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# 14 Tajikistan

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## 14.1 THE NATIONAL AND HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXTS

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### National Context

The Republic of Tajikistan is a small landlocked country located in south-eastern Central Asia and borders Kyrgyzstan to the north, the Xinjiang region of China to the east, Afghanistan to the south, and Uzbekistan to the west. The territory of Tajikistan is 144,100 square kilometers, with 93 percent of the territory covered by mountains. The country shares the most extensive border with Afghanistan through the rugged, mountainous area. About 6 percent of the country is suitable for agriculture, and the remainder is in the mountain valleys.

In terms of its size and population, Tajikistan is one of the most rapidly growing countries. According to the last census of 2020, the population of Tajikistan is 9.12 million, comprising 49.5 percent men and 50.5 percent women (Agency on Statistics, 2020). Approximately 74 percent of the population lives in rural areas. The people of Tajikistan are relatively young, and 18 percent are of preschool age, reflecting previously high fertility rates. Life expectancy at birth is 71.1 for men and 74.6 for women. According to the latest 2019 Census, 85 percent of the population is Tajik, 13 percent is Uzbek, 0.8 percent is Kyrgyz, 0.5 percent is Russian, 0.2 percent is Turkmen, and the remaining 2 percent comprise other nationalities. Many ethnic minorities live in rural areas, especially along the international borders with neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

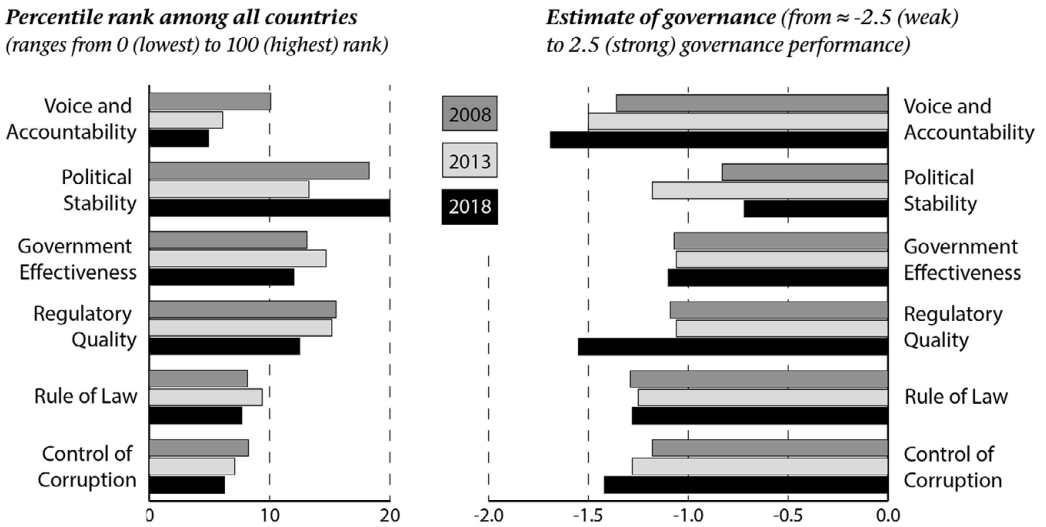
The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan was adopted on November 6, 1994, and amended two times, on September 26, 1999, and June 22, 2003.

The constitution has the highest legal power, direct application, and supremacy over the whole territory of Tajikistan. The constitution proclaims the establishment of a democratic, legal, secular, and unitary State (Constitution, Article 1), where the State power is based on the principle of separation of powers (Article 9). As the fundamental law of the State, the constitution defines the structure of the government; the fundamental rights, liberties, and responsibilities of its citizens; and the powers of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Within the presidential system of the government, the president of Tajikistan appoints the government and the prime minister – with the agreement of parliament. Thus, the president also serves as the head of the state. The parliament, consisting of the Upper House (*Majlisi Milli*) and the Lower House (*Majlisi Namoyandagon*), is responsible for legislation; jurisdiction rests with the Supreme Court.

As with other former republics of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan has undergone an economic and financial crisis. During the civil war of 1992–1997, the country lost thousands of people, and hundreds of thousands more were displaced. The civil war destroyed the economy and much of the educational infrastructure. Even though the share of state budget resources and other investments in education is gradually increasing, the economy's competitiveness remains low. The economy is heavily dependent on labor migration to Russia and remittances, which affects the demand for labor, including the domestic demand for professional skills, competencies, and knowledge, and employment opportunities for University graduates (NSED, 2020). The national currency depreciated by about 130 percent from 2000–2013, though per-capita growth averaged 5.6 percent in the same period, and wages grew substantially compared to the 2000 level. Even with a real overall GDP growth rate of 5 percent per annum, Tajikistan would require another fifteen years to reach pre-independence levels of its GDP per capita (World Bank, 2018).

Nevertheless, Tajikistan has achieved rapid poverty reduction for the past decade, mainly due to a favorable external environment. The absolute poverty in the country decreased from 72 percent in 2003 to 37.4 percent in 2012 and further down to 27.4 percent in 2018. Extreme poverty declined from 42 percent in 2003 to 17 percent in 2018 (NSED, 2020).

According to the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index, Tajikistan ranks 104th out of 141 countries. As for the burden of regulations, it ranked the country 69th with a score of 51.0 for 2018–2019 (Schwab, 2019). In terms of Skillset, Tajikistan ranks 71st among 141 countries with a score of 53.1 out of 100. In terms of the skillset of graduates and ease of finding skilled employees, Tajikistan ranks 60th with a score of 53.7 and 70th with a score of

**Figure 14.1 Worldwide governance indicators for Tajikistan**

53.7, respectively. Regarding corporate governance, which arguably is different from public University governance, WEF ranked Tajikistan 53rd with a score of 60.0.

According to the World Bank's Governance Indicators project, the national governing context is as follows. Figure 14.1 is intended to show trends over time associated with a set of country-level data. All of the indicators are below the 20th percentile, with only political stability reaching that level in 2018. Even from low starting points in 2008, control of corruption and voice and accountability dropped, as did regulatory quality. Together these indicate a low capacity for effective governing contexts and little likely ability to bring about meaningful change.

### Shape and Structure of Higher Education

The Tajikistan education system inherited a highly centralized and unified system of education that required substantial reforms and adaptation of new policies. The latest National Strategy of Educational Development 2020 recognizes the creation of an effective education system that provides inclusive and equal opportunities and the improvement of the general well-being of the population of the Republic of Tajikistan. However, the quality of education

remains low. The NSED 2020 highlights the insufficient growth in the number of preschool institutions, the poor quality of school infrastructure in the regions, and the low qualifications of teachers. In addition, low attendance rates; inadequate access to improved sanitation and water supply in rural schools; physical, financial, and cultural barriers to overcoming social exclusion; and gender inequality in terms of access to education at all levels create obstacles to building quality inclusive education system.

The transition from the planned to the market economy has led to several significant higher educational policy decisions, resulting in the quadrupling of the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) since 1990. By 2018–2019, 40 state higher education institutions enrolled 209,800 students, with 69 percent enrolled in full-time programs and 30.1 percent in part-time correspondence programs. The system employs 11,693 faculty members. Students enrolled in universities in Tajikistan are either funded by the state budget or pay tuition fees, a dual track tuition model. In 2018–2019, the overall percentage of students paying tuition fees at HEIs was almost 68 percent. Tuition fees consist of around 68 percent of University budgets and are the primary funding source for higher education. As with most of the students enrolled in education and humanities programs, the lack of student enrollment in science, engineering, and technology is of great concern to the government (ADB, 2015).

The gender distribution of higher education institutions remains a primary concern. For example, in the 1991–1992 academic year, the percentage of female students was 34 percent, whereas, in the 2018–2019 academic year, the proportion of females increased only slightly and amounted to 36.4 percent. In this regard, state policy in higher professional education aims to increase the access and enrollment of women with higher education (see Kataeva & DeYoung, 2017).

The government of Tajikistan is striving to integrate its higher education system into European higher education and actively pursuing the Bologna Declaration. Since 2007, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tajikistan has implemented reforms such as introducing a three-tier education system and implementing the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The Soviet-type of specialist diploma was gradually changed to bachelor's and master's degrees, except for some medical specialties. Some larger institutions have opened PhD programs. However, creating a consistent quality assurance system and a national qualification system have yet to be developed, approved, and implemented. Thus, the NSED 2020 recognizes the need to continue governance, quality assurance, teaching, training, and assessment reforms.

In December 2013, Tajikistan opened the National Testing Center (NTC) to increase transparency and access to higher education. The NTC was created by the president of the Republic of Tajikistan and was funded by the World Bank, the Russian Federation, and the Open Society Institute – Assistance Foundation (OSI–AF). During the first year of NTC’s activities, from 2013 to 2014, the admission of girls to HEIs increased by 8 percent, and from 2010 to 2016, the growth in admissions equaled 29 percent (NSED, 2021). Similar to other Central Asian countries, higher education in Tajikistan lacks graduates who can meet the changing requirements of the labor market. There is a lack of engineering and technology graduates for industry and small- and medium-sized enterprises.

In 2016, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science, the World Bank launched a project to develop mechanisms that improve and monitor higher education’s quality and labor-market relevance. The project aims to enhance institutional level operations, enhance quality assurance and curriculum reforms, and improve the assessment of higher education financing. The final component supports the overall project management, communication, training, monitoring and evaluation, and the audit of the Project (World Bank, 2016).

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### Higher Education Governing Context

Although the civil war delayed the beginning of the reforms and transition to a market economy, even during the turmoil the Law on Education (1993) was adopted, which brought about several changes in education. Private education institutions were legally allowed, and some were established, but the higher education sector eventually closed in the 2000s. The National Strategy for Educational Development of Tajikistan (NSED) adopted in 2001 acknowledges that the public management system of education is a legacy of a highly centralized and planned system of the former Soviet Union and remains unreformed to a considerable extent (NSED, 2021). Thus, the NSED 2021 priorities include the expansion of the autonomy of HEIs and the reduction of state intervention in HEIs’ activities, creation of supervisory boards in state-owned HEIs, and the creation of conditions for HEIs to independently form and design their development strategies for decision-making with regard to internal administration and financial management.

The Law on Higher and Professional Education (Law on HPE) clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the body responsible for the management of

higher education in the country, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) as well as the institutions of higher education (Tajikistan, 2003). The Law on Higher Education determines the framework for “operational management” of all higher education institutions, but no separate provisions exist for governance and management of these institutions. In terms of University autonomy, the Law on Higher Education defines it as “University autonomy is the highest form of the learning process and academic activities, determining the state responsibility of the institutions of higher professional education before their founder” (Law on Higher Education, 2009). However, in the context of Tajikistan, “the founder” of HEI is always “the government” as the rectors of universities are still appointed and discharged by the decree of the government (Law of HPE, 2009, article 14; DeYoung et al., 2018).

Although the Law on HPE states that the teaching staff, researchers, and students of institutions of higher professional education, including teachers of the institution of higher professional education, are provided with academic freedom in the presentation of the curriculum, the academic standards and draft curriculum provide the framework within which the higher education institutions must operate, limiting curricular autonomy (ADB, 2015). While the institutions may propose changes to the academic curricula, as curricula are strongly controlled by MoES (ADB, 2015). The autonomy of higher education institutions students, financial, staffing, and educational matters requires a University to operate within the budget approved by the MOES and Ministry of Finance, with staffing levels also defined by the budget.

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## 14.2 GOVERNING BODY PROFILE

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### Body Structure

The country’s universities have limited autonomy from direct governmental oversight. Looking into universities’ websites and governance profiles, higher education institutions in Tajikistan have Academic Councils (*Ucheniy Soviet*) as the primary governing body, led by the University’s rector. The heads of the Academic Councils are rectors of higher education institutions appointed by the country’s government.

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### Membership

The University Academic Council consists of the rector (chairman), vice-rectors, deans and directors of structural units, heads of basic units, and other

scientific and pedagogical staff. The rector of the University may, if necessary, change the composition and number of members of the Academic Council. The direct organization of the activities of the University Academic Council is assigned to its secretary. The secretary of the Academic Council is appointed and dismissed from the list of members of the Academic Council by the rector of the University. The meeting of the Academic Council is valid if it is attended by two-thirds of the members of the Academic Council. Decisions of the Academic Council meeting are valid if more than half of the members of the Academic Council attended the meeting and voted for a resolution.

The Academic Council in Tajikistan, as in the Moldovan case, seems to range in size among the universities.

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### **Membership Appointment Processes**

The membership of the Academic Council of universities is elected by open vote and approved, provided that two-thirds of the members of the Academic Council are present and more than half of the members of the functioning composition of the Academic Council have positively voted for the new composition. In case of early termination of membership of one of the members of the Academic Council, the replacement of the Academic Council is carried out at the beginning of the academic year, in the order of the formation of the Academic Council. In the event of termination of a member of the Academic Council, their membership in the Academic Council is also suspended. Membership for the Academic Council is defined by the position of a member, that is, vice-rector, deans, department chairs, etc. The government appoints the rector. Therefore, the rector has the authority to change who serves on the Academic Council. The members of the Academic Council are elected by open vote, provided that two-thirds of the members of the Academic Council are present and more than half of the members of the functioning Academic Council have positively voted for the new members. The rector of the University can also change the composition and number of members of the Academic Council.

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### **Chair Appointment Process**

The rector, appointed by the president of the country's government, chairs the Academic Council as part of their responsibilities.

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### Scope of Work

According to the Law on HPE, the exclusive powers of the higher body of an institution, that is, Academic Councils include (a) approval and amendment of the charter of the institution and change in the size of its authorized capital; (b) the establishment of the executive body, the appointment of its head, and his dismissal; (c) approval of the annual report and balance sheet of the institution of higher professional education; (d) deciding on the reorganization, transformation, and liquidation of the institution of higher professional education.

In addition, the charters of universities may outline more details of the scope of work of each Academic Council, mainly regarding the improvement of the management and structure of the University, including the creation and liquidation of centers, laboratories, faculties, departments, departments, sectors, and other educational, scientific, industrial and service structures; approval of the regulations of the structural divisions of the University; and promotion and doctoral students' issues.

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### Commentary

The higher education system has almost quadrupled since 1991 with the increased number of higher education institutions and enrolled students, consisting of 40 higher education institutions and more than 200,000 students. The primary concerns for higher education remain the low quality of education and discrepancies between the graduates' skills and the demands of the labor market and low enrollment of female students to higher education, among others. Currently, only about 34 percent of the total number of students are females. Tajikistan strives to build its education system according to the Bologna principles.

In terms of governance of the system and institutions, Tajikistan higher education represents a very centralized model with limited opportunities for institutional autonomy and weak participation of faculty and students in the governing process. The heads (rectors) of the higher education institutions are appointed by the government. Although the main governing body within higher education institutions is the Academic Council, the rector may discontinue the membership of Council members. Tajikistan remains among few countries with no private institutions.