

Education in Georgia

Context

Despite economic and political challenges, Georgia continues to embrace reforms and initiatives aimed at improving educational access, quality and opportunity in its public schools.

Impact of the economic crisis

The global economic crisis had a strong impact on Georgia, which was compounded by the aftermath of the 2008 clash with the Russian Federation and national political troubles. Known as the 'triple crisis', the impact of the three events resulted in a 10 per cent decline in Georgia's economy. Foreign investment declined by US\$1.5 billion and remittances fell from \$1 billion in 2008 to around \$700 million by 2009. Recovery continues to be slow, with negative growth still predicted.

Georgia's GNP per capita (PPP) of \$4,760 is the lowest in the Caucasus, and among the lowest in the CEECIS region. Georgia's real GDP growth rate dropped in 2009 by 7 per cent, a noticeable change from 2007, which had a positive growth rate of 12.3 per cent. The UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Georgia 99th out of 182 countries, with an HDI of 0.778. Almost 60 per cent of the country's population live below the national poverty line, and 25 per cent live on less than \$2 per day. There is concern that the number of boys and girls living in poverty could increase to over 345,000 in 2010, which would be up to 35 per cent of all children in Georgia. Unemployment has increased from 13 per cent to 16.5 per cent, with the youth unemployment rate, at 28 per cent.

Education reforms

Despite economic hardship, Georgia continues to prioritize education. This is partly rooted in the fact that with limited natural resources, the country's



© UNICEF

future is highly dependent on its human capital. Since the Rose Revolution in 2003, the government has made considerable progress in instituting structural, quality and financing reforms in the education sector, which have been codified into new legislation. Following is a brief summary of the major reform initiatives:

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

In 2008, the programme department was established in the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) to manage and implement many priorities, including:

- A per capita funding scheme, based on the number of students enrolled for a given year;

Quick facts about education in Georgia

Total population	4.4 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education	2.5%
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2007 [Gender Parity Index (GPI) (girls/boys)]	41% (1.13)
Net enrolment in primary school, 2007 (GPI)	94% (0.97)
Net enrolment in secondary school, 2007 (GPI)	82% (1.01)
Gross enrolment in tertiary education, 2007 (GPI)	37% (1.12)
Primary student/teacher ratio, 2005	14:1
Out-of-school children of primary school age (2005) (per cent girls)	18,000 (60%)
Percentage of children involved in child labour (per cent girls)	18(17)
Number of refugees and internally displaced persons	353,510*
TIMSS 2007 scores: mathematics, science (grade 4 & 8 average)	428, 419.5

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010; MICS final report, Tab. CP.2, p. 107; UN Refugee Agency, Georgia Profile 2010*

- A Board of Trustees empowered by a financial management authority at each school and made up of teachers, parents and government officials;
- A network of 72 Education Resource Centres (ERCs) responsible for data collection, trainings and research, replacing the former Education Department;
- The Consolidated Education Strategy and Action Plan (2007–2011), which includes a new curriculum designed to encourage active learning rather than rote transfer of knowledge;
- The Teachers' Professional Development Centre, established in 2006, which aims to develop standards and qualification requirements for teachers, and to introduce a system of certification;
- The Early Childhood Development National Strategic Plan of Action 2007–2009 was approved in 2008 to provide for programming, communication and policy development; and
- The continuation of the Safe School Initiative, which aims to build capacity in school systems to reduce violence against children.

Access

Early childhood education

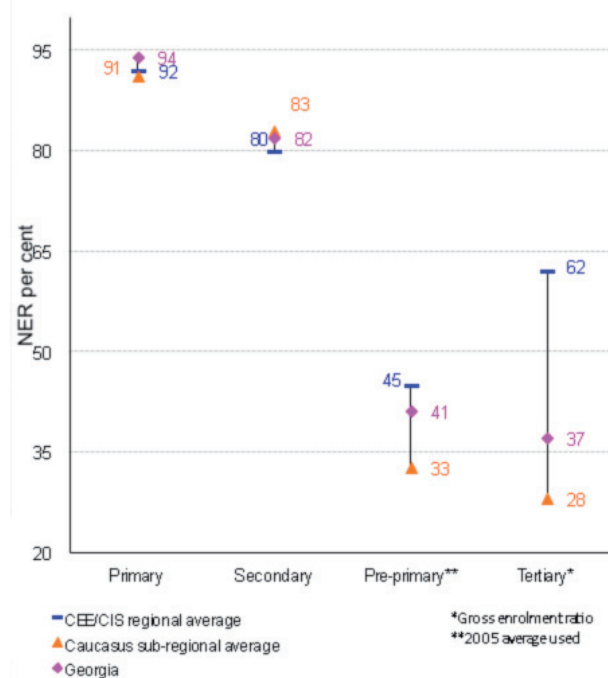
In 2009, Georgia's Ministry of Education and Science recognized the gap between policy and financial allocations at the preschool level. It responded by agreeing to increase attention towards early education and school readiness. A few districts are offering free access to preschool for disadvantaged children, aiming to entice parents who are currently expected to pay fees. In 2008, guidelines and trainings for preschool teachers, child-friendly and inclusive strategies as well as bilingual options for ethnic linguistic minorities emerged as vital components of ensuring school readiness.

Despite these improvements, only 41 per cent of preschool-aged children are enrolled, which is 2 per cent lower than in 2005 and continues to be below the regional average. Common reasons cited for not sending children to preschool include the parents' desire to care for their children at home and insufficient financial resources to cover hidden and informal costs. Access to preschool continues to be a challenge as well, affecting nearly 40 per cent of children in Georgia.

Basic education

Georgian net enrolment rates (NER) for its nine years of compulsory schooling are similar to regional and subregional averages, despite significantly lower expenditure rates. The net primary enrolment rate is 94 per cent, which is above regional and subregional averages (see Figure 1). A continuing concern, however, is the estimated 26,000 children who are still without access to schooling. Destroyed school buildings, trauma and displacement from the 2008 violence and earlier conflicts have resulted in limited educational facilities in some regions.

Figure 1. Comparing education net enrolment rates in Georgia by education level to the Caucasus subregion and CEE/CIS region, 2007



Access to secondary education is 82 per cent, which is on par with the region and subregion. The gross enrolment in tertiary education is 37 per cent. This is a 9 per cent drop from the 2005 enrolment level. The decline is most likely due to the introduction of centralized university entrance examinations in 2005. The exam is difficult and private tutoring remains popular, which excludes poor students. According to a 2006 Open Society Institute study, almost 80 per cent of respondents in a sample of university students claimed to have received some form of private tutoring.

Educational challenges facing adolescents and youth

Schools have limited sports programmes and recreational facilities for youth to develop their potential and participate in organized activities. Recreation activities could have a strong impact on the quality of work and performance of students in school. The lack of these facilities results in excess free time for students and greater potential to explore drugs, alcohol or become involved in crime. The quality of educational services and demand for schooling also declines as a result of limited facilities.

There is greater need for enhanced access to social services and school curricula that inform young people about HIV/AIDS. Programmes that discuss drugs, alcohol addiction, violence, crime and abuse are largely absent from society and school programming.

There are also few opportunities for young people to make a difference in their community or participate in the decision-making process. While other countries in the region have actively prioritized youth involvement, Georgia provides limited venues for children's voices to be heard. Also of concern is the high rate of violence in schools reported by young people in Georgia. Both physical and psychological victimization are a problem in Georgia, and boys are most vulnerable. Bullying is also common in schoolyards and wooded areas.

Equity

Severe inequities persist in enrolment and attainment figures between rich and poor, ethnic groups and for children with disabilities in Georgia.

The gender gap between primary and secondary has nearly closed, with a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 0.97. In pre-primary and post-secondary levels, however, boys are increasingly at a disadvantage. The GPI in pre-primary is 1.13, revealing that boys are less likely to be enrolled than girls. In post-secondary, the same finding emerges, with a GPI of 1.12 (girls/boys). Greater attention to boys' access to early childhood education and retention in tertiary level is needed.

Large gaps between children from the highest and lowest income quintiles are evident. In preschool, enrolment of children in the poorest income quintile is 20–30 per cent lower than those from the highest income quintile, which is likely explained by the fact that most programmes still have entry fees for children. Poorer families are less likely to be able to afford preschool. In primary school, completion rates between the richest and poorest are comparable, but Georgia's poorest students are about 20 per cent less likely to complete secondary school than students in the richest quintile. In post-secondary education, this gap widens. By

age 18, enrolment rates among children from families in the richest quintile are almost double the rate in the poorest quintile, although they decline for all children (see Figure 2).

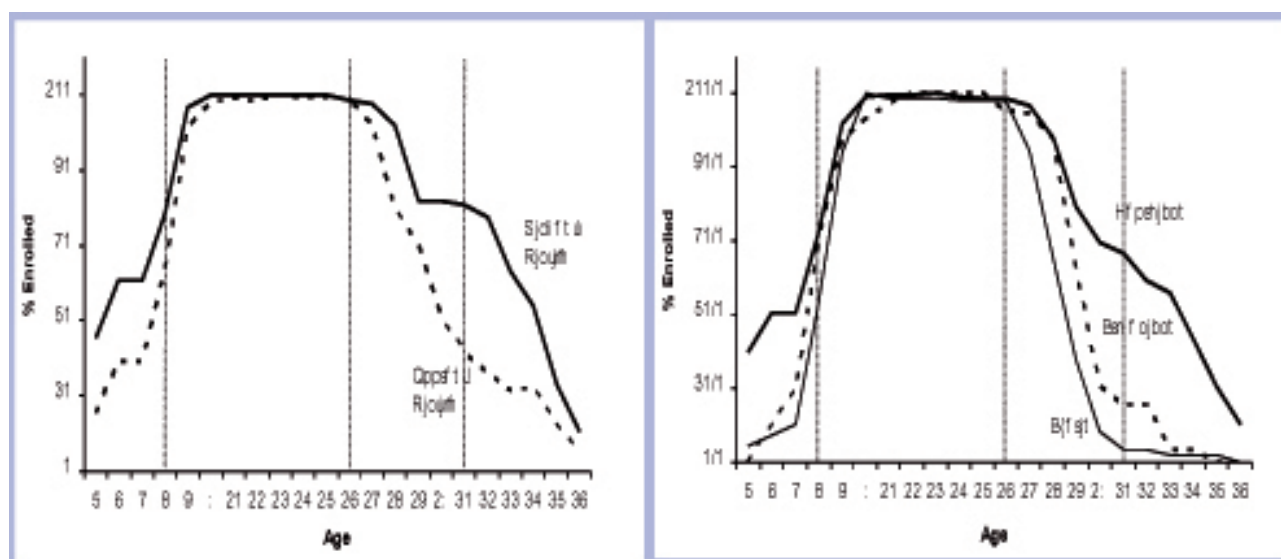
Inequalities also emerge between the enrolment and educational attainment rates of Georgian and non-Georgian children. Children who are not ethnically Georgian – namely, Armenians and Azeris – have significantly lower enrolment rates in pre-primary and post-secondary education. In post-secondary education, the gap between Georgian and non-Georgian students again widens. Less than 8 per cent of 16–29 year old Armenian children living in Georgia attained some form of tertiary education, as compared to 20–27 per cent among native Georgians.

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities and special learning needs continue to have low access to education. Stigmas associated with disabilities result in neglect or social isolation for children. According to UNICEF, of the 10,722 children registered with disabilities, only 28 per cent have access to learning institutions, although these are not mainstream schools. Efforts to shift away from institutional placement and boarding schools are occurring slowly and since 2005, the number of institutions in Georgia has decreased, from 46 to 22.

One improvement is the Education Strategy and Action Plan for Children with Special Needs (2009–2011) that was approved by the MoES. Child centres for children with disabilities and inclusive educational practices are gaining interest nationally. In Gori, Bolnisi and Tbilisi, day centres for children with disabilities have emerged. In primary school, teacher awareness activities and greater assistance to support children with disabilities are slowly increasing.

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



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

Box 1. 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 underutilized. In regions like Guria, Achara and Lower Qartli, school utilization rates range between 80 and 90 per cent. 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 quo. 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.”

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

Children affected by emergencies

The 2008 conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation over the breakaway region of South Ossetia resulted in the death of many people and more than 150,000 people were displaced from their homes. The education system was severely impacted in the conflict. Many schools were damaged in the fighting. Others were turned into makeshift shelters to house refugees. Approximately 28,000 internally displaced persons from the conflict have still not been able to return home. Displaced children have been integrated into schools in new areas of settlement. Orphaned children and high-poverty families struggle to start their lives over in new areas of the nation. For families that have returned to South Ossetia, many find limited access to schools, as buildings are still destroyed and rebuilding is necessary.

Learning outcomes and educational quality

Georgia has not participated in the international learning assessments, so information on learning outcomes is somewhat scarce. There is evidence that educational quality in Georgia has been declining due to the economic crisis and low expenditures on education. Deteriorating school buildings, low salaries and poor teacher motivation inhibit the quality of education available to students. Only half of parents surveyed reported that school conditions meet the learning needs of their children.

Limited access to textbooks and resources further infringes on instruction and lessons. In some parts of the nation, an excess of schools and teachers has resulted in the closing of educational institutions (see Box 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-service training is regarded as a challenge. Pre- and in-service teacher training needs further support in order to introduce, establish and provide a national system of continued and wide-scale quality education.

Teacher salaries in Georgia are defined by the recently adopted teacher pay scheme, which provides a basis to remunerate teachers above the minimum threshold, and compensate them based on their qualifications and experience. Teachers' salaries still remain low, but the relative position of teachers has improved: the average salary for teachers now ranges between \$137 and \$200 per month, depending on teacher work load, years of experience and educational qualifications.

Education financing

Georgia spends 2.5 per cent of its total GNP on education. This is the lowest expenditure rate in the CEECIS region, in which the average is 4.4 per cent. Most of the general education budget in Georgia is spent on wages and social security contributions for teachers, leaving very little for capital investments. As a consequence, the current stock of school infrastructure is depreciating quickly. About 92 per cent 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 (about 4–5 per cent of education spending), which does little to stem the rapid depreciation of the nation's large stock of school infrastructure.

Educational priorities in Georgia

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

- Ensure openness of general education and equal access for all
- Integrate the Georgian general education system into the international education arena
- Introduce national assessment, curricula development and accreditation systems in general education
- Ensure efficient and effective governance of general secondary schools
- Promote more equitable use of all necessary educational, physical and financial resources
- Achieve autonomous governance of schools
- Support inclusive education