

State of **SKILLS**



International
Labour
Organization

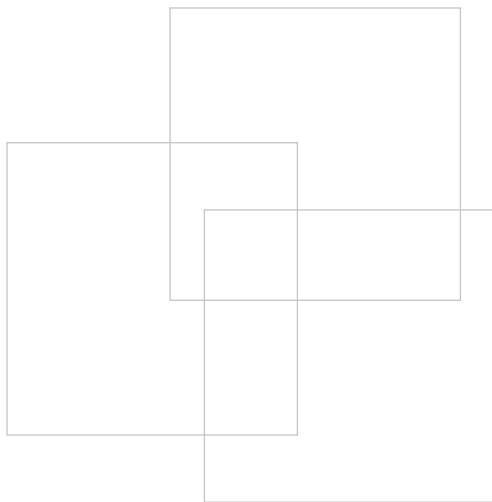
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1919-2019



Kyrgyzstan

State of

SKILLS



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The socio-economic context

Kyrgyzstan is a small, mountainous, landlocked country. It has a transitional economy that is dominated by minerals extraction and agriculture. Therefore, with large shares of the country's per capita income stemming from overseas remittances, external investments and donor support. Falling economic output, due to decreasing commodity demand worldwide, has contributed to rising unemployment and poverty as well as increasing fiscal pressure. The country has an annual budget deficit of approximately 3 to 5 per cent of GDP.¹

According to the Government's strategy for the period 2018–2040, economic policy will focus on providing employment and stable incomes by creating productive jobs. This key national policy, combined with increased labour mobility within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), requires a strong education and training system, to ensure that the skills of the population correspond to national and EAEU labour market needs.

¹ Data from Kyrgyzstan Economy Profile 2019, IndexMundi. Available at: www.indexmundi.com/kyrgyzstan/economy_profile.html [1 May 2020].

Kyrgyzstan has a population of 6.39 million, of which about 25 per cent are aged 14–28 years.

The high proportion of young people offers a unique window of opportunity for Kyrgyzstan, due to the favourable age dependency ratio. If this opportunity for economic growth is to be exploited, labour market relevant skills need to be developed.²

After two years of recovery, economic growth has slowed.

Economic growth decreased from 4.7 per cent in 2017 to 3.5 per cent in 2018 (Eurasian Development Bank, 2019). This was due to a slowdown in growth in the industry, construction and services sectors, although higher growth rates are projected for 2020–21. In 2018, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the services sector and agriculture accounted for 39.3 per cent of gross value added in GDP, followed by agriculture at 23 per cent.³

² Demographic Yearbook of the Kyrgyz Republic 2013–2017, National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, table 5.8 “Intraregional population migration by gender and territory”: www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/ebea9dd7-1d8b-4163-8a1c-5cd13b051dfa.xlsx [1 May 2020].

³ Express Overview “Key indicators of small and medium-sized enterprises by the territory”. National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic January–December 2018: www.stat.kg/en/statistics/download/operational/1064 [1 May 2020].

Poverty continues to be one of the major challenges for the country's growing economy.

Despite recent decreases, the poverty rate remains high. In 2017, 25.6 per cent of the population were classified as poor.⁴ In this context, providing socially vulnerable youth and adults with access to high-quality technical and vocational education and training (TVET) will be important for improving their livelihoods. The country's landlocked location, together with its poorly developed transport, communications and industrial infrastructure are likely to constrain economic development.

Kyrgyzstan's labour market reflects the economy's incomplete transition from agriculture to industry and services.

Agriculture and wholesale and retail trade are the leading employment sectors. Agriculture involves about 40 per cent of the country's labour force, and 20.3 per cent of total employment is provided by the increasing number of SMEs.⁵ Job creation is limited to a few sectors and varies between geographical regions.

⁴ Poverty Rate. National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2017: www.stat.kg/ru/statistics/download/dynamic/807 [1 May 2020].

⁵ Statistical Yearbook of the Kyrgyz Republic 2014–2018 (Section 5.6. Average annual number of people employed in economy by economic activity). National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic: www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/c341067d-1b0e-43da-a650-d69191f43f4b.rar [1 May 2020].

At the same time, about 15 per cent of job vacancies remain unfilled due to low wages and poor working conditions. This mismatch between the qualifications possessed by workers and the skills needed by employers has led to growth in informal, temporary, periodic and seasonal work as well as high levels of unemployment. The labour force participation rate in 2018 was 59.8 per cent, with rates of 45.1 per cent for women and 75.4 per cent for men. The employment rate is slightly lower in urban areas than it is in rural areas, mainly due to the inflow of unemployed people into urban areas in search of work opportunities. Young unemployed people (aged 20–29) constituted 44.5 per cent of the total unemployed population. By the end of 2018, 2.8 per cent of the economically active population were registered as unemployed (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2018a).⁶

⁶ Express Overview “Key indicators of small and medium-sized enterprises by the territory”. National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic January–December 2018: www.stat.kg/en/statistics/download/operational/1064 [1 May 2020].

Traditionally, the employed population in Kyrgyzstan has had a high level of education.

This trend is more pronounced among the urban employed population. In 2018, among the 2.38 million employed people, 22.4 per cent had completed higher education, 0.9 per cent had incomplete higher education, 12.3 per cent had secondary vocational education, 6.2 per cent had primary vocational education, 51.6 per cent had secondary general education, and only a small proportion (2 per cent) had completed only basic general education.⁷ Together, workers with only primary general education, without primary education and the illiterate made up 0.5 per cent of the employed. In 2015, women comprised 53.1 per cent of the officially registered unemployed.⁸ About 35 per cent of general school graduates enrol in TVET. In 2017, among youths aged 15–24, only 10.7 per cent participated in TVET, with 3 per cent in primary and 7.7 per cent in secondary TVET; 20.8 per cent were not in employment, education or training (NEET); and over 51 per cent entered the labour market without any qualifications or relevant skills. Only 2.4 per cent of the employed were TVET graduates.

⁷ Percentages are taken from an official publication. They total only 95.4 percent.

At the time of writing, the author is unable to contact either the NSK or the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MLSD) for additional information.

⁸ Employment and unemployment in 2018. Results of an integrated sample survey of household budgets and labour in 2018 (Table 2.6: Distribution of employed population by level of education, age and gender). National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic: www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/e4bfd54e-2d0b-45a1-a692-c6d43e54b134.rar [1 May 2020].

The lack of job opportunities and labour market relevant training is contributing to emigration.

Over 10 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's active population have emigrated, predominantly to Russia and Kazakhstan, and around 18 per cent have relocated within the country, to better developed regions. In 2018, migrants' remittances into Kyrgyzstan totalled \$2.7 billion, accounting for 33.6 per cent of the country's GDP.

A big concern is a mismatch between the skills possessed by young workers and those required by employers.

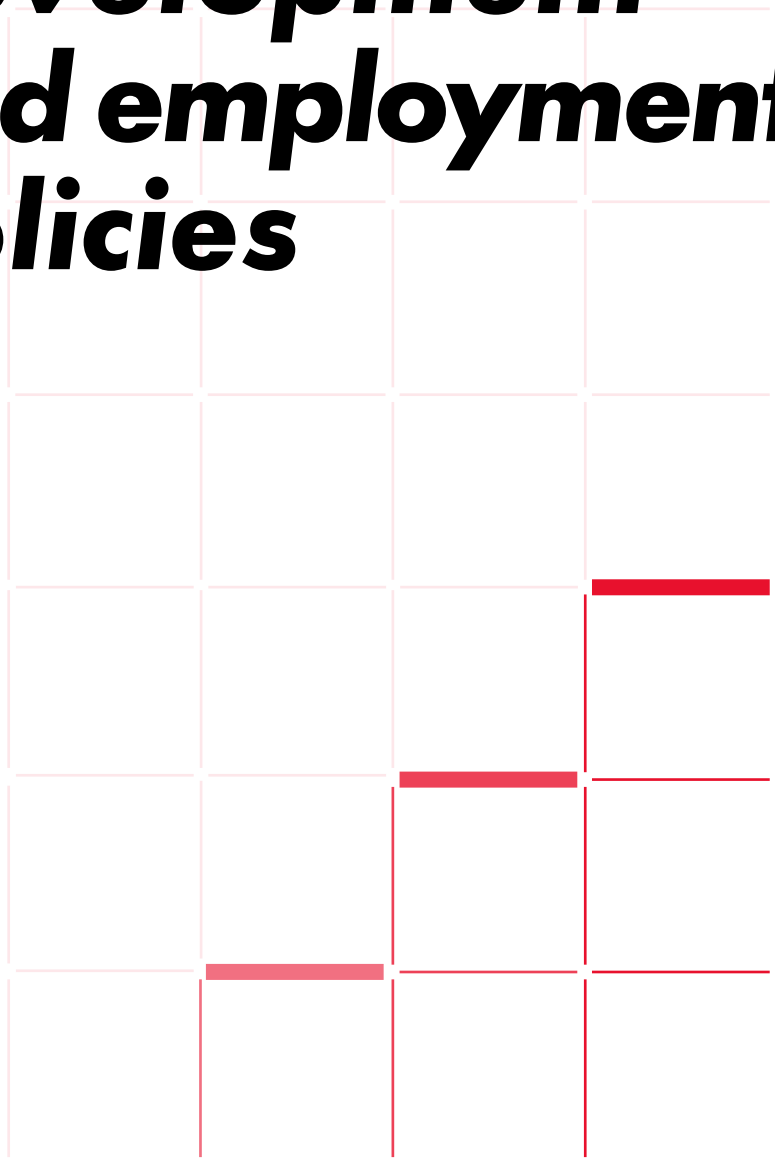
This issue will require effort from all stakeholders, including the private sector. The Government will have to take measures to anticipate skills needs and improve the planning of the training offer, in order to expand access to quality education and training.

Faced with a lack of labour (particularly in the regions) – due to migration of workers or because candidates lack the training or competencies required – companies have started to look for alternative solutions.

They hire foreign migrants or train their own workers themselves, instead of building interactions with the TVET system. Because of a lack of information about the TVET offer, inadequate knowledge and skills among TVET graduates and high training costs, 61 per cent of companies in the construction sector and 85 per cent in the service sector (home appliance repair) do not communicate with educational institutions.



Development and employment policies



Kyrgyzstan's National Development Strategy for the period 2018–2040 (NDS 2040) defines the country's aspirations for inclusive growth through diversified, export-oriented, green and regionally balanced economic development, supported by technology and based on a new generation of entrepreneurs.

The economic policy measures include the development of export industries, creation of jobs, increased investment in production infrastructure, and ensuring a favourable business environment. Improved policies and programmes – e.g. fiscal policy and export development programmes, relevant legal reforms, result-oriented governance and public administration – will serve the above aspirations. The NDS 2040 has three principal areas of focus: (I) social development, (II) economic development and (III) governance development.

- I.** Decent, safe and productive work, proper remuneration and just and equitable access to public education and health care are the cornerstones of the Government's social policy.
- II.** Economic development should draw on entrepreneurial activity and high-tech solutions for eco-friendly businesses, but requires basic infrastructure to be in place.
- III.** Public governance will turn to managing regional development through effective interaction between executive agencies, and there will be a shift to digital solutions in the delivery of public services.

Across these areas, human resource development is seen as a key factor. Full and equal participation of women in political, economic and public roles, and in decision-making at all levels, as well as balanced opportunities for women and men, are the main criteria for reform success.

“The following rights established in the present Constitution, shall not be subject to any limitation whatsoever. That of free basic general and secondary general education in state educational establishments.”





– Constitution of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan

Article 20.5

Employment policy, regulated by the Law on Employment Promotion⁹ and the Employment Promotion Programme and Action Plan 2020,¹⁰ aims to create new jobs whilst improving the competitiveness of the economically active population, including outgoing labour migrants, through support for lifelong and vocational training and improving coordination between the TVET system and the labour market. Priority will be given to sectors that generate higher benefit, employment growth and market demand. Complementary measures include establishing a new labour relations system, shifting from an hourly wages system to a fixed-term contract system and revitalizing the role of trade unions.

An urgent task for the state was to develop a labour market information system (LMIS). This now complements the skills forecasting activity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Development of the Kyrgyz Republic. The LMIS is expected to improve the efficiency of the employment services by increasing the speed of document and data processing and reporting. It will also allow all labour market records to be kept in a single database.

Labour migration has become an important element of employment policy, as a way of decreasing the number of unemployed in the country and in specific regions. Employment interventions related to migration will aim at the legal and economic security in the country of destination, and stimulating internal migration through regional development measures, to lower tensions in crowded regions. Migration support offices have been opened in popular destination countries and advice on legal, administrative and skills development issues will be provided through a dedicated web portal.

⁹ Law on Employment Promotion No. 214, dated 3 August 2015 (as amended by the Laws of 6 July 2016, No. 99; 20 October 2017, No. 178; 30 March 2018, No. 33; and 24 April 2019, No. 56).

¹⁰ Government Decision No. 485, dated 6 September 2013 on approval of the Programme for Employment Promotion and the Regulation of Internal and External Labour Migration Until 2020 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Programme for Employment Promotion and the Regulation of Internal and External Labour Migration Until 2020.

Another labour market measure is to help unemployed people develop skills in managing agricultural and other businesses. Priority is given to people with disabilities (PWDs), women with dependent children (under the age of 16), ex-services personnel, persons on probation, graduates and people looking for a job for the first time and who have no qualifications. Priority is also given to registered unemployed who do not receive unemployment benefits and have been registered for longer than 6 months, and those with more than three dependent children.

Public-private partnerships – with the involvement of financial institutions, public organizations and representatives of SMEs – can be used to outsource publicly funded programmes for micro crediting, training and retraining unemployed people.

The ongoing introduction of modern digital technologies will contribute to the efficient performance of the employment agencies and facilitate access for vulnerable groups to labour market information and services.

Another focus for employment promotion measures is labour force participation among members of low-income families. One such measure is for unskilled or low-skilled poor to participate in public works. Further work to support disadvantaged families and provide care for PWDs, especially in childhood, is recognized as socially significant. For these citizens, new remuneration mechanisms have been introduced, coverage by social and health insurance systems has been widened and involvement in economically beneficial relationships has been increased.

The skills system in Kyrgyzstan



(© ILO)

The TVET system comprises primary vocational education and training (PVET) schools and secondary vocational education and training (SVET) schools (colleges). As of 2018, there are 98 PVET schools (all public schools) and 148 SVET schools (colleges), of which 34 are private. PVET students number over 31,000 and SVET students over 90,000. The number of teaching staff in PVET institutions stands at 3,610 and in SVET colleges at 7,496.

PVET training programmes are mainly in construction (18 per cent of programmes), light and food industries (15 and 20 per cent, respectively), with few programmes offered in energy, metalworking, mining, ICT and tourism. In SVET, the majority of offered programmes are in health care (25 per cent), the economy (22 per cent) and education (16 per cent). The balance of the programmes on offer (37 per cent) are in ICT, social care, manufacturing and the service sector.¹¹

¹¹ Figures based on administrative data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and the Agency for Professional Vocational Education (APVE), and from National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2018b.

TVET reform policies

The Government has an approved Education Development Strategy for the period 2012–2020 (the EDS 2020), which is operationalized through 3-year Mid-Term Plans for each level of education. With NDS 2040 now in place, new objectives and tasks need to be added to the education agenda, such as providing equal access for every citizen, training people who can work in innovative development and the green economy, and training a new generation of entrepreneurs. The key tasks contained in the – as yet unrevised – EDS 2020 relate to the following areas:

- I.** Improving labour market information through forecasts, sectoral and regional studies, tracer studies and consultations with businesses conducted by the Ministry of Labour to identify employers' skills needs.
- II.** Improving the labour market relevance of training by, for example, modernizing equipment introducing short-term courses requested by employers and strengthening work-based learning initiatives.
- III.** Strengthening the involvement of the social partners in the development of occupational standards (30 standards have already been formulated jointly in 2017), combined with capacity development for local training centres.

- IV.** Developing the system of lifelong learning as a basis for continuous professional development. Various different schemes are used to train workers of enterprises.
- V.** Promoting the competence-based training (CBT) approach to prepare youths and adults for work. Twenty-one CBT curricula have been developed, tested and introduced in the TVET system, and more are on the way.
- VI.** Developing a national qualification system, national and sectoral qualification frameworks, and occupational standards.
- VII.** Facilitating access to education and training, particularly for vulnerable groups such as PWDs, former prisoners and the unemployed.

Governance

The central body responsible for TVET delivery is the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). While it is directly responsible for secondary and higher TVET, its Agency for Primary Vocational Education (APVE; under the MES) is responsible for TVET at primary level. Several line/sector ministries (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc.) also operate their own training centres.

For TVET coordination and consultation purposes, the National Skills Development Commission (NSDC) (chaired by the Vice Prime Minister) was established.¹² Because of the need to develop the national qualification system, a national qualification framework (NQF), sectoral qualification frameworks and occupational standards, and to build links and pathways between all levels of education, it is necessary to develop the NSDC further, both conceptually and institutionally, so it can cover all the key policies and coordinate numerous efforts. Working groups, involving the social partners, were set up under the regional authorities to look into the regional development needs and provide for efficient use of TVET resources. A Public Oversight Board was set up in the MES to increase the transparency of decision-making by the Ministry. School Advisory Boards (SABs) were established to support proper school management and performance and so raise the quality of educational services. The SABs promote efficient use of extra-budgetary funds and effective interaction with local governments and civil society. Employers' and workers' organizations, as well as local governments, are represented on the SABs. Social partners perform quality assurance functions through the accreditation and certification processes.

¹² Government Decree No. 193, dated 23 March 2012.

Social dialogue

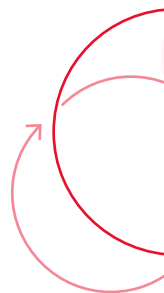
The framework for social partner involvement is laid out in the Law on Social Partnership.¹³ This establishes the legal framework for the organization, functioning, strengthening and development of the system and mechanism of social partnerships in the area of labour relations in the Kyrgyz Republic. Its aim is the regulation of social and labour relations, as well as respective economic relations, and the achievement of social harmony between NDS 2040 and the General Agreement between the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Federation of Trade Unions and the national employer associations for 2017–2019. Through NDS 2040, the Government intends to provide an enabling environment for businesses in the country. In the General Agreement, the social partners have agreed to take responsibility and coordinate activities in developing priority sectors of the economy.

Additionally, in the area of labour market and employment of the population, the parties have agreed to promote the partnership between educational organizations and employers, to introduce work-based learning and support continuous professional education for the purpose of enterprise development and enhanced labour mobility. The Government will support the development of public–private partnerships. The national social partners have agreed on the need to protect labour rights, including for occupational and environmental safety.

¹³ Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On social partnership in the field of labour relations in the Kyrgyz Republic”. Adopted by the Legislative Assembly of the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic on 5 June 2003.

The high growth potential of micro to medium-sized businesses in the regions, and their skills needs, should encourage businesses to set up social partnerships with local authorities and other key local actors in order to develop their enterprises. Social partnerships for the benefit of enterprises need additional conditions to be created, namely an appropriate legal framework, institutions with well-defined roles, agreed and clear procedures and outcomes, incentives supporting the sustainability of efforts and adequate capacity among all of the partners. A culture of cooperation, information sharing and consultation also needs to be nurtured.

The important changes in relationships within the education system described above have produced their first results. First, the voices of businesses are heard, their needs are documented, and they are familiar with and have agreed to any planned measures. Second, the programmes and curricula become more transparent, as businesses are directly involved in their planning, in developing the occupational standards and curricula, and in assessing graduates' competencies. Third, the MES is developing the qualifications system and frameworks that would make the education offer even more clear and transparent.



Financing

There are three main sources of funding for TVET: budget allocations (government subsidies), student fees and external funding (from international development partners).

The school budget draws also on funds coming from employers for training their personnel, from employment services for training the unemployed, and from the Skills Development Fund (SDF), which was set up within the Asian Development Bank (ADB) project as a quick response to the needs of employers, and which is currently transforming into a state-financed body, with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development as a founding member.

Over the past 5 years, the share of the state budget spent on education has been quite significant, ranging from between 14.2 per cent and 17.77 per cent. Expenditure on education as a share of GDP decreased from 6.78 per cent in 2013 to 6.03 per cent in 2017.¹⁴ The largest share of expenditure on education went to secondary education (an average of 57 per cent) and higher education (13 per cent). Only about 6 per cent of education funding was allocated to TVET in 2017.

PVET accounts for 3.7 per cent of the consolidated budgetary expenditure on education, while SVET accounts for 3.1 per cent. PVET receives 91.6 per cent of its funding from the state budget; for SVET, the share is 57.1 per cent, with the remainder coming from private tuition fees.¹⁵

¹⁴ Data is from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics:

<http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/kg> [1 May 2020].

¹⁵ Kyrgyz Republic Education Sector Overview for 2007–2017. Analysis commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) for the Education Development Strategy (EDS) 2040, supported by UNICEF.

SVET schools are funded according to the traditional itemized mode of financing, but a shift to per capita financing (PCF) is being considered. In 2018, per capita (normative) financing – PCF – was introduced in primary TVET,¹⁶ which has slightly increased school budgets and allowed the funds allocated for learning consumables to be increased by 3.5 times. The stimulating fund, allocated from the salary budget for teacher incentives, has allowed teacher salaries to be increased by 7–10 per cent and remuneration to be linked to performance. School performance is also improving – enrolment has increased by 103.5 per cent, and the average classroom size dropped to 27/28 students, which improves the student-to-teacher ratio.

Financing is based on items of expenditure. It mainly covers recurrent expenses, but is insufficient to meet all the actual needs. Major investment and capital expenditure costs are covered through external donor credits and using funds received from development partners. In general, financial resources are inadequate for funding sufficient qualified and motivated teachers, learning equipment and tools, resulting in a poor quality of service delivery. Bureaucratic budgeting and allocation procedures mean that service delivery is inflexible and so cannot respond quickly to changing demands.

¹⁶ Government Decree No. 545, dated 22 November 2018 “On measures for introducing normative funding in the state educational institutions of primary vocational education of the Kyrgyz Republic”.



Skills anticipation

There is currently a structural mismatch in Kyrgyzstan between labour supply and labour demand. A survey by the APVE found that over 58.3 per cent of companies in the mining sector, 55.8 per cent of construction companies and nearly all companies in the service sector experience the need to hire new staff. In addition, companies reported a shortage of skills as weakening their competitiveness and attractiveness to investors. Nevertheless, many companies, particularly SMEs, did not invest in training their existing personnel, partly because they could not afford it.¹⁷ The country urgently requires assessments of both current and future skills needs. While much is being done, various bodies are involved in the collection of labour market information and coordination remains a challenge.

The National Statistics Committee (NSC) deals with the compilation of labour statistics, through the collection of statistical reports, censuses, polls and periodic surveys, including labour force, employment and unemployment surveys. The Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MLSD) is the coordinating body responsible for labour forecasting. The Ministry of Economy (MoE) also has a labour resource forecasting function, in the field of economic activity. Forecasts by the MoE are developed for a period of 3 years.

¹⁷ Sector studies and skills needs analysis in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2016, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

The forecasting methodology used by the MLSD combines calculation and analytical methods, based on macroeconomic indicators, socio-economic development strategies, and expert assessments by heads of enterprises, organizations and institutions using data from employer surveys. This methodological mix allows forecasting of regional and sectoral skills demand.

A variety of data sources feed into the MLSD's calculations:

- I.** Sectoral ministries submit forecasts of demand for labour in their sectors to the MLSD.
- II.** Employers submit information on job vacancies to the employment agencies on a monthly basis.
- III.** Employment agencies in the regions conduct employer surveys in their catchment area on an annual basis.
- IV.** An integrated database of unemployed, jobseekers, employers and training providers combining information from 58 public employment units exists.
- V.** Forecasts based on employer surveys use employers' own assessments of jobs expansion/reduction and/or jobs creation.

The MLSD develops a consolidated short-term (1 year) forecast and mid-term (3–5 years) forecasts by region, type of economic activity, occupation and specialty. It also prepares a map of the labour resources for the MES to use in planning the training offer and its financing from the state budget.

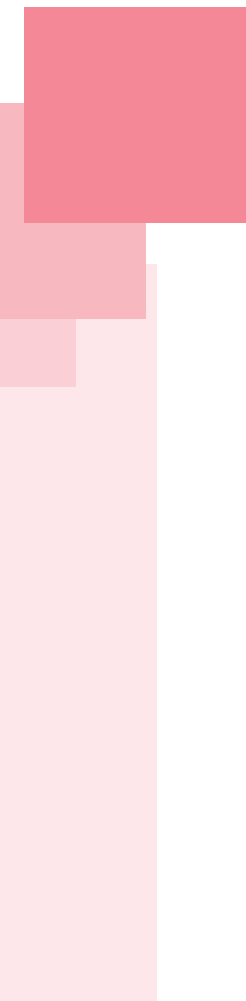
International development partners also produce labour market information. With their support, APVE has carried out skills studies in several priority sectors: construction, agriculture, mining, services and light industry. With the technical support of the ILO, the MLSD, NSC and local authorities are currently conducting a joint regional survey of enterprises and individual entrepreneurs. The primary TVET schools conduct regular tracer studies on a Lime Survey platform to obtain information from graduates on their employment experiences, their satisfaction with the learning process, and whether and how they use the skills they acquired. Regional and national reports are available for 2014 to 2017.

However, there has been no coordination between these different tools and mechanisms, or any attempt to make them system-wide and sustainable. Strengthened coordination between the TVET system and employers must be based on forecasts of the skills that employers will need, to accommodate rapid changes in labour market demands. Any measures and mechanisms adopted should be aligned with the development objectives and outcomes set by the NDS 2040.



Skills development





In 2018 there were 98 primary and 148 secondary TVET schools (114 public and 34 private) and 51 universities (higher TVET; 35 public and 16 private).¹⁸ The state has assigned to primary TVET the role of supporting vulnerable groups into employment and provides it with public financing.

Kyrgyzstan has high levels of youth and adult literacy, estimated at 99 per cent. The low coverage of children in grades 10 and 11 of general education (about 55 per cent) and increased numbers of children leaving school for economic reasons are issues of concern. Informal apprenticeships exist in a limited number of sectors and occupations, but do not provide formal qualifications or higher salaries. An estimated 164,000 young people are in the NEET group, representing a pool of future unskilled labour with low educational attainment.

The capacity of the formal TVET system is limited in terms of its facilities and financial and human resources. At present, the formal TVET system schools accommodate around 300 people each. Higher education is the first choice (69.9 per cent of participants); secondary TVET is the second choice, as this is the easiest way to enter a university (21.1 per cent); and participation in primary TVET is the lowest (9 per cent). Numbers of graduates in higher education and primary TVET have declined, and are below the 2014 values.

¹⁸ Figures based on administrative data from MES and APVE.

Delivery of training has been improved through diversification of training providers and programmes offered, with improved performance outcomes. Over 1,000 state-recognized centres across the country provide non-formal skills development for adults in foreign languages, computer skills and management. The Skills Development Fund (SDF) is a quick response to the needs of employers and vulnerable groups. Since 2016, SDF has organized training in TVET schools and funded the training of 17,503 people, of which 49.4 per cent were women, 46.5 per cent were sent by employers and 53.5 per cent attended as individuals. The cost of training was covered by the ADB project funds.

In recent years, the Government has undertaken a number of reform projects to improve the quality and delivery of training.

- Formal work-based learning was piloted in eight primary TVET schools, with employers providing access to workplaces, tutors and remuneration to the students; they also took the lead in the certification of competencies, with high results.
- New curricula were developed in cooperation with employers for various professions, including: web-optimizer, front-end developer, IT systems administrator, electro mobile maintenance operator; mountain guide, equine tourism instructor; drip irrigation system operator; biogas installation operator; and organic farming specialist.
- Four production and training centres of excellence, operating under the vocational lyceums, have been equipped and launched, offering automobile and agricultural machinery repairs. Five more centres of excellence are being created.

- Competence-based training (CBT) has been piloted and a pool of CBT experts trained. There is a political will to mainstream CBT in education.
- Actions taken to ensure the quality of training provision include independent certification by businesses and accreditation of providers.
- Between 2015 and 2017, 70 per cent of vocational lyceums were equipped with modern computers, and greenhouses and biogas installations were built in some TVET schools. New laboratories and workshops were opened in several colleges.
- In 2014, International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) centres opened in 10 regional vocational lyceums, offering training for the internationally recognized ICDL certificate.
- A teacher qualification framework was developed and piloted, and new tailored courses were rolled out across the system. Teachers' technical skills were updated by sector specialists in partnership with employers' associations. However, the development of teachers' technical skills is not yet an institutional mechanism and is not supported financially. IT skills and use of IT in teaching are challenges still to be addressed.

Skills recognition and quality assurance

A legal and institutional framework for independent skills certification has been developed, and has been tested by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) and several other associations, as well as in the primary TVET system. In contrast to previous practice, externally trained and certified assessors develop the assessment criteria and practical tasks, and assessment is made against sectoral, not educational, standards. In 2015–2016, 288 certification requests were received, covering 27 occupations across nine sectors, with the result that 196 people were successfully certified. All of those certified were in the following roles: farmer, cook, office manager, call-centre operator, paraveterinary worker and tailor.

In the primary TVET system, this approach was integrated in the final examinations, assessors and instructors from employer organizations were trained, new practical tasks for students were developed, and the rules and procedures were approved through respective documents. Interim results as reported by GIZ are: 22 examination commissions set up; 67 assessors from employers involved in final exams, with independent assessment of competencies; and 17 practical tasks tested, including tasks for PWDs.

In 2015, 291 primary TVET graduates underwent independent certification of competencies, of whom 184 received sector certificates. Independent certification in PVET was further developed through the second ADB project. In 2017/2018 school year, 426 students in 12 PVET schools participated in final examinations for 17 PVET qualifications, 75.6 per cent of whom demonstrated the full scope of competencies. The CCI trained and certified 256 assessors, 28 per cent of whom were from businesses. New mechanisms and tools for graduate certification were integrated into the official final examinations. This system is still developing, but issues around the provision of assessment and the allocation of funding for training, payment to assessors and continuing professional development for assessors need to be resolved.

Quality assurance is mainly ensured through licensing, accreditation (attestation) and standards. The Licensing and Accreditation Department of the MES is responsible for supervising licensing and accreditation. The Educational and Methodological Board, under the MES, is responsible for monitoring the quality of educational programmes and for developing attestation criteria. Accreditation was introduced in 2013 through amendments and additions to the Law on Education,¹⁹ and subsequent bylaws,²⁰ as a new mechanism for quality assurance, and since 2017 there has been fully-fledged independent accreditation. The National Accreditation Council, set up under the MES, selected accreditation agencies and had them listed in the National Register of Accreditation Agencies. TVET schools undergo both institutional and programme accreditations against defined quality criteria.

The recent innovations have improved the accreditation system, in that it is now independent, its results are open to the public and it has clear and agreed quality criteria. It also represents the key stakeholders – employers and students. The focus is now on learning outcomes rather than compliance with standards, and on quality process indicators rather than purely quantitative indicators.

¹⁹ Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 11, dated 4 July 2013 “On introducing changes in the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic ‘On Education’”.

²⁰ Decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic of 29 September 2015, No. 670 “On approval of the acts on independent accreditation in the education system of the Kyrgyz Republic” (The procedure for the recognition of accreditation agencies in the field of education; The procedure for accreditation of educational organizations and programmes; Minimum requirements for accredited educational organizations of primary, secondary and higher professional education of the Kyrgyz Republic); Government Decree No. 438, dated 4 August 2014 “On the National Accreditation Council under the authorized state body in the field of education”.

At present, the legal and institutional framework and mechanisms and tools required for recognition of prior learning (RPL) are not in place, although a mechanism has been developed and proposed for discussion. The current discourse in the country is focused on agreed learning outcomes, the NQF and occupational standards, which would build the base for RPL. A draft concept for the national qualification system has been approved by the Government, and work on the NQF and occupational standards is in progress.

Monitoring will draw on data within the education management information system (EMIS), which is linked to other national platforms. The EMIS school database is 93 per cent complete, data on kindergartens is 94.7 per cent complete, data on universities and colleges is 94 per cent ready, and there is complete data on vocational lyceums. Detailed data on enrolment and personnel is stored in the APVE's management information system (MIS). A 1C platform is used to store data on facilities, which is integrated with MIS data to aid the planning of facilities upgrades. Schools are better funded now that PCF has been implemented, using MIS information on enrolment and staffing. Information gained from the tracer study platform adds to the picture, and is used both by schools (to help them make changes in the content and learning environment) and the APVE (for analysis and strategic planning).

Social inclusion

In the context of a challenging economic situation and unemployment, there is a need to ease the transition of TVET graduates into the labour market. Young people (aged 20–29) constitute 33.6 per cent of the total unemployed population, 20.8 per cent of the NEET population. Over 51 per cent of general school graduates enter the labour market without either qualifications or relevant skills (Ajwad and Gonzales, 2018). These figures represent big problems for young people's futures and for the development of the country. Other vulnerable groups include the unemployed, women with children (particularly single mothers), PWDs and pensioners.



The TVET system should foster access to skills for disadvantaged youth and adults, to support their employment opportunities. Currently, access that is guaranteed by legislation is not always provided in practice. Informal apprenticeships are found in a few sectors and occupations, but these do not provide formal qualifications. Five evening schools, which deliver services to 4,756 people, cannot meet all the needs. Schools cannot cater for the needs of PWDs, which constitute about 3 per cent of the population, as they are not equipped with ramps and handrails, suitable sanitary appliances, elevators or specialized equipment. There are almost no teachers with the special knowledge and skills required to teach different groups of PWDs, nor psychologists or social support staff. Other barriers to social inclusion include the cost of training, restrictive entry requirements and procedures, lack of support measures for certain groups, a geographically uneven offer and lack of proper account of local economic and societal needs.

Nevertheless, there are numerous efforts to fill this gap. The TVET schools provide support for travel expenses, clothing, accommodation, etc., through charities and sponsorship. Rehabilitation centres have been opened in 20 primary TVET schools and provide training for 231 orphans, 286 disabled children and 132 social orphans in 13 programmes.²¹

²¹ Figures based on APVE data.

Specialized curricula and teaching methods and social and labour rehabilitation complement the learning process. Positions for psychologists, tutors, health workers and sign language interpreters have been created. However, due to low salaries, filling these positions has been a problem, and the lack of specialist staff hinders the wider delivery of services. Competence-based curricula provided for flexible, individualized training delivery for the rehabilitation groups. Short-term TVET courses have been introduced to increase coverage, although they also involve the working population.

Declining economic activity among women is another challenge, partly caused by their traditional roles in the family, and partly by their lack of access to training. About 400 professions are still prohibited to women, most of which are in high demand and better paid.²² Women's participation in primary TVET (about one-third of students) and their choice of training areas (tailoring, services and catering) remain limited. Female students outnumber males in secondary TVET, but are mainly trained in traditionally "female", less-well paid areas (education, health care, etc.).

²² ADB, Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors, 2017.



Lifelong learning

The development of lifelong and continuous education is laid down in the Law on Education and in EDS 2020. Although some measures have been put in place, Kyrgyzstan does not yet have a fully fledged system of lifelong learning, with clear pathways between different levels of education and mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal and prior learning.

The system for continuous adult education includes public and private providers, community and sectoral training centres, university-based continuous education centres, in-service training centres, and others. Based on information from various sources, the number of non-formal training providers is estimated at over 200. The total may be even higher if informal and individual providers are taken into account.

The MES is responsible for regulating (including through licensing) educational issues, but it does not provide direct leadership or coordination for continuous education. Because of this, the continuous education system is fragmented. Continuous education is not coordinated at the state level, and there is no system for monitoring its development or assessing its quality at the national level.





There are a few sectoral training centres, mainly in resource- and technology-intensive sectors, that provide professional development for workers. Non-formal training providers occupy the niche where formal training is too rigid to meet emerging needs and where education outreach is weaker. It is closer to the locations of people, to their actual needs, and the teaching approach is more developmental. A person can choose a suitable programme or, if one is not on offer, the training provider can quickly develop a tailored programme. The non-formal training providers cover a wide range of skills development that is also covered by the formal system, but they do not provide training in occupations that require expensive equipment or sufficient space, as well as the land. The public TVET system cannot, however, be ignored. In this situation, sector associations become part of the skills ecosystem. They play a role in developing the human resources of businesses through partnerships with the TVET system, building on positive examples of school–business partnerships and expanding into more strategic areas.

The MES needs to contribute by providing a legal framework and incentives, through measures to improve the quality and flexibility of TVET (including development of an NQF and teacher development) and by coordinating interactions between providers and enterprises. Currently, the sectoral associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international development partners are the most significant intermediaries. These influence continuous training through direct and methodological support, capacity development of teachers and managers working in non-formal education, financial support and advocacy activity. Continuous training has the potential to improve employability and earning in both formal and informal enterprises.

Key challenges

Although there have been significant efforts to reform the TVET system in Kyrgyzstan over recent years, and some positive developments at the national level, a range of challenges remain. These will require comprehensive policy measures and actions.

1 Access to TVET.

External factors that limit access to TVET for some people include imbalanced regional economic development, uneven distribution of newly created jobs, job creation not keeping pace with population growth, newly created jobs being non-inclusive by nature and an insufficient number of employment measures, so that only a few population groups are covered. The lack of capacity to offer training to PWDs – due to undeveloped infrastructure (e.g. ramps, elevators, bathrooms with handrails) and lack of specialist trainers, psychologists and social workers (due in part to low salaries) – makes TVET unattractive to disadvantaged groups. The system of lifelong and continuous education is fragmented and uncoordinated at the state level, has no system for monitoring quality at the national level and does not have a targeted social partnership. There are significant barriers to TVET access, such as high training cost, onerous entry requirements and procedures, geographically uneven training offer, undeveloped second-chance school and apprenticeship opportunities, and lack of mechanisms for upgrading to formal qualifications. Access to TVET needs a coherent, multidimensional approach and multi-stakeholder input.

2 **Quality and relevance.**

The lack of proper, formalized skills identification, poor coordination between the different tools and mechanisms (to make them system-wide and sustainable) and absence of a systemic social partnership has resulted in a regionally unbalanced training offer, which takes no account of changing regional labour markets and individual needs. Despite the positive developments, the quality of output is still affected by poor training infrastructure, lack of incentives for teachers (to adopt new teaching methods and technologies, and to improve performance outcome) and old methods of curricula development. Teacher training lags behind current technological developments.

3 **Governance and financing.**

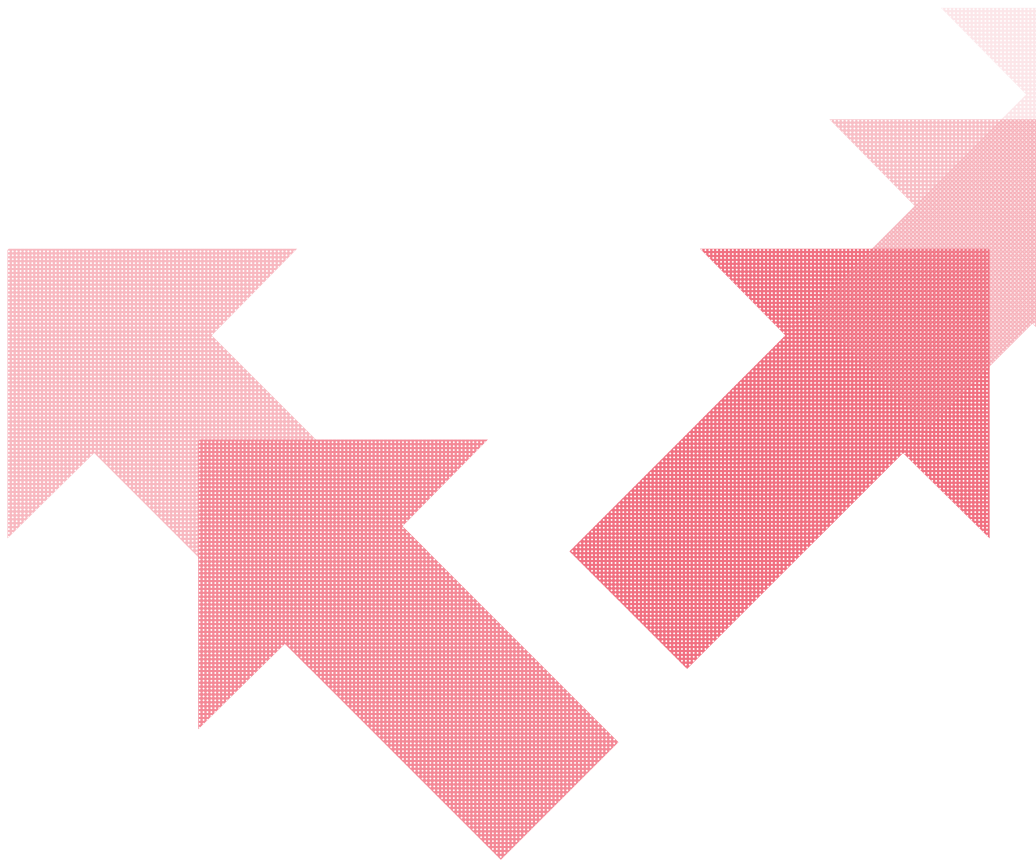
Despite positive changes (particularly the involvement of key stakeholders in coordination and consultation structures, such as the NSDC, SABs, etc.), the TVET governance system still lacks the modern tools, methods, rules and procedures needed for result-oriented management of education. Policy and legal provisions have been insufficient for such important areas as skills recognition, youth unemployment and inclusive and lifelong education.

Financing for TVET, which represents a significant share of public funds, only covers basic needs. It neither provides for quality, nor does it stimulate innovation in education; incomplete financial coverage and unnecessary bureaucracy hinder flexible and quality TVET provision. Management is focused more on process than on results. Management capacity at all levels is insufficient, lacking modern tools and approaches. The current management style and processes, and the inadequate financial, institutional and human resources, make it difficult to implement sustainable education strategies that are aligned with national goals and tasks.

4 Social partnership.

Employers are now turning towards education. However, this does not happen regularly or across the whole economy. Regional coverage is uneven, and skills needs and quality requirements are not clearly defined or documented. Employers are not sufficiently involved in many areas, including ensuring service quality in formal apprenticeships and work-based learning, developing the technical skills of trainers, guiding occupational standards and curricula, influencing policy measures and monitoring outcomes. The public–private partnership mechanism is not yet used to address the issues of poor infrastructure and skills mismatch.

The way forward



The following objectives and recommendations should be considered in further policy development processes.

1 An investment mechanism with appropriate financing mechanism, procedures and practices, for the effective allocation and efficient use of available.

Per capita finance (PCF) should be introduced at all TVET levels, along with a performance-based reward mechanism. There should be flexible allocation and disbursement of funds and a system of incentives for employers. Funding should cover all development needs.

2 Result-oriented management at all levels.

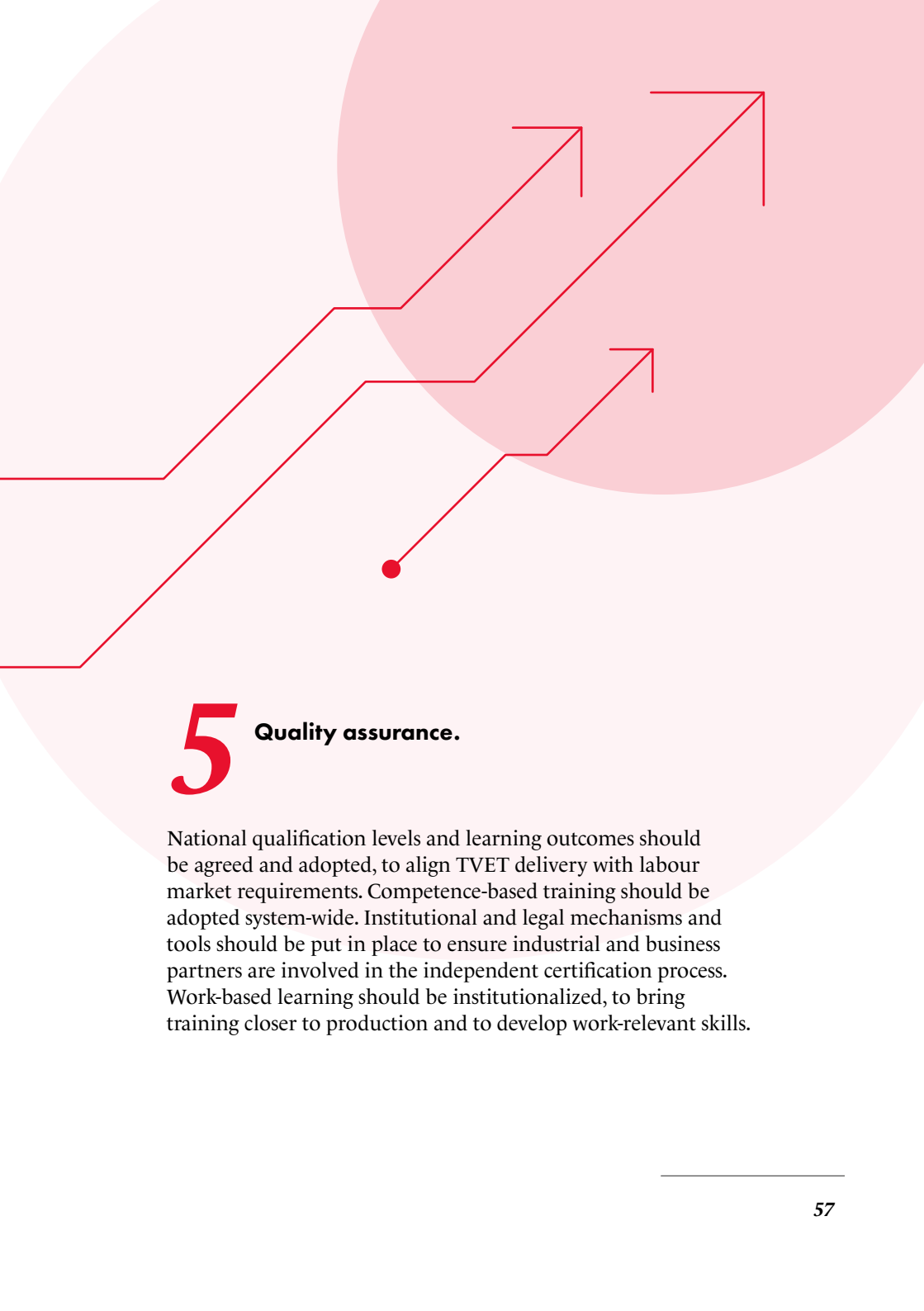
Result-oriented management should be put in place. A system of monitoring and evaluation should be set up to check that the implementation process is achieving its objectives and correctly applying measures, so that timely and appropriate adjustments can be made to the programmes and plans.

3 Labour market and TVET information systems.

Skills needs assessment tools (sector and tracer studies) should be formalized and regularly applied. They should be used for planning the training offer and its financing and for developing programme content. Labour market information held in the LMIS (in the MLSD) should be made available to all interested groups. The MES's EMIS and the AVE's MIS should be made fully functional, and used for planning TVET resources and delivery offers.

4 Developed and sustainable social partnership, with industry involvement in policy-making and TVET provision.

This objective will need a proper legal framework and institutional set-up. The existing Law on Social Partnership should be complemented with legislation regulating social partnerships in education. Coordination mechanisms should be developed for existing institutions (NSDC, sectoral and regional coordination structures), along with channels for regular exchange and consultation on consolidated actions, to ensure that TVET provision can respond rapidly to changing skills needs. The NSDC should adjust its mandate to cover human resources development and coordination.



5 **Quality assurance.**

National qualification levels and learning outcomes should be agreed and adopted, to align TVET delivery with labour market requirements. Competence-based training should be adopted system-wide. Institutional and legal mechanisms and tools should be put in place to ensure industrial and business partners are involved in the independent certification process. Work-based learning should be institutionalized, to bring training closer to production and to develop work-relevant skills.

6 **Social inclusion.**

Funds should be invested in educational infrastructure. Sufficient funds need to be allocated to prepare teachers and other staff for inclusive education. The SDF should be institutionalized and continue to fund training provision for vulnerable groups, primarily PWDs. There is a need to enhance support and guidance measures in order to prevent dropping out among the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and to support their reintegration. Measures and incentives need to be put in place to encourage employers to make their employment policies and work conditions more inclusive.

7 **Lifelong learning and continuous education and training.**

A clear policy on the development of lifelong learning and continuous education and training, as a tool for skills development for enterprises, needs to be adopted. RPL should be part of this policy, and RPL initiatives should be made operational. ICT-based, online and interactive learning provision should be scaled up in the TVET system.



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