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arise Action for Reducing
Inequalities in Education

ARISE

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Reducing
Inequalities
in Education

National Report for Kosovo



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National Report Kosovo

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Kosova Education Center

ARISE

Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education National Report for Kosovo

Pristina, 2021

ARISE Consortium



Centar za obrazovne politike
Centre for Education Policy



STEP BY STEP



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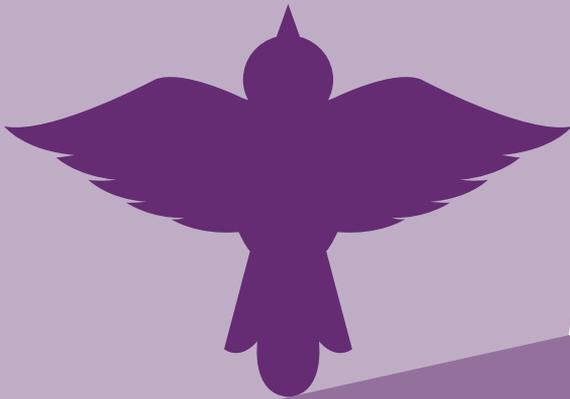




List of Abbreviations

AI	Administrative Instruction
CSW	Centre for Social Work
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESCS	PISA Index of Economic, Social & Cultural Statutes
EWS	Early Warning System
ISCED	International Standards Classification of Education
KAS	Kosovo Agency for Statistics
KCF	Kosovo Curriculum Framework
LC	Learning Centres
MDHSW	Municipal Directorates for Health and Social Welfare
MED	Municipal Education Directorate
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MH	Ministry of Health
MLSW	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
MOCR	Municipal Office for Communities and Returnees
NIPH	National Institute for Public Health
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRTAN	Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Nonregistration in Compulsory Education
SAS	Social Assistance Scheme
SES	Socio-economic Status





Introduction

The national report was created within the project Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education (ARISE¹), a regional project implemented in Albania, Bosna and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey and funded by the European Commission. The project aims to support inclusion of students with low socio-economic status by building national and regional partnerships of civil society organisations from six aforementioned beneficiaries to engage in advocacy and constructive policy dialogue with governments, raise awareness among education stakeholders and pilot interventions targeting low SES students at the school level.

Data and information presented in the national report are collected through a policy questionnaire fulfilled after the analysis of equity-related policy documents and consultations with relevant institutions and experts and focus group and interviews with policy makers, school principals, teachers, school support staff, students, parents, civil society organisations and educational experts. Focus group and interviews are implemented to obtain stakeholders' perspective on equity-related issues in general and in the educational context of a country.



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1 More information about project: <https://www.arisenetwork.eu/en/>

1. General policy context relevant for equity

“We, the people of Kosovo, committed to the creation of a state of free citizens that will guarantee the rights of every citizen, civil freedoms and equality of all citizens before the law; Committed to the state of Kosovo as a state of economic wellbeing and social prosperity”² are the first few words of the Constitution of Kosovo, which endorse equality and social prosperity for all members of the society regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, economic status etc. Along this commitment, Ombudsperson Institution of Kosovo which was established in 2000 protects human rights and freedoms, as well as, monitors equal treatment without discrimination on the bases protected by the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Protection from Discrimination, which along with the Law on Ombudsperson comprise the legal package for human rights in Kosovo.

Similarly, the Law on Pre-University Education in Kosovo, Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo and Law on Pre-school Education all emphasize the principles of equality in the education system, thus, ensuring that all students have the right to access and high-quality education regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity and ability. On this subject, there is a general consensus that Kosovo has a very advanced constitutional and legal framework in regards to equality. On the other hand, the term equity, which aims to address the fundamental differences of opportunity and access to resources, is not used directly in legal provisions but is rather implied. For e.g. in terms of educational equity, Kosovo guarantees all students the same schooling experience, which is free of charge for all students enrolled in primary and upper secondary education.

Kosovo provides universal access to public services, in particular, health and education. In addition, there are also quotas that sup-

2 Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Kosovo, 2008. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=3702>



port access to education, employment for disadvantaged/vulnerable groups, as well as, measures to improve social welfare which will be discussed in greater detail in the next sections of this report. Nonetheless, despite the fact that such measures are rooted in the constitutional and legal framework, unfortunately, there is considerable inequity in Kosovo, where, people's access to key institutions and opportunities continues to be determined by their political, economic and social status, often leading to social exclusion. This in turn reinforces inequality and inequity in terms of their access to resources, choices and opportunities, leading to a vicious cycle of inequity passed from one generation to another.

Research from international and local organizations, as well as, media reports indicate that discrimination, stigma and social neglect are still present in Kosovo society in particular towards disadvantaged groups, such as, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, people with special needs, and people from low-socio economic background. On this matter, wide-ranging discussions with education stakeholders, including, teachers, school directors, MED, MES and CSO representatives have indicated that Kosovo recognizes equity and has therefore developed an advanced legal framework to ensure equality and equity, however challenge remains its proper implementation in practice.

1.1. Poverty as source of inequity

Poverty in Kosovo is measured by the percentage of the population that do not meet a certain income threshold as defined/set by official institutions. In this regard, there are two poverty lines used to measure poverty in Kosovo, namely, 1) poverty line, which is considered adequate to meet basic needs and 2) extreme poverty. In 2017, after adjusting for inflation, the threshold for poverty and extreme poverty was €1.85 and €1.31 per adult equivalent per day.³

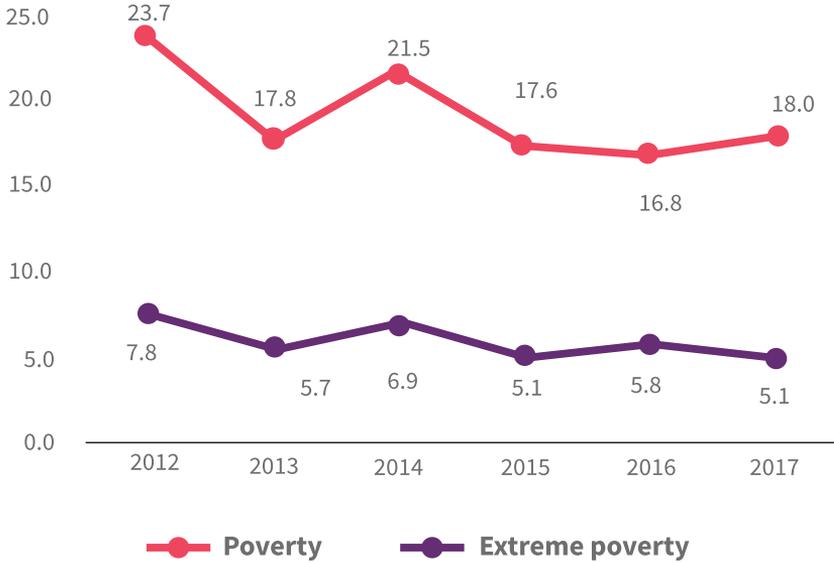
Based on the above, Kosovo is one of the countries with the highest poverty rates in Europe and as of 2017 around 18% of Kosovo's population lives below the poverty line with less than 1.85 EUR per day,

3 Consumption Poverty in the Republic of Kosovo. World Bank Kosovo, May 2019. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/210201560762490515/pdf/Consumption-Poverty-in-the-Republic-of-Kosovo.pdf>



whereas, 5.1% of the population lives below the extreme poverty line with less than 1.31 EUR per adult equivalent per day (Figure 1).⁴

Figure 1. Poverty headcount and extreme poverty headcount, 2012–2017



Source: KAS, 2019

Certain groups, including rural populations, women, children, unemployed and ethnic minorities are the most prone to poverty. The data provided in the report on consumption poverty in Kosovo indicate that the level of poverty and extreme poverty is higher in rural as compared to urban areas.⁵ In addition, as expected, there is a strong relationship between level of education and poverty rates, thus, inferring that individuals who lack basic education have more tendencies to live and remain in poverty as compared to those who have higher levels of education.⁶ Hereof, in 2017, the poverty rate among individuals who have not completed primary education was 21.5% as compared to the poverty rate of 5.5% among individuals who have completed tertiary education.⁷ Based on this, it can be argued that education plays a significant role in breaking the cycle of

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4 Consumption Poverty in the Republic of Kosovo. World Bank Kosovo and Kosovo Agency Statistics, May 2019. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/4901/poverty-statistics-2012-2017.pdf>

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

poverty, as it opens the door to better jobs and resources necessary to not only survive but also thrive.

Furthermore, it should be noted that poverty rates are higher among individuals with special needs, with one third of them living in poverty.⁸ These high rates of poverty are associated with limited opportunities for quality education and thereafter, employment. Lack of adequate school infrastructure, discrimination and stigma are some of the factors that impact their opportunities for education and future employment. The second and third poorest categories as according to this report are: unemployed (28.3%) and pupils/students (22.8%). Nonetheless, when divided by ethnicity, poverty is highest among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, with an average income of approximately 120 EUR per month or 2 EUR per adult per day.⁹ In addition, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, which constitute less than 2% of the population, are faced with many challenges such as social exclusion, discrimination, lack of access to social services, employment, health and housing. On this subject, when it comes to social inclusion, they are considered to be the most vulnerable group in Kosovo society.

Conclusively, economic vulnerability associated with high levels of unemployment in Kosovo (among other factors) impact the lives and wellbeing of all citizens, nonetheless, ethnic minorities in particular Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, elderly, people with special needs, and unemployed are considered to be the most vulnerable categories and prone to higher levels of poverty.¹⁰

8 Qehaja L.: Implementation of MLSW Sectorial Strategy in 2018 and 2019 – Mid-term Assessment Report. Prishtina, KEEN, November 2019. http://www.keen-ks.net/site/assets/files/1473/zbatimi_i_strategjise_sektoriale_te_mpms_eng.pdf

9 Multidimensional Poverty Analysis Kosovo 2017. Embassy of Sweden, Prishtina 2017. <https://sidase-wp-files-prod.s3.eu-north-1.amazonaws.com/app/uploads/2020/12/01095837/kosovo-mdpa.pdf>

10 Ibid.



2. Equity in Education

Kosovo participated in PISA for the second time in 2018, which once again showed that Kosovo 15-year old students performed amongst the lowest in all of the testing disciplines. In this regard, 15-year old in Kosovo scored 353 points in reading literacy, 366 points in mathematics and 365 scored in science, as compared to an average of 487 points in reading literacy, 489 mathematics and 489 points in science in OECD countries.¹¹ Such results show that 15-year old Kosovar students on average fall behind 4 years in three subjects as compared to their counterparts in OECD countries.

In terms of the impact of socio-economic status (SES) on student achievement, PISA 2018 results showed that students who have higher socio-economic standings outperformed disadvantaged students in reading by 40 score points, which is lower than the average difference observed between these groups across OECD countries (89 score points).¹² Similar results were observed in mathematics and science scores, thus, implying that socio-economic status in Kosovo has an impact on student achievement.

PISA assesses students' socio-economic status through PISA index of economic, social and cultural statuses (ESCS), which takes into account several variables related to students' family background, including, occupation, level of education, number of house possessions, number of books and other resources available at home.¹³ Of all of these factors, PISA 2015 and 2018 assessed and used only parental education and household items for students in Kosovo as variables to measure SES. In this regard, as commonly understood and expected, parents' level of education plays a determinant role on

11 Kosovo Country Note – PISA 2018 Results. OECD, 2019. http://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_KSV.pdf

12 Ibid.

13 OECD (2016), PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en>



students' achievement. To this end, PISA 2018 results indicate that students' achievement increases, with an increase in mothers' education with differences of 43 score points in reading, 32 score points in mathematics and 28 points in science. Similarly, the results for fathers' education show differences of 83 score points in reading, 62 point in mathematics and 62 in science.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, home possessions are another measure of family socio-economic status and **Table 1** below presents PISA scores of Kosovo students in mathematics as according to home possessions. Hereof, students who did not have access to the internet performed much lower (327) as compared to those who had access to the internet (371). In the same vein, students performed worse when they did not have a quiet place to study (356), did not have a desk (347) and a computer (355).

Table 1. Scores in mathematics according to home possessions

Home possessions	Variables	Scores in Mathematics
Own Room	Yes	367
	No	382
Internet	Yes	371
	No	327
Quiet place to study	Yes	369
	No	356
Desk to study	Yes	376
	No	347
Computer Possessions	Yes	371
	No	355
Cell phones with internet access at home	Yes, I use it	N/A
	Yes, I do not use it	
	No	
How many computers at home	None	N/A
	One	
	Two	
	Three or more	

The above-mentioned factors of home possessions had a similar impact on reading and science scores, where students performed lower when they had no internet connection and other home possessions as compared to those who had them. In the same vein, there is a large consensus among all participants in this research that socio-economic status impacts student performance. In this line, it



was indicated that socio-economic status does not only impact the quality of life, but also the opportunities and privileges for the future.

Low SES students during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, as in many countries worldwide, disrupted the education system, while forcing the Government of Kosovo to temporarily close all education institutions in an attempt to control the spread of the virus. Hence, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in cooperation with other education stakeholders, including municipal education directorates (MED), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the IT industry took the necessary measures to organize distance learning, which involved a presentation of video recordings broadcasted on national television, development of online platforms and use of digital tools (Google Classroom, ZOOM, viber, and other social networks).

COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities, hitting the hardest the poorest and the most vulnerable communities. In this regard, it has put a spotlight of inequalities in the education system as well. The organization of distance learning exacerbated pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities of vulnerable groups in Kosovo (children with low socio-economic standings, children/students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and children with special educational needs) to continue their learning. Despite the fact that there is no official data at the national level regarding the participation of students in distance learning, it is estimated that around 32,000 students did not have access to remote learning due to the lack of technological equipment, as well as, limited access to the internet. This in turn has deepened the learning gap between children from low SES and those from higher income households, which will be even more evident once the pandemic ends and children return to their regular schooling.

Children/students from vulnerable/disadvantaged groups lack access to the core elements of quality education, including, basic school material needs, clothing, technological equipment, parental engagement etc. In this regard, it was argued by MES representatives that a combination of all these factors causes stress among these children and impacts their relations with peers and school in general, which in turn impacts their behavior and school performance. Similar point of view had MED representatives and participants in the focus groups who argued that students from low socio-economic



conomic status lack a proper home environment, clothing, necessary school materials and electronic equipment, which makes them feel different from other peers, and besides other factors influences their school involvement and academic success at school. On the other hand, students that come from families with higher socio-economic status have a better home environment and home support to encourage their social and academic development.

Another issue raised throughout discussions with stakeholders was that children from low SES, due to their family financial constraints are not involved in extra-curricular activities (e.g. private tutoring in Mathematics, English Language, sports, reading etc.) as compared to their peers, which deepens further their differences in terms of development, self-esteem, and academic achievement.

In addition, the majority of participants in this research argued that life for low-income families is very difficult and often times, economic scarcity forces them to make decisions based on the need to survive rather than grow educationally. Along this line of reasoning, teachers and school directors stated that in many cases of school dropouts, children were forced to work and find other means to support their families, which in turn led to lower attendance rates and performance at school. Furthermore, they added that families who benefit from social assistance schemes, for different reasons (lack of basic education and the need to survive and find different means to support their families), do not show involvement on the issues concerning the education of their children. On the other hand, parental involvement, both at home and at school is very important in student learning outcomes.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that economic scarcities accompanied by lack of proper home environment, school materials, clothing, technological equipment, peer and parental involvement are some of the barriers for low SES children, which impact their attainment and achievement in pre-university education. It should also be noted that such disadvantages begin at a very young age and as a result, children/students with low socio-economic status are already behind as compared to their counterparts at each level of education.



3. Existing policy measures aimed at reducing inequity

3.1. Education System in Kosovo

The right to education and development of a child’s full potential is one of the fundamental rights and as such is guaranteed by the Constitution of Kosovo, according to which each individual has the right to education as according to ones needs and abilities.¹⁴ In addition, in terms of education, Kosovo legal framework envisions and supports a comprehensive approach, which means that all laws concerning the pre-university education sector in Kosovo include specific guidelines for combating dropouts from compulsory education and ensuring equal access to education regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, economic status etc.

The pre-university education system in Kosovo is organized based on International Standards Classification of Education (ISCED), and consists of the following four (4) levels:

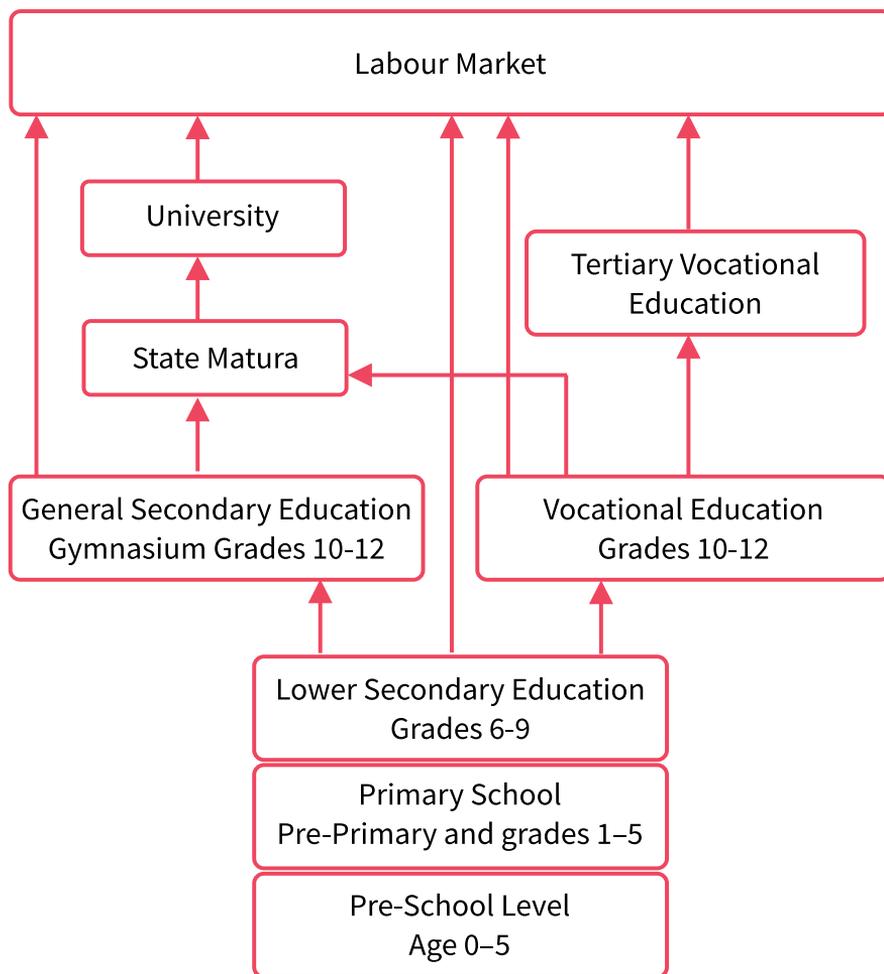
- ▶ Pre-School Education (ISCED 0, age 0–5),
- ▶ Primary Education (ISCED 1, grades 1–5, age 6–10),
- ▶ Lower Secondary Education (ISCED 2, grades 6–9, age 11–14),
- ▶ Upper Secondary Education (ISCED 3, grades 10–12, age 15–18).

The general structure of the education system in Kosovo is illustrated in Figure 2 below:

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14 Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Kosovo, 2008. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=3702>

Figure 2. General Structure of the Education System in Kosovo
(adapted from Butler et al.2009 and update in 2015)



Pre-school education is organized in specialized pre-school institutions and involves children age 0 to 5. This level of education is characterized by very low participation rate, mainly due to limited intake capacities which comes as a result of small number of public pre-school institutions. In addition, pre-primary level (grade 0), which is a preparatory program is provided in pre-school institutions and in the majority of primary schools in Kosovo.

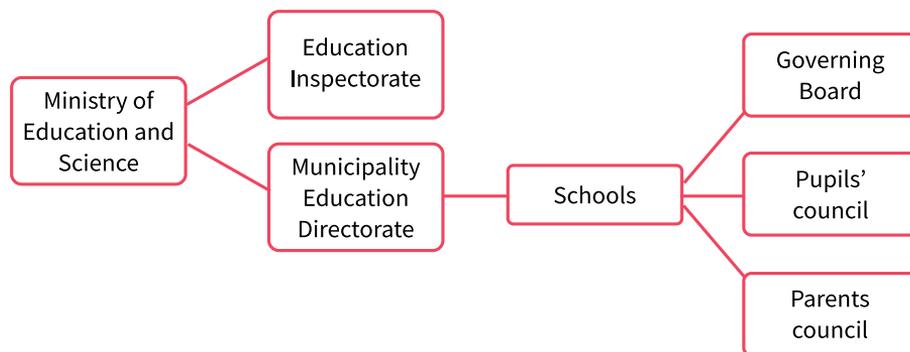
Primary and lower secondary education (grades 1-9) are compulsory and consist of five (5) years of primary education (grade 1 to



5) and four (4) years of lower secondary education (grade 6 to 9). Upon completion of the 9th grade, students can choose to continue upper secondary education (grade 10–12), which involves two major streams: General Secondary Education (Gymnasiums) and Vocational Education. Duration of schooling is three (3) years and upon their completion, students can take the Matura exam if they wish to pursue tertiary education. In general, the participation of children in all levels of education, in particular, compulsory education is very satisfactory with a gross enrollment rate of 95.7%.¹⁵

At the governance level, the provision of pre-university education is decentralized and is a shared responsibility between central government (Ministry of Education and Science – MES), local authorities (Municipal Education Directorate – MEDs) and schools. In this line, MES is responsible for policy development, national standards, monitoring and quality assessment, whereas, municipalities are responsible for school infrastructure and maintenance, teacher recruitment, registration and admission of children, teacher employment, school monitoring etc.¹⁶ At school level, besides school director, there are three governing bodies that are established to increase transparency and accountability, namely, steering school council, parents' council and students' council. The functioning and establishment of these bodies is regulated by Law.

Figure 3. Governing bodies in education



15 Education Statistics in Kosovo 2019/2020. Kosovo Agency of Statistics, June 2020. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/education-statistics-in-kosovo-20192020>

16 Law No.03/L-068 on Education in the Municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo. Kosovo, 2008. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2543>

The financing of the education system in Kosovo is done through the Central Budget, which is transferred to municipalities through a grant named “Specific Education Grant”. The amount of the grant is determined using a formula which takes into account the number of teachers and student enrolment. In addition, the formula takes into account the national curricula, class size; special education needs, location and operating costs.¹⁷ Nevertheless, currently, the same funding formula applies to all schools and does not take into account specific school needs (e.g. children with special educational needs, vocational schools, schools attended by ethnic minorities etc.). Financing of the pre-university education in Kosovo presents one of the key challenges in the field of education management. Even though expenditures on education have increased throughout years, Kosovo continues to remain one of the countries with the lowest expenditure per pupil capital. Furthermore, spending in education is characterized by lack of efficient management, with most of the expenditures being focused on capital investments, as well as, wages and salaries, and less on recourses that would directly improve learning and teaching.

At the content level, Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF)¹⁸ along with core curricula for each ISCED level is developed by the Ministry of Education and Science in close cooperation with other education stakeholders, including, municipal education directorates, schools, NGOs, education experts and developing partners. Whereas, educational institutions, both publicly-funded and private have the autonomy to develop their school-based curriculum and subject syllabi but may not deviate from the core curriculum developed at the national level.¹⁹ However, in practice due to the lack of capacities at school level (publicly funded education institutions), both school-based curriculum and subject syllabi are developed by the Ministry. In addition, the use of textbooks in public schools is limited to those approved by the Ministry, however, schools and teachers are allowed to use or find other supplementary learning materials and teaching methods.



- 17 Law No. 03/L-049 on Local Government Finance. Kosovo, 2008. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/Act-Detail.aspx?ActID=2525>
- 18 MES, “Curricular Framework of Pre-University Education in Kosovo (revised),” 2016 (Albanian). <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/03/korniza-kurrikulare-finale.pdf>.
- 19 Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo. Kosovo, 2011. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2770>



3.1.1. Education measures to reduce inequities

When it comes to education equity, as according to the legislation, Kosovo employs a range of measures to achieve equitable outcomes. In this regard, it provides free textbooks for all children enrolled in compulsory education, foresees the provision and arrangement of free and suitable transport for all children living within four (4) km distance from the school, foresees the provision of free of charge pre-school education for children from vulnerable groups, including children from families on social assistance, children with special educational needs, children without parental care, and children of war veterans.

Furthermore, in order to support children from low SES, municipalities through their education directorates, office for communities and returnees, and directorates for health and social welfare identify students of low SES and in cooperation with development partners (donors) provide the necessary school tools and didactic materials. Some municipalities also provide scholarships to students from low SES enrolled in upper secondary education, whereas, MES in cooperation with development partners on an annual basis has provided around 400 scholarships with an amount of 30 EUR per month, designated specifically to students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities enrolled in upper secondary education.

Legislation also foresees the organization of supplementary classes at school level to support children in improving their academic performance. Another good practice in Kosovo aiming to provide help to children with low achievement and other vulnerable groups, in particular, children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are Learning Centres, which have been established and until recently were managed by different NGOs with the support of international donors. Learning centers, which can be community or school-based provide additional learning support and organize different educational activities for children in need, including, pre-school programs for children age 3 to 5, additional learning classes, help children with homework, as well as, organize different social activities. A recent positive step, which was also praised by participants in this research, was the development and approval of the AI No.19/2018 on Establishment and Functioning



of the Learning Centres,²⁰ which recognizes the work of Learning Centres in improving students' academic performance and school attendance, hence, regulates the process of establishment, management and sustainable funding.

In the same vein, with the aim of combating school dropouts, Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Non-registration in Compulsory Education (PRTAN) have been established at national, local and school level. The establishment and functioning of these teams is regulated by the AI No. 08/2018²¹, according to which, the composition of teams at school level consists of school management, parents' and students' representatives, whereas, at the municipal level besides parents and students it also consists of representatives from municipal education directorate, department of health and social welfare. At the national level, PRTAN teams consist of representatives from MES, MLSW, MH, MEDs, schools, and other groups of interest. The role of these teams is to prevent cases of school abandonment and non-enrolment in educational institutions, as well as, cooperate with relevant institutions, NGOs and other stakeholders. What is very important and is also recognized by participants in this research is the development of the special module of Early Warning System (EWS) in Education Management Information System (EMIS), which is used to generate information on cases at risk of dropouts and links information from schools, MEDs and MES.

Generally, educational policy aims to be strategically planned, meaning that every five years, educational stakeholders, including, MES, MEDs, schools, NGOs and education experts evaluate the implementation of the previous strategic plan, identify challenges and opportunities and plan the areas for the development of education for the next five years. Currently, the document in effect is "Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017 – 2021", whilst during 2021 policymakers will initiate the process of developing the new strategic plan for the period 2022 – 2027. However, there is a general consensus among ed-



- 20 Administrative Instruction No. 19/2018 on Establishment and Functioning of Learning Centers <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/12/ua-nr-19-masht-per-themelimin-dhe-funkcionimin-e-qendrave-mesimore-x.pdf>
- 21 Administrative Instruction No. 08/2018 on the Establishment and Strengthening the Teams for Prevention and Response against Abandonment and Non-enrolment of Students in Compulsory Education. MES, 2018. <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/06/8-ua-masht-nr-08-2018-per-themelimin-dhe-fuqizimin-e-ekipeve-parandalimdhe-kbmnapu.pdf>





education stakeholders that participated in this research that there is a gap between policy development and implementation, meaning that Kosovo has a good legal framework, especially when it comes to ensuring equality, equity and inclusiveness in education, but lacks its implementation in practice mainly due to limited financial and human capacities at local and school level: “Kosovo has a very advanced legal framework, but unfortunately it is not implemented properly, which puts such efforts to improve education quality and inclusiveness as merely ink on paper.”²² Along this reasoning, it was also considered that monitoring mechanisms are not sufficient. Ministry of Education and Science through its Education Inspectorate is responsible to monitor the implementation of policies at local and school level, however, they have limited human capacities to carry all the responsibilities deriving from the Law on Education Inspectorate (i.e. teacher performance evaluation, school evaluation, administrative evaluation etc.), which often times results in superficial rather than constructive evaluations. Lack of monitoring mechanisms at national and local level hinder further the lines of accountability and transparency, which also impact policy implementation.

3.2. Health Care System

The Ministry of Health has the overall responsibility for the provision and supervision of health care in Kosovo, whereas, National Institute for Public Health (NIPH) is responsible for the organization, implementation and supervision of policies of public health in Kosovo.²³ Among other duties, NIPH is also responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the Extended Immunization Program, whereas, at municipal level, planning, management and monitoring of the immunization programs falls under the responsibility of Municipal Directorates for Health, whom in coordination with Municipal Education Directorates and schools carry out the process of student vaccination at schools.

In line with the Immunization Program and other strategic documents, Ministry of Health has also developed the Strategic Immuni-

22 Focus group with NGOs and education experts conducted on 22nd of October, Prishtina, Kosovo.

23 Law No. 04/L-125 on Health. Kosovo, May 2013. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8666>

zation Plan 2019 – 2021 which aims at setting directions for immunization of the entire population of Kosovo. According to this plan, Kosovo is considered to be very successful in the immunization program with the vaccination rate of 95%. Challenge in this regard, represent low vaccination rates among children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. In order to achieve immunization of the entire population, the respective authorities provide equal access to services of vaccination, as well as, organize various awareness raising campaigns on the importance of immunization and vaccination. Monitoring and reporting of data is conducted by NIPH.

Moreover, the Law on Health²⁴ is among others based on the principles of equity and inclusiveness and non-discrimination. In this regard, it specifically states that all citizens of Kosovo have full access to healthcare services, including easy access to healthcare facilities for people with disabilities and exemption of payments for those families with an income under the official socially vulnerable threshold as established by the Government.²⁵ Hereof, the only eligibility criterion to have access to health care services is to be registered as a citizen of Kosovo. The right to healthcare is also granted to individuals that are qualified with the refugee status and persons under subsidiary protection.²⁶

Healthcare services in Kosovo are provided by a network of healthcare institutions organized in three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. The operation of these public healthcare is funded by the Kosovo budget, off-budget funds by donors, as well as, contributions from co-payments of patients for healthcare services and products, which is regulated by a separate administrative instruction AI 04/2007 on the Collection and use of means from co-payments of health service users and self-generated incomes of health institutions.²⁷ In terms of healthcare support for children from low SES, the Law on Health and AI 04/2007 determine that health care services are provided free of charge in public health institutions for the special groups of individuals, which among other categories also

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Law No.06/L-026 on Asylum. Kosovo, May 2018. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5b-f2ac0b4.pdf>

27 Administrative Instruction No. 04/2007 (in Health) Collection and Use of Funds from Co-payments and from Users of Health Services and Incomes of Health Institutions. Kosovo, 2007. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=7510>



include individuals with an income below the official social vulnerable threshold as established by the Government, as well as, registered individuals as socially vulnerable based on the sub-legal act issued by MLSW.

In this line, vulnerable/disadvantaged groups in Kosovo do not seem to be excluded from access to health services, nonetheless, the whole access to health care is characterized by corruption, long traveling time, lack of essential medicine foreseen to be provided free of charge etc.; hence, it is the vulnerable groups that suffer the consequences of this system the most.

3.3. Social care and Welfare System

The provision and development of social care and family services in Kosovo falls under the authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW). Whilst, as of 2009, as part of the overall decentralization reform in the country, municipalities became the main authority of delivering social services, hence ensuring social protection and welfare of their citizens.²⁸ Nonetheless, the decentralization of duties and responsibilities was not accompanied by financial decentralization, thus, implying that municipalities, specifically the Municipal Directorates for Health and Social Welfare (MDHSW) are responsible to plan and develop services, whereas, all social and family services continue to be funded by the state budget.²⁹ In this line, MDHSW deliver social and family services through Centres for Social Work (CSW), which provide care for the elderly, social care and counselling for children without parental care, children with disabilities, children who suffer as a result of family conflicts, as well as, other social cases.³⁰

The Social Assistance Scheme (SAS) is the main social assistance program in Kosovo and the only program which uses household in-

28 Kahlert R., Danaj S.: Decentralization of Social Services in Kosovo – Policy Challenges and Recommendations. European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna 2018. <https://www.euro.centre.org/publications/detail/3239>

29 Sandu V., Kahlert R.: Monitoring and Evaluation of social Services in Kosovo – Policy Changes and Recommendations. Kosovo, 2019. <https://kosovo.savethechildren.net/sites/kosovo.savethechildren.net/files/library/PolicyBrief-ENG.pdf>

30 Law No. 02/L-17 on Social and Family Services. Kosovo, 2007. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/Act-DocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2447>



come and assets to identify beneficiaries.³¹ In this regard, the law on social scheme regulates the financial support to eligible families which should fall in one of two determined categories. The first category includes families, where all family members are financially dependent, unemployed, whereas, the second category includes families, where all family members are unemployed, but have one family member capable for work and at least one child under the age of five (5) and/or an orphan under the age of 15, in its full-time care.³² In this line, SAS focuses its financial resources on families with young children and in those families where all or most of the members are not capable of working. Social assistance in this regard is determined based on points earned, depending on the number of family members and based on the cost of the minimum food basket.³³ As of now, financial support varies from 50 EUR for households with 1 member to 150 EUR for households consisting of 15 family members.³⁴

Social assistance scheme is a scheme developed to target poverty; however, the amount of monthly allowances is very low and is not sufficient to get a person or family out of poverty. In addition, strict criteria make it difficult for other families in need who do not necessarily meet one of the two criteria for social assistance, to benefit from the scheme. In this regard, three major problems with technical and financial criteria are identified: Firstly, the criterion of having at least one child under the age of 5, which falls under category 2, is not supported by research, as the costs of raising a child do not necessarily decrease as a child turns five. Under this criterion a family in the second category is disqualified from the scheme when the child reaches the age of 5.³⁵ Secondly, employment of one family member (even short-term or seasonal employment) leads to the disqualification of the family from the social assistance scheme, which in turn serves as an incentive for individuals to work in the informal sector



- 31 Kosovo Social Assistance Scheme Study. Assessment and Reform Options. World Bank, March 2019. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/994991557470271998/pdf/Kosovo-Social-Assistance-Scheme-Study-Assessment-and-Reform-Options.pdf>
- 32 Law No. 02/L-17 on Social and Family Services. Kosovo, 2007. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/Act-DocumentsDetail.aspx?ActID=2447>
- 33 Law No. 02/L-17 on Social and Family Services. Kosovo, 2007. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/Act-DocumentsDetail.aspx?ActID=2447>
- 34 Social Welfare Statistics in Kosovo TM1. Kosovo Agency Statistics, May 2020. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5508/social-welfare-statistics-q1-2020.pdf>
- 35 Kosovo Social Assistance Scheme Study. Assessment and Reform Options. World Bank, March 2019. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/994991557470271998/pdf/Kosovo-Social-Assistance-Scheme-Study-Assessment-and-Reform-Options.pdf>



and thirdly, families cannot benefit from social assistance if they have a real estate over 0.5 hectares, despite the fact that they have no income.³⁶

In terms of support to children, there is also a child allowance in the amount of 5 EUR per month for each child under the age of 18.³⁷ However, such cash transfers are conditional and depend on school attendance. In this regard, all families/benefiting from social assistance scheme should provide a document issued by the school confirming that the child is a regular student. Otherwise, in the absence of this documents the family loses the right to social assistance.³⁸

In general, due to the decentralization reform, which shifted the responsibility of delivering services (education, health, social welfare, housing etc.) to municipalities, municipal directorates, in particular, education directorate, directorate for health and social welfare, office for communities and returnees and other respective divisions are responsible to cooperate with one another and based on their duties and responsibilities inform, identify and refer cases of students/families in need for social care services, health and education. Cross-sector collaboration is essential in providing quality education, social and health services to all students in need. In this regard, MES, MED and school representatives that participated in this research confirmed that cross sector cooperation is regulated and on a weekly basis formal meeting are organized at municipal level between all directorates to discuss different issues and share data and information. In terms of the education of children from low SES, in particular cases of school dropouts, there is a close cooperation between centers for social work, schools and healthcare providers.



- 36 Demi,A.:Employment and Social Welfare Policies in Kosovo. Assessment Report. KEEN, Prishtina, December 2017. http://www.keen-ks.net/site/assets/files/1406/assessment_report_on_employment_and_social_welfare_policies_in_kosovo.pdf
- 37 Kosovo Social Assistance Scheme Study. Assessment and Reform Options. World Bank, March 2019. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/994991557470271998/pdf/Kosovo-Social-Assistance-Scheme-Study-Assessment-and-Reform-Options.pdf>
- 38 Group interview with MED representatives conducted on 14th of October, 2020, Prishtina, Kosovo.

4. Analysis of Education Reforms and Equity

In general, it can be argued that education equity is part of the policy agenda in Kosovo, as it currently employs a range of measures aiming to achieve equitable outcomes. To begin with, as explained in the previous section on education system, it guarantees the right to same schooling experience for all students. This is stated in both the Constitution and Law on Pre-University Education in Kosovo, according to which, compulsory education (grade 1 to 9) is free of charge for all students. In the same vein, with the aim of reducing the cost burden for parents and providing opportunities to all children to go to school, regardless of their socio-economic background, Kosovo provides free textbooks (including textbooks in Bosnian and Turkish Language) for all children enrolled in compulsory education. On the other hand, the provision of one free meal to all students is a practice found in some municipalities/schools of Kosovo; however, this is not always the case as it depends on the willingness and management of the municipalities, which, as part of the overall decentralization reform in the country, are responsible for the management of pre-university education.

By legislation, municipalities are also required to provide and arrange free, safe and suitable transport for children living within four (4) km distance from the school,³⁹ which usually includes students living in rural areas, which in turn are associated with higher levels of poverty. Despite the fact that MED representatives that participated in this research confirmed that their municipalities organize safe and suitable transport for children as according to the legislation, this cannot be attributed as a good practice followed by all municipalities of Kosovo. In this regard, education experts and CSO

39 Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo. Kosovo, 2011. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2770>



representatives stated that only a few of the municipalities organize free transport for students, whereas, a greater challenge remains the provision of the transport and teaching assistants to children with special educational needs enrolled in regular schools, which directly impacts their school involvement and regular attendance. Although legislation foresees/requires the provision of such measures they are not implemented in practice, which shows another example of a policy that remains only good on paper.

Furthermore, in regards to social care measures appointed to achieve equity in pre-school education, children from vulnerable groups, including children from families on social assistance, children with special educational needs, children without parental care, and children of war veterans are exempted from any payment. To this end, municipalities are obliged to provide place in pre-school institutions and subsidize the children released from payment.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, this represents another good policy which does not take place in practice. Representatives from CSOs that are engaged on the education of vulnerable groups explained that the low number of children from low SES involved in pre-school education itself shows that many children do not benefit from such measures. To a great extent, this can be attributed to the lack of awareness among low income families regarding these measures. However, cases of public pre-school institutions not complying to the law for various reasons (e.g. limited number of children etc.) were also mentioned as a barrier to the inclusion of children from low SES in public pre-school education.

When it comes to supporting children from low SES in improving their academic performance, all school representatives that participated in the group interview, stated that supplementary classes are organized for students that need additional support to improve their learning. On the other hand, even though, the organization of supplementary classes is demanded by law, CSO representatives emphasized that this practice is not common in all schools of Kosovo, hence it depends greatly on the willingness and motivation of teachers: *“In general, even though the organization of supplementary classes is regulated by law, in most of the schools it is not required/overseen by school management, as well as, municipal and central authorities*

.....

40 Ibid.

*responsible for monitoring.*⁴¹ In this line, lack of supporting and monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability impacts policy implementation at school level.

Another good practice aiming to provide help to children with low achievement and other vulnerable groups, in particular, children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, are the so-called learning centers, which have been established and are functional in different municipalities of Kosovo. In this regard, it is considered and agreed among education community, that Learning Centers have played a major role not only on improving participation of children at all levels of education, but also their school performance. Nonetheless, until recently, learning centers have operated mainly through donor financial support, which is not sustainable. As mentioned on the previous section, a positive step in this regard was the development and approval of Administrative Instruction No. 19/2018 on Establishment and Functioning of Learning Centers⁴² which determines the criteria and procedures for the establishment, functioning and financing of the Learning Centers. Although some measures have been taken towards the implementation of this by-law, central authorities have not allocated budget for such means, which highly impacts the functioning of the learning centers. Currently, due to the lack of funds, many learning centers are not operational.

Furthermore, the establishment of prevention and response teams towards abandonment and non-registration in compulsory education (PRTAN) at national, local and school levels is another good practice identified by all participants in this research, which if implemented properly can have a great impact on reducing school dropouts and cases of non-enrolment in compulsory education. Although the establishment and functioning of such groups is regulated by the sub-law, similar to other reforms, question remains its implementation in practice. In this line, there is a difference between participants' responses regarding the functioning of PRTAN teams. On one hand, school, MED and MES representatives that participated in this research expressed that these mechanisms are functional and have managed to successfully solve many cases of school dropouts.

41 Focus group with NGOs and education experts conducted on 22nd of October, Prishtina, Kosovo.

42 Administrative Instruction No. 19/2018 on Establishment and Functioning of Learning Centers <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/12/ua-nr-19-masht-per-themelimin-dhe-funksionimin-e-qendrave-mesimore-x.pdf>



Whilst, on the other hand, CSO representatives based on school visits organized on behalf of their projects, argued that such groups are established in many schools, but are not functional in terms of their involvement and accomplishment of duties and responsibilities deriving from the respective legislation.

Additionally, the current financing of the education based on the number of students and teachers, without taking into account other school needs and specifics presents a challenge for schools to properly implement policies at school level. For e.g. vocational schools have additional needs for purchasing materials that would enable them to do the practical learning at school. Similarly, schools that provide services for children with special educational needs, those attended by communities have other needs which also need to be taken into account. Along this line of reasoning, when asked about measures taken at the school level to support children from low SES, school representatives through their interviews expressed that the *“lack of budget and inability to manage budget, limits our ability to organize activities or undertake measures to support children from low SES (e.g. organization of extra-curricular activities, support with school materials or other needs)”*.⁴³ As a result, schools through their governing boards collect funds from parents on voluntarily basis, which are then disbursed to children in need, purchase additional school material, or cover expenses for extra-curricular activities (e.g. school excursions).⁴⁴

Other challenging issues identified throughout this research are lack of professional services (psychological and pedagogue) at school level. Currently, there are around 81 psychologists and 69 pedagogues for all public educational institutions in Kosovo. On the other hand, such services, in particular psychologists are very important in supporting students’ ability to learn, succeed academically, socially and emotionally. In this regard, it was commonly agreed among participants in this research that the provision of supporting services is particularly necessary for children from low SES to help them improve their learning and succeed academically and emotionally. In addition, cooperation with parents and their involvement in the educational process is equally important in achieving students’ educational goals. This being said, there was a consensus among partic-

43 Joint Interview with school representatives conducted on 15th of October, Prishtina, Kosovo.

44 Ibid.

ipants that school governing bodies, namely, steering council, parents' and students' council should be strengthened as they currently are not functional in the majority of schools, in particular rural ones. Cooperation between these three bodies is important in supporting all children, including those from low SES. As critically important in achieving equitable outcomes was mentioned the role of teachers in classroom and the need for continuous improvement of teaching practices through TPD programs to acknowledge student identities and different ways they learn best.

Lastly, there was a general agreement among education stakeholders, namely, MEDs, MES and Schools that besides the provision of several measures to support the education of children from low SES, such as free textbooks, school materials, additional support through supplementary classes and learning centres, children, in particular low-income families need more financial support as the monthly allowances provided under the current social assistance schemes are not sufficient to help a family out of poverty. Along this line of reasoning, it was argued that social assistance schemes should be reviewed to tackle poverty. Such findings are in line with findings from different reports which assessed Kosovo Social Assistance Schemes.

Conclusively, all education stakeholders that participated in this research consider that Kosovo has a very good legal framework which also aims to ensure education equity. However, challenge remains the implementation of policies and standards at municipal and school level, which depends largely on the willingness and management of the municipality and schools. In addition, lack of supporting and monitoring mechanisms hinder the lines of accountability, which in turn is one of the key factors impacting policy implementation.



5. Key conclusions and recommendations

During the last decade, Kosovo has undergone major reforms in the education system, including the decentralization of the education system, development of competency-based curriculum framework, quality assurance, teacher professional development and licensing system, expansion of the use of ICT, investment on school infrastructure etc. All these developments are built on the principles of equality and equity, and given that they are inter-linked to one another, their proper implementation could have a great impact not only on improving the quality of education but also in achieving equitable outcomes. In this regard, wide-ranging discussions with education stakeholders have indicated that proper implementation of reforms in the education in Kosovo requires the strengthening of accountability, monitoring and other evaluation and supportive approaches that aim to improve implementation and effectiveness. However, regardless of the ingenuity of the accountability approaches, the implementation of reforms in education must be backed by sustainable financing and resources. This being said, some reflections on future directions of change with the aim of improving education equity are provided as following.

- 1. Revision of Kosovo Social Assistance Scheme** – The current social assistance schemes that aim to target poverty are not sufficient to help a family out of poverty, as the amount of monthly allowances is very low. In addition, strict criteria make it difficult for other families in need who do not necessarily meet one of the two criteria for social assistance, to benefit from the scheme. Moreover, the criterion of having at least one child under the age of 5, which falls under category 2, is not supported by research, as the costs of raising a child do not necessarily decrease as a child turns five. This being said and based on the discussions with stakeholders it



is recommended that Social Assistance Schemes which fall under the competence of MLSW shall be reviewed to target poverty in Kosovo.

- 2. Revision of Pre-university Education Funding Formula to meet School Needs** – Financing of the pre-university education in Kosovo presents one of the most important challenges in the field of education management. Besides low expenditures per pupil capital, spending in education is characterized by lack of efficient management, with most of the expenditures being focused on capital investments, as well as, wages and salaries. In this regard, the current funding of pre-university education in Kosovo does not meet the needs of schools for necessary improvements as well as implementation of policies/reforms at school level. In addition, the same funding formula applies to all schools regardless of their needs. This being said, it is necessary that pre-university education funding formula is reviewed to address school needs which shall in particular take into account higher financing needs for those schools that are attended by communities, children with special educational needs, children from low SES etc. The goal shall be to align the budget with school infrastructural situation to ensure equal educational opportunities for children from above-mentioned vulnerable groups. In addition, per capita investment on education should increase to include non-salary expenditures, such as: libraries, outdoor environment, school labs for practical learning, computers and organization of other extra-curricular activities.
- 3. Organization of supplementary classes and other mentorship programs at school level** – Policies, strategies, and supporting programs, despite their strengths, lose their relevance when responsible authorities do not have the capacities and willingness to implement them. It is evident that socio-economic status impacts students' involvement and achievement, therefore, municipalities and in particular schools should analyze school demographics and address student needs. In this regard, school management shall seek and oversee the organization of supplementary classes as demanded by Law. In addition, considering that students



who are connected to school tend to perform better socially and academically, school community should undertake other collaborative learning practices or mentoring programs to improve student learning and school involvement. In addition, it is recommended that school development plans should also focus on the education of children from low SES and provision of different forms of support.

4. **Provision of professional services at school level** – Psychologists and pedagogues through provision of counseling and emotional support are very important in supporting students' ability to learn, succeed academically, socially and emotionally. The expertise of such services is particularly helpful in addressing the needs of students from low SES and students with special educational needs, by providing ongoing support and making sure that they can cope with the learning process. In this regard, given the small number of school psychologists, there is a need to not only increase the number of school psychologists but also invest in their continuous professional development, as well as, coordinate and oversee their services based on their role and responsibilities.
5. **Increase parental engagement** – Data have shown that parental engagement is critical in student's educational experience. On the other hand, interviews with schools and CSOs have indicated that parental engagement in Kosovo is not sufficient, which to a large extent might be attributed to the fact that parents are not aware of their fundamental role in their children's education. In addition, the passivity of parents may come as a result of low levels of education and low incomes, or long working hours. Parents should be informed on their rights and motivated to actively participate and contribute to improving school outcomes. In addition, there is a need to develop and organize training programs and other educational activities which might bring parents closer to schools and enhance the communication between these two.
6. **Provision of teacher professional development (TPD) programs based on teachers' needs** – Interviews with education stakeholders indicated that teachers play a critical role



in students' engagement and learning outcomes. In this regard, there was a general agreement among all participants that investments shall be made to provide continuous TPD programs to teachers based on their needs. While the process of teacher professional development is regulated and various programs on inclusion and education equity have been developed, until now, the provision of trainings was based on government and donor priorities, which are not necessarily aligned with teacher actual needs. To this end, despite the increase of budget for TPD activities at central and local level, it is necessary that teachers' needs analysis is conducted at national level, and based on demographics and municipal/school needs, a list of priority training programs is developed and provided to teachers. This would also contribute in coordination of activities between stakeholders involved in the provision of TPD programs (MES, municipalities, NGOs, Faculty of Education etc.).

- 7. Implementation of Administrative Instruction No. 19/2018 on Establishment and Functioning of Learning Centers** – One of the best practices identified at national level regarding the provision of support to children from marginalized groups are Learning centers which have had a great impact on improving the participation and school performance of children/students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the education system. Considering that the establishment and functioning of LCs is already regulated, MES should allocate budget and take the necessary steps to implement it, so that their sustainability is ensured.
- 8. Strengthening of monitoring mechanisms at central and local level** – Despite that Kosovo has a legislative framework that aims to ensure education equity, lack of monitoring and supporting mechanisms to ensure accountability negatively impact their implementation. In this regard, there is a need to clarify responsibilities between central and local authorities in terms of quality assurance. In addition, investments shall be made to strengthen human capacities at both levels to carry out their roles in regards to quality assurance.



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