

Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2022



■ ACTE holds a beneficiaries training with its members.

I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

The Republic of Tajikistan is a country in the southeast of Central Asia bordering Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. More than 90% of its territory is mountainous with limited access to certain regions. The resident population of Tajikistan in 2021 reached more than 9.85 million people¹ and more than 89% of the population is Tajik. A majority live in rural areas.

Education is one of the priority directions of the country's financing. In 2021, the total government spending on education amounted to 5.6 billion somoni (USD 548 million), which is 6% of GDP and 19.9% of the total state budget. The dynamics of the volume of state financing of the education system show an increasing trend from year to year. According to the results of the ACTE study on the impact of COVID-19 on equitable education financing in 2021-2022, allocated resources for education spending during the pandemic remained largely unchanged.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected lives and livelihoods. The social and economic well-being of the population severely deteriorated following the outbreak of COVID-19, and Tajikistan remained far from recovery in 2020. From the first days of the pandemic, the Government of

Tajikistan has taken measures to reduce the risk. It placed a significant strain on the healthcare system in the country. The cost of per capita health care provision in 2021 is 242.1 somoni (equivalent to about 24 USD). The low level of public spending has resulted in an unusually high share of health spending being passed onto households, further contributing to lower levels of consumption. All levels of education were also badly hit by the impacts of the pandemic, from preschool and higher education to vocational education. The Republican Committee for the protection of public health and safety of the population decided to declare 27 April until 17 August 2020 as a summer holiday. All educational institutions were therefore closed in accordance with this holiday. More than 2 million schoolchildren in Tajikistan have been out of school for about a month and a half. Learners who studied in public schools were left without education as private schools organised distance education. The pandemic has exacerbated the education gap. According to unofficial data, during the pandemic-induced summer holiday, girls were mostly involved in housework, compared to boys. Learners with disabilities also faced multiple barriers to accessing education.

Families who worked on a daily wage were left without a livelihood, and one-time government assistance was provided only to families with small children under 3 years

old in the amount of about USD 50. The rest of the population was left without attention. As all country borders of Tajikistan were closed from April 2020, it greatly affected the level of well-being of the population of Tajikistan. According to official data of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), about 1 million people migrate to the Russian Federation, and other countries annually for their livelihood², but in 2020, many Tajik people were unable to go to work outside the country, and this affected many families in remote regions of Tajikistan. These families were unable to send their children to school because they could not afford to pay school fees, materials and stationery, clothes, etc.

At the beginning of the second half of 2020, the social and economic situation began to recover gradually. All educational institutions have already opened their doors, but with the observance of hygiene measures. Now the task of the government is to preserve and protect the educational budget.

II. CHALLENGES IN AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

With the onset of the pandemic, the government of the Republic of Tajikistan

1 See www.stat.tj - TAJStat

2 See <http://iom.tj>

had to take emergency measures to prevent the spread of the disease. Such a crisis has exacerbated and exacerbates existing barriers to equal education that affect the most vulnerable groups of the population. It also reveals many other problems related to information and technological access to educational services.

Schools were not closed for a nationwide quarantine, but to reduce the incidence among children, distance learning was a forced-recommendatory measure. The emergency measures taken by the government have left tens of thousands of families with the difficult task of providing their children with everything necessary to continue their education at home.

The transition to distance learning showed gaps in technological support and access to the Internet, especially in remote areas. According to the results of a study conducted by ACTE in 2021-2022, teachers gave students tasks via messengers and parents, in case of any questions, turned to them. As the realities of today show, at the height of the pandemic, educational institutions were not able to organise online learning. There were only attempts to record video lessons, but this was not as effective as in-person learning could be.

When studying at home, schoolchildren were faced with the lack of the Internet,

and also noted the lack of technical equipment, such as a mobile phone or computer. Due to the fact that each school is funded in accordance with the nationwide budget for education, the cost of Internet and computer equipment could be foreseen even before the start of the pandemic. However, in reality, it turned out that even schools in many cases failed to provide their students with conditions for continuing education at home. Due to school closures, children stayed at home and girls were mostly involved in household chores rather than boys. The absence of basic and prerequisite requirements for learning in rural areas, such as school heating, school infrastructure, and sanitary conditions for schools, among others, also compound challenges in terms of access to quality education.

School enrolment rates for students ages 16 to 17 (Grades 10-11) declined sharply after school attendance is no longer compulsory. In Grades 10-11, more girls are out of school than boys. Only 46% of girls are in school compared to 54% of boys in schools. However, according to the data of the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan in the 2021-2022 Academic Year, the gender parity index is 0.845. Although according to official data, there are practically no gender inequalities in access to education,

there are a number of indirect factors that influence the difference in the perception of girls' and boys' education.

First, girls are more involved in domestic work than boys. Surveys conducted by the Paper Lab Research Center in Central Asia in 2021 show that 15-year-old and older girls spend more time on housework, while boys can study, socialise, and engage in cultural education.³ Secondly, the issue of early engagement is still relevant in Tajikistan. For example, every year almost half of engagements are with brides aged 15-19. Even if we assume that the brides are 18-19 years old, this characterises the attitude of both the girl herself and her parents and teachers towards her education. The notion is that it is useful and important in terms of fulfilling the role of a good wife and mother (as the girls said during the focus group discussions), but not for self-realisation and achievement. Thirdly, the problem of the lack of sufficient sanitary and hygienic conditions leads to the loss of pubertal girls from the educational process for several days a month. And this violates the integrity of training and its effectiveness.

In 2018, Tajikistan signed the United

³ Research Center Paper Lab. (2021). Analytical report on the New Facets of Educational Inequalities in Central Asian Countries: Problem Measurement to Policy Change.



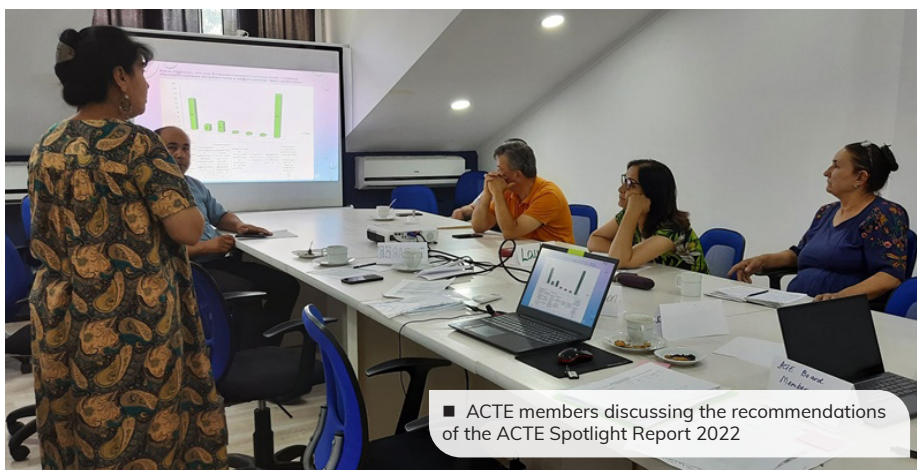
■ Training of ACTE members on Result Based Management in 2022

Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, providing inclusive education to youth and adults with disabilities remains a tremendous challenge in Tajikistan both for the state and for civil society organisations. During the pandemic and strict quarantine, educational TV lessons were developed, but not adapted for children with special needs. This reflects the attitude towards such children. Due to the small number and diversity of needs, they are left out of educational policy. It should be noted that statistics on such data are not kept.

Adapting the educational process to special needs requires large financial investments for the development of physical infrastructure, as well as the development of educational methods and applications. Additional finance will also require advanced training and training of teaching staff and the maintenance of additional staff units for working with children with special needs. In addition, the list of special needs is quite wide, and each type of disability requires a different approach. A serious barrier to creating an inclusive environment for children with special educational needs is the unpreparedness of society. Parents of children with special educational needs believe that it is better for their children not to attend school, so as not to become the subject of ridicule from classmates.

It should be noted that an additional constraint for the inclusion of children with special educational needs is infrastructural underdevelopment, but this is not only about ramps. Due to the fact that state bodies pay attention to the inclusion of children with special educational needs on a residual basis, international organisations and donors have turned out to be the main driving force in this direction in Central Asia. They provide training, fund research, and pilot infrastructure projects to include children with special educational needs in the educational process.⁴

The level of adult education and learning (ALE) coverage in Tajikistan is not high. The available statistics show that the enrolment rate of persons aged 25 and over has been slowly increasing since 2013. In 2013, 2.9% of the total population aged 25 and over was studied. In 2016, the level of adult participation in education dropped to 2.5%. By 2019, the level of adult participation in education was 2.77% of the total population aged 25 and over (out of 4.29 million people). These are the only data on vocational training, mainly on the



■ ACTE members discussing the recommendations of the ACTE Spotlight Report 2022

basis of state educational institutions.

The financing of the Adult Education Centre of Tajikistan (AECT) system is carried out from the budget of the education sector, but this is not the only source of financial income for the centre. The allocated funds are insignificant, only 0.06% of the education budget. The funds allocated for the needs of the AECT are only enough for the maintenance of buildings and staff. The state, in the face of a lack of funds, focuses on the development of paid education in the AECT system.

Over the period from 2008 to 2019, the financing of the AECT from the education budget has only doubled, while the total financing of the education system has increased more than 3 times. Incomes of AECT from the financing of ALPE increased 4.4 times, from paid services - 2.76 times. Since its establishment in 2008, a great contribution to the development of the AECT system and its technical equipment has been made by international organisations.⁵

In the AECT system there is also the problem of training and professional development of adult education teachers. In general, there are still many unresolved problems in the sphere of ALE in Tajikistan, the solutions to which have yet to be determined. The law is not a dogma; it must be improved taking into account the acquired practice. Adopting the law is just the first step in policy development. It is important to create effective mechanisms for its implementation.

III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4'S ROLE IN THE SDGs FOR REVIEW

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) will help to achieve these other SDGs, such as eradicating poverty

(SDG 1), achieving gender equality (SDG 5), ensuring good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all (SDG 8), building resilient infrastructure and foster innovation (SDG 9), ensuring access to information and awareness for sustainable consumption and style of production in harmony with nature (SDG 12), providing education and awareness toward taking urgent action to combat climate change (SDG 13), and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16).

Thus, in 2021, Tajikistan adopted several laws that intend to contribute to the SDG implementation in Tajikistan, such as the adoption of a National strategy for the development of education in the Republic of Tajikistan for the period up to 2030, which is fully consistent with the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period up to 2030 and the SDG 4.

The Medium-Term Development Programme of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021-2025 was developed and adopted. There was more emphasis on the mechanisms of promotion within the framework of the implementation of SDG 4, including at the disaggregated level (2021). To develop education and science, the government adopted relevant decrees of the State programme for the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) in secondary schools of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2018-2022. It also developed the State programme for improving the teaching and learning of Russian and English languages in the Republic of Tajikistan until 2030.

Progress towards SDG 4 still faces information and statistical gaps. The principle of the 2030 Agenda- "leave no one behind"- requires the use of data that must be disaggregated by vulnerability criteria. Since 2021, Tajikistan has been piloting a new Global Partnership for Education

⁵ The other article of the author Jamshed Quddusov titled "Analysis of development opportunities for adults learning and education in Tajikistan as a basis for strategic interventions" is published in the Russian variant of the journal.

⁴ Ibid.



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(GPE) 2025 operating model. In line with the pilot of the GPE 2025 operating model, the Government of Tajikistan and the Local Education Group (LEG) have analysed Tajikistan's progress and chosen data and evidence as a high priority. This will help to improve statistical gaps.

IV. KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ACTE, therefore, recommends the following:

- Develop a programme to support the continuing education of all learners, particularly learners with disabilities, teachers and educators, and parents, even amidst emergencies.
- Ensure learners', educators', and families' access to a free and stable Internet connection, especially those in rural and remote areas, and provide every low-income family with a smartphone or a tablet/laptop.
- Increase the number of preschool institutions as it will give an opportunity to increase the accessibility to preschools. Only 15-16% of children attend preschool institutions as of statistics for 2021.⁶
- Provide teachers, especially those in rural and remote areas, with regular and quality training to enhance their basic digital skills and build capacities to employ remote learning methods and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for teaching.
- Provide support and increase the motivation for girls to continue their education.
- Substantially increase the remuneration of teachers, among other reforms such as providing sufficient benefits, to increase the attractiveness of the position, renew motivation, and improve the retention rate of teachers.
- Ensure accessibility by improving the school infrastructure to be disability-inclusive and improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools, including access to clean drinking water in all educational institutions. There should also be centralised heating to ensure the comfort and safety of learners, teachers, and other staff during wintertime.
- Prepare a career guidance program among children beginning from the ages of 13-14.
- Introduce professions in the University programmes that are in demand in the labour market.
- Ensure the development of the implementation of the norms of the adopted Law "On Adult Education" - expanding the network of AET centres and increasing the coverage of adult education, developing AET statistics, increasing funding, expanding the training of adult education specialists, methodological support and development of the scientific basis for AET.
- Develop a sustainable strategy for financing the education system that could protect the progress of the last decade and make a significant contribution to the national development agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, to better realise the opportunities for receiving the demographic dividends.⁷

⁶ See <https://stat.tj/ru/news/publications/education-in-the-tajikistan>

⁷ Adult Education Association of Tajikistan. (2020). "Adult Education in Tajikistan" Journal. Retrieved from http://aeat.tj/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/zhurnali-kalonson_eng.pdf



The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

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The Alliance of CSOs in Tajikistan for Education is a national educational coalition promoting the achievement of quality education and lifelong learning based on the principles of inclusiveness and a human rights-based approach in the Republic of Tajikistan through the unification of civil society efforts. ACTE was established in 2016 and currently consists of 9 CSOs across Tajikistan. ACTE is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).