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**SUMMARY AND UPDATE ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND  
POLICIES IN CENTRAL ASIA - KAZAKHSTAN**

Review Report



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context and objectives of the study

The Central Asia Education Platform Phase 2 (CAEP 2) project is about to close in mid-March 2019. In the second project phase (2015–2019), the project has commissioned, produced and disseminated a series of stock-taking and review reports, discussion and background papers on the priority themes identified both during the Riga and Astana Ministerial Meetings (including National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), Mobility, Employability, Gender Equality).

In order to complete project activities under component 3 “Studies” and to enhance the visibility and communication of project results under component 2 “Communication and Mapping”, the project will elaborate a **final review report with information briefs covering all thematic priorities underlying the CAEP project**. The report shall also support the work of EU Commission services in developing the outline for the planned CAEP phase 3 by providing up-to-date information on CAEP 2 priority themes.

The **report and the information briefs shall cover both Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET), provide a final update on the current developments in the CA countries** (e.g. on NQF, where the report dates back to 2016), and a concise and brief overview on thematic areas and recent policy developments not covered by review reports, but relevant to the project (e.g. on Quality Assurance and Accreditation, or more specifically, the introduction of autonomy to HEI in Kazakhstan, internationalisation of education in Uzbekistan etc.).

Furthermore, the information briefs will reflect the presentations held during the respective CAEP events (national meetings, regional conferences, peer learning and working group meetings, webinars) and **sum up the information contained in various subsections of the CAEP website in an updated, user-friendly way, providing a first-hand source of information about the current and on-going reform activities in the CA countries**.

In the second step, the **project will disseminate these information briefs** through the website, the conclusive CAEP Newsletter and direct mailing of the CAEP and wider education community.

This review report/ summary and information briefs will be produced by EU based experts in close cooperation with CA experts, facilitating access to the more detailed information on the respective topics on the CAEP studies to be found in the CAEP website.

The activity aims at providing a **review and update of the current education policies in the CA countries with a clear focus on the thematic priorities identified both in the Riga and Astana Ministerial Meetings in 2015/2017** respectively, in order to summarise and share the findings from the CAEP 2 with education practitioners and experts both in the EU and CA countries for further discussion among policy makers, education practitioners and related stakeholders in HE and VET.

As a result, the review report will contribute to the following outcomes:

- experience, lessons learned, best/ good practices shared, mutual understanding/ learning enhanced;
- evidence-based policy approach improved;
- results of the stock-taking exercise within Central Asia disseminated.

## 2 Kazakhstan

### 2.1 Country brief

**Population (2017):** 18,037,646<sup>1</sup>

The Republic of Kazakhstan is situated in the north of Central Asia and with an area of 2,724,902 square kilometres it is the world's largest landlocked country, and the ninth largest in the world. Strategically, it links the large and fast-growing markets of China and South Asia and those of Russia and Western Europe by road, rail, and a port on the Caspian Sea. The country's 131 ethnicities include Kazakhs, Russians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Germans, Tatars, and Uyghurs. The Kazakh language is the state language, and Russian has equal official status for all levels of administrative and institutional purposes. Kazakhstan has transitioned from lower-middle income to upper-middle income status in less than two decades. The country moved to the upper-middle income group in 2006. Since 2002, GDP per capita has risen sixfold and poverty incidence has fallen sharply, showing a significant progress in country performance in the World Bank's indicator of shared prosperity.<sup>2</sup>

#### Education

Education is a high priority for Kazakhstan and in 2011, Kazakhstan was ranked first on UNESCO's "Education for All Development Index" by achieving near-universal levels of primary education, adult literacy and gender equality.<sup>3</sup> In 2017, Kazakhstan had an estimated GDP per capita of USD 8,792.<sup>4</sup> As Kazakhstan's overall economy has expanded in recent years, public expenditure in education has gradually increased to 3.7% of GDP in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

Kazakhstan was the first country in Central Asia to sign and ratify the Lisbon Convention (1999) and in 2010 joined the Bologna Process. Higher education in Kazakhstan is provided by 131 higher education institutions.<sup>6</sup> Most higher education institutions now offer the 3-cycle higher education system although some 5 or 6-year Specialist Diplomas are still available, especially in the field of medicine.

At the beginning of the 2018/2019 academic year, 824 VET institutions were functioning in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 477 of which are state and 347 are private. The total number of students is 489,8 thousand. Compared with the 2017/2018 academic year, the number of students increased by 1.0%<sup>7</sup>. Although the share of VET in secondary education is only approximately 7%, VET is seen as an important driver for economic developments, and evidence-based policies and strategies are well integrated.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/country/kazakhstan>

<sup>2</sup> [www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/overview)

<sup>3</sup> Overview of the Higher Education System: Kazakhstan, 2017

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/overview#1>

<sup>5</sup> Education Policy Outlook: Kazakhstan, 2018

<sup>6</sup> Effective Financing of Education Systems and Education Institutions in HE and VET in the EU and Central Asia, 2019

<sup>7</sup> Committee on Statistics, Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan

### Useful links

Ministry of Education and Science: <http://edu.gov.kz/kz>

National Erasmus+ Office: <http://www.erasmusplus.kz/>

UN Country Profile: <http://data.un.org/en/iso/kz.html>

## 2.2 Overview of the current state of priorities

### 2.2.1 Qualification frameworks and standards

Since Kazakhstan became an independent state in 1991, it has undergone several changes and particularly the education system is currently undergoing a huge conversion phase. It is based on the *State Programme for Development of Education (SPDE) of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020* which defines Kazakhstan as an educated country and a highly skilled workforce. The higher education system as well as the vocational education and training system are governed by the law *On Education*.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Kazakhstan was developed and legally established in 2012 as a part of the National Qualifications System (NQS). This system was designed to bring together all qualifications issued by various different organisations on the learning outcomes basis (qualifications are easy to compare by employers, educational institutions and individuals if they are classified in a common system). The NQF was also developed with the intention to be compatible with the European Qualifications Framework and as a tool for labour market relevance and educational quality.

The National Qualifications System consists of the following elements:

- 1. National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** – in Kazakhstan, this has been developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the Ministry of Education and Science (MES).
- 2. Sectoral Qualifications Framework (SQF)** – it classifies the industry's requirements for each qualification depending on the complexity of the work and the skills used. In Kazakhstan, this has been developed by the Sectoral Council for a specific industry.
- 3. Occupational Standards (OS)** – this is a set of common requirements for the content of professional work to update the qualifications that meet the current needs of the labour market. In Kazakhstan, the development of occupational standards is carried out by the authorised state bodies of relevant fields of activity, together with the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan, employers' associations and industry associations of employees.
- 4. Evaluation of professional skills and awarding qualifications** – the evaluation system of professional training and demonstration of compliance with professional development requires independent certification centres, organised by the trade associations of employers.

The National Qualifications Framework consists of 8 levels of qualifications and it corresponds both to the education levels defined by the law *On Education* as well as to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The lower levels (1-2-3) of the NQF define the lower secondary and upper secondary education or vocational skills for people who can work effectively under supervision; the central levels (4-5) typically define the expected requirements for professionals who can act

independently, while the highest levels (6-7-8) define the capacity to analyse and innovate processes, create new knowledge and may include the ability to lead and manage people and processes. In the NQF, these are typically reserved for holders of higher education degrees.

In Kazakhstan, the roles in developing and maintaining qualifications are clearly defined between educational organisations, stakeholders, business associations and some public bodies. The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) is the main authority for higher education and TVET. It develops state compulsory educational standards for qualifications and professions (TVET) and for specialty (HE). The ministry also ensures that training of specialists meets the requirements of the labour market, expanding academic and managerial autonomy of universities and development and improvement of teacher training and other aspects. It is important to follow the global trends, mainly the convergence of the education system to the needs of the labour market.

The adoption of NQF in educational institutions has been preceded by several steps. In 2007, a three-level model of higher education (bachelor, master, postgraduate) was created and universities' rights to determine the content of educational programmes was also expanded. Between 2008 and 2010, ETF prepared guidelines and organised several workshops that outlined the principles for the process, the methodology and the importance to link the standards both with the labour market needs and qualifications. In 2011, Kazakhstan joined the European Higher Education Area and the full implementation of compulsory as well as recommended parameters of the Bologna Process are also outlined in the *State Programme for Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan*. In 2012, amendments to the law *On Education* were adopted and Complex Testing of Entrants (CTE) was introduced, 'professional lyceums' became 'vocational colleges' and their 'pupils' became 'students'. Also, new State Compulsory Educational Standards (SCES) for postgraduate, higher education and TVET were created with institutions being able to develop the curriculum. Since 2012, all TVET graduates must be certified. However, there is no mechanism to assign qualifications to current workers or for informal learning. In 2013, Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development (MHSD) developed the occupational standards implementation methodology which was later revised. Business or employers' associations started to design occupational standards for their economic sectors. In 2016, a key development concerning governance was supported by legislative changes in the education law and labour code and the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs became formally responsible for occupational standards. While previously line ministries had been in control of the sectoral frameworks, there is now a better coordination and a closer link to the private sector.

However, despite major efforts to align and update the NQF legislation process and occupational standards, there are several challenges, for example:

- the NQF descriptors need to be reviewed;
- there is a risk of fragmentation with a very high number of sector qualifications frameworks;
- links between occupational standards and educational standards and programmes and the assessment of graduates need to be strengthened;
- the NQS is seen as the sum of the NQF, SQFs, occupational standards and independent assessment centres; however, this view is not entirely correct.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e\\_4ccf\\_8d94\\_a3256a255147/page/Kazakhstan%20-%20NQF%20Inventory](https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Kazakhstan%20-%20NQF%20Inventory)

## 2.2.2 Quality assurance and accreditation

In 2015, Kazakhstan introduced independent accreditation of education providers and programmes for higher education and vocational education and training. This approach is expected over time to replace the existing quality-related processes. In 2017, the state certification of universities stopped being valid and was replaced by institutional and specialised accreditation. In 2018, 93% of civil universities (110) had passed international accreditation.<sup>9</sup> This shift to external quality assurance has also helped internationalise Kazakhstan's education system. Similarly, a road map for the phased accreditation of VET educational institutions for 2016-2020 was developed and it is planned that from January 2020, the state certification in the VET system will be cancelled.<sup>10</sup>

There are 10 quality assurance agencies operating in Kazakhstan that are included in the Register of Accreditation Agencies, approved by the MES RK (four international - ASIIN, FIBAA, ACQUIN, MusiQuE and six national - IAAR, IQAR, KAZSEE, ARQA, ECAQA, IKAC). In 2017, two national QA agencies – IAAR and IQAR – became the members of ENQA and EQAR. With the adoption of new amendments to the law *On Education*, agencies of OECD countries will be able to enter the Register of Accreditation Agencies. According to these amendments, the Rules for the recognition of accreditation bodies, including foreign ones and the formation of a register of recognized accreditation bodies will be revised.

In terms of accreditation, Kazakh credit transfer system measuring the acquired knowledge is compatible with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and it has been used since 2010. The Kazakh credit used to correspond to 45 hours of student workload to study the discipline in the academic period of a semester lasting 15 weeks. According to the renewed law *On Education*, the workload of 1 Kazakh academic credit (30 academic hours) now corresponds to 1 ECTS credit (25-30 academic hours)<sup>11</sup>.

## 2.2.3 Employment and labour market needs

As already stated, the education system in Kazakhstan has undergone multiple reforms over the last decades. With the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework it has started to consider and take into account the learning outcomes as well as the labour market needs. The emphasis on work-based learning with the active participation of employer organisations also means that education and training sub-systems are open to one another and it allows people to move more easily between education and training institutions and sectors.<sup>12</sup>

The NQF covers both higher education and vocational education and training qualifications within an 8-level structure with levels 6-8 covering degrees awarded in HE and levels 2-4 covering qualifications in TVET. Level 5 is reserved for post-secondary education. The newly introduced Applied Bachelor Degree at level 5 is part of TVET but there are identical level descriptors for these qualifications as for academic bachelors awarded by higher education institutions that sit at level 6. The applied bachelor is not a real short cycle qualification as the duration is typically 4 years.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Education Policy Outlook: Kazakhstan, 2018

<sup>10</sup> Development of Kazakhstan's Education System: Presentation, 2018

<sup>11</sup> <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V1800017554#z6>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/national-qualifications-framework-nqf>

<sup>13</sup> [https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e\\_4ccf\\_8d94\\_a3256a255147/page/Kazakhstan%20-%20NQF%20Inventory](https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Kazakhstan%20-%20NQF%20Inventory)

Kazakhstan has made considerable progress with the introduction of the dual approach, as by 2016 about 60% of VET colleges applied the approach fully or at least in key elements. It foresees that up to 60% of all education content will consist of practical training, ideally provided by companies participating in the dual system.<sup>14</sup> This approach was also legally established in the law *On Education* while introducing a position of a 'young specialist' – a student who holds an employment contract with a company. Furthermore, a new education standard was adopted to provide flexibility to providers working under the dual approach. The National Chamber of Entrepreneurs plays a key role in this as it is able to influence enterprises to take part and support partnerships with colleges at the local level. The Chamber is developing training for in-company trainers working with VET students. It also plays an important role in consolidating the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development.

The number of vocational schools providing dual education in 2018 (460 units) increased by 39 compared to 2016 (421 units) with the participation of 3,055 enterprises and with the coverage of 31 thousand students. The success of this approach is also mirrored in the increase of employed graduates from 51% in 2017 to 68% in 2018.<sup>15</sup>

At country level, regional employment centres facilitate youth employment. The programme *Youth practice* is targeted at graduates and helps acquire initial experience in a profession (specialty) for up to six months. The remuneration of participants of the *Youth practice* programme is financed through the state budget (at the amount of 35,676 tenge). Vacancies are posted on the websites of the centres.

Seasonal employment of students is available in the framework of the project *Zhasyl El*, which aims at improving the environment, the creation of woodlands and green spaces across the country, the formation of a protective attitude to natural resources of the native land, and the provision of attractive out-door and leisure activities for the population.

Projects that are implemented aim at training specialists in professions in demand, facilitate their employment and transfer young people from labour surplus areas to labor shortfall regions (*Serpin 2050*, *Mangilik yel zhastary - industriyaga*). The organisation of youth internships (*Satti kadam*) targets a smooth entrance into the labour market for young people; a programme called *With diploma to the village!* supports young specialists in rural areas. With the initiative of the *Chamber of Entrepreneurs*, student business incubators are created to involve young people in entrepreneurial activities<sup>16</sup>.

Since 2014, the State also allocates funds through grants in the framework of the programme *Serpin 2050* for training specialists in HEIs in seven regions. The programme aims to reduce unemployment in the southern regions and to prevent shortage of staff in pedagogical, technical and agricultural fields in the western, eastern and northern regions of the country. In the framework of this programme, 12,462 grants were allocated. In the 2016/2017 academic year, 4,212 grants were allocated in 22 universities and 30 TVET organisations<sup>17</sup>.

Another positive initiative, *The Programme for the Development of Productive Employment and Mass Entrepreneurship (2017-2021)* is accessible to young people under the age of 29, the unemployed and the self-employed. It supports a variety of active labour market measures, including initial vocational education and training and the teaching of basic entrepreneurship and micro-credit programmes.

<sup>14</sup> Central Asia Education Platform Newsletter, June 2 2016

<sup>15</sup> Development of Kazakhstan's Education System: Presentation, 2018

<sup>16</sup> Overview of the Higher Education System in Kazakhstan, 2017

<sup>17</sup> <https://bolashak.gov.kz/ru/novosti/1062-proekt-serpin-2050-uspeshno-realizuetsya.html>

Special support programmes for VET and higher education graduates have also been set up to facilitate a first employment.<sup>18</sup>

Monitoring the employment of graduates in Kazakhstan, based on the submission of certificates of employment, was practiced before 2014, but proved not to be accurate. The MES has developed a personalised mechanism to monitor the employment of graduates by creating the section 'Employment of graduates' on the portal of the Ministry of Health and Social Development through the integration of information systems of the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of National Economy.

Nevertheless, according to the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs *Atameken*, in 2018, 60% of graduates do not work in their specialty, which confirms the urgency of the problem of employment<sup>19</sup>.

## 2.2.4 Innovative teaching methods

Teaching and learning innovation is an important part of national policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and its elements are reflected in key regulatory documents (such as in the law *On Education*). The foundation document driving the education reform in the country is *The State Programme of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016–2019*.

In **higher education**, the main practices being developed are:

1. **Student-centred learning and curriculum update** – this approach allows building individual learning paths and supports the practice-oriented educational programmes. This naturally contributes to closer cooperation between universities and the labour market. A key development in the higher education system is the law on the expansion of university academic and managerial independence signed by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on July 4, 2018. This law enables universities to form 80% of the curriculum independently (however, it needs to be based on professional standards aligned with the NQF and social demand). This is significant progress although there are some challenges that need addressing such as lack of professional standards and insufficient involvement of employers.
2. **Capacity building of the pedagogical skills and language proficiency** – the World Bank is planning to develop new practice-oriented programmes in pedagogical specialties as well as to attract foreign specialists and strengthen the material and technical base of seven pedagogical universities. In 2016, nine Kazakh universities in cooperation with foreign partners developed 20 educational programmes in English and in September 2017, the first admission of applicants was carried out. In addition to this, the education system is also undergoing a transition to trilingual education – Kazakh, Russian and English language.
3. **IT skills and interdisciplinary programmes** – from September 2018, universities started to offer IT-related programmes. Special attention is paid to cyber security expert training and universities across the country are implementing related study programmes. Since 2016, an *Information and Communication Technologies* course in English is compulsory for all students and currently, 84 out of 130 universities prepare IT specialists. However, key challenges remain to be addressed such as lack of sufficient IT skills among teachers as well as the quality of courses provided.
4. **MOOCs and blended-learning** – Kazakh universities started to implement massive open online courses (MOOC) with assessment of the compliance of learning outcomes and student

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/regions-and-countries/countries/kazakhstan>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.zakon.kz/4945546-60-vypusknikov-vuzov-v-kazahstane-ne.html>

competencies. In 2017, the project *Open University of Kazakhstan* was launched offering free access to online courses from leading universities. In addition to this, recognising the results of non-formal learning has been prescribed for the first time by law. However, for this approach to be successful, clear guidelines and methodological support need to be developed and provided.

5. **Entrepreneurial skills** – the recent amendments of the law *On Education* enabled universities to create endowment funds and open start-up companies. The discipline *Basics of Entrepreneurship* is taught in more than 60 universities and there are about 30 universities and business schools across the country. Currently, 31% of Kazakh universities have business incubators and start-up laboratories. The lack of competence of teaching staff in the field of entrepreneurial education is being addressed by several learning opportunities offered to them, for example basics of entrepreneurship training, applied business study and others.
6. **Internalisation of the teaching staff** – since signing the Bologna Declaration in 2010, internalisation of higher education has been supported by the implementation of academic mobility of students as well as the teaching staff. Since 2009, Kazakhstan has been proactively attracting foreign specialists and this contributes to the adaptation of high standards of education in the Kazakh universities.
7. **Access to HE and inclusive education** – expanding access to higher education is achieved through educational grants and through increase in state orders (i.e. free study places) to 10 thousand places. In addition to this, 30% of state grants are allocated to socially vulnerable groups of population. Seven resource centres for inclusive education have been developed and compulsory lectures on inclusive education have been developed. Further work is still required on creating equal conditions and barrier-free access for students with special educational needs.

In **vocational education and training**, the main practices being developed are:

1. **Dual learning** - as already mentioned, Kazakhstan has made significant progress with the introduction of this approach and by 2019, it is planned to introduce dual training in 80.1% of colleges.
2. **Expansion of the accessibility among young people to the labour market** – one of the most successful initiatives is the *Free Vocational Education and Training for All* launched in 2017 by the Head of State. By offering the first vocational training free of charge, this project has contributed to stopping the negative trend in VET student population numbers.
3. **WorldSkills Kazakhstan** - in August 2014, Kazakhstan became the 70th member of international non-profit movement *WorldSkills International* which aims to increase the prestige of working professions and skills development. Its mission is to form the mechanisms of staffing of high-tech industries in technical professions on the basis of international standards, including the mechanisms of professional orientation, training, formation of expert communities and increase productivity.
4. **Inclusive education in VET** – in order to support socially vulnerable categories of population, the quota for admission of disabled people in VET institutions has been increased from 0.5% to 1%.
5. **Content update of the VET educational programmes in partnership with business** – in 2019, approximately 30 educational programmes will be developed and 30 existing standard educational programmes will be updated on the basis of the module-competence approach. The emphasis will be shifted from the learning process to the learning outcomes and to ensure the continuity of all levels of education, a gradual transition to credit-modular technology of education will be carried out.

## 2.2.5 Contribution of education to prevent violent radicalisation of youth

Education is a powerful tool for shaping people's attitudes and opinions and how they react to a diversity. However, it is crucial to ensure accessible education for all in order to provide them with this knowledge, skills and attitudes. Given the current global situation full of violent acts and radicalisation, the role of quality education as well as social inclusion is becoming even more critical. In addition to this, Kazakhstan's youth population is inherently heterogeneous as its members live in different provinces, urban and rural areas, have various levels of education, and speak either Kazakh or Russian, as pointed out by Irina Chernykh, chief research fellow at the Astana-based Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies.<sup>20</sup> And as all these groups of population embrace various values and behavioural models, an increased awareness of social inclusion and its importance is essential.

In Kazakhstan, there are several examples of promising initiatives and practices promoting social inclusion. *The Education Improvement Programme* engages 20 government secondary schools and a few selected private schools in each of the three founding states of the University of Central Asia (UCA) – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The programme is designed to enhance students' academic achievements and opportunities for entry to high-quality universities and to be ready for responsible citizenship. One of its objectives is to improve learning outcomes for students and develop 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies. These include critical thinking, cooperation, communication that all lead to a socially inclusive approach to diversity and therefore, potentially reducing the chances of radicalisation. In each selected district, there is an EI District Resource School that shares experience and learning with other schools, providing an important cascading effect that will have a larger impact on education. Through on-going research, this programme aims to provide a model that can be adopted regionally and nationally.

Another example of promoting social inclusion in this region is the UNICEF-supported *Cash Transfer Programme for Pre-School Education in Kazakhstan* which found that the conditional cash transfers significantly increased the proportion of pre-school age children from poor households attending pre-school.

Although the economy of Kazakhstan has demonstrated a growth, poverty is still urgent in this region as more than 90% of poor families are multi-child families, and children make up more than 40% of all Kazakhstanis living below the poverty line.<sup>21</sup> UNICEF together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan conducted a research to study the barriers that poor and socially vulnerable families face when accessing social assistance and special social services. According to the UNICEF study, there are still categories of children coming from socially vulnerable families who do not have access to social benefits and special social services. Among the factors that impede access to social support are low awareness of government support measures and social worker's role, restrictive administrative rules, and negative attitudes towards children with disabilities.<sup>22</sup>

On December 3-4 2018, an event titled *Youth Involvement and the Prevention of Violent Extremism -- Nexus Analysis* took place in Almaty, organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It was the second of five regional dialogues within a UNDP regional project and stakeholders from the United Nations, government agencies, civil society and youth activists from all five Central Asian countries attended. The USD 6.4 million project is funded by the government of Japan and

<sup>20</sup> [http://central.asia-news.com/en\\_GB/articles/cnmi\\_ca/features/2018/12/13/feature-01](http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2018/12/13/feature-01)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/kazakhstan/en/social-inclusion>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/kazakhstan/en/social-inclusion>

implemented by UNDP offices in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.<sup>23</sup> It is aimed at mobilising the positive energy, open-mindedness and dynamism of young people in Central Asia as a potential force to counter extremist influences and narratives in the vulnerable communities. UNDP in Kazakhstan is the focal agent of the initiative while UNDP offices in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan will be responsible for implementing activities in the respective countries.<sup>24</sup>

It seems that since radicalisation is an individual process and some may become radicalised under certain circumstances while others do not, it is mainly individual approach, time-consuming and cost-intensive work together with early intervention that is most effective as the above-mentioned projects confirm.

## 2.2.6 Contribution of education in addressing gender inequalities

The Constitution of Kazakhstan establishes that a citizen has a right to receive free higher education in public higher educational institutions on a competitive basis. There is also a guarantee of non-discrimination and equality embedded in Kazakhstan's Constitution and it is also reflected in the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan *On Education* (2007). The law of Kazakhstan *On State Guarantees of Equality Rights and Equal Opportunities of Men and Women* (2009) specifically refers to guarantees of gender education (article 12). Gender discrimination is prohibited.

Kazakhstan has almost reached gender parity in access to education. In the last five years, the overall trend was that women outnumbered men in higher education. In 2017/2018 academic year, 54.7% of all students enrolled to higher education institutions were women and 45.3% were men. The opposite trend is observed in enrolment of men and women to VET. In the last five years, the share of women enrolling to VET decreased. Men slightly outnumbered women and in 2017/2018 academic year, 53.3% of all students were men compared to 46.8% of women.

These patterns of education are correlated in the horizontal segregation of women in the labour market. At the level of HE, in 2017/2018 women were concentrated in traditional fields of study such as education (72.3%), health (63%), social science, journalism and information (79.6%). In fields such as ICT, engineering and constructions women made up about 30% of all students. Men were concentrated in technical fields such as hydrocarbon, transport and energy industries.

In the VET, gender segregation in disciplines which men and women study is even more evident. Women concentrate in areas of study such as medicine and pharmacy, education, economics, management, arts and culture. In sectors such as energy and transport, men reach close to 100% of students. In this respect, despite reaching close to gender parity levels in higher education, Kazakhstan faces a challenge in addressing traditional patterns of choices of study by boys and girls in VET and HE. From the long-term perspective, such segregation in education results in horizontal segregation in the labour market and consequently, in a gender wage gap.

An interesting initiative to weaken the stereotypes about male and female occupations and to increase the number of women studying technical and engineering subjects, is the *Girls Engineers* initiative launched in 2018 at the Eurasian Technological University. Special scholarships will be awarded to girls studying subjects such as mechanical engineering, transport techniques and technologies, energy and information systems.

<sup>23</sup> [http://central.asia-news.com/en\\_GB/articles/cnmi\\_ca/features/2018/12/13/feature-01](http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2018/12/13/feature-01)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2018/02/22/the-united-nations-development-programme-commences-a-regional-initiative-on-prevention-of-violent-extremism-in-central-asia-funded-by-the-government-of-japan.html>

The law *On Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women* (2009) explicitly guarantees gender education in line with gender education policy. However, gender education has not been formally introduced into curricula at all levels of education. Therefore, a systematic approach to gender-responsive education is still needed. Although some elective gender courses were introduced in Kazakhstan's HEIs in Astana, Almaty and in the regions, these did not attract much interest and a systematic approach is critical to overcome the trend of gender segregation in the labour market.

However, according to the results of a gender study conducted by the Public Foundation *Institute for Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Kazakhstan* with the support of the Representative Office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Kazakhstan, only 9.1% of respondents indicated that they receive knowledge about gender policy through the education system. Gender education has not been formally introduced into curricula at all levels of education and there is still work to be done in this area<sup>25</sup>.

## 2.2.7 Effective financing of education systems and education institutions

### Higher Education

The financing system of higher education in Kazakhstan was created in 1999 and it has remained relatively unchanged since then. The distribution of state resources is concentrated mainly on three objects:

- provision of state grants for studies and scholarships for students with high United National Test scores for certain academic programmes;
- support for international scholarships under the Bolashak programme and other educational activities;
- support for student grants and other expenses at Nazarbayev University.

In 2017, Kazakhstan's public spending on education amounted to 3.7% of GDP. The share of public funding on higher education remains consistently low at around 0.3% of GDP<sup>26</sup>, funding on science does not exceed 0.2% of GDP. This level of investment as a percentage of GDP is lower than in many OECD countries and below the average level of 5-7% of GDP recommended by UNESCO. The financing of higher and postgraduate education in 2017 amounted to KZT 185.38 billion against KZT 187.6 billion in 2016. This is 1.6% of the total state budget and 0.38% of the country's GDP.<sup>27</sup>

In Kazakhstan, the financing of higher education on a grant basis (state order) is carried out per student. The rate for calculating the cost of education per student in Kazakh HEIs under the state educational order is established by the Ministry of Education and Science. In 2017 it was amounted to KZT 596,188.<sup>28</sup>

In 2017, there was a sustainable growth in the dynamics of the HE students. In 2017, the number of students increased by 4%. The increase in the total number of students is due to the growing number of universities in the country in 2016, as well as the introduction of paid doctoral studies.

As public expenditure for higher education is relatively low, Kazakhstan's higher education relies heavily on private sources of funding. Private sources of financing tuition fees account for the largest share of higher education funding in Kazakhstan. In particular, private sources are the main source of income for private higher education institutions, where 88% of students pay all tuition costs on

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.zakon.kz/4872564-gendernoe-issledovanie-kak-v-kazahstane.html>

<sup>26</sup> Education Statistics, the World Bank: <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/source/education-statistics-%5e-all-indicators>

<sup>27</sup> Committee on Statistics, Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan: <http://stat.gov.kz/>

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan: <http://www.edu.gov.kz/ru/index.php>

their own or are funded from non-state sources. Public funding is only available for about 22% of all students.

To conclude, Kazakhstan has a centralised education system, with extensive planning and a detailed system of norms. Kazakh schools have lower levels of autonomy; however, considerable efforts have been made to decentralise higher education for over a decade. Similarly, Kazakhstan is making efforts to reduce the large number of private institutions through mergers or closures.<sup>29</sup>

### **Vocational Education and Training**

At the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic year, 824 VET institutions were functioning in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 477 of which are state and 347 are private. The total number of students is 489,8 thousand. Compared with the 2017-2018 academic year, the number of students increased by 1.0%<sup>30</sup>. In 2017, for the first time in 5 years, the contingent of VET did not decline. Previously, the number of college students annually decreased from 30,487 to 10,328 people. The launch of the project *Free VET for All*<sup>31</sup> and the increase in the state order to 53.8% of students allowed to stop the negative trend.

From 2001 to 2016, the state budget expenditures on VET were almost unchanged and amounted to only 0.2%-0.3% of GDP. This is significantly lower than in other countries. However, financing of the VET system is growing every year. In general, over the past three years there has been an increase in public spending on the VET system. The financing of the VET system is carried out through the state orders provided by local executive bodies and the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), and the tuition fees. The authorised body (MES) and local executive bodies of the region, the cities of Astana and Almaty place a state educational order among VET institutions.

One of the most significant initiative concerning VET in Kazakhstan is *Free Technical and Vocational Education and Training for All* launched in 2017 by the Head of State. It aims to provide everyone with the first working specialty free of charge and it is expected that by 2021, more than 720 thousand citizens will receive free vocational education. The project is being implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. As a result, in 2017, for the first time in five years, there was no reduction in the VET contingent.

While there have been some increases in education expenditure in recent years and the funding model aims to achieve improvements in how resources are allocated, Kazakhstan needs to achieve better efficiency, transparency and equity of resource allocation in the system in order to cater to the different needs and realities of students at different levels of the system. Strengthening expenditure monitoring, along with the transparency and flexibility of the process are also some challenges for Kazakhstan.<sup>32</sup>

## **2.2.8 Expansion of academic autonomy of universities**

<sup>29</sup> Education Policy Outlook: Kazakhstan, 2018

<sup>30</sup> Committee on Statistics, Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan: <http://stat.gov.kz/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://opencollege.kz/>

<sup>32</sup> Education Policy Outlook: Kazakhstan, 2018

The system of higher and postgraduate education in Kazakhstan is currently undergoing a reform phase. On July 4 2018, the law *On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Expansion of Academic and Managerial Independence of Higher Educational Institutions* was approved and adopted<sup>33</sup>.

The Law was developed to implement the tasks outlined in the State of the Nation Address of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Nation Plan *100 Concrete Steps*. The implementation of this law provides for amendments and additions to the Labor Code and three laws (*On Education, On Science and On the Commercialization of the Results of Scientific and (or) Scientific and Technical Activities*).

The law aims to gradually expand the academic and managerial independence of universities, taking into account the experience of the Nazarbayev University. In general, these changes regulate the three main activities of universities: *academic, managerial, and financial*.

To broaden *academic independence*, competences are provided for empowering universities in determining student admission issues, defining the structure and content of educational programmes. In terms of personnel issue, universities will be able to independently determine the procedure for hiring, to form the structure of the university and the staff.

A new *Classifier in the fields of study* is being introduced, within which universities will be able to develop new educational programmes<sup>34</sup>. Together with these innovations, the licensing mechanism changes accordingly. If earlier the specialty was licensed by specialty through the number of books and the formal availability of teaching staff, now the field of study will be licensed.

Within the framework of *managerial independence*, universities are entitled to create endowment funds, to open start-up companies and affiliated branches in foreign countries. Universities with special status (national universities, state universities, Nazarbayev University) are given the function of awarding the PhD degrees.

In addition, the rules for the transformation of state and national universities into non-profit joint-stock company with 100% state participation are defined. The fixed periods of study at the bachelor's level are excluded; earlier this period was four years.

In order to improve the quality of the knowledge provided, low residence education and evening-time education at the higher education level are excluded. At the same time, special attention is paid to the introduction of non-formal education and its recognition by universities.

As part of the *financial independence* of universities, the norm regulating the cost of education in universities on a fee basis is excluded. This amendment is aimed at expanding the access of citizens to higher education, including the socially vulnerable groups of the population. In addition, universities may attract additional sources of financial and material resources, which will lead to diversification of sources of income and financial flows.

To conclude, 68 regulatory legal acts have been developed to implement the planned transformations. With the acquisition of academic autonomy, universities and stakeholders will have to face the challenges that will follow in the process of reforming the education system.

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<sup>33</sup> [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=39633866](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=39633866)

<sup>34</sup> [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=39785244#pos=8;-57](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=39785244#pos=8;-57)