



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF TURKISTAN REGION

The key indicators of the socio-economic development of Kazakhstan affect the living standards of local people in different parts of the country. In this regard, the state of social and cultural infrastructure in the regions has not yet been fully addressed. Accordingly, the measures taken within the scope of the programs aimed at improving public welfare and living standards cannot fully solve the problems accumulated over the years in the regions. These problems are related to the state of social and cultural infrastructure in the regions.

In this context, the situation in the Turkistan region is of particular interest. To describe the social and cultural infrastructure of the region, it is necessary to review its main spheres. The social infrastructure of the region includes housing, education, healthcare, the service sector, catering, financial services, etc. The cultural infrastructure includes museums, libraries, recreation areas, performance groups, theaters, community centers, parks, etc.

One of the most important issues of social infrastructure in the Turkistan region is the housing issue. For the region with a rapid population growth, the housing issue will always be high on the agenda. In particular, in the city of Turkistan, after it became the regional center, new residential buildings are being built and put to use, and new microdistricts are being opened. This indicates that the housing issue of the city's population has begun to be solved. However, since 2000, approximately 25,000 people have been on a waiting list to obtain land in Turkistan. Moreover, the increase in rental prices in the city in recent years means that the demand for housing has increased. Currently, the housing issue has become a serious problem for young families and professionals who have moved to the regional center.

The situation in the field of education in the Turkistan region is one of the main problems of the social infrastructure, which is evident through the statistics. Due to the daily increase in the number of school-aged children in the region, there is a shortage of school places. For example, in 2018, due to the shortage of places some schools had to operate in three shifts for 35,466 students in the Turkistan region. Along with the construction of new schools, this requires improvement in the quality of education. For example, more than 50% of high-school

graduates fail to enter a university. This suggests that students have not had full access to quality education.

In the field of healthcare, the level of chronic and infectious diseases in the region ranks high in some indicators, which indicates the lack of healthcare professionals and healthcare institutions in the Turkistan region.

The service and catering sector in the Turkistan region is well developed, as can be observed in every part of the region. If we consider the city of Turkistan, the quality and diversity of the service sector are high. This may be due to the traditional economic system of the population. For example, markets, shopping malls, hotels, and restaurants bear clear traces of medieval traditions. Moreover, the application of the medieval architectural style in the construction of the city continues the historical heritage. It is evident from the rise of such complexes as the Eastern Market and the Eastern Bath. In addition, in Turkistan, various services such as notaries, law offices, and mediation are also available. On the contrary, the level of the financial services sector in the region remains low. The main reasons for this are the insufficient service of the second-tier banks, the lack of specialized units, etc. The transportation is well developed in the region and at the interregional level. In particular, the schedule of routes in the direction of Almaty, Shymkent, Taraz, Kyzylorda is conveniently established.

The cultural infrastructure of the Turkistan region is directly related to the development of tourism in the region. The natural landscape features of the region and its historical and cultural monuments play here an important role. Besides, the development of Turkistan as a regional center contributes to the strengthening of its cultural infrastructure. Currently, there are 27 museums across the region as well as 358 historical and cultural monuments in museum-reserves. In 2019, 1,915,200 people visited the museums of the region. The number of libraries reached 390, and the total number of their readers is 489,900 3.2 % of them, or 15,400 readers, access information in libraries via the internet. In addition, as of 2019, four theaters operate in the region. In 2019, the theater repertoire included 65 performances and 12 new plays. Apart from that, there are 251 organizations

that provide cultural and recreational services in the Turkistan region. Among them are various hobby groups, performance groups, clubs, amateur associations, training courses, etc. In 2019, the number of participants in the performance groups was 11,900 and participants in the children's groups – 7,700. The parks also play a significant role as a place where people can spend their spare time. In this regard, there are 27 parks across the region. In 2019, 123 mass cultural events were organized in these parks. In general, 59,700 people spend their free time in these parks annually. These figures in the statistics show that the impact of cultural infrastructure on the social environment is high.

Despite these figures, 37% of respondents of the survey conducted in Turkistan in 2019 stated that it was difficult to live in the city. This is because the population is dissatisfied with the quality of healthcare, sports, and supplementary education organizations in the city. In contrast, 59.3% of respondents stated that they were completely satisfied with their life in the city. Furthermore, when asked about the spheres that require changes, 30% of respondents emphasized the need to focus on traffic regulation, 28.3% – on urban cleaning and ecology, 25.7% – on public service, 25.3% – on business development and tourist attraction, and 24% mentioned quality education. The answers of respondents point to the basic needs of the social and cultural infrastructure of Turkistan. It is also possible to see that the situation in Turkistan is reflected throughout the region.

To conclude, it can be stated that the social and cultural infrastructure of the Turkistan region is just developing. New residential houses, schools, clinics, theaters, museums, recreation areas, parks, and entertainment centers in the city of Turkistan will serve interests of city residents in the future. Apart from that, the results of state-run social programs implemented in the region should ensure that local people receive quality education and medical services. This will assist the Turkistan region to continue to increase its influence as a leading region in terms of economic activity in the southern part of the country. Moreover, the development of the social and cultural infrastructure in the Turkistan region will increase its tourism potential.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin temporarily relinquished his duties after he tested positive for COVID-19, while his first deputy Andrey Belousov was appointed the acting Prime Minister. During a video call, Mishustin assured President Vladimir Putin that the government would continue to operate normally in his absence. The prime minister also appealed to Russian citizens asking them to take the spread of coronavirus “as seriously as possible” (Kommersant, 30.04.2020).
- President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev had a telephone conversation with his Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Mirziyoyev following a dam breach at the Sardoba water reservoir in Uzbekistan’s Sirdaryo region. The parties discussed ongoing efforts to eliminate the consequences of the disaster, which had also affected several settlements in Kazakhstan’s Turkistan region. The Uzbek leader suggested to take joint measures to quickly restore the areas damaged by the flooding (Akorda, 02.05.2020).
- While detaining four Azerbaijani citizens suspected of poaching on the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan’s coastal guard used firearms killing one and injuring two suspects. Following the incident, Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan Serzhan Abdykarimov was summoned to the country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Azerbaijani side expressed serious concern in connection with human casualties, emphasizing that the use of firearms did not correspond to the spirit of friendly and fraternal relations between the two countries (Trend, 02.05.2020).
- The Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan commented on the false information spread in foreign and domestic media regarding biological laboratories in Kazakhstan. The ministry refuted allegations that the country is involved in the development of biological weapons. According to the comment, the Central Reference Laboratory in Almaty built through funding provided by the U.S. Department of Defense is fully owned by Kazakhstan, and its activities are aimed at ensuring biological safety and security (MFA of Kazakhstan, 02.05.2020).
- Permanent representatives of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states held a series of meetings at the SCO Secretariat in Beijing. The meetings were aimed at coordinating the final documents for the organization’s upcoming summit in St Petersburg scheduled for July 2020. Noting that the coronavirus pandemic affected the SCO’s operation, SCO Secretary General Vladimir Norov called for a more active involvement of permanent representatives in order to agree the documents in a timely manner (SCO, 27.04.2020).
- NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia James Appathurai outlined the alliance’s upcoming steps for increased support for Georgia as a response to security challenges in the Black Sea region. According to Appathurai, Georgia will participate in the NATO’s “hybrid defense” doctrine involving cybersecurity, energy industry and clandestine intelligence, among other measures (Agenda.ge, 30.04.2020).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The Eurasian Economic Commission approved the Eurasian Economic Union’s (EAEU) macroeconomic policy draft guidelines for 2020-2021 aimed at preserving macroeconomic stability in the EAEU states. The idea to draft such a document was put forward by the heads of the EAEU member states during their online summit held on April 14, 2020 in order to take coordinated measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection, strengthen economic cooperation, and overcome negative consequences of the pandemic (The Astana Times, 01.05.2020).
- Retail food trade in Uzbekistan is undergoing transformation due to the coronavirus pandemic as supermarkets are set to gradually replace bazaars. The United Arab Emirates-based Majid Al Futtaim, which operates Carrefour stores under a franchise deal, plans to open three supermarkets and one hypermarket in Tashkent in 2020. The company will earmark about \$11 million for its market entry and invest \$10 million a year for future expansion (Reuters, 30.04.2020).
- According to Kyrgyzstan’s Deputy Prime Minister Erkin Asrandiyev, Bishkek is in talks on debt restructuring with the Export-Import Bank of China, which owns \$1.7 billion of the country’s external debt totaling about \$4 billion. Earlier the Kyrgyz side made a request for debt relief in light of the coronavirus pandemic, which found understanding from Beijing. In particular, Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Jeenbekov had a phone call with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping and asked him to consider “easing and prolonging payments” (Rappler, 29.04.2020).
- According to the World Bank’s outlook on the macroeconomic situation in Tajikistan, the country’s GDP will decline by 1.7% or lower in 2020, while the budget deficit will increase to more than 5% of the GDP. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the risks to growth in Russia, which is the main source of migrant labor remittances, has led to a significant deterioration in Tajikistan’s macro-fiscal structure (Avesta, 28.04.2020).
- The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is ready to invest more than \$250 million in the diversification of Azerbaijan’s economy. The potential sectors for investment include renewable energy, infrastructure, telecommunications and agriculture. In particular, the bank is interested in assisting to improve the country’s power grid, launch clean energy projects, provide distant areas with broadband internet access, stimulate agribusiness and privatize state-owned enterprises (Caspian News, 01.05.2020).
- The EBRD and the Green Climate Fund will allocate €75 million for the rehabilitation of the subway in Georgia’s capital Tbilisi to increase its reliability, safety and efficiency. Funds will be spent on acquiring approximately 40 new comfortable and environmentally friendly metro cars (10 train sets) to replace existing obsolete trains, as well as on rebuilding metro stations and the tunnel. It is expected that the modernized metro will encourage people to use public transportation, which will significantly reduce air pollution (Novosti-Gruziya, 30.04.2020).

Society and Culture

- Pakistan officials handed over to the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Islamabad 60,000 tablets of hydroxychloroquine, which is used in the treatment of patients infected with coronavirus. The drugs will be delivered to Nur-Sultan for further distribution among medical institutions. President Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev and the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan expressed gratitude to the government of Pakistan and personally Prime Minister Imran Khan for providing the humanitarian aid (MFA of Kazakhstan, 28.04.2020).
- The OSCE Program Office in Bishkek handed over technical assistance to the State Agency for Local Self-Government and Inter-Ethnic Relations under the Government of Kyrgyzstan. The assistance was in the form of COVID-19 protection equipment, namely 400 H-95 reusable masks, 200 nitrile gloves, 50 protective goggles, 10 protective overalls, and 2 contactless thermometers. The agency and the OSCE office also cooperate in preventing interethnic conflicts (Kabar, 30.04.2020).
- The ministers of health of the member and observer states of the Turkic Council held a video-conference meeting with the participation of the Regional Director for Europe of the World Health Organization. The parties discussed ways of interaction in the fight against COVID-19 and in the post-pandemic period and decided to set up multilateral cooperation mechanisms to exchange information, experience and best practices in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of dangerous infections (Turkic Council, 28.04.2020).
- The Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission approved the interstate cooperation program of the EAEU member states in the field of the provision of space and geographic information services based on Earth’s remote sensing data. The program scheduled to be implemented in three stages during 2021-2025 is expected to improve the quality of relevant information services provided to users from various economic sectors of the EAEU countries (Eurasian Commission, 28.04.2020).
- Representatives of the government of Turkmenistan and the UN Development Program (UNDP) participated in a roundtable held at the UN Building in Ashgabat. The main theme of the event was the draft of the Country Program of Cooperation between Turkmenistan and the UNDP for 2021-2025. The parties discussed priorities for further expansion of cooperation in such fields as the rule of law and diversification of economy, as well as the quality of statistical data (MFA of Turkmenistan, 28.04.2020).
- According to the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, the country’s population reached 34.03 million people, increasing by 131,600 since the beginning of 2020. As of April 1, 2020, 30.8% of the population were under working age, 58.7% were of working age and 10.5% were older than working age. The largest share of Uzbekistan’s population resides in the Samarkand region (11.4%), followed by the Fergana (11.1%), Qashqadaryo (9.7%) and Andijan (9.2%) regions (Anadolu Agency, 27.04.2020).