

Education in

the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Context

A renewed government interest in education in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has yielded a new national focus on improving educational access, quality and opportunity.

Impact of the economic crisis

The global economic crisis has had an overall negative effect on the economy of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. GDP real growth declined in 2009 by 1.5 per cent, a significant shift after the two previous years, which had positive growth rates of 5 per cent and 5.9 per cent, respectively.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's strong economic growth has led to little improvement in national living standards. Job creation has been stimulated, but unemployment remains a national challenge at 32.2 per cent. Inflation is also a concern, with food and energy prices soaring by 86 per cent in 2008. Thus, while the increase in national wages is notable, it has not kept up with inflation. These realities have contributed to increased poverty rates. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ranks 72 out of 182 on the Human Development Index, with an HDI of 0.817. An estimated 21.7 per cent of Macedonians live below the poverty line, and 3.2 per cent of people in poverty live on less than US\$2 per day. The Gini coefficient has remained constant in the past two years at 0.39, suggesting that inequalities persist.

EU accession

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's status as a candidate country for EU membership makes it eligible for pre-accession funding and improves its reputation within the international community. This has focused the government on achieving the necessary requirements for



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membership. In particular, the Joint Inclusion Memorandum requires progress towards social inclusion and fulfilment of children's rights, which are among the EU's preconditions for membership.

Education reform

The government's renewed interest in the education sector produced several meaningful reforms:

- Education is one of the five strategic goals for 2008-2012.

The government increased financial allocations for education and allotted funding for IT technology and school reconstruction.

- Compulsory education extended in 2008 from eight to nine years, and secondary school became required in 2009.

Quick facts about education in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Total population	2 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education	6%
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2007 [Gender Parity Index (GPI) (girls/boys)]	38% (1.03)
Net enrolment in primary school, 2007(GPI)	89% (1.00)
Net enrolment in secondary school, 2007(GPI)	81% (0.98)
Gross enrolment in tertiary enrolment, 2007(GPI)	30% (1.27)
Primary school student/teacher ratio, 2007	18:1
Out-of-school children of primary school age (per cent girls)	6,000(45%)
PIRLS score (reading); TIMSS score (mathematics)	442,435

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010.

- New early-learning development standards were introduced in all kindergartens and community-based early childhood development (ECD) centres.
- Life-skills based education became a compulsory subject in all grades of primary education.
- The history of religion was added as an optional course in grades 7 and 8.

Access

Early childhood education

The government has prioritized early childhood education by adopting new early-learning development standards, as well as providing support to open new kindergartens and alternative programmes. Due to local initiatives, pre-primary education enrolment rates in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have increased from 11 per cent to 14 per cent. While still among the lowest in the region, the increase suggests that improvements are possible.

Basic education

Enrolment and completion rates in primary school have declined in recent years. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's net enrolment rate (NER) of 91.3 per cent is relatively high, but percentages drop when disaggregating data by ethnic groups or socio-economic status. Overall completion rates have dropped from 92.2 per cent in 2000, to 91.1 per cent in 2007. This could be attributed to the introduction of an additional year in primary school. Further steps must be taken to reduce the estimated 17,000 out-of-school children, according to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010*.

Interestingly, enrolment and completion rates in secondary school have increased. The secondary school NER is 74.7 per cent, 4.5 per cent higher than in 2000. Completion rates have also improved over the past seven years, increasing from 63.0 per cent in 2000 to 70.6 per cent in 2007 (see Figure 1). The secondary school attendance rate is 63 per cent, which is just below the mean for the region (see Figure 2). Gross enrolment in tertiary education (GER) is 36 per cent, while the regional average is 62 per cent.

Figure 1. Primary and secondary education trends, 2000–2007.

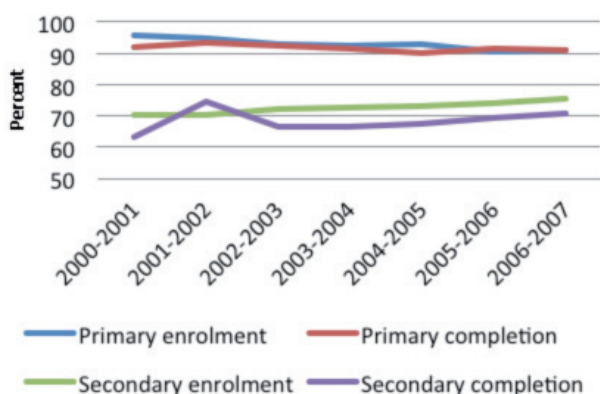
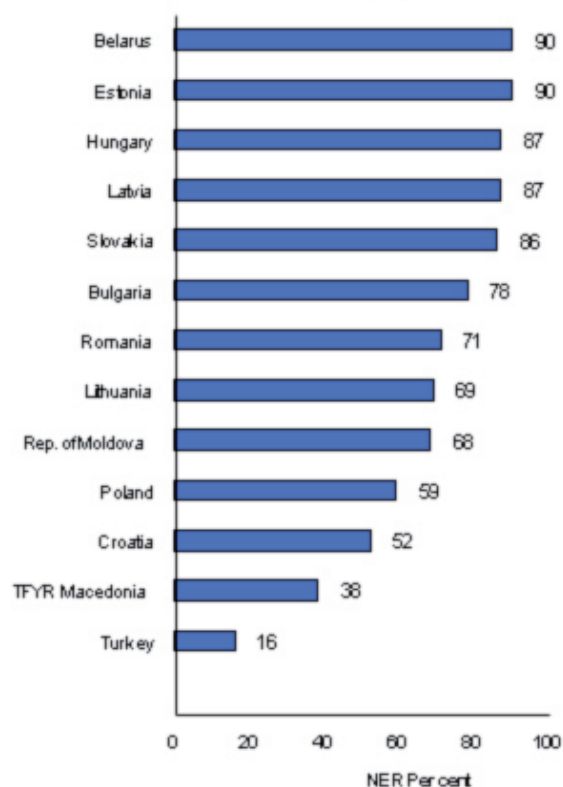


Figure 2. Pre-primary net enrolment rates in Central and Eastern Europe, 2007



Children with disabilities

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has shifted away from separate schools for children with special needs to a more inclusive approach. Students with disabilities are now more frequently placed in mainstream schools and attend classes with their peers. Many primary schools and day-care centres have implemented educational and therapeutic services for children with disabilities.

Educational challenges facing youth and adolescents

There are multiple challenges facing the youth in and out of school in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Drugs, human trafficking, incarceration and unemployment are a growing concern for adolescents. Some programmes aimed at supporting youth have surfaced, particularly HIV/AIDS prevention strategy centres. UNICEF has sponsored various activities at the local level that focus on supporting youth by encouraging them to get involved in their communities, as well as working with local governments to emphasize the importance of youth voices. Despite these efforts, the high unemployment in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has had a serious effect on young people, and obtaining employment is challenging.

Equity

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has had success in moving towards gender equality, but other equity issues pose a major challenge for the nation. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a Gender Parity Index (GPI) in primary school of 0.94, which is on track to fulfil the MDG

target. But by tertiary education, boys are under-represented by a ratio of 1 to 1.27. Large gaps in educational access and enrolment between sub-national groups also persist. The starkest differences occur between the richest and poorest income quintiles, urban and rural areas, and Macedonian and Roma ethnicity groups. The patterns of inequity are complex.

The gap between rich and poor students is most obvious in preschool. The richest students have much higher attendance rates, but ethnic and regional gaps in attendance are also large. In primary school, ethnic inequities are the most pronounced, with Macedonian children two thirds more likely to attend than Roma children. By secondary school, wealth and ethnic divides are almost equally prominent, while regional differences in attendance rates diminish.

Another source of alarm is the increased ethnic segregation and ethnic-based violence emerging in schools. In particular, in the municipalities of Kumanovo, Tetovo, Gostivar, Kicevo, Struga and some of Skopje, ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian children are being separated. Traditionally, these young people were in the same classes and schools, but due to tensions and influence of politics in education, schools are increasingly grouping by ethnicity instead of by grade. The demand for monoethnic schools is rising as well, and is seen as a preventive measure against ethnic-based tensions and violence in schools.

Roma education

Between 80,000 and 130,000 Roma people live in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, comprising about 2.7 per cent of the population, according to the Roma Education Fund. The Roma population is highly diverse, and includes people from all over South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Turkey, the U.N. Administered Province of Kosovo¹, Croatia and Serbia.) The Roma in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia mainly live in urban settlements. The poverty

rate in Roma settlements is three times the national average, with approximately 90 per cent of people living below the poverty line. Anti-discrimination laws are now established in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, but at the time of this report they were too new to assess.

Roma children have significantly less success in all phases of the education system than their non-Roma peers. While the laws of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia guarantee Roma children the right to education, there are few schools that offer language instruction suitable to Roma. Roma children experience discrimination in schools from teachers, administrators and students. Furthermore, Roma children are often relegated to special schools intended for children with mental or physical disabilities. These schools offer reduced curricula and have lower quality standards. The enrolment of Roma in these schools is significantly above the national average. Facing such challenges, only about half of Roma children in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia complete all eight years of primary school, and only about 13 per cent transition to secondary school. Of those, just over half graduate. A recent evaluation of a project aimed at improving the access to education for Roma children will serve as the foundation for further efforts to improve the educational opportunities for Roma in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Quality and learning outcomes

The main challenge to improving education in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia lies in bolstering the quality and learning outcomes in its schools. Of all the countries in the region that participated in PIRLS 2003 and TIMSS 2006, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia scored last on both tests (see Figures 3 and 4). The nation ranked below the international average in both literacy and mathematics achievement.

This data challenges the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to make its schools more effective.

Figure 3. Distribution of overall mathematics achievement on 2003 TIMSS, grade 8

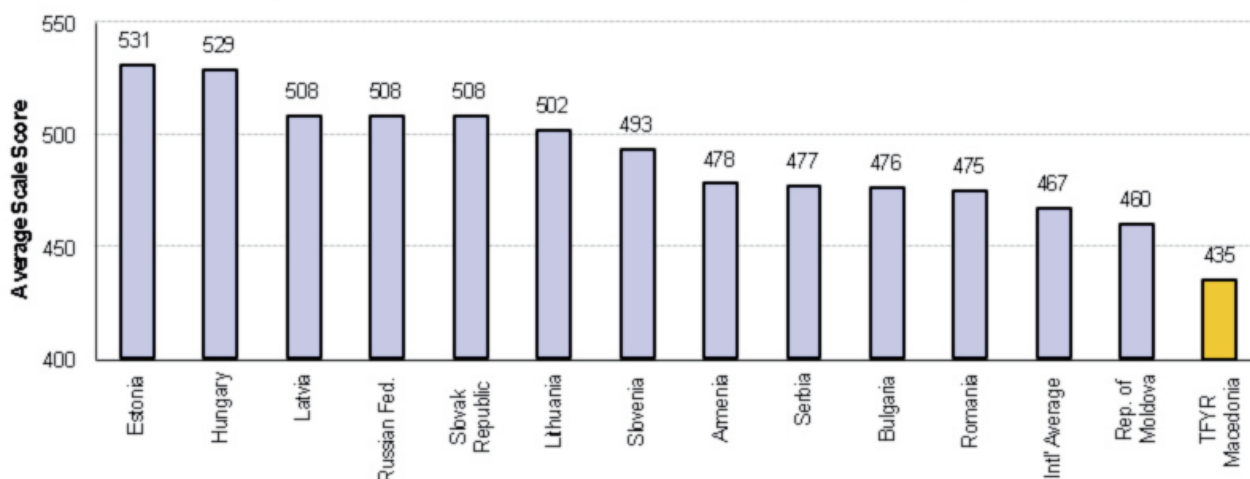
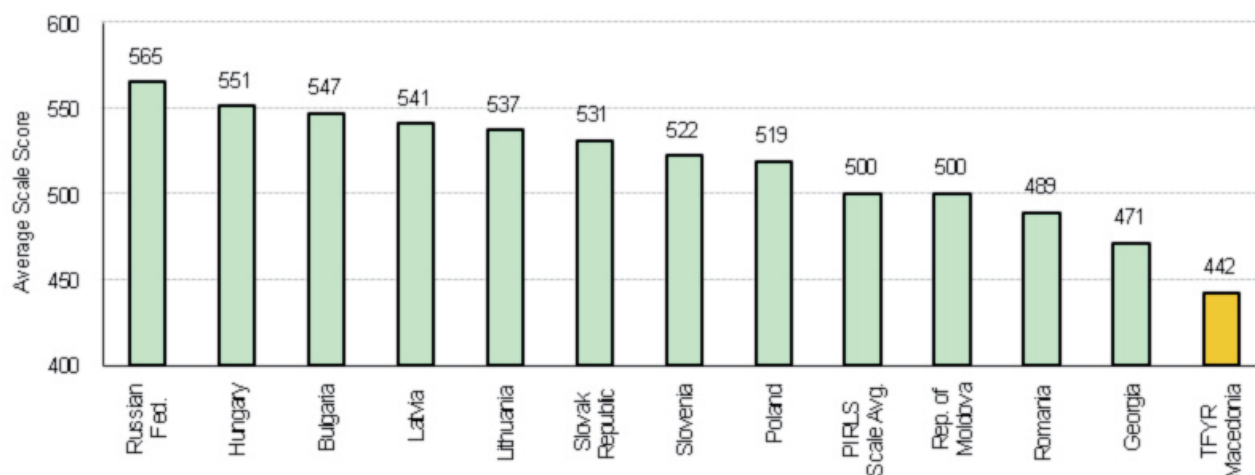


Figure 4. Distribution of overall reading achievement on PIRLS 2006 in the CEECIS region, grade 4



Children are not necessarily leaving school with a mastery of basic literacy and mathematics skills. Although the student/teacher ratio (19 to 1) in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is average for the region, teaching is thought to be largely ineffective because of outdated methodologies that centre on rote memorization and because of low teacher support in schools.

Studies and reports call for the introduction of basic learning standards for pre-primary and primary schools to ensure that students leave school with basic competencies and that children who are in need of special assistance are identified and serviced. Major contributors to poor school efficiency include: inadequate instructional time, a lack of teacher professional development, outdated materials and the decline of school libraries. School violence has also been identified as a problem that erodes school quality. The accuracy of textbooks is debatable.

Education financing

The current government has pledged to continue increasing budgetary allocations for education. As of 2008, 6 per cent of the GDP was allocated to education, an increase from 2007 (5 per cent) and from 2005 (3.5 per cent). The majority of investments are still going towards infrastructure, and information and communication technology.

Educational priorities

In partnership with the MoE, UNICEF aims to support the government's initiatives to:

- Reduce ethnic tensions and violence in schools
- Further reduce the inequalities between rich/poor, boy/girl, and ethnic majority/minority students
- Monitor and expand participation in early childhood programmes
- Increase the use of child-friendly pedagogies in primary schools
- Continue expanding inclusive schooling opportunities for children with disabilities
- Modernize school resources and curriculum
- Support the introduction of life skills in secondary school
- Support teacher training in numeracy and literacy.

1 UNSCR 1244.