



Key Reforms in Higher Education Discussed in Tajikistan

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Results of the Russia Education Aid for Development Project (READ), including the introduction of the University Entrance Examination as a fair and transparent tool for university admissions in Tajikistan, were discussed in Dushanbe on October 28. Deputy Prime Minister of Tajikistan, Marhabo Jabbori, World Bank Country Manager, Patricia Veevers-Carter, and Ambassador of Russia to Tajikistan Igor Lyakin-Frolov opened the workshop, which was attended by representatives of the government entities, donor agencies, and civil society organizations.
The Russia Education Aid for Development Project (READ), financed by the Russian Federation and administered by the World Bank, provided US\$4.1 million to build the institutional capacity of the National Testing Center (NTC) and support design and introduction of the Unified University Entrance Examinations (UEE). The Dushanbe workshop marks the closure of the READ grant financing implemented in Tajikistan in two phases, from May 2009 to October 2014.
"The World Bank and Tajikistan are longstanding partners in education because improved education is fundamental to alleviating poverty and improving economic competitiveness, said Patricia Veevers-Carter, World Bank Country Manager for Tajikistan. "The National Testing Center and the new UEE will aim to standardize testing practices and procedures, reduce corruption, and give students more equitable access to higher education.
The National Testing Center was founded by the Government of Tajikistan in 2008 as a first step in establishing a national education assessment system, with the goal of contributing to improved access to and quality of education in the country. In addition to the READ grant, the World Bank supported the NTC through the Education Modernization Project with a US\$2 million International Development Association (IDA) grant for the construction of the NTC building and provision of furniture and equipment. The Open Society Foundation provided US\$1.5 million for capacity building of the national experts and the NTC staff in the assessment area.
After stages of design, evaluation and pilots in 2012 and 2013, the NTC launched the UEE process in December 2013, and in May 2014 it was administered nation-wide for the first time, including the allocation of university places. More than 52,500 applicants were registered for the exams (including 17,500 females), 30 percent more than in the previous year, by all higher education institutions in the country. Around 46,000 registered applicants took the exam and around 30,000 have passed the minimum score needed to participate in the competition.
In addition to the university admission test, the NTC is expected to administer other types of large scale national and international student learning assessments to provide key information to policy makers and citizens on what children are learning in school, and to help identify areas for improvement.
The World Bank portfolio in Tajikistan comprises 13 investment operations with net commitments of US\$220.6 million. The largest share of the portfolio is in urban, rural and social development (21%), followed by agriculture (18%), energy (16%), governance (10%), environment and natural resources (7%), health, nutrition & population (7%), education (7%), water (7%), trade and competitiveness (5%), social protection and labor (2%).
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