

Building Skills in Kyrgyz Republic: Good Training Means Good Jobs

Project
Kyrgyz Republic:
Vocational Education
and Skills
Development Project

The Kyrgyz Republic is transforming an outdated system of vocational education into job-training programs that give graduates the skills companies need.



Cooking up jobs: More than 30,000 students have gained new skills under the improved program since 2008.

Karakol, Kyrgyz Republic – Burul Abakirova knows the cooking class she’s taking at a vocational school in northeast Kyrgyz Republic will improve her chances of getting a good job soon after graduation. But that’s not her only reason for joining the culinary program.

“I enrolled in the cooking class because it’s always warm in the kitchen and you will never go hungry,” said the 19-year-old with a smile.

In the school kitchen, filled with the aroma of freshly made pizza, Ms. Abakirova and other students are learning skills that are urgently needed by employers. The students are at the cutting edge of an attempt by the Kyrgyz Republic to change the way it trains and equips people who want to become technicians, skilled workers, and supervisors.

Until recently, the country’s vocational education system was largely based on an outdated Soviet-era program that was neither responsive to labor market demands, nor cost effective. This has resulted in a shortage of skilled labor that is holding back the country’s economic growth. Young people in the Kyrgyz Republic are particularly hard hit. About 10% of young people were unemployed in 2014.

The jobs that young people need are out there but the fresh graduates, and even many experienced workers, do not have the skills that companies need. In short, the education system has not been providing training that graduates can quickly convert into good jobs. In many cases, employers say they have to retrain new hires who have already completed a vocational course.

Turning Training into Jobs

To address the problem, the Kyrgyz Republic has promoted a dual-track job training program. One aspect is focused on skilled workers and artisans. The other develops technicians and mid-level supervisors. In partnership with the Asian Development Bank, the government has upgraded school facilities, modernized curricula, and initiated hands-on training programs. The skills of vocational teachers have also been improved.

“Now we can equip students with skills that match market demand.”

Headmaster Kudaibergen Jumaliev

Since 2008, more than 30,000 students in 25 schools have learned new skills in tailoring, hairdressing, mechanical engineering, carpentry, welding, and other areas under the ADB-supported Vocational Education and Skills Development Project. Placement rates are high: 85% of 211 budding seamstresses in one recent class were immediately hired by private companies upon graduation. A follow-on initiative, the Second Vocational Education and Skills Development Project, is building on this work to expand access to programs in rural areas and strengthen schools' financial viability.

The projects have a particular focus on low-income students, disabled people, and women and girls. More than 12,000 people have enrolled in standalone short courses on job training for out-of-school youth. Improved standards and assessment tools for 18 key occupations – ranging from plumbers to veterinarians – are also being implemented. The new standards require that students perform tasks at the level identified by the companies that will eventually hire them.

“Now we can equip students with skills that match market demand, allowing them to gain employment as soon as they graduate,” said Kudaibergen Jumaliev, the headmaster of a vocational school in northeastern Kyrgyz Republic. “Over 70% of our students gained employment within six months after graduation and some of them even gained employment before graduation during internships arranged by the school.”

The Exact Skills Required

As a result of the improvements, employers are now spending about two weeks to train graduates of vocational schools, compared to the two months spent previously, according to a survey conducted as part of the project.

“The project has helped modernize the public vocational education system and make it more entrepreneurial,” said Mamatkalil Razaev, a project officer in ADB's Kyrgyz Republic office. “More schools are now producing graduates with the exact skills that are required by their chosen industry.”

For Ms. Abakirova the broad program to improve the country's skills training means a new outlook on the future. As she lets her latest pizza creation bubble away in the oven, she is already thinking about the job she has her eye on at one of the increasingly popular ski areas in her home province of Karakol. “I will graduate in one year and once I receive my school diploma I can start working,” she said.

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