



CAREC REGIONAL WORKSHOP PROMOTING COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN CAREC COUNTRIES

**Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic
27-28 March 2019**

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

I. Introduction

1. A Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Education Consultation Workshop was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic on 27-28 March 2019. Officials from the eleven CAREC countries¹, university representatives, and development partners such as the European Training Foundation (ETF), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Erasmus Plus attended the workshop.

2. Mr. Taalaibek Cholponkulov, Director of the Primary Vocational Education Agency of the Ministry of Education of the Kyrgyz Republic welcomed the participants, and Steven Lewis-Workman, Officer-In-Charge, Kyrgyz Republic Resident Mission, provided opening remarks. Mr. Taalaibek Cholponkulov co-chaired the workshop, together with Ms. Rie Hiraoka, Director, Social Sector Division, Central and West Asia Department, ADB. The agenda and list of participants are in Appendix 1 and 2.

II. Rationale

3. The CAREC 2030 strategy was endorsed at the 16th Ministerial Conference on 27 October 2017 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. CAREC 2030 seeks to expand the horizons of economic cooperation in the region by connecting people, projects and policies for shared and sustainable development. Promoting cooperation in education and skills development is one of the operational priorities under CAREC 2030.

4. To initiate activities in this new operational area, a scoping study on “*Enhancing Regional Cooperation in Education and Skills under CAREC*” is being formulated. The scoping study seeks to identify regional initiatives for enhancing and expanding cooperation among member countries in skills development and higher education. The objectives of the regional education workshop were to (i) present the initial findings of the draft scoping study and solicit inputs from key stakeholders to help finalize the study; (ii) deliberate on key challenges and agree on a way forward on strengthening regional cooperation in education and skills development in the CAREC region.

¹ CAREC countries include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, People’s Republic of China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.



III. Highlights of the Workshop

5. Participants expressed their gratitude to the CAREC Secretariat for the conduct of the first education workshop under CAREC and welcomed the preparation of the education scoping study. The workshop highlighted that investing in human development is essential to achieve sustainable economic growth and should be at the center of all national and regional development agendas.

6. The employment and skills landscape is changing fast, fueled by the fourth industrial revolution, and it is estimated that more than 60% of children entering school today will end up in jobs and occupations that do not exist yet.² Hence, participants emphasized the need to focus on developing skills that are growing in demand in the evolving workplace, including soft skills (critical and analytical thinking, collaborative problem solving, and emotional intelligence) and digital skills.

7. ADB made a presentation on “Collaboration in Education and Skills Development to Improve Students’ Employability and Transition to World of Work”. ADB noted that, in the CAREC countries, there is evidence of a skills mismatch between labor demand and supply. To address this gap, it is key that higher education and vocational training institutions work closely with the industry in the development of curricula and occupational standards to improve employability and job-readiness of students. A representative from the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) shared the recent reforms that the country has undertaken to support the development of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and deepen the integration of industry and TVET through the provision of financial incentives to the private sector.

8. ETF presented its experience in promoting regional cooperation in TVET, skills development and labor mobility. In Central Asia, ETF has been actively involved in the Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP), an EU programme implemented over 2012–2019. CAEP aimed at strengthening cooperation between the EU and Central Asian countries and promoting dialogue and peer-to-peer learning on sector reforms on TVET and higher education. It covered several themes such as qualification frameworks, quality assurance, financing of TVET and higher education systems, education-business cooperation, innovative teaching methods, and gender and inclusion. It was noted, however, that the wide range of themes made it difficult to explore and address all of them in a substantive manner.

9. A successor regional programme is currently under development and expected to start in 2020. The successor CAEP will include the five Central Asian republics plus Afghanistan. ETF shared lessons learned from the first CAEP programme, which could also be useful for CAREC’s work in the education sector going forward. These include (i) addressing themes in more depth and systematically; (ii) focusing on the nexus between TVET and higher education, and avoiding parallel tracks and fragmentation; (iii) enlarging the participant base beyond government agencies and increasing involvement of business and employer representatives, and students; and (iv) improving cooperation with other donors and platforms working on this area.

10. **Potential areas for collaboration.** Participants agreed that work in education and skills development under CAREC should pursue the overall objective of improving movement of faculty, students, and workers across countries and enhancing responsiveness to the rapidly evolving

² The Future of Jobs. World Economic Forum. 2018



regional labor market needs. Participants expressed their broad support to the initial areas for collaboration identified in the education scoping study, including: (i) mutual recognition of qualifications and skills, (ii) quality assurance and harmonization of standards, (iii) promotion of student, faculty and worker mobility, (iv) improvement of labor market information and services, and (v) exchange of information, knowledge and educational innovations. Developing joint degrees and research programs, promoting the use of ICT tools to enhance regional cooperation in education, and strengthening linkages between the industry and education institutions were also mentioned as potential areas for collaboration going forward. Participants noted that national projects in some of these areas are currently ongoing, and regional initiatives under CAREC should aim at complementing such national efforts.

11. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) or Bologna process was mentioned as the most comprehensive regional cooperation initiative in the education sector worldwide. Given that three CAREC countries are members of Bologna, namely Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, supporting alignment of other CAREC countries' education systems with the EHEA may be an entry point to ensure comparability of standards and increase the quality of higher education institutions in the region. The Bologna process, however, focuses only in higher education. Participants noted that the scoping study should also capture best practices and experiences from other regions in skills development and TVET (e.g. the Copenhagen process in the EU).

12. **Panel discussions.** Three panel discussions were organized during the workshop to identify challenges and opportunities in the areas of intraregional migration and labor movement, academic mobility, and higher education, including accession to the Bologna process.

a. **Intraregional migration and labor movement: challenges and opportunities.**

Panelists highlighted the importance of sharing labor market information and the need to ensure that migrant workers' skills match labor market needs in the receiving countries. Policy reforms are ongoing in some CAREC countries. For instance, Kazakhstan has recently developed a regulation on labor migration, including a list of professions that are currently in demand, and the Kyrgyz Republic is developing an immigration policy with support from the IOM. Despite of this, there is still significant scope for strengthening cooperation among countries to improve market information flows, develop mutually acceptable qualifications, and improve the services provided to migrants. Labor information centers can play a key role in creating direct links between workers and the industry at both national and regional levels.

Participants suggested looking into experiences from other countries such as Moldova, where labor agreements have been signed with several countries to define the qualification requirements of migrants, regularly exchange labor market information, and provide vocational trainings to ensure matching of labor demand and supply.

b. **Challenges to Academic Mobility between CAREC Countries and Beyond.** University representatives from Afghanistan, PRC, Mongolia and Uzbekistan, and a government representative from Turkmenistan participated in this panel discussion and briefed workshop participants on the current academic mobility initiatives ongoing in their respective countries, including under the framework of the Erasmus Plus programme. The University of Central Asia (UCA), with campuses in three CAREC countries, was



presented as an example of a regional initiative to bring countries together and promote socio-economic development in the CAREC region.

Participants expressed strong interest in expanding cooperation and collaboration in the area of academic mobility going forward, and identified several challenges that currently hinder faculty and student exchanges within the region and beyond. These include: (i) limited information about universities and educational systems in CAREC countries; (ii) non-recognition of degrees, leading to difficulties in credit transfers; (iii) language barriers; and (iv) limited financial resources. In the case of Afghanistan, there is also a pressing need for governance reforms to enhance regional and international mobility.

Panelists noted that there is an imbalance between incoming and outgoing students, researchers and faculty staff in several CAREC countries. This is due to the perception that universities in CAREC countries are of low quality and uncompetitive. Being able to attract faculty and students from abroad is key for enhancing universities' quality and raising their positioning in international rankings. Hence, both public and private universities in the region need to step up their efforts to become more accessible, and reform their curriculum and services to make them more responsive to the needs of international faculty and students.

c. Lessons learnt from accession to the Bologna Process and challenges in acceding.

The Bologna process is an intergovernmental cooperation of 48 countries in the field of higher education. It is guided by six objectives: (i) adoption of a system of comparable degrees, (ii) adoption of a system based on two main cycles, graduate and undergraduate, (iii) establishment of a common system of credits (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – ECTS), (iv) promotion of mobility for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff, (v) promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies, and (vi) promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility and integrated programs.

During the panel discussion, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kazakhstan shared their experiences and the benefits brought by the accession to Bologna. These include: (i) autonomy of higher education institutions, (ii) enhanced quality of higher education systems and recognition of their universities in Europe and beyond, (iii) greater mobility of students, faculty and researchers, and (iv) increased cooperation among universities and knowledge transfer.

Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic have made significant progress over the past years in reforming their higher education systems to align with the EU model and to meet the requirements for becoming members of Bologna. Tajikistan representative informed participants that it is expected that the country will sign the Bologna Declaration by 2020. Kyrgyz Republic representative, however, noted that the first membership criterion, which relates to geographical location, may be an obstacle for acceding. While acceding to the Bologna process may not be feasible and/or a priority for all CAREC countries, workshop participants recognized the need to pursue similar objectives to those of Bologna, and make education systems more comparable and transparent in the region.



13. **Institutional arrangements.** The draft scoping study suggested the formation of experts groups in the areas of TVET and labor markets, and higher education. While noting that the proposed division could be sensible given that responsibilities for higher education and TVET lie within different ministries or departments, participants emphasized the need to (i) ensure close cooperation between both higher education and TVET stakeholders, and (ii) narrow down the scope of work to allow for more substantive discussions and interventions. Participants agreed that an expert group should be established to continue the education work under CAREC. However, the scope of work of such expert group should be defined based on themes of regional relevance such as quality assurance and harmonization of standards, academic mobility, improvement of labor market information, and the use of ICT in promoting regional cooperation in education. Recognizing the importance of effectively responding to labor market needs, participants highlighted that the expert group should be composed not only of senior officials in charge of higher education and skills development, but also education and training institutions, and representatives from the industry. Relevant agencies and institutions, and focal point contacts in each of the CAREC countries should be identified for future meetings and topical discussions.

IV. Next Steps

14. Going forward, the CAREC Secretariat will (i) complete the education scoping study based on the comments and observations received from member countries, development partners, and university representatives; (ii) working through the CAREC National Focal Points, seek countries' nominations for the establishment of an expert group to take the work forward on the selected themes; and (iii) process a small technical assistance grant to support the initial activities of the expert group. The outcomes of the workshop and agreed next steps will be presented at the CAREC Senior Officials' Meeting to be held on 26–27 June in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.



CAREC Regional Workshop
Promoting Cooperation in Higher Education and Skills Development in CAREC Countries

27–28 March 2019
Orion Hotel, Karkyra Ballroom, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic

AGENDA

Day 1: Wednesday 27 March 2019

08:30–09:00 Registration

09:00–09:10 **Welcome Remarks**

Mr. Taalaibek Cholponkulov, Director, Primary Vocational Education Agency, Ministry of Education, Kyrgyz Republic

09:10–09:20 **Opening Remarks**

Mr. Steven Lewis-Workman, Officer-in-Charge, Kyrgyz Republic Resident Mission, ADB

09:20–09:30 **Introduction of Human Development in CAREC Agenda**

Ms. Rie Hiraoka, Director, Social Sector Division, Central and West Asia Department, ADB

09:30–10:50 **Session 1: A Regional Approach to Education and Skills Development for CAREC**

Moderator: Mr. Taalaibek Cholponkulov, Director, Primary Vocational Education Agency, Ministry of Education, Kyrgyz Republic

- *“Scoping Study on Enhancing Regional Cooperation in Education and Skills under CAREC”* – Mr. Robert Wihtol, Education Specialist, ADB Consultant (15-20 min.)

Open discussion (60 min.)

10:50–11:20 Coffee/Tea break and group photo

11:20–12:20 **Session 2: Enhancing Regional Labor Markets and Skills Development**

Moderator: Dr. Shamsh Kassim-Lakha, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, University of Central Asia and AKDN Representative, Kyrgyz Republic

- *“Collaboration in Education and Skills Development to Improve Students’ Employability and Transition to World of Work”* – Mr. Jouko Sarvi, Lead Education Specialist, Social Sector Division, Central and West Asia Department, ADB (15 min.)

Open discussion (15 min.)

- *“Reforming TVET and Developing Technical and Skilled Talents in the New Era in China”* – Ms. Liu Yufeng, Research Professor and Director of the Division of International Cooperation and Comparative Education Research, Central Institute for Vocational and Technical Education, Ministry of Education, People’s Republic of China (15 min.)

Open discussion (15 min.)

12:20–14:00 Lunch



14:00–14:30 **Session 2 (continued)**

- *“The European Training Foundation experience with regional cooperation in VET, skills development and labour mobility”* – Ms. Christine Hemschemeier, Senior Specialist in VET Policies and Systems and European Training Foundation Country Coordinator for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (15 min.)

Open discussion (15 min.)

14:30–15:00 Coffee/Tea break

15:00–16:30 **Session 2 (continued)**

Moderator: Mr. Robert Wihtol, Education Specialist, ADB Consultant

Panel discussion on *“Intra-regional migration and labor movement: challenges and opportunities”* (45 min.)

- Panelists:
- Mr. Kamaldin Toktosartov, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Labor and Social Development, Kyrgyz Republic
 - Mr. Muhammad Masood Ahmad, Director General from National Education and Technical Training Commission, Pakistan
 - Ms. Banu Narbekova, Deputy Director of the Department of Higher and Postgraduate Education, Ministry of Education and Science, Kazakhstan
 - Mr. Bolotbek Orovov, National Coordinator for the Kyrgyz Republic, International Labor Organization
 - Mr. Dejan Keserovic, Coordinator for Central Asia and Chief of Mission for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, International Organization for Migration

Q&A (45 min.)

Day 2: Thursday 28 March 2019

09:00–10:15 **Session 3: Higher Education Challenges in the CAREC Region**

Moderator: Mr. Jouko Sarvi, Lead Education Specialist, Social Sector Division, Central and West Asia Department, ADB

- Presentation by Mr. Sohail Naqvi, Rector, University of Central Asia (15 min.)

Panel discussion on *“Challenges to Academic Mobility between CAREC Countries and Beyond”* (30 min.)

- Panelists:
- Mr. Mirwais Nahzat, Chief Operating Officer, Kardan University, Afghanistan
 - Mr. Abduvakhob Umarov, Dean of the Faculty of Economics, National University of Uzbekistan
 - Dr. Chinbat Undram, Vice President for Finance and Planning, National University of Mongolia
 - Mr. Dovlet Gurbansahedov, Head of Tertiary and Secondary Professional Education Division, Ministry of Education, Turkmenistan
 - Ms. Kailin Guo, Graduate Student, School of Education, Peking University

Q&A (30 min.)

10:15–10:45 Coffee/Tea break



10:45–12:00 **Session 4: Harmonizing Higher Education Quality and Standards**

“The Bologna Process Approach to Harmonization of Higher Education Standards” – Mr. Reijo Aholainen, Senior Ministerial Adviser, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland (15 min.)

Panel Discussion on *“Lessons learnt from accession to the Bologna Process and challenges in acceding”* (30 min.)

Moderator: Mr. Reijo Aholainen

- Panelists:
- Mr. Kudaiberdy Kojobekov, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Kyrgyz Republic
 - Mr. Shahin Bayramov, Deputy Director of Research and Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan
 - Ms. Nino Khitarishvili, Coordinator for VET Quality Assurance Systems Development, National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia
 - Mr. Tavakal Malikov, Head of Department for the Social Sector Development, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Tajikistan

Q&A (30 min.)

12:00–13:00 **Session 5: Wrap-up and next steps**

Mr. Robert Wihtol, Education Specialist, ADB Consultant

Mr. Jouko Sarvi, Lead Education Specialist, Social Sector Division, Central and West Asia Department, ADB

13:00–13:15 **Closing remarks**

Ms. Rie Hiraoka, Director, Social Sector Division, Central and West Asia Department, ADB

Mr. Kudaiberdy Kojobekov, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Kyrgyz Republic

13:15–14:30 Lunch



CAREC REGIONAL CONSULTATION WORKSHOP: “PROMOTING COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN CAREC COUNTRIES”

27–28 March 2019, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

I. PARTICIPATING DELEGATIONS

A. Afghanistan

1. Mr. Habibullah Sherwani, Manager, Scientific Research and Innovation, Afghanistan Technical and Vocational Education Authority
2. Mr. Mirwais Nahzat, Chief Operating Officer, Kardan University, Afghanistan

B. Azerbaijan

3. Mr. Shahin Bayramov, Deputy Director of Research and Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education
4. Ms. Farah Gasimova, Chief Advisor, Employment Policy and Demography Department, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population

C. People’s Republic of China

5. Ms. Liu Yufeng, Research Professor and Director of the Division of International Cooperation and Comparative Education Research, Central Institute for Vocational and Technical Education, Ministry of Education
6. Ms. Kailin Guo, Graduate Student, School of Education, Peking University

D. Georgia

7. Ms. Nino Khitarishvili, Coordinator for VET Quality Assurance Systems Development, LEPL National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport
8. Ms. Nino Popkhadze, Coordinator of HEI Authorization Division, LEPL National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport

E. Kazakhstan

9. Ms. Almagul Kultumanova, Director of the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Center, Ministry of Education and Science
10. Ms. Banu Narbekova, Deputy Director of the Department of Higher and Postgraduate Education, Ministry of Education and Science

F. The Kyrgyz Republic

11. Mr. Kudaiberdy Kojobekov, Deputy Minister of Education and Science
12. Mr. Kamaldin Toktosartov, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Development
13. Mr. Taalaibek Cholponkulov, Director, Primary Vocational Education Agency, Ministry of Education
14. Mr. Uvraim Akimbekov, Head of Employment Promotion Department, Ministry of Labor and Social Development
15. Ms. Damira Alibaeva, Head of Legal Provision Sector Division, Professional Education Department, Ministry of Education and Science
16. Ms. Irina Gordeeva, Head of Studies and Educational Work and Social Partnership Division, Primary Vocational Education Agency, Ministry of Education
17. Mr. Azamat Imankulov, Head of Social Partnership Sector, Studies and Educational Work and Social Partnership Division, Primary Vocational Education Agency, Ministry of Education
18. Ms. Anara Beishembaeva, Advisor, Primary Vocational Education Agency, Ministry of Education
19. Mr. Djo Wagner, Expert, Project Implementation Unit ADB Project “ Skills for Inclusive Growth Sector Development Program”
20. Ms. Aida Ajihodjaeva, Specialist, Project Implementation Unit ADB Project “ Skills for Inclusive Growth Sector Development Program”
21. Ms. Mashuma Bashirova Specialist, Project Implementation Unit ADB Project “ Skills for Inclusive Growth Sector Development Program”
22. Dr. Shamsh Kassim-Lakha, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, University of Central Asia
23. Mr. Sohail Naqvi, Rector, University of Central Asia
24. Mr. Roman Mogilevskii, University of Central Asia
25. Ms. Burul Tashtobaeva, Academic Secretary, Kyrgyz State Technical University
26. Ms. Marya Lein, Project Director, Finnish Consulting Group
27. Mr. Azamat Akeleev, Director, Consulting Company PROMOTANK
28. Mr. Rahat Bekboeva, Expert, Finnish Consulting Group
29. Ms. Gulzat Duishebaeva, Expert, Finnish Consulting Group
30. Mr. Thomas Bleik, Expert, Finnish Consulting Group
31. Mr. Gulnura Mamyrova, Expert, Finnish Consulting Group
32. Ms. Onola Umankulova, Executive Director, Education Quality Agency EdNet
33. Mr. Nurbek Saparov, Executive Director, Association Tour Operators and Member of Skills Council
34. Ms. Elmira Ibraeva, Independent Expert
35. Ms. Farida Ryskulueva, Project Manager, Project Implementation Unit ADB Project “ Second Vocational Education Skills and Development Project”
36. Mr. Meder Turgunbekov, Advisor to the National Focal Point for the Kyrgyz Republic

G. Mongolia

37. Dr. Chinbat Undram, Vice President for Finance and Planning, National University of Mongolia
38. Mr. Bakyei Agipar, Director of Center for Agricultural Economics and Innovation Development, Mongolian University of Life Sciences (MULS)

H. Pakistan

39. Mr. Rahman Shah, Section Officer (ADB-IV), Economic Affairs Division.

I. Tajikistan

40. Mr. Tavakal Malikov, Head of Department for the Social Sector Development, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade

41. Mr. Sulaymon Isvaliev, Chief Specialist of the Department for Higher and Postgraduate Education, Ministry of Education and Science

J. Turkmenistan

42. Mr. Tazebay Odebayev, Head of Department for Development and Financing of Social Sector, Ministry of Finance and Economy
43. Mr. Dovlet Gurbansahedov, Head of Tertiary and Secondary Professional Education Division, Ministry of Education

K. Uzbekistan

44. Mr. Shavkat Turaev, Deputy Head, Department of Coordination of Scientific Activities, Ministry of High Education
45. Mr. Miryakub Khaydarov, Associate Professor, Non-governmental Educational Institution "Centre of Professional Development"
46. Mr. Abduvakhob Umarov, Dean of the Faculty of Economics, National University of Uzbekistan

II. DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

A. Asian Development Bank

47. Ms. Rie Hiraoka, Director, Social Sector Division (CWSS), CWRD
48. Mr. Steven Lewis-Workman, Unit Head, Project Administration, Kyrgyz Republic Resident Mission
49. Mr. Jouko Sarvi, Lead Education Specialist, CWRD
50. Ms. Carmen Maria Garcia Perez, Regional Cooperation Specialist, CWRD
51. Ms. Jennifer Lapis, CAREC Regional Cooperation Coordinator (RCC), ADB Headquarters, Manila
52. Ms. Aidana Berdybekova, CAREC RCC, Kyrgyz Republic
53. Ms. Aliman Temirbek, External Relations Coordinator, KYRM

B. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

54. Dr. Rolf Peter, Senior Advisor, Professional Education and Training in Central Asia

C. Erasmus Plus

55. Ms. Gulnara Chokusheva, National Coordinator

D. European Training Foundation

56. Ms. Christine Hemschemeier, Senior Specialist in VET Policies and Systems and ETF Country Coordinator for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

E. International Labor Organization

57. Mr. Bolotbek Orokov, National Coordinator for the Kyrgyz Republic
58. Ms. Lilia Kachkinbaeva, National Project Coordinator

F. International Organization for Migration

59. Mr. Dejan Keserovic, Coordinator for Central Asia and Chief of Mission for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

III. RESOURCE PERSONS

60. Mr. Robert Wihtol, Education Specialist / ADB Consultant

61. Mr. Reijo Aholainen, Senior Ministerial Adviser, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland

IV. INTERPRETERS

62. Mr. Rustam Sataev

63. Ms. Elena Tsoi