

Education in Tajikistan

Context

Tajikistan continues to make steady progress in improving the quality of primary and secondary education and access to it.

Impact of the economic crisis

The impact of the global economic crisis was hard felt in Tajikistan. Labour markets across the nation plummeted, remittances fell and growth factors eroded. These economic realities were compounded by the nation's constant threat of food scarcity and other recent emergencies, including earthquakes, severe flooding, landslides and a major outbreak of polio.

The per capita GNP of Tajikistan is US\$1,710 (PPP), which is the lowest in Central Asia and the CEECIS region. Total expenditure spent on education in 2009 was 3.8 per cent of GDP. This level of spending is inadequate to meet the requirements of the country's high-needs education system. Alarmingly, budget cuts in the social sectors are still possible. The bulk of cuts are aimed at reducing recurring expenditures. Therefore, the recent increases in the price of utilities could have severe impacts at the school level.

The UNDP ranked Tajikistan 127 out of 182 nations in human development, with a Human Development Index of 0.688. This is the lowest rank in Central Asia and the CEECIS region. Inequality in the country is high, with a Gini coefficient of 33.6; the average annual rate of inflation is 91 per cent. The nation also has one of the highest poverty rates in the region: 22 per cent of Tajiks live below the international poverty line of \$1.25 per day, and 53 per cent live on less than \$2 per day. Tajikistan faces a major dilemma with its shrinking water reserves, requiring the government to ration energy. Additionally, the international food and oil crisis has made life in Tajikistan more expensive and thus more difficult



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for poor families. Around 20 per cent of boys and 17 per cent of girls are involved in child labour; in most CEECIS countries, about 10 per cent of children are economically active.

Education reforms

Despite the economic downturn and lingering national instability, Tajikistan is making steady progress towards the international targets for education (Education for All and Millennium Development Goals), except in early childhood education and gender equality at the secondary education level. Some of the recent government reforms are as follows:

- Phased expansion of compulsory education from 9 years to 12 years (to be completed by 2016), along with the ongoing development of a revised National Strategy for Education Development (NSED) for 2010–2020 that includes preschool.
- A 2010–2015 UN Development Assistance Framework initiative to pilot, evaluate and scale up pre-school alternatives.

The emergence of the Early Learning and Development Standards, which align to the Primary Education Standards and recognize pre-primary schooling as a priority.

Quick Facts about education in Tajikistan

Total population	6.7 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education	3.5%
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2007 [Gender Parity Index (GPI) Girls/Boys]	7% (0.91)
Net enrolment in primary school, 2007 (GPI)	97% (0.96)
Net enrolment in secondary school, 2007 (GPI)	81% (0.86)
Gross enrolment in tertiary enrolment, 2007 (GPI)	20% (0.38)
Primary student/teacher ratio, 2007	22:1
Out-of-school children of primary-school age (per cent girls)	17, 000 (56%)
Ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index	158

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, Corruption Perceptions Index 2009

- A commitment to officially acknowledge and target gender disparities (girls' poor attendance and high drop-out rates) by establishing the Centre for Gender Pedagogies.
- A new range of curricula development in light of the new 12-year education system.
- The emergence of education financing reports and the introduction of percapita financing.
- The establishment of a National Centre for Assessment to monitor national learning outcomes.
- The introduction of school-based databases, such as the Education Management Information System (EMIS) aimed at strengthening evidence-based learning.

Despite these positive strides, resources are scarce and the educational opportunities for many remain dire, especially for marginalized populations.

Access

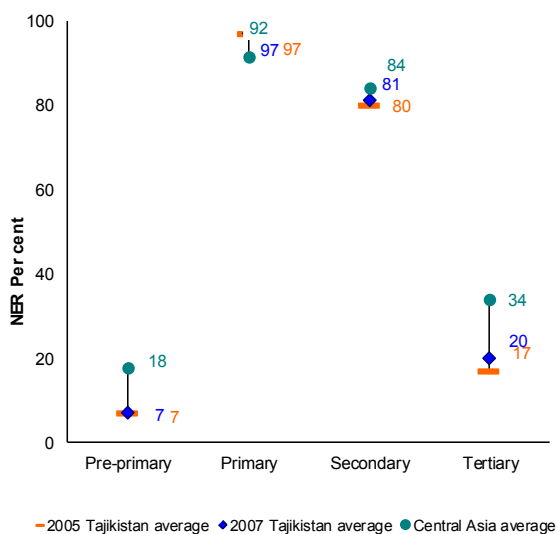
Early childhood education

With 1 out of every 10 people in Tajikistan in the age group 0–5, it is disturbing to find the net enrolment rate (NER) for pre-primary education at only 7–10 per cent. This is alarmingly low and notably worse than the subregional and regional averages. In rural areas, pre-primary enrolment drops to around 1 per cent. A lack of facilities and resources within preschools contributes to poor attendance.

Basic education

The NER for primary school in Tajikistan is 97 per cent, which is higher than both the subregional and regional averages. Net attendance is 97.5 per cent, which is on par with the regional average. The Millennium Development Goal Report (2010) indicates that Tajikistan is judged as 'potentially' achieving MDG2 – universal primary completion by 2015. The secondary school NER is lower, at 81 per cent, which is slightly below the regional average and tied with Kyrgyzstan (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Net enrolment rates in Tajikistan and Central Asia average, 2005 and 2007



Source: UNICEF. Global Monitoring Report, 2010

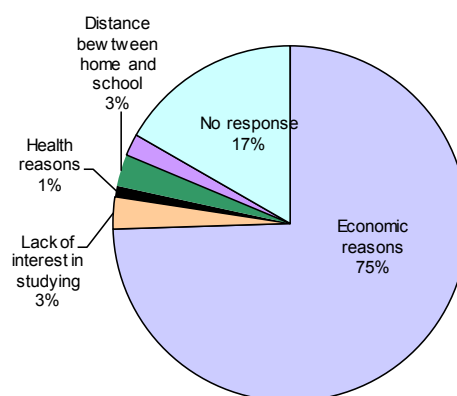
The gross enrolment in tertiary education is 20 per cent. This is below the subregional average of 24 per cent. High school fees and the scarcity of jobs after graduation have sharply reduced the number of students in higher education.

Challenges facing adolescents and youth

The 1.5 million adolescents and youth in Tajikistan today have endured economic, political and social changes. These young people have little trust in the system. Since the school curriculum is not sufficiently relevant to the needs of the labour market or life skills, many youth believe there is limited gain from staying in school past the primary years.

Child labour, family economic pressure and financial strains are also contributing to high drop-out rates. Approximately 18 per cent of young people participate in child labour, many out of necessity to support themselves or their family. Girls are under high pressure to leave school to help with domestic duties. Some parents believe there is limited benefit for girls to stay in school past the primary years. Unemployment among young adults is also high. Thirty-three per cent of people who are unemployed are young adults. Tajik youth find migrating for seasonal work to be an increasingly attractive option (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Reasons for dropping out of school in Tajikistan



Children affected by emergencies

The country's regular emergencies – floods, earthquakes, mudslides, avalanches and locust infestations – constantly threaten children's access to quality education. The frequency of emergencies impedes long-term vision and planning in education reform. These national challenges limit children's access to school on both the supply and demand side; many schools are rendered unfit for class due to emergencies and families are often forced to keep their children home because of the state of schools (see Box 1).

Box 1. Flood crisis in Tajikistan, 2010

Heavy rain in 2010 produced mudslides and flooding that devastated southern Tajikistan. Schools, hospitals and bridges were damaged and remain in need of repair. Many families lost their homes. Twenty-four people were killed and many more remained missing in the aftermath of the storm. The area relies heavily on agriculture for economic stability and many fear this year's crop will be lost due to the flow of debris covering the fields. The damage to local schools, coupled with family devastation, resulted in high absenteeism on the part of teachers and students. The emergency put students' learning on hold.

Equity

Although the government mandates equal education for all, disparities in access and quality of education persist. This is most visible in attendance and drop-out rates. In primary school, the gender parity index (GPI) is 0.96, indicating that enrolment is nearly equitable between genders. However, by secondary school the GPI is 0.86, which shows inequities in access to education for adolescent girls. Enrolment figures for girls fall by as much as 50 per cent as students reach grades 10 and 11. In higher education, the gender gap widens further, with an index level of 0.38, indicating that girls are highly underrepresented.

Dropouts and children who do not attend school regularly are a continuous challenge. Tajikistan has about 17,000 out-of-school children. Tajikistan's efforts to curb non-attendance rates yielded a reduction of 1,000 dropouts between 2005 and 2007. The number of out-of-school girls declined between 2005 and 2007, from 86 per cent to 56 per cent, suggesting some improvements in female retention. Socio-economic status is a strong indicator of drop-out potential. Tajikistan students who come from poor families are more likely to drop out of school.

The gap between rich and poor in Tajikistan is staggering, with over 70 per cent of the people in poverty. The richest 20 per cent of the population account for over 40 per cent of the nation's wealth. Girl's enrolment rates in grades 7–9 are only 70 per cent among the poor, versus 84 per cent among the wealthiest quintile in 2005. This stratification also occurs in the school system, as wealthy students go to private schools with better resources and quality of instruction, while poor students attend the public schools. The Tajikistan government must consider redesigning schools to promote socio-economic cohesion.

Children with disabilities

The number of children with disabilities in Tajikistan is estimated to be between 11,300 (Ministry of Health) and 84,000 (United Nations Development Programme)¹. Delayed diagnosis, low-quality services, social stigmas and insufficient funding are realities that impact boys and girls with disabilities. Legislation has been passed that condemns discrimination against people with disabilities, but much work is still necessary to enforce it. Negative attitudes and inaccessible infrastructure result in significant isolation for children with disabilities.

Children with special needs are not mainstreamed in Tajikistan. Instead, they attend special education institutions or are homeschooled. Institutional care facilities tend to be poorly funded and the education that is available is inadequate. Inclusive education is not yet a viable option, although the 2010–2020 Education Strategy aims to better address this issue. Collaborating with UNICEF in 2007, Tajikistan piloted community-based services aimed at avoiding the institutionalization of children with disabilities. The services provide children with vital support during day programmes. A database tracking children with disabilities has also emerged in an effort to ensure that students are receiving social care services.

School quality and outcomes

Little information is available on learning achievements in Tajikistan, since the country has not participated in any international learning assessments, nor has it carried out a national assessment of its students' learning outcomes (although there are plans to reform national testing processes). Proxy measures of school quality, however, paint a bleak picture of school-based processes. Challenges recognized by the Ministry of Education include a shortage of qualified teachers and staff, limited textbooks, and worn furniture. Student preparation and school readiness are also major concerns (see Box 2).



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Box 2. School readiness in Tajikistan

Many of Tajikistan's children enter school without being sufficiently prepared. These children face a number of risks that affect their ability to complete schooling and benefit from it, and to become productive adults. These risks include:

- high rates of children living in poverty (66 per cent);
- lack of stimulation from families and home environment (perhaps as much as 60 per cent);
- low rates (less than 10 per cent) of children attending any form of pre-primary school;
- high rates of stunting (27 per cent) and iodine deficiency (64 per cent), both risk-factors for poor development;
- children enter school late, with many not entering school until they are 8 years old. This late entry, plus the problems of early drop out beginning at age 12 means that children, particularly girls, may be receiving only four years of schooling.

"Therefore, in addition to risks of poor health and nutrition, over half of all children miss the chance of being in stimulating learning environments during the years with the most rapid growth of language, cognition and social capacities: the first seven years of life. The loss of human potential and human capital is enormous, and is a violation of children's rights to survival and development."

Source: Engle, Patice. Tajikistan: Towards a Comprehensive Policy for Early Childhood Development. 2007.

Teacher salaries and qualifications are low. Many educators have only completed secondary school, and most have minimal teacher training both pre-service and in-service. The government is aware of the shortage of qualified teachers, but even after increases in wages, educators are still paid significantly less than the average income level. Reforming teacher salary scales is a long-term and complex process.

Damaged physical structures and cramped classrooms further limit the quality of education available to students. Half of schools require major building repairs, half lack safe drinking water and one third do not have functioning toilets. Overcrowding is also an issue: 85 per cent of schools operate in two to three shifts and 30 per cent do not have a sufficient number of desks. According to a Tajik educator, "Teachers need to do three shifts a day in order to cope with the shortage of

desks and chairs. One school can accommodate 700 children, but in reality, 1,700 are crammed in. "Tajikistan imports all its desks and chairs. The cost for one desk and two chairs is approximately \$30, which contributes to the shortage. Many schools do have computers, but a lack of electricity and teacher competency results in limited usage.

School Financing

Access, quality and student outcomes are affected by the budget deprivation in Tajikistan. Tajikistan spends only 3.8 per cent of its GDP on education. High overhead costs leave little for school improvement and teacher training. Seventy-seven per cent of the total expenditure is spent on primary and secondary education. The size of this allocation is larger than most other countries in the region, which tend to spend about 60 per cent on basic education. Few resources remain for new school equipment and infrastructure improvement. Additionally, it should be noted that while teacher salaries remain below a living wage, a large proportion of the education budget is allocated to personnel.

Priority challenges in education

Despite significant progress, much work remains with regard to educational improvement. UNICEF, in partnership with the government and donors, has established the following priorities for education in Tajikistan:

- Increase girls' access and attendance rates at all levels of education
- Reduce drop-out and non-attendance rates in primary and secondary education
- Increase access to and quality of early childhood education, especially for poor, rural and children with special needs
- Promote the child-friendly schools (CFS) framework, through strategically integrating existing interventions, including girls' education, water and sanitation in schools, life-skills education and disaster risk reduction
- Increase budgetary allocations to education and establish better budget planning through Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks (MTEF)
- Reduce child labour and its influence on education dropouts
- Strengthen capacity in emergency preparedness, planning and response in the education sector, including in pre-primary and early childhood services

1 Tackling the rights of disabled children, (2007) Tajikistan. http://www.unicef.org/media/media_39883.html