



# Evaluation of the European Union's cooperation with Tajikistan

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This evaluation is a comprehensive and independent assessment of the European Union's (EU) development cooperation with Tajikistan in 2014-2020. It aims to discern key lessons and to formulate recommendations in order to improve strategies, programmes and implementation of current and future interventions.

The evaluation focuses particularly on the priority areas of interventions identified in the Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2014-2020: Rural development, Health, and Education. However, the thematic coverage is not limited to these three sectors. It also includes COVID-19-related support to mitigate the impact of the pandemic as well as cross-cutting issues, such as human rights, gender equality, the climate crisis and environmental issues and conflict sensitivity.

## EU development cooperation

The EU cooperation with Tajikistan cannot be dissociated from the EU's regional cooperation in Central Asia. Its geopolitical position and role in regional security and stability are the primary interests of the EU and EU MS. The EU and Tajikistan have a longstanding relationship based on strong mutual interest and guided by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) that was signed in 2004 and came into force in 2010. The EU has been among the few donors actively supporting the country to fulfil its ambition to establish democratic institutions and strengthen the market economy. The EU and its Member States (EU MS) provide 40% of the global total overall development assistance to Tajikistan.

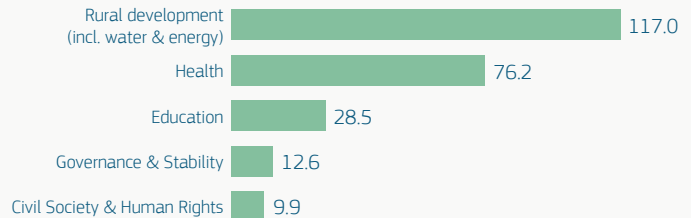
## Methodological approach

The evaluation is based on a mixed methods approach, including both quantitative and qualitative tools and methods. Multiple sources were systematically used to triangulate the information collected. In total, over 2,000 documents were consulted, 12 project activities in three districts were visited, and more than 100 interlocutors were interviewed.

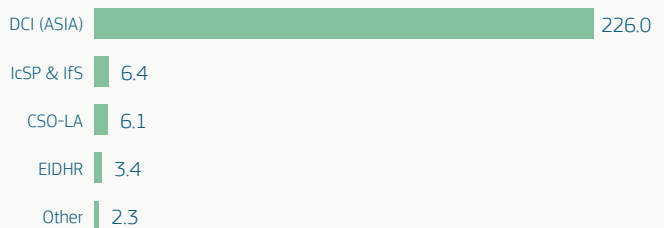
The COVID-19 pandemic posed an additional challenge in conducting the assessment. However, the evaluation team considers that it did not have a significant impact on the quality of the data collected. The most important limitation was access to reliable statistical data on the health and education sectors from the Tajik Government.

## KEY FIGURES / MIP 2014-2020

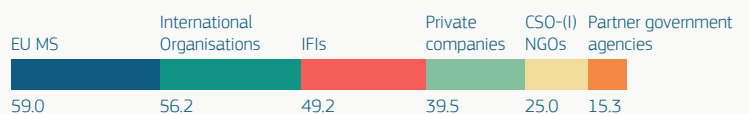
### Contracted amount per sector (million of euros)



### Contracted amount per instrument (million of euros)



### Contracted amount per channel (million of euros)



# CONCLUSIONS

## DESIGN OF EU SUPPORT

### C1 – Appropriateness of the support

The EU's support to Tajikistan was characterised by continuity while considering the positives and negatives of the EU's past engagement in the country.

- ↑ Projects in all sectors, budget support and blending operations were fully aligned with the relevant national and sectoral government strategies and development plans.
- ↑ Planning included wide-ranging deliberations with the Government and its agencies as well as like-minded development partners.

- ↓ The linkage between i) bilateral and regional support and ii) development and non-development cooperation (particularly GSP+ and rural development) was not sufficiently elaborated.
- ↓ The line between the long-term vision for change and the objectives to achieve this change was somewhat blurred.

### C2 – Adaptability to changing contexts

Tajikistan remained largely stable during the evaluation period and, consequently, there was no political need to change the general direction and thrust of the EU support.

- ↑ Whenever intervening internal and external factors required interventions to adapt (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic), the EU and its implementing partners generally achieved this task in an efficient, effective and transparent manner, and in consultation and cooperation with the benefitting stakeholders.

### C3 – Relevance, efficiency and comparative advantages of different funding modalities

All three funding modalities—projects, budget support and blending—proved their value. However, there was no comprehensive strategic reflection at country level on the comparative advantages and disadvantages of these modalities.

- ↑ In the education sector, technical assistance was preferred over budget support as stakeholders agreed that Tajikistan was not yet ready for budget support in education.
- ↑ The leverage effect of blending in the rural development sector and for energy projects is undeniable.

- ↓ Although not all stakeholders agreed on the delay of budget support disbursements in health, the reasons for this decision were transparently explained and conveyed.
- ↓ Interventions across all sectors experienced delays, some of which were considerable.

*The Mehrgon Market in Dushanbe*



# CONCLUSIONS

## EFFECTS OF EU SUPPORT

### C4 – Achievements at the output level

EU support contributed to tangible results in all sectors and for the benefit of the country as a whole.

- ↑ The evolution of the sector development plans and related action documents in recent years gives proof of gradual policy strengthening in health, education and rural development over the course of the evaluation period.
- ↑ Despite some delays in transforming policy into legislation, good progress was achieved in implementing development strategies and plans as well as the related budgets.

- ↓ While cooperation with civil society stakeholders increased, strengthened civil society capacity was not achieved in a systematic and comprehensive way.
- ↓ The case of trade—which was only supported through the EU's regional cooperation with Central Asia— shows that the EU went for ambitious output indicators which could ultimately not be achieved.

### C5 – Achievements at the outcome and impact levels

While EU-supported interventions have contributed to advances on outcomes and intermediate impacts across the board, they have done so to vastly different degrees.

- ↑ The EU has been most effective in making significant progress towards the establishment of system-wide and primary health care approaches, the formation of quality- and competence-based secondary education and IVET, and the improvement of livelihoods.

- ↓ Problems remain with regards to PFM, trade, gender equality and conflict sensitivity.
- ↓ The EU made laudable efforts in strengthening the gender-dimension of its support but gender has remained an underdeveloped aspect in government strategies and plans.

### C6 – Role of policy dialogue in achieving results

Sectoral policy dialogues were instrumental for the achievement of results in all areas.

- ↑ The EU-Tajikistan Human Rights Dialogue, the main platform for bilateral high-level policy dialogue, has gone far beyond tokenism by initiating legislative reforms and changes.

- ↓ The effectiveness of policy dialogue was partly hampered by a low level of Government interest and ownership.
- ↓ Policy dialogue was also hindered by the fact that policy planning is treated separately from the budget process and was always subject to the approval of the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

## PARTNERSHIPS

### C7 – Cooperation, coordination and the achievement of synergies

The EU is seen as a highly respected and effective actor that has put a strong mark on both donor-government and inter-donor coordination in the three priority sectors of EU support.

- ↑ A major push for a unified EU position was the Team Europe response to the COVID-19 crisis.
- ↑ The EU Delegation (EUD) has earned a reputation as a highly respected and effective actor that has put a strong mark on both donor-government and donor-donor coordination in the three EU focal sectors.

- ↓ Cooperation and coordination between DG INTPA and EEAS on specific thematic agendas was limited to a small number of examples such as in the area of human rights.
- ↓ Cooperation with EU MS (Germany and France) and like-minded states, especially Switzerland and the UK, manifested itself in some joint analyses and advocacy, but not in joint programming, which has to be considered as a weakness.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1 – EU HQ and EUD should spell out more clearly and explicitly the linkages between the support for i) bilateral and regional support and ii) development and non-development cooperation in order to maximise complementarities and synergies.**

- / It is recommended that the Annual Action Programmes (AAPs) for the respective interventions conceptualise and elaborate on how exactly regional-level and non-development support will contribute to the objectives of bilateral development cooperation and vice versa.
- / It would be useful to begin with a mapping of all relevant interventions in each sector, followed by detailed strategic considerations on how support at different levels contributes to the achievement of the stated objectives.

**R2 – EU HQ and EUD should improve the strategic approach to the bilateral cooperation programme through the sequencing of objectives.**

- / Prioritisation and sequencing are crucial to provide clear and structured pathways to change, comprising of realistically achievable milestones that sequentially build on each other.
- / The Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the MIP will offer an opportunity to introduce a time-bound approach to the confirmation and reformulation of existing and the addition of new objectives.

**R3 – EU HQ, EUD, EU MS, International Finance Institutions (IFIs) and the Government of Tajikistan should collectively develop theory-of-change-driven approaches to budget support and blending which establish clear criteria and perspectives for the application of these modalities.**

- / It would be advisable to develop clearer perspectives on the conditions and criteria that would guide any decisions on the provision of budget support and the more extensive use of blending.
- / Therefore, the EU together with partners should establish a working group to develop and specify the pathways towards budget support and a more prominent application of blending.
- / Ideally, deliberations should be based on theories of change that clarify and define the anticipated logical chains from outputs to impacts for these modalities.



/ *Small village Hisor*

**R4 – EU HQ, EUD, implementing partners and the Government of Tajikistan should develop firm approaches to the scaling up and country-wide implementation of pilot projects and thus ensure the sustainability of project support.**

- / The EUD should place a strong emphasis on the facilitation of concerted action involving first and foremost the Government but also implementing partners to expand the outcomes and impact of the chosen project support beyond the pilot areas.
- / New projects should only be started if they offer the potential for upscaling and replicability.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**R5 – EU HQ, EUD and implementing partners should intensify their efforts to systematically mainstream gender and a rights-based approach into EU-supported actions and strengthen related dialogues with the Government of Tajikistan to ensure that cross-cutting issues are well aligned with and contribute to the implementation of national strategies and plans.**

- ✓ Gender mainstreaming needs to go beyond a box ticking exercise and should contribute to the implementation of the current national gender strategy (2021–2025). This requires stronger collaboration between projects and the Government on gender aspects in sector reform strategies and plans.
- ✓ There is the need to mainstream the rights-based approach into all actions at the earliest opportunity. Specific objectives, indicators, baselines and targets as well as mainstreaming procedures and approaches across interventions should be introduced.

**R6 – EU HQ, EUD and implementing partners should implement a systematic approach to conflict sensitivity across the country programme. This effort should be supported by EU MS.**

Approaches to increasing the security-stability focus of the cooperation programme should

- ✓ include the mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity into the programme cycle,
- ✓ require that implementing partners conduct research with a conflict sensitivity focus during the inception phase of projects, including conflict analysis and stakeholder mappings,
- ✓ integrate conflict sensitivity indicators and measures in action documents and log frames, and
- ✓ conduct regular conflict-sensitive reporting based on continuous monitoring in programme/project areas.

**R7 – EU HQ and the EUD should encourage and provide institutionalised settings for a stronger civil society involvement in the design and implementation of individual interventions.**

- ✓ The EU should strengthen stakeholder participation at the level of individual interventions, especially during the design processes. This can be achieved through a mandatory requirement to consult relevant Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) during the planning phase of an intervention and the establishment of a formal process to guarantee that CSO views feed into the design process.
- ✓ The EUD should organise an annual exclusive CSO forum that discusses and takes stock of the state of implementation of the current MIP and individual action plans. The exclusivity of such a forum will make sure that CSO voices are heard and not overshadowed by government viewpoints.



✓ Panjshanbe Bazaar in Khujand