



**SKILLS DEVELOPMENT  
AND POVERTY REDUCTION  
IN TAJIKISTAN**  
ETF WORKING DOCUMENT



**etf**  
SHARING EXPERTISE  
IN TRAINING

## **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN TAJIKISTAN**

**Subhon Asiurov, Rustam Babajanov and K. Miraliev**

**Edited by Peter Grootings, ETF senior expert**

© European Training Foundation, 2007. Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Training Foundation or the EU institutions.

# 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the possible links between the ongoing reform of vocational education and training and the wider poverty reduction strategy, which is currently being implemented in Tajikistan.

The experience of other advanced and developing countries shows that a well functioning system of vocational education and training is an important factor for economic development, social cohesion and political stability. The present stage of development of Tajik society is characterised by ruthless and uncompromising labour market needs, declining social status, rising unemployment and limited economic capacities for the major part of the population. Under these conditions, vocational education and training becomes one of the major means through which young people who enter the labour market for the first time and jobless adult citizens can eventually secure themselves a source of income. In this sense vocational education and training constitutes also an important factor for poverty reduction of the population.

However, there are many signs that the system of vocational education and training in its present condition is far from becoming a real tool for poverty reduction and socio-economic development by virtue of its present nature, content, approaches and quality. Therefore, the existing system of vocational education and training needs to be radically redefined and a sound strategy and set of implementation measures for such radical reform, including the necessary regulations and substantive transformations, need to be developed.

The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has already adopted the State Concept of reforming of vocational education and training in October 2004. In this foundational document it is mentioned that "it is time to acknowledge the VET system is one of the national priorities for developing competitiveness of the economy and social protection of the population". The Government also has subscribed to the UN Literacy Decade (UNLD), which includes as one of the six goals of the Dakar Declaration that "the needs of all young and adult people will be adequately satisfied through equal access to programmes of basic life skills". The Government has worked closely with the World Bank and the IMF in preparing a National Poverty Reduction Strategy which is also aimed at achieving the Millennium Goals. The poverty reduction strategy places great emphasis on improving access to basic literacy, youth and adult training and the acquisition of basic life skills.

Besides a review of existing official documents such as the ones mentioned above, the authors of this study have also made use of the outcomes of discussions organised between key stakeholders in several parts of the country. Stakeholder workshops on vocational education and poverty reduction were held in the capital city Dushanbe as well as in the regions of Soghd (Kairakum), and Khatlon (Kurghantube) between April and June 2005. In addition, the results of a limited sociological survey that was conducted in the same period and the outcomes of various monitoring studies undertaken by the Trust Fund of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (a joint project of the World Bank and the Government of Tajikistan) have been used for this chapter.

In the following sections we shall first provide an overview of the national debates about poverty reduction in the country before discussing the potential contribution that vocational education and training can give to poverty reduction. After presenting our analysis of the current situation of vocational education and training it will become clear that many things need to change and improve before vocational schools really will be able to give a contribution to poverty reduction, either by providing the knowledge, skills and competences that people need to get out of poverty or to prevent that they fall into poverty in the first place.

## 2. Developments and debates on poverty reduction

In 1990, Tajikistan had the lowest level of gross domestic product per capita within the former Soviet Union, and the country was almost totally dependent from central subsidies from Moscow. A

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on a report prepared for the European Training Foundation in 2005 by Subhon Asiuov (Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan), Rustam Babajanov (Consultant on economic analysis of poverty of the Trust Fund for the National Poverty Reduction Strategy) and K Miraliev (Director of the Republican Centre of Information and Youth Orientation, Youth Committee) with assistance from Romish Sherali and Farid Safarmamadov (VET Support Foundation).

devastating civil war during the mid 1990s and the financial crisis in Russia in 1998 have delayed economic reform in Tajikistan, and only recently the government has begun to make progress in this direction, achieving macroeconomic stability and introducing a series of structural reforms.

In spite of an improving macroeconomic environment and progress in introducing structural reforms, Tajikistan still faces huge problems. The most recent evaluation of poverty levels was done in 2003 and has showed that about 64% of population is living in poverty, though the number was lower compared to the previous survey (in 1999 about 83% of population lived in poverty). As for the last years, even though a considerable economic growth has improved the situation, the level of poverty remains very high. Moreover, approximately 30% of the labour force is jobless. The growth of GDP is exclusively the result of exporting two kinds of products: aluminium and cotton. Both are highly volatile products with cotton being very dependent on climate changes and both on general trade market situations.

The macroeconomic situation in Tajikistan improved since 2002, the budget deficit has been brought down, external trade and direct foreign investments have increased, and external debt as percentage of GDP has decreased. Reflecting the improvement of the macroeconomic situation salaries have begun to rise in 2001. It is worth to note that salaries in the agriculture sector have been increasing by 40% and in the non-agriculture sector by 22%. The salaries in the public sector decreased with 8% relative to the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors in 2001, but from 2002 they also started to increase.

The effectiveness of implementing policies to reduce poverty depends on the participation of a wide range of parties as well as on a good system of monitoring and evaluation. One of the positive factors of the PRSP process in Tajikistan is the partnership between government and donors. The government is particularly working closely with the World Bank and has, for instance, jointly organised in July 2004 in Dushanbe a conference "Poverty and the social protection system in Tajikistan: perspectives of national researchers of Tajikistan". During this conference a comprehensive discussion of poverty problems took place and the changes in Tajikistan were reviewed, including the new problems that developed in the course of the implementation of the PRSP. Several factors were identified that prevented so far a successful implementation of the poverty reduction strategy: the lack of reliable statistics and appropriate methodological approaches, the absence of a broad awareness and understanding of the issues that are related to poverty and the limited involvement of key actors in the debates.

A whole series of fundamental questions still need to be clarified: Who are poor people? Which groups in society are poor? Where are they? What is the level and nature of their poverty? And why they are poor?

Poverty is obviously not static in nature, but is a changeable and dynamic phenomenon which is under strong influence of any structural alterations. Besides ethical and moral problems, there is the social nature of poverty, which makes that all members of society are involved in it. Unsolved problems of poverty and inequality impact on broader social-political conflicts, but also lead to displacements of people, diseases and the devastation of the environment.

Poverty is usually measured on the basis of income levels but it is obvious that income also relates to many other aspects that are important for people's life such as access to health care, education, other public services and broader social networks. Poverty is also normally measured in relation to either a relative or absolute poverty line. The relative poverty line identifies poverty in comparison to the total distribution of income and consumption across the country. For example it can be set at the level of 50%. The absolute poverty line links poverty to some absolute norms such as for example the minimum income through which a household can satisfy its key needs. In case of monetary measurements the absolute poverty line is often based on the calculation of the costs of basic foods, i.e. the price of the minimum food basket, or of costs of health care of a standard family. In the latter case, the calculation needs to be complemented with the costs of satisfying non-food needs. Taking into account that in many countries large groups of people in reality live on the edge of minimum or lower salaries, it is better to rely on the absolute poverty line instead of the relative one.

Available research in Tajikistan shows that the risk of falling into poverty is lower for urban inhabitants than for rural people. We also know that children run a higher risk to be poor than adults and the same is for large families as compared to small ones, especially when the large families also have to take care of old people. A recent phenomenon in Tajikistan has been the appearance of orphans and street children. They are among the poorest ones and many have to work or to beg in order to provide food not only for themselves but also – in the case of street children - for their families. The country

has also experienced high numbers of refugees, forced migrants and displaced people of whom many are among the poor. Research shows that people who have elementary or general secondary education run a higher risk of being poor than people who have vocational and high (university) education.

Overall, Tajikistan is still the poorest country within the East European and Central Asian regions even though the level of poverty has gone down between 1999 and 2003 from 81% to 64%. In 2003, 64% of the population of Tajikistan was poor (their daily expenditures according to purchasing ability was less than 2.5 dollars). In comparison, in Kyrgyzstan this was 54% (2001) and 45% in Moldova (2002). In the same year, 75% of all poor people of Tajikistan lived in the Khatlon and Soghd regions. The level of poverty in rural areas was a bit higher than in urban ones (65% versus 59%). Since 73% of the population is living in rural areas, it means that poverty in Tajikistan is above all a rural phenomenon. However, between 1999 and 2003 the difference between urban and rural areas declined, mainly because rural poverty reduced faster than urban poverty (with respectively 18% and 14%). Partly this was caused by relative stabilization of prices in rural areas.

The most important factor of poverty reduction so far in Tajikistan has been economic growth, and for the last six years this has been at a rate of about 10% annually. The dominating segments of economic growth were the agricultural (cotton production), aluminium production and hydro-energetic branches of the economy. Available analysis shows that poverty has reduced as a result of this economic growth, but that this has coincided at the same time with a small increase of inequality.

It is necessary to note that the solution of problems in one dimension of poverty directly depends on the solution of problems in others. For example, the solution of drinking water provision can contribute to reduce problems in health care and sanitation, and in improving production in agriculture (directing part of drinking water for irrigation); further it can contribute to establishing new workplaces, increasing incomes, improving access to education, developing infrastructures and so on. For this reason one cannot easily isolate individual needs of poor people, but needs to apply a more comprehensive and dynamic approach.

Whereas growth has perhaps been the most important factor in recent years to contribute to reducing poverty (but not inequality), the most important factor that has contributed to its initial increase and staying at a high level has undoubtedly been the dramatic reduction of employment and continuing low labour market demand. During the time of the command-led administrative system each worker had a guaranteed workplace. Moreover, at that time people were severely limited in choosing where to work and live, and mobility was very much reduced. As a result of all this, forms of hidden unemployment developed which became only addressed when enterprises were forced to make more efficient use of labour. The disappearance of enterprises and jobs has been most prominent in rural areas whereas some towns in some industrial and construction companies are presently facing the opposite situation of a lack of skilled workers to fill available work places.

This last observation illustrates one of the paradoxical situations of the present labour market in Tajikistan: an increasing demand for qualified people couple with relatively low levels of education and training among the unemployed, especially young people and women. At the same time, the labour market is still characterised by forms of hidden unemployment for example in the form of people working in the informal sector or abroad, while formally working in the formal – often state or public sector. Obviously, having a job does not prevent people from becoming poor, especially with low salaried jobs in the public administration, health and education.

Official unemployment has lately shown a tendency to gradually reduce but it remains an issue of great concern. At the end of 2004, the number of unemployed people who are officially registered at the employment services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) was about 38,800 and was 9.5% lower as compared with 2003. However, within the first 9 months of 2005 the number of registered unemployed went up again to 44,800. Women represent 56.5% of all registered unemployed in 2004. The total number of officially registered unemployment is relatively low and is only about 2% of the economic active population. However, it should be noted that not all the unemployed are registering themselves mainly because they do not have any benefit from doing so. According to data of the World Bank unemployment stood at 12% in 2003, reduced from 16% during the year before. However, there is a huge uncertainty about the value of the various existing statistics and a discussion is going on to come to a generally agreed form of measurement.

In 2004, some 82,500 new workplaces were created, including 27 thousand in agriculture, 8,000 by public, non-governmental and international organisations, and 600 by migrant workers. Almost 47,000 new jobs were created in the private sector.

In the same year, the Employment Services organised almost 200 job fairs with the participation of more than 2,300 enterprises and organisations, which is almost 6% higher than in 2003. Some 40,000 jobs were offered which was almost 14% more than the year before. More than 3700 people found a permanent job during these fairs (1.7% more than in 2003), some 2,950 people were employed in public works, and a total of 1435 persons sent to vocational training courses (42.9% more than in 2003). Qualifications of the unemployed are generally not appropriate for the needs of the labour market. But at the same time, in 2004 only some 6,000 unemployed people were sent for vocational retraining while almost 23,000 were involved in public works. There are insufficient means to expand retraining of unemployed people and as a result numerous vacancies remain unoccupied because people with the right qualifications are not available.

It remains difficult for people to start their own business. Administrative processes (licensing, certification and standardisation, export-import regulations, taxation and so forth.) are very complicated and not well known. The legal literacy of entrepreneurs is generally at a low level. Many entrepreneurs are not aware of the legal framework that exists or of existing support infrastructures such as provided by professional organisations. They are not well organised.

Against the background of high poverty levels it may be of interest to know how much people in the country are aware of the existence of a national poverty reduction strategy and what they think of the effects some of the measures have had. The results of a recent survey undertaken by the Trust Fund for the Poverty Reduction Strategy in collaboration with local NGOs provide some startling results. In general, not many people are aware of the existence of a poverty reduction strategy at all, even in regions that are among the poorest in the country such as Soghd and Khatlon (Table 1). But that should not come as a surprise given that not many people have really been involved in any of its activities, except in the capital of Dushanbe (Table 2); accordingly few people think the poverty reduction programmes have been very effective (Table 3). The situation with regard to vocational guidance is a further illustration of unawareness combined with a rather negative assessment (Table 4).

**Table1: Awareness of existence of PRSP in regions.**

	Yes	%	No	%
	<b>590</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>77.0</b>
Khatlon region	301	47.0	339	53.0
Soghd region	60	9.3	580	90.7
Dushanbe	64	40.0	96	60.0
RRS	160	20.0	640	80.0
GBAO	5	1.6	315	98.4

**Table 2: Participation in poverty reduction programmes**

	Yes	%	No	%
	<b>446</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>2116</b>	<b>82.6</b>
Khatlon region	78	12.2	562	87.8
Soghd region	10	1.6	632	98.4
Dushanbe	143	89.4	17	10.6
RRS	67	8.4	733	91.6
GBAO	148	46.2	172	53.8

**Table 3: Assessment of effectiveness of PRSP programmes**

	Yes	%	No	%
	<b>920</b>	<b>35.9</b>	<b>1642</b>	<b>64.1</b>
Khatlon region	231	36.1	409	63.9
Soghd region	39	6.1	603	93.9
Dushanbe	121	75.6	39	24.4
RRS	279	34.9	521	65.1
GBAO	250	78.1	70	21.9

**Table 4: Evaluation of vocational guidance (%)**

	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	No answer
	54.2	19.3	3.2	23.3
GBAO	75.3	22.8	1.9	-
Dushanbe	41.3	38.1	0.6	20.0
Soghd	21.4	17.3	6.1	55.2
Khatlon	95.9	4.1	-	-
RRS	41.1	27.8	4.6	26.5

## 2. National debates on the role of education and vocational education and training as a tool for poverty reduction.

The inherited system of VET in Tajikistan 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 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 often implied to maximisation the enterprises' needs for labour as a means to create reserves in case of future production problems.

Moreover, the system was developed in the time when Tajikistan was part of the former Soviet Union and its economy integrated in the Soviet labour division. Production targets for enterprises were set up by central planning authorities. In addition, the VET system used to receive guidelines and directions from Moscow, including occupational profiles of vocational education and training (based on work arrangements at the state owned enterprises themselves), detailed curricula, teaching plans, textbooks, workshop, classroom equipment and visual aids. Up to date vocational education and training continues to bear many basic features of the previous period and as a result. 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 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. Many schools also were destroyed and looted during the Civil War.

All these characteristics of the vocational education and training system were confirmed during discussions with key stakeholders in a series of regional workshops on the potential role of education and training for poverty reduction organised in the period between April and September 2005 in the capital of Tajikistan - Dushanbe, in two regions- Soghd (Kairakum city) and in Khatlon (Kurgan-Tube city), and in the Rasht region of Karategin zone. The discussions during the seminars were very rich and the following quotations show that there is a well developed awareness that education and training can contribute to reducing poverty. The discussions also indicated that many things are happening in the country even if they are not part of a policy or, indeed, initiated by a national poverty reduction strategy.

*After independence a lot of changes emerged in people's life, however many things still need to be changed. The experience of foreign countries shows that a good VET network can promote the development of the economy and others aspects of life. We have strong family relationships in Central Asia. Family members will always support each other. If there is at least one qualified worker in a family clan then he can help all others in the clan. If he is well qualified in an occupation then he can teach his relatives. Vocational education is an important means of poverty reduction. We have to try to achieve at least to reach again the level of the Soviet period. But it is a big problem that good staff are leaving the education and training system. We should try to find ways of returning them back to the system. I address all the NGOs working in this field to cooperate and together to investigate a way of solution of these problems.*

*Today basically, somehow we say that the old was bad and we should forget it, however during the Soviet time every school had a room for occupational guidance. In the kindergarten there were designed games for children, but now our children are oriented to things they see around them. For example in the rural areas, the children see husbandry, the girls see their mother busy with housing, and in addition there is no lesson held on labour in the schools. Children are losing broader reference points for future employment. This is a problem - occupational guidance.*

*The second problem is specialists for the VET system. I think that after some years we will not find them at all, because for such a salary and such an attitude to them as teachers and trainers, only people will work there who are fanatics or who are in a hopeless situation.*

*The third problem is infrastructure for the VET schools, which is at the level of zero.*

*The fourth problem is a social one. We have forgotten that in the condition of our republic where the problem of poverty is number 1 in CIS, that VET schools (PTUs) are playing a role of social protection of teenagers. They are provided with food, accommodation and free education. If they would not be in school, they would be on the street and deal with the different sects and criminals. We also face a problem of migration. The developed countries send their specialists overseas for a big amount of money while our young people migrate to Russia as a servant and this is of course not good. But on the other side our countrymen who have a good vocational education are in great demand abroad.*

*These problems also existed before. We have to find from which problem to start. I think we have to begin from vocational orientation. We can't train a student something if he did not determine his profession and does not have desire to learn himself..*

*Tajikistan is rich with craftsman – so called “usto”. Children who are not involved in education received guidance before from this usto in the villages. VET schools are not everywhere and parents are not willing to send their children to VET schools if they are far away. Everyone talked about firmness of family, but by dividing child from village to VET schools we will not contribute to his development. Everyone understood it, and helped usto with technical equipment and raw materials which frequently are of local origin. That is to use local resources – usto, raw materials, and premises. Migrants from villages are often involved criminal groups in the city. Developing the village we will reduce migration and poverty, we'll strength institution of family and reduce criminality.*

*For example, we did research on poverty in the Varzob district in 2002. The head of district offered us to work with young girls so that they do not migrate to the cities and to prevent them from falling into prostitution. He provided us with premise. We established a vocational training centre for young girls who are not attending vocational schools; we conducted several training sessions on identification of needs in the community. The young girls asked us to open 6 courses such as, dress-making, ceramic, sculpture, computer and Russian language. When they take a course they are also obliged to go through three additional programs: on human rights, reproductive health and sexual upbringing, and*

prevention of drug-addiction, AIDS, and other deceases transferred through sexual liaison. Now the girls have frequent orders from clients for services like massage, sculptures, drawings and so forth. They are earning money and the most important thing is that they returned to school and they have realized that they have to improve their education levels. They are working and they are not going to city. Young girls are coming and learning – children in daytime, adults in the evening. But it is only a pilot village and this initiative is unfortunately not followed in other villages.

We would be happy to open additional courses for disadvantaged children, but there are no appropriate condition and finance possibilities. And we should not say that no one is going to VET schools. I know schools where they are training mechanics, woodcarving, computer, dress designing. Many young people want to enter these schools. I think it is necessary to give more independence to heads of vocational school; they must trace labour market needs and interests of students and have the possibility to develop a flexible policy.

Before, the government didn't pay serious attention to the development of the VET system. These reforms should have started much earlier. VET teachers and trainers are earning less then their colleagues in secondary general schools. In the last government decrees about computerisation of schools the VET system is not even mentioned. We have bought our computers ourselves, but all of them are now lying idle – there is often no electricity and there are no specialists to use them for teaching. But at the same time there about 30 universities and higher education institutes in Tajikistan.

For 80% of the specialists graduating from these universities there is no demand on the labour market. A great number of our fellow citizens who have university diplomas are currently working in the second economy. Those who have professional qualifications however work in well paid jobs. Very often youths are entering to VET schools for the only reason that they have for three years a roof over their head and food. Our task is secure that there is demand for our students from enterprises and we should therefore improve the quality of their training. In the private sector one ustoz has two or three students and therefore the quality of training is high.

But when you have twenty students who do not have any desire to study, the equipment is old, time is limited, training base and materials are out of date, the salary of teachers is low and because of it he is going to school reluctantly then you will understand why the training level is low. Our equipment was produced more than 50s years ago, but in enterprises they now widely use digital machine-tools. Our welding workshop has only two transformers, it has 30 students, they do not have place for practical training. We can not provide them with modern technologies because of lack of money and equipment, and the instructor himself has never seen modern equipment so even if we had some he is not able to train students. So how can we talk about student's employability? Students will go to factory and will be retrained there. So why then he has to spend three years in VET school if student is not able to use his acquired knowledge in practice?

Another problem is cooperation between secondary schools and VET schools. We are executing the state plan of enrolling students, and each year from January we are visiting schools to persuade schoolchildren to enter VET schools. We explain them that they will learn a profession there. But then, there are talks in the schools that if a schoolchild is studying badly he will be sent to VET schools. And schoolchildren do not want to be the seen as stupid. Entering to high schools and universities is also done to avoid going to army. VET schools students are the potential reserve of our army. Students are even called to go to the army when they still have only one month to go before graduation. Reform must touch these problems.

There is modern equipment many enterprises and the employers will train the students themselves. Before all new equipment firstly were installed in VET schools. Another problem is finding instructors who will work with students. Now students after graduating stay in school and train students of lower courses. No one wants to go to teach in VET schools because of low salary. VET schools are trying to solve these problems all by their own.

There is such stereotype that only bad schoolchildren, hooligans are entering VET schools. We have to work over changing its image. It is also possible to change its name.

We talked about quality of education, about low salary, bad condition of material-technical base and etc. There are some problems that we can solve ourselves, but there are also difficulties that can only be solved on a higher level. A leader is not always to blame; it is the fault of social system. There is no unified approach in the system, it is not perfect. We can give recommendations to the government. We had a talk about teacher's qualification, we have to keep abreast of the times; teachers should be

*retrained in new methods of training. We have experience in working with adults through interactive methods, and we are already conducting short-time courses.*

*We are talking that our material-technical base is outdated. But it is only on the cases that we are talking about modern technologies. The agriculture machines are still those we had during Soviet time, and our trainer-simulator will be useful for training even if we will receive tractors from China or Europe. That is why we have to use everything we have to a maximum.*

*For foreign partners I would like to wish so that they paid attention to technical equipment of VET schools, computerization, retraining VET schools employees, direct exchange of experience between our and foreign colleges. For heads of VET schools it is necessary to do marketing analysis of the needs of the business environment: what do future consumers expect from our students.*

*It is necessary to fill up middle qualification levels in the service sphere, small and middle business, small agriculture enterprises, private workshops and etc. by specialists. Because in future they will create additional job vacancies, and at the same time they will move forward others, and as a result people will be employed and poverty level will be reduced. If the VET schools do not deal with this, then many different training centres will be established to train such specialists in the short term.*

*Our migrants in Russian Federation are working without certificates and receive very low salaries. They come back home for 2-3 months during the winter. If it would be possible to organise short term courses with issuing diplomas or certificates then could go back with official qualifications.*

The statements quoted from the discussions during the regional stakeholder workshops indicate that at the local community and school level there is an understanding of the role that vocational education and training can play in helping people to avoid or get out of poverty. There is also awareness that this would imply some radical changes in the VET system besides improvement of funding, equipment and teachers salaries.

Such awareness and understanding has been absent though when the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was prepared at the national level in 2002, even though a large number of people has been involved in the various preparatory discussions. The nine chapters of the PRSP included also chapters on "Education" and "Labour market and privatization" but there was hardly any attention to issues of vocational education and training. One of the reasons for this was that the different ministries involved only focused on what they thought to be their core business. As it happened the Ministry of Education only looked at primary and general education whereas the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, who is in charge of basic vocational VET, only looked at employment and social protection issues. This has been recognised and vocational education and training appears as a separate field of measures for poverty reduction in the second version of the PRSP which was approved in late 2005.

This report has stressed two key points: good vocational education and training is an essential condition for poverty reduction and the absence of due attention for the VET system has resulted in serious problems on the labour market. Tajikistan now has many graduates with higher education degrees, at the same time there are many jobless people, and there are many vacancies for qualified workers and specialists.

### 3. Current situation in vocational education and training<sup>2</sup>

Generally, the level of education remains high even though the level of literacy has gone down from 99% in 1991 to 95% in 2000. Since then, there are additional developments that give reason for concern.

The level of school attendance has become lower and has become a serious problem in urban areas. School attendance now stands at 88% but shows strong regional differences. In GBAO and Soghd regions it is currently respectively 95% and 90%, but only 82% in the so called Districts of Republic Subordination (DRS) and the capital of Dushanbe, and 88% in the Khatlon region.

School attendance varies for boys and girls. Boys always had better opportunities to finish school than girls. But also here the situation differs from region to region. In the GBAO and Soghd regions boys and girls there were hardly any differences. In Dushanbe the highest gender inequality existed: after

---

<sup>2</sup> See for a detailed review Henrik Faudel, Peter Grootings and Subhon Ashurov (2006) VET Reform in the Republic of Tajikistan, European Training Foundation, Turin

the 4th class only 79% girls and 96% boys continued education in schools. The number of boys in towns who are not attending school after the 4th class has increased by almost 4% and the number of girls even by 18%. In rural areas the situation is relatively better with 4% more boys and 7% girls not attending schools after primary education. Clearly, the situation for girls is deteriorating. The most important reason for not going to school is the financial situation of families.

Overall, in terms of public spending, the situation of the education sector has worsened as well. 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. Spending on education sector is currently about 2,8 % of GDP. However, the proportion of the government budget spent on education has fluctuated around 15%, and in 2004 was 17%, which cannot be considered low. The state budget for 2005 reserved a slight increase to 19,4 %. Nevertheless, the actual budget available for education is low, and remains a constraint for implementing reform at all levels of education. By far the largest part of the budget goes to salaries of teachers and other staff and there is little money left for running costs, maintenance and not to mention improvement. This creates serious problems as much of the education infrastructure is outdated and worn and many school buildings were destroyed during the civil war. Basic refurbishment is still needed for a large part of the sector.

In 2004, the total government budget for VET was TJS 4.82 million and the budget allocated to schools was TJS 1.12 million (EUR 1.63 million and EUR 0.38 million, respectively). In 2001, the total budget for VET was just over EUR 1 million. Though, since 1997 public expenditures for vocational education and training have been raised, the level of 1991 has not been achieved yet, and only the most necessary needs are covered. Thus the system will remain under-funded for years to come.

One additional problem is the lack of detailed information about the needs. For example, there is no reliable inventory of what is available in schools and what they need. The Ministry of Education estimated educational institutions under its responsibilities are in need of 153,700 units of school tables and chairs, 66,800 chairs, 9,900 chairs for teachers, 29,700 shelves, and 9,900 school-boards. The condition of material –technical base in schools is a major obstacle for the realisation of existing state educational standards. There is also a problem of textbooks and other educational materials; most of this still stems for the times of the Soviet Union and is in the Russian language. New school books have only been published thanks to assistance of international donors.

The Government has taken a series of initiatives to improve the situation in education and training but remains seriously constrained by the high costs and the lack of funding. In 2004 “A plan for the realisation of the education sector reform for 2004-2009” was accepted together with new education legislation introducing new teaching loads: 18 hours for teachers in grade 1 - 4 and 16 hours for teachers in grade 5 – 11. The new law on education also defines initial vocational education in PTUs as the first phase of vocational education. It considers VET as a subsystem of the education system, which should provide vocational education and training programmes to qualify workers and specialists at all levels as needed by the employment system.

Currently there are about 70 initial vocational schools (vocational schools and vocational lyceums) and more than 10 training centres. They provide programmes for lower and middle level qualifications in about 90 different fields, with about 25,000 students and some 2,700 teachers and trainers. Numbers of students have halved since the early 1990s as most parents have preferred to send their children to secondary general schools and universities.<sup>3</sup>

The vocational schools have suffered particularly badly as a result of recent developments. Vocational schools 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>4</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 in

---

<sup>3</sup> From 1996 until 2006 the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection was responsible for the management and administration of the initial vocational education and training (PTU) system. Since 2007 the PTU schools have come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Labour remains responsible for the Vocational Training Centres which basically train (unemployed) adults through short courses in similar occupations as the schools for young people.

<sup>4</sup> All over the Soviet Union, in fact, being called a ‘PTU’ was not a compliment, and gradually became seen as the equivalent of belonging to the lower classes.

particular 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.

VET schools in Tajikistan provide the following programme options:

- vocational training (duration of training up to 1 year)
- additional vocational education, including retraining, improvement of professional skills of jobless citizens, military men (duration of training up to 1 year)
- vocational education on basis of general secondary education (9 classes) without general secondary education (duration of training 1 - 2 years);
- vocational education on basis of general secondary education (9 years) with general secondary education (term of training 3 - 4 years);
- vocational education on basis of general secondary education (11 classes) (duration of training 1 -2 years)
- an integrated educational program of primary and secondary vocational education (4 years education) at vocational lyceum (diploma certified )

Education and training is provided in fulltime, correspondence, and evening formats. Students can also pass exams on the basis of self studies.

Vocational schools in Tajikistan have become dissociated from mainstream education and training (including secondary technical and higher education). 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>5</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 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

---

<sup>5</sup> Interview with the director of a textile vocational school in Khujand in April 2004.

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>6</sup>.

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 persons 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>7</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. The potential students for VET, 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.

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. 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 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>8</sup>. The concept noted that "it is time to confirm initial vocational education as one of the national priorities for establishing a competitive economy and social protection for the population."

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 further 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>9</sup>.

---

<sup>6</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>7</sup> For an analysis of the employment situation see the following chapter.

<sup>8</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 will be provided to the MoLSP through the Tacis programme that runs from September 2004 – August 2006.

<sup>9</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

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.

During 2004 policymakers in the MoLSP became seriously concerned about changing the existing VET system. They initiated consultations with and involvement of 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.

## 4. Conclusions

Poverty is a dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon, rooted in social-economic and social-political factors. Reliable assessment of poverty and poverty levels can only be done while using internationally agreed methods.

One of greatest challenges for poverty reduction is to provide the population access to basic resources: a workplace that can provide an income, public services such as health care and education, clean water etc. In policy terms this requires the development of employment opportunities and occupational preparation, the regulation of migration processes, promotion of entrepreneurship, credit systems, improvement of tax legislation and developing the potential of rural areas. Access to health care and education can be improved through improving sanitary conditions, the introduction of an insurance system and the reform of the education system so that their quality will improve and they become inclusive of the vulnerable groups in society. All this needs to be combined with an increased attention to the environment and with involvement of civil society.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is a purposeful, long-term and comprehensive document agreed between the government and the donor community and its realisation should take into account the priorities of each concrete phase of development. It should avoid one sided approaches to poverty reduction and be flexible to identify and address new poverty issues and measures that may arise over time. So far, the realisation of the PRSP has been part of an initial experimental phase and it has also maintained a largely a multi-sectoral approach, driven by individual ministries priorities. Key factors that restrain a further effective implementation of the poverty reduction strategy are basically to be found in organizational weaknesses and institutional shortages, the absence of efficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the low level of awareness among policy makers and the population at large. The key problem here is the lack of reliable data, the difficulty to collect them and the lack of opportunities to become involved in and/or become part of poverty reduction measures and policies.

The current situation on the labour market and the changes that are taking place such as in technology require appropriate levels of professional qualifications and will generate the need for lifelong learning. In a situation where majority of the population has limited access to higher levels of (vocational) education, initial vocational education needs to receive priority attention for youth and adults. However, the present situation in vocational education and training is characterised by the prevalence of outdated materials and curriculum contents both in pedagogical and technological terms; by mismatches between what schools teach and train and the labour market needs; by mismatches between the structure of the education system and the structure of employment; and by teachers and trainers whose knowledge and competences have become outdated. Therefore the modernisation and reform of vocational education and training is a high priority.

The key objective of initial vocational education and training is to provide proper conditions for citizens to develop their professional knowledge, skills and competences for getting and maintaining a position

---

facing survival problems. Discussions are ongoing regarding transforming the Modular centre into a national resource centre for students, teachers and trainers of vocational schools.

on the labour market. A new approach will have to focus on offering qualifications that respond to today's and future needs of the labour market. The system of initial VET should be flexible and easily adaptable, because it is difficult to precisely determine people's needs for acquiring qualifications. Moreover, these needs are changing very fast.

It is important to continue state support to financing vocational education and training, and to give more autonomy to VET schools in terms of offering education and training in response to local needs of learners and enterprises. In the curriculum more attention should be paid to practical skills training and developing competences, to developing learning standards, and also to recognising different ways of gaining comparable qualifications. Furthermore, it is also important to meet the needs of people for occupational guidance and counselling, in order to give people possibilities to make good choices. It is necessary to establish a structure of professional support institutions to provide leadership with the information they need to be able to take decisions, and to assist schools in developing and introducing innovations as needed.

Clearly, it will only be possible to develop the VET system with the involvement of all stakeholders, including the government, social partners, teachers and trainers, researchers and last but not least the students and their parents.

## Annexes

**Table 1: Monetary income of population**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Monetary income of people in current prices, million somoni.	738.3	1004.6	1302.5	1587.3	2352.7	2796.9
GDP per capita \$	177	189	203	220	237	-
Monetary expenses and savings in current prices, million somoni	716.1	909.9	1256.2	1553.9	2343.3	2582.2
Average monthly salary of worker, in somoni	11.61	15.57	23.50	32.55	44.31	71.77
Average monthly pension, in somoni	3.53	4.06	6.01	10.09	13.07	18.78
Minimal wage (average in month), in somoni	1.00	1.00	2.00	4.00	7.00	12.00

Source: State Statistics Committee

**Table 2: Dynamics of labour market for 1998-2003 (thousand)**

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Average annual number of population	6001.3	6126.7	6250	6375.5	6506.5	6640
Labour resources	3038	3125	3186	3301.0	3477	3664
Economic active part of population	1855	1791	1794	1872	1909	1932
Occupied in economy	1796	1737	1745	1829	1857	1885
Officially registered unemployed people	59	54	49	43	47	47
Economic inactive part of population	1183.0	1334.0	1392.0	1429.0	1573.0	1712
Level of unemployment%	3.2	3.0	2.7	2.3	2.5	2.4

**Table 3: Number of people occupied according to forms of ownership 1998-2003 (thousand)**

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Totally occupied in economy	176.0	1737.0	1745.4	1828.8	1857.1	1884.8

State	766.0	646.4	558.5	520.0	517.1	481.2
Private	595.0	641.7	751.7	743.5	816.0	843.5
Collective	418.0	432.6	415.2	550.2	510.8	542.4
Joint with foreign participation	7.0	6.7	14.1	13.2	12.0	16.9
Joint without foreign participation	10.0	9.6	5.9	1.9	1.2	0.8

**Table 4: General macro-economic indicators 1999-2004**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
GDP (in million somoni)	1.345	1.807	2.512	3.345	4.758	5100
Real GDP (changes in %)	3.7	8.3	10.3	9.1	10.2	10.6
Inflation in the end of period (%)	30.1	60.6	12.5	14.5	13.7	7.0
<b>Distribution GDP (%)</b>						
Agriculture	25.4	27.0	26.7	22.0	21.1	
Industry	21.7	23.9	22.6	18.7	17.7	
Trade	19.7	18.3	19.3	19.4	19.0	
Construction	5.4	3.4	4.1	2.6	3.1	
Others	27.8	27.5	27.4	37.3	39.1	
<b>Foreign trade</b>						
Export	689	784	652	734	798	914.9
Import	663	675	682	721	881	1372.2
Pure export	26	109	-30	13	-83	457.3
Foreign debt (% out of GDP)	118	128	99	82	73	42.2
Account current operation(% out of GDP)	-3.4	-6.5	-7.1	-2.7	-1.3*	

Sources: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy and Trade, State Statistic Committee, National Bank of Tajikistan

\*Preliminary data

**Table 6: Expenditures on education in state budget (% out of GDP)**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
% out of GDP	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.8	2.7*

Source: Ministry of Finance

\*Preliminary data

## HOW TO CONTACT US

Further information on our activities, calls for tender and job opportunities can be found on our website: [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu).

For any additional information, please contact:

External Communication Unit  
European Training Foundation  
viale Settimio Severo 65  
I - 10133 Torino  
E: [info@etf.europa.eu](mailto:info@etf.europa.eu)  
T: +39 011 630 2222  
F: +39 011 630 2200