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

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 Tajikistan

2.1 Country brief

Population (2017): 8,921,343¹

The Republic of Tajikistan is a mountainous, landlocked country in Central Asia with an area of approximately 144,000 square kilometres (mountains cover more than 90% of the country). It borders with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China. It has an area of 143,000 square kilometres and its capital city is Dushanbe. Tajikistan became an independent sovereign nation in 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated. Most of Tajikistan's population belongs to the Tajik ethnic group, who speak Tajik (a dialect of Persian). Many Tajiks also speak Russian as their second language. Tajikistan has a transition economy that is highly dependent on remittances, aluminium and cotton production. It has an estimated GDP per capita of USD 801.²

Education

Higher education in Tajikistan is provided by a total of 39 institutions. Although Tajikistan is not a Bologna signatory country, most HE institutions have now introduced 4-year bachelor degrees, 3-year PhD degrees and 2-year master degrees in line with the EU system; some 5 or 6-year specialist diplomas are still offered in professional fields such as medicine, veterinary medicine, pharmacy and engineering. The Government of Tajikistan has set a vision to modernise the higher education system, especially its contents towards more professionally-oriented skills to better meet the labour market demand and to build country's capacity.

Vocational education and training is provided by primary vocational (lyceums) and secondary vocational (colleges) institutions. Primary vocational institutions are administrated by the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Republic of Tajikistan (MLME) and secondary vocational institutions are administrated by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). Both ministries maintain a centralised management structure for the two subsystems.

Useful links

Ministry of Education and Science: <http://maorif.tj/>

National Erasmus+ Office: <http://erasmusplus.tj/?lang=en>

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

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/country/tajikistan>

² <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/overview>

2.2 Overview of the current state of priorities

2.2.1 Qualification frameworks and standards

The legislation of Tajikistan seeks to provide the quality of professional education mainly through establishing the *State Educational Standards* (SES) for each specialty of every level of professional education and to enforce these standards by licensing, certification and state accreditation of educational institutions. Such mechanism of ensuring, monitoring and evaluation of the quality of vocational education leads to a slight improvement in education quality; however, the current situation does not meet the goals and objectives of the national strategic documents yet. It is characterised by the absence of statistics, structuring and systematisation of the received qualifications and it is probably the result of a low level of readiness for the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), a lack of staff capacity required for the development of professional standards at all levels of professional education, as well as the limited financial resources of the country for the implementation of appropriate measures to improve the situation.

The evolution of the qualification system in Tajikistan is currently mainly at the stage of policy and methodology formulation. With adoption of the *National Education Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020* (2012), a more significant progress in the political perception of the problem of the vocational education quality in the country began. This strategic document assumes a transition to competency-based education, the modular organisation of educational programmes at all levels on the basis of the qualification requirements of the National Qualifications Framework. In 2012, the law *On the Training of Specialists Tailored to Needs of the Labour Market* was adopted, which aims to define the legal, financial and organisational basis of partnership between state and private sectors in the process of training of specialists according to the needs of the labour market.

A draft of the NQF concept has been developed and discussions are taking place regarding the need to establish a mechanism and special institution for the horizontal and vertical structuring of qualifications in the country. In this process, the higher education system is more successful, which is probably associated with the Tajikistan's intention to entry into the space of the Bologna Process. In the current period of development of the vocational education system in Tajikistan (with the country's labour redundancy and presence of a large volume of foreign labour migration), the importance of qualification framework has now been established as it is seen as a central element of the process of entering into the European space of vocational education as well as for achieving comparability and transparency of vocational education.

Currently, there are three types of training programmes implemented in higher education institutions:

- 4-year bachelor's programme after the general secondary education (11 grade);
- 2-year magister's programme after the Bacalaureate;
- 3-year PhD programme after the Magistracy.

The description of qualifications and its consistency to the needs of the labour market play a key role in ensuring the quality of vocational education. However, the adopted laws and regulations in the field of vocational education in Tajikistan do not contain a clear definition of the quality concepts and quality assurance, nor potential quality assurance systems and tools to improve the quality of education.

2.2.2 Quality assurance and accreditation

The main body, which is responsible for Quality Assurance is the State Agency on Supervision in the Sphere of Education operating under the Ministry of Education and Science. External quality assurance system currently consists of three consecutive steps of licensing, attestation, and accreditation. However, all three steps are drawing on the same standards and using more or less the same procedures and actors, thus overburdening HEIs without adding value to system's improvement.³

Tajikistan's current quality assurance model follows the practices common to those promoted by the ministries in post-Soviet systems and is not in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines - ESG), which the government aims to comply with. The State Agency for Supervision in the Sphere of Education (SASSE) is in charge of the external quality assurance under the Ministry of Education and Science. It aims to assure quality primarily by setting state educational standards and requiring HEIs to be in compliance with the standards through licensing, state attestation and accreditation. However, the model does not clearly define the concepts of quality and quality assurance, or the nature of quality enhancement or quality assurance system and tools. The SASSE does not have sufficient exposure to the ESGs and lacks the capacity to improve the national QA system. Also, as a result of conflicts of interest - the Ministry of Education and Science is both the founder and regulator of state HEIs - the majority of HEIs remain open whether or not they meet the standards. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of SASSE and aligning the existing model with the ESGs would help improve the quality of higher education.⁴

The Centre for Methodological Support and Quality Monitoring of VET was set up in 2014. This centre together with GIZ⁵ in Tajikistan developed educational modules for VET and is functioning under the head of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population of Republic of Tajikistan.

2.2.3 Employment and labour market needs

National priorities in the field of education are formulated in the *National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan till 2020* and the *Education Action Plan 2018–2020*. The Strategy 'is aimed at renewal of the education system, so that education could implicitly perform the mission of the key resource for improving the well-being of the society and citizens, as well as effectively respond to economic challenges of the developing country and globalisation process.'⁶ The strategy covers both higher education and vocational education and training.

Tajikistan recognises the importance of linking VET with the requirements of the labour market and the economy as a whole as well as the importance of social partnership for the improvement of VET quality.⁷ In addition to this, in 2016, a new law *On Adult Education* was adopted which creates the possibility for individual citizens to have work skills that they have obtained in non-formal settings certified by various state agencies.

³ Overview of the Higher Education System: Tajikistan, 2017

⁴ Republic of Tajikistan: Tajikistan: Higher Education Sector Study, 2014

⁵ Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

⁶ National Strategy of Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan till 2020, 2012

⁷ The Law on Training Specialists Based on Labour Market Needs, 2012

Concerning the NQF, Tajikistan is only in conceptualising phase. It adopted the framework in 2012 within the *National Education Development Strategy* and assumes a transition to competence-based training in VET as well as the complete adoption of an NQF. Tajikistan has adopted the National Classification of Occupations (NCO) in 2013, which links occupations to qualifications. The NCO consists of four levels, where level 2 and 3 are covering VET, and level 4 is covering HE.⁸

According to the World Bank study from 2017, Tajikistan's economy is not creating sufficient jobs for its rapidly growing workforce, so its most valuable asset – human capital – is largely underutilised. There is an urgent need to alter the existing growth model to ensure faster job creation and improved job quality.⁹ Women and youth are the least represented in the labour force. Inactive youth, i.e. those who are neither employed nor in school, represent 40% of the total youth population, which is high by international standards.¹⁰ Also women are much more likely to be out of work than men and there are limited capabilities to adapt the workforce to the labour market demands for skilled specialists.¹¹ Limited mobility and access to higher professional education have increased the significance of vocational training, but substantial reforms are needed to strengthen the system. Quality assurance measurements remain fragmented and differ between regions and therefore, a streamlined approach to evaluate the quality of education, monitoring, and assessment is much needed.¹²

To conclude, the Tajik labour market lacks qualified people in most branches of industry and is characterised by high unemployment and low salaries. Young people with traditional vocational qualifications, such as those provided by initial VET, experience considerable difficulties in finding employment in the country, and most of them become migrants. Estimates of the number of migrants vary from one eighth to one third of the workforce. On the other hand, every year many vacancies remain unfilled due to lack of relevant competencies.¹³ Therefore, there is a strong need to revitalise skills development and to improve transparency and efficiency through streamlining numerous specialisations into a manageable number of broad occupations or career paths. Additionally, the quality and relevance of programmes of studies needs to be improved in order to target gaps in the labour market, and to make vocational, professional and higher education institutions more accountable for quality results.¹⁴ As already stated in the previous sections, key elements of this process are the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms and the recognition of qualifications at national level.

2.2.4 Innovative teaching methods

One of the most important strategic documents regulating the goals and objectives of the national policy in the field of training and education is the *National Strategy for the Development of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020*. As one of the priorities for the development of the higher education system it explicitly states '*...support and development of innovative professional educational*

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

⁹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/publication/tajikistan-addressing-challenges-to-create-more-and-better-jobs>

¹⁰ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/publication/tajikistan-addressing-challenges-to-create-more-and-better-jobs>

¹¹ <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/regions-and-countries/countries/tajikistan>

¹² <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/regions-and-countries/countries/tajikistan>

¹³ https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Tajikistan%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

¹⁴ https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Tajikistan%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

*programmes and technologies, creation and development of a database of electronic learning tools in open access, an increase in the share of independent student activities in mastering training programmes, based on the widespread use of information resources and ICT, as well as the transition to a new generation of standards based on competency model and modular organisation of programmes with the obligatory involvement of employers.*¹⁵

Taking into account the latest achievements of science and technology, the strategy highlights the transition to new educational approaches such as competence-oriented education (focusing on the learning outcomes), project-based learning methods (implying the need to integrate acquired knowledge and skills), increase of independent learning activities and implementation of individual educational trajectory in a profile school of the highest level (as a practice of responsible choice).

The key objectives of the strategy are not only to improve the quality and effectiveness of educational provision but also to increase its accessibility and inclusiveness by using a differentiated set of learning strategies and technologies to facilitate attendance and achieve good results for all students, including students with special needs or difficult socio-economic conditions. It also aspires to internationalise teaching and ensure student interaction between countries, as well as ensure participation in international curricula.

In higher education institutions, new practical measures and approaches have been developed, such as:

- introducing information technologies – electronic laboratories with access to the Internet, electronic boards, electronic library;
- creating an inclusive learning environment – by implementing distance learning technologies based on the MOODLE electronic platform (i.e. open source platform);
- introducing creative learning methods - role-playing games, brainstorming, individual and group work, discussions;
- introducing lifelong learning – centres for short-term adult education have been established;
- training specialists that meet the labour market demand – technological parks have been created, combining the initiatives of the university's research, design, information technology and business activities.

While there have been efforts to actively introduce and utilise innovative teaching methods (interdisciplinary joint project activities, online co-education, 'inverted class' technology, dual learning and many others), there have been difficulties in applying them actively given the age, skills, experience and ability of teachers. Therefore, this is an area that needs addressing, for example through cooperation and partnership with other countries.

2.2.5 Contribution of education to prevent violent radicalisation of youth

In May 2017, OSCE organised a three-day interactive workshop on the role of youth in positive messaging against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism (VERLT) at their office in Tajikistan. The purpose of the workshop was to enhance the capacity of youth, civil society, law enforcement agencies and the media to jointly resist violent extremist propaganda in the public domain, to develop their critical thinking skills and to inform them about various methods of developing effective counter narratives in response to VERLT. Representatives of the Prosecutor

¹⁵ National Strategy for the Development of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020

General's Office presented the national strategy on the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, and underscored that this is the first government policy document of this kind to be adopted in Central Asia.¹⁶ As the Counter Terrorism and Police Issues Advisor at the OSCE Office in Tajikistan pointed out young people tend to spend a lot of time using modern technology and online communication and therefore it is essential to improve their critical thinking skills in order to effectively resist violent propaganda in the public domain. This naturally links with the role of education and equipping young people with the necessary strategic communication skills and ability to express their views in public.¹⁷

OSCE continually emphasises the importance of education and a 'whole-of-society' approach to tackling the phenomenon of violent extremism and in May 2018, they organised a training event in Dushanbe. This was a train-the-trainer course where teachers were able to discuss and learn practical techniques on when and how to discuss the issue of violent extremism and radicalisation with their learners and create a classroom climate that is inclusive and open. By empowering local teachers in taking preventive measures against violent extremism, this approach aims to strengthen the role of education in building community resilience against terrorist radicalisation.¹⁸

Another initiative, funded by the Central Asia Institute (CAI), focuses on young women and their freedom to access education. CAI promotes education, especially girls' education in the mountainous regions of Tajikistan. Courses of English, Russian and IT enabled the students to apply to universities after secondary school and choose professional occupations.

Together with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan also takes part in the *Education Improvement Programme*. It is designed to enhance students' academic achievements and opportunities for further studies through developing competences such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, and cooperation.

2.2.6 Contribution of education in addressing gender inequalities

In Tajikistan, the right to education for all is guaranteed by the Constitution and the state takes over the obligation to ensure fulfilment of this right. The Constitution also establishes a principle of non-discrimination and equality and specifies that all the rights and freedoms are provided to all without distinction on the basis of nationality, race, sex, language, religion, political convictions, and education, social or material status (article 17). This provision is reproduced in the majority of laws including the laws governing the education sector. There are five major laws related to education. The general law of Tajikistan *On Education* (2013) sets the general framework for all levels of education in Tajikistan. This law is gender neutral and it only refers to special conditions for children with special needs. The area of VET is governed by three laws: 1) *Law on Primary Vocational Education* (2003) and the *Law on Secondary Vocational Education* (2015). Both laws are gender neutral and extend special treatment only to people with special needs, orphans, underage and abandoned children. The third law is the law *On Adult Education* (2017). It is aimed at the provision of various forms of adult education including formal, non-formal education and informal education with opportunity to validate skills and get the certificate. This law is also gender neutral. The law governing the HE system is the law *On Higher and Postgraduate Education* (2009) and it does not establish any special measures to advance enrolment of girls/ boys to higher education. Special guarantees on ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in education and science are

¹⁶ <https://www.osce.org/office-in-tajikistan/318226>

¹⁷ <https://www.osce.org/office-in-tajikistan/318226>

¹⁸ <http://en.unesco.kz/training-teachers-to-prevent-violent-extremism-among-youth-in-tajikistan>

established by the law *On State Guarantees of Equal Rights of Men and Women and Equal Opportunities for their Exercise* (2005).

However, despite the legal declaration of these rights and guarantees, there are no effective mechanisms for implementation. For example, no systematic revision of curricula and/ or introduction of mandatory gender courses across all subjects have not been undertaken. Tajikistan has also adopted a *National Development Strategy 2030* and a *Mid-Term Development Programme for 2016-2020* in line with SDGs. Both programmes mentioned gender inequality in HE and VET and committed to address them. However, special measures or references to achievement of progress supported by gender-sensitive situational analysis are not fully elaborated in the targets and specific strategies.

Similarly to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan maintains the prohibition of use of women's labour in certain occupations. In 2017, by its *Resolution the Government of Tajikistan* adopted a list of occupations where use of women's labour is prohibited. It is needless to point out that such list restricts opportunities of women to receive VET and HE, and subsequently, employment in prohibited sectors.

Gender inequality in VET and HE is cumulated and starts at the secondary education level. Compared to boys, girls have fewer chances to be eligible to access higher education as they are less likely to graduate from secondary education. In this respect, enrolment of girls to higher education was almost three times lower compared to boys in 2012-2014.¹⁹ Recently, the share of girls enrolled to HE institutions was increasing steadily. In the 2015/2016 academic year, 33.2% of all students enrolled to higher educational institutions were girls.²⁰ And, for the first time in the last decade, a clear growth trend began to stabilise. The introduction of a national central standardised university entrance exam in 2014 might have had a positive impact on this.²¹

Due to stereotypes, girls select traditional 'female' occupations which later results in gender segregation in the labour market. At the level of HE, in 2016/2017 women largely concentrated in subjects of study such as education, culture and arts, followed by economy. Men were highly present in all fields of study except education. In addition to this, there is a prevailing rural/ urban divide in access to higher education. In rural areas, the quality of education is much lower compared to urban areas and people from low-income families face difficulties in accessing higher education due to the commercialisation of the system. In terms of income levels, men and women belonging to households with high consumption levels are more likely to complete higher education compared to men and women belonging to households with low consumption levels.²²

2.2.7 Effective financing of education systems and education institutions

Higher Education

With a view to developing the higher education system and integrating into the European Higher Education Area, the government is currently focusing on joining the Bologna Declaration. Although the government has started undertaking some of the necessary reforms (for example, implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), yet major reforms, such

¹⁹ Agency of Statistics under the President of Tajikistan: *Women and Men in the Republic of Tajikistan*, 2016

²⁰ Agency of Statistics under the President of Tajikistan: *Women and Men in the Republic of Tajikistan*, 2016

²¹ Presentation of Mirboboev at the CAEP Regional Conference, Brussels, February 13, 2019

²² The Republic of Tajikistan: *Tajikistan: Analysis of the Higher Education Sector*, 2014

as the establishment of a credible quality assurance system and national qualifications framework, are yet to be developed, adopted and operationalised. As the World Bank pointed out in their *Higher Education Sector Study*, the major overhaul of the higher education system, especially with regard to higher education governance, quality assurance, teaching, learning and student assessment, is to be undertaken as a matter of urgency.²³

The main problem of financing higher education in Tajikistan is the lack of public funding allocated from the budget. Strong economic growth in recent years has helped increase public funding for education in general, and for higher education. Primarily, due to low higher education enrolment rates relative to wealthier countries, higher education's share of the overall education budget is lower than that of wealthier countries, but similar to that of neighbouring countries²⁴.

There are two groups of higher education students in Tajikistan – those whose studies are funded by the government from the state budget (budgetary groups) and those who are self-funded and pay tuition fees (non-budgetary or contract groups). State HEIs primarily rely on two sources for financing: (i) the state budget for budget-seats; and (ii) tuition fees. Recently, the government started counting revenues raised by HEIs as part of the state budget for higher education; about 56% of the higher education budget is actually raised by HEIs themselves. Budget seats have been allocated to HEIs and programmes according to historical allocations without strategically reflecting the changing labor market demand.²⁵

Another challenge regarding the financing model of higher education is the unnecessary bureaucracy caused by involvement of different ministries. The main role of the state lies with the Ministry of Education and Science, while HEIs are accountable to the Ministry of Finance for the use of budgetary allocations. Other ministries are involved when discussing issues within their competence such as the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population and the Ministry of Economy Development and Trade.

In terms of autonomy and governance, the Ministry of Education and Science retains strong control over higher education and the system remains heavily centralised. Similarly, budget allocation is not connected either with the educational process or its results but is solely based on the observance of established estimated assignments within the framework of the economic budget classification, i.e. financial discipline.

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational institutions are administered by two ministries – the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment (MLME) which administers primary vocational institutions and the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) which administers secondary vocational institutions. The division of responsibility between these two ministries for two levels of education is reflected in the strong divide between two delivery networks consisting of technical schools (colleges) and vocational schools, respectively. The Ministry of Education maintains full control of the general education element of vocational curricula, and decides on the certificate for which a given vocational programme can qualify. This means that there can be no revision of the content of VET programmes without the full participation of the Ministry of Education.²⁶

²³ Republic of Tajikistan: Tajikistan: Higher Education Sector Study, 2014

²⁴ Republic of Tajikistan: Tajikistan: Higher Education Sector Study, 2014

²⁵ Republic of Tajikistan: Tajikistan: Higher Education Sector Study, 2014

²⁶ The Reform of Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Tajikistan, 2007

The main financing source of VET institutions is the public sector (the government) and the learners themselves through tuition fees. There are no additional sources of funding for VET institutions in Tajikistan, except for financial assistance from international organisations (Asian Development Bank, EU). For example, a recent ADB project in Tajikistan is targeted at unskilled youths and adults, especially women and girls, who will be able to obtain competitive technical qualifications, skills, and jobs from improved technical and vocational education and training.²⁷

²⁷ <https://www.adb.org/publications/taj-strengthening-tvet-project-brief>