

Education in Montenegro

Context

With multiple reform initiatives underway in Montenegro, the government recognizes improvements in education as one of many necessary factors for EU membership.

Impact of the economic crisis

After eight years of rapid economic growth, including GDP growth of 10.7 per cent in 2007 and 6.9 per cent in 2008, Montenegro's GDP declined by 5.7 per cent in 2009. The nation's financial downturn was a result of the international economic crisis. The rising cost of food and the volatility of fuel prices compounded the financial decline. The combination of crises led to a decrease in public spending and a tightening of services available to support the nation. Throughout the economic downturn, the main drivers of growth continued to be service, tourism and real estate/construction, but these could not sustain the growth rates of previous years. In 2009, the national GDP (PPP) per capita was 4,720 euros.

Despite the progress made during the decade of economic growth, further efforts are needed to support marginalized populations and reduce stratification in Montenegro. The nation ranked 65 out of 182 on the Human Development Index (HDI), but it had a Gini index of 0.30, suggesting that notable income inequalities linger. About 7 per cent of Montenegro's population live in poverty, with another 20 per cent living just above the poverty line. Families with three or more children are twice as likely to be in poverty. Around 30 per cent of Montenegrin children grow up under or close to the poverty line. For refugees and Roma children, the percentage of those in poverty rises to 49 and 57, respectively. National unemployment stands at about 14.7 per cent, but it rises to 82 per cent among the Roma population, according to the World Bank. Some 77 per cent of Roma are considered 'educationally deprived', which is seven times higher than the general population.



Source: UNICEF Montenegro

EU ascension

In 2008, Montenegro submitted an EU membership application. Montenegro's respect for international human rights laws and its overall commitment to work based on consensus were highlighted as strengths in its progress report. Other areas, such as corruption and a weak reform agenda arose as concerns. Montenegro is taking steps to address these issues and move towards EU membership.

Education reform

Educational improvement is a government priority in Montenegro. The following major education reforms have been initiated in pursuit of the Education for All (EFA) goals:

- Children's rights were included in the 2008–2012 National Programme of Integration.
- In 2001, Montenegro passed the Book of Changes of The Education System of Montenegro, which is a progressive and comprehensive education reform calling for improved quality, access and equality of education.
- The Ministry of Education (MoE) extended compulsory education to nine years, starting at age six. The phasing in of this reform is set to be completed by 2012.
- The MoE has prioritized higher education and lifelong learning.
- The nation passed legislation declaring: "Regardless of the national affiliation, race, gender, language, religion, social background and other per-

Quick Facts about education in Montenegro

Total population (2007)	598,000
Unemployment rate as a percentage of total unemployment (2005)	14.7%
Percentage of GDP spent on education	5.8%
Net attendance ratio in pre-primary school (NAR) (per cent) (2005)	29%
Net attendance ratio in primary school (per cent) (NAR) (2005)	98%
Net attendance ratio in secondary school (NAR) (per cent) (2005)	84%

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008; UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010.

sonal characteristics, all citizens of the Republic shall be equal in the exercising of the right of education.” (Article 9, General Law on Education).

- Montenegro established a National Forum for EFA, which is tasked with the responsibility of monitoring and advancing progress toward achieving the EFA goals.
- A child-care system reform initiative aims to empower families, early childhood professionals and communities to ensure that young children reach their full potential.
- The ministry developed strategic documents on Roma education, inclusive education of children with disabilities, national strategies for youth, a strategy on early and preschool education, civic education, and studies to advance understanding of the challenges facing its schools, including a comprehensive review of needed reparations to school infrastructure.
- In 2004, the Government of Montenegro adopted the Plan of Action for Children 2004–2010, defining key strategies in health, education and child protection to alleviate child poverty and to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through a rights-based approach that is firmly focused on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- A new law has been adopted specifically addressing the rights and needs of children with disabilities.
- Montenegro developed an extensive civic education curriculum in an effort to address regional ethnic divisions and build national cohesion (see Box 1).

Access

Early childhood education

Early childhood education consists of nursery schools for children up to 3 years of age and kindergartens for children 3 to 6 years. Both half- and full-day programmes are available in Montenegro; centres are established and partially funded by the government. Attendance is not obligatory and continues to be low. Only 29 per cent of 3–5 year olds are attending preschool education. In the central and northern regions of Montenegro, access is even lower than in the south. Compared to its regional neighbours, Montenegro is behind in preschool attendance. Greater attention to pre-primary education is needed. With a newly adopted strategy on early and preschool education, the country has addressed the issues of low preschool coverage and proposed mechanisms for improvement.

Basic education

Primary school education is free and compulsory. As of 2005, access to primary education in Montenegro was above average for South-Eastern Europe and the CEECIS region (see Figure 1). The attendance rate (NAR) for primary school as of 2007 was 98 per cent, which is higher than the regional average. Primary school completion rates are also relatively high at 91.1 per cent.

The NAR for secondary school is 84 per cent, which is on par with the regional average of 83 per cent and the subregional average of 82 per cent. Both

Box 1. Civic education in Montenegro

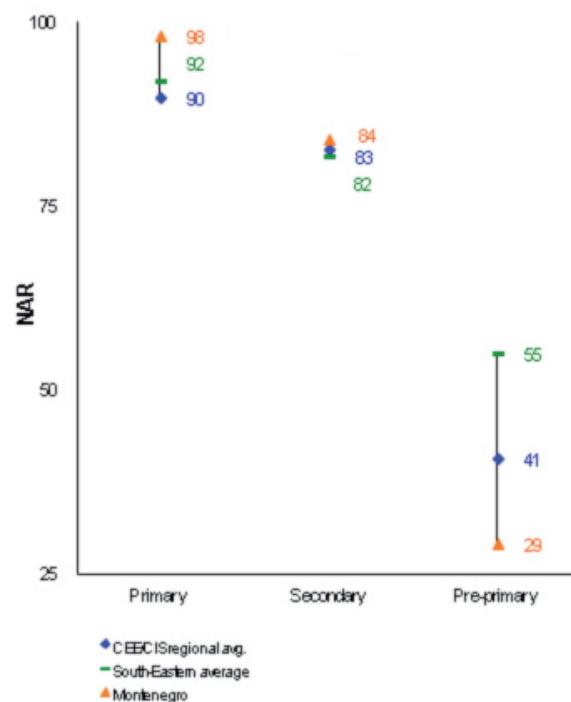
Montenegro has introduced Civic Education (CE) as a mandatory course throughout primary and secondary education. CE is defined as “a set of practices and principles aimed at making young people and adults better equipped to participate actively in democratic life by assuming and exercising their rights and responsibilities in society.” The programme addresses a wide array of topics, such as human rights education, political education, education for peace and education for democracy, through different forms of education – formal, non-formal and informal.

Civic education aims to connect knowledge to actions and behaviours. Three aspects in schools are emphasized in order to encourage individuals to ultimately be more active in society:

- Acquire *knowledge* and information **about** their rights, responsibilities, opportunities and ways for action within a community;
- Develop *abilities for* observing social problems and their resolution through co-operation;
- Develop *motivation* to use newly acquired knowledge and skills, apart from school, also **in** their life. This general objective is further specified through each of the three components of civic action (*specific knowledge, skills and values*).

Source: Strategy for Civic Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Montenegro 2007–2010. Podgorica, Bureau of educational Services, 2007, 58 p.

Figure 1. Net attendance ratios in Montenegro, South-Eastern Europe and the CEECIS region



secondary vocational and gymnasium curricula are available for students. Efforts to reduce the number of out-of-school young people have yielded impressive results, with only about 1,200 children remaining out. Higher education is a priority for the Montenegro government. As of 2008, the nation had one state university and two private institutions.

Children with disabilities

There are approximately 2,415 children with special needs in Montenegro. Under the 2004 Education of Children with Special Needs law, these boys and girls are to be involved in regular schools as much as possible. Integrated preschools and inclusive model primary schools have been introduced across the nation. Around 185 children with special needs now attend preschools, and it is estimated that 1,591 learners with special needs are in regular primary schools. Four mobile teams, which include trained specialists from both special and regular education, visit these schools to provide training and support teachers.

Other students with disabilities continue to attend special education institutions or boarding schools. In these instances, their placement is considered in the best interest of the child. Institutes cater to specific populations of children, including schools focused on hearing and speech impairments, mild and severe intellectual disabilities, autism and children with physical disabilities.

Educational challenges facing adolescents and youth

There is increasing concern in Montenegro over violence in schools, lack of available knowledge regarding healthy lifestyles and limited involvement of youth in communities. Various community and NGO efforts are under way to improve the lives of youth and adolescents. UNICEF is using a social mobilization approach through Local Plans of Action to foster community participation among youth. Adolescent Parliaments and roundtable discussions in the form of school-based youth groups are also emerging as ways to improve participation in schools. For instance, Y-PEER networks, which strive to improve cooperation among peer-education groups and coalitions of youth NGOs and teach about HIV/AIDS issues, have emerged to support Montenegrin youth.

Equity

Few figures are available on the equity of enrolment or completion rates of subnational populations. However, certain inequities have been identified by educationists in Montenegro. Specifically, it is believed that ethnic minorities have less access to quality education than their peers.

Education in Montenegro is currently delivered in the language of Montenegrin, but it is also available in Albanian. The curriculum of the Albanian students is identical to the mainstream curriculum, with the exception of the Albanian language and literature class. There have been reports suggesting that curricula and materials in Albanian schools are of lower quality than Montenegrin schools. In

particular, outdated textbooks, poorly translated documents and a biased history curriculum limit the quality of education in Albanian-language schools.

The education of other linguistic minorities, such as the Bosnian, Serbs and Croatian nationals, is recognized as an integral part of a unified educational system. While the Constitution of Montenegro proscribes Montenegrin as the official language, it also enables Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian to be used; this is a progressive approach that is atypical for newly independent states. Teaching common subjects using the languages of most minorities in Montenegro enables greater understanding and involvement among these populations.

Roma education

Montenegro's estimated 13,000 Roma continue to face discrimination in employment, education and health care. As of 2009, Montenegro had no anti-discrimination laws protecting the Roma. It is estimated that less than 5 per cent of Roma children have access to preschool. At the primary level, 25.2 per cent of Roma children enrol, but only 18 per cent complete primary education. Romani research on most at-risk adolescents found that Roma girls were most likely to have low levels of schooling. The Roma/non-Roma gap is most pronounced in secondary school: according to the MoE, only 31 Roma students are currently attending secondary school.

Segregation is a serious concern, with most Roma students attending de facto segregated schools. A lack of qualified Romani-speaking teachers working within the system further segregates Roma children. Recognition of Roma culture and heritage is also lacking in the general curriculum.

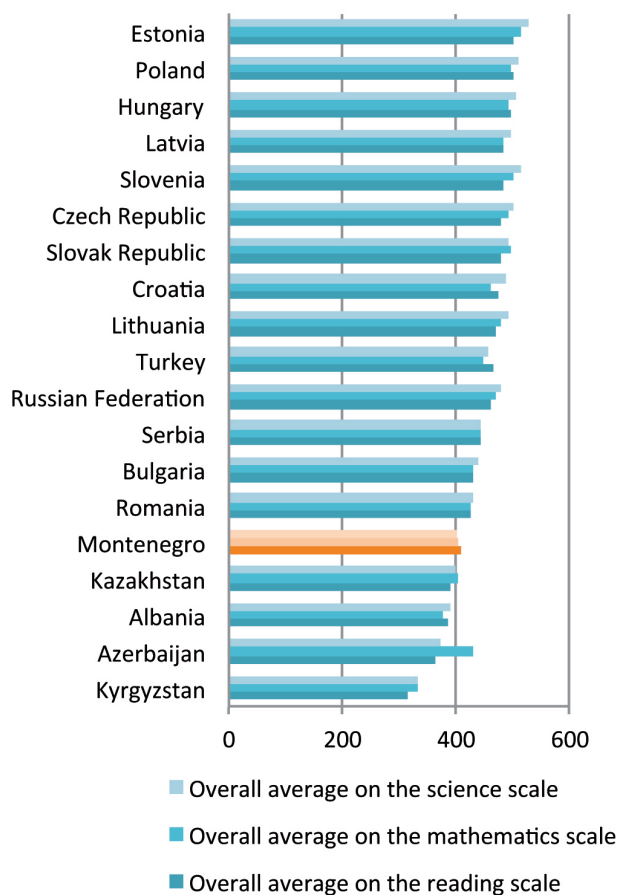
The Government of Montenegro is aware of the inequalities facing Roma children and is making some efforts to improve them. The government signed the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015, as well as the National Strategy on Roma Inclusion, and has established multiple partnerships with NGOs to prioritize access and opportunity to education for Roma children. Initial steps to aid Roma children include support for scholarship schemes, increasing access to textbooks and school supplies in Roma communities and increased monitoring of Roma children's enrolment. Addressing this dire situation requires significant focus and energy.

Learning outcomes and educational quality

Montenegro was one of 19 countries in the CEECIS region that participated in the PISA 2009 assessment. It ranked 15th in reading, mathematics and science. Its below-average performance indicated that learning outcomes in Montenegro lag behind those of its neighbours in Central Europe (see Figure 2). However, its performance ranked above wealthier countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Montenegro's school system shows evidence of inefficiency, which is expected in a system that pro-

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



duces such poor learning outcomes. Only 91.1 per cent of students complete primary school. However, 97.2 per cent of students that enter grade one reach grade five within five years. A setting recent provision to make first grade a full-day was postponed due to a lack of adequate facilities in most schools. This additional school time had the potential to increase the quality and instruction in the students' initial year. The transition rate between primary and secondary school is 98 per cent. Approximately 70.8 per cent of students who enrol in secondary school attend vocational schools. Unfortunately, existing curricular programmes for vocational education are not always in line with the labour market.

Projects such as Active Learning, which promotes child-centred instruction, have yielded initial improvements in quality and instruction, but greater work still needs to be done (see Box 2). The government's shift toward higher education is cause for further concern about the needed commitment to improve quality and instruction in the early years.

Education financing

As of 2008, 19.1 per cent of the state budget – 5.7 per cent of the GDP – is spent on education. Even though education is mandated to be free, parents and community members contribute to education financing through the purchase of textbooks, supplies and private tutoring. Only the poorest families are eligible for material assistance (supplies and textbooks). Official figures on this assistance are not published.

The breakdown of how educational funds are spent in Montenegro is not available, but it is estimated that a substantial portion of funds go towards tertiary education.

Education priorities in Montenegro

UNICEF's priorities in Montenegro are to:

- Develop child-friendly school standards
- Increase access and enrolment at the pre-primary level for all children
- Advocate and raise awareness on inclusive education
- Promote safe school environments
- Improve enrolment, attendance rates and educational quality available to Roma, children with disabilities, children of poverty and children in institutions
- Strengthen capacity of intersectoral bodies and teamwork to ensure full access to high-quality, inclusive education for all students
- Assist in improving learning outcomes

Box 2. Active learning in Montenegro

The Active Learning Project, piloted by UNICEF and the MoE, served as a basis to shift the teaching-learning process and ultimately improve student outcomes. Teachers who have participated tend to be "more receptive to change, are more favourable towards implementing reform measures (such as flexible scheduling and descriptive marking), and find the curricular reform training more applicable to their own context." The teachers are more successful in implementing and sustaining reform efforts. Approximately 56 per cent of teachers in the Republic of Montenegro have been fully trained by the project. If one includes those teachers who have received the first part of the Active Learning training package, then approximately 30 per cent of all teachers have been trained by the project.

Source: UNICEF Evaluation of Active Learning in Serbia and Montenegro, UNICEF Belgrade 2004