



**THE REFORM OF  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN**

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# THE REFORM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

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## FOREWORD

This report presents an analysis of vocational education and training (VET) in Tajikistan. It places the issue of skills development in a wider historical and institutional context and uses experiences from EU countries and other transition countries as a point of reference. The report's main assumption is that a modern public VET system is a necessary condition for transforming a society currently characterised by high levels of poverty, migration and social and economic inequality into one that has a sustainable future of sound economic development and social cohesion. Obviously, a functioning VET system on its own is not sufficient to achieve this, and more is needed. Based on an analysis of the current situation in VET, a broad concept for reform will be developed in this report. The concept takes into account the current challenges faced by the VET system in terms of the social, economic and political situation in Tajikistan. Based on a review of its principal characteristics, mostly inherited from the times when Tajikistan was part of the Soviet Union, a future perspective for VET will be presented. This perspective builds on past achievements and looks at lessons from elsewhere, but goes beyond an attempt merely to preserve or revive what existed before. VET in Tajikistan not only needs more funds for the modernisation of contents, equipment, materials and delivery. It also needs structural changes in the way it is organised and even more far-reaching systemic reform of its overall institutional set-up.

The context for reform of VET in Tajikistan is a complex one, politically, economically and socially. This complexity is the result of an institutional legacy inherited from an economic and political system that was

built around different principles, a system which had not been modernised since the early 1980s and which led the country into a disastrous civil war that brought destruction and human suffering. The situation is further compounded by the fact that the neighbouring region has, once again, become a playground for the economic and security interests of the world powers. In contrast to most other countries in Central Asia, Tajikistan is heavily dependent on external assistance to enable it to recover from the past and prepare itself for a sustainable future. Such assistance is currently provided from a number of sources, implying different approaches to economic and social development. The different sources of external assistance also seek to define various policy agendas, directly and indirectly, including the possible place and role of VET. It will be a great challenge for those responsible for developing and reforming the VET system to make good use of the international experience available for developing and implementing a national policy that fits the context of the country, to find support and commitment from the main stakeholders and to secure a sustainable future.

Following a brief outline of Tajikistan's history, the first chapter will summarise the key developments that have contributed to creating the situation, unique in many respects, in which Tajikistan finds itself at the beginning of the 21st century. Against this background, the main features of the existing VET system will be described in the second chapter. In the third chapter a number of features of the overall social and economic context that create the environment for current policy development for VET reform will be set out. A critical analysis, guided by benchmarks taken from

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international policy debates, in particular from EU and transition countries, will identify a number of key issues for policymakers to take into consideration. A final chapter will elaborate on a scenario for VET reform based on policy principles adhered to by EU Member States, and suggest how current and future EU assistance, including that of the ETF, might be used to assist in the further reform of VET in Tajikistan. The summary chapter at the beginning of the report presents the main findings without the detailed descriptions and analyses that are contained in the chapters that follow.

This report is the result of many lengthy discussions between the authors, who are involved in VET policy reform discussions in Tajikistan in different roles. Many discussions were also held with others, including national stakeholders at all levels and international consultants working in the country. One of the authors is in fact politically responsible for developing and implementing the reform. It is fair to say that in the course of these discussions, all participants learned a great deal from one

another in terms of understanding the challenges faced by VET in Tajikistan. A better understanding was also gained of the obstacles and perhaps even some of the opportunities involved in making progress with reform. It is also fair to say that none of the participants has the full answers as to how these challenges can be faced, though an overall direction has become increasingly clear. Discussions will have to continue, initiatives for change be tried out and experiences shared. In particular, it will be important for many more of the people who are – or who should be – involved in VET (in the government, among the social partners, both nationally and locally, and – perhaps above all – teachers and trainers in schools) to become engaged in these discussions. Any reform initiative needs to be based on the experience, insights and readiness of the people who will ultimately have to make it work. Outsiders can assist in providing access to experience from elsewhere, and that can perhaps guide policy development by showing that things can be done differently. This report is a small contribution to that process.

## SUMMARY

Tajikistan is a poor country. It was poor before it declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and poverty levels have shown a further dramatic increase following the gradual collapse and disintegration of the Soviet economy and as a result of the destruction caused by the civil war that devastated the country during the early and mid 1990s. The large state-owned industrial and agricultural companies either have closed down or are working at a fraction of their former production capacities. Most have not seen any investment in modernisation since the early 1980s and many were destroyed or looted during the civil war. Many suffer from high levels of debt and are often unable to pay even regular wages. With the loss of former Soviet subsidies, the state budget has been unable to keep up basic social sector expenditures. Public sector employees, especially civil servants, medical staff and teachers, are receiving such low salaries that many are forced to seek additional sources of income. People who are dependent on pensions and welfare payments are even worse off. Subsistence farming and informal sector activities, including the drug trade, have mushroomed. Large numbers of Tajiks have to work abroad. A series of natural disasters, including floods and bad harvests, together with the overspill from the war in Afghanistan, have added additional misery to the country and its people. There is also a need to care for returning Tajik refugees.

Since the end of the 1990s the economy has shown signs of recovery, though it remains fragile, with its dependence on informal sectors, subsistence agriculture and remittances remaining at a high level. Moreover, in this process, as so often before in its history, Tajikistan has become

highly dependent on assistance from other countries for its social and economic development, and to a greater extent than any other country in the region. In fact during most of the 1990s the country was left almost completely on its own as the civil war put a stop on international cooperation and aid programmes. It is only in recent years that the emergency food aid programmes have been followed up with development assistance, and only during 2004 that major foreign investments have been announced, largely by Russian companies trying to pick up investment projects left over from Soviet times. Tajikistan does not have the rich oil and gas supplies that are present in neighbouring countries, and although it has other energy resources, such as hydropower, capital investments were frozen in the mid 1980s and the energy sector has never been fully developed. A large part of its existing industrial (mining, aluminium and textile production) and agricultural (cotton) infrastructure is the result of Soviet economic policies rather than local entrepreneurial initiatives. Tajikistan does not have the means to capitalise on its natural resources, nor is it able to finance the modernisation and diversification of its hugely outdated and one-sided industrial and agricultural infrastructure.

The nature of the economy is rapidly changing as individuals, companies and communities are developing alternative income-generating opportunities, but Tajikistan is also facing problems relating to its institutions and human resources. Its economic, political and social institutions, including education and training, are largely those that were inherited from the Soviet Union, and still need considerable reform to enable economic and social

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development to take place under the new conditions. The demographic composition of the country's population and the qualification structure of its labour force have changed dramatically because of the civil war and migration. Most of the Russian-born administrative, managerial and technical staff left the country during or after the civil war. The qualification gaps created by their departure are still being felt, especially in industry and agriculture. Qualifications in administration, education and health, traditionally the sectors in which better educated Tajiks have found employment, have become outdated. This is also the case for the qualifications of workers at the lower levels of the qualification scale in industry, services and agriculture.

Furthermore, the lack of jobs, especially in rural areas, has forced a large number of Tajiks, among them some of the most able, to earn their living outside Tajikistan, mainly in other countries of the former Soviet Union. Most migrant Tajik workers work far below their formal qualification levels and in insecure and unsafe working conditions. While remittances have become an important source of income for many families, and indeed for the economy as a whole, high levels of migrant labour are creating additional economic dependency and social hardship. Rising birth levels are increasing the younger cohorts for whom education and employment must be secured in the near future. Reducing poverty levels, developing local capacities and institutions, improving qualifications and competences of the domestic labour force, securing economic and social development, and creating the kind of political stability that will allow these to happen are the formidable challenges that are currently faced by Tajik society. Other transition countries are facing similar issues, but Tajikistan's point of departure in the early 1990s was – and its current situation still is – much worse than in most other countries.

Experience from developed market economies and transition countries shows that a well-functioning VET system is crucial for economic development and social cohesion. Without a well-educated and qualified labour force that covers the

different qualification types and levels required by the employment system in a balanced way, no country can secure prosperity and decent standards of welfare and well-being for its people. The availability of a stratum of workers with mid-level qualifications, including skilled workers, technicians and mid-level professionals, is key to economic and social development. This understanding is a cornerstone of employment, education and social policies in EU Member States and of their cooperation with and assistance to third countries. It is on this issue that Tajikistan is currently faced with a major challenge, given both its loss of this stratum in the course of the recent migration waves and the dreadful state of its VET system.

The challenge is a complex one. In Tajikistan, VET no longer produces relevant qualifications for a skilled and competent workforce. Nor is it seen by young people and their families as an educational option that provides preparation for a favourable occupational future. It has become an instrument of social protection for children from poor families. This situation is the result of a longer process that has been aggravated and further complicated by the more recent independence, transition and civil conflict. However, the situation is made even more complex by the fact that many mid-level skilled worker, technician and managerial positions in crafts, industry and agriculture were previously occupied by 'Europeans' of Russian, Ukrainian or German descent. Most of these left the country in the exodus that occurred during and after the civil war, leaving this backbone of the employment system largely vacant, as Tajiks have not been able to fill the gap. It is estimated that 70–80% of the qualified workforce in the non-agricultural sector left the country in the first wave of migration. Thus, the present situation is not simply a matter of a non-functioning VET system: there are more complex issues at stake. It also results from longer historical and cultural developments that have influenced educational and occupational preferences of the urban and rural populations in Tajikistan and that will not be easy to change in the short term.

Vocational schools already had a poor image during Soviet times. They did not provide any educational or occupational career perspectives, and prepared students for simple jobs in industry and agriculture. The low status of vocational schools has been further aggravated by a gradual decrease in quality, resulting from underinvestment and lack of technological and curricular modernisation during the 1980s. These developments paralleled a similar decline in the quality of work and career prospects in the companies for which the system was preparing the labour force. Vocational schools, in contrast to their high status and impact during the sixties and seventies, have gradually become a last resort, both for students to learn and for teachers to teach. Over a longer period the VET system has thus gone into a vicious cycle of mutually reinforcing decreases in quality and status from which it has so far been unable to recover. Increasingly, able students choose other educational alternatives, and students who enter vocational schools do so for other reasons than achieving an occupational qualification.

In Tajikistan the main attraction of the basic vocational schools at the start of the 21st century has become the provision of free meals and shelter for children from poor families who cannot afford to send their offspring to other types of school. The social protection function of the vocational school system has become even more important because of the collapse of other social welfare institutions, in a context in which poverty among the population has dramatically increased. Authorities are therefore not inclined to let this social protection mechanism also slip away. However, the social protection role currently played by vocational schools has all the characteristics of temporary emergency aid.

Despite its increasing focus on social welfare functions, the VET system in its current form falls short of being an effective instrument for sustained poverty alleviation, as a result of how it is organised and what it provides. It does not deliver the kind of knowledge, skills and competences that would enable its students to find or create

gainful and decent employment. The VET system has not yet been able to respond properly to new and emerging knowledge and skill needs. Indeed, companies that have jobs to offer have become increasingly dissatisfied with the skills, knowledge and competences that vocational school graduates possess, and are unwilling to employ and retrain them. Given the high levels of unemployment among graduates from other types of schools, employers have sufficient choice in any case. This has become critical in a situation where most, if not all, of the jobs formerly provided by large state-owned industrial and agricultural enterprises, for which vocational schools still prepare students, have disappeared. Young graduates and adults with traditional vocational qualifications such as those provided by basic vocational schools find it difficult to find or keep employment. If they obtain employment, they are among the lowest paid.

In a situation where the government has to review its public expenditure, the inefficient and ineffective VET system has become an easy target for budget cuts. Giving up a publicly financed VET system also fits in with the economic and educational policies favoured by the international financial institutions up to now. For the moment, however, there is still considerable political support in Tajikistan for maintaining a public VET system. The key issue is not so much to end the social welfare role of vocational schools but to improve their qualifying role.

Although there are many possibilities for increasing the cost efficiency of the VET system, serious investment will still be needed for the modernisation of infrastructures, the payment of decent salaries to staff and the setting up of support systems that have not existed previously, for governance, administration and innovation. While it is not realistic to expect that, following privatisation, individual companies will once again be able to support or sponsor individual schools, some form of cost sharing between the public and private sectors should still be possible. However, the inability of vocational schools to provide

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relevant competences is only partly the result of lack of funding, and it will therefore not be enough to secure financial budgets to merely restore and update the system, as it once existed.

The main obstacle is a systemic one. The transition to a market economy, combined with the introduction of free educational choice for students, has created such fundamental changes in the VET environment that a simple revival of the former system without changing its basic characteristics will be doomed to failure. Companies now decide themselves who to 'hire and fire' according to their own needs. Private enterprises have to work with fixed budgets that cannot be renegotiated with ministries, and therefore have to be conscious of the costs of production. Students – at least those that can afford to do so – have more opportunities to escape from schools that prepare individuals for low-paid and low-status jobs. A policy aimed at modernising an institutional set-up that was already outdated as a result of many years of neglect and underinvestment, that became further impoverished during the years of civil conflict and that no longer responds to a fundamentally changed environment, will only aggravate Tajikistan's economic and social problems. In order to fulfil its potential contribution to economic and social development, Tajikistan's VET system requires modernisation, structural change and systemic reform. There is, of course, no clear blueprint available to show exactly what the VET system should look like in order to suit Tajikistan's social and economic needs. However, some of the parameters that policymakers and other stakeholders must take into account when reforming the system are clear, thanks to the experiences of other transition countries.

Modern VET institutions should be able to identify and flexibly respond to skill development needs and to provide the learning environments in which the workers of today and tomorrow can acquire the competences they need for employability. Tajik VET institutions are not currently able to do this. However, neither is there a developed private sector that can provide

sufficiently clear signals about the nature of skill needs. Moreover, national ministries and agencies are no longer able to determine the future knowledge and skill needs in full detail. Clear signals for VET will therefore remain the exception rather than the rule. However, this is the case not only in Tajikistan, and some lessons can be learned from experiences elsewhere.

One of the key lessons learned by countries seeking to cope with high levels of labour market uncertainty is that VET should not be too immediately responsive to short-term labour market needs but should instead provide broad qualifications that offer a basis for further specialisation and future development. A second major lesson is that VET should be responsive not only to enterprises and their qualification needs but also to the – often not well formulated – learning needs of people seeking to find or develop work opportunities. VET is after all about educating and training people so that they are able to determine their own occupational future, and not just about producing qualified labour to satisfy the demand of enterprises. In the overall context of uncertainty, schools need to provide students with the competences to master and cope with insecurity. This goes beyond the mere transfer of knowledge and skills.

In an uncertain economic and high-risk social environment, VET institutions can no longer afford to stick to the kind of vocational knowledge and skills they have always presented, in particular when these have already been obsolete for a long time. Therefore, if neither enterprises nor potential students are able to define their qualification needs, vocational schools must be capable of communicating with the students and enterprises in their own community in order to help them to identify their qualification needs and to develop programmes to serve these needs. Such a proactive approach calls for high levels of flexibility and professionalism. Schools should have the autonomy to take on this responsibility. However, individual schools cannot be expected to carry this out on their own. The main responsibility of schools is, and remains, the development of knowledge and skills and the

organisation of learning processes that enable individuals to achieve the learning outcomes that they are expected to reach. This is what teachers, trainers and managers of school organisations are responsible and accountable for. Other education and training professionals in the system need to support them by developing flexible and high-quality responses to training needs so that schools can concentrate on what they should be doing most.

This implies – and this is another important lesson that has been learned – that there is an overall national VET policy, agreed among principal stakeholders, including the social partners. Such an overall policy should provide clear frameworks, guarantee transparent governance and efficient administration, provide equal access, set priorities and criteria for funding, define responsibilities for achieving objectives, develop overall quality schemes and maintain quality assurance mechanisms, ensure the availability of high-quality facilities and professional teaching staff, enable continuous innovation to take place, and facilitate international cooperation and exchange. Such a national VET policy, and the institutional set-up that is needed for its implementation, must also be integrated with policies in other related domains, in particular in economic development, employment, education and social protection. This should ensure that VET institutions are in contact with other institutions that are relevant for social and economic development. A proper balance

between responsibilities at national and lower levels must therefore also be established.

The context for VET reform in Tajikistan is a complex one, politically, economically and socially. This complexity is the result of an institutional legacy inherited from an economic and political system that no longer exists, which missed out on necessary modernisation a long time ago and which led the country into a disastrous civil war that brought further destruction and human suffering. The situation is further compounded by the fact that the larger region has, once again, become a playground for divergent economic and security interests of the major regional and world powers. In order to prepare itself for a sustainable future Tajikistan, in contrast to most of the other countries in the region, cannot yet rely on its own natural and human resources and remains heavily dependent on external assistance. Such assistance is currently provided from a number of sources, implying different approaches towards development, including different views concerning the role of VET. The various sources of external assistance also seek to define different policy agendas, both directly and indirectly. It will be a great challenge for those who are responsible for the reform of the VET system to make good use of the international policy experience available for developing and implementing policies that fit the context of the country, to find support and commitment from the main stakeholders, and to secure a sustainable future.



# 1. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

# 1

## 1.1 A BRIEF HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

The Republic of Tajikistan – landlocked within its borders with Uzbekistan in the west, Kyrgyzstan in the north, China in the east and Afghanistan in the south – is a small, multi-ethnic country of some 150,000 sq km and with around 6.5 million inhabitants. Currently around 80% of its population are Tajik, with 15% of Uzbek origin and the remainder belonging to other ethnic groups, including a small number of Russians (1.1%)<sup>2</sup>. Large numbers of ethnic Tajiks live in southern Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan, while the Ferghana valley in the north of Tajikistan is largely the home of ethnic Uzbeks. Much of the east of the country is covered by the Pamir Mountains, which host the independent region of Gorno Badakshan (GBO); this region is populated mainly by around 200,000 Shiite Muslims of Ismaili

denomination, who have an ethnic and religious background different from the majority of the population. Three-quarters of Tajikistan's population live in rural areas, mainly in the Sughd region in the north and the Khatlon region in the south-west. The two largest towns are Dushanbe, the capital (650,000 inhabitants), and Khujand (165,000 inhabitants) in the Sughd region. Only 7% of the territory is arable land, the rest being mountainous.

Although the Persian-descended Tajiks are now a minority in a predominantly Turkic region, they are Central Asia's oldest inhabitants, having arrived long before Alexander the Great reached the region in 330 BC<sup>3</sup>. The Arabs introduced Islam to the area in the 7th century AD. Bukhara and Samarkand, now in Uzbekistan, were ruled by Persians when these cities were the cultural and scientific centres of the Islamic

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of historical developments up to the present day see Soucek (2000) and Meyer (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, Dushanbe, 2002. The ethnic composition of the country has changed considerably since the early 1990s as a result of migration.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander the Great reached as far as Tajikistan on his conquering route from Macedonia through Mesopotamia, on his way to Samarkand after crossing the Oxus and before founding the town of Alexandria Eschate near today's Khujand in north Tajikistan. He married a Bactrian princess named Roxana.

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world in the 9th and 10th centuries, until they were captured (and destroyed) by Turkish and Mongol invaders during the centuries that followed. It was Tamerlane (Timur), born in the area of Samarkand, who at the end of the 14th century brought this town to its ultimate glory, mainly by bringing in the riches and artists that he captured from elsewhere. Until the beginning of the 19th century Central Asia was at the crossroads of the silk route, linking Europe and Asia intellectually, economically and politically. But as before, it was the playing field of the world powers of the time, in particular the Russians and the British. By the end of the 19th century Central Asia was firmly in the hands of the Russian Empire.

After the Revolution of 1917 the Bolshevik army quickly destroyed the hopes of both the old despots and new nationalist Muslim reformers in the region that they could go their own way. After crushing several national, Islamic and democratic revolts in various parts of the region, Soviet Communist party leaders created Soviet republics, to be governed and administered under Moscow's control by local Communist party officials, and subsequently integrated these republics firmly into the centralised economic and political structures of the Soviet Union. Tajikistan first became part of the Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic (1918), then in 1924 became an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, a satellite of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1929 it received full republican status. In drawing the borders the Soviets kept more than 700,000 Tajiks who lived in Bukhara and Samarkand outside Tajikistan, though many Uzbeks were included from the Ferghana Valley. The tensions that were thus created between the different countries in the region have continued into the 21st century. Early aspirations for an Islamic-based republic were not realised, but continued to exist in Tajikistan with a resurgence of Islamic political activity in the mid 1970s in the south of the country, partly in response to the war in Afghanistan. As elsewhere in the region,

Islam became a vehicle for nationalism, especially among the impoverished sections of the population. But in Tajikistan it has been possible, following the end of the civil war in 1996, to preserve a relatively peaceful situation between the (Sunni and Shiite) Muslim and non-Muslim populations.

It is clear that the country in many respects benefited from being part of the Russian and later Soviet Empire, and the Tajik population recognises this. As in other Soviet republics, modern transport and communication infrastructures were set up, and basic health, education and other social services became available to the great majority of the population. A national, largely urban, intelligentsia has profited from the development of an education system that guaranteed universal access to basic education, in both the Russian and Tajik languages and – selectively – provided higher education opportunities for an increasing number of people (in particular to satisfy the increasing need for teaching staff and health workers). The education system gave the vast majority of people entry to vocational and professional education at basic, secondary and post-secondary levels. However, outside the urban centres and the large agricultural complexes in the countryside, access to education was more limited. The education system was well integrated into the overall Soviet system, which on the one hand implied that the main decisions and resources came from the centre in Moscow, but on the other hand allowed at all levels a range of international exchanges and cooperation with education institutions in all other republics, both for students and for teaching staff. As was the case with the employment system, it was the disintegration of the Soviet education system following its own gradual impoverishment and failed modernisation that is now creating such a tremendous challenge for national authorities. They are facing the task of rebuilding a modern national VET system on the remnants of the larger and centralised Soviet system.

## 1.2 TAJIKISTAN TODAY

### Political and economic heritage

Present-day Tajikistan is politically and economically mainly the product of Tsarist Russian and – later – Communist Soviet quasi-colonial policies in Central Asia that date back to the mid 18th century. Russia's main economic interest in Central Asia was to have a reliable supplier of raw materials, in particular cotton, and a market for its own industrial and agricultural products. It sought to secure this by colonising the new lands by the military and rural settlers as well as re-urbanising existing towns with artisans, traders and other entrepreneurs from the European parts of the Empire. Russia initially capitalised in particular on the traditional cotton and silk production of the Ferghana valley. With a view to becoming independent from world markets (in particular following export problems in the US during the civil war) it expanded and intensified cotton growth to the whole region, replacing other previously existing types of agricultural production (including cereals and cattle), and thus created an extreme monoculture which in turn caused local dependency on Russia's food exports. Because of the large amounts of water that are needed for cotton production, this has also created long-term ecological problems.

Soviet-led mass industrialisation arrived in Tajikistan only during and after World War II, when the Soviets sought to relocate Russia's own industrial infrastructure to its more distant republics in an attempt to save production capacities from war damage. Industrialisation in Tajikistan developed in line with an overall centralised planned economy that was based on the principle of mutual economic dependency, and became part of the internal division of labour within the Soviet Union. Soviet economic policy did not envisage individual republics developing indigenous industrial strength. Tajikistan, for example, developed aluminium production but had to import bauxite and

export semi-products. Most of the cotton grown in Tajikistan was exported to other republics. The Soviets had already introduced nationalisation and collectivisation of agriculture, including the forced and large-scale development of cotton growth. The expansion of cotton production in Tajikistan during the Soviet years also led to the forced migration of farmers from the Pamir Mountains to the cotton fields in the south-west of the country. Investments in the country's main energy source, hydropower, which became of strategic interest after the oil crisis of the 1970s, came to a halt in the mid 1980s, when the Soviet Union gradually ran into an economic crisis. Thus, the fate of the Tajiks at the start of the 21st century is coloured not only by its political heritage but also by its industrial and agricultural economic inheritance.

### High poverty levels

Even during the Soviet times, Tajikistan was the poorest and economically least developed country of all the Soviet republics. Its per capita income was the lowest and the percentage of its population living in poverty was one of the highest<sup>4</sup>. In 1989 the mean income per capita was less than half that of Russia; in 2002 the gross national income (GNI) per capita was less than \$200<sup>5</sup>. The country's economy gradually declined with the deterioration of the overall Soviet economy that began in the 1970s, in both economic and technological terms. Major investment projects that had been started in the early 1980s were discontinued because of a lack of funding from Moscow. Following its independence, Tajikistan also lost the budget transfers it had previously received from Moscow, which used to make up 40% of the republic's budget<sup>6</sup>.

Since declaring its independence in 1991 Tajikistan has experienced dramatic changes that have had serious consequences for the economic and social situation of its population. In 2004 Tajikistan remained the poorest country in

4 Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (2002), p.10.

5 World Bank (2004), p.1.

6 Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (2002), p.10.

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the Central Asian region<sup>7</sup>. It ranked 103rd among 174 states in terms of the human development index, and nearly two-thirds of its population lived below the poverty line<sup>8</sup>. However, the situation in 2004 was already considerably better than in 1999, especially in rural areas. These areas nevertheless remain characterised by higher levels of extreme poverty<sup>9</sup>.

### **Growing inequality and decreasing quality of education and social services**

Grants from Moscow had helped to develop and finance the education, health and welfare sectors. Tajikistan had full basic literacy levels until the end of the 1980s. However, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, budget transfers had been insufficient to cover modernisation needs since the beginning of the 1980s. Since 1991, without these transfers from Moscow – which in any case tended to cover only salary costs and a portion of running costs – it has proved impossible to maintain expenditure levels in education, health and social care. Maintenance and repairs, not to mention innovation and improvement of the social sector infrastructure, had already suffered over a long period of time before the final collapse of the Soviet Union. Access and overall quality deteriorated further following independence. Informal payments for educational services (access and diplomas) are once again widespread, though they had almost been eradicated during the 1980s. These developments have hit poor people in particular. Attendance and literacy levels have fallen, especially among girls in rural and mountainous areas.

### **Obsolete infrastructures and lost lives**

Tajikistan's economic and public infrastructure had already suffered from a lack of maintenance and modernisation during much of the 1980s. The country had to endure additional suffering on top of

these problems. Tajikistan was the only former Soviet republic in which the struggle for power following the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a protracted civil war among the various competing regional, political and religious groups in the country. Between 1994 and 1997, when a national conciliation and peace treaty was finally signed with assistance from the international community, Tajikistan not only suffered physical damage to large parts of its infrastructure (including destroyed and looted factories, schools and residential buildings). It also lost more than 50,000 lives, saw 600,000 people injured, had more than 26,000 widows whose families had lost their main breadwinner, and seen the entire younger generation traumatised by the war experience. There were also thousands of former combatants to be reintegrated into society and some 200,000 returning refugees who had fled the country during the war. Drought and a series of bad harvests caused additional suffering. Moreover, international aid had been suspended, except for emergency food aid, for most of the 1990s, and the donor community only returned at the beginning of the new millennium. Refugees of Tajik origin fleeing the war in Afghanistan were also seeking shelter in the country.

### **Economic disintegration and high unemployment**

In the course of the forced introduction of a market economy, the large state-owned companies in industry and agriculture, which previously employed the vast majority of Tajikistan's labour force, collapsed. Economic ties between Tajikistan and other former Soviet republics broke down, and complex supply and barter relations between companies in different republics came to an abrupt end. Many companies were either destroyed or ceased to operate during and following the years of civil conflict. Large numbers of

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<sup>7</sup> World Bank, *Tajikistan Poverty Assessment Update. Main Report, Europe and Central Asia Region*, Human Development Sector Unit, World Bank, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> The Human Development Index is a comparative measure of poverty, literacy, education and life expectancy. In 2003, 64% lived on less than \$2.15 per day, the highest rate of poverty in Europe and Central Asia, (World Bank, 2004, p.1).

<sup>9</sup> Extreme poverty is measured in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of less than \$1.08 per day. World Bank (2004), p.3–5.

Tajikistan's management and technical staff, many of whom were of Russian origin, left the country for good during the first wave of migration in the early 1990s<sup>10</sup>.

The Zarya Vostoka enterprise in Taboshar and Vostokredmet in Chkalovsk used to be Tajikistan's largest industrial enterprises, producing uranium and other necessary and essential components for Soviet nuclear weapons. The towns of Chkalovsk and Taboshar were managed and supplied by Moscow, and their populations consisted mainly of Russians. However, production in these enterprises declined and some units even stopped operating all together following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disruption of economic ties. A Tajik–US phosphorite-producing venture was set up in 2003 on the basis of Chkalovsk's Vostokredmet enterprise in 2003. There are also metallurgy and ore processing enterprises in the towns of Adrasmon, Konsoy, Choruqdarron and Oltin Topkan. However, production also declined in these towns following the collapse of the Soviet Union and substantial investment is needed to revive them. Moreover, there are several hydroelectric power plants whose construction or modernisation has been halted since the 1980s.

For further details see the Eurasianet website at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav102804.shtml>

Despite the privatisation of some industries and services, and the introduction of land reform allowing small private farming, the

private sector is developing only slowly outside agriculture, and has by no means been able to make up for the employment losses of the former state companies. Large industrial and agricultural complexes remain state owned, but are so heavily indebted or in need of modernisation investment that they are difficult to privatise. Much of the privatisation, especially of farms in rural areas, has left large numbers of people without any property and hence without a source of income<sup>11</sup>. These developments have resulted in high levels of unemployment, widespread poverty, a growing informal subsistence-based economy, and high levels of internal and external labour migration. Corruption and drug trafficking have become an important source of income for large numbers of people<sup>12</sup>.

#### Migration and remittances

Migration has also been a key strategy for coping with poverty in recent years and appears to have played a major role in falling poverty rates since 1999. An estimated 632,000 Tajiks – over 16% of the working age population – work temporarily outside the country, mostly in construction, the oil and gas industries, motor vehicle and machinery manufacturing, the sale of fruits and vegetables, catering, agriculture, shuttle trade and small-scale trade and markets in the Russian Federation<sup>13</sup>. This second wave of migration dates from the end of the 1990s and continues to the present day.

About half of all migrants send money in the form of remittances to their families back home. The total amount of these remittances was estimated in 2002 to be between USD 200 million and USD 230 million, around two-thirds of the national budget<sup>14</sup>. Labour migration is so important for the Tajik economy that the government is actually basing many of its social, employment and training policies on

<sup>10</sup> Umarov and Rebkin (2003) estimate that 70–80% of the qualified workforce has left the country.

<sup>11</sup> Gomart (2003).

<sup>12</sup> One estimate suggests that over a third of Tajikistan's economic activity may be associated with drug trafficking, (World Bank, 2004, p. 9).

<sup>13</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Labour Migration from Tajikistan*, 2003. The population considered to be of working age in Tajikistan are those aged 15–63 years.

<sup>14</sup> Op.cit.

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attempts to sustain high levels of migration, while simultaneously seeking to improve the labour market situation of its workers abroad.

Internal migration within the country was also important in the period 1999 – 2003. In the same period Tajikistan's population grew by 10%, though there were large regional differences. The population in regions with the highest poverty levels (Khatlon in the south and GBAO in the Pamir Mountains) remained constant, while the number of inhabitants increased in richer regions, including the capital, Dushanbe, the agricultural Regions of Republican Subordination (RRS) in the centre, and Sugd in the north<sup>15</sup>. This indicates a massive movement from rural areas into the cities. In Dushanbe most of the apartments and housing areas left by

Russian and other migrants have been taken over by families from the countryside, changing radically the demographic and cultural structure of the town. Internal migration, together with the departure of large numbers of people from the urban industrial labour force, has resulted in an increasing 'ruralisation' of Tajik society.

### 1.3 TAJIKISTAN'S FUTURE

#### Shifting alliances and open policy options

Following independence, Tajikistan has had to rely heavily on international assistance to finance its public expenditure, which is also under strain because of the country's high level of foreign debt. In 2003, long-term debts

In October 2004 Tajikistan and the Russian Federation signed an agreement on military and economic cooperation that includes the establishment of Russian military bases in the country, a 49-year lease on an anti-missile warning system at Nurek, the writing off of almost all debts, and the promise of considerable Russian investments.

In addition to the debt relief provided for in the Nurek agreement, Tajikistan will also receive a USD 250 million investment in the Sangtuda hydroelectric station from Russian energy company Unified Energy System (UES). Sangtuda had already secured up to USD 200 million in investment from Iran. In exchange for granting control of Nurek to Russia, Tajikistan will have USD 240 million of the USD 300 million debt it owes to Moscow written off. In return for giving Russia a stake in the 670-megawatt station at Sangtuda, Tajikistan will have an additional USD 50 million of its debt to Russia cleared. Construction began in 1987, but stalled with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The construction project, with an estimated cost of between USD 320 million and USD 550 million, is scheduled for completion by the end of 2008.

Another Tajik energy complex, the Rugun hydroelectric dam, located 110 kilometers to the south-east of Dushanbe, will receive USD 560 million from RusAl, one of the world's three biggest aluminium companies, to get the project, stalled since the 1980s, off the ground again. In addition to its Rugun investment, RusAl will also provide USD 600 million over the next five years for the construction of an aluminium smelter in southern Tajikistan. Overall, Russian private and state-owned companies are expected to invest up to USD 2 billion over the next five years in the Tajik economy. In a country with an estimated GDP of just under USD 7 billion for 2003, that could grant Russian firms a sizeable interest in the local economy. On the other hand, these investments will obviously contribute to considerable employment creation.

See the Eurasianet website for further details:  
<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav102804.shtml>

<sup>15</sup> World Bank (2004), p.9.

amounted to USD 985 million<sup>16</sup>, of which around USD 300 million was owed to the Russian Federation. Net foreign direct investments, so far mainly from Russian businesses, have been minimal (USD 9.5 million in 2001 and 31.6 million in 2003), however with an expected increase in the years to come due to foreign interests in hydro-power and aluminium. The government had an immediate need to borrow from the international financing institutions for its recurrent budget expenditure and to rely heavily on international donor aid for the modernisation of its economy. It is currently receiving the highest amount of EU assistance per capita in the region<sup>17</sup>. With the international loans, however, came the standard macroeconomic policy conditions – generally known as the Washington consensus – which aim to stabilise the national budget and reduce inflation<sup>18</sup>.

In 2004, Tajikistan again found itself in the position of being courted by the world powers and their geopolitical interests<sup>19</sup>. The current context is extremely complicated, with international security, ideological and religious hegemony, and economic (energy) interests at play from at least four major international stakeholders: Russia, the EU, the United States and China<sup>20</sup>. The policy options and policy messages that Tajikistan is receiving from

its international partners are contradictory, and it is difficult to say at this stage to what extent the present government is dedicated and committed to any particular policy advice, or whether –very pragmatically – it is simply following the ‘argument of the purse’. Political, economic and ideological alliances are continuously shifting, and it is not easy to predict what the implications of this situation will be for policymaking in the field of education and training<sup>21</sup>.

### Poverty Reduction Strategy as the framework for international assistance

In 2002 the government agreed on a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) which was prepared by a Presidential Working Group with assistance from the IMF and the World Bank<sup>22</sup>. The PRSP forms the overall policy framework for international financial assistance and defines four priority areas for reducing poverty:

- encouragement of accelerated, socially fair and labour-intensive economic growth, with the emphasis on export;
- efficient and fair provision of basic social services;
- targeted support to the poorest groups in the population;
- efficient governance and improved security.

16 Asian Development Bank (2006)

17 From 1992 to 2000 the EU provided more than €350 million to Tajikistan, most of it in the form of grants. On 11 October 2004 the EU and the Tajik government signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the final one to be negotiated with a CIS partner country. The PCA provides for a significant strengthening of relations between the EU and the country concerned. At the same time, an Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-related matters was signed. The EU is providing assistance through four instruments: humanitarian assistance through the Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), the Food Security Programme, exceptional macrofinancial aid and the Tacis programme. The Food Security Programme and Tacis were suspended in 1997 for security reasons, but were resumed in 2002. Tacis puts particular emphasis on poverty reduction, including community and rural development. It also gives priority to regional cooperation.

18 For a critical account of the government’s position vis-à-vis the international institutions and the internal tensions resulting from this, see Kurbanov (2004).

19 For an analysis of developments see Soucek (2000) and Meyer (2004).

20 Regional powers such as Iran and Turkey are also very active in the country.

21 The need for economic assistance appears to be driving Tajikistan’s diplomatic decisions. Most recently, this has been the case in relation to the Russian Federation, in response to a redefined Russian foreign policy in the region that includes an active military and economic presence backed up by investments and debt relief. According to Eurasianet, a key instrument in Russia’s efforts to restore its influence across the broader region may be the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO), which was established in 2002 as a regional free-trade vehicle among member states Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Frequent quarrelling among member states has so far frustrated attempts to promote free trade in Central Asia. At the organisation’s summit in Dushanbe on 18 October 2004, Russia joined the organisation, pledging to help address regional issues including hydropower, trade and the struggle to contain Islamic radicalism. See Footnote 14.

22 Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (2002), World Bank (2004).

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The agreed strategy includes giving attention to education, health, social protection, agriculture, privatisation, labour and private sector development, infrastructure and telecommunication, and environmental protection and tourism. As well as focusing on the adoption of appropriate policies and actions in these sectors, the strategy emphasises the need for effective macroeconomic management and efficient public administration<sup>23</sup>.

In order to be able to measure progress in the fight against poverty, the government has selected a number of poverty indicators and set itself specific quantitative targets to be achieved for each of these within a certain period. In the selection of

indicators, the government has adopted some of those that were established as part of the Millennium Development Goals<sup>24</sup> by the UN. Table 1 lists the indicators, the current situation in Tajikistan and the targets to be reached.

### VET and the Poverty Reduction Strategy

Although education is included as one of the priorities of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, it is mentioned in an even less ambitious formulation than in the related UN Millennium Goal and concerns mainly general education. There is considerable cause for concern, as the enrolment rates in primary and secondary education have fallen, especially among girls and children

**Table 1: Poverty Reduction Targets in Tajikistan<sup>25</sup>**

Indicator	2001	Mid-term target for 2006	Target for 2015*
Population living below poverty line (%)	83	75	60
Primary education coverage (%)	77.7	82	90
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live newborns (2000)	36.7	32	25
Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live newborns (2000)	43.1	40	35
Adult population with access to reproductive health services (%)	21.8	24	30
Share of private sector in GDP (%)	30	40	60
Population with access to clean drinking water (%)	51.2	58	80
Employment rate among able-bodied citizens (%)	56	59	65–70
Number of telephones per 100 residents	3.6	4	5

\*Year established by the UN as a target year for the Millennium Development Goals

<sup>23</sup> Questions have been raised from various sides concerning the lack of difference between the priorities and policy recommendations that now appear under the label of poverty reduction and those that were previously part of structural adjustment. These questions also concern the role of the financial institutions in defining the poverty reduction agenda, which is officially supposed to be a government-driven process. Countries are apparently reluctant to propose alternative approaches, as they know the limits in terms of the policies that international financial institutions are prepared to accept. Moreover, PRSPs remain heavily dependent on traditional liberal macroeconomic conditionality. Critics of such macroeconomic policies have long called for a social impact analysis. The recent initiative by the World Bank to undertake such an impact analysis has been met by new criticism that this should not be carried out by staff of the international institutions themselves. See among others Wilks and Lefrançois (2002). Indeed, an internal review of the Tajik PRSP jointly undertaken by the monitoring and assessment departments of the World Bank and the IMF comes to a similar conclusion. See International Monetary Fund and World Bank (2004). This review has not so far had any particular practical consequences.

<sup>24</sup> By 2015 all 191 UN member states have pledged to achieve eight development goals: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development.

<sup>25</sup> Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (2002), p.12.

from poor families, despite the right to compulsory basic education<sup>26</sup>. In 1999 there were fewer school places available in secondary education, despite the fact that the school-age population had increased by 12%<sup>27</sup>. The physical condition of school facilities had deteriorated as a result of insufficient maintenance and modernisation before 1991, and because of the destruction that occurred during the civil war and the lack of funds for subsequent reconstruction. Qualified teachers had left because of low salaries and poor working conditions, and curricula and teaching aids had not been modernised for more than 20 years. The government's own budget for education had fallen by almost 40% between 1990 and 2000<sup>28</sup>. Reversing these trends, especially in support of poor families, is one of the top priorities of the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

VET does not appear as such under the priority for education, although large numbers of young people, not only from poor families, are engaged in different levels and types of VET<sup>29</sup>. In the section on Objectives and Strategies for Poverty Reduction, under the heading Privatisation, Labour and Private Sector Development, it is stated that 'labour market policies will aim to create a more flexible labour market through training and retraining of workers, employment counselling and providing help in seeking jobs'<sup>30</sup>. In the section on Current Situation, Issues and Priorities for Poverty Reduction there is only one small paragraph under the Privatisation, Labour and Private Sector Development priority that refers to the deteriorating level of skills of the labour force, the main cause being identified as a lack of budgetary funds<sup>31</sup>.

Reform of VET is not mentioned at all as a priority for poverty reduction. The priorities for poverty reduction under the Privatisation heading are formulated as follows:

Expansion and growth in private sector activity and development of mechanisms to encourage employment and labour relationships will be one of the driving forces for reducing poverty. The government's primary task in encouraging private sector development and facilitate effective growth in employment (sic). This involves (a) development of the legislation and a regulatory framework concerning entry and exit of enterprises and the use of labour; (b) increasing competition through privatisation, with priority being given to privatisation in the agricultural sector; (c) measures to develop financial markets and the supply of credits; (d) development of mechanisms to effectively manage the labour market; and (e) establishment of labour relationships regulation institutions<sup>32</sup>.

Elsewhere in the PRSP, in the section in which measures are described, it is stated that 'reform of vocational education will involve a range of measures including rehabilitation of buildings and re-equipment of training facilities; revision of curricula to reflect international standards; and provision of targeted assistance to poor

<sup>26</sup> Enrolment rates in primary and basic education were virtually 100% at the time of independence. These rates have declined, and in 2003 were 98% in primary education and 94% in basic education. Non-enrolment was highest in urban areas, at 6% for boys and 18% for girls in basic education. Actual attendance levels were lower, at 88% in 2003 in primary and basic education combined (and 82% in Dushanbe) (World Bank, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Government of Tajikistan (2002), p.21.

<sup>28</sup> This fell from an already low figure of USD 5.8 per capita in 1990 to USD 3.7 in 2000 (Government of Tajikistan, 2002, p.22).

<sup>29</sup> In most EU countries, in fact, VET is considered an integral part of the education system.

<sup>30</sup> Government of Tajikistan (2002), p.15.

<sup>31</sup> Government of Tajikistan (2002), p.28.

<sup>32</sup> Government of Tajikistan (2002), p.29.

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students<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, under all other priorities, except the one concerning macroeconomic management and growth, the need to improve the skills and knowledge of people working in these sectors is mentioned. Skills development needs of these different sectors (public administration, social protection, education, health care, agriculture, infrastructure and communication, environmental protection and tourism) are apparently not seen as being covered by an overall VET system.

Tajikistan remains heavily dependent on international assistance to attain the targets that are set in the PRSP. The entire state budget in 2004 was USD 300 million; initial estimates put the cost of meeting the Millennium Development Goals on education, health and water alone at around USD 450 million annually through to 2015<sup>34</sup>. Until recently, no major external funds or assistance have been provided for VET<sup>35</sup>. In fact, the implicit message from the international financing institutions has so far been that Tajikistan can no longer afford to finance a VET system such as the one it had inherited<sup>36</sup>.

This report takes a different view. It argues neither for simply restoring the inherited VET system nor for destroying it. If local policymakers are convinced that they need a VET system, their views should be taken seriously. There is a history and an institutional heritage embodied in VET. The inherited system is impoverished, largely obsolete and without direct relevance to emerging labour market needs, and would

therefore need to be reformed and modernised. In order to support the development of a modern VET system it is possible to draw on the policy experiences of EU Member States in improving the competence levels of their populations, and also to take on board recent concerns within the international donor community about the need to pay more attention to (formal and informal) skills development for economic and social development<sup>37</sup>.

### Skills development and poverty reduction

One of the Millennium Goals is to achieve universal primary education, and PRSPs also give some attention to improving the access to and quality of education. The inclusion of education among the Millennium Goals is remarkable given that development funding for education and training decreased dramatically during the 1990s in the context of structural adjustment policies and liberalisation<sup>38</sup>. However, there is increasing concern that PRSPs do not provide appropriate frameworks to enable proper attention to be given to the importance of education and training for poverty reduction. One of the critical issues is the almost exclusive focus on basic literacy and primary education. Another is the insufficient attention given to employment issues in PRSPs<sup>39</sup>.

In recent debates there has been increasing support, among both donors and researchers, for broadening the

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<sup>33</sup> Government of Tajikistan (2002), p.43. The budget part of the PRSP, covering the period 2002–2006, anticipates that USD 1,404,000 (USD 1,389,000 of this from external sources) will be required to finance the planned measures. The indicators are: 30 school buildings repaired; 30 vocational education institutions equipped; 113 new curricula developed; 1,100 system specialists trained; package of normative documents for vocational education institutions introduced; programme of targeted training at vocational education institutions implemented. Op. cit. p.66.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations (2005).

<sup>35</sup> The first major support for VET reform came from the EU Tacis Programme.

<sup>36</sup> See among others World Bank (briefing note) (2004). The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, which has been responsible for the basic vocational school sector since 1996, has been engaged in lengthy discussions with the international financial institutions. Support for the Ministry's position has included a Presidential Decree in favour of maintaining a dedicated system of basic vocational education, while the international financial institutions have argued for closing it down. The government has realised that it needs a reform concept and strategy if it wishes to seek international assistance for the sector.

<sup>37</sup> See for an overview King and Palmer (2005).

<sup>38</sup> For a description of these trends see McGrath (2002).

<sup>39</sup> However, there are signs that Tajikistan will incorporate special reference to the need to reform the VET system in order that it can be used to reduce poverty, in the revised PRSP under discussion with the international lending institutions in early 2005.

concept of primary (or basic) education to include basic vocational education<sup>40</sup>. Basic literacy is not sufficient to guarantee that poor people will be able to find or develop a sustainable source of income through employment. The concept of basic education therefore needs to include basic skills and competences. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes is one of the six Dakar goals for achieving Education for All (EFA). UNESCO has introduced several initiatives to support the integration of a vocational skills training component in EFA National Action Plans. The ILO strategy for Decent Work recognises that a well-functioning system of education and training enhances both economic and social integration by offering opportunities to many groups who would otherwise be excluded from the labour market. The European Commission stresses the vital importance of training in reducing poverty and in development, and states that technical education and vocational training are necessary for the establishment of an education system that offers an alternative to students leaving the system who will ultimately provide a skilled workforce for the formal and informal sectors. Several bilateral donors, such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), are currently undertaking reviews of the links between basic education and skills development in development projects<sup>41</sup>.

The discussions on rethinking the role of education and training for poverty reduction have a parallel in policy and research debates on the importance of competences for economic development and social cohesion in developed countries, and in particular in EU Member States. Increasingly, the concept of competences has replaced more traditional notions such as knowledge and skills. Behind this shift in focus is a combination of a number of

developments: the changing nature of work in the employment system; new applied knowledge and broader skill requirements posed by change; and new insights from learning theories about how people learn and can make use of what they have learned<sup>42</sup>. It is widely understood that improving the contribution made by skills development to economic prosperity and social cohesion will imply considerable reforms in the existing VET systems.

These debates pose tremendous challenges for the reform of VET systems, in particular in countries such as Tajikistan which are now affected by high poverty levels, and which, though they have a long tradition of public VET, have seen their systems become obsolete and their infrastructures and capacities deteriorate during the transition period. The poverty reduction context provides an urgent policy framework for re-establishing the relevance of VET for both individual learners and the emerging employment system.

The macroeconomic context, particularly the severe limits on state budgets and administrative capacity, suggests that the potential for poverty reduction through economic growth lies, among other measures, in developing and utilising existing human resources more efficiently, and in setting appropriate conditions for development of skills in support of public and private employment initiatives at local level.

This report argues for assisting Tajikistan in developing a well-balanced education system in which the various levels (pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education), sectors (general, vocational, professional and academic) and target groups (young people and adults) receive support that does not lead to the oversupply or undersupply of graduates at various qualification levels. Neither an overemphasis on primary education nor one on higher education will serve Tajikistan well for its future social and economic development. EU experience shows that modern and flexible economies

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<sup>40</sup> See for the debate King and Palmer (2005)

<sup>41</sup> The ETF launched a project in 2005 in Central Asia on skills development for poverty reduction.

<sup>42</sup> See for an overview Grootings and Nielsen, ETF (2005)

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need a strong body of qualified labour at the middle level of the qualification range<sup>43</sup>. Only a well-functioning public VET system can guarantee the availability of such a strong stratum of workers with mid-level

qualifications in the labour force. Moreover, such mid-level qualified labour is needed in all sectors of the economy, and hence an overall VET policy needs to be developed<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> The qualification structure necessary for modern economies takes the shape of an onion rather than of an inverted pyramid.

<sup>44</sup> For a review of this discussion see Grootings, ETF (2004).

## 2. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN TAJIKISTAN

# 2

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the years following Tajikistan's independence, the VET system received little attention, either from the government or from the international donor community. In fact, on the government side there was a 'survival-only' strategy: existing facilities and teaching capacities were kept at a minimum operational level, and no resources were made available to improve capacities and adapt infrastructures to the realities of a changing society. As a result, VET has largely lost its immediate relevance for the employment system and its attractiveness for young people. In particular, the lower-level basic vocational schools have developed a reputation for providing welfare for children from poor families, rather than being places in which young people acquire knowledge and skills that are relevant for work. The public discussions concerning VET tend to refer only to these basic vocational schools,

whereas so-called technical education is generally considered to be part of secondary (specialised) education<sup>45</sup>.

Renewed interest in VET came about in 2002 with the preparation of the PRSP. Although the PRSP gave only marginal attention to VET as such, at least the issues of the knowledge and skills of the workforce were put on the policy agenda.

The basic features of the VET system will first be presented. This description paints a rather desperate picture of the current situation. However, before jumping to quick conclusions, it is important to understand how VET has reached such a hopeless situation. The current state of VET will be placed in a historical context. This will show that many of the present problems are not simply the result of neglect and destruction since the early 1990s, but go back to the years before independence and the civil war. It will also demonstrate that

<sup>45</sup> In this report we shall use a broader concept of VET to include all levels and all forms of VET, not only that which is provided by basic vocational schools.

the main problems are systemic in nature. The VET system in Tajikistan, as inherited from the Soviet times, collapsed together with the all-Soviet education and employment systems of which it was an integral part.

Basic vocational schools have particularly suffered in this respect, and the report will therefore give additional attention to these schools. While it is important to understand that some of the main roots of the present situation in VET are to be found in the breakdown of the broader institutional setting, a policy for reform should be equally embedded in a wider human resource development policy for social and economic development. A key issue in this context is to ensure that the education and training system as a whole is able to respond, flexibly and on a lifelong basis, to the learning aspirations of individuals and the training needs of the employment sector. Skills development, and in particular VET for the lower and middle level of qualifications that are needed in any economy (formal and informal), needs to have its proper and recognised place in an overall education and training system.

In the next section of this chapter it will be argued that the potential scope for VET is large in quantitative terms. However, although the VET system will still have to cater for relatively large numbers of people, the composition of its future clientele will be very heterogeneous. Students in VET increasingly have very different learning and skills development needs. This, taken together with the absence of clear signals for skills development from the formal and informal employment system, calls for considerable changes in the way VET is organised and in what it delivers. A brief description in the final section of the current VET reform policy initiatives indicates that there is a growing awareness of the nature of the problems, but that reform is still in its very early stages.

## 2.2 CURRENT SITUATION IN VET

### Structure of the education system in Tajikistan<sup>46</sup>

Since 1996 compulsory basic education in Tajikistan has covered grades 1–9 (lowered from 11 grades), including four years of primary education and five years of lower secondary education. Pupils enter grade 1 during the year in which they turn seven years of age, and leave compulsory education at the age of 16. At that age, school graduates have only gone through basic general education and have not yet achieved any vocational qualification. Those leaving the education system immediately following compulsory education therefore enter the labour market as unskilled workers. On the other hand, education legislation guarantees each student free access to any school at upper secondary (general or vocational) and – on a competitive base – technical (secondary specialised) and higher level, in order to achieve their first work-related qualification<sup>47</sup>.

Following completion of compulsory basic education the Tajik education system offers a number of different options, including general upper secondary, vocational and technical education, or combinations of these. These different types of programme are provided in different schools, though some schools integrate different types of programme<sup>48</sup>.

Following completion of general upper secondary education students can continue to either higher education, technical (secondary specialised) or vocational education. After technical education students can continue to higher education. Students can enter post-secondary and higher public schools free of charge on the basis of competition for limited places. They can also gain access on a fee-paying basis.

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<sup>46</sup> See Burnett and Temourov (2002).

<sup>47</sup> UNESCO (2000).

<sup>48</sup> Since independence, new types of school have been established, such as lyceums, gymnasiums and combined kindergarten-school complexes. Lyceums cover grades 6–11 and are specialised, usually in such subjects as economics and humanities. Gymnasiums cover grades 1–11 and have a more comprehensive curriculum with in-depth teaching in certain subjects; they are more academically oriented. Since 1994 the establishment of private schools at all levels has been permitted.

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The education system includes the following types and levels of schooling (see overleaf):

- Pre-schools
- General schools:
  - primary education grades 1–4;
  - lower secondary or basic education grades 5–9, after which a certificate of ‘incomplete secondary education’ is issued;
  - upper secondary education grades 10–11, after which a certificate of ‘complete secondary education’ is issued.
- Vocational schools (PTUs)<sup>49</sup>:
  - basic vocational education grades 10, or 10 and 11, after which a vocational qualification certificate is issued;
  - basic vocational education combined with complete secondary education grades 10–12, after which a certificate of ‘complete secondary education’ and of a vocational qualification is issued;
  - basic vocational education after secondary education covering grades 12, or 12 and 13, after which a vocational qualification certificate is issued.
- Technical colleges (specialised secondary schools)<sup>50</sup>:
  - secondary technical education combined with complete secondary education grades 10–13, after which a secondary professional education certificate is issued;
  - secondary technical education grades 12–13 after secondary general education, or grades 13–14 after initial vocational education, after which a secondary professional education certificate is issued.
- Higher education institutions:
  - junior specialist education of two years’ duration;

- four-year Bachelor’s degrees after secondary education, initial vocational education combined with complete secondary education, and after both types of technical education;
- two-year Master’s degrees after completing a Bachelor’s degree;
- PhD.

For school leavers who have achieved a vocational qualification without a complete secondary education, progression to higher levels of education is not possible.

Graduates with a certificate of complete secondary education can continue into either technical or higher education.

Graduates with a certificate of the one to two-year vocational programmes after finishing complete secondary general education can progress to higher levels of education, but only based on their secondary general education certificate: they would receive no transfer of credits from the vocational portion if they subsequently enrolled in, for example, technical education.

The vocational schools are therefore almost completely isolated within the overall education system, and effectively create dead-end educational pathways for their students. Graduates are expected to enter the labour market upon achieving their vocational certificates. In 2002, only around 4% of the graduates of vocational education continued in technical and higher education<sup>51</sup>. As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union there has been an initiative to link specialised secondary schools to higher education institutions<sup>52</sup>. This would further contribute to the widening of the gap between vocational schools and other types and levels of education.

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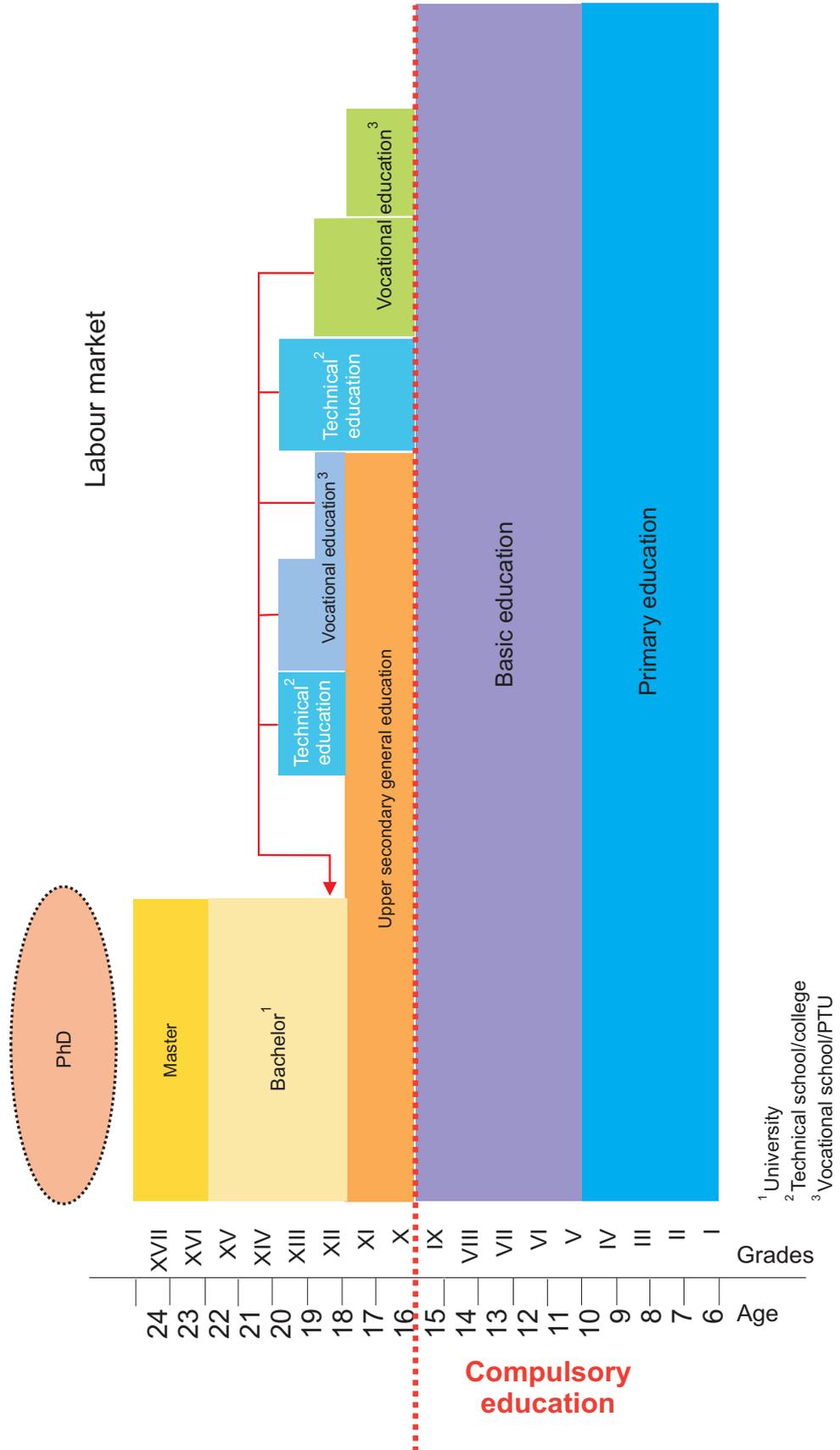
<sup>49</sup> The schools that provide basic vocational education are referred to in a number of different ways, such as basic vocational schools, initial vocational schools and vocational schools. The authors of this report will use the term ‘vocational school’.

<sup>50</sup> The schools that provide secondary specialised education/technical education are referred to in a number of different ways, such as technicum schools, secondary specialised schools, colleges and technical colleges. The authors of this report have opted for the term ‘technical colleges’.

<sup>51</sup> Information provided by MoLSP, March 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Decree 96 of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, State Education Standard of Higher Professional Education, February 23, 1996.

Diagram of the vocational education and training system in Tajikistan



 This diagram represents the first stage in the ongoing development of a standard graphical model for vocational education and training systems. Future refinement may include the further alignment of terms, student enrolment and dropout figures, and local language terms.

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### Vocational schools, technical colleges and other training centres

The provision of vocational and technical education is strictly institution-based, and is offered almost exclusively by schools from the public system. Vocational schools under the authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP) deliver vocational education for workers occupations, and the technical schools under the authority of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and a number of other line ministries deliver education for technician and specialist occupations. There is almost no cooperation between the ministries in charge – nor between individual schools – on such issues as optimising the use of the delivery networks through the sharing of facilities and staff, and reviewing curricula.

From a comparative view the classification of vocational and technical schools and qualifications used in Tajikistan, as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, is confusing, as they are all located at ISCED level 3, though they clearly prepare for rather distinct levels of qualification and types of occupation<sup>53</sup>. In reality, existing vocational and technical schools cover the range ISCED 2–4. As in all other former

Soviet countries, the Tajik education system defines two main types of vocational and technical schools.

- Basic vocational schools used to be attached to large industrial, service and agricultural enterprises, and since 1996 have been administered by the MoLSP. These schools train students for semi-skilled and skilled jobs in specific enterprises. They have traditionally been very skill-oriented, and also provided practical training, in either school or enterprise-based workshops. However, the guaranteed training partnership with large state-owned enterprises has been lost, and most schools have become detached from practical training opportunities. The delivery network of vocational schools has remained virtually unchanged since 1991. In the school year 2003/04 there were 71 vocational schools, three training centres under the employment services and nine business centres in mountainous areas, all delivering basic vocational training<sup>54</sup>. Of all the vocational schools, around 54 are agricultural schools in rural areas<sup>55</sup>. Vocational schools are relatively small, with on average 40 staff and around 350 registered students.

### ISCED Levels (International Standard Classification of Education):

ISCED level	Primary	Basic	Upper secondary education	Technical education	Vocational education	Bachelor	Master	PhD
1	x							
2		x						
3			x	x (1 & 2 year after compulsory education)	x			
4				x				
5						x	x	
6								x

<sup>53</sup> See also Godfrey (2002).

<sup>54</sup> Included in the total number of vocational schools are 16 vocational lyceums, one specialised vocational school and two evening schools. Of these schools, 15 are located in Dushanbe (including five vocational lyceums, one specialised school and one evening school); 20 in the Khatlon region (including two vocational lyceums), 24 in the Sogdian region (including seven vocational lyceums), 12 in the central region (including one vocational lyceum and one evening school) and one vocational lyceum in the GBAO.

<sup>55</sup> However, only around 35 operate exclusively as schools, with the others having rented out their premises for other purposes. In fact, there is little reliable information available on what is really happening in schools in terms of teachers and students in the classroom. Three vocational schools were recently transformed into full-time training centres for the employment services.

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■ There are 58 technical colleges, of which eight have entered into cooperation with institutions of higher education<sup>56</sup>. Technical colleges prepare students for mid-level technical and professional occupations in such areas as teaching (20 colleges), health (12 colleges), industry and trade. These colleges are administered by the MoE and by a large number of other specialised ministries and state agencies. They used to offer an alternative, longer route for students who could not enter upper secondary general and higher education directly. Entry to technical colleges was based on the results of entry exams taken at the end of grade 9 or grade 11. Numbers of students were defined by the needs of the respective ministries and their organisations.

Facilities and equipment are in a miserable state in the vast majority of vocational schools, and are not much better in technical colleges. Hardly any investment has been made in new equipment for at least 20 years.

### Enrolment, attainment and dropouts

Net enrolment rates in compulsory education have fallen during the past decade. During Soviet times net enrolment in primary and basic education was virtually 100%. According to the World Bank Education Sector Review, in 1999 net primary enrolment was officially around

92%, and according to survey data was as low as 82%<sup>57</sup>. According to 2003 figures, net enrolment was 98% in primary education and 94% in basic education<sup>58</sup>. In 2004, around 98% of the relevant cohort completed grade 9. The fall in enrolment, attendance and completion rates must be seen against the background of the emergence of poverty and the immediate effects of the civil war, which left many schools without functioning electricity and heating systems for many years. However, as can be seen from official figures in Table 2, total enrolment in secondary general education has increased substantially from 84,900 in 1998/99 to 163,000 in 2003/04. This positive trend may be ascribed to the more stable social and economic situation now, given the time that has elapsed since the civil war. Information about actual participation is, however, not available.

Total enrolment in both vocational and technical education has decreased substantially in absolute numbers, in spite of the larger population cohorts in the relevant age groups. Of the students who completed basic education in 2003/04, around 50% continued in upper secondary education, 10% went into vocational or technical education. Around 40% did not continue their education beyond the compulsory level, and together with those who did not complete compulsory education, they constitute a significant influx of unskilled workers to the labour market.

**Table 2: Total enrolment in education in selected years (in thousands)**

	1990/91	1995/96	1998/99	2000/01	2003/04
Primary and basic education (1–9)	1139.6	1198.2	1347.1	1369.8	1496.9
Secondary education (10–11)	170.6	111.9	84.9	131.6	163.0
Vocational education	41.9	30.6	24.7	24.5	24.2
Technical education	*	26.8	19.4	23.2	29.2
Higher education	69.3	*	75.5	77.7	107.6

\*number not available

Source: Annual Handbook 2004, Tajikistan. Ministry of Education

<sup>56</sup> There is also an industrial-technical pedagogical college (based in Dushanbe, with a recently opened affiliate college in Khujand, in the Sogdian region).

<sup>57</sup> World Bank, 'Tajikistan Education Sector Review', 10 October 2002.

<sup>58</sup> World Bank, 'Tajikistan Poverty Assessment Update', Main Report, Washington, 2004.

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In addition to these workers, those who leave the education system after upper secondary education also enter the labour market without qualifications, albeit with a higher general education level. This makes a total of more than 100,000 new entrants to the labour market every year who have no qualifications<sup>59</sup>. In contrast, the total number of people benefiting from short-term skills courses is limited to around 5,000 per year.

### Challenges in general education

Efforts to improve education in Tajikistan in the mid 1990s focused first and foremost on re-establishing acceptable physical infrastructures, including adequate heating, electricity, roofs and windows. The infrastructure problems were further accentuated by a rapid increase in the number of school-age children. These basic challenges have still not been fully met. Many schools, especially outside the capital, function in a multiple shift system and have not yet been refurbished<sup>60</sup>.

Subsequently the focus has moved to the content of general education and teachers' qualifications and salaries. Some of the most significant drawbacks of the Soviet approach to general education, which persisted in Tajikistan, were an overloaded timetable, a large number of different and unrelated subjects, and strong emphasis on academic and rote learning. Teaching was teacher-centred. Furthermore, Tajikistan had no national assessment system, and there is accordingly no clear understanding of how the education system performs in terms of learning outcomes. The approach to general education is mirrored in the general education elements of vocational and technical education, and rather than encouraging less academically minded pupils to remain within the education system, it encourages them to drop out.

Reform has begun, but the old approaches continue to be the norm, though the number of different subjects has been reduced.

### Qualification levels

The general understanding in Tajikistan is that the VET programmes provide programmes at ISCED level 3 for skilled workers, and that the technical colleges provide qualifications at ISCED level 4 for technicians. However, the system is very supply-oriented and hence is not based on an analysis and clear understanding of the different qualification levels existing on the labour market. The difference between the level and complexity of the vocational part of the various vocational programmes, and the different levels at which they are expected to qualify are not very clear. There is a lack of transparency in terms of the system and the qualifications it provides.

In VET the various types of programme are defined primarily in terms of their general education content and weight. Thus the main argument for choosing between, for example, the one to two-year programme or the three-year programme after 9th grade is whether or not the student wishes to obtain complete secondary education together with the vocational skills. It is not based on an assessment of the qualification level for which the student wishes to be prepared on the labour market. By the same token it is not fully clear what the difference is in terms of acquired skills between the different VET programmes and the short (maximum three months) courses which are provided, for example through the employment services.

The prevailing emphasis on general education and the short period of time that is actually devoted to vocational theory and skills training lead to the conclusion that upon graduation from vocational schools or colleges, the students are not skilled workers or technicians, but have reached in reality lower qualification levels. This indicates that the system considers itself to be providing a higher qualification level than it actually does.

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<sup>59</sup> The number of dropouts and the number of people leaving school without a qualification are based on rough calculations from data provided by the MoE, the MoLSP and the World Bank.

<sup>60</sup> The World Bank has for a number of years provided funds to refurbish primary and basic education facilities.

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### Vocational and technical education programmes

The List of Occupations and Specialities in VET comprises 250 occupations and specialities covering 33 sectors of the economy. There are VET programmes for 93 occupations and specialities, and short-term vocational training courses in 40 different occupations and specialities.

The list of occupations has not been reviewed since Soviet times, and is therefore not based on an understanding of the current labour market; nor are employers involved in its preparation. Furthermore, the list of occupations does not take into account the different levels and complexity of occupations in the labour market. Nevertheless, this list is currently used as the basis for the preparation of education programmes. The list of occupations is not compatible with the ISCO classification<sup>61</sup>.

In November 2002 a decree was approved that covered the general requirements (standard) of public secondary vocational education including the list of approved professions. The intention is that within the next five years, standards should be prepared for all the approved professions,

with the involvement of 'scientists, enterprise representatives and experts'. This process has not started because of a lack of funding. There have been discussions on whether it would be more cost-effective to take over standards from Russia and simply translate these into Tajik.

The most frequented programmes are shown in Table 3.

In addition to programmes offered by vocational schools and colleges, the Employment Service, which is also administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social protection, offers short courses for young people and adults who are registered as unemployed. The most frequently attended short vocational training courses in 2003 were: tailor or seamstress (1,480); PC operator (1,003); bookkeeper (725); farmer (270); tractor operator (188); secretary (168). The total number of people trained was 5,535<sup>62</sup>. Tailoring is the most frequently attended formal and non-formal VET programme. In fact, tailoring represents over a quarter of all new qualifications awarded. Though the number of tractor drivers who graduate was previously higher, it still represents around 20% of all new graduates.

**Table 3: Number of graduates from the most frequented VET programmes in selected years**

	1991	1996	1999	2001	2002
Total no of graduates	24,705	18,270	15,730	13,649	13,672
Train conductors and assistants	1,352	667	644	295	328
Wood processors and carpenters	1,620	1,012	704	317	224
Plumbers	3,105	1,402	1,790	1,367	1,178
Electrical assembling and mechanical engineers	654	811	559	518	268
Welders	1,590	1,084	389	648	483
Tractor drivers	3,669	3,091	2,024	2,416	2,590
Tailors	2,675	2,219	1,823	3,800	3,630
Automobile drivers	1,734	707	397	662	890

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, March 2004

<sup>61</sup> Following consultations with local stakeholders in four countries (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan), in 2005 the ETF launched a regional project on the reforms of national classifiers. The project connects these reform discussions to ongoing debates in EU and OECD countries on National Qualification Frameworks.

<sup>62</sup> State Employment Services, March 2004

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This partly reflects the fact that Tajikistan is a rural society, but also, more significantly, that VET relating to an occupation of the past is still provided, and that it has not been sufficiently replaced by more all-round farming qualifications. In fact, farming is not among the most popular programmes.

### Contents and curricula

Curricula and learning materials date from the early 1980s, and were developed and provided by the central authorities in the former Soviet Union. These are now outdated in pedagogical and technological terms, while the capacity – both financial and professional – to modernise VET programmes is still severely limited. Training provision remains highly supply-driven, based on infrastructures, school capacities and curricula inherited from the past. It is dominated by the delivery of programmes for occupations for which there is little demand on the labour market, while emerging job opportunities in the formal and informal economy are not catered for.

In 2002, a National Standard for Vocational Education<sup>63</sup> was approved. This regulates the relation between general and vocational education and practical training within VET programmes, the total number of hours for programmes, and their certification. It also defines occupational levels.

The three-year programmes after the 9th grade have 4,889 teaching hours. General education makes up 43% of these hours, vocational theory 24% and practical training 39%. There is an overload of subjects, with 17 different subjects alone in general education. There is hardly any link between the general education element of the curriculum, vocational theory and practical training. Furthermore, practical training suffers greatly from a lack of

adequately equipped workshops and the virtual disappearance of company-based practical training.

The Methodological Scientific Centre of the MoLSP has been in charge of the revision of existing and development of new curricula<sup>64</sup>. However, there is limited capacity to develop new curricula, and very little change has been made to the curricula implemented when Tajikistan became independent. The few new curricula that have been introduced were copied from Russia. This means that the curricula are not adapted to the national and or local situation in Tajikistan. Schools can take the initiative to propose a new curriculum, which will eventually have to be approved by the MoLSP. However, in practice this rarely happens<sup>65</sup>.

### Teachers and trainers

As of 1 January 2004, 3,120 professional staff were officially employed in vocational schools. This number has increased since 2002 (when it stood at 2,803). The number includes full-time and part-time teachers and trainers. Over 25% of staff are female, although among teachers of special and vocational subjects the proportion is more than 50%.

Table 4 shows that most management staff and general/social subject teachers have higher education or – as is the case for almost a third of general education teachers – technical education. More than half of vocational theory teachers and practical trainers have technical education, and the vast majority of the rest have higher education. This indicates that almost all vocational teachers and trainers have an educational background at least one level higher than that which they teach.

In general there is concern among Tajik VET policymakers that the qualification levels of teaching staff in vocational

<sup>63</sup> Decree No 419 of 4 November 2002 on the National Standard for Vocational Education in the Republic of Tajikistan.

<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that numbers of staff employed in the VET Department and the Methodological Centre are very low. Each unit has about five staff members and no external VET support institutions exist.

<sup>65</sup> Two internationally supported projects assist the Methodological Scientific Centre in building up capacity in curriculum development. One project is supported by Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst and the other by the Tacis programme. However, these are smaller pilot initiatives and have not yet been able to introduce any changes at a system-wide level.

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**Table 4: Educational level of professional staff in vocational schools as of 1 January 2004**

	Total no of staff	Higher education	Technical education	Other education
Management staff	322	88%**	12%	0%
Practical trainers	1,509	40%	56%	4%
Social subject teachers	152	100%	0%	0%
General education teachers	620	71%	29%	0%
Vocational theory teachers	305	47%	53%	0%
Others*	212	67%	31%	2%

\*Includes mentors, physical education teachers and military teachers

\*\*Directors and deputy directors almost all have higher education, compared with only 50% of senior masters.

Source: Department of VET, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, March 2004

schools are relatively low, in terms of both their education levels and the nature of the technical and pedagogical education they have received. Of greater concern, however, is the fact that relatively few teachers and trainers have real practical work experience. If practical experience is available, this has become largely outdated and still stems from the pre-1991 period.

Practical trainers are trained at the Technological-Pedagogical College in Dushanbe and at its affiliated institution in Khujand. In 2005, there were 1,158 students in the two institutions, and there were 202 graduates in 2005. The college trains trainers in six fields as shown in table 5.

The lack of adequate training facilities in the college and the limited industrial training provision prevent the development of relevant occupational skills. A large number of the trainers are not familiar with technological developments in their field,

and furthermore have little or no practical experience of the occupations for which they train. Although not apparent from Table 5, it appears that most newly recruited trainers arrive in vocational schools straight from the Technological-Pedagogical College without any prior industry experience, or, increasingly, are graduates who come directly from the vocational schools themselves. The college now provides both a Master's qualification and a Bachelor's degree in the relevant subject area, which means that students are not necessarily attending simply in order to become trainers in VET institutions. One aspect of the appeal of all kinds of higher education is that young men with a higher education diploma are exempt from military service.

Teachers of general subjects and vocational theory are trained at the Tajik Pedagogical University and its Industrial Pedagogical Faculty, respectively.

**Table 5: Number of graduates in the Technological-Pedagogical College according to field of specialisation in 2003-05**

Specialisation	2003	2004	2005
Technical services and auto mechanics	50	77	53
Agricultural machinery	8	30	27
Sewing	15	36	25
Industrial and civil engineering	10	15	26
Motor vehicle and motor transport services	-	5	32
Electricity	-	6	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>202</b>

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The latter has recently been renamed as the Technology and Entrepreneurship Faculty, though its functions remain largely the same, as do its educational programmes. Policymakers are also concerned about the quality of the teacher education programmes. They see the need to expand facilities for teacher and trainer's training to institutions outside the capital and to improve the quality of the education programmes provided.

The in-service training system for teachers and trainers has virtually collapsed and most teachers and trainers have been able to update neither their pedagogical knowledge and skills nor the knowledge and skills relating to the subjects they teach since the 1980s. Professional teaching literature, journals and magazines, such as those from Russia, which used to be widely available and easily accessible, are now very difficult to obtain. Even those teachers and trainers who previously updated themselves out of professional interest now find it difficult, if not impossible, to do so.

The attractiveness of a career as a teacher or trainer in VET is at an absolute low. Salary levels are not sufficient to support a family. While in 1989 average teaching salaries were on a par with overall average salary levels, this situation changed dramatically during the 1990s. In 1999 average monthly salaries in education were 5,508 roubles, whereas the overall average was 10,374, and as high as 31,746 roubles in industry<sup>66</sup>. In practice an ordinary teacher would earn around a third of the amount considered to be the poverty line. Many teachers are forced to seek alternative incomes, or have left teaching altogether. As a consequence the teaching force is ageing rapidly, and it is very difficult to attract young teachers. Although salary levels for teachers have increased with other civil servant salaries, the starting levels were very low, and this has had only a limited effect on disposable income.

### **Governance and management**

The MoE is in charge of the management of all parts of the education system,

including technical education, with the exception of the basic vocational schools, of which the MoLSP is in charge. The division of responsibility between the two ministries for the two levels of education is reflected in the strong divide between the two delivery networks, consisting of technical schools (colleges) and vocational schools, respectively. Both ministries maintain a centralised management structure for the two subsystems. The MoE also maintains full control of the general education element of vocational curricula, and decides 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 MoE.

The social partners are currently not involved in any aspect of the governance and management of the VET system. There is no national council of social partners that could serve as a platform for discussing the future development of the VET system in Tajikistan. In fact, the legacy of the Soviet times is very evident in the understanding of who is considered to represent employers. The view is still that the Ministries of Agriculture and Industry are the most relevant employer representatives with whom the future of the VET system should be discussed.

In the MoLSP the VET Department is in charge of policy development, preparation of legislation, the definition of the National Standard for Vocational Education, and overall management and monitoring. The Scientific Methodological Centre for VET is responsible for the development of curricula and teaching plans, textbooks and manuals, technical facilities and the dissemination of external experience. The institutional capacity of both units is limited. The VET Department has to a large extent focused on the day-to-day survival of the current school network; the Scientific Methodological Centre has been unable to prepare new curricula and textbooks. The MoE is in charge of setting the requirements for the general education component of VET, and developing the related curricula and textbooks.

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<sup>66</sup> UNESCO (2000).

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The responsibilities of the vocational schools have up to now been very limited. They have received planning figures from the MoLSP VET Department for the number of students to be enrolled in each programme, and must manage the budget according to a strict line-item budget system. However, the ministry has developed plans to give schools the responsibility for proposing the occupations to be offered and the number of students to be enrolled in each programme, with effect from the school year starting September 2006. This move away from a strictly centralised approach is echoed at the regional level with the establishment of a small regional department for vocational education. The technical colleges are centrally managed and do not have any real autonomy.

The national budget for education as a share of GDP fell from the time of independence until 1996, and has since then increased only slightly. In 2004 the total government budget for VET was TJS 4.82 million and the budget allocated to schools was TJS 1.12 million (€ 1.63 million and € 0.38 million, respectively). In 2001 the total budget for VET was just over € 1 million. Though the government has increased expenditure on education and the per-student financing has increased again in recent years, the system will remain under-funded for years to come.

However the proportion of the government budget spent on education has fluctuated around 15%, and in 2004 was 15.03%, which cannot be considered low (ADB, 2006). Nevertheless, the actual budget available for education is low, and remains a constraint for implementing reform at all levels of education.

As Table 7 shows, in 2001 around 85% and in 2004 around 75% of the government budget for VET was used for salaries and social contributions, and for student meals. Salaries in education, however, are very low. President Rakhmonov signed a decree on 4 November 2004 raising the minimum wage and salaries of government employees with effect from 1 January 2005. The decree provides for workers in

science, health care and social services to receive a salary increase of 100%, preschool and elementary school teachers an increase of 70%, other teachers an increase of 60%, and other state employees in the educational and cultural spheres an increase of 50%. The minimum-wage unit, which is also used to calculate pensions, will increase from TJS 7 (USD 2.50) to TJS 12 (USD 4.30) per month with effect from 2005.

It is evident that the size of the public budget and the current budget structure are insufficient to cover the acquisition and innovation needs of VET in terms of equipment, teaching and learning material, and staff development of teachers and trainers<sup>67</sup>.

Approximately 17% of the total budget for VET in 2004 came from self-financing by schools. This income derives primarily from sales of school-based production and delivery of other services. Around 60% of the income generated by schools was spent on salaries and related social contributions, and on manufacturing costs, fuel and lubricants. Schools are required to transfer 15% of their income to the MoLSP.

### 2.3 HERITAGE FROM THE PAST

The inherited system of VET in Tajikistan as described above was part of a manpower planning system designed for a centrally planned economy in a society based on socialist principles. Its main features stem from the period of extensive industrialisation in the Soviet Union during the 1950s, during which large state-owned mass industrial and agricultural companies were in need of large numbers of semi-skilled workers and mid-level technicians in order to be able to fulfil production targets set by the central planning authorities. The VET system that developed in this context was functional for the manpower planning system of the time. Young people were trained in vocational (workers) and technical (technicians) schools directly attached to the companies (base companies) in which they were to be

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<sup>67</sup> Nor, in fact, is the TJS 0.16 available per meal per student enough to provide a decent meal.

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**Table 6: National budget for education in 1991, 1996 and 2002 as a share of GDP**

	1991	1996	2002
National budget for education as a share of GDP (%)	9.0	2.1	2.6
National budget for vocational education as a share of GDP (%)	1.3	0.04	0.09

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, March 2004

employed. Once employed, they received further training on the job, sometimes in combination with short courses. A certain number were also given the opportunity, with the support of the base companies, to continue studies in higher education. The numbers of students per specialisation were calculated on the basis of planning figures from the companies that were going to employ them.

Manpower planning, which determined educational and occupational choices, ensured jobs for school graduates. However, neither the school nor the job was necessarily the one to which the young people aspired. Although job mobility was not encouraged, during the growth periods of the 1950s and 1970s the economic and political system provided graduates of basic vocational schools with ample opportunities to build careers. Vocational schools catered for the majority of primary school leavers. The largest proportion of each cohort entered vocational schools, and access to higher education – despite increasing educational aspirations – was limited, and for the majority of secondary school graduates basically consisted of teaching and medical colleges.

As in all other former Communist countries, the situation began to change during the early 1980s. Career opportunities gradually became blocked because higher-level positions were already occupied by earlier graduates and no new ones were created. Technological and organisational changes increasingly required a different workforce composition, and there was less need for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Basic vocational schools gradually became dead-end streets and lost their appeal as an educational pathway for potential students. Increasing budget problems led to a hiatus in further extensive growth, and insufficient resources were available for investment in technology-driven intensive growth. The Soviet economic system as a whole entered a vicious cycle in which a number of different developments mutually reinforced one another towards a final collapse. Companies were unable to keep up with technological innovations; client markets were no longer ready to accept low-quality products and services; and budgetary problems further intensified the slow-down and put a stop to investments, not only in production companies but also in schools and other public institutions. Shortages of daily goods and basic

**Table 7: The proportion of total government expenditure on VET spent on main budget items in 2001 and 2004\***

Budget item	2001	2004
Salaries	40.3	40.1
Social contributions	9.3	10.1
Maintenance of buildings	6.8	7.0
Meals for students	35.0	23.6
Electricity, gas and water	1.5	8.2
Purchase of equipment	2.3	7.7
Others	4.8	3.3

\*planned budget

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, March 2004

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services became a reality of life. The crisis in VET in all transition countries, including Tajikistan, has a wider context and a longer history. It did not suddenly occur at the beginning of transition; it has not been an effect of independence; nor is it caused only by insufficient funding. But all these factors have played a role in it.

The centralised manpower planning system encouraged companies to maximise their needs for labour, as one way of creating production reserves under conditions of overall scarcity of resources. 'Soft' budgets made mutual alliances between companies and basic VET schools beneficial and easy to maintain. Indeed, companies and schools normally belonged to the same industrial sector ministry apparatus: hence, industry, construction, transport and agriculture all had their own VET subsystems. Company and school directors would form a strong lobby at local and ministerial level to defend their common interests. Hoarding of labour made labour itself a scarce resource; this further encouraged companies to persuade workers to remain in their employment, which contributed to companies becoming highly inefficient in terms of overall production costs<sup>68</sup>. With the introduction of 'hard' budgets towards the end of the 1980s, and subsequently during the 1990s following privatisation, companies were quick to shed their overcapacities and abandon all expenditure that was not directly production-related, with a view to bringing overall production costs down. Vocational schools, company-based training centres and other training facilities were among the first to be closed or abandoned<sup>69</sup>.

VET served enterprises who themselves were fully integrated into the overall Soviet economy. Companies received their production plans from central planning authorities. The large companies in Tajikistan were in fact all established at the

initiative of – and mostly with the financial support of – the central authorities in Moscow, and were not necessarily established to develop and maintain a strong national Tajik economy. They were part of an all-Soviet system of division of labour and were integrated into complex company structures that transcended republican borders. Although in the meantime most, if not all, large enterprises have collapsed, the structure of VET in Tajikistan continues to perpetuate many of the features of the past employment system. It has become totally irrelevant to emerging labour market needs. Moreover, it no longer responds to the education and training needs of young people and adults.

The VET system previously received guidelines and directions from Moscow, including descriptions of the kinds of occupational profile to be included in VET (profiles that were themselves based on job profiles as created by the particular forms of work organisation in state companies), detailed curricula, teaching plans, textbooks, and workshop and classroom equipment. The current situation is aggravated by the fact that most curricula and learning materials in vocational schools stem from the early or mid 1980s. These are now hopelessly outdated in pedagogical and technological terms, while the country's capacity – financially and professionally – to modernise VET programmes is still severely limited, in part because in the past there was no requirement to do this type of development work.

While the problems in vocational schools began decades ago, the collapse of the central planning system and the sudden introduction of market mechanisms added other dimensions to the crisis in VET. During the transition period governmental responsibilities for education and training were reorganised. The MoE became responsible for primary, secondary general,

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<sup>68</sup> Companies did this not so much by offering higher wages, as the wage system was highly centralised, but rather by providing a whole range of other benefits, ranging from housing to scholarships and holiday resorts.

<sup>69</sup> But it was not only the VET system that was sector or company-based. The whole social and welfare system was built around companies and – for the individual – based on work in an enterprise: this included housing, childcare, education, health, recreation and pensions. All this collapsed with the breakdown of the overall economic system.

technical and higher education<sup>70</sup>. The MoLSP became responsible for the basic vocational school system, without, of course, having available the VET budgets that had been at the disposal of the sectoral ministries in the earlier years.

### 2.4 THE DECLINE OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

Vocational schools have suffered particularly badly as a result of recent developments. They already had low status during the 1980s, but have since declined further in a downward spiral from which they are unlikely to be able to recover under their own steam<sup>71</sup>. They have lost their guaranteed training and employment partnership with large state-owned companies. They also lost their financial sponsors when they became detached from their base companies. While there is considerable regional variation (depending on the destruction caused by the civil war), most vocational schools have very impoverished material resources, with obsolete teaching materials and poorly equipped workshops. Where workshops have equipment, it is hopelessly old and worn out; some have no equipment at all. Many school buildings need considerable refurbishment, including improvements in sanitary and heating conditions. Resources for modernisation and reconstruction are not available within the country, and the international donor community has so far given little attention to the problems of the VET system<sup>72</sup>.

Vocational schools in Tajikistan have become dissociated from mainstream education and training (including secondary technical and higher education). This situation has been further institutionalised by the fact that in 1996 the MoLSP was given responsibility for these schools. However, vocational schools have also become dissociated from the labour market, as they are still preparing students

for the same limited number of semi-skilled occupations that were once sought by large industrial and agricultural companies, but that have now largely disappeared. So far, vocational schools have shown limited or no capacity to adapt to changing labour market conditions, which are characterised not only by the disappearance of mass employment in large industrial and agricultural enterprises, but also by the gradual emergence of an informal subsistence-based economy of small private farms and trading businesses. Nor, for that matter, do vocational schools properly prepare the large numbers of workers who migrate to other countries in search of employment. There are signs that companies who are in need of qualified workers, especially firms with foreign capital involvement, already bypass the public VET system and look for internal qualification solutions<sup>73</sup>. They hire graduates from higher levels of education for jobs normally available for vocational school graduates and give them in-house training, either on the job or through short courses.

With access to secondary general and higher education increasingly becoming dependent on the ability to afford formal – and, increasingly, informal – payments, lower levels of education, in particular vocational schools, have become a refuge for students who cannot afford to go elsewhere. This development has further decreased the status of these schools.

By increasingly catering for students from poor families who cannot afford alternative education paths, vocational schools are now widely seen as being involved with social protection rather than with professional preparation. As a consequence, large numbers of young people and adults currently remain excluded from any opportunity to continue or improve their level of education and labour market position. As elsewhere, those with lower levels of education and

<sup>70</sup> In other countries different decisions were taken. In the Russian Federation for example, at least until 2004, the MoE was responsible for basic vocational schools.

<sup>71</sup> All over the Soviet Union, in fact, being called a 'PTUjnik' was not a compliment, and gradually became seen as the equivalent of belonging to the lower classes.

<sup>72</sup> See Godfrey (2002).

<sup>73</sup> Interview with the director of a textile vocational school in Khujand in April 2004.

training in particular become the most vulnerable victims of this process. By neglecting their qualification function, vocational schools run the risk of perpetuating poverty among the social groups from which they now largely recruit their students. At the same time, at the moment there are no other institutions able to take over the – albeit limited – welfare functions that vocational schools currently perform<sup>74</sup>. Closing down basic vocational schools will therefore not contribute to any reduction of poverty. Instead, basic vocational schools should improve and develop their qualification role.

## 2.5 POTENTIAL SCOPE OF VET

As recently as 2003, around 100,000 young people entered the labour market following completion of 9 or 11 grades of schooling without any occupational qualification. These numbers are predicted to increase even further in the near future. Employment services have the capacity to train or retrain only 5,000 unemployed people per year. Annual cohorts entering vocational schools currently number around 25,000 (down from over 40,000 several years ago and expected to decrease further in the short run), while a further 25,000 students enter secondary technical schools (also down from 40,000 several years ago though increasing again). Both types of school put around 15,000 graduates in the labour market each year. Higher education institutions educate around 10,000 specialists annually. Estimates from the employment services indicate that around 50% of all university graduates will not find a job<sup>75</sup>. Furthermore, there are around 600,000 labour migrants from Tajikistan, most of whom work in one of the other countries of the former Soviet Union. Some 57% of these migrant workers are without professional qualifications, leaving them to take unskilled and poorly paid jobs with hazardous working conditions. Remittances of labour migrants, however,

constitute one of the most important sources of income in the country, and government policy is based on the assumption that labour migration will continue for some time to come.

It is clear, therefore, that the VET system potentially caters for considerable numbers of young people and adults. Potential VET students, young people and adults, have become increasingly heterogeneous, and the current system has proved unable to respond flexibly to this growing diversity. Instead, vocational schools have continued to provide standardised programmes and have gradually limited themselves to providing VET for students who are unable to enter other forms of education, and in doing so have further decreased their own appeal for students interested in acquiring qualifications relevant for the labour market or for further education.

## 2.6 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND MAIN POLICY CHALLENGES

It has been generally understood in Tajikistan that VET no longer meets the required standards. The first attempt to adapt the VET system was made with the adoption of a National Standard for Vocational Education in 2002. This was followed by the Law on Basic Vocational Education in 2003. But these documents were mainly intended to fill a regulatory and legislative gap, in a situation in which Tajik education had to be reorganised as a national system, and did not really introduce fundamental changes<sup>76</sup>. Further impetus for reform has come directly from the President's Executive Administration and from the President himself, who considers VET an important tool for poverty alleviation. The Minister of Labour and Social Protection was asked to take further steps to reform the system. In early 2004, the minister established a special working group consisting of representatives of key ministries, public agencies and social

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<sup>74</sup> The welfare function basically consists of providing one free meal per day to students. Each meal has the value of TJS 0.16. It could be argued that keeping vocational schools operational, including employing teaching and training staff, forms part of social policy rather than education and training policy.

<sup>75</sup> Kodusov (2003). For an analysis of the employment situation see the following chapter.

<sup>76</sup> For a review of these documents see the following chapter.

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partners to prepare a concept for a future VET system. In August 2004, the minister submitted a draft concept to the government for approval; the government approved the concept in October 2004, and the MoLSP was given the responsibility of developing a strategy for its implementation<sup>77</sup>.

In parallel with these developments at national level, Tajikistan has also developed, with the assistance of the international donor community, a number of practical measures. The first of these was to establish facilities for short-term flexible retraining of adults. Employment offices provide short courses for young adults who have left (primary or secondary) school without a recognised qualification.

These short courses of up to six months mostly lead to the same qualifications that are provided by vocational schools, and effectively undermine the latter's reputation among both prospective students and companies. Another measure was the establishment of a modular training centre to cater especially for former combatants from the civil war and to provide them with basic skills to facilitate their reintegration into society<sup>78</sup>.

Following on from the actions undertaken so far, Tajik policymakers are facing the challenge of devising short-term solutions

to transform a technologically and pedagogically outdated VET infrastructure in order that it can better respond to new needs for knowledge and skills. They must also decide on the main policy objectives that they wish to achieve with the VET system in the medium to long-term. This will imply a rebalancing of the welfare and qualification objectives of the VET system and make VET an integrated part of a coherent overall lifelong learning system. Policymakers must also define, identify and mobilise the resources and capacities necessary to ensure that their policy objectives are realised. Moreover, they will have to involve other stakeholders in these discussions, and to create efficient platforms and mechanisms to do so, at national, regional and local level.

In 2004, policymakers in the MoLSP became seriously concerned about changing the existing VET system. They initiated consultations and involved other stakeholders, such as other ministries, government offices and social partners. Within the framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategy they have also raised the issue of VET reform becoming one of the national priorities, and have started to mobilise resources to support and finance change. These processes have only just begun, and the task of transforming the heritage of the past remains a formidable one.

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<sup>77</sup> During the period February – July 2004, staff of the ETF assisted the working group in ensuring an informed debate on the key issues at stake for the preparation of the concept. Continued support for the elaboration of an implementation strategy was provided to the MoLSP through the Tacis programme that ran from September 2004 – August 2006.

<sup>78</sup> The first centre was set up with UNDP funding, and introduced the ILO Modules for Employable Skills (MES) approach. A second affiliate centre was set up in the Garm region. The project has been dependent on external funding and the centres are facing survival problems. Discussions are ongoing regarding transforming the modular centre into a national resource centre for students, teachers and trainers of vocational schools.



## 3. THE SOCIOECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT FOR VET REFORM

# 3

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The direction and feasibility of any reform of VET are linked closely to the overall performance of the economy, the availability of public and private resources, the expected development of employment and the structure of the labour market. This section will look briefly at each of these areas.

The collapse of the Soviet economy and the civil conflict that followed had devastating effects on all economic activity in Tajikistan. The large state-owned companies in industry and agriculture that used to employ the vast majority of the republic's labour force ceased to exist. Many companies were destroyed or were not operational during the years of civil conflict. The private sector has developed only slowly, and has not yet been able to make up for the employment losses left by the former state companies. These

developments resulted in hitherto unknown high levels of unemployment, a growing informal subsistence-based economy, widespread poverty, and considerable internal and external labour migration. Furthermore, as a result of decreasing government spending, the education, welfare and health care services deteriorated rapidly. Though recent years have seen a reversal of these trends, which may be a sign for cautious optimism for the future, Tajikistan still ranks as one of the poorest countries in the world.

### 3.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS<sup>79</sup>

The main government strategy for promoting economic growth and reducing poverty is spelled out in the National Poverty Reduction Strategy<sup>80</sup>. As part of the agreement with the international

<sup>79</sup> The information in this section is based on 'Asian Development Outlook 2004, Economic Trends and Prospects in Developing Asia, Central Asia', by the Asian Development Bank (Key Indicators on the Asian Development Bank's website for Tajikistan, 10 August 2004: [www.adb.org](http://www.adb.org)); and 'Tajikistan Country Brief, Tajikistan Data Profile, Tajikistan at a glance, and Gender Stats Tajikistan' (World Bank website, 10 August 2004: [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)).

<sup>80</sup> Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, Dushanbe, 2002.

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financial institutions, the government is pursuing a policy aimed at stabilising macroeconomic developments, and has been relatively successful in doing so. Some key developments will be described in this section, and an assessment of their relevance for VET policies follows.

### Macroeconomic trends

Since 1998, Tajikistan has experienced continuous high growth rates in GDP, ranging from 5.3% in 1998 to 10.2% in 2003. Though lower, the forecasts for 2004 and 2005 remained high, at 8.0% and 5.0% respectively. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that GDP in 1996 was only 32.6% of GDP in 1991, and in 2003 was still only around half the size of the 1991 figure.

The government was able to maintain an almost balanced budget in 2001 and 2002 at -0.1% of GDP, and managed a surplus of 0.9% of GDP in 2003, though it has not quite been able to curb the inflation rate, which was 16.4% in 2003. However, inflationary processes are not completely under the government's control, since many basic subsistence goods needed by households have to be imported and are subject to cost changes resulting from policies in neighbouring countries and from unreliable transport infrastructures<sup>81</sup>.

Foreign trade in 2003 increased substantially, with a 14.2% increase in exports and a 23.2% increase in imports. The economy still relies heavily on cotton and aluminium, which together make up around 75% of total exports. Many basic consumer goods, including meat, still have to be imported.

The current account deficit has been reduced to 1.3% of GDP, compared to 2.7% in 2002. This has been mainly as a result of the growing importance of remittances from migrant workers, which rose from an estimated USD 65 million in 2002 to USD 202 million in 2003, the equivalent of around 13% of GDP.

Despite constraints caused by macroeconomic stabilisation policies, the

government, in line with the priorities set by the PRSP, increased budget allocations for the social sector – including education – in 2004, and in doing so has demonstrated a willingness to address some of the negative social consequences of transition. Supported by enhanced tax collection, it has even been possible to strengthen public administration by increasing civil service wages by 20% in 2003 and by a further 25% in January 2004, while at the same time initiating a heavily debated reduction of staff to streamline the civil service<sup>82</sup>.

### Structure of the economy

Since the mid 1990s the relative importance of the main economic sectors has changed, and continues to do so. From a share of 45.3% of GDP in 1992, industry now contributes less than 20% of GDP. This decline can largely be attributed to developments in manufacturing. During the same period the share of GDP contributed by the service sector increased from 27.6% to over 42%.

The rapid growth in services, and especially in trade, has been followed by expansion in non-cotton agriculture and non-aluminium manufacturing sectors. This trend is expected to continue over the years to come.

In agriculture, cotton remains by far the most important crop. Other important crops are: grain, sweet corn, feed corn, rice, potatoes, vegetables, fruits, grapes and hay. Animal husbandry is concentrated on beef cattle, milk cows, sheep, goats and horses. However, Tajikistan still has to import considerable amounts of meat from outside the country.

State farms concentrate to a large extent on cotton: in terms of value, 96% of production in state farms derived from cotton crops in 2000. In contrast, for private farms the importance of animal husbandry was significant, at around 25%<sup>83</sup> of production value.

In industry, aluminium processing made up 47.2% of total industrial production in 2004). Other major industrial sub-sectors

<sup>81</sup> Kurbanov (2004).

<sup>82</sup> Further increases in teaching salaries were announced at the beginning of 2005.

<sup>83</sup> IMF Country Report No. 01/69, May 2001.

**Table 8: The share of GDP by economic sector 1995, 1998, 2001 and 2004**

	1992	1995	1998	2001	2004
Agriculture	27.1	36.7	25.1	26.5	21.6
Industry	45.3	34.0	20.1	22.7	19.6
Construction	*	3.2	3.8	4.1	5.5
Trade	**	7.5	22.1	19.1	19.7
Transport and communications	**	4.5	4.2	3.9	5.5
Other services	27.6	9.6	17.1	14.6	17.4

\* Included in Industry. \*\* Included in Other services  
Source: Annual Handbook Tajikistan, 2005

are (hydro-) electric energy at 6.0%, light industry at 17.8%, food processing at 15.0% and flour grinding at 8.7%. Within light industry the most important branch is textiles. Attempts are being made to revitalise textiles and other light industry further. However, most manufacturing equipment is outdated and there is a shortage of skilled workers and mid-level technicians, positions left vacant by those who left the country for good during the 1990s.

Privatisation of most of the 8,200 government-owned SMEs put up for sale was completed by the end of 2004, though in many cases the acquired assets have been sold off and operations have ceased. Privatisation has therefore led to the loss of production capacity and employment. In contrast, privatisation of large enterprises is slow. In a strategic plan for the privatisation of medium and large enterprises for the period 2003–07, over 500 joint stock companies and enterprises will be put up for sale. Hotels and restaurants are already mainly in private hands, but most companies in construction, transport, communication and agriculture remain government-owned. In agriculture there are still a significant number of large state-owned cotton farms. The restructuring of these farms has been slow because of their high level of debt, which in 2002 was higher than actual cotton

exports. Other enterprises too have high debt burdens and require considerable investment.

Though economic recovery has been underway since 1998, the international financial institutions argue that a number of constraints may still hinder continued and sustainable economic progress. While the high growth rates and the government's commitment to increased finance for the social sectors are promising, the high debt burden may not only prevent investment based on foreign loans and credits, but also damage the recovery achieved so far. Exports remain highly dependent on cotton and aluminium (75%), and thus sensitive to changes in international price fluctuations. The high price of aluminium on the world market has contributed substantially to the GDP growth of recent years. Sustaining and expanding economic performance also depends on the capacity of the state structures. These are notoriously low, with severe governance problems and a weak public administration. Continued private sector development will partly depend on the capacity of the public administration to eliminate corruption and red tape, and to provide a climate conducive to encouraging private sector investment at all levels – from microbusiness financing to the revival of large industrial enterprises – as well as to attract direct foreign investment<sup>84</sup>.

<sup>84</sup> According to the IMF, a number of factors constrain a more rapid development of the private production sectors. These include relatively high taxes, red tape in providing financing, low levels of domestic investment, a lack of capacity for attracting foreign investment, and barriers to regional trade. In addition, there is a high perceived risk of corruption which corrodes interest in doing business. IMF Country Report No. 01/69, May 2001

### Challenges for VET reform

In terms of VET reform, the macro and sector-specific developments present a complex set of challenges. Macroeconomic stabilisation policies have not led to an increase of private sector initiatives in the formal sector, despite privatisation. There is a growing awareness that institutional changes are also needed. Yet outside agriculture there have been no clear indications of skills development needs. This may suggest that many existing enterprises can currently manage with the skills of the workforce that they retained after restructuring, or that there is a sufficiently educated supply in the labour market to enable them to cover their skill needs. In the latter case, as in other places where high levels of unemployment exist, this will be reflected in a situation where higher educated individuals take jobs which would previously have been filled by people with lower levels of education. The relative worsening of the labour market situation of vocational school graduates is the result of such processes. The increase in the number of private farmers and the diversification away from cotton implies that VET in this sector can no longer continue to focus on jobs within the old-style state farms. It must adapt what it offers to new types of farming entailing a need for broader sets of skills and knowledge<sup>85</sup>.

Furthermore, although relatively successful, macroeconomic stabilisation has not provided the government with sufficient budget capacities to invest seriously in a reform of the whole education sector. Even with a focus mainly on primary and general education, the majority of funds to finance investments and reforms have come from loans from the international financial organisations. The incentive for doing this has probably come largely from outside as part of the structural adjustment and – later – the Poverty Reduction Strategy negotiations. Thus it must also be assumed that investments needed for the reform of VET will not – at least in the short and

medium-term – be financed from the government budget. As mentioned above, the current assistance framework of the PRSP does not foresee much attention being given to VET.

However, when looking at the issues in terms of what is happening inside the employment system, the need for public intervention in the present VET system is quite clear. Shifts in the relative importance of economic sectors, despite the absence of reliable information on the labour market implications of these changes, signal considerable needs for retraining and further training of adults. Shifts in the structure of individual sectors, such as trade and agriculture, imply changes in employment structures and skill needs. They also point to a need to reorient the current structure and content of VET towards young people. Moreover, although the Poverty Reduction Strategy includes the development of new sectors (such as energy and tourism), it is questionable how this can be done without giving any attention to the human resources that will be needed. Equally important, though hitherto largely neglected, except from an immediate poverty reduction point of view, are the human resource challenges posed by rural development needs arising from the collapse and privatisation of the large state farms and industrial enterprises in rural areas.

### 3.3 DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS<sup>86</sup>

For any education system the age structure of the population sets quantitative parameters for planning and policymaking.

Despite the considerable migration of non-Tajik citizens during the first half of the 1990s, the total population in Tajikistan increased from 5.3 million in 1990 to 6.7 million in 2004. Although the annual growth in population has decreased from 2.9% in 1985 and 2.3% in 1990, it remains high, and stood at 2.1% in 2002<sup>87</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> The Tacis project Support for the Establishment of a Structure to provide Information, Training and Advice to Farmers and other Rural Businesses in the Khatlon Region of Tajikistan addresses this issue.

<sup>86</sup> Asian Development Bank, Key Indicators, Tajikistan website, 10 August 2004 ([www.adb.org](http://www.adb.org)).

<sup>87</sup> During the period 1991–95, around 285,000 people emigrated from Tajikistan, many of whom were managers, professionals and intellectuals of non-Tajik origin.

### 3. THE SOCIOECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT FOR VET REFORM

Although the share of the total population under the age of 15 fell from 43.2% in 1998 to 38.9% in 2004, the population is still characterised by a large proportion of young people. In the same years the shares of the population of working age (16–63 years) were 50.4% and 57.0%, respectively. This age structure will maintain a strong pressure on the need to create employment and on having sufficient capacities in the education and training system. In total there are around 120,000 new entrants to the labour market every year.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid disintegration of the basic social functions of the state, poverty has become an almost all-encompassing fact of life in Tajikistan. The civil war and increased poverty have triggered the rise of another phenomenon, that of labour migration to CIS countries, and especially to Russia and Kazakhstan<sup>88</sup>. According to the International Organisation for Migration, in 2002 around 927,000 adults over 15 years of age in Tajikistan lived in households in which the main income was derived from remittances<sup>89</sup>. A survey conducted in early 2003 showed that over a quarter of all households had at least one family member working abroad. Around 18% of the adult population, equivalent to 632,000 people, had left the country to work abroad during the period 2000-03 most of them for seasonal work; around 84%<sup>90</sup> of migrant workers had worked in Russia.

The majority of Tajik migrants in Russia work in the construction, oil and gas industries, motor vehicle and machinery manufacturing, the sale of fruit and vegetables, catering, agriculture, shuttle trade and small-scale trade and markets<sup>91</sup>. Around 85% of migrant workers are male. The majority (57%) of migrant workers define themselves as not having a profession or skills<sup>92</sup>. The two largest

groups of migrant workers are those up to 29 years of age and those aged 40 or over. The former is the largest group, and typically consists of people with 9–11th grade general education and no qualifications, whereas over a quarter of the latter group are qualified workers and specialists. Around 14.5% of migrant workers gained their first work experience abroad<sup>93</sup>. More than 40% of Tajik migrants in former Soviet Union countries come from the region of Khatlon<sup>94</sup>.

The education system must be capable of absorbing an increasing number of young people at all levels of post-compulsory education, while at the same time developing higher-quality and more relevant educational offers for young people. The demographic development will, in the years to come, require the labour market to create around 120,000 jobs for new entrants alone. The question will be at what level of education these young people will leave the education system, and what kinds of job will be available to them. The government's current education and employment policies will have their own impact here. In terms of education, this impact will be dependent on the educational strategies that are developed.

For example, will the government choose an education policy that produces a balanced supply of qualifications at different levels? Or will the policy be governed by attempts to keep as many young people away from the labour market for as long as possible, by expanding higher education?

The first wave of migration in the early 1990s saw the departure of 70–80% of the adult skilled workforce outside agriculture. While this migration has kept unemployment levels down, it has also deprived the country of the most productive

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<sup>88</sup> All statistics on migration are from the International Organisation for Migration, *Labour migration from Tajikistan*, July 2003.

<sup>89</sup> *Idem*, p.20.

<sup>90</sup> *Idem*, p.23.

<sup>91</sup> *Idem*, pp.30–31.

<sup>92</sup> *Idem*, p.29.

<sup>93</sup> *Idem*, p.15.

<sup>94</sup> *Idem*.

part of its population. This situation has created the major challenge of building up a qualified workforce for the industry and service sectors. Since the end of the 1990s migration has also provided an outlet for many Tajiks who have good levels of education and have found themselves unemployed. Again, this has eased unemployment figures, but it has deprived the country of additional numbers of potentially productive workers. It is questionable whether the country can continue to rely in the long-term on access to the Russian labour market in particular. Moreover, migrant workers will also need appropriate qualifications, especially qualifications that are recognised by enterprises and labour markets abroad. Given that most migrant workers find employment far below their own qualification levels, there will be a tremendous need for requalification when they return.

### 3.4 LABOUR MARKET DEVELOPMENTS

During the transition period the labour market in Tajikistan has faced difficult challenges, with mass lay-offs from state-owned companies, a lack of capacity in the formal private sector to absorb the increasing population into employment, an exodus of skilled workers and professionals of Russian and German origin, and massive seasonal migration, especially to Russia and Kazakhstan. In parallel, an informal sector has developed, mainly in the form of subsistence farming and trading that will soon face the challenge of developing growth and sustainability. These developments also present mixed signals for VET.

However, it is not easy to develop a clear picture of the labour market situation in Tajikistan. There is no regular comprehensive collection of labour market data<sup>95</sup>. No surveys are currently undertaken that could inform on the future demand of the labour market at national level in terms of occupations and specialities. Likewise there is a lack of data on the informal sector, in terms of both quantitative and qualitative information<sup>96</sup>. As a result of migration, the development of a large informal sector, the collapse of industrial companies and the non-functioning of the employment services, it is very difficult to assess labour market developments and to have a clear picture, based on statistics, of the current contribution of VET to employment. A textbook labour market, which allocates resources based on price and quality, simply does not exist.

During the period 1991–2004, while the total population increased by 23.0%, from 5.51 million to 6.77 million, the working age population increased by 49.8%, from 2.58 million to 3.86 million.

In contrast, the number of employed people decreased every year until 1996, and although it has since increased, in 2004 it was still below the 1991 level. Table 9 shows that the labour force participation rate decreased from around 77% in 1991 to around 51% in 2004.

Table 10 shows that in the period characterised by strong economic growth rates, the increase in the size of the total population of working age was still higher every year (apart from 2001) than the increase in the number of people employed. The labour market is not able to follow the demographic changes.

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<sup>95</sup> Although in 2002 the MoLSP carried out a survey according to the ILO methodology of Labour Market Surveys to establish real unemployment, this has not been done regularly, and it is questionable whether the survey was able to establish realistic unemployment figures. No tracer studies are carried out to understand how VET graduates perform on the labour market after graduation, nor are studies available to assess how graduates from other types of education fare on the labour market.

<sup>96</sup> A number of other surveys related to the labour market have been carried out. These include the poverty assessments in 1999 and 2004, and, for example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) study, 'Labour Migration from Tajikistan'. However, these do not adequately make up for the lack of comprehensive labour market information at national level, nor do they inform on future priorities in terms of occupations and skill requirements.

### 3. THE SOCIOECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT FOR VET REFORM

**Table 9: Key labour market indicators in Tajikistan for 1991 and 1998–2004 (in thousands)** <sup>97</sup>

Indicators	1991	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004**
Total population	5,505.6	6,001.3	6,126.7	6,250.0	6,375.5	6,506.0	6,640.0	6,772.0
Population younger than working age	2,509.9	2,595.2	2,616.2	2,611.3	2,601.1	2,589.7	2,585.0	2,634.0
Population of working age*	2,577.5	3,024.8	3,126.7	3,246.7	3,397.0	3,573.3	3,739.6	3,860.0
Population older than working age	418.2	381.3	383.6	392.0	377.4	343.0	315.4	278.0
Labour force	1,971.0	1,855.0	1,791.0	1,794.0	1,872.0	1,904.0	1,928.0	1,978.0
Employed population	1,971.0	1,796.0	1,737.0	1,745.0	1,829.0	1,857.0	1,885.0	1,939.2
Registered unemployed	***	54.1	49.7	43.2	43.0	46.7	43.0	38.8
Economically non-active population	5,55.0	1,183.0	1,334.0	1,392.0	1,429.0	1,573.0	1,712.0	1,786.0

\*According to 1998 legislation the working age is 15-63 years.

\*\*Preliminary figures.

\*\*\* Figure not available

Source: Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Tajikistan, May 2005

**Table 10: Year-on-year changes in key labour market indicators, 1998–2004 (%)**

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Population	2.13	2.09	2.01	2.01	2.05	2.06	1.99
Population of working age	4.43	2.86	1.95	3.61	5.33	4.65	3.22
Labour force	0.71	-3.45	0.17	4.35	1.71	1.26	2.59
Employed	0.28	-3.29	0.46	4.81	1.53	1.51	2.88

Source: Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Tajikistan, May 2005

The nature of employment has also changed dramatically since 1991. The state is no longer the main employer, but has been replaced by the private sector. Interestingly enough, collective forms of enterprise have also increased, especially in agriculture.

**Table 11: Public, private and collective employment according to ownership for 1991, 1998 and 2002 (%)**

	1991	1998	2002
Public	59.7	42.7	27.8
Private	19.0	33.1	44.0
Collective	21.2	23.2	27.5

Source: Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Tajikistan, 2004

<sup>97</sup> The numbers in the table do not add up completely and are indicative of the situation only.

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The importance of different sectors has also changed. The greatest falls in employment took place in the construction and manufacturing industries. Agriculture, however, remains by far the dominant employment sector. In 2000 around 65% of all employment was in agriculture, 7.5% in industry, 10.7% in education, culture and art, and 4.5% in health and social care. Trade only made up 1.8% of total official employment<sup>98</sup>, but can be expected to make up a much larger proportion of economic activity when the informal sector is included.

Another changing feature of employment is that much of it is created in small and micro-businesses and through self-employment<sup>99</sup>. According to the employment services, employment in small and micro-businesses is usually obtained through family or other contacts. At the same time, vacancies posted through the employment services are typically those in more traditional jobs, and require low skills for low pay.

Most new employment has been created in the agriculture and trade sectors. Both are sectors that have seen a rapid expansion of informal sector activities with low productivity. New jobs in agriculture in particular are typically related to subsistence farming activities, a point also indicated by the fact that the increase in employment has occurred in a period when agriculture has seen a reduction in its overall importance in the economy. Trade, too, is strongly dominated by the informal sector, and a great deal of employment stems from work in markets or similar activities.

Registered unemployment remains low in Tajikistan, increasing from the level of an unknown phenomenon at independence to over 54,000 people (2.9%) in 1998<sup>100</sup>. Since then registered unemployment has fallen somewhat, and in 2004 was only 38,800 (2.0%). Given the lack of incentives to register (low compensation levels, and the unattractiveness of the limited number

of vacancies, training opportunities and other initiatives offered through the employment services) combined with strict rules for being accepted as unemployed, this level does not even remotely reflect reality. The 2002 Labour Force Survey arrived at a figure of over 200,000 unemployed (11.3%). Moreover, massive levels of migration have also resulted in decreasing unemployment figures.

Of those registered unemployed in 2002, 55% were women, 62.6% were in the age group 15–29 years, and 69.8% were from the rural population<sup>101</sup>.

The labour market in Tajikistan is a difficult context for VET reform. Despite economic growth since 1998, the labour market has been unable to absorb the existing labour force, let alone create new employment for the young people entering the labour market for the first time, and who increase the labour force by around 120,000 every year. The informal sector and migration currently absorb large numbers of the surplus labour force and help to maintain social stability. The nature of employment has also changed dramatically. The former large state-owned enterprises, which required sets of fixed skills, have given way to large numbers of small and medium private sector companies, mainly in the informal sector. Consequently, the types of knowledge, skills and attitudes required are no longer the same, and this requires changes in VET programmes. Precise data and information on these developments, however, are not available.

For a reform of the VET system, it will be particularly important to know exactly how the qualification structure of the national workforce has changed as a result of migration. It was always the case that a high proportion of managerial, technical and skilled jobs were occupied by 'Europeans', chiefly Russians, Ukrainians and Germans, while the Tajik population was supposedly spread over a wide spectrum of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in agriculture, industry and services.

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<sup>98</sup> IMF Country Report No. 01/69, May 2001.

<sup>99</sup> Kodusov (2004).

<sup>100</sup> Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, May 2005.

<sup>101</sup> Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, May 2005

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However, the real picture may have been more complex, and there are probably considerable differences between urban and rural populations in terms of traditions, lack of Russian language skills and access to educational facilities. There are also obvious differences between the public administration, health and education sectors on the one side and economic sectors such as agriculture and industry on the other<sup>102</sup>.

However, the complexity of the labour market context is not just the result of the current shortage of jobs, the changing nature of existing jobs or the absence of reliable information. Rather, it is the overall uncertainty surrounding labour market developments and structures that creates the main problems for policymakers. Such

uncertainty is likely to persist for a long time, and could even become a structural characteristic. Hence, the issue is not so much to collect hard data, as these would not be easily available in the first place. Under conditions of high labour market uncertainty, the key policy issue is to establish sustainable and trusted communication platforms between VET institutions and the employment system, at all levels (local, regional, national and in all sectors), and to have a flexible and open VET system in place that can respond effectively to changing skills needs. Of course, labour market data and analytical capacities are needed, but their purpose is to facilitate communication between stakeholders on developing and implementing policies and measures.

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<sup>102</sup> Soucek notes, with reference to this issue in the wider Central Asian context, 'The disparity is thus probably not the result of deliberate discrimination but of a force of inertia on both sides: tradition of a mostly rural population on the native side, convenience of an already qualified workforce on the mostly "European" employer's side, occupational preferences among the educated Central Asians all have played their specific roles.' (2000, p. 295)



## 4. MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR THE REFORM OF VET

# 4

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Like all other transition countries, Tajikistan is facing the challenge of reforming its VET system. However, although the challenge is the same, the political, social and economic context in which this reform is to take place differs markedly from that in other countries. Policymakers in Tajikistan will therefore need to develop their own reform policy and strategy based on a realistic assessment of their own needs and opportunities. In doing so, however, they should be able to make good use of experiences of VET reform from other countries, even if these experiences do not produce a clear blueprint that can be easily copied and implemented.

Experience from other market economies and transition countries shows that a well-functioning VET system is crucial for economic and social development<sup>103</sup>. Without a well-educated and qualified labour force, covering the different qualification types and levels needed by an

evolving employment system, no country can secure prosperity and decent standards of welfare and well-being for its people. The availability of a stratum of workers with mid-level qualifications, including skilled workers, technicians and mid-level professionals, is one of the pillars of sustained economic and social development. This understanding is a cornerstone of the employment, education and social policies of EU Member States, and of their cooperation with and assistance to third countries. It is on this very issue that Tajikistan is currently facing a major challenge.

### 4.2 CURRENT SITUATION IN TAJIKISTAN

In Tajikistan, VET no longer produces relevant qualifications for a skilled and competent workforce. Nor for that matter is it seen by young people and their families as an attractive educational option because it no longer prepares individuals for a positive

<sup>103</sup> For a review, see the various chapters in Grootings, ETF (2004).

## THE REFORM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

occupational future. VET has developed into an instrument of social protection for children from poor families. This situation is the result of a longer process that has also occurred in other countries of the former Soviet Union, but which in Tajikistan has been aggravated and further complicated by the more recent events of independence, transition and civil conflict.

In Tajikistan the main attraction of basic vocational schools at the turn of the 21st century has become the provision of free meals and shelter for children from poor households, whose families could not afford to send their offspring to other types of schools. The social protection function of the vocational school system has become even more important because of the collapse of other social welfare institutions in a context where poverty among the population has dramatically increased. Authorities are therefore not much inclined to let this social protection mechanism slip away as well, even though the social protection role currently played by vocational schools has all the characteristics of temporary emergency aid<sup>104</sup>.

However, despite its increasing focus on social welfare functions, the VET system in its current shape falls short of being an effective instrument for sustained poverty alleviation. This is because of the way it is organised and the provision it offers. It does not deliver the kinds of knowledge, skills and competence that would enable its students to find or create gainful and decent employment<sup>105</sup>. The VET system has been unable to respond properly to new and emerging needs for knowledge and skills. Indeed, companies that have jobs to offer have become increasingly unsatisfied with the skills, knowledge and competences possessed by vocational school graduates, and are unwilling to employ and retrain them. Given the high levels of unemployment among graduates from other types of education, employers have sufficient choice in any case. This has

become critical in a situation where most, if not all, of the jobs formerly provided by large state-owned industrial and agricultural enterprises, for which vocational schools still prepare, have disappeared. Young graduates and adults with a traditional vocational qualification such as those provided by basic vocational schools find it difficult to find or keep employment. If they have found employment, they are among the lowest paid<sup>106</sup>. Thus, VET will only be able to contribute effectively to the reduction of poverty when it takes its primary role of qualifying individuals for decent work more seriously.

To what extent does the VET system qualify graduates for obtaining and retaining a position on the labour market, by providing them with relevant skills of an appropriate quality and with a vocational qualification recognised and appreciated by employers, other education institutions and potential future students? A more detailed assessment of its qualifying role for employment presents the following picture.

- VET is currently still heavily supply-driven. Policymakers do not base their decisions concerning the contents and coverage of VET programmes on information on and analysis of labour market developments. Such information is not actually available, nor are capacities in place to collect and analyse labour market data and to prepare these as a basis for informed policymaking. This means that decisions on the education programmes to be offered, the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students should be taught, and the number of students to be admitted to these programmes are at best based on common sense and anecdotal information. However, what happens in reality is that everyone in the system simply continues doing what they have been doing since the 1980s. The aim is to keep the system running.

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<sup>104</sup> Its importance – especially in financial terms – appears to be exaggerated. The cost per meal per student amounted to TJS 0.16 in 2005. Total expenditures on meals are TJS 1,193,540 which is 17% of the budget. VET Department, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2005.

<sup>105</sup> See for the concept of decent employment, ILO.

<sup>106</sup> Godfrey (2002).

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- There is very little interest from the private sector in becoming involved in VET, not only in terms of providing practical training opportunities or cofunding, but also in terms of policy development and consultations. This is true for employers and unions. As a result, the MoLSP continues to draw on line ministry input to policy debates (the Ministries of Economy, Industry, Construction, and Agriculture, as former state employers). It must also think and act as a kind of enlightened state on behalf of private employers in developing reform policies that are relevant to labour markets. Social partnership is only in its infancy. Moreover, reform thinking is mainly limited to national-level discussions. This situation makes the reform project vulnerable and puts its sustainability at risk.
- The qualifying role of the various schools and programmes is not very clear. Different VET programmes (one, two and three-year programmes) provided by different institutions appear to differ according to the general education level that they provide rather than the occupational skill level for which they qualify students. In other words, it is possible to obtain the same qualification through different programmes of different durations that differ only in the amount and level of general education they provide. There is no relationship between levels of qualifications on the labour market and levels of VET programmes.
- In fact, it appears that the common understanding that VET programmes qualify skilled workers, that technical education qualifies specialists and that short-term courses provided by the employment services produce a qualification comparable to that of the VET programmes (but without offering general education) still prevails, without being questioned. This structure of vocational and technical education and training reflects the characteristics of employment that were prevalent for mass-industrial enterprises and large-scale agricultural farms. It is ill-adapted to the new realities of work and employment.
- All VET programmes continue to be aimed at traditional wage employment in large industrial complexes and state farms, without account being taken of the drastic decrease in job opportunities in industry and the increasing diversity in scale and products in the agricultural sector. Work in the informal sector is increasing. The system educates individuals for non-existent or disappearing jobs.
- Moreover, the existing 93 VET programmes are based on a list (the so-called Classifier) of 260 occupations on a one-to-one basis. This means that each occupation from this list has its own specific programme that prepares individuals for the narrow specialisations of a specific job. Specialisation for a fixed set of job-related skills starts at the very beginning of the programme. The scope for transferring from one programme to another is severely limited, and often does not exist at all.
- In curriculum terms, school-based VET programmes are dominated by a large number of general subjects that are not related to the vocational orientation of the programme, nor to the vocational theory and practical parts. The approach to the teaching of knowledge, both general and vocation-specific, is based on knowledge transfer by the teacher, with an emphasis on rote learning by the student. Even in VET, the traditional view that students should learn pieces of theory, pieces of applied theory and practical skills is still present. These three elements of the curriculum remain largely unconnected. This creates a gap between the academic knowledge taught and the real-life situations in which this knowledge should be applied.
- The contents of the general subjects are the responsibility of the MoE, and are the same as those for secondary general schools. The strict division of responsibilities in VET for content and curricula of the general and vocational elements between different ministries has led to a situation in which they are two non-integrated parallel parts. The focus of the general education element is to develop purely academic

## THE REFORM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

knowledge for its own sake rather than as a tool for improving the capacity of students to acquire broad vocational knowledge and skills. In reality the strong academic bias of the general education element of the curriculum, with its large number of distinct subjects (17 in total in the three-year programmes), rather reduces the focus on the vocational qualification. It has the adverse effect of limiting the skill level acquired to that of a semi-skilled worker at best. Against this background it is difficult to imagine that VET actually does provide vocational skills at the level of a skilled worker. Realistically, vocational qualification levels are far lower than this. The incompatibility between general education and vocational qualification levels are a major obstacle to improving the image and status of VET.

- The quality and relevance of practical training has decreased rapidly. The former close links between vocational schools and large industrial complexes and state farms have not yet been replaced by new ways of cooperating between the education and employment sectors. This means that work-based practical training opportunities have all but disappeared. The development of skills now relies on the capacity of the practical trainers and the availability of adequately equipped workshops within vocational schools. However, most practical trainers have little experience from the world of work of the occupation for which they train. New entries into the training profession are typically new graduates from the Technological-Pedagogical Colleges in Dushanbe and Khujand who have no industry experience. Thus, many trainers have a limited understanding of new technologies, have no opportunity to obtain new skills and, furthermore, have had limited exposure to work situations which would allow them to develop appropriate competences, attitudes and practical skills themselves, even in the basic areas of the occupation for which they train.

The extent to which VET also qualifies individuals to enter higher levels of education needs some further attention.

- Progression to higher levels of education (including technical schools) is based purely on achievement in general education, whereas the vocational and technical parts are solely job-related. This situation reflects the view that VET is for those students who do not succeed in general and higher education, and who therefore should be prepared for work. Attending a vocational school is the result of a negative choice rather than a positive decision. Though progression from VET to higher levels of education (both technical and higher education) is possible following completion of the three-year programme, graduates rarely use this option.
- This aspect of VET is further reinforced by the fact that different ministries are responsible for different parts of the curriculum. Vocational schools have not been included in the debates on education reform, except indirectly through the curriculum discussions concerning general education. Nor, obviously, has there been any real cooperation on reform between the different ministries.
- The strict division between vocational and technical schools does not allow for the sharing of scarce resources such as equipment and training workshops. Less focus on the institutional founders of vocational and technical education could lead to a more efficient use of resources.

The overall picture that arises is not very positive. Effective vocational institutions should be able to identify and flexibly respond to skills development needs and to provide the learning environments in which the present and future workforces can acquire the competences they need for their employability and further studies. Tajik vocational institutions are currently not able to do this. This is largely the result of a longer-term development in which VET, at least at the lower levels of the qualification structure, has become increasingly isolated from the wider education system. For many

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years this did not create too many visible problems, as long as graduates managed to find jobs and as long as the employment system provided alternative mechanisms for individual development.

The situation has dramatically changed with transition. VET is now also isolated from, and no longer in touch with, developments in the employment system. However, as previously argued, a well-developed private sector that could provide sufficiently clear signals about the nature of employers' skill needs does not exist; nor are national ministries or agencies any longer able to determine in full the future needs for knowledge and skills. Clear signals for the future direction of VET will therefore remain the exception rather than the rule.

Tajikistan is not the only country that has experienced a crisis in its VET system. Similar developments have occurred in other countries, and although the conditions in other countries may not be completely comparable, some lessons may be learned from the experience elsewhere. Policymakers may be able to use such lessons to develop ideas for the reform of VET that fits the particular context of their country.

### 4.3 LESSONS FROM ABROAD

One of the key lessons for countries seeking to cope with high levels of labour market uncertainty is that VET should not be too immediately responsive to short-term labour market needs, but instead should provide broad qualifications that offer a basis for further specialisation and future development.

Another lesson is that VET should perhaps be responsive not only to enterprises and their qualification needs but also to the – often not well formulated – learning needs of the individuals who are seeking employment or work opportunities. VET after all is about educating and training people so that they are able to determine their own occupational future, and not just about producing qualified labour to satisfy the demands of enterprises.

In an uncertain economic and high-risk social environment, VET institutions can no longer afford to stick to the kinds of knowledge and skills they have offered up to now, in particular when these have already been obsolete for a considerable length of time. If neither enterprises nor potential students are able to define their qualification needs, vocational schools must communicate with the students and enterprises in their own community in order to help them to identify their qualification needs and develop programmes to serve these needs. Such a proactive approach calls for high levels of flexibility and professionalism. Schools, teachers and trainers should have the autonomy to assume these responsibilities.

However, it would be unrealistic to expect individual schools, given their history and heritage, to be able to develop the necessary capacities for undertaking all this on their own. The schools' main responsibility is and remains the organisation of learning processes that enable learners to develop the knowledge and skills they should possess upon leaving school. Teachers, trainers and managers of school organisations should be responsible and accountable for this. Other education and training professionals in the system need to support them with the development of flexible and high-quality responses to training needs, so that schools can concentrate on their principal task.

This implies that an overall national VET policy exists, agreed among principal stakeholders, including the social partners; this is another important lesson to be learned. Such an overall policy should provide clear frameworks, guarantee transparent governance and efficient administration, provide equal access, set priorities and criteria for funding, define responsibilities for achieving objectives, develop overall quality schemes and maintain quality assurance mechanisms, secure high-quality facilities and professional teaching staff, enable continuous innovation, and facilitate international cooperation and exchange.

## THE REFORM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

Such a national VET policy, and the institutional set-up required for its implementation, also needs to be integrated with policies in other related domains, in particular those relating to economic development, employment, education and social protection. This should ensure that VET institutions are in contact with other institutions relevant for social and economic development. A proper balance between responsibilities at national and lower levels must therefore also exist.

An important element of any national VET policy is to be clear about the objectives of VET and to ensure that the agreed objectives are met. Increasingly, policymakers are taking a broad view of VET, especially in countries where there has been a long tradition of having VET as part of the overall education system<sup>107</sup>. VET has become – or, more correctly, is gradually becoming – an integrated part of lifelong learning systems. Lifelong learning itself has become the dominant policy paradigm for coping with rapid changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes in employment. This has important curricular and institutional implications, and one of these relates to the objectives for VET.

### 4.4 THE MAIN CHALLENGE

Against the background of the country's own situation, and in view of lessons from other countries, policymakers are facing a major challenge in the reform of the Tajik VET system. They will have to transform its current social protection role into one that allows it to make a real contribution to poverty alleviation, by delivering VET courses and qualifications that either fulfil a labour market demand or enable people to create employment, and that will attract able students who are interested in acquiring professional qualifications. The VET system will only be able to do this if it manages to replace its (negative) social protection stigma with a (positive) recognised capacity to provide such relevant qualifications. However, at the same time it cannot ignore the fact that it

will also be catering for students from poor families. This is an issue that concerns the overall VET system, but that affects vocational schools in particular. The key issue is therefore that basic VET cannot be limited exclusively to taking care of the poor. Vocational schools must provide basic levels of qualification that have a value on the labour market and in the wider education system, including, though not exclusively, to students from poor families.

The challenge is therefore to develop an overall VET system that is open and flexible enough to do both: contribute to poverty alleviation, and qualify individuals for employment and further education. These two objectives go hand in hand. However, this cannot be possible by looking at the vocational schools in isolation. In order to stop their vicious downward spiral it will be necessary to have a more global approach to the reform of the vocational schools and to redefine their place within the overall VET system. Basic vocational schools will have to re-establish a positive relationship with other parts of the education system, and at the same time improve their relevance for the employment system, in the fields of initial and further training, and re-training.

In the medium term it may be necessary to take an even more radical approach and to replace the current institution-based approach (distinguishing vocational schools and technical colleges) with an approach based on programmes that prepare students for different levels of qualification. Such programmes for different levels of qualification may well be provided in one and the same type of institution. Given scarce resources and the tremendous need for investment in the refurbishment and modernisation of infrastructures, this option will need further serious consideration. It will therefore be necessary to establish the appropriate communication and consultation platforms within the government to allow this to happen.

The brief review of the current state of VET in Tajikistan and the identification of the

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<sup>107</sup> This is in contrast to (mostly Anglo-Saxon) countries, where more focused and narrow labour market training, which has not been integrated in overall education systems, has dominated.

#### 4. MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR THE REFORM OF VET

major challenges for reform make it clear that there is much more at stake than modernising curricula, updating the skills and knowledge of teachers and trainers, or providing finances for new equipment to

schools. The reform agenda is larger and more fundamental. We shall return to the issues in more detail in the following chapter, in which the reform agenda is described.



## 5. A REFORM AGENDA FOR VET IN TAJIKISTAN

# 5

### 5.1 A CONCEPT FOR THE REFORM OF VET

Within the international donor community there are various concepts of what should happen to VET, and in particular the part of VET that is currently under the responsibility of the MoLSP. One very strong view is that the public system of basic VET, represented by the vocational schools, should be closed down. There are arguments relating to efficiency and effectiveness, which boil down to a view that VET should not primarily be under the responsibility of the state and the public education system. Training should be left to private enterprises and the markets that govern them. In contrast, the reform concept developed by the MoLSP, which has been approved by the government, argues for maintaining but radically reforming the current system<sup>108</sup>. It proposes a system of VET for Tajikistan which is built on improving and further developing the existing infrastructure and resources. However, it does so within a

radically redefined approach that will make the VET system better and able to respond more efficiently to new challenges. To that end, a comprehensive reform agenda has been proposed that includes the main issues to be addressed in the reform of VET.

The reform of VET focuses on providing occupational qualifications that are relevant to current and future needs for qualified workers on the labour market. Those qualifications must also appeal to an increasingly heterogeneous group of young and adult students who are seeking income through decent work. Given that labour market requirements and people's qualification needs are not only difficult to identify but also changing rapidly, the VET system needs to be flexible and adaptable. Responsiveness, flexibility and adaptability will need to be secured by establishing effective consultation platforms between government and social partners. Additional elements of reform include increased decentralisation of administration and

<sup>108</sup> 'State Concept of Vocational Education and Training System Reform in the Republic of Tajikistan'. Decree no 387 of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1 October 2004.

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decision-making, sustainable funding arrangements, greater autonomy for vocational institutions with regard to the delivery of education and training, a greater emphasis on practical training in skills and attitudes, reliable assessment standards and procedures, and the creation of different pathways for achieving comparable qualifications. Vocational guidance and counselling must be developed in order to assist individuals to make the right qualification choices. A professional support structure must be put in place to provide information for policymaking and to help institutions to develop and introduce innovations when necessary.

It is suggested that VET in Tajikistan should be framed, from a short-term perspective, within a poverty alleviation context, but should in the long-term enable young people and adults not only to enter and develop labour market positions, but also to qualify for further education and to function as responsible citizens in a dynamic society. This threefold objective for VET needs to be reflected in the contents and the structure of the curriculum. VET should be guided by principles of lifelong learning. Open horizontal and vertical pathways into and out of the VET system should guarantee lifelong access to further qualification. Such a concept must find the right balance between the position of VET within the overall education system and its connection with the labour market. In particular the vocational schools must be brought back within an overall VET structure that covers different levels of qualifications rather than distinct student client groups. In the short term, however, VET should be flexibly responsive to immediate employment opportunities and the needs of individuals to find or create decent work. Finding the balance between short-term poverty alleviation and long-term lifelong learning calls for a well-designed development strategy based on wide consultations with stakeholders and professionals.

The concept also addresses how such qualifications can be developed, delivered

and assessed in ways that are in line with international quality standards. It is suggested that investment should be made in developing an overarching national qualification framework. A national qualification framework organises the various types and levels of qualification in a systematic and coherent manner based on agreed occupational and educational standards. A national qualification framework also defines which courses lead to which qualifications and at which level. It enables VET policy to follow a qualification and programme approach rather than the current institution-based approach. It also offers a quality assurance framework for decentralised and responsive delivery of qualifications. Finally, a clear and transparent national qualification framework provides a reference system for international cooperation and mobility. Indeed, there is ample scope for regional cooperation in the very development of national qualification frameworks in neighbouring countries. The development of a national qualification framework will require considerable time and investment, but international experience also shows that it provides an ideal opportunity for government and social partners to agree on the main principles of the VET system, including necessary inputs, quality of processes and standards for outcomes<sup>109</sup>.

The concept places great emphasis on developing a VET system that is financially affordable, at least in the long run, and that has the capacity to adapt flexibly to changing situations. This assumes the participation of social partners and cooperation between the public and the private sectors. It also calls for a strong support base of research and development.

The concept also suggests that the reform experiences of other countries should be closely followed, including in particular those of neighbouring countries and other transition countries, with a view to learning from good practice implemented elsewhere. Most other countries that were part of the former Soviet Union have

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<sup>109</sup> OECD (2005).

already experienced more than a decade of reform. Tajikistan's particular situation as a relative latecomer, and especially the relevance of the wider regional labour market for its own economic and social development, calls for reform to be seen from a global perspective. Policymakers, researchers, practitioners and students must participate in regional and wider international VET networks and projects. International cooperation and exchange is an effective way of keeping VET up to date by providing hands-on experience of alternative methods.

Finally, as is clear from the above, the concept assumes that the development of a modern VET system must involve all stakeholders, including the state, social partners, teachers and trainers, researchers and developers, and – last but not least – students and their parents. This is confirmed by the experiences of other countries which are reforming their VET systems. Only through a broad involvement of all stakeholders will it be possible to develop and successfully implement a modern and flexible VET system that is relevant to the context of Tajik society, for which there is a sense of ownership among the stakeholders, and which on this basis guarantees commitment and a high degree of sustainability. Joint participation in international exchange and cooperation may be a strong tool for fostering the involvement of different stakeholders, in particular during the development of new policies.

### 5.2 THE VET REFORM AGENDA

On the basis of the analysis, and following the outline of the concept of VET agreed upon by the government, it is possible to formulate an ambitious reform agenda. This agenda includes all the major building blocks of a modern and open VET system, and formulates the priority measures that must be undertaken in order to set the reform process in motion. The agenda is ambitious not only in the sense that it covers all the key elements of a VET system but also because it will require considerable resources, both human and material.

Since national funding, from either the state or the private sector, will not be sufficient to cover the costs of the reform, the mobilisation of funds will necessarily include close cooperation with and coordination of international assistance. This situation will put great demands on the capacity to manage a variety of national and international projects and programmes in such a way that they all contribute to the reform of the system. This is not an easy task.

The highest priority must be given to ensuring that the reform of the VET system is undertaken by the people who are directly involved themselves in the system, from national policymakers to local administrators, school directors and teachers. This raises the issue of ownership and professional capacity. The key issue of VET reform is that all the stakeholders have to learn to play new roles in the system. They can only do this in practice and together. There must also be continuity and feedback. Again, this situation makes high demands on the capacity to manage the reform process. Experience from elsewhere shows that this is often underestimated and neglected.

In brief, the reform agenda includes the elements listed below. These aspects are interrelated and form part of a comprehensive reform approach. Obviously, not everything can be accomplished at once, but it is important to realise that individual measures will be dependent on, or have an impact on, other aspects of the system and therefore that each needs to be considered as part of an overall reform strategy.

1. *Structure: Moving from an institution-based approach to high-quality qualification programmes for all levels*  
VET is currently based on the existence of different schools at upper secondary level that deliver different types and levels of qualification, and that are governed and administered by different ministries. Access to these schools is dependent on success in general education. This creates a situation of isolation from the overall education system for basic and lower vocational

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education, gives it the stigma of being a last resort and a dead-end for those not able to learn or who can't afford to learn, and prevents the development of a well-qualified mid-level stratum in the workforce. A reorientation and revalidation of occupational qualifications in VET programmes, and their relations at different levels, will make VET pathways more attractive for individuals seeking to develop and or improve their employability.

### 2. *Standards and assessment: Developing a national qualification framework*

VET is also currently based on input rather than output standards. In particular, there is a lot of emphasis on teaching and assessing individual subjects and the number of teaching hours as key elements of education standards. Education standards are dominated by general subjects, with the professional qualification being seen as a by-product rather than the core of the programme. This does not guarantee that what students learn in school has relevance for what they will need to know and be able to do in the occupation or job for which they are preparing. Nor does it enable students to use their vocational qualifications to access higher levels of VET.

A national qualification framework will bring coherence, transparency and consistency to what is now a multitude of unrelated vocational qualifications. It will also give more emphasis to defining and assessing learning outcomes at different levels by ordering the occupations that exist in the labour market according to an agreed set of criteria, by sector and level. A national qualification framework will also facilitate alternative ways of achieving the knowledge, skills and competences required for occupations, such as by assessing the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning processes. It should also leave space for local initiatives and flexibility, while at the same time providing a national quality assurance system. The development of a pilot qualification framework in one of the high-priority economic sectors such

as tourism could further clarify the issues at stake.

### 3. *Contents and curricula: Establishing a better balance between theoretical knowledge, practical skills and attitudes*

VET programmes are not only biased towards general subjects at the expense of vocational ones. They are also characterised by the fact that general subjects, vocational theory and practical learning are not integrated. Practical learning is often only characterised merely by training in narrow skills (such as how to operate a particular machine or tool) rather than learning how to cope with ordinary and critical situations that may occur in the reality of the occupation. As a consequence, little attention is given to developing work attitudes.

This has been the traditional approach to VET in many countries, but has for many years been under strain. Modern approaches, such as those that are competence-based, have replaced outdated knowledge-cum-skill-based approaches. These approaches start from the basic competences that graduates need, and therefore imply radical changes in the content of curricula, methods of teaching and learning, and the definition of learning outcomes.

### 4. *Teachers and trainers: Attracting professionals and developing rewarding careers*

Teaching and training in VET has become extremely unattractive because of low salaries and unattractive working conditions resulting from impoverished VET facilities. However, the existing approach and institutional set-up for teaching and training in VET requires radical reforms in line with the need to restructure and reorganise programmes, curricula, teaching methods and assessment. In particular, vocational teaching staff must become more familiar with the reality of the occupations for which they are preparing students. This will have implications for the organisation and contents of preservice training,

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in-service training and recruitment policies.

It will also require fundamental changes in the professional roles of teachers and trainers. Instead of transferring the knowledge or skills that they themselves have previously acquired, they must develop into professionals who are capable of organising the learning processes to enable their students to become competent to start work in the occupation for which they are preparing themselves. The importance of well-organised learning processes is increasingly recognised once more, and with this has come a reassessment of the importance of well-educated and trained professional teachers and trainers. However, these new roles call for different pedagogical and domain competences on the part of teachers and trainers. These new professional roles will obviously need to be adequately valued and rewarded in terms of salaries and career prospects.

### 5. *Enrolment and progression: Increasing attractiveness and creating open pathways*

Vocational and technical schools currently have fixed entry and exit points based on the duration of the programmes. It is practically impossible to switch programmes or schools, and each programme is oriented towards specific jobs or occupations. Success in attaining general education standards is a condition for entry to higher levels of education. Because of the current dominance of general subjects and the way in which they are taught, there are high dropout rates in lower and upper secondary education. Large numbers of young people enter the labour market without any qualifications. Some receive a second chance through short courses offered by the employment services. Moreover, vocational certificates do not enable students to continue their studies at a higher level, even within the same occupational domain. The system is rigid, closed and full of dead-end streets.

If the VET system were to be made more open, for example by organising

open and flexible horizontal and vertical pathways, entry to VET would be made much more attractive. In this way the system could also be opened up to adults who wish to improve their formal qualifications. Flexible pathways also help to make the VET system more efficient, in particular when combined with a programme-based approach within the context of a national qualification framework.

### 6. *School network: Improving quality and efficiency*

The current school network is relatively costly, particularly in view of the fact that almost all individual schools need heavy investments in refurbishment and modernisation. Schools are relatively small, each having their own management and overhead structures, and covering a very limited number of occupations and programmes. Basic vocational schools are institutionally separated from the secondary specialist schools, the former being administered by the MoLSP and the latter by the MoE or by one of a number of other ministries and national agencies. They are not considered part of an overall VET system.

Given the absence of curricular reform, the poor state of school material resources and the difficulties they have in attracting and retaining competent teachers and trainers, the quality of education and training is very low in all schools. Most of the programmes have lost their relevance for students and employers. On the other hand schools, especially those in rural areas, have developed into social institutions that fulfil functions beyond mere education and training. Some schools have also managed to enter the market for continuing education and training. A strategy for restructuring the existing school network must be based on these various considerations. There is an urgent necessity to develop such a strategy.

### 7. *Research and development: Investing in capacity building for support infrastructure*

One consequence of the fact that the Tajik education system was integrated

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into the Soviet system was that no national support and development infrastructure existed when the country became independent. Up to now Tajikistan has not had the financial and professional resources to build this up. All standard curricula, materials and equipment were formerly provided by Moscow, and innovations were also introduced from the centre. Moreover, in the past all the information needed to allocate resources was provided by the administration, from the local to the national level. No monitoring system existed, nor did an independent research infrastructure provide feedback to policymakers. This explains why there is currently a simultaneous lack of reliable data and analysis, and an absence of capacity to provide these. The small units that have been established inside the ministries are facing an impossible task. Research at the universities and other institutes of higher education has traditionally not been of an applied or policy-oriented nature; even if institutions were created to undertake policy-oriented research and practical development and innovation work, there would be few people with adequate competences and experience to carry out this work. Such work is currently mainly undertaken by NGOs and financed by international donors: a lack of continuity and the remoteness from policymaking are the main problems raised by this situation. There is an urgent need for the development of a professional support infrastructure that is at the service of both policymakers and practitioners in the schools. Different models can be applied, ranging from a centralised structure that is close to ministries, to a relatively independent one that is close to universities, or a more flexible and decentralised structure that is close to schools. Given available resources, the most appropriate model would probably be a mixed structure that uses the research capacities of universities as well as the practical innovation capacities of experienced and dedicated teachers in schools. The research and development infrastructure, together with the in-service teacher and trainer

training sector, would constitute a new career domain for experienced teachers and trainers, in addition to the present career paths into managerial and administrative functions at regional and national level.

### 8. *Governance: Establishing tripartite platforms for VET*

The MoLSP, with support from the Office of the President's Administration, is currently leading the reform of VET, at least in terms of the basic vocational schools. The MoE's main concern continues to be primary and general education reform. Employers and trade unions, with the exception of the teachers' union, are not very much engaged in the debate on the future of VET. This is partly because the private sector is not yet well organised, and also because it currently has other urgent matters to deal with. However, in order to develop broad ownership of, and participation in, the reform policy it will be of the utmost importance for the MoLSP to continue its attempts to involve employers and trade union representatives, at all levels, nationally, regionally and locally.

At national level, early involvement in reform policy debates leading to a sense of co-ownership may also facilitate other forms of participation at a later stage, such as providing practical training facilities, taking part in occupational standard setting, examination and even co-financing of VET. At regional and local level, the participation of social partners in the implementation and monitoring of policy initiatives will contribute greatly to ensuring that the VET provided by schools is relevant to the labour market. Overall, the government needs to make a serious investment in order to retain trust and confidence in the public VET system on the part of the social partners and among employers in particular.

### 9. *Administration and management: Introducing regional decentralisation and school autonomy*

Given the increasing heterogeneity of skill needs in companies and among prospective students, a centralised and

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standardised VET system will never be able to produce the necessary flexibility and responsiveness. In the absence of clear signals, schools must be able to communicate actively with their partners. This is particularly the case where traditional employment structures have collapsed and new ones, in both the formal and informal sectors, are emerging only slowly. Under such conditions, schools cannot rely on providing standard programmes, especially when these were originally designed for highly specialised jobs in mass production or agriculture.

A proactive and innovative approach by vocational schools requires competences from its managers, teachers and trainers that still need to be developed. This also requires a change of the current administrative and funding arrangements. However, decentralisation in this sense goes beyond giving more authority to lower levels in the public administration system, and requires increased autonomy for schools. Increasing the autonomy of schools in deciding on the content of vocational programmes and the methods by which they are delivered may run the risk of diverging quality levels. It is for this reason that the quality assurance provided by a national qualification framework is so important.

- 10 *Financing: Diversifying funding sources and moving towards per capita funding*  
The current centralised and itemised funding system does not allow any financial flexibility at school level. Moreover, funding from the MoLSP covers only part of the salaries and social costs incurred by schools and is in no way sufficient to cover maintenance, renovation and innovation. Schools are allowed to seek additional sources of income, but tend to opt for non-education-related sources (such as renting out premises or selling products produced by students) that do not contribute to improvements in the quality or relevance of the education they provide. In addition, enterprising schools are penalised because they are

required to pass on some of their income to the central authorities. This situation does not motivate schools to look for additional funding.

At the moment, financial contributions from the private sector, either monetary or in kind, are very rare. In view of rising poverty levels and the fact that parents in rural areas send their children to vocational schools because they receive shelter and a meal, contributions from families to vocational schools can be excluded. In fact, most additional funding to schools now probably comes from international donor projects and is of an ad hoc and temporary nature. Moving towards a per capita funding system may allow schools to develop greater autonomy and responsibility. The search for a diversified funding strategy is more of a medium-term issue, although consideration of this must start urgently. In the short term, mobilisation of the international donor community to support the reform of VET in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy seems to be the most feasible option.

11. *Legislation: Drafting an integrated law on VET for young and adults*  
Legislation prepared up to now has basically served to fill the regulatory gaps left when Tajikistan declared independence and had to establish a proper legislative basis for a national education system. There are separate laws for the various education subsectors, including for basic vocational schools. The current legislation is not based on a view that recognises the need for lifelong learning.

Vocational education for young people and VET for adults will need to be integrated into one comprehensive piece of legislation that should also provide the legal basis for some of the other elements that have been elaborated in this reform agenda: the national qualification framework, involvement of social partners, decentralised administration and school autonomy, per capita financing and

additional funding sources, and the research and development infrastructure. The new legislative framework will have to be an enabling legislation rather than a prohibiting one, since the reform process itself is largely a learning process for all stakeholders involved.

12. *International cooperation and exchange: Profiting from lessons of good practice and regional cooperation*

Upon its independence, Tajikistan not only faced the challenge of setting up its own national education system. It also lost access to the Soviet education space, which had provided for educational mobility and exchange, facilitated by the common Russian language. Although the reform of VET will have to fit the national context of Tajikistan, and no other country's system can therefore be easily copied, there exists a rich variety of international experience of how similar challenges have been handled elsewhere.

Policymakers, teachers, trainers and students should be helped to make use of that experience through manifold forms of cooperation and assistance. These could include cooperation in policy learning, partnerships between schools and other vocational institutions, and mobility and exchange of teachers and students. It will be particularly important to use cooperation as a means of strengthening regional contacts, not only because neighbouring countries are facing similar issues, but also because of the regional economic and labour market dimensions. In other parts of the world, including the EU, cooperation between countries in a 'technical' area such as VET has facilitated cooperation in more sensitive areas.

### 5.3 DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORM STRATEGY: IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

A review of the current situation indicates that there is increased understanding and agreement among stakeholders concerning critical VET reform issues. This is well illustrated by the development of a VET reform concept by the MoLSP and its acceptance by the government. However, this is the case mainly at national level and for representatives of various government institutions. Although the MoLSP has taken the initiative to set up a so-called Inter-sectoral Working Group to jointly develop the concept for VET reform, the reform discussions have not yet included other stakeholders (social partners) at regional and local levels. Hence, there is a need to broaden the involvement of these other stakeholders in the principal discussions so as to ensure increased relevance of VET for the emerging employment system.

However, at the same time, policy analysis and debate are conceptually still framed by the particularities of Tajikistan's history and situation. This concerns in particular the focus on vocational schools in isolation from the wider education and VET system. There is therefore an implicit acceptance from the traditional role and status of these vocational schools, overemphasising the social function of VET (in a narrow sense, i.e. the provision of schooling and meals to children of poor families) at the expense of other functions, and in particular the qualification function. Communication and coordination between the MoLSP and the MoE must be intensified in order to ensure that basic vocational education once again becomes integrated in an overall – and lifelong – education policy and system.

Moreover, the emphasis in reform debates is still on the identification of funds and the modernisation of curricula and equipment as the main issues to be resolved. There appears to be limited understanding of systemic reform issues at national and regional level. There has also been very little exposure to VET reform experiences in other transition countries, including

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neighbouring and other CIS countries. Conceptually, therefore, the debate needs stronger international reflection. This may also contribute to the ability to question some of the inherited characteristics of the VET system and to pursue a more radical reform.

The VET concept developed by the MoLSP shows that a reform process has already started, though it needs to be further developed, as set out above. Most importantly, it must also be translated into an implementation strategy that has clear priorities and objectives and is based on realistic resources, both human and financial.

The first steps have also been taken in relation to capacities for implementing VET reforms. There is a dedicated team in place

for the management and coordination of the reform process, though this team requires further strengthening and capacity building. The team involved in coordinating the VET reform strategy must also be better integrated into the overall educational reform structures in order to ensure that VET remains part of the education system and will become an integrated element of a future national lifelong learning system.

Professional capacities to take on operational reform and modernisation initiatives, such as reforms of curricula, textbooks and teachers/trainers, are severely limited, both quantitatively and qualitatively, at both national and school level. This remains a major issue of concern, and will need to be addressed more seriously.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>CACO</b>	Central Asian Cooperation Organisation
<b>CIS</b>	Community of Independent States
<b>DFID</b>	UK Department for International Development
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GBAO</b>	Gorno Badakshan
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>GTZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>ISCED</b>	International standard classification of education
<b>MES</b>	Modules of employable skills
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MoLSP</b>	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
<b>NGO</b>	Non governmental organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>RRS</b>	Regions of Republican Subordination
<b>PRSP</b>	Poverty reduction strategy paper
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>SME</b>	Small and medium sized enterprises
<b>TJS</b>	Tajik somoni
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>VET</b>	Vocational education and training



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