the evaluation and certification system for IVET; the elaboration of methodologies for IVET teacher training; the development of social partnerships at national, regional and local level; and the design and elaboration of training standards, curriculum and evaluation. (CEDEFOP, 2011). The **National Agency for Employment**, subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, is the one of the most important providers of vocational training for adults, especially for the unemployed. Most of the courses are provided by the local employment agencies through their own training centres or in cooperation with private institutions, with the costs of the courses covered from the Unemployment Fund.

The **Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection** (MMFPS) has the following tasks in the field of lifelong learning: to develop, together with the MECTS, national policies and national strategies in the field of adult vocational training; to regulate apprenticeship schemes and training in the workplace; and to monitor, evaluate and control (directly or through authorized bodies) training providers, other than those of the national education system. The MMFPS and its regional branches,



the County Labour and Social Protection Directorates, are responsible for the retraining and further training of the labour force. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

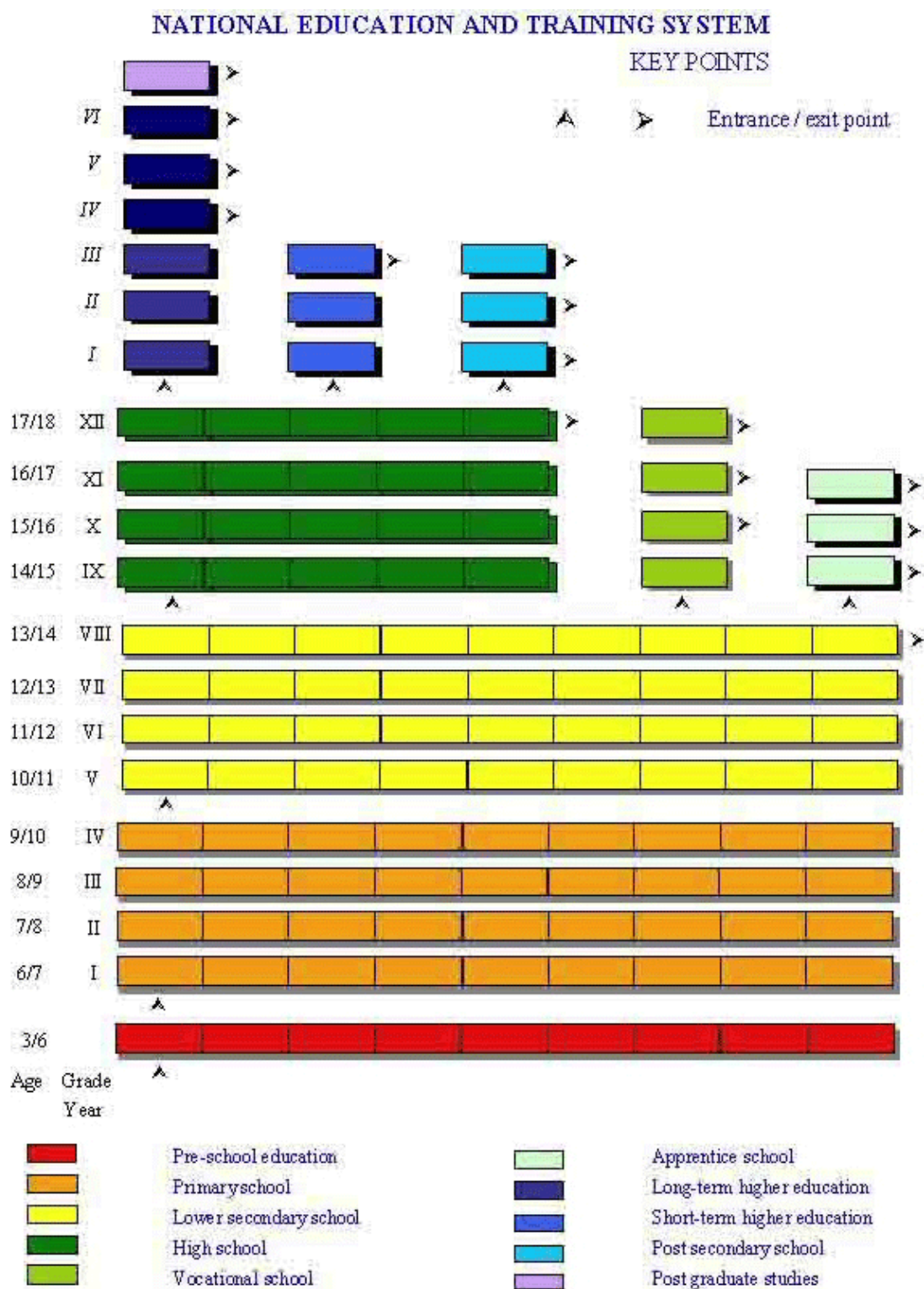
County school inspectorates are specialized bodies subordinated to the MECTS with the following main functions: to monitor the organization and operation of the pre-university school network and inspect schools; to monitor, in the area of their jurisdiction, all pre-university educational activities and services provided by public and private entities. Each school inspectorate comprises a managing board and an advisory council. The advisory council is comprised of directors of educational units, prominent teaching staff and representatives of parents, local administration, religious and business communities. An inspectorate, headed by an inspector general, has been established in each region, where there are also **Departments of education** that make technical recommendations and monitors funds allocated from the local budgets. Local jurisdictions (municipalities, towns, and communes) participate in the management of schools together with the directors and the school boards. Romania is divided into 41 counties and the municipality of Bucharest. The counties and Bucharest are grouped into eight development regions. Each county is administered by a county council, responsible for local affairs, as well as by a prefect appointed by the central government, acting as head of all central government decentralized services in the county. Each county is further subdivided into cities and communes.

Public pre-university educational units are managed by **directors**, if necessary assisted by deputy directors. In discharging their managerial duties, the directors rely on **Teachers' Councils** and **Management Boards**. Directors and deputy directors of preschools, primary, lower secondary and vocational schools, as well as deputy directors of secondary and postsecondary schools, are appointed by the inspector general. Directors of secondary and postsecondary schools are appointed by an order of the Minister of Education upon proposal of the inspector general.

As a rule, a higher education institution includes several faculties, colleges, divisions, departments, research and small production units. Higher education institutions are governed by Senates; faculties and divisions are led by professional boards. Senates are headed by rectors, faculty boards by deans, and division boards by directors. The functions of these bodies and their relationships are spelled out by the University Charter, adopted by the Senate. The rector is elected by the Senate and confirmed by an order of the Minister. The academic autonomy refers to institutional management, structuring and operation; teaching and scientific research activities; and administration and financing.

Structure and organization of the education system

Romania: structure of the education system (2002)



Source: Website of the National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance, September 2003.

Romania: structure of the education system (2011)

Age	Type of education	Grade	ISCED	Educational level		Qualification level	
>19	Post-compulsory		6	Post-university education		5	
				Doctorate (PhD)			
			5	University education	Master	University and post university education	4
					Bachelor		
4	Post high school education		Post-secondary education	3			
18	Post-compulsory	XIII	3	High school – upper cycle	Upper secondary education	3	
17		XII					
16		XI					Completion year
15	Compulsory	X	2	High school – lower cycle	School of Arts and Trades	1	
14		IX					
13		VIII	Lower secondary school (Gymnasium)	Lower secondary education			
12		VII					
11		VI					
10		V					
9		IV	1	Primary school	Primary education	-	
8		III					
7		II					
6		I					
5		0	Pre-school education (kindergartens)	Pre-school education			
4							
3							

Source: CEDEFOP., 2011.

Pre-school education

According to the new National Education Law of 2011, early childhood education covers the age group 0-6 years. Day care of children aged four months to 3 years is provided in crèches. Pre-primary education caters to children between 3 and 6 years of age. Pre-primary education is provided in kindergartens; attendance is not compulsory and it is free of charge in public institutions. The compulsory pre-primary year (preparatory year) for the 5 to 6-year-olds will be established gradually.

Primary education

Primary education covers the first four years of compulsory education. According to the 2003 amendment to the Education Law, children enter school at age 6 instead of 7; however, children may begin their compulsory education at the age of 7 if requested by their parents or before age 6 if they have reached an appropriate level of development. Primary education is provided in three types of schools: grades 1-4



schools (mainly in rural areas); grades 1-8/9 schools (gymnasia, covering primary and lower secondary education); and grades 1-12/13 schools (usually arts, sports or pedagogical schools covering primary and full secondary education). There is no examination or certification at the end of grade 4. Pupils having completed grade 4 proceed to lower secondary education (gymnasium).

Secondary education

Since 2003/04, the first phase of compulsory lower secondary education covers four years (gymnasium, grades 5 to 8). Starting from 2007/08, at the end of grade 7 and upon completion of the gymnasium, students sit national tests. The second phase of compulsory secondary education lasts two years, either in the lower cycle of the lyceum (grades 9 to 10, organized in three streams: general/academic, technological and vocational) or in arts and trades schools offering vocational education for various occupations and preparing for employment (being phased out). At the end of compulsory education students no longer sit the school-leaving examination and receive a graduation certificate. Graduates from arts and trades schools have to attend the completion year in order to enter the upper cycle of the lyceum. Upper secondary education covers grades 11 and 12/13; attendance is not compulsory but free of charge in public institutions. The upper secondary school ends with a final examination leading to the baccalaureate diploma. Postsecondary education programmes provide one- to three-year vocational training programmes for those who have completed secondary education and have passed the entrance examination. Students who pass the final examination are awarded a certificate of qualification in their respective field of specialization. On the basis of Article 23 the new Education Law of 2011, secondary education comprises lower secondary (gymnasium, grades 5 to 9) and upper secondary education (lyceum, grades 10 to 12/13) offered in three streams: general/academic (humanities or sciences), technological and vocational, each with several specialization profiles. Vocational education programmes last between six months and two years. Technical and vocational education consists of vocational, technical education and postsecondary education (one- to three-year programmes offered in post-lyceum and foremen schools). Technical education includes grades 12 and 13 at the upper secondary level, technological stream (Article 24). The Law envisages that upper secondary education (lyceum) will become compulsory in 2020 (Article 16). In terms of the future National Qualifications Framework, pre-university technical and vocational education covers the first three qualification levels, namely: level 1 through the arts and trades school; level 2 through the completion year; and qualification level 3 through the upper secondary cycle (technological stream) and postsecondary education. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

Higher education

Access to higher education for upper secondary school graduates is subject to the results of the entrance examination, organized by the higher education institutions themselves and based on general criteria established by the Ministry of Education. Higher education is provided in university colleges, universities, polytechnic universities, academies, institutes, and postgraduate schools. The university college is a functional unit under a higher education institution or faculty. Before 2004, higher education institutions offered short-cycle courses (three-year programmes leading to a diploma offered by university colleges) and long-cycle courses lasting four to six



years provided in universities, academies, and other similar institutions. Studies at postgraduate level included one- or two-year master's degree programmes, doctoral programmes (normally lasting four years), and specialist degree programmes (not less than one year of study). Since 2005/06 the new three-cycle structure is being implemented in accordance with the Bologna process. First-cycle degree programmes last three to four years and lead to a bachelor's degree; the duration of second-cycle programmes leading to a master's degree is one or two years; and doctoral degree programmes last a minimum of three years. Three-year programmes offered in university colleges have been reorganized and integrated into first-cycle programmes.

At the pre-university level the school year 2011/12 comprised 177 teaching days divided into two terms. (Eurydice, December 2011). In 2008/09 it comprised 172 teaching days. (Eurydice, 2009). Classes are normally held from mid-September to mid-June and the school week consists of five days. The academic year is divided into two semesters comprising fourteen weeks of courses each.

The educational process

In general, the motivating factors for revising educational contents are convergent to the expectation that the shifting of emphasis from information to training, from authoritarianism to autonomy, from the unilateral conveying of information to cooperation, from a subordinate position of pupils to their active participation in the pedagogical activity, will have a relevant impact on the quality of learning.

In accordance with Education Act of 1995, curricula were defined by the national departmental commissions under the coordination of the National Curriculum Council (NCC). The NCC prepared the curricula, ensuring their vertical and horizontal coherence, and submitted them to the Ministry of Education for approval. During the period 1998-2000, the curriculum development process consisted of a sequence of stages including: i) the selection of the model of curriculum, following experts consultations; ii) the preparation of curriculum drafts by the national departmental commissions and their forwarding, accompanied by a report, to the commission of experts of the NCC; iii) consultations on curriculum drafts involving all stakeholders; iv) systematization of the suggestions made during the consultations and their submission to the commission of experts of the NCC; v) analysis of the suggestions; vi) approval of the final version of the curricula by the Executive Board of the NCC; and vii) final approval of the curricula by Order of the Minister of Education.

Syllabi for grades 1-9 usually include: a presentation note; the framework objectives, having a high degree of generality and complexity, which are linked to the acquisition of certain skills and attitudes that are specific to the respective subject, objectives that are pursued along several years of study; reference objectives which specify the expectations as to the results of learning and follow the advance in the acquisition of skills and knowledge on a yearly basis; examples of learning activities (at least one for each reference objective); the contents, which are means through which the achievement of the established framework and reference objectives is pursued, organized either systematically or according to the component domains of the various subjects; and the curricular performance standards, which are criteria for the assessment of the quality of the learning process and represent synthetic



statements indicating the extent to which the curricular objectives are achieved by the students in terms of the knowledge, skills and behaviors established by the curriculum.

A student-centered educational process has become a compulsory curricular orientation and consequently the application of certain teaching and learning strategies and of certain methods that should accomplish this aim has become equally impending. This is also reflected in the conception underlying the National Curriculum for primary and secondary education. The latter, being organized in curricular areas that include a core of compulsory subjects besides a range of elective ones, has been reshaped in order to allow students to choose subjects or contents according to their own interests and aptitudes through a varied offer of electives. This had the aim of developing the students' critical thinking, their capacity to solve problems, to communicate in their mother tongue or in a foreign language, to use new information technologies, etc.

The syllabi for all levels and all types of schools also explicitly include strategic elements that are meant to serve the goal of forming a new educational profile of the student. Thus, at the level of each curricular area the objectives and the strategic and methodological aspects of the curriculum are centered not only on the interests of the society but also on the interests of the student. Rendering the contents flexible and adapting them to the concrete level of development of the students has constantly been pursued, the emphasis being on procedural learning, on the students' structuring of their own strategies and procedures of solving problems. These orientations have materialized, on the one hand, in the way in which contents have been organized and, on the other hand, in the types of activities that should be carried out together with the pupils for attaining the curricular goals. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2001).

As part of the extension of the compulsory education duration to ten years (2003), curricular policies were redefined on the basis of the following principles: shifting the focus of education from the content to the development of competences, skills, and attitudes; ensuring a flexible educational offer based on training modules and programmes; ensuring the opportunity to design individual school routes depending on peculiarities, interests and personal needs; introducing new ways to select and organize the content of the subjects; adjusting educational contents to the demands of daily life and the characteristics of the labour market. The adjustment of the national curriculum to the changes in the pre-university education system also took into account the need to comply with the European Union documents regarding the acquisition of key competences.

As a result, the national curriculum is divided into three parts: the *common core curriculum* which is centrally defined and mandatory for all the students up to a certain type and level of education, specifying the compulsory subjects, the syllabi and time allocation in each grade; the *differentiated curriculum* (in the case of upper secondary education), determined at the central level and specifying the main features of each module, programme and specialization; and the *school-based curriculum* which includes the educational offer specific to each school. Curriculum frameworks and syllabi have been elaborated by national committees of specialists, under the supervision of experts working at the National Centre for Curriculum and Assessment



in Pre-university Education, established in March 2007, which took over the attributions of the former National Council for Curriculum. The teaching and learning strategies promoted by the new curriculum are based on the following principles: the orientation towards student's activity by using active-participative methods; the approach to the contents from the perspective of the reference objectives/specific competences of the syllabus; the focus on the functional, practical, applicative features of the content (by using specific methods and by capitalizing the students' learning experience, achieved in various contexts); and the diversification of assessment methods and instruments by promoting complementary assessment methods. (Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, 2008).

General objectives are defined per curricular cycles which do not necessarily correspond to the structure of the education system at each level. The introduction of these curricular cycles aims at ensuring coherence and continuity from one level to another and also the correlation of the education system structure with the students' ages and level of maturity. For each curricular cycle a set of objectives has been decided; they point out to a series of dominant features for each school phase, reflected in the school syllabuses. The *fundamental acquisition* cycle includes the last year of the kindergarten (preparatory class) and grades 1 to 2. This cycle is focused on: the learning of basic elements of the main conventional languages (writing, reading, counting); the child's stimulation so that he/she could perceive, know and master the surrounding environment; the stimulation of the child's creative potential, of his/her intuition and imagination; the formation of the motivation for learning, understood as a social activity. The *development* cycle includes grades 3 to 6. Building on the previous cycle, it is focused on: the development of language and the encouragement of the use of Romanian, the mother tongue, and also a foreign language; the development of a structured thinking and problem-solving skills; becoming familiar with a multidisciplinary approach of knowledge fields; create a uniform set of values within a democratic and pluralist society; to encourage talent, experience and expression in various forms of art; to shape responsibility for the students' own development and health; and to shape responsible attitudes towards the environment. The *observation and orientation* cycle includes grades 7 to 9 and grade 9 of the arts and trades schools. It is focused on the school and professional orientation and particularly on: the discovery made by the student of his/her own affinities, aspirations and values to build a positive image of himself/herself; the formation of the ability to analyze the set of skills achieved by learning for orienting to a certain professional career; the development of communication skills, including various languages; the development of autonomous thinking and of the responsibility of integrating into the social environment. The *advancement* cycle includes grades 10 and 11 of the high school (lyceum), grade 10 of the arts and trades schools and the completion year. It is focused on the consolidation and advancement of the knowledge in the specialization chosen, without overlooking the basic training in the other curricular fields. The objectives of this cycle are focused on: the development of cognitive knowledge allowing the creation of a relation between fields related to knowledge; the development of social and cultural skills allowing active integration in various social groups; the formation of positive and responsible attitudes towards the personal actions having an impact on the social environment; practicing the imagination and creativity as sources for a quality personal and social life. The *specialization* cycle includes grades 12 and 13. It is focused on the preparation of the student for higher education or the optimal integration into the labor market pointing



to: acquiring self confidence and building a positive image for the personal success; making adequate decisions in the context of social and professional conditions; understanding and use social change patterns of the society. (*Ibid.*).

The national curriculum for grades 1 to 4 (primary education) and the gymnasium (grades 5 to 8/9) is structured in seven curricular areas, namely: language and communication; mathematics and natural sciences; human beings and society; the arts; physical education and sports; technologies; and counselling and guidance. Optional subjects or activities can fall in either of the curricular areas. The curriculum frameworks for primary education were approved by the Orders of the Minister of Education No. 4686/2003 and 5198/2004. The curriculum frameworks for the gymnasium were approved by the Minister of Education Order No. 3638/2001. In 2008 the core curricula for grades 5 to 8 were further revised. (Eurydice, 2009).

Pre-primary education

According to the new National Education Law of 2011, early childhood education (ECE) covers the age group 0-6 years. Day care of children aged four months to 3 years is provided in crèches. Pre-primary education caters to children between 3 and 6 years of age. Pre-primary education is provided in kindergartens; attendance is not compulsory and it is free of charge in public institutions. The compulsory pre-primary year (preparatory year) for the 5 to 6-year-olds will be established gradually. It is expected that the preparatory year will be part of primary education, preceding grade 1.

The main objectives of ECE for the age group 3-6 years (pre-primary) are: the free, integral and balanced development of a child's personality, based on his/her own pace and needs, and in support of his/her autonomous and creative training; developing the ability to interact with other children, adults and the surrounding world in order to gain new knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours; encouraging exploration, exercise, testing and experimentation as autonomous learning experiences; helping the children to discover their personality and autonomy, and develop a positive self-image; helping the children to acquire knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes necessary in their school education and throughout life. EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10; Eurydice, 2009).

Preschools (kindergartens) are mostly public and are established by the county school inspectorates. The activities of private institutions are supervised by the inspectorates. Kindergartens operate using the Romanian language as the medium of instruction or the languages of the national minorities.

Private and public preschools offer various types of programme: normal (four to five hours in the morning); extended (eight to nine/ten hours per day); and weekly programme (five days a week, Monday to Friday). Classes are mixed, organized according to age group, and normally comprise an average of 15 children. The framework curricula for pre-primary education and the corresponding syllabi were adopted in 2000 (Order of the Minister of National Education No. 4481/2000).

The curriculum of 2000 by age-level group set the following categories and number of activities per week:

Pre-primary education: framework curriculum (2000)

Category	3- to 5-year olds	5- to 6/7-year olds
<i>Normal programme activities</i>		
<i>Common activities:</i>	7	10
Language education	1	2
Mathematics activities	1	2
Knowledge of the environment	1	1
Social education	1	1
Practical and home activities		1
Aesthetic education	2	2
Physical education	1	1
Chosen activities, playing and other activities	17	14
Extensions	0-1	1-2
Optional activities	0-1	1-2
Minimum no. of activities	24	26
Maximum no. of activities	25	28
<i>Supplementary activities for prolonged and weekly programme (in the afternoon):</i>		
Recreational activities	10	5
Development and exercising individual aptitudes	15	15
Remedial teaching	-	5
Minimum no. of activities	49	51
Maximum no. of activities	51	53

The length of the activities depends on the age group considered: 15-20 minutes for the lower (3 to 4-year-olds) and middle age group (4 to 5-year-olds), and 30-35 minutes for the upper age group and preparatory year group (5 to 6-year-olds). All activities have to respect the right of the child to play as a form of activity, method, procedure and mean to attain educational objectives.

In recent years, the interest in ECE has significantly increased, as demonstrated by the National Strategy for ECE developed in 2003, the ECE Reform Project 2006-2011, the Inclusive ECE Project 2006-2011 (co-funded by the Government of Romania and the World Bank), as well as the development, with UNICEF support, of the Early Learning and Development Standards for children from birth to age 7 (2007-2009)—a policy document that promotes an integral approach to education, care and protection services for children below the age of 7 and a child's whole development. Since September 2008, a new curriculum for ECE (age group 3-6 years) is being implemented. The new approach to ECE include the following features: promoting a child's global development (including all the development areas indicated in the document Early Learning and Development Standards); promoting education centred on development and learning specific to very young children (encouraging play, exploration, experimentation, interaction with the surrounding environment) and children's preparation for school and life; focus on individual needs, interests and pace of development when organizing, carrying out and assessing



learning, with an emphasis on the spontaneity of learning; adopting the principle that every experience in kindergarten is a learning experience for a child; promoting teacher's freedom of choice when organizing and carrying out learning activities, guided by curriculum objectives. The new curriculum enabled the transition from activities focused on particular areas of knowledge (knowledge-centred) to activities centred on learning experiences. The curriculum setting the framework objectives and standards for five learning areas (that do not coincide with the five areas of development, but cover them in their formulation) is centrally defined and applied by all public kindergartens. A good practice guide is attached to the curriculum and it supports teachers in the application of the new curriculum, provides suggestions for organizing the learning environment in order to respond to children's diverse needs and interests and create various learning situations, as well as suggestions for learning aids appropriate for a particular age group. (Eurydice, 2009).

The teacher is fully responsible for choosing the methods, taking the structure of the group into consideration and the teaching aids available, and following the general methodological guidelines provided by the national curriculum and the teachers' guides. Teachers can decide to organize the activities with all the children (frontal activities), in smaller groups or individually (differentiated activities), depending on the specific objectives of the activity and the level of development of the children. Testing children or grading their work or giving qualifying descriptors is not allowed in kindergartens. The new curriculum promotes the idea of encouraging children and helping them to develop a positive self-image, gain confidence in their own abilities and individual progress at one's own pace. Assessment is continuous and is based on observation with the resulting data being added to the children's portfolios along with their works.

In the past preschool teachers must have completed a four-year programme in pedagogical high schools (normally for grade 8 graduates). Educators (*institutori*) were trained in pedagogical university colleges in a two-year programme (for graduates from pedagogical high schools) or in a three-year programme (for those who have completed another type of upper secondary school). Currently, the initial education and training for kindergarten teachers is provided by universities, in compliance with the Bologna process, through the Departments for Preschool and Primary Education Teacher Training. The duration of the training programme is three years and its completion leads to the award of a first degree in preschool and primary education pedagogy. Graduates can hold a position as a pre-primary and primary education (grades 1-4) teacher. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

In 1998/99, the attendance ratio in kindergartens was 64.2% (it was about 80% in 1989/90). The main reasons for the declining participation after 1989 have been high fees and the decrease of parents' income. (Ministry of National Education, 1999). In 2000, the attendance rate of 3 to 6-year-olds was estimated at 65.2% (89% in the case of 6-year-olds). According to national data, in the year 2000 there were 616,313 children enrolled in 12,831 kindergartens; the total number of pedagogical staff was 35,619 and the children-teacher ratio was 17.3:1. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2001). It is estimated that in 2003/04 the overall participation ratio was 69.2%, increasing to 90% in the case of the preparatory year. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2004). In 2002/03 there were 629,703 children enrolled in 9,547 preschools with 34,307 pedagogical staff.



As of 2007, the preschool net enrolment ratio (NER) was 71%. In the same year, the percentage of children in the first grade of primary education who have attended a preschool education programme was estimated at 91.2% (it was 85.5% in 2001). However, within disadvantaged communities, the preschool NER is predicted to be significantly lower. (UNICEF, 2010).

The National Institute of Statistics reports that in 2009/10 there were 666,123 children enrolled in 1,697 kindergartens, of whom 325,174 were girls; the number of pedagogical staff was 38,322, of whom 38,210 were women. The enrolment ratio for the age group 3-6 years was estimated at 81.9% (82.6% in the case of girls). Most of the children, i.e. 617,934 children, were enrolled in kindergartens using Romanian as medium of instruction. (NIS, 2010).

Primary education

Primary education is part of the ten-year compulsory education and covers the first four years, i.e. grades 1 to 4. According to the 2003 amendment to the Education Law, children enter school at age 6 instead of 7; however, children may begin their compulsory education at the age of 7 if requested by their parents or before age 6 if they have reached an appropriate level of development. Primary education is provided in three types of schools: grades 1-4 schools (mainly in rural areas); grades 1-8/9 schools (gymnasias, covering primary and lower secondary education); and grades 1-12/13 schools (usually arts, sports or pedagogical schools covering primary and full secondary education).

Public primary schools are established by the county school inspectorates with the agreement of the Ministry of Education. The activities of private institutions are supervised by the inspectorates. Depending on local needs and possibilities, and upon approval of the Ministry of Education, school inspectorates can establish schools providing primary education with complete/partial tuition in the languages of the national minorities or only in the mother tongue. In these schools, the Romanian language is studied during primary education according to an adapted syllabus. There are no formal admission conditions regarding the nationality of the children. (Eurydice, 2009).

According to the primary education curriculum, the main aims of primary education are to: build up each child personality, respecting his/her development level and rhythm; ensure that each child acquires the basic knowledge, competences and attitudes that stimulate the effective and creative relation with the social and natural environment, and provide the necessary opportunities for further education. For primary education (and gymnasium education as well) the national curriculum establishes the two types of educational objectives: i) framework objectives, referring to the development of competences and attitudes by each specific topic and pursued over a number of years of study (for most subjects the framework objectives are established for one education level; and ii) reference objectives specifying the expected learning outcomes per year of study and following the progress of the pupil regarding the development of competences and knowledge every year. The reference objectives are established within the syllabus for each subject and grade and are derived from the framework objectives of the subject for the given education level. The national curriculum for primary education is structured into two parts, i.e. the



mandatory common core curriculum and the school-based curriculum. Based on consultations with the parents, the pupils and other partners and subject to the approval of the teachers' council, the school's administration council decides every year the number of classes per week for each compulsory subject (if that is not already established by the common core curriculum) and the structure of the local offer for the school-based curriculum. The latter can include: additional classes devoted to the subjects of the core curriculum; extensions of the subjects of the core curriculum; and subjects not included in the core curriculum. (*Ibid.*).

As mentioned, the national curriculum for grades 1 to 4 (and for the gymnasium) is structured in seven curricular areas, namely: language and communication; mathematics and natural sciences; human beings and society; the arts; physical education and sports; technologies; and counselling and guidance.

The framework curriculum of primary education (2003-2004) is shown in the table below:

Romania. Primary education: weekly lesson timetable according to the framework curriculum (2003 and 2004)

Curricular area/discipline	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	1	2	3	4
<i>Language and communication:</i>	7-8	7-8	7-9	7-9
Romanian language	7-8	7-8	5-7	5-7
First foreign language	-	-	2-3	2-3
<i>Mathematics and natural sciences:</i>	3-4	3-4	4-6	4-6
Mathematics	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4
Knowledge about the environment	1	1	-	-
Natural sciences	-	-	1-2	1-2
<i>Human beings and society:</i>	1	1	2-3	3-5
Civic education	-	-	1-2	1-2
History	-	-	-	1-2
Geography	-	-	-	1-2
Religion	1	1	1	1
<i>Arts:</i>	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3
Plastic arts	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2
Music	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2
<i>Physical education and sports</i>	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3
<i>Technologies:</i>	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2
Practical skills	1-2	1-2	-	-
Technological education	-	-	1-2	1-2
<i>Counselling and guidance</i>	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1
Sub-total (common core curriculum)	17	17	18	20
Optional subjects (school-based curriculum)	1-3	1-3	1-4	1-4
Total weekly periods (min.)	18	18	19	21
Total weekly periods (max.)	20	20	22	24

Sources: Webpage of the Ministry of Education, September 2003; Eurydice, 2009. Each teaching period lasts 45-50 minutes in schools operating in one shift. In the case of schools providing tuition in the languages of national minorities, the minimum-maximum number of periods per week is: 22-24 in grades 1-2; 23-26 in grade 3; and 25-28 in grades 4.

With the consent of the parents or of the legally appointed guardian, pupils can choose the religion and the faith. Upon the request of the parents or legally appointed guardians, pupils may not attend the religion class and in this case must choose another optional subject. Schools specializing in the arts and in physical education offer supplementary or integrated lessons and follow a special schedule (the number of periods per week is normally higher than in regular primary schools). Schools can also organize extra-curricular activities, according to the existing resources and needs.



Extracurricular activities can include: study of foreign languages, remedial education, cultural activities, arts, sports, etc. (Eurydice, 2009).

The teacher is fully responsible for choosing the methods, taking the structure of the class into consideration, the teaching aids available in the school and following the methodological guidelines of the national curriculum and the teachers' guides for each subject. Teachers are allowed to use only textbooks and teaching aids that are approved by the Ministry of Education. For most subjects there are three alternative textbooks approved by the Ministry for each grade. Each teacher decides at the beginning of the school year the textbooks to be used for each subject.

The general and specific rules regarding the evaluation, assessment and progression of the pupils are established in the Regulation for Organization and Functioning of Pre-tertiary Education Institutions (Ministerial Order No. 4925/2005). Pupils' evaluation has to be performed on a regular basis for all subjects (compulsory and optional) during the semesters by the teachers working with the class (continuous evaluation). Usually at the end of each semester there are periods dedicated to the consolidation and evaluation of the competences acquired by the pupils (formative and summative evaluations) decided by the teachers working with the class. Evaluation methods and instruments are established by the teacher according to the age and psychological characteristics of the pupils and taking the specificity of the subject into consideration. These can include oral questioning, written papers, practical activities, reports and projects, interviews, portfolios, etc. Each evaluation (continuous, formative or summative) of the pupils' performance in each subject is translated into a qualitative mark on a 4-level scale (insufficient, sufficient, good and very good). The final semester and end-of-the-year qualitative mark for each subject has to be within the 4-level scale (final average mark). Pupils can progress to the next grade if for each subject studied in the given grade their school year final average qualitative mark is at least 'sufficient'. Pupils who 'failed' no more than two subjects are given the possibility to take a 'catch up' examination during the summer vacation. There is no leaving examination or a formal certification at the end of primary education. Pupils having completed grade 4 enter lower secondary education (gymnasium, grades 5 to 8). (*Ibid.*).

Since 1990, the pupil-teacher ratio improved considerably. In primary education, between 1995 and 1998, the average ratio was 20 pupils per teacher (22-23 pupils per teacher in urban areas and 17 pupils per teacher in rural areas). (Ministry of National Education, 1999). In 2002/03, there were 5,609 educational institutions with 981,975 pupils enrolled at the primary level; the total number of pedagogical staff was 54,573.

Romania has the largest Roma population in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region, with an estimated 2 million Roma, comprising about 10% of the total population. Roma enrolment and completion rates are far below the national average for non-Roma children. In primary school, only an estimated 40% of Roma children enrol, compared with the national average of 93%. Additionally, only about 30% of those Roma who enrol complete primary school. At the secondary level, the enrolment ratio is estimated at about 25%. Low enrolment rates among the Roma are further exacerbated by the poor quality of segregated schools. When Roma are sent to separate schools, they often receive a poorer quality education than the non-Roma



population. 'Roma school' buildings are older and more overcrowded than other schools, and often lack a library. Such schools also have fewer qualified teachers and significantly higher teacher transfer rates, especially in grades 1 to 4. According to UNICEF Romania, 67% of Roma schools had a deficit of qualified teachers; among schools with half or more Roma students, the deficit was over 80%. Romania is participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion Initiative. (UNICEF, 2010).

The National Institute of Statistics reports that in 2009/10 there were 4,623 schools offering primary and lower secondary education (grades 1-8). The total enrolment was 1,719,676 pupils (including 831,158 girls), of whom 873,997 were enrolled in gymnasium education; the number of pedagogical staff was 135,231 (including 101,670 female teachers), of whom 82,959 in gymnasium education and 6,355 in special education. Most of the pupils (i.e. 1.61 million), were enrolled in schools using Romanian as medium of instruction. Out of the total enrolment in grades 1-8, 16,308 pupils (including 6,089 girls) were enrolled in special education. The enrolment ratio for the age group 7-10 years (grades 1-4) was estimated at 94.9% (94.7% in the case of girls). (NIS, 2010).

Secondary education

Compulsory education covered nine years (primary and lower secondary education) in 1999, increased to ten years from 2003/04. The first phase of compulsory lower secondary education covers four years (gymnasium, grades 5-8). Starting from 2007/08, at the end of grade 7 and upon completion of the gymnasium students sit national tests whose results, in addition to the results obtained in grades 5-8, are used for determining the type of school in which they will continue their studies. The second phase of compulsory secondary education lasts two years, either in the lower cycle of the lyceum (grades 9 and 10, organized in three streams: general/academic, technological and vocational) or in arts and trades schools offering vocational education preparing students for simple occupations. At the end of compulsory education students no longer sit the leaving examination and receive a graduation certificate. Graduates from arts and trades schools also receive a graduation certificate and, if successful in the examination assessing their professional skills, are awarded a professional qualification certificate (level 1); they have to attend the completion year in order to enter the upper cycle of the lyceum.

Upper secondary education covers grades 11 and 12/13; attendance is not compulsory but is free of charge in public schools. The upper secondary school ends with a final examination leading to the baccalaureate diploma. The baccalaureate exam consists of two or three examinations on common core subjects (Romanian language, a foreign language and the mother tongue where applicable) and three examinations on subjects according to the profile and specialization chosen. For certain profiles and specializations students can take a separate attestation exam. Postsecondary education programmes provide one- to three-year vocational training programmes for those who have completed secondary education and have passed the entrance examination. Students who pass the final examination are awarded a certificate of qualification in their respective field of specialization. On the basis of Article 23 the new Education Law of 2011, secondary education comprises lower secondary (gymnasium, grades 5 to 9) and upper secondary education (lyceum, grades 10 to 12/13) offered in three streams: general/academic (humanities or sciences),



technological and vocational, each with several specialization profiles. Vocational education programmes last between six months and two years. Technical and vocational education consists of vocational, technical education and postsecondary education (one- to three-year programmes offered in post-lyceum and foremen schools). Technical education includes grades 12 and 13 at the upper secondary level, technological stream (Article 24). The Law envisages that upper secondary education (lyceum) will become compulsory in 2020 (Article 16).

In terms of the future National Qualifications Framework, pre-university technical and vocational education covers the first three qualification levels, namely: level 1 through the arts and trades school; level 2 through the completion year; and qualification level 3 through the upper secondary cycle (technological stream) and postsecondary education. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

At the upper secondary level, the general/academic stream is usually offered in theoretical high schools (lyceums) and mainly prepares students for higher education. The technical and vocational education stream is offered in technological lyceums providing one or more profiles and several specializations leading to the award of a level 3 qualification and preparing for postsecondary or higher education. As regards the vocational stream, there are specialized lyceums for military training and theological education. Arts and sports education and training are usually offered in educational institutions covering both primary and secondary education. Usually pedagogical high schools also cover primary and secondary education.

The general objectives of lower secondary education (gymnasium) are to help pupils to: develop the capacity to communicate efficiently in real situations using the Romanian language, their mother tongue, foreign languages and various specialized languages; develop the capacity to adapt to and integrate into the community; develop positive attitudes in relation to the social environment such as tolerance, responsibility and solidarity; develop the capacities and motivation necessary for lifelong learning in a changing society. The general objectives of the upper cycle of lyceum are to help students to: develop the capacity to formulate and solve problems combining knowledge from different domains; valorize their experiences in order to achieve an optimal vocational guidance towards the labour market and/or postsecondary education (non-tertiary or tertiary); develop the capacity to actively integrate in various social-cultural groups; develop essential functional competences for a successful life (communication, critical thinking, decision-making, processing and contextual use of complex information); cultivate the expressions and sensitivity in order to obtain personal fulfilment and promote a quality life; develop moral autonomy. (Eurydice, 2009).

The new curriculum developed after the changes introduced in 2003 considers three components: the core curriculum, the differentiated curriculum (after grade 8), and the school-based curriculum. The core curriculum (compulsory for all students) focuses on key competences and comprises a range of common subject matters with the same number of lessons in all profiles, majors and specializations. Subjects are grouped in seven curricular areas as in the case of primary education. The differentiated curriculum comprises a range of subject matters, established at the central level, which vary according to the profiles (academic and technological) and to specializations (for the vocational classes). These subject matters are compulsory for



the students who have chosen a given profile or specialization. The school-based curriculum includes a range of specific subject matters offered by individual schools. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2004).

As in the case of primary education, the gymnasium curriculum is structured into two parts, i.e. the mandatory common core curriculum and the school-based curriculum. Based on consultations with the parents, the pupils and other partners and subject to the approval of the teachers' council, the school's administration council decides every year the number of classes per week for each compulsory subject (if that is not already established by the common core curriculum) and the structure of the local offer for the school-based curriculum. The latter can include: additional classes devoted to the subjects of the core curriculum; extensions of the subjects of the core curriculum; and subjects not included in the core curriculum. Schools can also organize extra-curricular activities, depending on the existing resources and needs.

The weekly lesson timetable of the gymnasium (grades 5 to 8) according to the framework curriculum of 2001 is presented in the table below:

Romania. First phase of compulsory secondary education (gymnasium, grades 5-8): weekly lesson timetable according to the framework curriculum of 2001

Curricular area/discipline	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	5	6	7	8
<i>Language and communication:</i>	9–10	8–9	8–9	9–10
Romanian language and literature	5	4	4	4
First foreign language	2–3	2–3	2–3	2–3
Second foreign language	2	2	2	2
Latin	–	–	–	1
<i>Mathematics and natural sciences:</i>	5–6	8	10	9–10
Mathematics	4	4	4	4
Physics	–	2	2	2
Chemistry	–	–	2	2
Biology	1–2	2	2	1–2
<i>Human beings and society:</i>	3–5	3–5	4–5	6–7
Civic culture	0–1	0–1	1–2	1–2
History	1–2	1–2	1–2	2
Geography	1–2	1–2	1–2	2
Religion	1	1	1	1
<i>Arts:</i>	2–3	2–3	2–3	1–2
Fine arts	1–2	1–2	1–2	–
Music	1–2	1–2	1–2	–
Plastic arts/music	–	–	–	1–2
<i>Physical education and sports</i>	2–3	2–3	2–3	1–2
<i>Technologies:</i>	1–2	1–2	1–2	1–2
Technological education	1–2	1–2	1–2	1–2
<i>Counselling and guidance</i>	1	1	1	1
Sub-total (common core curriculum)	23	25	28	28
Optional subjects/activities (school-based curriculum)	1–3	1–3	1–2	1–2
Total weekly periods (min.)	24	26	29	29
Total weekly periods (max.)	26	28	30	30

Sources: Webpage of the Ministry of Education, September 2003; Eurydice, 2009. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes in schools operating in one shift.

In 2008 the core curriculum and syllabi for grades 5-8 were revised, according to the following principles: focus on learner-centred educational process; selection of the learning contents according to the social, scientific and motivational learning criteria; promotion of practical instead of theoretical teaching and learning approaches; ensuring the coherence of the gymnasium curriculum with the primary education curriculum and high school education (where the focus is on key competences). (Eurydice, 2009).



The lower cycle of the lyceum (grades 9 and 10) and the arts and trades schools are the two educational paths completing the ten-year compulsory education. The lower cycle of the lyceum is organized in three streams (general/academic, technological and vocational), and each of them provides different profiles and specializations and different framework curricula. The curricular offer includes three components: the common core curriculum (comprising subjects grouped in seven curricular areas as in primary and lower secondary education), the differentiated curriculum (defined at the central level), and the school-based or locally-developed curriculum (the latter in the case of technological education and developed in collaboration with economic agents).

The weekly lesson timetable for the common core curriculum in the lower cycle of the lyceum is shown in the table below:

Romania. Second phase of compulsory secondary education (lower cycle of lyceum, grades 9 and 10): weekly lesson timetable for the common core curriculum

Curricular area/discipline	Number of weekly periods in each grade	
	9	10
<i>Language and communication:</i>	8	7
Romanian language & literature	4	3
First foreign language	2	2
Second foreign language	2	2
<i>Mathematics and natural sciences:</i>	6	6
Mathematics	2	2
Physics	2	2
Chemistry	1	1
Biology	1	1
<i>Human beings and society:</i>	4	4
History	1	1
Geography	1	1
Social studies	1	1
Religion	1	1
<i>Arts:</i>	2	2
Plastic arts	1	1
Music	1	1
<i>Physical education and sports</i>	2	2
<i>Technologies:</i>	2	2
Information and comm.. technology	2	1
Entrepreneurial education	–	1
<i>Counselling and guidance:</i>	1	1
Total weekly periods (core curriculum)	25	24

Source: Eurydice, 2009. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes in schools operating in one shift.

The table below shows the weekly lesson timetable for two specialization profiles in the general/academic lyceum (differentiated and school-based curriculum):

Romania. Second phase of lower secondary education, grades 9 and 10 (lower cycle of lyceum, grades 9 and 10): weekly lesson timetable for the differentiated and school-based curriculum

Curricular area/discipline	Number of weekly periods in each grade	
	9	10
<i>Core curriculum</i>	25	24
Profile: sciences. Specialization: mathematics-informatics, natural sciences		
<i>Differentiated curriculum:</i>	6	7
Romanian language & literature	–	1
Mathematics	2	2
Physics	1	1
Chemistry	1	1
Biology	1	1
Informatics	1	1
<i>School-based curriculum</i>	1	1
Total weekly periods	32	32
Profile: humanities. Specialization: philology, social sciences:		
<i>Differentiated curriculum:</i>	5	7
Romanian language & literature	–	1
First foreign language	1	1
Latin	1	1
History	1	2
Geography	1	1
Social studies	1	1
<i>School-based curriculum</i>	2	1
Total weekly periods	32	32

Source: Order of the Minister of Education No. 5723/2003. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes.

Students are continuously assessed in all the subjects (compulsory and electives). Usually at the end of each semester there are periods dedicated to the consolidation and evaluation of the competences acquired by the students (formative and summative evaluations) decided by the teachers working with the class. For some subjects of the common core curriculum, a semester summative written paper covering all the content taught during the given semester is also prescribed. Concerning the marks, a 10-point scale is used where 1.00 to 4.00 stands for 'insufficient'; 5.00 to 6.99 for 'sufficient'; 7.00 to 8.99 for 'good'; and 9.00 to 10 for 'very good'. At the end of each semester and of the school year, teachers record the final average mark in each subject. The mark obtained at the semester summative written paper counts as 25% of the semester final average mark for the given subject. Students are promoted to the following grade if for each subject studied in the given



grade their school year final average mark is at least 5.00 and at least 6.00 for behaviour. Students who 'failed' in no more than two subjects are given the possibility to take a 'catch up' examination during the summer vacation. As mentioned, starting from 2007/08 at the end of grade 7 and upon completion of the gymnasium (grade 8) students sit national tests whose results, in addition to the results obtained in grades 5-8, are used for determining the type of school in which they will continue their studies. Students take written exams in Romanian language and literature, mathematics and mother tongue (where applicable); in addition, in grade 8 they take a written exam in history or geography. No final examination is organized at the end of the lower cycle of the lyceum. The baccalaureate exam at the end of upper secondary education consists of two or three examinations on common core subjects (Romanian language and literature, a foreign language and the mother tongue where applicable) and three examinations on subjects according to the profile and specialization chosen. In the case of the general/academic lyceum, these examinations are in history/geography (humanities profile) or mathematics (sciences profile), one subject chosen by the student within the area of specialization, and another subject chosen by the student from a different curricular area. (Eurydice, 2009).

The National Institute of Statistics reports that in 2009/10 there were 1,638 high schools (lyceums), and the total enrolment was 837,728 students, of whom 419,479 were girls; the total number of pedagogical staff was 60,255, of whom 40,848 were female teachers. In the same year, there were 98 vocational and apprenticeship schools with a total enrolment of 115,445 students (including 42,496 girls) and 2,803 teachers, of whom 1,634 were female teachers. Furthermore, there were 80 postsecondary and foremen schools with 62,575 students enrolled (including 45,239 girls, mainly in postsecondary education) and 965 teachers/trainers. In 2009/10, the enrolment ratio for the age group 11-14 years (grades 5-8) was estimated at 94.5% (94.4% in the case of girls); for the age group 15-18 years (grades 9-12) it was estimated at 81.3% (82.5% in the case of girls). (NIS, 2010).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The National Assessment and Examination Service (SNEE) was established in 1998 as the first national, independent body providing professional expertise in educational assessment and examinations. The SNNE was responsible for the design and implementation of a new educational evaluation system, particularly for: i) current assessment in pre-university education; ii) school-leaving examinations (baccalaureate exam); iii) national assessments at the end of educational cycles (beginning with grade 4); and iv) continuous teacher training in the field of assessment and examinations. After the adoption of the new national curriculum, at the end of the 1998/99 school year the SNEE organized for the first time the national *capacitate* exam for grade 8 pupils (now phased out). The main innovations were: the national character of the exam; the large number of pupils taking the exam; the large number of teaching staff involved; schools used the same textbooks (no alternative textbooks were published in 1998/99 for grade 8); the initiative to offer free transport to the examination centres; in the absence of some national standards (at that time under elaboration), achievement was related to the curriculum objectives of the subjects examined. The average pass rate was 77.6%. It was 82.7% in urban areas and only 67.5% in rural areas. (Ministry of National Education, 1999).



In 1998, the evaluation organized by the SNEE and applied on a national sample of over 4,000 primary school pupils, was, for the first time, exclusively external. One of the major research objectives was the identification of curriculum items that needed to be changed for the primary cycle, as the 1997/98 cohort was the last one following the older programme. The scores in the mother tongue were higher than those in mathematics (7.12 in the mother tongue; 6.76 in mathematics). In general, a high performance was found with items requiring automatism, mechanical learning and well-fixed construction schemes. The performance was poorer with items requiring conceptualization, abstract thinking and reasoning. (*Ibid.*).

Then, the National Commission for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Pre-university Education was established in order to develop the institutional evaluation and create a national framework for accreditation in pre-university education. The corresponding national standards for the institutional evaluation were set by the Government Decision No. 127/2000. The Commission has been replaced by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP) in 2006. The evaluation process at the tertiary and higher education level is accomplished through internal evaluation and external evaluation, the latter under the responsibility of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) established in 2005. The main functions of ARACIP are to ensure that minimum quality standards, defined at national level, are achieved in all evaluated schools and to offer equal opportunities for increasing the quality of education provided in all schools. (Eurydice, 2009).

The country has participated in international assessment studies such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment). PISA 2009 results in reading, mathematics and science show that Romania lags behind the majority of countries in the CEE-CIS (Central and Eastern Europe–Commonwealth of Independent States) region and falls within the bottom quartile of all countries participating in the study. Romania scored 14th out of 19 countries from the region in reading, mathematics and science, which is not a significant change from its ranking in 2006. Overall, Romania ranked 59th out of the 75 countries participating in PISA. With regard to TIMSS 2003, Romania's performance in the region was similar: it ranked fourth to last in mathematics out of participating CEE-CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries. However, Romania scored just below the international average, ranking 27th out of 46 participating countries. In mathematics, the country's performance declined between 1999 and 2003. In science, Romania ranked third to last in the CEE-CIS region, scoring just ahead of the Republic of Moldova and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In science, Romania scored just above the international average; its performance stayed relatively stable over time, increasing slightly. (UNICEF, 2010).

Outcome indicators of educational achievement are close to international averages, but lower than in the European Union, OECD, and even neighboring countries in the CEE region. Although Romanian students' performance in TIMSS continues to be close to the international average, this too is still below the OECD average. Furthermore, Romania performs worse than the average for all European and Central Asian countries and significantly below the European Union countries. The trend in these performance indicators for Romania has been stagnant, while that of

other countries in the region, such as Lithuania and Latvia, show improvement. A high proportion of students do well, but there is substantial polarization in performance: at the high end of test takers scores are very high, but at the low end scores are very low, and there is very little middle ground. (World Bank, 2007).

Teaching staff

Prior to the implementation of the Bologna process, preschool teachers were graduates of a four-year programme in pedagogical high schools (normally for grade 8 graduates). Educators (*institutori*) in preschools were trained in pedagogical university colleges in a two-year programme (for graduates from pedagogical high schools) or in a three-year programme (for those who had completed another type of upper secondary school). Currently, and in compliance with the Bologna process, the initial education and training for kindergarten and primary school teachers is provided by universities, through the Departments for Preschool and Primary Education Teacher Training. The duration of the training programme is three years and its completion leads to the award of a first degree in preschool and primary education pedagogy. Graduates can hold a position as a pre-primary or a primary education (grades 1-4) teacher. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

Secondary school teachers (including the vocational education and training system) are trained through short- and long-cycle programmes offered by universities; they are usually trained in a field of study corresponding to the subject (or a maximum of two subjects) that they will be entitled to teach. In the upper secondary schools, teachers must have completed a long-cycle programme (four to six years' duration); technological education is provided by engineers trained in polytechnic universities. Vocational and apprenticeship teachers must be graduates of short-cycle programmes (three years' duration). Based on the field of studies and area of specialization, teachers in secondary education are qualified to teach a single subject (most of them) or a maximum of two subjects (specific to graduates of short higher education).

Currently, pre-service training for secondary education teachers is provided by specialist structures functioning in universities (Teacher Training Departments). In this context, the development of teaching competences is modular, through theoretical and practical training throughout the academic years of study, and is based on a parallel (concurrent) model. The completion of teacher training is attested through a certificate issued by the higher education institution. Alternatively, higher education graduates who choose a teaching career can attend the courses provided by the Teacher Training Departments after they get a teaching position. In this way, initial teacher training takes place in parallel with specialist training throughout the years of study at university. A recent Order of the Minister of Education (No. 5720/2009) approving the Methodology for In-Service School Teacher Training and other new regulations provide some innovating elements for teacher training, particularly the structure of the competence approach model. The competence system makes use of those categories and levels of competence used in the European Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education including: two basic categories of competences: professional competences (cognitive competences and functional-action competences), and transversal competences (role competences and personal and professional development competences). (*Ibid.*).



Foremen instructors must be graduates of a foremen school and must have attended training programmes for foremen instructors. Training programmes normally last two years and have a three-module structure. In addition to specialized training for those who wish to become teachers it is compulsory to take a psychology-pedagogy module organized by the Teacher Training Department, which exists in each higher education institution. The programmes that provide psychological-pedagogical training include: courses in pedagogy, psychology, specific teaching methodology, teaching practice and optional courses (established according to the orientations and options of every higher education institution). (CEDEFOP, 2011).

At the higher education level, the academic staff includes: junior assistant lecturers, assistant lecturers, lecturers, readers, professors and consulting professors with an initial long-cycle university education. Teaching positions are awarded on the basis of a competition.

As regards primary school teachers, the pre-service training is followed by a probation period lasting at least two years, considered as the final stage of teacher training. During this probation period, teachers are employed with the same rights and duties of confirmed teachers, and they can benefit from the assistance provided by inspectors and/or by a mentor. The probation period ends with the teacher confirmation examination, i.e. an assessment that certifies that the teacher has the necessary professional competences. Taking the teacher confirmation examination becomes obligatory after two years since the end of the induction, and beginner teachers can sit this examination at most three times in a five-year period. Those who don't pass the examination can no longer work as qualified teachers. (Birzea *et al.*, 2006; EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

The selection, recruitment and employment process for primary and secondary education teachers is based on an annual examination-based competition. Anyone who meets the education requirements established in the Statute of Teaching Staff (Law No. 128/1997) can participate. Methodological coordination is ensured by the Ministry of Education, while the local organization and the way it takes place are ensured by the county school inspectorates and some representative schools appointed by the Ministry of Education. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

In-service teacher training is offered by a variety of institutions, including higher education institutions, in-service training centres, professional associations, and NGOs. The National Centre for In-service Training of the Pre-university Education Staff, established in 2001, is responsible for elaborating standards and accrediting in-service programmes offered by public or private providers. As a rule, pre-university education teachers must participate in an in-service training programme at least once every five years. They can also participate in programmes as part of the professional development of their teaching career, and are free to choose the programme which corresponds to their interests and needs. (Birzea *et al.*, 2006). Following the Government Decision No. 2191/2004, 16 Regional Centers for Pre-university Teaching Staff Training have been established in order to evaluate, monitor and approve the training activities at regional level.

In addition to the teaching load (25 lessons per week at the primary level; 18 lessons per week at the secondary and postsecondary level), teachers also carry out



other activities, including: nine weekly periods for preparation and three to four periods for scientific-methodological activities (in the school, in teacher training institutions and at home); two periods a week for communication with the pupils' families (in the school); four to five periods per week for evaluation of the pupils, including through participation to the meetings of the Teachers Council (evaluation of the pupils work can be performed at home); one hour per week for tutoring (in the school); and one to two periods per week for school service (in the school). (Eurydice, 2009).

Teachers' salaries are established at national level through salary scales according to the criteria set by the Statute of Teaching Staff and the specific legislative acts establishing salaries financed from the state/local budgets. For pre-tertiary education teaching staff, the salary scale provides fixed incomes by teaching position, level of initial training, professional degree and seniority. According to criteria established by the Statute and the Ministry of Education, the county school inspectorates and/or the school management can grant certain incentives based on the quality of the teaching activity, the specific conditions of service, etc. (*Ibid.*).

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Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection: <http://www.mmuncii.ro/> [In Romanian. Last checked: March 2012.]

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National Centre for In-service Training of the Pre-university Education Staff:
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National Centre for the Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas:
<http://cnred.edu.ro/> [In Romanian. Last checked: March 2012.]

National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training:
<http://www.tvet.ro/> [In Romanian. Last checked: March 2012.]

National Council for Adult Vocational Training: <http://www.cnfpa.ro/> [In Romanian. Last checked: March 2012.]

National Qualifications Authority: <http://www.anc.gov.ro/> [In Romanian. Last checked: March 2012.]

National University Research Council: <http://www.cncsis.ro/> [In Romanian. Last checked: March 2012.]

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education: <http://www.aracis.ro/> [In Romanian and English. Last checked: March 2012.]

For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>