Following Kazakhstan’s declaration of independence after the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, the country began establishing programs aimed at encouraging more youth to pursue international study opportunities. So what is the state of outward mobility roughly 25 years later? According to the latest figures from UNESCO, the concept of overseas learning is now widely accepted in Kazakhstan. Here’s a closer look at the data.

A 140 Percent Increase

According to UNESCO, the number of Kazakhstani students enrolled in foreign colleges and universities climbed from 28,249 to 66,623 from 2006 to 2015 -- an increase of just under 140 percent in less than a decade.

Which begs the question: Where are most of them choosing to study? The Russian Federation draws the vast majority of Kazakhstani students for a number of reasons, including geographic and cultural proximity, cost, quality and the comparatively easy admissions process. In fact, a full 74 percent chose Russia as their destination country.

China was also a significant draw, with 13,198 Kazakhstani students choosing to study there in 2015, according to figures from the China Scholarship Council as shared by the Institute of International Education’s (IIE) Project Atlas. (Also worth noting? UNESCO data doesn’t actually include China in its data, so the overall number of outbound Kazakhstani students may actually be closer to 80,000 than 66,000.)

So how did fellow “big three” destinations, the US and the UK, measure up? They claimed roughly 2,000 and 1,600 students each, respectively, highlighting the fact that most Kazakhstani students still prefer to remain within their regions.

The Push for English Proficiency

Also aligned with the outward mobility movement over the past near-decade? A government push to promote English language learning toward the imperative of trilingualism. Said President Nazarbayev in his remarks at the time, “Kazakhstan must be perceived in the world as a highly educated country whose population can use three languages: Kazakh as the national language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as the language of successful integration in the global economy.”

Despite the government support for boosting both English language proficiency and enhanced job prospects for qualified students, Kazakhstan has for a long time earned a “very poor” English Proficiency rating. The takeaway? As more Kazakhstani students endeavor to study abroad, there is still work to be done when it comes to supporting language learning.

Read more about studying in Kazakhstan.
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