

# UPGRADE

Enhancing Graduates' Employability Tracking in Moldova

## RECOMMENDATIONS

to mainstream monitoring HE graduates' employability at national and university level

### Milestone 7

GRADUATES'  
EMPLOYABILITY  
TRACKING



Co-funded by  
the European Union



**UPGRADE**

ENHANCING GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY TRACKING  
IN MOLDOVA



## MS7: RECOMMENDATIONS to mainstream monitoring HE graduates' employability at national and university level

Project Acronym:	UPGRADE
Project No:	101129166
WP / Task:	WP2/ MS7 - Recommendations to mainstream monitoring HE graduates' employability at national and university level
Project partner (s)	PI-ASEM/MD

This document is a deliverable within UPGRADE project „ENHANCING GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY TRACKING IN MOLDOVA”, ref. nr. 101129166, funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ programme, key action 2 - Capacity Building in Higher Education.

*Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.*



## TABLE OF CONTENT

---

INTRODUCTION .....	4
1. Mainstreaming graduates' employability tracking on NATIONAL level.....	6
1.3. Current Challenges at the National Level .....	8
1.4. Government Priorities for Tracking Graduate Employability .....	8
1.5. Recommendations for the Moldovan Government .....	9
2. Mainstreaming graduates' employability tracking on INSTITUTIONAL level ..	12
2.1. Institutional Policies on Employability of Graduates and Career Orientation ....	12
2.2. Areas of Expertise of Institutional Career Guidance Centres .....	13
2.3. Institutional Procedures in place to Monitor Employability of Graduates .....	14
2.4. Problems and Issues Faced by Institutions in Career Guidance Services .....	16
2.5. Problems and Issues Related to Monitoring Graduates' Employability and Professional Path .....	18
2.6. Recommendations to Mainstream Employability of Graduates .....	20
2.7. Recommendations to Mainstream Monitoring of Graduates' Employability and Career Path .....	22
CONCLUSIONS .....	24



## INTRODUCTION

*Milestone 7 – “Recommendations to mainstream monitoring of higher education (HE) graduates’ employability at national and university level”* – has been elaborated within the framework of the UPGRADE project, Enhancing Graduates’ Employability Tracking in Moldova (project number 101129166), co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The UPGRADE project brings together key national stakeholders to build an inclusive and sustainable system for tracking the employability of university graduates, strengthening the capacity of institutions and informing evidence-based reforms in the higher education sector of the Republic of Moldova.

### General information about the project:

ACRONYM:	UPGRADE
FULL TITLE:	Enhancing Graduates’ Employability Tracking in Moldova
GRANT AGREEMENT NO:	101129166
FUNDING SCHEME:	ERASMUS+, CBHE
START DATE:	01 November 2023
DURATION:	36 months
END DATE:	31 October 2026
PROJECT BUDGET:	962 909.00 EUR

The overarching aim of the UPGRADE project is to enhance the monitoring of university graduates’ employability in Moldova, to be achieved by Month 36 of the project implementation.

OB1: To promote the monitoring of higher education (HE) graduates’ employability and build national consensus among key stakeholders, by Month 36.

OB2: To enrich and advance the legislative and normative framework on HE graduates’ employability at both national and institutional levels, by Month 30.

OB3: To enhance the human capacity of the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova and Moldovan higher education institutions (MDHEIs) to monitor graduates’ employability, by Month 30.



**OB4:** To strengthen the capacity of MDHEI staff to design and implement graduates' employability surveys, deliver efficient career guidance services, and support the labour market integration of students and graduates, by Month 36.

Recommendations to mainstream monitoring of higher education (HE) graduates' employability at national and university level (MS7) serves as a strategic instrument developed under the UPGRADE project to provide actionable recommendations for mainstreaming the monitoring of HE graduates' employability at both the national and university levels. Its purpose is to guide Moldovan decision-makers in designing coherent and sustainable mechanisms that respond to ongoing challenges in the transition from education to employment. The document addresses key issues such as the lack of a national graduate tracking framework, insufficient alignment of university programs with labour market needs, and the limited institutional capacity to conduct follow-up studies and career services. Through its recommendations, the document offers a roadmap for aligning Moldovan higher education with European standards and best practices in graduate tracking.

The recommendations herein are grounded in the findings of the 1st Experts' Workshop conducted in Moldova (27-28 March 2024) and respond directly to the strategic and specific objectives of the UPGRADE project. They support both systemic reform and institutional innovation by fostering cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Research, universities, employers, and civil society. The document emphasizes the value of reliable graduate employment data to inform curricula development, improve quality assurance, and drive policy decisions. By tackling the gaps in graduate monitoring, the recommendations aim to empower HEIs to better prepare students for the labour market while enhancing the country's economic resilience and social cohesion. Ultimately, this document is a vital contribution to Moldova's national reform agenda in higher education and a key milestone in the realization of the UPGRADE project's long-term impact.



## 1. MAINSTREAMING GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY TRACKING ON NATIONAL LEVEL

The employability of higher education graduates in the Republic of Moldova is influenced by a combination of legal frameworks, current labour market conditions, statistical trends, existing challenges, and governmental priorities.

### 1.1. National Legal Framework on Graduates' Employability

Moldova's approach to graduate employability is underpinned by several legislative instruments aimed at facilitating the transition from higher education to the labour market:

a) Education Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 152/2014: This foundational document outlines the state's commitment to supporting graduates' employment. Notably, Article 111 provides tax exemptions to private legal entities that employ graduates within their first year after graduation. Additionally, the Code mandates collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) and the business sector through initiatives such as:

- Establishing joint centres for professional counselling and graduate employment.
- Organizing job fairs.
- Creating joint research incubators and laboratories.
- Offering continuous professional training.
- Providing internship opportunities.
- Involving business representatives in developing the National Qualifications Framework and professional standards.
- Engaging business experts in monitoring and evaluating higher education quality.

b) National Qualifications Framework (NQF): Implemented in 2017, the NQF aligns with the European Qualifications Framework, aiming to establish an integrated, open, and flexible national qualification system that meets labour market needs and promotes.





## 1. Labour Market Overview and Student Graduation in Moldova

The labour market situation for graduates in Moldova presents a complex landscape shaped by demographic shifts, economic constraints, and systemic challenges. Over the last decade, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions (HEIs) has significantly declined—from 102,000 in 2015 to just 56,527 in the 2023/2024 academic year. This decrease suggests both reduced interest in local higher education and the effects of emigration and demographic decline. Despite the reduction in student numbers, Moldova's labour force participation rate for individuals aged 15 and older was 44.5% in 2024. However, the youth unemployment rate, particularly for ages 15–24, was 4.0% in 2024, indicating persistent barriers for young people entering the workforce.

The employment market is dominated by the services sector, which absorbs nearly two-thirds (63.9%) of the employed population, followed by industry (24%) and agriculture (12.1%). This sectoral distribution underscores a disconnect between what universities traditionally offer—often theoretical knowledge—and the hands-on skills demanded by employers. Many graduates find it difficult to secure employment aligned with their field of study, and length of service remains a key requirement for employers, disadvantaging fresh graduates. The labour market is further constrained by limited entry-level opportunities, wage stagnation, and ongoing migration of skilled young people seeking better prospects abroad.

According to the Ministry of Education and Research, in 2023 there were 2,041 teaching vacancies, with only 354 young graduates filling these positions, resulting in a vacancy coverage rate between 11.9% and 15.8%. Moreover, just under half of all assigned graduates actually took up positions, reflecting a low motivation to remain in teaching careers and a general dissatisfaction with career pathways. A lack of structured mechanisms for tracking employment outcomes, combined with limited employer engagement, hinders the effective transition of graduates into the labour force. As a result, Moldova continues to face a brain drain, with highly qualified youth leaving the country due to poor employment prospects.

The absence of a national graduate registration and tracking system makes it difficult to identify gaps and align higher education with labour market needs.



Without reliable data, universities struggle to reform curricula or design targeted interventions to support students' professional integration. The business environment remains underutilized in academic development, and universities lack systematic support for internships and job readiness programs. These issues collectively undermine the confidence of young people in the value of local higher education. Therefore, the development of a comprehensive graduate employability strategy is not only essential but urgent for both Moldovan HEIs and the government to build a stronger, more relevant and resilient higher education system.

## 2. Current Challenges at the National Level

Several systemic issues hinder the effective integration of graduates into Moldova's labour market:

- **Mismatch between Education and Labour Market Needs:** Higher education programs often struggle to adapt to the evolving demands of the economy, resulting in graduates facing difficulties in securing employment that aligns with their qualifications.
- **Limited Practical Experience:** Insufficient collaboration between HEIs and employers leads to a lack of practical training opportunities, leaving graduates underprepared for real-world job requirements.
- **High Emigration Rates:** The country experiences significant emigration, particularly among young, educated individuals, leading to a "brain drain" that depletes the skilled workforce.
- **Lack of Comprehensive Graduate Tracking:** There is no national mechanism for systematically tracking graduates' employment outcomes, making it challenging to assess and improve the effectiveness of higher education programs.

## 3. Government Priorities for Tracking Graduate Employability

The Moldovan government has identified several priorities to enhance the monitoring and support of graduate employability:





- **Integration of Information Systems:** Developing mechanisms to monitor graduate employment rates by integrating information systems within the Ministry of Education and Research.
- **Curriculum Revision:** Aligning university curricula with labor market needs through active involvement of the business community.
- **Additional Funding for High Employability Rates:** Providing extra funding to universities that demonstrate higher graduate employability rates.
- **Internationalization of Higher Education:** Developing a national brand for higher education and creating platforms like "Study in Moldova" to attract international students and promote Moldovan universities globally.

#### 4. Recommendations for the Moldovan Government

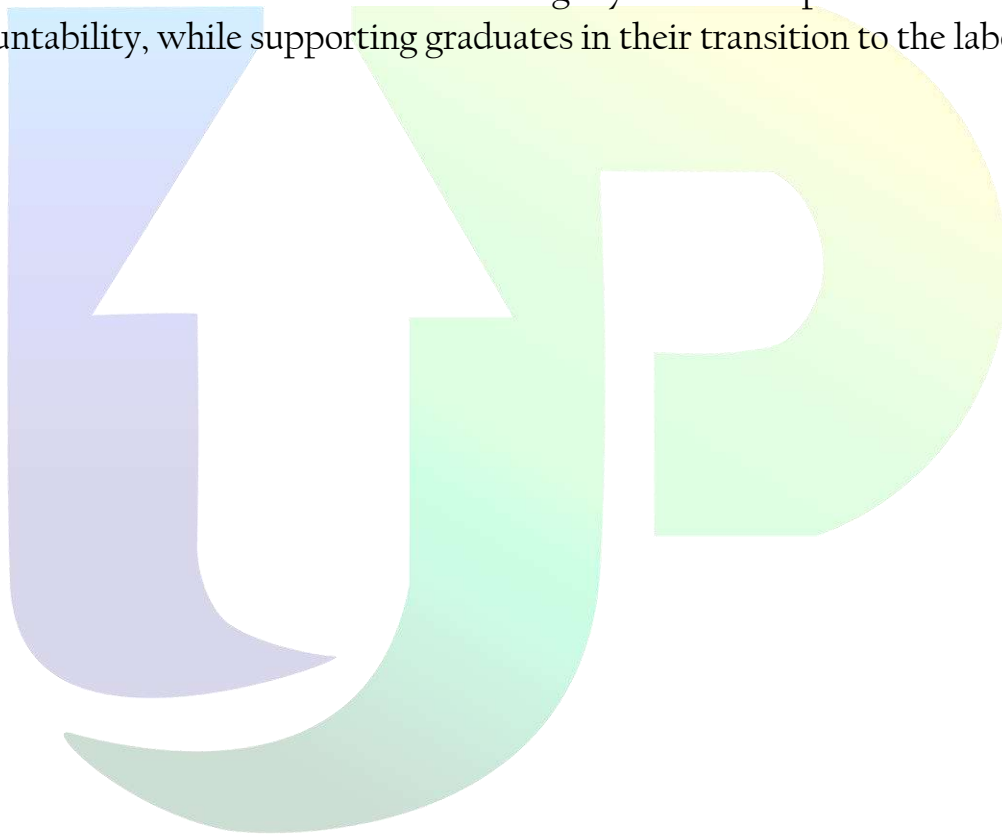
1. **Adopt and enforce a National Regulation on Graduate Employability Tracking:** Moldova currently lacks a standardized, legally binding framework for universities to monitor graduates' career paths. Establishing and enforcing such regulation would ensure national coherence, create a systematic approach across all HEIs, and empower the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) to collect reliable data for policy development.
2. **Develop a Centralized Digital Platform for Graduate Tracking and Career Support:** A unified online portal, managed by MER, would serve as a data hub and service platform for graduates, universities, employers, and government agencies. It would centralize data collection, support automated employment monitoring, and provide career services (job postings, internships, surveys), enabling evidence-based decision-making and improving the visibility of employment trends.
3. **Integrate Graduate Tracking Indicators into HEIs' Institutional Accreditation Criteria:** Linking accreditation and performance evaluation to the implementation of graduate tracking tools would institutionalize accountability and motivate HEIs to adopt long-term tracking practices. This would drive quality assurance, improve curriculum relevance, and support MER's capacity to assess systemic impact.
4. **Fund the Establishment and Strengthening of Career Guidance Centers in All Public HEIs:** Currently, only a minority of HEIs have functioning career centers. Providing targeted funding, equipment, and training would enhance career services at scale, ensuring that all institutions can support student transitions into the labor market and collect employment data in a coordinated manner.



5. **Promote Lifelong Learning and Continuous Professional Development:** Encourage the development of programs that support continuous skill enhancement, enabling graduates to adapt to changing job market conditions and technological advancements.
6. **Promote Inter-Ministerial Collaboration for Sector-Specific Employment Distribution:** Ministries such as Health, Internal Affairs, and Defense currently play a role in graduate employment. Formalizing this collaboration through cross-sectoral agreements and standard employment databases would align education outputs with labor market demands and reduce fragmentation in graduate distribution processes.
7. **Offer Financial Incentives to Employers Hiring Fresh Graduates:** Moldovan employers often prioritize work experience, making it difficult for graduates to enter the workforce. Introducing tax exemptions or wage subsidies for employers who hire new graduates can stimulate youth employment, reduce brain drain, and build trust between universities and the private sector.
8. **Launch a National Employability Observatory:** A dedicated unit within MER could coordinate research, evaluation, and policy development on graduate employability. It would ensure continuous analysis of national trends, publish annual reports, support forecasting of labor needs, and disseminate best practices to all HEIs, fostering a culture of data-driven reform.
9. **Integrate Employers into Curriculum Design and Assessment Processes:** Employers in Moldova often report a mismatch between graduate skills and job requirements. Systematic involvement of industry in curriculum development, graduate evaluation panels, and accreditation reviews ensures relevant skill development, improves student job-readiness, and reinforces university-labor market links.
10. **Develop a National Graduate Employability Scorecard:** A standardized dashboard assessing HEIs on key performance indicators (employment rate, job relevance, student satisfaction, etc.) would benchmark progress, increase transparency, and help students make informed choices. It also incentivizes institutions to continuously improve their programs.
11. **Institutionalize Graduate Surveys as a National Requirement:** A standardized national graduate employability survey—developed, adopted, and implemented by the Moldovan Government—is essential for collecting consistent and comparable



data on employment outcomes across all HEIs. Once formally integrated into the national education policy framework, this survey must be mandatory for all higher education institutions and administered at key intervals. By taking ownership of this process, the government ensures uniform methodology, avoids fragmented or inconsistent data collection, and enhances its ability to design effective, evidence-based policies. HEIs, in turn, will be required to incorporate the national survey into their internal quality assurance mechanisms and use the data to adjust curricula, career services, and employer engagement strategies. This approach enables a cohesive national monitoring system and promotes institutional accountability, while supporting graduates in their transition to the labor market.





## 2. MAINSTREAMING GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY TRACKING ON INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

### 2.1. Institutional Policies on Employability of Graduates and Career Orientation

Several Moldovan universities involved in UPGRADE project have taken notable steps toward institutionalizing career guidance and graduate employability tracking through official frameworks and internal policies. The Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM) has a formally operates under Institutional Development strategy for 2023-2027 and have adopted Regulation on the Organization and Functioning of the Marketing, Partnerships and Career Service, which defines its scope of work, responsibilities, and instruments for tracking graduate outcomes. The Moldova State University (USM) operates under a comprehensive institutional development strategy (2021–2026) and a Methodological Guide for the Career Guidance Centre, approved by the University Senate, which serves as a practical framework for running career-related activities. Alecu Russo State University of Bălți (USARB) has established a Career Guidance and Relations with the Labour Market Centre and applies internal policies on employability tracking and student support services. In contrast, Cahul State University (USC) and Comrat State University (KDU) currently lack permanent and fully structured career guidance centres. However, within the UPGRADE project, both institutions are working to formally establish such centres and integrate career services into their institutional development strategies.

To ensure functional and sustainable support for graduate employability, all higher education institutions in Moldova should adopt a minimum legal framework that includes: (1) an approved regulation or charter defining the mission and operational mechanisms of career guidance centres; (2) internal procedures for collecting and analysing data on graduate employability; (3) integration of graduate feedback into quality assurance mechanisms; (4) formal assignment of human and financial resources to support the centre's activities; and (5) Senate or Board-approved institutional policies aligning with national legislation. Establishing such frameworks ensures that each university's career services are not just occasional or project-based but form part of a systematic, long-term institutional effort. Institutions like ASEM, USM, and USARB can serve as models, having already operationalized structured approaches. For USC and KDU, UPGRADE





presents a timely opportunity to formalize their career guidance centres, embed them into institutional governance, and align their operations with national standards.

Aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs is one of the most critical reforms needed to ensure that Moldova's higher education system becomes more relevant, competitive, and inclusive. Institutional frameworks that embed graduate tracking and employer engagement allow universities to continually assess the effectiveness of their programs, revise curricula in response to labour market signals, and provide targeted support to students in transition to employment. A structured approach ensures that universities move from ad-hoc activities to strategic initiatives based on evidence and stakeholder input. By institutionalizing these processes, universities can better understand which programs lead to successful employment, which skills are in demand, and where gaps exist. Furthermore, such frameworks encourage partnerships with employers and industry representatives in co-designing academic content, ensuring practical learning components like internships and apprenticeships are integrated. This also supports the university's role as a regional development agent and as a key player in reducing youth unemployment and emigration. Strong institutional frameworks provide not just structure but legitimacy, creating a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. Ultimately, aligning education with employment requires that universities embed employability into their mission, and this begins with sound internal governance and regulatory instruments.

## 2.2. Areas of Expertise of Institutional Career Guidance Centres

The career guidance centres of the UPGRADE partner institutions focus on several key areas that support students and graduates in their professional development and transition to the labour market. These areas include career counselling, employability skills development, labour market orientation, internship facilitation, employer engagement, and alumni tracking. Each institution implements a range of services tailored to their student community:

- ASEM offers an extensive array of services through its Marketing, Partnerships and Career Service (SMPC), including annual job and internship fairs, public lectures by employers, and career guidance workshops such as "How to prepare for a job interview" and "Next level: a new job".
- USM provides career education and individual counselling via its Career Guidance Centre, including events like "Festival of professions", and implements structured guidance programs for students with special needs.





- UPSC organizes online and in-person career fairs, vocational assessments, and distributes dedicated Graduate Guides to help young specialists navigate employment in the education field.
- USARB engages students in professional development workshops on networking and communication, maintains job boards, and gathers employer feedback to adjust services.
- USC, although still developing its centre, already conducts student and employer satisfaction surveys, and uses the SYSLAB model for career support.
- KDU provides career guidance through the Centre for Professional Guidance, and conducts job fairs, open days, and training programs on soft skills and digital readiness.

Despite these positive examples, the current services provided by the institutions vary in scope, depth, and consistency. While many centres are active in organizing events and offering counselling, the majority lack permanent staffing, digital systems, and institutional funding to sustain and expand these services. Feedback mechanisms from employers and graduates, though present, are not systematically integrated into institutional decision-making. Furthermore, outreach to underrepresented student groups, especially those in rural areas or with special needs, remains limited. Career guidance services are often implemented more as extracurricular initiatives rather than as an integrated part of academic and quality assurance processes. To truly promote employability, these services must become institutionally embedded, more data-driven, and aligned with real labour market needs. Enhancing the capacity of centres, professionalizing staff roles, and scaling good practices across institutions are crucial next steps. The progress made within UPGRADE creates a solid foundation—but sustained impact depends on expanding and improving these services systemically.

### 2.3. Institutional Procedures in place to Monitor Employability of Graduates

Moldovan Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have in place a variety of mechanisms designed to track the career paths and employability of their graduates. Monitoring graduates' employment outcomes is crucial for assessing the relevance and effectiveness of study programs, informing curriculum updates, and improving institutional quality assurance. It also helps universities build stronger connections with the labour market, offering data-driven insights into trends, gaps, and areas for improvement.



Moreover, graduate employability is an important performance indicator reported annually to the Ministry of Education and Research. However, the current reporting mechanisms are fragmented and require revision to reflect the complexity of career trajectories and provide actionable data. A more structured and standardized national approach is essential to ensure coherence and comparability of data across institutions.

Each UPGRADE partner institution has undertaken efforts to establish internal procedures for graduate tracking.

- ASEM monitors employability through annual online surveys, conducted six months post-graduation, and also collects data through telephone outreach by departmental staff.
- USM applies a multi-tier tracking system, where faculties maintain updated graduate databases, collect feedback via email and social media, and conduct follow-ups at intervals after graduation using detailed questionnaires.
- UPSC maintains employment records through its Career Guidance and Counselling Centre and follows formal Senate-approved procedures to inform and track students' transition into employment.
- USARB conducts surveys and employer feedback collection, as well as data analysis through its Career Guidance and Labour Market Relations Centre.
- USC uses graduate and employer satisfaction surveys and compiles data through its quality management unit, although structured procedures are still being formalized.
- KDU tracks employability through job fairs, surveys, interviews, and maintains a graduate database hosted on a dedicated online platform ([vipuskniki.kdu.md](http://vipuskniki.kdu.md)), collecting feedback on hard and soft skills development.

To fully harness the benefits of graduate tracking, Moldovan HEIs must elevate their procedures by adopting centralized and standardized monitoring mechanisms. A unified national platform would allow for real-time data collection and easier integration of information across universities. It would also support longitudinal tracking, enabling better analysis of graduate trajectories over time. Centralization would enhance reporting accuracy to the Ministry and facilitate benchmarking between institutions. Furthermore, access to consolidated data would allow policymakers and HEIs to better anticipate labor market needs and adapt academic programs accordingly. Ultimately, improving graduate monitoring ensures a more responsive, accountable, and future-ready higher education system in Moldova.



## 2.4. Problems and Issues Faced by Institutions in Career Guidance Services

Career guidance services offer crucial benefits to all actors in the higher education ecosystem. For students, these services help in clarifying career goals, understanding labour market demands, and acquiring job search and soft skills that increase their employability and confidence. For universities, career services improve graduate outcomes, feed data into institutional quality assurance, and boost the institution's reputation and attractiveness to prospective students. Employers benefit from structured collaboration with HEIs by gaining access to a pool of better-prepared, career-oriented candidates with relevant skills and knowledge. Additionally, regular interaction between universities and employers through career centres enhances curriculum relevance and supports workforce development. A strong career guidance framework bridges the gap between education and employment, creating a more dynamic, adaptive, and inclusive higher education environment.

However, Moldovan HEIs face significant challenges in establishing, consolidating, and modernizing institutional structures responsible for career guidance and graduate employability monitoring. These challenges affect the scope, quality, and sustainability of the services offered. Key problems include:

1. **Limited Institutional Funding and Resources:** Many career centres lack stable funding, dedicated office space, and technical equipment. Without consistent investment, these units remain underdeveloped, leading to sporadic activities rather than sustained support services. Securing dedicated funding would allow HEIs to professionalize and expand career services.
2. **Lack of Specialized Career Guidance Staff:** Most centres are staffed by part-time personnel or academic staff without formal training in career counselling. This limits the depth and quality of services provided. Investing in trained personnel would enhance service effectiveness and provide students with professional, personalized support.
3. **Fragmented Internal Coordination:** Career services often operate in isolation from academic departments, QA units, and external relations offices. This limits integration of employability into broader institutional strategy. Improved internal coordination would ensure that employability becomes a cross-cutting institutional priority.
4. **Outdated or Absent Operational Frameworks:** Some HEIs either lack formal regulations governing career services or operate under outdated frameworks.



Without clear mandates, roles, and responsibilities, services remain inconsistent and dependent on individual initiative. Updating and approving modern operational documents would enhance transparency and functionality.

5. **Insufficient Employer Engagement:** Collaboration with the business sector is often limited to one-off events or informal relationships. Systematic partnerships are needed to co-create internships, mentoring programs, and feedback loops. Strengthening employer engagement would align university programs more closely with market needs.
6. **Weak Communication with Alumni:** HEIs often lose contact with graduates shortly after graduation due to outdated contact databases and lack of engagement strategies. This limits alumni contributions to mentoring, recruitment, and tracking employment outcomes. Building alumni networks and platforms would create a valuable resource for guidance, promotion, and data collection.
7. **Low Student Awareness and Participation:** Many students are unaware of the availability or benefits of career guidance services. Low visibility reduces participation and the overall impact of the centre. Strengthening promotional strategies and embedding services into academic life would increase student involvement and improve outcomes.
8. **Limited Career Services for Graduates and Final-Year Students:** Career guidance centres mostly focus primarily on student recruitment and admissions-related activities, such as promoting university programs and attracting candidates during the admission cycle. While this is important, it often comes at the expense of comprehensive services for graduates and final-year students, who require targeted support for labour market integration. As a result, many graduates leave university without receiving structured career counselling, job search assistance, or employability training—critical services that should be part of a modern career centre's mandate. This limited scope reduces the long-term impact of the centre and weakens institutional efforts to improve graduate outcomes. To address this, career centres should expand their operational focus to include services tailored specifically for soon-to-be graduates and alumni.

Addressing these problems is essential for Moldova's HEIs to create robust career ecosystems, better support their students and graduates, and become active contributors to national workforce development.





## 2.5. Problems and Issues Related to Monitoring Graduates' Employability and Professional Path

Moldovan higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly making efforts to monitor the employability and professional trajectories of their graduates using various tools and techniques. These include online and printed surveys, telephone interviews, email outreach, alumni databases, and occasionally social media communication. Some universities also collect data through department-level records, employer feedback forms, and participation in national or institutional job fairs to indirectly assess employment outcomes.

Tracking the employability of graduates is vital for universities because it offers direct feedback on the relevance and quality of academic programs, helps to identify gaps between education and the labour market, and guides curriculum reforms. It also strengthens a university's ability to build partnerships with employers and to provide targeted career services and internships. At a systemic level, accurate employability data allows national authorities to evaluate the impact of higher education policies, inform funding decisions, and shape strategies for economic development. Furthermore, graduate tracking aligns with European Union standards, where employability is a key performance indicator in the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). These efforts contribute to Moldova's ambition to harmonize its higher education system with EU principles and benchmarks.

However, considering that employability of graduates is one of the indicators officially reported to the Ministry of Education and Research, the current system reveals a significant need for structural and methodological improvements.

### Challenges in Delivering and Collecting Graduate Employability Surveys:

1. **Limited Response Rate from Graduates:** Many graduates do not respond to surveys, especially when contact information is outdated. This creates incomplete data and limits representativeness. Improving alumni engagement strategies would increase participation and yield more reliable insights.
2. **Lack of Follow-up Mechanisms:** Most surveys are conducted only once (usually 1 year post-graduation) without tracking long-term career development. This fails to capture full career trajectories. Implementing longitudinal follow-up surveys would provide more comprehensive data over time.
3. **Exclusive Focus on Graduate Feedback (No Employer Input):** The surveys target only graduates and miss the perspectives of employers. It limits understanding of





workplace performance and skill gaps. Including employer surveys would enrich the data and support better alignment with labour market needs.

4. **No Unified or Standardized Methodology:** Each institution currently uses its own survey formats, timing, and data collection procedures, which makes national comparisons inconsistent and unreliable. Universities collect employability data independently, without applying a common methodology, raising concerns about the accuracy, comparability, and credibility of the results. In the absence of a unified approach, it becomes difficult to assess the real employment outcomes of graduates at national level. A standardized national graduate tracking tool, with clear guidelines and uniform indicators, would significantly improve data quality, ensure methodological consistency, and facilitate benchmarking across institutions.
5. **Manual and Fragmented Data Collection:** Data is often collected and stored manually, without digital integration or automated systems. This leads to inefficiencies and delays. A centralized digital platform would streamline the process and improve reporting capacity.
6. **No Incentives for Graduates to Participate:** Without motivation (e.g., networking opportunities, access to job platforms, alumni benefits), many graduates ignore requests for participation. Offering incentives would significantly boost engagement and data quality.
7. **Lack of Institutional Coordination and Motivation for Staff Involved in Graduate Tracking:** In majority of MD HEIs, the responsibility for collecting and managing graduate employability data is distributed inconsistently across departments, with no clear coordination, accountability, or dedicated personnel. This fragmented approach undermines the quality and continuity of data collection. Moreover, staff involved in these tasks often manage them in addition to their primary responsibilities, without formal recognition, incentives, or structured support. To improve coherence and data reliability, universities should designate a central unit or responsible person for overseeing the tracking process. Additionally, institutional incentives and recognition mechanisms—such as performance-based bonuses, acknowledgment in annual evaluations, professional development opportunities, or formal inclusion of these tasks in job descriptions—can greatly enhance staff engagement. Together, these measures would ensure a more consistent, motivated, and professional approach to employability monitoring, while fostering a data-driven culture within institutions.
8. **Lack of Integration with Other Institutional Systems:** Graduate data is often isolated from academic records, career services, or alumni networks. Integration would allow a holistic view of student progress and outcomes, supporting more strategic planning and quality assurance.



9. **Lack of Public Access to Graduate Employability Data:** Currently, external users, such as prospective students, parents, employers, and career counsellors do not have access to graduate employability data collected by universities. This is a major limitation, as employment outcomes are an important criterion when choosing a study program or specialization. The absence of publicly available, transparent data reduces the ability of applicants to make informed decisions and weakens trust in the relevance of educational offerings. Moreover, it limits the visibility of high-performing programs and prevents the labour market from better aligning with graduate qualifications. To address this, Moldova's HEIs and national authorities should work toward publishing aggregated and anonymized employability statistics, through institutional websites or a centralized national platform.

Addressing these issues will help Moldovan HEIs transition from sporadic data collection to a systematic and impactful employability monitoring process, strengthening institutional development and reinforcing national education reform efforts.

## 2.6. Recommendations to Mainstream Employability of Graduates

In light of the numerous challenges identified in institutional career guidance services—such as insufficient funding, limited employer engagement, lack of trained staff, and weak alumni communication—Moldovan HEIs must adopt a set of strategic and practical measures to strengthen and mainstream employability efforts. The following recommendations aim to improve the impact, visibility, and long-term sustainability of career services within the higher education system, while also encouraging the diversification of support mechanisms for students and graduates.

1. **Institutionalize Career Guidance Centres in All HEIs with Dedicated Frameworks and Budgets:** Many centres currently operate on an informal or project basis. Formal institutional recognition (via Senate-approved regulations and strategic inclusion in university development plans) ensures legitimacy, resource allocation, and long-term sustainability. This also allows for better integration of employability support into institutional governance and quality assurance systems.
2. **Diversify the Services Offered by Career Centres:** Career services must go beyond job fairs and CV workshops. Expanding into areas like entrepreneurship training, digital skill development, networking events, and personal branding will equip students with a broader skill set. This holistic approach better prepares graduates for dynamic labour markets and alternative career paths, including freelancing and self-employment.



3. **Establish Structured Employer Engagement Mechanisms:** A lack of systematic employer involvement limits job opportunities for students. HEIs should formalize collaboration with industry through advisory boards, curriculum co-design, joint internship programs, and employer feedback loops. Stronger links to the labour market improve curriculum relevance and open pathways for direct recruitment.
4. **Introduce Career Education into Curricula across Disciplines:** Embedding career development modules (e.g., "Career Planning", "Labour Market Trends", or "Start Your Business") into undergraduate and graduate programs ensures all students receive structured support. This proactive approach promotes early career thinking and raises awareness of labour market dynamics among all students, not just those who actively seek help.
5. **Train and Certify Career Guidance Staff:** Career advisors often lack specialized training. Investing in national or regional certification programs and participating in international mobility (e.g., Erasmus+ staff training weeks) will raise the professional standard of services. Trained counsellors provide more targeted, evidence-based support, increasing trust and uptake among students.
6. **Establish and Promote Alumni Networks as a Resource for Employability:** Weak communication with alumni limits graduate tracking and mentorship opportunities. Building digital alumni platforms, organizing networking events, and involving alumni in career fairs and panels will strengthen ties. Active alumni networks can become valuable ambassadors, mentors, and employers for current students.
7. **Develop Digital Portals to Deliver Career Services:** Physical services alone are not enough in a digital age. Creating university-branded career portals with tools for job search, internship matching, online counselling, and employer profiles increases access and inclusivity. Such institutional portals support ongoing engagement, even after graduation, and streamline data collection and reporting.
8. **Promote Cross-Institutional Exchange of Good Practices:** Why it matters: Career services in Moldova vary in maturity and approach. Creating national or regional communities of practice among HEIs allows less-experienced universities to learn from more established models. This can lead to harmonization, capacity building, and development of joint initiatives like national career weeks or shared alumni databases.
9. **Implement Regular Monitoring and Evaluation of Career Services:** Why it matters: Without data on the effectiveness of services, continuous improvement is difficult. Introducing KPIs (e.g., student satisfaction, employment rate post-service, number of employer partnerships) allows career centres to assess impact and justify resource needs. Transparent evaluation builds institutional credibility and trust among stakeholders.



Implementing these recommendations will help Moldovan HEIs move from isolated and under-resourced efforts toward modern, integrated, and student-centered career ecosystems. A stronger career guidance framework will not only boost graduate employability but also elevate institutional performance, reputation, and alignment with national and EU-level strategic priorities in higher education.

## 2.7. Recommendations to Mainstream Monitoring of Graduates' Employability and Career Path

In response to the challenges identified in monitoring graduates' employability and professional trajectories—including low survey response rates, fragmented methodologies, and lack of employer feedback—it is essential for Moldovan higher education institutions (HEIs) to implement a coordinated, standardized, and technologically enhanced approach. Below are 11 key recommendations designed to mainstream the graduate tracking process, align institutional practices with national and EU standards, and contribute to the creation of a robust, data-driven system that benefits institutions, students, employers, and national authorities.

1. **Develop and Implement a Standardized National Graduate Employability Questionnaire:** Currently, each HEI uses its own survey instruments, leading to inconsistent and incomparable data. A standardized questionnaire—developed at national level and used by all HEIs—ensures uniformity in data collection, facilitates national reporting, and allows for comparative institutional performance analysis. It also ensures alignment with EU practices and international indicators.
2. **Develop a National Framework for Monitoring Graduate Employability and Career Path:** The lack of a national framework has resulted in inconsistent practices and fragmented data across HEIs. A legally binding framework coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research would define clear roles, methods, and reporting timelines, making graduate tracking a national priority. It would provide universities with clarity, legitimacy, and alignment with funding, quality standards, and European benchmarks like the EHEA.
3. **Create a Centralized National Graduate Tracking Platform:**
  - **A national-level digital platform,** hosted by the Ministry of Education and Research, would collect, manage, and analyse data from all HEIs in a centralized manner. This would streamline reporting obligations, reduce duplication of efforts at institutional level, and provide policymakers with a reliable, real-time overview of graduate employment trends.





- **Design a Digital, User-Friendly Survey for Graduates:** A responsive, mobile-compatible survey platform with a simple and intuitive interface will significantly improve user experience and increase participation rates. If the survey is easy to complete in 5–7 minutes and accessible via mobile or email, graduates are more likely to engage. HEIs benefit from better quality data and easier data processing.
  - **Integrate Graduate Survey Tools with Institutional Academic Databases:** Integrating existing student data (such as study program, cycle of study, graduation year) with the survey tool reduces manual data entry and avoids errors. This saves time for institutional staff, ensures data accuracy, and enables better segmentation and analysis of employment outcomes by program or faculty.
  - **Introduce Incentives for Graduates to Complete Employability Surveys:** Many graduates lack motivation to respond. Offering small incentives—such as participation in raffles, access to alumni career services, or certification of survey participation—can greatly improve response rates. Better participation leads to more representative data, which improves institutional and national decision-making.
  - **Allow Partial Pre-Filling of Survey Based on Institutional Data:** Graduates often abandon surveys if they are too long or repetitive. Pre-filling fields such as degree program, graduation year, or contact information makes the survey more efficient and improves completion rates. This also reinforces data accuracy by relying on verified institutional records.
  - **Enable Modular Surveys Adapted to Program or Study Cycle:** Not all graduates have the same employment patterns (e.g., vocational vs. academic paths). Modular survey formats tailored by discipline or study cycle (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate) allow HEIs to gather more relevant data and better understand graduate-specific trajectories. This supports targeted program improvements.
4. **Collect and Analyse Employer Feedback as a Parallel Data Source:** Surveying only graduates provides a limited perspective. Including employers in the feedback process helps assess graduate preparedness, identify skill gaps, and build stronger links between academia and industry. For HEIs, this enhances curriculum alignment and improves labour market relevance.
5. **Provide Training for Institutional Staff on Graduate Tracking Tools and Analysis:** Even with the right tools, outcomes depend on staff competence. Training institutional teams on the use of digital platforms, data analysis, and communication with graduates ensures professional and consistent survey implementation. It also builds internal capacity for evidence-based policy making.



## CONCLUSIONS

Tracking graduates' employability and professional paths is a strategic necessity for both higher education institutions and national authorities in Moldova. The current landscape is marked by disjointed initiatives, uneven institutional practices, and a lack of standardized methodologies, limiting the country's ability to make informed educational and labour market decisions. Although Moldovan HEIs have made efforts to implement internal tracking tools such as graduate surveys, alumni outreach, and employment data collection, these remain insufficient without systemic support and a common national vision. Monitoring employability offers immense value—it helps universities evaluate the effectiveness of their programs, align curricula with market needs, and provide relevant career services. For national authorities, such data is vital to forecast labour demand, plan workforce development strategies, and respond to economic priorities.

Institutional-level tracking also supports internal quality assurance, accreditation, and public trust in the education system. However, without a clear legal framework, digital infrastructure, and sustainable coordination mechanisms, these processes cannot reach their full potential. A national platform would unify data collection efforts, enable real-time reporting, and ease institutional burdens in complying with Ministry of Education requirements. Standardized national graduate surveys would ensure comparability across HEIs, support evidence-based policymaking, and align Moldova with European Higher Education Area (EHEA) practices. Furthermore, integrating survey tools with university databases would streamline the process and reduce administrative costs, while modular, user-friendly survey design would significantly increase participation.

The UPGRADE project plays a critical role in addressing these challenges by providing the strategic tools and institutional momentum needed to reform graduate employability monitoring. It envisions the development of a standardized national graduate survey, the creation of a digital platform to centralize data collection and reporting, and the modernization or establishment of career guidance centres across all participating universities. The project also supports the drafting of a national legal framework, which will provide long-term sustainability and coherence to the entire tracking system. By fostering stronger links between universities, employers, and the Ministry, UPGRADE builds the foundation for a more connected, efficient, and student-centered higher education sector. Institutionalizing graduate tracking is not just a quality measure—it's a strategic necessity for Moldova's economic, social, and educational development.