

Education in Uzbekistan

Context

Uzbekistan, like the other Central Asian states, emerged from transition with serious economic and social challenges to state-building. While Uzbekistan boasts impressive progress in expanding equitable access to primary education, the quality of education in its schools remains a major concern and a major challenge.

Like other Central Asian states, during Soviet times Uzbekistan's economy was regulated and sustained by the central government. Thus its economy suffered a major decline during its period of transition to a market economy in the absence of Soviet support. Reversing that decline in the mid-1990s, Uzbekistan's GNP (PPP) per capita increased to \$2,060 USD, which is the second lowest in the CEE/CIS region after Tajikistan.¹ Its annual economic growth is 7.3%, which is up from only 3.5% in 2000,² which depends mostly on its export of cotton, gold, natural gas and minerals.

Despite this economic upturn, the total government expenditure, as per cent of GDP, is reportedly 12%, which is above the regional average but the highest in the Central Asian sub-region. The UNDP ranks Uzbekistan 113th (0.70) out of 177 countries on its Human Development Index, which is between Egypt and Mongolia. While official unemployment rates are exceptionally low for the region at 0.8%, underemployment is thought to be quite high at about 20%.³ About 30% of the population live below the national poverty line.



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Education Reforms

Since the early years of independence, the government has made education a national priority, providing free compulsory education for all children and adopting the MDGs and EFA goals as its national targets for educational improvement. The following reforms have been introduced:

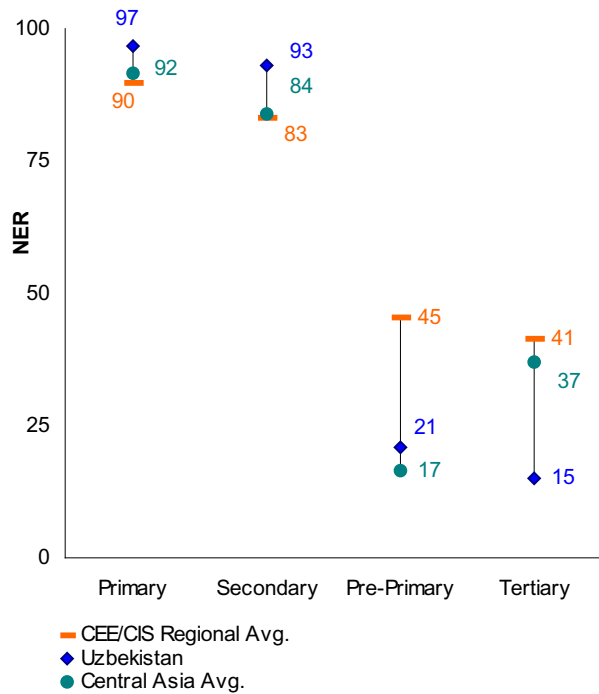
- In 2007, the *Law on Education* was revised to more explicitly advocate for the rights of the child and affirm its commitment to providing free compulsory education for all children. The law also addresses the need for pre-school and child protection.
- In 2004 the National Program on School Education Development for 2004-2009 was adopted with the main objectives of improving the quality of education. The program consists of five components:

Quick Facts about Education in Uzbekistan

	Uzbekistan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Central Asia
Total Population	26.5 m	14.8 m	5.3 m	6.5 m	4.8 m	57.9
Youth Unemployment Rate as a % of Total Unemployment	x	153	155	136.1	150.2	
Percentage of GDP spent on Education	12%	4	3.7	2.2	x	
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment, 2005 (Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Girls/Boys))	22	33, (.97)	10, (1.0)	7, (.93)	x	17.8
Net Enrolment in Primary School, 2005 (GPI)	97.5 (.97)	91, (.98)	87, (.99)	97, x	x	91.67
Net Enrolment in Secondary School, 2005 (GPI)	x	92, (.99)	80, (1.01)	80, (.85)	x	84
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment, 2005 (GPI)	15, (.80)	41, (1.25)	43, (1.62)	17, (.35)		34
Primary Student/Teacher Ratio, 2005	x	x	24	22	x	
Out of School Children of Primary School Age (% girls)	x	9,000 (59%)	24,000 (48%)	18,000 (86%)	x	51,000
Ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (out of 179 countries)	175	150	150	150	162	x

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report; Innocenti Research Centre.

Figure 1: Comparing Education Net Enrolment Rates in Uzbekistan to Sub-Regional and Regional Averages, 2005



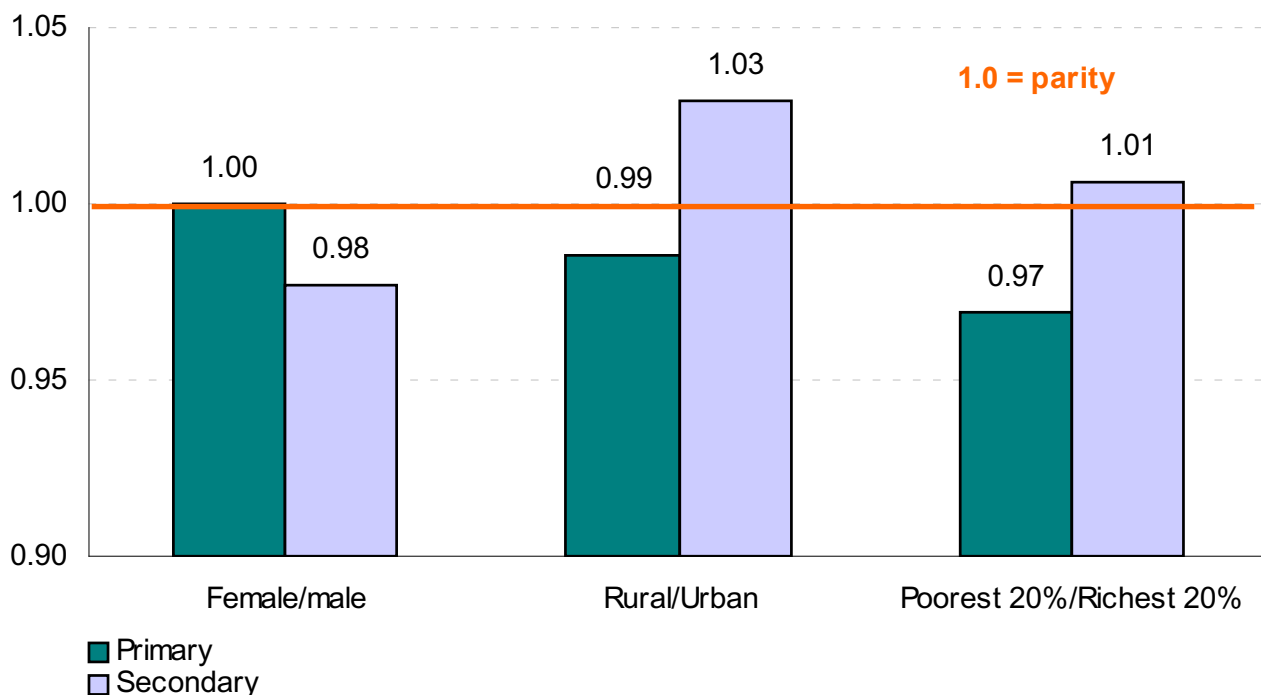
- Capital rehabilitation and reconstruction of school buildings,
- Improvement of State Educational Standards and Curriculum,
- Strengthening of teachers' capacity at all levels (Pre- and In-Service) and increase of teachers' salaries;
- Provision of schools with new modern teaching aids and laboratory equipment, computers, textbooks and materials; and
- Development of sport in schools.

- During the five years of the current national program, 266 new schools have been built and 6,573 existing schools have been renovated (~60% of all the schools nationwide).
- The system of teacher in-service training has been strengthened, requiring three years of training instead of five as before. Teacher's salaries have also significantly increased (more than 2.5 times since 2004).
- In 2008 the Regulation on Provision of Basic Education was being revised to include a whole chapter on inclusive education.
- In the beginning of 2008, the National Program on Improving Quality and Efficiency of Education was adopted, covering main government priorities for 2008-2012
- New legislation was adopted addressing issues such as child trafficking, child labour, domestic violence against children and on children with disabilities.

Access

Access to primary and secondary education in Uzbekistan is above average for the sub-region and region. In primary school, the net enrolment rate (NER) is 97%, which is higher than the averages for the Central Asian sub-region – 92% – and for the CEE/CIS Region – 90%. The primary school net attendance rate (NAR) in Uzbekistan in 95.8%. The transition rate to secondary school is 100%, indicating that the gap in access between primary and secondary is not significant, unlike in many other countries in the region. The secondary school NER is 93.1%, which is the highest in the sub-region and among the highest in the region. Tertiary education is the lowest in the sub-region and region with a 15% gross enrolment ratio.

Figure 2: Sub-national parity ratios for net primary and secondary school attendance in Uzbekistan



Access to early childhood care and education (ECCE) remains a concern. Only about 20% of children aged 3-5 are attending pre-school, which is below the pre-independence level, although the government estimates that 50% will be enrolled as a result of a newly passed resolution. Similarly, children are often enrolling in school at ages beyond the minimum starting age. These figures show that Uzbekistan is currently behind on EFA Goal 1 – expanding access to ECCE – although the government is making progress. Preschool is now included in the government’s welfare program to make children more school-ready.

Equity

Uzbekistan has made much progress in bringing about equal access to sub-national groups. No gender gap remains in primary school enrolment, with a gender parity level of 1.00 and it is near closed in secondary school, with a parity ratio of 0.98.

For the country’s 130,000 children⁴ with disabilities, access to ECCE and primary schooling is severely limited. Access to quality education is even more severely limited with very few mainstream teachers and schools having the supplies and training needed to work with children with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages (DDD). SEN children are normally educated in separate schools. Yet the MoE estimates that only 20,000 or 15% of children with special needs are enrolled in special schools. ‘Disabled children are educated separately and are often denied their right to access education at all and social integration.’⁵ Currently there are 86 special boarding schools for children with special needs enrolling 15% of all children, some children are enrolled into the special “baby homes” (orphanages for children under three years old, which is under the Ministry of Health) and the remaining portion are enrolled under home-based education under the Ministry of Labour.

There is also a gap in access to primary school for the richest and poorest quintiles of the population. There is much concern that this gap is growing. With rising unemployment, poverty and informal costs of schooling, it is likely that the poorest segment of the population will be less able to pay for schooling and thus have reduced access to education.

Officially, there is no significant gap in rural-urban access to education with parity ratios above .99 in both primary and secondary school. However, children living in remote rural areas face serious access issues due to increased travel and accommodation costs’ that are incurred.

Learning Outcomes and Education Quality

Although primary completion rates are high in Uzbekistan at 97%, the country faces many challenges to improving school quality. Not much data is available on learning outcomes. However, a learning assessment given to a sample of Uzbek

students in 2006 found that in mathematics only about 30% of the children scored a level considered proficient in basic skills. Similarly, on the literacy assessment, only about 30% of students scored above the level considered as proficient. About the same percentage showed a proficient background in life skills.⁶

These poor learning outcomes indicate a low level of school quality.

Although teachers’ salaries have recently been raised, teachers’ remuneration remains low, with the gap between teacher wages and average salary earned growing bigger. With low wages and little resources for professional development, teacher training institutions find it difficult to recruit new teachers and schools find it difficult to hold on to experienced teachers, who are increasingly seeking higher paid jobs in other sectors. This has led to a teacher shortage, which exists on a national level but especially among certain skill groups. For example, teachers who can teach Uzbek language, English, computer science and economics are scarce. Although the situation is continuously improving, poor working conditions for teachers further exacerbate the teacher shortage. About 60% of teachers have higher education degrees.

Figure 3: Public Per Pupil Expenditure (PPE) in education as percentage of GDP per head, by level, compared with the OECD average

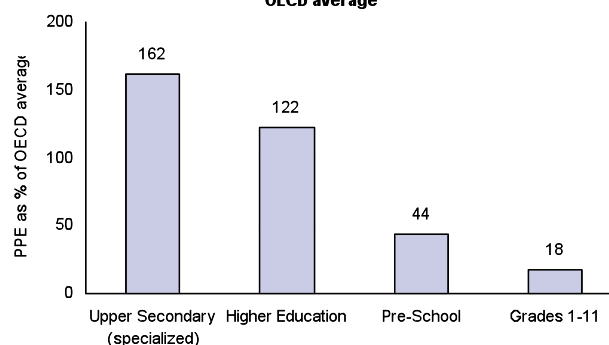
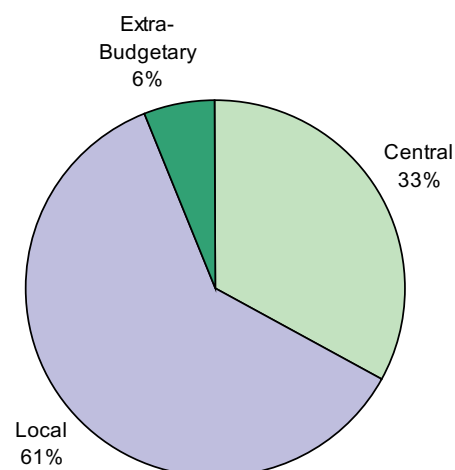


Figure 4: Sources of Funding for Education in Uzbekistan





The country's curriculum and textbooks are reported to be out of date and irrelevant to the current global economy, although they are currently undergoing reform. Increasingly parents and students are calling for reform of the curriculum to make it more suitable to globalizing job markets. However, the government has recently made textbooks more affordable for parents, introducing a scheme for textbook rental at 30% of their original cost.

Internal school efficiency is suspected to be poor, although little data is available on in-school repetition rates, dropout rates or secondary school completion rates. However, with overall poor school conditions and low teacher motivation, school efficiency is expected to be low.

Education Financing

Uzbekistan reportedly spends just about 12% of its GDP on education, which is the highest percentage in the sub-region and region.⁷ This level of spending surpasses even the average OECD spending, which is 6%, and nears the level spent on education during the Soviet era. The increase in expenditure on education is part of the government's efforts to show commitment to achieving the EFA and MDG goals.

Uzbekistan's education per pupil budget expenditures are divided into four categories: Higher education, upper secondary education (specified and vocational), basic education (grades 1-9), and pre-school. The largest portion of the budget, in terms of per pupil expenditures, is spent on upper secondary school and vocational programmes. The second largest portion is spent on higher education, which has the lowest enrolment rates of any of the levels. Basic education, grades 1-9, have the lowest per pupil expenditure rates, even lower than in pre-primary school. These figures most likely reflect the differences in the quantities of students enrolled.

Funding sources for education are relatively diversified. The majority - 61% - of funds come from local governments and only 33% come from the central government. While decentralized education spending is in line with current global trends, this could lead to expenditure inequalities between regions. Informal student costs normally rise when government expenditure is unequal.

Education Priorities in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's education priorities according to UNICEF are to:

- Increase educational access for children living in remote areas, children with special education needs and children of linguistic minorities;
- Reduce absenteeism, especially when caused by child labour;
- Increase the availability of quality data on school based processes and learning outcomes,
- Improve school infrastructure;
- Improve teacher working conditions;
- Develop a system of quality monitoring and assurance;
- Improve access to quality basic education;
- Develop the system of teachers self-assessment and monitoring of their work based on international benchmarks;
- Improve the system of monitoring students' attendance and drop outs to ensure all children are in school; and
- Develop a system of provision of second chance schooling for students who dropped out of basic education.

- 1 EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008.
- 2 World Bank Statistics Online.
- 3 CIA Factbook web site.
- 4 UNICEF Uzbekistan Web Site 2008.
- 5 UNICEF Uzbekistan Web Site 2008.
- 6 MLA 2006.
- 7 UNICEF Uzbekistan.