

Youth Partnership

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

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3.1. General context

Armenia's labour market is a dynamic landscape characterised by emerging opportunities and evolving challenges, where youth play a vital role. Youth employment in the country faces hurdles such as high unemployment rates and a skills mismatch, while youth entrepreneurship showcases a growing start-up ecosystem and a resilient spirit of innovation among young Armenians.

Mismatch between university learning and labour market needs is a major issue contributing to youth unemployment in Armenia. Socio-economic difficulties and competition with more experienced generations further compound the problems young people face while transitioning into adulthood. Finally, insufficient opportunities make moving from education to employment, and establishing independence and a family, extremely challenging.

The labour market in Armenia

Armenia's employment sector, regulated by several laws, is currently under reform and expecting a new strategy for the years 2023-30. Recent changes to employment programmes include support for those affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through employer incentives, training and education. Both national and local bodies recognise the importance of youth in their strategies, providing them with opportunities for employment support, primarily through donor-funded programmes.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the lead partner for the Government of Armenia in the development of employment-related legislation and policies. The ILO strives to achieve the United Nations Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 8: "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" and SDG 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". The ILO organises educational, practical programmes raising awareness of labour rights and career development and provides comprehensive study reports as well. The "[Gender and youth employment in Commonwealth of Independent States countries](#)" report provides a detailed overview of the gender inequalities in the labour market in Armenia and a few other Commonwealth of Independent States member countries.

Youth data and statistics

Each year, the [Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia](#) publishes a report on a wide variety of topics, including its annual report on the labour force. Although the reports are quite detailed and cover a variety of indicators, the age groups do not correspond to the official age brackets for youth. Analysis presented is often for 15-29 or 15-34, so extrapolating for youth aged 16-30 is necessary.

According to the "[2022 demographic handbook of Armenia: population](#)", the total number of young people aged 15-29 is 540 000, of whom 264 200 (48.93%) are male and 275 800 (51.03%) are female. As of 2022, Armenia has a labour force of 1 296 400 people, according to the Statistical Committee's "[Labour market in Armenia 2022](#)" report. The total includes 400 800 (30.92%) people between the ages of 15 and 34, of which 239 800 are men (59.83%) and 161 200 (40.17%) are women. Among women aged 20-34, 59% have higher education, whereas only 34% of young men of the same age have higher education. The economic activity rate for the total population is 54.8% – 44.8% for women and 67.3% for men. The report does not specify activity rates for young people.

The [unemployment rate](#) in 2022 is at 15.4%, which is a substantial improvement compared to the 18.1% in 2021. Among young people aged 15-29, the unemployment rate is higher, at 24.4%. Only 35.4% of women are employed, while 19.6% are unemployed, which indicates a large number of economically inactive women. The most common reason for this is family circumstances such as taking care of children.

Main concepts

The realm of employment and entrepreneurship within the Republic of Armenia is defined by a diverse range of roles and responsibilities. At the core of these roles lie the employee and the employer, both pivotal to the nation's labour market, along with the individual entrepreneur and the business as a unit.

Definitions

The intricacies of employment and entrepreneurship within the Republic of Armenia are structured by its labour laws. One such intricacy is the concept of an employee, as defined by the Article 17 of the [Labour Code](#) of the Republic of Armenia. An employee is an eligible citizen who has attained the working age set forth by the Labour Code. They are contracted to perform tasks for an employer, with the nature of the work corresponding to a specific profession, qualification or role.

Conversely, an employer, as defined by the Article 18 of the Labour Code, partakes in the labour relationship by utilising the skills and labour of citizens. This relationship is formalised on the basis of a labour contract, and at times, as per the stipulations of the law.

Moving on to entrepreneurial activities, as per the [Law on Individual Entrepreneurs](#), an individual entrepreneur is someone who operates independently and at their own risk, without necessarily constituting a legal entity. They engage in activities aimed at accruing profit, be it through the use of property, the sale of goods, or the provision of services. This opportunity is open to eligible citizens of the Republic of Armenia, foreigners, as well as stateless persons who are not barred from engaging in such activities by law.

Armenian law describes an enterprise as an entity engaging in business through its own or allocated property, acquiring rights and responsibilities directly or via power of attorney. These entities assume responsibility for fulfilling obligations and typically aim for profit. Enterprises can be classified as for-profit or not-for-profit based on how profits are used. While some businesses are state-owned, most are private, and a few large ones are publicly listed.

The far-reaching impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Russian aggression against Ukraine¹

The Covid-19 pandemic affected community life on both social and economic levels. Despite the fact that the impact of the pandemic varies from region to region and community to community, systemic issues and chain reactions will have a lasting impact on Armenians for years to come, according to the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)'s Covid-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment](#). More than 82% of respondents reported that they had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. The small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, which makes up the largest share of employment in the economy, was severely hit by the pandemic. It was [estimated](#) that almost 65% of the businesses surveyed were temporarily closed during the lockdown, and more than 50% of SMEs in the tourism, manufacturing, and trade sectors reported being deeply affected.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, followed by military actions by Azerbaijan in 2022, significant humanitarian funding was provided by national and international charities and donor organisations. These funds supported essential needs, housing, employment programmes, and other necessities for populations affected by these crises. Presently, there are ongoing humanitarian, social assistance, and economic empowerment programmes for displaced individuals and those residing near Azerbaijani border areas.

There are many shocks that affect Armenia's economy, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, and the escalation of conflict in Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2022. Armenia was indirectly affected by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the sanctions that followed. According to various sources, over [100 000 Russian citizens relocated to Armenia](#) after the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. Over 50 000 of them are working in the information and

¹ This report was prepared between March and July 2023. It should be noted that subsequent to this period, specifically on September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan launched a military attack against Nagorno-Karabakh, whereas a ceasefire was agreed on 20 September 2023. This incident has had notable implications for the data and the broader situation in Armenia as detailed in the report. However, these developments are not addressed within the scope of this report.

communications technology (ICT) industry. This relocation affected capital flow from Russia to Armenia as well, affecting the exchange rate of the Armenian dram (AMD), which increased in [value by 22% in 2022 compared to the United States dollar](#). According to the World Bank, in 2022 [Armenia had 8.6% inflation on consumer prices](#).

3.2. Administration and governance

Governance

Legal framework

Navigating the employment sector in Armenia involves a keen understanding of a collection of legal acts that establish its governance, namely, the [Labour Code](#), the [Law on Employment](#), the [Law on Employers Union](#), and the [Law on Trade Unions](#).

Youth employment and entrepreneurship are clearly considered priorities by the Government of Armenia, as seen in the number of legislative and strategic documents published in recent years, in particular: the [Government Program for 2021-26](#), the [Transformation Strategy of Armenia 2020-2050](#), the [draft of the Employment Strategy for 2022-2027](#), and mid-term budgetary expenditure plans for the various ministries.

Employment programmes in Armenia have undergone significant transformations in recent years, reflecting broader changes in the country. Alongside existing initiatives, there are now specific projects aimed at assisting individuals impacted by the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. These initiatives cater to various groups, such as those who have participated in military actions, their families, displaced individuals, and others. [Starting from July 2023](#), multiple support formats have been introduced to facilitate the integration of participants in military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh. These formats include one-time payments to encourage employers, a five-month educational course, and a three-month paid traineeship.

Government agencies

Government agencies in the Republic of Armenia play pivotal roles in various aspects of the country's socio-economic fabric, from economic development and labour regulation to social welfare and technological advancement. While the Ministry of Economy (MoE) drives initiatives for economic growth and competitiveness, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA), Unified Social Services (USS), and Labour and Health Inspectorate ensure a balanced and fair labour market, whereas the Ministry of High Tech Industry (MHTI) fosters technological evolution, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MESCS) oversees the integration of youth in the labour market.

The [Ministry of Economy](#) spearheads the nation's economic development and sustainable growth, managing initiatives across sectors such as agriculture, tourism and trade to foster competitiveness and attract investment. Aiming for job creation and prosperity, the MoE focuses on building a business-friendly environment. The ministry's governing legal acts are accessible on its [website](#).

The [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs](#) manages labour, employment and social protection policies, prioritising social justice and worker well-being for sustainable economic development. Ensuring fair wages, safe conditions and non-discrimination, it enforces labour laws and handles issues such as job creation and social security. Its Employment Department leads initiatives for job growth, skill development, and social inclusion.

The [Labour and Health Inspectorate](#), under the MLSA, enforces Armenia's labour laws and health safety regulations, ensuring compliance in workplaces nationwide. In addition to inspections, investigations, and educational initiatives, the Labour and Health Inspectorate ran a 2022 campaign educating those under 18 about human trafficking, forced labour, and work ethics.

The primary aim of the [Unified Social Services](#) is to offer personalised and targeted assistance to vulnerable demographics, including low-income families, people with disabilities, the elderly and those affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Operating under Armenia's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the USS merged with the Employment Agency and three other social sector institutions. With 49 regional branches, the USS delivers services and employment support tailored to those in social distress. Undergoing reforms as of 2023, the USS streamlines access to effective social services. As part of the 2024-30 Employment Strategy, it primarily targets social and family benefit recipients, and in 2022, it introduced the [WorkForAll platform](#), connecting job seekers with employers.

The [Ministry of High Tech Industry](#) is a central body of executive authority that develops and implements the government's policy in the spheres of communication, information, information technology and security, postal services, licensing, granting of permits and military industry. Government policy pertaining to high technology, information technology, information security, digitalisation and others is developed and implemented by the ministry. The MHTI offers grants, start-up tax rebates, apprenticeships, training and other forms of support for individuals and companies in Armenia and its diaspora. Most individual beneficiaries of the MHTI's programmes are young people.

The [Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports](#) oversees education and youth matters, including general and vocational education, professional orientation and youth employment. In partnership with the MLSA, the MESCS links employment and youth entrepreneurship within policy priorities, as highlighted in strategic documents like the [Work Armenia strategy](#). Despite these priorities, the ministry offers limited programmes on these subjects.

The [Standing Committee for Labor and Social Affairs](#), a parliamentary entity, oversees issues related to labour, employment and social welfare. The committee assesses proposed laws, drafts and government initiatives for their potential impact on society, workers' rights and social welfare programmes. It also facilitates collaboration and dialogue between the government, civil society, trade unions and other stakeholders to address these concerns effectively.

Armenian state institutions and policies overseeing entrepreneurship and employment are currently undergoing significant changes. The functions of the dissolved [Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development National Centre \(SMEDNC\)](#) were transferred to the [Investment Support Centre \(Enterprise Armenia\)](#), which is currently reforming its entrepreneurship support programmes. Although youth entrepreneurship is not currently a primary focus, other institutions like the [National Centre of Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#) and the [Tourism Committee](#) continue to support sector-specific entrepreneurship development.

Non-governmental agencies

The [Republican Union of Employers of Armenia](#), founded in 2007, is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO) that advocates for employers' interests and carries out socio-economic development programmes. [The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia](#) works to promote workers' rights, social justice, and fair labour conditions across various industries. Established in 2009, the [Tripartite Collective Agreement](#) between the Armenian Government, the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia, and the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia enabled joint discussions on legislative amendments and strategies. However, as of July 2023, this commission is inactive.

Vocational education and training system: key actors

Armenia's school-based vocational education and training (VET) system offers preliminary-vocational (craftsmanship) and middle-vocational education. The aim, as stipulated by the [Law on Primary Professional \(Craftsmanship\) and Secondary Professional Education](#), is to prepare specialists, develop skills, broaden knowledge and upgrade qualifications. The MESCS, along with the [National Centre for VET Development](#) (NCVETD), spearhead the ongoing evolution of VET policies and development plans.

The main progress in the made so far in the Armenian VET sector is documented in the [Torino Process 2018-2020 report](#). Moreover, in 2021 the [UNDP Armenia](#) launched the [Strengthening Digital Vocational Education and Training](#) online programme in order to overcome the difficulties faced during the Covid-19 period. Several VET support programmes are implemented in Armenia with donor funding, including [Erasmus+ funded Capacity-building in VET projects](#) or the [World Skills Armenia Initiative](#). International development actors, such as [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit](#) (GIZ) and [World Vision](#), actively promote dual education and work-based learning into the VET education system.

Donor community

The Armenian donor community consists of both international and local donors. International funding for youth entrepreneurship and employability has increased substantially in the last five years. Many organisations support youth employment and entrepreneurship in the country, including the [European Union](#), the [United States Agency for International Development](#) (USAID), the [World Bank](#), [United Nations](#) agencies, the [Austrian Development Agency](#), and the [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#).

[Erasmus+](#), [EU4Youth](#), [EU4Business](#), [Innovation Matching Grants](#), [Armenian Workforce Development Activity](#), [Innovative Tourism and Technology Development for Armenia](#), [Erasmus for Youth Entrepreneurs](#), the European Solidarity Corps and other programmes have high demand from and impact on their beneficiaries, especially young women and men. Often, budgets available for such programmes exceed the state funding for similar initiatives, affecting the overall ecosystem of support for entrepreneurship and employment in Armenia.

Cross-sectoral co-operation

Interministerial working groups are the most common form of cross-sectoral co-operation models between ministries and other public bodies. Such working groups often include representatives from civil society, United Nations agencies, the private sector and experts. Often, interministerial working groups are established for a specific cause or task. The most common legal bases for such working groups are decisions of the Government of Armenia or a minister's decree.

An [Interministerial working group](#) was established for the Work Armenia strategy of the Government of Armenia. It included the Deputy Prime Minister, ministers, deputy ministers, and senior management from nine ministries and state agencies. All these public authorities had a role in the development and implementation of the Work Armenia strategy.

There are no examples of specific youth entrepreneurship-related working groups at the national level. Nevertheless, there are cross-sectoral co-operation bodies supporting dialogue on entrepreneurship-related reforms. As an example, the [Investment Council of Armenia](#) was established in 2007 based on the memorandum between the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development and the Government of Armenia. Details are provided in the [Networks and partnerships](#) section of this report on p. 26.

3.3. Skills forecasting

Forecasting system(s)

The Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia plays a key role in forecasting skills by collecting and analysing national-level data. Their annual reports, such as “[Labour market in Armenia, 2022](#)” and “[Small and medium entrepreneurship in the Republic of Armenia, 2022](#)”, offer valuable insights into the evolving trends and needs of the Armenian labour market and the entrepreneurial landscape. These high-quality datasets, which are available for public use, can help in predicting future skills requirements, thereby shaping policy making and strategic planning for workforce development and entrepreneurship support.

The USS conduct analyses of the employers and vacant positions registered in their systems. These analyses are conducted on a monthly basis, looking at geographical and sectoral split, legal type of employers, channels of communication, etc. These analyses are mainly used for the internal purposes of the USS and the MLSA Employment Department.

Similarly, the [Staff.am](#) job portal publishes an annual analysis of the skills required by employers, based on the announcements on their platforms. In its “[2022 labour market](#)” report, the Staff.am portal team analysed 40 000 announcements presented on the platform, statistical data from the Statistical Committee and aggregated data on income taxes from the [State Revenue Committee](#). The report identified labour market trends, skills in demand, changes compared to previous years, etc.

Various organisations and donor-funded activities regularly contribute to the analysis of the labour market and entrepreneurship in Armenia. Reports such as “[The labour market mismatch and the skills gaps in Armenia](#)” (2022) by the Armenia Workforce Development Activity, “[New forms of employment in the Eastern Partnership countries: platform work – Armenia](#)” (2021) by the [European Training Foundation](#) (ETF), and “[Rapid assessment of the employment impact and policy responses of the Covid-19 pandemic on Armenia](#)” (2021) by the ILO, offer valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of the labour market, skills gaps and new employment forms.

Reports such as “[Youth-focused and gender-sensitive labour market research in Armenia](#)” (2019) by [Save the Children](#), “[ESEE assessment of MSME trends and policies in Armenia](#)” (2021) by the ILO, and “[Assessing the impact of Covid-19 on small and medium-sized enterprises in Armenia](#)” (2020) by the [American University of Armenia](#) provide a wealth of information that allows us to forecast skills needs in the Armenian labour market.

Even though a plethora of labour market data exists, Armenia lacks formal forecasts and projections due to a short statistical history and various economic uncertainties over the past 30 years. These factors impede the accuracy of potential labour market predictions, despite the information’s potential to foresee skill needs and entrepreneurial trends.

Skills development

In accordance with the [Law on Education](#), state-funded higher-education institutions (HEIs) and VET institutions are allocated government-funded slots per profession, institution, and geographical distribution. This is determined through requests from educational institutions, applicant numbers per profession, government priorities and statistical data.

Educational institutions in Armenia aim to align their curriculums with labour market demands and state needs, shifting focus to transversal competences due to rapidly changing labour demands. Meanwhile, the USS consult regional offices to plan support programmes without incorporating labour market projections.

Enhancing skills through projects and programmes

Civil society organisations actively partake in building competences among vulnerable societal groups, including youth, women and individuals with disabilities.

The MHTI project, [University-Private Sector Cooperation for Training Specialists](#), seeks to create educational programmes in collaboration with universities and technology companies. Launched in 2020, the programme has since facilitated training for over 5 000 graduates.

The [Innovative Tourism and Technology Development for Armenia](#) project focuses on innovative tourism and start-up development, providing grants, expert guidance and community participation to nurture the entrepreneurial ecosystem. It also encourages participation of Armenian SMEs in [Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe grants](#).

The USAID-financed [Armenia Workforce Development Activity](#), managed by the [Enterprise Incubator Foundation](#), strives to empower youth through readiness and skills development initiatives. The programme plans to reach 10 000 individuals, promoting a self-reliant workforce and addressing the mismatch in labour market supply and demand.

The [Innovative Agriculture Training & Learning Camp](#) project, funded by the USAID, fosters partnerships between the agricultural sector, young professionals and university graduates. By providing agribusiness training, it aims to bridge the labour market supply and demand gap.

Cultivating skills for the future

Since 2018, the EU4Youth grants have supported entrepreneurial and employability initiatives for young people, including curricular innovation at school, VET and HEI levels; ideation and business planning; policy dialogue; social entrepreneurship; green economy; and skills development. Several organisations implement these projects, with new initiatives [set to launch](#) in July 2023. More information about the results of the EU4Youth programme can be found on the [official web page of the programme](#) and EU4Youth achievement reports for [2021](#) and [2022](#).

The [TUMO Centre for Creative Technologies](#), a free educational programme, provides teenagers with a diverse learning experience in creative technologies, with multiple locations both within and outside Armenia. Self-learning activities of the programme, guided by coaches, are interactive exercises designed to foster skills development, enhance future employability and nurture an entrepreneurial mindset.

Competence-building opportunities by Armenian NGOs

Youth NGOs play a crucial role in developing skills and competences among youth, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. With support from various international entities, several small-scale projects have been implemented to provide youth with competence-building opportunities.

Youth NGOs are also important for building the skills and competences of young people, especially in the light of Covid-19 pandemic and the crisis following the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and further escalations of the conflict. Various small-scale projects were implemented with the support from the UNDP, the German [Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development](#), the [International Visegrad Fund](#), the [Embassy of the United States of America in Armenia](#), the European Union Erasmus + programme, and through subgranting of larger-scale grant programmes. The [KASA Swiss Humanitarian Foundation](#), the [Youth Initiative Centre NGO](#), the [Armenian Progressive Youth NGO](#), the [Youth for Development NGO](#), the [European Youth Parliament NGO](#), the [Youth Cooperation Centre of Dilijan NGO](#), the [Children of Armenia Fund](#), the [Stepanavan Youth Centre NGO](#) and many other organisations provide competence-building opportunities to youth and youth workers through their projects throughout Armenia.

Awareness-raising campaigns

Public authorities, civil society, experts and youth workers all exhibit a significant interest in labour market analysis and forecasts, primarily those of international standing. Such information is often disseminated widely via social media and at events, although these efforts are typically part of project-specific visibility

initiatives rather than larger campaigns.

The MLSA and the USS, in collaboration with employers, organise annual job fairs to assist job seekers in finding employment opportunities. These job fairs are held both in Yerevan and in other Armenian cities, engaging approximately 4 000 job seekers and 50 employers. Details of these job fairs are shared on the MLSA website in the form of press releases, but the job vacancies presented at these fairs are not extensively promoted on online platforms or social media.

3.4. Career guidance and counselling

Career guidance and counselling services

Implementation of professional orientations in the education system

Professional orientations have been a part of the formal education system in Armenia since 2012, following the approval of the [“Concept of the development of professional orientation of the Republic of Armenia”](#) and its action plan. The aim was to provide opportunities for career choices, continuing career development, and lifelong reskilling. As of 2023, professional orientation and career guidance are highlighted in various laws (the Law on Education, the Law [“on social protection in case of employment and unemployment of the population”](#), the Law [“on initial vocational and secondary vocational education”](#), the Law [“on higher and postgraduate professional education”](#)), strategies, and policy documents, reflecting its importance in Armenia’s public education system.

Career guidance services in VET institutions and general schools

The [“Review of national career development support systems”](#) report reveals that students in Armenia’s 96 VET institutions have access to a comprehensive suite of career services. These services, based on the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre’s methodological guidelines, include skills training, counselling, apprenticeships, work-based learning, and ten specialised modules, including “Career management”, “Self-assessment”, and “Entrepreneurship skills”.

The report suggests that, from 2018 to 2020, a substantial 97.34% of VET graduates took advantage of various career guidance services. In higher education, students can receive guidance from institutional career centres, but proactive contact from students is required. Unfortunately, data regarding the extent and nature of these services are scarce.

According to the ETF’s [“Review of national career development support systems”](#), a third of Armenian general schools have career teachers trained by the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre. Career education is provided in 21.4% of schools, mainly through compulsory clubs for grades 8 to 11, while career learning is integrated into existing subjects at elementary and middle schools. The focus is on identifying student’s personal traits, developing competencies and providing vocational information. Professional orientation begins as a separate subject in grade 7, and by grade 11, a significant amount of time is dedicated to career guidance and individual career path research.

The 49 local USS offices could benefit inactive or unemployed individuals, as well as those not in education, employment, or training. The [“Key policy developments in education, training and employment – Armenia 2022” report](#) by ETF estimates that around 40% of the workforce is engaged in Armenia’s informal economy, accounting for 36% of the nation’s gross domestic product. However, there is a dearth of dedicated research on support for career development and career guidance initiatives for workers in Armenia’s private sector.

Involvement of various organisations and the private sector in career guidance

Since 2012, the MLSA and the MESCS have trained over 900 teachers. The MLSA’s [Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre](#) devised the training methodology and promoted the creation of professional orientation clubs. However, most of these clubs, established with the help of international and local organisations, could not survive without external support. Private schools (e.g. [Ayb school](#) or the [Shyrakatsy lyceum international scientific-educational complex](#)) and various companies also contribute by offering original professional orientation programmes: [Open Door Month](#) by the [Business and Education Partnership Foundation](#); the [one-day Professional Orientation Tour](#) by the [Leadership School Armenia](#) and the [American Chamber of Commerce in Armenia](#); the [Global Leadership Program](#) by the [Armenian General Benevolent Union](#); and [Guiding youth careers](#) by the UNDP and the MESCS. These efforts are consolidated in a [“National report on career guidance” by the ILO](#).

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions introduced professional orientation

and career guidance in 2013. The Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre's package of materials relating to the institutional and methodological basis of TVET institutions' career guidance units includes:

- examples of regulation on the TVET institutions career guidance unit;
- a job profile for career consultants/co-ordinators;
- an example questionnaire for monitoring career guidance units.

According to [ILO report](#), the package was officially transferred from the MLSA to the MESCS in March 2017. Then, in May 2017, the MESCS disseminated it to the TVET institutions.

Professional orientation programmes available for VET include [the National Centre for VET Development](#) in Armenia-organised [“Introduction of the student company educational model in Armenia”, “Professional orientation”, “VET – private sector cooperation”](#) conference.

Funding

A unique aspect of Armenian state regulations is that the MLSA has been funding the Provision of Career Guidance Methodology and Human Resource Training programme since 2013. Over the past three years, the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre has received between AMD 24 and 25 million (approximately €55 000-57 000), mainly for [teacher training and supervision functions](#).

According to the [mid-term expenditure projections](#) of the MESCS, each VET institution employs a career practitioner. Under the youth programmes, AMD 4 million (around €9 000) is earmarked for the development of professional orientation methodology in non-formal education contexts. The budget for the Unified Social Services also includes provisions for career guidance services. HEIs manage their budgets independently and, in most cases, operate career centres offering services to students and alumni.

Significant funding for career guidance and professional orientation is provided by various donors and development partners through projects in education, employment, youth, and related fields.

Quality assurance

In Armenia, career guidance services undergo regular analytical assessments at both national and international levels. Notable assessments include reports by the Save the Children, the ETF, and the ILO. The ETF [“Review of national career development support systems”](#) reports that the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre plays a vital role in ensuring high-quality career information. However, integrated career information remains a challenge because there is no unified platform from which verified career information can be retrieved.

VET institutions in Armenia have a unique toolkit for monitoring career guidance services, leading to the creation of a career guidance database for tracking graduates. The most recent monitoring indicators are provided by the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre. The investment in primary and secondary schools is ongoing, so the monitoring data are incomplete. Information on the activities of the career centres in higher education institutions is collected from each institution for review purposes.

Quality assurance for career guidance classes is maintained through supervision visits from the Career Guidance and Capacity Development Centre. However, due to limited human and financial resources, it is not possible to cover all the career guidance and professional orientation centres in the country. This measure aids teachers in introducing professional orientation clubs in their schools. Additionally, organisations implementing donor-funded projects conduct programmatic monitoring to ensure the high quality of services and student satisfaction.

The [“Research on professional orientation clubs in selected schools of Armenia”](#) report, conducted by

Save the Children in 2020, revealed that 96.4% of the beneficiaries affirmed the importance of receiving such services at school. Students rated the services highly, with an average satisfaction score of 4.9 out of 5.0. They noted the relevance of the topics, the usefulness of employer meetings, and the effectiveness of the self-realisation, self-assessment aids, and decision-guiding tests.

3.5. Traineeships and apprenticeships

Official guidelines on traineeships and apprenticeships

Since 3 May 2023, traineeships and apprenticeships have been legally supported in Armenia, across various education and employment sectors. This legislation is detailed in the [amendment](#) to the Labour Code, which is due to come into effect on 1 December 2023.

Definition and provisions for traineeships

The Labour Code, under Article 201.1, specifically provides provisions for traineeships. Employers are permitted to hire interns for vocational training for up to five months with a payment of at least the minimum wage. Such an arrangement necessitates a traineeship contract, registered according to Armenian legislation.

If a trainee decides not to work for the employer after their training or fails to meet their employment obligations as specified in their contract, they are required to compensate the employer for the actual costs associated with their vocational training. This repayment agreement is stated within the traineeship contract. The traineeship period will adhere to the same regulations as standard employment in relation to maximum working hours, minimum daily and weekly rest periods, and meal breaks. Article 201.2. of the Labour Code further expands upon this by stating that employers can organise additional professional training for an employee, with the employee's consent. This can take place domestically or internationally, and throughout this period the employee will retain their original salary and position.

Definition and provisions for apprenticeship

The Labour Code amendment in Armenia, effective from 3 May 2023, introduces provisions for apprenticeships in Articles 201.3 and 201.4. It outlines that apprenticeships are available to students at VET or HEIs, or those within a year of graduation. Apprentices' compensation is negotiated, and they can constitute up to 10% of the total staff at an establishment, working up to 20 hours weekly with mandated rest breaks. However, this apprenticeship duration is not recognised as work experience. Additionally, different models of traineeships and apprenticeships are commonly used across educational institutions, private companies and employment centres, with contracts typically formulated between the apprentice and employer, occasionally based on verbal agreement.

Example of traineeships and apprenticeships

Most of the banks in Armenia offer traineeships and apprenticeships to young people to continuously replenish their human resources. Even the [Central Bank of Armenia](#) offers traineeship programmes for undergraduate students expecting their master's degrees and for students expecting PhD degrees. The internship programme is carried out by the bank on the basis of letters sent by students themselves. As a rule, the students of the internship programme are not paid by the bank.

Dual education

Work-based learning, or "dual education", is actively promoted in VET and higher-education programmes through international partners and donor-funded programmes.

The Erasmus+-funded project, [Introducing Work-based Learning in Higher Education Systems of Armenia and Moldova for Better Employability of Graduates](#), led by the [French University in Armenia](#) in partnership with the MESCS, aims to foster partnerships between businesses and higher education institutions, promoting work-based learning and increasing graduate employability in Armenia and the Republic of Moldova through the development of a flexible apprenticeships/higher education model.

The [FAST Foundation's](#) apprenticeship programme provides undergraduate and graduate students with the opportunity to apply academic skills in real-world ICT contexts, benefiting both individual career progression and the broader Armenian ICT ecosystem by enhancing economic growth and aiding the

transition from academia to the workforce.

In collaboration with the MESCS, the GIZ has spearheaded the development of dual-education programmes in Armenia through their [Private Sector Development and Vocational Education and Training in the South Caucasus](#) project, successfully implementing a dual-training system across 13 institutions and 12 specialties, fostering private-sector engagement in practical student training and aiding in the development of the VET strategy.

The [Strategic Development Agency NGO](#) advances dual education in VET institutions and policy through its [Modernising VET in Agriculture in Armenia](#) project, enhancing agricultural expertise, developing legal and institutional frameworks for dual-professional education, and fostering sector partnerships with the MESCS.

Youth-focused civil society organisations like the [KASA Swiss Humanitarian Foundation](#) and [Armenian Progressive Youth](#) utilise traineeships and apprenticeships in their employability initiatives, providing soft-skills training and subsequent paid traineeships in private companies, facilitating these processes through employment contracts due to the unavailability of traineeship contracts as of July 2023.

Promoting traineeships and apprenticeships

While no legal basis for traineeships and apprenticeships has been established, various entities such as government institutions, vocational training centres, educational establishments and industry associations have undertaken promotional efforts. In the banking sector, promotional activities are common at higher education institutions, introducing traineeships and entry-level engagement programmes for young graduates – sometimes arranging for a specific bank to provide their educational training.

VET institutions work alongside industries to create tailored dual-education/work-based learning programmes, often promoting these schemes to private-sector stakeholders for collaboration and placement facilitation for students, both during and after their studies. Common promotional tools include job fairs, career counselling, VET competitions, and more. Online platforms and job portals like [Staff.am](#), [Job.am](#), and the [Youth Opportunities Armenia](#) group target the youth demographic, collating and promoting traineeship and internship opportunities to their large, active audiences.

Recognition of learning outcomes

Validation of non-formal and informal learning process in Armenia

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been [recognised by the Government of Armenia](#) since 2015 as a mechanism for validating and recognising learning outcomes acquired outside a formal learning context.

The validation process in Armenia typically involves a series of steps. First, self-assessment requires individuals to reflect on their acquired knowledge, skills and competencies, identifying areas they wish to have validated. The learner then needs to document evidence of their learning through portfolios, work samples, certificates or testimonials from trainers or employers.

In the next step, the submitted evidence is assessed by authorised organisations to determine the level and relevance of the competencies acquired. This can be accomplished through interviews, examinations or practical demonstrations, depending on the nature of the learning. Finally, the individual's skills and competencies are formally recognised in the form of certificates or credentials, which can aid in employment, career advancement and further education.

It is crucial to remember that specific procedures and requirements for validating non-formal and informal education can vary depending on the profession and the organisation authorised for evaluation. Although the validation of non-formal and informal learning has been formally available in Armenia for over eight years, it appears to be used primarily in donor-funded programmes, with little evidence of use by private

companies or individual learners.

Recognition through YouthPass

Currently, [YouthPass](#) is used for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning of young people in projects funded by Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps programmes. YouthPass is well recognised among youth organisations and practitioners involved in these programmes, encouraging individual reflection and learning awareness. The [EU4Youth Better Skills for Better Future](#) project, implemented by Save the Children, has adapted YouthPass for the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes for training and apprenticeship participants. In light of its success, the EU-funded EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship programme plans to further support the piloting of this model for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning.

Funding

Funding opportunities for traineeships and apprenticeships

Funding for traineeships and apprenticeships in Armenia is primarily available through educational institutions and employment support programmes.

The state funding for traineeships and apprenticeships is mainly available through funding for educational institutions (VET dual-education programmes, primarily) and employment support programmes. Under the [Work Practice employment support programme](#) of the USS offers paid traineeships for young people who enter the labour market for the first time after their education. The programme covers the minimum monthly salary (AMD 68 000; €145) for the trainee, 50% of the minimum monthly salary for the trainee's supervisor for a period of three months, and compensation of the taxes associated with the salaries.

International organisations such as the European Union, the USAID, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank also support programmes with elements of traineeships and apprenticeships. For example, the USAID-funded [Strengthening Elections and Political Processes in Armenia](#) project offered a traineeship programme to university students and recent graduates, providing opportunities for professional growth in public-policy research and analysis.

Interest and investment from the state, private companies, donors and civil society demonstrate the willingness to engage more beneficiaries in existing traineeship and apprenticeship programmes. While funding may be limited due to the new legislation, these opportunities contribute to the development of skills and enhance career prospects for individuals in Armenia.

Investment and sustainability of traineeships and apprenticeships

The exact amount of funding allocated by private-sector organisations for traineeships and apprenticeships in Armenia is challenging to determine. While on-the-job training is often considered part of an employment contract, learners during the probation period are expected to focus on learning rather than fully performing their duties, requiring additional investment from companies to support their training. Professional associations like the [Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises](#) and the [Union of Banks of Armenia](#) occasionally engage in educational programmes with traineeships, but it is more common for private-sector companies to cover the costs of training new employees and integrate traineeships or apprenticeships into their operational models.

However, sustaining dual-education programmes in VET institutions becomes challenging once external support and grant projects end. Similarly, private companies hosting traineeships or apprenticeships must bear their own costs, posing a risk to the long-term sustainability of these programmes. Without dedicated funding, the viability of traineeships and apprenticeships in both the private sector and VET institutions is at stake. It is crucial to explore mechanisms for securing long-term investment to ensure the continued effectiveness and impact of these programmes in developing skilled professionals in Armenia.

Quality assurance

Considering the absence of specific legislation on traineeships and apprenticeships, the processes for quality assurance at the national level remain undefined. The MESCS, the NCVETD, and other relevant stakeholders have roles in supporting quality assurance for traineeships and apprenticeships within VET dual-education programmes. However, the primary responsibility for ensuring quality lies with the stakeholders involved in the implementation of these programmes. Similarly, in the private sector, the management of quality assurance for traineeships and apprenticeships in educational programmes is determined by the respective companies.

The [National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation](#) plays a prominent role in assuring the quality of the validation of non-formal and informal learning model. The National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation carries out quality-assurance processes through institutional and programme accreditation in preliminary, vocational and higher-education institutions. Its overarching objective is to support tertiary-level institutions in fostering a quality culture in alignment with the legislation of the Republic of Armenia. The National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation actively engages in collaboration with international stakeholders to facilitate the exchange of best practices in the quality assurance of educational programmes.

3.6. Integration of young people in the labour market

Youth employment measures

Targeted employment support programmes

There is a targeted focus on vulnerable groups in Armenia's employment support programmes, with specific eligibility criteria for applicants. To benefit from these programmes, individuals must be registered as job seekers at the USS and meet certain requirements, such as being a first-time entrant to the labour market, having participated in military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh, receiving social or family benefits or having a disability. The MLSA refers to these prospective beneficiaries as "uncompetitive in the labour market".

Seasonal employment support and animal husbandry programmes

The [Seasonal Employment Support](#) project targets youth, offering employment in vulnerable and impoverished villages, specifically in mountainous, highland or border rural areas. The project, which lasts up to six months, pays participants based on work volume or hourly rates for agricultural equipment use, with project costs ranging from AMD 50 000 (€120) to AMD 300 000 (€700).

Another initiative, the [Support to Engage in Animal Husbandry](#) programme, aims to help families generate income through livestock farming. It also seeks to improve demographic indicators in various regions and reduce the risk of migration. The beneficiaries of this programme are individuals who are deemed uncompetitive in the labour market and are registered at regional employment centres. The maximum support provided through this project is AMD 1 million (€2 400).

Professional training and employment promotion activities

Participants in a programme engaging in animal husbandry receive extensive support, including a monthly stipend equivalent to 50% of the minimum monthly salary (€80) for a year, one-time compensation for purchasing animals (up to €840) and fodder (up to €750) and monthly payments to the veterinarian (€27) for a year. This support can extend up to two years.

The [Provision of Temporary Employment programme](#) offers paid public works to unemployed Armenian citizens displaced due to war, providing a daily wage of €19 for a maximum of three months. While this programme is not exclusively meant for young people, they can participate if they meet the criteria.

The USS's [Professional Training programme](#) aids unemployed or dismissal-prone individuals by offering new skills for suitable employment and promoting entrepreneurial activities. Participants receive a stipend equivalent to 50% of the minimum monthly salary (€80), with training courses typically lasting up to five months.

The [Employment Promotion Activity programme](#) from the USS provides support for various vulnerable groups, including disabled individuals who receive one-time support for workplace improvement (€1 150) and a monthly salary subsidy of up to €115 for up to 12 months. Unemployed individuals aged 16-29 from benefit-receiving families can get a subsidy for up to three months, covering 50% of the monthly salary up to €370 per month.

The [State Programme for Compensation of Highly Competitive Specialists' Salaries and their Equalised Fees](#), managed by the MoE's [National Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#), facilitates the hiring of high-paid foreign experts by offering up to 70% compensation of the specialist's salary, up to €3 800, for a maximum of 12 months.

Despite these efforts, Armenia lacks an equivalent to the proactive European Union Youth Guarantee scheme, with most local programmes being reactive and targeting young people already in vulnerable social situations.

“Flexicurity” measures focusing on young people

Although Armenia’s Labour Code provides for workers’ rights, there are still issues in its application. As Save the Children [reports](#), around 20% of young workers are without formal contracts as of 2023, and many are uninformed about their rights during workplace conflicts.

The State Revenue Committee is working to close a loophole that allows workers to shift from employee to service provider status to reduce tax liabilities, but this change often leaves them exposed to unfair dismissals and without benefits. However, the limited power of the Labour and Health Inspectorate forces many workers into lengthy and expensive legal disputes to protect their rights, prompting some to find new jobs.

Armenia’s USS have launched the [Job Security Programme for the Unemployed](#) (2022) to increase employment opportunities and alleviate family poverty. Eligible employers are those not associated with state administration, operating for at least two years, maintaining a staff of at least 10 people, and whose revenue fund has not reduced by more than 5%.

The programme provides one-time compensation to employers signing a minimum one-year contract with an unemployed person. Compensation stands at AMD 250 000 (€600) for employing any unemployed individual registered with the USS and AMD 350 000 (€850) for each beneficiary unemployed person hired. For seasonal employment, the compensation is adjusted based on the contract terms.

Reconciliation of private and working life for young people

Family circumstances often lead women to exit the labour market. To facilitate their reintegration after maternity, the Unified Social Services offer the [Nanny with State Support](#) programme. This initiative, targeting parents on leave with children under three years of age, provides assistance to organise childcare concurrently with work, enabling parents to maintain their skills and ensuring employment for nannies. Beneficiaries are those planning to return to work before their child turns two years old, with the 11-month programme offering compensation for childcare, capped at the minimum monthly salary (AMD 68 000).

Furthermore, the Labour Code provides specific protections for pregnant and nursing mothers, including additional health measures, rest and feeding breaks, medical examinations and modified work hours. Maternity leave provisions cover up to 140 days (or 180 days for multiple births). Alongside these protections, the code also offers provisions for remote work, a practice popularised during the Covid-19 pandemic. Companies retain the flexibility to design remote working structures, particularly in high-demand sectors like ICT, offering further potential support for women balancing work and family commitments.

Funding of schemes/initiatives

Labour market integration measures, particularly those targeting youth, are predominantly funded by the state. The MLSA and its USS serve as the primary government entities responsible for such measures, with a [budget allocation](#) of AMD 1.91 million (equivalent to €4.5 million) in 2023. The MHTI and the MoE also contribute by covering costs associated with ICT sector employment programmes and the [State Programme for Compensation of Highly Competitive Specialists’ Salaries](#) respectively.

Prominent among these initiatives is the [Resilient Syunik Team Europe Initiative](#), a collaborative effort involving the European Union, the European Investment Bank, European Union member states Austria, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden, and external partner Switzerland. With a budget of approximately €51 million, this initiative aligns with the Government of Armenia’s regional development priorities and the European Union’s Economic and Investment Plan. The initiative seeks to promote sustainable socio-economic and institutional development in the Syunik region by improving the business environment for SMEs, enhancing private sector competitiveness, facilitating access to high-quality public services, prioritising green regional development and safeguarding biodiversity.

Quality assurance

Each institution responsible for implementing the described employment measures also bears the primary responsibility for monitoring and ensuring the quality of these programmes.

The MLSA comprises two departments which underpin the quality assurance of employment programmes: the Department of Labour and Employment and the Department of Summary Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation. The latter collects and analyses data across all the MLSA's work strands, providing analytical insights to senior management and relevant departments for use in policy making.

Similarly, the USS headquarters collects data and oversees the implementation of employment programmes. However, it is worth noting that the USS only collates data on project processes, neglecting to track the impact of employment projects, such as their success in ensuring long-term employment for beneficiaries. There is an ongoing debate about developing a system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of employment support programmes.

3.7. Cross-border mobility in employment, entrepreneurship and vocational opportunities, programmes and schemes for cross-border mobility

Armenian diaspora and cross-border co-operation

Armenia is in a specific situation when it comes to cross-border co-operation. According to [the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs](#), there are an estimated 7 million Armenians living in more than 100 countries around the world. There are dozens of pan-Armenian and spiritual organisations, hundreds of communities and patriotic groups, around 1 000 daily and weekly schools, scientific and educational institutions, sports and cultural associations, charities, and socio-political entities actively working in the diaspora. Considering this factor, many programmes of cross-border co-operation look towards the diaspora as a primary destination.

Engagement and opportunities for the diaspora

The Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs in Armenia provides numerous opportunities for young people from the diaspora and from Armenia.

The «[iGorts 2023](#)» programme: this scheme recruits diaspora Armenian professionals to serve in Armenia's public sector for a year. They go through an application and interview process and are placed in state agencies where their expertise is needed. Their role is to enhance and develop programmes and policies within state institutions.

The [NerUzh Diaspora Tech Startup Programme](#): this initiative, first attempted in 2018, aims to attract diaspora technology and business talent back to Armenia. The programme works to bolster the Armenian start-up ecosystem by encouraging diaspora entrepreneurs to base their start-ups in Armenia. Winners of the competition, who present a viable business plan and register their company in Armenia, receive between USD 15 000 and USD 30 000 in funding, mentorship and support to expand their businesses in Armenia.

[The Employment Support Programme for Lebanese Armenians](#): this scheme aids relocated Lebanese Armenians to find work in Armenia. The programme facilitates these individuals' access to the job market and helps them find meaningful careers in Armenia through job matching, enhancing employability, addressing skill mismatches, providing mentorship and creating networking opportunities.

The MESCS also offers various opportunities for collaboration with the diaspora. Such programmes include most of its programmatic directions. The MESCS offers full scholarships for diaspora and foreign students to study in universities in Armenia. Also, the MESCS endorses various educational [international opportunities](#) for youth and students in Armenia.

International youth programmes and collaborations

International cross-border programmes are highly attractive for young people in the Republic of Armenia and their numbers continue to grow. Some of the popular programmes include the following.

The [Erasmus+ Youth Programme](#) is available to Armenian youth and civil-society organisations because Armenia is a partner country. Several youth organisations in Armenia utilise this programme to build competences among their youth and youth workers, aiming to enhance the skills and abilities of participants and equip them with the necessary tools to thrive in the job market. Youth organisations and HEIs actively use(d) opportunities offered by Erasmus+ programme and its predecessors. According to [Support for Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Eastern European and Caucasus](#), during the 2014-22 Youth in Action programme, Armenia hosted 126 youth exchanges and 151 youth-worker mobility projects and sent participants to 570 youth exchanges and 952 youth-worker mobility projects. Over 8 000 young people and youth workers took part in projects outside of Armenia. Entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and employability have been popular topics for such projects during and since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The [Erasmus Mundus](#) programme aims to equip participants with advanced knowledge, skills and international experience, enhancing their employability and entrepreneurial capabilities.

[Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurship](#) is a cross-border exchange programme in which Armenian youth can participate. Unfortunately, it is not a well-known opportunity among young people in Armenia.

The [American Council for International Education](#) offer a wide range of programmes for youth of different ages and experience levels. The [Professional Fellows Programs](#) are among their most popular programmes.

The [European Solidarity Corps](#) is another popular programme for young people and youth organisations in Armenia. Armenia is a partner country within the European Solidarity Corps. In its predecessor [European Voluntary Service](#) programme Armenian youth organisations hosted 258 and sent 593 volunteers, according to [Support for Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Eastern European and Caucasus statistics](#).

Legal framework

In the formal education context, foreign students can study in Armenia according to two decrees by the Government of Armenia:

- [“On admission to higher educational institutions of foreign citizens of the Republic of Armenia, as well as family members of the diplomats working in Republic of Armenia diplomatic institutions operating in foreign states”](#) (2011);
- [“On the procedures for admission of foreign citizens to primary professional \(vocational\) and middle professional education institutions of the Republic of Armenia”](#) (2011).

These acts, among others, provide a legal basis for foreign and diaspora students to attend cross-border educational (including skills development) programmes in Armenia.

Article 15 of the Labour Code confers the same rights to foreign employees as to Armenian citizens, dictating employment principles, rights and obligations. The Republic of Armenia Law [“on the legal status of foreign citizens”](#) governs the employment of foreigners, requiring a work permit that details the nature of the work its and duration, along with conditions for permit rejection and contract requirements. The [State Migration Service under the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development](#) manages these permits and all employment contracts for foreigners and Armenians alike, which must comply with the Labour Code’s regulations on work hours, leave and termination procedures.

The Republic of Armenia [Tax Code](#) oversees the taxation of foreign entities and individuals, applying the same 23% flat income tax rate and social security contributions to foreign employees as to Armenians. Foreign employees residing in Armenia for 183 days or more per year are taxed on worldwide income, while shorter stays only require tax on Armenian-sourced income. Double-taxation avoidance treaties may offer foreign employees exemptions or lower tax rates, but these vary depending on personal circumstances including residency status, employment duration, location and applicable tax treaties.

3.8. Development of entrepreneurship competence

Policy framework

In 2020, the Government of Armenia approved the 2020-24 [Small and Medium-sized Entrepreneurship Development Strategy](#). A critical part of this strategy, as outlined in section 4.2, is to strengthen the capabilities of SMEs and foster an entrepreneurial culture by integrating key entrepreneurial skills into educational curriculums.

To nurture entrepreneurship on a wider scale, the Government of Armenia is set to share successful entrepreneurs' stories and magnify the visibility of start-up support programmes. It is also committed to expanding awareness and engagement in non-formal education and continuous vocational training within SMEs, instilling a culture of lifelong learning.

Specific actions are being undertaken to boost the representation of women and youth in entrepreneurship, particularly in regional areas. These efforts encompass increasing awareness, delivering education and ensuring mentorship. Emphasis is placed on facilitating the integration of repatriated people into the country's business community.

While the importance of entrepreneurial education is often emphasised by public figures, these competences are generally integrated into broader educational programmes, making their effectiveness challenging to assess. So, it is vital that the development of entrepreneurial competences is more explicitly emphasised in state initiatives and policies already underway.

Formal learning

Entrepreneurship is incorporated into public education subjects, such as technological education, in grades 2-4; 5-7; in the 10th grade as a theoretical component; and in the 11th grade as a practical component. This was initially piloted in schools through [Junior Achievement of Armenia](#), an NGO dedicated to youth entrepreneurship education. Junior Achievement of Armenia has various grant programmes supporting youth-led start-up ventures, especially those stemming from their entrepreneurship education programmes. Junior Achievement of Armenia actively [supports](#) the development of the entrepreneurship education concept, the creation of educational materials and manuals and the advancement of subject standards and programmes for entrepreneurship education.

In collaboration with the MESCS and the NCVETD, the GIZ has developed an [entrepreneurial training module](#) for VET education. This module has been widely implemented within the VET sector and is currently included in most VET educational programmes. Entrepreneurship education is also integrated into professional orientation and career guidance services to encourage young people to consider entrepreneurship as a potential career path.

Non-formal and informal learning

The [National Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#) spearheads numerous events promoting entrepreneurial culture in Armenia, including the notable [INNO Armenia 2023](#) – National Week of Innovation and Entrepreneurship – organised by the National Centre of Innovation and Entrepreneurship with the MoE and other state institutions. Additionally, the MESCS supports the establishment of [two youth centres annually](#), equipping them to build youth competencies for the labour market and entrepreneurship.

Informal learning, volunteering and youth work play crucial roles in developing entrepreneurial skills among Armenian youth. This is further bolstered by several large-scale donor-funded programmes.

The [Armenian General Benevolent Union](#) operates the [Women Entrepreneurs](#) programme for businesses in Armenia and Artsakh, enhancing participants' entrepreneurial knowledge and skills.

Impact Hub Yerevan, a co-working space and innovation hub, offers various entrepreneurship training

programmes, focusing particularly on social entrepreneurship.

The [Enterprise Incubator Foundation](#) supports the Armenian high-tech industry and start-up ecosystem with comprehensive programmes.

The American University in Armenia significantly contributes to developing entrepreneurial competences, notably through its on-campus start-up incubator, the [Entrepreneurship and Product Innovation Centre](#), and its [Turpanjian Rural Development Programme](#).

The Armenian National Agrarian University has established the [Impact Aim ANAU AgriTech Accelerator programme](#), providing knowledge, funding and support for ventures.

Finally, the [Joint Research Centre](#), in partnership with the [European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#), has developed [EntreComp: the entrepreneurship competence framework](#). It consists of three competence areas: "Ideas and opportunities"; "Resources"; and "Into action". Each competence area is composed of five competences, which are also divided into levels of expertise. This tool was introduced in Armenia through the ETF, although more promotion is needed.

Educator support in entrepreneurship education

The [Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship Training programme](#) is organised by the MESCS and the [Central Bank of Armenia](#). Through this programme, over 8 000 teachers have received training on how to deliver financial literacy classes to pupils. This training covers various aspects, including personal-finance management, savings, budgeting, banking services and the basics of investment. By equipping teachers with this knowledge, the programme enables them to effectively transmit financial literacy skills to their students. Various materials have also been developed to support teachers in their work.

The GIZ, in collaboration with the MESCS and the NCVETD, has developed an [entrepreneurial training module](#) for VET education. Three products have been developed based on this module:

- ["Development of entrepreneurial skills for the participants of the module training course";](#)
- ["Development of entrepreneurial skills module for trainers of secondary professional state educational institutions";](#)
- ["Entrepreneurial Skills Development module for students of secondary vocational state educational institutions".](#)

The GIZ supported the MoE in developing a [methodology](#) for SME trainings. This methodology was created in 2021 and presented to the MoE for adoption. Unfortunately, there have been changes in the structures and institutions operating under the MoE.

The [SMEDNC Foundation](#), a body operating under the MoE, supported entrepreneurial learning and development in Armenia. Although SMEDNC ceased operations in 2020-21, its website (now part of the Investment Support Centre's domain) still contains materials developed by SMEDNC and other organisations prior to 2020. In addition, SMEDNC maintained a pool of trainers who received professional entrepreneurship training over the years.

3.9. Start-up funding for young entrepreneurs

Access to information

Information on available funding, programmes and services and professional guidance for start-ups in Armenia is dispersed across multiple sources.

The MoE publicises business support programmes on its [website](#) and [Facebook page](#), offering general information and requiring further exploration for details. Projects are often run by third parties like banks, requiring beneficiaries to identify the actual provider of the support.

The MHTI also presents information about their programmes, from internships to grant opportunities for diaspora startups, on their [website](#) and [Facebook page](#). Grant disbursement occurs through the complex [ARMEPS](#) centralised electronic procurement system, posing potential challenges.

The USS provide detailed overviews of employment support programmes on their [website](#) and via employment support specialists at regional offices. These specialists also provide information on entrepreneurship support programmes for vulnerable groups.

The Investment Support Centre used to have a [web page](#) with relevant start-up information, showcasing a clear need for a similar, current platform to consolidate information on opportunities for entrepreneurs in Armenia.

All state agencies are open to collaboration for wider dissemination of their programmes and services, actively participating in events organised by civil society and the private sector to promote opportunities for start-ups and beyond.

Access to capital

Armenia boasts a rich and diverse ecosystem for startups, offering extensive access to capital through various means. From local organisations and banks to national and European Union programmes, the country is committed to fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.

Local institutions such as the [Enterprise Incubator Foundation](#), [Armenia Startup Academy](#), and [Business Angel Network of Armenia](#) play a significant role in incubating and accelerating start-ups, offering mentorship, funding and access to investment networks. The presence of venture capital firms like [SmartGateVC](#) and [Granatus Ventures](#) further expands the availability of early-stage funding for technology start-ups.

Additional support comes from government initiatives and programmes, such as the Start-Up Loan Guarantee Fund, the [Innovative Matching Grant programme](#), and the [Agro-Processing support programme](#). These initiatives reduce financial risk, promote innovation and support specific sectors like agro-processing.

The role of banks should not be overlooked, with institutions like [Ameria Bank](#), [ACBA Bank](#), and [Evoca Bank](#) offering favourable conditions for business loans, further widening the access to capital for SMEs.

Access to European Union funding, including through the [European Neighbourhood Instrument](#), [Horizon Europe](#), Erasmus+ and [Creative Europe](#), broadens the opportunities for Armenian start-ups. These programmes support a variety of activities from co-operative research to cultural exchange.

Finally, the MHTI offers a multipronged approach to supporting start-ups, including fostering growth through mentorship, providing infrastructure via the Innovation and Technology Park, financial aid through start-up support programmes and international exposure through co-operation and partnerships.

Overall, Armenia presents an increasingly favourable environment for start-ups, with a wide array of funding and support mechanisms.

3.10. Promotion of entrepreneurship culture

Special events and activities

Armenia hosts a range of events aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and innovation, though not exclusively for youth. However, these events tend to attract a significant number of young participants, especially those operating in the ICT sector. Notably, these events also provide a platform for young entrepreneurs to showcase their offerings, engage with potential investors and expand their business networks.

Noteworthy events include the [Sevan/Seaside Startup Summit](#), a prominent annual gathering located near Lake Sevan. Although it is not youth-focused, the event draws in entrepreneurs, investors and mentors from both Armenia and overseas. With start-up pitching competitions, workshops and networking opportunities, it has seen participation from over 25 000 individuals and 1 000 startups by 2023.

Another significant event is the [Global Entrepreneurship Week Armenia](#), organised by the American Councils in Armenia. This week-long celebration of entrepreneurship encompasses a range of activities, including conferences, panel discussions, workshops and start-up showcases, equipping aspiring entrepreneurs with valuable insights and connections.

Similarly, the [Armenian Youth Business Forum](#) offers a conference-style environment for young entrepreneurs, business leaders and professionals to discuss, learn and explore potential business collaborations across various sectors.

On the technology front, the MHTI organises the annual [Digi Week](#), attracting technology experts and policy makers globally to discuss technology advancement and investment opportunities.

Despite the lack of youth-specific initiatives to cultivate an entrepreneurship culture, the existing landscape of events in Armenia does provide ample opportunities for young entrepreneurs to engage, learn and expand their entrepreneurial journey.

Networks and partnerships

While there are no partnerships and networks in Armenia that specifically focus on youth entrepreneurship, the youth are considered a priority demographic by many entities that support entrepreneurship and small-to-medium enterprises.

The [Investment Council of Armenia](#), modelled after the Business Support Office of Armenia and funded by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development and the [UK Government's Good Governance Fund](#), facilitates public-private dialogue and consults SMEs. Since its inception, the Investment Council has passed 25 large-scale legislative reforms, including preferential tax regimes for ICT start-ups, sales tax regime introduction, leasing reforms and more.

Increasingly, business membership organisations have been crucial in dialogues with the Government of Armenia and the National Council of Armenia on various tax and sectoral reforms. Several programmes funded by the European Union and the USAID, such as the [Business Membership Organisations Development Initiative in Armenia](#) for the GIZ SME Development in Armenia programme and the [USAID Armenia Business Enabling Environment activity](#), have facilitated growth and dialogue between public-sector agencies and business membership organisations.

Active business-membership organisations in Armenia include: the American Chamber of Commerce in Armenia, the [European Business Association Armenia](#), the [Armenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#), the [Mantashyants Entrepreneurs Union](#) and the [Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises](#).

So, even without youth-focused networks, Armenia's entrepreneurial ecosystem is robust and engaging, with various entities supporting SMEs and facilitating public-private dialogue, thereby indirectly aiding the growth of young entrepreneurs.

3.11. Current debates and reforms

Forthcoming policy developments

In Armenia, young people are frequently the focus of most educational, employment and entrepreneurship support programmes, either intentionally or because of their inherent curiosity and interest in such developmental initiatives. The absence of policies specifically aimed at young individuals complicates the analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of existing support measures for this demographic.

Professional orientation has been emphasised in several educational, employment support and private-sector support laws. Despite being on the public sector's agenda, the allocated resources may not adequately cover the needs of the educational sector and labour market, indicating a need for more advocacy.

The year 2023 will witness significant changes in the employment sector. The [Employment Strategy for 2023–2030](#) is expected to be adopted in the second half of the year, and the corresponding action plan, including new youth-targeted employment programmes, is set to be developed by the MLSA with the support of UNDP Armenia, with young people listed as one of the four main target groups. Following this strategy, employment support programmes are to be revised to cater more effectively to the needs of these groups, including youth.

The Government of Armenia routinely introduces measures to support entrepreneurship, offering networking and ideation events, grants, subsidies, consultancy and various other support initiatives through the MoE, the MHTI and other agencies. However, there is a lack of a systematic approach, particularly one targeting young people.

Ongoing debates

The [MESCS has established a working group to develop the Law on Youth](#). Composed of civil-society representatives, youth workers, experts and representatives from other relevant ministries and public agencies. Both employment and entrepreneurship topics have been priorities in all past youth-policy strategies, suggesting these subjects might find their way into the Law on Youth in some form.

In VET, it is widely understood that work-based learning or dual-education programmes are highly productive in meeting labour market demands and ensuring the employment of graduates. The Government of Armenia and the donor community support further work in this direction. A revision of financing mechanisms for running such programmes could increase their appeal for both the VET institutions and private-sector counterparts.

Professional orientation and career guidance are well prioritised by legal acts and strategic documents. Although there are clear success stories of introducing professional education and career guidance at all levels of the education system, a lot of work remains to ensure all interested pupils and students receive high-quality professional orientation services.

The integration of entrepreneurial competences into the education sector is progressing, but there is still a long way to go. Aspects like financial and legal literacy, taxation and other elements of entrepreneurship are insufficiently covered in the education system, which consequently does not prepare young people for entrepreneurial careers. The best practices of entrepreneurial competence learning are still found among civil society initiatives, which can and should be adapted for the public sector.

The start-up ecosystem is rapidly evolving, spurred on by government reforms in taxation, public procurement and the Labour Code, which have a positive impact on the economy. While the ICT sector enjoys additional benefits, such as tax breaks and access to capital, opportunities for most other sectors remain limited.

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