

## Tajikistan

### Update on the context and situation of children

In 2022, UNICEF Tajikistan completed its 2016-2022 Country Programme. The completion of the Country Programme provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on past achievements in protection and promotion of children's rights and to strategically consider what can be done better to reimagine and deliver a future for every child in Tajikistan.

These past six years have been a time of progress for Tajikistan and its children, supported through strategic plans including the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2030, the Midterm Development Programme (MTDP) 2021-2025, and the National Plan of Action 2018-2022 to implement the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. These strategic plans reflect a number of key child-related priorities in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and lay a solid groundwork to monitor national results for children.

During this period, however, children in Tajikistan have also faced many challenges due to various flooding, earthquakes, a polio outbreak in 2021, a measles outbreak in 2022, conflict along the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border, potential inflow of Afghan refugees as well as the socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During his address to Parliament in December 2022, the President of Tajikistan highlighted positive trends in the poverty rate, which decreased from 27.4 per cent in 2018 to 22.5 per cent in 2022. According to the World Bank, remittances remain a strong driver for economic growth, accounting for 32 per cent of GDP (WB, 2022).

Meanwhile, according to the Antimonopoly Agency of the Republic of Tajikistan, 10 out of 19 key staple products are imported; In July 2022, the agency reported that the impact of the conflict in Ukrainian had resulted in supply chain disruption and high cost of living. Furthermore, wage growth has not been ahead of growth in consumer prices, further increasing the cost of living.

Meanwhile, vaccine coverage remains consistently high in Tajikistan, reaching 520,000 children annually. Nonetheless, the health system is often overwhelmed and under resourced. There are challenges with availability of critical commodities in maternity and neonatal departments, compliance with protocols and standards, infection prevention and control (IPC), awareness among parents of adequate new-born care, disease prevention, and early recognition of childhood illnesses.

The prevalence of iodine deficiency disorder among children and women significantly reduced through the universal salt iodization programme. However, in 2022 a UNICEF bottleneck analysis found that supply challenges of KIO<sub>3</sub> threatened these gains. Furthermore, inadequate diets and rampant infections continue to lead to stunting and wasting. While mothers generally breastfeed, only half of all infants are introduced to complementary foods at appropriate ages, and only 9 per cent of children aged 6-23 months receive optimal infant and young child feeding (DHS, 2017).

In 2022, the Government continued making progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, with 55 per cent of the population accessing safely managed water and 81 per cent accessing basic water. Nonetheless, 1 in 4 households lacks access to sufficient water. Rural areas often have weak waste disposal systems, dysfunctional sewage systems and inadequate supply of clean, piped water, forcing residents to use potentially contaminated river water.

Enrolment rates at primary and lower-secondary schools have improved, however overall, the access to and quality of education remains constrained given the expanding numbers of students entering schools each year. Pre-primary education Tajikistan lags behind other Central Asian countries, with enrolment

rates stagnate at 15 per cent (MoES EMIS, 2021). In 2020/21, only 30.6 per cent of children with disabilities were enrolled in education, with one third of them in residential care institutions. Girls are twice as likely to not complete secondary education and only 35 per cent of higher education students are female (National Strategy for Education Development 2021-2030). Furthermore, 21st century skills for young people are needed to improve their employability and meaningful participation in society. National teacher training and retraining systems follow outdated curriculum and there is a lack of adequate teaching and learning materials oriented on competency-based education and blended learning approaches.

With 60.9 per cent of the population under 30 years, Tajikistan has a young population. The Government is committed to the development of young people and views youth entrepreneurship as an important accelerator of economic growth and job creation, as articulated in the NDS 2030. This is a major step in addressing the challenge of having 1 in 3 young people aged 15-24 years not in employment, education or training (NEET); the NEET rate among females is nine times higher than for males (Labour Force Survey, 2016). To further address youth empowerment issues, the Government adopted and began implementing Youth Strategy 2030 in 2021 with significant support by the UN (especially UNICEF) and youth participation is identified as one of the ten priorities of the strategy. Despite the normative ground being framed, the narrative of youth participation remains challenging, where only 15 per cent of young people are participating in the life of their community (UNICEF, 2018).

Meanwhile, between 2017 and 2021 the number of children in post-trial detention decreased by 34 per cent (from 175 in 2017 to 116 in 2021) (Supreme Court of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2021). In 2021, the Government introduced amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code to reduce the period of initial detention of children from 72 hours to 48 and also reduce the duration of questioning of child victims and witnesses. However, budget resources are required to institutionalize and scale up these important achievements nationwide.

The Government continues to make progress in the process of deinstitutionalization of children - the number of children in residential care decreased by 20 per cent (from 8,099 in 2020 to 6,482 in 2021). Most children are in institutions because of poverty and a belief that institutions can provide better shelter and food than what is available at home. In addition, institutions are believed to be better equipped to provide for children with disabilities. Meanwhile, children left behind by migrating parents continue to face many challenges in accessing basic health, civil registry, social protection and education services.

## Major contributions and drivers of results

### Every child survives and thrives

#### *Immunization*

- Together with WHO, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population (MoHSPP) to develop the fully costed National Immunization Strategy 2023-2027. Amongst other priorities, the document takes account of the new programme direction to address 'zero-dose' children and high-risk groups in immunization service delivery.
- In response a measles outbreak, UNICEF and WHO supported supplementary immunization activities, targeting 418,365 children (6 months to 15 years) in high-risk areas with 99 per cent coverage. Through procurement support, UNICEF ensured availability of essential vaccines in the country; as of 31 December 2022, 96.5 per cent of children under one year received the third dose of pentavalent vaccine.
- UNICEF supported the Government with implementation of the revised National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for Introduction of COVID-19 vaccines. In 2022, UNICEF delivered over

5.2 million doses of three types of COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX AMC platform; over 5.2 million people over 18 years old (97.6 per cent) received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine and 5,232,503 people (96.7 per cent) received one booster dose. UNICEF also provided essential equipment and supplies, and over 3.4 million people were reached with timely and accurate information on COVID-19, which contributed to a reduction of new cases.

#### *Early childhood development*

- To improve responsive parenting, UNICEF and MoHSPP launched the Bebbio parenting app to promote nurturing care of children from 0-6 years old. The app provides comprehensive, evidence-based information and interactive tools for tracking child development, immunization and health check-ups, as well as support with early learning, nutrition, responsive parenting, protection and safety.

#### *Improved service quality*

- With funding from the EU, IsDB and ADB (training component only), UNICEF strengthened the knowledge and skills of 2,315 health workers through on-the-job training and provided medical supplies and equipment to strengthen health delivery services at 899 primary healthcare facilities, 15 secondary healthcare facilities and provided nine ambulances in four districts.

#### *Nutrition*

- In 2022, UNICEF supported significant steps for universal salt iodization with 89 per cent of household salt reported to be adequately iodized. However, a bottleneck analysis revealed levels of iodization varied between small, medium and large-scale producers, with the supply of KIO3 being the biggest challenge. To resolve this, with USAID's support, UNICEF convened regional roundtable discussions with salt producers, key government ministries and other relevant stakeholders explored options to access legal, quality-assured KIO3. As a result, a revolving fund for KIO3, to be managed by the government, will be established in 2023 by leveraging resources from other development partners, including US\$ 1 million from the World Bank. UNICEF also supported the development of the standard of salt iodization to eliminate ambiguity.
- Meanwhile, 515,853 caregivers were reached with IYCF counselling with 836 newly trained healthcare providers. In addition, UNICEF in partnership with WHO supported the Parliament and MoHSPP to amend the Health Codex in relation to the International Code on Breastmilk Substitutes. 12,696 children with severe wasting recovered through UNICEF's support for improved service quality, therapeutic food and supportive supervision, resulting in 82 per cent increase in admission and cure from 2021.

#### *Adolescent health*

- The government-led adolescent mental health programme expanded to additional schools in Sughd and Districts of Republican Subordination. To further expand access to adolescent mental health services, UNICEF modelled digital mental health prevention and promotion solutions to address the needs of adolescents and youth in Tajikistan.
- Peer-to-peer support mechanisms were established in schools with Afghan refugees; 120 peer supporters (60 girls) reached 5,260 adolescents (2,760 girls) to raise awareness on emotional distresses, coping strategies and psychological services.
- The network of Adolescents Living with HIV (Teenergizer) was expanded to Kulob district to advocate for rights of HIV-positive adolescents.

### **Every child learns**

#### *National education development strategy 2030 and sector-wide coordination*

- UNICEF provided coordination and technical support to the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) to develop and operationalize the COMPACT partnership document under the new GPE

2025 Operating Model, which enabled leveraging of US\$ 88.6 million of GPE, IsDB, OFID and the Government of Tajikistan funds to implement priority reforms that aim to accelerate results for equity, efficiency, and improved learning outcomes through inclusive, gender sensitive and resilient education systems.

- UNICEF co-led national consultations countrywide to revisit and reiterate priority areas in education, which were declared during the global Transforming Education Summit, resulting in the endorsement of the National Statement of Commitments until 2030 to inform the government on prioritizing public education spending on critical education reforms leading to transformative change.

#### *Digital education*

- With thanks to EU funding, UNICEF enhanced policy dialogue with the government, donors, private sector/local internet providers and mobile operators (Tcell and Babilon) in strategizing resources and capabilities to address short-term and long-term needs of the digital learning agenda. In 2022, UNICEF deployed digital learning solutions with more than 2,000 high-quality inclusive digital resources to ensure uninterrupted access to learning for more than 250,000 pre-primary children and over 1.5 million school learners.
- Under the GIGA initiative, UNICEF supported mapping of demand for internet connectivity in all schools to develop an investment case to foster collaboration between government and private sector, mobile operators and internet providers to negotiate lower prices and higher internet speed for schools. UNICEF advocated for building affordable and sustainable country specific models for finance and delivery, subsidizing market creation costs and incentivizing private sector investment.

#### *Competency-Based Education*

- With GPE and IsDB funding, UNICEF contributed significantly to coordinate and support implementation of competency-based education reform. More than 8,000 school learners and 900 teachers in pilot schools countrywide benefited from new pedagogical competencies to enable their successful learning and skills development and smooth transition from learning to earning.

#### *Skills and employability*

- Strategic partnership with Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population (MoLMPE) led to establishing the Donor Coordination Council, which result in US\$ 80-90 million being leveraged from IFIs (including World Bank, ISDB, EU, KOIKA and ADB) for implementation of the Youth Skilling and Employability Roadmap.
- Impact sourcing hubs are now included in the economic empowerment plan. In 2022, UNICEF jointly with MoLMPE, successfully established an additional impact source hub in Penjikent which will provide opportunities for women living in rural area to have access to digital skills and help their transition to employment.
- The sustainability strategy for adolescent innovation labs was developed and approved in partnership with MoES. In 2022, skills and innovation programming scaled up in 36 innovation labs, allowing 29,461 adolescents the opportunity to build transferrable skills through outreach and training on Adolescent Kit, UPSHIFT and ICT.

#### *Strengthening school-based disaster risk reduction (DRR)*

- More than 6,700 children, 1,300 young people, 435 teachers and 3,000 community members in Rasht and GBAO regions were engaged through a USAID BHA-funded programme which is improving selected schools' resilience to disasters and adverse effects of climate change.

### **Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

#### *Strategic policy achievements*

- Several strategic policy achievements took place in 2022 creating a significant push for further reforms in child protection and social protection. The Social Protection Strategy 2040 and the State Programme on Social Workforce set the vision for the country to embrace vulnerable children and their families by protective measures and services through a strengthened social protection system and a qualified and well-trained workforce. The methodology and value of cash assistance under the Targeted Social Assistance programme was revised, making the cash payment amount based on number of children in the household, therefore covering more children.
- The State Programme on Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Employment and Education for Women and Children Repatriated from the Conflict Zones and its corresponding action plan have been drafted and are expected to be approved in early 2023. UNICEF continuously advocated for family-based care for all children and stressed the importance of the principle of the best interest of the child.

#### *Guardianship*

- The number of children in residential care decreased by a further 20 per cent (from 8,099 in 2020 to 6,482 children in 2021). The number of children in formal family-based alternative care (guardianship) increased by 2 per cent (from 672 in 2020 to 685 in 2021).

#### *Bylaws on reporting sexual gender-based violence (SGBV)*

- Under the Spotlight initiative, UNICEF supported the Government with the development of internal reporting mechanisms specifically for children, including on SGBV issues, resulting in approved bylaws allowing children to directly appeal to state institutions on all issues related to their rights, specifically on SGBV.

#### *Juvenile justice system reform*

- UNICEF facilitated the first ever participation of young people in three different high-level policy dialogues on justice for children, including the: National Workshop on Juvenile Justice System Reform, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister; National Rule of law Forum; Justice for Children Working Group. The Ministry of Justice committed to provide platforms to hear voices of youth and invited youth participation in the working group on juvenile justice system reforms.

#### *Children left behind*

- Significant advocacy events on migration in 2022 included the participation of the Government of Tajikistan at the 2022 International Migration Review Forum (with support from EU and Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund), where Tajikistan committed itself to support the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration. Together with MoLMPEP, the first migration multimedia portal ([www.childrenmigration.com](http://www.childrenmigration.com)) was launched. The portal is designed to raise awareness about the impact of migration on families, especially women and children left behind, and to share important information about where to find support.

#### *Violence against children (VAC)*

- Under the Spotlight initiative, mechanisms for reporting VAC and SGBV were established in 61 schools and are accessible to more than 90,000 school children and staff. This also included sensitization and capacity building sessions for 17,766 people, including 9,292 girls and women. School directors and education departments employees from an additional 177 schools have already gone through the initial training; it is planned to scale up this mechanism to 430 new schools in 2023.

### **Every child lives in a safe and clean environment**

#### *Water conference*

- In partnership with the Government of Tajikistan and the EU, UNICEF contributed to the 2nd

International Decade Water Conference conducted in Dushanbe in June 2022. During the event, UNICEF organised the International Youth and Children’s Forum attended by more than 200 delegates (including 67 international youth delegates from 33 countries), developed the Youth Water Anthem, facilitated side events such as “Dushanbe Water Festival” and a nation-wide art competition amongst school children, and production a virtual reality (VR) film “Walking the water experience in Tajikistan”. The VR glasses and film were donated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be presented at the UN Water Conference in New York in March 2023.

#### *Enabling environment*

- UNICEF provided technical support to the National Plan on Drinking Water Safety (Framework), endorsed by MoHSPP, and to the Water and Sanitation Tariff Setting Strategy, endorsed by the State WatSan Operator (KMK). UNICEF also supported the first WASH joint sector review (both in Tajikistan and the region) using a WASH bottlenecks analysis. Additionally, the review and updating of the National Standards on WASH in healthcare facilities and schools were completed and endorsed with financial support from EU.

#### *WASH in healthcare facilities*

- Under the IPC project funded by EU, WASH and healthcare waste management infrastructure was rehabilitated in 15 secondary-level healthcare facilities across Tajikistan reaching 61,337 people, including children, women, elderly and disabled. Handwashing stations and healthcare waste management equipment were also provided to 750 primary healthcare facilities, reaching 375,000 beneficiaries in rural areas. In addition, through an IsDB funded maternal child health project, WASH facilities were rehabilitated in three rural hospitals, reaching 23,700 residents. An investment case on WASH in healthcare facilities was also developed to highlight gaps in service delivery and sector financing and linking it to the cost of inaction. Furthermore, UNICEF successfully leveraged funds up to US\$ 1 million from IOM directing to 20 primary healthcare facilities in Vahdat District, complementing UNICEF’s work supported by the EU.

#### *WASH in schools*

- In partnership with MoES, UNICEF accomplished the “3 Star Approach” project activity (a soft component promoting access to WASH services, supplies and improved hygiene behaviours and practices) in 45 schools across the country to sustain WASH infrastructure that was rehabilitated in 2019-2020, benefitting up to 43,000 children and 2,600 teachers.

#### *WASH in emergencies*

- With funding from the US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), the Government of Japan and UNICEF, in partnership with MoES, WASH rehabilitation was completed in 10 schools where children of Afghan refugees study in Vahdat, Rudaki and J. Rasulov districts. In total, 16,924 school children (8,183 girls, 8,571 boys), out of whom 660 are refugee children, and 910 school staff (727 women, 183 men) benefited from the provision of inclusive and quality services. UNICEF also increased the availability of critical hygiene supplies to 12 schools, reaching 22,595 people (10,506 girls, 10,969 boys) out of whom 750 are refugee children, and 1,118 school staff (896 women, 222 men).

### **Every child has an equitable chance in life**

#### *Young people’s participation in decision making*

- UNICEF’s Young People Advisory Group amplified voices of Tajik youth in more than 70 events on national and international platforms in front of decision-makers, including the Minister of Education, EU Ambassador, and UN Deputy Secretary-General.
- UNICEF supported the Government in developing the Youth Strategy 2030 Implementation plan. UNICEF also supported the facilitation of leadership skills training to over 170 volunteer leaders in 78 districts and towns in preparation for the launch of the National Programme on

Volunteering by the Committee of Youth and Sports.

- In 2022, 35,429 adolescents and youth (13,713 female) were engaged in dialogue with local governments through participation platforms in order to work jointly on community projects, share ideas and learn together. These initiatives empowered adolescents to identify their own priorities, generate solutions and become agents of change in their communities. At the same time, 240 government staff gained capacity to support adolescents' development and participation with a view of safeguarding their rights as well as developing and implementing youth-friendly policies and programmes. These efforts led to 53 social projects being implemented by young people jointly with local authorities. This represents a strategic moment of engaging young people in decision-making processes in Tajikistan.
- In addition, 70 young researchers were capacitated and empowered through participation in the Child & Young People Participatory Research in Tajikistan. These young researchers produced data on mental health and, jointly with the Academy of Science, developed 60 self-produced stories.
- Finally, an online course on Rights to Participation based on CRC was developed by UNICEF and will be conducted through the Student Council platform for accessibility by all school children in Tajikistan.

### **Communication and Advocacy**

Following the Global Strategic Plan for 2022-2025, UNICEF focused on the areas of:

- Advocacy: emphasizing the role and leadership of youth in ensuring universal access to WASH.
- Youth Engagement – supporting UNICEF's Regional Office flagship result on Digital Connectedness with youth around social issues via co-created content for social media.
- Digital transformation – supporting creation of high-quality content, resulting in 61.9 per cent digital audience growth (39,000 in 2021 to 63,000 in 2022) and 217 per cent growth for profile reach on Instagram (4 million in 2021 to 8.7 million in 2022).



## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF spearheaded the integration of child-related issues into all UN-wide discussions and decisions through active participation in all UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) result groups and chairing the result group for outcome 3 “People in Tajikistan benefit from quality, equitable and inclusive health, education and social protection systems.” UNICEF provided extensive support to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2026, including the Joint Communications and Advocacy Strategy. UNICEF also led thematic working groups of the Donor Coordination Council on Education and Social Protection.

UNICEF continued strong partnership with the EU focused on IPC, including WASH in healthcare facilities and access to education. Meanwhile, UNICEF partnered with USAID, Aga Khan Foundation and Early Years Network (consisting of 40 local CSOs) in order to launch the Bebbu parenting app. Furthermore, in partnership with USAID-BHA, IFRC and Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan, UNICEF further enhanced child centred disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and school safety aspects at national and local levels. This also facilitated supportive efforts to national capacities for emergency preparedness and response.

To maximize opportunities for children in Tajikistan, UNICEF leveraged over US\$ 184 million by extending technical support to IFI and development partner funded government initiatives. This includes technical support for the COMPACT partnership under the new GPE 2025 Operating Model; to JICA for improving WASH in healthcare facilities; and World Bank, ISDB, EU, KOIKA and ADB for implementation of the Youth Skilling and Employability Roadmap. UNICEF also partnered with the World Bank in early childhood development; nutrition services (including with USAID support); expanding skills and developing resilience among adolescents and youth; conducting a joint assessment of the social protection sector; and strengthening the country’s data systems and child poverty measurement agenda (in partnership with Tajstat); IsDB and ADB for maternal and child health; GPE and IsDB for competency-based education; and ADB on urban water supply and sewage.

In addition, UNICEF worked closely with UNDP, UN Women and UN RCO to lead the SDG financing agenda and played an important role in joint UN programmes on migration, peacebuilding and ending violence against women and children. Under the Spotlight Initiative, UNICEF strengthened partnership with UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women to develop a national referral mechanism and improve mental health support to survivors of SGBV. UNICEF also helped facilitate the Model United Nations with UNHCR (including on refugee children) and collaborated with WFP on a healthy diets campaign. Under Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund, UNICEF strengthened partnership with IOM, FAO and UN Women to support children and women left behind. UNICEF also supported the UN joint response framework along with World Bank, ADB and other development partners to support national efforts to ensure financial stability, promote job creation, food security, and protect the vulnerable.

Finally, UNICEF and the Football Federation of Tajikistan conducted joint events including International Girl’s Day and World Children’s Day. UNICEF also established a Young Persons Advisory Group, consisting of 43 young people (23 girls) from diverse backgrounds, to hear and amplify young people’s voices in decision making.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

### **Innovative policy-based tracking system for SDG financing for children**

Public finance for children continued to be a priority area in 2022. UNICEF with other UN agencies led the SDG Financing agenda through advocacy, coordination, and capacity building. These efforts



have contributed to strengthening the national financial architecture, broader policy engagement and partnership to promote financing for development in Tajikistan. A roadmap for Financing SDGs is under consideration by the Government followed by the inter-agency review and feedback process.

Partnership with the Ministry of Finance was further strengthened under the tracking tool initiative that aimed at creating an integrated SDG financing tracking mechanism and digitalising reporting process of child related indicators of the budget. This innovative policy-based tracking system identify, tag, and monitor SDG initiatives disaggregated by gender and age across government agencies through the national budget, thereby strengthening SDG planning, implementation and financing.

At the local level, UNICEF provided technical assistance with development of socio-economic indicators for 2023 and projections for 2024-2026 to regional and district economic development departments to ensure the local priorities, including child related indicators are integrated within national priorities.

To raise awareness on the selected areas of public finance management, several learning sessions were offered to the UNICEF staff with participation of local expert, followed by the discussions on linkages of sectoral public finance initiatives with the new 2023-2026 UNICEF Tajikistan country programme scope.

### **Moving forward on a more unified and strategic child rights monitoring agenda**

Based on previous lessons learned, UNICEF moved towards a more unified and strategic child rights monitoring agenda. UNICEF strived to link the data supply and SDG monitoring elements with the work on strengthening the child rights institutions. For example, the results of the situation analysis in Roghun and Nurobod conducted by the MEDT within the SDG localization agenda were presented at the high-level event organized by the office of the Commissioner on Human (and Child) Rights. This allowed wider dissemination of the situation analysis results and innovative collaboration with the MEDT on child-focused SDG monitoring agenda.

Furthermore, attendance of the representative from the secretariat of the National Commission on Child Rights (NCCR) together with the Tajstat representative at the regional Transmonee meeting and the country's presentation of achievements and challenges on data for children with a focus on vulnerable children drew more attention to the importance of data systems on vulnerable children. Familiarization of the NCCR representative with the draft regional child rights monitoring framework opened new entry points to making the work of the NCCR more result-oriented (focusing on the situation of children). These efforts gave impetus to making the child rights monitoring more explicit and visible on the national agenda.

### **Lesson Learned: Legal access to a sufficient supply of KIO3 is needed for the successful implementation of salt iodization nationally**

In 2022, UNICEF supported strong steps for universal salt iodization with about 89 per cent of household salt reported to be adequately iodized. However, a bottleneck analysis revealed levels of iodization varied between small, medium and large-scale producers, with the supply of KIO3 being the biggest challenge. To resolve this, UNICEF convened regional roundtable discussions with salt producers, key government ministries and other relevant stakeholders explored options to access legal, quality assured KIO3. As a result, a revolving fund for KIO3, to be managed by the government, will be established in 2023 by leveraging resources from other development partners. UNICEF also supported the development of the standard of salt iodization to eliminate ambiguity.

### **Lesson Learned: Digital learning**

Development of digital ecosystem in education requires a full-fledged approach to address ICT and non-ICT related gaps, which should be informed and guided by the national strategic documents on digital education transformation under the leadership of National ICT Council and it is critical to build

solid partnership and coordination around the digital agenda between government, development partners and private sector.

Government buy-in and institutional reform are key to effective digital learning strategies. Without systems-level reform and resources, the development of digital competencies and use of digital technologies in teaching and learning processes remain untenable and unscalable.

Teachers and parents can underestimate the impact of technology on student learning. Parents' lack of digital skills must be prioritized through community engagement interventions. Awareness raising and provision of information and education are essential steps. Well-designed digital solutions can supplement best practices for teaching.

Digital solutions should expand and enhance teaching practices, blending online learning and face-to-face teaching, for the best learning outcomes.

### **Lesson Learned: Competency-based learning**

Teachers' engagement has shown that quality interventions focusing on teachers' professional development increase educational quality and learning outcomes. However, ensuring competency-based education reform in Tajikistan requires greater ownership and support from government educational institutions, donors and partners especially for the most marginalized children and children with special needs. In order to ensure replication and expansion of the competency model, additional learning pathways have been identified in close collaboration with MoES.

On the other hand, the turnover of teachers and changing of national priorities are key challenges. To improve further quality for competency-based education and pre-service teacher trainings other alternative platforms such as technology for teaching and learning should be harnessed. Computer-mediated instruction provides the ability to individualize learning for each teacher and student.

Additionally, a change in teachers' role is required. Competency-based learning shifts the role of the teacher from the centre to school-based support, whereby teachers are continuously supported in their work with students, guiding learning, answering questions, leading discussions, and helping students synthesize and apply knowledge.