

Appraisal of the Pre-University Education Strategy 2014-2020

FINAL REPORT

UNICEF Albania support to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth
in conducting an appraisal of the current Strategy of Pre-University
Education 2014-2020

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ACRONYMS

AADF	American–Albanian Development Fund
AQAPUE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
CES	Centre for Educational Services
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
ECA	Europe and Central Asia
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ERP	Economic Reform Programme 2018-2020
EU	European Union
GD PUE	General Directorate for Pre-University Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HRMS	Human Resources Management Software
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDE	Institute for Development of Education
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
JASR	Joint Annual Sector Review
LEO	Local Education Office
MoESY	Ministry of Education Youth and Sports
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSDI II	National Strategy for Development and Integration
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional Development
POS	Programme for Official Statistics
PUE	Pre-University Education
PUEDS	Pre-University Education Development Strategy
RED	Regional Education Directorate
SEI	State Education Inspectorate
TDMS	Teacher Development Management System
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
VET	Vocational Education and Training
PUES	Pre-University Education System

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Government of the Republic of Albania officially approved the Pre-University Education Strategy (PUEDS) in January 2016. The development of the Strategy followed the priorities set in the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2015-2020 (NSDI II) and built on previous education strategies. The PUEDS serves as basic policy document for the sector development. The four Pillars are as follows:

- A. Enhancing leadership, governance, and management of resources and capacities of PUES,
- B. Inclusive quality learning,
- C. Quality assurance based on standards comparable to those of EU countries,
- D. Contemporary teacher's and school leaders professional development and training

The overall goal of the PUEDS is to ensure inclusiveness and equitable access to education for all. In modernising its education system Albania is creating a platform for social inclusion and striving to improve student achievement at all levels for example, through introducing a competency-based curriculum, expanding Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education and redesigning teacher education.

The government has committed itself to improving levels of equity, equality, vulnerability and non-discriminatory access for children with disabilities and children from minority populations.

The broad objectives of the appraisal were to:

- Guide the Ministry of Education Sport and Youth (MoESY) in taking stock of the progress, achievements and shortfalls in specific areas of the PUEDS implementation by reviewing challenges and progress of implementation of the current strategy;
- Identify challenges, gaps, and agree on priorities to move forward during the remaining period of the current strategy as well as for the new education sector strategy.

MAIN FINDINGS

1. **Unsatisfactory levels of financing are one of the main issues to affect negatively the output of the education sector in Albania.** The level of available budget relative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remains lower than targeted and Albania is consistently one of the lower investors in education in the region.
2. **Decentralisation has potential to increase efficiency and accountability** in management and governance of the Albanian Education System, provided that practices of information sharing, communication, and transparency between the national, regional and local levels of education across the country are developed and promoted.
3. **School administrators are seen as weak links in the system.** The need is to strengthen and improve the education management system with particular emphasis on building the systems to include building monitoring and professional support services.

4. **The importance of a functioning Education Management Information System (EMIS) is recognized** and MoESY is finalizing the piloting of EMIS at different levels.
5. **Partner and government coordination need improvement.** The concern is for partner and government coordination calls for further analytical support on preparing and implementing a model to improve on the future coordination particularly in the light of the Albania's preparation for EU membership and likely premium that this places upon effective coordination.
6. **Major gains have been achieved particularly in the area of access to schools.** The government continues to demonstrate proven commitment in addressing the quality and equity issues in the PUEDS and as a national priority.
7. More needs to be done to develop **early childhood education programmes** to reach the targets set out in the PUEDS and the National Strategy for Development and Integration II (NSDI).
8. Albania has made **increased investments in supporting inclusiveness as a key policy issue in pursuance of the national goals.** The data though indicates that there remain groups excluded from education.
9. **The improvement of quality aspects of education is a matter of concern** – there are more pupils, but have they achieved more, and will this be the case with the consolidation of a new curriculum paradigm?
10. **It is vital to take note of recent regional research as to what actually works through implementing the new competency-based curriculum.** Trends suggest that true competency-based education may only survive in alternative settings - schools that are given the flexibility to meet the needs of non-traditional learners in ways that transcend the constraints and inflexibilities of traditional education, as we have known it.
11. **Teachers need to be better supported to implement the new curriculum.** Achieving success with the curriculum has been limited because of the lack of resources at the school level, especially ICT.
12. **Good progress has been made with the selection and supply of textbooks.**
13. **The use and utility of ICT is poor.** Although ICT is recognized as being vital for progressive education in Albania the challenge noted is to make their use effective within the new curriculum paradigm.
14. **Monitoring of Education Sector performance.** Albania does not have a process in place to provide comprehensive monitoring of the Education Sector performance.
15. **The length and timing of training that teachers currently are offered in response to implementing a major reform is limited.** The three days offered for training on the curriculum would seem to be much too short especially with the range and complexity of the changes in education.
16. **Teachers need to be better prepared,** supported and resourced and this will also have implications for budget and resource allocations to schools.
17. **Practice teaching is the least effective part of the system.** Effective implementation will contribute to quality improvement in raising learning outcomes of all pupils.
18. **Building a Teacher Competency Framework will be important in the next stage of implementation.** Building a Teacher Competency Framework will be important to support future developments and build on the platform of professional standards already developed for teachers.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS (Abridged)

A. Enhancing leadership, governance, and management of resources and capacities of PUES

- MoESY and Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (AQAPUE) to provide technical assistance to municipalities for managing the pre-school system. Municipalities have to allocate necessary resources for that purpose.
- Responsibilities of organizational units and personnel of General Directorate of the Pre-University Education (GD PUE), Regional Education Directorates (RED) and Local Education Offices (LEO) should be carefully considered to ensure efficient operation of the newly established structure.
- Establish a full-fledged Education Management Information System (EMIS).
- Government of Albania must decide on the level of public spending for education, based on realistic projections.
- School development planning should be significantly improved and relieved of formalism.

B. Inclusive Quality Learning

- Curriculum experts to make school visits to support teachers in their classroom knowing how to use the curriculum (through a demonstration lesson in their subject field).
- In the immediate, develop and implement in-service blended learning programmes for all teachers that extend their training in the delivery of the **curriculum and managing assessments**.
- MoESY to review publishing policy and work with local publishers to produce textbooks aligned with curriculum framework, including contextualizing those textbooks produced by international publishers.
- Develop a blended learning programme appropriate for assistant teachers to provide training in specific disability areas so that they can better support the pupils and schools.
- Recruit minority group members in the community who have the potential to support vulnerable and marginalised children and pupils from these communities.
- Undertake a sound planning exercise with use of school digital mapping and demographic data to optimise the network of pre-university education institutions in Albania.
- Increase the resource base for ICT utility – in the light of funding restrictions ensure ICT and technology in education remains priority funding.
- Building ICT skills for teachers and directors in the use of technology in effective teaching and learning.
- Develop and introduce blended learning programmes for In-service teacher education that promotes teachers to integrate practice and reflection in the classroom.

C. Quality assurance based on standards comparable to those of EU countries

- Two new institutions, AQAPUE and GD PUE, need to establish close cooperation in monitoring the Pre-University Education Sector and assuring the quality of education services.
- Albania to introduce a full-fledged joint annual sector review (JASR) as a tool for monitoring the Pre-University Education System.
- Define a set of national education indicators based on the UNCESO and EUROSTAT standards, and include those indicators in the Programme of Official Statistics (POZ).

- Transform the school performance card into a tool for improvement by developing a contextualised school index
- Support schools in integrating the requirements of the new curriculum in the assessment.
- Communicate external assessment results to each school in a way it could be compared at local, regional and national level.

D. Contemporary teachers and school leader's professional development and training

- Unify and align teacher development and school leadership programmes.
- Introduce flexible training opportunities within in-service programme to include blended learning systems.
- Review and strengthen all teacher education programmes and reduce the theory-practice gap.
- Establish a well - resourced national structure for teachers as a profession in the form of Teacher Development Management System (TDMS).
- Review and revise a transparent, valid and reliable entry system for teacher programmes.

SUGGESTIONS MOVING FORWARD (see main report for full details)

A Transition Road Map will be required for developing a new PUEDS strategy in the next phase, including a time-line with milestones and indicators for support to the development of the next phase.

Consider developing an Education Sector Strategic Plan to incorporate all sub-sectors in education under one umbrella plan.

Education institution building and putting decentralization in place remains a major challenge. The government's policy on decentralization recognizes the importance of improved service delivery, local partnerships and decision-making and accountability.

Making implementation happen is the biggest short-term challenge. More needs to happen at the level of implementation to address key issues particularly focusing on the curriculum, teacher professional development and support to ICT infrastructure.

Reinforcing teacher development at all levels must be a central activity in addressing implementation for any re-design of PUEDS. Teachers taking initiatives and be more responsible for their own development sits well with designing **accredited blended learning activity**.

More flexible training methods and schedules for teachers both in pre-service and in-service through appropriate combinations of full-time, part-time and importantly blended learning opportunities would make sense at this stage of PUEDS.

Greater emphasis on pedagogic knowledge will better support competency-based education. This is imperative for the introduction of competency-based learning.

Greater investment in ICT and teaching – learning resources will have major benefits. ICT also has the potential to impact on the ways that teachers approach their daily tasks and complement different avenues for pupil learning and has the potential to reduce the theory-practice divide.

Robust systems of monitoring and evaluation are needed at all levels. Stronger monitoring and support to decentralisation and schools will be essential for effective implementation of curricula interventions and improving quality at the institution level.

Put in place a Joint Annual Sector Review to provide a regular overview, periodic and systematic assessment of the PUEDS carried out jointly with partners and stakeholders.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Albania has made steady progress in the last years in developing and aligning its education policies with Europe. In particular it has articulated the need to ensure inclusiveness and equitable access to education for all in the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2015-2020 (NSDI II) (QBZ, 2016) and in the Pre-University Education Development Strategy (PUEDS) (QBZ, 2016-1).

In modernising its education system Albania can be proud of embarking on a series of important and ambitious education reforms in the Pre-University Education, for example: creating a platform for social inclusion, introducing a competency-based curriculum and redesigning teacher education. The government has committed itself to improving levels of equity, equality, vulnerability and non-discriminatory access for children with disabilities and children from minority populations.

The Government of the Republic of Albania officially approved the Pre-University Education Strategy (PUEDS) in January 2016 (QBZ, 2016-1). The development of the Strategy followed the priorities set in the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2015-2020 (NSDI II) and built on previous education strategies. The PUEDS serves as the basic policy document for the sector development. The four Pillars are as follows:

- A.** Enhancing leadership, governance, and management of resources and capacities of PUES,
- B.** Inclusive quality learning,
- C.** Quality assurance based on standards comparable to those of EU countries,
- D.** Contemporary teachers and school leader's professional development and training.

Each policy priority is broken down into goals and respective activities for attaining the goals are defined. Expected results provide measurable and time-bound targets, whereas the Performance Assessment Framework outlines the monitoring methodology and provides a concise set of indicators.

There have been key areas of adjustment and lesson learning over the three-year period of implementation for example, a move toward decentralization and increased service delivery and developments in addressing teacher development that will need to be reflected in any redesign of PUEDS. During the three-year implementation period the PUEDS has informed a range of reforms, including:

- Improved, more transparent and de-politicised teacher and school director recruitment;
- Universal enrolment in pre-school education year at age five and boosting of preschool quality;
- A revised curriculum based on competencies aiming at providing Albanian children with skills for life;
- Institutionalisation of the national pupil assessments practice;
- Improved textbook quality and provision of textbook subsidies and other incentives for certain categories of population;

- Provision of a national in-service training of teachers and school director programmes;
- Embracing of more inclusive classroom practices;
- Adoption of a more decentralised management of education.

The budget projection for the period 2014-2020 leads to an anticipated average annual implementation cost of ALL 46.70 bn (~ € 373.57 mil.), or a total of ALL 326.88 bn (~ € 2.615 bn) for the seven-year duration of the Strategy.

1.2. Purpose of the Appraisal

Three years from the approval of the PUEDS, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY) has decided to take stock of progress, achievements and shortfalls of implementation. Thus, the broad objectives of the appraisal were to:

- Guide the MoESY in taking stock of the progress, achievements and shortfalls in specific areas of the PUEDS implementation by reviewing challenges and progress of implementation of the current strategy;
- Identify challenges, gaps, and agree on priorities to move forward during the remaining period of the current strategy as well as for the new education sector strategy.

1.3. Approach and Methodology

The Appraisal is based upon a review and analysis of relevant documentation, interviews with key persons and field studies comprising individual and focus group discussions. The timing of the Appraisal is significant in that it comes after three years of PUEDS implementation and with only one year left of the four-year timeframe.

The Appraisal Framework focused in part, on the adaption of the Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal by GPE/IIEP (UNESCO, 2015). We have adapted the Guidelines to the Albania context and needs since, as we have seen, the PUEDS has run for three years and the Guidelines are more appropriate for finalising a credible sector plan and strategy. With the purpose of the Appraisal in mind we have focused on the key elements of Relevance, Effectiveness and consideration for cross-cutting issues to frame the key questions with an emphasis on the achievement of output and outcome level results.

There is a number of very recent publications, consisting of studies and stocktaking exercises focusing on various segments of the Albanian Pre-University Education System, undertaken by national institutions and development partners. Many of the reports provide valuable information on the PUEDS implementation progress. In particular we have relied heavily on the very recent OECD/UNICEF preliminary findings and background report (OECD, forthcoming), the UNESCO Education Policy Review (UNESCO, 2017) and Gonzales's UNICEF supported study of the implementation of the competency-based curriculum in Albania (Gonzales, 2018). Other sources of useful information were policy documents of the Albanian Government related to the education sector.

An important criterion concerned that of Effectiveness (Achievement of Results to Date) that ensures that key strategy components are addressed. An assessment was made of current

achievements or achievements to date and, where possible, whether the strategy implementation had been able to influence and improve service delivery.

The leading questions were:

Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are the objectives of the Strategy still appropriate and relevant to the current context and needs of the beneficiaries? • To what extent do they still correspond with MoESY priorities?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What progress has been made to date towards achievement of expected results for each component? • Are the planned benefits being delivered and received? • What real difference has the PUEDS priorities made to beneficiaries? What outcomes support this so far?

In addition to the leading questions the Team developed a collection of indicative questions for individual and focus-group discussions categorized by appraisal issues based upon the expected results of the PUEDS pillars (A-D) grouped under thematic clusters (see Annex A). These provided a structure for the Appraisal.

The approach was also aligned with a recent policy review that focused on three policy domains jointly identified by the government of Albania and UNCESO emerging from the 4 pillars (UNESCO, 2017). These were (1) Curriculum development and reform; (2) Information and Communication Technology; and (3) Teacher and school leadership policies. The idea being that that these issues would deliver maximum impact toward achieving the policy goals for the present and future PUEDS. We found this a compelling argument in framing the Appraisal.

The Appraisal was undertaken by a team of three independent experts, two international and one national expert during April/May 2019. A desk review of the current context of Albania was undertaken to inform the design of the Appraisal. A questionnaire was issued to gather data and the views on the PUEDS were gathered from the MoESY, and key Albanian education units and those of teachers and pupils.

The team practiced impartiality, independence and credibility. Triangulation was used as a data approach to cross-check findings from multiple sources that began with identifying key issues from the desk review and key questions emerging were utilised in the appraisal.

The team as much as possible ensured that the review was conducted in a way that was consistent with gender equality, inclusion, conflict prevention and respect for human rights in line with UNICEF Guidelines. Clear measures to address inclusion issues and core issues concerning equity issues received prominence.

2. TECHNICAL APPRAISAL

This section examines the degree to which the PUEDS is consistent with the policies, country needs and beneficiary requirements and an assessment that looks forward to what needs to be amended in the current PUEDS to reach Relevance in the next stage of PUEDS development.

PUEDS is highly relevant and remains in keeping with the needs and priorities of national plans and sub-sector development. The four major pillars continue to be critical areas for education

improvement. These were relevant at the time of designing the PUEDS, in 2014, and they remain relevant today. At the strategic level all four key pillars remain relevant to the development objective of the PUEDS being an inclusive education system.

A. Enhancing leadership, governance, and management of resources and capacities of PUES

One of the key challenges for effective delivery of education services in the Albanian context is the development of a governance model based on performance, transparency and accountability. For the purpose of analysis, PUEDS efforts to address this important challenge are grouped into four main clusters:

- A1. Legislation – Development of new legislation to support reform efforts, and implementation of the legislation in all levels of the Education System;
- A2. Decentralisation – Further devolution of responsibilities to local authorities and schools, as well as re-structuring of central government units and agencies;
- A3. Performance, Transparency and Accountability – Improvement of school management and interaction among key government agencies, as well as provision of accurate data at regular intervals to inform decision-making and promote transparency and accountability;
- A4. Financing – Provision of stable and sufficient funding for the Education System, comparable to other European countries.

Progress towards targets

A1. Legislation – The 69/2012 Law on Pre-University Education and related secondary legislation did not provide a solid legal base for the education reform which aimed to introduce important changes in the system, such as: competency-based curriculum, merit-based and transparent teacher recruitment, performance-based governance model, and so on. On the other hand, the most recent EU Progress Report recognizes that, from the perspective of legislation, Albania is moderately prepared for EU membership in the field of education (European Commission, 2019), which is a clear indication that activities targeting improvement of legislation are still **relevant** to the Albanian context.

The Pre-University Law was amended in 2015 and 2018 (QBZ, 2018) and a number of bylaws, including Decisions of the Council of Ministers (DCM), Minister's Orders and other regulations, were issued, few of them calling for special mention:

- Order No. 25, dated 25/07/2018 on the establishment and functioning of the education institution board (MASR, 2018-2);
- DCM No. 98, dated 27/02/2019 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (AQAPUE) (QBZ, 2019);
- DCM No. 99, dated 27/02/2019 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the General Directorate of Pre-university Education (QBZ, 2019-1).

Although, new legislation in Albania is mainly based on strategic priorities from PUEDS, actual budget allocations lag behind initial projections and this may impede the implementation of legislation. One important aspect that emerged from interviews is the necessity to introduce weighted pupil-based

funding formula responding to the needs of different and vulnerable groups, which is one of the requirements of the Law on Pre-University Education (Article 37).

A2. Decentralisation in the Albanian Education System is part of government initiatives under the framework of the decentralisation and regional development reform. In 2014, the Parliament approved the New Administrative-Territorial Reform that upheld 12 regions and introduced a new division of territory into 61 municipalities (“bashki”). In this part, PUEDS mainly focuses on devolution of financial resources to schools, which still remains relevant since there was no progress in this area during the past period.

Some important aspects of decentralisation are missing in the Strategy. One of them is devolution of responsibilities for Pre-School Education to local authorities, which includes the appointment of pre-school directors by mayors, and the appointment of teachers by pre-school directors, following procedures prescribed by legislation. The transfer took place in 2015 upon enactment of the new Law on local self-governance (Law, 2015), but due to ineffective planning, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, there remain considerable challenges in managing this sub-sector. Informants report that most municipalities do not have the capacity to address quality issues in Pre-School Education, whereas the State Education Inspection reports “pre-school directors mainly do not follow up on recommendations from the inspection process” (IShA, 2017).

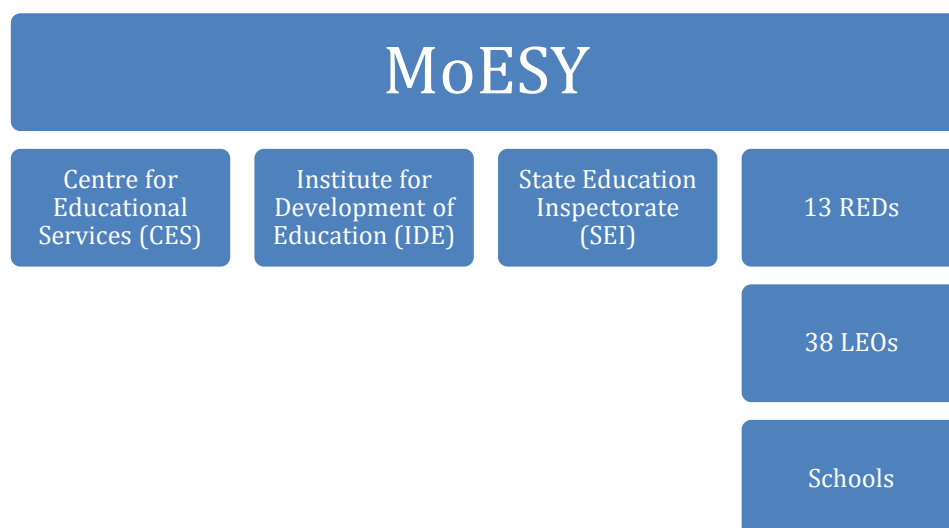
A key objective of PUEDS outlines the need for decentralisation of services and the further devolution of responsibilities to the local authorities and schools as well as moves to restructure central government units and agencies. In February 2019, the Council of Ministers approved the Decision, which effectively establishes a new structure for the governance of the Pre-University System (QBZ, 2019) (QBZ, 2019-1). The regulation introduces two new institutions: the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (AQAPUE) and the General Directorate for Pre-University Education (GD PUE). The AQAPUE was established by merging the Institute for Development of Education (IDE) and the State Education Inspectorate (SEI), and its role is described in section C of this chapter.

The GD PUE is the implementation arm of the MoESY in the Pre-University Sector and has 4 regional education directorates (REDs), located in Lezhë, Durrës, Korçë and Fier, as well as local education offices (LEOs) for 51 municipalities. The GD and subordinated structures are effectively responsible for management of the Pre-University Education System, including, inter alia: monitoring, evaluation and inspection; school budget planning; collection and processing of statistical data; implementation of curriculum and standards; provision of technical assistance to schools, hiring of teachers and liaison with local authorities.

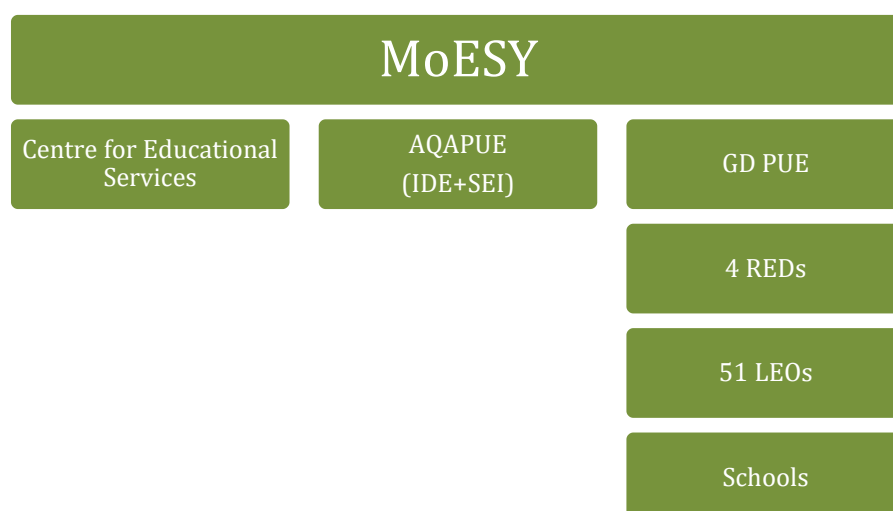
By the Prime-Minister’s Order (Government of Albania, 2019), GD PUE and REDs have an identical organisational structure consisting of three sectors: 1) Sector for Curriculum and Professional Development (6 employees in GD and 4 in each RED); 2) Sector for monitoring, inspection and evaluation of the quality (7 in GD, 4 in each RED); 3) Sector for Human Resources and Statistics (6 in GD, 5 in each RED). The Minister’s Order (MASR, 2019) introduces the organisational structure at the local education level (LEO), consisting of two sectors: 1) Sector for monitoring of the curricula and professional development; 2) Sector for Services. In total, there are 51 LEOs, some of them responsible for two or three municipalities. Each LEO has 6 to 15 staff members, in total 428. Figure 1 provides an overview of the current and new governance structure of the Pre-University System.

Figure 1. Current and new governance structure of the Pre-University System

a) Current structure



b) New structure



Although implementation of the new structure is at the very initial phase, concerns on the inspection role to be exercised by the REDs were raised from multiple sources. In fact, each RED has only 4 staff members in the Sector for monitoring, inspection and evaluation quality (QBZ, 2019-1), whereas there are 1,840 schools of ISCED level 1-3 in Albania, as well as 1,919 of ISCED 0 (INSTAT, 2018). If the inspection role of REDs will be carried out with assistance from LEOs, there is a considerable risk of bias, since LEOs are also responsible to provide direct technical assistance to schools. Maintaining an independent and credible inspection service is a key to improving the accountability of all actors in the Education System.

A3. Performance, Transparency and Accountability – Schools in Albania are required to have **mid-term plans** which need to be based on an extensive self-assessment with participation of all relevant stakeholders (school staff, pupils, parents, community, local authorities, etc.). There is a general perception that the planning process is not carried out according to the prescribed methodology, particularly in terms of self-assessment and stakeholder participation, and that it is also characterised

by high degree of formalism in implementation. This was confirmed by multiple sources and in the annual reports of the State Education Inspection (IShA, 2016) (IShA, 2017) (IShA, 2019). With on-going devolution of responsibilities from central level to local authorities and schools, mid-term planning becomes increasingly important as it builds in-house capacities for defining and addressing school development needs. If institutional support and oversight for implementation of school mid-term plans is missing, there is a risk that school development planning becomes just a formal exercise which does not help the school improve and does not inform education policy making at local level.

As of 2010 all schools in Albania are required to undergo **external assessments**, which are carried out by the SEI and must be preceded by self-evaluation (QShA, 2018). The procedure is detailed in the SEI Manual (IKAP, 2011), but there are reports of schools struggling with self-evaluation and not performing that step properly (QShA, 2018). Since 2017, there is an on-line portal to facilitate e-inspection in all areas, which are the responsibility of the central government, including education (<http://e-inspektimi.gov.al>). With legislation changes, the school external evaluation is the responsibility of the central and regional level of the GD PUE. Since the GD PUE is virtually responsible for management of the school system, the challenge remains to separate its inspection duties from provision of day-to-day support to schools.

In October 2018, **the School of Directors** was established with support from American–Albanian Development Fund (AADF). The School is registered as non-governmental organisation and, as such, is unique for Albania and Western Balkans Region. The AADF pledged \$2.9 mil. for 10 years, whereas the Government is providing premises for the School. Following a comprehensive need analysis carried out by a team of international and local experts, the School is in the process of developing curricula. The idea is to develop one-semester long training programmes to be offered to school directors and other interested candidates by universities. The Director indicated that instructional leadership shall constitute an important aspect of the training programme, and particular attention will be paid to practical training of school directors.

Our informants, in general agreed that **the new system of teacher recruitment** is transparent and provides almost no room for any influence by decision makers, contributing directly to de-politicisation of the Education System. Teachers apply for job through the online system known as “Teachers for Albania” (<https://mesuespershqiperine.al/>), are ranked by the system and ranking has to be respected during the hiring process. Since 2014 when the portal came into operation, 6,104 teachers were employed through this system (MoESY, 2019). The recent EU progress report recognises the new way of recruitment as an achievement (European Commission, 2019). An experienced regional administrator told the Team that since this system was introduced, he is relieved from all kinds of pressure and the “waiting area of his office is not full of people”. However, there are reports that the priority set by the system is not always respected at pre-school level, which operates under the control of municipalities. Also, there is more transparency and participation in the process of selection of school directors, where applications are assessed and scored by local committees, but the final decision is still made by the LEO Director.

Concerning **statistics**, the EU progress report takes note of progress (European Commission, 2019) and calls for full implementation of the new Law for Official Statistics (Law, 2018). The Education Management Information System (EMIS) is not yet operational, and there are parallel processes of data collection by MoESY Statistical Unit and the Centre for Educational Services (CES), although only statistics from MoESY are considered official and reported to INSTAT. The MoESY collects and

processes data in Excel tables, and produces annual statistical reports on schools, pupil enrolment, teachers, as well as some indicators that allow for international comparison (MASR, 2018). On the other hand, CES collects individual pupil data from public schools through a system called Socrates and is working to reach out to private sector as well. Education staff data are stored in a separate system - the Human Resources Management Software (HRMS) - that applies to the whole public service and there is currently no connection between the two systems.

Non-sufficient or incomplete data may seriously affect the quality of decision making at all levels of the Education System. With the new organization of RED/LEO the GD PUE will own the data. However, CES will be responsible for managing the Socrates system, which should gradually replace the classical data collection system. Considerable efforts are required to establish a fully-fledged and efficient EMIS. On the other hand, the OECD/UNICEF review observed that some data is available to the public but most of it is not available in a way that can be easily downloaded and used in different ways (OECD, forthcoming).

The 2017 Education Policy Review (UNESCO, 2017) hinted **the absence of inter-agency consultation** in Albania, often resulting in duplication of efforts and leaving gaps in implementation. Therefore, the Review identified the need to develop and promote practices of information sharing, communication, and transparency between the national, regional and local levels of education across the country. In addition, the review advocates for an expansion of transparency and cooperation with other relevant stakeholders to ensure legitimacy of policies and improve the exercise of democratic principles in the country. We observed gaps in communication between REDs and LEOs, as well as between LEOs and municipal authorities.

A4. Financing – A simple comparison between the budget planned for the implementation of the Pre-University Strategy and the annual budgets approved for Pre-University Education by the Albanian Parliament shows **a considerable gap between the two** which ranges from 34 to 44 per cent of the planned budget (Table 1). The unsatisfactory level of financing is one of the main issues to affect negatively the output of the education sector in Albania (UNICEF, 2017).

In general, low levels of education spending raise issues of access, inclusiveness and efficiency levels of education. Total spending in Education in 2017 amounted to 4.1% (3.2% public and 0.9% private spending) of GDP (QShA, 2018), which is far below the OECD average of 6.3% (UNICEF, 2017). Key budget indicators from PUEDS are provided in Table 2. Spending in education has fallen from 11.3 % of the total budgetary expenditures in 2010 to 10.4 % in 2018 (QShA, 2018) (MASR, 2019-1).

Public spending for Pre-University Education (incl. Vocational Education Training (VET) and Pre-School) in 2018 was ALL 39.2 bn. or 2.38% of the GDP with the projected variations in next three years (2019 – 2.40%, 2020 – 2.44%, 2021 – 2.34%, 2021 – 2.30%)¹. Per-pupil expenditure in 2018 was ALL 85,865 (~ \$780) accounting for 18.9% of the GDP per capita², which is at the level of Bulgaria – 19% (2012), lower than Italy – 20.6% (2012), Serbia – 50.9% (2010), Slovenia – 30% (2011), and higher than Romania – 11.6% (2012)³. The Law prescribes that the budget for Pre-University Education should be based on per-pupil formula which takes into account separate indicators for each level of the system (Law, 2018-1). However, this was not the case in Albania.

Table 1. Gap between the planned PUEDS budget and the approved budget for PUE in Albania

¹ MASR: Relacion mbi kërkesat buxhetore për periudhën afatmesme 2020-2022, Pasq nr.4.2+4.3

² Authors' calculation. Nominal GDP per capita in 2016 was \$4,132 – (INSTAT, 2018), p.143.

³ Data for reference countries from http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNESCO&f=series%3aXUNIT_GDPCAP_1_FSGOV

Policy Priority	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
A) Enhancing leadership, governance, and management of resources and capacities of PUES,;	4,489,217	6,486,800	8,013,735	10,880,326	12,987,440
B) Inclusive quality learning;	30,122,488	31,983,474	33,301,865	34,477,390	35,715,343
C) Quality performance according to standards of EU countries;	7,812,820	8,386,244	7,659,047	7,948,761	8,349,436
D) Contemporary teachers and school leader's professional development and training.	75,020	82,522	90,774	99,852	109,837
Total budget planned	42,499,545	46,939,040	49,065,421	53,406,329	57,162,056

MoESY Budget for Pre-University Education

Budget Program	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Planning, Management, Administration	774,500	662,161	665,751	797,042	781,000
Basic Education (including pre-school education)	20,342,400	20,719,409	21,869,776	22,128,500	23,337,000
Secondary Education (General)	6,690,609	6,689,557	6,855,455	7,286,643	7,639,043
Total budget approved	27,807,509	28,071,127	29,390,982	30,212,185	31,757,043
Budget gap (ALL)	14,692,036	18,867,913	19,674,439	23,194,144	25,405,013
	34.6%	40.2%	40.1%	43.4%	44.4%

Sources:

Strategy on Pre-University Education Development 2014-2020 (QBZ, 2016-1).

Ministry of Finance and Economy: Annual budgets for years 2016-2017 as amended by the Albanian Parliament, <https://financa.gov.al/buxheti-ne-vite/>

Relacion mbi kërkesat buxhetore për periudhën afatmesme 2020-2022. MASR, May 2019. (MASR, 2019-1).

Table 2. Key budget indicators from PUEDS

Indicator	Value 2018	PUESD Target
Education budget as % of GDP	3.2%	5.01%
Education budget as % of public expenditures	10.4%	17.31%
Pre-university education budget as % of GDP	2.38%	3.01%
PUE budget as share of public expenditures	7.89%	10.39%
Spending per pupil (in 000 ALL)	85,865	

Source: Relacion mbi kërkesat buxhetore për periudhën afatmesme 2020-2022. MASR, May 2019.

Albania seems to be far from the 2020 target of public spending of 3% for Pre-University Education and 5% for Education. A UNICEF sponsored study concluded that by not achieving these targets, the country loses \$35 mil. every year (UNICEF, 2017). Nevertheless, such increase of GDP has to be carefully considered and decided by the highest political levels in the Government.

From year to year the number of children having benefited from **the free textbook programme** has increased. In addition to children from grades 1-4, there are 18 categories of other children who receive free textbooks. For the school year 2019/20, the idea is to provide free textbooks to all children of the primary level. There is no evidence of any system for **promotion of fundraising from the private sector**, but schools are allowed to receive donations, which are managed by the school boards.

Summary of findings

The table below summarizes our assessment of Progress and State of Play, as well as challenges linked to expected results from PUEDS grouped by the four clusters. Numbering corresponds to PUEDS results.

Expected results (numbering corresponds to PUEDS results)	Progress/State of Play	Challenges
A1. Legislation 4. By 2016, necessary education legislation in line with EU countries is in place. 11. By 2017, new or amended legislation will be implemented in the Education Institutions (EI).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New legislation in Albania is mainly based on strategic priorities from PUEDS. Pre-University Education Law of 2012 was amended in 2015 and 2018. • A number of new bylaws to support the Education Reform were issued. • Implementation lags behind in certain aspects due to capacity limitations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual budget allocations may impede the implementation of legislation.
A2. Decentralisation 1. From 2014, resource management competences are assigned to schools (decentralisation). 12. By 2017, mechanisms for decentralised management of financial resources will be established and in operation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-school education was transferred to municipalities. • Establishing GD PUE with 4 REDs and 51 LEOs as implementation arm of the MoESY in Pre-University Education. • Budget allocations are still not made to schools, but schools are allowed to receive donations that need to be under control of the school board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity of municipalities to assume full responsibility for pre-school system. • Lack of coordination among central and local government. • Questionable capacity for independent and high-quality inspection. • Low school capacities for sound financial management.
A3. Performance, transparency and accountability 2. By 2015, periodic self-assessment and assessment reports on institutional and personal performance are developed at all education stages. 3. By 2015, effective development plans at all EIs levels are implemented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are struggling with the self-assessment process and not performing that step properly • Planning at the school level is at initial stage. The planning process is characterised by a considerable degree of formalism. • In October 2018, the School of Directors was with support from AADF, and registered as NGO. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure external school evaluations are carried out on a regular basis and that schools have the capacity to conduct self-evaluations (OECD, forthcoming) • Low capacities for implementation and monitoring of school plans.

Expected results (numbering corresponds to PUEDS results)	Progress/State of Play	Challenges
<p>5. By 2016, new capacities for the preparation of education administrators and managers are built.</p> <p>6. By 2016, participation and transparency in education decision-making process are ensured.</p> <p>9. By 2017, EMIS is applied at all levels of education system and decision-making is based on data.</p> <p>10. By 2017, a coordination and interaction system between different leadership levels in education and other sectors will be in place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New process of teacher recruitment and selection of school directors provide for more transparency and fairness. • The EMIS is not yet operational, and there are parallel processes of data collection by MoESY and CES. Existing databases are not integrated. • Inter-agency consultation still needs improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data across the country's databases are not integrated (OECD, forthcoming) • Deficient or incomplete data may seriously affect the quality of decision making at all levels of the Education System. • A limited amount of education data is easily accessible to the public (OECD, forthcoming).
<p>A4. Financing</p> <p>7. By 2016, funding terms and rules to support priorities in education inclusion and equality in education are developed and applied.</p> <p>8. By 2016, pupil-based funding model is effectively functioning.</p> <p>13. By 2017, mechanisms for textbook cost coverage will be implemented.</p> <p>14. By 2017, GDP percentage for PUEDS reaches 3% while for the system in general 5%.</p> <p>15. By 2018, a transparent system for funding and fund-raising promotion from private sector will be in place.</p> <p>16. By 2020, pupil-based public expenses will be comparable with the region counties average levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public spending for Pre-University Education (incl. VET and Pre-School) in 2018 was 2.38% of the GDP and total spending for Education 3.2% of GDP. • Huge gaps between the planned budget and allocated for PUEDS implementation. • Per-pupil funding formula was not used for budgeting purposes. • From year to year the number of children having benefited from free textbooks program has increased. • No evidence of promoting fundraising from the private sector. • Per-pupil expenditure as % of GDP per capita is among the lowest in the Region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Albania is far from the 2020 target of public spending of 3% for PUE and 5% for Education. In general, low levels of education spending raise issues of access, inclusiveness and efficiency levels of education. • Ensuring budget support for PUEDS implementation.

Specific Recommendations

- MoESY and AQAPUE to provide technical assistance to municipalities for managing the pre-school system. Municipalities have to allocate necessary resources for that purpose.
- Responsibilities of organisational units and personnel with GD PUE, REDs and LEOs should be carefully considered to ensure efficient operation of the newly established structure. Particular attention to be paid to separating inspection role from provision of day-to-day support to schools under responsibility of RED/LEOs.
- Establish a full-fledged Education Management Information System (EMIS), which is based on personal pupil and other data provided and updated by schools. Such a system should generate all

kinds of statistical reports and be integrated with teachers' data from the Government Human Resources Management Software (HRMS).

- The Government of Albania must decide on the level of public spending for education, based on realistic projections. Increasing the share of GDP spent on education is strongly recommended and in line with proclaimed Government policies. However, it is a higher-level political decision because it means cutting allocations to other sectors of the economy or mobilizing local resources.
- School development planning should be significantly improved and relieved of formalism. Medium-term school planning and annual planning should be given due consideration in the curriculum to be developed by the School of Directors.

B. Inclusive Quality Learning

Inclusiveness is built into all areas of Albania education system and is emphasised in the programmes and reforms: the modernisation of the curriculum; social inclusion at all levels; expanding ICT: teacher educational development and improving pupil achievement. The PUEDS response to the diversity of needs of all learners consists of the following:

- B1. Curriculum and textbook provision – Introducing the new competency-based curriculum and improving the quality of textbooks;
- B2. Inclusion – Ensuring participation of all children in the Education System with focus on vulnerable groups such as: children with disability, children from Roma and Egyptian communities, and children living in poverty;
- B3. School as a community centre – Utilisation of school resources to support development of children, youth and the community;
- B4. Advisory and supporting services – Provision of specialised support to pupils to achieve their educational and developmental potential;
- B5. Digitalising the learning process – Promoting the use of ICT and electronic content in teaching and learning.

Progress towards targets

B1. Curriculum and textbook provision – In 2014, Albania adopted the Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education, which represents a major departure from content-based curriculum (MoESY, 2014-1). The Curriculum Framework is designed in six curriculum key stages representing periods with common features in terms of children's development and curriculum requirements. They constitute the main reference points for defining key competencies to be mastered, pupil progress and achievement requirements, the organisation of learning experiences, access and assessment criteria, as well as specifying the institution responsible for their achievement. In addition to the Curriculum Framework, which defines competencies and learning fields, core curricula for ISCED levels 0-3 were developed, effectively translating competencies into learning outcomes and setting the stage for development of subject syllabi.

Implementation of the new curriculum began in the school year 2014/15 for grades 1 and 5, and has been gradually rolled out to other grades with full coverage planned in the school year 2019/20 (QShA,

2018). The Institute for Development of Education (IDE) manages the curriculum reform, training, research and the ICT. The Institute has issued comprehensive guidelines and support material for teachers and directors on the new curriculum for all levels of pre-university education (IZhA, 2018) (IZhA, 2017-3) (IZhA, 2016-3).

One of the 17 measures of the Economic Reform Programme 2018-2020 (ERP) intends to support the rollout of the curriculum to all grades and schools by development and piloting of new curricula and training of teachers (Government of Albania, 2018). However, the budget for this purpose is surprisingly low – ALL 2.88 mil.

Implementing the curriculum though remains a serious problem especially in relation to teacher development and in the absence of classroom and support resources. Teachers we met with understood well the demands of the curriculum change and could sufficiently articulate the needs. They perceived the benefit of new curriculum positively but putting outcomes-based learning in practice and building continuous assessment remains difficult for many. Pupils interviewed shared the opinion that school infrastructure does not support curriculum implementation, primarily due to shortage of resources for demonstration and practical work.

At present, teachers have an obligation to undertake three days of training per academic year. The teachers can select from a catalogue of training that includes, in addition to others, modules on the curriculum provided by the IDE to all teachers, directors and supervisors. In our discussions, the IDE is committed to ensuring that the new competency-based curriculum is ready for full implementation by the end of the current PUEDS. Teachers and school directors though expressed the need for less theory but a practical and structured orientation on how to implement specific subjects in the classroom.

We did not observe any classroom in action, but we noted and were informed by the schools of insufficient numbers of interactive classrooms, broken computers and in general, a dire lack of support resources and teaching aids. Many teachers have taken advantage of government portal to select training modules, but they report that they have had (limited) training at the schools and that they needed much more practical training in managing the curriculum and classroom teaching in their subjects and less theory.

Teachers reported attending the Teachers' Professional Network once a month (for just over the hour) in subject specialist groups (e.g. mathematics). The same was confirmed by other informants who underlined the need for more support to schools in implementing the new curriculum. One of the key challenges for successful implementation of the new curriculum is to acknowledge that any introduction of a system change (curriculum paradigm) requires greater consolidation of quality improvements in approaches, for example: renewal of awareness campaigns and intense preparation of all teachers, inspectors and school directors.

The availability of textbooks to support the lesson is always popular with teachers. This aspect of PUEDS has been a success in the schools we visited - we were told that there were sufficient books available at the schools. Although Gonzales notes that 'teachers, parents, and students help one another to access materials, as the materials provided are not enough' (Gonzales, 2018).

With the implementation of the new curriculum teachers can select maths and science textbooks from three publishers: Cambridge, Pearson, and Oxford. However, teachers we spoke with reported that examples in textbooks are often derived from contexts not suitable for Albania. Pupils confirmed the same concern of suitability. For example: a chemistry textbook provides a number of laboratory

activities, which cannot be implemented in the Albanian context. On the other hand, it does not provide the necessary theoretical background because it is assumed that with the new curriculum it would have been derived from the laboratory activity. This confirms the outcome of an earlier study that found that an emerging issue was that because the books were imported, the texts were not always applicable to the local context (Gonzales, 2018). We did not confirm whether the books were sufficiently gender sensitive. The Curriculum Guideline suggests that if the teachers note that the selected textbook lacks knowledge, concepts and topics defined in the syllabus or does not meet the learning outcome then they are advised to use other learning resources. (IZhA, 2018)

B2. Inclusion⁴– Addressing inclusion is one of PUEDS strengths in providing access and participation for all. Table 3 provides key inclusion indicators, which speak of **high enrolment in all levels of education, and good teacher-pupil ratio**. The transition rate to upper secondary education is also high – 94.9%, whereas the dropout rate for compulsory education is rather low – 0.57%.⁵

However, data analysis raises some concerns regarding gender representation in the Pre-University Education. As shown in table 1, Gender Parity Index in primary and lower secondary Education in 2016/17 was 0.89, whereas in upper secondary education – 0.88. Also, transition rate in upper secondary education is lower for girls than for boys – 91.4% vs. 98.3%, warranting further investigation on disparity causes.

Table 3. Key inclusion indicators

Indicator	Value	Year
Child-Educator ratio in Pre-School Education	17.9	2016/17
Pupil-Teacher Ratio in primary education (grades 1-5)	17.8	2017/18
Pupil-Teacher Ratio in lower secondary education	10.1	2017/18
Pupil-Teacher Ratio in upper secondary education	13.8	2017/18
Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in Pre-School Education	80.3 %	2017/18
Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in Primary Education	103.8	2017/18
Gross Enrolment Rate in Lower Secondary Education	97.4	2017/18
Gross Enrolment Rate in Upper Secondary Education	93.9	2017/18
School dropout rate from compulsory education	0.57%	2016/17
Transition rate to upper secondary education	94.9%	2016/17
Transition rate to upper secondary education (Male)	98.3%	2016/17
Transition rate to upper secondary education (Female)	91.4%	2016/17
Gender Parity Index (GPI) in Primary and Lower Secondary Education ⁶	0.89 ⁷	2016/17
Gender Parity Index (GPI) in Upper Secondary Education	0.88 ⁸	2016/17

Source: 2017/18: (INSTAT, 2018), 2016/17: (MASR, 2018)

Due to a decline in birth rate and migration, the number of pupils in Albania has been continuously decreasing. Table 4 shows that in a five-year period, the number of pupils in Albanian schools decreased by 16.9%. At the same time, the number of teachers remained very much the same: 33,657 in 2013/14 and 33,731 in 2017/18 ((INSTAT, 2018), p. 43).

As in most countries in Europe, Albania faces **demographic aging** of its population. According to INSTAT (INSTAT, 2019), the population in the age group of 19 and below has been projected to

⁴ The obligation to ensure inclusion is in compliance with law 69/12 – on pre-university education (article 5) and Law 10221 – on protection from discrimination.

⁵ A new definition of dropout has been developed by UNICEF. The Instruction in the new academic year signed by the Minister and distributed to all school will be implemented to provide more reliable data on the level of drop out.

⁶ Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio between number of female and male enrolled in certain level of education.

⁷ Calculated by authors: (MASR, 2018), p. 21 – 173,222 male and 154,878 females.

⁸ Calculated by authors: (MASR, 2018), p. 28 – 67,528 male and 59,586 females.

decrease from 700,616 (in 2019) to 619,017 (in 2025), and further to 586,042 (in 2031). This will inevitably affect enrolment in all levels of pre-university education but should also be seen as an opportunity for revisiting the network of public education institutions, which currently consists of 1,777 kindergartens, 1,220 primary and lower secondary schools and 380 upper secondary schools (INSTAT, 2018).

Table 4. Enrolment of pupils in ISCED levels 1-3 in the last five years

Education level	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Primary (ISCED 1)	195,720	188,371	179,564	174,836	170,861
Lower Secondary (ISCED 2)	181,354	175,037	163,935	153,264	148,810
Upper Secondary (ISCED 3)	151,937	140,042	130,380	127,114	120,062
Total	529,011	503,450	473,879	455,214	439,733

Source: (INSTAT, 2018),p.42

It should be noted that Albania has a **considerable number of small schools with the so-called combined classes** where pupils from different age groups work together. It is the policy of MoESY to close combined classes by merging those schools with larger ones and transporting the pupils to another school if necessary. In 2018, the State Education Inspection (SEI) undertook monitoring visits to schools with combined classes in 12 out of 38 LEOs to collect information about the state of play. (IShA, 2019)

In the Albanian Education System, “of strategic concern in terms of equity, equality, vulnerability, and non-discrimination, 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” (UNESCO, 2017).

According to MoESY, the share of children with disabilities who attend regular classes increased from 75% in 2014 to 85% in 2018. A recent UNICEF-sponsored study reports that **5,839 children with disabilities** aged 6-17 years, as recorded by the State Social Service, are at school, which is only 57.6% of children receiving disability allowances (Rogers & Sammon, 2018). On the other hand, MoESY recorded only 4,378 children with disabilities enrolled in education – 43.2 per cent of children aged 6-17 years receiving disability allowances, which requires further investigation. There has been no significant increase of children in education who are receiving disability allowances over the last three years (Rogers & Sammon, 2018). As Gonzales (2018) points out, children with disabilities are underrepresented in pupil populations and the challenge in supporting children with disabilities is first identifying them⁹. Her respondents suspected that many children were simply unidentified "officially". This may be due to stigma and fears of bullying. Whatever the reasons may be, Gonzales argues that this prevents the children from receiving extra support (Gonzales 2018). Rogers&Sammon (2018) point out gender disparities in receiving disability allowance, with boys being overrepresented by about 5 percent for the whole country compared to the proportion of boys in the child population.

PUEDS aims at providing **support services to children with disability** in each education institution and the municipality. There has been a decrease in the use of special schools with increasing numbers of inclusive schools. Attitudinal and philosophical shifts have had an impact and schools have received additional services to support inclusion. Our school visits clearly demonstrated good understanding of

⁹ See Gonzales (2018) a UNICEF sponsored report on the curriculum implementation and reform.

and implementing inclusive education principles.¹⁰ Teachers were very positive about the policy aims and the approach managed within the schools. Transport for children from poorer families is working well (free transport over 2 km from the school) but there are difficulties to organize transport for children with disability especially in the rural areas.

Currently there are 940 teacher assistants in the system - however these are not enough to meet the overall need. In addition, we learned that many teachers who do not have a full teaching load were appointed teacher assistants, regardless of their qualifications. Training of teacher assistants in specific needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children is required as currently they lack skills to manage more than to care for general needs of children. The need is for specific training on caring for the children with disability.

Albania has approved the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians (2016-2020) with the following priorities: a) to provide quality and inclusive education for Roma and Egyptians and promote intercultural dialogue; b) to increase the number of Roma and Egyptians completing all levels of education; c) to develop school communities that promote intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding; and d) to appreciate and promote the recognition of Roma and Egyptian identity as an integral part of Albania's cultural heritage (MMSR, 2015).

There are **5,500 Roma and 11,100 Egyptian children** in the Albanian schools in 2018, and the number has tripled in the last decade. Participation of children aged 7-15 in compulsory education is 66%, however, “the gap between Roma/Egyptians and other non-Roma children living in the same areas remains significant” (European Commission, 2019). There is evidence to show that Roma children perform poorly in the 5th grade scoring 29 points as compared to countrywide scores averaging 45 in combined national assessment (UNICEF, 2017). From 2014, 70-80 Roma and Egyptians receive scholarships (30 EUR/month) from Roma Education Fund (REF), whereas Romaversitas Albania supports university students. There are quotas for Roma and Egyptian university students, and they benefit from the tariff waiver. The Higher Education Policy exempts minority students from 100% fee in degree programmes and 50% fee for the master’s programmes.

In April 2017, the Albanian government adopted the National Agenda for Children’s Rights (2017-2020) confirming its commitment for violence-free schools (MMSR, 2017). In addition, the Agenda foresees a range of activities **to improve access to schools and prevent the dropout of vulnerable groups**. UNICEF has taken a lead role in providing support to address the problem of violence in schools by encouraging whole school and community approaches to this endeavour (UNICEF, 2019).

The high number of out of school children is a concern with figures showing that 15,000 children among primary up to upper secondary aged children are not in school (UNICEF, 2017). Reasons for this are varied and relate to poverty and children living in remote areas and linguistic and ethnic minorities especially relating to Roma and Egyptian communities (UNESCO, 2017).

B3. The school as a community centre – The PUEDS aims that community centres school networks are in place to offer positive models and enable children to develop democratic values. The initiative to create the school as a community centre started from 2014 and so far, there are 270 community schools. The idea is to involve communities in creating child friendly school environments, as well as

¹⁰ School visit – a concerned and caring group of teachers who have had inclusion training from World Vision (and earlier inputs from Save the Children) clearly articulated concerns for inclusion and provided clear examples of action taken.

to strengthen and extend the school network. Informants told us the focus was on providing further academic support to children falling behind. In this respect, supplementary classes were organised for those pupils deemed to need further help. One effect of the community involvement was that it often brought the local businesses closer to schools. A good example from a school in Mirditë Region saw businesses employing local women, so that they could support their children. Supporting homework tasks at school is another of the measures to provide assistance to children with learning difficulties, although it targets all children. Initially, the project relied on volunteers and students, but now it is being implemented with help of regular teachers who get extra payment or given less teaching hours.

B4. Advisory and supporting services – In 2013, MoESY issued Order No. 344/2013 which effectively established psycho-social services for pre-university institutions (MAS, 2013), and was amended in 2018 (MASR, 2018-1). Such units operate under supervision of regional education directorates. It is anticipated that one school psychologist and one social worker should be employed for 3000-3500 children in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary schools, or 1800-2300 pupils in upper secondary schools, with gymnasia with above 700 pupils being compulsory to have one psychologist or one social worker. In most cases, one psychologist or social worker is responsible for several schools and provides psycho-social support to children. In a school visit we met with a school psychologist who served five schools and worked one day each in supporting the school.

B5. Digitalising the learning process – The strategic commitment for digitalisation of teaching and learning was re-affirmed in the Government Programme (Qeveria e Republikës së Shqipërisë, 2017). Promoting computer skills among pupils as well as integrating ICT into teaching and learning is a top priority of the PUEDS.

Even though ICT is recognised as a priority it has not achieved its targets. In general, there is a lack of opportunities to engage pupils in collaborative learning. The recent Education Policy Review (UNCESO, 2017) highlighted a number of gaps in the data about ICT facilities available in the education system that limits the understanding of the extent to which it has been implemented. It concluded that there is limited knowledge and understanding amongst staff of the technologies available, there is difficulty in understanding what is available to staff because whilst the technology exists, it is not functional (UNESCO, 2018).

Schools we visited lacked adequate and proper ICT infrastructure - lacking both Internet connections at the classroom level and sufficient numbers of functioning computers. Where computers existed, pupils and teachers could only access in computer labs. The PUEDS intended to have Internet connected libraries but this did not materialise. It was clear that pupils had greater access to IT at home than in the schools. In addition, a number of teachers were concerned that they did not have sufficient knowledge of working with ICT and variously unprepared for integrating ICT in the class because, in part the computers in the laboratory were not working.

Some teachers compensated for lack of ICT facilities by developing 'digital homework tasks'. This was viewed as part of 'active learning' and 'knowledge gathering' through instructing pupils to manage homework knowing that many pupils have their own internet connections and computers in their homes or can have access. More alarmingly, some teachers were open about using traditional teaching (teacher centred) when increasingly faced with lack of resources in the class (especially a need for ICT, smart boards, etc.).

Summary of findings

Expected results (numbering corresponds to PUEDS results)	Progress/State of Play	Challenges
<p>B1. Curriculum/Textbooks</p> <p>1. By 2015 and on, new and unified schools' texts are provided, according to the new curricula approach for all education stages.</p> <p>2. By 2015, school texts for minorities will meet European standards.</p> <p>10. By 2019, the new curricula will be implemented based on skills at all PUE level, together with the necessary improvements in learning methodology and pupil assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers and pupils report that textbooks translated from international publishers do not always match the Albanian context. Textbooks in minority languages have been made available for the Greek and Macedonian minority. Teachers understood the demands of the curriculum change and could articulate well the needs. Teachers perceive benefit of new curriculum but putting competency-based learning in practice and building continuous assessment remains difficult for many (interviews). Teachers have had (limited) training at the schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with local publishers to produce textbooks aligned with curriculum framework, including contextualizing the textbooks produced by international publishers. Given limited resources in the system, the government to consider restricting free distribution of textbooks to categories in need. How to make the transition from theory to <i>practice</i> in training? Scarce resources for roll-out of the new curriculum The new curriculum paradigm requires greater consolidation of quality improvements in approaches How to provide teachers in the schools with concrete and practical examples of successful methodology in the classroom: how to manage the curriculum in specific situations (subject oriented) in supportive ways? School infrastructure does not support curriculum implementation
<p>B2. Participation and inclusion</p> <p>6. By 2018, 95% of children ages 5-6 (including disability children) are included in reception classes, while 90% of group ages 3-5 are included in different pre-primary education forms functioning under the relevant curricula.</p> <p>7. By 2018, the school's digital map will function, and the network of high schools will be optimised.</p> <p>9. By 2019, the system enables inclusion of pupils in compulsory education, having in focus pupils from vulnerable and marginalized families.</p> <p>11. By 2020, supporting services to disability children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing Inclusion is one of PUEDS strengths although targets for all age groups have not been attained. The share of children with disabilities who attend regular classes increased from 75% in 2014 to 85% in 2018. There has been no significant increase towards more children in education who are receiving disability allowances over the last three years. School enrolments rapidly declining due to demographic change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The preschool targets have not been met. New modalities of working with local government in order to reach this objective are needed (budgets, efficient models etc.). Lack of reliable data on inclusion of children with special needs restricts planning for inclusion. The next strategy should have a focus not just on access but also in full inclusion and learning of children with disabilities Mobilise minority and vulnerable communities to support children and pupils from those communities.

Expected results (numbering corresponds to PUEDS results)	Progress/State of Play	Challenges
<p>will be provided to all EIs in every municipality. 12. From 2017 assistant-teachers will be provided for children with special needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a digital map of public pre-university institutions, but it does not provide all information needed for efficient educational planning . • The number of Roma and Egyptian pupils has tripled in the last decade. • Currently 940 teaching assistants in the system - however not enough to meet the needs - currently lack skills to manage but more to care for general needs of children). • Homework at school is one of the measures to provide assistance to children with learning difficulties, although it targets all children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimising the network of pre-university education institutions across the country. • Adopting an approach to training and support teachers so as to be able to manage their classes when they have pupils with behavioural challenges.
<p>B3. Advisory and supporting services 5. By 2017, all schools will have psycho/social services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both schools visited had social/psychologist leader but in general, many reportedly overburdened. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of high-quality psycho-social and career guidance services in all schools based on developed and agreed protocols.
<p>B4. Community centres 3. By 2016, community centres school network is expanded and offers positive models and enables children to develop democratic values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School as community centre started from 2014 and there are 270 community schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community centres will have to achieve set performance standards. • Current decentralisation means greater responsibility for school directors to engage with community.
<p>B5. Digitalising the learning process 8. By 2018, high schools will be having safe and functional infrastructure providing the opportunity to use digital means in teaching process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognised as a priority but not achieved – Lack of opportunities to engage pupils in collaborative learning and unable to use integrated learning. • Schools lacked adequate and proper ICT infrastructure • Teachers variously unprepared for integrating ICT in the class. • A consensus that some teachers resorted back to their more traditional teaching habits (teacher cantered) when increasingly faced with lack of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget constrains for provision of ICT infrastructure. • Clear pedagogical steps mapped out for improved learning with ICT to inform all teacher development initiatives. • Building teachers' ICT pedagogical competencies in all curriculum areas. • MoESY does not have a set of minimum standards for infrastructure.

Expected results (numbering corresponds to PUEDS results)	Progress/State of Play	Challenges
	(especially a need for ICT, smart boards).	

Specific Recommendations

- Curriculum experts to make school visits to support teachers in their classroom through 1-day *practice* sessions so that groups of teachers become more comfortable in **knowing how** to use the curriculum (through a demonstration lesson in their subject field).
- Develop and implement in-service blended learning programmes for all teachers that extend their training in the delivery of the **curriculum and managing assessments**. This would be an emphasis on professional learning activities, collaborative learning, practice and reflection on experience and promoting working in subject groups to reflect on experience. (There are open learning sources available to readily adaptable to Albania context through copyright permission).
- MoESY to review publishing policy and work with local publishers to produce textbooks aligned with curriculum framework, including contextualizing those textbooks produced by international publishers.
- Develop a blended learning programme appropriate for assistant teachers to provide training in specific disability areas so that they can better support the pupils and schools.
- Recruit minority group members in the community who have the potential to support vulnerable and marginalised children and pupils from these communities.
- Undertake a sound planning exercise with use of school digital mapping and demographic data to optimise the network of pre-university education institutions in Albania.
- Increase the resource base for ICT utility – in the light of funding restrictions ensure ICT and technology in education remains priority funding. Review the current provision levels and standards of provision of ICT and support resources to institutions. Develop a short, medium and long-term national plan with realistic costing profiles for all institutions and national minimum standards of provision of ICT (This will rely on public and private provision and a review of programme and budget priorities in the current PUEDS).
- Building ICT skills for teachers and directors in the use of technology in effective teaching and learning. Review current ICT in education methodology and programmes and develop new programmes and approaches at all levels of teacher education to **integrate** ICT into teacher education programmes (no longer a priority the provision of computers to school laboratories).
- Develop and introduce blended learning programmes for In-service teacher education that promotes teachers to integrate practice and reflection in the classroom. (In the short-term utilising international accredited open-source programmes should be considered).

C. Quality assurance based on standards comparable to those of EU countries

The purpose of quality assurance in education is to assess quality of services provided to learners in multiple ways and at multiple levels, by detecting flaws in the Education System and taking corrective action. The PUEDS addresses Quality Assurance through three different, but interlinked, groups of activities:

- C1. Institutional Re-structuring – Development of legal framework and mechanisms for sound quality assurance;
- C2. System Monitoring – Monitor progress towards achievement of the goals set by PUEDS and other education policies, and support data analysis for decision making;
- C3. External pupil assessment – Develop capacity to assess the effective acquisition of learning by pupils and provide relevant information to assess the quality of learning outcomes.

Progress towards targets

C1. Institutional re-structuring – In general, Quality Assurance (QA) in Albania is a shared responsibility of three different levels: 1) Central level represented by the State Education Inspectorate (SEI), Institute for Development of Education (IDE) and Centre for Educational Services (CES); 2) Regional/Local level represented by regional education directorates and local education offices (RED/LEO) and 3) Education institutions as direct service providers.

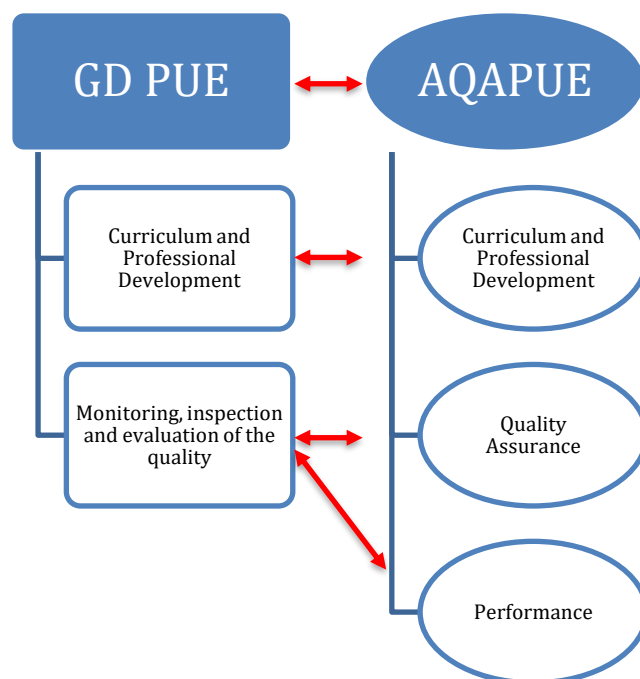
Whereas IDE develops methodologies for quality assurance and evaluation of pre-university education institutions, as well as their curriculum (QShA, 2018), the SEI is responsible for inspection and external evaluation of schools, whereas CES maintains responsibility for national assessment as quality assurance tool. RED/LEOs provide direct support to schools within their area of responsibility, whereas schools themselves are responsible to ensure the quality of provision for their pupils.

The Pre-University Education Law, as amended in 2018, abolishes the State Education Inspectorate in its current form and provides for the establishment of an institution responsible for quality assurance in the Pre-University Education. The Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (AQAPUE) was established in February 2019 (QBZ, 2019) as effective merger of State Education Inspectorate (SEI) and the Institute for Development of Education (IDE). AQAPUE is responsible for assessing performance of the education system, as well as for curriculum development and teacher professional development. The agency will have 58 employees and organisational structure of 4 units: Directorate for Performance; Directorate for Curricula and Qualifications; Directorate for Quality Assurance; and Directorate for Finances and Support Services (Government of Albania, 2019-1).

With the new organisation of the Pre-University Education Governance, the responsibility for school evaluation and inspection rests with the General Directorate for Pre-University Education (GD PUE), whereas AQAPUE will focus on system performance level and “risk-based assessment of pre-university education providers” (QBZ, 2019). Given similarities in the organisational structure of GD PUE and AQAPUE interaction between the two new institutions should be possible at multiple levels, as shown in Figure 2. However, effectiveness of such interaction largely depends on clear definition of roles of respective units in GD PUE and AQAPUE, which should lead to avoiding unnecessary overlapping and

to ensuring complementarity of action. For example, GD PUE and REDs carry out inspection of schools, whereas AQAPUE may undertake risk-based inspection of schools, exchanging information with the GD PUE. Also, AQAPUE may need to provide technical assistance to GD PUE in the field of curriculum, professional development, school monitoring, evaluation and inspection. Several informants shared their concern on the impact that the new organisational structure may have on the quality of the inspection process, pointing out difficulties to separate management and oversight role of the GD PUE and REDs.

Figure 2. Possible interaction between GD PUE and AQAPUE and relevant organisational units



In 2017, MoESY established a system for **accreditation of in-service training providers and programmes** (MASR, 2017-1). A seven-member committee appointed by the Minister, routinely accredits in-service providers and programmes based on public call for expression of interest.

The school performance card is an instrument for school assessment which is based on a set of objectively verifiable indicators as well as indicators based on perceptions of parents, teachers and pupils. It has been implemented since 2014 and is used to rank schools at the regional level. Public and private schools are ranked separately, and rankings are published on the web. The Team observed that the use of this instrument might be inappropriate and even demotivating for schools serving a considerable number of children from vulnerable groups. The OECD/UNICEF Review recommends transforming the school performance card into a tool for improvement by developing a contextualised school index (OECD, forthcoming). Given the limited availability of comparable data, the Review recommends that in the short term the MoESY focuses on providing schools with a dashboard of indicators benchmarking their performance to that of schools from the same socio-economic background. In the medium term, once data robustness is ensured, the Ministry can work to introduce a contextualized school index.

C2. System Monitoring – Albania does not have a set of national education indicators, but certain indicators that allow for monitoring of reforms and international comparison are produced. The

indicators are defined in the Programme of Official Statistics (PSZ), along with reporting periodicity and submission deadlines (QBZ, 2017). Producing indicators is the responsibility of National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) even in those cases when responsible government agencies have all data needed. An earlier OECD review concludes that existing data gaps and poor coordination of tools and mechanisms hamper system assessment (OECD, 2015).

Albania does not have a sector review process in place, in terms of a government-led activity of bringing different stakeholders together to review status, progress and performance in the implementation of PUEDS, as described in the JSR Guide (GPE, 2018). Such a process would introduce a fully-fledged monitoring system and a reliable and comprehensive evidence base system. These would foster greater accountability and shared responsibility for results and generate more responsive planning and resource optimisation.

No Education Sector performance reports were produced to date. Nevertheless, IDE conducted research, which produced some evidence base for decision-making. Sound examples are: the National Report on the Perception of Teachers and Parents on the Quality of Pre-University Education Reform in the Republic of Albania (IZhA, 2017); the Report on Identification of Training Needs for School Directors and Teachers at PUE (IZhA, 2016) and the Report on the initial training of teachers in Albanian higher education institutions (IZhA, 2016-4). In addition, focused comprehensive stocktaking exercises were undertaken by UNCESO (2017) (2018), UNICEF (2017) and OECD (2019).

C3. External Pupil Assessment – External assessment in Albanian Pre-University Education is the responsibility of the Centre for Education Services (CES), which also manages state exams for regulated professions leading towards licensure. The CES currently organizes final exams for grade 5 and grade 9 leavers, as well as the Matura Exam for those who have completed the upper secondary education. The CES developed **comprehensive reports from external assessment for grades 5, 9 and 12.** However, producing reliable data on learning outcomes to be used for improvement at system and school level remains a challenge.

The new competency-based curriculum requires a significant shift in assessment practice, primarily at school level with teachers being required to undertake closer examination of the mastery of competences. Also, the new, competency-based curriculum has to be reflected in the nationally mandated assessment (UNESCO, 2018). There is progress in aligning the assessment with the requirements of the new Curriculum. The IDE developed teacher guides for the new curriculum, which also provide information on the assessment. Portfolio assessment has become an integral part of the school system. On the other hand, it was reported by teachers that parents have difficulties with understanding the new assessment system, and also that teachers require further training on managing assessment systems in the classroom and on result reporting.

Albania has a clear policy of improving the results in international rankings such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Albania participated five times in PISA – 2000, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018. Despite the fact that in PISA 2012 Albanian pupils scored lower than pupils from any European and Asian country, there was some improvement in performance compared to PISA 2000. The improvements were equivalent to a quarter to half a year of schooling in mathematics and science and more than one year of schooling in reading, and this was achieved despite substantial increases of enrolment in upper secondary education, which usually results in lower average pupil performance due to the inclusion of poorer and traditionally excluded pupils (World Bank Group, 2014).

The 2015 PISA results saw considerably improved performance compared to PISA 2012 which is equivalent to one and a half year in reading, three quarters of the year in mathematics and one year and a quarter in science (QShA, 2017). This time Albania compared quite well with some European countries for example: Moldova, Turkey, Romania, Montenegro and Georgia (Table 5), with decreased share of underachieving pupils compared to previous tests, but still with a modest share of high performers. (OECD, 2016)

Table 5. Performance of ECA countries in PISA 2015

	science	reading	mathematics	mean
Croatia	475	487	464	475
Bulgaria	446	432	441	440
Romania	435	434	444	437
Turkey	425	428	420	425
Moldova	428	416	420	421
Montenegro	411	427	418	419
Albania	427	405	413	415
Georgia	411	401	404	405
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	384	352	371	369
Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)	378	347	362	362
ECA average	422	413	416	417
OECD average	493	493	490	492

Source: (UNICEF, 2019-1)

According to the recent UNESCO Education Policy Review (UNESCO, 2018) girls in Albania consistently perform better than boys in all disciplines. Our informants mentioned that the improvement of PISA results is partly attributed to activities undertaken to motivate test-takers in terms of raising the awareness of pupils on the importance of trying hard to respond to as many items as they can rather than leaving them blank. In March 2019, Albania participated for the first time in the assessment of pupil learning in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

However, there are worrying disparities of educational attainment between urban and rural regions estimated to differ by two years of schooling (UNICEF, 2017). There are additional concerns to be addressed indicating that although Albanian children can expect to complete 13 years of education by the age of 18, when the schools are adjusted for quality of learning, this only represents the equivalent of 8.9 years meaning a learning gap of 4.1 years (World Bank Group, 2018).

Summary of findings

Expected results (numbering corresponds to PUEDS results)	Progress/State of Play	Challenges
C1. INSTITUTIONAL RE-STRUCTURING 1. By 2015, legal framework and standards will be in place to ensure quality. 2. By 2015, efficiency mechanisms for accreditation and licensing of institutions and programmes will be in place. 3. By 2015, School Performance Card is being implemented. 5. By 2016, monitoring, inspection and assessment mechanisms will be in place. 7. By 2016, SEI is organized and functions at central and regional level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency for Quality Assurance in the Pre-University Education (AQAPUE) was established in February 2019 by effectively merging the SEI and IDE. System for accreditation of in-service providers and programs established in 2017. SEI has implemented the school performance card and rankings have been published on the RED web pages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact that the new organisational structure may have on the quality of the inspection process, anticipating difficulties to separate management and oversight role of the GD PUE and REDs. Avoiding overlapping and ensuring complementarity of action between GD PUE and AQAPUE. School Performance Card ranking may be inappropriate for schools serving a considerable number of children from vulnerable groups since it is based upon student outcomes.
C2. SYSTEM MONITORING 4. By 2015, the Ministry will be drafting the PUEDS annual performance report. 9. By 2018, the system is monitored based on international indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Albania does not have a set of national education indicators, but INSTAT produces certain indicators that allow for monitoring of reforms and international comparison. Albania does not have a sector review process in place and no performance reports have been produced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing data gaps and poor coordination of tools and mechanisms hamper system assessment (OECD, forthcoming).
C3. PUPIL ASSESSMENT 6. By 2016, efficient pupil skill assessment mechanisms and contemporary assessment techniques and methods will be in used. 8. By 2016, the test of General Certificate of Secondary Education is made as exit test.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is progress in aligning the assessment with the requirements of the new Curriculum. CES developed external assessment reports for grades 5, 9 and 12. Albania demonstrated significant improvement in PISA 2015 score compared to previous years, which is partly due to better motivation of test-takers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was reported by teachers that parents have difficulties with understanding the new assessment system. Producing reliable data on learning outcomes to be used for improvement at system and school level.

Specific Recommendations

- Two new institutions, AQAPUE and GD PUE, need to establish close cooperation in monitoring the Pre-University Education Sector and assuring the quality of education services.

- Albania to introduce a full-fledged joint annual sector review (JASR) as a tool for monitoring the Pre-University Education System, assessing its performance and generating more responsive planning and resource optimisation. Such reviews should be annual and linked to the budget planning cycle, in line with JSR Guidelines by GPE (2018).
- Define a set of national education indicators based on the UNCESO and EUROSTAT standards, and include those indicators in the Programme of Official Statistics (PSZ).
- Transform the school performance card into a tool for improvement by developing a contextualised school index. (OECD, forthcoming)
- Support schools in integrating the requirements of the new curriculum in the assessment.
- Communicate external assessment results to each school in a way it could be compared at local, regional and national level.

D. Contemporary teachers and school leader's professional development and training

There are important changes taking place in Albania that aims to build a high-quality education system relevant to the 21st century social and economic realities. The PUEDS emphasises the importance of improving the quality of teaching and learning and pays particular attention to supporting teachers' professional development. Teachers are agents of change in every responsive education system, and their strong professional background is the key to success of every education reform. We know from research that teachers are critically important for improving the quality of education.

In Albania, since the introduction of the PUEDS teachers have faced a series of demands for example, implementing a more student-centred curriculum and integrating ICT teaching/learning in their classrooms. All this is happening within a major structural change as the government decentralises the administration to the lower levels where teachers and administrators will have new roles and responsibilities.

The case for strengthening and producing competent teachers in Albania is well recognised and that teacher professional development is one of the most important factors in improving the quality of education and raising the level of pupil attainment. This is the reason that the improvement of the initial teacher training and teacher professional development is one of the four policy priorities of the Pre-University Strategy and remains highly relevant intervention for years to come.

Table 6 shows that the number of teachers in Albania has not changed much during the five years, although the number of children decreased around 17%.

Table 6. Teachers in Albania from 2012/13-2016/17

Education level	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Pre-School (ISCED 0)	4,498	4,459	4,495	4,687	4,644
Primary and Lower Secondary (ISCED 1&2)	25,263	25,051	24,777	25,007	24,866
Upper Secondary (ISCED 3)	8,610	8,606	8,671	8,942	9,042
Total	38,371	38,116	37,943	38,636	38,552

Source: (MASR, 2018)

While reviewing priorities and raising education budgets among other measures will be important it will need to be a heavy focus on teachers and teacher quality in Albania at this stage of development that will ultimately be the most important factor in raising the achievement levels for all pupils.

The PUEDS addresses improvement of teaching through three main sets of activities: D1 Pre-Service training; D2 In-service training; and D3 Teacher Certification.

Progress towards targets

D1. Pre-Service training – Throughout the last two decades teachers in Albania have experienced numerous changes and new demands for their qualifications (Gardinier, 2016). Until recently, all initial teacher education programmes lasted 4 years, but the enactment of the new Higher Education Law brought a change (Law, 2018-1). The new Law prescribes that all teachers should pursue post-graduate studies in the respective field with pre-school and primary teachers required to complete a Professional Master programme (60-90 ECTS) and subject teachers complete a Scientific Master programme (120 ECTS). Such programmes are required to have at least 20% of credits of pedagogy and 80% of curricula for teacher education in each subject and this is required to be similar in all higher education institutions (Law, 2018-1).

IDE has developed professional standards for teachers at all ISCED levels (IZhA, 2016-1) (IZhA, 2016-2) (IZhA, 2017-2), which may be used as guidance for development of the new pre-service programmes, but there is no obligatory teacher competency framework to serve this purpose (IZhA, 2017-1). UNESCO Education Policy Review summarizes findings from several studies suggesting that pre-service training programmes in Albania “are not adequately supporting the country’s education reform efforts” (UNESCO, 2017).

Studies suggest that course delivery is still characterized by teacher-centred methodology (e.g. lectures), rather than the student-centred techniques that teachers are now expected to use in the classroom due to the adoption of competency-based Learning. This change provides new platforms for enhancing teaching and learning, an opportunity poorly used so far. Closing the theory-practice gap is required in initial teacher education. This will mean better integration of theory, pedagogical knowledge and practice.

Teacher education programmes do not sufficiently cover important topics such as: pupil assessment, lesson planning, classroom management, and working with special needs children and those from diverse backgrounds. The UNESCO Review (UNESCO, 2017) and the IDE study (IZhA, 2017-1) suggest that practice teaching is the least effective part of the curriculum due to weaknesses in supervision and mentoring of trainees.

The IDE have acknowledged the need to harmonise pre-service programmes offered at the public and private institutions offering teacher development programmes. A study conducted by IDE (IZhA, 2017-1) concluded that there are difficulties with adaptation of study programmes to the requirements of the Law and the new competency-based curriculum with little to no similarity between programmes offered by universities across the country. There are currently 14 universities that need to harmonise their programmes. In this regard, the, MoESY has established 16 working groups composed of representatives of higher education institutions offering teacher education in different areas, IDE experts and teachers. Groups have worked for one year and first drafts of new curricula are completed.

In the last few years, the Government has made efforts to attract highly qualified applicants in the teaching profession by offering scholarships and raising the bar for admission to pre-service programmes (QShA, 2018). Entry level for initial teacher training has been raised to the grade-point average from upper secondary education of 7.5 and above. Many country examples show improving initial entry level has benefits for improving the quality of education and also raises the status of teaching as a profession.

D2. In-Service training – Recognising that highly qualified and motivated teachers are a key factor in the provision of quality education the MoESY has prescribed that teachers and school administrators should undergo at least 3 days of professional development training every year. The main training provider is the IDE, but other providers also offer programmes subject to accreditation by the Commission for the Accreditation of Training Programmes. Many teachers and administrators have taken advantage of the IDE portal to select training modules. The database of training programmes lists 52 accredited training providers and 428 accredited training programmes.

The Institute for Development of Education (IDE) coordinates the implementation of the new curriculum, which represents a major paradigm shift for teachers in Albania. The Institute has issued comprehensive guidelines and support material for teachers and directors on the new curriculum for all levels of pre-university education (IZhA, 2018) (IZhA, 2017-3) (IZhA, 2016-3). At present, the Institute provides a three-day training on the new curriculum to all teachers, directors and supervisors. However, the 3-day training offered by the IDE is too limited. Teachers interviewed felt that they needed more than the three-day training. This is confirmed by Gonzales (2018) study ‘teachers commonly cite the need for more training, pointing out the current three-day training is not adequate to bridge the training gap’. In particular, some teachers felt that they also have had (limited) training at the schools – but they reported that they organise to meet regularly in the school to discuss issues of their teaching and classroom work.

In 2018, IDE trained 22,000 teachers and maintains the training database accessible to all accredited providers. However, little is known about the quality and impact of the training programmes, the area IDE plans to look closer to in the near future.

Teachers have the opportunity to share experiences and reflect through “professional development networks” that meet on regular basis and staff from schools can share their challenges and successes. The reason the networks seem to be working is because the teachers see them as a place to share their concerns and successes (Gonzales, 2018). There are 1,066 professional networks across Albania based on subject areas, grade levels and themes. For example, there is a network of teacher assistants which supports their professional development. Teachers we met with reported attending the Teachers’ Professional Network once a month (for just over the hour) generally together with subject specialist (for example, mathematics or history groups). The teachers also met regularly in the school to discuss and reflect on issues of teaching and classroom work. They also organised a number of ad-hoc meetings amongst subject specialist from different schools (for example history) to support each other within the school.

Reinforcing teacher development at all levels must be a central activity in any re-design of PUEDS. Research shows that improving **Continuing Professional Development** (CPD) has the greatest short-term impact. Redesigning, strengthening and intensifying CPD for all teachers will require a rethink of current approaches to CPD. A teacher professional development continuum (life-long learning system) that brings together career opportunities and performance monitoring will be required.

D3. Teacher Certification – The CES administers the state exams for teacher certification. The exams are conducted twice a year in CES premises and consist of 50 multiple-choice questions randomly chosen from among a set of 3,000 test items. There are separate test items for each subject. Certain reports questioned this practice given the fact that Master’s degree is required for entering teaching profession and the pre-service programmes are accredited by the respective Agency (UNESCO, 2017). However, it is indicative that 50% of test-takers in April 2019 term have failed the exam¹¹.

Albania does not have a full-fledged system of teacher appraisal. Based on normative provisions every teacher should have a personal annual plan that include indicators related to professional development, pupil achievement, participation in consultations and absences. There is no common format for such a plan and neither a guideline on how personal plans should be dealt with. The appraisal merely consists of the school director assessing the realization of the plan at the end of the school year based on the evidence provided by the teacher.

Promotion is separate from the regular appraisal and requires certain number of years of service and passing of the exam administered by IDE rather than promotion being assessed in the most part on merit. Teachers with 5 years of experience may apply for promotion to Qualified Teacher (Category 3), those with 10 years of experience for Specialist Teacher (Category 2), whereas teachers with 20 years of experience may be promoted to Master Teacher (Category 1). The IDE reports that 9,000 teacher applications for promotion were processed in the period 2014-2016 (IZhA, 2017-1), which includes portfolio assessment and testing. According to a MoESY Report (MoESY, 2019), master teachers constitute 35.2% of teacher population in the school year 2018/19, specialist teachers – 26.6%, qualified teachers – 16.7%, whereas 21.5% of teachers are not categorised.

Progress towards targets

Expected results (numbering corresponds to PUEDS results)	Progress/State of Play	Challenges
D1. Initial training 7. By 2016, Faculty of Education programmes will be harmonized with educational policies of the Ministry and international standards and the whole FE personnel will be trained through PD programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum and training programmes are at different levels. The quality and content of initial teacher education programmes varies between programmes. Entry level for initial teacher training set at grade-point average of 7.5 and above. A lack of life-skills reflected in training curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theory-practice gap in initial teacher education. How to emphasise practical training as part of initial teacher training programmes. Unifying and aligning teacher development programmes. Initial teacher education examinations to reflect competencies required in the schools.
D2. In-service training 1. By 2015, the PD’s need assessment capacities are functional. 2. By 2016, at least 50 programmes for PDs’ are accredited based on needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2018, IDE trained 22,000 teachers 52 accredited training providers and 428 accredited training programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing teacher professional development continuum (life-long learning system) that brings together career opportunities and performance monitoring will be required.

¹¹ <http://www.albanianfreepress.al/news/2019/04/mesuesit-e-sapodiplomuar-50-mbetes-ne-provimin-e-shtetit-145884/>

Expected results (numbering corresponds to PUEDS results)	Progress/State of Play	Challenges
<p>3. By 2015, PDs programme mechanism for monitoring and assessment will be in place.</p> <p>4. By 2016, PDs administrative guidelines will be harmonized with the legal framework into force and will be implemented.</p> <p>6. By 2016, the Ministry in cooperation with IDE and CES will certify trainers of PD programmes.</p> <p>9. By 2017, stable mechanisms for PD at school will be in place.</p> <p>10. By 2016, PD administration database system will be in operation.</p> <p>11. By 2017, our educational institutions, at any stage, will have in place instruments for national and international cooperation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No reliable information on the quality and impact of trainings in the classroom Teachers reported that in the absence of in-school support for managing the curriculum they often organised ad-hoc meetings amongst subject specialist to support each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing additional training to the already three-day training during the school year. Greater provision for introducing and maintaining a major curriculum development.
<p>D3. Teacher certification</p> <p>5. By 2016, specialists from the Ministry, those of local education units and school headmasters will have leadership and management trainings by accredited programmes.</p> <p>8. By 2017, the licensing of all teachers in the system will be finalized and 5% of them will hold more than one license.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern for end examination – the use of multiple-choice questions at this level (random selection of 50 items from 3,000) is questionable. Informed that 50% of new teachers fail state end examination. The promotion from one category to the other is heavily dependent on experience, involvement in training and taking an exam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The promotion of teachers and directors is not merit -based. Develop career development system (CPD). Teacher appraisal is not informing needs of professional development thereby not tailoring training.

Specific Recommendations

- Unify and align teacher development and school leadership programmes by reviewing all teaching and learning in the professional development programmes and initial teacher training programmes.
- Introduce flexible training opportunities within in-service programme to include blended learning systems.
- Review and strengthen all teacher education programmes and reduce the theory-practice gap by redesigning programmes to integrate theory, pedagogic knowledge and an emphasis on practice, ensuring development of competencies new teachers need at the start of their careers

- Establish a well - resourced national structure for teachers as a profession in the form of Teacher Development Management System (TDMS) that incorporates an appropriate Continuous Professional Development (CPD) system with all levels of professional learning and training, teacher standards, performance assessment and the promotion and licencing of teachers.
- Review and revise a transparent, valid and reliable entry system for teacher programmes.

3. CONCLUSIONS

1. **Unsatisfactory levels of financing are one of the main issues to affect negatively the output of the education sector in Albania.** The level of available budget relative to GDP remains lower than targeted and Albania is consistently one of the lower investors in education in the region. Many reports acknowledge low levels of education spending which raise issues of access, inclusiveness and efficiency levels of education. Competency based education involves high costs for administration and the retraining of teachers in an entirely new system. If Albania is to increase the budget to MoESY then the question of budget allocations and priorities need to be considered.
2. **Decentralisation has potential to increase efficiency and accountability** in management and governance of the Albanian Education System, provided that practices of information sharing, communication, and transparency between the national, regional and local levels of education across the country are developed and promoted. MoESY and AQAPUE need to provide technical assistance to municipalities to manage the pre-school system, as well as to GD PUE to act as executive agency of the Government for the Pre-University Education Sector. It is important to ensure the GD PUE, through its network of RED/LEOs is able to provide day-to-day support to education institutions and conduct high quality inspections and performance evaluations.
3. **School administrators are seen as weak links in the system.** The need is to strengthen and improve the education management system with particular emphasis on building the systems to include building monitoring and professional support services. A simple approach towards decentralization would mean school administrators being trained to manage and implement school development (improvement) plans and the financing mechanisms to support the implementation. Also, school administrators have to act as instructional leaders in schools.
4. **The importance of a functioning EMIS system is recognized** and MoESY is finalizing the piloting of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) at different levels. The measurement of the achievement of education outcomes in the new curriculum system will require the development of Key Performance Indicators. MoESY is finalizing the development of the integrated data system. The Socrates system will support coordination between all institutions and is expected to be in full operation in 2020. It is currently in a pilot phase and will be managed by Centre for Educational Services (CES), in cooperation with the local education authorities and schools.
5. **Partner and government coordination need improvement.** The 2017 Education Policy Review (UNESCO, 2017) hinted the irregularity of inter-agency consultation in Albania, often resulting in duplication of efforts and leaving gaps in implementation. In addition, the review advocates for an expansion of transparency and cooperation with other relevant stakeholders to ensure legitimacy of policies and improve the exercise of democratic principles in the country. The concern highlighting the need for partner and government coordination calls for further analytical support

on preparing and implementing a model to improve on the future coordination particularly in the light of the Albania's preparation for EU membership and likely premium that this places upon effective coordination.

6. There are though few development partners supporting education but moving toward an understanding of sector dialogue as a multi-stakeholder process there is a need to identify which stakeholders should be involved and how and what structure would be appropriate. The initial need is to set up education discussion platforms between all partners and this is even more important as Albania embarks on decentralisation of government. In the first instance, this could take the form of a **National Education Forum** to bring together the four regional structures and partners, government and the public to consult on education sector development. In addition, the development partners would develop a coordination group and work plan.
7. **Major gains have been achieved particularly in the area of access to schools.** The government continues to demonstrate proven commitment in addressing the quality and equity issues in the PUEDS and as a national priority. The concern is that whilst the goal of social inclusion is being well addressed in PUEDS and the NSDI II the need is also to improve student achievement levels among the more vulnerable groups.
8. More needs to be done to develop **early childhood education programmes** to reach the targets set out in the PUEDS and the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI II). The critical importance of the early years for learning is recognized in the PUEDS that has set the goal of increasing the number of rural and urban kindergartens and highlights the need to improve the quality and expand equitable access to reach all children. UNICEF (2017) note that compared to other education programmes, the returns in ECD are the highest particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹² This will require greater investment levels than is currently the case and as Fuller and Khamsi (2017) note the gap between the rich and the poor is particularly noticeable at this level whilst poverty affects enrolment and attendance and for example, only 13.5% of Roma ages 3-5 participate in ECD (Fuller & Khamsi, 2017).
9. Albania has made increased investments in supporting inclusiveness as a key policy issue in pursuance of the national goals. The data though indicates that **there remain groups excluded from education**. Although there has been significant increase in participation of Roma and Egyptian children at all levels in the later years their enrolment rates remain low, especially in rural and remote areas.
10. **The improvement of quality aspects of education is a matter of concern** – there are more pupils, but have they achieved more and will this be the case with the consolidation of a new curriculum paradigm? Research associated with what works best in the classroom in terms of promoting more effective teaching and learning, suggests that teacher-directed, more direct styles of classroom interaction are superior to the alternatives when working with competency-based education. This is the case in crucial areas like learning to read and learning basic mathematical concepts and algorithms.
11. **It is vital to take note of recent regional research as to what actually works through implementing the new competency-based curriculum.** Trends suggest that true competency-based education may only survive in alternative settings - schools that are given the flexibility to

¹² See <https://www.unicef.org/albania/early-childhood-development-and-learning>

meet the needs of non-traditional learners in ways that transcend the constraints and inflexibilities of traditional education, as we have known it. In addition, the focus on devolution raised by a number of the papers on devolution would mean looking at a strategy for implementation on the expectation that devolved responsibility would lead to improved education planning and management at the lower levels with active participation and authority to utilize resources on identified development needs.

12. **Teachers need to be better supported to implement the new curriculum.** Achieving success with the curriculum has been limited because of the lack of resources at the school level. **However, good progress has been made with the selection and supply of textbooks.** It has been argued that teachers need to be better supported and resourced and this will have implications for budget and resource allocations to schools.
13. **The use and utility of ICT is poor.** While large numbers of computers have been supplied to the schools, their use by teachers and pupils in the teaching learning process has been limited because many are not functioning. Importantly, although ICT is recognized as being vital for progressive education in Albania the challenge noted is to make their use effective within the new curriculum paradigm. The reports recognize the potential for effective learning and the development of more efficient education services. Ways of providing support to institutions to manage and integrate ICT and related source into teaching and learning activities will need to be explored.
14. **Monitoring of Education Sector performance needs improvement.** Currently, Albania does not have a process in place to provide comprehensive monitoring of the Education Sector performance. EMIS is still not fully operational, whereas national education performance indicators have not been clearly defined. Also, there is no consultation process among key stakeholders in the Education System which would lead to credible performance appraisal, and foster accountability and shared responsibility for results.
15. **The length and timing of training that teachers currently are offered in response to implementing a major reform is limited.** The three days offered for training on the curriculum would seem to be much too short especially with the range and complexity of the changes in education. An OECD study found that the most effective professional development programmes upgrade pedagogic knowledge and skills over a sustained period of time rather than through disjointed one-off and short-term courses (OECD, 2014). They bring together initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development so as to create a lifelong framework for teachers.
16. **Teachers need to be better prepared.** International research points out that competency-based education inevitably involves high costs for administration and the retraining of teachers in an entirely new system. The general concern reported is that teachers working with their pupils do not get beyond the first levels of competencies and in general, achievement levels are higher for urban-based pupils. In total, achievements of Roma and Egyptian pupils are lower than those of other pupils. Thus, teachers need to be better prepared, supported and resourced and this will also have implications for budget and resource allocations to schools. A number of the reports also indicate that there are some challenges and difficulties in developing monitoring tools that capture the intended changes in teachers' teaching and pupils' learning.
17. **Practice teaching is the least effective part of the system.** Effective implementation of the revised curriculum will contribute to quality improvement in raising learning outcomes of all pupils.

Teacher education and teacher professionalism is rightly identified as an overarching factor in managing the curriculum and improving the quality of education in Albania. However, several reports identified practice teaching as the least effective part of the system due to weaknesses in supervision and mentoring of trainees.

18. **Building a Teacher Competency Framework will be important in the next stage of implementation.** There is evidence to show that considerable emphasis and measures need to be taken to strengthen and develop capable and up-to-date teachers who can manage outcomes-based learning. Building a **Teacher Competency Framework** will be important to support future developments and build on the platform of professional standards already developed for teachers. This will lead to improving teacher professional qualifications and competences and provide well-managed longer-term and cohesive training programmes for in-service training for existing teachers. The idea will be to develop a full **Teacher Development Management System (TDMS)** that unifies all the components.

4. SUGGESTIONS MOVING FORWARD

A Transition Road Map will be required for developing a new PUEDS strategy in the next phase. The Road Map would include a timeline with milestones and indicators for support to the development of the next phase. The Road Map would assist the MoESY in taking steps towards operationalising the next strategic plan whether this be an extension of PUEDS or as has been suggested, there would be an **Education Sector Strategic Plan**.

An Education Sector Strategic Plan would incorporate all sub-sectors in education under one umbrella plan. This will allow the MoESY and development partners and other stakeholders to plan together and adopt a long-term strategy merging with the PUEDS and VET and higher education sector with investment planning captured within a single resource and funding envelope. It will also mean that dialogue and coordination will be broad based and focus on government priorities and it would result in more effective and better coordinated support to the sector.

The next year will be a time of reflection and action and key decision making on the way forward. If developed an **Education Sector Strategic Plan** can have the advantage of greater coordination and prioritizing if managed well and will aid the alignment of the development partner activities fully behind the government single strategic plan. In addition, there are significant implications in terms of the need to make a clear prioritization of the interventions and activities, perhaps focusing on fewer activities so that results can be achieved by the end of the current strategy period. In addition, there would better links to the macro-economic framework and sector ceilings where budget priorities can be set, and this is particularly important if we consider the current low budget levels for education.

Education institution building and putting decentralization in place remains a major challenge. Efficient implementation of the new structure for the governance of the Pre-University System requires high level of coordination between AQAPUE and GD PUE, as well as close monitoring from MoESY to identify any initial implementation challenges and inform the development of the new Education Strategy. The government's policy on decentralization recognizes the importance of improved service delivery, local partnerships, decision-making and accountability. The future sees decentralization (administration, implementation and monitoring) as a major component in PUEDS activities; managing and coordinating the flow of information, strengthening school autonomy and the

setting up of relevant structures to support teachers and school principals. However, decentralization rather than ‘deconcentration’ will see a heavy emphasis on capacity building (cost implication) that is integrated into decentralized services rather than taking part in stand-alone training.

The foundations for a successful PUEDS outcome have been laid. However, an education strategy that attempts to bring about substantial, systemic changes needs to be realistic about the timeframe of the expected changes. Following on the establishment a new curriculum paradigm that affects all in education, decentralisation plans and ambitious teaching-learning methodologies required to implement change requires an additional two to three years of implementation to ensure that the changes are embedded, and that schools and institutions operate adequately and show results. The same applies for putting implementation in place that requires time and additional resources to ensure success for all.

As we have seen, **making implementation happen is the biggest short-term challenge.** In general, PUEDS has laid the platform and foundations for improving implementation and has promoted and contributed to the quality goal mostly through a series of inputs: for example, the development of the competency-based curriculum and putting in place developments for teacher training. A major challenge facing MoESY in addressing many of the issues of school improvement and particularly that of the curriculum and teacher professional development is how to turn around a system where implementation remains a serious problem. Making implementation happen is the critical challenge. More needs to happen at the level of implementation to address key issues particularly focusing on the curriculum, teacher professional development and support to ICT infrastructure.

Reinforcing teacher development at all levels must be a central activity in addressing implementation for any re-design of PUEDS. Research shows that improving **Continuing Professional Development** has the greatest short-term impact and is ultimately the most important factor in raising achievement levels for all students. Already embedded in the system of teacher development is the idea of teachers taking initiatives and being responsible for their own development and this sits well with designing **accredited blended learning activity.**

More flexible training methods and schedules for teachers both in pre-service and in-service through appropriate combinations of full-time, part-time and importantly blended learning opportunities would make sense at this stage of PUEDS. This idea leads to thinking about alternative methodologies for implementing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) being developed with a focus on blended learning and teachers accessing online professional development programmes that would be part of their licence portfolio.

Greater emphasis on pedagogic knowledge will better support competency-based education. While many teacher education curricula generally incorporate subject content (knowledge and understanding of the subject to be taught in school) and pedagogic content knowledge (knowledge of how to teach the subject), international research suggests pedagogic content knowledge is the most important component of the teacher education curriculum (seen as more important in primary teacher education than in secondary) as it develops the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to teach subjects effectively and is best acquired through a mixture of theory and practice in the classroom. This is imperative for the introduction of competency-based learning. Therefore, training for teachers that moves them between principles to practice and back again is seen as the most powerful way of translating ideas into classroom practice (Vavrus, 2010).

Greater investment in ICT and teaching – learning resources will have major benefits. ICT also has the potential to impact on the ways that teachers approach their daily tasks and complement different avenues for pupil learning and has the potential to reduce the theory-practice divide mentioned by teachers.

Robust systems of monitoring and evaluation are needed at all levels. Stronger monitoring and support to decentralisation and schools will be essential for effective implementation of curricula interventions and improving quality at the institution level. More frequent support visits (that would involve the university) will be needed to track performance across all institutions and inform on implementation and effectiveness.

The absence of a Joint Annual Sector Review means that opportunity is lost in providing a regular overview, periodic and systematic assessment of the PUEDS carried out jointly with partners and stakeholders. Therefore, the Government needs to consider introducing such a process within the new planning cycle, and use it to improve effectiveness, transparency and accountability within the Education System.

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ANNEX 1. PUEDS pillars and expected results

Numbering corresponds to results from PUEDS

A. Enhancing leadership, governance, and management of resources and capacities of PUES

A1. Legislation

- 4. By 2016, necessary education legislation in line with EU countries is in place.
- 11. By 2017, new or amended legislation will be implemented in EIs.

A2. Decentralisation

- 1. From 2014, resource management competences are assigned to schools (decentralisation).
- 12. By 2017, mechanisms for decentralised management of financial resources will be established and in operation.

A3. Performance, transparency and accountability

- 2. By 2015, periodic self-assessment and assessment reports on institutional and personal performance are developed at all education stages.
- 3. By 2015, effective development plans at all EIs levels are implemented.
- 5. By 2016, new capacities for the preparation of education administrators and managers are built.
- 6. By 2016, participation and transparency in education decision making process are ensured.
- 9. By 2017, EMIS is applied at all levels of education system and decision making is based on data.
- 10. By 2017, a coordination and interaction system between different leadership levels in education and other sectors will be in place.

A4. Financing

- 7. By 2016, funding terms and rules to support priorities in education inclusion and equality in education are developed and applied.
- 8. By 2016, pupil-based funding model is effectively functioning.
- 13. By 2017, mechanisms for textbook cost coverage will be implemented.
- 14. By 2017, GDP percentage for PUEDS reaches 3% while for the system in general 5%.
- 15. By 2018, a transparent system for funding and fund-raising promotion from private sector will be in place.
- 16. By 2020, pupil-based public expenses will be comparable with the region counties average levels.

B. Inclusive quality learning

B1. Curriculum/textbooks

1. By 2015 and on, new and unified schools' texts are provided, according to the new curricula approach for all education stages.
2. By 2015, school texts for minorities will meet European standards.
10. By 2019, the new curricula will be implemented based on skills at all PUE level, together with the necessary improvements in learning methodology and pupil assessment.

B2. Participation and inclusion

6. By 2018, 95% of children ages 5-6 (including disability children) are included in reception classes, while 90% of group ages 3-5 are included in different pre-primary education forms functioning under the relevant curricula.
7. By 2018, the school's digital map will function, and the network of high schools will be optimised.
9. By 2019, the system enables inclusion of pupils in compulsory education, having in focus pupils from vulnerable and marginalized families.
11. By 2020, supporting services to disability children will be provided to all EIs in every municipality.
12. From 2017 assistant-teachers will be provided for children with special needs

B3. Advisory and supporting services

5. By 2017, all schools will have psycho-social services.

B4. Community centres

3. By 2016, community centres school network is expanded and offers positive models and enables children to develop democratic values.

B5. Digitalising the learning process

8. By 2018, high schools will be having safe and functional infrastructure providing the opportunity to use digital means in teaching process.

C. Ensure quality assurance based on standards comparable to those of EU countries; and**C1. Institutional re-structuring**

1. By 2015, legal framework and standards will be in place to ensure quality.
2. By 2015, efficiency mechanisms for accreditation and licensing of institutions and programmes will be in place.
3. By 2015, School Performance Card is being implemented.
5. By 2016, monitoring, inspection and assessment mechanisms will be in place.
7. By 2016, SEI is organized and functions at central and regional level.

C2. System monitoring

4. By 2015, the Ministry will be drafting the PUEDS annual performance report.
9. By 2018, the system is monitored based on international indicators.

C3. Pupil assessment

6. By 2016, efficient pupil skill assessment mechanisms and contemporary assessment techniques and methods will be in used.
8. By 2016, the test of General Certificate of Secondary Education is made as exit test.

D. Training and development of teachers and administrators

D1. Initial training

7. By 2016, FE programmes will be harmonized with educational policies of the Ministry and international standards and the whole FE personnel will be trained through PD programmes.

D2. In-service training

1. By 2015, the PD's need assessment capacities are functional.
2. By 2016, at least 50 programmes for PDs' are accredited based on needs.
3. By 2015, PDs programme mechanism for monitoring and assessment will be in pace.
4. By 2016, PDs administrative guidelines will be harmonized with the legal framework into force and will be implemented.
6. By 2016, the Ministry in cooperation with IDE and NTA will certify trainers of PD programmes.
9. By 2017, stable mechanisms for PD at school will be in place.
10. By 2016, PD administration database system will be in operation.
11. By 2017, our educational institutions, at any stage, will have in place instruments for national and international cooperation.

D3. Teacher certification

5. By 2016, specialists from the Ministry, those of local education units and school headmasters will have leadership and management trainings by accredited programmes.
8. By 2017, the licensing of all teachers in the system will be finalized and 5% of them will hold more than one license.

ANNEX 2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRIORITY IMPROVEMENT

A. Enhancing leadership, governance, and management of resources and capacities of PUES	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
MoESY and AQAPUE to provide technical assistance to municipalities for managing the pre-school system. Municipalities have to allocate necessary resources for that purpose.	H	M	M	x		
Responsibilities of organizational units and personnel with GD PUE, REDs and LEOs should be carefully considered to ensure efficient operation of the newly established structure. Particular attention to be paid to separating inspection role from provision of day-to-day support to schools under responsibility of RED/LEOs.	H	L	L	x		
Establish a full-fledged Education Management Information System (EMIS), which is based on personal pupil and other data provided and updated by schools. Such a system should generate all kinds of statistical reports and be integrated with teachers' data from the Government Human Resources Management Software (HRMS).	H	M	L		x	
Government of Albania must decide on the level of public spending for education, based on realistic projections. Increasing the share of GDP spent on education is strongly recommended and in line with proclaimed Government policies. However, it is a higher-level political decision because it means cutting allocations to other sectors of the economy or mobilizing local resources.	H	M	M		x	
School development planning should be significantly improved and relieved of formalism. Medium-term school planning and annual planning should be given due consideration in the curriculum to be developed by the School of Directors.	M	M	M		x	

B. Inclusive Quality Learning	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
Curriculum experts to make school visits to support teachers in their classroom	H	M	M	X		

B. Inclusive Quality Learning	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
through 1-day practice sessions so that groups of teachers are more comfortable in knowing how to use the curriculum (through a demonstration lesson in their subject field).						
In the immediate, develop and implement in-service blended learning programmes for all teachers that extend their training in the delivery of the curriculum and managing assessments. This would be an emphasis on professional learning activities, collaborative learning, practice and reflection on experience and promoting working in subject groups to reflect on experience. (There are open learning sources available to readily adaptable to Albania context through copyright permission).	H	M	M	X		
MoESY to review publishing policy and work with local publishers to produce textbooks aligned with curriculum framework, including contextualizing those textbooks produced by international publishers.	M	M	M		X	
Develop a blended learning programme appropriate for assistant teachers to provide training in specific disability areas so that they can better support the pupils and schools.	H	M	M	X		
Recruit minority group members in the community who have the potential to support vulnerable and marginalised children and pupils from these communities.	M	M	M			X
Undertake a sound planning exercise with use of school digital mapping and demographic data to optimise the network of pre-university education institutions in Albania.	M	H	M		X	
Increase the resource base for ICT utility – in the light of funding restrictions ensure ICT and technology in education remains priority funding. Review the current provision levels and standards of provision of ICT and support resources to institutions. Develop a short, medium and long-term national plan with realistic costing profiles for all institutions and national minimum	H	M	H		X	

B. Inclusive Quality Learning	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
standards of provision of ICT (This will rely on public and private provision and a review of programme and budget priorities in the current PUEDS).						
Building ICT skills for teachers and directors in the use of technology in effective teaching and learning. Review current ICT in education methodology and programmes and develop new programmes and approaches at all levels of teacher education to integrate ICT into teacher education programmes (no longer a priority the provision of computers to school laboratories).	H	M	M	X		
Develop and introduce blended learning programmes for In-service teacher education that promotes teachers to integrate practice and reflection in the classroom. (In the short-term utilising international accredited open-source programmes should be considered).	H	M	M		x	

C. Quality assurance based on standards comparable to those of EU countries	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
Two new institutions, AQAPUE and GD PUE, need to establish close cooperation in monitoring the Pre-University Education Sector and assuring the quality of education services.	H	L	L	X		
Albania to introduce a full-fledged joint annual sector review (JASR) as a tool for monitoring the Pre-University Education System, assessing its performance and generating more responsive planning and resource optimisation. Such reviews should be annual and linked to the budget planning cycle, in line with JSR Guidelines by GPE (2018).	H	L	L	X		
Define a set of national education indicators based on the UNCESO and EUROSTAT standards, and include those indicators in the Programme of Official Statistics (PSZ).	M	M	L		X	
Transform the school performance card into a tool for improvement by developing	M	M	L		X	

C. Quality assurance based on standards comparable to those of EU countries	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
a contextualised school index (OECD, forthcoming)						
Support schools in integrating the requirements of the new curriculum in the assessment.	H	M	M	X		

D. Training and development of teachers and administrators	Decision-making aspect (High/Medium/Low)			Timeframe		
Recommendations	Priority	Difficulty	Costs	Short	Medium	Long
Unify and align teacher development and school leadership programmes by reviewing all teaching and learning in the professional development programmes and initial teacher training programmes.	H	H	M	X		
Introduce flexible training opportunities within in-service programme to include blended learning systems.	H	M	M	X		
Review and strengthen all teacher education programmes and reduce the theory-practice gap by redesigning programmes to integrate theory, pedagogic knowledge and an emphasis on practice, ensuring development of competencies new teachers need at the start of their careers	M	H	H		X	
Establish a well - resourced national structure for teachers as a profession in the form of Teacher Development Management System (TDMS) that incorporates an appropriate Continuous Professional Development (CPD) system with all levels of professional learning and training, teacher standards, performance assessment and the promotion and licencing of teachers.	H	H	H		X	
Review and revise a transparent, valid and reliable entry system for teacher programmes.	H	M	M		X	

Note: For methodology see (UNESCO, 2017)

ANNEX 3. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Zamira Gjini, MoESY, Head of the MoESY Directorate of Policies and Development

Dikensa Topi, MoESY, Head of Monitoring, Priorities and Statistics Unit

Florian Nurce, MoESY, Budget and Financial Management

Rozalba Merdani, MoESY, Supervisor of the Policies and Education Strategies Department

Anila Ferizaj, MoESY, Specialist in the Pre-University Directorate for the Development of Education Programs

Tatjana Vuçani, MoESY, Specialist in the Pre-University Directorate for the Development of Education Programs

Besnik Rama, MoESY, Specialist in the Pre-University Directorate for the Development of Education Programs

Sulman Hodaj, General Directorate for Pre-University Education, Director

Majlinda Mehmetaj, MoESY, Specialist in the Sector of the Development and Feasibility of the Projects

Arta Tani, MoESY, Statistics Specialist

Gerti Janaqi, IDE, Head of IDE

Aurela Zisi, IDE, Preschool Education Specialist

Evis Mastori, IDE, Curricula Specialist

Albana Markja, IDE, Teacher Policy Specialist

Dorina Rapti, IDE, Head of the Curricula Department

Rezana Vrapı, CES, Director

Agim Alia, CES, Specialist

Enkeleda Isaku, Tirana Municipality Economic Centre of the Development and Education of children, Head of the Care and Development Directorate

Larisa Haxhi, Tirana Municipality Economic Centre of the Development and Education of children, Supervisor of the Sector of the Administration of Kindergartens

Stavri Lako, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Supervisor of the Employment and Vocational Education

Luljeta Dautaj, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Specialist for the Employment and Vocational Education

Doriana Matraku, School of Directors, Director

Blerina Subashi, INSTAT, Head of Socio Demographic Statistic Sector

Antonieta Rama, State Education Inspectorate, Inspector

Majlinda Lika, State Education Inspectorate, Inspector

Alma Lama, Trade Union, President of the Tirana Branch

Xhemal Xharda, “Kuqan” Compulsory school Elbasan, School Director

Brisida Cekrezi, “Osman Myderizi” Compulsory school Tirana, School Director

Daniel Trujillo, OECD, Consultant in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills
Soumaya Maghnouj, OECD, Analyst at the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills
Caitlyn Guthrie, OECD, Policy analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills.
Roberto De Bernardi, UNICEF, UNICEF Representative
Jawad Aslam, UNICEF, UNICEF Deputy Representative
Mirlinda Bushati, UNICEF, Early Learning Education Specialist
Alessandra Frontoni, EU Delegation Representative
Brisida Jahaj, World Vision, Education Adviser
Ema Kasapi, Save the Children, Education Specialist
Mirela Andoni, Independent Consultant
Gerda Sula, Step by Step Albania, Director
Anisa Kaltanji , SchoolMe , Manager
Pellumb Karameta, Education Expert
Focus group with 20 Teachers, "Kuqan" Compulsory school Elbasan
Focus group with 15 Students, "Kuqan" Compulsory school Elbasan
Focus group with 10 Teachers, "Osman Myderizi" Compulsory school Tirana
Focus group discussion with 7 Students, "Osman Myderizi" Compulsory school Tirana