

**Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe**  
**Survey on elementary school children parents' attitudes towards and views on**  
**parental participation in schools.**

Moldova

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

RM – Republic of Moldova

ME – Ministry of Education

PC – Parents' Council

**RESEARCH PURPOSE:** to investigate the level of involvement and school activism that parents manifest, to identify the opportunities created by the school and the support offered to parents for building a functional partnership; the school directors' attitude towards the parents' role and place, as well as their involvement in school life.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This project involved representatives from 10 Eastern European countries. In order for data to be comparable between the participant states, it was decided to employ two-stage sampling (urban-rural and distribution on regions). The parents of pupils from 30 gymnasia have filled a total of 1128 questionnaires. Depending on the number of pupils, 27 to 50 parents have been interviewed in each school. Also every school principal had to fill a questionnaire, in order to allow us to analyse by comparison the relationship between school and family through the parents' and the school managers' viewpoint. 30 managers have been interviewed.

Classified by residence environment, 46.7% of the parents are urban dwellers, while 53.3% reside in the countryside. Classified by region, 39.5% are from the South of the country, 34% from the Centre and 26.5% from the North. The gymnasia have been categorized according to capacity (up to 225 pupils – small, 226 to 450 pupils – mid-size, and over 450 pupils – large), in order to facilitate the understanding of the kind of institutions the children are studying in. Therefore, it has emerged that, of the interviewed parents' children, 69.1% go to small gymnasia, 21.9% frequent mid-size ones, and 9% study in large establishments.

Classified by gender, 52% of the interviewed parents' children were boys and 48% were girls. The average age of the children discussed with the parents was 10.6 years. Thus, the age of the children involved in the study was from 8 to 13 years. It is also noticeable that 1<sup>st</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> form pupils are not represented in this sample. This is rather good, because parents of 1<sup>st</sup> form pupils are still lacking the experience of active collaboration with school, while by the time of their children's graduation in the 9<sup>th</sup> form the parents may have become overly active in their collaboration with the school, and these phenomena have the potential of distorting the survey results. From among the interviewed parents, 70.5% were mothers, 13.5% -- fathers, 0.3% -- stepmothers, 0.1% -- stepfathers, and 15.7% -- other guardians (grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings, neighbours etc.). Unfortunately, there is no conclusive up-to-date country-wide information about the proportion of guardians among carers. This temporary or partial abandonment of children by parents is widespread and growing in RM, where in the last 10 years men and women have been leaving the country to work abroad.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Modern society increasingly appreciates the positive effects of an active participation by parents in school life. A large number of international studies and a smaller amount of local research have highlighted the extent to which the quality of parents-school interaction has a defining impact upon the quality of education. The recognition of the important role parents have in improving the children's school success has made educational authorities realise and support the necessity of forging stronger links between parents and school and promote them at public policy level as well. In the current context, these links are even more important than ever. Increasingly, the school's social mission goes further than the mere achievement of curriculum-defined pedagogical goals, since a large number of parents are far too preoccupied with family, professional, and social problems to be able to trace their children's evolution or to check the coherency between family and school education.

After analysing the **dimension of the parents' participation** in school life (all kind of participation), we have found that generally there are positive experiences and attitudes towards it. Traditionally group meetings and verbal messages from teachers to parents via children prevail over other forms of participation.

Analysing the answers to the question *How many times during the last school year a member of the family has been invited to school to meet the class or a group of parents, including group parents' assemblies?*, we have found the following replies: 2-3 times – 32.8%, more than 3 times – 61.3%. Asked

whether the parents have responded to these invitations by attending, the majority of parents (79.4%) have indicated that they did, every time. At the same time, school managers have indicated that during the last year they have asked the parents to school over 3 times, for meetings with the class or group meetings with other parents (including parents' assemblies), and the parents had come. Compared to group meetings, individual meetings with parents are used with much less regularity: during the year 68.6% parents have never been asked to individual meetings; the ones invited, 2 or 3 times, were summoned in connection with their children's behaviour problems; 1.4% parents do not recall whether they have been invited or not. The managers have provided essentially the same data.

The great majority of parents – 94.4% – assert themselves as capable and competent enough to take part in such meetings, group or individual, and 95.6% believe that it is their duty to go to such meetings, because, as 96.3% are convinced, this may help the children. School managers, who estimate these meetings as most valuable and useful, share this opinion.

Asked about communication regarding the children's progress – grades and other information received by the parents through the children or directly, about 70% of the parents said that they have received such information 2-3 or more times; the rest, 30%, received it once or don't recall ever receiving it. 20% of the managers claim that every year the parents are sent 2 or 3 times information about helping the child to study, about the school, its rules, lesson content etc. 40% of the managers said that they have sent out such information more than 3 times within the year (meaning administrative information (meetings scheduling, timetables: 27.8%; school results, grades: 22.2%), suggestions for parents: 19.4%; behaviour and discipline-related: 16.7%). At the same time, 59.3% of the parents have indicated that they have never received such information. Just 25.2% said they did receive it 2-3 or more than 3 times. This discrepancy might be caused either by the managers' tendency of presenting the situation in an overly positive manner, or by the communications not reaching the parents, for whatever reason. The survey's data show in the same time that parents from the urban area received such information more frequently than the parents from rural area (29,2% parents from the cities received information 2-3 times, or more than 3 times in comparison with 21,6% from the villages).

The parents have very seldom been sent informative school bulletins – 52.6% of the parents said they have never seen such information. Over 85% of those who did receive it have read it too; 82% believe the school ought to send such bulletins to the parents. Also just 50% of the managers have confirmed that the information had been sent, referring mainly to administrative notices (36.8%), extracurricular activities (26.3%), education and grades – 15.8% each. It is sad to find out that only 12 of the 30 managers involved in this research find that these bulletins were useful and welcome. According to the managers explanation the printing of the bulletins costs too much and the schools can't afford them. Other reasons mentioned by the directors are: they don't have special staff and enough time for this. Therefore, although the parents expect written information, including bulletins, not all managers realise their necessity, even today, in the era of information and Internet. 51.5% of the parents have never received any information from school concerning drug use, health issues, and violence. 15.8% have received such information once, 18.2% -- 2-3 times, 11.5% -- more than 3 times, while 3% parents are not

sure or don't recall whether they did. Over 80% of those who have received the information have read it every time, and 88.3% believe that the school ought to send such data to the parents. About 89.5% of the interviewed parents believe themselves able and competent enough to understand such data, and 95% consider it is their duty to read it, because thus they might be able to help their child.

Concerning the **support given to learning**, about 90% of the parents believe that the school ought to ask the family to help the child in making homework, and the managers share this opinion: 90% say that in every family there is somebody able to do this. Only 4.8% don't think so, and 3.5% don't expect there to be anyone. Asked whether it is the family's duty to help the children thus, 82.1% of the managers agreed that it is, and only 5% disagree. In more than 55% of cases children are helped by the mother to do their homework, in 18% of cases -- by somebody else, in 17% -- by nobody, and only in 8% of cases their fathers are helping. Thus, there are significant differences related to mother and father level of involvement in homework preparing. In the same time, the number of children that need help for homework preparing is very huge: according to the survey results, only 17% of children can do it alone, based on knowledge achieved at school.

Asked *What kind of difficulties does your child encounter in school?*, the parents have replied the following: learning difficulties – 28.5% of the children; behaviour issues – 9.4%; communication with teachers and staff – 6.1%, relationships with peers – 7.1%, no difficulties whatsoever – a happy 63.8%, which is an encouraging number. According to the data, children from urban areas have more problems. Thus, 12.3% of parents from urban areas mentioned behaviour problems, but for parents from rural areas the number is 6.8%; 10.1% parents from urban areas mentioned problems concerning children's relationships with their classmates, but only 4.5% parents from rural areas noted the same; and 9.1% parents from urban areas told us about de communication problems with teachers and school staff, while just 3.5% of parents from rural areas stated this.

In order to obtain a general vision regarding the level of parental involvement in children's education, especially in promoting an interest for reading, the survey proposed to identify the amount of books in families. Thus, the replies to the question *How many books do you have at home?* (both children's books and adult literature) have contoured the following situation: there are no books in the house – 13.1%; 1 to 10 books – 39.8%; 11-50 books – 28.6%; 51-100 books – 10.2%, 101-250 books – 5.1%; over 500 books – 0.5%; "I don't know" – 0.6%. In rural areas, the number of families without any books is double, compared to urban families. This is alarming, especially in this century of information, when the average IQ was expected to grow in geometrical progression, and moreover in a European country, small as it is, whose citizens would be expected to realise that in order to wholly integrate in the European community we need citizens with well-developed intellects.

**Positions, functions of the parents in school.** The parents can be involved in decision making in 4 ways: (i) as a members of the School Council, (ii) as a members of the school Parents' Committee, (iii) as a members of the Parents Association and (iv) as members of the class Parents' Committee. The survey data show that some school principals do not perceive all these possibilities. Thus, only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all headmasters have mentioned that school regulations stipulated that parents have to be members of the

School Council. They have also specified that there are 3 or 4 involved parents, but the parents from these institutions have anyway indicated that they are part of the School Council. Yet in 5 institutions the School Council doesn't involve any parents (4 rural, 1 urban school).

While the situation of the School Councils wasn't very clear, in what regards the Parents' Committee, each of the 30 institutions have an average of 10 members in Committees, according to both managers and parents. As to Parents' Associations, they only exist in 19 institutions of the visited 30. Membership varies between several and several hundred parents, depending on the institution's capacity, students' number etc.

At the same time, over 60% of parents say that within the last 3 years neither they, nor anyone else from their family have represented the class; 16.7% have once; 7.7% -- twice; 11.1% -- thrice and more; 1.6% -- cannot recall. Over 63.3% of parents have never been members of the School Council, Parents' Committee or other such organisation, while 8.5% have been in them 3 or more times. According to the focus group discussion, the parents are unfortunately not motivated to participate in school life, because they do not see the real benefits from the Parents Councils – actually, they do not see their role, and some of them do not know what a PC at school level is.

The perception of **volunteering** and supporting such activities as sport events, social functions and cultural initiatives – school plays, concerts, trips etc. – is medium-level exploited by both parents and teachers: thus, during the last year over 52% of parents have never been asked to get involved in school life on such occasions, although over 70% of those who had been asked have responded positively. Thus, the school doesn't use all possible opportunities for involving parents as volunteers. The parents' opinions as to whether the school ought to ask the parents' help in such activities are divided: *no* and *probably not* – 15%; *I don't know* – 5%, but 76% believe that parents ought to volunteer for school activities, but only half of all respondents do this when they are asked.

**Participation in decision-making.** The majority of parents (46.5% -- never and 14.4% -- once) say that during the last year their opinion or the family's has never been consulted as to how the money raised from parents and money from the state are spent in school, although those who have been asked (69.4%) have always expressed their point of view, and the school has mostly (36.1%) or entirely (44.9%) taken it into account. Also 56.6% believe that the school ought to ask their opinion in such cases.

Regarding extracurricular activities – sport contests, arts (outside the school curriculum), school events organisation – anniversaries, trips (not just helping) and discussing problems of health and security – guards, road crossing, CCTV, drugs, relations with the police etc., the managers believe that they have asked the parents' opinion an average of 2-3 times a year. Yet a huge number of parents (62.6%) assert that no one has asked their opinion over any of these matters during the last year. At the same time, both managers and parents recognise the importance of talking and of parental involvement decision-making about all aforementioned activities.

According to data analysis, the parents have tried to influence certain aspects individually only, staying focused on the specific issues their own children had, and have usually obtained a solution.

Unfortunately, the parents are not yet used to join efforts in order to obtain a decision concerning a common issue (85% have never tried this).

School and parents are two very important educational partners in ensuring the harmonious development of children. Their capacity and openness for efficient and empathic communication are the conditions of a sustainable partnership. Based on the survey results related to the perception about parental participation forms in school life and the reasons that influenced the level of involvement of the parents in school life, we found a generally positive attitude towards the openness of school and parents. Thus, the great majority of respondents (both parents and directors) don't agree with the state that *parents and school are usually in conflict relationships* (parents: 72,4% - don't agree at all, 19,8% - agree a little).

Asked about the reasons that would negatively influence a parent's involvement in school life, both parents and principals mentioned in the same proportion the following: large numbers of absent (due to migration) parents, some parents' low interest for their children, lack of time, low life standards.

### **CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS.**

As a general conclusion, we have found that both parents and headmasters have a largely positive attitude towards parents' participation in school matters and school-parents partnership, but the degree of parental participation in school activity at different levels and in various aspects is still quite reduced due to migration, some parents' low interest for their children, lack of time, low life standards.

When analysing and comparing the managers' and the parents' conclusions, we can see that although the managers count on parental participation and recognise its importance, usually in every class there are only 2-3 parents to actively collaborate with, while the others are only convoked to group meetings and in certain critical situations. The following conditions/factors might contribute to the rising of Parents' Committees' efficiency: a better collaboration between parents and school; involving the parents in various activities; efficient collaboration between the members of the Committee, care for extracurricular activities and collecting financial resources.

Traditionally group meetings and verbal messages from teachers to parents via children prevail over other forms of communication. Written bulletins are sent very seldom, partially due to a lack of resources, and partially because not all managers acknowledge the necessity, even today, in the era of information and Internet.

For a deeper understanding of parents needs, and also for a better communication between the sides, it is important to make daily collaboration and cooperation between schools and parents a natural occurrence.

It is sad to see that meetings with school psychologists take place very rarely. Most parents (89.3%) have replied that they have never been invited to such meetings, and the managers corroborate this finding. We find this situation deeply disturbing, since, according to the latest data, a fifth of all RM children are growing without the physical presence of one or both parents, and require a special, individual psychological approach. At the same time, the Psychology departments of 5 universities in the

country prepare school psychologists – the majority of which are unemployed or leave the country in search for work.

Because of the some parents' inability to help the children with their homework, it is important for specialists in education to analyze and discuss thoroughly this problem. It would be good to create an initiative group that could encourage and motivate other parents to be also involved in their children's school life: actually, a Parents' Club would be an excellent idea.

There should be a special educational policy for increasing the degree of parental participation in school life, especially for village schools, because the survey results shows differences of parents' participation between rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the level of participation is lower, the number of families with no books in the house in rural areas is double in comparison with similar urban families.

According to the parents' answers about partnership optimisation, it is necessary to consider certain measures: more transparency in the administration of money given by parents must be ensured; changes must occur first at superior levels, which are most affected by corruption; parents should be involved in common projects; it would be good to organize meetings in which children could participate, as well as the school administration, teachers and parents; a more positive attitude must exist in the schools, there should be no difference between poor and wealthy children, the teachers should treat them equally.