**Education
Sector**

Albania

Education Policy Review:
Issues and Recommendations

Extended Report

**Education
2030**

Albania

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Issues and Recommendations

Extended Report

Disclaimer

Foreword

The Republic of Albania is undergoing significant education reforms, including the implementation of the Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020. These reforms reflect the high priority given to education in Albania, in the perspective of European Union integration and the country's international commitments. Looking beyond the year 2020, these and other reforms are expected to help align the education sector with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of the international 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

SDG4 is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. This means building upon the range of actions taken by the government and other stakeholders to achieve inclusion, equity and quality in education. It involves a holistic approach to human development, an increased focus on the articulation between different types and levels of education and training, and more inter-sectoral cooperation.

It is in that context that Albania requested UNESCO to conduct an Education Policy Review (EPR). This extended report presents the findings and recommendations of the EPR in three policy domains selected by the Ministry of Education and Sport as key strategic areas for the reform process: (1) Curriculum Development and Reform; (2) Information and Communication Technology in Education and (3) Teacher and School Leadership policies.

The UNESCO review team, composed of staff and international consultants, made several visits in the period 2015 to 2017 for the purpose of collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data. In-depth interviews and focus groups took place with key stakeholders and the preliminary findings and recommendations were discussed at a technical workshop in March 2017. This process was conducted in close consultation with the Albania's Institute for Educational Development (IED).

On 12 April 2017, at a special event in Tirana, the Deputy Prime Minister, H.E. Niko Peleshi, the Minister of Education and Sport, Hon. Lindita Nikolla and UNESCO's Assistant Director-General of Education, Mr Qian Tang, launched SDG4-Education 2030 and the EPR report in English and Albanian. The findings and recommendations were jointly presented by IED and UNESCO. This extended report elaborates on the context of education in Albania, key policy issues and recommendations, cross-cutting issues and possible future areas for cooperation.

For the implementation of the ongoing curriculum reform the report recommends further professional development of teachers in areas such as student assessment, meeting the needs of disadvantaged learners, and using ICTs for teaching. Measures to raise the status of the teaching profession and to attract high quality applicants to initial teacher education are also suggested. The report recommends to increase Internet connectivity especially in rural areas, to invest in digital learning resources, and to develop national guidelines on the use of ICTs in education. According to the review team cross-cutting actions in each domain are needed to improve communication between education stakeholders, promote inclusive education, strengthen institutions, and to enhance monitoring and evaluation.

The EPR process and output provide an evidence-based approach to education sector development in Albania grounded in international research and comparative experiences combined with the insights of national stakeholders.

It is our hope that through this EPR, UNESCO contributed to policy analysis and dialogue to guide the implementation of the Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020 and to eventually align the national reform agenda with SDG4-Education 2030.

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Figures and Tables

Abbreviations

ACCE	Albanian Coalition for Child Education
ALL	Lekë
ANE	Agency of National Examination
CBR	Country Background Report
CoE	Council of Europe
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
RED/DAR	Regional Education Directorate/Drejtoria Arsimore Rajonale
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
EPNSL	European Policy Network on School Leadership
EPR	Education Policy Review
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPA	Grade Point Average
GPI	Gender Parity Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDI	ICT Development Index
IED/IZHA	Institute of Educational Development/Instituti i Zhvillimit te Arsimit
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MES	Ministry of Education and Sport
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoSWY	Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
MSHIAP	Ministry of State for Innovation and Public Administration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NREN	National Research and Education Network
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSE	Pre-School Education
PUED	Pre-University Education Development Strategy
RED	Regional Education Directorate/Drejtoria Arsimore
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals as abbreviation
SIE	State Inspectorate of Education
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	World Bank

Executive Summary

The Republic of Albania (hereinafter 'Albania'), is located in Southeast Europe and has a population of around 3 million. Albania is rich in history and culture, however, under communist rule for most of the second half of the 20th century, Albania became one of the poorest and most isolated countries in Europe.

Since the fall of communism in the 1990s, Albania has made steady progress in establishing democratic political institutions and a market economy. Albania became a candidate country for European Union (EU) membership in 2014 and has since pursued public sector reforms, including in education, as required for the opening of EU accession negotiations.

Education reforms are instrumental in fostering democratic citizenship and for developing the skills and competencies needed for Albania's sustainable economic development. Perhaps more than any other institutions, schools are sites of identity construction. Over the last decades, schools have had to change their role from reproducing loyal communist subjects to fostering the growth and development of students' critical-thinking and digital competencies for participation in the society and economy of Albania and beyond.

BACKGROUND

This Education Policy Review (EPR) was initiated in 2015 through a request to UNESCO by the Government of Albania, with the purpose of supporting the country's vision for educational reform in the context of its national, regional, and international aspirations. It was conducted by a UNESCO expert team in close cooperation with specialists in the Ministry of Education and Sport (MES) and the Institute for Educational Development (IED) in Albania.

The team investigated three key policy domains in the area of pre-university education in which Albania has embarked on significant reforms; (1) Curriculum development and reform; (2) Information and communication technology (ICT) in education; and (3) Teacher and school leadership policies.

Building on a country background report prepared by the Institute for Educational Development, the team conducted a literature review and interviews with key stakeholders to assess the situation in each domain and to identify key policy issues. Based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data this EPR report advances a set of recommendations intended to support education reforms in line with the

country's broader policy aspirations. The annexes provide analytical tools to aid policy-makers to prioritize the recommendations taking into account the relative costs, level of difficulty, timeframe, and their estimated impacts. Indicative priorities, discussed in a technical workshop with stakeholders, are contained in the annexes.

ALBANIA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In each of the three key policy domains of the EPR, issues of equity, equality, inclusion, and access to education were central concerns for stakeholders. Thus, by pursuing national goals and strategic reforms related to improving equity, inclusion and quality, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, Albania is paving the way for long-term system reform towards EU integration and greater alignment with the international education agenda, Sustainable Development Goal 4-Education 2030.

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/70/1: *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* The 2030 Agenda is integrated, indivisible, and applies universally to all countries. Developed through a broad consultative process driven and owned by Member States, including Albania, the 2030 Agenda includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a plan of action that is committed to ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including by eradicating extreme poverty by 2030.[1]

SDG4-Education 2030, the new international agenda for education, is one of the 17 SDGs. The Education 2030 Framework for Action outlines how to translate into practice the commitments made at the World Education Forum held in Incheon, Republic of Korea and provides guidance for implementing SDG4-Education 2030, to *'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'*.

The achievement of SDG4-Education 2030 will depend on collective efforts at all levels; however, primary responsibility to deliver on the right to education is with governments.

KEY POLICY DOMAINS

The EPR provides a sector-wide perspective with in-depth analysis of three key education policy domains; curriculum development and reform; information and communication technology (ICT) in education; and teacher and school leadership

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1   http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

policies. These domains were identified by the Government of Albania and UNESCO as areas in which strategic reforms could deliver maximum impact. Some of the main findings, issues and recommendations in each domain are summarized below.

Curriculum development and reform

The curriculum reform currently underway in Albania aims to equip students with a broad set of competencies that include communication and higher order skills such as critical thinking, extracting and analysing information from a variety of sources, and utilizing multiple strategies for learning, including problem-solving, analysis, and presentation. The key competencies that underlie the new curriculum are aligned with the key competencies for lifelong learning that have been by throughout the European Union. The adoption of this approach in Albania's national curriculum framework seen as a significant step in curriculum modernization.

There is some concern in the country, however, that the pedagogical shift required to engage students in a constructivist, collaborative learning approach and adopt a new competency-based assessment model is one for which teachers in Albania have not been adequately trained or prepared. To address this gap, the EPR report recommends improving school placements and the mentoring of new candidate teachers, and enhancing opportunities for collaborative peer-learning and other forms of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers.

Furthermore, inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized groups in education is a key issue. The review team found that pre-university education in Albania is not of equal quality for all students in all regions of the country. There are differences between rural and urban schools, in the quality of the teaching force and in the availability of resources such as transportation and ICT. There are also groups of minority students (such as Roma, Balkan Egyptian, low-income students, and students with disabilities) who are not yet being well-served. To address these significant gaps in educational equity and equality, the EPR recommends that teacher training and professional development be expanded and an increased emphasis placed on inclusiveness while teaching (through differentiated instruction) as well as on effective pedagogy and classroom management in order to engage all students in the learning process. It is recommended that the authorities should also ensure that all curricular materials, including new textbooks and online resources, are relevant and appropriate for Albania's students.

An additional recommendation in the domain of curriculum development and reform concerns the need to improve systems for monitoring and evaluating student

participation, achievement, and progression through school. For example, the collection of data from regularly administered student surveys could inform ongoing improvements to the teaching and learning climate in schools. Information from a recent OECD PISA assessment showed that, in general and to a greater degree than in many other countries, students in Albania believe that their teachers treat them fairly and listen carefully to them. This positive classroom climate serves as an excellent context for the current efforts to improve student learning outcomes.

Information and communication technology in education

In the domain of information and communication technology (ICT) in education, Albania has made significant headway towards expanding access to ICTs throughout the country. However, more can be done to extend ICT use and internet access to schools and communities in more remote areas. To achieve this goal and ensure that all students can benefit from ICT in education, as required by the new curriculum, one of the key recommendations advanced in the EPR is for Albania to increase its investment in ICT infrastructure and connectivity, particularly in remote areas.

All children should have the opportunity to engage in safe and educational use of the Internet and benefit from appropriate access to information through technology. Along these lines, another key recommendation of the EPR is for the Government to increase investment in digital learning resources so that teachers and students may benefit from teaching and learning strategies that cultivate the digital competencies they need to succeed in Albania's workforce and in the global knowledge economy.

The EPR found that online safety is becoming an increasingly important issue to address in Albania. With greater access to the internet, children and young adults can encounter significant threats such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and unlawful solicitation. In Albania, young people are facing these risks and more should be done to ensure their protection. The EPR recommends greater collaboration between educational institutions, parents, and youth in order to raise awareness of problematic online situations that can put children and other vulnerable populations at risk.

As in other domains of pre-university education, the EPR identified the need for greater monitoring, evaluation and standard-setting in the use and provision of ICT in education in Albania. National ICT policies in education will have the greatest impact if they are aligned with other strategic and operational policies, particularly those designed to enhance equity, quality and inclusion for all children.

Teacher and school leadership policies

In Albania, deep reforms in the education sector have placed new and intensified demands on Albania's teachers, principals, schools, and other institutions that prepare, certify, and maintain the quality of the education workforce. Based on the UNESCO review team's findings, there are several important areas where Albania can make improvements to its teacher and school leadership policies. Many of these issues were identified in the Government's Pre-University Education Strategy for 2014-2020, but more can be done to ensure that the reforms are implemented in a way that enriches the quality of educational provision across the country.

One key dimension of the system that is examined in the EPR is the area of workforce development. The teaching workforce in Albania may be younger than the average in OECD countries, and female teachers greatly outnumber males in Albania, as in many other countries. However, there is a paradoxical challenge in the teaching workforce. While on the one hand, there is a general oversupply of teachers, there are nonetheless several areas where teaching jobs go unfilled, such as in the fields of ICT, physical education, and in some of the sciences such as biology/chemistry. Furthermore, initial teacher education (ITE) programmes admit and produce more teachers than the education system needs, while at the same time, leaving positions unfilled in these key subjects and remote areas. To address the crucial issues related to workforce development, the EPR recommends that Albania examine its teacher deployment procedures, intensify efforts to recruit qualified teachers to fill positions and locations that are experiencing shortages, and introduce more flexible routes into the teaching profession, particularly in shortage areas.

International research has shown that the quality of teachers and their teaching are the most important school-related factors in student achievement. Stakeholders in Albania shared that while teaching was once a highly respected profession in Albania, its status has declined in recent years and, as a result, there are fewer high-quality applicants going into the profession. Attracting qualified teachers to the profession is thus a key area of needed reform in Albania. To reach this goal, the EPR recommends that the Government invests in efforts to raise the status of the teaching profession by attracting high-quality applicants to ITE programmes and raising the bar for entry into these programmes. Furthermore, there is a need to create greater alignment between the new competency-based curriculum and the content of ITE programmes.

Improving processes and institutions for initial teacher education (ITE) and teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) were found to be central issues that Albania must address in order to ensure the success of education sector reforms. The emphasis on implementing a more student-centred, competency-based curriculum, expanding the use of ICT in schools, and increasing equity, have placed new

expectations on teachers to create more inclusive classrooms where students develop transversal skills and prepare for their role in the knowledge society.

As Albania continues to decentralize its education system and pursue policies that require greater school autonomy, principals will play an increasingly important role in both leading and facilitating the distributed leadership of others. For this reason, the EPR recommends that the Government support school leaders by creating a well-resourced central body to create and implement programmes that will develop the professional capacities of school leaders and prepare teachers to pursue leadership positions as a means of career advancement. Along these lines, the EPR also recommends that schools, and in particular school leaders, play a greater role in staffing decisions, and that all forms of teacher assessment, including certification examinations, undergo rigorous piloting in order to ensure that they are robust and valid measures of teachers' competence.

Like its neighbours in Europe and the Western Balkans, Albania sees the role of teachers and school leadership as central to improving student learning outcomes and creating a more equitable and inclusive education system overall.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As well as the specific issues identified in the key policy domains of curriculum reform; ICT in education; and teacher and school leadership policies, the EPR highlights a set of cross-cutting issues that are of strategic importance to education reform. These issues are: improving information-sharing, communication, and transparency throughout the education system; building a more equitable society through inclusive education; developing strong institutions and school infrastructure; and strengthening capacities for monitoring and evaluation of educational reforms.

The need for greater communication and transparency among Government ministries and agencies and between the national authorities and key education stakeholders was evident in each of the three policy domains reviewed. Extensive reforms such as implementing a new national curriculum and upgrading ICT infrastructure in schools cannot be accomplished without effective coordination and communication across the country.

Analysis across the three key policy domains clearly demonstrated that despite the Government's efforts to integrate all children into schooling, a significant segment of the population is being left behind. In particular, Roma children, children in rural and remote communities, and children with disabilities are not currently attaining the quality education to which they are entitled by law due primarily to structural barriers and discrimination. To achieve the goal and targets of SDG4-Education

2030, as well as Albania's own national priorities in education, the Government must do more for these children.

Related to this issue, due to internal migration and rapid urbanization, many schools in cities and suburbs appear to function at the edge or above their capacity. With the implementation of the new curriculum, and the need for more differentiated forms of instruction, overcrowding in urban classrooms may jeopardize many of the benefits of these reforms. To address these issues, this EPR report recommends that the Government increases investment in institutions, including by strengthening the capacities of teachers and school leaders, and school infractracture. Targetted investments are needed to reduce overcrowding in public schools in urban area and to increase educational access and quality for marginalized and disadvantaged populations including Roma and Balkan Egyptian children, children in remote rural areas, and children with disabilities. The report recommends that the government should capitalize on ICTs transformative potentials by strategically using ICT to improve governance, access to resources, teachers' professional development and the quality of learning. Targeted support to higher education institutions would help to address critical needs in human resource development and strengthen institutional governance across the education system. The quality of higher education pertains to the education of future teachers and educational professionals.

The Government of Albania will need to pay significant attention to strengthening monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacities throughout the education sector. The implication is to identify key indicators and that responsibilities for data collection and analysis are clearly assigned and that the necessary capacities to collect, analyse, disseminate and utilize data are in place.

In the domain of curriculum development and reform, it is recommended to develop and implement a student information management system and to broaden the set of indicators to include qualitative and outcome-based measures. For ICTs in education there is a recommendation to collect and publish statistics on the use of ICTs. In the domain of teachers and school leadership policies, it is recommended to conduct an evaluation of the teacher internship programme and to develop a system-wide performance appraisal system for teachers. Effective monitoring and evaluation can help not only governments, development partners and donors, but all those concerned with education and its quality and coverage, so as to inform future policies and strategies. SDG4-Education 2030 has significant implications for M&E, because of the wide range of targets and associated indicators and the need for internationally comparable data.

CONCLUSION

The EPR has identified a number of areas where Albania is poised to make further strides in the realm of education, in the direction of its aspirations for EU integration and towards meeting its international commitments.

Aligning the development of education with SDG4-Education 2030 will help Albania towards further integration into the global community. Educational reforms including curriculum modernization, promotion of key competencies for lifelong learning, enhancing social inclusion, expanding ICT in education, improving standards for teachers and school leaders, and raising the level of student achievement are among Albania's top priorities.

This report is intended to be strategic tool that can assist the Government of Albania in realizing these priorities. It presents evidence and analysis to support and inform national policy-making processes, investigates major issues in specific policy domains and formulates evidence-based recommendations.

The EPR report does not, however, provide a comprehensive analysis of Albania's entire education sector. Rather this EPR is indicative of the kind of research and analysis that could also be done in other sub-sectors or domains such as early childhood care and education, technical and vocational education and training, tertiary education, including university, and global citizenship education, all of which are within the scope and targets of SDG4-Education 2030.

The review process has successfully created linkages between SDG4-Education 2030, the 2014-2020 PUEDS and other strategies. Depending upon the availability of extra-budgetary resources UNESCO is ready to support the Government of Albania in following up, in partnership, on the recommendations made in the EPR report, for example by advising on implementation and on related issues. Possible areas for UNESCO support could be the development of national resource centres for teachers and school leaders. This could involve, for example, tailored support to various dimensions of teacher policies, such as continuing professional development and teacher standards. Subject to funding, UNESCO could also contribute international expertise and experience in support of a centre for school leadership offering relevant training programmes to develop the capacities of school leaders. UNESCO could also provide technical advice for the development of monitoring and evaluation in relation to the SDG4-Education 2030 targets and indicators.

With a window open to significant reform, it is hoped that the EPR process and this report will provide an impetus for national actors to address important policy

issues within and across the three domains of curriculum development and reform; ICT in education; and teacher and school leadership policies. The dissemination of this EPR report, in English and Albanian languages, provides an important opportunity for strategic policy dialogue and meaningful transformations in the field of education. Accession to the EU is a long-standing goal of Albania and continues to serve as a key driver for public sector reforms, including in education. This EPR report aims to support this process and Albania's closer integration into the international community. Through effective engagement with local stakeholders and strategic development partnerships Albania will be well prepared to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning, with wider benefits for society as a whole.

■ Introduction

BACKGROUND

This Education Policy Review was initiated in 2015 by the Republic of Albania (*Republika e Shqipërisë*), hereinafter 'Albania', with the purpose of supporting the country's vision for educational reform in the context of its national, regional, and international aspirations. Albania's longstanding relationship with UNESCO as a key international development partner provided an ideal opportunity for technical cooperation. Drawing on UNESCO's expertise, the Education Policy Review (EPR) Extended Report provides evidence and analysis for the harmonization of ongoing national reform efforts with Albania's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the area of education. By pursuing inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, Albania is paving the way for long-term system reform on the pathway towards EU integration and alignment with the international education agenda, SDG4-Education 2030.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

The EPR was conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sport (MES) and the Institute of Educational Development (IED) of Albania. As requested by the national authorities, the review was conducted from a sector-wide perspective, and thus, includes overarching aspects related to the planning and management of the education sector in Albania. Three policy domains were identified by the Government of Albania and UNESCO as areas in which strategic reforms could deliver maximum impact towards the achievement of national sector priorities. These are: (1) Curriculum Development and Reform; (2) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Education; and (3) Teacher and School Leadership Policies. The EPR provides a set of evidence-based policy recommendations to contribute to educational development in the country. These recommendations are intended as a contribution to education policy dialogue and to support Albania to implement the 2014-2020 Pre-University Education Development Strategy (PUEDS), and to align the education sector with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education and lifelong learning.

In conducting the EPR, the review team adopted an international and comparative perspective to identify relative achievements, strengths, weaknesses and policy bottlenecks in the education system of Albania, whilst taking into account the

views and experiences of a wide range of education stakeholders. The review team used a variety of quantitative and qualitative data sources on multiple constituting elements (country context, including demography, economy and society) and on the education system itself. The review involved an analysis of policy documents, national background papers and comparative data on the education system of Albania in the context of wider trends influencing education in the Western Balkans, the European Union, and beyond. The analysis was then verified through interviews and discussions with officials from various divisions of the MES as well as other education stakeholders at central, state, regional and local levels, including principals, teachers, student teachers, and students at primary, secondary, upper secondary and higher education levels.

Specifically, the EPR process included:

- **The Country Background Report** *(CBR)* prepared by the national team (appointed by the national authorities) in 2015 in accordance with UNESCO education policy analysis guidelines (e.g. based on the UNESCO National Education Support Strategy, UNESS). The CBR (IED, 2015) provides baseline factual and descriptive information.

- **UNESCO Benchmarking Factsheet** provided basic information about how Albania's education system is performing in comparison to other countries.

- **UNESCO Literature Review** conducted during 2015-2016 explores recent works on education policy in Albania. The purpose of the literature review was to provide background information and to inform and stimulate further discussion with national stakeholders during missions.

- **Series of UNESCO Missions** including (1) a scoping mission; (2) two fact-finding missions (September and October 2015); (3) a high level technical coordination mission (December 2016); (4) a technical workshop with key stakeholders (1 March 2017); and (5) a launch and dissemination event of the EPR (12 April 2017). These missions involved cooperation between the national team based at the IED and the UNESCO review team.

STRUCTURE OF THE EXTENDED REPORT

The Albania EPR Extended Report is composed of six chapters, of which the first two provide the background and context for the review in an international and comparative policy perspective. Chapters three through five discuss the evidence

base for policy issues and recommendations in the three priority policy domains, while chapter six includes an analysis and discussion of cross-cutting issues and steps for moving forward. In sum, the structure is as follows:

- **Chapter 1** presents an overview of the education system in Albania with a particular focus on characteristics most relevant to the three priority domains analysed in the subsequent chapters.

- **Chapter 2** provides a concise analysis of the country's education system performance in an international perspective with a specific focus on issues of access and participation; equity and equality; educational processes and outcomes; government expenditures; and decentralization and accountability in the pre-university education system.

- **Chapters 3, 4 and 5** present an in-depth assessment of the three national priority domains in education, namely: (Chapter 3/Domain 1) curriculum development and reform; (Chapter 4/Domain 2) ICT in education; and (Chapter 5/Domain 3) teacher and school leadership policies. In each domain, the main policy issues are examined in light of existing evidence, and a series of recommendations for action are elaborated.

- **Chapter 6** concludes the EPR Extended Report and presents the four cross-cutting policy issues and related recommendations as well as plans for follow-up actions.

- **Annexes** provide graphic tools for policy-makers and other stakeholders to consider the priorities for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the various policy recommendations, taking account of likely costs, level of difficulty, feasibility, and the estimated timelines. Indicative priorities, discussed with stakeholders in a technical workshop in Albania are presented.

- **Bibliographic references** are listed alphabetically.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

While the UNESCO review team employed a rigorous research methodology in compiling this EPR, certain limitations to the research process were present. For example, in situations where particular data were not available, the review team had to rely on interviews from government officials in regard to policy details and objectives. In some instances, the lack of available data and documents made it difficult to reference specific information to validate findings. Furthermore, the review team experienced occasional difficulties collecting and incorporating new information on policy actions that took place during the period of the review process.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the Extended Report of the EPR is intended to contribute to policy dialogue within the education sector in Albania, in the context of the 2014-2021 PUEDS, and the global agenda of SDG4-Education 2030, by providing a solid platform upon which ongoing analysis of the most pertinent issues identified in the three priority domains can be built. Examples of experiences from other jurisdiction are intended to aid reflection and discussion, even though their social and historical contexts differ from Albania. Ultimately, with a window opened to potential reform, it is hoped that this EPR Extended Report will provide the impetus for national actors, with the support of international development partners, to address the policy issues identified and to press forward to achieve their goals and strategies for education.

■ Chapter 1
Context of the Albanian Education Policy Review

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the country context in which the EPR has been conducted. Drawing on evidence presented in the Country Background Report (IED, 2015), as well as an array of other sources, the chapter provides a brief historical overview of Albania's educational developments over the last two decades. Through a discussion of key demographic, economic, and societal factors that have shaped and framed education policy and reform in Albania, the chapter contextualizes the three priority policy domains examined in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. In particular, the chapter analyses key legal provisions and reforms aimed at improving educational provision in line with Albania's overarching aspirations of European Union (EU) accession and harmonization with international development goals, including SDG4-Education 2030.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Albania is a small, upper middle income country with a population of almost 3 million located in South East Europe, in the Western Balkans. The country has long coastlines with both the Adriatic and Ionian Sea. Following recent administrative territorial reforms, the country now has 12 regions and 61 municipalities which are responsible for the provision of public services including education, at the local level. The capital city, Tirana, is the largest city and epicentre of political, economic and cultural life, thus hosting many public institutions.

Albania is a parliamentary democracy established under the Constitution that was renewed in 1998. The country is a member of many multilateral organizations including, but not limited to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations (UN), including UNESCO, the World Bank (WB), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Albania is a non-member partner country with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Albania applied for candidacy to the European Union (EU) in 2009 and gained official EU candidate status in June 2014. This was an important landmark for a country that only two decades earlier was one of the poorest and most isolated states in Europe, emerging from communist rule (see European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 2014).

Demographics and employment

More than 82.6% of Albania's population is of ethnic Albanian origin. Greeks compose 0.9% of the total population, while another 1% embraces various ethnic groups, including Aromanians, Roma, Macedonians, Balkan Egyptians, Montenegrins, and 'other,' with the remaining 15.5% qualifying as 'unspecified' (Republic of Albania, Institute of Statistics, 2011*a*). The official language is Albanian, spoken by 98.8% of the population. Other major spoken languages include Greek, Macedonian, Roma, Aromanian, Turkish, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian (Republic of Albania, Institute of Statistics, 2011*b*). Religious affiliation is as follows: 56.7% Muslim, 10% Catholic, 6.8% Orthodox Christian, 2.5% Atheist, 2.1% Bektashi, 5.7% belonging to 'other', and 16.2% qualifying as 'unspecified' (Republic of Albania, Institute of Statistics, 2011*c*).

Until 2001, Albania was a predominantly rural society with 53% of its citizens residing in rural areas. Now the majority of its residents (54% in 2013) are settled in urban areas (Republic of Albania Council of Ministers, 2013, pp. 10-12). Internal migration triggered by significant economic and social imbalances between various geographical areas has been a challenge to the authorities, including decision-makers in the education system. Concurrently, extensive external migration of some of the most capable members of the labour force has posed a challenge to the society as well.[2] Most migrants originally from Albania are likely to be of working age, which has had a negative impact on the country's workforce (World Bank, 2015, pp. 35-36).

For the period of 2007-2012, the unemployment rate averaged 13%, while the youth unemployment rate has been moderately high in comparison (32.5% in 2014), but still much lower than in some neighbouring countries, such as Montenegro (60.1% in 2014) (World Bank, 2015, p. 12).

Economic development

Though Albania's economy has shown relative strength in recent years, there are still concerns over issues such as social disparities, gender inequality, the freedom of the press and other media, and environmental sustainability. Over the past decade, Albania has stayed committed to its liberal economic policies, which first denoted the start of the post-communist period in the 1990s. While the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates dropped from 7.5% in 2008 to the moderate 1.6% in 2012, Albania was still successful in translating the sustained growth into some enhanced wellbeing (Republic of Albania Council of Ministers, 2013, p. 5). The Human Development Report of 2016 ranked Albania's Human Development Index

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2   The most severe forms of migration resulting in 'brain drain' for Albania have been addressed through various initiatives like the *Brain Gain Programme*. The latter established by the Albanian Government with the support of UNDP aims at countering the economic and social effects of the "brain drain" by encouraging highly skilled professionals to come back to Albania.

as 75th (in the 'high' category) out of 188 participating states (UNDP, 2016). Albania has outperformed other countries and ranks higher than average with respect to its standing on converting wealth into better living standards (Republic of Albania Council of Ministers, 2013, pp. 6-7). This may be viewed as particularly important in the context of efforts to reduce youth unemployment and implement education sector reforms.

Albania has also taken significant measures to reduce and ultimately bridge the infrastructure gap, by channelling a good share of its capital expenditure (up to over 50%) to the transport sector (Republic of Albania Council of Ministers, 2013, pp. 9-10). Ideally, road improvements, especially away from major cities, can be translated into socially meaningful investments and also help the education system advance.

In addition, Albania has attracted significant foreign direct investments (FDI). For example, in 2010, Albania was ranked 18th in the list of more than 140 countries rated for their FDI flows. In the first quarter of 2015, FDI grew by 53% compared to the previous year (World Bank, 2015, p. 49). Exports also increased, and the business climate has substantially improved. The introduction of a flat-rate corporate income tax of 10% and reduction of the social insurance contributions to 15% have eased the fiscal burden and reduced the labour costs in the economy (Republic of Albania Council of Ministers, 2013, p. 10). While the investments and net exports have served as drivers for the economy, private consumption has been contracting. The expansion trend for public investments has also slowed due to the recent efforts on fiscal consolidation (World Bank, 2015, p. 49).

Gender equality

The Constitution guarantees equality of every individual before the law and contends that no person will be unjustly discriminated due to gender.[3] In Albania, the legislation allows the international treaties to supersede the national laws, and this comes at the backdrop of the country's Parliament having ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. At the same time, however, women are only marginally protected with almost non-existent constitutional bans on domestic violence or sexual harassment (UNESCO, 2015*c*, pp. 14-17, 21). Furthermore, according to a recent common country assessment, 'gender-based violence (women aged 15-49) has increased from 56% in 2007 to 59.4% in 2014' (UNCT, 2015, p. 21). Thus, gender-based violence is a significant issue in Albania, with more than half of women experiencing it in some form.

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3   See Article 18 of the 1998 Constitution of the Republic of Albania (available at http://www.osce.org/albania/41888?download=true).

On the gender continuum, another challenge has been the low incidence of women in decision-making and governance positions. Despite the quota mandating that at least 30% of political party runners should be women, only slightly over 16% of the country's entire pool of female candidates on the party lists had been elected as parliamentarians (UNESCO, 2015*c*, p. 21). Women are also significantly under-represented in school leadership positions (Çobaj, 2015). However, in comparison with the earlier years, the participation of women in politics is increasing, and women can be found in leading positions in educational and social welfare institutions, through less so in the Parliament or institutions of local governance.

Media and ICT

While the right to freedom of the press and media is stated in the Constitution, in reality, it is often compromised in favour of various political and economic interests. This issue is increasingly under scrutiny as the country seeks to join the European Union. According to the 2016 Annual Press Freedom Index, Albania was ranked 82nd which was 14 points higher than its 2011 ranking (UNESCO, 2015*b*, p. 14). However, according to a 2016 Freedom House report, Albania ranks as 'partly free', falling at the mid-point between most and least free (i.e. 15/30 in the legal environment)[4].

Improvements in information and communication technology (ICT) and the general Internet connectivity of Albania have been steady. During the period of 2000-2008, the number of Internet users grew exponentially from 2,500 to 750,000 users. The national coverage of mobile phones has reached over 90% of the population. The significant opportunities and challenges in the area of ICT, particularly in light of Albania's educational goals, are discussed in Chapter 4.

EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

Beginning with the fall of communist rule in the early 1990s, the main objective in the education sector has been to transform education from a vehicle of state control to a means of democratic social and economic development. According to the reflections of a former teacher under the communist system:

> We [teachers] were not there to watch and nurture children's individual intelligence and development. We were not there to support their understanding of the world according to their personal experience; instead, we had to turn them into robots. As a teacher, I found this very demoralizing as we were stunting the cultural and intellectual development of our youth (Olsen, 2000, p. 42).

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4 https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/albania

In contrast to the aim of producing obedient communist subjects, the overarching intention became to replace the tradition of 'learning by rote' with teaching and learning for democratic citizenship through open discussions and critical thinking. With the help of local and international NGOs, a range of new pedagogical models were introduced in Albania during the first post-communist decade. These projects helped educators to overcome 'the cultural legacy of five decades of autarchy and passivity;' which even in 2003, continued to 'shape daily life in education and its management' (OECD, 2003, p. 46). Since that time, education in Albania has undergone a series of significant reforms, from the policy level to the school level.

Even so, in the early period of democratization, there were many lingering effects of the previous system. For example, the state governing bodies and affiliated institutions of the newly democratic society inherited a high-degree of pervasive politicisation. Civic participation in local governance, including the education sector, materialised more as an exception, rather than as a rule, throughout the country. At the same time, throughout the 1990s and especially following the civil unrest in 1997-98, Albania was facing the challenge of physical rehabilitation of school infrastructure, especially in rural areas (Olsen, 2000).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the broadening and deepening of the cooperation with international organizations, as well as casting the legal foundations for significant reforms, Albania entered a new phase of national education development (MES, 2014*g*, p. 4). Among the notable, donor-sponsored initiatives since the mid-to-late 1990s were the Albanian Education Development Project of the Soros Foundation/Open Society, as well as the assistance of the UNICEF, the Council of Europe, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Embassy of the United States of America. Each of these agencies, albeit with distinct programmatic foci, sought to support local education reform efforts such as school rehabilitation, teacher training, curriculum development, global education, and democratic citizenship education (Gardinier, 2016). Gradually, the country demonstrated its readiness and willingness to implement larger-scale, multilaterally supported frameworks for development of the education sector, including, for instance, the World Bank's *Educational Excellence and Equity Project (EEEP)*. This Project, with its total project cost of USD 75 million, resulted in improved quality of physical classroom conditions, enhanced and more relevant curricula, and reinforced institutional governance for higher education (World Bank, 2014*a*; 2014*d*).

The regional and international context of Albania's education reforms

A significant driver for reform in the education sector was, and still remains, the alignment of national policy objectives with European and international aspirations and benchmarks (Gardinier, 2016). Although there are no mandatory directives from the European Union (EU) specifically on education, Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) is a shared EU framework for cooperation in education, with a number of benchmarks for 2020, among which these three relate directly to pre-university education:

■ At least 95% of children (from the age of 4 and up to compulsory school age) should take part in early childhood education;

■ Fewer than 15% of those aged 15 can be under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science; and

■ The rate of early leavers from education and training in the age group of 18-24 should not reach 10%.[5]

Six new priorities for a period of 2016-2020 have also been introduced (European Commission, 2015*d*):

■ Relevant and high-quality knowledge, skills and competences developed throughout lifelong learning, focusing on learning outcomes for employability, innovation, active citizenship and well-being;

■ Inclusive education, equality, equity, non-discrimination, and the promotion of civic competences;

■ Open and innovative education and training, including by fully embracing the digital era;

■ Strong support for teachers, trainers, school leaders, and other educational staff;

■ Transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications to facilitate learning and labour mobility;

■ Sustainable investment, quality, and efficiency of education and training systems.

Education policies within European Union countries are a significant reference point for EU candidate countries. As discussed in subsequent chapters of this EPR, Albania's education reforms draw upon some of the major principles of the pan-European social and economic recommendations, including those from the European Union, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe, as well as several bilateral

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5   See http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework_en

and multi-lateral organizations including UNESCO. In addition, although Albania is not a member of the OECD, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has become an important reference point for policy-making in the country.

Beyond Europe, global frameworks, such as the *Education for All* and the *Millennium Development Goals* have served as an important reference for education policy development in Albania. The policy implications for education of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, including SDG4-Education 2030, are currently under consideration. The shared vision of SDG4, to '*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*' is more comprehensive in scope than previous international education agendas that have mainly focused on access to basic education. It thus provides a wider normative framework for Albania's ongoing education reforms.

Since 2000, Albania has become a signatory to a number of international and European covenants, conventions and recommendations that directly or indirectly impact the country's education sector, as well as provide a supra-national normative framework for ongoing policy reforms. Some of the major conventions and agreements include the following (in chronological order)[6]:

■ Partnerships with the Council of Europe Development Bank, the European Investment Bank, and World Bank, including the EEEP (covering a period of 2006-13; aimed at developing and implementing national education strategies and ongoing educational reforms);

■ Bologna Declaration (signed in 2003; aimed at aligning higher education in Albania with the broader European norms and standards);

■ International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ratified in 2007; called, among other provisions, to guarantee the basic right of access to education, including at a pre-school level, to every child of a migrant worker, based on the fundamental principle of equal treatment);

■ Accession to NATO (in 2009; aimed at the overall strengthening of the ties with the US and all other European/Western allies);

■ Visa liberalization agreement with the EU (signed in 2010; aimed at easing the travel to the EU member-states, thus increasing exposure of the Albanian citizens to pan-European values and norms);

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6   Compiled based on Gardiner, 2016, pp. 132-3 and UNESCO Global Database on the Right to Education (on Albania) available at http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/index.php?action=countries&lng=en.

- EU candidate status (granted in 2014 and providing for greater support to all kinds of domestic reform seeking to bring Albania closer to the intra-EU regulations);

- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified in 2013; called, among other provisions, to ensure the right of persons with disabilities to education, based on the principles of inclusiveness, equitable treatment, and non-discrimination).

Domestically, the Government of Albania, after having accelerated democratic reforms since the mid-1990s, has adopted a number of key legislative instruments directly or indirectly affecting the education sector. Among these are the following (in chronological order)[7]:

- Law #7952 on *Pre-University Education* (adopted in 1995);

- *Private Education Law* (adopted in 1995-96);

- Normative Provisions for Public Schools (adopted in 1996);

- Law #8461 on Higher Education (adopted in 1998);

- Law #8872 on *Vocational Education and Training* (adopted in 2002, later amended);

- Law #78 [on *State Matura examination as a mandatory test signifying the completion of secondary schooling and a pre-requisite for entering higher education*] (adopted in 2006);

- Law #9741 on *Higher Education* (adopted in 2007, later amended);

- Law #9970 on *Gender Equality in Society* (adopted in 2008);

- Law #69/2012 on *Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania* adopted in 2012);

- Law on *Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Institutions of Higher Education of the Republic of Albania* (adopted in 2015).

The overarching legal instrument among these is Law #69/2012. Building upon the outcomes of the sector transformation in the earlier decades, this fundamental piece of legislation elaborates some of the most progressive principles in education, including but not limited to the open and inclusive approach to schooling for children with disabilities, the heightened role of parents in school governance, increased school autonomy, and restructuring the sequence of basic education.

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7   Compiled from Gardinier, 2016, p. 130; Vadahi and Bilali, 2015, pp. 336-7.

In addition, four of the legal acts above merit further mention: Laws #7952, #8872, #9741, and #9970. The first introduces a few key regulations relating to the areas of assessment of students, enrolments, standards, and teacher training provisions; and as such, it precipitates the more recent Law #69/2012. The second defines the overall composition, organization, and management principles of vocational education and training (VET). The third re-frames the mission, as well as the objectives of higher education. In 2014, the Law #9741 served as the legal basis to revoke the licenses of select higher education institutions deemed as being in disagreement with the respective, legally binding provisions. Finally, Law #9970 is a cross-cutting legislative instrument that aims to enshrine women's rights and eliminate gender-based discrimination in education.

The *Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020* (PUEDS) (MES, 2014*a*) also deserves to be highlighted here. This strategy has served as a backbone instrument for the EPR review, as it sets out the government's vision for national education reform. This strategy is referenced extensively throughout this Extended Report, particularly in the three key policy domains presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Education system structure

Since the collapse of communist rule in Albania, the country has been struggling to maintain the near-universal enrolment rates in basic education. As of 2014, Albania's education system, including pre-school was serving approximately 585,945 students. This represents a decline in the student body from nearly 700,000 students in 2007. Some of this decline can be attributed to demographics and migration. Relevant data on education are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1.   Data on private and public Education

	Total	Pre-school education (PSE)	% of Total	Primary education (PE)	% of Total	Secondary education (SE)	% of Total
Pupils	585945	82494	14.08%	363408	62.02%	140043	23.90%
Institutions	3569	1857	48.88%	1493	39.30%	497	13.08%
Teachers	37943	4495	11.85%	24777	65.30%	8671	22.85%

Source: MES, 2014*a*, p. 16

According to UN estimates, the youth population in the age group of 19 and below has been projected to decrease from 32% (as recorded in 2010) to 24% of the total population in 2025 (World Bank, 2012, p. 10). The overall structure of the education system in Albania is presented in the figure below.

Preschool (or pre-primary) education in Albania includes kindergartens and preparatory classes, and is intended for children aged 3-6, but is not compulsory. The preparatory classes provide preschool education to children of the age of 5 who have missed the opportunity to engage in pre-primary schooling before. According to national statistics, the enrolment rate in preschool education for the academic year 2014-2015 was 81%. The MES has indicated that there is a broad-based recognition that 'quality intervention in early childhood has a high rate of return on primary education' (MES, 2014*a*, p. 14).

Children above the age of 6 are entitled to **basic education**; comprising the schooling at both the primary/elementary and lower secondary levels. The structure is currently '5+4' with basic education encompassing 9 years of mandatory schooling intended for students up to 16 years old. All those who have not completed basic education and are above the age of 16 may complete it in part-time schools (MES, 2014*a*, p.14).

Upon completion of compulsory basic education, students face two main options with regard to continuing their studies in the **upper secondary education**: the options are either academically oriented gymnasiums or vocational education and training (VET) programmes. Since the academic year of 2009-2010, VET has been offered through three different levels of schooling. The two-year programmes, comprising the first level, aim at equipping students with basic skills of semi-skilled workers and culminate in awarding a basic vocational training certificate. The one-year programmes at the next level are meant to train technicians with an award of a certificate of professional training. VET programmes following at the third level last for one extra year and pave a way to higher education (MoSWY, 2014, p. 11).

In Albania, VET graduates are fewer in numbers and have different gender composition compared to their peers in gymnasiums. For instance in 2012, almost 41,000 students graduated from gymnasiums, of which young women represented about 50% of the pool. In the same year, less than 2,900 students graduated from vocational schools, of which less than 30% were young women. One of the primary reasons given for fewer graduates in VET[8] is the lesser attractiveness of the vocational track to young people (MoSWY, 2014, p. 11). Thus, one of the key objectives in the vocational sub-sector is to increase the share of young people who choose the vocational track from 14% to 25%. At the same time, the national strategic objectives imply that the employment rate for VET graduates will be expected to grow to 40%, with the share of women making up around 75% in the total pool of graduates with then secured jobs (MEI, 2015, p. 640). Overall, the labour skill shortage has been reported as a severe constraint for businesses in Albania. There is growing evidence

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8   For instance, over the period of 2006-11, the enrolments in vocational education have decreased by 38% (Republic of Albania, 2014c, p. 10).

to an inadequate supply of skills in the labour market, which, according to the World Bank, is largely due to the lack of preparation and training available in the pre-university education system (World Bank, 2015*b*, p. 28).

The higher education system of Albania has been aligned with the principles of the Bologna Declaration (as the key guiding document of the Bologna Process), and normally assumes three year bachelor degree programmes followed by one-to-two years of master's degree studies and three years of doctoral studies. The most recent reforms in higher education have been associated with the improvement of governing architecture, funding and general organisation of higher education institutions. The overarching reform has aimed at improving the quality of both the teaching and scientific research streams. In terms of funding mechanisms, as a result of the reform, the government plans to establish a National Agency for Financing of Higher Education, which will be the main hub for the distribution of public grants in the system (MEI, 2015, p. 639). One of the key issues of higher education is the rather low attainment rate in Albania compared to the EU27 average (14.3% vs. 35.7%, calculated as a percentage of 30-34-year-olds with completed university or university-like education) (MoSWY, 2014, p. 20).

Figure 1   Education System of Albania
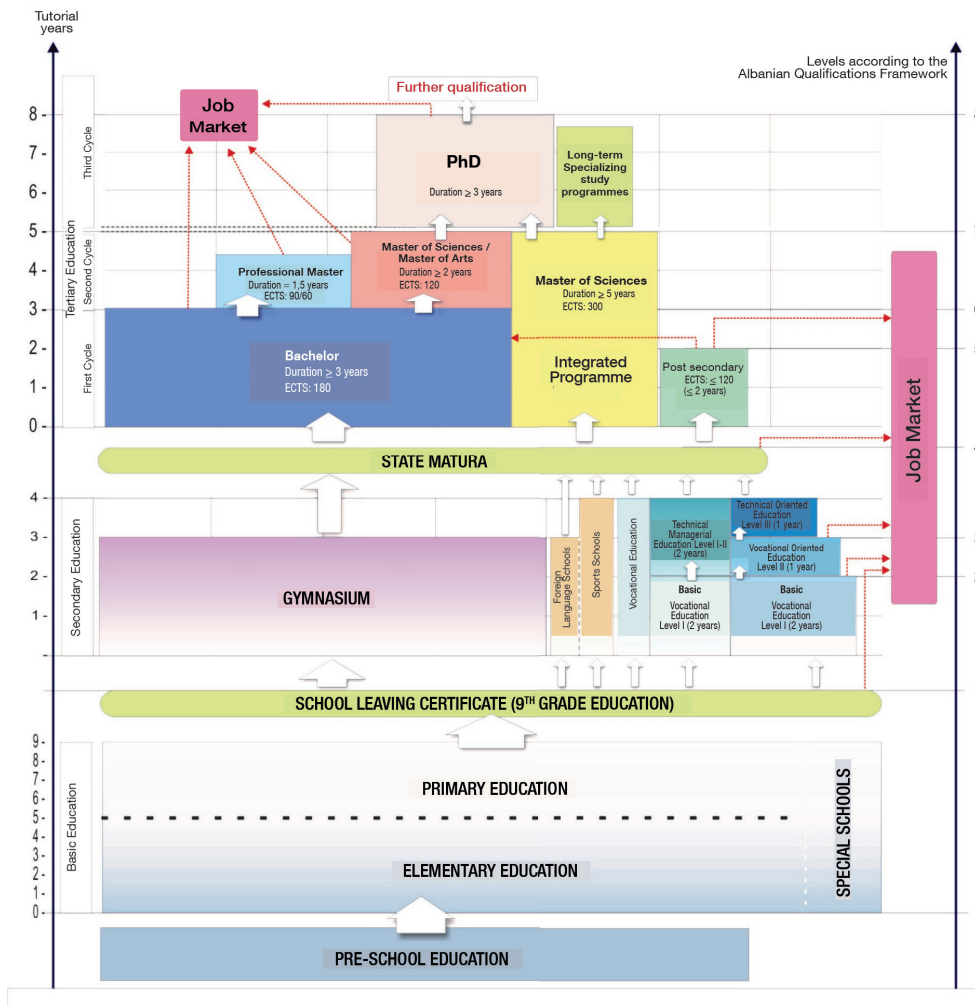
Source: adapted from IED, 2015

Governance of the education sector

As part of the broader public governance system in Albania, the education sector continues to function as a somewhat centralized model of inter-governmental networks. The administration at the regional level remains connected to the ministerial level in Tirana, namely the Ministry of Education and Sport (MES) and the Ministry of Finance, and is largely dependent on the central level. Local authorities do have the vested powers to establish schools and assign children to them accordingly, however at the time of this EPR the local expenditure for education comes directly from central government funds. The revenues generated by the local governments remain very limited (OECD 2003, p. 46; see also Schmidt-Neke, 2007, p. 18).

At the same time, the latest education development strategies adopted by the Government testify to the bold commitments to expedite the sector reform. Optimisation of school autonomy is one key area of these reforms (MES, 2014*a*, p. 6) which has led to some innovations in the system, such as the schools as community centres initiative and the State Inspectorate of Education (SIE) model of school self-assessment.

There are three levels of **educational governance** in Albania. The central level comprises the Parliament with its Committee of Education and Culture, the Council of Ministers, and the Ministry of Education and Sport (MES). The regional/local level refers to the districts and municipalities and includes administrative bodies, such as Regional Education Directorates (REDs), Municipalities, District Councils and their Departments for Education and Health. Finally, at the school level governance comprises the school principals along with their deputies, school boards, as well as the teachers' councils and parents' councils.

MES is the governmental ministry responsible for the overall policy and administration of the education system at the national level, with the exception of vocational education and training (VET), which is under the MoSWY. The key functions of the MES include: the implementation of laws and other regulations as approved by the legislature or the executive; administration of decisions on legal matters and management or professional supervision; approval of statutes, curricula and other documents of strategic importance; budget development and the financing of education. The MES takes decisions on the education service supply by primary and secondary schools, regulates post-secondary (except VET) and higher education, including the financing and general development standards and requirements (UNESCO, 2011, p. 4).

Three specialized, MES-affiliated agencies play a central role in the pre-university education system. The first is the Institute of Education Development (IED) (originally established in 1970 under a different name) with a primary mission to provide the MES with specialized expertise and professional advice derived from the targeted

research and studies. The specific areas of expertise for the IED are the curriculum content development, modern technologies in teaching and teaching methodologies, as well as school management and leadership practices in general education. General task-lines where the inputs of the IED may be deemed particularly value-added are the design of studies to serve as a basis for forthcoming policy development and sector-wide strategies, as well as the development of standards for teacher qualifications and school leadership performance.

The second, system-specific institution is the Agency of National Examinations (ANE) (established in 2010) mandated to organise and carry out national examinations in the pre-university education system, as well as state exams for regulated professions and higher education institution admission exams. The primary mission of the ANE is to analyse and interpret the results of examinations and national assessments, using contemporary methods and standards, as well as provide key data on various indicators for school development or the performance of the entire education system in Albania. The third institution with a critical mission for the education system is the State Inspectorate of Education (SIE), established in 2010. The mission of the SIE is to contribute to the general improvement of the education service through inspection and follow-up enforcement of legal requirements in the pre-university, as well as tertiary education systems (IED, 2015).

Education reforms in Albania

In January 2015, the Ministry of Education and Sport (MES) unveiled the *2014-2020 Pre-University Education Development Strategy* (PUEDS), designed to capitalize on the pillars of the previous national plan and take the sector reform further, linking it more intimately with the country's overall development and EU integration strategies. According to the PUEDS (MES, 2014*a*, p. 11), the strategic policy objectives guiding the PUE education system are the following:

a. Enhance leadership, governance and resource management capacities

b. Inclusive quality learning

c. Ensure quality performance according to standards of EU countries

d. Contemporary professional training and development of teachers and administrators

Three of the areas that are central to the new strategy comprise the three policy domains addressed in this EPR: curriculum development and reform; information and communication technology (ICT) in education; and teacher and school leadership policies.

Schools as community centres initiative

When it comes to improving and piloting new learning environments for students, Albania's education reform has opted for a major innovation, that is, the *schools as community centres* initiative. This initiative is intended to enhance the quality of schooling through a number of means, including the provision of environments that inspire basic democratic values, care for the emotional and mental health status of students, advocate for diversity, and promote a culture of all-inclusive collaboration (MoSWY, 2014, p. 25). Standards for schools as community centres have been developed particularly to improve the quality of teaching, quality of service in schools, as well as quality of relations between schools and the community-at-large (MES, 2014*a*).

One such standard calls for a 'barrier-free environment' as a prerequisite for the fundamental principle of inclusiveness. To qualify for a school as a community centre, schools need to foster an environment that is not only integrative of the very diverse body of students attending them, but also guarantees a notion of equality among all participants in the learning process. Teachers are viewed as the central actors in implementing this new model of schooling (MES, 2014*a*, p. 14).

Overall, the schools as community centres initiative, if fully implemented and further disseminated across the education system, may better align the sector with the provisions of the *Law #69/2012*[9] (Republic of Albania, 2012, pp. 13-14). Based on the information collected by the UNESCO review team during the fact-finding missions in Albania, it appears the government intends to apply some of the good practices from piloting the schools as community centres to the entire cohort of pre-university schools in the country.

School assessment

Another indicator of the government's serious concern for positive learning environments in schools is the special mandate the SIE has on assessing and reporting on the state of both the 'Climate and Ethics' and 'Care toward the Student' dimensions in pre-university education. While the SIE has been empowered by its mandate to broadly assess the activities of the REDs, it is the latter that have been vested with a responsibility to assist the schools in navigating through the overall improvement process[10].

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9   In particular, the first clause of Article 32 declares some general responsibility of any educational institution in the country to establish an environment capable of helping students to grow to the fullest of their potential.

10 These are also provisions reflected in Articles 27 & 28 of the *Law #69/2012*, although the quality support and monitoring roles receive only cursory consideration in the legislation.

The SIE has worked over the last six years to identify and disseminate the good practices identified through numerous school visits. SIE-affiliated experts have published a wide array of articles based on the results of their inspection work. This practice has been perceived as generating a positive impact, particularly on teacher performance (Gary, 2014, p. 13).

Complementing the work of the SIE in terms of school assessment and accountability, feedback collected directly from students serves as another important source of data to inform schools' continuous improvement efforts. While apparently not part of a regular practice yet, the UNESCO review team understands that, in the future, students may be polled by some schools to hear what they think about their learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

Following the collapse of communist rule, which spanned over four decades, Albania has made continuous efforts to strengthen its democratic governance and market economy structures. Throughout the 1990s, the country struggled with an array of socio-economic challenges, from significant infrastructural gaps to rampant outward migration and socio-spatial disparities triggering internal relocation of various population groups. However, from 2000 until today, Albania has made steady progress and continues to pursue significant reforms in preparation for EU accession. For example, roads have been constructed and improved; ICT utilization has been expanding rapidly and is becoming accessible to an ever-growing share of the population; and the youth unemployment rate, although high, has been controlled at almost half that in some neighbouring countries.

In terms of education, Albania has advanced significantly, despite various challenges. After dismantling the communist and authoritarian structures in its educational system, and pursuing a continuous path of alignment with wider international norms and standards, the education sector is now poised for success with greater levels of social inclusion and higher student achievement. The latest educational reforms and strategies must be fully implemented and sustained in order to see measurable improvements on issues related to equity, efficiency, quality, access, and inclusion in education. These key dimensions of Albania's education sector are analysed and placed in a broader international and comparative context in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2
Pre-University Education in Albania:
An International and Comparative Policy Perspective

INTRODUCTION

This chapter situates Albania in the context of the wider international community in order to provide a comparative analysis of key policy dimensions in the pre-university education (PUE) system. Six key aspects of education in Albania: access and participation; equity and equality; educational processes; student outcomes; government expenditures; and decentralization and accountability measures are examined. Placing Albania in a wider comparative perspective, with attention to major international trends in education, helps inform the analysis of policy issues and recommendations presented in subsequent chapters.

In order to provide a useful comparative policy analysis, this chapter makes reference to education systems in the Western Balkans, the European Union, and beyond. Some of the countries discussed in this chapter share similarities in geopolitical and socio-economic qualities with Albania, as well as sharing an orientation towards European Union (EU) accession and membership. Some OECD member countries including Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland are also referenced as potential cases for policy learning; these countries have been identified in a number of international education studies and assessments, including the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), as 'top performers' in education with leading records of socio-economic and human development (OECD, 2011*b*). The province of Ontario, Canada is also discussed as an interesting case for policy learning, particularly in the domain of curriculum reform.

The chapter begins with a consideration of inputs supporting teaching and learning in Albania, particularly focused on access and participation. Next, the chapter examines issues of equity and equality with particular attention to income and social class, urban and rural schooling, gender, minorities including Roma and Balkan Egyptian communities, and students with disabilities. The chapter then examines educational processes and student outcomes in a comparative perspective. Government expenditure and, finally, decentralization and accountability are then considered.

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

The ability of students to have free and unconstrained access to education, as well as adequate participation in schooling, constitute two of the fundamental characteristics of an equitable education system. While access to schooling was nearly universal under communism, enrolments have fallen in Albania over the last few years. As of 2014, Albania's pre-university education system and pre-school, were serving approximately 585,945 students. This represents from nearly 700,000 students in 2007. The reasons for these falling enrolments have been multifaceted. First, the lack of schools, especially at the preschool level, has been deemed to be contributing to low enrolments, which have been a factor in rural areas in particular. Secondly, insufficient public financing may have resulted in further declines in enrolment rates especially in rural areas. Demographic factors, including out-migration may also be significant. Variations in household incomes have also been adversely impacting school enrolment rates.

Many of these reasons have had a protracted effect. For instance, according to the Review of the UN-Albania 2012-2016 Cooperation Programme, the under-financing of preschool has been causing serious concerns (Republic of Albania and UN Albania, 2014, p. 17). The net pre-primary enrolment rate in Albania, for the 3-6-year-olds in 2011-2012 was 33%, compared to 63.8% in Croatia, for example (WB, 2014*c*, p. 1). The UN's strong advocacy may be having a positive effect on the Government of Albania in making pre-primary years in schools obligatory (Republic of Albania and UN Albania, 2014, p. 17). According to national statistics, the enrolment rate in preschool education for the academic year 2014-2015 was 81%.

Based on the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data, the net enrolment rate for the 2013-2014 academic year was to 95.5% (UIS, 2015*i*). Interestingly in the same year the gross enrolment rate in primary education equalled 112.5%, thus the gap between net and gross rates was 17 percentage points. This may indicate that a share of student enrolments are over age or repeat a school year (see UIS, 2015*f*; UIS, 2015*i*).

According to the UIS generated data (UIS, 2015*k*), the rate for out-of-school children of primary school age in Albania has reduced by more than 60% since 2009 to 4.1% in 2015. However, it appears that the dropout rates in more impoverished regions of Albania may reach 10 to 20 percentage points (Government of Albania and United Nations, 2011, p. 74). The least impacted by the phenomenon of dropouts are the youth in the age group of 7 to 13 years old (ILO, 2012, p.13) For the Roma communities, the reality is harsher: the available data indicate that up to half of all Roma school-age children over the course of their enrolments have dropped out of school at least once (ACCE, 2013, p. 24).

In recent years, the issue of early school leaving has been addressed through a number of policy initiatives. Three particular government programmes stand out in particular:

- The Inter-agency work performed jointly by MES, REDs, and local police in the respective areas, all aimed at revealing the names of children who have not registered prior to the start of the given academic year. This may help in considering each case of a missing student individually (IED, 2015);

- The 'Second Chance' initiative which intends to bring back to schooling children who drop out for various reasons and those students who are stripped of an opportunity to go to school due to risks associated with blood feud (Republic of Albania, 2011, p. 12);

- Summer camps (totalling 60 camps around the country) initiated by UNICEF in cooperation with non-profits and certain REDs aimed at encouraging marginalised children and minimizing dropouts during summer holidays. The camps attracted more than 2,660 children, of whom 27% were Roma and Balkan Egyptians (Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, 2014, p. 7).

Private educational provision in Albania

Following the dismantling of communist rule and the development of the market economy in Albania, the private education sector experienced rapid growth. While at the turn of the millennium, the share of private pre-school providers was negligible at 0.2%, this quickly changed and recent national statistics indicate that private pre-schools constitute 8.4% of the total number of pre-school institutions, with around 6% for enrolments of the total number of children in attendance of preschool. In basic education private schools comprise 8.5% of the total schools, and they provide education service to 7.2% of the total number of students (MoSWY, 2014*c*, pp. 14-15).

Overall, schooling in private institutions seems to present a number of advantages for students in Albania. Among them are, for instance, more comfortable schooling hours, smaller class sizes, and prearranged transportation (Rukaj, 2012). Also, some private schools attract students as they feature better-equipped ICT laboratories and more highly trained teachers (Republic of Albania, 2008*b*, p. 29). Tuition fees, range from €50-80 to €200-300 per month (Rukaj, 2012; Council of Europe, 2012, p. 92), which has negative implications for equity, particularly between rural and urban communities.

The Country Background Report (IED, 2015) advocates that in accordance with the *Law 69/2012 on the Pre-University Education System of the Republic of Albania* and the associated by-laws, private schools, after they obtain a license, assume rights and obligations almost identical to those of public schools (IED, 2015, p. 10). This

essentially means that the same level of scrutiny utilised for public schools may be applied to private schools. Furthermore, similar to the higher education institutions, should it be required, the Government may choose 'to use licensing, regulation and inspection to prevent the private education sector expanding beyond the size which can guarantee quality' (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 159).

EQUITY AND EQUALITY

Regarding equity and equality, Albania has made significant progress over the past decade in the education sector, there are still many gaps to be bridged. In primary education, Albania has achieved a Gender Parity Index of 1.0.

Equity considerations are central to the advancement and continuous betterment of any education system. In Albania, of strategic concern remain the issues related to income and social class inequality, the urban-rural divide, gender disparities, and discrimination against minorities (such as Roma and Balkan Egyptians), and children with disabilities.

There are still significant barriers to Roma educational equity and inclusion. According to research conducted a few years ago by the Albanian Coalition for Child Education more than 50% of Roma children in 6-16 age group had never been enrolled in school and more than 40% of Roma youth aged 15-16 could be considered as illiterate, thus fuelling further discrimination (ACCE, 2013, p. 24).

Income and social class

Policies to address Roma-related issues are in place, however early school leaving is one of the factors leading to lower completion rates, a phenomenon complicating the equity scene in the pre-university sub-system. It reverberates most painfully with marginalised or impoverished communities in the country, including Roma. Experts believe that those children who are raised in poverty are more prone to learning difficulties or dropping out of school (ILO, 2003, p. 4).

The 2014 European Commission Albania Progress Report reiterated that the problem of street children and child labour in Albania remained an alarming concern (European Commission, 2014, p. 48) and the high incidence of child labourers has been a significant factor distorting school attendance and creating a serious equity

issue in the country[11]. Albania reports an estimated 35,000 children (more than 5% of its 5-17 year-old population) to be working. The schooling experience of child labourers is usually substantially impacted and their fundamental right to education seriously impaired. By the age of 17, child labourers in Albania have cumulatively completed around four years less schooling than their non-working peers. Further, they are more likely to repeat a grade in school, which could have been otherwise completed at their initial age. Finally, child labourers are much more prone to miss more classes in total than those not engaged in any economic activity. As a result, more than 45% of child labourers finish their schooling as they complete the compulsory level of education compared to just slightly over 10% of their peers (ILO, 2012, p. xiii). Around 75% of the street children in Albania come from Roma and Balkan Egyptian communities (United States Department of Labor, 2014, p. 1).

An issue related to equity and equality is that of private tutoring services. One of the greatest threats private tutoring has generated is the potential depreciation and distortion of formal schooling as the primary agent for education dissemination and upbringing of a meaningful and socially active citizen. Further, private tutoring has the potential to considerably distort the fundamental principles of equality in schools. If both students and teachers in the classroom become engaged in private tutoring, the schooling environment may suffer from the marginalisation of certain groups of students; especially the poorest (see Mazawi et al., 2013, pp. 206-213; Silova, 2010, p. 334).

The situation in Albania is not much different from that in the neighbouring Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there has been very little attention to dealing with the equity issues associated with private tutoring (Jokic´ et al., 2013, p. 11). Private tutoring may present the education system with fairly high financial costs assumed by the service delivered to select students. In Albania, for private classes, students may need to pay anywhere between €4-8 per session (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 54).

One of the difficult issues associated with private tutoring is the incidence of teachers coaching their own students in Albania. While the scope of this issue has been demonstrating a downward trend, it may still be viewed as a major concern for the education system. From a legal standpoint, tutoring one's own students is a malpractice, which is clearly banned and strongly discouraged by the Teachers' Code of Conduct. At the same time, while many stakeholders may be willing to recognise that there is a high risk of breaking the code (Council of Europe, 2012,

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11   ILO (2012, p. xii) defines as child labourers all those children who engage either in hazardous economic activities that are non-permissible by any standards, or work in otherwise non-hazardous conditions for a number of hours over a permissible standard, or alternatively, are too young to perform a given economic activity, whether paid or unpaid. National legislation prohibits children under the age of 13 to work whatsoever, thus any child who engages in any type of economic activity will be considered a child labourer. In Albania, 5-13-year-olds constitute about 29% of all child labourers and among all child labourers boys make up a larger proportion than girls, roughly, around 63% vs. 37% (ILO, 2012, pp. xii-xiii).

p. 52), teachers should know whom they can legitimately train outside of classroom. In certain circumstances, private tutoring may trigger pockets of corruption (Council of Europe, 2012).

Another equity issue for the Government of Albania to address is that not all families are able to afford the costs of school textbooks. Albania has, indeed, introduced a reimbursement system, and made textbooks effectively free not just for Roma students, but also for students from other national minorities, migrant families, or recipients of state social assistance (Republic of Albania, 2014*c*, p. 6). However, according to some Roma leaders, there have been various instances of publishers not issuing receipts for the books purchased, and in effect, precluding the buyers from claiming reimbursements (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 78). A system of borrowing textbooks may also be helpful, as was implemented in the neighbouring Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (European Commission, 2013, p. 28). The availability of textbooks may be one of the underlying causes for lower school attendance rates for Roma children (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 78).

Urban-rural divide

On the equity continuum, even when controlling for their socio-economic status, rural families in Albania appear to be significantly disadvantaged compared to urban households, especially in terms of access to quality education (Gjokutaj, 2007). Historically, there have been major disparities between urban and rural localities in terms of enrolment rates, starting from a secondary level of schooling and higher (at times up to 3 times difference) (World Bank, 2005, p. 14). Again, low public spending has been mentioned as one reason for lower enrolments. In rural areas, this more general problem has been exacerbated by the per-student subsidies being lower than in urban areas for basic education. While certain rural areas experienced declines in student numbers, the respective peri-urban areas witnessed increased student numbers. Notwithstanding other possible reasons, internal migration was seen as a major contributor to the redistribution of the student population (World Bank, 2005, p. 17).

Overall, internal migration and rapid urbanisation have caused many schools in cities and suburbs to function at the edge or above their capacity, often teaching classes of up to 50 students per session (Republic of Albania, 2008*b*, pp. 10-11). As a result, peri-urban areas especially have been turning into the new epicentres of inequity. This has been reflected not just in overcrowded classes, but also an inflow of children with weaker academic background moving from rural areas, particularly in the country's northeast (Gjokutaj, 2007).

Roma and Balkan Egyptians

The Roma and Balkan Egyptian populations, which represent anywhere between 0.3% and 3.0% of Albania's total population (World Bank, 2015, p. 8) remain the most marginalised groups in Albania, with some of the lowest rates for participation in and attainment, and the highest rates for dropouts from the education system. According to the UNDP and World Bank, those belonging to the Roma population may be prone to a 170% 'increased likelihood of being poor' (World Bank, 2015, p. 8). The monthly income per capita for Roma is more than three times less than that for non-Roma (Republic of Albania, 2011, p. 10).

Albania has made progress in addressing many of the Roma related issues. Following the adoption of the *National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2010-2015*, and as reflected in the *Education Strategy of 2009-2013*, the Government has stepped up its dedication to ensuring access to equal opportunities to Roma citizens, as well as other vulnerable and minority groups. The authorities have clearly prioritised to increase the enrolment of Roma children in preschool education; the target is to have an annual 5% increase for Roma children in preschool and preparatory class enrolments (MES, 2014*a*, pp. 14-5).

As part of the assistance programmes in targeted locations, the international donors in partnership with the Government of Albania have initiated interventions, such as Roma community centres, aimed at mediating the existing challenge with the provision of social services to Roma and Balkan Egyptians.

Ever more important has been the opportunity that the Roma community members are engaging in and influencing the local decision-making processes by taking a stance on forthcoming community development plans, which directly impact their well-being (UNDP Albania, 2013; 2015). The Government has, for example, attached high importance to facilitating the participation of Roma parents in school boards or similar decision-making bodies. Further, the state seems to fully support the provision of counselling to Roma parents, whether in schools or preschool institutions, on their rights and responsibilities in reference to the educational progression of their children. There is also state commitment to promote exchanges between diverse communities, for instance, through the inclusion of Roma culture studies both in the required curriculum in education and extracurricular activities (Republic of Albania, 2011, pp. 13-14).

Only slightly more than 1% of Roma and less than 5% of Balkan Egyptians aged 7-20 year-olds have completed secondary education. The percentages for those who have graduated from tertiary level institutions go further down to 0.3% and 0.2% respectively (Republic of Albania, 2014*d*, p. 9). For the 14-20 year age group, Albania is one of the few countries, alongside with the Former Yugoslav Republic

of Macedonia and Montenegro, where the gap between Roma and non-Roma youth having completed at least the primary education level in 2011 was more than 25 percentage points. Bulgaria and Croatia, while still featuring a gap, have narrowed it down to less than 15 percentage points (UNDP, 2015, p. 18).

Studies have shown that while there may be no nominal difference between the schools and/or classes Roma students and their non-Romani peers attend, the former may nonetheless end up receiving education of inferior quality due to implicit or explicit discrimination (UNDP, 2015, p. 22). The Government's bold commitments and concurrent improvements in Roma education and advancement policies are a positive development. The Government of Albania has, over the past decade, recognised the problem and called upon the respective authorities to promote 'non-inferior attitudes towards Roma' through more inclusive policies and job regulations, as well as legislative changes (Republic of Albania, 2011, p. 14). At the same time, these well-intentioned directives may stay on a governmental 'wish list' without being fully realized in practice if the central authorities and local municipalities do not cooperate effectively on the issue. More specifically, the implementation of the newly devised inclusive policies may be seriously hampered by the limited administrative capacities and constrained budgets at the regional and local levels of governance (European Commission, 2014, p. 50).

Gender disparities

Some international assessments have concluded that Albania is free of major gender disparities in education (see for instance, World Bank, 2005, p. 15; UNICEF, 2010). UNICEF, for instance, emphasizes Albania's success in achieving gender equity in primary education, as the Gender Parity Index (GPI) equals 1.0. At a secondary education level, it is 0.98, yet still reflects high participation of girls in schooling. On the 2012 and 2015 PISA results, girls in Albania outperformed boys by 60 and 59 points, respectively, in reading, which is equivalent to 1.5 years of schooling. Girls outperforming boys in reading tends to be a global phenomenon; however, the gap in Albania emerged as one of the bigger ones, exceeding that in neighbouring countries such as Romania, Greece, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Bulgaria (Harizaj, 2011 cited. in Gardinier, 2016).

Some gender disparity pertinent to the preschool level in particular may be observed when access and age are analysed. While 48% of boys in Albania attend more than one year of preschool, the respective share among girls is 58%. Subsequently, the gap is 10 percentage points, while the OECD average is only 2.5 percentage points. As for the age at which children commence their schooling, 44% of boys aged 6 or less vs. 54% of girls of the same age start attending pre-school (World Bank, 2012, p.21).

Students with disabilities

The right of children with disabilities to education, and furthermore, access to special teaching personnel trained in catering to the special needs students may have is guaranteed by law. However, there is significant evidence suggesting the highly constrained capacity of individual schools for the intake of children with disabilities (ADRA Albania, 2015). The supply of schools for children with disabilities is rather limited in Albania with virtually non-existent access to education in rural areas (De Soto et al., 2005, p. 58). It is anticipated that considerable infrastructure improvements and improved access to services for children with disabilities will result from adoption of the most recent framework law on inclusion of and accessibility for people with disabilities (European Commission, 2014, p. 37).

Wide-scale inclusion of children with disabilities into the learning and communication processes in schools is a complicated question and has not been fully resolved even in economically advanced countries, such as Finland. In Bulgaria, close to 40% of the elementary school parents surveyed were convinced that inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream schools may have negative effect on their non-disabled children's education (*BalkanInsight,* 2010). As a result of such perceptions, which exist throughout the Western Balkans region, students with disabilities, and students with a range of varying special needs and abilities often face discrimination and obstacles to realizing their right to quality education.

In Albania, discriminatory attitudes may also be contributing to higher dropout rates among the students with disabilities. In fact, some parents appear to push these rates even higher as they refuse to enrol and keep their children with disabilities in school, fearful of potential stigma (ADRA Albania, 2015). In addition, more than 60% of those aged 7-17 years who have never attended school report some kind of disability or serious illness precluding them from participating in formal schooling. The literacy rate for this narrow group is startlingly low: less than 9% compared to more than 92% among out-of-school children without disability or illness (ILO, 2012, p. 14).

The Government of Albania has committed to increase the enrolments of children with disabilities and children from impoverished families in PUE (MES, 2014*a*). At the level of pre-school in particular, the target is to increase the enrolment annually. The Government has also prioritised trainings for pre-school teachers, which would allow them to handle with greater care the needs of children with disabilities. Moreover, it has been recognised that newer deployments of support teaching personnel adequately trained is a necessity in school with integrated teaching for children with disabilities (MES, 2014*a*, pp. 14-15).

EDUCATIONAL PROCESSES

There has been growing evidence of the positive relationship between better student performance and environmental characteristics in schools, such as learning-favourable classrooms, amiable teacher-student relations, and positive expectations from a general learning experience (OECD, 2013). School-managed factors, such as an orderly classroom environment, teacher support and strong school leadership favour and promote better results. A well-balanced, compassionate and conducive atmosphere in schools also significantly contributes to positive outcomes of the education system as a whole (OECD, 2013, p. 62). At the same time, newer demands have been placed on various stakeholders in the system due to changes in teaching approaches, revisions in the curricula and textbooks, as well as expanded ICT infrastructure in schools (Sahlberg, 2010*b*).

Teacher quality and learning environment

The phenomenon of teacher-student relations is partly what the school climate often encompasses (OECD 2013*a*, p. 169). Albania is an exceptional country in that its students returned positive responses to questions in the PISA 2012 survey about their teacher attitudes in class; and in a majority of votes (around or above 90%) (OECD, 2013*a*). For instance, 93% of students thought that teachers treat them fairly, and 89% believe that teachers listen to them carefully, which also means they are quite likely to attend to the student needs adequately (OECD, 2013*a*, p. 170).

A strength of the education system in Albania is that 98% of its students attend schools where intimidation among students is virtually non-existent. To compare, in Finland only 70% of students find themselves in that kind of school. At the same time, 95% of students in Albania are enrolled in schools where possible lack of respect for teachers is not a factor hindering learning. Comparatively, in Croatia, the respective indicator is only 58%. Disruption of classes is also a relatively rare phenomenon in Albania. Whereas over 90% of students in Albania attend schools with almost no disruption of classes, in Finland less than half of their peers go to school free of class disruption (OECD, 2013*a*, pp. 173-174).

In addition to the above strengths, Albania also has only 20% of its student body attending schools where student truancy is an issue at stake. On this account, the country is comparable, for example, to Switzerland. It seems that students' support for each other and positive relationships in the classroom are a widespread phenomenon in Albania (OECD, 2013*a*, pp. 173-174).

The UNESCO review team's fact-finding missions to Albania corroborate these findings. The students interviewed told the UNESCO review team about the culture of mutual support as quite common among peers. They also stated that by and large they felt happy about their teachers, particularly the general pattern of interactions in classes. Some of the students interviewed referred to the spirit of collaboration demonstrated by teachers especially during the extra-curricular activities.

At the same time, it appears that teachers in Albania tend to find it quite challenging to teach and nurture the unique talent in the classes characterized with heterogeneous ability levels across the student body. This phenomenon may be linked to teachers lacking relevant training and skills of developing and maintaining an approach to differentiated instruction that enables the teacher to work in different ways with students of diverse ability levels in class. Also, it may be due to the predominance of more traditional, teacher-centred methods of teaching, which rely heavily on techniques such as memorisation and recitation. The policy implications of these issues are further considered in Chapter 5.

Countries of the Western Balkans, including Albania, have been experiencing rather slow development of learner-centred pedagogical approaches (see European Commission, 2013*a*, p. 8). This is said to have its roots in the overly pronounced emphasis on theory in the teacher education, and then importantly, also the belief that only narrowly-trained specialists can address the particular needs of either the most talented children or those with learning difficulties or disabilities. Thus, the need to enhance teachers' capacities to address students' diverse needs and challenges has been deemed a high priority for the entire region (European Commission, 2013*a*, pp. 8-9).

STUDENT OUTCOMES

While schools in Albania have made tremendous progress in recent years, Albania remains a low-ranked country as far as PISA results are concerned. In Table 2 below, Albania's mean scores in reading, mathematics and science from PISA in 2000, 2009, 2012, and 2015 are listed; in Table 3, Albania's mean scores are compared with the benchmark of the OECD average and the 2015 top performer, Singapore. Albania is gradually improving its educational performance on PISA, and this represents one indication of improvement in students' learning outcomes.

Table 2.   Albania's PISA performance by discipline and year

Albania	2000	2009	2012	2015	Average 3 year trend
Reading	349	385 (+36*)[15]	394 (+9)	405 (+11*)	+10*
Mathematics	381	377 (-4)	394 (+17*)	413 (+19*)	+18*
Science	376	391 (+15*)	397 (+6)	427 (+30*)	+18*

Source: World Bank, 2012; OECD 2013*a*, and 2016*a*

Table 3.   Albania's 2015 PISA performance compared to other mean scores

PISA 2015 results	Singapore's mean scores	OECD mean scores	Albania's mean scores
Reading	535	493	405
Mathematics	564	490	413
Science	556	501	427

Source: OECD, 2016*a*

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE

Insufficient financing of education detrimentally impacts the efficiency of the education system. As a direct consequence, it also diminishes the quality of schooling and affects strongly all communities and individuals who belong to the population strata most vulnerable to cuts in the state social programmes and public expenditure.

In Albania, historically, the Government's education spending has been low, and over the past 15 years, it has by and large remained predominantly below 3.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). By 2007, one year before the global financial crisis and economic recession, the respective share barely reached 3.27%. Only in 2013, was 3.5% of GDP recorded (UIS, 2015*c*). At the same time, the private/household spending on education as a share of GDP has been on the increase since 2011 and, by upholding the trend, amounted to 0.9% at the end of 2015 (MoSWY, 2014, p. 20).

Comparatively, in terms of the education expenditure as a percentage of GDP, Albania's indicator is above Romania (which between 2009 and 2013 witnessed a sharp decline from 4.24% to 2.99 %), yet below Slovenia's rate of 5.66% of GDP (OECD, 2014, p. 5), and far below Finland which spends almost 7.2% of its GDP on education (UIS, 2015*c*). These figures provide a good indication of the general range among countries in terms of the percent of GDP allocated to education.

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12   Note: change in score from previous round is in parentheses, with * indicating that the change is statistically significant (World Bank, 2014; OECD, 2016).

An analysis of the structural distribution of funds in accordance with the approved programs and the areas administered by the MES is illuminating. Figure 2 below indicates that the expenditure on basic education consumes more than 60% of the total MES budget. For education at the secondary level, the government expenditure per student in Albania as a percentage of GDP per capita fell to a level of 5.9% in 2013 (UIS, 2015*e*). The allocations to higher and vocational education sub-sectors taken together comprise 20% of the total budget.

Figure 2   Structure of the MES realised budget for 2014, according to programmes (%).

Programme	Percentage
Planning, management and administration	1,70%
Sport	0,30%
Scientific research	0,40%
Higher education	13,80%
Vocational education	5,50%
Upper secondary education	15,10%
Basic education	61,50%
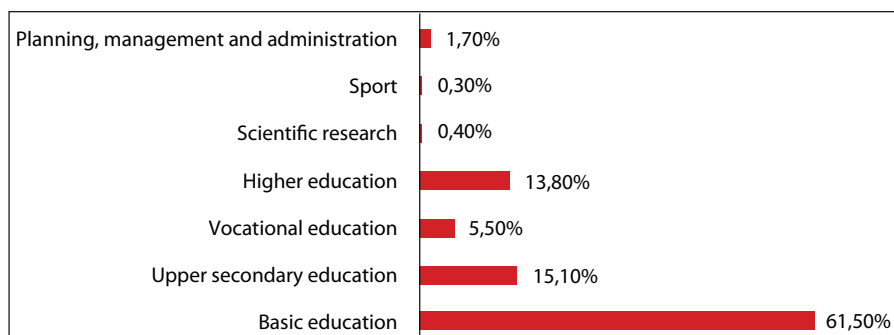
Source: Adapted from IED, 2015

Notably, the relative importance attached to financing compulsory basic education is very much in line with the accepted international norms and is not much different from what can be observed in the public financing structural frameworks of top performing countries in the education sector.

However, with tightening budgets and decreasing share of expenditure on education, Albania may face increasing risks related to 'budget leakages' and 'diversion of funds,' (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 9). There may still be a significant disconnect between the central and local governance levels, causing gaps in budget reconciliations of MES and local government units.

One measure potentially having a positive impact on the efficiency of the education system by making the financing more targeted is the introduction of the per-student financing. The framework elaborated in the strategic documents of the Government of Albania aims at bridging the gaps between the capacities to respond to varying needs in various locations throughout the country. The model takes into account a number of variables, including but not limited to the number of students, number of teachers and support staff, as well as geographic dispersion of education-related required services (MoES, 2008, p. 26).

DECENTRALISATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The introduction of per-student financing and the associated revision of resource allocation frameworks, creating simultaneously greater demand for more participation, and hence, transparency and flexibility, is what, along with several other factors, has determined the trend for increased financial, and overall, school autonomy. On the OECD compounded scale of measures for school autonomy over resource allocation, Albania is ranked behind many countries in the Western Balkans region and the respective reference, with the exception of Greece (OECD, 2013*a*, p. 131). Centralised relative to schools (or to be more precise, concentrated at a regional/local governance levels to a greater extent) are the functions of budget formulation and management, but even more so the function of human resource management (OECD, 2013*a*, p. 131).

The autonomy of schools, as the final recipients and beneficiaries of funding, including that calculated on per-student basis, is a necessary prerequisite of the true decentralisation in the sector. As a whole, the decentralisation of the national education system is anchored by the fundamental belief that the closer a governmental unit providing a public service stands to a respective constituency, the more efficient it is capable to fulfil its mission. According to the Urban Research Institute (2005, p.4), local governments are often better positioned to know what the actual needs and concerns of the local population are, and thus they may have much better potential to respond to those needs more accurately than the central government.

Local governments have become truly empowered, at least legally, only after the adoption of Albania's new Constitution, although they were established officially as politically autonomous bodies in 1992 (Urban Research Institute, 2005, p. 3). In the education sector, recognition of the role and meaning of autonomy at local levels, including at the individual school level, culminated in the respective provisions of the *Law 69/2012 on the Pre-University Education System of the Republic of Albania*. The Article 28 of the Law limits the powers of local government units with regard to the manipulation of the material resource to restoration of building, strictly in accordance to with the standards approved by the Council of Ministers (Republic of Albania, 2012, p. 11).

One of the key initiatives of Albania's decentralisation reform has been the hiring procedure for teachers. According to Article 60 of the Law 69/2012, school principals can appoint a teacher to the available vacancy only upon and following the recommendations of the employment admission commission. These new provisions, and the subsequent implications for teachers and school leadership policies, are discussed in Chapter 5.

Albania has been leading on the continuum of such a phenomenon as principals welcoming teacher participation in school management. Overall, to advance a school culture of collective decision-making, school collaboration may be instrumental. As the

observations from the UNESCO review team's fact-finding missions indicate, there is room for greater collaboration between schools, as well as within schools, in Albania, at all levels, from teachers to principals.

According to a recent World Bank study, 'accountability is the only public good that the state cannot provide on its own, and which required citizens to be not only *able* but also *willing* to bring pressure to bear on government and service providers' (Serra et al., 2011, p. 5). With the increased share of powers allocated to the lower levels of governance as a result of decentralisation, it might be reasonable to expect a rise of counter-balancing mechanisms, mostly aimed at ensuring accountability of the entire education system. This is also important, if the system intends to sustain its efficiency.

It appears that parental participation in and control over schooling processes may be one effective measure for accountability in Albania. According to Serra et al. (2011, p. 2), several sources indicate a rather restricted engagement of parents in the life of Albania's schools.

Accountability in the education sector is exercised in two distinct streams. One is the top-down accountability system that is rooted in the evaluation and monitoring by the higher-positioned, administrative bodies, which apply predefined sets of appraisal measurement criteria and, as a result, sanctions or rewards (Serra et al., 2011, p. 18). The other stream refers to the bottom-up approach, which enacts the control exercised by the recipient of the public good over the quality, timeliness, and utility of the respective product or service. Parents and guardians are the primary agents who represent the interests of their children as recipients of the public good in schools. And they are the ones who are expected not just to be able, but importantly, also *willing* to apply pressure and thus motivate service providers, that is the pre-university education system, to ensure high-quality outcomes (Serra et al., 2011, p. 12).

The backbone of the bottom-up accountability in Albania's schools is school boards. The parent members of school boards need to be elected from the members of parent councils, which in their turn should represent the interests of all parents in a particular school. It is critical that the parent members of the boards are elected and not appointed by school principal or teacher council.

With this in mind and when put in a comparative perspective, one may discern two major types of parental involvement in school: one relates to parents communicating with the school authorities (e.g. their child's behaviour or progress), while the other assumes parents' active participation in school activities (e.g. volunteering in extra-curricular activities and/or assisting with library service or participating in school governance/management matters). On these matters, according to an OECD-scale, Albania has been scoring above most of the countries in the Western Balkans (OECD, 2013*a*, p. 141).

Albania's record on education system efficiency appears mixed. On one hand, the overall financing of education may need improvement, while on the other hand, Albania positively distinguishes itself for its funding of basic education. At the same time, there is compelling evidence of the education system being affected by instances of 'budget leakage' (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 9), and there may still be communication challenges between various levels of governance that have a detrimental impact on system efficiency.

Decentralisation processes also merit further attention. With uneven progress on record, some of the systemic achievements may be defeated if the trend is not sustained, thus threatening overall efficiency. The private segment of the education system also needs to factor in greater consistency in upholding high standards and capitalising on its potential advantages. As to the high incidence of private tutoring in Albania, there is a need for the Government to take a more legalistic approach to the issue, creating more policy alignment with wider European norms and standards.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined several aspects of pre-university education development and reform in Albania in an international and comparative perspective. The chapter focused on: access and participation; equity and equality; educational processes that affect teaching and learning; student outcomes; government expenditures; and decentralization and accountability. Increasing equity and inclusion in pre-university education are central goals of the Government's national education reform efforts. Viewing Albania's education system in a wider international perspective provides the Government with important insights about Albania's relative strengths and weaknesses in relation to other neighbouring systems.

Having situated Albania in a wider regional and international context, the EPR now turns to an in-depth evidence-based analysis of the three key education policy domains: (1) curriculum development and reform; (2) information and communication technology (ICT) in education; and (3) teacher and school leadership policies. Policy actions in these three critical domains should help Albania achieve better results for the investments that both the government and individuals make in education. In particular, enhancing the implementation of the reformed curriculum; ensuring broader and more effective use of ICT in education; and strengthening teacher and school leadership policies may all contribute to improving student learning outcomes and help Albania to achieve its national vision, in the context of SDG4-Education 2030.

■ Chapter 3
Curriculum Development and Reform

INTRODUCTION

The first key policy domain presented in this EPR Extended Report is the area of curriculum development and reform. Throughout the period in which the EPR was conducted (2015-2017), Albania was undergoing a curriculum reform for the pre-university education (PUE) system. The curriculum reform was designed to make the curriculum for basic education more modular and comparable to competency-based curricula in EU Member States, as well as to introduce a modern ICT curriculum in primary and secondary schools.

In the previous National Education Strategy for 2004-2015 (MoES, 2005), curriculum development was identified as an urgent need. The strategy document specifically mentioned that the curriculum should focus on the knowledge, skills and attributes needed by pupils to be able to function in a democratic society and free market economy, and that this in turn necessitated a shift away from isolated subjects and toward a more integrated approach. It was this strategy that established the '5+4+3' structure of the pre-university education system including 5 years of primary + 4 years of lower secondary + 3 years of upper secondary education, and identified the need to align the curriculum with the emerging needs and aspirations of students and parents in Albania.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM

According to the Country Background Report (IED, 2015), the current curriculum reforms are motivated by the failings of the previous curriculum to achieve intended results and the need to improve students' performance on the OECD PISA assessment. Table 4 below summarizes the reasons given by IED stakeholders for the change in curriculum policy (IED, 2015):

Table 4.   IED stakeholders feedback on curriculum issues

▪ The curriculum lacked a competence-based approach and a clear cut and coherent vision and philosophy; ▪ The lack of an officially approved *Curriculum Framework* that would regulate the curriculum system as a whole; ▪ The Teaching Plan was one of the most overloaded in Europe; the curriculum displayed a huge number of subjects; many of them unnecessary at certain ages of schooling; ▪ The curriculum lacked a thorough integrative and cross-curricular vision that should have infused the whole system of pre-university education; ▪ The learning outcomes and content were insufficiently adapted to the age of students and their real capacities to fulfil the curriculum requirements;	▪ The objectives and content lacked a systemic and profound vertical and horizontal correlation; therefore, real cross-curricular integration and consistency of the subjects (and of different topics inside the subject) were lacking; ▪ The curriculum was barely meeting the needs and interests of students on the one hand and those of parents and school on the other; ▪ School-based curricula for optional subjects were missing from the core curriculum; ▪ The differential approach to curriculum and instruction that would enable inclusion and would offer equal chances to all students was absent; ▪ Textbooks were overloaded and lacked content that was appropriate to the specific ages and developmental stages of the learners.

Source: authors

To address these gaps, the goals of the curriculum reform are to enable pupils to be successful, to create the conditions for students to develop the key competencies of the new curriculum, to prepare pupils for further academic work and for living in society; and to have a school programme and curriculum that responds to the needs and interests of the learners (MES, 2014*a*; 2014*h*). In a world of increased interdependence and mobility, today's students and tomorrow's adults should be flexible and able to respond to fast and unexpected changes in society such as economic crises, epidemics and conflict. Education should be part of the answer to these needs. The new conception of learning requires pupils to play an active role in the development of new knowledge and competence. Teachers must create learning situations for pupils that enable them to take more responsibility for their learning. In addition, schools should be developed as a multifunctional centre for the community that offers quality education services, in cooperation with and in service to the community. Along these lines, the *Pre-university Education Development Strategy for 2014-2020* notes as well that schools should have a role in helping young people understand the need for and participate in working to reduce poverty, marginalization, discrimination and injustice (MES, 2014*a*, p. 9-10.).

Albania's new pre-university curriculum intends to engage students in more active and collaborative learning and has its foundations in constructivist pedagogy (Chapter 5 in this EPR also addresses some of the pedagogical and training issues arising from the implementation of the new curriculum). According to the Country Background Report (IED, 2015) and those interviewed during the UNESCO review

team missions, this is a very big shift for many teachers and educators who were trained with previous methodologies and are accustomed to a more teacher-centred approach to learning.

Furthermore, according to interviews with staff of the IED and MES, the performance of students on the PISA tests was another source of concern. Between 2000 and 2012 Albania made gains on PISA outcomes at the same time that it significantly increased the number of 15-year-old students participating in education (World Bank, 2014a). In 2012, 60% of students taking the test scored below level 2 in mathematics (considered by OECD standards to be functionally innumerate) and 52% below level 2 in reading (considered to be functionally illiterate). It must be noted that these percentages represented an improvement from the 2000 and 2009 PISA results. Furthermore, PISA results continued to improve for the 2015 PISA cycle.[13] However, Table 5 below shows that performance continues to be relatively low among the OECD and other countries participating in PISA. The analysis of Albania's performance was also hampered by the fact that Albania did not meet the PISA technical standards for related student-level data in 2012 (World Bank, 2012).

Table 5. Albania's 2015 PISA performance compared to other mean scores

PISA 2015 results	Singapore's mean scores	OECD mean scores	Albania's mean scores
Reading	535	493	405
Mathematics	564	490	413
Science	556	501	427

Source: OECD, 2016a

An analysis of PISA results in Albania also showed that there are significant differences in the performance of students in rural and urban schools, and between boys and girls, with girls consistently outperforming boys and with students in urban schools outperforming those in rural schools (Harizaj, 2011).

In many jurisdictions, including Albania, there has been a marked growth in participation in international assessments over the past two decades, primarily focusing on language, literacy, mathematics and science. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and PISA have been in place since 1995 and 2000 respectively. Since 2011, the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) has been examining the skills and competencies of the population of those aged 16 to 65 years. As noted in the background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring report, these assessment processes are also driving curriculum

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13   In 2000, 64% of students were below level 2 in mathematics, and in 2009, 68%. In 2000, 70% of students were below level 2 in reading (World Bank, 2014a).

change (Altinyelken, 2015). This is particularly true in the case of Albania due to the government's goal to improve outcomes on assessments such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), as indicated in the Country Background Report (IED, 2015) and in the Strategy for Pre-University Education (MES, 2014*a*).

In light of these new national goals, the orientation of curriculum to the subject disciplines and their content has shifted. While the discipline-oriented learning of the subjects remains an important component, the curriculum itself is increasingly oriented to providing students with the skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes that are required to live and learn successfully throughout their lives. The obligation to address all learners' needs regardless of the level of ability, disability, or prior learning and to ensure that each learner succeeds to the best of his/her abilities, is deeply ingrained in the curriculum reforms of recent decades in many countries.

Reflecting these shifting priorities, the new curriculum has its foundation in the following documents: *Korniza Kurrikulare e Arsimit Parauniversitar* and *Kurrikula Berthame per Arsimin e Mesem Te Ulet* (MES, 2014*h*; 2014*i*). The reformed curriculum focuses primarily on compulsory basic education: the primary and lower secondary years. Table 6 below outlines the new curriculum framework based on seven key competencies (MES, 2014*i*).

Table 6.   The seven competencies of the new curriculum framework

1. Communication and expression competencies – to be an effective communicator	▪ Communicating in the mother-tongue; ▪ Communicating in foreign languages; ▪ Expressing themselves through various types of signs, symbols and artistic codes; ▪ Communicating through the use of information technology; ▪ Engaging in and contributing to productive dialogue; ▪ Following the rules of communication; ▪ Providing and receiving feedback in a constructive way; ▪ Expressing tolerance and sensitivity in communication.
2. Thinking competencies – to be a creative thinker	▪ Exercising mathematical competence, as well as basic competencies in science and technology; ▪ Exercising digital competencies; ▪ Understanding, judging, synthesizing; ▪ Developing abstract thinking; ▪ Making information and evidence-based decisions; ▪ Linking decisions with their consequences; ▪ Assessing and self-assessment; ▪ Problem-solving.

3. Learning competencies – to be a successful learner	▪ Learning to learn; ▪ Knowing, selecting and making use of learning instruments and methods; ▪ Mastering reading, writing, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology; ▪ Identifying and processing information in an independent, effective and responsible way; ▪ Learning in teams and exchanging positive experiences.
4. Life, work and environment-related competencies – to be a productive contributor	▪ Presenting oneself in the best way emphasizing one's own capabilities; ▪ Working independently and as a member of a team; ▪ Organizing and leading learning and social activities; ▪ Demonstrating entrepreneurial skills, planning knowledge for work, and rational use of time; ▪ Mastering abilities for conflict management and risk assessment; ▪ Undertaking independent and responsible actions; ▪ Engaging in environmental protection and development.
5. Personal competencies – to be a healthy individual	▪ Demonstrating an understanding of oneself and others; ▪ Demonstrating self-confidence; ▪ Managing one's emotions and stress; ▪ Exercising empathy for others; ▪ Demonstrating one's ability to conduct a healthy lifestyle; ▪ Making general choices related to personal health.
6. Civic competencies – to be a responsible citizen	▪ Competencies for interpersonal, cultural, and social relationships; ▪ Understanding and respecting diversity among people; ▪ Exercising tolerance and respect for others; ▪ Assuming accountability for issues of general public interest, responsibility and civic participation; ▪ Tolerating and undertaking useful changes in one's private life, for an entire society and for the environment.
7. Digital competencies – to be able to succeed in a digital world	▪ Using ICT to facilitate the process of learning and to increase the effectiveness of learning; ▪ Using multimedia tools to collaborate with other people and with adults, increasing productivity and learning effectiveness; ▪ Collaborating with peers via telecommunications using collaborative tools to investigate teaching topics and to solve issues and problems that may arise inside and outside of school; ▪ Creating original animations or documentaries based on the events of the community, locality or school environment; ▪ Using critical thinking skills to plan, research and manage projects in order to develop strategies to solve problems and reach decisions, based on information gained suing appropriate tools and digital resources.

Source: MES, 2014*i*

As reflected to some extent in these seven key areas of competency, Albania's curriculum reform aims to advance academic achievement; increase students' competency in learning and living; increase inclusion of diverse learners; and engage and retain students at least to the completion of basic education in order to allow all Albania's children and youth to participate successfully in society and within the wider European arena.

In today's world, curriculum results from the work of educational experts and from the local, national and global needs, expectations and aspirations that educational systems engender. In OECD countries, the focus of the last fifteen years has been on the idea of '21st century skills'. This derives from a combination of concern from political leaders, employers, education professionals, parents and students about the wide range of knowledge, skills and competencies that children and young people need in navigating successfully in a rapidly changing and globalizing world (Scott, 2015).

With such complex aims and objectives, it is understandable that a national curriculum would have many facets to its development. For example, according to Braslavsky (2003), there are four phases or aspects of a curriculum: 1) curriculum as presented to the teachers, 2) curriculum implemented by the teachers, 3) curriculum as experienced by students, and 4) curriculum as evaluated (the teachers' efforts and the students' results). Braslavsky (2003) also pointed to another form of community-based curriculum development in which society and/or parents propose what they want to include, responses from educators and experts are solicited, and the proposals and responses are used to identify common aspects that should be part of the general education. Once complete, common standards for learning are developed, including the mechanisms for assessing learning outcomes.

In a paper prepared for the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE), Amadio, Opertti, and Tedesco (2015) stress the importance of communicating curriculum goals to the wider public in order to legitimize the curriculum content. For these authors, public stakeholders such as the media, social networks, and civil society members play an increasingly important role in creating a space for dialogue over curriculum content, particularly in terms of local values and societal goals for education (Amadio et al., 2015).

In Albania, where the curriculum was traditionally focused on programmes of study and the subject disciplines, reforms have increasingly focused on a more integrated and interdisciplinary approach to learning that involves problem-solving and the development of competencies required for citizenship, critical thinking, collaboration, relationship management and learners' understanding of their own learning processes. In general and at the same time, education systems are also being asked to consider how the curricula and learning experiences of students will ensure that all children are included and taught, regardless of their backgrounds, such as ethnic or economic

status, or apparent differences in ability (Amadio et al., 2015.). Albania's curriculum reforms, which include democratic citizenship education, place it firmly within this international dialogue for change.

Amadio, Opertti and Tedesco (2015) highlight four emerging traits as a way of rethinking curriculum. Firstly, curriculum articulates the educational and development aims and purposes of the society and the personal learning and development needs of pupils. Secondly, curriculum should be the product of a social dialogue involving a wide variety of stakeholders and a broad view of the education system. Thirdly, curriculum should support the notion that education policies can be an essential part of a larger, systemic vision of society; and fourthly, curriculum may be able to promote the democratisation of learning opportunities and stimulate the transformation of the teacher's role. At the highest level, the curriculum expresses the intentions and commitment of the jurisdiction regarding its education system. Through statements of overarching goals of learning for pupils, descriptions of what the learning priorities of the system are and some definition of the common features and experiences across schools and classrooms, the curriculum establishes the aspirations, priorities and mechanisms for the system. These intentions are further actualised in the programmes of the schools themselves: the learning activities of students and teachers, the time spent in school (hours/day, days/year) and the resources available to the schools (teachers and other staff, texts, access to technology, and opportunities for experiential learning).

In the key policy domain of curriculum development and reform, the EPR has identified four specific policy issues and a number of evidence-based recommendations which are elaborated below[14].

POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY ISSUE 1.1
The curriculum documents should reflect the intentions of the reform, be appropriate to students and useful to teachers

In order for a curriculum reform to be successful, the documents describing the reform, including its intentions and the specific learning outcomes being sought, should be clear, well-organised and straightforward to use, and illustrative of the changes that are being made. These documents are generally intended for school and teacher use

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14   Policy issues are denoted with the Domain number, followed by the Policy Issue number. For example for the first domain on Curriculum Development and Reform, Policy Issue 1 is denoted as 1.1. Recommendations are denoted with the Domain number, followed by the Policy Issue number, followed by the Recommendation number.

and set the context and orientation for the reform. Given the inadequacies identified in the Country Background Report (IED, 2015) with the previous curriculum as well as the challenges faced by the schools, the reformed curriculum should have a more experiential and constructivist foundation than its predecessor. The curriculum reform aims to equip students in Albania with a broad set of competencies that include communication and higher order skills such as critical thinking, extracting and analysing information from a variety of sources and through multiple strategies for learning, including problem-solving, analysis, and presentation.

Evidence

In the UNESCO review team's interviews with the staff from IED, concern was expressed about the extent of the pedagogical shift required to engage students in a constructivist, collaborative learning approach and about the teachers' comfort with the new competency-based assessment model. The teachers of Albania presently are varied in their qualifications and in their experience of more interactive, student-centred pedagogies. There are teachers who were trained prior to Albania becoming democratic, and teachers trained more recently who may be quite comfortable with a constructivist approach, but who have nonetheless been using the previous, more teacher-centred curriculum. The review team found that the present set of documents for lower secondary teachers in Albania is overwhelming in its scope and detail and thus needs to be streamlined in a way that classroom teachers can use it in their daily preparation and delivery of learning. While there are some materials provided to guide teachers in curriculum implementation, a too finely grained prescription of time and sequence is a potential barrier to the stated objectives of enabling all pupils to learn mathematics, for example. The effective differentiation of instruction at the classroom and individual pupil level requires that teachers have the opportunity, time, and support to develop and use their professional judgment for instructional purposes. To enable success for all, teachers must determine whether and what additional teaching, new strategies or extended practice will be needed by some and to provide opportunities in school for that learning.

To put Albania's curriculum reform in context, it is helpful to examine the curriculum content of other countries. Finland and the province of Ontario in Canada have been selected as examples that may be of interest to Albania due to their notable performances on PISA in recent years following earlier curriculum reforms (OECD, 2013*a*). When looking at the strands or major themes of the mathematics curriculum plans, for example, the curricula are fairly similar, with the exception of Finland's emphasis on 'thinking skills and methods' as the first strand (see Table 7).

Table 7. Comparisons of mathematics curricular content

Finland	Ontario (Canada)	Albania
▪ Thinking skills and methods ▪ Numbers and calculations ▪ Algebra ▪ Functions ▪ Geometry ▪ Probability and statistics	▪ Number sense and numeration ▪ Measurement ▪ Geometry and spatial sense ▪ Patterning and algebra ▪ Data management and probability	▪ Numbers ▪ Geometry ▪ Measurement ▪ Algebra and Functions ▪ Statistics and Probability

Source: Finnish National Agency for Education, Ontario Ministry of Education, MES 2014*i*

When it comes to looking at specific learning objectives, there is more divergence among the three jurisdictions. The curriculum in Finland focuses on fairly high-level concepts and the Ontario and Albania documents are more specific. This is in part because Finland does not break its mathematics curriculum out on a year-by-year basis, but addresses Grades 6-9 as a block. In addition, it appears that Finnish teachers (perhaps due to their extensive initial teacher education and pedagogical preparation) are provided with less specific direction regarding expectations for pupils or detailed methodology.

Table 8. Summary of objectives of mathematics in Finland, Ontario (Canada) and Albania

Finland	The pupils will gain experience in succeeding with mathematics: ▪ Learn, through investigation and observation, to formulate mathematical concepts and concept systems; ▪ Learn to use mathematical concepts; ▪ Learn basic calculation skills and learn to solve mathematical problems; ▪ Find similarities, differences, regularities, and cause-and-result relationships between phenomena; ▪ Justify their actions and conclusions and present their solutions to others; ▪ Learn to present questions and conclusions on the basis of observations; ▪ Learn to use rules and follow directions; ▪ Learn to do sustained, focused work, and to work in a group.

Ontario (Canada)	[Throughout Grade 6] students will: ▪ Develop, select and apply problem-solving strategies as they pose and solve problems and conduct investigations, to help deepen their mathematical understanding; ▪ Develop and apply reasoning skills (e.g. classification, recognition of relationships, use of counter-examples) to make and investigate conjectures and construct and defend arguments; ▪ Demonstrate that they are reflecting on and monitoring their thinking to help clarify their understanding as they complete an investigation or solve a problem (by comparing and adjusting strategies used, by explaining why they think their results are reasonable, by recording their thinking in a math journal); ▪ Select and use a variety of concrete, visual and electronic learning tools and appropriate computational strategies to investigate mathematical ideas and to solve problems; ▪ Make connections among mathematical concepts and procedures, and relate mathematical ideas to situations or phenomena drawn from other contexts (e.g. other curriculum areas, daily life, sports); ▪ Create a variety of representations of mathematical ideas (e.g. by using physical models, pictures, numbers, variables, diagrams, graphs, onscreen dynamic representations), make connections among them, and apply them to solve problems; ▪ Communicate mathematical thinking orally, visually and in writing, using everyday language, a basic mathematical vocabulary, and a variety of representations, and observing basic mathematical conventions.
Albania	The pupil should gain the following 6 key competences in Mathematics: ▪ Problem solution in Mathematics; ▪ Mathematical reasoning and verification; ▪ Mathematical thinking and communicating; ▪ Conceptual links; ▪ Mathematical modelling; ▪ Using ICT in Mathematics; ▪ The pupil should gain knowledge on numbers, space, measurement, statistics; ▪ The pupil should understand the role of mathematical thinking in the development of technology and science and to know how to apply mathematics in everyday life; ▪ The pupil should use mathematical language; develop clear concepts, logical thinking and see reciprocal interdependence between phenomena; ▪ The pupil should gain experience in presenting concepts in different ways; learn to argue orally and in writing, using illustrations and concrete tools; learn to detect similarities, differences, regularities and cause-effect relationships; understand mathematical concepts through investigations and use them; analyze problem situations and solve mathematics problems; argue their actions and conclusions and present them to others; use rules and follow instructions; learn to work in a collaborative group; present mathematical situations in different ways; use technology to facilitate the application of mathematics; and feel successful in mathematics.

Source: Finnish National Agency for Education, Ontario Ministry of Education, MES 2014*i*

As the information in Table 8 indicates, the key difference between Ontario's mathematics document and that of Albania is the inclusion of concrete examples for the process expectations. While the Albania curriculum documents emphasize *what* is to be learned, the Ontario documents place some emphasis on *how* it might be learned and how that learning might be demonstrated. Both Albania and Ontario describe in depth specific expectations by strand or theme for Grade 6 pupils. Alternatively, Finland provides a shorter list of expectations that appear to be more inclusive of Grades 6-9.

Albania goes further than Finland and Ontario, and provides an extensive document for Mathematics Grade 6 (Programme of Mathematics Teaching Field: Grade 6, 7, 8 and 9), as well as a daily planning guide for teachers of mathematics in Grade 6 (Planning the Curriculum for Grade 6: Mathematics). The Grade 6 planning document for teachers is very detailed in its recommendations for the number of hours for each subtopic, and in its placement of topics during each of the three trimesters. As might be expected from the country's history over the past three decades, Albania's curriculum appears to be highly prescriptive. This is in contrast with Finland and Ontario, which provide greater latitude in the curriculum documents to teachers to make decisions about the allocation of time and sequencing of material.

In general, Albania's curriculum reflects the reform goals quite well. However, in the analysis of Albania's performance on PISA prepared by the World Bank, students in Albania demonstrated particular weakness in linking basic mathematical knowledge to the real life problem situations, and in connecting and evaluating texts as they related to their daily lives (World Bank, 2012). Though Albania improved in PISA 2015, the country still ranks below the OECD average in all disciplines. The curriculum objectives are not very explicit in specifying that there might be more than one appropriate or successful strategy for problem-solving or in emphasizing the need for students to understand and communicate their thinking effectively. The greater emphasis on communication and thinking skills in the new curriculum may help improve performance on the PISA subscales in which Albania's performance has been particularly poor.

Policy Issue 1.1 Recommendations
Clarify and Streamline Curriculum Documents

1.1.1 *Continue reviewing all curriculum documents (curriculum framework, core curriculum, programmes, assessment documents, etc.) with a view to maintaining their inner coherence, so they all clearly state the intentions, commitments and goals of the curriculum reform, and how it will work for both compulsory and upper secondary education.*

The key elements of a curriculum reform process are: to define the goals and objectives of the reform; to develop the documents and processes that represent the changes and their implementation; to communicate the nature and timing of the reform to internal and external stakeholders[15]; to pilot the reformed curriculum and prepare teachers for the new pedagogical methods required for effective implementation; and to develop processes for the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation itself, and the subsequent achievement of the students. The Curriculum Framework outlines the key stages used in its conceptualisation and the supplementary processes that will be used to bring the curriculum reform to fruition (MES, 2014*a*).

The philosophy of the reformed curriculum (both its constructivist base and its commitment to the success of all students) requires that teachers have some flexibility and autonomy in the determination of teaching and learning strategies, and the use of time in the classroom. Without that flexibility, students who are struggling to master a concept or process will be left behind and it will be difficult to accommodate the diverse needs of students. It is also important that teachers are able to understand the context that has generated the changes, and how the various years and subjects will be connected and integrated.

1.1.2 *Provide teachers with the necessary documents and guides, with concrete examples of what successful performances might be as illustrations, but not as rigid prescriptions. Emphasis should be placed on communication and critical thinking skills and on the possibility that there may be more than one appropriate or successful approach to a problem or task.*

The curriculum documents should be revised as implementation proceeds to reflect more clearly what learning in a classroom with the reformed curriculum might look like. Sidebars and boxes supporting the curriculum text can provide examples illustrating what a lesson might look like, to include all levels of performance of students, and would be useful in the subject specific documents.

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15   Internal stakeholders include teachers, administrators, parents and students, and government agencies; external stakeholders include post-secondary education institutions, civil society organizations and employers, and potentially international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD, Council of Europe and others.

(a) engagement and communication with teachers, parents, employers and tertiary education institutions about the curriculum reform and its intentions;

(b) the preparation of teachers to use the new curriculum; and

(c) the provision of appropriate learning resources including textbooks to support the reform

The implementation of the reformed curriculum must be examined as part of Albania's larger education reform efforts and within what is known about successful educational change. International scholars such as Michael Fullan have written extensively on the challenge of making meaningful change in education systems. According to Fullan (2016), 'The simple implementation question is, "What types of things would have to change if an innovation or a reform were to become fully implemented?"' Reflecting on this question is key for education stakeholders, as the implementation of major school reform requires active engagement and communication among teachers, parents, school leaders, administrators, teacher educators, and community members.

In school year 2015-2016, Albania's curriculum reform was in its second year of piloting and implementation. The section below discusses the components of the policy issue above in light of the documents and resources received and reviewed, and the interviews undertaken with students, teachers, parents, administrators and officials of IED and MES by the UNESCO review team.

Evidence

According to officials of MES and IED, the new curriculum requires a significant shift in pedagogical and assessment practice for Albania's teachers. The shift in practice that teachers are being asked to make will require different and more extensive preparation for lessons and a closer examination of what each student is able to demonstrate for assessment purposes. It requires the teacher to determine whether the student has partially demonstrated competency and to adjust teaching and learning strategies to improve that student's performance, as well as the performance of all the other students. For the curriculum to succeed in achieving its stated goals, the implementation process must be focused on the achievement of these shifts in teachers' practice, not simply on a bureaucratic implementation of the new curriculum.

Based on the information provided to the UNESCO review team, the reformed curriculum is being implemented according to the following schedule:

2014-2015	▪ New curriculum was piloted at Grades 1 and 6 in 26 selected schools (2 schools in each of the 13 regional directorates)
2015-2016	▪ Pilot proceeded with Grades 2 and 7 in the 26 selected pilot schools ▪ Teachers of Grades 1 and 6 and principals from all schools received two days of training on new curriculum during the summer ▪ Implementation of new (and modified after pilot) curriculum for all schools of Grade 1 and Grade 6 began in September of 2015
2016-2017	▪ Pilot proceeded with Grades 3 and 8 in the 26 selected pilot schools ▪ Teachers of Grades 2 and 7 and principals from all schools received two days of training during the summer ▪ Implementation of the new curriculum adds Grades 2 and 7 for all schools
2017-2018	▪ Pilot extends to Grades 4 and 9 for the 26 selected pilot schools ▪ Teachers of Grades 3 and 8 and principals from all schools receive two days of training ▪ Implementation of the new curriculum now includes Grades 3 and 8 for all schools
2018-2019	▪ Pilot extends to Grade 5; Teachers from Grades 4 and 9 and principals in all schools receive training ▪ Implementation includes Grades 4 and 9 in all schools
2019	▪ Teachers from Grade 5 and principals in all schools receive training ▪ Implementation in Grade 5 of new curriculum in all schools

Although IED was responsible for the development of the curriculum and the design of the training, it was the State Inspectorate of Education (SIE) that prepared the report on the pilot process each year and approved the expansion of the implementation. At the end of the first year of piloting (2014-2015), some changes were made based on feedback from the pilot schools, according to the IED staff interviewed for this review. The review team was not provided with specific information about the nature of these changes.

As of 2015, through the pilot and training process, IED developed a team of 238 national trainers and 221 local trainers. National trainers are IED curriculum experts and RED experts or teachers selected by REDs. Local trainers are teachers from the pilot schools. The understanding from the EPR mission and subsequent interviews was that in each year of the implementation process, teachers who will be newly responsible for the implementation of the curriculum in that year are receiving two days of training with the national and local trainers.

In Albania, the teacher who begins with students in Grade 1 remains with the students until the end of Grade 5. In most cases, this is similar to Finland, whereas in Ontario the teacher gets a new class every year. Thus, in Albania the teachers who

participated in the first pilot for Grade 1 are also the teachers who are presently piloting Grade 2. While they are piloting Grade 2, they serve as an in-school resource for those now implementing Grade 1. Similarly, the subject teachers of Grade 9 who are the first wave of piloting, and then act as in-school resource personnel for the subsequent pilots and implementation. The national and local trainers are organising professional networks for the teachers to provide on-going support. This support primarily takes the form of monthly meetings at the school level organized with the support of REDs. The UNESCO review team heard little evidence of opportunities for teachers to co-plan, co-teach or observe colleagues who had piloted/implemented the new curriculum.

Despite having a concrete plan for the implementation of the new curriculum, it was clear from the UNESCO review team's interviews that there had been little consistent communication with educators and parents about the context for the new curriculum reforms, or specifically, the "why" of the changes being made. The reasons for the curriculum reform cited by MES are quite compelling: Albania's students need the skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes to succeed in the pan-European and global community in the 21st century, and there is clear evidence that the former curriculum was not meeting these objectives. This information, however, did not appear to have been effectively communicated to educators and parents.

The evidence collected by the UNESCO review team in meetings with teachers and principals revealed that those who have been directly involved in the two-day training received information focused on their classrooms and their subjects, while teachers who were not yet directly involved tended only to have heard about the new curriculum from their colleagues, and they did not have a solid high level understanding of the reasons behind the changes being made.

Parents interviewed by the UNESCO review team had only the most basic information about the curriculum reform. All parents interviewed believed that the previous curriculum had 'too much stuff in it,' but at the same time several were concerned that the new curriculum 'seemed too easy.' Parents with children in the pilot schools or in the implementation process had slightly more information than those whose children were not part of the current implementation. Parents interviewed reported that their information came from school meetings or from discussions with friends and neighbours.

Faculties of education play a key role in ensuring that new teachers coming into the education system are prepared for the reformed curriculum. When interviewed there was a basic awareness of the curriculum reform and that it entailed a new focus on competencies. A few faculty members were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the changes while others were not sure of the relevance to their work in teacher education.

Discussion

Context is fundamental to building support for a major change or educational reform. Parents, teachers, principals, educational institutions and employers all need to understand why the curriculum is being reformed. Research has shown that the success of the reform is amplified when key stakeholders share an understanding of the context and reasons for the change, and when that understanding remains constant over a prolonged implementation period (Ungerleider, 2008).

Likewise, Fullan (2015) emphasizes the importance of a shared understanding of the reform in order to bring about lasting change in schools. According to Fullan (2015), the 'essence of change' involves three dimensions: 'beliefs and values; knowledge and skills, and outcomes.' Furthermore teachers, schools, and education officials must share a 'theory of change' or at least an understanding of the goals of the reform, in order to produce the intended positive results (Fullan, 2015).

The education reform process in Ontario, Canada provides an interesting example here. In this case, a key element for the success of the reforms was the establishment of a series of consultative forums by the Minister of Education to discuss the on-going progress of the reforms. The Minister met quarterly with the representatives of principals, superintendents and teachers. A larger 'partnership table' included representatives of parent organisations, faculties of education, employers, technical colleges as well as the key educational players. These layers of regular communication helped to maintain focus on the objectives of the reforms, and to keep support strong among stakeholder groups by providing opportunities for concerns to be raised and addressed and successes to be celebrated (OECD, 2011*b*). In Ontario, this strategic process of communication helped to engage other, non-government organizations (teachers' unions, employers and faculties) in understanding and supporting the reforms, and these organizations became a part of the feedback loop that connected those in the classrooms to the reforms and back to the policy-makers.

Policy Issue 1.2 Recommendations
Coordinate and Communicate Implementation Plans

1.2.1 *Continue to implement a comprehensive public communications programme to explain to all teachers, principals, parents, employers, teacher training institutions, tertiary education institutions and the general public the nature of and reasons for the curriculum reform, in order to facilitate the implementation process.*

In large systems, there is a tendency to tell key players what is to be done or changed, without always spending the effort to explain why the change is necessary. This can lead to a 'this too will pass' attitude among the very individuals on whom successful implementation rests, or worse a kind of 'reform fatigue' which leads to disengagement. Parents and employers need to be informed of the goals, objectives, and purposes of the curriculum reform. A guide has already been produced for parents, for example.

1.2.2 *Through collaboration between MES and IED, develop a structure for sustainable dialogue about the curriculum reform at two levels: with representatives of the State Inspectorate of Education (SIE), REDs, principals, teachers (including teacher unions) and administrators regarding its ongoing implementation and professional learning activities; and with the education representatives and representatives of parents, faculties of education, tertiary education and employers to review the progress and success of the reform, and the success of students under the new curriculum as well.*

Once communicated to all of those responsible for the implementation, such a formal dialogic process can assist in a systemic understanding of the role and scope of teachers' individual professional judgement, and can identify areas requiring additional resources or training. Such a process helps to build a degree of consistency of approach without requiring a lockstep, heavily prescriptive approach to learning activities.

1.2.3 *In the short term, incorporate into the implementation an additional professional learning component for teachers that includes opportunities for teachers to engage in: collaborative lesson planning, observation of others' classrooms, reflection on the lessons and observations with colleagues, and extended work on assessment for as well as of learning.*

The implementation of Albania's curriculum reform must be accompanied by on-going opportunities for professional learning and reflection that are designed with the best available evidence and practice in mind. The UNESCO review teams' interviews with teachers and principals involved in the implementation who had participated in the

training revealed that they were struggling to understand more fully how to change classroom practices. The on-going support that follows the two days of intensive training focused in some measure on the curriculum documents themselves consists largely of monthly meetings at the school to discuss progress.

Throughout the reform process, the collaborative learning process in schools is key. MES reports that there are departments in schools in which teachers collaborate in order to discuss and design syllabi and organize their classes. There is also an active process of peer observation and reflection sessions. However, some teachers interviewed by the UNESCO team said that there are few opportunities to observe colleagues' classrooms, to plan lessons collaboratively with colleagues, or reflect with colleagues on the progress of the professional learning.

The videos on the website of the IED are presentations by IED staff explaining what the new curriculum changes mean, but at the time of the review they lacked accompanying video examples of what learning might look like in an actual classroom using the competency-based approach and more collaborative group learning.

The present international literature on teacher professional learning supports the notion of building collaborative professional communities in which teachers observe one another, work together on lesson planning and assessment, and are generally encouraged to take risks and open their practice to the view of their colleagues (Caena, 2011). This is particularly true of reform efforts that require teachers to make significant changes in their pedagogy. The World Bank, in its analysis of Albania's PISA results, also recommends a programme of peer mentoring, classroom observation and feedback to improve the capacity of Albania's teachers (World Bank, 2012).

1.2.4 *Integrate student assessment components in the teacher training programmes, considering performance standards as well. Specifically, include in professional learning activities instruction on the use of data from formal and informal assessment* for *and* of *learning for purposes of instructional planning.*

When significant changes are being made in the ways in which student learning is being assessed, and when teachers are being asked to build continuous assessment and feedback into their practice, it is desirable to provide some structured learning for teachers in how to assess student learning. Teachers can use informal diagnostic assessments and classroom work to provide information to the teacher about how well students are learning, and in what ways they might alter instruction to improve individual student learning. This is assessing *for learning*. Teachers may also need assistance in learning how to assess demonstrated learning (e.g. student presentations or other non-text, non-test examples of learning) and in how to provide helpful

feedback to students on an almost daily basis. This complex process of continuous assessment (formative and summative) at both the individual and classroom level is an essential part of successful teaching in the new environment.

The education reform includes the development of digital competences. One of the main challenges regarding the implementation of the reform related to school textbooks and teaching materials is the lack of proper infrastructure, particularly in the areas of ICT. For this reason the curriculum reform in Albania includes an initiative focusing on the use of ICT in education. To support the development of students' digital competences and to help teachers and students in the learning process, MES and IED are working to provide other learning resources, especially digital resources, for schools.

Periodic external assessment processes also provide useful information to educators and policy-makers about the strengths and weaknesses of system performance in specific areas. The Ontario practice of having the Education Quality and Accountability Office conduct assessment in mathematics and language at years 3, 6, and 9/10 using assessments that are based on the new curriculum, has had an effect on both student achievement and teacher pedagogy. Ontario's experience with census assessment (every student in the year being assessed) has provided classroom teachers with detailed analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of their students, enabling them to better focus on specific skills and concepts. External international assessments such as PISA and PIRLS can also provide wider system-level information on student achievement.

1.2.5 *Through collaboration between MES and IED, conduct ongoing reviews of whether new textbooks are adequate for the purposes intended and provide additional information to schools regarding technology requirements related to the new curriculum. Discuss with publishers the importance and possibility of increasing contextualization to Albania in textbooks, especially in science and mathematics texts.*

An on-going consultation process helps those in government responsible at the highest level for the reforms to know how things are progressing; it helps those charged with daily implementation to understand that the government is committed to seeing the project through to success, and helps keep the focus of players throughout the system on the continuing reform work. Consultation with parents, employers and tertiary education providers helps them understand on a continuing basis the value of the changes being made, to become comfortable with the new pedagogies, and in the case of faculties of education to make changes to the initial teacher education programs that support the reformed curriculum and its pedagogy.

The UNESCO review team understood from those we met with in schools that a number of the new texts in use, particularly those in the fields of science and mathematics, have been produced by well-known international education publishers. These publishers frequently adapt materials for specific countries, not only translating materials but changing contextual references (geography, currency, etc.) to maintain relevance to learners' experiences.

The process for new textbook selection has also changed with the implementation of the reform. According to MES new textbooks are newly designed according to the curriculum programmes and they are competitively assessed according to the textbook standards by four evaluators. The winning textbooks are then piloted for one year before being certified by the publishers after reflecting on comments and feedback from the teachers who piloted the texts. This process should aid in increasing the relevance and alignment of new textbooks with the reformed curriculum. In addition to reviewing new texts for an adequate level of contextualization to Albania, this recommendation would also include reviewing whether there is sufficient technology to support a text that relies on internet access for activities and whether the new texts are appropriate to the age of students and their stage of development.

1.2.6 *Through collaboration between MES, IED, and teachers, prepare a guide to help educators identify what factors to consider in the selection of textbooks; for example, factors such as the previous experience of students, availability of other resources (including ICT), and students' language levels could be considered.*

A guide has already been produced for parents, for example. Nonetheless, in interviews, representatives from UNICEF, emphasized the need for greater emphasis on mentorship and reflection as part of the implementation and training process. According to UNICEF, teachers are grasping the 'big picture' of the reform, but they may experience challenges with classroom implementation of the new pedagogy.

1.2.7 *Through collaboration between MES and IED, explore the possibility of building digital resource repositories for teachers of all grades and subjects, taking account of successful examples from other jurisdictions.*

While digital infrastructure continues to be a challenge in Albania (as discussed in Chapter 4), there are models in other jurisdictions of effective digital resource banks or repositories that can be used to supplement or replace traditional texts. Such digital resource repositories may include materials for lesson planning, teacher professional learning materials for instruction and assessment, student exercise and learning materials, problem sets, and experiments. This is another area in which teacher preparation and the quality of the ICT available will have an impact (see Chapters 4 and 5 of the EPR).

POLICY ISSUE 1.3

Inclusion is a key function of the curriculum in which the curriculum design helps to ensure that appropriate learning experiences are available to all students including those who have different abilities and challenges (physical, behavioral, and cognitive), those from linguistic and ethnic minorities and those who may not previously have attended school

Pre-university education in Albania is not of equal quality for all students in all parts of the country. There are differences between rural and urban schools, in the quality of the teaching force and in the availability of resources such as transportation and ICT. There are groups of students (Roma, Balkan Egyptians, low-income students, and students with disabilities) who are not yet being well-served.

Inclusion is relevant to a discussion of curriculum implementation as it should be an integral part of the daily operation in classrooms and schools; it is through the everyday practices of learning and teaching that inclusion is made real. Inclusion of children with disabilities and marginalised student populations is an issue that has been raised in Albania by a number of international partners, including UNICEF, EU, and the World Bank, and by civil society organizations such as Save the Children and the Albanian Coalition for Child Education (ACCE).

Evidence

Albania has a legislative framework that mandates inclusion, but the reality is that there are still many students who are marginalized. The legislative foundation for inclusion is clear in the *Law on Pre-University Education in Albania*, particularly through Article 5 on the right to education, which states: 'the right to education in Albania shall be guaranteed to the Albanian citizens, foreign citizens and those without citizenship, without discrimination in terms of gender, race, colour, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, political or religious convictions, economic or social status, age, residing location, disability or other grounds being referred to in the Albanian legislation' (Republic of Albania, 2012). Law 10221 on 'protection from discrimination' is another legal mandate to ensure inclusion (MES, 2014*a*, p. 50).

This is further elaborated in the *Law on Pre-University Education in Albania*, Article 6: General Principles, of which principles 1-6 are particularly pertinent:

1. The interest of the students in the activity of the institutions of pre-university educational system shall have priority;

2. The human rights and freedoms in general and rights of children specifically shall be observed, protected and promoted in the pre-university educational system;

3. Protection against any form of action or omission, which may cause discrimination, maltreatment or moral harm, shall be provided to students and educational employees in the pre-university educational system;

4. The principals of all-involvement of students shall be abided by in the educational institutions;

5. Every student shall be ensured the right to quality education;

6. Students of vulnerable families, disabled students and those being learning difficulty shall be ensured specific care. (Republic of Albania, 2012)

In addition to this legal framework, inclusion is also a central principal in the *Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020* (MES, 2014*a*). For example, the following extract from this strategy (see Table 9) places inclusive quality learning squarely in the context of overall curriculum reform in Albania:

Table 9.   Inclusive quality education in the PUEDS

Inclusive quality learning	
Policy goals	**Main activities**
Reforming the curriculum of PUE	▪ To plan, pilot and implement the new curriculum package in line with EU countries; ▪ To plan and ensure pre-primary and school texts and other quality didactic equipment for all levels; ▪ To institutionalise sport activities in PUE institutions.
Inclusion	▪ To include 95% of children in Pre-School Education and reception; ▪ To ensure inclusion of pupils in mandatory education, gradually provide at least one preparatory school year for all children (5-6 years old) as well as services of early childhood and good parenting on marginalized groups, especially in the North-Eastern areas; ▪ To find a new inclusion philosophy and put into action three-ministry agreement to identify and include children into school.

Source: MES, 2014*a*, p. 50

The subsequent 'Main Results' heading in the PUEDS identifies as results anticipated between 2014 and 2020 the availability to all schools of psychosocial services, and the inclusion of pupils and the implementation of the new curricula, accompanied by necessary improvements in learning methodology and pupil assessment (MES, 2014*a*, p. 51). However, PUEDS addresses the connection between the curriculum and inclusion without going into detail about how the professional capacity of those in the system will be developed to meet the goals.

In the UNESCO review team's interviews with the representatives of UNICEF Albania and school personnel, it became clear that ensuring inclusive quality education for children with disabilities and children from marginalised communities, such as Roma and Balkan Egyptians, remains a challenge in Albania.

Due to persistent challenges with social and economic conditions, pre-university education in Albania has thus far been unable to provide the same quality of education services to all students. Differences between urban and rural areas regarding the quality of schools and teachers, and variation in resources related to transportation infrastructure and ICT use, have led to differences in education quality and provision. To address these issues, the Strategy for Pre-University Education Development (MES, 2014*a*) has prioritized quality and equality in education.

Inclusion is directly related to the implementation of curriculum, and it is an integral part of the daily work of teachers and schools. In Albania, although special attention is paid to the inclusion of children with disabilities and those who are marginalised, more can be done to ensure quality education for all. MES and IED have cooperated with international partners such as UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, Save the Children, the Albanian Coalition for Child Education (ACCE), and other organizations for this purpose. The situation for marginalized children may also improve due to the new legislative framework which mandates inclusion. Nonetheless, there are many challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure that all students receive inclusive quality education.

These challenges reflect the deep socio-economic and urban-rural divisions; for example, the inclusion and quality of learning for Roma students is predominantly an issue for urban schools, while in rural communities, children with disabilities confront barriers of old buildings without adequate universal access, multi-grade classrooms, and parental attitudes that are not disposed to school attendance. There are also transportation issues for children with disabilities in the rural communities. According to UNICEF, school attendance is a major issue with both of these marginalised groups, yet the numbers of students not attending school is under-reported. The only hard data available for the UNESCO review team on children with disabilities was the number of students actually enrolled in schools. However, interviewees highlighted that there are significant numbers of children who are not in school at all, and not acknowledged as being in need of education. Additionally, many Roma girls drop out school at the 5th year of education (age 10).

An issue conveyed to the review team by the EU is the fact that Albania's national data on early school leaving is not disaggregated by different vulnerable groups. Thus, self-identification is the only sure means to determine the percentage of minorities and to track their participation in schooling. The free textbook programme for Roma

children is one means to have these families self-identify. The reformed curriculum in Albania includes very little information on the means by which inclusive education will be realized in schools and classrooms.

The Roma and Egyptian communities are both considered as vulnerable, yet distinct. The Roma children are more migratory, do not have Albanian as their first language, and often face discrimination from other children, parents and teachers. The Balkan Egyptians are less transient and speak Albanian, but are more visibly part of a minority. According to UNICEF, school attendance is a major issue with both of these marginalised groups, yet the numbers of students not attending school is underreported.

Discussion

Beyond the formal commitment to inclusion and protection from discrimination in law and policy, the actual reformed curriculum in Albania includes very little information on the means by which inclusive education will be realized in schools and classrooms. Inclusive education is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. Inclusion is still thought of in some countries as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general educational settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (UNESCO, 2009).

Different jurisdictions approach the realization of inclusive quality education in different ways. For example, in Finland, inclusive education means that the education is organised so that every pupil gets adequate and well-timed support to her/his learning and growth. It is a question of both developing the system and structures and developing the school culture and pedagogical methods that promote the success of all pupils in their studies (UNESCO IBE, 2007). In Ontario, Canada (Ontario, 2008), inclusive education is defined as "education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students should see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected."

Along these lines, in some jurisdictions, the curriculum documents themselves directly address the issue of inclusion, providing schools with a basis for ensuring that the school is open to including its diverse population and teachers with a basis for adapting instruction according to their professional judgement. Statements regarding inclusion may occur in the overarching framework documents or in specific curriculum documents that explore the subject content. Research has also shown how collaborative learning for teachers has been a successful way to ensure

that teachers learn how to differentiate and expand instructional approaches (Ainscow, 2005). In some jurisdictions, such as in Finland and Ontario, Canada, there are also broad policy documents addressing inclusion in general, and outlining the obligations of school authorities. For example, in Finland's core curriculum for basic education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2004), there is a provision for some students to be given an individual education plan (IEP) to meet their unique educational needs. This document also recognizes the right for students with Finnish as a second language to have access to be guaranteed the use of their first language (for example, Roma, Sami, and sign languages) as a language of instruction (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2004).

Similarly, in the case of Ontario, Canada, the teacher is expected to work with the student's individual educational plan (IEP) for appropriate instruction. Students can also be given what is termed 'accommodations' such as extra time for assessments, or alternative forms of assessment, if, for example, the language of instruction is their second language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Furthermore, there is a provision in Ontario's curriculum documents that the mathematics curriculum must be free from bias and students must be provided with a safe and secure learning environment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). For further information on strategies for curricular inclusion, UNESCO staff and international experts may be available to provide stakeholders in Albania with additional resources on specific ways to improve inclusion principles and practices throughout the pre-university curriculum, policies, and programmes.

The challenges to having an effective system of inclusive education in Albania go far beyond the curriculum itself, as evidenced in an analytical study prepared by Save the Children (2012). The study notes that for many years the promotion of inclusive education has been carried out through: direct support to children with disabilities, including the development and implementation of individual education plans and monitoring the learning and social achievements of children with disabilities; building the capacity of teachers, parents, and education and psychology specialists of the REDs with regard to inclusive education; providing awareness activities to selected kindergartens and schools and to their surrounding communities, on the rights of children with disabilities to inclusive education; and preparing and distributing materials published for the awareness campaign.

A Save the Children (2012) study identifies continuing challenges to ensure that the legislative promise is realized, including infrastructural barriers and difficulties in accessing schools, difficulties in identifying children who should be included in public schooling, the lack of professional help and support for disabled children within schools, and the rigid social and emotional environment of many schools. The study cites Albania's continued reliance on the medical model of disability rather

than social and biopsychosocial models, and the lack of clarity around the meaning of inclusion and integration; insufficient direct investment in the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities; ambiguous data provided by the institutions responsible regarding the total number of children with disabilities (the State Social Service and the Institute of Statistics), apparently resulting from a lack of capacity in data gathering and maintenance; the need for greater capacity building and training for teachers on inclusive education required to establish it as a norm; and the challenges of the inflexible curriculum (Save the Children, 2012).

The implementation over five years of the reformed curriculum presents the opportunity for incorporating an increased emphasis on appropriate and inclusive education into the work of the schools and the continuing professional learning of the teachers and principals. The focus of the new curriculum on competency development connects positively with the inclusion agenda. A continuing process for school staff of collaborative inquiry that examines teachers' work with the new curriculum and on the inclusion of learners with diverse needs and circumstances can increase the success of those in danger of being marginalized and amplify the success of all students. Such a process should involve outside experts working with teachers, principals, policy-makers and stakeholders. The outsider presence enables participants to see the work of the school through other eyes, not just as it is, but as the way the school is presently working. This in turn assists in identifying the levers for change – those actions that change the behaviour of the system and of individual educators. It has been shown that the effective development of inclusive practice involves social learning processes within a school (Ainscow, 2005).

Policy Issue 1.3 Recommendations
Improve Inclusion Practices in Schools and Classrooms

1.3.1 *In the short to medium term, expand teacher training and professional development to support the implementation of the new curriculum, adapting it to inclusiveness while teaching (differentiated instruction) as well as to classroom management (strategies for managing those with behavioural challenges or students who have difficulty participating).*

This implementation period, with its clear focus on changing practice, presents an ideal opportunity to address the issues of inclusion more directly. UNICEF and Save the Children in Albania are already partners in supporting the teacher training, and could play a more active role in ensuring that teachers have the skills and experiences required to promote inclusion.

1.3.2 *As part of, or in addition to, the training underway for the new curriculum, engage in a process of collaborative inquiry at the school level that assists teachers and principals in developing a repertoire of high level pedagogical and assessment skills required for the implementation of both the curriculum and effective inclusion practices.*

As previously noted on teacher professional learning to implement the new curriculum, teachers need more than presentations and documents to understand, adopt and practice the new pedagogy. The best professional learning for the implementation of effective inclusion practices is a form of collaborative inquiry, where teachers work together on changing their practice, and monitor the effects of their efforts on the achievement, behaviour and attitudes of their students over time.

1.3.3 *Invite international experts from countries with well-established inclusion practices to assist Albania in the design process for such collaborative inquiry, to help educators and policy-makers in developing new practices and to aid in identifying systemic obstacles to effective inclusion.*

As noted in the discussion section, having experts from jurisdictions that have well-established practices of inclusion assist in the design process and participate in some of the reflections with teachers and policy-makers is a valuable part of helping systems identify obstacles and barriers that can be surmounted. UNESCO staff and review team members are available to assist stakeholders in Albania in identifying international experts in the area of inclusive education.

POLICY ISSUE 1.4
The implementation of the curriculum, and the collection of student achievement data, should be guided by effective monitoring and evaluation procedures

In undertaking major reforms, it is desirable for those directing the reforms and those implementing the reforms to be able to monitor the progress of the implementation and the success of the changes. The development of clear and measurable targets and indicators is a crucial step in ensuring the success of Albania's education reforms. Enacting effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the new curriculum, as well as the outcomes of reform, is key to success as it will provide useful feedback to education authorities, and can help teachers and principals in the schools see their progress. With reliable information, governments can more effectively target investments in training and resources, and make changes to implementation plans and guidelines if these are needed.

Evidence

The *Draft Strategy for Pre-University Education 2014-2020* (MES, 2014*a*) includes a table that outlines numerical targets, such as enrolment, number of qualified teachers, student computer ratio, number of schools inspected; however, other than the number of students continuing from year to year, there is no clear reference to student achievement indicators for the curriculum reform in the strategy (MES, 2014*a*). The only output referring to actual learning in the section 'Ensure Quality Performance According to Standards' is the reference to PISA results for 2015 (the first year of system wide implementation of the new curriculum in Grade 1 and Grade 6) and the PISA results for 2018. Depending on the exact timing of the 2018 PISA, it may test the last cohort of students who have experienced the old curriculum.

The action plans of the Draft Strategy contain a large section on building the student information management system (MES, 2014*a*). However, the action plan does not specify milestones or processes as part of the development. An effective student information management system should include yearly achievement, national assessment results, and other information relevant to the individual student. An effective system should be able to accumulate the relevant information on a student as he/she moves through the system, and perhaps from school to school or region to region. Feedback surveys should be developed centrally in consultation with the representative local participants.

To be able to monitor student achievement effectively, in a world where students may move from school to school, or may leave school, requires a robust national system for managing student information, from enrolment to achievement. There are jurisdictions that have implemented effective systems, which may be willing to share their expertise and advice – this could help to speed and streamline Albania's work. In the intervening period, provision should be made for each school to improve the data it collects on a daily basis in a less technologically sophisticated way that might have sufficient consistency to be used as indicators.

It will be critical for the Matura examination or other national examinations to be aligned with the reformed curriculum. According to findings from the UNESCO review team research, the implementation of the Matura examination since 2009 has posed a number of challenges in terms of both processes and attainment levels. Some changes have been made, but work still needs to be done.

Discussion

It will be necessary for Albania to maintain the rigour of the present pilot and training processes that accompany the implementation of the new curriculum, and to learn what is being found during the course of these. In the experience from Ontario, Canada, a sustained focus over an extended period (more than seven years) and constant attention to system coherence and alignment (combined with strong political leadership from the Premier and Minister of Education) helped keeping a sustained focus on educational improvement (OECD, 2011). In the case of Ontario's efforts to improve secondary school outcomes, there was a strong push as well from the secondary schools and the school boards for the Ministry to 'stay the course' with the understanding that the changes would not happen quickly and would require sustained attention (Ungerleider, 2008).

A strong pilot and implementation process must involve revision and adjustment as the educators, administrators, and REDs work to make real the government's intentions of the reformed curricula and its promise to students. For example, requirements might emerge for more professional learning activities to improve pedagogy or assessment; a wider variety of learning resources; or greater clarity about some parts of the curriculum. Monitoring and assessment by IED, MES and the REDs will be required to determine the extent to which any problems that arise should be addressed at a local or a national level. To provide information on the progress of the reforms, it would be very useful to have short annual surveys for all teachers, principals, and RED directors that examine for example the following:

- What aspects of the new curriculum are working well;
- What aspects of the new curriculum need improvement;
- The efficacy of the training and professional learning;
- Unexpected barriers or obstacles encountered; and
- Successes experienced.

These surveys should be developed centrally in consultation with the representative local participants. The surveys can then be administered and the data collected at the school level, then aggregated up to the level of the RED, and then to the country level. The ability to see results from school to nation would provide an overview of the implementation and strengths and weaknesses, by topic and by region.

Similarly, feedback could be sought each year from students in the lower and upper secondary grades. Student questionnaires could be adapted from those used in other jurisdictions or PISA, and could include specific questions regarding Albania's curriculum.

The engagement of the university departments of teacher education with the reformed curriculum should also be monitored to ensure that the initial teacher preparation programme is taking into account the reforms and any developing changes.

To be able to monitor student achievement effectively, in a world where students may move from school to school, or may leave school, requires a robust national system for managing student information, from enrolment to achievement. There are jurisdictions that have implemented effective systems, which may be willing to share their expertise and advice – this could help to speed and streamline Albania's work. In the intervening period, provision should be made for each school to improve the data it collects on a daily basis in a less technologically sophisticated way that might have sufficient consistency to be used as indicators.

Policy Issue 1.4 Recommendations
Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Efforts

1.4.1 *Through collaboration between the IED and ANE, ensure that the Matura examinations and any other nationally mandated assessments reflect the reformed curriculum.*

Indicators for assessing the outcomes of the reforms might include (without being limited to) a number of factors: success in a year or in courses as measured by promotion; an analysis of student report cards; student performance on exams developed by the National Testing Agency (ANE) that reflect the new curriculum; student attendance; the percentage of students continuing to be enrolled in school each year to the end of basic education; and the percentage of students proceeding to upper secondary education each year.

1.4.2 *Broaden the set of indicators used by MES, IED, and REDs to assess progress to include qualitative and outcome-based measures.*

Both qualitative and quantitative indicators and information are useful in providing formative feedback to MES and IED about the progress and impact of the reforms. In addition, it will be important for MES and IED to ensure that national examinations developed by the National Testing Agency are aligned with the new curriculum, through the teachers' instruction and the assessment of learning outcomes.

1.4.3 *Systematically develop short surveys for teachers, principals, and regional education directors to be administered annually with the intention of identifying successful practices, unexpected issues, obstacles and successes with implementation.*

A survey that provides feedback to both education authorities and to those responsible for implementation in the schools and classrooms can provide useful information on the progress of the reforms and any adjustments required, and help keep those responsible for implementation engaged in the process. Surveys should be 'low-stakes,' and should not be tied to teacher performance evaluation or merit-based pay.

1.4.4 *Collect annual feedback from students in the lower and upper secondary grades who are using the new curriculum.*

Student questionnaires can serve as a barometer for student engagement and confidence, which the reforms are intended to increase. Such data can be aggregated up from the school level to the RED and national levels in order to provide a snapshot of annual progress. Care should be taken however, not to see each year's change as definitive, as reforms such as Albania's are a long-term project, and often have uneven progress.

1.4.5 *Determine key milestones for the development and implementation of a robust student information management system, to be used as indicators of progress.*

The development of effective student information management systems is a major challenge. The use of key milestones can assist in the identification of barriers and obstacles, and the measurement of progress toward the goals. Such milestones can include for example the development of clear statements of goals for the system, contracting with experts for advice on system design, and the development of timelines for execution. When milestones are part of an indicator process, they can signal major obstacles that require additional and/or immediate attention if the implementation is to succeed.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined a number of policy issues followed by specific recommendations regarding Albania's curriculum reform. Whilst recognizing that Finland and Ontario, Canada have very different social and political histories from Albania, it is hoped that their experiences are of interest to ongoing policy discussions in Albania. It is recommended that curriculum reform should be incremental; widespread communication of reforms must reach a range of stakeholders; there must be support for local implementers, as well as ongoing professional development, monitoring, formative evaluation, and feedback mechanisms to make adjustments where needed. Furthermore, based on research and evidence in the field, guiding principles and professional development are necessary to ensure full inclusion for vulnerable students, particularly students with disabilities and those from marginalized communities. Teachers will need on-going professional development and opportunities for collaborative work that would enable them to create inclusive learning environments and flexible instruction to reach all learners. New curriculum materials and textbooks, particularly those in the sciences and mathematics, should provide local contextualization to increase their relevance to learners. Finally, system alignment over the medium and long term of implementation should be improved for greater coherence.

Chapter 4
Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Albania's Education System

INTRODUCTION

The second key domain of education policy presented in this Extended Report is the area of information and communication technology (ICT) in education. Within this domain, this chapter examines the ways in which Albania has approached the strategic integration of ICT into the education system. The chapter begins with an overview of general issues and trends in the use of ICT in education, and then takes a closer look at recent ICT developments in Albania and the wider region. Next, the chapter identifies four key policy issues that demand greater attention in the context of Albania's strategic reforms and international priorities. Each policy issue is followed by a discussion of the evidence base that informs action on the issue. Then, a number of policy recommendations concerning the use of ICT in education are discussed. Many of these recommendations build upon existing national policies, such as the Strategy for Pre-University Education Development, 2014–2020 or PUEDS (MES, 2014*a*) and the Cross-cutting Strategy 'Digital Agenda of Albania 2015-2020.' (MSHIAP, nd).

As noted in Chapter 3, at the time of this report (2015-2017), Albania was undergoing a curriculum reform for the pre-university education (PUE) system. Minister of Education and Sport, Hon. Lindita Nikolla has highlighted several goals for the curriculum reform. In particular, she addressed the need for schools to better prepare students to participate in the knowledge society, and for young people to improve their digital literacy skills in order to participate in the digital world (MES, 2015*j*). Thus, the curriculum reform for pre-university education will play a key role in reframing Albania's education sector to equip students with 21st century skills and competencies.

These priorities echo the Cross-cutting Strategy '*Digital Agenda of Albania 2015-2020*' which endorses 'a society based in knowledge and information through the consolidation of digital infrastructure in the whole territory of the Republic of Albania' (MSHIAP, nd, p. 23). This strategy further emphasizes key issues addressed in this chapter including the improvement of the quality of online public services and an increase in governance transparency (MSHIAP, nd, p. 23). Thus, the curriculum reform, the Cross-cutting 'Digital Agenda' and other national strategies all emphasize the importance of developing young people's digital skills and competencies as a critical component of Albania's future economic and global competitiveness.

THE RISING INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ICT IN EDUCATION

The world in which schools operate has undergone major changes since the beginning of the 2000s, increasing the impact of globalization and the challenges for a sustainable future. For the last two decades, the skills and qualifications desired for an educated and trained workforce have changed significantly due to the growth of economic competition in the knowledge-based society (Sahlberg, 2006). Competencies needed in society and working life have changed, requiring skills for building a sustainable future. The use of ICT in both schools and everyday life are converging, coming ever closer to each other. Hence, today knowledge, access, and the ability to use information and communication technology (ICT) are vital for participating effectively in the information society.

ICT permeates the business environment, it underpins the success of modern corporations, and it provides governments with an efficient infrastructure. World Bank data shows that 2.6% of the world GDP is generated by the telecommunication sector and that ICT service exports correspond to 31.1% of the total service exports (World Bank, 2016). Furthermore, in an effort to make public institutions more inclusive, effective, accountable and transparent, more and more governments across the globe are opening up their data for public information and scrutiny. In this regard, the 2016 UN E-Government survey shows that 128 of 193 UN Member States publish Open Government Data (UN, 2016). Moreover, a recent EU project analysing the factors driving consumers' empowerment found a positive correlation between internet use and consumers' capability to purchase products (goods or services) that suit their own specific needs and desires (Nardo et al., 2013). Despite these drivers for change, the OECD-PIAAC survey has shown that many workers use ICT tools regularly but do not have adequate skills: on average, over 40% of the workers using office software every day do not seem to have sufficient skills to use them effectively (OECD, 2016*b*, 2016*c,* 2016*d*).

Therefore, to prepare young people adequately for the challenges and opportunities of a globalized economy, education systems have the responsibility to provide students with ICT skills and capabilities. As a necessary condition for this, countries must implement long-term incremental changes in their education systems requiring an adequate policy framework as well as adequate human and financial resources. This change requires strong strategic leadership from national experts, local authorities, school principals, and teachers. Furthermore, extensive amounts of shared thinking and collaboration are needed, and there are some very positive examples discussed in this chapter.

National ICT education policies can serve several very important functions. Strategic policies can provide a rationale, a set of goals, and a vision for how education systems might improve with the introduction of ICT and how students, teachers, parents, and the general population might benefit from its use in schools. These strategic policies can motivate change and coordinate efforts so as to advance the nation's overall educational goals. Companion operational policies can set up programmes and provide resources that enable these changes. In the context of Albania, it is important that the Government focuses on its capacity for responding to emerging educational needs, particular in the ICT field. Based on the interviews and observations of the UNESCO review team, the implementation of ICT in education has been insufficient thus far in Albania.

Albania is not alone in the need to improve the use of in ICT in education; the shift towards an information society has led many countries to change their curriculum policies and programmes because students need to develop new digital competencies that were previously absent in the curricula. The experience in the Nordic countries, for example, shows that the integration of technology into the curriculum, with the explicit statement of what students are expected to do at different stages of education, drives not only students' acquisition of ICT related skills but also the implementation of a transparent and comprehensive monitoring system and the development of teachers' ICT skills.

One specific example of an effective reform in Norway is the Knowledge Promotion Reform introduced in 2006 which led to the implementation of a new curriculum in compulsory and upper secondary education. The new curriculum was competency based and expressed expected learning outcomes as competency goals at the 2nd, 4th, 7th and 10th grades. In upper secondary education, there are competency goals for every level, and more than 50 of these goals are ICT related. As a consequence of this reform, teachers' ability to provide learning opportunities in digital competences for their pupils has received increasing attention and is driving the development of a framework for the inclusion of ICT in initial teacher training in Norway. Furthermore, since 2013, Norway has used uses grade-specific tests, which in the case of 4th graders are taken by over 40,000 students, to monitor the students' achievement of ICT related goals.

This example shows how the need for the 21st century skills and competences (OECD, 2013e) has influenced the design of the core curriculum for basic education. As noted in the previous chapter, Albania's new curriculum has been inspired by the international frameworks and trends such as the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (2006). In the related European Reference Framework, competences are defined as 'a combination of knowledge, skills and

attitudes appropriate to the context' and digital competences are recognized as one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning (European Parliament, 2006, p. 14). Furthermore, because digital competence is a transversal key competence, which enables acquiring other key competences (e.g. language, mathematics, learning to learn, cultural awareness), it is crucial that Albania continues support the development of students' digital competencies.

The EU report *A Framework for Developing and Understanding Digital Competence in Europe* (Ferrari, 2013) presents the final findings of the European DigComp projects and proposes a framework for digital competence for all citizens. DigComp provides a common language on how to identify and describe the key areas of digital competence and thus offers a common reference for Albania. The output of this project was based on a data collection phase (including a literature review, case study analysis, and an online survey) and an intensive stakeholder consultation (including workshops, interviews, reviews by experts, presentations at seminars and conferences). The report concluded that the areas of digital competence include:

1. **Information:** identify, locate, retrieve, store, organise and analyse digital information, judging its relevance and purpose;

2. **Communication:** communicate in digital environments, share resources through online tools, link with others and collaborate through digital tools, interact with and participate in communities and networks, cross-cultural awareness;

3. **Content-creation:** Create and edit new content (from word processing to images and video); integrate and re-elaborate previous knowledge and content; produce creative expressions, media outputs and programming; deal with and apply intellectual property rights and licenses;

4. **Safety:** personal protection, data protection, digital identity protection, security measures, safe and sustainable use;

5. **Problem-solving:** identify digital needs and resources, make informed decisions as to which are the most appropriate digital tools according to the purpose or need, solve conceptual problems through digital means, creatively use technologies, and solve technical problems. (Ferrari, 2013)

DigComp proposes ways to address the skills challenges that Albania is currently facing. The aim is for everyone to have the key set of competences needed for personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. These competences include literacy, numeracy, science and foreign languages, as well as more transversal skills such as digital competence, entrepreneurship competence, critical thinking, problem solving and learning to learn (Ferrari, 2013).

On a practical level, incorporating ICT in education is a major shift for most teachers, learners, and school leaders, and as a result, many countries have spent more than a decade implementing major investments to promote the effective use of ICT in education. Nevertheless, we still lack sufficient conclusive empirical data showing how the incorporation of these technologies is contributing to the improvement of education quality (OECD 2016*d*; UNESCO, 2016*a*, p 6). Research has suggested that simply putting computers into schools is not enough to develop students' skills and competencies (OECD, 2016*b*). In this regard, two other 'complementary innovations' are at least as important as access to technology: explicit ICT curriculum goals and teachers' ICT competences. Both of these areas are addressed to some extent in the policy issues below and in Chapters 3 and 5 in this EPR.

RESEARCH ON ICT IN EDUCATION

In the last two decades, an increasing number of scholars have tried to assess the effects of ICT on learning outcomes (e.g. Angrist and Lavy, 2002; Fuchs and Wöbmann, 2005; Leuven et al., 2004; Luu and Freeman, 2011; Machin et al., 2006; Malamud and Pop-Eleches, 2010; Rouse et al., 2004). However, so far, there is no definitive evidence of a substantial impact of ICT on students' learning. The presence of mixed results revealing insignificant, positive or even negative impacts of ICT on students' learning is certainly due in part to the complexity of this relationship, but also to the fact that it has been studied within different disciplines from pedagogy, sociology, and computer sciences to economics, and even within the same discipline using different methodologies (e.g. Biagi and Loi, 2013, p. 31).

A recent international workshop organized by the Norwegian Center of ICT in Education on the effects of ICT on learning outcomes highlighted that focusing on traditional subjects and associated effects may sometimes lead to other broader applications, impacts and benefits being missed (Loi and Berge, 2015). For instance, the Danish experience suggested that technology helps teachers to differentiate their teaching, improves their motivation, and frees up time enabling teachers to focus their efforts where they are more needed. Furthermore, in some countries, ICT is increasingly used to provide children with opportunities to learn in a creative way instead of media providing the information. In addition, there is some evidence (e.g. Dykes, 2015) that 'learning through creating' is an important strategy for the effective integration of ICT into education. Finally, the workshop concluded suggesting that when looking at new ways to integrate ICT into education, it is indispensable to adopt a multiple-stage approach that evaluates the effects at each phase of the implementation process, including exploration, innovation, and scaling. Clearly, this is a time consuming and expensive process. Therefore, to gather evidence and to sustain the research in the field it is advisable to secure an adequate amount of

dedicated funds, that is, funds that are independent from the political cycle of a country (Loi and Berge, 2015).

According to recent research conducted by the OECD, the introduction of digital technologies in schools has not resulted in what was promised, e.g. improved efficiency through better results at a lower cost (OECD, 2016*b*, p. 67-110). Teachers throughout Europe do not feel sufficiently skilled to use ICT effectively, at best using digital technologies to complement prevailing teaching practices. Indeed, the OECD (2016*b*, p. 85) found that:

> Schools and education systems are not yet ready to realise the potential of technology and the appropriate conditions will need to be shaped if they are to become ready. Gaps in the digital skills of both teachers and students, difficulties in locating high-quality digital learning resources and software, a lack of clarity over learning goals, and insufficient pedagogical preparation on how to blend technology meaningfully into teaching, have driven a wedge between expectations and reality.

When considering the effects of ICT in education, it is recommended to adopt a more transversal or holistic approach (Scheuermann and Pedró, 2009). This approach should consider not only the effects of new technologies on students' learning outcomes but also their impact on skills, such as problem solving, students' and teachers' digital competences, motivation and recognition, as well as teachers' time management. Many of these skills are directly in line with curricular goals and objectives in Albania. As a result, the present chapter adopts a holistic approach considering both inputs (infrastructure, teachers' skills and training, monitoring system) and outcomes (students' ICT skills) that would characterize the effective integration of ICT in education in Albania.

POLICY GOALS FOR ICT IN EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

In Albania, the Directorate of Technology, Information and Communication based at the MES and the Directorate of the Methodology and Technology in Teaching based at the IED are the agencies responsible for the ICT policies in education. Over the last decade, ICT has played a minor role in a number of strategies and policies in Albania.

As of 2014, however, increasing the availability and effectiveness of ICT in education has become a clear priority for the Government of Albania. For example, in the 2014-2020 Pre-University Education Development Strategy PUEDS (MES, 2014*a*), the Government has set out to increase the funding for enhancing and improving digitization of the learning process. According to the CBR (IED, 2015, p. 38) the priorities in the area of ICT in education in the PUEDS are as follows:

- The provision of the infrastructure of schools for the use of information (computer, laptop, smart table, tablets);
- Internet with high-speed and online access opportunities in other environments within schools, not only in laboratories;
- Technical support that ensures efficient use of infrastructure.

Albania further aims to 'transcend the digital gap and to empower the youth' through increased investment and capacitation for the use of ICT in education (MSHIAP, nd, p. 6). As noted in Chapter 3 of the EPR, digital literacy is also one of the key competencies that is integral to the new Curriculum Framework in Albania. The approach to key competencies in Albania's new curriculum is holistic and occurs through the study of individual subjects. More specifically, the learning goals of the transversal competences are described as seven competence areas in the new Albania Curriculum Framework. One of the seven areas of key competency is '*Digital competencies – to be able to succeed in a digital world,*' which includes:

- Using ICT to facilitate the process of learning and to increase the effectiveness of learning;
- Using multimedia tools to collaborate with other people and with adults, increasing productivity and learning effectiveness;
- Collaborating with peers via telecommunications using collaborative tools to investigate teaching topics and to solve issues and problems that may arise inside and outside of school;
- Creating original animations or documentaries based on the events of the community, locality or school environment;
- Accurately using advanced commands of standard software for word processing, spread sheets, videos, and photos for presentation;
- Using critical thinking skills to plan, research and manage projects in order to develop strategies to solve problems and reach decisions, based on information gained using appropriate tools and digital resources. (MES, 2014*i*).

Thus, recent educational policies have clearly indicated the Government's priorities in the area of ICT in education. In the area of increasing the number of youth and adults, including teachers, with information and skills using ICTs, Albania's recent policies are well aligned with SDG4-Education 2030.

These policy documents highlight that the provision of ICT and Internet connectivity to all primary and secondary schools is intended to increase the quality and relevance of education, improve the effectiveness of education delivery, and facilitate greater access to information and services by marginalised groups and communities in Albania. Thus, the focus of governmental projects in education is oriented more and more towards raising ICT awareness and optimizing Internet connectivity. However,

despite this significant policy attention to the value of ICT in education, many challenges remain. According to stakeholders including teachers, teacher unions, parents, media representatives, and students, there were widespread concerns about the lack of infrastructure in schools during the UNESCO review period (IED, 2015). In particular, throughout the review process and the elaboration of the EPR report, the UNESCO review team encountered some difficulties in obtaining access to the most current data concerning the integration of new technologies in education (e.g. resources invested, equipment, students' and teachers' ICT competences, teachers attending ICT related training initiatives).

To help address these limitations, Ministry officials who participated in the March 2017 technical mission provided new data that indicated that there were 1,496 computer labs throughout schools in Albania. Depending on school size, computer labs are equipped with 5 to 15 computers for pupils plus one for the teacher. Yet according to the data reported in the Digital Agenda 2015-2020, and more recent updates from stakeholders, many of the 15,731 computers and 1,631 laptops in Albania's schools are not functional. Stakeholders also reported that access to ICT equipment and to broadband internet connection is restricted to dedicated computer labs (IED, 2015), and that computers in computer labs, despite being connected to the Internet, do not have programme management or subject content applications (MSHIAP, nd, p. 17). This may change incrementally with the implementation of the new curriculum; for example, some new textbooks for upper secondary school have digital content developed by educational publishers.

The UNESCO review team was also informed that Internet connection services in schools are not part of the national public services but are instead run by private companies. Furthermore, the quality of network services and infrastructures is not guaranteed by national guidelines nor measured. Interviews also revealed that in Albania there is no explicit and definite period for the renewal of schools' ICT infrastructure. Overall, according to the principals, teachers and students that were interviewed, the major obstacle to ICT use is the insufficient ICT equipment in schools.

Thus, in light of the evidence presented in the domain of ICT in education, four policy issues and corresponding recommendations are identified.

POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY ISSUE 2.1
The lack of a stable, responsive, and widely available infrastructure and digital learning resources hinders the use of ICT in schools

A certain level of technological infrastructure is a prerequisite for using technologies effectively for teaching and learning. For a sustainable solution, ICT infrastructure must include pedagogical aspects such as the development of digital competence among teachers and greater access to digital content for teaching and learning. In recent years, the Government of Albania has taken numerous steps to underline the importance of the development of ICT stating it as a high-priority sector on its way to achieving higher living standards and economic development and growth.

Evidence

In 2005 the number of Internet users in Albania was only 6% of the population, but in 2014 the number had increased already to 60.1%. Similarly, the number of mobile-cellular subscriptions (per 100 persons) passed from 47.9 in 2005 to 105.5 in 2014 (World Bank, 2016, p. 19). However, to the knowledge of the UNESCO review team, statistics on the percentage of students who have access to a personal laptop, tablet, or smartphone are not available.

According to data presented in September 2016 by The Ministry of Innovation and Public Administration responsible for Innovation and ICT at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) regional development forum, 33% of households in Albania enjoy broadband internet, while 49% of mobile phone users access broadband, and the fiber optic infrastructure in the country is 5000 km (MSHIAP, 2016). Thus, the penetration of new technologies into Albania's society continues to expand.

Although there is not yet any overall measurement of information society in Albania, development of information society or e-government in Albania has been part of the reports and studies done on the global level by ITU. The ICT development index (IDI) proposed by the ITU is a valuable tool to understand the relative degree of diffusion of ICTs in a country. The IDI, which has been published annually since 2009, is a composite index that combines three sub-indicators into one benchmark measure – for a total of 11 indicators – and covers 175 economies worldwide. The 2016 IDI takes values between 1.07 (Niger) and 8.84 (Rep. of Korea), with higher values indicating higher ICT development.

Albania ranks 91st in the 2016 IDI, and has improved its IDI value from 4.62 in 2015 to 4.92 points in 2016. The most significant progress in the country has been made in

Internet uptake and in the growth of households with a computer, the latter having risen from just 4.9 percent in 2006 to 25.7 percent in 2015. The fixed-broadband penetration rate for Albania increased slightly from 6.5 percent in 2014 to 7.6 percent in 2015. The price of the ITU-defined fixed-broadband sub-basket fell from USD 29.79 per month in 2008 to USD 9.52 in 2015. The mobile-cellular sub-basket decreased in price from USD 32.13 in 2008 to just USD 6.35 in 2015. Mobile-broadband prices also declined between 2012 and 2015. Mobile-broadband penetration increased significantly from 30.9% in 2014 to 40.6 in 2015 and, as reported the World Bank, the Internet bandwidth (bit/s per internet user) has been approximately doubling year on year since 2005. In this regard, in the 2005-2014 period, the bandwidth in Albania grew at an annual average rate of 97,5%, well above the one registered during the same timeframe in Europe and Central Asia (46.9%), in Nordic countries like Norway and Sweden and Finland, 37.8%, 43.4%, and 49.7%, respectively, in Southeast European countries like Montenegro (55.6%) and Serbia (73.3%) and below the average growth rate registered in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia where the bit/s per internet user more than doubled during the same period (+106.2 per year).

Nonetheless, according to the recent OECD report *Competitiveness in South East Europe: A Policy Outlook 2016*, Albania is still in the process of developing a policy framework related to the integration of ICT in education, while such a framework is already in place in neighbouring countries like Montenegro and Serbia (OECD, 2016*d*, p. 14).

As previously noted, the Government of Albania has recognized that the public education system is critical to the society and has embarked on a path to prepare students to excel in an information-based, technologically advanced society, to create technologically savvy citizens and prepare children for higher education and the labour market (MSHIAP, nd). The government created a working group in late 2005 to draft the Master Plan for the e-School Programme (MoES, 2005), which was adopted and officially launched by the Prime Minister on 19 December 2005. During the implementation of the project, a set of ICT educational targets was introduced, including the objectives that all public upper secondary schools (N=376) and primary schools (N=800) be equipped with computer labs, along with standards for hardware, networks and applications. The plan also called for teacher training on ICT skills and the use of computers – both critical components of expanding ICT use in schools.

By 2012, there were about 9 students per computer per school in Albania against an OECD average of 4.7. Between 2009 and 2012, the number of students per computer per school slightly decreased in Albania (-0.2), whereas it increased at the OECD level (+0.5). During the same time-frame, the share of school computers that are connected to the Internet passed from 41.3% to 70.3%, values still well below the

OECD average (97.5%), but showing the highest increment (+29%) among the countries that took part to PISA 2012 (+1.3%).

As a result of national policies supporting the economic development of rural areas of the country, between 2009 and 2012 a large number of schools located outside the main urban centres gained access to the Internet. Consequently, the number of students in rural area schools without computers connected to the Internet declined rapidly (OECD, 2015).

Although improving rapidly, infrastructure provision varies considerably across schools and the lack of it is still an obstacle to greater use of ICT for educational purposes in Albania. To use ICT in teaching and learning implies having access to digital devices, whether it be a computer, a tablet PC, a mobile phone, or an interactive whiteboard and having a stable, reasonably fast connection to the Internet (MSHIAP, nd, p. 17). A reliable Internet connection enables students and teachers to use different sources of information and in particular to work with curriculum projects. In terms of its relevance in the subject areas of the curriculum, the UNESCO review team found that until 2006, ICT as a distinct subject was taught only at the upper secondary level, whilst in 2014 it was expanded to the basic education level from grade 3 to grade 12.

The UNESCO review team also found that pre-university schools in Albania do not have a specific budget to purchase technology equipment; thus, MES supports schools to purchase desktops, laptops, printers, and photocopy with project funding or from other local and foreign donors (IED, 2015). As a consequence, there is no central plan for the acquisition, maintenance and replacement of this equipment. Thus, schools purchase or replace the existing equipment when they have the funds to do so rather than when it is needed and acquire the equipment that they can purchase given the available funds rather than the equipment that fits their needs the best. At the same time, ICT maintenance is not performed regularly but only when there are available funds.

Discussion

Despite efforts from MES, the ratio of students per computers per pre-university school is, on average, 27:1 (MSHIAP, nd, p. 17). Yet, exclusively measuring the number of PCs and Internet access broadband often gives an incorrect picture of the situation. For example, a school with ADSL connection (low bandwidth) to one office (or classroom) and one to a computer lab only shows that there is Internet connection in the school. In reality, this kind of Internet connection is not functional. A few teachers and some students can work with text, but not with pictures, sound or animations. The benchmark for a highly 'digitally equipped school,' according to

the Survey of Schools report (European Commission, 2013*b*), means that a school has relatively high equipment levels, fast broadband (10mbps or more) and high 'connectedness' (e.g. having a website, email, a virtual learning environment and a local area network).

Throughout the European Union, the use of ICT in education is expanding, though it is still varied among countries. According to a recent report from the European Commission (2013*b*), there are now between three and seven students per computer on average in the EU; laptops, tablets and netbooks are becoming pervasive, but only in some countries. Interactive whiteboards are present in schools (over 100 students per interactive whiteboard), as well as data projectors. More than 90% of students are in schools with broadband, at most commonly between 2 and 30mbps on average in the EU. The percentages of what are termed 'highly equipped schools,' i.e. with high equipment level, fast broadband (10 mbps or more) and high connectedness, differ enormously between countries (European Commission, 2013*b*). Even so, school heads and teachers consider that insufficient ICT equipment (especially interactive whiteboards and laptops) is the major obstacle to ICT use. The report found no overall relationship, however, between high levels of infrastructure provision and student and teacher use, confidence and attitudes (European Commission, 2013*b*).

Policies and action at the level of infrastructure are needed to enable the majority of students, at all grades, to be in highly digitally equipped schools. These policies, putting the focus on providing laptops, tablets, netbooks or other digital equipment, would help to overcome what is still considered by practitioners as the major obstacle to ICT use (European Commission, 2013*b*). Such policies are a matter of urgency in Albania as the country aims at reaching European standards. Infrastructure-related policies should be accompanied by complementary measures in other areas – and particularly in teacher professional development (as discussed in Chapter 5) – for the use of this infrastructure to have the most impact for students.

Policy Issue 2.1 Recommendations
Increase Investment in Services and Materials that Support Effective ICT Use in Schools

2.1.1 *Address the need for a stable, responsive and widely available ICT infrastructure by setting clear, medium-long term goals to expand devices and Internet access; these should be backed by the funds that are necessary to cover devices, connectivity and maintenance.*

Albania should continue its investments in digital devices as well as in Internet access for all schools at all educational levels. In doing so, Albania should make sure the

investments are well-balanced in terms of devices and Internet access on the one hand, and that technical maintenance costs for schools are covered on the other.

School principals, teachers and students consider that insufficient ICT equipment (e.g. high number of students per computer, insufficient Internet bandwidth, obsolete equipment, lack of programme management or subject content applications) is the major obstacle to the use of ICT in schools. Therefore, Albania should continue to invest in digital devices and Internet access for school. In doing so, it should make sure that there is a good balance between investments in terms of expenditure for devices, Internet access and expenditure on technical maintenance. This effort should be accompanied by locating the devices closer to the students (e.g. in the libraries or in the classrooms) and by incrementing significantly the number of fully operational computers available per student per school. Targets should be formulated in terms of, for example, number of students and teachers per computer, number of computers connected to the Internet, and bandwidth capacity. In addition, special consideration should be given to the risk of a growing digital divide between urban and rural areas.

2.1.2   *Increase the investment in ICT infrastructure and connectivity to remote areas.*

Investments in ICT infrastructure that will provide Internet connectivity to schools in remote areas are expensive, as are technical maintenance costs. Nevertheless, these are necessary expenditures to support any initial investment in hardware. This can be obtained via direct investments or via the implementation of projects funded by external international donors such as the World Bank. The incorporation of the private sector and educational technology (ed-tech) industry in Public-Private partnerships could also contribute to sustainability and impact of investments in ICT infrastructure.

For a sustainable solution, ICT infrastructure must also include pedagogical aspects – digital competence among teachers and digital content – these are key elements of a systemic policy. Drawing up a sustainability plan from the very start of a policy is a good starting point for more effective development of ICT in education policy. This will necessarily involve the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of State for Innovation and Public Administration.

2.1.3   *Increase the investment in digital learning resources.*

Policies aimed at promoting the use of ICT in education often focus on investment in infrastructure, equipment, and in-service training of teachers. However, in order to look at the added value that ICT can bring to teaching and learning, attention should be paid to the development and publication of digital learning resources. The investments cited above only pay off if teachers and students also have good quality digital learning materials. To some extent, such materials can be found for free on the

Internet, but due to language issues and the need to have learning materials that are "contextualized" and adapted to the national curricula, Albania also needs to invest in developing digital learning materials for its students and teachers. A step in this direction is that, based on the new reform of curricula, textbooks for 10 and 11 grade students now have digital content developed from education publishers. Furthermore a new curriculum for ICT as a subject within computing and programming for 10, 11 and 12 grade students is being introduced, commencing with grade 10 in 2016/17.

The investment in the digital learning resources can be done by developing national model content for providers of digital content based on public investment or procurement from educational publishers in the private sector. Albania should develop a national hub or repository for digital learning materials, such as Open Education Resources (OERs)[16] or commercial resources that could stimulate the use of ICT. Such a repository or one-stop-shop would enable teachers to find existing materials and high quality digital content in the Albanian language, in accordance with the national curriculum. This could be done by following UNESCO's advice for policy development and teacher development (UNESCO, 2015e), and by implementing the Paris OER Declaration of 2012, which states that a common national repository or a one-stop-shop for digital learning materials should be established where teachers could search for their needs by grade level and subject, thus stimulating the use of such materials. In addition to this, teachers will need assistance in developing the skills and knowledge required to work with the digital content presented in new texts to address the new curriculum.

2.1.4 *Ameliorate and maintain the pre-university information management system and the Electronic Higher Education Database.*

Improvements in the level of student access to digital media and Internet should be included as a core element of the ICT in education policy, as inadequate access will adversely affect ICT-use even if all other conditions are favourable. Policies that adopt a balanced, holistic approach catering for capacity building, leadership development,

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16   OERs are freely accessible, openly licensed documents and media that are useful for teaching, learning, and assessing as well as for research purposes. UNESCO has defined OER as: '... any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them,' whereas OECD defines OER as: 'digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students, and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning, and research. OER includes learning content, software tools to develop, use, and distribute content, and implementation resources such as open licences'. (OECD, 1997). OERs range from textbooks to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video and animation. It is the leading trend in distance education/open and distance learning domain as a consequence of the openness movement. There is no universal usage of open file formats in OER. The development and promotion of open educational resources is often motivated by a desire to provide an alternate or enhanced educational paradigm.

professional development, pedagogical and technical support for ICT use as well as improved infrastructure in schools will be more successful than policies focusing on one or two strategic areas.

2.1.5 *Increase the investment in the human resources necessary to utilize these tools and systems, and capitalize on the training provided to teachers by the ICT academy.*

Teachers play a significant role in the effective use of ICT for educational purposes. Initial teacher education, in-service and pre-service teacher training, and continuing professional development (CPD) all contribute to building teachers' digital competencies. These can include developing ICT skills for coding and the web, the skills to teach ICT as a subject, and the skills to use ICTs to support teaching and learning in other subjects.

Computer and/or tablet access is a necessary but not sufficient condition for ICT-use in learning and teaching. The availability of both pedagogical and technical support at the school level is important to ensure that teachers actually use ICT in their teaching. School-level leadership must therefore make provision of such support a high priority within its goals for learning and teaching in the school.

POLICY ISSUE 2.2
Teachers need stronger basic pedagogical ICT skills

According to the CBR (IED, 2015, p. 46) and based on the UNESCO review team interviews, teachers in Albania are not prepared for the use of technology in teaching. The skills that teachers have to develop during their initial teacher training to use technology in the classroom for pedagogical purposes include basic knowledge of the computer; internet navigation; use of electronic billboards; creating digital teaching materials; communicating through electronic mail; and knowledge of the basics for creating and editing web pages.

Furthermore, according to the UNESCO review team's interviews with school principals, teachers and students, despite recognizing the need for more skilled teachers, national plans for improving teachers' ICT skills and digital competencies should be improved. Enhancing teacher professional development is crucial to helping teachers transform their positive opinion about ICT use into competencies and effective practice in the classroom. Professional development for teachers should give priority to developing pedagogical rather than merely technical ICT skills.

To improve teachers' ICT skills, the on-going Higher Education Reform in Albania states that teachers have to acquire basic ICT skills during their initial training (MES, 2014*a*). Teachers currently have limited possibilities to acquire ICT skills as part of their continuing professional development (CPD) because educational institutions in general, and schools in particular, do not have the resources to finance such initiatives. Collaborations could promote EU initiatives like the eTwinning project and encourage projects at the local level. The development of collaboration initiatives among teachers and schools should be supported as a strategy to create high quality digital resources in the Albanian language.

Policy Issue 2.2 Recommendations
Invest in Teachers to Build Capacity for Effective ICT Use in Schools

2.2.1 *Implement the Higher Education Reform, with a particular focus on the education of candidate teachers, and develop a national system to monitor the ongoing development of pre- and in-service teachers' ICT skills.*

The full implementation of the Higher Education Reform will ensure that teachers acquire basic ICT skills during their initial pre-service training (MES, 2014*a*). Pre-service teacher education could incorporate an element on ICTs, across subject areas, and for ICT as a subject. In the future, candidate teachers could be encouraged to continue their professional education and earn an MA degree in ICT for use in schools.

2.2.2 *Collaborate with international donors in order to design and implement continuing professional development initiatives aimed at training in-service teachers, and ICT teachers in particular, in the use of ICT for educational purposes.*

Collaboration could take the form of promoting EU initiatives like the eTwinning project as well as encouraging local projects. The development of collaboration initiatives among teachers and schools should be supported as a strategy to create high quality digital resources in Albanian language. Several promising initiatives are already underway. A guide for teachers' training about ICT in education has been produced and an ICT teacher's academy, based on a digital portal is being created.

2.2.3 *Encourage collaboration among teachers and school leaders with different levels of expertise in the use of ICT for teaching and learning purposes.*

Promoting collaboration among teachers and school leaders is an effective way to enhance their competences, promote new practices, and encourage the use of technologies for teaching and learning purposes. According to recent research

in Albania, teachers who have been successfully trained use ICT more frequently (Abdurrahmani, et. al., 2012, p. 131). Similarly, the use of ICT in teaching and learning at school is more frequent among the teachers who are confident about their ICT expertise and who are working in school environments where staff collaborate on and plan ICT use (Fraillon et al., 2015, p. 23).

POLICY ISSUE 2.3
Improving online safety for children and youth should be a greater priority

In today's online environment, safety is a fundamental concern. With greater access to the internet, children, young adults, and other vulnerable populations can encounter significant threats such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and unlawful solicitation. Providing education about online risks, protective measures, and safe online practices should be a greater priority in Albania.

Children and young people are increasingly surrounded by digital technologies and through these technologies they experience a large variety of positive, but also problematic, situations (Livingstone et al., 2011). According to Mitchell et al. (2009, p. 707), problematic online situations encompass a wide range of possible online behaviours and experiences that, together or individually result in disruption of relationships, values, daily obligations, and or mental or physical well-being.

There is a common understanding that an online child protection policy rests on the commitment and shared responsibilities of all stakeholders. To act effectively, governments and educators must raise parents' awareness on possible online risks and provide them with tools to increase the online safety of their children. Thus educators have the responsibility to foster both children's and parents' Internet literacy. In order to cope with the challenge of Internet use, teachers, ICT coordinators and school principals should receive a regular training on the issue of children Internet safety. Albania should promote whole-school e-safety policies ensuring that children and young people use ICTs appropriately and safely. To be effective, these policies should apply to all members of the school community, including staff, students/pupils, and other community members who have access to and are users of school ICTs, both in and out of school.

Evidence

A recent survey conducted by World Vision International (2016) on a sample of 821 respondents aged 13-18 demonstrated that improving online safety should be a priority also for Albania. About 44% of the respondents reported using Internet

to watch pornographic material daily while 62% affirmed having friends that visit similar websites. According to the survey, children view parents (48%), friends (37%), and siblings (36%) as the first persons to report an issue to. Teachers (32%) and police (27%) are the least likely people they would report to (World Vision International, 2016). Unfortunately, most of the parents in Albania do not know how to protect their children from online risks as they are unaware of parental control tools (UNICEF, 2016).

Research in the wider European community has demonstrated similar findings over the last few years regarding online risks to children. For example, the 'EU Kids Online' project shows that 4 in 10 European children aged 9 to 16 encountered one or more form of problematic situations in the previous year: 14% had seen sexual messages; 6% had sent nasty or hurtful messages; and 30% had contact online with someone they had not met face-to-face. Furthermore, 21% of 11-16 years old had come across potentially harmful user-generated content (Livingstone et al., 2011).

The effects of youth viewing inappropriate internet content can be significant. A literature review conducted by Owens et al. (2012) concluded that youth who consume pornography may develop unrealistic sexual values and beliefs. In addition, higher levels of permissive sexual attitudes, sexual preoccupation, and earlier sexual experimentation have been correlated with more frequent consumption of pornography. Furthermore, their study suggests that young people who use pornography, especially found on the Internet, have lower degrees of social integration, increases in conduct problems, higher levels of delinquent behaviour, higher incidence of depressive symptoms, and decreased emotional bonding with caregivers.

Cyberbullying is another risk for children online. Three criteria distinguish bullying from other kinds of aggression: unbalance of power, repetition or duration of negative actions and the deliberate will to hurt. Initially the research interest was directed towards physical and verbal forms of harassment (Olweus, 2001, Heinemann, 1973, Olweus, 1978). In more recent research, cyberbullying is defined by Olweus similar to traditional bullying, with the distinction that it happens through the use of electronic means (Olweus, 2013). Cyberbullying takes a number of forms, including flaming: electronic transmission of angry or rude messages; harassment: repeatedly sending insulting or threatening messages; cyberstalking: threats of harm or intimidation; denigration: put-downs, spreading cruel rumours; masquerading: pretending to be someone else and sharing information to damage a person's reputation; outing: revealing personal information about a person which was shared in confidence; and exclusion: maliciously leaving a person out of a group online, such as a chat line or a game, ganging up on one individual (Schenk et al., 2012).

A study conducted by Cowie (2013) examined the effectiveness of common responses to cyberbullying and analysed the main consequences of cyberbullying for the emotional health and well-being of children and young people. The study found that victims experience lack of acceptance in their group, which results in loneliness, social-isolation, and often low self-esteem and depression. Bullies too are at risk. They are more likely than non-bullies to engage in a range of antisocial behaviours and, like victims, they have an increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation.

Albania has already taken significant actions to prevent children and young adults from being exposed to potential online risks. Law no. 10347 (date 4.11.2010) 'For Protection of Children Rights' created the National Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights and specified an action plan for child protection. This plan was supervised and implemented by the Ministry of Innovation and Information Communication and the National Authority for Electronic Certification. More recently, the Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, Ministry of Education and Sport, with the support of UNICEF, have signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* aimed at increasing the efficiency of institutional interaction in children online safety. This agreement has the scope to enhance and promote child online safety against inappropriate content (e.g. pornographic material) and protect them from violence, exploitation, abuse, dangers and threats (e.g. cyberbullying) posed by the use of the Internet17. In addition, Albania has adopted an action plan for the protection of children's rights (DCM No. 182/2012). The cross-cutting strategy *Digital Agenda 2015-2020*, also foresees a few activities for the online protection of children (MSHIAP, nd, 19).

In December 2010, the Ministry of Innovation and Information Communication Technology, the National Agency for Information Society and the National Authority for Electronic Certification organized a conference for a safer Internet. Its scope was to raise awareness about online safety (World Vision International, 2016). In 2012, the Ministry of Innovation and Information Communication Technology launched the 'Internet Safety Week'. In February 2013, the largest electronic communications companies in Albania and the IT association company, AITA, signed the Code of Conduct. Upon the signing of this code, the companies engaged in delivering technical filtration techniques and parental advice for the protection of children and young people from the illegal and harmful electronic communications (MSHIAP, nd, 19). To further promote online safety, every year, the first Tuesday of February is 'Internet Safety Day'.

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17   See the platform www.isigurt.al

On December 9, 2016 UNICEF launched a campaign called *#openyoureyes* in Albania, funded by the Government of United Kingdom, to raise awareness among children, adolescents, and their parents about online risks so that the children and youth could take full advantage of using Internet without facing any negative impact (UNICEF, 2016). More recently a guide for teachers on how pupils can be safe when they use the Internet has been launched. The UNESCO review team was also informed that beginning in 2017, information on Internet safety will also be included in teacher training.

Discussion

Countries generally recognize that the Internet offers a wide range of opportunities for children in terms of their identity and self-expression, education and learning, their creativity, participation and online citizenship. They also recognize that children's use of the Internet exposes then to various risks (OECD, 2012*c*, p. 40).

The various risks to which children are exposed online raise different policy issues, and most national interventions to protect children are complex. Following the categorization proposed by the OECD (2012*c*), these can be grouped as follows: i) multi-layered policies comprising direct and indirect policy tools, ii) multi-stake holder policies related to the various roles and responsibilities of stakeholders; and iii) multi-level policy mechanisms at national and international level. Multi-layered interventions, such as the ones implemented in Austria, UK, Japan, and the USA blend legislative, self- and co-regulatory, technical, awareness, and educational measures, as well as positive content provision and child safety zones.

Because an online child protection policy rests on the commitment and shared responsibilities of all stakeholders, it is essential to identify participants and define their roles. In particular, the adoption of clear policy objectives at the highest government level provides leadership and gives higher visibility to national policies to protect children online. It helps to engage all stakeholders and to facilitate co-ordination of efforts. Policy interventions and educational approaches to on-line safety are often adapted to children characteristics because it is widely recognized that children degree of vulnerability is related to their age and socio-economic background. Furthermore, governments acknowledge that parents have a special role and responsibility in the education of their child and that the role of parents is even more central in the case of mitigating the risks related to the net.

For policies to be effective, however, governments and educators must raise parents' awareness on possible online-risks and provide them with tools to increase the online safety of their children. Thus educators have the responsibility to foster both children and their parents' Internet literacy. Finally, private sector actors also have a role to play

in reducing children's online risks. For example, as reported by the OECD (2012*c*) many service providers have accepted responsibility for introducing more nuanced safeguards for children and for self-policing their websites and implementing use policies.

Multi-level policy mechanisms aim at fostering national and international collaborations to better protect children online. Countries generally consider international co-operation essential for protecting children on an inherently global medium. Beyond sharing best practices, international co-operation at the operational level has produced a number of promising initiatives like the Council of Europe's action against cybercrime (https://www.coe.int/en/web/cybercrime).

Policy Issue 2.3 Recommendation
Protect Youth and Vulnerable Populations from Dangerous Online Activity

2.3.1 *Through collaboration across education institutions, raise awareness of problematic online situations among children, adolescents, young adults, and their families.*

In order to cope with the challenge of Internet use, teachers, ICT coordinators and school principals should receive a regular training on the issue of children Internet safety. Albania should promote whole-school e-safety policies ensuring that children and young people use ICTs appropriately and safely. To be effective, these policies should apply to all members of the school community, including staff, students/pupils, who have access to and are users of school ICTs, both in and out of school.

Parents must also play a central role in prevention by banning websites and setting age-appropriate limits of using the computer and Internet. Therefore, parents should be aware that their child/children can be exposed to problematic online situations, and they should also be able to recognize in a short time, and react immediately, if their child has been exposed to these risks. This could be done by involving parents in the school's e-safety plan (see above) as well as by promoting a national media campaign on online safety.

According to World Vision International (2016), Law no. 10347 (date 4.11.2010) 'For protection of children rights' does not offer enough protection from the potential harms of Internet use and its side effects. The law also lacks the scope to protect against actions facilitating crimes against children and adolescents, including Internet pornography. It follows that Law no. 10347 could be revised in order to offer more protection from the potential harmful effects of Internet use.

A National Report on the Situation of Children's Rights in Albania (2013-2014), published by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) with financial

support from UNICEF is a positive step towards protecting children's rights. However, the UNESCO review team questions to what extent policies designed to protect the rights and wellbeing of young people are well-coordinated and effectively implemented. More attention could be given to the coordination of various actions and to the effective cooperation among the entities, agencies, and organizations enforcing these initiatives and investigating related cyber-crimes.

POLICY ISSUE 2.4
Albania would benefit from a central evaluation system and national guidelines on the use of ICT in education

With the appropriate tools for the task, appropriate teacher support and adequate assessment methods, digital tools can support and facilitate learning in new and better ways. But, as many studies have demonstrated, ICT-tools do not automatically create these effects (OECD, 2015*a*). On the contrary, if ICT-tools are simply introduced into classrooms without the proper contextualisation and support by teachers and other features of the environment, ICT-tools might have the opposite effects. Thus, the research (European Commission, 2013*b*) has demonstrated the importance of taking into account the complex interrelationships between cognitive skills, digital tools and the socio-material organisation of learning situations in processes of acquiring knowledge.

Evidence

As of 2017, stakeholders who were interviewed by the UNESCO team reported that Albania does not have either a central monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system or national guidelines concerning the use of ICT for assessment purposes and a clear research agenda on ICT in education. However, the *Digital Agenda of Albania 2015-2020* states that an efficient monitoring and evaluating system is one of the pre-conditions for its successful implementation (MSHIAP, nd, p. 42).

Based on the findings of the UNESCO review team, there is a need for greater coordination and transparency regarding information on the use of ICT in education in Albania. The review team found that it was difficult, for example, to know the bandwidth in schools, if the hardware and the software are obsolete or up to date, the number of personnel receiving ICT training, the level of teachers' ICT skills, the presence of pedagogical and technical support at school, and how technologies were deployed for educational and administrative purposes. To inform the policy-makers about the efficiency and effectiveness of the system, input data should be compared to output and outcome data. For example, output data may include the number of hours per week a student in a given grade and subject uses ICT at school; the number

of hours per week spent by a teacher to prepare ICT materials to be presented in his/her classes; or a list of typical tasks students are able to perform using ICT. Outcome data could be, for example, indicators assessing students'/teachers' confidence in using ICT; students'/teachers' ICT skills; and students' learning outcomes (i.e. PISA test scores, students' grades at national exams, etc.). Furthermore, data should be accompanied by any additional information that could be useful for their interpretation concerning, for example, the definitions used, the method followed to collect the data and their representativeness, the comparability of the data over time.

The successful implementation of education reform in Albania requires coherent and sustained interventions. According to the UNESCO review team's analysis, the current policy and institutional architecture concerning ICT in education is too fragmented to meet evolving national aspirations and global demands. Albania would benefit from developing a stable, responsive and widely available infrastructure and digital learning resources; improving teachers' basic and pedagogical ICT skills; raising the awareness of potential online risks to children and young people; implementing a central monitoring and evaluation system; and developing national guidelines for the use of ICT for assessment purposes. Furthermore, the review team recommends that administration needs to be streamlined and rationalized; data collection should be enhanced and better use made of data in policy making; and more attention needs to be given to strengthening capacity at the school level to address emerging needs. Additionally, equity must be put at the centre of all these reforms. National ICT policies in education will have the greatest impact if they are aligned with other strategic and operational policies, particularly those designed to enhance educational quality, equity, and inclusion.

In terms of research capability on ICT in education, the UNESCO review team found that one of the main indicators of lack of scientific research in this field was the extremely low number of research institutions in Albania involved in international scientific research programmes. For instance, there were 245 applications to the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) with research institutions from Albania in the consortium and only 34 projects were selected (13.9%) (MSHIAP, nd, p. 18).

Discussion

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

As countries invest more in ICT, and as these investments become more strategic, a greater emphasis on M&E typically occurs, evolving from a simple counting of basic inputs (e.g. how many computers there are in schools) to more developed attempts to assess the impact of technology on learning. A solid-evidence base is indispensable for informed, effective and timely-decision making. Building community, collaboration

and cooperation among researchers, quality data, adequate analytical skills, and policy support are the essential elements of any solid evidence-based approach; these elements enable policy makers to take well-informed and rational decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence at the centre of the M&E policy development and implementation process (Loi and Berge, 2015).

Many countries have sought ways to find empirical information that would allow them to track the pace of policy implementation for the integration of ICT into their education systems. Policy makers are actively looking for policy examples or models on implementing ICT in education in other countries on which to base their own policies. A challenge remains, however, that we still do not have '...a system of indicators to facilitate international comparison, one that can monitor the evolution of this dynamic complex, incorporate all the dimensions involved and facilitate the analysis of the kind of results we can expect from this process, according to their stages of development' (Momino and Carrere, 2016, p 6).

Assessment

As ICT use become more widespread, interest in ICT-enabled assessments (e.g. taking tests on computers) becomes more common. Assessment is a powerful driver of innovation and change in education as it defines the targets for both learners and teachers. Assessment is often understood as having three purposes: diagnostic, formative and summative (NACCCE, 1999). Diagnostic assessment is used to analyse pupils' capabilities and aptitudes as a basis for planning (i.e. at the beginning of the learning experience). Formative assessment has the aim to gather evidence about the pupils' progress to influence teaching methods and priorities (i.e. during the learning process); and summative assessment is used to assess pupils' achievements at the end of a programme of work (NACCCE, 1999). ICTs are currently exploited to support mainly summative but also formative and diagnostic assessment both in Europe and the USA. ICT-enabled assessment approaches are generally used as a means of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of test administration, improving the validity and reliability of test scores, and making a greater range of test formats susceptible to automatic scoring (Redecker, 2013, p. 10). However, as argued by Binkley et al. (2012) and by Ripley (2009), ICT can also be used to modify and alter how competences are assessed and, in this regard, create formats and environments which facilitate the assessment of skills that have been difficult to measure with traditional assessment formats (e.g. problem solving skills, communication and collaboration skills, ICT skills).

Although the use of ICT to support pupil assessment is becoming increasingly widespread, at the EU level only a few countries (Estonia, Austria, the United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, Spain) centrally recommend the use of ICT in pupil assessment in compulsory education (Eurydice, 2011, p. 57). Therefore, the fact

that in Albania there are no central recommendations to the use of ICT in student assessment does not constitute an exception.

Research and innovation

MES has foreseen in its strategy (2014*a*) to pilot the use of tablet devices in the pre-university education system, a project to be implemented in accordance with the most recent developments in the approved national curricula and the long-term strategy of the Government. Ministry officials reported that the Tablet Pilot Project, implemented in 2015, increased the modernization and digitalization of the education system through the creation of 120 new interactive classrooms, some with smartboards, in 60 secondary schools throughout Albania. The interactive classrooms are managed at the central level.

The use of tablet devices in education in Albania is very important not only to break the divide of the use of tablet devices in the education system but also to bridge the divide for students and teachers in their homes. MES will evaluate the results of the projects individually, based on an initially agreed evaluation format. The outcomes are going to be used for the preparation of the long-term digitalization strategy of the pre-university system. The UNESCO review team found it difficult to gain access to the project plan and documents of the *Tablet Pilot Project*; hence, the review relies on interviews with the government officials in terms of details and objectives of this particular project.

In sum, when looking at new and appropriate ways to integrate ICTs into education at a national scale, it is indispensable to adopt a multiple-stage approach that evaluates the effects at each phase of the implementation process and builds on the results of each stage (e.g. development, exploration, and replication). This can be a time consuming and expensive process. Therefore, to gather evidence and to sustain the research in the field, it is advisable to secure an adequate amount of dedicated funds (i.e. funds that are independent from the political cycle of a country) in order to ensure the full implementation and sustainability of the ICT strategies for education (Chambers, 2015).

Policy Issue 2.4 Recommendations
Develop Tools and Systems that Will Expand ICT Access and Functionality in Education

2.4.1 *Develop a central system for the periodic (annual or biannual) collection and publication of statistics that comprise data on infrastructure, equipment, training, teaching resources, assessment resources, and the use of ICT.*

A central database system would reduce the workload of schools and facilitate communications between schools and government agencies, as well as across agencies. The system should be available for ministries and governmental organizations to use for planning and policy making purposes. The statistics should be complemented by in-depth evaluations to ensure better understanding of the core issues. Effective measurement requires good baseline data, however what may constitute an indicator for policy makers may not always align with the indicators of success selected by educators.

Albania should collect more systematic information on what works and on what does not work from pilot projects on the use of ICT in education that have been successfully implemented in Albania as well as in other jurisdictions. This information should constitute the basis of new national or local projects.

2.4.2 *Develop a platform for implementing ICT in education and national guidelines on the use of ICT in education.*

Leadership in the use of ICT in education requires a map and a compass to guide decision-making and action plans. To be truly useful, such roadmaps need to strike a delicate balance: they must incorporate a contextual understanding of real-world technologies, but remain grounded in pedagogical frameworks that guide their application. Generally speaking, policies seem to address this issue in several different ways, for example: by articulating intentions related to having a dedicated group/unit/agency for ICT in education; through a plan to set up a unit or agency specifically devoted to overseeing the use of ICT in education; and by dedicating a professionally staffed focal unit/agency charged with implementing policies on ICT in education, which actively coordinates with other organizations on ICT issues in education.

National or local projects should be implemented following a multi-stage approach going from the piloting to the up-scaling phase. Each phase of the implementation process should build on the results of the previous stages. The information and the results generated within this process must be collected and systematically available for all the stakeholders. Moreover, Albania should participate in international comparative studies regarding the use of ICT in education (i.e. studies like the IEA-ICLS and the EC-Survey of Schools: ICT in Education. Benchmarking Access, Use and Attitudes to Technology in Europe's Schools; European Schoolnet monitoring studies).

It will be necessary to discuss how the investment in ICT in education should be organized. By creating a new platform for ICT in education, Albania can strengthen and coordinate future efforts. In the meanwhile, it is recommended to cooperate

with other national ICT centres active abroad in order to develop a systemic knowledge base and experience on what works and on what does not work. This information should be used to develop guidelines on the use of ICT in education for all stakeholders.

2.4.3 *Build on the important efforts made thus far to improve access, equity, and quality in education by addressing the remaining ICT challenges that must be overcome in order for students to develop the digital competencies necessary to succeed in a digital world.*

The successful implementation of education reform in Albania requires coherent and sustained interventions. Addressing these challenges will require a bold and systematic approach to reform, particularly in the area of ICT in education. According to the UNESCO review team analysis, the current policy and institutional architecture is too fragmented to meet evolving national aspirations and global demands. Thus, the UNESCO review team recommends that administration of educational reforms needs to be streamlined and rationalized; data collection should be enhanced and better use made of data in policy making; and more attention needs to be given to strengthening capacity at the school level to address emerging needs. Additionally, equity must be put at the centre of all these reforms. National ICT policies in education will have the greatest impact if they are aligned with other strategic and operational policies.

2.4.4 *Develop and include in the future Digital Agenda of Albania clear milestones stated for every year with regard to the development of digital learning materials, competence development, and infrastructure improvement so that progress can be measured annually or biannually.*

The *Digital Agenda of Albania 2015-2020* is an ambitious strategy and plan for all sectors, including education. According to the 'Digital Agenda': 'Technology is the future of world economic development. Our mission is to use it as a tool to ensure good governance and create development opportunities for the next generation' (MSHIAP, nd, p. 7). To deliver on this vision, the responsibilities of different stakeholders on the national, regional and local levels should be made clear and adequate financial and human resources be pledged. For example, in terms of hardware this would also mean setting aside funds for maintenance and replacement of old or obsolete equipment. Lastly, targets, resources, and responsibilities should be coordinated at the national level. The improvement of M&E practices (as noted in previous recommendations), particularly in the areas of curriculum implementation and the use of ICT, will play a key role in helping Albania meet its strategic goals and targets for education.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a number of key policy issues pertaining to the use of ICT in education. In particular, it has focused on the lack of a stable, responsive, and widely available infrastructure and digital learning resources and the corresponding need to increase investment in materials and services to support effective use of ICT in schools. It has also highlighted evidence regarding the need for Albania's teachers to develop stronger pedagogical ICT skills by investing in capacity development for candidate and in-service teachers as well as school leaders and administrators. The chapter also discussed the wider international and regional efforts to enable students to develop the digital competences needed for the information society whilst also improving issues of safety and child protection for internet use, which needs to be a greater priority in Albania. Finally, the chapter discussed the importance of monitoring & evaluation in the context of national strategies for ICT in education.

It is important for the Government of Albania to be mindful that ICT in schools bring new actors and stakeholders into the educational sector. Funding models with private sector (e. g. the educational technology or 'edtech' industry) in public ICT education policies can be a key factor in ensuring sustainability. Public-Private partnerships could contribute to sustainability and impact of initiatives. It can boost the available financing for policies and projects. However private funding should not necessarily dictate the operations of policy programmes. Caution is needed to ensure that commercial interests do not overrule the content and educational interest of policies. Despite concerns, the educational technology industry could be a key partner in the education innovation strategy for Albania.

Chapter 5
Teacher and School Leadership Policies in Albania

INTRODUCTION

Teacher and school leadership policies are the third key policy domain addressed by the Education Policy Review. In Albania, efforts to create a more student-centred curriculum, expand the use of ICT, and increase equity have placed new expectations on teachers to create more inclusive classrooms where students develop transversal skills and prepare for participation in a democratic knowledge society. As Albania continues to decentralize its education system, school leaders are also expected to take on new responsibilities, reach out to parents, and build strong links with their communities (MES, 2014*a*).

This chapter examines a number of ways in which Albania could enhance procedures for the education, certification, deployment and development of the country's teachers and school leaders to further support its education reform. It presents policy issues Albania may wish to consider addressing as it moves forward with this reform, as well as a number of recommendations for how each issue could be addressed. The policy issues and recommendations build upon information gathered in interviews with stakeholders in Albania, desk-based research and government strategy documents, notably the Ministry of Education and Sport (MES)'s draft *Strategy for Pre-University Education Development, 2014–2020* (MES, 2014*a*). A common theme running throughout the recommendations is the need to share information, collaborate and consult, notably with teachers and school leaders who must feel ownership of the reforms that affect them.

The main teacher and school leadership policy issues identified in this EPR include the status of the teaching profession, teachers' and principals' employment and working conditions, initial teacher preparation, the state examination and internship programme that lead to teacher certification, hiring and deployment procedures, continuing professional development, teacher performance appraisal, and the school leadership role. In highlighting these key policy issues, the UNESCO review team views the pathway of teachers' initial training through to their certification and continuous professional development as an ongoing process of lifelong learning. The recommendations in this policy domain thus follow a sequential progression from teachers' initial induction into the profession, through various aspects of certification and career advancement, and, for some, promotion to the school leadership role.

These are key areas of reform where Albania can continue to improve the link between policy and practice, particularly where national goals have already been set.

Recent research has shown that the quality of teachers and their teaching are the most important school-related factors in student achievement (OECD, 2005; European Commission, 2007). As the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, has stated, 'an education system is only as good as its teachers. Unlocking their potential is essential to enhancing the quality of learning' (UNESCO, 2014, p. i). Furthermore, there is 'increasing consensus that teachers are central for achieving universal access to high-quality and equitable education for all learners' (UNESCO, 2015e, p. 13). The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,* adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, incorporates education in several Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4. SDG target 4c involves substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers, underscoring their importance to the development of effective and equitable education systems (UNESCO, 2015b). School leaders also play a significant role in student learning and education reform (Schleicher, 2012; UNESCO, 2014). Albania has recognized the crucial importance of teachers and school leaders by making the development of their roles a key part of the country's pre-university education (PUE) reform agenda (MES, 2014a).

In light of the wider significance of these issues, this chapter provides an overview of the changing role of Albania's teachers, information on the teacher workforce, and a discussion of recent reforms with particular attention to the key institutions responsible for enacting teacher and school leader policies in Albania. This overview is followed by an evidence-based discussion of nine specific teacher and school leadership policy issues and a number of corresponding recommendations for policy action on these issues.

ALBANIA'S TEACHER WORKFORCE

The role of the teacher has become more demanding and complex. For instance, in the European Union, teachers are:

> increasingly called upon to help young people become fully autonomous learners by acquiring key skills, rather than memorising information; they are asked to develop more collaborative and constructive approaches to learning and expected to be facilitators and classroom managers rather than ex-cathedra trainers. (European Commission, 2007, p. 4)

Similarly, with the implementation of the new competency-based curriculum in Albania, the role of teachers continues to change and evolve, whilst reforms also draw new attention to issues of initial teacher education (ITE), certification, and teachers' continuous professional development (CPD). According to research in Albania:

The teaching role in European countries has faced several challenges. Knowledge-based teaching has become obsolete. The orientation towards pedagogical professionalism has replaced these conceptions, and more focus is being given to building teachers' ability to develop professional autonomy and become pro-active agents of change. Changing reality, expectations and tasks need to be addressed with teachers acquiring new skills (Abdurrahmani and Boce, 2011, p. 215).

The teacher workforce in Albania has seen a number of shifts over the last decade. As reported in the *Strategy for Pre-University Education Development, 2014–2020*, 37,943 teachers were employed in Albania's public and private pre-university education systems of whom 90% held jobs in public schools during the 2014-2015 period (MES, 2014*a*) (see Table 10). It is the central government that pays public teachers' salaries. Teachers' terms of employment are outlined in collective agreements negotiated between the government and teachers' unions. The most recent collective agreement covered the period from May 2010 to December 2014, and a new contract has been signed as of 2016 (Kontrata Kolektive e Punes, 2016). Appointment and dismissal provisions for teachers and school leaders are set out in the *Law on the Pre-University Education System* and related administrative instructions, their working hours are set out in Administrative Instruction 44, and their roles and responsibilities are described in the *Normative Provisions of the Pre-University Education System* (ACCE, 2015).

Table 10. Number of students, schools and teachers in Albania's public and private pre-university education systems, 2014-2015 school year.

Individuals/ Institutions	Total		Pre-school		Primary education		Secondary education	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
Students	545,436	40,509	77,154	5,340	342,765	20,643	125,517	14,526
Schools	3,297	272	1,751	106	1,372	121	381	116
Teachers	34,193	3,750	4,150	345	22,905	1,872	7,138	1,533

Source: MES, 2014*a*, p. 17.

There are indications that the teaching workforce in Albania may be younger than the average in OECD countries (Abdurrahmani, 2013; OECD 2014*b*). At all educational levels, particularly at the primary level, female teachers outnumber male teachers. As of 2013, 83.6% of primary teachers, 65.2% of lower secondary teachers, and 63.6% of upper secondary teachers were women (UIS, 2015). Whilst imbalanced, this is consistent with the typical gender distribution of teachers in the European Union (EU), where men make up an average of 32.2% of the teaching workforce at the lower secondary level (European Commission, 2015*a*). Nonetheless, some authors note that this gender imbalance has not always characterized the teaching force in Albania; for instance, data from INSTAT shows that in 1991, the percentage of female teachers was 55% (out of 28,789 teachers, 15,826 were women) which then rose to 63% by

1999 (INSTAT Statistical yearbook 1991-1999, p. 152, ctd. in Çobaj, 2015, p. 4). Çobaj, (2015, p. 5) notes that this gender imbalance is particularly problematic when it comes to the representation of women in school leadership positions; for example, 'in nine-year schools, women constitute 75% of teachers, but only 43% of school principals, whereas men constitute 25% of teachers, but 58% of school principals.'

In the PISA 2012 study, principals reported that 83.9% of teachers in their schools had a qualification equivalent to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 5A level (a bachelor's or master's degree), slightly below the OECD average of 85.5% (OECD, 2013*b*). As of 2012-2013, fewer primary teachers had university degrees (80% overall; 76% in villages) than lower secondary teachers (90% overall; 87% in villages) or upper secondary teachers (98% overall; 99% in villages) (ACCE, 2013) (see Table 11).

This is consistent with Albania's PISA 2009 results, which showed that more students in rural schools were experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers than urban students (24.7% vs. 14.5%) (World Bank, 2012).

Table 11. Number of teachers in Albania's public and private pre-university education systems by gender, educational qualification and location, 2012-2013 school year.

Educational Qualification	Public				Private			
	Total	Female	Village	Female	Total	Female	Village	Female
Primary Education								
Secondary degree	4,595	2,979	3,410	1,965	116	104	7	6
Pedagogical degree*	3,759	2,500	2,825	1,672	94	88	6	6
University degree	18,857	13,880	10,577	7,034	1,695	1,423	123	98
Total	23,452	16,859	13,987	8,999	1,811	1,527	130	104
Lower Secondary Education								
Secondary degree	1,382	701	1,010	425	24	13	1	0
Pedagogical degree*	781	356	639	250	11	6	0	0
University degree	12,384	8,137	7,004	4,047	1,071	839	75	51
Total	13,766	8,838	8,014	4,472	1,095	852	76	51
Upper Secondary Education (General/Gymnasiums)								
Secondary degree	93	67	17	6	9	5	0	0
University degree	5,287	3,395	1,956	1,033	1,477	974	57	34
Total	5,380	3,462	1,973	1,039	1,486	979	57	34

Pedagogical degrees were issued by Albania's three pedagogical secondary schools, which trained future pre-school and primary teachers in the 20th century (OECD, 2002). The required academic qualification to become a teacher has since increased.
Source: ACCE, 2013

In November 2013, MES and IED conducted a nationwide study of school personnel and found that 1,984 teachers, mainly in rural areas and small cities, did not have a teaching certificate or were not qualified to teach (MES, 2014*f*). As a result, these under-qualified teachers were removed from their teaching posts. 2,065 teachers were also found to be teaching subjects, which they were not qualified to teach, and they were either re-assigned or transferred (MES, 2014*f*).

There is currently a general oversupply of teachers in Albania, and unemployment among teachers is high (European Commission, 2013*a*). As of 2013, some schools were employing more teachers than they needed: 1,184 according to government research (MES, 2014*b*). At the same time, there is continuing demand for teachers of certain curriculum subjects at the primary and pre-school levels (see Table 12), and it is difficult for some regions of the country, particularly in the economically challenged northeast, to find teachers (MES, 2015*i*). These are all indications of issues with workforce planning, and they also reflect challenges resulting from the internal migration to urban centres.

Table 12. The five subjects and levels with the most vacant teaching positions, 2015

Level or Subject	Number of Vacant Positions
Pre-school Education	175
Primary Education	440
Physical Education	576
Mathematics	278
English language	232

Source: MES, 2015*h*

A high demand for physical education (PE) teachers in Albania is likely the result of a recent government initiative to increase the amount of PE in schools, as well as the fact that there is only one Sports Academy in the country that prepares future PE teachers. Stakeholders also reported a shortage of teachers for ICT, biology/chemistry and the arts. As noted in Chapter 4, initial teacher education (ITE) programmes to prepare ICT teachers are lacking, so qualified math or science teachers commonly teach that subject.

In 2013, the average student-teacher ratio in Albania was significantly higher than the OECD average at the primary level (19:1 compared to 15:1) and upper secondary level (19:1 compared to 14:1) and roughly equivalent at the lower secondary level (13:1 and 13:1) (World Bank, 2014*a*). At all levels, the ratios were higher in the cities: 25:1 at the primary level, 17:1 at the lower secondary level, and 23:1 at the upper secondary level (ibid). Overcrowding is a problem in urban and suburban

classrooms. Outside of the cities, Albania has over 1,000 micro-schools with small student populations (MES, 2014*a*).

Between 2013 and 2020, MES has projected a decrease in the number of public primary students and teachers by 7.4% and 1% respectively, while the number of public secondary students and teachers is projected to increase by 3.8% and 1% respectively (MES, 2014*a*, p. 174). In the future, MES plans to increase teachers' work time and limit the size of the teaching population (ibid). This explains the minimal projected increase in the number of secondary teachers in the future.

As of the 2013-2014 school year, there were 2,548 principals working in Albania's schools (MES, 2014*a*). The UNESCO review team heard conflicting reports about their present and future supply. Some stakeholders stated that teachers continue to want to be principals. Others said that this was not the case because there is no financial incentive to take on the added responsibilities of the role. The country's teacher and principal salary scheme indicates that starting salaries for principals are not considerably higher than the current average teacher salary (Republic of Albania, 2013).

RECENT TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER REFORMS

In general, Albania's recent teacher and school leader policy reforms were intended to align initial teacher education programmes (and other higher education programmes) with the European Bologna process, improve teacher and school leader quality, and create a meritocratic hiring process. The key pieces of legislation that enacted these changes were the *Law on the Regulated Professions in the Republic of Albania* (2009) (implemented for the first time in 2011); *Regulations on the Organisation and Conduct of Professional Practice for Teaching as a Regulated Profession* (2011), which set out a one-year internship as an additional requirement for teacher certification; and the *Law on the Pre-University Education System* (Law 69/2012), which upgraded the academic qualifications required for teacher certification and required teachers and principals to participate in a mandatory three days of continuing professional development per year.

In 2010, the government issued an administrative instruction requiring teachers to participate in a pre-service professional development programme and successfully pass an exam in order to be appointed as a principal, but, as of 2015, these requirements had not yet been implemented. In 2013, the government released *General Teacher Standards* to describe what teachers should know and be able to do, and introduced a competitive employment exam, the *Teachers for Albania* test, in 2014.

National and regional organizations responsible for teacher and school leadership policies and programmes

As noted in previous chapters, MES is the main body responsible for the development of teacher and school leadership policies at the national level. Other national bodies with related responsibilities include:

- The Institute of Educational Development (IED): responsible for the one-year internship, continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and principals, the *General Teacher Standards* and the *Teachers for Albania* employment initiative;

- The Agency of National Examination (ANE): responsible for the state exam for teacher certification;

- The State Inspectorate of Education (SIE): responsible for teacher and principal assessments as part of school inspections;

- The Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (PAAHE): responsible for the accreditation of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes;

- The three teachers' unions (i.e. the Independent Union of Education in Albania, the Union Federation of Education in Albania and the Education and Science Federation of Albania): responsible for representing teachers' employment rights, negotiating teachers' collective agreements, contributing to policy development and delivering education quality initiatives; and

- Non-governmental and international organizations (e.g. UNICEF, ACCE, Save the Children, World Bank, Council of Europe, etc.): responsible for providing professional development and contributing to policy development.

Public and private higher education institutions provide accredited ITE programmes, while private agencies and some universities deliver accredited CPD.

Private ITE providers comprise:

1. Universiteti Privat Albanian University, Fakulteti i Shkencave Shoqërore
2. Shkolla e Lartë Universitare, jopublike, "Universiteti Marin Barleti" Fakulteti i Drejtësisë dhe Shkencave Sociale e Politike
3. Universiteti Europian i Tiranës, Fakulteti i Shkencave Sociale dhe Edukimit
4. Shkolla e Lartë Private "Hëna e plotë" (Bedër), Fakulteti i Filologjisë dhe Edukimit

Public universities providing professional masters or MSc programmes in education include:

1. Universiteti i Elbasanit "Aleksandër Xhuvani", Fakulteti i Shkencave të Edukimit
2. Universiteti Fan S. Noli, Korçë, Fakulteti i Edukimit dhe Filologjisë
3. Universiteti Aleksandër Moisiu, Durrës, Fakulteti i Edukimit
4. Universiteti Eqerem Cabej Gjirokastër, Fakulteti i Edukimit dhe Shkencave Shoqërore
5. Universiteti "Luigj Gurakuqi" Shkodër, Fakulteti i Shkencave të Edukimit
6. Universiteti i Tiranës, Fakulteti i Shkencave Sociale

At the regional level, the Regional Education Directorates (REDs), as well as the Education Offices (EOs), have a range of human resource responsibilities, from organising the appointment of teachers and principals to schools to evaluating teachers for promotion and assessing principals' performance.

Based on the review of a wide range of policy documents and legislation, as well as an extensive process of interviews with key stakeholders in education, the UNESCO review team has identified nine key policy issues and corresponding evidence-based policy recommendations discussed in the sections below.

POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY ISSUE 3.1
There is a need to raise the status and increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession, while making strategic financial investments to improve the education system as a whole

Stakeholders interviewed by the UNESCO review team shared reflections that teaching was once a highly respected profession in Albania, but its status has declined in recent years. The most common concern expressed by stakeholders about the quality of teaching in Albania was that the profession no longer attracts high-quality applicants. This has also been identified as an issue by different international

organizations like the Council of Europe (Smith and Hamilton, 2011), the European Commission (2013*a*) and the World Bank (2014*a*, 2014*c*, 2014*d*). Of the many inter-related factors that affect the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession, requirements for entry to the profession through admission to ITE programmes and remuneration are particularly important in Albania given current concerns about the quality of ITE applicants and the government's proposal to increase teachers' salaries.

Evidence

Admission to initial teacher education programmes

In Albania, primary teachers complete a five-year ITE programme leading to both a bachelor's and master's degree (i.e. a first- and second-cycle degree). Since 2007, admission to this programme, like admission to the country's other first-cycle study programmes, has been based 80% on the applicant's State Matura Exam results and 20% on their secondary school Grade Point Average (GPA) (European Commission, 2013*a*). Lower and upper secondary teachers, on the other hand, complete a two-year ITE programme leading to a master's degree. For this programme, applicants must have obtained a first-cycle degree and meet the university's admission criteria.

A new higher education law, approved in September 2015, removed the State Matura Exam results as a criterion for admission to first-cycle study programmes like the primary ITE programme (Republic of Albania, 2015*a*). Applicants to primary ITE programmes will now need to have a certain secondary GPA determined by the Council of Ministers, and meet other admission criteria set by the university (ibid). This change places more emphasis on universities' own admission criteria. While this should give universities more autonomy, without central oversight, intake could vary significantly across institutions. Accordingly, some stakeholders interviewed by the UNESCO review team called for the government to work with universities to set the admission criteria. Discussions about what role the government will play appear to be on-going.

According to stakeholders, in the past, initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in Albania generally accepted only high-performing students. However, in the early- to mid-2000s, the doors of the country's universities were opened wider and the size of ITE programmes expanded. Now, applicants to ITE programmes have lower Grade Point Averages (GPAs) than applicants to other university programmes (European Commission, 2013*a*; ACCE, 2015). This is a problem for both the primary (bachelor's, initially) and secondary (master's) level programmes (MES, 2014*a*).

A related problem is that ITE programmes are admitting and producing more teachers than the education system needs, while gaps remain for certain shortage subject areas (Smith and Hamilton, 2011; European Commission, 2013*a*). Labour market data on

the demand for teachers at different levels and for different curriculum subjects does not inform admission quotas. This has created a high unemployment rate among teachers, which could be making the profession less attractive to potential high-quality applicants.

To address these issues, international organizations have suggested Albania launch a marketing campaign and work with universities to attract high-quality applicants to ITE programmes, make better use of labour market data, and introduce additional ITE admission criteria (Smith and Hamilton, 2011; European Commission, 2013*a*). MES (2014*a*) has proposed a more targeted measure: a new policy to provide ITE scholarships to students with high secondary school results who commit to teaching for a certain number of years.

Compensation
Albania has increased teachers' salaries in the past to make the profession more attractive and dissuade private tutoring (Council of Europe, 2011; European Commission, 2013*a*). Between 2005 and 2009, teachers' wages increased by 67% (World Bank, 2014*a*). Since at least 1999, Albania has also provided a monthly stipend to teachers of specialized subject areas, like math, physics and ICT, to attract and retain them (Republic of Albania, 1999). Despite these increases and incentives, MES (2014*a*) has described teachers' current salaries as 'inadequate' and 'non-motivating' (p. 31). The Ministry has proposed general salary increases, as well as a new remuneration scheme that takes into account merit and criteria like: job position, qualifications, work experience, professional experience, other engagements outside the school environment, extra work, distance from residence and training (ibid).

However, a review of the salaries of comparable professions in Albania suggests that teachers' salaries are competitive. According to the Government of Albania, the average monthly teachers' salary, regardless of school level, is 54,700 Lekë (€400), and the average monthly salary for general upper secondary teachers is 60,100 Lekë (€435). This is higher than the average public sector monthly salary, which was 53,025 Lekë (€387) in 2014 (Republic of Albania Institute of Statistics, 2014*b*). It is also higher than the average monthly salaries in sectors like transport and communication, and industry: as of 2013, 51,638 Lekë (€377) and 37,646 Lekë (€275) respectively (Republic of Albania Institute of Statistics, 2014*c*).

Teachers' salaries are expected to reach an average of 59,600 Lekë (€433) for basic education teachers (primary and lower secondary) and 67,400 Lekë (€489) for upper secondary teachers by 2020 (Gazeta Panorama Online, 2015). However, MES (2014*a*) has also designated teaching as a public service, rather than a contracted role, and introduced legislation that clearly sets out teachers' tasks and increases their work time.

Discussion

Raising the status and increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession

A range of inter-related factors affects the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession, including: the requirements for entry to the profession; whether induction, mentoring and professional development supports are provided; the amount of autonomy and decision-making authority teachers have in their classrooms and schools; the competitiveness of their salary; their career prospects and working conditions; and the prestige associated with their role (Ingersoll and Perda, 2007; Schleicher, 2011). To attract the best teacher candidates, jurisdictions typically implement a combination of targeted measures (e.g. scholarships, publicity campaigns and incentives directed towards desired applicants) and general measures (e.g. competitive salaries, benefits, appealing working conditions and other factors designed to make the teaching profession more attractive) (Schleicher, 2012).

Albania's targeted measures include the current allowance to teachers of certain specialized subject areas and the proposed scholarships to high-quality ITE candidates, while a general measure is the proposed salary increase. Two of Albania's other recent initiatives may also have a positive impact on the status of the teaching profession: the requirement for higher academic qualifications to become a primary teacher, and if implemented effectively, the Schools as Community Centres project. OECD research suggests that people with closer connections to schools, like those fostered by Schools as Community Centres, tend to have a more favourable attitude towards teachers (Schleicher, 2012).

Other jurisdictions have launched marketing campaigns to increase the prestige and attractiveness of the teaching profession, similar to the one the Council of Europe suggested Albania introduce. Estonia, for example, launched a "Study to become a teacher" initiative in 2014, which included video clips of celebrities, children and teachers talking about the teaching role (European Commission, 2015*c*). When England was faced with a general teacher shortage in 2000, the country increased teachers' previously low wages, improved their work environment, opened up flexible routes into teaching as a second career and launched a nation-wide recruitment campaign to promote the profession (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

Admission to initial teacher education programmes

OECD and World Bank research point to the importance of limiting entry to the teaching profession through stringent admission criteria to initial teacher education programmes (Schleicher, 2012; World Bank, 2013). An oversupply of ITE candidates leads to a surplus of teachers and low employment, which may make the profession less attractive to potential high-quality applicants. Most European countries conduct labour market monitoring or more sophisticated forward planning exercises to

forecast and take action on the future supply of teachers to meet demand (European Commission, 2015*c*). Belgium (Flemish Community), for example, develops five-year projections based on demographic data (e.g. birth rates, migration), the number of candidates in ITE programmes, and the percentage of teacher attrition (ibid). By comparison, Albania collects data on teacher vacancies from different regions of the country, but does not seem to have a thorough forward planning process to inform quotas for ITE programmes.

The governments of 14 out of 32 OECD member and partner countries, and some Western Balkan countries, control the number of spaces available to ITE candidates through funding to higher education institutions (Duda et al., 2013; OECD, 2014*a*). Across the Western Balkans, the most common criterion for admission to initial teacher education programmes is State Matura Exam results (Duda et al., 2013). However, ITE providers in Croatia also make use of a range of selection methods typical of countries like Finland, which is known for investing in the selection and preparation of the best teacher candidates for its education system, including applicants with 'a high overall level of literacy and numeracy, strong interpersonal and communication skills, a willingness to learn, and the motivation to teach' (Barber and Mourshed, 2007, p. 17). ITE providers in Croatia assess applicants' performance at the upper secondary level, on an entrance exam, and on written and oral exams and interviews that relate specifically to initial teacher education (Eurydice, 2013). The latter two methods are used in just under a third of 35 European countries (ibid).

Compensation

On the surface, the competitiveness of teachers' average salaries in comparison to those of comparable professions in Albania does not present a strong argument for increasing their remuneration in order to make the profession more attractive to potential ITE applicants. However, when considering a salary increase, two other factors that are particularly important are the starting salary and growth in earnings over time (OECD, 2005; European Commission, 2015*c*). The UNESCO review team was not provided with a copy of the current teacher salary scheme in Albania. However, the team did find a 2013 salary scheme and related information about compensation on-line, according to which the minimum monthly starting salary for most teachers appears to be:

■ 45,500 Lekë (33,500 Lekë base salary + a 12,000 Lekë group bonus for having a degree above a high school diploma) (~€330 including the bonus) at the primary and lower secondary level; and

■ 50,500 Lekë (38,500 Lekë + a 12,000 Lekë group bonus) (~€365 including the bonus) at the upper secondary level. (Republic of Albania, 2013)

An accurate assessment of whether this represents a good starting salary requires a comparison with starting salaries in comparable professions, information that the UNESCO review team lacks at the time of the review. This information is likely accessible to the Government of Albania. It would be particularly useful to compare teachers' starting salaries with those of professionals in specialized fields, like sciences, math and ICT, which may offer higher earning potential.

In Albania, teachers' salaries appear to increase annually over a 25-year span by 2% of the monthly group bonus they receive for their academic qualifications (e.g. 2% of 12,000 Lekë for having a degree higher than a high school diploma) (Paga e mesuesve, si te llogaritet, 2014). If teachers pass assessments and exams for promotion, their salary increases by 5% of the group bonus in their fifth year of teaching or later ("qualified teacher" status), 10% in their tenth year or later ("specialized teacher" status) and 20% in their twentieth year or later ("master teacher" status) (ibid). This suggests a salary increase of 20-25% over the span of a 25-year career, much smaller than the average salary increase of 69% over 24 years in European countries (European Commission, 2015*b*). This indicates limited opportunities for growth in earnings in Albania. However, up-to-date salary information would be needed to determine whether this is, in fact, the case.

If teachers' salaries in Albania are already high compared to comparable professions, the government will need to consider that they may need to increase substantially to have an impact on the attractiveness of the profession. This was the case in Switzerland where salaries had to be raised considerably to attract a greater supply of ITE applicants (OECD, 2005). By contrast, in the UK, a smaller increase had a larger impact because the teacher salary was relatively low (ibid).

According to Schleicher (2011), introducing or increasing salary allowances can be a less costly alternative to increasing all teachers' salaries, while recognizing teachers' workload and motivating them to attain higher qualifications. Allowances commonly provided in member states of the European Union and several pre-accession and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries – and in Albania – recognize additional responsibilities (e.g. serving as department heads), working overtime, teaching students with special education needs, teaching in challenging circumstances and obtaining further formal qualifications (European Commission, 2015*b*). Albania has proposed a new remuneration scheme that would recognize 'merit', which implies that teachers will be paid allowances or salary increases for good performance (MES, 2014*a*, p. 81). Any remuneration or reward for good performance would need to be based on a thorough and trusted teacher performance appraisal process, which Albania currently lacks (see discussion of Policy Issue 3.8).

Recent OECD research suggests that Albania's education system as a whole may benefit more from investments in infrastructure than an increase in teachers' salaries (OECD, 2014*a*). In countries with a GDP per capita of less than US $20,000, students' overall academic performance on PISA is not related to teachers' salaries. These countries may benefit from first devoting more finances towards material resources, like infrastructure, instructional materials and transportation, before considering increasing teachers' salaries. In Albania, the GDP per capita was USD 4,619.20 (equivalent to €4,347 or just over 600,200 Lekë) in 2014 (World Bank, 2015). The country has made infrastructure investments in the recent past, but still faces significant challenges in this area, which are reportedly affecting teaching and learning (see Policy Issue 3.2).

Attracting highly qualified applicants to the teaching profession is thus a key area of policy concern in Albania. One possible approach to increasing the attractiveness of teaching would be an across-the-board increase to teachers' salaries. However, if teachers' salaries in Albania are already high compared to comparable public professions, a salary increase would need to be substantial in order to have an impact on the attractiveness of the teaching profession as a whole. The government will need to weigh the relative costs and benefits of teacher salary increases and determine whether the increased salaries would have an overall positive effect on the attractiveness of the profession. In sum, a more strategic approach towards financial investments in the education system, including a strategy for the financing of education system personnel, would be advantageous.

Policy Issue 3.1 Recommendations
Invest in Efforts to Raise the Status of the Teaching Profession

3.1.1   *In the short to medium term, invest in efforts to raise the status of the teaching profession by attracting high-quality applicants to ITE programmes and raising the bar for entry into these programmes.*

Introducing the scholarships proposed in the *Strategy for Pre-University Education Development, 2014-2020* (MES, 2014*a*) and setting a high bar for entry to ITE programmes will contribute to raising the status of the profession and making it more attractive to high-quality applicants. Albania could also consider developing a recruitment campaign targeted to candidates for high-demand subject areas and harder-to-staff regions. Going forward, Albania will need to evaluate the implementation of any campaigns, scholarships and incentive programmes to ensure they are having the desired impact.

The Government could also play an important role in admission to ITE programmes, working with the country's ITE providers to set quotas and establish a higher bar for

entry to the programmes. Setting quotas would involve working with ITE providers and REDs to analyse teacher labour market data and conducting forward planning exercises to forecast the future demand for teachers based on relevant demographic and labour market data (see Policy Issue 3.6 below).

To raise the bar for entry into ITE programs, Albania could consider implementing selection methods like those utilized in other jurisdictions, such as Croatia, to find the best candidates who have a strong motivation to teach. In addition to an assessment of applicants' academic results or qualifications, the admission process could include interviews and possibly the results of a standardized exam, although only if the validity, fairness and reliability of the exam can be assured (see Policy Issue 3.5).

3.1.2 *In the short term, conduct a review to determine whether alternative financial investments would be a more efficient and effective use of resources than an across-the-board salary increase for teachers.*

Albania has already committed to increasing teachers' salaries, and future increases in work time may require additional pay. However, given the infrastructure challenges the education system faces (see Policy Issue 3.2), focusing more financial investment in that area rather than on teachers' salaries may have a greater impact on student achievement, as well as the attractiveness of the teaching profession, considering the increased workload and stress inherent in work environments that are poorly equipped and resourced. The country is encouraged to review its plans for teacher salary increases, as well as its investments in infrastructure directly related to schooling and access to schools, to identify the changes that are likely to have the most impact on the education system as a whole, keeping in mind that if teachers' salaries are already adequate compared to similar professions, they may need to increase substantially in order to have any effect on the attractiveness of the profession.

POLICY ISSUE 3.2
Working and employment conditions may be having a negative effect on teaching and learning

In Albania, a number of working and employment conditions may affect the attractiveness of the teaching profession and hamper teachers' efforts to teach effectively. These include urban and suburban classrooms that are overcrowded, staff shortages in rural areas, and widespread physical infrastructure problems. During the visits of the UNESCO review team in September and October 2015, teachers were not informed of the workload provisions in the new contract of December 2015.

Evidence

Working conditions

With support from international donors and partners like the World Bank, Albania has succeeded in building or renovating schools, and it has also worked to reduce class sizes over the past 10 years. Between 2007 and 2013, average class sizes decreased from 27 to 26 students at the primary and lower secondary levels, and 36 to 32 students at the upper secondary level (World Bank, 2014*a*, p. 32). However, in 2013, class sizes remained higher than the average in the country's urban areas, especially at the upper secondary level and particularly in Tirana (ibid).

The current mandated maximum class size in Albania is 26 to 30 students for the first grade, and 30 to 35 students for grades two to five and the lower and upper secondary level (MES, 2014*e*). However, some stakeholders interviewed by the UNESCO review team stated that their classrooms had over 40 students, and they described the difficulty this posed for teachers trying to conduct student evaluations and use interactive, student-centred teaching methods. According to MES, in the academic year 2015-2016, 12% of students attended school in two shifts, and 27% of classes had more than 30 students, which is a reduction from 30% the previous year.

While there is overcrowding in cities and suburbs, 1,000 'micro-schools' in rural parts of the country are characterized by 'few pupils… low quality teaching and [a] lack of teachers with adequate education' (MES, 2014*a*, p. 50). Staff shortages are likely placing additional burdens on the teachers who work there. MES has proposed a school mapping exercise to ameliorate the situation, but weak transportation infrastructure makes it difficult to consolidate these small schools.

Despite investments in ICT equipment, science laboratories and Internet connectivity, stakeholders reported that schools still lack equipment, labs, photocopiers, and basic furniture like tables and chairs. Though MES has proposed financial investments to address these problems (MES, 2014*a*), stakeholders called for greater coordination between the central and regional levels of government in order to support schools with their infrastructure challenges.

Employment conditions

Collective agreements between Albania's three teachers' unions and the government are usually negotiated every four years, though there is no fixed timeframe. Whilst at the time of interviews in September-October 2015, teachers had been working under an expired collective agreement for nine months (Kontrata Kolektive e Punes, 2012), a new agreement was signed for the period spanning 2015-2017 (Kontrata Kolektive e Punes, 2016). The maintenance of collective agreements is important for several reasons, including the following:

- The country had introduced an array of new policies and procedures related to teachers' hiring, dismissal, workload and professional development that are subject to collective bargaining;

- Documents setting out employment conditions, like the collective agreement, are particularly important because teachers' individual employment contracts generally contain very little information (i.e. the location of their job, the start date and salary);

- A problem that is reportedly on-going, albeit less common than in the past, is teachers being transferred from schools without their agreement and without the unions being consulted.

Furthermore, although MES has made efforts to consult with education partners on broad plans for reform, the review team found that the unions and some teachers felt disengaged from the development of the new curriculum and other material intended for teachers' use (see recommendations in Chapter 3).

In 2014, Albania introduced Administrative Instruction 44 (MES, 2014*e*), which reduced most teachers' mandated teaching hours by several hours per week. This was reportedly connected to a reduction in the number of classes taught per week to give school staff more time to devote to the Schools as Community Centres project. Now, teachers' teaching hours in Albania are comparable to the weekly teaching hours in many European countries (European Commission, 2015*c*). In Albania, they differ depending on the level and curriculum subject taught, ranging from 20–23 hours for primary teachers, 20–22 hours for lower secondary teachers, and 18–22 hours for upper secondary teachers (MES, 2015*e*).

Despite the reduction in mandated classes and teaching hours, teachers with whom the UNESCO review team spoke expressed concern about the workload and, more broadly, about a lack of acknowledgement of the actual amount of work that they do such as lesson planning and preparation, marking of student's work, and communicating with parents. These activities add to teachers' total overall work time per week yet, at the time of the research interviews, these activities did not appear to be contracted or regulated.

Discussion

A decline in the attractiveness of the teaching profession for reasons that include increasingly poor working conditions is not uncommon across the European Union (European Commission, 2015*c*). Some countries have addressed this problem by gathering information from teachers about the specific issues that are making their jobs less satisfying. For example, in 2013, France surveyed a sample of its teachers and

discovered that low job satisfaction was caused by a number of issues, including poor working conditions, lack of career advancement opportunities, and organizational issues (e.g. high rate of reform, lack of consultation on school plans, lack of resources and lack of training) (ibid). Thirty-two countries, including Croatia and Serbia in the Western Balkans, participated in the OECD's most recent Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in 2013 in order to gather this kind of information to inform further policy changes.

Working conditions

Poor school infrastructure can increase teachers' perceived workloads and levels of stress (World Bank, 2013). Recent research in Albania found that improved working conditions and infrastructure, reduced class sizes, and better didactic materials in schools participating in the World Bank's Education Excellence and Equity Project, in addition to wage increases, contributed to increased levels of job satisfaction among Albania's teachers (World Bank, 2014*a*). At schools the World Bank visited, principals and teachers reported that improvements to infrastructure also had a positive impact on student behaviour and learning (ibid).

Across European countries in 2010/11, the most common maximum class size limit was 28 students, lower than the mandated maximum class sizes of 30 to 35 students in Albania (Eurydice, 2012). In the Western Balkans and the broader Balkans region, Croatia's maximum class size at all levels was 28; in Bulgaria, it was 22 and 26 students at the primary and secondary levels respectively; and in Slovenia, it was 28 students at the primary and lower secondary levels and 32 at the upper secondary level (Eurydice 2012, p.154). However, overcrowding in urban areas has been a problem across the Western Balkans, limiting teachers' ability to implement student-centred teaching practices (Duda et al., 2013).

There is a relationship between class size, infrastructure and equity. Although evidence of the impact of class size on student performance is weak, some research indicates that smaller class sizes are particularly beneficial to students from disadvantaged backgrounds (OECD, 2014*a*). Despite this, disadvantaged students around the world 'are the most likely to suffer because of insufficient numbers of trained teachers, overstretched infrastructure and inadequate materials…[and] larger class sizes' (UNESCO, 2014, p. 18, 28).

Jurisdictions are urged to provide teachers with preparation and training to face a range of challenging classroom environments (e.g. overcrowded classrooms, small-school classrooms with multiple grades, classes serving a high number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special education needs) (UNESCO, 2014).

The extent to which this type of preparation and training is provided in Albania is unclear. Given the continuing performance gap between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and average students in Albania and the government's goal to improve the inclusiveness of the education system, it is imperative that the country address, and properly prepare teachers to face, the infrastructure and class size challenges that are likely to affect their teaching.

Employment conditions

Many high-performing education systems, including Finland, Canada (Ontario) and Japan, also have strong teachers' unions (OECD, 2011*b*). In Ontario, Canada, the creation of a provincial framework establishing new collective agreements within a set four-year timeframe and the formation of a consultative Education Partnership Table of policymakers and stakeholders brought an end to years of labour strife and allowed the province to move forward with its education reform (OECD, 2011*b*; Pervin and Campbell, 2011). Internationally, social dialogue involving the government, unions and other major stakeholders allows for consensus building around reforms to increase the likelihood that they will be effective and equitable (Vere, 2007; UNESCO, 2014).

According to World Bank research, important determinants of teachers' job performance and motivation include a clear definition of teachers' tasks and responsibilities and compatibility between these tasks and the amount of time teachers are expected to work (World Bank, 2013). In countries with high teacher quality, both teaching and non-teaching tasks are acknowledged as part of teachers' total work time (UNESCO, 2015*d*). Non-teaching activities commonly identified in contracts or regulations in OECD countries are: the planning or preparation of lessons, teamwork and dialogue with colleagues, and communicating and co-operating with parents, followed by grading student work, general administration and paperwork, and professional development activities (OECD, 2014*a*).

Successful education systems like those in Finland, Canada (Ontario), Japan, Republic of Korea and Singapore tend to devote more time to collaborative non-teaching activities intended to improve instruction at the school (World Bank, 2013). This kind of collaborative school culture, including shared decision-making and mutual support, is linked to greater motivation, effectiveness and job satisfaction among teachers (European Commission, 2015*c*). In Albania, being an active and collaborative member of the educational institution is one of the General Teacher Standards, but more could be done to encourage collaboration at the school level.

Policy Issue 3.2 Recommendations
Improve Education Quality by Addressing Structural Issues in Schools

3.2.1 *In the short term and on a continuous basis, Albania would benefit from a strong consultative partnership between the government, teachers, and teacher unions, one in which all parties work together to address challenges associated with teachers' working and employment conditions, and develop a comprehensive description of teaching and non-teaching tasks.*

Teachers and their unions can be valuable partners in Albania's education reform. It is important that they be involved in the policy development process, the development of material (e.g. curriculum, guidelines) to enact reforms, and the work to define the tasks and responsibilities associated with their role. A comprehensive description of teachers' workload would include both teaching and non-teaching tasks, including collaborative work with colleagues.

To inform this work, Albania could survey its teachers to obtain an accurate assessment of their actual workload and to identify and respond to working and employment conditions impacting their job satisfaction and effectiveness. Albania could consider joining the OECD's TALIS study in addition to, or instead of, conducting its own surveys of teachers.

To avoid any potential labour disruption, Albania could consider establishing a set timeframe for bargaining on collective agreements. Teacher transfer and dismissal procedures need to be viewed as fair; these could be reviewed in consultation with the unions. REDs and school leaders should be knowledgeable about what constitutes an unlawful teacher transfer or a violation of the labour code, and any evidence of such activity will need to be investigated as a priority.

Albania's teachers must be prepared to respond to the demands of the country's classrooms, whether they are overcrowded, include multiple grades, or include students with special education needs or disabilities. It will be important to include classroom management and strategies for teaching and assessing students in challenging classroom environments (e.g. large classes; multi-grade classrooms) in the country's standardized ITE curriculum and as targeted CPD for in-service teachers.

3.2.2 *In the short to medium term, Albania's education system would benefit from investments in infrastructure, including investments to reduce overcrowding in public schools in urban areas and attention to the issue of collective (multi-grade) classes.*

This recommendation builds on one of the short-term recommendations in the previous section. Infrastructure investments and a reduction in overcrowding are costly, given that the latter may require the hiring of more teachers. However, they

may be particularly important to Albania's reform efforts. Albania would benefit from ensuring that there is sufficient coordination at the national, regional and local level so that the system can be more responsive to schools' infrastructure needs.

POLICY ISSUE 3.3
Initial teacher preparation should support Albania's education reform efforts and prepare teachers for the realities of classrooms and schools

Teacher preparation in Albania is in a state of flux. According to the UNESCO review team's research, there are a number of problems with the country's ITE programmes that the government is poised to address through policy changes. These challenges include a lack of sufficient preparation in the student-centred pre-university curriculum and inconsistencies across ITE programmes and practice teaching opportunities.

Evidence

In Albania, ITE programmes for the preparation of lower and upper secondary teachers are consecutive, taking place after the completion of a three-year 180-ECTS bachelor's degree programme in a particular subject. They are two years in length, consist of 120 ECTS credits and result in a Master of Arts or Science degree. Programmes for primary teachers are described in Albania as "integrated" and appear to be similar to the concurrent model. They are relatively new in this form, having only been introduced in 2012 when the qualifications to become a teacher were reformed, requiring all primary teachers to obtain a master's degree. The programmes are five years in length and include three years (180 ECTS) of study at the bachelor level, followed by two years (120 ECTS) of study at the master's level, resulting in Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees.

Some stakeholders expressed concern that the country lacks alternative or flexible ITE programmes that could quickly prepare new teachers to fill areas of shortage, and programmes do not seem to exist to prepare ICT teachers. Currently, it is reportedly not uncommon for ICT to be taught by math or science teachers. Given the importance of subject matter knowledge to effective teaching, it is a concern if the government is not providing or developing other means to prepare teachers for all subjects of the curriculum.

Despite recent advances in teacher preparation to align programmes with European standards, notably by adding the completion of a research thesis as a requirement for all programmes, MES, stakeholder comments and recent research identify further issues with ITE programmes. For example:

- The ITE programme content varies across institutions and the curriculum is overloaded;

- '[N]o attention is paid to what study programmes are necessary for a successful teacher' (MES, 2014*a*, p. 29);

- More supervised teaching practice is required; and programmes are fragmented (MES, 2014*a*).

Standardization and accreditation

Attempts have been made to standardize ITE curriculum in the past, through guidelines developed by an Initial Education Working Group in 2008 and IED's 2013 General Teacher Standards, but the extent to which these have been used to inform the development of ITE content is unclear (Abdurrahmani and Boce, 2011; European Commission, 2013*a*). A new higher education law, approved in September 2015, will require 80% of ITE master's programme curriculum to be standardized, and 25% of the credits to address 'general psycho-pedagogical training' (Republic of Albania, 2015*a*). MES (2014*a*) has signalled that it plans to ensure programmes cover content on the pre-university curriculum, ICT and student assessment.

Programme accreditation could be used to periodically ensure programmes are covering required content, but this does not appear to happen in Albania. All new ITE programmes must be approved by MES and accredited by the Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (PAAHE) according to quality standards for all bachelor's and master's degree programmes (PAAHE, 2012). However, it was reported that programmes are only re-accredited if providers determine they have changed substantively and not on a cyclical basis. Albania's new integrated primary ITE programmes have apparently not been accredited due to a disagreement between the providers and the accrediting body.

Programme content

Stakeholders in Albania expressed concern that ITE programmes are not supporting the country's education reform efforts. Recent research found that programmes do not provide sufficient preparation in the pre-university curriculum (see Chapter 3) and that course delivery is still characterized by teacher-centred methodology (e.g. lectures), rather than the student-centred techniques teachers are now expected to use in the classroom (Abdurrahmani, 2013; European Commission, 2013*a*).

Due to the new competency-based curriculum, teachers in Albania are being asked to shift from a teacher and examination centred culture to a learner-centred culture that assumes that all students can learn if they are engaged and appropriately supported. Such a culture measures success based on the student's actual progress toward the learning

goals and competencies, rather than whether or not the student achieved a particular standard. For many teachers, this new approach is a significant shift in values as well as in teaching practice. Research has demonstrated that in many low- and middle-income countries, and in post-communist countries as well, pedagogical practices have persisted in being teacher-dominated, lecture-driven and quite formal, with a focus on factual and procedural knowledge to prepare for traditional formal examinations (Altinyelken, 2015). In circumstances where the reformed curriculum requires a significant pedagogical shift on the part of at least a portion of the teaching force, sustained professional learning is a requirement for success. Thus, the development of candidate teachers' pedagogical skills should be addressed in ITE programmes.

Studies also suggest that Albania's ITE programmes do not sufficiently prepare student teachers in student assessment, lesson planning, classroom management, and teaching students with special education needs and students from diverse backgrounds (Vula et al., 2012; European Commission, 2013*a*). Preparation in the latter area is even more important now because the government is hoping to create a more inclusive education system for the increasing numbers of families who are attempting to reintegrate into Albania after living in Greece or Italy (European Commission, 2013*a*). Although this is the government's aspiration, students from diverse or disadvantaged backgrounds are not yet fully included in the country's schools.

The practicum
Practice teaching in Albania has been described as 'the least developed component of the teacher education curriculum' (European Commission 2013*a*, p. 25). When a practicum is provided, it is typically spread over two modules. In the first module, students observe classes in small groups, and during the second, they engage in practice teaching (Vula et al., 2012). One university the UNESCO review team visited offered a general upper secondary programme that included a nine-week practicum, including a three-week module in the first year of the programme and a six-week module in the second year. However, the length and timing of the practicum vary depending on the ITE provider and programme.

In the ITE system, in the institutions of higher education, during the practicum student teachers are supervised and evaluated by a university professor and a mentor teacher in the school. Some ITE providers have their own assessment and mentor selection practices. For example, one university visited by the UNESCO review team assessed student teachers using a standard evaluation form and required that mentors have at least five years of teaching experience. However, research indicates these are not established practices across all ITE programmes, and mentor teachers are generally not trained adequately for their role (Vula et al, 2012; European Commission, 2013*a*). The Government has proposed the development of a new regulation to standardize the practicum, so this may change in the future (MES, 2014*a*).

Discussion

Across countries that participated in the OECD's TALIS 2013 study, teachers who completed ITE programmes that covered content knowledge, pedagogy and practice teaching related to the subjects they teach felt better prepared for their roles than those whose ITE programmes did not cover those components (OECD, 2014*b*). Across the Western Balkan countries, ITE programmes tend to be theoretical, focusing on subject matter knowledge rather than practical preparation in student-centred teaching techniques and inclusive education (Duda et al., 2013). In these countries, national frameworks, such as common professional teaching standards, are not used to guide ITE programme content, resulting in significant differences in how providers prepare teachers (ibid). By contrast, it is common in OECD countries for a government body or central authority to establish a framework for ITE programme content (OECD, 2014*a*). OECD research (2005) also recommends that programmes be subject to periodic accreditation and on-going evaluation against these frameworks as a quality assurance measure, which does not currently happen in Albania.

Research suggests that:

■ Well-designed practice teaching experiences reduce the rate of new teacher attrition, improve performance among beginning teachers, and increase the likelihood that they will use innovative teaching methods and be effective problem-solvers (Musset, 2010). Research recommends that the practicum be lengthy and include supervision by well-trained mentor teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2012). On average, European ITE programmes include a minimum of 25 ECTS practicum credits, compared to an average of 10-16 ECTS credits in Albania (Vula et al, 2012; European Commission, 2015*c*).

■ In Finland, which has performed well in recent years on the OECD PISA assessment, experienced teachers who serve as mentors are trained in supervision and selected on the basis of their competence to work with student teachers. Teacher Training Schools conduct research with ITE providers during the practicum to connect practice with research and theory (Sahlberg, 2011) and the practicum lasts at least one year in total, during which student teachers participate in collaborative learning with school staff, as well as practice teaching (Schleicher, 2012).

Albania need not establish an intensive, potentially costly professional development school model like Finland's, but it could adopt some of these practices to improve its practicum and foster greater connections between ITE providers and schools. The Government of Albania has proposed providing professional development on new teaching methods and inclusive education to ITE faculty, but it is unclear whether

plans are being developed to establish stronger links between ITE providers and schools (MES, 2014*a*).

Overall, flexible routes into teaching allow individuals who have developed skills or knowledge in particular fields to become teachers, and can be particularly helpful in addressing shortage subject areas (OECD, 2005; Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Research indicates that these types of programmes can produce teachers who are just as effective as those who take the traditional ITE route, as long as admission criteria for the programmes are high (Boyd et al., 2007). These programmes may be delivered part-time, cover a reduced number of ITE modules and involve some paid teaching as is the case in Denmark which offers the 150 ECTS-credit "Merit Teacher" programme to individuals over the age of 25 who have studied to work in other fields (European Commission, 2015*c*). A programme such as this could benefit Albania given the country's shortage of teachers for certain high-demand subject areas and schools.

In order to improve Initial Teacher Education (ITE), the new 2015 law on higher education (Republic of Albania 2015*a*), states that 80% of curricula for teacher preparation in each subject will be the same in all higher education institutions. This reflects that fact that, according to MES, university professors and school teachers consider practice teaching as a very important component of the ITE programme. In addition, 25% of all the curricula will be focused on the pedagogical development of the teachers (ibid.). These new legal provisions may help to increase the alignment of the ITE programmes with the new curriculum and improve teachers' psycho-pedagogical preparation as well.

Policy Issue 3.3 Recommendations
Strengthen Teacher Education and Provide Flexible Routes into the Profession

3.3.1 *In the short term, strengthen teacher preparation by enhancing the practicum and elements key to Albania's education reform.*

It will be important for the common ITE curriculum resulting from the recent passage of Albania's higher education law to be developed in consultation with ITE providers, teachers and other key stakeholders. It is essential that student teachers develop a thorough understanding of the philosophy behind the pre-university curriculum reform and that ITE faculty model student-centred teaching methods. Theoretical coursework will need to be balanced by practical preparation in topics like classroom management and assessment.

Stakeholders could also provide valuable input on improvements to the practicum, which should include common assessment criteria for student teachers, informed

by standards (see Policy Issue 3.8); and training and selection criteria for mentor teachers, which could be based on the equivalent criteria for internship mentors (see the next Policy Issue). The practicum will need to be of sufficient length and begin early in student teachers' studies to give them the opportunity to practice and reflect upon teaching strategies as they learn more in their programmes.

Key to this enhanced practicum will be the establishment of stronger partnerships between ITE providers and schools. The practicum should be viewed as a joint investment in the next generation of teachers. The General Teacher Standards, whether current or revised (see Policy Issue 3.8), could be used to create a common understanding of good teaching practice among ITE providers and schools.

The accreditation of ITE programmes on a cyclical basis would encourage evaluation and improvement on a continuous basis, in addition to being important for quality assurance purposes. Changes to the accreditation process and/or criteria may be required if these are not stringent enough to ensure programmes are covering the required content.

3.3.2 *In the medium to long term, consider introducing more flexible routes into the teaching profession to address teacher shortages.*

If labour market analysis and forward planning exercises project continued shortages for certain subject areas, Albania could consider introducing alternative ITE programmes that are shorter in duration and/or delivered part-time. Like traditional ITE programmes, these programmes would need to be selective but they would also need to have their own admission criteria to acknowledge applicants' previous experience. Considerable thought would need to go into determining the contents and practice teaching opportunities these programmes should offer.

3.3.3 *In the medium term, improve coordination of teacher preparation in universities, practical training, professional development and performance evaluation, including through the harmonization of legislation.*

The *Law on the Pre-University Education System* (2012) and Albania's *Regulated Professions Act* (2009) require the successful completion of an internship and a state exam in order for an ITE graduate to be certified as a teacher. Albania's introduction of this internship programme, which was first implemented in 2011, is a positive move intended to develop future teachers' capacity, ensure high quality and successful performance, and enhance knowledge and skills (MoES, 2011*b*). Some residual issues with the programme include the workload associated with the mentorship role, the lack of training targeted to mentors and interns, and the absence of remuneration for interns. Increasing attention to these issues through the coordinated implementation

of policies and the harmonization of legislation will improve the overall quality of teacher preparation in the country.

POLICY ISSUE 3.4
The teaching internship programme needs to better support both interns and mentors

Evidence

According to the *Regulation for the Organisation and Conduct of Professional Practice for Teaching as a Regulated Profession* (2011), graduates of ITE programmes are required to work in a school for one academic year under the supervision of the principal and a mentor teacher. These interns are required to reflect on their work by maintaining a portfolio of their teaching experiences. Aside from mentoring, they are not offered professional learning opportunities targeted to their particular needs as novice teachers.

REDs select mentors for the internship according to criteria set out in the 2011 regulation, such as ten years of teaching experience, use of innovative teaching methods, a willingness to collaborate, and communication skills (MoES, 2011*b*). At the end of the school year, the mentor and principal evaluate the intern according to regulated assessment criteria based on the General Teachers Standards (MoES, 2011*b*). Mentors conduct the majority of the evaluation while the principal assesses only whether the intern has respected the rules and ethics of the school and cooperated with colleagues (ibid). Based on the assessment results, a regional evaluation commission determines whether interns have successfully completed the internship and can take the state exam for certification.

In 2014, MES identified mentors' increased workload, in addition to a lack of mentors, as a challenge with the internship programme (MES, 2014*a*). Mentors are required to devote one quarter of their workload towards the internship, with two-thirds of that time devoted to observing their intern and one third devoted to counselling them (MoES, 2011*b*). Mentors are generally selected on the basis of their experience and level of achievement in their profession. Their selection as a mentor is reflected in a reduction of their workload in order to be effective in monitoring the interns. One quarter of the mentors' workload should be covered by the interns. In 2010 the European Commission recommended that mentors be well-trained for their role (European Commission, 2010) and, according to UNESCO (2014), mentors receive formal training in a number of European countries.

Interns represent a large unpaid workforce in Albania's schools, possibly 8% of the teaching population in the 2014-2015 school year by the UNESCO review team's calculations. They receive social and health benefits, and the internship year counts towards their pension, but they are not remunerated; recent researchers and stakeholders in Albania have identified this as a weakness of the programme (European Commission, 2013*a*). MES recently proposed paying interns half a teacher's salary, but this change had not been implemented at the time of writing.

Remunerating interns would be an important policy change for a number of reasons, including its capacity to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Currently, the prospect of an unpaid year of internship, after five years of higher education, could be a strong disincentive to potential high-quality ITE applicants, particularly those considering teaching as a second career. However, professional practice is seen as part of the initial training of future teachers and interns are considered as candidates for the teaching profession. A scheme for monitoring the interns, on the basis of their classroom management, planning, and other facets of their work, is in place. The indicators used are measurable and are utilized for the final evaluation of the intern's performance.

Discussion

Teachers report that the most common induction elements offered in European schools are mentoring, meetings with the principal or other colleagues, and courses and seminars, with mentoring being perhaps the most important element (EC, 2015*c*). Most countries in the Western Balkans have introduced a traineeship phase for beginning teachers, and in a number of these countries, mentoring is the primary support offered (Duda et al., 2013; EC 2015*c*). EC research (2010) recommends that attention be paid to the process of matching mentors with new teachers so that mentors can, among other things, provide knowledgeable professional support on new teachers' curriculum subject(s). It also cautions that, if mentors are also assessors, new teachers may be less willing to seek help or share problems (ibid). This is an important point for Albania, which may want to review the assessment role of its mentors, as well as their overall workload.

The European Commission (EC, 2010) identifies support for mentors' workload as one of the conditions of success for effective induction programmes. As such, the European Commission recommends a reduction in mentors' teaching timetable to allow them time to work with beginning teachers, as well as recognition for their role (ibid). Scotland is one country where both mentors and beginning teachers are granted reduced workloads. Mentors are allocated three and a half hours per week to fulfil their role (ibid). Recognition for mentors includes this type of time allowance in three out of 21 OECD countries, whereas salary allowances are provided in eight

countries (OECD, 2014*a*). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the mentor role is built into the salary scale, and mentors are granted an allowance of 5 to 10% above their salary.

Given that the competence of mentors is essential, the European Commission (2010) also recommends that mentors be well trained for their role. Mentors receive formal training in a number of European countries (UNESCO, 2014). In Estonia, for example, ITE providers offer targeted training to both mentors and new teachers. ITE providers monitor and evaluate the implementation of the induction programme on a continuous basis. The results inform improvements to both the induction programme and ITE programmes (EC, 2010).

The European Commission (2010) also recommends that beginning teachers be given a reduced workload, but not reduced remuneration, to give them opportunities to work with their mentors and conduct tasks which may take them more time than experienced teachers, like lesson planning. Across European countries that offer induction, it is uncommon for new teachers to not receive some form of remuneration (EC, 2015*c*). For example, in Montenegro, teacher-trainees receive 80% of a teacher's full salary (Duda et al., 2013), whereas in other countries, new teachers are already fully employed in a school during their induction phase (EC 2015*c*).

Policy Issue 3.4 Recommendations
Improve Effectiveness of ITE Practicum, Mentoring, and Internship Programmes

3.4.1 *In the short term, further address mentors' workload challenges and consider how they could be better prepared, supported, and recognized for their role.*

As a priority, it will be important for the government to determine whether Albania's school year calendar and the timing of intern placement and mentor selection processes are contributing to any difficulty in reducing mentors' teaching hours, and if so, work to revise these processes. It will also be important to make changes to ensure that mentors are not overburdened by the responsibilities of their role; this could mean reducing the maximum number of interns that can be assigned to each mentor. Mentors' teaching and work hours at all school levels may need to be clarified in the relevant administrative instruction.

In considering mentors' workload challenges and recognition, Albania could review the specific tasks assigned to them. Given the responsibility they bear, Albania could consider formal recognition for their role. In addition to reduced teaching hours, recognition could take the form of remuneration (e.g. a salary allowance) and/or the addition of the mentorship role to the teacher career path. If it is not feasible

in practice for mentors' teaching hours to be reduced, Albania may instead need to reduce and shift their responsibilities.

Proceeding with the establishment of the regional mentor networks described in the *Regulation for the Organisation and Conduct of Professional Practice for Teaching as a Regulated Profession* (2011) will ensure that mentors have opportunities to collaboratively support and learn from each other. This could take the form of online collaboration, in addition to face-to-face learning communities. As Albania has proposed, mentors should also be provided with professional development for their role.

3.4.2 *In the short to medium term, conduct an evaluation of the internship programme to determine its effectiveness and identify necessary improvements.*

Albania could conduct a formal evaluation of the internship programme to determine whether it is effectively meeting the goals established by the government and to develop any necessary improvements. The evaluation could examine the procedural aspects of the programme (e.g. whether ITE graduates are having difficulty finding internship placements; how many are assigned to particularly challenging classes), the different elements of the programme and their effectiveness (e.g. mentoring, portfolio, assessment), as well as the pass/fail rate and its implications. ITE faculty could provide information about why ITE providers have thus far not been engaged in the internship and what factors might increase their involvement. The results of the evaluation could be used, among other things, to inform the development of additional targeted supports for interns (e.g. professional development).

3.4.3 *In the medium to long term, ITE programmes at the Bachelors level should include a well-designed practicum component, and the conditions of service applicable to interns could be reviewed.*

If justified by the findings of an evaluation like the one described above, moderate improvements to the internship programme could be introduced, as well as major changes like a shift of the internship phase to the first year of employment. It is a concern that interns, some of whom may not have participated in a practicum, make up such a significant proportion of Albania's teaching workforce and that they are not currently paid for their efforts (although MES has proposed plans to pay them). Shifting the internship to the first year of employment would address these issues.

A one-year internship in the first year of employment would reduce the demand for internship mentors, considering there would be fewer new teachers hired each year than graduates of ITE programmes needing internships. Completion of the programme

could remain a requirement for full teacher certification, which is the practice in most OECD countries with mandatory induction programmes (OECD, 2005). It could also have an impact on the attractiveness of the teaching profession by reducing the amount of time candidates need to wait to become employed as teachers.

POLICY ISSUE 3.5

The state exam for teacher certification should provide a reliable assessment of readiness to enter the profession

Albania's Regulated Professions Act (2009) requires all graduates of ITE programmes to pass a state exam in order to be certified to teach. Along with the professional internship, this exam was first implemented in 2011. There are issues surrounding the purpose and content of the exam, including concerns about a disconnect with the revised pre-university curriculum, as well as its reliability, validity and fairness.

Evidence

Albania's Agency of National Examinations (ANE) administers the state exam for teacher certification. The faculty of one of Albania's ITE providers is responsible for developing and maintaining a collection of 3,000 multiple-choice questions and selecting the 50 items that appear on the exam. The state exam is conducted by computer at the IED headquarters in Tirana twice per year, in July (first session) and November – December (second session).

Some stakeholders interviewed by the UNESCO review team expressed concerns over the design of questions on the exam. According to ANE, the collection bank of questions for the state exam are designed by lecturers in Higher Education Institutions in the field of education. For each teaching profile for the state exam, and there is a commission responsible for the test which analyses the questions. Before the exam, the specific questions are randomly assigned by computer. Reports that the questions have not been piloted (ACCE, 2015), that participants' complaints have led to the removal of questions (although the removal has been done before the test), and other issues, are indications of potential problems with the exam's content.

Exam content and methodology
Stakeholders interviewed by the UNESCO review team called for a thorough discussion of the purpose of the exam, what the 50% cut-off mark represents, and the design of the questions. Recent research suggests that the exam has not been developed according to standards for effective test development (ACCE, 2015). Reports that the questions have not been piloted, that participants' complaints have

led to the removal of questions (although the removal has been before the test), and that the pass rate fluctuates over sessions, are indications of real problems with the exam's content and methodology.

The exam as an assessment tool

A study by the Council of Europe questioned the necessity of the exam when it was first announced given that Albania already planned to require higher academic qualifications (i.e. a master's degree) and the completion of an internship programme for teacher certification (Smith and Hamilton, 2011). It stressed that 'no professional examination for entry to school teaching should be developed unless it is coherently linked with university initial teacher education courses, and involves public university leadership and staff in its planning' (p. 36). Although ITE faculty have been involved in the development of the exam, the UNESCO review team heard concerns that neither the exam nor the country's ITE programmes reflect the revised pre-university curriculum. This raises concerns about the alignment of teacher preparation with the broader education system.

Discussion

Exam content and methodology

It is crucially important that the exam developers pilot and psychometrically assess the test instruments according to internationally recognized standards to ensure that it is a valid, robust, reliable and fair measure of teachers' competencies (see Hobson et al, 2010). The cut-off mark should be determined based on the results of a piloting phase and the professional judgement of experts with a deep understanding of teaching as new teachers practice it. This recommendation also applies to Albania's other high-stakes teacher tests, including the Teachers for Albania competitive employment exam, and the tests that are conducted as part of the qualifications scheme. Research points to the importance of rigorously screening candidates before initial teacher education as opposed to solely afterwards, and evidence supports the use of performance-based assessments of teaching practice as one among several possible authentic measures of teachers' competence. Thus, the UNESCO team recommends a combination of changes to strengthen its initial teacher preparation system, including raising the bar for entry into ITE programmes and modifying the internship programme, as well as improving Albania's teacher and certification processes.

The exam as an assessment tool

The majority of school systems in the world employ some type of assessment to screen potential teacher candidates (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Rigorous screening as a means of entry into ITE rather than solely after the ITE has been completed is a more

efficient form of quality assurance (ibid). There are three common post-ITE methods of assessment for certification. All of these methods are currently utilised in Albania, and the first two are common across other Western Balkans countries (Duda et al., 2013), and they include:

■ State exams covering basic knowledge and skills (e.g. literacy and numeracy), knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, education legislation, language proficiency and ICT;

■ Performance-based assessments, generally during the induction or probationary phase; and

■ Assessments of portfolios describing teaching experiences (Hobson et al, 2010; OECD, 2014*a*).

There are arguments for and against the use of standardised exams for teacher certification like the one used in Albania. These exams may be used as a measure to raise the status of the teaching profession or provide reassurance to the public that teachers have met a minimum standard (Hobson et al, 2010). They may also provide a means to assess subject matter knowledge or literacy skills, which are particularly important to teacher quality. However, research indicates that alternate methods to assess knowledge and skills offer more accurate predictors of success (e.g. performance during ITE) (D'Agostino and Powers, 2009). Based on a number of research studies, the main argument against using exams for certification is that it is difficult for them to meaningfully measure the complex competencies and attributes required for successful teaching (Hobson et al, 2010). Instead, researchers found that performance-based assessments within the school context provide the most meaningful measurement because they assess real teaching in a real classroom setting (Hobson et al, 2010).

Policy Issue 3.5 Recommendations
Enhance the Relevance and Reliability of Teacher Certification Processes

3.5.1 *It will be important for Albania to ensure that the state exam for teacher certification is properly piloted and that the test instrument is psychometrically assessed.*

Representatives of MES and ANE, ITE providers and other key stakeholders could work together to clarify the purpose of the exam (e.g. what it is intended to measure and why, how it relates to initial teacher preparation, the General Teacher Standards, and the revised pre-university curriculum). These discussions could also involve an exploration of the benefits the exam yields that would not otherwise be obtained

from the assessments that are conducted during initial teacher preparation and the internship programme.

It is crucially important that the exam developers pilot and psychometrically assess the test instrument according to internationally recognized standards to ensure that it is valid, robust, reliable and fair. The cut-off mark should be determined based on the results of a piloting phase and the professional judgement of experts with a deep understanding of teaching as new teachers practice it. This recommendation also applies to Albania's other high-stakes teacher tests, including the *Teachers for Albania* competitive employment exam, and the tests that are conducted as part of the qualifications scheme.

3.5.2 *Albania could improve ITE and the state exam to better reflect the revised pre-university curriculum.*

The UNESCO team recommends a combination of changes to strengthen its initial teacher preparation system, including raising the bar for entry into ITE programmes and modifying the internship programme, as well as improving Albania's teacher qualification and certification processes. Specifically, Albania could improve ITE and the state exam to better reflect the revised pre-university curriculum. Research points to the importance of rigorously screening candidates before initial teacher education as opposed to solely afterwards, and evidence supports the use of performance-based assessments of teaching practice as one among several possible authentic measures of teachers' competence.

POLICY ISSUE 3.6
Changes are needed to make teacher hiring and deployment procedures more efficient, effective, and equitable

Albania's Administrative Instruction 38 was released in 2015 (MES, 2015*e*). While the administrative instruction clarifies the procedures for the transfer, appointment, and dismissal of teachers, some issues remain. Specifically, the *Teachers for Albania* test for employment may not provide an efficient and accurate method of assessment for hiring purposes, and schools are not adequately involved in hiring decisions. Most importantly, Albania needs to ensure that qualified teachers are deployed equitably throughout the country.

Evidence

Methods of assessment for hiring

MES has made significant efforts to address the problem of political interference and corruption in the hiring decisions of the education sector. In 2012, the *Law on the Pre-University Education System* created new assessment commissions, composed of local representatives, to make decisions about teacher appointments. In 2014, MES established the *Teachers for Albania* initiative with the intent of making the initial appointment of newly certified or unemployed teachers more meritocratic. For this initiative, teachers who are newly certified or unemployed take a paper-based competitive employment test related to their school level or curriculum subject (MES, 2015*a*). The test is developed by IED, implemented in each region by the REDs, and overseen by SIE. It costs approximately 10,000 Lekë (~€74) to take, and if the teacher does not pass, the cost increases by 2,500 Lekë each time it is re-taken to a maximum of five times. The results are published on the MES website. The current procedures for administering the test are set out in Administrative Instruction 40, released in October 2015.

The hiring of teachers in Albania is conducted primarily at the regional level. When seeking employment, teachers submit an application to the RED where they wish to work (MES, 2015*e*). A regional assessment commission conducts the assessment for initial appointment according to the criteria and multi-stage process set out in Administrative Instruction 38, which includes ranking of applicants' documentation; a ranking of the applicants' *Teachers for Albania* test results; and a general ranking of applicants based on the two previous rankings (ibid). The applicants with the highest overall rankings are invited to select positions from among the job vacancies in the region, beginning with the highest-ranked candidate. The teacher then signs a one-year probationary contract with the principal of the selected school. After the probation, the principal permanently appoints the teacher upon the approval of the school's parent council and the regional psychosocial services commission.

The transfer of in-service teachers follows a separate process, which is also conducted at the regional level and also set out in Administrative Instruction 38 (MES, 2015*e*). REDs advertise vacant teaching positions in their region. In-service teachers who wish or are obliged to transfer (e.g. due to a reduction in their teaching load at their current school) submit application files to be reviewed and ranked by the assessment commission. Those ranked highest are given the first opportunity to select vacant positions.

Stakeholders expressed concern about the efficiency and effectiveness of the *Teachers for Albania* test, stating that new teachers now have to sit for two tests, often in quick succession. One test is for certification to have the right to practice as a teacher and the other test, *Teachers for Albania*, is for employment in one of the vacancies in

the regional directorates, often in quick succession. Some stakeholders called for measures besides the test to carry more weight in hiring decisions. For example, interviews, which were once a part of the assessment process, could be used again in the future.

For the 2015-16 school year, the overall pass rate on the *Teachers for Albania* test was 40% (2,100 out of 5,267 teachers), with a much lower rate for certain school levels and subjects (MES, 2015*h*). Only 28% of test-takers passed the primary test (215 out of 767), 27% passed the physical education test (50 out of 183), and just 16% passed the math test (50 out of 318), all subjects or levels where teachers are in higher demand (ibid). The employment test follows candidates' successful completion of their ITE programme, then their internship, and then the state exam for teacher certification. Teachers' ability to pass those stages combined with the low pass rate on the employment test raises serious questions. Furthermore, if the test has not been piloted or otherwise developed according to internationally recognized standards for high-stakes assessments, it is likely not methodologically robust (see Policy Issue 3.5).

Some stakeholders called for principals to play more of a role in the appointment process. According to Administrative Instruction 38 (06/10/2015) (MES, 2015*e*), the school principal, after the approval of the commissions at the school level (parents' council, psycho-social commission, subject department), makes the final decision for teacher hiring. The participation of parents on the assessment commission even in the level of regional education directorate is supported by the Ministry of Education and Sport and stakeholders, but in practice, stakeholders reported to the review team that parents did not feel qualified to evaluate candidates and that their voices outweighed those of educators on the commission. With Administrative Instruction 38 (06/10/2015), the composition of the commission now includes more teachers (MES, 2015*e*). This Commission is created at the regional education directorate level and is composed of eight members from different structures, four of whom are teachers.

Deployment procedures

Like other countries in Central, Eastern and South-East Europe, Albania has moved to a more decentralized teacher management and deployment system over time (UNICEF, 2011). In decentralized systems, governments generally rely on incentive strategies to try to ensure an equitable distribution of teachers across the country. Albania currently provides an allowance to teachers who travel for their work, and the amount is higher in the northern half of the country, which includes economically challenged regions (Republic of Albania, 1999). It was reported that the government is also considering implementing an initiative to attract teachers to harder-to-staff areas by providing allowances to teachers for rent, electricity, water and transportation,

salary bonuses, free continuing professional development courses and priority in transferring to their next teaching position. As part of this initiative, ITE graduates in Albania would be encouraged to complete their internship in harder-to-staff schools.

Research points to the need for Albania to make better use of deployment procedures to address inequities in the education system. An analysis of earlier PISA (2009) results showed that Albania's students were in the bottom 20% of the Economic, Social and Cultural Status (ESCS) measure and that students in rural areas were less likely to have teachers who used effective teaching practices, according to the survey results, and more likely to be in schools experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers than urban students and those in the top 20% of the ESCS (World Bank, 2012, p. 31, 39). For the 2015-16 school year, some REDs, notably among areas in the northeastern quarter of the country, reported a significant number of vacancies unmatched by applicants (MES, 2015*h*).

Discussion

Methods of assessment for hiring

OECD research recommends that jurisdictions with decentralized hiring and deployment procedures, where decisions are made at the regional or local level, provide teachers with prompt information about vacancies and involve principals in the hiring process to ensure a good match between teacher and school (OECD, 2005; Schleicher, 2012). Like Albania, France and Spain use competitive employment tests (OECD, 2014*a*). Other European countries, like Austria and Germany, draw up candidate lists, ranking teachers' applications at the central, regional or local level (OECD, 2005; Hobson et al, 2010). Some European countries, such as Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia, and Sweden, also have a high level of individual school involvement in the hiring of teachers (OECD, 2005).

Common practices for assessing applicants, particularly in jurisdictions where schools have greater involvement, include interviewing applicants, observing their teaching, reviewing portfolios and/or academic achievements, and assessing references (Hobson et al, 2010). In some jurisdictions, school principals may also serve as a member of a regional or local appointment commission, providing input into hiring decisions relating to his or her school. This assures school involvement while ensuring a single individual does not have sole authority over hiring decisions.

Deployment procedures

Research recommends that national bodies work to ensure an appropriate supply and distribution of teachers to address any inequities in the education system, even

in jurisdictions with a decentralized teacher labour market (Schleicher, 2012). UNESCO (2014) warns that there is no simple solution to this problem. It is a growing challenge in Europe where countries are facing subject- and region-specific teacher shortages (EC, 2015*c*). To address this, the development of effective labour market monitoring and forward planning systems and the use of financial and nonfinancial incentives, like those proposed by Albania, to attract teachers to work in harder-to-staff schools are recommended (World Bank 2013; EC, 2015*c*).

One caution about using an incentive strategy is that it may attract only the least experienced teachers. To counter this issue, jurisdictions elect a number of strategies. For example, one incentive scheme in Australia provides compensation benefits not only to teachers who work in remote schools but also to their spouses and children (Queensland Government, 2015). These family benefits may serve to attract more experienced teachers. Another method to attract teachers to harder-to-staff schools is to recruit them from the local area. An example is the Free Teacher Education Policy in China which offers high-performing students from disadvantaged, rural regions of the country free university tuition and ten years of job security if they agree to work as teachers in their home area for at least two years (UNESCO, 2014).

Policy Issue 3.6 Recommendations
Improve Education Quality through Strategic Staffing Decisions

3.6.1 *In the short term, ensure that the Teachers for Albania test is methodologically robust, and in the future, consider augmenting it with other assessment methods.*

As with the state exam for certification, it is crucially important that the *Teachers for Albania* test meet internationally recognized standards for the development of high-stakes tests. Albania may also want to investigate the possible causes behind particularly low pass rates at the subject or regional level.

In addition, the UNESCO review team asks whether a more efficient recruitment method could be found that does not involve the duplication of effort resulting from the use of two examinations, one for certification and one for employment. As described in the previous section, there are arguments for and against using tests such as these as a gatekeeper to the profession (or employment). Other assessment methods that may be more effective in assessing candidates' competence and fit for a school include interviews, portfolio assessments and observations of teaching.

3.6.2 *In the short to medium term, provide more support and information to parents who are involved in hiring and decision-making processes.*

As a priority, MES or IED could develop information sessions and/or guidelines for parents on assessment commissions, and RED staff could provide them with on-going support. A handbook could also be developed to guide parental involvement in hiring and decision-making processes.

3.6.3 *In the medium term, schools should exercise a greater role in decision-making to ensure a good fit between the RED, schools and the teacher. Principals should also exercise their role in staffing decisions, consistent with their role in school leadership.*

In the past, there was greater school involvement on the assessment commission, and interviews were an integral part of assessments. These practices are recommended in the research literature, and Albania could consider adopting them again. The country's plans to strengthen the school leadership role provides an opportunity to increase principals' inputs on staffing decisions.

3.6.4 *Albania's education system would benefit from efforts to recruit qualified teachers to harder-to-staff schools and regions.*

MES already collects regional data on subject-specific teacher vacancies. As recommended earlier in this chapter, the government could use this and other demographic and labour market data to conduct forward planning exercises in order to prepare for regional fluctuations in the demand for teachers. To ensure schools in remote or harder-to-staff regions reach a wider pool of potential applicants, all REDs should post job vacancies on-line, if they do not do so already. In this case, the government may need to provide support to REDs with poor ICT infrastructure.

Albania is encouraged to proceed with its plan to incentivize teachers to work in harder-to-staff areas of the country with the caveat that this initiative should not be targeted to interns or inexperienced teachers. Albania could explore the possibility of providing incentives to appeal to experienced teachers, such as the dependant allowance provided in the incentive scheme in Australia. The government could also consider introducing a programme to recruit successful students in rural or disadvantaged regions of the country to apply to ITE programmes.

A coherent strategy for continuing professional development aligned with the country's education reform priorities is needed

In 2012, Albania reformed its continuing professional development (CPD) system in an effort to better meet teachers' learning needs, and shifted the development and delivery of CPD from central or regional government bodies to external providers (EC, 2013*a*). Although working to better meet teachers' needs is a positive move, issues with the current CPD system include a lack of alignment, the quality of the accredited PD programmes and PD providers, the cost of the professional development, and the continued learning gaps among teachers, who would benefit from participating in more collaborative, school-based learning.

Evidence

MES and IED are responsible for overseeing Albania's continuing professional development (CPD) system. IED conducts nation-wide questionnaires of teachers to determine their learning needs, and a Commission for the Accreditation of Training Programmes accredits CPD programmes for four-year terms to meet those needs (EC, 2013*a*). 739 training programmes were accredited for 2011-2013, and 40 private agencies applied for accreditation in response to the 2014-2016 list of needs (IED, 2015).

The *Law on the Pre-University Education System* (2012) requires teachers to participate in three days of CPD per year. According to Administrative Instruction 26, the three days of CPD are equivalent to 18 hours of learning (9 hours in the classroom and 9 hours of independent personal work) (MES, 2014*a*). As of 2014-2015, teachers must participate in this mandatory CPD in order to qualify for promotion at or after the five-, ten- and twenty-year point in their careers as part of their qualifications scheme (MES, 2015*b*, 2015*d*).

The 2012 Law requires schools to plan CPD in accordance with teachers' needs, as well as central and local educational policies. However, teachers make their own decisions about the CPD they wish to take, selecting from a list of accredited offerings. Their career progression system does not reward participation in some potentially valuable forms of CPD, like school-based learning.

MES (2014*a*) has described the country's CPD system as being in need of reform (p. 32). The issues with CPD identified by MES (2014*a*) and confirmed by stakeholders in Albania and recent research, relate to the following:

■ Professional development programmes lack range and depth; the system does not encourage the development of school-based or on-line learning;

- The CPD system does not effectively encourage staff to work together; many teachers are not engaged in the CPD that's available to them, and they continue to have gaps in their learning;

- The accreditation process is not completely functional; inadequate information is provided about the programmes, and the fees are high;

- Universities are not engaged in providing CPD on a wide scale; some private agencies lack professional expertise and offer programmes that do not meet needs. (MES, 2014*a*)

Stakeholders reported to the UNESCO review team that, while they found some CPD to be beneficial, they wanted it to be more relevant (e.g. targeted to their school or region or the different needs of beginning and experienced teachers). CPD was previously offered locally for free by the REDs. A few universities, notably the University of Korçë, continue to provide accredited CPD to teachers in the local area. However, it was reported that CPD workshops used to be delivered by agencies accredited by the Training Accrediting Committee to groups of 10 to 50 teachers from all regions of the country. Those who develop and deliver the training do not necessarily have recent experience in schools throughout the regions. As a result, the CPD tends to be general and not connected to the reality of the region, school or classroom.

There are indications that CPD participation rates among teachers have not been high (Dhimitri et al, 2014; World Bank, 2014). This could be due to the cost to teachers. The *Law on the Pre-University Education System* (2012) states that funding for CPD is derived from teachers, the state budget and other legal sources, but stakeholders reported to the UNESCO review team that teachers bear the cost of the three days of training themselves. In some cases, the cost of training is covered by different projects as part of agreements between MES and different funding agencies. The cost for a credit ranges from 1,500 Lekë (~ €11) to 25,000 Lekë (~ €185). Since 2014, IED has delivered and covered the cost of several trainings for ITE alongside the implementation of the new curriculum. However, teachers who travel from remote regions to the capital for their CPD likely incur additional costs. Budgetary constraints are also impacting the government's CPD quality assurance practices. Based on the order 421 (04/11/2015) from the MES it was reported that new CPD programmes are no longer being accredited because of concerns over their efficiency, the process of needs identification and monitoring.

In 2016 MES and IED conducted an on-line assessment of 1,500 teachers and principals in Tirana as well as 17,613 teachers and principals across the country to identify their professional learning needs. MES has also proposed future improvements to the CPD

system to: address local needs (e.g. by providing more funding to REDs and schools to develop training); ensure providers are of high quality (e.g. by strengthening CPD-providing excellence centres at faculties of education and periodically certifying trainers); and finance teachers' participation in mandatory training by 2020.

A significant issue with Albania's CPD system that may not be addressed by these proposed changes is a lack of alignment with school, regional or system-wide education development goals. Although the General Teacher Standards require teachers to develop PD plans to improve student achievement, this does not seem to be an institutionalized practice. The CPD teachers take need not align with school or regional development plans or broader education priorities (MoES, 2013). MES (2014a) has proposed that individual CPD plans be used to inform school development plans in the future. However, there does not seem to be a coherent strategy to help teachers work towards the overarching goals of the education reform (e.g. student-centred teaching, equity and inclusion).

Discussion

There is a correlation between sustained teacher PD and improvements in student achievement (OECD, 2014a). High-performing education systems tend to invest the most in teachers' initial and on-going learning (UNESCO, 2014). The European Commission (2007) has urged EU countries to create coherent, adequately funded, nation-wide CPD systems that cover a continuum of learning from ITE, through induction for beginning teachers, to career-long professional development, including formal, informal and non-formal learning opportunities.

In European education systems where central authorities are involved in CPD planning, a framework of CPD priorities is generally established and taken into account in schools' and individual teachers' plans. In Slovenia, for example, the Ministry of Education sets out the professional development needs for the whole education system, schools set out annual plans that describe the needs of their teachers, and teachers have the freedom to select CPD that addresses their personal needs for professional growth (EC, 2015c). Depending on the country, teachers' may identify their own needs individually or in consultation with their principal as part of a systematic teacher performance appraisal process (see Policy Issue 3.8).

Among OECD member countries, PD providers are most commonly higher education institutions (e.g. ITE providers), schools and private companies, and in the Western Balkans, they tend to be state bodies and NGOs, in addition to private providers (Duda et al., 2013; OECD, 2014a). Across the Western Balkans, and in countries like Finland, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway, teachers can choose among different CPD providers (Musset, 2010). Having a range of providers

can benefit teachers if the professional development that is offered meets high standards (OECD, 2005). However, in some countries with a market-based approach characterized by a significant number of providers, like Albania's, governments have struggled to ensure the quality of CPD (Musset, 2010).

In OECD countries, governments tend to provide funding to support mandatory CPD but rarely cover the cost of non-compulsory CPD (OECD, 2014*a*). Teachers most often bear the cost of qualification programs that require more time and money (ibid). In the Western Balkans, teachers generally have difficulty paying for CPD and rely on external financial support (Duda et al., 2013). Common financial support mechanisms to encourage participation in CPD include: offering free courses focused on the government's priority areas; covering teachers' travel expenses for compulsory training; and subsidizing schools to meet their local CPD needs (EC, 2015*c*). Albania appears poised to introduce some of these measures.

Workshops constitute one of the most common delivery methods of accredited CPD in Albania. Research shows that these one-time events are among the least effective and least efficient forms of CPD, and instead points to collaborative, school-based CPD as the most effective way to sustainably improve teachers' competence over time (Musset, 2010; Schleicher, 2011; World Bank, 2013). Albania hopes to encourage this kind of collaboration by, for example, supporting the creation of subject commissions and CPD groups in schools (MES, 2014*a*).

Across the Western Balkans, collaborative learning among teachers is not a common form of CPD, but efforts are underway in some countries to develop school-based Professional Learning Communities in which teachers share and solve problems together (Duda et al., 2013). While Finland is similar to Albania in that teachers are required to participate in three days of training per year, CPD is different in other ways. First, school-based learning is an integral part of their CPD system. Second, in each school, Finnish teachers form problem-solving groups, which meet regularly to plan, act and reflect on teaching challenges in the same manner that they expect their students to behave when tackling problems in the classroom (OECD, 2011*b*).

Policy Issue 3.7 Recommendations
Create Resources for Teachers' Professional Development and School-Based Learning

3.7.1 *In the short term, proceed with plans to provide more support for school-based learning and professional networks to support teachers' CPD.*

The UNESCO review team met with teachers who described some of the professional networks they have formed and the other collaborative work that they do. Each

school in Albania is required to have a Teachers Council, composed of the teaching staff and principal, to steer the school's activity (Republic of Albania, 2012). With funding support from the government, Teachers Councils could take the lead role in organizing more school-based, job-embedded learning (e.g. classroom observations, joint planning sessions, problem-solving groups). The government could also work with REDs and schools to establish learning networks across schools and regions, and set aside time during the year for school-based CPD related to school improvement.

Consideration could also be given to expanding the forms of CPD that lead to career progression to include more options that involve participating in or taking on a leadership role to support structured school-based CPD.

3.7.2 In the medium to long term, Albania could establish a well-resourced national structure for teacher education and professional learning to develop and implement a CPD strategy to support Albania's education reform.

Albania has set out ambitious plans to improve its CPD system in the PUEDS (MES, 2014*a*). Aligning initial teacher education, internship and continuing professional development, and national, regional and local efforts, will also be important to ensure that teachers participate in CPD connected to the goals of the education reform. This work will require dedicated resources, both human and financial. For this reason, Albania is encouraged to establish a national structure for teacher education and professional learning, either within an existing agency or as a separate body. At the present time, it is very unlikely that IED has the resources and staff necessary to undertake this project.

The main goal of this well-resourced national structure would be to move forward with improvements to the CPD system in consultation with all relevant authorities and stakeholders, including the teachers' unions, ITE providers, NGOs and teachers and principals themselves, by developing an overarching CPD strategy. The strategy would involve:

- the development of a framework of CPD options to address teachers' identified needs, the competences required to effectively deliver the revised pre-university curriculum, and the priorities for the country's education reform;

- a review of funding, accreditation and monitoring processes to ensure their efficiency and effectiveness; and

- the articulation of the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the planning, development and delivery of CPD in order to coordinate their efforts.

CPD options would be aligned with the General Teaching Standards and relevant to different stages of a teacher's career, with some options targeted specifically to beginning teachers (e.g. mentoring). Consideration would also be given to the most appropriate delivery methods for each option, ensuring that one-time workshops are not the sole method of delivery and that more professional learning resources are made available to teachers on-line. Based on this information, funding priorities could be set for the development and delivery of the professional development.

POLICY ISSUE 3.8
Albania needs an effective process to assess teachers' performance, promote improvement, and recognize good teaching

By developing General Teacher Standards, Albania has taken positive steps towards ensuring a common understanding of what teachers should know and be able to do. However, the country does not yet appear to have an effective mechanism for assessing teachers' performance in relation to those standards. Principals are tasked with conducting annual performance appraisals of teachers, but this process is reportedly not systematic and does not yield useful feedback or promote participation in continuing professional development. As such, it neither assures quality nor supports improvements in teaching.

Evidence

Albania issued General Teacher Standards in 2013. Additional standards relating to the teaching of different curriculum subjects have been developed, but have not yet been released. Administrative Instruction 5 states that the General Teacher Standards, and the indicators associated with them, are intended to inform MES and IED's work on teacher professional development, local hiring practices, mentoring and teachers' self-assessments (MoES, 2013). MES (2014*a*) recently proposed the introduction of a re-certification process for teachers that would involve improved performance standards, teacher performance assessment, and career-long professional development.

In Albania, principals have a teacher inspection workload of four hours per week (three hours for classroom observations and one hour for checking documentation) (MES, 2014*e*). The State Inspectorate of Education (SIE) is also tasked with observing classes and assessing teachers as part of its school inspections. However, SIE lacks the staff to conduct thorough assessments of schools (and their staff) on a regular basis (MES, 2014*a*).

Teacher performance appraisal in Albania is neither used to systematically recognize good teaching nor improve poor teaching. Stakeholders interviewed by the UNESCO review team reported that the General Teacher Standards are not used to assess teachers' performance, and other criteria do not seem to be used on a consistent basis. Furthermore, recent research has found that appraisals are rarely conducted, and when they are, they do not result in useful feedback (ACCE, 2015). Principals generally do not provide effective professional assistance or counselling to teachers (MES, 2014*a*), and they do not receive training for this task (see Policy Issue 3.9).

Albania is considering implementing a 'merit'-based pay system (MES, 2014*a*). It has expressed concern that its seniority-based career progression qualifications scheme, which only allows for promotion at set points in a teacher's career, is too rigid (IED, 2015). Annually, approximately 3,000 teachers are reviewed for career progression as part of Albania's qualifications scheme. Promotion to a higher qualifications category is based on years of seniority, accumulation of continuing professional development credits, the results of a professional portfolio assessment conducted by the RED, and successfully passing a subject- or school-level-based qualification exam. Teacher performance appraisal results are not taken into account. Furthermore the qualifications exams, like the other standardized tests of teachers in Albania, have likely not been piloted and psychometrically assessed for their validity, reliability and fairness (see Policy Issues 3.5 and 3.6).

MES (2014*a*) has proposed the restructuring of teachers' career steps and professional roles. Although little detail about this proposal is provided in the strategy (MES, 2014*a*), this appears to be a positive move that would address the current lack of differentiated roles and responsibilities related to higher levels of competency in the career path of teachers. Currently, teachers take the same qualification exam for promotion, regardless of whether they are at the five-year, ten-year or twenty-year point in their career; furthermore, the assessment criteria for promotion are the same at each level, and expectations for their role do not differ.

Discussion

Research recommends the use of standards that describe what teachers should know and be able to do as a way to align all of the elements of the teaching profession that relate to teachers' knowledge and skills: pre-service education, certification, continuing professional development, performance appraisal and career progression (OECD, 2005, 2013*b*; Darling-Hammond and Lieberman, 2012). These standards should be appropriate to teachers at different stages of their career and should cover teacher competencies, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, commitment to continuing professional development, work with different students and colleagues, and contributions to the school and the profession (OECD, 2005). Research advises

that they be accompanied by mechanisms to assess teachers' performance in relation to the standards (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson, 2007; OECD, 2013*b*). Albania's General Teacher Standards seem to cover all important areas listed above, but its teacher performance assessment mechanisms are not effective.

The most effective performance appraisal systems reward excellent teaching and are growth-oriented, providing opportunities for continuing professional development to encourage improvement and learn from challenges (Santiago and Benavides, 2009, in OECD, 2010). Other key components of an effective performance appraisal system include:

■ appraisal criteria that are appropriate to teachers at different stages of their careers and are based on teaching standards and competencies;

■ a standardized appraisal instrument that ensures system-wide accountability;

■ multiple sources of information for the appraisal, such as classroom observations, interviews and teacher self-evaluations;

■ evaluators (e.g. principals, experienced teachers and/or external inspectors) who are trained to conduct appraisals and provide feedback; and

■ formative results, including the identification of areas for improvement and related CPD, and/or summative results, such as rewards and sanctions. (OECD, 2009)

A teacher performance appraisal system will not effectively improve teachers' performance if appraisers have limited expertise, teachers do not trust the process or disagree with the standards upon which the appraisals are based, appraisal instruments are not well developed and the workload associated with the appraisals is considered excessive. For these reasons, it is essential that teachers and principals be involved in the development of both the standards and teacher performance appraisal process, and that appraisers (in Albania's case, principals, in addition to SIE inspectors) are properly trained. Slovakia, for example, requires school leaders to participate in courses to prepare them to conduct annual teacher appraisals (OECD, 2015). Albania could ensure that preparation in appraisal, including the provision of feedback to teachers on their performance, is included in its proposed leadership programme for principals.

If Albania develops an effective, system-wide teacher performance appraisal system that is trusted by teachers, they could include appraisal results among the factors that inform decisions about career progression, so that the qualifications scheme takes into account assessments of actual teaching in the classroom. France, Hungary, Slovenia, the Netherlands and Slovakia are among the jurisdictions that follow this practice (OECD, 2013*e*). In addition to career progression, rewards for good performance could also include participating in certain types of CPD (e.g. sabbaticals, school-based research) and taking on diverse career opportunities including school leadership.

Both the OECD (2005) and the European Commission (2015*a*) have recommended expanding the career opportunities of classroom teachers to make the teaching profession more attractive and make the best use of teachers' competences. This can also be a way to distribute leadership within a school to support the principal with the growing administrative and pedagogical responsibilities inherent in increasingly decentralized education systems (Vaillant, 2014). Diverse career opportunities can be horizontal (e.g. related to specific tasks or roles) or vertical (e.g. related to certain competencies) (OECD, 2005). They could be recognized through additional pay or release time. Examples of roles that would achieve the dual purpose of diversifying the career path while contributing to the profession include: mentor to new teachers or teacher candidates in ITE programmes, coordinator of in-service training, and school project co-ordinator (OECD, 2005).

Like teacher performance appraisal, the re-certification of teachers can provide a means to ensure teachers update their knowledge and develop their competencies. However, it can be costly if it involves the on-going delivery of mandatory CPD to all teachers within an education system. Indications are that Albania is considering this option. OECD research (2010*b*) recommends that any re-certification process be efficient, transparent and fair and involve performance-based methods of assessing knowledge and competencies (e.g. interviews, assessments of work portfolios, psychometric tests).

Policy Issue 3.8 Recommendations
Reward Good Teaching Through Effective Performance Appraisal Systems

3.8.1 *In the short term, the development of a system-wide, growth-oriented performance appraisal system based on teacher standards would support improvements to teaching quality.*

Albania would benefit from the development of a well-designed teacher performance appraisal process in consultation with teachers, principals and relevant stakeholders. The General Teacher Standards could be reviewed and the draft standards relating to the teaching of different curriculum subjects could be finalized as part of this process. This will be particularly important if teachers were not involved in the initial development of the standards or if they are not widely accepted across the education system.

Key elements of a standardized, growth-oriented teacher performance appraisal process would include: a common appraisal instrument based on standards; multiple sources of information for appraisals, including classroom observations; feedback sessions; a learning plan; professional development support; and a process for improving and sanctioning poor performance. The appraisal process could vary for beginning and experienced teachers, and would presumably result in changes to the

performance appraisal of interns. Principals, as appraisers and pedagogical leaders responsible for improving teaching and learning in their schools, would need to be trained to support on-going communication with teachers about their performance.

3.8.2 *In the medium to long term, Albania could use the teacher performance appraisal process as one factor to reward good teaching with career progression and diverse career opportunities including leadership.*

Once an effective teacher performance appraisal process is developed and implemented, appraisal results could be used among the factors that inform decisions about career progression as part of the qualifications scheme. Changes could be made to the qualifications scheme to allow teachers to advance more quickly depending on the results of their performance appraisals and other assessment measures. The teaching career path could also be diversified to provide teachers with more opportunities to use their knowledge and competencies to improve teaching, learning, and leadership activities in their schools.

POLICY ISSUE 3.9
The school principal's leadership role needs to be strengthened and supported

Albania is making significant efforts to further develop the role of the school leader. MES has introduced open competitions for the principal position to put an end to the political appointments of the past. Standards, new requirements for the role and a pre-service training programme have been developed but have not yet been implemented. Issues still to be addressed include the lack of succession planning procedures, appraisal that recognizes the distinct role of the principal, targeted professional development and supports, and fair processes for dismissal.

Evidence

Becoming a principal
Based on the MES Order 418 (11/08/2016), For the professional development and qualifications of education institutions in pre-university education system (MES, 2016), training for 213 school principals from Tirana, Elbasan and Durres was delivered according to a professional training programme in the period September to December 2016. Six standards for the school leadership role, related to the topics of each of the modules, were also developed to inform self-assessments, principal appointments and performance appraisal (MoES, 2011*a*).

Historically, the principal position in Albania has been akin to a political appointment (Council of Europe, 2011; EPNSL, 2012). Those who were hired were not necessarily qualified or experienced enough to take on the school leadership role. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, MES has made significant efforts to eliminate political interference in the hiring decisions of the education sector. The *Law on the Pre-University Education System* (2012) established open competitions for the role, as well as an assessment commission to evaluate applications.

Administrative Instruction 57, issued in 2013, sets out the current appointments process. The RED posts vacancies for school leadership positions. Competitions are organized by an assessment commission consisting of a representative of the RED and the school board and two representatives from each of the school's Parent Council and Teachers Council (MES, 2013). Candidates must have a second-cycle higher education degree and five years of teaching experience (ibid). Competitions are based on an assessment of the candidate's application file (e.g. CV), letters of recommendation, and an interview that includes questions about how the candidate would propose to develop the school (ibid). As with the assessment of teachers for hiring purposes, it was reported that parents do not understand or are not comfortable with the criteria to select principal candidates. The commission puts forward two candidates, and the RED Director makes the final decision (ibid). Some research has found that a lack of succession planning, as well as principals' starting salaries, are issues of concern in Albania's system (EPNSL, 2012).

Performance appraisal and qualifications assessment
MES (2014*a*) has proposed further developing leadership assessment and self-assessment. In addition to SIE, which lacks the staff to conduct regular school evaluations, RED Directors are responsible for evaluating principals' performance. However, stakeholders reported that this does not happen on a regular basis. In addition, the qualifications scheme for teachers also applies to principals, which means that principals are required to pass the same professional portfolio assessment and qualifications exam at ten- and twenty-year intervals as teachers. They are tested on their teaching subject or level, rather than being assessed for competencies and responsibilities related to school leadership.

Administrative Instruction 44 requires principals to maintain a teaching workload of four, six or eight hours per week depending on the size of their school, even at the upper secondary level (MES, 2015*e*). This requirement and the absence of a distinct qualifications assessment process for principals suggest a lack of recognition of the separate role played by principals in the school (MES, 2013, 2015*e*). Given MES's plans (2014*a*) to further decentralize the education system so that schools take ownership of some tasks currently at the municipal level, it is likely that principals' responsibilities will expand. Principals of large schools, particularly at the upper

secondary level, may already find it difficult to balance their administrative and instructional management responsibilities with a teaching workload.

Continuing professional development and support of principals

By law, principals, as teachers, are required to participate in three days of continuing professional development per year. Between 2006 and 2013, the World Bank's Education Excellence and Equity Project funded training for principals in Albania on management and education leadership (World Bank, 2014*a*). Stakeholders described this training as beneficial. However, it was discontinued when the project ended. Some NGOs continue to provide CPD to principals, but the topics do not necessarily address areas of need relating to school management (Nathanaili, 2015). Otherwise, CPD designed specifically for school leaders appears to be lacking, and the amount of support for principal networks, which could provide a valuable forum for the exchange of effective practices, is unclear.

It was reported that a lack of training has contributed to problems with the administrative management of schools, personnel management, the organization of school-level professional development, and instructional leadership, specifically concerning reform efforts. To build leadership capacity across the education system, MES (2014*a*) has proposed the establishment of a school for headmasters, presumably to provide both pre-service training and continuing professional development on leadership and school management.

The dismissal of principals

Albania's education system has traditionally experienced high principal turnover (Council of Europe, 2011; EPNSL, 2012; Naithanali, 2015). As one stakeholder said, principals were previously 'blown about by the political winds.' There were reports that the position has been more stable in the past three years. However, there is evidence that issues with principal turnover and dismissal may continue (BIRN, 2014; Nathanaili, 2014), and this is an important issue given the key role principals should play in the country's education reform.

Discussion

After teaching, school leadership is the most important factor open to policy influence that affects student learning. According to the World Bank's SABER 2013 study, jurisdictions should focus efforts on selecting the right people for the principal role, developing them into quality leaders and granting them the authority to improve instructional practice (World Bank, 2013). Selecting the right people means implementing succession-planning policies to pro-actively identify teachers with leadership potential, which can improve the quantity and quality of candidates for the leadership role (Pont et al, 2008). It also means making the role attractive

through sufficient remuneration. In the majority of European countries, including Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, the starting salary for principals is higher than the GDP per capita (EC, 2015b). Based on the 2013 salary scheme, this also appears to be the case in Albania, but the salary may not be commensurate with the responsibilities of the role.

A number of international jurisdictions have developed comprehensive leadership frameworks to support the kind of system-wide education reform that Albania is undertaking. These frameworks generally include standards for the school leadership role, which are used to inform pre-service training, appointment and self-assessment, as Albania intends its standards to be used (OECD, 2013d). They are also used to inform succession planning, continuing professional development, supports and formal appraisal (ibid). A review of Albania's standards reveals the administrative, pedagogical and behavioural domains that are common to principal standards in other jurisdictions (MoES, 2011a). However, the extent to which these standards are accepted and used within the education system is unclear.

Research highlights the need for both pre-service and in-service professional development for principals: the 'training of school principals and leaders is very important since they are the people who apply education policies in schools, so if they are poorly trained and supported, no policy, be it national or regional or local, can be effective' (Vaillant, 2015, p. 4). Recommended CPD activities include formal induction, periodic in-service training to allow principals to update their skills, and collaborative activities like peer learning and networking (Elmore, 2006; Pont et al., 2008). Examples from other jurisdictions include introducing a two-year principal induction program, consisting of learning modules and self-study in Austria (Pont et al., 2008) and, in Norway, a training programme to strengthen principals' pedagogical leadership with particular attention to new school principals with less than two years of experience (Schleicher, 2012). Albania may wish to consider these practices when it rolls out school leadership training in the future.

Policy Issue 3.9 Recommendations
Invest in Capacity-Building for School Leadership

3.9.1 *In the short to medium term, create a well-resourced structure or central body dedicated to school leadership across Albania that could create and implement programmes to develop the professional capacities of school leaders.*

Albania has already developed a qualifications programme for school leaders, leadership standards and requirements for principal certification. The country would benefit from establishing a well-resourced structure or central body dedicated exclusively to the development of policies to support school leaders. Part of the mandate of this structure or central body would be to develop a school leadership framework in consultation with all relevant stakeholders and principals. If appropriate, this body could also serve as the school for principals proposed in MES's strategy (MES 2014*a*), but only if the schools were equipped to develop policy as well as professional learning.

School leadership standards would serve as the basis for the leadership framework, and would be used to inform the development of new procedures, like succession planning and performance appraisal, as well as CPD and supports (e.g. induction, principal networks). The framework would encompass the qualifications programme, which Albania should start to deliver as a priority.

With the government's new appointment procedures for school leaders and intent to eliminate the influence of politics on hiring decisions, it is assumed that the turnover rate among principals and the back-and-forth between the principal and teacher role will decrease. It would thus be an opportune time to make the school leadership role more distinct by defining principals' responsibilities, re-considering their teaching workload, and developing assessments for salary increases or career progression that relate to their work as school leaders rather than the qualifications scheme for teachers. In conducting this work, policy makers would need to keep in mind the different needs and responsibilities of principals in primary and secondary schools and other school contexts.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of teacher and school leadership policies and programmes in Albania based on the information provided by representatives of MES, IED, ANE, SIE, the teachers' unions and NGOs that operate in the country, the staff of REDs, and individual principals and teachers. The chapter also provides information from national and international research literature, including publications produced by the European Commission, UNESCO and the OECD.

The inter-jurisdictional examples of policies and initiatives provided throughout the chapter were drawn primarily from European countries in order to provide Albania with relevant comparators.

The main teacher and school leadership policy issues examined in this chapter include the status of the teaching profession, teachers' employment and working conditions, initial teacher preparation, the state examination and internship programme that lead to teacher certification, hiring and deployment procedures, continuing professional development, teacher performance appraisal, and the school leadership role. These are key areas where the country can take action to further support teacher and school leadership quality. Albania has already taken a proactive approach to addressing many of these areas by setting ambitious goals for reform.

In general, throughout the three key policy domains, recommendations for action to address these issues are labelled as short-term if they are of higher priority. In some cases, such as the work to strengthen teacher preparation following the passage of a new higher education law, the recommendations are short-term because work is already well underway. The recommendations with the potential to have the greatest system-wide impact relate to teacher preparation, CPD, the deployment of teachers to schools in disadvantaged areas, and support for the school leadership role. Investments in infrastructure have significant financial implications, but will go a long way towards improving teaching and learning. An important action that is not reflected in the *Strategy for Pre-University Education Development, 2014-2020* (MES, 2014*a*)*,* is a review of the development and use of the exams for teacher certification and employment. Any high-stakes assessment that determines whether individuals will become teachers and work in Albania's schools must be methodologically robust in order for the results to be fair and reliable.

Albania's education system is currently undergoing significant change. Many of the programmes and policies relating to teachers and school leaders are relatively new and their effectiveness will need to be evaluated. As mentioned throughout the EPR, consultation, collaboration transparency, and information sharing with teachers, principals and major stakeholders will be crucial to these efforts. Addressing the nine policy issues and associated recommendations identified within this chapter, as well as the cross-cutting issues discussed in Chapter 6, will be integral to the success of these reforms.

Chapter 6
Conclusions, Recommendations and Follow-up Actions

INTRODUCTION

This UNESCO Education Policy Review (EPR) Extended Report has provided an analysis of the country context and the reform of its pre-university education system, regarding: access and participation; equity and equality, educational processes; student outcomes; government expenditure decentralization and accountability. This report seeks to contribute to the understanding of education change in Albania and to serve as a tool for deep reflection upon how education can contribute more to the society as a whole. The report focuses attention on three key policy domains: curriculum development and reform; ICTs in education; and teacher and school leadership policies. This concluding chapter highlights four cross-cutting policy issues that are strategically important to education policy and planning in Albania, and finally outlines possibilities for future collaboration between UNESCO and the Government of Albania in the field of education.

The analysis of the country context emphasized how, since the collapse of communist rule in the early 1990s, Albania's society has been undergoing profound changes. From relative isolation Albania has become EU facing and is eager to be recognized within the international community at large. This has profoundly influenced the society and public policies, particularly those addressing pre-university education. After the collapse of communist rule, Albania's external orientation has led to outward migration, which in turn has contributed to a declining birth rate and a loss of the professionals needed in various sectors, including education. Nevertheless, Albania has achieved significant progress in such areas as well-being and human development, infrastructure and ICTs. These areas of development can be interpreted as both contributors to and outcomes from advances in education.

Beginning in the 1990s, education reforms in Albania have proceeded through a series of legal and normative provisions covering various aspects of the education system. Throughout the last two decades, the overarching intentions were economic opportunity and development, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and the alignment of national policy objectives with broader international and regional norms, strategies, and frameworks. Assistance from international donors also played a key role in Albania's educational reform plans, and a particularly important initiative

was the World Bank's *Education Excellence and Equity Project* (EEEP) throughout the years 2006-2010.

It is insightful to view Albania's education policy initiatives within broader national plans, especially to understand recent education reforms as part the country's strategy for eventual accession to the European Union. This helps to explain the recent importance given to European models and European educational indicators.

Recently, an updated National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) (2014-2020) was passed by the Council of Ministers. Whilst the NSDI covers a wide range of economic, political, security, legal, and infrastructure reforms, it also includes specific reference to education reform, including on curriculum modernization, promotion of European principles, social inclusion, competitiveness, standards for teachers, student achievement and non-discrimination (Council of Ministers, 2008, ctd. in Gardinier, 2016).

The comparative analysis conducted with reference to systems in the Western Balkans, the European Union, and beyond provided examples of policy initiatives that serve to both contextualize and inform education policies in Albania. A consideration of the evidence and discussion from each of the three key policy domains, in light of the comparative policy analysis, provides further insight into some of the important cross-cutting issues of concern in this EPR. Following a brief synthesis of findings from each policy domain, these cross-cutting issues are presented below.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

Domain 1: Curriculum development and reform

At the time of the review process, Albania was in the middle of a curriculum reform for the pre-university education (PUE). The curriculum reform was designed to make the curriculum for basic education more modular and comparable to the curricula in the EU member states, as well as to introduce a modern ICT curriculum in basic and secondary schools.

The motivation for Albania's curriculum reform was the improvement of student outcomes: academic achievement, competency in learning and living, inclusion of diverse learners, and engagement and retention of students at least to the completion of basic education in order to allow Albania's children and youth to participate successfully in society and within the European arena.

The review on curriculum development and reform highlights the following issues: curriculum reform must be incremental; widespread communication of reforms

must reach a range of stakeholders; there must be support for local implementers as well as ongoing monitoring, formative evaluation and feedback mechanisms to make adjustments where needed. Furthermore, guiding principles are ensuring full inclusion for vulnerable students; professional development that enables teachers to create inclusive learning environments and flexible instruction to reach all learners; local contextualization of the curriculum materials and texts; and improving system alignment over the medium and long term of implementation.

Domain 2: ICT in education

Albania's education system has gradually improved its integration of ICT into education, yet the use of ICT in schools remains in its infancy, and experiences vary. The provision of ICT and Internet connectivity to all primary and secondary schools in Albania aims at increasing the quality and relevance of education, the effectiveness of education delivery, as well as facilitating greater access to information and services by marginalized groups and communities.

Despite the significant policy strategies on ICT, many challenges remain. Policy and actions should find the right balance between implementing central educational goals and adapting to the particular needs of regions and schools. It is important to build consensus among all stakeholders, as they are more likely to accept change if they understand the rationale and potential usefulness of reforms. Leadership in the use of educational technology requires a map and a compass to guide decision-making and action plans. To be truly useful, such roadmaps need to strike a delicate balance: they must incorporate a contextual understanding of real-world technologies, but remain grounded in pedagogical frameworks that guide their application.

Domain 3: Teacher and school leadership policies

Efforts to create a more student-centred curriculum, expand the use of ICT, and increase equity have placed new expectations on teachers to create more inclusive classrooms where students develop transversal skills and prepare for participation in a democratic knowledge society. As Albania continues to decentralize its education system, including autonomy at the local level, school leaders are also expected to take on new responsibilities, reach out to parents and build stronger links with their communities.

The main teacher and school leadership policy issues addressed in the EPR include the status of the teaching profession, teachers' employment and working conditions, initial teacher preparation, the state examination and internship programme that lead to teacher certification, hiring and deployment procedures, continuing professional development, teacher performance appraisal, and the school leadership role. These

are key areas where Albania can take action to further support teacher and school leadership quality. Albania has already set ambitious goals to address many of these areas.

Albania's education system is currently undergoing significant change and has been during the past two decades, most notably in the perspective of EU integration. Many of the programmes and policies relating to teachers and school leaders are relatively new, and their effectiveness will need to be monitored and evaluated. Thus, consultation, collaboration and information sharing with teachers, principals and major stakeholders will be crucial to the success of these reforms.

ASSESSING POLICY AND SYSTEM REFORMS

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that universally apply to all countries who need to mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and injustices, and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. The global education agenda (SDG4-Education 2030) is part of the 17 UN SDGs that make up the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The agenda was developed through a broad consultative process driven and owned by Member States, including Albania. The success of SDG4-Education 2030 will depend on collective effort. Legal and policy frameworks that promote accountability and transparency as well as participatory governance and coordinated partnerships at all levels and across sectors, upholding the right to participation of all stakeholders, will need to be established or further developed in Albania (UNESCO, 2015*a*).

SDG-4, that is, the goal to *'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'* aims at transforming lives through education, recognizing the important role of education as a main driver of development and in achieving the other proposed SDGs. It is transformative and universal, attends to the 'unfinished business' of the EFA agenda and the education-related MDGs, and addresses global and national education challenges. It is inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection; cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability. Education is a public good, a fundamental human right and a basis for guaranteeing the realization of other rights. It is essential for peace, tolerance, human fulfillment and sustainable development. Education is a key to achieving full employment and poverty eradication[18].

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18   http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002338/233813m.pdf

As a longstanding UNESCO member and, now, an official EU candidate country, Albania is focused on developing and aligning its education policies and practices with those found in other neighbouring countries. Yet, the country has much progress to make towards the *EU's Education Benchmarks for 2020*[19]. In addition, Albania is increasingly aiming to benefit from and contribute to the wider international community, including UNESCO and other international organizations, particularly during the last two decades of democratisation. Whilst progress against most EU benchmarks is consistent with progress on the SDGs, and SDG4-Education 2030 in particular, there are some distinctive features of the new international agenda that deserve to be taken into account by education policy makers and planners.

While actions in the three policy domains, namely curriculum development and reform; ICT in education; and teacher and school leadership policies may improve the outcomes of Albania's education system, this review has also identified four cross-cutting policy issues that Albania could take into account to better align with SDG4-Education 2030 targets. The basis for each of these is found in the strategic analysis of the three key policy domains. Addressing these cross-cutting policy issues should therefore support developments within and between the domains themselves.

Taking a sector-wide perspective that builds on the description of the country context, the comparative analyses in Chapters 1 and 2, and the policy issues and recommendations identified within the chapters on the three specific education policy domains, the cross-cutting issues are of strategic importance for the education systems as a whole. Addressing them will help Albania to align education in the country with the international SDG4-Education 2030 agenda and targets.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence presented in the three priority domains and in the light of the international SDG4-Education agenda, the following four cross-cutting policy issues emerge as requiring further elaboration and policy attention:

a. Improving information-sharing, communication, and transparency;

b. Building a more equitable society through inclusive education;

c. Promoting strong institutions and school infrastructure; and

d. Strengthening capacities for monitoring and evaluation of educational reforms.

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19 http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm

Cross-cutting policy issues refer here to important education policy themes which are to be covered across specific policy domains, rather than being a subject of only one particular domain of education. The above-mentioned policy issues should be taken into account in all education reforms as a whole and when working on each of the policy domains. The recognition of these cross-cutting issues and the implementation of the corresponding recommendations will enhance the impact of the domain-specific recommendations. Thus, while recognizing the rapid and profound changes taking place in Albania, the cross-cutting policy recommendations should, as far as possible, build on the capacities that exist and strengthen the impact of reforms already underway.

a.   Improving information-sharing, communication, and transparency

This EPR identified a need to develop and promote practices of information-sharing, communication, and transparency between the national, regional and local levels of education across the country. Greater communication and transparency would help to enhance levels of trust, integrity, system coherence, and effective governance in terms of policy design as well as implementation. Shortcomings in communication and coordination are currently evident in education planning and management, where the absence of consultation and the simultaneous work of multiple agencies have resulted in confusion or gaps in implementation.

The need for greater communication and transparency was evident in each of the three key policy domains. For example, in the domain of curriculum development and reform, stakeholders identified the need to effectively implement a comprehensive public communications programme to inform various educational actors and the public of the specific nature and purposes of the curriculum reform (Recommendation 1.2.1). In the domain of ICT in education, the EPR highlighted the importance of developing a central system for the collection and publication of statistics that comprise data on the use of ICT throughout the country (Recommendation 2.4.1). In the third domain of teacher and school leadership policies, the EPR emphasized the need for the development of a strong consultative partnership between the government, teachers, and teacher unions in order to more fully address challenges arising from the teachers' workload (Recommendation 3.2.1).

The EPR report recommends that the Government of Albania should expand its efforts of transparency by providing relevant stakeholders with adequate information on priorities, programmes, and activities. This could help to ensure the legitimacy of policies and contribute towards democratic political participation and social cohesion in the country. The Government would benefit from developing and maintaining effective communication capacities with all stakeholders, to better take stock of their needs and preferences, and to foster a more deliberative public space

for multi-stakeholder participation, including through the media. Through greater transparency and coordination with education stakeholders, the Government can foster local and regional democracy, strengthen the local and regional government structures, and reinforce cooperation of local elected representatives in order to ensure effective decentralisation and local self-government.

b. Building a more equitable society through inclusive education

If the right to education for all is to become a reality, all learners must have access to quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and other international human rights treaties prohibit any exclusion from or limitation to educational opportunities on the basis of socially ascribed or perceived differences, such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, language, religion, nationality, economic condition and/or dis/ability. Education should not be simply about making schools available for those who are already able to access them. Instead, it is about being proactive in identifying the barriers and obstacles learners encounter in attempting to access equal opportunities for quality education, as well as in removing those barriers and obstacles that lead to marginalization and exclusion. Education systems should be made inclusive and equitable; that is, every child and young person should have access to education that is welcoming and responsive to his or her characteristics and needs (UNESCO, 2012[20]).

Analysis across the three policy domains clearly demonstrates that social and educational inclusion is a systemic issue worthy of greater attention in Albania. The analysis showed that Albania has made progress towards achieving universal primary school enrolment and increased access to all levels of education. However, the Government should pay particular attention when it comes to the enrolment rates of national minorities as well as children with disabilities. Despite previous efforts to integrate children with disabilities and special needs into mainstream education in Albania, the development of inclusive education as described in this EPR is still only partially realized. Several of the policy issues and recommendations elaborated in each of the domains have illuminated areas where greater steps towards equity and inclusion can be taken. These include Policy Issue 1.3, on inclusion as a key function of the curriculum; Recommendation 2.4.3 on digital competences; and Recommendation 3.2.2 on overcrowding and collective (multi-grade) classes.

The needs of marginalized and excluded groups, including national minorities and people living in rural areas, should be an integral part of, and mainstreamed in, all education reforms. Currently, there are significant gaps in the available data regarding school enrolment and school leaving. The lack of disaggregated data on students,

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20   See also http://www.unesco.org/new/en/inclusive-education/

as highlighted by Policy Issue 1.4, becomes a particular challenge for the effective monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of education reforms, especially in the area of equity and inclusion. A holistic approach to education from early childhood onwards can incorporate the needs of marginalized and excluded groups in all education activities. This will, however, mean developing capacities for policy-making and system management to support strategies towards inclusive quality education, commissioning research on inclusive policies and pedagogies (see Recommendation 1.3.3), supporting quality learning enhancement, and highlighting groups that are currently marginalized and excluded from quality education (UNESCO, 2009).

To achieve such targets, the EPR recommends that the Government of Albania provide leadership and investment, to emphasize in the curriculum that social inclusion and social cohesion are major aims for the society. The Government should also ensure the universal nature of public education that extends equally to all regions, localities and social classes. In order to ensure full inclusion, there is a need for a more rigorous and complete compilation of data on student enrolment and/or achievement. In addition, there is a need for education and training in inclusive pedagogies to be added to the initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, as well as to pre-service and in-service training of all teachers. ICT can also be used as a vehicle to make learning more inclusive. The EPR found that targeted services may stigmatize certain vulnerable groups, thus, it is recommended that Albania provides education for all children within the mainstream education system, and that the mainstream education system changes to accommodate social and cultural diversity (see UNESCO, 2012). Thus, inclusive education represents more than ensuring that marginalized and diverse students complete their schooling; it also indicates a qualitative change to their experience of learning as inclusive within the classroom. This is done through an inclusive curriculum and inclusive instructional strategies as highlighted throughout the three policy domains.

Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and the Government of Albania should commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. As stated in the Incheon Declaration of the 2015 World Education Forum, 'No education target should be considered met unless met by all' (UNESCO, 2015*a*).

c.   Promoting strong institutions and school infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure and innovation are crucial drivers of economic growth and development. School infrastructure includes suitable spaces to learn for all students. This is one of the most basic elements necessary to ensure access to education. Facilities may be inadequate in many ways, including being over-crowded or dangerous or lacking in adequate learning facilities. In addition, access to the

Internet has become crucial to ensure equal access to information and knowledge, as well as to foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

In addition to the development of Albania's physical infrastructure, the need to strengthen educational institutions through the development of the capacities of teachers and school leaders represents another crosscutting dimension that was evident throughout the EPR. In each of the three policy domains, stakeholders highlighted the ways in which educational reforms and improvements hinged upon the development of improved infrastructure alongside new teaching and leadership competencies. For example, Policy Issue 1.2 and Recommendations 1.3.1; 1.3.2; 2.1.5; 2.2.3; 3.3.3; and 3.5.2 all highlight the need to prepare teachers to effectively teach the new curriculum.

ICT plays a critical role in enabling inclusive education and sustainable development by providing people not only with access to information and services but also with opportunities to participate and contribute to the knowledge society. The Government of Albania should capitalize on ICT's transformative potentials in education by strategically and effectively using ICT to improve governance, access to resources, capacity building, teachers' professional development, and quality of learning.

The Government of Albania should strengthen the educational institutions and invest in better infrastructure as well as improve the coverage of education services in all geographical areas to help address the education needs of the rural populations and disadvantaged groups. Targeted support to higher education institutions would help to address critical needs in human resource development and strengthen institutional governance across the education system, including higher education particularly as it pertains to the education of future teachers and education professionals.

d.   Strengthening capacities for monitoring and evaluation of educational reforms

One of the main purposes of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in education is to ensure that equitable and quality education is being provided to all of the population and at all levels. Quality education is a multi-dimensional concept that takes into account the quality aspects on input (human, material, and financial), process (teaching-learning and effective management practices), and outputs and outcomes (the learning outcomes and quality of results).

The implementation of educational reforms may encounter certain difficulties related to, for instance, the weakness of institutional structures, the need for stronger capacities, the insufficiency of financial resources, or unexpected crisis situations [21].

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21   http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/our-expertise/monitoring-and-evaluation

There are some major challenges to the establishment of a good and useful M&E system. These relate mainly to aspects of coordination and synergy between sub-systems. Many countries typically have provisions for the M&E components as mentioned above, but often these are not well-coordinated, and there is no strategy or systematic mechanism to ensure that these different systems mutually reinforce each other to create synergy and support for the performance of the education system in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Furthermore, due to the interrelationship among education sub-sectors (pre-primary, primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary), coordinated effort among M&E systems should be established not only within the sub-sectors of education, but also across all other concerned sectors[22].

There are several Recommendations for improving monitoring and evaluation, and data use, across the three priority domains. Recommendation 1.4.2 is to broaden the set of indicators used to assess progress to include qualitative and outcome based measures; Recommendation 1.4.5 is to develop and implement a student information management system; Recommendation 2.4.1 is to collect and publish statistics on the use of ICT in education; Recommendation 3.4.2 calls for an evaluation of the internship programme; and Recommendation 3.8.1 is to develop a system-wide performance appraisal system for teachers based on teacher standards.

To address these key policy issues, the Government of Albania will need to pay significant attention to strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of educational reforms. This demands that key indicators be defined, that a monitoring and evaluation framework be developed, that responsibilities are clearly assigned, and most importantly, that action is taken on the findings of monitoring and evaluation exercises. An effective M&E system can help not only governments, development partners and donors, but all those concerned with education and its quality and coverage. Therefore, it would be helpful to involve all the stakeholders in the process of M&E system development as well so that its ownership by all the stakeholders is enhanced (UNESCO, 2016*b*).

In sum, taking a sector-wide perspective that builds on the key policy issues and recommendations identified within each of the three policy domains of the EPR, along with these four cross-cutting issues, will be of strategic importance for the success of educational reforms in Albania. Addressing these issues holistically should help Albania to fulfil its national strategies and further align educational development in the country with the international SDG4-Education 2030 agenda and targets.

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22   http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/me-report.pdf

LOOKING FORWARD: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

This UNESCO Education Policy Review (EPR) report presented evidence and analysis to support and inform national policy-making processes to help Albania to reach its vision for education in the context of SDG4-Education 2030. The report investigated major issues in specific policy domains and formulated evidence-based recommendations for the Pre-University Education system.

The EPR report did not, however, provide a comprehensive analysis of Albania's entire education sector. Rather this EPR is indicative of the kind of research and analysis that could also be done in other sub-sectors or domains such as early childhood care and education, technical and vocational education and training, higher education, and global citizenship education, all of which are within the scope and targets of SDG4-Education 2030.

In a 2016 report to ECOSOC[23], the Republic of Albania stated that the UN System in Albania could provide the following forms of support: know-how with respect to the methodological aspects of monitoring and evaluation; support in identifying gaps in terms of capacities; aid in the consolidation of capacities regarding the establishment of a monitoring system for the SDGs; and support with national processes to reach consensus on the targets. The Government of Albania also called for support in reaching 'a common understanding of linkages between the SDG outcome document and national strategic documents' as well as in aiding a 'dialogue on data requirements and statistical capacity needed for proposed SDG indicators.'

The EPR process has successfully created linkages between SDG4-Education 2030, the 2014-2020 PUEDS and other strategies that can help Albania to make progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNESCO is ready to support the Government of Albania in following up, in partnership, on the recommendations made in this report, for example by advising on implementation and on related issues, including the mobilization of financial resources.

Technical support could be provided for the strategic alignment of the education sector, and the development of monitoring and evaluation in relation to the SDG4-Education 2030 targets and indicators. UNESCO could also provide tailored support to various dimensions of teacher policy, such as continuing professional development and teacher standards, with reference to UNESCO's Teacher Policy Development Guide (UNESCO, 2015*b*). Depending on extra-budgetary funding, UNESCO could provide support to resource centres for teachers and contribute expertise and international experience to the development of a national centre for school leadership.

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23   https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/integration/Albania.pdf

With a window open to significant reform, it is hoped that the EPR process and this report will provide an impetus for national actors to address important policy issues within and across the three domains of curriculum development and reform; ICT in education; and teacher and school leadership policies. The dissemination of the EPR report provides an important opportunity for strategic policy dialogue and meaningful transformations in the field of education. Accession to the EU is a long-standing goal of Albania and continues to serve as a key driver for public sector reforms, including in education. The EPR report aims to support this process and Albania's closer integration into the international community.

Albania has demonstrated a commitment to the global goals of sustainable development, gender equality, and education as a human right and a public good for all. However, social transformation is not a short-term endeavour; it will require sustained effort in the medium and long-term towards 2030 and beyond. Through effective engagement with local stakeholders and strategic development partnerships Albania will be well prepared to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning, with wider benefits for society as a whole.

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Annex 1

Policy recommendations by estimated level of priority, difficulty, costs and timeframe

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM

POLICY ISSUE 1.1

The curriculum documents should reflect the intentions of the reform, be appropriate to students and useful to teachers.

Curriculum Policy Issue 1.1	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
1.1.1 Review all curriculum documents (curriculum framework, core curriculum, programs, assessment documents, etc.) with a view to ensure their inner coherence, so they all clearly state the intentions, commitments and goals of the curriculum reform, and how it will work for both compulsory and secondary education.	H	M	L	→		
1.1.2 Provide teachers with documents that serve as guides, with concrete examples of what successful performances might be as illustrations, but not as rigid prescriptions. Emphasis should be placed on communication and thinking skills and on the possibility that there may be more than one appropriate or successful approach to a problem or task.	H	M	M	→		

POLICY ISSUE 1.2
The implementation process for a major curriculum reform is critical to the success of the reform and includes:

a) Engagement and communication with teachers, parents, employers and tertiary education institutions about the curriculum reform and its intentions;

b) The preparation of teachers to use the new curriculum; and

c) The provision of appropriate learning resources including textbooks to support the reform.

Curriculum Policy Issue 1.2	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
1.2.1 Continue to implement a comprehensive public communications programme to explain to all teachers, principals, parents, employers, teacher training institutions, tertiary education institutions and the general public the nature of and reasons for the curriculum reform, in order to facilitate the implementation process.	H	H	M	→	→	
1.2.2 Through collaboration between MES and IED, develop a structure for sustainable dialogue about the curriculum reform at two levels: with representatives of the SIE, REDs, principals, teachers (including teacher unions) and administrators regarding the on-going implementation and professional learning activities; and with the education representatives and representatives of parents, faculties of education, tertiary education and employers to review the progress and success of the reform, and the success of students under the new curriculum as well.	H	M	M	→	→	
1.2.3 In the short term, incorporate into the implementation an additional professional learning component for teachers that includes opportunities for teachers to engage in: collaborative lesson planning, observation of others' classrooms, reflection on the lessons and observations with colleagues, and extended work on assessment for as well as of learning.	H	M	M	→		

Curriculum Policy Issue 1.2	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
1.2.4 Integrate student assessment components in the teacher training programmes, considering performance standards as well. Specifically, include in professional learning activities instruction in the use of data from formal and informal assessment for and of learning for purposes of instructional planning.	M	M	M	→		
1.2.5 Through collaboration between MES and IED, conduct ongoing reviews of whether new textbooks are adequate for the purposes intended and provide additional information to schools regarding technology requirements related to the new curriculum. Discuss with publishers the importance and possibility of increasing contextualization to Albania in textbooks, especially in science and mathematics texts.	H	M	M	⟶		
1.2.6 Through collaboration between MES, IED, and teachers, prepare a guide to help educators identify what factors to consider in the selection of textbooks; for example, factors such as the previous experience of students, availability of other resources (including ICT), and students' language levels could be considered.	M	M	M	⟶		
1.2.7 Through collaboration between MES and IED, explore the possibility of building digital resource repositories for teachers of all grades and subjects, taking account of successful examples from other jurisdictions.	H	H	H	⟶		

POLICY ISSUE 1.3

Inclusion is a key function of the curriculum in which the curriculum design helps to ensure that appropriate learning experiences are available to all students including those who have different abilities and challenges (physical, behavioural, and cognitive), those from linguistic and ethnic minorities and those who may not previously have attended school.

Curriculum Policy Issue 1.3	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
1.3.1 In the short to medium term, expand teacher training and professional development to support the implementation of the new curriculum, adapting it to inclusiveness while teaching (differentiated instruction) as well as to classroom management (strategies for managing those who have behavioural issues or students who have difficulty participating).	H	H	H	⟶	→	
1.3.2 As part of, or in addition to, the training underway for the new curriculum, engage in a process of collaborative inquiry at the school level that assists teachers and principals in developing a repertoire of high level pedagogical and assessment skills required for the implementation of both the curriculum and effective inclusion practices.	M	M	L	⟶	→	
1.3.3 Invite international experts from countries with well-established inclusion practices to assist Albania in the design process for such collaborative inquiry, to help educators and policy-makers in developing new practices and to aid in identifying systemic obstacles to effective inclusion.	M	M	H	⟶	→	

POLICY ISSUE 1.4

The implementation of the curriculum, and the collection of student achievement data, should be guided by effective monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Curriculum Policy Issue 1.4	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
1.4.1 Through collaboration between the IED and ANE, ensure that the Matura examinations and any other nationally mandated assessments reflect the reformed curriculum.	H	H	M		→	
1.4.2 Broaden the set of indicators used by MES, IED, and REDs to assess progress to include qualitative and outcome-based measures.	H	H	H		→	
1.4.3 Systematically develop short surveys for teachers, principals, and regional education directors to be administered annually with the intention of identifying successful practices, unexpected issues, obstacles and successes with implementation.	M	H	M		→	
1.4.4 Collect annual feedback from students in the lower and upper secondary grades who are using the new curriculum.	H	L	L			→
1.4.5 Determine key milestones for the development and implementation of a robust student information management system, to be used as indicators of progress.	H	M	H			→

ICT IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

POLICY ISSUE 2.1
The lack of a stable, responsive and widely available infrastructure and digital learning resources hinders the use of ICT in schools.

ICT Policy Issue 2.1	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
2.1.1 Address the need for a stable, responsive and widely available ICT infrastructure by setting clear, medium-long term goals to expand devices and Internet access; these should be backed by the funds that are necessary to cover devices, connectivity and maintenance.	H	M	H			
2.1.2 Increase the investment in ICT infrastructure and connectivity to remote areas.	H	H	H			
2.1.3 Increase the investment in digital learning resources.	H	M	H			
2.1.4 Ameliorate and maintain the pre-university information management system and the Electronic Higher Education Database.	H	M	H			
2.1.5 Increase the investment in the human resources necessary to utilize these tools and systems, and capitalize on the training provided to teachers by the ICT academy.	H	M	M			

POLICY ISSUE 2.2
Teachers need stronger basic pedagogical ICT skills.

ICT Policy Issue 2.2	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
2.2.1 Implement the Higher Education Reform, with a particular focus on the education of candidate teachers, and develop a national system to monitor the ongoing development of pre- and in-service teachers' ICT skills.	H	M	M		→	
2.2.2 Collaborate with international donors in order to design and implement continuing professional development initiatives aimed at training in-service teachers, and ICT teachers in particular, in the use of ICT for educational purposes.	H	M	L		→	
2.2.3 Encourage collaboration among teachers and school leaders with different levels of expertise in the use of ICT for teaching and learning purposes.	M	L	M		→	

POLICY ISSUE 2.3
Improving online safety for children and youth should be a greater priority.

ICT Policy Issue 2.3	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
2.3.1 Through collaboration across education institutions, raise awareness of problematic online situations among children, adolescents, young adults, and their families.	H	M	M		→	

POLICY ISSUE 2.4
Albania would benefit from a central evaluation system and national guidelines on the use of ICT in education.

ICT Policy Issue 2.4	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
2.4.1 Develop a central system for the periodical (annual or biannual) collection and publication of statistics that comprise data on infrastructure, equipment, training, teaching resources, assessment resources and the use of ICT.	M	M	M		→	
2.4.2 Develop a platform for implementing ICT in education and national guidelines on the use of ICT in education.	H	H	H			→
2.4.3 Build on the important efforts made thus far to improve access, equity and quality in education by addressing the remaining ICT challenges that must be overcome in order for students to develop the digital competencies necessary to succeed in a digital world.	H	M	M			→
2.4.4 Develop and include in the future Digital Agenda of Albania clear milestones stated for every year with regard to the development of digital learning materials, competence development, and infrastructure improvement so that progress can be measured annually or biannually.	M	M	M			→

TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP POLICIES

POLICY ISSUE 3.1
There is a need to raise the status and increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession, while making strategic financial investments to improve the education system as a whole.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.1	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.1.1 In the short to medium term, invest in efforts to raise the status of the teaching profession by attracting high-quality applicants to ITE programmes and raising the bar for entry into these programmes.	H	M	M	→		
3.1.2 In the short term, conduct a review to determine whether alternative financial investments would be a more efficient and effective use of resources than an across-the-board salary increase for teachers.	H	M	M	→		

POLICY ISSUE 3.2
Working and employment conditions may be having a negative effect on teaching and learning.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.2	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.2.1 In the short term and on a continuous basis, Albania would benefit from a strong consultative partnership between the government, teachers, and teacher unions, one in which all parties work together to address challenges associated with teachers' working and employment conditions, and develop a comprehensive description of teaching and non-teaching tasks.	H	M	L			→
3.2.2 In the short to medium term, Albania's education system would benefit from investments in infrastructure, including investments to reduce overcrowding in public schools in urban areas and attention to the issue of the collective (multi-grade) classes.	H	M	H		→	

POLICY ISSUE 3.3
Initial teacher preparation should support Albania's education reform efforts and prepare teachers for the realities of classrooms and schools.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.3	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.3.1 In the short term, strengthen teacher preparation by enhancing the practicum and elements key to Albania's education reform.	H	M	M	→		
3.3.2 In the medium to long term, consider introducing more flexible routes into the teaching profession to address teacher shortages.	M	M	M		→	
3.3.3 In the medium term, improve coordination of teacher preparation in universities, practical training, professional development and performance evaluation, including through harmonization of legislation.	M	M	M		→	

POLICY ISSUE 3.4

The teaching internship programme needs to better support both interns and mentors.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.4	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.4.1 In the short term, further address mentors' workload challenges and consider how they could be better prepared, supported, and recognized for their role.	H	M	M	→		
3.4.2 In the short to medium term, conduct an evaluation of the internship programme to determine its effectiveness and identify necessary improvements.	M	M	L	⟶		
3.4.3 In the medium to long term, ITE programmes at the Bachelors level should include a well-designed practicum component, and the conditions of service applicable to interns could be reviewed.	M	M	L		⟶	

POLICY ISSUE 3.5

The state exam for teacher certification should provide a reliable assessment of readiness to enter the profession.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.5	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.5.1 It will be important for Albania to ensure that the state exam for teacher certification is properly piloted and that the test instrument is psychometrically assessed.	H	M	M	→		
3.5.2 Albania could improve ITE and the state exam to better reflect the revised pre-university curriculum.	M	L	M	⟶		

POLICY ISSUE 3.6
Changes are needed to make teacher hiring and deployment procedures more efficient, effective and equitable.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.6	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.6.1 In the short term, ensure that the Teachers for Albania test is methodologically robust, and in the future, consider augmenting it with other assessment methods.	H	M	M	→		
3.6.2 In the short to medium term, provide more support and information to parents who are involved in hiring and decision-making processes.	H	L	L	——→		
3.6.3 In the medium term, Albania could involve schools more closely in decision making to ensure a good fit between the teacher and school. Principals could have more input on staffing decisions, consistent with their role in school leadership.	H	L	L		———→	
3.6.4 Albania's education system would benefit from efforts to recruit qualified teachers to harder-to-staff schools and regions.	H	M	M	————————→		

POLICY ISSUE 3.7
A coherent strategy for continuing professional development aligned with the country's education reform priorities is needed.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.7	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.7.1 In the short term, proceed with plans to provide more support for school-based learning and professional networks to support teachers' CPD.	H	M	M	→		
3.7.2 In the medium to long term, Albania could establish a well-resourced national structure for teacher education and professional learning to develop and implement a CPD strategy to support Albania's education reform.	H	M	H		———→	

POLICY ISSUE 3.8
Albania needs an effective process to assess teachers' performance, promote improvement, and recognize good teaching.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.8	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.8.1 In the short term, the development of a system-wide, growth-oriented performance appraisal system based on teacher standards would support improvements to teaching quality.	H	M	M	→		
3.8.2 In the medium to long term, Albania could use the teacher performance appraisal process as one factor to reward good teaching with career progression and diverse career opportunities including leadership.	M	M	L		⟶	

POLICY ISSUE 3.9
The school principal's leadership role needs to be strengthened and supported.

Teacher and Leadership Policy Issue 3.9	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
3.9.1 In the short to medium term, create a well-resourced structure or central body dedicated to school leadership across Albania that could create and implement programmes to develop the professional capacities of school leaders.	H	M	H	→		

Annex 2

Strategic Prioritization Matrices

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM

	HIGH IMPACT ON OUTCOMES	
HIGH IMPACT	**MUST HAVES**	**QUICK WINS**

MUST HAVES

Capacity at point of delivery

- In the short to medium term, expand teacher training and professional development to support the implementation of the new curriculum, adapting it to inclusiveness while teaching (differentiated instruction) as well as to classroom management (strategies for managing those with behavioural challenges or students who have difficulty participating) (1.3.1);

Alignment and coherence

- Through collaboration between the IED and ANE, ensure that the Matura examinations and any other nationally mandated assessments reflect the reformed curriculum (1.4.1);
- Continue reviewing all curriculum documents (curriculum framework, core curriculum, programs, assessment documents, etc.) with a view to maintaining their inner coherence, so they all clearly state the intentions, commitments and goals of the curriculum reform, and how it will work for both compulsory and upper secondary education (1.1.1);
- Through collaboration between MES and IED, conduct a review of whether the new textbooks being used are adequate for the purposes intended (1.2.5);
- Discuss with publishers the importance of increasing contextualization to Albania especially in maths and science. (1.2.5).

QUICK WINS

Resources where they yield most

- Through collaboration between MES and IED, explore the possibility of building digital resource repositories for teachers of all grades and subjects (1.2.7);
- Provide teachers with subject documents and planning documents that serve as useful and flexible guides (1.1.2).

A learning system

- Place emphasis on communication and higher order thinking skills, and on the possibility that there may be more than one appropriate or successful approach to a task or problem (1.1.2);
- In the short term, incorporate into the implementation an additional learning component for teachers that includes opportunities to engage in collaborative lesson planning, observation of others' classrooms, reflection on the lessons and observations with colleagues and extended work on assessment for as well as of learning (1.2.3);
- Include in teacher training instruction in the use of data from formal and informal assessment for and of learning for purposes of instructional planning (1.2.4);
- As part of, or in addition to, the training underway for the new curriculum, engage in a process of collaborative inquiry at the school level that assists teachers and principals in developing a repertoire of high level pedagogical and assessment skills required for the implementation of the curriculum and effective inclusion practices (1.3.2).

Quality assurance

- Through collaboration between MES and IED, develop a structure for sustainable dialogue about the curriculum at two levels: with representatives of SIE, REDs, principals and teachers (including unions) regarding the implementation and professional learning activities, and with education representatives, parents, faculties of education, tertiary education and employers to review the progress and success of the reform (1.2.2);

- Broaden the set of indicators used by MES, IED, and REDs to assess progress to include qualitative and outcome-based measures (1.4.2);

- Systematically develop short surveys for teachers, principals, and regional education directors to be administered annually with the intention of identifying successful practices, unexpected issues, obstacles, and successes with implementation (1.4.3);

- Collect annual feedback from students in the lower and upper secondary grades who are using the new curriculum (1.4.4);

- Determine key milestones for the development and implementation of a robust student information management system, to be used as indicators of progress (1.4.5).

Low Feasibility

High Feasibility

Stakeholder participation

- Continue to implement a comprehensive public communications programme to explain to all teachers, principals, parents, employers, teacher training institutions, tertiary education institutions and the general public the nature of and reasons for the curriculum reform (1.2.1);

- Invite international experts from countries with well-established inclusion practices to assist Albania in the design process for such collaborative inquiry, to help educators and policy-makers in developing new practices and identifying systemic obstacles to effective inclusion (1.3.3).

LOW IMPACT

MONEY PITS

LOW HANGING FRUIT

LOW IMPACT ON OUTCOMES

ICT IN EDUCATION

HIGH IMPACT ON OUTCOMES

HIGH IMPACT

LOW IMPACT

Capacity at point of delivery:

- Address the need for a stable, responsive and widely available ICT infrastructure by setting clear, medium-long term goals to expand devices and internet access backed by funds to cover devices, connectivity and maintenance (2.1.1);
- Increase investment in the human resources that are necessary to utilize ICT tools and systems (2.1.5);
- Increase investment in ICT infrastructure and connectivity in remote areas (2.1.2).

Quality assurance

- Implement the Higher Education Reform, with a focus on the education of candidate teachers, and develop a national system to monitor pre- and in-service teachers' ICT skills (2.2.1);
- Ameliorate and maintain the information management system and the Electronic Higher Education Database (2.1.4);
- Develop a central system for the periodical (annual or biannual) collection and publication of statistics that comprise data on infrastructure, equipment, training, teaching and assessment resources, and use of ICT (2.4.1);
- Develop and include in the future Digital Agenda of Albania clear milestones stated for every year with regard to the development of digital learning materials, competence development, and infrastructure improvement so that progress can be measured annually or biannually (2.4.4).

Low Feasibility

QUICK WINS

Resources where they yield most

- Increase investment in digital learning resources (2.1.3);
- Develop a platform for implementing ICT in education and national guidelines on the use of ICT in education (2.4.2);
- Through collaboration across education institutions, raise awareness of problematic online situations among children, adolescents, young adults, and their families (2.3.1);

A learning system

- Capitalize on the training provided to teachers by the ICT academy (2.1.5);
- Encourage collaboration among teachers and school leaders with different levels of expertise in the use of ICT for teaching and learning (2.2.3);
- Build on the important efforts made thus far to improve access, equity and quality in education by addressing the remaining ICT challenges that must be overcome in order for students to develop the digital competences necessary to succeed in a digital world (2.4.3).

High Feasibility

Partnerships:

- Collaborate with international donors in order to design and implement CPD initiatives aimed at training in-service teachers in the use of ICT for educational purposes (2.2.2).

MONEY PITS

LOW HANGING FRUIT

LOW IMPACT ON OUTCOMES

TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP POLICIES

HIGH IMPACT

MUST HAVES

Capacity at point of delivery:

- Take steps to reduce overcrowding in schools (3.2.2);
- Create a well-resourced structure or central body dedicated to school leadership that could create and implement programmes to develop the professional capacities of school leaders (3.9.1);
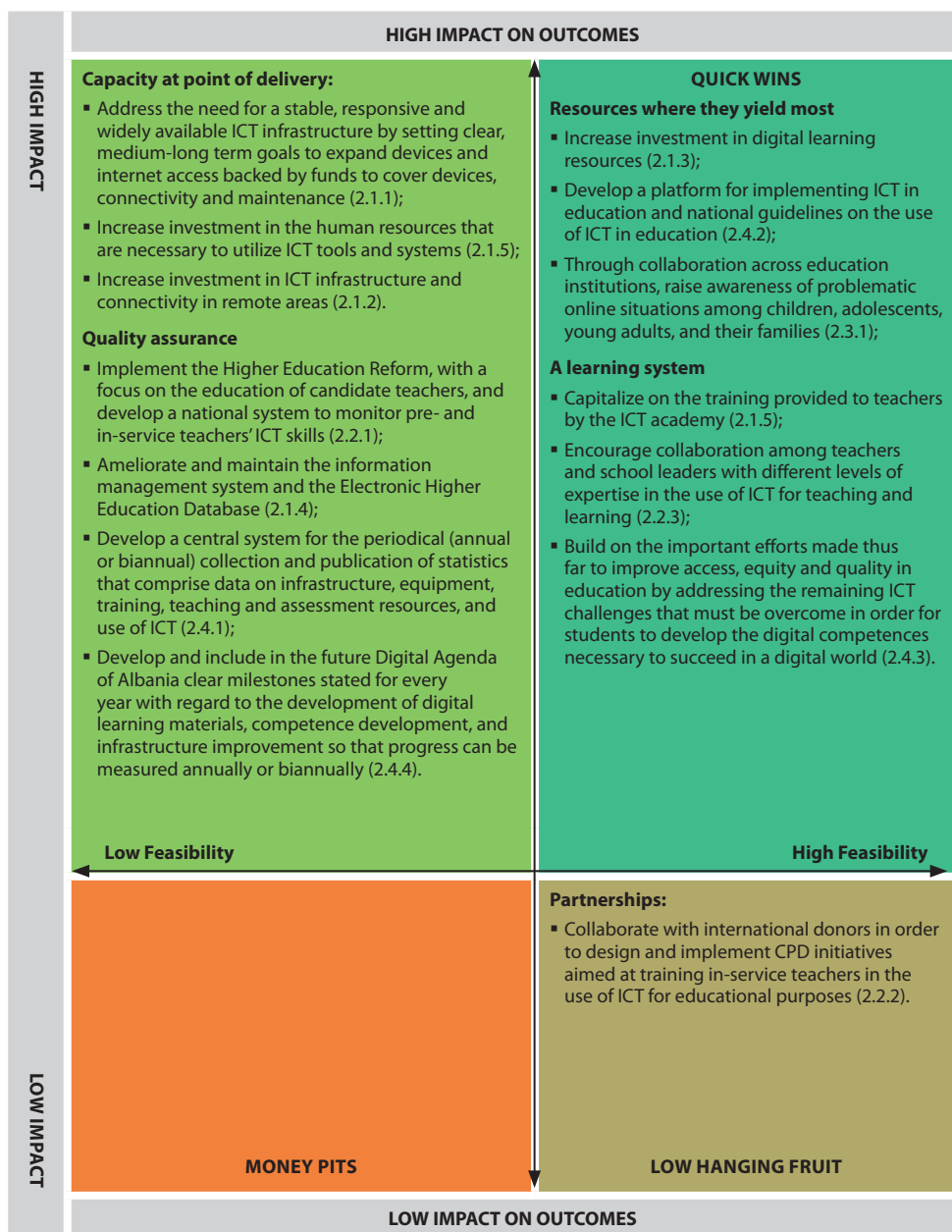- In the long term, Albania could establish a well-resourced national structure for teacher education and professional learning to develop and implement a CPD strategy (3.7.2).

Quality and coherence:

- Ensure that the *Teachers for Albania* test is methodologically robust (3.6.1;);
- Ensure that the state exam for teacher certification is properly piloted and that the test instrument is psychometrically assessed (3.5.1);
- Develop and implement a growth-oriented performance appraisal system based on teacher standards to support improvements to teaching (3.8.1);
- Improve ITE and the state exam to better reflect the revised pre-university curriculum (3.5.2);
- Use the teacher performance appraisal process as one factor to reward good teaching with career progression and diverse career opportunities including leadership (3.8.2).

Low Feasibility

QUICK WINS

Resources where they yield most:

- Invest in efforts to attract high-quality applicants to ITE programmes and raise the bar for entry to these programmes (3.1.1);
- Recruit qualified teacher to harder-to-staff schools and regions (3.6.4);
- Introduce flexible routes into the teaching profession, particularly to address teacher shortages (3.3.2);
- Conduct a review to determine whether alternative financial investments would be a more efficient and effective use of resources than an across-the-board salary increase for teachers (3.1.2).

A learning system:

- Strengthen teacher preparation by enhancing the practicum component (3.3.1; 3.4.3);
- Conduct an evaluation of the internship programme to determine its effectiveness and identify necessary improvements (3.4.2);
- Proceed with plans to provide more support for school-based learning and professional networks to support teachers' CPD (3.7.1).

High Feasibility

MONEY PITS

Communication and Inclusion:

- Provide more information to parents involved in hiring decisions (3.6.2);
- Schools should exercise a greater role in decision-making to ensure a good fit between the RED, schools and the teacher. Principals should also exercise their role in staffing decisions, consistent with their role in school leadership (3.6.3);
- Further address mentors' workload challenges and consider how they could be better prepared, supported, and recognized for their role (3.4.1).

LOW HANGING FRUIT

LOW IMPACT