



ROYAL THAI EMBASSY
IN ASTANA

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, AND TAJIKISTAN

• Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's education system has undergone significant reform in recent years. Up until 2020, the country followed an 11-year education system, but it transitioned to a 12-year system to align with global standards. This shift aimed to modernize education and better prepare students for the global job market. The additional year of schooling allows students to explore their interests more deeply and specialize in subjects that align with national economic priorities, such as engineering, technology, and the sciences.

Students in Kazakhstan begin their education in primary school (grades 1-4) and then move to middle school (grades 5-9). Upon completion of middle school, students have the option to either attend high school (grades 10-12) or pursue vocational training. The vocational pathway typically lasts 2-3 years and is designed for students who wish to acquire technical skills or enter the workforce earlier.



The university entrance exam in Kazakhstan, known as the Unified National Testing (UNT), plays a critical role in university admissions. The exam covers core subjects like Kazakh Language, Kazakh History, and Math, along with two additional subjects based on the student's chosen field of study. For the 2023-2024 academic year, more than 112,000 scholarships were allocated to support over 186,000 high school graduates, with a strategic focus on technical specialties such as engineering, IT, and natural sciences. This emphasis reflects Kazakhstan's broader goal of aligning its education system with the needs of its industrial and technological sectors, thereby fostering economic growth.

Kazakhstan's education system has been the focus of substantial reform and investment in recent years. In addition to transitioning to a 12-year system, the country has increased its budget allocations for education. The government currently spends about 4% of its GDP on education, with plans to raise this figure to 7% by 2025. This push reflects a broader commitment to enhancing both education and scientific research. A significant portion of the increased funding is being directed toward promoting scientific advancement at universities, with more grants available for scholars engaged in research projects. These efforts aim to foster innovation and ensure that academic research aligns with national economic and technological priorities.

Bolashak Scholarship Program

Kazakhstan's Bolashak Scholarship Program, established in 1994, plays a significant role in shaping higher education in the country. The program allows students to study at top universities around the world, with all expenses covered by the government. However, Bolashak recipients are required to return to Kazakhstan upon graduation and work in their respective fields for a minimum of five years. This ensures that the country benefits from the skills and expertise these students acquire abroad, particularly in high-demand areas such as science, technology, engineering, and management. As of 2023, more than 15,000 students have participated in the Bolashak program, attending prestigious institutions such as Harvard, Oxford, and MIT.



• Kyrgyzstan

The Kyrgyz Republic follows an 11-year education system, with compulsory education covering primary school (grades 1-4) and middle school (grades 5-9). After completing middle school, students have the option to continue their education in high school (grades 10-11) or pursue vocational training. Like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan offers a vocational pathway that starts after grade 9, typically lasting 2-3 years. This route is designed for students who prefer to develop technical skills and enter the workforce sooner.

Kyrgyzstan has seen significant growth in vocational education in recent years. For example, in 2017, the number of students enrolled in secondary professional education increased by 2.2 times over a 10-year period, from 40,000 to nearly 90,000 students. This reflects a growing recognition of the importance of vocational training in meeting the country's labor market needs.



In recent years, the Kyrgyzstan has begun moving away from the Soviet education standards. So the country has recently shifted to new textbooks developed under the Cambridge system, a key part of a comprehensive reform of the national education system.

One of the major reforms under consideration is the introduction of a 12-year education system, similar to Kazakhstan's. This change would not only modernize the curriculum but also provide an opportunity to rewrite educational programs entirely and retrain teachers in line with new international standards. This transition to a 12-year system is seen as a crucial step in aligning the country's educational system with Western models, further enhancing the quality of education in Kyrgyzstan.

The key supporter of Kyrgyzstan's education reform, specifically the transition to a 12-year education system, has been the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The ADB has played a crucial role in financing this transformation, contributing \$40 million to help restructure the country's education system. This funding supports the development of new curricula, the overhaul of textbooks, and the retraining of teachers to align with international standards.

University admissions in Kyrgyzstan are determined by the Nationwide Testing (ORT), which is similar to Kazakhstan's UNT. The ORT exam plays a central role in determining students' eligibility for state-funded spots in universities. However, competition for these scholarships is fierce, as the number of available state-funded scholarships is limited. For the 2023-2024 academic year, only 10,000 scholarships were available for 76,244 high school graduates, making university access highly competitive. While top-performing students may qualify for these scholarships, many others must pay for their education, especially at private universities.

• **Tajikistan**

In Tajikistan, education has been declared one of the priority areas of state policy due to the country's growing need for qualified personnel to support its economic development. As the economy expands, there is an increasing demand for skilled workers across various sectors. Education is seen as playing a crucial role in producing a qualified workforce and building the foundation for a stable and prosperous society.

Government spending on education has been steadily increasing, reflecting this priority. In 2022, Tajikistan allocated 5.45% of its GDP to education, which constitutes 20% of total government expenditures. These rising expenditures underscore the government's commitment to improving educational access, infrastructure, and quality across all levels of schooling. Despite economic challenges, the country is focusing on enhancing its education system to meet the demands of a rapidly developing economy and to foster long-term social stability.

In Tajikistan, the education system also follows an 11-year structure, divided into primary school, middle school, and high school. However, unlike in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan requires students to complete high school before they can pursue vocational training or apply to universities. This means that students who wish to enter career-focused training must wait until they complete grade 11, effectively delaying their entry into the workforce or technical fields.

University admission in Tajikistan is based on the Centralized Entrance Exam (UNT), which was introduced in 2014. This exam plays a key role in determining whether students qualify for government scholarships to cover their tuition fees. However, like in Kyrgyzstan, the number of scholarships is limited, and many students are required to pay for their education.

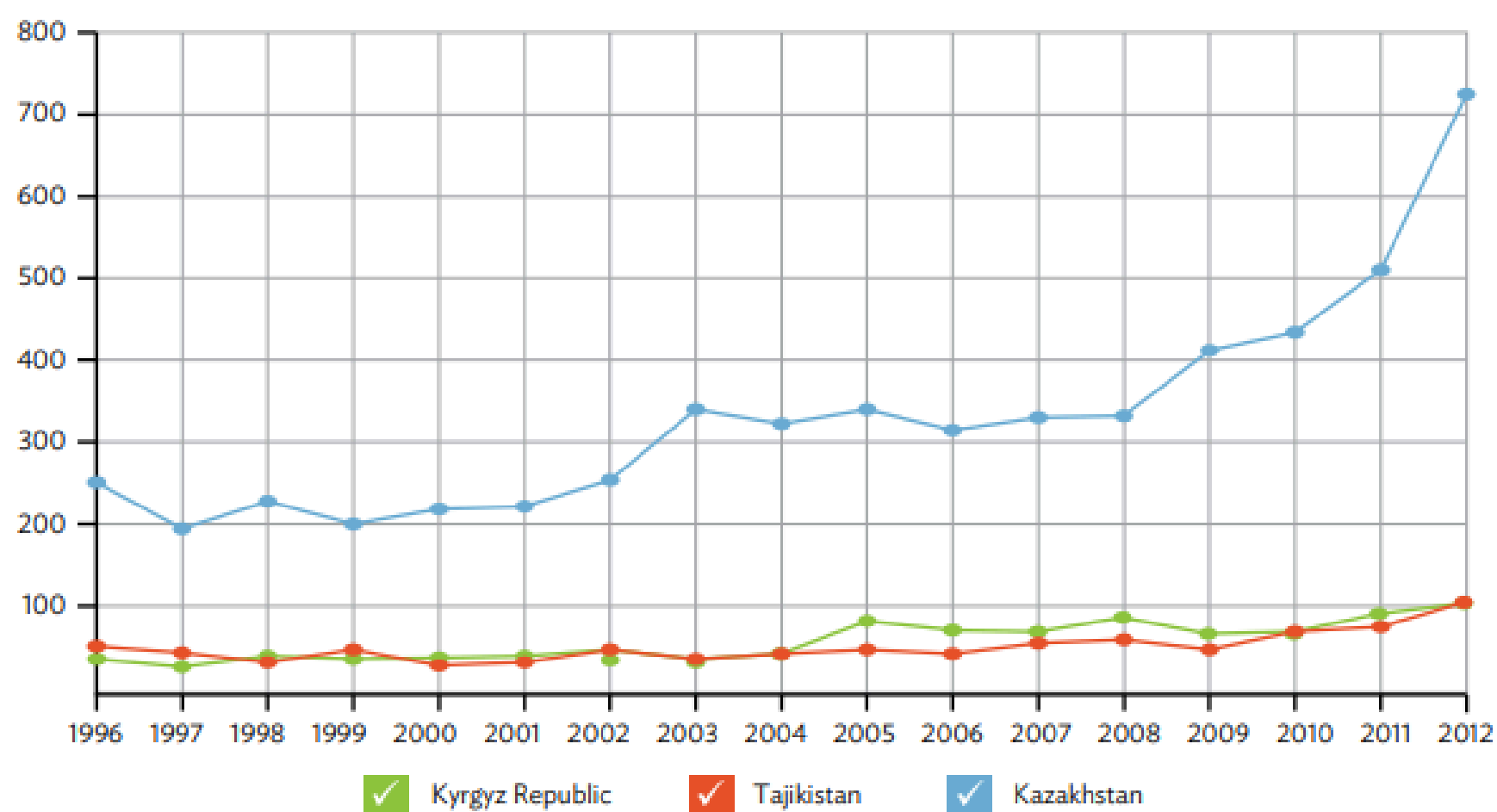
It worth mentioning that in line with the country's economic needs, the state scholarships for technical specialties, particularly in fields like energetics and irrigation, have been increasing. These areas are critical to Tajikistan's development, and the government is actively encouraging students to pursue studies in these sectors to ensure a steady supply of skilled professionals capable of supporting the nation's infrastructure and industrial growth.



The ranking of the Universities

According to the QS World University Rankings 2022, Kazakhstan has become the leading higher education system in Central Asia, with two universities in the top 100 universities in Asia. Kazakhstan is also the best represented country among other Central Asian countries, with 32 universities in the ranking, four times more than its nearest sub-regional competitor, Uzbekistan, which has eight universities. It is worth noting that Kyrgyzstan has two universities and Tajikistan one university in this list.

Figure 6: Comparison of Research Output from the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan Using the SCOPUS Database



Source: SCImago Journal and Country Rank. <http://www.scimagojr.com/>

hello@realygreatsite.com

A similar conclusion can be made from the graph above which demonstrates that the research papers of Kazakhstan scholars are published 7 times more than Kyrgyz and Tajik scholars. Also, the recent sharp increase of Kazakhstan indicators can be correlated with the increase of the state investments to develop the science in the country.