

Education in Georgia

Context

Georgia has been a leader in education, traditionally showing positive student learning outcomes on par with other countries in the region.¹ This is partly rooted in the fact that, with limited natural resources, the country's economy is highly dependent on its human capital.² Recent years in Georgia have marked a decline in school quality and efficiency but also some innovative education reforms that could serve to reverse negative trends.

Georgia's GNP (PPP) is \$3,410 USD, which is the lowest in the Caucasus sub-region and among the lowest in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS). Its annual economic growth of 9.4% pales in comparison to Azerbaijan's annual growth of 34% and Armenia's growth of 14%. However, this rate is up from a rate of only 1.8% in 2000, which pre-dated the country's 'Rose Revolution' and subsequent change of government. The UNDP Human Development Index ranks Georgia (.75) 96th of 177 countries, which places it 12th of the 22 countries in the region.³ Almost 60% of its population lives below the national poverty line and 25% live on less than \$2.00 USD dollars a day.⁴ Unemployment stands around 13% with the youth unemployment rate more than double that at 28%.⁵

Education Reforms

'Due to years of conflict, natural disasters and neglect as well as insufficient capital investments for education, the condition of many schools is deteriorating rapidly to a level below the minimum conditions needed for learning and teaching. Since

the Rose Revolution the Government's sector wide education reform has made considerable progress in instituting structural, quality, and financing reforms which have been institutionalized into new legislation.⁶ A brief summary of the major reform initiatives are as follows:



- The government, in partnership with the World Bank and UNICEF, completed a Consolidated Education Strategy and Action Plan (2007–2011), which includes pre-school education and early childhood development, general education, vocational education, higher education, lifelong learning, non-formal education, inclusive education and children with special needs as national priorities and as requirements for the FTI and Catalytic Fund.

In 2008 the programme department has been established in the MoES to manage and implement these priorities.

- 'The government introduced a per capita funding formula nationwide at the general secondary education level in January 2006. Under the new scheme, schools receive a direct transfer of funds from the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) based on the number of students enrolled for a given year. The voucher covers current school expenditures, of which teacher salaries are the main component.'

Box 1. Quick Facts about Education in Georgia

	Georgia	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Caucasus
Total Population	4.5	8.4 m.	3.01 m.	15.91 m.
Youth Unemployment Rate	28%	21%	59%	36%
Percentage of GDP spent on Education	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.7 avg.
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment, 2005 (<i>Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Girls/Boys)</i>)	43, 1.13	21 (1.04)	33, 1.16	32 avg.
Net Enrolment in Primary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	93, .99	85%(.98)	79, 1.04	89 avg.
Net Enrolment in Secondary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	81, 1.0	78 (.97)	84, 1.03	81 avg.
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	46, 1.04	15 (.90)	28%, 1.22	33 avg.
Primary Student/Teacher Ratio, 2005	14	13	21	16 avg.
Out of School Children of Primary School Age (% girls)	26,000 (50)	91,000 (50)	18,000, (40)	135,000
Percentage of children involved in child labour boys, girls	x	7, 7	x	x
Number of refugees and internally displaced persons	500,000	684,292	219,620	1.4 m.
PISA Score (mathematics ((regional rank/15), reading (''''), science (''''))	x	476 (14), 353(14), 382 (14)	x	x
TIMSS Score (mathematics (regional rank/14), Science(regional rank/14))	x	x	478 (8), 461(13)	x
Transition rate to Secondary	98.3	99%	98.8	x
Percentage of Dropouts in Primary School (% girls), 2003	x	2	7.6	x

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008. Innocenti.

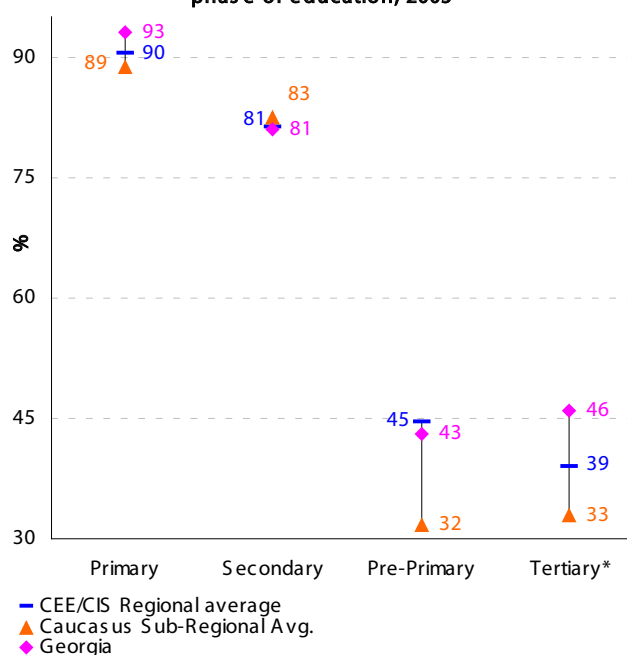
- 'All educational institutions were established as public legal entities. Nowadays, each school is governed by a Board of Trustees empowered by a financial management authority'⁷ and made up of teachers, parents and government officials.
- 'The administrative structure of the education system has also been adapted. Former Education Departments have been replaced by a network of 72 Education Resource Centers (ERCs) responsible for facilitating schools' work through collecting data, organizing trainings, conducting research, and monitoring accounting.'⁸
- As stated in the Consolidated Education Strategy and Action Plan (2007 – 2011) of the MoES of Georgia, the National Curriculum and Assessment Center, established in April 2006, has introduced a new curriculum, designed to encourage active learning rather than a mechanical transfer of knowledge.
- The Teachers' Professional Development Center, established in July 2006, aims to develop standards and qualification requirements for teachers, to conduct a process of accreditation of teacher training and retraining programs and to introduce a system of teacher certification.
- New and more transparent examinations have been introduced.
- The government has invested heavily in repairing old buildings and improving infrastructure.
- The *ECD 2007-2009 National Strategic Plan of Action* was drafted and budgeted to provide for programming, communication and policy development.⁹ The document was approved by the Parliament of Georgia in July 2008.
- The Education Strategy and Action Plan for Children with Special Needs (2009 – 2011) has been developed by the MoES of Georgia in partnership with the Save the Children and USAID. In October 2008 the document was approved by the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia.

Access

Georgian net enrolment rates for its nine years of compulsory schooling are similar to regional and sub-regional averages, despite significantly lower expenditure rates. However, according to UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, the country is off-track to achieve MDG goal 2 of universal primary education.¹⁰

Considering that its education expenditure is the lowest in the CEE/CIS region, Georgia has managed to keep enrolment rates on par with the regional average. The net primary enrolment rate is 93%, which is above regional and sub-regional averages. Although, this leaves a substantial number – around 26,000 – of the children without access to compulsory schooling. In the wake of the 2008 conflict, the number of out-of-school children increased significantly due to destroyed school buildings, trauma and displacement. Access to secondary education is on par with the region and sub-region at 81%. Early childhood education is undergoing a process of rapid expansion and reform. However, currently only 43% are enrolled, which is below the regional average. See Box 1.

Figure 1: Comparing Education Net Enrolment Rates in Georgia, to the Caucasus sub-regional average and the CEE/CIS regional average, by phase of education, 2005



Equity

Severe inequities persist in enrolment figures in Georgia. Large gaps between children from the highest and lowest income quintiles can be seen in both pre-primary and post-secondary education. In pre-school, enrolment of children in the poorest income quintile is 20-30% lower than those from the highest income quintile, which is most likely explained by the fact that parents are expected to pay entry fees to enrol their children in pre-school.¹¹ Poorer families are less likely to be able to afford pre-school. In post-secondary education this gap widens. By age 18, enrolment rates among children from families in the richest quintile are almost twice what they are in the poorest quintile, although they decline for all children. The same trends are evident between Georgian and non-Georgian ethnic groups. Children who are not ethnically Georgian – namely Armenians and Azeris – have significantly lower enrolment rates in pre-primary and post-secondary education.¹²

Educational attainment rates convey inequities between income and ethnicity groups. Georgia's poorest students are about 20% less likely to complete secondary school than students in the richest quintile, although primary completion rates are comparable. 'Estimates indicate that less than 8% of all Armenian individuals between 16 and 29 years old, most of whom reside in rural areas, attained some form of tertiary education as compared to 20 to 27 percent among native Georgians.'¹³

Despite a lack of legislation defining and enforcing gender equality in school enrolment, there seems to be little evidence of a gender gap. Attainment equal education enrolment rates among boys and girls was one of the highest priorities of the Soviet era... During the transition period, however, enrollment

rates fell below their pre-independence numbers at all levels of compulsory education, excluding higher education. With few exceptions, reductions seem to have occurred across both gender groups.¹⁴ The exception lies in upper secondary school, where boys are increasingly showing a disadvantage in enrolment and completion; enrolment rates are 5% higher for girls than for boys in upper secondary school.¹⁵

Children with disabilities and special learning needs continue to suffer lower access to education. According to UNICEF, of the 10,722 children registered with disabilities, only 28% have access to learning institutions, although these are not mainstream schools. 'Until recently, there have been few alternatives to institutionalised care or special education for disabled children, as there is currently no policy for special or inclusive education in general education. Disabled children remain isolated from society and have been deprived of their right to receive an education. Moreover, Georgian society continues to discriminate against children with disabilities.'¹⁶ In response the government has developed a new policy for SEN children to be launched in 2009 (See Education Reforms).

Quality

Georgia has not participated in the international learning assessments and so information on learning outcomes is somewhat scarce. There is evidence that education quality in Georgia has been deteriorating in recent years, which is a remnant of the phasing out of the Soviet school system during the transition years. The system is being used inefficiently with too many school buildings and too few students. Pupil-teacher ratios are very low, at about 14:1. High drop out rates and low secondary school completion rates are other signs of poor quality education. Absenteeism is a major problem in some areas.

After many years of attention to in-service training, the reform of pre-career training is regarded as the challenge. Pre- and in-service teacher train-

ing is an area that needs further efforts in order to introduce, establish and provide a system of continued and wide-scale quality training opportunities.

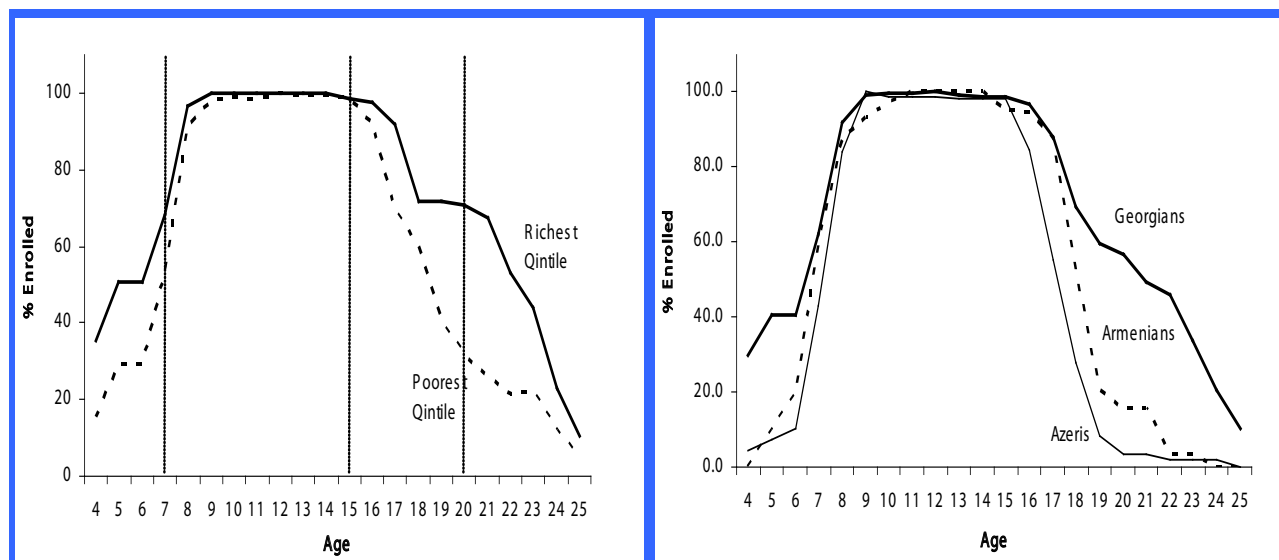


'Additionally, 'a large proportion of students in Georgia rely on "out-of-class" private tutoring to improve their quality of learning and to prepare them for tertiary education'; this indicates both poor quality education and poorly designed examinations ... Proliferation of private tutoring in Georgia is related to two key factors: highly competitive university entrance examinations inherited from Soviet times and the deteriorating quality of mainstream schooling during the transition years. The admission policy was modified by the Government in 2005 through the introduction of centralized university entrance examinations; demand for private tutoring, however, still remains high. A 2006 Open Society Institute (OSI) study indicates that in Georgia, almost 80% of respondents in a sample of university students claimed to have received some form of private tutoring.'¹⁷

Education Financing

Georgia spends 2.8% of its total GDP on education. This is the lowest expenditure rate in the CEE/CIS region, which has an average of 4.4%.¹⁸ 'Since 2005, expenditures in education have remained relatively stable at the current rate... Success of the new comprehensive reform depends partly on increased spending on education. Deteriorating school buildings further add to poor school quality. Only half of parents surveyed reported that school conditions meet the learning needs of their children.

Figure 2: Tracking Inequities between income brackets and ethnic groups in Georgia, 2008



Source: Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. *Child Poverty Study – Georgia*.

Most of the general education budget in Georgia is spent on wages and social security contributions for teachers, leaving very little space for capital investments. As a consequence, the current stock of school infrastructure is depreciating quickly. About 92% of the overall budget for general education is spent on teacher salaries, social security contributions, and utilities (mainly school heating, water, and electricity)...Capital expenditures for general education are quite low (at about 4% to 5%) given the rapid depreciation of the nation's large stock of school infrastructure. Partly due to significant increases in wages and expenditures on utilities between years 2004 and 2005

Teacher salaries in Georgia are defined by the recently adopted teacher pay scheme, which provides a basis to remunerate teachers above the minimum threshold accounting for their qualifications and experience. The relative position of teachers has improved; the average salary for teachers now ranges between GEL 195 and GEL 283 (\$137-\$200 USD) per month depending on teacher work load, years of experience and educational qualifications. However, teachers' salaries still remain low.¹⁹

Educational Priorities in Georgia

- Respond to the needs of children affected by conflict
- Increase expenditure on education.
- Develop system for monitoring learning outcomes.
- Increase the completion rates of boys and minority ethnic groups from upper secondary school.
- Decrease dropouts from compulsory schooling.

The Consolidated Education Strategy and Action Plan (2007 – 2011) of the MoES sets the following major objectives to be achieved by 2011 in general education:

- Ensure openness of general education and equal access for all;
- Integrate the Georgian general education system into the international educational area;
- Introduce national assessment, curricula development and accreditation systems in general education;
- Ensure efficient and effective governance of general secondary schools;

Conflict in South Ossetia

In 2008, conflict ensued between Georgia and the Russian Federation over the break away region of South Ossetia. During this conflict, which eventually spread to the capital, many people were killed and more than 150,000 people were displaced from their homes. The education system was hard hit with many schools being damaged in the fighting or made into makeshift shelters to house refugees. The full and long-term impact of the war on education remains to be seen.

- Ensure more equitable use of all necessary educational, physical and financial resources;
- Ensure autonomous governance of schools; ensure the support to inclusive education.

- 1 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 2 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 3 UNDP Human Development Index Online.
- 4 UNDP. Human Development Index Website 2008.
- 5 UNDP Human Development Index.
- 6 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 7 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 8 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 9 UNICEF Georgia Annual Report 2007.
- 10 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008.
- 11 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 12 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia; UNICEF, Childinfo.org.
- 13 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 14 UNICEF. Gender Review Georgia. 2004.
- 15 UNICEF. Gender Review Georgia. 2004.
- 16 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 17 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 18 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.
- 19 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.

Box 2. Resource Rationalization in Georgia

'Resource rationalization is a very sensitive issue with major political constraints. Georgia has more teachers and schools than it requires to operate adequately. With the exception of schools in more populated regions (Tbilisi, Mcheta mtianeti, and Kakheti) school stocks are being under-utilized. In regions like Guria, Achara, and Lower Qartli, school utilization rates oscillate between 80 and 90 percent. Given that the student population is shrinking rapidly, demand for schools is likely to decrease further in the near future. Although the government has engaged in an aggressive process of school administrative consolidation (654 schools have been consolidated since 2005), the process is not an easy one. School consolidation means that some school principals will lose their status. Also, in mountain areas, where access to schools is limited and the population is scattered (such as in Guria and Mcheta mtianeni), schools cannot be consolidated nor closed, as students would not have access to other schools within a reasonable distance. Furthermore, the main challenge of consolidation is reducing the stock of teachers. In order for the education system to achieve a teacher-student ratio aligned with the ECA average (16 students to 1 teacher), about 28 thousand teachers would be made redundant. This process is likely to take significant time and effort due to the political and social implications of cutting teacher jobs.'

Source: Angel-Urdinola, Diego F. 2008. Child Poverty Study – Georgia.