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2023

# LED Moldova - Annual Report

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LED LIECHTENSTEIN  
DEVELOPMENT  
SERVICE



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# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

## Political and socioeconomic context

In February 2023, the Prime Minister, Natalia Gavrilita, resigned amid the economic turmoil and the spillover effects of the ongoing war in neighbouring Ukraine. President Maia Sandu nominated the presidential aide and former interior minister, Dorin Recean, Prime Minister. Further reshuffle of the Cabinet occurred in July 2023 when three new ministers were appointed, including a new Minister of Education and Research - Dan Perciun.

*2023 marked a historical stage in the Republic of Moldova's European integration process, paving the way to starting accession negotiations.*

In June 2023, Moldova hosted the second meeting of the European Political Community, underlining its readiness to stand together with its European Union partners to address the current challenges. In December 2023, EU leaders decided to open accession negotiations, presenting an opportunity for Moldova to grow more sustainably and to bring greater prosperity to the country. Moldova started the negotiations with the EU and the alignment with the Community Acquis against a background of weak public administration, a vulnerable economy, a large budgetary deficit, and an insufficient popular support for the European path. Nonetheless, the latest conclusions of the progress review revealed that Moldova has made an important progress towards meeting the objectives underpinning its candidate status. Accordingly, six out of the nine criteria were fulfilled for beginning negotiations for EU membership<sup>1</sup>. To further advance on its accession path, sustainable and tangible reform progress, notably in the areas of the rule of law, justice, and fundamental rights, are of key importance. The progress review also emphasized the need for pursuing transformative economic reforms, sectoral cooperation, country's integration in the EU internal market as well as enhancing measures related to renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The energy crisis continued to dominate the public agenda in 2023. The response to the energy crisis was robust with initiatives to diversify gas supplies, build reserves, reduce consumption, and promote alternative fuels, which prevented the need for energy rationing or other quantity restrictions. While supply of electricity from Transnistria was reinstated in 2023, energy prices still remain high. A comprehensive and targeted subsidy scheme was put into place to partially mitigate the effects of the substantial increase of energy price on vulnerable population groups<sup>2</sup>. Against this backdrop, the discourse about renewable energy and green technology as well as investments in this sector has gained traction. The interest from development cooperation donors in stimulating green employment and measures for environment has also intensified.

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<sup>1</sup> European Council (2024) [link](#), accessed on 5.02.2024

<sup>2</sup> Expert Group (2023), State of the country report, 2023

## Educational context

*2023 is marked by an increased leadership, clear vision, and sustained effort to transform education.*

The key policy document approved in 2023 were: Education Development Strategy 2030, amendments to Education Code, secondary legal framework to the Law on Dual Education. The Government has set ambitious directions in the Education Development Strategy 2030<sup>3</sup> to address both current and longstanding development challenges to reform the education system, including Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. The main priorities in the field of education, to be implemented by 2030, include increasing the attractiveness and relevance of studies for the labour market, making the educational process more efficient through digitisation, and strengthening human resources in the field. To this end, the ministry set up a National Institute of Education and Leadership that will provide continuous training of teachers at European level and an effective mentoring mechanism in the education system as well as to comprehensively transform and modernise universities and pedagogical colleges. The Ministry has allocated 289 million MDL to improve infrastructure and change teaching content in the Higher Education institutions.

With regards to the VET sector, the strategy calls for the continuation of reform initiatives in VET and emphasizes the achievement of such crucial objectives as:

- further development of the National Qualifications Framework, qualification standards and occupational standards;
- improvement in forecasting future labour market needs;
- improvement of career guidance services;
- further development (and re-organization) of the network of VET institutions, including the provision of dual education;
- promotion of (stronger) partnerships between VET institutions and employers and the strengthening of the involvement of social partners in VET policy;
- improvement of teaching quality in VET.

It is worth noting that MER outlined three priority areas to be addressed in the academic year 2023/24: (i) increase of number of students enrolled on dual programmes from 1'307 to 2'000; (ii) 10% increase in employment rate of VET graduates; (iii) improvements in learning environment by providing continuous teacher training and by modernizing the infrastructure of VET institutions. To this end, the Ministry allocated 35 million MDL in 2023 to improve the infrastructure of 34 VET institutions and trained 600 teachers. Furthermore, the donor

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<sup>3</sup> Government of the Republic of Moldova (2023), Education Development Strategy 2021-2030, Government of Moldova.

community active in VET supported the Ministry in its efforts to promote dual education and improve the VET infrastructure.

After granting Moldova EU candidate state, the country underwent a detailed assessment of the state of play and of the country's alignment with the EU acquis, including in education. The Commission working document<sup>4</sup> concluded that the education system is broadly aligned with EU policy and practice, though students' learning outcomes lag behind the European average. The accessibility and inclusiveness of education vary across the country's urban and rural areas, as does the quality of teaching and learning. This contributes to the persistent mismatch between the skill level of the workforce and what employers require, which is one of the key business environment obstacles for firms. Investment in research and development remains low and has been falling despite the government's strategy to increase it.

The report underscored the need to better match the vocational education and training skills on offer with labour market needs. In the coming year, Moldova should in particular:

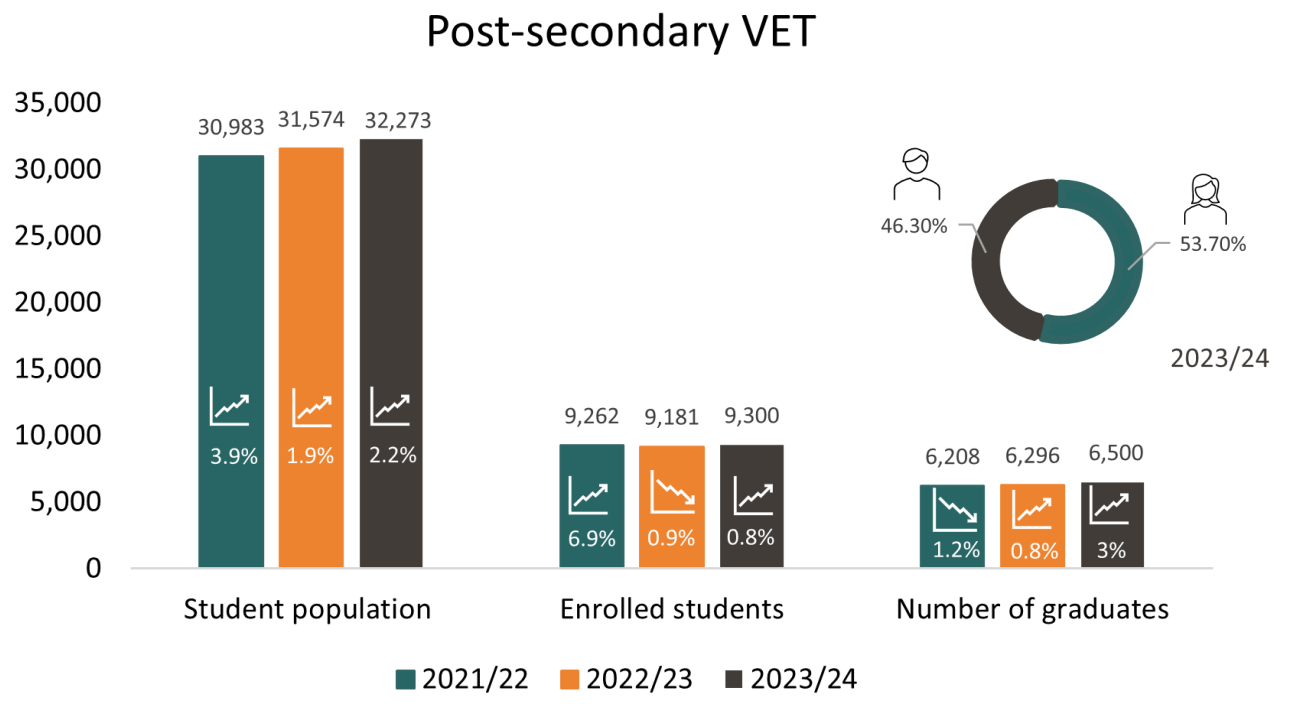
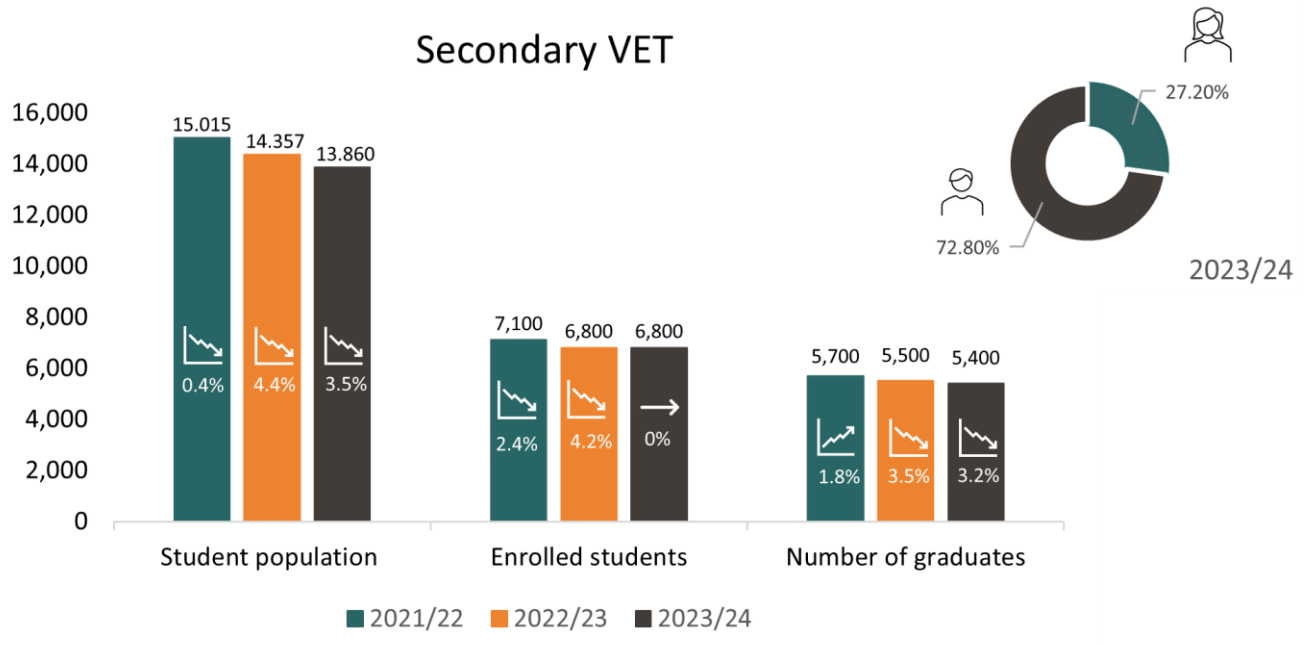
- promote reforms to consolidate quality and efficiency of the school network in both general education and VET;
- strengthen continuous professional development of teachers and school leaders in line with the national education strategy for 2030;
- implement the youth strategy.

## **The network of VET institutions**

In 2023/24, Moldova has a total of 88 VET institutions: 38 VET schools, 37 colleges, and 13 centres of excellence with a total number of 46'133 students studying in VET institutions. Generally, the student population in upper secondary VET has decreased significantly by 27% (from 19'581 to 14'357) between 2012/13 to 2022/23, whilst the population in post-secondary VET has slightly increased by 2.8% (from 30'725 to 31'574). A brief overview of the key characteristics and trends in the upper secondary and post-secondary VET registered in 2023 is presented below (source: National Bureau of Statistics, <https://statistica.gov.md/ro>).

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<sup>4</sup> Publications office of the EU (2023), Commission staff working document, link, accessed on 6.02.2024



**Figure 1. VET system at a glance**

**Coordination Office, Moldova**

In 2023, further staff fluctuations occurred at LED MD. As of August 2023, the team consists of two members of staff: Director and Financial Manager.

# LED SUPPORT FOR MOLDOVA

## Strategy

In formal education, LED MD continues to support projects that aim at improving the quality and relevance of education, with a special focus on the Vocational Education and Training system. This component is complemented with support for non-formal education and for advocacy in education. In this sense, LED MD supports non-formal education programs for skills development that occur both inside and outside educational institutions and offer innovative, flexible, and learner-centred delivery modes. As for the component on advocacy in education, LED MD supports advocacy work with a focus on strengthening the dialogue between the key stakeholders to improve the school environment and pupils' wellbeing.

In 2023, LED revised its global strategy. For Moldova, the thematic focus will be narrowed to VET and employability. Future interventions could promote national frameworks for VET, support vocational training providers (initial and continuous training), strengthening vocational orientation and integration into the labour market of graduates with the goal of increasing the employability of VET students. Derived from the global strategy, LED MD will draft and publish the new Country Program 2024 - 2026 on its website.

## Project Portfolio

The portfolio of projects supported by LED in Moldova is published on the LED Moldova website ([link](#)). The table below illustrates the project portfolio with active phase budgets at the end of 2023.

Project	Contract partner	Budget	Project start	Project end
Strengthening Vocational Education and Training in Moldova - CONCEPT V	Association Education for Development (AED)	€ 1.574.438	01.01.2023	31.12.2025
Creating Values for Others: VET institutions provide relevant vocational skills - CREATIVO	Center for Entrepreneurial Education and Business Support (CEDA)	€ 400'915	01.12.2020	31.05.2024
Hope has an address - Production and Training Centre Construction	Eco-Razeni Association	€ 99'420	01.07.2022	30.06.2023
GirlsGoIT	TEKEDU	€ 397'092	01.01.2021	31.12.2023
Youth Maker Club (YMC)	Moldovan Association of ICT Companies	€ 578'024	01.09.2021	31.08.2024
Together for Quality Education	APSCF	€ 346'812	01.10.2021	30.11.2024

**Table 1. LED MD Portfolio**

■ Formal Education
 ■ Non-Formal Education
 ■ Advocacy

The CREATIVO project is co-financed with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the budget solely reflects the LED contribution.

## Strengthening of Vocational Education and Training in Moldova (CONSEPT V)

In 2023, the phase five of the project CONSEPT commenced, building on the outstanding achievements of the previous phases, particularly in teacher training, management support, and curricular development. It is worthwhile to mention that this phase brings to the fore a greater business sector engagement in the VET design and delivery, leaning on the presumption that a labour market-oriented VET system significantly strengthens the employability of their graduates. By teaching occupational competences in line with the current and future demands in labour market, the VET system contributes to both the personal income and socioeconomic inclusion of graduates which in turn leads to the competitiveness and growth of the economy. In a nutshell, the intervention supports the Centre of Excellence in Transportation and the Centre of Excellence in Energy and Electronics and their ascribed institutions (14 partners in total) to (i) become more capable and proactive in finding and liaising with the business sector; (ii) provide together with private companies suitable company-based learning experiences; (iii) engage the representatives from business sector in the development of the value chain of curricular documents; and (iv) strengthen the capacity of teaching staff to apply innovative educational strategies and use various learning platforms and contents. The project is implemented by the Association Education for Development (AED).

In 2023, the key achievements were as follows:

- The course on Partnership Management was developed, accredited, and ready to be delivered at system level to support VET institutions in liaising with the private sector and establishing sustainable partnerships.
- Capacity-building activities were carried out for in-company mentors and school-based mentors/instructors.
- Four occupational standards (OS), five qualification standards (QS) and five curricula were developed and approved for the selected study programs.
- Teaching staff benefitted from instructional and occupational training to guide them with the delivery of the updated curricula for the selected occupations.
- A company survey on the readiness to offer internships was carried out with 11 enterprises (pilot phase): None of the surveyed economic units reported having ever participated in the development of curricular documents; only 4 economic agents formally assigned an instructor to coordinate internship activities on the premises of the company; only 4 in-company mentors benefitted from periodic training (esp. psychopedagogical) required to monitor internships.
- A student survey on internship experience was conducted with 94 first-year students: the average satisfaction score ranged between 8.1 to 8.8 (1 to 10 scale) depending on their study program, revealing that the great majority were satisfied with the internship preparation and company settling-in. However, 34% of the respondents reported to have suffered trauma / physical injury induced by the work processes; 28% suffered episodes



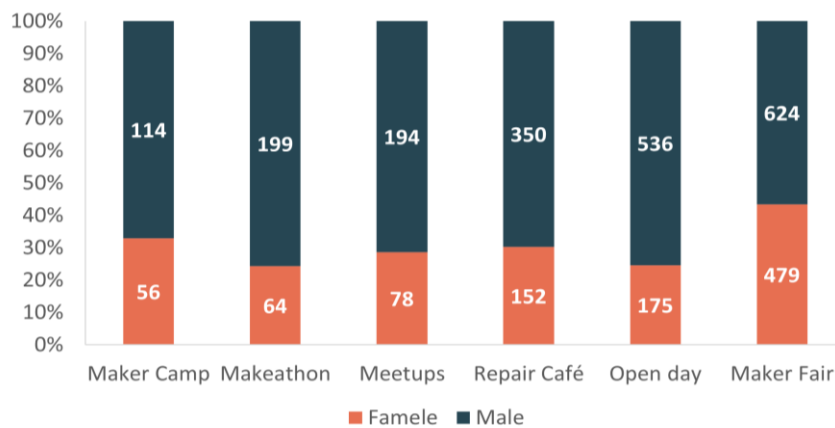
of stress, anxiety, psycho-emotional disturbance induced by the work environment / interpersonal relationships; 22% did not receive the full amount of remuneration as per law; and only 70%-80% were able to carry out the given tasks as per curriculum.

- A company survey on student performance during internship: the average satisfaction of the companies with their trainees' level of knowledge and practical skills was 7.8 (1 to 10 scale); 83.3% of hosting entities reported that the trainees demonstrated mastery of 50%-75% competencies, and 16.7% observed a 100% mastery.

## Youth Maker Club (YMC)

The Youth Maker Club (YMC) was designed to enhance vocational education for youth, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in various trades and industries in the modern job market. Three YMCs are located in Balti, Cahul and Chisinau and provide a rich offer of non-formal education opportunities for VET students (e.g. courses of vocational training<sup>5</sup>, Repair Cafes, Makeathons, Winter / Summer Camps, Maker Fairs, Meetups). The YMC project, implemented by the National Association of ICT Companies ([link](#)), registered significant success in providing personal and professional opportunities for its beneficiaries, expanding their horizon of learning experience with real-world practical activities and of social and networking opportunities. In addition to technical skills, the project emphasized the development of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are essential in any professional setting.

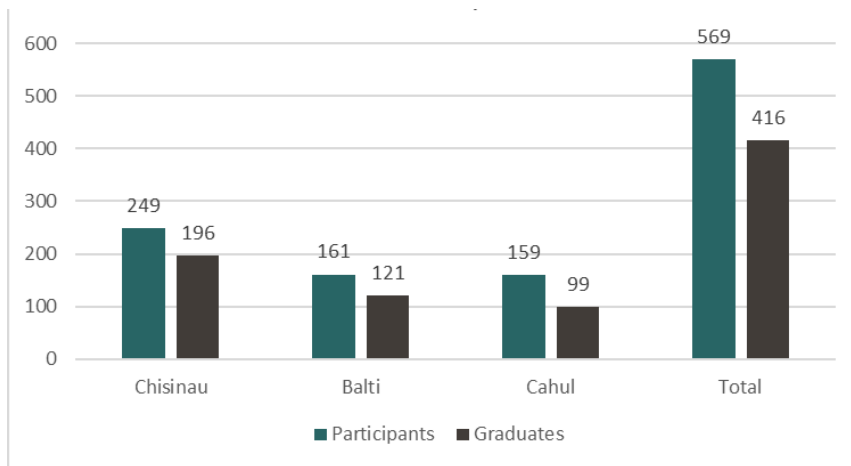
Altogether, the YMC events were visited by over 3'000 people, many of whom became YMC graduates and Maker Club' members.



**Figure 2. Gender distribution of YMC participants**

In 2023, YMC held a total of 30 vocational courses - 10 per location. A total number of 569 VET students attended courses in Year 2 which is an increase of 55% compared to Year 1. Out of the total number, 35% were girls that is higher than the proportion of 24% recorded in Year 1.

<sup>5</sup>The courses of vocational training include (1) Electronics and Programming, (2) Operation of CNC Machines, (3) Drones and Aircraft, (4) Robotics and Mechatronics, (5) 3D Modelling and Printing, (6) 3D Modelling and Laser Cutting.



**Figure 3. Attendance and completion rates**

Since the beginning of Year 2, 62 YMC participants applied for small grants under the Product Development Program to design individual projects (53 projects recorded), making use of knowledge and skills in using 3D technology, laser cutting, embedding electronics, CNC milling.

YMC alumni and members have an overwhelmingly positive outlook on their experience in the project. The external evaluation of the project showed that over 91% of the respondents suggested that the project was according to or above their expectation, indicating high levels of satisfaction with both the education and social components of the project. This finding is further substantiated by the fact that 96% of YMC participants would recommend the Youth Maker Club to their friends and peers.

The external evaluation also indicated that the vocational courses are relatively well-adapted to the beginner level. Over 65% of participants mentioned that they have encountered no challenges in understanding theoretical and practical aspects of their courses. Additionally, over 70% of participants enjoyed interactive aspects of the YMC courses, they were generally satisfied with the course organization, educational and support materials, and had high degree of confidence in the mentors and their teaching methods. It was further evidenced that one of the key strengths of the educational offer was the adaptive and student-centered learning methodology allowing the courses to be accommodated to different learning styles and to experiential learning which exponentially increased the levels of participants' engagement.

### **Creating Values for Others: VET institutions provide relevant vocational skills (CREATIVO)**

The CREATIVO project seeks to enhance the relevance of vocational skills development programs, through fostering stronger ties with the private sector, providing demand driven services, ensuring sound financial management, enhancing managerial capacity, and maintaining a commitment to quality delivery. The overarching goal is to bridge the gap between the skills offered by the VET institutions and the demands of the labour market, enabling youth and adults with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the labour market. To this end, the partner institutions are supported to (i) effectively deliver demand-

driven courses (CVET) in partnership with and for the private companies and (ii) improve their school-based entrepreneurial activities (EAs) so that trainees gain relevant skills, and the institutions generate higher income. In 2023, the project team continued to provide tailored support to its partner institutions which originally showed a diverse spectrum of performance levels, aiming to enhance their institutional capacity, including specific areas such as human resources, operational, and financial capacities based on identified needs. Despite possessing generally adequate management and strategic planning capacities, most VET institutions encountered challenges in establishing sustainable collaborations with the private sector. CREATIVO has made significant progress in addressing communication difficulties between VET institutions and the private sector by capacitating underdeveloped Continuous Training Centers/Units. Through comprehensive efforts, including needs assessments, workshops, and consultations, institutions have gained valuable insights into program evaluation, regulatory knowledge, and collaboration with stakeholders.

The update / design of seven courses and the successful accreditation of five CVET courses played an important role in boosting the confidence of VET institutions. This achievement not only validated the quality of the courses but also sparked increased interest in broadening their CVET portfolios. This positive impact was observed not only among institutions that have been actively involved in CVET but also resonated with those engaged in launching EA.

VET institutions engaged in EA made significant strides by expanding their product offerings and services. This expansion was facilitated by the establishment or renovation of new sales or service points, showcasing a tangible impact on their entrepreneurial ventures. Notably, collaborations flourished among VET institutions and extended to partnerships with clients, indicating a positive trend in fostering synergies between educational institutions and the broader business community. Entrepreneurial activities present a clear advantage to the learning process, offering VET students the opportunity to acquire job-related skills. 85% of surveyed students considered that EA made a great impact on their future careers and 64% believed it would secure employment. This positive feedback underscores the project's success in shaping students' perspectives on the value and potential outcomes of EA in relation to their professional future.

The key achievements attained in 2023 were as follows:

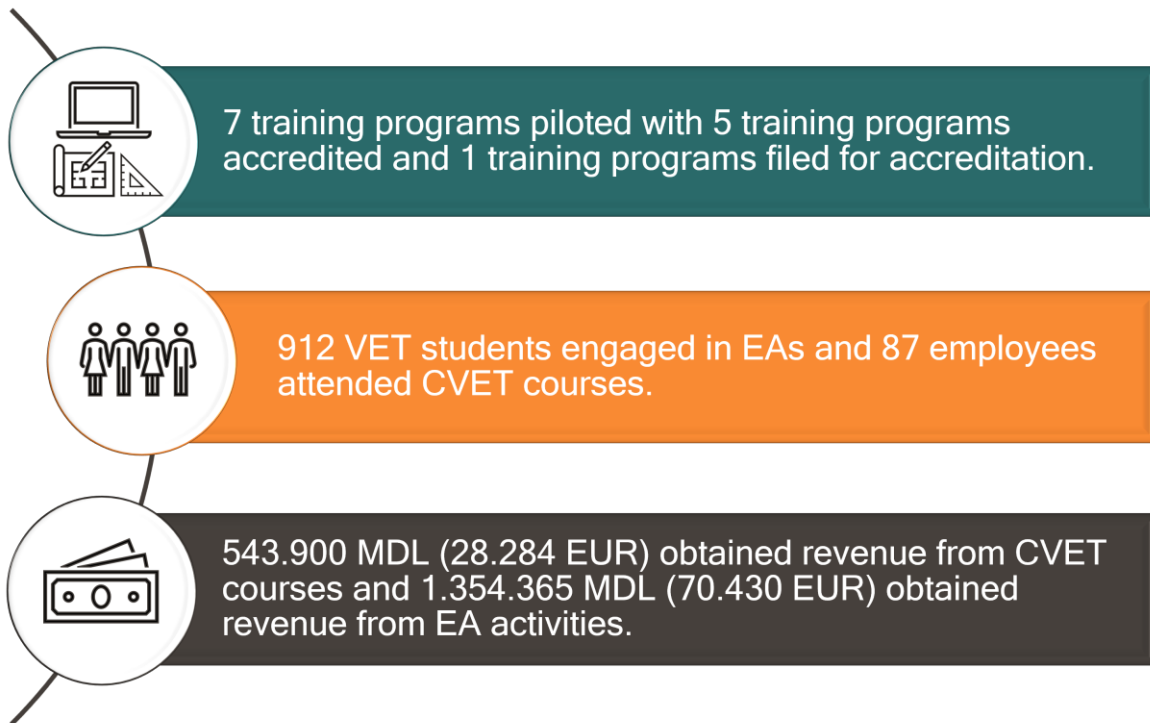
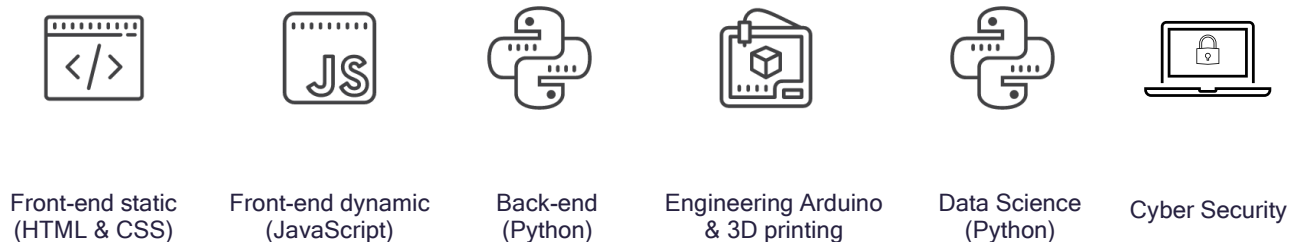


Figure 4. Key achievements of CREATIVO project

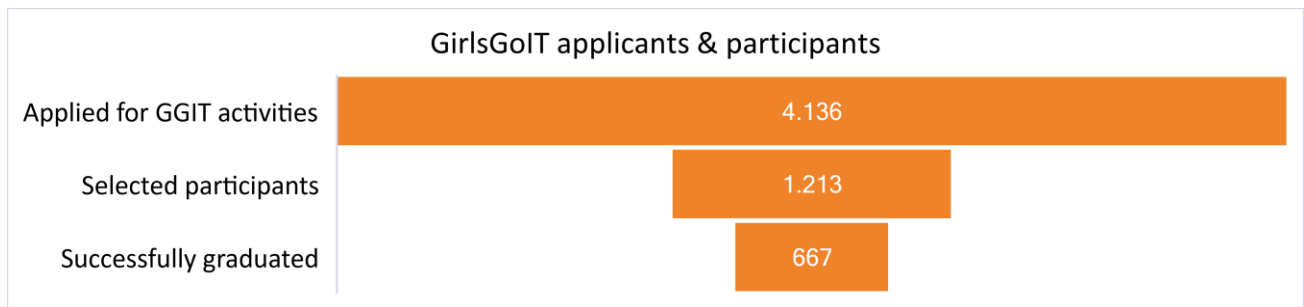
## GirlsGoIT

In 2023, TEKEDU conducted two bootcamps and a summer camp, each designed to provide young girls with the opportunity to learn and to develop their technology and computer science skills. Participants could choose from the following learning tracks:



In addition to technical content, participants could learn the basics of project management, drafting a CV, public speaking, critical thinking, etc. Trainers are former GirlsGoIT participants and active professionals who serve as role models. An online educational platform was developed to support participants in their learning.

In 2023, a total of 268 girls aged 14-20 years were selected to participate in all three GirlsGoIT events out of 1'224 applications received from 33 regions of Moldova. Overall, 218 girls successfully graduated by presenting their final project and passing the technical test. The satisfaction rate with the GirlsGoIT activities is high, 100% of the graduates who completed the evaluation forms (n=127 girls) found the program helpful. 57% of participants considered IT as one of the options for studies. 80% of participants hold these views due to the attended bootcamps and summer camp.



**Figure 5. Number of applicants, participants, and graduates 2021-2023**

A total of 441 girls from 677 who graduated in the last 3 years completed the tracer survey: 99% of participants found the program helpful; 84% of participants consider IT a viable sector for girls/women and 42% hold these views due to GirlsGoIT activities; 40% of respondents chose to follow up with other ICT or STEM related opportunities. Despite the increase in the number of students who opt for studying Computer Science and IT, the proportion between girls and boys is skewed with 1:4. As such, the number of students studying Computer Science and IT increased from 3'063 students (out of which 627 girls) in the academic year 2019/2020 to 3'817 students (out of which 884 girls) in the academic year 2022/2023. GirlsGoIT has contributed, alongside other targeted events, to advance views about IT sector being a good career option for girls.

## Together for Quality Education

The project has advanced its mission to enhance knowledge and awareness on bullying through collaborative efforts with the project partners and authorities. Due to the joint effort, the legal framework has been improved by including the definition of bullying in the Education Code and by approving the Methodological guidelines for preventing and combating bullying. In response to the law amendments, the project supported MER to launch a program of Trainer of Trainers (ToT) for 40 district-level key resource persons from 35 regions, tasked with disseminating and implementing the guidelines locally. In 2023, 27 trainers reported to have organized a total of 171 bullying prevention and intervention activities and training for over 4'200 beneficiaries, including pupils, teachers, and school administrators from 313 schools.

CSO representatives from 45 organizations attended a training course on “Identification, Prevention, and Intervention in Bullying and Cyberbullying Situations”, enhancing their capacity to handle (cyber)-bullying cases. In 2023, the findings and recommendations of the KAP study “Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices in Preventing and Combating Bullying in Schools in the Republic of Moldova” were published. The dissemination helped raise awareness about bullying and laid the base for the launch of the anti-bullying campaign. Based on evidence from 1'153 students, 109 teachers, and 107 psychologists, the study revealed that 21% of students (grades 5-12) experienced bullying weekly, with 8% facing improper jokes on daily basis. Most incidents (58%) occurred in the classroom with 33% of incidents taking place on social media and 28% in school halls. The study emphasized that inadequate management of such cases can harm students significantly. The involvement of students,

parents, and educators in anti-bullying programs is essential for the prevention of the phenomenon.

Five sub-grant projects were supported as part of the project. The grantees underwent bullying training and received technical assistance to effectively conduct the project activities. The initiatives have successfully reached over 2'660 individuals, including 2'248 pupils, 281 teachers, administrators, psychologists, and 135 parents, who participated in training and / or informational sessions about the bullying phenomenon in 15 regions of Moldova.

## **Hope has an address – Production and Training Centre Construction**

The project aimed at strengthening the institutional capacities of Eco-Razeni to provide better and effective socio-professional inclusion of young people with disabilities, disadvantaged men and women aged 16 - 35 years from the Republic of Moldova. Eco-Razeni has been providing on-the-job assistant cook and assistant baker training programs to disadvantaged young people since 2015. Against the backdrop of increased demand for such training, Eco-Razeni started the construction of larger spaces to offer more training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people from the local community and other regions of the country. To this end, funds were dedicated to finalizing the construction of the Production and Training Centre with an area of 500m<sup>2</sup>. The Centre includes kitchen, bakery, storage rooms, dish washing areas, laundry, refrigerated storage, production warehouse as well as bathrooms and staff room.

The project contributed to the procurement of equipment and completion of the construction of the Centre by covering the costs of finishing works such as: ventilation system; heat treatment plants (CTA); mounting suspended ceiling and accessories; lighting system; boilers; landscaping works (fence, paving), electricity power generator. Besides, cooking equipment was purchased: 6-hole gas hob on stainless steel support, gas food boiler, grill, electrical oven, tunnel dishwasher.

Due to the joint support of the donor community, the Production and Training Centre of the Social Enterprise Floare de Cireş Catering started its activity in March 2023 and managed to record excellent short-term results:

- 250 takeaway warm meals delivered daily (Monday - Sunday) to Ukrainian refugees from 6 Temporary Placement Centers;
- 150 takeaway warm meals delivered daily (Monday - Friday) to the lonely old people and children from poor families in the villages of Răzeni and Cigîrleni;
- The team has grown to 42 employees, of whom 21 are young people with disabilities and from other disadvantaged groups;
- The operating capacity of Floare de Cires increased by 2.5 times with approximately 100 catering events served on monthly basis;

- Every 4 months, a group of 11-13 young people with disabilities and from other disadvantaged groups attended the on-the-job training program in Răzeni and acquired vocational skills for occupations: cook's helper, waiter's helper, baker's helper.

# FINANCES

<b>2023 Budget for LED Moldova Office (€):</b>	<b>108.140</b>
<b>Personnel</b>	<b>47.415</b>
Salaries	37.830
Social contributions and taxes	9.080
Professional development activities of staff	505
<b>Office Structure</b>	<b>15.492</b>
Office rent and utility services	9.279
Office running costs, administration, and organization	3.469
Office equipment and software	2.744
<b>Coordination, Supervision and Communication Activities</b>	<b>1.017</b>
<b>Unforeseen</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>63.924</b>

LED Moldova is audited annually. The financial audit report for 2023 will be available on [www.led.md](http://www.led.md).

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