

Youth Partnership

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CONTRIBUTION OF PARTNER COUNTRIES TO EU YOUTH WIKI CHAPTER III: AZERBAIJAN EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Author: Maryam Majidova

**(National Focal Point at the “EU4Youth Co-ordination and Support”
Project Consortium led by EY)**

Co-author: Evgeniia Petrivska

**(Senior Non-Key Expert at the “EU4Youth Co-ordination and Support”
Project Consortium led by EY)**

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3.1. General context

Labour market situation in the country

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Azerbaijan's labour market has undergone significant changes as the country has transitioned from a centrally planned to a market-based economy. Today, Azerbaijan is an upper-middle-income country with a high [human development index](#).

Reliable data on youth labour participation remain limited and the country still grapples with challenges such as youth unemployment, gender wage disparities and access to quality employment opportunities.

Definition

In Azerbaijan, terms such as "youth employment" and "youth entrepreneurship" do not carry any distinct or separate definitions within the country's legal framework. Instead, they are encompassed within broader definitions put forth by legislation such as the laws "[On Employment](#)" and "[On entrepreneurial activity](#)", respectively. This legislation covers general employment and entrepreneurship, applicable to all demographics, including young people.

"Employment" is defined as any activity involving citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, foreigners and stateless persons that does not contravene the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan and that brings profit (income).

"Entrepreneurial activity" is defined as an activity carried out independently by a person with the main purpose of generating profit from the use of property, the provision of goods, the performance of work or the provision of services.

Demographics and employment statistics

In 2022, the [State Statistical Committee](#) reported that young people aged 14 to 29 accounted for 23.2% of the population and 26.5% of the economically active population, while overall labour force participation stood at 52.4%. However, reliable data on youth labour participation are scarce, with the committee being the sole public data source. No systematic national or international data collection exists for youth employment and entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan.

While there are no official statistics about the share of young people engaged in entrepreneurial activity, data from the State Statistical Committee show that almost half of the entrepreneurship subjects were concentrated in the capital as of 2021. Furthermore, gender disparity is also apparent in the field of entrepreneurship as the data show that women made up only 26.5% of entrepreneurship employees in 2020.

Unemployment rates have improved, with the official overall and youth unemployment rates standing at around 6% and 10.1% in 2021, respectively. Notably, these rates may not accurately represent part-time employment and informal employment. The [informal sector](#) is a key part of the economy, prevalent across sectors like agriculture, trade and services, and the government has initiated efforts to regulate this area.

Main concepts

Azerbaijan's labour market, although diverse, leans heavily on the oil and gas sector, presenting an economic vulnerability coupled with educational shortcomings and a skills gap within the workforce. However, the government's efforts aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises (hereinafter, SMEs) promotion and labour market reforms signal a positive shift, underlining the need for prioritised

workforce development, reinforced education–job market connections and comprehensive workers’ rights protection for a successful economic transition.

Labour market composition and challenges

Azerbaijan’s labour market encompasses key industries like oil and gas, construction, manufacturing, agriculture and tourism. However, the economy has faced challenges as a result of heavy reliance on oil and gas, accentuated by “oil shocks” and the Covid-19 pandemic. Efforts to develop the country’s human capital have faced **obstacles**, with nearly 66.8% of the active workforce lacking formal qualifications and over 60% of school leavers entering the workforce annually without a specialisation.

The quality of education remains a concern, despite **high literacy and enrolment rates**. Graduates often lack requisite job skills and awareness of their employment rights, contributing to exploitation, especially in regions outside the capital. A survey by the Trade Unions Confederation found that 27% of regional respondents were not regularly paid the minimum wage and a significant number did not receive paid leave.¹

Azerbaijan grapples with the challenges of youth unemployment, gender wage disparities and the difficulty of accessing quality employment opportunities. Women in particular struggle to secure higher-paid and managerial roles, earning **48% of men’s average wage** in the market in general and 73% in similar roles. **Female youth unemployment** was also higher at 11.8% compared to that for males (8.6% in 2021).

Aiming to meet international standards, the country has introduced **education and skill development reforms** and initiated vocational training programmes with global partners to boost employability. While economic factors and job prospects abroad have caused emigration, mainly to Russia and Turkey, foreign workers have been drawn to sectors like construction, oil and gas. Azerbaijan’s government has adopted strategies and road maps to develop a knowledge economy, enhance labour productivity, modernise education to meet labour market needs and promote inclusive youth employment. Its “**Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future**” **development concept** aspires to a developed, competitive Azerbaijan with high incomes, low unemployment and extensive opportunities for all citizens.

While no legal barriers exist for women’s employment, existing policies and strategies have different impacts on different gender groups. Especially because of persisting gender stereotypes, women are still **discouraged** from pursuing careers in traditionally male-dominated sectors, which are usually the most well-paid and in-demand professions.

Throughout the years, the government has taken measures to simplify permit-issuing procedures for entrepreneurs and has created an electronic portal. The “**Strategic Road Map for the Manufacture of Small and Medium Entrepreneurship-level Consumer Goods**” envisages introducing further simplification measures for necessary procedures, including the access of SMEs to financial opportunities.

Despite issues such as youth unemployment, wage gaps and insufficient youth labour data, the country has relatively improved unemployment rates and attempted to control the informal sector in recent years. It has demonstrated a commitment to labour market improvement through education

¹. Analytical study on the development of a youth employment promotion strategy, Azerbaijan Confederation of Trade Unions, 2021.

reforms, skills initiatives and legal foundations. However, it needs to further ensure equal access to quality job opportunities for all.

Entrepreneurship and labour market reforms

The economy's diversification underscores the importance of entrepreneurship. The [government has promoted SMEs](#) as catalysts for innovation, productivity and employment. This support includes financial aid, simplified business registration and improved access to markets and networks. The transition also brings challenges and opportunities for [labour market reforms](#) such as addressing gender disparities, ensuring fair work conditions and tackling youth unemployment through career guidance, fostering entrepreneurship and strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and the private sector.

3.2 Administration and governance

Governance

Legal framework

The [Constitution of Azerbaijan](#) (1995) and the [Labour Code](#) (1999) serve as the pillars of the country's employment legal framework, guiding the relationship between employers and employees.

The Labour Code plays an essential role in not only defining the fundamental labour rights of individuals but also ensuring their enforcement. For instance, it specifies the minimum age for employment as 15 years, although it does permit 14 year olds to engage in light work after school hours with parental consent. Additionally, it provides protection for recent graduates by forbidding probationary periods within their specialisation during their graduation year.

The Azerbaijani government's 2018 introduction of the Law "On Employment" established a comprehensive framework for employment policy, dovetailing with the Law "[On Youth Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan](#)" (2002), which empowers youth participation in employment and entrepreneurship policy making. Together, these legal instruments create a supportive environment for workers, recent graduates and young entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan.

The main actors

A robust network of public and non-public bodies shapes Azerbaijan's employment and entrepreneurship policy.

The [Ministry of Economy](#) implements the state policy and regulates the formation of the economic policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as the formation of the state policy in the field of entrepreneurship development and state support for entrepreneurship.

The [Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan](#) (MLSPP), established in 1992, oversees labour market regulation and social protection. Key institutional reforms have facilitated economic development, and [Azerbaijan's membership](#) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) since 1992 has led to the ratification of 58 conventions on various employment-related topics. The MLSPP [sets policies](#) on labour, employment, social protection and migration. It addresses concerns ranging from the neglect of minors to the social integration of former prisoners.

The MLSPP oversees the [State Employment Agency](#) (SEA), an agency that recommends state policies, oversees unemployment insurance funds and promotes job opportunities. In a noteworthy evolution, the SEA was established as a public legal entity in 2019. The subsequent year saw the SEA's charter granted [Presidential approval](#), thus further endorsing its legal status. The establishment of the SEA represents a continuation and strengthening of the foundational work carried out by its predecessor, the State Employment Service, under the supervision of the MLSPP.

Under the MLSPP, the [State Labour Inspectorate Service](#) ensures compliance with the Labour Code, while the State Social Protection Fund provides social insurance, labour pensions and benefits. The [Agency for Sustainable and Operational Social Security](#) (DOST) co-ordinates with agencies to provide employment services like jobseeker registration and job intermediation. [The State Social Protection Fund](#) provides compulsory state social insurance and additional voluntary social insurance, labour pensions, social benefits, targeted state social assistance, pensions and compensation.

The [State Agency on Vocational Education](#) (SAVE), established in 2016, collaborates with employers in a public-private partnership to enhance vocational education and training (VET). They ensure curriculums align with occupational standards and meet labour market demands. [Over 100 agreements](#) have been forged between the agency, schools and the private sector. The VET

curriculums are crafted with contributions from employers, ensuring alignment with occupational standards and responsiveness to labour market demands.

The [Small and Medium Business Development Agency](#) (SMBDA), under the Ministry of the Economy, [supports](#) the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by providing services and co-ordinating government services for SMEs. The SMBDA participates in forming state policy for SMEs and ensures service quality for entrepreneurs.

The [National Observatory on the Labour Market and Social Protection Affairs](#) (the Observatory) conducts regular labour market analysis and informs stakeholders about skills demand. Other institutions like the [Ministry of Science and Education](#) (hereinafter - MSE) and [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#) also engage in activities related to youth employment and entrepreneurship.

Non-public actors include the [Confederation of Trade Unions](#) (ATUC), which has advocated labour and socio-economic rights since 1993. The ATUC network of 16 000 unions and one million members [promotes youth employment and entrepreneurship](#) through collaboration with the government and employers. Their “[Young Trade Union Leader: Comprehensive Programme for Young Workers](#)” programme exemplifies this mission, aiming to increase membership, boost youth activity and safeguard talented young people’s interests.

The [National Confederation of Entrepreneurs \(Employers\) Organisations](#) (ASK) co-ordinates the activities of entrepreneurs and protects their legal and economic interests. It has implemented initiatives on youth employment, particularly entrepreneurship. ASK drives youth employment and entrepreneurship via a [dedicated commission and initiatives](#), which [encompass](#) a school-to-work transition survey and participation in the ILO’s “Start and Improve Your Business” and “Know About your Business” programmes.

Ultimately, this complex interplay of organisations, each with a distinct but complementary role, helps drive employment, entrepreneurship and youth engagement in Azerbaijan, forming the backbone of its socio-economic development.

Hierarchical management of employment and labour market

In Azerbaijan, employment and labour market issues are managed hierarchically with the MLSPP leading the charge in policy creation and enforcement, particularly around youth employment and entrepreneurship. By collaborating with other government bodies, the MLSPP develops unified strategies, proposes legislation and supervises national policy implementation to address employment challenges.

Collaborative approach: national policies and local implementation in Azerbaijan’s employment and labour market

In Azerbaijan, top-level employment and labour market policies are transformed into grass-roots action by regional and local authorities, including municipalities. These bodies adapt national strategies to meet regional needs, collaborating with local stakeholders to address specific labour market requirements. Local self-government entities [formulate and enforce social and legal protection programmes for youth](#), as per state policy, offering organisational support and preferential loans for young people in rural areas venturing into agriculture or entrepreneurship. This co-ordinated approach, which blends nationwide direction with local specificity, ensures an effective and adaptive response to employment and labour market challenges across the country.

Cross-sectoral co-operation

Social partnerships and collaboration in employment strategy implementation

[Azerbaijan's Employment Strategy 2019-2030](#) emphasises social partnerships at all implementation stages and advocates collaboration between the public and private sectors, including stakeholder consultations during the strategy's execution and evaluation. [The Action plan for the implementation of the Employment Strategy 2020-2025](#) stipulates co-operation with the private sector and other entities to create an appropriate regulatory legal framework and enhance communication between employers and the local institutions of the SEA.

One significant mechanism for co-operation is the [Tripartite Commission of Social and Economic Affairs](#) (TCSEA), established in 2016. This includes the MLSP, the ATUC and the ASK. The TCSEA ensures legislative consultations, co-ordinates work on the General Collective Agreement, aids regulation of social-labour relations nationally, shares best practices on social partnership and raises public awareness of its activities. It also collaborates with international organisations to learn from global best practices and holds consultations on the application of international labour norms.

Advancing sustainable development and bridging cross-sectoral co-operation

The Republic of Azerbaijan, having adopted the “[Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)”, strives for a more sustainable and diverse economy. The [National Co-ordination Council for Sustainable Development](#), established in 2016, oversees the performance of state agencies in relation to the national obligations from the Agenda 2030. The council assigns tasks to relevant state agencies and monitors national achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, there exists an information gap regarding specific cross-sectoral co-operation among ministries, departments and agencies in formulating policies and measures related to youth employment and entrepreneurship. Current strategies covering employment and entrepreneurship generally incorporate activities for young people, but details about cross-sectoral collaboration remain less transparent.

3.3 Skills forecasting

Forecasting system(s)

The evaluation of labour market demands and the necessary skills forecasting in Azerbaijan is a multifaceted endeavour, driven by several entities working in synergy. Their combined efforts aim to create a robust and adaptable framework, responsive to the changing needs of the economy and the labour force.

Type of schemes and mechanisms in place

As of the rules of “[Admission to VET institutions](#)” set by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2019, the admission plan for educational institutions integrates the needs of the labour market and the economy’s developmental directions. This plan is a collaborative effort between the MLSPP and the MSE, factoring in skills forecasting. The SEA leverages its vacancy database for student admissions and forecasting the necessary labour market skills.

The sixth “[State Programme on Improvement of Official Statistics in the Republic of Azerbaijan between 2018 and 2025](#)” aims to enhance the national statistical system to better address international challenges. It focuses on refining statistical data on the labour force, poverty, non-formally employed people, child labour and the employment status of persons with disabilities. The programme also includes integrating government databases into the State Statistical Committee’s database, monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) progress and creating a statistical database and internet portal for public awareness.

Digital skills forecasting

According to an [EU4Digital study](#), Azerbaijan’s data-collection methodology is aligned with approximately 43% of the European Union’s (EU) practices. Despite not having implemented regular national-level digital skills forecasting, Azerbaijan uses a regular labour force forecasting model. The government has shown interest in aligning existing forecasting methodologies with EU practices and has begun to measure some digital skills indicators using the [Digital Economy and Society Index methodology](#).

Top-level authority co-ordinating labour market and skills forecasting

The Ministry of Economy implements state policies and nurtures economic growth by creating business-friendly environments, promoting investment, fostering entrepreneurship, managing regulatory systems and preparing macroeconomic forecasts, thereby enhancing the competitiveness and educational resources for micro, small and medium-sized businesses.

The MLSPP [evaluates](#) the demand and supply of the labour force and generates forecasts on the development of the labour market. They then utilise this information to formulate and implement policies in labour relations, employment, demography and social protection. Furthermore, the MLSPP also contributes to the creation of socio-economic forecasts alongside other authorities.

The SEA [develops](#) forecasts on the funding needed for the social protection of jobseekers and unemployed citizens and guarantees the execution of policy measures. It also prepares annual forecasts for employment by economic sectors and estimates the number of unemployed people for the next three years.

The Observatory assesses the labour market and social protection areas, monitors developmental trends and prepares analyses and forecasts. These efforts are geared towards effective management decisions in the relevant sectors.

Public-private partnerships and vocational training enhancement

Public-private partnerships play a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency of VET in Azerbaijan. These partnerships engage in the development and forecasting of specialist training in line with labour market requirements. Furthermore, they co-operate with entrepreneurs, unions and associations to formulate educational standards and curriculums on pertinent professions. Nationwide, Sector Committees ensure broader stakeholder participation, mainly focusing on the evolution of occupational standards. [Mutual agreements](#) between employers and VET institutions facilitate short-term, tuition-based courses. VET institutions can offer these courses, lasting up to six months, throughout the year based on requests from employers or their organisations. Students receive a completion certificate at the end of the course.

Collaboration for youth employment and entrepreneurship

The ATUC contributes to labour market analysis and, in collaboration with the government, addresses issues of youth employment and entrepreneurship. In 2021, ATUC produced an analytical study on youth employment promotion strategies, and Azerbaijan has participated in the European Training Foundation's (ETF) [Torino Process](#) since 2011, reaping benefits from national consultations and expertise support in projects like "[Make it Match](#)", culminating in the creation of the Observatory. ETF currently aids the [design of an expansive EU project on skills matching](#) to bolster labour market information systems and support the Observatory's impending launch.

The EU Twinning Project, "[Support to the State Statistical Committee and the State Tax Service under the Ministry of Economy](#)", ran from 2020 to 2022, aiming to enhance local capacity for handling business statistics relevant to Azerbaijan's private sector and the performance of SMEs. However, specific cross-sectoral co-operation measures among public authorities, social partners, employers' associations and trade organisations are absent, representing an untapped area of potential policy development and implementation influence.

Skills development

Formal education institutions, general, higher and vocational

The MSE plays a crucial role in identifying the need for specialists and managing the supply of job roles. Their responsibilities extend to drafting proposals for the yearly intake of students into higher, secondary-specialised and initial vocational education institutions, as well as conducting activities to satisfy the demand for pedagogical staff.

In 2016, to address the challenges of skills mismatch across various sectors, the government introduced the [Strategic Road Map for Vocational Education and Training](#) (the Road Map for VET). The Road Map for VET sketches out a strategic vision for 2020 and sets a long-term plan for 2025. SAVE is responsible for implementing the reform agenda proposed in the road map.

In 2018, several vital legal documents were passed with the specific aim of bolstering the VET system. These included the country's first [Law "On VET"](#), the Law "On Employment" and the [Employment Strategy for 2019-2030](#). This employment strategy acknowledged the rising need for highly skilled workers with advanced competences and targeted rapid enhancements in the fields of education, training and skills development.

The [Strategy of socio-economic development for 2022-2026](#) was established for the implementation phase. This strategy seeks to modernise the VET system, better align it with labour market requirements and enhance its reach and quality. Key objectives of the strategy include expanding VET coverage, integrating employers into the VET system, refining VET financing and management and boosting the professionalism of VET educators and management staff.

Non-formal and informal learning

SAVE spearheads the implementation of modern education technologies and the analysis of best practices in the field of initial VET. It also develops and facilitates the use of methods for recognising competences obtained through non-formal and informal channels.

The [Employment Strategy for 2019-2030](#) outlined a series of steps for the creation of an outcome-based [National Qualifications Framework](#) (NQF), supporting the development of competence-based curriculums and setting up a system for recognising competences gained through non-formal and informal learning.

Awareness-raising initiatives organised by top-level public authorities

The Azerbaijani government has prioritised human capital development in several policy documents, including “[Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development](#)” and the “[Strategic Road Map for the National Economy and Main Economic Sectors](#)”.

Endorsed by the President in 2022, the [State Programme for enabling young individuals to study in esteemed universities](#) aims to nurture skilled personnel to fortify Azerbaijan’s sustainable development by educating them about global market technologies and developing practical knowledge to meet labour market standards. The programme, set to run until 2026, involves identifying priority specialities, establishing associated educational programmes and implementing mechanisms to ensure graduates’ employment and stimulate career progression.

3.4 Career guidance and counselling

Career guidance and counselling services

Existence of guidance and counselling services

Azerbaijan's career orientation services, legally grounded by [Article 22](#) of the Law "On Employment", offer interviews, assessments and career guidance, a system further enhanced by the 2019 "[Provision of Career Guidance Services](#)" regulations. Alongside enhancing career guidance in educational institutions, the country is addressing identified inadequacies and organising vocational classes in schools.

Even though Azerbaijan is not part of the EU Youth Guarantee Scheme, similar measures have been enacted to bolster professional skills, employment opportunities and overall youth development, as mandated by the Law "On Employment", which also encourages vocational training for young people and staff education initiatives led by employers.

Career guidance and counselling services' providers

Azerbaijan has a robust system of career guidance and counselling services, primarily orchestrated by the MLSP and the MSE, through various institutions. These institutions provide a range of services, including career guidance, vocational training and support for job seekers and the unemployed. Various online platforms and projects have been launched to aid in the delivery of these services, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Overall, these initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to equipping individuals with the necessary tools and resources to navigate the labour market successfully, and to fostering a highly skilled workforce in Azerbaijan.

Collaboration between MLSP and MSE; SEA's initiatives

The MLSP and the MSE along with their respective educational institutions are engaged in collaboration through planned, regular and ad hoc meetings. The [MSE's plan](#) envisages that, by 2025, all general schools will be capable of effectively handling career education and supporting the country's VET system.

The SEA delivers career guidance services predominantly through general educational institutions and its regional offices. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the SEA launched "[Alo Career](#)", an online support platform aimed at fostering individuals' personal and professional development, ensuring the availability of career guidance services for target groups and providing a prompt response to requests.

The SEA also runs the online project "[Bacar](#)", which includes information about professions, vocational diagnostics and career choice support.

Career development forum and upcoming initiatives

In December 2022, the SEA held [the second Azerbaijan Career Development Forum](#) to raise awareness about current labour market trends and challenges and to discuss the future of career planning. The forthcoming initiatives in the field include an employment map of Azerbaijan, a national employment register, an informal employment control information resource, a mobile inspection and monitoring system, an electronic labour exchange and fair, and a public works portal.

Role of the Observatory and vocational training centres

The Observatory supplies data that informs career guidance services in SEA and DOST offices. Citizens wishing to receive vocational training can apply to SEA Regional Employment Centres or "[DOST Centres](#)". After registering as jobseekers or as unemployed, these institutions refer them to a vocational training provider. Applications for these services are free and state-funded.

The [vocational training centres](#) play a vital role in providing registered jobseekers and unemployed individuals with quality education in modern professions and specialisms aligned with labour market requirements, helping them find employment.

MSE's contributions and higher education institutions' initiatives

The MSE provides career guidance services at every stage of education. Their affiliate, the [Education Institute](#), has developed a [methodological tool](#) for career guidance professionals, offering both online and offline training nationwide and promoting career guidance in all aspects of general education, with school psychologists and teachers serving as primary providers.

In higher education, independent career centres have been established at most institutions to guide students towards their future careers and further education; notable examples include [Baku State University's Career Planning Centre](#) and [ADA University's Career Management Centre](#), both providing guidance and job search assistance. In the [vocational education sector](#), SAVE provides career guidance and counselling, conducted by teaching staff and deputy directors overseeing education and training. This includes initiatives such as open-house events, company tours, internship programmes and job fairs in collaboration with the SEA.

Career guidance and counselling projects

Seven pilot vocational education centres are set to open career support centres under the EU-funded project "[VET for the future development of VET providers' excellence in Azerbaijan](#)" (2020-2024), implemented by the [United Nations Development Programme](#) (UNDP). Higher education institutions have no single unified career guidance system, but most have independently established career centres and offer career-counselling services, job-seeking assistance, CV writing guidance, interview preparation and job fair organisation.

[Established](#) under the Presidential Order (2019), the Youth Development and Career Centre operates under the [Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan](#). The centre offers training through its representative offices on various topics related to personal and professional development, ensuring comprehensive development of young citizens in cities and regions according to state youth policy.

[Junior Achievement Azerbaijan](#) (JAA) is a part of a global youth-serving NGO that has established a [Career Planning and Development Programme](#). The programme aims to help young individuals discover their potential and understand the importance of career planning. Within this framework, JAA launched the "Build the Future" project (2015-2019), focused on career preparation and professional skills development.

Additionally, JAA conducted the "Youth Empowerment and Leadership" programme (2019-2020), supported by various entities, including the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Youth Foundation, the [United Nations Population Fund](#) (UNFPA), [United Nations Children's Fund](#) (UNICEF) and the EU. This project aimed to enhance young people's professional abilities and employment opportunities. Last, the three-month "Career Orientation and Planning Training for Youth" project implemented in 2020 provided training sessions, helping participants to refine their professional choices.

Main users of the services

Under the Law "On Employment", career guidance services cater to students, their parents, jobseekers and unemployed individuals. In 2022, the [SEA extended its career guidance services](#) to nearly 70 000 people. Jobseekers and students were the primary beneficiaries of these services, gaining insights into profession selection methods and learning about in-demand occupations from volunteer employers sharing insights into the labour market.

General education institutions established [vocation-oriented classes](#) from the academic year 2019-2020. These aim to nurture entrepreneurial skills and provide the labour market with professionally

trained individuals. According to the “vocation-oriented classes” web page, successful graduates from the 80 schools and 124 classes offering these classes receive completion certificates and secondary education attestation. The courses include professions in the service, construction and agriculture sectors.

Specific target groups

The SEA is implementing the “[Creation of inclusive and decent jobs for socially vulnerable groups of the population](#)” project with the UNDP until 2024. This project aims to enhance the employability of jobseekers from vulnerable groups and create opportunities for them to engage in productive employment. Beneficiaries submitted business plans after receiving appropriate training during the first stage. The SEA is now facilitating the provision of assets for the approved beneficiaries to realise their business plans.

Funding

Career guidance and counselling services receive funding from the [Unemployment Insurance Fund’s budget](#). The career guidance budget for 2022 stood at 2 million Azerbaijan manats (AZN), unchanged from the previous year, representing 1.1% of the total budget. To establish the Youth Development and Career Centres in 2019, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan’s reserve fund initially allocated AZN [4 million](#) to the Youth Foundation. Information on the centres’ annual budget is not publicly available.

Quality assurance

Role of the TKTA

The [Education Quality Assurance Agency](#) (TKTA) is tasked with supporting the establishment and development of internal quality assurance systems. It evaluates these systems and provides improvement recommendations. However, no specific guidelines for career guidance and counselling exist. Despite mention of career guidance services in legal policy documents, they lack a comprehensive definition of career guidance and counselling and no open-source information about providers receiving feedback or recommendations is available.

Career guidance and counselling services co-ordination and projects

The sole co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanism for career guidance and counselling services is stipulated in the “[Rules for Implementation of career guidance services in general education institutions](#)”. This mandates the collaboration of pedagogical staff from general education institutions, non-governmental organisations and private enterprises with the MSE for training implementation.

There are organised awareness-raising events that provide occupational information, professional presentations and company visits, keeping in mind the age characteristics of students at different levels of general education. However, while aggregate data on career guidance service users is monitored by agencies under the MOE and MLSP, these data are neither adequately segregated nor evaluated. That being said, individual projects like “Alo career” do conduct customer satisfaction surveys.

The EU-funded project “[Support to Implementation of NQF in Azerbaijan](#)” developed proposals for a Concept National System of Career Guidance and Counselling in Azerbaijan’s implementation plan. It recommended developing a quality assurance system and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of career guidance services in co-operation with the MOE and MLSP.

3.5 Traineeships and apprenticeships

Official guidelines on traineeships and apprenticeships

The state of vocational education and training

Azerbaijan's vocational education system, guided by the Law "On VET", encompasses basic vocational high schools, college-preparatory schools and education centres, with SAVE bolstering effectiveness through employer collaborations. The Road Map for VET, aiming to align the vocational system with labour market needs, established pilot institutions with industry-aligned standards and fostered collaboration between stakeholders, promoting practical training and apprenticeships.

Despite these advancements, legal provisions for apprenticeships remain ambiguous, including the responsibilities of involved parties, social security coverage and the status of traineeships in educational programmes, and no connection to the Youth Guarantee Scheme exists due to Azerbaijan's non-participation.

The crucial role of SAVE in vocational education

For 2025, the [long-term vision](#) is to forge a vocational education system that cultivates a skilled workforce through strong partnerships with employers and robust vocational institutions and programmes responsive to labour market demands.

SAVE is crucial to the vocational education system, spearheading public-private partnerships with employers for improved efficiency. It collaborates with employers to develop curriculums meeting labour market needs based on occupational standards. Though SAVE oversees vocational institutions, decision making and policy implementation are co-ordinated with the MSE and other government bodies. Some [responsibilities](#), such as financing or constructing new VET institutions, curriculum approval and quality assurance, fall under other entities.

The "Be Professional" apprenticeship programme and dual education

Pursuing this objective, SAVE has been running the "[Be Professional](#)" apprenticeship programme within the "[Dual Education Programme](#)" since 2021. It includes both short and long-term [apprenticeship programmes](#) in collaboration with employers, targeting jobless youth. Participants gain theoretical and practical knowledge in various professions as per employer requirements. The first weeks cover theoretical skills, followed by a combination of theoretical and practical courses. After the [evaluation](#), successful trainees receive certificates and the chance to work at the training companies. [Agreements](#) between employers and VET Centres require the provision of work uniforms, transportation, insurance and daily meals during the programme.

In the 2022-2023 academic year, 15 vocational educational institutions across nine regions began teaching the [apprenticeship profession](#) under the dual education programme. As of May 2023, 785 students were enrolled in the programme, which is supported by over 70 employer partners, offering 23 specialities in fields like industry, tourism, service and agriculture.

Promoting traineeships and apprenticeships

Vocational training and on-the-job learning

In Azerbaijan, vocational training efforts focus on programme-based collaboration with institutions and employers, but the legislation overlooks specifics on traineeships and apprenticeships.

Typically, [on-the-job learning](#) in Azerbaijan takes the form of an informal apprenticeship. The local SEA bodies and "DOST" centres in Azerbaijan co-ordinate [vocational training](#) for the unemployed and

jobseekers. The institutions providing these services fall under the employment agencies' jurisdiction and other collaborating vocational education institutions.

International projects and vocational education development

International pilot-project and [work-based learning initiatives](#) include the GIZ-implemented, EU-financed [dual-like VET pilot schemes in agriculture and tourism](#), and the “[Access to Hospitality and Apprenticeship Scheme](#)” project spearheaded by the British Council and SAVE. Launched in 2016 and continuing through 2020, the Access to Hospitality and Apprenticeship Scheme aimed to bolster vocational graduates' employment opportunities in Azerbaijan. By involving leading employers from the rapidly growing tourism, hospitality and service sectors in student apprenticeship schemes, and offering practical experience at top-tier hotels, the programme provided a launchpad for student careers and contributed to the vocational education sector's development.

SAVE also implements the [Dual Education/Work-based Learning Programme](#) with the joint initiative of the EU and the UNDP to help students learn in a real-time working environment and directly increase the quality of education. Within the programme, VET institutions in regions have built partnerships with local employers in different professional spheres to offer students hands-on training courses.

Legislative gaps and promotional challenges

Azerbaijan's legislation does not explicitly make reference to traineeships and apprenticeships, which limits the availability of high-level promotional information. The existing measures are predominantly programme-based, working in conjunction with other institutions and employers. However, details about initiatives to assist young people in engaging in these opportunities or awareness-raising efforts are not readily accessible or exclusively focused.

Recognition of learning outcomes

ECTS integration and recognition of informal learning

Azerbaijan, a member of the Bologna Process since 2005, has adopted the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and recognised informal and non-formal learning through changes to the Law “[On Education](#)” in 2009, 2018 and 2020. This law allows for the application of ECTS in formal education systems, including at secondary, higher and vocational levels, potentially enabling credit recognition for traineeships and apprenticeships.

The TKTA is the primary institution in charge of accreditation. It handles the processes of education institution accreditation, foreign credential recognition, non-formal and informal learning recognition and validation, and provision of advice and methodological support for developing internal quality assurance systems in education institutions.

In 2020, a Cabinet of Ministers resolution approved the [regulation for non-formal and informal learning](#) assessment and certification, tasking the TKTA with the implementation of its inaugural validation scheme. This scheme certifies equivalence to an initial vocational qualification, facilitating its holders to progress with vocational education in the formal system. The process is available to citizens who have completed secondary education and possess a minimum of two years' work experience in a relevant speciality.

TKTA's role and the validation process

The four-step validation process comprises applicant registration, preliminary document review, evaluation of knowledge, skills and experience, and issuance of a professional qualification confirmation. Applicants with a minimum of two years of non-formal and informal education can access detailed information about each step and track their application via an [electronic subsystem](#).

According to the [annual report](#) and [website](#) information, the TKTA has prepared the selection criteria for experts and employers and the internal procedural rules for practical examinations, and created expert and question databases for multiple specialities. The TKTA provides recognition for 17 different specialities and lists the module specifications for each on its website.

The [State Examination Centre](#) manages central assessments in general education and admissions for undergraduate and graduate levels of higher education at universities. Simultaneously, the [Higher Attestation Commission](#) oversees the external assessments of doctoral degrees.

The NQF

Adopted in 2018, the Azerbaijan [National Qualifications Framework](#) (NQF) seeks to enhance the transparency and quality of qualifications across all education sectors. The framework aims to align qualifications with societal and labour market needs, encourage lifelong learning and promote recognition of prior learning. It serves as a tool for creating a bridge between education and training and labour market demands, facilitating the recognition of competences obtained through non-formal and informal learning.

Funding

Under the Law “On VET”, the financing for VET institutions comes from various sources, including the state budget, state foundation, student fees and external donors. SAVE operates using funds from the state budget, supplemented by extra-budgetary funds, loans, grants, donations and service provision revenues. In 2023, the government set aside AZN 64.2 million for VET expenses, equating to less than 1.5% of the total education budget of AZN 4.4 billion. However, the specific amount of funding for traineeships and apprenticeships, either within the VET budget or separately, remains unknown.

Moreover, the EU assists the Azerbaijani government with [various VET-focused projects](#), often encompassing traineeships and apprenticeships. Since 2017, the EU has contributed more than €9 million towards these initiatives, with [€5.6 million directed](#) towards the “VET for the Future” project that includes dual education and work-based learning programmes. Regarding the budget for the apprenticeship project implemented by the British Council, no information is currently accessible.

Quality assurance

Considerable strides have been made towards increasing the autonomy of VET institutions. The Cabinet of Ministers approved new [statutes for VET institutions](#) in 2019, which governs their transition to public legal entities and grants them greater control over service provision and financial management. Additionally, the TKTA lends its expertise by offering advice and methodological support for the development of internal quality assurance systems in educational establishments.

Nevertheless, there is no distinct system for the quality assurance of traineeships and apprenticeships. Currently, SAVE takes the lead in supervising the quality assurance of VET institutions, with a focus on various factors like the curriculum, personnel, educational infrastructure and teaching processes. The Road Map for VET charts the creation of 10 new centres of excellence across the country, specialising in education and training for occupations in high demand. These centres carry the important duty of informing policy makers based on key performance indicators.

3.6 Integration of young people in the labour market

Youth employment measures

It is worth noting that one of the shortcomings of the policy framework on youth employment is the lack of specific policy measures targeting young people in the country. Although policy documents include objectives to increase youth employment, they do not clearly specify the implementation mechanisms to achieve expected results. Moreover, existing measures are mostly project based with no legal base for direct job-creation schemes targeting young people.

As previously mentioned, Azerbaijan does not implement the Youth Guarantee Scheme; however, it has implemented similar policies aimed at enhancing youth employment. Over the years, Azerbaijan has adopted various policy documents with objectives and measures aimed at facilitating young jobseekers' access to employment.

Policies and measures

The Law "On Employment" in Azerbaijan plays a pivotal role in offering support and assurances for jobseekers and the unemployed. This law focuses on defining terms, safeguarding rights, co-ordinating efforts and promoting collaboration to bolster employment opportunities and provide social protection for individuals in Azerbaijan.

The law encompasses several significant aspects and provides a comprehensive framework for supporting social enterprise and employment. It addresses the definition of key terms, the right to participate in employment initiatives, additional safeguards for vulnerable individuals, the establishment of Co-ordination Committees and employer responsibilities in terms of sharing job vacancy information and promoting educational opportunities.

Employment strategy for 2019-2030

The Employment Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the period 2019-2030 aims to facilitate the shift of employment policy from an extensive to an intensive phase. Its key objectives include boosting employment, ensuring full employment, promoting decent work and enhancing labour productivity. Priorities have been identified, such as enhancing the transition of young individuals from vocational education to the labour market, improving career-counselling and planning services, and fostering the widespread adoption of digital technologies.

Targets in employment strategy

The strategy sets forth key targets pertaining to vocational education, including reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) to 15%, ensuring the employment of individuals registered in the SEA, delivering vocational training to the unemployed, establishing regional vocational training centres, developing occupational standards for all occupations in the labour market and establishing mechanisms for validating non-formal and informal learning.

Action plan for the Employment Strategy (2020-2025)

The [Action plan](#) for the implementation of the Employment Strategy for the period 2020-2025 aims to ensure its successful implementation and includes the following activities:

- expanding the network of vocational rehabilitation centres for individuals with disabilities;
- supporting the establishment of career centres and career-counselling services;
- enhancing the effectiveness of vocational training courses;
- broadening the application of competence-oriented modular training;

- implementing measures to attract the inactive working-age population to the labour market.

These activities are designed to promote effective employment and address the needs of various target groups within the labour market.

National priorities for socio-economic development

The [Azerbaijan 2030: national priorities for socio-economic development](#) outlines five core priorities aimed at fostering a competitive economy, developing a dynamic and inclusive society based on social justice, nurturing human capital alongside a modern innovation environment, revitalising liberated territories and promoting clean environment and “green growth”. Among these priorities, the goal of a “Society based on dynamic, inclusive, and social justice” targets effective employment for all, women’s increased economic participation, an infrastructure for individuals with disabilities and broadened employment support alongside strengthened social security systems.

Wage subsidies and unemployment insurance fund

As per the [decision](#) of the Cabinet of Ministers, the MLSPP offers wage subsidies to social workers through the Unemployment Insurance Fund, with a particular emphasis on supporting young individuals. The SEA administers a [wage subsidy programme](#), wherein a portion of an employee’s salary is provided for a minimum duration of three months and a maximum of 12 months. In 2023, a total of 882 individuals benefited from wage subsidies under this initiative by the agency.

Youth Employment Programme and Youth Fund

In April 2019, the SEA and the MLSPP’s Youth Fund jointly launched a new [Youth Employment Programme](#). The primary objectives of this programme are to assist young individuals in achieving successful career development, generate additional job opportunities, particularly in regional areas, and enhance competition within the labour market.

The programme specifically targets graduates of vocational and higher education institutions who are under the age of 29. Participants are offered a minimum one-year employment contract and receive financial support from the Youth Fund. Within the programme, young individuals have the opportunity to engage in career planning activities and vocational training programmes, which are organised by the Youth Fund and the SEA. The programme gives preference to socially vulnerable groups, individuals residing in regional areas and those with limited or no prior work experience.

Azerbaijan Employment Support Project

The [Azerbaijan Employment Support Project](#), which was approved by the World Bank in March 2020, aims to assist the most vulnerable groups in Azerbaijan to secure employment and income by promoting self-employment opportunities. The project involves enhancing the government’s national self-employment programme, providing support to start-ups, expanding the programme to reach more beneficiaries, improving governance and co-ordination, and conducting tests to provide business support to individuals with the potential to develop their own enterprises.

Flexicurity measures focusing on young people

Azerbaijan is witnessing a [shift away](#) from traditional employment models towards supporting career transitions and ensuring their security. This change has been influenced by factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise of online platforms and technological advancements. Freelancing has become prevalent, particularly among young people, with the [majority](#) of self-employed individuals engaged in sectors like software development, language translation, advisory services and teaching. However, there is a need for a definitive regulatory framework to address the specific needs of young people,

including the implementation of measures like “first-job” contracts and flexible working arrangements, to enhance flexibility and security in their employment.

Digital transformation in labour and employment

As per the Presidential Decree “[On the expansion of the application of electronic services in the field of labour, employment, social protection and social security](#)”, a unified electronic information system comprising 18 subsystems, including the “[e-social’ internet portal](#)”, was launched.

Another significant addition is the [Labour and employment subsystem](#) (AMAS), developed on the unified platform of the MLSPP. This subsystem offers real-time access to employment services such as job vacancies, thereby presenting an accurate representation of job prospects for jobseekers through a regularly updated database.

The AMAS “[Employment map](#)” oversees the overall automation and management of human resource functions and salary operations. It ensures adherence to international labour standards, manages salary calculations and payments, builds an industrial accident register and features electronic audit and penalty modules.

Moreover, the “[Informal Employment Control](#)” maintains a single electronic information system designed to identify businesses promoting informal employment, assess their risks, conduct comparative audits, develop annual plans in relevant sectors, register events and disseminate pertinent notifications.

The state of freelancing

Freelancing presents an appealing alternative for young individuals who struggle to secure traditional employment, providing an opportunity to secure international jobs that often pay more than local employers.

Legislation currently views personal self-employment and freelancing in Azerbaijan as informal employment due to the absence of legal recognition or registration. For example, employment contracts are only offered to regular platform workers, not those working occasionally or flexibly.

Legislative challenges for freelancers

Consequently, most young people engaged in freelancing roles in language translation, training, consulting services, transport tourism and other services operate unregistered and tax-free. Despite the introduction of tax income benefits for entrepreneurs following the 2019 [Tax Code](#) amendment, these benefits do not extend to platform workers or freelancers, failing to incentivise legalisation of their economic activities.

Reconciliation of private and working life for young people

The Labour Code of Azerbaijan comprehensively outlines the major rules and encompasses various facets of leave entitlements, encapsulating rest periods, basic leave periods, educational leave, maternity leave, social leave for childcare and paternity leave. The Labour Code stipulates several provisions and benefits for employees such as minimum rest periods between two working days and paid basic leave periods.

Labour regulations and leave entitlements

Additional leave days are granted to individuals with multiple children, while young workers have prescribed minimum leave periods based on their age. Working individuals who are also studying can benefit from paid educational leave for assorted purposes. Maternity leave has a specific duration, which can be extended in cases of difficult childbirth or multiple births. Parents or family members looking after a child are entitled to partially paid social leave until the child attains a certain age. Furthermore, men also have a right to unpaid paternity leave.

Rights of persons with disabilities

While Azerbaijani legislation seeks to address the needs of persons with disabilities in the employment sector, it lacks distinct privileges for young individuals, and despite these legislative efforts, those with disabilities still encounter substantial difficulties in the employment sector, indicating that there is room for further legislative improvement.

The Law “On Employment” and [other legal acts](#) endeavour to provide equal job opportunities to all citizens, and special provisions exist for segregated employment and vocational training for people with disabilities. Retention preference at workplaces during cutbacks is given to employees with disabilities with comparable skills. The state ensures training opportunities for and offers financial assistance to companies employing workers with disabilities. A specific quota is set for the employment of people with disabilities, depending on the company’s size. Additionally, aid is also provided for those wishing to establish themselves as self-employed.

The rights and social security of people with disabilities are protected under the [Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”](#) (2018).

Advancing women’s employment rights

Under the World Bank’s [“Lifting Legal Barriers to Women’s Employment in Azerbaijan”](#) project (2020), two draft laws were prepared:

- on amendments to the Labour Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan to reduce the number of jobs restricting women’s employment, based on scientific approaches;
- on approval of a list of certain industries, positions and workplaces, including underground jobs with harsh working conditions where the labour of pregnant women or women with a child under one year was prohibited (this new resolution approves a revised list of industries, occupations and workplaces with severe conditions where female labour is prohibited).

In 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers [passed](#) a bill reducing the number of prohibited jobs from 674 to 204, with the restriction applying only to pregnant women or women with children under the age of one.

Other potential [measures](#) encompass the implementation of a draft resolution [“On Women, Peace and Security”](#) and the [Action Plan on Ensuring Women’s Employment](#). These initiatives aim to update laws related to gender equality, enhance women’s rights awareness, fight against gender-based violence, support women entrepreneurs and organise sexual and reproductive health and family planning.

Funding of schemes/initiatives

State programmes and their financing

State programmes like the Youth Employment Programme are funded through both the state budget and the respective budgets of implementing agencies. [Article 7.7 of the State Budget for 2023](#) allocates AZN 562 million for expenditure related to culture, art, information, physical education, youth policy and associated activities. From this, AZN 46 million is earmarked for physical education and youth policy, and AZN 255 million is allocated to other institutions and events related to the fields of culture, art, information, physical education and youth policy.

However, precise information on the amount designated for youth policy, specifically youth employment measures, remains unavailable. [The Employment Support Project's](#) implementation has been approved and is to be financed by a \$100 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), according to its project page.

EU funding for youth programmes

In terms of [EU funding](#), Azerbaijan has participated in six EU4Youth capacity programmes. These programmes aim to promote youth employment and entrepreneurship via co-operation between public authorities, awareness-raising activities about decent work standards and the piloting of certain elements of the Youth Guarantee Scheme. Consequently, the EU has allocated €20 million for the implementation of these projects.

Quality assurance

Azerbaijan utilises a robust approach to ensure the quality of strategic plans, road maps and governmental programmes on youth employment. This approach involves in-depth analysis, consultations with experts and an assessment of implementation activities to measure the effectiveness, efficiency and compatibility of various initiatives. However, it is important to note that, currently, no separate system is in place specifically for the quality assurance of youth employment measures and schemes in the country.

Ensuring quality measures

The quality of existing measures is typically ensured through the periodic monitoring of strategic plans, road maps and other relevant documents. This is carried out by the [Monitoring and Evaluation Group of the Centre for Analysis of Economic Reforms and Communication](#), which has developed a monitoring and evaluation management system. This system is designed to ensure the timely and high-quality implementation of strategic road maps and other government programmes, and is based on the experience of both local and foreign experts, consulting companies, scientific organisations and international organisations operating in the country.

Monitoring methodology and evaluation

The [methodology](#) for the monitoring process comprises the analysis of reports and documents, assessment of the degree of implementation for each measure, discussions with relevant state authorities and consultations with experts from international organisations, civil society and non-governmental organisations. It also involves the evaluation of implementation activities. In line with the regulation, the final report is made publicly available on the official website of the evaluating institution within one month of being submitted to the President. Some of the criteria used in the monitoring process include effectiveness, efficiency and compatibility.

Annual statistics and lack of separate quality assurance

The SEA annually releases [statistics](#) that break down the age and gender groups of the people it has supported with employment services, including those targeting youth. However, it is important to note that there is no separate system for the quality assurance of youth employment measures and schemes implemented in Azerbaijan.

3.7 Cross-border mobility in employment, entrepreneurship and vocational opportunities

Programmes and schemes for cross-border mobility

In Azerbaijan both national and international programmes focused on education, training, youth and sport serve as vital tools for fostering youth mobility and skill development. Through various initiatives such as learner and staff mobility, youth participation activities and language learning opportunities, these programmes promote personal and professional growth for individuals globally. Collaboration between governments, international partners and organisations further enhances opportunities for bilateral relations, vocational education and sectoral development, ultimately contributing to the advancement of individuals and societies.

At the national level, for active young individuals eager to participate in international events and overseas internship programmes of international organisations, the [Youth Foundation](#) offers public funding, thereby supporting the cross-border mobility of youth.

Erasmus+: fostering youth mobility and skill development

Erasmus+, an EU programme focusing on education, training, youth and sport, serves as the principal instrument for young people's mobility. Its chief objective is to aid the professional and personal development of individuals in Europe and beyond, via [Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals](#). Key Action 1 encourages [various activities](#), which include learner and staff mobility for international learning experiences, youth participation initiatives promoting democratic engagement and language learning opportunities with flexible support tools. The [National Erasmus+ Office in Azerbaijan](#) supports the implementation of the programme in the country.

Bilateral labour agreements and international partnerships

In addition, the Azerbaijani government has entered into [bilateral labour agreements](#) concerning labour, social security and employment with several countries, including Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Ukraine and the Kyrgyz Republic. A joint declaration on a [mobility partnership](#) with the EU and its participating member states has also been signed by Azerbaijan, targeting better management of legal and labour migration, prevention of irregular migration, promotion of international protection and maximising the developmental impact of migration and mobility.

Work placement programmes and public funding

The [International Agricultural Internship Programme in Germany](#) provides valuable opportunities for students to gain practical experience in the field of agriculture and enhance bilateral relationships. Through collaboration between SAVE, the [German Sparkassenstiftung Foundation](#) and [AgrarKontakte International \(AKI\) e.V.](#), this programme supports the development of vocational education and training while contributing to the growth of the agricultural sector in Azerbaijan.

Legal framework

Cross-border mobility and legal frameworks

Despite the absence of a specific legal framework for the cross-border mobility of young people for employment, entrepreneurship and vocational opportunities in Azerbaijan, the country's general legislation on labour migration applies to all young individuals. However, no distinct legislative framework exists for social security, rights and obligations, and specific taxation arrangements for young people.

As per [Article 28](#) of the Azerbaijani Constitution, every citizen possesses the right to leave the country freely and seek work and residence abroad. The [Migration Code](#) (2013), stipulates that any capable

citizen older than 18 can engage in paid labour activity overseas, either via physical persons or legal entities.

Regulatory bodies and single window principle

The [State Migration Service](#) is tasked with implementing a unified state policy for migration, developing the migration management system, regulating and forecasting migration processes (including labour migration) and co-ordinating related authorities' activities.

Furthermore, the Azerbaijani government has been applying the “[single window](#)” principle in migration management since 2009. This approach allows for more flexible and effective migration process management, improving, simplifying and enhancing transparency in migration management mechanisms.

Legal status and rights of migrants

Foreigners and stateless persons can now freely enter and leave the country using temporary and permanent residence permit cards and other valid identification documents, eliminating the need for additional visas.

The Migration Code outlines norms regarding state policy implementation in the field of migration, migration process regulation, the legal status of foreigners and stateless persons in Azerbaijan, and relations arising in this field.

According to Article 75 of the Migration Code, migrant workers enjoy the same rights as Azerbaijani citizens regarding working conditions, and their salaries follow the pay order established for citizens. The code also assures the social protection of Azerbaijani citizens through agreements between legal entities facilitating activity and foreign legal entities and natural persons, and in offered employment contracts.

International co-operation and visa facilitation

The “[Azerbaijan 2020: look into the future](#)” development concept emphasises the importance of international co-operation for enhancing labour migrant regulation. Azerbaijan is part of the [Budapest](#) and [Prague](#) processes, which cover legal migration, asylum, visa and voluntary return, to promote EU co-operation in migration, improve legislation, learn from international experiences and accelerate integration with the EU and other countries.

Moreover, the [Visa Facilitation Agreement](#) seeks to expedite and reduce costs for Azerbaijani citizens to obtain short-stay visas for the Schengen area. Full visa-fee waivers are available for students, journalists, civil society representatives or those engaged in scientific, cultural or artistic activities or sports events.

3.8 Development of entrepreneurship competence

Policy framework

Legislative steps governing social enterprises and SMEs

The Law “On Employment” in Azerbaijan recognises a social enterprise as a specialised legal entity established to ensure job opportunities for individuals who require additional social protection and struggle to find employment. The Strategic Road Map for the Manufacture of Small and Medium Entrepreneurship-level Consumer Goods, established in 2016, lays out five strategic targets and corresponding short, medium and long-term priorities for SME development aim to support the growth and development of SMEs, leading to a stronger economy and long-term economic prosperity. These include improving the business climate, enhancing access to finance, internationalising SMEs, improving quality and skills and promoting innovation.

The vision for 2030 and beyond

The policy document “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development” aims to develop entrepreneurial competences by focusing on various aspects. It recognises that the private sector, including SMEs, will play a significant role in driving economic growth and employment. To achieve sustainable and high economic growth, the document outlines key strategies such as improving the business environment, implementing a transparent privatisation strategy, enhancing the economic efficiency of business promotion mechanisms and developing tax and customs policies to stimulate entrepreneurship in the country. By addressing these areas, the document aims to create a favourable environment for entrepreneurship to thrive, providing support, resources and incentives for individuals to develop their entrepreneurial competences and contribute to the country’s economic growth.

Integrating entrepreneurship into education

The Road Map for VET focuses on developing an entrepreneurial mindset by 2025. This includes offering training and educational programmes developed with SMEs to instil an entrepreneurial spirit among students, teach non-traditional approaches and entrepreneurial skills and provide relevant theoretical and practical knowledge to students intending to start their own businesses. Entrepreneurship is promoted in practical classes by organising meetings with successful entrepreneurs.

The role of SMBDA and other entities

The SMBDA and its [development centres](#) provide crucial support to SMEs, helping to set up regional business incubator hubs, support the implementation of business ideas and provide training programmes for entrepreneurs. The [SME Friends network of regional centres](#) implements business surveys to analyse demand and supply gaps in the SME market, while also serving as a platform for co-operation and dialogue between local business communities and the government. Regional [SME Houses](#) act as one-stop shops, offering access to government services and business-to-business (B2B) services, while the [SME Development Fund](#) provides training and consulting to SMEs, supporting start-ups, youth, women and disabled persons’ entrepreneurship.

The future of social entrepreneurship

While social entrepreneurship is in its infancy in Azerbaijan, the government’s plans to introduce specific legislation indicate growth potential, as existing laws lack a clear definition of “social entrepreneur” or “social entrepreneurship”. Currently, potential benefits in the Tax Code for social entrepreneurs are not tailored to their needs, and entities must register as Limited Liability Companies due to a lack of registration options for “social enterprises” or “social economy organisations”. The

government's commitment to developing a law on social entrepreneurship could address these gaps, enhancing recognition and promoting sector growth.

Despite being a relatively new concept in the country, several examples of successful social entrepreneurship are currently operating in Azerbaijan.

[Kendistan/Camping Azerbaijan](#) is an informal youth group that uses social media to raise funds for social projects in remote villages. Over the years, they have organised projects such as "Santa Claus for Villages", reaching over a thousand children in numerous remote villages. They also finance the School Bus Project, addressing the lack of secondary schools and challenging weather and terrain conditions in some villages.

Sara Rajabli launched [BUTA Arts and Sweets](#) in 2017, a platform that currently involves 20 women with special needs, offers over 40 sweet menus and co-operates with more than 70 companies and organisations. With BUTA, Rajabli created Azerbaijan's first free certification programme in confectionery for women with special needs, developed in co-operation with the MSE. As a result, 13 women with special needs have been officially certified by the MSE.

Formal learning

According to the [SME Policy Index Report](#), which assesses the implementation of the small business act for Europe in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region, entrepreneurial learning in Azerbaijan features modules, materials, guidebooks and online resources. These learning aids, utilised in VET and higher education, cover key competences such as financial and economic literacy, planning, idea creation, market analysis and legal aspects.

Entrepreneurial key competences in the national curriculum

The MSE has developed national curriculums for college-preparatory schools and technical and vocational schools. These curriculums include [key competences](#) such as literacy, numeracy, IT and entrepreneurship. Currently, entrepreneurship is listed as a key competence in 56 pilot curriculums. However, primary, lower and upper-secondary education are not involved in entrepreneurial learning.

Promoting entrepreneurship via VET

In 2018, SAVE introduced a mandatory [entrepreneurship module](#) for all VET levels. This module, developed in co-operation with foreign and local experts, is part of SAVE's ongoing commitment to promoting entrepreneurship among VET students. This promotion is furthered through the organisation of events, workshops, competitions and field visits in conjunction with relevant stakeholders and non-governmental institutions. Furthermore, the regional vocational training centres under the SEA offer "[Principles of Entrepreneurship](#)" courses for jobseekers and the unemployed.

Practical entrepreneurial experience in higher education

Practical entrepreneurial experience is mandatory in selected VET and higher education specialties. This experience is facilitated through activities such as company visits, participation in fairs and events and, for higher education students, placements in factories and technical parks. Notably, this practical experience is excluded from secondary education. However, bachelor programmes such as "Commerce", "Business Management" and "The Economy", along with some secondary vocational schools, include 14 weeks of practical experience.

Incorporating social entrepreneurship in formal education

While knowledge about social entrepreneurship is currently limited in Azerbaijan, there are attempts to incorporate courses on the basics of the social economy into the formal education system. For instance, social entrepreneurship is part of the curriculum of the NGOs and Human Rights programme offered by [Baku State University](#). In addition, the [Azerbaijan Tourism Institute](#) introduced an extracurricular course entitled “Social Enterprise” in 2018.

Non-formal and informal learning

Enhancing skills and knowledge for entrepreneurs through SME development centres

To enhance the knowledge and skills of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and to broaden their access to innovation, SME development centres under the SMBDA provide expert-led training and seminars. These educational initiatives cover a broad range of [areas](#), such as business planning, development, marketing, sales, business legislation, financial management and human resources management.

Additionally, these centres offer individual and group consulting services, SME networking opportunities and information on innovation within entrepreneurial activity. The centres actively support innovative entrepreneurship, start-ups and family businesses and promote entrepreneurship among women, people with disabilities and young people. They also provide vital information to SMEs. Importantly, all services provided by SME development centres are free of charge.

Recognition of professional qualifications through non-formal and informal learning

In August 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers in Azerbaijan approved [rules for conducting examinations and issuing documents to recognise professional qualifications obtained through non-formal and informal learning](#). Known as “assessment and recognition”, this process is integrated into the vocational education sector and is linked to the NQF. Successful completion of all modules results in a diploma, equivalent to formal vocational education programmes, thereby enabling individuals to continue their education or work in the relevant field.

Progress and achievements of the TKTA

The TKTA under the MSE is responsible for assessment and recognition, alongside with the MLSPP, employers and the [State Agency for Vocational Education](#). The TKTA, which also provides guidelines and supervises the validation process, collaborates with the Assessment Commission, comprising representatives from various sectors.

Since 2020, the TKTA has [published](#) 14 qualifications available for validation. Out of 279 applications for assessment and recognition, 118 have passed the initial review process. Of these, 11 applicants received diplomas, while 16 others received certificates.

ETF's partnership on promoting entrepreneurship

The ETF has created a [partnership](#), which includes Azerbaijan, with the goal of developing a joint vision and conceptual framework for entrepreneurial vocational training centres. Drawing inspiration from the EU's framework promoting entrepreneurship as a key competence, the partnership aims to cultivate entrepreneurship as a lifelong learning goal. It encourages the knowledge sharing, peer learning and collaborative efforts of Centres of Vocational Excellence to improve their performance.

Unfortunately, local organisations in Azerbaijan currently have limited access to opportunities for experience exchange and learning from their counterparts in the EU and EaP regions.

Support for educators in entrepreneurship education

The vision of the VET Road Map

The ambitious goal of the Road Map for VET involves achieving an educational process that grants international certificates to vocational education schools. This requires high standards for education, training and facilities in these institutions.

For its long-term vision, the [government's aim](#) is for vocational schools to evolve into hubs that promote entrepreneurial initiatives and creative ideas. The road map anticipates that fostering a culture of entrepreneurial ideation and encouraging interaction with industrial centres will attract experienced, knowledgeable teachers to these schools.

Teaching personnel: assessment, upskilling and retraining

According to the road map, the MSE will carry out assessments to identify the potential and competence level of the current teaching personnel in vocational schools. This evaluation will consider the need for upskilling and retraining. When recruiting new teachers, the MSE will provide training seminars to ensure new recruits are familiar with pedagogical procedures and are adequately prepared for teaching.

For this purpose, the MSE is tasked with organising pedagogical evening courses. Promotion of entrepreneurship education will not be the sole responsibility of the teaching personnel; it will also involve practical class meetings with successful entrepreneurs. The road map budgets for an investment of AZN 50 000 for the retraining of teachers running the entrepreneurial module.

The role of SAVE and SEA in supporting educators

The SEA also supports educators through its vocational training centres. These centres [aim](#) to study and apply international experiences, involve trainers in continued education and expand opportunities to increase their proficiency.

In addition, SAVE organises training programmes for teachers on entrepreneurship education. For instance, in 2021, a three-day training programme entitled "[Entrepreneurship Pedagogy and Development of Entrepreneurship Teaching Models](#)" was held for vocational education institution teachers. The training was conducted by "Education HUB", a specialist in the education field, with support from SAVE and the UN Development Programme's Russia representative. The programme featured presentations on applying interactive methods in entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, the organisation of hackathons and using the Hypothesis-Action-Data-Insights (HADI) cycle for the implementation and development of entrepreneurial projects.

3.9 Start-up funding for young entrepreneurs

Access to information

The information on funding opportunities for start-up creation, programmes, service providers and specific professional guidance is primarily available on the [SMBDA website](#). The agency consistently updates and provides information about the announcements of grant and project support programmes. Moreover, the SMBDA website also features useful guidelines and print and video materials related to entrepreneurship, including detailed explanations of policy frameworks, reports and support mechanisms. An [e-trade business portal](#) is also available, connecting businesses with potential buyers through a catalogue of firms.

Access to capital

There are various initiatives and collaborations in place to support entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan and extend their access to financial resources. These efforts include providing financial aid, organising grant competitions, offering tax exemptions and establishing state-backed institutions focused on financing business projects. Additionally, international partnerships contribute to fostering economic diversification and improving access to finance for small businesses in the country.

Financial aid for entrepreneurs

The SMBDA [facilitates](#) entrepreneurs' access to financial resources by providing funding and foreign grant opportunities, offering tax exemptions via [start-up certificates](#) for micro and small businesses, and funding developmental projects through [grant competitions](#), with announcements and results regularly published across various media platforms.

State-backed financial institutions

[The Entrepreneurship Development Fund](#), under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economy, was established in 2018. Initially formed within the legal framework of the National Entrepreneurship Support Fund, its mission is to finance business entities' investment projects via concessional loans, aligned with Azerbaijan's socio-economic development priorities. The fund plays a significant role in the preparation, implementation and financing of programmes that promote entrepreneurship development.

[The Agrarian Credit and Development Agency](#), established in 2015 under the Ministry of Agriculture, provides farmers with subsidies and agricultural loans on favourable terms. It also offers concessions on machinery and breeding animals and oversees the provision of concessional loans and guarantees.

International collaboration for economic diversification

In 2022, Azerbaijan and the EU jointly established a high-level [working group focused on the EU's Economic Investment Plan](#). This move aims to bolster the government's efforts to further diversify the Azerbaijani economy, create high-quality jobs nationwide and promote inclusive rural development. The European Commission's Director for Neighbourhood East and Institution Building confirms that the Economic and Investment Plan includes investments to enhance small businesses' access to finance across the country.

3.10 Promotion of entrepreneurship culture

Special events and activities

Promoting entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijani government has been active in promoting entrepreneurship, co-operating with various institutions and providing entrepreneurs with support. Acknowledging the growing role of entrepreneurs in the country's economy and employment, "[Entrepreneur Day](#)" has been celebrated annually on 25 April since 2016 to inspire entrepreneurship in society. The socio-economic development programme for 2030 also aims to stimulate and support entrepreneurial activity in the country.

Investment and youth entrepreneurship forums

The Republic of Azerbaijan's active commitment to fostering entrepreneurship is demonstrated by its yearly hosting and organisation of significant entrepreneurship forums. These initiatives underline the country's strategic approach to driving socio-economic development through the encouragement of entrepreneurial spirit, particularly among young people.

The [Second Forum of Young Entrepreneurs](#), held in Baku in 2021, highlighted the commitment to youth entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan, fostering dialogue among entrepreneurs, government representatives and delegates from both public and private sectors. This event, spearheaded by multiple stakeholders, provided a platform for sharing success stories and discussing available entrepreneurial support.

The following year, the SMBDA and the [Islamic Co-operation Youth Forum](#) jointly organised the [Investment and Youth Entrepreneurship Forum 2022](#), with 47 start-ups presenting their business concepts to potential investors. This forum aimed to fortify the start-up ecosystem across Azerbaijan, Eurasia and Organisation of Islamic Co-operation countries, drawing participants from a wide range of sectors, including local and international organisations, policy makers, entrepreneurs and business leaders.

International support for entrepreneurship

Various special events and activities promoting entrepreneurship are also organised and supported by international organisations. Notable examples include the [Entrepreneurship for Youth project](#), funded by the EU, and the UNDP's "[Economic Empowerment for Entrepreneurship and Employment](#)" project. These initiatives aim to strengthen the participation and capacity of civil society to develop the entrepreneurial ecosystem, promote entrepreneurship education and provide financial literacy to vulnerable groups, including young people and women.

Recently, the EU has [assisted](#) the Azerbaijani government in creating a more enabling environment for SMEs and enhancing competitiveness. The project focused on the development of SMEs to improve competitiveness, job creation and sustainable economic growth in Azerbaijan. It also aimed to align SMBDA's positioning with the Road Map for VET, promote SME development and stimulate economic diversification.

Networks and partnerships

The promotion of youth entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan necessitates collaborative engagement from a myriad of stakeholders, including public and private organisations, NGOs, educational institutions and international partners, with strategic alliances and public participation playing crucial roles. The growth of SMEs is bolstered by the exchange of best practices, global partnerships and fostering

relationships between local SMEs, international financial institutions and foreign investors to stimulate economic growth and global economic integration.

International relations of the SMBDA

While there is no distinct mechanism for promoting youth entrepreneurship, the SMBDA is actively engaged in promoting entrepreneurship among interested individuals, with a special focus on young people. As part of its mandate, the SMBDA collaborates with private and public organisations, encourages public participation and forges alliances with scientific and educational institutions. The agency's [global outreach](#) includes countries such as Türkiye, Italy, the UK, the USA, South Korea and Switzerland, studying best practices in SMEs and fostering strategic relationships, which include signing memorandums with relevant organisations. Furthermore, the SMBDA connects international financial institutions and foreign investors with local SMEs, while supporting foreign organisations and investors in the Azerbaijani economy.

Role of the private sector

The [Public-Private Partnership Development Centre](#), established within the SMBDA, works towards boosting the private sector's role in Azerbaijan's economic development. Key activities include developing a legislative and institutional infrastructure for public-private partnerships, co-ordinating programmes and projects, enhancing SMEs' participation, building awareness and capacity for all stakeholders and ensuring projects align with public-private partnership criteria.

Notable state-business partnership entities that support the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Azerbaijan include the [Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Foundation](#), [Azerbaijan Investment Company](#) and the [National Confederation of Entrepreneurs \(Employers\) Organizations](#).

Role of international organisations, NGOs and development co-operation partners

Established in 1996, the [American Chamber of Commerce](#) (AmCham), the largest and most dynamic business association in Azerbaijan, serves as a crucial platform for over 250 members from all sectors of the economy. AmCham facilitates public-private dialogue on economic reforms, organises events and projects targeting young people and actively shares knowledge and proposes solutions to common concerns through industry sector committees.

In June 2023, the [EU4Youth Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Programme](#) developed some key collaborations, forming the [National Steering Group in Azerbaijan](#) to guide youth employment and entrepreneurship planning, critically assess apprenticeship processes using best practices from the EaP and EU regions, with the expectation of becoming a permanent influence on youth employment policies.

Azerbaijan Young Entrepreneurs Network

The [Azerbaijan Young Entrepreneurs Network](#) was established in 2011 to support the development of young entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan. It also aims to educate entrepreneurs and enhance their theoretical and practical skills. The organisation actively shares information about opportunities and events in the entrepreneurship field through social media.

3.11 Current debates and reforms

Forthcoming policy developments

The new State Programme on Youth, planned for the period 2023-2027, is currently being prepared [in collaboration with UNICEF](#). This initiative aims to outline the government's youth policy objectives for the upcoming years. However, no draft of the programme has yet been published.

Moreover, the adoption of the country's first-ever [Law "On Social Entrepreneurship"](#) is anticipated in the near future. The Social and Volunteer Activities Entity is playing a pivotal role in overseeing the drafting process, with various other stakeholders, including civil society, participating in meetings. Although specific details remain undisclosed, the drafting of the bill is expected to conclude by the end of 2023.

Ongoing debates

The government has shown keen interest in improving both the labour market and the education sector within the country. Apprenticeships, primarily informal, exist in Azerbaijan, and efforts are underway to integrate them into the formal education system. Along with the measures and imminent developments previously mentioned, there is a plan to develop the concepts of work-based learning and apprenticeships, both currently without a legal basis in the legislation. Internships, another significant stepping stone for young people transitioning into the labour market, are also lacking a comprehensive regulatory framework.

The MLSPP is working hand in hand with the MSE on the development, approval and implementation of a normative framework. This will establish the legal basis for the internship system, outlining rules for students across higher, secondary and vocational educational institutions. Moreover, the MLSPP has drafted amendments to the Labour Code aiming to delineate the organisational mechanism for internships and apprenticeships, along with the legal status of those involved in such activities. These proposals were submitted to the ILO for expert review, with the ILO's recommendations being utilised in the preparation of these proposals following a series of discussions and online meetings.²

In June 2022, the government, in association with the ILO, organised a [conference](#) to discuss the priorities and outcomes of the new Decent Work Country Programme between 2022 and 2026. The key focus areas of the programme, as deduced from the discussions, include the application of international labour standards, employment, social protection, social services, occupational safety and health, labour inspection, social dialogue and tripartism.

². Analytical study on the development of a youth employment promotion strategy, Azerbaijan Confederation of Trade Unions, 2021.

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