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EDUCATION - IREX HIGHLIGHTS

EDUCATION | INDEPENDENT MEDIA | CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

Education underpins development.

Economic development, political stability, poverty alleviation, and democratic reforms are all closely tied to the quality of basic and higher education.

IREX helps improve the quality of basic and higher education, encouraging individuals and societies to embrace new approaches to teaching and learning.

Principles of the IREX approach:

- **Promote student-centered education:** IREX programs support the advancement of student-centered learning environments, shown to encourage critical thinking skills and improve learning outcomes.
- **Partner with local authorities:** IREX understands that the approval and support of the local Ministry of Education are critical to enacting successful reforms. By engaging local authorities in a cooperative approach, IREX programs have achieved national-level changes to pre-service training and curricula employed by in-service educators.
- **Comprehensively address the professional training cycle:** IREX programs create vital ties between pre-service and in-service training for the mutual benefit of future and practicing teachers and faculty. Improved clinical practice helps pre-service educators benefit from the expertise of their experienced colleagues.
- **Involve local stakeholders:** From assessment to evaluation, the IREX approach draws in local stakeholders in education—instructors, administrators, parents, and future employers—ensuring that project design and implementation are tailored to local culture, conditions, and systems.
- **Empower local education experts for culturally-appropriate reforms:** By preparing local Master Trainers to lead assessments, peer-to-peer trainings, and curriculum development initiatives, the IREX approach empowers local education experts to become the engine of reform.

Program Highlights in Basic Education

Since 1998, IREX's portfolio of **Curriculum Development and Teacher Training** programs has developed numerous teacher curriculum and methodological manuals reaching more than 10,000 teachers, school administrators, and pre-service education faculty. In Armenia, teacher trainer corps members have provided training to in-service teachers from 600 primary and secondary schools around the country. Several of the manuals developed by IREX for primary and secondary education are being incorporated into the Armenian national curriculum standards. More than 60 percent of IREX-trained teachers in Armenia have received Ministry of Education awards. In Azerbaijan, more than 50 faculty members and 1,000 pre-service teachers from 10 pedagogical institutions of higher education have been trained in new techniques. In the middle schools, more than 100 clinical faculty members have become mentors.



The **International Educators Program (IEP)** and the **Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA)**, programs of the Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs of the US Department of State, bring outstanding secondary teachers from Eurasia, Southeast Asia, the Near East, and South Asia to the United States to develop expertise in their subject areas, enhance their teaching skills, and increase their knowledge about American culture. Through academic study, experiential learning, and professional networks, educators learn new ways to present content and assimilate innovative methods to teach students from diverse social backgrounds. Small grants are issued for collaborative projects between American schools and schools overseas.

Higher Education and Administration

Since 2001, the **University Administration Support Program (UASP)**, through support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, has helped to improve the administration and management of universities across Russia and Eurasia. Over the past five years, more than 30 university administrators from 18 Russian universities and the Ministry of Education and Science have spent 10 weeks at American public universities focusing on university management topics. More than 25 of these administrators received competitive grants to jump-start university reform projects in their home institutions. Grants have helped revamp strategic planning systems, create technology transfer offices, and improve university community and alumni relations practices.

In Ukraine, IREX Europe is part of a consortium led by the BBC World Service Trust and funded by the European Union to improve the standards of journalism education at Ukrainian institutions of higher education. The project **Improving Journalism Education at Ukrainian Universities** is establishing a foundation for long-term professional exchange and educational reform in the field of journalism. Improved curricula and teaching skills, textbooks, and stronger links between students and the media industry will pioneer education reform in Ukraine, bringing journalistic education practices in line with European Union standards under the Bologna Declaration of 1999.

Expanding Educational Resources

Global Connections and Exchange, a program of Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State, builds technology resources for education by establishing school-based Internet centers that provide Internet service and technology training for teachers. In Uzbekistan, more than 230,000 students, teachers, and community members use the 60 school-based Internet centers located around the country. As a result, hundreds of teachers now use interactive approaches to learning in order to foster students' critical thinking skills. Teachers also contribute to the national curriculum by creating lesson plans that incorporate interactive methods and the use of technology. More than 450 lesson plans are available through the education portal at <http://www.connect.uz>.

Benefits of the IREX approach:

- **Culturally-appropriate, needs-based reforms:** IREX prepares local education experts to diagnose their institutions' needs and design a culturally-appropriate response. When local experts draft curricula and adopt training methods for their peers, their efforts resonate with the local community and are sooner adopted into regional and national practice.
- **Geographic reach:** With a cascading training model at its core, the IREX approach offers an unmatched geographic reach. Corps of Master Trainers bring training directly to in-service teachers in schools—a recognized key to successful reform.
- **Flexibility:** Local experts are empowered with the skills they need to develop and test new training programs, preparing them to adapt to changing conditions and incorporate new best practices.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** With its focus on building the capacity of local experts to serve as trainers, curriculum designers, and evaluators, the IREX approach is inherently cost-effective.
- **Sustainability:** IREX's commitment to involve local authorities in project design and implementation helps education reform develop internal momentum. Post-project efforts often find support from the local Ministry of Education.
- **Replicability:** Because it draws on the expertise and cultural sensitivity of local education practitioners to create and modify curricula and trainings, the IREX approach can travel to new geographic regions.



Girls' Education

Global Connections and Exchange launched **Tech Age Girls** to encourage women's leadership in the field of technology. A core group of young Uzbekistani technology pioneers - girls ages 12 to 16 - now serve as trailblazers around the country. Participants are matched with a female mentor and participate in an intensive training program in Web design and leadership skills that culminates in the creation of their own Web sites and an internship. When they return home, the girls mentor their peers to implement new projects in their schools and communities. The success of Tech Age Girls is spreading to IREX programs in Turkmenistan and Ukraine.