

Education in Uzbekistan

Context

Uzbekistan's high enrolment figures in primary and secondary school are an indicator of its commitment to education. An increased governmental focus on improving early childhood education further aims to support the nation's youngest learners.

Impact of the economic crisis

The global economic crisis impacted Uzbekistan's economic and social sectors as demand for exports fell and foreign investment in the nation dried up. Living conditions worsened for many families, with incomes declining and unemployment rates rising. Agriculture and industry suffered the most. Despite these economic realities, Uzbekistan's total growth, as a per cent of GDP, has remained positive in recent years. In 2007, the GDP real growth was 9.5 per cent, in 2008 it was 9 per cent, and in 2009 it was 8.1 per cent. Its GDP per capita (PPP) is currently US\$2,800. However, the economic growth does not appear to be stimulating higher incomes or creating better-quality social services, since the cost of consumer goods has increased 10–20 per cent and the majority of incomes have remained constant.

The social sector in Uzbekistan remains fragile. About 27 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line; the government aims to reduce poverty by 13 per cent by 2015. Three fourths of people in poverty reside in the rural areas. A social protection policy inherited from the former Soviet Union still functions in Uzbekistan, but benefits are slow to reach recipients and they have a minimal impact on vulnerable and impoverished families. The UNDP ranks Uzbekistan 119 (0.76) out of 182 countries on its Human Development Index, which is between Equatorial Guinea and Kyrgyzstan. As an upper low-income country in the CEECIS region, Uzbekistan is on target to achieve the MDG goal of halving poverty. Alarmingly, Uzbekistan ranked 174

out of 180 on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2009, the highest in the region.

Education reforms

The president of Uzbekistan highlighted education as a 2010 priority. The government is building upon the provision of free compulsory education for all children and working towards the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals as national targets for educational improvement. The 2015 joint UNICEF and government targets aim to:

- Increase preschool enrolment by 50 per cent for all children between 3 and 7 years old
- Meet the requirements to become child-friendly in at least half of the schools
- Increase in-school attendance – especially during the harvesting seasons – and ultimately lower child labour participation
- Introduce new child-centred teaching technologies in pre- and in-service Teachers Training Institutes

These new targets are built upon existing foundations, such as:

- The Law on Education (1997), which explicitly advocates for the rights of the child and affirms a commitment to providing free compulsory education for all children. The law also addresses the need for preschool and child protection.
- The National Programme on School Education Development (2004–2009), which aimed to improve the quality of education. Its successes included:
 - the construction of 351 new schools and the renovation of 8,150 existing structures (83 per cent of all schools nationwide);
 - improved state educational standards and curricula;
 - the strengthening of teacher in-service training and a fivefold increase in teacher salaries;

Quick Facts about education in Uzbekistan

Total population	27.8 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education	12%
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2007 [Gender Parity Index (GPI) (girls/boys)]	21%
Net enrolment in primary school, 2007 (GPI)	91% (0.97)
Net enrolment in secondary school, 2007 (GPI)	92% (0.97)
Gross enrolment in tertiary enrolment, 2007 (GPI)	10% (0.71)
Primary student/teacher rate, 2007	18:1
Out-of-school children of primary school age (per cent girls)	145,000 (59%)
Ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2009 (out of 182 countries)	174

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2008, 2010; Innocenti Research Centre.

- new modern teaching aids and laboratory equipment, computers, textbooks and materials provided to all schools covered by the programme; and
- the development of sport programmes and improvement of sports grounds in schools.
- The Child-Friendly School Programme, which began in 2006 to improve the quality and efficiency of basic education in regions facing development challenges. The programme introduces new teaching technologies as well as tools for monitoring and evaluating teacher performance and the active involvement of families in schools.
- The Law on the Guarantees of the Rights of the Child (2008), which ensures fulfillment of children's rights in all areas of life.
- Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 207 of 30.09.2008, which regulates the use of minors in different categories of labour activities.

Access

Early childhood education

Access to early childhood care and education (ECCE) remains a challenge. Nationally, only 20 per cent of children attend preschool; in rural areas, the number decreases to 13 per cent (see Figure 1). This suggests that Uzbekistan is currently behind on EFA Goal 1 – expanding access to ECCE. However, in an effort to ensure children are school-ready and to increase enrolment, the government recently added preschool to its welfare improvement programme.

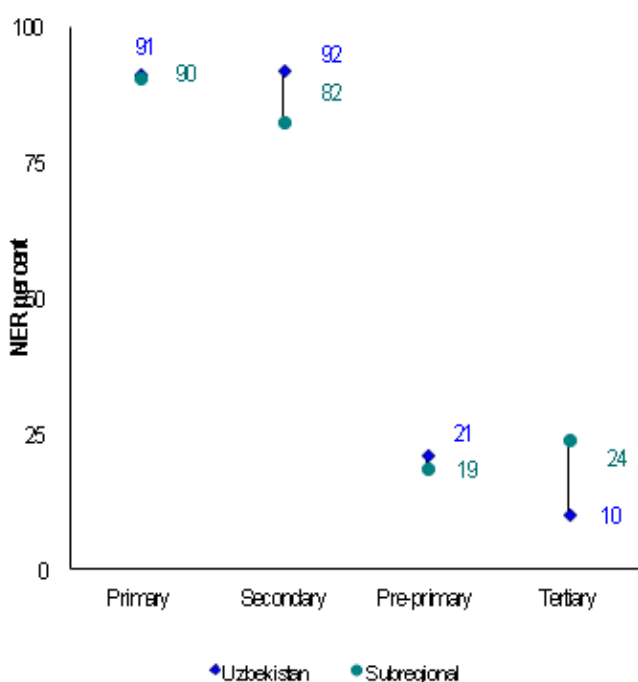


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Basic education

Access to primary and secondary education in Uzbekistan is about average for the subregion and region. In primary school, the net enrolment rate (NER) is 91 per cent (taking into account both 6- and 7-year-olds), which is on par with the 92 per cent average for the Central Asia subregion. The transition rate to secondary school is 100 per cent, indicating that the gap in access between primary and secondary education is not significant, unlike in many other countries in the region. The secondary school NER is 92 per cent, which is the highest in the subregion and among the highest in the region. As of 2007, reports indicate that Uzbekistan has 145,000 out-of-school children. This figure likely includes children whose families moved from one place to another but do not complete the full transfer process, which requires registering at a new school and formally closing out enrolment in the old school.

Figure 1. Comparing education net enrolment rates (NER) in Uzbekistan to subregional averages, 2007



Tertiary education in Uzbekistan requires greater attention. The gross enrolment rate for tertiary education is 10 per cent, which is the lowest in the subregion, whose average is 24 per cent.

Children with special educational needs

For the country's 132,000 children with disabilities, access to ECCE and primary school is severely limited. Special schools designed for students with intellectual and physical challenges comprise 0.9 per cent of the schools in the nation. In 2001, the MoE developed an inclusive education programme with the support of UNICEF and UNESCO. Criteria and assessments were established to identify children who should be mainstreamed and those who require alternative school arrangements. Currently, there are 86 boarding schools for children with special needs. The MoE reports 55 per cent of students with disabilities are now in mainstream schools or covered by home-based education. Further focus is required to establish fully inclusive classrooms, provide teachers with the training and supplies to serve disadvantaged students, and to improve monitoring of children who are at risk for retention. Over 40,000 children who have been identified with special needs receive state support.

Educational challenges for youth and adolescents
A variety of issues – including child trafficking, child labour and street children – have emerged over the past few years that highlight the exploitation and inadequate protection of youth in Uzbekistan. These challenges can act as barriers to accessing education for young people. Various programmes have been implemented to advocate for young people’s rights, such as the Leave No Child Out Campaign, an advocacy campaign that aims to expose social exclusion and promote anti-discriminatory practices. School boards and youth parliament aim to promote the rights of children and youth.

Equity

Uzbekistan has made progress in providing equal access to education for both genders. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in both primary and secondary school is 0.97. At the tertiary level the gender gap is more notable at 0.71, indicating that girls are not equally represented in higher education (see Figure 2).

Regional disparities reveal a gap in attendance rates between rural and urban areas, with children from rural areas being at a disadvantage. In 2008, the government established the Rural Basic Education Project to improve the quality of and access to basic education in 438 of its rural schools. The project has now expanded to include 300 more schools. Despite these improvements, students living in remote rural areas continue to face serious access issues in upper secondary school. These may be due to increased travel and accommodation costs, as schools are more spread out. Since the rural population constitutes 60 per cent of the total population in the nation and is growing at a higher rate than the urban population, increased attention will be needed in this area.

There is also an access gap between the richest and poorest quintiles of the population. Rising unemployment and increasing poverty will likely broaden the gap, as poor people will be less able to afford informal fees of schooling and thus will have reduced access to education. Notably, all

first graders are provided with a full set of school supplies and a school bag. Those deemed ‘most vulnerable’ are also supplied with clothing.

The largest ethnic minority groups in Uzbekistan are Russian, Karakalpak, Kazak, Tajik, Turkmen and Kyrgyz. To accommodate the diverse populations, schooling is conducted in seven languages, mostly in separate schools. For example, there are approximately 800,000 ethnic Turkmen living in Uzbekistan. In some parts of the nation they live in clusters and in other areas they are more spread out. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkmen-language schools surfaced in Uzbekistan to accommodate this large ethnic minority group. As of 2010, there are 47 Turkmen schools in Karakalpakstan and Khorezm that accommodate 9,227 students. All subjects in these schools are taught in Turkmen. Uzbekistan’s national language is Uzbek, which is an obligatory subject in all schools. Beyond primary and secondary school (grades 1–9), however, when the students move to upper secondary education (grades 10–12) and higher education, Uzbek is the only language of instruction and communication.

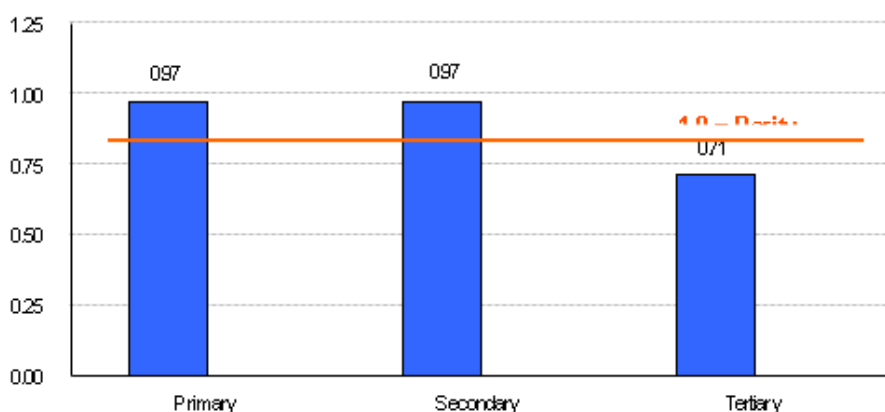
Learning outcomes and education quality

Although primary completion rates are very high in Uzbekistan at 99 per cent, the country faces many challenges to improving school quality. Very little 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 per cent of the children scored at a level considered proficient in basic skills. Similarly, on the literacy assessment, only about 30 per cent of students scored above the level considered proficient. About the same percentage demonstrated proficiency in life skills. These poor learning outcomes indicate a low level of school quality.

Although teachers’ salaries have recently been raised, remuneration remains low, and the gap between teacher wages and average salaries is widening. Despite these realities, the teaching profession is valued and respected in society.

Teacher qualifications are rigorous, and in order to obtain requalification (certification to teach a second subject), teachers must complete 546 hours of additional coursework. Eighty-three per cent of schools exhibited gains in the New National Programme on School Education Improvement 2004–2009. Unlike many neighbouring nations, teacher shortage is not a major concern in Uzbekistan. There is, however, a lack of teachers interested in working in rural schools, particularly in subjects such as physics and chemistry.

Figure 2: Subnational gender parity ratios for net primary, secondary and tertiary education in Uzbekistan





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Uzbekistan's curriculum and textbooks are reported to be out-of-date and irrelevant to the current global economy. Parents and students are increasingly calling for reform of the curriculum to make it more suitable to globalizing job markets, and the government has recently made textbooks more affordable for parents, introducing a scheme for textbook rental at 30 per cent of their original cost.

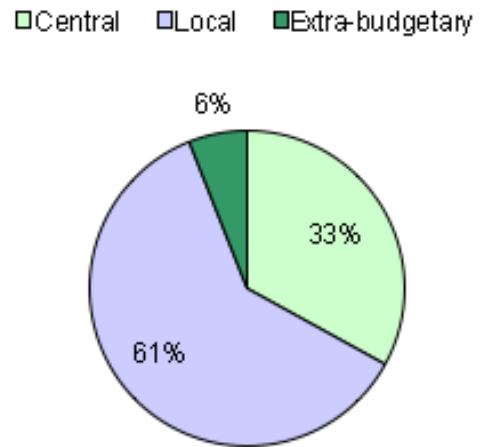
Education financing

Uzbekistan reportedly spends about 12 per cent of its GDP on education, which is the highest percentage in the subregion and region. This level of spending surpasses even the average in OECD countries, which is 6 per cent, 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 Education for All and Millennium Development Goals.

Uzbekistan's per pupil education expenditures are divided into four categories: higher education, upper secondary education (specified and vocational), basic education (grades 1–9), and preschool. In terms of per pupil expenditures, the largest portion of the budget 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 has the lowest per pupil expenditure rates, even lower than in pre-primary school.

Funding sources for education are relatively diversified. The majority (61 per cent) of funds come from local governments, and only 33 per cent of funds come from the central government (see Figure 3). 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.

Figure 3: Sources of funding for education in Uzbekistan



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 minority groups
- Reduce absenteeism, especially when caused by child labour
- Increase the availability of quality data on school-based processes and learning outcomes
- Improve school infrastructure and teachers' working conditions
- Develop a system of quality monitoring and assurance
- Develop a system of teachers' self-assessment based on international benchmarks
- Improve the system of monitoring students' attendance and dropouts to ensure all children are in school
- Develop a second-chance system of schooling for students who have dropped out of basic education



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