

Education in Ukraine

Context

Impact of the economic crisis

As the third largest country in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS), Ukraine was significantly impacted by the global economic crisis. Its effects extend beyond economic stability to the country's political and social sectors. Shrinking budget revenues, a growing deficit and rising external debt are now realities.

The economic recession resulted in a 15 per cent decline in the GDP real growth rate in 2009 (see Figure 1). This was a sharp reversal of the past seven years, during which there was positive annual growth. The nation's GDP per capita (PPP) of US\$6,300 dropped from being the third highest among CIS states to the fourth, trailing Turkey, Romania and Hungary.

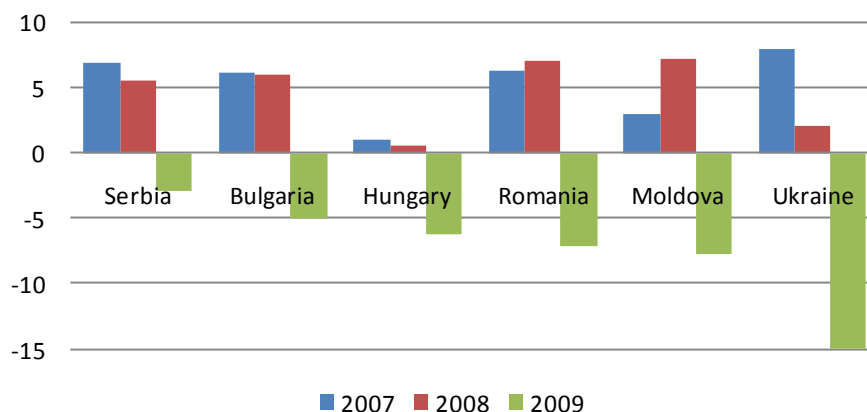
Ukraine faces many challenges in the social sector. The UNDP Human Development Index ranks Ukraine 85 out of 182 countries, with an HDI of 0.796. Some 27 per cent of Ukrainians live below the national poverty line. Larger families continue to be most at risk, with 42 per cent of families with two children, 62 per cent of families with three children and 76 per cent of families with four children living below the poverty line. Inequalities between rich and poor continue to rise as a result of worsening access to social services. The Subsistence Minimum and Minimum Wage Law of 2010 aims to provide social protection by raising minimum wages, but implementation has been



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slow. The government's poverty reduction policy has also been relatively ineffective, yielding a 0.2 per cent reduction in the incidence of poverty, and 0.6 per cent drop in the depth of poverty. Birth grants and cash benefits for children under 3 years have decreased the incidence of poverty by only 2 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively. As of June 2010, 398,700 people were formally registered as unemployed.

Figure 1. GDP Real Growth Rate 2007-2009



Quick facts about education in Ukraine

Total population	46.2 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education	5.4%
Net pre-primary school enrolment rate (NER), 2005 [Gender Parity Index (GPI) (girls/boys)]	56% (.97)
Net enrolment rate in primary school, 2007 (GPI)	89% (1.0)
Net enrolment rate in secondary school, 2007 (GPI)	84% (1.01)
Gross enrolment in tertiary education, 2007 (GPI)	76% (1.24)
Primary student/teacher ratio, 2007	16:1
Out-of-school children of primary-school age (per cent girls)	167,000 (49)
Ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2009 (out of 180 countries)	146

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010.

Education reforms

Various efforts by the Ukrainian government have been undertaken with the aim of improving access and quality in schools. These include:

- Increasing funding to support children with disabilities under the National Plan of Action for Children, effective in 2010;
- Examining preschool programming;
- Shifting compulsory education to include the first 12 years of schooling;
- Introducing external testing for secondary school graduates in 2008;
- Increasing efforts to expand and diversify teaching methodologies in preschools;
- Making it state policy to integrate programmes for continuing education into the national education system;
- Guaranteeing, by creating the network of general education institutions, the constitutional right of each citizen to have free access to full secondary education; and
- Introducing a school bus programme in rural areas as a step toward ensuring equity in access to education.

Access

Access to education faces challenges at pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels in the Ukraine.

Early childhood education

The net enrolment rate (NER) in pre-primary education in the Ukraine is 56 per cent; however, enrolment in rural areas drops to 21 per cent. Pre-primary education includes nurseries, nursery-kindergartens, kindergartens and school-kindergartens. There are over 15,300 programmes in the country, although 1,400 of them do not operate officially. Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) understands the school readiness advantage that pre-primary education has for children who attend.

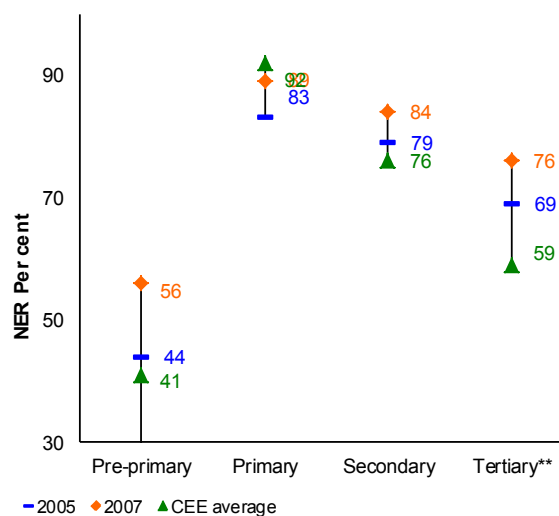
In primary education, the net enrolment rate is currently 89 per cent, a 6 per cent increase over the enrolment rate in 2005. However, Ukraine's primary NER remains below the regional average (Ukraine's NER may be an underestimate compared to other countries because Ukrainian students start school at 7 years of age, which is later than some countries). In rural areas, access to education remains especially limited.

In secondary school, the NER in Ukraine is 84 per cent, which is above the CEECIS regional average. Ukraine continues to struggle with high numbers of out-of-school children. As of 2007, 167,000 children were reported out-of-school. This is an improvement from 2005, when 296,000 students were out-of-school, but it remains one of Ukraine's biggest challenges.

Ukraine's tertiary education system is a leader in the region. With a gross enrolment rate (GER) of 76 per cent, enrolments rates are significantly higher than the regional average (59 per cent) and sub-

regional average (43 per cent). Higher education has been a major point of investment for the MoES (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Education net enrolment rates (NER) in Ukraine compared to CEE regional average, 2005 and 2007



*Pre-primary average is based on 2005 data.

**Cross enrolment rate (GER).

Educational challenges facing adolescents and youth

Adolescents and youth are faced with multiple educational challenges both within and outside of school. In secondary schools, students report that the current system does not teach them to make decisions, use information and communication technologies, resolve conflicts or think critically. At vocational schools, students are taught through outdated lessons from the old Soviet curricula. This does not provide the marketable skills necessary to be employable upon competition. This problem is compounded by the fact that vocational education is the preferred choice of schooling for increasing numbers of young people. The MoES runs 962 state vocational educational institutions that accommodate about 523,000 students – 350,000 (70 per cent) of them men.

Outside of school, Ukrainian youth are vulnerable to drug abuse, prostitution and child trafficking. AIDS and HIV are increasing concerns among this population of young people. Clinics and educational awareness programmes are surfacing with the help of various NGOs.

Equity

Gender enrolment in the Ukraine is about equal until tertiary education. In primary school, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) is 1.00, which is above the regional average. In secondary school the girl/boy GPI increases slightly to 1.01. In higher education, the gender ratio increases further, with a girl/boy GPI of 1.24. This indicates that girls are more likely to complete secondary education and to pursue higher education.

Children in institutions

Children in institutions are a matter of growing concern. Progress in reforming the system and the provision of alternatives is slow, and government financial support for these institutions is inadequate. The number of orphans and children without parental care doubled during the 1990s, and rose to 96,000 in 2004. Key causes of child abandonment include family poverty and childbearing by underage mothers. Children are often removed from families through legal action as a result of family breakdown or other reasons. The number of children living or working in the streets is reported to have increased steadily over the last decade, with a consequent rise in risk-taking behaviour. There is a policy trend towards seeking institutional remedies for the growing number of problem children and youth. This leads to further alienation and stigmatization, especially in the case of people with HIV/AIDS.

Source: UNICEF Ukraine Web Site

While 134 minority groups have been identified in the Ukraine, it is difficult to compare equity issues between groups due to a lack of data. There is some evidence that linguistic minorities have less access to high-quality education than majority language groups. The national law on the right to education in one's native tongue states that all citizens will be provided with the "conditions required for the study of the Ukrainian language and the profound fluency in it," and also that, "the free choice of the language of education shall be an inalienable right of citizens of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic." In reality, linguistic minorities do not receive any accommodations to support their mother tongue language in school.

Students with disabilities

Improving the care for students with disabilities has become a priority in Ukraine.

Deinstitutionalization of at-risk children (including children with disabilities) is an area in which Ukraine has made progress in recent years. About 76,200 children are currently in residential care. Efforts are under way to shift away from institutionalization. In 2004, approximately 69,000 students with special needs attended specialized classes at mainstream schools. Teacher training to accommodate children with disabilities continues to be needed (see 'Children in institutions').

Roma education

There are about 400,000 Roma children in the Ukraine, according to unofficial estimates. Living conditions for the majority of Roma families include poor sanitation and limited access to education due to poverty, language barriers, seg-

regation and discrimination. In 2006, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) took action against the Ukraine government, accusing it of ignoring and marginalizing the Roma. The ERRC found in their investigation that Roma children were segregated in schools, had less experienced teachers and that Roma classes were held in worse facilities than were regular classes. The Ukraine government responded by saying that it has tried to raise the living conditions for Roma, but reported the Roma themselves elect to have substandard living conditions and are not interested in economic and social advancement.

Quality

The quality of education in the Ukraine continues to be measured by proxy indicators, as the nation has not participated in any of the international learning assessments, nor has it carried out a national evaluation of student learning.

The lack of official and reliable data is a serious challenge for the MoES. The absence of external assessments makes it impossible to objectively evaluate the educational attainment of students, which, in turn, makes it impossible to compare these results at local, regional and national levels. As a result, it is difficult to develop compensatory programmes that provide students from different regions and social groups with equal opportunities to access high-quality education. Finally, it is impossible to compare the performance of



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Ukrainian students with that of their international peers. Such student assessments serve as a measure of national educational standards as well as helping to inform future education reform efforts.

Students in the Ukraine complete an average of 14 years of education. In 2006, 98 per cent of enrolled students survived to the last grade of primary school. The primary school completion rate is 96.6 per cent. The student/teacher ratio in primary school is 16 to 1. Only about 0.1 per cent of students repeat a grade. This indicates that the system is efficient, although efficiency is not necessarily indicative of quality. No figures are available on the number of school dropouts in the Ukraine.

Notwithstanding the lack of official data, there are indicators that school quality needs improvement. On a recent UNICEF-IRC survey of attitudes of young people, one early school leaver argued that a school diploma does not enhance your job prospects because the educational quality in school is low. Another stated, "A diploma is one thing and education is another... Learning things that can be used in life is different from what they teach you at school." These remarks are indicative of some students' views on the limitations of the education system.

Education financing

Ukraine spends 5.4 per cent of its GDP on education. This level of spending is on par with other countries in the region. The biggest investments are in higher education.

Teachers' salaries are equal to 80 per cent of the national wage, which is among the highest in the region relative to the national average wage. This is nevertheless still lower than ideal.

Education priorities in Ukraine

The Ukraine MoES and government are prioritizing the following education initiatives:

- Increasing the enrolment rates of out-of-school children so that all children have access to school
- Decreasing the number of school dropouts in secondary school
- Realigning the curriculum, especially in vocational schools, with the labour market
- Decreasing the number of institutionalized children
- Improve the system of unified external graduation tests
- Improve staffing in schools in rural areas