USAID Allocates Additional $2.5 Million for COVID-19 Response and Recovery in Uzbekistan

November 12, 2021, Tashkent, Uzbekistan – As part of the United States Government's comprehensive global response against the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) recently allocated an additional $2.5 million to Uzbekistan. This brings the total direct U.S. Government contribution to support Uzbekistan's efforts to combat COVID-19 to over $16 million. USAID will use these additional funds to provide senior-level technical assistance on ensuring quality of medicines, and to address vaccine hesitancy in the country.

"More and more people are getting fully vaccinated in Uzbekistan. But the fight is far from over—the virus continues to rage in this country and new variants pose a constant global threat. Ending the pandemic is vital to keeping everyone safe, saving lives, and rebuilding global economies," said Mikaela Meredith, USAID Mission Director to Uzbekistan. "Vaccines are a key tool in that effort, and the Biden Administration is committed to that effort, recently announcing that the United States has donated and shipped more than 200 million U.S. COVID-?19 vaccine doses worldwide," she added.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, USAID has worked closely with the Government of Uzbekistan to strengthen the national laboratory systems for large-scale testing; prevent and control infections in labs and healthcare facilities; improve diagnostic capacity, COVID-19 surveillance and rapid response; enhance the treatment of infected people; and improve public awareness of COVID-19, community engagement, and volunteer mobilization.

In addition to supporting measures to combat the spread of COVID-19, USAID partners with the Government of Uzbekistan to diversify the country's economy and increase regional trade, address tuberculosis and other health threats, support early education efforts, and build the government's capacity to respond to the population's needs.

USAID is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results.

Nepal reports 355 new Covid-19 cases, three deaths

Nepal on Friday reported 355 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours taking the nationwide infection tally to 816,415.

Similarly, 42 people tested positive in a total of 1,932 antigen tests, according to the Health Ministry.

As of Friday, 4,493,288 PCR and 690,258 antigen tests have been carried out across the country.

A total of 9,134 PCR tests were performed in the past 24 hours, according to the Health Ministry.

In its regular situation report, the ministry did not mention the death toll over the past 24 hours. It, however, reported three Covid-19-related fatalities, which included the number of deaths managed by Nepal Army on different dates.

The countrywide death toll has now reached 11,469. The number of active cases stands at 7,498.

According to the ministry, 797,448 infected people have recovered from the disease so far, 389 of them in the last 24 hours.

Kathmandu Valley recorded 171 new infections in the past 24 hours, according to the Health Ministry.

In the past 24 hours, 22 new infections were recorded in Province 1, 12 in Province 2, 206 in Bagmati, 48 each in Gandaki and Lumbini, three in Karnali and 16 in Sudurpaschim.

On Friday, 190 individuals infected with the virus were being treated in intensive care units across the country. Another 57—13 in Province 1, one in Province 2, 37 in Bagmati and two each in Gandaki, Lumbini and Sudurpaschim—were on ventilator support.

Nepal on Thursday reported 301 new coronavirus cases and six deaths. Similarly, 387 new coronavirus cases and six deaths were recorded on Wednesday and 443 new coronavirus cases and one death were reported on Tuesday.

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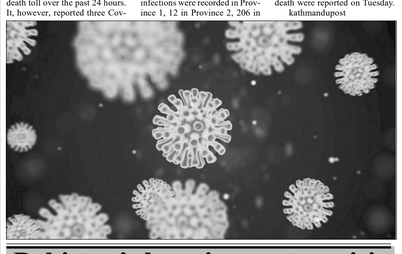


Tajikistan: Teachers leaving for Russia and not looking back

Irosfil worked for 10 years as a teacher in a town near Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, before finding that his salary could no longer stretch to feed his family of six.

"I even had a credit line with the grocery store," said Irosfil, requesting that his real name not be used and speaking via messaging app from Moscow, where he now works as a street cleaner and delivery worker.

"My father was a migrant and he never wanted me to follow in his path. But in the end, I could not wait to go to Russia. When the [school] summer holiday began, I flew out," the 33-year-old told Eurasianet.

As a deputy school director in Vahdat, Irosfil was paid $180 per month – almost twice as much as most of his colleagues, whose salaries hover closer to the $100 mark.

His personal journey mirrors trends in one of the world's most remittance-dependent economies, where living costs have soared over the last two years.

This year has seen a jump in the number of Tajiks arriving in Russia. According to the Interior Ministry in Moscow, 1.6 million people – a quarter of Tajikistan's working-age population – entered Russia this year intending to work.

Tajik officials meanwhile freely admit that schools, which were already straining to deliver an acceptable education, are being decimated by the teacher exodus.

The top education official in the southern region of Khatlon, Ashurali Olimi, said in September that 750 teachers in that region had quit their jobs this year. He pinpointed their "difficult financial position" as the cause.

Deputy Education Minister Nurali Sobirzoda acknowledged later the same month that the situation was becoming critical across the country.

Irosfil estimates that he was one of seven teachers that quit his school the same month out of a total teaching staff of 56. In previous years, two or three of his colleagues would spend the summer in Russia, he said, and usually return to school in the fall.

The math that motivated his decision is well known to most citizens in Central Asia's poorest country. Menial work in Moscow can reap up to $800 per month. Irosfil shares a two-room flat in the Russian capital with nine other Tajiks, which allows him to keep his monthly living costs to around 15,000 rubles ($210). He sends roughly the same amount home and can save any money left over for the future.

Tajikistan has seen prices for food rise precipitously since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The sudden collapse in migration remittances – typically equivalent to between a quarter and a third of GDP – after Russia shut its borders last year weakened the somoni and bolstered inflation.

Supply-chain interruptions and gas-price spikes underpin cost increases for everyday goods.

Inflation has continued despite Russia reopening to migrants this spring – a decision that sparked desperate scenes as migrants gave up livestock and borrowed money to purchase air tickets sold at sky-high prices by a company tied to Tajikistan's ruling family. Kazakhstan's decision to raise wheat prices by a quarter to compensate farmers for losses during the region's long and severe drought is expected to further boost rising flour prices at markets in Tajikistan.

The government has raised teacher salaries three times in the last five years, most recently in 2020. But Munira Inoyatova, who served as education minister from 1994 to 2000, told Eurasianet that incremental pay increases were no match for rising living costs. "Now is such a time that even if a teacher earns 3,000 somoni ($270) he or she will not have enough [to live on]," Inoyatova said.

According to official statistics, there are over 98,000 teachers in Tajikistan with higher-education qualifications, a further 30,000 with vocational training and a further 1,800 who took up their posts immediately after leaving high school.

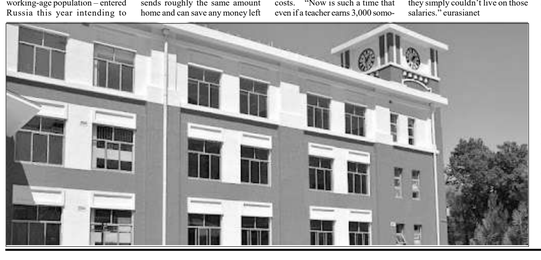
Inoyatova and other experts fear a rapid deterioration in standards if the trend continues.

"Teachers work not only with a stick and a blackboard. They work with humans. Experienced teachers can handle young children. But will the young cadres be able to fulfill this task without training from their more experienced colleagues?" she asked.

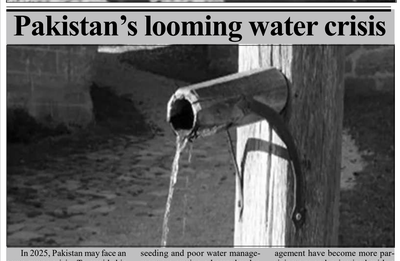
For Robiya, the mother of two teenage twins who attend another school in Vahdat, it is too early to answer that question.

Their Russian-language and biology teachers both quit over the summer to search for work in Russia, and the school has not yet found permanent replacements.

"We parents and our children had gotten used to these teachers," said Robiya, who preferred to use only her first name. "I suppose they left the school because they simply couldn't live on those salaries," eurasianet



Pakistan's looming water crisis



In 2025, Pakistan may face an acute water crisis. To avoid this outcome, Pakistan must frame a rational, politically unbiased and holistic water policy that reflects its priorities of growth and development. The problem is not due to water availability, but the mismanagement of water resources.

In 2021, the government of Pakistan's Sindh province received 5.38 million acre-feet (MAF) of irrigated water, which is a 35 per cent decline in its share in provincial allocation. Red chilli, cotton and rice crops have suffered the most due to the shortage. The decline in provincial allocation was a political move despite the Pakistan Meteorologist Department claiming that this decrease is due to climate change.

Under the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan, Pakistan gave up its control over three eastern tributaries of the Indus River, which is one of the root causes of the water crisis. The total inflow of water in the Indus River System was 117 MAF before the treaty. Now, Pakistan receives only 80 MAF, which is allocated to Pakistan's provinces under the Water Allocation Strategy. This allocation deals in terms of numbers, not water quality, which is different in every region . Both of these crucial variables were missing in the treaty.

Currently, 97 per cent of the fresh water in Pakistan is used in the agriculture sector, which makes up 18 per cent of Pakistan's GDP. Bad agriculture choices, flood irrigation, a lack of hybrid seeding and poor water management are putting a heavy burden on water resources. There are several issues with water management, including a lack of basin-wise water resource management and no proper system to stop evaporation and pilferage (40 per cent of water is lost). Pakistan also faces the challenges of 13 per cent of the cultivable land being saline and 30 per cent of agricultural land being waterlogged.

There is no policy for the mangroves which require a constant inflow of fresh water to stay alive to prevent sea incursion and there has been no melting in the glaciers for the past two years. The frequency of seasonal and tropical storms have increased, which has resulted in severe flooding in coastal areas including Karachi and Keti Bunder. Interprovincial rivalry further aggravates the situation. In 2005, a team of international consultants gave their analysis and redesigned water demands for the Indus Delta. It was agreed that 10 MAF would be given to Sindh, but the question remained: how?

Pakistan's water issues are due to ineffective management. Unequal access and distribution, growing population, urbanisation, progressive industrialisation, lack of storage capacity and climate risk makes water management a difficult task. Climate change has been causing shifts in the weather pattern in different parts of the country, which requires area-specific solutions, not a generic policy. Since the 1980s, domestic water supply and irrigation management have become more participatory and privatised with a focus on physical targets rather than on capacity building. This has benefited the economic and political elite and has deprived poor farmers of their due access to irrigated water.

Pakistan can only store 10 per cent of the average annual flow of its rivers, which is far below the world average storage capacity of 40 per cent. Pakistan had been water-abundant in the past (almost 6000 cubic metres per capita in 1960), but now has become a water-stressed country with 1017 cubic meter per capita.

Water governance in Pakistan needs to be reassessed and made more compatible with other public policies. Pakistan's first National Water Policy in 2018 does not pay enough attention to water sensitive urban designs, risk management against natural hazards and trade in water-intensive crops. Any policy to address these challenges should include customised, location-specific solutions which can deal with the topographical, source water body, receiving water body and socioeconomic context of the setting.

Water storage and management should be the focus of the government, along with transparent assessments undertaken in every province about water inflow and outflow. There must be a strong political will to stop Pakistan from entering a water crisis. Otherwise, Pakistan will face what we see in apocalypse movies, an extinction-level event.

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