

COUNTRY NOTE ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN MOLDOVA (2023)



1. ABOUT THIS COUNTRY NOTE

This country note presents a snapshot of findings on adult education in the Republic of Moldova: on access to and prospective demand for adult education, on adult skills and competences, and on the extent to which opportunities for lifelong learning benefit specific groups of adult learners (women and adults at risk of socio-economic disadvantage).

The country note is based on evidence collected each year for monitoring purposes through KIESE¹ and the Torino Process² – two annual ETF initiatives which track developments in the domains of education, skills, and employment in countries - partners of the ETF. In the context of these initiatives, adult education is an element of the broader concept of lifelong learning and may refer to any formal, non-formal, or informal learning activity, both general and vocational, undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training.

The findings in this note focus on policy and system performance in support of adult education in Moldova, as well as on the learners. The note does not provide a description of adult education arrangements in the country. Where necessary and appropriate, the note may draw on information from third-party reports.

2. ADULT EDUCATION IN MOLDOVA

2.1 Gauging demand for adult education

Understanding demand for adult education is an important prerequisite for crafting relevant educational programmes and policies. It allows to identify which adult populations need learning opportunities, helping policymakers and practitioners create and provide courses that fill specific skills gaps and meet personal and career aspirations.

So far, there is no uniform, internationally agreed-upon metric for measuring demand for adult education. To gauge the educational needs and expectations of prospective adult learners, one can leverage existing data sources for a blend of indirect indicators instead. Which indirect indicators, however?

Assuming that education and training in a country can be judged by how it treats those most in need, focusing on indicators related to vulnerable adults – the long-term unemployed, the economically inactive, and those with low or no educational attainment – can be a promising strategy to understand the broader demand for adult education. Giving attention to these groups can serve as a useful proxy of wider educational and training needs across the workforce. The extent to which countries succeed

¹ The Key Indicators on Education, Skills and Employment (KIESE) are a collection of statistics that form part of a broader set of information proposed by the ETF to enable a review of developments in the field of education, skills and employment in the partner countries.

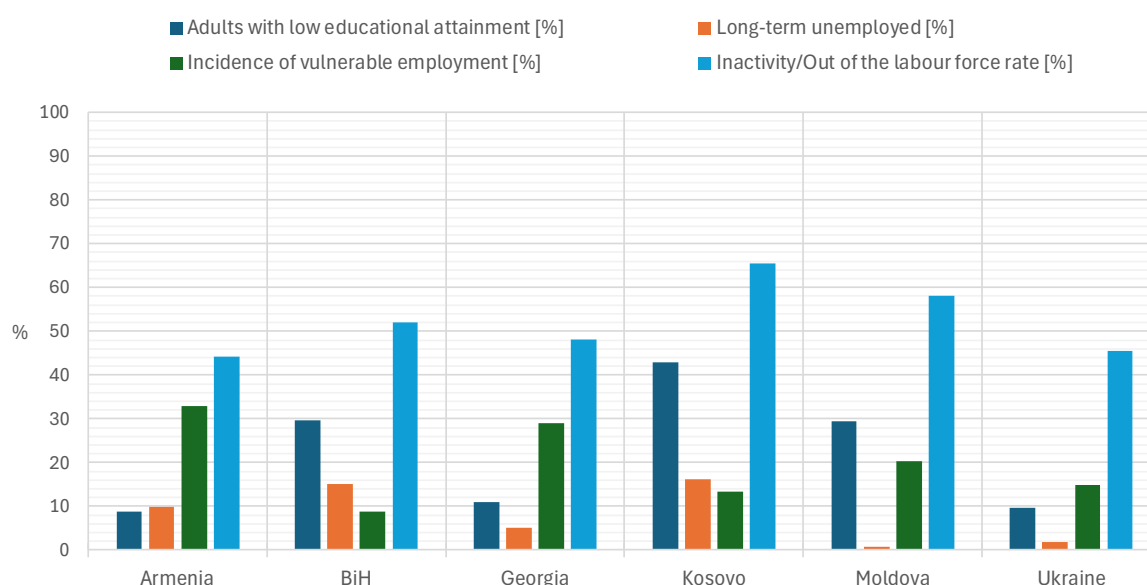
² The Torino Process is a multiannual review of policy and system performance in support of lifelong learning through vocational education and training (VET) in countries in East and South-East Europe (including Turkey), Central Asia, and the South and East Mediterranean region. The Torino Process is carried out in partnership with countries in these regions on a regular basis since 2010.

in providing these groups with access to training and meeting their educational needs can significantly influence both the demand for and the supply of skills in the labour market.

This is particularly relevant for ETF partner countries, where the proportion of adults exposed to vulnerability can be significant. In Moldova for instance, the data reveals that close to 30% of the adult population has low educational attainment, which is a relatively high proportion in comparison to other countries in the sample of six presented in Figure 1. The group of lower skilled and lesser educated adults is also the group most at risk of unemployment, in any country.

Another group of adults in vulnerable positions, who may benefit from training to escape their predicament, includes those who are long-term unemployed. However, the share of adults fitting this category in Moldova is low, at less than 1%. This low figure could reflect a dynamic labour market, but may also be influenced by emigration, which reduces the domestic pool of individuals actively seeking employment and counted in unemployment statistics. Consequently, for Moldova, this metric might not accurately reflect the true demand for adult education.

Figure 1. Demand for adult education: vulnerable and at-risk population in working age (2022 or latest available year)



Source: ETF KIESE database

Notes: Reference year before 2022 for Armenia is 2017 (long-term unemployment). Reference years before 2022 for Bosnia and Herzegovina are 2018 (long-term unemployment) and 2021 (educational attainment and inactivity). Reference year before 2022 for Georgia is 2018 (long-term unemployed). Reference years before 2022 for Kosovo are 2019 (long-term unemployment) and 2020 (educational attainment). Reference year before 2022 for Moldova is 2018 (long term unemployment). Reference years before 2022 for Ukraine are 2018 (long-term unemployment for age group 15-70), 2021 (vulnerable employment for age group 15-70) and 2021 (educational attainment and inactivity).

In terms of vulnerable employment, 13.3% of the population is at risk, which falls well below the average for the sample. However, the proportion of economically inactive individuals ranks as the second highest within the sample. Here too, given the high rate of emigration, where individuals working abroad are still counted within the working-age population despite not seeking jobs locally, this leads to an overestimation of economic inactivity. Therefore, the effectiveness of this indicator in informing adult education policy in Moldova is also constrained, as it might not fully capture the local demand for education and training.

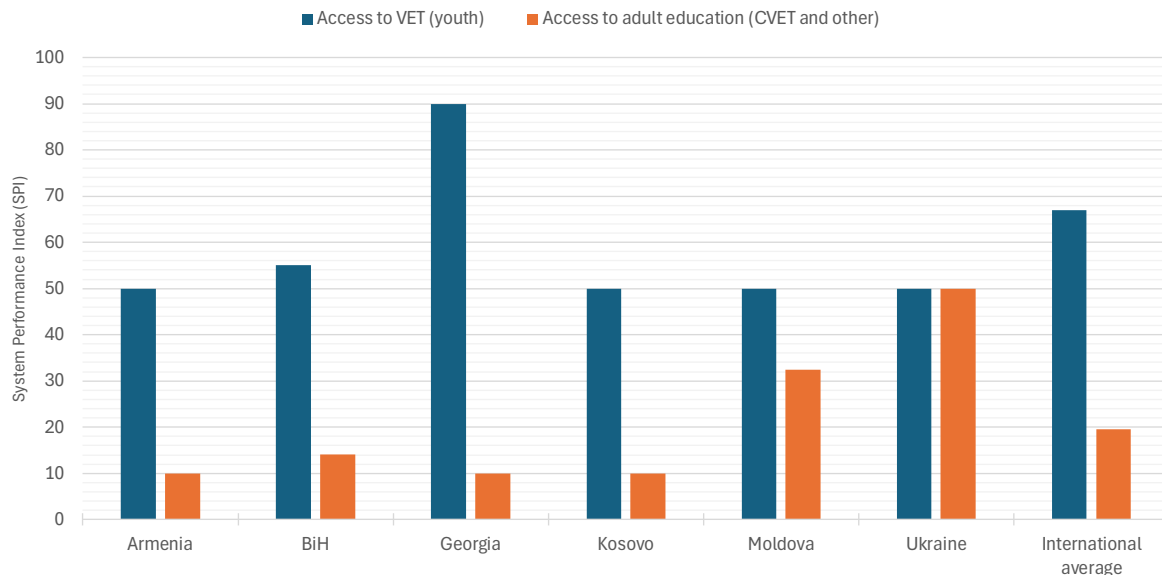
2.2 Access to and participation in adult learning

Despite a marginal advantage for young women, the VET system in Moldova is almost equally accessible for both young and adult females and there is also no significant variation in performance between genders in this dimension of monitoring. The same is true for the prospects of female learners in VET for successful participation and graduation – there is no gender- or age-based variation in system performance and the information provided by national authorities suggests that the absence of gender-based discrimination has been an enduring feature of education and training in the country.

However, Moldova encounters challenges in attracting some adult learners to some segments of its education and training system, particularly the subsystem of VET. This difficulty is more pronounced in Moldova than in other partner countries of the ETF, on average. Despite a supportive normative framework for CVET in particular, the actual network of providers remains limited in size and capacity, which restricts the availability of continuous training opportunities for adults.

The challenge is confounded by the one-sided focus of efforts to improve access to learning, which mainly target vulnerable youth, leaving a gap in promoting learning opportunities for other groups of learners, in particular adults. While there is a barrage of rather successfully operating measures in support of the long-term unemployed, adults who are without education or with low level of education have considerably less incentive and opportunity to re-engage and participate in learning. System performance in support of economically inactive populations is even lower and hampered by the lack of evidence about members of this learner group – their needs and situation and the degree to which they participate in adult education.

Figure 2. Access to learning for youth and adults (2023): index of policy and system performance



Source: ETF Torino Process database

Notes: The System Performance Index SPI is a metric of performance calculated on the basis of quantitative and qualitative data collected annually through the Torino Process. It ranges from 0 (min/low performance), to 100 (max/high performance). International average refers to the average of countries which participate in the 2023 round of Torino Process policy and system performance monitoring. These countries are Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Palestine, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

Gaps in the national career development support system of Moldova, particularly regarding adult career guidance, contribute to these challenges. For instance, adults who are in employment are routinely overlooked, receiving little to no targeted support in the form of career guidance.³ For those who are not in employment and look for a job, the Public Employment Services (PES) provide regular career guidance services, in particular information on professions and the specifics of the labour market; self-knowledge; counselling for career choice and further development. In 2022, around 14,000 jobseekers benefited from these services, a higher number compared to previous years.

More efforts are required to improve outreach and provision of career counselling to vulnerable groups. These groups include the low-qualified, geographically isolated, older workers, and women, as well as the long-term unemployed, inactive individuals, inmates, and persons with disabilities. The overarching issue is the absence of cross-sector collaboration and cooperation, coupled with the lack of a legal framework to implement a strategic, lifetime approach to career guidance. Consequently, adults find limited support to manage the challenges in their careers, livelihoods, or transitions.

Moldova demonstrates a relatively effective approach to providing adult learning opportunities outside the traditional VET framework. This includes active labour market measures and regulations that support lifelong learning in formal, non-formal, and informal education settings. As part of its Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) portfolio, the PES annually organises a range of activities that encompass (re)training and skills validation programmes aimed at jobseekers, with the latest datasets indicating an incremental increase in participant numbers. In 2022, over 1000 jobseekers accessed vocational training courses. This aligns with the strategy to enhance the match between the education of jobseekers and skills profile and the demands of the labour market.

The challenge of insufficient or lack of practical skills presents a significant barrier to labour market entry. To address this, the PES regularly coordinates on-the-job training and vocational internships for jobseekers, working closely with companies. These initiatives are designed to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, facilitating smoother transitions into employment.

Moldova also stands out as one of the few countries that have integrated into their ALMPs programmes for the validation and certification of knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal and informal contexts. This opportunity often emerges from career guidance sessions offered to jobseekers. Despite these efforts, the participation rates in programmes focused on practical skills acquisition and the validation of informal/non-formal skills remain relatively low. This is attributed to the limited resources available to the PES, underscoring the need for increased investment to expand these critical services.

An important contribution in this area is provided through civil society organisations (CSOs). The ETF survey on the role of CSOs in the development of human capital, carried out in 2023, has revealed that Moldovan CSOs enlist adult learning in non-formal and informal settings among their common activities, with particular attention to vulnerable adults. The survey has interviewed 32 CSOs that contribute to developing human capital in different forms⁴, of which more than half (56%) engage in providing adult learning. Often CSOs focus on both technical and key competences, and blend learning activities with other services such as personal and career counselling.

³ See https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/skills-policies-and-systems/WCMS_835223/lang-en/index.htm

⁴ The survey identified 75 CSOs active in human capital development, out of them 32 were interviewed.

This type of non-formal and informal learning remains mostly undocumented, despite a favourable environment overall. This is part of a pattern of mixed messages regarding participatory governance in adult education, and education (VET) more broadly. Although evidence is suggesting that communication with stakeholders is a regular occurrence and a development priority, the involvement of employers in the steering and management of the VET system remains a relatively weak link. A challenge is the absence of a structure that plays an intermediate role between the policymaking level on the one hand and the VET institutions and other players on the other.

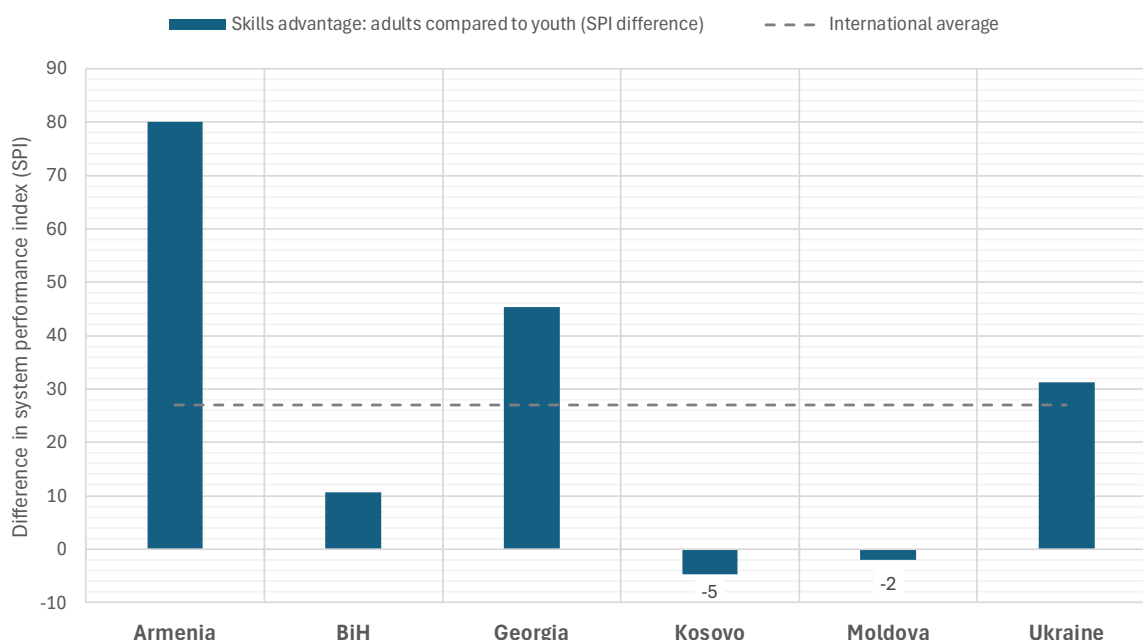
The establishment of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in 2015 is fostering cooperation with employer organisations, notably at sector level. CoVEs and employer representatives of the same sector work jointly on qualification standards, curricula, work-based learning, student assessment and continuing training. This development is still in the process of gaining traction, but once it does, is expected to bring system-wide change.

This combination of factors may explain the relatively good system performance of the country in comparison with other countries in the sample in Figure 2. In addition, many learners opt to enter the workforce directly after completing their initial VET course, in line with the policy emphasis on ensuring a smooth entry of VET graduates into the labour market rather than promoting continued educational trajectories.

2.3 Quality and relevance of skills and competences

In Moldova, young learners and adults alike are equipped with skills of relevance for work. Like elsewhere, some of these skills can be traced back to education and VET in particular, which offers good exposure to the world of work and up-to-date career guidance. Other skills are gained in the course of employment.

Figure 3. Skills gap between youth and adults (2023): difference in system performance



Source: Torino Process database

Note: The "Skills Gap between Youth and Adults (SPI difference)" represents the difference in the System Performance Index (SPI) scores between two key Torino Process monitoring targets (MTs): the skills and

competences of youth in VET (MT35) and those of adults (MT39). This measure is calculated by subtracting the SPI score for MT35 (youth) from the SPI score for MT39 (adults). Positive values indicate areas where the skills and competences of adults surpass those of youth, while negative values indicate the opposite.

The system is notably responsive to local labour market developments, thanks to efforts in monitoring and analysing market trends and skill needs. This, however, does not necessarily translate into improved labour market outcomes, as the employability of VET graduates remains a significant challenge.

Moldova is only one of two countries in the sample shown in Figure 3 where adults underperform in skills and competences compared to youth. This is a reversal of the more common pattern observed in other countries, where adults typically outpace youth in this respect. This could be indicative of gaps or at least areas in need of improvement regarding adult education and lifelong learning opportunities more broadly. It may suggest that while the youth are receiving some foundational skills, there might be less emphasis or fewer resources dedicated to the ongoing skill development of the adult workforce. The ongoing emigration of skilled workers may be a contributing factor as well.

The same findings hold for female learners: young female learners are more likely than their adult peers and more likely than young male learners to possess key competences and labour market-relevant skills. They are also more likely to find a job. It should be noted, however, that the evidence of better employability of female VET graduates is influenced also by their readiness to accept lower-paid jobs when compared to males. While adult females find it more challenging to connect with the labour market system and young males may find it more attractive to find new opportunities abroad, young females may be able to better adjust to the labour market needs and offer more flexibility for them to succeed. This means that employability may not be the most reliable of proxies for the quality of education and training received by this group of learners in VET.

3. FURTHER READING

For more information on the monitoring results of Moldova, see the Torino Process policy and system performance report for 2023 at:

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/trp-assessment-reports/moldova-2023>

For more information on key developments in education, skills and employment in ETF partner countries in 2023, see the cross-country monitoring report at:

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/education-skills-and-employment-trends-and-developments>