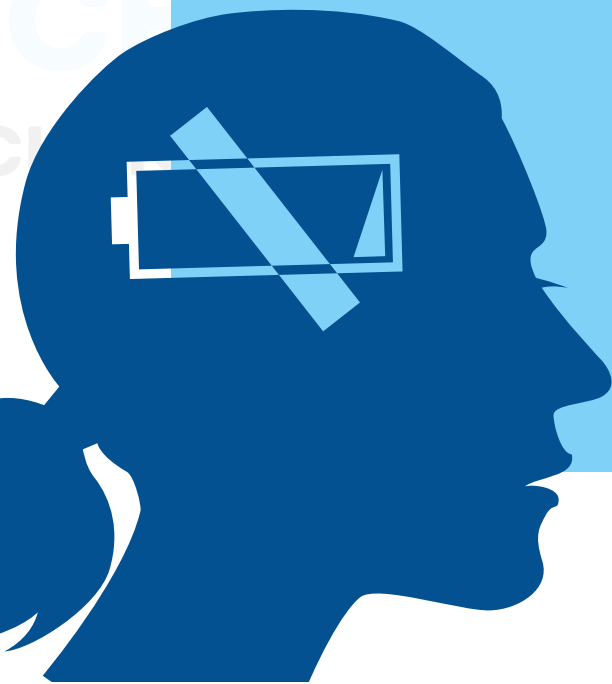


ALBANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM AND MEASURES TO PREVENT BRAIN DRAIN



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ELBASANI STREET, PARK GATE BUILDING,
10TH FLOOR, APP. 71 / 73, PO BOX 2418/1 1010 TIRANA, ALBANIA

WWW.PARTNERSALBANIA.ORG

AUTHOR:

ERA SHERIFAJ

LAYOUT AND DESIGN:

REGANA HYSENBELLI

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education plays a very important role in creating human capital and is one of the preconditions for a country's economic and social development[1]. In Albania, education has gone through important phases of change and embarked on significant education reforms over the years, which have improved access to education and learning outcomes[2]. However, despite these developments, the Albanian education system faces various challenges that hinder its progress. This policy brief discusses how to improve education in Albania by incorporating innovative approaches and provides recommendations on how to prevent brain drain.

[1] Education in Albania, INSTAT; <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/statisticalliteracy/educationinalbania/#:~:text=Education%20is%20a%20way%20to,age%20where%20enrolled%20in%20education>

[2] Multi-dimensional Review of the Western Balkans, OECD 2022; https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/multi-dimensional-review-of-the-western-balkans_8824c5db-en

OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

03

Participation in Education

The participation and enrolment of young people in different levels of education in Albania are decreasing through the years from 2017 to 2021[1], and the number of students who leave the country to study abroad is higher every year, followed by an inclination to stay abroad after studies (94% of them in 2020 [3]), inducing brain drain.

Participation in Secondary Education

Pre-university students are in a continuous decrease in absolute number in all programs, which in 2021 reaches 13.2% compared to students of pre-university education 2017-2018. A higher decrease is noted in the lower secondary (17%) and upper secondary (14%), in comparison to 2017-2018[1]. Also, the rate of “leaving secondary education” (*secondary education in Albania is not mandatory*) is 1.5% in 2021, this rate is higher in the rural areas (3.3%) and most of the leaving students are young men 2%[4].

Poverty, mentality, parental attitudes, and cultural practices, family income, family factors and circumstances, educational level of parents, emigration of the family for better employment opportunities and better education for their children, education and teaching quality in schools, school infrastructure, distance and logistics, lack of motivation, etc. are among the main factors behind the leaving secondary education in Albania and the decreasing number of students in all levels.

Following the consequences of the above factors, and the performance of the students, only 27%[5]-29%[6] of the students enrolled in upper secondary education (gymnasium), graduate within the 3-year period. Also, only 40%[7] of the graduates of upper secondary education in 2021, have been enrolled in tertiary education in Albanian universities.

The situation does not seem very optimistic for *vocational education* in the country. A decrease of 11% is noticed in vocational education enrolments, and participation in vocational education continues to remain low as only 17-18% of young people choose vocational education compared to high school education.

[3] <https://exit.al/en/exit-explains-the-mass-exodus-of-albanian-students-and-the-impact-on-the-economy/>

[4] Monitoring of Political, Social and Economic Participation of Youth, Albania 2021: <https://www.partnersalbania.org/publication/monitoring-of-political-social-and-economic-participation-of-youth-2021-country-report-albania/>

[5] Percentage calculated only for the students enrolled and graduated in the general upper secondary education (gymnasium) which lasts for three years, according to the formula: number of students who graduated in 2020 from the general upper secondary education (gymnasium) / number of students enrolled in 2017 in general upper secondary education (gymnasium).

[6] Percentage calculated only for the students enrolled and graduated in the general upper secondary education (gymnasium) which lasts for three years. Calculation formula: number of students who graduated in 2021 from the general upper secondary education (gymnasium) / number of students enrolled in 2018 in general upper secondary education (gymnasium).

Participation in Tertiary Education

In the 2021-2022 academic year, only 21.7% of young people (aged 18-29) are enrolled in Albanian tertiary education[4]. It is observed a decrease in the number of students in tertiary education, 6% less of the previous academic year, and a 13% decrease from 2016 to 2021[8]. The decrease in the number of students enrolled in Albanian universities induces that more and more undergraduates prefer to study abroad rather than in Albania, with the aim to receive a higher quality education and obtain a degree of greater value.

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the number of *Albanian students studying abroad is 11,675* and Albania has an outbound mobility ratio of 9%[9].

In general youth emigration has a high cost in the country, where the total education costs of people who leave Albania in one year vary from €330 million to €504 million, depending on the educational structure. This means an opportunity cost of €559 million in terms of lost annual gross value added, which is a direct negative effect on the potential GDPT of the country, meaning that every work-capable person who leaves Albania on average takes around €14,900 of some potential future annual GDP with them[10].

The graduation rates from tertiary education are a matter of concern as well, as only 23% [11] of young people enrolled in tertiary education, graduated within the regular (3-year) academic period of graduation.

[7] Calculation formula: number of students who graduated in upper secondary education in June 2021 /the number of 18-year-old students enrolled in tertiary education in September 2021..

[8] Calculated from the data provided by the Ministry of Education and Sports

[9] UNESCO Institute of Statistics, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>; outbound mobility ratio: total number of tertiary students from Albania studying abroad, expressed as a percentage of total number of tertiary students enrolled in Albania.

[10] Cost of Youth Emigration, WFD,2018; https://iri.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Cost-of-youth-emigration-Albania_official-version_compressed.pdf

[11] Calculation Formula: Number of students (aged 18-29) who graduated from tertiary education in 2021 / number of students (aged 18-29) enrolled in tertiary education in 2018 An average duration of 3 years is taken for all programs

QUALITY OF THE ALBANIAN PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

05

The quality of public education in Albania has been improving over the last decade. The Albanian government has made significant investments to improve educational facilities, increase teacher salaries, and revise the curriculum. However, despite these efforts, there are still some significant issues that need to be addressed.

Some of the major concerns include a *lack of resources, outdated teaching methods, inadequate lab equipment, furniture or facilities, including information and communications technology infrastructure*, for supporting high-quality learning[12]. Moreover, the educational and training system still suffers from comparatively inferior educational attainment and performance, leading to an unsuitably qualified labour force, skills shortages, and soaring youth unemployment[13].

This situation of education in the country has decreased the trust of the citizens in the quality of the Albanian education system, and families choose to enrol their children in private schools, especially in upper secondary education[9].

Private education institutions are perceived as institutions of higher quality in Albania compared to public education, and if the financial situation would allow, the percentage of Albanians would choose private education for their children might be higher.

The lack of trust in the quality of education and lack of employment opportunities obliges families to choose emigration as an alternative to provide better education and employment opportunities for their children. Also, as mentioned above many students choose to continue their tertiary education in foreign universities, with the aim to receive a better education.

[12] OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Albania; <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/7f73878b-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/7f73878b-en>

[13] Education, Training and Employment Developments 2021, EFT; https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI_Albania_2021.pdf

CARRIER GUIDANCE SERVICES

06

In recent years, career guidance services have been developed and introduced in schools all over the country, however, the effectiveness of these services remains unclear. Most of the young people in Albania face difficulties in finding a job, and the youth unemployment rate in Albania continues to be high at 20.9%.

In the last four years, most of the students in higher/tertiary education have chosen to study "Economics, Business, Finance and Law, followed by "Health and Welfare"[1]. But, with regards to the job market needs, the 5 most in-demand professions in Albania are IT professionals, (software and web developers), health care professionals (nursing, radiology, and medicinal technology), engineers (civil, electrical, and mechanical engineers), accountants, sales and marketing professionals[14].

So, carrier guidance services would contribute to a better orientation of the youngster's for their future education.

GENDER GAP IN EDUCATION

In the academic year of 2020-2021, 32,690 students graduated in tertiary education, *66.1% of graduates were female*[1]. In comparison with young men young women are more devoted to education and have a lower ratio of dropouts from secondary education, a higher willingness to enrol in tertiary education, and a higher ratio of graduation from tertiary education[4]. However, in Albania, it continues to exist gender stereotypes regarding the capacities, jobs, and fields of study women can overtake and there is an untapped potential for young females in the field of technology and engineering as the areas in which most females have graduated comparatively with males are "Education" (82.3 %), followed by "Arts and Humanities" (79.9 %) and "Social Sciences, Journalism and Information" (79.1%)[1]. Meanwhile, the areas in which more males have graduated compared to females are "Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction" (64.4%), "Services" (63.9 %), and "Information and Communication Technologies" (61.6 %)[1].

[14] <https://praktika.al/top-10-profesionet-me-te-kerkuara-ne-shqiperi/>

CURRENT REFORMS AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION

Below are listed some of the current policies and actions contributing to the development of the education system in Albania.

EDUCATION STRATEGY 2021-2026[15]

The new "Strategy on Education" for the period 2021-2026, was approved at the end of 2021, and for the first time includes all cycles of education, starting from preschool education to higher education. The vision of the strategy is to offer qualitative education based on inclusive principles and lifelong learning. One policy of the strategy relates to efficient management of the education system, to increase performance at the school level through professional management structures and quality assurance structures.

Regarding early childhood education and care (preschool education), the strategy predicts: a) increasing full inclusion of children in preschool education and b) increasing attendance of preparatory classes. In relation to pre-university education, it predicts several changes in terms of teacher's development, inclusiveness and participation in preparatory classes, and ICT development. Meanwhile, the *higher education* section includes objectives related to the *internationalization of higher education; quality improvements in assessment framework regarding higher education programs; improvements in research infrastructure, ICT infrastructure, and services for public higher education institutions*[16].

[15] <https://arsimi.gov.al/vendim-nr-621-date-22-10-2021-per-miratimin-e-strategjise-kombetare-per-arsimin-2021-2026-dhe-te-planite-veprimit-per-zbatimin-e-saj/>

[16] <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/albania/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments>



LAW ON “VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING[17]” AND NATIONAL STRATEGY ON EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS 2023-2030[18]

Albania, since 2017, has a law on “Vocational Education and Training” and a new “National Strategy on Employment and Skill for 2023-2030” in force. The purpose of the Law on “Vocational Education and Training” is to create and develop a unified VET System that is able to respond to socioeconomic and technological changes, in compliance with the overall educational system, local and global labour market needs, to create sustainable mechanisms of quality assurance in vocational education institutions.

Meanwhile the new “National Strategy for Skills and Employment 2023-2030” focuses on qualitative employment and lifelong learning for all. The strategy addresses 16 challenges and formulates 16 solutions, grouped around 5 main goals: *reducing the skills mismatch for all professions; increasing the level of skills of women and men of working age; better functioning of the labor market for all; mediation and delivery of support programs for effective and inclusive employment; and ensuring decent work for everyone, everywhere.*

[17] <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2017/02/16/15-2017>

[18] <https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/561>

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION 2023-2030^[19]

Currently, the draft “National Strategy on Science, Technology, and Innovation 2023-2020”, and its implementation plan, have been in the consultation process until April 2023. One of the priorities of the strategy is the gradual *increase of the budget for scientific research and innovation* until 2030 to 1% of the GDP, including the contribution of all actors – the business sector, private higher education, non-profit organizations, ministries, and municipalities.

Another priority is *increasing the participation of institutions that carry out scientific research in programs* within the framework of the EU, such as Horizon Europe, etc. Creating an environment that facilitates and promotes interaction and joint projects between research institutions and the business community is the main focus of this strategy. Meanwhile, the *improvement of the capacities of scientific researchers and the creation of researchers’ networks inside and outside Albania*, to increase the performance in national and international programs, is one of the essential elements of the strategy, as well as the development of the infrastructural capacities of scientific research, creating suitable research environments, laboratories, and research infrastructures.

[19] <https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Draft-Strategjia-Komb%C3%ABtare-p%C3%ABr-Shkenc%C3%ABn-Teknologjin%C3%AB-dhe-Inovacionin.pdf>

CAREER ORIENTATION GUIDE (JANUARY 2023) - IN SUPPORT OF CAREER ORIENTATION FOR STUDENTS IN THE 9TH GRADE[20]

In January 2023, the Ministry of Education and Sports presented the new Career Orientation Guide. The guide aims to support young people and their parents, who have a great influence on their children's decision-making. The guide also will support the career guidance coordinator at the school for the coordination and development of the career guidance activities. Meanwhile, every school will have an up-to-date career guidance space.

UPDATE OF MATURA 2021 - REGULATION AND NEW INITIATIVES FOR MATURA 2023

Matura 2021 regulation was adapted and launched in January 2021 by the respective ministry[12]. In 2023 the Ministry of Education and Sports, in the presentation of the Matura 2022 report, presented new innovations for the 2023 Matura, among which is the design of special tests for students with disabilities[21].

DRAFTING OF THE NEW TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR TEACHERS IN VET

The new program was drafted in 2020. It enables teachers in upper secondary education in VET schools to achieve relevant qualifications and to complete the obligatory trainings depending on their degree[12].

DRAFTING OF NEW TEACHERS ASSESSMENTS AND DEVELOPMENT LEARNING STANDARDS (2021)

New standards for teachers' assessment and development learning standards, and the new competence-based curricula are completed by the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university education for this level[12].

NEW GUIDANCE ON STARTING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR 2021-2022

New guidance on "The school year 2021-2022 in pre-university education" was approved by the Minister of Education and Sports. Novelty of this guidance include the fact that English language will be introduced as a foreign language from the 1st class of basic education and other changes that are reflections of the pandemic situation[12].

[20] <https://www.ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Udhezuesi-i-karrieres-klasa-9-Final-1.pdf>

[21] https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Ditari-Mujor-Janar-MAS_compressed.pdf

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

11

Frequent monitoring of the young people participation in Albanian education remains important. Analysing the answers of: Why the young generation is leaving the Albanian education systems? What is the average age? Reasons behind the fact etc. will provide more data, which will contribute to the preventive measures and undertake initiatives on the reintegration of the young people.

Some of the policy recommendations provided would contribute to an improved education system in Albania and the reduction of the brain drain.

01

Replication of successful Educational Models worldwide would contribute to an improvement of the Albanian Education System. Albania could adopt some of the best practices, such as *reducing class sizes, creating small communities, and providing individualized attention* to each student. Providing the students with a holistic education and a range of opportunities to develop *critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and innovation skills* would contribute to a more attractive and impactful education.



02

Increasing the Budget of Education is needed to ensure *proper physical and learning infrastructure*. It is crucial also the **improvement of accessibility** in education in terms of logistics, especially for students with disability, and for those living in long distances from the schools. This will contribute to an improved frequency of the school.

03

Universities should improve, adjust, and update the **curricula and teaching methodologies** so that students will acquire relevant knowledge and skills. **Investment in research** remain very important. Also, frequent investment in **capacity building of the teachers and professors** will also contribute to a more qualitative education system.

04

Investment in Technology in schools and universities could revolutionize education in Albania. Digital technology has proved to be an effective tool in learning and enhance interaction between students and teachers. For instance, *interactive whiteboards, smart projectors, computer labs, and educational software are some of the tools that can improve teaching in Albania*. With such interactive technologies, students are likely to retain more information and engage more in the learning process. However, it is crucial to incorporate technology throughout education institutions in Albania, and not just in a few or in its major cities.

05

The Albanian Qualification Framework should be fully implemented and used for the quality assurance of vocational education and training programs, in particular those offered by private and non-for-profit training providers.

06

Certification of Albanian Universities to European standards at least, would contribute to the value of the diploma, being equivalent and recognized in the European countries.

07

The **Career Guidance Services** should be properly implemented. Also, the coordinators of the carrier guidance should be qualified experts, providing updated information about new job trends, market needs, and tailor the service according to the specific areas in Albania, to support the youngsters in making the right decisions for their future.

08

Economic and social support for students from marginalized families would contribute to the continuousness of their studies and to their academic progress.

09

Work-based learning as an educational strategy, would contribute to the provision of youngsters with real-life working experiences, applying academic and technical skills and developing their employability. In this regard, the national regulation on work-based learning should be adopted, and the necessary supporting tools and instruments should be developed. Cooperation between universities and businesses should be strengthened, assuring to the students career exploration opportunities, career planning activities and help students attain competencies such as positive work attitudes and other employability skills.

10

Stimulating the return of students studying abroad and brain drain prevention. The "Excellence Program" has been successful in Albania and has attracted the attention of many Albanians who study and work abroad. However, this program should not be focus only in the employment of young people in public sector, but private companies and businesses in the country should be encouraged to participate in the process. Offering job opportunities and stimulating contractual agreements to the well educated youngsters would contribute to a higher percentage of returnees, but also to the decrease of the brain drain in Albania. Transfer of knowledge, skills and professional experiences from the other countries in Albania would contribute to the country development.



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