



United Nations  
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International Centre  
for Technical and Vocational  
Education and Training



# TVET Country Profile

## REPUBLIC OF KOREA



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Compiled in collaboration with the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET), Republic of Korea.

## Contents

Statistics.....	3
1. TVET systems .....	5
2. TVET strategy and key policy documents.....	7
3. Governance and financing .....	9
4. TVET teachers and trainers .....	10
5. Qualification system and quality assurance.....	11
6. Current reforms and policy discussion.....	11
7. References and further reading.....	14

## TVETipedia Glossary

In case of further clarification and definitions of terms contained herein, please refer to UNESCO-UNEVOC’s online TVETipedia Glossary, which provides definitions and background information from various trustworthy sources on terms commonly used in the area of technical and vocational education and training. Find out more at [www.unevoc.unesco.org/l/68](http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/l/68).

## Acknowledgements

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## UNESCO-UNEVOC TVET Country Profiles

To find similar information on other countries, please visit the UNESCO-UNEVOC World TVET Database at [www.unevoc.unesco.org/l/589](http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/l/589).

## Statistics<sup>1</sup>

### General information

Category	Indicator	Statistics (2015)
Demographic	Total population (in thousands)	50,293
	Population growth	0.4 %
	Median age of population <sup>2</sup>	40.8
	Population aged 15-24 years (in thousands)	6,785

Socio-economic	GDP growth (annual %)	2.6%
	GDP per capita (current US\$)	34,549
	Unemployment rate (%) <sup>3</sup>	3.7%
	Youth literacy rate, population 15-24 years, both sexes (%)	99.9%

### Participation in education by level and by programme orientation, 2015

Category		Gross enrolment ratio (%)		Percentage of students who are female (%)	
Primary education (ISCED 1)		99.0%		48.23	
Secondary education, all programmes	Lower secondary (ISCED 2)	98.89%	103.3%	47.7%	47.7%
	Upper secondary (ISCED 3)		95.23%		47.8%
Tertiary education, all programmes (ISCED 5-8)		93.1%		40.8%	

Category		Percentage of students enrolled in vocational programmes, both sexes (%)		Female students enrolled in TVET as a percentage of total secondary enrolment	
Secondary education, all programmes	Lower secondary (ISCED 2)	17.5% (2016)	-	15.3% (2016)	-
	Upper secondary (ISCED 3)		9.4%		-

Indicator	Both sexes (%)	Percentage of students who are female (%)
Percentage of students in tertiary education enrolled in short cycle education (ISCED 5)	22.8%	39.0%

### Education finance

Category	Indicator	Statistics (2014)
Expenditure	Government expenditure on education as % of total government expenditure (%)	5.6%
	Expenditure on secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education as % of total government expenditure (%)	-

### SDG thematic indicators related to TVET and skills<sup>4</sup>

Category	Indicator	Statistics (2015)
Selected SDG thematic indicators	Participation rate in technical-vocational programmes (15- to 24-year-olds) (%)	-
	Percentage of youth/adults who have achieved at least a minimum level of proficiency in digital literacy skills (%)	90.0%

### Type of TVET institutions<sup>5</sup>

Type of institution	Education level	Ministry responsible	Number of institutions
Specialized Vocational High Schools	Upper Secondary (ISCED 3)	Ministry of Education	495
Meister High Schools	Upper secondary (ISCED 3)	Ministry of Education	50
Vocational Colleges	Associate Bachelor's	Ministry of Education	137
Polytechnic Colleges	Up to Associate Bachelor's	Ministry of Employment and Labour	34
HRD Centre, Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Upper Secondary (ISCED 3)	Ministry of Employment and Labour	8
Vocational Training Centre, Korea Employment Agency for Disabled	Upper Secondary (ISCED 3)	Ministry of Employment and Labour	8

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all statistics have been gathered from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). <http://uis.unesco.org/>

<sup>2</sup> UN DESA. World Population Prospects. <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>

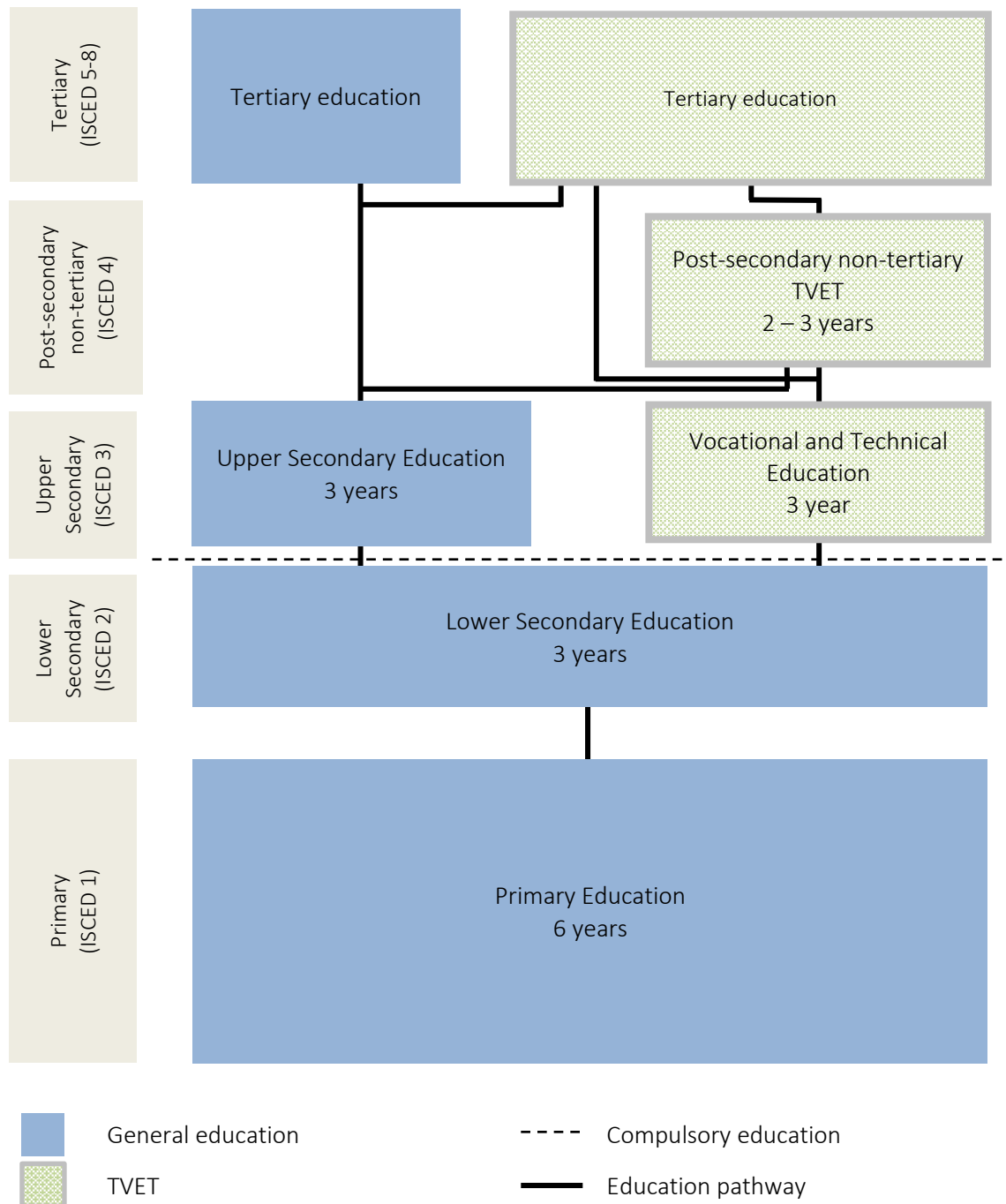
<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization. ILOSTAT - ILO database of labour statistics. [www.ilo.org/ilostat](http://www.ilo.org/ilostat)

<sup>4</sup> Other Sustainable Development Goal 4 thematic indicators at <http://sdg4monitoring.uis.unesco.org>

<sup>5</sup> Compiled by the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET)

## 1. TVET systems

TVET in the South Korean education system<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup>Compiled by UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre.

## Formal TVET system

The formal TVET system in the Republic of Korea is structured as follows:

<b>Vocational and Technical Education</b> is offered at the upper secondary level (ISCED 3).	
Duration:	3 years
Admission requirements:	Graduation from lower secondary school (middle school), or equivalent academic credentials
Taught in:	Specialized vocational high schools and Meister High Schools under the Ministry of Education
Graduates from vocational and technical education are able to go on to vocational colleges at the post-secondary non-tertiary level (ISCED 4) and universities and polytechnic colleges (four-year programmes).	
<b>Colleges and polytechnic colleges</b> provide TVET at the post-secondary non-tertiary level (ISCED 4).	
Duration:	2-3 years
Admission requirements:	Graduation from upper secondary high school (vocational high school and general high school), or equivalent academic credentials
Taught in:	Vocational colleges under the Ministry of Education, and Polytechnic Colleges under the Ministry of Employment and Labour
Graduates from post-secondary non-tertiary courses are able to go to universities at the tertiary level (ISCED 5).	
<b>Universities and polytechnics</b> provide TVET at the tertiary level (ISCED 5).	
Duration:	Various (3 month to 1 year for non-degree courses, or 2 years for industrial degree and associate degree courses)
Admission requirements:	Graduation from high school (vocational high school and general high school), or equivalent academic credentials
Taught in:	Korea Polytechnics, which confer industrial bachelor's degree, HRD centres under the Korea Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and private vocational training institutes

## Non-formal and informal TVET systems

The **Ministry of Employment and Labour** and the Ministry of Education offer non-formal TVET programmes. Some examples include:

<b>Programme:</b>	<b>Re-employment Programme of non-profit Vocational Training Centres</b>
Ministry/organization responsible:	Ministry of Employment and Labour
Target audience:	Unemployed
Admission requirements:	Applicants must be unemployed at the time
Qualifications received:	Some certification according to the programme which enables the graduate to seek gainful employment
<b>Programme:</b>	<b>On-the-job training</b>
Ministry/organization responsible:	Ministry of Employment and Labour
Target audience:	New and existing employees
Admission requirements:	Depending on the programme. In recent years, the Ministry of Employment and Labour is supporting the on-the-job training through the employment insurance fund. Korea is also introducing the work-based training system in the form of apprenticeships. These modalities have different admission requirements.
Qualifications received:	Some certification according to the programme which enables the graduate to seek gainful employment
<b>Programme:</b>	<b>College Lifelong Education Centre Programme</b>
Ministry/organization responsible:	Ministry of Education
Target audience:	All
Admission requirements:	None
Qualifications received:	Credits are certified according to the programme

The Academic Credit Bank System, a central agency for continuing education, aims to provide all citizens with greater access to a variety of educational opportunities and to foster lifelong learning. It seeks to innovate, diversify and maximize the educational opportunities for both students, studying at post-secondary institutes, and adults, seeking additional education and training. The Credit Bank System recognizes diverse learning experiences gained in school as well as out-of-school. When a learner accumulates the necessary CBS-approved credits, he/she can be awarded a degree.

## 2. TVET strategy and key policy documents

Technical and vocational education and training in Korea has widely been credited for effectively supporting the rapid economic growth in the last 40 years. During the 1960s and 1970s, TVET was geared towards providing initial training for large populations of learners to meet rising labour demands. In the 1980s, TVET was upgraded to raise the skills levels of workers. In the 1990s, there was an expansion in the TVET institutions, and this, coupled with

the Employment Insurance Act, helped Korea grow out of the Asian financial crisis. Since 2000, the goal has been to streamline the division of roles and responsibilities and strengthen collaboration among TVET stakeholders.

The following key documents help guide the development of TVET in the Republic of Korea.

Name of document	Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Enforcement Decree of the Act
Date entered into force	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1998) and Enforcement Decree of the Act (March 2009)
Website link	<a href="http://t1p.de/ompy">http://t1p.de/ompy</a>
Key points and objectives	
<p>The Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided the legal framework for the primary and secondary education system in the Republic of Korea. The Enforcement Decree of the Act establishes the roles and responsibilities of Specialized High Schools and Meister High Schools that specialize in experiential education such as education and on-the-job training aimed at cultivating talents in various industrial fields.</p>	

Name of document	Higher Education Act
Date entered into force	1 March 1998
Website link	<a href="http://t1p.de/6r7m">http://t1p.de/6r7m</a> (Including amendments)
Key points and objectives	
<p>The Higher Education Act provides the legal framework for the tertiary education system, and establishes the following institutions to provide higher education: universities and colleges, industrial colleges, and junior colleges. Article 4 of the act relates to junior colleges, a tertiary TVET institute, and defines its roles and responsibilities, as well as the terms per school year and the type of courses it offers.</p>	

Name of document	Workers Vocational Skills Development Act
Date entered into force	1 January, 1999 (Amended 2015)
Website link	<a href="http://t1p.de/a7s5">http://t1p.de/a7s5</a>
Key points and objectives	
<p>The Workers Vocational Skills Development Act relates to providing access for workers to quality technical and vocational education and training. The Act was amended in 2015 as a response to the transition towards knowledge economy and lifelong learning society, and strengthens the need to provide workers with learning and training possibilities at all levels</p>	

Name of document	Framework Act on Qualifications
Date entered into force	26 December 2008
Website link	<a href="http://t1p.de/c8jm">http://t1p.de/c8jm</a>
Key points and objectives	
<p>The Framework Act on Qualifications sets out the roles and responsibilities of the government in the establishment of national job ability standards and a qualifications</p>	



structure. The Act also establishes a Qualifications Policy Council, under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, that is responsible for developing policies and the certification of qualifications.

### 3. Governance and financing

#### Governance

In the Republic of Korea, a distinction is made between vocational education and vocational training, and it covers formal, non-formal or informal systems. Vocational education is generally taught in schools, whereas vocational training is based on programmes offered through the employment insurance fund and public or private training institutes.

- The **Ministry of Education** is responsible for vocational education. Under the ministry, the Human Resource and Competency Policy Division, Lifelong Education Policy Division, Career Education Policy Division, and Secondary Vocational Education Policy Division under the Lifelong and Vocational Education Bureau are responsible for related work.

The Korean Council for University College Education (KCCE) is in charge of coordinating and managing of vocational colleges and research.

- The **Ministry of Employment and Labour** governs vocational training. Under the ministry, the Skills Development Policy Division, Human Resource Development Division, and Skills Development Assessment Division under the Skills Development Policy Bureau of Employment Policy Office are in charge of coordinating vocational training. In the private sector, vocational training is provided through training facilities based on the Act on the Vocational Competency Development of Workers.

The Human Resources Development Service of Korea, under the Ministry of Employment and Labour, is in charge of implementing skills development policies. These policies cover lifelong vocational competency development, national qualification examination, foreign employment support, overseas employment, and skills competitions.

The Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) and the Korea Labour Institute (KLI) are responsible for conducting research related to vocational education and training. KRIVET also conducts research on qualification frameworks, the development and provision of TVET programmes, the management of qualifications, the assessment of TVET institutes and courses, and the provision of career information and counselling.

#### Financing

Public funds from the Ministry of Employment and Labour, related ministries and municipal governments, as well as private sector funding through the Employment Insurance paid by the private sector, finance vocational education and training.

All companies are obliged to pay contribution to the Employment Insurance, the amount depending on the total wages and the company size. The Employment Insurance fund covers

the costs of vocational skills development for workers in companies that are registered in the Employment Insurance Fund, or for people who previously worked in such companies. A public fund supports training costs for people who are not in these categories.

Funds invested in training institutes including vocational high schools, vocational colleges, and industrial colleges are mostly borne by students, government and companies. In vocational colleges, support from the government is relatively low since more than 90% of them are private colleges and the government tends to focus its support on the public sector.

Training for the unemployed is supported by training account programme (paid by the government and private sector), for which up to KRW 2 million (approximately USD 1800) are provided per person. For some professions, trainees in the programme are required to make a financial contribution for their own training. For some industries selected by the government, training fees are exempted, traffic and accommodation expenses covered, and the trainees receive training benefits.

Government spending on VET projects in the last years:

- 2012: KRW 1.01 trillion (approximately USD 898 million)
- 2013: KRW 1.18 trillion
- 2014: KRW 1.15 trillion
- 2015: KRW 1.31 trillion
- 2016: KRW 1.60 trillion (approximately USD 1.4 billion)

#### 4. TVET teachers and trainers

TVET teachers teach in vocational high schools and vocational colleges. About 84% of the teachers at vocational high schools are part-time, and 16% are full-time. Teachers must have industry and pedagogical knowledge. TVET teachers are further classified as professional teachers, general teachers, and on-site training teachers.

TVET Trainers are responsible for vocational training programmes and give career guidance in TVET institutes and industries. They are trained in the Korea University of Technology and Education.

Teachers need the following qualifications:

<b>Education level</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Upper secondary	Teachers and trainers are required to have teacher certificates awarded by colleges of education. TVET teachers and trainers can also have a Master's degree from graduate schools of education, or have completed teaching courses at universities, industrial colleges, vocational colleges, and open universities.
Post-secondary non-tertiary education and tertiary	Teachers in vocational colleges are required to have a Doctoral degree majored in the specific area or equivalent field experiences

(Vocational training teacher's certificate (Level 1-3) in vocational training)

Trainers in vocational training centers need to obtain national technical qualification in their areas of expertise and some work experience.

For contracted training, VET institutions approved by the Ministry of Employment and Labour will provide in-service training courses to teachers and trainers. Institutions include public (polytechnic colleges) and private training centres and institutes.

## 5. Qualification system and quality assurance

### National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The Republic of Korea is currently in the process of developing an NQF. The Korean Qualifications Framework will be developed on the basis of National Competency Standards.

The Republic of Korea does have a Technical Qualifications Framework that is divided in national and private qualifications. The framework has five levels: craftsman, industrial engineer, engineer, master craftsman and professional engineer. The Human Resources Development Service of Korea manages the Technical Qualifications Framework and supervises over 450 qualifications.

As of June 2017, there are around 23,500 private qualifications registered, and 99 private qualifications officially recognized and accredited by the ministries as nationally recognized qualifications.

### Quality assurance

Over 331 National Competency Standards (NCS) currently exist. These standards are developed and maintained by the Ministry of Employment and Labour (through HRD-Korea) and the Ministry of Education (through KRIVET). The Ministry of Employment is responsible for the majority of these standards (288), together with the Ministry of Education (22) and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (12).

The Korea Skills Quality Authority (KSQA) is in charge of ensuring the quality of TVET.

## 6. Current reforms and policy discussion

Current reforms and projects and policy discussions in the Republic of Korea on TVET are focused on a number of areas, including:

National Competency Standards	The development of National Competency Standards is an important step as it can help ensure that the TVET system provides skills that are linked to labour market needs.
College Lifelong Learning Programme	The Ministry of Education has been implementing the “College of Lifelong Education” policy which provides financial support in order to open college to adult learners. The universities and colleges provide

programmes not only for newcomers from high school graduates, but also for the adult learners.

Work first  
College Later  
Programme

The Korean government has been pursuing a “work first, college later” policy to meet the demand of high school level workers. The Ministry of Education is currently investing more into vocational high schools to attract students and expand the proportion of vocational students, establishing specialized vocational high schools, Meister schools, and apprenticeship schools. The programme also intends to lower unemployment rate of college graduates.

Learning  
Voucher  
Programme

The Neilbaeum Voucher System aims to assist unemployed people and workers in small businesses to promote skills training by issuing vouchers that cover the cost of the training. Vouchers are provided to people who are recognized by the employment centres as being in need of training. To receive the voucher, applicants must have at least two job-seeking activities, and exploratory activities for finding job training.

Employment  
Success Package

The Employment Success Package is a comprehensive support programme to assist disadvantaged job seekers with low income in accordance with their individual plans for employment. This systematic programme includes research on the actual condition and path planning; enhancement of motivation and competency; and intense job searching service. The job seekers who have succeeded in finding a job are given employment success allowance to enter the labour market.

Meister High  
School  
(Specialized  
Vocational High  
School)

The Meister high schools are customized high schools that respond to the demands of particular industry sectors. The purpose of the Meister high school is to operate curricula that directly link with the industry demands to enhance professional vocational education. It develops Meisters-to-be using education based on high-level technology. The graduates of the Meister high schools are given the opportunity to enter notable companies, serve military duty related to their specialty and attend higher education while working. As of 2017, 47 Meister high schools are in operation, with the final aim to have 50 schools piloted.

## Challenges

According to KRIVET, the Republic of Korea is facing the following challenges to the TVET system:

<b>Increasing youth unemployment rate</b>	Youth has attained very high academic achievement, and almost 70-80% of the high school graduates enter colleges. However, the employment rate of college graduates has been decreasing because of the mismatch between demand and supply in the labour market. Especially small- and medium-sized enterprises lack human resources, while college graduates are unable to find decent jobs related to their interests.
<b>Difference of working conditions between large enterprises and SMEs</b>	Even though almost 95% of enterprises in Korea are SMEs, there are gaps in wages, job stability, welfare systems and training opportunities between LEs and SMEs. College graduates prefer to work for larger enterprises, which are limited. So it is necessary to strengthen the SMEs to provide good working conditions to attract more workers.
<b>Rapid development of science and technologies</b>	Technologies and science are developing at a rapid rate, which brings about changes in the structure of industries and labour market. To meet the changes of the jobs and industries, the TVET system needs to be upgraded and able to predict possible changes linked to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
<b>Ageing society</b>	The Korean society is ageing partly because of low birth and longer life expectancy rates. This has an impact of social structures, as well as the productivity of the labour force. The ageing population group also becomes socially vulnerable unless opportunities are provided to develop skills needed in the labour market.
<b>Free Semester System for Career Education</b>	To provide career education from middle school onwards, the 'Free Semester System' has been implemented from 2015. For one semester among six (3 years) in the middle school, students are given the opportunity to get work-experience. This policy intends to make students understand the labour market better so that they build their career and delve into future jobs fitting to their characteristics and aptitudes.

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