

# Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific

## KAZAKHSTAN



“Despite the overall progress of countries around the world towards the Sustainable Development Goals, inequality is one of the significant obstacles in this direction. [...] inequality within a society has great potential to be a source of instability. Without social justice, it is impossible to achieve unity in society, and accordingly a sustainable growth. That is why Kazakhstan pays a specific attention to the issue.”

H.E. Mr. Mukhtar Tileuberdi,  
First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan  
74th Annual Session of UNESCAP

### Country Background

<b>18.0</b>	million, total population	<b>0.27</b>	GINI coefficient (income inequality)
<b>24,056</b>	GDP per capita, 2011 PPP \$	<b>0.06</b>	D-index (inequality of opportunity)
<b>2.7 %</b>	people in poverty (below the national poverty line)	<b>72</b>	years of life expectancy at birth
<b>0 %</b>	people in extreme poverty (below \$1.90 a day)	<b>15</b>	expected years of schooling at birth

Source: ESCAP, World Bank Open Data, UNDP

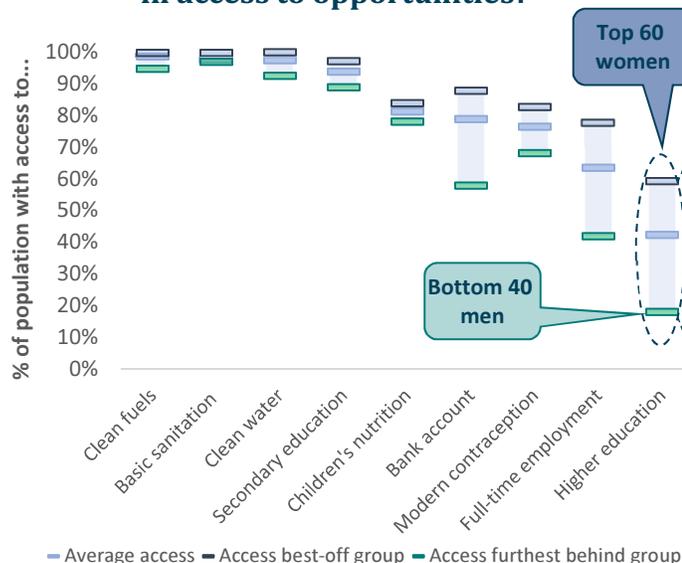
## Leaving no one behind by ensuring a level playing field

Inequality of opportunity refers to the unequal access to fundamental rights and services, required for individuals to sustain and improve their livelihoods.<sup>1</sup>

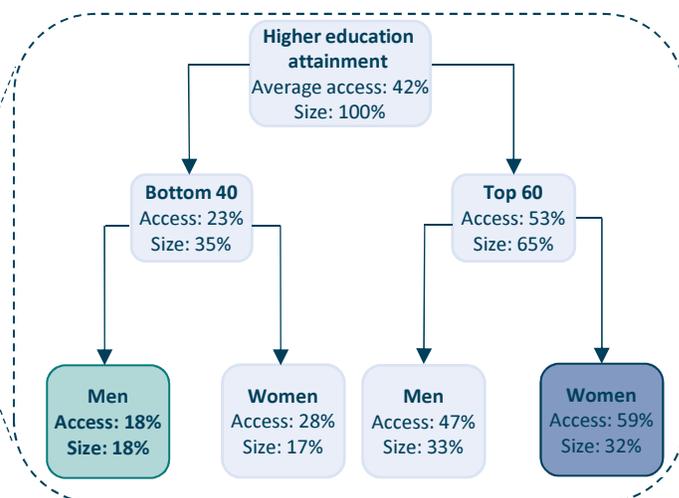
In Kazakhstan, despite almost universal access to some key services, gaps remain between the *best-off* and the *furthest behind* groups in access to few opportunities. Full-time employment and higher education are the most unequally distributed opportunities, with access gaps of at least 30 percentage points between the *best-off* and the *furthest behind* groups. In these opportunities, less than 50 per cent of people in the *furthest behind* group have access.

Identifying the characteristics of the *best-off* and the *furthest behind* group in higher education reveals that 6 out of 10 women belonging to the top 60 of the wealth distribution have completed higher education. This blue box represents the *best-off* group. The green box shows the *furthest behind* group with the lowest higher education attainment: men in the bottom 40, where only 18 per cent have completed higher education.

**Figure 1. How wide are the gaps in access to opportunities?**

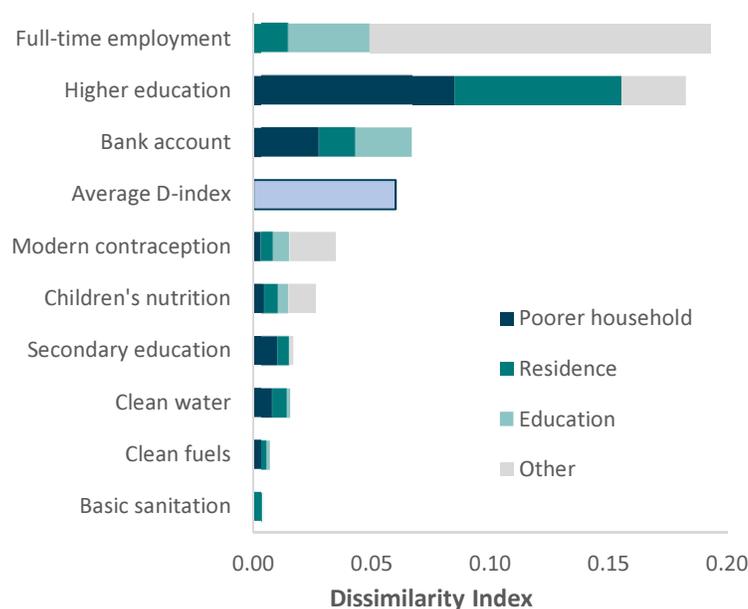


**Figure 2. Who are the furthest behind?**



Source: ESCAP calculations, using data from MICS 2015 and the Gallup World Poll

**Figure 3: Drivers of inequality in access to different opportunities**



**Household wealth, the place of residence and educational level are behind most of the inequality in access to opportunities.**

Other circumstances, however, also appear relevant in explaining unequal access to opportunities.

For example, women, youth and single people have limited access to full-time employment in Kazakhstan. Also, a woman's age and the number of children under the age of five in the household explain unequal access to modern contraception. The number of children in the household explains, together with mother's education, inequality in children's nutritional outcomes.

*Source: ESCAP calculations, using data from MICS 2015 and the Gallup World Poll*  
*Note: A Dissimilarity index (D-Index) is used to examine which circumstance contributes most to overall inequality among different population groups.*

## Key Takeaways

**In Kazakhstan, the largest opportunity gap between the *best-off* and the *furthest behind* group is in higher education.** While 59 per cent of Kazakh women in the top 60 of the wealth distribution have completed higher education, only 18 per cent of men in the bottom 40 have. **Prioritizing equal access to higher education would reduce not only education inequalities, but would also allow development gains through sustained human capital accumulation.**

Only 40 per cent of Kazakhs in the *furthest behind* group are in full-time employment, contrary to the 80 per cent rate of the *best-off* group. **Easing the school-to-work transition and developing specific policies and programs that promote access to decent full-time jobs should be prioritized by policymakers.**

**Among all groups, inequality of opportunity is explained by distinct circumstances.** Household wealth appears as the most important circumstance shaping inequality in 5 out of 9 opportunities. **Since wealth is strongly linked to unequal outcomes in many development objectives and opportunities, leveling the playing field, including through the provision of social protection, is a must.**

<sup>1</sup> The opportunities considered in this country brief are education, women's health, children's nutrition, decent employment, basic water and sanitation, access to clean energy, and financial inclusion. In Kazakhstan, access to electricity and professional help during childbirth are universal. Therefore, these opportunities are not reported in the graphs.

Cover photo by Jade Tong Cuong

For more information and thematic reports on these data and analysis, please visit: <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development/poverty-and-inequality/resources>

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