

Education in Tajikistan

Context

Since the 1997 end of Tajikistan's civil war, which devastated the country's schools along with other national infrastructure, the government has made attempts to improve the country's fragile education system. Its initial education reforms aimed to improve financial predictability and to align national policies with budget allocations. National Strategy for Development of Education (2006-2015) focuses on the improvement of management, quality of education, equitable access, community participation and physical infrastructure. While reforms are just beginning to come into fruition, progress is slow due to the country's almost constant state of national emergency. Currently, Tajikistan is making steady progress for achieving the international targets for education (EFA goals and MDG) except in Early Childhood Education and gender equality in secondary education levels.

The per capita GNP of Tajikistan is \$1,356 (PPP)¹, which is by far the lowest in Central Asia and the CEE/CIS region and is just about at the same level as Rwanda and Kenya. Its average annual economic growth has only increased since 2000, raising from a decline of -0.9% a year in 2000 to a growth rate of 7% in 2006 and finally an increase to 7.8% in 2007.² Inequality in the country is high, shown by its high gini coefficient of .326³, which is on par with the Caucasus sub-regional average, and in line with Kyrgyzstan (.30) and Kazakhstan (.33).⁴ The richest 20% of the population accounts for over 40% of the nation's wealth.



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UNDP ranks the country's human development as 122nd of 177 countries, with a Human Development Index of 0.673, which is the lowest in Central Asia and the CEE/CIS region.⁵ Its total expenditure on education makes up 3.8% of its GDP, which is up from 1999, at which time it spent 2.2%. This level of spending, which is about half of the OECD average expenditure of about 6%, is severely inadequate to meet the requirements of the country's high-needs education system.

Seventeen per cent of the population lives on less than a dollar a day and 53% lives on less than \$2 dollars a day, which is one of the highest poverty rates in the region.⁶ Child labour remains at 20% for boys and 17% for girls, which are the highest rates in the region; in most CEE/CIS countries about 10% of children are economically active.

Box 1. Quick Facts about Education in Tajikistan

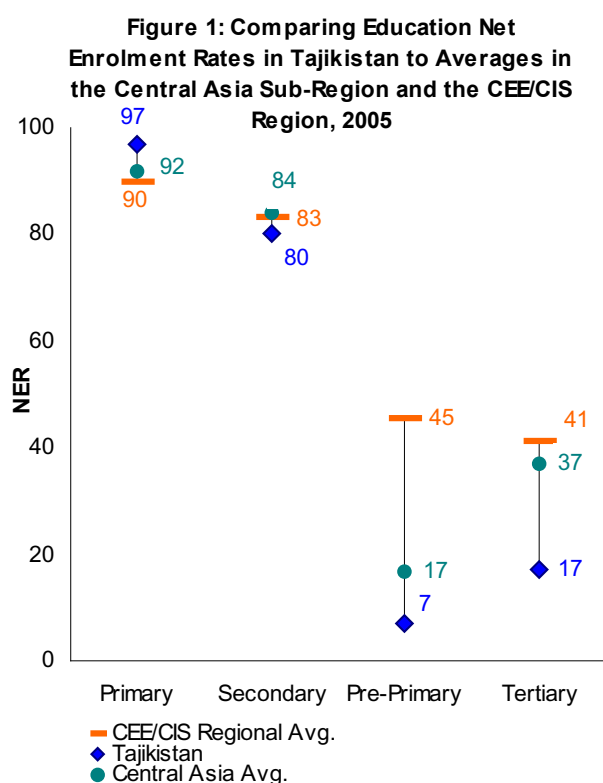
	Tajikistan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Central Asia
Total Population	7.06 m*	14.8 m	5.3 m	4.8 m	26.5 m	57.9
Youth Unemployment Rate as a % of Total Unemployment	136.1	153	155	150.2	x	
Percentage of GDP spent on Education	3.8	4	3.7	x	x	
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment, 2005 (Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Girls/Boys))	7, (.93)	33, (.97)	10, (1.0)	x	21	17.8
Net Enrolment in Primary School, 2005 (GPI)	97, (.99)	91, (.98)	87, (.99)	x	x	91.67
Net Enrolment in Secondary School, 2005 (GPI)	80, (.85)	92, (.99)	80, (1.01)	x	x	84
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment, 2005 (GPI)	17, (.35)	41, (1.25)	43, (1.62)		15, (.80)	34
Primary Student/Teacher Ratio, 2005	22	x	24	x	x	
Out of School Children of Primary School Age (% girls)	18,000 (86%)	9,000 (59%)	24,000 (48%)	x	x	51,000
Ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (out of 179 countries)	150	150	150	162	175	x

*Source: State Statistics Committee, Retrieved from <http://stat.tj/english/database.htm> on September 10, 2008; Innocenti Research Centre

Progress in education reform is continually hindered by the country's regular emergencies. Natural disasters – such as floods, extreme climatic waves, earthquakes, mudslides, avalanches and locust infestations – constantly threaten children's access to quality education. The frequent occurrence of emergencies, which necessitate immediate and short-term planning, impede long-term vision and planning in education reform. Tajikistan faces major dilemmas 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 for the country's poor. 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. Winter Crisis in Tajikistan, 2007

In 2007, Tajikistan experienced its coldest winter in decades. Freezing temperatures hit at the same time as an oil and gas shortage, leaving almost the entire country without heat or electricity for weeks on end. Schools were no exception. With no heat and temperatures between 0-10 degrees Celsius, children could not be expected to learn. The lack of heat in schools, coupled with already poorly protective school infrastructure made for high absenteeism on the part of teachers and students. Students' learning was severely jeopardized by their discomfort and the increase in the rate of sickness from the extreme cold. Much ground was lost for the academic year.



Tajikistan is one of the three countries in the region judged unlikely to achieve MDG2 – universal primary completion by 2015.

Education Reforms

One out of five schools was destroyed during Tajikistan's six-year civil war. At the war's end, Tajikistan began to rebuild its damaged education system, facing the traditional challenges of access, equity and quality but also the challenges of redesigning schools to meet the needs of the Tajik nation state with its severe need for social cohesion and labor market prospects. Some of the most significant government reforms are as follows:

- A National Strategy for Education Development 2006-2015 was developed and launched.

- In 2005, the government declared that the state guarantees equality of education opportunities for all boys and girls.
- Tajikistan applied and was accepted to the Fast Track Initiative and Catalytic Fund; it was granted 18.4 million dollars over a two year period.
- It made early childhood care and education (ECCE) a priority, especially for the rural poor and children with special needs.
- A new range of curricula were developed and education quality made a national priority.
- It initiated policy based budget planning in education through the introduction of MTEF
- It established a National Center for Assessment, to monitor national learning outcomes.

Despite these positive political strides, resources remain scarce and the educational opportunities of many remain dire.

Access

Tajikistan has high primary school enrolment rates, like other countries in Central Asia, with a primary school net enrolment ratio (NER) of 97%, which is higher than both the sub-regional and regional averages (See Figure 4). Its net attendance rate is 94%, which is about on par with the regional average. Yet 18,000 primary school aged children remain out of school, 86% of whom are girls. Its secondary school NER is much lower, at 80%, which is the second lowest in the region on par with the Kyrgyz Republic. NER in tertiary education is also significantly below the sub-regional average (37%) at 17%.⁷

Its pre-primary NER is precariously low at only 10%, which is significantly lower than the sub-regional and regional averages. In the Soviet time, many families were encouraged to put their children in pre-school so that mothers could join the work force. In 1982 there were 1,498 kindergartens with coverage by preschool system of 228,773 children.¹ During the civil war, pre-school enrolment declined sharply because many pre-schools were destroyed and because it was not safe for young children to at-

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 profit from it, and to become productive adults. These risks include:

- High rates of children living in poverty (66%);
- Lack of stimulation from families and environment at home (perhaps as much as 60%);
- Low rates (less than 10%) of children attending any form of pre-primary school;
- High rates of stunting (27%) and iodine deficiency (64%), both risk factors for poor development; and
- Children enter school late, so that not until children are 8 years old are most in school. 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 (Article 6, CRC).'

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

tend school. Between 2001 and 2003 the number of pre-schools further declined through funding cut-offs or deterioration of infrastructure. This trend has now been gradually reversed and the number of pre-schools is again on the rise. However, about 460 pre-schools are working mainly in the urban areas with limited facilities and staff. See Box 2.

Equity

Although the government mandates equal education for all, disparities in access to and quality of education persist in attendance rates, in both primary and secondary school.

- In primary school, the gender parity index is .96, indicating that enrolment is nearly equitable between genders. However, by secondary school the gender gap in enrolment levels grows to an index level of .89, which conveys extreme inequities in access to education for girls.⁴
- The rural-urban differentiation in both primary and secondary school enrolment does not show a large disparity, although urban children are slightly less likely to enroll than rural children, most likely due to increased employment opportunities and higher cost of life in urban areas.

These disparities, while significant in and of themselves, may not represent the full picture of disparity in Tajikistan because they only take into account school attendance and ignore regularity of school attendance and dropout rates. Dropouts and children who do not attend school regularly are a large challenge in Tajikistan. Girls are more likely not to attend school regularly and to dropout, as are urban children. See Box 3.



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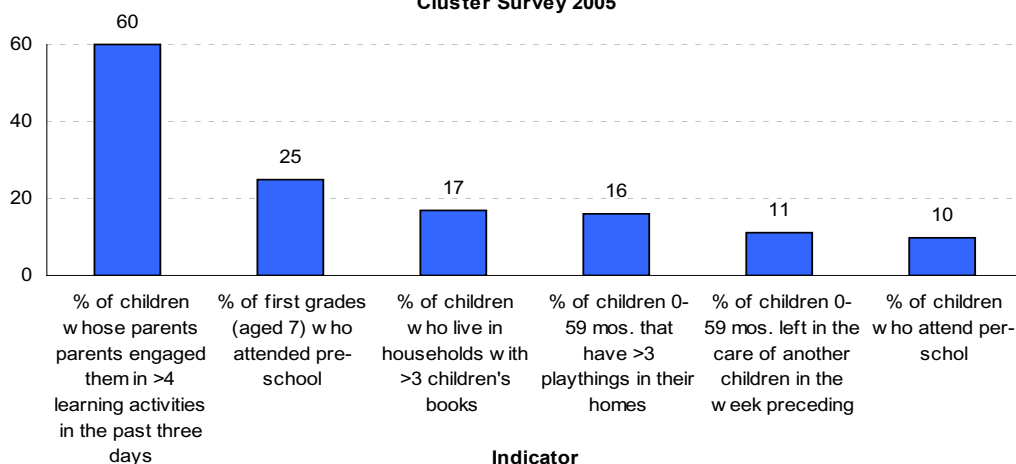
School Quality

Tajikistan has not participated in any international learning assessments and has not carried out a national assessment of its students' learning outcomes, thus little is known about the actual outcomes of the education system.

However, proxy measures of school quality paint a bleak picture of school-based processes.

Teachers, most of whom have only completed secondary school, are paid significantly less than the average income level, even after recent increases in wages. According to a Tajikistani

Figure 2. Child Development Indicators from the Tajikistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005



Box 3. School dropouts and non-attendance in Tajikistan

'In Tajikistan, dropouts often have the impression that one can count on high income without education. This impression stems from Tajikistan's underdeveloped labour market, which has an insufficient demand for people with good knowledge, extensive educational training and professional skills. A simple labourer can earn, on average, 5-7 somoni a day and 150-200 somoni a month (about US\$70). In comparison, the average monthly base salary of a secondary school teacher is only 60 somoni (about US\$18) in a month... The results of a survey among teachers (100 total, including 47 males and 53 females) indicated that the main reasons why students drop out of school are the effects of poor economic conditions, which drive children to work at an early age. A look at the socioeconomic circumstance [of dropouts] revealed that most of them come from large, poor families; are products of broken marriages; and do not receive enough parental care and attention, including help with their school work. See Figure 3.

Thus many school aged children remain out of school. Estimates of the percentage of out of school children range from 4.6-19.4 percent of school age children. The imprecise measure of out of school children in Tajikistan impedes government action. This problem is compounded by the fact that the government does not have sufficient funds to implement the law that guarantees compulsory basic education.'

Source: Budiene, Virginija. Open Society Institute. Monitoring School Dropouts.

teacher, '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.³ Tajikistan imports all its desks and chairs at a cost of approximately \$30 USD for a desk and two chairs, which contributes to the shortage.¹ These conditions are extremely burdensome considering teachers' low salaries and lack of support in the classroom. Repetition rates are low at only 0.5%, which is not surprising considering the lack of resources for repeating children, and dropout rates are high; dropout estimates range from 4.5% to 20%.

Education Financing

Tajikistan spends 3.8% of its GDP on education. Of its total expenditure on education 73% goes to personnel costs, yet teachers' salaries remain low. High overhead costs leave little left over for school improvement and teacher training.

The largest percentage – 77% – 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% on basic education. Figure three demonstrates how little resources remain for new school equipment and infrastructure improvement. Additionally, it is notable that, although teacher salaries remain excruciatingly low, the largest percentage of the budget is allocated to personnel.

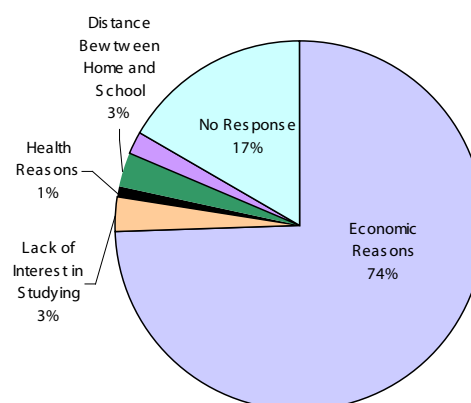
Priority Challenges in Education

Despite significant progress since the end of the civil war, much work remains with regard to educational improvement. UNICEF, in partnership with the government and donors, sets the following as some of the priority challenges in education in Tajikistan:

- Increase girls' access to and completion of primary and secondary school;
- Reduce the dropout and non-attendance rate in primary and secondary education;

- Increase access to and quality of early childhood care and education, especially for rural children and children with special needs;
- Increase budgetary allocations to education and better budget planning through MTEF;
- Reduce child labour and its influence on education dropouts;
- Improve management of the education system and its efficiency;
- Initiate SWAP and better predictability and harmonization of external/internal resources; and
- Strengthen capacity in emergency preparedness, planning and response in the education sector, including in pre-primary and early childhood services.

Figure 3: Reasons for Dropping Out of School in Tajikistan



Source: UNICEF. Education for Some more than Others (2007).

- 1 Human Development Report 2008.
- 2 World Bank Online Statistics 2008.
- 3 UNDP Human Development Reports.
- 4 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008.
- 5 UNDP Human Development Reports.
- 6 TLSS 2007
- 7 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008.