

**Early Childhood Education in Albania at a Glance
Subsector Review Final**

**Sarah Fuller
ITSF 5006: Comparative Policy Studies
Professor Gita Steiner-Khamisi
Teachers College, Columbia University
Fall, 2017**

ALL	Albanian lek
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
EC	European Commission
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
IDPs	Internationally displaced persons
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDA	International Development Association
IPS	Integrated Planning System
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LGUs	Local government units
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sport
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
IBE-UNESCO	UNESCO International Bureau of Education
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	United States Dollar

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Albania was recently introduced to democracy after the fall of communism in the country in 1991. Despite this, the country experiences continued political conflict and instability, seen by Albania's low scores on the World Bank Group's Worldwide Governance Indicators and its listing as a warning state on the International Fund for Peace's Fragility Index 2016. Though recent reforms have improved the efficiency of state institutions, the country still has much room for improvement in stabilizing its political situation, as well as its economy.

The economy was hit hard by the global financial crisis of 2008, after which Albania's GDP growth slowed significantly. Reforms have aimed to promote investments and competitiveness, but the country's poverty rate remains high, especially in rural areas and in the North. Similarly, resources are concentrated in urban areas and in the South, particularly around Tirana. While Albania's HDI is .76, it also shows regional disparities similar to those seen in the distribution of the country's poor. Thus, influenced by poor infrastructure, low employment, and a lack of public services, many Albanians have begun migrating to urban areas, as well as out of the country, leading to significant brain drain and higher demands on urban education services and other social sectors to respond to growing urban populations.

As a member of NATO and now a candidate for membership in the European Union, Albania has focused on integration with the goals of sustainable growth, improved transportation and energy networks, and environmental and agricultural progress. The 2014-2020 National Strategy for Development and Integration has thus played an important role in the country's development by emphasizing these areas. It has also influenced the creation of the Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020.

Although very little policy focus is given to preschool education, the MoES has established the goal of implementing a mandatory preprimary year before grade 1 by 2018. The "Review Focus" summarizes the need for increasing attention in preschool education, as both UNESCO (2015) and Save the Children (2012) explain that it prepares children for future educational success. Furthermore, Psacharopoulos (2017) shows the economic value of investing in preschool education. With one of the youngest populations in Europe, Albania has great potential to take advantage of these benefits.

Nonetheless, the country has a long way to go in achieving this goal and its aims for educational equity and inclusion, expressed throughout the "Key Issues and Challenges" section of this review, which begins with an explanation of terminology and the structure of preschool education in Albania. Preprimary constitutes 11% of all students enrolled in school in the country, and Kindergarten enrolment has increased, albeit slowly and very minimally.

Preschool education in Albania has received decreasing budgetary attention, leading MoES to call for increasing policy attention and funding specifically for preprimary. Funding for preschool is complicated by Albania's decentralized structure through which kindergarten infrastructure is the shared responsibility of municipalities or LGUs and the central government. Grants which are not specifically allocated for education have provided some support, although the resources are frequently used for other services and the preschool education subsector benefits only minimally from this support. While fees are supposed to

be covered for kindergarten, this has yet to be implemented, and many families still end up paying for services, which precludes access among the country's marginalized populations.

While enrolment has increased in total numbers and preprimary year enrolment has reached 81% (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010), gross enrolment in preschool for ages 3-6 remains much lower, and particularly lower than the European average. While different explanations are proposed, it becomes clear that a lack of facilities is the main precluding factor in preschool education access. Furthermore, little support is offered to parents to communicate the importance of early childhood education, although demand for preschool services is on the rise. Although private kindergartens account for a small percentage of preschool services, the number is increasing in light of insufficient supply of public services.

In rural areas, enrolment is decreasing, and there is a severe lack of kindergarten facilities. Urban areas, however, also see a lack of supply, as the existing facilities are significantly overcrowded, leading to competition for spots and the exclusion of those who cannot afford to pay school fees. The response by the public sector to increasing demand has been slow. Quality and standards are lacking among existing facilities, which are not designed appropriately for young children. These problems and others have contributed to the poor quality of preschool services. While the pupil-to-teacher ratio is already high at 18.3, class sizes are much larger and reflect overcrowding with class sizes averaging between 20.1 and 25.3 students. The pupil-to-teacher ratio is also affected by whether schools offer meals or not, and only urban schools have this option for students. Because of these high pupil-to-teacher ratios and class sizes, quality of supervision and activity facilitation is low and inclusion is hampered. Recently, a new curriculum has been designed to make activities more developmentally appropriate and to integrate preprimary and primary learning more coherently. However, teacher training fails to provide guidance on methods for implementing the new curriculum and professional development in this regard is lacking. Similarly, quality assessment instruments do not exist for the preschool sector, and standards are seldom applied.

Although gender disparity is not a concern in this subsector, disparities among other subgroups are. The gap between the rich and the poor is particularly noticeable in early childhood education, and poverty affects enrolment and attendance, with only 25% attendance rates among the poor compared to 60% among the richest quintile (Fabbi, 2014). Inaffordable school fees make preschool services inaccessible to the poor and many Roma families. Thus, exclusion of these groups persists. Only 13.5% of Roma ages 3-5 participate in preschool education. Although recent reforms and programs have aimed to increase their participation, there is still much room for growth in improving their access. Students with disabilities also continue to be excluded, and many remain in special schools with the government looking to increase the number of special, segregated institutions in the coming years. Although teacher quality has recently improved because of reforms, teacher training lacks elements of inclusion for these marginalized groups.

This subsector review next analyzes the involvement of donors in Albania in recent years and the improvement of donor coordination mechanisms. While a donor matrix is presented listing preschool-focused activities, little funding has been directly targeted to this subsector. Finally, the review presents conclusions of areas for needed focus including increasing preschool funding from the government and donors, improving equity for the country's marginalized groups, and considering ways to improve quality in light of examples of best practices.

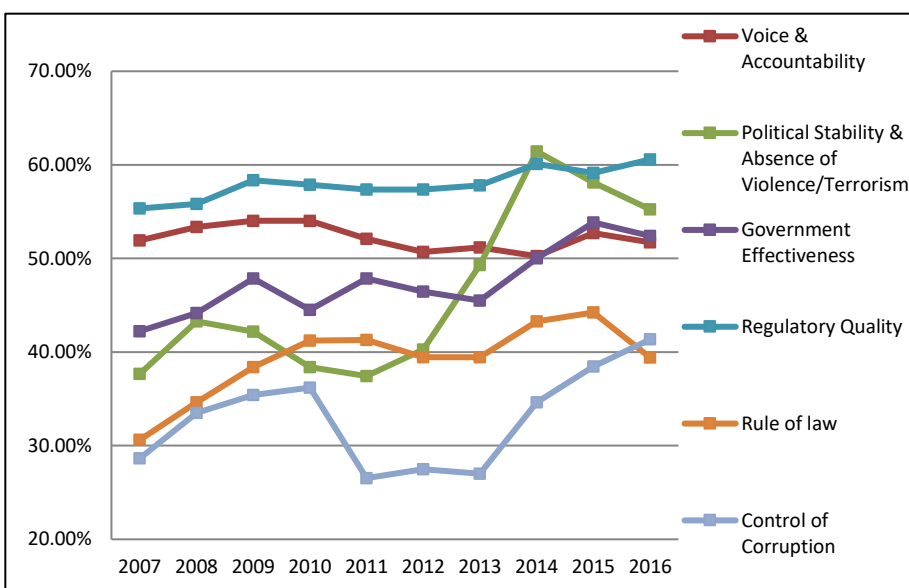
INTRODUCTION

Understanding the challenges of early childhood education in Albania requires an understanding of the political, economic, and social context in which they occur. This introductory section gives an overview of key indicators for the country of Albania that reveal recent progress and ongoing challenges. It then explains the focus of the review on early childhood education in light of recent policy discussions.

Political, Economic, & Social Context

Figure 1: Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2007-2016

As a country with a relatively recent introduction to democracy, Albania experiences political conflict and party fractionalization that compound the difficulties of a dysfunctional parliament and frequent boycotts (World Bank, 2015a). This instability contributes to Albania's low scores on the World Bank Group's Worldwide Governance Indicators in Figure 1, although as is visible in the graph, Albania has made important progress broadly across indicators. The World Bank (2011) attributes recent



Source: World Bank (2016)

progress partially to Albania's competitive political system, as well as to the country's success in increasing plurality in the media and in establishing an open market economy. Furthermore, through its involvement in Albania, the World Bank (2011) claims to have supported the reforms and development that have made state institutions more effective and efficient in delivering public goods. In 2016, Albania was listed as a "warning" state on the International Fund for Peace Fragility Index (See Appendix, Figure A1) (International Fund for Peace, 2016), which explains areas of concern for the country's stability. As visible in Figure A1 (Appendix), the most concerning areas are currently human flight and brain drain, external intervention (in Albania's case, related to foreign assistance), poverty/economic decline, factionalized elites and state legitimacy (influenced by corruption as seen above). Albania's status as a new member of NATO and a candidate for membership in the European Union has played a major role in national policy discussion and commitments to development, including in sustainable growth, improved transportation and energy networks, and environmental and agricultural progress (UNDP, 2016c).

Before 2008, Albania's economy grew at a rapid pace of up to 7% of GDP, but growth slowed and even reversed after 2008, dropping to only 2.8% in 2015. The global financial crisis not only severely affected Albania's GDP, as seen in Table A1 (Appendix), but also showed weaknesses in Albania's economic model, which the World Bank (2017) claims required a shift in focus to investments, exports, productivity, and competitiveness. Progress, driven by reforms, in making that shift is visible in the 2016 growth rate of 3.5%, with the same number projected for 2017-2018 (World Bank, 2017).

Albania's rural poverty rate remains higher than its urban poverty rate, although poverty in both urban and rural areas has fallen significantly since 2002 (See Appendix, Figure A2). According to the World Bank (2006; 2007), the large decline in poverty between 2002 and 2005 is attributable to high GDP growth and large inflows of remittances. That is, while inequality (in this case the gap between the rich and the poor) remained relatively the same during that period, the mean incomes for each quintile rose, decreasing the number of people in poverty. During this period, urban poverty declined more than did rural poverty, leading to a greater concentration of poor in rural areas. After 2008, the global financial crisis affected poverty rates once more, as the economy, which is a relatively new free market, is not yet able to deal well with economic downturn, and economic investment has brought few benefits to rural areas (Beauchamp, 2017). Decentralization and the privatization of important economic sectors, mainly agriculture and construction, along with trade, have enabled the return of economic growth (Beauchamp, 2017).

It is also important to note regional difference in poverty. All of the poorest prefectures, beside Fier, are located in the North, while the five wealthiest prefectures are in southern Albania (World Bank, 2015a). Resource concentrations, especially in the education sector, reflect similar patterns.

Albania is currently ranked 75th in the world for its Human Development Index (HDI) of .76, with a Gender Development Index (GDI) of 0.96. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) of 0.27 shows high inequality in achievement regarding health, empowerment, and the labor market (UNDP, 2016a). The existing HDI and GDI, however, may be falsely inflated, according to UNDP (2016b). HDI and GDI are calculated using income, longevity, and education, but UNDP (2016b) states that in Albania, only income data is statistically reliable. It explains that not all deaths are reported, making measures of longevity statistically unreliable, and that the government has historically exaggerated enrolment rates in education (UNDP, 2016b).

Figure A3 (Appendix) shows HDI disparities by prefecture, which can be explained at least partially by differences in GDP per capita and by larger family sizes in poorer prefectures, especially when comparing rural areas to the capital, Tirana (UNDP, 2016b). It also provides insight into the phenomenon of increasing rural-to-urban migration, driven by poor infrastructure, inadequate education and health services, and low employment. The 2011 census showed that approximately 54% of the population lived in urban areas and 46% in rural areas, but internal migrants now comprise approximately 15% of the population of Tirana (UNDP, 2016b). Thus, greater pressure is placed on urban education services to respond to the growing population, as well as on rural education components to provide more appropriate services that meet the needs of the rural populations (Fabbi, 2014).

Review Focus

In 2013, with the election of a new government, a comprehensive process for developing Albania's priorities was adopted. This included naming objectives, conducting well-designed, indicator-based assessments, and preparing coordinated action plans. The 2014-2020 National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) provides the framework for strategies adopted by all sectors, but functioning sector approaches require that policies respond to the most crucial needs and lead to strategies designed to address them, in addition to monitoring and assessment (European Commission, 2014).

With the NSDI 2014-2020 and EU integration in mind, significant education reforms have been proposed, including the Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020. In it, the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) has named four priorities: enhancing leadership, governance, and resource management; providing inclusive, quality learning; ensuring quality performance aligned with EU standards; and improving professional training (MoES, 2014). The government also expects these priorities to assist in aligning the education sector with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Changes in Albanian law since 2012 reflect similar aims. In 2013, policy commitments set the goal of increasing the pre-university enrolment of children with disabilities and from impoverished families by 2% while improving access and infrastructure (UNESCO, 2017). Regarding early childhood, Law n. 69 (2012) explains that preschool education guides children's social, physical, and intellectual development from ages 3 to 6. Since the National Education Strategy 2009-2013, the MoES has emphasized the importance of children's early development in future school readiness and success, explaining that children's early success impacts overall economic development (Tahsini, Voko, Duci, & Hallkaj, 2014).

Despite this, preschool is not mandatory, and only recently were plans set to institute a compulsory preprimary year for children ages 5-6. Parents pay preschool fees, which prevent the enrolment of children from poor populations to whom only minimal financial assistance is offered. Net preprimary enrolment is close to 80%, but large disparities exist for rural populations, minority groups, and students with disabilities (Save the Children, 2012). According to UNESCO (2015), the lack of early childhood facilities and services contributes to poor educational attainment in Albania. Furthermore, there is a lack of nurseries for children ages 0-3 in rural areas, and urban kindergartens are overcrowded. Thus, the existing infrastructure is inadequate for ensuring equitable coverage (Fabbi, 2014).

In the facilities that do exist, however, no reporting mechanism is present to ensure that learning environment standards are met. Thus, spaces in many preschools are not designed appropriately for children's development, and staff lack the knowledge to meet young students' developmental needs. However, reliable data is lacking regarding the population of students with disabilities and their participation in early childhood education in both general and special schools.

According to Save the Children (2012), quality early childhood education encompasses socio-emotional, cognitive, motor, and communication development, preparing children for further success in and outside of school. UNESCO (2015) states that early childhood education sets the foundation for learning and life chances and thus can offset the threats against human rights presented by poverty and marginalization. Psacharopoulos (2017) shows that investing in early educational development produces the highest social returns, which surpass 20% (See Figure A4, Appendix) and has a benefit-cost ratio of 7:1. Enrolling an additional 10,000 children in preschool in Albania would cost \$2.5 million more per year but yield an approximate 10% enrolment increase and incalculable benefits for these children and society (Psacharopoulos, 2017). Albania has one of the youngest populations in Europe, of whom 7% is below the age of 5 (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010). It thus has great potential to invest in the early childhood subsector not only to promote the country's economic advancement but also to protect the human rights of all children, particularly those from its most vulnerable groups. With this potential in mind, this subsector review aims to explore the challenges that Albania faces in providing quality early childhood education to all children.

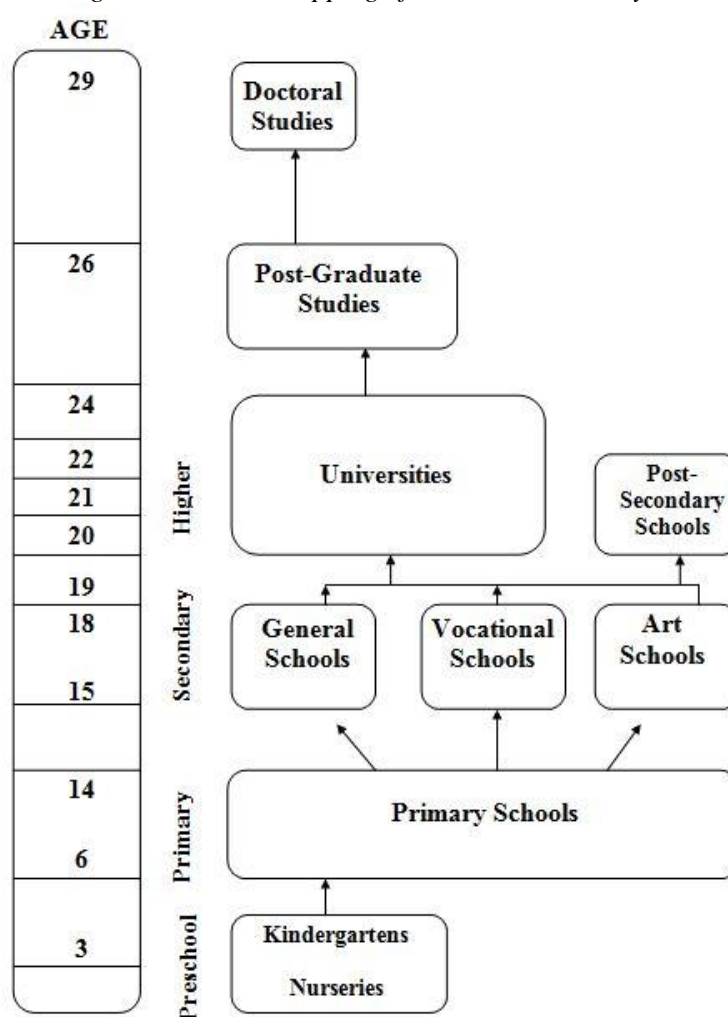
KEY ISSUES & CHALLENGES

In its Strategy on Pre-University Education Development 2014-2020, the MoES of Albania identified areas of each education subsector to which it believes more focus must be given to achieve both EU integration and the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Much of this strategy focused on developing the preprimary sector. Similarly, UNESCO (2017; 2015b) has outlined key challenges that Albania faces in developing its preprimary subsector. Drawing on these reports, strategies, and other available data, this section presents the main issues currently affecting Albania's early childhood education subsector including lack of funding, insufficient supply of educational services and facilities, low access, particularly among Albania's most marginalized populations, continued exclusion, poor infrastructure, and issues with quality and teacher training.

Structure of the School System

When discussing early childhood education in the context of Albania, it is important to understand terminology. Early childhood or "preschool" encompasses anything prior to entering grade 1 of primary school, including nurseries and kindergartens, which are sometimes referred to collectively as preschool centers. Nurseries are for children ages 0-3. Kindergarten refers to the three levels of educationally structured classes for children ages 3-5 and is offered in public, private, or community, NGO-based centers. Compulsory education in Albania begins with grade 1 at age 6, and preschool education is not compulsory, but in recognizing the importance of early childhood education and care, the government of Albania has planned to mandate the final year of kindergarten by 2018 (Fabbi, 2014). In this context, the final year of kindergarten (age 5-6) is known as pre-primary school and is offered also as preparatory classes in public schools. The term pre-primary, however, has also been used previously as synonymous with preschool in general, referring to non-compulsory education for children ages 3-6.

Figure 2: ISCED Mapping of Albanian School System

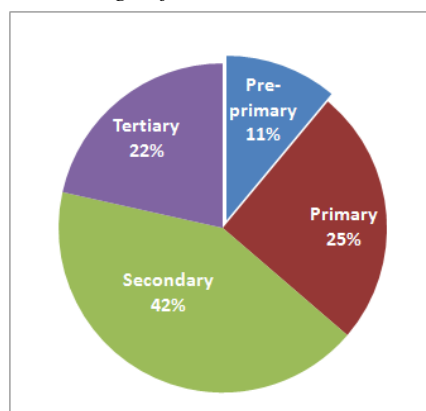


Source: IBE-UNESCO (2011)

In terms of size, Figure 3 shows that primary has the largest number of students behind secondary school, but when lower and upper secondary numbers are disaggregated, primary contains the largest number of students. The primary sub-sector, however, makes up only 25% of total enrolment. While the size of the student population in primary and secondary schooling has declined, that in tertiary schooling has generally increased until 2014-2015 (Figure 4). Data is not available for post-secondary, non-tertiary education enrolment. Preprimary (in this case referring to students ages 3-6) constitutes only 11% of all enrolled students, a significantly low number (World Bank, n.d.a).

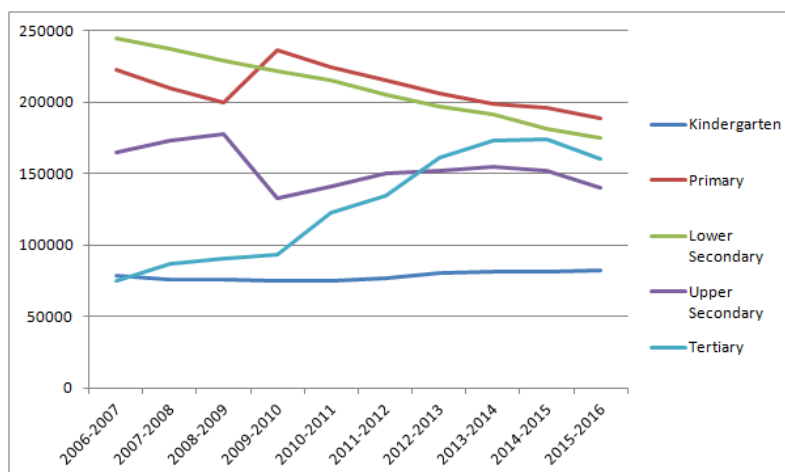
The 2011 Census data reported that Albania has 135,412 students between the ages of 3-6, representing 4.8% of the population (INSAT, 2017). The number of students enrolled in Kindergarten has increased only slightly (See Figure 4), particularly in recent years since the government has moved to make the last year of kindergarten mandatory. Enrolment rates are almost equal for males and females and reflect similar patterns as population distribution (See Figure A5, Appendix). It is important to note, however, that although kindergarten enrollment in pure numbers has increased only slightly since 2013 (Figure 4), the population below age 10 as reported by INSTAT (2017) has continuously declined from 358,000 in 2013 to 331,000 in 2017.

Figure 3: Size of Sub-sectors by Percentage of all Enrolled Students



Source: World Bank (n.d.)

Figure 4: Size of Sub-sectors by Number of all Enrolled Students



Source: World Bank (n.d.)

Financing Preschool Education

In 2009, government spending on education was only 3.8% of GDP (UNESCO, 2015) compared to the OECD average of 5.7% (Roma Education Fund, 2011). Albania implements a per-pupil spending model, and average per-pupil spending is 8.5% of GDP per capita (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010). The 2014-2020 Strategy on Pre-University Education names the goal of spending 3% of the GDP on Pre-University funding (MoES, 2014a), but education spending fell 3.8% of GDP in 2009 to 2.9% of GDP in 2016 (Psacharopoulos, 2017). An additional 0.9% of GDP was contributed by private spending. Education spending as a percentage of budgetary expenditure has decreased from 11.3% in 2005 to 9.5% in 2015. Preprimary spending in particular has fallen, as a lack of attention from the government toward this

subsector has led to a continuous decrease in the funds allocated toward it (MoES, 2014a). For example, in 2009, preschool spending accounted for 6.9% of total public recurrent educational spending (Roma Education Fund, 2011), 9.2% of which was spent on administration, utilities, maintenance, and pedagogical inputs (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010). In 2015, however, the preschool budget comprised only 4.5% of the total budget of the MoES (UNESCO, 2015). The MoES (2014a) has identified pre-primary as a sector that needs greater funding focus and specifically names increasing preprimary spending as a goal, though it does not name a specific targeted amount.

Responsibility for preschool education is shared among the national, regional, and local levels, as shown in Figure A6, Appendix (Fabbi, 2014). According to Law n. 8653 *For the organization and functioning of local government*, the responsibility for kindergarten infrastructure is a shared responsibility of municipalities or local government units (LGUs) and the central government. Regions, which lack their own revenue sources, receive some financial resources from local governments and conditional grants from the central government, distributed according to population size, geographic indicators, and socioeconomic need (Save the Children, 2012). The grants cover some operational costs, such as water, electricity, and building maintenance, but the funds are not specifically earmarked for education, and many units of local government end up using the grants for other public services. Thus, great variation by locality is visible in educational spending (Roma Education Fund, 2011). Recent improvements have allowed local authorities to use the funds for constructing kindergartens and to compete for more funding on the basis of prioritizing vulnerable groups, such as the Roma (Roma Education Fund, 2011).

Save the Children reports that kindergarten fees are supposed to only be applied for meals in the cases of full-day kindergartens, with the LGUs subsidizing all other expenses and the MoES contributing the payment of teacher salaries (Tahsini, Voko, Duci, & Hallkaj, 2014). Nevertheless, parents must pay fees and often other expenses, which hinder access for many families.

Access & Coverage

Early educational activities are of utmost importance for continued educational attainment, but not all students are exposed to skills they will need for development. UNICEF data shows, for example, that just slightly over 30% of children ages 0-5 in Albania have three or more children's books in the home (Psacharopoulos, 2017). Early childhood educational services must be adequate to provide for children's developmental and learning needs, especially when they are not met at home. According to UNICEF, among children ages 0-3, only 10% have access to organized nursery services (Byrne, 2014). Table 1 shows data for the 2009-2010 school year when only 53.3% of the

Table 1: Educational Coverage by Population and School Type, Ages 3-5, 2009-2010

	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Total
Population	46,344	46,798	47,326	140,468
Students	16,256	24,888	33,771	74,915
Coverage	35.1%	53.2%	71.4%	53.3%
Schools				
Public	15,309	23,780	32,137	71,226
Community (estimate)	300	300	400	1,000
Private	647	808	1,234	2,689
% Public	94.20%	95.50%	95.20%	95.10%

Source: Mingat & Hoxha (2010)

population of kindergarten children (age 3-5) were being covered by early childhood education services. This number is significantly higher among 5-year-olds than among 3-year-olds, despite the importance of the earliest years of learning and the benefits of early intervention (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010).

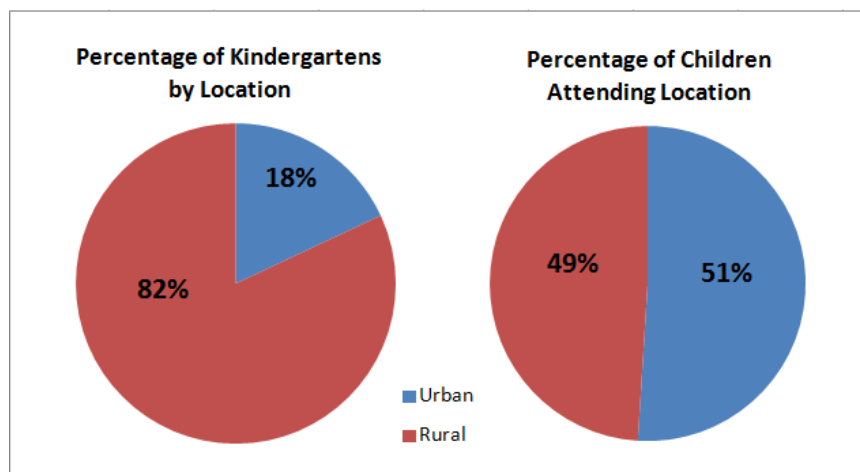
The total number of children enrolled in kindergarten is increasing. Enrolment reached approximately 77,000 children ages 3-5 in 2015 (MoES, 2014a), and national statistics report 81% preprimary enrolment in year before grade 1 of primary school for 2014-2015 (UNESCO, 2017). Gross enrolment in preschool education (ages 3-6), however, remains at only approximately 60% total, much less than the 75% European average and the average for the region. Save the Children Albania reports that this could possibly be explained, at least partially, by Albania's low fertility levels and emigration, but a more likely reason is suggested by Tahsini et al. (2014) as the lack of facilities. UNICEF explains also that only 20% of parents in Albania are well informed of the role and importance of early childhood learning and development for their children (Byrne, 2014). There is very little information available to the public about raising children, no informative courses for young parents, and no system of home visits for at-risk families (Byrne, 2014).

Furthermore, enrolment in towns and villages is actually decreasing. The MoES (2014a) attributes this to a decline in births in rural areas, rural-to-urban migration, and female unemployment which leads mothers to keep their children at home. The World Bank (2015b) claims that the Living Standards Measurement Survey of 2012 showed that parents noted "personal preference" for not enrolling their children in preschool, but this is vague considering the lack of kindergarten facilities. In other words, UNESCO (2017), explains that despite parents' personal preference to not enroll students, the demand for preschool is increasing, even in rural areas, but inadequate infrastructure discourages enrolment and attendance (UNESCO, 2017) (See "Infrastructure & Facilities, p. 13). Thus, while the World Bank notes parents' preference, UNESCO explains that this is likely attributable to a lack of kindergarten facilities. As noted previously, MoES spending on preprimary education has decreased in recent years, pointing to the fact that the government lacks sufficient funds to build more facilities to respond to this increasing demand.

In addition to decreasing rural enrolment, preschool attendance rates are concerning, as UNICEF (2014a) reports that only 40% of preschool-age children actually attend preschool, citing lack of supply as a main reason. This, combined with continued low enrolment, highlights the government's lack of funding to supply a sufficient number of preschool facilities, evidenced by overcrowding in urban areas and schools being located long distances from children's home in rural areas (See "Facilities & Infrastructure, p. 13).

Table 1 illustrates enrolment in public, community, and private schools, with 95% of three- to five-year olds being enrolled in public kindergartens. Community schools are usually established by NGOs to fill gaps in services for remote populations, highlighting further the need for rural facilities. According to the MoES (2014a), private kindergartens account for 8.4% of all kindergartens and 6% of enrolment, which shows an increase from 2009-2010 data in Table 1 and the growing incapacity of the public sector to meet demand. Although the insufficiency of available data on preschools and the lack of appropriate teaching methods are commonly attributed to the high number of private and community facilities, the data above, which still shows a high percentage of public preschools, seems to negate this as an acceptable response.

Figure 5: Percentage of Kindergarten Facilities & Attendance by Location (Urban & Rural)



Source: Hazizaj, Elezi, & Ballo (2014)

Location also is important when considering equity of access. For example, care and development programs for children ages 0-3 are offered in nurseries, which do not exist in Albanian villages and are too few in main cities and towns. However, the location of kindergarten facilities is quite the opposite, with 82% of facilities being located rurally and only 18% in urban areas. This is accompanied by its own challenges, however, because, as visible in Figure 5, the number of urban facilities are inadequate to accommodate the number of students who attend kindergarten in urban areas, which is just over 50% of all enrolled kindergarten students (Hazizaj, Elezi, & Ballo, 2014). Thus, according to UNESCO (2017), most urban kindergartens are overcrowded and operate well beyond their capacity, while in rural areas, kindergartens are small in terms of the number of attending students per school. (For a further discussion of urban and rural infrastructure capacity, see section “Infrastructure & Facilities,” below)

In 2009-2010, 47% of all children ages 3-5 were out of school, and five large urban districts (Durrës, Elbasan, Shkoder, Tirana Bashki and Tirana Rreth) comprised more than half of these out-of-school children ages 3-5 (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010). Competition for spots in these kindergartens then excludes students who can’t afford to pay the fees, often the Roma who are concentrated in cities. As UNESCO (2015) has cited the lack of early childhood development services as one contributing factor in Albanian students’ poor educational attainment, Albania is in great need of establishing more kindergartens and nurseries.

Infrastructure & Facilities

In its 2017 Education Policy Review, UNESCO outlines key priority areas for Albanian education, one of which is increasing the number of educational facilities and improving the quality of existing infrastructure. This becomes increasingly important as the demand for preprimary education, especially in urban areas, continues to grow (MoES, 2014a). For example, 29 nurseries in Tirana accommodate 2,000 children, and other cities such as Fier, Shkoder, and Durrës have only 2-4 nurseries, while smaller towns

have only one with the capacity to accommodate no more than 70 children (Save the Children, 2012; Byrne, 2014). In urban and suburban areas, the shortage of preschool facilities in light of growing demand has led to overcrowding, and thus many students who are enrolled in preschool do not attend (UNESCO, 2017). This reflects the slow response of the public sector to increase their capacity in response to migration from rural to urban areas, which has also contributed to rising demand for preschool services (MoES, 2014a). UNICEF explains that LGUs lack the budget and the know-how to develop more preschool facilities (Byrne, 2014).

In rural areas, student numbers are typically smaller than in urban areas, but not enough preschools are available to ensure access to early childhood education (UNESCO, 2017). Even for those who are enrolled, traveling long distances to reach school buildings is unfeasible and thus many do not attend (UNESCO, 2017). While public funds provide for the transportation of students attending primary schools more than 2 km from their home, no such coverage exists at the preprimary level, further discouraging attendance in rural areas (MoES, 2014a).

In addition to a lack of facilities, Albania's MoES (2014a) expresses concern that the conditions of existing kindergarten facilities do not meet accepted standards, in that the classrooms and furniture are inappropriately designed for young children and that the buildings lack resources to provide engaging educational activities. Save the Children reports that there is no adaptive furnishings for children with disabilities, and there is an absence of books, blocks, and toys designed for child development (Tahsini et al., 2014). Furthermore, most buildings are old and many lack running water (Tahsini et al., 2014). For this reason, recent efforts have focused on improving the quality and conditions of buildings, furniture, and didactic resources in order to be more appropriately designed for young children (MoES, 2014a).

Quality & Curriculum

Ensuring that preprimary education is of high quality is important in the development of Albania's early childhood sector. According to the OECD's 2011 PISA data reported by the World Bank (2015b), 15-year-olds who received at least some preschool education in Albania scored only 18 points higher on the reading assessment of PISA than those who received no preprimary education. Compared to the OECD average, where students who received some preprimary education scored 47 points higher on average on PISA reading assessment than those who received no preprimary education, the difference made by preprimary education in Albania is low.

The country's pupil-to-teacher ratio for preprimary education averages 18.3 (World Bank, n.d.). In nurseries, this ratio is 7:1, and while no official ratio is set by the MoES, directives permit ratios between 10:1 and 25:1, which usually vary depending on if the school is rural or urban (World Bank, 2015b). Interestingly, trends are visible when comparing class sizes in preschools that offer meals with those that do not. Kindergartens that provide meals are only present in urban areas, and rural kindergartens do not offer meals. In urban schools, class size is approximately 25.3 students compared with 20.1 in rural areas, but in urban schools, class size is much larger when meals are offered than when they are not (30.5 and 21.8 respectively) (See Figure A7, Appendix). This most likely was a result of planning for efficiency, as it would be more expensive in these urban schools to provide for both small class sizes and more than one teacher per group (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010). In the districts with highest enrolment, pupil-teacher ratios

show great variance: from 10 to 26 students per teacher in rural areas; from 13 to 33 students per teacher in urban schools that do not offer meals; and from 22 to 37 students per teacher in urban schools with meals (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010).

Because of high pupil-to-teacher ratios, supervision and facilitation of children's activities and play is often difficult and remains superficial (Tahsini et al., 2014). Save the Children notes that this hampers the inclusion of all children the scaffolding and guidance of their learning, and holistic interaction (Tahsini et al., 2014).

Only centers that serve children ages 18-36 months have requirements for when they must remain open, which are set at from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Kindergartens for children ages 3-6 have no specifications provided by Albanian law, other than that should offer either half- or full-day kindergarten. Thus public, private, and community kindergartens are free to operate according to their own set schedules (World Bank, 2015b). The World Bank (2015b) reports that public preschools operate for 30 hours per week on average, while data is not available for private preschools.

The existing pre-primary curriculum is designed for children ages 3-6, encompassing language, math, science, arts, health education, social development, and personal development (Fabbi, 2014). The MoES (2014a) identifies challenges in its coherence with the curriculum of other levels of education. It was not based on nor designed as part of the Pre-University Curriculum Framework, and there is little connection between activities at the preprimary level and the curriculum of primary school (MoES, 2014a). Furthermore, it is content-oriented and emphasizes a targets-based approach rather than a developmental skills-based approach (MoES, 2014a). There is also a lack of clarity between its content and how teachers can apply it through developmentally appropriate, meaningful activities (Fabbi, 2014).

A new curriculum has been designed to be implemented by 2019, aiming to integrate preprimary learning with basic education. The new curriculum will focus on social-emotional, physical, and intellectual development through games and active participation, and it addresses development according to children's ages, environment, and individual needs (MoES, 2014a). However, teachers have little to no guidance on implementing it, and training on the new curriculum has not yet been offered (MoES, 2014a). Save the Children explains that without structured guidance, it is difficult for preschool teachers to make learning relevant to children's home experiences and to differentiate for students with disabilities (Fabbi, 2014).

Quality assessment instruments are also entirely missing in the preschool sector (MoES, 2014a). In nursery schools, whose administration is the responsibility of Local Government Units (LGUs), standards are seldom applied. Appropriate toys, learning materials, and play space are often missing, the youngest children (ages 0-2) are kept inside, and staff lack knowledge about holistic child development, differentiation, and special educational needs (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010). The LGUs do not have professional staff to offer technical support, training, or monitoring. Current reforms call for the State Education Inspectorate to monitor the achievement of standards and the quality of preprimary education, but these mechanisms still do not exist (Tahsini et al., 2014).

Disparities between Rich and Poor

The gap between the rich and the poor in Albania is especially noticeable in early childhood development, and poverty plays an important role in determining enrolment and attendance at the preschool level. Among families from the country's poorest quintile, only approximately 16% provide learning materials for young children at home, but this number rises to 52% among families in the wealthiest quintile (Tahsini et al., 2014). Save the Children notes that this gap is also prevalent in parents' support for learning. Among the poorest quintile, 68% of parents support children's learning compared to 96% of parents in the wealthiest quintile. Of children enrolled in kindergarten, children from the poorest quintile have attendance rates of only 25% compared to 60% attendance rates of children from the richest quintile (Fabbi, 2014).

Despite Law n. 8653/2001 which was supposed to place the responsibility of covering all kindergarten fees, besides meals, on the LGUs (Tahsini et al., 2014), this is not put into practice, and families are still expected to pay for preschool services, including kindergarten tuition (Tahsini et al., 2014). The fee for nurseries is between 2,500 and 3,500 ALL (around 22-30 USD) per month, making these services inaccessible to poor and Roma families who often cannot afford these fees. Save the Children explains that even low-income families who receive social assistance allowances cannot afford to send their children to school and that neither the local nor central government offers financial support or incentives for preprimary school (Tahsini et al., 2014). This again highlights the government's inability to financially fund the construction of preschool facilities and the delivery of preschool services, which may offer one explanation for this disparity in enrolment between the wealthy and the poor.

Inclusion

Exclusion is visible in almost all social sectors in Albania and includes economic, ethnic, and gender disparities and differences between rural and urban populations. In preschool education in Albania, however, enrolment by gender is not a significant concern, as it is adequately balanced (See Figure A5, Appendix). As previously mentioned, the MoES (2014b) identified the goal that by 2018, 95% of children ages 5-6 will receive preprimary education (i.e., the last year of kindergarten). In this goal, it explicitly named including all vulnerable groups, including Roma and Egyptian children, other minorities, and those with disabilities, in all levels of education, especially preschool and preprimary reception classes (MoES, 2014b). Nonetheless, significant barriers to the inclusion of these marginalized groups remain.

Ethnic minorities, namely the Roma, have benefited the least from social development policies, and clear indicators for identifying their vulnerabilities do not exist (Save the Children, 2012). In 2007, UNICEF data showed that 62% of Roma ages 3-16 did not attend kindergarten or school and that a participation rate of only 13.5% existed among children ages 3-5 (Roma Education Fund, 2011). The children who are not enrolled in kindergarten are predominantly Roma, who, according to the World Bank (2015a), need early childhood services the most. Roma children who do not possess birth certificates, a frequent occurrence in their communities, were often denied the right to enroll in education. In 2010, MoES issued an official guideline, however, that granted all Roma children the right to enroll (Save the Children, 2012). Moreover, Fabbi, (2014) found that parents of Roma children have poor cooperation with local schools and face discrimination from other parents, in addition to lacking the language skills required to

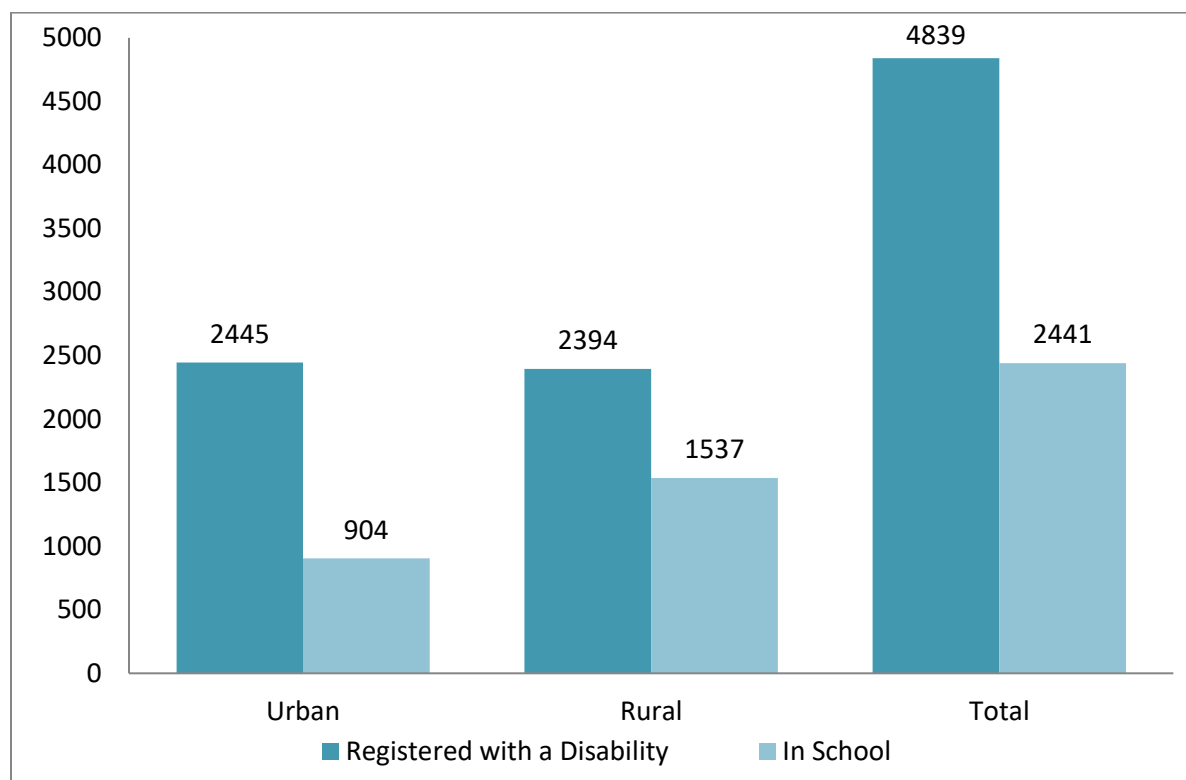
complete registration paperwork. Save the Children also names lack of adequate clothing, poor nutrition, internal migrations, and weak comprehension of Albania as further reasons why Roma access to early childhood education is low (Fabbi, 2014).

While the Roma Education Fund (2011) named an increase in the number of preschool facilities in areas heavily populated by Roma as a strength, the existing facilities are still insufficient to supply preprimary services adequately in areas of high Roma populations. There is also a lack of unified assessment for the quality of preschool services delivered at existing facilities to Roma children (Roma Education Fund, 2011).

The Roma Education Fund (2011) provided funding for a project from 2006-2008 that aimed to increase enrolment among Roma populations in all levels of education. One part of this project included issuing birth certificates to 130 newborn Roma and informing over 1,000 Roma adults of the importance of birth registration. The project also led to an increase of 150 Roma students attending preschool institutions and over 500 Roma families informed about the importance of preschool and primary education (Roma Education Fund, 2011). According to the MoES, Roma enrolment in public kindergartens in 2010-2011 rose to 516 children (Roma Education Fund, 2011). Hazizaj et al. (2014) also says that Roma attendance is growing, especially with some governmental financial assistance, and soared by two thirds between 2011 and 2014 (Hazizaj et al., 2014).

Another marginalized group in Albanian education is students with disabilities. While the newly designed curriculum to be implemented in 2019 addresses for the first time the needs of students with disabilities in the general classroom, UNESCO (2017) states that school buildings and classrooms are designed in a way that makes them inaccessible to students with disabilities of all types. Thus, students with disabilities remain in special schools, and with the current infrastructure not designed to accommodate these students, the government has instead committed to increasing the number of special facilities (UNESCO, 2017). In its most recent Strategy on Pre-University Education, the MoES (2014b) named the goal that the number of special institutions for students with disabilities will have increased from its 2013 number of 704 to 900 by 2020.

In Albania, data for children with disabilities only represents those receiving disability allowances, who include only children with moderate or severe disabilities. Additionally, families are only entitled to these allowances for one child, so the number of children with disabilities is actually much higher than reported (Shanaj, Hallkaj, & Cuninghame, 2015). Lack of reliable data on children with disabilities makes it difficult to be certain of how many are out of school. It is estimated that there are 120,000 children with disabilities in Albania of whom slightly over 2,000 are enrolled in basic education (Fabbi, 2014). Approximately 740 of these students attend special schools. Fabbi (2014) explains that it is even more difficult to estimate the number of children with disabilities who are enrolled in preschool, but given that educators do not place high importance on early intervention, it is likely that their enrolment is much lower in preschool. The data presented in Table A2 (Appendix) and Figure 6 is provided by State Social Services rather than the MoES, which suggests that the number of students with disabilities benefitting from public education is likely much lower (UNICEF, 2014b).

Figure 6: Number of Children Ages 0-6 Registered with a Disability and Attending School

Source: Shanaj et al. (2015)

While reported numbers show that 40% of students with disabilities are excluded from basic education, Figure 6 reveals that this percentage rises to 50% of all students ages 0-6 (Shanaj et al., 2015). This means that only half of the students ages 0-6 who are registered with a disability are attending preschool, including general classrooms and special schools. This number is approximately 64% in rural areas and 37% in urban areas (Figure 6) (UNICEF, 2014b). UNICEF offers one possible explanation for the surprisingly higher rates of access among students with disabilities in rural areas based on interviews with key informants and inclusive education specialists in Albania. They explained to UNICEF that although significant barriers exist in rural areas, the criteria applied for registering students with disabilities for school are more tolerant in rural schools, while children with disabilities are turned away from urban schools more frequently (UNICEF, 2014b).

This does not mean that barriers to quality education for students with disabilities in rural areas should be overlooked. These include distance from special institutions, physical conditions of the roads students must travel to reach school, the inability of general schools to meet students' special needs, teachers' poor training, lack of funding, and multi-grade teaching (Shanaj et al., 2015). Many of these barriers also exist in cities, especially poor teacher training and a lack of adequate facilities. Furthermore, Save the Children notes that while assistant teachers could facilitate inclusion, there remains a great, unfulfilled need for these assistants at the preschool level and beyond (Tahsini et al., 2014).

Tahsini et al. (2014) notes that a significant impediment to inclusion within the classroom is the lack of teachers' knowledge in creating and working according to an individualized plan for children with special needs. UNICEF also notes that children with disabilities who attend general schools frequently experience mockery and discrimination, and that families often fear stigmatization, which causes some to not access the already limited services (Shanaj et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2014b). Thus, according to Tahsini et al. (2014), the need remains to increase communication between teachers and parents and the full involvement of parents in their children's education, in addition to the already stated need to improve teachers' knowledge of inclusive practices. Similarly, Save the Children calls highlights the lack of a flexible and thorough system for assessing children's specific needs and progress, not only in learning but especially in social and emotional development at the preprimary level (Tahsini et al., 2014).

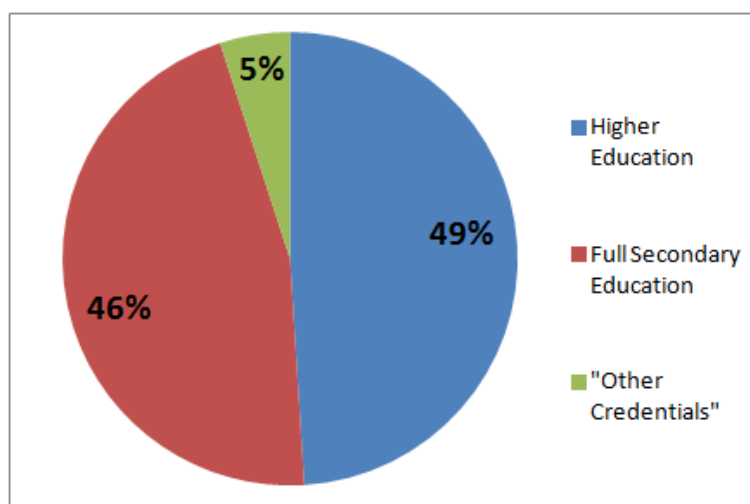
Teachers and Professional Training

Of all of Albania's preschool teachers, 100% are female, compared to 84% in primary school and 66% in lower secondary school. Public preschool facilities are staffed with three categories of teachers, as seen in Figure 7. Those with higher education, 49% of the total in 2010, most often have received four years of pedagogical training through education faculties in universities, while those in the Full Secondary Education category often receive pedagogical training for preschool teaching. More

recently, three-year programs have been implemented as an alternative option for aspiring preschool teachers, and current recruitment focuses almost entirely on those who have completed higher education. During pre-service training, however, there is no public authority responsible for overseeing practicum experiences, and there is no required field work for pre-service teachers (Tahsini et al., 2014). Nonetheless, the 2014 World Bank Report on Early Childhood in Albania identified a growing level of training for pre-service preschool teachers, accompanied by increasing regular, in-service training (Tahsini et al., 2014). Teachers now must hold a bachelor's degree and renew their licenses each year by passing an exam and obtaining three credits of continuing education (Fabbi, 2014). If teachers fail the exam or receive low scores for five years, their licenses are revoked, but limited attention is given to upholding this standard (Tahsini et al., 2014).

According to Tahsini et al. (2014), these recent changes in training and qualification requirements have led to an increase in the number of qualified teachers (See Figure A8, Appendix). A majority of preprimary teachers meet the requirements set by the MoES, and the number is growing. In 2014, for example, approximately 60% of public preschool teachers and 78% of private preschool teachers had a

Figure 7: Percentage of Preschool Teachers by Educational Attainment



Source: Mingat & Hoxha (2010)

bachelor's degree (Tahsini et al., 2014). That year, the MoES (2014) set forth the goal that by 2020, 100% of preschool teachers will have appropriate qualifications. In 2015, this number of qualified preschool teachers rose to approximately 78% of all preschool teachers and continues to grow (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, n.d.) in light of these reforms.

Despite significant progress, the quality of staff in nurseries for children ages 0-3 remains poor. Additionally, training for inclusive education and in inclusive practices is lacking, leading to teachers who are not prepared to design and implement individualized education plans for students with disabilities (Tahsini et al., 2014). According to Mingat & Hoxha, (2010), no factual evidence exists to make the case that preschool teachers with higher education qualifications are better teachers than those without, in terms of how much students at that level learn. It is, however, close to 20% more costly to hire teachers with higher education degrees (Mingat & Hoxha, 2010).

DONOR INVOLVEMENT

Albania joined the World Bank Group in 1991, receiving a total of approximately \$1.4 billion between 1991 and 2011. Because of economic and social improvements, the country transitioned in 2009 from an International Development Association (IDA) grantee to borrowing from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). Total ODA commitments in 2015 amounted to 3% of GNI (OECD, 2017), and net ODA and per capita aid have decreased in recent years. Albania's high public debt of more than 70% of GDP after 2013 highlights the urgency with which the country has needed to reform its public financial management system (EC, 2014).

According to the EC (2014), over 40 bilateral and multilateral donors support Albania's efforts toward development and EU integration. The EC (2014) explains that assistance is provided mostly through twinning projects (which provide support in developing public administration capacities), technical assistance, supplies, and direct grants to relevant authorities. If conditions for a sector approach outlined in the NSDI 2014-2020 are met, sector budget support will be the preferred type of funding (EC, 2014).

Collaboration among donors has been essential, especially noted by the Integrated Planning System (IPS) project, managed by the World Bank and financially supported by Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, the UK, and the EC. Through this project, Albania improved its budgeting system, results-based monitoring capacities, and the functioning of its ministries, along with strengthening donor coordination (World Bank, 2012). The project lasted from 2005 until 2012, during which the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination (DSDC) was established, allowing Albania to improve alignment between donor assistance and national policies. The second phase, IPSII, which started in 2013, was supported by the World Bank and three donor governments: Austria, Switzerland, and Sweden (World Bank, 2012).

Donor coordination is now the responsibility of the Deputy Prime Minister, assisted by the Department of Development Programming, Financing, and Foreign Aid. Medium term budget programs include donor-funded implementation, according to the funding framework outlined in the NSDI. Annual donor-government round tables occur for improving aid harmonization (EC, 2014). According to Open Aid, Albania has a well-developed and government-led system of donor coordination, in addition to a developing Fast Track Initiative of the Division of Labor, which is coordinated by the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination. According to OECD (2017), the top ten donors of gross ODA for Albania in the year 2015 were the EU, Germany, Turkey, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, the U.S., the IDA, Austria, and Sweden. Additionally, international organizations are active in giving aid, including the World Bank, OSCE, the Council of Europe, and UN agencies.

With the goal of EU integration in mind, donor efforts are particularly aimed at boosting growth, creating jobs, implementing sustainable development initiatives, and improving climate policy (EC, 2014). This focus is visible in Figure A9 (Appendix), as the 2015 net ODA (including flows from DAC countries, non-DAC countries, and multilateral organizations) which totaled 334 million USD, was focused especially on social and economic infrastructure (OECD, 2017). Of the 44% of bilateral, sector-specified aid that went to Social Infrastructure and Services, 15% of this sector's aid, or approximately 7% of total bilateral aid, funded education (See Figure 8, Appendix). Aid Data (n.d.) shows that 373.4 million USD

from all donors has been used to fund inclusive, quality education between 2007 and 2013. But the EC (2014) explains that education aid has been largely for programs in vocational education and training, the construction of basic education facilities, providing higher education and scholarships, developing the country's use of information and communication technology, and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, usually without a specified subsector.

According to the Global Partnership for Education (2017), Albania has not received any GPE grants, but GPE did work with Albanian government officials to review the 2004-2015 National Education Strategy. UNICEF (2015) explains that while some international and local NGOs provide social assistance services for children, these projects last for a limited time, and continuity of service delivery is not guaranteed.

Donor Matrix

The following matrix includes some of the largest projects funding preschool education, listed chronologically. Many education projects in recent years funded basic education without mentioning early childhood. The largest project found was that of 75 million USD multilateral World Bank project called Education Excellence and Equity, aimed at improving quality learning, increasing secondary enrolment, especially for the poor, and initiating higher education reform. As with the majority of education funding, it did not mention preprimary education (World Bank, 2017).

Donor	Project/Program	Duration	Funding Amount(USD)	Information on Type of Assistance
Norway	Save the Children Program Implementation	2007	441,000	Project-based funding for program implementation
Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (IDC)	Social Integration for the Promotion of Young Children and Youth At-Risk Aims to promote educational opportunities from preschool to secondary...	2008-2012	12,500	Project-based, bilateral ODA
IDC	Early diagnosis and social integration of deaf children - Although the project funding includes diagnosis procedures, it also focuses on early development and social integration through inclusive education of deaf children.	2008-2013	590,000	Project-based, bilateral ODA; aid grant
IDC	Preschool "Don Marino Pigozzi"	2012-2015	107,000	Project-based, bilateral ODA
UNICEF	Early Learning	2009	19,300	Project-based; multilateral ODA grant

UNICEF	Community Based Early Childhood Care and Education	2013	1,000	Project-based funding; multilateral
UNICEF	Child Care Reform and Protection Mechanisms (including provisions for early childhood care)	2013	54,000	Project-based funding; multilateral
European Communities	Increasing the Wellbeing of Preschool Children by Promoting Socio-Emotional Values	2013	93,000	Project-based funding; multilateral
IDC	Renovation of a Kindergarten	2013	89,000	Project-based, bilateral ODA; aid grant
IDC	Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs: Project focused on access to preprimary and primary school, particularly aiming to improve the quality of inclusive education for children with special needs	2013-2015	784,000	Project-based, bilateral ODA; aid grant
IDC	Renovation of a Kindergarten in Korca, Albania	2014	76,000	Project-based, bilateral ODA; aid grant
UNICEF	Early Childhood as a Path Toward Social Inclusion: Programming	2015	3,600	Project-based aid; multilateral
UNICEF	Early Childhood as a Path Toward Social Inclusion: Infrastructure & Services	2015	83,000	Project-based, multilateral aid
IDC	Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Albania: This project aims to contribute to the inclusion of children with disabilities and other learning difficulties in school and pre-school age in 6 Albanian regions through public awareness, teacher training, and institutional collaboration	2015	287,000	Project-based, bilateral aid
IDC	Early Intervention Center, Tirana	2015-2016	6,700	Core support to NGOs, other private bodies, PPPs, and research institutes

Source: Open Aid Italy (n.d.); Open Aid Sweden (n.d.); OECD (2017); Center for Public Information Issues, (n.d.); World Bank (2017)

CONCLUSION

This review has identified many challenges that continue to face the preprimary subsector of Albania. From the data presented here, the main challenges that emerge include: funding preprimary services and the construction of facilities; increasing access for all students and equity for those from marginalized populations, including minorities, Albania's poor, and children with disabilities; and increasing the quality and monitoring of preprimary services. Similar problem can be seen in other Balkan states, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), where enrolment is even lower. The 2011-2012 BiH's preschool participation (ages 3-6) was 13.1% (Camović & Hodžić, 2017), compared to Albania's 2015 figure of 60%. In the mandatory preprimary year, participation was 46% of children ages 5-6 (UNICEF, 2014c), compared to Albania's 81% in 2015. Like in Albania, marginalized groups include children from poor families (with a participation rate of only 2% among BiH's poorest quintile) and Roma (with a participation rate of only 1.5%) (UNICEF, 2014c).

The preschool sub-sectors of Albania and BiH face similar obstacles. Lack of infrastructure has been noted as one of Albania's main challenges, as is true also for BiH. While preschool in BiH saw a 42% enrolment increase from 2004 to 2015, the same period also saw a 60% spike in the number of children turned away due to lack of space (Camović & Hodžić, 2017). This problem mirrors that in Albania in that urban preschools in BiH experience severe overcrowding with long waiting lists, while rural kindergartens are operating at only one third of their capacity in terms of student enrolment (Camović & Hodžić, 2017). From this comparison, it appears that more attention must be given to areas where services are inadequate to meet demand, such as in overcrowded urban and underserved rural areas.

To further increase enrolment in preschool services, Albania has set the goal to provide a compulsory preprimary year by 2018, but it has not yet been implemented. Similarly, BiH mandated a preprimary year in 2007. However, similar to how education is decentralized in Albania, it is the responsibility of each canton in BiH. As not all cantons have endorsed the preprimary year, great variation in its enactment is seen throughout BiH (Camović & Hodžić, 2017). The IEA (2016) states that if all children from low-socioeconomic families were enrolled in high quality, early childhood education, the gap in achievement between low and high income groups could close by as much as 20-50% (IEA, 2016). They offer this consideration in light of policies in Denmark and Estonia, however, where universal preprimary education is mandatory and publicly funded, and where expenditure for infrastructure, services, and quality development has increased. These factors have led to higher numbers of young children enrolled across socioeconomic levels. As noted throughout the review, however, this is not the case in Albania where preprimary funding has decreased in recent years. Similarly, UNICEF (2014c) notes a lack of budgetary prioritization for preschool services in BiH, and in both countries, school fees continue to preclude universal enrolment. Thus, in considering the benefits of enrolling all children in Albania, alternative funding models to the ones that exist must be considered, as very little funding is allocated for preprimary education and parents are still responsible for school fees.

In Albania, a contradiction emerges in that the MoES attributes low enrolment, at least partially, to parents' unwillingness to send young children to school, while UNICEF clearly explains that insufficient funds impede the construction of adequate facilities (Byrne, 2014). As the MoES (2014a) has set the goal of increasing the number of rural and urban kindergartens by 2020, the trend of decreasing preprimary

spending cannot continue. As the Roma Education Fund (2011) explains, educational grants from the central government to LGUs are not currently earmarked for education. Given that LGUs lack not only the budget but also the knowledge to increase quality preprimary services (Byrne, 2014), LGUs could benefit from both increased earmarked funding as well as standards-based guidance for construction of adequate and appropriate facilities and the delivery of quality services. With very little aid directed explicitly to preprimary funding, external aid to the preprimary sector must be given adequate attention.

In Albania, fewer than 50% of students ages 0-6 with disabilities attend preschool. Despite setting the goal of inclusion, it recently planned to construct more special institutions (MoES, 2014b). It is thus evident that a lack of attention is given to making existing infrastructure accessible for all children and to constructing new, inclusive facilities. Similarly, insufficient attention has been paid to the needs of Roma and other minorities, whose preprimary enrolment rates remain at only 13.5% (Roma Education Fund, 2011). Hazizaj et al. (2014) has credited recent increases in Roma attendance to programs facilitating communication with Roma families and governmental financial assistance, which shows that these efforts must be continued and improved if inclusion of minorities is to increase. UNICEF, however, acknowledges the continued lack of home-visits, facilitated registration, and communication with minority parents (Byrne, 2014), highlighting an area for potential improvement, similar to strides made in BiH where the number of home visits to vulnerable families is leading to increased enrolment, albeit slowly (UNICEF, 2014c).

One area that has received significant attention is teacher training, leading to a larger number of qualified, preprimary teachers (Tahsini et al., 2014). However, the institution of a new curriculum has been accompanied by little focus on teacher training for implementation. In 2008, the OECD named the Swedish Educare preschool system as a role model for its clear curricular objectives, related activities, and explicit teacher guidelines. While Albanian teacher training is improving and teachers in Sweden are well-qualified, it must be noted that in Sweden, preschool receives stable government funding (OECD, 2008). With little budgetary consideration in Albania, developing pre-service training and professional development on curriculum implementation remains a challenge. So too does increasing training for teachers to use developmentally appropriate and inclusive teaching methods (Tahsini et al., 2014).

Ensuring quality has also been an area of little attention in Albania. While current reforms call for the State Education Inspectorate to monitor the achievement of standards and the quality of preprimary education, these mechanisms still do not exist (Tahsini et al., 2014). Developing a system of standards-based quality assessment with staff from the LGUs offering technical support, training, and monitoring has been proposed but received no further attention (Tahsini et al., 2014). The OECD (2008) offers the model of Swedish preschool quality monitoring. Similar to Albania and BiH, the Swedish system is decentralized, but resources are allocated directly to schools, granting principals the freedom to use funds as needed, such as for monitoring quality. In Albania, grants are given to the LGUs, and principals cannot decide at the school level how to use the funds. While Swedish schools have used monitoring to improve quality by contextualizing learning in terms of development, future learning (in primary school), the school environment, and the approach of staff, many of these elements are missing in Albania. Little staff support is given, the environments, as noted, are inappropriately designed for children, and the curriculum continues to lack coherence with future learning goals. Thus, if quality monitoring is to be improved, so too must be these elements of preschool in Albania.

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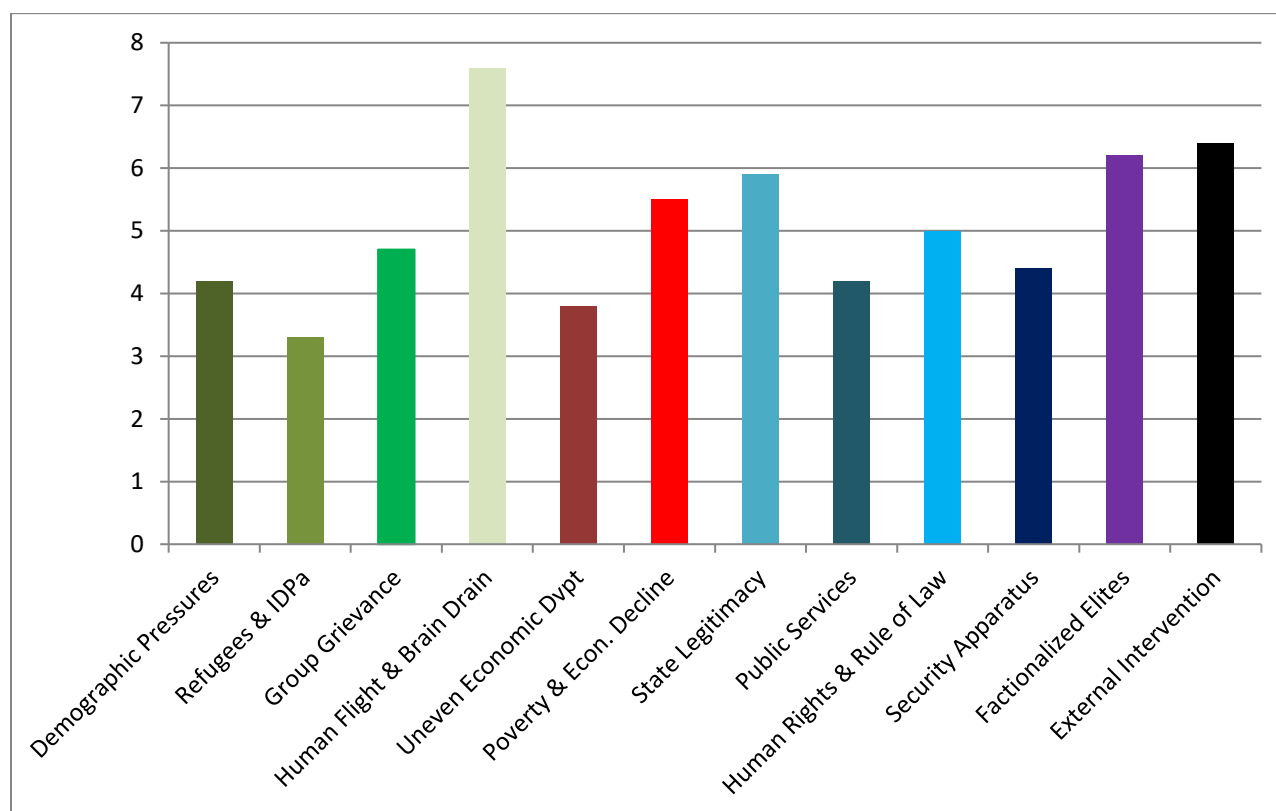
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Appendix

Figure A1: International Fund for Peace Fragility Index, 2016, Albania

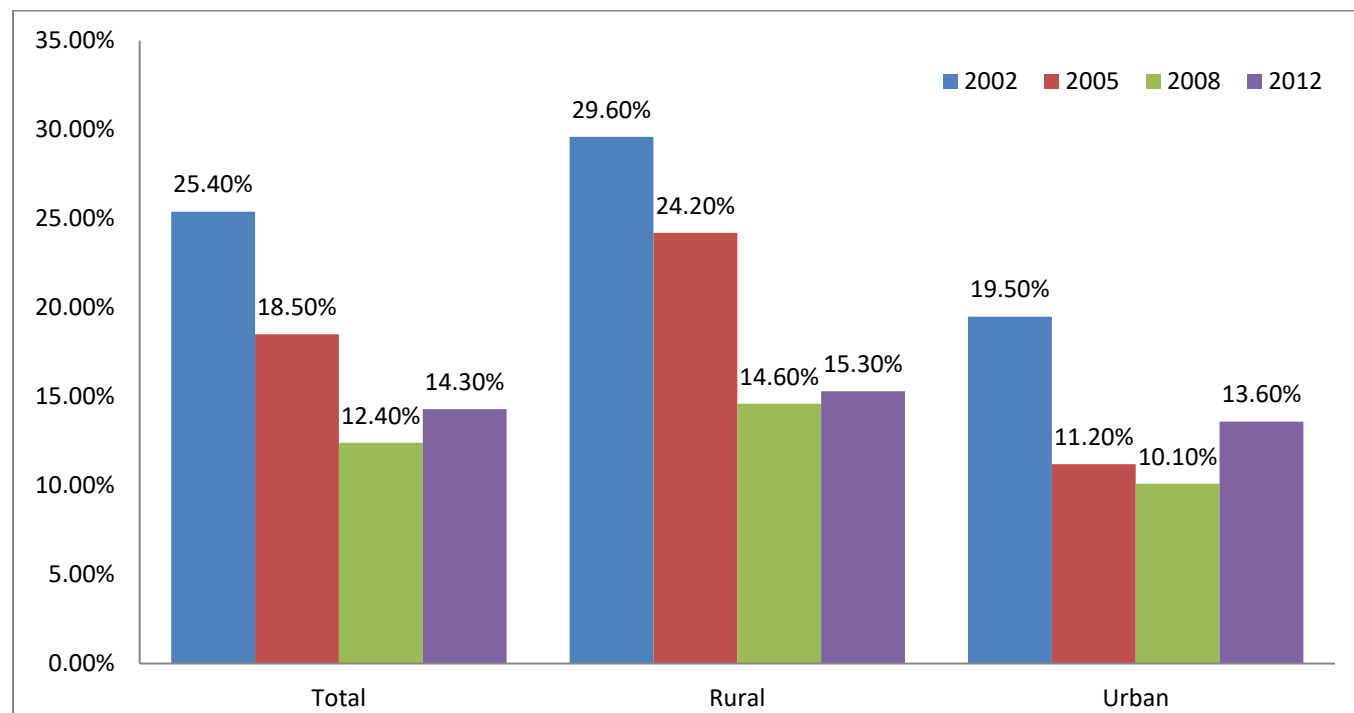


Source: International Fund for Peace, 2016

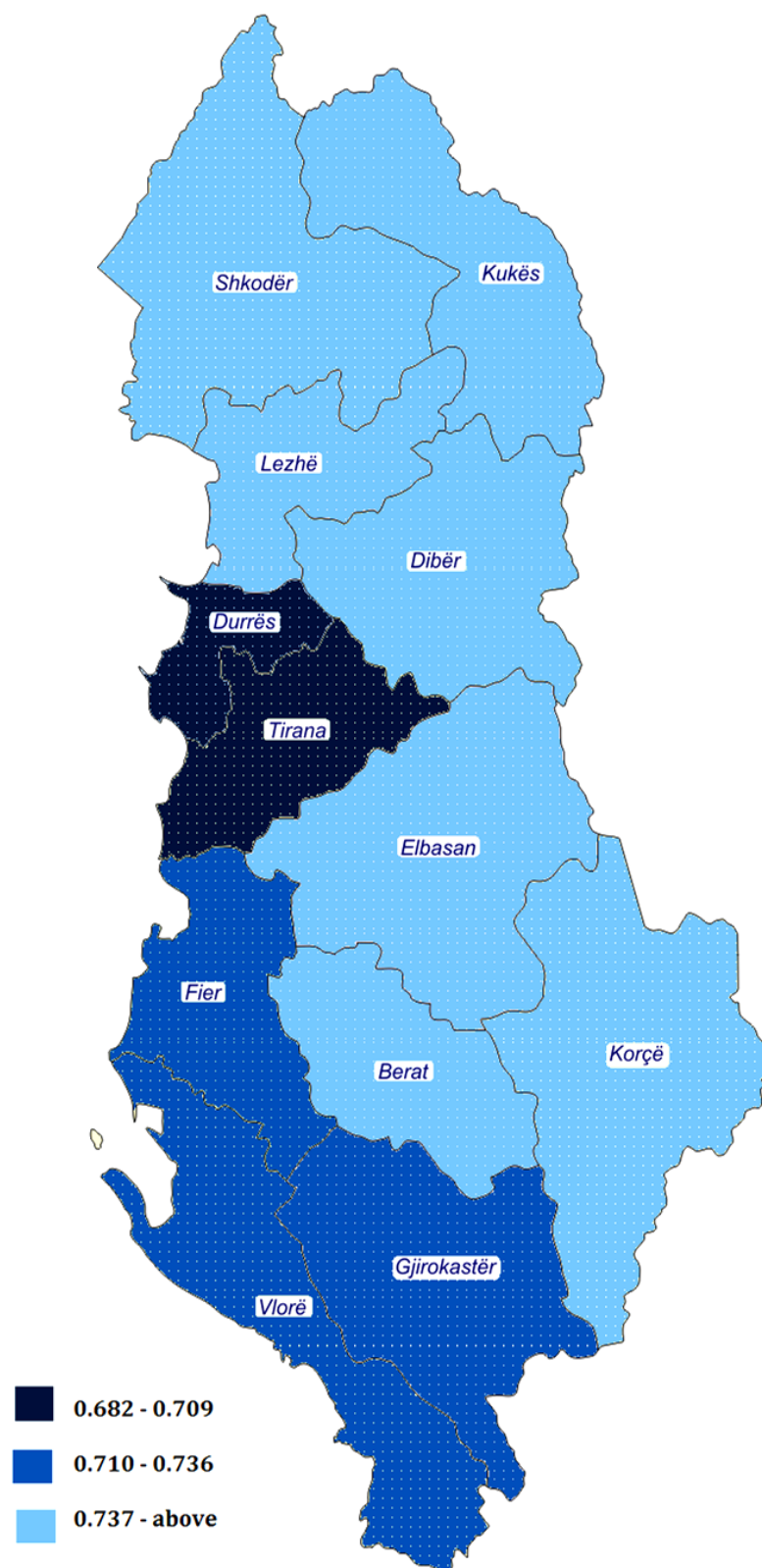
Table A1: GDP and GNI trends, 2010-2015

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Population (millions)	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9
GDP (current US\$, billions)	11.9	12.9	12.3	12.8	13.2	11.4
GDP Growth (annual %)	3.7	2.6	1.4	1.1	1.8	2.8
GDP per capita (current US\$)	4094.4	4437.8	4247.8	4412.3	4568.6	3945.2
GNI (current US\$, billions)	12.7	12.8	12.7	13.0	12.8	12.4
GNI per capita (current US\$)	4360.0	4390.0	4360.0	4480.0	4450.0	4300.0

Source: World Bank, n.d.

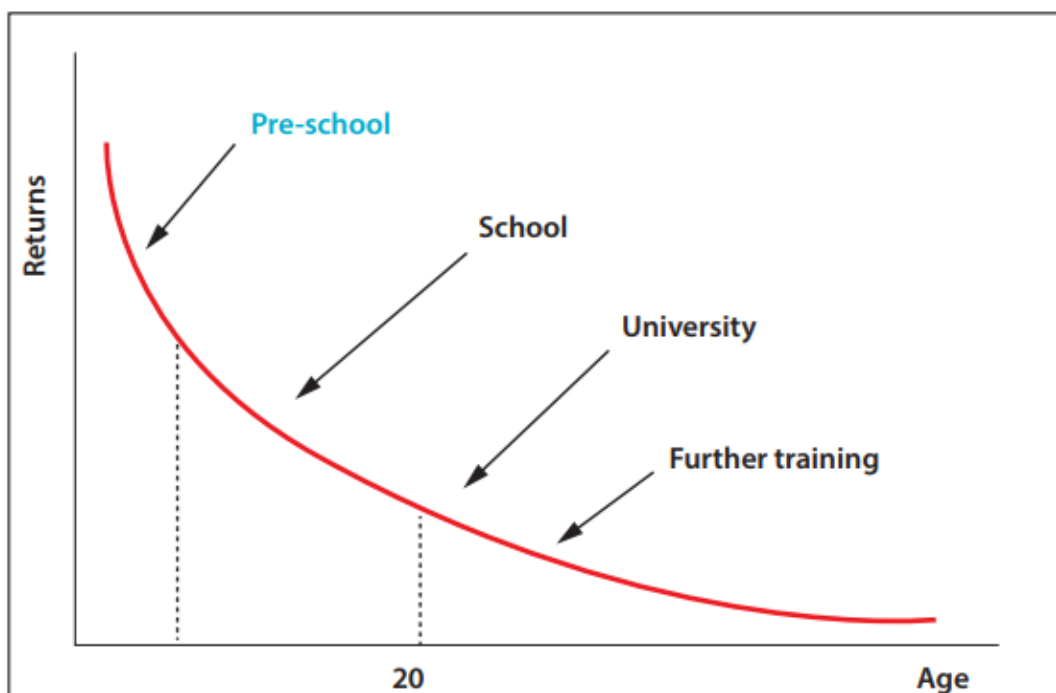
Figure A2: Poverty headcount ratios by year and location (urban and rural)

Source: World Bank, n.d.

Figure A3: HDI in Albania by prefecture, 2013

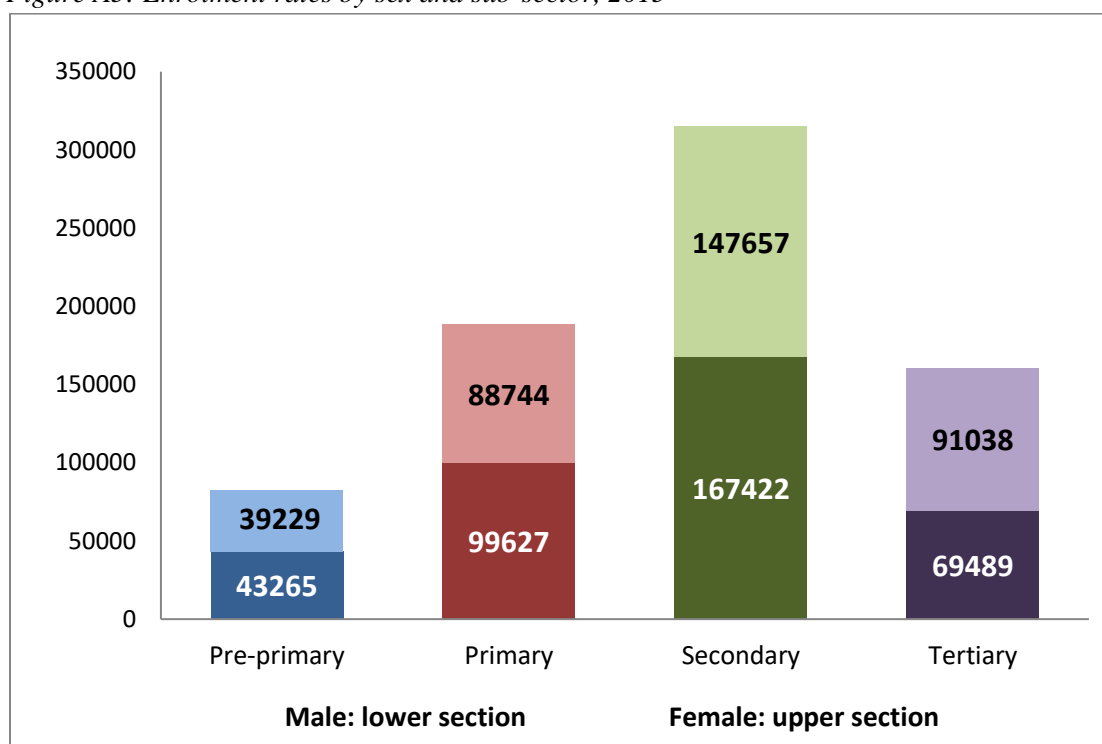
Source: UNDP, 2016

Figure A4: Social returns from investment by educational level

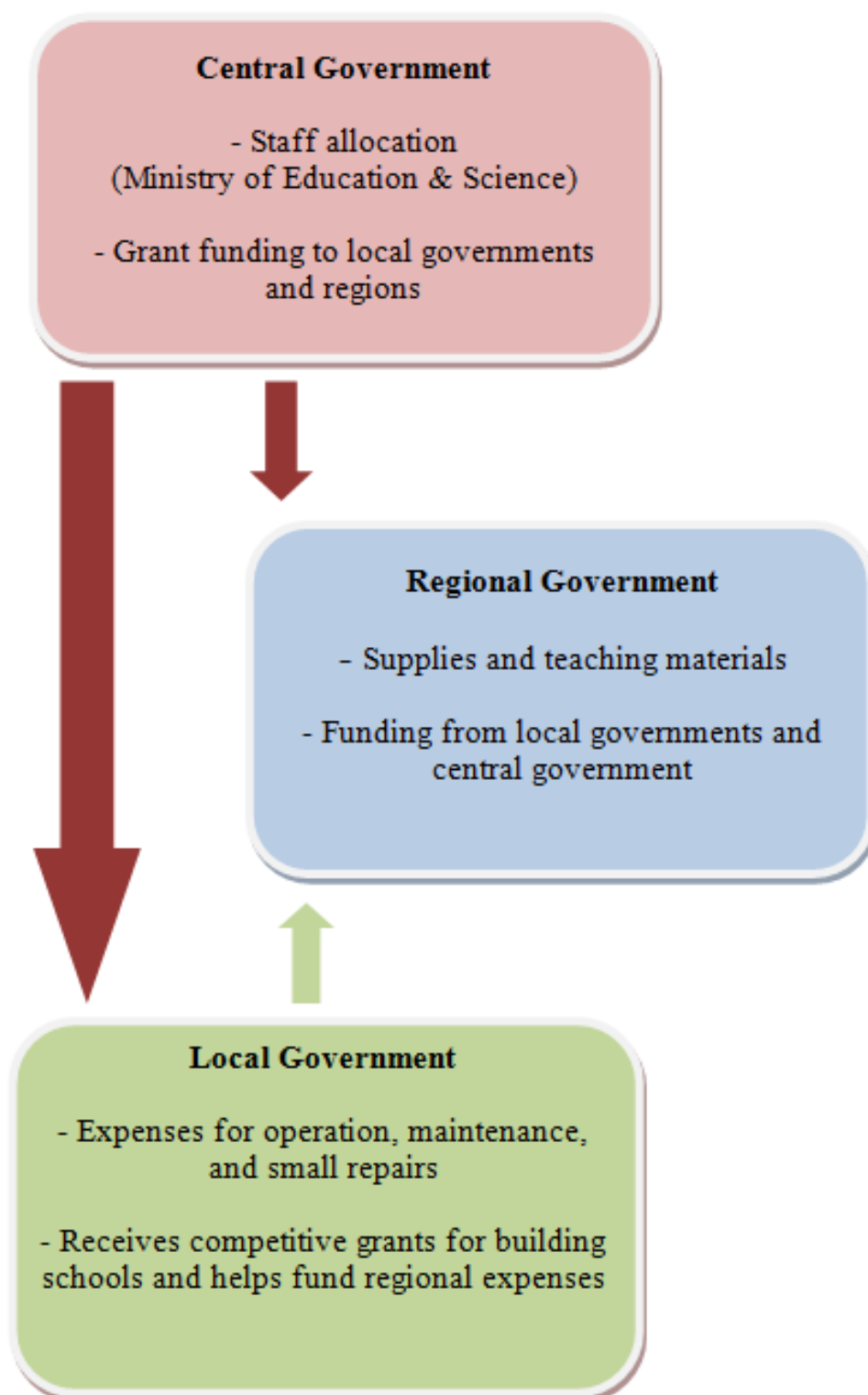


Source: Psacharopoulos, 2017

Figure A5: Enrolment rates by sex and sub-sector, 2015

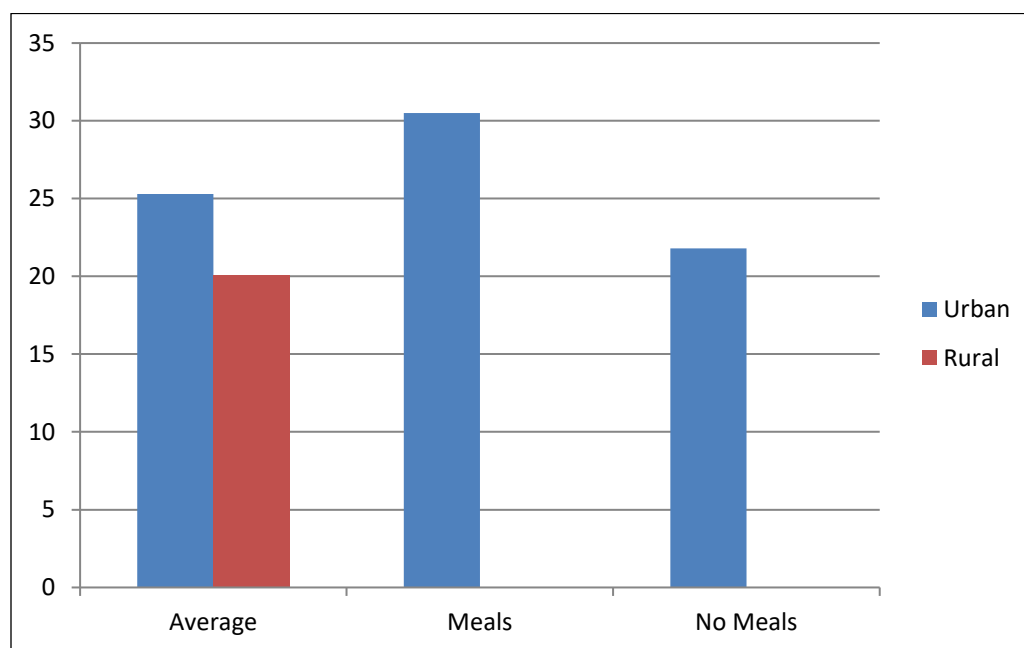


Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, n.d.

Figure A6: Governmental responsibilities in preschool education by level

Source: Roma Education Fund, 2011

Figure A7: Class size by location (urban and rural) and meals offered/not offered



Source: Mingat & Hoxha, 2010

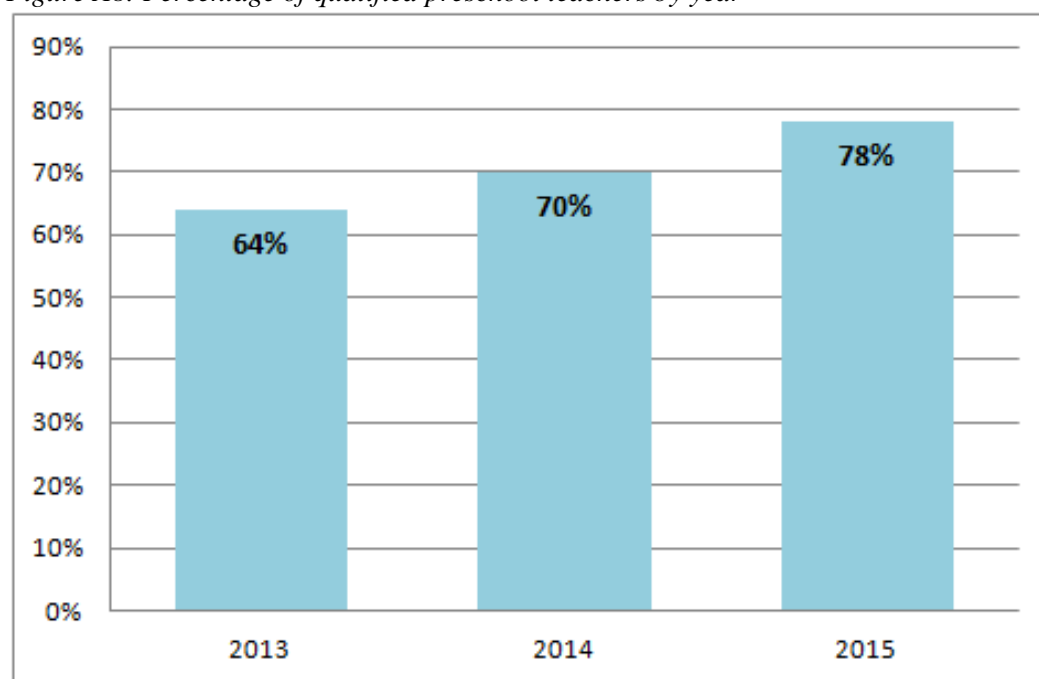
Table A2: Number of students registered for disability allowances attending school by urban/rural and education level

	Ages 0-6 (Preschool)		Ages 6-15 (Basic Education)		Ages 15-18 (Secondary)	
Urban	Total	Females	Total	Female	Total	Female
Registered for Disability Allowance	2445	1268	4659	2000	2238	993
In School	904	*not available	2141	*not available	891	*not available
Rural	Total	Females	Total	Female	Total	Female
Registered for Disability Allowance	2394	1187	4094	1833	1971	798
In School	1537	*not available	3135	*not available	845	*not available
Total	Total	Females	Total	Female	Total	Female
Registered for Disability Allowance	4839	2455	8753	3833	4209	1791
In School	2441	*not available	5276	*not available	1736	*not available

Source: Shanaj et al. 2015

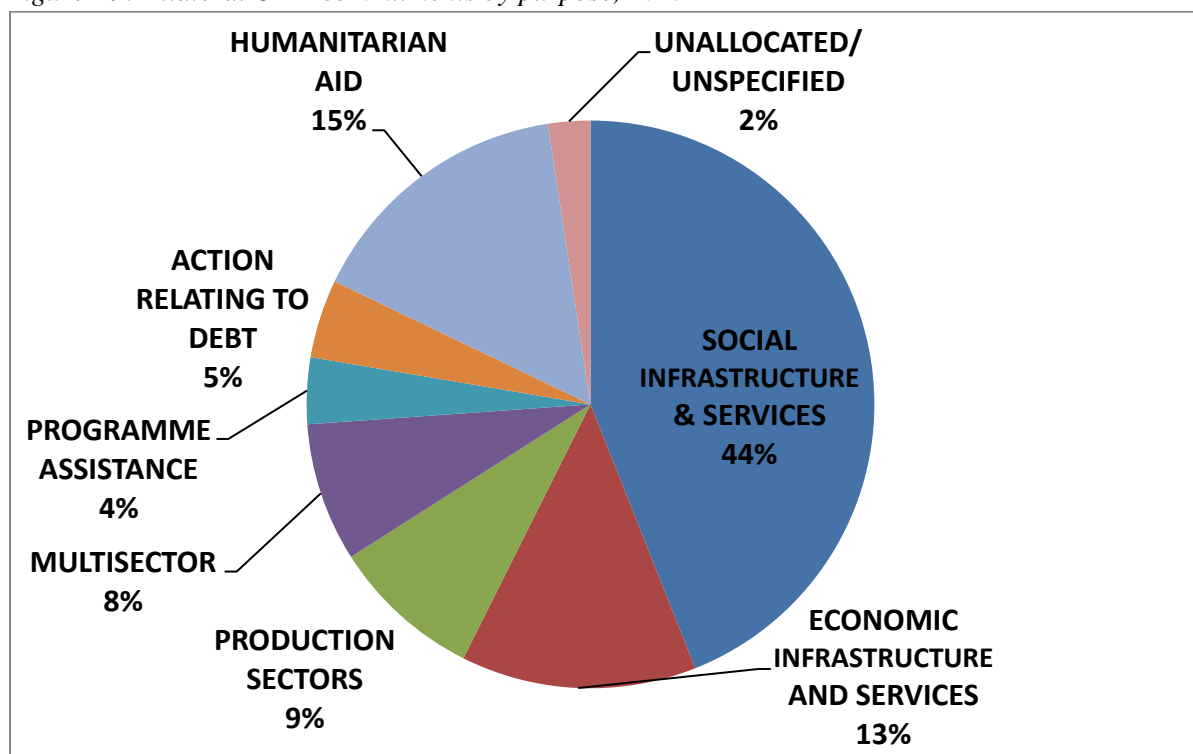
*Data on the number of children with disabilities in schools is not disaggregated by sex.

Figure A8: Percentage of qualified preschool teachers by year



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, n.d.

Figure A9: Bilateral ODA commitments by purpose, 2015



Source: OECD, n.d.