

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

QS Sustainability Report

Azerbaijan Technological University

Reporting Period: January–September 2025

Executive Summary

In 2025, Azerbaijan Technological University advanced SDG 8 through a coherent employability and workforce-development model that combined strategic employer partnerships, structured internships, career services, digital and sector-specific skills training, enterprise scholarships, and performance-based staff incentives. The University positioned itself as a labour-market-responsive institution that prepares graduates for productive employment while also strengthening decent work conditions within the academic environment.

1. Institutional Approach to SDG 8

Azerbaijan Technological University (ATU) advances SDG 8 through an integrated institutional model that links education, employability, industry engagement, staff development, and innovation. During the reporting period, the University implemented a coherent set of initiatives aimed at strengthening graduate readiness for employment, expanding work-based learning, aligning academic provision with labour market demand, supporting youth economic participation, and improving decent work conditions within the institution itself.

ATU's SDG 8 contribution is built on four mutually reinforcing pillars: graduate employability, university–industry cooperation, future-oriented skills development, and decent work within the institution. This approach reflects a transition from a traditional academic model toward a skills-based, labour-market-responsive, and partnership-driven university ecosystem.

2. Graduate Employability and Transition to Work

A major contribution to SDG 8 during 2025 has been ATU's deliberate focus on supporting students' transition from education into employment. Across the reporting period, employability was treated not as an isolated service, but as a university-wide strategic function.

In January 2025, ATU expanded its cooperation with AzerGold CJSC through a Joint Action Plan for 2025 that included student internships, participation in industry projects, joint research, curriculum adjustment in line with sector needs, the involvement of company professionals in teaching, and familiarization visits to production sites. This initiative strengthened students' practical preparation and created a direct pathway from academic study to industrial employment.

ATU also reinforced its employability agenda through sector-based internships. In February 2025, tourism students were placed in hotels including Leon Hotel, Dashli Gala Hotel, Cinema Boutique Hotel, and Gold Naftalan Hotel, where they gained real-world experience in hospitality operations, customer service, and service management. In parallel, students in ecology and environmental engineering participated in practical training with municipal and environmental institutions, applying their academic knowledge in operational settings relevant to sustainability and public service.

The University systematically improved the governance of these internships through faculty-level coordination meetings focused on placement quality, evaluation rules, institutional supervision, and employer expectations. This ensured that internships functioned as structured learning experiences rather than passive observation periods.

A particularly strong example of work-to-employment transition was the "Training to Career – 2" initiative launched in March 2025 with Synergia Academy and Tabia Group. The project targeted young people aged 18–30 and offered a 3–6 month training pathway combining theory, practical assessment, and direct employment opportunities in Tabia Group hotels.

ATU's employability efforts reached their highest institutional scale through the Career Festival held in May 2025. This flagship initiative combined a job fair, career trainings, and a career forum into a coordinated employability platform. More than 600 undergraduate and 150 graduate students participated, while over 40 employers from both the public and private sectors presented more than 400 vacancies.

The accompanying Career Forum allowed students to hear directly from senior professionals about career trajectories, decision-making, labour market expectations, and entrepreneurship. The Career Trainings, delivered by HR leaders from Kapital Bank, Azersun Holding, and AzerGold, focused on career planning, interview skills, and professional self-presentation.

In June 2025, the University also organized digital skills trainings for students from several faculties. Training in MS Office and Python strengthened digital literacy and improved labour market readiness for students preparing to enter increasingly technology-driven work environments.

3. University–Industry Cooperation for Human Capital Development

A defining strength of ATU's SDG 8 performance is its extensive and growing cooperation with employers and industry actors. These partnerships are operational and designed to improve workforce preparation, applied learning, and sectoral relevance.

In addition to AzerGold and Tabia Group, ATU developed or deepened collaboration with a range of economic actors during 2025. In May 2025, the University's leadership visited the Milla dairy plant, where discussions focused on internships, research collaboration, and future joint projects. The visit exposed university leadership to current production technologies and helped identify areas where academic programmes could better support industrial workforce needs.

The same month, ATU organized further professional trainings with Nar, one of its strategic corporate partners. These sessions supported both students and academic staff. Students were introduced to mobile communications, telecommunications technologies, and the realities of the labour market, while academic staff were trained on modern equipment and practice-based teaching methods through the Nar Laboratory.

In June 2025, ATU held a strategic meeting with Agro Dairy LLC to explore cooperation in personnel training, scientific-practical partnership, and future joint initiatives. This cooperation is highly relevant to SDG 8 because it strengthens the University's role in preparing graduates for one of the country's productive economic sectors.

In September 2025, the University opened new teaching spaces within the framework of university–industry cooperation, including a design workshop and a specialized teaching room created with the support of Tamas Regional Development Public Union and BuildX. These spaces were designed to support practical learning and improve students' direct exposure to work-relevant tools and environments.

An even stronger industry-embedded model was implemented later in September 2025, when a department branch was launched directly at the Ganja Instrumentation Factory. This initiative allowed students to study within a real manufacturing enterprise, apply

theoretical knowledge to production settings, and build professional competence through direct exposure to industrial systems.

4. Skills for Emerging and Innovation-Driven Labour Markets

ATU's SDG 8 contribution extends to preparing students for the evolving demands of digital, innovation-driven, and technology-intensive economies. The University has made visible efforts to ensure that workforce preparation includes not only traditional employability skills, but also future-oriented competencies.

In January 2025, student teams from the University's Innovation Center won the national "Digital" Grant Competition with projects focused on artificial intelligence applications. These projects promoted entrepreneurial, creative, and technology-driven skills relevant to modern labour markets.

This direction continued in May 2025 through a webinar organized with the International Bank of Azerbaijan and the University of Granada, where participants explored the application of artificial intelligence and data technologies in the banking sector. By exposing academic staff and young researchers to fintech applications, risk management systems, fraud detection, and customer analytics, the University supported knowledge formation in high-value employment sectors.

The Nar training series similarly strengthened labour market readiness in telecommunications by introducing students to real equipment, operational systems, and technology-enabled work environments.

In June 2025, ATU expanded students' digital competencies through training in software applications and programming. These initiatives matter for SDG 8 because digital literacy is increasingly a core condition for access to decent work, especially for young graduates entering competitive and technology-mediated labour markets.

ATU also supported innovation-oriented skills development through its participation in InterFood Azerbaijan and Caspian Agro in May 2025, where the University presented research, prototypes, and applied projects in food and agricultural technologies. These exhibitions linked academic and innovation work to productive economic sectors, opening channels for technology transfer, collaboration, and future workforce opportunities.

5. Youth Engagement, Motivation, and Inclusion in Economic Participation

ATU's contribution to SDG 8 includes efforts to strengthen student motivation, confidence, and pathways into active economic participation.

In February 2025, on the occasion of Youth Day, the University recognized high-performing and socially active students for academic excellence, engagement in university life, and participation in major initiatives such as COP29. Recognition mechanisms of this kind strengthen student motivation, leadership confidence, and social capital, all of which influence future labour market participation.

In cooperation with PashaPay LLC and the Education Student Loan Fund, ATU contributed to initiatives focused on hard skills, soft skills, and labour market integration for students, including those benefiting from education loans. This widened the University's reach in terms of employability support and reflected an understanding of SDG 8 as connected to inclusive economic participation.

ATU's support for enterprise scholarships also reflects this principle. In June 2025, the University announced a new scholarship established with Khazri TN LLC for students in technical disciplines. Two full-time students were selected to receive 100 AZN per month, bringing the total number of enterprise-funded scholarships at the University to three.

6. Decent Work Within the Institution

An especially important dimension of SDG 8 is the quality of work provided by the institution itself. ATU addressed this directly in September 2025 through the introduction of a differential salary system for academic staff.

The new system links salary supplements to scientific and pedagogical performance, creating a merit-based incentive structure. This reform strengthens internal decent work conditions by improving fairness, promoting professional accountability, and rewarding contribution. It also contributes to a more sustainable academic workforce by aligning institutional expectations with motivation and recognition.

7. Institutional Outcomes and Key Performance Indicators

8. Strategic Assessment

The University's 2025 SDG 8 performance reveals a coherent model built on the progression: Education → Skills → Work-Based Learning → Employment Readiness → Economic Contribution.

Rather than treating employability as a peripheral service, the University has integrated labour market preparation into partnerships, teaching spaces, internships, student training, digital skill development, employer-supported scholarships, and internal employment reform. This approach aligns strongly with SDG 8 targets related to productive employment for young people, reduction of skills mismatch, promotion of innovation-oriented economic participation, and improvement of decent work standards.

9. Conclusion

Azerbaijan Technological University demonstrates a strong and credible contribution to SDG 8 through a multi-level strategy that connects higher education with labour market realities. The University's work in 2025 shows clear evidence of employability enhancement, practical training, industry partnership, digital and technical capacity building, internal staff support, and economic relevance.

Its initiatives support not only the transition of students into employment, but also the development of a more skilled, adaptable, and innovation-oriented workforce. In this sense, ATU is contributing to sustainable economic growth at both the institutional and regional levels, while positioning itself as a university that actively translates education into opportunity, productivity, and decent work outcomes.

Selected Institutional Indicators

Indicator	Value
Students engaged in Career Festival	750+
Employers participating in Career Festival	40+
Vacancies presented through Career Festival	400+

Training duration in “Training to Career – 2”	3–6 months
New Khazri TN scholarship recipients	2 students
Scholarship amount	100 AZN per month
Total enterprise-funded scholarships by June 2025	3

Annex: Reference Links

Initiative	Link
AzerGold joint action plan	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=9482760588435735&set=a.289702834408269
Tourism internships	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1101845348407185&set=pcb.1101845495073837
Tourism internships – Gold Naftalan	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1104973708094349&set=pcb.1104973958094324
Environmental practice placement	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1101478288443891&set=pcb.1101478491777204
Internship process improvement	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=999511833867270&set=pcb.9995114220533698
PashaPay employability initiatives	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10034858856559234&set=a.225186527526565
Digital grant	https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=122186307722085761&set=a.12210

competition	9853118085761
Youth Day recognition	https://www.atu.edu.az/xeber/1144
Training to Career – 2	https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1106097167982003&set=pcb.1106097814648605
Career Festival implementation	https://atu.edu.az/news/1190
Career Forum	https://atu.edu.az/news/1192
Career Trainings	https://atu.edu.az/news/1191
AI webinar with banking sector relevance	https://atu.edu.az/news/1182
Nar trainings	https://atu.edu.az/news/1181
Milla plant visit	https://atu.edu.az/news/1183
InterFood Azerbaijan and Caspian Agro participation	https://atu.edu.az/news/1193
Digital skills training	https://atu.edu.az/news/1210
Agro Dairy meeting	https://atu.edu.az/news/1213

Khazri TN scholarship	https://www.atu.edu.az/xeber/1214
Differential salary system	https://atu.edu.az/news/1246
University– industry practical training spaces	https://atu.edu.az/news/1253
Ganja Instrumentation Factory branch	https://atu.edu.az/news/1256