

UPGRADE

Enhancing Graduates' Employability Tracking in Moldova

GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY COUNTRY PROFILE MOLDOVA

Deliverable 2.1

GRADUATES'
EMPLOYABILITY
TRACKING



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This comprehensive report analyses the employability of graduates from six Moldovan universities based on survey data from 1,322 respondents. The findings are contextualized within Moldova's labour market and compared to European trends. Key insights include, but not limit to:

Demographic Profile

- Respondents are distributed across various age groups, with the majority being between 22 and 30 years old.
- Most respondents completed Bachelor's degrees in diverse fields.
- The majority studied full-time, with a smaller portion opting for part-time or distance learning.
- Graduation years were mostly concentrated in the last five years.

Employment and Job Search

- The majority of graduates found jobs within a year, but a significant number of graduates take over a year to secure stable employment.
- The type of employment varies, albeit full-time positions being dominant, part-time and contractual jobs also represent a considerable percentage.
- The match between obtained degrees and job roles is inconsistent, with a significant number working outside their field of study. Many graduates struggle to find jobs relevant to their qualifications.

Salary and Financial Stability

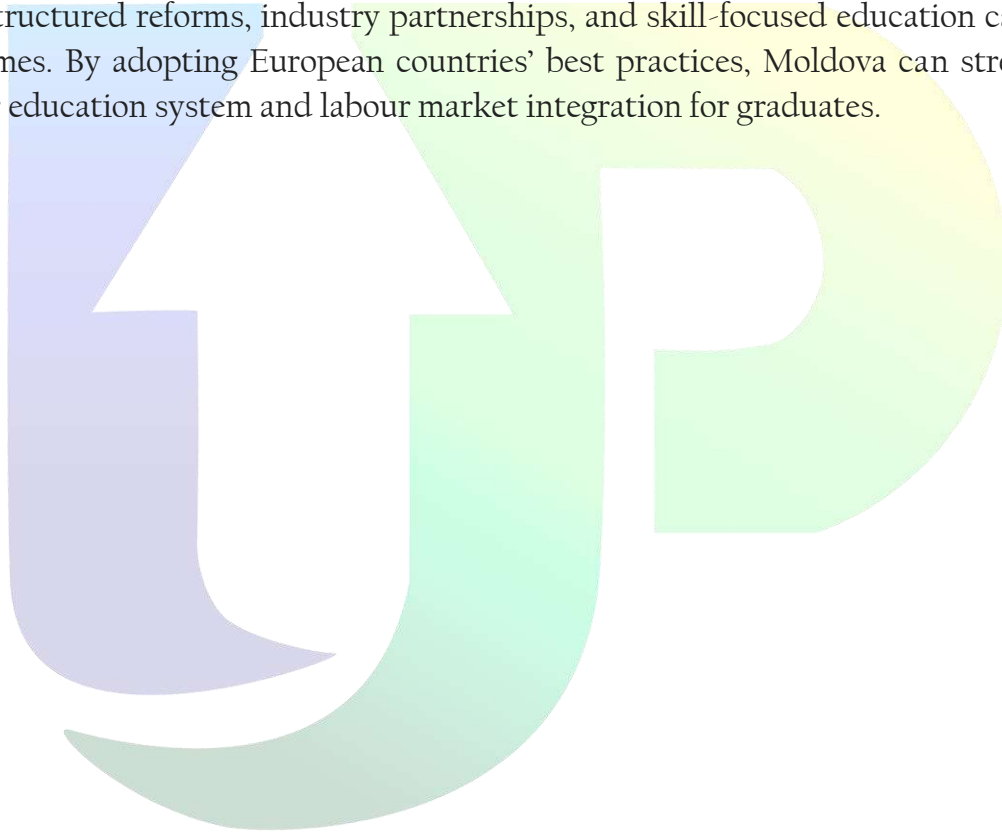
- Salaries vary widely depending on the field, with IT, finance, and healthcare professionals earning higher than education and social work graduates. Wage disparities across sectors discourage graduates from staying in their fields.
- Compared to national averages, graduate salaries remain relatively low, affecting job satisfaction and retention.



Impact of Education on Career

- Graduates expressed mixed opinions on whether their courses sufficiently prepared them for the labour market.
- Some universities showed stronger employability results due to better industry linkages.
- Employers reported gaps in practical and soft skills.

Moldova faces graduate employability challenges; international examples show that structured reforms, industry partnerships, and skill-focused education can enhance outcomes. By adopting European countries' best practices, Moldova can strengthen its higher education system and labour market integration for graduates.





2. INTRODUCTION

GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY COUNTRY PROFILE / MOLDOVA Report analyses the status of the graduates' employability in Moldova, identifying challenges, trends and patterns with the scope of providing insights to inform policy improvements and institutional strategies aimed at enhancing employment outcomes.

Graduate employability is a significant indicator of a country's higher education effectiveness and economic performance. As Moldova continues its efforts to align its higher education system with European standards and labour market demands, understanding the employment outcomes of university graduates is critical.

In Moldova, the transition from university to the labour market is challenged by structural, economic, and educational factors. While Moldova has made efforts to modernize the higher education system and align it with the market requirements and European standards, many graduates still encounter difficulties in finding a job that match their qualifications, securing stable incomes, or transitioning from studies to employment. By understanding these employment aspects, this report aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to enhance employment outcomes for graduates and provide support to Moldova's economic and educational development.

This report is based on primary data collected from a standardized employability survey conducted between December 2024 and January 2025. A total of 1,322 respondents, comprising current students and graduates from six Moldovan universities, participated in the study. The survey gathered information on various aspects of graduate employment, including educational background, employment status, salary levels, career satisfaction, the extent to which university studies contributed to career success; but also identifying the challenges that graduates encounter in securing employment. The report also provides a comparative perspective via the analysis of additional sources, including national labour market reports, comparative studies on graduate employability in Europe, academic research on employment trends in Moldova and neighbouring countries.

Based on this analysis, findings and recommendations are provided as resources for education and labour market stakeholders towards enhancing employment outcomes. A more dynamic, collaborative and responsive approach to graduate employability is essential in ensuring that Moldova's higher education system effectively contributes to economic and workforce development.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sources

Graduate employability is a significant indicator of higher education effectiveness and economic vitality. Therefore, this report is built mostly on primary data sources, i.e., a standardized survey, as it directly collects original data from respondents. Among other types of information sources, the report uses statistical reports, journal publications, and online media.

3.2. The survey

The survey collected information about the career paths of university graduates in Moldova, to improve study programs and facilitate the transition to the labour market.

The survey was conducted in the period between December 2024 - January 2025 across six Moldovan universities: ASEM; MSU; UPSC; USARB; CSU; KDU. The responses were collected via online survey platforms, mostly Google Forms (5 out of 6 universities). The survey covered demographic information, educational background, employment status, job search experiences, university support, and skill assessments.

3.3. Survey responses

The conducted survey has collected 1,322 responses from current students & graduates from the six Moldovan universities. Two out of the six universities have larger representation compared to the remaining four. MSU (28.3%) and ASEM (22.4%) together make up over half of the respondents (*please check Table 1*). Therefore, their responses might dominate overall survey trends, especially in employment fields related to economics, business, and social sciences. Moreover, regional universities - such as USARB (North), KDU (South - Gagauzia) and CSU (South) - collectively represent about 36% of respondents, therefore, the differences in employment opportunities across regions may have influenced the responses regarding employability rates.



University	Respondents	Percentage (%)
MSU (Moldova State University)	374	28.31%
ASEM (Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova)	296	22.41%
USARB (Alecu Russo State University of Bălți)	230	17.41%
UPSC (Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University)	173	13.10%
KDU (Komrat State University)	173	13.10%
CSU (Cahul State University)	75	5.68%

Table 1. Survey responses per number of students of each University

3.4. Survey participants

A significant impact on survey results would be the profile of the participants, depending on their age, graduation year, gender, level of studies, or study mode.

The respondents' age range spans from 19 to 66 years, while the median age is 24 years. Since the majority of respondents are young, but there are some older graduates, indicates possibly lifelong learning or late-degree completion. Younger graduates may report more challenges in finding jobs, while older respondents might have more established careers.

The most common graduation years are 2023 and 2024. This significant portion of respondents, which are recent graduates, could have provided biased responses towards their immediate post-graduation. Also, recent graduates' responses might be influenced by short-term employability rather than long-term career growth.

The absolute majority, around 78%, of respondents are female (*please check Table 2*). The high proportion of female respondents may influence the results, especially regarding the employment rate, due to maternity leaves, or, the level of income, which is lower for women than for men, or, gendered employment trends¹.

¹ National Bureau of Statistics, Moldova's demographic profile https://statistica.gov.md/index.php/ro/portretul-statistic-al-femeilor-si-barbatilor-in-republica-moldova-9617_61008.html



	ASEM	MSU	UPSC	USARB	CSU	KDU	TOTAL
Female	73.74%	65.51%	92.49%	85.22%	78.46%	83.82%	77.44%
Male	25.25%	33.69%	7.51%	14.35%	20.00%	16.18%	21.95%

Table 2. Gender distribution among the survey's participants

Most respondents (more than 60%) are at the bachelor's level, meaning survey insights may reflect early-career challenges rather than those at an advanced professional level. Master's graduates may have better job prospects, affecting overall employability statistics. Such an assumption aligns with a previously conducted survey by the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, which indicates higher employability of master's graduates compared to bachelor's graduates².

Differences in study modes could also impact employability outcomes, with full-time students potentially having better access to internships and networking (*please check Table 3*). Moreover, full-time students may have had more academic engagement, impacting how they perceive university support in employment.

	ASEM	MSU	UPSC	USARB	CSU	KDU	TOTAL
Full-time	71.04%	83.91%	57.80%	57.83%	62.67%	68.21%	69.80%
Part-time / Distance learning	28.96%	16.09%	42.20%	42.17%	37.33%	31.79%	30.20%

Table 3. Study mode of survey participants

Last but not least, almost 95% of respondents indicated that they are currently in the Republic of Moldova, while only 5% reported living abroad. Given Moldova's ongoing challenge of population migration, particularly among young people, this 5% likely underrepresents the actual number of graduates who have left the country. It is reasonable to assume that the true figure is higher. Since many Moldovans migrate in search of better job opportunities and improved labour market conditions, suggests that some indicators such as employment rate or income level may be higher than those reflected in the via the results of the conducted survey.

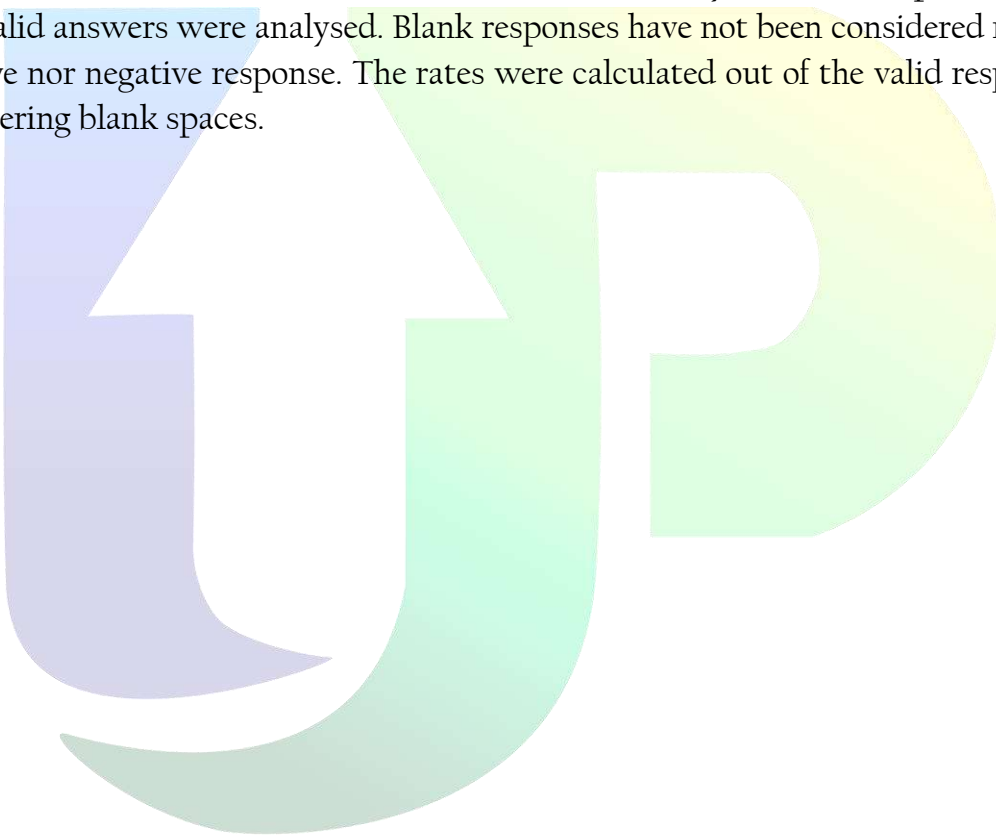
² Ministry of Education and Research & National Institute for Economic Research, Tracking the Career Paths of Higher Education Graduates in the Republic of Moldova, https://mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/anexa_foia_de_parcuri_ord.997.pdf



3.5. Standardized approach

The surveys conducted in each of the six universities are similar for most parts of the survey. However, in some cases, more options for answers have been given, either to an already addressed question or a new question. At the scope of providing a more precise analysis, only questions contained in all the surveys have been analysed. The options with other answers to already addressed questions or totally new questions have been ignored, without considering their potential impact on standard questions and the overall response to the survey.

To offer more accurate information for further analytical and comparative analysis, only valid answers were analysed. Blank responses have not been considered neither as a positive nor negative response. The rates were calculated out of the valid responses, not considering blank spaces.





4. GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY IN MOLDOVA. STATE OF THE ART

4.1. Employability rate

Around 84% of the respondents are employed and 16% are not, with minor differences across the six universities. All forms of paid activity are qualified as employment, be it employee, freelancer, businessman, paid maternity leave, etc. Therefore, the rate of 16% is composed of unpaid respondents: unemployed, not working students, etc. It is to be noted that many of the responses include multiple mixed categories (e.g., "Employed, Student"), showing that many graduates are balancing work and further studies.

The employment rates of students and graduates of Chisinau universities (ASEM, MSU, and UPSC) are slightly higher compared to regional universities.

It is also to be noted that the overall employment rate might be higher than 83.74% at the national level. One condition that drops this level is the high representation of females in the survey, for the reasons stated in the previous sections and beyond that. Similarly, not all the unemployed are struggling to find a job. According to the conducted survey results, a significant portion of the unemployed are not even searching for a job. Therefore, the rate of around 16% unemployed could not entirely be imputed to provided education, labour market conditions, etc.

	ASEM	MSU	UPSC	USARB	CSU	KDU	TOTAL
Employed	84.46%	88.24%	82.66%	82.17%	81.33%	77.01%	83.74%
Not employed	15.54%	11.76%	17.34%	17.83%	18.67%	22.99%	16.26%

Table 4. Employability rate of survey participants

4.2. Job search duration

Survey results indicate that a significant percentage of graduates secure employment within the first three months post-graduation. However, some face prolonged job searches exceeding six months, often due to a lack of relevant work experience or sector-specific demand fluctuations.

Around 60% of respondents found a job within 1 month after graduation. 15 % of respondents found a job within 3 months after graduation. 5% have expressly responded to have spent more than 1 year to secure employment.



The positive results of around 60% of graduates may be attributed, at a glance, to certain conditions related to the conducted studies (i.e., type of degree obtained, type of attendance of courses, etc.). However, out of the results of the conducted survey, there isn't any clear link between other conditions that one might think could affect faster employability. Indeed, the ratio regarding gender, type of attendance of studies, type of degree obtained, or, employment aligned to the obtained degree, is identical across those employed within 1 month and those employed beyond that.

One condition that is more likely to influence fast employment is work experience. The survey shows that graduates with relevant work experience had significantly shorter job search durations.

Employed within one month	ASEM	MSU	UPSC	USARB	CSU	KDU	AVERAGE
Employed	44.53%	62.30%	74.71%	64.07%	49.33%	55.17%	58.35%

Table 5. Employment within one month rate

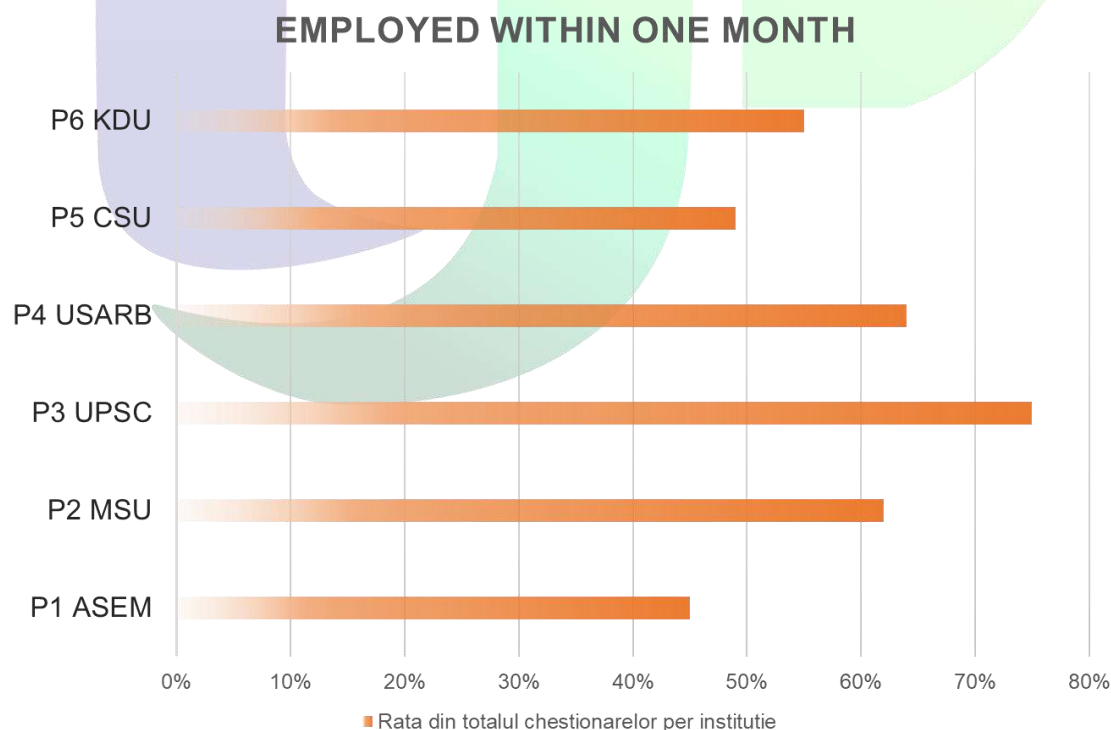


Figure 1. Employment within one month rate



4.3. Career satisfaction

The respondents were asked to answer a series of five questions about how satisfied they were with their careers so far.

Career growth - the average rating obtained is 7.3 out of the maximum of 10. Around 63% have responded with 8, 9 or 10. Around 11% are completely dissatisfied, rating 0, 1 or 2. This indicates that most graduates feel satisfied with their career growth. However, a small group sees low satisfaction, possibly due to working in different fields or industry changes.

Recognition of professional qualifications - the average rating is 7.3 out of 10. Around 26% gave the maximum of 10, indicating full satisfaction with the recognition of professional qualifications. In contrast, around 10% expressed dissatisfaction with ratings from 0 to 2. Graduates largely believe their university studies provided them with valuable qualifications. This suggests good theoretical training.

Relationship with work colleagues - the average rating obtained is 7.8 out of the maximum of 10. A strong 39% of respondents gave the maximum of 10, indicating full satisfaction regarding their relationship with work colleagues. In comparison, 10% have expressed total dissatisfaction, giving ratings from 0 to 2. Graduates largely feel satisfied with their relationships with their colleagues, suggesting good interpersonal, behavioural, and soft skills.

Work conditions - the average rating obtained is 7.6 out of the maximum of 10. Almost 31% gave a 10 to this question, indicating full satisfaction with their work conditions. In contrast, 9% gave ratings from 0 to 2, suggesting total dissatisfaction.

Income - the average rating obtained is 6.9 out of the maximum of 10. Only 9% are fully satisfied with their income (giving a maximum of 10 out of 10). If compared to the above-listed responses' analysis, the lower satisfaction regarding income suggests that this may be perceived as the main reason for unemployment.

The ratio between satisfied, neutral, and dissatisfied is similar across most of the provided examples. The key satisfaction drivers are career growth opportunities, relationships with work colleagues, and work conditions. While the level of income is the main reason for dissatisfaction among graduates.



4.4 Challenges in finding the first job

The transition from education to employment remains difficult for many Moldovan graduates. The predominant barrier cited by nearly half of respondents (48.9%) is the lack of professional experience, a challenge that reflects a deep-rooted structural mismatch between the academic preparation provided by Moldova's higher education institutions and the practical demands of the labour market. This disconnect stems in part from a historically theory-centred educational model, inherited from the post-Soviet era, where higher education focused primarily on the transmission of theoretical knowledge with limited emphasis on applied learning or work-based education.

Expanding access to internships, apprenticeships, and career counselling could enhance students' practical skills and improve their transition from education to employment. Unlike in many EU countries, where internships are more regulated and integrated into academic programs, Moldova lacks a standardized approach to practical training.

Another key challenge is unrealistic salary expectations, cited by 19% of respondents, highlighting a disconnect between student perceptions and labour market realities. Many graduates, especially in business, law, and IT, expect high salaries influenced by international media and diaspora narratives. However, Moldova's low wages, limited formal jobs, and informal labour market offer far fewer high-paying entry-level roles. This gap is worsened by the lack of labour market exposure during studies, leaving students uninformed about typical salaries, hiring practices, and realistic career paths.

Career uncertainty (10.2%) stems from weak, underfunded career services in Moldovan universities, leaving many graduates without personalized guidance, industry exposure, or clear career paths — especially in fields like social sciences and humanities.

Lack of professional networks (9.8%) is another barrier, as Moldova's job market relies heavily on personal connections. Students from rural, low-income, or first-generation backgrounds are at a clear disadvantage, with limited access to mentors or networking opportunities through universities.

Limited foreign language skills (9.2%), especially in English, further restrict opportunities in sectors like IT, tourism, and international organizations. Most universities offer only basic language courses, not job-specific training.

Poor job search (7.1%) and IT skills (4.8%) also highlight gaps in practical training, leaving many graduates unprepared to navigate job portals, professional networks, or modern digital workplaces.

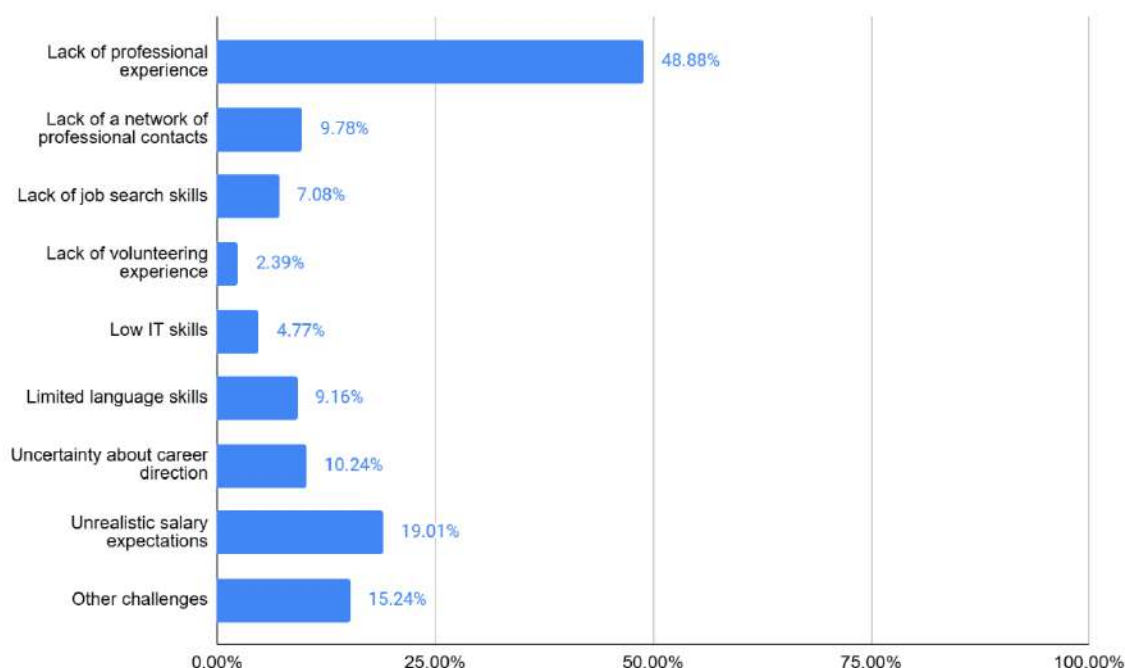


Figure 2. Main challenges encountered in identifying the first job

These combined gaps create a persistent skills mismatch, limiting graduate employability and leaving employers struggling to find qualified talent. Addressing this requires stronger career services, expanded work-based learning, better employer engagement, and more transparent hiring processes.

4.5 Work in the field of studies

Across surveyed institutions, 69.24% of graduates work in their field, while 30.76% work outside it — a relatively positive outcome for Moldova's transitioning economy. However, these average masks significant institutional variation, highlighting uneven university capacity to prepare graduates for field-specific jobs.

MSU (76.60%) and USARB (73.13%) have the highest alignment rates, while CSU (57.33%) and KDU (62.35%) show lower rates, indicating variations in graduate employment outcomes across institutions.

Geographical labour market opportunities further amplify these disparities. Graduates from institutions located in or near Chisinau, where Moldova's largest employers across all sectors are concentrated, have greater access to field-relevant positions, particularly in areas like finance, IT, legal services, and public administration. In contrast, graduates from institutions in smaller cities or peripheral regions often face a more restricted set of employment opportunities, where overqualification and sectoral mismatches are more common.

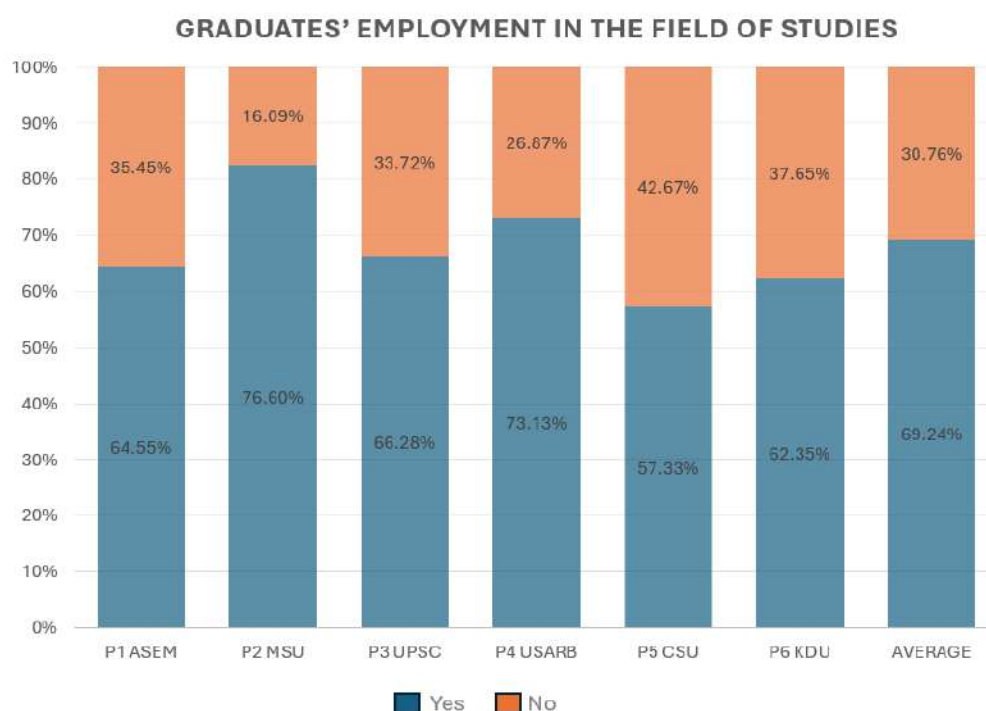


Figure 3. Graduates' employment in the field of studies

These disparities reflect the need for tailored employability strategies — including stronger career services, regional economic development, and deeper university-employer partnerships — to better align education with local labour market realities.

4.6 Sector of employment

The public sector employs 57.92% of Moldovan university graduates, solidifying its position as the largest employer of higher education graduates in the country. This dominance is particularly pronounced in certain institutions, most notably:

- UPSC (77.91%), which specializes in the training of teachers, educators, and professionals for the social services sector;
- USARB (77.27%) which is a regional university that primarily supplies graduates for the northern Moldova region, including in the public sector;
- CSU (66.67%), regional university but from the southern region of Moldova.

These figures highlight the crucial role the public sector plays in absorbing university graduates, particularly in regions where the private sector is underdeveloped and has limited capacity to offer high-skill employment opportunities.



However, this heavy reliance on public sector employment raises structural concerns about the long-term sustainability and adaptability of Moldova's labour market. With limited fiscal space, ongoing demographic decline, and increasing pressures to modernize and optimize public administration, the capacity of the public sector to continue absorbing large cohorts of university graduates is likely to diminish over time. On top of that, the growing adoption of digital solutions to improve efficiency and reduce costs is likely to impact all sectors of the economy, including the public sector.

The private sector employs 33.57% of graduates, but the distribution across institutions is highly uneven, reflecting both the specialization of individual universities and the varying levels of private sector development across Moldova's regions.

- ASEM (69.40%) stands out with the highest share of graduates employed in the private sector, a finding that reflects the close alignment between ASEM's economics and business programs and the demand for such skills in private companies, particularly in Chisinau. Furthermore, graduates from business-oriented programs tend to develop more transferable skills, allowing them to adapt to a broader range of private sector opportunities.
- In contrast, at institutions such as UPSC (2.79%), USARB (5.66%), or CSU (6.00%) private sector integration is minimal. These figures are indicative of both the narrower professional profiles of graduates (largely trained for public service roles) and the weak private sector presence in the regions where these universities operate. In such areas, private firms tend to be small, family-owned enterprises, with limited capacity to absorb university graduates into formal, high-skill positions. Nevertheless, some economic indicators indicate over the existence of good potential for improvement, suggesting deeper analysis and research towards developing better private sector opportunities to graduates³.

The non-governmental sector employs only 4.98% of graduates, with slightly higher shares at MSU (7.49%) and CSU (9.33%), where there is some tradition of NGO engagement, particularly in areas such as community development, human rights, and social work.

Therefore, heavy reliance on the public sector as the primary employer creates a labour market dynamic that is vulnerable to public finance constraints and reduces the incentive for universities to modernize curricula and develop skills more relevant to the private sector. It also reinforces regional inequalities, as graduates in Chisinau benefit from

³ INEKO and IDIS "Viitorul", Measuring regional business environment in Moldova, <http://competitiveness.viitorul.org/>



a more diverse employment landscape, while those in the regions are often left with a binary choice between public sector employment and migration.

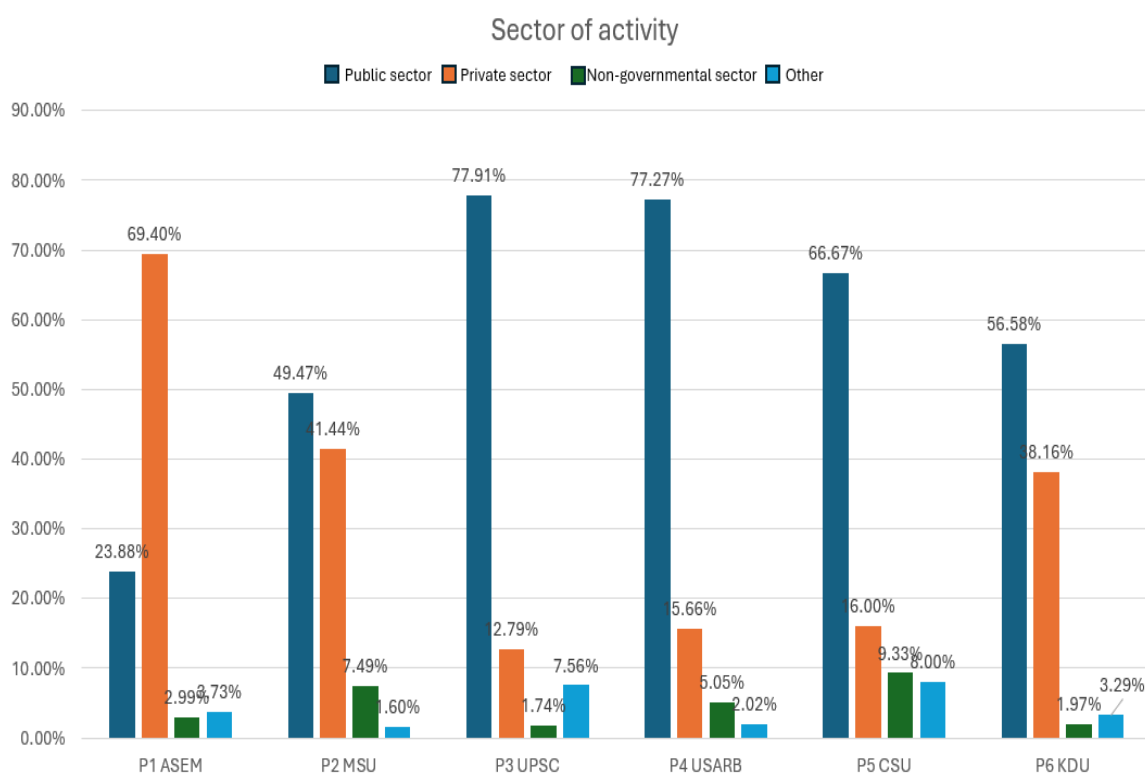


Figure 4. Distribution of Graduates by the Sector of Employment

4.7 Salary earnings below average

The income trajectories of Moldovan university graduates vary significantly across institutions, with pronounced differences rooted in the type of university, its geographic location, and its alignment with labour market demand.

The most favourable economic outcomes are observed among graduates of ASEM, where only two out of ten respondents reported incomes below the national average. As seen previously, ASEM accounts for the majority of graduates employed in Moldova's private sector, and this is closely linked to the income levels they achieve. Graduates benefit from the university's well-established reputation in fields directly associated with higher-paying industries, such as banking, finance, business administration, and information technology. Similarly, around 35-40% of USARB graduates and over 45% of CSU graduates earn below the national average.

In contrast, graduates from multi-disciplinary, regionally located, or pedagogically focused universities face far less favourable economic prospects. At MSU, for example, more than half of the graduates earn below the national average. MSU's broad academic



offering, spanning humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and public administration, results in a graduate pool that largely enters sectors with low wage levels, particularly within the public sector, academia, or administrative roles.

A similar trend is evident at UPSC where more than half of graduates earn below the national average. With most entering the chronically underfunded education and social sector, their low incomes reflect not the quality of their education, but rather the systemic undervaluation of teaching and social professions in Moldova.

Overall, graduate incomes in Moldova vary based on factors such as institutional focus, labour market demand, and regional economic conditions. Universities with strong connections to growing industries tend to offer better earning prospects, while those preparing graduates for fields with lower wage levels see different employment outcomes.

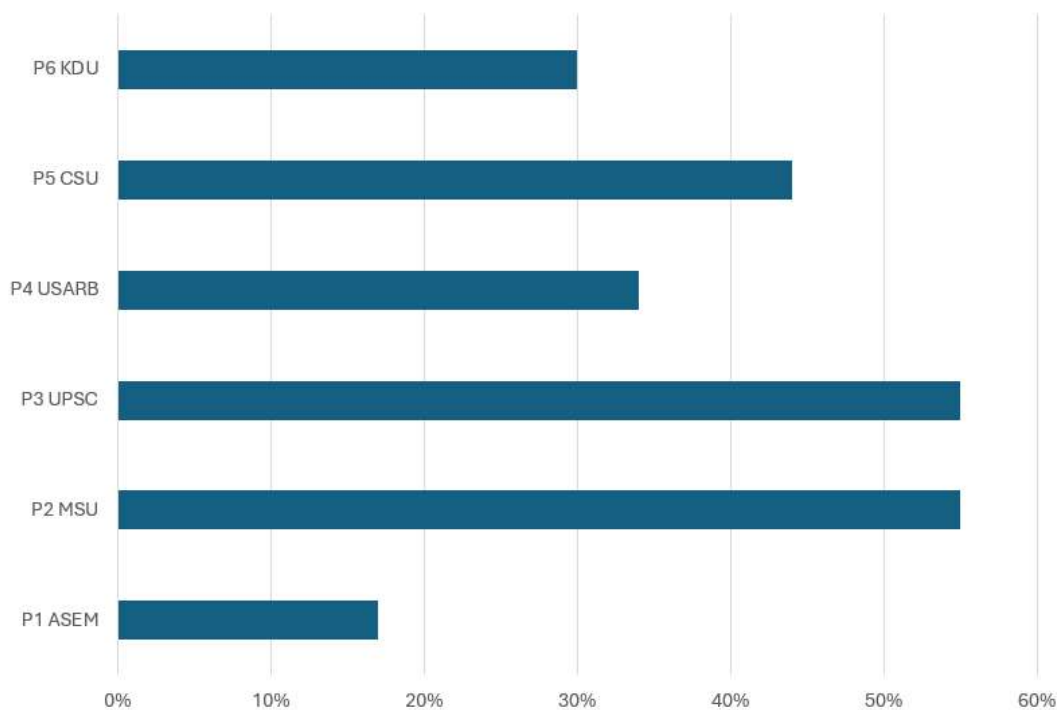


Figure 5. Percentage of Graduates Earning Below the Average Salary

4.8 Graduates location - Moldova vs other countries

The data indicates that the overwhelming majority — 96.41% — of graduates who participated in the survey are currently living and working in Moldova, while only 3.59% are employed abroad. This apparent dominance of domestically based graduates could, at first glance, suggest a relatively high rate of domestic retention among Moldovan



university graduates. However, this outcome is also strongly influenced by the accessibility and responsiveness of graduates living within Moldova compared to those working abroad, which introduces an important response bias into the findings.

Additionally, even taking this aspect into account, the data does reinforce several important structural patterns. Graduates from Chisinau-based institutions, particularly ASEM and MSU, overwhelmingly remain in Moldova, a reflection of the relatively stronger absorption capacity of the capital's labour market, especially in the private sector. For these graduates, the combination of closer alignment between academic programs and labour market demand, better career services, and stronger professional networks within the capital, reduces the need to seek employment abroad.

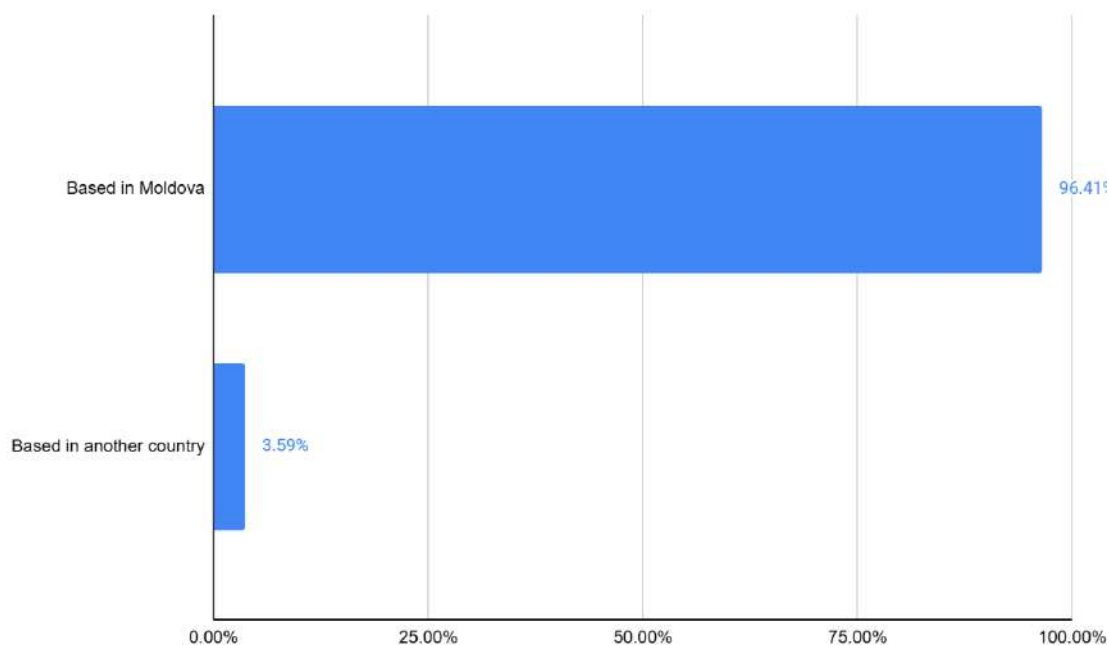


Figure 6. Location of the respondents

In contrast, graduates from regional institutions, particularly in economically weaker areas, face a more precarious local labour market, with fewer professional opportunities in their fields of study. While the survey shows a high rate of domestic employment for these graduates, this is likely skewed by the underrepresentation of graduates who have left Moldova altogether.

This analysis underscores a broader methodological challenge for graduate tracking in Moldova: graduates who migrate are systematically less visible in institutional follow-up efforts, leading to an incomplete picture of employment outcomes. A more comprehensive approach to graduate tracking, incorporating collaboration with diaspora



organizations, social media outreach, and cross-border alumni networks, would help correct this bias and produce a more accurate understanding of Moldova's true graduate mobility patterns.

In summary, while the official data suggests that the vast majority of surveyed graduates remain in Moldova, this conclusion must be interpreted cautiously. It reflects not only the employment realities within Moldova, but also the uneven accessibility of different graduate cohorts — with domestic graduates far more likely to respond to institutional surveys than those who have left the country. This highlights the importance of improving graduate tracking methodologies to ensure more inclusive and representative data collection, particularly for mobile and emigrant graduates.

4.9 Positive effect and recommendations for course improvements

Graduates' feedback on the positive effects of their studies and their recommendations for improvement are crucial in identifying strengths and weaknesses in university programs. Out of the 1322 responses, most of the graduates have recommended the following:

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are the most frequently mentioned benefits. Graduates feel that their education helped them develop analytical abilities.

Strong technical and theoretical knowledge has also been praised but suggested to be paired with more practical experience.

Despite these strengths, several areas for improvement have been identified. A notable concern among graduates is the need for better communication and teamwork skills, which are increasingly valued by employers but are often underemphasized in university curricula. Additionally, many respondents perceive a disconnect between academic programs and current job market trends, pointing to insufficient networking opportunities, limited exposure to entrepreneurial skills, and a lack of modern teaching methods that reflect industry realities.

Another critical issue highlighted in the feedback is the perceived inadequacy of career guidance services. Many graduates expressed dissatisfaction with the level of support available in navigating career opportunities, suggesting that clearer pathways to employment, structured mentorship programs, and stronger industry connections would significantly improve post-graduation outcomes.

When analysing the data at the university level, distinct patterns emerge, revealing variations in how institutions address these concerns. Some universities perform better in equipping students with technical knowledge, while others excel in fostering practical experience or industry engagement. These findings underline the importance of tailored



improvements across institutions to ensure that graduates are not only academically prepared but also equipped with the necessary skills and support to transition successfully into the workforce.

University	Positive effect and recommendations
ASEM	Strong technical knowledge, but more business & entrepreneurial training needed
CSU	Critical thinking & teamwork skills are highly valued, but there is a need for more research integration
KDU	Strong academic preparation; however, more career guidance and counselling is required
MSU	High focus on technical skills, but graduates suggest more practical experience
UPSC	Communication and teamwork skills emphasized; modern teaching methods suggested
USARB	Well-rated regarding critical thinking, but stronger networking opportunities are needed

Table 5. Positive effects of studies and recommendations for improvement

The provided responses pointed out several aspects that universities could consider in their teaching programs, such as:

- Graduates feel well-prepared in theoretical knowledge but struggle with practical applications. Increasing practical training and internships could be a solution to this identified problem.
- Graduates are interested in better career services and job placement programs, suggesting that more career counselling, mentorship, and preparation for the job market is required.
- Graduates feel the need for more entrepreneurial and business skills, therefore, universities should focus more on delivering knowledge and skills related to business development, start-ups, management, and leadership.
- Overall, it can be observed that graduates mostly appreciate their obtained knowledge and education but would like to get more prepared for the job market, via more practical experience and career support during and after their studies.

4.10. Willingness to recommend the study programme

The data reveals that 91.67% of surveyed graduates would recommend their study programme to others, indicating a high overall level of satisfaction with their educational experience. This overwhelmingly positive response suggests that, despite the structural challenges in Moldova's labour market, most graduates view their education as valuable and worthwhile.

The institutional breakdown highlights some variations though all institutions report relatively high recommendation rates.

- CSU, all respondents (100%) reported that they would recommend their program, which may suggest strong local loyalty and appreciation for the university's role, despite some of the employment and salary challenges faced by graduates, as seen in the previous sections.
- UPSC, 95.35% of graduates would recommend their study program, one of the highest rates across institutions.
- USARB and MSU also show a very high recommendation rate of 94.76% and respectively - 90.91%.

Even at ASEM where graduates often face intense competition in the private sector job market, 85.86% still report that they would recommend their study program. This positive evaluation can be partially attributed to the fact that ASEM graduates are among the highest earners compared to their peers from other institutions.

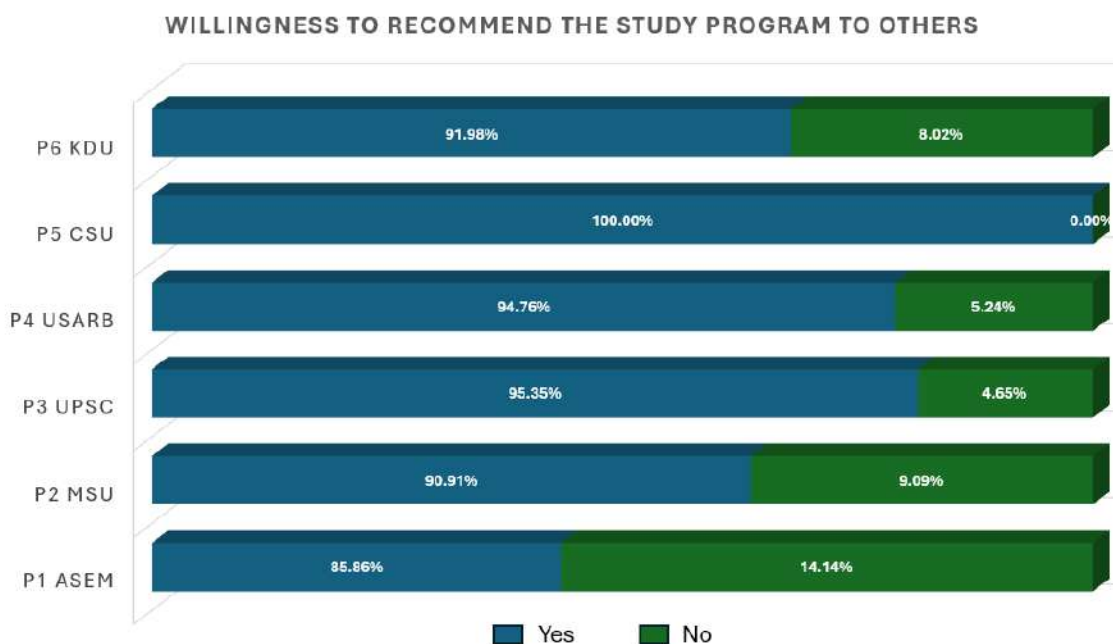


Figure 7. Willingness to recommend the study program to others



While the high recommendation rates are encouraging, they should not be interpreted as meaning that graduates face no challenges in employment. Graduates may still recommend their programs based on the perceived academic value, personal growth, rather than because they believe the programs guarantee easy access to quality employment.

Additionally, those who experience the most difficult transitions to employment - especially those who migrate abroad or who are underemployed - are less likely to respond to such surveys, meaning the sample could be slightly biased in favour of those with more positive experiences.





5. GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY IN MOLDOVA. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The employability of graduates is a key indicator of the effectiveness of higher education systems, the adaptability of national economies, and the alignment between educational supply and labour market demand. Across Europe, graduate employment rates vary widely, reflecting national differences in economic structure, educational policies, labour market flexibility, and the strength of university-industry linkages.

The European Commission recommends adopting a range of measures to enhance the employability of recent graduates, including labour market forecasting to assess the demand and supply of skills, employer involvement in external quality assurance processes, incentivising student work placements, offering comprehensive career guidance, and implementing graduate tracking surveys to monitor career outcomes⁴.

As well, European countries exhibit diverse graduate employment rates. Malta leads with 93.4%, followed by Germany at 92.7%. Conversely, North Macedonia and Italy have rates of 57.2% and 58.7%, respectively. Moldova's rate positions it between these extremes, indicating room for improvement.

Challenges such as overqualification are prevalent in some European countries. In England, over 37% of employees are overqualified for their jobs, highlighting a mismatch between education and labour market needs⁵. This underscores the importance of aligning educational programs with market demands.

- University-level comparisons showed higher employment rates in universities with strong industry partnerships.

At the university level, comparative research across Europe consistently demonstrates that institutions with strong and structured partnerships with industry, local employers, and professional associations tend to report higher graduate employment rates and faster school-to-work transitions. These partnerships not only facilitate internships, apprenticeships, and work placements but also ensure that curricula remain responsive to evolving sectoral needs, reducing the incidence of skills mismatch and graduate underemployment.

- Compared to European Union benchmarks, Moldova's graduate employment rate (~65%) is lower than the EU average (~80%).

⁴ European Education and Culture Executive Agency: Eurydice and Riiheläinen, J., *Structural indicators on graduate employability in Europe – 2016*, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2017, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/989238>

⁵ Financial Times, https://www.ft.com/content/f7b31c10-d0f3-4af2-a678-0a0bb8e235ab?utm_source=chatgpt.com



With a graduate employment rate of approximately 65%, Moldova falls closer to the lower range of the European spectrum, indicating substantial room for improvement in ensuring that graduates successfully transition into relevant and stable employment. This intermediate position reflects both structural economic challenges and deficiencies in educational alignment with labour market needs.

Moldova's position is particularly concerning when compared to the European Union average graduate employment rate of approximately 80%, signalling a significant gap between Moldova's graduate labour market outcomes and EU standards. This discrepancy highlights the need for systemic reforms in higher education governance, labour market policies, and regional economic development strategies, particularly if Moldova seeks to align itself more closely with EU norms and benchmarks as part of its European integration agenda.

- Neighbouring countries (Romania & Ukraine) also show slightly higher graduate employment levels.

Moldova's graduate employment rate also trails slightly behind neighbouring Romania and Ukraine, both of which benefit from larger, more diversified economies and a greater array of employment opportunities in both urban and rural areas. Romania's integration into the EU labour market, coupled with its expansion of vocational education pathways and increased foreign investment, has improved employment prospects for university graduates, especially in industries such as IT, manufacturing, and services.

Comparative Insights with European Trends

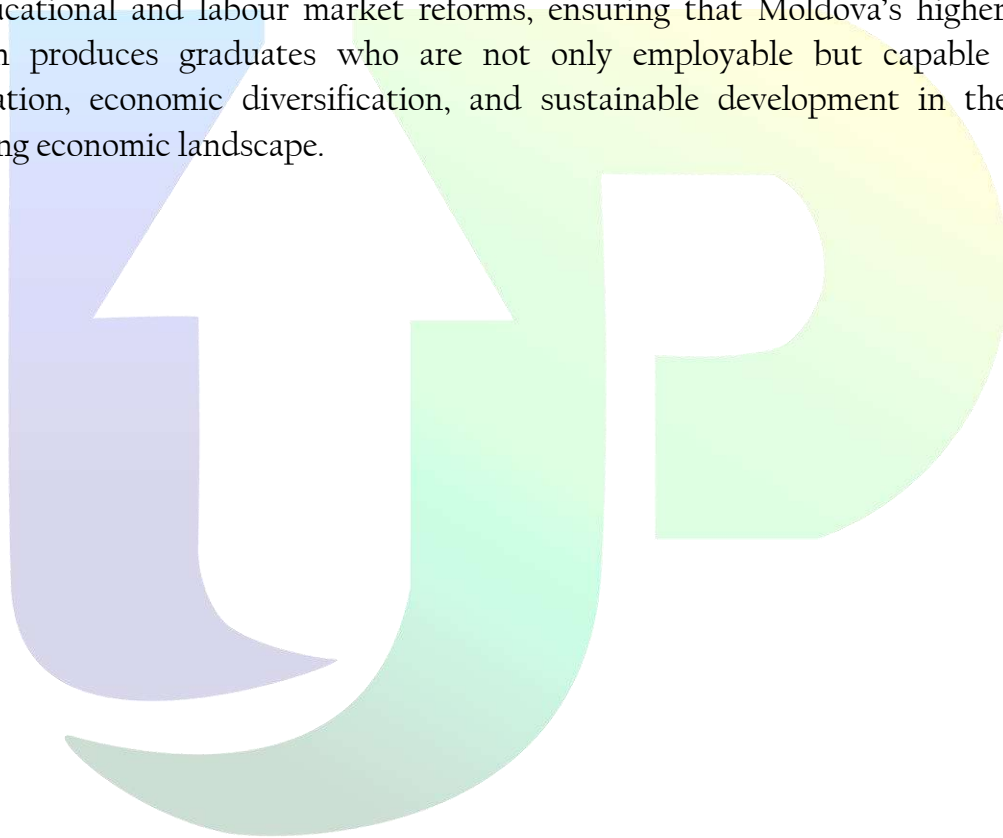
Moldova's graduate employment trends align with patterns observed in several Eastern European nations but diverge from those in Western Europe, where structured apprenticeship systems and industry-academic collaborations significantly enhance employability. Countries with robust vocational training programs, such as Germany, report lower unemployment rates among recent graduates. Another key difference lies in the institutional infrastructure supporting school-to-work transitions. In most Western and some advanced Eastern European countries, graduates have access to high-quality career services, robust graduate tracking systems, and active labour market programs targeted specifically at recent graduates. In Moldova, career services are uneven across institutions, graduate tracking is fragmented, and national-level programs targeting graduate employment are largely absent. This policy vacuum leaves both universities and graduates without adequate support, resulting in prolonged job searches, mismatched employment, and higher rates of graduate frustration and emigration.



Policy Implications and Future Research

Finally, there is a pressing need for longitudinal research into the long-term career trajectories of Moldovan graduates. Short-term employment outcomes provide only a partial picture of how effectively the higher education system prepares graduates for sustainable careers. Future research should track graduates' career mobility, wage progression, job satisfaction, and professional development over time, identifying the systemic barriers and enabling factors that shape career success in the Moldovan context.

This evidence-based approach will be essential for informing the next generation of educational and labour market reforms, ensuring that Moldova's higher education system produces graduates who are not only employable but capable of driving innovation, economic diversification, and sustainable development in the country's evolving economic landscape.





6. CONCLUSIONS

The transition from higher education to the labour market remains a complex and uneven process for Moldovan graduates. While a significant proportion of university alumni eventually secure employment, many encounter substantial obstacles that delay their entry into stable careers, limit the relevance of their initial job placements, and contribute to long-term career insecurity. These challenges are particularly acute outside the capital, where regional disparities in labour market opportunities and institutional support structures further hinder successful school-to-work transitions. Despite some progress in aligning university curricula with Moldova's evolving economic needs, the mechanisms designed to facilitate a smooth integration into the workforce remain inconsistently developed across institutions and regions.

A fundamental issue persists in the misalignment between educational programs and labour market demands. Moldova's higher education system has traditionally prioritized theoretical knowledge over practical application, leaving many graduates ill-prepared for the expectations of modern employers. This mismatch is especially evident in rapidly evolving sectors such as information technology, digital services, agribusiness, and environmental technologies, where businesses struggle to find graduates with relevant, industry-specific competencies. While some universities have begun adapting their curricula, progress remains slow, and many graduates in these fields require extensive on-the-job training before they can contribute effectively. This additional training burden discourages some employers from hiring recent graduates altogether, exacerbating youth unemployment and underemployment.

The availability and quality of internship programs further deepen this divide. While some universities have developed structured internship pipelines and career centres, many regional institutions still lack institutionalized programs that provide students with real-world work experience. As a result, graduates without internship exposure face prolonged job searches, weaker professional networks, and reduced bargaining power in salary negotiations, as employers view them as higher-risk hires. Additionally, career services remain underfunded and underutilized in many universities, particularly outside the capital, leaving students without adequate guidance in navigating early career opportunities. Addressing this gap requires a more systematic approach to integrating internships into academic programs, with stronger university-employer partnerships that ensure students gain practical experience before graduation.

Disparities in salary outcomes also reflect the structural imbalances of Moldova's economy. Graduates from non-technical disciplines—including social sciences, humanities, and education—face a double disadvantage: limited field-specific



employment opportunities and lower-than-average wages in the positions they do secure. The Moldovan labour market tends to favour graduates from business, finance, and technical disciplines, where private sector demand and wage growth potential are higher. In contrast, graduates in fields like sociology, literature, and pedagogy are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage public sector jobs, particularly in education and local administration. This wage disparity discourages talented students from pursuing careers in non-technical fields, contributing to both talent loss and chronic shortages in essential public services. Policymakers must consider targeted wage incentives, career development programs, and improved funding for key public sector roles to address this imbalance and retain skilled professionals in critical sectors.

Many Moldovan universities lack dedicated career counselling offices, and where such services exist, they are often understaffed, poorly resourced, and disconnected from labour market realities. Alumni networks, which serve as a vital mechanism for mentorship and job placement in other countries, remain underdeveloped, particularly in regional institutions. Without strong professional networks, graduates struggle to access informal job opportunities and career guidance that could improve their employment prospects. Establishing well-funded, institutionally supported career centres with active alumni engagement would significantly enhance graduates' ability to navigate the job market effectively.

Entrepreneurship has often been cited as a potential solution to Moldova's limited formal employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas. However, university-level entrepreneurial education and business incubation support remain severely underdeveloped. Outside Chisinau, local economic ecosystems often lack the infrastructure necessary to support business creation, leaving graduates without the mentorship, financial backing, or institutional support needed to pursue self-employment. In contrast, countries such as Estonia and Lithuania have successfully leveraged university-based innovation hubs and entrepreneurship programs to stimulate local economic diversification and graduate-led business development. Moldova must consider similar initiatives, fostering partnerships between universities, local governments, and private sector actors to create a more robust entrepreneurial ecosystem, particularly in underdeveloped regions.

Addressing these systemic issues requires a coordinated effort from universities, government institutions, and the private sector. A more dynamic approach to curriculum reform, with a stronger emphasis on practical skills and industry collaboration, would better align graduate competencies with labour market needs. Expanding access to structured internships, career counselling, and professional networking opportunities would help reduce job search duration and improve employment stability. Finally,



targeted policy interventions—such as wage incentives for non-technical fields and increased support for entrepreneurial initiatives—could help bridge economic and regional disparities, ensuring that all graduates, regardless of discipline or location, have a viable pathway to sustainable employment.





7. RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive strategy to enhance graduate employability in Moldova requires a coordinated effort to align higher education with labour market demands, equip students with relevant skills, and establish stronger connections between universities and employers. The current disconnect between academic programs and industry needs has contributed to prolonged job searches, underemployment, and a skills gap that limits both individual career growth and economic development. Addressing these challenges requires a systematic approach that integrates practical experience into higher education, strengthens career services, and ensures continuous adaptation to evolving labour market trends.

A key priority is fostering stronger collaboration between universities and industry partners to ensure that curricula reflect the competencies and skills required in the workforce. Universities should work closely with employers to develop academic programs that integrate real-world applications, case studies, and industry-driven learning objectives. This alignment would help graduates transition more smoothly into employment while reducing the need for extensive on-the-job training. At the same time, universities must expand and institutionalize career services to provide tailored job search assistance, networking opportunities, and structured internship pipelines. Well-funded career centres can play a crucial role in guiding students through the transition from academia to employment by offering professional coaching, mentorship programs, and direct employer engagement.

Practical experience must also become an integral component of all university programs. Internships, apprenticeships, and project-based learning should be embedded into the curriculum to ensure students acquire hands-on experience before graduation. These initiatives should not be limited to large universities in the capital but extended to regional institutions through partnerships with local businesses and government agencies. A decentralized approach would allow graduates from all regions to develop industry-relevant skills while addressing local labour shortages. To further support regional employment integration, universities should collaborate with businesses and municipalities to design internship programs tailored to specific economic needs outside Chisinau, ensuring that students gain exposure to job opportunities in their home regions rather than being forced to seek employment in the capital or abroad.

In addition to technical and field-specific expertise, universities must place greater emphasis on soft skill development. Employers increasingly value competencies such as communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and critical thinking. Structured workshops and courses focusing on these skills should be incorporated into all study



programs to ensure that graduates are not only technically proficient but also capable of thriving in diverse professional environments. Furthermore, universities should expand micro-credentialing programs and industry-recognized certifications in high-demand areas, such as digital literacy, project management, and foreign languages, to enhance graduate adaptability and competitiveness. These certifications would provide students with tangible proof of their expertise in key transversal skills, increasing their employability across various sectors.

To support career readiness more systematically, universities should introduce mandatory career preparation modules that equip students with the tools to navigate the job market effectively. These courses should cover job search strategies, professional branding, networking techniques, and labour market adaptability. By making career education an integral part of higher education, universities can ensure that students graduate with a clear understanding of how to position themselves for employment in a rapidly changing economy.

Sustained progress in graduate employability also depends on continuous monitoring of labour market trends. Universities, in collaboration with policymakers and industry representatives, must regularly track employment patterns and emerging skill requirements, adjusting curricula and training programs accordingly. This data-driven approach will help ensure that graduates are prepared for the jobs of the future rather than being trained for industries that are shrinking or undergoing transformation.

Implementing these measures will help bridge the gap between education and employment, positioning Moldova's graduates for greater success in an increasingly competitive and dynamic job market. By embedding practical experience into academic programs, strengthening career services, expanding regional employment opportunities, and fostering industry collaboration, Moldova can create a higher education system that not only produces highly skilled graduates but also ensures they are equipped to thrive in the workforce.



Policy Recommendations

To improve graduate employment outcomes and ensure a stronger alignment between higher education and labour market demands, a set of targeted policy measures can be considered at the national level. These interventions would facilitate more structured cooperation between universities, employers, and public institutions, fostering a smoother transition from education to the workforce.

A key area of focus is the formalization of university-industry collaboration through structured partnerships and a national framework for work-integrated learning. Expanding the integration of mandatory internships, apprenticeships, and industry-based projects across study programs can enhance students' practical experience and job readiness. Encouraging tax incentives for companies offering structured internships, particularly in priority economic sectors such as IT, agribusiness, and renewable energy, could further stimulate employer engagement. Germany's dual education system demonstrates the benefits of embedding practical training within academic studies, an approach that could be tailored to Moldova's higher education system by incorporating industry participation within accreditation standards.

Enhancing the efficiency of higher education funding can further strengthen labour market alignment. Performance-based funding models that consider graduate employment success rates have been successfully implemented in countries such as the United Kingdom, where universities are incentivized to improve career preparation and employer engagement. Exploring similar approaches could create a direct link between institutional performance and public investment, encouraging the modernization of curricula and the expansion of career support initiatives.

To promote regional employment integration, mechanisms that facilitate structured graduate trainee programs can be developed in collaboration with employers, particularly in areas outside Chisinau. Financial instruments such as targeted employer subsidies for hiring recent graduates or co-financing structured work experience programs could contribute to a more balanced distribution of employment opportunities across the country. France's tax incentives for graduate employment illustrate how such initiatives can encourage businesses to invest in young professionals, ensuring that recent graduates have access to meaningful job placements.

Expanding career services infrastructure remains an important element in supporting graduates' transition into the workforce. Establishing well-resourced career centres at all universities, with integrated job placement assistance, professional counselling, and employer engagement, would provide more consistent support across institutions. Connecting these services to a National Employment Portal—where job



listings, internship opportunities, and employer-student networking events are consolidated—can further streamline access to career opportunities. A structured model, as implemented in Sweden, links university career centres with national employment agencies, ensuring that students and graduates benefit from a coordinated approach to job placement and career planning.

Finally, fostering an entrepreneurial culture among graduates through a national university entrepreneurship program can contribute to economic diversification and job creation. Providing structured support such as startup incubation, mentorship, and access to early-stage funding would encourage more graduates to pursue self-employment. This could enhance economic resilience by equipping graduates with the skills and support necessary to launch sustainable ventures.

These policy interventions, implemented in coordination with universities, employers, and relevant government agencies, can contribute to a more dynamic and responsive higher education system. Strengthening collaboration, improving data-driven decision-making, and expanding structured employment support mechanisms would enhance graduate employability while fostering sustainable economic growth.