

KAZAKHSTAN · KYRGYZSTAN · TAJIKISTAN · UZBEKISTAN

Youth Employment in Central Asia

Who is excluded, what the evidence says works, and what to test first

IN BRIEF

In all four countries young women are more likely than young men to be out of work and education: more than one and a half times as likely in Kazakhstan, more than twice in Kyrgyzstan and three times in Tajikistan [1, 2, 3]. Where the data allow a closer look, this exclusion is mostly not unemployment. In Tajikistan's 2025 labour force survey, 64% of women aged 20 to 24 are neither working nor studying, against 14% of men. Across the whole 15-24 age group in that survey, at least 85% of those out of work and education (NEET) are outside the labour force [3]. The programme types reviewed here, training with work experience, apprenticeships and job matching, are designed for people who are in it.

For a funder, this has four consequences.

- **Decide who the programme is for before choosing the instrument.** A scheme for unemployed graduates in Kazakhstan and one for rural young women in Tajikistan are different undertakings, and the evidence reviewed here speaks mainly to the first.
- **Favour designs that tie training to an employer and last several months.** Across the reviews, that is the design feature with the most consistent support.
- **Build a comparison group into what is funded.** We identified one impact evaluation of a youth programme in the four countries. The rest of the regional evidence reports how many participants found work, which does not show how many found work because of the programme.
- **Plan on national survey figures, and check them.** This report leads with each country's own statistics. The internationally published estimates differ from them by up to thirteen percentage points, and section 2 sets the two side by side.

SECTION 1

Question and approach

This review asks how large youth labour-market exclusion is in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan when the four are measured on the same terms, and which employment interventions have credible evidence behind them and a plausible claim to work in these labour markets. Turkmenistan is left out because the data needed for a fair comparison were not available.

Youth means ages 15 to 24. The main measure is the NEET rate, the share of all young people who are not in employment, education or training. It captures detachment from the labour market and says nothing about the quality of the jobs young people hold, so it is read alongside youth unemployment, informal employment and the gap between women and men.

The review draws on 37 sources selected from 127 identified in a structured search of international and national statistics, evaluation repositories and research literature, in English and Russian, for 2016 to 2026. Numbers in square brackets refer to the sources listed at the end, after a short note on method.

Three scope choices shape what follows. The intervention review covers three families: skills training combined with work experience, apprenticeships and employer-linked programmes, and matching, information and hiring incentives. Entrepreneurship support and public works were left out. So were measures aimed at bringing young women into the labour force, such as childcare or cash transfers, and so was labour migration. Section 2 shows why the second of these exclusions matters most, and section 5 says what it would take to close each.

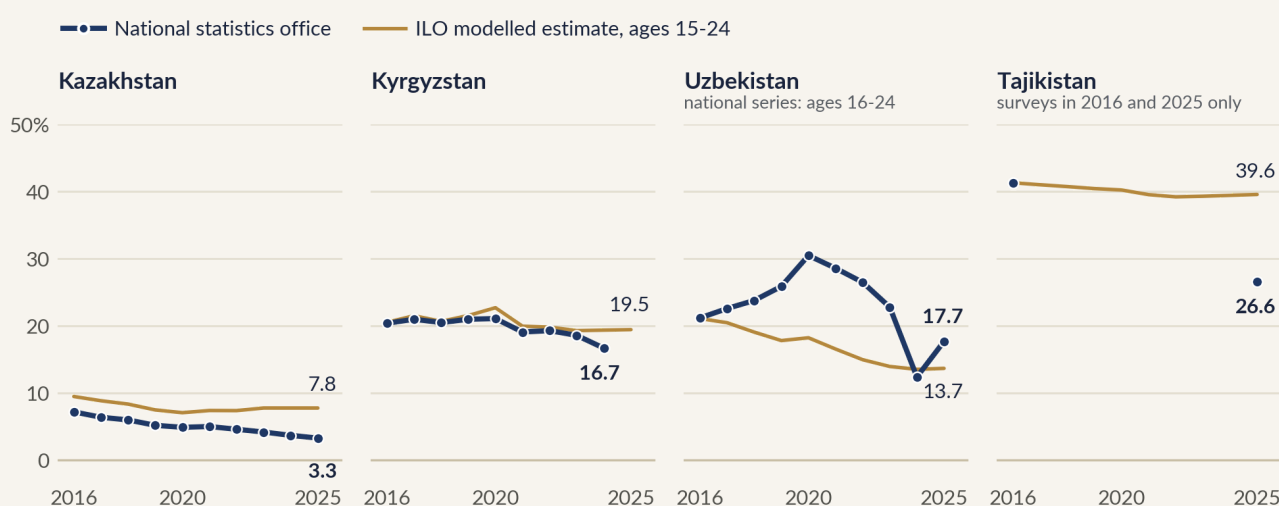
SECTION 2

The scale and shape of youth exclusion

THE NATIONAL FIGURES

Each of the four statistics offices publishes a survey-based series, and this report leads with those. The latest national NEET rates are 3.3% in Kazakhstan (2025), 16.7% in Kyrgyzstan (2024), 17.7% in Uzbekistan (2025) and 26.6% in Tajikistan (2025) [1, 2, 3, 4]. These are not yet a harmonised comparison. They refer to different years, and the Uzbek figure covers ages 16 to 24 and is defined as not in education or employment. They are the best available guide to each country, and should be compared across countries with that caution.

FIGURE 1 Youth NEET rate, 2016-2025: national series and ILO modelled estimates



Sources: Kazakhstan, Bureau of National Statistics [1]; Kyrgyzstan, National Statistical Committee [2]; Uzbekistan, National Statistics Committee, share of 16-24 year-olds not in education or employment [4]; Tajikistan, Labour Force Surveys 2016 and 2025 [3, 5]. ILO modelled estimates, ILOSTAT [6].

The four have moved differently since 2016. Kazakhstan's rate has more than halved, from 7.2%. Kyrgyzstan's held near 20% until 2020 and has eased since. Tajikistan has two observations nine years apart, 41.3% in 2016 and 26.6% in 2025. Uzbekistan's series rose to 30.5% in 2020, fell to 22.8% in 2023, dropped to 12.4% in 2024 and

stood at 17.7% in 2025. A movement of that size in one year may reflect a break in the series. The platform gives no explanation, and the statistics committee should be asked whether definitions, coverage or methods changed before the figure is used for targeting.

HOW THE INTERNATIONAL ESTIMATES COMPARE

The ILO publishes modelled estimates on one definition for all four countries, and these are the figures most often quoted internationally. For 2025 they are 7.8% for Kazakhstan, 19.5% for Kyrgyzstan, 13.7% for Uzbekistan and 39.6% for Tajikistan [6]. They agree with the national series on the extremes: Kazakhstan lowest, Tajikistan highest. Otherwise they diverge. The estimate is above the national figure by 4.5 points in Kazakhstan, about 3 in Kyrgyzstan and 13 in Tajikistan, and below it by 4 in Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan change places depending on the source. Tajikistan stands about ten points above Kyrgyzstan on the national surveys and twenty on the estimates.

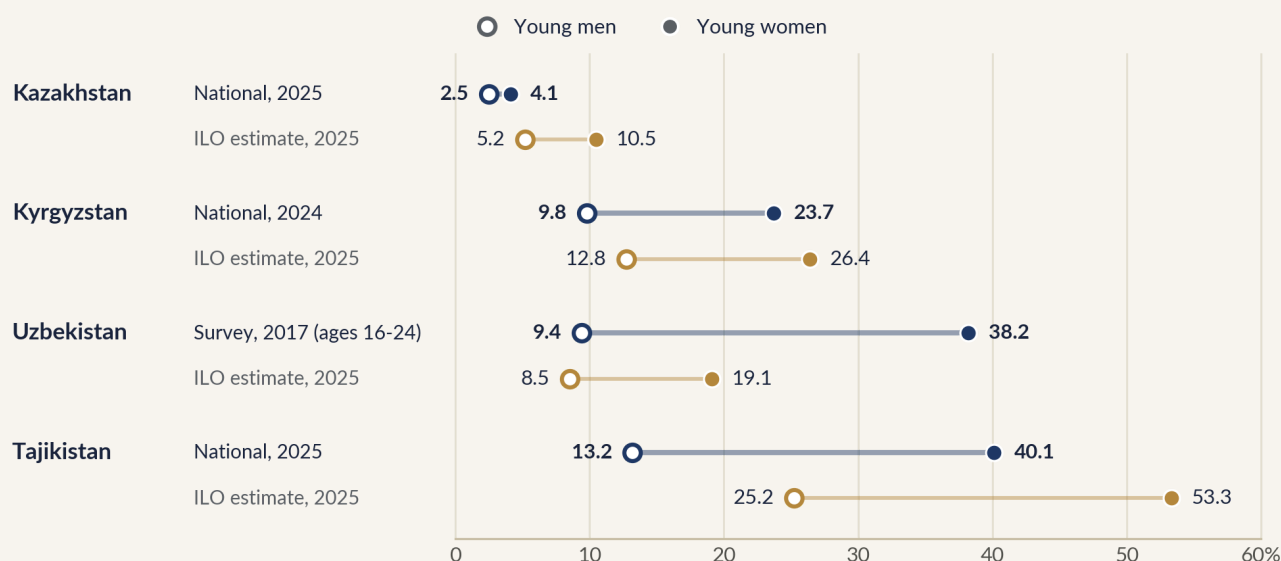
The reason is visible in the ILO series itself, which marks the values that correspond to a reported survey. For Kyrgyzstan that covers every year to 2023. For Kazakhstan the last marked year is 2016, for Tajikistan 2016 is the only one since 2012, and for Uzbekistan no year is marked [6]. The international databases we checked carry no national figure for Uzbekistan and none for Kazakhstan after 2016 [5], although both offices publish annual series on their national platforms. The ILO's own guidance is that estimates for countries with limited reported data "should not be considered as 'observed' data" [6].

We therefore use the national figures for levels, trends and targeting, and the ILO estimates as a cross-check on a common definition. The estimates are likely to be revised once Tajikistan's 2025 survey is taken into account. One discrepancy runs the other way and needs explaining: Kazakhstan's national figure for 2016 is 7.2%, while the ILO series marks 9.5% as the reported value for the same year [1, 6].

YOUNG WOMEN AND YOUNG MEN

The gap between young women and young men is the most consistent feature of the data, and it widens as the overall rate rises. In Kazakhstan the 2025 figures are 4.1% for young women and 2.5% for young men [1]. In Kyrgyzstan they are 23.7% and 9.8% for 2024 [2]. In Tajikistan they are 40.1% and 13.2% for 2025, a ratio of three to one [3]. Uzbekistan's national series is not published by sex; a 2017 household survey analysed by the World Bank gave 38.2% and 9.4% for ages 16 to 24, a ratio of four to one [7]. The ILO estimates put the rate for women at about double the rate for men in all four countries, which understates the gap in Tajikistan [6]. For Uzbekistan the 2017 survey found a much wider gap than the estimates show, and recent national data by sex are needed to say what the gap is now.

FIGURE 2 Youth NEET rate by sex: national surveys and ILO modelled estimates



Sources: national surveys [1, 2, 3]; Uzbekistan Household Budget Survey 2017 as analysed by the World Bank [7]; ILO modelled estimates, ILOSTAT [6]. Ages 15-24 unless stated.

The Tajik survey also shows when the gap opens: between the late teens and the early twenties. Among 15-19 year-olds, 21.9% of young women and 12.4% of young men are NEET. Among 20-24 year-olds the figure for men is 14.1% and for women 64.0%. The rate for young women is higher in rural areas (41.8%) than in towns (35.0%) [3].

UNEMPLOYMENT AND INACTIVITY

Unemployment is measured against a different base. The NEET rate is a share of all young people. The unemployment rate is a share of those in the labour force, meaning those working or looking for work. The two percentages cannot be set against each other directly. We did not retrieve national youth unemployment rates on the 15-24 band for all four countries, so the only common figures are the ILO estimates for 2025: 3.8% in Kazakhstan, 8.2% in Kyrgyzstan, 11.4% in Uzbekistan and 14.6% in Tajikistan [8].

Counts of people can be compared, and they show how little of exclusion is unemployment. Tajikistan's 2025 survey counts 67,439 unemployed 15-24 year-olds and 449,086 who are NEET. Even if every unemployed young person were also NEET, at least 85% of NEET youth would be outside the labour force altogether. From the same counts the youth unemployment rate works out at 15.5%, or 20.0% for young women and 12.8% for young men; these are our calculations from the survey's tables of unemployed persons, labour force and NEET youth by age [3]. The ILO estimate for Tajikistan is close to this in total but splits the other way by sex, 3.8% for women and 18.6% for men, and that split should not be used [8].

Figures on wider age bands give context but do not belong in the comparison. Among all Tajik women aged 15 to 75, 30.9% are in the labour force, against 57.1% of men [3]. Kazakhstan's national youth policy now covers ages 15 to 35, and on that band its NEET rate was 6.0% in 2025, 8.5% for women and 3.5% for men [1]. Uzbekistan reports unemployment of 6.4% for ages 16 to 30 in 2025 [4].

INFORMAL WORK

A comparable measure of informal employment among youth was found for two of the four countries. In Kyrgyzstan 79.2% of employed 15-24 year-olds worked informally in 2023, a share that has stayed between 77% and 82% since 2016 [9]. For Tajikistan the only youth figure is 82.4% in 2016. The 2025 survey reports informality for non-agricultural employment at all ages (25.8%) with no breakdown by age [3]. We found no youth series for Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan; the World Bank puts informal employment in Uzbekistan at about 59% of all employment in 2019 [7]. For Kyrgyzstan this changes how the NEET rate should be read: about four in five young people counted as employed hold informal jobs, so a falling NEET rate is compatible with no improvement in the quality of work.

TABLE 1 What is known, by country (ages 15-24 unless stated; %)

	KAZAKHSTAN	KYRGYZSTAN	TAJIKISTAN	UZBEKISTAN
NEET, latest national figure	3.3 (2025)	16.7 (2024)	26.6 (2025)	17.7 (2025), ages 16-24
NEET, ILO estimate, 2025	7.8	19.5	39.6	13.7
NEET, women / men, national	4.1 / 2.5 (2025)	23.7 / 9.8 (2024)	40.1 / 13.2 (2025)	Not published by sex 38.2 / 9.4 in a 2017 survey, ages 16-24
NEET, women / men, ILO estimate, 2025	10.5 / 5.2	26.4 / 12.8	53.3 / 25.2	19.1 / 8.5
NEET, regional range, national	1.3 to 8.1 (2025)	Not retrieved	12.8 to 31.4 (2025)	12.7 to 24.8 (2025)
Youth unemployment, ILO estimate, 2025	3.8	8.2	14.6 15.5 in 2025 survey (calculated)	11.4
Informal share of youth employment	Not found	79.2 (2023)	82.4 (2016)	Not found
Last year marked as reported in the ILO series	2016	2023	2016	None

Sources: [1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9]. National figures refer to different years and, for Uzbekistan, a different age band and definition; they are not a harmonised comparison.

SECTION 3

What works

THE OVERALL RECORD

The evidence on youth employment programmes is now large. The most recent synthesis, by the ILO and the World Bank, pools 220 interventions in 62 countries and finds average effects of 0.053 standard deviations on employment and 0.062 on earnings [10]. These are small. As an illustration, where half of participants would have found work anyway, an effect of 0.05 standard deviations corresponds to about 2.5 more participants in every hundred being employed. Pooled effects are larger in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income ones.

The same review ranks types of programme, and the ranking depends on where one looks. Across all countries, "entrepreneurship promotion and skills training interventions reported larger impacts than employment services and subsidized employment programmes". In low- and middle-income countries taken alone, "interventions that promoted self-employment showed the largest impacts, followed by employment services and skills training interventions" [10]. Two points follow for this review. The type the 2026 review finds most effective where jobs are scarce, support for self-employment, lies outside our three families. And employment services come out better in the 2026 review than in its 2017 predecessor, which found their effect on employment indistinguishable from zero [11].

On design the review is clearer. In low- and middle-income countries programmes "were most effective when they ran for at least four months", and those "that combined multiple components, such as skills training, job matching or wage subsidies, achieved better outcomes for young people than single, short interventions" [10]. Two critical reviews add a caution. McKenzie finds that "many of these evaluations find no significant impacts on either employment or earnings" [12]. Carranza and McKenzie conclude that success "depends critically on program design and delivery elements that can be difficult to scale effectively", and that "in many cases the binding constraint may be a lack of firms with job openings, rather than a lack of workers with the skills to fill these openings" [13].

The sources behind this section divide unevenly. Of the 21 on interventions, eight are rigorous studies or systematic reviews from settings only moderately similar to Central Asia, and seven come from the region or its neighbours but report outcomes without a comparison group. Three combine a rigorous design with a closely comparable setting: two trials from Mongolia and one from Kazakhstan. The remaining three are critical or narrative reviews of the wider literature [12, 13, 14].

SKILLS TRAINING COMBINED WITH WORK EXPERIENCE

Training shows better results when a workplace is attached. In J-PAL's review of 28 randomised evaluations, seven of the twelve programmes with an on-the-job component or internship raised employment or earnings [14]. Colombia's Jóvenes en Acción, which paired classroom training with a placement, produced gains in formal employment and earnings that persisted in long-term follow-up [15]. A 3ie review of programmes for women finds that vocational training raised the likelihood of employment by 11% across eight programmes [16].

Results from settings closer to Central Asia are weaker. In Turkey, vocational courses for the unemployed delivered through the public employment service had an average effect on employment "close to zero and statistically insignificant"; gains in the quality of jobs had disappeared after three years, and courses run by private providers did better [17]. In Mongolia, demand-driven training for disadvantaged youth improved self-employment and the match between skills and jobs, with "positive but uncertain effects" on employment and earnings, and the benefits went mostly to older and better-educated participants [18].

OUR READING

This is our preferred candidate for a local test among the options reviewed. The workplace component is the design feature with the most consistent support across the reviews; it suits the group these programmes can reach, young jobseekers and vocational students; and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan already have delivery systems in which a test could be run. The 2026 review ranks employment services ahead of skills training in low- and middle-income countries, which is a reason to build job-search support into such a programme, not to prefer training over it. Two conditions apply: an employer is involved in designing the course and hosting the placement, and the programme runs for months, not weeks.

APPRENTICESHIPS AND EMPLOYER-LINKED PROGRAMMES

Fewer rigorous studies exist here, but two are strong and one of them comes from the nearest comparator. In Mongolia, a transition economy with a vocational system inherited from the socialist period, lotteries allocated places in oversubscribed vocational schools among about 8,000 applicants. Admission "led to significantly higher employment, and increased earnings for women" [19]. In Côte d'Ivoire, subsidised dual apprenticeships created 0.74 to 0.77 new positions for each subsidised apprentice, and four years on the apprentices earned 15% more [20].

Evidence from the region and its neighbours describes outcomes without a comparison group. In Georgia, more than three-quarters of trainees in industry-led courses found work within a year, but only one-third found a full-time job relevant to their course [21]. In Kyrgyzstan, 81% of 7,900 graduates of an ADB-supported project were employed six to nine months after training, and ADB's validation notes that it is not known how much of this can be attributed to the project [22]. Kyrgyzstan also has a national tracer survey: of the 2024 graduates of its vocational lyceums, 66% were in work six months after graduation, including 20% who were self-employed, while 16% were unemployed and 7% neither working nor studying. The survey was run by the Ministry of Education and Science with the European Training Foundation, and 57% of graduates responded [23]. In Tajikistan, reported employment after graduation in a comparable project fell from 82.5% in 2016 to 40.1% in 2022, and the validation questioned the evidence behind the indicator [24]. An ADB review published in 2021 found no tracer studies of secondary vocational graduates in Tajikistan and estimated that only about 20% to 25% enter the labour market on graduation [25].

OUR READING

Promising where a formal vocational system and willing employers already exist, which is the case in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The evidence base is thin enough that any expansion should be set up as a test.

MATCHING, INFORMATION AND HIRING INCENTIVES

The two syntheses disagree about employment services. The 2017 review put their effect on employment at 0.01 standard deviations and that of subsidised employment at 0.02, neither distinguishable from zero [11]. The 2026 review, with twice as many interventions, ranks employment services second in low- and middle-income countries [10]. We read this as improving evidence for job-search and matching support, with wage subsidies still in doubt.

Trials of subsidies disagree on whether anything is left behind. In Jordan, a wage voucher for female college graduates raised employment by 38 percentage points while it was paid, and the effect was no longer significant once it expired [26]. In North Macedonia, unemployed applicants randomly selected for interviews for subsidised jobs were 14 to 15 percentage points more likely to be employed three and a half years later [27]. The populations differ, and neither study covers youth as a whole. Information alone has not been enough: in the Mongolian trial, newsletters on the returns to training increased attendance without raising employment or earnings [18].

OUR READING

Job-search and matching support is worth including as one component of a programme. It reaches jobseekers only, and fits where formal vacancies exist. Hiring subsidies should be funded only with follow-up that continues after the subsidy ends.

EVIDENCE FROM THE FOUR COUNTRIES

We identified one impact evaluation of a youth programme with labour-market outcomes in the four countries. The Kazakhstan Youth Corps offered people aged 18 to 29 grants for community service projects together with life skills training. A randomised trial found "little evidence" of any positive effect a year later, and "some evidence of a negative effect of the training-only intervention on the probability of reporting any income-earning activity" [28].

This was a civic service scheme, not vocational training, and it should not be read as a verdict on training. What it does show is that grants and short life-skills courses did not, on their own, improve young people's prospects of earning.

The rest of the regional record consists of monitoring data. Kazakhstan's Enbek programme reported about 2.5 million participants between 2017 and 2020, of whom 1.84 million, or 73%, were employed afterwards, and its youth internship scheme placed 122,532 young people over the same period; the World Bank's 2022 completion report notes that "there is no scientific evaluation of the impact of training on employment numbers" [29]. For Uzbekistan the World Bank wrote in 2021 that "the effectiveness of these programs has not been rigorously evaluated" [7]. Our search found nothing later that changes either statement. In Kyrgyzstan, GIZ's employment promotion and vocational training project, which ran in successive phases from 2013 to 2024, reports a 65% employment rate among participants in its training courses at vocational schools and lists no evaluation [30]. Placement rates serve a purpose in managing a programme. They do not establish how much additional employment it caused.

TABLE 2 The three intervention families: strength of evidence and applicability

FAMILY	STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE	APPLICABILITY TO CENTRAL ASIA	EVIDENCE FROM THE FOUR COUNTRIES
Skills training with work experience	Our preferred candidate for a local test. Gains are most consistent when a placement is attached.	Medium to high. Trials in Mongolia and Turkey show smaller effects than the Colombian programme.	Monitoring data on placements. No impact evaluation identified.
Apprenticeships and employer-linked programmes	Moderate. Few trials, two of them strong.	High for formal vocational schooling (Mongolia). Medium for dual apprenticeships.	Tracer-based project reports (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) and a national tracer survey of vocational graduates in Kyrgyzstan [23]. Work-based learning piloted in Kyrgyzstan from 2019; no evaluation identified.
Matching, information and hiring incentives	Mixed. Employment services rank higher in the 2026 review than in 2017. Trials conflict on whether subsidy effects last.	Medium. Fits where formal vacancies exist, and reaches jobseekers only.	A large internship scheme in Kazakhstan; no impact evaluation identified.

Strength of evidence summarises the studies discussed above. Applicability is the reviewers' judgement.

SECTION 4

Implications for programme design

The points below indicate what the evidence supports building in or testing. None is a finding about what will work in a given country, because the region does not yet have such findings.

ACROSS THE FOUR COUNTRIES

- **Match the instrument to who is excluded.** The three families were built for jobseekers. Where most excluded young people are outside the labour force, as in Tajikistan, they will reach a minority.

- **Tie training to an employer, and run it for at least four months.** Programmes that combine classroom training with a workplace placement show the most consistent results, and in low- and middle-income countries those lasting four months or more were the most effective [10]. Single, short interventions did less well.
- **Measure after the support ends, against a comparison group.** In Turkey the effects of training had gone within three years, and in Jordan the effect of the subsidy ended with the voucher.
- **Track the kind of job, and what it cost.** Formal status, earnings and whether the job lasts should be reported, as they were in Colombia. This review found no comparison of cost per participant across programmes in the region; recording cost with outcomes would allow options to be weighed against each other.

If one thing is to be tested first, our view is that it should be employer-linked training in Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan, for the reasons given in section 3. Separately, and with more urgency, Tajikistan needs diagnostic work on young women outside the labour force, because no programme choice for that group is yet supported by evidence.

BY COUNTRY

TABLE 3 Next steps by country

	THE DECISION AHEAD	WHO IT CONCERNS	PROPOSED FIRST STEP	EVIDENCE NEEDED BEFORE EXPANSION
Kazakhstan	Whether internships and short courses merit funding at their present scale.	Jobseekers aged 15 to 24, starting in the regions where exclusion is highest. The NEET rate was 8.1% in Mangystau and 6.5% in Atyrau in 2025, against 3.3% nationally [1]; internships and courses reach the jobseekers within that group.	Confirm the current design of the youth internship scheme with the implementing ministry, and establish whether phased entry or a waiting list would allow a comparison group. Scale alone does not make randomisation feasible.	Employment and earnings at least a year after placement, set against comparable non-participants, with cost per participant.
Kyrgyzstan	Whether to extend work-based learning beyond the pilot centres.	Vocational students and recent graduates. The national NEET rate is 16.7%, and 23.7% for young women [2].	Confirm the present status of the pilots begun in 2019 [22]. Follow a cohort of participants and a comparable group through the first year after graduation, building on the national tracer survey of vocational graduates [23].	Formal employment, earnings and job retention at twelve months. The national survey tracks the population trend and will not by itself show the pilot's effect.
Tajikistan	What kind of programme to pilot for young women outside the labour force.	Women aged 20 to 24, especially in rural areas and in the districts of republican subordination, where 48.2% of young women are NEET [3].	A diagnostic of the barriers to participation and of local demand for labour, using the 2025 survey and fieldwork, followed by the choice of a pilot.	Results from a small tested pilot. Tracer studies of vocational graduates are a separate need and concern a different group, those already in training.

Uzbekistan	Which figure to plan on, and for whom.	Not yet identifiable. The national series is not published by sex; regional rates run from 12.7% in Khorezm to 24.8% in Jizzakh [4].	Ask the statistics committee whether definitions, coverage or methods changed in 2024, request breakdowns by sex and age, and reconcile the series, which covers ages 16 to 24, with the ILO estimate (17.7% against 13.7% for 2025).	Reconciled definitions and credible breakdowns by sex, age and region. Evaluating existing programmes, which the World Bank found had not been done by 2021 [7], is a separate and later decision.
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SECTION 5

What this review leaves open

The questions below fall into two groups. The first are questions the sources searched could not settle. The second lie outside the scope of this review: published evidence on them exists but was not appraised here, so their absence from this report says nothing about the state of that evidence.

NOT SETTLED BY THE SOURCES SEARCHED

- **How far the national figures can be relied on.** A reconciliation of the national and ILO series for the four countries, covering definitions, age bands and breaks in method, would give funders defensible figures for targeting. The possible break in Uzbekistan's series in 2024 and Kazakhstan's 2016 discrepancy are the first two items.
- **Whether existing programmes work.** An evaluation built into one national scheme would be the first evidence of impact for the families reviewed here, and would inform whether that scheme should grow.
- **How much youth work is informal.** The statistical sources searched give no breakdown by age for Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, and none for Tajikistan after 2016.

OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THIS REVIEW

- **What brings young women into the labour force.** Childcare, cash transfers and measures addressing mobility and social norms have their own international evidence base, which this review did not cover. Appraising it is the step before choosing a pilot in Tajikistan or Uzbekistan.
- **Whether self-employment support belongs in the mix.** The 2026 review finds it the most effective type in low- and middle-income countries, and the 3ie portal lists studies of business training and microfinance in Kyrgyzstan that this review did not appraise. Extending the review to cover them would test our choice of three families.
- **How migration changes the picture.** Labour migration shapes youth employment in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and there is a body of research on how migration and remittances affect young people's work and study at home. This review did not cover it. Bringing it in would show whether programmes at home compete with migration or help prepare young people for it.

Note on method

The search ran between 19 September and 8 October 2026 across three tiers: international and national statistics (ILO, World Bank, ADB and the four national statistics agencies), evaluation repositories (3ie, the Campbell Collaboration and donor evaluation offices) and research literature. The 3ie Development Evidence Portal was searched by country across all sectors and returned 138 records for the four countries. All were screened by title and abstract; the ten closest to the review question were then screened in full and logged individually, and the other 128 were logged as a single entry. A further pass of GIZ and SDC project and evaluation records for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan found no published evaluation of their vocational or youth employment work in either country, and added one source on project results. Across all tiers, 127 entries were screened against fixed criteria and each exclusion recorded with its reason. Of the 37 sources included, 16 concern the situation in the four countries and 21 concern interventions. The list below gives the 30 cited in the text; the other seven were used to check figures.

National series for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were read directly from the statistics offices' SDG platforms on 7 October 2026, and Tajikistan's from the published tables of its 2025 Labour Force Survey. Figures on the wider age bands used in national youth policy, such as 15 to 35 in Kazakhstan and 15 to 29 in Tajikistan, are reported as context and kept out of the comparison. Uzbekistan's series for ages 16 to 24 is the exception: it is the only national series available, so it is shown alongside the others and qualified wherever it appears. The report leads with these national figures and uses the ILO modelled estimates as a cross-check on a common definition; where the two disagree, both are shown and neither is adjusted. The national figures are not harmonised with one another. Figures described as calculated are our own arithmetic from published counts.

Each source was assessed on the strength of its design and, separately, on how far its findings transfer to Central Asian labour markets. Statements that something was not found, or not identified, mean that it did not appear in the sources searched; they are not claims that it does not exist. Google Scholar, ELDIS and the evaluation database of AFD were not searched directly.

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ABOUT THIS REVIEW

TR Evidence Reviews bring together the available statistics and evaluation evidence on a question of programme design in Central Asia, and say what the evidence supports. This review was prepared by Target Research in October 2026.

Target Research carries out evidence reviews and evaluations for development programmes and other organisations working in the region. To discuss a review on another question, or one of the first steps proposed in Table 3, write to office@target-research.org.

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