

Education in Kazakhstan

Context

The Kazakhstan government continues to prioritize education. Building upon the nation's longstanding success on national indicators and equal access for all, it aims to focus on preschool education and secondary school.

Impact of the economic crisis

Kazakhstan felt the shock of the global economic and financial crisis a year earlier than most of its neighbours. In 2007, the widening national debt resulted in a 20 per cent devaluation of the national currency, and national panic over the economy resulted. The Kazakhstan government responded by releasing a package of anti-crisis measures. This included financial sector stabilization measures, such as the development of the real estate/residential construction sector, support of small and medium enterprises, development of the agro-industrial sector, realization of industrial and infrastructure projects, job creation, training programmes for the unemployed and social assistance programmes. The intent was to soften the financial impact of the crisis. So far, the stimulus has successfully kept Kazakhstan's economy from spiralling downwards. Furthermore, positive growth in the coming years is predicted. The Assessment of the Financial and Economic Crisis on Child Wellbeing, a report commissioned in response to the crisis, suggested that children were minimally impacted, but that prolonged economic insecurity could stretch family incomes or delay health care, which could ultimately affect children.

Kazakhstan has the highest GNP (PPP) per capita in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Its per capita GNP – \$10,270 USD (2009 est.) – is more than three times what it was at the start of the decade. Kazakhstan's economic growth was bolstered by high global



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prices for oil and wheat, which are its two main exports. On the HPI-1 index, which measures human poverty by taking into account health, education and standard of living, Kazakhstan ranked 37th out of 135.

A number of economic, social and political reforms have improved the quality of life in Kazakhstan and laid the foundation for an education system that keeps pace with its neighbours in the EU. About 21 per cent of people in Kazakhstan live on less than \$2.15 per day (2003), while child poverty stands at 28 per cent. Additionally, the total unemployment rate is 6.6 per cent, with youth unemployment at 7.2 per cent (2009). Kazakhstan is ranked 82nd out of 182 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index (2008–2009). Despite the global financial downturn, the government has increased public expenditure in the social sector in absolute terms, including creating financial supports and policies that target vulnerable groups and regional pockets of poverty.

Quick facts about education in Kazakhstan

Total population	15.4 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education	3.2%
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2007 [Gender Parity Index (GPI) (girls/boys)]	39% (0.98)
Net enrolment in primary school, 2007 (GPI)	90% (1.0)
Net enrolment in secondary school, 2007 (GPI)	86% (.99)
Gross tertiary enrolment, 2007 (GPI)	47% (1.25)
Primary student/teacher ratio, 2007	17:1
Out-of-school children of primary-school age (per cent girls)	9,000 (25%)
Ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (out of 179 countries)	120

Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010.

Education reform

In education, many reforms have taken place to improve the status, quality and structure of schooling. Some of the most notable are as follows:

- A revised Law on Education was adopted in 2007 aimed at developing a competitive education structure and improving national regulatory systems in education.
- The Integrated National Programme on Healthy Life Promotion 2008–2016 provides for the expansion of youth-friendly services and incorporates life skills in the secondary school curriculum.
- The government developed statewide standards for education in 2007 and opened 80 new schools. It is set to open 245 new schools over the next five years.
- In 2009, there was an increase of preschool coverage from 30 per cent to 40 per cent.
- The Education Development Programme 2020 was approved in 2010 by the government and submitted for the president's signature.
- In 2010, the Government of Kazakhstan started developing the methodology of per-capita financing of education that will be piloted in 2011 and introduced in 2012–2013.

Access

Early childhood development

The priorities of the Government of Kazakhstan are to: (1) expand preschool programmes, (2) introduce mini-preschool centres, and (3) improve parental support for children ages 0–3. These measures have slowly increased national participation in early childhood education, but greater efforts are still needed. Participation in early childhood education has increased to 40 per cent; however, only 2 per cent of children with special needs have access to early childhood development programmes. Services are run by both state and private entities, including preschools, kindergartens, development centres, parental counselling units, family centres and short-term stay groups. Private preschools constitute 4.8 per cent of educational facilities (237 of 4,972).

Kazakhstan launched the Balapan Programme in 2010 to address low preschool education enrolment and to enhance school readiness. The programme target is to have 70 per cent preschool access in urban and rural areas by 2015. For children aged 5 and 6, the aim is 100 per cent enrolment. The programme also seeks to improve the quality of preschool education by raising teacher qualifications and encouraging parental involvement. The demand for preschool for children with special needs is predicted to rise from 2 per cent to 2.5 per cent. Finally, access to individual care plans is projected to increase from 8 per cent to 30 per cent by 2020 through a network of parental counselling units.

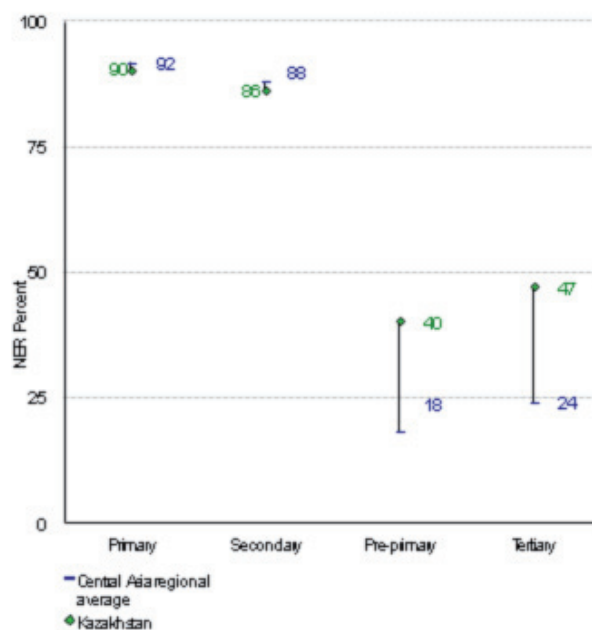
The education development programme seeks to improve the education financing system and its management as Kazakhstan transitions to a 12-year educational system. Improving teacher status

and introducing e-learning are also priorities. The programme will strengthen state support and provide incentives for teachers. It has established targets to increase the number of schools that provide inclusive education from 10 per cent to 30 per cent by 2015, and 70 per cent by 2020.

Basic education

The net enrolment rate (NER) for primary school is 90 per cent, just under Central Asia's average of 91.67 per cent. The net attendance ratio in primary school is 99 per cent. Secondary schools had an NER of 92 per cent in 2005, but by 2007, access dropped to 86 per cent. This is just below the Central Asian average of 88 per cent (see Figure 1). The net attendance rate in secondary school increased 2 per cent to 97 per cent during this same time period. About 9,000 children remain out of school, which continues to be one of the lowest figures in the region.

Figure 1. Comparing net enrolment rates in Kazakhstan to subregional average



Gross enrolment in tertiary education is 47 per cent. While this figure is low, it is the highest in the region. The average in Central Asia is 24 per cent. Vocational training systems have been restructured in Kazakhstan, and a three-stage model of higher education was introduced. Plans for development of a national system of quality assessment are being discussed.

Children with disabilities

There continues to be a serious concern in Kazakhstan about access to education for children with special needs. It is estimated that 153,000 boys and girls have special needs, although this is likely an underestimate, as many families conceal their children's disabilities out of shame. In urban ar-

eas, around 19,000 children with disabilities are accommodated in special-needs schools designed for students with mental disabilities. Approximately 4,415 others attend special-needs classes at general-education schools. Other children are homeschooled. The quality of education available to homeschool students is limited. Services in rural areas consist of 104 boarding schools, called *internats*, and 13 'sanatoriums'. Currently, there are around 34,000 rural children enrolled in boarding schools and close to 4,000 in sanatoriums.

Public attitudes towards people with disabilities remain stigmatizing, and discrimination frequently leads to social and economic exclusion both for the child and his or her family. Institutionalization and special schools therefore remain the dominant choice for children with disabilities. Those who graduate from specialized boarding schools are sometimes housed in institutions for the elderly, as there is nowhere else for them to go.

Community-based integrated social services are beginning to emerge in Kazakhstan. These UNICEF-supported programmes promote inclusive modelling for preschools and provide social assistance for families with children with special needs. There is still concern that many children's needs go undiagnosed or unnoticed until primary school. Many mainstream schools and classroom teachers do not have the accommodations or training necessary to support learners with special needs.

Kazakhstan signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and legislation is in place that provides a framework for educating children with disabilities. However, there is a lack of finances to support the new policies, particularly at the local level. More prevention and rehabilitation institutions are becoming available, but will likely be challenged by a shortage of qualified teachers.

The educational access for students with special needs is an ongoing concern. A lack of services and technology in schools, limited numbers of trained professionals and minimal medical services for children with severe developmental problems are a few of the areas requiring additional support. Finally, Kazakhstan needs improved legislative mandates and a regulatory process to hold the system accountable.

Educational challenges facing youth and adolescents
Efforts to engage the youth and adolescents of Kazakhstan have yielded notable results. In 2009, over 2,500 people attended a forum for and about youth and adolescents called, "We are the peers of our country's independence." Topics of discussion included greater educational, social and psychological support for boys and girls. Youth centres are one of many proposed ideas. Kazakhstan is aiming to include young people in programmes and policies that affect them and their peers.



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Twenty-first century Kazakh youth endure significant pressure. In particular, pressure rises during secondary school when students are required to learn three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English). The qualifying exams for acceptance into tertiary education induce more stress. According to the World Health Organization, stress rates among Kazakh youth rank an alarming 3rd out of 106 nations, and Kazakhstan ranks high for suicides. Curriculum changes under the 2008–2016 Healthy Life Promotion have introduced life-skill courses in secondary school and may be an initial step towards improved stress management.

Equity

Parity in educational access across gender, region and income is generally very high in Kazakhstan all the way through secondary school, much like the former Soviet system. In primary school, there is less than 1 per cent difference in attendance rates between boys and girls, between children living in rural and urban areas and between the highest and lowest income brackets. In secondary school, these trends continue, except for children from the lowest income bracket, with the poorest children being 2.7 per cent less likely to attend school.

Recent media and NGO reports have identified a problem in access to education for children of migrant families. This issue is of greatest concern in the southern parts of Kazakhstan.

Education quality

Kazakhstan's performance on international PISA 2009 suggests that education quality is in need of attention. Kazakhstan scored seventh to last in reading out of 75 countries, and fourth to last in reading out of the 19 participating countries in the CEECIS region. It also scored fourth to last in mathematics and science out of the 19 countries participating from the CEECIS region. Its scores in all three subjects were below the mean score for all 65 participating countries (see Figure 2).

UNESCO's *Education for All Monitoring Report 2009* ranked Kazakhstan in first place on the Education Development Index. On the 2007 TIMSS assessment, Kazakhstan's grade four students obtained a 549 in mathematics (the average score was 500). Furthermore, 19 per cent of students reached the advanced

Figure 2. Comparing performance in reading, mathematics and science on PISA 2009



benchmark in mathematics. Kazakhstan obtained the highest score in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Asia. Russia is close behind with a score of 544. Similarly, on the fourth grade science section, Kazakhstan obtained a 533 (average score 500) and 10 per cent of the students reached the advanced benchmark. Kazakhstan ranked third in the Central South-Eastern region behind Russia and Latvia, but first in Central Asia out of participating nations.

Across the system, teachers, who are central to improving learning outcomes, are underpaid and overworked. Salaries in the education sector are only 60 per cent of the average national wage, which is the third lowest proportion in the region (for countries where data is available). Moreover, teachers' salaries as a proportion of the average national wage have actually decreased since 1993. With deteriorating working conditions, little in-service support and salaries that are declining, teachers have little incentive to invest in improving students' learning outcomes.

The major challenges with regard to educational quality are as follows:

- While compulsory education is free by law, in practice, parents and communities often bear a portion of the cost of schooling through textbooks, supplies, school fees, school meals and, in some cases, school maintenance.

- The country's monitoring and evaluation system needs restructuring so that concrete information is available on the learning outcomes of the educational system.
- There is a shortage of trained teachers, especially in the remote areas where city-trained teachers are unwilling to work.
- There is a challenge of updating the curriculum and instructional materials, which largely date from the Soviet period.
- There is a need to establish a concrete set of uniform standards to maintain accountability and equity across school districts.
- Drop-out rates are thought to be on the rise as the national curriculum is increasingly seen as irrelevant to the modern job markets, although official numbers are not available.
- Crumbling school infrastructure due to poor maintenance leaves many schools unusable. Additionally, poor heating and sanitation facilities make other schools unsafe. The poor state of school infrastructure impedes access to education and also negatively affects the quality of learning. When the government is spending the bulk of its resources on repairing school buildings, spending on learning materials suffers.

Education Financing

Total state expenditures on education increased in 2008 to 3.6 per cent, an improvement over the 2005 allocation of 0.2 per cent. Little information is available about the breakdown of that spending. Based on the national wealth, expenditures in Kazakhstan are low compared to other governments in Central Europe, which spend about twice the amount on education.

Education priorities

The following are UNICEF's education priorities in Kazakhstan:

- Increase the percentage of GDP spent on education
- Increase teachers' salaries to at least match the national average wage
- Increase access to early childhood education, especially for students from vulnerable families and in rural areas
- Improve legal mandates and access for special education and children with disabilities
- Attract new young education specialists to begin careers in the MoE to fill a widening human resource gap
- Monitor the standardization of schools and enforce compliance of national standards across all school types, especially in rural areas