

UPGRADE

Enhancing Graduates' Employability Tracking in Moldova

OPERATIONAL PLAN for national reform on HE Graduates Employability

Milestone 8

GRADUATES'
EMPLOYABILITY
TRACKING



Co-funded by
the European Union



UPGRADE

ENHANCING GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY TRACKING
IN MOLDOVA



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1. INTRODUCTION

The UPGRADE project – Enhancing Graduates' Employability Tracking in Moldova (Project No. 101129166, funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme) is a national reform-driven initiative aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Moldovan higher education system to monitor and improve graduate employability outcomes. The project brings together a strong consortium of national and European institutions committed to implementing sustainable mechanisms for tracking graduate career pathways, enhancing career guidance services, and aligning higher education with labour market needs.

Graduate employability and career development are increasingly recognised as critical indicators of the quality and relevance of higher education systems. In the context of the Republic of Moldova, this issue has acquired heightened importance due to the pressing need to align academic outputs with evolving labour market demands, counter youth unemployment, and increase the international competitiveness of Moldovan universities. Strengthening the employability of graduates is also a fundamental requirement for achieving performance-based higher education financing, which is increasingly tied to employment outcomes and institutional accountability.

The elaboration of this **Operational Plan for National Reform on Higher Education Graduates' Employability** under the UPGRADE project represents a key step in aligning institutional practice with national policy and international best practices. It outlines the roadmap for the development and adoption of three crucial deliverables:

-  D2.2. Graduates' Employability tracking survey
-  D3.1. National Regulation on Monitoring of HE Graduates' Employability
-  D3.2. Methodological Guide for the Establishment and Functioning of University Career Guidance and Counselling Centres
-  D3.3. National Digital Platform for Graduate Tracking

These deliverables collectively lay the groundwork for systemic change in how Moldova monitors graduate outcomes, delivers support services for career development, and informs evidence-based policy planning in higher education.

This reform initiative is fully aligned with Moldova's broader education and development policy landscape, notably:

-  *Education Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 152 of July 17, 2014*, which sets the legal foundation for quality, relevance, and labour market integration in higher education;
-  *Education Development Strategy 2030*, which prioritizes digitalization, lifelong learning, and the modernization of higher education governance;
-  *Moldova's status as an EU candidate country (since June 2022)*, which reinforces the imperative for adopting European tools and standards in education, including the tracking of graduates and performance-based management.



Moreover, the operationalization of a national graduate tracking system responds to Moldova's commitment to strengthening data-driven policymaking and aligning with European initiatives such as the European Graduate Tracking Initiative and the European Education Area (EEA).

By supporting the development of regulatory and technical infrastructure for graduate employability monitoring, the UPGRADE project contributes not only to institutional strengthening within partner universities but also to Moldova's strategic path toward European integration and higher education reform.





2. VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

2.1 VISION

To establish a modern, coherent, and sustainable national system for tracking graduates' employability and strengthening career guidance in Moldovan higher education, fully aligned with European standards and supportive of evidence-based education policy and institutional development.

2.2. MISSION

To develop, adopt, and implement a set of national regulatory and digital tools that enable the continuous monitoring of graduates' career pathways, facilitate institutional and national-level decision-making, and ensure that Moldovan higher education institutions are responsive to labour market needs and aligned with the country's European integration agenda.

2.3. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

In line with the main deliverables of the UPGRADE project (D2.2, D3.1, D3.2, D3.3), and the national vision for higher education reform, the following seven strategic objectives will guide the implementation of the national reform on HE graduates' employability:

SO1: To develop and adopt a National Regulation on Monitoring of HE Graduates' Employability: Establish a clear legal and institutional framework to ensure the regular, transparent, and harmonized tracking of graduates' labour market outcomes across all accredited higher education institutions.

SO2: To design and implement a National Digital Platform for Graduate Tracking: Create a centralized, interoperable, and data-secure online system that enables real-time collection, management, and analysis of employability data from universities, employers, and relevant public authorities.

SO3: To develop a Methodological Guide for the Creation and Functioning of University Career Guidance and Counselling Centres: Provide HEIs with national-level guidelines on the structure, staffing, functions, and services of institutional career centres to improve graduate employability and labour market readiness.

SO4: To circulate National Graduates' Employability Tracking Survey: Conduct a nationally coordinated, multi-university pilot survey to test data collection instruments and validate key indicators related to graduates' employment status, career progression, and satisfaction with study programs.

SO5: To institutionalize Graduate Tracking and Career Guidance as Core University Functions: Embed employability tracking and career support services into the internal quality assurance systems of all Moldovan public HEIs, ensuring long-term sustainability and integration with strategic development plans.



SO6: To promote Data-Driven Policy-Making and Performance-Based Financing: Enable the Ministry of Education and Research to use graduate tracking data for informed planning, performance monitoring, and resource allocation through compensatory financing and targeted interventions.

SO7: To align Moldova's graduate tracking system with European frameworks and best practices: Ensure full compatibility with the European Graduate Tracking Initiative and similar EU-level tools, reinforcing Moldova's education system in the context of its EU candidate status and broader education reform process.



3. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The national reform on Higher Education (HE) Graduates' Employability in Moldova, supported through the UPGRADE project, is strategically aligned with the country's broader development agenda, education policies, and European integration commitments. This reform aims to enhance evidence-based governance, modernize career services within higher education institutions (HEIs), and introduce robust digital tools for graduate tracking—essential elements in fostering employability and socio-economic relevance of higher education in the Republic of Moldova.

The **Education Development Strategy for 2020–2030** defines a broad reform agenda shaped by national challenges and Moldova's European aspirations. Strategy highlights persistent mismatches between education outcomes and labour market needs. Low graduate employability limited institutional capacity in career guidance, and a lack of integrated graduate tracking mechanisms are among the key issues identified. It also stresses the need for modernization by improving flexibility, relevance, and responsiveness of the education system to national economic priorities and demographic trends.

In this context, the General Objective 1 of the Strategy—Aligning education with labour market needs through sustainable human capital development—is of particular relevance. The national reform on graduate employability supports this objective by introducing a comprehensive policy framework and digital tools to bridge the gap between higher education and employment outcomes. It enables data-informed decisions, resource allocation, and curricular adjustments at both national and institutional levels.

The **Program for the Implementation of the Education Development Strategy 2030** outlines concrete actions aligned with the reform. These include:

-  Enhancing mechanisms for monitoring and forecasting labour market needs;
-  Strengthening career guidance and counselling services in education;
-  Developing digital platforms to support education policy decisions;
-  Increasing the responsiveness of educational offerings to changing labour demands.

These actions directly correlate with the four main deliverables of the reform:

D3.1 National Regulation on Monitoring of HE Graduates' Employability;

 **D3.2 Methodological Guide for Career Guidance Centres;**

 **D3.3 National Graduate Tracking Platform;**

 **D2.2 Pilot Graduate Employability Tracking Survey.**

Together, they form a coherent strategy to institutionalize graduate tracking and support human capital development.

The reform also resonates with the **National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030"** and the **National Economic Development Strategy 2030**, both of which prioritize human resource development, integration of youth into the workforce, promotion of innovation, and modernization of the education system. These strategic



frameworks recognize the need to improve education-to-employment transitions, stimulate entrepreneurial and digital skills, and create supportive ecosystems for labour market inclusion. The national reform contributes directly to these goals by creating structural mechanisms for evidence-based career guidance and graduate tracking.

Moldova's status as a candidate country for EU accession (since June 2022) further elevates the importance of the reform. The EU Accession Roadmap emphasizes public administration reform, labour market integration, education system modernization, and digital transformation as critical domains. Graduate employability and performance-based education systems are essential elements of this agenda. The reform directly contributes to the alignment of Moldova's higher education with EU standards, by promoting transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

Moreover, the reform is aligned with European-wide tools and frameworks such as the **European Graduate Tracking Initiative** and broader objectives of the **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**. The integration of graduate tracking indicators into performance-based funding models for HEIs represents a key step in modernizing Moldova's education governance system. It also enables comparability, benchmarking, and internationalization of national practices in line with Bologna Process objectives.

Through this strategic alignment, the national reform ensures both short-term policy impact and long-term sustainability by embedding the reform outputs into institutional, national, and European frameworks.

4. PRIORITY ACTIONS AND TIMELINE

The national reform on higher education graduates' employability tracking is grounded in Moldova's strategic commitment to aligning its education system with labour market needs and European standards. Informed by institutional priorities, national policy frameworks, and the broader objectives of sustainable human capital development, this operational plan translates reform commitments into actionable steps.

To ensure structured implementation and systemic impact, the reform is articulated through seven Strategic Objectives. These objectives reflect Moldova's intent to institutionalize employability tracking mechanisms, build digital infrastructure, strengthen university-level career guidance capacities, and promote data-driven policy development.

Each objective is associated with a set of priority actions, measurable key performance indicators (KPIs), and clearly defined responsibilities involving both central authorities (primarily the Ministry of Education and Research and the Electronic Government Agency) and higher education institutions. This results-oriented approach ensures that progress toward each objective can be systematically monitored and evaluated, contributing to the long-term sustainability and policy uptake of the reform.

No	Priority Actions	Indicators	Timeline	Responsible Actors
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SO1. To Develop and Adopt a National Regulation on Monitoring of HE Graduates' Employability

1.1	Ensure the formal initiation of the regulatory drafting process by the Ministry of Education and Research, grounded in existing project outputs and national policy priorities	Ministerial decision launching the process issued; preparatory framework note approved	Q4 2025	Ministry of Education and Research (MER)
1.2	Institutionalize structured coordination with the National Policy Task Force Group, comprising representatives of HEIs and labour market actors, to co-create the Regulation	At least 2 consultation meetings convened and documented	Q4 2025 – Q1 2026	MER, NPTF
1.3	Develop a comprehensive draft of the National Regulation, harmonized with international standards, European practices and Moldova's higher education and labour market policies	Draft regulation prepared and submitted for internal review	Q1 2026	MER, NPTF
1.4	Conduct an inclusive national validation and feedback process engaging relevant ministries, higher	Formal validation report compiled; endorsement by key stakeholders	Q2 2026	MER, Ministry of Labour, Rectors' Council

	education institutions, employers, and social partners			
1.5	Secure legal approval, publication, and official dissemination of the National Regulation to ensure enforceability across the higher education sector	Regulation published in Official Monitor; distributed to all HEIs	Q3 2026	MER, Government Secretariat
1.6	Strengthen institutional capacity for implementation by organizing national awareness-raising and training workshops for HEIs on the Regulation's provisions and application modalities	Two national-level workshops held with participation of all public HEIs documented	Q3–Q4 2026	MoER, Rectors' Council, NPTF, UPGRADE Consortium

SO2. To Design and Implement a National Digital Platform for Graduate Tracking

2.1	Development of a comprehensive concept note for the national graduate tracking platform, outlining core functionalities, data architecture, and user requirements.	Concept note validated by the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) and circulated to HEIs	Q4 2025	MER, NPTFG, ICT consultants
2.2	Coordination of the technical design and development process of the digital platform in consultation with ICT experts, HEIs, and data protection authorities.	Prototype version of the platform completed and internally tested	Q1–Q2 2026	MER, Electronic Governance Agency, HEIs, contracted ICT provider
2.3	Alignment of the platform with national data protection laws and interoperability standards, including potential integration with national statistical and education databases.	Data protection compliance certificate and interoperability validation obtained	Q2 2026	MER, National Centre for Personal Data Protection, Electronic Governance Agency
2.4	Piloting and institutional testing of the platform in selected universities to ensure functionality, usability, and accuracy of data flows.	At least 3 HEIs pilot the system and submit formal feedback	Q3 2026	MER, Selected HEIs, ICT support team
2.5	Finalization and national-level deployment of the digital platform for operational use by all HEIs, with supporting documentation and training.	Platform fully functional and accessible to all public HEIs	Q4 2026	MER, HEIs, NPTFG, Council of Rectors
2.6	Establish a sustainability and maintenance framework for the platform post-2026	Sustainability plan drafted and endorsed by MER; Maintenance budget secured for 2027–2028	Q4 2026	MER, National IT Provider, Ministry of Finance



2.7	Expand platform functionality to include graduate services such as CV generation, job-matching, alumni networking, and mentorship tools	At least 3 user-facing services added to the platform interface; positive user feedback collected	Q1-Q4 2027	MER, Platform Development Team, Partner HEIs, Private Sector Employers
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SO3: To Develop a Methodological Guide for the Creation and Functioning of University Career Guidance and Counselling Centres

3.1	Conduct a comprehensive mapping of existing career guidance and counselling services in Moldovan HEIs to identify gaps, needs, and institutional practices	Mapping report finalized and shared with stakeholders	Q2 2026	MER, National Policy Task Force (NPTF), HEIs
3.2	Develop a national framework and structure for Career Guidance and Counselling Centres, informed by European models and institutional feedback	Draft framework document elaborated	Q2-Q3 2026	MER, NPTF, EU Experts
3.3	Draft the Methodological Guide detailing operational models, staffing, services, and institutional integration of Career Centres in HEIs	First draft of Methodological Guide completed	Q3 2026	MER, Working Group, NPTF
3.4	Organize national consultation workshops with HEIs and stakeholders for feedback, refinement, and validation of the Methodological Guide	Number of national consultation workshops held; feedback incorporated	Q4 2026	MER, HEIs, NPTF
3.5	Finalize and officially adopt the Methodological Guide at national level; disseminate the Guide to all HEIs with guidance on implementation	Guide approved and disseminated; Implementation memo issued by MER	Q1 2027	MER
3.6	Provide capacity-building workshops for university administrators, academic staff, and Career Centre personnel on the use and implementation of the Guide	Number of training sessions conducted nationally	Q2-Q3 2027	MER, HEIs, External Trainers
3.7	Monitor and evaluate the initial implementation of the Career Guidance Centres in HEIs based on the Methodological Guide	Evaluation report on institutional uptake and practices		MER, QA agencies, NPTF

SO4: To Circulate a National Graduates' Employability Tracking Survey

4.1	Review and revise the existing survey instrument piloted under the UPGRADE project to align with national data needs, European frameworks, and institutional capacities	Final version of national survey instrument validated by MER	Q1 2026	MER, National Policy Task Force (NPTF), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), EU Experts
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4.2	Integrate the revised survey into the National Digital Platform for Graduate Tracking, ensuring interoperability and data security compliance	Survey module fully operational within digital platform	Q2 2026	MER, Platform Development Team, NBS
4.3	Develop national guidelines for the administration of the Graduate Tracking Survey by HEIs, including timeline, responsibilities, and reporting mechanisms	National guidelines finalized and distributed to all HEIs	Q2 2026	MER, NPTF, QA Agencies
4.4	Launch a nationwide information campaign to ensure awareness and participation among recent graduates, academic staff, and HEIs	Awareness materials developed and distributed; outreach events conducted	Q3 2026	MER, HEIs, NPTF
4.5	Pilot the administration of the national survey in a selected group of HEIs with full data collection, analysis, and feedback loops	Pilot survey successfully administered and evaluated	Q3–Q4 2026	MER, HEIs, Platform Development Team
4.6	Conduct full-scale national implementation of the Graduates' Employability Tracking Survey across all public HEIs	Survey conducted at national scale; participation rate and data quality monitored	Q1 2027	MER, NBS, HEIs
4.7	Analyze collected data and produce an annual national report on graduates' employability outcomes to inform policymaking and funding decisions	Annual report published and integrated into MER policy cycle	Q2 2027	MER, NBS, QA Agencies

SO5: To Institutionalize Graduate Tracking and Career Guidance as Core University Functions

5.1	Develop and adopt institutional policies mandating the integration of graduate tracking and career guidance within internal quality assurance and strategic management frameworks	Institutional regulations adopted by at least 80% of public HEIs	Q2–Q3 2026	HEIs, MER, QA Agencies
5.2	Establish or strengthen Career Guidance and Counselling Centres in all public HEIs based on the national methodological guide developed under the reform	Career centres operational and aligned with national standards in at least 90% of HEIs	Q3 2026	HEIs, MER
5.3	Integrate graduate tracking responsibilities into existing institutional structures (QA offices, alumni offices, etc.) to ensure long-term sustainability and coordination	Defined institutional roles and responsibilities for graduate tracking formally adopted in internal documentation	Q3 2026	HEIs, Institutional Senates
5.4	Allocate institutional budgets for annual graduate tracking activities and career services, with provisions for digital tools, staff, and outreach	Budget lines allocated in institutional financial plans; annual monitoring by MER	Q4 2026	HEIs, MER, Ministry of Finance

5.5	Implement regular training and capacity-building programmes for university staff on graduate tracking methodologies, data management, and career counselling	Number of national-level and institutional training session conducted annually	Q3 2026 – Q2 2027	MER, NPTF, HEIs, International Experts
5.6	Develop university-level reporting mechanisms to feed graduate tracking data into national systems and use findings for internal policy adjustments and academic offer redesign	Annual internal reports produced by HEIs based on tracking data; recommendations integrated into institutional strategies	Q1 2027	HEIs, QA Councils, MER

SO6: To Promote Data-Driven Policy-Making and Performance-Based Financing

6.1	Institutionalize graduate employability indicators within the national Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) to support longitudinal analysis and policy evaluation	Graduate employability module integrated into national HEMIS; standardized data collection protocols approved	Q3 2026 – Q1 2027	MER, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), HEMIS Operator, HEIs
6.2	Develop and adopt national guidelines for the use of graduate tracking data in institutional planning, accreditation, and higher education policy development	Guidelines validated and disseminated to all accredited HEIs; referenced in MER planning and QA documents	Q1 – Q3 2027	MER, NCAQAER, HEIs
6.3	Pilot the introduction of employability indicators within performance-based funding models for public universities to link institutional outcomes with financing	Number of universities engaged in pilot model; national policy brief on implementation feasibility developed	Q1 – Q4 2027	MER, Ministry of Finance, Public HEIs
6.4	Conduct national training and capacity-building programmes for HEIs and MER staff on data analytics, visualization, and evidence-based decision-making	Number of national-level training sessions delivered; toolkit on employability data use published	Q3 2026 – Q4 2027	MER, NPTF, HEIs, EU Experts
6.5	Establish an inter-institutional coordination mechanism for the systematic use of graduate tracking data in education reform and policy evaluation	Coordination mechanism established and operational; annual report on data-driven reforms published	Q2 – Q4 2027	MER, NBS, Ministry of Labour, Employers' Associations
6.6	Publish annual national reports and policy briefs on graduates' employability to support transparency, benchmarking, and performance-based governance	First national employability report published; open-access online dashboard launched	Q1 – Q3 2028	MER, NBS, HEIs, UPGRADE Platform Coordination Unit



SO7: To Align Moldova's Graduate Tracking System with European Frameworks and Best Practices

7.1	Ensure compatibility of the national platform with EU-level data standards (e.g. UOE, ISCED, Eurograduate indicators) and privacy regulations (e.g. GDPR)	Technical compliance validated; metadata and classification structures aligned with EU templates	Q2 2027	National Platform Developers, MER, NBS, EU Consultants
7.2	Establish partnerships and data-sharing agreements with EU institutions and networks (e.g. Eurograduate, Eurydice, EQF bodies) to enable international benchmarking	At least 2 formal cooperation agreements signed; data exchange protocols defined	Q1-Q4 2027	MER, EPDRI, NBS, EU Partner Institutions
7.3	Facilitate participation of Moldovan HEIs in European graduate surveys, tracer studies, and peer-learning initiatives on tracking and employability	Participation in at least 1 joint EU survey and 2 peer-learning activities documented	Q2 2027 – Q2 2028	MER, HEIs, QA Agencies
7.4	Promote use of European tools for recognition and transparency (e.g. Diploma Supplement, ECTS, EQAR) as part of institutional employability frameworks	Adoption rate of Diploma Supplement & ECTS enhanced; employability references integrated	Q3 2026 – Q1 2028	HEIs, NARIC, MER
7.5	Organize an annual national forum on graduate tracking and employability aligned with Bologna Process priorities and European Skills Agenda	First edition of the forum organized; attendance by EU stakeholders and regional partners ensured	Q4 2027	MER, EU Delegation, HEIs

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The successful implementation of the national reform on higher education graduates' employability tracking in the Republic of Moldova requires the proactive identification of potential risks and the design of effective mitigation strategies. Considering the multi-stakeholder nature of the reform, its systemic implications, and the interlinkage with national legislative and institutional processes, risk management must be embedded as a continuous and adaptive process throughout the operational plan.

These risks have been identified through stakeholder consultations, previous project experience, and institutional assessments, and reflect both systemic and contextual vulnerabilities in the Moldovan higher education and public administration environment.

5.1. Political and Administrative Delays

 **Risk:** The reform process may be affected by political instability, such as changes in government or ministerial leadership due to electoral cycles. Turnover in public administration may also lead to delays in the endorsement, adoption, or implementation of key regulatory acts and operational mechanisms.

 **Mitigation Measures:**

- Establishment of multi-level governance mechanisms, involving representatives from the Ministry of Education and Research (MER), higher education institutions (HEIs), labour market actors, and civil society to ensure continuity and institutional memory.
- Early-stage validation of draft policy documents and technical deliverables with relevant stakeholders to minimize delays during political transitions.
- Integration of reform deliverables into medium-term national development frameworks, such as the Education Development Strategy 2030 and Moldova's EU accession roadmap, to secure political and strategic backing across political cycles.

5.2. Institutional Resistance or Slow Buy-In

 **Risk:** Some HEIs may demonstrate limited readiness or resistance to institutionalize graduate tracking mechanisms or career guidance services due to capacity constraints, institutional inertia, or perceived administrative burden.

 **Mitigation Measures:**

- Implementation of an inclusive co-creation model, whereby universities are directly involved in the development of the regulatory, methodological, and digital tools from the outset (e.g., through the National Policy Task Force).
- Organization of awareness-raising campaigns and capacity-building workshops targeting academic leadership, quality assurance offices, and institutional planning units.

- Recognition and dissemination of good institutional practices among HEIs through national conferences, peer-learning, and the use of performance-based incentives (e.g., funding, visibility).

5.3. Legal and Data Protection Constraints

UP Risk: Legal bottlenecks may emerge in relation to personal data collection, processing, and storage required for graduate tracking. The development of the national digital platform must comply with Moldova's data protection legislation and be aligned with EU GDPR requirements.

UP Mitigation Measures:

- Early involvement of legal and data protection experts from the Centre for Personal Data Protection (CNPDCP) and other relevant authorities in the design phase of the national platform and regulatory framework.
- Development of data-sharing protocols and consent mechanisms aligned with best practices and international standards.
- Regular legal audits and compliance assessments during platform development and rollout.

5.4. Digital Infrastructure and Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities

UP Risk: The development and operation of the national graduate tracking platform may face risks related to insufficient digital infrastructure and skills across higher education institutions, limited system interoperability, or potential cybersecurity threats. These vulnerabilities could compromise data integrity, availability, and confidentiality, affecting stakeholder trust and long-term platform sustainability.

UP Mitigation Measures:

- Integration of the platform into the government's secure digital infrastructure, in coordination with the E-Governance Agency and the Ministry of Education and Research.
- Implementation of robust cybersecurity protocols, including encryption, access controls, and regular penetration testing.
- Establishment of a National Technical Support and Cybersecurity Task Unit responsible for monitoring, incident response, and capacity building in universities.
- Continuous training for IT administrators and institutional users on data security and safe digital practices.

5.5. Financial and Technical Sustainability Challenges

UP Risk: Insufficient financial allocation or long-term maintenance planning may compromise the sustainability of digital tools and institutional services after the conclusion of the UPGRADE project.

UP Mitigation Measures:

- Inclusion of dedicated budget lines for graduate tracking and career guidance in institutional and ministerial budgets.
- Establishment of maintenance and technical support frameworks for the national platform, with clearly defined institutional responsibilities and cost-sharing mechanisms.
- Development of a medium-term digital sustainability plan, including possible integration into national IT infrastructures or public procurement mechanisms.

5.6. Weak Integration into National Policy-Making

UP Risk: Despite the availability of tracking data, weak integration into strategic planning and funding decisions may reduce the reform's long-term impact.

UP Mitigation Measures:

- Design of policy feedback loops, whereby graduate tracking data is systematically used in decision-making processes at both ministerial and institutional levels.
- Alignment with Moldova's efforts toward performance-based financing, where employability indicators are included among key metrics.
- Participation in European benchmarking and monitoring initiatives (e.g., Bologna Process, European Graduate Tracking) to ensure external validation and relevance.

6. MONITORING, REPORTING, AND EVALUATION

The implementation of the national operational plan for higher education graduates' employability tracking requires a robust, transparent, and adaptive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. The goal of this framework is to ensure continuous oversight, track progress against strategic objectives, identify implementation gaps, and enable data-informed decision-making across the reform cycle. It also reinforces accountability among institutional and governmental stakeholders and serves as a foundation for policy learning and system-level improvement.

The monitoring, reporting, and evaluation mechanism will be embedded within the governance structure of the reform and will operate at both central and institutional levels. The Ministry of Education and Research (MER) will serve as the coordinating authority responsible for consolidating data, ensuring alignment with national education priorities, and reporting progress to relevant national and international bodies.

6.1. Key Components of the Monitoring Framework

1. **Indicators and Results Framework:** Each strategic objective and priority action defined in the operational plan will be accompanied by a set of measurable indicators of progress. These indicators will be tracked systematically through institutional reports, digital platform analytics, and administrative data submitted by HEIs and partner agencies.
2. **Annual Progress Reporting:** All responsible actors, including HEIs, ministerial departments, and affiliated institutions will be required to submit structured progress reports on an annual basis. These reports will include narrative updates, quantitative metrics, and reflections on implementation challenges. MER will consolidate these into a national annual monitoring report, to be shared with stakeholders and development partners.
3. **Mid-Term and Final Evaluation:** A mid-term evaluation will be conducted at the end of 2026 to assess implementation fidelity, effectiveness of tools (e.g., digital platform, methodological guide), and institutional readiness. The final evaluation, to be carried out in 2028, will review the overall impact of the reform on graduate employability, quality assurance processes, and policy integration. Independent evaluators and international experts may be engaged to ensure objectivity and comparability with EU standards.
4. **Institutional Self-Assessment and Peer Review:** HEIs will be encouraged to integrate graduate tracking and career guidance indicators into their internal quality assurance systems. Self-assessment templates and peer-review mechanisms will be developed to promote continuous institutional improvement and knowledge exchange among universities.
5. **Digital Monitoring Tools and Dashboards:** The national digital platform will include embedded monitoring tools, allowing real-time data visualization, custom institutional dashboards, and automated alerts on key indicators. This will enhance responsiveness and support performance-based management both at institutional and national levels.



6. **Stakeholder Feedback and Participatory Monitoring:** The monitoring process will incorporate stakeholder voices, including students, graduates, employers, and academic staff. Feedback loops—such as online consultations, surveys, and focus groups—will be integrated to validate findings and identify emerging needs.
7. **Alignment with EU Monitoring and Reporting Instruments:** All reporting and evaluation mechanisms will be aligned with Moldova's commitments under the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the European Graduate Tracking Initiative, and the EU accession roadmap. This ensures compatibility of data, enables benchmarking with EU member states, and supports external validation of reform achievements.





7. SUSTAINABILITY AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Ensuring the sustainability and institutionalization of the national reform on higher education graduates' employability tracking is a strategic priority embedded in both the design and implementation of the operational plan. Sustainability in this context refers not only to the long-term maintenance of tools and frameworks to be developed under the reform, but also to their integration into national education governance, funding structures, and institutional cultures.

To ensure legal durability and continuity beyond the project's lifecycle, two of the core outputs developed under the UPGRADE initiative, **the National Regulation on Monitoring of HE Graduates' Employability (D3.1)** and **the Methodological Guide for the Creation and Functioning of Career Guidance and Counselling Centres (D3.2)**, will be formally adopted through **Ministerial Orders** issued by the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova. These regulatory instruments will ensure mandatory compliance by all public and private higher education institutions and embed graduate tracking and career guidance as system-level functions within Moldova's higher education architecture.

The National Digital Platform for Graduate Tracking (D3.3), once developed, will be hosted, maintained, and updated under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Research and incorporated within the broader National Education Platform infrastructure. Institutional responsibilities for data entry, validation, and use will be clearly delineated through accompanying methodological instructions, while technical and financial provisions for platform maintenance will be secured in the post-UPGRADE period, with support from national public funds or future external assistance.

The reform envisions the gradual integration of employability tracking indicators into Moldova's performance-based funding mechanisms for higher education, expected to be refined and scaled up beyond 2027. By institutionalizing graduate outcomes, career guidance activities, and tracking participation rates as quantifiable metrics, the reform will contribute to a more transparent, merit-based, and impact-oriented financing model that incentivizes institutional performance and alignment with labour market needs.

Although piloted and developed with the participation of selected UPGRADE partner universities, all tools, frameworks, and digital solutions resulting from the reform will be accessible and applicable to all accredited public and private HEIs in Moldova. The national legal framework will mandate their use, ensuring uniformity, comparability, and interoperability of graduate tracking data across the entire system. Tailored guidance, institutional onboarding support, and capacity-building programmes will be made available to non-UPGRADE institutions to guarantee an inclusive and equitable reform rollout.



To safeguard institutional capacity over the long term, structured training programmes, peer learning schemes, and communities of practice will be developed and sustained beyond the project's duration. These will involve administrative and academic staff, career counsellors, IT personnel, and quality assurance officers, and will be coordinated by the MER in collaboration with national and international stakeholders.

The national reform on graduate tracking and career guidance in higher education has been explicitly aligned with Moldova's European integration agenda, including key priorities under the EU accession roadmap, the Bologna Process, and the European Education Area (EEA). While the core tools, regulations, and platforms are still in development, their design is being guided by European standards and frameworks, including the European Graduate Tracking Initiative, EQAR principles, and EHEA instruments on quality assurance and learning outcomes. This alignment ensures that once implemented, Moldova's national system will be well-positioned to support international benchmarking, cross-border data comparability, and evidence-based education policymaking, reinforcing both the country's higher education modernization process and its broader European trajectory.

