

Education in Albania

Context

Impact of economic crisis

Despite its status as an EU candidate country, Albania continues to face economic and social challenges. The nation has one of the lowest per capita GDPs in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS), at US\$7,240 (PPP). Albania's total expenditure on education is also low, at 3.13 per cent; 10.13 per cent of the public spending in 2010 was for education. The national GDP per capita in 2010 was \$8,000.

The distribution of wealth in Albania continues to be uneven; however, efforts to reduce poverty have yielded some success. In 2002, 25.4 per cent of Albanians lived in poverty; by 2008, that declined to 12.4 per cent. Families in extreme poverty have also declined, from 5 per cent in 2002 to 1.2 per cent in 2008. Seventy-four per cent of families in poverty report being unable to afford school books, 56 per cent are unable to afford medical and healthcare for their children and no disabled children from poor families attend preschool. National unemployment hovers at around 15 per cent, which is comparable to other countries in the region, but child labour rates are exceedingly high, with almost 30 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls working before the legal age, which has a clear impact on education. Thirty-one per cent of poor parents accept the reality that their children have to work, according to local research.

Education reform

Albania has made significant efforts to improve its educational system, but the country still faces many obstacles to match the educational outputs of its neighbours in Western Europe. Some notable efforts in the past few years include:

- In 2008–2009, nine years of schooling became compulsory.



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- In 2008, the government increased teachers' salaries by 14 per cent (\$250 per month).
- The government launched the 2009–2013 national strategy for pre-university education.
- The government approved a strategy to increase the access to and improve preschool education for all 5- to 6-year olds.
- The MoE is making efforts to develop a national policy based on UNICEF's Child-Friendly School framework.
- In 2008–2010, the government continued to support a national scaling up plan on the Minimal Learning Objectives and School Plans in response to its 'Hidden Dropout' problem. The approach piloted by UNICEF is currently being evaluated by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) to assess progress and identify gaps for further action.
- By the end of 2008, all primary and secondary schools in Albania were equipped with computer labs.
- To promote sustainable development, the government introduced an innovative environmental education programme into 400 primary schools (grades 1–5) that uses a 'child-to-child' methodology.

Quick Facts about education in Albania

Total population	3.2 million
Percentage of GDP spent on education	3.7%
Youth unemployment rate % (2002)	15.8%
Net pre-primary school enrolment, 2005 (Gender Parity Index (GPI) (girls/boys))	47% (1.00)
Net enrolment in primary school, 2005 (GPI)	94% (1.00)
Net enrolment in secondary school, 2005 (GPI)	74% (0.98)
Gross enrolment in tertiary education, 2005 (GPI)	19% (1.57)
Student/teacher ratio, 2005	18:1
Out-of-school children (per cent girls)	14,000 (49%)
Number of refugees and internally displaced persons of concern	91
PISA 2009, scores: reading, mathematics, science (rank/65)	385(60), 377(60), 391(60)

Sources: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, UNECE Trends in Europe and North America 2005, PISA 2010

- The MoES, in cooperation with UNICEF, is promoting the 'Albania Reads' initiative to improve the country's performance in reading, which trends show is its weakest subject.
- The new law on pre-university education foresees universal education for all children 5–6 years old and provision for inclusive education.

Access

Albania's pre-primary and primary education net enrolment rates are above the CEE/CIS regional average, but secondary and tertiary enrolment rates lag behind (see Figure 1).

Early childhood education

Preschool is a priority of the 2009–2013 national strategy for pre-university education. Enrolment in preschool stands at 49 per cent, suggesting that much work is still needed to achieve Education for All (EFA) goal Number One of expanding and improving early childhood care and education. In some rural areas, preschool enrolment has declined by as much as 30 per cent. Only 135 Roma children have access to preschool. Also, there is a concern about the quality of preschool education in Albania. Under the national strategy, the government aims to focus on both access and quality. Currently, 6 per cent of the total education budget is devoted to preschool education, according to a UNICEF financial analysis in 2010.

Albania has made significant progress toward achieving universal primary school enrolment. As of 2005, the primary net school enrolment rate (NER) was 94 per cent, which is above average for the region. There is some national concern, however, because this figure has been declining since before 2001 (see Figure 2). However, the primary gross intake rate is 99 per cent, signifying that the capacity

exists to enrol nearly all children in the country by first grade. There are 14,000 (4.6 per cent) out-of-school children living in Albania, according to the *UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010*. However, this is likely an underestimate.

Secondary enrolment rates are among the lowest in the region, with a NER of 74 per cent as of 2005. In addition, enrolment in higher education is very limited, with a gross enrolment rate (GER) of only 19 per cent.

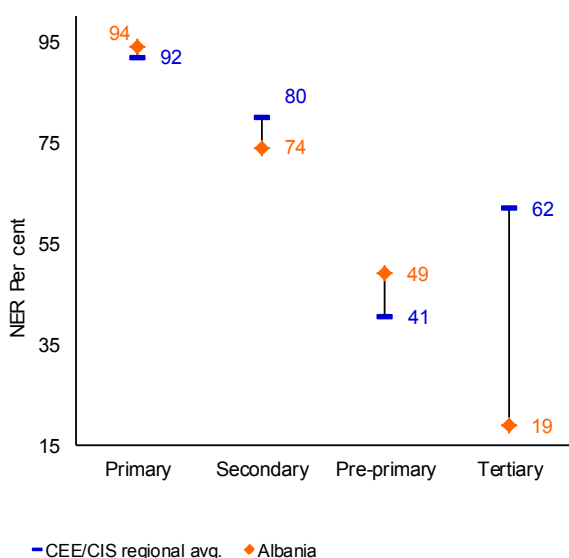
Children with disabilities

The disability law in Albania entitles all people to have basic human rights, including access to education. Beyond that, however, limited financial and human resources hinder implementation. There is minimal statistical data identifying the number of people with disabilities. It is estimated that 33,000 children have a disability, 14,000 of whom have a mental or sensory impairment.

There is no specific department in the MoES that oversees special education students, but there are eight specialized schools, six schools for children with mild mental disorders, one residential school for children with hearing impairments and a school for children with visual impairments. Teacher preparation to support children with special needs is limited, since there is little training in the tools and methods that are most successful with specific populations. Inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schooling is progressing slowly.

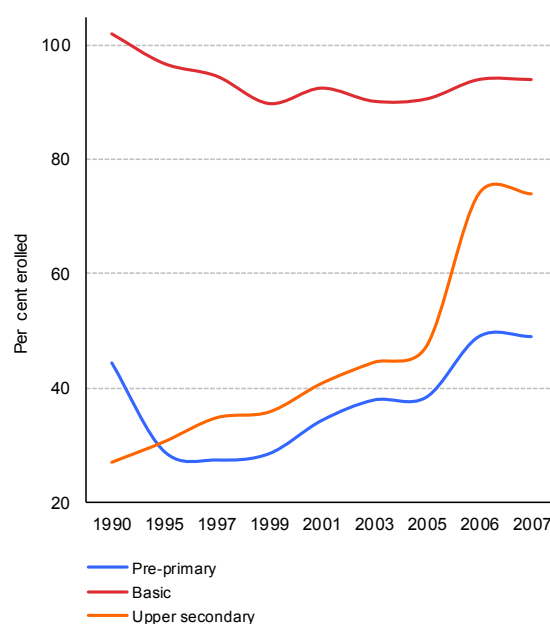
Despite slow national change, small improvements are occurring. In two central Albanian districts, UNICEF and MEDPAK are working with several doz-

Figure 1. Education net enrolment rates (NER) in Albania 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, 1990-2007



Source: Transmonee 2007.



en schools to adopt measures to improve support for children with disabilities. Around 300 students with disabilities are involved in this project.

Educational challenges facing youth and adolescents

Many changes in the secondary educational system affect young Albanians. The closing of many vocational schools in rural areas yielded an 89 per cent decline in overall vocational enrolment. The enrolment in general secondary schools did increase, but only by 24 per cent. The quality of education has not improved alongside enrolment figures. Limited teaching materials, outdated curricula and unskilled teachers are issues that affect the quality of learning available for Albanian youth.

Young people exiting the school system often find that they are unprepared or uncompetitive in the job market. In 2001, only 13 per cent of young adults had full-time positions. Emigration is viewed by those with means as a popular choice, resulting in national brain drain. Those who are not invested in education tend to be at risk of dangers such as trafficking, drug abuse or crime.

Equity

Albania has taken significant strides to close the gaps in equity in its education system and it has many accomplishments at the primary level. It has achieved gender equity in primary education, with a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.0. Girls' participation remains high throughout upper secondary education, with a GPI of .98, and surpasses boys in tertiary education; 50 per cent more girls enrol in higher education than boys.

Disaggregating the data by geographical location or economic status reveals wider gaps in educational opportunity. Throughout primary education, children living in rural towns have higher rates of participation than those 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 per cent) attend secondary education as urban children (27.2 per cent).

While nationwide school drop-out rates are less than 1 per cent, children from some remote poor regions, such as in Kukësi, are 16 times more likely to dropout of school than urban children. Official drop-out figures may be as much as 2.5 times higher than what is reported, since school principals often report fewer dropouts to avoid a reduction in teaching personnel.

The largest gap remains between the poorest and the richest quintiles. There is only a 1 per cent difference in the enrolment rates of the richest and poorest children in primary school. However, in secondary school, only 7.9 per cent of the country's poorest children are enrolled, compared to 27.8 per cent of the richest children. Enrolment in remote, poor areas outside of cities and towns is even more dismal. Attendance rates show a similar gap. The net attendance rate of the poorest children in secondary school is 8 per cent, while the richest children are at 28 per cent.

Education for Roma Children

A major concern in Albania continues to be the schooling of Roma children. Of the estimated 90,000 to 100,000 Roma people living in Albania (3.1 per cent of Albania's total population), half are under the age of 18. Enrolment and completion rates for these children are significantly lower than that of their non-Roma peers. In primary school, 48 per cent of Roma children are enrolled, which is less than half of the national average, and only 25 per cent complete primary education. In secondary school, completion figures drop as low as 4.3 per cent for Roma, and only 0.2 per cent complete tertiary education.

A lack of mother-tongue instruction, discrimination, distance between schools and Roma settlements and a lack of appreciation for Roma culture in schools are suspected to contribute to the high drop-out rates and low attendance rates of Roma children. Sixty per cent of Roma children drop out of school before the fourth year of primary education.

The Albanian government, with the support of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity (MoLSAEO), approved an action plan to address access to and enrolment of Roma children in school. The plan, which is part of the Decade of the Roma Inclusion 2010–2015, targets education, social inclusion and equal opportunities for Roma children and communities. Particular emphasis for

children is on early childhood schooling and inclusive education in compulsory school. The location of schools and the quality of education available for Roma children are being investigated.

Quality

Proxy measures of quality indicate that Albania has much progress to make in improving school-based learning processes. While almost all students enrol in grade one, as of 2005, only 90 per cent complete the four years of compulsory primary school. Three per cent of Albanian students drop out after grade one, and another 2 per cent drop out after grade two. Furthermore, 2 per cent of students repeat at least one grade, the majority of repeaters being boys. The average student/teacher ratio in Albania is 18 to 1, 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 PISA Assessment in 2000, Albania scored the second lowest (after Peru) out of the 41 participating countries, with only 9 per cent of its students performing at a level designated as proficient. In mathematics, Albania performed only slightly better, scoring 39th out of the 41 countries. These low scores indicate a need for investment in improving educational effectiveness and quality.

In PISA 2009, Albania scored 16th out of 19 participating countries in the region in reading, mathematics and science. The 2009 results showed improvements, as Albania scored fifth to last in reading out of all 65 participating countries (compared to the second lowest in 2000). In 2009, Albania scored 36 points higher in reading than in 2000, and 17 points higher in sciences than in 2000. Albania did not participate in PISA 2003 or 2006.

Education financing

In 2001, Albania spent 2.5 per cent of its GDP on education; by 2010, this increased to 3.13 per cent. This is below average for the subregion, which spends an average of 4.4 per cent of GDP on education, and significantly less than the OECD average, which is about 6 per cent. The low education expenditure manifests itself in the system's deteriorating infrastructure, outdated curricula and teaching methods, and poor qualifications of teachers. A University of Ljubljana study revealed that 60 per cent of teachers reported that the system of pre- and in-service teacher training is poor, and 25 per cent called for radical changes. The teaching profession is not attracting young people; only 14 per cent of the teaching force obtained their certification within the last two years. This means that the country could face a shortage as older teachers begin to retire.



Education priorities in Albania

The priorities of UNICEF and its partners for Albania's education system are to:

- Increase access and quality of preschool education, with a focus on the most marginalized children
- Improve national education governance and accountability systems
- Strengthen EMIS capacity to assess hidden marginalization
- Improve the quality of teaching and the support available for teacher development
- Develop and apply inclusive education
- Achieve a school drop-out rate of zero per cent
- Strengthen school-community partnerships
- Improve the efficiency of education financing, with special emphasis on mechanisms and levels of financing
- Increase education resources to 7 per cent of GDP (6 per cent from the public and 1 per cent from the private sector)
- Work toward EU-level standards in primary and secondary school and achieve necessary reforms in order for Albanian degrees to be recognized in the EU