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Skills that Matter: Building Adaptive Human Capital in the Danube Region

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**Interreg
Danube Region**



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Preface: Why Skills Matter

- **Skills and talents** – the driving forces behind innovation, productivity, and competitiveness
- The region's future competitiveness hinges on skills...

“One in three employers in the Danube Region **struggles to find workers with the right skills**” (*CEDEFOP Skills Panorama, 2023*)

... **Why?** → **demographic decline**, fueled by **low fertility** and **emigration** erode the talent base

The state of skills and talent in the region

Danube Region Monitor 2025

**Thematic Chapter
“Basic Skills and Skills Shortages”**

How well are we equipping those who are already on the labour market?

- Tertiary education
- ICT skills
- Life-long learning

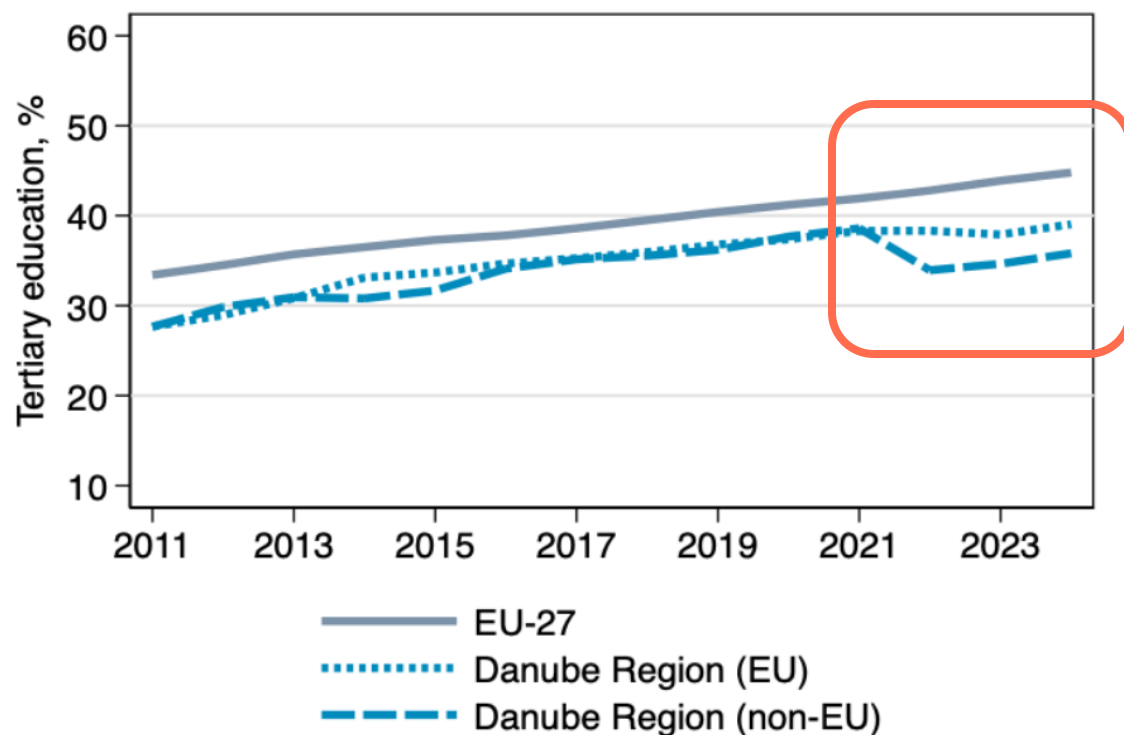
How well are we equipping next generation?

- Basic skills
- Digital skills
- Citizenship skills

1.1. Tertiary education (share of 30-34 y.o.)

Rising qualifications – but uneven progress

Average estimates



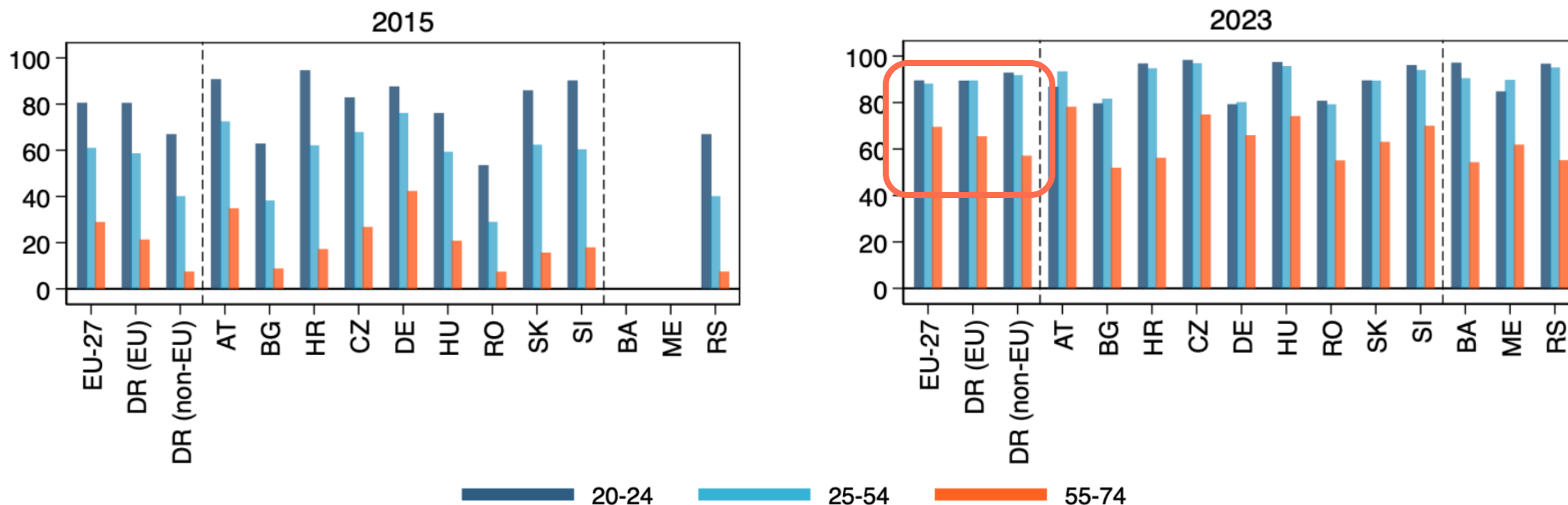
Rising across the Danube Region

... yet the EU-DR gap remains large and has widened slightly post-COVID

→ renewed divergence and a widening human-capital divide

1.2. ICT skills (share of population with basic or above-basic digital skills by age)

Digital skills – the new basic literacy



Overall improvement across the Danube Region

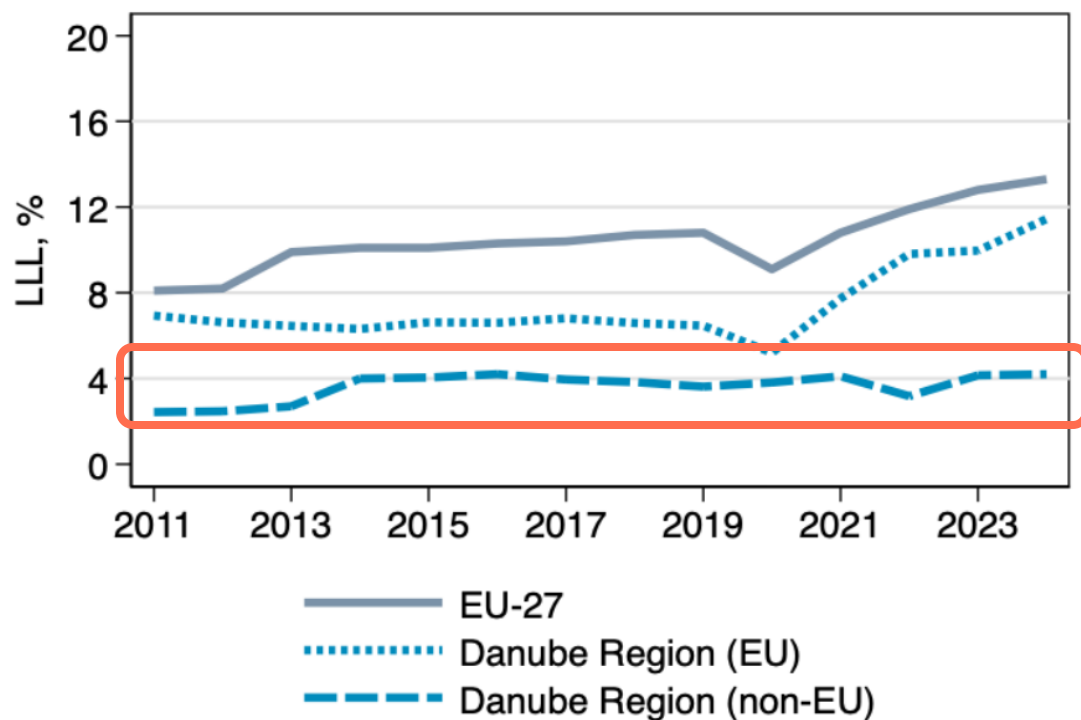
... but **older generations still lag far behind**, especially in non-EU countries

→ persistent digital divide and weak digital inclusion of seniors

1.3. Life-long learning (share participating in education and training, 25-64 y.o.)

Adult learning remains the missing link in skills development

Average estimates



Lifelong learning is **rising in the EU Member States** of the region

... but **stagnating in non-EU countries**

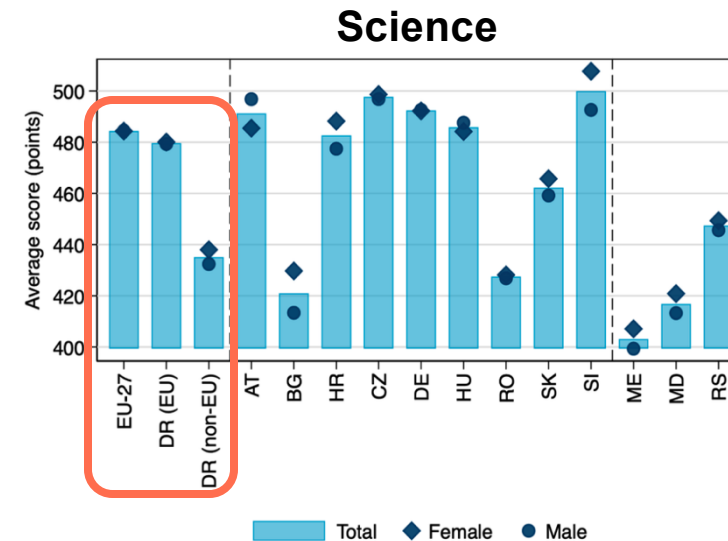
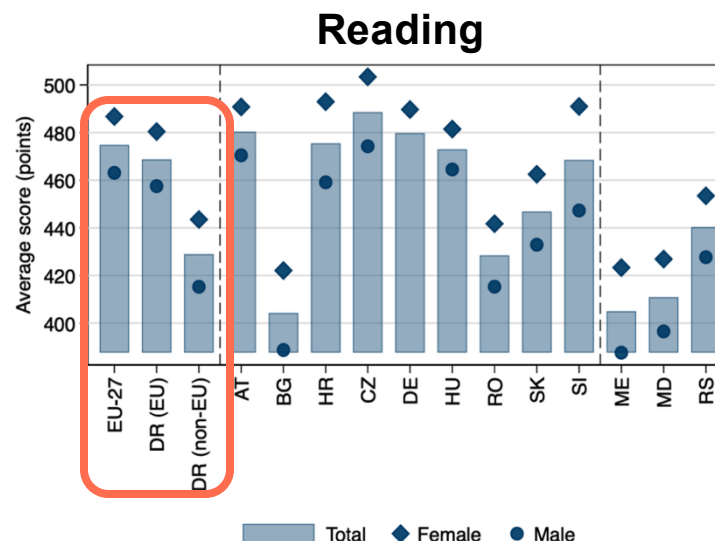
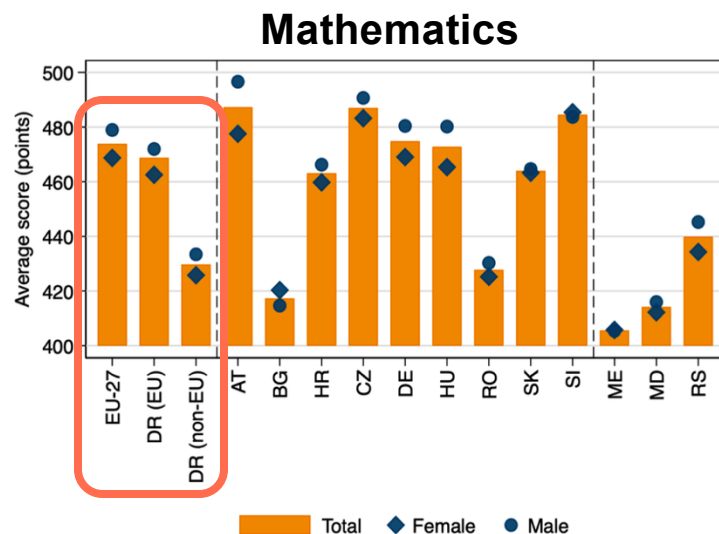
→ deepening skill divides and limits on the region's ability to reskill for future labour-market needs

... Skills formation in the Danube Region: progress, but uneven

- **Progress in education is clear, but a widening skills-use gap remains:** more people study, yet too few gain the *relevant* and *adaptive* skills needed in fast-changing labour markets
- **Where do these gaps start?... in schools**

2.1. Basic skills (15 y.o)

Uneven foundations for future learning

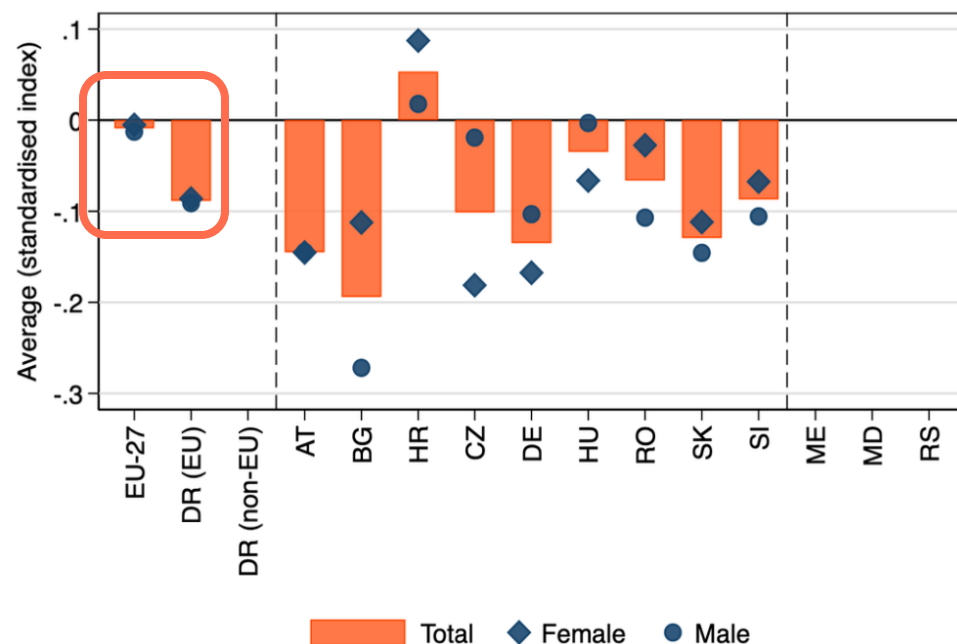


EU candidate countries of the region lag by up to a year in reading, maths, and science

School engagement, absenteeism and socio-economic background matter the most:
students with stronger support at home and active learning environments perform best

2.2. Digital skills (15 y.o)

Confidence gap emerging early



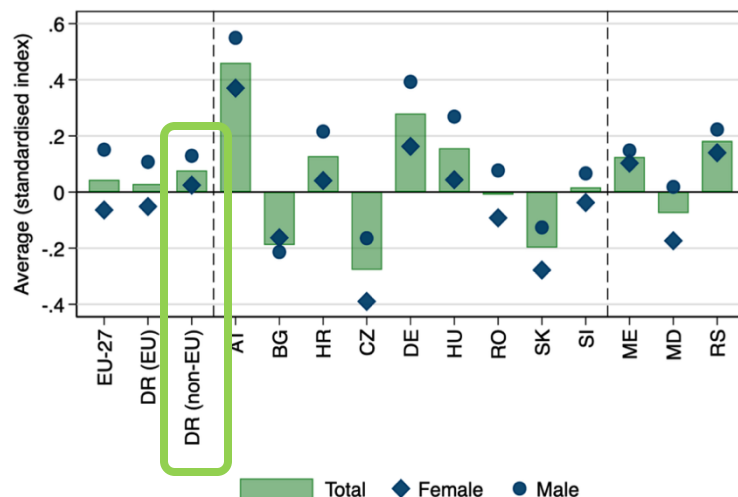
Students across most Danube Region Member States report below-average ICT competence, even in countries with strong academic results

Active learning, supportive teachers and socio-economic background matter the most

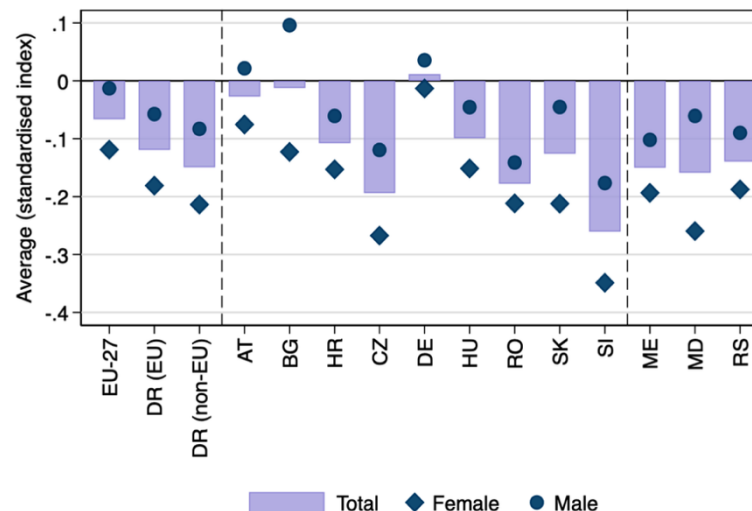
2.3. Citizenship skills (15 y.o)

Uneven foundations for inclusion and creativity

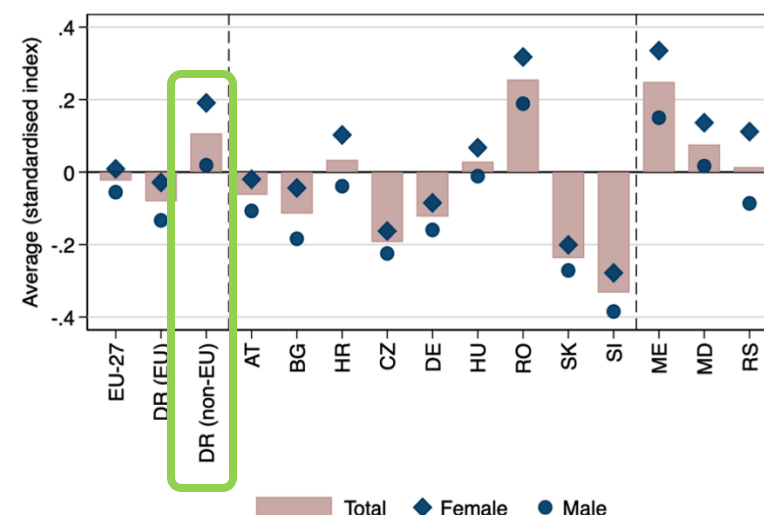
Sence of belonging



Growth mindset



Creative thinking



Students in most Danube countries **score below the EU average in growth mindset**

EU candidate countries perform relatively better in creative thinking and sense of belonging

Teacher support, family encouragement, active learning and socio-economic background drive stronger citizenship skills

Policy take-aways – Building relevant skills

- **Strengthen foundations early:** ensure **quality and equity in basic education** to close learning gaps before they become structural
- **Empower teachers and schools:** promote **innovative, digital, and inclusive teaching** that builds adaptable and creative learners
- **Make lifelong learning the norm:** scale up **reskilling and upskilling**, targeting low-skilled adults and older workers left behind
- **Cooperate to retain and attract talent:** connect education, labour markets, and mobility policies across the Danube Region to turn brain drain into **brain circulation**
- **Align skills with transformation:** integrate **green and digital competences** across education and training systems

Thank you!

**Danube Region Monitor
'People & Skills'
Report 2025**



**'Basic Skills and
Skills Shortages'
Thematic Chapter 2025**



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