

# **Proposal for a Curriculum Review Cycle Fitting the Moldovan Context**



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# Foreword

Curriculum is a powerful lever for supporting student learning and well-being, and for preparing students to thrive in and contribute to the future. It can help ensure consistent levels of quality across different types of education provision and age groups, thereby contributing to a more equitable education system. However, curriculum may also constrain the creativity and agency of students and teachers, particularly if it is overloaded or lacks flexibility to allow exploration of individual interests and purpose. Moreover, if a curriculum remains unchanged for extended periods, it may fail to reflect societal developments and lack the innovation needed to meet evolving needs.

The OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040 project has shown that, in recent years, an increasing number of OECD countries have engaged in curriculum reviews to ensure education remains relevant. These experiences offer valuable opportunities for peer learning for education systems aiming to strengthen their capacity for curriculum design and implementation. The Republic of Moldova is among such countries as it seeks to move from an ad hoc approach to curriculum review towards a more planned and cyclical process.

Moldova considers education a national priority. The launch of the *Education Development Strategy 2030* in 2023 gave renewed impetus to the country's education reform agenda. In particular, the Strategy calls for a review of Moldova's school curriculum to provide clear guidance that enables students to develop the competencies needed to thrive in the 21st century. It also emphasises the importance of strengthening the education system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation to ensure that curriculum resources are of high quality and support meaningful change in classroom practice.

This report provides analysis and recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) of the Republic of Moldova as it implements the *Education Development Strategy 2030*. Drawing on international research and experience, as well as Moldova's own efforts in curriculum reform, the report addresses six key questions related to the design and implementation of a curriculum review. It proposes a curriculum review cycle that reflects international good practice and is adapted to the Moldovan context. The proposal was presented to the MoER and the ministry's Curriculum Working Group for validation and refinement based on their feedback. This proposal may also be of interest to other countries seeking to establish a more planned and cyclical process for curriculum review.

This publication is the first output of the technical assistance project "Support for the review of Moldova's school curriculum", funded by the European Union. The project is part of the OECD Education Policy Committee's work on implementation reviews and technical assistance.

# Acknowledgments

This publication is part of the OECD Education Policy Committee's work on implementation reviews and technical assistance. It is the first output of the project "Support for the review of Moldova's school curriculum", funded by the European Union. It was prepared by the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills Secretariat. The OECD project team comprised Marco Kools, Jan Maarse and Esther Ferreira Dos Santos. Elizabeth Fordham (OECD) and Zbigniew Marciniak (external expert) reviewed and provided valuable contributions to the report.

The OECD project team is grateful for the collaboration with the MoER and the Delegation of the EU to the Republic of Moldova, and all education stakeholders from Moldova that contributed to the development of this report. The team is equally grateful for the overall guidance from Andreas Schleicher and Paulo Santiago. Editorial support was provided by Diana Egeli and Daiana Torres Lima.

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

CWG	Curriculum Working Group
EU	European Union
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LNF	Literacy and Numeracy Framework
MoER	Ministry of Education and Research (of the Republic of Moldova)
NACE	National Agency for Curriculum and Evaluation
NCAC	National Curriculum and Assessment Council
NCC	National Curriculum Council
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (of the Republic of Ireland)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
VET	Vocational Education and Training

# Executive summary

The Republic of Moldova considers education a national priority. The launch of the Education Development Strategy 2030 in 2023 renewed momentum for education reform in Moldova. The Strategy calls for a comprehensive curriculum review to ensure students develop the competencies needed for success in the 21st century. It also emphasises the need to strengthen system capacity for curriculum design and implementation so that high-quality curriculum resources translate into meaningful change in classroom practice.

This report provides analysis and recommendations for Moldova's Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) to consider as it puts this strategy into action. It was prepared by the OECD under the EU-funded technical assistance project "Support for the review of Moldova's school curriculum". It presents a proposal for a curriculum review cycle that reflects good practice internationally and fits the Moldovan context. Drawing on international research and experience, as well as Moldova's own efforts in curriculum reform it addresses six key questions for designing and implementing a curriculum review. The proposal was presented to the MoER and the by the ministry-established Curriculum Working Group, allowing for validation and refinement based on their feedback.

## What are the main purposes of the curriculum review?

- **The MoER should clearly define and prioritise the key purpose(s) of the curriculum review** to ensure focus and to align ambitions with the education system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation.
- **The MoER should consider making the improvement of curriculum resource quality a key purpose of the current curriculum review.** Enhancing the rigour, focus, coherence and clarity of subject curriculum frameworks and other curriculum resources could significantly increase their quality and usability.
- The MoER should ensure strong leadership to determine and prioritise the purpose(s) of the review.

## What is the scale of the review?

- **Moldova should consider adopting a sequential approach to curriculum review by levels of education.** This would make the process more manageable than an integrated review, improve quality assurance, and spread costs over time — an important consideration given limited resources.
- **Ad hoc, subject-based curriculum reviews could still be allowed when necessary.** As Moldova strengthens its curriculum monitoring and evaluation, emerging evidence may justify timely, targeted revisions to specific subjects without waiting for the full review cycle to conclude.

## What are the main curriculum outputs of the review?

- **Moldova should define the main curriculum outputs at the start of the review cycle to focus and plan the review effort.**
- **For the current curriculum review, Moldova should simplify and clarify the subject curriculum frameworks, and develop separate, non-mandatory pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines.**
- **Digital curriculum resources should form an integrated part of Moldova's curriculum review cycle and action plan.**

## How should the curriculum review cycle be planned and operationalised?

- **Moldova's curriculum review cycle should ensure ample time and other resources for activities that support curriculum analysis and planning, redesign, preparation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.**
- **Moldova should develop a costed action plan covering the entire curriculum review cycle to guide the process and monitor progress against review purposes and milestones.**
- **Moldova should continue to engage in expert consultations for the redesign of curriculum resources and their piloting in future curriculum review cycles.**
- **The MoER should establish a rigorous quality assurance process for all new draft textbooks, which may require updating current approval procedures to ensure a robust review.** To expand the pool of qualified developers, the MoER could open the competitive textbook development and publishing process to international providers.
- **The MoER should ensure student assessments and examinations are aligned with the curriculum.** It should consider:
  - **Develop and implement the planned online student assessment platform, ensuring it captures 21st-century competencies embedded in the curriculum, such as digital literacy, critical thinking and creativity.**
  - **Investing in capacity development and communication activities, targeting teachers, school leaders, students and parents, to promote the effective use of the online assessment platform.**
  - **Developing and disseminating a coherent national assessment framework that integrates the various assessment instruments and ensures their alignment with the intended learning outcomes of the curriculum.**
- **Curriculum-based professional development initiatives should form the core of the implementation phase.** The mentor system, a large-scale professional development initiative, has significant potential to help teachers improve their practice in line with the new curriculum. To address concerns regarding consistency of mentor quality, Moldova should consider:
  - **Establishing clear expectations for mentors and ensuring a consistent selection process.**
  - **Providing continuous training and self-learning resources to ensure all mentors have a deep understanding of the new curriculum and possess the skills to support teachers in adapting their teaching.**
- **The measures MoER has taken to strengthen curriculum monitoring and evaluation should be sustained and built upon in future curriculum review cycles.**

- While recognizing that monitoring and evaluation serve multiple purposes – throughout the entire curriculum review cycle, **Moldova should initiate the monitoring of curriculum implementation early in the implementation phase to identify good practices and enable timely adjustments.**

### What could be the duration of the review cycle?

- **The MoER could consider establishing a curriculum review cycle lasting approximately 10 years.** However, a flexible approach is advisable. A slightly longer cycle may be appropriate for lower secondary education than for primary and upper secondary levels if a grade-by-grade curriculum roll-out is maintained. More complex and ambitious curriculum reviews may likewise warrant longer cycles.

### How should the review process be governed?

- **The MoER should consider establishing a curriculum review body.** A semi-autonomous body could provide a neutral platform for curriculum analysis and design, helping to manage the often-political nature of curriculum reform and enhance quality assurance of curriculum resources. The MoER would retain responsibility for the overall vision, goals, and implementation of the review, while the new body would focus on analysis, curriculum redesign, and planning support. The body could be hosted by the National Agency for Curriculum and Evaluation (NACE) or the National Institute for Education and Leadership.
- **Moldova should continue a strong stakeholder process in future curriculum reviews** as this can help enhance their understanding of the desired curriculum changes and support for the curriculum review process.

# **1**

## **Overview of school education and past and current curriculum reviews in Moldova**

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Through the EU-funded project “Support for the review of Moldova’s school curriculum” the OECD provided Moldova with technical support for the review of its competency-based school curriculum. The project included the development of a proposal for a planned, cyclical curriculum review that reflects good practice internationally and is tailored to the Moldovan context. This chapter sets the context by providing an overview of school education and past and current curriculum reviews in Moldova.

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## Background

The Republic of Moldova considers education a national priority. Since the adoption of a new Education Code in 2014 (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2014<sup>[1]</sup>), Moldova's education system has undergone intensive reform and modernisation, with a focus on strengthening education governance and improving the quality of education. The launch of the Education Development Strategy 2030 (in 2023) gave renewed impetus to this reform agenda (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2023<sup>[2]</sup>). In particular, the Strategy called for a review of Moldova's school curriculum to provide the guidance needed for students to develop the competencies for thriving in the 21st century. The Strategy also highlighted the importance of strengthening the education system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation so that curriculum resources are of high quality and lead to real change in classroom practice.

This paper provides analysis and recommendations for Moldova's Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) to consider as it puts this strategy into action. It was prepared by the OECD under the EU-funded technical assistance project "Support for the review of Moldova's school curriculum" (see Box 1.1). The paper is structured in three sections. Section 1 sets the context by providing an overview of school education and past and current curriculum reviews in Moldova. Section 2 explores six key questions for the design and implementation of a new curriculum review cycle, drawing on insights from international research and experience, as well as Moldova's own experience. Section 3 consolidates this analysis in a proposal for a curriculum review cycle that is evidence-informed, well-planned and allows adequate time for analysis and planning, redesign, preparation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

### ***Project overview and methodology***

The EU-funded technical assistance project "Support for the review of Moldova's school curriculum" provides the MoER of Moldova and the ministry-established Curriculum Working Group (CWG) with technical support for the review of Moldova's competency-based school curriculum. The project comprises two strands of work:

1. Technical support for the establishment of a curriculum review cycle that fits the Moldovan context.
2. Technical support for the development of a curriculum framework for primary-, lower secondary- and upper secondary education. This strand of work focuses on i) developing an enhanced subject curriculum framework "format" to be used for redesigning (or updating) all subject curriculum frameworks; and ii) reviewing the lower secondary mathematics and science curriculum frameworks.

This paper is the main output of the first strand of work. It was developed through several diagnostic activities. These comprised a desk study of international research and country examples of curriculum reviews, including Moldova's own experiences in reviewing its school curriculum. The desk study drew heavily from the analysis of the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040 project (see Box 1.1) whose staff were also part of the OECD project team. In addition, the OECD project team conducted interviews with key stakeholders during a four-day visit to Moldova in October 2024. The proposal was presented to the MoER and CWG for discussion and feedback on two occasions. These meetings allowed for validating and enriching the proposal for a Moldovan curriculum review cycle.

### Box 1.1. OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040 project

OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040 aims to build a common understanding of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values students need in the 21st century. It also supports countries in sharing and creating new knowledge on future curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation.

Recognising the urgent need to make the process of curriculum design and development a more evidence-based and systematic process as well as to support an open, global discussion about future of education, in 2015 the OECD launched the “Future of Education and Skills 2030” project (Education 2030, transitioning to Education 2030/40). The project aims to support countries in adapting their education systems by considering the types of 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values) that students and teachers need to thrive in the future and managing curriculum issues, e.g. addressing curriculum overload, managing curriculum flexibility and autonomy, closing equity gaps through curriculum innovations, managing time lag between curriculum and today’s evolving societal needs, embedding attitudes and values in curriculum, etc.

To this end, the Project promotes two strands of work:

#### **Strand 1: Learning and Teaching for 2030**

In this concept and vision-making strand of work, the project engages multiple stakeholders (governments, school leaders, teachers, students, researchers, social partners, etc.) in a global dialogue to develop a common language/vision that captures shared aspirations for a better future of education. As a result, the [OECD Learning Compass](#) has been co-created to represent the types of competencies deemed important for students to thrive in the future. Building on this, the [OECD Teaching Compass](#) has been also co-created to define the competencies, professional agency and well-being teacher will need in order to empower their students to shape a better future.

#### **Strand 2: International Curriculum Analysis**

In this strand of work, the project promotes an integrated view of future curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation. It conducts comparative analyses on curriculum issues that are highly relevant and should be prioritised in making the vision of education ([OECD Learning Compass](#)) a reality. The analyses include trends in curriculum redesign, innovations in curriculum implementation and evaluation, as well as lessons learned from countries on curriculum reform.

For more information on the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040 project please visit the website <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/future-of-education-and-skills-2030.html#strand2>.

### ***What is a curriculum?***

Curriculum is often considered the main tool that educators can use to prepare their students for the future. However, what does the term “curriculum” imply? No universal consensus exists on what exactly constitutes a curriculum and it is often a contested concept. Although curriculum may be broadly defined as the totality of the intended learning experiences of students at school, it is, in fact, a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, and a more nuanced definition is necessary.

In recognition of this complexity, OECD’s Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040 project definition of curriculum aims to be inclusive (covering both the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum), multilayered (scoping different aspects of curriculum and covering both mandatory and non-mandatory curriculum content), and dynamic, holistic and multidirectional (taking an ecosystem approach to curriculum rather than a linear, industrial model) (OECD, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>).

The findings from the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040 project – from here on referred to as “Education 2030/40” for simplicity – show the scope and structure of content covered in curricula or

curriculum frameworks can vary considerably across countries. That said, common elements of curricula and curriculum framework often include:

- curricular goals
- content
- guidelines on pedagogy
- guidelines on assessment
- instruction time (OECD, 2024<sup>[4]</sup>).

A main curriculum document is often supplemented by separate subject curriculum frameworks that focus on learning goals/content for specific subjects and instruction time. In some countries these documents also provide guidance on pedagogy and assessment, while in others the latter are presented in separate documents. While these pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines are often non-mandatory, they are frequently considered part of the curriculum.

### ***What does a curriculum review entail?***

In this paper, the term “curriculum review” refers to all phases and underlying activities of a review cycle. This process typically begins with the collection and analysis of relevant evidence – including, importantly, the perspectives of key stakeholders such as teachers, school leaders, students and parents. These insights help articulate the rationale for the review and define its purposes (i.e. *why* the review is undertaken and *what* it aims to change), which guide the planning of the review.

In line with the definition of curriculum of Education 2030/40, this paper considers curriculum review as a dynamic and cyclical process, rather than a linear exercise that results solely in a set of high-quality curriculum resources. While having a high-quality curriculum is important, it is not enough. International research evidence highlights the importance of allocating sufficient time and resources for curriculum implementation (OECD, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>; Alvunger et al., 2021<sup>[5]</sup>; Gouédard et al., 2020<sup>[6]</sup>). This includes supporting teachers in understanding the desired curriculum changes and assisting them in putting these changes into practice.

In addition, monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation enable an examination of whether the changes lead to the desired improvements in classroom practice and student learning. In other words, they help determine whether the written (or intended) curriculum is taught and experienced by students as intended and whether it leads to the desired learning outcomes (OECD, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>). Monitoring and evaluation also allow for timely course corrections in curriculum redesign (i.e. curriculum resources) and implementation, if necessary. Therefore, curriculum review, when evidence-informed and well-planned, can be a valuable developmental process for all involved (Choppin et al., 2020<sup>[7]</sup>; Sinnema and Stoll, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). Monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation also serves as an important accountability measure when they are well designed and effectively implemented (OECD, 2024<sup>[4]</sup>).

In sum, curriculum review is considered a cyclical process that facilitates regular redesign or updating to ensure the curriculum remains relevant and up to date.

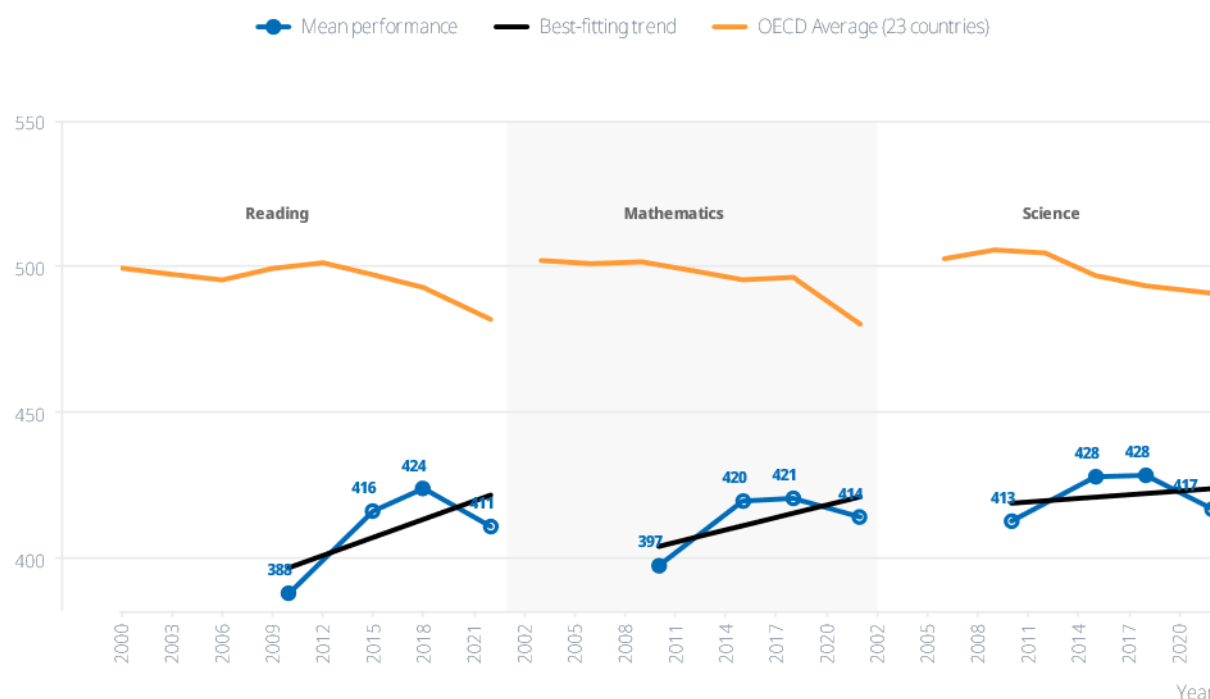
## **School education in Moldova**

### ***Student outcomes***

Moldova's participation in the 2022 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed that the average performance of 15-year-olds was below the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science (OECD, 2023<sup>[9]</sup>). Nevertheless, average scores in mathematics and reading in 2022

were higher than those recorded in PISA 2009, indicating modest but sustained progress in student performance over the longer term.

**Figure 1.1. Student performance in mathematics, reading and science, PISA 2009-2022**



Note: White dots indicate mean-performance estimates that are not statistically significantly above/below PISA 2022 estimates. Blue dots indicate mean-performance estimates that are statistically significantly above/below PISA 2022 estimates. Black lines indicate the best-fitting trend. An interactive version of this figure is available at <https://oecdch.art/a40de1dbaf/C032> (accessed on 4 March 2025).

Source: OECD (2023<sup>[9]</sup>) PISA 2022 Results (Volume I and II) – Country Notes: Moldova

The proportion of top performers (Level 5 or 6) in at least one subject was smaller in Moldova than the OECD average. For example, about 1% of Moldovan students were top performers in mathematics, compared to 9% across OECD countries. Similarly, a smaller proportion of students in Moldova achieved the minimum level of proficiency (Level 2 or higher) in all three domains. For example, in mathematics, 44% of Moldovan students attained at least Level 2 proficiency, significantly lower than the OECD average of 69%.

### ***The school system***

The Moldovan school system is relatively small. In 2023/24 there were 1 201 schools, serving around 334 000 students. Most students attend schools where the language of instruction is Romanian. However, there are also schools that accommodate the needs of minority populations, offering instruction in Russian, Gagauz, Ukrainian or Bulgarian (European Commission, 2025<sup>[10]</sup>). Education is compulsory for children aged six to sixteen (see Table 1.1); however, many begin formal education earlier and continue their studies beyond the compulsory years.

**Table 1.1. Overview of the education system**

Educational stage	Grades	Ages	Years	ISCED levels
Early childhood education and development	0	1-2	Up to 2 years	01
Preschool education (the final year is compulsory)	0	3-6	Up to 4 years	02
Primary education (compulsory)	1-4	7-10	4	1
Lower secondary (gymnasium) (compulsory)	5-9	10-15	5	2
Upper secondary general education (lyceum)	10-12	15-18	2- 3	3
Upper secondary vocational education and training (VET)	10-12	15-18	2-3	3

Source: European Commission (2025<sub>[10]</sub>), Eurydice – Moldova, <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/node/23723> (accessed on 14 November 2024).

## Curriculum

Moldova's national curriculum for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education is centrally defined by the MoER. It comprises several core documents, including the *National Curriculum Reference Framework*, which serves as the overarching curriculum document. This framework outlines the overall vision, design principles and structure of the curriculum, and sets out the key competencies to be developed, as well as the underlying philosophy of teaching and learning. In addition, education level-specific *framework plans* define the compulsory and optional subjects, as well as the minimum and maximum instructional hours. *Subject curriculum frameworks* provide further detail on expected learning outcomes, pedagogical approaches and other key components. The MoER also considers school textbooks, methodological guidelines (i.e. pedagogical guidelines) and assessment guidelines to be integral parts of the curriculum (European Commission, 2025<sub>[10]</sub>).

The curriculum is organised according to the main educational levels (see Table 1.1) and aims to promote a holistic, learner-centred approach to education. It seeks to balance students' cognitive, social and emotional development, while placing increasing emphasis on competence-based education and alignment with European standards (MoER, 2023<sub>[11]</sub>).

The current primary education curriculum in Moldova is designed to develop foundational literacy and numeracy competencies, while also fostering key competencies such as critical thinking, creativity and civic engagement (MoER, 2023<sub>[11]</sub>). The list of compulsory subjects is outlined in Table 1.2. Within the parameters of the national framework, schools are granted a degree of flexibility to offer optional subjects and adapt learning pathways, with 10-15% of instruction time allocated to them. The curriculum places particular emphasis on formative assessment, personalised learning approaches and inclusive pedagogical practices. These elements are intended to address individual learner needs and promote equity in educational outcomes (MoER, 2018<sub>[12]</sub>).

Lower secondary education introduces a more subject-specific curriculum that is delivered by specialised subject teachers. In addition to the compulsory subjects, students are to choose optional subjects that account for 15-20% of instruction time. The curriculum aims to incorporate cross-cutting themes such as media literacy, democratic citizenship, and sustainable development. The emphasis on key competences is intended to help students apply knowledge in real-life contexts and develop their transversal skills (European Commission, 2025<sub>[10]</sub>).

**Table 1.2 Compulsory subjects in primary and lower secondary education and instructional time (hours per week)**

	Primary education (with instruction in Romanian)				Lower secondary (with instruction in Romanian)				
Subjects	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Romanian Language and Literature	8	7	7	7	6	6	5	5	5
Foreign Language I	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Foreign Language II	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2
Mathematics	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Sciences	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Biology	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	2
Physics	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	2
Chemistry	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2
Informatics	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Romanian and Universal History	-	-	-	1	2	2	2	2	2
Geography	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1
Moral-Spiritual Education	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Education for Society	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1
Musical Education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-
Art Education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
Technological Education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Physical Education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Personal Development	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Source: Developed by the authors of this report based on Ministry of Education and Research (2025<sup>[13]</sup>), Framework Plan for Primary, Middle and High School Education, Academic Year 2025–2026. Chişinău: Ministry of Education and Research.

Upper secondary education in Moldova is structured into two main pathways: general and vocational. The general upper secondary curriculum maintains a broad subject offering, while providing opportunities for specialisation based on students' preferences. Students may select from two profiles: the scientific profile or the humanities profile. The curriculum includes six compulsory subject areas: Language and Communication; Mathematics and Sciences; Socio-humanistic Education; Technologies; Physical Education (Sport); and Counselling and Personal Development (see Table 1.3). Additional subjects are determined based on the chosen profile, with optional subjects accounting for around 20-25% of instruction time.

**Table 1.3. Compulsory subjects in upper secondary education and instructional time (hours per week)**

Subjects	General upper secondary (Humanities Profile with instruction in Romanian)			General upper secondary (Scientific Profile with instruction in Romanian)		
	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Romanian Language and Literature	5	5	5	4	4	4
Foreign Language I	3	3	3	3	3	3
Foreign Language II	2	2	2	-	-	-
World Literature	1	2	2	-	-	-
Mathematics	3	3	3	5	5	5
Physics, Astronomy	2	2	2	3	3	3
Chemistry	1	1	1	3	2	3
Biology	1	1	1	2	3	3
Romanian and Universal History	3	3	3	2	2	2
Geography	2	2	1	2	2	1
Education for Society	1	1	1	1	1	1
Informatics	1	1	1	2	2	2
Physical Education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Personal Development	1	1	1	1	1	1

Source: Developed by the authors of this report based on Ministry of Education and Research (2025<sup>[13]</sup>), *Framework Plan for Primary, Middle and High School Education, Academic Year 2025–2026*. Chişinău: Ministry of Education and Research.

Upper secondary VET programmes in Moldova place a stronger emphasis on practical skills and workplace competences, while maintaining general education subjects in the core curriculum to support a balanced education (OECD, 2023<sup>[14]</sup>). Students may choose from four specialisation profiles: arts, sports, theology or military studies. Since 2014, Moldova has also implemented dual VET, which is delivered through partnerships between VET institutions and companies, with a greater focus on in-company, practical training (European Commission, 2025<sup>[10]</sup>).

### **Student assessment**

In Moldova, as in OECD countries, both formative and summative classroom-based assessments contribute to students' semester and annual results. The national curriculum emphasises formative assessment to support learning – a practice formally introduced in 2010 alongside the competency-based curriculum. However, many teachers continue to face challenges in applying formative assessment effectively in the classroom. Although implementation is guided by assessment guidelines, its application remains superficial. This is partly due to the quality of the guidelines, which are reported to lack clarity, require simplification and, according to teachers, impose a significant administrative burden. The concept of formative assessment was also unfamiliar to many teachers at the time of its introduction (UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>). Moreover, it remains unclear whether formative and summative assessments are fully aligned with the competency-based approach. Further analysis is required to assess whether they evaluate not only content knowledge but also the application of skills.

As in many OECD countries, the use of standardised student assessments in primary and secondary education is well established in Moldova (OECD, 2013<sup>[16]</sup>; OECD, 2023<sup>[17]</sup>). A mandatory full-cohort assessment is conducted at the end of Grade 4 for system monitoring and to support teaching and learning. Moldova also administers central examinations to certify learning: the Grade 9 gymnasium examination and the Grade 12 baccalaureate examination.

International evidence underscores the importance of aligning all forms of student assessment with the curriculum, and of maintaining this alignment following a curriculum review. Assessments must validly measure the competencies that students are expected to develop. If assessments remain based on the previous curriculum, they risk measuring content that is no longer prioritised, resulting in a disconnect between instruction and evaluation. Furthermore, what is assessed strongly influences what is taught. When assessments focus narrowly on specific knowledge or skills, they can unintentionally narrow the curriculum, limiting opportunities for students to engage with the full breadth of the curriculum (OECD, 2013<sup>[16]</sup>).

### ***Moldova's Education Development Strategy 2030***

Moldova's Education Development Strategy 2030 outlines a long-term vision for the development and transformation of the sector, covering early childhood education and care, primary, secondary, tertiary, and vocational education, as well as non-formal education and lifelong learning. It aims to achieve the following strategic objectives:

- Connect education to the requirements and needs of the labour market from the perspective of sustainable development by restructuring the mechanisms for the development of human capital.
- Ensure access to quality education for all throughout their lives.
- Provide the educational system of all phases and forms of education with qualified, competent, motivated and competitive teaching, scientific-didactic and leadership staff.
- Strengthen socio-educational cohesion for quality education by combining the efforts of all actors of the educational process.
- Create new, effective, and motivating environments for the development and lifelong learning of all citizens.
- Improve the functionality, quality and sustainability of the education system through the efficient implementation of digital technologies.
- Ensure for all citizens, throughout their lives, opportunities for learning and education in a formal, non-formal or informal context.
- Promote innovations and changes in education through the development of scientific research.
- Increase the performance of the educational system by streamlining the network of educational institutions, modernising the infrastructure, strengthening the leadership and managerial capacity and developing a culture focussed on quality (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2023<sup>[2]</sup>).

To achieve these strategic objectives – particularly the objectives of enhancing the quality of the education system and its connections with the labour market – the Strategy calls for a review of the school curriculum. It also emphasises the need to strengthen the system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation so that curriculum resources are of high quality and lead to real change in classroom practice.

### **An overview of past and ongoing curriculum reviews in Moldova**

Curriculum is a powerful lever for supporting student learning and well-being, and for preparing students to thrive in and contribute to the future. It can help ensure consistent levels of quality across different types of education provision and age groups, thereby contributing to a more equitable education system. However, curriculum may also constrain the creativity and agency of students and teachers, particularly if it is overloaded or lacks flexibility to allow exploration of individual interests and purpose. Moreover, if a curriculum remains unchanged for extended periods, it may fail to reflect societal developments and lack the innovation needed to meet evolving needs (OECD, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>).

In recent years, an increasing number of OECD countries have engaged in curriculum reviews to ensure education remains relevant (OECD, 2020<sup>[18]</sup>; Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[6]</sup>; Schleicher, 2021<sup>[19]</sup>). These experiences offer valuable opportunities for peer learning for education systems aiming to strengthen their capacity for curriculum design and implementation. Moldova is among such countries as it seeks to move from an ad hoc approach to curriculum review towards a more planned and cyclical process.

### ***Past curriculum reviews in Moldova***

Since gaining independence in 1991, Moldova has conducted five reviews of its school curriculum when including the current curriculum review that was initiated in 2024 (OECD, 2003<sup>[20]</sup>; UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>). The first curriculum review began in 1996 (see Figure 1.2).

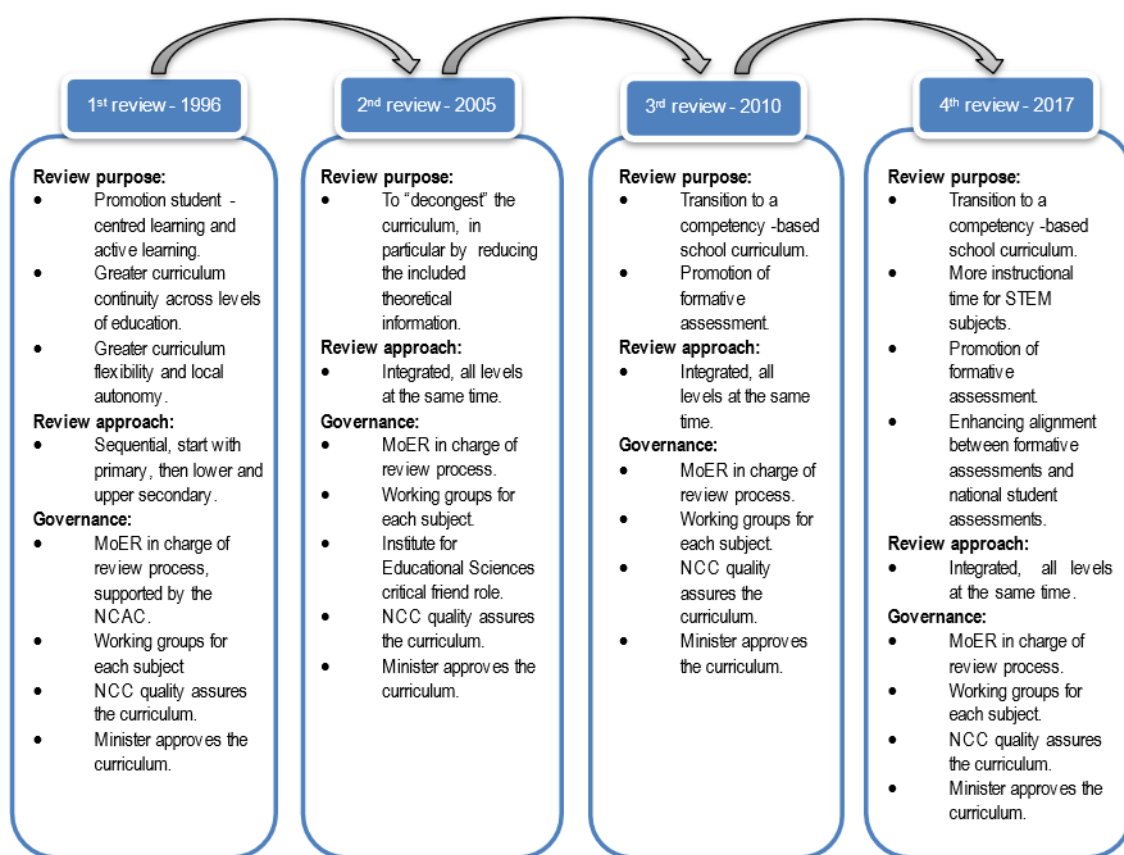
One of its main purposes was to move away from a “programme of study” that emphasised rote learning and content-based instruction, and instead to promote student-centred and active learning approaches. The review also aimed to strengthen curriculum continuity across educational levels and to enhance flexibility and local autonomy in curriculum design (OECD, 2003<sup>[20]</sup>).

The MoER was responsible for planning, designing and implementing the new curriculum across all subjects. To support this work, the MoER established the National Curriculum and Assessment Council (NCAC), composed of representatives from universities, teaching staff and non-governmental organisations, to oversee and facilitate curriculum design and implementation. In addition, subject-specific working groups were established, each comprising five to seven teachers and one or two university-based experts. More than 1 000 experts, teachers and other stakeholders contributed to the planning and design of the revised curriculum (World Bank, 2005<sup>[21]</sup>).

Prior to implementation, the National Curriculum Council (NCC), composed of curriculum experts, reviewed the curriculum documents to ensure quality. The NCC then submitted its recommendations for approval to the Minister of Education. A sequential approach to curriculum review was adopted across levels of education. The new primary education curriculum was approved for implementation in 1998, followed by the approval of curricula for lower and upper secondary education in 2000. Implementation involved the development and distribution of curriculum materials to schools and district Departments of Education, along with the participation of curriculum developers in teacher training. The MoER was responsible for monitoring the implementation process (World Bank, 2005<sup>[21]</sup>; Gremalschi, 2015<sup>[22]</sup>).

A second curriculum review was initiated in 2005. Its main purpose was to “decongest” the curriculum, particularly by reducing the theoretical content in curriculum resources (Gremalschi, 2015<sup>[22]</sup>). Unlike the first review, which followed a sequential model, this review adopted an integrated approach by updating the curricula for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education simultaneously. The revised curriculum was implemented from the 2006/07 school year onwards.

Figure 1.2. Overview past curriculum reviews: purposes, review approaches and governance



Source: Developed by the authors of this report based on OECD (2003<sup>[20]</sup>), *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Southeastern Europe 2003: Volume 2: FYROM, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia*, OECD Publishing, Paris; World Bank (2005<sup>[21]</sup>), *Implementation Completion Report - General Education Project*; Government of the Republic of Moldova (2014<sup>[23]</sup>), *Education Development Strategy 2014-2020*; Gremalschi, A. (2015<sup>[22]</sup>), *Key competences in general education: challenges and constraints*; UNICEF (2019<sup>[15]</sup>), *Republic of Moldova. Review of the evaluation and assessment in education*; Dumbraveanu (2022<sup>[24]</sup>), *Science Education in Moldova*.

The governance of the second review in part mirrored that of the first. The MoER remained responsible for planning, designing and implementing the new curriculum. However, the NCAC was not continued. Instead, the MoER engaged the then-existing Institute for Educational Sciences, comprising teacher trainers and researchers, as a "critical friend" to support the review process.

In 2010, Moldova began its third curriculum review since independence. This review aimed to introduce for the first time an explicit, competency-based approach to learning in Moldova. As part of this, it also placed significant emphasis on formative assessment (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2014<sup>[23]</sup>; Gremalschi, 2015<sup>[22]</sup>). As in the previous review, an integrated approach was adopted, with the entire school curriculum reviewed simultaneously. The MoER once again established subject working groups to revise all subject-specific curriculum frameworks and requested the NCC to conduct quality assurance prior to implementation.

A fourth curriculum review began in 2017. The review continued the purpose of transitioning to competency-based teaching and student learning, with an ongoing emphasis on formative assessment. It also aimed to enhance the alignment between formative assessments and national standardised student assessments. In addition, the review sought to increase instructional time for STEM subjects. The school curriculum was redesigned and updated during 2017-18 and approved for implementation from the

2019/20 school year onwards. The review was operationalised and governed in the same way as previous reviews. A notable change was the introduction of a merit-based selection process for membership in the subject working groups. Unlike in previous reviews, where members were invited to participate, candidates were now required to apply and were selected based on merit. This measure aimed to enhance transparency and improve the quality of curriculum developers (Dumbraveanu, 2022<sup>[24]</sup>)

## ***Moldova's current curriculum review***

### *Remaining challenges as Moldova initiated its fifth curriculum review*

While the move towards a competency-based curriculum can be seen as a positive step towards a more comprehensive and well-rounded education, the system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation have hindered its practical application in classrooms across Moldova. One key challenge has been the limited capacity to develop quality curriculum resources. Several studies have found that curriculum documents have remained largely theoretical and have lacked rigour, focus, coherence and clarity throughout successive curriculum reviews, despite efforts to address these issues (Vivdici, 2023<sup>[25]</sup>; Dumbraveanu, 2022<sup>[24]</sup>; Gremalschi, 2015<sup>[22]</sup>; UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>). These findings were corroborated by the OECD team's analysis conducted as part of the second strand of work under this project (see Box 1.1). For example, the review of the lower secondary mathematics curriculum framework revealed that the document was overly lengthy (exceeding 180 pages) and lacked a user-friendly structure to support the identification of learning outcomes. Interviews with various stakeholders confirmed that the format and complexity of the curriculum documents posed challenges for their use by teachers, students, parents and other key actors, such as textbook developers.

In addition, interviews with education stakeholders and findings from several studies highlighted the limited experience and capacity of textbook developers and publishers in Moldova. As a result, textbooks were often insufficiently aligned with curriculum frameworks and remained overly theoretical in nature – issues that may partly reflect the broader quality concerns identified in the curriculum documents. Moreover, a limited understanding of formative assessment among textbook developers likely contributed to the lack of assignments and exercises designed to support assessment and student learning (UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>; Hadîrcă and Vivdici, 2021<sup>[26]</sup>).

Unlike many OECD countries, Moldova has not benefited from the presence of a dedicated agency for curriculum development. As shown by the experience of Korea, for example, which has established the Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation, and Ireland, which is served by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, establishing such a body can yield several advantages, including the development and institutionalisation of specialised expertise in curriculum design, subject-specific knowledge and educational research. The absence of such a body is partly due to the historically ad hoc nature of curriculum reviews in Moldova – an approach the MoER is keen to move away from.

Lastly, teacher capacity is a critical factor in determining a system's ability to implement a curriculum effectively. A significant portion of Moldova's ageing teaching workforce was originally trained to teach a knowledge-based curriculum. Many teachers also lacked the necessary skills for effective formative assessments, a concept that was unfamiliar to many, as mentioned earlier (UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>). Consequently, the transition to competency-based teaching, assessment, and student learning is expected to require more time and effort, including additional investments in the professional development of Moldova's teaching workforce (OECD, 2023<sup>[27]</sup>; Vivdici, 2023<sup>[25]</sup>; Casap, Midari and Gonta, 2022<sup>[28]</sup>).

### *Moldova's fifth curriculum review*

As mentioned earlier, the Education Development Strategy 2030 called for a review of Moldova's school curriculum. This review was initiated in 2024. One of its initial outputs was the *Concept for School*

*Curriculum Development*, which sets out, among other elements, the stated purposes of the current curriculum review (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2024<sup>[29]</sup>) (see Box 1.2). While the list of stated purposes is extensive, the OECD team found that the key purposes of the current review were not clearly defined, and their relative importance was not articulated (see below).

### Box 1.2. The Concept for School Curriculum Development is to guide Moldova's curriculum review

In 2024, the MoER of Moldova released the Concept for School Curriculum Development to guide the current curriculum review. The concept document was developed based on studies, a public consultation process, and incorporates the recommendations of the Council of Europe on key competences for lifelong learning, as well as the curriculum development objectives outlined in the Education Development Strategy 2030. The concept document lists the arguments or purposes of the current curriculum review, which is deemed necessary to:

- Implement the European Council recommendations on the development of key competences for lifelong learning;
- Achieve the priorities outlined in the Education Development Strategy 2030, particularly focusing on inclusion, personal development, and active and responsible citizenship;
- Define a new profile for graduates, better prepared for future professions;
- Strengthen the interconnection between formal, non-formal, and informal education to support the development of each child's potential;
- Support the development of school competences through innovative teaching, learning, and assessment methods;
- Ensure the unitary character of education by leveraging social, cultural, and linguistic diversity, while promoting intercultural and multilingual education;
- Reduce the gap between the educational offerings of schools and the evolving demands of the labour market and vocational/higher education;
- Increase students' motivation for learning and modernise the educational process by leveraging technological innovations, digital pedagogy, and artificial intelligence;
- Improve learning outcomes in general, as well as in national and international assessments.

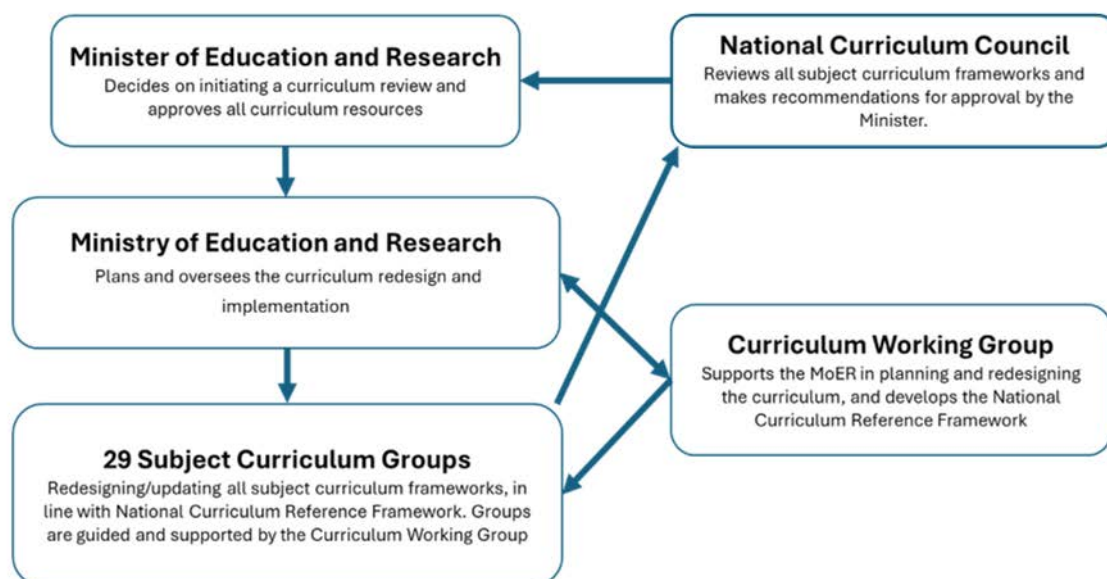
The concept document forms the basis for developing all curriculum outputs, including the National Curriculum Reference Framework and subject curriculum frameworks.

Source: Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova (2024<sup>[29]</sup>), Concept for School Curriculum Development (Conceptia Dezvoltării Curriculumului Școlar), [https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/last\\_version\\_copy\\_compressed\\_1\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/last_version_copy_compressed_1_0_0.pdf) (accessed on 4 March 2025).

Under this current review, the MoER again intends to adopt an integrated approach, in which all levels of education are reviewed simultaneously. The governance of the review slightly differs from previous reviews (see Figure 1.3). To support the planning and oversight of the redesign of the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary curricula, the MoER established a Curriculum Working Group (CWG) composed of national experts. As in previous reviews, the MoER established subject working groups for each subject. These groups, comprising over 160 curriculum experts, teachers, and other stakeholders, are tasked with redesigning and updating all subject curriculum frameworks. The updated subject curriculum frameworks are planned to be piloted during the 2026/27 school year, with nationwide implementation scheduled for 2027/28 onwards (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2024<sup>[29]</sup>).

The NCC continues the critical function of reviewing all subject curriculum frameworks and advising the Minister on their approval. The enhanced subject curriculum framework format, which features clearer learning outcomes, is expected to support the NCC in assessing the alignment of textbooks with the curriculum.

**Figure 1.3. Overview of the governance of the current curriculum review**



Source: Developed by the authors based on information shared by the MoER

In addition, the action plan for the current curriculum review which was developed with support of the CWG indicates that the review will focus primarily on the development and revision of curriculum resources. However, the action plan does not explicitly address curriculum implementation and monitoring and evaluation (see Chapter 2) (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2024<sup>[29]</sup>).

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## **2 Examining Moldova's curriculum review from an international perspective**

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This chapter looks at Moldova's curriculum review from an international perspective. It explores six key questions to inform the design and implementation of a curriculum review cycle, drawing on insights from international research and experience, as well as Moldova's experience. It identifies both strengths and challenges in Moldova's past and current curriculum reviews, and offers recommendations for developing a curriculum review cycle that reflects international good practice while being tailored to the Moldovan context.

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## What are the main purposes of the curriculum review?

### ***The purposes of curriculum reviews vary across countries***

Education 2030/40 shows that, in recent years, many OECD countries have undertaken reviews of their school curricula to ensure their continued relevance to students and to the world outside of school. While the specific purposes of these reviews vary, common themes have emerged, and there is substantial evidence that setting a clear and coherent direction is critical for success (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). Common purposes for curriculum reviews often concern desired changes in educational goals/content, subject renewal, and modifications in the allocation of instructional time. For example, over the last decades many countries have pursued substantial changes in education goals and content by moving towards a competency-based curriculum – Moldova is among these countries. In addition, more recently, several OECD countries, such as New Zealand, the Netherlands and Sweden, have emphasised a focus on foundational competencies, particularly literacy and mathematics (Swedish Ministry of Education, 2025<sup>[2]</sup>; Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2024<sup>[3]</sup>; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2024<sup>[4]</sup>).

Curriculum reviews also frequently have as their purpose the reduction of curriculum overload or a change of instructional time, for all subjects or selected subjects (OECD, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>). Japan, for example, reduced curriculum content and decreased the amount of instruction time in its 1998 reform to ease anxiety among students and parents about intensified competition for university entrance. Although the purpose was to let no students fall behind and to enhance the quality of learning time, the reform was misunderstood as a lowering of standards. In response to a backlash to the 1998 reform, the 2008 curriculum again increased both content and instruction time (OECD, 2020<sup>[6]</sup>; Yamanaka and Suzuki, 2020<sup>[7]</sup>). In addition to highlighting the importance of clearly communicating the purposes of a review, this example shows that curriculum reviews often pursue multiple review purposes.

### ***Having many curriculum review purposes risks a less-than-optimal curriculum review, or even failure***

While countries often pursue multiple purposes within a single curriculum review, this approach requires careful consideration. When the number of purposes exceeds the education system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation, there is a risk that efforts become fragmented, which can ultimately undermine the reform's success. A lack of focus can lead to the inefficient use of limited time, human and financial resources (Bryson, George and Seo, 2024<sup>[8]</sup>; Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>).

Incorporating multiple changes into a curriculum framework simultaneously is also a complex undertaking that can risk undermining its overall quality. For example, transitioning to a competency-based curriculum, integrating new cross-cutting concepts, themes or values, and integrating subjects are each significant reforms, and even more so when pursued simultaneously. If not well managed, such changes can lead to curriculum overload or result in content that is overly broad yet lacking in depth – often described as “a mile wide and an inch deep” (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>).

Introducing several curriculum changes at once can also place significant strain on the teaching workforce, particularly when these involve unfamiliar concepts or pedagogical approaches. As mentioned earlier, this has also been a challenge for Moldova where many teachers continue to struggle to transition towards competency-based teaching and to use formative assessments to enhance their teaching and student learning.

### ***Moldova could clarify and prioritise the key purpose(s) of the current curriculum review***

Moldova's current curriculum review appears to pursue multiple purposes, which risks overstressing the system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation. The list of purposes for curriculum change as

stipulated in MoER's Concept for School Curriculum Development (see Box 1.2) is extensive (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2024<sup>[11]</sup>). The document identifies no fewer than nine review purposes, without providing insight into their relative priority.

The purposes span a wide range of issues, several of which represent significant curriculum changes in their own right. For example, revising the graduate profile and strengthening the connections between formal, non-formal and informal education are both important but complex undertakings that may entail substantial curriculum changes. Attempting to address all nine purposes simultaneously obviously risks a less-than-optimal curriculum review, especially considering the system's limited capacity for curriculum design and implementation (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2023<sup>[12]</sup>). One could argue that revising the graduate profile to better prepare them for future professions should be among the key purposes also because of the direction it provides for the curriculum review.

Moreover, the Concept document appears to lack an overarching rationale and clearly defined goal for the curriculum review. Establishing such a goal could help Moldova in identifying a manageable number of specific review purposes and in determining their relative importance, thereby enhancing the focus and coherence of the curriculum review. For example, in England, the government has articulated a clear overarching goal to "modernise the curriculum" and has an expert-led study to define the specific purposes and activities required to achieve this goal (Department of Education, 2024<sup>[13]</sup>).

To determine the overarching goal and underlying purposes of the curriculum review, Moldova will want to ensure policy coherence with related reforms and policies, such as the development of Model Schools and the establishment of a national mentoring system (see below). Moldova also needs to understand the implementation context, and in particular factors that have shaped the previous attempts to adapt the school curriculum. The OECD team acknowledges that this may present challenges, as past investments in the monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation have been limited (OECD, 2023<sup>[14]</sup>; UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>).

In light of this challenge, the MoER has amended the timeline of the current curriculum review and allocated additional time and resources to support further curriculum analysis and stakeholder consultations. The evidence generated through these efforts could inform the definition of a clear overarching goal. This, in turn, could support the clarification and prioritisation of the purposes listed in the Concept document.

***The MoER is rightly focused on the need to improve the quality of curriculum documents, which could be given more prominence in the review***

In clarifying the purpose(s) of the review, the MoER should pay particular attention to the need to enhance the rigour, coherence, focus and clarity of curriculum documents. This specific purpose appears to be missing from the Concept document, yet, as noted earlier, the poor quality of curriculum documents has been a persistent concern in Moldova and one that has impeded the success of previous curricula. High-quality curriculum resources can significantly support their effective use in schools and serve as a powerful tool to improve teaching and student learning (Glatthorn et al., 2018<sup>[16]</sup>).

The MoER and the CWG have acknowledged the importance of addressing this issue. One of the first activities of the current curriculum review was the development of a simplified subject curriculum framework format, designed to improve the clarity and structure of curriculum documents by focusing on clearly formulated learning outcomes (referred to in Moldova as "units of competence"). This format was co-developed by representatives of the MoER, CWG, teacher training institutions, teachers, curriculum experts and other education stakeholders, with technical support from the OECD, during an international peer learning event held in November 2024. The new format is intended to guide the redesign or update of all subject curriculum frameworks (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2023<sup>[12]</sup>). In recognition of these efforts, Moldova should consider making the improvement of curriculum resource quality a key

purpose of the current curriculum review. This would help to ensure that this work receives adequate attention and investment.

### ***Strong leadership is needed to determine and prioritise the review's purposes***

Strong leadership from the MoER is essential to determine which curriculum review purpose(s) to prioritise. Current and future reviews are likely to benefit from stakeholder consultations and more robust evidence generated through the systematic monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation (see below). Such evidence may point to the need for multiple curriculum changes. In this context, strong leadership and clear decision-making are critical to interpret the evidence and establish priorities. Prioritisation is essential to maintain focus in the review process and ensure alignment with the system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation. However, the extensive list of review purposes outlined in the Concept document suggests that such prioritisation has not yet occurred. This risks a lack of focus and an overestimation of the system's capacity for curriculum review.

### **What is the scale of the review?**

#### ***While curriculum reviews vary among countries, three distinct approaches concerning their scale can be identified***

Education 2030/40 shows that countries adopt a wide range of approaches to curriculum review (OECD, 2024<sup>[17]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[18]</sup>). However, a closer examination reveals several common patterns. In particular, three distinct approaches can be identified based on the scale of curriculum reviews.

The first approach concerns what may be referred to as an “**integral approach**”, in which all levels of education are reviewed at the same time. Countries that have adopted such an integral approach include Armenia, Estonia, New Zealand and Singapore (English Department of Education, 2024<sup>[19]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[20]</sup>; NCEE, 2021<sup>[21]</sup>; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2021<sup>[22]</sup>; Sarv and Rõuk, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>; Lemos et al., 2024<sup>[24]</sup>) (see Box 2.1) – and also Moldova in its most recent curriculum reviews. A key advantage of this approach is that it supports curriculum continuity by aligning curricula and learning outcomes across different levels of education. This can help prevent gaps in curricula and facilitate smooth transitions between levels of education (Shuey et al., 2019<sup>[25]</sup>; Benyon, 2007<sup>[26]</sup>).

Potential disadvantages of such an approach include the high opportunity costs that are all incurred at the same time. Curriculum review, like many other education reforms, typically requires substantial investments of time, financial resources and human capital (Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). Moreover, this approach can be particularly complex and demanding to manage, as was evidenced by Moldova's own experiences. For example, during the fourth curriculum review, all subjects across primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education were reviewed within a two-year period (2017–18). This compressed timeline seems to have further challenged Moldova's capacity to effectively oversee and quality-assure the curriculum review process and contributed to a lack of quality of curriculum resources.

A “**sequential approach**” to curriculum review involves reviewing the curricula for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education through separate processes. Countries such as Ireland, Hungary and Lithuania have adopted this approach (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2024<sup>[27]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>) (see Box 2.1). Moldova also applied a sequential approach in its first curriculum review, initiated in 1996. However, subsequent reviews have adopted an integrated approach.

## Box 2.1. Different curriculum review approaches concerning their scale: country examples

### Armenia – an example of an integral approach to curriculum review

In 2020, Armenia launched a comprehensive curriculum reform aimed at transitioning to a competency-based school curriculum guided by clearly defined learning outcomes. The reform adopted an integral approach, simultaneously reviewing the curricula for primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education. Particular emphasis was placed on STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), green education, and foreign languages. To support effective implementation, the reformed curriculum was piloted in the Tavush region over two school years (2021/22 and 2022/23).

The pilot phase was considered successful, with piloting of additional subjects and roll-out in other regions ongoing or planned at the time of finalising this paper. Full nationwide implementation of the revised school curriculum is to be completed by 2026.

### Ireland – an example of a sequenced approach to curriculum review

Ireland is among those countries that have adopted a sequential approach to curriculum review. The most recent completed review focused on the lower secondary level, known as the “Junior Cycle.” Announced in 2012, the Junior Cycle reform aimed to modernise the curriculum and the Junior Certificate, which marks the completion of lower secondary education. Implementation began with the introduction of revised subject specifications in 2014, followed by the first student certification in 2017. The final set of revised subjects was introduced in 2019, with the first certification taking place in 2022. Meanwhile, preparations for the primary curriculum review began in 2016. By the time of finalising this paper, all curriculum area specifications had been developed and were awaiting ministerial approval. Similarly, work on the upper secondary curriculum review also commenced in 2016, leading to the publication of an advisory report in 2022. The redesign process has since started, with all revised subjects expected to be in place by September 2029.

### Wales (United Kingdom) – an example of a “subject-based approach” to curriculum review

In 2011, Wales embarked on a large-scale school improvement reform and introduced a range of policies to improve the quality and equity of its school system. The disappointing PISA 2009 results sparked a national debate on the quality and future of education in Wales, which had resulted in a broad consensus on the need for change. Among the key reforms was the development of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), a subject-specific initiative designed to strengthen foundational competencies across the curriculum. The LNF became a statutory requirement in September 2013 for all students from Year 0 (the first year of primary education) through to Year 9 (the end of lower secondary education). In addition to implementing the framework, teachers were mandated to conduct annual assessments of students’ progress in meeting the LNF expectations and to report these results to parents. Together, the introduction of the LNF and the accompanying assessment obligations marked a substantial shift in curriculum and assessment policy in Wales, demonstrating how a targeted, subject-based approach can drive focused improvements within a broader reform strategy.

While Moldova’s limited capacity for curriculum design and implementation supports the adoption of a sequential approach to curriculum review, there may be cases where a targeted, subject-specific review is warranted. As the MoER strengthens curriculum monitoring and evaluation, new evidence may emerge that justifies a more immediate response – one that cannot wait for the full curriculum review cycle to conclude.

Sources: Lemos et al. (2024<sup>[24]</sup>) Curriculum and Learning: Towards a Competency-based Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Curriculum Reform in Armenia (English), Washington, D.C., World Bank Group, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099021724065028226> (accessed on 18 December 2014); National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2020<sup>[28]</sup>), Draft primary curriculum framework: Primary curriculum review and redevelopment, NCCA, <https://www.ncca.ie/en/resources/draft-primary-curriculum-framework>; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2024<sup>[29]</sup>), Schedule of senior cycle subjects for redevelopment, <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/senior-cycle-redevelopment/schedule-of-senior-cycle-subjects-for-redevelopment/> (accessed on 18 December 2024); OECD (2014<sup>[30]</sup>), Improving schools in Wales: an OECD perspective, OECD Publishing, Paris (accessed on 18 December 2014).

One potential disadvantage of the sequential approach is the risk of misalignment of curricula education levels – if not managed well. Another potential disadvantage is the perceived continued disturbance from the public debate that often accompanies a curriculum review. This public debate may become politicised (Nieveen, van den Akker and Voogt, 2023<sup>[31]</sup>; Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>).

Conversely, possible advantages of sequencing a curriculum review by levels of education include the spreading of opportunity costs over a longer period. This is particularly important for countries with tight public budgets and limited capacity for curriculum design and implementation, such as Moldova. This approach may also make the review process less complex and easier to manage. For the same reason it may also help the quality assurance of all curriculum resources, which as mentioned has been a challenge for Moldova in the past.

With a **“subject-based approach”** to curriculum review, the process is limited to a review of specific subjects only. Such reviews are often ad hoc in nature and may be prompted by emerging evidence, societal developments, or identified gaps that require an immediate response. Wales (United Kingdom) provides an example of this approach (see Box 2.2) (OECD, 2014<sup>[30]</sup>).

### ***Moldova could consider sequencing curriculum reviews by levels of education***

Moldova’s previous experiences with curriculum reviews suggest that an integrated approach to curriculum review is a complex exercise to manage, especially considering the country’s limited system capacity for curriculum design and implementation (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2023<sup>[12]</sup>). Evidence from past reviews also indicate persistent difficulties in overseeing and assuring the quality of curriculum resources across all levels of education. These challenges have contributed to enduring concerns regarding the quality of curriculum resources (Gremalschi, 2015<sup>[32]</sup>; UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>; Dumbraveanu, 2022<sup>[33]</sup>). Taken together, these issues suggest an integrated approach to curriculum review does not seem to match well with the system’s current capacity for curriculum design and implementation.

Moldova should therefore consider adopting a sequential approach to curriculum review. Sequencing curriculum reviews by educational level could make the process more manageable and facilitate better oversight and quality assurance. This approach would also allow Moldova to spread opportunity costs (i.e. time, financial, and human resources) over a longer period, an important advantage for a country with a constrained public budget and limited implementation capacity. During interviews and stakeholder consultations conducted by the OECD team, most education stakeholders expressed support, or at least openness to transitioning to a sequential approach. This suggests that there may be a conducive policy environment for making this shift in the curriculum review approach.

### ***However, it could still allow for ad hoc, subject-based curriculum reviews, if needed***

While adopting a sequential approach to curriculum review could make the overall process more manageable for Moldova, this does not preclude the possibility of undertaking targeted, subject-specific reviews when justified by evidence. The planned systematic monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation is expected to significantly strengthen Moldova’s evidence base in the coming years. This enhanced data may reveal pressing issues in specific subject areas that require more immediate attention. In such cases, rather than initiating a full-scale curriculum review earlier than planned, an ad hoc subject-based review could offer a more efficient and responsive means of addressing specific curriculum shortcomings. Moldova has prior experience with this approach, for instance through the targeted review and update of the Computer Sciences curriculum (Gremalschi, 2015<sup>[32]</sup>). This flexibility within a broader sequential curriculum review approach can help balance long-term planning with short-term responsiveness to emerging needs.

## What are the main curriculum outputs of the review?

**Countries often develop a main curriculum document that sets out the basis for the curriculum, and supplement this with separate subject frameworks and guidance documents**

A central question for a curriculum review is to determine the main outputs in terms of the core curriculum resources that will be developed or updated. Answering this question helps bring further focus to the review effort and is vital for developing a costed action plan. Countries often produce a main document – frequently termed a “national curriculum framework” – that sets out the defining features of their curriculum. While the scope of this main document varies, it often sets out the overall vision of the curriculum, its core values and main goals, rationale and guiding design principles. It often lists key competencies to be achieved and includes a philosophy of teaching and learning that provides users with an underlying conceptual approach to selecting and sequencing content, as well as to teaching practice (OECD, 2020<sup>[6]</sup>; UNESCO, 2017<sup>[34]</sup>). Moldova as mentioned earlier also has such a main curriculum document, the National Curriculum Reference Framework, which is revised during a curriculum review.

In addition, many countries complement their overarching curriculum framework with more detailed curriculum documents that provide specific content guidance and define the desired learning outcomes for each learning area or subject – sometimes referred to as *subject curriculum frameworks*. Countries vary in terms of which elements of the curriculum are mandatory and which are provided as non-mandatory guidance. In some cases, these subject-specific documents are further supplemented by additional resources, such as pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines (see Table 2.1.).

**Table 2.1. Overview of key curriculum outputs**

	Included in the main curriculum document		Included in a separate document	
	Mandatory	Non-mandatory	Mandatory	Non-mandatory
<b>Educational goals and content</b>	<b>OECD:</b> Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), Norway, Ontario (Canada), Poland, Portugal, Québec (Canada), Sweden, Scotland (United Kingdom), Netherlands, Türkiye, Wales (United Kingdom)  <b>Partner:</b> Brazil, China, Hong Kong (China), India, Kazakhstan		<b>OECD:</b> Australia, British Columbia (Canada), Chile, New Zealand, Portugal, Québec (Canada), Türkiye  <b>Partner:</b> Argentina, Hong Kong (China)	<b>OECD:</b> Northern Ireland (United Kingdom)
<b>Guidelines on pedagogy</b>		<b>OECD:</b> Estonia, Finland, Mexico, New Zealand, Ontario (Canada), Portugal	<b>OECD:</b> Costa Rica	<b>OECD:</b> Australia, Chile, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland (United Kingdom),

		<b>Partner:</b> Hong Kong (China), Kazakhstan		Norway, Ontario (Canada), Türkiye  <b>Partner:</b> Argentina, Hong Kong (China), India
<b>Guidelines on assessment</b>	<b>OECD:</b> Estonia, Ontario (Canada)	<b>OECD:</b> Estonia, Finland, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), Türkiye  <b>Partner:</b> China, Hong Kong (China), India, Kazakhstan	<b>OECD:</b> Denmark, Norway, Ontario (Canada)	<b>OECD:</b> British Columbia (Canada), Costa Rica, Hungary, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Scotland (United Kingdom)  <b>Partner:</b> Argentina, Hong Kong (China)

Source: Adjusted from original table in OECD (2020<sup>[6]</sup>), Curriculum (re)design: A series of thematic reports from the OECD Education 2030 project, OECD Publishing, Paris.

### ***Moldova could simplify and clarify the subject curriculum frameworks, and develop separate, non-mandatory pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines***

Moldova should, as it has done in previous reviews, define the main curriculum outputs at the outset of the review cycle. These may include the National Curriculum Reference Framework and the subject curriculum frameworks, among others. However, evidence indicates that these curriculum documents have faced several challenges. As previously noted, they were often overly theoretical and lacked the necessary rigour, focus, coherence, and clarity (Vivdici, 2023<sup>[35]</sup>; UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>). This was also evident in the OECD team's analysis of the lower secondary mathematics curriculum framework. The document was lengthy, difficult to navigate, and included extensive pedagogical guidance that overshadowed the presentation of learning outcomes. This was problematic, especially considering that Moldova had already developed separate pedagogical guidance documents – namely, the guidelines for the “methodological organisation of the educational process” for both primary and secondary education (see Table 2.2.).

As mentioned earlier, the MoER and CWG acknowledged these challenges. One of the first activities undertaken as part of the current curriculum review was the development of a simplified subject curriculum framework format. This new format focuses on the clear articulation of learning outcomes and excludes pedagogical guidance and theoretical underpinnings. It is intended to be used consistently in the redesign or updating of all subject curriculum frameworks and represents an important step toward enhancing the quality and usability of Moldova's curriculum resources. To achieve this, it is essential that all subject curriculum frameworks are written in clear, accessible language to support use not only by teachers but also by students, parents, and other stakeholders.

In addition, the MoER has decided to continue providing pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines, as non-mandatory resources. Their non-mandatory nature allows for regular revisions and updates, for instance, to incorporate innovations and emerging best practices in teaching and assessment. Moreover, it is recommended that the existing assessment guidance documents (see Table 2.2.) be reviewed to improve their quality and consolidated into a single, coherent resource to enhance usability for teachers and other stakeholders. The review should also prioritise reducing the reported administrative burden associated with their use (UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>).

**Table 2.2. Overview of curriculum subject frameworks and pedagogical and assessment guidelines**

	Primary education	Lower secondary (gymnasium)	Upper secondary education (lyceum)
Curricula and Academic Plans	National Curriculum: Primary education Guide to integration of the curriculum for Primary Education	National Curricula (i.e. subject curriculum frameworks)	National Curricula (i.e. subject curriculum frameworks)
	National Curriculum Supplement : Academic Plans for Education in Primary School, Gymnasium and Lyceum, Academic Year 2024-2025		
	Methodological Organisation of the Educational Process in Primary Education, Academic Year 2024-2025	Methodological Organisation of the Educational Process, Academic Year 2024-2025 ( <i>documents by subject</i> )	
Methodologies of Classroom Assessment	Regulation on Evaluation and Marking of Learning Outcomes, Promotion and Graduation in Primary and Secondary Education		
	Methodologies of Integration of Criteria-based Assessment through Descriptors (documents by grade)	Methodological Foundations on Provision of Continuity for the Integration of Criteria-based Assessment through -- 15 Descriptors in Grades IV and V	-
	Methodological Guides for Integration of Criteria-based Assessment through Descriptors (documents by grade)	-	-

Source: Overview based on the report UNICEF (2019<sup>[15]</sup>), Republic of Moldova: Review of the Evaluation and Assessment in Education, available at <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/reports/review-evaluation-and-assessment-education-0m>, and updated by the authors.

### ***Moldova is mobilising the “untapped” potential of digital technologies for curriculum implementation***

The OECD team learned of several initiatives to support the implementation of the curriculum through the development of a suite of digital resources, including digital textbooks and an online student assessment platform. As noted in an earlier OECD paper (2023<sup>[14]</sup>), these digital resources hold considerable potential for improving teaching and student learning. In many OECD member countries digital technologies and resources, sometimes powered by Artificial Intelligence, are increasingly used to assist teachers and students in the classroom or students in their learning at home. Smart digital technologies can improve education systems and education delivery in different ways. They can enhance access to education, improve its quality for students and enhance its cost-efficiency for societies. Another promise is to make education more inclusive, and it can provide additional learning opportunities to students from more disadvantaged groups – assuming that they are widely accessible and used. Even if these promises of digitalisation do not fully materialise, digitalisation could still open new avenues for formal education by making it more engaging for students and teachers (OECD, 2021<sup>[36]</sup>; OECD, 2023<sup>[37]</sup>).

When developing digital textbooks, Moldova should therefore consider moving beyond static (non-interactive) formats that simply replicate traditional chalk-and-board teaching methods in digital form. While such resources remain useful and will continue to play a role in education, relying solely on them risks missing out on the potential of AI-enabled tools to enhance teaching and learning. Interactive digital textbooks can offer more personalised and engaging learning experiences, adapting content to students' individual needs and providing real-time feedback. Several OECD countries have adopted such resources. For example, in Korea, interactive textbooks are available through Edunet T-Clear, the national teaching

and learning platform. These textbooks offer a wide range of interactive and adaptive materials and are interoperable with other Edunet T-Clear platforms via a single sign-on (SSO) service (OECD, 2023<sup>[37]</sup>).

In addition, the MoER's plan to develop an online student assessment platform is a promising initiative to support teachers in the effective use of formative assessment. Online assessment platforms can offer several benefits, including immediate, personalised feedback that helps students identify their strengths and areas for improvement. Such a platform can also provide teachers with detailed analytics on student learning across topics and skills, enabling more targeted instruction. Moreover, interactive digital environments and gamified features can make assessments more engaging and less stressful for students, while fostering self-directed learning. To realise these and other benefits of online student assessment platforms, the MoER should carefully design the platform's governance and resourcing structure. The development of both the content and underlying technology should be guided by principles of quality, security and privacy, with a strong focus on user needs. Moreover, it is important to establish processes for the ongoing maintenance of test items, including ensuring their alignment with curriculum learning outcomes in the event of a curriculum review, to secure the platform's long-term effectiveness and positive impact on educational practices (OECD, 2023<sup>[38]</sup>).

Given the time, human and financial resources involved, the development of the “new” curriculum outputs – namely, a suite of digital curriculum resources – should be fully integrated into Moldova's curriculum review cycle and action plan. This integration would help ensure their systematic revision during future curriculum reviews and maintain their alignment with curriculum learning outcomes, as well as with pedagogical and assessment guidelines.

## How should the curriculum review cycle be planned and operationalised?

### ***While some countries seem to favour ad hoc curriculum reviews, many have increasingly adopted more planned, cyclical approaches***

The findings from Education 2030/40 show that countries operationalise their curriculum reviews differently. Some countries conduct their curriculum reviews on an ad hoc basis, for example following a change in government or in response to an external “shock” such as poor performance in an international student assessment such as PISA (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>; Lingard, 2021<sup>[39]</sup>). Such an “**ad hoc curriculum review**” is conducted when the need arises, without a fixed interval. Here lies one of its main advantages in that it allows for a rapid response to new demands or identified needs. It also signals responsiveness of the system and can be an effective means for making modifications in specific curriculum areas or subjects. However, frequent ad hoc changes may have negative consequences, including reform fatigue, reduced teacher engagement and a lack of policy coherence (e.g. misalignment of the curriculum with student assessments).

While some countries conduct reviews on an ad hoc basis, an increasing number of countries and jurisdictions have moved towards more planned and cyclical approaches to curriculum review (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>). A “**cyclical curriculum review**” is conducted at regular, predefined intervals. Although this approach may be less responsive to immediate needs, it offers several advantages. A planned review cycle allows for sufficient time to prepare the review process, which can support cost-efficiency, stakeholder engagement and stronger policy alignment. It also provides time for the careful redesign or updating of curriculum resources, as well as for piloting before full-scale implementation. In recognition of these advantages, the MoER has indicated its intent to move away from an ad hoc approach to curriculum review to one that is planned and cyclical in nature.

### ***Planned, cyclical approaches to curriculum review tend to follow a series of common steps***

Data from 17 OECD member countries and jurisdictions, as well as 7 non-member countries, show that curriculum review cycles vary significantly (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>). As illustrated in Table 2.3., the duration and steps involved in the review process differ across countries and jurisdictions. Despite this variation, five overarching steps are commonly observed in curriculum review processes: analysis and planning; redesign; preparation; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation.

**Table 2.3. Cyclical approaches to curriculum review in selected jurisdictions**

Country/ jurisdiction	Frequency of major curriculum review	Steps in the review process
Chile	Every 6-12 years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Political consensus</li> <li>2. Design</li> <li>3. Public consultation</li> <li>4. Design evaluation</li> <li>5. Dissemination and curricular implementation</li> <li>6. Monitoring and evaluation</li> </ol>
Hungary	Every 5 years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Government decision</li> <li>2. Analysis and evaluation</li> <li>3. Design</li> <li>4. Elaborate modifications and design evaluation</li> <li>5. Formulate and release draft</li> <li>6. Public consultation</li> <li>7. Review and approval</li> <li>8. Codification and publication</li> </ol>
Lithuania	Every 10-12 years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Government decision</li> <li>2. Developing a vision</li> <li>3. Consultations with stakeholders on the vision</li> <li>4. Development of curriculum</li> <li>5. Piloting and amendment</li> <li>6. Consultations with stakeholders on the vision</li> <li>7. Training of teachers</li> <li>8. Formal approval by the Minister</li> </ol>
Poland	As necessary / when appropriate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Analyse existing curriculum and relevant data</li> <li>2. Launch debate on curricular and organisational changes</li> <li>3. Experts develop specific subject core-curricula</li> <li>4. Social pre-counselling, analysis of discussion results by experts</li> <li>5. Revised draft</li> <li>6. Approval by ministry of education</li> <li>7. Inter-ministerial and public consultations</li> <li>8. Revision</li> <li>9. Review by legislative institutions</li> <li>10. Signature by minister</li> </ol>
Quebec (Canada)	Every 15 years, with adjustments made as necessary/appropriate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Public consultation</li> <li>2. Adoption of a policy statement</li> <li>3. Legislative and regulatory changes</li> <li>4. Development of a programme development framework</li> <li>5. Drafting of programmes</li> <li>6. Implementation of the reform</li> <li>7. Training and support</li> </ol>

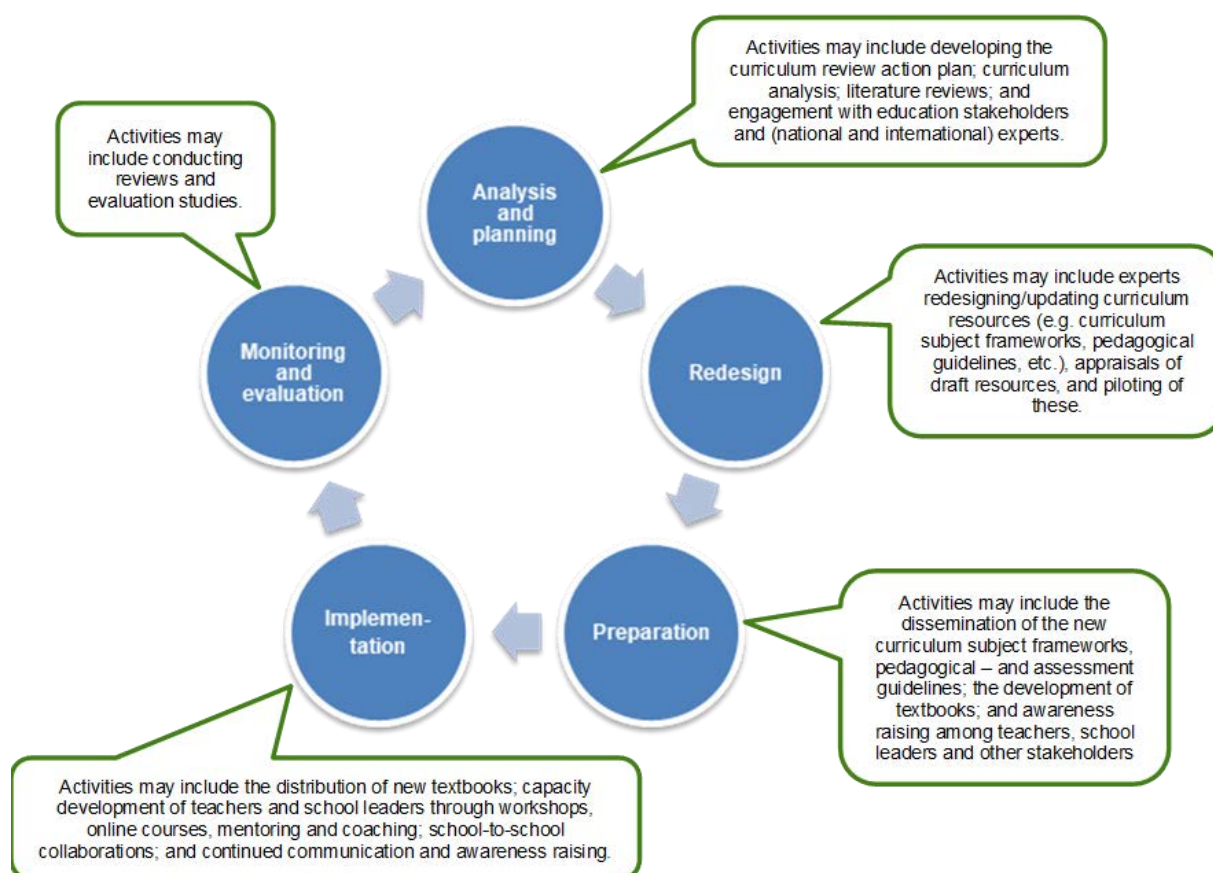
Source: Data derived from the OECD 2030/40 Policy Questionnaire on Curriculum Redesign (2020<sup>[10]</sup>), item 2.1.1, <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934195017>.

***Previous curriculum reviews have not always provided sufficient time and resources for curriculum analysis and planning, redesign, preparation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation***

As mentioned above, the MoER aims to move away from an ad hoc curriculum review approach to one that is planned and cyclical in nature. It may look towards the above-mentioned main steps or phases for shaping its curriculum review cycle. Regardless of how the different phases are defined, Moldova's curriculum review cycle should provide ample time and other resources for activities that support curriculum analysis and planning, redesign, preparation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

Past curriculum reviews have not consistently done so. For example, the previous review launched in 2017 concentrated heavily on the redesign of the curriculum, with limited attention paid to the analysis and planning, implementation, and particularly monitoring and evaluation phases. All subjects were reviewed without piloting, which limited the opportunity to test and refine the new curriculum prior to full implementation. Implementation was further hindered by significant delays in textbook development. Evidence also indicates that schools received limited support during the implementation phase, partly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dumbraveanu, 2022<sup>[33]</sup>; Vivdici, 2023<sup>[35]</sup>; Casap, Midari and Gonta, 2022<sup>[40]</sup>). Moreover, investments in monitoring and evaluation were minimal, preventing timely adjustments and limiting the availability of data to inform planning. This lack of evidence also posed challenges for the MoER and CWG in preparing for the current curriculum review. Therefore, Moldova should ensure that both current and future curriculum review cycles provide ample time and other resources for activities that support analysis and planning, redesign of the curriculum, its implementation (which calls for the necessary preparations), and monitoring and evaluation. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of possible activities associated with each phase. Building on lessons from past experience, the following text offers additional guidance to the MoER and CWG for defining and operationalising these phases.

Figure 2.1. Five main steps of the review process



Source: Developed by the authors of this report.

### ***Moldova's current curriculum review lacks a costed action plan that covers the entire curriculum review***

As outlined above, a critical first step in the analysis and planning phase is for the MoER to define the overarching goal and key purpose(s) of the curriculum review. These provide the foundation for developing, and subsequently implementing, and monitoring and evaluating a coherent curriculum review action plan. A well-designed and clearly communicated action plan can guide all curriculum review activities and support the monitoring of progress towards achieving the defined review purposes and milestones. To be effective, the plan should clearly set out all key activities to be undertaken throughout the curriculum review cycle. It should also account for the necessary time, equipment, facilities, and financial and human resources (Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>).

The evidence suggests action planning is an area for improvement for Moldova's current curriculum review, however. The action plan of the current curriculum review is not costed and primarily concerns the redesign of the curriculum and does not address curriculum implementation and monitoring and evaluation (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2024<sup>[11]</sup>). While the OECD team learned of different plans and initiatives to support the implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum, these were not consolidated into a coherent action plan.

The absence of a coherent action plan covering the full curriculum review cycle presents several challenges. These include the potential duplication of efforts, gaps in implementation, inefficient use or misallocation of resources, and a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of implementation partners and other education stakeholders (Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). Moreover, without such a plan, the reform risks becoming misaligned with the curriculum review purposes – an issue that may have affected Moldova’s current curriculum review. For instance, while finalising this paper, the OECD team became aware of a pilot initiative to develop and trial an integrated science curriculum for lower secondary grades 5 to 7, while maintaining the existing (non-integrated) curriculum for grades 8 and 9. It was not clear to the OECD team how this initiative aligned with the stated review purposes (see Box 1.2).

In sum, it is recommended that for the current and future curriculum reviews, Moldova develops a costed action plan that covers the whole curriculum review cycle. This action plan should be based on clearly defined review purposes and describe all activities to be undertaken throughout the review cycle. The review purposes can serve as a basis for prioritising activities within the plan and for identifying those that could be deferred or excluded.

### ***Expert consultations support the redesign of curriculum documents***

While the proposed sequencing of the curriculum review by levels of education would support the MoER and the curriculum review body proposed in this paper (see below), in planning, implementing and quality-assuring the redesign process, it remains important to allocate adequate time and other resources to the redesign of the curriculum. This is particularly relevant given Moldova’s current limited capacity in this area, which will require time to strengthen.

Nevertheless, Moldova can build on several strengths in curriculum design. These include good practices from the current curriculum review, such as the use of expert consultations during the drafting of curriculum documents and their engagement in the piloting of these resources. These expert consultations should be continued in future redesign phases to ensure Moldova’s teachers, teacher trainers and other stakeholders have an opportunity to provide feedback. Beyond enhancing the quality and user friendliness of the curriculum – both of which have posed challenges in Moldova in the past – the active involvement of teachers and other stakeholders can help build broader support for the curriculum review process (see below) (Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>; Van den Akker, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>; Nieveen et al., 2022<sup>[42]</sup>).

### ***The quality assurance of new textbooks has received insufficient attention in the past***

As noted above, Moldova has experienced the negative consequences of insufficient attention to textbook quality assurance. During interviews, the OECD team frequently heard concerns regarding the quality of Moldova’s textbooks. These concerns included poor alignment with subject curriculum frameworks and an overly theoretical approach – issues that may reflect broader quality challenges identified in the curriculum resources.

OECDs work on curriculum design and implementation – notably Education 2030/40, shows different approaches to textbook development across countries (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[43]</sup>). Governments support both public and private textbook development, depending on the country context. While some countries adopt a more decentralised approach to textbook development, quality assurance and procurement – granting autonomy to local authorities or schools, others adopt a more centralised approach with the government playing a dominant role in these processes. Countries such as Greece, Japan and Moldova fall into the latter category. In Japan, textbooks are developed by private textbook publishers but must undergo a rigorous approval process administered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The Textbook Authorization and Research Council evaluates submissions to ensure compliance with national curriculum guidelines. The Council prepares an assessment report, which is submitted to the Minister for examination and authorisation (OECD, 2018<sup>[44]</sup>).

Moldova's approach to textbook development shares some similarities with that of Japan, particularly in its efforts to regulate private textbook publishers and promote quality and transparency through a competitive selection process that is managed by the MoER. However, unlike Japan, Moldova has a much smaller domestic market of textbook developers and publishers, which limits competition. Moreover, interviews with education stakeholders and findings from recent studies point to limited experience and capacity among textbook developers and publishers in Moldova as a contributing factor to concerns about textbook quality, as mentioned earlier (UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>; Hadîrcă and Vivdici, 2021<sup>[45]</sup>).

The earlier mentioned efforts by the MoER to improve subject curriculum frameworks are expected to support textbook developers in aligning content more effectively with learning outcomes. However, these improvements may not fully address the underlying challenge of limited capacity among textbook developers and publishers in Moldova. One option the MoER may consider is opening the competitive process for textbook development and publishing to international service providers. These providers could operate independently or in partnership with national textbook developers and publishers through consortia. Such a measure could help broaden the pool of qualified textbook developers and publishers and improve the overall quality of curriculum resources.

Furthermore, the OECD team learned the MoER was considering leading the development of the textbook content of selected subjects, i.e. with the support of curriculum experts. It would (only) leave the publishing and distribution of these textbooks to private companies. The experiences and lessons learned of trialling this approach as part of the ongoing curriculum review could help in deciding whether to continue and possibly expand this (more centralised) approach to curriculum development in future curriculum review cycles.

In addition, the MoER should ensure a rigorous and transparent quality assurance process for all new draft textbooks. This may require reviewing and updating existing procedures for textbook approval to ensure they are sufficiently clear and support a robust review process. Moreover, international evidence highlights the importance of establishing an independent review panel, comprising curriculum experts, teachers, subject specialists and other relevant stakeholders, to support the quality assurance of curriculum resources (Glatthorn et al., 2018<sup>[16]</sup>). In recognition of this evidence and following the example of countries such as Japan, the MoER recently established the National Council for Textbook Selection. Composed of teachers and curriculum experts, the Council is tasked with reviewing textbooks for alignment with the curriculum and providing recommendations for approval to the MoER. This is a promising step toward strengthening textbook quality assurance in Moldova. However, the MoER should closely monitor the effectiveness of the Council and take additional measures as needed. These could include involving the curriculum review body proposed in this paper (see below) in the textbook review process or engaging international experts to support the Council's work by providing independent expert judgement.

### ***Moldova recognises the importance of ensuring student assessments and examinations are aligned to the new curriculum***

The MoER has recognised the importance of aligning student assessments with the learning outcomes promoted through the curriculum, and of maintaining this alignment following a curriculum review. This is crucial because assessments shape significantly what is taught in classrooms and are therefore central in determining whether a curriculum's stated aims are reflected in practice. International research shows that often one of the biggest obstacles to successful curriculum implementation is the failure to adapt assessments, in particular high-stakes exams, to reflect changed expectations for learner outcomes (Glatthorn et al., 2018<sup>[16]</sup>; Gouédard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>).

The MoER plans to broaden its use of assessment instruments to gain a clearer understanding of students' learning levels and to better align student assessment with the national curriculum. In addition to updating the national assessment guidelines, the MoER is also planning to develop an online student assessment platform. This platform is expected to offer significant benefits for both teachers and students. For example,

for teachers, it can enhance efficiency by providing immediate feedback, thereby allowing more targeted instructional planning and student support. For students, instant results and explanations can foster self-directed learning and reflection. The platform may also support a wider variety of question formats such as simulations and drag-and-drop tasks that better assess 21st-century competencies (OECD, 2023<sup>[38]</sup>; Foster and Piacentini, 2023<sup>[46]</sup>). When developing the planned online student assessment platform, the MoER should consider the inclusion of 21st-century competencies embedded in the curriculum (e.g. digital competence, critical and creative thinking), beyond easily measurable competencies.

Moldova should also review its examination framework to ensure alignment with the new curriculum. As well as reviewing the specifications of the nationally administered exams, Moldova might also want to consider introducing an internally assessed component to the graduation requirement in Grade 12. A number of OECD countries include portfolios or projects as part of a final certificate as a means of assessing a wider range of competencies and better reflecting the breadth of the curriculum. For example, in British Columbia, Canada, the K–12 Student Reporting Policy requires learners to reflect on their development of Core Competencies and to engage in goal setting. While the policy establishes provincial standards, schools are given flexibility in how they implement and document this reflection process. Students can also choose which competencies they reflect on. Singapore offers another example, where A-level students complete a General Paper and a Project Work component to develop their critical thinking, process, and communication skills, reflecting the curriculum's emphasis on knowledge skills (OECD, 2024<sup>[47]</sup>). Moldova may look towards these and other international examples when reviewing its examination framework.

The MoER also plans to introduce standardised, sample-based student assessments to strengthen national-level monitoring of learning outcomes. These assessments will enable Moldova to better monitor curriculum implementation through in-depth analysis of student assessment data. Insights into the competencies students have mastered, as well as those they find challenging, can inform current and future curriculum reviews and support timely adjustments to meet students' learning needs. For example, these findings could guide investments in teacher professional development and additional teaching and learning resources, including digital resources.

In light of the above, the MoER should consider developing a coherent national assessment framework that integrates various student assessment instruments and provides a structured approach to monitoring, evaluating and supporting student learning in relation to curriculum learning outcomes across the education system. A well-designed national assessment framework helps ensure that assessments are aligned with the intended learning outcomes of the curriculum. Clear and consistent communication about planned policy measures, as well as the purposes and appropriate uses of different types of assessment is essential. This is particularly important for key stakeholders such as teachers, school leaders, students and parents, to ensure that assessment practices contribute effectively to improvements in teaching and learning at the classroom, school and system levels (OECD, 2013<sup>[48]</sup>).

***The mentor system, a large-scale professional development initiative, has significant potential to help teachers improve their practice in line with the new curriculum***

Professional development of teachers is essential to the successful implementation of curricula. When aligned with a new curriculum, professional development can act as a key driver of change, enhancing teaching practices and improving student learning outcomes. Curriculum-based professional development may include a wide range of activities, such as participation in formal courses, collaborative working and learning within and between schools, and mentoring support (Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, 2020<sup>[49]</sup>).

Moldova has recently launched a large-scale professional development initiative focused on mentoring support. Beginning in the 2024/25 school year, approximately 1 000 mentors – practising teachers – were selected and trained to support their peers in innovating and enhancing teaching practices, integrating digital technologies, and developing both professional and personal competencies. Research evidence

shows the potential of mentoring programmes in helping teachers improve their practice and encouraging a focus on shared goals (OECD, 2019<sup>[50]</sup>; OECD, 2024<sup>[51]</sup>). To realise this potential in Moldova, it is essential that all mentors are qualified. However, several stakeholders raised concerns about inconsistent mentor quality. They noted that the rapid scale-up of the initiative may have limited the establishment of a rigorous process to clearly define mentor roles and apply consistent criteria during selection. Therefore, in addition to using research to monitor the effectiveness of the mentoring system in supporting curriculum implementation, Moldova should consider setting clear expectations for mentors and ensuring consistency in how mentors are selected. It could draw on examples from the United States (see Box 2.2).

### Box 2.2. Quality standards for mentors in the United States

In the federalised education system of the United States, various states have implemented mentoring standards to ensure high-quality mentoring practices in education. The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, for example, has outlined six standards that define the necessary skills and dispositions for effective mentoring. These standards aim to provide a shared vision and serve as a self-reflection tool for mentors. According to these standards, a proficient mentor should:

- Establish a learning-focused relationship with mentees
- Encourage mentees' reflective practices
- Emphasise professional growth and ethics for mentors
- Enhance mentees' knowledge and skills in curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Connect mentees with organisational systems and learning communities
- Promote equitable thinking, practices, and outcomes.

Each standard details effective mentor actions through multiple descriptors and examples of excellence in mentoring.

Similarly, the state of New York has developed a set of standards to guide the design and implementation of teacher mentoring programs. These standards are grouped into four categories: qualities and dispositions of an effective mentor, professional practice, knowledge of the mentee, and knowledge and skills of mentoring in practice. Each standard includes a definition and a set of performance indicators outlining the qualities and activities required to meet the standard.

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2020<sup>[52]</sup>), *Washington State Standards for Mentoring*, [https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/best/pubdocs/Standards\\_for\\_Mentoring\\_2020.pdf](https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/best/pubdocs/Standards_for_Mentoring_2020.pdf) (accessed on 5 March 2025); New York State Professional Standards and Practices Board (2022<sup>[53]</sup>), *Mentoring Standards and Program Guidance*, [https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/nysed-mentoring-standards-and-program-guidance\\_0523.pdf](https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/nysed-mentoring-standards-and-program-guidance_0523.pdf) (accessed on 5 March 2025).

Key criteria for selecting mentors include a demonstrated record of effectiveness in their own classrooms, a strong understanding of pedagogy and instructional practice, and the capacity and willingness to work with adults (OECD, 2024<sup>[51]</sup>). Additional criteria for consideration in the Moldovan context may include a deep understanding of the new curriculum, as well as practical skills in designing lessons and assessments aligned with subject curriculum framework learning outcomes.

In addition, while Moldova has provided initial short training to all mentors, various stakeholders consider this unlikely to have been sufficient to ensure that all mentors have the competencies required to support teacher in adapting their practices in line with the curriculum. Planning for continuous training opportunities and the development of self-learning resources is likely to be necessary to support the effectiveness of the mentoring system. Importantly, once the new curriculum is finalised, it will be crucial to provide all mentors with targeted training to ensure they have a deep understanding of its content, and the competencies needed to help teachers innovate their instruction and serve as leaders of curriculum change (see Box 2.3).

### Box 2.3. OECD Teaching Compass – Reimagining teachers as leaders of curriculum change

In 2025 the OECD Future of Education and Skills project (Education 2030/40) released the OECD Teaching Compass. This visionary framework aims to reimagine teaching as a proactive, purpose-driven and future-ready force for positive change – in particular, viewing teachers as curriculum change agents.

It's built on the pillars of teacher agency, competencies and well-being, aligning them with curriculum goals and system transformation, anchoring professional identity, sense of purpose, professional integrity and dignity at the centre. The Teaching Compass is a response to the persistent gaps in education reform is the misalignment between curriculum goals and teacher capacity/ system capacity. It aims to help education systems bridge this divide by guiding both teacher education reforms and in-service professional development, ensuring that teachers have the tools to bring modern curricula to life in their classrooms, not just in theory but in practice.

It is also important to recognise the influence of factors beyond the school, including parents and local communities, where students often engage in community service, project-based learning, and other experiential activities in modern curriculum. The Teaching Compass promotes an ecosystem approach to curriculum change, emphasising *shared responsibility* among all stakeholders to ensure that every student receives a quality and relevant education.

The Teaching Compass is grounded in research, and enriched through international collaboration, dialogue and co-creation among the Education 2030/40 project's diverse group of stakeholders. It is structured around the following key concepts:

- **Making the future we want a reality for both students and teachers:** Clarifying a shared vision and purpose, aligning education with collective aspirations for the future.
- **Anchoring the Compass:** Navigating change without losing focus - grounding teaching practices in a strong professional identity and clear ethical values that guide educators through complexity, supporting improved student learning and well-being.
- **Teacher agency to lead curriculum change:** Empowering educators with the autonomy, confidence and capabilities necessary to initiate and sustain meaningful innovation and transformation in education.
- **Teacher competencies for navigating complexity:** Cultivating critical competencies and adaptive skills that enable educators to effectively manage complexity, uncertainty and continuous change in educational environments.
- **Teacher well-being for thriving professionals:** Promoting comprehensive well-being strategies to ensure that teachers flourish personally and professionally, sustaining their capacity to educate, inspire and engage students.
- **Teachers as integral to a learning ecosystem for collective impact:** Positioning educators within collaborative networks and partnerships that foster collective responsibility, mutual learning, and systemic educational improvement.

Source: OECD (2025<sup>[54]</sup>), "OECD Teaching Compass: Reimagining teachers as agents of curriculum changes", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 123, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/8297a24a-en>.

### ***The MoER has taken several measures to strengthen curriculum monitoring and evaluation, which could be sustained and built on in future curriculum review cycles***

Countries that adopt an evidence-informed approach to curriculum redesign and implementation are more likely to achieve the intended impact on student outcomes (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>). As mentioned earlier, careful monitoring of implementation enables timely adjustments where necessary and informs the planning of future curriculum reviews. The MoER recognised that previous curriculum reviews had lacked adequate monitoring and evaluation of implementation. To address this, it committed to strengthening monitoring and evaluation processes, including the development of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework. This framework is intended to guide the tracking of progress in implementing the new curriculum and conducting evaluation studies. Additionally, the MoER has expanded the mandate of National Agency for Curriculum and Evaluation (NACE) to include broader responsibilities for curriculum monitoring and evaluation, including the development and administration of the standardised, sample-based student assessments mentioned earlier. In line with recommendations from a recent OECD paper (2023<sup>[14]</sup>), NACE has been tasked with conducting in-depth analyses of student assessment data. These

analyses are expected to inform current and future curriculum reviews and support timely adjustments in response to students' learning needs.

These measures for strengthening curriculum monitoring and evaluation should be continued and built on in future curriculum review cycles.

***Initiating the monitoring of curriculum implementation early in the implementation phase can help identify good practices and enable timely adjustments***

In some OECD countries the different phases of the curriculum review cycles deliberately overlap, while in others they do not, or the overlap is minimal (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>). For example, in Estonia, Japan and Wales (United Kingdom) the monitoring of curriculum implementation started as soon as the new curriculum was rolled out (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>; Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). Moldova could consider adopting a similar approach by initiating the monitoring of curriculum implementation early in the implementation phase. Early tracking of progress can help identify both good practices and potential obstacles as they emerge. This enables a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by schools and teachers, thereby supporting the provision of timely and targeted support.

However, it is important to note that monitoring and evaluation serve multiple purposes throughout the entire curriculum review cycle. For instance, the piloting of curriculum resources during the design phase relies on robust evidence generated through monitoring. In addition, the continuous analysis of standardised student assessment data and findings from school evaluations contributes valuable insights. Together, these and other monitoring and evaluation activities generate evidence to support improvements at the classroom, school, and system levels, as well as to inform future curriculum review cycles.

## What could be the duration of the review cycle?

***Evidence from 24 countries showed an average curriculum review lasts 9.5 years, however there are considerable differences among countries***

The pace and duration of a curriculum review (cycle) determine how the implementation process unfolds. A variety of factors can influence decisions regarding the length of a curriculum review. These include national culture (e.g. uncertainty avoidance, long term-orientation) (Morena and Calvan, 2019<sup>[55]</sup>; Hofstede, 2011<sup>[56]</sup>), political factors (e.g. political short-termism) (OECD, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>; Van den Akker, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>) and the systems' capacity for curriculum design and implementation, including teachers' skills for realising the desired curriculum changes (Gouëdard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[57]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>). Data collected from 17 OECD member countries and jurisdictions, along with 7 non-member countries, through the OECD Education 2030/40 project, show that the average duration of a curriculum review is approximately 9.5 years (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>). However, this average masks significant variation across countries and jurisdictions (see Table 2.3.).

***While Moldova on average started a new curriculum review once every seven years, it may consider lengthening this period for future curriculum review cycles***

In 2024, Moldova initiated its fifth curriculum review, having completed four previous reviews over a span of 28 years (between 1996 and 2024). These reviews varied in terms of complexity and the scale of curriculum changes, resulting in an average curriculum review of approximately seven years. While initiating a new curriculum review every seven years is not uncommon among OECD countries, Moldova may wish to consider extending the duration of future curriculum review cycles.

The system's limited capacity for curriculum design and implementation underscores the importance of allocating sufficient time and resources to each phase of Moldova's curriculum review cycle. As noted above, previous curriculum reviews have not always devoted adequate time and resources to all phases. This observation was corroborated by several stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team, who emphasised the need for additional time to redesign and quality-assure subject curriculum frameworks and other curriculum resources. While the proposed sequencing of the review by levels of education could reduce the demands associated with the redesign and quality assurance of curriculum resources (compared to an integrated curriculum review approach), the overall system capacity for developing high-quality curriculum resources remains limited. Capacity development of curriculum developers should be prioritised and factored into the curriculum review timeline.

Furthermore, international evidence underscores the importance of investing in preparatory activities to support effective curriculum implementation. Data collected by the OECD from 24 countries and jurisdictions show that, on average, more than three years are allocated to such activities, including the dissemination of new subject curriculum frameworks, pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines, and the development of textbooks (OECD, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>). International evidence indicates that preparatory activities can begin during the curriculum redesign phase and continue into the implementation phase, thereby facilitating an effective and timely roll-out of the new curriculum. That said, the MoER should allocate adequate time and resources to preparatory activities in future curriculum review cycles. One critical activity is the development and dissemination of textbooks, which during the previous curriculum review took significantly longer than anticipated and delayed the grade-by-grade roll-out of the curriculum.

The MoER should ensure that future curriculum reviews allocate sufficient time for the implementation phase, which has not always been the case in the past. This research evidence shows that improvements in teaching and student learning take time, and that schools may initially experience an "implementation dip" (Cooper, Bumbarger and Moore, 2015<sup>[58]</sup>; Hopkins et al., 2013<sup>[59]</sup>). Typically, modest gains may be observed in the first year of implementation, followed by a decline over the next two to four years – the "implementation dip" – before improvements are consolidated and sustained over a five- to eight-year period. Therefore, allocating sufficient time for curriculum implementation is essential.

In addition, the MoER may consider varying the duration of implementation by education level, especially if it continues to use a grade-by-grade roll-out approach as in previous reviews. For example, the grade-by-grade roll-out of the revised curriculum at the lower secondary level (Grades 5 to 9) would span five years, whereas at the upper secondary level (Grades 10 to 12), it would require only three years.

As noted earlier, the MoER should also consider initiating curriculum monitoring activities shortly after implementation begins. This would enable timely course corrections, where necessary. However, determining whether such adjustments yield the intended effects on teaching practices and student learning requires time.

In sum, given Moldova's currently limited capacity for curriculum design and implementation, the MoER may consider establishing a curriculum review cycle of approximately 10 years. However, a flexible approach is advisable. A slightly longer cycle may be appropriate for lower secondary education compared to primary and upper secondary levels if a grade-by-grade curriculum roll-out is maintained. As Moldova's capacity for curriculum design and implementation improves over time, it may become feasible to shorten the review cycle if desired. Furthermore, one can argue that for a curriculum review that is more complex and entails large-scale curriculum changes a longer review cycle may be needed to successfully complete each of the review phases. During this period, ad hoc, subject-based curriculum reviews could allow for responding to immediate needs, as mentioned earlier.

## How should the review process be governed?

### ***Education governance structures may be more or less conducive to curriculum review and can evolve over time to respond to changing needs and national contexts***

Education systems are among the most complex public sector organisations, making reform and innovation particularly challenging. The inherent characteristics of the sector, including a wide range of stakeholders, differing time horizons and the unpredictability and limited measurability of outcomes distinguish it from other public services (Cerna, 2014<sup>[60]</sup>). Education governance structures may also be more or less conducive to curriculum review. These structures typically evolve over time in response to changing needs and national contexts (Gouédard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). Governance structures that facilitate a curriculum review typically demonstrate strong government leadership, which defines the overall vision, goals and purposes of the review. Additionally, they involve effective and efficient coordination among central government, specialised agencies responsible for curriculum or relevant bodies within broader agencies, expert groups, and other stakeholders actively engaged in the curriculum review process (Nieveen et al., 2022<sup>[42]</sup>). Governance structures that leverage existing system capacity for curriculum design and implementation – and invest in its continuous development – are also more likely to support successful curriculum reviews. Stakeholder engagement plays a critical role in mobilising available curriculum expertise within the system and in fostering a policy environment conducive to change (OECD, 2024<sup>[17]</sup>).

### ***In some countries and jurisdictions ministries of education play a leading role in the curriculum review process...***

In systems such as England, France, Hungary, Japan, Portugal and Singapore, the curriculum review process is led by ministries of education (Department of Education, 2024<sup>[13]</sup>; OECD, 2023<sup>[61]</sup>; OECD, 2018<sup>[44]</sup>; Gouédard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). For example, in Singapore the Ministry of Education is the main agent for curriculum review at the national level and has a dedicated curriculum planning and development division. The Ministry leads the design of the curriculum, directs all related policies, orchestrates consultation and communication, and closely monitors implementation and results.

Ministries of education often draw on the expertise of external groups to support specific aspects of the review process. In some cases, they delegate tasks related to the analysis and planning of the review or curriculum design to temporary expert groups or advisory committees. In England, for instance, the government recently appointed an independent panel of experts to review the national curriculum. In parallel, it launched a broader Curriculum and Assessment Review, encouraging contributions through an online platform and actively seeking input from children and young people, parents, teachers, educational experts, schools and employers. To ensure transparency and rigour, the review was framed by clearly defined aims, terms of reference and guiding principles (Department of Education, 2024<sup>[62]</sup>). In Moldova, the MoER has established a similar expert group, the Curriculum Working Group (CWG), to support the current curriculum review process, particularly the analysis and planning, and redesign of the curriculum.

### ***... while in other countries and jurisdictions ministries of education give responsibilities for curriculum review to specialised agencies***

In countries such as Ireland, Finland, Latvia and Sweden, governments have established specialised agencies that often operate at arm's length and lead all or part of the curriculum review process. One example is Ireland's National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), a statutory body under the Department of Education governed by a broad representation of stakeholders. The NCCA is responsible for leading the analysis and planning, and redesign of the curriculum. While it is not responsible for curriculum implementation, it supports educational change in early childhood settings and schools by

developing various support materials. These include examples of practice, samples of student work, online toolkits, and curriculum planning resources.

Another example is Sweden, where the National Agency for Education carries out curriculum redesign as part of a broader organisational mandate. Its responsibilities include developing school improvement programmes, delivering in-service teacher training, distributing grants, organising school leader training and administering large-scale student assessments. The agency as such plays a central role in supporting schools with curriculum implementation (Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d.<sup>[63]</sup>).

### ***Establishing a curriculum review body can strengthen a system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation***

The option of establishing a specialised, semi-autonomous curriculum agency in Moldova was proposed in earlier reviews by the OECD (2003<sup>[64]</sup>) and the World Bank (2005<sup>[65]</sup>), nearly two decades ago. At the time, this recommendation was not pursued. However, there are several reasons why the MoER should consider establishing a specialised curriculum review body. First, the establishment of such a body could allow for consolidating and further developing the available expertise for curriculum design in the country – thereby directly responding to the call for action of the Education Development Strategy 2030. The proposal of this paper that Moldova considers sequencing curriculum reviews by levels of education, and make such reviews a regular, planned function of the education system, makes the creation of a permanent body for curriculum expertise all the more important. Second, establishing a specialised body at arm's length from the MoER, with a (semi-) autonomous and neutral role, could be beneficial given the often complex and politically sensitive nature of curriculum review (Gouédard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>; Nieveen et al., 2022<sup>[42]</sup>). In the case of Moldova, this involves managing different stakeholder views. Third, establishing a specialised body with curriculum expertise could help strengthen the much-needed quality assurance of curriculum resources. The persistent lack of quality in curriculum resources has been noted across several curriculum reviews (Gremalschi, 2015<sup>[32]</sup>; UNICEF, 2019<sup>[15]</sup>; Dumbraveanu, 2022<sup>[33]</sup>).

Within this institutional set up, the MoER would retain responsibility for the overall vision, goals and purposes of a review, while the proposed body's mandate would focus on analysis, curriculum redesign and technical input to the planning of any changes. A key activity during the analysis and planning phase is the development of a curriculum review action plan. The proposed body could support the MoER in preparing this plan, although MoER's leadership would remain essential, particularly given its central role in implementation.

Establishing a separate agency would, however, entail significant costs. Therefore, the MoER could consider creating a dedicated body (e.g. centre or unit) within a larger existing agency. Two potential host agencies stand out, both of which were mentioned by several stakeholders during interviews conducted by the OECD team. One option is the recently established National Institute for Education and Leadership. The Institute's mandate includes managing and modernising Moldova's teacher professional development programmes, implementing the earlier mentioned mentoring system, and conducting educational research (OECD, 2023<sup>[14]</sup>). Locating the proposed body within the Institute could strengthen the link between curriculum development and teacher professional development (Lysaght et al., 2019<sup>[66]</sup>; Cordingley, 2019<sup>[67]</sup>). A potential disadvantage of this option is the separation of responsibilities for curriculum and assessment policy, which leads to a second option for Moldova to consider.

Another option is NACE. The NACE is responsible for the design, development and implementation of national student assessments and examinations. Its mandate for curriculum monitoring and evaluation has recently been expanded. The OECD team also learned that NACE is expected to play a key role in updating assessment guidelines. Establishing the proposed curriculum body within NACE could help strengthen the alignment between curriculum and assessment policy, which is vital for successful curriculum implementation (Glatthorn et al., 2018<sup>[16]</sup>).

Whichever host agency is selected, it will be essential for Moldova to invest in strengthening the organisational capacity of the curriculum review body, in line with the Education Development Strategy 2030's call to enhance the system's capacity for curriculum design. This may involve establishing a dedicated core team and investing in their professional development. Additionally, the curriculum review body could benefit significantly from networking and forming partnerships with similar agencies in EU and OECD member countries to support its capacity development.

### ***Stakeholder engagement is central to the success of a curriculum review***

International examples of successful curriculum reviews highlight the importance of engaging teachers, students, parents and other education stakeholders in the review process. This includes communicating *why* the curriculum should be changed (i.e. the rationale) and *what* is to be achieved (i.e. the purpose(s) of the review). This is important to help enhance their understanding of the desired curriculum changes and gain their support for the curriculum review (Gouédard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[11]</sup>). On the other hand, a lack of stakeholder involvement can result in groups feeling left out. Especially when teachers and school leaders are not sufficiently included, this can hinder the curriculum review or may even lead to resistance. Furthermore, the engagement of teachers, school leaders, curriculum experts and other education stakeholders could, as mentioned earlier, help ensure the quality and user friendliness of curriculum resources (Nieveen et al., 2022<sup>[42]</sup>; Gouédard et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). Therefore, many countries and jurisdictions engage education stakeholders throughout the curriculum review cycle.

Moldova has in past reviews engaged stakeholders in the curriculum review process, though in varying degrees. The curriculum review that was started in 1996 was considered a good example of strong stakeholder engagement throughout the review. This included early consultations to help define the purposes of the review, the redesign of the curriculum and its implementation (World Bank, 2005<sup>[65]</sup>). While stakeholder engagement may not have been equally strong in some of the curriculum reviews that followed, the MoER and CWG have demonstrated a clear commitment to a strong stakeholder process in the current curriculum review. This is important as Moldova's teachers, school leaders, curriculum experts and other education stakeholders are central to the system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation.

In addition, as in many systems, such as Australia, England (United Kingdom), Estonia and the Netherlands, the MoER and CWG have proactively engaged international experts to inform the curriculum review and to complement the national pool of curriculum expertise (OECD, 2023<sup>[14]</sup>). These are good practices that should be continued and embedded in future curriculum review cycles and action plans.

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# **3**

## **A proposal for a curriculum review cycle fitting the Moldovan context**

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This chapter summarises the analysis presented in Section 2. It presents a proposal for a curriculum review cycle that reflects good practice internationally and fits the Moldovan context. Drawing on international research and experience, as well as Moldova's own efforts in curriculum reform it addresses six key questions for designing and implementing a curriculum review. To illustrate this, a basic example of a curriculum review cycle at the primary education level is included.

The proposal will also be of interest to other countries seeking to adopt a more planned and cyclical approach to curriculum review.

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## A proposal for a curriculum review cycle fitting the Moldovan context

This chapter presents a proposal for a curriculum review cycle that reflects good practice internationally and fits the Moldovan context. The proposal aims to provide Moldova with guidance and practical considerations for adopting a planned and cyclical approach to curriculum review. To illustrate this, a basic example of a curriculum review cycle at the primary education level is included (see Box 3.1). The proposal was presented to the MoER and CWG, allowing for validation and refinement based on their feedback.

### *Defining the key purpose(s) of a curriculum review*

- **The MoER should clearly define and prioritise the key purpose(s) of the curriculum review.** This is essential to ensure focus in the curriculum review process and to align ambitions with the education system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation.
- **The MoER should consider making the improvement of curriculum resource quality a key purpose of the current curriculum review.** Enhancing the rigour, focus, coherence and clarity of subject curriculum frameworks and other curriculum resources could significantly increase their quality and usability, thereby supporting more effective teaching and learning.
- **The MoER should ensure strong leadership to determine and prioritise the purpose(s) of the review.** While evidence from monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation and stakeholder views may suggest the need for pursuing multiple curriculum changes, strong leadership by the MoER is crucial to decide which purpose(s) to prioritise.

### *Determining the scale of curriculum reviews*

- **Moldova should consider adopting a sequential approach to curriculum review by levels of education.** This could make the review less challenging to manage (than when using an integrated approach to curriculum review) and support stronger quality assurance of curriculum resources. It would also allow Moldova to spread opportunity costs over a longer period – an important consideration given the country's limited budget and capacity for curriculum design and implementation.
- **Ad hoc, subject-based curriculum reviews could still be allowed when necessary.** As Moldova strengthens its curriculum monitoring and evaluation, emerging evidence may justify timely, targeted revisions to specific subjects without waiting for the full review cycle to conclude.

### *Clarifying the main outputs of the review*

- **Moldova should define the main curriculum outputs at the start of the review cycle to focus and plan the review effort.** These may include the National Curriculum Reference Framework, subject curriculum frameworks, non-mandatory pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines, and the planned digital curriculum resources.
- **For the current curriculum review, Moldova should – as planned – simplify and clarify the subject curriculum frameworks, and develop separate, non-mandatory pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines.** This should include reviewing and consolidating existing assessment guidance documents into a single, coherent document aligned with the revised curriculum.
- **Digital curriculum resources should form an integrated part of Moldova's curriculum review cycle and action plan.** This would help ensure their revision in future curriculum reviews and maintain their alignment with the curriculum.

### ***Planning and operationalising the curriculum review cycle***

- **Moldova's curriculum review cycle should ensure ample time and other resources for activities that support curriculum analysis and planning, redesign, preparation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.** Past curriculum reviews have sometimes lacked adequate resources for these phases.
- **Moldova should develop a costed action plan covering the entire curriculum review cycle to guide the process and monitor progress against review purposes and milestones.** This plan should be based on well-defined review purposes that determine the initiatives and activities to be included.
- **Moldova should continue to engage in expert consultations for the redesign of curriculum resources and their piloting in future curriculum review cycles.** This will ensure that teachers and other stakeholders have opportunities to provide feedback on draft curriculum resources, enhancing their quality and user friendliness.
- **The MoER should ensure a rigorous quality assurance process for all new draft textbooks.** This may require reviewing and updating existing procedures for textbook approval to ensure these support a robust review process. The establishment of the National Council for Textbook Selection is a promising step toward strengthening textbook quality assurance in Moldova. The MoER should closely monitor the effectiveness of the Council and take additional measures as needed.

The MoER is also considering leading the development of the textbook content of selected subjects, i.e. with the support of curriculum experts. Trialling this approach could help in deciding whether to continue and possibly expand this (more centralized) approach to curriculum development in future curriculum review cycles.

Additionally, the MoER may consider opening the competitive process for textbook development and publishing to international service providers. This could broaden the pool of qualified developers and publishers and contribute to enhancing the overall quality of curriculum resources.

- **The MoER should ensure student assessments and examinations are aligned with the curriculum.** It should consider:
  - **Developing and implementing the planned online student assessment platform, while considering the inclusion of 21st-century competencies embedded in the curriculum (e.g. digital competence, critical and creative thinking), beyond easily measurable competencies.**
  - **Investing in capacity development and communication activities, targeting teachers, school leaders, students and parents, to promote the effective use of the online assessment platform.**
  - **Developing and disseminating a coherent national assessment framework that integrates the various assessment instruments and ensures their alignment with the intended learning outcomes of the curriculum.**
- **Curriculum-based professional development initiatives should form the core of the implementation phase.** The mentor system, a large-scale professional development initiative, has significant potential to help teachers improve their practice in line with the new curriculum. To address concerns regarding consistency of mentor quality, Moldova should consider:
  - **Establishing clear expectations for mentors and ensuring a consistent selection process.**
  - **Providing continuous training and self-learning resources to ensure all mentors have a deep understanding of the new curriculum and possess the skills to support teachers in adapting their teaching.**

- **The measures MoER has taken to strengthen curriculum monitoring and evaluation should be sustained and built upon in future curriculum review cycles.**
- While recognizing that monitoring and evaluation serve multiple purposes – throughout the entire curriculum review cycle, **Moldova should initiate the monitoring of curriculum implementation early in the implementation phase to identify good practices and enable timely adjustments.**

### ***Defining the length of the review cycle***

- **The MoER could consider establishing a curriculum review cycle lasting approximately 10 years.** However, a flexible approach is advisable. A slightly longer cycle may be appropriate for lower secondary education than for primary and upper secondary levels if a grade-by-grade curriculum roll-out is maintained. More complex and ambitious curriculum reviews may likewise warrant longer cycles. Ad hoc subject-based reviews could still help address immediate needs.

### ***Governance of the curriculum review***

- **The MoER should consider establishing a curriculum review body.** First, this could allow for consolidating and further developing the available curriculum expertise in the country – thereby directly responding to the call for action of the Education Development Strategy 2030. Second, having a specialised body at an arm's length of the MoER to fulfil a (semi-) autonomous, “neutral” role may be helpful considering the often conflictual and political arena of curriculum review. Third, such a specialised body may help strengthen the much-needed quality assurance of curriculum resources.

Under this arrangement, the MoER would retain responsibility for the overall vision, goals and purposes of the review, and its implementation. The proposed body's mandate would focus on analysis, curriculum redesign and support for planning. The body could be hosted by NACE or the National Institute for Education and Leadership.

- **Moldova should continue a strong stakeholder process in future curriculum reviews.** This is important as Moldova's teachers, school leaders, curriculum experts and other education stakeholders are central to the system's capacity for curriculum design and implementation. Engaging stakeholders, ideally early on, can help enhance their understanding of the desired curriculum changes and support for the curriculum review process.

### Box 3.1. An illustrative example of a curriculum review cycle at the primary education level

It is recommended that Moldova adopts a sequential approach to curriculum review by level of education. This could make the review less challenging to manage (than when using an integrated approach to curriculum review) and support stronger quality assurance of curriculum resources. It would also allow spreading opportunity costs over a longer period – an important consideration given Moldova’s limited budget and capacity for curriculum design and implementation. A sequential approach would involve launching three separate curriculum review cycles – one each for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education – on a staggered basis. For example, the review cycle for the primary education level could begin and be followed by the lower secondary education cycle several years later, which in turn could be followed by the upper secondary education cycle later.

Each curriculum review cycle would be evidence-informed, planned and cyclical in nature. It is suggested that the cycle span approximately 10 years, which would help to ensure ample time and other resources for each of the main phases of the review (analysis and planning, redesign, preparation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation). However, this indicative duration should be applied flexibly: for example, a slightly longer cycle may be appropriate for lower secondary education than for primary and upper secondary levels if a grade-by-grade curriculum roll-out approach is adopted.

The example below of a curriculum review cycle at the primary education level is aimed to illustrate what a curriculum review cycle could look like in practice. This example is illustrative and would require further adaptation depending on government priorities. For instance, Moldova may choose to begin implementation in Grade 1 with a limited number of subjects and phase in the remaining subjects in the subsequent year.

#### Phase 1: Analysis and planning

The analysis and planning phase could begin with a curriculum analysis, understood as a systematic process for examining and evaluating the curriculum’s intended goals and purposes, content, pedagogical approaches, assessment strategies and overall effectiveness. This analysis would draw on evidence from the ongoing monitoring of curriculum implementation and evaluation studies of the previous curriculum review, relevant national and international literature, and engagement with education stakeholders and experts. This analytical process, together with a series of stakeholder consultations, would support the proposed curriculum review body in identifying possible review purposes, expected curriculum outputs (e.g. resources), and in developing a costed curriculum review action plan covering the full duration of the review cycle.

While the proposed curriculum review body would play a central role during the analysis and planning phase, the MoER would retain responsibility for determining the overall vision, goals and purposes of the review, and for reviewing and endorsing the curriculum review action plan. This action plan is the key output of the analysis and planning phase and could be finalised within the first year of the cycle (Figure 3.1).

#### Phase 2: Curriculum redesign

In the curriculum redesign phase, the curriculum review body would lead the redesign and updating of all curriculum resources. These may include the National Curriculum Reference Framework, subject-specific curriculum frameworks, and non-mandatory pedagogical and assessment guidelines. Using accessible and user-friendly language is critical to support their effective use by teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders. The curriculum review body could continue the practice of engaging expert groups, such as subject working groups, that support the revision of subject curriculum frameworks and related pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines. The NACE would play a key role in updating the assessment guidelines. Draft curriculum resources would be reviewed by curriculum experts, teachers and selected stakeholders, and piloted in a sample of schools. Feedback from this piloting would inform subsequent revisions. As a final step in the curriculum redesign phase, the curriculum review body would review and endorse all draft curriculum resources. Endorsed resources would be submitted to the Minister for formal approval. Resources that are not endorsed would be subject to further revision.

The curriculum redesign phase is expected to last two to three years.

Figure 3.1. Example of a possible curriculum review cycle at the primary education level

Primary education				
Years	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
1	Analysis & planning	Analysis & planning	Analysis & planning	Analysis & planning
2	Redesign	Redesign	Redesign	Redesign
3	Redesign	Redesign	Redesign	Redesign
4	Preparation	Preparation	Redesign	Redesign
5	Implementation	Preparation	Preparation	Preparation
6	Implementation	Implementation	Preparation	Preparation
7	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation	Preparation
8	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation
9	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation
10	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation

Source: Developed by the authors of this report.

### Phase 3: Preparation for implementation

During the curriculum redesign phase, some preparative activities could already be initiated to lay the groundwork for the implementation of the curriculum. Preparative activities may include the dissemination of the subject curriculum frameworks, pedagogical guidelines and assessment guidelines. A key preparatory activity is the development and quality assurance of paper-based and digital textbooks. Sufficient time should be allocated for this.

Moreover, it will be essential to raise awareness among teachers, school leaders, students, parents and other education stakeholders regarding the curriculum review. Communication efforts could focus on the timeline, rationale and purposes of the review, and the nature of the curriculum changes. A further critical activity in the preparatory phase is the revision of student assessment and examination frameworks and resources to ensure continued alignment with the new curriculum. This work includes the planned development, and in future cycles, the updating of an online student assessment platform.

### Phase 4: Implementation

The implementation phase would focus on the grade-by-grade roll-out of the new curriculum and may include a continuation of some preparative activities. Curriculum-based professional development initiatives would form the core of the implementation phase. Key activities may include capacity development of teachers and school leaders through targeted workshops, online training modules, school-to-school collaborations and ongoing mentoring support provided through Moldova's newly established mentoring system. The implementation phase would also involve the distribution of new textbooks and sustained communication efforts to raise awareness and support among teachers, school leaders, students, parents and other education stakeholders.

The implementation phase is expected to last five to six years.

### Phase 5: Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring of curriculum implementation should begin early in the implementation phase to allow for identifying both effective practices and emerging challenges. Activities may include ongoing monitoring, reviews and evaluation studies. These should assess not only the extent to which the curriculum review purposes and student learning outcomes are being achieved, but also other important outcomes such as teacher well-being. In addition, these should examine implementation processes (e.g. the implementation and effectiveness of the mentoring system) to enable timely adjustments where necessary.

However, monitoring and evaluation serve multiple purposes throughout the entire curriculum review cycle. For instance, the continuous analysis of standardised student assessment data and findings from school evaluations provides valuable insights. Together, these and other monitoring and evaluation activities can inform improvements at classroom, school, and national levels, and support evidence-informed planning of future curriculum review cycles.

# Proposal for a Curriculum Review Cycle Fitting the Moldovan Context

This report provides Moldova with concrete guidance and practical considerations for transitioning from an ad hoc approach to a planned, cyclical curriculum review. Drawing on international research and experience, as well as Moldova's own efforts in curriculum reform, it addresses six key questions: what are the main purposes of the curriculum review, what is the scale of the review, what are the main curriculum outputs of the review, how should the curriculum review cycle be planned and operationalised, what could be the duration of the review cycle, and how should the review process be governed.

The report concludes with a proposal for a curriculum review cycle that reflects good practice internationally and is tailored to the Moldovan context. It will also be of interest to other countries seeking to adopt a more planned and cyclical approach to curriculum review.



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