

Education in Azerbaijan

Context

Reforms and initiatives in Azerbaijan over the past decade aimed at improving public education have yielded greater access to primary school, but further focus on early and secondary education is still necessary.

Impact of the economic crisis

Azerbaijan's limited integration into the global world market shielded the nation from most of the impact of the economic downturn. The largest effect was the decline in the price of oil, the nation's major export. However, even with this drop, economy grew.

Azerbaijan's economic growth continues, but at a slower pace. In 2006, the nation's GDP growth was 34.5 per cent; in 2007, GDP grew by 25 per cent, and in 2009, GDP growth was 9.3 per cent (see Figure 1). The slowing of the annual growth in 2009 is associated with the decline in the cost of oil. Azerbaijan's per capita GNP (PPP) in 2007 was US\$6,570, the second highest in Central Asia. However, Azerbaijan's per capita GNP lags considerably behind some of its neighbours in Central Europe, with per capita GNPs ranging from \$2,800 in the Republic of Moldova to almost \$26,230 in Slovenia.

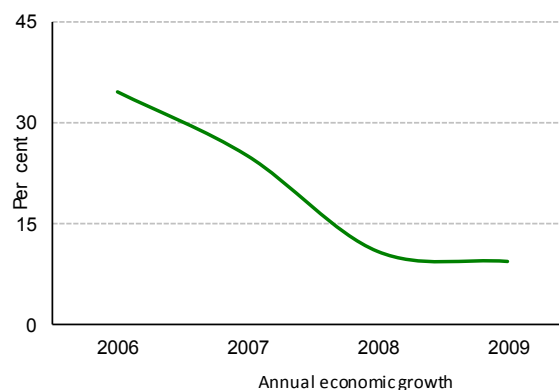
The nation's growing economy has yielded improved living conditions for many children and families. Azerbaijan ranks 86 out of 182 on the Human Development Index, with an HDI of 0.787. National unemployment has declined in recent years to 6 per cent, but national income inequalities are rising, as is evident by the Gini coefficient of .19 in 2005, rising to .365 in 2007. Around 11 per cent of the country lives below the national poverty line, and inflation, which is at 17 per cent, poses a threat for low-income families.



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Azerbaijan is home to a large displaced population, with over 1 million refugees, internally displaced people (IDP) and families seeking asylum. As of 2006, Azerbaijan had the highest IDP population per capita in the world. The majority of IDPs are ethnic Azeris who were displaced from their homes during the Nagorno-Karabakh war, which ended in 1994. From 2001 to 2007, the government committed \$3.6 million to improve living conditions for refugees,

Figure 1: Annual economic [or GDP] growth in Azerbaijan, 2006–2009



Quick facts about education in Azerbaijan

Total population	8.5 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education 2007	2.9%
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2007 (Gender Parity Index [GPI], girls/boys)	24% (1.05)
Net enrolment in primary school, 2007	95% (0.99)
Net enrolment in secondary school, 2007	83% (.97)
Gross enrolment in tertiary education, 2007 (GPI)	15% (.88)
Primary student/teacher ratio, 2007	12:1
Out-of-school children of primary school age (per cent girls)	20,000 (55%)
Transition rate to secondary school, 2006	100%
Percentage of children (5-14 years) involved in child labour (2005)	7%
Number of refugees and internally displaced persons	684,292
PISA 2009 score: reading, mathematics, science (rank/65)	362 (64), 431(45), 373 (63)

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, 2010; Dayioglu, Meltem (2007). Working Children in Azerbaijan; PISA 2010

including building 106 schools and 34 kindergartens to accommodate 1,276 new children. Tent camps have slowly been replaced by permanent settlements and houses. Despite these improvements, IDPs remain a major challenge for the Azerbaijan government.

Education reforms

Azerbaijan spent 11 per cent of its total budget on education in 2009, and the government continues to embark on reforms to improve the country's education sector. Current educational reform priorities include:

- Improve the quality of education and equity in access
- Focus on gender equality and eliminate disparities of all kinds
- Improve national attitudes towards the education of girls
- Examine the policies and referral system that address issues of violence against children

Access

Efforts to improve access to education are evident in Azerbaijan's strong primary education enrolment, but a greater focus on early and secondary education is necessary. Azerbaijan is making progress towards the Millennium Development Goal 2 (universal primary education) by 2015 (see Figure 2).

Early childhood education

Pre-primary school enrolment remains a concern in Azerbaijan. The net enrolment rate (NER) of 24 per cent for pre-primary school, remains the fourth lowest in the region, behind Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia. More concerning is that pre-primary attendance is around 9 per cent. In rural areas, this figure drops to about 2 per cent. Most parents recognize the importance of preschool and have the financial means to send their children; however, there is a shortage of kindergarten programmes. The government's privatization programme results in public kindergartens closing, then reopening as profit-making institutions. The recent decision to establish a preschool department in the Ministry of Education (MoE) is a sign of the government's commitment to early childhood education. School readiness is a new component being advocated within vulnerable communities.

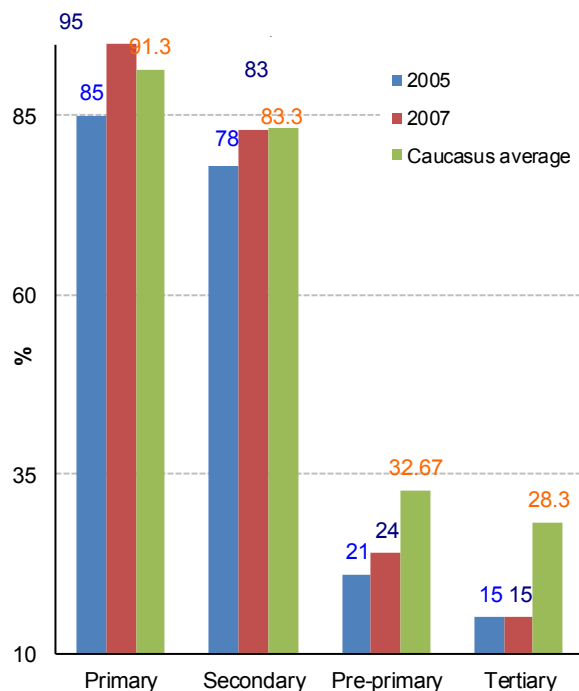
Basic education

Azerbaijan has a net enrolment rate of 95 per cent. This is a 10 per cent increase from 2005. However, 20,000 children remain out of school, the highest figure in the Caucasus.

The enrolment rate in secondary school is 83 per cent. This indicates that students drop out in the secondary grades. The low secondary NER is indicative of the poor quality of secondary schooling and the sense among students that there is a low return in the labour market for pursuing higher education. This is reaffirmed by the low tertiary enrolment rate of 15 per cent.

Children with disabilities

Figure 2: Education Net Enrolment Rates in Azerbaijan between 2005-2007 as compared to the Caucasus Average



Access to quality education is a concern for the 49,000 registered children with disabilities in Azerbaijan. In 2006, the president endorsed a programme to reintegrate institutionalized children by 2015. While a programme on inclusive education exists, only around 15.8 per cent of enrolled children are involved in inclusive classrooms in mainstream schools. Approximately 48.5 per cent of children with disabilities are homeschooled and the remaining students attend boarding or special schools.

The Development of Children and Young People through Sport Project aims to increase the participation of various marginalized groups, including children with disabilities. The programme supports recreation and physical activity clubs in communities.

Equity

Azerbaijan has a strong tradition of equity in schools. However, four equity gaps stand out: gender, rural/urban, refugee/non-refugee and rich/poor disparities.

Enrolment and attendance rates between boys and girls have remained relatively even, with a gender parity index (GPI) of .99 in primary and .97 in secondary enrolment. In pre-primary, boys are underrepresented, with a girl/boy GPI of 1.05. In tertiary education, the rate switches and boys are overrepresented, with a girl/boy GPI of 0.88.

The significant number of displaced persons poses a major challenge for educational equity and access in the country. Many refugee children remain without access to primary education. A report on Chechen refugees in Azerbaijan found that about

20 per cent of Chechen children are not attending school, about 24 per cent are attending Chechen schools and about 57 per cent are attending Azerbaijani public schools, where they do not receive instruction in their native language. Many refugee children enter school late and with less educational preparation than Azerbaijani children. Most refugees have special linguistic needs, since many do not speak the national language, straining teachers and school resources. Additionally, many of the displaced children and youth have experienced extreme violence and hardship as a result of conflict and thus have special psychosocial learning needs.

The most significant equity gap is between the richest and poorest income quintiles. The wealthiest children in the country are about 6% more likely to enrol and attend primary school than the poorest children, although both groups are almost equally likely to complete primary school. The gap is larger in secondary school, where the richest students are approximately 10% more likely to attend secondary school than the poorest students.

Quality and learning outcomes

Educational challenges facing youth and adolescents
Access to quality education is a major challenge for young people. More than three fourths of the students who sat for the national university examination in 2007 scored below 300 out of a possible 700 points. Furthermore, one fifth of the high school graduates with the highest GPAs obtained less than 200 points on the examination. So there is no congruence between secondary grades and university preparation. Students who remain in school and perform well are not necessarily being sufficiently prepared for higher education.

Efforts to engage young people are evident in the establishment of a Youth Parliament. The parliament encourages adolescents to discuss issues such as health care, education and child protection. The aim is to raise awareness and also ensure that the voices of youth are heard. Recent topics include girls' education, early marriage and risky behaviour.

The MoE is aware of Azerbaijan's lagging quality of



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instruction and learning outcomes compared to its neighbours in the CEECIS region. Rote instruction and outdated materials limit the quality of learning in schools. In addition, Azerbaijan does not have policies and referral systems to address issues of violence against children. Such an environment clearly reduces the quality of instruction and the opportunities that children have to learn.

The government is responding to these realities by driving multiple reforms to improve school quality and instruction. The active learning programme in primary school is a major initiative being supported in collaboration with UNICEF. Improving teacher preparation through a new pre-service national curriculum is also occurring. For educators already in the profession, school-based professional development models are being implemented at both the primary and secondary levels. UNICEF's child-

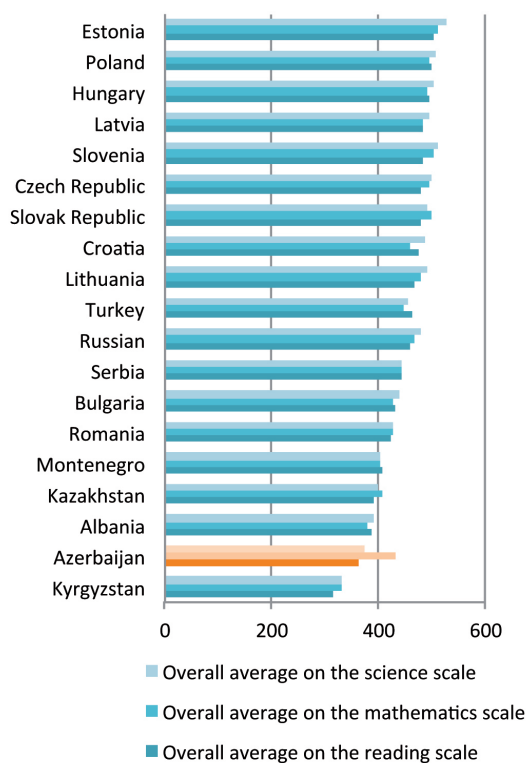


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friendly school framework has aided in the reform agenda. In 2010, the government introduced new Quality Basic Education Standards.

On the PISA 2009, Azerbaijan ranked 18th in reading and science out of the 19 participating countries in the region, and 13th in mathematics. It scored second to last in reading out of all of the 65 participating countries (see Figure 3).

As might be expected with low learning outcomes, **Figure 3: Comparing performance in reading, mathematics and science on PISA 2009**



internal school-based processes lack efficiency because of poor quality. The school system has a minimal percentage of repeaters (0.3 per cent) and a high primary school completion rate (97 per cent). With high completion rates and low performance on learning outcomes, these figures indicate that schools lack minimum standards of learning. Children are being passed from grade to grade whether they have learned the required material or not.

Education financing

Azerbaijan spends about 11.9 per cent of its GDP on education – a significant increase since 2000, when education spending was about 4.5 per cent of GDP. Approximately 7 per cent of the financing is designated for pre-primary, 17 per cent for primary, 54 per cent for secondary education and 7 per cent for tertiary.



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Priority challenges in education

The educational priorities for UNICEF and its partners in Azerbaijan are to:

- Support the implementation of active learning policies that ensure all primary-school students attend child-friendly schools
- Develop models for inclusive, quality education
- Develop national policies for early childhood development and support families with young children
- Promote the rights of young people to education