

Family structure and children's educational attainment in transition economies

Access to education has been hampered by economic and family shocks in south-east Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union

Keywords: education, children, parental migration, parental health, civil wars

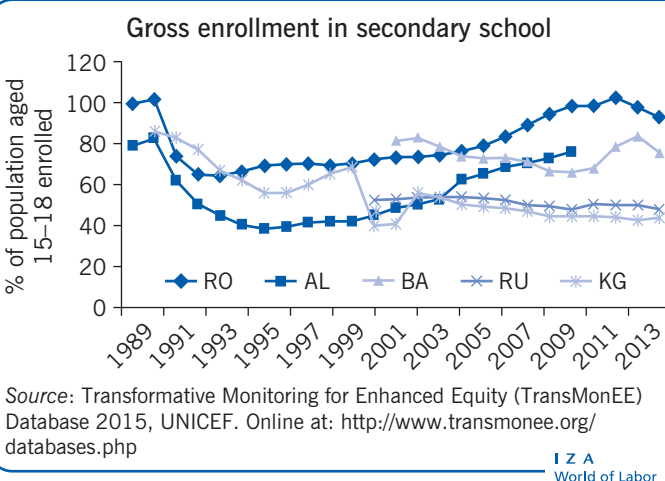
ELEVATOR PITCH

Compared to developing economies, European transition economies had high levels of human capital when their transitions began, but a lack of resources and policies to protect poor families hampered children's access to education, especially for non-compulsory school grades. Different phenomena associated with transition also negatively affected children's education: e.g. parental absence due to migration, health problems, and alcohol abuse. These findings call for a greater policy focus on education and for monitoring of the schooling progress of children in special family circumstances.

KEY FINDINGS

Pros

- + Human capital development is crucial for economic growth and poverty reduction since it reduces intergenerational transmission of economic status and increases the probability of escaping poverty.
- + Human capital development depends on public and family investment in children's education.
- + During the early years of transition, south-east European and former Soviet Union countries had higher stocks of human capital compared to developing economies.
- + Access to education was universal during the socialist period.



Cons

- Enrollment rates in pre-school and secondary school have dropped sharply in many transition economies.
- Poor families have been disproportionately affected by changes in the educational systems of transition countries.
- Real expenditure on education has fallen in most transition countries.
- Parental health shocks due to economic transition or civil wars have negative impacts on children's schooling achievements.
- Parental absence due to temporary migration is negatively associated with school attendance.

AUTHOR'S MAIN MESSAGE

Children's educational achievements and the equality of the opportunities available to them have been negatively affected by the transition from centrally planned to market economies, due to governments' tendency to neglect educational expenditure. School dropout rates are associated with other factors closely related to the transition process, such as parental migration and health status. Policymakers in south-east Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union should thus promote educational opportunities and improve the quality of their education systems. They should encourage school attendance for children with special family circumstances, such as when parents live far away or suffer from health issues.