

**The Role of the Romanian Language
in Supporting Sustainable Development of the Republic of Moldova**

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Abstract

The 21st century is marked by accelerated transformations, requiring educational systems to prepare the future workforce with relevant competencies, soft skills, and adaptability. In this dynamic context, a visionary language policy becomes essential, extending the concept of learning beyond formal schooling to lifelong learning and integrating andragogical principles. Such an approach contributes significantly to continuous personal development, enhanced social inclusion and cohesion, improved intercultural dialogue, and strengthened economic competitiveness.

This paper analyses the role of language policy in adult education in the Republic of Moldova, with particular focus on the implementation of the National Program for Learning the Romanian Language by National Minorities for 2023-2025. The adopted methodology is descriptive and analytical, based on an in-depth analysis of official documents, especially Government Decision No. 115/2023, and on the interpretation of quantitative data from relevant studies, such as the 2021 study conducted by the OSCE High Commissioner's Office.

The research findings indicate that, despite recognition of linguistic diversity, the level of Romanian language proficiency remains low among many national minorities, posing an impediment to full integration. The 2023-2025 National Program addresses this need by offering free courses and continuous training for teachers, aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. These initiatives not only facilitate better social and professional integration but also strengthen national identity and fulfil the European aspirations of the Republic of Moldova. By promoting a sustainable linguistic education system, Moldova's language policy aims to support the personal and professional development of all citizens, directly contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals related to quality education and reduced inequalities.

Keywords: social cohesion, sustainable development, linguistic education, Romanian language, minorities, language policy

Introduction

The 21st century is widely recognised as an era of accelerated transformation, in which the labour market and daily life are shaped by increasingly advanced technologies, globalisation, and rapid change. The stability and growth of the global economy are directly proportional to the ability of education systems to prepare the workforce for the future. An educated population with relevant skills fuels innovation, productivity, and competitiveness.

Modern society, and consequently employers, now seek not only theoretical knowledge but also a set of transversal competencies (soft skills) and adaptability. Educational systems, often rigid in their traditional structures, face pressure to align with these new realities. Ignoring these trends would mean remaining unprepared for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st-century labour market. Therefore, fundamental transformation of education is essential—an adaptation to new demands and the fast pace of innovation. In this context, developing critical thinking skills to solve new problems daily and building resilience in the face of significant labour market challenges become imperative in the 21st century.

Research methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is predominantly descriptive and analytical, aiming to evaluate the impact and implementation of a public policy initiative. This approach relies heavily on in-depth analysis of official documents and relevant strategic reports, including the National Program for Learning the Romanian Language and studies conducted by international organisations.

The research involves interpreting quantitative data from surveys and implementation reports, such as the number of course participants and the percentage of national minorities who express a desire to learn Romanian. By combining these elements, the methodology seeks to provide a detailed and nuanced picture of the linguistic and educational context in the Republic of Moldova, identify needs, and examine how language policy responds to them, thereby contributing to an understanding of social and professional integration processes.

Results and discussion

Among the key competencies that should be cultivated in global citizens, those who see humanity as a whole and identify with it, we can identify critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and innovation, collaboration and communication, digital literacy, adaptability and resilience, global citizenship and interculturality, and lifelong learning. A substantial part of these competencies is shaped by educational language policy. A visionary language policy in education acts as a valuable tool for creating a more open, adaptable, and prosperous society capable of facing challenges and seizing opportunities in the 21st century.

An effective language policy for adult education must extend beyond language learning in formal schooling to embrace lifelong learning. A modern language policy that integrates andragogical principles contributes extensively to continuous personal development for several reasons:

- improving personal life by enriching travel experiences, enhancing access to information, and facilitating interpersonal relationships

- increasing social inclusion by offering linguistic opportunities to people from vulnerable social groups or those with limited formal education
- enhancing social cohesion by facilitating intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding
- boosting economic competitiveness, as employees with developed language skills are more adaptable and arguably more valuable in the global labour market

It is worth noting that “adult education has remained a key topic on the European agenda since the beginning of the century, when the Lisbon Declaration established that education is a key resource for development.”¹ Education and training are indispensable for the future of Europe in general and the Republic of Moldova in particular, especially when facing complex and frequent transformations such as digital and green transitions, as well as climate, demographic, and other changes.

“Adult education, as part of lifelong learning, is characterized by the trend of responsible entities in European countries toward greater diversity and quality of courses to ensure compatibility and complementarity among existing initiatives. However, adult education is directly related to other components of the educational context of society, including informal education (unstructured), non-formal education (extracurricular), and formal education (school-based).” According to researcher Schifirneț (2007), adult education—mainly found in the realm of non-formal education—focuses on values, attitudes, lifestyles, and models of action. It is closely linked to lifelong learning, which is not so much an educational field as a principle that implicitly structures activities focused on adult education.²

The situation in the Republic of Moldova requires a nuanced approach to language policy in adult education, considering the country's ethnic diversity. According to a 2021 study, supported by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and developed by the "CIVIS" Centre for Analysis and Research in Sociology, Political Science, and Psychology, this diversity significantly shapes language-learning needs and preferences (see Figure 1).

¹ Uwe Gartenschlaeger, Eeva-Inkeri Sirelius. Învățarea pe tot parcursul vieții pentru întreaga Europă: de ce instruirea adulților este importantă pentru țările vecine ale UE // https://www.dvv-international.org.ua/fileadmin/files/eastern-neighbors/publications_Moldova/A_EducatiaAdultilor-ilovepdf-compressed_1.pdf#:~:text=E%20%C3%AEngrijor%C4%83tor%20%C8%99i%20faptul%20c%C4%83%20politicile%20referitor,personal%C4%83%20%C8%99i%20de%20cultivare%20a%20activismului%20social%2Dpolitic.

² https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/328-333_4.pdf

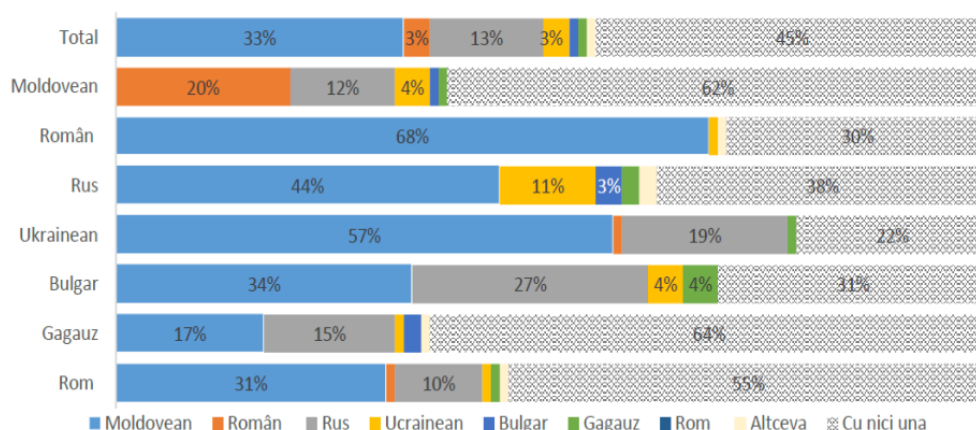


Figure 1. Population by Nationality in the Republic of Moldova (2021)²

According to the same reference study, „over 60% of respondents from national minority groups believe that all citizens should know the Romanian language (Figure 2).” The data indicate a balance in promoting Romanian as the state language while respecting minority languages and recognising the need to learn internationally spoken languages. Thus, language policy in adult education in the Republic of Moldova is shaped by the country's multilingual character, its European aspirations, and the constant need to respond to the demands of the 21st-century labour market and society.

As a national prerogative, the main objective of language policy is to ensure that all adult citizens have access to lifelong learning and to develop the necessary language competencies essential for adapting to the demands of the modern labour market and society.

The Romanian language plays a fundamental and multifaceted role in supporting the sustainable development of the Republic of Moldova, influencing key aspects of society, the economy, and culture. Its status as the state language strengthens national identity and provides a coherent framework for progress in various fields.

One of the most important roles of the Romanian language is its unifying function. By promoting the state language, social cohesion is reinforced, facilitating communication and understanding among citizens, regardless of ethnicity. This contributes to a sense of shared belonging and to strengthening national identity—factors that are crucial to a nation's long-term stability and development. A united population, sharing a common language, is better equipped to tackle challenges and seize opportunities.

Romanian is the primary language of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova. Through it, knowledge is transmitted, professionals are trained, and critical thinking is developed. Moreover, Romania facilitates access to academic and research resources, enabling the Republic of Moldova to integrate into the European scientific and educational space.

Among the reasons for not knowing Romanian, the survey highlights primarily a lack of interest or motivation to learn the language, as well as the “poor quality of Romanian

² <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/114569/MDA-114569.pdf>

language instruction in schools and the low priority given to learning the language, often justified by a lack of time.”³

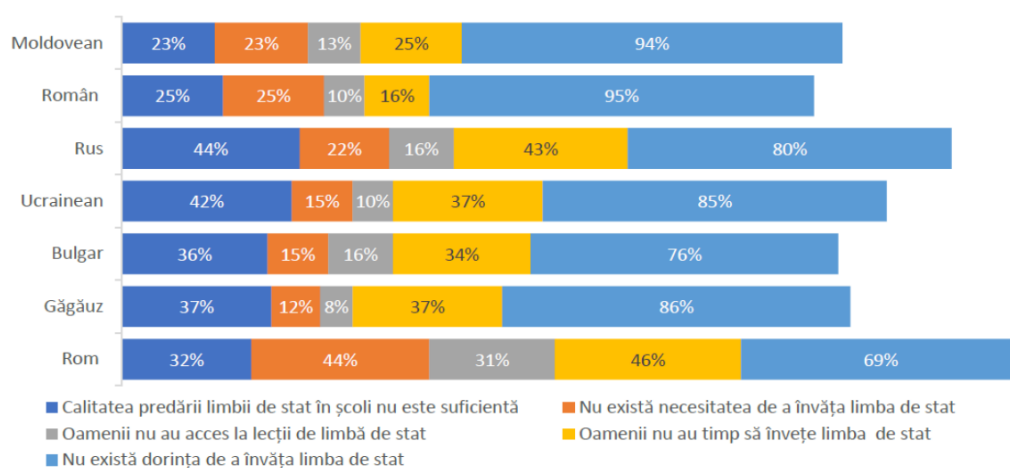


Figure 2. Reasons for Not Knowing the Romanian Language (2021)⁴

A central pillar of this policy is the *National Program for Learning the Romanian Language by National Minorities, including the Adult Population, for the Years 2023–2025*. This strategic governmental document outlines the general framework, objectives, action directions, and funding to facilitate Romanian-language learning for national minorities in the Republic of Moldova, including the adult population, over the period 2023-2025.

The reality described in the study conducted with the support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and developed by the “CIVIS” Center for Analysis and Research in Sociology, Political Science, and Psychology in 2021 served as a catalyst for the linguistic policy of the Republic of Moldova to align with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, particularly with SDG 4 – “Quality Education” and SDG 10 – „Reduced Inequalities.” Sustainable development is not limited to economic aspects; it also involves the preservation of cultural identity and spiritual richness, with the Romanian language serving as a central element in this effort. A vibrant culture, supported by a strong language, contributes to the spiritual well-being of society and the promotion of cultural diversity. Through its role in strengthening identity, education, the economy, and culture, the Romanian language significantly contributes to building a resilient, prosperous, and European-integrated society.

Given that minorities are an integral part of society in the Republic of Moldova, the *National Program for Learning the Romanian Language by National Minorities, including the Adult Population, for 2023–2025*, has encouraged the active participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public, cultural, social, and economic life, through and

³ <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/114569/MDA-114569.pdf>

⁴ <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/114569/MDA-114569.pdf>

thanks to the Romanian language, while also preserving and developing their linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identity.

This program was approved by the Government of the Republic of Moldova on March 7, 2023, through Government Decision No. 115, and aims to significantly improve the level of Romanian language proficiency among national minorities. It also represents a significant effort by the state to ensure better social and professional integration of national minorities by facilitating access to language education.

The *National Program for Learning the Romanian Language* contributes to sustainable development and national sustainability in the Republic of Moldova. By improving language competencies, the program increases employability and professional advancement for minority members, contributing to the development of the country's human capital. A better-integrated and more competent workforce is crucial for a sustainable economy.

The *National Program for Learning the Romanian Language for National Minorities* is not just a linguistic initiative, but also a strategic component of the Republic of Moldova's efforts to build a more inclusive, prosperous, and sustainable society within the context of its European aspirations. Accession to the European Union entails several language requirements, both at the institutional level and for individual citizens. Knowledge of the EU's official languages is essential for active participation in European structures. Thus, the development of language competencies at the national level is not only a cultural aspiration but a strategic necessity for the Republic of Moldova. A multilingual population is a valuable resource, capable of propelling the country toward sustainable development and full integration into the international community.

The implementation of the program involved a consortium of universities and educational centers, including Moldova State University, "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University, "Alec Russo" State University of Bălți, the National Association of European Trainers of the Republic of Moldova and the Pro Didactica Educational Centre.

The strategic document's introduction states: "The Republic of Moldova demonstrates a strong interest in empowering individuals and communities of national minorities by increasing their involvement in the country's social, cultural, economic, and political life. The integration of individuals into society and their active participation in community life require meeting fundamental conditions regarding the protection of human rights and freedoms. The Republic of Moldova's cultural diversity leaves its mark on interpersonal relationships, intercultural communication, and even on the social and professional inclusion of national minorities. A tradition has been formed in which representatives of different ethnicities coexist in cooperation and understanding. In recent years, a favorable attitude of national minorities toward learning and using the Romanian language has emerged, and representatives of ethnic minorities are increasingly interested in integrating into a consolidated society through proactive participation in socially significant activities."⁵

The *National Program for Learning the Romanian Language by National Minorities, including the Adult Population, for the Years 2023–2025*, aligned with the

⁵ <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/114569/MDA-114569.pdf>

National Development Strategy “European Moldova 2030,” has provided free access to courses for adult persons, representatives of national minorities interested in developing their communicative and linguistic skills in Romanian, as follows:

- 2023: The target indicator, established through Contract No. 21077032 for the procurement of services for organizing and delivering Romanian language courses for national minorities, aimed at training 6,500 participants.
- 2024: The indicator increased to 10,000 trained individuals from across the geographical territory of the Republic of Moldova. Initially, Contract No. 21170212 set a target of 6,500 participants. However, due to increased interest with approximately 13,000 people registered for courses, the indicator was supplemented by an additional 3,500 participants, through Contract No. 21193895 for the procurement of the same type of services.
- 2025: The initial target indicator was set at 6,500 individuals completing the free Romanian language course.

The 2024 data revealed a significant increase in interest in learning Romanian compared to the 2021 study.

The free courses were designed to help participants either improve their Romanian language skills or learn the language from scratch, aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). To ensure psycho-emotional comfort, the courses were offered both in-person and online to make them accessible to as many people as possible.

The program also included training for teaching and management staff to improve the quality of Romanian language instruction in educational institutions, especially in regions with a high proportion of national minorities (Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit). During the October–December 2024 period, around 400 teaching staff from across the country participated in the continuing training program titled “*Improving the Linguistic Communication Skills of Romanian Language Teachers in Educational Institutions with Instruction in the Languages of National Minorities (IPLNM)*,” carried out as part of the National Program for Learning the Romanian Language by National Minorities, including the Adult Population, for the years 2023–2025, approved by Government Decision No. 115 of 07.03.2023.⁶

These activities provided a vital platform for enhancing both linguistic and pedagogical skills. Through its actions to improve the quality of Romanian language instruction, the Ministry of Education and Research (MEC) remains committed to ensuring equal access to professional training and to the effective integration of the Romanian language into educational institutions offering instruction in the languages of national minorities.⁷

⁶<https://upsc.md/2024/10/15/limba-romana-la-intensitate-maxima-in-upsc-prin-imersiune-cultural-lingvistica/>

⁷ <https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/mec-lanseaza-prima-runda-programului-de-formare-lingvistica-dedicat-cadrelor-didactice-din>

In the long term, the program contributes to better social and professional integration of national minorities by facilitating communication in the state language, encouraging active participation in public life, and supporting continuous personal development.

As part of the *National Program for Learning the Romanian Language by National Minorities, including the Adult Population, for the Years 2023–2025*, the following materials and documents have been developed: the Didactic Concept for the Romanian Language and Literature discipline, in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR); the Learning Efficiency Standards for the Romanian Language and Literature discipline in institutions with instruction in the languages of national minorities, aligned with the CEFR; the Romanian Language Curriculum for adult learners; the Romanian Language textbook and workbook for adults, representatives of national minorities in the Republic of Moldova – Level A1⁸; the Romanian Language textbook and workbook for adults, representatives of national minorities – Level A2⁹; the Romanian Language textbook and workbook for adults, representatives of national minorities – Level B1; Model language competence evaluation tests for specific social and professional groups (based on labour market demand), etc.

CONCLUSION

Despite recognising linguistic diversity, studies show that Romanian language proficiency remains low among many national minorities, posing barriers to employment in public administration and to full participation in social life. The 2023–2025 National Program addresses this need while reflecting the Republic of Moldova's commitment to European objectives and to strengthening a cohesive society.

Through these initiatives, the Republic of Moldova aims to create a sustainable language education system that supports the personal and professional development of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or age. Through the *National Program for Learning the Romanian Language by National Minorities, including the Adult Population, for the Years 2023–2025*, the country's language policy has moved beyond language learning confined to formal schooling. It has expanded into the concept of lifelong learning, integrating andragogical principles and contributing extensively to continuous personal development.

A significant number of participants have reported improvements in their personal lives through enhanced communication with grandchildren and relatives who speak Romanian, improved access to information, and facilitated social interaction. Thus, the *National Program for Learning the Romanian Language by National Minorities, including the Adult Population, for 2023–2025* reflects the Republic of Moldova's commitment to European goals and building a cohesive society, addressing the need to overcome barriers caused by persistently low levels of Romanian language proficiency among many national minorities.

⁸ https://mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/manual_limba_romana_a1_complet_compressed.pdf

⁹ https://mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/manual_limba_romana_a2_integral_compressed.pdf

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