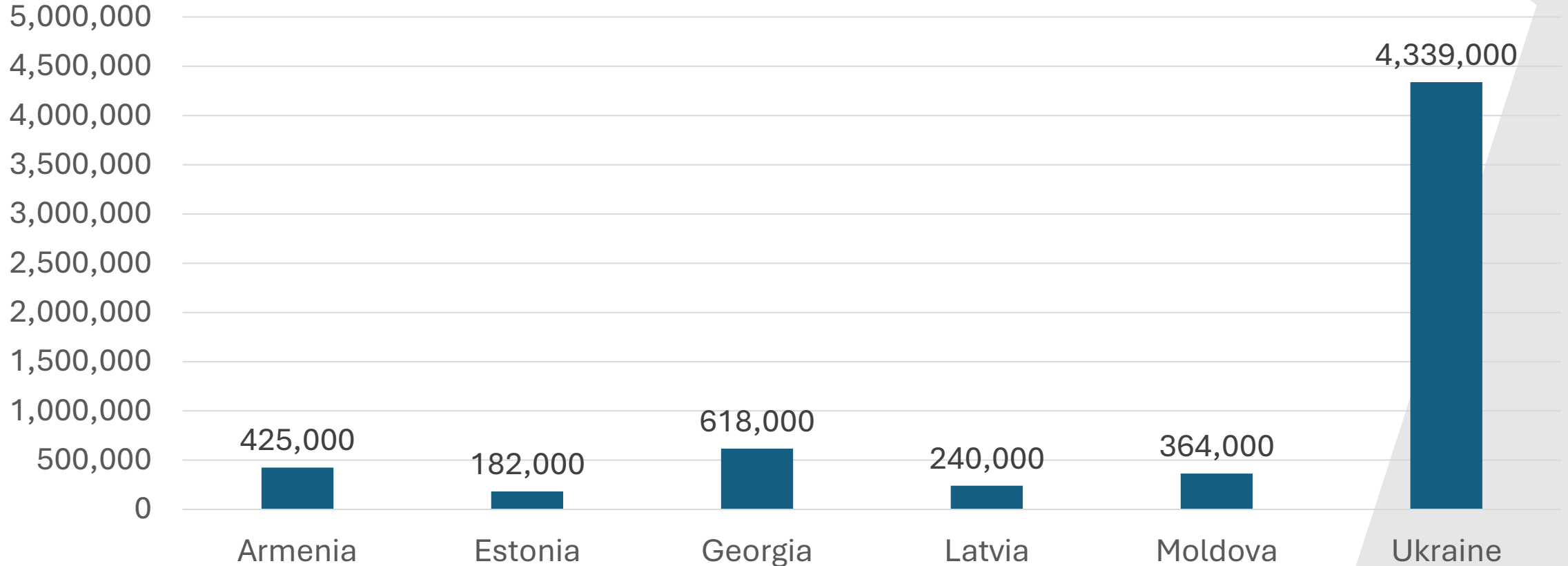


CROSS-COUNTRY OVERVIEW AND MAIN FINDINGS FROM ONLINE SURVEY

Elements of comparison between the participating countries regarding School Network Optimization



Just for scale



1. Variations in School Occupancy Rates



Main reasons for variations in occupancy rates between schools

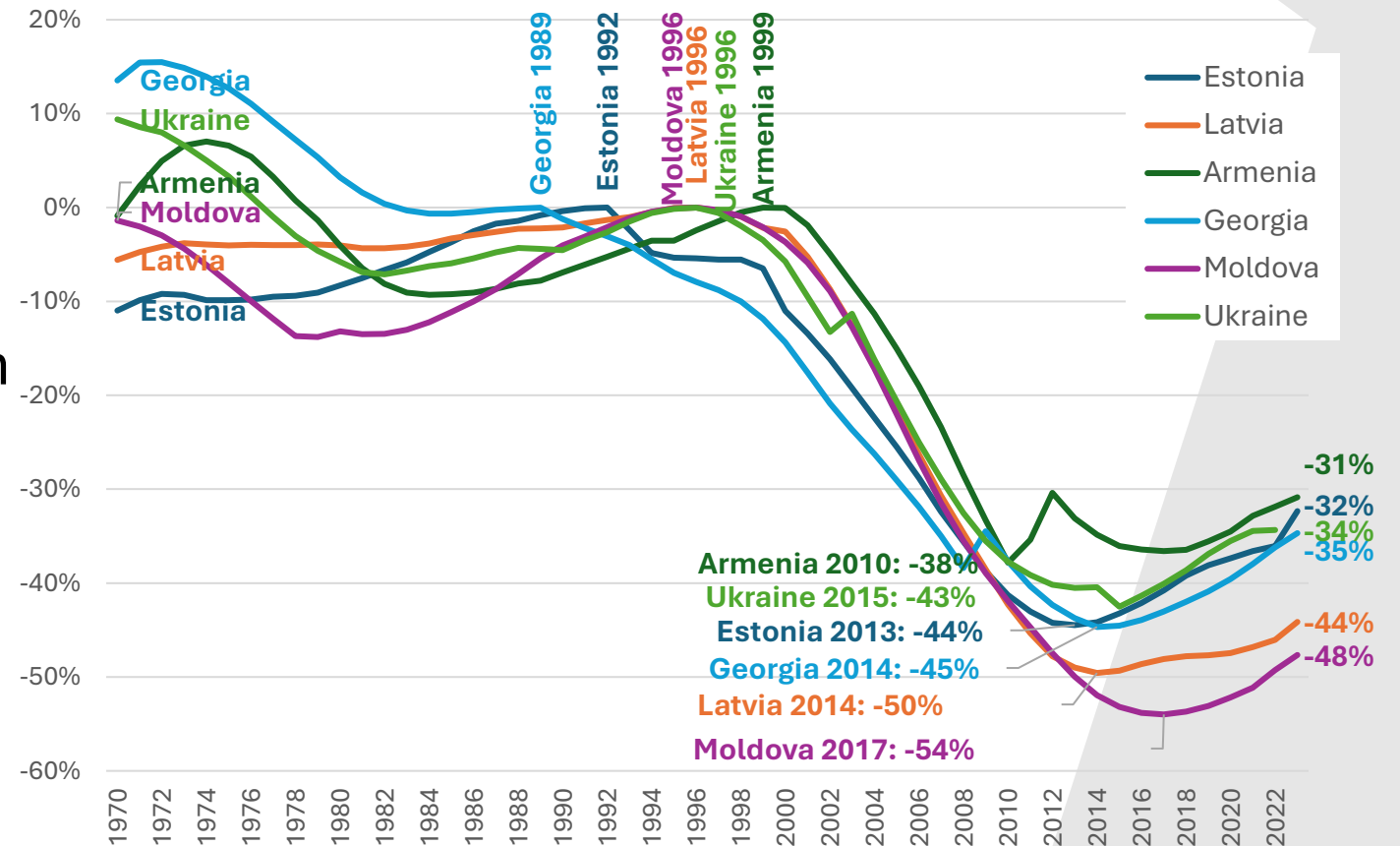
	Armenia	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Demographic changes	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Parental preferences for specific schools	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
School reputation and performance	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Accessibility and transport issues	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓
Availability of specialized programs (e.g., language instruction, vocational training)	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓

Factors contributing to underutilized school capacity

	Armenia	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Declining student population	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Families choosing private or alternative schools	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Inefficient distribution of schools	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Limited transportation options	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Other (please specify) ²	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Demographic decline and school-age population

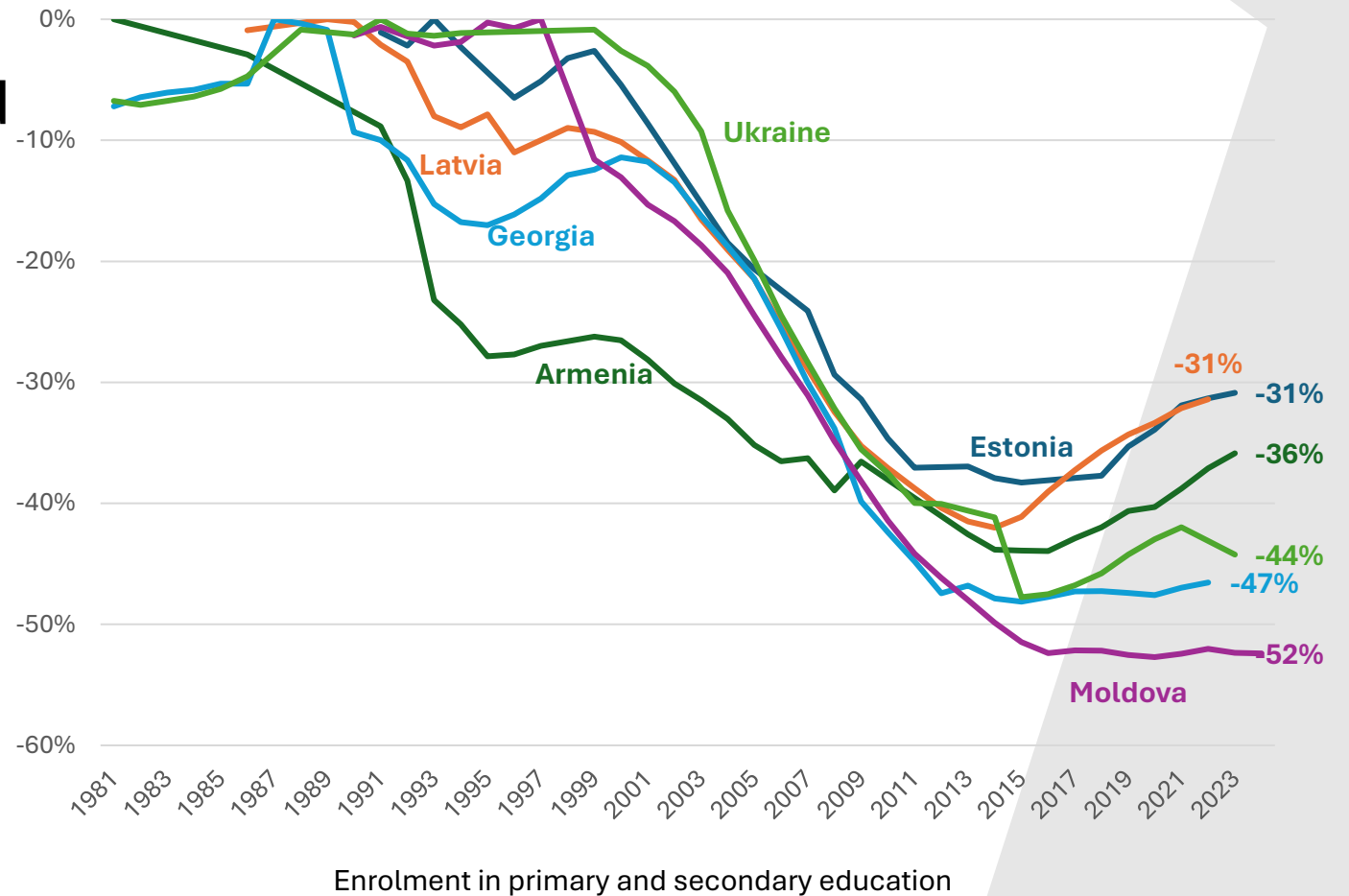
- Strong demographic decline in all countries
 - Starting 1989-1999
 - Some countries lost half of their school-age population
 - -54% in Moldova
 - -50% in Latvia
 - Some rebound since mid-2010's



School-age population (primary+secondary – ages vary across countries and years)

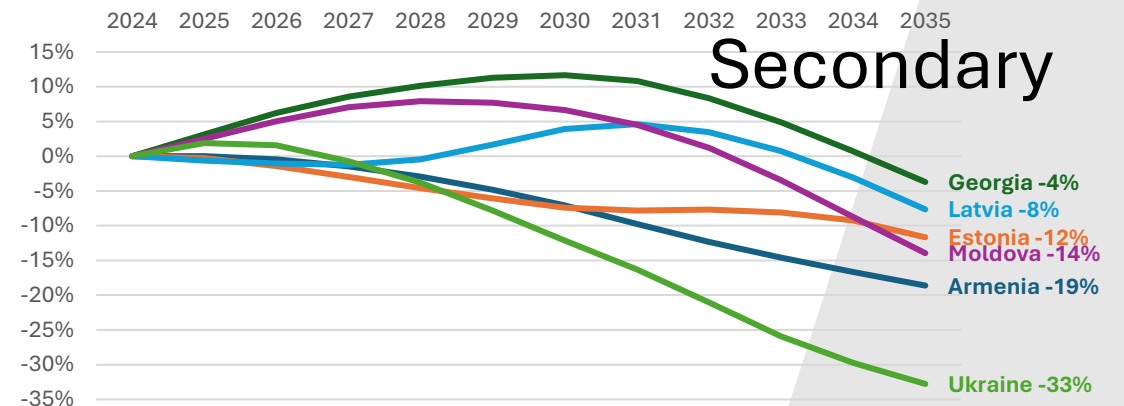
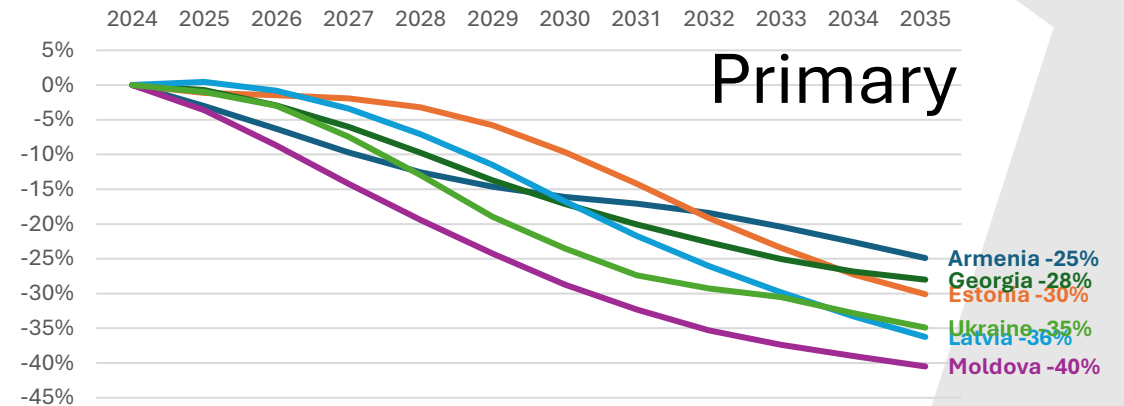
Plummeting enrolment in general education

- Very quick decline in enrolment between 1999 and 2015
 - Except
 - Armenia, more gradual
 - Georgia, more fluctuations
 - Some countries lost half of their enrolment in 15 years
 - -52% in Moldova
 - -47% in Georgia
 - Some rebound since mid-2010's



School-age populations projected to further decline

- Starting with primary education, the regain in school-age population is projected to be inverted in the short term
 - Declines between -25% and -40%
 - Compared to 2024
- Within a few years, this decline is projected to reach secondary education in the medium term
 - Starting 2027-2031
 - Declines between -4% and -33%



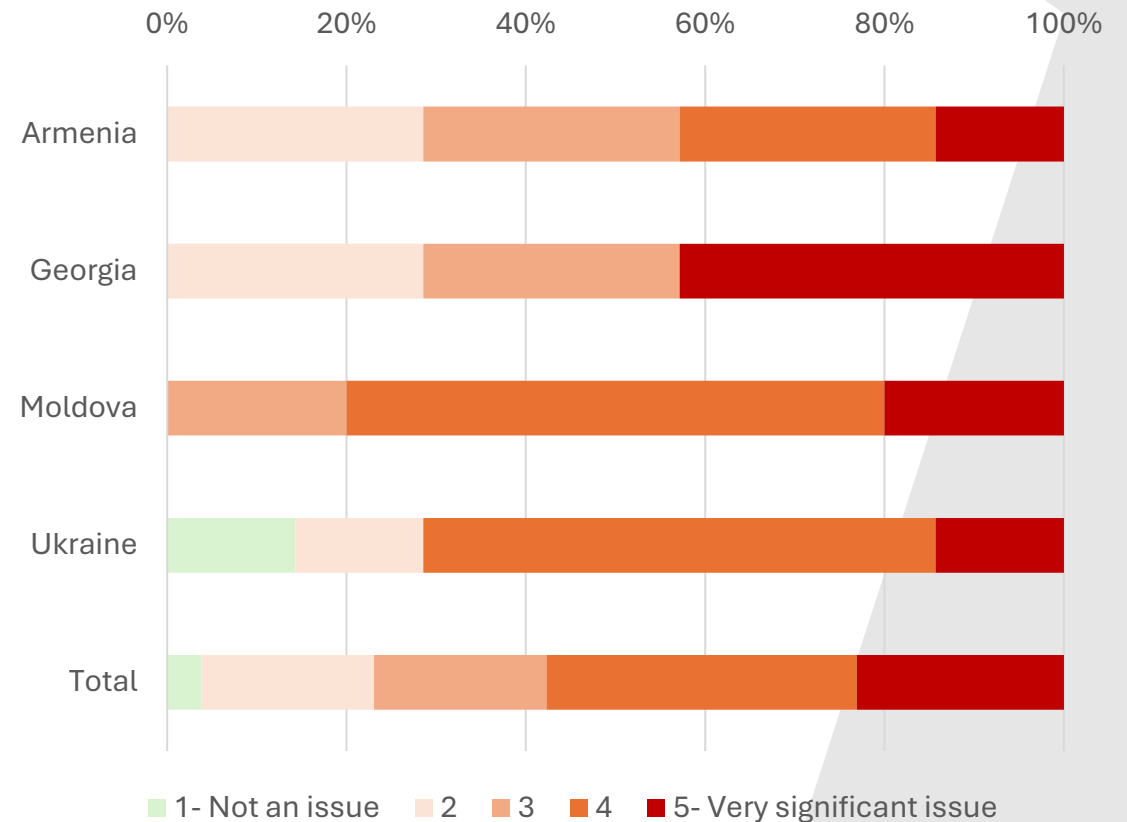
School-age population (ages vary across countries)

2. Strategies for Better Utilisation of Schools



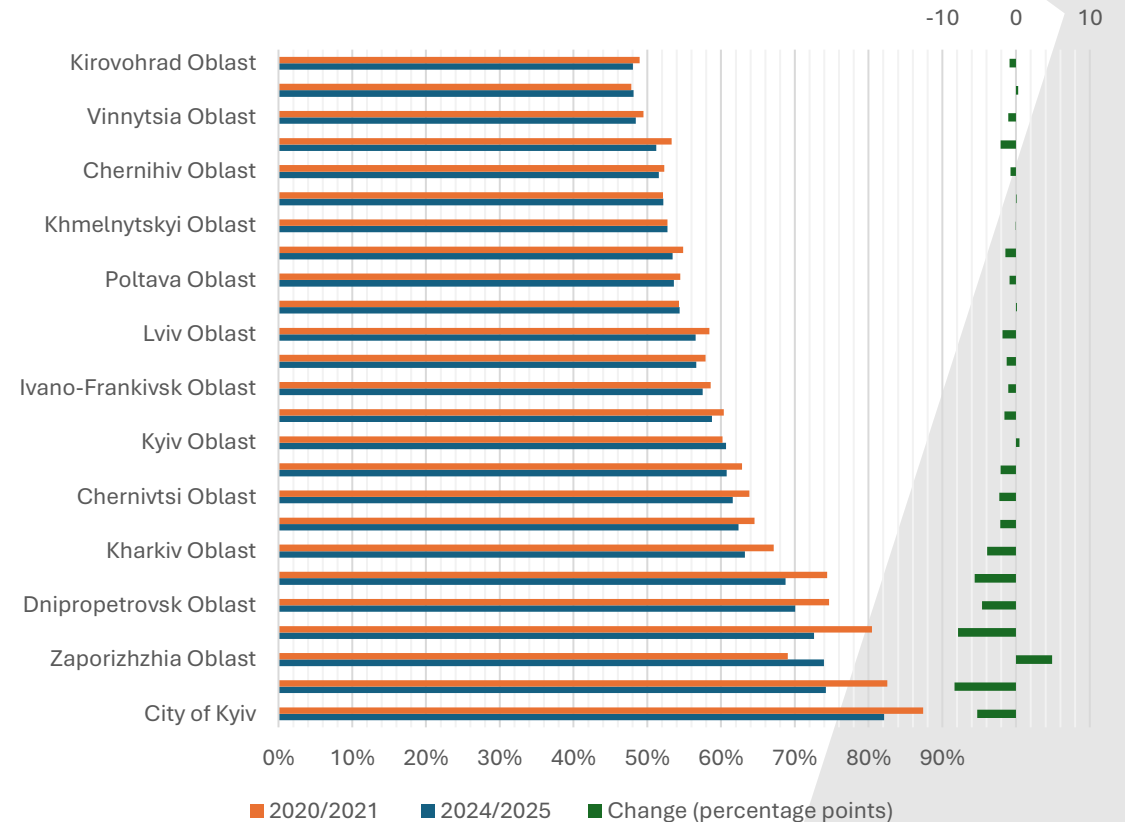
Under-utilization of school capacity

- Under-utilization considered a significant issue in Moldova
- A concern in all other countries



Example- Ukraine

- Regional average occupancy rates between 48% and 82%
- In most Oblasts, average occupancy lower than 60%
- Occupancy still decreasing

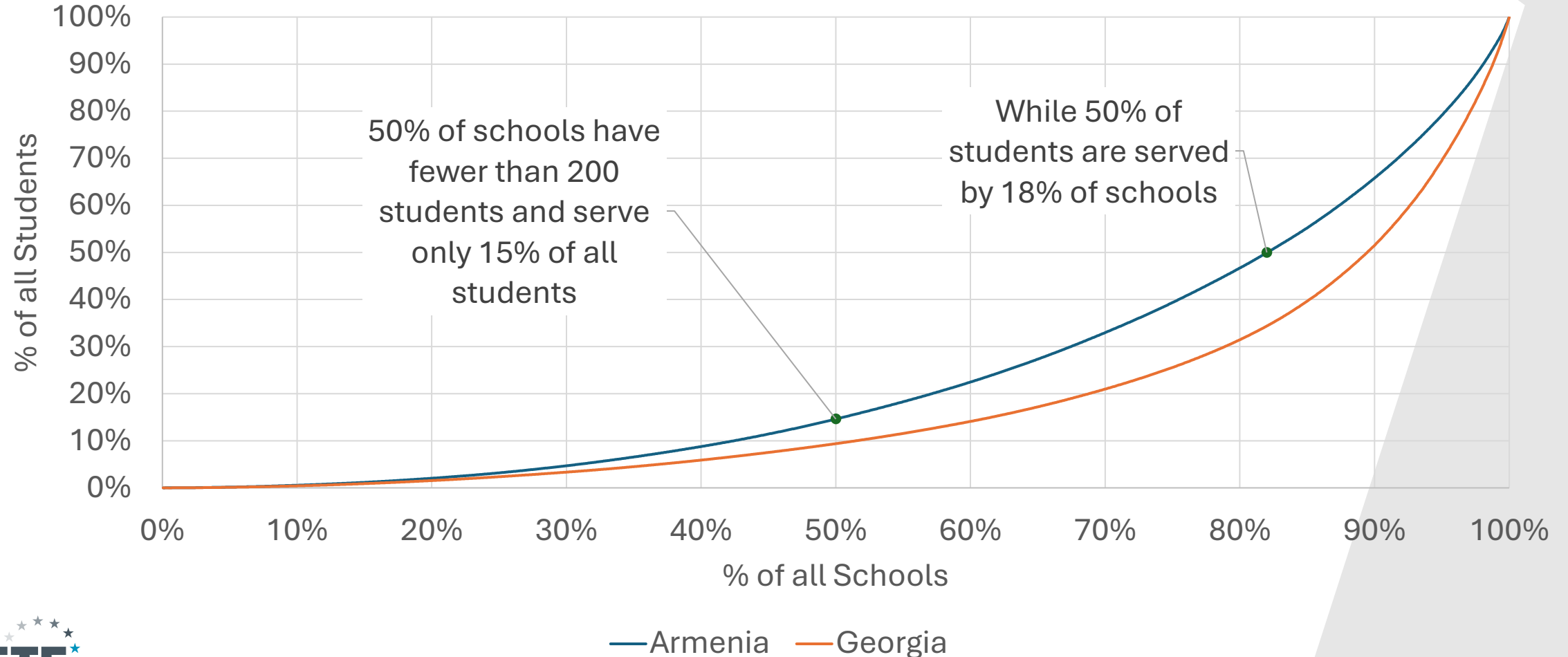


Occupancy rates by Oblast – 2020/2020-2024-2025

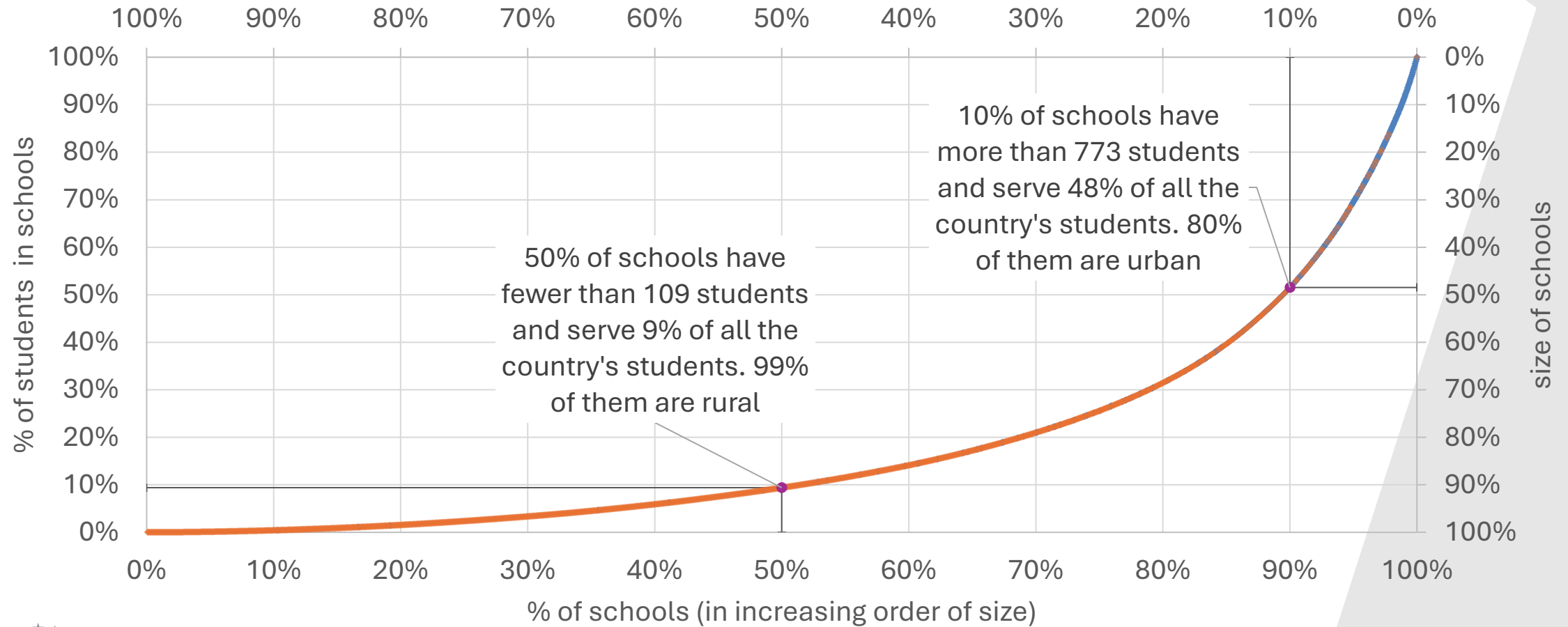
Impacts of underutilised school capacity on resource allocation and funding

- **Inefficient spending**, as schools with fewer students still require funding for buildings and staff.
- This **limits the funds available for improving education quality**, modernising facilities, or supporting specialised programmes
- And lead to **inequities between schools** - Access to resources is unequal among students
- **Shortage of teachers** in rural/small schools.
- **Teacher layoffs** , lack of motivation, school closures, community drains

School concentration (Armenia & Georgia)



School concentration (Georgia)



Similar issues elsewhere - Ireland

Five schools have more staff than pupils - Dept of Education

Updated / Thursday, 13 Mar 2025 16:38



One of the schools had just one pupil when the national annual count was made last year (Stock image)

The latest enrolment data shows 127 mainstream primary schools with fewer than 20 pupils.

The number of mainstream primary schools with fewer than 50 pupils enrolled is 570. This represents 18.5% of all primary schools, but they cater for just 3% of all pupils.

Strategies for Better Utilisation of Schools

	Armenia	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Redistricting school catchment areas	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Enhancing school programs to attract more students	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Merging schools with low enrolment	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Improving transportation services	✓✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Expanding community use of school facilities	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓

Strategies for Better Utilisation of Schools

- **Phased merging**
- **Reduce political factors** - More transparency, more evidence-based decision-making
- **Improve use of facilities:**
 - Use schools as community centres: offering social and educational activities to residents of all ages.
 - Allow multiple education providers (e.g. primary and VET school) to share the same building
- Establish **inter-municipal cooperation** for joint lyceums
- **Adapt secondary offer to local demand**
 - Based on surveys among students and parents to identify reasons for dropping out after grade 9 and preferred academic profiles
 - Introduce lyceums with attractive specialization tracks to retain students within the region.
- **Financial incentives**

Exemples of financial incentives

- **Ukraine:**

- school subsidies only for schools with more than 45 students (except primary and special education schools – starting 2016: new threshold=60)
- Calculation based on what the class size "should be" rather than the actual class size

- **Moldova:**

- school formula gives bonus to region for closed schools (fewer schools than the previous year)

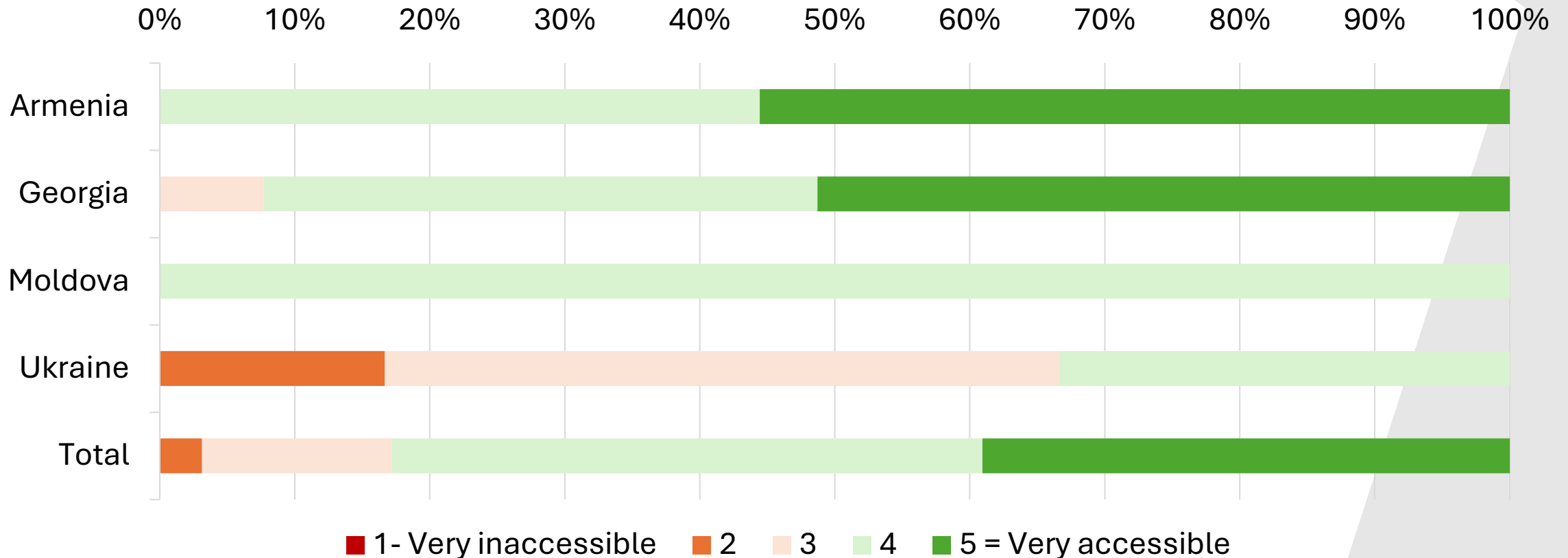
- **Armenia:**

- Schools with fewer than 100 students are not included in the School Renovation/Restructuring Programme
- Voluntary mergers of nearby under-filled schools encouraged by offering salary top-ups for staff willing to relocate (+30% of base salary)

3. Accessibility barriers



Accessibility issues



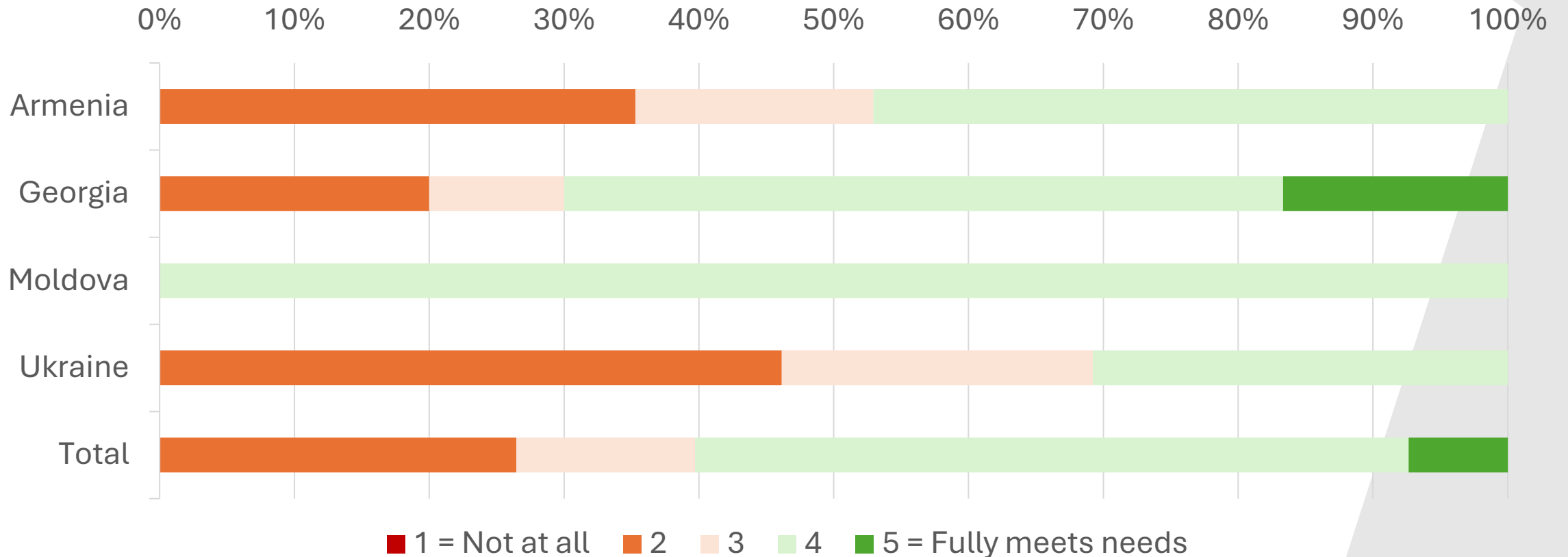
Improvements to improve school accessibility

- Organize a reliable **student transportation system**,
 - Improve road infrastructure
 - Appropriate and safe vehicles
- Establish **inter-municipal agreements** for shared use of existing educational infrastructure, allowing broader coverage without duplicating resources.
- **Modernize school infrastructure** in remote areas,
 - especially where daily transportation is not feasible due to poor road conditions or long distances.
 - Important to attract teachers where they are lacking
- Establish **boarding facilities**
- Invest in **digital infrastructure and blended learning**, providing access to quality education for students in geographically isolated communities.

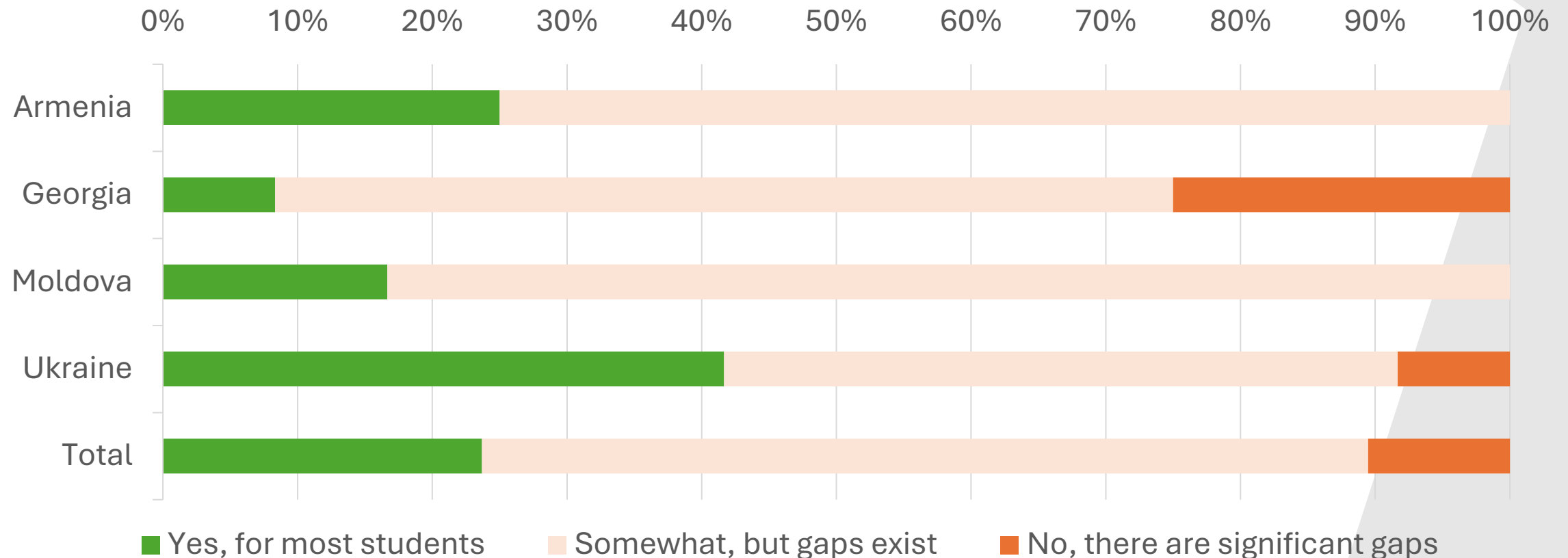
4. Community Satisfaction with School Distribution and Educational Offer



Student needs met by current distribution of schools



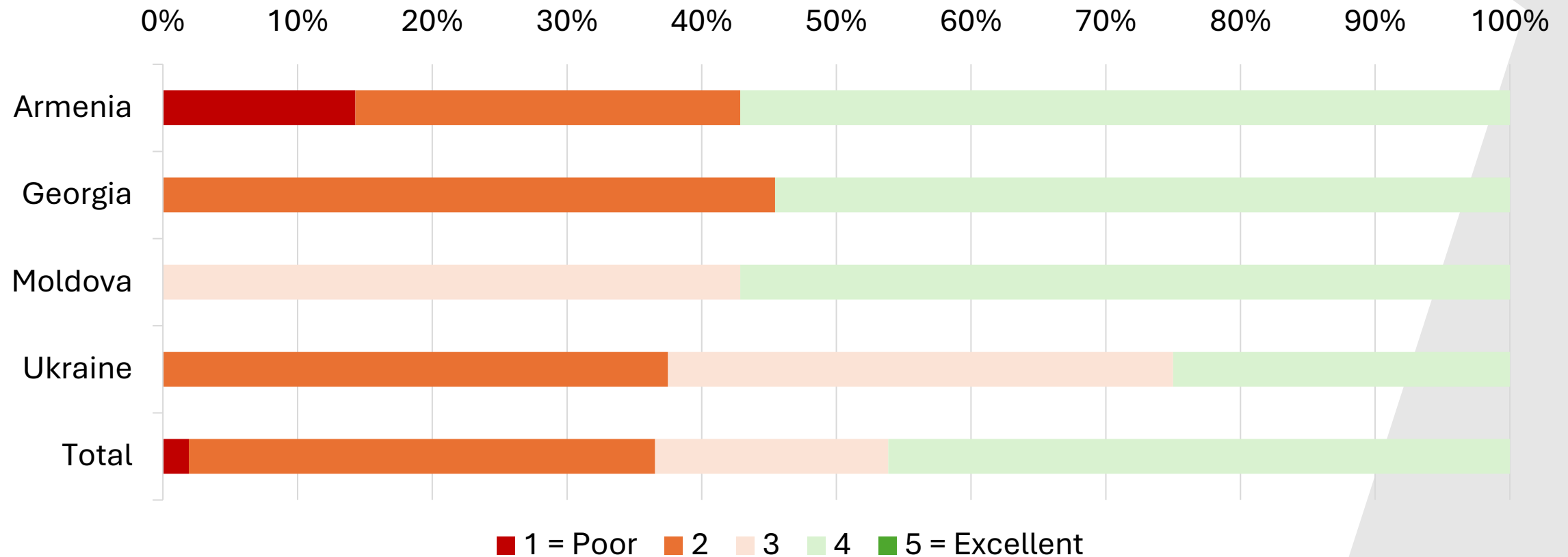
Sufficient access to specialised programmes (language instruction, VET, special education)



5. Condition of School Facilities



Condition of school facilities



Most pressing infrastructure issues

	Armenia	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Poor building conditions (e.g., roofing, walls) Insufficient classroom space	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Lack of modern technology and equipment	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Inadequate heating/cooling systems	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓

Criteria for prioritization

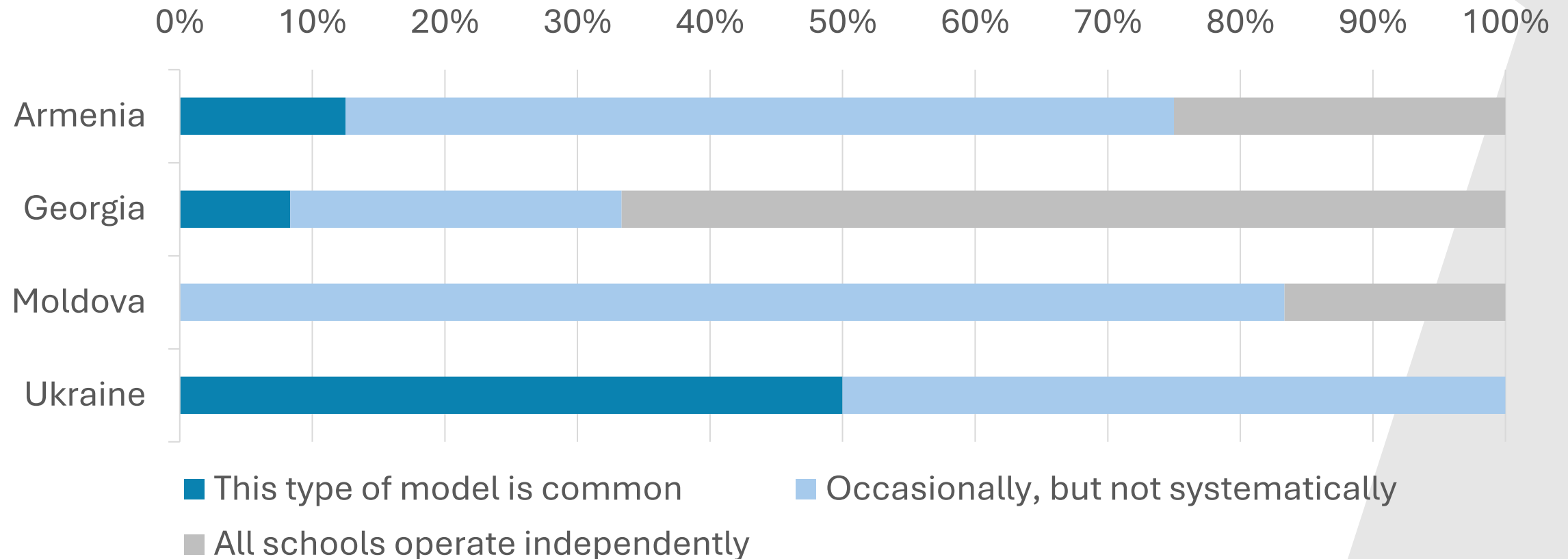
	Armenia	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Schools with the highest student population	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Schools with the worst facility conditions	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Schools that serve marginalized or rural communities	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

Other: Multi-factor approach, Rural schools with minimum number of students, Safety (Ukraine)

6. Collaboration between schools



Collaboration between schools, e.g. satellite / branch school model?



Benefits of collaboration

- **Resource and Cost Efficiency:**
 - More efficient distribution and use of educational resources.
 - Cost-effective while keeping smaller institutions operational.
 - Sharing of equipment and facilities (e.g., labs, gyms, digital tools).
- **Improved Educational Quality:**
 - Access to qualified teachers, especially in specialized subjects like STEM, foreign languages, IT.
 - Enhancement of teaching through teacher collaboration, shared evaluations, and professional development.
 - Use of modern equipment and digital infrastructure supports practical learning and skill development.
- **Expanded Student Opportunities:**
 - Greater choice in educational profiles and personalized learning paths.
 - Access for branch school students to higher-quality educational environments and facilities.
 - Encouragement of competitiveness and exposure to better learning standards.
- **Support for Specialized and Inclusive Education:**
 - Schools can specialize in specific academic directions.
 - Inclusive support for students with diverse needs through well-trained staff.
- **Stronger School Networks and Community Involvement:**
 - Collaboration fosters exchange of ideas and innovation.
 - Joint approaches toward parents and community involvement.
 - Thoughtful management of school downsizing or closures, minimizing disruption.

How could collaboration between schools be improved?

- **Better Funding Models:** Introduce student-based funding ("money follows the student"), small grants, and inter-municipal cooperation to share financial responsibilities.
- **School Networks and Clusters:** Form hubs, clusters, and networks (geographic or thematic) to centralize resources, planning, and teaching.
- **Shared Resources and Programs:** Encourage joint teaching, shared access to labs, sports facilities, and extracurricular projects.
- **Digital and Peer Collaboration:** Use digital platforms, promote peer learning, teacher exchange, and mentorship.
- **Community and Cultural Alignment:** Align around shared educational goals, involve local governments, and strengthen inter-community cooperation.

Challenges and benefits in schools sharing resources?

Key Benefits

- **Cost efficiency and optimization of public spending**
- **Access to qualified specialists** (especially in rural/remote schools)
- **Improved infrastructure** and educational opportunities
- **Professional development** for teachers through collaboration
- **Educational equity and progress** through resource sharing

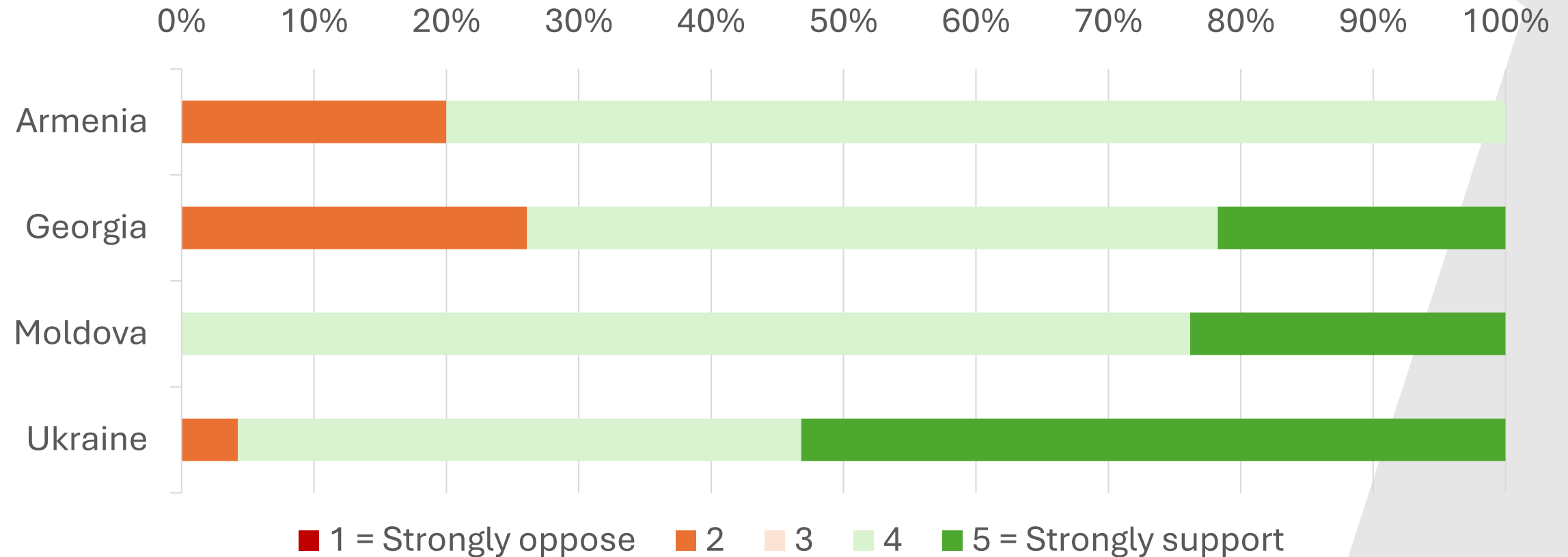
Key Challenges

- **Logistics:** Transportation difficulties for students and teachers; scheduling conflicts
- **Administrative incompatibility:** Different budgeting rules, governance systems, or autonomy levels
- **Resistance to change:** From teachers, parents, or local communities; fear of school closures
- **Incentive misalignment:** Funding based on student numbers discourages sharing due to school competition
- **Unclear responsibilities:** Disputes over maintenance, funding, and authority

7. School Mergers: Perspectives and Concerns



View the idea of merging underutilised schools



Concerns with school mergers

	Armenia	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Loss of school identity and traditions	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓
Increased travel distance for students	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Risk of school dropouts	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Impact on teaching quality	✓✓	✓			✓
Disintegration of rural communities where schools are closed	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓

+ Road safety issues




Anecdotal evidence from 6 school merger studies in Armenia

Pros	Cons
Healthier academic competition	No clear signs of better educational quality
Better discipline	Harder for teachers to give individual attention
Broadened children's social horizons	Pupils' difficulty to adapt to new pedagogical and peer environment
Host schools attract more new students	In some cases, the physical conditions of the host school were judged worse than those of the closed school
	Labelling or discrimination toward transferred children, undermining learning comfort

Additional difficulties faces in process

- Resistance from communities and political side
 - Merging or closures vetoed by municipality councils
- Lack of comprehensive planning
- Lack of communication
 - Last minute closures/mergers put families in difficulties

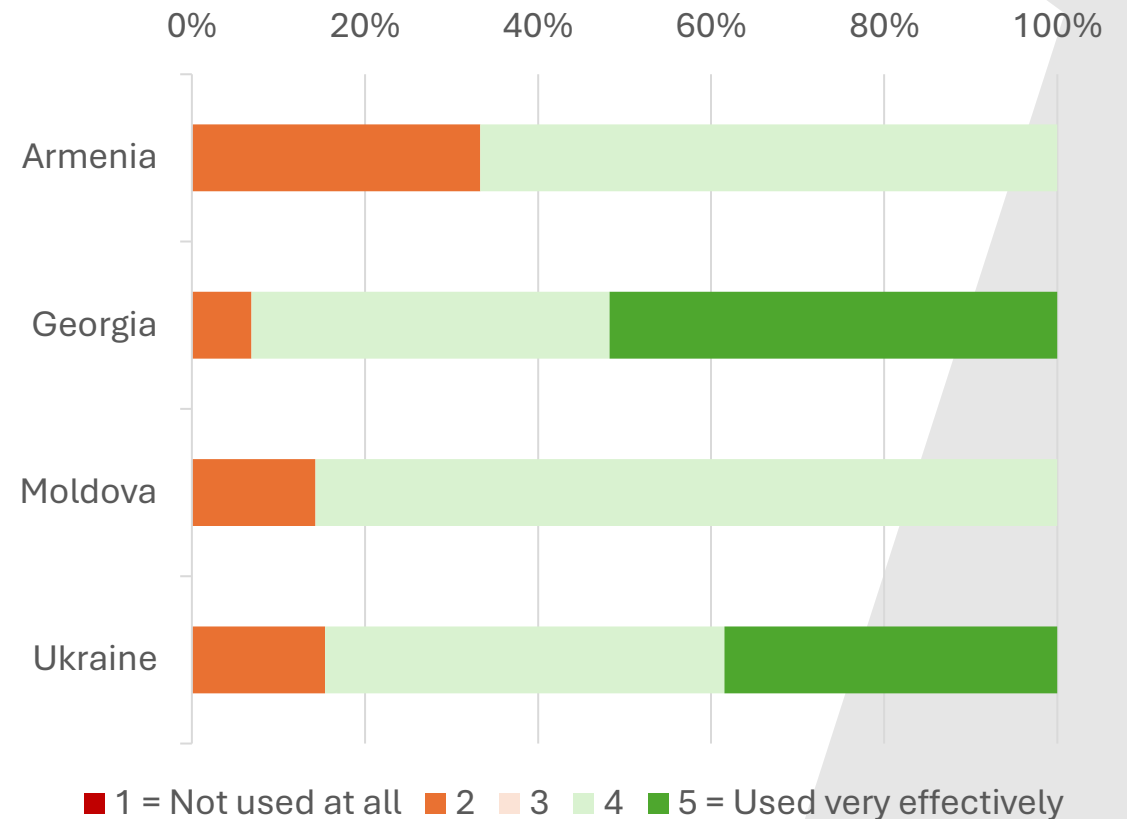
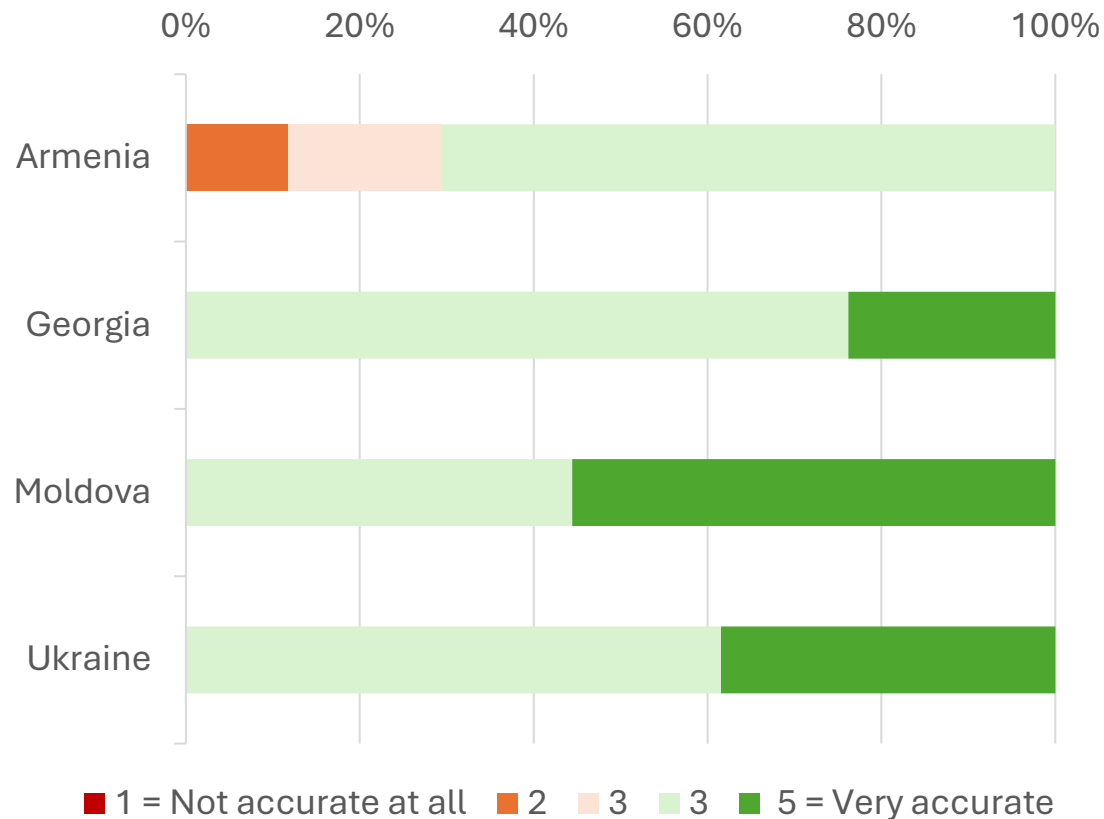
Key Conditions for Supporting a Merger

- Improved education quality (not just cost-saving): educational needs of students prioritized, including access to subject-specialist teachers and modern teaching
- Better hub school available nearby
- Low enrolment or poor performance in existing schools
-  **Infrastructure & Resources**
 - Receiving (hub) schools must be upgraded beforehand:
 - Modern facilities, labs, equipment, and shelters
 - Sufficient classrooms and inclusive learning environments
-  **Transportation & Accessibility**
 - Reliable, safe, and free student transport must be guaranteed
 - Dormitories where needed
 - Attention to accessibility for children with disabilities
-  **Process & Community Involvement**
 - Transparent and inclusive planning with clear goals
 - Change management support for staff
 - Avoid layoffs through staff redistribution
 - Monitor impact on vulnerable groups

8. Data, Planning and Monitoring



Accuracy of data on school occupancy and capacity and use for decision-making?



How to improve data accuracy and transparency

1. Data Standardization & Verification

Clear **data collection standards** and **verification protocols**

Use **independent audits** and **cross-verification** with external systems

Train local staff to improve **data quality**, especially for open-ended entries

2. Digital Systems

Expand or upgrade **Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)** for real-time, reliable data

Implement **automated systems** like Ukraine's AIKOM for better planning and oversight

3. Regular Updates & Reviews

Set clear **timelines for updates**

Conduct **periodic reviews and audits** to ensure data remains current and relevant

4. Legislative & Zoning Reforms

Enforce **school zoning policies** to ensure accurate student-school mapping

Address gaps in **residential address registration** (Georgia)

5. Transparency & Communication

Increase **open access** to data

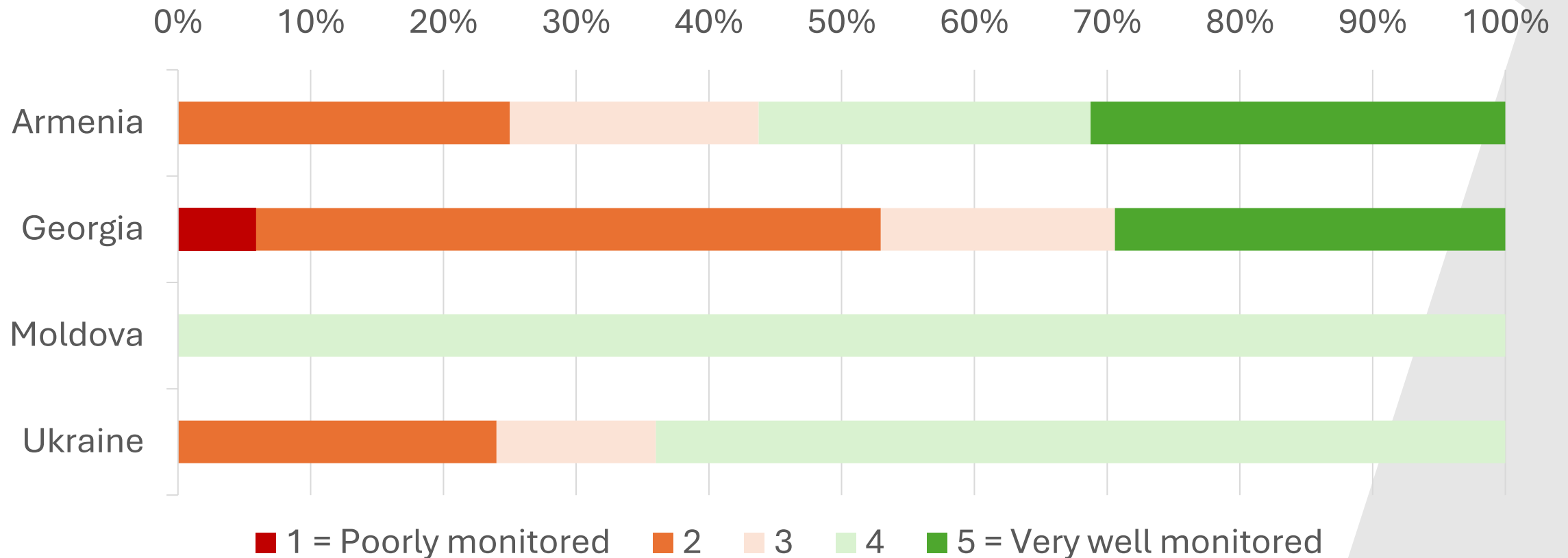
Use **multiple formats** to communicate data

Conduct **surveys, parent meetings, and community consultations**

6. Stakeholder Inclusion

Incorporate **voices from all stakeholders**, including community leaders, parents, and local officials

Monitoring of school network reforms



Strategies for Better Utilisation of Schools

	Armenia	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Ministry of Education	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Local government/Local public authority	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Independent experts or research institutions	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Community stakeholders	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓

+ Road safety issues

Improvements for evaluating school network changes

1. Data and Monitoring Framework

- Establish clear performance indicators , evaluation criteria, assign responsibilities, and ensure decisions are practical and data-driven.
- Implement unified system for data verification and improve data availability.
- Leverage technology to improve decision-making, data verification, and monitoring systems.

2. Stakeholder and Community Engagement

- Designate a lead partner for school network reform and ensure external evaluation.
- Involve local authorities and communities in decision-making, addressing resistance to changes.
- Provide accessible information through online guides and community information points.

3. Political Sensitivity & Regional Considerations

- Address political concerns regarding rural school closures to avoid blockages
- Alleviate overcrowding in urban schools through private schools and voucher funding.

Thank you

