YOUTH PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATION QUALITY IN TAJIKISTAN: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region
This study has been commissioned by UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS) and UNICEF Tajikistan. The report was written principally by Jane Lowicki-Zucca, with writing contributions from Matthew Emry and Erin Tanner. Jamie Vinson researched and prepared trend analysis data.

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A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region

Commissioned by the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (UNICEF RO CEECIS) in partnership with UNICEF Tajikistan

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Findings were analysed and the report was written principally by Jane Lowicki-Zucca, with writing contributions from Matthew Emry and Erin Tanner. Jamie Vinson researched and prepared trend analysis data.

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PREFACE

In December 2009, UNICEF’s Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (UNICEF RO, CEECIS) embarked on an exciting and ambitious project to improve education quality for youth in the CEECIS region. In partnership with UNICEF Country Offices, the RO mobilized an international research team, country-based youth research teams, a reference group of international experts, youth and other national non-governmental implementation partners, education and statistical authorities and others to investigate and improve knowledge about education quality for youth in the region. The study focuses on three sites: Kosovo, Georgia and Tajikistan. It also aims to inform and promote further research and action to improve education quality for young people, particularly where they are impacted by various forms of political, economic and social instability and to create opportunities for youth contributions to education policy and programme decision-making.

Three participatory studies on youth perspectives of education quality are at the heart of this work. Youth are asked to describe their understanding and experiences of education quality and what drives changes in it. Their inputs are compared with literature on education quality and youth. The three cases will also be compared with a focus on how various forms of instability impact education quality for youth in similar and different ways. The case findings further stand alone in providing valuable information about how youth aged 13–24 define, rate and prioritize improvements for education quality that are relevant for immediate follow-up by a wide range of actors.

Other aspects of this work include a literature review on fragility, education quality and youth; a discussion of trends in youth development and education indicators in the region and in the cases considered; and the development of youth advocacy statements by youth in each site. Youth are involved in the project design and implementation and will actively promote its findings in each site, contributing to the sustainability of project outcomes. Youth are also principal respondents who, together with their peers and future generations of young people, stand to benefit from any improvements in education quality achieved.

Findings are presented here for Tajikistan, the third case considered between January and August of 2010. They include background information on youth and education quality in Tajikistan, including some youth development and education trends. They also include the research design, methods and results of a nationally representative structured survey of youth opinions on education quality and of a series of focus groups undertaken by and with youth. Case reports are available for Kosovo and Georgia. A report combining and comparing the three cases will be completed in 2011.
FOREWORD

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the quality of the education system in Tajikistan has deteriorated and does not adequately respond to the evolving needs of citizens and the labor market. This is evidenced by the fact that many young people leave the education system before fully completing secondary education. In order to better understand the challenges faced by young people in exercising their right to education, the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE CIS), together with UNICEF Tajikistan and in partnership with the Ministry of Education, conducted an innovative and participatory study of adolescent and youth perspectives on education quality in Tajikistan in 2010. This study was the first of its kind in the country in which youth themselves were directly involved as trained researchers in the assessment of the quality of education.

The results of the study show that youth in Tajikistan most often prioritize the need for improving Learning Processes and Systems, with an emphasis on improving teaching. Youth want more teachers and more interactive and engaging teaching methods. They also want more support for teachers, including higher salaries and more training opportunities, in addition to increased government monitoring and oversight of teaching quality and school administration.

Youth also stress the need to prioritize improvements in their Learning Environment. Youth want modern schools and universities. Of these many desires, youth most often highlight the need to prioritize the provision of more, better quality, free and low-cost books in multiple languages; functioning computers and internet service, with skilled teachers to instruct them on their use; and heat and electricity to power the technology they desire and to erase the need for school closures during the coldest periods of the year.

Youth further emphasize the need for changes to Learning Content, and in particular call for more technology and foreign language classes. They also request support for a wide range of daytime and evening extracurricular activities such as creative arts, sports, youth clubs and social events. They say that these offerings not only promote learning and healthy living, but will draw youth into education and support their completion of secondary school. In addition, they say that more vocational education opportunities are needed, particularly for female youth who are forced or choose to drop out of school.

Youth cited that their Participation is very limited and they would like to play a greater role in education decision-making processes, with attention to expanding their activism at the primary, basic and secondary levels. Youth want to have approaches to learning in which young people can freely share ideas and experiences and contribute to improvements in education quality.

UNICEF aims to use the study outcomes to inform its policy dialogue with the Government. We will also use it as a model for young people’s participation in the education sector and beyond. We also encourage the Government of Tajikistan and international partners to join the effort to act effectively on the findings and recommendations made by youth through this research study.

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ACRONYMS

CEE  Central and Eastern Europe
CIS  Commonwealth of Independent States
DRS  Districts of Republican Subordination
EMIS  Education Management Information System
FTI  Fast Track Initiative
GBAO  Mountainous Autonomous Region of Badakhshan
GDP  gross domestic product
GSE  general secondary education
HEI  higher education institution
HIV/AIDS  human immunodeficiency virus, acquired immune deficiency syndrome
IDP  internally displaced person
MoE  Ministry of Education
NGO  non-governmental organization
NSED  National Strategy for Education Development
PIRLS  Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PSU  primary sampling unit
RO  Regional Office
SAS  State Agency for Statistics
SPE  secondary professional education
SSE  specialized (technical) secondary education
TIMSS  Trends in Mathematics and Science Study
UN  United Nations
UNEC E  United Nations Economic Commission in Europe
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF  United Nations Children’s Fund
USSR  Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VET  vocational education and training
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Despite a wide range of very difficult challenges to education quality that youth say they are facing in Tajikistan, interestingly, most voice significant satisfaction with the quality of education in the country. The Government of Tajikistan, teachers and others involved with providing education services to youth are clearly doing something right, as the majority of Tajikistan youth give education quality above average ratings. This strong level of youth satisfaction likely reflects their widespread recognition of the constraints and realities of recent decades of political, economic and social transition in Tajikistan. Although they voice many areas of dissatisfaction and call for more action on many fronts, they appear to appreciate improvements that have been made so far and show significant optimism for better education quality in the future. Youth support and optimism are key assets to further engage and build on in efforts to rapidly improve education for all youth across the country.

Between March and July 2010, UNICEF RO CEECIS developed and conducted a nationally representative survey of youth opinions of education quality in Tajikistan in partnership with UNICEF Tajikistan and a national research agency. The research was designed and implemented by youth, with assistance from an international research team. It involved over 1,000 youth participants, including 865 survey respondents aged 13 to 24 from randomly selected areas of Tajikistan, and 178 other young people in 21 focus group discussions. Dozens more young people were involved as members of the research implementation team, as participants in a Youth Consultation to develop research topics and questions, and as participants in a forum for the development of a youth advocacy statement summarizing their opinions and concerns.

Results show that youth appreciation and desire for high quality education in Tajikistan are strong. Nearly 50 per cent of Tajikistan’s youth rate education quality as ‘good’, and more than one fifth call it ‘very good’. The vast majority of Tajikistan youth – 86 per cent – also want to achieve more education than they already have. Youth of all ages and among all subgroups that were analysed share similar feelings, with even 72 per cent of youth surveyed who dropped out of, or temporarily suspended their attendance in, primary, basic or secondary school wanting more education. Large majorities of youth expect education to build their capacity in all aspects of life; prepare them for work and a profession; expand their knowledge and skills; improve their status in society; support good citizenship and youth contributions to the development of Tajikistan; and to help them learn about and understand other people’s experiences.

Youth opinions of education quality today have been shaped by recent decades of often painful political, economic, social and cultural transition following Tajikistan’s declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Youth and their families have endured the impacts of five years of civil war between 1991 and 1996, and persistent ethnic, religious and political tensions, including between majority Tajik and ethnic minority communities, as well as between conservative and moderate Islamic communities. They have also weathered a period of steep economic decline, deindustrialization, high unemployment and heavy poverty, where rural populations swelled, and economic activity largely shifted to agricultural production. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced from their homes as a result of conflict, and over a million people (about one in every seven) have left the country in search of work, sustaining their families and the economy through remittances.

Through these events, Tajikistan’s education system took major hits, as it needed to be recreated in the post-Soviet era, and infrastructure was destroyed by conflict. Public spending on education plummeted, and highly qualified teachers were and are among the many workers losing or abandoning low-paid skilled work. Enrolment in secondary and tertiary education also dropped significantly, as youth found it more and more difficult to attend school amid crises, competing responsibilities and rising traditionalism in many areas.

The Government of Tajikistan and its people have worked hard and made great strides to overcome these difficult challenges. GDP has risen, the government has developed and begun to implement education reform policies and programmes, and public spending on education is increasing steadily. Enrolment in secondary and tertiary
education has rebounded, and Tajikistan has managed to maintain a high youth literacy rate and high progression to secondary education.

Despite these achievements, overall unemployment and poverty remain high, and many youth are not completing secondary school. The majority of Tajikistan’s youth are active in the labour market, and people aged 15–29 years old make up the largest share of the working population of 15–64-year-olds, while job choices are limited for all young people. Education gains have not been felt evenly, and in particular, a stark gender gap has emerged. Female enrolment in secondary school has not returned to previous highs, and their enrolment in tertiary education has decreased dramatically since pre-independence years. Youth in rural areas are also far less likely to obtain tertiary education compared with youth in urban areas, where both wealth and higher education institutions are concentrated. The economically poorest young people can ill afford education costs, including corruption, and youth with special needs and those from ethnic minority communities often do not have the learning materials and support they require. A high birth rate, rising population and the increasingly commonplace occurrence of child marriages (especially affecting female youth) also mean that the government must plan for the education of many more learners in the near future.

Despite these ongoing challenges, youth surveyed register remarkable optimism. Although nearly a third of youth surveyed say they don’t know enough about education reform efforts to voice an opinion, more than half of youth feel that these efforts have led to some degree of improvement. Nearly 40 per cent of youth also say they trust Tajikistan’s Ministry of Education to provide good education quality for all learners in the country and that it is already “doing a great job”. More than 40 per cent affirms its trust in government to provide good quality education services, saying, “It can, but needs to do a better job.”

This confidence appears to be driven by youth recognition of the challenges faced by the newly independent country and some tangible signs of improvement that they contrast with even bleaker education conditions of the past. Significant trust in education authorities is nonetheless accompanied by strong calls by youth to further action, along with expectations of swift results. Many youth also register outright dissatisfaction and lack of trust, and the issues they raise require urgent attention. Nearly half of youth, for example, feel that the government should spend more on ensuring quality education for youth.

Youth in Tajikistan most often prioritize the need for improving learning processes and systems, with an emphasis on improving teaching. Although most youth are to some degree satisfied with the quality of teaching, many are not. Many say that there are simply not enough teachers, and that teacher salaries are too low to attract and retain the most highly skilled instructors. They particularly lack specialists, and as a result, many go without opportunities to learn science, mathematics, computer science and languages, while teachers within the system struggle to take on multiple subjects beyond their areas of expertise to bridge the gaps. Youth want more teachers and more interactive and engaging teaching methods. They also want more support for teachers, including higher salaries and more training opportunities, in addition to increased government monitoring and oversight of teaching quality and school administration.

Many youth say that despite government efforts to curb corruption, it is thriving in many parts of the country and the education system. They cite numerous incidences, ranging from teachers requesting bribes in exchange for good marks and access to the presidential quota system that provides free tertiary education opportunities to some of the most marginalized young people, to the misuse and diversion of education resources for personal gain, including the imposition of arbitrary fees on student access to newly supplied school computers. Youth are also critical of their own behaviour, participating in and tolerating those activities which they feel harm youth and keep them from achieving their education goals, do not foster incentives to learn well and create a long-term skills deficit for the country as a whole. Their suggestions range from implementing an anonymous complaints system within schools and universities, to reforming and better monitoring the quota system and changing their own individual behaviour.
Youth also stress the need to prioritize improvements in their learning environment. Youth want modern schools and universities, fully equipped with functioning heating, electricity, water, furniture, laboratories, libraries, sports facilities, cafeterias and more. Of these many desires, youth most often highlight the need to prioritize the provision of better quality, free and low-cost books in multiple languages; functioning computers and Internet service, with skilled teachers to instruct them on their use; and heat and electricity to power the technology they desire and to erase the need for school closures during the coldest periods of the year.

Many young people are also very concerned about youth becoming complacent about their education in the face of difficulties. Their most frequently cited priorities for action to improve education quality in the country are directed at themselves: “Study well; behave well; and complete your education with the resources that are available.” Most youth feel there should be more opportunities to participate in education decision-making, and offer an inspiring list of ideas for what they can do themselves to improve education quality in addition to studying – from getting involved in student government, to tutoring other youth and encouraging them daily to get to school.

Youth further emphasize the need for changes to learning content, and in particular call for more technology and foreign language classes. They want computers and the Internet to be used regularly in their classrooms, with full access for all youth – female and male, rich and poor, urban and rural, abled and disabled. They also request support for a wide range of daytime and evening extra-curricular activities such as creative arts, sports, youth clubs and social events. Some would like to see youth centres established as loci for non-formal skills training and supplemental learning, as well as for social interaction. They say that these offerings not only promote learning and healthy living, but will draw youth into education and support their completion of secondary school. In addition, they say that more vocational education opportunities are needed, particularly for female youth who are forced or choose to drop out of school.

Youth also provide important insights into barriers to achieving their education goals. Despite their general hopefulness about education quality, a worryingly large proportion – 47 per cent—of young people are regularly absent from school without authorization, and 17 per cent say they have dropped out of, or temporarily suspended, their education at some point during primary, basic or secondary school. Most absenteeism is taking place among youth with basic education, which may signal substantial dropouts on the horizon. They say their absenteeism often reflects seasonal agricultural work demands. Youth who have dropped out or suspended their education mostly say they lacked parental or spousal support (especially females), that they lost interest in school and/or that lack of financial means or poverty drew them away. Others leave school simply because only nine grades are offered in their area or because they have to work. To curb absenteeism and dropouts and to improve education quality overall, youth prioritize the need to decrease education costs and increase financial support for individuals and families who need it most.

In more encouraging news, youth widely report feeling safe in and around schools and that limited violence occurs there. When it does occur, it often reflects serious tensions, including between ethnic groups, requiring further investigation and action. Youth also report little drug use at or near school, and less than a quarter say that there is too much smoking at school, suggesting that anti-smoking promotion or other protective factors may be effective, although more work is needed to curb youth smoking. Schools are also playing a central role in providing youth with information on health, HIV/AIDS and nutrition; gender and physical relationships; and peace and tolerance. Although some youth report no access to information on these topics at all, those that do most frequently saying they receive the information from school or university.

This research also reveals important differences in the opinions and experiences of subgroups of youth. Although youth opinions across subgroups of youth analysed generally tend in similar directions, urban, older, more highly educated, female, absentee, dropped-out and conflict-affected youth tend to express their opinions more strongly and/or are somewhat more critical of education quality than their counterparts. For example, urban youth are more likely than rural youth to rate education quality as ‘poor’ or ‘somewhat poor’ and emphasize their support for a range of changes. Among other things, urban youth appear to be much more heavily affected by corrup-
tion than rural youth. Meanwhile, rural youth appear to more often face problems with inadequate facilities and equipment and more strongly emphasize problems with parental support for their education than urban youth. Rural youth are more likely to have dropped out of school.

Many of the opinions of tertiary-educated youth are in line with those of urban-based youth, likely in part reflecting the prevalence of university students in urban areas. Tertiary-educated youth voice concerns about a range of education quality issues more often than less-educated youth. Although tertiary-educated youth, who are older, might be best positioned to see education improvements over time, they are also most likely to feel the brunt of the range of difficulties outlined, as they have lived through more of them across the full spectrum of the education cycle.

Some of the most interesting and troubling differences occur between male and female youth. Males are under-represented in the random sample, likely reflecting reports of a high level of young male migration to other countries for work. Male youth surveyed are also much more likely to achieve tertiary education than female youth, likewise reflecting available enrolment data. Meanwhile, females sampled are more likely to have dropped out of or suspended their education, while males are much more likely to report being absent from school without authorization. Although females often emphasize their concerns about various aspects of education quality more than males, they are much more likely to report knowing little about education reform or spending, revealing less exposure to education policy discussion.

The opinions of absentees, dropouts and conflict-affected youth are similar to one another. They are all more likely to rate education quality as ‘average’ compared with their respective counterparts, and frequently display more cynicism about a range of quality issues. These and other youth subgroup differences warrant further research, particularly to understand what factors are pulling young people out of school, where sources of dissatisfaction lie and what more can be done about them.

Most youth further believe that a failure to provide high quality education in Tajikistan supports increased out-migration of youth, a weaker economy and poor development, poor health practices and decreased demand for secondary school. Some also say the failure to provide high quality education breeds poor youth self-esteem; a devaluing of youth overall; decreased youth feelings of responsibility for the country; and deeper problems for females, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other groups. Some also believe that it is a risk factor for a return to armed conflict and increased discontent with government.

Tajikistan’s youth want to avoid these and other risks. They laud education improvements thus far, but want their ongoing concerns and ideas taken into serious consideration moving forward. They would like more opportunities to be involved in education decision-making. This study captures many of their inputs, including the detailed findings and recommendations that follow.
1. **EDUCATION QUALITY AND YOUTH IN TAJIKISTAN: A BRIEF BACKGROUND**

**YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF INSTABILITY AND CONFLICT**

Tajikistan’s youth aged 13 to 24 today have are coming of age in the turbulent aftermath of the dramatic break-up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991. They have endured the consequences of economic and political transitions, years of civil war and social degradation and still rocky efforts to recover. Their education prospects have been battered amid struggles over political control, how to shape Tajikistan’s cultural and national identity and freedoms. Although there are encouraging signs of improvement on many fronts, many challenges in education quality remain.

The Tajikistan Soviet Socialist Republic, set in a spectacular and rugged mountainous landscape, was among the last of the USSR’s constituents to declare its independence in 1991. Having been one of the economically poorest Soviet republics and created by Joseph Stalin in part as a means to divide and rule the Muslim peoples of Central Asia, the new Republic of Tajikistan was born amid economic vulnerability and ethnic, religious and political tension (UNITIP, 2010). Nearly 80 per cent of the population was and is ethnic Tajik, 20 per cent is Uzbek and smaller numbers are Kyrgyz, Russian, East Asian, Roma and others. War erupted as opposition groups, including those seeking to create an Islamic state, launched a violent rebellion against the new government (BBC, 2010; BBC, 2010a).

Tajikistan’s young people were among the more than 100,000 people killed in the bloody five-year civil war that ensued after independence. They also witnessed and experienced a range of other rights violations. Young people were among the at least 600,000 people – then roughly one tenth of Tajikistan’s population – who fled their homes as a result of the conflict and became internally displaced within Tajikistan. They were also among the additional 90,000 who became refugees outside of Tajikistan, mainly in neighbouring Afghanistan (HRW, 1993; ICG, 2001).

The conflict also took a heavy toll on Tajikistan’s infrastructure, making daily life difficult for all and returns home extremely difficult for many refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), who had already lived in extreme conditions in exile. Most relevant to this study and later discussed in detail, much of the country’s education infrastructure and systems were destroyed or in significant disarray. The population of Tajikistan also became heavily armed, abetting further deadly violence. Psychological scars also ran deep. Youth also bore heavy burdens, taking on personal and family responsibilities at an early age amid the upheaval.

In 1993, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) authorized a peacekeeping force in Tajikistan to protect the CIS borders. A draft constitution was approved in 1994, reinstituting a presidential system.

In addition to, and in part as a result of the armed conflict and political unrest that followed independence, Tajikistan’s youth and communities were simultaneously struck by devastating economic and social upheaval that accompanied the transition to a market economy from Soviet central planning. Separation from the USSR meant severing the country’s ties to regular economic assistance and established production and trade arrangements, and the country went through a period of deindustrialization, increased unemployment and associated social degradation.

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1 GBAO (Mountainous Autonomous Region of Badkhshan) is Tajikistan’s poorest region, located in the isolated mountainous east, and inhabitants speak mainly Pamiri, which is very different from Tajik. Tajikistan’s southern region, Khatlon, borders Afghanistan and has the second largest economy and a very mixed ethnic mosaic. Its northern region, Sughd, hooks into Uzbekistan’s Fergana valley and has been a seat of power historically. This region has concentrations of ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz people and is now feeling the repercussions of ethnic conflict between neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Today, Tajikistan’s power and economic wealth are concentrated around Dushanbe, the capital, in the region known as the Districts of Republican Subordination. This central region is predominantly Tajik, but many East Asians also reside here, along with much of the remaining Russian and Jewish populations.
Tajikistan’s economic growth fell by more than 60 per cent after independence, and the government was unable to pay adequate attention to economic recovery until after the war’s formal end (World Bank Group, 2003; World Bank, 2010). Between 1991 and 2002, Tajikistan’s labour force increased by 15 per cent while employment dropped nearly 9 per cent. At the same time, the number of people working in industry dropped by more than half, and employment in agriculture rose nearly 40 per cent. This brought agriculture’s total share of employment to approximately 67 per cent by 2002, up from 45 per cent in 1991. In the same period, however, real output in agriculture dropped nearly 30 per cent (UNESCAP, 2003, 123).

Rising industrial unemployment meant increased unemployment for workers with higher education, creating heavy outward migration of highly qualified labour. Many low-paid, unskilled and/or underemployed workers also sought opportunities abroad. By 2003, upwards of 1 million economic migrants from Tajikistan were sending remittances home (UNESCAP, 2003, 123).

Youth have been at the centre of these seismic shifts, with an estimated 60 per cent of 15-to-19-year-olds participating in Tajikistan’s labour market, finding mostly low-skill, low-wage work with few protections, and as described below, often with less training than previous generations (UNESCAP, 2003, 123; UNICEF/IRC, 2009). Young people aged 15 to 29 have also made up the largest share – about 51 per cent in 2007 – of Tajikistan’s working population of 15–64-year-olds.

Although youth are heavily engaged in Tajikistan’s workforce, many youth who would like to work cannot find jobs. Youth unemployment constitutes 33 per cent of total unemployment, which in 2007 stood at an estimated 11.3 per cent, with spikes up to 33 per cent during periods of seasonal unemployment (Baskakova, 2007; UNICEF Tajikistan, 2010a). Still others are underemployed, and many young people have given up looking for work (UNESCAP, 2003, 123).

Stark gender gaps in employment have also emerged. The number of women employed, including female youth, dropped 43 per cent between 1991 and 2002 (UNESCAP, 2003, 123). About 73 per cent of women’s labour is unpaid, and the gender wage gap is 50 per cent. Women with disabilities face strong discrimination in all economic sectors, especially those living in rural areas. Most women in rural areas also lack personal identification papers, making it more difficult for them to pursue economic opportunities and secure social entitlements (UNIFEM, 2009). Meanwhile, males, including young males, are under increased pressure to provide for themselves and their families and to migrate in search of work.

By 2007, almost half of Tajikistan’s GDP was earned by temporary migrants working abroad, with about 96 per cent of them employed in Russia. Tajikistan had the highest rate in the CIS of outward migration for labour, with one quarter of all families sending at least one member abroad to work – primarily males. Half of these migrants were youth aged 15 to 29 (Baskakova, 2007).

With much external assistance and internal effort, however, Tajikistan’s economic growth rebounded between 2000 and 2008, averaging 8.6 per cent annual growth in GDP per year (World Bank, 2010). Despite this encouraging progress, in 2007, Tajikistan had the lowest GDP per capita of the former Soviet republics and the second highest rate of inflation (OECD, 2009). Economic growth also slowed to 3.4 per cent in 2009, as the effects of the global financial crisis that began in 2008 struck Tajikistan, and remittances to the country have declined (World Bank, 2010). Meanwhile, over half of the working population remaining in Tajikistan continues to work in agriculture (particularly cotton, cereals, fruits and vegetables) and one fifth in industry (such as aluminium and chemical heavy manufacturing and various light industries, such as food processing, fabric, carpets) (BBC, 2010; UNTIP, 2010; World Bank, 2009).

Tajikistan’s progress was also assaulted by a series of energy and food crises in the latter half of the 2000s. Much of the country is mountainous, and harsh winters with record-breaking temperatures below -25 degrees Celsius have created more hardships for young people and their families (OECD, 2009; CARE, 2008). Freezing weather slowed

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the production of hydroelectric power, Tajikistan’s major source of energy (UNICEF, 2008; CARE, 2008; Najibullah, 2008). The severe cold and the energy crisis increased food and fuel prices and decreased the power available to businesses, forcing many families to sell off livestock and household assets (CARE, 2008).

Freezing temperatures and energy problems also damaged water lines and rendered classrooms intolerably cold, making school attendance virtually impossible, especially in high mountain and rural areas. During the winter of 2008, an estimated 90 per cent of rural schools had no functional heating system as a result of the energy crisis or outdated equipment, and only 40–50 per cent of students would attempt to attend class. With classroom temperatures below -9 degrees Celsius, many schools were forced to reduce their operating hours to two to three hours per day or to close altogether (UNICEF, 2008).

Poverty has also gripped the country, which had the highest overall poverty rate in the CIS region and Europe, at 47 per cent in 2009, after having fallen from 83 per cent in 1999 (World Bank, 2010). The poverty rate is higher for families with children than those without children, and families with seven or more members account for almost 60 per cent of the total population (World Bank, 2010; UNTIP, 2010; Baskakova, 2007). Poverty is also significantly higher for people living at higher altitudes, where weather conditions are extremely harsh and temporal migration is the main source of employment (World Bank, 2009).

Opportunities for girls and young women have also changed dramatically since independence. Alongside the gender gaps in employment and wages noted previously, there has been a resurgence of traditionalism in family and cultural life (UNIFEM, 2009). Girls have been taken out of school in greater numbers to help with domestic responsibilities. Early marriage primarily involving girls is also more common in this generation than during the Soviet era, and the rate of child marriage has stood steady at about 13 per cent annually from 2000 to 2008 (UNICEF, 2010). Because married girls become members of their husbands’ families, many parents opt to concentrate resources on sons, who will support them in old age (UNICEF Tajikistan, 2010a).

Instability has taken a further toll on Tajikistan’s health system and on young people’s health. The country’s health indicators remain among the lowest in Central Asia and the CIS. In particular, the spread of tuberculosis is alarmingly high, with male youth experiencing a higher rate of infection than female youth (SSCT, 2009). Despite strong efforts by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the UN and the government, infant mortality rates are also high and on par with some countries in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF Tajikistan, 2010a).

Despite an overall low prevalence of people known to be living with HIV in Tajikistan – 15.5 per 100,000 as of October 2008 – incidence among young people is rising (WHO, 2011). “The driving force of the epidemic continues to be injecting drug use, although commercial sex and considerable migration of population are [of] increasing importance” (WHO, 2011). Drugs from Afghanistan are transported through Tajikistan, and drug use has increased, especially among young people. Discussing sex within the family is taboo, in part due to often strict observance of Islamic practices. In addition, few youth-friendly health services and life-skills learning opportunities exist, leaving young people with little information about the dangers of HIV/AIDS, other sexually transmitted infections and drug use (UNICEF Tajikistan, 2010a).

All of these difficult pressures affect an increasing number of young people, as Tajikistan’s fertility rate remains the highest in the CIS and a significant percentage of marriages are taking place among children (Baskakova, 2007; SSCT, 2009). As it is, approximately 70 per cent of Tajikistan’s estimated 7.6 million people in 2008 are under 25 years old. Nearly half of the population is under 18, and 23 per cent are between 15 and 24 (SSCT, 2009; UNICEF Tajikistan, 2010; Baskakova, 2007; World Bank, 2010). Rural populations are growing at a much faster rate than urban ones, with three quarters of Tajikistan’s population now living in rural areas. The number of youth living in rural regions is increasing by 3.6 per cent per year, which may deepen corresponding regional, ethnic, religious and political divides (OECD, 2009; Baskakova, 2007; SSCT, 2009).
Clearly, Tajikistan continues to have many urgent problems to solve, from economic recovery and energy challenges, to providing adequate social services, ending gender inequality, confronting diverse and at times dangerous ideologies and providing security while also respecting human rights. Many reforms and substantial international support are needed to give Tajikistan the momentum it needs to move in the direction of increased stability. As further described, Tajikistan’s education system and youth also have key roles to play.

THE EVOLVING EDUCATION SITUATION

The quality of young people’s education in Tajikistan has been directly impacted by the stresses of economic transition, war and the related poverty, gender inequality and other challenges described previously. Prior to independence, Tajikistan’s education system was supported and modernized with inputs from the central government of the USSR. Education was widely available, and gender gaps were narrower. Although educational attainment remained below average compared with the other USSR republics, youth literacy was high (Curtis, 1996; UNESCO, 2010). These and other gains for young people and the society were rocked after independence and the outbreak of war.

Rapid deindustrialization of the economy displaced a large portion of the highly qualified workforce, and agricultural labour swelled. The departure of specialists in education, science, medicine and culture from the country created a shortage of highly qualified personnel within the education system (MoE, 2005). The war further destroyed or damaged one fifth of the nation’s schools and disrupted education for thousands of children, youth and others who became IDPs and refugees or otherwise bore the direct effects of war (FTI, 2009; MoE, 2005; UNICEF Tajikistan, 2010a). Public expenditure on education also dropped precipitously from 8 per cent in 1993 to 2 per cent in 1995, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Public education expenditure in Tajikistan as a percentage of GDP, 1985–2008

![Graph showing public education expenditure in Tajikistan as a percentage of GDP, 1985–2008](image)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010
Data are not available for years not included on the graph from 1985 to 2008.
Total public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) is the current and capital expenditures on education by local, regional and national governments, including municipalities (household contributions are excluded), expressed as a percentage of the GDP.

Amid the fray, enrolment in secondary school also took a severe downward turn. As depicted in Figure 2, the gross enrolment rate for secondary school fell from over 100 per cent in 1991, to 82 per cent in 1993 and as low as 74 per cent in 2000. The secondary enrolment rate went down for both males and females, but female enrolment...
dropped more than male, losing 23 percentage points between 1992 and 2000, compared to 17 percentage points for males; as discussed below, female secondary enrolment has not rebounded as robustly. Enrolment in tertiary education also took a downturn, with particularly disastrous effects for females, as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 2.** Gross enrolment rate in secondary education in Tajikistan, by total and sex

![Graph showing gross enrolment rate in secondary education in Tajikistan](image)

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2010
Data are not available for years not included in the graph from 1990 to 2008.
Figures disaggregated by sex are not available for 1990 and 1991.

Gross enrolment rate, secondary is the number of pupils (total, male, female) enrolled in secondary school, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population (total, male, female) in the theoretical age group for secondary education.

**Figure 3.** Gross enrolment rate in tertiary education in Tajikistan, by total and sex

![Graph showing gross enrolment rate in tertiary education in Tajikistan](image)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010
Data are not available for years not included on the graph between 1980 and 2008.
Data disaggregated by sex is not available for 1980.
Gross tertiary enrolment rate is the number of pupils (total, male, female) enrolled in tertiary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population (total, male, female) of the five-year age group following on from the secondary school leaving age.

Given Tajikistan’s established production roles in the centrally planned USSR economy, before independence, students knew what to expect from the labour market on graduation. In the sudden political and economic transition, all bets were off. As unemployment grew among technical specialists and those with higher education, the training of specialists and the number of students actually graduating from secondary professional training schools also fell by about 50 per cent in the decade after independence (UNESCAP, 2003, 123). Having moved away from the mandatory work assignments of the Soviet era, the system was unprepared to help young people redirect their studies and work options. Many left school without finishing, and hundreds of thousands migrated out of the country in search of work, particularly young males.

MORE RECENT EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS

Since independence, Tajikistan has worked hard to develop legislative frameworks for education and improve service provision. Article 41 of Tajikistan’s constitution adopted in 1994 declares the right of every person to education, and basic education is obligatory and free. The government also guarantees, “free high school, trade, and in accordance with ability and on a competitive basis, specialized high school and university education” (Republic of Tajikistan, 1994). Tajikistan’s Law on Education was also adopted December 27, 1993, and was partially amended in 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 2003. It is currently being revised again to reflect a shift to 12-year education. The law makes education a priority at all levels of state governance and regulates its structure and management. The Ministry of Education (MoE) sets, implements and monitors state policies and standards in education. See Appendix 1 for details on the structure of Tajikistan’s education system.

The country has held its ground or made encouraging progress in several other areas, as well. Despite many pressures, it has managed to maintain a high level of youth literacy, as depicted in Figure 4. Progression to secondary school has also held steady and strong at nearly 100 per cent for both males and females, as shown in Figure 5. Gross enrolment in secondary and tertiary education has also been making a steady recovery since 2000, as seen in Figures 2 and 3 (with differences, however, for males and females). In addition, public expenditure on education has begun to recover, with 3.5 per cent of GDP spent on education in 2008 (UNESCO, 2010). To its credit, Tajikistan steadily increased its overall spending on education, reaching nearly $177 million in 2008, as shown in Figure 6. Tajikistan has also embarked on a comprehensive national education reform process, including the development of a National Strategy for Education Development, 2020 (NSED).

Figure 4. Youth literacy rate in Tajikistan, by total and sex

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010
Youth literacy rate is the percentage of people aged 15 to 24 who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement about their everyday life.
Despite this important progress, Tajikistan still faces many challenges to improving education quality for youth and other learners. Tajikistan’s education system currently serves 1.77 million students in primary, basic and higher secondary school. By 2016, this number will increase more than 20 per cent, to 2.132 million. Moves are also underway to add a year to the full cycle of general education (from 11 to 12 years). About 12,000 new classrooms will need to be built to meet the new requirement, and 37,000 new teachers will also need to be trained and employed (Uldashev, 2010).

Meanwhile, despite gradual post-war rebuilding and refurbishment, an estimated 80 per cent of educational facilities still require major repairs. Without adequate space, 85 per cent of schools are forced to operate in two or three shifts. More than half of schools lack adequate sanitary facilities or heating systems and are not well maintained. The energy crisis and lack of heat in schools have made it impossible for classes to continue in many areas amid freezing temperatures. Curricula have also not been updated, and learner-centred practices have not been integrated into teaching methods (FTI, 2009; MoE, 2005; UNICEF Tajikistan, 2010a).

Although secondary enrolment rates have been rising overall, there are troubling disparities. Enrolment rates for females have been on the rise, but they have not rebounded as much as they have for males, and the gender gap...
in education has widened for females since Tajikistan’s independence. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Tajikistan maintains the greatest gender disparity in education favouring boys among UNECE countries. As depicted in Figure 2, a gap of 3 percentage points favouring males in secondary enrolment in 1992 widened to 16 points in 2002, and remained large at 12 points in 2008 (UNECE, 2009 and 2009a).

There is also a high drop-out rate, which disproportionately affects females. These dropouts can be “attributed to the large scale influence of traditional gender roles” and decreased interest among parents (especially within economically poor families) in sending girls to school. At the same time, these changes may simultaneously be sparking interest among girls in obtaining basic vocational education, which may be more appealing to their families (Baskakova, 2007).

Moreover, as illustrated in Figure 3, female gross enrolment rates for tertiary education fell dramatically since before independence and have not rebounded the way that rates for males have. In 1990, 17 per cent of females and 28 per cent of males were enrolled in tertiary education. By 2008, female tertiary enrolment had returned to just 11 per cent, while male enrolment surpassed the pre-independence level, reaching 29 per cent. The downward trend for females, which reached a low of 6 per cent gross tertiary enrolment in 2001, began to reverse following a presidential initiative in the same year to attract more young women into higher education. The initiative allowed higher education institutions (HEIs) to introduce enrolment privileges for young women from rural areas whereby they could be admitted through formal interviews rather than being required to sit typical entrance exams (Baskakova, 2007).

There are also pronounced enrolment disparities in rural and agricultural communities. A recent study by the International Organization for Migration and the NGO ‘Pulse’ shows that young people’s involvement in agricultural activities has lowered enrolment rates, particularly in cotton growing districts. Transportation presents an additional access challenge for rural students, especially in the high mountainous east. Rural schools are also typically overcrowded, forcing students to study in two or three shifts, adding further disincentives for rural youth to attend school (MoE, 2005). Furthermore, since HEIs are concentrated in cities, rural youth are at a distinct disadvantage in accessing universities and vocational schools (Agranovich, 2010).

Access to education is also a problem for young people in communities where minority languages are spoken, due to a significant imbalance in the availability of teaching materials in languages other than Tajik or Russian. Children and youth with disabilities and other special needs are also largely left out of school, and instead stay home in high numbers, receiving no education at all. Public attitudes remain extremely negative towards young people with special needs, and discrimination frequently leads to social and economic exclusion both for the young person and her or his family. Lack of acceptance of these young people hampers efforts to ensure good quality learning opportunities that meet their special needs (OSF, 2009).

The economically poorest young people and other learners in Tajikistan also face strong barriers to accessing education because of corruption, which adds untenable costs. According to UNESCO’s 2008 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Corruption has penetrated all parts of Tajik education, starting from the ‘gifts’ parents give preschool teachers to look better after their kids and ending into multi-thousand dollar bribes from senior university administrators to government officials to get extra benefits for their schools (Briller, 2007).

These and a range of similar practices have made formal learning opportunities more difficult to attain for many students when 30 somoni (about USD 7) can represent a week’s wages for the majority of families, and when bribes for university admission can cost USD 4,000 (Ivanov, 2009). Public financing arrangements for schools also “rely significantly on the budgets of local authorities; introducing inequalities to the education services across regions,” where revenue levels vary (World Bank, 2009).

Drops in state expenditure on public education and high inflation have also stimulated the emergence of non-state alternatives. In many cases, these alternatives offer better quality education for those who can afford it. Some of the new educational institutions are private and self-financed, and others are combined.
Many improvements in the school-to-work transition are still to be made. Graduates continue to confront structural unemployment issues and mismatches between the skills they have obtained through formal education and labour market needs. Graduates are often not able to find employment in their preferred professions. Many are also forced to undertake additional training before beginning work because they have not developed the necessary skills in school. Curricula remain outdated and unable to meet current international market demands or the career aspirations of many students, and employers are reluctant to invest resources in training new labour market entrants. As in other settings, graduates in Tajikistan are also often forced to find work through familial contacts, leading to jobs that are not in their desired profession and further devaluing the education they achieved (Baskakova, 2007; SSCT, 2009).

As described, many highly skilled young people who are unable to find suitable employment domestically are forced to migrate externally in search of work, stay home and be included among the unemployed or take lower skilled, lower paid jobs that do not fit their desired career path. School-to-work transition challenges are particularly pronounced for educated youth who live in rural or high mountainous areas where the vast majority of jobs are in agriculture or involve manual labour. About 23 per cent of youth graduates from university in 2008 remained unemployed by the end of the year (SSCT, 2009).

Data are limited for assessing and comparing employment and other learning outcomes in Tajikistan. Tajikistan does not presently participate in either the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) or the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and does not appear to be scheduled for future assessments. Although youth literacy rates have remained strong, some recent research indicates that learning achievement at grade nine in mathematics, natural sciences and geography may be showing deterioration from previous years (FTI, 2009).

The MoE has explained, “The education sector has a very weak capacity in the sphere of management and planning at all levels.” In particular, it has highlighted the absence of a rational and streamlined decision-making process; low policy development and system management capacity; and an inability to assess learning results and the effectiveness of educational establishments (MoE, 2005). In addition to the areas of progress outlined previously, however, Tajikistan has taken steps to strategically address these and other education challenges.

As part of its efforts to meet Millennium Development Goal education targets by 2015, with support from an EU/MTEF project and UNICEF, the MoE established a working group tasked with creating an education costing model to calculate what is needed to support education reform. The model shows that Tajikistan needs to increase spending on education to 6 per cent of its GDP by 2020. While Tajikistan’s education spending still falls short of meeting its goals, the government has demonstrated firm commitments to annually increase education spending (UNICEF Tajikistan, 2010a; FTI, 2009).

Other steps have also been taken to improve funding. Using World Bank and Catalytic Funds, Tajikistan has introduced per capita education financing, which has helped improve sector management and implementation capacity, increase access to schools and reduce shortages in textbooks (World Bank, 2010). Tajikistan was also endorsed as a Fast Track Initiative (FTI) recipient country in 2006, and as of 2010, had received three payments totalling in USD 31.9 million (MoE, 2009).

EDUCATION REFORM

Education is a national priority for the Tajikistan Government, which aims to achieve “standards of access and quality in conformity with international norms…[and] universal access to quality education [for] all children and young people of the country” (MoE, 2005). Tajikistan has set five goals for education that are articulated in both its National Development Strategy and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper developed in 2004, and its NSED 2020 (FTI, 2009; MoE, 2005). The goals include to:
• improve the management and performance of the education system;
• improve system effectiveness through decentralization, community participation and building institutional and human capacities;
• ensure the quality of education services;
• ensure equitable access to basic education and merit-based access to other levels;
• improve the physical infrastructure, and material and technical aspects of the education system.

To reach the NSED 2020 goals, Tajikistan’s parliament made significant changes to the Law on Education in April 2010 that, among other things, increase the total number of years for general education and lower the age of entrance into primary school. Starting in 2020, compulsory education will be extended by one more year to cover grades 1 to 10 (currently primary and basic school are years 1 to 9). Also beginning in 2020, children will begin grade 1 at age 6 instead of the current age of 7, and the system will be extended from 11 years of general education to 12. See Appendix 1 for more information on the Tajikistan education system.

To support these major shifts, the MoE is preparing a new teaching programme and revised curricula for grades 1 through 12 (primary, basic and secondary levels). It will also work to increase the number of schools and is currently seeking donor support for the civil works component of this strategy (Uldashev, 2010).

The revised secondary level curriculum will aim to improve student preparation for both university and Vocational Education and Training (VET). Emphasis will also be placed on linking education with local labour market needs and goals. Further details will be included in a new NSED being drafted for 2011–2020.

As already noted, the government has taken additional legislative measures to redefine state education policy, update the education system, ensure equal access to education, address gender issues in education, improve the quality of education and reduce poverty through increased literacy (MoE, 2005). Some of these legislative measures are listed at the end of Appendix 1.

Within higher education, the MoE recognizes a need to develop students’ capacity to think critically and creatively, particularly in relation to the labour market; heighten students’ sense of personal responsibility for educational excellence; encourage competition between higher learning institutions; and eliminate corruption and nepotism within the educational process. It also wishes to expand education services by including adult and distance learning (TDG, 2010).

The government has further identified the importance of providing more support to the nation’s wide range of VET institutions. In 2002, Tajikistan’s Ministry of Labour and Social Protection organized a working committee to draft the law “On the initial vocational education.” Among other provisions, the law ensures the rights of citizens to obtain training, retraining and advanced training in primary VET institutions and guarantees the right to free VET in state institutions (TDG, 2010). The forthcoming NSED 2011–2020 will further detail VET reforms.

To reach its education goals, the government has sought and gained economic assistance from a wide range of supporters, including the Islamic Development Bank, international humanitarian organizations, local business leaders, the Asian Development Bank and various governments. With their support, Tajikistan has completed or is beginning projects to reconstruct and rehabilitate over 130 educational institutions, including secondary schools; build and equip regional schools; purchase school equipment; and advance other aspects of its education sector development programme (TDG, 2010).

Education reforms have also depended on improving the capacity of the MoE to fulfil its mandate and manage education spending. To this end, the MoE has worked strategically to modernize and computerize its Education Management Information System (EMIS). It is also working to make schools more autonomous, and education
1.

**Finance reforms have supported the introduction of per capita financing, where money is budgeted according to the number of students in a school system (FTI, 2009).**

In order to help Tajikistan’s education pedagogy shift toward more interactive and inclusive teaching and learning methodologies, the MoE has tasked Tajikistan’s Academy of Education to develop new curricula and education standards.

The MoE recognizes, however that “there is [still] a need to continue building its management capacities, particularly in the area of strategic planning, policy development and review, and monitoring and evaluation,” and is working to determine how best to improve its structure and work processes (FTI, 2009).

The government’s education reform work is also linked to other areas of youth development. The Tajikistan government has said the main concerns facing youth today include: education, employment, protection of health and healthy lifestyles, housing for young urban families, distribution of land to rural young families and young people’s international participation (SSCT, 2009). The extent to which education reform efforts succeed in reflecting and responding to these and other youth concerns will undoubtedly be a test of its quality.
2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This case study seeks answers to the following general questions:
• How do youth view the quality of education they have received, or are receiving?
• What do youth think affects the quality of education in their setting at micro and macro levels?  
• What do youth believe should be done to improve the quality of education in their setting at micro and macro levels, including their priorities for action?

To find answers to these questions, field research involved two principle approaches that emphasize understanding education quality issues and what affects them through the perspectives of youth:
• The participatory development and implementation of a nationally representative structured survey of youth opinions on education quality;
• Focus groups with youth to discuss education quality issues.

In Tajikistan, they were preceded and informed by a stakeholder analysis; a Youth Consultation on youth education quality issues; and review, revision and pilot testing of a structured survey questionnaire and of research implementation protocols by the youth research team. Youth researchers and other youth also developed an Advocacy Statement on their opinions of education quality in Tajikistan. These processes are described here, along with details of the sample design for Tajikistan.

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS AND IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

Work began in December 2009 with a stakeholder analysis that identified the wide range of actors who have an interest in, and/or could make contributions to the project and its outcomes. Particular attention was paid to identifying and understanding the dynamics among youth and their networks and organizations. In light of this analysis, UNICEF worked to develop partnerships with individuals and organizations that were well placed and willing to support project implementation and outcomes across Tajikistan beyond the short contracting period.

M-Vector Consulting Agency, a research, consulting and training agency serving public and private clients with offices in Dushanbe and Khujand, acted as the principal implementing organization in collaboration with the local researcher, UNICEF Tajikistan, the international research team and the youth research team. M-Vector carried out administrative, logistical, financial and data management responsibilities for project implementation. UNICEF Tajikistan also assisted the international research team with administrative, logistical and technical support, including obtaining the necessary permissions to undertake the research. Many other groups and organizations assisted the youth research team in their work, including by providing space to hold focus group discussions. For example, the youth NGO called Youth Group for the Protection of the Environment hosted a focus group discussion with working students in Khujand.

YOUTH CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION QUALITY

A Youth Consultation was held as a first step in developing the components of the structured survey questionnaire and focus groups. Youth involved in the consultation and later in testing and revising the survey questionnaire did intensive work to define the facets of education quality from youth perspectives and prioritize questions for inclusion in the study. The consultation was also a forum for engaging youth to participate in the youth research team to implement the study and to generate interest among youth in the outcomes. Diverse participation was sought, including

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2 For example, at the micro level, youth might talk about poverty in the family or local conditions of violence as affecting education quality and their education choices, while at the macro level, they might – in their own words – talk about what drives or supports this poverty and violence and other systemic and structural factors that affect service delivery.
Youth already involved, or interested in becoming active in addressing youth and education issues, supporting the sustainability of project outcomes. Youth were recruited through announcements circulated by two youth networks (21st Century Youth and the Dushanbe Debate Club) and at three universities in Tajikistan’s capital city Dushanbe (National University of Tajikistan, Russian-Tajik Slavonic University, and Technical University of Tajikistan).

The local researcher organized the Youth Consultation in collaboration with UNICEF Tajikistan. The one-day event was held at the City Business Center ‘Poitakht’ in Dushanbe, on March 27, 2010. Twenty-nine young people aged 15–28 participated (53 per cent male, 47 per cent female) from around the country, including from Dushanbe, Ghonchi, Khorog, Khujand, Kolkhozbod, Qabodiyon, Shaartus and Shahriston. They included youth at schools and universities, those involved with youth NGOs and employed and unemployed youth.

Consultation participants were engaged in a series of brainstorming and synthesizing exercises that moved them from thinking and talking about youth and education quality issues in general, to developing specific questions about the topics they raised for use in the structured survey questionnaire and focus groups. The consultation report and contributions from UNICEF RO CEECIS, the Reference Group of Experts, UNICEF Tajikistan and other methodological background sources, formed the basis of a draft survey questionnaire that was debated, field tested and revised with youth during the Research Team’s training period.

**NATIONAL RESEARCH TEAM RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING**

A team of youth researchers and supervisors was recruited to implement the study through notices circulated through NGO, and youth, school and university networks. Youth researchers between the ages of 18 and 24 were sought with strong, proven verbal and written communication and interpersonal skills and with a preference for research experience and prior involvement or interest in activism on youth and education issues. Researchers were needed with energy and a dynamic ability to track down and build a rapport with youth respondents and collect information accurately and ethically. Given the structured nature of the survey, however, they were not required to have extensive experience or training in qualitative methods.

An even mix of male and female researchers was also sought in order to ensure adequate coverage for same-sex interviewing. Researchers were further sought from a variety of geographic locations in Tajikistan to facilitate project implementation in randomly selected locations, ensure a variety of language skills and ease social interaction throughout Tajikistan.

The Tajikistan youth research team was ultimately comprised of 21 female and 21 male youth coming from each of Tajikistan’s five regions. Some of the youth researchers had participated in the Youth Consultation prior to the team training, and many had not. They self-identified in a range of ways, including as students; members of the Tajik and other ethnic communities; and as working youth, including in one case, as a teacher. Eleven research supervisors, six male and five female, were also employed to facilitate the work of the youth researchers and also came from each of Tajikistan’s five regions. They included several NGO staff members, a sociologist, an independent researcher, a university lecturer, schoolteachers, a gymnasium teacher, a member of M-Vector and a PhD student.

Youth researchers, research supervisors and members of M-Vector staff attended a five-day training on the study methodology held in Dushanbe City, from June 19–23, 2010. The international research team and the local researcher worked with the team to review and discuss the study goals and objectives and to learn and practice its methods. The team debated, field-tested and revised the survey questionnaire. See Appendix 2 for the final structured survey questionnaire Tajikistan, and Appendix 3 for the Tajikistan Training Agenda.

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3 Given resource and time constraints, many of the issues raised by youth were not addressed in the survey or focus group discussions. Those issues ultimately included were the mutually agreed upon priorities for the purposes of this study by the parties involved and should not be considered the sum total of youth-defined youth education quality issues in Tajikistan.
At the end of the training, the youth research team and supervisors worked with the international research team, the local researcher and M-Vector to develop a detailed team implementation plan. Fourteen two-person subgroups of the larger team and research supervisors took responsibility to implement the survey in specific geographic areas. They also made commitments to organize and conduct focus groups with youth across the country.

Youth involved in designing and implementing the study were also invited to participate in a one-day event to develop a youth advocacy statement, which can be used by youth, UNICEF and other actors for advocacy purposes with a variety of audiences. The statement is presented in Section 5, following the presentation of study results, conclusion and recommendations.

**SAMPLE DESIGN**

M-Vector designed the sample in collaboration with the lead consultant for the implementation of a two-stage cluster survey that would allow UNICEF to make inferences about youth 13–24 according to settlement type (urban/rural). A multistage method of sampling was used to design the sample.

Stratification was conducted first by region (Dushanbe, Sughd, Khatlon, DRS and GBAO) and then by settlement type (urban/rural, where just under 30 per cent of the population is estimated by Tajikistan’s State Agency for Statistics (SAS) to live in urban areas and just over 70 per cent in rural areas). The total sample size of 600 respondents was distributed among those strata proportional to their population size. SAS urban and rural population aggregates served as primary sampling units (PSUs). The numbers of PSUs by strata and interviews for each for the Tajikistan sample design are shown in Table 1. The distribution of PSUs across five regions in Tajikistan is further depicted in Figure 7.

Households were randomly selected at the second stage of sampling. Eligible youth within these households were identified and randomly sampled using the Kish table. After the Structured Survey was implemented, M-Vector re-weighted the sample based on actual response rates.

**Table 1. Distribution of Tajikistan interviews by strata and PSU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>PSU</th>
<th>Interviews Projected urban</th>
<th>Interviews Projected rural</th>
<th>Interviews Completed PSU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Sino</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somoni</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dushanbe Region Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Population data for the year 2009 compiled by Tajikistan’s State Agency for Statistics (SAS) served as the sampling frame.

5 According to the SAS, the target population for the study (13–24 year olds) is present in about 35 per cent of Tajikistan’s households. Assuming a 15–20 per cent non-response rate, 20 households per Primary Sampling Unit were randomly selected to obtain 10 completed surveys in each.
Figure 7. Tajikistan youth and education quality study primary sampling units (PSUs)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>PSU</th>
<th>Interviews Projected urban</th>
<th>Interviews Projected rural</th>
<th>Interviews Completed PSU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS)</td>
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<td>Shahrinav (Shahrinav)</td>
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<td>Guliston (Rudaki)</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>Tojikobod (Tojikobod)</td>
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<td></td>
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Youth perspectives of education quality in Tajikistan: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Selected characteristics of the final sample drawn are depicted in Table 2. Overall, 865 youth were surveyed in Tajikistan, including 239 in urban areas and 626 in rural areas. Urban and rural percentages reflected the roughly 30/70 split anticipated by the sample design, and about one third more females were sampled than males. The average age of the respondents was between 17 and 18, with about 64 per cent of the sample between the ages of 13 and 18 (and the remaining 36 per cent between 19 and 24). Most respondents (82 per cent) were ethnic Tajiks, and the remaining 18 per cent were mainly ethnic Uzbeks. About 11 per cent of the sample was married or divorced, and 7 per cent had children of their own. Nearly 20 per cent were also employed, and less than half of all youth sampled report having any of the economic indicators surveyed (home computer use was particularly low, with just 19 per cent of youth with access).

Less than 10 per cent of respondents were displaced at some point in their lives. The vast majority of youth said they were currently living with an adult family member (more than 90 per cent). More than half (53 per cent) were enrolled in school or university at the time of the survey, and about 5 per cent said they had dropped out at the primary, basic or secondary level. Approximately 45.5 per cent of youth reported primary or basic (mainly basic, or middle school) as the highest level of education they had attained. Another 37.5 per cent of youth reported a secondary or primary and secondary professional level of education (mainly secondary school), and 15.4 per cent reported having tertiary education. Most had attended or were attending public schools. Nearly 20 per cent reported having resumed their education after a temporary disruption at some point in their lives, exceeding the number who reported some experience of displacement.
The characteristics highlighted in Table 2 varied along several lines according to whether the environment of reference is urban or rural. Tajiks are more highly represented in urban areas (where they account for 90.8 per cent of respondents) than in rural ones (78.6 per cent). Uzbeks are more highly represented in rural areas (where they are 17.3 per cent of respondents) than urban areas (7.5 per cent). Most of the small number of Kyrgyz youth sampled is in rural areas, as well. Youth in urban areas appear wealthier on average, as they are more likely than youth in rural areas to have their own room, have access to a home computer, have a cell phone and have a car in their family. Urban youth are also more likely to be employed than youth in rural areas.

Youth in urban areas are further more likely to have moved on to secondary and tertiary education than youth in rural areas, while youth in rural areas are more likely to have temporarily suspended their education. Youth in urban areas are also more likely to currently be enrolled at the tertiary level. Although both urban and rural youth predominantly attend or attended public school, more youth have experience with private education in urban areas.

There are also some differences for the males and females sampled. Males are slightly more highly represented among Tajiks and females among Uzbeks. Family resources may also be more focused on males, higher proportions of who report having their own rooms, cell phones and access to a home computer than females. Female youth are more likely to be married (16.2 per cent of females compared with 3.8 per cent of males) and to have children than male youth (10.9 per cent of females and 2.2 per cent of males). A much higher proportion of males (about twice as many) have attained some degree of tertiary education compared with females. Males sampled are also slightly more likely to have jobs than the female youth sampled (22 per cent of males have jobs, compared with 17 per cent of females).

It is unclear why far more females than males (one third more, as noted previously) were sampled. The random selection of youth within households should not have produced a bias toward female respondents, as subjects were chosen using the Kish Table from among all youth regularly residing in the household. Researchers were required to attempt to reach subjects three times before abandoning interviews and did not move to other subjects within the same household if the randomly selected individual could not be contacted. The approach also included all residences, so that youth living alone, male or female, would have had an equal probability of being sampled. The difference likely reflects a high level of outmigration from Tajikistan by young males described previously, but additional research would be useful to determine where many of Tajikistan’s young males are residing today.

Table 2. Selected characteristics of the final Tajikistan youth perspectives of education quality survey sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Tajikistan All</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>626</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>495</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>107</td>
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</table>

6 As noted in Table 2, all of the numbers reported in this section represent unweighted data. All of the relationships reported, however, hold true when statistical tests are run using standardized, re-weighted data. However, more youth marriage appears to be taking place in rural areas than in urban areas when analysed using standardized, re-weighted data (about 14 per cent of youth in rural areas compared with 8 per cent of youth in urban areas, a statistically significant difference). Data reported in the Results section use standardized re-weighted data.

7 In addition to the settlement type and sex differences reported in these paragraphs, when data are analysed for differences by region, youth in the Dushanbe region are consistently more likely to have more access to each of the economic indicators surveyed, with particularly high access to home computer and cell phone use compared with their peers in other regions. See also the Note on Interpreting Survey Results at the end of the Research Design and Methods section.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATION QUALITY IN TAJIKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATION QUALITY FOR YOUTH IN THE CEECIS REGION

27
### 2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

#### Characteristic

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<th>Rural</th>
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<td>Frequency</td>
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<tr>
<td>One or more times and:</td>
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</table>
Youth perspectives of education quality in Tajikistan: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region

### RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

M-Vector provided the youth research team with information on each of the PSUs, or ‘clusters’, where the 14 team subgroups would be working. Researchers were trained to randomly select households within the PSUs using addresses as starting points in urban areas and other starting points in villages. They were also trained to then determine whether or not one or more eligible youth resided within the household and how to randomly select the respondent. If more than one eligible subject resided in a household, researchers used the Kish Table to determine which individual should be selected for the interview.

Emphasis was placed on strict adherence to team protocols to ensure the validity and utility of research findings and the safety and well-being of research respondents and the research team. Team members worked in two-person subgroups of the larger team to enhance security, oversight and teamwork. As much as possible, the subgroups were comprised of one male and one female in order to address any gender issues that might arise for both respondents and researchers. Although the contents of the survey were not considered to be particularly sensitive, randomly selected youth respondents were interviewed one-on-one and in confidence, as much as possible by a member of the same sex only. For additional information on research protocols and on the strengths and limitations of the approach, see Appendix 4.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Tajikistan All</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
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<td>% within urban</td>
<td>% within rural</td>
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<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
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</table>

* Statistics represent data that have not been re-weighted. Frequencies and percentages will vary somewhat in the Results section, where standardized re-weighted data are presented. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth of a per cent.

** Other ethnicity includes 13 Turkmen (1.5 per cent of the sample) and one unknown (0.1 per cent of the sample).

*** ‘Education attained’ refers to the highest level of education attained by the respondents. Refer to Question 12 in the Tajikistan survey. Result categories are grouped together for preschool, primary, basic, secondary, primary and secondary professional and tertiary.

**** Represents answers to the question: “Have you ever been forced to temporarily suspend your education for a month or more and then later returned?”
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Based on Youth Consultation suggestions and team discussion during the training, youth researchers organized focus group discussions and conducted them in sub-teams of two. One researcher facilitated conversation while the other took detailed notes, and the two reported jointly. Sessions ran about an hour and a half to two hours each and involved no more than 12 participants in each.

Facilitators explored questions from the Structured Survey and consultations in deeper detail, in addition to questions germane to the experiences of the particular group, such as youth who study in rural areas. Some focus groups were also dedicated to exploring a particular topic in detail, such as the quality of teaching or the connections between education quality and job market experiences. As shown in Table 3, 21 focus groups were held in total, involving 178 youth, including at least 76 females and 102 males. The average age of focus group participants is 17.

Table 3. Tajikistan youth perspectives of education quality study focus group discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Rural/ Urban</th>
<th>Males/Females</th>
<th>Average age and range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth going in for sports</td>
<td>Vanj District</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>10 males/0 females</td>
<td>18 (13–23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minority youth</td>
<td>Murghob</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5 males/5 females</td>
<td>19 (16–24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth who live far from education facility</td>
<td>Rasht</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7 males/0 females</td>
<td>19 (18–22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated young people</td>
<td>Dehmoy Village, Ghafurov District</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4 males/3 females</td>
<td>20 (20–21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth who do not agree with the current education system, indolent youth</td>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5 males/3 females</td>
<td>16 (15–16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated youth</td>
<td>Panjaket Town</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>8 males/4 females</td>
<td>19 (15–23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from rural areas</td>
<td>Shurobi Village, Hisor District</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5 males/4 females</td>
<td>15 (14–18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of labour migrants</td>
<td>Zoosun Village, Ayni District</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4 males/2 females</td>
<td>15 (14–17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working students</td>
<td>Khujand</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>9 males/3 females</td>
<td>14 (12–17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students studying at schools that lack electricity, gas and visual aids</td>
<td>Zafarobod</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4 males/5 females</td>
<td>15 (13–17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolchildren in schools without heating</td>
<td>Faizabad</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4 males/6 females</td>
<td>17 (13–23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening schools and their influence on the quality of education</td>
<td>Somoniyon, Rudaki</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3 males/4 females</td>
<td>18 (13–22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicap youth from poor families</td>
<td>Panj District, Panji Bolo Town, Jamoat of Panji Bolo Town</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3 males/5 females</td>
<td>16 (13–18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people whose parents are unemployed</td>
<td>Khovaling</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4 males/2 females</td>
<td>17 (13–18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working youth</td>
<td>Kurgan-Tyube</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5 males/2 females</td>
<td>18 (15–22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people living in villages</td>
<td>Sebiston</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7 males/2 females</td>
<td>15 (13–18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in village schools</td>
<td>Asht</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4 males/3 females</td>
<td>17 (14–21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATION QUALITY IN TAJIKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATION QUALITY FOR YOUTH IN THE CEECIS REGION

NOTES ON INTERPRETING SURVEY RESULTS

Given the age range of the respondents, youth opinions about their experiences of education quality in Tajikistan span many years of the functioning of the education system. Unless otherwise noted, all respondents were asked to provide opinions about their current or most recent term in the formal school system in Tajikistan. For example, youth currently in secondary school were asked to refer to their most recent term of enrolment. Those who had graduated and/or were no longer enrolled in any education programme were asked to refer to their experience of the last term they were enrolled in the formal education system. Thus, the findings should be understood as representing the average of this range of experience. Note, however, as detailed in Table 2, 53 per cent of respondents state that they are currently enrolled in an education programme. Thus, in the majority, youth responses speak to their opinions of very recent experiences of education quality.

For all statistical analyses, T-tests or Chi-square tests for statistical significance were run, with findings reported for significance at a 95 per cent level of confidence and higher. The sample was designed to be able to make inferences from the sample to the population with regard to settlement type (urban/rural). Thus, any finding of statistical significance can be generalized to the population with a high level of confidence for 13–24-year-olds according to:

- Settlement type (urban/rural)
- Although the sample design does not support inferences about other sub-categories of youth sampled at population level with a high level of confidence, statistical analyses were also run according to a range of other youth subgroups, including:
  - sex (male/female);
  - age group (younger: 13–18, and older: 19–24);
  - education level attained (primary/basic, secondary/primary and secondary professional, tertiary);
  - drop-out history (dropout or non-dropout from, or temporarily suspended attendance in, primary/basic or secondary/professional school);
  - employment (those with a job and those with no job);
  - displaced (those ever or never displaced);
  - absenteeism (those absent from school one or more times in the previous 12 months without an authorized excuse, and those not absent without an authorized excuse); and
  - conflict-affected (those who say they have felt direct negative effects of armed conflict on their education quality, and not conflict-affected – those do not feel their education has been directly affected by conflict).

Findings of statistical significance for these subgroup comparisons are representative of the sample drawn only. They provide interesting information that may warrant further research. Results of these analyses are presented along with information obtained from the focus groups that were held.

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8 For simplicity, the shorthand primary/secondary/tertiary will be used to represent these subgroups.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Rural/Urban</th>
<th>Males/Females</th>
<th>Average age and range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students paying bribes at schools/ universities</td>
<td>18. Dushanbe City</td>
<td>18. Urban</td>
<td>18. 1 males/7 females</td>
<td>18. 19 (14–29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. RESULTS

The youth involved in the pre-survey consultations process in Tajikistan initially grouped the dozens of topics and questions they developed on education quality and youth into seven domains:

- **Education system** – Issues ranging from regulation of the university quota system and the scarcity of higher education institutions (HEIs) in rural areas, to the irrelevance of military training in school and what some youth call an unstable, frequently changing education system.

- **Quality of pedagogical staff** – Teacher shortages, including in rural areas; low teacher and lecturer salaries; use of old teaching methods; under- or unqualified teachers.

- **Technical facilities in education institutions** – Poor equipment and facilities (no computers, heat, electricity, cafeterias, showers, health spots, or facilities for students with disabilities); poor student dormitories; scarcity of electronic libraries and databases.

- **In- and out-of-school student support** – Extreme scarcity or non-availability of counselors; lack of literature; little financial support from parents; no employment-oriented crafts clubs.

- **Material and non-material support for youth** – Few student stipends, discounts, loans or free public transportation; limited job opportunities; no student-organized charity events or ‘big events’ for youth; few youth spaces in cities; no assistance for entering HEIs.

- **Violation of youth rights and freedoms** – Environmental issues on education grounds; arbitrary collection of funds from students; no rights to choose courses and teachers; insufficient information for youth; early marriages that cause school drop-outs; beer bars near schools; class cancellations.

- **Implementation of youth rights and freedoms** – Poor control over administration’s performance; no anonymous complaints system; no regulation of alcohol consumption; need for legislative amendments; poor attention to youth in rural areas.

To develop the structured survey questionnaire, these youth-generated interests were further debated and reconciled with inputs from youth involved in the pilot test, the Reference Group of Experts and the international research team. They were also reconciled with the following UNICEF education criteria:

1. Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities.

2. Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive and provide adequate resources and facilities.

3. Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace.

4. Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.

5. Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

The domains ultimately agreed to by youth involved in the study design in Tajikistan are as follows, with additional detail provided below amid the description of survey findings:

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9 The presidential quota system is a government decree on admitting students from remote rural areas into HEIs, with the aim of increasing opportunities for males and females in these areas to obtain higher education. The government has also issued quotas specifically supporting the admission of females into HEIs.
• **Demographics and family** – Key background information on respondents.
• **Education satisfaction and expectations** – Young people’s overall level of satisfaction with education quality; if and why youth value education; and factors that most affect educational attainment.
• **Learning environment** – UNICEF’s criterion two and issues raised by youth under ‘Technical facilities in education institutions’, ranging from adequacy of facilities to school security.
• **Learning content** – UNICEF’s criterion three and youth issues noted in ‘Education system’, ‘Technical facilities in education institutions’ and ‘In- and out-of-school student support’, such as the use of computer and Internet in classes, course selection and textbook quality.
• **Learning processes and systems** – UNICEF’s criterion four and ‘Education system’, ‘Quality of pedagogical staff’, and ‘Material and non-material support for youth issues’ raised by youth, such as teacher qualifications and student stipends and transportation.
• **Learning outcomes** – UNICEF’s criterion five and similar issues raised by youth under both ‘Violations’ and ‘Implementation of youth rights and freedoms’, including the relevance of education to employment and absenteeism.
• **Youth participation** – Issues raised by youth, including those under the ‘Implementation of youth rights and freedoms’, with a focus on the prevalence of youth involvement in groups and organizations and in education decision-making.
• **Politicization of education** – Political issues raised by youth as distinct from other structural and systems issues.

Key findings on youth opinions in these areas of education quality follow, including both structured survey responses and focus group discussion. Topics are covered mostly according to the flow of the questionnaire in Appendix 2, with some re-ordering. Summary points and/or key youth recommendations are also listed as Key Findings at the end of each group of questions.
Youth perspectives of education quality in Tajikistan: A case study of education quality for youth in the CECIS region

3. RESULTS

EDUCATION SATISFACTION AND EXPECTATIONS

Tajikistan youth highly value formal education and want more of it, but indicate clearly that there is substantial room for improving its quality. They outline key learning objectives and barriers to attaining their desired level of education which, if not met and addressed, may be sources of youth dissatisfaction with education and governance authorities.

How youth rate education quality

Despite a range of challenges to education quality that youth describe, on the whole, most of Tajikistan’s youth are satisfied with the quality of their education, with almost half rating it ‘good’, and more than a fifth calling it ‘very good’, as seen in Table 4. Nearly one third think it’s ‘average’, however, and smaller numbers (8.5 per cent combined) say it’s ‘somewhat poor’ or ‘poor’, indicating significant room for improvement.

Those who give Tajikistan’s education quality lower marks (with more of them calling it ‘average’ or worse compared with their respective counterparts) include youth in urban areas; older youth; those who have dropped out of or temporarily suspended their attendance in primary, basic or secondary school; and those who feel that armed conflict has negatively affected their education. Those with a history of absenteeism are also more likely to rate education quality as ‘average’, while those who have not skipped school recently are more likely to feel the quality is ‘very good’, as shown in Table 4.

The strong positive message that youth send with their mostly above average rating of education quality is very interesting in contrast to the wide range of very difficult problems many say they face within the education system and a high level of self-reported absenteeism. As described below, many youth feel that quality is average or worse (about 39 per cent combined) for a number of pressing reasons, from “lack of teachers with specialized training” and “facilities that do not accommodate youth with disabilities,” to “lack of heat and electricity in schools” and “teacher corruption.”

At the same time, many young people say their overall rating of quality relates to the improvements they perceive to be taking place, especially since Tajikistan’s civil war. For example, an 18-year-old male in Khovaling District says, “In comparison with the post-war period, the quality of education in Tajikistan has improved.” Another 17-year-old female says, “The quality of education is good, and I have hope that it will be better.”

A 22-year-old male in Rasht District says, “The education quality has been improving. I cannot say it is really good because we have not reached that level yet, however, it completely differs from the conflict times.” A 19-year-old in the same district agrees that “it is good, but not in every part of Tajikistan, especially in our area. It has been affected by declines in economic, social, moral and other types of growth in the country, low-quality health services, a reduction in the number of specialists in the country, increased unemployment and a decreased sense of responsibility among many young people.”

Inconsistencies in quality for many youth are cited in different settings around the country and are reflected in the varied responses to questions on quality. Improvements also take time, and not all youth see the benefits when they need them most. Another young person in Rasht District explains, for example, “I don’t know about the whole of Tajikistan, but as for our school, at the beginning, there was no computer. Then, after they equipped the school with computers, there was not a teacher to teach us. By this time, we have finished school. There were many other cases like this. It is easy to conclude what kind of experience young people can get in such a situation.”

Youth in rural Zoosun village in Ayni District also give perspective on overall youth education quality ratings. They state, “Education quality in Tajikistan is in a transition period,” and, “It has been improving because innovations have been happening in this sector every year. In comparison to previous years, requirements have increased and representatives from the Education Department of the district visit our schools often to inspect. This means that
school principals and teachers should have a serious attitude toward their job. At the same time, new textbooks were introduced recently for some subjects, but the process has been going very slowly. Probably only a few teachers and specialists work hard, while the majority does not care. Education quality also depends highly on living standards. If living standards are high, there will be an interest in learning and getting an education. If they are low, people will not think about education and rather will be preoccupied by other things – fieldwork, livestock grazing, general household chores and labour migration.”

**Figure 8.** "How would you rate the quality of the provision of education in Tajikistan today?"
Percentages of youth responses (all, settlement type, age group and absenteeism)

**Why and how much youth value education**

Youth highly value education in Tajikistan. As shown in Table 5, the wide majority of youth fully agree with the statements that education is important for the following reasons: “building my capacity in all aspects of life/learning is intrinsically good;” “gaining new information and skills;” “preparing for a job or profession;” “ensuring a better status in society;” “good citizenship and helping me develop this country;” and “learning about and understanding other people’s experiences.” The vast majority of youth – 86 per cent – also fully disagree with the notion that “education is not very important.”
Although most youth widely agree on all of these ideas, there are some differences of emphasis. Youth in rural areas agree more strongly that education is important for youth citizenship and contributions to development and for learning about and understanding other people compared with youth in urban areas. Full agreement is also generally stronger for youth without a history of absenteeism, who are more enthusiastic about education’s importance for job preparation, achieving a better status in society and citizenship and development, although absentee youth also strongly agree. Dropouts also highly value education in all of these ways, but a small number of them (less than 10 per cent) more often disagrees, and nearly 16 per cent thinks that education is not very important. In addition, youth who feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict emphasize their ideas about education’s value slightly less strongly than their peers.

Over and over, youth voice a strong understanding of how formal education can enhance their lives and the well-being of Tajikistan society. “It provides me with an opportunity to learn how to communicate with people, have sufficient life and respect in society,” says one 17-year-old boy in basic school in Khovaling District. “Each young person must be educated; if you are educated, you will never be lost in life,” another 18-year-old secondary school student adds. Working students in their teens and pre-teens in Khujand say, “We need highly qualified, educated specialists for the development of our country,” and “to meet international standards.” Another says, “We need education in order to implement our tasks and responsibilities at a high level and get a high salary.” Still others agree that “it is impossible to improve the country, increase the level of the economy and improve the quality of people’s lives without a high quality education;” and “education is the requirement of contemporary society and the labour market.” One also notes, “We should not forget the statement of our great ancestors: ‘One should learn from his birth to his death.’”

Young people across the country express a variety of dreams for their future and stress the importance of education in reaching their life goals. Teens in the rural Zafarobod District talk about becoming “prominent figures in Tajikistan.” One wants “to be a physician in order to treat patients.” Another dreams of “becoming a border guard to protect our country from theft,” while another wants “to become a teacher and educate the next generations.” They agree that “if you are educated, you will have a good life, and nobody will offend you,” remembering and quoting Lenin’s statement, “Learn, learn and learn.” A working youth in Kurgan-Tyube appears to aspire to a life beyond agricultural work, saying, “Good quality education is important to help not earn one’s living sitting under the sun and dirty. An educated man earns his living through knowledge. An educated man is respected and is always important.” One youth in Ayni District wants to avoid outmigration and “to become a master of sports. This is useful for my health, and I would like many sportsmen in my village and many competitions in order to raise the reputation of our village.” Another in Ayni “would like to learn chemistry, physics and geometry thoroughly and become a qualified specialist in the future to earn a good reputation in my village, district and to serve my country.”

Like these young people, thousands of other youth have diverse education and life dreams that they look to formal education to support.

Figure 9. “Education is important for...” Percentages of youth agreement

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATION QUALITY IN TAJIKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATION QUALITY FOR YOUTH IN THE CEECIS REGION
Youth perspectives of education quality in Tajikistan: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region

Youth desire for more education

Most of Tajikistan’s youth want to achieve more education than they already have. This sentiment holds for nearly all youth in every subgroup analysed, although younger youth, understandably, feel this desire particularly strongly, as shown in Table 6. Males are just slightly more interested in achieving more education than females; both groups strongly want more. Youth at all levels of education are still striving to complete more education, but those with secondary or professional level education emphasize their interest most strongly.

The desire for more education is strong even among youth who dropped out of or temporarily suspended their education in primary, basic, secondary or professional school; 72 per cent of this group say they want more education, compared with 90 per cent of youth who did not drop out. Similarly, absentees are still very much interested in completing more education than they already have, as also shown in Table 6.

Factors affecting youth reaching their education goals

Youth describe a range of factors that most influence or influenced their ability to achieve their desired level of education.10 As shown in Table 7, of 16 possibilities, the highest proportion of all youth surveyed cite their personal interest, motivation and attitude as a principal factor influencing their education prospects, with 71 per cent of youth choosing this response. Support from parents and teachers, as well as financial means stand out as key for the next largest proportions of youth surveyed. At the same time, many other factors are playing key roles in young people’s ability to realize their education goals, such as personal academic achievements, the quality of

Note that youth who had already completed their most desired level of education were asked to note what factors were most important in making that possible.

---

A. Building my capacity in all aspects of life/learning intrinsically good
B. Gaining new information and skills
C. Job/profession preparation
D. Ensuring a better status in society
E. Good citizenship and development
F. Learning about and understanding other people’s experiences
G. Education not very important

---

10 Note that youth who had already completed their most desired level of education were asked to note what factors were most important in making that possible.
secondary school and the accessibility of programmes. For many youth, a combination of factors is influencing their educational attainment.

Although the strong level of youth satisfaction with education quality and their strong desire to achieve more education suggest that most youth are highly motivated to study and learn in school and at university, many youth also say that youth motivation to learn is waning. “In my mind,” an 18-year-old secondary school student in Kurgan-Tyube says, “experiences of education depend on the personal will of schoolchildren. It is difficult to force someone to study, and we need to awaken youth interest in education [when it is faltering].”

As described elsewhere, many youth feel their interest in education is faltering amid competing responsibilities for work and in the face of a number of education quality challenges. Still, many youth highly prioritize the need to take responsibility for their own education and do the best they can, as emphasized in the section on ‘Youth education quality priorities and solutions’.

Table 7 shows that youth in urban areas tend to emphasize the importance of many factors much more than youth in rural areas. Urban youth may be more aware of these issues and/or may be experiencing them more frequently. Younger youth rely more on parental support than older youth, and spousal support is more important for a small number of older youth.

Males and females feel similarly about most of the influencing factors, but males emphasize the importance of parental support, their academic achievements and programme availability more than females. More females, on the other hand, are concerned with other responsibilities, such as for work and family (6 per cent of males cite this, compared with 10 per cent of females).

Youth with secondary, professional or tertiary education cite many factors more frequently than youth with basic or primary education. These include personal academic achievement, spousal support, financial means, the availability of programmes, arbitrary fees, secondary school quality and the effective implementation of education policies. Tertiary-educated youth feel particularly strongly about financial means (33 per cent of them cite this, compared with 21 per cent of secondary- and professional-educated youth and 18 per cent of basic and primary-educated youth).

Youth who have not dropped out of school also tend to emphasize a range of factors more than their counterparts. Most notably, they are more likely to say that their academic achievements, having parental support and their personal interest, motivation and attitude matter to their education achievement.

Similarly, youth without a history of absenteeism note many influencing factors more than absentee youth, including personal interest, motivation and attitude; teacher support; and secondary school quality.

Youth with jobs further emphasize the importance of personal academic achievement, financial means and the effective implementation of education policies more than youth without jobs. Youth without jobs, on the other hand, more often feel that teacher support is a key factor. Youth who feel their education has been negatively impacted by armed conflict are also more likely to say that politics in Tajikistan matter (9 per cent of them, compared with 4 per cent of other youth). Meanwhile, secondary school quality and flexible course schedules are emphasized more by youth who don’t feel their education has been directly affected by conflict.
Education satisfaction and expectations

Table 4. “What factors most influence or influenced your ability to achieve the level of education you wish for? Percentages of youth answering ‘yes’ (overall and by settlement type)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Frequency Rank All</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal interest, motivation and attitude</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of parental support</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from teachers</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial means</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My personal academic achievements</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of my secondary school</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility of programmes</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible course schedule</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of programmes</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other responsibilities (work, family, other)</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics in Tajikistan</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to pay additional fees arbitrarily imposed in school</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effective implementation of education policies</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of spousal support</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No factors most influence my ability to reach my education (an “other” response generated by youth)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of affordable childcare for children I am responsible for</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of married students in school</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (poor studying conditions; family does not agree; no personal interest; illness; I wear a hijab; I don’t know)</td>
<td>&lt;0.8</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Empty cells denote lack of statistically significant difference within the subgroup.

Almost half of youth surveyed feel that the quality of their education is better than that received by their parents, as outlined in Table 8. However, one third of all youth believes it is actually worse. Many subgroups of youth are more likely than their counterparts to say that their education is worse than that received by their parents, including absentees, dropouts, female youth, older youth, secondary- and tertiary-educated youth and those who feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict. Youth with a primary or basic education and those without a history of absenteeism are the most optimistic, with about half of each of these groups saying that education is better today than it was for their parents.

Among youth who think that education quality is worse today, one 13-year-old male in the rural village of Vanj in GBAO says, “Our education is very poor in comparison to the education of our parents because now we have better opportunities and conditions than our parents had, but nobody is willing to study. Western TV and films and serials have been negatively impacting our youth.”
Table 5. Do you think the quality of your education is better, worse or about the same as the quality of education your parents received?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Younger 13–18</th>
<th>Older 19–24</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Not absent</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Conflict-affected</th>
<th>Not conflict-affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Basic/ primary</th>
<th>Secondary/ professional</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
<th>Dropout</th>
<th>No dropout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key findings: Education satisfaction and expectations

- Almost half of youth feel education quality in Tajikistan is good, and one fifth feel it is very good; nearly one third feel it is just average, and a small proportion feel it’s poor or somewhat poor.
- Almost half of youth seem to feel that despite recent and ongoing challenges, education has improved in the time since their parents went to school. Youth with primary or basic education and non-absentees are the most optimistic. A third of youth, however, feel their education quality is actually worse than what their parents achieved.
- The vast majority of Tajikistan’s youth want more education than they have already achieved.
- Youth highly value education as important for building capacity in all aspects of life; job preparation; better status; citizenship and development; gaining new information and skills; and learning about and understanding other people.
- The factors cited most frequently that enable youth to reach their education goals are personal interest, motivation and attitude; parental and teacher support; financial means; and personal academic achievements.
- Youth in urban areas, those with secondary or tertiary education, dropouts and non-absentees tend to emphasize the importance of many factors much more than their respective counterparts. They may be more aware of these issues and/or may be experiencing them more frequently.
- Few youth see politics in Tajikistan or the effective implementation of education policies as main barriers to reaching their individual education goals, although many have strong opinions on education reform.
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Questions on youth opinions of their learning environment in Tajikistan focused on the adequacy of facilities, materials and in-school support; safety and security issues, including the level and sources of violence experienced in and around school; and discrimination, or ‘difficulties’, youth may be experiencing in their attempts to get an education. Although young people’s interests in improving education quality in Tajikistan are diverse, they highlight the need to improve access to new, up-to-date and ideally free books in multiple languages and computers and Internet in school.

School cleanliness and maintenance

Most youth affirm that school facilities are fully or at least somewhat clean and well maintained, but many (about one third) also indicate the need for improvement, as shown in Table 9. Several subgroups of youth register slightly more disagreement with the idea that school cleanliness and maintenance are good, including urban, older, tertiary-educated, absentee, drop-out and employed youth.

As described below, youth frequently cite lack of functioning electricity and heating systems at school as problems. Some report that heating systems also at times produce dangerous, dirty smoke in classrooms.

Presence of hazardous materials

Very few youth report the presence of hazardous materials at their school, as seen in Table 9, but urgent follow-up research and action is needed in affected areas. Males are somewhat more likely than females to report the existence of dangerous materials at school, and again, youth often report poor school heating systems as creating in-class pollution problems.

Teaching and learning facilities and equipment

Most youth feel that school facilities are to some degree adequate, but many (about one fifth) disagree, as seen in Table 9. Facilities may be a bit worse in rural areas, where youth are less enthusiastic that they have the facilities and equipment needed for learning successfully. Pockets of youth in urban areas also disagree more strongly than their peers in rural settings. Several other groups are similarly less enthusiastic and slightly more likely to disagree than their respective counterparts that facilities are adequate, including females, older youth, absentees and dropouts. Some youth who have permanently or temporarily stopped their education are particularly critical, with nearly a quarter fully disagreeing that facilities and equipment are adequate.

Youth repeatedly raise concerns about a lack of books and their poor quality. A basic school student in Dushanbe City says, “There is a shortage of books, and even when we have them in school, they are in bad condition.” Many students are particularly annoyed at being required to rent books that are in poor condition. Another basic school student in Dushanbe City says, “Children must pay for the torn books. There is a need to print new books, since many books lack pages and there are few in foreign languages.” “We are forced to pay for torn books, and this year I bought 18 books for 32 sonomi,” says another. Still another adds, “We pay for books, but we can’t read anything since they are torn.”

Students also say they need more books in different languages – Tajik, Russian, Uzbek and Kyrgyz. Uzbek-speaking students in Zafarobod District say they want more books in Uzbek in order to “ensure students get an education” and understand material well, although they also stress the importance of knowing more than one language so they “will be able to travel to foreign countries without any assistance.” Kyrgyz-speaking students in Murghob, in the GBAO region, want more affordable books with up-to-date content. A 21-year-old tertiary-educated female says, “Teaching materials are not sufficient at schools. They are usually bought in Kyrgyzstan and are very expen-
sive; they cost about 15-20 Tajik somoni each. Not every student can afford this and sometimes the content of those textbooks does not comply with curricula.” As described in the ‘Learning content’ section, Kyrgyz students would also like to have more teaching materials and learning opportunities using the Tajik language.

Access to books has improved for youth in some areas. A tertiary student in Soughd Province says, “We had difficulties with textbooks two years ago, and two or three students had to share one book, but now there are sufficient textbooks for everybody.” Many young people also call for more access to different kinds of books through libraries, however. For example, a 14-year-old male in the rural village of Sebiston says, “It is necessary to organize a library in the village in order to give young people an opportunity to read fiction and increase the level of their knowledge.”

Beyond books and as described in the sections on ‘Learning content’ and ‘Youth education quality priorities and solutions’, young people across Tajikistan say that improving computer and Internet access in school for all students is a key priority.

Respondents also cite a wide range of facilities and equipment gaps in schools. Some schools lack basics, such as comfortable tables and chairs, and one in Panj District notes the need for “elevators in tall buildings,” particularly to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Students in a focus group discussion in Zafarobod District say that all of the schools they attend “are not equipped with visual aids and do not have test glass for chemistry class.” Students in Ayni District say they mostly do not have the necessary equipment for science classes, and what they do have “is outdated since it is inherited from the Soviet times. They are out of order, and there is no reason to use them.”

Boys in Zafarobod District also highlight and agree that “sports facilities are in bad condition, and there is little sports equipment. Some schools don’t have a gymnasium, and in winter, we hold physical training in classrooms or do something else because we don’t have opportunities to do things outside.” Young males in rural Vanj District in GBAO region are pleased with some improvements that have been made to schools, but call for more rehabilitation of sports facilities and grounds within schools, with one calling this “the most effective way of improving the country education quality… and promote a healthy lifestyle.” They also note that their sports facility has badly needed repair since the earthquake that took place in Tajikistan in January 2010 and ask for any support possible, including to repair a damaged wrestling carpet.

**Functioning heating and electricity**

More than a third of Tajikistan’s youth say that heating and electricity do not function consistently in their school, as seen in Table 9. Lack of heat and electricity is a problem for youth in both rural and urban areas. Although youth in rural areas are less likely to fully agree that their school has regular heating and electricity, more than a quarter of youth in both areas say they don’t have heat and electricity consistently.

Many youth feel particularly strongly that lack of these services is a problem in their school, including older youth, dropouts, absentees and those who feel their education has been negatively affected by military conflict. Youth with a history of displacement feel the strongest, with nearly half of them saying their school does not have consistent heat or electricity.

Students studying in the rural District of Zafarobod say they face regular education disruptions in winter because their schools lack heat and electricity services. “Winter is difficult,” one teen says. “The classrooms are so cold, we have to suspend school for a month, and as a result, many of us have to continue our schooling into June [to make up for the time lost].” Another explains, “Some of us collected money and purchased an electric heater for our classroom, but our teacher doesn’t use it so that it doesn’t get destroyed. Other classrooms have wood-based
heaters, and we have no other choice but to bring wood from home. If we use them, however, the classrooms become dirty and smoky, and all of the teaching aids become black.”

Another teenage girl in Dushanbe City (Sino) says, “Each year the school administration collects money for a new heater, but the heater in the classroom is always next to the teacher.” Youth in Kyrgyz-majority Murghob, in the GBAO region, also emphasize lack of electricity as a major problem affecting education quality. In Faizabad, students agree that “most of the time, we do not have power, and when it comes, it has low voltage, and there is almost no time to warm up the school room. Students are also required to bring heaters to class themselves. We must sit wearing our coats, which is inconvenient, and frankly, in such conditions, our brains can hardly work, and of course, efficiency decreases.” Another student notes, “I have a classmate, who is often sick and misses lessons. When she comes back to school, she becomes ill again because it is cold in the room. This continues all winter.” “What we need are small heating units and transformers for each school so that power is continuous and schools are warm,” the group in Faizabad asserts.

Functioning clean cafeterias

Functioning clean cafeterias appear to exist in at least half of Tajikistan’s schools. As shown in Table 9, more than half of youth fully or somewhat agree with this statement. There are likely more problems with school cafeterias in rural areas, where more than a quarter of youth fully disagree that there is a clean, functioning cafeteria in their school. Dropouts, absentees and youth without jobs are also more likely to say their school goes without this service.

Functioning health centres

Less than half of youth say that there is a functioning health point in their school, and as shown in Table 9, about 40 per cent report that their school lacks a health service for students altogether. Youth report the existence of health centres in school more often in urban areas have (more than half of urban youth say there is one, while more than half of rural youth agree that there is not one in their school). The dearth of health centres in school also appears to affect youth in basic and primary school most, while tertiary-level students report the most access. Female youth, absentees and those with a history of dropping out of school permanently or temporarily are more likely to feel and report a lack of health services at school.

Figure 11. “How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the learning environment at your school/university?” Percentages of youth responses in Tajikistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Fully agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Fully disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “My school/university is clean and well maintained”</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “The facilities are adequate; there are enough desk, chairs, laboratory, computer and sports equipment; books and other learning materials”</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “Heating and electricity function consistently”</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATION QUALITY IN TAJIKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATION QUALITY FOR YOUTH IN THE CEECIS REGION
4. “There are too many students/pupils in my classes”
5. “I have access to at least one well-qualified counsellor in my school/university”
6. “There is too much smoking in my school/university”
7. “There is a lot of drug use in my school/university”

Class size

Most youth in Tajikistan do not report a problem with class size. However, nearly 40 per cent of respondents say their classes are to some extent too large, as seen in Table 9. Feelings are strongest about this problem in urban areas and among female youth. Students who work in Khujand emphasize, “If there are more students in a classroom than there should be, students cannot learn in an appropriate way.”

Dormitories

Nearly half of all youth surveyed say more and better-maintained student dormitories are needed. The strongest calls come from tertiary-educated youth, with 94 per cent calling for more and better dorms, and more than three quarters of youth in urban areas and of older youth also say they need them. Males emphasize the need slightly more than females, more than 70 per cent of who nonetheless also issue the call. Youth who have not dropped out of school also emphasize the need, as do youth with jobs.

Tertiary students interviewed in Ghafurov District, Soughd Province complain that “dormitory conditions are poor. Six to eight students live in one room, and they have to pay for this accommodation every month.”

School and university counsellors

Few youth in Tajikistan say they have access to a well-qualified counsellor in school or at university (less than a fifth say they do, as shown in Table 9), with no differences in urban and rural areas. Females report their absence a bit more strongly than males, as do primary-, basic-, secondary- and professional-educated youth. Tertiary institutions appear to provide students with access to a well-qualified counsellor much more than lower-level schools, as nearly 40 per cent of tertiary-educated youth report their presence (about twice as many as their less-educated peers). Dropouts are also more likely to say well-qualified counsellors are not available to students.
Teenagers involved in a focus group in the Asht District say that more school counsellors would help address problems with teenage suicide occurring in the district. They are concerned that young people have few support systems to deal with their problems and few activities to distract them from and take them beyond their troubles. They suggest that in- and out-of-school centres be established where young people can access counselling services. They also support a range of extra-curricular activities described in the ‘Learning content’ section.

Smoking in school

Very positively, most youth do not say too much smoking is taking place in school. As shown in Table 9, only about a quarter of youth agree with this statement to some degree. Although this still shows much room for improvement, it may be an indication that anti-smoking rules are reasonably well enforced, that cigarette addiction has not taken hold of youth in Tajikistan to the extent that it has in other countries, and/or that anti-smoking promotional work with youth and tobacco policies are effective.

Males are slightly more likely to report too much smoking at school than females (32 per cent of males report it versus 22 per cent of females). Smoking in school is a problem for many youth at all ages, but appears to affect older, tertiary-educated youth more. More than half of tertiary-educated youth sampled say there is too much smoking at school, compared with 17 per cent of basic- or primary-educated youth and 27 per cent of secondary- or professional-educated youth. Perhaps understandably, youth who have not dropped out of school feel the problem more than dropouts, however, youth with a history of absenteeism are more likely to report it than youth who attend school regularly. Youth with jobs and those who feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict are also particularly sensitive to smoking at school or university.

Some youth also express disappointment with smoking and alcohol use among teachers and school administrators in school. A 16-year-old student in Shurobi Village in Hisor District is frustrated when “Teachers go out and smoke cigarettes behind the school.” Another 17-year-old in Shurobi says he and other “students lost respect for a teacher and the school principal” after they “drank vodka together” in the classroom instead of teaching their computer skills class.

Drug use in school

Reports of drug use at school are extremely low. As shown in Table 9, less than 2 per cent of youth report any awareness of it occurring, with only slightly more reports coming from youth urban areas and male youth.

Proximity of beer bars to school

Although the vast majority of youth do not report a problem with beer bars being located too close to school, it is a problem for about 11 per cent of young people, more often in urban areas and according to older, male, employed, tertiary-educated and conflict-affected youth. Further investigation of the prevalence of beer bars near school deserves further research and action in places where there are disruptions to learning and young people’s health and well-being.

Violence in and around school

The vast majority of youth in Tajikistan say they feel safe in and around their school, as shown in Table 10. Among the less than 5 per cent of youth who report not feeling safe to some degree, more of these reports come from urban areas, tertiary-educated and conflict-affected youth. The survey asks about the extent to which youth feel violence in occurs in their school and about the prevalence of personal experiences of victim-
ization by violence in school, but not the types and dynamics of this violence, some of which were described in focus group discussions as noted below.

Although most youth say they feel safe at or near school, over a quarter report that, to some degree, violence occurs in and around their school. Reports again come more often from youth in urban areas, where about 41 per cent of respondents fully or somewhat agree that violence occurs, compared with 24 per cent of rural youth. Female youth, absentees, those without jobs and those who feel their education has been negatively affected by military conflict also more strongly agree that violence is occurring in or near schools compared with their counterparts.

Despite the reports of violence occurring, few youth say they have experienced this violence personally. About 8 per cent of youth say they have been a victim of violence in or around school or university, a proportion that just slightly exceeds that of youth who do not feel safe at school (under 5 per cent). Consistent with other violence-related findings, more reports come from urban areas, although rural youth are also affected. There is more full agreement among males, although some females also say they have been victimized. In addition, absentee youth and those with a history of displacement are more likely to say they have experienced physical violence personally in or around school.

Youth report corporal punishment in a number of schools. Teenage girls in basic school in Dushanbe City (Sino) describe episodes of this violence and other cruel and unusual punishment. “Teachers even use sticks and say humiliating words [to students],” one says. Another observes, “Schoolchildren are forced to sweep the stairs in school even when they are sick and not [otherwise] allowed to do so.” A 14-year-old female youth in Shurobi Village also reports that at times, “Teachers beat students. They support and help students from wealthy families. As for the children from poor families, they do not care; they often punish them.” Others from Shurobi confirm reports of teacher preferences for wealthier students, and at times, students being instructed to conduct fieldwork and pick cotton if they have missed class or not performed well.

**Weapons in school**

Similar to young people’s feelings on personal safety, less than five per cent of youth report any knowledge of youth carrying weapons in school (firearms, knives or other tools), as seen in Table 10. Of those who do, however, more of these reports come from urban areas and conflict-affected youth.

**Student vandalism at school**

In contrast to youth feelings on other dimensions of safety and security at school, reports of vandalism of school facilities by students are much higher, with nearly half of youth agreeing to some degree that students damage school facilities. Again, more reports come from urban areas. Absentee youth also report vandalism somewhat more, while youth who attend school regularly are more likely to fully disagree that it is occurring. Female youth tend to have more extreme views in one direction or another, with more either fully agreeing or disagreeing that vandalism occurs, compared with males.

Overall, while a troubling problem in many institutions, student vandalism of school facilities is clearly not making most youth feel unsafe at school; if it were, positive response levels on other security issues would be higher.
Youth perspectives of education quality in Tajikistan: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region

**Figure 12.** “How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about safety and security in and around your school/university?” Percentages of youth responses in Tajikistan

1. “I feel safe in and around my school/university”
2. “Violence occurs in or around my school/university”
3. “I have personally been the victim of physical violence in or around school/university”
4. “Some students carry weapons, knives or other dangerous tools in or around school/university”
5. “At times, students/pupils damage school/university facilities”

**Sources of violence in and around school**

Since most youth aren’t experiencing violence in or around school in Tajikistan, reports on who is responsible for violence are correspondingly low.\(^{11}\) Consistent with other violence-related responses, rural youth are less likely to feel that violence is occurring in or around schools in Tajikistan. Youth in urban areas also tend to emphasize several key influencing factors a bit more than rural youth, as noted in Table 11.

As also shown in Table 11, when violence does occur, youth most often report that students are responsible, with more reports of this coming from younger youth. Respondents also emphasize that youth involved in violence often have poor communication skills that make them more vulnerable to resorting to violence to resolve differences (emphasized especially by youth who have not dropped out of school). School and university staff are also implicated in some of the violence, but less often than people and groups unconnected to the school. Gender inequality and inadequate policing are also cited as problems that contribute to school-centred violence. Smaller numbers of youth (particularly conflict-affected respondents) also point to the effects of war and displacement and periodic instability in their area.

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\(^{11}\) The percentage of youth commenting, however, is somewhat higher than those who say violence occurs in or around school since respondents were permitted to comment on problems they feel might be happening at other schools and universities.
Overall, conflict-affected youth report the presence of school-centred violence more often than non-conflict-affected youth, and are more likely to say that inadequate policing and poor communication skills among youth are contributing factors. Youth with a history of absenteeism report the existence of violence more than non-absentees. Absentees are also more likely to say that school and university staff are involved.

Many young people involved in focus groups say they have not witnessed or heard of any violence in and around their school. Cases they do report, however, tend to involve fighting between younger students and corporeal punishment of teachers by teachers. Teens in rural Zafarobod District say that some violence has occurred between girls at the primary level in their area.

Youth in the Kyrgyz-majority area of Murghob in the GBAO region, however, say that violence occurs regularly between Kyrgyz and Tajiks. “We often have violence cases in schools,” says a 24-year-old male with tertiary education. “Some days we fight with Tajiks during almost every break, and these fights continue after classes, during concerts and in markets.”

“This is a very serious problem,” a 16-year-old male in Murghob continues. “Sometimes adults of different nationalities fight with each other. But despite all of this, we feel safe ourselves in our area.” A 20-year-old male tertiary student clarifies, however, saying, “We rarely witness violence cases at universities. But while we study at university, we cannot feel ourselves like at home. We feel uncomfortable sometimes.” These young people explain that the violence reflects tensions “between the representatives of different nationalities” and feelings of “inequality,” where minority Kyrgyz youth feel disadvantaged within the Tajik-majority country.

**Table 6.** “Who and what are causing violence occurring in and/or around schools/universities?” Percentages of youth who answer ‘yes’ (all and by settlement type)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violence source</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No violence occurs</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students/pupils</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor communication skills among youth</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People or groups other than students and staff</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/university staff</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender inequality</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate policing</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing effects of war and displacement</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (“from time to time, general instability in my area;” “problems between youth;” “students from other schools”)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Empty cells denote lack of statistically significant difference within the subgroup.

**Barriers to getting an education**

About half of youth say they do not face any special difficulties in getting an education. Youth who do, however, most frequently cite the inadequacy of facilities to meet their special needs as a key barrier to getting an education, with just under a fifth saying this is a problem, as shown in Table 12. In these cases, youth at times refer to physical disabilities and/or to particular learning interests and education and professional goals they would like to pursue, and/or to problems with materials and equipment. This is a bigger problem for youth in urban areas and for conflict-affected youth.

An 18-year-old female secondary student participating in a focus group discussion with young people with disabilities in Panji Bolo town, Panj District says, “I’m not satisfied with conditions in my school since my health is poor, and it is
hard for me to go upstairs. In addition, even with excellent marks it is hard for me to enter university since my parents cannot afford my study.” Another 16-year-old girl from Panji Bolo town says that one of her bothers “is handicapped” and, “From the 9th form, I left school. My mother is uneducated and does not work. My father and brother get 75 somoni per month, and this 150 is not enough for school expenses and medicine. My mother and I cultivate tomato and maize on the household land and make some money to buy wheat and other products for home.”

Coming in second, youth highlight the unwillingness or inability of parents to support their education. This problem is more prevalent for youth in rural areas, for females, older youth and youth with basic, primary, secondary or professional education. About 17 per cent of females cite it, compared with 6 per cent of males, and 17 per cent of older youth say it’s a problem, compared with 9 per cent of younger youth. Interestingly, however, just 2 per cent of tertiary-educated youth say lack of parental support is a particular barrier, compared with 12 per cent of secondary- and professional-educated youth and 14 per cent of basic- and primary-educated youth.

Most strikingly, however, nearly a third of dropouts cite lack of parental support as an issue, against just 8 per cent of non-dropouts. As described in the ‘Learning outcomes’ section, lack of parental support is the reason cited most frequently by young people for why they left school permanently or temporarily. As described below and in the box on ‘Education barriers for female youth’, the vast majority of these reports come from female youth.

Many youth also indicate that they are targeted with teacher mistreatment and punishment in school that hinders their learning. Urban, absentee and employed youth complain of this more often than their respective peers.

The location of schools is also a problem for some youth in both urban and rural areas. It is particularly a problem for youth who have been displaced and for tertiary-educated young people. As described in the box on ‘Education challenges for youth in the rural village of Rudakoul’, Tajikistan’s youth living in isolated rural areas at times miss out on education opportunities, not only because of the demands of agricultural work and family responsibilities, but because of limited education offerings in their area.

Smaller numbers of youth also name a wide range of other barriers they face in getting an education, including violence in and around school; unwelcoming fellow students; bullying; not having classes in their native tongue; and an inability or unwillingness to pay fees arbitrarily imposed in school.

With regard to subgroup differences, younger, absentee youth more often cite the issue of violence in schools, while younger youth and those without jobs more often report feeling unwelcome among their fellow students. Displaced and conflict-affected youth and those with basic/primary-level education more often say they have been bullied in school. Conflict-affected youth also more often say they face difficulties learning because classes are not in their mother tongue (about 5 per cent of them, compared with 2 per cent of non-conflict-affected youth). There are no significant differences between subgroups of youth on their opinions regarding payment of arbitrary fees.

Less than 1 per cent cite sexual harassment as a problem, although youth may be very hesitant to raise the issue in the interview setting, given cultural taboos surrounding youth involvement in sexual activity. Interestingly however, similar number of both males and females surveyed cite experiences of sexual harassment in school. They are principally younger youth and are more often conflict-affected.

A number of youth – principally females, but also one male interviewed – say that being married is a significant barrier to getting their education. They explain that after marriage, they are no longer permitted to attend school. Most of these reports come from older youth, those with either a basic/primary- or secondary/professional-level education and dropouts. As also described in the ‘Learning outcomes’ section, marriage is among the many reasons youth cite for having dropped out of school.

Among other things, these results show that several subgroups of youth are more likely to face problems getting an education than their counterparts. Overall, males are much more likely than females to say that they face no difficulties getting an education (60 per cent of males compared with 46 per cent of females). A significant num-
The number of young people – females especially – are not receiving the parental and/or spousal support they say they urgently need to reach their education goals. Female youth also more frequently say that early marriage is a key barrier to completing their education.

In addition, displaced, absentee, dropout and conflict-affected youth are all more likely than their counterparts to say they face difficulties getting an education. These findings are consistent with many others reported where these subgroups of young people tend to emphasize problems a bit more strongly and sometimes starkly so. Dropouts in particular say they experience many difficulties getting an education, with just 21 per cent of them reporting no problems, compared with nearly 60 per cent of non-dropouts. Many of the barriers outlined in Table 12 are also among those described by dropouts in the ‘Learning outcomes’ section.

Youth with disabilities in Panji Bolo town highlight the need for more financial support to individuals with disabilities and to households with members with disabilities. They say it would be much easier for them to attend school if “pensions are increased for youth with handicaps and for households with members who are handicapped.” A 16-year-old female with disabilities says, “It would be good to have access to books for free and to not be asked to pay for school renovations.” Youth with disabilities also say they require learning facilities that are equipped to meet their needs, including having entrance ramps and elevators. Youth in this focus group agree, “All handicapped youth should be able to study in comprehensive schools,” and that “colleges and universities should be established in the district so that we can study in our district” and receive “free education.” They would like “more tours and summer camps organized for handicapped youth.” They also want “more foreign language lessons” and the “establishment of enterprises so that youth can leave for Russia.” They also say, “Schools must be beautiful as in other countries!”

Figure 13. “Do you face difficulties getting an education for any of the following or other reasons?” Percentages of youth answering ‘yes’

- Facilities inadequate for my special needs: 17.9
- Parents do not or cannot support my education: 12
- Teacher mistreatment and punishment: 9.2
- Cannot access easily due to location: 8.2
- Cannot afford or unwilling to pay fees arbitrarily requested at school: 7.5
- Violence in and around school: 4.1
- Other students unwelcoming: 3.2
- Am married and not permitted to attend school: 3
- Classes/lectures not in mother tongue: 2.8
- Bullied: 1.9
- Sexual harassment: 0.8
- Other**: ≤1
- I do not face difficulties for any of these reasons: 51.6

*Empty cells denote lack of statistically significant difference within the subgroup.
** Others include: “I wear a hijab;” “classes overcrowded;” “only nine grades are available;” “long distance from home;” “lack of books;” “no library;” “teacher shortage;” “age limitation;” “I don’t want to study;” “illness.”
Learning environment

Education barriers for female youth

Young people in Tajikistan face barriers to education as a result of gender norms in the society that often dictate education possibilities for both males and females amid competing pressures and opportunities. For female youth, this has amounted to a startling decline in the numbers reaching tertiary education and a range of other challenges while attempting to complete basic and secondary education. Both male and female youth interviewed for this study describe some of the dynamics behind what is happening for these young women.

Needing but not having parental support for education is key for many young people in meeting their education goals and dreams in Tajikistan, and females often lack this support, especially when compared to males. Almost a fifth of female youth – twice as many as males – say their parents do not or cannot support their schooling. When the issue is financial, resources are often concentrated on supporting the education of males. Frequently, females are not expected or encouraged to continue their education.

Two teenaged young women in Somoniyon, Rudaki, say that their parents do not help them with their education. “There is gender inequality,” one female teenager says. “Fathers do not allow their daughters to be educated as their sons are. Many people know that each person has the right to be educated, but not many people can rise against close relatives who violate that right.”

Another notes that even when girls are in school, it is often more difficult for them to advance their learning because of gender discrimination in the home. Only the males involved in a focus group discussion in Somoniyon, Rudaki, were able to use a computer and the Internet because, as one young person explains, “Boys are exceeding because girls are rarely allowed to get such skills at home, and there is a lack of computers in school. Girls cannot work on them, and they sit and look at their classmates using them.”

Although many males are deprived of schooling because of their perceived role in providing for their families alongside or in the absence of parents, females are also affected, as they are expected to take on a range of family responsibilities considered to be within their purview, which some parents consider to be more important than formal education.

A 16-year-old girl in the village of Sebiston who has not been able to complete secondary education says, “My father took my documents from the school because I was looking after my sick mother. As a result, for the time being, I do not have my nine-years certificate.” A 19-year-old female in Faizabad, meanwhile, can’t continue her education and has been prohibited from trying to earn money to do so. “I finished school last year,” she says, “but I could not enter university due to financial problems. This year I want to enter the university, but my father does not allow me to work and says there is no need for me to work. For the time being, I am at home.”

An 18-year-old female living in the village of Sebiston says, “There is a tradition in our village that makes entering institutes or universities for girls after leaving the secondary school impossible. Some say, ‘It is not good for a girl to study.’ Unfortunately, our people think that if a village girl goes to the city for study, she will become involved in some bad situation. Men in the village say, ‘It is very easy for village girls to go astray.’ We village girls want to study, but we know well that [for this and other reasons] our parents do not allow us to continue our education, and we are therefore not encouraged to study.”

Female participants in a focus group in Panjakent Town assert, “In the majority of cases, girls are not allowed to continue their education, and they marry forcefully. As for educated girls, they are not allowed to work, and as their parents see such an outcome, do not support their daughters’ education.”
Some female youth also say that they are discouraged by a lack of fairness in the education system that doesn’t sufficiently support them in confronting the barriers they face. Young men and women working in Kurgan-Tyrube say that girls need more opportunities to complete education, including higher education. They state, “More presidential quota places should be allocated for girls.” They also call for more support to households that are missing parents or where family members are sick, disabled or economically impoverished in order to ensure the family support for education that girls especially need. One 16-year-old female in basic school says, “There is no need to marry girls young. They also want to study, and it is important.” A 20-year-old female in Dushanbe City, who completed just four years of schooling, regrets her limited education. “It’s a pity that I did not study. It’s hard for me to find a job since I am uneducated.”

In addition to the direct impact that lack of education has on girls’ health and employment opportunities, many youth also say that educating girls and young women “is important for the education of future generations. If I don’t know the alphabet, how will I teach my children?” a 19-year-old asks. Youth in Panjakent Town also feel women must be educated, especially given the number of men and boys who migrate outside of the country. They agree that “education is necessary for women so they will also be able to keep their families in case their husband is absent.”

A tertiary-educated youth in Ghafurov District, Soughd Province says, “In our society, the majority [of parents] pays attention to the education of boys because they think a girl is ‘somebody’s property’ and that there is no reason to educate girls. But girls will become mothers in the future, and they need to be educated first. Because how can an uneducated mother educate her children? Girls should not count on husbands to provide them with everything. They should get education themselves.”

In addition to efforts to ensure female youth have full opportunities to complete their desired level of formal education, some youth also say that vocational education is particularly important for female youth who have dropped out of school. An 18-year-old female secondary school student in Panji Bolo town suggests, “Youth groups and training opportunities should be set up for girls who miss out on education due to early marriage. They need something to help them fill the gap with regard to education.”

Teenage girls in the village of Sebiston also note, “It would be good to organize sewing training courses and other kinds of vocational trainings for girls [especially those who are not able to advance their education]. Continuation of education after the ninth year of schooling should also be added to the Law on Education; it should be compulsory. If girls’ right to education is not reinforced by the law, then it will be infringed by parents.”

Girls also call for more programmes to promote girls’ education among parents and girls themselves. Many also call for additional targeted opportunities for females under the presidential quota system to ensure that more female youth make it to tertiary education.

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Education challenges for youth in the rural village of Rudakoul

Youth living in the Village of Rudakoul tell youth researchers they have rarely travelled the 40 kilometres to the centre of Kabadiyan District in Tajikistan’s Khatlon Oblast. They have few hopes of completing secondary school or studying a range of subjects they would like to learn about if given the chance. The following is a synthesis of the words and experiences of nine girls and boys between the ages of 13 and 18 whose parents are unemployed in Rudakoul village, located in Kabadiyan District. Their descriptions of education quality in their town likely mirror those of many youth in rural areas in Tajikistan, where agricultural life shapes their days and opportunities.
“We’d like to gain a lot from education, but lessons here often don’t meet basic requirements. There is one secondary school in our village, and up until 2000, it was located in a van. With international donor support, however, we now have a single-story building with five classrooms, one computer room, one teachers’ common room, two offices (one for the director and one a store room), two toilets and one library. The school is intended for 150 students, and 136 attend. It is also intended for incomplete secondary school – for the time being, the school only offers classes one to nine. There are 12 to 16 pupils in each class, and six teachers work in the school in total. We know little about how the school is financed and administered or what powers the school and parents have, but education is free. The pupils receive textbooks, and so far, the school is still in good condition.”

“Teachers earn 80 to 190 somonies per month (about $18–42, or €12–29). The teachers are not highly educated, and there aren’t enough of them. They teach such subjects as mathematics, algebra, geometry, Tajik language, literature, history, biology, geography, ecology and the basics of law. All classes are taught in Tajik. Other subjects such as chemistry, physics and foreign languages are ‘celestial’ for us; they are not taught. Even though we have a computer room, there are no computer classes, as we have no computer teacher.”

“We come to school with pleasure and interest. School is the only place we can communicate with peers. But because of the lack of teachers and subjects, many lessons are not conducted, and most classes are empty. Lessons are basically conducted for three to four hours per day.”

“More than 70 per cent of school-leavers from this school do not complete secondary school and instead stay in the village and do field work. Girls in our village mostly complete nine classes, generally do not continue their education, and like others, start to work. In the past five years, however, about 20 per cent of parents have shown more interest in education for their boys. Boys whose families want them to continue education as senior pupils and get a complete secondary education go to the centre of the District and live temporarily in the houses of their relatives. These parents are officially unemployed and are not registered in any work place. These families have plots of land or rented lands where they are dealing with fieldwork and garnering profit from the land, livestock and labour migration. These parents and young people in particular want to gain Russian skills so that they can migrate for labour.”

“Although we would like to get an education, and we like to go to school, conditions are insufficient. Our village is located far from the district centre, and we do not always see the gains or the sense in getting an education.”

“Despite the good condition of the school, it is necessary to increase the potential of teachers. In particular, they need to know more about computers and the Internet. New methodologies should be introduced in the process of teaching, including with in-class use of and training on computer technology and Internet. Teacher salaries should be increased, and education should be extended from nine years to the full 11 years of education.”

Youth researchers who conducted the focus group remark, “Participants were thoughtful but silent for more than seven minutes when we first asked them about their school environment and any problems they may be experiencing. It was as if no one had ever asked them any questions before, and they prefer to listen to adults and live based on their parents’ instructions. They were not used to expressing their personal, independent opinions, but slowly, they described their situation. Girls were particularly silent and very passive. Girls were hesitant to express their ideas because girls in their village almost do not speak with boys.”

These and other young people in remote rural and mountainous areas need more opportunities to consider and discuss education quality and the possibilities for improving it. As described, they also want more access to upper secondary and tertiary education opportunities.
Key findings: Learning environment

- Most youth affirm that school facilities are fully or at least somewhat clean and well maintained, but about a third also indicate the need for improvement. Few report the presence of hazardous materials, but in areas where they do, urgent follow-up is required.

- Most youth feel that school facilities are to some degree adequate, but about a fifth disagree. Many call for more computer and Internet service in school; enough up-to-date, low-cost or free books, including in multiple languages; modern libraries; sports and other facilities and equipment; laboratories; desks and chairs; and facilities for students with disabilities.

- More than a third of Tajikistan’s youth say that heating and electricity do not function consistently in their school in both rural and urban areas, at times causing health hazards in addition to disrupting the learning process.

- Functioning clean cafeterias appear to exist in at least half of Tajikistan’s schools, while less than half of youth report a functioning health centre in their school.

- Nearly 40 per cent of respondents say their class sizes are too large, especially youth in urban areas and female youth.

- Nearly half of all youth surveyed say more and better-maintained student dormitories are needed, with the strongest calls coming from tertiary-educated youth.

- Less than a fifth of youth in Tajikistan say they have access to a well-qualified counsellor in school or at university, with no differences in urban and rural areas.

- Very positively, only about a quarter of youth agrees that too much smoking is taking place in school; however, work still needs to be done to curb smoking among youth of all ages.

- Nearly half of all youth surveyed say more and better-maintained student dormitories are needed, with the strongest calls coming from tertiary-educated youth.

- The vast majority of youth in Tajikistan say they feel safe in and around their school. Of the less than 5 per cent of youth who report not feeling safe to some degree, more reports come from urban areas, tertiary-educated and conflict-affected youth.

- Although most youth say they feel safe at or near school, over a quarter report that, to some degree, violence occurs in and around their school, with reports more often coming from youth in urban areas.

- About 8 per cent of youth say they have been a victim of violence in or around school or university, a proportion that just slightly exceeds that of youth who do not feel safe at school (under 5 per cent). Consistent with other violence-related findings, more reports come from urban areas, although rural youth are also affected.

- Less than 5 per cent of youth report any knowledge of youth carrying weapons in school (fire arms, knives or other tools); more of these reports come from urban areas and youth who feel their education quality has been negatively affected by conflict.

- About half of youth say they do not face any special difficulties in getting an education. Youth who do most frequently cite the inadequacy of facilities to meet their special needs as a key barrier to getting an education, with just under a fifth saying this is a problem. Second most frequently, youth highlight the unwillingness or inability of parents to support their education, a problem more prevalent for youth in rural areas, females, older youth and less-educated youth.
LEARNING CONTENT

Survey questions about Learning content focused on the changes youth would like to see made to their classes and how they prioritize these changes, as well as the extent to which youth receive information about health, gender and peace and tolerance issues in school compared with other sources. Youth highlighted the need to increase computer and Internet usage at school, a desire for foreign language learning centres and improved access to literature in schools and universities.

Youth priorities for improving their classes and lectures

Youth most frequently agree that there needs to be more literature that is accessible to all. As shown in Table 13, nearly two thirds of respondents in both urban and rural settings call for this, especially females. Students who regularly attend classes (non-absentees) also value this option significantly. As described in the section on ‘Learning environment’, although some improvements have been made, many youth still lack access to the learning materials they need, including books and well-stocked libraries. They also desire literature for pleasure, in addition to that needed for course work.

More than half of all youth also call for more computer and Internet access at school and use in their courses. Although this is named somewhat less frequently than literature issues, it is young people’s number one priority change for their classes. Again, females and students who regularly attend school want this particularly strongly.

Young people surveyed say their top priority for improving their classes is the introduction of computers and Internet access in all schools. A 19-year-old in Kurgan-Tyube says, “It is necessary to have new technology and qualified technicians, because if one doesn’t know computers and a foreign language, it will be hard for [him] to live.” Another teen in Zafarobod District says, “Computers should be used more in the learning process, including for drawing classes, as a way to help young people learn how to use them.” A 13-year-old in Sebiston village suggests, “Extra lessons should be conducted on computers [to make up for the fact that] there are a total of two computers in our school, which are not connected with the Internet, and we are not allowed to work on computers [in school].”

Youth who study computers and use them in Kulob City say they have access at home, university, social organizations, school and Internet Cafes. They say they got involved with learning computers “Because of a lack of information and books,” “to become aware of modern technology,” “to broaden my knowledge,” “to learn computer programmes” and “play interesting games.” They say their learning is progressing but they face problems with lack of electricity, computer programmes disappearing and a lack of teaching specialists in this field, especially in school.

In the village of Rudakoul, in Kabadiyan District, students say, “There is a computer classroom in school, but nobody learns computers because there is no teacher.” Youth in Ayni District say, “It is necessary to increase the number of computers in school, but the most important thing is to ensure supply of electricity and heating…If there is a computer and no electricity, there is no reason for the computer.” However, some teachers create additional barriers to students, such as by imposing fees on computer use in schools.

Youth in Faizabad say they have computers in school but that in addition to problems with electricity, “We do not have Internet access. We would like to have the Internet in order to obtain more and new interesting information.” Youth who do have Internet access, lament however that “it is too slow.”

Half of all youth also want increased access to opportunities to learn foreign languages. Youth in urban settings feel especially strongly about this, perhaps because they are aware that white-collar jobs may reward linguistic competence. All of the participants in a focus group discussion in Somoniyon, Rudaki say they want to learn foreign languages but that they “lack foreign language teachers in school and do not have access to foreign language centres or literature.”
“Nobody cares about this issue,” one says. “Pupils can rarely find the necessary literature in libraries to learn a language independently. The MoE is not taking adequate action on this.” Students in Zafarobod District also say that more foreign language courses are needed, including for one eager young person, in Chinese. Tertiary students in Sughd Province also emphasize the importance of foreign language learning, with one saying, “There is a proverb that ‘one who knows languages, knows the world.’ Everybody should try to learn foreign languages. Students have to learn Russian well since the majority of them go to Russia for earning.” Some learners note that they prefer language courses be taught only in the foreign language to be learned, while others feel the teachers should be able to speak the language taught and the language spoken by the students to make the learning process easier.

Youth interviewed in Kyrgyz-majority Murghob, in the GBAO region, agree, “We have a problem with the Tajik language.” They are particularly interested in more opportunities to learn Tajik, since “the Kyrgyz language is mainly active in our district.” “Our district’s residents are Kyrgyz people,” a 16-year-old secondary-educated male explains. “We have 14 schools in total, out of which only one is a Tajik school.” “Some schools have two groups: Tajik and Kyrgyz,” a 17-year-old adds. The group says they do have Russian teachers of varied quality, but that there are too few opportunities for Tajik language study and practice.

“We are obliged to learn the Tajik language since we live in Tajikistan, and without it, we cannot find a job,” says a 20-year-old male. Another says, “There were even some cases when heads of organizations, who could not fill out documents in Tajik, were fined. There should not be behaviour like this.”

Students who cannot master Tajik are also disadvantaged in university, where courses are taught in Tajik. A 17-year-old Kyrgyz male says, “All of the classes at university are conducted in Tajik, and it is difficult for us during the first two-to-three years. We cannot follow classes thoroughly. As a result, half of young people study in Kyrgyzstan. When they graduate and come back to Tajikistan, they have difficulties finding jobs because they have a diploma from Kyrgyzstan and do not know Tajik. For those who attend university in Tajikistan, many “always seek the Russian versions” of course materials because “everything is taught in Tajik.”

A 21-year-old tertiary-educated, Kyrgyz female explains, however, “We cannot learn Tajik at school. Nobody speaks Tajik in our area, not even our teachers, headmasters or parents. Even if we learn vocabulary, we cannot practice it. We need much time for this.” She and others say they need more than short-term courses to address the challenge. “It is necessary to arrange Tajik language courses and establish conditions for students to practice, including through internships,” a 20-year-old university student says. “Short-term courses of two to three months is just enough to learn speaking skills. More time is needed to learn to a level where documents could be filled out properly.”

In addition to courses and internships, this group of ethnic-minority youth asks the MoE to “organize summer camps for Kyrgyz-speaking students in areas where Tajik-speaking people live. This will provide opportunities to learn and practice the Tajik language.” They also emphasize that the language gap, discrimination in the quota system and other experiences of inequality between nationalities “can drive to a big scandal like in Kyrgyzstan,” signalling that these issues may foster conflict. They add, “Kyrgyz people should be provided with an opportunity to get a job in Kyrgyzstan since they know the Kyrgyz language.”

Uzbek students in Faizabad say there are enough schools in their district, but they want more opportunities to study in Uzbek and Russian. A 13-year-old female says, “I would like to have more Russian forms [in school] or a Russian school.” A 15-year-old female adds, “I would like to study at an Uzbek school because I am Uzbek. We don’t have any Uzbek schools now, and there used to be Uzbek forms in school, but they were transferred into Tajik.”

Beyond technology, literature and language learning, about half of the respondents would also like more extra-curricular activities, particularly females and students who regularly attend school. One 17-year-old female secondary student in Panji Bolo town suggests that summer camps should be organized for youth. A 17-year-old male in the village of Sebiston suggests, “Evening activities and clubs should be organized for young people.”
More international exchange opportunities are also popular among urban and female respondents. Youth who don’t feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict also choose this option more frequently than their conflict-affected counterparts. A 16-year-old female in Panji Bolo town explains, “It would be good to have exchange visits with other schools so that we can learn from them and they can learn from us.”

Although not a key issue for most respondents, more than a third of youth want to be able to choose their courses and exams, especially urban youth.

Urban, female and non-absentee respondents are also especially interested in the provision of more non-formal training opportunities (for non-absentees, the desire is expressed twice as frequently as their counterparts). Meanwhile, conflict-affected youth have significantly lower interest in this option than their unaffected peers.

About a third of respondents suggest more innovative and engaging teaching methods be utilized in their classes. Urban, female and more educated respondents make this choice more frequently, as do youth who do not feel their education is worse off due to conflict. Many youth call for “new methods of work” where “the methods of Soviet-style education are ended” and learning is more “interactive,” as some youth in Khooling District describe.

Youth-to-youth activities are desired by about one fourth of respondents, although their popularity increases with the respondent’s level of educational attainment (reaching about one third). Youth in Somoniyon, Rudaki, for example, believe, “One group of youth could advance educational opportunities for another group of young people [because] nobody understands the young people better than people of the same age.” Youth life skills development is of interest to many youth, too, if less so for urban male youth surveyed.

Despite high unemployment and the outmigration from Tajikistan of many young people, most youth do not call for stronger education linkages to the job market. It is, however, more important for urban respondents and those who have reached tertiary education, who desire this twice as much as their rural and less educated counterparts. This may be explained by the fact that rural youth may often engage themselves in family farm enterprises, thereby not feeling a critical need to confront a job market. School leavers in urban settings, where most universities are, may expect to face stiffer competition for available job opportunities.

Overall, youth who regularly attend classes show higher interest in a wide variety of opportunities, often more frequently calling for improvements to their classes and lectures. This may reflect a better understanding of their educational environment, as well as more keen interest in reaping every possible benefit from their educational opportunities. Conflict-affected youth never significantly exceed their unaffected counterparts in choosing any options. If anything, they distinguish themselves for valuing change opportunities less. Their education having been worsened by conflict, they might simply be happy to see it returned to what was previously considered normal. Youth with basic or primary level education are less likely to call for changes to their classes than more educated youth.

Youth with no history of dropping out or temporarily suspending their education are more likely to say they are not interested in any changes being made to their courses. This may reflect a higher level of satisfaction overall among non-dropouts with this facet of education quality. Female youth also distinguish themselves by emphasizing an interest in a number of changes to their classes more so than male youth. Although females are much less likely than males to move onto tertiary education, many have keen interests in making improvements to their classes.

When asked to prioritize these potential changes to their classes and lectures, most youth name the expansion of computer and Internet usage in school as their top desire, as noted in Table 14. More and free centres for foreign language learning is the second most frequently named priority, followed by making necessary literature avail-
able and accessible to all in third place. In fourth and fifth places, respectively, youth want more opportunities for international student/pupil exchanges and more extra-curricular, after-school activities.

Youth in the Asht District suggest a range of extra-curricular activities, from creative courses offered during the daytime and evenings, to parties and sports activities at school. They note that schools will often require rehabilitation in order to accommodate these activities but that they are much needed in their district, including to address problems with teen suicide. Youth in Somoniyon, Rudaki who attend both Tajik and Russian schools also support the establishment of evening schools, providing more flexibility for youth to attend classes and the provision of a wider variety of courses. They also suggest the establishment of youth centres, where non-formal learning could also take place, as well as providing space for young people to socialize. They further call for “more events for youth” at schools and universities.

**Figure 14.** “Would you like to have any of the following changes made to your classes/lectures?” Percentages of youth answering ‘yes’ in Tajikistan

Information sources for youth on health, gender, sex and peace and tolerance

Tajikistan’s schools play a central role in providing youth information on health, HIV/AIDS and nutrition; gender issues and physical relationships between people; and peace and tolerance. As shown in Table 15, youth name school most frequently as their main source of information on these subjects. Among youth who receive information on these subjects, TV and radio are distant seconds as sources regarding health, and peace and tolerance issues. Peers and friends are second most important for youth on gender and sex issues. A range of other sources also play key roles for smaller numbers of youth, including the Internet, NGOs and family. University students in Faizabad, for example, report, “NGOs have held seminars on HIV/AIDS, other diseases and health issues and distribute leaflets at our university.” Interestingly, peers are not a significant source of info for peace and tolerance, whereas families are a relatively important source.

Many youth say they don’t receive information on these subjects at all. Nearly a third of respondents do not receive any information regarding gender and relationships, while an equivalent proportion gets it from school. Information on health and peace and tolerance are comparatively more available. About a fifth of respondents do not receive any information on health, HIV and nutrition, and just 10 per cent of youth do not receive information about peace and tolerance.

There are many differences among subgroups of youth on their sources of information, underscoring a need to better understand and address the different ways in which young people are targeted and/or prefer to receive information. Youth in urban areas more often turn to the Internet for information on health, nutrition, gender and sex than youth in rural areas (twice as often in the case of health and nutrition issues). Rural youth are less likely to receive information on peace and tolerance. When youth in urban areas receive peace and tolerance information, they turn to family members more often than youth in rural areas.
Females are much less likely than males to receive information on health and nutrition, and on gender and sex, but when they do, they rely more on school than males. Females also rely more on family for gender and sex information, while more boys turn to peers and the Internet. Females get less information on peace and tolerance, and when they do, they turn more to family, while males turn more to the media.

Conflict-affected youth rely less strongly on school and more strongly on media, Internet and NGOs for information on health and nutrition than non-conflict-affected youth. Although they receive information as much as non-conflict-affected youth on health, gender and sex, surprisingly, conflict-affected youth less often get information on peace and tolerance from any source. When they do, they turn more to family and the Internet than their peers.

Unsurprisingly, dropouts are less likely to get information on any of these subjects in school, compared with non-dropouts. For gender and sex issues, dropouts rely more strongly on family than non-dropouts. Absentees and non-absentees receive information largely from the same sources, but non-absentees rely a bit more on school for peace and tolerance information, while absentees turn a bit more to family and media sources.

In addition, younger youth get more information from school on all of these subjects than older youth. Although older youth also principally rely on school, media sources also play a significant role in delivering this content. Younger youth are less likely to get information on gender and sex from any source. Those at the secondary level rely most on school for health and nutrition information, while those at the basic and primary levels are the least likely to get information on these subjects. Tertiary-educated youth rely strongly on schools, but also turn to the Internet more regarding gender, sex and peace and tolerance issues. They also turn more to the media regarding peace and tolerance issues than their less-educated peers.

All of these distinctions point to a need for further research regarding the ways in which different groups of youth receive information on these topics and how they would prefer to receive the information. Review of its content and evaluation of its impact, including on youth behaviour, are also necessary. Some interviews with youth clearly indicate a strong need for awareness raising, with one youth in Faizabad, for example saying, “I don’t think we need such information [about HIV/AIDS]; only those people who have an abnormal life style need to know about it.” Colleagues promptly disagree, however, arguing, “I think this information is useful, since if we do not know the ways of HIV/AIDS and other disease transmission, we cannot protect ourselves and the number of infected people will increase.” They add, “Any information helps us.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7. “Where do you get the majority of information about…”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentages of youth answering ‘yes’ in Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, HIV/AIDS and nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers/friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television, radio and newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not receive information on these topics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. RESULTS

Key findings: Learning content

- More than half of all youth also call for more computer and Internet access at school and use in their courses, and this is most often named as young people’s top priority for improving their courses.
- Half of all youth want increased access to opportunities to learn foreign languages. Youth in urban settings feel especially strongly about this; this is their second most frequently requested priority.
- Youth most frequently agree that there needs to be more literature that is accessible to all. Nearly two thirds of respondents in both urban and rural settings call for this, especially females, making it young people’s third most requested priority change to their classes.
- About half of the respondents would like more extra-curricular activities, particularly females and students who regularly attend school.
- Among many other suggestions, more international exchange opportunities are also popular among urban and female respondents, with 40 per cent or more calling for this improvement to learning content.
- Tajikistan’s schools play a central role in providing youth information on health, HIV/AIDS and nutrition; gender issues and physical relationships between people; and peace and tolerance. Youth name ‘school’ most frequently as their main source of information on these subjects.
- Many youth say they don’t receive information on these subjects at all. Nearly a third of respondents do not receive any information regarding gender and relationships, while an equivalent proportion gets it from school. Information on health and peace and tolerance are comparatively more available. About a fifth of respondents do not receive any information on health, HIV and nutrition, and just 10 per cent of youth do not receive information about peace and tolerance.
- Further research is needed on the ways in which different groups of youth receive information on these topics and how they would prefer to receive the information. Review of its content and evaluation of its impact, including on youth behaviour, are also necessary.
LEARNING OUTCOMES

The extent to which youth are absent from school without authorization or choose to drop out of school altogether before completion are key indicators of young people’s level of satisfaction with education quality. They may also be indicators of gendered attitudes to education when seen as an authority institution, where males in particular may rebel against this authority. They can also be symptoms of structural issues in Tajikistan society that foster mismatches between young people and the education system, for example, where career paths may be open principally to certain groups only.

Youth absenteeism

Youth absenteeism from school is widespread in Tajikistan. More than one third of all youth surveyed admit to having been absent from school without a legitimate excuse between 1 and 9 times during their last 12 months of schooling. When those who admit having skipped school 10 or more times in that time period are added, the proportion reaches nearly half of all youth, as shown in Table 16.

Given the stigma that is often attached to breaking rules and ditching school, this level of response may even underreport the actual level of unauthorized absenteeism. At the same time, the high level of response indicates some openness among youth to discuss their absenteeism.

Figure 15. “In the last 12 months, did you stay away from school/university at least a whole day without a legitimate excuse?” Percentages of youth responses in Tajikistan (all, and by sex, age group, dropout)
Males have skipped school more often than females, although many females are also not showing up, as outlined in Table 16. Males may be engaging in more risk-taking behaviour than females in general. They may also be skipping to attend to work or other responsibilities. Females may also be less willing to admit to their absences, or their activities may be more closely monitored such that absenteeism is more difficult for them to undertake. Females may also be skipping to attend to other responsibilities or other pressures that eventually cause them to attain less education than males overall, as previously noted.

Interestingly, despite their more optimistic view of education quality in many respects, younger youth are somewhat more likely to skip school than older youth. While older youth might be skipping school because they have a higher level of freedom to make decisions and may be engaged in more diverse activities compared with younger youth, it is unclear why a larger proportion of younger youth are not making their way to class.

Youth who have dropped out of school or who had been forced to temporarily suspend their education are much more likely to be absent from school than youth who have not had these experiences. This is in line with knowledge from other settings where serial absenteeism is linked with dropping out, particularly where special learning needs are not being met.

Youth who feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict are more likely to skip school very frequently compared with non-conflict-affected youth. Similar proportions of both groups say they have not come to school 1 to 9 times within the past year (more than a third each), but conflict-affected youth are almost twice as likely to have skipped class 10 times or more (17 versus 9 per cent).

Youth in Somoniyon, Rudaki say that various aspects of poor education quality and youth unemployment support youth absenteeism. “Young people are ready and want to get high quality education, but they are not provided with it. That is why young people do not try to attend lessons in the schools and study at universities. Those who want to work can’t find jobs.”

Youth with tertiary education in Dehmoy Village, B. Ghaforov District in Soughd Province agree that many “youth are not interested in studying. Many are engaged in field [agricultural] activities to assist their families, and therefore have been leaving schools.” They add, “Children from poor families often cannot continue to study,” and that another reason for poor quality education (poor access and completion) is that “families have many children” and cannot support their education adequately.

A 16-year-old in the rural village of Sebiston explains that youth absenteeism reflects seasonal work demands. “People in Sebiston village mostly are busy with viticulture (growing grapes), which is the main source of income and involves both adults and schoolchildren. In March and April, people clean grapevines, and in August, September and October, they gather the harvest. This is driving the majority of schoolchildren to be out of school in our area.” Another 16-year-old adds, “For example, all able-bodied members of our family, including me, work in the field during seasonal work periods. I will get tired after the work, and I do not like to do my lessons. When I complain to my father, he gets angry with me.”

Youth in the rural village of Shurobi in Hisor District explain, “Youth miss their classes due to fieldwork and household chores. As a result, they do not understand some themes, and teachers do not understand this and scold them. There were cases when teachers barred student access to quarter tests because students missed classes. Parents do not allow their children to attend school during the peak harvest or sowing season, and even if they are allowed to go to school, they are tired and unprepared.”

The reasons for absenteeism among all of the groups of youth cited are worthy of further investigation to determine whether education quality issues are principle push factors, or if issues outside school matter more.
Dropping out of school

The drop-out rate is a key indicator of the success or failure of an education system to achieve its goals and objectives in any society. Depending on the reasons, dropping out may also be an indicator of young people’s disappointment with education quality. In this survey, 151 youth, or just about 17 per cent of the sample drawn, claim to have dropped out before completing primary, basic or secondary school or to have temporarily suspended their education. The sample of dropouts is small and does not represent the opinions of all dropouts in Tajikistan with a high level of confidence. It does, however, provide interesting information on their main reasons for dropping out. The group that temporarily stopped their education similarly provides indications of why these interruptions have occurred for youth in Tajikistan.

This sample of young people involves all subgroups of youth analysed. More often, however, rural, female, older, and primary- or basic-educated youth are affected. Youth with a history of displacement and absenteeism are also more likely than their peers to have stopped their education permanently or temporarily (29 per cent of every displaced youth, versus 17 percent of the never displaced, and 23 per cent of absentees, compared with 13 per cent of non-absentees).

As shown in Table 17, youth most often say they left school because they lacked parental and/or spousal support. This lack of support may be an inability to financially support young people’s education, but at times, it also means that parents and spouses don’t feel education is important and forbid or make it more difficult for students to continue. Next most frequently, youth say that school didn’t interest them and that they lacked financial means. A wide range of other reasons is also given, from personal or family health problems and work responsibilities, to marriage and lack of education facilities. A 16-year-old female in Panji Bolo town, for example, says, “I want to study, but I had to suspend my education because my father is handicapped; [I am needed at home, and I have less support for my education].” A 23-year-old male in Faizabad says, “I got typhoid fever when I was in 10th form, and I missed about two months of school because of the disease. I continued my studies as soon as I got better.”

Although a higher proportion of rural youth is affected (20 per cent, versus 11 per cent of urban youth), there are few differences between urban and rural youth on the reasons they give for stopping school. Instead, some of the starkest differences that occur among subgroups of youth occur between males and females. The female youth sampled are much more likely to have left school overall (23 per cent of them, versus 10 per cent of males), and are 13 times more likely to say it was because they lacked parental and/or spousal support for their education. These females were also twice as likely to be from rural areas. Moreover, female youth left school much more often because of marriage than males did.

Lack of parental and/or spousal support is also a bigger issue for displaced, absentee and conflict-affected youth than their respective peers. Meanwhile, although youth with a history of displacement are more likely than the never displaced to have dropped out or stopped their education for a period of time, only one of these 14 young people says the interruption was caused mainly by displacement. Instead, they stress a lack of teachers and schools as key reasons for ending their education. Never displaced youth, on the other hand, more frequently say they left because they had to work.

A 22-year-old male living and working in Kurgan-Tyube, who finished nine years of school, says, “I left school to learn my profession. I was young and did not take it seriously, and I didn’t have anybody to support me. My father left for earnings, and I left together with my father, brothers and sisters. My mother worked in the market, baked bread at home and used to sell it. I helped my mother and got acquainted with a shoemaker, who suggested I become his pupil. I started to help him and finally left school to work more and make more money.”

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12 Note that unlike those reported in Table 2, figures here represent standardized re-weighted data relating to responses for Question 25 in the Structured Survey Questionnaire.
Other working youth involved in focus group discussion in Kurgan-Tyube say that youth who leave school do so because “one of the parents is absent, often leaving the mother alone.” At times, short-term work plans turn into a permanent departure from education for youth. A 19-year-old says, “After I finished school, I wanted to work to help my mother. Now it is too difficult to enter the university, but I wanted to be a doctor.”

These working youth also agree that youth leave school “to be independent” and “to have personal money.” One explains that studying and working is also very difficult to do at a young age. “It is good to work and make your own money,” this 15-year-old says, “but sometimes it’s hard because you have to find time for both education and the job. Sometimes I don’t have time to open a book and just fall asleep as soon as I come home.”

Youth who work and study in Khujand and haven’t yet dropped out of school also stress that balancing work and education is very hard. A 16-year-old male says, “It has been difficult to combine study with work. It is a big physical overload on the body and affects further development of the body.” A 13-year-old male agrees, saying, “We have to choose either to study or to work. We do this because of financial difficulties in the family.” A 13-year-old working girl adds, “Some also work because they want to become financially independent.” Still another 15-year-old male says that even though he works and studies, he feels “it’s harmful, since young people always lack sleep from combining study with a job.”

These working youth say that their motivation to prioritize education over work would increase with stipends and in-kind assistance for themselves and their families, particularly the poorest families. They also feel that the “organization of more extra-curricular activities” would draw them in, including “sports competitions and creative events in the evenings.” They further suggest more “flexible course schedules” and better teacher training, including through “practical professional learning experience abroad, to improve their skills and knowledge, which they can then bring back to classrooms in Tajikistan.”

Working youth interviewed in Kurgan-Tyube agree, “Stipends should be increased for schoolchildren, especially those from poor families. This would motivate schoolchildren to education.” In addition, they call for “benefits to children, the poor and ‘defective’ [those missing a parent] families.”

Other youth who did not drop out of primary, basic or secondary school explain that they weren’t able to move on to university as hoped. An 18-year-old female, who graduated from secondary school explains, “A negative impact on the quality of education is that I finished school last year, but I could not enter the university since the volume of work at my home is very high. It impacted me to miss an opportunity to enter university. Schoolchildren not only help their families to sell the products in the market, but they have much to do at home, and this decreases their education quality.”

A 17-year-old male who completed secondary school in Sebiston village says, “I graduated from the eleventh year of secondary school this year and very much wanted to enter the Tajik Technology University in Dushanbe City, but the financial situation of our family is very bad. There are six children in our family besides me, and only my father is working. Because of lack of sufficient finances and accommodation, I cannot continue my education.”

Table 8. “What were the main factors that contributed to your decision to drop out or stop school temporarily?” Percentages of Tajikistan youth answering ‘yes’ in Tajikistan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for drop out</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Frequency rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental and/or spousal support</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School did not interest me</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of financial means/poverty</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I or a family member had a health problem</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 18: Exam preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for drop out</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Frequency rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I had to work</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only nine classes were available in school/we want more</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education facilities were too far away/there were no schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I faced strong discrimination in school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being forcefully displaced from my home</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education quality was poor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment was poor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School workload was too heavy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of a natural disaster</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of the hijab</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because there were no teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a family member</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School was unsafe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education was not relevant to my finding a job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was expecting a baby</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on the responses of 151 youth respondents, or 17.4 per cent of the sample of 865, who were permitted to name all that most apply as the main reasons for their having dropped out.

Exam preparation

Well more than half of youth respondents feel that their courses and teachers are adequately preparing them to pass exams, as shown in Table 18. Urban respondents and those who have dropped out or stopped school for a time more often feel inadequately prepared by their instructors than their rural and non-dropout counterparts. At the same time, rural youth are more likely to say they just somewhat agree that they are prepared. Interestingly, however, although youth without a history of absenteeism feel more strongly prepared, they are more likely to say they feel unprepared overall than absentee youth. Perhaps their expectations and related requirements are higher than for absentees.

As examples, a 14-year-old Uzbek girl in Faizabad says, “Although it’s cold in winter, our school is good. We have good teachers. They prepare us for exams; they help us study well.” Another teen adds, “If we do not understand something, teachers explain it to us after the lessons.” Meanwhile, a 20-year-old male in the same town feels, “Not all the teachers are good enough in our university. Some do not explain the subject at all, but require us to know all of the material. During the tests, they give us questions that we cannot answer since we have never had lessons on them, and then we must also pay for tests.” Youth without specialist teachers also feel disadvantaged in related exams, particularly in the sciences and mathematics.
Education relevance to employment

About 20 per cent of the sample declares that they have a job. Of these 170 respondents, just over half feel that the education they received is relevant and useful to the job they are engaged in, as seen in Table 19. Females report having found their education relevant and useful to a much higher degree than males. Nearly two thirds of regularly attending students and tertiary-educated respondents report finding their education useful to and relevant for the work activity they are currently pursuing. Older youth and those who feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict are also somewhat more likely to see the links between their jobs and the education they have achieved. Clearly, when youth manage to find a job in Tajikistan, they are mostly able to see direct linkages between their education and the work they are doing.

One 19-year-old, out-of-school youth working in Kurgan-Tyube says, “Education is good in principle. To be frank, however, I did not get more knowledge at school [than outside school], however, [school] has somehow helped me.”
Figure 17. “If you have a job, is the education you received relevant and useful to the work you are doing?”
Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all, by sex)

Consequences of poor quality education

Tajikistan youth show awareness of a wide range of negative consequences of poor education quality, as shown in Table 20. Youth most widely recognize increased outmigration of youth from Tajikistan as resulting from poor education quality. Rural youth show an acute and dramatic awareness of the risk of increased outmigration resulting from poor quality education, surpassing their urban counterparts by more than 10 percentage points on this issue. On nearly all other issues, urban youth indicate stronger concerns, especially regarding the negative impact of poor education quality on health outcomes and on youth demands for secondary school. Urban youth are also far more likely to feel that poor education quality contributes to youth feeling less responsible for the future of Tajikistan.

In general, youth with more education show more sensitivity to possible consequences of poor quality education and emphasize outmigration concerns more often than youth with basic or primary education. Tertiary-educated youth in particular feel that poor quality education leads to poor health practices and less use of health services. Older youth also more often feel that poor quality education can lead to increased difficulties for various groups of youth (females, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities or who are displaced, and others) and that it leads to lower youth self-esteem.

The views of males and females are similar on all of the topics surveyed except that female youth are more likely to feel that poor education quality leads to deeper problems for female youth, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities or who are displaced, and other groups facing difficulties getting an education (21.8 per cent of them, versus 13.3 per cent of males).

Dropouts are more likely to say that they don’t know what the consequences of poor education quality might be, compared with non-dropouts (about 19 per cent of dropouts, compared with 10 per cent of non-dropouts). Meanwhile, non-dropouts are more likely to say that poor education will lead to less interest in secondary school (32 per cent, compared with 19 per cent of non-dropouts); less youth responsibility for Tajikistan’s future (23 versus 14 per cent); and more youth not feeling valued in society while society values them less (25 versus 16 per cent).

Youth without a history of absenteeism show stronger feelings than absentees about a few possible consequences of poor quality education, including health problems, deeper problems for subgroups of youth and increased youth grievances and disappointment with government. Youth who do not feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict further feel more strongly than their counterparts that the economy and development outcomes are weakened (38 per cent of non-conflict affected youth, compared with 30 per cent of conflict-affected youth).
Interestingly, only a small minority (less than one fifth) of respondents cites increased youth grievances and disappointment with government and a return to conflict as possible results of poor education. Urban youth and youth who experienced displacement mention these results more frequently than their rural and non-displaced counterparts, however. In the case of increased likelihood of a return to conflict in Tajikistan, about 27 per cent of displaced youth responded positively, compared with 12 per cent of non-displaced youth.

Although youth involved in discussions in Somoniyon, Rudaki say they are generally satisfied with the quality of education despite many improvements that need to be made, they feel that the problems that exist are “certainly a main reason for weak social skills among youth and the level of youth responsibility for the future of Tajikistan.” They say, “If education is not good for all pupils/students, youth feel unappreciated and their level of disappointment increases. There is low self-appraisal among youth.”

Plain and simple, some youth feel that poor quality education makes it very hard to find employment or employment that youth most want to undertake. A secondary-educated girl in Dushanbe City says, “It’s too hard to find a suitable job having such low education.” Youth are also concerned that the transition from the Soviet-run education system is leading to a critical gap in expertise for the country as a whole. “The education we get today mismatches the education of our parents’ in the Soviet times,” says a 20-year-old woman in Dushanbe City. Another 16-year-old female in the same focus group adds, “The government must pay more attention to resolving problems in the education sector. It may face a serious problem finding qualified workers as the generation that works now got education in the Soviet times. After several years, no one will be able to substitute them.”

At the same time, youth with jobs at times feel disappointed at not having been able to continue their education. A 17-year-old male who works in Khujand and is completing secondary school says, “The education I obtained in school was not enough/useful to enter university.” A 19-year-old out-of-school youth working in Kurgan-Tyube further says that many “young people are forced to work in order to earn a living, but most of them want to have a profession, to be educated and to enter university. It’s good to have such a will.”

Table 9. “What are the results of failing to provide good quality education to youth in Tajikistan?” Percentages of youth answering ‘yes’ in Tajikistan (all, by settlement type and education level)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result Description</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased outmigration of youth from Tajikistan</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaker economy and poor development outcomes</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor health practices and lower health service use</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased demand for secondary school</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor self-esteem among youth</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth do not feel valued in society, and society does not value youth</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth feel less responsibility for the future of Tajikistan society</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeper problems for female youth, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, the displaced and other groups facing difficulties getting an education</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased youth grievances and disappointment with government</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased likelihood of a return to conflict in Tajikistan</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Empty cells denote lack of statistically significant difference within the subgroup.
Consequences of outmigration on education quality for youth

Youth say that widespread outmigration from Tajikistan is having a mixed impact on their education quality. Many youth agree, “Lack of employment and insufficient wages have driven parents and young people themselves to work abroad, particularly in Russia.” They also widely agree, “Low teacher salaries have caused many highly qualified teachers to leave Tajikistan to work abroad,” again, mainly in Russia. Family separations have left many youth with less daily support, and these young people have had to take on new responsibilities at home to compensate for the absence of relatives, who have left to work for the family. Loss of teachers has also had a deleterious impact on the range of subjects offered in school and the overall quality of teaching, where young people say their schools often lack qualified specialists. At the same time, many of the young people actively use remittances from family members working abroad to continue and complete their education as best they can.

The extent to which economic hardship and outmigration are dampening youth and parental interest in formal education is not fully clear. Some youth feel their own migration outside the country is inevitable and that this distracts them from their studies, while others feel it inspires them to get the best education they can to prepare for life and work abroad. In addition, although youth say that economic difficulties are contributing to serial absenteeism and are causing many young people to cut their education short, most youth surveyed still strongly desire more education and cling to hopes of better economic and education opportunities. Many youth are optimistic that education quality, job prospects and salaries will improve in Tajikistan to an extent where outmigration will become less attractive and necessary. At the same time, others interviewed have their sights firmly set on finding work abroad with or without a high level of formal education.

Youth whose parents are unemployed in Khoovaling District explain, “Half of the citizens in our district are unemployed because of lack of work in our area” and “low government wages.” As a consequence, youth say that many families affected by unemployment and low incomes “do not send their children to school, [while others] nevertheless do.” An 18-year-old male in secondary school in the district gets through school using what resources he can, saying, “Our family has cattle and land to cover expenses.” A 16-year-old in Khoovaling meanwhile relies on remittances, saying, “My brothers in Russia send money to buy my uniform.”

Youth in Khoovaling District call for an increase in industrial enterprise in their district and say, “The state must think about these families and provide them with jobs.” They also call on parents to “try to provide children with at least secondary education” despite the financial difficulties they face.

A 19-year-old, out-of-school youth working in Kurgan-Tyube says that more government support to families would help curb the outmigration of youth in search of work in their area and elsewhere. “If somehow the government could support poor families, families without breadwinners and widows it would help prevent their sons from leaving the country to earn a living,” he says.

Youth living in Zoosun village in Ayni District, who have a parent or other relative working abroad, describe the challenges they face obtaining high quality teaching in their area. They concur, “Labour migration by teachers has been seriously affecting the education quality in our school since there are teachers among those labour migrants going to Russia. The majority of them leave for Russia in March and work there until September and then come back, although some stay even until November. Thus, we can see teachers all the time during only during three months of winter, but the classrooms are very cold in winter, and there is no electricity. Sometimes teachers of other subjects replace them, but the students do not like this since these teachers differ in their world outlook. As a result, students lose interest in subjects, which should have been taught by the teachers who migrated abroad. We are also missing some subjects. For example, there are only a few foreign language teachers in our schools because these teachers migrated to Russia due to low salaries. As a result, young people cannot learn foreign languages. There are also gaps in chemistry, physics and biology.
“When a teacher leaves for Russia, students start comparing these teachers with those that remain and feel they have a different world outlook. As a result, it affects both parties so strongly that, at times, students escape from classes or teachers leave class without teaching. Most offensively, students don’t prepare for their classes.

“Another issue affecting education quality,” the youth from Zoosun continue, “is the sickness of teachers who travel to Russia. They get sick there and come back and are discouraged from their profession and never return to school. They set up a small shop with their savings collected in Russia and engage in entrepreneurship and forget about teaching completely. At the same time, labour migration of teachers does have some positive aspects. When teachers go to Russia, they improve their world outlook and run their classes in a more interesting way.”

As for the effects of their parents’ migration to Russia on their education quality, youth in Zoosun village say there are pros and cons. “My father’s migration has affected my education,” says a 15-year-old male. “Since I am the eldest child in our family, I need to help my mother with field work and household chores, which affects my studies.” A 15-year-old female says, “Migration of my father has been positively impacting my education because we have better living conditions, and I have the opportunity to purchase the textbooks I need, which has been useful.” Another 15-year-old girl adds, “If the father is in Russia, his child can become ill-mannered because most of mothers cannot allocate enough time to educate their children due to their overloaded schedule. But my mother deals with my education and breeding seriously, and I also do my best to focus on studying.” Contact with the migrant parent matters, according to a 14-year-old male who says, “My father calls us almost every day and asks how I am doing with my studies. I also make efforts to perform well, and thus, my father’s migration has not affected my education at all. When my father calls us every day, I feel that he is with me and educates me.” Lastly, a 16-year-old male adds, “Fathers’ migration has both positive and negative impacts. Its negative impact is that they can become ill, and its positive impact is that they bring more money [to the household].”

Youth with family working abroad interviewed in Zoosun village further feel that, “Instead of improving, outmigration is just increasing, and this is the main reason for the decline in education quality in our school, along with an inadequate attitude of officials in charge of this issue.”

In this situation, these young people have interests in a high level of learning with a variety of objectives in mind. One 14-year-old male in Zoosun says, “In our village, those people who have higher education and work for some governmental agency or school receive a very low salary and as a result go to Russia in order to earn and improve their living conditions. Therefore, I would also like to go to Russia to earn after I finish secondary school because the families with labour migrants have better living conditions compared with others that don’t.” Another young man says, “I definitely want to continue my studies at one of the universities in Dushanbe; I would like to have a profession that allows me to earn enough so I do not need to go to Russia.” Meanwhile, another young man interested in becoming a sports professional is solidly focused on gaining higher education in order to work effectively in the village. “I definitely would like to continue my education after finishing secondary school and become a physical training teacher in order to contribute to increasing the number of sportsmen in our village,” he says. A teenage girl in the village would also like to study and work in the area as a medical doctor, but she worries that she won’t be able to do so, particularly because she is female. Meanwhile, youth say, “Many boys already prepare for going to Russia while they are in the 8th or 9th grade; they get prepared for this both psychologically and physically.”

Above all, youth with migrant family members and many others call for increased teacher salaries and salaries in general in order to keep teaching talent in Tajikistan and in their schools and to keep families together. They also think that officials should prioritize ensuring electricity and heating in all schools and provide new textbooks to remote villages “so that students from these areas have the same opportunity to get education as students in other areas of the country.” They appreciate the opportunity to voice their opinions on education quality, to describe their “dreams and expectations” and say they hope their involvement will bring some result.
Key findings: Learning outcomes

- Despite young people’s generally positive feelings about education quality, youth absenteeism from school is widespread in Tajikistan. More than one third of all youth surveyed admit to having been absent from school without a legitimate excuse between 1 and 9 times during their last 12 months of schooling. When those who admit having skipped school 10 or more times in that time period are added, the proportion reaches nearly half of all youth.
- Males have skipped school more often than females, although many females are also not showing up. Despite their more optimistic view of education quality in many respects, younger youth are also somewhat more likely to skip school than older youth, a particularly worrying sign for progression into secondary education.
- Youth who have dropped out of school or who had been forced to temporarily suspend their education are much more likely to be absent from school than youth who have not had these experiences. This is in line with knowledge from other settings where serial absenteeism is linked with dropping out, particularly where special learning needs are not being met.
- Youth absenteeism in Tajikistan may be driven particularly by the demands on youth for seasonal agricultural work. More research and action are needed to understand and curb youth absenteeism.
- About 17 per cent of the sample drawn claim to have dropped out before completing primary, basic or secondary school or to have temporarily suspended their education; the group is not representative of the opinions of all permanent or temporary dropouts in Tajikistan with a high level of confidence, but provides information on the reasons why dropouts occur.
- More often, rural, female, older, and primary- or basic-educated youth and those with a history of displacement and absenteeism are dropping out permanently or temporarily.
- Youth who left school permanently or temporarily most often say it was because they lacked parental and/or spousal support; because school didn’t interest them; and because they lacked financial means.
- More than half of youth respondents feel that their courses and teachers are adequately preparing them to pass exams, especially youth in rural areas and those with no history of disrupted education.
- About 20 per cent of the sample declares that they have a job, and of these 170 respondents, just over half feel that the education they received is relevant and useful to the job they are engaged in, especially females.
- Tajikistan youth show awareness of a wide range of negative consequences of poor education quality, especially increased outmigration of youth and a weaker economy and poor development outcomes.
Learning Processes and Systems

Youth satisfaction with teacher qualifications

Overall, satisfaction with the skills of teachers is very high among respondents, as seen in Table 21, without stark differences by location, sex or age group. Even absentees show a very high rate of appreciation, although students who attend school regularly report even higher approval rates.

The survey response is surprising in contrast to repeated calls from youth to prioritize the recruitment of more qualified teachers, especially specialists, as described in the section on ‘Youth education quality priorities and solutions’, and calls to root out teacher corruption. Some youth who believe education quality in Tajikistan is low say this is simply because “schools lack teachers.” Youth in focus group discussions also describe very mixed experiences with teacher quality, noting differences between and within schools. Some schools are described as having high or low quality teaching across the board, while others have some very good teachers working alongside those who youth consider to be less qualified and less effective within the same school.

Over and over, youth across the country say that Tajikistan’s education quality is compromised due to a lack of teachers overall and lack of teachers with sufficient qualifications to teach the courses they are responsible for. At the same time, youth clearly appreciate efforts that are being made, and many laud the skills and dedication of their instructors, who at times take on many subjects to fill gaps, despite receiving very low salaries.

A 16-year-old female who completed secondary school in Dushanbe City (Sino) says, “Teachers’ salaries are low, and as a result, the most qualified do not want to teach in schools. Due to the shortage, some teachers have to teach on several subjects.” A 13-year-old female working student in Khujand similarly says, “One teacher teaches several subjects that are not related to each other at all. Education quality depends on teachers…and teacher quality does not depend on teaching materials alone. They need other resources as well to improve their world outlook,” such as “opportunities for practical work exchanges [for teachers] in other countries.”

A teenager in Sebiston village calls education quality “at a middle level” overall for Tajikistan but “very low” for his school “because of a lack of teachers.” Another student in this village says, “The physical training teacher in our school also teaches Russian and physics, although he is not a specialist in these subjects. This of course impacts the quality of education because mostly we learn lessons from this teacher by heart, and this is why we don’t understand the essence and definitions of many rules. Plus, the lessons are not interesting.”

“We are often missing very important teachers,” explains a teenager in Kurgan-Tyube. “For example, for a long time, we had no computer skills teacher. Then we got one but the teacher was young and inexperienced and no one took him seriously.” A 15-year-old working male in basic school in Khujand further explains, “We lack specialists. Due to low salaries, graduates of teacher training universities do not wish to work as teachers, and the teachers with great experience and working record have been leaving Tajikistan schools.” In another example, a student in Sebiston says that although “our school has more computers, our teacher in informatics teaches only two programmes – Word and Paint. He does not teach other necessary programmes.” “Some teachers working in our schools also only have a secondary school education,” adds another youth from Sebiston. “Living in a village is a big obstacle for us young people,” explains one more. “There are few other resources to make up for [teaching knowledge and skills] gaps in school – no foreign language centres or Internet cafes.”

In addition to lack of teachers and specialists overall, some students say that teachers do not teach well because they are distracted by “weddings and other social events” that take up their time and draw their attention away from teaching. Like students, teachers are also affected by financial difficulties. A 17-year-old secondary student in Ayni District says, “The miserable [teachers’] salary is not enough at all, and therefore, [teachers] have additional jobs or get engaged in farming, field work or livestock breeding, or the majority of them go to Russia. If their sal-
ary is high enough to keep their families and children, they will not need to go to Russia and will teach with great interest. Classes would be conducted properly and education quality would improve.”

Some youth also believe that poor quality teaching is contributing to poor student motivation. A 16-year-old girl in basic school in Dushanbe City says, “Schoolchildren do not want to study because some teachers do not give sound knowledge, explain their subjects badly and do not encourage children at all.” Another 14-year-old girl in basic school agrees, adding that this leads to “attitudes where schoolchildren treat their teachers with disrespect.”

Despite these problems, in general, most youth are nonetheless very satisfied with the quality of the teaching in the country. Resoundingly and repeatedly, however, youth say, “It is necessary to raise teacher salaries to motivate them” and to provide an incentive to attract and retain high quality teaching in Tajikistan. They also call for regular teacher training and professional development opportunities and strong monitoring by the MoE, as well as parent and student involvement.

Figure 18. “My teachers/lecturers are well qualified to teach my courses.” Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all and by absenteeism)

Teacher interest in student progress

Most youth appear to receive individual attention from their instructors, as shown in Table 22, especially in rural settings. Tertiary-educated respondents are much less likely than youth with less education to feel that their lecturers show interest in their progress. This may be explained by smaller class sizes and more personal relations between teachers and students in primary, basic and secondary grades, compared with generally larger university lectures. Slightly fewer conflict-affected than unaffected respondents report that their teachers/lecturers show interest in their progress. A similar pattern is also discernible between absentees and non-absentees, where non-absentees indicate more frequently that their teachers show interest in their progress.

As examples of student comments on this, a 13-year-old female student in Faizabad says, “My teachers are very much interested in our progress. When our class wins the quiz they are happy for us, especially the head of our class, who says that our class is the strongest.” A 21-year-old in Faizabad, on the other hand, says, “Most of our teachers in the university, except some of course, do not care at all about our progress.”
Youth perspectives of education quality in Tajikistan: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region

3. RESULTS

Interactive and engaging teaching approaches

About three quarters of youth surveyed agree to some extent that at least half of their teachers engage students individually and/or in groups in each or every other class, as seen in Table 23. Female youth are a bit more likely to disagree with this, as are youth with primary or basic education. Dropouts and youth who have temporarily stopped their education are more likely to disagree that teachers regularly use engaging methods. Youth with a history of absenteeism also disagree more and are less enthusiastic when they agree.

Youth researchers conducting focus groups remark, “Some rural youth are particularly [unfamiliar with] interactive methods,” and are “very shy and at times afraid.” One says, “Village youth have good ideas but are unable to express their opinion.” They suggest that these and other youth would benefit from “training sessions on interactive methods of communication” that would boost youth activity in and out of school.

Many youth also say that students in Tajikistan are losing interest in school because “classes are boring.” A 14-year-old male in Panji Bolo town says, “I think our lessons are not interesting. A teacher writes the lesson on the board, and we copy what she writes. A school has never taken us to a museum or to other districts.” A 17-year-old male agrees, saying, “A teacher needs to attract children [to learn].”

Youth also debate the extent to which teachers need to be ‘strict’ with students in order to encourage the best possible results from learners. A 16-year-old girl in Panji Bolo town offers, “My parents say that if teachers are strict, pupils study well. I also think teachers should be strict.”

Youth studying in village schools in Asht District also suggest, “Teachers’ lessons should be attractive and encouraging for students,” and should include incentives for youth to study, such as “presents and stipends for pupils who study well and are high achievers.” They also support youth-to-youth learning, and say that teachers should “involve good pupils and high achievers to work with pupils who do not study well.”

Figure 19. “My teachers show interest in my progress.” Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all, by settlement type, education level, absenteeism)

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Youth perspectives of education quality in Tajikistan: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region

Learning processes and systems

Youth interest in interactive teaching approaches

More than half of youth surveyed fully agree that Tajikistan’s youth are ready and willing to involve themselves in more interactive teaching approaches, as represented in Table 24. These feelings are equally shared by youth in both rural and urban areas and across most other subgroups of the sample analysed. Female youth are particularly keen in their interest. While absentee youth still mostly think youth desire more interactive teaching methods, they are a bit less enthusiastic than their non-absentee peers.

A 14-year-old male student with a disability in Panj District, Panji Bolo town says, “Our lessons are not interesting. A teacher writes the lesson on the board, and we copy what she writes. A school has never taken us to a museum or to other districts.”

Figure 20. “At least 50 per cent of your teachers engage students in debate and discussion, small group work, and/or individual work in front of the class (e.g., doing problems on the board) in each or every other class session.” Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all, education level)
Teacher corruption

About a fifth of respondents report corruption occurring to some degree in the form of needing to give money or other benefits to teachers/lecturers in order to earn a good grade, as shown in Table 25. Urban settings seem to be much more heavily affected by the practice, with urban youth reporting the need to make payments or give other benefits to their instructors more than twice as often as youth in rural areas. This may be because of the concentration of HEIs in urban areas, as tertiary-educated youth are also more likely to report the need to pay instructors in order to earn good grades. This suggests that corruption may be rife in HEIs, although youth with lower levels of education also report that it is occurring. Females seem to be more aware of a climate of corruption than males, as are older respondents compared to younger ones. In addition, youth who feel their education has been negatively affected by armed conflict report a bit more frequently the need to pay teachers in order to get good grades.

In a focus group discussion involving youth who pay bribes in schools in Dushanbe City, participants say that “corruption, unfair and illegal practices very much exist” in their schools, taking many forms. They say that bribes in schools are asked and conferred in a variety of situations, ranging from holiday celebrations and birthday parties for teachers to exam periods. A 17-year-old basic school student says, “Teachers require us to set the table during examinations and provide them with delicious food. If you do it, they promise good marks.” Another describes instances of “teachers selling the answers to questions” provided to students that are meant to assist them in preparing for exams. In order to gain access to a presidential quota position, a 20-year-old female says, “I passed all my exams, but I was still asked to pay, so, I paid for the quota.”

Other students in Dushanbe also say, “Corruption in the education sphere in Tajikistan is an integral part of our life, and the economic situation of our country plays an important role in this process. Despite all of the attempts of the government to eradicate corruption, it still exists and is prospering.”
Most youth involved in a focus group in Zafarobod District feel they earn their marks on their own merits, however, they add, “There are some cases when students help teachers with household chores in order to get good marks.”

One young person involved in a focus group with tertiary-educated young people in Soughd Province says, “If corruption is eradicated completely, education quality would definitely improve because the majority of students take their examinations through bribes. When teachers do not get bribes and do not give students marks [based on bribes], students will have no other way [to pass] than by preparing for classes and examinations properly.”

These young people say that teacher corruption extends to student access to computers and Internet in school. “We have few computer lessons,” one says, “but children are not allowed to work on the computers. Teachers use the computers for their benefit only. Teachers make money recording movies and concerts on the computers and then selling them.” “Meanwhile,” another concurs, “Many schoolchildren cannot even use a computer.” A 14-year-old male secondary school student in Panji Bolo town says, “We have books and computers, but a teacher of the computer lesson asks us to pay before using the computer.” Youth in Panjakent Town also say, “There is no computer teacher at school. If any student pays one or two somoni, then they can use the computer. Otherwise, they are not allowed to use the school computers for learning.” As described in the section on ‘The politicization of education’, these youth also feel that funds for supplying computers to schools in their area are being misused.

Youth interviewed who pay bribes in school in Dushanbe City agree that the main reason for bribery in schools and universities is the “low salary of teachers.” Others highlight “weak knowledge of schoolchildren” about their rights and also the material they need to know in order to pass exams. They also fault a lack of control by government and the MoE. When asked what they and their parents feel about the bribery, one youth responds, “We must pay the bribe, otherwise we will get bad marks.” Another says, “It doesn’t matter whether we want to pay the bribe or not since we must pay regardless.”

When asked how youth feel about teachers who take bribes, most express disappointment and frustration. “I have a bad attitude towards them,” says a secondary school student in Dushanbe City (Sino). “Such teachers are not respected.”

Youth in Khovaling District, whose parents are unemployed and where unemployment is particularly high in general, say that corruption has a very negative impact on education quality. One 16-year-old male in Basic school says that when “schoolchildren and students know that teachers are corrupted and take bribes,” it further “alienates them from education. They do not attend lessons and instead try to search for money to pass exams.”

Youth in Murghob, a Kyrgyz-majority area in the region of GBAO, also report bribery occurring within the school and university systems. A 17-year-old university student says, “At universities, teachers ask Kyrgyz students to bring meat and oil during sessions to get good marks. Thus, we bring them to get marks and even pass examinations in advance.”

Another youth in Murghob feels teacher corruption creates a vicious cycle of weakened education quality. A 24-year-old tertiary-educated male says, “There are people who have a higher education diploma that in reality [they] don’t deserve. They paid for their education and diploma at university. Teachers should possess good qualifications, but unfortunately, at present, we rarely meet highly qualified specialists. Paying for marks and diplomas should be stopped, and control over bribery at universities and other educational institutions should be strengthened” to ensure high quality education over time. Some students and schools in Murghob have worked to ensure fair assessment, and they believe it is inspiring students to properly prepare for examinations.
Despite the many reports of bribery in schools, youth also report experiences with teachers who don’t ask for and refuse to take bribes from students. “I go to a village school in Dushanbe,” says one young woman, “and teachers do not take bribes here.” Another young person in Zafarobod District says, “I once bought a power generator for my teacher in the hopes of getting a good mark, but the teacher said that s/he would give him the mark he deserved because it would be more useful to my future.” A 14-year-old female in Faizabad says, “Teachers in our school are honest. The head of our class doesn’t even accept presents on holidays. She says she gets her salary and doesn’t need more.”

To address corruption, youth say that the government, and especially the MoE, needs to step up supervision of schools and, in particular, must improve regulation and monitoring of the presidential quota system. Youth also call on one another and their parents to stop participating in bribery. One youth in Dushanbe City says, “Students must use their knowledge to get marks.” Another adds, “Parents should not give money to their children to get good marks.”

**Figure 22.** “To earn a good grade at my learning institution, pupils/students are obliged to give money or other benefits to teachers/lecturers.” Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all, by settlement type, sex, age group)

**Assessment transparency**

Despite reports of corruption in the form of payments to instructors, overall, youth see grading as largely fair and transparent, as shown in Table 26. Older youth and conflict-affected youth are less positive about grading processes, while respondents who achieved a tertiary education are particularly critical of it. Youth without jobs are more confident in the fairness of grading processes, although youth with jobs also express a high level of confidence, too.

Students in Zafarobod District say they think “the scoring system is fair” in their school but highlight some challenges. “Some teachers are kind enough to support students with bad performance and give them satisfactory marks in order to pass to the next grade,” one says. “But this is not good, as it leads other students to lose interest in learning.” Another adds that, “There are also some cases where students with excellent performance come to
class unprepared and teachers say, ‘S/he is a student with excellent performance, and we should not put a bad mark’. This is also not good because scoring should be fair, not based on reputation."

In areas and schools where there is less satisfaction, youth continue to call for major changes to end bribery and nepotism impacting the assessment process. Youth in Kyrgyz-majority Murghob, in GBAO, describe efforts to improve grading fairness. A 16-year-old male in secondary school in Murghob says, “The scoring system should be fair at the school. Some teachers pay attention to the social status and wealth of students and score them accordingly. Bribery should be stopped, and relatives should not interfere in this process. This year, we organized a campaign for fair scoring during examinations in our school, and some students received bad marks. Those students were not shifted to the next grade. Now students have a serious attitude towards examinations.”

Students in the rural village of Shurobi, in Hisor District, also say they face major problems with the fairness of the grading process. A 14-year-old female says, If you get a bad mark, teachers ask you to give money, and then they correct the mark.” Another says, “If students miss class because their parents require them to do fieldwork, teachers torture them and make the students do more field work and pick cotton. If the students refuse, they are ‘tortured’ during examinations and then asked to ‘redeem themselves’ – i.e., to pay them a bribe.” Another adds, “If we had commissions from the MoE every month for inspections and to demand high quality, teachers would have a more serious attitude toward their job.”

A young person in Dushanbe also gives an example of a Chemistry teacher in 10th grade having given students unusually good marks during the first quarter marking period and later told them “not to count on good marks the next time around. When one of my classmates asked her how he could prepare, she said her birthday was coming up.” In other cases, youth say that students themselves exert their influence on teachers for good marks. Another youth in Dushanbe tells a story of a student who “abused his father’s position in society, as well as his financial resources. He did not do his home tasks and when asked why, merely said he would not need to. When it came time to put quarter marks, of course he brought gifts to teachers —often monetary ones. A teacher raised the issue of his dismissal, but our school principal supported the student. I am not going to say that teachers are not guilty of corruption at all, but I think that students are guilty themselves.”

Beyond corruption issues, some youth also take issue with a new credit-based system of scoring that is being instituted in HEIs. One youth in Dushanbe feels that “under this system, students who do not do anything can count on luck to choose answers randomly. I think that written and verbal examinations instead allow any person to improve their communication skills to successfully communicate with other people. Dishonest teachers also may have more opportunities to abuse this system.”
Functioning of parent-student-teacher consultations

Parent-student-teacher consultations seem to be working reasonably well for more than three fourths of the sample interviewed, as seen in Table 27. However, nearly three times as many youth in urban areas fully disagree that they function well compared with youth who fully disagree in rural areas. The degree of dissatisfaction also increases with age and education attained. Nearly three times as many 19–24 year olds than 13–18 year olds fully disagree that these consultations function well, and more than three times as many fully disagree among tertiary-educated youth, compared with youth with less education. This disagreement may coincide with the decreased relevance of these consultations at the tertiary level, which involves older youth and is concentrated in urban areas.

In addition, youth without jobs are also substantially more satisfied with parent-student-teacher consultations than youth with jobs. Youth without a history of absenteeism are also more strongly satisfied with these processes than absentee youth.

One 16-year-old basic school student in Dushanbe City stresses that engaging parents is critical in improving education quality in the country. She says, “I think we need to conduct more parents’ meetings to discuss education quality, not only concentrate on collecting fees at school.”
Anonymous complaints mechanism

Most youth in Tajikistan like the idea of setting up systems for anonymous reporting to register complaints and make suggestions to improve education quality, as seen in Table 28. Urban youth particularly like this, as do older and tertiary-educated young people. Perhaps not surprisingly, dropouts see this suggestion as a lot less important. Although most dropouts and youth who have temporarily stopped their education agree this is needed, many of them see it as less important compared with their non-dropout peers.

One young person who pays bribes in school in Dushanbe City (Sino) says, “We want to be active [in political debates over education quality], but we cannot due to fear.” A system for anonymous student suggestions would likely make inroads in overcoming such fear of reprisal from teachers, administrators and of loss of opportunities.

![Figure 25. “System should be put in place for pupils/students to register complaints and make suggestions anonymously.” Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan](image)

Key changes to Tajikistan’s education system

Youth researchers surveyed their peers about how they feel about several specific changes that could be made to Tajikistan’s education system, outlined in Table 29. Youth strongly agree on all but one of them.

Youth widely agree that teacher salaries should be increased to motivate their interest in and responsibility for students. Both males and females feel strongly about this, but females particularly so. Increasing student stipends, especially for low-income students, is similarly a very popular idea among respondents, without significant differences among subgroups of youth. Likewise, the vast majority of respondents agree that free transportation to and from school would be a significant improvement. A small cluster of dropouts disagrees, possibly reflecting disengagement from the education system, from which they have exited permanently or temporarily.

Although more than a fifth of respondents say they “don’t know,” very few youth disagree with the need to improve regulations and oversight of the presidential quota system. Females and youth who do not feel their education has been directly negatively affected by conflict are slightly more supportive of this already very popular idea.

“There is a need to improve control so that people use their knowledge to access the quota,” says a 20-year-old female in secondary school in Dushanbe City (Sino). Youth in the Kyrgyz-majority area of Murghob, in the GBAO region, say they do not have equitable access to quota opportunities. “For example,” a 16-year-old describes, “if there are three applicants for one seat, two of them are Kyrgyz and one is Tajik nationality. The Tajik applicant always wins, because the majority of the selection board members are Tajik.” A 21-year-old female adds, “They agree before the examinations take place.”

Uzbek youth in Faizabad also highlight frustration with the quota system. One 19-year-old female says, “More quota opportunities must be made available overall so that more young people can get higher education. Control
over quota distribution must also be strengthened so that it goes to those young people who really want to study and possess sound knowledge. We would also like to have a university here so that local people could have more access to higher education.”

Youth in the rural village of Vanj, in the GBAO region say that poor management of the quota system in an example of “reform in the education sector [being] run in the wrong way.” An 18-year-old says, “Incompetent students are being admitted to universities through bribery or corruption; strong relative relations [nepotism] and unfair distribution of the presidential quota at schools.”

Wearing uniforms in school and at university is also a very important idea for many youth. Youth in rural areas are particularly interested in this, where 81 per cent of youth support this, compared with 67 per cent of youth in urban areas. More than a fifth of urban respondents, on the other hand, asserts that special requirements to wear uniforms would be very disagreeable. Uniforms get progressively less important to youth as their age and education level increase, and with conflict-affected and absentee youth in general. Females support uniform requirements more strongly than males, and nearly twice as many males fully disagree with the idea. Similarly, the never displaced are more interested in uniforms, while twice as many youth who have been displaced are opposed.

Youth interviewed who support a uniform requirement tend to make three main arguments. First, they feel a uniform requirement levels the playing field for low-income youth, who otherwise may feel ill-dressed and out of place in school and may be discriminated against by teachers who show preferences to wealthy students. Second, some feel it distinguishes students in a way that motivates them to take their studies more seriously. For example, youth in Zafarbod District feel strongly that “students should distinguish themselves by way of their clothing and behaviour,” and “feel free only when they have a uniform.” Pro-uniform youth want a “good design” that suits all wearers. Youth in Ayni District feel, “Those who do not attend [school] might be encouraged to attend school and to wear such a uniform.” They want uniforms to be legally required and students who don’t wear them to be “kicked out of school to teach a lesson to others.” Thirdly, some youth also feel that uniforms elicit respect from others.

Those opposed argue that uniforms are confining and deny students freedom to dress as they choose. They also argue that, in some cases, uniforms promote ill health and more difficulty learning. “Children are forced to wear the skirts and a blouse even in the winter time even though teachers wear coats,” a 16-year-old girl in Dushanbe City (Sino) remarks. One says, “Knowledge does not depend on a uniform.” Some youth who are economically poor also state that the uniform in reality creates an additional problem for them, as they often cannot afford to buy it, and as a result, at times, do not attend school. Some female youth are also opposed because they feel it would make it even more difficult for them to wear a hijab to school.

Nearly half of youth fully oppose permitting students and pupils to wear a hijab at school. Youth in rural areas and female youth are particularly unenthusiastic about the idea (with half of rural youth and 55 per cent of females fully disagreeing with the statement). At the same time, a third of youth fully supports allowing students to wear hijabs in school. Secondary-education youth are less in favour than primary-educated, while tertiary-educated are the most conciliatory. Youth who feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict are also somewhat more conciliatory, with less than half of them (44 per cent) fully disagreeing with allowing the hijabs, compared with more than half of non-conflict-affected youth (53 per cent).

Youth in Somoniyon, Rudaki, who are also proponents of school uniforms simply say, “The hijab doesn’t match the [school] uniform,” while others among them say, “It doesn’t impede anything. We are not against it.” Males and females in a focus group discussion in the rural village of Shurobi in Hisor District are split on the subject of uniforms, with males pro and females con. The females are strictly against the prohibition against the hijab and say, “Some female students have very good performance and want to continue their education, but they are not allowed to attend school in hijab, and sometimes teachers jeer at them. Meanwhile, parents do not allow their daughters to go out to school without the hijab. It’s not the uniform that should distinguish students from others” [as the boys believe].
Disputes over wearing the hijab in school reflect wider religious tensions within the society, including disputes over the reach of conservative Islam. An 18-year-old male in rural Vanj District, for example, expresses concern over “inappropriate dressing in public areas” and the “excessive influence of religious education.”

**Figure 26.** “How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about changes that could be made to the Tajikistan education system?” Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan.

**Statements**
1. Increase teacher salaries to motivate their interest in and responsibility for students
2. Increase student stipends, especially for low-income students
3. Provide free public transportation to students to and from school
4. Improve regulation and oversight of the quota system
5. There should be special requirements to wear school/university uniforms
6. Students/pupils who choose to should be permitted to wear a hijab at school/university

**Answers**

1. 
   - Fully agree: 88.5%
   - Somewhat agree: 6.5%
   - Somewhat disagree: 1.3%
   - Fully disagree: 0.8%
   - I don’t know: 0.3%

2. 
   - Fully agree: 88.4%
   - Somewhat agree: 5.3%
   - Somewhat disagree: 0.8%
   - Fully disagree: 0.1%
   - I don’t know: 0.1%

3. 
   - Fully agree: 86.9%
   - Somewhat agree: 5.3%
   - Somewhat disagree: 4.3%
   - Fully disagree: 0.3%
   - I don’t know: 0.2%

4. 
   - Fully agree: 79.3%
   - Somewhat agree: 12.3%
   - Somewhat disagree: 5.7%
   - Fully disagree: 0.8%
   - I don’t know: 0.1%

5. 
   - Fully agree: 75.5%
   - Somewhat agree: 16.2%
   - Somewhat disagree: 3.6%
   - Fully disagree: 1.5%
   - I don’t know: 1.6%

6. 
   - Fully agree: 45.1%
   - Somewhat agree: 9.7%
   - Somewhat disagree: 8.6%
   - Fully disagree: 3.4%
   - I don’t know: 2.1%
Youth satisfaction with Tajikistan’s education reform

When it comes to youth opinions about national education reforms, more than a quarter of youth say they don’t know anything or enough about education reforms to give an opinion, as shown in Table 30. Urban youth are a bit more informed than rural youth and more strongly agree that reform efforts have led to improvements in education quality. A very large portion of female youth (over a third) claims to be uninformed about education reform. Among those who say they do have an opinion, females’ views are more favourable than those of males.

Younger respondents have a slightly more favourable view of education reforms, corresponding with increased awareness and dissatisfaction among secondary- and professional-educated youth, compared with those having primary or basic education. Although tertiary-educated youth are the most likely to say reforms have led to education improvements, they are also the most likely to be dissatisfied.

Youth with a job are more likely to have an opinion about education reforms, and when they do, to be more critical than youth without a job. A similar pattern can be seen with youth who feel their education has been negatively affected by conflict. Youth with a history of displacement have a particularly low opinion of education reforms coupled with a low degree of awareness. Dropouts and youth who temporarily stopped their education also have a lower opinion of reforms compared with their counterparts, while many are not very aware of reforms.

Overall, among youth who know something about education reform efforts, there is substantial appreciation for progress. However, there is much room for expanding youth knowledge about these efforts, particularly among females, those who have been displaced and those who have stopped school permanently or temporarily.

A 22-year-old working male living in Kurgan-Tyube who left school after nine years of study says, “When I studied in school it was a horror. All school desks and chairs were broken. We did not have conditions for study. Now it is better; schools have computers. Year after year, it became better.”

Similarly, one youth in Panji Bolo Town in Panj District says, “I think that before, the quality of education was not good, but with the support of the Tajik president, the quality of education is being improved.” Other youth want the pace of progress picked up. A 17-year-old male with disabilities in Panji Bolo town says, “If the education sector and the president pay more attention to youth, young people will study better and be better qualified.” An 18-year-old female with disabilities from the same town agrees, saying, “I want the president, together with the MoE, to change the quality of education.”

Figure 27. “Do you think the national education reforms have been improving the quality of education in Tajikistan?” Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all, by settlement type, sex and dropout)
Government spending on education

Most youth feel that the Tajikistan government is not spending enough on education, with just a quarter approving of current spending levels, as seen in Table 31. As with education reforms, many youth are uninformed about government spending on education, with a third saying they don’t know anything or enough about the subject to provide an opinion.

Knowledge is slightly higher among urban youth and much higher among the tertiary-educated. Both groups feel particularly strongly that the Tajikistan government does not spend enough on education. As shown in Table 31, at least a fifth of urban and tertiary-educated youth fully believe the current spending level is not sufficient.

Females show a similarly worrying degree of lack of awareness about education spending as they do on education reforms, reflected by a much higher rate of “I don’t know” responses as compared with males. It is unclear why females know comparatively little about education spending and reform, but it may indicate that females are much more likely to be left out of discussions in families and society about public policy issues or to feel that those issues are outside their purview. Conflict-affected youth have a relatively lower level of uncertainty about their opinions of government spending, and perhaps counter-intuitively, a better view of its progress than their unaffected peers. The opposite occurs among respondents who have experienced displacement, where those who have not been displaced approve more of the government’s education spending level.

Youth who have not stopped their schooling are much more likely to have some knowledge about education spending and to approve of its level, although as with other youth, less than a third of them fully approve.
Some students say that the current level of spending requires more monitoring and evaluation. A 20-year-old secondary student in Dushanbe City (Sino) says, “The Hukumat allocates money, but no one knows how the money is spent.” At the same time, other youth feel the money is often clearly misspent and/or poorly monitored in their area. For example, some youth in Panjakent Town say, “Allocated funds do not fully reach schools. Not all of the computers allocated for school reach their destination. They bring four computers to school... in order to demonstrate that they equipped the school with computers, ...but the rest will be used or sold by the head of the town. The province administration decides how to distribute them.”

Other youth in the Panjakent Town, however, feel that “the government has been providing great support to the education sector and school, including computers and Internet. In comparison with previous years, schools and the education sector have been improving, and school management has been gradually improving.” Disagreement on the state of progress is common across the country. For example, a 22-year-old male in the village of Vanj in GBAO says, “The quality of education in Tajikistan is very low presently because classes are not conducted properly in schools.” A 20-year-old colleague responds, “Anyway, education quality in different parts of the country has been improving every year because Tajikistan is a young country, and it has still been reforming its education policy. Schools have been provided with computers already, which is also a firm step towards modernizing with the latest techniques and technology.” As previously detailed, many youth give this and other progress mixed reviews, although most are generally supportive of efforts thus far.

Youth also debate the pros and cons of private education and increasing education costs. Some feel that if paying more brings better quality, it is a good thing. A 29-year-old male in Dushanbe, with eight years of education says, “If the quality of education will increase along with its cost, I’m for it!” Other youth in Dushanbe say, “In private school, we pay for education and the quality is much better.” One young person in Dushanbe further argues, “It is necessary to increase tuition fees to the extent that schools can meet their financial needs themselves – to purchase inventory, teaching materials, computers and so on. Universities could also offer students who do well after they begin university free or reduced tuition as an incentive.”

Still others fear that rising costs will make getting an education even harder for those who can least afford it. A 16-year-old female in Dushanbe City with nine years of education says, “Many poor youth already cannot get education, and they would face more difficulties paying for education if costs go up.”

**Figure 28.** “Do you think the government spends enough money on ensuring quality education for youth?”
Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all, by settlement type, sex and dropout)
Key findings: Learning processes and systems

- Over two thirds of youth fully agree that their teachers are well qualified to teach their courses. At the same time, youth believe many schools badly lack teachers, especially specialists and particularly due to low salaries.

- Most youth say their teachers show interest in their progress, particularly those with primary, basic or secondary education.

- About three quarters of youth surveyed agree to some extent that at least half of their teachers engage students individually and/or in groups in each or every other class. At the same time, a quarter of youth disagree, while 82 per cent say they are ready and willing to participate in more interactive teaching approaches.

- About a fifth of respondents report corruption occurring to some degree in the form of needing to give money or other benefits to teachers/lecturers in order to earn a good grade, particularly in urban settings, where youth report the need to make payments or give other benefits to their instructors more than twice as often as youth in rural areas.

- About three quarters of youth agree to some degree that the grading process is transparent and fair, although older and tertiary-educated youth are more critical.

- Parent-student-teacher consultations seem to be working reasonably well for more than three quarters of the sample interviewed.

- About three quarters of youth feel to some degree that a system should be put in place for pupils/students to register complaints and make suggestions anonymously; urban, older and tertiary-education youth are most likely to support this.

- Youth widely agree with the following changes to the education system, with more than three quarters of youth fully agreeing with each:
  - increase teacher salaries to motivate their interest in and responsibility for students;
  - increase student stipends, especially for low-income students;
  - provide free public transportation to students to and from school;
  - improve regulation and oversight of the quota system;
  - enact special requirements to wear school/university uniforms, ensuring the requirement does not become a further deterrent to the economically poorest students.

- Nearly a half of youth fully oppose permitting students and pupils to wear a hijab at school, with youth in rural areas and females particularly opposed. A third of youth, however, fully support allowing students to wear hijabs in school, and youth with tertiary education are particularly conciliatory.

- About 42 per cent of Tajikistan’s youth agree that education reform has led to improvements in education quality. Large proportions of youth, however, say they are uninformed about education reform, particularly female youth and youth in rural areas.

- Most youth feel that the Tajikistan government is not spending enough on education, with just a quarter overall approving of current spending levels. As with education reform, many are uninformed, with a third saying they do not know anything or enough about government spending on education.
3. RESULTS

Youth membership in groups and organizations

Participation of youth in groups and organizations is very limited, with approximately 8 per cent of youth reporting that they are involved in one or more. About 71 per cent of the groups that youth provide further information about are affiliated with a school. As shown in Table 32, most of these are youth clubs and sports groups. Some youth are also involved in student, pupil or school governments.

Table 10. Types of groups and organizations youth are involved in Tajikistan (by frequency*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of group or organization</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth club</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports group</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate club</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School self-government</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student self-government</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco club</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National/patriotic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Cross</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of tutorial council</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil self-government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on the responses of 45 of the 65 youth surveyed, and how often they claimed to be part of one or more groups or organizations.

More research is needed on young people’s interest and involvement in groups and organizations. Many participants in this study call for the organization of more extra-curricular opportunities, including youth group and club activities. It is important to recognize, however that, since most young people are not involved in groups and organizations, work to expand opportunities for youth participation in a variety of aspects of life must consider approaches that go beyond this model. The Council of Europe notes the need for more opportunities for participation by unaffiliated youth (Siurala, 2000; Williamson, 2002). Given the low level of computer and Internet access in Tajikistan, young people may not yet be widely exploring other forms of participation and expression, including through online social and advocacy networks. However, some may be, and many young people are clearly very interested in more opportunities to use new technologies, including in school. As previously noted, youth emphasize the need for more space and facilities at school for extra-curricular activities, and some would like to see the establishment of youth centres, including for non-formal education and social interaction.

Some youth feel that special efforts are needed to engage girls who have dropped out of school, including for marriage, in youth groups and activities. An 18-year-old female in Panji Bolo town suggests, for example, that girls in early marriages be provided with opportunities to learn sewing and embroidery as one way to bridge the gaps in their education (see the text box, Education barriers for female youth).
Student government activity

Either student government bodies are more common in urban settings, or urban respondents are simply more aware that they exist, as indicated in Table 33. The presence of such bodies seems to be higher in tertiary schools, judging from the pattern of response by youth grouped by educational level completed. Conflict-affected, displaced, dropouts and absentees have the highest level of responses stating they don’t know about student government activity (ranging from 21 to 33 per cent of them saying this). The bodies are generally seen to be effective by two thirds of respondents that say they are active in their school or university, without differences among subgroups of youth.

Figure 29. “Is there an active student government body in your school/university?”
Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan

![Figure 29](image)

Youth involvement in education decision-making

Less than a third of youth feel there are enough opportunities for them to participate in education decision-making in or out of schools, as seen in Table 34. Another quarter feel there are “somewhat” enough, indicating that there could be more. More than a fifth of youth feel there are not enough opportunities to participate. Another fifth of youth further register no opinion on whether they have enough opportunities to participate, likely representing lack of exposure to a range of possibilities and/or lack of personal interest.

Urban youth more often have an opinion on the prevalence of opportunities for participation and are a bit less likely to feel there are not enough. Meanwhile, rural and younger youth more often feel there are not enough. Similarly, more educated respondents report having enough opportunities to have their voice heard. This group also reports the least uncertainty about responding. Dropouts both show less awareness and are more reluctant to say there are enough opportunities to have their voice heard.

Some youth do not speak out and attempt to participate in education debates because they fear reprisals from teachers, administrators and others in society, who youth fear might then seek to limit their opportunities in response to criticism.

Some working youth who study in Khujand agree that they need to be more active in speaking out to improve education quality. A 17-year-old secondary student says, “Youth should learn how to express their opinions in appropriate ways.” Others add, “Youth must also perform well to improve education quality practically.” A 16-year-old working secondary student further asserts, “Youth are ready and wish to improve education quality in Tajikistan, but their voice is not heard. Youth have many ideas and wishes, but they do not have opportunities to implement them in practice. We hope that everything will change in the near future.”
As described in the section on ‘Youth education quality priorities and solutions’, many youth across the country agree that youth have limited say in various aspects of their education experience and would like more. They outline many possible steps forward. For example, a 17-year-old female secondary school student in Panji Bolo town says, “NGOs and state structures working with youth must conduct seminars and meetings with youth [on education issues].” An 18-year-old female from the same town agrees, adding, “Youth must participate in the adoption of laws,” while a 13-year-old male suggests, “More focus groups like the ones conducted for this study should be organized so that each youth will be active and the quality of education will be better.”

Many youth emphasize that improving education begins with and must involve youth. An 18-year-old male in Rasht District says, “First of all, young people should have a will to seek solutions to education and other problems. Everything is possible if there is a will to solve problems.” Others agree, saying, “Young people should always cooperate with their families, local authorities, education department, the youth committee and other governmental and non-governmental organizations and unions. Youth should propose more plans and projects on education quality and should ask their school administration, education department and local authorities to create enabling conditions for education in schools.”

Youth in Faizabad suggest holding “public meetings of school children with school directors, university rectors and representatives of the MoE, where young people could express their opinion about the education system in Tajikistan and make recommendations for improvements.” They also endorse active student government structures, suggesting “a system, like one working in some schools in Dushanbe City, where schoolchildren elect a school president and ministers, giving them an opportunity to influence education through their representatives.” Youth in Panjakent Town add, “It is necessary to establish relations between the school administration and parents’ committee and school units (students associations, women’s committees, girls’ council and so forth).” Other youth suggestions for youth action to improve education quality in Tajikistan are listed in the section, ‘Youth education quality priorities and solutions’.

Figure 30. “Do youth have enough opportunities to contribute to education decision-making in school/university and in other policymaking forums?” Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all, by settlement type, age group, education level and dropout)

Key findings: Youth participation

- Participation of youth in groups and organizations is very limited, with approximately 8 per cent of youth reporting that they are involved in one or more.
• About 71 per cent of the groups about which youth provide further information are affiliated with a school.
• Most of the groups and organizations that youth say they are involved in are youth clubs and sports groups; some youth are also involved in student, pupil or school governments.
• More research is needed on young people’s interest and involvement in groups and organizations. Work to expand opportunities for youth participation in a variety of aspects of life must consider approaches that go beyond this model. The Council of Europe notes the need for more opportunities for participation by unaffiliated youth. Tajikistan youth are also interested in computer and Internet technology and a range of extra-curricular activities, including in youth centres.
• Only a third of youth say that a student government body is functioning in their school or university, but nearly a quarter say they don’t know. More student government activity appears to be taking place in urban areas and at the secondary and tertiary levels.
• Less than a third of youth feel there are enough opportunities for youth to participate in education decision-making in or out of schools, and another quarter feel there are “somewhat” enough, indicating that there could be more. More than a fifth of youth feel there are not enough opportunities to participate, while another fifth of youth register no opinion.
• Overall, there is much room for improvement in youth participation in education decision-making and other forums and activities.
THE POLITICIZATION OF EDUCATION

Youth involved in the research design wanted to explore the extent to which their peers feel that military conflict has impacted education quality in general in Tajikistan and for individual youth personally. They also asked whether military training should be removed from the curriculum and assessed the level of trust youth have in education decision-makers to deliver better education quality for all students.

Impact of military conflict on education quality

Over two thirds of youth in Tajikistan fully or somewhat agree that military conflict has had a negative impact on education quality in general in the country, as seen in Table 35. Urban youth are more convinced of this than rural youth, although rural youth also feel strongly about it and more often say they are “not sure.”

Similarly, younger youth feel strongly about the negative impacts of military conflict on education quality, but more often do not register an opinion compared with older youth. Tertiary-educated young people feel very strongly that Tajikistan’s education quality has been hurt by military conflict, with more than 90 per cent agreeing with this to some degree. Youth who feel their education has been directly and negatively affected by conflict hold similar opinions to tertiary-educated youth and sharply contrast with non-conflict-affected youth, who see the connection, but less so.

Youth in Dushanbe City state, “Yes, the civil war has certainly impacted the development of our country.” For some young people, it meant loss of education with lasting impacts, despite the cessation of conflict. “My sister still suffers today from the consequences of the civil war, as she was forced to leave school,” a secondary school student in Dushanbe says. Meanwhile, a 13-year-old Uzbek youth in Faizabad says, “War certainly influenced those who were studying during the civil war, but it doesn’t influence education now.” Youth in Panjakent Town say, “Education quality depends very much on the political environment. Teachers were afraid to come out of their homes and to go to school during the period of instability. Classes were not conducted in time. But at present, we have stability, education quality has been improving, and Tajikistan has been developing. At the same time, youth in urban areas have more opportunities, and education quality remains lower in rural areas.”

Figure 31. “Military conflict has negatively affected education quality in Tajikistan.”

Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan

![Figure showing percentages of youth agreement](image-url)
When asked whether military conflict has negatively affected the quality of the respondent’s education personally, just less than one third of youth believe that their education was negatively affected to some degree, as shown in Table 36. Males more often feel the impact of conflict on their education, and up to 40 per cent of older youth and 50 per cent of tertiary-educated youth feel a direct negative impact. Displaced respondents also more often report feeling directly affected, with about half agreeing that they have been, while absentees differ more modestly from non-absentees.

Figure 32. “Do you agree that military conflict has negatively affected the quality of your education?”
Percentages of youth agreement in Tajikistan (all, by settlement type, sex and absenteeism)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement Type</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not absent</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Military training in school

The majority of respondents think that military training should not be dropped from the school curriculum, as shown in Table 37. Interestingly, females are slightly more supportive of military training in school, although they are also more likely than males to say they are “not sure” about their feelings on the issue. As young people’s education level increases, so does their reluctance to drop military training from the curriculum. Youth with primary or basic education are the least likely among their counterparts to have an opinion on this topic.

Youth who have dropped out are less likely to have an opinion. Among those who do, they are less likely than non-dropouts to say military training should be eliminated. At the same time, absentees are just as likely as non-absentees to have an opinion, but more often feel that it should be dropped (more than a third of them, compared with more than a quarter of non-absentees).
Youth confidence in education authorities

Youth indicate a substantial amount of trust in, and appreciation for the work that Tajikistan’s MoE does to provide good quality education for all students, without significant differences in youth opinions in urban and rural settings. As shown in Table 38, although more than a third of youth feel the MoE is already doing a great job (echoing generally high youth ratings of education quality, noted previously), a large proportion (over 40 per cent) say that the MoE can do a better job and that they trust education officials to do so. Very few youth say they have no opinion on the subject.

Males are a bit more approving than females, who are again, less likely to register an opinion. Conflict-affected youth and absentees are significantly less enthusiastic than their counterparts in their trust of the MoE’s willingness and ability to provide good quality education for all students. Meanwhile, dropouts are just marginally cooler in their assessment of the MoE’s performance and are less likely to have an opinion than their non-dropout counterparts.

Overall, most Tajikistan youth have confidence in the MoE but call on education officials to do a better job at improving education quality at all levels for all learners. Education authorities should understand that they have a significant window of opportunity to take constructive action to make improvements with substantial popular support and a high level of youth satisfaction. Notably, however, about 15 per cent of respondents already issue a vote of no confidence. This proportion exceeds (and is nearly twice as much as) the 9 cent of youth who rate education quality in Tajikistan as “somewhat poor” or “poor.” Thus, youth confidence in the willingness and/or ability of government to provide better services can begin to flag even before youth perceive education quality as subpar. Given the high value youth place on education in Tajikistan and the strong level of satisfaction that already exists, youth will likely continue to have high expectations for maintaining and improving education quality in the areas that require urgent attention.
Figure 34. “Do you trust the Ministry of Education to provide good quality education at all levels and for all students?” Percentages of youth responses in Tajikistan (all, by sex, dropout and absenteeism)

Key findings: The politicization of education

- Over two thirds of youth in Tajikistan fully or somewhat agree that military conflict has negatively affected education quality overall. One third also say their own education quality was negatively affected by military conflict. Urban, older and tertiary-educated youth feel particularly strongly about the negative impact of military conflict on education quality in Tajikistan.

- Although nearly a third of youth would like to see military training removed from the curriculum, most youth (about 57 per cent) do not feel that it should be removed. Males are more likely than females to agree that military training should be removed from the curriculum.

- Tajikistan education authorities have an opportunity to work rapidly to improve education quality for young people while youth have a high level of confidence in the MoE to deliver better services. More than a third of youth trust the MoE to deliver high quality education for all students and feel that it is already doing a good job, while more than 40 per cent trust that it can and will do a better job.
3. RESULTS

Youth education quality priorities and solutions

In a final, open survey question, youth were asked to name and talk about their top priority for improving education quality in Tajikistan. The spread of youth responses is wide, and their priorities are diverse. The two priorities most frequently cited represent just under 12 per cent each of the responses overall. The top 10 most frequently cited priorities, however, amount to 64 per cent of the responses, as depicted in Table 39.

Youth are very concerned about their motivation to study. Most frequently, they prioritize the need for young people to apply themselves diligently to achieving high education goals, including the need to complete secondary school. Some call for unity among students and for youth to cooperate well with peers, teachers and parents in and out of school.

Teaching issues are also key priorities. Youth call for better qualified teachers about as much as they do for stronger youth efforts to study well. Youth say they need more specialists and want teachers to be better trained. If taken together with other teaching priorities listed in the top 10 in Table 39, youth cite teaching issues most frequently as their priorities for action (with more than a quarter of youth prioritizing improvements in teaching). Many say that there are simply not enough teachers, let alone highly qualified ones, and they want more modern, interactive and interesting teaching methods. They call on government to pay teachers on time and to have teachers pass tests to ensure their skills are top notch, including using technology more in lessons. Many ask for more foreign and domestic language instructors (such as for English, Tajik and Uzbek), and for teachers to follow ethical principles, including ending corruption.

Youth further prioritize a range of learning environment improvements, with an emphasis on modernizing facilities. As previously described, many want the basics like heating and electricity functioning in school. Youth also highlight the need for better technology in school, particularly computers and Internet service. Many also plead for more and better free or low-cost books.

Youth also prioritize expanding course choices, with calls for more technology classes (particularly computer science) and language courses (particularly English, but also Tajik and Uzbek). When the issue of adding new courses is taken together with calls for specific improvements to course content, changes to courses becomes the fourth most frequently cited youth education priority (with 8 per cent of youth citing related issues).

Many also stress the need for low- or no-cost education and/or financial support and incentives to individual youth and their families to ensure young people’s ability to achieve their education goals.

Table 11. Ten most frequently cited youth priorities for improved education quality in Tajikistan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Priority</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Youth must study, behave well and complete school</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improve teacher qualifications and training (more specialists are needed, in particular)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Improve and modernize the conditions of schools and universities (furniture, electricity, heating, water, libraries, sports facilities, laboratories, food, renovations)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Introduce new technology in school (computers, Internet)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. More, better quality, free and low cost books should be provided</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. More courses should be offered (particularly technology, domestic and foreign languages, culture and science)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Decrease education costs; provide more financial support and incentives to learners and families</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As highlighted in Table 40, the largest proportion of youth priorities fall under the domain ‘learning processes and systems’, with about 46 per cent referring to these topics. ‘Learning environment’ topics come next, with about 25 per cent focused on this education quality domain. Youth emphasize ‘youth participation’ next, representing 11 per cent of the priorities named, followed by 8 per cent focused on ‘learning content’ and 5 per cent on ‘learning outcomes’. Smaller percentages say they don’t know, don’t care or that they do not see problems they would like to change.

Despite differences in the frequency of domains prioritized, youth make clear from other findings of the study (consultation, focus groups, survey topics) that all of the education quality domains are intertwined and interact to produce quality education.

### Table 12. Tajikistan youth priorities for education quality improvement by domain*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education quality domain</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning processes and systems</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth participation</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning content</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t care</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no problems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimates are based on data for Tajikistan Youth Survey question 39a, where responses are recoded by domain, including some shared domains, for a total of 990 recoded responses without re-weighting.

Although they don’t make the top 10 most frequently cited priorities for change, many youth also highlight the need for improved access to education for girls. In some cases, they are calling on girls to take more interest in school and to complete their secondary education. In others, they suggest that girls’ education be achieved by avoiding early marriage. They especially call on parents not to force girls into marriage and to support their education. They also call on girls to express their interests and to study hard.

Many youth also prioritize a wide range of regulatory, financial and legal changes. They call for improved monitoring and supervision of schools, teachers and students, improvements to the education system through education reform, increased government spending on education and new education laws and regulations, including ensuring girls’ education completion.

Youth suggestions for how their priorities should be met are included among the recommendations outlined below. As for who should undertake the changes, they cite a wide range of actors, and some emphasize that many parties need to be involved. They frequently note the need for government action at both local and central levels,
as well as action by school and university administrators and teachers. They also call on parents to be highly engaged in their children’s learning and to interact regularly with teachers.

One of the most inspiring aspects of the survey results, however, is the list of hundreds of ideas youth respondents provided on a range of things youth can and should be doing to improve the many facets of education quality they prioritize. These ideas represent the voices and energy of thousands of individual youth, each with aspirations for learning and engaging fully in their communities and society. The vast majority constructively calls on their peers to take action. Many encourage their peers to improve themselves individually by studying, and others issue moving calls to help other youth in need, even by filling teaching gaps with skills and talents some youth already have.

In order to achieve a range of education quality objectives in Tajikistan, youth say youth should:

- Study hard and gain knowledge. Read a lot.
- Enjoy learning.
- Attend school, and complete your education, using existing conditions to the best of your ability as they change. Don’t roam the streets, and instead, study. Get a friend to school.
- Develop goals and interests in expertise and professions, and be inspired to achieve them.
- Avoid early marriage.
- Support girls to continue and complete their education.
- Express your interest in education, particularly girls, and try hard to study and learn.
- Try and do your best in any aspect of study and making change.
- Don’t be indifferent or prevent solutions from being found.
- Don’t be afraid to give your opinion; express yourself freely, including your complaints.
- Participate; take initiative; voice your opinion; play key roles; take an active, direct part.
- Participate in referenda. Vote and get involved in the voting processes.
- Organize and hold demonstrations.
- Establish a student union and become involved.
- Work on adopting an education law.
- Observe the situation, and pass your messages to government.
- Know your rights as students and citizens, and fight for them.
- Appeal to and communicate more with teachers, school administrators, heads of university, the MoE, the chairman of the village, the government, and the president with your ideas for change.
- Help increase and engage in cooperation between students and the MoE.
- Support the development of new youth funds for youth education.
- Offer your assistance in implementing education changes. Assist and be among the education monitors.
- Help, show appreciation to and encourage your teachers.
- Call on teachers to teach well; and choose your teachers wisely.
- Listen to your teachers and their ideas for improving your education.
- Cooperate with teachers to make education quality improvements.
- Give your ideas for and feedback on new teaching methods.
- Don’t engage in bribery.
- Speak out against corruption in the education system.
- Take on additional courses and expand your expertise; become good experts.
- Get involved in extra-curricular activities.
- Learn new languages and new technologies.
- Use computers and Internet where they are available.
- Raise money for your school.
Youth perspectives of education quality in Tajikistan: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region

Key findings: Youth priorities and solutions

- Youth priorities for action to improve education quality in Tajikistan are diverse; two priorities most frequently cited represent just under 12 per cent each of the responses overall. The top 10 most frequently cited priorities, however, amount to 64 per cent of the responses.
- Most frequently, youth prioritize the need for young people to apply themselves diligently to achieving high education goals, including completing secondary school.
- Improving teaching quality is a major priority for youth, who call for better qualified teachers about as much as they do for stronger youth efforts to study well. Youth say they need more specialists and want teachers to be better trained.
- If taken together with other teaching priorities listed in the top 10, youth cite teaching issues most frequently as their priorities for action, with more than a quarter of youth prioritizing improvements in teaching.
- Youth further prioritize the modernization of schools and improvement of technology, particularly computer and Internet usage in their courses.
- Although youth most frequently prioritize changes to learning processes and systems and learning environment issues, youth make clear from other findings of the study (consultation, focus groups, survey topics) that all of the education quality domains are intertwined and interact to produce quality education.
- Although they don’t make the top 10 most frequently cited priorities for change, many youth also highlight the need for improved access to education for girls.
- Although youth cite many actors who should be involved in making change, from government to teachers and parents, they offer a compelling and moving list of things youth can and should be doing to improve the many facets of education quality they prioritize.

- Pay more taxes.
- Get involved in renovation processes.
- Help youth develop their independence.
- Listen to your parents, who should be encouraging and supporting your education.
- Listen to your peers, other pupils and students, and their ideas.
- Don’t go abroad for work, particularly males, who do this more frequently.
- Don’t do bad things. Don’t violate school rules. Respect teachers, elders and peers.
- Work together with parents to solve issues.
- Keep what books you have in good condition.
- Gather together to discuss issues and go to the head teacher with them.
- Think about your future, and be responsible for it.
- Support other youth. Youth should be united. Explain education issues to other friends.
- Assist others. Be a good person. Be honest. Live in harmony with others.
- Use the skills you have to teach and engage others: conduct seminars; hold forums to discuss issues; teach others a language you know; inform parents about the need to support young people’s education and improve education quality; tutor your friends and encourage them; help the people with disabilities; study with friends.
- Use your language skills to translate the books youth need.

Some youth say that, while they can give their opinions, at times they feel they have no power or that it is not their role to make some changes, which must be made by others, including government. About 8 per cent say they don’t know what youth should do about their priority issue or have nothing to say. There is much room for further engaging these and other young people about the roles they might play, building on the many ideas and high level of enthusiasm of their peers.
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUBGROUPS OF YOUTH

As described throughout the presentation of study findings, youth hold many differences of opinion according to a range of subgroup experiences. Most frequently, these differences occur between youth in urban and rural areas, those who are more and less educated (primary, secondary and tertiary levels) and males and females. Differences also occur frequently for youth in different age groups, youth with and without a history of absenteeism, dropouts and non-dropouts, and those who do and don’t feel conflict has negatively affected their education personally.

Overall, although youth opinions across all subgroups analyzed trend in largely similar directions, urban, older, more highly educated, female, absentee, dropped-out and conflict-affected youth tend to express their opinions more strongly and/or are somewhat more critical of education quality in Tajikistan than their counterparts. Males and females also hold at times similar but distinct opinions of education quality, reflecting different experiences within Tajikistan’s education system.

Wealth is concentrated in urban areas, as are universities and the students attending them. More youth with jobs sampled are also in urban areas compared with rural areas. Meanwhile, more youth with primary, basic, secondary or professional educations are in rural areas, as are two times as many youth sampled that have permanently or temporarily stopped school.

Youth in urban areas more often rate education quality as somewhat poor or poor, and in general, are more critical of many dimensions of quality. They emphasize the influence of many factors on their ability to achieve their education goals more than rural youth, potentially showing more awareness and/or direct experience of them.

Urban youth are a little less likely to think schools and universities are clean and well maintained, and some urban youth are very dissatisfied with facilities and equipment. Urban youth also issue relatively stronger calls for more and better dormitories and smaller classes. Although reports of not feeling safe and violence in and around school are generally low, they more often come from urban youth, who also more often report personal victimization, weapons in school, a low level of drug use, a moderate level of vandalism and problems with the proximity of beer bars to schools. They also appear more aware of a range of factors contributing to what school-centred violence exists.

Urban youth also more often emphasize that school facilities at times do not address special learning needs, and they complain more often of teacher mistreatment of students. Although rural youth are also interested in changes to their classes, urban youth register stronger support for change in a range of areas, including for more international exchange opportunities, more freedom to choose courses and exams, more non-formal training opportunities and engaging teaching methods and better links to employment opportunities. Urban youth more often feel unprepared for exams and are more heavily affected by teacher corruption, and push especially strongly for an anonymous student reporting mechanism to give feedback on the learning process.

Youth in urban areas further have stronger opinions on nearly all risks of poor quality education surveyed, including increased youth grievances with government and a return to conflict. There is more student government activity reported in urban settings, but urban youth still feel more often than rural youth that there are not enough opportunities for youth participation in education decision-making. Urban youth are generally more informed than youth in rural areas on education reform and government spending on education. They are somewhat more convinced that military conflict has had a negative impact on education quality in Tajikistan, although rural youth also largely agree. Youth in urban areas also more often feel that military conflict has directly and negatively impacted their education. At the same time, and despite their more frequent criticisms of education quality issues, urban youth are more likely to say that reform efforts are producing improvements, while still feeling that not enough money is spent on education.
Despite these many distinctions, youth opinions in rural areas generally coincide with those of urban youth, and the two groups agree on many things. For example, there is no difference between youth in rural and urban areas on their level of trust in the MoE to provide quality education to all students and in feeling that the quota system for university admissions needs more regulation and monitoring. Rural youth do, however, distinguish themselves in several notable respects.

Youth in rural areas appear to have more problems with inadequate facilities and equipment, particularly lacking cafeterias and health spots. Both rural and urban youth note problems with heating and electricity, but youth in rural areas emphasize these problems a bit more. Rural youth also emphasize lack of parental and/or spousal support more strongly than urban youth, as a key difficulty they face in getting an education. They more often feel just ‘somewhat’ prepared for exams and are comparatively more interested in life skills development in school. Rural youth stress the risk of outmigration of youth from Tajikistan resulting from poor education quality, and they feel particularly strongly that the government is not spending enough on education. Rural youth are also particularly against allowing students to wear a hijab in school.

Many of the opinions of tertiary-educated youth are in line with those of urban-based youth, at least in part reflecting the prevalence of university students in urban areas. Along with secondary- and professional-educated youth, tertiary-educated youth emphasize more factors as important to achieving their desired level of education, although financial means is especially important to youth who have attained tertiary education. Secondary-, professional- and tertiary-educated youth also more often feel that their education is worse than that of their parents’ compared with youth with primary or basic education. Tertiary-educated youth more frequently report problems with the location of schools, school cleanliness and maintenance, lack of dormitories, smoking in school and beer bars near school. Meanwhile, they report the most access to health spots and counsellors.

Tertiary-educated youth further register stronger opinions on the potential risks of poor quality education. They are more likely to complain about teacher corruption and less likely to say that teachers assess them fairly and show interest in their progress. They particularly support the idea of an anonymous student complaints mechanism. Tertiary-educated youth sampled are the most likely to hold a job and to see the relevance of their education to the work they are doing. At the same time, they especially want to see better links between education and the job market and to improve life skills development. Tertiary-educated youth sampled further feel particularly strongly that government education spending is insufficient. They recognize more opportunities for participation in education decision-making and are more tolerant about allowing youth to wear a hijab in school than their less-educated peers. They strongly feel the negative impacts of military conflict on education quality in general, and on their education personally. They are the most knowledgeable about education reform and show the highest proportions of both dissatisfaction and satisfaction with education reform progress, compared with less-educated youth, who give an opinion less often. Interestingly, as education level increases, support for the continuation of military training in school also increases, while primary- and basic-educated youth are less likely to have an opinion on the subject.

Youth with jobs sampled are also most likely to have tertiary education. They generally feel similarly as those without jobs, but tend to highlight the presence of violence in school a bit more and are somewhat more critical of the cleanliness and maintenance of schools, lack of cafeterias, smoking in school and teacher mistreatment. Like the tertiary-educated, they more often have opinions on education reform and are more critical of progress compared with their unemployed peers, although many also affirm progress.

Youth with primary or basic education make up the largest proportion of the Tajikistan survey sample, and in many ways appear the most optimistic about education quality. Although they register many issues that need to be addressed, they are most likely to say they feel their education quality is better than their parents’ and less frequently call for changes to their classes. At the same time, they particularly lack health spots and, along with secondary- and professional-educated youth, more often report lack of parental and/or spousal support and marriage as barriers to getting an education – key issues highlighted by dropouts for why they left school permanently.
or temporarily. Although reports are infrequent, basic- and primary-educated youth also report more experiences of bullying and of sexual harassment in school.

Younger youth aged 13 to 18 are correspondingly a bit more satisfied with the impacts of education reform, while older youth aged 19 to 24 more often rate education quality as average, somewhat poor or poor. Younger youth see negative impacts of military conflict on education quality, but more often say they are ‘not sure’ about this. Meanwhile, younger youth would also like to have more opportunities to participate in education decision-making. Worryingly, younger youth are more likely to skip school than older youth and to cite violence and feeling unwelcome by peers in school as barriers to getting an education.

Older youth, on the other hand, mirror some of the tendencies of more-educated, urban-based young people, but not entirely. They more often say that education is worse than their parents’ was and are more critical of facilities and equipment, the lack of heat and electricity, school cleanliness and the lack of dormitories. Older youth more often feel that marriage is a barrier to getting an education, and spousal support is particularly important for a small portion of older youth. They more often have jobs and see the relevance of education to their work. They report more teacher corruption, are less happy with the fairness of assessment and especially want an anonymous complaints mechanism set up for students. Older youth also more often disagree that parent-teacher-student consultations work well. More also feel a direct negative impact of military conflict on their education quality and that poor education quality can lead to low self-esteem and problems for various youth subgroups.

Similarities and differences between males and females are some of the most interesting and troubling findings emerging from the survey. Both males and females interviewed are widely interested in more education than they have already attained, and both appear to face significant barriers in completing their education. Many males appear to be missing from the sample, which may be a reflection of the high level of outmigration by young males in search of work reported by other sources. It is unclear how much education these males were able and wanted to complete prior to departure and what education they obtain while abroad. Females are more likely to have dropped out of school, sometimes temporarily, than males. Female dropouts are more often from rural areas and most often cite lack of parental and/or spousal support for their education as a key factor in their withdrawal. They are also more likely than males to say they left school due to marriage. Other sources further show that females are far less likely than males to attain tertiary education.

At the same time, males are much more likely to be absent from school without an accepted excuse, and most absenteeism is occurring among primary- or basic-educated youth, despite these youth showing more optimism in general about most domains of education quality surveyed. Since serial absenteeism is known to be a precursor of dropping out in many societies, the significant level of absenteeism youth report within this earlier stage of the education cycle in Tajikistan is not a healthy sign.

Males and females consistently name similar concerns about education quality, but their emphasis differs in many areas, and females voice their opinions more strongly than males in many respects. Female youth more often name other responsibilities for family and work as a key factor in achieving their education goals and are more likely to say that their education quality is worse than their parents’. Males, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of parental support, academic achievement and programme availability in attaining their education goals. Among other issues, females also highlight the inadequacy of facilities and equipment, lack of health spots and counsellors and crowded classrooms more than males. Their calls are stronger for better literature, computer and Internet access, extra-curricular activities, non-formal training and more engaging teaching methods. They call for more regulation and monitoring of the quota system and report teacher corruption and the existence of violence in school more often than males, although males more often say they have experienced violence personally. For their part, males report hazardous materials, the need for dormitories and the problem of smoking in schools a bit more. Males are also more likely to feel their education was directly negatively affected by military conflict.
Despite females’ keen engagement on many issues, they appear more disengaged from, or left out of, education policy discussion than males. They are less likely to have opinions on education reform progress, government spending and whether they trust the MoE to provide good quality education for all. Given the distinct difficulties females face in completing their education, and feeling more strongly that poor quality education can lead to deeper problems for female and other youth groups, males are somewhat more approving of MoE work on education reform. These differences in part correspond with the higher proportion of males among the tertiary-educated, who are more likely to know about education policy issues. Thus, the relative absence of tertiary-educated females may be creating a gap in their involvement in the education policy discussion despite their interest and concern for education quality issues. There is also clearly much room to inform and engage youth in primary, basic and secondary school on education policy concerns.

The opinions of absentees, dropouts and conflict-affected youth are correlated with one another, and these youth appear to have similar experiences. Absentees are more likely to be dropouts, and vice versa. Conflict-affected youth are more likely to be absentees, and absentees are more likely to say they feel military conflict has directly negatively affected their education. They are all more likely to rate education quality as average compared with their respective counterparts, and frequently display more cynicism about a range of issues. Each of these groups is more critical of a number of learning environment issues, including the adequacy of facilities, lack of heat and electricity, cafeterias and health spots, and is more likely to report smoking, violence and vandalism. They more often say they face difficulties getting an education, including as a result of teacher mistreatment for absentees, marriage for dropouts and an inability to study in their mother tongue. They voice less trust in the MoE to provide good quality education for all.

Non-absentees and non-dropouts, on the other hand, show more concern over the consequences of poor quality education, such as possible health and development impacts. They also register more interest in a variety of possible improvements. Non-conflict-affected youth show more knowledge of education policy issues and student governance. In the Tajikistan context, youth whose education has been directly affected by conflict and who feel particularly disaffected with education as absentees and dropouts are still very interested in attaining more education and care about quality issues, but they seem to be less engaged in steps to improve it.

Youth with a history of displacement share many of the same response patterns as absentees, dropouts and conflict-affected youth, but they less frequently emphasize their concerns over particular areas of education quality. The displaced surveyed are more likely to have dropped out of school permanently or temporarily, but not mainly due to displacement. Instead, they cite lack of parental and/or spousal support as a key barrier. Displaced youth are also more likely than never displaced youth to feel that their education has been negatively affected by military conflict. They know less about education reform, student governments and are more likely to say that poor quality education contributes to youth disappointment with government and a return to conflict.

All of these youth subgroup distinctions and those not addressed in this analysis, such as regional differences and those based on disability, ethnicity and religious affiliation, deserve further research and attention. Gender gaps in education are particularly pressing, where economic, political, social and cultural issues must be further analysed and addressed to ensure both females and males are findings the opportunities they need to attain their education goals.

Key findings: Similarities and differences between subgroups of youth

- Although youth opinions across all subgroups analysed trend in largely similar directions, urban, older, more highly educated, female, absentee, dropped-out and conflict-affected youth tend to express their opinions more strongly and/or are somewhat more critical of education quality in Tajikistan than their counterparts.
- Youth in urban areas more often rate education quality somewhat poor or poor, and in general, are more critical of many dimensions of quality.
• Many of the opinions of tertiary-educated youth are in line with those of urban-based youth, at least in part reflecting the prevalence of university students in urban areas.

• Youth with primary or basic education make up the largest proportion of the Tajikistan survey sample, and in many ways, appear the most optimistic about education quality. Worryingly however, younger youth are more likely to skip school than older youth and to cite violence and feeling unwelcome by peers in school as barriers to getting an education.

• Similarities and differences between males and females are some of the most interesting and troubling finds from the survey. Both males and females interviewed are widely interested in more education than they have already attained, and both appear to face significant barriers in completing their education. Many males appear to be missing from the sample, which may be a reflection of the high level of outmigration by young males in search of work reported by other sources. Females are more likely to have dropped out of, or temporarily suspended school than males. At the same time, males are much more likely to be absent from school without an accepted excuse.

• The opinions of absentees, dropouts and conflict-affected youth are correlated with one another, and these youth appear to have similar experiences. They are all more likely to rate education quality as average compared with their respective counterparts, and frequently display more cynicism about a range of issues. In the Tajikistan context, youth whose education has been directly affected by conflict and who feel particularly disaffected with education as absentees and dropouts are still very interested in attaining more education and care about quality issues, but they seem to be less engaged in steps to improve it.

• Youth with a history of displacement share many of the same response patterns as absentees, dropouts and conflict-affected youth, but they less frequently emphasize their concerns over particular areas of education quality.

• All of these youth subgroup distinctions and those not addressed in this analysis such as regional differences and those based on disability, ethnicity and religious affiliation deserve further research and attention, gender gaps in particular.
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Tajikistan’s youth widely appreciate national efforts to overcome years of dramatic political, economic and social upheaval and rebuild its education system. Gains for youth across the country are uneven, however, and much remains to be done. Young people want to meet or exceed international education standards, and they want to be an active part of the solutions. They want a modern education system that supports their roles and lives in contemporary society. They emphasize the need to improve teaching quality, education facilities and learning approaches with increased use of computer technology. Young people express pride in the society they and others are building and place a high level of responsibility on themselves to do their part by studying well and taking more concerted action to effect change. They want to see more efforts to curb corruption, increase equity in education and address the financial and other barriers many youth face in getting an education. Their visions and ideas are near- and long-term, as they seek to reduce the factors for widespread outmigration and help young people complete their schooling in order to sustain a highly skilled, healthy and dynamic population well into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for improving education quality for youth in Tajikistan are derived from the youth survey and focus group results, and reflect the substance and diversity of youth suggestions. See also the Tajikistan youth advocacy statement.

General:

- Improve the quality of teaching. Ensure teachers are well paid, receive regular training and utilize interactive and engaging teaching methods. Ensure students have access to well-trained specialists, including computer science, sciences, mathematics and foreign languages. Teachers should be fully informed about, trained in and equipped and empowered to implement education reforms. Education authorities should work together with youth and parents to regularly monitor and evaluate teaching quality and support improvements on an ongoing basis.

- End teacher and other forms of corruption in schools, such as requiring students to pay bribes to instructors in order to get good grades and to access the presidential quota system and other education services. Learning processes should be regularly monitored and evaluated by MoE officials, with further input and review by other areas of government and the public. Anonymous student complaints systems should be established in schools and universities to report corruption and other issues. Youth should also desist from participating in corruption.

- Improve young people’s learning environment with an emphasis on modernizing facilities, equipment and approaches to learning. Continue to expand computer and Internet access in all schools and for all learners, ensuring sufficient electricity to power the technology. Provide more up-to-date, low-cost or free and relevant textbooks in necessary languages. Ensure all learning facilities have consistent access to heat and electricity. Establish and/or continue to improve school libraries, sports and dining halls, laboratories, dormitories, health spots and materials and equipment for people with disabilities and other special-needs learners. Increase student access to school-based counselling. Research and develop youth-driven solutions to address smoking, drug and alcohol use among youth, and violence in and around schools, including inter-ethnic and religious conflict.

- Revise curricula with an emphasis on increasing the use of technology in the learning process and expanding opportunities for domestic and foreign language learning, vocational training and non-formal learn-
ing. Ensure textbooks and other learning materials are in line with new curriculum requirements and that teachers are well trained to implement reforms. Expand learning opportunities for children with disabilities and other special-needs learners across the education system. Increase extra-curricular, non-formal learning, internship and international student exchange opportunities. Expand vocational training opportunities for all youth and especially for female youth and others compelled to cut short their primary, basic or secondary education. Work to ensure that curricula reform is tied to strategic plans for improving employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers.

- **Decrease education costs, and expand financial support to students, with special attention to the needs of the economically poorest students, female youth, youth with special needs and those in single-parent households.** Decrease the cost of education to ensure no learners are denied education opportunities because of an inability to pay education fees. Continue to increase public spending on education. Provide more financial aid to students at the secondary and tertiary levels. Increase the number of presidential quota opportunities for female and impoverished youth.

- **Expand opportunities for youth participation in education decision-making and action for change through student governments and other forums.** Awareness raising efforts should be undertaken to inform youth about education policy and opportunities for their involvement in decision-making and other activism. Youth should take action and get involved with efforts to improve their education quality.

- **Promote the value of education among parents and youth alike, emphasizing the rights of both females and males to complete their education.** The MoE should work with youth, parents, teachers and others to identify and develop strategic solutions to address gender and other barriers to education for youth such as unemployment and financial difficulties, rising traditionalism and religious conservatism, early marriage especially affecting girls and lack of parental support.

- **Undertake further research to investigate differences in youth experiences and opinions of education quality highlighted in this study.** Attention should be paid especially to the diverse experiences of the following youth subgroups: those in urban and rural areas; males and females; older and younger youth; those studying at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels; those who have experienced displacement and those not; conflict-affected youth; those who have dropped out and those who have not; youth who are frequently absent from school and those who regularly attend; those who are employed and unemployed; ethnic minority youth; and youth with disabilities.
Specific:

Learning environment

- Continue to maintain and improve the cleanliness of schools/universities and identify and address schools that require rapid attention.
- Determine any patterns in gaps in teaching and learning facilities and equipment, and prioritize improvements to these facilities, including those highlighted here.
- Ensure that any and all hazardous materials are rapidly removed from all learning environments.
- Provide functioning, clean cafeterias in all schools and universities.
- Ensure each school and university has a functioning health spot.
- Ensure all classrooms are heated and have adequate electricity, year-round, including having functioning computers and Internet service.
- Increase the number of well-qualified counsellors in schools and universities and make them accessible to all students. Undertake outreach programmes for youth to overcome any stigma attached to engaging with these professionals.
- Reinforce anti-smoking rules, or implement them in schools where they are lacking. Ensure anti-smoking promotional work covers youth in urban and rural settings and at all levels of education, documenting and replicating successes.
- Conduct more research on the prevalence of drug and alcohol use among youth in and out of school. Tailor anti-drug and anti-alcohol abuse promotion and recovery support appropriately, including providing coverage at all levels of education and in rural and urban areas. Sanction students, teachers and professors who violate anti-drug and alcohol rules.
- Study the prevalence of beer bars near schools and universities and their impact on the learning process, and make recommendations for action.
- Conduct more research on the prevalence and nature of violence in and around schools to determine key areas of concern for youth and develop appropriate responses, including to curb vandalism of school facilities by students and to address inter-ethnic violence.
- Where classroom overcrowding exists, take steps to decrease class size.
- Construct dormitories to accommodate student needs for on-campus living and studying.
- Promote and equip schools, teachers and students to expand inclusive education. Ensure that schools are accessible for students with disabilities, including ramps, elevators and other necessary learning materials and equipment.
- Ensure adequate, free public transportation for students to and from school at all required hours.
- Conduct further research on barriers to education for subgroups of youth, especially females, youth with a history of absenteeism, dropouts, conflict-affected and displaced youth. Take action to ensure inclusive education, with an emphasis on the full participation of female youth.
- Promote the education of females in all areas of society and particularly among parents to address lack of support for the education of girls and young women, and among female youth themselves.
- Avoid early marriage and promote the completion of formal education among dropped-out and married students, and increase opportunities for their vocational education.

Learning content

- Ensure more computer and Internet usage in school. This is young people’s most frequently cited priority for improving their classes in Tajikistan.
- Provide access to more free centres for foreign language learning and more language learning opportunities in school, including especially in Tajik (for non-Tajik speakers), Uzbek, Russian and English. Establish summer
camps and internships for young people interested in mastering Tajik or another language that is not their mother tongue.

- Make necessary literature available and accessible to all in school and libraries, including electronically, and in preferred languages.
- Expand opportunities for international student exchange.
- Increase the availability of extra-curricular, after-school activities, ranging from creative arts and sports, to clubs and social events, offered daytime and evenings.
- Establish youth centres, supporting non-formal skills training and social interaction and emphasizing youth participation in direction and management.
- Research what information youth receive on health, nutrition, gender, sex and peace and tolerance, how they receive it, their preferences in how to receive it and its impact.

**Learning outcomes**

- Investigate the prevalence of absenteeism, dropping out and temporary suspension of education, and examine the reasons for this, such as lack of parental and/or spousal support; lack of youth interest; financial hardship; family responsibilities; and discontent with aspects of education quality. Determine whether specific groups of youth are more likely to skip school, drop out and/or temporarily suspend their education; what young people are doing while out of school; and if there are differences for males and females and youth in urban and rural areas. Take strategic steps to sustain and increase learner motivation and to help young people stay in school, especially females.

- Calculate and publish information on primary and secondary completion rates in Tajikistan.
- Ensure that school curricula match the requirements of all compulsory exams. Ensure that teachers are well prepared and equipped to teach their students, and that all students have the necessary learning materials and facilities to succeed.
- Ensure education links to the job market to facilitate a smooth school-to-work transition.
- Invest more in high quality education especially to curb the outmigration of youth; strengthen the economy and development outcomes; support good health practices and outcomes; ensure youth interest in secondary school; and support youth self-esteem.
- Increase government support to the economically poorest youth and families to increase and ensure youth opportunities for formal education, curb outmigration and decrease family separations.
- Increase teacher and other salaries to provide incentives to keep talented educationalists in Tajikistan schools year-round.

**Learning processes and systems**

- Supply more teachers to Tajikistan schools, especially those with specialized skills, including in computer technology and science.
- Ensure teachers utilize more interactive, participatory and interesting teaching methods. Youth are widely ready and willing to engage in more interactive learning.
- Regularly train teachers and refresh their skills, and offer them periodic in-service training opportunities abroad to improve their skills and expand their world outlook.
- Ensure teachers are trained in education reforms so that they can implement them fully.
- Increase teacher and lecturer salaries. Pay instructors well to reward and incentivize good work and responsibility for students.
- Teachers should regularly show interest in the progress of students to address individual learning needs and motivate students to learn more.
• Education authorities should take stronger steps to curb and end teacher corruption and other forms of corruption in schools. Learning processes should be regularly monitored and evaluated by education ministry officials, who are further overseen by a system of government checks and balances and by the public.

• Continue to support and ensure the functioning of parent-teacher-student consultations.

• Increase student stipends, especially for low-income students.

• Provide free public transportation to students to and from school.

• Improve regulation and oversight of the presidential quota system, ending corruption and levelling the playing field. Expand the number of quota places available overall, and particularly to females and those least able to afford education costs.

• Consider developing and enacting special requirements to wear school and university uniforms, ensuring the requirement does not become a further deterrent to the economically poorest students.

• Increase constructive dialog on whether students should be permitted to wear in school.

• Set up systems for students to anonymously report and register complaints and make suggestions to improve education quality.

• Expand education reform efforts and step up the pace of their implementation, ensuring coverage across all regions and all levels of education in Tajikistan.

• Continue to increase government spending on education to support the successful implementation of reforms and improvements in the range of education quality issues outlined by youth.

• Increase promotional efforts that provide youth with information about education policy issues, especially to female youth.

• Provide trainings for youth on interactive communication methods.

Youth participation

• Support student governments and the roles they play in education decision-making, with attention to expanding their activism at the primary, basic and secondary levels. Make them more transparent and inclusive for all youth.

• Utilize interactive approaches to learning in school where young people can freely share ideas and experiences and contribute to improvements in education quality. Institute an anonymous student complaints/suggestions system in schools and universities.

• Expand opportunities for regular youth discussion on education quality in and out of schools and universities, including to shape and measure progress in achieving education reforms.

• Conduct further research on young people’s interest in youth organizations and clubs and online exchange and activism.

• Support the development of active listening skills among youth in Tajikistan to facilitate constructive communication, mutual understanding and action. Work with youth to determine and establish more safe spaces for youth expression, where they receive legitimate responses without fear of reprisal.

• Follow up on the many youth suggestions for youth action, as outlined in the ‘Youth education quality priorities and solutions’ section.

Politicization of education

• Increase public dialog on the inclusion of military training in school curricula, and consider requests by youth to opt out of military training in school.
5. TAJIKISTAN YOUTH ADVOCACY STATEMENT

UNICEF provided youth the opportunity to develop a youth advocacy statement supporting the empowerment of Tajikistan youth to take action on education quality issues. The process of developing the youth statement and the statement itself were designed to give young people a positive experience in collaborative advocacy and to enhance their skills developing advocacy messages. The statement, which expresses young people’s views on education quality, may be used locally, nationally and internationally by youth, UNICEF and other stakeholders to advocate for the improvement of education quality for youth. Key audiences will include local and national youth organizations and networks; local, regional and national government; UNICEF, civil society and other stakeholders.

The Tajikistan Youth Advocacy statement (Emry, 2010) summarizes youth perspectives on:

- Why improving education quality is important to young people.
- The current challenges education is facing that have kept education from meeting the needs of young people.
- How education quality can be improved.
- How policy makers and educators can involve youth in the process of improving education.

Youth researchers, who undertook the youth study and who were involved with many institutions and public organizations across the country, developed the youth advocacy statement. UNICEF international research team, UNICEF Tajikistan staff and other facilitators worked with youth participants at a one-day event that took place some weeks following the five-day training, but before the completion of the study. The agenda included: welcome and introductions; discussion of youth needs in education; explanation of what an advocacy statement is; and breakout groups to develop content.

Participants worked in small groups to produce draft elements of the statement and then reported back to the entire group, which posed clarifying questions and selected which language, challenges identified and key recommendations they would like to see in a collective statement. The facilitators and a team of volunteer youth participants consolidated all small group drafts into a larger workshop draft that considered all of this key feedback, and the participants provided additional feedback. A UNICEF International Team member further edited the draft statement, and a subset of the youth participants with English skills provided final revisions.

The final statement reflects participants’ personal experiences with education, the education challenges they see, their hopes for improved education quality and how these improvements would empower them and their society. They include the key steps they believe need to be taken to improve education quality and how UNICEF can promote the study’s findings. The text of the final statement follows, providing powerful closing remarks.
TAJIKISTAN YOUTH ADVOCACY STATEMENT

July 7, 2010

We are youth and young adult representatives from the many communities of Tajikistan. We are researchers for UNICEF’s investigation of youth perspectives on the quality of education in Tajikistan. We are members of many institutions and public organizations from across our country. We are university and secondary school students; we are also young teachers, and we have gathered here in Dushanbe, Tajikistan to discuss the problems that exist within our education system. The challenges we as young people face are the problems that our nation must address if it and we are to be prosperous. For this reason we, as youth representatives would like to express our individual and the general opinion youth hold concerning the quality of education in Tajikistan.

We present this statement with the hopes and aspirations that together with our leaders we will improve the quality of education, improve the welfare of young people and build the prosperity of Tajikistan. Through this statement we offer some ideas for how the problems facing education quality in Tajikistan can be solved.

We would like you to consider the following core education quality issues:

Throughout Tajikistan we are faced with a shortage of well-equipped secondary schools. Existing classrooms are frequently overcrowded. The infrastructure of schools is often poor and problematic, and does not meet the needs of the physically disabled. In many regions of Tajikistan, schools are too far away for students to readily access them, and in some villages there are no secondary schools at all, and even other villages are without preschool facilities.

Our textbooks are woefully inadequate in both quality and quantity. Textbooks are not compliant with our curricular requirements, and are not regularly available in native or second languages. We lack enough schools where instruction is offered in second languages such as Russian or Uzbek. Conversely, we lack Tajik language teachers at Uzbek- and Kyrgyz-dominated schools (such as in the Asht, Oksinjot, Oshoba and Murghob districts). This has contributed to the deteriorating level of education quality in secondary and higher education institutions.

Many schools do not have proper libraries, and libraries that do exist, often lack proper publications and resources. Electronic libraries are even less likely to be available. Furthermore, schools do not offer language, computer, sewing, dancing or music courses. Sports facilities are also not usually available (such as in the Asht, Danghara Sebiston and Kubob districts). These services and facilities should not be viewed as luxuries; they are important components to developing well-rounded students. They are important for providing constructive extra-curricular activities that offer students positive alternatives to unhealthy behaviours.

Teachers are not encouraged and do not generally use interactive and engaging teaching methods. Many teachers lack the skills or knowledge base needed to teach the subjects for which they are responsible. Teachers who are specialized in one subject are expected to teach other courses for which they are not trained. Teachers are also not given proper incentives to do their job well. They are poorly paid and are not given the manuals and resources they need for their classes. Too many teachers also misappropriate school resources for their own private use. Youth and teachers do not respect the laws and policies put forth by the Ministry of Education, and there is a broad absence of mutual respect between students and teachers.

Corruption exists at a number of educational institutions. Student scoring is neither transparent nor fair. Some teachers expect payment for good scores. Students are forced to pay to use what are supposed to be free and
public educational resources and equipment, such as textbooks, computer labs, etc. These practices regularly discourage students from wanting to do well in school. This must change.

Persistent social and economic inequality throughout Tajikistan and the financial difficulties many families face make it very difficult for large numbers of students to afford education-related expenses. The tuition is too high at some educational institutions, and some schools impose their own arbitrary fees. The quota system for economically poor students from rural or remote regions is mismanaged and full of corruption, preventing deserving students from accessing higher education. The academic opportunities between rural and urban children are unequal and favour urban students from more politically influential regions of Tajikistan. Forcefully displaced youth who would like to continue their education often lack access to adequate educational institutions. Labour-based migration also poses unique and unaddressed problems for students and teachers: school teachers leave their jobs, contributing to the lack of teachers in migrant communities; and students who migrate for work often do not complete their studies.

Tajikistan’s youth have a limited worldview, which is exacerbated by growing nationalism and individual regionalism among young people, and is urged by various political leaders. Students are further affected by either anti- or pro-religious agendas. Religion has negatively affected some students’ ability to receive a secular education in more religious regions of Tajikistan, and conversely religious intolerance has caused unimpeded public (and systemically supported) discrimination against students who openly practice their religion. Cultural, religious, systemic and institutionally based gender discrimination also perpetuates inequalities for girls wishing to continue their education, particularly for those at upper secondary and higher education levels. Students are also hindered by a lack of parental, family, spousal or teacher support. This is all compounded by the fact that young people are generally unaware of their legal rights and the government’s responsibilities for their education.

Student and staff violence are also prevalent problems within schools and universities. Furthermore, schools do not have adequate medical or counselling services to address the many social, economic and psychological stresses with which students are forced to cope.

Students lack the motivation to do more with the education they receive. Students are not compelled to compete, and do not have consistent or proper internship opportunities. Students are not given enough practical learning experiences in or outside of school. There are not enough cultural centres or international student exchange programmes. Students are not being adequately taught the foreign languages required to compete in a globalized economy. Young people themselves must also take more personal responsibility towards their education.

Young people strongly wish for and are ready to take part in the decision-making processes that determine the quality of their education at micro or macro levels, but they are not given the opportunity. Whereas some reforms and improvements have been made, they do not go far enough to address our many and legitimate concerns. For these reasons, we call upon the Ministry of Education, our governmental and community leaders, school officials, donors, UNICEF, parents and young people themselves to improve the quality of education in Tajikistan for all.

We propose and call on the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, Parliament, the various ministries, donors, community leaders, parents and young people themselves to take the following actions to improve education quality in Tajikistan:

**Improve our learning environment**
- The Ministries of Health and of Education need to ensure that all schools are equipped to meet the needs of disabled students. We cannot treat disabled youth as second class citizens;
- The Ministries of Labour and Social Protection and of Education need to ensure that all schools are provided the necessary equipment for laboratory classes, sports activities and computer courses;
The Ministries of Health and of Education need to launch classes on tolerance and diversity in order to foster healthier attitudes towards people from different socioeconomic, cultural, religious, ethnic and political backgrounds;

The Ministries of Health and of Education must offer proper, professionally qualified and confidential counselling services in all educational institutions;

Construct new and modern schools, using localized labour forces, particularly young labourers;

Build enough schools and hire enough quality teachers to ensure that the maximum number of students per class is no more than 20 to 25;

Local government authorities and school administrators need to repair the existing inventories of school equipment, tools and resources;

The Government of Tajikistan needs to support local authorities to supply power generators and properly ventilated coal-based stoves to adequately heat schools in the winter;

The Ministry of Education needs to partner with local authorities and business leaders to establish more rural internet cafés, sports and recreational centres and debate clubs for rural students;

Local authorities and business leaders need to encourage local entrepreneurs to assist in the purchase of school equipment, tools and resources. Business leaders need to understand that by providing this assistance, they are investing in the skills and capacities of Tajikistan’s long term professional and general labour pools;

The Ministry of Education, school administrators and local authorities should set up boxes through which students can drop anonymous complaints. Schools could also install surveillance cameras to safeguard against teachers who abuse students;

Government, political party and religious leaders must settle their disputes over the role and place of religion within education so that we can end discrimination and likewise minimize unfair influences on young people who simply wish to receive a quality public education. Civil dialogue between secular and religious leaders is needed to move local mentalities and traditions towards the valuing of quality public education for all young people.

**Improve our learning processes and systems**

**Education funds**

- The Ministries of Finance and of Education need to approach more donors to increase investments in Tajikistan’s education system (young people and teachers should be included in these meetings);
- The State Agency of State Financial Control and Fighting Corruption and the Ministry of Education need to set up a highly visible and well monitored special department or agency, and a task force to seek out, prosecute and end corruption within the education system;
- The Ministries of Finance, of Economics and of Education need to work together to ensure the use of foreign aid and Government of Tajikistan budget allocations to education are more transparent, targeted and purposeful. This process needs to be made more public.

**Teacher support and qualifications**

- The Ministry of Education should hire teachers based on a competitive merit system in conjunction with applicants’ qualifications;
- The Ministry of Education and district governments need to pay salaries to rural teachers in a timelier manner (for example: Zafarobod). Rural teachers should also be paid higher salaries in order to attract more highly qualified teachers to less desirable posts. The Ministry of Education in general should increase teachers’ salaries and expand their package of benefits;
- The Ministry of Education needs to provide teachers with adequate classroom tools and resources, and provide them access to additional training and programmes that build their teaching capacity;
The Academy of Sciences and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection with the Ministry of Education should develop more professional development courses for teachers to ensure teachers and professors are skilled in what is most relevant for modern society and needs.

Access to education
- Reduce tuition fees and education-related expenses to improve the likelihood that low-income families will be able to afford and attend school;
- Establish opportunities and special classes for individuals who would like to complete their education but were forced to drop out (due to early marriage, pregnancy, illness, economic status, etc.);
- The Ministry of Transport and Communications needs to partner with local authorities to provide free transportation for teachers and students living in remote areas, in order to improve attendance rates and minimize the financial hardship of rural communities;
- The Ministries of Education, Finance and of Foreign Affairs could improve student motivation by increasing student stipends, organizing international information exchanges and ensuring access to student exchange programmes;
- The Ministry of Education, anti-corruption authorities and the Youth Parliament need to strengthen the control of stipend distribution and the quota system; particularly in rural areas, and help to address problems associated with regionalism;
- The Ministry of Education should allow communities that wish to pay fees to subsidize the needs at poorly performing schools to do so, particularly in localities where the population has the financial capacity, but where the Ministry of Education is not providing adequate financial resources to certain schools;
- Encourage girls to complete secondary education before marriage. Educate families to understand the importance of girls’ education. Establish mechanisms that make it easier for girls who married young or are young mothers to continue their education without punishment or discrimination.

Improve our learning content
- Provide to schools where Uzbek and Kyrgyz is the language of instruction, more Tajik language teachers and courses;
- Organize additional Tajik language courses for students who do not speak Tajik but study in Tajik-speaking schools;
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should establish more foreign language centres and courses;
- The Ministries of Culture and of Education need to establish more modern libraries, including electronic libraries, as well as facilities where young people can engage in healthy extra-curricular activities;
- The Ministry of Education should utilize more sector specialists to help the education system modernize textbooks and make them more relevant to today’s academic and professional needs.
- The Ministries of Health and of Education need to work together to develop a more relevant and informative curriculum that promotes healthy lifestyle choices, and improves youth awareness of health issues, risks and preventive measures;
- Establish new and modern printing services that use the best of current technologies so that our textbooks are of higher physical quality and are printed in a more rapid and timely manner.

Ensure positive learning outcomes
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should expand international student exchange programmes and teacher training opportunities abroad. They should also invite highly qualified specialists from other countries to run professional development courses in Tajikistan;
- School administrators should partner with NGOs and the Ministry of Culture to develop more supplemental courses and international excursions that introduce students to broader world views;
The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection needs to work directly with the Ministry of Education to develop more employment opportunities for students and university graduates;

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection needs to stop the outflow of highly qualified specialists by directly connecting them to well-paid positions within Tajikistan;

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection must prohibit the use of government-mandated youth labour in both rural and urban areas (such as forcing students to clean public land or schools).

**Increase youth participation**

- The National Youth Committee and the National Youth Parliament should ensure that they have student representatives from each and every school;
- The Ministry of Education and partnering NGOs should conduct trainings and seminars to improve and expand youth awareness of their legal rights in regards to education;
- NGOs should conduct information campaigns and distribute booklets to improve parental, student and community awareness of gender issues, gender needs and gender rights in education;
- Youth Committees and youth organizations should expand opportunities to young people to be involved in public and open debates about education.

**UNICEF and youth groups should actively promote the findings of this education study by:**

- Circulating the report’s findings specifically within each of the clusters in which the study was conducted. UNICEF and the MoE should hold meetings in each cluster to discuss the findings with the community. These meetings should be well advertised so that questionnaire respondents and focus group participants can attend anonymously;
- Distributing the final report among Tajikistan’s youth networks;
- The NGO community can promote the study’s results and use the relevant components in their own work;
- Youth researchers and UNICEF should hold press conferences and conduct a public awareness campaign through the media;
- Creating a website that explains the findings, outlines strategies, takes suggestions and promotes education quality;
- UNICEF and youth researchers should hold a meeting with the Ministry of Education to present the research results. UNICEF should also organize a follow-up meeting one year later to review any progress made;
- UNICEF should circulate the report and an executive summary to interested parties, after which UNICEF will organize meetings with representatives from the various departments and ministries to discuss next steps;
- UNICEF should organize meetings at the local level between the youth researchers and community business, religious, civic and other leaders to identify community members who have the capacity and are willing to support activities that can improve education quality and provide necessary equipment and resources at the local level.
6. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: TAJIKISTAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The education system of the Republic of Tajikistan is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (State Republican/Central Government Management Body). Line ministries and their agencies manage primary, secondary and higher professional (vocational) institutions. Local government bodies supervise secondary education institutions (MoE, 2009).

As shown in Table 41, Tajikistan’s current education system has two cycles: general and professional. The general education cycle comprises three levels: primary, basic (also called incomplete secondary) and secondary education. The professional education cycle includes tertiary education and comprises three elements: primary/initial/first, secondary and specialized/higher. These three elements of the professional include, but are not limited to, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher professional education. Children currently begin formal education at the age of 7.

Table 12. Structure of Tajikistan’s current education system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of education</th>
<th>Duration of studies</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Educational institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool training and education</td>
<td>1–3, 3–6</td>
<td>1–6(7)</td>
<td>Kindergarten/nursery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• primary</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>7–18</td>
<td>General education schools,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• general basic</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>7–11</td>
<td>gymnasiums, lyceums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• general secondary</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>11–16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>16–18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional education:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• primary</td>
<td>1–4 years</td>
<td>From age 16</td>
<td>Vocational schools, centres,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• secondary</td>
<td>2–4 years</td>
<td>From age 16</td>
<td>technical colleges, colleges, special</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• higher</td>
<td>4–6 years</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>secondary schools, universities,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>academies, institutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-diploma education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Master courses, postgraduate courses,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>doctorate courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional (extra) education</td>
<td></td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** is conducted in regular schools of general and professional education, outside main educational curricula or in the establishments for additional education (small research academies, palaces, stations, clubs, centres, art and musical schools, etc.).

* is taught on the basis of general secondary, primary and secondary professional education

Source: MoE, 2009

The secondary professional education cycle offers a range of possibilities, among them general secondary, vocational and technical education. Progression to tertiary education is possible only after completion of general secondary education (GSE) or specialized (technical) secondary education (SSE). A diploma of completed secondary professional education (SPE, in the most cases vocational education) allows for further progression only if combined with a completed GSE curriculum.

Higher education is provided mainly by universities and institutes. At the first stage, students can graduate as junior specialist (two years), bakalavr (bachelor degree, four years), or depending on the subject and the institution of study, specialist (four to five years). The title of magistr (master) or kandidat nauk (candidate of sciences) is awarded after two or three years of study, respectively, beyond the bachelor degree. Postgraduate studies (third stage) involve a three-year aspirantura beyond the second stage of studies and combines the writing of a dissertation, coursework and teaching, leading to the degree of doktor nauk (PhD) (OECD, 2009).
The legislative framework of education in Tajikistan

*The Majlisi Oli* (Parliament) of the Republic of Tajikistan adopted the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan:

- “On education” (1993)
- “Standard provisions on educational establishment of higher vocational education” (1996)
- “State educational standard of secondary and higher vocational education” (2002)
APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON RESEARCH PROTOCOLS AND STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

More on research protocols

Researchers followed an informed consent procedure to ensure all that youth respondents freely chose to participate with adequate information about the nature of the survey and the potential consequences of their participation in it. Printed participant information sheets on the uses and confidential nature of the study were provided to each respondent in multiple languages. If respondents were under the age of 18, informed consent was obtained from both the youth and his or her parent or guardian.

As much as possible, interviews were conducted in private in a separate room or in a quiet corner of a room out of earshot, while the researcher not conducting the interview remained nearby at the scene until the work was completed. Younger researchers were also paired with older ones, enhancing mentorship and addressing any age discrimination issues that might have arisen, where potential respondents may have perceived younger researchers as bearing less authority. As possible, the groups were also assigned to work in survey areas that were nearest their residences to facilitate logistics. Researchers read survey questions aloud to respondents and marked responses on printed questionnaires; respondents were not required to read the questions or to write their answers.

Research supervisors accompanied team subgroups with younger youth researchers and circuit rode to other teams. As needed, research supervisors also served as researchers to conduct interviews. The supervisors helped the youth researchers manage their work and were present to enhance security and address any age discrimination issues the researchers might encounter. Supervisors also worked to ensure quality and reviewed completed questionnaires to be sure they were coded properly and assisted with their secure storage and transfer to M-Vector.

No identifiers were used in written research materials; no names were taken, and numeric researcher and location codes were used. Data were kept secured at all times, including in locked filing cabinets in M-Vector offices.

Attempts to ensure quality were also made through regular contact with the Research Team by the international research team, M-Vector and the local researcher, including some travel to implementation sites to accompany researchers on their rounds. M-Vector also reviewed all completed surveys prior to entering information into the database. Where issues were spotted, researchers were contacted immediately to rapidly resolve them. Any errors found during a data cleaning process performed by the lead consultant were rectified by M-Vector. A random check performed by the local researcher of 5 per cent of the survey data entered into the database revealed no errors.

Strengths and limitations

The scarcity of up-to-date population data presented the major constraint to obtaining accurate, nationally representative findings. Despite this circumstance, the international research team and local researcher felt confident that the best available and accessible data were used for the sampling frame, given time and other resource limitations.

Given resource constraints and the physical size of Tajikistan, travel by the international research team and implementing partners to support and monitor study implementation in sites around the country was limited.
The relative inexperience of the youth researchers also presented a potential source of bias should they stray from the protocol designed to ensure the equal probability of being sampled, or to read and explain each question fully. The five-day training stressed the importance of adhering to the protocols, and the various checks described earlier were employed to monitor compliance. Procedures were clarified as needed and strategies were developed and implemented to address all methodological challenges encountered. Researchers also set their own schedules within the implementation timeframe, corresponding with times they could expect youth to be at home or otherwise accessible. Each survey took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. In these ways, the impetus to stray from protocol and rush the work was further minimized.

The research was made possible and was successful due to the dedication and strong collaboration of all of the partners involved, including UNICEF Tajikistan, the youth researchers and supervisors, the local researcher, M-Vector and international research team staff. Youth researchers provided the enthusiasm and energy needed to effectively identify and elicit information from their peers in diverse settings around Tajikistan. They were dedicated to the work, and the interests in it they expressed ranged from wanting to improve education quality for isolated rural youth, to wanting to insure inclusive education for all ethnic groups and to find ways for youth organizations to contribute to change.

The Research Team did not encounter any insurmountable difficulties in tracking down youth for interview despite the general mobility of youth. Youth were deemed eligible for interview if they had slept in the household at least four nights in the previous week. This eliminated the possibility of double counting should the same youth be randomly selected in another areas — for instance, if they travelled back and forth from their homes during the week to attend university classes. Youth who had migrated out of Tajikistan were not eligible for the survey. Researchers ultimately faced challenges scheduling the interviews if the youth subject was not home at the time, but in most cases, these were resolved, and interview times were secured. The refusal rate once a youth subject was contacted was very low.
REFERENCES


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