

Snapshots of Education Developments and Trends from Central Europe to Central Asia 2005-2006

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report provides snapshots of developments related to education and education policy in 28 countries and territories over the last year with a focus on secondary education and, where relevant, vocational training and higher education. While this report is by no means an exhaustive, systematic study of the various education systems, certain trends nevertheless emerge.

The new member states of the European Union in Central Europe and on the Baltic Sea have been struggling over the past year to better blend into the EU mainstream with regards to education practices, objectives, and goals; to advance vocational training; and in some cases, to introduce standardized nationwide high-school examinations (*Matura*). These reforms are taking place in the context of newly available structural funds from the EU; new member states are still deciding how to access and use these significant sums, which are disbursed through various programs.

The introduction of tuition fees for university courses, and more generally the introduction of new financing models for education, are also key aspects of education reform in these countries, with the Baltic states leading the pack on market-driven fees. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary need to undertake more to provide equal access to Romani pupils, while Estonia and Latvia are still fine-tuning the education opportunities they provide to their Russian-speaking minorities.

The Balkan countries, by contrast, are still grappling with ethnic segregation in schools—especially, but by no means exclusively, of Roma—despite increased awareness and efforts on the parts of governments and civil society to improve the situation. Generally depressed economies exacerbate the problem; many schools are in disrepair and teachers are often underpaid and unmotivated. Corruption is still an issue at all levels of the education system.

In the countries of Europe included in this report, much of the reform already implemented or planned for the near future takes place in the context of the Bologna process, which foresees the mutual recognition of degrees and courses, the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System, increased student and staff mobility, reformed quality assurance systems, and standardized bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.

This is also the declared goal of the countries of the Caucasus, where pervasive corruption is hampering a reform process whose results are only just beginning to materialize.

Turkey is grappling with inequality in secondary education whereby an elite receives a world-class education while everyone else gets only the most basic schooling.

The situation in Palestine has deteriorated across the board over the last year, but education has especially suffered from the withholding of donor funding following the formation of a government by Hamas, and from the continued Israeli occupation (or, in the case of Gaza, frequent incursions).

Pakistan is another country with a highly divided school system: public secondary education is of generally low quality while private education is accessible only to the select few, and may be further curtailed by the government. The country was hard hit by an earthquake in October

2006; hardest hit were schools and the children studying there. Rebuilding the education infrastructure in the affected areas will be a priority task.

Mongolia is struggling with rural-to-urban migration and the difficulty of bringing education services to remote corners of this vast country.

The states of Central Asia with their authoritarian politics face serious problems, including corruption and shortages of classrooms and teachers. Change, where it has occurred, tends to be piecemeal and leaves the underlying causes of low-quality education untouched.

In almost all the countries surveyed here, children with special needs face considerable obstacles accessing education, a problem that tends to be neglected by policy-makers.

Another common problem is the lack of attention to the demands of the labor market in the design and implementation of vocational training. The generally low prestige, and often quality, of vocational training programs and the lack of lifelong training opportunities severely curtail the career opportunities of youths in these countries.

2. CENTRAL EUROPE

2.1. Czech Republic

At the political level, the resignation of former Education Minister Petra Buzkova was one of the most significant education-related events in the Czech Republic, just as the rise of Roman Giertych was in Poland. The move had been announced last year and took place in 2006.

Buzkova had been education minister since 2002. Her term in office was marked by attempts—not unanimously applauded—to reform the system. Sparks flew after she limited the number of high schools to which students could apply; there were also accusations that the minister exerted too much political control over schools.

“I think she was not unsuccessful,” political analyst Vaclav Zak told Radio Prague last year in an assessment of Buzkova’s performance. “Salaries of teachers went up. We have a new law on grammar schools and secondary schools, a new law on universities.” But he added, “The problem with universities now is that there is a strategic decision to be made whether people should contribute to education or whether it should be seen as a public expenditure. It’s a political question, not depending only on the Ministry of Education.”

However, the ministry’s plans will be hampered if the draft government budget for 2007 is passed in its present form. Under the draft, the ministry will bear a quarter of all the budget cuts and will need to slash spending by 4 billion crowns (approximately 141 million euros) compared with 2006. While the system is therefore clearly headed in the right direction, budget cuts could affect its ability to reform in coming years.

At the implementation level, key changes are taking place in the Czech education system. In the past school year (2005-2006), schools enjoyed increased freedom in the way they implemented curricula; once the new system has been fully introduced in 2007, schools will be largely autonomous in deciding how to approach the curricula, in a move to allow them to bet-

ter tailor teaching methods to the needs of pupils and teachers. The new system will retain basic frameworks for each subject and age group; pupils are required to reach certain levels of competence at a certain age. The system will also make teaching results comparable nationwide, even as the increased freedom in curricula creation will produce greater differences. This resembles the reforms Poland undertook a few years ago.

Another Czech development that could indicate that Central European education systems are gradually converging concerns the Czech equivalent of Poland's *Matura* reform. Currently each secondary school develops and runs its own school-leaving test, a practice that has been criticized repeatedly because it makes the results difficult to compare, even though some universities consider the test results as part of their entrance exams. Standardized nationwide school-leaving tests will take place in the school year 2007-2008 for the first time.

A study on unequal access to tertiary education generated public attention for this important problem. According to the study, written by Petr Mateju, Jana Strakova, and collaborators and titled "Nerovne sance na vzdelani" ("Unequal Chances for Education"), social and economic backgrounds significantly determine applicants' chances of getting into a college or university.

Michael Smith, a researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, summarized the report's findings for *Transitions Online* in April 2006. "While applicants whose parents do not have a secondary-school diploma have only a 37 percent chance of getting into college, applicants whose parents have a university education have a 61 percent chance," Smith reported. "Applicants from low-income families have a much worse chance of getting into college than applicants from wealthier households. University students from rich households (those in the top quintile based on a composite of income, occupation, and education) constitute over 40 percent of the student population in the lucrative fields of the natural sciences, medicine, arts, and law. Students from poorer households dominate in the field of agriculture, which arguably provides the least chance for economic advancement later in life."

Smith's report also drew attention to an important facet of exclusion. "Anyone wandering through university classrooms (or even gymnasium classrooms) would be looking long and hard to find any Romani students," he wrote. According to the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Centre, around half of the Romani children in the Czech Republic go to schools or classes for the mentally disabled. That share is a bit higher in Slovakia and a bit lower in Hungary, which highlights the systemic nature of the problem.

2.2. Hungary

Remarks made in February 2005 by Hungary's education minister, Balint Magyar, to the effect that the Hungarian education system was outdated provoked a debate about what should be done to update it.

The Hungarian system is suffering from many of the same problems that prompted the Polish and Czech governments' push for reforms, notably too much rote learning instead of a focus on problem-solving; performance differences among institutions of secondary education, with grammar schools far outdoing specialist and technical schools; and the fact that the choice of school, and hence the quality of the education a pupil receives, still depends too much on the pupil's social background. The main goals of education reform in Hungary are to replace rote

learning with the development of concrete skills, to promote the use of computers, and to improve foreign-language learning.

A key problem in Hungary's outdated education system is the quality of teachers. There are too many of them, a much-debated OECD report found in 2005, but too few with the top qualifications that would ensure that changes designed by the ministry are properly carried out.

"There is a substantial reserve pool of teacher labor in the form of persons without teaching degrees who nonetheless seek teaching jobs, current teachers who want to work overtime, and teachers past the age of retirement who keep working," Phillip McKenzie, one of the authors of the OECD report, titled "Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers," told the *Budapest Times*. The government is working to create a teacher training system that would attract people who are genuinely interested in the profession. Part of the problem is that Hungarian teachers receive woefully uncompetitive salaries compared with other professions.

The Education Ministry has also begun a program to end, or at least curb, school segregation. Many Hungarian schools, the ministry assessed, had been using entrance interviews as a means to exclude children from underprivileged backgrounds. An amendment to the Education Act passed in December 2005 obliges schools to give preference to prospective pupils from their catchment area. Schools may admit pupils from outside their catchment area only if they give preference to those from underprivileged backgrounds. Additional efforts will be needed to ensure that schools do not circumvent the new regulations by, for example, assigning all disadvantaged pupils to one class.

In all three Central European countries with large Romani communities—the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia—Roma continue to have difficulties accessing education. However, Claude Cahn of the European Roma Rights Center in Budapest told Radio Prague in May, "Of the three countries named, the only government which has actually created measures that seriously try to begin to address [the issue] is Hungary. Even there, although there have been some very interesting policy measures, the impact is still not seen. So none of the governments really has taken up the challenge as it exists yet." Many Romani students continue attending schools for the mentally disabled. The Open Society Institute's Roma Education Initiative has, together with other civil society organizations, advocated for changes at the policy level, so far without much success.

With funding from the Roma Education Fund, the project "Integration of Children Living in Roma Settlements in Public Education" is being implemented by the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity; the Roma Coordinator Network; the Faag Foundation; and the Local Roma Minority Self Government. The project will prepare an action plan to implement education legislation in settlements; promote stakeholder collaboration; train tutors, coordinators, and teaching assistants; and support extracurricular programs.

In tertiary education, the top issue has been the government's plan to introduce tuition fees designed to improve the quality of teaching. However, it is also clear that tuition fees will help the government reduce the budget deficit, at 8 percent of GDP the EU's highest. The proposed fees are 105,000 forints (385 euros) per semester for a bachelor's degree and 150,000 forints (550 euros) for a master's, although individual institutions could increase or decrease the fees by up to 50 percent. The National Conference of Student Self-Governments, a student union,

protested the plans, arguing that students from poorer families would be deterred from studying, while the committee of Hungarian university rectors supports the move. The plans received a blow, however, when President Laszlo Solyom refused to sign the education law in August 2006 and referred it to the Constitutional Court because he doubted that the bill would ensure the autonomy of higher education institutions. While the president's veto was unrelated to the issue of tuition fees, it will delay their introduction since they are contained in the same bill.

2.3. Poland

The education system in Poland has always been a battlefield between liberals and conservatives, but a minimum consensus would invariably be reached, usually manifested in the choice of education minister—always a moderate politician with an academic background. But following negotiations between the parties of Poland's incoming government coalition, the conservative Law and Justice and the far-right League of Polish Families, the League's leader, Roman Giertych, became education minister in July 2006.

This was the first time since 1989 that a full-fledged politician rather than an education professional had taken charge of the ministry.

In his few weeks in office, Giertych has already caused controversy with various statements and decisions, such as an amnesty for students who had failed one of the five tests of the *Matura* but scored at least 30 percent on average in the other four.

Other controversies surrounding the minister included his claims that gay activists were spreading "homosexual propaganda" in schools and therefore should not enter schools at all; projects to make religion a full-fledged subject pupils could choose for their *Matura*, even though teaching religion is entirely in the hands of the Church (which does not, however, fund the courses); or speaking out against preschool because it separates 5-year-olds from their families too early. Finally, Giertych has proposed the introduction of "patriotic upbringing" classes in order to raise awareness of Poland and Polishness among young people. The idea was criticized as a possible gateway for nationalism and obscurantism.

The past school year was the first full year with a new examination system in place. This includes the *Matura*, which became mandatory for the whole country only in 2006. In 2006, 21 percent of pupils failed the exam, compared with 13 percent in 2005. Experts attributed the poor result to the fact that the nationwide *Matura* also included many poorer-performing schools such as vocational schools.

Poland has a much smaller Romani community than the other countries of Central Europe, but there are problems with regards to segregation and access to education. The government is sponsoring a program for the inclusion of Roma that foresees an end to segregated schools and free textbooks for Romani children.

While the partisan agendas that are currently clashing in Poland's education sector are unlikely to derail education reform, the incompatible visions of the ultimate purpose and content of education might make implementation more difficult as reform is pulled in different directions.

2.4. Slovakia

The 2005-2006 school year started on a somewhat disappointing note. A report by the Education Ministry for the Council of Europe highlighted below-par education in mathematics, an embarrassing figure of a mere 25 percent of secondary school students continuing their education at universities, and the decreasing quality of teachers' education, attributed in part to their low wages. The ministry admitted that the Slovak education system had been neglected for at least a decade since various governments lacked the resolve to provide more funding to meet the country's increasing education needs.

The Slovak government vowed to take steps to address the deficiencies. In January 2006, the Education Ministry decided to increase state funding by 24 euros to 612 euros per student annually. The money will fund the purchase of books and school equipment and help raise teachers' salaries. At the same time, the ministry recognizes that by itself, more money will not resolve underlying problems; it is now forcing principals and local communities to think of their schools in more economic terms. Small schools are encouraged to save money, merge with larger ones, or face the prospect of shutting down, which the government considers a better option than the ongoing accumulation of debt.

The Roma Education Fund has granted the Ministry of Education funds for a project "Let's Go to School Together," which addresses the continued segregation of Romani students. This pilot approach combines teacher training, support for children in the classroom, and outreach to parents in eight schools targeting 150 Romani children. A curriculum for teacher training is being prepared for teachers in eight kindergartens and eight schools in the pilot area.

Education was one of the top issues in campaigning for Slovakia's general election held in June 2006. In the run-up to the poll, the incumbent government pledged an extra 13.3 million euros for the country's schools, most of it for a teachers' raise. The opposition criticized the move as a typical one-off pre-election show.

With the elections over, incoming Education Minister Jan Mikolaj presented a new education strategy that foresees more systemic change. Among Mikolaj's priorities is a greater emphasis on national and Christian traditions in schools; improvements in the status of teachers, not least through higher salaries; and changes in the way schools are financed from the state budget. The ministry also announced it would introduce tuition fees for university education, beginning in the 2007-2008 academic year. The government plans to introduce these changes by amending the Education Act; they are intended to take effect by September 2007.

While Slovakia's education reform is in line with the initiatives underway in other Central European countries, the new government's emphasis on values and traditions make a Poland-style situation, where education serves as an arena for clashing political and social visions, a distinct possibility.

3. THE BALTICS

3.1. Estonia

Education is among the three main priorities of Estonia's budget for 2007. This fall the European Commission is to approve two government programs, one aimed at pupils and teachers, the other at tangible assets such as school buildings and educational aides.

The neglect of school buildings and training equipment, especially in vocational schools, remains a serious problem that has resulted in a loss of interest in vocational training and a subsequent shortage of professionals on the market.

Schools are unequally distributed across the country, while the advanced age and poor pay of teaching staff put an additional burden on the system. Overall, teachers are in short supply, especially for foreign languages and natural sciences. The Ministry of Education hopes that a pay raise of 12 percent will alleviate the problem; teachers will also be allowed to take on additional courses to generate more income.

Sustained attention is now being paid to the qualifications of information technology lecturers, with special courses being offered by private companies to improve the qualifications of such teachers.

The existing practice of concluding fixed-term employment contracts with principals is to be reviewed; one option includes long-term contracts for principals once they successfully finish their first term.

Secondary education for national minorities is also undergoing reform. In a gradual transition starting in September 2007, major subjects will be taught in Estonian. Some universities will offer special courses for teachers of Estonian literature in minority schools as well as, for example, for music teachers. New textbooks, methodological literature, and dictionaries are being prepared.

Representatives of the Russian community have complained about the reform, saying that Russian teachers and pupils are not ready to switch to courses in Estonian. They suggest that instead of switching to Estonian, schools pay higher wages to Estonian-language teachers in order to improve the teaching of classes in Estonian.

The issue of minority education is likely to remain politically charged as the introduction date for the new system approaches.

3.2. Latvia

Education is becoming more expensive in all the Baltic countries, and Latvia is no exception; tuition fees are to rise in almost all universities starting September 1 to between 600 lats (850 euros) and 3,324 lats (4,700 euros) a year. University representatives say the increase is due to the need for higher salaries for professors and rising costs owing to inflation.

A new tendency is the interest of employers in certain branches (machine building, metal working, and the pharmaceuticals and chemical industries) in financially contributing to education, for example by funding special scholarships.

The new education law is still in the draft stage but will include an increased market focus. A positive element identified by experts is the increased flexibility in teachers' education. The draft also foresees that underperforming schools will be closed down.

The issue of minority education is still acute and has become entangled in politics in this election year. Most parents still oppose the reform, which—starting in the new school year—provides for 60 percent of subjects in minority schools to be taught in Latvian and 40 percent in the minority language. In the last academic year, pupils in grades 10 and 11 were already taught according to the new rules. It is left to the individual primary school to decide which subjects are to be taught in Latvian, which in the minority language, and which bilingually. As in Estonia, the reform is controversial and has raised fears among the country's Russian-speaking minority.

3.3. Lithuania

During the reporting period, the Lithuanian government made two important decisions ahead of the new academic year: to offer financial assistance to disabled university students and to amend the law on vocational training.

The amendments foresee a range of improvements and innovations. On-the-job training will be provided by experienced instructors; people with work experience will be able to qualify for their trade by taking an examination; and graduates of vocational schools can obtain formal qualifications from associations of employers and experts. In this way, the government is involving employers in the process of vocational training and providing young people with the opportunity to acquire credentials without interrupting their work lives.

The creation of a modern vocational training and career-planning system has begun in Lithuania through two major projects supported by the EU running from the end of 2005 to March 2008. Beginning in the fifth grade, pupils will receive information on various trades and will be assisted in planning their careers. A network of computerized vocational guidance centers, a labor and trades database, and a few hundred consultants are to contribute to the system. Throughout the country 640 computerized points of vocational guidance are being established, with remote areas being given particular attention. The system will be connected to the European information system PLOTEUS, providing information on education opportunities across Europe.

Lithuania is also introducing a new development plan for higher education for the period 2006-2010. The Council on Higher Education has approved the plan, which foresees reforming the management of universities, the financing of scientific research on the basis of competitive projects following a Scandinavian model, and funding for scholarships.

The Baltic countries are among a small group in Europe where course fees are fixed according to supply and demand rather than regulated by the state. Protesting a decrease of the state budget for higher education, thousands of students rallied in the Lithuanian capital earlier in

2006. (Lithuania links financial aid in state universities to individual student performance, as do Latvia and Estonia.)

Overall, Lithuania appears set to continue on its reform course focused on market principles and quality, as do the other two Baltic republics.

4. SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

4.1. Albania

Albania's education indicators are overall pointing up. But while enrollment in primary schools stands around 98 percent, dropout rates, though falling in recent years, continue to be a problem as pupils abandon their classes for work to help meet the financial needs of their families. Even forced child labor remains an issue. Other reasons for high dropout rates are blood feuds, which often keep children away from schools out of concern for their safety. Many families also simply fail to understand the importance of education. The Ministry of Education and other organizations are implementing programs to promote education in poverty-stricken areas and to encourage dropouts to return to school.

Even though a national strategy for Roma has been adopted by the government, Romani as well as Egyptian children are still faced with discrimination in schools, one of the factors behind the high illiteracy rate among these groups. They often do not attend school because they lack the required identification documents. Similar problems affect children with special needs, who frequently have difficulty accessing education facilities.

Minorities' rights to education are generally respected, and a state committee on minorities has been established. However, education in minority languages needs to be expanded further. The Greek minority in particular has voiced concerns that Greek children who live outside the main areas of Greek settlement are unable to access education in their language.

Key concerns in higher education include a lack of technology and equipment, and insufficient funds for scientific research. A basic orientation toward the demands of the labor market, including lifelong learning programs, is also urgently needed.

Higher education in general is falling in line with the Bologna process, and the university system is being decentralized. Steps have been taken toward granting universities financial autonomy, and admission procedures have been improved. The Tempus program and participation in Joint European Projects have also helped bring higher education closer to standards prevailing in the EU. Teaching staff is more mobile, and processes of quality assurance and accreditation are being reformed.

Significantly lower enrollment after the mandatory eight years of education is a great concern in the country; according to UNICEF, the net secondary school attendance share was just 39 percent. More students are being accepted to university, but the new education minister has revoked the decision of the previous government to establish three new universities in the coming school year since financial resources have been found to be insufficient.

Some 3 percent of GDP is allocated to education. A government promise last year to raise the budget for education has not materialized. The lack of funding puts considerable strain on a system that is already under heavy pressure, not least from the country's depressed economy.

4.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, education reform is ongoing, albeit slowly.

While the Bologna process was officially introduced in universities at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year, many experts believe that the introduction was rather ad hoc. Drafting of the Law on Higher Education began in 2003, but the law—an important precondition for the implementation of the Bologna process—has yet to be adopted. The Bologna Declaration is just one of many international documents, such as the Lisbon Convention, that have been ratified by the Bosnian authorities without much thought given to their implementation.

These problems are of a political nature and mostly due to Bosnia's fractured system of governance, with its division into two entities. There is no Education Ministry at the central level; instead, education falls under the competency of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, while the two entities (the Republika Srpska and the Federation) have their own education ministries. The Federation is in turn divided into 10 cantons, which run their own ministries of education and coordinate little.

Higher education reflects this fragmentation, which makes it difficult to compare performance of higher education institutions or indeed to establish a single set of education standards. Some universities were thus better prepared and funded than others in the 2005-2006 term for the purposes of Bologna.

Primary education is satisfactory, with enrollment rates of some 95 percent. Some regions of the country have recently introduced nine-year primary education.

Vocational training, by contrast, still fails to meet the needs of the labor market. According to official statistics, unemployment rates in Bosnia are around 40 percent; thus, it is not surprising that even university graduates have a hard time finding jobs.

Teacher and student strikes were frequent throughout 2005 and 2006, sparked by a variety of reasons that typically included demands for higher teachers' salaries.

The Romani population continues to be vulnerable, often facing discrimination and harassment. Access to education is difficult for Roma, as well as for displaced people and refugees. Although a national Romani strategy was adopted in 2005, implementation is lagging.

The lack of infrastructure and great distances to schools in some rural areas also keep some children from enrolling. Girls are especially vulnerable, as many parents cannot afford to send both boys and girls to school. The traditional notion in some rural areas that girls should remain at home is a contributing factor. Some children with special needs and disabilities also face problems accessing education.

Bosnia's three main national communities recognized by the constitution—Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims)—are given the opportunity to study in their own languages (the former Serbo-Croat) and under different curricula. But the segregation of students continues: the “two schools under one roof” syndrome still affects more than 50 schools in Bosnia, where mainly Croatian and Bosniak children learn in physically divided schools with separate entrances, following different curricula. These schools require administrative and legal unification; some local authorities and parents, however, refuse to accept an end to segregation.

The international community, together with the education authorities, has come up with guidelines for textbooks for more sensitive subjects, such as geography and history, that would provide multiple points of view on the recent history, especially the 1992-1995 conflict involving all three populations in the country. The project is still underway.

In the past year, the High Representative—the highest international official in the country—removed two education officials from their positions, the minister of education in the Central Bosnia canton, Nikola Lovrinovic, for not implementing legislation on higher education, and the minister of education of Republika Srpska, Milovan Pecelj, for not carrying out his duties.

Bosnia suffers from the generic problems affecting transition countries in the region, such as low growth, high unemployment, and vocational and university training that fails to meet the demands of the labor market. In Bosnia's case, these problems are magnified by a fragmented political system that provides few incentives for cooperation or coordination across the various divisions (entities and cantons).

4.3. Bulgaria

Bulgaria's education system showed signs of progress in 2005. However, unequal access to education for all children remains a serious concern. Romani children and children with disabilities or special needs continue to be put in separate schools of lower quality. The practice has prompted discrimination lawsuits in local courts.

An action plan was introduced in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, but initiatives such as textbooks for Romani children or free school lunches have proved insufficient. Non-governmental groups and international organizations are exerting pressure on the education authorities to end segregation.

Enrollment in primary and secondary education is high, but dropout rates are on the rise in some areas due to factors including poverty and lack of parental awareness of the importance of education. The highest dropout rates are being recorded among the Roma.

In some regions, social inclusion programs are being implemented with the aim to involve children from vulnerable groups that generally do not have access to education due to extreme poverty or discrimination.

With a decrease in the school-age population, the authorities are considering closing schools and dismissing redundant teaching staff. Many schools are overstaffed, with low wages for

teachers and professors. This prompted teaching staff across the country to go on strike in December 2005 to demand a 15 percent pay raise and higher budget allocations for education.

While amendments to the Law on Vocational Education and Training and to the Law on Higher Education were adopted in September 2005, vocational training is still in need of reform. Life-long learning programs are required to meet the demands of the labor market. Other initiatives by the government include anti-corruption programs that have been introduced in some Bulgarian high schools.

The country's accession to the EU on 1 January 2007 imposes additional standards that need to be met, such as the requirement to implement existing EU law in the area of education for children of migrant workers. Framework legislation providing for mutual recognition of professional qualifications from throughout the EU was adopted in 2005.

The education authorities introduced reforms in secondary schools at the beginning of 2006 that included standardized national exams and short-term vocational training programs. The reform was prompted by Bulgaria's ranking below the EU average in the PISA study.

While higher education institutions have great autonomy compared with other countries in the region, university governance still must improve, as must monitoring and evaluation systems. Declining enrollment in higher education, for which some analysts blame complicated entrance examinations, is also becoming an issue.

The tangible prospect of European integration has no doubt provided much of the momentum behind Bulgaria's reform in the education sector. While much has been achieved in terms of policy development and legislation, implementation in the classroom often remains elusive, especially with regards to vulnerable children.

4.4. Croatia

Croatia's education sector is still undergoing significant reform as the country's higher education system is being brought into line with EU practices and expectations. (Croatia hopes to become a member in 2009; independent observers believe 2011 to be a more realistic goal.) Starting in October 2005, students attended classes in accordance with the Bologna process; the European Credit Transfer System became compulsory at the same time.

As for general EU accession requirements in the education field, education for children of migrant workers still needs to be assessed by the relevant authorities in order to comply with the body of EU law that candidate countries must pass to become members (the so-called *acquis communautaire*).

An evaluation of some 900 university programs was undertaken in 2005, but the implementation of its findings, and of the Bologna process more generally, will require significant funding. First steps have been taken: additional money was allocated to meet an increase in enrollment at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year, and the authorities have introduced lump-sum funding for university management instead of the direct allocation of funds to universities.

Vocational training still must be reformed in order to meet the demands of the labor market. Trainers' qualifications as well as additional funding are some of the more pressing needs in this sector.

More systemic change is foreseen under the Education System Development Plan for 2005-2015 introduced by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, to be supported by a 68 million euro loan from the World Bank. The plan foresees the introduction of national education standards and nationwide standardized school-leaving examinations, and lays out the principle of lifelong learning, among other things. In 2005, a new program for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications was established. However, it does not yet fully meet the demands of the relevant EU legislation.

An experimental teaching plan with lower workloads for students was introduced in the 2006-2007 school year.

Upcoming challenges include curriculum reform, the upgrading of school facilities, information and communication technology programs in education, and further development of vocational training.

While a national program and action plan for the Romani minority is in place, increased funds need to be allocated to programs for social cohesion and for the inclusion of this minority in education programs, according to experts. Romani children have a difficult time completing their education due to general discrimination and a lack of awareness of the value of education. They face segregation and are frequently assigned to lower-quality classes, which has prompted nongovernmental groups to file lawsuits. Despite continuing problems, international programs to provide support to the Roma, along with the efforts of the education authorities, are having an impact.

The Roma Education Fund is supporting a project based on a pilot initiative of the Open Society Foundation Croatia. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, the Government Office for National Minorities, Roma for Roma, and the Roma Association of Baranja as partners will implement the project "Improvements of Access and Quality of Roma Education," which will support two of the four education components of the National Program for Roma, namely preschool education and primary education, targeting 1,668 students and 200 teachers.

Other minorities in Croatia, notably ethnic Serbs, have easier access to quality education. In September 2005, common history books were drafted to include the recent war in Croatia in an attempt to close the gap between ethnic Serbian and Croatian children, and were promptly criticized by some parents. They will be introduced across the country in the current school year, starting in the fall of 2006.

Low-level ethnic tensions endure, however. In September 2005, parents in some villages of Slavonia refused to send their children to school over allegations that some ethnic Serbian teachers had expressed nationalist views and had refused to teach classes in Croatian. Some of the teachers were subsequently moved to other schools.

People with disabilities still struggle with lack of access to quality education.

Overall, it appears that Croatia is resolutely moving in the right direction. The incentive of EU accession and a positive economic climate are no doubt having an impact on the quality of education in the country.

4.5. Kosovo

Kosovo's main problem in the education field is the continued operation of two separate education systems—one for the Albanian majority with its own curricula, one for the ethnic Serbian minority following Serbian curricula—that generally refuse to recognize each other's diplomas.

Kosovo's Bosnian and Turkish minorities are generally able to attend schools in their own languages, with textbooks from Bosnia and Turkey, although teaching staff and facilities are still an issue. Other minorities such as the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians are often excluded from formal schooling in their language; if they are enrolled at all, they attend Albanian schools.

Serbian children usually attend school in Serbian communities, such as Gračanica, that are some distance from Albanian villages or towns; they often face problems of transport and crumbling facilities, with classes running in shifts to maximize use of classrooms.

In general terms, most problems affecting Kosovo's education sector are not primarily due to policy challenges: laws on primary, secondary, and higher education have been adopted by the Kosovo government. The key obstacle to reform is the fact that many municipalities are unable to meet their financial and administrative obligations under the law. Rural areas in particular suffer from a widespread lack of facilities and equipment.

The University of Pristina also has capacity problems. In addition to a lack of basic facilities such as laboratories and equipment, Kosovo's higher-education sector is not sufficiently responsive to the needs of the labor market, and vocational training is underdeveloped.

Kosovo's candidacy for membership in the Bologna process was rejected in 2005, due to the province's unresolved international status. Kosovo is at the time of this writing still a nominally Serbian province under UN administration; its final status is widely expected to be settled by the end of 2006 and will most likely be some form of independence with extensive international guarantees for minority rights. This may have an impact at the policy level but is unlikely to bring improvements to its education sector, which is in urgent need of upgrading.

4.6. Macedonia

A national strategy for education for 2005-2015 has been developed by the government to chart a course of reform in line with EU practices and expectations. For example, the government has taken the first steps to implement the Bologna process. However, recent international assessments of student performance at various education levels suggest that Macedonia's education system is still underperforming.

International organizations and initiatives such as the EU Tempus and Erasmus Mundus programs are contributing to a more vigorous exchange of students and staff, hence ideas and ap-

proaches, with universities in the EU. Higher-education reform has already resulted in increased student enrollment, although university graduates still represent only around 15 percent of the labor force and programs are still considered outdated when measured against the demands of the labor market. Universities will need increased funding to meet such demands. Vocational training is also in the process of being revamped to meet the needs of the labor market.

The low level of education provided to the Romani population is a persistent problem. Although the government adopted a national strategy for Roma in January 2005, some 10 percent of Romani children have never been enrolled in primary schools and dropout rates are around 50 percent by the fifth grade. Programs initiated by the international community in cooperation with the government currently provide scholarships for a number of Romani students, funded by the Roma Education Fund. However, these stopgap measures do not directly address the underlying causes. Another project provides grants, on a competitive basis and with the participation of Romani organizations, to 10 public preschools. The grants help train teachers and Romani assistants in order to improve communication with parents and coordination with Roma Education Centers.

Primary and, increasingly, secondary education is available in Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish, but universities rarely teach in these languages. A positive development was the recent establishment of the University of Tetovo, which provides instruction in Albanian.

While primary education is mandatory and up to 95 percent of all children are enrolled in schools, some children are still excluded from the education system, especially ethnic Albanian girls living in closed ethnic communities. People with disabilities still frequently face discrimination and a lack of access to education.

The fact that ethnic tension is still close to the surface was confirmed when history teachers of ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian backgrounds participated in a project to draft a joint history course on Macedonia's conflict of 2001. The project sparked considerable controversy.

In addition to the problems that most transition societies must grapple with, Macedonia's education sector remains an arena for ethnic tension and exclusion. The government will need to pay sustained attention to these problems if it is to secure equal access to quality education for all children.

4.7. Montenegro

In May 2006, the citizens of Montenegro voted in a referendum for independence from the state union with Serbia, but many of the problems afflicting the Serbian education system continue to apply to Montenegro as well.

Reform is underway, however, beginning with the introduction of nine-year elementary school programs in more than 20 schools in 2005 and reformed high-school programs to be introduced in the 2006-2007 school year. These include such structural changes as the introduction of electives for students, high-school diplomas that will be internationally recognized, the decentralization of the overall system, implementation of quality assurance, introduction of life-

long learning, and various other innovations that are designed to bring the country closer to Europe.

Romani education continues to be an issue for Montenegro, while members of the Albanian minority also showed dissatisfaction with Montenegrin curricula in 2005, when they demanded greater representation of their own culture and history in the country's schools. However, the government of Montenegro is now taking the issue of Romani education seriously. In October 2005, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Pedagogical Institute of Montenegro, based on their previous work through the Roma Education Initiative, began a project to improve Romani education at five sites through effective partnerships between schools and civic groups. The project aims to motivate schools to include Romani pupils and provides additional equipment and capacity-building for teaching in a diversified environment; it also involves Romani assistants in the teaching-learning process. Existing sites will be developed into model centers for Romani inclusion.

Montenegro appears to be on the right course as it embarks on its reform of the education sector, for example by including the Romani dimension in all its reform measures.

4.8. Romania

Romania's education system made some progress in 2005-2006, notably with a continued upward trend in enrollment rates. (The UNDP's 2005 Human Development Report put the combined enrollment rate for primary, secondary, and tertiary education for 2002-2003 at 72 percent, with a constant upward course since the early 1990s.) The country, which will enter the EU together with Bulgaria on 1 January 2007, has managed to meet key requirements for EU membership, such as mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

However, international assessments such as PISA suggest that even after some education reforms, Romania's students perform below the EU average. Higher education is still in need of greater reform as well as increased funding to reduce high student-to-teacher ratios. Additional vocational training has to be made available if the education system is to respond to the demands of the labor market.

The Bologna process is being implemented in the higher education system, with some university departments already replacing the four-year period for a bachelor's degree with a three-year period, followed by two years for a master's and an additional three years for a doctorate.

As has become the rule ahead of the start of a new school year, the media have been reporting poor conditions in many rural schools. That the problem goes deeper was underlined by a strike in November 2005, when teachers and students demanded higher teachers' wages and an increase in the education budget to at least 6 percent of GDP, the EU standard that was promised by the ruling parties. Just a month earlier, the education minister had resigned after only some 3.7 percent of GDP had been allocated to education for 2006. The strikers received some concessions but not to the extent they had hoped for. Teachers' unions threatened to boycott the start of the 2006-2007 school year in mid-September over the government's refusal to raise their wages.

A scandal broke over the summer of 2006 when test subjects from primary and high school finals were leaked, suggesting that some students had bought them. As a result, top education officials in the ministry and in local commissions were sacked.

Romani and rural children, often poor, still have trouble getting access to primary education, even as Romania's participation in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 has paved the way to greater inclusion. High schools and universities do reserve a limited number of places for Roma.

Other minorities enjoy better access to education, including at university level. For Romania's sizeable Hungarian minority, this is true even outside their main settlement areas in Transylvania. In eastern Romania, for example, the Csango, a Hungarian-speaking Catholic minority, have been granted the right to study their language in primary schools, while a secondary school is being built for them.

The establishment of an all-Hungarian language state university is being debated, however, and has provoked conflict within the governing coalition, which includes the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania.

According to a report from the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania published in March 2006, shortcomings in Hungarian-language public education in Romania "considerably lower the young Hungarians' chances to pursue their studies or a career."

School attendance for people with disabilities continues to be low, with limited physical access to education facilities.

Romania will need to work hard to overcome the inequalities built into its education system. Impending EU accession is likely to provide incentives for increased attention and resources for education.

4.9. Serbia

Serbia's Ministry of Education and Sports drafted a strategy for the period 2005-2015 to help consolidate and advance the reform process that began in 2001. It calls for a decentralized, high-quality system that provides access to all potential students and cooperates with international institutions. However, reform has been going slowly and will need considerable attention and resources in the coming years.

As is the case with other countries of the region, Serbia's higher education reform is taking place in the context of the Bologna process; a new Law on Higher Education, passed in September 2005, aims to pave the way for its implementation.

Higher education particularly needs reform, but it also suffers from grossly insufficient funding. The average length of study is estimated at 7.5 years, with only a third of enrolled students finishing their studies.

Critics of Serbia's education system have been pointing out that it is too centralized and not sufficiently focused on abstract reasoning and the very process of learning, but rather on sub-

ject matter and rote learning. However, it is difficult to objectively evaluate the state of Serbia's education system, as overall quality assessment is still lacking. (Similar criticism applies to Montenegro, which gained independence from the state union with Serbia in spring 2006.)

Vocational training and lifelong learning also need bolstering, as the education system still fails to meet the demands of the labor market.

Serbia also must work on integrating ethnic minorities into the education system. Although ethnic minorities have a right to education in their own language, this right is not respected throughout the country. The Roma have the most difficult time getting access to education, and relevant resources remain scarce despite a Strategy for Integration and Economic Empowerment of Roma developed as part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015.

Since over half of Serbia's Roma are thought to be below the age of 25, education is a key concern for this community.

Statistics on the extent of the problem are hard to come by since many Roma are not registered and have no documents. Clearly, though, Romani school enrollment rates are considerably lower than those of other ethnic groups, especially in upper grades. Some statistics suggest that up to 80 percent of Roma in Serbia are illiterate, with only one-fifth of Romani children included in Serbia's education system. The government is trying to encourage inclusion through free textbooks, scholarships, and training of teaching staff.

Dropout rates are also high, with most Romani children leaving school at the age of 11 or 12. This is partly a reflection of traditional attitudes, especially to girls' education, but many Romani children are also considered unqualified by school authorities, who sometimes place them in schools for children with mental disabilities.

With funding from the Roma Education Fund, two projects are underway in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sports. The first provides grants of between 1,000 and 3,000 euros and professional support to 30 education institutions with Romani inclusion projects at the preschool level, in order to assist up to 1,000 Romani children. Romani coordinators will be in place to motivate Romani parents and to liaise between the Romani community and education institutions. The second project will develop and pilot in 20 schools a new functional basic education program for 250 second-chance young adult students who have not completed basic education, providing both general education and a first professional certificate in five occupations selected on the basis of local labor market needs, again with the involvement of Romani coordinators.

Other minorities have as a general rule fewer problems in Serbia's schools. Some regions provide education in minority languages, notably Vojvodina with a great number of Hungarian schools, Bosilegrad with Bulgarian primary schools, and Bujanovac and Presevo, where the Albanian minority can study in its own language. According to a UNDP report, in 35 of the 44 municipalities in Vojvodina and in its capital Novi Sad, one or more national minority languages are in official use, and the same applies to Bulgarian in eastern and Albanian in southern Serbia. The report warns, however, that the Law on the Official Use of Languages is only partially being implemented, mainly in municipalities where a national minority is represented in the local government.

The 2005-2006 school year started with a teachers' strike for higher salaries, and a similar strike took place in early 2006. While such strikes are common in the region, they underline the fact that reform will require resources. Serbia's depressed economy and political uncertainty provide less-than-favorable conditions for such reform to take place.

5. TURKEY

Turkey's education sector was expected to equip the 605,986 students who graduated from the country's secondary schools in 2005 with the necessary life, employment, and further learning skills, but not all schools did so. Students who attended elite public or private schools received a first-class education and often continued their education in top universities around the world. This is illustrated by the PISA results, which show that Turkey is doing a good job in educating a handful of star students.

However, the remaining graduates from general and vocational public secondary schools are doomed to join the expanding group of unskilled and unemployed youth. Indeed, youth unemployment, which stood around 20 percent—twice the general rate—in 2005, is a big social threat for the country.

The same year, more than 1.7 million people took the very competitive university entrance exam, two-thirds of whom were sitting the exam for at least a second time. This figure alone suggests that a university education is increasingly perceived as the sole means of social mobility in Turkey. The incredible 1 billion U.S. dollars spent annually by households on private courses to prepare students for the exams is another important indicator of the role of education in upward social mobility. Yet only 11 percent of those who took the exam were placed at a four-year university program while 4 percent entered two-year programs at universities with a vocational focus and 13 percent were taking distance-learning courses through open universities. This means that only a small fraction of a generation receives an education that will effectively help them to face down post-graduation unemployment: the unemployment rate among recent university graduates is around 30 percent.

School-to-work transition is also a problem for the 36 percent of secondary school students—around 1.1 million people—who attend vocational or technical schools, as their training rarely equips them for the labor markets. These schools, designed to operate in a state-driven economy where state-owned enterprises were the largest employer, find it difficult to adapt to the needs of the new economy. In addition, the overall low social status of vocational education and the uncertain access it provides to higher education drive students away from vocational to general schools, which makes the Education Ministry's goal of having 65 percent of students attend vocational schools a very distant prospect.

Lately, however, the Education Ministry and the Higher Education Council have begun tackling these policy challenges. The ministry has been running two projects funded by the European Commission to design a vocational qualification system, to change the curriculum of vocational and technical high schools, and to improve teacher training. Another project on secondary education financed by the World Bank is about to take off. The ministry and the council are working separately on a new university entrance exam system that would boost the quality and status of secondary education.

Major disagreements and ideological differences between the two institutions have made the public debates on vocational schools and on entrance to university highly politicized and tense, however. While both parties have made some efforts to discuss these issues in a more rational manner, this tension impedes efforts to improve secondary education in Turkey.

6. PALESTINE

After many years of progress, Palestinian education declined in the past year due to the dual challenges of the ongoing, increasingly restrictive Israeli military occupation and the ascension to government by Hamas and the international response it triggered.

Palestinian schools are divided into basic education (grades 1-10) and secondary education (grades 11-12). In secondary school, students are tracked into arts or science or vocational studies. Higher education follows the completion of grade 12 and includes community colleges, vocational programs, and four-year institutions. Access to higher education depends upon the concluding secondary examination, the *tawjihi*.

Through the end of 2005, considerable progress had been made in the three key areas of Palestinian education: access, quality, and delivery. (Details are provided in the very comprehensive chapter on education in the RAND Corporation's excellent 2005 report "Building a Successful Palestinian State.") Unlike in many societies in the Middle East, Palestinian schools have realized equitable access and gender parity. In fact, more females are now enrolled in secondary schools than males. There has been a greater emphasis on pre-school education, improved pedagogy, and student-centered learning. Elementary and secondary school curricula have been reformed over the past decade with an expanded education system and more transparent education policies. Highly restrictive constraints on teaching and the curriculum have been loosened somewhat, so that Palestinian teachers have some flexibility in using unapproved content or deviating from the established curriculum. There has always been strong community support for education and the increased quality of education had been viewed as a positive sign for the future amidst an increasingly bleak political and economic situation.

However, the hopes invested in Palestinian education have greatly eroded in 2006. After decades of conflict, the obstacles to good education in the Palestinian system are becoming overwhelming: disintegrating schools; poor resources and infrastructure; interrupted semesters; decreased access to schools; trauma caused by violence; and increased poverty. (The problems of Palestinian education are thus reflective of the overall disintegration of Palestinian institutions and services.) The United Nations estimates that 80 percent of Palestinians in Gaza and 43 percent of those in the West Bank live in poverty. Declining access to education has been compounded and, in part, caused by the ongoing Israeli military occupation. The Israel Defense Forces have seized school property while the building of the security wall and the proliferation of military checkpoints increasingly restricts the movement of students, teachers, and administrators. Since 2000, hundreds of schools and Ministry of Education offices have been damaged by shelling and gunfire, and some razed by Israeli bulldozers. Other schools have been appropriated by Israeli authorities as military bases or detention centers.

Palestinian government ministries and local organizations have been relying increasingly on international funds and assistance to meet both basic education needs and the challenges of education reform, but many of the programs supported by U.S. and European donor govern-

ments were suspended after Hamas came to power. This includes a number of significant education-related projects announced in the late fall of 2005, for example a grant of 25 million U.S. dollars by USAID for a project to be implemented in secondary schools, to train thousands of young Palestinians. Other programs that have shut down include curriculum support projects supported by various European governments and non-government groups that aimed to introduce information technology and computers into Palestinian classrooms, particularly in secondary schools.

This lack of adequate funding is even more damaging because of the refusal of the Israeli government to transfer the taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Many international implementers have also stopped their work with Palestinian educators because of a fear that Western governments will view this as support to an organization that sponsors terrorism. Even UNRWA, the United Nations agency assisting Palestinian refugees, cannot have direct contact with the Palestinian government. This creates particular problems because UNRWA runs hundreds of Palestinian schools (with an estimated student population of 250,000) and often works in concert with the Palestinian Education Ministry.

Perhaps the greatest impact of sanctions on the Palestinian government has been that Palestinian teachers were not paid at all between March and September. As a result, teachers went on strike at the beginning of the school year in September, after which they received two payments totaling 750 U.S. dollars, far below their monthly salaries. Most of the Palestinian Authority's 37,000 teachers, along with over 100,000 public employees, remain on strike.

Many organizations involved in Palestinian education, including UNRWA, fear that the entire education system is on the verge of collapse; that it will be very difficult to re-build; and that the impact on Palestinian youth will be devastating.

7. THE CAUCASUS

7.1. Armenia

In Armenia, a new stage of education reform began in 2004 with the aim to raise the quality of general education and ensure its relevance to the new economy and knowledge society. The overall vision and methodology has been developed with financial and expert assistance from the World Bank, and the reform as a whole is to be conducted with a World Bank credit. Already in 2005, the education budget increased dramatically.

The project has four components: to assist in developing a more relevant and inclusive national curriculum for general education, national education standards, and a national assessment system revolving around the Assessment and Testing Center (ATC) established in 2004; to help incorporate information and communication technologies in the learning and teaching process; to enable teachers to understand and implement the new curriculum and assessment techniques in the classroom; and to help improve the management and efficiency of the education system. This last component will be carried out by supporting decentralized schools, increasing community and parent involvement in school management and financing, expanding and further developing the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which supports effective decision-making at all levels of management (central, regional, and school), and training school managers and administrative staff.

In line with this reform, the government approved the National Curriculum for General Education and the State Standard for Secondary Education in 2004. Under the new system, which took effect this year, the 12-year mandatory schooling is divided into a primary (grades 1 to 4), middle (grades 5 to 9), and high school level (grades 10 through 12). The Standard describes the structure of educational content, the maximum workload and the general qualitative requirements for learners, the forms of assessment, and the marking scheme. Subject standards for the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences are currently being developed.

While the current stage of education reform in Armenia is primarily targeting secondary education, the government has over the past several years also adopted a number of key documents regulating high education. In addition, Armenia has become part of two major international developments in the sphere of higher education with the ratification in 2004 of the Lisbon Convention (which Armenia had signed in 2001) and the signing in May 2005 of the Bologna Declaration. Awareness of the Bologna Process has increased considerably during recent years. Nevertheless, awareness of the reforms has yet to reach the majority of grassroots representatives who will be expected to implement them. The government has made considerable progress in creating the legal framework for the Bologna reforms, but does not provide any funding related to reform to institutions of higher education.

Indeed, funding is a key problem across Armenia's education sector. The government spends only around 2.8 percent of GDP on education, well below the OECD average of 5 percent. In the field of vocational education and training, for example, only about 45 percent of total expenditure are funded by the state, with the remainder coming from tuition fees and other sources. This financing model has resulted in a high level of informal payments in the sector. It also means that the maintenance and development of the system—rehabilitation of buildings, procurement of modern equipment, training of managers and instructors, new methodological literature, manuals, and textbooks—are left to individual institutions, which are expected to provide funding from external revenue. However, this non-budget revenue is used up for wages and salaries. The Armenian education system is therefore in a serious funding crisis.

7.2. Azerbaijan

Since 1999, the Ministry of Education has been implementing a comprehensive Education Reform Project that sets out a new general education curriculum, designed to better prepare students for Azerbaijan's rapidly changing economy and society, and changes to teacher training and the institutional set-up in the education sector. Following a review of the project, a ten-year, three-stage strategy was launched in 2002 with financing from a World Bank loan of approximately 73 million U.S. dollars.

The school year 2006-2007 began with the piloting of a new model of school financing in 59 schools in three regions, which are now managing their own accounts. The decentralization of school finance is seen as an important step in the reform process.

In 2007, radical changes are expected as the ministry has begun introducing a new curriculum for grades 1 through 11 and will use new curricula for teacher training. An indication that the government recognizes the urgent need to reform the country's education system is the introduction of new subjects—basic computer science and English—in primary schools.

The ministry has spent over 5.5 million U.S. dollars to print around five million new textbooks (more than a hundred titles) in a successful drive over the past few years to provide free textbooks to all schoolchildren. However, a conference of education stakeholders held ahead of the new school year pointed out that the quality of these textbooks still needs to be improved.

The ministry, together with UNICEF, began a massive nationwide de-institutionalization program to reorganize the special boarding school system for disabled children and orphans.

Overall, Azerbaijan's education system is still underperforming, and further changes focusing on the quality of education will be needed. The legal framework is still unsatisfactory as the education law has been under discussion for the past five years.

7.3. Georgia

Georgia's education sector is in the process of profound change. The country's education reform aims to effectively realign the system's objectives, policies, and management capacity to improve the quality and relevance of learning outcomes. This will better prepare students for the demands of a market economy and a democratic society. Reform is still in its early stages; while it has been successful in general, certain challenges remain.

According to the new Law on General Education (2005), primary school in Georgia includes grades 1 to 6, basic education grades 7 to 9, and upper secondary grades 10 to 12.

The draft Law on Education establishes schools as independent legal entities with their own budget and bank account. The Law promotes the decentralization of the school system through the establishment of boards of trustees empowered to take key decisions regarding the management of schools, including the allocation of resources and the monitoring of expenditures. The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning & Management (EPPM) in cooperation with the Liberty Institute has carried out a countrywide training program in institutional management for newly-elected boards of trustees of over 700 schools.

Administrative mergers reduced the number of schools from 3,154 legal entities to 2,500, a number that was further reduced to 2,331 through the introduction of a system of per-capita financing. The new system is expected to bring down the number still further over the coming two years.

A national curriculum has been developed and adopted. New subject curricula have been developed for grades 1, 7, and 10 and piloted in 100 schools. The process is on track to be rolled out to the rest of the country for all grades. Textbook materials are being piloted simultaneously with the new curriculum.

New policies have also been adopted to help strengthen the qualifications, certification, and accreditation of teachers. A revised and transparent pay scheme for teachers has been approved to link remuneration to qualifications and workload.

A continuing challenge is the improvement of communications, both between different levels of the education system—for example, ministry, resource centers, and schools—and at the

inter-sectoral level (between government and non-government structures) so that stakeholders are better aware of the various aspects and details of the reform. This would help increase their involvement and motivation.

Given the rapid pace of change, the reform strategy should be better communicated to a general audience rather than just to specialists.

Mechanisms should be introduced to strengthen the impact of research on policy and practice, and to enhance cooperation between research providers and consumers.

Georgia's new Law on Higher Education (2004) lays out changes to the structure and academic and administrative practices of the country's universities as well as to the design of degree programs. Joining the Bologna Process (May 2005) has raised the bar for Georgia's higher education system. However, the process cannot be successful without adequate support from policy-makers and institutions of higher education. There is a continuing lack of awareness on the Bologna process in general, especially on the key steps its implementation requires.

After the initial stage of the accreditation process, the number of higher education institutions has been reduced from more than 200 to 117. According to preliminary results from the second cycle of the accreditation process, the number might drop further to about 40 by the end of 2006.

University rectors and management have been replaced, and a significant share of the academic staff was freshly hired through academic competitions. Most of the newcomers worked in research institutions before and have little or no teaching experience. A priority for the new academic and administrative staff will be to elaborate strategic development plans; develop new degree programs; introduce doctoral programs; reshape the administrative structures; and develop effective financial management.

In 2005, a new policy on admission to higher education was introduced. Under the new rules, prospective students take a standardized nationwide examination following graduation from secondary school.

For higher education reform to be successful, the main actors need qualified and long-term assistance. Training programs and visits to international partners have to date been haphazard and focused on top management only, which—due to ineffective mechanisms for sharing knowledge within institutions—have failed to produce tangible results. Intensive and regular training courses for both academic and administrative staff is of critical importance for the implementation of reform.

8. PAKISTAN

Even though Pakistan's constitution requires the state to “remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education...; make technical and professional education generally available and higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of merit,” Pakistan remains a long way from either removing illiteracy or making secondary education freely available. It is one of the few countries in the world that continue to spend only about 2 percent of GNP on education.

The secondary education sector is still not receiving the kind of attention it deserves and has seen few recent reforms. There are indications, though, that this may be about to change. The Ministry of Education has circulated a first draft of a new curriculum for different grades including the secondary school level. The curriculum attempts to provide a broader understanding of the country's multicultural legacy by pointing to the need to study Pakistan's pre-Islamic past, as well. How much of this will be implemented in the classroom remains to be seen: even if the curricular changes go through, it is not clear if the concomitant changes in assessment systems and textbooks will follow. Certainly, no major initiatives are in place yet to change the orientation of the teachers, obviously a critical factor in the endeavor.

As of 2011, science and mathematics in the first through tenth grades will be taught only in English, in response to the poor showing of students in these subjects and the general stress on English skills. But teachers have received no training, and none of the provinces is likely to be ready to implement this change anytime soon, probably not even by 2011, which might result in an even lower level of education in these subjects.

The shortage of teachers, poor facilities available to them, low pay and status, as well as their politicization continue to be major problems across much of the country.

In order to increase enrollment and lower dropout rates at the secondary level, provincial governments—notably in Punjab and Sindh—are planning to provide free textbooks, and stipends for girls. While this could help bridge the significant gender gap at this level, it is unlikely to have much impact on the equally serious problem of the quality of education.

The private sector, already a significant factor in primary education, has recently become considerably more active in secondary education as well. Most of these schools also have their students take the government examinations: the Secondary School Certificate examination or Matriculation after 10 years of schooling is considered final for purposes of basic general education; those seeking higher education or a professional degree typically take the Higher Secondary School Certificate examination after 12 years of schooling.

A few students take Ordinary (O) and Advanced (A) level examinations, equivalent to 11 years and 13 years of schooling respectively, held by the UK Examination Boards. Increasingly, middle class families are willing to undergo considerable economic strain to ensure this education for their children; they regard the alternative as providing little value in terms of learning or relevance for the job market. Private schools are increasingly coming under government scrutiny, however. Earlier this year, the Education Ministry banned a book of short stories that was part of the O-level Urdu course, on the grounds that some of the stories were inappropriate for the relevant age group. The problem was resolved when the University of Cambridge International Examinations provided an alternative text, but it is clear that private schools face an uncertain future. This is also indicated by a pending bill in the Punjab legislature (other provinces are similarly inclined) seeking greater regulatory powers over private schools.

While the government has made some efforts through the Education Sector Reform program to improve the country's schools, the focus has been more on access than quality. The latter issue must be tackled now with the utmost urgency.

Another challenge is the provision of schooling to the victims of the October 2005 earthquake in northern Pakistan, which displaced some 3.5 million people and killed around 75,000. The quake also destroyed perhaps 7,500 school buildings and killed, injured, or displaced some 2,000 teachers. Around 2,500 tent schools have been provided and equipped by UNICEF to cover the immediate need; the organization plans to have 125 permanent schools newly constructed by the end of 2007 and has assisted in the reconstruction of some 4,000 state primary schools. A special concern will be to provide schooling for children—especially girls—who have never been to school before. In some areas, enrolment rates are actually on the increase compared to the period before the disaster. UNICEF is promoting the concept of child-centered learning also to help children deal with their trauma.

9. CENTRAL ASIA

9.1. Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has launched a national education development program to be implemented between 2005 and 2010. The Kazakh government, like that of Kyrgyzstan, intends to move to a 12-year education system by 2008. Moreover, the authorities plan to set up a national education quality evaluation system.

They face considerable obstacles, however, including a shortage of around 500,000 places for pupils in primary and secondary schools and outdated programs. The authorities plan to build approximately 300 school buildings for primary and boarding schools and for vocational education.

Another challenge for the Kazakh government is to provide preschool to the vast majority of children who are not yet able to attend. Currently, only 20.7 percent of children in urban areas and 5.5 percent of children in rural areas have access to any form of preschool.

Kazakhstan, as well as Kyrgyzstan, provides education in several languages in addition to Kazakh and Russian, notably Uzbek, Uighur, and Tajik.

At present, only 15 percent of Kazakhstan's population is computer-literate. There is one computer per 54 schoolchildren in Kazakhstan and only 44 percent of Kazakh schools have Internet access. To improve the situation, the Kazakh government plans to open more than 1,000 state-run Internet cafes within its Electronic Government program. There are currently 46 state-run public Internet cafes. By the end of 2006, the Kazakh authorities will have opened 460 cafes, and 266 more are set to open in 2007.

The UNDP's 2005 Human Development Report puts Kazakhstan at the top of the Central Asian countries in terms of combined enrollment rate for primary, secondary, and tertiary school, which stood at 85 percent in 2002-2003.

9.2. Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's education sector suffers from corruption, serious quality issues, and a lack of teachers and textbooks.

These problems are acknowledged by the government. Kyrgyzstan's education minister described the quality of education services provided by Kyrgyz universities as "catastrophically low" in a statement in July 2006, adding that the country's higher education system had run out of control between 1992 and 2005. Indeed, the government maintains that many universities in the country continue to flout legislation. In response, the Education Ministry inspected 54 universities and their branches and shut down five universities, one university branch, and one high school on the grounds that they did not meet licensing requirements. Moreover, 21 universities lost licenses to provide education services in 89 disciplines.

A survey by the Kyrgyz Ombudsman of a number of Kyrgyz universities in January 2006 showed widespread corruption, with the Osh State University taking the top spot. It is becoming common practice for students to do seasonal work in Russia to pay bribes for grades and credits, and, in the end, diplomas. In many cases, those students enroll in so-called "distance education" courses, where they do not show up in school even for tutorials.

Kyrgyzstan's education sector lacks the most basic assets; for example, only around 70 percent of schoolchildren receive textbooks. More worrying is the fact that Kyrgyzstan is short of around 3,500 teachers. University graduates are not interested in working in schools because of low salaries and the lack of infrastructure, especially in rural areas. The authorities are trying to address the problem by providing salary supplements to teachers working in rural areas.

The new Kyrgyz government announced it would supply elementary school pupils ages 6 to 8 with free meals starting in the school year 2007-2008 in order to boost enrollment.

The challenges faced by the Kyrgyz authorities in reforming the education sector are formidable; the fact that the government recognizes the problem is one of the few positive developments in this bitterly poor country.

9.3. Tajikistan

Corruption is a major problem in the countries of Central Asia, and Tajikistan's education sector is no exception. The system creates a win-win situation for dishonest teachers and students alike: it provides teachers with additional sources of income without the need to spend longer hours at work, while students who bribe their way through university do not need to spend time studying.

On 26 July 2006, Deputy Education Minister Farkhod Rakhimov announced that two universities and two university branches would be barred from admitting students since they had failed to meet the relevant standards. Rakhimov said the universities in question could keep their licenses and would continue their operations but that they needed to address their shortcomings within six months. Just as in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, "distance education" is common in Tajikistan, and many students obtain diplomas and degrees without attending classes and lectures.

Like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan lacks schoolteachers. The news agency *Varorud.org* reported on 29 May 2006 that official estimates put the teacher shortfall at 9,000. Many university graduates go to Russia in search of seasonal jobs, rather than teaching in their own country.

According to the country's education minister, Abdudjabor Rakhmonov, Tajik-language schools badly need teachers who can teach Russian language and literature. He singled out the quality of Russian-language instruction in secondary schools as especially bad. The Tajik Education Ministry and the Russian Embassy in Tajikistan reportedly plan to open an advanced training institute for Russian language and literature. Tajik-language schools also suffer from a shortage of Russian-language textbooks. To fill the gap, the language department of the Russian-Tajik Slavic University will develop such books.

Overall, Tajikistan's secondary education sector suffers from neglect and a lack of funding, problems that go far beyond education.

9.4. Turkmenistan

The education sector of Turkmenistan has been on a downhill course since 1993, when the country introduced the *Bilim* (Education) reform. The reform reduced primary and secondary school education from a combined 10 to nine years; slashed the number of schools teaching in the Russian, Uzbek, and Kazakh languages; and cut university courses from four or five years to two years of general plus two years of specialized study. As a result, the higher education sector has been destabilized, according to observers. Of a population of some 5 million, only about 3,000 enter university each year.

For the last five years, the share of girls attending schools has been falling, mainly because their families cannot afford to send them. Cultural values also play a role, however, with an increasing number of families raising their daughters according to traditional values based on religion or local customs.

Around 80 percent of schoolchildren receive textbooks. By contrast, all pupils are given copies of *Rukhnama*, a book written by President Saparmurat Niyazov. In April 2006, Niyazov, known in the country as Turkmenbashi, or father of all Turkmen, ordered all libraries in rural areas to close because "nobody goes to libraries anyway." Under a new edict, teachers are reportedly required to sit an exam on the *Rukhnama* and face lower pay or even dismissal unless they publish newspaper stories praising the president.

The situation in Turkmenistan's education sector is dire; it appears that the president is intent on creating generations of badly educated Turkmen and has largely escaped censure for his actions.

9.5. Uzbekistan

The improvement of relations between Uzbekistan and Russia prompted the most momentous change in Uzbekistan's education sector during 2005-2006, the enhanced role of Russian-language study in the country's schools. In 2006, the Moscow State University opened a branch

in Tashkent. While the university will enroll only 80 students in its first year, it aims to attract 1,000 students every year in the future. The Russian Federation has also again begun supplying Uzbekistan with textbooks.

Uzbekistan's problems are in many respects similar to those experienced by its neighbors Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan; among the most serious is an acute shortage of school facilities. In line with the National Human Resources Training program launched by the Ministry of Education in 1997, the country is shifting to a new 12-year education system, which includes a nine-year primary and secondary education plus three years of college.

The Uzbek government plans to open 1,689 colleges and 178 high schools by 2010. It claims to be able to provide these institutions with new textbooks, equipment, and qualified teachers in a program that has to be completed by 2009. As of this school year, around 40 percent of schoolchildren have been transferred into the new system.

Uzbekistan has a multilingual education system in which national minorities can receive an education in the Russian, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Tajik, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz languages.

The number of university students has decreased from 282,722 in 1991 to 235,700 in 2002, even though the population grew in the same period from 20.7 million to 25.3 million people. Only 10 percent of secondary-school graduates go on to higher education, while 20 percent go to technical schools. The remaining 70 percent would need vocational education in order to compete in the labor market.

According to the UNDP's 2005 Human Development Report, Uzbekistan's combined enrollment rate for primary, secondary, and tertiary school was 76 percent in 2002-2003.

The Uzbek education sector faces many of the problems that affect the other countries of Central Asia. The government is taking steps to address them. Whether they are sufficient without a major reform push remains an open question.

10. MONGOLIA

The Mongolian education sector is still recovering from the crisis of the transition period, but education reform remains a high priority for the government. Recent reforms include expanding the period of mandatory schooling to 11 years and lowering the official age of school entry from 8 to 7 years. In 2007, the government plans to add a twelfth year to mandatory schooling and to lower the entry age to 6.

These changes were part of a broader reform push outlined in Mongolia's development strategy for 2006-2008, which set the following priorities for the education sector: the provision of elementary education to all children and a reduction in the dropout rate; an increase in mandatory schooling to 11 years by 2006 and 12 years by 2007; improved learning environment and facilities at secondary schools and a sufficient supply of teachers and textbooks; reduced gender inequality in primary and secondary school enrollment and literacy levels; and easier access to schools for disabled children by providing schools with the necessary equipment.

The Education Master Plan for 2006-2015 was endorsed by the government in the fall of 2006. It reflects the work of the Education for All action plan, the government's medium-term plan for 2002-2005, and constitutes an effort to set government priorities. Although the government has made some progress, significant challenges remain.

Mongolia has a very low population density, which—together with the harsh climate—raises the cost of providing education services. For example, the delivery of textbooks to remote rural schools is more difficult than in areas with higher concentrations. Due to large-scale migration from rural to urban areas, enrollment in rural schools is falling while urban schools are overstretched.

A variety of internationally funded projects are underway to improve school facilities, provide proper technical and vocational training, and support rural education and development. Given the difficulties of delivering quality education in this vast and sparsely populated country, such programs are urgently needed if the government's reform drive is to preserve its momentum.

This report was edited by T.K. Vogel and Alex Ulmanu with input from Batuhan Aydagul (Turkey), Jeffrey W. Helsing (Palestine), Aris Jansons (Baltic states), Elmina Kazimzade (Azerbaijan), Wojciech Kosc (Central Europe), Christina McDonald (Roma issues), Giorgi Machabeli (Georgia), Larisa Minasyan and Armenuhi Tadevosyan (Armenia), Enkhtuya Natsagdorj (Mongolia), Abbas Rashid and Ahmad Raza Khan (Pakistan), Mirna Skrbic (Southeastern Europe), Hamid Toursunof (Central Asia), and Natalia Shablya.