

# Tajikistan

## Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2023



### I. Country Context

Tajikistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, with over 93% of its territory covered by mountains. The country has a population of over 10 million people, with approximately 42% of the population under the age of 18 and 3.4% over the age of 65. The majority of the population resides in rural areas (71.2%). Tajikistan ranks 85th in the world in terms of territory size and possesses significant hydro energy resources, freshwater reserves, diverse mineral deposits, favourable conditions for cultivating environmentally friendly food products, and opportunities for the active development of ecotourism (Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan). This aligns with the fundamental principles of human development in terms of access to natural resources.

Tajikistan ranks sixth globally in the utilisation of "green energy" production resources and is determined to provide access to modern energy sources and develop "green energy" as key factors in achieving sustainable development. The country continues to experience high population growth rates, exacerbating labour surplus, and poverty issues. The

severity of problems related to external labour migration due to the lack of sufficient employment opportunities highlights the need to create new jobs and rehabilitate existing ones, prepare migrants for work abroad, and ensure the protection of the rights and interests of labour migrants from Tajikistan in other countries.

The National Development Strategy for the period up to 2030 (NDS-2030), adopted in 2016, serves as a logical continuation and further development of the priority directions for national development outlined in the NDS for the period up to 2015, namely: (1) public administration reform, (2) private sector development and investment attraction, and (3) human capital development. The programmes and policies currently being implemented are based on a long-term vision of social and economic development, encompassing extensive reform programmes. These strategic documents demonstrate a sufficient degree of alignment with the international agenda and the SDGs.

The consistent implementation of specific economic and managerial reforms has facilitated sustainable economic growth averaging 7.3%. Only in 2020 did economic growth sharply slow down due to the COVID-19 pandemic,

but growth rates have again become sufficiently high in subsequent years, exceeding 8%. The benefits of economic growth have contributed to a reduction in poverty in the country overall. The poverty rate in Tajikistan has decreased by 6.4 percentage points over the past six years to 23.4%. However, the benefits are unevenly distributed across regions and between urban and rural areas. While poverty is declining both in cities and rural areas, it remains more concentrated in rural regions of the republic.

Tajikistan belongs to the group of countries with a medium level of human development and ranks 122nd on the Human Development Index (HDI) with a score of 0.685. Compared to 2015, Tajikistan has climbed seven steps in the country rankings, with an annual growth rate of 0.68%. By 2030, the goal is to transition to a group of countries with a high level of human development. Although the policy to promote economic development is accompanied by actions to strengthen the country's public finances, and the overall budget deficit does not exceed 1% of GDP, but remains highly sensitive to external shocks and is therefore not entirely stable.

Overall, government spending from 2015 to 2022 has not been below 30% of GDP,

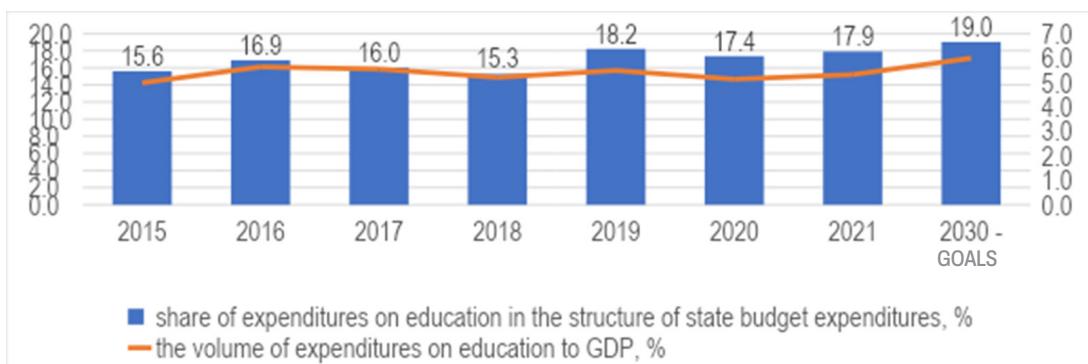


Figure 1. Spending on education in the structure of the state budget and GDP in the Republic of Tajikistan

which is in line with the level of most comparable countries. The government directs nearly 47% of total expenditures to programmes related to healthcare, education, social protection, and culture. The growth in social expenditures reflects the demographic structure of the country with a rapidly growing population. Social expenditures have been gradually increasing, from 10.4% of GDP in 2015 to 14% of GDP in 2022. Social expenditures are mainly driven by the education and social protection sectors.

To prevent the impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic spheres, a package of anti-crisis measures was adopted, including the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Tajikistan No. 1544 in June 2020, "On Preventing the Impact of COVID-19 on the Socio-Economic Spheres of the Republic of Tajikistan." This decree served as the basis for providing state financial support to vulnerable groups of the population in Tajikistan, as well as implementing fiscal incentives, monetary measures, and exemptions from payment of rent for state property and other measures regarding economic entities. The government committed to increasing expenditures on healthcare and social needs to support the poor and vulnerable groups and publishing quarterly reports on healthcare and social expenditures related to COVID-19.

An assessment of the progress made by Tajikistan in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, based on an analysis conducted by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and the Agency on Statistics of Tajikistan, in partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), shows that Tajikistan is making progress towards most of the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). But some areas require focused attention to accelerate progress or reverse current trends.

## II. Progress in Achieving SDG 4

Education has significant potential to reduce vulnerabilities by improving knowledge, developing necessary skills, and transforming perspectives and beliefs. At the same time, the country's strategic documents focus on creating opportunities for the education of all individuals regardless of their location, social affiliation, abilities, or health conditions. To improve the quality and accessibility of education in line with the needs of an innovative economy and the requirements of the information society, the country is implementing the Education Development Strategy for the period up to 2030.

The implementation of measures within the national workforce training system has contributed to sustainable government expenditure on education. From 2015 to 2021, the share of education expenditure in the structure of the state budget increased from 15.6 to 17%. The value of this indicator is not lower than that of other Central Asian countries. However, the key task for the future is to enhance the linkages between education expenditure and its outcomes.

There has been an increase in the number of students at all levels of education, indicating the growth of the country's education system capacity. In 2015, there were 2.1 million people enrolled in the country's education system, whereas, in 2022, the number reached 2.7 million. It is expected that by 2025, the number of students will rise to at least 3.2 million,

which will increase the burden on the education system and highlights the importance of growth in financial, infrastructural, and human resource support for the education system. The highest growth rates in student enrolment were observed in the higher education and vocational education systems, which are more directly connected to the labour market.

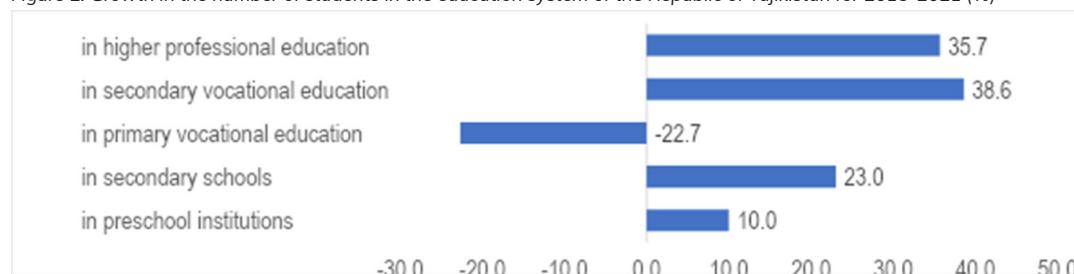
The most pressing tasks of the education system in Tajikistan are associated with a significant increase in population access to preschool and vocational education, as well as the quality of education. By 2030, it is planned to ensure that all girls and boys have access to improved early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education systems so that they are prepared for primary education. The coverage rate of preschool education for children aged 3-6 years has increased from 12.3% in 2015 to 15.6% in 2021. Available data on preschool institutions indicate the importance of improving infrastructure as 48% of urban preschool institutions have a permanent centralised cold water supply compared to 17% of rural preschool institutions. Functioning central sewage systems exist only in 7% of kindergartens and early development centres located in rural areas, and in 41% of kindergartens/early development centres in cities.<sup>1</sup>

To increase the coverage of 3-6-year-old children with preschool education and achieve the set targets in the future (30% by 2025), it is necessary to create new places in preschool educational institutions for at least 127,000 children in all regions of the country. This includes supporting the growth of alternative forms of preschool education, including child development centres, which is an ambitious and challenging task. Requirements for the staffing, infrastructure, and programmatic capacity of the preschool education system will need to increase.

Universal access to general secondary education has been almost achieved. In 2021, 96.9% of the population aged 7-17 are covered by formal education (primary, secondary, and vocational education) compared to 93.3% in 2015. There is still a gender gap in the coverage of these education levels, but it is decreasing. In general, the situation with enrolling children in the first grade of general education appears to be

fairly favourable, where almost all children in this age group are enrolled in the first grade. However, a challenging situation is observed after completing the 9th grade, where the dropout rate, especially among girls, is around 30%.

Figure 2. Growth in the number of students in the education system of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2015-2021 (%)



Source: Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF. Situation Analysis on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Tajikistan



Enrolment rates for students aged 16-17 (grades 10-11) drop sharply after school attendance is no longer compulsory. At this stage, so far, the greatest coverage is achieved until the completion of the 9th grade by schoolchildren and in the process of moving to subsequent levels of formal education, the percentage of coverage is rapidly declining, especially for girls, which is largely due to persistent gender stereotypes. Addressing the challenge of increasing coverage in the upper grades requires complex actions, including improving school infrastructure, enhancing the quality of teaching, and most importantly, raising awareness among students, particularly girls, about the importance of education in their adult lives.

The number of children with disabilities covered by the school education system has increased by 27 percentage points compared to 2015. Currently, there are 7,362 students (2,922 girls) with disabilities enrolled in general educational institutions in the country, and 975 children (377 girls) with disabilities are receiving home-based education. The existing infrastructural, financial and personnel conditions do not yet contribute to inclusive education in the formal education system. The coverage of children with disabilities by preschool educational institutions does not exceed 5%. About 0.4% of schoolchildren in the country are children with disabilities, although the proportion of children with disabilities in the total number of children, according to the most optimistic estimates, is at least 1%.

Since 2020, as part of the digital transformation policy in the school education system, an assessment has been conducted to identify needs and gaps for the successful transformation of the education system, taking into account a holistic approach to creating a digital ecosystem, including the availability of digital resources, ICT equipment, digital educational platforms, ICT skills among teachers, and most importantly, the presence of high-speed internet in schools in both urban and rural areas. Without systemic-level reforms and resources, the development of digital competencies and

the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning processes remain inadequate and unscalable.

Considering the goal of achieving 100% enrolment of children aged 7-17 in formal education by 2025, and based on projected calculations, the number of children in this age group will reach 2.4 million by the 2025/2026 academic year. Therefore, an additional 0.2 million educational institutions will need to be created.

In the vocational education system, the number of students in higher education dominates. The coverage of higher education (bachelor's degree) among the population aged 18-21 is increasing: in 2021, it reached 21.5% compared to 16.8% in 2015. However, there is a significant gender gap in coverage, and it is not decreasing. Overall, the coverage of individuals with disabilities over the age of 18 in the vocational education system does not exceed 0.3%. Consequently, this population group is in need of vocational guidance and labour adaptation, especially in rural areas.

The country's legislation provides equal opportunities for boys and girls to receive education, undergo professional training, and engage in self-education. Despite the reduction, there remains a significant gender imbalance in the vocational education system, which contributes to inequality of opportunities in the country which is relatively more due to persisting - gender stereotypes on the attitude of parents towards the education of girls and boys. In conditions of limited resources in poor households, as a rule, priority is given to vocational education for boys. There is also the prevalent practice of relatively early marriage, especially in rural areas. For rural residents of the country, entering into a first marriage at a younger age is typical.

In the medium term, objectives have been set, which should ensure the achievement of the following results (they will become monitoring targets for civil society). These include the expansion of coverage and access to quality inclusive early childhood development, general secondary, and vocational education; ensuring growth in

the proportion of individuals with vocational education among the employed population to 40%, including a minimum of 35% for women; increasing the coverage of people with disabilities by educational institutions at all levels to at least 30%; creating socially safe and favourable conditions for learning at all levels of the education sector; optimising mechanisms for regulating and financing the development of education and science systems; and ensuring the alignment of education and science system reforms with overall institutional transformations in the country and increasing their contribution to sustainable economic development, among others.

### III. Prospects for the Localisation of SDG 4

The process of localising SDG 4 is still in its early stages. In terms of cities and districts across the country, a system for collecting quantitative and qualitative indicators for SDG 4 analysis is being established. The availability of data for monitoring learning outcomes is currently low, hindered by the absence of a standardised methodology. More efforts need to be made to assess the proportion of children in Grades 2-3 who have reached at least the minimum level of proficiency in mathematics and reading.

It is important to strengthen a multi-sectoral approach that allows for the application of comprehensive techniques and expands the scale of activities related to health care, agriculture, education, water supply, sanitation and hygiene, environment, social protection, and the economy. A system for assessing the results of the implementation of national programmes at the local level needs to be developed and implemented to demonstrate their achievements and cost-effectiveness.

To monitor the proposed new education goals in cities and districts across the country, particularly Task 4.1 of ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary education that leads to relevant and effective learning outcomes by 2030, internationally comparable data is necessary for areas such as learning outcomes. It may be worth considering various methods of data

ACTE's General Assembly (June 2023)

collection to assess learning opportunities and outcomes, including household surveys. One recommendation could be initiating the development of a module that includes simple questions to assess reading and numeracy skills, as well as questions about parental support/participation in education.

The development of an annually updated database on the state of schools in cities and districts across the country, children with disabilities, and low-income families with children is also crucial, relying on prompt and systematic interagency communication. At the same time, exploring options for assessing inequalities (including health-related) in access to education, including through interagency working groups, will contribute to consolidating actions, creating conditions for consistent data analysis, and combining efforts across data sources. Cities and districts play a crucial role in implementing SDG 4 and should utilise the full potential of the SDGs as a policy tool for improving people's lives.

#### IV. Civil Society Engagement in SDG 4 Processes

The broadest discussions on the implementation of SDG 4, in which the greatest participation and involvement of civil society is shown, are associated with the following:

- In the process of preparing the Voluntary National Review (VNR), there are wide thematic discussions on the status of the implementation of the SDGs, including SDG 4, among certain groups, for example, the private sector, youth, persons with disabilities, the media, and public associations, both directly at the site of the National Development Council under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, as well as in cities and regions of the country. Tajikistan presented its first VNR in 2017, and its second in 2023.
- As part of the preparation of the Medium-Term Development Programme of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021-2025, broad discussions were organised on the state and prospects for the development of the country, in which the structures of the public administration system (including local government) and representatives of civil society

participated. The annual monitoring assessments of the implementation of the RPS are discussed on the platform of the National Development Council under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Monitoring progress with wide involvement/participation of civil society should be accompanied by systematic activities to raise awareness of the SDGs in general, and SDG 4 in particular, as well as the availability of information on indicators, and their target values both at the country level and at the level of regions, cities and districts. The existing platform within the framework of the National Development Council under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, which has 13 thematic platforms / working groups composed of representatives of ministries and departments and civil society, allows consolidating the actions of various structures to reflect "problem" and "breakthrough" points of activity in the implementation of SDG 4.

#### V. Recommendations

1. Financing SDG 4 should be included in budget planning at both national and local levels. Through the "SDG needs lens," integrated national and local financing frameworks should be developed in alignment with the SDG agenda to help guide effective government spending related to SDG implementation.
2. Put in place an effective mechanism for intersectoral coordination to ensure the overall implementation of the SDGs and the interaction of economic, social, and environmental factors in inclusive development.
  - The determination and formation of local and regional development visions during the development and monitoring of medium-term development programmes for cities and districts across the country.
  - The alignment of priorities, incentives, and goals through national, regional, and local authorities. Monitoring assessments, continuity of actions at the country,
3. Address the digital divide by improving the ICT infrastructure, including procurement of necessary equipment and devices for distance learning, providing training to students/teachers on the use of distance learning skills and tools, and establishing online mentoring systems for teachers and educators to support activities, methodologies, and pedagogy in the field of distance learning.
4. The development of a digital ecosystem in education requires an integrated approach to addressing ICT and non-ICT gaps, which should be based on national strategic documents for the transformation of digital education led by the National ICT Council.
5. Test statistical tools and institutionalise key disaggregation criteria in all data collection, processing, and publication efforts to address the data gaps. The disaggregation of data can be based on vulnerability criteria. In addition, enhance the coordination of cross-sectoral data through the alignment of data collection systems of the Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan and sectoral ministries. For example, data from the Ministry of Education and Science should align with the data from the State Statistical Committee.
6. Invest and support independent data generation, which can involve supporting research to supplement official data, including through national research institutions that have the relevant capacity for such work.
7. Define the mechanisms for implementing an inclusive approach to education for all in the regulatory and legislative acts and monitor the compliance with the requirements and regulations on the condition of the infrastructure of preschool and general education institutions, which should be accessible to learners with disabilities.