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Common Country Analysis
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1. Introduction

The 2020 Common Country Analysis (CCA) examines the major factors influencing the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the national development goals in Tajikistan. It aims to identify the underlying causes of inequality and vulnerability in line with the commitment to leave no one behind, UN Charter values, and international norms and standards. A number of key issues have also been examined in the broader regional context to better understand the transboundary nature of development. As the primary source of reference for the UN System in the country, the CCA aims to guide engagement with the Government and the people of Tajikistan to implement policies and programmes to promote sustainable development. In particular, CCA will inform the preparation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) between the Government of Tajikistan and the United Nations System. CCA draws upon various sources including national surveys, administrative data, thematic analysis, global and regional reports, and findings from the Vulnerability and Resilience Atlas (VRA) for Tajikistan.¹ It is important to note that credible and disaggregated data are limited. This greatly affects the depth of analysis, and a thorough review of development policies to address deprivation and inequality, especially for groups of people left behind. Lastly, the CCA is an ongoing process to assess the state of national development in Tajikistan which will be updated annually.

2. Progress toward the 2030 Agenda

Tajikistan has made steady progress toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).^{2,3} The National Development Strategy (NDS-2030) which was adopted in 2016 provides the overarching development framework. It is closely aligned to Agenda 2030. NDS-2020 is being implemented through three mid-term development programmes (MTDPs) each with a five-year duration. Currently, the second MTDP (2021-2025) is being finalized. In the last 15 years, there has been a significant reduction in income poverty rate (SDG 1).⁴ There has also been progress in education (SDG 4), with higher enrolment rates at primary and secondary school level. Other SDGs on track include access to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), and climate action (SDG 13).⁵ However, progress has been relatively modest in the achievement of SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 5 (Gender equality), and SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth). At the current rate, the SDGs that may not be achieved by 2030 are: SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), SDG 15 (Life on land), and SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). There are no recent data on responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). Inter-relational analysis of SDGs⁶ shows that SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy) has a major multiplier effect to influence the achievement of other SDGs in Tajikistan, followed by SDG 2 (Zero hunger); SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals); SDG 4 (Quality education); SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth); and SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation). The rankings showed SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) to be the most dependent on progress in other SDGs.

Despite progress on SDGs, inherent vulnerabilities can easily undermine Tajikistan's development trajectory. Low-level of economic development, high exposure to environmental hazards, and socio-economic disparities make Tajikistan vulnerable to internal and external shocks. A weak governance system and the cascading effects of the COVID-19 has made it even more challenging for the country to

¹ United Nations Country Team in Tajikistan, 2019, Vulnerability and Resilience Atlas for Tajikistan, online platform.

² See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>, <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

³ Sachs, J. et al., 2020, The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19, Sustainable Development Report 2020.

⁴ From 83 percent in 2013 to 26 percent in 2019. World Bank data, 2020. [<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan>]

⁵ Status based on selected targets and an SDG targets' index. [<https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/TJK>]

⁶ Technical consultations between the UN, government partners, CSOs and think tanks to assess the extent of SDGs interrelation, 2016 (unpublished).

achieve all the SDGs and realize the national development aspirations as articulated in the NDS-2030.⁷

3. National vision for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

SDG nationalization has further progressed, but there are still some gaps. The national development framework is broadly aligned with the SDGs,⁸ but SDGs-driven investments and plans have not been developed yet. The NDS-2030 focuses on economic diversification and competitiveness, sustainable jobs, improving energy supply and transport connectivity, ensuring food security, enhancing public administration, and developing human resources.⁹ It is estimated that USD 118 billion can be mobilized for the implementation of NDS-2030 from 2016 to 2030, which roughly translates into USD 7.8 billion annually, equivalent to over 96 percent of the GDP in 2019.¹⁰ However, a national SDG roadmap and SDG financing frameworks are needed to better understand the gaps and measures needed to increase financing for development. Moreover, the localization of SDGs is at an early stage. Institutional mandates and responsibilities to support SDGs have been strengthened, but capacities are still weak.

4. Political and institutional analysis

Tajikistan is a presidential republic with a bicameral parliament. The Constitution defines Tajikistan as a democratic, law-based, secular and unitary state.¹¹ After the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, the country immediately entered a phase of high political instability, with a five-year civil war. **Since the end of the civil war, political stability and peace has been maintained. Although several reforms have been untaken, institutions and capacities remain relatively weak.** There is a high level of perceived corruption: in 2019, Tajikistan received poor rankings from both the Transparency International (TI)¹² and the World Bank¹³ in terms of corruption perceptions and corruption control.

People face obstacles accessing justice and public services¹⁴ which undermines trust.¹⁵ The Government has undertaken a number of legislative and policy reforms to foster an effective justice system. Implementation lags due to lack of clear mechanisms for implementing legislative acts. Access to justice is negatively affected by weak capacities, insufficient access to information, and lack of transparency.¹⁶ In addition, the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights is weak. Although nearly 50 percent of the total population is covered by state run free legal aid, legal aid centres are insufficient with limited funding. Moreover, the Law on Legal Aid adopted in 2020 does not recognise victims of violence as eligible to receive free (state-funded) legal aid in criminal cases.¹⁷

Freedom of expression is restricted and space for civil society is narrowing.¹⁸ Independent media outlets face significant constraints. The ability of the civil society to influence state policy is limited. There are no procedures for public consultations and participation in the decision-making. The Fora on

⁷ UNDP, September 2020, Impact of COVID-19 on Lives, Livelihoods and Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in Tajikistan. [<https://www.tj.undp.org/content/tajikistan/en/home/library/impact-of-covid-19-on-lives--livelihoods-and-micro--small-and-me.html>]

⁸ The Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) determined that about 64 percent of the SDG objectives are reflected in two national strategic documents (76 of 119 relevant SDG goals). A broad review of 10 national strategies has shown mainstreaming of SDGs in these documents is 78 percent.

⁹ [<https://medt.tj/en/strategy-and-programmes/nds2030>]

¹⁰ Annually in nominal terms over 15-year period; GDP in 2019 was over USD 8.11 billion. World Bank, 2020.

¹¹ Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan - Генеральная прокуратура Республики Таджикистан. [www.prokuratura.tj]

¹² Ranked 153 out of 180 countries and dropping from 124 in 2003. Transparency International, 2019, Corruption Perceptions Index. [<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results/ata>]

¹³ Corruption control score of 13.5 on a scale of 0 to 100. World Bank, 2019, Worldwide Governance Indicators. Country Data Report for Tajikistan. [<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators#>]

¹⁴ Safarzoda et al, 2017, Analysis of execution of the state programmes of the Republic of Tajikistan in the field of judiciary and legal reform, pp. 6-7.

¹⁵ Sputnik News, 7 February 2020, 'Рахмон провел перестановки в судебной системе Таджикистана'.

¹⁶ Among others, see Open Budget Survey & Transparency International. [<https://www.internationalbudget.org/open-budget-survey/country-results/2019/tajikistan> of Tajikistan] [<https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/tajikistan#>]

¹⁷ Adopted on 4 July 2020, No.1694.

¹⁸ https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session35/Documents/A_HRC_35_22_Add_2_EN.docx.

Rule of Law is an informal mechanism which is annually organized by the Ministry of Justice. It is the only platform for civil society organizations (CSOs) to voice their concerns. Tajikistan's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index worsened from 149 in 2017 to 161 in 2020.¹⁹ In 2019, Freedom House gave Tajikistan a score of 7 or 'not free'.²⁰

Achieving a genuine tripartite social dialogue and trade union pluralism is a challenge. There is lack of genuine collective bargaining, insufficient compliance with the international labour standards, weak labour administration, and poor organizational capacities amongst trade unions and employers' organizations. Women are under-represented in bi-partite and tripartite mechanisms. Labour inspections are a serious concern. The labour code reform in 2016 and Law No. 1505 (2018) present serious concerns with regards to ratified international labour standards.²¹

Gender inequality is pervasive and systemic. National institutional mechanisms for ensuring gender equality are underdeveloped and underfinanced. There is no established process for gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting. While there have been some advances, opportunities for women for holding public offices are limited, especially at the top level of the government. After the last national elections in 2020, women constitute 14 out of 63 Members of the Parliament and chair two out of nine Parliamentary Committees.²² Quota are not prescribed nor used. In 2017, in the judiciary, women were 15 percent of all judges and 25.6 percent of judges in the Supreme Court. A woman was appointed as a Chair of the Supreme Economic Court. The number of women chairing regional, city and district courts is low.

5. Economic transformation

With a per capita GDP of USD 874 or USD 3,379 (PPP),²³ Tajikistan is the poorest country in Central Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).²⁴ In 2021, the classification of Tajikistan was changed from low income to lower middle income.²⁵ Between 2000 and 2019, per capita GDP increased nearly three times. However, aggregate economic growth, driven mainly by domestic consumption which is fuelled by remittances,²⁶ has not led to better job opportunities in the domestic market and a significant increase in household income. Outmigration for employment is a major coping strategy. Remittances account for nearly a third of GDP. While the proportion of people living under the national poverty line fell from 80 percent in 2003 to 26 percent in 2019,²⁷ over 20 percent of the population is still vulnerable to multidimensional poverty and income inequality. Residents of rural areas, Khatlon province and Regions of Republican Subordination (RRS) are particularly prone to poverty. In 2020, the Human Development Index (HDI) score for Tajikistan was 0.668 and it was ranked 125 out of 189 countries.²⁸ Employment disparities are linked to sex, age, and skills. The COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated the precariousness of jobs and vulnerability of the economy.

¹⁹ Over a total of 180 countries. [<https://rsf.org/en/tajikistan>]

²⁰ For example, the civil society rating declined from 1.75 to 1.50 in 2020. Freedom House, 2020, 'Freedom in the World 2020' Annual Report. [<https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2020>]

²¹ With regards to ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81). Comments adopted by the CEACR: Tajikistan. C081 - Observation (CEACR) - adopted 2019, published 109th ILC session (2021). [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13203:0::NO::P13203_COUNTRY_ID:103547]

²² Website of the Parliament of the Republic of Tajikistan. [<https://parlament.tj/ru/kumitaho>]

²³ GDP in current USD in 2019. Market value of GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusts for price of non-traded goods & services. World Bank database. [<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?locations=TJ>]

²⁴ Calculations based on national poverty rate latest year in CIS, World Bank database. [<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC>]

²⁵ According to the World Bank classification, lower middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$1,046 and \$4,095. [<https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>]

²⁶ From 2007 to 2014, Tajikistan had the world's highest remittances to GDP ratio. Remittances were equivalent to 48 percent of country's GDP in 2014, and close to 19 percent in 2015 (World Bank data, 2016). In 2019 remittances amounted to over USD 2.3 billion, equivalent to 28.6 percent of GDP. [<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=TJ>]

²⁷ World Bank data. [<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=TJ>]

²⁸ UNDP, 2020. [<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>]

Low-end services, subsistence agriculture, and commodities characterize the nature of the economy. Although the share of agriculture has declined, it remains the main source of livelihoods. There has not been adequate economic diversification. A rapidly growing population will put a major strain on the economy, from public goods and services, to food supplies and the availability of jobs in the future. On the positive side, demographic changes including an increase in the labour force can further feed growth and economic development provided that the government makes sufficient investments in enhancing human capabilities and improving public services. Over the next 30 years lower fertility rates and a declining dependency ratio²⁹ can create a demographic dividend.³⁰ Matched with significant and quality investments in health, education, employment, especially for women and youth, and family planning services, this can foster rapid, more inclusive economic growth and improve Tajikistan's human development.

Lack of appropriate qualifications, skills, and competencies³¹ are affecting employability of young people. In 2016, 1 in 3 young people (ages 15 to 24) were not employed, receiving education or enrolled in training (NEET).³² The vocational education system does not meet the needs of employers and entrepreneurs are not engaged in the development of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system.³³ ³⁴ A significant number of people have opted for employment in the Russian Federation, where the demand for low-skilled workers is high. Many others who enter the labour force in Tajikistan end up in informal employment.

Limited role of the private sector is a major constraint to inclusive growth. Private sector investment is low, amounting to about 5 percent of the GDP.³⁵ Businesses are overregulated and subjected to numerous inspections, and compliance costs are high. The Doing Business Index ranks the country 106 out of a total of 190 countries³⁶. While business reform is on the agenda, improved regulations have not yet led to any significant increase in private sector investment and job creation. Inflation is kept under control and price stability is ensured by the Tajikistan National Bank, but high lending rates of over 22 percent dampen demand for credit and limit businesses to expand.³⁷

Tajikistan is heavily dependent on imports of food grains from its neighbouring countries. Although most of Tajikistan's agriculture exports go to its neighbouring countries, trade integration in Central Asia is impeded by historical legacies, inadequate private sector development, business and regulatory environment including cumbersome trade procedures, and infrastructural gaps, which increase the cost of trading goods. In light of trade disruptions and price volatility, the COVID-19 crisis has also shown the need for improved connectivity and regional integration.

Public spending is increasing but the country needs to invest more in sustainable economic transformation. While the fiscal gap narrowed,³⁸ the public expenditure, as share of the GDP, increased from 13 percent in 1998 to almost 22 percent in 2006.³⁹ Since 2006, the public expenditure in real terms has gradually risen and it is estimated to reach 33 percent in 2020.⁴⁰ Between 2016 and 2020, average

²⁹ The dependency ratio is the ratio of working-age population (15-64 years old) to non-working age population. United Nations.

³⁰ This is the boost to economic growth that occurs when there are more working age people relative to dependents. UNFPA, 2020.

³¹ 21st century *transversal* skills include communication, team work and networking, critical thinking and problem solving, initiative and resilience. See: ILO, Skill-up, dtd Nov 2019; AES, What are 21st century skills, dtd 2020.

³² Labour Force Survey, 2016. While routine employment periodically updated by the Agency on Statistics do not include disaggregated figures, the Labour force survey is a household survey which captures the employment situation including unemployment, labour underutilization, and NEET.

³³ ILO, 2020, Assessment Report State Strategy for Labour Market Development of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020, Working Paper, forthcoming.

³⁴ Rodrik, D., 2015, Premature Deindustrialization. [<https://www.nber.org/papers/w20935>]

³⁵ World Bank, 2018, Tajikistan Country Economic Memorandum: Nurturing Tajikistan's Growth Potential; World Bank Group, May 2018, Tajikistan - Systematic Country Diagnostic.

³⁶ Doing Business Rankings. [<https://www.doingbusiness.org/en/rankings>]

³⁷ [<https://nbt.tj/en/macroeconomic/tavarrumi-solona-iyun-2017.php>]

³⁸ Between 1995 and 2006, the fiscal deficit decreased from 11 percent of the GDP to around 3 percent. World Bank, 2008, Fiscal Policy for Growth and Development in Tajikistan. [<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/6494>]

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Calculations based on IMF budget data. [<https://www.imf.org/~media/Files/Publications/CR/2020/English/1TJKEA2020001.ashx>]

tax revenue covered around 61 percent of the total public expenditure, with the budget shortfall being mainly covered by grants for public investment programmes funded by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

Although some budget data are made available, there is limited public participation in the public budget preparation. The Open Budget Survey ranks Tajikistan 101 out of 117 countries in terms of budget transparency.⁴¹ Public expenditure for energy and social sectors are prioritized. Social spending accounts for the largest share of public expenditure, with education receiving approximately one third of it. Around 60 percent of the public economic expenditure is allocated to the energy sector,⁴² while agriculture and industry account for less than 10 percent.⁴³ Low public investment in employment-sensitive sectors, such as agriculture and industry suggests that the fiscal policy is not fully aligned to inclusive growth.

6. Environment and climate change

Due to its geology, hydrology, and topography, Tajikistan is disaster-prone and highly vulnerable to climate change. Tajikistan has vast natural wealth, including minerals,⁴⁴ rivers with hydropower potential, and rich biodiversity.⁴⁵ In 2013, Tajikistan was considered the most vulnerable country to climate change in Central Asia.⁴⁶ In 2019, disasters triggered internal displacement of 4,800 people.⁴⁷ Climate change and natural hazards affect the agriculture sector and can also trigger technological accidents (so-called “NaTech” events). According to estimates, economic losses from weather-related disasters vary from 0.4 to 1.3 percent of Tajikistan’s GDP per annum.

Urgent action is needed to build resilience in agriculture, promote low-emission land use and meet the country’s adaptation and mitigation targets. Climate change puts at risk short and long-term economic performance of the country. Agricultural risks could lead to an increase in food insecurity, poor nutrition and worsening of livelihood opportunities for the rural population, especially among women, young persons, and vulnerable groups, who are less likely to have access to information and resources.⁴⁸ Moreover, the government has limited resources and capacity to put in place climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.

A weak legislative and institutional capacity makes it challenging to effectively manage environmental resources⁴⁹ including land, water, flora, and fauna, as well as management and supervision of business activities to protect the environment. While the NDS-2030 contains ambitious targets for environmental protection, funding is limited. Environmental programmes rely heavily on donor funding. To ensure environmental protection and build resilience of communities and vulnerable groups there is a need to further strengthen governance, rule of law and transparency. An efficient use of natural resources, improved infrastructure, institutional capacity, and higher budget allocation are also needed.

Tajikistan has rich biodiversity⁵⁰ but faces increasing losses. The country hosts part of the Central Pamir-Alai region supporting 4,300 species and 1,400 endemic plants, but data on threatened vascular plant species and location of endangered plants are lacking. Existing programs and strategies to support biodiversity conservation and management of protected areas are insufficiently funded, initiatives are

⁴¹ Open Budget Survey Tajikistan 2019 | International Budget Partnership.

⁴² Major expenditure under fuel & energy sector is for building the Rogun Hydropower Plant.

⁴³ Calculations based on data from the Tajikistan Agency on Statistics, World Bank and IMF.

⁴⁴ [<https://eiti.org/tajikistan>]

⁴⁵ World Bank Group, May 2018, Tajikistan - Systematic Country Diagnostic.

⁴⁶ World Bank Group, 2013, Tajikistan: Overview of Climate Change Activities, Washington, DC.

[<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/17552>]

⁴⁷ IDMC, 2020, Global Report on Internal Displacement. [<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>]

⁴⁸ FAO, 2016, National gender assessment of agricultural and rural livelihoods. Tajikistan. Country gender assessment series.

[<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5766e.pdf>]

⁴⁹ [www.eco.tj]

⁵⁰ The territory of Tajikistan is recognized by the NGO Conservation International as a hotspot of biodiversity.

not well monitored, and updated data are lacking and not shared across different institutions.⁵¹

Tajikistan has abundant hydropower resources, but it needs to balance energy security, efficiency, and management of renewable energy sources. It ranks eighth worldwide in terms of gross theoretical capability of hydropower resources.⁵² Tajikistan is also rich in minerals but the price volatility that characterizes commodities impedes strategic investments in the mining sector. Water resources are critically important for the country and the region, particularly its use in the agriculture and the energy sectors. Integrated water resources management needs to be fully operationalized along with greater cooperation at the regional level. The hydro-energy of small rivers, solar energy, geothermal waters, wind energy and bioenergy are potential energy sources but require a sustainable approach to energy production.

7. Social exclusion

Tajikistan's Constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities for all the citizens. However, some segments of the population experience social exclusion. The population is young (median age is 23) and is growing faster than in any other country in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Deprivations and vulnerabilities are more concentrated in rural areas, where about 74 percent of people live. Social exclusion is generally associated with gender, age, disability, and ethnic identity. Migrants, including seasonal migrants, returnees, stateless persons, refugees and asylum-seekers are at risk of being left behind.⁵³ Limited disaggregated socio-economic data further compounds appropriate policy responses to address social exclusion.

Poor households are often the most vulnerable. Poverty, deprivations, and vulnerabilities are concentrated in remote and rural areas. Lack of quality physical infrastructure and access to services are key challenges that people in remote areas face. Around one-third of the population in rural areas was experiencing poverty.⁵⁴ Poverty rate among women is higher including cases of extreme poverty which is more common among female-headed households. 34 percent of children live in poor households and 16 percent live in extreme poverty.⁵⁵ Living in rural areas is also one of the key determinants of labour migration. In 2019, nearly 90 percent of Tajik labour migrants were from rural areas.^{56,57}

Health system faces a number of challenges, from funding to lack of quality data and capacities. Population growth and increasing health needs⁵⁸ will require higher public investments. Despite government efforts, health spending is insufficient to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and to adequately respond to COVID-19. Despite improvements, efforts are needed to improve the quality and coverage of sexual and reproductive health services. Birth rates for adolescents are high. Too many women and new-borns die from childbirth complications. Young people have a variety of health concerns: mental health, depression, obesity, violence, stigma and discrimination, suicide, unwanted pregnancies. Medical care and psychological support to children, adolescents and youth can only meet a third of the national demand.⁵⁹ Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are increasing. There are also

⁵¹ Report of the state of environment in Tajikistan, 2018. [http://stat.wv.tj/publications/October2019/tphifzi_muhiti_zist_-_2019_nav.pdf]

⁵² Out of the potential 527 billion kWh per year, the country's technical exploitable and economic capabilities are estimated to be 264 billion kWh per year, out of which very modest resources have been exploited so far. WEC, 2010, Survey of Energy resources.

⁵³ Tajikistan hosts the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers in Central Asia, primarily from Afghanistan, and over 48,000 stateless persons, the majority of whom are women and girls.

⁵⁴ 30.2 percent in rural areas, 18.4 percent in urban areas. World Bank Group, 2020, Poverty in Tajikistan 2020 infographic. [<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2020/10/15/poverty-in-tajikistan-2020>]

⁵⁵ Tajikistan Agency on Statistics, 2018, Child poverty report.

⁵⁶ Asian Development Bank, 2020, Migration in Tajikistan.

⁵⁷ Ministry of Labour, August 2020, Migration and Employment of Population.

⁵⁸ According to UNFPA projections, the population at high health risk, 0-5 aged people and childbearing women aged 15-49, will increase by 19 percent and 58 percent in 2030 and 2050, respectively. UNFPA, 2020, Population Situation Analysis Report for Tajikistan.

⁵⁹ UNICEF Tajikistan, 2018, Rapid Assessment of the system response to adolescents' mental health, including prevention of suicidal behavior, in the Republic of Tajikistan, Key Results; Strategic Research Centre under the President of Tajikistan, UNICEF, 2019, Report on findings of the Adolescent Baseline Study.

significant gaps in access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, especially in rural areas.⁶⁰

HIV infections are increasing. The number of people living with HIV in Tajikistan is 12,876,⁶¹ of which about a third are women. There are gaps in the quality of HIV testing and counselling services, particularly in rural areas. Stigma and gender discrimination contribute to the spread of HIV and hinder access to adequate testing and treatment services.⁶²

Tajikistan faces a challenging food security situation. About 1 in 3 households are moderately or severely food insecure, and nearly 1 in 10 face severe food insecurity.⁶³ Vulnerability to climate change and reliance on imports threatens food availability in Tajikistan. The outbreak of COVID-19 has seen an increase in food prices which can contribute to a higher income poverty rate as many low-income households spend a major part of their income on food.

Malnutrition is a significant health problem, more prevalent in remote areas. Although the rate of malnutrition has decreased in the last decade, the number of those undernourished has remained stagnant.⁶⁴ Tajikistan has the highest rate of malnutrition among the former Soviet Republics.⁶⁵ Access to nutritious food and feeding practices are the main causes of malnutrition. About 1 in 3 children are exclusively breastfed.⁶⁶ Micronutrient deficiencies affect the lives of many infants with high rates of anaemia and iodine deficiency.⁶⁷ According to a survey, only 9 percent of children between 6-23 months of age are given a minimum acceptable diet and 58 percent of children do not consume any vegetables or fruits.⁶⁸

Despite an increase in budget allocations and services, equal access to education is a concern. This is especially the case in rural areas, for girls, and for children with disabilities, and for refugee children and undocumented children. A third of children with disabilities are in residential care institutions.⁶⁹ Although measures are being taken, girls do not enjoy equal access to education compared to boys, especially in upper secondary education.⁷⁰ The projected increase in primary and secondary school students will further stretch resources to ensure that the quality of education improves. There is limited capacity and preparedness to deliver digital learning⁷¹ and to provide 21st century skills for young people to improve their employability and active participation in the society.⁷²

Women, compared to men, face barriers to political participation, access to economic resources, including land, finance, and assets. In 2020, Tajikistan ranked 137 out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (0.626), a fall of 14 places compared to the 2018 ranking.⁷³ In 2019, less than 29 percent of working age women were in the labour force, compared to over 50 percent for men.⁷⁴ Since 2000, the gender pay gap has narrowed but, on average, women still only receive about 64 percent of the monthly wage for men.

⁶⁰ According to the 2017 World Bank report, access to improved water on premises is 87 percent in urban areas, and only 36 percent in rural areas.

⁶¹ State AIDS Centre. [<http://www.nc-aids.tj/statistika.html#sdfootnote3anc>]

⁶² SPIN-Plus, 2015, The People Living with HIV Stigma Index, Analytical report, Dushanbe.

⁶³ Average for 2016-2018. The Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia, 2019.

⁶⁴ According to the 2017 Demographic and Health Survey, stunting among children under 5 years of age fell from 27 percent in 2012 to 17 percent in 2017. With an annual population growth rate of 2.5 percent, however, the current decline rate is insufficient to meet the 2025 target of a 40 percent reduction in the number of stunted children under five years of age.

⁶⁵ Global Hunger Index. [<https://www.globalhungerindex.org/tajikistan.html>]

⁶⁶ UNICEF, Drexel University & Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2016, Formative Research on Infant and Young Child Feeding and Maternal Nutrition in Tajikistan, Dushanbe: Polygraph. [<https://www.unicef.org/tajikistan/resources.html>] (Accessed: 10/10/20).

⁶⁷ Anemia: 28 percent; Iodine deficiency: 55 percent. UNICEF & MoHSPP, 2016.

⁶⁸ UNICEF, 2019, The State of the World's Children.

⁶⁹ MoES, 2020, EMIS.

⁷⁰ Republic of Tajikistan, 2020, Draft National Strategy for Education Development, 2021-2030.

⁷¹ Internet coverage is low: 48 percent of urban and 32 percent of rural adolescents have access to internet. Rates are lower for girls. UNICEF and EU, May 2020, Rapid Education Needs Assessment.

⁷² 21st century transversal skills and deep skills. EC, 2019, Skills for Industry Strategy 2030; AES, 2020, What are 21st century skills.

⁷³ World Economic Forum, 2020, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, p. 329. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf]

⁷⁴ ILO Modelled Estimate for 2019. [<https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/population-and-labour-force/>]

Gender inequality is pervasive and systemic, and fuels high levels of violence against women and girls. In 2017, 24 percent of women aged between 19 and 49 had experienced physical or sexual violence. In 97 percent of these cases it was the current or former husband who was responsible for such acts. Around 80 percent of married women reported that their husbands exhibited at least one form of marital control.⁷⁵ Tajikistan has not yet criminalized all forms of violence against women in line with 2013 CEDAW recommendations.⁷⁶ Lack of investment, weak capacities combined with a culture of deference, low awareness of legal rights, and gender-based stereotypes are some of the key barriers to achieve gender equality in the country.

A social protection system exists but it is fragmented and underfunded. According to 2018 official data, 19 percent of total public expenditure, approximately 4.5 percent of the GDP, was allocated for social protection.⁷⁷ Just over 7 percent of the population received cash transfers in 2018, indicating limited targeting. Results-based budgeting, improved targeting and delivery of benefits, enhanced performance monitoring, and introduction of a database of beneficiaries would greatly improve the effectiveness of existing schemes. Another major bottleneck is the lack of qualified personnel who can effectively manage the social protection system.⁷⁸

8. Compliance with international human rights, norms and standards

Human rights situation in the country has not improved. Gender inequality, child labour, limited freedoms of association, expression, and peaceful assembly, statelessness and limitations to the right to seek asylum are some of the pressing concerns.⁷⁹ Tajikistan lacks a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and there are restrictions on religious freedoms. Conditions in prisons require urgent attention. In 2016, the *Law on Ombudsperson* was amended to bring the institution closer to the Paris Principles, but full compliance with fundamental standards related to its independence were not achieved.⁸⁰

Women face violations of their human rights, and protection of women's rights is inadequate. Tajikistan accepted all the recommendations related to gender equality and women's empowerment provided under the 2nd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). However, national gender equality policies are not aligned with the recommendations contained in the UPR.

Tajikistan has ratified only 50 out of 190 ILO labour conventions.⁸¹ Moreover, implementation is difficult to assess as Tajikistan does not regularly report to the ILO Supervisory Bodies. These bodies have raised a number of concerns, notably regarding gender equality, the prevalence of child labour and serious restrictions on the labour inspection system.⁸²

Legal framework for refugees and asylum seekers is closer to international standards, but major gaps remain. Asylum seekers and refugees do not have access to free legal assistance and protection other than provided by legal partners of UNHCR.⁸³ Reform of the system is impeded by the removal of UNHCR observer status on the RSD Commission in 2018. Persons arriving in Tajikistan with the intention of seeking asylum are expected to possess valid passports and enter the country with a Tajik visa. Not

⁷⁵ Demographic and Health Survey, 2017, p. 208. [<https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-fr341-dhs-final-reports.cfm>]

⁷⁶ [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Sharedpercent20Documents/TJK/INT_CEDAW_CSS_TJK_32597_E.pdf]

⁷⁷ Own calculations using exchange rate of 11.3 somoni for 1 USD and based on data from the Tajikistan Agency on Statistics, 2018.

⁷⁸ There is only one University that trains social workers at bachelor and master's level, and vocational education is lacking.

⁷⁹ [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/TJK/CO/3&Lang=en]

⁸⁰ Human Rights Committee, 2019, Concluding Observations on the third periodic report of Tajikistan, para 9.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPRpercent2fCpercent2fTJKpercent2fCOpercent2f3&Lang=en]

⁸¹ This includes all eight fundamental human rights conventions of the ILO. In January 2020, the country ratified the Protocol of 2014 to the ILO Forced Labour Convention.

⁸² The Labour Code reform in 2016 presents serious concerns to the compliance with the provision of the ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81). Comments adopted by the CEACR: Tajikistan. C081 - Observation (CEACR) - adopted 2019, published 109th ILC session (2021). [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13203:0::NO::P13203_COUNTRY_ID:103547]

⁸³ Law No. 1182 of 2015 does not provide for free assistance to asylum seekers and refugees.

meeting these conditions results in exclusion from asylum procedures with subsequent penalization and possible deportation.

Tajikistan has not ratified the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Despite this situation, the country progressed well in harmonizing its legislation with international standards and authorities report about 840 *de jure* stateless persons in Tajikistan. . In January 2018, the Government adopted the “Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons”. However, this law considers a stateless person as one who enters Tajikistan as ‘stateless’ and does not provide a status determination procedure.

Tajikistan has taken steps to reform the juvenile justice system. Over the last 10 years, juvenile delinquency increased from 589 offences in 2009 to 907 in 2018.⁸⁴ Most crimes are theft. While data on the status of the juvenile justice system is available, it not fully disaggregated. Tajikistan has taken steps to reform the juvenile justice system. In 2015, Government policy and practice shifted from juvenile justice to justice for children, recognising children as alleged offenders, victims and witnesses of crime. New codes helped to bring the system in line with international standards. In 2017 a National Program on justice for children was also approved.

9. Development, humanitarian, and peace linkages

There has been tangible progress to achieve stability and to avoid a relapse into humanitarian crisis. However, owing to Tajikistan’s fragilities, this progress can be easily undone. The priority is to strengthen country capacities and reliable response mechanisms to reduce major fragilities and risks. These will help to solidify the work of Government and other partners for sustainable development and resilience and prevent humanitarian crises.

Main risks and fragilities include disasters, socio-economic vulnerability of households, and risks emanating from regional conflicts. Tajikistan is categorized as “above average” in overall risks due to its exposure to climate change and natural hazards, socio-economic vulnerabilities, such as a high dependency on food imports and direct remittances, security threats such as violent extremism, potential risks coming from the southern border with Afghanistan, inequality, and partially inadequate coping capacities. However, the relative risk exposure has slightly diminished over the past decade.

Tajikistan is prone to environmental hazards, including floods, earthquakes, mud flows, landslides, epidemics, droughts, avalanches, insect infestations. Out of all risks and exposures, droughts and floods have affected most of the people. With 63 percent of the population living in highly seismic areas, earthquakes are a constant risk. People without economic means are unable to move and can be “trapped” in environmentally fragile areas. A more systematic approach is needed to analyse, anticipate, reduce disaster risks, and for greater preparedness and response at the community level.

Tajikistan is overly dependent on remittances and on the economic situation in Russia. Since 2005, Tajikistan has ranked as one of the top countries in terms of remittances received as a share of GDP. Any decline in remittances invariably increases poverty and vulnerability of the households. The COVID-19 has further underlined the vulnerability of households who depend on remittances. There was a sharp fall in personal remittances which is likely to have an impact on income poverty.

Food security is a major concern and greatly affected by shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted Tajikistan’s dependence on food imports. On average, Tajik households spend 50-60 percent of their income on food.⁸⁵ The combined effects of a lingering COVID-19 pandemic, reduced remittances, higher food prices, and increased poverty could undermine social cohesion.

Unstable situation in north-eastern Afghanistan is a major destabilizing factor. Tajikistan is a peaceful country that borders one of the world’s most volatile one. With the withdrawal of the US troops from

⁸⁴ Tajikistan Ministry of Interior.

⁸⁵ [<https://reliefweb.int/report/tajikistan/fill-nutrient-gap-tajikistan-summary-report-july-2018>]

Afghanistan, Taliban has been able to bring more territory including the several border posts under its control. There have been reports that Taliban control 85% of the territory.⁸⁶ There are ongoing attempts to support the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to agree on a peace settlement, but no agreement has been reached yet. The situation in Afghanistan remains fluid. When fighting broke out, several Afghan civilians and troops crossed into Tajikistan seeking refuge. Since then, all of them have returned to Afghanistan. In the meantime, the movement of goods between the two countries remains largely unaffected.

Cross-border issues with Kyrgyzstan around the Ferghana Valley contribute to inter-ethnic tensions. Together with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan forms a part of the Fergana Valley. The ethnically diverse and heavily populated region is highly fertile and geographically distanced from the capitals. Over half of the long border is not delimited and demarcated leading to territorial disputes in the contested borderlands. Conflicts between bordering communities of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have erupted over access to water or pastures, or as a protest against rigid border control. The latest escalations in April 2021 resulted in deadly clashes between Tajik and Kyrgyz communities which resulted in loss of life and the destruction of property.⁸⁷

10. Financial landscape

Achievement of the SDGs and NDS-2020 targets will depend on leveraging diversified sources of financing. Tajikistan is not mobilizing sufficient financing for sustainable development. A financing roadmap aligned with the national priorities and sector strategies is needed. Moreover, a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform can help the country to increase private investments and explore innovative financing for the SDGs. In terms of public spending, education, energy, and social insurance and protection are considered as priorities. Challenges in the area of public spending include transparency, efficiency, and equity. Public financing relies highly on foreign aid and concessional loans. Among others, effective implementation of the Public Finance Management Strategy 2030, introduction of programme budgeting, fiscal decentralization, and control and accountability of public expenditures is critical.

Tajikistan is considered to be at a high risk of “debt distress”.⁸⁸ Although Tajikistan continues to receive concessional grants and budget support, its external debt has continued to increase. The country attracts different forms of financing from multilateral and bilateral donors, such as equity, quasi-equity and concessional credit directed at public corporations and the private sector.⁸⁹ However, full implementation of the NDS-2030 will require a balance between widening the fiscal space while maintaining a sustainable debt level.⁹⁰

A weak policy, regulatory, and tax environment limits the role of private sector role in the economy. The private sector accounts for about 60 percent of GDP. However, domestic private sector investment has been declining and it is low compared to similar countries. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) amounted to only 2.6 percent of GDP in 2019.⁹¹ Despite efforts to increase the country’s Doing Business ranking, long-term domestic and FDI are negatively affected by an unfavourable business environment.⁹² Innovative financing schemes involving the private sector and IFIs can be leveraged to increase the resource base. Public and private partnerships, social impact investments, business challenge funds, and blended finance are some of the schemes that Tajikistan can tap into for additional financing. Furthermore, through an improved regulatory environment and incentives, remittances and

⁸⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/militia-commanders-rush-aid-afghan-forces-against-taliban-2021-07-09/>

⁸⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56940011>

⁸⁸ [<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/209181595281237113/pdf/Tajikistan-Joint-World-Bank-IMF-Debt-Sustainability-Analysis.pdf>]

⁸⁹ Claussen, J., Sultanov, F., 2018, Financial Analysis to support the SDGs implementation in Tajikistan, p. 15. [https://untj.org/?page_id=9821]

⁹⁰ World Bank Group, May 2018, Tajikistan - Systematic Country Diagnostic.

⁹¹ World Bank data, 2019.

⁹² The Doing Business Index ranked the country 106 out of a total of 190 countries (2020), gaining twenty positions from 2018. World Bank Group, 2020, Doing Business Index, Economy Profile Tajikistan.

[<https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/t/tajikistan/TJK.pdf>]

diaspora savings can be mobilized for long-term investments.

11. Conclusion

The national development vision calls for: *'a steadily growing, competitive country that provides decent living standards and equal opportunities for each person to realize his or her potential based on equality, justice and respect for human dignity'*.⁹³ Over the last two decades, Tajikistan has made tangible progress across several socio-economic indicators.⁹⁴ While poverty rates have fallen, Tajikistan remains the poorest country in Central Asia.⁹⁵ A child born today is expected to be only half as productive as he or she could be with good health and education.⁹⁶ 1 in 4 persons is vulnerable to multi-dimensional poverty.⁹⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic may push many families back into poverty.⁹⁸ Below are four key pillars that provide a framework for future cooperation between the Government and people of Tajikistan and the United Nations System.

Well-being: Invest in people and protect from harm

The provision of quality, affordable and accessible services in education, health, social protection, water supply and sanitation are central for achieving the NDS-2030 goals and the SDGs. As noted in the Voluntary National Report (VNR, 2017), *'empowering women economically, politically and socially'* is essential for more inclusive development in Tajikistan.⁹⁹ More effective social services and spending will better protect vulnerable groups, reduce pressures for seasonal migration, and help to counteract polarization. Moreover, a healthy, productive population can better support the shift to a more diversified, digital, and knowledge-based economy that is competitive, resilient, and sustainable.

Sustainable, inclusive economic growth: Unleash private sector capabilities for job creation, develop skills, and invest in greening the economy

The quality of growth since 2000 has not reduced income disparities, nor has it done enough to create adequate number of decent jobs, significantly raise household incomes, and increased investments in human capital. Economic growth has been driven by domestic consumption and remittances and less by private investment. Informality remains a concern. Future policies should invest in digital infrastructure and skills, high technology adoption, environmental sustainability, and effective climate change adaptation and mitigation. Weaknesses in manufacturing growth must be countered through greater private sector investment, improved economic governance, a transparent regulatory environment, and incentives for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These should promote greater economic participation of women and other vulnerable groups. Agriculture is still the main source of livelihood. Inclusive and climate-smart agriculture can enhance small-holder productivity, increase farm incomes, and generate decent employment.

Natural resource base: Strive for an integrated response to environmental and climate fragilities

Sustainable economic growth, health, and wellness of the population are at risk from the degradation of water, air, forests, agricultural land, and loss of biodiversity. Tajikistan is disaster-prone and climate change is expected to increase both the magnitude and frequency of climate-related hazards. Sustainable management of the country's natural resources *will depend upon* policy and regulatory change and capacity development for climate change adaptation and mitigation, more efficient use of natural resources, especially water, effective disaster risk management and increased community

⁹³ Government of Tajikistan, 2016, National development strategy of the republic of Tajikistan for the period up to 2030, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Sachs, J. et al., 2020, The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19, Sustainable Development Report 2020.

⁹⁵ World Bank, 2020, Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population); Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) (% of population). The number of people living in extreme poverty, or on less than \$1.90 per day, is unchanged for the past 15 years.

⁹⁶ World Bank, 2019, Early Childhood Education and Care: A Focused Review of Preschool Education in Tajikistan.

⁹⁷ Government of Tajikistan, 2017, Voluntary National Review, p. 9.

⁹⁸ World Bank, October 2020, Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune. For Europe and Central Asia, COVID-19 is projected to increase the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty (<\$1.90 per day, PPP) from 4.8% to between 5.3 and 5.5%.

⁹⁹ Government of Tajikistan, 2017, Voluntary National Review, p. 24.

readiness to respond to disasters and emergencies.

Governance and rule of law: *Increase effectiveness and accountability of public institutions, open civic space and promote trust*

Awareness about rights and due process amongst the population is low. More coherent and transparent governance institutions are needed that are accountable and free from corruption. Embedding equality and non-discrimination in the legislative framework and ensuring freedoms of association and participation are central to enhance the fairness and legitimacy of laws and to build trust and social cohesion. Major bottlenecks include gender-based discrimination and exclusion exist at many levels. Lastly, reliable, timely, and disaggregated statistics are essential not only to strengthen the governance but also for effective policymaking and programmes.