

# FLEXIBLE WORK MODELS AND FEMALE EMPLOYEE PREFERENCES

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## SUMMARY

New arrangement models have quickly become the most common work organization for many companies, offering employees a better work-life balance and higher job satisfaction. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of these models without a clear understanding of emerging hybrid forms and the support needed to ensure a sustainable and efficient transition. The lack of clear regulatory frameworks and adequate infrastructure has created challenges for both employers and employees, highlighting the need for strategic policies and investments to support the sustainable development of the new forms of work.

This study explores the determinants of the acceptance of the new working models and female employee satisfaction in post-pandemic Moldova. Using a questionnaire survey and an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model, the research evaluates employees' preferences for traditional, hybrid, and remote work arrangements. The findings indicate a growing inclination toward hybrid work models, which offer flexibility and work-life balance. However, full adaptation remains hindered by limited digital infrastructure, employer concerns over productivity, and insufficient policy support. While remote work is valued for its flexibility, employers in Moldova express reservations about its impact on oversight and collaboration. By focusing on female employees—who represent the majority of the workforce sample—this study offers a gendered perspective on evolving work preferences and provides evidence-based recommendations for designing inclusive and adaptive work policies. The findings contribute to understanding workforce transformation in Moldova and support efforts to align labor market practices with broader trends in digitalization and gender equity.

**Keywords:** *flexible work arrangements, hybrid work culture, remote work, future of work, labour market*

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in early 2020, triggered a profound global crisis that disrupted economic systems and labor markets worldwide. Supply chain interruptions, declining commercial activity, reduced working hours, and widespread sectoral shutdowns led to a severe recession across countries. One of the most transformative effects of the pandemic was the rapid and large-scale shift toward remote work, particularly during lockdown periods when physical presence at the workplace became impossible.

Before the pandemic, remote work was relatively rare, typically reserved for specific professional roles or individual circumstances. The crisis forced organizations to adopt digital solutions for virtual collaboration and to reconfigure their operational models almost overnight (Mitchel, 2023). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), approximately 81% of the global workforce experienced mandatory workplace closures during the early stages of the pandemic. Teleworking, initially perceived as a temporary solution, quickly became a necessity, fundamentally reshaping how work was organized and perceived.

Although remote work offers greater flexibility and autonomy, it also brings new challenges. These include blurred boundaries between professional and personal life, increased stress levels, and unequal access to adequate infrastructure. Many employees struggled with combining household responsibilities and professional duties, while employers expressed concerns about productivity, oversight, and maintaining team cohesion (Bolino et al., 2020; Hajal, 2022). Despite such challenges, remote and hybrid work models are likely to persist beyond the pandemic, becoming integral to the future of work (Carroll & Conboy, 2020; Bloom, 2020).

The post-pandemic era is marked by experimentation with flexible arrangements—ranging from full-time remote work to hybrid models that combine office presence with telecommuting. However, the shift to these models has outpaced the development of regulatory frameworks, infrastructure, and managerial practices needed to support them sustainably. Although literature increasingly addresses the opportunities and limitations of hybrid work, few studies systematically examine its impact on employee productivity, satisfaction, and gender-specific needs—particularly in countries with emerging economies, such as Moldova (Williams & Shaw, 2025).

In this context, understanding employee preferences is critical for designing adaptive and inclusive work policies. This is especially important in Moldova, where labor market structures, digital readiness, and organizational cultures differ significantly from those in more advanced economies. Moreover, gender plays an essential role in shaping work experiences, as women often bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care responsibilities.

This study aims to explore how Moldovan employees—especially women—perceive traditional, hybrid, and remote work models in the aftermath of the pandemic. Drawing on a nationally representative survey and applying an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model, the research seeks to identify the key factors influencing preferences for different work arrangements. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on gendered experiences within Moldova's evolving labor landscape and its contribution to evidence-based policy recommendations for building a more resilient and equitable workforce.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of flexible work arrangements has fundamentally reshaped traditional employment structures. Hybrid and remote work models allow employees to perform their tasks across multiple physical and digital spaces, blending professional and personal environments (Halford, 2005). While these models offer advantages in terms of flexibility and autonomy, they also introduce challenges related to communication, coordination, and performance management.

A growing body of research highlights the benefits of remote work for employees. Numerous studies point to increased job satisfaction, enhanced productivity, and improved work-life balance when employees have control over their schedules and workspaces (Charalampous et al., 2018; Barath & Schmidt, 2022a; Yang et al., 2021). Home-based work can reduce commuting time and associated stress, provided workers have adequate privacy, technological support, and minimal distractions (Gratton, 2021; Haines et al., 2002).

However, flexible arrangements are not universally positive. Remote work may lead to social isolation, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and extended working hours that negatively affect health and well-being (Tavares, 2017; Smoder, 2021; Pulido-Martos et al., 2021). Employees may face reduced access to informal learning, limited career advancement opportunities, and diminished team cohesion (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Sewell & Taskin, 2015). Organizational cultures also face challenges in adapting oversight and performance evaluation mechanisms to remote or hybrid contexts.

Traditional office-based work environments, despite being less flexible, continue to offer benefits such as structured routines, direct supervision, immediate access to infrastructure, and stronger social integration

(Iqbal et al., 2021; Zwanka & Buff, 2021). These advantages help explain the enduring preference for in-office work in many organizational cultures, particularly in sectors requiring face-to-face interaction and real-time decision-making.

Recent literature has also emphasized the importance of employee autonomy and results-based work structures as emerging trends in future work models. Ragan Decker and Daroon Jalil (2024) outlines eight flexible models, including task autonomy, compressed workweeks, location flexibility, gig-based contracts, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) tools. These models reflect a broader shift toward employee-centered work design and digital transformation.

Despite global attention to flexible work, research remains limited in several areas. First, there is a need for context-specific studies that examine how flexible work arrangements function in emerging economies with limited digital infrastructure and evolving labor policies. Second, existing literature often overlooks gendered dimensions of work model preferences, particularly in countries where traditional gender roles persist. Women frequently face additional constraints in balancing professional and domestic responsibilities, making their perspectives crucial for designing inclusive work systems (Dien, et al., 2023; Buonomo et al., 2023).

Finally, there is a lack of empirical research focused on post-pandemic employee preferences in Moldova, a country navigating both economic transition and digital transformation. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing how Moldovan employees—especially women—perceive and evaluate different work models and by identifying the structural barriers to broader adoption of flexible arrangements.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*Data Collection and Sampling.* The data for this study come from Moldovan employee satisfaction work model survey conducted by the authors in 2024 among nationally representative samples of resident population. The sample size were 422 employed individuals in Moldova from urban and rural areas. To ensure balanced demographic representation, the data were weighted by age and gender. Of the total respondents, 74% were women and 26% were men, reflecting the research focus on female employee preferences.

The questionnaire comprised 25 items, covering demographic characteristics, work arrangements, satisfaction levels, and perceived challenges and preferences related to work models. The study utilizes weighted data based on age and gender criteria to ensure the sample is adequately representative, which enables a detailed analysis of employed individuals. The survey

was conducted using online auto-administration method through Google forms platform. The survey contained 25 questions. The participants were from different sectors, mainly education, science and culture (29.7%), trade (23%), and services (16.2%).

To investigate the determinants of female employees' preferences the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression method was used. OLS is widely recognized in empirical economic and social sciences for estimating linear relationships between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. In this study, the dependent variable is a binary indicator reflecting the preference for the traditional work model, while the independent variables include age, residence (urban/rural), sector of activity, job position, and currently practiced work model. OLS was selected for its interpretability, computational efficiency, and its compatibility with

similar studies conducted in other international contexts. The estimated coefficients provide direct insights into the marginal effects of each explanatory variable on the probability of preferring traditional work arrangements.

The model's goodness of fit is assessed through the R-squared value, F-statistic, and the significance levels (p-values) of individual coefficients. Further will provide variables description:

1. *Dependent variable:* Traditional\_Work\_Model (binary: 1 = preference for traditional model; 0 = otherwise);
2. *Independent variables:* Age: continuous variable (years), Residence: binary variable (1 = urban, 0 = rural), Sector of activity: categorical (transformed into dummy variables), Job position: ordinal (hierarchical level), Work model practiced: binary (1 = traditional, 0 = hybrid/remote).

Statistical analyses were performed using Gretl (Gnu Regression, Econometrics and Time-series Library), an open-source econometric software suited for linear models. The interpretation of results relies on coefficient values, standard errors, and associated p-values to determine statistical significance.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data were collected through a self-administered online survey, which may have excluded individuals with limited digital access or low technological literacy, particularly from rural areas or less digitized sectors. As such, the findings may not fully capture the preferences of all categories of employees in Moldova.

Second, although the sample is nationally representative and weighted by gender and age, the predominance of women in the respondent pool (74%) could influence the generalizability of the results to the entire working

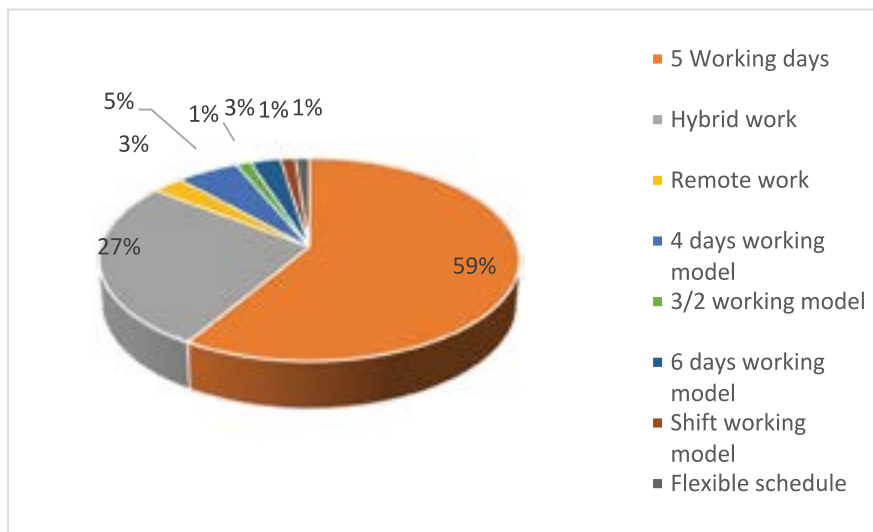
population. This gender imbalance, while intentional for analytical purposes, limits the ability to make strong comparative inferences between male and female employees.

Third, the study relies on cross-sectional data, which prevents drawing causal inferences. Employee preferences and practices may evolve over time, especially in response to changing organizational policies or external shocks. Longitudinal studies would be necessary to observe how these preferences develop and to better understand causality.

## DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The survey analysis reveals that 58.7% of respondents adhere to the traditional work model, requiring physical presence in the office for five days a week. Meanwhile, 26.7% follow a hybrid model combining remote work and physical presence (Figure 1).

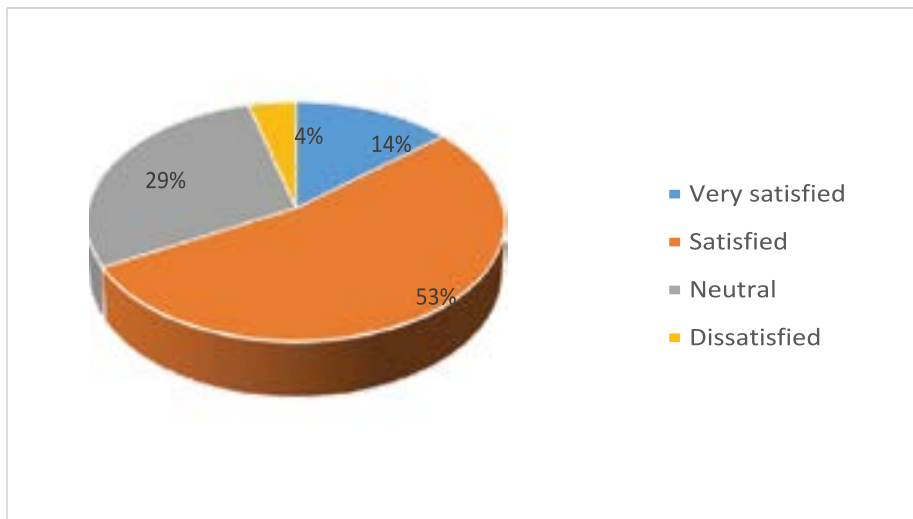
Figure 1. Types of Work Models Used by Employees



Source: Moldovan employee satisfaction work model survey, 2024

The work model satisfaction rate shows that 53.4% of respondents are satisfied while 13.7% express very high satisfaction. Neutral opinion have 28.8% of participants and only 4.1% expressed dissatisfaction (Figure 2).

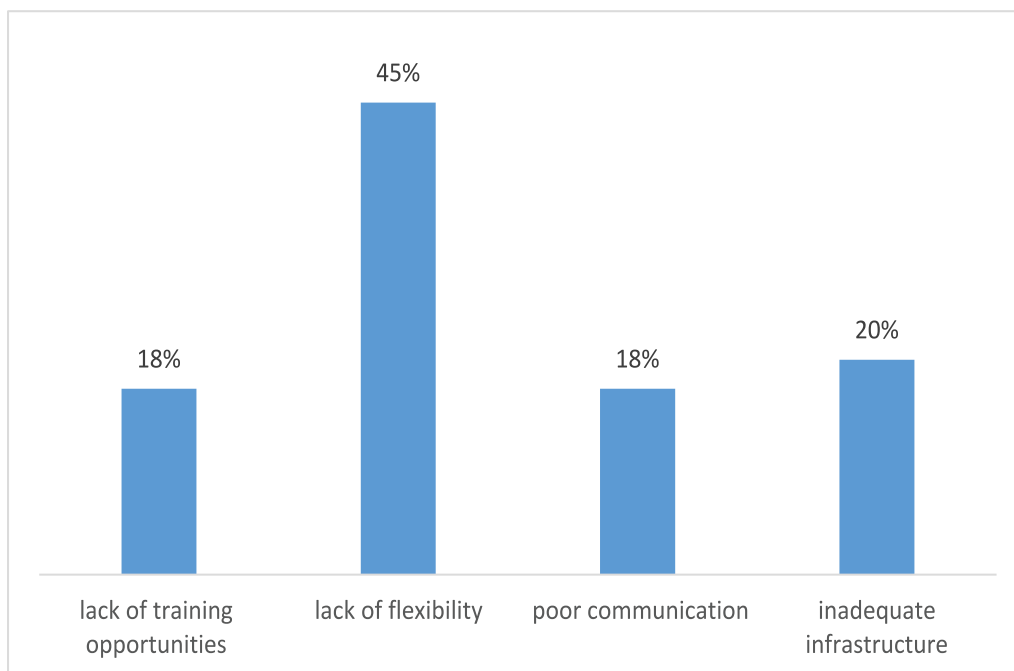
**Figure 2.** The work model satisfaction rate



Source: Moldovan employee satisfaction work model survey, 2024

The workforce encounters multiple difficulties during their work model due to insufficient flexibility (44.6%), inadequate training opportunities and communication problems (17.55% each) and insufficient infrastructure (20.3%) (Figure 3).

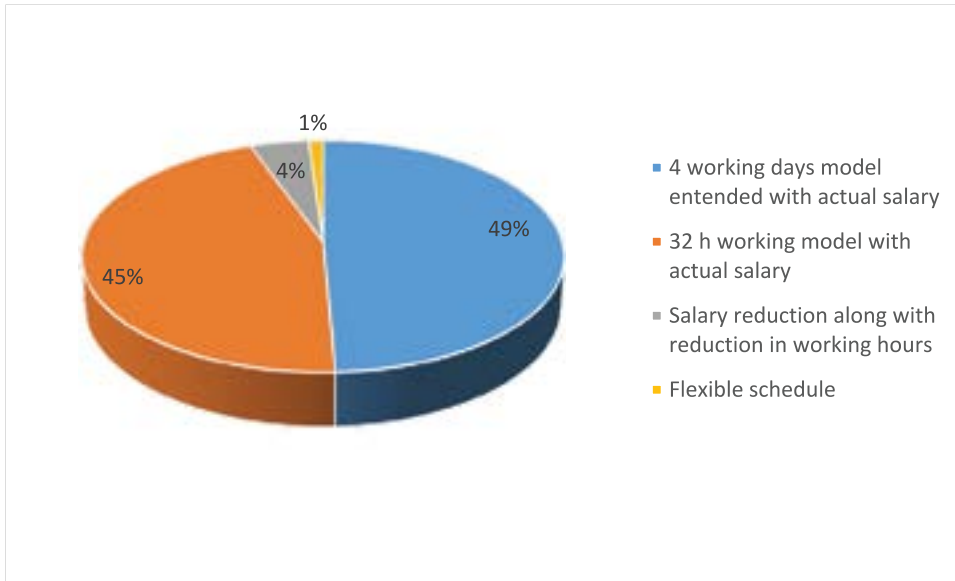
**Figure 3.** Key challenges in new work models adoption



Source: Moldovan employee satisfaction work model survey, 2024

Regarding changing work patterns, 49.3% of respondents prefer keeping their current salary with an extended schedule over four days, while 45.2% prefer maintaining their salary with a reduced 32-hour workweek (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Employee preferences on switching to a 4 working days model



Source: Moldovan employee satisfaction work model survey, 2024

The main barriers to implementing alternative work models were insufficient financial resources (41.34%), resistance to change (36.33%), and lack of necessary skills (22.33%).

## DETERMINANTS OF FEMALE WORK MODEL PREFERENCES

The analysis investigates the determinants of the preference for the traditional work model by female employees. The model explains 23% of the variation in the dependent variable, which is a moderate predictive capacity. The statistical significance of the model is

confirmed by an F-statistic of 3.057 with a p-value of 0.0173, which means that at least one explanatory variable has a statistically significant effect on the adoption of the traditional work model.

Dependent variable: Traditional\_Work\_Model

|                      | Coefficient | Std. Error | t-statistic | p-value |     |
|----------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|---------|-----|
| constant             | 1,66258     | 0,490226   | 3,391       | 0,0014  | *** |
| age                  | -0,319714   | 0,114598   | -2,790      | 0,0074  | *** |
| residence            | -0,487811   | 0,247487   | -1,971      | 0,0542  | *   |
| sector               | 0,0254072   | 0,0538103  | 0,4722      | 0,6388  |     |
| position             | 0,0369216   | 0,0719228  | 0,5134      | 0,6099  |     |
| work model practiced | 0,270952    | 0,0977489  | 2,772       | 0,0078  | *** |

|                         |           |                              |          |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|----------|
| Mean dependent variable | 1,649123  | Std. dev. dependent variable | 0,767445 |
| Sum squared residuals   | 25,37714  | Model standard error         | 0,705401 |
| R-squared               | 0,230587  | Adjusted R-squared           | 0,155154 |
| F (5, 51)               | 3,056854  | p-value (F)                  | 0,017287 |
| Log-likelihood          | -57,81723 | Akaike criterion             | 127,6345 |
| Schwarz criterion       | 139,8928  | Hannan-Quinn criterion       | 132,3984 |

Excluding the constant, the highest p-value was obtained for variable 4 (sector of activity).

Source: Developed in Gretl (Gnu Regression, Econometrics and Time-series Library)

The estimated regression equation is:

$$\text{Traditional\_Work\_Model} = 1.6626 - 0.3197 * \text{Age} - 0.4878 * \text{Residence} + 0.0254 * \text{Sector} + 0.0369 * \text{Position} + 0.2710 * \text{Work\_Model}$$

where:

Constant (1.6626, p-value = 0.0014) – the positive value of the constant suggests a general predisposition of the examined population towards the traditional work model.

Age (-0.3197, p-value = 0.0074) – the significant negative relationship between age and the traditional work model indicates that older female employees are less likely to prefer the traditional model. This result can be explained by older women's preference for a more flexible schedule as it helps them better manage fatigue and stress accumulated over the years. As they age, their tolerance for prolonged effort decreases, and a rigid 9-to-5 schedule can become physically and mentally exhausting. Flexibility allows them to distribute their tasks according to their energy levels and avoid overexertion. Additionally, professional stress increases with age, especially in dynamic work environments. An adaptable schedule gives them more control over their work pace, reducing pressure and the risk of burnout.

Residence (-0.4878, p-value = 0.0542) – the negative coefficient suggests that individuals living in rural areas are less likely to adopt the traditional work model; the effect is at the statistical threshold (p = 0.0542, close to 0.05). This can be explained by the fact that in cities there are more traditional jobs that require physical presence,

while in rural areas there may be more opportunities for flexible work (e.g. freelancing, agriculture, self-employment).

Sector (0.0254, p-value = 0.6388) – this factor does not significantly affect the preference for the traditional model.

Position (0.0369, p-value = 0.6099) – the position within the company does not significantly influence the preference for the traditional model.

Work Model Practiced (0.2710, p-value = 0.0078) – the positive and statistically significant relationship indicates that employees currently practicing a traditional work model are more inclined to prefer this model. However, this association should not be interpreted as causal. Rather, it may reflect underlying factors such as organizational culture, job type, or individual familiarity, which reinforce existing preferences. Further longitudinal or experimental research would be necessary to establish causality.

The physical presence of employees at the workplace facilitates communication, collaboration, and timely decision-making. It also supports organizational culture and provides access to essential resources. These aspects may explain why some employees continue to prefer traditional work arrangements.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that the traditional five-day, in-office work model continues to dominate Moldova's labor market. Over half of the surveyed employees remain in traditional arrangements, reflecting persistent cultural norms and employer preferences for direct oversight and structured routines. Despite international trends promoting flexible work, Moldovan organizations appear cautious in embracing alternative models such as hybrid or remote work.

A significant share of respondents—particularly older women and those residing in rural areas—demonstrate openness to non-traditional arrangements. The regression analysis revealed that age and currently practiced work model are the strongest predictors of preference for traditional work, with older women more inclined to favor flexibility due to accumulated work-related fatigue and competing personal responsibilities. Rural residents, although only marginally significant, tend to prefer non-traditional models, possibly due to more limited access to formal employment or the need to reconcile work with household or agricultural duties.

The hybrid model is viewed favorably by many employees for its flexibility and potential to improve

work-life balance. However, its full implementation is hindered by several systemic barriers: insufficient digital infrastructure, limited employer readiness, and lack of supporting policies. These constraints are particularly pronounced outside urban centers, further reinforcing geographical inequalities.

While remote work offers substantial benefits, including autonomy and reduced commuting, many employers in Moldova remain concerned about potential declines in productivity and challenges related to oversight and collaboration. This hesitance is exacerbated by the limited availability of digital tools and insufficient organizational experience with remote management practices.

Another important insight emerging from this study is the relevance of gender-specific perspectives in understanding work model preferences. By focusing on female employees—who represent the majority of the sample—the study highlights the particular challenges women face in balancing professional and domestic responsibilities. This reinforces the importance of promoting flexible and inclusive work arrangements. Moreover, the concentration of female workers in sectors

such as education, healthcare, and social services—where remote and hybrid work options are less widespread—further limits their access to alternative work models.

The results also highlight employees' divided views on the four-day workweek. Nearly half (49.3%) would

accept longer daily hours for an additional day off, while 45.2% prefer a reduced 32-hour week at the same pay. This division reflects broader tensions between income security and time autonomy and should be considered by employers exploring alternative scheduling options.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the survey confirm that the traditional work model continues to dominate the labor market in Moldova. Nevertheless, there is a growing openness to hybrid arrangements, especially among women, older employees, and those residing in rural areas. Although satisfaction with current work models is generally high, respondents emphasized the need for increased flexibility, more accessible training opportunities, and stronger organizational communication.

Regression analysis method identified age, residence, and the currently practiced work model as key factors influencing preferences for traditional arrangements.

These findings underscore the importance of demographic and contextual variables in shaping work model acceptance, particularly among women balancing professional and caregiving responsibilities.

The adoption of alternative work models in Moldova is constrained by several barriers, including limited financial and technological resources, institutional resistance to change, and gaps in digital and managerial competencies. Overcoming these obstacles will require a coordinated effort by employers, policymakers, and educational institutions.

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