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Inclusive and Productive Employment in the Republic of Moldova – Independent Final evaluation

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Republic of Moldova

Evaluation date: 25 September 2025

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: DWT/CO Budapest

Technical Office: DWT/CO Budapest

Evaluation manager: Nina Krgovic

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DC Symbol: MDA/22/01/CHE

Donor(s) & budget: SECO, CHF 2,000,000 (USD 2,212,104.27)

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The project “Inclusive and Productive Employment in the Republic of Moldova” aims to foster more and better jobs, strengthen employability through improved TVET and adult learning systems, and advance the formalization of employment. Its objectives respond to the country’s persistent labour market constraints—low employment rates, high inactivity among youth, women, and older workers, skills mismatches, population aging, emigration, and high levels of informality—exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, the energy shock, and the unprecedented influx of refugees. The project’s intervention logic is built around a complementary package of demand-side measures that support job creation and enterprise productivity, supply-side measures that improve skills and lifelong learning pathways, and governance measures that reinforce formalization, social dialogue, and digitalization as cross-cutting drivers of decent work.

The project is national in scope, covering the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova and working with key ministries, national agencies, employers’ and workers’ organizations, and relevant TVET and labour-market institutions. Its strategy combines technical assistance, capacity-building, policy advice, and institutional strengthening, delivered through coordinated actions aligned with the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) 2021–2024. Management is ensured through an ILO-led structure with technical backstopping from relevant global departments and close tripartite engagement to ensure coherence and ownership. The project is financially supported by the Government of Switzerland and implemented under ILO’s standard project governance arrangements, including regular planning, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms.

Present situation of the project

The project Inclusive and Productive Employment in the Republic of Moldova was implemented in a context marked by persistent structural labour market challenges and the compounded effects of multiple crises. Although the development gap between Moldova and the rest of Europe had narrowed over the past two decades, the country still had one of the lowest per-capita incomes and gross wages in Eastern Europe. Economic growth prior to the pandemic had been largely jobless, and employment rates remained low, with high

	levels of inactivity particularly among youth, women, and older workers. Skills mismatches, demographic aging, sustained emigration, and widespread informality continued to constrain labour market performance. While the economy eventually began to recover from the severe COVID-19-related recession, labour market recovery lagged behind. These vulnerabilities were further exacerbated by the energy crisis and by Moldova hosting the highest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita in Europe, adding additional pressure on labour market systems and institutions. Within this context, the project was implemented in line with its objective to support more inclusive and productive employment outcomes. It deployed a complementary package of interventions aimed at generating more and better jobs, improving employability through strengthened TVET and adult learning systems, and advancing the formalization of employment. The project built on the commitment of the Government of Switzerland to support implementation of the ILO Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) 2021–2024. Implementation efforts also incorporated contributions to social dialogue and the digitalization agenda of the Moldovan Government. Activities were carried out at the national level, in close collaboration with government institutions, employers' and workers' organizations, and relevant labour-market stakeholders, ensuring that the intervention remained responsive to the country's evolving economic and social context throughout its duration.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The final evaluation assessed the effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of the project across all outcomes, reviewing performance against targets, implementation approaches, partnerships, and the integration of key ILO principles. It served both learning and accountability purposes for SECO, the ILO, and national constituents, and aimed to inform future programming and strategic decision-making. The evaluation covered the entire duration of the project and all components, identifying key results, challenges, lessons learned, and opportunities for future interventions.
Methodology of evaluation	The final evaluation used a participatory, mixed-methods approach designed to ensure accountability, promote ownership, and generate robust and actionable findings. Data collection combined an extensive desk review with predominantly face-to-face and remote qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, double

interviews, focus group discussions, and email questionnaires. In total, 49 stakeholders (36 women) from government institutions, social partners, LEPs/LPAs, the donor, experts, and the ILO were consulted, with questions tailored to stakeholder groups and triangulated across sources. Quantitative data from project documents, progress reports, and statistical sources complemented qualitative insights and were analyzed using responsibility assignment mapping, change analysis, and contribution analysis to assess effectiveness, contribution pathways, and partnership arrangements. The evaluation followed the OECD/DAC criteria and ILO Evaluation Policy Guidelines, and was conducted in three phases—inception, data collection, and analysis/reporting—between July and September 2025. Limitations included dependence on stakeholder availability, variations in data completeness, and reliance on remote interviews for some groups; however, triangulation and a strong documentary base helped mitigate these constraints.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The ILO project demonstrates strong relevance to Moldova’s national priorities, aligning with “Moldova 2030” and the nationalized SDGs. By promoting decent work, productive employment, and labour rights—particularly for youth, women, and persons with disabilities—it addresses key labour market needs. Its multi-stakeholder approach strengthens coordination among government, social partners, and local actors, supporting sustainable labour market outcomes. The project design reflects a solid understanding of systemic challenges, incorporating human rights and gender-sensitive approaches, though some gaps remain in gender mainstreaming and stakeholder engagement.

The project shows strong internal coherence, with well-integrated components and effective collaboration with national institutions. However, external coherence is more limited, with insufficient coordination with other actors in the sector.

Effectiveness is generally high across outcomes. Despite some underperformance under Outcome 1, job creation efforts yielded tangible results. Progress under Outcome 2 demonstrates alignment of vocational training with labour market needs, while Outcome 3

reflects strong achievements in protecting vulnerable workers through policy development, capacity building, and awareness raising. Overall, the project has responded well to labour market challenges and laid a foundation for continued progress.

Efficiency was satisfactory, supported by adequate staffing, sound financial management, and a robust M&E system. Flexibility and strong partnerships facilitated implementation, although delays, communication issues, and role clarity challenges affected timeliness. Budget allocations prioritized immediate employment needs, raising some concerns regarding longer-term investments in skills and formalization.

Impact is difficult to fully assess due to limited indicators and project duration. However, early signs suggest contributions to inclusive employment, skills alignment, and improved working conditions, supporting progress towards decent work and sustainable development.

Sustainability prospects are mixed. While policy-level achievements are well embedded and aligned with national frameworks, institutional and financial sustainability remain uncertain. Continued support may be required to ensure the durability of results, particularly at the beneficiary level.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main findings & Conclusions

1. Capitalize on achievements and design the next phase. Build on lessons learned, good practices, and successful approaches from this phase, using a concise concept-note model to guide a flexible, responsive next intervention.
2. Reinforce the three-dimensional approach with balanced budgeting. Maintain the integrated focus on employment, skills, and formalization, ensuring adequate resources for all areas and continuing strong technical support to MLSP and NEA.
3. Review and integrate MTE recommendations into the next National Employment Programme. ILO, MLSP, and NEA should jointly assess and incorporate relevant MTE

	recommendations into the forthcoming NEP to strengthen its strategic focus and effectiveness. 4. Conduct an ex-post evaluation of all LEPs. Evaluate the eight existing LEPs to assess sustainability, identify effective models, and inform national integration and future programming. 5. Strengthen and sustain the national skills anticipation system. Deepen interinstitutional cooperation, advance micro-credentials, expand lifelong learning access, and invest in capacity-building to support a responsive skills system. 6. Advocate for renewal of the Programme to Tackle Undeclared Work with a strong M&E framework. Promote continuation of the programme, refine tools such as OpenIMIS, engage stakeholders, and establish clear KPIs to monitor formalization outcomes. 7. Improve project design and enhance gender responsiveness. Strengthen the results chain, incorporate LNOB, develop gender-specific indicators, involve women's organizations, and distinguish clearly between capacity building and capacity development. 8. Enhance collaboration with other development partners. Strengthen coordination with organizations such as UNDP, Helvetas, and CEDA through joint initiatives, shared platforms, and regular exchanges to improve external coherence and impact. 9. Strengthen management arrangements to enhance clarity and working environment. Clarify roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines within project teams, strengthen internal communication, and promote transparent and inclusive management practices to support a more effective and healthy work environment.
Main lessons learned and good practices	Main Lessons Learned 1. Value of a three-dimensional approach and balanced budgeting The integrated focus on employment, skills development, and formalization proved effective, with each component reinforcing the others. However, its success depends on balanced and adequate budget allocations across all three areas.

2. **Importance of integrating evaluation recommendations into policy implementation**
The NEP mid-term evaluation underscored that MLSP and NEA must systematically incorporate evaluation findings to ensure accountability, informed decision-making, and adaptability of employment policies.
3. **Need for contextualized assessment before expanding or institutionalizing LEPs**
While the two LEPs supported under the project functioned well, sustainability varies across districts. An ex-post assessment of all LEPs is necessary to understand long-term performance and determine the feasibility of replication, as local contexts differ widely.
4. **Flexibility as a driver of relevance and adaptability**
The project's ability to adjust plans, timelines, and activities proved crucial for overcoming delays and responding to emerging challenges. Flexibility, coupled with strong technical partnerships, enhanced the project's effectiveness.
5. **Importance of efficient management arrangements, communication, and role clarity.** Effective management structures, clear roles and responsibilities, and strong communication are essential for efficient implementation. Gaps in these areas can lead to delays and coordination challenges, while improvements contribute to better performance and team functioning.

Good Practices

1. **Use of a Concept Note to support systemic change**
Replacing a rigid project document with a flexible Concept Note enabled more adaptive, responsive programming aligned with national priorities. This approach strengthened engagement and supported broader systemic improvements.
2. **Engagement of professional associations to enhance outcomes**
Collaboration with associations such as the National Association of Beekeepers provided tailored support to grantees, facilitated business formalization, and strengthened the associations themselves. This created a



	supportive ecosystem that improved service delivery, networking, and sustainability for beneficiaries.
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