

Chapter 1. The Albanian education system

Since the 2000s, Albania has improved access to education and raised learning outcomes. However, educational attainment and performance continue to be strongly influenced by students' background characteristics. Learning levels remain among the lowest in Europe. This reflects systemic challenges of low funding, unstable governance and limited capacity. Placing student learning at the centre of Albania's evaluation and assessment processes can help to focus the system onto raising standards for all.

Introduction

Albania has made significant progress in developing a multi-party democracy and open market economy, evolving from one of the poorest countries in Europe into an increasingly competitive, upper-middle income economy. As part of this process, Albania has embarked on significant education reforms such as the decentralisation of school governance and the introduction of a competency-based curriculum. This has contributed to improvement across key education indicators. For example, access to compulsory education has expanded in recent years, and student performance on international surveys has trended upward over several cycles. However, a large share of Albanian students continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies. Equity is also a concern, with continued disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes according to ethnic background and geographical region. This limits the employment and life chances of many individuals and risks holding back national development. This review looks at how the education evaluation and assessment system can be strengthened to support more effective learning and better outcomes for all students.

National context

Political and economic context

Transparency and accountability in public administration are improving, but progress has been hindered by the political landscape

Albania has introduced a series of important public administration and anti-corruption reforms to improve efficiency and transparency in governance structures and processes. This includes the Inter-sectoral Anti-corruption Strategy 2015-2020, which has sought to eliminate corruption in public administration across all public services (Ministry of Justice, 2015^[1]). Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean, showed a statistically significant increase of five points for Albania between 2013 and 2018. However, at 36 points, this remains slightly below other Western Balkans countries and markedly behind all EU countries (Transparency International, 2018^[2]).

Strengthening the independence and transparency of public administration is important for improving Albania's education system. Albania has made some efforts to address the politicisation of appointment decisions, for example by introducing open competitions for the appointment of principals to schools (see Chapter 4). However, at present, the selection of school principals, as well as the appointment of staff at key educational agencies reportedly remain subject to political influence. It will be important for Albania to ensure appointment is based on merit, and that the best candidates with demonstrated competence and experience are selected and retained in these positions (see Chapter 4).

Economic growth is expected to continue, but further progress is needed to reduce poverty

Over the last three decades, Albania has transitioned from one of the poorest and most isolated countries in Europe to an upper-middle-income country, NATO member and candidate for European Union membership. Annual GDP growth in Albania was 4.1% in 2018, behind only Montenegro (5.1%) and Serbia (4.4%) in the Western Balkans and higher than the OECD and EU averages of 2.2% and 2.0% respectively (The World Bank, 2019^[3]). While slowing, economic growth is projected to remain at about 3.7% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2019^[4]).

Sustained growth has contributed to a decline in poverty. In 2002, 54% of the Albanian population was living on less than USD 5.5 (in 2011 purchasing power parity) a day. By 2018, this had fallen to an estimated 35%, a notable drop, though still the highest rate among Western Balkan countries (The World Bank, 2019^[5]).

Unemployment is high and many Albanians have low skills

Albania continues to face high rates of unemployment, especially among its youth population. In 2018, the country's unemployment rate stood at 13.9%, a rate on par with Serbia (13.5%), lower than in Bosnia and Herzegovina (20.8%), Montenegro (15.5%) and North Macedonia (21.6%), but significantly higher than the EU (6.8%) and OECD (5.3%) averages (The World Bank, 2019^[3]). The unemployment rate among 15-24 year-olds was 31.0%, significantly higher than the respective EU and OECD averages of 17.1% and 11.9%. The share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is also high. As of 2015, 32.8% of Albanian youth were NEET, the highest percentage among Western Balkan countries and significantly higher than the rate in the EU (12.0%) and OECD (14.2%) countries.

While international surveys signal that Albania's global competitiveness has risen in recent years and is now slightly above that of other Western Balkan countries, many Albanians are employed in low-skilled and low-productivity jobs, particularly in the agriculture sector (WEF, 2017^[6]; European Commission, 2018^[7]). These low-skilled individuals face an increased risk of becoming poor or being excluded from the labour market. In order to ensure Albanians have the skills needed to be employed, Albania's National Employment and Skills Strategy has called for investments in vocational education and training (VET) and human capital development more broadly (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2014^[8]). Closing skills gaps is particularly important for attracting foreign direct investment as Albania looks toward EU accession (The World Bank, 2019^[5]).

Social context

Demographic changes and migration flows contribute to disparities by geography

Albania is facing a general population decline as a result of a declining fertility rate and negative net migration (INSTAT, 2018^[9]). The share of the Albanian population that was 15 years old decreased by about 2 percentage points between 2013 and 2017 and is expected to decline through 2060 (INSTAT, 2018^[10]). This is reflected in the downward trend in the number of students enrolled in basic education, public and private combined, which decreased by 27% between 2006-2007 and 2016-2017.

At the same time, net migration continues to be negative, with more people leaving than entering the country. In 2013, the stock of emigrants was equal to 43.6% of the population residing in Albania (King and Gëdeshi, 2019^[11]). While emigration has significantly declined in recent years, Albania's net migration rate in 2017 was -3.3%, much lower than in other Western Balkan countries with available data such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (-0.4%), North Macedonia (-0.5%) and Serbia (0.0%) (CIA, 2019^[12]). The Migration Policy Institute suggests that the pursuit of education and better career opportunities are among the key factors driving Albania's international migration outflows (Barjaba and Barjaba, 2015^[13]). Indeed, about 31% of persons with a tertiary level of education born in Albania lived outside the country in 2011 (King and Gëdeshi, 2019^[11]).

Demographic changes and migration are also contributing to changes in the geographic distribution of people within the country. Some areas in Albania are facing severe depopulation while others are experiencing large-scale urbanisation (Betti et al., 2018^[14]).

Albania's rural population declined by 2.4% in 2017, faster than the decline in other Western Balkan countries and much faster than the average 0.4% decline across the OECD and 0.7% decline in the EU (The World Bank, 2019^[3]). In 2018, about 40% of the Albanian population lived in a rural area, as compared to about 22% on average in the OECD (Echazarra and Radinger, 2019^[15]).

Patterns of poverty have also been influenced by migration flows. According to the latest national data, absolute poverty increased between 2008 and 2012 in the coastal region (12.7% to 17.7%), in the central region (10.7% to 12.6%) and in Tirana (8.8% to 12.1%), while declining in the mountain region (25.9% to 15.1%) (INSTAT, 2015^[16]). The large drop in the poverty rate in the mountain region is likely due to population shifts and internal migration out of the mountain region, particularly rural areas (INSTAT, 2015^[16]; Betti et al., 2018^[14]). The 2011 census in Albania revealed that for the first time there were more people living in urban (53.5%) than in rural (46.5%) areas, and urban poverty likely increased as a result, with non-working poor being concentrated in rural areas (INSTAT, 2012^[17]; Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2014^[8]).

Albania is home to many ethnic and linguistic minorities, for whom socio-economic outcomes tend to be much lower than for the majority ethnic Albanian population

Data from the most recent national census (2011) indicate ethnic Albanians comprised 82.6% of the total population. Greeks made up 0.9% of the population and other groups of North Macedonian, Montenegrin, Aromanian, Roma and Egyptian origin comprised about 1%; the ethnic and cultural affiliation of 15.5% of the population was unspecified (INSTAT, 2012^[17]).

Roma and Balkan Egyptians tend to have lower life expectancy, lower educational attainment and lower employment outcomes than ethnic Albanians. For example, while 80% of ethnic Albanians have achieved at least lower secondary education, this share is only 49% among Balkan Egyptians and 21% among Roma (United Nations, 2015^[18]).

In recent years, Albania has adopted several inter-ministerial strategies and action plans to support the socio-economic inclusion of Roma, Balkan Egyptian and other vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities. For example, the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians 2015-2020 (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2015^[19]) and the National Action Plan for People with Disabilities 2016-2020 (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2016^[20]) aim to remove barriers to public services and promote the integration of these marginalised groups into broader Albanian society.

Governance, funding and structure of the education system

Governance of the education system

The Pre-University Education Strategy sets policy priorities, but planning and implementation capacity are relatively weak

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (hereby, the ministry) steered the preparation of Albania's current Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020 (hereby, the strategy), which was adopted in 2016 (see Box 1.1). The strategy took one year to develop and underwent an extensive public consultation. It delineates a vision for the future and an implementation plan complete with specific activities, assigned responsibilities and deadlines for implementing change. However, implementation has been relatively weak, in

part because individual agencies develop their own work plans, which undermines sector-wide planning. In addition, indicators and targets found in the strategy are not aligned with each other, which diminishes the strategy's ability to drive system improvement. Albania is currently discussing the future of the strategy, which expires in 2020. This presents an opportunity to take stock of strengths and weaknesses in the education system and to integrate evaluation processes into the new strategy (see Chapter 5).

**Box 1.1. Policy Priorities of the Albanian Pre-University
Education Development Strategy 2014-2020**

In 2016, Albania adopted the national Pre-University Education Development Strategy for 2014-2020. It delineates seven principles for reform that guided the drafting of the strategy:

- **Qualitative and Inclusive Education:** Provide students with the right to quality education, equal opportunities to be educated and the right to be different.
- **Uniform Education System:** As far as possible, learning conditions in educational institutions should be comparable to the regional and European educational systems.
- **Education for Life:** Create the conditions for students to build new knowledge and competences that enable them to respond to the country's development and changes in the labour market.
- **Quality Assurance of Standards Achievement:** The provision of pre-university education is based on educational standards and both internal and external evaluations.
- **Decentralisation:** Creates conditions for centralised management of a decentralised education system by fostering the autonomy of educational institutions.
- **Accountability and Transparency:** Increase the legal framework, mechanisms and procedures needed for accountability and transparency.
- **Community Support:** Provide financial support from all possible sources of society to both public and private pre-university education institutions.

The strategy also sets the policy priorities for education. For each priority, the strategy sets forth expected results and main activities that will be undertaken. The four priorities are:

- Improving the governance, leadership and management capacities of pre-university education system resources.
- Quality and inclusive learning.
- Quality assurance based on comparable standards with EU countries.
- Modern teacher training and development.

Source: MoESY (2016^[21]) *Srategjisë së Zhvillimit të Arsimit Parauniversitar, për Periudhën 2014–2020* [Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020], <https://qbz.gov.al/> (accessed on 16 January 2020).

The ministry relies on local representatives to implement national policies

The ministry plays a strategic role in making decisions related to education policy and is responsible for the overall development, co-ordination and administration of education at the national level. In addition to pre-tertiary education, the ministry is in charge of higher education, youth issues, sports development and scientific research. Vocational education is the responsibility of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance. Due to the low percentage of enrolment vocational education schools represent, they are not covered in this review.

As in many OECD countries, Albania has deconcentrated control of its education system. Regional education directorates and education offices, subordinate to the ministry, were created in 2003 to support the implementation of national education policies in schools. In 2019, service delivery was further deconcentrated at regional level in order to bring services closer to schools. Under this reform, regional directorates are now also responsible for school external evaluation, and they are under the oversight of the General Directorate for Pre-University Education (see below).

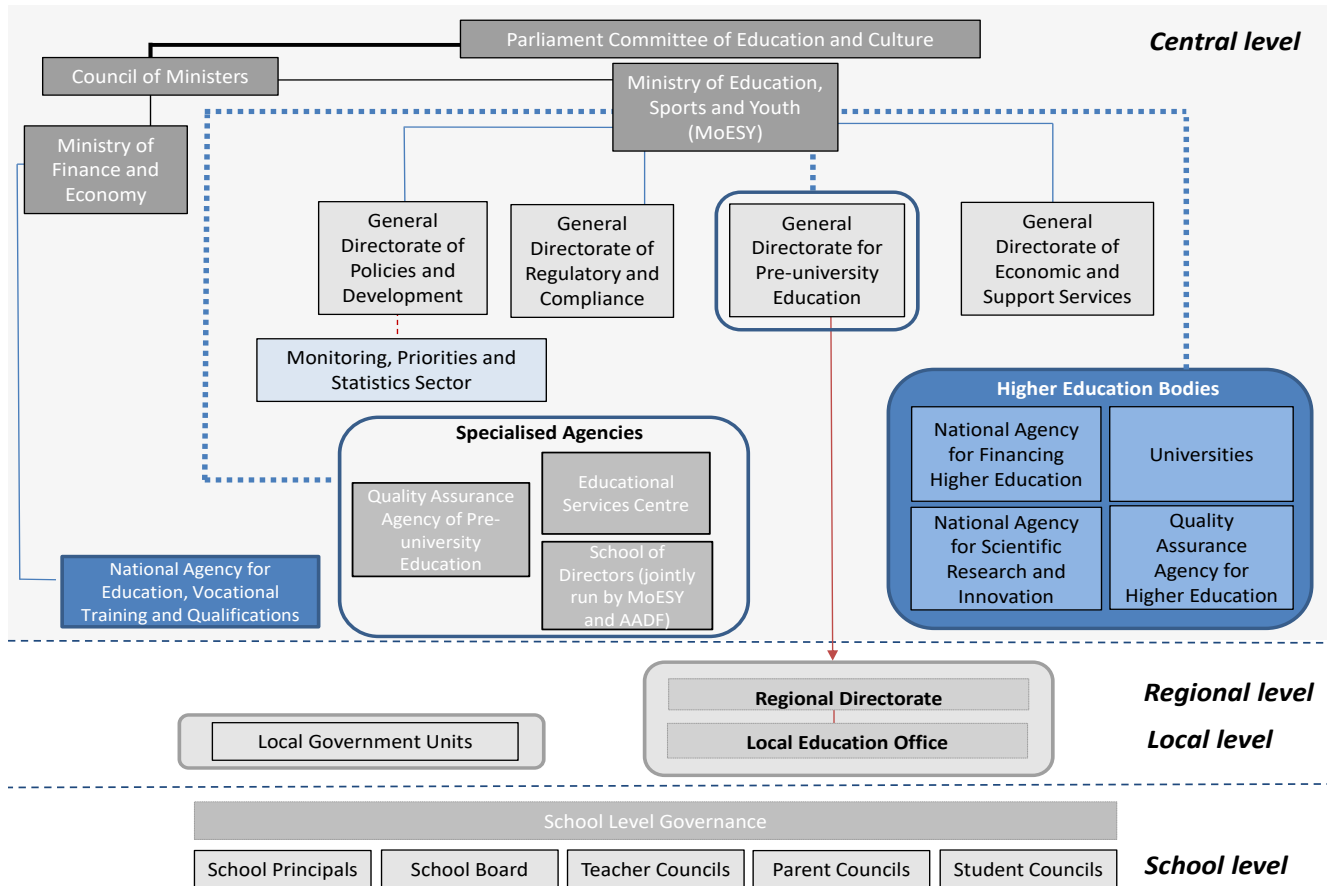
The responsibilities of specialised agencies are evolving

Albania has three specialised public agencies related to pre-tertiary education that are accountable to the ministry (see Figure 1.1) (Wort, Pupovci and Ikonimi, 2019^[22]):

- The Education Development Institute and the State Education Inspectorate, established in 2010 and 2013 respectively, merged in 2019 to form the **Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education** (hereby, the Quality Assurance Agency). There are currently about 56 employees at the Quality Assurance Agency. This new agency is responsible for standard setting and programme design, covering areas such as teaching standards, learning standards, curriculum design and teaching preparation. In addition, the Quality Assurance Agency is responsible for designing and revising the framework for school evaluation, defining guidelines for school external evaluation and school self-evaluation and providing training to inspectors for school external evaluation. While the school inspection function, previously held by the State Education Inspectorate, is now being fulfilled by the General Directorate for Pre-University Education, the Quality Assurance Agency has a mandate to conduct risk-based assessments of pre-tertiary education providers. The Quality Assurance Agency also has a new mandate for monitoring the performance of the education system.
- The **General Directorate for Pre-University Education**, established in 2019, is an executive arm of the ministry. It coordinates the work of four regional directorates that are tasked with managing the delivery of services to schools. This includes: co-ordinating professional development and curriculum implementation; inspecting and evaluating schools; managing school funding and the allocation of human resources; supporting the administration of the Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievement (VANAF) and the National Basic Education Exam; and collecting and managing educational data. Each regional directorate has 12 to 16 local education offices (51 total) that report to them and serve as liaisons with schools. Inspectors are part of the regional directorates and report to the General Director. Albania is considering making inspectors responsible for supporting schools in response to their evaluation, which carries significant risk in terms of independence and impartiality (see Chapter 4).
- The **Educational Services Centre (ESC)** was established in 2015, assuming many of the functions of its predecessor, the National Exam Agency, and before that, the Education Centre for Assessment and Examination. The ESC is responsible for developing, administering and analysing the results of national and international assessments. The ESC also publishes reports on assessment results, contributes to the drafting of laws and bylaws relevant to its operations and manages Albania's four education databases. Albania is currently piloting an education management information system (EMIS), and it is currently envisaged that the ESC will manage the platform once it is complete. There are 44 employees at the ESC, most of whom have a Master's of Science degree. While the ESC has staff with psychometric

expertise and experience, it has limited human and financial resources. As a result, the ESC relies on around 2,000 external experts each year to realise the scope of its mandated activities.

Figure 1.1. Structure of education governance in Albania



Note: This figure provides a broad overview of the governance structure in Albania but does not include all governance units and sub-units. It is not the official organigram of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. AADF = Albanian-American Development Foundation.

Adapted from: MoESY (2018^[23]), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania*, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Tirana; Wort, M., Pupovci, D. and Ikonimi, E. (2019^[22]), *Appraisal of the Pre-University Education Strategy 2014-2020*, <https://www.unicef.org/albania/reports/appraisal-pre-university-education-strategy-2014-2020> (accessed on 13 January 2020).

Albania's curriculum and assessment frameworks orient teaching and learning, and schools have flexibility on implementation

Albania's current curriculum framework, published in 2014, defines the goals, general principles, educational levels, crosscutting key competencies and subject areas of the pre-tertiary education system. It sets out a constructivist and student-centred approach to teaching and learning and describes the methods teachers should be using in their classrooms, such as formative assessment and portfolio. It sets forth the key competencies for lifelong learning that all students are expected to achieve by the end of upper secondary education, informed by the EU's 2006 Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO, 2017^[24]).

With approval from their local education institutions, schools can draft their own curriculum on the basis of the curriculum framework and standards approved by the ministry. Schools in Albania have much greater flexibility in making decisions about curriculum than schools in other Western Balkans countries. Data from OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 show that about 79% of the responsibility for curriculum lies at the school level (either teachers, principals or school boards), a percentage similar to the OECD on average (73%) and much higher than in Montenegro (34%), North Macedonia (41%) and Croatia (44%) (OECD, 2016^[25]).

Albania's assessment framework builds on the curriculum framework. The framework defines policies and practices such as portfolio assessment, formative assessment and continuous assessment, though these definitions sometimes lack clarity and concreteness (see Chapter 2). The framework also describes the role of teachers vis-à-vis assessment, including working collaboratively with other teachers, as well as the role and responsibilities of other stakeholders such as school administrators. However, the implementation of many of the processes and activities described in the framework is left to schools, regional directorates and local education offices, with little additional support or concrete guidance at the national level.

School autonomy has grown but school planning and self-evaluation remains weak

As part of its broader decentralisation efforts, Albania has taken steps to increase school autonomy, which is one of the general principles of the National Education Law (MoESY, 2012^[26]). School-level governance in Albania involves school principals along with their deputies and school boards. According to Albanian law, each school must also have its own teacher, parent and student councils that help shape policies at the school level. For example, schools now play an important role in hiring and dismissing teachers and selecting textbooks. However, the ministry, regional directorates and local education offices continue to make all decisions related to financial resources, and schools receive no discretionary funding.

The ability of schools to reflect on their own policies and practices is important for making effective use of school resources, lack of discretionary financial resources notwithstanding. However, the capacity for school planning and self-evaluation remains weak in Albanian schools. Despite guidelines and methodological documents developed by the ministry and the defunct State Education Inspectorate (see above), not all schools understand the legal obligation of conducting self-evaluations and many view this task as a formal bureaucratic exercise. Prior to the merger between the State Education Inspectorate and the Education Development Institute, this was particularly problematic because the limited capacity of the State Education Inspectorate meant that schools would go several years without undergoing an evaluation. Albania is currently looking to address this lack of capacity (see Chapter 4).

Funding of the education system

Spending on education is low

Expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP in 2016 in Albania (4.0%) was similar to the percentage in Serbia (3.9%) but lower than on average in the OECD (5.4%) and the EU (5.1%) (UIS, 2020^[27]). The share of total government expenditure in 2016 allocated to education in Albania (13.6%) was higher than in Serbia (8.7%) and on average in OECD countries (13.2%) and in the EU (11.8%). These expenditure rates have generally been

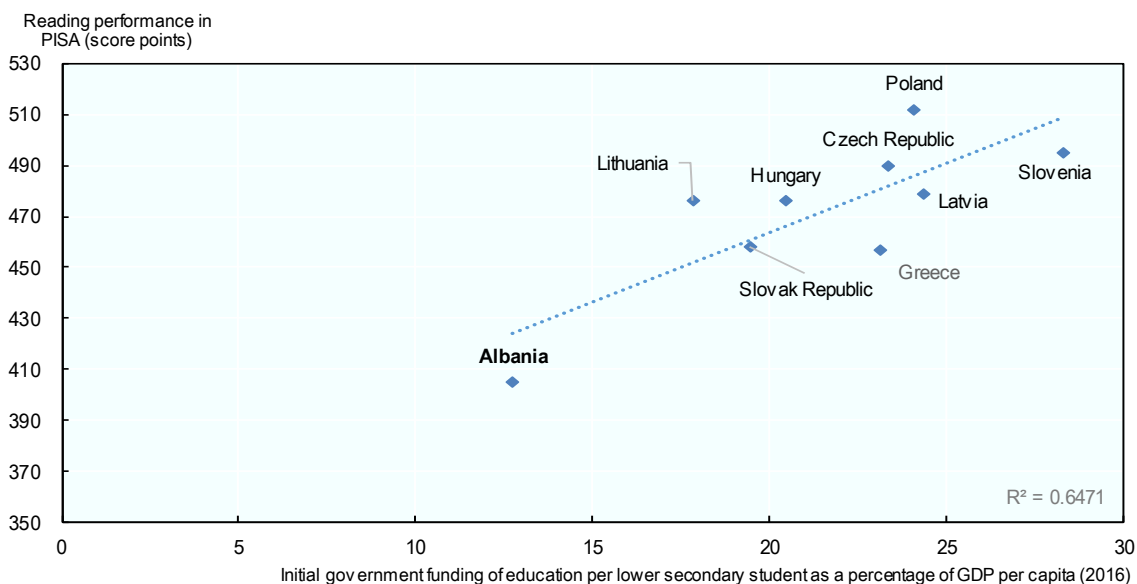
increasing in Albania over the last two decades and peaked in 2016, the most recent year for which there is international data.

In terms of spending by education levels, spending on primary education in Albania (1.8% of GDP) is on par with neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans but higher than on average in the OECD (1.4% of GDP) and the EU (1.3% of GDP) (OECD, 2018^[28]). This leaves limited financial resources for other areas of the education system. In particular, at the secondary education level, Albania spends about 0.4% of GDP, much less than on average in the OECD and EU (2.0% of GDP each).

Spending on education in Albania is inadequate

Data from PISA indicate that for countries where spending per student is below a certain threshold¹, higher expenditure is associated with higher student outcomes (OECD, 2016^[25]). When comparing expenditure per lower secondary student in Albania to other European and OECD countries, the data suggest that Albania remains in a position of low spending and low results (see Figure 4). While there is scope for better use of resources, Albania will find it difficult to achieve significant gains in learning outcomes without higher investment.

Figure 1.2. PISA 2018 results and government expenditure on lower secondary education



Note: Internationally comparable data on cumulative expenditure per student for Albania is unavailable.

Source: UIS (2020^[27]) *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 16 January 2020); OECD (2019^[29]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.

Funding to schools is allocated centrally and managed at the regional and local levels

Public pre-tertiary education in Albania is funded primarily through central funds, with additional contributions from local funds and smaller contributions in the form of donations, sponsorships and revenues generated by educational institutions. Funds from the ministry's budget flow to regional directorate and local education office budget accounts, while additional central funding streams for education are administered by local government units (e.g. communes, municipalities). Regional directorate and local

education office budgets cover the costs of delivering most educational services (e.g. school teaching staff salaries). Local government units (LGUs) are responsible for functions related to construction, infrastructure, maintenance and utilities, and these responsibilities have recently been expanded (see below).

Challenges associated with the allocation of funds to regional and local entities include a lack of clarity in competences and responsibilities between local and central governments and an insufficient level of funding directed at regional directorates, local education offices and LGUs in order to fulfil their functions. Many of these entities also lack the financial management capacities, and human resources more broadly, to manage funds and deliver decentralised services (Haxhimali, 2019^[30]; MoESY, 2018^[23]).

Funding is not targeted toward tackling disparities

While decentralisation has provided some budget flexibility to regional directorates, local education offices and LGUs, funding is not clearly targeted toward mitigating the impact of factors known to affect student outcomes such as socio-economic disadvantage and high concentrations of disadvantage within schools (OECD, 2016^[31]). For example, among the 12 prefectures in Albania, Gjirokastër had the lowest poverty rate (10.6% in 2012) yet the highest average annual expenditure per student in 2011 (MoESY, 2018^[23]; INSTAT, 2015^[16]).

Funding formulas provide an effective means to provide differential funding based on need and thereby help redress disparities (OECD, 2017^[32]). In Albania, while provisions in the law call for the pre-tertiary budget to be based on a per-pupil formula, this has not yet been implemented (Wort, Pupovci and Ikonimi, 2019^[22]). Currently, there is no funding formula used for the allocation of ministry funds to regional directorates/local education offices. Furthermore, regional directorates/local education offices choose how to allocate funds among the schools they manage without clear guidelines or orientation. For example, the ministry designates the number of employees a given local education office will be able to hire, without providing guidance on the number of teachers that should be hired per school (Ministry of Finance and Economy of Albania, 2018^[33]). There is no clear process for making allocations based on disparities among students, and schools do not have the budget autonomy needed to allocate their own funds based on school needs (see Chapter 4).

A portion of central funds, known as unconditional transfers, allocated to LGUs is calculated based on a formula-based system created in 2002. These transfers were designed to help close gaps between LGUs' independently generated revenue and the costs of exercising their functions, which in the area of education were recently expanded to include staffing of pre-schools and provision of non-teaching staff in pre-tertiary education (Minister for Local Affairs, 2015^[34]; Assembly of the Republic of Albania, 2018^[35]; MoESY, 2018^[23]; The Parliament of Albania, 2015^[36]; SCHROEDER, 2007^[37]). However, this weighted formula does not provide differential funding based on the needs of students.

Rather, it responds to characteristics of the population in a given LGU such as the number of students in each level of education and the level of income within the LGU. Moreover, LGUs have flexibility in how these funds are targeted, which means funds are not necessarily used to redress disparities.

Spending on capital investment in and around schools is inadequate

Further capital investment is needed to ensure school environments and the infrastructure in and around schools is up to contemporary standards (MoESY, 2018^[23]; Psacharopoulos, 2017^[38]). Many schools, particularly those in rural areas, struggle to meet their basic infrastructure needs (e.g. heating) (Gjokutaj, 2013^[39]). In addition, due to migration patterns from villages to cities, some schools have become overcrowded, and some schools do not have adequate lab equipment, furniture or facilities, including information and communications technology infrastructure, for supporting high-quality learning (UNESCO, 2017^[24]; Psacharopoulos, 2017^[38]; MoESY, 2018^[23]). In Albania, 47% of computers in rural schools are connected to the Internet, as compared to 70% in North Macedonia and 94% on average in OECD countries (OECD, 2016^[25]). Poor infrastructure around schools, namely the road and transport system, also place limits on student access to schooling and on the ability to consolidate schools, particularly in remote rural areas (MoESY, 2018^[23]).

Private funding of education is increasing

Private schools are a growing component of the Albanian pre-tertiary education system. Between 2005-2006 and 2014-2015, enrolment in private schools grew faster than in public schools at the basic education level (MoESY, 2018^[23]). While enrolment in private schools at the upper secondary level has increased, enrolment in public school at this level has decreased. Albanian law allows financial support to be provided to private, not-for-profit pre-tertiary education institutions that have been operating for at least five years; however, this provision has not yet been implemented due to budget constraints (MoESY, 2012^[26]; MoESY, 2018^[23]).

While there has been no public spending on private education, private spending by individuals and households has increased in recent years, from a level of 0.8% of GDP in 2009 to 0.9% of GDP in 2017 (MoESY, 2018^[23]). Public spending as a percentage of GDP decreased over the same period, from 3.4% to 3.2%. This raises equity concerns. Notable areas of private spending are tuition, which by some estimates can range from EUR 50 to EUR 300 per month in schools, and educational materials such as textbooks. Philanthropic contributions to education are negligible in Albania (UNESCO, 2017^[24]; MoESY, 2018^[23]).

In some countries, private spending in education can sometimes include private tutoring or shadow education. However, there is little research on this issue in Albania. The Albanian Teachers' Code of Conduct has banned the practice of teachers providing private tutoring to their own students, and legally it is considered malpractice. However, reports indicate that the situation in Albania is not unlike in neighbouring countries, where very little attention has been paid to the effects of private tutoring on educational equity (UNESCO, 2017^[24]).

Structure of schooling in Albania

The Albanian pre-tertiary education system includes pre-school education, basic education (comprising primary and lower secondary education) and upper secondary education (often referred to in Albania as simply secondary education) (see Figure 1.3). Only basic education is compulsory. In 2012, the length of compulsory education increased from eight to nine years, a duration similar to the length of compulsory schooling found in OECD countries.

Figure 1.3. Structure of the education system in Albania

ISCED level	Starting Age	Grade	Education programme in English (examinations where applicable)		
8	24/25		Higher Education - Doctoral Studies		Long-term Specialisation Studies
7	22/23		Higher Education - Master's Programmes	First and Second Cycle Integrated Studies	
6	18/19		Higher Education - Bachelor's Programmes		
4	18/19		Post-secondary Professional Degree or Certificate		
State Matura Examination					
3	15	13			Upper Secondary Education - Vocational, Level III (1 year)
		12	Upper Secondary Education - Gymnasium (3 years)	Upper Secondary Education - Oriented (can be 3 or 4 years)	Upper Secondary Education - Vocational, Level II (1 year)
		11			Upper Secondary Education - Vocational, Level I (2 years)
		10			
National Basic Education Examination					
2	11	9	Basic Education - Lower Secondary School (4 years) Compulsory		
		8			
		7			
		6			
1	6	5	Basic Education - Primary School (5 years) Compulsory		
		4			
		3			
		2			
		1			
0	5 - 6		Pre-primary Education - Kindergarten		Pre-primary Education - Preparatory Classes
	4 - 5				
	3 - 4				

Source: MoESY (2018^[23]); *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment: Country Background Report for Albania*, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Tirana.

Early childhood education

Most Albanian children attend pre-school

Pre-school in Albania is optional and consists of kindergarten and preparatory classes for children aged three to six. Kindergartens operate in age groups of 3-4 year-olds, 4-5 year-olds and 5-6 year-olds, while preparatory classes take place in basic education schools and target five-year-old children who may or may not have previously attended pre-school. The net enrolment rate at the pre-primary level in Albania has greatly increased since 2000, reaching about 81% in 2016 (UIS, 2020^[27]). The rate in 2017 was about 80%, lower than in the OECD on average (84%) and the EU (87%), but significantly higher than in Serbia (61%) and Montenegro (60%). About 8% of pre-primary education students were enrolled in a private institution in Albania in 2017, as compared to 34% on average in the OECD.

Challenges persist in delivering quality pre-school education

The ministry has made efforts to increase the quality of pre-school education over the last several years. These have included the adoption in 2016 of a new competency-based Pre-School Curriculum Framework aligned to contemporary child development theories and practise (ASCAP, 2016^[40]), as well as a 2018 law that set forth new minimum standards and selection procedures for pre-primary principals (MoESY, 2018^[41]). However, the quality of teaching staff and the physical condition of pre-schools remain key challenges (UNESCO, 2017^[24]; Psacharopoulos, 2017^[38]). For example, in some regions, particularly areas with higher poverty such as the northeast of the country, it has been difficult to find qualified pre-school teachers, in part due to migration toward urban centres. In an effort to deliver more effective pre-school educational services adapted to local needs, the responsibility for staffing pre-schools now lies with LGUs (see above Funding of the education system).

Primary and secondary education

Variability in class size and student to teacher ratios present challenges

About 49% of enrolment in basic education in 2016-2017 was in rural areas, as compared to 54% in 2006-2007 (MoESY, 2018^[42]). In rural areas, there are about 17 students per class in public basic education, as compared to about 21 students per class on average across all Albanian basic education public schools. However, about 27% of classrooms in Albania had over 30 students in 2015-2016, and overcrowding is of particular concern in urban centres (UNESCO, 2017^[24]). Some teachers have reported class sizes of over 40 students, beyond the legal limit. In OECD countries, the average class size is about 21 and 23 for primary and lower secondary schools respectively (OECD, 2018^[43]).

The student to teacher ratio in public basic education is smaller in rural areas, about 11, as compared to a national average of about 14 (MoESY, 2018^[42]). At the upper secondary level, the student per teacher ratio in public schools is also lower in rural areas (about 13) than on average in Albania (about 14). In OECD countries, the ratio of students to teaching staff is 15 across all primary schools, 13 in public lower secondary schools and 13 overall (OECD, 2018^[43]).

The presence of multi-shift schools and multi-grade classrooms raises equity concerns

Several features of the basic school system in Albania stand out when compared with school networks in most OECD and EU countries. These include the relatively large number of students enrolled in multi-shift schools (12%) and multi-grade classrooms (10%) (UNESCO, 2017^[24]). Recent national data indicate that about 22 000 students attend a multi-grade classroom, which is a concern in terms of equity. Multi-grade classrooms have lower levels of reading and writing skills and have faced particular challenges in implementing the new competency-based curriculum (UNESCO, 2017^[24]).

Challenges remain in the supply of and demand for quality teachers

Albania has engaged in several important efforts to improve the quality of teaching. These include raising entry requirements and moving toward the standardisation of curriculum content for certain initial teacher education programmes, updating teaching standards, implementing a state exam for new entrants to the teaching profession, and setting up professional learning networks (see Chapter 3). In addition, the percentage of teachers that have attained some level of higher education has increased from two-thirds of teachers in 2006-2007 to 91% in 2016-2017 (MoESY, 2018^[42]). However, data from the OECD Teacher and Learning International Survey (TALIS) indicate that this percentage is below the average across participating countries and economies in the OECD (98%) and in the EU (98%) (OECD, 2019^[44]). Moreover, there remain concerns about the quality of teachers, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas. As reported by principals in the PISA 2015 survey, the gap in the quality and quantity of teaching staff between rural and urban schools is particularly large in Albania, and Albania is one of only ten countries and economies where the quality of teaching staff is of greater concern among rural school principals than among city school principals (Echazarra and Radinger, 2019^[15]). Economically disadvantaged areas of Albania also have greater difficulty finding quality teachers, in part due to migration into urban areas (UNESCO, 2017^[24]).

Most students who finish basic education go onto enrol in upper secondary education, but the share enrolled in VET programmes is low

At the end Grade 9, all students take the National Basic Education Examination. The pass rate for all tests taken in 2017 was 99.2%, which indicates the National Basic Education Examination is not a barrier for entry into upper secondary education (MoESY, 2017^[45]). Those students that complete basic education have increasingly become more likely to enrol in upper secondary education. The percentage of students who received a basic education diploma and enrolled in Grade 10 the following year increased from 80% in 2006-2007 to 95% in 2016-2017 (MoESY, 2018^[42]).

At the upper secondary level, students can choose to enter general (*gymnasium*), “oriented” (e.g. arts) or vocational programmes. The number of places in oriented programmes are limited and entrance is primarily merit-based. National data indicate that in 2019 about 3% of students who completed basic education enrolled in an oriented programme. About 17% of upper secondary students were enrolled in vocational studies in 2017, the most recent year for which there is international data (UIS, 2020^[27]). This is a much lower share than on average in the OECD (44%) and the EU (48%). Students in vocational programmes are able to enter tertiary education after completing four years (or three levels) of vocational education. However, students in general programmes can enter university after only three years. This dis-incentivises enrolment in vocational education by students who are interested in these programmes but are also interested in attending a university.

The State Matura Examination certifies completion of upper secondary education and is used for selection into higher education

The role of the State Matura Examination has evolved over time. Prior to 2006, it was used primarily to certify completion of upper secondary education, while universities carried out their own examinations to select for entry into their institutions. To combat high levels of corruption in university entry and admission processes, increase the level of reliability, validity and trustworthiness and reduce the amount of student testing, the State Matura Examination became the upper secondary exit and tertiary entry instrument in 2006. National data indicate that the vast majority of students pass the State Matura Examination, which suggests access to tertiary education is limited in part by the ability of students to remain in school until the State Matura Examination in Grade 12. The graduation rate – calculated nationally by dividing the number of graduates by the number of students registered in the Matura – in 2016-2017 was 94% (INSTAT, 2018^[10]).

In 2016, a new higher education law provided greater flexibility on the use of the State Matura Examination as the basis for entry into higher education programmes. While students must still achieve a minimum score based on a formula weighting set by the Council of Ministers, universities are allowed to develop their own criteria, which are publicly available, set quotas and conduct their own ranking of applicants (Council of Ministers of Albania, 2019^[46]; MoESY, 2018^[23]; Albanian Academic Network, 2020^[47]). The use of additional criteria by universities has thus far been limited, and there are mixed views among universities as to whether adding criteria will make schools less competitive in enrolling students or, by setting higher expectations, increase the quality of candidates.

Main trends in participation, learning and equity in primary and secondary education

Participation in primary education in Albania has increased to EU and OECD levels in recent years, but participation in secondary education remains low. Many students drop out of school. Students have increasingly opted to enrol in private schools over public schools. While Albania has significantly improved learning outcomes in recent years, the number of students mastering basic competencies remains low, and very few students are developing higher order skills by the age of 15. Equity of access and outcomes remains a challenge, particularly on the basis of gender, ethnic group and geographical distribution.

Participation

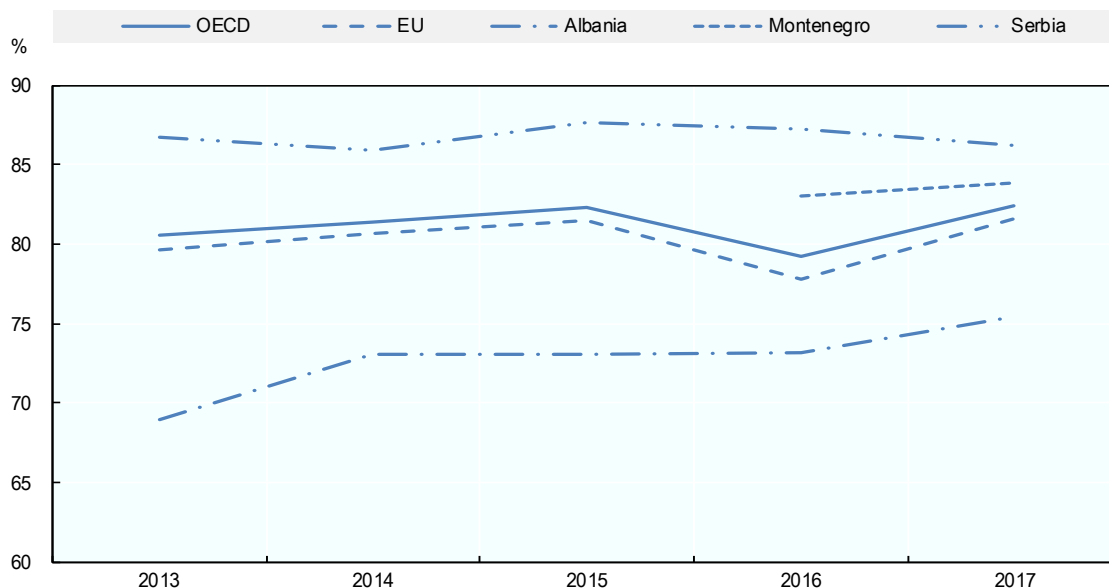
Participation in primary education has increased to EU and OECD levels in recent years, but participation in secondary education is low

Under communist rule prior to the early 1990s, enrolment rates in basic education were near-universal in Albania (UNESCO, 2017^[24]). At the primary level, enrolment rates declined significantly in the 2000s and have increased overall since 2009 (UIS, 2020^[27]). The net enrolment rate in primary education in Albania in 2017, the most recent year for which there is international data, was about 96%. This was slightly higher than in Serbia (95%) and comparable to the rate in Montenegro (96%), the OECD on average (96%) and the EU (96%).

At the secondary level, net enrolment rates are low in Albania. In lower secondary education, the Albanian net enrolment rate (86%) in 2017 was below that of Serbia (95%), Montenegro (92%), the OECD on average (91%) and the EU (91%) (UIS, 2020^[27]). At the

upper secondary level, the net enrolment rate in Albania (75%) was significantly below Montenegro (84%), Serbia (86%) and the average in the OECD (83%) and the EU (82%) (see Figure 1.4). This reflects in part the comparatively high dropout rates in Albania (see below).

Figure 1.4. Net enrolment rates in upper secondary education (2013-2017)



Source: UIS (2020_[27]), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 16 January 2020).

Students in Albania drop out at higher rates than in neighbouring countries

The cumulative dropout rate in primary education was 6.8% in Albania in 2016, the most recent year for which there is international data (UIS, 2020_[27]). This is more than double the rate in the EU (2.5%), more than 3 times the rate in the OECD (1.8%) and Montenegro (2.0%), and more than 4 times the rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1.6%) and Serbia (1.5%). In lower secondary general education, the cumulative dropout rate in Albania in 2016 was 5.5%. This rate is higher than in Bosnia and Herzegovina (4.0%), Montenegro (0.8%) and Serbia (4.5%), and over double the rate in the EU (2.4%) and in the OECD (2.4%).

A 2017 study by the ministry highlighted several reasons for school abandonment in Albania. These include the distance between school and home, particularly at the lower secondary education level; pressure to contribute to family income; family obligations such as caring for children and elders and doing housework; early marriage; social pressure from other students who have left school; and risk factors such as disability, ethnicity, migration and poverty (MoESY, 2017_[48]).

In response to these challenges, Albania has implemented several interventions since the mid-2000s. These include: the creation of a “second chance” programme that provides students with additional opportunities to finish school; the provision of free textbooks to Roma and Balkan Egyptian students; home school options for students in “blood feuds”; the establishment of a psycho-social unit to follow up with students who have dropped out or are at risk to do so; and the adoption of criteria for auxiliary teachers for students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2017_[24]). In addition, UNICEF has worked with the ministry to

design and implement an early warning system model to prevent drop-out in 20 schools and four municipalities.

Participation in tertiary education has declined in recent years

School life expectancy (from primary education through tertiary education) has increased from 10.6 years in 2000 to 14.8 years in 2017, similar to that of neighbouring countries like Serbia (14.7 years) and Montenegro (15.0 years), though lower than the average in the EU (17.1 years) and the OECD (17.2 years) (UIS, 2020^[27]). However, after a consistent increase since 1991, the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education has fallen from 66% in 2014 to 55% in 2018. This is in part due to the closure of private universities awarding a high volume of reportedly low-quality degrees, as well as migration outflows driven by the pursuit of education and career opportunities abroad (see Social context).

Private school enrolment is increasing

The share of students in basic education attending private schools has increased over time, with 4% in 2006-2007 compared to 7% in 2016-2017 (MoESY, 2018^[42]). Around 9% of basic education schools in Albania are private. At the upper secondary level, about 23% of schools are private and the share of enrolment in this sector has grown from about 8% in 2006-2007 to 11% in 2016-2017. The increase in enrolment in private schools in Albania is related to factors such as preferences for smaller class sizes, better infrastructure, foreign language curricula, twinning between Albanian and EU private schools and recognition of studies in Albanian private schools by some EU countries.

There is limited outcome evidence to suggest that private schools are of higher quality than public schools. State Matura Examination results show higher achievement among students in private schools than those in public school, but published results are not controlled for student characteristics such as socio-economic disadvantage and there is no analysis on the possible impact of positive self-selection into private schools (MoESY, 2017^[49]). Average upper secondary course mark data also demonstrate higher achievement in private schools than in public schools, but these results are not comparable between schools (MoESY, 2017^[49]). PISA 2018 data, however, show that on average private schools perform significantly higher in reading than public schools, even after accounting for students' ESCS (PISA's index of economic, social and cultural status) (OECD, 2019^[50]).

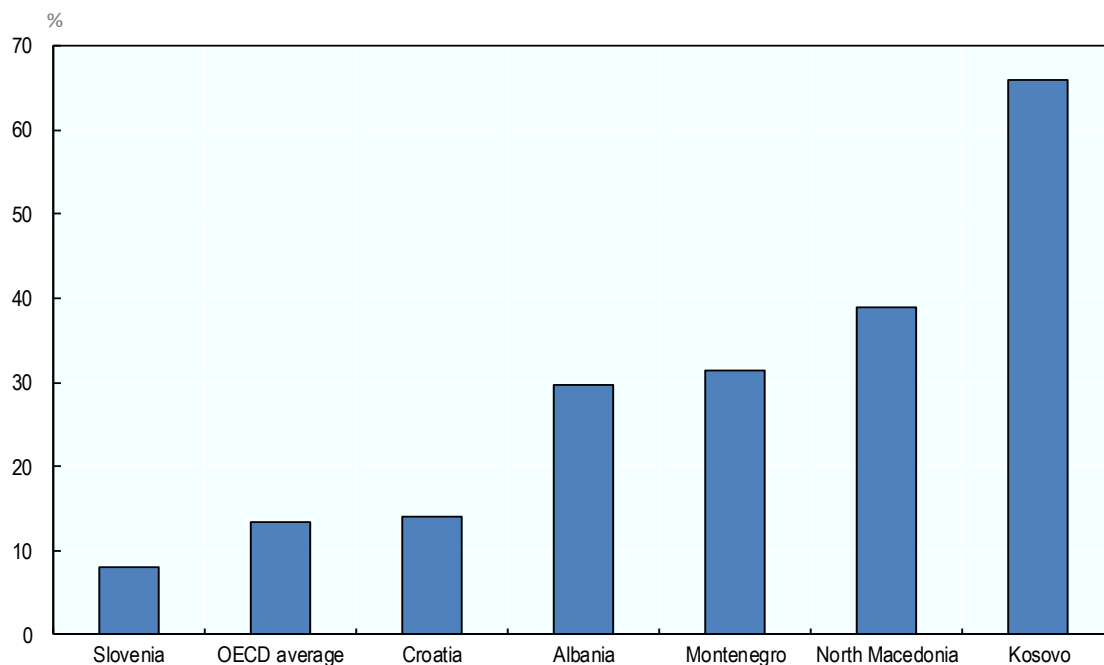
Learning environment and outcomes

Over half of 15-year-olds lack basic reading skills and 2 out of 5 lack basic mathematics skills

As compared to the OECD average (13.4%), Albania has a high proportion (29.7%) of students who are not demonstrating basic proficiency (Level 2) in all of the three core PISA domains (see Figure 2). Over half of Albanian 15-year-olds lack basic reading skills (52.2%), as compared to 22.6% on average in the OECD. In mathematics, 42.4% lack basic skills, as compared to 24.0% on average in the OECD. This suggests that a large number of students in Albania have not yet acquired the basic competencies needed to participate fully in a knowledge-based society upon completion of compulsory education. However, the proportion of students not demonstrating basic proficiency in all three domains (i.e. reading, mathematics and science) is lower in Albania than in neighbouring peer countries such as Montenegro (31.5%), North Macedonia (39%) and Kosovo (66%) (OECD, 2019^[29]). The proportion not demonstrating basic proficiency in specific subjects has been

decreasing over time, with a significant reduction of 18.3 percentage points in mathematics between 2012 and 2018 and 10.3 percentage points in science between 2009 and 2018.

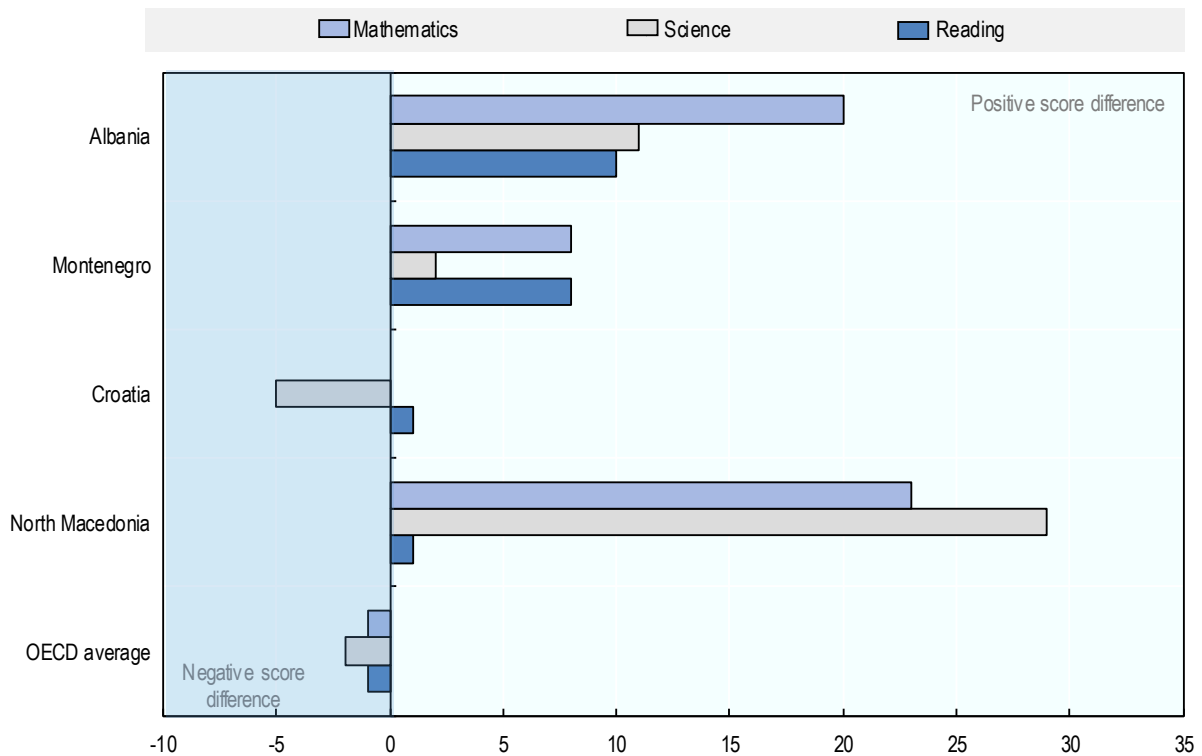
Figure 1.5. Share of low achievers in all three core PISA subjects (below Level 2)



Source: OECD (2019^[29]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.

Learning outcomes have increased significantly over time but still lag behind the OECD average

The latest PISA results indicate that long-term trends in mean scores in all three PISA subjects are positive and significantly higher in Albania than in most of its neighbouring countries and the OECD on average (see Figure 1.6). Short-term growth in performance in mathematics in Albania has been particularly significant, with the mean score increasing by about 24 points since the last PISA survey, as compared to 12 points in Montenegro, -1 points in Slovenia and 2 points in OECD countries (OECD, 2019^[29]). Moreover, the gap between the highest- and lowest-achieving students is closing, with improvements in the bottom of the performance distribution outpacing improvements at the top in every subject.

Figure 1.6. Average 3-year trend in performance across PISA assessments

Note: The average 3-year trend is the average change, per 3-year period, between the earliest available measurement in PISA and PISA 2018, calculated by a linear regression.

Source: OECD (2019^[29]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.

Evidence suggests there is a relatively positive classroom climate in Albania

Data from PISA 2018 indicates that the percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that certain teacher behaviours hinder student learning to some extent or a lot is lower in Albania than on average in the OECD (OECD, 2019^[51]). These behaviours include teachers not meeting individual students' needs, teacher absenteeism, staff resisting change, teachers being too strict with students and teachers not being well-prepared for classes.

Additional evidence suggests that Albanian schools offer a positive classroom climate. Albania ranked first among PISA countries and economies in the percentage of students reporting that their teachers support them (OECD, 2019^[51]). Based on students' reports, Albania has one of the most positive disciplinary climates among the countries which participated in PISA 2018 (OECD, 2019^[51]). Moreover, UNESCO has found that a culture of mutual support is common among students, that teachers exhibit a collaborative spirit and that students feel happy in their interactions with teachers. However, the authors found that teachers find it difficult to differentiate instruction for the various levels of ability found among students in their classrooms (UNESCO, 2017^[24]).

Instructional time in Albania is limited and prescribed, but schools have some flexibility in how the school day is organised

The minimum instruction time for compulsory education in Albania, 6 025 hours, is lower than in most EU countries, but higher than in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019^[52]). In Albania, the ministry defines the percentage of learning time during each curriculum stage, which spans multiple grade levels, and the percentage of instructional time per week that should be dedicated to each subject area (AQAPUE, 2014^[53]; AQAPUE, 2018^[54]). Lessons are mandated to be 45 minutes long.

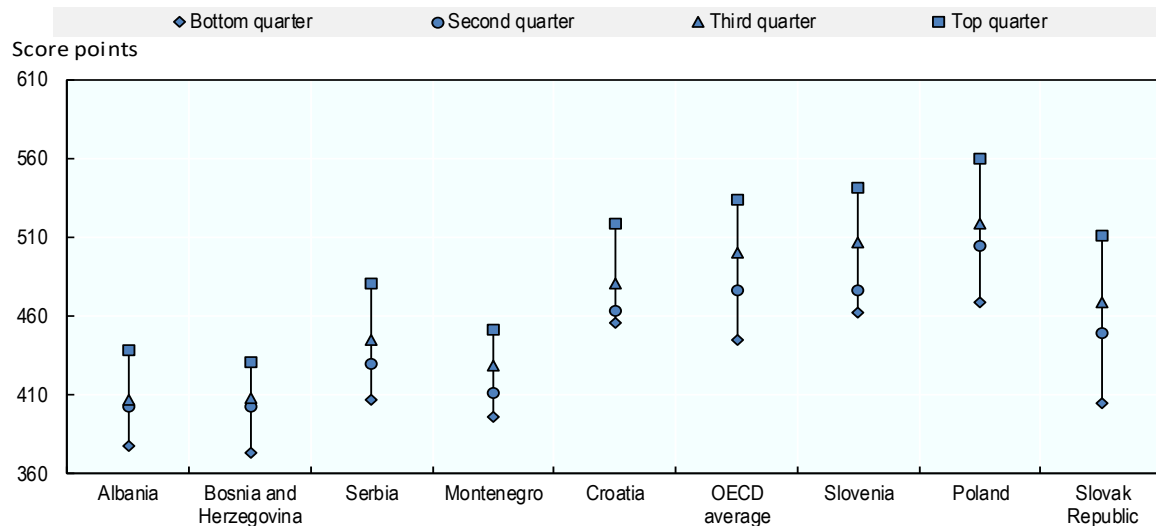
A 2018 reform, titled “Three Subjects in Six Hours,” has provided schools more flexibility in how they choose to organise the instructional day. Prior to the reform, each 45-minute block in a day was dedicated to a different subject, with 4-6 blocks per day depending on the level of schooling (MoESY, 2018^[55]). With the reform, schools may choose to offer a subject for two consecutive 45-minute blocks. The purpose of the reform was to reduce the number of books students had to carry in a single day and to allow students to engage in a wider range of instructional activities, especially those that require more time, application of knowledge and group work. Indeed, research suggests that teachers have found the new curriculum difficult to implement in 45-minute lessons, in part because it takes longer to plan engaging student activities (Gonzalez, 2018^[56]). However, some interviewees during the OECD mission noted that with the new reform teachers saw their students fewer days per week, which impacted their ability to adequately assess students, suggesting that more support is needed to help schools make the most of the new flexibility.

Equity

Socio-economic conditions have an impact on student outcomes

Students in Albania from disadvantaged backgrounds perform lower than more advantaged students. Data from PISA 2018 indicate that students from the bottom quarter of the ESCS (PISA’s index of economic, social and cultural status) in Albania performed 61 score points lower, equivalent to about two of schooling, in reading than their peers from the top quarter of the ESCS (see Figure 1.7). This gap is slightly larger than in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina (58) and Montenegro (55), though it is not as large as that found across OECD countries (average difference of 89 score points) (OECD, 2019^[57]). Despite this gap, more disadvantaged students are academically resilient (able to beat the odds and achieve high performance levels in PISA) in Albania (12.3%) than on average in the OECD (11.3%) (OECD, 2019^[57]).

Figure 1.7. Performance in reading by national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (PISA 2018)



Source: OECD (2019^[57]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en>.

Females have higher enrolment rates and better outcomes in education than males

Females have a higher net enrolment rate than males in the compulsory education age group (100% versus 96%) and at the upper secondary level (78% versus 73%), according to the most recent international data available (2017) (UIS, 2020^[27]). In OECD countries on average, these gaps are slightly smaller, with parity (98%) in the compulsory age group and a 3 percentage point difference (84% versus 81%) in favour of females at the upper secondary level. At the tertiary level, gross enrolment ratios indicate large gaps between females (70%) and males (46%), and this gap is larger than that found in OECD countries on average (83% versus 65%).

Females in Albania are also more likely to graduate from various levels of education and to complete more schooling than males. The gap in the gross graduation ratio between females and males is larger at higher levels of education, and females are expected to complete about 1.3 extra years of education as compared to males (15.5 years versus 14.2 years) (UIS, 2020^[27]). This difference is higher than on average in OECD countries (17.6 for females versus 16.8 for males).

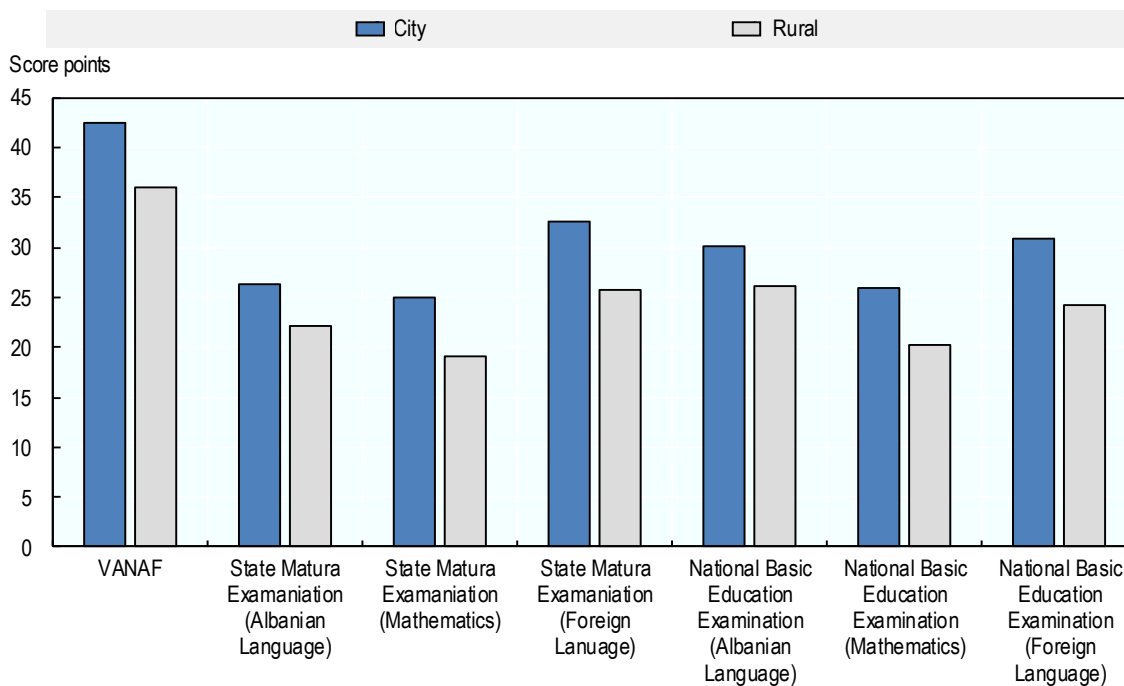
Females also outperform males in Albania across many outcome measures. For example, females score higher than males on Albania's national tests. Data from PISA 2018 show significantly higher performance for females than for males in the reading and science domains, as is the case on average in OECD countries (OECD, 2019^[29]). In mathematics, the difference in performance between females and males is not significant in Albania, while on average in OECD countries females perform lower than males. In addition, fewer females than males lack basic science and reading skills (i.e. the percentage of females who are low achievers is smaller than that of males). This percentage point gap in favour of females is greater in Albania (10.7 in science and 20.1 in reading) than on average in OECD countries (2.4 in science and 10.2 in reading).

Student access and outcomes differ between city and rural schools

Remote rural areas do not offer the same spread of learning opportunities as compared to areas with higher population densities. For example, data from PISA 2015 indicate that a significantly greater number of extracurricular activities are offered in urban schools than in rural schools, as is the case on average in the OECD (Echazarra and Radinger, 2019^[15]). In addition, internal migration patterns, which have contributed to overcrowded classrooms in some urban areas and to difficulty in recruiting quality teachers to rural areas, have contributed to regional differences in student access to quality learning opportunities (see Primary and secondary education). Efforts to provide better learning opportunities by consolidating schools are limited by poor transportation infrastructure connecting remote regions of Albania.

Outcomes as measured by educational attainment and international and national assessments are better in cities than in rural areas. On average, urban regions in Albania have attained two years more of schooling than rural regions (10.5 versus 8.6) (Psacharopoulos, 2017^[38]). Data from PISA 2018 indicate that, in all three domains, students from rural schools in Albania have lower mean scores than students from urban schools (OECD, 2019^[50]). While students from urban schools outperform students from rural schools in most OECD countries, the difference in reading performance is lower in Albania (difference of 33 points) than on average in the OECD (difference of 43 points). National assessment and examinations data show a similar pattern of higher performance for students from cities than for students from rural areas (Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8. National assessment and examinations performance, 2016-2017



Source: ESC (2017^[58]), *Matura Shtetërore 2017 Raport Publik mbi Arritjet e Nxënësve* [State Matura Public Report about Students' Achievements], The Educational Services Centre, Tirana; MoESY (2017^[59]), *Vlerësimi i Arritjeve të Nxënësve* [Assessment of Students' Achievements of the 5th Grade], The Educational Services Centre, Tirana; ESC (2017^[60]), *Provimet Kombëtare të Arsimit Bazë 2017: Raport Publik mbi Arritjet e Nxënësve* [National Education Exam of 2017: Public Report about Students' Achievements], The Educational Services Centre, Tirana.

Equity for Roma and Balkan Egyptian populations remains a concern

Educational outcomes for Roma and Balkan Egyptians, who represent about 1.2% and 2.5% respectively of public basic education enrolment, remain among the lowest in Albania (UNESCO, 2017_[24]). For example, among Roma and Balkan Egyptian persons aged 7-20, roughly 1% and 5% respectively have completed secondary education. Roma and Balkan Egyptian students also have some of the highest rates of dropout in the country. For Roma specifically, the school dropout rate is about 50% (Psacharopoulos, 2017_[38]). Moreover, by some estimates, over half of Roma children aged 6-16 have never been enrolled in school (UNESCO, 2017_[24]). Achievement outcomes are also low for Roma: the literacy rate among Roma is 65%, 30 percentage points lower than that of non-Roma, and data from the VANAF show that Roma students score an average of 29 out of 100 points, compared to 45 on average across Albania (Psacharopoulos, 2017_[38]).

Albania has engaged in efforts to improve education for Roma and Balkan Egyptians, illustrated especially by the doubling of the number of Roma in kindergarten since 2011 (UNESCO, 2017_[24]). Policy responses to low educational outcomes for Roma and Balkan Egyptian students have included a textbook reimbursement program and efforts to promote Roma and Balkan Egyptian identities as an integral part of Albania's cultural heritage. However, research suggests further efforts are needed to close equity gaps. In particular, the level of funding in the education sector is inadequate for providing access, promoting inclusivity and improving outcomes for Roma and Balkan Egyptians (Psacharopoulos, 2017_[38]).

Box 1.2. OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment look at how evaluation and assessment policy can be used to improve student outcomes. They assess countries' evaluation and assessment policies and practices for school education, and draw on insights from international practices, to provide actionable recommendations.

The reviews focus on four key components:

Student assessment monitors and provides feedback on individual student progress and certifies the achievement of learning goals. It covers classroom-based assessments as well as large-scale, external assessments and examinations.

Teacher appraisal assesses the performance of teachers in providing quality learning for their students.

School evaluation looks at the effectiveness of schools in providing quality education.

System evaluation uses educational information to monitor and evaluate the education system against national goals.

The reviews draw on existing OECD work on evaluation and assessment, which included reviews of 18 countries' evaluation and assessment policies and practices. Each country review is based on national information, provided by the country to the OECD; background research and country visits. During the country visits a team of OECD staff and international experts meet with key actors across the education system to identify policy strengths and challenges, and discuss the challenges of evaluation and assessment with national actors. The OECD prepares a report for the country which analyses national practices and policies, and provides policy recommendations to strengthen evaluation and assessment linked to national goals and priorities.

Key indicators

	List of key indicators	Albania	OECD
Background information			
Economy			
1	GDP per capita PPP, constant 2011 international USD, 2018 *	12 306	40 490
2	GDP annual growth rate (in percentage), 2018 *	4.1	2.3
Society			
3	Population annual growth rate, 2018 *	- 0.2	0.6
4	Population aged 14 years or less (%), 2018 *	18	18
5	Fertility rate (births per woman), 2017 *	1.6	1.7
6	Rural population (percentage of total population), 2018 *	40	19
<i>Unemployment rates</i>			
7	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24 years old) (modelled ILO estimate), 2018 **	31.0	11.9
	Total unemployment rate (modelled ILO estimate), 2018 **	13.9	5.3
Education indicators			
System			
8	Official entrance age of pre-primary education, 2018 ***	3	3.1
9	Starting age of compulsory education, 2018 ***	6	5.6
10	Duration of compulsory education (years), 2018 ***	9	10.8
Students			
<i>Net enrolment rates (2017)</i>			
11	Pre-primary education ***	79.9	84.4
	Primary education ***	95.5	95.9
	Lower secondary education ***	86.3	90.8
	Upper secondary education ***	75.4	82.5
12	Share of students enrolled in vocational programmes in upper secondary level ***	16.5	43.5
13	Share of primary students enrolled in private schools ***	7.4	11.3
	Share of lower secondary students enrolled in private schools ***	6.5	15.3
Teachers			
<i>Ratio of students to teaching staff (2016)</i>			
14	Primary education ***	18.2	12.8
	Lower secondary education ***	10.8	10.5
	Upper secondary education ***	14.5	11.8
<i>Share of female teachers (2016)</i>			
15	Pre-primary education ***	100	96.7
	Primary education ***	84.6	84.7
	Lower Secondary education ***	65.1	70.8
	Upper Secondary education ***	65.0	61.0
Finance			
16	Total government expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, all levels, 2016 ***	4.0	5.4
17	Total public expenditure on primary education as a percentage of total government expenditure on education, 2015 ***	56.8	25.2
18	Total public expenditure on secondary education as a percentage of total government expenditure on education, 2016 ***	25.4	34.6
<i>Initial government funding per student in constant PPP USD</i>			
19	Primary education, 2015 ***	3 428.3	8 363.0
	Lower secondary education, 2016 ***	1 513.8	9 488.9

List of key indicators		Albania	OECD
	Upper secondary education, 2016 ***	728.2	9 322.8
	Tertiary education, 2016 ***	1 738.2	11 467.8
Learning outcomes (PISA 2018)			
20	Mean students' performance in science ****	417	489
21	Mean students' performance in reading ****	405	487
22	Mean students' performance in mathematics ****	437	489
23	Percentage of students scoring at PISA proficiency level 5 or 6 in reading ****	0.4	8.7
24	Percentage of students scoring below PISA proficiency level 2 in reading ****	52.2	22.6
25	Percentage of variance in reading performance explained by students' and schools' socio-economic background ****	7.8	12.0
26	Percentage of resilient students (students in the bottom quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status who perform in the top quarter of students internationally in reading)	12.3	11.3

Source: * The World Bank (2018^[61]), *World Bank Indicators: Education*, <https://data.worldbank.org/topic/education> (accessed on 15 June 2018); ** International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018^[62]), *ILOSTAT*, <https://www.ilo.org/ilostat/> (accessed on 15 July 2018); *** UIS (2020^[27]), *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 14 June 2019); **** OECD (2019^[29]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.

Note

¹ Among the countries and economies whose cumulative expenditure per student is under USD 50 000 by age 15, higher expenditure on education is strongly associated with higher PISA science scores.

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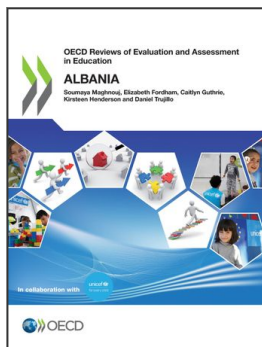
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