

NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SYSTEM REVIEW – AZERBAIJAN

March 2022

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT	3
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CONTENTS	4
----------	---

1. CONTEXT AND SYSTEM OVERVIEW	6
Background	6
1.1 Context	6
1.2 System overview	9

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK	14
---------------------	----

3. COORDINATION AND COOPERATION	16
3.1 Promoting coordination, cooperation and good governance	16
3.2 Key civil society stakeholders	17

4. MAIN SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES	19
4.1 Education, training and work-based learning for youth	22
4.2 Unemployed support and support to NEETs	25
4.3 Workers/Employed	26

5. FUNDING	27
------------	----

6. ACCESS	28
-----------	----

7. USE OF TECHNOLOGY	29
----------------------	----

8. QUALITY OF PROVISION OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES WITHIN A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	30
8.1 Standards	30
8.2 Staffing	30
8.3 Quality of data and information	31
8.4 Monitoring, evaluation and policy feedback	32

9. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD	33
-------------------------------	----

ACRONYMS	38
----------	----

REFERENCES	39
------------	----

1. CONTEXT AND SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Background

Education, training and labour market systems are increasingly challenged by global developments such as digital transformation, globalization, demographic change, climate change and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. All these have a profound impact on the lives of individuals and on society. The development of technology, especially information and communication technology (ICT), has boosted economic globalization and opened new opportunities for people, but also new risks.

Amidst these developments with uncertain outcomes, some things are for sure: firstly, a fast-evolving world and a changing labour market require individuals to become real lifelong learners, to acquire new competences to cope with change and to adapt and further develop existing competences. And, secondly, there is a growing demand for valid information on the changing labour markets and future prospects. This goes along with a growing need for supporting people to manage their more frequent and complex transitions within and between education and work. In this context, there is a greater need than ever for career development support. At the same time, career development support – that is lifelong career guidance, and in particular career education, and career development support for workers – itself faces challenges in adapting to the new circumstances.

Against this background, ETF engaged in reviewing the state of national career development support systems in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine. The objective of the reviews is to describe existing capacities and development potentials of career development support systems, not just services or policies, to inform policy and practice enhancement in a system approach, to support the selection of country priorities for further system development and future planning, and to inform ongoing and future EU and ETF activities, like the EU4Youth. For more information about the conceptual approach to the reviews, please refer to the ETF-ILO publication “Developing National Career Development Systems”¹.

The review process was led by local experts under the coordination of ETF and included (a) desk research and individual consultation interviews, (b) a national consultation meeting that involved all relevant stakeholders to clarify open questions from desk research, to add details and triangulate desk research findings by listening to different points of views from Ministries of education, labour and youth, social partner representatives, youth organizations, practitioners, employer organizations, sector representatives, researchers, (c) review report finalization, translation and distribution, (d) discussion of findings with national authorities to identify priority areas for further system development, (e) a wide validation event to discuss the review findings and how to move forward in priority areas identified, and (f) last revision of the report that is being published in both English and national language.

1.1 Context

Azerbaijan’s national development strategies and their implementation plans adopted in the last decade have highlighted the development of human capital and establishment of an effective social security system as key two issues. The provision of human resource development through LLL is one of the critical factors for a stable and prosperous development of the new national socio-economic system.

The Employment Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2030 emphasises that globalisation, the rise of new jobs, application of modern production and management technologies, and

¹ ETF-ILO (2021): <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/developing-national-career-development-support-systems>

modernisation of workplaces increase the need for high-skilled workers with high level competencies and necessitates the implementation of rapid improvements in the field of education, training and skills development. The Strategy also includes a set of actions on the development of an outcome-based NQF, support for the development of competency-based curricula, and development of a system for recognition of competencies obtained through non-formal and informal learning. The boosting of employment rates for all groups of population is the objective.

Currently, the MLSP and SEA play central roles in the provision of career guidance to unemployed persons, jobseekers, and youth. Measures are implemented in accordance with the Active Employment Programme. The MoE has specific tasks in preparing youth for active citizenship, and for freely choosing their profession and employment. Its responsibility is to ensure a conducive environment for learners to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies in accordance with the State Education Standards. The Ministry of Economy takes into account school leaver and graduate competences to plan how these competences could be absorbed in the labour market. The MLSP reacts to employers' needs, by assisting them in finding skilled workforces, etc.

Career guidance in Azerbaijan as a national policy is described as a 'hidden' element integrated into LLL or national employment strategies. The guidance support is more visible in employment strategies implemented through active labour market measures. The Action Plan on the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan is oriented towards creating content for a competency-based personality-oriented education. But there is insufficient attention to measures that assist learners to acquire career management skills (CMS)². Career education is undervalued as a set of preventive measures for reducing the number of dropouts and youth at risk and the number of persons not in employment, education, and training (NEET). Moreover, it does not empower all to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.

Analysis of the relevant legal acts and documents, as well as interviews indicate that career guidance provision in Azerbaijan is rather seen as part of the 'portfolios' of different ministries (of education, employment, or other areas), and there is no department or unit (except the SAVE under the MoE) that is responsible specifically for career guidance either within these ministries or across the ministries. There is a need to establish relevant inter-ministerial communication, cooperation and coordination mechanisms on career guidance. There are no visible indications describing a systemic approach in the provision of career guidance services.

Insufficient qualification requirements for guidance advisors and lack of hands-on training opportunities for qualifying in the formal education system hinder specialist training. ICT means are poorly used to build a career guidance system, integrate services or expand access to career guidance services. There are no developed instruments and procedures to assess the quality and effectiveness of the services provided.

Over the last decade, several donor-financed projects have been implemented in Azerbaijan to improve career guidance services in education and employment sectors. However, none of the projects have continued and none of their results are being implemented by any institution.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the age structure of Azerbaijan's population for 2020-2030

Age structure	2020 (%)	2025 (%)	2030 (%)
65+	7.3	9.4	12.5
30-64	47.9	49.1	47.3
15-19	21.3	17.8	19.5

² For a definition, please see <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/investing-career-guidance>

0-14	23.5	23.8	20.8
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Source: United Nations, department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241.

The total employment rate in 2019 was 95.2%³ while the official unemployment rate was 4.8% (4.0% for males; 5.7% for females). Between 2019 and 2020, unemployment increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic with youth unemployment (15-29 years) remaining high at 11.2% (9.6% for males and 13.0% for females).

Table 2: Employment and unemployment rates

	2019		2020	
	% males	% females	% males	% females
The total employment rate (age group 15+)	96.0	94.3	94.0	91.6
Youth unemployment rate (age group 15-29)	7.4	10.3	9.6	13.0

Source: SSC

The proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training (NEETs) was around 17.7% in 2019. The Employment strategy for 2019-2030 aims to reduce the number to 15% by 2030.

Addressing the lack of available skilled workers is a key issue for economic diversification of the country. Indeed, in the 2018 EU-Azerbaijan Business Climate Report only 32% of EU companies doing business in Azerbaijan indicated that they are satisfied with the availability of skilled workers.

At the same time, given the high proportion of young people entering the labour market every year, addressing the skills mismatch is equally critical to reduce (youth) unemployment in Azerbaijan. Only 32.5% (30.4% for female) in employment have vocational qualifications, while every year, around 40% of secondary school graduates enter the labour market with no vocational qualifications.

According to the latest statistics, young people make up 22.8% of the population of Azerbaijan, or 2.3 million of the country's population (15-29 years old). 50.5% of youth lives in urban places, 49.5% in rural places, 47.6%. Less than 70% of the population is currently within the working age range of 15 to 64; a share that is estimated to remain at that level until at least 2025. In such a context, investments in human capital, education and youth are key factors for the promotion of stability and long-term economic resilience.

The Employment strategy for 2019-2030 states that the high share of women and youth among the unemployed is one of the main problems in the labour market.

Over the last ten years, the unemployment rate among young people aged 15-24 has decreased, reaching 12.9% in 2017 (14.9% among women), which is 2.6 times higher than the national average. Among young people aged 15-29, this figure was 9.2% in 2017 (11.0% among women), i.e. 1.8 times higher than the national average.

Based on the 2020 results of the sample statistical survey on Labour force (Economic activity of the population), 137 800 youths aged 15-29 years were economically active, of which 1223.9 were employed persons. Men (661 600 persons) among employed youths predominated women (562 300 persons). According to the results of the survey, number of unemployed youths aged 15-29 years made 154 100 persons, including men – 69 900 persons, women – 84 200 persons.

³ State Statistics Committee, 2020 – Labour Market statistical yearbook (page 23)

10.6% of 154 100 employed youths aged 15-29 years have higher education, 11.9% – secondary specialised, 4.4% – primary vocational, 59.5% – complete secondary, 13.4% – general secondary education, 0.2% – primary education.

Table 3: Youth unemployment was 11.2% in 2020

Age groups	Economically active population		including			
			employed		unemployed	
	Total	women	Total	women	Total	women
Total	5 252.5	2 567.5	92.8%	91.6%	7.2%	8.4%
15-19	107.6	48.0	84.6%	83.1%	15.4%	16.9%
20-24	500.9	234.2	85.0%	82.6%	15.0%	17.4%
25-29	769.5	364.3	91.9%	90.3%	8.1%	9.7%

Source: SSC

According to the census of 2009, 8.4% of the population consists of ethnic minorities such as Tats, Talysh, Lezgins, Avars, Armenians, Turks, Kurds, Molokans, Ingiloyts, Tsakhurs, Khynalygs, Buduqlus, Grysz, Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, and others. Disaggregated unemployment statistics are not carried out for ethnic groups of the population.

1.2 System overview

Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population

The following institutions are dealing with career development support under the MLSPP:

National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs under the MLSPP	Identifies skills and training needs
State Employment Agency	Designs and coordinates the implementation of career development support activities
Regional Employment Centres and DOST Centres	There are 22 regional employment centres that provide career guidance and counselling services. DOST Centres provide career information to the unemployed.
Regional Vocational Training Centres	There are 4 regional vocational training centres that deliver training courses of up to 6 months, also covering a component on career development. 3 new regional training centres are planned to open in 2023

National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs (NSO)

The NSO was established with Public Legal Entity status in 2019 and started to function in 2020. The reason for its foundation was to establish a monitoring and forecasting system that will lead to better decision-making in employment. The mission of the NSO in the labour market is: i) Assessment of current situation; ii) Study the development trends; iii) Monitoring; iv) Public legal entity dealing with analysis and forecasting aimed at more effective and sound decision-making for policymakers. The

NSO can publish reports and disseminate information about its findings. The NSO can carry out analytical research, analysis and scientific research by state order, as well as within projects financed by international and local donor organisations. Data obtained by the observatory is usually disseminated to the general public and used for career guidance services in SEA and DOST offices.

The NSO's policy agenda on LLL including career guidance is to improve and strengthen the country's capacity in i) data collection (monitoring, observations, surveys); ii) Analysis and processing (think tank); iii) Forecasting; iv) building a platform for discussions and dialogue on research and proposals; v) identifying solutions (training, proposals, learning, etc.).

The NSO is a public legal entity under MLSPF but a semi-independent organisation. The authorised fund is AZN one (1) million (m) and is formed at the expense of the Unemployment Insurance Fund under the MLSPF. As well as AZN 2.6 m were allocated for the maintenance of the NSO. The Observatory is engaged in activities of national and (or) public importance. The Observatory may engage in income generating activities to achieve the objectives set out in the Charter. The NSO has an independent balance sheet, property, treasury and bank accounts, a logo (emblem), a stamp with the name of the Ministry and its own name, appropriate stamps and letterheads.

State Employment Agency

SEA designs and coordinates the implementation of career development support activities. Career Guidance Sector of the Vocational Training and Career Guidance Department established at the State Employment Agency (SEA) in 2020 is one of the functional departments in the field of career guidance in the country. However, the Central Career Branch was only established under SEA on the March 15, 2022, and this Centre will continue the work of the Career Guidance Sector to carry out and further develop career guidance services.

Regional Employment Centres and DOST Centres

Role of Regional Employment Centres and DOST Centres in lifelong learning and adult education:

Regional Employment Centres subordinated to/ under SEA were approved by the Decision of the Board of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan and re-registered as public legal entities by the Territorial Tax Offices of the State Tax Service under the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Local bodies of the SEA or 'DOST' Centres receive applications from persons wishing to be involved in vocational training, register them as jobseekers and unemployed persons, and refer them to an institution that carries out vocational training (VTCs). In addition to this, local bodies of the SEA, in turn, identify the institution that provides additional vocational training, chooses it, approves its list, formalises relationships with it, publishes the list, prepares relevant documents for the purpose of formation and financing the vocational training group, as well as carrying out monitoring of training. Application to the SEA and DOST Centres is free of charge. The Centres are funded from the state budget.

Vocational Training Centres

Role of Vocational Training Centre: Vocational Training Centres subordinated to the SEA provide vocational training for jobseekers and unemployed persons on the basis of the order of the SEA and employers, as well as other applicants to acquire a specialty (profession) according to the needs of the labour market and (or) a new specialty (profession); organises paid short-term courses and thematic trainings at the request of individuals and legal entities (including subject on career guidance); participates in the process of recognition of skills acquired through informal and non-formal methods together with the relevant state bodies and carries out activities in other areas identified by the legislation.

Thus, the main role of Vocational Training Centres is to help registered jobseekers and the unemployed persons to find employment by providing quality education in modern professions and

specialties in accordance with the requirements of the labour market. Employed jobseekers can also apply to DOST and SEA Centres.

Ministry of Education

MoE⁴ responsibility is to ensure learner's realization of his/her talents and abilities, in preparation for independent life and wilful choice of profession, development of active civic position, respect and tolerance for national and universal values, human rights and liberties, freely using modern information and communications technologies, and other technical means, acquisition of the basics of economic knowledge, communicating in one or several foreign languages, etc. Work of MoE related to career guidance can be divided into education levels such as general education, vocational education and higher education.

General education

Career guidance services in general education institutions are organized on the basis of the "Rules for the implementation of career guidance services in general education institutions" (Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated May 12, 2020, No. 167). Career guidance services are carried out within a different framework for each level of general education and cover five directions: awareness-raising activities; identification of vocational interests and skills; diagnostic activities; consultation services; training activities.

The Education Institute of the Republic of Azerbaijan has developed a methodological tool "Organization of career guidance service in general education institutions" for career guidance practitioners in general education institutions and is carrying out online and offline training for practitioners (mainly career guidance coordinators, school psychologists, etc) from 4 100 schools in Azerbaijan. The training is planned to be finalized in the first half-year of 2022. After the end of the training, career guidance will be carried out in all pillars of general education: primary education, general secondary education and complete secondary education. Main practitioners of career guidance are career guidance coordinators. One coordinator is appointed for each general education institution. These coordinators coordinate the work with the class teachers, psychologists, and other pedagogical staff, and at the same time support the organization of events together with the vocational and higher education institutions. Career guidance is carried out both in an integrated format as a part of subjects taught and as a separate measure (company visits, presentations, etc.). Parents can be involved in the identification of vocational interests and skills of pupils.

Starting from 2019-2020 academic year vocational-oriented classes were established in general education institutions with purpose to inculcate basic entrepreneurial skills, provide the labour market with professionally trained persons. Establishing vocational classes in general education institutions also carried the purpose of working against the lower attractiveness of vocational education institutions. The classes are offered to complete secondary education pupils (X-XI grades). The courses are carried out for one year and successful graduates receive certificates of completion as well as an attestation for finishing of complete secondary education. Currently these classes are offered in 80 schools and 124 classes throughout the country. The courses include professions from service, construction and agriculture profiles. The aim is to increase the number of schools to 110 schools and 210 classes. Impact analysis of these classes on education is being conducted by the Education Institution. The activities are carried out in liaison with the SAVE.

Vocational Education

The SAVE provides career guidance and counselling services for students and potential students, and graduates transitioning from school to work, and it ensures cooperation with employers, etc. These services are carried out by chief (senior) masters, teachers and deputy directors responsible for education and training. Activities for potential students include visits to general education schools and organising open house events for schools, while for the students of vocational education institutions it

⁴ Law on Education

includes tours to companies, organising internships for VET students, etc. Vocational education institutions participate in job fairs organized by the SEA in each district twice a year. In 2021, SAVE in cooperation with SEA organized a job fair only for vocational education graduates in Baku. This arrangement is expected to be repeated in the coming years.

Career Centres were established and equipped at Gabala State Vocational Education Centre, Baku State Vocational Education Centre on Processing Industry. "Local Governance Assistance" Public Union established a Career Centre at Barda Vocational Lyceum within the "Modernization of Barda Vocational Lyceum" project.

22 persons from 10 vocational institutions in Baku, Ganja, Sheki, Gabala, Barda and Jalilabad participated in the "Organization of Career Counseling Service" consisting of 2 stages (October-November), "Training for Trainers" (December, one week) and "Training Program for Career Guidance Counselor" and were provided with certificates. After both trainings, a mentoring process was organized for two months based on an individual approach through practice and consultations in order to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the application of acquired knowledge in work activities.

- Within the training program, visual materials for career guidance counselors and students - "Manual (Guidance) for career counselors", "Handbook for students on career planning" have been developed and are being edited.
- 25 thematic videos are being prepared for students to provide electronic content on career planning, as well as for use in trainings and other events organized by Career Centres.

Career centres will be established in 7 pilot vocational education institutions (3 in the regions, 4 in Baku: 1) Baku State Vocational Education Centre on Industry and Innovations, 2) Ganja State Vocational Education Centre on Industry and Technologies, 3) The repair work at the Baku State Vocational Education Centre on Tourism and Social Services is expected to be done, 4) Baku State Vocational Education Centre on Culture and Arts, 5) Sheki State Vocational Education Centre, 6) Jalilabad State Vocational Education Centre, 7) Baku State Vocational Education Centre on Communications and Information Technologies) within the EU-funded project "VET for the future development of VET providers' excellence in Azerbaijan" (2020-2024) implemented by the UNDP.

"Concept and Strategy for Career Centre" and "Key Performance Indicators" documents have been developed within the project. It is planned to establish 7 Career Centres in vocational education institutions in 2022. The project also envisages activities for the development of electronic career platforms, diagnostic tests and games for selected specialties. The initiative also envisages the creation of an Internet resource. This internet resource will support young people in vocational education in choosing a direction and specialty.

A methodological manual on "Organization of career guidance and counselling services in vocational education institutions" is being prepared by the Education Institute of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Higher education institutions

The Law on "Higher education" is still in the process of development. Currently, most of the HEIs have independently established career centres and provide assistance to students for finding jobs. Currently, there are 51 universities in Azerbaijan, 40 public and 11 private universities. Career centres provide career-counselling services, assist in job-seeking, CV development, preparations for interviews, and they organise job-fairs, company visits, etc.

Ministry of Youth and Sports

Currently, there are 35 Youth Houses (centres) all over the country, five of them in Baku under the supervision of the Ministry of Youth and Sport. However, no information on career guidance activities is available. In 2019, the Ministry developed 25 animated videos "My specialty" about the most demanded occupations in the labour market. This activity was carried out in the field of career guidance to inform young people about the most demanded occupations.

Employer Organisations and other public agencies are not active in providing career development services.

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

To support the UN's Sustainable Development initiatives the “**Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development**” approved by the Presidential Decree on 2 February 2021 defines human capital development as one of the priorities. Priority number three is “Competitive human capital and space for modern innovations” and activity plans are being developed for implementation of these priorities. The other priorities include, sustainably growing competitive economy; society based on dynamic, inclusive and social justice; great return to the liberated territories; clean environment and “green growth” country.

The “**Strategic Road maps for the national economy and main economic sectors**” approved by the Presidential Decree defines the country's development goals up to 2025 and target vision after 2025, and priorities to ensure their implementation. Human capital development is identified as one of the strategic targets for strengthening competition capacity through cooperation among all components of the Azerbaijani economy. Human capital plays a decisive role in increasing labour productivity, sustainable economic growth, increasing competitive capacity in manufacturing and the services sector, and the country's integration in global markets. In order to achieve this, improved quality is required in the following: all pillars of education, in the continued development of staff knowledge and skills through training, harmonisation of qualified staff training with labour market requirements, encouragement of investments by companies in research and development, and efficient use of existing human capital. This will be provided at two levels: (1) improvement of quality in all pillars of education for the purpose of human capital formation and development; (2) encouragement of continuous development of human capital, and investments in research and development in order to improve labour productivity.

The **Strategic Road Map for the development of vocational education and training** in the Republic of Azerbaijan (approved by Presidential Decree on 6 December 2016,) focuses on short, medium and long-term development until 2025 and will require a well-qualified human-resource base. To support the goals, education and training systems will need to undergo substantial changes, improving not only the formal education system but also strengthening the adult learning provision and creating more LLL opportunities.

“Poor career guidance in general schools” was detected as the main problem in the Strategic Road Map for the development of vocational education and training in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Targets for the period after 2025 are: “During this period, career guidance will be effectively conducted in general education institutions. **Education advisors** in primary schools shall ensure that pupils choose appropriate vocational training institutions and programmes from an early age. Various events and competitions will be organized to provide pupils with vocational education information. The skills of pupils in crafts and vocational areas will be assessed at an early age, and the teaching materials and systems will be digitalized”.

The **State Programme “Youth of Azerbaijan in 2017-2021”** adopted by the President of Azerbaijan Republic plans to ‘increase levels of awareness on specialty and profession selection, labour market and employment among young people’. This is aimed at strengthening youth career guidance work and expanding their knowledge on the most demanded professions and specialties in the labour market. Responsibility for the implementation of the State Programme is delegated to the Ministry of Youth and Sport. 25 animated videos were produced about the most demanded occupations in the labour market.

To implement the State Programme “Youth of Azerbaijan in 2017-2021”, the following measures for career guidance for young people are determined in the Action Plan “Preparation of methodological tools for occupation consultancy and career development for young people and organizing consultancy services” (responsible bodies: MLSP, ME, MYS):

- organizing job fairs for young people (responsible bodies: MLSP; period: 2017-2021); annually around 100 job-fairs are organized in cities and rayons/regions;

- strengthening career guidance (professional orientation), increase awareness on the most demanded occupations and specialists in the labour market (responsible bodies: MLSP, ME, MYS; period: 2017-2021).

Career guidance services are organized according to Article 22 of the Law on 'Employment'. In order to implement Article 22, regulations on the '**Provision of career guidance services**' were approved by the Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 266 dated 11 June 2019. The Regulations set out the directions and methods for providing career guidance services. Services are provided for jobseekers and for the employed, unemployed persons, students, pupils and their parents.

Currently, career guidance is conducted by the SEA and education institutions in accordance to the '**Law on Employment**' and '**Rules for implementation of career guidance services in general education institutions**' approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on 12 May 2020. According to the Rules, the objectives of career guidance are to:

- inform students about the required knowledge, skills and competencies in occupations and specialties;
- develop students' ability to use knowledge, skills and competencies in the process of choosing an occupation and specialty;
- direct students to the choice of relevant specialties and occupations in accordance with their interests, skills, abilities and personal qualities and to provide them with professional advice;
- ensure the connection between the education and labour market for the development of human capital and ensuring the transition from education to the labour market;
- assist in the development of the minimum skills required to start employment;
- inform students about career planning and lifelong learning opportunities;
- instil basic entrepreneurial skills in students and encourage them to create their own jobs in the future;
- develop basic knowledge and skills of students related to vocational education in general education thereby giving them a free choice in career planning.

The Rules also foresee the organization of career guidance work in school and forming vocational-oriented classes in schools. It is also planned to create a Centralized Career Portal, which will provide comprehensive and realistic information on the demand for certain professions and specialties in the labor market in the field of digitalization of career guidance services.

Article 22 of the '**Law on Employment**' is related to the organization of career orientation services. According to this article the relevant institution conducts interviews and tests for students, pupils, jobseekers and the unemployed to organize career guidance, to help them choose an occupation and specialty in accordance with their education, skills and personal qualities, and provides consulting services aimed at shaping their interests.

The above-mentioned legal-normative documents do not present a definition of career guidance and counselling. There are no mechanisms for coordination, monitoring and evaluation of career guidance and counselling services. At the same time, the lack of a legal-normative base and a single staff schedule for the work of Career Centres in vocational education institutions, as well as the lack of a separate career consultant position make it difficult to organize this service.

3. COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

This section details aspects related to formal coordination, strategic leadership, governance and cooperation between stakeholders.

3.1 Promoting coordination, cooperation and good governance

Currently, there is no systemic and coherent communication and coordination mechanism in place among responsible bodies, stakeholders, employers and other involved parties to plan and provide career guidance services. Currently, the MLSPP and SEA play the central role in provision of guidance to unemployed persons, jobseekers, and youth. Measures are implemented in accordance with the Active Employment Programme. The MoE has its own specific tasks to prepare youth for active citizenship, and to freely choose their professions and type of employment.

The State Employment Agency cooperates through regular and ad hoc meetings with the MoE, Ministry of Economy and other relevant ministries, employers and ASK, Small and Medium Business Development Agency (SMBDA), trade unions, local executive and self-governing bodies, and other active employment arrangements. According to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan 'On Employment', the SEA prepares and submits a draft of the national employment programme defining the annual activities of the Service to the MLSPP. According to the law, the MLSPP and Local Self-Government Bodies, employer organisations and trade unions are preparing national and regional employment programmes to provide employment assistance. These programmes are based on indicators of economic and social development forecasts. The national Employment Programme is approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and regional employment programmes are approved by the local executive authorities.

The roles of guidance and counselling activities are not specifically highlighted in employment programmes. The employment plans primarily emphasize the implementation of active employment measures. The content of the guidance is more about the provision of information on vacancies in the labour market which cannot be considered to be comprehensive content on career guidance services.

Only in the area of general education, the mechanism for communication, cooperation, and coordination among involved parties in planning and providing career guidance services is defined by the 'Rules for implementation of career guidance services in general education institutions. According to the Rules, training shall be implemented by the pedagogical staff (appointed coordinator for the group) of general education institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private enterprises in coordination with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Observation, awareness-raising, diagnostic, consultation and training events are regularly organized with the participation of students, taking into account the age characteristics of children studying at different levels of general education. These events include information about occupations, presentations by professionals in various fields, visits to companies, etc. The activities are discussed in the Pedagogical Councils (council of teachers and school managers) and included in the annual action plan (Articles 3.2 and 3.3.).

Career Centres established in vocational education institutions will play an important role in coordinating the organization of career guidance and counseling services and building cooperation with partners. Also, the direction of coordination and cooperation in the organization of career guidance work is mentioned in the career guidance coordinators' task function in general education institutions.

3.2 Key civil society stakeholders

The 'Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH' conducted the activity 'Capacity building on Career Guidance for Specialists of Employment Centres and Vocational Schools' in 2018. In January 2018, the project included an assessment of the capacities of career guidance practitioners in Employment Centres (MLSPP) and the SAVE that was carried out by contracting an international expert on TVET and Employment. During the assessment, the needs and structure of the training have been discussed with the partners (around 10 employment centres, 5 VET schools and 2 VTCs from Baku and regions). Based on the results, modules for a 9-day training were developed and introduced to the target group involved in career guidance activities. Training was given from 27 February to 2 March, and the second round took place from 2 to 6 April 2018. Career guidance specialists from employment centres and teachers from VET schools participated in the training.

The project 'Profession guidance' was initiated by the The National Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Employers) Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ASK) in 2016 with the support of MoE. The project involved organizing workshops for pupils from grades 9-11 in more than ten general education schools in Baku city and Ganja and was afterwards extended to the Lankaran and Khachmaz regions. The purpose of the workshops was to assist learners in choosing a career path in accordance with their interests and abilities and labour market needs. Invited professionals from different occupational areas ran the workshops and visits to the enterprises were organized.

"Support to vocational education in the South Caucasus" project is being implemented by ASK and Bildungswerk der Wirtschaft Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e. V. Education centre with the support of German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and "SEQUA" organization. One of the main goals of the project is to help students make the right career choice and get career guidance service. Within the project, ASK received the 'Atlas of future occupations' developed by experts from the Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO and the Agency for Strategic Initiatives.

ASK was supporting the translation of the software program called the 'Atlas of future occupations' from Russian to Azerbaijani (Russian software program) and this program was submitted to the Ministry of Education.

Junior Achievement Azerbaijan (JAA) has implemented various projects in the field of career guidance and development for youth. Some of the activities include:

- **Build the Future: Career Planning and Development for Secondary School Students** - The project is supported by Chevron Khazar and engaged more than 2047 students during 2015-2019 academic years. Starting from the 2017-2018 academic year, the project was organized jointly with the 'Friends of School' and a total of 60 student-trainers were involved. The objective of the project was to prepare youth for their future careers, develop their professional skills, and encourage youth to run their own business;
- **Youth Empowerment and Leadership Program** – the project (2019-2020) was funded by the EU and UNICEF. The main objective of the project was to enhance professional skills and employment opportunities for young people. It was implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Youth Foundation, and UNFPA. The project worked closely with Binagadi, Khazar District Youth House, Mingachevir City Youth House, Shamkir, Bilasuvar, and Kazakh Youth Development and Career Centres. The YELP project gathered 1 500 young people from various age groups to increase work readiness and career planning, and 240 people for financial literacy and entrepreneurship.
- In 2020, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP Azerbaijan) in partnership with the State Agency on Vocational Education and Junior Achievement Azerbaijan Organization and with the financial support of the European Union have organized online trainings for students of vocational education institutions on career guidance, planning and specialty choice. The trainings covered presentations and discussions on a variety of topics, including career planning, assessment of

personal qualities, creating individual professional development plan, ways to explore job opportunities and preparation for the interviews.

"Bridge to the Future" Youth Public Union implements "Promotion of vocational education among region pupils" project in Ganja since 2022. The goal of the project is to increase learners' interest in vocational education and to provide career guidance services in Ganja. It is planned to hold awareness-raising sessions on the vocational education level for a total of 200 students from 10 secondary schools in Ganja withing the project.

Azerbaijan Intern Academy Project: Azerbaijan Intern Academy was established by the Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan and UNICEF Azerbaijan. The project aims to support employment of young people by providing them with work experience appropriate to their knowledge and skills by increasing the number of internship programs in Azerbaijan, attracting various organizations, and training key personnel for the local market. Within the project, selected interns are sent to cooperating organizations to acquire work experience in Azerbaijan through the Internship Academy. It is proposed to ensure inclusion of people with disabilities. At the end of the period, interns are evaluated by the Intern Academy, the founding bodies and the partner organization.

4. MAIN SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

The main activity of the SEA in career guidance is career guidance services provided in general education institutions and in the SEA offices. Desk research showed that about 118 138 persons in 2018 and 134 760 persons in 2019 were provided with career guidance services. This was 2.3% and 2.6% of the economically active population in 2018 (5 133 000) and 2019 (5 190 000), respectively. Beneficiaries of career guidance services were jobseekers and pupils who usually were informed about methods for selecting professions, and the most demanded occupations and specialities as presented by employers who volunteered to make presentations on the current situation in the labour market.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the SEA launched **'Alo Career'**, an online support service aimed at assisting the personal and professional development of individuals during the pandemic, ensuring the availability of career guidance services for the target groups, the quality of services provided and prompt response to the request. 5 webinars were held with 250 participants, 734 persons used these services and 1 332 individual meetings were held. Currently, the customer satisfaction rate is above 98%. The aims of the support services are the following:

- career planning, goal setting,
- selection of occupation,
- labour market and job search,
- providing recommendations and evaluating the preparation of resumes,
- provide necessary assistance in preparation for job interviews.

'Bacar' (learn a skill) is another service of the SEA that includes a career guidance component. 'Bacar' will be an online platform with three components: training on self-employment and electronic processes in the selection of career pathways; online career guidance and vocational training using special innovative approaches (online tests), and simulators. The career guidance component of the project includes information about occupations, vocational diagnostics and support for career choice. The main target group includes the unemployed and jobseekers nationwide.

Since September 2020 more than 2 000 persons have been provided with career guidance services taking into account pandemic situation. "Azerbaijan Career Development Forum" was held for the first time in Azerbaijan on December 8, 2021. In addition, activities are carried out within projects with learners, students, their parents, unemployed and jobseekers.

The general education schools provide career guidance services in line with the sample activity plan approved by the Ministry of Education. The activities cover the whole academic year for all grades, without mentioning exact hours allocated to the services. The activity plan includes six main directions:

1. Organization of activities by the pedagogical council. At this stage career guidance coordinators are designated, and an activity plan is developed based on the sample activity plan. This is usually carried out before the academic year starts.
2. Awareness-raising activities includes information about various occupations (by subject teachers), games and competitions about occupations (by coordinators, heads of youth associations), presentations on occupations of parents and characteristics of occupations. This direction also includes excursions to various companies.
3. Identification of vocational interests and skills. These activities are carried out by coordinators and school psychologists. It includes identifying individual and psychological characteristics of learners, their interests towards entrepreneurship and vocational directions. The results can be discussed with parents of the learners.

4. Diagnostic activities: these activities are carried out in the beginning of each academic year for all grades. It includes surveys and tests for identifying individual and psychological characteristics of learners, development of personal career portfolio for pupils that are used throughout all their general education and are updated every year.
5. Consultation services: these activities include grouping pupils in line with their interests and skills according to the results of diagnostic measures and informing them about programs offered in HEIs, secondary specialized education institutions and vocational education institutions. Individual and/or group consultations are carried out for career planning and identifying perspectives in labour market.
6. Training activities: these activities include creating vocational-oriented courses, cooperation with vocational education institutions, training on modules for acquiring job skills and knowledge with assessment and certification. These activities cover the complete secondary education stage.

Career guidance in vocational education is carried out by teachers and deputy directors responsible for education and training. This includes visits to general education schools, organization of open house events for employers and general education schools, organizing tours to companies, organizing internships for VET students, etc. Currently, there is no dedicated staff member allocated for this purpose. Career Centres were established and equipped at Gabala State Vocational Education Centre, Baku State Vocational Education Centre on Processing Industry. "Local Governance Assistance" Public Union established a Career Centre at Barda Vocational Lyceum within the "Modernization of Barda Vocational Lyceum" project. 7 pilot vocational education centres are planned to open career support centres in the framework of the 'VET for the future development of VET providers' excellence in Azerbaijan' project (2020-2024). To form a staff responsible for career guidance and counselling services in these centres, 22 persons from 10 vocational institutions in Baku, Ganja, Sheki, Gabala, Barda and Jalilabad participated in the "Organization of Career Counseling Service" consisting of 2 stages (October-November), "Training for Trainers" (December, one week) and "Training Program for Career Guidance Counselor" and were provided with certificates. After both trainings, a mentoring process was organized for two months based on an individual approach through practice and consultations to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the application of acquired knowledge in work activities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual info-sessions and open house events were organized with the participation of employers for career guidance through the social media accounts of the MoE and SAVE. In 2021, influencers (intellectuals, artists, startappers, career experts) were involved in awareness-raising activities to promote vocational education,

To promote and raise the image of vocational education in the country and apply WorldSkills standards, Azerbaijan was accepted as a full member of "WorldSkills Asia" on March 13, 2020, and as the 85th member of "WorldSkills International" on October 14.

During 2021, national competitions on "Fashion technologies", "Carpet weaving", "Web programming", "Cooking" and "Cybersecurity" were held within WorldSkills Azerbaijan.

The situation is different for higher education institutions (HEIs). Currently, there are 51 HEIs in Azerbaijan. As independent entities some of the HEIs have established well-functioning career centres to assist students in their future career pathways and further education. Some of them are mentioned in the table below.

Information on career development, further education and LLL possibilities in universities was gathered through official university web-pages:

Higher Education Institutions	Career counselling and further education
Universities under the Ministry of Education	
Azerbaijan State University of Economics	Career Centre Further Education Division under Distant, part-time and further education Centre
Baku State University	Career Planning Centre
Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry Education	Graduate-career Centre
Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University	Continuous Education and Training Division
Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction	Experience and career centre Requalification faculty
Azerbaijan University of Languages	Further Education and experience faculty Germanic Studies Institute / Goethe and Schiller Centre Confucius Institute Other language and culture centres
Baku Slavic University	Department of practice and career development of graduates
Baku Music Academy named after Uzeyir Hajibeyli	Further Education Division
Baku Engineering University	Department on work with enterprises and career
Sumgait State University	Career Centre
Lankaran State University	Practice, potential development and career division
Ganja State University	Practice and career centre Further Education Faculty
Azerbaijan State Academy of Physical Education and Sport	Career Centre
Private Higher Education Institutions	
Western Caspian University	Training Centres
Higher Education Institutions under other ministries and committees	
Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan	Requalification courses
ADA University	Career Management Centre
Baku Higher Oil Academy	Lifelong Learning faculty

Azerbaijan University of Tourism and Management	Career Counselling and Communication division
Higher Education Institutions of Special Purpose	
Azerbaijan State Customs Committee Academy	Lifelong learning division

Source: Official web pages of universities

The Youth Development and Career Centre was launched in November 2018 under the Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 1 October 2019, in order to ensure the comprehensive development of young citizens living in cities and regions in accordance with the state youth policy, it was decided to open offices of Youth Development and Career Centres in Haydar Aliyev Centres. These centres are currently functioning in 52 centres in Azerbaijan. In 2019, AZN 4 million was allocated from the reserve fund of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan to establish the Youth Development and Career Centre. The Youth Foundation is a public legal entity.

The NGO Junior Achievement carried out a project (2019-2020) with the Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Youth Foundation, and UNFPA to enhance professional skills and employment opportunities for young people. In cooperation with various youth centres, the project covered topics such as enhancing work readiness, financial literacy and entrepreneurship.

4.1 Education, training and work-based learning for youth

According to the Law on General Education, one of the objectives of the general education institutions is to provide career guidance services to the pupils. The aim is to prepare pupils for making career choices and employment. In order to inform pupils about the labour market and vocations two different activities are organized by the SEA and MoE.

The SEA organizes visits to general education institutions at least once a month. Trained professionals provide career guidance services for the pupils of the general education institutions. This is carried out in line with the **'Rules for implementation of career guidance services in general education institutions'** adopted in 2020. The Rules include the aims and organization of career guidance. The aims include the following:

- informing learners about the required knowledge, skills and competencies in professions and specialties;
- development of learners' ability to use knowledge, skills and competencies in the process of choosing a specialty and profession;
- to direct learners to the choice of relevant specialties and professions in accordance with their interests, skills, abilities and personal qualities and to provide them with professional advice;
- implementation of information on ensuring the connection between the education and labour market for the development of human capital and ensuring the transition from education to the labour market;
- assisting in the formation of the minimum skills required to start employment;
- informing learners about career planning and lifelong learning opportunities;
- instilling basic entrepreneurial skills in learners and encouraging them to create their own jobs in the future;
- development of basic knowledge and skills related to vocational education in the general education level of learners by giving them a free choice in career planning.

The Rules on organization include the following activities and guiding notes on how to organize them:

- awareness raising activities: information about occupations considering the age groups of pupils;
- obtaining information about vocational interests and abilities: these activities include the identification of the individual and psychological characteristics of the learners with the involvement of pedagogical employees and parents, as well as identification of interest in labour and entrepreneurial activities in any profession;
- diagnostic measures: carrying out tests and surveys to identify motivation, skills and interests of pupils;
- consultation services: these services include the characteristics of the learners identified during diagnosis, as well as providing help in making right and conscious decision in the choice of programs and professions offered by higher, secondary and vocational education institutions taking into account learners' tendencies and interests and professional self-determination, career planning advices, support activities for choosing the development path and identifying perspective in the labor market;
- training activities: These activities are aimed at developing practical skills needed in the labour market. These topics are included in the content of subjects and extracurricular activities in the curriculum.

At the same time, the MoE provides career guidance services in general education schools. For these purposes, the Education Institute of the Republic of Azerbaijan has developed a methodological tool for career guidance practitioners and is carrying out online and offline training for practitioners (mainly career guidance coordinators, school psychologists, etc.) from 4100 schools in Azerbaijan. Career guidance is carried out at all stages of general education: primary education, general secondary education, and complete secondary education. The tool includes information about the aims, content and responsibilities of career guidance counsellors, organization of career guidance services, as well as vocational interests and motives for diagnostics.

Aims, content and responsibilities include legal basis of career guidance, factors affecting career choice, principles of career guidance work and inclusion of new occupations in career guidance. The principles cover the following:

- Public importance of career guidance;
- Scientific character of career guidance;
- Principle of consciousness;
- Taking into consideration the age characteristics of pupils;
- Taking into consideration the individual characteristics of pupils;
- Systematic and consistent approach;
- Succession principle;
- The principle of compliance of the capabilities and abilities of the individual with the requirements of the chosen profession;
- Independence and freedom of choice;
- Taking account of the demand in the labour market.

Organization of career guidance services include methods of organization, planning, recommendations for career planning, etc. topics. Diagnostics include methods of identifying motivations for choice of professions, methods of identifying interests of pupils and organising work with parents.

The law on 'Vocational education' does not mention career guidance and counselling services as basic understanding or in articles, but various activities are carried out in this direction. Exhibitions and job fairs are organized with the cooperation of SAVE and the SEA. These active labour market programs provide career information to students of vocational education institutions, at the same time they inform employers about the potentials of the students.

Career Centres were established and equipped at Gabala State Vocational Education Centre, Baku State Vocational Education Centre on Processing Industry. "Local Governance Assistance" Public Union established a Career Centre at Barda Vocational Lyceum within the "Modernization of Barda Vocational Lyceum" project.

22 persons from 10 vocational institutions in Baku, Ganja, Sheki, Gabala, Barda and Jalilabad participated in the "Organization of Career Counseling Service" consisting of 2 stages (October-November), "Training for Trainers" (December, one week) and "Training Program for Career Guidance Counselor" and were provided with certificates. After both trainings, a mentoring process was organized for two months based on an individual approach through practice and consultations in order to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the application of acquired knowledge in work activities.

- Within the training program, visual materials for career guidance counselors and students - "Manual (Guidance) for career counselors", "Handbook for students on career planning" have been developed and are being edited.
- 25 thematic videos are being prepared for students to provide electronic content on career planning, as well as for use in trainings and other events organized by Career Centres.

The project 'VET for the future development of VET providers' excellence in Azerbaijan' (2020-2024) funded by the EU and implemented by the UNDP is planning to open career support centres in 7 vocational education centres (in Baku, Ganja, Jalilabad and Shaki). For these purposes, training, webinars, and team building exercises were organized in July 2021 for career coordinators in VET centres to improve their skills and capacity. "Concept and Strategy for Career Centre" and "Key Performance Indicators" documents have been developed within the project. It is planned to establish 7 Career Centres in vocational education institutions in 2022. The project also envisages activities for the development of electronic career platforms, diagnostic tests, and games for selected specialties. At the same time, the project developed new career guidance and counselling methodology and guidelines for the establishment of Career Support Centres.

A methodological manual on "Organization of career guidance and counselling services in vocational education institutions" is being prepared by the Education Institute of the Republic of Azerbaijan. One of the main competency modules in vocational education institutions is "Personal development and career planning".

Projects implementing internships (dual training model) in the workplace have been launched in vocational education institutions. These include, "Bacarıqlı OL", the Dual Education Program in Tourism implemented in cooperation with the State Tourism Agency, and the "Vocational Education and Training for the Future: Support to the Establishment of Advanced Vocational Education Centres in Azerbaijan" project implemented by UNDP in cooperation with the SAVE. Career Centres will provide training and counseling hours to students in preparation for the internship process, as well as support in coordination with the employer in the future.

According to the official websites of HEIs, around 10 HEIs under the Ministry of Education have developed their career centres. One of the best practice examples is the University of Economics. Azerbaijan National University of Economics - UNEC Career Centre employs two full-time staff members. Sponsors from leading companies finance several activities. Primary services to students provided free of charge are:

- Training sessions for potential graduates (improvement of soft skills, such as self-marketing, resume writing, CV building, leadership, etc.).

- Bimonthly info tours/visits to companies (online system for registration of students to take part in the tour).
- Three-time-a-week Business Club events to improve English/Russian language skills free of charge. Access to bank sponsor events.
- Biannual (January, May) Job Fair Day in cooperation with 60-70 companies, an open event for UNEC students as well for students from other universities. During this event, companies organize simulations of a Job Interview.
- Radio UNEC - a bimonthly broadcast 'Career 360 degrees' in cooperation with social media network.
- Face-to-face service: career coaching on how to find a job and psychological advice regarding specific personal issues of students.
- A portal for companies to meet students and vice versa: companies may place information on their business profile and employment offers. Students, on their part, may create their personal profile and add their CV built according to the template provided in e-format.
- UNEC organizes Job Fairs for disabled people in cooperation with companies who are ready to employ persons with disabilities (call centres, design, etc.).
- UNEC is a member of international virtual company Pen International led by Germany. This activity facilitates the development of skills for self-employment. Groups of UNEC students have an opportunity to establish a virtual company and run it virtually in the international market for three weeks.
- A mechanism for monitoring graduate career development currently does not exist. The intention to establish the Alumni Association is under discussion. 83% of graduates are employed after graduation (SES statistical data), 17% of graduates with Bachelor's degree continue studies at Master level programmes, including abroad, or are enrolled in the National Army.

4.2 Unemployed support and support to NEETs

The share of young people not in education, employment, or training ('the NEET rate') represents the number of young people aged 15-24 not in education, employment or training as a percentage of the total youth population. It serves as a broader measure of potential youth labour market entrants than youth unemployment since it includes young people outside the labour force who are not in education or training. In Azerbaijan, the share of NEETs was 17.7% in 2019. There is a NEETs gender gap in Azerbaijan, with more women NEETs than men. In 2019, 16.0% were men, and 19.6% were women. Over the past decade, the NEETs rate has shown a modest decrease. In 2010, it stood at a high of 22.1%, while in 2015, it was 18.0%. However, since 2020 and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NEETs rate is expected to have increased⁵.

Graduates, jobseekers, unemployed persons, or others face challenges in planning career pathways due to not having sufficient information, lacking career management skills, or requiring specific upskilling/reskilling support. In this regard, career guidance services play an important role to help individuals understand the education system and meet labour market needs through upskilling/reskilling. In Azerbaijan, career guidance is one of the active labour measures with vocational training for the unemployed and jobseekers, support for self-employment, job fairs and labour exchanges, paid public work, etc. Desk research showed that about 118 138 persons in 2018 and 134 760 persons in 2019 were provided with career guidance services. Beneficiaries of career guidance services were jobseekers and pupils who usually were informed about methods for selecting the right professions, the most demanded occupations and specialties of employers and provided with information on the current situation in the labour market. However, activities on qualitative career

⁵ European Training Foundation, 2021 – Azerbaijan - Education, Training and Employment Developments 2021

guidance services are very limited in Azerbaijan. It usually includes providing information on the current situation in the labour market and most demanded occupations and specialties in the labour market, employment opportunities for existing professions and specialties, and opportunities in vocational and further training.

4.3 Workers/Employed

Cooperation between vocational education and employers is increasing. This can be seen both from agreements signed between employers, the SAVE and vocational education institutions. At the same time, joint activities between the SEA and SAVE can also be seen in the last two years. It is planned to develop business skills and promote entrepreneurship among young people studying in vocational education Centres, ensure self-employment, increase the number of young people receiving vocational education among micro and small entrepreneurs, support new business initiatives and increase interest in vocational education within the “Youth Business Workshop” project implemented jointly by the SAVE, SMBDA and SEA in Gabala, Jalilabad and Aghdam. Cooperation between vocational education institutions and employers is becoming mutually beneficial. Employers use vocational education institutions to increase qualifications of their employees and to retrain them, and at the same time to employ graduates of the schools. Vocational education institutions profit from this cooperation by providing their students with places for internship and using qualified employees of the employers to improve education. An example of this cooperation is pilot projects of dual education and can be seen in Jalilabad VET school in furniture production.

Some of the largest employers in Azerbaijan have established their own career centres. The career centres include activities to recruitment of new employees, increase qualifications of their employees (academies, vocational education institutions) and to promote their employees. One of the examples is Azersun Holding’s Azersun Career centre. The website of the centre includes links to create CVs, job advertisements, Azersun Academy’s courses, etc. One of the main mobile operators, Azercell, has also established its career centre for recruitment, training, and promotion.

To support career development in the informal sector, the government has approved rules for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). Implementation of assessment and recognition procedures started in 2020 by Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA). 14 qualifications are included in the VNFIL and so far, 119 persons applied for assessment and recognition. 51 persons passed the initial review process and 43 persons participated in knowledge assessment. 24 persons participated in assessment of skills, competence, and experience. 11 persons were awarded with diplomas and 16 persons were awarded with certificates. The process is new, and demand is increasing. The EQAA plans to increase the number of qualifications included in the VNFIL and the number of applicants is expected to increase in the future. The VNFIL was carried out for 5 professional qualifications (Drywall installer and repairers, Barbers, Plastic pipe welders, Mobile phone repairers and Confectioners) and 22 applicants (43%) applied for the Barber qualification. Career counselling services are not provided as part of the process.

Although, the pace of increase in cooperation between vocational education and employers was observed in recent years, a lack of an incentive mechanism to encourage employers is one of the main barriers. Incentive mechanisms will motivate employers to accept more students to internship programs, to be involved attend in organizing and managing education, development of educational resources, etc. Another barrier is the lack of social dialogue between government, vocational education institutions and employers. The social dialogue enables to build strong relationships between all involved parties in developing a vocational education policy including organizing career guidance.

5. FUNDING

Provision of career guidance services is funded through the budget of the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). Reviewing laws on Unemployment Insurance Fund (2018, 2019, 2020) show that AZN 1 150 000, AZN 1 300 000, AZN 2 000 000 and AZN 2 000 000 have been allocated for career guidance services in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively. This is a share of 1.3% in 2018, 1.3% in 2019, 1.6% in 2020 and 1.3% in 2021.

According to the Law on Budget of Unemployment Insurance Fund for 2022 the amount allocated to career guidance stayed the same and AZN 2 000 000 were allocated to the career guidance services. This is 1.1% of the total budget of the unemployment insurance fund.

Career guidance is not a priority in distributing the budget of the Unemployment Fund. Additional funding by social partners is a realistic option in the area of VET at least, but as the quality of VET does not meet fully the needs of social partners, especially employers, currently they are not interested in contributing directly to funding career guidance services.

Recognition of non-formal and informal skills is not financed from the state budget in accordance with the "The Rules of Carrying out examinations and issuing of the document confirming professional qualification of citizens for the purpose of an assessment and recognition of the knowledge, skills, competence and experience acquired by citizens through non-formal and informal forms of vocational education". There have been employers who support social projects in this area, or the citizens cover the costs.

6. ACCESS

22 SEA offices and 5 DOST offices cover all regions of the country. Career guidance services as one of the active labour measures are carried out by these offices for unemployed and jobseekers, self-employment, and employed. Job fairs and labour exchanges, paid public works, etc. are typical services.

The project 'Creation of inclusive and decent jobs for socially vulnerable groups' implemented by the UNDP and SEA started in January 2019 and is expected to last till 2024. The aim of the project is to increase the potential of unemployed and jobseekers from vulnerable groups and create opportunities for their involvement in productive employment in the labour market. 12 regions and cities (Sabunchu and Binagadi regions of Baku, Absheron, Shamakhi, Zagatala, Shamkir, Barda, Fuzuli regions, Sumgayit, Mingachevir, Goychay and Ganja cities) were selected as pilots for the first year of the project.

To cope with the pandemic situation the SEA also launched 'Alo Career' and 'Bacar' projects to reach citizens online.

The Ministry of Education carries out career guidance services in general education and vocational education throughout the country. Sample activity plan for career guidance services in general education is approved by the minister. The activity plan covers the whole academic year.

SAVE together with the SEA organizes job fairs for students from vocational education institutions.

"Education and Career Exhibition" is held annually, where all education institutions participate, and students can get information about vocational and higher education institutions. Lack of well-elaborated client profiling system and limited labour resources is one of the main barriers to providing career guidance services for the unemployed and jobseekers.

7. USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Two projects of the SEA especially stand out for the use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

'Alo career' a support service aimed at assisting the personal and professional development of individuals during the pandemic, ensuring the availability of vocational counselling services for the target groups, the quality of services provided and prompt response to the request. This project creates chances for citizens to use 'Zoom' to contact the Agency employees and get support on career planning, selection of occupation, preparation and evaluation of resumes, and assistance in the preparation for the job interviews.

'Bacar' (learn a skill) is another future service of the SEA with a career guidance component allowing users to join online information sessions and training on self-employment, career guidance and vocational training activities. The career guidance component of the project includes information about occupations, vocational diagnostics, and support for career choices.

'Strategic Road Map for the development of telecommunications and information technologies in the Republic of Azerbaijan' was approved in 2016 and one of the main components of the Road Map was Priority 2.4 'Improvement of electronic services of government agencies. Improvement activities in this area could also increase the quality of data used in career guidance.

At present Employment sub-system under the MLSP services is under construction. This platform will have a career part which will support users to create CVs and find new jobs.

The Action Plan for 2020-2025 to implement the Employment Strategy plans to create a Centralized Career Portal, which will provide comprehensive and realistic information on the demand for professions and specialties in the labor market.

Weak internet connections and lack of computers of locals in rural areas are the main barriers for citizens to access career guidance services.

8. QUALITY OF PROVISION OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICES WITHIN A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

This section analyses aspects which contribute to raising and maintaining the quality of provision, including the definition of standards of service and ethical treatment of personal information, professionalization and training of practitioners and other staff, quality of tools, methodologies and information.

8.1 Standards

Desk research proved that currently there is no higher education institution in Azerbaijan offering a diploma program on career guidance or professional training courses leading to upgrading advisors' qualifications. Advisors' skills in career guidance services are upgraded by short-term courses organized by the SEA. The training is usually organized at regional training centres of the SEA or secondary schools. The participants are trained in topics such as the implementation of practical activities for career guidance, how to provide career guidance services, presentation of occupations, diagnosis of occupational interests, etc.

The Education Institute of the Republic of Azerbaijan has developed a methodological tool for career guidance practitioners (for all pillars of general education) and provides online and offline training for practitioners (mainly school psychologists).

The EU Funded 'Support to implementation of NQF in Azerbaijan' (January 2018– October 2020) project developed a qualification standard, occupational standard, curricula and assessment standard for Career Guidance Counsellor qualification in 2020. The standards were developed in consultations with the SEA, universities, practitioners, and experts in the field. The qualification falls under the AzNQF level 5, sub-bachelors' level of education. It is not offered by any education institution yet and there is no plan to establish post-graduate courses for the preparation of career services specialists. However, there is the possibility to establish such a course under the supervision of the MoE.

The implementation of actions to create a training base for the preparation of career counseling specialists was mentioned in the "Action Plan for 2020-2025 to implement the Employment Strategy".

8.2 Staffing

Staffing in the SEA:

Career guidance by the Vocational Training Department of the SEA is given by 5 employees. Other than that, career guidance services are provided in 22 regional offices of the SEA. Depending on the size of the SEA office, there is at least one specialist dealing with career guidance. Their skills in career guidance services are upgraded by short-term courses organized by the SEA.

Staffing in the MoE:

According to the sample activity plan for general education institutions to provide career guidance services, the services are provided by school psychologists and career guidance coordinators in full-time positions. Practitioners (career guidance coordinator) from 4 100 schools in Azerbaijan are

trained in accordance with the newly developed "Organization of career guidance service in general education institutions" methodological tool. The training is conducted in online and offline formats.

The organization of career guidance in VET is carried out by the deputy director on education, training masters and chief master. However, there is no staff in the staff schedule that provides career counselling services.

Hindering factors currently are the lack of materials for career guidance practitioners' professional development and shortages in finding specialized professionals for delivering career services.

8.3 Quality of data and information

Information and intelligence to support career development is delivered by the National Skills Observatory (NSO). The maximum number of positions for the Observatory is 70 employees. Currently, 54 employees work for the NSO. The observatory applies cutting edge corporate management instruments. In general, the NSO receives official requests through MLSPP, however the NSO can also receive unofficial requests (paid requests by companies). Around 60 policy documents related to the analysis of the labour market (several of them related to LLL and adult education) were developed, but there is not any published report yet. The NSO implements the following ongoing activities in the field of labour market:

- On-the-job training based on international experience, analysis of internship mechanisms and preparation of proposals, study of the possibility of applying the 'dual education' system;
- Analysis of the characteristics of the national labour market for pandemic and post-pandemic periods;
- Analysis of statistics of able-bodied inactive population and preparation of proposals on their involvement in the labour market;
- Preparation of proposals for improving the system of vocational education, secondary specialization and higher education in accordance with the requirements of the 'National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning';
- Analysis of issues of effective use of human capital in Azerbaijan and preparation of proposals for the next 5 years.

The NSO implements the following ongoing activities in the field of training and education:

- Creating a database of training suppliers;
- Training 'Instructions on conducting telephone conversations with respondents' was organized for the staff of the National Observatory;
- Training on 'Instructions for using the SoGoSurvey platform' was conducted for the staff of the National Observatory;
- Training for employees of the National Observatory on various topics (MIS training – 1 hour x 5 groups, a total of 42 employees, training 'Order and Chaos' – 2 hours, a total of 50 employees, training 'Convass Business Model' – 2 hours, a total of 32 employees) internal trainings were conducted;
- 'Organizational Culture and Work Ethics' training for new employees of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection;
- Around 10 000 employees work in the MLSPP and its organizations. So, the NSO should also train (data collection, data processing, data analysis, conduct surveys and interviews, policy design, forecasting etc.) these employees in the future;

- There are 600 000 disabled, so the NSO is going to study skills of this group and involve them in training in the future.

Main source of the NSO for data collection is administrative information mainly from the SEA and education institutions. As well as the NSO is planned to obtain missing qualitative and quantitative data through surveys. The NSO planned (according to its Charter and annual internal activity plan) to collect data on demanded skills and occupations in the labour market and this information will be used by the SEA for delivering career services and education institutions for development of competency-based curricula. The main barriers are in collecting student tracking data from education institutions and limited resources for conducting surveys.

8.4 Monitoring, evaluation and policy feedback

Currently no comprehensive monitoring and feedback exists on the whole career development support system in Azerbaijan. Individual projects carry out customer satisfaction surveys, mainly online. For example, 'Alo career' customer satisfaction survey with above 98% customer satisfaction rate.

Proposals for the implementation plan of a Concept 'National System of Career Guidance and Counselling in Azerbaijan' developed by the EU funded 'Support to implementation of NQF in Azerbaijan' project (from 23 January 2018 to 22 October 2020) recommended the establishment of a quality assurance system, monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness in providing career guidance services. The project recommended the cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population for strengthening quality assurance and evidence base in career guidance. The responsibility on information, guidance, and counselling service quality assessment and evaluation of effectiveness is delegated to relevant subordinate bodies of the MoE and the MLSPP following the existing legal procedure. Data on the users of career services are available in bulk format without disaggregation for age, gender, region, etc.

9. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

As a conclusion it should be noted that the main actors in the field of the career guidance are the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population (namely, State Employment Agency, Regional Employment Centres, DOST centres and Regional Vocational Training Centres) and Ministry of Education (namely, SAVE and General Education department through activities carried out in general, vocational education institutions).

Collaboration of MLSPP and MoE is best represented in general education where trained professionals provide career guidance services for the pupils. At the same time the Ministry of Education has established vocational-oriented classes in general education schools. Pupils attending to these classes receive certificates of completion of relevant courses on given vocations.

Vocational education institutions carry out career guidance for their students and graduates, as well as for potential students, however, the organization of counselling service is not systematic. For the first time, three career Centres have been established and seven will be established. 22 career counsellors were trained to organize the activities of Career Centres. A handbook for students, a guide for career counsellors and a manual are developed by the Education Institute. SAVE also organises job-fairs in cooperation with SEA.

HEIs have established career centres to provide career-counselling, assistance in job-seeking, CV development, interview preparation.

Even though collaboration between the key actors exists, but it is not systematic and needs to be improved. Also, the roles of guidance and counselling activities are not highlighted in employment programmes.

Training of career guidance practitioners in general education is carried out by the Education Institute in line with the newly developed "Organization of career guidance service in general education institutions" methodological tool. Skills of career guidance professionals from the SEA are upgraded through short-term courses. A qualification standard, occupational standard, curricula and assessment standard for Career Guidance Counsellor was developed within the EU funded project in 2020. This kind of standards should be used for training of career guidance practitioners both by the SEA and MoE.

There are good initiatives of digitalization of career guidance services, such as 'Alo career' and 'Bacar'. But considering current developments in regards with pandemics and also for the purpose of increasing wider access to services strengthening of digitalization is needed.

Based on the above-mentioned findings the following reform areas have been identified:

1. Strengthening cooperation and collaboration (focus on joint understanding of CG/CD), as well as strengthening CG/CD definition in the legislation
2. Developing training resources (including digital) on CG/CD and strengthening professionalization of CG/CD practitioners (quality as wider topic for PES and education sector)
3. Ensuring access to CG/CD services in VET, general education and higher education through strengthening digitalization

Detailed recommendations

Recommendations do not represent final solutions but are aimed at guiding policy and practice discussions. They follow the key pillars of this report and cover the system, provider and practitioner level:

Policy framework

Short-term:

- Establish an inter-ministerial working group with participation of employer and employee organizations, experts, and NGOs to build trust and common understanding through engaging in a joint process, such as discussing the outcome of the review of the national career development support system aimed at
- 1. developing a national theory of change (ToC)⁶, a long-term vision guiding the development of a national career development support system, and action plan(s) to prioritise certain reform initiatives;
- 2. developing a joint understanding of the expected outcomes for career guidance for individuals, organisations and society across ministries, sectors, and education levels.

Medium-term to long-term:

- Include a clear definition in the terms of the outcomes of career guidance and in terms of the scope and role of career guidance in contributing to wider employment, social and education outcomes for individuals, organisations, and society in a law (Career guidance services were emphasized in the law on 'Employment', but there is no definition.). A stand-alone Lifelong Career Guidance Strategy or LLL strategy that integrates career guidance could build an integrative framework that provides clarity to all actors. A clear legal mandate needs to be given to a body responsible for overall coordination of career guidance in the country across ministries (the MoE and MLSPP, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance), employers and employee organizations, research and NGOs. This will allow to integrate services and actors to a system. Such a body could take the form of an inter-ministerial working group (national career guidance forum) or an existing (SEA) or new agency, and needs the resources, including financial, to fulfil its role.

Coordination and Cooperation

Short-term:

- Develop an annual action plan for the inter-ministerial working group starting already in 2022.
- Build on good practice cases of fruitful cooperation between employers, the SAVE and vocational education institutions, such as the Jalilabad State Vocational Education Centre in furniture production to increase the qualifications of employees and to retrain them, to secure the employment of graduates and internship places for students as well as using qualified employees of the employers to improve education.

Medium-term to long-term:

- Ensure strategic cooperation with employers/employer organisations at national, regional and provider level to involve the world of work in career guidance activities in education and facilitate the work at provider, e.g., school, level.
- Establish public-private partnerships e.g., for delivery of large-scale ICT services (see example⁷ 'Atlas of new professions').
- Ensure official permanent status and funding of a coordination body.

Services

⁶ See p. 17: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/developing-national-career-development-support-systems>

⁷ See p. 51: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/international-trends-and-innovation-career-guidance-volume>

Short-term:

- Offer work-based learning schemes to all students in different forms to allow them to complete real life work experience that helps develop interests and iteratively build future professional identities, as well as job shadowing, mock interviews, student companies, etc.
- Offer special services for NEETs and for region youth.
- Identify the most effective media used for career guidance during the pandemic (TV, radio etc.) and build on that to continue the outreach to the rural population especially.

Medium-term to long-term:

- Diversify career guidance methodologies by adapting methodologies to client groups (from NEETs to disabled, to employed, etc.) moving beyond the 'testing and matching' approach (using e.g., narrative approaches like storytelling, culturally adapted psychometric and non-psychometric tests).
- Ensure a multi-channel approach to the delivery of career-guidance services to meet the needs of diverse clients, increase access to and the quality of guidance services: from telephone, online, distance (telephone, radio, TV), personalised, group to self-directed service offers, and involvement of parents and/or the wider community.
- Shift from support for making career and/or education choices at transition points through provision of 'information' about learning opportunities and about occupations towards enabling individuals to manage their own education and careers, with a focus on increasing lifelong career adaptability and employability through career management skills development. Dedicated learning programmes are to be developed and integrated from primary school onwards until higher education as they aim at learning about oneself, learning about the world of learning and work, and are therefore geared towards preparing individuals holistically for their future (either as part of existing subjects, or as stand-alone subjects and/or integrated through extra-curricular activities).
- Ensure that Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) receive support in the career development of staff, as they have limited resources for this task, inter alia through leveraging the role of the NSO, and social partners who can provide skills needs assessments and forecasting (for sectors), facilitate cooperation with adult learning and vocational education and training institutions for continuous professional development, also tapping into formalisation of non-formal and informal learning at the workplace and the recognition of prior learning (as well as providing counselling services to applicants).
- Develop career guidance services through specialized Youth Houses outside of formal education.

Funding

Short-term:

- Allocate more funds to trainings for career guidance practitioners for online service delivery as COVID-19 showed the importance of digital services.
- Increase the coverage and awareness of programs like 'Alo Career'.

Medium-term to long-term:

- Ensure an increase in specialized professionals for delivering career services, through creating specialised qualifications and education pathways, through outsourcing to NGOs already active in this field (while this requires accreditation or other quality assurance), retraining other specialists also those currently registered as unemployed, etc. and earmark clear funds for this task of increasing staff.

- Identify in close cooperation with social partners new funding sources for ensuring access to career guidance services for all employed people within private and public sector and all vulnerable groups (e.g., in precarious employment or informal sector) facing the need for re/upskilling in the context of digital and green transitions. Given the Azerbaijan case, a special focus shall be put on career guidance support to those employed in sectors hit most by the greening of the economy.
- Expand the amount of financial resources for career guidance services to fulfil the needs of the new profiling logic (see recommendation below) as the share of financial resources spent on career guidance services is very low in comparison with other measures/programs funded by budget of UIF.

Access

Medium-term to long-term:

- Develop a proper client-profiling system to ensure tailoring services to the specific needs of individuals, thereby improving the quality and effectiveness of services, and to ensure dealing effectively with the increase of clients with limited resources: clients can be grouped according to their needs, e.g., those that can be referred to self-help services (e.g., online), those with limited, and those with intense needs for support. Also, different qualifications of practitioners are required for these different support roles, ensuring that only some need to be highly trained and specialised.
- Ensure outreach strategies and activities to rural areas and specific client groups such as NEETs are in place.

Use of technology

Short-term:

- Ensure integration of existing ICT services and face-to-face services to improve resource efficiency and service effectiveness.
- In urban and rural public spaces, provide free WLAN access and/or access to computers with internet to overcome the challenge of limited access to internet.

Medium-term to long-term:

- Ensure the interoperability of ICT services from different actors.
- Use the potential of ICT to bring together the different elements of the career-guidance system as an integrative factor to improve effectiveness and efficiency.
- Use ICT in career guidance as a support for traditional services (e.g., harnessing the potential for connecting stakeholders: individuals-employers, schools-employers, practitioners-individuals, etc.; facilitating self/career/opportunity exploration and acquiring skills for deciding and acting; increasing accessibility: offering one-stop-shop information points, providing LMI, etc.).
- Develop publicly accessible, interactive, centrally maintained comprehensive single entry e-information resources on learning opportunities and the world of work for career guidance providers and users developed to address the different needs of users (e.g. parents), including inter alia a detailed description of the education system, education levels, entry requirements to next levels of formal education, recognition of non-formal education, including recommendations on how to use the AzNQF website, register of qualifications, labour market information, etc.

Quality, professionalisation and continuous improvement

Short term:

- Develop training modules for managers of career guidance provider organisations and staff of ministries and agencies responsible for career guidance to deal with the new role of providers in the near future and the paradigm shift in career guidance practice that is necessary to remain effective and efficient as service in the light of changing labour markets and skills requirements.
- Establish an interdisciplinary working group of researchers, representatives of career guidance practitioners and clients to develop a diversified set of career guidance methodologies, tools, and materials for career guidance practitioners (for their work and for their professional development).
- Develop ethical standards including on the use of ICT for all career guidance practitioners across sectors and policy fields.
- A minimum amount of continuous professional development hours within a calendar year should be included in each career guidance practitioner's annual performance objectives or provider organisation's annual action plan (related to learning about new and diversified methodologies, profiling, adapting approaches to individual needs, etc.).
- Make tracer studies for upper secondary, VET and Higher Education institutions mandatory to collect information on their graduates which directly informs career guidance work and curriculum development.
- Develop simple client feedback forms to capture client satisfaction.

Medium to long term:

- The output of the EU funded project 'Support to implementation of NQF in Azerbaijan' (from month/year to month/year) should be officially adopted and leveraged: qualification standard, occupational standard, curricula, and assessment standard for Career Guidance Counsellor qualification to inform the development of new and the adaptation of existing education and training programmes and courses, and to promote the profession. Ensure that the qualification is appropriate to fill positions required for the profiling logic developed for the country.
- Develop specific Bachelor and Master's degree programmes for career guidance practitioners with high qualification needs according to the profiling logic developed.
- Next to qualification standards for practitioners, ensure provider quality through e.g. accreditation of providers according to national service standards and ethical standards (standards are to define the service outcome for clients across education, employment, youth, social service sectors (career management skills), the standards of career practitioners' competencies, the standards of organisation of career guidance services (covering conditions, requirements and principles essential for quality provision of services from an organisation's perspective), and the standards of career guidance programmes (providing a structural framework for developing and delivering services and activities in an organisation).
- Create a culture of continuous policy and service improvement through continuous monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices. Involve the interdisciplinary working group of researchers in conducting research on policy and service effectiveness and impact. Ensure that the input and output of career guidance services is monitored regularly. Monitoring of career guidance in education settings should be integrated into overall monitoring approaches for the educational level/institution.

ACRONYMS

ASAN	State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan
AzNQF	National Qualifications Framework on Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan
CMS	Career management skills
DOST	Agency for Sustainable and Operational Social Security under the MLSP
GDP	Gross domestic product
LLL	Lifelong learning
ME	Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan
MYS	Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSO	National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs under the MLSP
SAVE	State Agency on Vocational Education
SEA	State Employment Agency under the MLSP
SSC	State Statistical Committee
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VTC	Vocational Training Centre

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