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***STUDY OF LABOUR MARKET NEEDS, TRAINING
REQUIREMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR
COLLABORATION WITH EXPERTS***

***SZABOLCS-SZATMÁR-BEREG COUNTY,
NORTHERN GREAT PLAIN REGION***

***ÖTLET A VIDÉKÉRT EGYESÜLET
IDEA FOR THE REGION ASSOCIATION***



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. GENERAL INFORMATION	3
2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	3
3. METHODOLOGY APPLIED	4
4. LABOUR MARKET AND TRAINING NEEDS OF COMPANIES.....	6
4.1. Workforce needs and recruitment trends.....	6
4.2. Recruitment methods and support needs.....	8
4.3. Training needs and professional development.....	9
5. CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.....	11
5.1. Overview of educational institutions.....	12
5.2. Challenges for educational institutions	13
6. THE ROLE OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN TRAINING AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION	14
6.1. Organisational profiles and target beneficiaries.....	14
6.2. Services supporting integration into employment.....	15
7. IMAPPING OF TRAINERS (teachers, skilled professionals and craftsmen).....	15
8. COOPERATION OPPORTUNITIES AND STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES	15
8.1. Relationships between companies and educational institutions	15
8.2. The situation of dual and practical training	17
8.3. Models and gaps in cross-sectoral cooperation	18
8.4. Database of potential trainers and experts (by thematic fields)	18
9. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	19
10. ANNEXES.....	21
11. LIST OF FIGURES.....	23

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Country: Hungary

County/region: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg / Northern Great Plain

Partner organisation: Ötlet a Vidékért Egyesület (Idea for the Region Association)

Study date: 15/05/2025

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was carried out within the CONCORD project "Promoting a Sustainable Collaboration Across Borders to Collectively Boost the Economies of Three Crossborder Regions", initiated by the AGES Association from Satu Mare. The overall objective of the project is to improve employment opportunities and economic growth in the counties of Satu Mare (Romania), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (Hungary) and Zakarpattia (Ukraine) by developing local employment and training opportunities .

The specific objective of our study was to support effective labour market integration in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County by identifying locally recognized trainers, experts and master craftsmen who possess significant practical experience and who currently work or have previously worked in companies, institutions or organisations. During the survey, particular attention was paid to identifying professionals who not only possess a high level of expertise, but who are also capable of and willing to transfer this knowledge to current and future members of the workforce. Another objective of the research was to map company needs and employer expectations in order to gain a more accurate understanding of the qualification requirements of the labour market. The shortage of skilled labour is one of the most pressing challenges in the region; therefore, the study aimed to identify the key sectors where the lack of qualified professionals is most acute and where targeted training programmes are most needed.

Based on this dual approach—identifying potential trainers and assessing the needs of companies—our aim was to lay the groundwork for developing local training solutions capable of effectively bridging the gap between labour market demand and supply. The results of the study will serve as direct input for the workshops and pilot training programmes planned in the next phase of the project, where the viability of the concept will be tested in practice. The research also represents an important building block in promoting sustainable cooperation among the three border regions. The identified challenges, methods and good practices will be shared with partners in Romania and Ukraine, thereby supporting the development of effective cross-regional employment policy solutions.

3. METHODOLOGY APPLIED

Data collection methods:

- Online questionnaires (Google Forms)
- Emails
- Telephone interviews
- Face-to-face interviews

Targeted stakeholders:

- Companies (small, medium and large enterprises)
- Vocational schools
- NGOs involved in education and workforce development
- Professional associations and organizations representing the business environment (e.g. Rotary Club, German-Romanian Economic Association, etc.)

Number of targeted participants: 55

Time frame of data collection: April 8 2025 - April 30 2025

The research methodology, target groups, and the formal and professional requirements of the studies resulting from the analysis were defined by the AGES Association, the initiator of the project. Project partners actively participated in shaping the methodology through the submission of proposals and recommendations. A key principle of the joint expert work was to ensure that the analyses carried out in the three participating countries (Hungary, Romania and Ukraine) would be based on a comparable and harmonised methodology. This approach ensures that the data and findings regarding labour market conditions and vocational education in the border regions can be directly compared, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the specific characteristics and challenges of the entire cross-border area. The development of the online questionnaires required a high level of professional coordination due to the different legal frameworks and educational systems of the partner countries. Country-specific characteristics of the three border regions—Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (Hungary), the Satu Mare region (Romania), and Zakarpattia (Ukraine)—had to be taken into account in order to ensure harmonised data collection..

Target groups:

1. Companies: This category includes businesses of different sizes, sole entrepreneurs and primary producers who, in their role as employers, have direct experience with labour market conditions and workforce needs.
2. Vocational education institutions: Educational institutions providing vocational training, which play a key role in preparing the future workforce.
3. Vocational trainers: Professionals who directly participate in vocational training or in-company training by transferring both theoretical knowledge and practical skills
4. Non-profit organisations: Civil society organisations that often act as intermediaries between employers and potential employees and support the labour market integration of various target groups..

SAMPLING

The survey was conducted using a systematic sampling procedure, the first step of which was the compilation of a comprehensive stakeholder list. This list included the most significant employers in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, ensuring that key labour market actors were involved in the research.

At the same time, we collected the contact details of the county's vocational training centres and the vocational schools operating within them, so that the perspectives of the education and training sector would also be adequately represented in the survey. The identification of civil society and training-related stakeholders was carried out by the Idea for the Region Association and its partners, using their existing networks to include businesses, civil organisations and trainers directly accessible through their professional contacts, thereby further expanding the pool of potential respondents. The stakeholder database was organised into categories to ensure clarity and systematic data management. In the table, the group of trainers was included within the category of institutions, as all vocational trainers carry out their activities within some form of training institution.

During data collection, the following information was recorded for each stakeholder:

- exact address of headquarters or operational location
- name of the organisation or enterprise
- name of the head of the organisation
- contact details (telephone number and email address)
- website address (where available)

Several sources were used to compile the stakeholder database:

- publicly available data from the County Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- official websites of companies and vocational training institutions
- platforms and civil hubs representing non-profit organisations
- relevant contacts from the professional networks of the Idea for the Region Association and its partners

TIMING AND TERRITORIAL COVERAGE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

The data collection tools used in the survey were developed by adapting the original Romanian-language questionnaires, and were finalised in early April 2025. During the data collection process, a digital solution was applied: the questionnaires were implemented on the Microsoft Forms platform. Following test responses and methodological validation, the data collection process was launched on 8 April 2025 by sending the questionnaires to the predefined target groups (127 addresses).

By the end of the extended data collection deadline on 30 April 2025, a total of 59 valid responses had been received, of which 20 came from entrepreneurs (or respondents who responded on behalf of companies), 19 from employees of non-governmental organisations, 11 from trainers, and 9 educational (training) institutions were, also represented.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Parallel to the questionnaire survey, interviews based on a structured interview guide were launched in mid-April with representatives of companies and non-profit organisations. During the research process, a total of 8 interviews were conducted with different organisations, including companies, individual entrepreneurs and civil society organisations.

CONCLUSIONS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Alongside the quantitative data collection, qualitative data collection began in mid-April 2025 through structured interviews with representatives of the business and non-profit sectors following a

pre-developed interview guide. Efforts were made to ensure heterogeneity among respondents by involving organisations from different sectors, with diverse market positions and operational backgrounds. This approach allowed the research results to reflect multiple perspectives.

During the research process, several barriers to response willingness were identified. In many cases, completing the questionnaires was only possible after repeated contact attempts—typically following a second or third email exchange or after telephone follow-up. In several instances, respondents preferred completing the faster questionnaire instead of participating in the more time-consuming interview. An overall tendency emerged during the research: the willingness to respond increased significantly when personal professional contacts were activated or when repeated targeted requests were made.

The analysis of organisational response mechanisms revealed that access to senior management levels is particularly challenging, as requests often remain blocked at administrative levels, such as secretariats acting as organisational filters. Several factors were identified behind refusals to respond:

- Data protection concerns: in the context of GDPR compliance, organisations are often reluctant to share potentially sensitive information, which may lead to a complete refusal to participate;
- Information security considerations: increasing online fraud and phishing attempts have contributed to a growing distrust of external data requests;
- Organisational hierarchy and responsibilities: lower-level managers often lack the authority to respond, while senior management may be constrained by time limitations or prioritisation considerations.

The most important methodological conclusion is that in the absence of personal professional networks, the willingness of organisations to participate in research decreases significantly, both in questionnaire surveys and interviews. Despite the methodological challenges encountered, the research succeeded in reaching the planned sample size: a total of 54 valid questionnaire responses were collected and 9 structured in-depth interviews were conducted, providing a solid basis for drawing well-founded conclusions.

4. LABOUR MARKET AND TRAINING NEEDS OF COMPANIES

4.1. Workforce Needs and Recruitment Trends

Among the surveyed companies, the most common pattern in 2023–2024 was occasional or infrequent recruitment (once a year or even less frequently). Only two companies reported recruiting on a quarterly basis, while just one respondent hired new employees on a weekly or monthly basis. Overall, the demand for labour appeared to be sporadic rather than continuous. Most of the surveyed companies expect their workforce demand to remain unchanged in 2025 (14 responses). However, a few respondents indicated that they anticipate an increase (2 responses) or a decrease (2 responses) in labour demand, while some respondents were unable to assess future needs.

Among the respondents, nine companies expressed a preference for hiring skilled workers, although they are also willing to provide training for employees if necessary. Four respondents stated that they employ exclusively skilled workers, while three companies organise training or further training for their employees when required. Two respondents—both micro or small enterprises—primarily retrain their existing employees to perform specific tasks or roles. When recruiting new employees, the majority of respondents prioritise skilled labour. However, there were also companies—typically in the construction or agricultural sectors—where the employment of unskilled or semi-skilled workers is more common. This pattern may partly be explained by the composition of the sample, which mainly included sole entrepreneurs and small businesses, whose labour needs are generally smaller in scale but often require highly specialised expertise.



1. Figure: Demand for skilled workers

Demand for skilled workers	Number
We provide continuous training / training to employees, depending on the needs.	4
We prefer to train existing employees for the task or position.	3
We employ only qualified employees.	4
We prioritize qualified employees, but provide training when necessary.	9

Translation of the table – fig. 1

Just over half of the responding companies are open to employing recent graduates: six indicated that they regularly hire newly qualified workers, while five occasionally offer job opportunities for them. At the same time, responses from nine companies revealed that they rarely (6) or never (3) employ recent graduates. Most respondents do not use atypical forms of employment. Among those who do, the most common forms are simplified or occasional employment (6 mentions), followed by student work (3 mentions). Remote work and labour leasing were each mentioned twice, while part-time employment appeared only once among the responses. In terms of cooperation with educational institutions, four respondents indicated that they participate as employers in dual education programmes. Among the challenges related to recruitment and finding suitable employees, the shortage of skilled labour emerged as the most significant issue (11 mentions). Respondents referred to the lack of qualified professionals, insufficient vocational training, and inadequate foundational skills. Several respondents also highlighted general labour shortages and a lack of motivation among applicants. Additional challenges include employee turnover, labour migration, and the difficulty of finding reliable and efficient workers.

Keeping up with wage expectations also represents a challenge: four companies stated that providing competitive salaries is problematic for them.

Most respondents indicated that they would be open to employing workers from other countries. According to questionnaire responses, 10 companies would consider hiring workers from Ukraine or Romania (with an additional 2 mentioned during interviews), while 7 companies expressed openness toward workers from Asian countries (with one additional mention during interviews). However, many respondents would attach certain conditions to this: the most frequently mentioned expectations include a shared language, appropriate professional skills and qualifications, and the ability of employees to arrange their own accommodation and commuting. The openness toward workers from Asian countries was mainly explained by lower employment costs and greater work capacity.

During the interviews, however, distrust emerged as a significant barrier in this regard. In some cases, the recommendation of a trusted person was considered essential, while in others dual citizenship was mentioned as a prerequisite. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in smaller settlements, where even workers arriving from other Hungarian towns may still be perceived as outsiders.

According to one interviewee, Romania's accession to the Schengen Area could create greater potential for the development of an integrated cross-border labour market. At the same time, the respondent emphasised that although workers could potentially come, it is not common for employees from Romania to actually seek employment in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County.

4.2. Recruitment methods and support needs

According to the responses, employee referrals (12 companies) and social media platforms (11 companies) are considered the most effective recruitment methods. This indicates that companies increasingly rely on trust-based relationships and internal recommendations rather than seeking employees through traditional advertising channels. The use of online job advertisements (5 companies) and large job portals (4 companies) appears to be declining.



2. Figure: Methods used to recruit the workforce

Methods of recruiting the workforce	Number
Other online recruitment platforms (e.g. munka.hu, munkaerotoborzo.hu, profession.hu)	4
Online Labor Recruitment Platform for Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County www.laboro.hu	0
Internal recruitment (e.g. redeployment / relocation)	2
Cooperation with educational institutions (in partnership)	5
Recruitment events (job fairs, workshops, etc.)	1
Recommendations from employees	12
Social media platform	11
Online job ads (e.g., company website)	5
Recruitment agencies	2

Translation of the table – fig. 2

Most respondents believe that the most necessary and effective support for workforce recruitment would be wage subsidies (14 mentions). At the same time, respondents also expressed a strong need for the development of locally oriented job portals (10 mentions), which is also in line with the objectives of the project.

This recruitment pattern is consistent with national and international trends, where recruitment based on personal networks and referrals is becoming increasingly important, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As labour market competition intensifies and the shortage of skilled workers grows, it has become crucial for companies to rely on trusted sources of information. The dominance of employee referrals may also indicate that companies often struggle to find suitable candidates through traditional recruitment channels, while the networks of existing employees serve as a more effective filtering mechanism.

The increasing role of social media platforms in recruitment can be explained by several factors. On the one hand, they offer a cost-effective solution for smaller businesses; on the other hand, they allow more targeted access to potential candidates. By analysing user profiles, companies can more accurately identify professionals with the required skills and experience, particularly among younger generations.

The strong demand for wage subsidy programmes clearly reflects the financial challenges faced by businesses in the region. Ensuring competitive wages—especially to retain skilled workers—places a significant burden on companies with more limited financial resources. This finding is consistent with a previously identified problem: many workers choose to seek employment abroad or in other regions of the country where wages are higher.

The demand for the development of locally focused job portals also indicates that respondents recognise the specific characteristics of the local labour market. Such a platform could take into account not only geographical proximity, but also the specific needs and opportunities of the local economic environment, which may be particularly important for businesses operating in peripheral regions. At the same time, this need highlights the limitations of large national job portals in effectively serving local labour markets.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the surveyed companies adapt flexibly to the changing recruitment environment, but they still require significant financial and infrastructural support in order to successfully recruit and retain the appropriate workforce.

4.3. Training needs and professional development

Nearly half of the responding companies prefer externally organised training programmes that do not provide formal certificates (9 responses), while about one third favour internal training tailored to company needs (7 responses). Fewer respondents (3) expressed a need for formal training programmes leading to a certificate or diploma. This clearly reflects the phenomenon of “job shadowing,” where employees acquire skills and knowledge directly through participation in work processes. Regarding companies’ training practices, most respondents (ten companies) indicated that training is organised only rarely, while in a further five cases training takes place occasionally. Four companies reported that they do not organise training at all, and only one company stated that it provides quarterly training for its employees. Overall, it can be concluded that in most cases training activities are not systematic but rather occasional.

According to the responses, internal training is provided in the following areas: hospitality service, culinary training, marketing, electrical installation, and hemp processing, although each of these was mentioned only once.

Among the training needs identified by respondents, both profession-specific areas—such as hospitality, forestry and agriculture, transport, and construction—and more general cross-sectoral competencies appeared. These include digital and IT skills, hygiene knowledge, as well as financial literacy, equal opportunity awareness, and sustainability-related topics.

According to respondents, the most important personal competencies in today’s labour market are reliability, responsibility, precision, and perseverance. Several respondents also mentioned cooperation and communication skills, as well as basic digital competencies. However, these qualities are often lacking among new entrants to the labour market. The most frequently mentioned issue was the lack of responsibility (11 cases), followed by insufficient flexibility (10), adaptability (8), discipline and cooperation (7–7), and communication difficulties (6). In other words, employers most often miss exactly those skills they consider the most essential: personal attitude, rule-following behaviour, cooperation, and independence. In addition, recurring problems include weak professional ethics, insufficient foreign language skills, lack of specialised expertise, and limited digital competencies. One respondent specifically highlighted the lack of dedication and motivation among employees. Altogether, these findings suggest that the gap is not only related to professional knowledge, but also to basic work attitudes and professional commitment.



3. Figure: Skills deficient in new employees

Lack of skills among new employees	Number
Knowledge of foreign languages	4
Specialized professional skills	4
Flexibility	11
Adaptability	8
Discipline (Compliance with the Rules)	7
Professional ethics (moral values and integrity)	4
Cooperation Capacity	8
Communication skills	7
Digital skills	3
Taking responsibility (carrying out tasks)	12

Translation of the table – fig. 3

The lack of basic labour market competencies is not only a local phenomenon but also aligns with the framework of key competences identified by the European Union. The EU has defined eight key competences—including communication in the mother tongue and foreign languages, digital competence, learning to learn, and social and civic competences—which are essential for successful participation in a knowledge-based society. The deficiencies highlighted by employers—particularly reliability, punctuality, responsibility, and communication skills—are directly related to these key competences and appear as fundamental expectations across almost all job roles.

Such competency gaps significantly reduce employees’ employability and workplace performance, while also increasing staff turnover and training costs. In addition to technical skills, the lack of so-called “soft skills” is particularly problematic, as these competences usually require longer periods to develop and are more difficult to measure.

Several types of interventions can help address these missing basic competences. In the short term, targeted training programmes can be organised that specifically focus on developing the lacking skills. These may include short, intensive workshops (for example, communication or teamwork training) or longer-term modular training programmes. Workplace mentoring programmes can also serve as effective tools, where experienced employees support newcomers in learning workplace norms and expectations.

In the long term, a sustainable solution may lie in placing greater emphasis on these basic competences within the education system. Dual education, project-based learning, and problem-based learning are pedagogical approaches that not only develop technical knowledge but also foster the attitudes and competencies necessary for effective work performance.

The proactive involvement of companies is also crucial. Competence-based recruitment methods used during the hiring process, together with the development of internal training systems, can significantly reduce the business impact of skill gaps. In addition, consciously shaping organisational culture—one that recognises and rewards outstanding performance related to key competences—can encourage employees to develop these skills in the long term.

To support the implementation of training activities, companies would primarily find it useful to involve well-trained local instructors (9 responses). At the same time, training scholarships and accessible sources of information on local training opportunities were also considered important (both mentioned by 7 respondents). These needs are closely related to the barriers identified by companies: the most significant obstacles are high training costs (average score: 3.65) and lack of available time (3.45).

5. CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

As regards the possibility of involving trainers, experts and vocational training institutions, replies were received from eleven trainers and nine organisations active in the field of vocational training. From the very first step of establishing contact, the problem arose that many people have reservations about providing personal data or the data of other people, even in the case of requests for research or development. Specialists in the field of education are, without exception, open to transmitting their knowledge in the form of short courses; However, there is not the same unity of opinion in terms of having or being willing to share information about other trainers or experts who might be involved. It is important to emphasise, however, that – in line with feedback from the business environment – trainers are generally open to adapting training content to local labour market needs. However, additional institutional or organisational support is needed to achieve this approach, as trainers from vocational training institutions, acting individually, have a limited capacity to intervene in this process.

The professional offer outlined from the answers presents a significant diversity: the trainers and experts identified cover various fields, from natural sciences (biology, chemistry), humanities (Hungarian, ethics, history) and foreign languages (German), to technical fields (construction, mechanics, electrical engineering), economics (accounting, economics, administration) and computer science (programming, project work). Several responses were also received from the areas of health and social care, which is particularly relevant from the perspective of alignment with the deficient sectors in the region (e.g. lack of medical staff). Mental health, communication and pedagogy skills also appear in the answers. With the exception of three respondents, all the trainers surveyed have practical professional experience in their field, in addition to teaching experience.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (8 people) occasionally participate in continuing professional training programs, two participate regularly (weekly or monthly), and only one person develops their skills quarterly. Based on the responses of the 11 trainers, there is a clear demand for the exchange of experience as a form of empirical learning. In parallel, a significant part of respondents (7 people) show interest in practical training, which indicates that specialists are mainly looking for application-oriented development opportunities. Although specialized training and familiarity with modern teaching methods were mentioned by six respondents each, these types of development of a more theoretical nature are less accentuated than the direct acquisition of practical experience. On this basis, it can be concluded that, among trainers, there is a clearly expressed need for practical, reflective and mutual learning-based approaches.

5.1. Overview of educational institutions

As part of our research, we asked trainers working in vocational and technical education about their field of specialization and experience. The results show that the trainers surveyed cover a wide professional spectrum. The largest share is represented by the technical fields: four trainers from the IT area (programming, digital skills), three trainers from the construction sector (one of which specialized in the wood industry), two trainers from the mechanical field, one trainer from the electrical field and a specialist from the chemical industry participated in the survey. From the economic and services sector, trainers from tourism and public catering (one person) and from the administrative-communication field (one person) were also identified.

In terms of practical experience, the overwhelming majority of respondents, 75% (9 people), have practical professional experience in the field they teach. This positive percentage is of particular importance for the quality of vocational training, as trainers with real experience on the labour market can transmit knowledge in a more authentic and applied way. Only three respondents indicated that they have exclusively teaching experience, without specialized practical experience.

A particularly valuable result is the fact that several trainers also have interdisciplinary practical experience, complementary to their training portfolio. For example, a chemistry trainer with practical experience in the hospitality industry was mentioned, as well as a specialist who, in addition to computer science, also has practical pedagogical experience. This professional diversity creates opportunities for the development of complex training programs with a multidisciplinary approach.

Participation in continuing education and preferences

The frequency of participation of trainers in continuing training programmes presents a varied picture. The largest group of respondents (58.3%, 7 people) participate "occasionally" in vocational training. Regular participation, weekly or monthly, was indicated by only two trainers (16.7%), and only one person (8.3%) attends training quarterly. This result highlights the fact that, although there is interest in continuous professional development, regular and structured participation in refresher programmes is not yet a widespread practice among the trainers surveyed.

In terms of preferences related to the types of training, most respondents consider several forms of professional development useful. The most popular types of training are:

1. Practical training – mentioned by 8 respondents (66.7%)
2. Experience exchange programs – considered important by 10 respondents (83.3%)
3. Specialized training – relevant for 7 respondents (58.3%)
4. Knowledge of modern teaching methods – highlighted by 6 respondents (50%)

It is worth noting the very high share of experience exchange programs, which indicates the importance of professional communities and mutual learning for trainers. The significant demand for practical training is consistent with the applicative nature of vocational training and reflects the trainers' commitment to acquiring current and relevant knowledge for the labour market.

The openness of institutions to cooperation with the business environment also presents a positive image:

83.3% of respondents (10 people) indicated that their institution is open to collaboration with local businesses and organizations to adapt training programs to the requirements of the labor market. Two respondents expressed uncertainty ("maybe"), which may indicate some gaps in institutional strategies or communication in this area.

Overall, the results show that the group of trainers surveyed is well prepared from a professional point of view, mostly with practical experience, and open to professional development. At the same time, there is still room for improvement in terms of the regularity of participation in continuing training. However, the high level of willingness to cooperate with the business environment provides a solid basis for the development of training programmes better aligned with the needs of the labour market.

5.2. Challenges for educational institutions

The territorial focus identified in our research poses significant challenges for the effective functioning of the vocational training system. The vast majority of the surveyed specialists work in educational institutions located in the larger cities of the county – mainly in Nyíregyháza, Mátészalka and Kisvárda. This centralization, although it derives naturally from the territorial distribution of vocational training centers and high schools, produces serious logistical problems: it is precisely in the periphery, socio-economically disadvantaged areas that it is most difficult for training programs and qualified teachers to reach.

The structural problems of the vocational training system are also amplified by demographic trends. The ageing of the population puts a double pressure on institutions: on the one hand, the decrease in the number of children endangers their sustainability, and on the other hand, the age structure of the teaching staff is becoming increasingly unfavourable. Ensuring a flow of new teachers for vocational training has become a critical issue, as the number of well-trained specialists with practical experience, pedagogical competences and adequate motivation is constantly decreasing. For younger generations, the private sector offers more attractive career opportunities and incomes, making it difficult to attract talented education specialists.

As a result of the existing shortage of teachers, there has been an overload at the system level: trainers who practice their profession at a high level usually work simultaneously in several institutions and participate in parallel examinations. This multiple overload leads not only to physical and mental exhaustion, but also accentuates the phenomenon of burnout. Our research revealed that these overworked trainers often show scepticism towards new initiatives, are not open to taking on additional tasks and are less willing to share their professional networks or recommend other trainers.

The system of continuous training of teachers does not fully fulfill its role either. A significant part of teachers perceive compulsory training not as an opportunity, but as an administrative burden. These imposed programs are often not adapted to individual professional development needs and represent, for already overworked teachers, an additional temporal and psychological pressure. This fact is also reflected in the irregularity of participation in continuing education programs highlighted in our research.

Overcoming geographical distances raises not only logistical problems, but also significant financial challenges. The costs associated with commuting (fuel, wear and tear, travel time) are a considerable burden for both institutions and teachers. Access to peripheral areas thus requires multiple consumption

of resources, which is not adequately compensated by the current funding frameworks.

The functioning of vocational training institutions is also fundamentally influenced by the centralised management structure. The management of the institutions under the coordination of the vocational training centers have limited decision-making powers in terms of the configuration of the educational offer, the allocation of resources and the management of personnel. The launch of new specializations is an extremely long and bureaucratic process, which prevents flexible adaptation to changes in demand on the labor market. This rigid system makes it considerably difficult to cooperate directly with economic actors and to quickly restructure training programmes.

The challenges described above act in a complex way, reinforcing each other and hindering both the efficient functioning and the renewal of the vocational training system. The shortage of human resources, structural and geographical inequalities, as well as the lack of institutional flexibility cumulatively prevent the rapid adaptation to the demands of the labor market and the continuous improvement of the quality of training at the level of the entire county.

6. THE ROLE OF NONPROFITS IN TRAINING AND INTEGRATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

6.1. Profile of the organisations and beneficiaries targeted

Our questionnaire was answered by 19 non-profit organizations. The majority of respondents (14 organisations) are active in the cultural and/or social field, carrying out social inclusion, community development and working with young people; At the same time, among them there are also organizations with a sports, medical or even civic security profile. It is important to stress that these are mainly smaller organisations working with well-defined target groups and not large foundations.

With regard to the difficulties of integration into the labour market of the target groups, respondents most frequently indicated a low level of qualification (9 mentions), mobility problems and lack of available job opportunities at local level (5 mentions), lack of work experience (5 mentions), as well as problems related to job quality or lack of quality jobs (5 mentions). Also, the lack of motivation appeared in the answers (4 mentions). Several organisations have identified Roma people or people in disadvantaged situations as a target group, in which case social and ethnic discrimination has been highlighted as a major problem.

6.2. Services to support integration into employment

Most of the organisations surveyed offer forms of support and services that contribute to the integration of target groups into the labour market. These include, for example, assistance in drafting CVs, counselling services – including labour market counselling, career guidance, job-search support, mental health and legal counselling – as well as help in various employment-related administrative procedures.

Also, several organizations provide training opportunities, such as educational recovery courses, professional training, thematic workshops or motivational programs associated with certain professions. In addition, in many cases the job search is also directly supported, for example by providing logistical support for job search activities (internet access, office equipment) or by intermediating job offers. One organization paid special attention to supporting people with disabilities in the process of accessing the labor market.

7. MAPPING OF TRAINERS (teachers, qualified specialists and craftsmen)

Based on the questionnaire responses, eight school principals indicated that they know trainers with both teaching experience and practical expertise, three of whom mentioned specialists by name. As for practitioners outside the education system, five principals were able to identify such persons, and four of them also provided contact details. The vast majority of respondents (except for two people) were open to

establishing contacts with the recommended specialists in the future. In addition, five civic organizations recommended retired craftsmen, artisans or specialists who, through their experience, can contribute to the training programs.

8. OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION AND STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

8.1. Relations between companies and educational institutions

Collaboration with vocational education and training institutions is currently not a widespread practice among the respondent companies: four companies indicated the existence of regular collaboration and two mentioned occasional collaborations with educational institutions. The existing forms of cooperation are mainly of the professional internship type: four companies participate in the training as dual partners, and two companies occasionally offer internship places for students. In addition, five respondents said they provide information about job opportunities during the summer, and one company has already organized job presentations.

In the interviews, several participants stressed that vocational training could become truly effective if educational institutions adapted more flexibly to the real workforce needs of companies and if a more active dialogue between the two sectors developed.

The responses on the willingness to collaborate were as follows:



Figure 4: Cooperation between enterprises and educational institutions

Collaboration with education/training institutions	Number of companies
Yes, regularly	4
Yes, occasionally	2
Rarely	0
Not at all	14

Translation fig. 4

Depending on the type of collaboration, the economic actors surveyed provided the following answers:



Figure 5: Types of collaboration between companies and educational institutions

Type of collaboration between companies and educational institutions	Number of companies
The company is a dual partner of an educational institution	4
The company occasionally offers internship places	2
Information on summer job opportunities	5
The company organizes trade presentations	1
Other	0

Translation of fig.5

It is important to emphasize that – in line with feedback from the business environment – trainers are generally open to adapting training content to local employment needs. However, achieving this objective requires additional institutional or organisational support, as trainers in vocational training institutions, acting individually, have a limited capacity to intervene in this process.

Most entrepreneurs are, in principle, open to organising joint employee training programmes with other companies: five have clearly expressed their intention to collaborate, two have indicated their availability under certain conditions, eight have declared themselves undecided ("maybe"), and five have been reluctant or rejected the idea.

Possible causes of the lack of availability for collaboration

The low level of cooperation between companies and educational institutions can be explained by a number of complex factors. Based on the in-depth analysis of the interviews and the data collected through the questionnaire, the following potential obstacles were identified:

A first factor is the lack of trust, which can be mutual. Companies often perceive that educational institutions are not keeping up with changes in the market, and teaching programs and methods are outdated. At the same time, from the perspective of educational institutions, there may be a fear that companies will place excessive emphasis on very specific skills, which can only be used in the short term, to the detriment of general, valuable skills in the long term.

Structural and administrative barriers also play an important role. The centralized management structure of the vocational training system, rigid curricular requirements and bureaucratic procedures make it

difficult to react quickly to companies' needs. From a business perspective, long-term engagement can be problematic, especially for small firms with limited resources, where short-term survival often takes precedence over long-term investment in training.

Temporal factors are also determinants: educational cycles and the timing of companies' needs are often uncorrelated. While educational institutions have been operating in training cycles for several years, companies are often faced with immediate or short-term workforce needs. This discrepancy is particularly problematic in fast-moving industries, where market demand can change significantly in just a few months.

Human resource constraints are present on both sides: overwork of teachers and lack of human resource capacity within companies are major obstacles to effective cooperation. Vocational education trainers already have many responsibilities, and within companies – especially SMEs – there is often a lack of a dedicated HR specialist to coordinate collaborations in the field of training.

Geographical and infrastructural factors also influence the willingness to collaborate. For companies located in peripheral areas, distance and transportation difficulties can represent physical barriers in maintaining regular contact. This aspect is particularly relevant in the less developed areas of the county, where infrastructure deficiencies further deepen the gap between training centers and the business environment.

The complex interaction of these factors can explain this ambivalent situation: although most companies support, at a declarative level, the idea of cooperation (also reflected by the high share of "maybe" responses), in practice they are reluctant to make a concrete commitment and to actively involvement.

8.2. Dual and practical training situation

Of the institutions surveyed, five have formal cooperation agreements with local companies, all carried out within the dual education system; In one case, this type of collaboration also allows the mandatory professional internship to be carried out.

Also, 17 civic organizations indicated that they would be willing to participate in joint programs with local schools or companies, aimed at supporting the formation of their target groups, and three of them already have active experience in this field. One of the organisations has been involved in the implementation of the courses organised by the Employment Agency, another, through its leader, carries out training and examination activities, and a third organisation has implemented 'transition' training programmes in collaboration with training firms, focusing on various trades (e.g. green space caretaker, mason, social caregiver, salesperson), being responsible for social and inclusion modules.

8.3. Patterns and gaps in cross-sectoral cooperation

Of the civic organizations, 15 indicated that they would be willing to collaborate with local educational institutions, and three had previously participated in such programs. These collaborations have materialized in the form of alternative training programs, educational recovery and talent support activities, creativity development workshops, as well as prevention programs, carried out in primary schools and high schools.



5. Figure: Would your organisation cooperate with local educational institutions in the implementation of joint training programmes?

Collaboration in joint training programmes with local educational institutions	Number of organisations
The collaboration has already been achieved	3
Yes	15
No	1

Translation of fig. 6

Of the 11 trainers who completed the questionnaire, all showed interest in collaborating in organizing short-term training programs, both theoretical and practical; Only one possible ("may") response was recorded. Of these, nine have previously participated in training for employees, in collaboration with companies.

A few respondents also identified other trainers who have both teaching and practical experience; However, although six indicated that they knew such people, only two gave concrete names.

With one exception, respondents were open to possible subsequent contact, in order to deepen discussions on the initiative.

The overwhelming majority of respondents – a total of 18 organisations – expressed their intention to collaborate with the AGES Association and the "Ötlet a Vidékért" Association in the project. Of these, 13 organizations would accept the partnership without conditions, and 5 organizations would assume the collaboration with certain conditions, in order to support the integration of the beneficiaries into the labor market.

8.4. Database of potential trainers and specialists (structured by thematic areas)

In our research, we identified, as a trend worthy of attention, the clear reluctance of respondents to share information regarding potential trainers and specialists. Even in situations where respondents were cooperative in other areas of research, they generally avoided providing concrete data on their professional networks. This phenomenon can obviously be linked to the entry into force, in 2018, of

the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which significantly changed attitudes towards the management of personal data. As a result of this regulation, both economic actors and individuals treat not only their own data, but especially the personal data of other people, with increased caution. Awareness of the responsibilities related to the transmission of third-party data has led to widespread restraint.

This trend was also evident in the relevant question in the questionnaire: respondents usually offered either evasive answers or explicitly indicated that they did not want to share this type of information. This finding, in itself, represents valuable feedback on the methodological limits of professional network mapping and, at the same time, underlines the need to adopt alternative approaches to building databases with trainers and experts, which are fully in line with data protection requirements.

9. KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9. KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall aim of our study was to formulate strategic recommendations that would contribute to increasing the quality of technical and vocational education, strengthening cooperation between educational institutions and economic actors, as well as addressing the challenges of the labour market in the region. Research results can serve as direct input for the development of targeted programmes that reduce employment barriers, strengthen training efforts and support the development of a more inclusive and flexible labour market.

One of the most striking findings of the research is the high and growing level of mistrust that manifests itself both in the data collection process and in the region's economic and social networks. Even contacting stakeholders was a major challenge: in many cases, companies refused to cooperate and did not want to provide even basic data, such as the number of employees. Often, the answer would have been possible only at the top management level, but these people were rarely accessible.

The communication difficulties encountered during the research indicate deeper structural problems. All companies, institutions and non-profit organizations included in the stakeholder list were also contacted by phone, but in almost 50% of the cases calls made to public numbers were not answered. It was particularly evident that management levels, both within companies and institutions, often proved inaccessible; Communication has stalled at the secretariat or assistance level, and information has rarely reached decision-makers.

Several causes can be identified behind this mistrust. From an institutional perspective, the main barrier is the centralized organizational structure and the concentrated decision-making process, in which employees often do not even undertake to fill out a questionnaire without the approval of management. In the case of companies, the caution generated by online fraud and phishing activities is increasingly felt. This phenomenon is particularly characteristic of small firms, which have less capacity to protect against such threats. Distrust has not only hindered the data collection process, but most likely also affects cooperation between companies, negatively influences recruitment strategies and ultimately has an unfavorable impact on both the demand and supply of labor.

In the design of training programs, it is essential that they go beyond simple training to perform work

tasks and provide participants with comprehensive, long-term usable knowledge. It is important that learners and workers also understand the "whys" behind the processes, thus ensuring that the knowledge and skills acquired are not lost, but become applicable and even adaptable. This complex approach is particularly present in the vision of civic organisations, which regard training not only as an economic tool, but as an essential factor of social integration and individual development. At the same time, there is a need for an increased focus on the development of basic skills, in particular digital skills, given their usefulness in a growing number of occupations and their role in facilitating the job search process. However, it should be stressed that these measures, taken in isolation, do not solve the problem of the shortage of skilled labour, which requires a complex and interdisciplinary approach.

Based on the results of the data collection, opportunities for cooperation in the field of workforce development in the region are emerging at several levels. Strengthening relations between local educational institutions and companies is a particularly promising area: several surveyed institutions already have formal cooperation agreements, especially in the context of dual training, and the responses indicate that even more would be open to collaboration, especially if it increased the relevance of the educational offer for the labour market.

The study also highlighted the potential for the joint involvement of civic organisations, specialists and craftsmen. Several respondents identified experts from outside the formal education system who possess valuable knowledge and practical experience and who would be willing to engage in mentoring and training activities. In addition, some trainers have dual competences (theoretical and practical), which can form the basis for a more flexible and practice-oriented training system. Organisations are also open to working with schools, especially when it helps to support the target groups they work with.

The research identified local specialists and trainers with experience in a wide range of fields, including: construction (carpenters, bricklayers, construction work), installations (water, gas, heating, electricity), wood industry, water management, mechanics and engineering (pneumatics, technical drawing, materials science), chemical industry, computer science (programming, digital skills, project-based work, Excel, applied informatics), Economics and Public Administration (Project Writing, Entrepreneurial Skills, Basic Accounting, Administration), Tourism and Hospitality (Services and Classification of Accommodation Units), Education (Pedagogy, Inclusive Education, Talent Support), Health and Social Work, Mental Health, as well as Natural Sciences and Humanities (Biology, Chemistry, Natural Sciences, History, Library Science, Ethics, Hungarian Language and Literature, German, communication).

10. APPENDICES

- Questionnaires/interviews used

11. LIST OF FIGURES

1. Figure: Demand for skilled workers	7
2. Figure: Methods used to recruit workers	8
3. Figure: Missing skills in new employees	10
4. Figure: Cooperation between businesses and educational institutions.....	16
5. Figure: Types of collaboration between companies and educational institutions.....	16
6. Figure: Would your organisation cooperate with local educational institutions in the implementation of joint training programmes?	18