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KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

2025

AZERBAIJAN

THE EU AGENCY SUPPORTING COUNTRIES TO DEVELOP THROUGH LEARNING

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

Each year, the ETF monitors developments in education, skills and employment in its partner countries to support informed decision-making by identifying trends, opportunities and challenges. The results are reported by country, across countries and by selected theme.

The present document is the country-level report (country fiche) for 2025 for Azerbaijan. Like all ETF monitoring, it draws on multiple sources of evidence and is the culmination of a year-long process of data collection, analysis and consultations. One key source of evidence is the ETF KIESE database, which provides internationally comparable indicators on areas such as country demography, economy, education and employment. The indicators are sourced mainly from international repositories, including UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD, Eurostat and the ILO, while some come directly from partner countries, for instance, from their labour force surveys[1].

Another source of evidence is the Torino Process, a flagship monitoring initiative of the ETF which compiles system performance indices (SPIs) on the basis of KIESE data and expert surveys. The SPIs combine selected KIESE indicators to track policy and system performance in education and VET in key areas such as access, quality and system management. Where KIESE data is missing, the SPIs rely on expert surveys which help fill the gaps and contextualise the findings at the stage of analysis. 'Performance' in this context refers to the extent to which policies and systems deliver results in these areas[2]. In 2025, the ETF compiled SPIs for a total of 32 areas and sub-areas of performance, including for groups of learners such as youth and adults, males and females, socio-economically disadvantaged young people, and adults with no or low education.

ETF country missions complement these data sources by engaging with key policy stakeholders, gathering qualitative insights on policy developments, recently enacted legislation and major reform steps. Finally, where necessary, the ETF draws on third-party publications and analytical work to complement gaps in available evidence or to clarify developments that are not fully captured in the ETF monitoring evidence.

The country fiche begins with Chapter 1, a country profile describing the demographic and socio-economic conditions in the country. Chapter 2 presents recent policies in education and training, together with the structure of the education system, including adult learning. Chapter 3 provides an overview of employment and labour-market policies and introduces the main strategies, institutions and programmes. Chapter 4, which is the final chapter, presents the results of policies and arrangements in education and training.

[1] The full selection of KIESE indicators for 2025 can be found here https://bit.ly/4j6taZW.
[2] The subset of KIESE indicators used for the calculation of the Torino Process SPIs in 2025 can be found here: https://bit.ly/433OR8j. The full list of questions used in the 2025 round of Torino Process system performance monitoring can be found here: https://bit.ly/3YUIbXE. For a full overview of the Torino Process system performance monitoring framework, see https://bit.ly/47YGA6l. The methodology for the calculation of the SPIs can be found here: https://bit.ly/3XJg101.

CONTENTS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Country profile and developments**: Azerbaijan has achieved a high level of human development, supported by substantial national income generated from hydrocarbon exports. However, this economic model also exposes the country to external shocks and volatility. At the same time, inflation and disparities in income and regional development are affecting the living standards of large segments of the population. A further structural challenge is the presence of a significant population of internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom have experienced long-term displacement and face specific barriers to labour market participation, access to services and stable livelihoods. While favourable macroeconomic conditions create opportunities for strategic investment in skills development, the reliance of the economy on a narrow export base, combined with uneven regional development, limits labour market diversification. These factors can reduce incentives for employer engagement, and may ultimately put the long-term sustainability of education and VET reforms at risk.
- **Developments in education and training**: The education system provides multiple pathways from compulsory schooling into vocational and tertiary education, and vocational education and training has received greater strategic attention in recent years. Curricular reforms promote competence-based approaches, dual education schemes are being expanded, and financing arrangements are being adjusted. A national qualifications framework embeds key competences, including digital and citizenship skills, into formal standards. Continuing vocational education has broadened through active labour market measures and a more diversified mix of providers. However, VET has yet to achieve the same level of attractiveness as other learning pathways; significant investments have improved infrastructure, although disparities remain across institutions. The professional development of teachers could also benefit from the adoption of a more comprehensive national framework. Quality assurance arrangements are evolving, yet institutional independence requires strengthening, and quality assurance should place greater weight on the employment outcomes of graduates.
- **Employment and labour market developments**: The employment rate of people of working age is moderate, and unemployment is relatively low. However, many jobs offer low productivity and weak social protection, which affects their quality and inclusiveness. A substantial share of employment is concentrated in sectors with lower value added, and vulnerable forms of work are common. A significant number of young people are neither in employment nor in education or training, which raises concerns about their long-term prospects. Participation in formal continuing vocational training is low compared to the size of the workforce. In response, active labour market programmes have expanded significantly, providing job search support, vocational training, public works and self-employment schemes. These initiatives have broadened participation, especially among unemployed individuals. At the same time, employer involvement in structured skills development varies. Large enterprises often organise in-house training, while smaller firms have fewer resources to invest in upgrading skills. As a result, better alignment between vocational education and labour market demand remains a central policy issue.
- **Trends in access, retention, completion**:

  Although access to VET is formally open, vocational pathways attract fewer school leavers than academic programmes. Participation has increased, but VET remains a secondary choice for many young people. Enrolment is gender-segmented by field, although completion rates are similar for women and men. Financial support helps disadvantaged learners enter programmes, and most students complete their studies. Modular structures support progression, but uneven student services and infrastructure affect learning conditions. Adult participation remains low, particularly among employed adults, due in part to required financial contributions.
- **Quality and relevance of learning**: Vocational education standards include a broad set of key competences, such as communication, numeracy, digital skills and personal development.

However, many learners enter vocational programmes with weak foundational skills acquired during compulsory schooling, which affects their ability to benefit fully from training. Adult literacy is high, yet more advanced digital skills are less common among adults in working age. Work-based learning is expanding but still involves only a small proportion of learners, and most programmes rely mainly on classroom-based instruction. As a result, graduates do not always gain sufficient hands-on experience before entering the labour market. Continuing vocational programmes linked to employment services are more closely connected to employer demand. Even with curriculum reforms and stronger consultation with industry, vocational qualifications do not consistently signal job readiness. Expanding practical training and improving quality across institutions are therefore key priorities.

- **System management and organisation**: Public funding for vocational education has increased in nominal terms, alongside the introduction of new financing mechanisms. However, resources remain constrained, and provision depends predominantly on public funding. The quality of infrastructure and equipment for teaching and learning varies widely across providers and, in many cases, does not adequately support modern training needs. Staffing levels are sufficient in numerical terms, yet structural weaknesses affect quality. As to the availability and quality of evidence, data systems are being upgraded, but systematic graduate tracking and regular labour market outcome surveys are largely absent. Quality assurance arrangements exist, though greater institutional independence and a stronger focus on improvement instead of compliance are needed. International cooperation is still very limited in scope.

1. COUNTRY PROFILE

Table 1.1 Demographic and socio-economic context: Key indicators, Azerbaijan

Indicator	Value	Year	Source
Total population (in thousands)	10154.0	2023	UN DESA, World Bank
Relative size of youth population (%)	19.1	2023	UN DESA
Population growth rate	0.1	2023	World Bank, UN DESA
Dependency ratio	43.6	2023	World Bank, UN DESA
Immigrant stock as % of total population	M.D.		UN DESA
Emigrant stock as % of total population	7.8	2024	UN DESA
GDP growth rate	1.1	2023	World Bank
GDP per capita (PPP)	23597.8	2023	World Bank
Migrant remittance inflows (USD m) as % of GDP	2.6	2023	World Bank
Inflation rate	2.2	2024	IMF
Poverty headcount ratio ($8.30/day)	35.9	2005	World Bank
Gini coefficient (Income inequality)	M.D.	M.D.	World Bank
Human development index (HDI)	0.789	2023	UNDP, World Bank

Source: ETF KIESE database

1.1 Demography

The population of Azerbaijan was stagnating around 10.2 million in 2023, with an annual growth rate of only 0.1% (Table 1.1). Young people (aged 15-24) accounted for 19.1% of the total population, a share that is modest in international comparison but broadly similar to that of neighbouring countries.

The dependency ratio is 43.6, which means that most people in Azerbaijan are of working age, while the shares of children and older adults who depend on them for support remain moderate. Data on immigration are not available, but the emigrant stock, estimated at around 7-8% of the total population in 2024, is average in comparison with other ETF partner countries (UN DESA, 2024).

1.2 Economy

In 2023, GDP growth in Azerbaijan stagnated at 1.1% after several years of dynamic expansion. The slowdown was due to a contraction in oil production and weak, albeit steadily improving performance in non-oil sectors, which together curbed overall economic activity (World Bank, 2024).

GDP per capita amounted to USD PPP 23 597.80. This is a high level in regional comparison and reflects the significant income generated by hydrocarbon exports, which account for more than 40% of total GDP and over 90% of export revenues (EBRD, 2024). However, as capital-intensive industries such as oil and gas generate high output but relatively few jobs, the gains from national income are not evenly distributed across the wider population, as discussed in the next section (Galt & Taggart, 2024).

Migrant remittances accounted for 2.6% of GDP, which represents a moderate share in regional comparison. At the same time, the rate of inflation rate was at 2.2% in 2024, down from over 8% in 2023. The upward pressure on prices was due mainly to external factors such as increased global food and energy prices and strong domestic demand supported by rising wages and social transfers (Asian Development Bank, 2024; EBRD, 2024).

1.3 Income and living standards

This section describes the economic well-being and living standards of the population in terms of poverty levels, income distribution and overall human development (Table 1.1).

In 2005, approximately 36% of Azerbaijan's population were living below the USD 8.30 per day poverty line (Table 1.1)[3]. This figure reflected widespread poverty during the years of oil boom, when economic growth had begun to accelerate but was still far from inclusive. Since then, living standards have improved drastically. In Azerbaijan, 5.2% of the population lives below the national poverty line in 2023, based on a poverty calculation by the Asian Development Bank (ADB)[4]. Analysis by the ADB and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) confirm that the country experienced a sharp reduction in inequality during the 2000s and early 2010s, as the benefits of oil revenues translated into large-scale social transfers and wage increases (ADB, 2018; UNDP, 2022). Oil revenues enabled substantial public spending on pensions, social aid and public sector salaries, which improved the living standards of lower-income groups and contributed to pro-poor growth (UNDP, 2022).

Still, structural inequalities remain, particularly between urban and rural regions and between oil-related and non-oil-related sectors (World Bank, 2023 There are structural inequalities, particularly between urban and rural areas and between oil-related and other sectors of the economy (World Bank, 2023). However, these differences are not always fully visible in official statistics, which may underestimate gaps in household income caused by higher wages in the oil industry and the concentration of better-paid jobs in Baku).

Despite these disparities, Azerbaijan's overall level of human development remains relatively high. In 2023, the country's Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.789, placing it in the high human development category.

1.4 Recent developments

Political and electoral developments. In September 2024, Azerbaijan held parliamentary elections – the first to take place across the entire national territory since the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), led by President Ilham Aliyev, retained a parliamentary majority with 68 out of 125 seats, a slight decrease from 70 in 2020. Ten other parties, including the opposition Republican Alternative Party, each secured between one and three seats, while 44 independents – many reportedly aligned with the president – entered parliament. Voter turnout declined to 37.3% of 6.4 million registered voters, compared to 46.8% in 2020, reflecting persistent opposition boycotts and limited political pluralism[5].

Conflict and Nagorno-Karabakh. The formal end of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in September 2022 marked a turning point for Azerbaijan's domestic and regional agenda. Since then, the government has prioritised reconstruction and the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) under the 'First State Programme on the Great Return'[6]. In August 2025, a landmark peace agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia at the White House, with international mediation. This historic accord establishes a framework for normalising relations and regional stability, the first such agreement since the early 1990s[7].

Climate and energy transition. Azerbaijan's international standing was further elevated by hosting COP29 in November 2024[8]. The government announced plans to mobilise USD 2 billion in renewable

[3] Last available data.
[4] Azerbaijan: Poverty | Asian Development Bank.
[5] Election results | Azerbaijan | IPU Parline: global data on national parliaments.
[6] The Great Return » AZERBAIJAN » Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic.
[7] Trump's Armenia-Azerbaijan agreement advanced peace, but Washington can't let up now – Atlantic Council; U.S. secures strategic transit corridor in Armenia-Azerbaijan peace deal | Reuters; Azerbaijan and Armenia sign peace deal at White House that creates a 'Trump Route' in region | Europe | The Guardian.
[8] COP29 Presidency Launches Initiatives to Focus Global Attention and Accelerate Climate Action.

energy investment by 2027, focusing on wind and solar power, and advanced the Black Sea interconnector project to link its electricity grid with Europe. These initiatives are integral to Azerbaijan's ambition to become a regional green energy hub and to diversify its economy away from hydrocarbons[9].

Employment and skills policies. Amendments to the Employment Law in July 2024 introduced targeted measures for vulnerable groups and expanded training for green economy skills. In June 2025, the 2025-2030 Action Plan for vocational training in the penitentiary system was launched by Presidential Decree, aiming to strengthen rehabilitation and post-release employment opportunities. These reforms reflect a broader policy shift towards inclusive labour markets and skills for the green transition[10].

With the cessation of hostilities in 2022, the scale of displacement became fully apparent; by mid-2024, approximately 657 000 internally displaced persons were registered, highlighting the enduring legacy of the conflict. Most ethnic Armenian residents had left Nagorno-Karabakh by late 2023. The government's 'First State Programme on the Great Return' aims to resettle IDPs across nearly 280 000 hectares and rebuild social infrastructure by 2026[11]. This process places mounting demands on housing, education, healthcare and employment systems, especially in the liberated territories (ETF, 2024).

The end of the conflict has unlocked substantial fiscal and economic opportunities for Azerbaijan. According to a 2018 study by Berlin Economics (Berlin Economics, 2018) a full resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could enable Azerbaijan to reduce conflict-related expenditures by up to 2.4% of GDP annually, including savings on military spending and support for displaced people. Such fiscal savings can create space for increased investment in socially productive sectors such as education, health and skills development.

The reconstruction of liberated territories is generating new demand for skills, particularly in construction, logistics, public administration and green energy. The government has prioritised the development of vocational education and training (VET) programmes tailored to the needs of the reconstruction effort and the green transition. For example, specific training programmes for renewable energy projects and targeted upskilling of local populations have been launched in the Karabakh and East Zangezur regions, now designated as 'green energy' zones (ETF, 2024). These initiatives are designed not only to support local recovery but also to modernise Azerbaijan's national skills base and align it with emerging sectors.

The peace agreement with Armenia in August 2025[12] is expected to further stabilise the region, facilitate cross-border trade and support the reintegration of displaced populations. However, the scale of reconstruction and the need for social cohesion present ongoing challenges for Azerbaijan's education, training and employment systems.

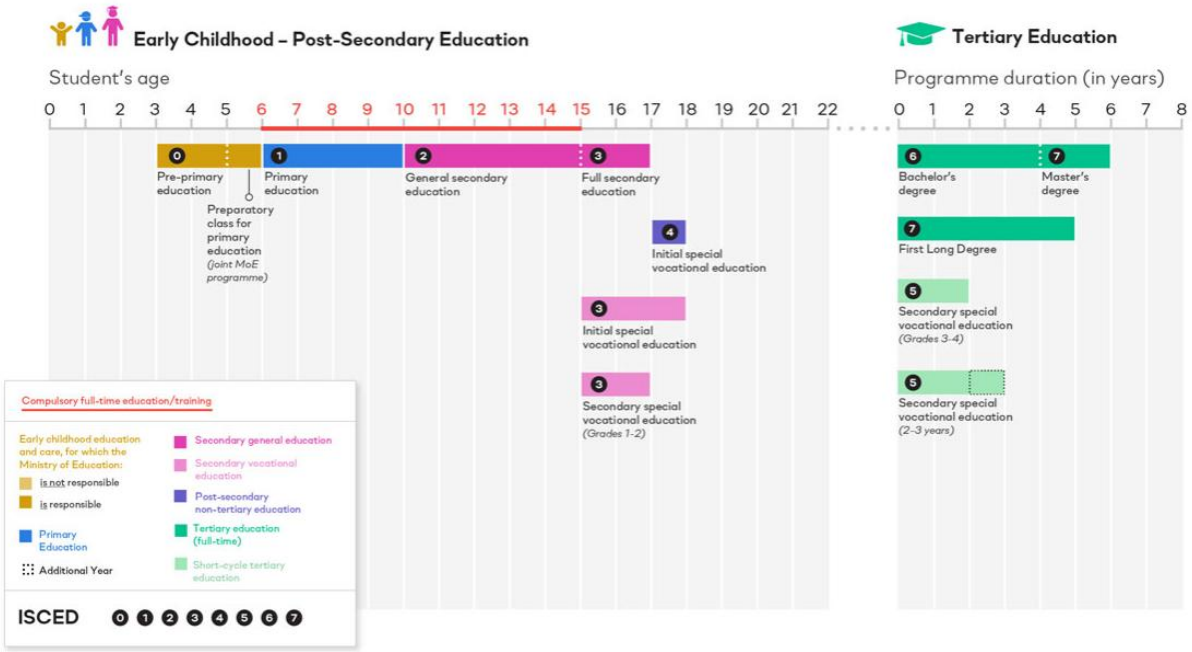
[9] Azerbaijan unveils $2.7 billion green energy plan to power Europe | News.az; Azerbaijan hoping to cut emissions with $2 bln green energy investment | Reuters.
[10] Azerbaijani President approves Action Plan to improve quality of vocational education in penitentiary institutions.
[11] Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict » AZERBAIJAN » Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic; The Great Return » AZERBAIJAN » Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic; The Great Return » AZERBAIJAN » Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic.
[12] Armenia/Azerbaijan: Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the initialling of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Treaty – Consilium.

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING: POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 Structure and levels of education, including VET

This section provides a brief description of how the education system is organised across different levels, including pre-primary, primary, secondary (distinguishing between general and vocational tracks), tertiary and adult learning. It uses the UNESCO ISCED classification and is based on monitoring information collected through the Torino Process expert survey[13].

Figure 2.1 Structure of the education system: Azerbaijan (2025)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2021).

Formal education

In Azerbaijan, education can begin with early childhood education and care (ISCED 0) for children from the age of one. Provision is ensured through nurseries and kindergartens operated by both public and private providers. At the age of five, children may attend one year of preparatory classes to ease their transition into school. Attendance at either early childhood education or preparatory classes is not a prerequisite for entering primary education.

Compulsory education in Azerbaijan extends over nine years and covers primary (Grades 1-4) and general secondary education (Grades 5-9). Primary education (ISCED 1) begins at the age of six. It focuses on the acquisition of basic literacy, numeracy and communication skills and marks the start of formal schooling.

General secondary education (ISCED 2) lasts five years (grades 5-9). It offers a broad curriculum in languages, mathematics, sciences and social studies. At the end of Grade 9, students take a centralised graduation examination in the mother tongue, a foreign language and mathematics. Those studying in foreign languages also take an Azerbaijani language exam. Successful graduates receive

[13] The full questionnaire can be found here: https://bit.ly/418jfwC. In this document, the survey may be referred to interchangeably as the 'monitoring survey', 'expert survey' or 'Torino Process monitoring survey.'

a school-leaving certificate, which allows them either to enter the labour market from the age of 15 or to continue their education in complete secondary, vocational or secondary-specialised institutions.

Complete secondary education (ISCED 3) lasts two years (grades 10-11). It builds on the general curriculum and provides broader academic preparation for tertiary education or vocational pathways. Students sit centralised graduation examinations in the same subjects as in grade 9 and obtain a maturity certificate. This certificate entitles them to compete in the national entrance examination for tertiary education or to enter the workforce.

General and complete secondary education are delivered in several types of institutions: general secondary schools (grades 1-9), full secondary schools (grades 1-11), gymnasiums with a humanities orientation, and lyceums for gifted students offering a more specialised curriculum.

Vocational education and training provides an alternative to the academic route and covers ISCED levels 3 to 5. It is delivered by vocational schools, vocational lyceums and vocational education centres, which together offer initial and higher vocational programmes. Learners entering VET after grade 9 study for one to four years, depending on the qualification level. Those completing both vocational and general education receive a vocational diploma together with the maturity certificate. The vocational diploma provides access to employment, while the maturity certificate allows participation in centralised entrance examinations for higher or secondary-specialised education.

Higher vocational education (ISCED 5) usually lasts four years and leads to the award of a sub-bachelor qualification. Secondary-specialised education, also classified at ISCED level 5, combines specialised training with elements of complete secondary education and lasts between two and four years for students entering after grade 9.

Higher education in Azerbaijan follows a three-cycle structure consistent with the Bologna Process. The first cycle comprises Bachelor's programmes (ISCED 6) lasting four years, the second cycle leads to a Master's degree (ISCED 7) after two years of study, and medical education follows an integrated four- to six-year programme at ISCED level 7, followed by residency training.

Adult learning

Adults in Azerbaijan have access to a wide range of educational opportunities within and beyond the formal system. Adults may pursue initial or continuing VET (ISCED 3-5), secondary-specialised education (ISCED 5), or higher education (ISCED 6 and above) under the same entry requirements as younger learners. Completion of grade 9 (ISCED 2) or grade 11 (ISCED 3) is required for admission to VET and secondary-specialised education, while access to Bachelor's programmes (ISCED 6) requires a maturity certificate or a secondary-specialised diploma, together with participation in the national entrance competition.

Public funding entitles each citizen to one qualification free of charge; any subsequent studies must be financed privately or by employers. Adults with relevant work experience who enrol in initial VET may complete their studies in a shorter timeframe – typically six months for short-term programmes or up to one year less than standard duration.

The State Employment Agency (SEA) plays a central role in promoting adult learning through active labour market programmes (ALMPs). It operates vocational training centres and cooperates with private VET providers to deliver short-term courses tailored to the needs of jobseekers and unemployed individuals. These courses generally last up to six months and are designed to improve employability and occupational mobility. Within the Self-Employment Support Programme, unemployed citizens receive vocational training combined with guidance, equipment, and tools to support business creation and self-employment.

Participation in SEA programmes is open to all unemployed citizens, including those with special status such as war veterans, internally displaced persons and children of martyr families. For these groups, participation in education and training is provided free of charge, under the same admission requirements as for other learners.

2.2 Strategy and legal framework

Azerbaijan's education and training reforms in 2024-2025 are guided by two overarching policy frameworks: the Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development and the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026. Both place human capital at the centre of national development, recognising education as a driver of inclusive economic growth and resilience[14][15].

General education

The Ministry of Science and Education (MoSE), established in 2022, is responsible for education policy[16]. In 2024, two specialised agencies under MoSE became fully operational: the State Agency for Science and Higher Education and the State Agency for Preschool and General Education, which reinforced sectoral governance and administrative efficiency[17]. In general education, reforms focus on expanding preschool coverage, rolling out competency-based curricula, and improving international learning outcomes.

Key priorities in general education include:

- **Expanding preschool coverage** (target: 50% enrolment of 1- to 5-year-olds by 2026), though actual coverage remains below target - about 35% in 2023 according to UNICEF (UNICEF, 2023);
- **Rolling out competency-based curricula** to improve PISA outcomes, with a nationwide STEAM initiative (400 schools, 25 labs, ~180 000 students) exemplifying the shift towards practical, skills-oriented learning;
- **Improving international learning outcomes** and aligning basic education with labour-market needs.

Despite these reforms, there are challenges, such as disparities in access, teacher shortages, and the need for more robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (ETF, 2024).

Vocational education

VET reform continues to be anchored in the Strategic Roadmap for the Development of VET 2016-25, adopted in 2016, and the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026, with goals to modernise infrastructure, diversify programmes and strengthen labour market links (ETF, 2025)[18]. The legal foundation is the 2018 Vocational Professional Education Law (No 1071-VQ of 24 April 2018, amended in May 2024) (Ministry of Justice, 2023), which defines the state's policy and institutional basis for vocational training. This law (and associated regulations) introduced new occupational standards, state VET curricula and admission rules. These reforms are linked to the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (AzQF, 2018), which supports recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Under MoSE, the State Agency for Vocational Education (SAVE), was established by decree in 2016. May 2024, MoSE also created a dedicated VET Department to coordinate the expansion and modernisation of vocational training. Together, MoSE and its agencies design and execute policy (curricula, teacher training, school-building, etc.) across all education levels (ETF, 2024).

Key developments and challenges:

Participation in initial VET is growing (from 16 590 in 2021 to 24 823 in 2024), but remains modest by regional standards. Only 15% of general education graduates opt for VET pathways, and VET is still perceived as less attractive than academic routes. Women represent only 36% of VET enrolments,

[14] Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development | Ageing Policies Database – UNECE.
[15] Accelerated Pathways to SDG Progress: Azerbaijan's National Commitments for Sustainable Development and SDG Advancement | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
[16] About the Ministry |Ministry of Science and Education Republic of Azerbaijan.
[17] Preschool education. |Ministry of Science and Education Republic of Azerbaijan.
[18] Accelerated Pathways to SDG Progress: Azerbaijan's National Commitments for Sustainable Development and SDG Advancement | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

concentrated in service-related fields, while men dominate technical and industrial tracks. Societal stereotypes and family attitudes, especially in rural areas, continue to limit female participation in certain VET specialisations. Over 8% of new VET admissions are from socially vulnerable groups, and more than 3% are recipients of targeted state social assistance. However, there is no direct correlation between socio-economic background and VET access, and no targeted studies have been conducted to explore indirect barriers. Free education is generally limited to one qualification per citizen; employed adults must pay for further training, which reduces participation. The State Employment Agency (SEA) Soffers short-term, labour-market-oriented courses, but coverage is still limited, especially in rural areas (ETF, 2024).

Curriculum and innovation:

In 2024 the government introduced nine new vocational specialties to reflect both technological change and the green transition. Examples include drone maintenance and repair, electric/hybrid vehicle service[19], and renewable energy and irrigation systems (e.g. solar/wind energy technicians, irrigation equipment operators)[20]. These programmes are being rolled out nationally, but the overall responsiveness of VET to labour market needs is still to be improved (Bîrsan, 2024a; ETF, 2024).

Public financing for VET remains critically low (AZN 77.1 million[21] in 2024), with real spending declining due to inflation. The introduction of per-capita financing in continuing VET is a positive step, but only 12% of institutions have adopted this model (ETF, 2024).

Teacher recruitment and retention are hampered by low pay, limited career progression, and a lack of systematic professional development. Many VET teachers lack pedagogical qualifications, and in-service training is carried out on an ad hoc basis. Only 15% of VET providers have adequate infrastructure; the rest face outdated technology and poor facilities. Open educational resources are being used, but further investment is needed.

2.3 Main actors and governance

National level

Azerbaijan's education and training system is governed by a multi-layered institutional structure, with the Ministry of Science and Education (MoSE) at the apex. Institutional responsibilities have been further decentralised with the creation of three specialised agencies:

- State Agency for Science and Higher Education;
- State Agency for Preschool and General Education;
- State Agency for Vocational Education (SAVE).

In May 2024, MoSE also established a dedicated VET Department to coordinate the expansion and modernisation of vocational education and training (VET), aiming to improve alignment with labour market needs.

While these reforms have clarified mandates and improved sectoral focus, they have also introduced new coordination challenges. The proliferation of agencies and departments has sometimes resulted in overlapping responsibilities and fragmented decision-making, particularly between SAVE and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSPP), which oversees adult learning and employment services. The lack of a unified data and monitoring system further complicates evidence-based policy and hinders the evaluation of outcomes across agencies (ETF, 2024).

[19] Azerbaijan to train technicians for maintenance and repair of electric and hybrid cars; Technicians for drone maintenance and repair to be trained in Azerbaijan ABC.AZ.
[20] Azerbaijan introduces new specialties in alternative energy education.
[21] According to the Central Bank of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the official exchange rate on 25 March 2026 was 1 EUR = AZN 1.9498.

International level: donors

Azerbaijan has historically benefited from strong cooperation with international partners, most notably the European Union (EU), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These actors have supported reforms in VET, digital skills, quality assurance and labour market alignment.

Recent developments and diplomatic context:

The EU has been a particularly active partner, financing both policy-level assistance and targeted capacity building. Notable projects include:

Education for Employment (EU Annual Action Programme 2018), implemented with UNDP as 'VET for the Future' [22], which modernises VET institutions and strengthens labour market links; this project stands out as the most comprehensive and impactful intervention in recent years (Bîrsan, 2024b).

Key achievements and lessons learned:

- The project modernised infrastructure and equipment in eight pilot VET centres, established career support and competence centres, and piloted learning factories and income-generating activities. It also developed over 40 new curricula (including for dual and work-based learning), 18 short-term courses, and 78 new training materials, with a strong focus on inclusivity for people with disabilities and gender balance;
- The project institutionalised career guidance services, established seven career support centres, and piloted innovative approaches such as digital learning resources, online courses and the use of virtual reality in VET. The National Skills Council was established to improve coordination between VET providers, the private sector and government;
- The project's dual VET model, which blended theoretical learning with practical internships, was highly valued by both students and employers, improving employability and motivation. However, the evaluation noted that partnerships with the private sector were often ad hoc and not always transparent, with market imbalances sometimes resulting from personal relationships rather than merit-based selection;
- The project's sustainability was enhanced by capacity-building for teachers and managers, the creation of a competence centre for training of trainers, and the development of business plans for income generation. However, challenges remain in ensuring the continued operation of modernised infrastructure, maintaining private sector partnerships, and embedding knowledge-sharing networks among VET providers.

With EU support the following projects have been implemented:

- Support to the Ministry of Science and Education in Further Development of NQF Level 5 Qualifications and Strengthening Education System Resilience (2023-2025)[23], aligning qualifications with labour market needs and enhancing programme quality;
- Strengthening Institutional Capacities of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (2022-2024)[24], which introduced new accreditation standards and strengthened internal/external QA systems;
- Strengthening Capacities for Quality Assurance and Credit Transfer in Vocational Education and Training (2023-2025)[25], which supports the development of a modernised QA framework and a roadmap for implementing a credit system to facilitate student mobility and recognition of learning outcomes.

[22] VET FOR THE FUTURE | United Nations Development Programme.
[23] EU Project page – EU for Azerbaijan.
[24] EU project page – EU NEIGHBOURS east.
[25] eu.eudigitool-project.pdf.

However, this and other major EU-funded projects concluded in 2024, creating a gap in technical assistance and capacity building, especially in areas such as modular curricula, validation of non-formal learning and quality assurance. The official UNDP Azerbaijan website confirms the closure of the VET for the Future project and the end of UNDP operations in Azerbaijan as of 2024[26].

In January 2025, the Government of Azerbaijan suspended cooperation with USAID[27], a longstanding contributor to social and economic development projects supporting youth employment, workforce skills and inclusive growth. Policy disagreements and concerns over political agendas were the reasons behind this decision[28]. This has led to the winding down of several donor-funded initiatives, but the government is actively engaging alternative development partners to mitigate the impact

The conclusion of these and other internationally supported projects[29] reflects a broader trend of political distancing between Azerbaijan and the EU, as the government seeks to diversify its international partnerships and align donor support more closely with national priorities. While the EU remains a key technical and financial partner, the evolving relationship is marked by a shift towards greater self-reliance and selectivity in external engagement. The EU continues to invest in green and digital transformation, but the overall donor landscape is changing.

As reported in the UNDP's project's final evaluation, while the project embedded sustainability considerations from the outset and developed an exit strategy, the end of major donor funding (including the closure of UNDP's mandate in Azerbaijan in May 2025) creates risks for the continuity of reforms, especially in areas such as digital innovation, career guidance and inclusive education (Bîrsan, 2024b).

Other donors, including the UK (through the UK Integrated Security Fund), have supported women's economic empowerment and skills development in conflict-affected regions, with a focus on establishing Women's Resource Centres (WRCs) and integrating psychosocial support, legal aid and vocational training. These projects have been highly relevant and effective in empowering vulnerable women, but their sustainability is threatened by the government's decision to discontinue UNDP's mandate and the lack of a clear transition plan for WRCs (Hassan, 2025). Evaluations[30] highlight the need for improved coordination among donors, the government and the private sector. While the EU and UNDP brought global expertise and credibility, the lack of a centralised knowledge-sharing platform and the ad hoc nature of some partnerships limited the scalability and sustainability of results. The evaluations recommend re-creating networks for sharing best practices and ensuring that future donor interventions are better aligned with national priorities and market needs

The World Bank and ADB remain engaged, particularly in digital skills and green transition, but their interventions are more narrowly focused. In 2025, ADB[31] and the government of Azerbaijan have launched a new partnership Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for Azerbaijan for 2025-2029 aimed at enabling a green and diversified economy and fostering low-carbon connectivity and inclusive development (ADB, 2025). In the same year, the World Bank[32] approved the Azerbaijan Scaling-Up Renewable Energy Project (AZURE) aiming at enabling the country to diversify its energy mix, and meet growing electricity demand through a more resilient and reliable power grid. These projects are a first step towards supporting Azerbaijan's vision of creating a green energy corridor, an initiative to increase renewable energy development and trade in the region.

[26] UNDP ceases operations in Azerbaijan; UNDP ceases its activity in Azerbaijan | Caliber.Az.
[27] Azerbaijan Ends Cooperation With USAID, Citing Political Agendas – Arise News; Azerbaijan Suspends Cooperation With USAID, Foreign Minister Says.
[28] Why Azerbaijan Decided to Cut Ties with USAID – Caspian – Alpine Society
[29] UNDP, UNHCR, and ICRC 'told to leave' Azerbaijan.
[30] Evaluation Report – UNV Categories; Final Evaluation Report 25 April 2025.docx.
[31] ADB Launches New Country Partnership Strategy for Azerbaijan | Asian Development Bank.
[32] Azerbaijan to Strengthen Energy Security and Diversify its Energy Mix.

2.4 Policies and developments

Overview

The period 2024-2025 marks a pivotal phase for Azerbaijan's VET and skills development system, characterised by focusing on implementation, system consolidation and adaptation to a changing donor and geopolitical landscape. While the legal and strategic frameworks for VET are largely in place, the focus has shifted to operationalising reforms, embedding quality assurance, and ensuring that new qualifications and learning pathways are meaningful for learners and employers alike.

Azerbaijan's VET sector is navigating a complex environment:

- **Donor transitions** have left a gap in technical assistance and innovation, with the conclusion of major EU- and UNDP-funded projects and a recalibration of relations with USAID and other partners (see links above);
- **Systemic challenges** - including fragmented governance, limited employer engagement and uneven quality assurance, continue to affect the practical relevance and impact of reforms (ETF, 2024);
- **Emerging priorities** such as digitalisation, green skills and the validation of non-formal and informal learning are increasingly prominent, but require new forms of partnership and capacity building.

Against this backdrop, the following sub-sections examine the state of play in qualifications and recognition, work-based learning, career guidance and other key policy areas – highlighting both progress and persistent bottlenecks, and referencing the latest available evidence from national and international sources.

Qualifications, validation and recognition

Azerbaijan's National Qualifications Framework (AzNQF) [33], adopted in 2018, is an eight-level comprehensive framework covering general, vocational and higher education. The MoSE provides policy direction, while three decentralised agencies implement the framework at sub-sector level. The legal basis and structure are in place, but key procedures, such as systematic placement of all new and existing qualifications and fully articulated quality assurance mechanisms, are still being developed or piloted.

The 'VET for the Future' project made significant progress in operationalising the AzNQF, supporting the development of new curricula aligned with European Qualification Framework (EQF) levels 3, 4 and 5, and piloting the validation of prior learning (VPL) and recognition of non-formal and informal learning (Bîrsan, 2024b).

As of 2025, no qualifications are yet placed in the framework, and the NQF is not yet widely used by learners, employers or providers. The system is in an 'activation stage', with the foundation established but practical uptake and impact still limited (ETF, 2025).

Implementation is supported by a growing inventory of occupational and qualification standards developed with sectoral stakeholders, and by a modular curriculum approach, especially in VET, aimed at strengthening labour market relevance and flexibility (Aleksov *et al.*, 2023).

A key feature is the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), operational since 2020 under the Education Quality Assurance Agency (TKTA)[34]. By early 2025, validation procedures were available in 26 vocational specialities, delivered through four authorised validation centres. Uptake is growing, especially in construction, tourism and services, supported by guidelines for assessors and pilot projects under EU/ETF cooperation.

[33] NQF Azerbaijan.pdf.
[34] site.contentinfo | TKTA.

On credit systems, higher education institutions use the ECTS model. However, a unified national credit transfer and accumulation system is still in preparation. Pilots in VET modularisation and credit transfer are ongoing with EU technical assistance, with the long-term aim of supporting lifelong learning, flexible pathways and recognition of prior learning outcomes (ETF, 2025).

Work-based learning

In Azerbaijan, work-based learning (WBL) within the initial vocational education and training (VET) system has been expanding steadily, in line with government reforms aimed at aligning education with labour market demands. Traditionally, VET in Azerbaijan was predominantly school-based, but a noticeable shift toward integrating practical work experiences in the form of internships, apprenticeships, and dual education pathways has been observed. For the academic years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, participation in dual education programmes increased by 46%, although dual education still accounts for only about 4% of all initial VET students (ETF, 2024).Correspondingly, the number of VET institutions offering dual programmes rose by 25%, and employer participation grew by 20% during this period, reflecting an encouraging but nascent expansion of employer involvement.

Curricular reforms embed WBL elements into new occupational standards, emphasising both technical and transversal competences (e.g., teamwork, digital literacy). Still, coverage remains limited, and sustained employer engagement will be essential for scaling up apprenticeships and practical placements (ETF, 2024).

Career guidance

Career guidance is an integral part of active labour market policies, primarily funded through the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The 2019 regulatory framework guarantees services for students, jobseekers, employees and parents. Delivery is coordinated through:

- the Azerbaijan Public Employment Agency (APEA), which operates 22 regional offices;
- the nationwide Agency for Sustainable and Operational Social Security (DOST) centres[35], providing one-stop access to employment and social services.

Digital tools have become a significant pillar of career guidance provision. The Baku Vocational Education Centre launched the www.avando.az platform, providing comprehensive career information and resources. Additionally, targeted outreach employs multimedia channels, including video tutorials and open-door events, which reached over 39 000 participants in the 2023-2024 period (ETF, 2024).

These initiatives strengthen informed career choices, but further integration with employers and education providers is needed to ensure alignment with labour market demand. The UNDP VET4Future final evaluation highlights that career guidance is not yet systematically embedded in the daily practice of most VET institutions. While several centres now offer career services, these are often limited to basic CV writing or job search support, and are not fully integrated into the broader educational and training experience. Many VET teachers and administrators still lack the training and resources to provide meaningful, ongoing guidance tailored to students' aspirations and labour market realities (Bîrsan, 2024b). With the conclusion of major donor projects, the evaluation underscores the need for national stakeholders to take ownership of guidance reforms, invest in ongoing professional development for career specialists, and ensure that guidance is recognised as a core component of quality VET provision (Bîrsan, 2024b).

Quality assurance[36]

Azerbaijan has progressively established a national quality assurance (QA) framework that closely links qualification design, programme delivery and accreditation with the Azerbaijan National Qualifications Framework (AzNQF, 2018). The system is underpinned by the Law on Education, the revised Rules for Accreditation of Education Institutions (2020) and subsequent ministerial decrees –

[35] DOST centers | DOST Agentliyi.
[36] Please refer to the 2025 ETF report on NQF in Azerbaijan: NQF Azerbaijan.pdf.

most notably, the adoption of accreditation criteria for higher education institutions in 2022 and for VET institutions in 2024. Collectively, these instruments institutionalise a learning-outcomes orientation across all education sectors, in line with European and international best practice.

Key pillars of the QA framework include:

- **Standards development**: Occupational and qualification standards are developed in cooperation with sector committees, which bring together employers, professional associations and state actors. These standards form the foundation for new or revised qualifications, ensuring labour market relevance and alignment with the AzNQF;
- **Validation and approval**: The Ministry of Science and Education (MoSE) holds final approval authority, verifying that all qualifications are consistent with AzNQF descriptors and relevant state standards for general, vocational and higher education;
- **Assessment and accreditation**: QA is exercised through both internal mechanisms (provider-level self-evaluation, curriculum alignment) and external evaluation by the Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA/TKTA). EQAA oversees institutional and programme accreditation, recognition of foreign qualifications, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL).

Sectoral responsibilities are divided among specialised agencies:

- **SAPGE** (State Agency for Preschool and General Education): Develops curricula, sets standards and monitors quality in general education;
- **SAVE** (State Agency for Vocational Education): Ensures VET provision and qualifications are aligned with national standards and supports providers in piloting and refining QA practices;
- **SASHE** (State Agency for Science and Higher Education): Supervises programme approval and QA in higher education.

Providers in VET and higher education are responsible for designing programmes, maintaining internal QA and awarding qualifications in line with accreditation criteria. Programmes and institutions are periodically subject to external evaluation by EQAA and the relevant sector agency. The State Examination Centre conducts centralised student assessments, including school-leaving and higher education entrance exams, reinforcing accountability in general education.

Progress 2023-2024:

- EQAA conducted institutional accreditation of 13 universities and programme accreditation of several master's programmes (e.g. chemistry at Baku State University);
- Pilot accreditations in VET were launched in 2024, marking a step towards sector-wide QA coverage;
- Draft external QA guidelines were prepared for higher education (including templates for self-evaluation reports), while similar guidance for VET and general education is under development.

Despite this progress, QA remains in a consolidation phase. Awareness of the AzNQF among employers and learners is still limited; full referencing of all qualifications in the national register is ongoing; and institutional capacity for internal QA varies. Strengthening the link between QA, qualifications design and labour market signalling is a priority for the coming years.

Ongoing initiatives 2024-2025:

- ETF continues to monitor and support QA and NQF reforms, as reflected in the 2025 Torino Process Questionnaire and Country Fiche;
- The Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (TKTA) has led the development of an action plan to address gaps in the national QA system, with a focus on stakeholder involvement and alignment with European standards (TKTA, 2024);

- Azerbaijan remains a member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)[37] and participates in the ENQA network, though recent political distancing from the EU has affected some projects and cooperation mechanisms.

Centres of excellence

Centres of Excellence (CoEs) are emerging as a strategic tool for capacity building in high-priority sectors. Notable examples include:

- the International Centre of Excellence and Training for Mine Action, established by Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) with EU, UNDP and bilateral support. It provides training on de-mining, risk management and victim assistance, with a focus on operational innovation and gender equality. The EU allocated an additional EUR 10 million (2024-2025) to strengthen its activities[38, 39];
- cooperation with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to establish a centre on aerospace and defence technologies, designed to serve as a regional hub for advanced training and R&D[40].

These centres form part of a broader government initiative to modernise vocational and technical education infrastructure, especially in liberated and developing regions, and strengthen links with the private sector and international donors. Through these strategic institutions, Azerbaijan aims to elevate the quality and relevance of its vocational education, contribute to social and economic stability, and promote sustainable development in line with national priorities and international commitments[41]. These initiatives underscore Azerbaijan's proactive approach to consolidating specialised competencies, expanding training capacities, and leveraging partnerships to develop Centres of Excellence that respond to both national needs and global challenges.

Digital education and skills

Azerbaijan has made significant progress in expanding digital infrastructure and skills across its education system. By the 2023-2024 academic year, over 4 305 schools and colleges were connected to the Azerbaijan Education Network (ATN). A 2022 presidential decree funded nationwide fibre-optic connections, and by 2024, approximately 1 824 schools were on the fibre network. The Ministry's e-portal and video portal now host over 19 500 curricular digital resources for students and teachers (ETF, 2024; ITU, 2024).

The government and partners have launched multiple programmes across education levels:

- The Digital Skills Project, a public-private initiative (with Algoritmika) to teach coding and algorithmic thinking in schools. As of 2024 it covered 532 schools and 410 000 students (ETF, 2024); by 2025, it had expanded to 762 schools and 510 000 students, training ca. 6 000 teachers. Dedicated informatics classes (5 h/week) are now offered in selected schools. This builds on the 2017–2018 'Digital Skills' pilot to modernise computer science teaching[42]. https://edu.gov.az/en/programmes/reqemsal-bacariqlar_16387.
- Present in hundreds of secondary schools and dedicated STEAM centres, engaging approximately 180 000 students in integrated science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics education.

[37] Azerbaijan – Country – EQAR.
38 Mine action in Azerbaijan: EU helps to establish Centre of Excellence – EU NEIGHBOURS east; UNDP and ANAMA signed the Statement of Intent on cooperation in establishment of the International Centre of Excellence and Training for Mine Action in Azerbaijan | United Nations Development Programme; Azerbaijan to open Int'l Centre of Excellence and Training for Mine Action.
[39] Mine action in Azerbaijan: EU helps to establish Centre of Excellence – EU NEIGHBOURS east.
[40] Azerbaijan to establish Center of Excellence with support from Israel Aerospace Industries | Report.az.
[41] UNDP and ANAMA signed the Statement of Intent on cooperation in establishment of the International Centre of Excellence and Training for Mine Action in Azerbaijan | United Nations Development Programme.
[42] "The Digital Skills" project |Ministry of Science and Education Republic of Azerbaijan.

STEAM Azerbaijan runs project-based activities (robotics, drones, satellite, alternative energy labs) and national competitions (e.g., ROV Challenge, drone racing) (ETF, 2024)[43];

- The 4IR Academy (Coursera partnership), a nationwide lifelong learning programme by the Ministry of Economy (C4IR) and Ministry of Education, delivered via Coursera. It offers 800+ free online courses in AI, big data, blockchain, cloud, programming, etc. In its first year ca.10 000 learners enrolled and earned over 4 000 certificates[44], with women making up over half of participants[45]. The programme supports rural access via offline mobile apps and was recognised for 'AI innovation' at Coursera Connect 2024[46];
- The EU4Digital Initiative continues to play a significant role in supporting digital skills development in Azerbaijan. In 2025, the EU4Digital Academy launched a free Azerbaijani-language 'Cybersecurity' course, designed for citizens and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This self-paced, five-hour online training covers core cybersecurity principles and foundational skills, and is suitable for non-experts seeking to build their digital awareness. Upon completion, participants receive an EU-aligned micro-credential (badge) that can be displayed on CVs or social media as proof of their new skills[47]. The EU4Digital Initiative's efforts are part of a broader EU commitment to harmonise digital markets, promote digital literacy and support economic growth in Azerbaijan. By providing accessible, high-quality online learning opportunities, EU4Digital helps bridge digital skills gaps and supports the country's ongoing digital transformation[48].

Azerbaijan has made significant progress in expanding digital skills and ICT training for educators, as part of its broader digital transformation agenda. The country's rapid digitalisation has increased demand for employees and teachers with specialised digital skills. National assessments and international reviews highlight that, while infrastructure and access have improved, there is a continuing need for targeted interventions to enhance digital literacy and ICT competence among both the general population and educators (ITU, 2024).

Azerbaijan's Digital Education Concept (2018) and strategic roadmaps mandate teacher training in ICT. Between 2013-2021 the Ministry of Education trained over 81 500 teachers in ICT usage and digital pedagogy. During the COVID lockdown, the Virtual School project delivered 194 webinars attended by approximately 110 000 teachers (2020)[49].

Every year the Ministry assesses training needs and provides new packages (interactive whiteboards, e-textbooks, online platforms) to tens of thousands of teachers. The EU-funded SELFIE tool (a digital readiness self-assessment) has been introduced in vocational and general schools with ETF support. New postgraduate training courses in ICT education are being developed through partnership with Turkey and international donors. Teacher professional standards now include e-learning methods and digital content creation (ETF, 2024).

Green transition

Environmental education and green skills are being integrated across Azerbaijan's education system, reflecting the government's focus on climate and sustainability. In 2024 Azerbaijan hosted COP29, underscoring its commitment to climate action. At COP29, Azerbaijan reaffirmed ambitious targets, including a 40% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 and 30% renewable energy share by 2030[50]. The 2022-2026 Socio-Economic Development Strategy emphasises sustainable development and new curricula modules on climate change and renewable energy have been developed in vocational and technical education (CAREC, 2025b). Pilot modules in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and circular economy are being introduced, and education for sustainable development is now

[43] Azerbaijan | Technology | Education Profiles.
[44] 4cu senaye inqilabi.
[45] Government Spotlight: Azerbaijan's 4IR Academy Bridges the Digital Skills Gap | Coursera.
[46] 4cu senaye inqilabi.
[47] Azerbaijani 'Cybersecurity' course now available from EU4Digital Academy – EU NEIGHBOURS east.
[48] Home – EU for Azerbaijan.
[49] Azerbaijan | Technology | Education Profiles.
[50] Azerbaijan's energy context – Implementing a Long-Term Energy Policy Planning Process for Azerbaijan: A Roadmap – Analysis – IEA.

embedded in national strategy. Green competencies are being incorporated into VET programmes to equip students with skills for the low-carbon economy (CAREC, 2025b)[51].

The liberated Karabakh and East Zangezur regions have been designated 'green energy' zones. Specific training programmes for renewable energy projects have been launched in these zones, with about 5 000 workers to be re-skilled/upskilled in green skills over the next two years. VET institutions have also begun offering new renewable-energy courses (e.g. solar/wind installation) to support reconstruction and development of these territories (CAREC, 2025b).

The Ministry of Labour's vocational training centres now offer courses on green and sustainable technologies for jobseekers, aiming to build a workforce for emerging green sectors[52] .These short-term courses target areas such as energy efficiency, solar installation and eco-friendly construction, aligning training with industry demand.

Adult learning

Adult learning in Azerbaijan is at a pivotal stage, shaped by the country's broader economic transformation, demographic trends, and the imperative to build a resilient, future-ready workforce. The government's policy direction, as articulated in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 and the National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development 2030, places lifelong learning and upskilling at the centre of national development efforts (ETF, 2024).

Recent years have seen a marked increase in adult participation in continuing vocational education and training (VET). According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population (MLSPP), the number of adults enrolled in continuing VET programmes rose from 9 500 in 2023 to 15 571 in 2024, reflecting a deliberate policy shift towards active labour market policies (ALMPs) and expanded targets for adult training. The SEA is the principal public provider, operating training centres in Baku, Ganja, Goychay and Barda, with plans to expand to ten centres nationwide. In addition, contracted private providers deliver training in other regions, and unemployed individuals who travel for training are eligible for transportation cost reimbursement (ETF, 2024).

Despite these advances, significant disparities persist. Gender gaps are particularly pronounced: in 2023, women accounted for only 5% of participants in continuing VET and 32% in the Employment Support Programme, despite legal prohibitions on gender-based discrimination (ETF, 2024). Fields such as baking, tailoring and hairdressing attract more women, while technical and industrial fields remain male-dominated. Regional disparities also remain, with rural areas facing more limited access to adult learning opportunities.

Medium and large enterprises play a crucial role in non-formal adult learning, often providing structured internal courses, on-the-job learning and mentoring. Notable companies such as SOCAR, AzerSun and Holcim have established their own VET centres or in-house training facilities, offering both initial and continuing VET for employees. However, employer support for external courses is less common, partly due to the lack of tax incentives, and micro- and small enterprises typically lack the resources to offer such programmes.

Despite progress, overall participation in adult learning remains low by international standards. Labour Force Survey data indicate that participation in training or lifelong learning among adults aged 25-64 is still well below the EU average. Free continuing VET is generally available only to the unemployed; employed adults must pay for further training, which remains a significant barrier to participation. Data and monitoring remain a challenge, with limited availability of disaggregated data on adult learning, hindering effective policy targeting and evaluation (ETF, 2024).

[51] The transition to a green economy also highlights the development of workforce skills.
[52] The transition to a green economy also highlights the development of workforce skills.

3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT: POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

3.1 Strategy and legal framework

Azerbaijan's labour market and employment policy for 2024-2025 is defined by the dual imperatives of post-conflict reconstruction and structural transformation towards a more diversified, resilient and inclusive economy. The overarching framework remains the Employment Strategy 2019-2030 which foster a more inclusive, productive and resilient labour market, aligned with the country's broader socio-economic transformation goals.

The Employment Strategy is embedded within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Decent Work Country Programme and national plans such as the Strategic Road Map for the National Economy and Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development. Its overarching aims include reducing the NEET rate among youth to 15%, increasing formal employment in the non-agricultural sector to 80% and expanding access to vocational training. These targets reflect a policy focus on both quantitative and qualitative improvements in employment outcomes, with a particular emphasis on youth, women and vulnerable groups[53].

The strategy is underpinned by a robust legal architecture that governs employment relations, labour market regulation and social protection. Recent amendments to the Law on Employment (July 2024) are also targeting employment programmes funded through unemployment insurance, aimed at enhancing inclusion for socially vulnerable groups. These programmes are implemented via competitive employer selection and public accountability mechanisms (ETF, 2024).

The Labour Code (1999) and related laws provide the framework for employment contracts, workers' rights, workplace safety and social protection mechanisms. Notably, legislation promoting gender equality in employment has been gradually strengthened, including the removal of occupational restrictions for women in sectors such as transportation and railways.[54]

In February 2020, an Action Plan for 2020-2025[55] was approved to operationalise the strategy through concrete actions across five thematic blocks: regulatory and institutional reform; labour market monitoring and forecasting; workforce skills development; labour standards improvement; and labour migration and permit procedures.

The National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs, established in 2020, plays a crucial role in evidence-based policy development. Its responsibilities include defining strategic employment areas, forecasting demand for key occupations and competencies, conducting surveys and proposing actions to reduce informal employment. The Observatory also analyses graduate labour market adaptation and develops proposals for improving relevant fields (ETF, 2024).

3.2 Main actors and governance

National level

Employment policy development and implementation is led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population (MLSPP), supported by the Azerbaijan Public Employment Agency (APEA), which manages public employment services nationally through 22 regional offices. The MLSPP coordinates active labour market policies (ALMPs), unemployment insurance and social protection programmes.

[53] azerbaijan_national_employment_policy_2018.pdf.
[54] https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099101624174034921/pdf/P179715-053cf272-5f35-47e0-8828-75e5f0dd1aee.pdf.
[55] Action Plan for Employment Strategy_en.docx.

Furthermore, the National Observatory on Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs, established in 2020, plays a critical role in evidence-based policy making. It conducts labour market forecasting, monitors informal employment, analyses skills demand and supports policy evaluation aligned with national strategic goals (ETF, 2024).

DOST centres (Agency for Sustainable and Operational Social Security) operate as one-stop shops for integrated employment and social services, facilitating efficient citizen access and administrative coordination (ETF, 2024).

International level

Azerbaijan's labour market and employment reforms receive significant, though evolving, support from international donors and multilateral institutions. The country has historically engaged with a range of development partners including the European Union (EU), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and multilateral development banks. However, geopolitical considerations have affected these relationships recently (OECD, 2025).

The European Union remains a key partner, providing technical assistance and funding programmes to modernise employment services, strengthen active labour market policies, support skills development aligned with labour market demands and improve social protection systems. EU programmes focus on digitalisation of employment services and inclusive labour market participation, particularly targeting youth, women and vulnerable groups[56].

USAID was a longstanding contributor to social and economic development projects supporting youth employment, workforce skills and inclusive growth. However, in January 2025, the Government of Azerbaijan suspended cooperation with USAID, citing policy disagreements, temporarily disrupting some aid flows and project implementation. The suspension has introduced uncertainty in donor-funded employment programmes but Azerbaijan is actively engaging alternative development partners to mitigate this impact[57].

The OPEC Fund for International Development supports Azerbaijan's economic resilience and social development through various development initiatives, particularly in renewable energy and sustainable growth.

Besides bilateral aid, Azerbaijan plays an active role in regional partnerships such as the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Programme, which fosters cooperation on skills development, trade and sustainable development strategies (CAREC, 2025a).

Despite fluctuations in bilateral aid flows, Azerbaijan received approximately USD 400 million in official foreign assistance in 2023, marking a decline compared to previous years. However, **towards the end of 2024, the country began withdrawing from several international cooperation frameworks – particularly those involving the EU and USAID – reflecting a shift in its external engagement model**. In this evolving context, the government continues to express commitment to strengthening labour market governance and policy frameworks, increasingly relying on domestically driven reforms while maintaining selective international partnerships.[58].

To strengthen energy and economic diversification, micro, small and medium-sized enterprise(s) empower (MSMEs) and foster their competitiveness and growth, Azerbaijan also utilises support from development finance institutions, including the World Bank[59] and European Investment Bank[60], which fund projects fostering private sector growth and employment opportunities in non-oil-related sectors.

[56] Azerbaijan – European Commission.
[57] Azerbaijan suspends cooperation with USAID, foreign minister says | Reuters.
[58] Azerbaijan economic indicators | TheGlobalEconomy.com.
[59] Azerbaijan to Strengthen Energy Security and Diversify its Energy Mix.
[60] EBRD lends up to US$10 million to Bank Respublika in Azerbaijan – EU NEIGHBOURS east.

3.3 Policies and developments

Overview

Azerbaijan has embarked on significant labour market reforms aimed at fostering formal employment, diversifying job opportunities and promoting inclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Policy initiatives in Azerbaijan have increasingly focused on formalising labour, advancing social dialogue and supporting inclusive employment growth amid ambitious reconstruction efforts and demographic shifts.

Between 2019 and 2025, over 556 000 new labour contracts were registered, a 42% rise, with 90% of growth occurring in the private, non-oil sector. Infrastructure-led reconstruction, especially in the liberated Karabakh area, helped catalyse demand for labour. Administrative reforms in tax and contract digitisation (e.g. Digital Radar and e-document systems) contributed to the formalisation of work arrangements and improved transparency in the labour market[61].

The Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Affairs, together with the ILO, has initiated a self-assessment process to enhance institutional capacity. A strategic plan to reinforce effective policy participation by employer and worker representatives is slated for implementation by the end of 2025[62].

Legal changes in early 2025 eliminated occupational barriers for women in roles traditionally closed to them, such as bus drivers and railway engineers. These reforms were showcased by both the World Bank and IMF as standout examples of inclusive labour-market modernisation[63].

In June 2024, Azerbaijan established the Highly Qualified Migrant Programme by Presidential Decree No 156, aimed at attracting foreign professionals whose expertise aligns with the country's socioeconomic goals[64]. In April 2025, the government introduced an enhanced Highly Qualified Migrant status, featuring a points-based system with a five-year renewable work permit exemption, broader sector coverage and expedited application processing. The initiative grants work-role exemptions in areas matching applicants' expertise, and simplifies residence and permanent permit requirements[65][66].

Youth Guarantee

Azerbaijan does not operate a nationally branded Youth Guarantee scheme as defined by the European Commission. However, several initiatives reflect its core principles, namely, ensuring that young people receive timely offers of employment, education, training or apprenticeships after leaving school or becoming unemployed.

The most prominent initiative is the EU4Youth Phase III Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship programme[67], which run until July 2025. It was implemented by the Central Project Management Agency (CPVA) on behalf of the European Commission and co-financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. The programme targets Eastern Partnership countries, including Azerbaijan.

[61] Labor market reforms lead to significant growth in employment contracts and social support.
[62] Azerbaijan moves toward strengthened social dialogue with ILO support | International Labour Organization.
[63] Reforms related to women's labour in Azerbaijan were highlighted as a model example at the Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund; Azerbaijan's gender employment reforms: model for inclusive economic growth.
[64] Azerbaijan – Prague Process.
[65] Regulations and Criteria for Assessing a Person as a Highly Skilled Migrant – Unified Tax & Technology Businesses.
[66] Azerbaijan: 'Highly Qualified' Work Permit Exemption Expanded | Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy LLP.
[67] Official Invitation Letter Youth Entrepreneurship_Azerbaijan.pdf.

Key objectives of the programme in Azerbaijan include:

- Fostering digital, green, entrepreneurial and career management skills among youth;
- Supporting validation of skills acquired through non-formal learning, with emphasis on recognising competencies outside traditional education;
- Building structural capacities of institutions for mapping, outreach, and delivery of employment, education and training offers – effectively piloting Youth Guarantee-type schemes;
- Developing cross-sector partnerships between public, private and non-governmental actors to support youth employability, especially for disadvantaged groups.

In parallel, the Azerbaijani government has introduced a range of supportive measures for young entrepreneurs. According to Dayday.az, these include:

- tax incentives for start-ups;
- startup certification schemes to facilitate access to funding and legal recognition;
- incubation programmes offering mentoring, workspace and technical support;
- international exposure opportunities, helping young entrepreneurs connect with global markets and networks.

The impact of these efforts was highlighted in the EU4Youth programme's five-year review, which noted growing youth interest in citizenship education, community engagement and participation in decision-making. The programme supported[68]:

- direct training and mentoring;
- matching employers with jobseekers;
- grants for youth-led businesses;
- policy development to improve skills and job creation;
- tailoring education to market needs;
- local initiatives for vulnerable youth.

Despite regional challenges, including the conflict with Armenia, the impact of the war in Ukraine, and the post-COVID recovery, EU4Youth has made a measurable contribution to youth empowerment in Azerbaijan. These combined efforts represent a functional equivalent of a Youth Guarantee, demonstrating Azerbaijan's growing commitment to youth inclusion, employability and entrepreneurship.

3.4 Active labour market programmes (ALMPs)

Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) play a crucial role in Azerbaijan's inclusive employment strategy. The Azerbaijan Public Employment Agency (APEA) administers a range of ALMPs that include vocational training, entrepreneurship support, temporary employment schemes and wage subsidies. These programmes primarily target registered jobseekers and the unemployed, with a growing focus on supporting women, youth and persons with disabilities.

During the period from 2021 to 2023, participation in active labour market programmes (ALMPs) in Azerbaijan showed a steady increase, as reflected in administrative data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its SEA, which report a growing number of beneficiaries of employment services, vocational training and self-employment

[68] New avenues to shape youth policy in Azerbaijan as EU4Youth programme concludes latest five-year cycle – EU NEIGHBOURS east.

schemes. However, overall coverage remains limited relative to the total number of unemployed and jobseekers. The MLSPP is leading the digital transformation of ALMP delivery, using platforms such as the e-Social portal (e-social.gov.az) and labour market monitoring dashboards to improve targeting and expedite service provision.

Efforts to measure the effectiveness of ALMPs are still developing; however, the MLSPP and APEA, in collaboration with international experts, are establishing performance metrics and impact indicators to evaluate outcomes. Enhancing data disaggregation by gender, age and region is a policy priority to enable detailed monitoring of inclusivity and impact.

According to official data published by the **SEA under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan**, active employment measures in **January-September 2024** covered over **303 000 individuals**, including approximately **124 000 people placed in suitable jobs**, nearly **11,900 participants in the self-employment programme supporting small family farms** and vocational training organised for over **12,200 unemployed persons**[69]**.**

The government is expanding vocational training infrastructure, with new Regional Vocational Training Centres under construction in multiple regions including Guba, Masalli, Sabirabad and Shaki. These centres will offer modern facilities and training aligned with labour market demands, aiming to increase the number of such centres from four to ten by 2030 as part of the broader employment strategy.

Career guidance services are integral to ALMPs, funded through the Unemployment Insurance Fund and delivered through a network of APEA offices and DOST centres, which act as one-stop shops providing integrated social and employment services. In 2023, career counselling reached over 282 000 individuals. Digital services have expanded greatly, with more than 90% of MLSPP services offered online, facilitating wider access and streamlined processes[70].

Beyond training and placement programmes, initiatives such as youth entrepreneurship workshops and sustainable youth employment projects foster skills development and support young people in launching their own businesses. These efforts place particular emphasis on vulnerable groups, including internally displaced persons and recipients of state social assistance.

[69] https://sosial.gov.az/en/media/news/more-than-300000-people-were-covered-by-active-employment-measures.
[70] Unemployed and job seekers | DOST Agentliyi.

4. KEY INDICATORS: EDUCATION, SKILLS, EMPLOYMENT

4.1 Headline indicators

Education and VET

Monitoring a complex education and training system typically starts with three straightforward questions: who takes part, what do they achieve, and how is the process supported?

The first question explores the extent to which learners engage in education or training. It is addressed by indicators grouped under *Participation and access* in Table 4.1; net enrolment rates at lower and upper secondary levels, the share of students in upper-secondary VET, the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education, and adult participation rates in lifelong learning. The second question – what learners achieve – examines key education outcomes, such as learner progression and the skills or qualifications they obtain. These are reflected in the indicators under Attainment, completion and outcomes: the share of adults with tertiary qualifications, the rate of early leavers from education and training, and the percentage of 15-year-olds underachieving in mathematics. The third question considers the financial, physical and informational resources that sustain the education process, reflected by the indicators under *Resources and data*: public expenditure on education as a share of GDP, the adequacy of infrastructure and the availability of internationally comparable data.

Table 4.1 Headline indicators: education and VET (Azerbaijan, EU average) (2022-2024)

Participation and access	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Total net enrolment rate (lower secondary)	87.1	90.7	M.D.	98.1	UIS UNESCO
Total net enrolment rate (upper secondary)	80.3	84.3	M.D.	93.6	UIS UNESCO
Students in VET as a % of total upper secondary students	28.7	27.8	7.1	48.8	UIS UNESCO
Gross enrolment ratio (tertiary)	41.0	41.4	M.D.	79.7	UIS UNESCO
Participation in training/lifelong learning in the previous 4 weeks (% aged 25-64)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	13.3	LFS
Attainment, completion and outcomes	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**EU (1)**	**Source**
Educational attainment of total population: % with ISCED 5-8	25.1	25.2	25.4	30.2	LFS
Early leavers from education and training (% aged 18-24)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	9.3	LFS
Underachievers in maths (% aged 15)	61.9	N.A.	N.A.	31.1	PISA OECD (4)
Resources and data	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**EU (1)**	**Source**
Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	3.0	3.6	M.D.	4.7	UIS UNESCO
Inadequate or poor-quality physical infrastructure (2)	47.8	N.A.	N.A.	27.9	PISA OECD (4)
Availability of internationally comparable data on education	N.A.	20.3	52.6	N.A.	TRP (3)

Notes: 1. EU average, latest available year. PISA data: OECD average. 2. %age of students in schools whose principal reported that the school's capacity to provide instruction is hindered at least to some extent by inadequate or poor-quality physical infrastructure. 3. ETF Torino Process (TRP).
Source: ETF KIESE database.

The rate of participation in education in Azerbaijan increased between 2022 and 2023, though it remains below EU averages. Net enrolment at lower secondary level rose from 87.1% in 2022 to 90.7% in 2023, but it still falls short of the EU average of 98.1%. At upper secondary level, enrolment grew from 80.3% to 84.3%. This is below enrolment at lower secondary level and suggests that a significant share of students do not continue their education beyond the end of compulsory schooling.

In the same vein, participation in tertiary education remained at relatively modest 41% throughout the monitoring period.

VET attracts a comparatively small share of upper secondary learners. In 2023, just over a quarter (27.8%) of students were enrolled in VET programmes. The sharp decline to 7.1% in 2024 (Table 4.1) represents a major contraction and may reflect a change in classification or data coverage rather than an actual shift in participation. In both years for which data are available, the limited scale of VET provision indicates that the transition from school to work is dominated by general education pathways, which may be leaving young people with a deficit of competences relevant for employment. In addition, the quality of foundational skills and competences at the end of compulsory general education is a concern, as suggested by the high share (61.9%) of 15-year-olds in Azerbaijan who did not reach minimum proficiency in mathematics as tested by OECD's PISA.

The educational attainment of the population in working age remained broadly stable throughout the reference period covered in Table 4.1 – the share of adults with tertiary education (ISCED 5-8) increased only slightly from 25.1% to 25.4% between 2022 and 2024.

Public expenditure on education increased from 3.0% to 3.6% of GDP between 2022 and 2023 but remains relatively low. Nearly half of students (47.8%) were enrolled in schools with inadequate or poor-quality infrastructure, which implies that the conditions for teaching and learning vary significantly between providers. On a positive note, the coverage of internationally comparable data increased from 20.3% of indicators foreseen for monitoring in 2023 to 52.6% in 2024. However, the data cover mainly the capital.[71]

Employment and demand for skills

The set of labour-market indicators follows the same question-and-answer logic applied to education and training, but from the perspective of employment. The indicators are organised into two complementary groups. The first group, *Employment and labour-market outcomes* (Table 4.2), addresses how effectively the labour market absorbs people. It consists of the overall employment rate (aged 15+), youth employment rate (aged 15-24), employment rate of recent graduates (aged 20-34, ISCED 3-8), unemployment rate of the overall population (aged 15+), youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) and the NEET rate (aged 15-29). The second group, *Demand for skills* (Table 4.2), looks at the types of jobs and skills that the economy generates. It consists of employment by broad economic sector (agriculture, industry, services), the incidence of vulnerable employment and educational mismatch.

Table 4.2 Headline indicators: employment (Azerbaijan, EU average) (2022-2024)

Employment and labour market outcomes	2022	2023	2024	EU (1)	Source
Employment rate (% aged 15+ or similar age group)	64.2	64.2	64.2	54.7	LFS
Employment rate (% aged 15-24 or similar age group)	38.5	38.6	38.0	35.0	LFS
Employment rate of recent graduates aged 20-34 (ISCED 3-8)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	82.4	LFS
Unemployment rate (% aged 15+ or similar age group)	5.6	5.5	5.3	5.9	LFS
Unemployment rate (% aged 15-24 or similar age group)	13.6	13.1	12.9	14.9	LFS
NEET rate (% aged 15-29 or similar age group) (1)	19.8	19.5	19.1	11.0	LFS
Demand for skills	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**EU (1)**	**Source**
Employment by broad economic sectors (%): agriculture	35.8	35.8	35.4	3.3	LFS
Employment by broad economic sectors (%): industry	15.4	15.7	16.1	24.1	LFS
Employment by broad economic sectors (%): service	48.8	48.5	48.5	72.1	LFS

[71] The improvement is linked to the participation of Azerbaijan in PISA 2022, which included schools located in Baku. Since the ETF Torino Process monitoring framework uses PISA data to calculate several of its indices, the inclusion of Baku led to a significant increase in the metric that tracks data coverage.

Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	53.6	54.0	54.0	10.0	LFS
Employment by 'educational mismatch': % matched	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	ILOSTAT

Notes: 1. Data refer to 2019. 2. data refer to 2019, age group 15-59. 3. data refer to 2019, age group 16-24. 4. data refer to 2019, age group 15-24.
Source: ETF KIESE database

The data shown in Table 4.2 suggest that – with high employment and relatively low unemployment – the labour market of Azerbaijan is stable. Between 2022 and 2024, the employment rate for those aged 15 and above stood at 64.2%, while unemployment declined slightly to 5.3%. However, high employment does not necessarily translate into secure or well-paid work. The data also suggest that job quality is a challenge. Around 54% of all employed people are in vulnerable employment, including own-account and contributing family workers. At the same time, there is no data on employment outcomes of recent graduates or on education-job matching.

A significant share of the labour force is concentrated in agriculture, which accounts for 35.4% of employment. Services represent 48.5%, while industry accounts for 16.1%. Such a high share of employment in agriculture typically points to slow structural transformation and limited diversification of the economy. The minor shifts recorded since 2022 do not suggest a substantial reallocation of labour towards higher value-added activities.

Youth employment has remained broadly stable at around 38% over the monitoring period, while youth unemployment, despite some improvement, is more than twice the rate of unemployment for adults. The share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is 19.1%.

4.2 System performance indicators

As noted in the introduction to this paper, 'performance' in the context of ETF monitoring describes the extent to which VET systems deliver on their commitments to learners and stakeholders in support of lifelong learning. These commitments typically cover three key areas: ensuring broad and equitable access to opportunities for education and training; delivering high-quality and relevant education, and; maintaining effective and efficient organisation and management of the education system, including adequate resourcing.

To measure performance systematically, the ETF uses system performance indicators (SPIs), which summarise the extent to which education and training systems fulfil each of their commitments. Each SPI is presented on a scale from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger performance.

Both the headline indicators in Section 4.1 and the SPIs presented in this section are guided by the same core questions: who takes part?; what do they achieve?; how are they supported by education and training systems?. The main difference between these two sets of data lies in how these questions are answered. Headline indicators answer the questions with single, stand-alone measures drawn directly from international data sources. The SPIs, on the other hand, are evaluative, composite measures. They are designed explicitly to assess how well VET systems fulfil broader policy commitments that cannot be adequately captured through individual statistics.

Access and participation

This section presents system performance in VET and adult learning against two specific policy outcomes: support for equitable access and participation for young people and adults, and support for young people in initial VET (IVET) to successfully complete their programmes.

The scope of SPIs tracking access differs according to the target group of learners. In the case of young people, the SPI assesses access specifically to IVET, while for adults it captures access to continuing VET (CVET) and other adult learning opportunities, such as those provided through active labour market policies (ALMPs). A separate SPI measures how effectively young learners in IVET are supported in progressing through their programmes and achieving graduation.

In both cases, performance depends on the policies and measures the country is implementing. They provide the opportunities, incentives and guidance needed to encourage participation and successful completion. The SPI results therefore reflect how effectively these policies deliver on their intended objectives.

Access by age and gender

The entry barriers to initial vocational education and training in Azerbaijan are low. Access is open to anyone who has completed 9 or 11 years of general education (ISCED Levels 2 and 3) and obtained a school-leaving certificate (Grade 9) or a maturity certificate (Grade 11). These qualifications allow enrolment in IVET programmes at ISCED Levels 3 to 5.

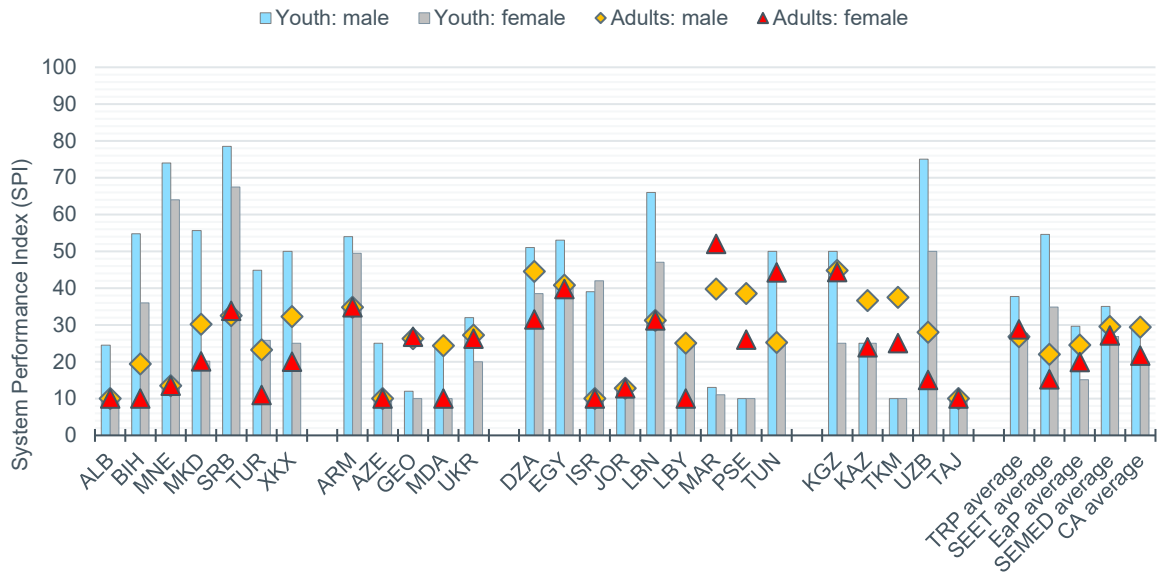
Although still relatively low, enrolment into IVET has increased substantially in recent years. According to the monitoring survey, student admissions to public VET institutions rose from 16 590 in 2021 to 24 823 in 2024. The Socio-Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2022-2026 identifies the expansion of VET, including higher technical VET, as a priority. The increase in admissions occurred in a context where widening participation in VET is defined as a strategic objective. At the same time, actual enrolment is below the planned admission targets set by the State Agency for Vocational Education.

In 2024, 8% of admissions were in short initial VET programmes (ISCED 3 or 6 months to 1 year), 82% in technical VET programmes (ISCED 3-4, 1 to 3 years), and 10% in higher VET programmes (ISCED 5, sub-Bachelor level). In international comparison, technical VET at ISCED 3-4 corresponds to initial VET. The distribution therefore shows that most learners enter programmes leading to a full vocational qualification at upper secondary level.

Despite the rise in admissions, system performance in support of access to VET programmes is limited for both genders (Figure 4.1). According to the monitoring survey, IVET attracts a very limited share of general education graduates despite some improvement in recent years. In 2021, for example, only 11% of graduates from Grades 9 and 11 enrolled in VET programmes. This share increased to 13% in 2022 and 2023, and to 15% in 2024. On higher level, admissions to VET account for about one-quarter of tertiary education admissions. High-achieving students usually pursue tertiary education through centralised entrance examinations, while VET is widely perceived as an option for lower-performing students. Access in formal terms is broad; participation among higher-performing cohorts is limited.

The law guarantees equality of access for girls and boys to IVET. The monitoring survey notes that in 2024, girls accounted for 36% of total VET admissions and were in majority in roughly one-third of VET specialisations. At the same time, as in many other countries, enrolment is strongly segregated by field of study. Industrial, agricultural machinery and construction programmes attract predominantly male learners. In several regional areas, girls are discouraged from enrolling in tourism and catering occupations such as those of tourism operator, front office staff, wait staff and bartending.

Figure 4.1 Access to learning opportunities by country, age and gender of learners - system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average (2025)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100[72].
Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

Unlike in many other ETF partner countries, in Azerbaijan IVET offers opportunities for learning across the life course. In the 2024-2025 academic year, the age of learners enrolled in public IVET programmes ranged from 14 to 70. Nevertheless, system performance in support of access to learning for adults is at a similarly low level to that for youth (Figure 4.1). In 2021 (the latest year for which there is internationally comparable data), the share of people in working age who participated in training/lifelong in the previous 12 months was only 7.4% (KIESE SPI Indicator 17).

One part of opportunities for lifelong learning is provider through continuing VET programmes. Access to CVET in Azerbaijan depends largely on the ability of learners to pay tuition fees. The state guarantees one free qualification per citizen. Adults who already hold a qualification must usually pay tuition fees if they seek an additional qualification, while unemployed individuals are exempt from fees. Participation among employed adults therefore depends on their willingness and capacity to finance training.

Continuing VET is delivered through public VET institutions and through SEA under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population. SEA offers short training courses, usually up to six months, for job seekers and unemployed individuals. The monitoring survey notes that participation expanded from 9,500 trainees in 2023 to 15 571 in 2024. This increase followed higher national targets for active labour market interventions. On the other hand, the participation in CVET of youth aged 15-24 is relatively low (10.5% for women and 11.5% for men, KIESE SPI Indicator 15).

There are no universal academic entry requirements for continuing VET, although certain occupations require a health certificate. The institutional network covers the entire country. SEA operates training centres in Baku, Ganja, Goychay and Barda and contracts private providers in other regions. According to the monitoring survey, plans exist to increase the number of SEA training centres to ten. Learners travelling between administrative regions may receive reimbursement for transport costs. Dormitory facilities exist but are limited.

Women account for only a small share of participants in continuing VET. Their participation fluctuated between 5% and 16% in recent years and stood at 5% in 2023. Programme choice follows traditional

[72] The Torino Process makes a distinction between theoretical (full) index range and index range used for reporting purposes. For reporting purposes, rare instances of extreme values on the low end (SPI < 10) and on the high end (SPI > 90) of the index scale are truncated at the upper (10) and lower (90) decile end. This means that the reporting does not discriminate SPI values below 10 and above 90. The international average, on the other hand, is calculated using the full range of the index.

lines. Baking, cooking, tailoring, fashion design, hairdressing and nail services attract mainly women. Irrigation systems, tractor operation, welding and electrical work attract mainly men. Service occupations in tourism and catering are less attractive to adult women in several regional areas.

The monitoring survey notes that adult participation in active labour market programmes has expanded at scale and provides data to corroborate the observation. Around 138 000 individuals took part in ALMPs in 2022. Participation rose to approximately 436 000 in 2023 and reached 416 000 in 2024. The increase followed a presidential instruction to strengthen labour market interventions.

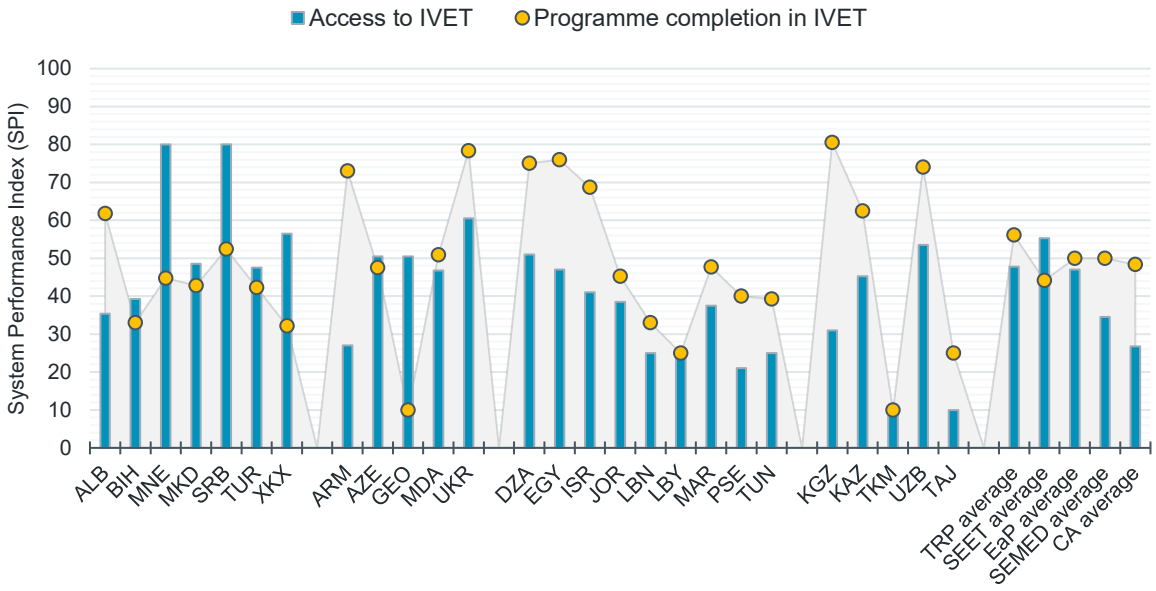
In 2024, over 160 000 individuals received standard job search assistance, and a further 1 467 were placed through quota-based mechanisms. Paid public works involved 17 114 participants. Self-employment programmes enrolled 17 327 individuals, while 15 571 took part in vocational training. Career counselling reached 203 837 individuals, and 391 benefited from private sector employment incentives.

Self-employment programmes combine vocational training with business training. Upon completion, participants receive equipment and tools as a grant to establish their own businesses. These programmes are implemented through SEA local offices across all regions of the country. In 2023, women accounted for 32% of participants in the self-employment programme. Gender-disaggregated data for other ALMP components are not currently reported.

Retention and programme completion

Most learners enrolled in initial VET in Azerbaijan reach graduation. There is no evidence of systematic differences in completion between boys and girls. However, the monitoring evidence on institutional support suggests that the support environment is uneven and not universal across providers. Correspondingly, system performance in this domain of monitoring is average (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Access and programme completion in IVET - system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.
Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

The modular structure of IVET programmes allows learners to accumulate units over time. This organisation provides flexibility in progression and reduces the risk that temporary interruptions result in definitive withdrawal. Male learners called to military service during their studies are entitled to resume and complete their education after service. This provision safeguards their pathway to

qualification and prevents structural disadvantage linked to conscription. No formal rule places either gender at a disadvantage in relation to completion.

At the level of institutional support, data show that structured study assistance is present but not widespread. Some 27% of students in VET and general education attend schools which provide rooms where students can do homework (KIESE SPI Indicator 20, sourced from OECD PISA). 45% of principals report staff assistance with homework (KIESE SPI Indicator 21), and 36% report peer-to-peer tutoring arrangements (KIESE SPI Indicator 22). These figures suggest that student support is part of the institutional offer in a share of providers, yet it is not universal. The evidence does not allow a direct link to be drawn between these arrangements and graduation outcomes, but it points to differences in the intensity of study support across institutions.

Gender disparities are visible at the stage of participation rather than at graduation. The monitoring survey notes that at the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year, female learners accounted for 46.6% of enrolment in general education and 33.5% in initial VET. Once enrolled, however, boys and girls appear to reach qualification at comparable rates.

Quality and relevance of learning outcomes

In this section, the SPIs capture the quality of the provision of basic skills and key competences to learners in IVET, as well as the degree to which adults possess foundational skills. These results are complemented by selected KIESE indicators, which track the relevance of learning outcomes by examining employment rates of individuals aged 15 and older, disaggregated by educational attainment in ETF partner countries.

ETF monitoring keeps quality and relevance separate because, although they often reinforce each other, they do not always coincide. Learners with strong foundational skills may still struggle to find suitable employment, while individuals might secure jobs without acquiring a comprehensive skillset. By tracking these aspects separately, the reporting hopes to identify both the intrinsic benefits of education and how effectively it aligns with the needs of the labour market.

Quality of learning by age and gender

In Azerbaijan, the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the State Standards for VET define what learners must know and be able to do in order to obtain a qualification. They describe eight key competences for lifelong learning, namely communication in the mother tongue; communication in a foreign language; work-related numeracy; information and communication technology; work ethics; entrepreneurship; personal and career development; and aesthetics and cultural self-expression.

All initial VET programmes include corresponding foundational modules in their respective curricula that address transversal skills such as planning, workplace health and safety, and other core competences. The monitoring survey notes that, depending on the field of study, learners also receive instruction in areas such as customer service, the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the use of manual tools. Teaching and assessment are expected to cover these elements, since they form part of the qualification requirements.

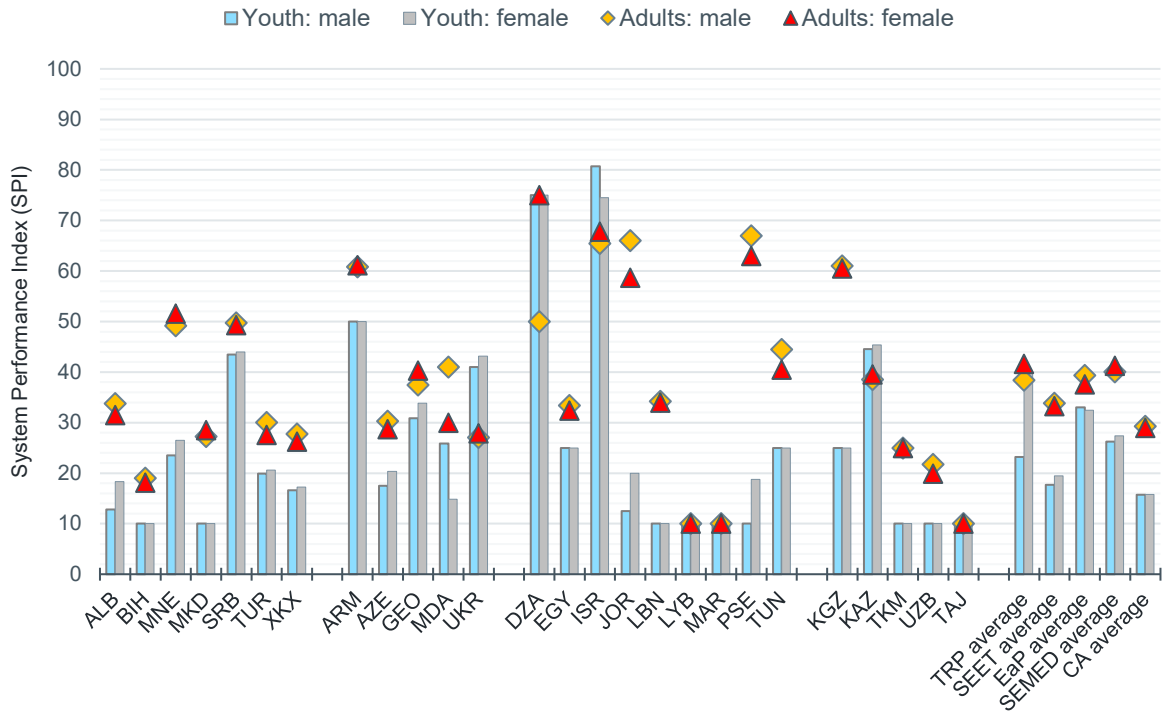
Although the formal standards define a broad set of competences, the central question for quality is whether delivery mechanisms succeed in translating these requirements into measurable improvements in foundational skills and in good quality of learning outcomes. The monitoring evidence suggests, however, that this is not yet the case. System performance in this monitoring domain is low (Figure 4.3), largely due to weak results on indicators capturing foundational skills at the end of compulsory education.

In Baku in 2022, for example, 61.5% of girls and 76.0% of boys in general education and VET did not reach baseline proficiency in reading (KIESE SPI Indicator 24, sourced from OECD PISA).[73] In mathematics, 60.4% of girls and 63.2% of boys performed at that level (KIESE SPI Indicator 25).

[73] In 2022, PISA in Azerbaijan covered only the capital, Baku.

These figures suggest that a substantial share of young people enter upper secondary education, including VET programmes, with very limited proficiency in core domains. In this context, the quality of foundational skills in IVET depends not only on the formal inclusion of key competences in standards and curricula, but also on the capacity of providers to provide effective remedies by strengthening literacy, numeracy and scientific reasoning among boys and girls whose prior attainment may be weak.

Figure 4.3 Quality of skills and competences by country, age and gender of learners – system performance index, ETF partner countries and international average (2025)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.
Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

As to adults, to the extent that foundational skills encompass basic literacy, they are near universal among adults of working age. According to official statistics, the literacy rate among the population aged 15 and above reached 99.8% in 2023. The gender gap is negligible: 99.8% among men and 99.7% among women (KIESE SPI Indicator 59).

On the other hand, the monitoring survey reports that adult numeracy skills are at an average level. Functional digital and information-processing skills are even less developed. System performance in this domain is correspondingly subdued and below the regional EaP average (Figure 4.3). Only 33.1% of women and 36.6% of men aged 25-74 report using basic arithmetic formulas in spreadsheets (KIESE SPI Indicator 47). The share creating electronic presentations is even lower, at 7.2% of women and 7.9% of men (KIESE SPI Indicator 45). More advanced operational skills, such as installing software and applications, are reported for 8.8% of women and 9.7% of men (KIESE SPI Indicator 53), while connecting and installing new devices is reported by 16.1% of women and 17.7% of men (KIESE SPI Indicator 54).

Even in more routine digital activities, participation varies. While 68.2% of women and 73.2% of men participate in social networks (KIESE SPI Indicator 43), only 1.4% of women and 1.5% of men report having completed an online course (KIESE SPI Indicator 57). Internet banking is used by just 1.7% of women and 1.9% of men (KIESE SPI Indicator 56). These figures support the observations shared in the monitoring survey that self-learning is the most common route for acquiring ICT skills and that formal education and training structures are not yet the main source of advanced digital competence.

A considerable share of adults speaks at least one foreign language, mainly Russian or English, according to survey reporting. Entrepreneurial competence is described as relatively strong, while problem-solving skills are assessed as average. These characterisations are based on self-reporting in the monitoring survey and are not linked to external assessment data.

In continuing VET, the eight key competences are embedded in the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and translated into transversal curriculum components such as 'Professional ethics and social life skills', 'Basics of Azerbaijani legislation', 'Health, safety and environmental protection' and 'Planning and reporting'. These components apply to adult learners, both men and women, and provide a structured framework for competence development beyond initial education.

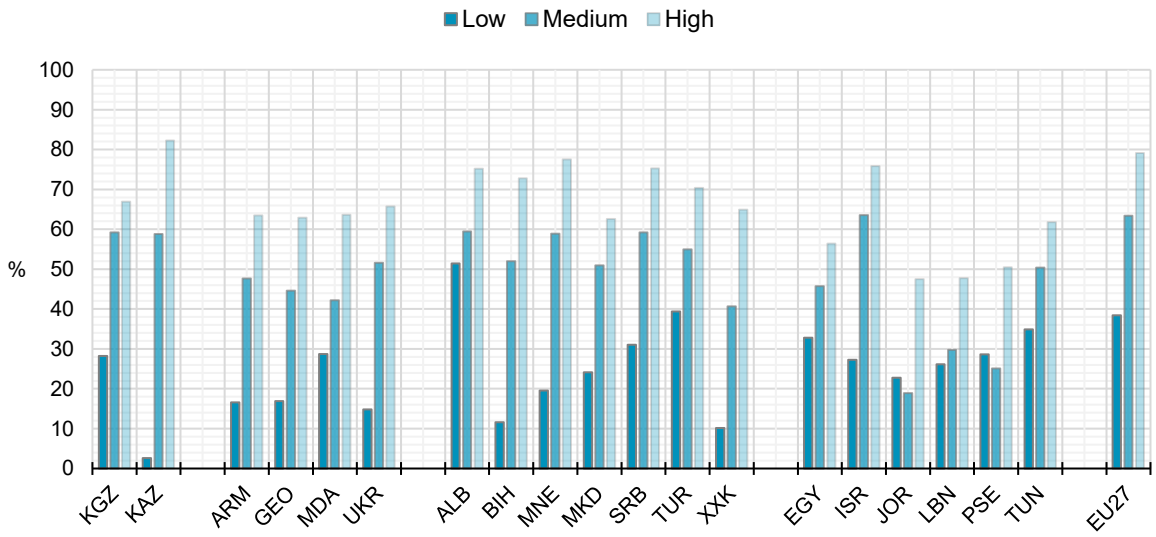
As noted, gender differences in foundational skills are minimal at population level. Literacy rates differ by only 0.1 percentage points (KIESE SPI Indicator 59). In digital skills, differences between women and men are present but moderate, typically within a few percentage points across most indicators. There is no evidence of systematic divergence between boys and girls in IVET at the level of formal competence requirements. Where differences in outcomes arise, they are more likely to be linked to prior attainment and field of study choices than to unequal standards.

Relevance and labour market outcomes

This section uses employment data to gauge how effectively education in Azerbaijan meets labour market needs.

Across ETF partner countries, employment outcomes differ significantly depending on the level of educational attainment of individuals. Higher education, for instance, consistently translates into higher employment rates. On average, the employment rate is 24.6% for individuals with low educational attainment, it rises to 48% for those with medium education, and it reaches 65.2% for highly educated individuals. Despite these substantial differences – approximately 41% separating the lowest and highest education groups – employment rates at all levels remain consistently below the average for the EU-27, by about 14% (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Employment rate (age 15+) by educational attainment, ETF partner countries (2024)



Source: ETF KIESE database

In regional perspective, the data in Figure 4.4 show that employment outcomes consistently improve with higher educational attainment, but also that the extent of improvement differs across ETF regions. In Central Asia, the gap in employment between individuals with high and low education levels is the largest. Employment levels in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region and in Southeast Europe and Turkey (SEET) are generally lower than in the EU-27, despite some between-country differences. In

the SEMED region (except Israel which is close to the EU average), employment rates remain low even for highly educated individuals, which may be due to structural labour market challenges.

Figure 4.4 includes all ETF partner countries with sufficiently recent and internationally comparable data. Azerbaijan, however, is not featured due to the lack of such data. Despite this gap, it is possible to offer indirect insights into the labour market relevance and economic value of educational and VET qualifications by drawing on information collected through the Torino Process monitoring survey on the employability of VET graduates, employer recruitment practices, and the organisation of work-based learning and continuing training.

The monitoring survey suggests that the labour market relevance of VET qualifications has scope for improvement. Most initial VET programmes are delivered in school-based formats, and graduates often encounter difficulties in securing employment within their field of specialisation. The limited integration of work-based learning contributes to this situation, as only a small share of learners participates in dual schemes. Although the number of institutions and employers involved in dual education has increased, the survey notes that participation still covers only a small proportion of students in VET. This limits the extent to which learners acquire work experience and employer-recognised competences prior to graduation.

CVET programmes, on the other hand, especially those organised through the SEA, tend to be developed in closer cooperation with employers. These programmes are frequently linked to active labour market measures and, in some cases, include commitments related to post-training employment. Such arrangements strengthen the connection between training provision and labour demand, even though participation levels in formal continuing VET remain extremely low in relation to the size of the economically active population. With less than 1% of the labour force engaged in formal continuing VET, the contribution of VET to the upskilling of the existing workforce is limited.

Further evidence of weak alignment between qualifications and labour demand can be found in employer recruitment practices. Employers often resort to hiring university or college graduates for positions that would normally correspond to vocational qualifications. In other cases, firms rely on in-company training to compensate for skill gaps. These practices suggest that vocational qualifications do not always function as a reliable signal of job readiness. In response, national authorities are supporting the expansion of competence-based curricula and employer involvement in curriculum development. This may offer a foundation for strengthening the employment prospects of future graduates from VET.

System management and organisation

In the final section on policy and system performance, the focus shifts to the organisation and management of the education and training system, with particular attention to VET.

The analysis presents data on system performance in the form of SPIs in three areas: effective allocation and use of financial resources in VET; allocation, use and professional capacity of human resources, including leadership skills and professional competence of school management and staff; and system steering and management, which includes data, quality assurance, school leadership and the internationalisation of VET.

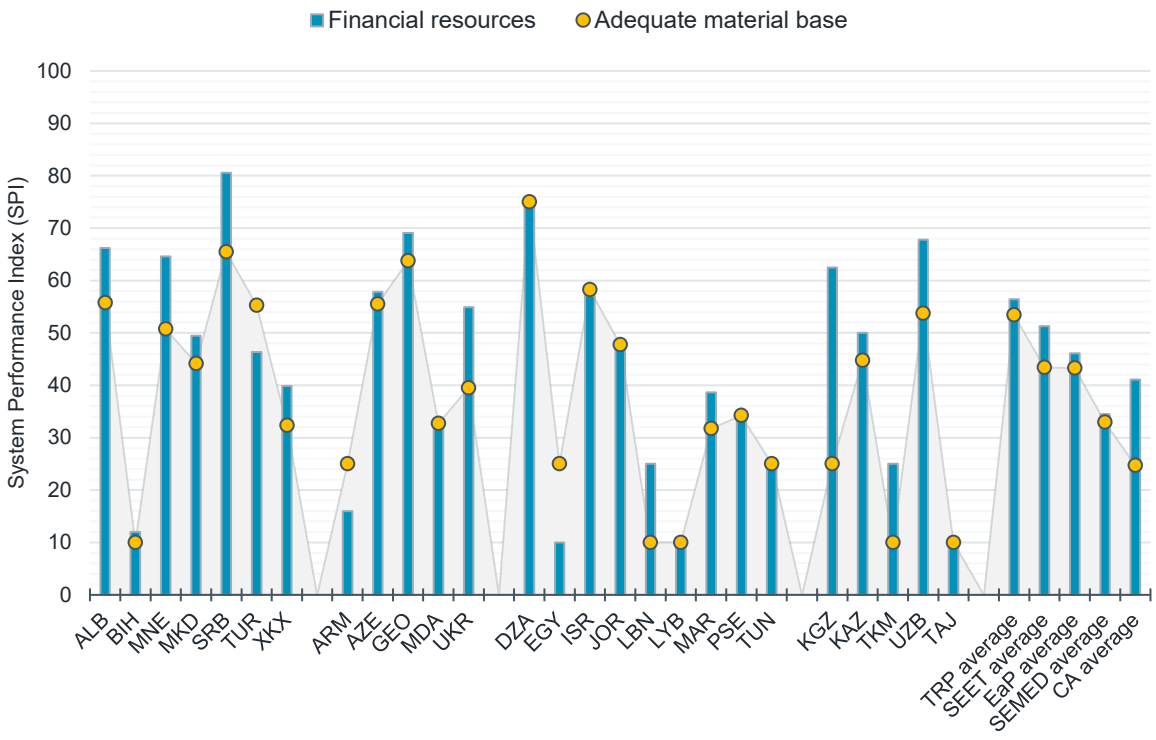
Financial resources in VET and lifelong learning

This section examines the availability of funding for VET in Azerbaijan and discusses how effectively this funding translates into tangible resources, such as well-equipped teaching facilities, workshops and appropriate instructional materials.

The monitoring survey assesses that public financing for VET in Azerbaijan is at a level that limits the scope for structural improvement of the material base for teaching and learning. In 2024, total public allocation to the VET sector reached AZN 77.1 million, compared to AZN 63.8 million in 2022. This corresponds to an average of approximately AZN 1 million (around EUR 530 000) per provider, to cover both capital and current expenditure, including salaries and student benefits.

In nominal terms, the budget for the sector increased by 21% over the two-year period, which also helped improve the SPI result of Azerbaijan in the domain of resources and placed the country well above the regional EaP average (Figure 4.5). In real terms, however, cumulative inflation of 24% resulted in a 2.5% decline in purchasing power. Even under more optimistic assumptions of high internal efficiency in the network of VET providers, despite nominal increase, this funding envelope leaves limited room for the modernisation of workshops, the renewal of equipment, or for large-scale upgrading of facilities.

Figure 4.5 Allocation and use of financial resources in education and training – index of system performance, ETF partner countries and international average (2024)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.
Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases

The monitoring survey notes that the funding sources are not well diversified. According to the data by the State Agency for Vocational Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, out-of-budgetary income of public VET institutions increased in nominal terms from AZN 389 600 in 2020 to AZN 947 691 in 2023, before falling to AZN 598 299 in 2024. As of 2024, such income still represented only 0.8% of total public financing for the sector. The low share confirms that institutions depend almost entirely on state allocations and that in practice, they have very restricted capacity to generate additional resources through services, partnerships or commercial activities.

Reforms in financing mechanisms have started to modify allocation procedures, though they still need to gain traction. A per capita financing scheme for continuing VET was introduced by the SEA in 2021. According to the monitoring survey, this approach channelled public funds into short-term vocational training delivered by 4 public and 145 private providers. The model permits competitive trainer remuneration and covers costs for equipment, materials and premises. It was designed to expand provision beyond the small number of public centres.

A legal basis for per-capita financing for institutions under the state agency for VET was adopted in 2022. By 2024, 12% of these institutions had shifted to the new model. Annual per capita expenditure levels for 168 occupations were approved by the Cabinet of Ministers through Decree No 192 of 14 June 2023. While this framework creates greater transparency in allocation, the transition is still at an early stage, according to the survey.

The state of the material base is of concern, despite above average system performance results. According to the State Agency for VET, only 15% of providers have adequate material and technical infrastructure. A further 53% operate with partially adequate facilities, while 32% function with inadequate infrastructure.

Some compensatory measures are in place. Open educational resources developed nationally are used in both initial and continuing VET. The SEA organises continuing VET programmes in well-equipped private training facilities through public procurement procedures. In addition, four modern training centres are being established under the SEA to provide upgraded infrastructure for continuing VET.

These initiatives create islands of improved provision. However, given the scale of infrastructure deficits across the majority of institutions, the existing funding level and limited own-resource generation capacity restrict the speed and breadth of renewal. As a result, the material conditions for teaching and learning in many public VET institutions are still below the standards required for modern, technology-intensive vocational training.

Human resources: allocation, use, professional capacity

There are no acute staff shortages in VET in Azerbaijan. According to the monitoring survey, the pupil-qualified teacher ratio stands at 9.18, suggesting that on average, institutions likely operate with a sufficient number of staff to deliver programmes. However, there are structural weaknesses which affect the quality of teachers and their professional development, which in turn hampers system performance in this domain (SPI of 62).

According to the data used for the calculation of the composite SPI result, on average only 25.4% of teachers in general education and VET are fully certified by the relevant authority (KIESE SPI Indicator 111). This share is higher in VET than in general education; the monitoring survey notes that a large proportion of VET teachers and industrial training masters operate without full formal qualification. The discontinuation of dedicated VET teacher qualifications following the collapse of the planned economy has left a structural gap that has not been replaced by a comprehensive national framework for VET teacher education.

Participation in professional development is similarly limited. The teachers in just 26.4% of schools covered by the 2022 round of OECD's PISA have attended a professional development programme (Indicator 112). This low participation rate aligns with evidence from consultations quoted in the monitoring survey, which describe in-service training as organised on an ad hoc basis and only minimally regulated through state standards. The absence of a structured link between professional development, career progression and remuneration further reduces incentives for systematic upgrading of competences.

The financing structure also limits strategic human resource development in VET. Staff compensation accounts for 87.3% of total VET expenditure (Indicators 114 and 115). While this share suggests that personnel costs dominate the budget, it leaves limited room for investment in structured training systems, qualification upgrading or institutional development.

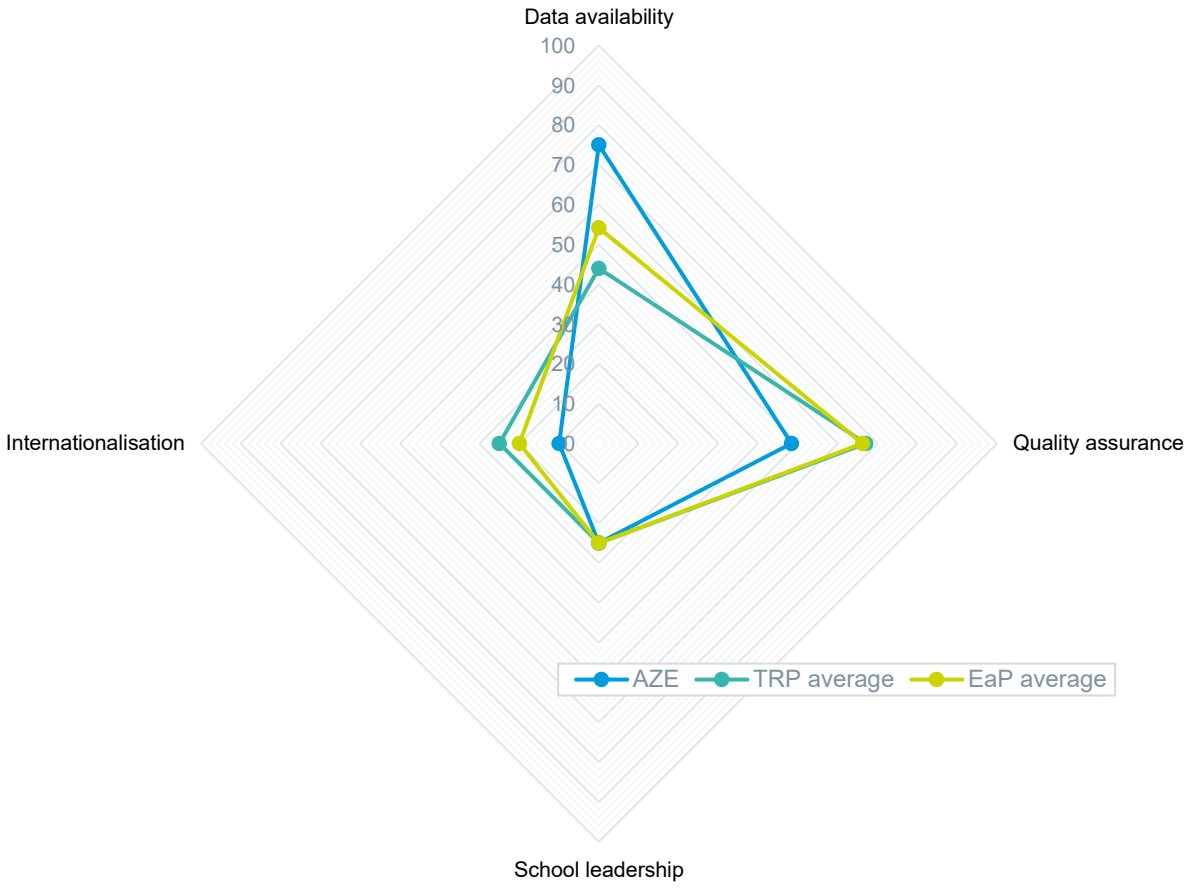
In comparison, CVET programmes organised by the SEA operate under more flexible recruitment arrangements. Trainers are contracted on a programme basis, and competitive remuneration packages allow the attraction of moderately to highly qualified professionals.

System steering and management

This section summarises the system performance results in the domains of data availability and capacity for informed decision-making, quality assurance, school leadership and internationalisation in VET in Azerbaijan.

The management of VET in Azerbaijan is supported by formal institutions and newly introduced digital tools. At the same time, despite progress, there are gaps in the availability of data, the reliability and independence of quality assurance, the professional capacity of school leaders, as well as in the degree to which the VET system has exposure to international partnerships and cooperation.

Figure 4.6 System steering and management – index of system performance, selected dimensions, ETF partner countries and Torino Process average (2024)



Note: Theoretical index range: min/low performance=0, max/high performance=100.
Source: ETF KIESE and Torino Process databases.

Data on VET are primarily administrative and only partially disaggregated. National statistics provide basic information on enrolment, staffing and finance, but there are no systematic tracer studies or regular labour market outcome surveys for VET graduates. Only a small number of providers conduct internal follow-up exercises, and these do not feed into a national evidence base.

The State Agency for VET operates the Vocational Education Sub-system (PTS), a digital platform intended to centralise information and improve coordination. The platform integrates ten modules covering institutions, staff, training, students, stipends, finance, orders, graduates, employers and administration. In 2024, the system was reported to be 94% operational. Two modules function at 75% and 65% respectively, while the others are fully operational. According to the monitoring survey, a total of 96,020 credentials have been entered into the system. Azerbaijan also participates in international initiatives such as OECD's PISA, which helps to boost the availability of internationally comparable data for otherwise difficult to document domains of education. This in turn boosts system performance

in the area of data to levels well above those of other countries in the EaP region, on average (Figure 4.6).

Despite this progress, however, the monitoring survey notes that there are still some weaknesses in the reliability of data covering some areas. For example, official statistics suggest that less than 1% of the working-age population participates in continuing VET. Given the scale of the labour force, this figure is unlikely to capture the full extent of adult training activity and points to shortcomings in data collection and validation.

As to quality assurance, Figure 4.6 shows that monitoring results are below average. This assessment is supported by school-level evidence. Only 18% of VET and general school principals sampled in the PISA survey in 2022 report that achievement data are publicly posted (KIESE SPI Indicator 81), which suggests that accountability vis-à-vis external stakeholders is somewhat weak. At the same time around 53-55% indicate that student achievement data are tracked by administrative authorities or shared directly with parents (KIESE SPI Indicators 82 and 83).

The monitoring survey confirms that the area of quality assurance is still in transition. Mechanisms inherited from the centrally planned period are being replaced by new frameworks intended to align VET provision with labour market requirements and international good practice. Around 61% of principals report internal self-evaluation (KIESE SPI Indicator 84), and 49% report external evaluation (KIESE SPI Indicator 85). Written curricular specifications and systematic recording of student results are reported by roughly 52-62% of schools (KIESE SPI Indicators 86, 87, 88 and 89). However, improvement-oriented mechanisms are less common: only 42% report structured teacher mentoring (KIESE SPI Indicator 91), and just 39% report sustained consultation with external experts over at least six months (KIESE SPI Indicator 92). This suggests that the purpose and focus of quality assurance is more frequently on compliance and procedures and not so much on development and improvement.

The Education Quality Assurance Agency (TKTA), established in 2019 under the Ministry of Science and Education, is responsible for accrediting institutions and programmes, recognising non-formal and informal vocational learning, and supporting the development of internal quality assurance systems. Accreditation procedures cover both institutional performance and programme content, including criteria related to educator qualifications and alignment of learning outcomes with labour market needs. The Agency publishes information about its activities online.

However, the Agency operates under the same ministry that governs most public providers. This institutional arrangement limits the degree of external independence. Although employers and non-governmental organisations are represented in the Accreditation Council, the structure does not meet the standard of full separation between regulator and provider that is common in European quality assurance systems.

For continuing VET under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, Quality Assurance Councils were introduced at provider level in 2021. These councils supervise quality-related matters concerning both learners and trainers. Their effectiveness will depend on the robustness of procedures and the transparency of findings.

Formal leadership positions exist in both initial and continuing VET providers. Nevertheless, like in many other countries in the monitoring sample, performance across many VET institutions is rated from poor to average. The monitoring survey notes that the only exception are the centres of excellence and providers under the SEA.

Low remuneration in initial VET reduces the attractiveness of leadership positions. The structure of career progression pathways is weak, and professional development for school leaders is not organised within a coherent national framework. In-service training for leadership staff takes place on an ad hoc basis and is not systematically linked to performance assessment or career advancement.

The situation is different situation in CVET, which is managed by the SEA and where the introduction of per-capita financing has enabled higher remuneration levels, including for managerial staff. The

monitoring survey notes that this financial reform has improved recruitment conditions and strengthened leadership capacity within that segment of the system.

As to the internationalisation of VET in Azerbaijan, exposure to international cooperation is still very limited. Data provided through the monitoring survey shows that in 2024, there were only 66 foreign students enrolled in VET institutions, which represents less than 0.3% of total admissions. Only nine VET educators participated in international training programmes, which corresponds to approximately 0.3% of the teaching workforce. At the same time, there is no systematic data on student exchange programmes. The termination of major international projects, including Erasmus+ in 2025, is likely to reduce mobility and partnership opportunities further.

Some steps have been taken to integrate international input into training materials. Of 32 textbooks developed in 2024, the monitoring survey notes that 11 were of foreign origin. In addition, 9 out of 392 institutional partnerships (2.3%) were established with foreign VET providers.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ALMP(s)	Active labour market programme(s)
ANAMA	Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action
APEA	Azerbaijan Public Employment Agency
ATN	Azerbaijan Education Network
AZN	Azerbaijani manat
AZURE	Azerbaijan Scaling-Up Renewable Energy Project
BQP	Great Creation Party (Böyük Quruluş Partiyası)
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CF	Country fiche
CLO(s)	Country Liaison Officer(s)
COP29	29th Conference of the Parties (UN Climate Change Conference)
CPVA	Central Project Management Agency
CPS	Country partnership strategy
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
DigComp	Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (European Commission)
DOST	Agency for Sustainable and Operational Social Security
EaP	Eastern partnership
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EQAA	Education Quality Assurance Agency
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EU4Digital	European Union initiative supporting digital economy and society
EU4Youth	European Union Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Programme
GDP	Gross domestic product
HDI	Human development index
HSE	Health, safety and environment
IAI	Israel Aerospace Industries
ICT	Information and communication technology
IDP(s)	Internally displaced person(s)
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILOSTAT	ILO statistics database
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INT Unit	ETF Country Intelligence Unit
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
KIESE	Key indicators in education, skills and employment
LFS	Labour force survey
LLL	Lifelong learning
MLSPP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population
MoSE	Ministry of Science and Education
MSME(s)	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprise(s)

NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPP	Purchasing power parity
PTS	Vocational education sub-system
SAVE	State Agency for Vocational Education
SASHE	State Agency for Science and Higher Education
SEA	State Employment Agency
SEEMED / SEMED	Southern and eastern Mediterranean region
SELFIE	Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational Technologies
SOCAR	State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic
SPI(s)	System performance index/indices
STEAM	Science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics
TKTA	Education Quality Assurance Agency
TRP	Torino Process
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics

VET	Vocational Education and Training
VHP	Civic Solidarity Party

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