

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract: This research analyzes the strategic management of human resources in higher education in the Republic of Moldova, in a context marked by structural reforms and overlapping crises (2019–2024). The study investigates the dynamics of economic resilience and perceived vulnerability, highlighting a decline in professional stability correlated with aging and the pressure of digitalization. By analyzing the stages of reform of governance structures and the process of institutional optimization, marked by the reduction in the number of universities in the country, the paper demonstrates the need for a transition to predictive management. The results emphasize that the adoption of alternative forms of employment and investment in digital human capital are essential for strengthening modern academic resilience.

Keywords: *higher education, strategic management of human resources, economic resilience, educational digitalization.*

Introduction

The education system, since the independence of the Republic of Moldova, has undergone several profound transformations, going through a complex process of transition from the Soviet-style educational model to a system aligned with European values and standards. This evolution was not only structural, but also paradigmatic, aiming to redefine the role of the teacher, the student and the ultimate goal of education in society. With the declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova, the education system underwent a true identity revolution, generated by a change of alphabet starting with 31.08.1989, which remodeled the foundation of human resources management in educational institutions, requiring the reeducation of the entire teaching staff in record time. The return to the Latin script and national values was the central pillar of educational reconstruction, providing the necessary foundation for the training of a new generation of specialists during the transition period (Moșneaga & Rusnac, 2001). And if Moșneaga and Rusnac emphasize the institutional restructuring of universities during the transition period, Cibotaru (2001) completes the picture by analyzing the conflict between the conservative pedagogical tradition and the imperative of modernization, providing a theoretical basis for understanding the challenges that human resources management in education still faces today.

After this period of sudden transition from Soviet-style textbooks to classical Romanian literature with the formation of our own imprints on the curriculum, we encounter another challenge that just as suddenly came to change the educational system of the Republic of Moldova. A radical turning point in the education system was the year 2005, when the Republic of Moldova joined the Bologna Process (Ministry of Education and Research, n.d.). The structure of higher education was modified by the emergence of the three cycles: Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate. The accession to the Bologna Process in 2005 represented a catalyst for the modern-

ization of higher education in the Republic of Moldova, imposing a new dynamic in human resources management through the standardization of qualifications and increasing academic mobility (Rusnac & Guțu, 2007). At the same time, the Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was implemented to allow the mobility of students and teachers. The introduction of transferable credits allowed the quantification of students' effort, but also imposed on teachers a rigor in designing course units based on learning outcomes. This stage continues today with the emphasis on the quality of studies and the international recognition of diplomas, facilitating the integration of Moldovan graduates into the European labor market. All these challenges for the national education system generated the adoption of the Education Code in 2014, which sparked several comments, postponements of adoption and shifts of the terms of entry into force on several subjects reaching the current period. Since its adoption on July 17, 2014, the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova no. 152 has become the most dynamic legislative act in the field, having undergone over 30 legislative interventions (amendments, additions and repeals of articles) to date (Legis, n.d.).

Table 1.

Typological analysis of changes in the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova with impact on HR

Perioada	Predominant type of changes	Impact on Human Resources
2015 - 2018	Structural and financing adjustments.	Implementation of the "per student" formula and financial autonomy.
2019 - 2021	Digitalization and pandemic measures.	Recognition of distance learning and teleworking.
2022 - 2024	University reform (mergers) and debureaucratization package.	Increase in allowances for young people and performance payments.
2025	Network consolidation (Model Schools).	New criteria for certification and mobility of teachers.

The amendments were not simple technical adjustments, but reflected the reform directions of the Ministry of Education and Research (MEC) and the need to adapt the system to recent crises, which confirms that the education system in the Republic of Moldova is in a state of "permanent reform".

One of the biggest challenges with a major impact on human resources strategies is the optimization and efficiency of the educational system. Over the past decades, the transformations have been marked by the country's demographic realities caused by migration and the decline in the birth rate, but most of all by economic factors.

Table 2.

Evolution of higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova in the period 2015-2025

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Public institutions	19	19	19	19	18	16	16	13	13	12
Private institutions	12	11	10	10	9	8	8	8	8	4
Total institutions	31	30	29	29	27	24	24	21	21	16

Source: Activity report of the Ministry of Education and Research for 2024
https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_mec_2024.pdf

Over the course of a decade (2015–2025), the total number of higher education institutions has almost halved (from 31 to 16). This decrease of approximately 48% is an indicator of the inability of the state and the private sector to maintain an extensive university infrastructure in the face of a massive youth exodus and a drastic decrease in the number of students. The decrease in the number of public institutions from 19 to 12 is not an organic process, but the result of the merger reform that began intensively in the period 2022-2024. The state has opted to concentrate resources in a limited number of entities to ensure financial survival, sacrificing regional or niche institutional diversity. A 66% decrease in the dynamics of private institutions is alarming. This fact demonstrates that the private education market in the Republic of Moldova is close to collapse, being unable to compete with state universities, which benefit from subsidies, or to attract sufficient paying students in the face of competition from universities abroad, especially from neighboring Romania.

These measures have forced managers to adopt much more pragmatic and results-oriented human resource management strategies. Thus, according to statistical data, in the 2023/24 academic year, 3.7 thousand people (core staff) work in higher education institutions, down 1.9% from the previous academic year, and in the 2025/26 academic year, 3.6 thousand people (staff with a core position in the institution) work in higher education institutions, down 0.9% from the previous academic year (NBS, n.d.).

One element of the transformation through the Bologna Process is Quality Assurance and Academic Autonomy, which shifted the responsibility for human resources management from the ministry to the institution, forcing universities to create their own strategies for attracting and retaining talent. Each university has created its own structures, such as Quality Management Sections or Departments, which oversee the quality of teaching, teaching materials and services offered to students. In the new paradigm, the performance of teaching staff is no longer measured solely by seniority or academic titles, but by quantifiable quality indicators.



Figure 1. Evaluation of human resources in the educational system from the perspective of quality

Also, the innovative solutions proposed by Sarbu and Corețchi (2024) (alternative forms of employment) are becoming vital in education precisely because they allow teachers to balance their personal lives with the constant pressure of research and performance indicators (Sârbu & Corețchi, 2024).

Human resources are now more valuable than during the period when economic doctrines were founded. If in classical doctrines the labor factor was viewed as a factor of production, often subordinated to technical capital, the contemporary economy repositions it as the

supreme intangible asset for generating innovations and creativity. This paradigm shift is especially essential in educational organizations, where value is not generated by machines, but by the creativity and accumulated expertise of people

Human resource strategies in the educational system are different from other fields due to the dual nature of the objectives pursued, where administrative efficiency must constantly be harmonized with academic freedom and the social mission of the institution. Unlike the corporate sector, where success is often measured by immediate profitability, in higher education strategies are focused on intellectual capital and long-term impact on society.

The main elements that differentiate human resources in the field of education from other fields are two elements: professional autonomy and vocational motivation. According to research conducted by Cebanu (2025), The predictive management of human resources in academia goes beyond the administrative sphere, becoming a strategic process of harmonizing the individual potential of teaching staff with the development objectives of the educational institution. A teacher possesses a high degree of autonomy in the actions taken to achieve the objectives that the organization obtains rather on the trust and academic prestige of the individual than on the basis of task and control strategies of human resource management. Unlike other industries, where financial incentives are predominant, in education strategies must emphasize intellectual satisfaction, professional recognition and continuous development.

In recent years, the system has undergone an accelerated transformation under the pressure of external factors, such as the pandemic and the requirements of the information age. Digital education has ceased to be an option and has become a basic component, forcing a massive update of the digital skills of the entire teaching staff. Digitalization in the evolution of higher education in the Republic of Moldova was initially forced by the pandemic crisis and later consolidated by European integration policies. This stage evolved in two parallel directions that reconfigured the tasks of the staff. The first direction is the implementation of platforms such as Moodle or Google Classroom, and the use of open educational resources. And the second is the digitalization of registers, admission processes and data management through educational management information systems. If digitalization through platforms has imposed a massive effort on teachers, then data management has led to a streamlining of human resources by reducing manual bureaucratic burdens. Some academic staff, especially the older segment, felt this stage as additional pressure, which explains the negative correlation between age and resilience in your data.

At the same time, we note that digitalization is not a one-time event, but a maintenance process, and universities must permanently invest in “digital human capital”, not just in software.

These successive transformations have created a system that, although still facing challenges related to resources and brain drain, is today much more flexible and better anchored in international realities.

In the Republic of Moldova, where the field of education is in a continuous process of modernization, the strategic management of human resources is not a static element, but evolves through cyclical stages of reform, adapted to the European context. Pillar 2 of the “Education 2030” Strategy” highlights a clear transition from administrative personnel management to an approach focused on performance and resilience (Ministry of Education and Research, n.d.). According to the strategic aspects, the reform of human resources management in the education system of the Republic of Moldova has been articulated in recent years around four strategic pillars, designed to transform the system from a reactive one to a proactive and competitive one. The Optimization and Reconfiguration Pillar, whose central objective was to manage the exodus of teaching staff and combat the phenomenon of staff aging. Through the efficient redistribution of teaching norms and massive investments in infrastructure and tech-

nology, the aim was to create a modern working environment, capable of supporting existing human capital and maximizing the impact of available resources. The second pillar focused on Professionalization and Strategic Recruitment of young people. This direction aims to reduce the vulnerability of the system by ensuring a constant flow of new teachers, prepared for digital teaching methods. To make the teaching career attractive, concrete incentive measures have been implemented, such as a significant increase in allowances for young specialists.

Pillar three emphasizes the quality system with Performance-Based Assessments and Meritocracy. The strategic objective was to abandon the fixed salary model in favor of a mechanism that recognizes additional effort and academic excellence. Thus, by reviewing the attestation methodology and introducing incentive payments and performance bonuses, a framework was created in which the quality of the educational act becomes the main benchmark for career development. Pillar four is marked by the European integration of the Republic of Moldova, Digitalization and Continuous Training have become critical priorities. Aligning teachers' skills with EU standards is supported by free training programs for thousands of teachers. These initiatives not only aim to increase the quality of teaching, but also to reduce technological stress, ensuring a smooth transition to a modern, digitalized education adapted to the requirements of the 21st century. Figure 2 transposes the four pillars of the strategic development of human resources in the Republic of Moldova.

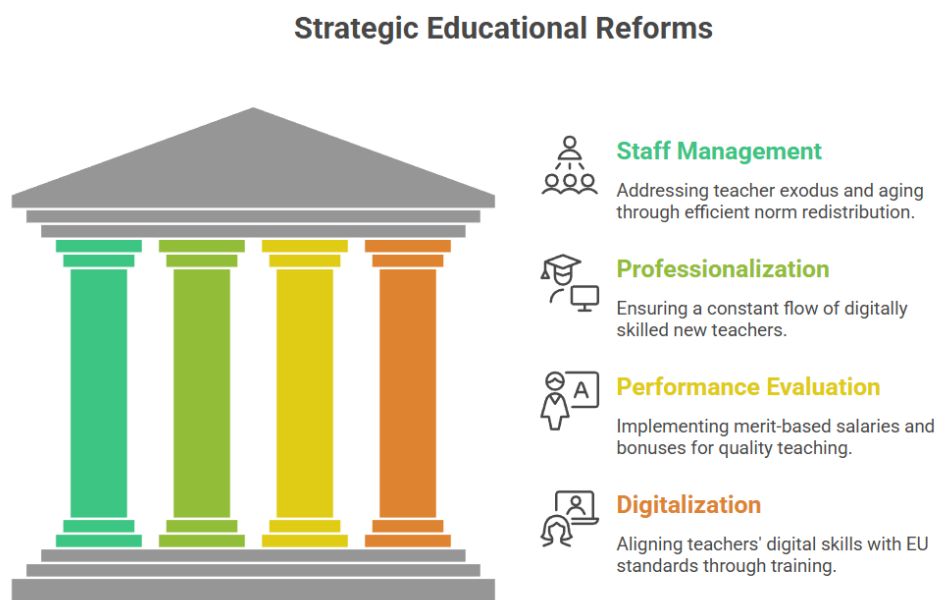


Figure 2. Strategic pillars for human resource development in the context of the Education 2030 strategy of the Republic of Moldova

Conclusion

In the Republic of Moldova, the education sector is constantly undergoing reforms, and strategic points regarding human resources have different stages. The digitalization stage acted as a catalyst for the modernization of human resources, forcing the transition from a management based on presence to one based on results and technological accessibility. However, the success of this stage directly depends on the capacity of institutions to mitigate technological stress through continuous support and adequate infrastructure. The current reforms of the Ministry of Education transform human resources management from a survival tool into an engine of institutional resilience, where success is conditioned by the system's capacity to move from the stage of quantitative optimization to that of qualitative excellence.

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