

Kyrgyzstan: Social situation

Kyrgyzstan is the second most impoverished country in Central Asia, after Tajikistan. The country has made progress in many social areas, especially the health sector, with outstanding results in reducing child mortality and under-nourishment. However, the poorly performing education sector requires further attention and resources. Inter-ethnic tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks threaten the already fragile political, economic and social stability of the country.

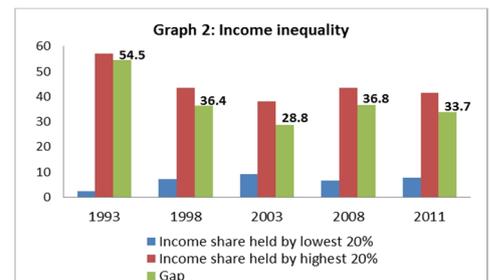
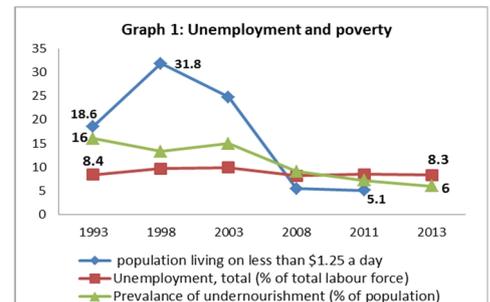
Background

After a sharp economic contraction during the first years of independence, the Kyrgyz economy has returned to high but volatile [GDP growth](#) since 1996. GDP has tripled in the past decade, reaching US\$7.4 billion in 2014 and annual [per capita](#) income has increased to US\$1 269. As a 'lower-middle-income' country, Kyrgyzstan ranks 135th out of 189 countries in purchasing power parity-based [GDP rankings](#). The fragile economic situation — one of the causes of the political unrest that ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April 2010 — is facing new challenges due to Russia's economic slowdown. The [income index](#), one of the components of the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI), has deteriorated slightly since 1990, while the country's scores in [education](#) and [health](#) (other HDI components) have improved. Kyrgyzstan's HDI has [increased](#) from 0.607 to 0.628 between 1990 and 2013, ranking it [125th](#) out of 187 countries, on a par with Guatemala, in the 'medium human development' category.

Employment, poverty and income inequality

Some [62%](#) of the working-age population is employed. According to the [2009 census](#), agriculture holds the main share in total employment (46.2%), followed by services (39.5%) and industry (14.3%). In 2013, the [unemployment rate](#) was 8.3%, a slight improvement of 0.1% from 1993. [Female unemployment](#) in 2013 was 9.2%, down from 9.4% in 1993. On a more optimistic note, [youth unemployment](#) fell from 20.1% in 2002 to 13.4% in 2013.

The percentage of the population [living on less than US\\$1.25 a day](#) fell from 31.8% in 1998 to 5.1% in 2011 (see Graph 1). The percentage of the population whose food intake is insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements ([prevalence of under-nourishment](#)) fell from 16% in 1993 to 6% in 2013. This trend is also reflected in income disparities. In 1993, there was a 54.5% gap between the income share held by the [lowest 20%](#) (2.5%) and the [highest 20%](#) (57%) of the population (see Graph 2). In 2011, this gap had narrowed to 33.7%. Consequently, Kyrgyzstan's [Gini index](#) improved from 53.7 in 1993 to 33.4 in 2011, reflecting a more equal distribution of wealth.



Data source: World Bank.

Education: high spending yields poor returns

Basic [education](#) lasts 11 years — four years of primary education starting at the age of six or seven, followed by five years of middle school and two years of high school. The number of schools has [increased](#), while the number of students has declined. In 2011, slightly over 1 million students attended 2 197 general schools. In addition, there are 235 vocational schools, 747 pre-school institutions and 54 [higher education](#) institutions in the country. Kyrgyz is the language of instruction in 65% of the general schools; around 10% of the remaining schools teach only in Russian and 15% in Kyrgyz and Russian. Uzbek and Tajik-medium education is available in 76 and 9 schools, respectively.

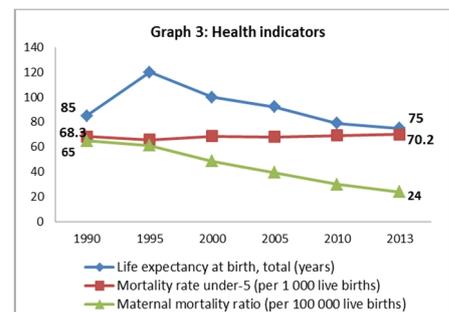


Kyrgyzstan [spent](#) 7.4% of GDP on education in 2012, the highest level in Central Asia. However, learning outcomes are poor. Poor [educational performance](#) is documented by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), evaluating teenagers' proficiency in reading, mathematics and science. Kyrgyzstan [ranked last](#) in all three areas in both PISA [2006](#) and [2009](#). According to PISA in 2009, 83% of 15-year-olds were 'functionally illiterate'. However, scores are better in urban areas, correlating with higher per capita educational spending. In the 2009 PISA, the [rural-urban divide](#) in educational performance was a massive 160 points, equivalent to four years of school. Education also correlates with income levels, with just 6% of the poorest quintile participating in tertiary education, compared to 41% of the top quintile. With regard to gender, female participation is close to parity (women : men ratio = 0.99) in primary education and significantly exceeds it at [tertiary level](#) (1.25).

The European Union's [budget support](#) for developing Kyrgyzstan's education sector amounted to €17 million in 2013-2015.

Overhaul of healthcare

Since 1996, successive reform programmes have resulted in a successful and broad-ranging overhaul of Kyrgyzstan's [healthcare system](#), which it had inherited from the Soviet era. Subsequently, there has been good progress in ensuring financial protection of the population and access to and efficiency of health services. The [national health reform programme](#), supported by the [World Bank](#), has set itself the goal to improve the quality of healthcare and accelerate health gains in four priority areas: cardiovascular diseases, responsible for [50% of deaths](#) in the country; maternal and child health; tuberculosis; and HIV infection. Good results have been achieved with regard to some of the [Millennium Development Goals](#). For example, there has been a drop in the [under-five mortality rate](#) from 65 per 1 000 live births in 1990 to 24 in 2013. The [maternal mortality ratio](#) has also fallen, though by less than the target of -75%, between 1990 and 2015. During the same period, [life expectancy at birth](#) has increased by 1.9 years to 70.2. A high [incidence of tuberculosis](#) (141 per 100 000 in 2013) and rising rates of [HIV infection](#) are major concerns.



Data source: World Bank.

Inter-ethnic tension: major concern for social stability

According to the [2009 census](#), the country's population (5.83 million in 2014) comprises over 100 nationalities, with an ethnic Kyrgyz majority accounting for 70.9%, followed by Uzbeks (14.3%) and Russians (7.8%). While the share of the ethnic Kyrgyz in the total population has increased from 64.9% in 1999 due to migration inflow, the Russian population has decreased due to an outflow.

The outbreak of [ethnic violence](#) between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 2010 (20 years after the [ethnic riots in Osh](#)) has had a devastating impact on social harmony. According to the international inquiry commission's [report](#), 470 people were killed, over 100 000 refugees fled to neighbouring Uzbekistan (most of whom were [turned back](#)) and 300 000 were internally displaced in June 2010. Most of the casualties, as well as those subsequently prosecuted for instigating violence, were Uzbeks, reflecting the ethnic divide in the country. Although some [steps](#) have been taken towards reconciliation, the bloody conflicts have not been forgotten and there is a [high risk](#) of renewed outbreaks. Members of the Uzbek minority are also victims of [human rights abuses](#), criticised by NGOs and governments alike. [Azimjon Askarov](#), an ethnic Uzbek currently serving a life sentence for inciting ethnic hatred during the 2010 riots, [received](#) the 'Human Rights Defender Award' from the United States in July 2015, which caused a [diplomatic row](#).

Environment: poor performance harmful to public health

The [Environmental Performance Index](#) ranks countries with regard to their environmental performance in two areas: 'protection of human health from environmental harm' and 'protection of ecosystems', based on nine [categories](#), including air quality, water resources and health impact. In 2014, Kyrgyzstan ranked [125th](#) out of 178 countries, having seen minor progress over the past ten years. While the country performed well in [agriculture](#) (ranking 10th), it scored low in [biodiversity and habitat](#), and hence ranked 157th. Although the most notable improvement has been with regard to 'water and sanitation', which measures the percentage of the population with access to clean drinking water sources and sanitation, the country ranked 88th in this category. In the '[health impacts](#)' category, which measures the probability of death among children under five years of age, Kyrgyzstan ranked 116th.