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Education policy

A robust education policy framework is essential for developing human capital and meeting the labour market's need for a skilled and productive labour force. This chapter, composed of four sub-dimensions, assesses the presence and efficacy of education strategies, legislation, programmes and institutions. The first sub-dimension, equitable education for an inclusive society, examines system governance and the quality of pre-university education starting from preschool. The second, teachers, looks at the selection, initial training and ongoing professional development and management of the teaching workforce. The third sub-dimension, school-to-work transition, focuses on VET governance and the labour market relevance and outcomes of higher education. The fourth sub-dimension, skills for green-digital transition, explores the frameworks and initiatives for fostering green and digital skills in education curricula.

Key findings

Albania has continued to increase its overall education policy score since the last *Competitiveness Outlook* (CO), remaining well above the regional average (Table 8.1). Its performance in ensuring an equitable education for an inclusive society and reinforcing teachers' education and training has continued to improve. Conversely, further progress has been limited by the nascent policies on the skills needed for the green-digital transition.

Table 8.1. Albania's scores for education policy

Dimension	Sub-dimension	2018 score	2021 score	2024 score	2024 WB6 average
Education	7.1: Equitable education for an inclusive society			3.8	3.3
	7.2: Teachers			4.0	3.1
	7.3: School-to-work transition			3.5	3.4
	7.4: Skills for the green-digital transition			3.0	2.0
Albania's overall score		2.4	3.3	3.6	3.0

The **key findings** are:

- Albania's performance in PISA 2022 (Programme for International Student Assessment) significantly deteriorated compared to 2018 in mathematics, reading and science (by 69, 47 and 41 points, respectively), the largest decline observed among the other participating economies in the region.
- In 2021, Albania approved its National Strategy for Education 2021-26, which is the first strategy to encompass both pre-university and university education. Monitoring of the strategy has been strengthening, and it foresees an annual evaluation analysis of the education system, although no progress report has been published yet.
- There has been a significant priority placed on increasing participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) with positive results shown through augmented coverage. Albania is outperforming its regional peers with a net enrolment rate in pre-primary education of 75% in 2022, but these rates still lag behind EU and OECD levels (85% and 88%, respectively).
- Requirements to enter the teaching profession have changed, particularly with the aim of improving the supply of teachers. Individuals with a university diploma in a relevant field can become teachers, provided they undergo psycho-pedagogical training and have obtained an average grade criterion of 7.5. Additionally, higher education institutions are working on a unified programme for continuous training in the field of teaching.
- School-to-work transition remains a challenge for Albania, with high youth unemployment rates (28.2% in 2022) and decreasing vocational education and training (VET) enrolment. However, the government has made efforts to consolidate the VET institutional framework, improved quality assurance of VET and adopted a new Employment and Skills Strategy (2023-30), with intentions to ensure quality vocational education and training.
- Education digitalisation is increasingly recognised as a priority for Albania. There is a specific priority for digitalisation outlined in the National Strategy of Education 2021-26 and a cross-sectoral Strategy for the Digital Agenda 2022-26. Information and communications technology (ICT) curricula are being revised for all levels of education, with ICT included from Grade 1. On the other hand, initiatives to help students develop the skills needed for the green transition are yet to be developed.

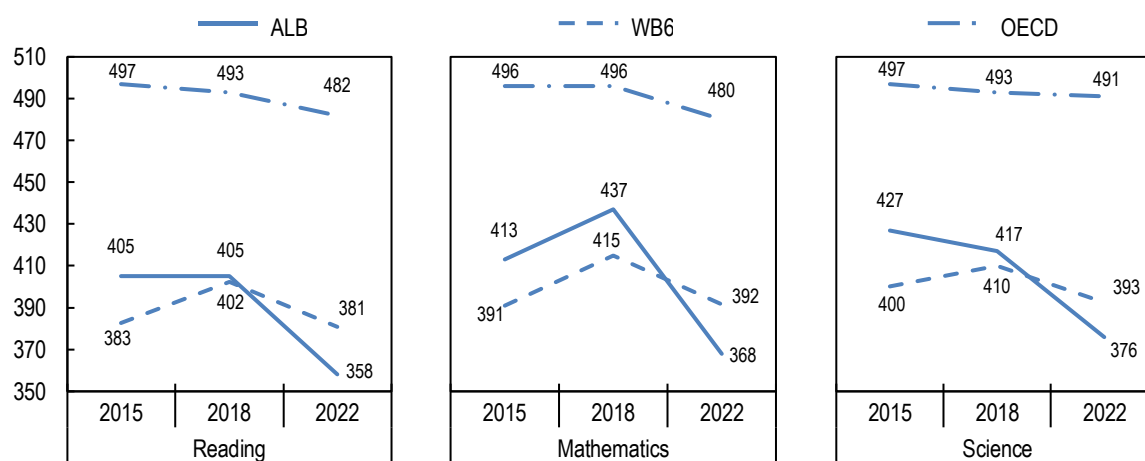
State of play and key developments

Over the past few years, net enrolment rates in both primary and secondary education in Albania have been trending downward, albeit at varying paces. Primary education enrolment rates have exhibited the sharpest decline, falling from 98.3% in 2017 to 90.8% in 2022 (UIS, 2023^[1]). Notably, there was a substantial drop of 2.8 percentage points between 2020 and 2021, followed by a further decrease of 3.0 percentage points between 2021 and 2022. In a similar pattern, net enrolment rates in lower secondary education decreased, although this drop was much smaller at only 2.5 percentage points (98.6% in 2017 to 96.1% in 2022). Even given the decline, this figure remains comparable to EU and OECD levels (98%). Conversely, the decrease in enrolment rates in upper secondary education (89.0% in 2017 to 85.5% in 2022) widened the gap with EU and OECD averages, which stood at 93%. Recent data reveal the continuation of this trend: Albania's national statistics institute INSTAT reported that enrolment in both primary and secondary education dropped by 4.0% and 7.4%, respectively, between the 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years (Taylor, 2023^[2]).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 results show that Albania's average scores in mathematics, reading and science are slightly lower than the WB average, and much lower than the EU and OECD averages (Figure 8.1). At the same time, 56.2% of Albanian students were low performers, or those who did not achieve a baseline level of proficiency needed to participate fully in society (Level 2), in all three subjects – a proportion more than three times above the OECD average (16.4%) (OECD, 2023^[3]). While both the WB and the OECD area saw a decrease in their average scores compared to 2018, the deterioration for Albania was by far the most significant in the WB region. For example, Albania's average mean score in mathematics fell by 69 points, while the OECD area's average mean score only declined by 15 points, illustrating the magnitude of the economy's weakening performance. Yet despite this reduction in score, Albania's ranking fell by only one place between the PISA 2018 and PISA 2022 evaluation, dropping from 61st to 62nd place.

Figure 8.1. PISA performance in reading, mathematics and science in Albania (2015-22)

Scores are expressed in points



Note: WB6 average excludes Bosnia and Herzegovina for PISA 2015 and PISA 2022 and excludes Serbia for PISA 2015.

Source: OECD (2023^[3]).

The observed drop in the results may be attributed to a combination of different external factors. On the one hand, the 2019 earthquake in Albania caused serious damage to education infrastructure. This resulted in more than half of students who participated in PISA 2022 studying outside of their regular schools and reduced teaching hours until April 2022. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic further hindered the regular functioning of the education system in Albania. These disruptions on learning and on the psychosocial life of students may have had a negative impact on the engagement of students in PISA 2022 (OECD, 2023^[3]).

Sub-dimension 7.1: Equitable education for an inclusive society

Since the last assessment, Albania has continued efforts to strengthen its education **system governance**, aligning progressively with EU and OECD education systems. In 2021, the National Strategy for Education 2021-26 was adopted. This is the first strategy encompassing all levels of education. Only vocational education and training (VET) and adult learning are addressed separately by the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-30. The new national education strategy has a clear vision, budget, timeline and implementation plan, and was developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders. Albania also has a national qualifications framework (AQF) that was introduced in 2010. In 2021, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Advisory Group adopted a referencing report aligning the AQF with the EQF. The referencing is a milestone ensuring transparency and promoting quality assurance through the alignment of the frameworks.

Albania is making efforts to improve data collection, monitoring and evaluation. It has data on learning outcomes from international assessments like PISA and from the National Assessment of Primary Education Pupils' Achievement (VANAF) in Grade 5. Also, since 2022, it has been working on fully developing the Pre-university Information Management System (SMIP) to digitally collect and process information on student attendance and grades. For the first time, starting from the 2023/24 school year, using SMIP is obligatory for all schools and teachers across the economy.¹ While this is a positive development, issues posed by limited digital infrastructure or insufficient teacher training hinder the effectiveness of the platform's implementation (Dervishi and Vrapı, 2022^[4]). Furthermore, Albania is introducing an annual evaluation process on system performance. In that regard, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY) adopted a Pre-University Education System Performance Assessment Manual and Methodology in 2022 and determined a national indicator framework in 2023. Implementing this system evaluation will help better identify the achievements and challenges for pre-university education and adjust policies as necessary.

The economy's government expenditure on education as a share of GDP has decreased from 3.9% in 2019 to 3.1% in 2021, and is much lower than the OECD (5%) and EU (5%) averages (World Bank, 2024^[5]). Moreover, spending per pupil in Albania is a mere one-tenth of the average spending by OECD countries (EUR 804 versus EUR 8 395, respectively²) (UNICEF Albania, 2021^[6]). The challenge posed by funding is most notable for preschool education, which has suffered long-term underfinancing. Indeed, while the EU average for preschool education spending hovers around 4.9% of GDP, Albania's average is only 0.29% of GDP (UNICEF Albania, 2021^[6]).

Albania performs relatively better in **early childhood education and care (ECEC)** compared to the WB6, with higher enrolment rates and a specific strategic and legal framework regulating ECEC. Net enrolment in pre-primary education was 75% in 2021. While lower than the OECD³ and EU⁴ averages (85% and 88%, respectively) ECEC enrolment in Albania is significantly higher than most WB6 economies (UIS, 2023^[1]). However, pre-primary education is not compulsory and some children from vulnerable groups continue to face barriers to access. The government aims to address these barriers through specific objectives outlined in the National Agenda on Child Rights 2021-26. These include financial support for children from low-income families attending public day care and kindergarten, and exemption of fees for Roma and Egyptian students in early childhood education. On the other hand, the curriculum sets out learning standards for

different age groups in ECEC and there is an assessment framework to help monitor early childhood learning and development. Legislation also sets out minimum education requirements and standards for preschool teachers and principals. However, following the decentralisation of ECEC in 2016, the distribution of competencies between the national and local levels of government remains ambiguous. Another challenge is that preschool education services have suffered long-term underfinancing (EuroPartners Development, 2023^[7]).

Albania's initiatives to strengthen its instruction system contribute to ensuring **quality instruction for all**. The National Strategy for Education 2021-26 sets out a vision to improve quality and equity in education. Albania has a competence-based curriculum for all education levels and harmonised with the EU, and clear learning standards aligned with the curriculum and student assessments. Learning standards are established to serve as a baseline for syllabuses, teacher guides, and other materials that support teaching and learning. In 2021, Albania decided to introduce English as a foreign language starting from Grade 1. In addition, Albania has several standardised assessments and examinations of student learning. The Educational Services Centre drafts and administers the national assessment (VANAF) for students in Grade 5 and national examinations (National Exam of Basic Education and State Matura) for students in Grades 9 and 12, respectively. It also manages the country's participation in international assessments. In 2023, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth introduced new innovations for the State Matura, such as the design of special tests for students with disabilities (MoESY, 2023^[8]). School performance cards and national assessments and examinations provide information about school performance and student learning outcomes. While some of this information is contextualised (such as by geographic region or gender), data on student participation, retention, learning outcomes and school performance disaggregated by socio-economic background are not available. Therefore, Albania has yet to progress in its efforts to build monitoring and evaluation at the system level. The economy has a School Evaluation Framework that sets out school quality standards and serves as the main reference for external and internal school evaluation.

The early school-leaving rate in Albania (15.5% in 2022) is much higher than the WB6 (7.6%) and EU (9.6%) averages (Eurostat, 2023^[9]). Recognising this issue, there are several policies in place for the prevention of early school leaving. In the National Education Strategy 2021-26, there are targeted mechanisms to provide schools with additional resources to increase participation and retention as well as to help to raise learning outcomes of different student groups, based on their needs. At the level of the Local Offices of Pre-university Education, a school dropout reduction network has been established, consisting of heads of institutions, teachers and psychosocial service workers as well as security officers. However, while these developments are positive, Albania reportedly exhibits one of the highest degrees of social segregation in schools across the entire Western Balkans and Eastern Europe (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, and Network of Education Policy Centers, 2021^[10]).

Sub-dimension 7.2: Teachers

The accreditation criteria for **initial teacher education (ITE)** in Albania are the same as the general accreditation process for higher education institutions. The requirements for teacher certification are higher than the average in OECD countries. In general, teachers are required to obtain a master's degree in order to be certified to teach in the country's public schools at the primary and secondary level. However, to increase the number of applications to ITE, the required grade point average to enter some teaching programmes was reduced from 7.5 to 6.5 in 2022. Candidates who have completed ITE must conduct a nine-month teaching internship, pass a state examination, and take a separate recruitment test before they can become fully certified teachers. The online portal "Teachers for Albania" helps manage the recruitment process across the country. New teachers have access to professional networks and three training days per year offered by accredited providers.

However, Albania has witnessed a dramatic reduction in the number of high school graduates who choose to study teaching in recent years. In response, the government has introduced new alternative pathways to enter the teaching profession to improve the teacher supply. As of 2023, the teaching profession can be exercised by individuals who hold a university diploma of first and second cycles or dual university diploma – equivalent to a teaching field/subject in pre-university education. Candidates must also have certified knowledge in psycho-pedagogical training by institutions of higher education offering continuing education study programmes. Currently, a working group of professors in public and private higher education is working on unifying the continuing education programme for the teaching profession.

There have also been some efforts to increase recruitment and the attractiveness of teaching (relative to other professions). A state examination for the regulated profession of assistant teachers was held for the first time and the profile of teachers in “special education” has become a licensed profession. Teachers’ salaries have increased by 7% in 2023 and another increase is planned for 2024, as part of a wider reform to increase salaries of public employees. The government is in the process of re-examining teachers’ workload – which, if reformed, could lead to an improvement in working conditions by enhancing job satisfaction and facilitating a better work-life balance.

Albania has been developing its regulatory framework for the **professional management and development of teachers**. Since 2021, there are new professional teacher standards for the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in place, and professional teacher standards for VET teachers are being developed. The Commission for the Accreditation of Training Programmes holds the specific mandate of accrediting these professional development programmes. On the other hand, the Agency for the Assurance of Quality in Pre-University Education determines teacher development needs using a range of sources, such as self-appraisals or surveys, appraisals by school leadership and external experts, results from teacher qualification tests and student results on national and international assessments and exams. A study to identify the professional development needs of teachers conducted once every four years was most recently completed in 2021, highlighting the need to further support new teachers, and develop all teachers’ digital skills.

There are three categories of teachers in Albania (qualified, specialist and master), which align with years of experience and the accrual of professional development credits. As teachers progress through these categories, upward movement is accompanied by salary increases. For example, obtaining a “qualified teacher” title corresponds with a 5% salary increase, while achieving the “specialist” or “master” titles each leads to a 10% salary increase. Teachers’ standards in Albania are, however, not differentiated by competency level, contrary to an increasing number of OECD countries. Therefore, teachers at different qualification categories are not expected to demonstrate different levels of competency. The state supports teachers by financing professional development activities and providing access to professional learning networks. All teachers must complete at least three days of training per year and go through certification processes to evaluate their professional development and impact on the teaching process. In this process, they now receive an e-certificate for their level in the teaching career structure.

Sub-dimension 7.3: School-to-work transition

There are some indications that school-to-work transition in Albania has gone back to levels similar to those pre-COVID-19, although it continues to remain a challenge. For instance, the unemployment rate of youth (ages 15-24) decreased from 29.7% in 2021 to 26.9% in 2023 (World Bank, 2024^[5]). However, the youth unemployment rate is still more than 10 percentage points higher than the EU average (15.8% in 2023). Similarly, Albania’s NEET rate (not in education, employment or training) decreased from 26.5% in 2018 to 23.5% in 2022, although this is approximately 2.5 times the rate in the EU (9.6% in 2022) (Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, 2023^[11]; Eurostat, 2024^[12]).

In this context, VET programmes can play an important role in facilitating the school-to-work transition by providing practical skills, hands-on experience, and industry-relevant training that directly prepare individuals for employment opportunities and career pathways. In the 2021/22 school year, 16 516 students were enrolled in VET, accounting for 17% of the total students enrolled in upper secondary education. Moreover, there are 34 public and 12 private schools offering initial VET (IVET) in Albania (ETF, 2022^[13]).

Albania has made progress in the area of **VET governance** by strengthening its institutional framework and the quality assurance framework of VET programmes, but continues to face challenges in increasing VET enrolment and improving resources for the sector. VET enrolment fell in the 2022/23 school year compared to the previous year (European Commission, 2023^[14]), and vocational students tend to have weaker numeracy skills than their peers in general education. However, Albania has the second narrowest learning gap in this area in the region (35 score points in PISA 2022), which is also lower than the OECD average (59 score points in PISA 2022).

VET governance is centralised under the Ministry of Finance and Economy, which oversees a state-funded system composed of vocational schools (targeting young people) and vocational training centres (mainly targeting adults). Supporting the Ministry are the National Employment and Skills Agency (NESA) and the National Agency of Vocational Education Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ). Albania has made efforts to reinforce and restructure these agencies by increasing their resources or allocating new responsibilities. For instance, the number of employees in the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) has increased due to these additional responsibilities of administering and managing education and professional training providers. However, staffing for both NAES and NAVETQ remains inadequate (European Commission, 2023^[14]). Co-ordination and policy coherence is ensured by the National VET Council at the national level, NESA Governing Committees at the regional level and Steering Committees in each VET school. Stakeholders can participate via these co-ordination bodies.

The National Strategy on Employment and Skills 2023-30 is the main strategy that sets out the vision and policy goals for VET. One of its priorities is skills development for better matching of demand with supply in the labour market for more employment, in great part through an improved VET system. One of the reforms implemented towards that direction has been the development of a quality assurance framework for VET, although in the context of the Swiss-funded Skills Development for Employment Programme. This involved the development of an accreditation model for all VET providers, procedures, criteria, and standards, as well as capacity development for the National Agency for VET and Qualifications and external evaluators who are in charge to assess the criteria for accreditation. Until March 2023, six VET providers (public and private) successfully completed the accreditation process and received certification, and the accreditation process will be fully implemented by 2024 based on the Action Plan for the Strategy on Employment and Skills 2023-30.⁵ Another strategy that will guide VET governance in Albania is the recently prepared Optimisation Plan of VET. Its implementation commenced in 2023 in the Durrës/Kavaje, Elbasan, and Korce regions and will continue throughout 2024.

To ensure that the system adequately responds to the labour market needs for skills, NESA conducts annual studies of labour market skills needs. The government collects information on completion rates, employment rates of VET graduates, and the number of learners who are hired after completing an apprenticeship or work-based learning (WBL) opportunity. However, there is no information gathered on VET graduates' salaries.

In Albania, there is a specific regulatory framework governing work-based learning (WBL). According to the regulation, every school student should have a contract with the company in which they carry out a professional practice. There are no financial and/or non-financial incentive schemes for employers to encourage apprenticeships or other forms of WBL. The system collects some information to monitor the WBL sector, but there is no information on demographics, completion rates or credits/wages earned.

One of the top priorities of the National Education Strategy (2023-30) is the **labour market relevance of higher education**. The government is developing short-cycle tertiary education programmes (ISCED 5)⁶ in higher education public institutions, to enable more young people to obtain high qualifications in a shorter time, as well as to transition faster to the labour market. For instance, the “Innovation and Excellence in Manufacturing” and “Innovation and Excellence in Information Technology (IT)” training programmes offer qualifications in innovation, design, marketing, and research and development, with the cost of participation entirely covered by the government. These packages not only aim to cultivate relevant, in-demand skills among young people, but also direct them toward growing sectors with more plentiful employment opportunities.

Furthermore, higher education institutions will be encouraged to design and offer continuing education programmes as a way to support better labour market integration. These programmes can be offered as qualification and requalification courses, summer schools and similar activities. There are a number of policies to promote the internationalisation of students and staff, and quality assurance bodies align with the standards and guidelines of the European Higher Education Area. The Albanian Government will make available a fund to urge public local higher education institutions (HEIs) to launch and provide joint study programmes with EU HEIs. There are also some targeted mechanisms in place to help align programmes with labour market demands, such as the Labour Market Observatory. This instrument, which was built recently and is now operational, aims to collect all the labour market information from all the responsible actors/institutions in order to provide a complete overview of the situation and better orient the policies on the required/necessary professions.

Sub-dimension 7.4: Skills for the green-digital transition

The **digital skills development** of students is gaining prominence in Albania. This is reflected in the new Digital Agenda for Albania 2022-26 and the National Strategy of Education 2021-26, which has a dedicated priority for digitalisation. One of the main actions towards preparing students for the digital transition is the revision of the ICT curriculum. There is an inter-institutional working group in charge of revising the ICT curriculum for Grade 1 to Grade 3 as well as equipping schools with “smart labs.” ICT and digital skills development courses are incorporated in the curricula in both primary and secondary education, following a coherent progression. Coding courses have been introduced as part of the curricula in primary school, starting in Grade 1, in the 2023/24 school year. To support this transition, Albania has developed professional standards guiding teachers’ ICT use and offers them ongoing training and professional development opportunities in this field. However, a 2021 survey found that 85% of teachers assessed their digital competence to be either at a beginner or elementary level. Plans are under way to establish ten technological youth centres nationwide by the end of 2024. These centres will offer training in digital skills to young people through individual sessions, workshops and projects.

However, despite efforts to improve technological resources in schools, they remain inadequate. PISA 2022 results showed that Albania has one of the lowest rates of availability of computers by student of all WB6 economies: one computer for every five students, which is much lower than the OECD average of 1.2 computers per student (OECD, 2023_[3]). Additionally, 65% of students study in schools reported to have inadequate or poor-quality digital resources, compared to 25% in the OECD (OECD, 2023_[3]). The Albanian Government has attempted to partially address this issue by allocating ALL 10 million (EUR 96 450) from the 2023 budget for the Ministry of Education to purchase computers and electronic equipment for schools. However, given the priority that the next PISA exam will place on digital learning, it is likely that Albania’s ranking might fall without substantial reforms made to the economy’s approach to promoting digital skills. There are no reports publicly available that present regular monitoring results of performance indicators or programmes on digital skills development for students.

Education policies can play an essential role in preparing students for the green transition and ensuring that greening the economy does not lead to new forms of vulnerability and deprivation. As with most Western Balkan economies, Albania's work on supporting **green skills development** for students is at an early stage. While there is no dedicated policy for green skills, the framework outlining the curriculum for pre-university education includes a competency related to environmental protection and sustainable development. Moreover, schools have mandatory courses and various activities to promote students' knowledge to contribute to a greener and more sustainable economy. One such example is the "Land at school" initiative, which, as of March 2023, requires all schools to develop gardens to confer a sense of responsibility for the environment among students. Albania also plans to integrate skills needed for the green transition in the VET curriculum, although recent initiatives only include more generally promoting vocational education and providing enhanced career guidance for students.

Overview of implementation of Competitiveness Outlook 2021 recommendations

Albania's level of progress in implementing CO 2021 Recommendations is varied. On the one hand, the economy has fully implemented the recommendation to develop a new education strategy and improve its monitoring. Conversely, efforts to strengthen data collection and management have been moderate, and there has only been limited progress on planning exercises to identify teacher demand and to ensure integrity in external school evaluation. Table 8.2 presents a more detailed picture of Albania's progress on implementing past recommendations for education policy.

Table 8.2. Albania's progress on past recommendations for education policy

Competitiveness Outlook 2021 recommendations	Progress status	Level of progress
Develop Albania's new education strategy with a clear set of priorities and a strong monitoring framework	MoESY in Albania has adopted the "National Strategy for Education 2021-26". For the first time, the strategy includes all levels of education from preschool education to higher education. Monitoring is based on an information collection system and analysis of monitoring indicators of the Integrated Planning System Information System (IPSIS).	Strong
Conduct forward planning exercises to identify teacher demand	While the new National Education Strategy highlights the lack of certain teacher profiles in some areas of the country, there have been a number of measures planned in this regard, but no measures have been implemented yet.	Limited
Ensure integrity in external school evaluation	There are external evaluation mechanisms in both in pre-university education and in higher education. Albania intends to implement the Higher Education Information Management System (SMIAL), which will enable the periodic transparent evaluation of HEIs through comparative indicators at the international level. However, the integrity of these evaluations is compromised by several high-profile instances of cheating during the state matura exams.	Limited
Continue to strengthen the collection and management of data	Efforts to improve the collection and management of education data and linking various databases have continued. The new education strategy aims to have a fully functioning Pre-university Information Management System (SMIP), and to create the Higher Education Information Management System (SMIAL).	Moderate

The way forward for education policy

Albania's education system exhibits a nuanced landscape with notable achievements and challenges across various dimensions. Notably, the steep decline in performance in PISA 2022 relative to both the regional and OECD averages highlights the need for more focused efforts in improving the education system. Key challenges include disparities in access to education, limitations in monitoring and evaluation

practices, and the challenges of school-to-work transition. To address these issues, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Improve the quality and equity of education performance in line with findings of international assessments such as PISA.** The significant decrease in performance in PISA 2022 underscores the need to ensure adequate and equitable allocation of financial resources to schools. Albania should ensure continued participation in international assessments (e.g. PISA, International Computer and Information Literacy Study [ICILS]) to monitor progress.
- **Continue efforts to improve monitoring and evaluation at the system level.** System evaluation in Albania is not yet sufficiently developed due to the limited availability of co-ordinated and high-quality data. To address this, ensure implementation of planned improvements to the Pre-university Information Management System (SMIP) and the planned annual system performance evaluation process outlined in the education strategy. Albania should also work towards making data on student participation, retention, learning outcomes, and school performance disaggregated by socio-economic background readily available for comprehensive analysis.
- **Enhance access to ECEC and primary education for all groups.** Remove barriers to access for children, particularly those from vulnerable groups, by reinforcing the National Agenda on Child Rights initiatives. Consider making pre-primary education compulsory to promote inclusivity and ensure a strong foundation for all children. Albania should also allocate sufficient resources to overcome long-term underfinancing issues in preschool education.
- **Continue reforms to modernise VET and ensure implementation of work-based learning (WBL).** School-to-work transition is a significant challenge in Albania, and the VET system can help ensure graduates are well prepared for the demands of the labour market. To do so, Albania should implement VET curriculum reforms to align with labour market needs, and strengthen co-operation with social partners, in particular employers, who can increase provision of WBL opportunities. Sweden could offer a good practice example of how to improve the involvement of social partners (Box 8.1).

Box 8.1. Social partners' involvement in Sweden

Since 2007, Sweden has developed a permanent national framework for social partners' involvement. In 2010, programme councils were created for each national upper-secondary VET programme. Thirteen sectoral National Programme Councils (*nationella programråd*) concern themselves with the 12 national vocational programmes. Each council has 8-10 members representing industry, social partners, and sometimes national and regional authorities, and meets around six times a year. Councils advise the National Agency for Education (the government agency that manages, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, the Swedish school system for youth and adults, including upper-secondary VET) on the quality, content and organisation of upper-secondary VET for youth and adults, aiming to match VET provision to labour market needs. The councils advise on proposals for new subjects or courses submitted by the National Agency, which may lead to modification of the proposals, or possibly even their abandonment. Social partners reported to the OECD that they were generally satisfied with this framework. This is a major achievement, as international experience shows that establishing employer engagement in VET systems can be extremely challenging.

Source: OECD (2022^[15]).

- **Enhance support in the education system to promote students' acquisition of digital and green skills.** Regarding digital skills, Albania should ensure that all schools have updated, functional infrastructure and equipment that would enable students to regularly engage with digital tools and build the relevant competencies. Moreover, while initial efforts to integrate green skills into school curricula have been promising, the economy should sustain this momentum by strengthening its policy framework and evaluating the effectiveness of current initiatives to identify areas for improvement and reform.

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Notes

¹ There has been a recent public outcry regarding the use of the SMIP due to concerns about the violation of children’s rights. Namely, filing the personal data of children on this government database is seen to be in violation of Law 69/2012 “On Pre-University Education” Articles 66, 67, and Law 9887 “On Protection of Personal Data”.

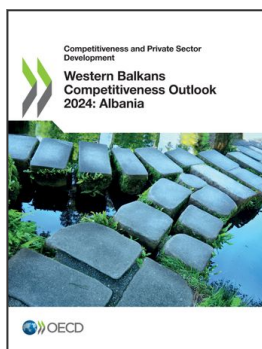
² The original data were given in USD, making average spending per child in Albania USD 900, while the OECD average was USD 9 400. The exchange rate used to convert USD to EUR was 1 USD:0.8931 EUR.

³ The OECD average excludes Canada, Estonia, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom.

⁴ The EU average excludes Estonia.

⁵ This implementation process concerns all public VET providers, as well as private providers offering professional qualifications of AQF levels 2-5.

⁶ Level 5 vocational/professional qualifications correspond to a post-secondary study programme of professional type, a professional non-university study programme after secondary education or a vocational certificate.



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