

Education in

U.N. Administered Province of Kosovo

Context

The education system of the U.N. Administered Province of Kosovo¹ is precariously enmeshed in the political and ethnic tensions that divide the country. Since the end of war in 1999, the political situation in Kosovo has remained unstable. The Government of Kosovo has declared national sovereignty, which is recognized by 76 countries, but Serbia maintains that Kosovo is one of its provinces. The population remains segregated along ethnic lines and the education system both reflects and perpetuates those divisions.

Comprehensive data on the socio-economic situation of Kosovo is scarce; no population census has been done since 1981, although one is planned. Estimates paint a bleak portrait of the situation of poverty and unemployment in Kosovo. The estimated GDP (PPP) of Kosovo is about US\$1,700 per capita, which is the second lowest in the CEECIS region after Tajikistan (\$1,300). Almost 40 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, and income inequality is high, with a Gini index of .30. Unemployment is endemic, with rates at 60 per cent for Kosovar Albanians, 50 per cent for the Kosovar Serbs, 70 per cent for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE), which are the three prominent minority groups. Almost 40 per cent of the population is thought to be under the age of 20, making youth unemployment and educational opportunities a major challenge.

Education Reforms

Education reforms in Kosovo are complex because of the parallel nature of the school systems. The government of Kosovo has taken initial steps on the path toward the Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):

- The government has drafted a Kosovo Development and Strategy Plan, which incorporates the MDGs and takes an approach in line with human rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- In cooperation with UNICEF and Save the Children, the government of Kosovo has put in place child-rights coordinators or focal points in municipalities.
- The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) extended compulsory education to nine years, starting at age 6 for enrolment in primary education.
- The MoEST undertook a comprehensive curriculum reform for preschool, primary and secondary education, which has further guided the process of subject curriculum development.
- In 2007, the Kosovo Parliament endorsed a Strategy of Pre-University Education (2007–2017), which identifies, and plans the development needs of the pre-university level.



- In cooperation with UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology established 20 community-based early childhood centres for children between the ages of 3 and 6 years. Each centre is staffed by a community liaison, and most of them have become sustainable, with a number of municipalities covering the costs in cooperation with communities.

Structure of the education system in Kosovo

Kosovo's schools are operated in a parallel education system: the Serbian government administers education for Kosovar Serbs and the Government of Kosovo administers education for Kosovar Albanians, Turks, Bosniaks, Croats and others. Kosovar Serbs attend eight years of compulsory schooling in compliance with Serbian educational law. Their textbooks, curriculum, teacher salaries and education administration come from Belgrade. All school materials and instruction are in the Serbian language. Serbians who live in Serb-minority neighbourhoods are bussed to Serbian schools.

The Government of Kosovo requires nine years of compulsory schooling. The National Curriculum of Kosovo is taught to Kosovar Albanians, Turks, Bosnians, Croats and some other minority groups. The majority of children follow the National Curriculum of Kosovo with instruction in their mother tongue (except for the Roma and other small minority groups); the curriculum is administered in Albanian, Turkish, Bosnian and Croat. The Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE) minority groups attend school largely based on where they live. Nevertheless, the majority of Roma attend Serb schools. Instruction for RAE students is not offered in their mother tongue, so they join either the eight- or nine-year system based on where they live.

Access to education in Kosovo

Enrolment rates in primary education are relatively high in Kosovo. Even during the war, enrolment remained high because communities, placing high cultural value on education, maintained the administration and financing of the schools in the absence of government control. The estimated net enrolment rates (NER) for Albanian and Serbian children between the ages of 7 and 14 is 97.5 per cent and 99.5 per cent, respectively. However, access to secondary schooling is the lowest in the region. Secondary enrolment figures are unknown, but are estimated to be much lower than primary school enrolment. Children under the age of five suffer a severe shortage of access to pre-primary education. Only about 5 per cent of children are enrolled in early childhood education programmes (see Table 1 and Box 1).

Declining access to secondary school is presenting a serious challenge to the government of Kosovo. The under-20 population is growing rapidly, now comprising about 40 per cent of the population, which places increasing demands on secondary schools. The number of secondary schools is just over one tenth of the number of primary schools. Bosnian, Croat and RAE secondary schools do not exist, making access and quality of education for these groups lower than for others. The scarcity of secondary schools is made worse by the deterioration of school infrastructure. Some schools were damaged in the fighting and others were rendered uninhabitable from crumbling walls, broken heating systems, a lack of plumbing and broken windows and doors.

Equity

Inequities in education are a serious concern in Kosovo. Minority ethnic groups have less access to education and significantly lower average educational attainment rates than Kosovar Serbs or Kosovar Albanians.

Kosovar Serbs have the highest levels of educational attainment, spending an average of 10.61 years in school (see Figure 1). Literacy rates are quite high among Kosovar Serbs in comparison to the rest of the population: 99 per cent of males and 96 per cent of females are literate. However, 5.5 per cent of Kosovar Serb children do not attend primary school and these children have less access to secondary schools than Kosovar Albanian children because of the smaller number of Serbian secondary schools. Children who do not gain admittance to the secondary

Box 1. Early childhood development and school readiness

Investments in early childhood development and school readiness pay a high public return in the form of better learning outcomes for students, better citizens and a more productive labour force. But until 2004, only 3–5 per cent of children aged 3 to 6 in Kosovo had access to early childhood education and development programmes; by 2007, this increased to less than 10 per cent, which still compares poorly to the percentage of children attending early childhood programmes in other European countries.

Early childhood education in Kosovo remains neglected. Low levels of preschool attendance were further depressed when 36 pre-primary school facilities were closed down in five municipalities after 2006.

Kosovo has a proportionally higher number of young children than any other country in Europe, so the emphasis on early education should also be proportionally higher. At present, the government has few resources to establish institutionalized early learning programmes. The majority of existing preschools and kindergartens or pre-primary classes are located in urban centres. State-provided rural early childhood education services, such as pre-schools or kindergartens, did not exist during the previous administration, so there is little knowledge regarding the meaning or processes of early learning.

school nearest their home are often forced to pay room and board to attend a school farther away, which increases the cost and makes secondary school inaccessible for the poorest students.

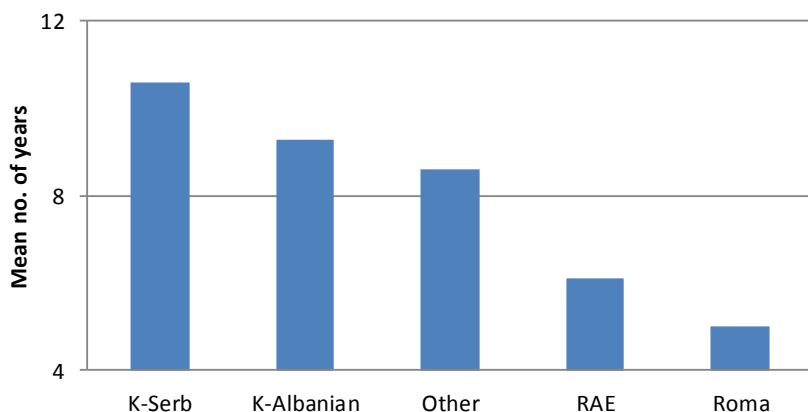
School completion rates for Kosovar Albanian's are high through compulsory school. The average Kosovar Albanian studies for 9.33 years. Around 80 per cent of Kosovar Albanian students who complete compulsory basic education continue on to upper secondary school. However, high school completion rates are around 9.7 per cent for Kosovar Albanians. The average student-teacher ratio for Kosovar Albanian schools is approximately 20 to 1.

Table 1. Number of Students in Kosovo Schools, by ethnicity and grade level

	Albanian	Bosnia	Ashkali	Roma	Croat	Turk	Egypt.	Goran	Other
Pre-primary	17,159	186	38	25	0	105	30	50	3
Primary	315,699	4,363	2,231	1,008	38	2,365	859	642	2
Secondary	68,500	666	68	33	0	465	8	19	1

Source: UNICEF. 2004. *Quality Education for All in Kosovo*.

Figure 1. Mean years of schooling in Kosovo, by ethnicity



The biggest equity gaps fall on the three biggest minority groups: the RAE children. Only 75 per cent of all RAE children attend primary school, which is significantly lower than the national average of about 98 per cent. The literacy rate among the RAE – about 80 per cent – is much lower than among the general population. The situation worsens in secondary school when RAE children’s access declines sharply. Eighty per cent of female and 60 per cent of male RAE children do not have access to secondary school. In short, the RAE communities rank last on indicators of educational equity and access.

Despite significant increases in the absolute and relative enrolment of girls, gains in gender equity are largely limited to lower primary education. At other levels, significant gender disparities persist and generally increase with age, notably at secondary levels, where drop-out and completion rates remain a problem. Gender gaps are evident in both arms of the education system. Kosovar Serb men study one year more on average than women. Among Kosovar Albanians, there is a striking gap in participation in secondary school between males and females. Out of almost 70,000 pupils, 56 per cent are male and only 44 per cent

are female. The gender gap worsens among the smaller linguistic groups. Among Bosniak, Turkish and Gorani speaking communities, boys attain on average two years more education than girls. Among RAE speaking communities, approximately 20 per cent more females are out of school than males. Also, the illiteracy rate among RAE women is twice that of RAE men – 8 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women are illiterate.

Among all groups, particularly vulnerable group is that of a children with special needs. Although there are no comprehensive statistics covering this group, it is estimated that only 10 per cent of children with special needs are mainstreamed into the education system, and nearly half are illiterate.

Educational quality

Kosovo does not have a monitoring and evaluation system, so the learning outcomes of the education system are unclear. A poorly developed education management information system (EMIS) is hampering the sector. The lack of reliable data for informed planning and decision-making is a real concern. The quality of schools is reported to be deteriorating due to a number of factors. The rising numbers of students and the stagnant number of schools is causing student/teacher ratios to increase. Children attend overcrowded schools, where classes often last 30 to 35 minutes instead of 45 minutes. This makes classroom processes less efficient and has a negative impact on quality.

The quality of teaching in Kosovo is less than adequate, especially with the introduction of the new curriculum and teaching in many schools is carried out by poorly paid and often underquali-



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fied teachers. There are approximately 20,000 practicing teachers in Kosovar pre-primary, primary and secondary education institutions, about 30 per cent of whom are untrained. Most have undergone a subject-based training in existing teacher-training institutions and thus are unprepared to teach the new comprehensive curriculum, which requires them to teach multiple subjects. Additionally, the current pre-service teacher training “promotes knowledge-based and encyclopedic learning instead of a rights-based, gender-neutral and participatory classroom environment”,² which further undermines the ability and motivation of teachers to implement the new curriculum. In-service teacher training does not reach most teachers and, when it does, it is inadequate.

Physical and psychological violence remains a problem for students in Kosovo. Schools do not take account into children’s concerns about safety nor their psychosocial needs. According to an early survey conducted in one of the refugee camps during the crisis and published in the *Croatian Medical Journal*, 77 per cent of children reported that they were forced through physical violence to leave their home; 55 per cent of them saw the torture of a family member or other close person, and 57 per cent of them strongly believed that they could be seriously hurt or killed. While several years have passed since the war, the extreme trauma faced by many children in Kosovo is likely to continue to affect their ability to learn and feel safe in school. Many children and adults, mostly minorities, continue to report that they do not feel secure walking around in their neighbourhoods. In 2005, two Serbian children were shot and killed



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and several others were wounded while they were playing in a river in an Albanian-majority neighbourhood. Minority children cite this incident as a reason for their insecurity.

Education financing

Kosovo spends 4.2 per cent of its total GDP on education. This is slightly below the regional average of 4.4 per cent. However, a disproportionate amount of education spending in Kosovo goes to higher education. The Kosovo government has recently increased the budget allocation for education, and priority has been given to school infrastructure.

1 UNSCR 1244.

2 Pupovci & Ilazi (2003). *Education for Democratic Citizenship: From Policy to Effective Practice Through Quality Assurance, Country Report: Kosovo*.