

Education in Albania

Context

Albania, as an official EU candidate country, has much progress to make toward the EU's education benchmarks before its accession. While education improvement in Albania is supported by its government and growing economy, the country still faces many obstacles to matching the educational outputs of its neighbors in Western Europe.

Albania has a per capita GNP of \$5,316 USD (PPP), which is the lowest in South-eastern Europe and among the lowest in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS).¹ Its annual growth rate has hovered around 5.2% since 1990.²

While Albania's economy continues to grow, its total government expenditure is the lowest in South-eastern Europe with only 3% of its budget allocated to education and 3.7% to health. The average standard of living in Albania is among the lowest in the sub-region, with 25.4% of the population living below the national poverty line and 50% of the population living on less than \$4.00 USD a day.³ The national unemployment rate - 15% - is in comparable range to the poorest countries in the region. Yet its child labor rates are the highest in the region with almost 30% of boys and 20% of girls working before the legal age.⁴

Education Reform

Despite its challenges, Albania has made significant efforts to improving its education provision.

- The current SWAP represents a unique opportunity to put the system into action as well as to enhance cooperation among education partners.⁵
- Significant resources were raised for education from the World Bank Project – Education, Excellence and Equity. Much of these resources went to supporting the National Teacher Standard and the scaling up of the Hidden Dropout Approach.⁶
- The government invested heavily in EMIS and



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thus has created the grounds for better information to be provided to schools and the MoES.⁷

- The MoES has taken initial steps to prepare a national policy based on UNICEF's Child Friendly School pilot project.⁸
- Regional EFA plans have been developed (Kukës and Korça Regions) in the framework of decentralization processes to act as concrete tools for strengthening the regional dimension of the National Strategy for Development and Integration.⁹
- The government has introduced a new environmental education program into the primary school curriculum (grade 1-5) that uses 'child to child' methodology in an attempt to promote sustainable development.¹⁰
- The government approved a strategy to increase the access to and improve the quality of pre-school education across Albania.
- The MoES, in cooperation with UNICEF, is promoting the 'Albania Reads' initiative to improve the country's performance in reading, which trends show as its weakest subject.¹¹

Access

Albania has made significant progress toward achieving universal primary school enrolment. The net primary school enrolment ratio is 94%, which is above average for the region. Worryingly,

Quick Facts about Education in Albania

	Albania	South-Eastern Europe
Total Population	3.2 million	50.7
Youth unemployment rate as percentage of unemployment rate	152%	x
Percentage of GDP spent on Education	3.7%	4.07%
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment, 2005 (<i>Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Girls/Boys)</i>)	47% (1.00)	55
Net Enrolment in Primary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	94% (1.00)	92
Net Enrolment in Secondary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	74% (0.98)	82
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	19% (1.57)	35
Student/Teacher Ratio, 2005	18	18.2
Out of School Children (% girls)	14,000 (49)	80,000
Number of refugees and internally displaced persons of concern	91	690,000
PISA Score (mathematics ((regional rank/17), reading (''''), science (''''))	x	x

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, Innocenti Research

this figure has been on the decline since before 2001.¹² However, the primary gross intake rate is 99%,¹³ signifying that capacity exists to enroll nearly all children in the country in first grade.

Several challenges remain with regard to access. There are 14,000 (4.6%) out-of-school children living in Albania. Secondary enrolment rates are among the lowest in the region, with a secondary school NER of 74%. Similarly only 49% of children are enrolled in pre-primary education, which leaves the country far from achieving EFA goal number one; this figure drops to 30% in the rural areas. In addition, the GER for higher education is only 19%.

Equity

Albania has taken significant strides to close the gaps in equity in its education system and it has made many accomplishments in primary education. It has achieved gender parity in primary education, with a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.0. Girls' participation in education remains high throughout upper secondary education, with a GPI of .98 – and far surpasses that of boys in tertiary education; 50% more girls enroll in higher education than boys (GPI=1.5).

The bigger gaps in educational opportunity are based on geographic location and economic status. Throughout primary education, children living in rural areas have higher rates of participation than those children living in urban areas. Rural children have higher attendance rates, higher enrolment rates, and higher survival and completion rates. However, by secondary school the situation changes dramatically. Half as many rural children (13.6%) attend secondary education as urban children (27.2%), and rural children's attendance rates (13.6%) are half that of urban children's (27.2%) in secondary school.¹⁴



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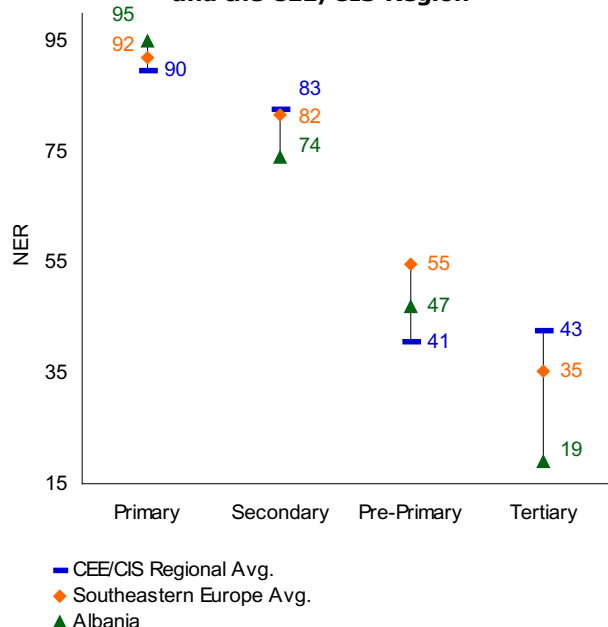
A similar trend holds true between the highest and lowest wealth quintiles. There is only a 1% difference in the enrolment rates of the richest and poorest children in primary school. However, in secondary school only 7.9% of the country's poorest children are enrolled, as compared to 27.8% of the richest children. Attendance rates show a similar gap. The net attendance rate of the poorest children in secondary school is 8% and 28% for the richest children.

Additionally, there are serious obstacles to education for ethnic minorities in Albania, particularly for Roma children, who have a primary participation and completion rate that is half that of the national average¹⁵ (See Box 1).

Quality

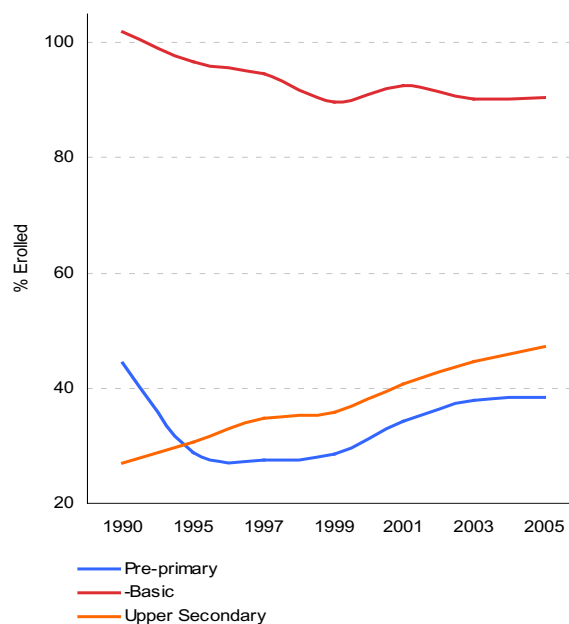
Proxy measures of quality indicate that Albania has much progress to make in improving school-based learning processes. While almost all students enroll in grade one, only 90% complete the four years of compulsory primary school. Three percent of Albanian students drop out after grade one and

Figure 1. Net Education Enrolment Ratios in Albania, Southeastern Europe and the CEE/CIS Region



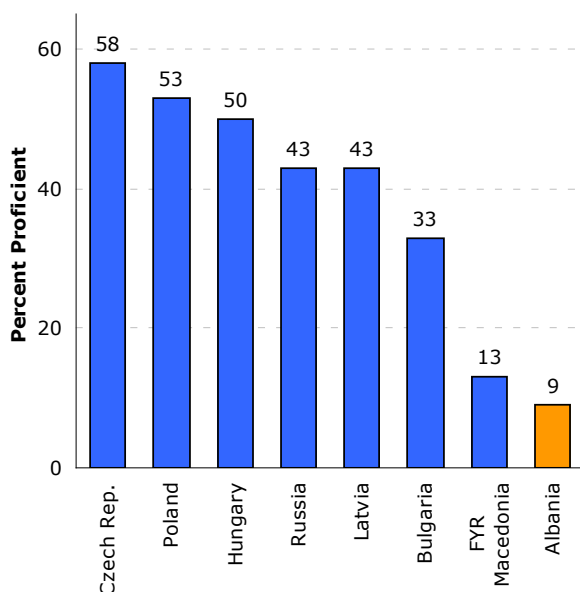
Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report.

Figure 2. Overtime Trends in Pre-Primary, Basic and Secondary School Enrolment in Albania, 1990-2005



Source: Transmonee 2007.

Figure 3. Percentage of Students Scoring Proficiency in the Region on the PISA 2000 literacy Assessment, age 15



Source: PISA International Report. IEA. 2000.

two more drop out after grade two. Furthermore, two percent of students repeat at least one grade, the majority of repeaters being boys. The average teacher/pupil ratio in Albania is 1:18, which is the highest in Central and Eastern Europe.

Measures of learning outcomes in the region show that Albanian students lag behind their peers in both literacy and numeracy. On the OECD PISA Assessment in 2000, Albania scored the second lowest (after Peru) out of the 41 participating countries, with only 9% of its students performing at a level designated as proficient. In math, Albania performed only slightly better, scoring third from last out of the 41 countries. These low scores indicate a need for investment in improving educational effectiveness and quality. Albania did not participate in PISA 2006.

Education Financing

Education financing in Albania is centralized, at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Albania spends 3.7% of its GDP on education. This is below average for the sub-region, which spends an average of 4.4%, and significantly less than the OECD average, which is about 6%.

The low education expenditure rate manifests itself in the system's low teacher salaries. Sixty per cent of teachers reported that the system of pre- and in-service teacher training is poor and 25% call for radical changes.¹⁶ The teaching profession is not attracting young people; only 14% of the teaching force obtained their certification within the last two years. Furthermore, often teacher salaries – around \$80 USD per month – are significantly lower than the average national wage, forcing teachers to take second jobs to support themselves. Starting from July 2008, the government increased teachers' salaries by 14% (\$250 per month).

Box 1. Education for Roma in Albania

There are an estimated 90-100,000 Roma people living in Albania, making up 3.1% of the total population. Fifty percent of the Roma population is under the age of 18. Roma children are legally entitled and mandated to attend school, starting at age six, for the eight years of compulsory education. However, only 48% of Roma children are enrolled in primary education, which is less than half of the national average, and only 25% complete primary education. After primary school, their participation in national education declines significantly. Only 4.3% of Roma have completed secondary school and only 0.2% have completed tertiary education.

In Albania, there is no mother tongue instruction for Roma children, which contributes to the high dropout rates and low attendance rates. One paper reported that 60% of Roma children drop out of school before the fourth year of primary education. Parents report that this is a result of discrimination against the children in schools and a function of the schools being situated too far from their settlements.

(Sources: Open Society Institute. (2006). *Monitoring Education for Roma: A Statistical baseline for Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe*; Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe. (2000). *Minorities in Southeast Europe: Roma of Albania*.)



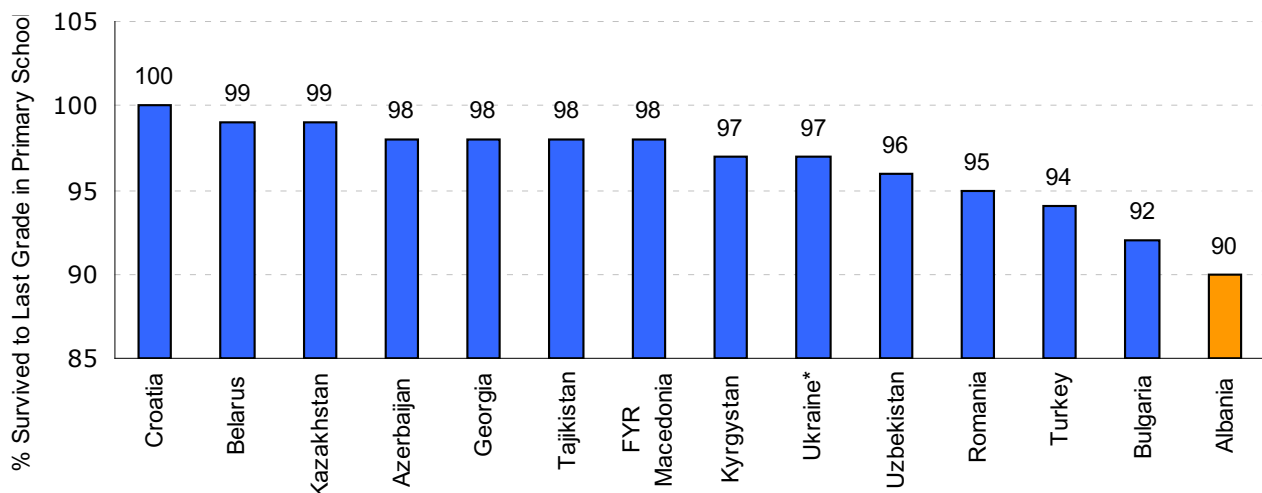
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Education Priorities in Albania

The priorities of Albania's education system are to:

- Reform governance systems and strengthen system management capacity with special focus on policy development linked to research and EMIS data, as well as on decentralization, school autonomy and accountability issues;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning processes with special emphasis on a demand driven curriculum model, which focuses on acquisition of necessary skills for the labour market; and
- Improve the efficiency of education financing with special emphasis on mechanisms, leveled financing and budget preparation.

Figure 4. Survival Rate to Last Grade in Primary School in the CEE/CIS Region, 2004



- Build capacity and develop human resources;
- Develop and apply national standards for teacher training programs;
- Develop and apply rights-based policies that prevent and reduce marginalization in education for all excluded groups, including Roma, Egyptian and special needs children; and
- Promote child-centered pedagogies and curricula for all children.¹⁷

Box 2. The Hidden Dropout Challenge in Albania

In an education system where teachers, classrooms and supply closets are overburdened and under-resourced, students who struggle in school are often ignored in class and passed from grade to grade with little individual attention from the teacher and minimal academic achievement. Struggling learners' challenges are exacerbated by whole-class teaching techniques, which mostly cater to outspoken and successful students. Without support, struggling students disengage from class lectures and silently fall farther and farther behind as they pass through the system. These students eventually abandon the system and join the masses of primary school dropouts. UNICEF and Albania's MoES are working hard to establish Minimum Necessary Learning Objectives (MNLOs) that all children in every classroom must master. *Source: UNICEF, 2006: Albania.*

- 1 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report
- 2 Human Development Report 2007/8 Online. United Nations Development Programme.
- 3 UNDP Human Development Index Online.
- 4 UNDP Human Development Index Online.
- 5 UNICEF Albania.
- 6 UNICEF Albania.
- 7 UNICEF Albania.
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- 12 UNICEF MICS 2006.
- 13 EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 Will We Make It. UNESCO.
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- 15 Monitoring Education for Roma. OSI. 2006.
- 16 Zgaga, P. (2006). The Prospect of Teacher Education in South-east Europe. Centre for Educational Policy Study. University of Ljubljana.
- 17 UNICEF Albania.