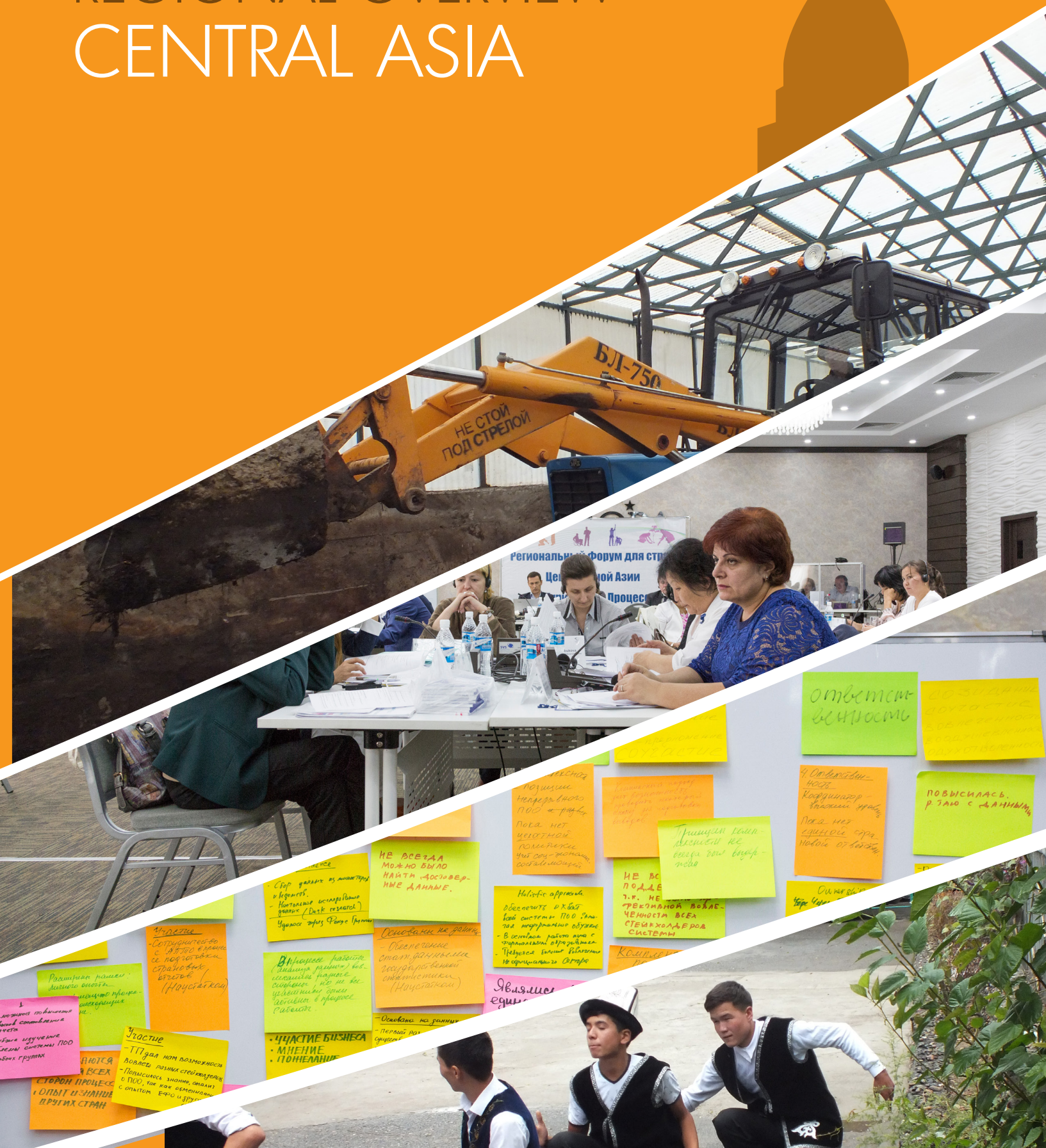


TORINO PROCESS REGIONAL OVERVIEW CENTRAL ASIA





CENTRAL ASIA

Since the first round of the Torino Process in 2010, social, economic and demographic developments in Central Asia have pushed education, including VET, up the policy agenda in all countries. VET is expected to supply the labour market with the necessary skills, thereby supporting economic growth.. At the same time, it is expected to play a key role in social inclusion and cohesion by providing good job opportunities primarily for young people, but increasingly also for adults.

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REGIONAL CONTEXT AND RESULTS



While most Central Asian countries have experienced continuous, and often impressive, economic growth since 2010, all four countries have been hit by the unfavourable global economic context and the crash in oil prices from 2014. This particularly affected the Russian and Kazakh economies, the main markets for Central Asian exports and key destinations for labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The 2016 Torino Process reports show that economic growth has not generated a corresponding rise in activity and employment rates, which have fallen slightly since 2010, despite picking up somewhat from 2014. Both activity and employment rates continue to be lower for women than for men, with women overall being worse affected by the downturn.

With the exception of Kazakhstan, youth unemployment has remained higher than the rate for whole working age population (15+). Yet, a small decrease in both aggregate and youth unemployment has become noticeable for most countries since 2010.

It remains unclear to which extent the decrease in youth unemployment has been supported by policy developments, including those in VET or rather has occurred as a result of the decreasing relative size of the youth population and migration.

Central Asian economies continue to have high levels of self-employment (which explains to some extent their relatively low unemployment rates) and

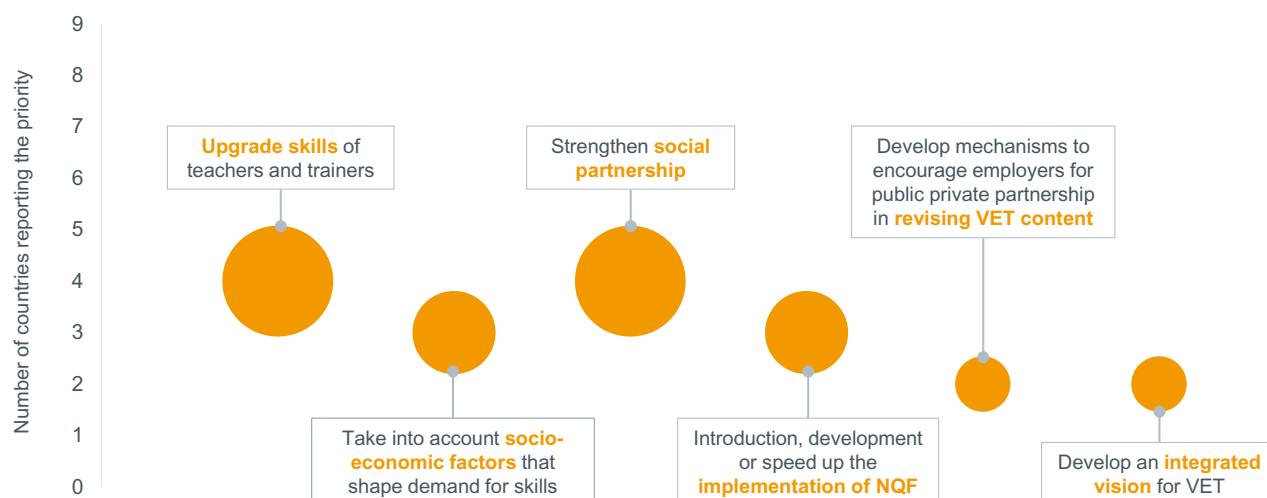
in most countries large informal economies. In all countries agriculture still accounts for a large share of employment, though much of this is subsistence in nature. The agricultural sector continues to be associated with the highest levels of informality and contributes to the important urban-rural disparities and internal migration that exist in the region.

All four countries continue to have a large share of small and micro enterprises, while large and medium enterprises are mostly limited to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Small and micro enterprises in all countries are associated with low competitiveness and productivity.

The region's workforce has a higher educational attainment than in 2010. Among adults (+25 years), Educational attainment has increased steadily in most countries, with fewer adults having a low level of education and more attaining higher levels. However, this has not systematically resulted in greater employability, pointing to mismatches between skills developed in the education and training systems and those required by the labour market. There is broad consensus as to the need to increase the quality and relevance of education and training.

The countries have made an important effort since the 2010 Torino Process to bring VET closer to the needs of the labour market and make VET provision accessible to a wider range of users. Though enrolment in traditional long VET courses has not increased in all countries, all countries report on an important expansion of short VET courses.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES



PROGRESS IN VET SYSTEM REFORMS



'VET has conquered a prominent role in the policy debate, but it is not holistic enough to cater for the needs of the society'

Since the first round of the Torino Process in 2010, the importance of VET on the policy agenda has increased in all Central Asian countries. This resulted, between 2010 and 2012 (earlier in Uzbekistan) in the adoption of VET policy documents that spell out a national vision for the medium to long-term development of VET systems. In all cases, VET is expected to play a role in the labour market, supporting economic development but also has a social mandate. In subsequent years VET was in many countries included in strategic developments in other domains, such as employment and overall (sustainable) development.

Between 2012 and 2014, VET received more consideration in employment and economic development policy documents, though VET policy documents focus on first time learners and long courses. In most countries, VET policies are insufficiently connected to the overall education system and only limited attention is paid to education pathways. The 2014 and 2016 Torino Process rounds indicate an increasing awareness that lifelong learning and adult learners require specific policy measures and that education pathways are critical to the attractiveness of VET.

In order to support the implementation of their strategies, all countries have developed action plans and defined targets. The 2014 and 2016 Torino Process rounds showed that Central Asian countries are aware of the importance of monitoring reform progress, but have not yet developed robust systems for this. Most countries have stepped up data collection, and Kazakhstan has gathered and analysed data in a systematic manner and used it for policy review.

None of the countries plans to evaluate developments achieved in policy priority areas. In the Central Asian Education Platform dialogue, all Central Asian countries have committed to improving data collection and use.

'While actions have been put in place to shape a higher quality and diversified VET provision on the basis of needs, countries in the region call for a better use of evidence and system change'

From 2010, Central Asian countries have identified the availability of labour market information as a key priority for ensuring quality VET. This evolved from 2012 into a need to better understand present and medium term skills needs and improve interaction with employers.

The 2016 round of the Torino Process shows that some progress has been made in both areas. Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyzstan have improved their labour force surveys, developed regional labour market analysis and developed medium-term labour market need projections. Only Kazakhstan has so far set up an internet-based information system for the public. All countries report employer involvement in defining skills requirements, either on a sector basis or for standard development, though in most countries these developments are not yet system wide. None of the countries has yet evaluated the results of this work on the employability of VET graduates.



VET graduate employment is recognised as a key indicator of the labour market relevance of VET in all Central Asian countries. Kyrgyzstan has engaged VET schools in systematic tracking of VET graduate employment. Since 2014 countries have developed a better understanding of the importance of matching and have therefore started to review their graduate tracing approaches.

Though all countries report on the piloting of new tools and measures, there is also an increasing concern that there is insufficient financial or human capacity to mainstream these at system or national level. And while more evidence is becoming available, it is not used systematically for policy making, as “ownership” is fragmented and typically involves a number of Ministries and/or state agencies.

Business creation and entrepreneurship have appeared on the policy agendas of most Central Asian countries from 2012. VET systems have been slow to take up the issue (with the exception of Uzbekistan), and in most countries entrepreneurial learning was first introduced in VET from 2014.

The four Central Asian countries have reported on the involvement of the VET system in the provision of short term training courses for the unemployed since the 2010 Torino Process round. In nearly all countries this opportunity to engage with new course formats and a new audience has, over time led to an overall expansion of short courses for new target groups.

‘Short courses have allowed for more opportunities offered to more people’

During the 2010 round of the Torino Process, most Central Asian countries defined the social mandate of VET in terms of access for clearly specified groups and training for the unemployed. Overall participation in VET and its accessibility were rarely considered, and in all countries, with the exception of Uzbekistan, state funded VET provision was not available to all. The 2016 Torino Process round showed that since 2010 the understanding of accessibility of VET has evolved and that all countries have undertaken a number of measures to open up VET. These have resulted in a higher participation in VET, though not necessarily in Initial VET.

Many countries have made VET gradually more accessible through the expansion of short-term training. Though this is apparently not provided with state funding, it has proved relevant in contexts of widespread poverty, and where many cannot afford to attend long VET courses. Short courses have also improved participation in VET of people with very low levels of education, who for formal reasons cannot enrol in long courses. Some countries have also started to use short VET courses to support enterprise development.

In 2010, Uzbekistan was the only country to report on the inclusion of students with special needs. By 2016 most countries had taken their first steps in inclusive approaches, covering physical access and new teaching methods. However, all countries noted that considerable efforts in teacher training and stakeholder cooperation would be required for large-scale implementation.

‘Make all pieces of the jigsaw fall into place: countries are moving towards an integrated action approach to address quality of VET provision’

Since the 2010 Torino Process, all countries are addressing internal efficiency on a continuous basis. Actions initially focused on relatively limited pilot projects, such as updating specific curricula, introducing specific new teaching methods. However, the 2016 round shows countries are attempting to mainstream them. Many countries have also started to see things in the perspective of their qualification systems, so that issues that were previously dealt with in isolation (for example content development and student assessment) are now considered as part of a wider development.

All countries recognise that teachers and trainers are a key factor for the successful development of their systems. Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyzstan have reformed staff salaries and increased them from 2011/2012. Yet, all countries continue to report difficulties in attracting and retaining staff with sufficient practical (enterprise related) skills. All countries have improved their in-service training and several countries have taken steps to reorganise their systems to make them more flexible and demand-oriented.



Central Asia

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

Employment rates across the region show relatively stable patterns

Employment rate in 2015



Kazakhstan
80.4%

Kyrgyzstan
67.2%

Change since 2013:

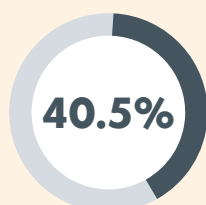


With decreasing unemployment across the region

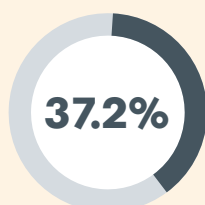


ranging from **5%** to **11.5%**
for the active population

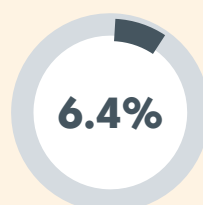
Most countries have seen an increase in VET participation



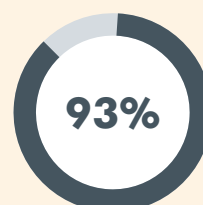
Kazakhstan



Kyrgyzstan



Tajikistan

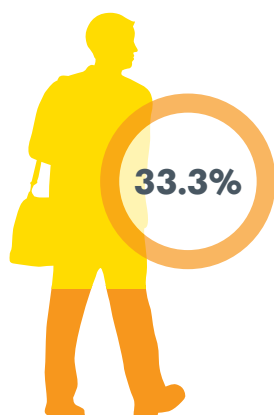


Uzbekistan

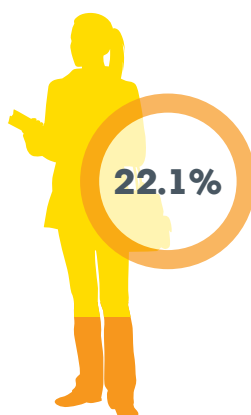
Percentage of total upper secondary students in vocational programmes

Education levels vary across the region

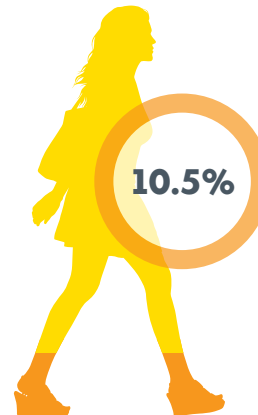
Adults attaining a higher education degree:



Kazakhstan



Kyrgyzstan



Tajikistan

The **share** of **NEETs** (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the **region** is on the **increase**.

Percentage change since 2013:



Kazakhstan



Kyrgyzstan

Enterprise-based practice is already a mandatory part of VET in all Central Asian countries except Kazakhstan. For this reason, countries started only from 2014 to explore other approaches. For its part, Kazakhstan made it a policy priority to introduce the dual approach from 2013 and has made system wide changes in this respect, including changes to legislation.

Most countries also report a gradual shift towards competence-based approaches and better alignment with employers' needs, recognising that the shift is not yet system wide.

All countries recognise the importance of quality in VET, and acknowledge that traditional approaches are formal and control-oriented. However, there is little development in this area. Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyzstan have started to implement independent accreditation, but none of the countries has as yet developed quality assurance approaches that can be implemented at a large scale at VET provider level.

All Central Asian countries have shown an interest in developing their qualification systems. Kazakhstan adopted a National Qualification Framework in 2012 and has already carried out a major review in 2016. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are at much earlier stages of development. Progress is generally slow, owing to the nature of national qualification frameworks, which affect all parts of the VET and education system.

'The challenge is with implementation: clarity of roles and responsibilities to increase accountability in delivery mechanisms'

In 2010, Central Asian countries referred to a general need to improve social partnership. From 2012, many countries noted the need for better coordination

among the public institutions responsible for human capital development. All countries subsequently set up new bodies at national level (national skills councils) and sector level (sector skills councils). However, in 2016 most countries report challenges in operationalising their work in a sustainable manner.

This applies in particular to sector skills councils. These were set up in all countries to formulate skills requirements, so that VET can then translate these into provision matching employer expectations. Countries that have been able to support active council work, report improved provision and cooperation between VET and the private sector. However, countries also refer to the very limited capacity of employer organisations to engage in council work on a regular basis. This is especially the case for sectors in which small and micro enterprises predominate.

Since 2012, all four countries report on measures taken to improve governance of VET providers. All countries have introduced school/college boards that involve local enterprises and public administration. However, by 2016, countries were not certain whether the new bodies were actually supporting improvement, as their mandate often remained unclear or overlapped with existing management structures.

The 2016 round of the Torino Process therefore demonstrates a heightened awareness that new governance structures may fail to deliver the expected results if working processes and responsibilities have not been clearly defined.




EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Kazakhstan has put great effort into improving its evidence on education and foster evidence-based policy making. The country regularly takes part in international comparisons, such as PISA and PIAAC, and actively uses findings to improve its education system. The Ministry of Education and Science commissions specific research to explore emerging issues. The implementation of the education strategy (including VET) is reviewed on a yearly basis, and the country uses the Torino Process to assess how VET has developed. To support systematic administrative evidence gathering, Kazakhstan has developed an internet based National Education Database, which also covers VET, operational since 2014.

Kazakhstan has considerably enhanced the role of employers in VET policy development and implementation. A key role is played by the Chamber of Entrepreneurs, which was set up 2013. Membership of the Chamber is mandatory for all businesses, including also small and medium enterprises. This means the Chamber is well resourced, and able to offer professional support and services to its members, including on skills. At regional level, the human capital development units of the regional chambers support cooperation between VET colleges and enterprises in a hands-on manner. The Chamber has the leading role in implementing the roadmap, which since 2014 has supported the large scale roll-out of dual education in all regions of Kazakhstan. Since 2016 the Chamber has also become responsible for the development, review and approval of occupational standards, which was previously the responsibility of line ministries. This has led to better coordination and a closer links with the private sector.

Uzbekistan: Self-employment and small business creation are a policy priority in Uzbekistan. The country has integrated entrepreneurial learning in its VET curricula, so that all students take part. In addition, a special credit facility has been established for VET graduates as part of a wider job guarantee scheme. It also provides information and training for VET graduates to help them develop business plans and apply for loans.

Uzbekistan has moved towards including students with special needs as of 2005. It remains the country with the greatest experience in this area and provides the greatest choice of professions for special needs students. In 2015 about 5,000 special needs students were enrolled in upper secondary education, including VET. Uzbekistan maintains a small number of specialised schools, in which 1500 students requiring specialised and intensive support are enrolled. The remaining special needs students study in mainstream schools.

A stylized map of Central Asia is shown in a light orange color against a light blue background. Two orange circular markers are placed on the map: one in the northern part of the region and one in the southern part. Lines connect these markers to two orange text boxes. The top box, connected to the northern marker, contains text about Kyrgyzstan. The bottom box, connected to the southern marker, contains text about Tajikistan.

Kyrgyzstan: In 2013, VET providers, the VET Agency and the Ministry of Education and Science initiated a sustainable tracer study methodology to be used by all VET providers. The methodology was developed with the participation of VET providers and extensively tested and improved over 3 years. It was adopted nationally in 2016 and will rolled out to all providers by 2018. In 2016, 30% of Initial VET providers were using the approach. The tracer study involves VET providers collecting feedback from graduates on their teaching and learning experience, their transition to the labour market and their employment situation. The data is used by VET providers and the national authorities.

Tajikistan: Tajikistan was the first Central Asian country to recognise that traditional VET provision is not always accessible or suitable for many adults, especially those with a low level of education. In 2008, Tajikistan set up adult learning centres to provide short, practice-oriented training and validate formal and non-formal learning. The centres are open to adult learners, with a specific focus on potential migrants. By 2016 there were 30 centres and a further 40 sub-centres across the country. Tajikistan adopted a law on adult education in 2016.



The ETF is an EU agency that helps transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy.

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