

VI. PROMOTING CHILD DEVELOPMENT

A. GOVERNMENT POLICIES TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Kyrgyz and Kazak Governments remain committed to improving the situation of children. Policies to promote the transition to a market economy have so far maintained a certain level of support (Graph 26), but this generation of children is clearly facing severe difficulties. Currently, the real value of resources funding investment in human development is much less than that enjoyed in the recent subsidized era of the former Soviet Union. Public expenditure in social sectors, in real terms, is less than one half of the pre-independence levels, social assistance has sharply contracted, and social infrastructure has deteriorated. This loss of public support is all the more important in the context of declining family income accompanied by a sharp increase in poverty and unemployment and spiraling social ills including increased crime and fragmented families.

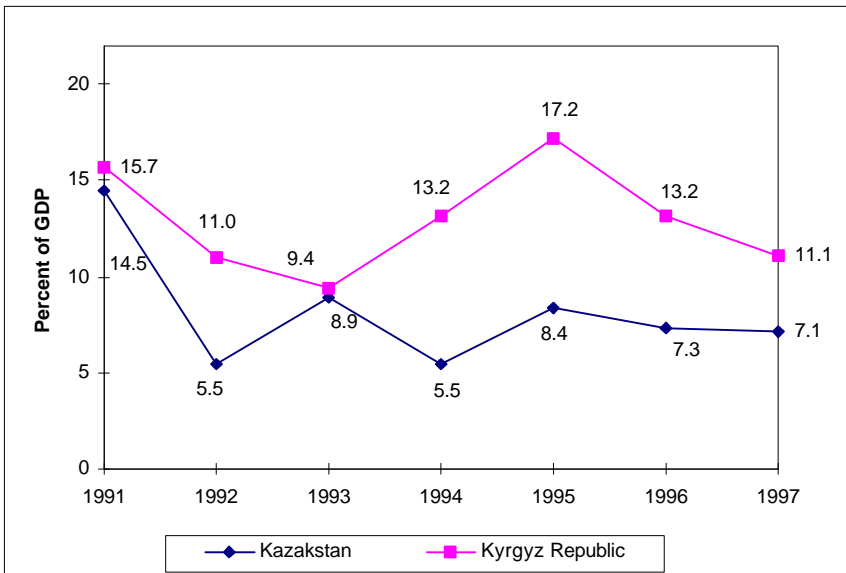
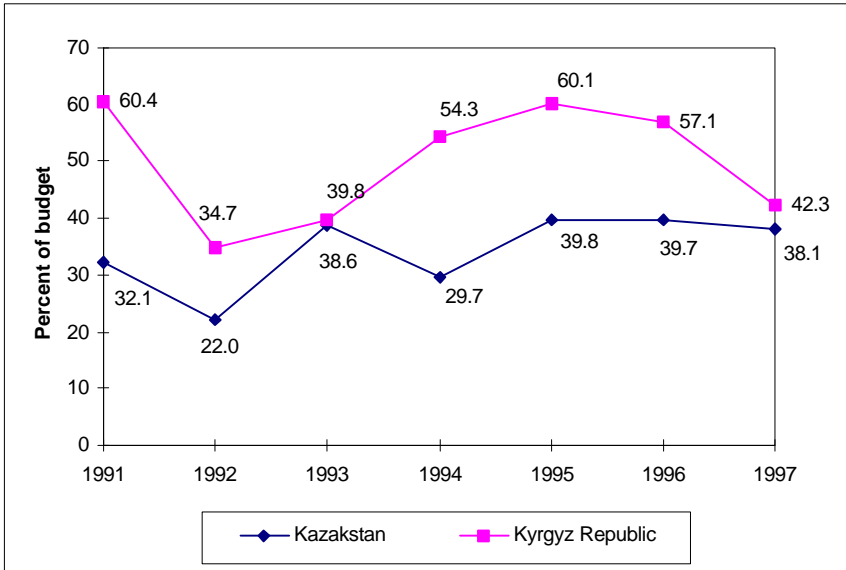
1. Public Social Expenditures

With all the problems, the commitment of the Governments to child protection and development is indisputable. Public social expenditure, although shrinking in real terms by about 53 percent in Kazakhstan since independence (Graph 27), still comprises about 40 percent of the total respective budgets and exceeds the spending levels of most governments in Asia and Europe.

2. Social Sector Reforms

To reduce the impact of restricted public resources on children and young people, the Governments need to urgently develop a

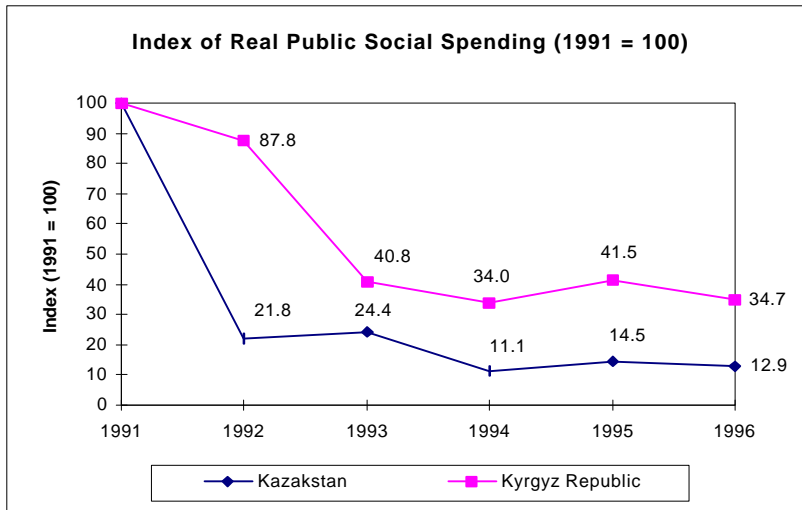
Graph 26: A Commitment to the Social Sectors
(Nominal public social expenditures)



Note: Social expenditure comprises public funds for health, education and social protection. Extra-budgetary funds for social insurance are not included.

Sources: Ministries of Finance, World Bank, IMF

Graph 27: Fall in Real Social Spending
(Real public social expenditures; in 1991 prices)



Note: Social expenditure comprises public funds for health, education and social protection. Extra-budgetary funds for social insurance are not included.

Sources: Ministries of Finance, World Bank, IMF

comprehensive package of reforms for social support, including social services such as health and education, social protection including employment promotion, and social assistance including support for poor children. The reform packages must recognize and be consistent with the broader restructuring of the economy on the basis of market institutions. Also, proactive rehabilitation and support policies need to be developed for those children with special needs, including the homeless and those in state institutions such as orphanages. Within each sector, reforms must encourage improved beneficiary targeting, efficiency in resource use, and a heightened sense of family responsibility for child care. As detailed immediately below, there are active programs of reform in each country in education, health, social assistance, and social protection. One theme running through these sectors is an ongoing decentralization and devolution of the responsibility for social services delivery to regional and local governments.

The governments of both countries have substantially reformed their education systems since 1992. In the Kyrgyz Republic the Year of Education and Women in 1996 brought major reforms to the edu-

education sector. With support from the Asian Development Bank, the Kyrgyz Government developed a complex activity plan, the National Education and Training Program, known as the Bilim (knowledge) Program. The five strategic objectives of Bilim are (i) preserving access to education; (ii) increasing the quality and efficiency of education; (iii) rationalizing the education sector in the context of the transition to a market economy, regional differences in the country, and the evolving interests of citizens; (iv) stimulating and broadening the meaning of education as a participatory process; and (v) strengthening the financial sustainability of the education and training systems. Within this overall goal structure, the Program assigns top priority to maintaining access to general education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and providing the young generation with new opportunities to become active members of society and the emerging market economy.

To realize these ambitious goals, an action plan has been adopted that includes:

- establishing an Education Support Fund to ensure access to education facilities, especially for poor children;
- restructuring curricula with special concentration on basic education;
- surveying school infrastructure and equipment and rehabilitating and upgrading infrastructure;
- developing a needs plan to provide for teacher recruitment, retention, and retraining; and
- rationalizing service provision based on sustainable resources, restructuring administration and management, encouraging private sector involvement and community self-help, and decentralizing the education system.

The Government estimates the total costs of the education reform package at Som 1 billion (\$80 million) for the years 1997 to 2000. The Program is supported by the Asian Development Bank.¹

1 Under a recently signed loan agreement, the Bank will finance about 45 percent of this program with long-term concessional funds.

Kazakstan, too, is making major progress in education reform although here the emphasis has been on facility rehabilitation and curriculum reform. The Asian Development Bank has financed projects to upgrade secondary education facilities and introduce new textbooks.

The health sector has also seen the beginning of comprehensive reforms. The introduction of a compulsory medical insurance system in 1996 brought major changes to the health sectors of both countries. Particularly in Kazakstan, the institutionalization of the Medical Insurance Fund in 1996 resulted in radical reforms by replacing the supply-oriented health provision established under the former Soviet Union with a more decentralized system driven more by demand and the ability to pay. As these reforms develop, it should (i) rationalize the provision of health services at the local level; (ii) privatize the medical and pharmaceutical industry; (iii) encourage new economic activities by tapping non-budgetary financial sources at the local level and introducing economic incentives; and (iv) improve the organization and management of the health system by appropriate delegation of responsibilities to local agencies. The World Bank and US-AID are supporting health sector reforms in both countries.

Efforts have been made to improve preventive health care for vulnerable groups, particularly children and families in ecological disaster areas by investing in medical education, environmental health, sanitation and nutrition policies, and integrated childhood and youth development programs. UNICEF is closely working with the national and local governments and NGOs to promote integrated child development in the remote areas of southern Kyrgyzstan and the Aral Sea region in Kazakstan.

In social assistance, the Kyrgyz Republic, with the help of the World Bank, in 1996 made major progress to better target vulnerable groups, particularly children and larger families (Chapter IV.C). Reforms in the social allowances system are also ongoing in Kazakstan, albeit at a slower pace. The reforms in both countries concentrate on providing assistance to larger families and disadvantaged children, particularly the disabled. Better targeting will provide for greater impact with the limited fiscal resources available. The next phase of reform needs to include greater service efficiency, especially at the local level. Strengthening local-level service provision is a long-term effort that will not be accomplished easily.

Social assistance efforts by the Governments in both countries are being complemented by the activities of semi-governmental

Photo 18: Children Waiting for Social Assistance Payments



organizations. Some non-profit organizations such as the Bobek Fund in Kazakhstan and the Children's Fund in the Kyrgyz Republic are subsidized through the state budgets. These semi-governmental organizations play an increasingly important role in promoting child development under a more beneficiary oriented, cost-efficient approach.

For social protection, since 1996 both countries have started to reform their pension system. The pension system affects children indirectly as they will be future beneficiaries. However, in practice, the more immediate impact is that, at the local level, pension payments are often linked to social assistance needs. Local governments often simply use what limited resources there are for the most immediate needs. Reform of the pension system should be carefully constructed so as not to further reduce needed support for children.

Rising unemployment, particularly for the young, is becoming a major concern. Active labor market policies increasingly need to be designed to emphasize the problems of the juvenile unemployed. In the Kyrgyz Republic pilot programs have been developed to encourage entrepreneurial activities by young people. These programs work through the creation of business "incubators" (agencies for assisting entrepreneurial activity) that provide business advice and small-scale

credit for new small businesses. In Kazakstan tax relief is being given to companies that hire unemployed young people.

Other government programs to promote child development focus on maintaining moral values in society, reducing crime among young people, and reestablishing cultural activities especially those for children and young people. The Kyrgyz Government, for example, hopes to see in the implementation of the “Mandaniyat” (culture) program an impact on many of today’s urgent problems.

3. Special Agencies to Promote Child Development

As part of the general activities related to children, both countries in 1996 established special Councils for Women and the Family (CWF) as coordinating and consultative bodies under the Presidents of the Republics. The Councils are actively supported by the sector ministries. Although children are not explicitly named in the titles of the new bodies, children’s affairs are a major area of their work. It is hoped that these new policy-review bodies will provide a focal point for reform measures to lessen the social impact of current economic and social developments on children.

In Kazakstan, the CWF has noted as policy priorities the “protection of the morals of children and prevention of crimes” along with policies towards unemployment and mitigating the deterioration of the social status of children. Also in Kazakstan, the conditions in detention camps and prison colonies have been discussed by the new body, and a special “Department for Teenage Affairs” has been established under the Ministry of Internal Affairs with staff at the provincial and communal level.

In the Kyrgyz Republic the CWF is referred to as the Ayalzat Committee and was established specifically to improve the quality of life for women and children. In all six oblasts a special position under the provincial governor was designated to achieve Ayalzat goals at the local level. The national Ayalzat Commission is in charge of coordinating women and child development issues among the line agencies and is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for social policy. The Ayalzat Committee has concentrated particularly on creating programs for girls in education and ensuring legal protection for girls. Other stated concerns include those societal issues that risks girls not achieving their full potential, including teenage pregnancy and early marriages, family violence, and the emerging problem of prostitution.

B. PRIVATE SECTOR SUPPORT FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Since independence many private organizations have emerged in both countries with the goal of improving social protection for children. In the Kyrgyz Republic, in 1996 more than 130 NGOs were registered with the Ministry of Interior with some expectation of helping children. Most NGOs are in the early stage of formation and they often have no offices or paid full-time staff and suffer from weak financial foundations. One serious barrier to the development of NGOs is that they are sometimes treated by officials either as political parties or as business entities. An income tax rate of 40 percent in the Kyrgyz Republic, for example, assessed on income from donations to NGOs, would substantially hinder development and effectivity. The primary concern of many of these NGOs, such as the Kyrgyzstan Children's Fund or the Bobek Foundation in Kazakstan, is the immediate physical needs of small children and their mothers and a number especially focus on handicapped children. In addition, some NGOs specifically work to protect the human rights of children and to provide social support for teenagers.

The Kyrgyzstan Children's Fund (KCF) is one of the most active NGOs responding to the needs of children. It was formed in 1988 as an independent non-profit, non-governmental organization with offices in several oblasts. The KCF is funded by international organizations such as UNICEF and foreign NGOs, local enterprises and individuals, as well as by charitable fund raising activities like telethons and lotteries. Its objectives are to publicize and improve the present condition of children, play an advocacy role for child protection and children's rights, and assist families. It distributes food and clothing, provides medical equipment for invalids and handicapped children, provides scholarships for gifted children from poor families, and organizes medical assistance in remote areas. In partnership with Save the Children Fund, UNICEF, France Liberty and the Red Crescent, the Kyrgyz Children's Fund has organized food and clothing for over 3,000 families. The Fund recently established a house in Bishkek where homeless children can go for food and shelter.

In Kazakstan, the semi-private Bobek Foundation was set up in 1992. It is headed by the wife of the President and is staffed by experts transferred from the Ministry of Health. The Foundation administers public funds as well as money received through official channels. It is active in all regions of Kazakstan with major programs in Karaganda,

Eastern Kazakhstan, and Kokshetau Oblasts. Bobek's primary activities include arranging for (i) medical assistance, hospital equipment and the upgrading of maternity houses, especially in the ecological disaster areas of the Aral Sea basin and Semipalatinsk; (ii) food, medicine, and books for children in need, especially for orphans; and (iii) emergency aid for essential services.

Box 11: NGOs for Handicapped Children in Kazakstan

Among the many, mostly small NGOs working in Kazakstan to ameliorate the plight of handicapped children, and to assist their families are:

Ak-Bota, an association for the support of handicapped children with psychological and physical disorders. There are 300 members in Almaty. The creation of regional chapters is underway.

The Association of Handicapped Children's Parents, which takes care of the social support and physical rehabilitation of children. It also works to protect their families' rights with regards to child allowances and education. Located in Almaty, there are nearly 500 members and 11 staff. The association is looking for funds to start a center for the support of children suffering from cerebral palsy and similar diseases.

Kenes, the center for the treatment and social support of handicapped children works in a manner similar to that of the Association of Handicapped Children's Parents. Kenes has approximately 20 staff in Almaty.

Urpak is a center for the rehabilitation of children suffering from problems arising in ecological disaster areas. There are around 20 activists in Almaty. Similar centers are planned for Semipalatinsk, Pavlodar, and the Aral region.

Special Olympics Kazakstan was set up to promote sports for the handicapped, both children and adults. Special Olympics sports clubs are set up in all regions in order to achieve participation in international sports competitions. The organization has a reported 4,500 handicapped members.

With a focus on the immediate needs of children and their families, the Union of Mothers with Large Families is a private association in Kazakhstan which assists about 3,000 families in different parts of Almaty. The Union focuses on families with many children (a minimum of eight). The association distributes food and textile donations and supports families in coping with administrative procedures for obtaining discount rates for housing and public transport.

Care for the handicapped has drawn by far the most attention among NGOs dealing with children. As discussed, Soviet policy was to create special establishments for handicapped persons and separate them from their families and the rest of society. As these establishments can no longer be financed publicly in the Soviet fashion, there is a great need for private support. NGOs, mostly locally-based and small-scale, are very active in supporting handicapped children.

In addition, there are several private initiatives concerned about conditions in Kazak prisons, some with special reference to children kept in detention camps. The Kazakhstan Society for the Protection of Prisoners and People Released from Prison unites the mothers of child-prisoners working for an improvement in the conditions in child detention centers. The group is not officially sanctioned, and operates sometimes with great difficulty.¹

An interesting initiative to provide support and guidance among young people, especially girls, in Kazakhstan is currently being implemented by the private association Malvina. With the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, publications for children and young people, which were financed by the central government, are no longer printed. To fill the void, Malvina published a magazine for girls between 7 and 14 years. Distributed so far in five oblasts, it focuses on (i) discussing changes in ethics and lifestyle affecting young people (increased violence, alcoholism etc.), (ii) informing local girls about women's movements worldwide (e.g. the Beijing conference) and discussing feminist concepts, and (iii) promoting creative activities (e.g. publishing poems). The first editions have been sponsored by an NGO based in the Netherlands.

1 One activist, a doctor who was working in one of the detention camps, prepared a video documenting conditions under which the children suffer, and, as a result, lost his position. The SOROS Foundation, however, provided him a grant to exhibit his film in Germany. During a visit of a delegation of the Kazak Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Tourism the German Ministry of Family and Youth officially raised the issue of bad conditions in Kazakhstan's detention centers for children.

C. EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

1. Child-related Work of International NGOs

A large number of International NGOs work in Central Asia on issues of importance to children. They include Mercy Corps, France Liberty, Save the Children, CARE International, International Red Crescent, the Counterpart Consortium, and the Soros Foundation. These organizations work in response to a wide range of problems, including emergency assistance, school rehabilitation, and the provision of basic necessities including food, medical supplies, and equipment. International NGOs have a particularly strong presence in remote regions such as Naryn in the Kyrgyz Republic and near ecologically disasters such as the Aral Sea. As an example of this type of work, the international NGO, France-Liberty, has assisted approximately 45,000 people with grants of food and clothing in Talas, Naryn, Osh and Jalal-Abad Oblasts of the Kyrgyz Republic. Mercy Corps International also distributes food, especially to hospitals, boarding schools, and kindergartens. Care Germany has been closely cooperating with the Kazakstan Bobek-Foundation to provide assistance to children afflicted with cancer, especially those suffering from leukemia.

In education, the Soros Foundation has been actively involved in different areas of child development. In Kazakstan the organization has developed a number of innovative programs and supported pilot implementation programs including those helping to repair and equip kindergartens; retrain and motivate teachers to promote creativity in secondary education; and establish a health project for teenagers that includes sexual education, AIDS prevention, and drug prevention components.

2. Official Assistance for Child Development

Multilateral and bilateral donors finance various programs for Central Asian countries which directly or indirectly affect children. For example, in both Kazakstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, the World Bank and USAID support health reform and the provision of health services and equipment; activities which can have a very dramatic impact on children. In addition, the World Bank finances social safety net and social protection projects, focusing on the rationalization of transfer payments to poor families and children, and on labor market issues

including youth unemployment. The Asian Development Bank, as one of the lead foreign financing agencies, focuses on the education sector in both countries, and also provides technical assistance. The TACIS Program launched by the European Union for the former Soviet Union and Mongolia provides training projects for young entrepreneurs.

The United Nations group has active programs in Central Asia, many of which impact on children. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, supports a wide variety of programs such as on-the-ground emergency assistance, small income-generating projects at the community level (in Osh and Chui Oblasts of the Kyrgyz Republic), and employment promotion and a study on child labor in Kazakstan (through ILO).

Of particular interest is the work of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in both countries. With the 50th anniversary of UNICEF celebrated in 1996, UNICEF is campaigning to further the implementation of the convention on Child Rights.¹ Apart from this advocacy role, UNICEF is implementing a major relief program in health and education in the Aral Sea area (ASPERA) of Kazakstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan explicitly targeting women and children. The program covers immunization, maternal child health, nutrition (micro-nutrient insurance and breastfeeding), and education (mainly classroom supplies). Within Kazakstan, the regional focus is on the Kzyl-Orda Oblast, and the financial focus will be on primary health care.

In the Kyrgyz Republic UNICEF has provided outstanding on-the-ground emergency intervention assistance. From finding funds for the donation of immunization drugs to buying coal to heat homes and schools in mountainous regions of the country, UNICEF attempts to address almost all of the most serious social assistance needs. In April 1996, 1,380 metric tons of coal were purchased locally in Talas Oblast and then distributed through the region to the most financially hard pressed and remote schools. In the winter of 1995-96 projects included targeting assistance for the most vulnerable urban poor, such as single mothers and their children, and orphans. In Bishkek, these groups were given a two-month ration of 50 kilograms of flour and 10 kilos of sugar. In the more remote districts of Naryn and Talas Oblasts, UNICEF

1 The Convention on Child Rights consists of 42 paragraphs which cover "traditional" human and civil rights and those related to basic survival, participation in society and development, protection against exploitation, and the right to appropriate care.

provided for a three-month supplementary feeding program for children under 2 years. Approximately 900 children received a ration of a half liter of fresh whole milk (purchased locally) for six days a week.

Various bilateral donors are implementing a significant number of poverty-related programs in Kazakhstan, although none of them are directed explicitly toward children or young people. The German Agency for Development (GTZ) is supporting labor market projects including business incubators in which a major beneficiary group is young people. US AID sponsored a survey on the nutritional status of the population as well as reproductive and children's health in Kazakhstan.