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**SUMMARY AND UPDATE ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND
POLICIES IN CENTRAL ASIA - KYRGYZSTAN**

Review Report



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1 Introduction

1.1 Context and objectives of the study

The Central Asia Education Platform Phase 2 (CAEP 2) project is about to close in mid-March 2019. In the second project phase (2015–2019), the project has commissioned, produced and disseminated a series of stock-taking and review reports, discussion and background papers on the priority themes identified both during the Riga and Astana Ministerial Meetings (including National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), Mobility, Employability, Gender Equality).

In order to complete project activities under component 3 “Studies” and to enhance the visibility and communication of project results under component 2 “Communication and Mapping”, the project will elaborate a **final review report with information briefs covering all thematic priorities underlying the CAEP project**. The report shall also support the work of EU Commission services in developing the outline for the planned CAEP phase 3 by providing up-to-date information on CAEP 2 priority themes.

The **report and the information briefs shall cover both Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET), provide a final update on the current developments in the CA countries** (e.g. on NQF, where the report dates back to 2016), and a concise and brief overview on thematic areas and recent policy developments not covered by review reports, but relevant to the project (e.g. on Quality Assurance and Accreditation, or more specifically, the introduction of autonomy to HEI in Kazakhstan, internationalisation of education in Uzbekistan etc.).

Furthermore, the information briefs will reflect the presentations held during the respective CAEP events (national meetings, regional conferences, peer learning and working group meetings, webinars) and **sum up the information contained in various subsections of the CAEP website in an updated, user-friendly way, providing a first-hand source of information about the current and on-going reform activities in the CA countries**.

In the second step, the **project will disseminate these information briefs** through the website, the conclusive CAEP Newsletter and direct mailing of the CAEP and wider education community.

This review report/ summary and information briefs will be produced by EU based experts in close cooperation with CA experts, facilitating access to the more detailed information on the respective topics on the CAEP studies to be found in the CAEP website.

The activity aims at providing a **review and update of the current education policies in the CA countries with a clear focus on the thematic priorities identified both in the Riga and Astana Ministerial Meetings in 2015/2017** respectively, in order to summarise and share the findings from the CAEP 2 with education practitioners and experts both in the EU and CA countries for further discussion among policy makers, education practitioners and related stakeholders in HE and VET.

As a result, the review report will contribute to the following outcomes:

- experience, lessons learned, best/ good practices shared, mutual understanding/ learning enhanced;
- evidence-based policy approach improved;
- results of the stock-taking exercise within Central Asia disseminated.

2 Kyrgyzstan

2.1 Country brief

Population (2017): 6,201,500¹

The Kyrgyz Republic is a landlocked country bordering with China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It has an area of 200,000 square kilometres and its capital city is Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and adopted a parliamentary system in 2011. The majority of population is of Kyrgyz ethnic, followed by significant minorities of Uzbeks and Russians. The state language is the Kyrgyz language although Russian remains widely spoken and is the second official language. The Kyrgyz Republic has maintained macroeconomic stability, invested in infrastructure, and improved access to social services. Kyrgyzstan has an estimated GDP per capita of USD 1,220.²

Education

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic is the body of state policy and normative and legal regulation in the field of education, scientific, scientific-technical and innovative activity, intellectual property as well as in the sphere of upbringing, social support and social protection of students and pupils of educational institutions.³

The higher education system of Kyrgyzstan consists of 52 higher education institutions, both public and private. Although it is not a Bologna signatory country, Kyrgyzstan has been working towards implementing key aspects of the Bologna reforms. In 2012, the traditional system of higher education qualifications (Specialist Diploma) was replaced with a new two-tier system in line with the EU (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree). For some specialties, the specialty is kept for example, in the sphere of medical education and some engineering and cultural areas. The third-tier PhD programmes are currently being piloted. At the same time, the traditional two-level system of assignment of academic degrees is maintained ('candidat nauk' – 'doktor nauk'). In 2015, there was a 45% gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education.

Vocational education in Kyrgyzstan is divided into primary and secondary vocational education. On average, the duration of training programmes ranges from one to two years (excluding time for general secondary education). Responsibility for VET falls under the Ministry of Education and Science and VET is part of the *Education Development Strategy 2012–2020*.

Useful links

Ministry of Education and Science: <http://edu.gov.kg/kg/>

National Erasmus+ Office: <http://erasmusplus.kg/en/%D0%BE-erasmus/>

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/country/kyrgyz-republic?view=chart>

² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/overview>

³ https://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-kyrgyzstan#_Toc488826499

UN Country Profile: <http://data.un.org/en/iso/kg.html>

2.2 Overview of the current state of priorities

2.2.1 Qualification frameworks and standards

The perspectives of integration of the Kyrgyz educational system into the international educational area have driven the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic and educational organisations to adapt a variety of international practices. One of the initiatives that became a crucial subject for discussion in academic society and at the ministerial level, has been the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which is one of the main objectives of the *Concept for the Development of Education 2017-2020*. Since this concept was developed, several important steps have been taken to support the development of NQF and to modernise and adapt existing qualifications with the aim of better aligning them with the needs of employers and the labour market, and consequently, ensuring better quality education.⁴ It should be noted that these efforts to develop the individual elements of the Qualification System have been financed largely by major international donors such the European Union, Asian Development Bank and GIZ⁵. The active involvement of the Ministry of Education and Science and other governmental bodies started with the TEMPUS project QUADRIGA – Qualification Frameworks in Central Asia: Bologna-based Principles and Regional Coordination (2012-2014). It provided valuable input to the elaboration of the NQF in Kyrgyzstan by mobilising national expertise and facilitating exchange at regional level with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

The National Qualifications System has only started its development recently with the National Qualifications Framework draft developed in 2017. According to the draft concept, the system includes:

- National Qualifications Framework;
- professional standards and procedures for their recognition;
- industry/ sectoral qualification frameworks;
- qualification assessment and assessment institutes.

The NQF project has been developed under the QUADRIGA project and it provides for nine levels including level 5 (a short cycle), level 6 (the first cycle/ bachelor's degree), 7a (the second level/ specialisation), 7b (the second level/ master's level) and levels 8-9 (the third cycle/ doctoral programmes).⁶

However, despite considerable efforts in this area, there are still many challenges to overcome in order for NQF to be integrated in the system. And given the limited expert and financial resources of the country, the role of the international assistance remains a crucial one.

2.2.2 Quality assurance and accreditation

New state education standards of higher professional education based on the qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA, Dublin descriptors) were approved

⁴ Central Asia Education Platform Newsletter, October 3 2016

⁵ Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

⁶ https://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-kyrgyzstan#_Toc488826499

on September 15, 2015. They introduced an ECTS compatible credit system (1 credit in the national system of Kyrgyzstan is equivalent to 1 ECTS credit) with the following programme requirements:

- level 1 - Bachelor programmes (4 years, 240 credits), considering that general secondary education in the Kyrgyz Republic is 11 years;
- level 2 - Master programmes (2 years, 120 credits);
- level 3 - PhD programmes (3 years, 180 credits), this level, not yet adopted by law, is in a discussion of amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic *On Education*;
- training of specialists (5 years, 300 credits, medical specialists 6 years and 360 credits).

Public and private higher education institutions pass through the state licensing procedure to begin the implementation of educational programmes. Monitoring of their activities is carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic. Since September 1, 2016, *the Law on Education* foresees the introduction of independent accreditation, through independent accreditation agencies. Their status is recognised by the National Accreditation Council.

2.2.3 Employment and labour market needs

In Kyrgyzstan, the main vision of the Education Development Strategy is to ensure a significant improvement of the education system and to provide equal access to quality education. One of the aims of the strategy is also to ensure that the citizens will be able to *'handle general and specialised knowledge and skills that will allow them to be successful in life and labour market'*.⁷ To implement the tasks set in the concept of the National Qualification System, an inter-departmental working group was established under the leadership of the MES KR.

Since Kyrgyzstan is not a formal member of the Bologna Process, it is implementing it on a voluntary basis by ad hoc groups under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. As already mentioned, Kyrgyzstan is only at the beginning of implementing National Qualifications Framework which is an important element of the Education Development Strategy. Its objectives are to *'enhance transparency of qualifications, facilitate mobility of citizens to other countries, structure and integrate education and training systems in the country, enhance employability, boost lifelong learning and link qualifications better to the labour market'*.⁸

The labour market in Kyrgyzstan is influenced by a number of factors including a shift away from agriculture towards services, a slowdown in economic growth since 2013, and a significant informal sector (71.7% of those employed in 2015), especially in rural areas (79.2% of those employed).⁹ People aged under 20 account for 41% of Kyrgyzstan's population; those aged 20-29 are a further 20%. However, the economy is unable to provide adequate work for many young people, so youth unemployment is high, at 18%.¹⁰ In addition to this, poverty levels are still high – in 2016, 25.4% of the population was below the poverty line with the majority present in the countryside. Educational attainment is broadly greater among urban citizens.¹¹

⁷ Education Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2012-2020

⁸https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Kyrgyz%20Republic%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

⁹ Torino Process 2016-17: Kyrgyz Republic: Executive Summary, 2017

¹⁰https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Kyrgyz%20Republic%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

¹¹https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Kyrgyz%20Republic%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

The education and training system are poorly integrated, so that the NQF should address the issue of building pathways. VET remains a second-class option although specialists of VET system are in more demand on a labour market than alumni of higher educational institutions.¹² Graduates of initial VET have been especially successful on the labour market in recent years, demonstrating high activity rates (75.6% in 2015) and low unemployment rates (7.4% in 2015). Secondary VET graduates have also largely been successful, although they have seen rising unemployment rates in recent years.¹³

Kyrgyzstan has a number of good practice cases illustrating the close cooperation between individual VET schools and enterprises. The significant progress in the VET system represents the introduction of work-based learning through piloting an apprenticeship scheme in 2016.¹⁴ Work-based learning became an integral part of the VET system in Kyrgyzstan and its most common forms are various internships that are mandatory at all VET levels. However, only a small number of VET schools ensure practical training within the enterprise due to predominance of small and micro enterprises in the country.

The VET system in Kyrgyzstan has undergone significant changes in terms of its governance and in 2015, the overall responsibility (initial and secondary VET, the VET Agency) was given to the Ministry of Education and Science while previously, this responsibility had been shared with the Ministry of Labour. Similarly to other Central Asia countries, the VET system reforms are supported by the European Training Foundation (ETF). For example, together with the Asian Development Bank it supported the development and testing of a VET graduate tracer study methodology.

Interesting initiatives are being taken by higher education institutions as for most of them, one of the most important strategic directions is cooperation with the business environment and government bodies. Higher education institutions actively involve representatives of the business environment and government agencies (for example, tax authorities, the financial police, the National Bank) to develop state educational standards, graduate programmes, curriculum adjustments, guest lectures, courses and internships.

Another way of strengthening the links between employment and the labour market is implementing the Labour Market Information System (LMIS) as presented in Brussels in February 2019. LMIS is a special open system of employment, which will provide useful information on current trends in the labour market, list popular professions as well as existing vacancies.¹⁵ Also, in order to organise events to track graduates of educational institutions of higher professional education and to obtain timely information about the employment of university graduates, in September 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science developed and approved the *Methodology for tracking the employment of graduates of educational institutions of higher professional education of the Kyrgyz Republic*.

2.2.4 Innovative teaching methods

In the Kyrgyz Republic, the teaching and learning innovation is an important component of the national policy which is reflected in the document *Concept and Strategy for the Development of Education in the Kyrgyz Republic 2012-2020*. There is no specific budget for innovations in teaching and learning but the funds are allocated from the country's budget for the preparation of

¹²https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Kyrgyz%20Republic%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

¹³ Torino Process 2016-17: Kyrgyz Republic: Executive Summary, 2017

¹⁴ Astana Declaration, 2017

¹⁵ Presentation by N. Kulmambetov at the Regional Conference: Strengthening education reforms and employability in Central Asia and the EU, February 13 2019

programmes for teachers working in the field of vocational education. In higher education institutions, funding is allocated from the university budget. The key aims of the above-mentioned strategy are to increase the relevance of education to labour market needs (i.e. to focus on skills and competence rather than on knowledge exclusively), to improve quality and effectiveness of education provision, to increase access and inclusive approach in education by diverse teaching methods and technologies and to internationalise teaching provision and learners' interaction across countries.

The latest well-established innovations in the field of higher education and vocational education and training include the student-centred learning (inclusive approach), competence-based teaching and learning (focus on learning outcomes), inquiry-based learning, research-based learning (typically for master study programmes), action learning and role playing. There are some cases of online and interactive learning practice as well as dual learning (combining classroom study and workplace practice) and ICT-based pedagogy.

Despite significant efforts to reform the system, there remains major room for improvement. Interesting findings have been published by various authors where it is generally agreed that although Kyrgyzstan has been politically independent from the Soviet Union for more than 20 years, education in Kyrgyzstan has not changed significantly over that period. Today, as in the Soviet era, a teacher in a conventional classroom is considered to be an expert and a provider of knowledge. This system tends to promote 'reproductive knowledge', i.e. knowledge that should be memorised for further reproduction, rather than 'productive knowledge' that might be used creatively. The findings of the study indicate that a small proportion of schools seem to be promoting student-centred teaching approaches. While some teachers have adopted modern teaching approaches, the majority of primary and secondary teachers use predominantly conventional methods.¹⁶

2.2.5 Contribution of education to prevent violent radicalisation of youth

One of the institutions that aims to address security-related concerns including arms control, confidence- and security-building measures, human rights and national minorities is the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). One of its flagship educational initiatives in Central Asia is the OSCE Academy in Bishkek which promotes its commitment to young people in the Central Asia countries and in Afghanistan. It aims at fostering regional cooperation, conflict prevention and good governance through post-graduate education, professional trainings and intellectual exchange. The Academy provides expert training and education in human rights, conducts demand-driven and practice-oriented research on pertinent topics, supports the cooperation among the Central Asian academic institutions and also establishes a regional network of professionals and researchers. It launched two master's programmes – in 2004, master's programme in Political Science with focus on Central Asia; in 2011, master's programme in Economic Governance and Development.

As already stated, education plays an important role in promoting values such as tolerance, non-discrimination, freedom, inter-cultural understanding and cooperation. An interesting project encouraging these principles and focusing on street children was the *Vocational Education for Street Children in Kyrgyz Republic* project. It supported the reintegration of street children into normal life through specialised vocational training in the Bishkek area by providing methodology and pedagogy from Akershus University College from Norway (the project was funded by the Government of Norway). Through teachers' capacity building, elaborating of training curricula and cooperation with the private sector, this methodology enhanced the employment opportunities for street children and

¹⁶ Teachers' Pedagogical Approaches in Kyrgyzstan: Changes and Challenges, 2015

significantly improved their life chances by integrating them into working life or, in some cases, into further studies.

Kyrgyzstan also takes part in the *Education Improvement Programme* together with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. It is designed to enhance students' academic achievements and opportunities for further studies and develop competences such as critical thinking, creativity, cooperation and communication which all lead to a socially inclusive approach to diversity.

2.2.6 Contribution of education in addressing gender inequalities

The legislation of Kyrgyzstan establishes several guarantees of the right to education and gender equality. The Constitution in its Article 45 specifies the right of everyone to education and notes the role of the state in establishment of conditions for the development of state, municipal and private educational institutions. Article 16 of the Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women, and specifically refers to measures aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for men and women which should not be considered discriminatory.

As to the education sector, several policies and laws were adopted to ensure the implementation of constitutional guarantees, specifically, the law *On Education* (2003), the law *On Status of Teacher* (2001), the law *On Primary Vocational Education* (1999). The law *On Education* establishes the right to education regardless of sex, ethnicity, language, social and material status, restrictions related to health, nature of activities, religious beliefs, political and religious convictions, place of residence and other grounds (article 8). The law *On Status of a Teacher* enumerates principles of pedagogical activities of teachers. Amongst them, it mentions the prohibition of direct, hidden and indirect discrimination, restriction of rights or provision of privileges to students based on grounds of sex, race, language, disability, ethnicity, religious beliefs, age, origin, property and other status and other groups (article 4). The law *On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Men and Women* prohibits direct and indirect gender discrimination. The indirect discrimination also includes the reproduction of gender stereotypes with use of media, education, culture and other ways which inflicted or may inflict negative impact such as harm to people of certain sex (article 5). These laws are gender neutral. They establish a set of strong guarantees of equality in education; however, these guarantees are not supported with effective implementation mechanisms.¹⁷

A review of statistical data demonstrates a high concentration of women in traditionally 'female' occupations. In Kyrgyzstan, boys tend to enrol more to primary vocational education than to secondary vocation and higher education. In secondary vocational education and higher education, women considerably outnumbered men. In secondary vocational education, share of men remained at the level of about 43%. At the level of higher education, during the last five years some increase in enrolment of men was registered. Despite some decrease in women's enrolment to HE in Kyrgyzstan, their share remains high and they still outnumber men enrolled to HE institutions.

Girls tend to enrol in subjects such as education, health, economics and management. Men study specialised technical subjects, including agriculture. Gender wages in traditional 'female' jobs are 2.5 times lower compared to 'male'. Moreover, these jobs are mainly funded by the public sector. Thus, women are not fully benefiting from private sector development, where salaries are higher than in the public sector.

In higher education, a similar trend is evident. In 2017/2018 academic year, women in Kyrgyzstan selected education (86.6%) and service (66.6%). Men outnumbered girls in majority of other

¹⁷ Kochorbaeva Z. et al., 2016

subjects, particularly in technical science (72.4%) and interdisciplinary science (74%). More women than men pursue research degree.

Given the key gender concerns in VET and HE in Kyrgyzstan, one of the strategies is to encourage women to select non-traditional occupations for study and then, jobs. *The National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic on Achievement of Gender Equality until 2020* envisages change in this situation. It mentions that gender asymmetry in the labour market will be overturned in the various economic sectors. It aims to result in reduction of vertical and horizontal segregation and implementation of the principle 'equal pay for the work of equal value'. *The Strategy of Education Development for 2012-2020* targets to increase the share of girls enrolling to VET schools.

To conclude, Kyrgyzstan is committed to address current gender inequalities in VET and HE. However, clear strategies that use international experience in this area are missing. For instance, there is a lack of system-wide approach to ensure gender mainstreaming in the education sector. Gender expertise of educational standards, training and methodological materials is not applied. Experts note that a rapid review of these materials revealed that they may reproduce gender stereotypes and perceptions. Another challenge is the lack of strong human resource capacity and methodologies to build/ improve gender competence of teachers inside the teachers training and the improvement of the qualification framework.¹⁸ The qualification framework for teachers should include gender dimensions in addition to knowledge of subject, specifically, a requirement of knowledge and skills in pedagogical practices to prevent and overcome gender stereotypes and gender-based discrimination and promote gender equality.

2.2.7 Effective financing of education systems and education institutions

Higher Education

In recent years, in the system of higher education, the main direction of the reform policy has been the creation of uniform conditions for the financing of universities with a focus on providing services, rather than on financing infrastructure. Key standards of education financing are specified in Chapter VI of the Law on Education. Currently, the procedure and methodology of financing of educational institutions is performed in accordance with the Government resolution No. 370 dated 1.07.2016¹⁹ from the republican budget funds on the basis of the state educational grant from 1.09.2016²⁰.

The calculation of the size of the state educational grant is carried out on the basis of the actually established consolidated costs of organisations of higher professional education both at the expense of budgetary funds and at the expense of funds from the provision of educational paid services, per one student. The Ministry of Finance and sectoral ministries finance the expenses of universities from the state budget under a single cumulative expenditure item. With an increase or decrease in the volume of approved budget estimates for universities, the new budget is determined as a revised financing plan for the relevant period. Accounting and reporting of funds of the republican budget of universities is carried out according to established treasury procedures. Universities prepare reports and submit them to sectoral ministries. Sectoral ministries compile summary reporting data on the means of the republican budget on the basis of university reports. Sectoral ministries then submit

¹⁸ Kochorbaeva Z. et al., 2016

¹⁹ As amended by resolutions of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic from 20.07 2016, № 406; 3.02.2017, № 71; 2. 06 2017 № 339, 23.06.2017, № 404; 20.09.2017, № 591; 15.05 2018, № 234.

²⁰ It does not apply to higher educational institutions of the State Committee on Defense Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic.

reports on higher education institutions to the Ministry of Finance, according to the form and deadlines set by the Ministry of Finance.

The National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040 sets the task of 'changing the system of financing the higher education sector'. In particular, for the period up to 2023, it is indicated, 'the state will support the direct participation of business in training, in the formation of educational programmes, as well as the creation of *university-production* systems' and the creation of a separate national government project to support three leading public universities in the country to join the leading world rankings.

Vocational Education and Training

In initial vocational education, the principle of per capita financing is currently used. The methodology was developed and tested as part of the Asian Development Bank project. Government resolution No. 545 from November 22, 2018 *On measures for the implementation of normative financing in state educational institutions of primary vocational education of the Kyrgyz Republic* approved the procedure for determining the standards of budget financing, standard norms and the procedure for the formation and execution of expenditures of state professional lyceums of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as a list of state professional lyceums of the Kyrgyz Republic, which are not covered by the mechanism of normative financing.

There are three public administrations in charge of VET in Kyrgyzstan – The Ministry of Education and Science, The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the VET Agency. The State Agency of Vocational Education became a government body in the system of technical and vocational education in 2008. Its objectives and functions are to implement the integrated government policy on providing the labour market with a skilled workforce and meeting the needs of society in vocational education with regard to the interest and capacities of citizens. The structural chart of the Agency reflects its departmental affiliations.²¹

The Agency, according to the calendar plan, determines benchmarks for the expenses of state vocational schools from the republican budget funds based on the general need for budget financing and a single standard for covering the need. The head of the state professional lyceum is personally responsible for preventing misuse of funds and accounts payable at the end of the financial year. State professional lyceums also prepare reports on the means of the republican budget and submit it to the Agency on the forms and terms established by the Ministry of Finance for budget organisations. The Agency then forms a consolidated report on the republican budget and special funds based on reports of state professional lyceums.

²¹ World TVET Database: Kyrgyzstan, 2013