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5.1 History and Social Parameters of the Education System

The Republic of Azerbaijan lies along Greater Caucasus mountain range. The country is bordered on the east by the Caspian Sea, from where it draws its petroleum wealth. Its neighbors include Russia, Iran, Georgia, Turkey, and Armenia. The country has one exclave and one enclave.

Although a young country, the nation possesses a long history and deep culture as part of the crossing between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The territory was part of numerous empires, including the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan first encountered independence in the early twentieth century, shortly after its first oil boom. The republic declared its independence in 1991.

Since the late 1980s, the country has been involved in armed conflict with ethnic Armenians over the enclave Nagorno-Karabakh. This conflict, along with other disputes, has resulted in a population of nearly a million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Although a ceasefire has been in place since 1994, nearly 20 % of the republic's territory around Nagorno-Karabakh remains occupied by Armenian forces.

Education is central for its development objectives. While IDPs and oil provide context, the process is guided by the goals of democratic reform and economic liberalization. The major educational challenge for Azerbaijan is successful completion of its ongoing reform process to ensure that young people are adequately prepared for a new future.

5.1.1 Cornerstones

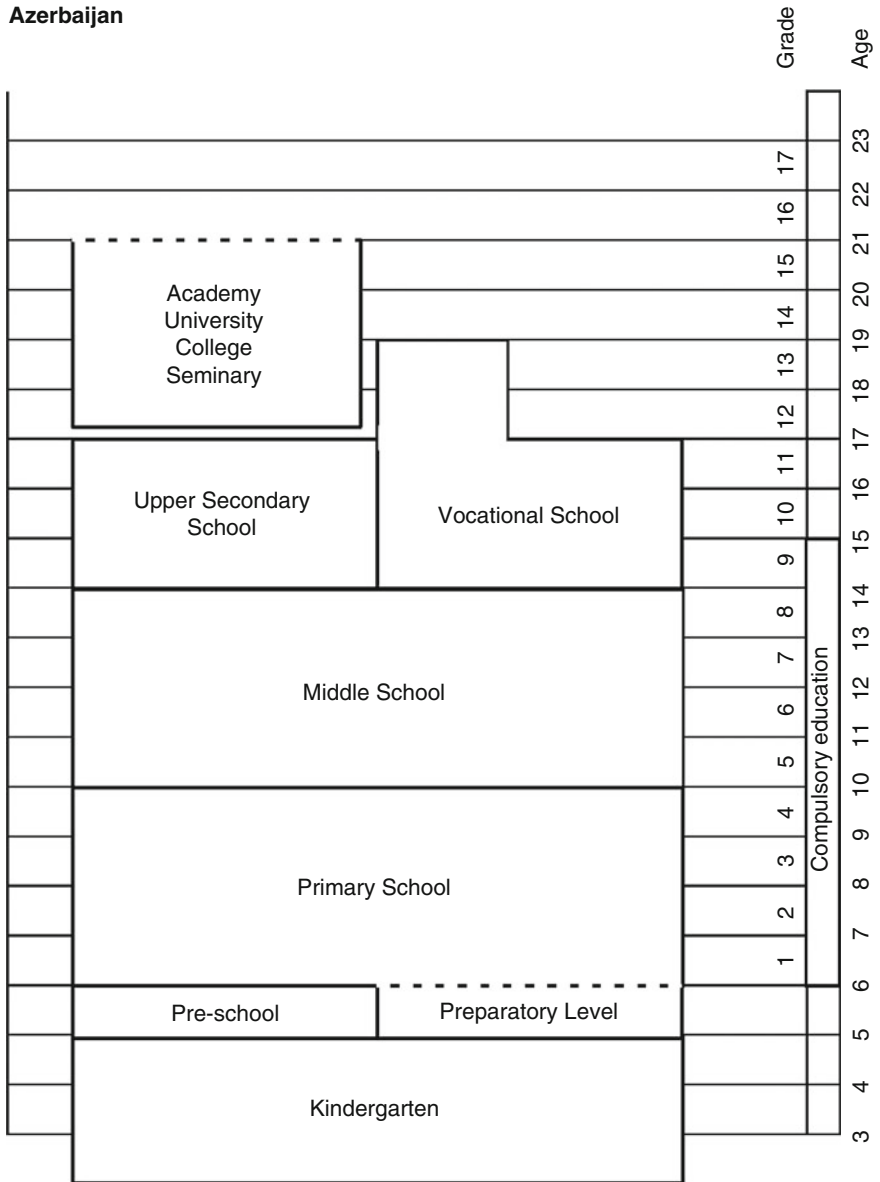
The education system of Azerbaijan, and other Muslim populations in the Caucasus, grew out of a collection of religious schools (*madressas*) and district schools. Many were established during the Khanate period (late 1750s) or earlier. Tsarist Russia introduced district schools in urban centers, primarily for urban elites, in the 1800s, but then enacted broader requirements that opened schools for the broader (rural) population during the second half of the century (Ahmadov 1995).

After the first oil boom in the 1880s, local nobles opened schools and fought illiteracy. The Jadidist movement brought education to the larger population and also supported ideas that supported the attempt at independence in the early twentieth century (Altstadt 1998).

The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan existed between 1920 and 1921. Global changes after World War I and the Russian revolution stalled this attempt and opened the way for the Soviet control. The Soviets built upon the existing education structures by linking them into a system comprised of kindergartens, general education schools, and secondary schools.

The Soviets first concentrated on education programming on the reduction of illiteracy and on workforce training. By midcentury, most were provided with basic education followed by vocational training. Opportunities to study outside of a person's native province became more available in the mid-1960s as part of efforts connected to the space race.

Azerbaijan



Although schooling in Azerbaijan was originally intended for the children of the elite, the primary context shifted and has held firm on preparing a capable workforce. Independent Azerbaijan’s current system of education remains consistent with this principle. However, contemporary curricula and other educational capacity do not fully reflect nor respond to emerging political, social, or economic demands yet.

With the loss of the centralized, command Soviet economy, the frail education system was tested by privatization, inattention, and mismanagement. Most students, parents, and teacher centered on the entrance examination for university. Since a university diploma is a necessary requirement for aspiring youth, other aspects were neglected during early independence.

5.1.2 Reform and Innovation

At the close of the Soviet period, basic education was either followed by secondary school or a 2-year vocational school. Graduates could pursue vocational or professional education for an additional 4–5 years. Ten years were necessary to complete general and secondary education. Independent Azerbaijan increased this by an additional year.

This addition was one of the major changes included in its first Education Law, which was adopted in 1992. Early reforms included curriculum and textbook reform, with a special emphasis on the use of Azerbaijani Turkish in the Latin (Roman) alphabet in place of Russian and the Cyrillic alphabet that were mandated by new laws on language usage.

Real reforms did not begin until the Ministry of Education created a national Education Sector Reform Program (ESRP) in 1999. The ESRP was reviewed in 2004 and led to a 10-year program called the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) which was designed on this foundation with assistance from the World Bank. Its first phase (2003–2007) focused on school rehabilitation, technology, and other improvements. This effort was joined by efforts on early childhood development, civic education, information technology, and other areas as supported by UNICEF, the Open Society Institute, US Agency for International Development, and others.

A major reform in addition to the ESDP concerned the national university entrance examination. A milestone event for most aspiring youth, this exam outranks nearly any activity in the preparation of young professionals. With such importance, it not only orients youth toward career fields necessary for economic development but also presents myriad opportunities for corruption, such as gate-keeping and other activities that took advantage of applicants. Efforts to streamline the process and guarantee transparency began shortly after independence. Joined by UNESCO and UNDP assistance, the registration and reporting process was digitalized, creating a system that has served for reforms in other countries.

Just as this new system was being implemented, the Bologna Process began to gain the attention of education reformers. A national commitment to join this process was made in 2004, and universities were instructed to begin steps to prepare their faculties and curricula. Departments began to require the preparation of syllabi, the introduction of improved teaching methodology, the opening of new departments, and the creation of a course credit schema.

Infrastructure improvements have also been the focus of recent sustainable development for education. Between 1998 and 2012, more than 1,600 schools and related structures have been built or repaired. While some funds for these

improvements originate from the national budget, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, formed through the support of the State Oil Fund of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR), has sponsored many of these projects.

The Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on developing “National Strategy of Development of Education in Azerbaijan in 2011–2021” is the latest in recent administrative actions to buttress early reforms and to support new projects, such as in higher education. It also builds on the new Education Law (2009) and will be carried out by a newly named Minister of Education. With these efforts, Azerbaijan continues to strengthen its education sector in order to create a sound engine to drive economic and social development.

5.1.3 Context and Conditions

Azerbaijan has a total population of 9.3 million people, a grouping that is primarily comprised of Azerbaijani Turks (nearly 90 %). The country is also home to representatives of populations from neighboring areas, such as Daghestanis, Russian, Armenians, and Kurds, as well as from indigenous ethnolinguistic groups, such as the Talish, Lezghins, Mountain Jews, and Avars (SSC 2012).

Due to its location on one of the world’s great crossroads, the country has experienced rule under many of the great empires. Under Arab and Persian rule, Azerbaijani Turkish was written in the Arabic alphabet. After the first oil boom in the late 1800s and experience with Tsarist Russian rule, a local national movement turned its focus to Europe and adopted a Latin-based script. This alphabet was used during the early years of the Soviet period, but was replaced by Cyrillic in 1924. After independence in 1991, Azerbaijan’s government replaced Russian with Azerbaijani as the national language and, in 2000, began requiring all official documents to use Azerbaijani Latin.

Azerbaijan was the first Muslim nation to integrate aspects of Western society with Islamic life. The population of this secular nation includes a mix of Shiite and Sunni communities, as well as representatives of other creeds. Since most major cities are predominantly Shiite, there is a tendency to describe Azerbaijan as a Shiite nation.

Azerbaijan’s population is predominantly young, and more than half live in urban areas. Officially, the size of the capital city of Baku has doubled since the end of the Soviet period, but it may be home to more than half of the population. Other urban centers and much of the rural areas have seen massive emigration, including temporary migration to Baku, Russia, and Turkey in pursuit of work opportunities, leaving behind a fraction of their official population.

The republic also has a sizable population of refugees and internally displaced persons from the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as well as from other conflicts in the broader region, such as Chechnya. Although special camps and settlements were created, an unknown number of IDPs have sought residence and occupation in Baku and other urban areas. This influx has been joined by a number of provincial residents seeking employment to support their families. Temporary economic migrants to neighboring countries also comprise another portion of the population.

Local resources and infrastructure are still strained by these significant population changes, although these numbers are not officially recorded.

While the republic faces many difficulties in the transition away from the Soviet Union, its petroleum reserves have helped to fuel an economic recovery that has helped reduce the high levels of unemployment and poverty reported by the World Bank in 1997. Living conditions dropped in the mid-1990s and recent inflation has increased the cost of the daily breadbasket for the common family. During the global economic crisis of the late 2000s, Azerbaijan continued to post strong economic growth. A growing gap between the upper and lower economic classes seems apparent, given the large salaries and conspicuous consumption of high-price items by a relatively small segment of the population.

Teaching remains to be a prestigious occupation, despite low wages and a short work week. Attempts have been made to raise salaries, but these efforts have not removed efforts by teachers and administrators to augment their income through tutoring and bribes. Teaching continues to be one of the favored career fields for young girls as it allowed them to only work part of the week and devote the rest to household management and child-rearing.

Family and close friends provide the primary social safety net for most persons. Schools play an important role in helping young people to meet new people outside of their direct family and to form relationships. Budgetary restraints though limit the school's ability to provide activities or services outside of basic instruction. Accordingly, schools currently play a restrained, albeit potentially influential role in the community and the reform process.

5.2 Fundamentals, Organization, and Governance of the Education System

The State Statistical Committee reported that 6,400 educational institutions existed in Azerbaijan for the 2011/2012 school year, a decrease of nearly 600 from 5 years earlier. These schools, colleges, and other institutions serve approximately 1.64 million students. Free, public education lasts for 11 years, but a certificate of general education is awarded at the conclusion of 9 years. Most schools serve small communities surrounding them, but urban centers have magnet and other specialized schools that attract students from around the district. Most pupils complete general education, but fewer numbers go on to secondary school, vocational training, or higher education. Education remains highly valued by the populations, but reforms are still necessary to ensure that graduates gain appropriate skills and can find employment as adults.

5.2.1 Objectives

With its solid, inherited base, which allowed high literacy, established structures, and open, accessible education, Azerbaijan's reform efforts have primarily been

directed at supporting national goals of democracy promotion and economic liberalization. The World Bank-supported ESDP ends in 2014. It is designed to address two underlying needs – to educate Azerbaijani youth about their own history, culture, and traditions and to allow education to match ongoing social, economic, and political reforms. Priorities include establishing new standards, providing the capacity to meet these standards, to promote desired ethics and values among youth, and to assist them to meet the demands of a developing labor market.

5.2.2 Legislative Framework

According to the Constitution, all citizens of Azerbaijan have the right to education. The state guarantees the right for free general and secondary education, executes control over the education system, guarantees continuation of education for especially gifted youth at government expense, and establishes minimum standards. The Constitution also specifies that political parties, sociopolitical societies, and religious organizations may not be involved in education and are not allowed to establish parallel education structures. Also, citizens have the right to use their mother tongue and choose their language of education.

To provide more specific rules and regulations, an Education Law was also adopted in 1992. It focused on the decentralization of management, provisions for private education, and the need to change curriculum to reflect national and cultural themes. The law was also meant to set norms and standards for facilities, equipment, and staffing, but implementation was difficult, particularly in relation to meeting norms set for workload, class size, and salaries (Kazimzade 2004).

To address these issues, a new law was passed in 1995 to set more appropriate goals. The new law also changed compulsory education from 9 to 11 years. A ministerial decree was also issued to clarify duties and responsibilities to realize goals and guarantees set by this law.

A presidential decree in 1998 created a state reform commission that resulted 2 years later in another decree on how to improve the education system. This second decree laid the foundation for the Education Sector Reform Program in 2001. This program, with support from the World Bank, was envisioned in three stages – preparatory, objective setting, and implementation. The program was reviewed in 2004 and focused on achievements and information regarding pilot projects. The ESRP remains the republic's primary policy document for guiding reform (Kazimzade 2004).

National level initiatives from international assistance along with local level initiatives from nongovernmental organizations (NGO) have helped explore and practice. Issues include the formation of parent-teacher associations, the integration of handicapped students, textbook development, and teacher training.

A long-anticipated, revamped Education Law was passed in 2009. It is aimed at integrating lessons learned from earlier reform efforts and at strengthening the educational base of the future generation. It also includes language in support of Azerbaijan's commitment to the Bologna process, clarification on private education, and other issues currently under discussion.

Azerbaijan's commitment to the Bologna process has helped to restructure universities, develop specialized programs, introduce new fields of study, expand vocational education, and encourage higher level scholarship. Within universities, departments and programs are introducing credits and the use of course syllabi. Most though remain dependent on direction from the rectorate; accordingly, most programs are fairly regimented.

5.2.3 Governance

Under the Soviet Union, the education sector was managed by three separate government agencies. A central ministry existed to oversee general education and another for higher education. A separate committee had responsibility for vocational education. These agencies carried out their mandates with guidance from Moscow.

After independence, the nascent government experimented with several formations. Eventually a single ministry was formed. The Ministry of Education (MoE) serves as the central governing, managing, and regulating body for most aspects of education. Its mission is guided by the Cabinet of Ministers, set out in legislature, and further defined by presidential decrees. Separate institutions, such as certain universities, maintain a level of autonomy from the Ministry, but must report on their activities.

Despite decentralization, the MoE and its provincial representations continue to play a central role in nearly all other aspects of management. Most schools are monitored by school inspectors and methodologists, who often guide school performance. In higher education, university autonomy is stronger, but most institutional management remains dependent on top-down approaches. A growing number of younger faculty members are becoming more involved in commissions, departmental decision making, but not in any joint fashion. Public and private institutions are subject to review by the Ministry of Education by regulations concerning licensure and accreditation. Higher education institutes have gained significantly more autonomy, including financial control.

The Scientific Methodological Centre, the Pedagogical Research Institute, and the Education Problems Institute have been tasked with identifying potential opportunities for streamlining and other improvements. The State Students Admissions Committee exists as a separate entity to oversee the important process of university admission examinations as well as other national exams.

5.2.4 Finance

Azerbaijani schools face two major problems in terms of finance. The first is the amount of funds allocated for education. The second concerns how funds are made available to schools.

Schools are publicly financed, with amounts spent on education increasing annually. Expenditures increased from little more than a quarter of a million dollars

in 2000 to approximately 1.2 billion USD in 2008, a fourfold increase. This upward trend is not large when compared to rates for other government expenditures. In fact, education's share of the national budget has decreased. In 2003, education financing was 19.7 % of the national budget, but only 11.5 % in 2008 (MoE 2008). In 2012, this percentage continued to decrease, but the actual funds available for education increased by more than 10 times due to the growth of GDP from 2001 to 2011.

The process of financing is not directly under the Ministry of Education (MoE). During early independence, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) was granted control over most financing, particularly funds delivered to local schools and personnel, due to its stronger ability to monitor transactions. Under this system, the MoE planned budgets and submitted invoices.

The amount of disbursed funds did not always reach the level specified in budgets. The process was also too slow to meet needs. Also schools used funds when received due to the inability for funds to roll over at the end of a year. For these reasons and more, the MoE sought to increase its control over the national budget allocated for education. For example, the MoE's share of fund management was reported as 33.6 % in 2008, up from 11 % in 2003 (MoE 2008).

The majority of funds for education are still managed by the Ministry of Finance and often disbursed through local authorities and executive committees. Eighty percent of the funds from the state budget are allocated for salaries and pensions. Salaries are paid through digital transfers to local automated teller machines. The purchase of new inventories and equipment comprises 11 %, a fourfold increase from the 2008 level. An unaccounted portion is left to cover utility costs, emergency repairs, and other operating expenses, some of which may be covered locally by informal parental payments (Expert 2005). Capital investments have also increased (MoE 2008).

Although some improvements have been made, schools and universities still do not have enough funds. Their administrators also do not have sufficient authority nor training to make good use of these funds should they become available (Lepisto and Kazimzade 2008). The experience of public universities in this regard should be reviewed as public institutions are now able to charge tuition to students who did not receive high marks on entrance examinations. Public general and secondary education is officially free of charge.

5.2.5 Public and Private Sectors

Azerbaijan has only 34 private schools above the preschool level where there are an additional 37 relatively new private preschools. The majority of private educational facilities are higher education institutions and are located in the capital, although a few new schools have appeared, such as in Ganja and Shemkir. Together they service about 27,500 pupils. This figure increases to 39,600 if preschool institutions are included. The relative low number of private institutions is partially explained by a lack of demand and ability for parents to pay tuition. It is also associated with a continuing difficulty to obtain and maintain a license and accreditation. Despite

their small portion of the education market, they remain influential for education reforms since their pupils are often from established or aspiring families and the faculties are often more able to pursue innovative curriculum design and course instruction.

5.2.6 Quality and Support

The public tends to consider university matriculation and test performance as a method for measuring performance of an individual school. A state-mandated examination based on the score from a battery of five exams, which is organized into four specialty categories on the one hand and student preference for particular faculties on the other hand, places pupils at both public and private specific institutions. The score also determines whether an applicant becomes a fee-paying or nonpaying student. Accordingly, this exam is a vital turning point for the aspiring youth.

Schools with high scorers and large numbers of matriculants are able to attract pupils from other schools and to develop good reputations. This perspective persists despite the growing phenomenon of private tutoring which also prepares students for the same purpose. Tutoring usually happens concurrently or sometimes instead of attending lessons at school. A pupil's teacher may also be their privately paid tutor (Silova and Kazimzade 2003).

5.3 Overview of the Structure of the Education System

Azerbaijan's education system serves children from the age of two and upwards. While restructuring has affected capacity, the structure of the system includes all internationally recognized levels.

5.3.1 Elementary (ISCED 0)

The general facilities called kindergartens in Azerbaijan serve primarily as nursery schools for children from two up to school age. Only larger facilities allow younger children and in this case keep sections divided into two age groupings. MoE reports 1,666 preschool institutions in the country, 37 of which are private and a relatively new development. In total, they serve over 113,500 children.

Parents can drop their children off at different times of the day, and they are charged for these services. Most of these facilities tend to be open during work hours. Very few kindergartens provide services for handicapped children. According to UNESCO, special facilities also exist for ethnic minorities (2005).

Preschool facilities have faced a decline during independence. In 2000, rumors circulated that they would be closed or completely privatized. In 2008, Azerbaijan's 1,761 preschool establishments provided services to 508,000 children, about 80 %

of the number operating at the end of the Soviet period. Only one of these was a private institution. Since that time, the number of total institutions has dropped by 100, but the number of private preschools has drastically increased. The number of students in attendance also dropped by nearly 11,000. This change seems to indicate increasing privatization of this market.

5.3.2 Primary (ISCED 1)

In 2012, Azerbaijan had over 4,500 general schools with about 1.3 million pupils and approximately 150,000 teachers across Years 1 through 11. Most general schools offer classes for pupils in Year 1 through 9. Less than 400 of these schools offer only primary education. Eighteen private schools offering primary and secondary education are part of this number. Primary, middle, and secondary school pupils often attend classes in the same school building. To accommodate their numbers, pupils attend in shifts. Less than 30 % of all public schools offer two or three shifts, which are attended by less than 20 % of all pupils (SSC 2012).

Primary education includes Years 1 through 4, although some schools also feature a Year '0' or preparatory level, which is distinct from kindergarten. Children must be aged six at the beginning of the school year to enter. Enrollment has remained high, in part due to international efforts and attention. UNESCO reports high efficiency and high continuation rates (2005). Pupils in Years 1–4 totaled 489,099, with 1,537 in private schools (SSC 2012).

5.3.3 Lower Secondary (ISCED 2A)

Middle school lasts for 5 years from Years 5 to 9. In 2011–2012, pupils in Years 5 through 9 totaled a little more than 604,000, with approximately 3,668 more pupils at private schools. At the end of this cycle, pupils complete one of two state exams. Pupils wishing to continue on an academic track take one of these exams, while others wishing to complete their education or go on to vocational tracks take another one. While the transition from primary education to secondary school does see some loss in attendance, it is after the completion of this level that nearly half of all students choose not to continue on the academic track. Successful completion is marked by the award of a school leaving certificate.

5.3.4 Special Schools for Handicapped Pupils

Azerbaijan has 19 specialized schools, some of which are boarding schools. Nine schools are for the mentally challenged; two each for the blind, the deaf and dumb, and those with speech deficiencies; and one for those stricken with poliomyelitis or cerebral palsy. Some boarding schools serve orphans, including economic ones. These schools serve about 6,100 pupils (SSC 2012).

Mainstreaming handicapped pupils has only recently begun in Azerbaijan, typically supported with international assistances and support centers. About 575 special needs students attend classes in general education schools. An unknown number of handicapped children never enter school. Their parents do not receive appropriate support or guidance for rearing and training these children.

5.3.5 Upper Secondary (ISCED 3)

After the completion of general education, pupils may follow a professional or vocational track for the next 2 years. Most of those on the academic track remain in the building where they had general education for Years 10–11. In some of urban schools, class groups are divided into academic orientation and are assigned teachers with similar interests and strengths. Azerbaijan's general education schools serve 604,000 pupils. Another 54,456 pupils attend one of the republic's 59 specialized schools. One of these schools is private and has 1,220 pupils. An additional 2,500 pupils study at one of the country's seven correspondence or night schools (SSC 2012).

Many secondary school pupils are oriented not on class work and lessons. Instead they focus on preparation for the university entrance exam battery in one of four areas. As a result, a high number of pupils may or may not attend classes, preferring to study alone or with the aid of private tutors. Regulations on private schools have made it difficult for private secondary schools to open. Accredited universities tend to be able to open special preparation schools for secondary pupils. A state exam for completion of secondary education is being prepared and will be administered by the MoE.

5.3.6 Postsecondary (Non-tertiary) (ISCED 4)

Secondary school graduates have the right to attend vocational and professional schools. Some of these technical schools also offer a four- instead of 2-year program for more specialized training. Those who attend vocational school attend classes in a new building with a new set of children. Most provincial centers have a few technical schools, or technicums, that offer these 2-year programs in education, medicine, music, technical trades, or general training. While many can attend a local school, particularly young women attend a local technicum, others may go seek more specialized technical schools, including military, agricultural, and arts schools. Azerbaijan has a total of 107 vocational institutions – 47 professional schools and 60 technicums – with a combined total of 28,993 students. None of these schools are private. Azerbaijan has 375 additional institutions that offer courses in sports, creative arts, and other fields to nearly 226,500 children and young people (SSC 2012).

5.3.7 Tertiary (ISCED 5A, 5B, 6)

Azerbaijan has 51 institutes of higher education accommodating 143,000 students. About 19,600 of these attended one of the 15 private institutions in the country. The public institutions include academies, universities, institutes, colleges, and a seminary. All can offer bachelor programs and many offer a master's program (SSC 2012).

In 2011–2012, Azerbaijan had 31,200 students in bachelor programs, with 11 % in correspondence courses and 13.5 % at private institutions. A total of 4,225 were studying in master's programs, with more than one fourth in correspondence programs and about 10 % at private institutions. The private institutions had a combined student population of 14,000. In 2012, about 2,700 entered private bachelor programs and 100 entered master's programs at these institutions (SSC 2012).

The World Bank reports that Azerbaijan has very low enrollment at university – between 19 % and 20 % of the potential population (2011). The State Students Admission Commission however reports a slightly higher trend. However, its figures show that less than 60 % of all secondary school graduates apply for university and less than half are actually accepted. It is important to note that this group is only a portion of all youth of relevant age, since an unreported number of students do not move from general to secondary education.

5.3.8 Adult and Further Education and Training

The law of Azerbaijan provides lifelong learning, typically for vocational training. Several ministries maintain institutions for professional development, particularly for in-service training. Civil society organizations and private companies now offer courses in new areas of specialization, including language learning, computing, accounting, and project management.

5.4 Developments in the Current School System

Over its first two decades of independence, Azerbaijan has built on a strong foundation for further development based on its early reform programs. Subsequent reform packages and relevant legislation have been created to cover nearly all aspect of reform. Some efforts, such as the independent textbook commission and the creation of a school-finishing examination, have been met with resistance. However, implementers have typically used these opportunities to adjust the programs to ensure sound enactment. Other efforts, such as the financing scheme for merit-based students at universities, have supported larger goals of institution autonomy.

5.4.1 Transition

School wastage persists in Azerbaijan. Retention is problematic after middle school, partially due to the informal costs of further education. It also arises from the population's mistrust of the ability of schools to prepare their children for the labor market (Williams 2000). This problem also affects other issues, not only in terms of choice of institution or discipline but also in matters relating to corruption (Silova and Kazimzade 2006; Lepisto and Kazimzade 2008).

5.4.2 Quality Management

Quality management in Azerbaijan is still partially dependent on the republic's Soviet tradition of quotas and statistical reporting. Quality is often measured by reported amounts of students instead of being based on merit-based evaluation. With Azerbaijan's participation in Education for All, TIMSS, and PISA, quality management is receiving more focus in schools. It is anticipated that results from commitments pertaining to the Bologna Process will result in quality improvements across higher education.

While these improvements are underway, schools tend to be monitored and controlled by inspectors and methodologists from provincial education offices, local representations of the Ministry of Education. However, professional associations, NGOs, and even Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) have begun to influence school performance as have media and other public reviews.

5.4.3 Special Problems

The MoE has focused efforts on physical infrastructure, primary school attendance, curriculum reform, and teacher training. Problems such as violence are limited, but other issues such as corruption, nonattendance, and other substantive aspects of education still require attention.

5.4.4 Integration

Azerbaijan makes allowances for ethnic minorities, foreign-born pupils, and others. Public schools with Russian as a primary language of instruction had been popular for second or third generation immigrant students and certain ethnic groups. Special schools for temporary residents were established during the Soviet period to allow them to study in Russian as a group. With the language shift from Russian to Azerbaijani in the 1990s, the popularity of Russian language schools dropped as most parents attempted to ensure that their child would possess proficiency in Azerbaijani. However, the Russian schools are still popular with those who intend

to travel to Russia for trade or study. Some schools also offer language training and instruction in target languages, such as Georgians living in the north.

Most foreign-born pupils tend to attend private schools, particularly at the few institutions that offer instruction in English. Where some private primary and secondary schools are attended by the children of expatriates, universities have seen a growing number of students from Turkey, Iran, India, and nations in Africa. Some of these institutions have a history of hosting exchange students, such as the State Oil Academy, but many more are gaining the experience needed to serve this community better. Other institutions have also established strong relations with foreign universities and have used their advice to improve their curriculum, management, and structure. For these foreign-born students, the government provides preparatory instruction so that they may attend public schools.

Children of expatriate workers, usually from the petroleum or diplomacy sectors, typically attend private schools, some of which are foreign and not locally licensed. Accordingly, this grouping is not part of integration efforts.

5.5 New Developments

Since 1991, Azerbaijan has struggled to establish a strong education system, and the nation should be proud of its many advances. Its achievements have been fuelled by a strong oil-based economy and a desire to meet global standards. In the last decade, the republic has taken a number of important steps, including the passage of a new Education Law of 2009 that will bring its higher education system in line with that found in Europe. Its primary and secondary levels are also going under a number of extreme changes, encouraged by the World Bank, the UN, and other international agencies.

Perhaps the strongest sign of an educational recovery is the assignation of a new Minister of Education in 2012. A member of the upcoming generation, the new minister is western-educated and has already demonstrated his acumen in economic development. The changes he will oversee hold strong promise as does the state's shift away from Soviet-era leadership. Similarly, Azerbaijan is enacting a number of reforms that will help education managers and faculty at all levels gain the skills and experience needed to perform the work envisioned by the reforms.

However, this is not to say that Azerbaijan's reform is complete, but merely that more pieces are finally being set in place. The largest challenge that confronts the country is its need to educate its new generation (and to train older age cohorts) so that they may find local employment. Without a stronger connection between education and the skills needs of the marketplace, the government of Azerbaijan will be hard-pressed to deliver reform, to meet desired standards, or to show that the country has reached a maturity level similar to upper middle income countries.

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