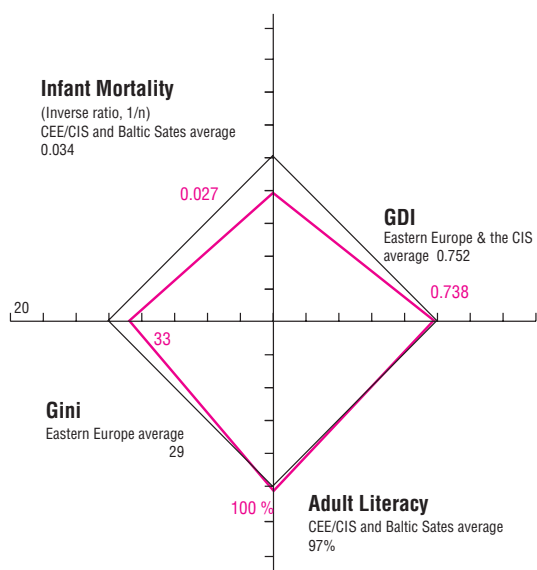


KAZAKHSTAN

• YURI ZAITSEV
SVETLANA SHARIROVA

USD 24 A MONTH



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*, **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*, **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*, **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

The social and economic status of the people of Kazakhstan has worsened since the early 1990s. Nearly all the social achievements of the former system of centralised planning and strong social protection were lost in the transition to a market economy. The people of Kazakhstan have lost all illusion about fair distribution of resources and opportunities. Kazakhstan was closer in 1995 to the ideas and purposes of social and economic development expressed in the Copenhagen commitments than it is today.

The recently adopted law «On the Subsistence Level Index» establishes the poverty line on the basis of the economic situation in the regions. In January 1999, the poverty line was set at 70% of the index, according to the economic situation and possibilities of the State Budget. In the first quarter of 1999, the poverty level was equivalent to USD 27/month; in the second quarter it was USD 24/month.

However, not all families living below the poverty line may apply for social support, since massive provision of such support is considered an unacceptable burden on the state budget. To qualify for support, a family's average income must be approximately half the poverty index. Hence the index functions mainly as a tool for analysis of living standards.

According to the Statistics Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in 1998 18.3% of the population lived below the poverty level; for 1999, the estimated figure is 23%. The share of the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum is considerably higher. The average subsistence level in Kazakhstan in 1998 was equal to 3,707 Tengge (about USD 47). Two of every three poor people live in southern or eastern Kazakhstan. In rural areas, where 57% of all poor people live, the monthly income per capita is lowest—1,492 Tengge (about USD 19).

The implementation plan for the Governmental Programme of Action for 1998–2000 envisaged development of a state programme for support to the poor and homeless. But in mid-1999, the government abolished this plan because of the budget deficit.

The government is seriously in arrears in payments for social benefits and unemployment compensation. According to the Ministry of Labour, for 1988 the government owes the State Fund for Support of Employment USD 41.6 million in social benefits payments (for unemployment benefits, scholarships, public works), of which USD 41 million are for unemployment compensation.

In comparison with 1998, the situation of socially vulnerable groups in 1999 has worsened drastically. «In 1999, government arrears were USD 317 million for social payments, plus USD 346 million for budget deficit, plus about USD 200 million for

the external debt. On the whole, the government will need more than USD 500 million to keep its promises.»¹

In the summer of 1999, the government renounced all its obligations to vulnerable groups in Kazakhstan; since then, all the costs of social benefits are to be paid from local budgets.

The gross external debt of the Republic of Kazakhstan on January 1st 1999 was USD 7,542.9 million, of which USD 3,960.6 million was owed directly by the state, USD 2,308.9 million was external debt not guaranteed by the Republic of Kazakhstan, and USD 1,273.4 million was owed on direct contracts.²

The result of new laws adopted within the period from December 1998 to July 1999 are as follows:

- unemployment benefits were abolished;
- temporary disability benefits were limited to a maximum of USD 50 per month;
- nearly all benefits and privileges to regional populations suffering ecological disaster were abolished or frozen;
- compulsory social support from the state budget was replaced by compulsory social support from employer's funds;
- four-month benefits paid for pregnancy and birth were limited to a maximum of USD 50 per month;
- paid leave for nursing a child up to three years was abolished;
- privileges to the families giving birth to twins were eliminated, as well as benefits to children whose parent(s) are in hiding and under investigation for non-payment of support.

- benefits to persons suffering radiation-related ailments due to nuclear testing were considerably reduced.

Benefits to single mothers were eliminated in 1997.

HEALTH

The scientists' prognosis for the coming years is unfavourable: a further decrease in the parameters for women's health is expected.

70% of women suffer from anaemia. In the Southern region of Oblast, the number is 76%; in the city of Almaty, 63% of expectant mothers suffer from anaemia. Many babies are born ill. According to the Paediatrics and Children's Surgery Scientific Centre, the frequency of kidney diseases, endocrine system diseases and anaemia in children has doubled in the last ten years.

In rural areas, the number of facilities offering First Aid has dropped drastically. Medical obstetrical units were closed in 1200 auls (villages). In the past three years, the number of beds at obstetrical-gynaecological facilities has been reduced 1.5 times. In certain regions, women are illegally forced to pay for gynaecological aid.

Programmes on protection of reproductive health exist in Kazakhstan. As a rule, they are conducted by NGOs and funded by international organisations. (See Table)

HOSPITAL FACILITIES AND MEDICAL PERSONNEL						
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Number of doctors of all specialties, except for dentists	–	61080	60125	57912	54519	53181
Number of doctors per 10,000 people	–	38.9	37.8	37.6	35.6	34.3
Number of middle medical personnel (including dentists)	–	177656	168400	150123	129515	120434
Number of middle medical personnel per 10,000 people	–	108.2	100.9	93.6	81.8	77.7
Number of hospital beds	–	205653	192627	164444	136392	123493
Number of hospital beds per 10,000 people	–	123.8	116.9	100.3	87	79.6
Number of medical institutions rendering ambulance-polyclinic aid to the population	–	3527	3405	3155	2976	3034
Women's advisory units	809	835	853	834	743	753
Number of maternity homes	–	–	44	38	39	40
Number of beds for pregnant women and for women after birth	18582	17751	16515	13813	11493	10615
Children's polyclinics and sections	1333	1269	1292	1196	1049	1050
Number of hospital beds for the children	45985	40921	37372	31432	24998	22669

Source: National Agency on Statistics, 1999

¹ *Continent* 11(12), 1999, p.10.

² These figures are from the official government response to the authors' inquiries. The government did not explain the terms, but the authors assume that the state is somehow also responsible for payment of debts incurred through direct contracts.

With regards to VIH/AIDS, the growth in HIV infections in 1996–1998 (48 cases in 1996; 437 cases in 1997; 299 cases in 1998; and 85 cases in the first five months of 1999) is centred on the city of Temirtau, where, according to official data, about 3,000 young people are intravenous drug abusers. The prognosis for 2000 is that 10,000 will be infected.

The government envisaged measures for AIDS prevention in 1998 within the framework of the Programme «People’s Health». The law «On AIDS Prophylactics» of October 5th 1994 ensures that everybody in the territory of Kazakhstan has the right to an anonymous HIV exam. If grounds are sufficient (Article 6), citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, foreign citizens and persons without citizenship are obliged to have a medical examination. If

infected, citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan and persons without citizenship are granted the right to be treated free of charge (Article 7).

UNEMPLOYMENT

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection at the end of 1999, there are 29 applicants for every working place in Kazakhstan. The Ministry reported that only 30% of the population have formally registered their employment status, meaning that many people now work in the informal sector.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF EMPLOYED AND UNEMPLOYED, IN THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE							
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Number of employees including:	7716.2	7571.9	6926.3	6581.8	6551.5	6518.9	6472.3
men	3935.3	4013.1	3670.9	3422.5	3472.3	3494.1	3520.9
women	3780.9	3558.8	3255.4	3159.3	3079.2	3024.8	2951.4
Number of unemployed including:	–	–	–	536.4	808.3	970.6	967.8
men	–	–	–	188.8	322.5	357.2	323.2
women	–	–	–	347.6	485.8	613.4	644.6
of which:							
registered including:	4.0	33.7	40.5	70.1	139.6	282.4	257.5
men	1.0	8.6	12.1	24.7	55.7	104.0	86.0
women	3.0	25.1	28.4	45.4	83.9	178.4	171.5

Source: Labor and Employment of Population in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Almaty, 1998.

GENDER EQUITY

The new law «On Education» adopted in 1999 has drastically limited access to free higher education. A new system of educational grants and educational credits was introduced. In 1999, the state allotted 11,179 grants and 7,598 credits.

At writing, gender-disaggregated information on student numbers in the 1999–2000 academic year is not available. In 1995, 143,900 (52.7%) of students in state higher educational institutions were women; in 1996, the number of women was 146,600 (52.2%); in 1997, 51.8% were women; and in 1998, 170,100 women students made up 53.4% of the student population.

The number of women deputies in parliament dropped from 17 (1995–1999) to 12. In October 1999, the number of women elected deputies to the lower chamber of parliament (Mazhilis) dropped from 9 (13.4%) in 1995–1999 to 7 (10.8%). The number

of female deputies in the upper chamber (Senat) fell from 8 to 5 (18.2% to 12.8%). The number of women ministers fell as well, from 2 in February 1999 to 1 in December 1999.

Women’s NGOs, in particular the coalition «Women’s Electoral Initiatives», which is a non-party women’s electoral block, as well as independent women candidates for the parliament and local bodies, are coming out in support of quotas for women.

In March 1999, a state mechanism for improvement of the status of women was created. It is the National Commission on Family and Women in the Office of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This is a governmental structure, which functions in contact with women’s NGOs. The real effects of its activities are low.

● **Feminist League**
feminist@online.ru