ERAC

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL COALITION

ENHANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ALL IN KOSOVO

Promoting Inclusive Education and Diversity in all Schools in Kosovo

Policy Research

July, 2018

European Union 4 Kosovo

Equal Rights for All Coalition
ERAC brings together seven (7) NGOs that work in the domain of *rule of law* and *fundamental rights* that will work together with an additional *nineteen (19) grass root NGOs*, with a particular focus on the establishment of a sustainable network of NGOs that are active in the protection and promotion of the fundamental rights of vulnerable and/or marginalised groups. The project's special focus are the following groups: *all minority communities* in Kosovo, *women, youth* and *LGBT community*. Although working on similar topics and issues, these NGOs are often divided on the basis of the particular target groups they are working with or the region they are active in. By establishing structural cooperation between selected NGOs and providing formal opportunities for continuous learning, the action generates the sharing of knowledge and experience between NGOs, strengthens their capacities for advocacy with relevant central and municipal institutions, and increases their visibility.

ERAC members are the following organisations:

- European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo – leader of the Coalition;
- Centre for Social Group Development – member of the Coalition;
- Centre for Equality and Liberty for the LGBT Community in Kosovo – member of the Coalition;
- Kosovo Center for Gender Studies – member of the Coalition;
- Youth Initiative for Human Rights – member of the Coalition;
- Kosovo Glocal – member of the Coalition;
- Centre for Legal Aid and Regional Development – member of the Coalition.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Administrative Instruction
CSW	Centre for Social Work
DHSW	Directorate of Health and Social Welfare
ECMI Kosovo	European Center for Minority Issues Kosovo
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ERAC	Equal Rights for All Coalition
EWS	Early Warning System
FMC	Family Medicine Center
KESP	Kosovo Education Strategy Plan
MED	Municipal Educational Directorate
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MDCYS	Municipal Directorate for Culture, Youth and Sport
MOCR	Municipal Office for Communities and Returns
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OOSC	Out of School Children
PRTAN	Prevention and Response towards Abandonment and Non-Registration
SDG4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
UIS	UNESCO Institute Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Among fundamental children's rights, access to education is solidly guaranteed by international agreements, above all the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Equal access to the educational system is considered to be the first step towards a full social inclusiveness in a democratic country. Dropout phenomena or early school leaving hampers this social process and hinders a free access to the job market.

According to statistics[1], although the rate of dropouts has significantly decreased in the last years from 0, 48% in 2011 to 0,12% in 2014, the risk of school abandonment still represents a fundamental challenge in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021. Currently around 1'061 cases of dropouts from compulsory school have been registered, of them 483 (45,5%) are girls and 578 (54,5%) are boys. It is generally accepted that the relation between educational inclusion and social inclusion affects the economic and social performance of a country. Levels of employment and criminality are strictly dependent on the average level of education and professional skills of the population. Thus, a highly inclusive educational strategy represents a priority in a long term perspective of full employment and social cohesion. The unemployment rate in Kosovo is very high compared to European standards, indicating a crack in the access to formal education.

In line with the mission of advocating human rights for marginalized and vulnerable social groups, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in partnership with many external organizations such as ECMI Kosovo, UNICEF, Save the Children, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Idea Partnership, and etc., pursues total inclusiveness in the educational field. The first step consists in targeting children at-risk of dropout and non-enrolment and to shed light on the issue. The categories identified by MEST[2] are children with disabilities, repatriated and returnee children, children with socio-economic problems, children belonging to the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian communities, children working for household's income, pregnant or married girls and children that have been trafficked or sexually abused.

ERAC through this study takes stock of the situation providing an in-depth analysis of the adopted strategy[3] to address the issue, according to the recently amended Administrative Instruction (AI 19/2012). For the sake of accuracy, the research covers only the Kosovo educational system supervised by MEST and does not take under consideration the rate of participation in the Serbian language educational system. A detailed description of the field action carried out by the Teams for the Prevention and Response towards Abandonment and Non-Registration (PRTAN) for the implementation of the Early Warning System (EWS) will be examined. The final recommendations are intended to enhance the capacity development of School and Municipal PRTANs for the institutionalization of sustainable solutions and implementation of Action Plans.

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[1] KESP 2011–2015 Evaluation Report.
[2] Education Statistics in Kosovo, 2016/2017. MEST and ASK (Kosovo Agency for Statistics). Sistemi i Menaxhimit te informative ne Arsim, 2017. http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/12/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2016-17-shqip.pdf
[3] Equity in Education for All. Manual for School Prevention and Response Teams towards abandonment and non-registration in Compulsory Education. Government of Kosovo. December, 2014. https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/12/manual-for-school-prevention-and-response-1.pdf

INTRODUCTION

Education is de jure guaranteed by the first binding tool advocating children's human rights, which is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This document paves the way to worldwide initiatives aimed to raise awareness on fundamental concepts such as the best interest of the child and stakeholders' obligations to ensure it. Before this document, the UN Convention against Discrimination in Education[4] (1960) for the first time directly approached the issue of inclusive education as a priority. The most recent statements, for instance the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), currently represent a strong legal basis for action. The latest summit on Education held in Incheon in May 2015 drafted the latest agreements in alignment with the universal rights of education for all: the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and the Education 2030 Framework for Action. The Incheon Declaration claims the duty of the involved parties to "Ensure inclusive end equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"[5]. The principles enshrined in the document are (1) education as a fundamental right and an enabling right, which practically guarantees at least twelve years of free and compulsory education in each country; (2) the concept of education as a public good and a "...shared societal endeavor"[6]; (3) the tangled link with gender equality.

The ultimate goal of the international commitment is to address all forms of disparities and marginalization towards a total inclusiveness to the educational system. The main targets of the SDG4 call for a qualitative educational inclusion at all levels: primary and secondary school, early childhood development, higher education and university, technical and vocational education, increase of literacy.

Inclusive education is inextricably correlated to social inclusion, in a society where differences contribute to a necessary diversification of the social fabric. An inclusive system based on democratic values, tolerance and respect promotes economic development and social harmony. The opposite process defined as social exclusion can occur in the early stages of life (Agoni-Destani, Hoxha, Kelmendi, 2015). Therefore, inclusive education plays a relevant role and contributes in the wider mechanism of social inclusion, as generally required in a democratic society. Hence this report is intended to focus on children belonging to marginalized and vulnerable social groups in Kosovo. According to Robo (2014), an inclusive quality education generates more inclusive societies. For instance, most disadvantaged and vulnerable children benefit from specific care and educational programs starting in schools. Considering the connection between early departures from formal education with employment opportunities and living standards, education represents the basic precondition for a favorable economic growth; the capacities and qualification of human capital in the production process are highly dependent on the quality of

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[4] Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960, Article 1: "For the purposes of this Convention, the term `discrimination' includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education and in particular:
(a) Of depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level;
(b) Of limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard;
(c) Subject to the provisions of Article 2 of this Convention, of establishing or maintaining separate educational systems or institutions for persons or groups of persons; or
(d) Of inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are in-compatible with the dignity of man.
http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12949&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
[5] Incheon Declaration, May 2015. https://en.unesco.org/world-education-forum-2015/incheon-declaration
[6] Framework for Action, SDG4 – Education 2030, pg. 28. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656E.pdf

the education system. The earthshaking structural changes in Western Balkans have severely affected the right of access in education for many marginalized groups. The unemployment rate in Kosovo is very high compared to European standards, indicating a discrepancy in the access to formal education[7]. According to the Evaluation Report of the Strategic Plan 2011-2016[8], gross enrolment rates in pre-university education in Kosovo has overall increased, set marginally below the European standards. For instance, in upper secondary education from 82% in 2009 to 97% in 2014.

Bearing this in mind, the educational evaluation is an essential indicator for a comprehensive study of childhood's conditions in a specific country. However, the socio-economic picture of Kosovo is still much diversified throughout the region- above all, the gap between urban/rural areas- and municipalities. Children's inclusiveness in the educational system represents a pillar indicator in the assessment of early childhood development. In line with the mission of advocating human rights for marginalized and vulnerable social groups, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund and the European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) Kosovo, pursues the total inclusiveness in the educational field. The first step was to target children at-risk of dropout and non-enrolment and to shed light on the issue. The categories identified by MEST are children with disabilities, repatriated and returnee children, children with socio-economic problems, children belonging to the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian communities, children working for household's income, pregnant or married girls and children that have been trafficked or sexually abused.

This research is intended to assess the current situation and review the actions undertaken so far to tackle the issue: (1) to check the advancement of the results so far, (2) to target and address practical obstacles encountered by the field experts in the functionalization of PRTANs[9], (3) to provide policy recommendations for future improvement. Mapping the factual inconsistencies between central directives and field implementation will contribute to strengthen the existing capacities and to identify the complications in putting solutions into practice. This investigation will rely not only upon a comprehensive desk and preliminary research, but also on data collected by the extensive presence on the field of ECMI Kosovo experts through a direct collaboration with PRTANs and stakeholders at the local level. For an overall setting of the development plan, achievements so far in the formal adoption of common procedures will be discussed. But more room will be left to present the level of real effectiveness achieved, obstacles and recommendations for the improvement of forthcoming phases. Before jumping into the details of the field action, it is necessary to outline the current governmental directives and strategies issued to handle the problem.

A clarification has to be provided following the current situation of the educational system of Kosovo. There are two parallel education systems operating in Kosovo: one of them is run by the Government of Kosovo, more specifically the Ministry of Education, Science and Technologies (MEST), which provides education in Albanian, Turkish and Bosnian language. The other is run by the Republic of Serbia and its Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and provides education in Serbian language. This study deals only with the Albanian system supervised by MEST. For a comprehensive analysis of the parallel system in Serbian-language

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[7] Evaluation Report of the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011-2016. MEST, 2015. https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2016/02/raport-vleresimi-psak-2011-2016-eng-web.pdf

[8] http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/02/raport-vjetor-statistikor-me-tregues-arsimore-2016-17.pdf

[9] Prevention and Response Team Towards Abandonment and Non Registration (PRTAN) in compulsory education, established by the Administrative Instruction 19/2012.

education, please refer to the ECMI Kosovo publication on the Education in Serbian Language in Kosovo (2018)[10]. There, among the indicators, dropouts and educational achievements are discussed as a fundamental qualitative index of education.

The first section of this analysis is devoted to the legislative basis provided at the jurisdictional level to guarantee inclusiveness, followed by the examination of the current directives issued to address the problem and finally a task description of the institutional tools appointed for the ad-hoc action. The last section will deal with subsequent recommendations raised from the evaluation of obstacles and challenges. The aim of this policy analysis is to assess the level of progress so far in tackling this social and educational plague, thus recommendations are accounted as suggestions for future improvement.

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

This research is intended to assess the current situation and review the actions undertaken so far to tackle the issue: (1) to check the advancement of the results so far, (2) to target and address practical obstacles encountered by the field experts in the functionalization of PRTANs, (3) to provide policy recommendations for future improvement. Mapping the factual inconsistencies between central directives and field implementation will contribute to strengthen the existing capacities and to identify the complications in putting solutions into practice. This investigation will rely not only upon a comprehensive desk and preliminary research, but also on data collected by the extensive presence on the field of ECMI Kosovo experts through a direct collaboration with PRTANs and stakeholders at the local level. For an overall setting of the development plan, achievements so far in the formal adoption of common procedures will be discussed. But more room will be left to present the level of real effectiveness achieved, obstacles and recommendations for the improvement of forthcoming phases. Before jumping into the details of the field action, it is necessary to outline the current governmental directives and strategies issued to handle the problem.

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[10] ECMI Kosovo Publication on Serbian Language Education in Kosovo.

Current situation

According to the Annual Statistical Report 2016/2017[11] of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the total number of students attending compulsory school in Kosovo is estimated to be around 250'931 students, excluding pre-school institutions and higher education. Among the indicators suggested by the Indicative Framework on Education in Kosovo[12] (2017), Access and Participation are related to an inclusive chacterisation of education and consequently, fundamental for the assessment of the current situation in Kosovo. This macro-indicator includes specific factors contributing to the evaluation of the educational system: registration numbers, children out of compulsory school, level of literacy, children with physical and/or learning disabilities. Hence, in conjunction with the indicators presented in the above-mentioned Framework, the Annual Statistical Report with Education Indicators of 2016/2017[13] presents the overall picture of the educational progress in the country.

Focusing on the Access and Participation indicator, Kosovo educational performance is estimated to be significantly low compared to the other European countries. In the assessment of the rates of access and participation on the basis of school levels, although the situation has slightly improved (+1,53% for primary school; +2,65% for middle school), the collected outcomes are still disheartening. For what concerns primary schools, Kosovo has the lowest participation percentage (96,2%) only after Macedonia. The comparison with the highest value of participation in primary schools (Lithuania with 103,4%) shows that the urgency to enhance equal access and participation in Kosovo is still current. The situation is better when putting middle schools under the lens: the mean percentage orbits around 93,3%, which although being higher than in many other Balkan countries, should be still considered very low in reference to the European standards. Indeed, analyzing the overall value of the participation level in compulsory schools in Kosovo, the results presented by the recent Annual Statistical Report prove a decrease of the educational participation (-0,4%) in respect of the previous year. The value is among the lowest ones in Europe, second to the last one, Bulgaria. The EU baseline is estimated to be around 103,5% which if compared to the current Kosovar rate (94,8%), the latter is definitely below the average.

However, the purpose of this research is to tackle a specific issue, i.e. the assessment of the adopted strategy to reduce out-of-school children in Kosovo. The Annual Statistical Report through a complex calculation of data, obtained a percentage of OOS children from the 1st to 9th grade approximately of 5,2% (5,1% female; 5,3% male). Dropout rates are not encouraging as well: in primary school rate of dropouts is 0,1%, in middle school 0,05%, while in secondary school is estimated to be 1,6%. As evidenced by numbers, a serious concern regards high schools, where the number of early leavers has increased in comparison with the previous year. Hence, it can be assumed that the current strategy is not fully effective based on the current statistics. To achieve a substantial decrease of the number of out-of-school children, it is necessary to identify the total number of current and potential cases and then to evaluate the effectiveness of the prevention mechanisms of the field action.

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[11] http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/12/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2016-17-shqip.pdf
[12] http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/12/korniza-e-treguesve.pdf
[13] http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/02/raport-vjetor-statistikor-me-tregues-arsimore-2016-17.pdf

A special focus should be devoted to students belonging to marginalized and vulnerable groups in Kosovo. As already mentioned, children from minorities such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians undergo serious educational obstacles. Unfortunately, there are not updated data on the present situation. Although, investigations dating back to 2012 carried out by the Kosovar NGO "Balkan Sunflower" present a quite serious alarm in regards of the current generation. According to the survey, 36% of the new generation of vulnerable and marginalized groups does not have any kind of institutional education at all. While during Yugoslav times everyone was mandatorily included in the educational system, after the war participation rates have significantly dropped. As well presented in the Kosovo 2.0 piece "Held back and excluded"[14] of 2016, the reasons behind the phenomenon are mainly economic factors and long distance from schools. Furthermore, children nowadays endure the consequences of the war on their parents, such as lack of education and illiteracy. In fact it is very difficult for these children to understand the relevance of being educated and cultured whereas their parents have to struggle every day to feed their families. Hence, access to education and attendance in compulsory school for vulnerable and marginalized communities is still to be considered very low.

Poverty and unemployment affect deeply households, requiring labor force to collect money. In the worst cases, children represent a labor force to be exploited and are required to contribute to the household income, as a priority of survival. Within this context, the educational role is thus downgraded. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of 2013/2014 states that in elementary education the participation rate for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children is 78,7% (17,5% less compared to the overall participation rate in Kosovo) and in secondary schools, only 16,5%. However, the inaccuracy of data is due to the invisibility of these children to the system: as not enrolled in the educational system, it becomes extremely difficult to identify cases of non-enrollment. Strategies so far have not been successful and they have achieved very little results.

Additionally, children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian ethnicities also face problems of discrimination and segregation leading them to drop out from school. This issue is evidence-based on real cases reported to the Equal Right for All Coalition (ERAC). Among those, a successful case management has been recorded in Prizren, involving a Roma child in primary school (see Annex 1) in August 2017. Experiencing harassment and discrimination among peer students, school attendance became intolerable for the young student. Afraid that the situation could get even worse, he never reported his concerns to teachers or parents which, given for granted his social background, once away from school did not take any action to reintegrate the child in the school. Thanks to the intervention of ERAC paralegals, not only the child was reintegrated, but also the awareness of EWS Prevention mechanism and school PRTANs was increased. Thankfully, this represents a positive case where the institutionalized strategy has proved to be efficient, nonetheless it is of high priority to enhance and strengthen the process of identification of children at risk of dropping out.

A special note should be made in regards of special education for children with disabilities. According to recent statistics published by MEST, the total number of students with a certified disability is 5'294, in the specific 41% of children with disabilities are female, the rest is male. The types of disability taken under scrutiny are intellectual, physical, communicative, autism, emotional, Down syndrome, hearing and speech impairment. This category of students should be as well addressed in the establishment of an equal and inclusive educational environment in order to ensure not only their compulsory education, but also to fulfill their specific needs.

[14] http://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/held-back-and-excluded/

Taking into account the depicted situation, this research is intended to shed light on the hurdles in the implementation of sustainable solutions, towards a full social exertion to single out the issues. Once acknowledged that the current situation is stagnating, it is essential to target the weak/strong points of the process, to foster the cooperation between the administrative mechanisms and to come up with pragmatic recommendations. This research is intended to fit this precise purpose.

The Legislative Framework

Universal human principles are strongly grounded in the youngest Constitution of Kosovo. The legislative frame of Kosovo pledges and supports inclusive access to education; for instance, the laws concerning educational and vocational setting of the country include specific guidelines for the struggle against premature withdrawal from compulsory education and equal access to schooling. Starting with the Anti-Discrimination Law[15] (2004), article 4 on the implementation scope assures equal access to all levels of education and vocational training without any discrimination on gender, ethnicity or disability. A similar concept is provided in the Law on Education in the Municipalities[16], where among the responsibilities entrusted to the Municipal authorities, the admission of the students is carried out with due respect for principles of non-discrimination. In line with this, the Law on Pre-School Education[17] focuses on the inclusive character of education, ensured by the first article. Inclusiveness without any distinction and equality are supported by an effective parental participation (art. 4) towards a full development of children's personality.

Nevertheless, the most far-reaching measures against dropouts are incorporated in the Law on Pre-University Education[18] (2011). In this binding regulation, education is presented as a joint responsibility between family, public institutions, municipality and government (art. 3). According to this law, access and progression are enabled without any discrimination on any real or presumed ground.

According to the previous Kosovo Task Force Committee in 2005 (established following the AI 13/2005), dropouts students are defined as students who do not enroll in the school or who leave the school before the completion of compulsory education. This definition has been developed within the Kosovar context for a better understanding of causes and factors. It is generally recognized that school early leaving is a harsh loss for society and its outcomes, as a lack of formal education is among others a reason behind unemployment. In fact, a solid inclusive education system is the basis for empowering the economic capacities of a country to compete in the international markets. Since students who dropout generally present difficulties in basic skills and long-term learning capacities, school-abandonment undermines the effective participation of the country in the European policies of integration. The main educational priorities towards inclusiveness are the reduction of the number of out of school among vulnerable and disadvantaged children and the promotion of good practices heading the institutionalization of sustainable solutions. After the war, the most excluded and vulnerable

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[15] Assembly of Kosovo, Law on Anti-Discrimination, 2004.
http://www.assembly-kosova.org/common/docs/ligjet/2004_3_en.pdf
[16] Assembly of Kosovo, Law on Education in the Municipalities of Kosovo. Article 3, comma (b), 2015. http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/09-2008-03-l068-en.pdf
[17] Assembly of Kosovo, Law on Pre-School Education, 2006.
https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/08-2006-02-l52-en.pdf
[18] Assembly of Kosovo, Law on Pre-University Education, 2011.
http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/ligjet/Law%20on%20preuniversity%20education.pdf

communities in Kosovo have been Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. The social marginalization seriously affects the educational level of the children belonging to these groups due to their economic situation and scarce parental awareness. Since 2013 under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in partnership with ECMI Kosovo and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), worked together for the implementation of the Administrative Instruction (AI 19/2012, amended in AI 08/2018) for the Prevention of Dropouts and School Abandonment and the functionalization of Teams for the Prevention and Response towards Abandonment and Non-Registration (PRTAN) issued by the department of Pre-University Education Policy/MEST.

Greater attention is given to the protection of vulnerable groups within the society, among the duties of the central government. In particular, the Kosovar legal framework supports measures to prevent dropout phenomena and supports inclusive education with technical assistance. However, effective actions against school abandonment should be carried out locally under the supervision of the municipalities. Decentralization does indeed form the basis approach, structured through the cooperation of parents, police and public authorities. Dropout as a multidimensional problem, derives from a broader sense of disconnection and alienation and therefore needs a systemic approach to be tackled. MEST provides guidelines to municipalities and local institutions to pledge a full attendance to school, for instance assuring public transport. Finally, the principle of inclusive education enshrined in article 40 of the Constitution guarantees the accommodation of all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic features.

Recent Governmental Strategies

Data provided by MEST in 2016 show[19] a decline in the dropout rate from 2011 until 2014, from 0,48% to 0,12%. A gender analysis of the data shows a significant difference between male and female students who dropout: 26,7% females and 73,3% male. The explanation to the phenomenon provided by the MEST is to be delved into the deterioration of economic situations and familiar living standards. Young male students are often seen as a precious labor force to increase familiar incomes. Considering the relevance of decreasing dropouts, the current Education Strategy (2017-2021)[20] enshrines specific targets in relation to the current situation.

The Kosovo Strategic Education Plan for the period 2017-2021 explicitly addresses the issue of early school leavers, although the dropout rate has decreased in the last six years. As stated in the plan, attendance data discrepancies still represent a huge obstacle in the monitoring process. Population's movement within and out of the country causes problems of dropout and non-enrolment. For instance, a serious concern is the category of returned students: those children whose families fled Kosovo during the war and returned back to their hometowns. Their integration in the school system needs to be supported by an intensified cooperation between the Municipal Directors of Education (MEDs) and MEST, especially concerning administrative procedures and data gathering. Therefore, dropout risk still stands out as a challenge in the educational progress of the country. According to the ministerial directive, low awareness exacerbated in remote rural areas and a lack of coordination between institutions negatively affects the enrolment rate. In order to fully implement the legal framework addressing the phenomenon, the cooperation between schools, local administrations and central government

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[19] KOSOVO EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN, 2017-2021. Kosovo, 2016. Pg. 23. http://keen-ks.net/site/assets/files/1387/kosovo_education_strategic_plan_2017-2021_-_eng.pdf
[20] http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/KOSOVO_EDUCATION_STRATEGIC_PLAN.pdf

must be strengthened. To improve effectiveness through these mechanisms, the guidelines issued by the central authority for the next four years include: (1) empowerment of capacity management in schools and municipalities, (2) revision of PRTANs capacities, (3) improvement of sex disaggregated data, (4) action plans development within the municipalities, (5) monitoring and assessment of progress, (6) special programs for accelerating learning for dropped out pupils.

The strategy proposed by the government is aware of the transdisciplinary approach required to face the problem, taking into account social, individual, familiar and educational factors. The social groups addressed by the ministerial strategy are: children with disabilities, returned children, children from families with socio-economic disadvantages, children from non-majority communities. Referring to the Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor[21] (2011-2016) the rate of dropouts are of concern, as economic issues are among the main causes behind school withdrawal. The numbers become particularly serious when it comes to vulnerable groups and the poorest segments of the population, such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Students from these communities have been identified as particularly subject to experiencing exclusion from education. In the aforementioned plan, the reasons for a lower attendance are to be found into issues of discrimination, lack of access to education, lack of law enforcement and transitional environment. In fact, the correlation between poverty and dropout children entailing social exclusion cannot be denied, as is generally accepted. Consequently, social awareness must be raised and concretely channeled through the institutional mechanisms established to face all cases of school abandonment.

The Institutional Framework

MEST, UNICEF and ECMI collaborate in the implementation of a sustainable system for dealing with children at risk of dropping out, children that have been registered but fail to attend, children that have attended the school but fail to learn and children that are enrolled for several years but fail to progress. The main priorities are the reduction of the number of out of school for vulnerable and disadvantaged children through the promotion of good practices towards the institutionalization of sustainable solutions contributing to the realization of children's rights. As a result of the identification of challenges and obstacles, the action plan should highlight the complications in putting sustainable solutions into practice, since the risk of school abandonment still represents a fundamental challenge in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021.

Considering the need for a total interplay of the local community surrounding a child, two types of PRTANs have been formed: one related to the school action and one adjacent to the municipality. The aim of these two bodies is to collaborate horizontally and to enhance the communication between communities and schools. As a matter of fact, municipal PRTANs are community based and cooperate with local NGOs, centers for social work, police, MED, Youth centers and other relevant actors. They are composed of at least five (5) members: representatives of parents' council, two (2) teachers, a representative of students' council, school directors and representatives of other relevant institutions and NGOs. On the other hand, School PRTANs focus more on the child and the school environment working together with school directors, parental representatives, teachers and peer students. School and Municipal Action Plans should

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[21] Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Kosovo. NATIONAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR PREVENTION AND ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR IN KOSOVO 2011-2016, June 2010. http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Strategy_for_Prevention_and_Elimination_of_WFCL_English_FINAL_(2).pdf

be compliant to the MEST directives and have to run parallel to each other. Final outcomes and performance are monitored by the Municipal Education Directorates (MEDs), who requires regularly written reports on the progress achieved. All information must be gathered in the software Early Warning System (EWS) within the broader Education Management Information System (EMIS), issued by the AI 25/2013.

IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS

Field Action Plan

Decentralization has been so far the most suitable approach to tackle the issue of out-of-school children (OOSC) for an effective implementation of sustainable solutions on the field. As claimed in the Monitoring Education Participation document drafted by UNICEF and UIS, prevention represents the current initiative to address educational exclusion.

Training sessions have been organized since 2013 by the Ministry of Education in Kosovo in collaboration with ECMI Kosovo and UNICEF in order to establish a permeable municipality-based network of trainers. Their task was to prepare local PRTANs to deal with the phenomenon of dropout by using the provided tools (indicator sheet, EWS, data gathering, re-integration process). Central tool in this process is the Education Management Information System (EMIS) defined as "an institutional service unit producing, managing and disseminating educational data and information, usually within a national ministry or department of education", whose functions include "collecting, storing, integrating, processing, organizing, outputting, and marketing educational data and statistics in a timely and reliable fashion"[22]. Trainers have been certified by MEST with the Training of Trainers Program (ToT) and handbooks about the use of EMIS have been provided to instruct them. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in each of the major municipalities in order to present the joint education program drafted by MEST/UNICEF/ECMI Kosovo. The ideal expectation of this process was to train and to strengthen human resources on the field; to ensure successful outcomes, capacity and skill development at all levels has been essential.

The starting point of the training process was to increase awareness of the municipal officials and to institutionalize their commitment and goodwill to focus on the problem of dropout and

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[22] Monitoring Education Participation: Framework for Monitoring Children and Adolescents who are Out of School or at Risk of Dropping Out. UNICEF and UIS, pg. 10.

non-enrollment. Secondly, the preparation concentrated on learning the systematization of the procedure to address OOSC using specific software developed by MEST and EduSoft, such as EWS and EMIS. Hence trainings at this point realized in concrete and technical teaching of how to use the tools for the identification of early leaver students. The subsequent result of this stage was the capacity building of PRTANs in schools and municipalities. Peer trainers once assimilated the preparation provided by MEST experts, move to the assigned municipalities to instruct PRTANs members on how to implement the procedures. This brings us to the final phase of good practices, which is the increase of ownership of the involved stakeholders for a comprehensive approach to the problem and the mentoring/monitoring of PRTANs' activities. Both School and Municipal PRTANs' work must be grounded in the Action Plans to ensure equity in schooling access and retention of the most marginalized groups of the community. The system also requires a detailed documentation of cases and data through the Early Warning System. School PRTANs members must refer on a quarterly basis to the municipal ones, in order to keep the information system updated and to notify any alarming case. The Municipal Educational Directorate (MED) is engaged in monitoring performances and outcomes of the prevention teams' action. However, because of the wider outreach of the training program, the identification of PRTANs members has been backed by motivation and experience as main criteria. Regular roundtables of the central working group on education seek to contribute for advocacy and the implementation of foreseen activities included in the National Plan agenda.

The role of ECMI Kosovo for ten (10) years, was to support the whole process, starting from the organization of training seminars and workshops, to the final monitoring phase of the functionalization of PRTANs, and implementation of all designed instruments to support the functioning of the teams, through an established cooperation with municipality stakeholders. ECMI Kosovo's role on the field is to link schools with community stakeholders, in order to create a stable network enclosing any child in danger of dropout. The process of the case management indeed gets involved many characters from the local community: (1) the case of a child in risk of abandoning school is firstly discussed within the school environment, led by the school PRTAN; (2) a private conversation with the child in order to identify with him/her possible learning incapacities and to raise his interest in education; (3) if the process does not reach any result so far, the involvement of the community stakeholders is required. The experts refer to parents and psychological support from medical centers and other civil stakeholders, until the complete re-integration of the student into school. Other municipal directorates are directly involved, such as the Directorate of Health and Social Welfare (DHSW) and the Municipal Directorate for Culture, Youth and Sport (MDCYS), and from other relevant offices such as the Civil Registry, the Centre for Social Work (CSW), the Family Medicine Centre (FMC), and the Municipal Office for Communities and Returns (MOCR).

In 2017 the activities accomplished on the field pursued the empowerment of the mechanisms already institutionalized in reducing the number of out of school children and drop out for vulnerable and disadvantaged children in 30 targeted municipalities. ECMI Kosovo have employed external consultants with specific professional expertise for more effective results in the training sessions.

The previous Kosovo Taskforces established in 2005 to address the issue, already assumed that the effectiveness of the solutions does not result in late intervention but on the opposite in a systematic and grassroots support based on early intervention system. This assumption

has been extensively absorbed by the new generation of taskforces established within the AI 19/2012. Prevention is the adopted approach against school abandonment. Therefore it is of utmost importance to institutionalize the identification mechanism of students at risk of dropout. The Ministry for Education, Science and Technology advocates the implementation of the above-mentioned directive towards a full functionalization of PRTANs. The establishment of these group experts is modelled on a decentralization approach, heading to give a direct support to school directors, teachers and families and to endorse an inter-sectorial cooperation. The role of PRTANs operates within both an upward and downward strategy: monitoring and gathering of data during the case management, developing action plans in response to non-enrollment and dropouts, immediate and long-term interventions, issues reporting, raising awareness and ensuring a special attention to children with special education needs.

Achievements

For an assessment of the institutionalization of sustainable solutions against school abandonment and non-enrolment rates, the achievements so far in the implementation of the strategy will be herein discussed.

The adopted policy focuses on creating a prevention approach more than on establishing a reaction procedure to dropouts. In fact, considering the alarming situation related to dropouts and non-enrolment rates before 2016, a relevant improvement can be assumed nowadays. The first positive outcome of the plan was the signed agreement with all 33 targeted municipalities in Kosovo (so called Memoranda of Understanding). ECMI Kosovo succeeded in drafting and delivering PRTANs manuals and thus to expand OOSM in all the municipalities so far. Between February and April 2017 all the teams for the prevention of dropouts were established. To pursue a total inclusiveness in the educational system of Kosovo, it is essential to strengthen the ad-hoc action within civil communities and families. The mission of ECMI experts is to work for the development of the above-mentioned directive towards a full functionalization of PRTANs in the targeted municipalities.

Despite the relevance of educational inclusion in the social context, the implementation of the directives to improve school retention did not get enough attention, especially at the municipal level. Consequently, the current aim is to offer an adequate support to structure a sustainable system within MEDs for dealing with children at risk of dropping out, children that have been registered but fail to attend, children that have attended the school but fail to learn and children that are enrolled for several years but fail to progress. In order to fully implement this prevention system as claimed by the recently amended Administrative Instruction 19/2012, it is still necessary to operate on the school field, since it represents the primary source of actions and identification of the cases. The capacity development of the prevention teams has to be empowered. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative data collected will help schools, MEDs and MEST to orient future policies in accordance with the factual situation. In the same way, MEDs need to focus more on fostering cross-sectorial coordination, especially considering the type of the referred cases which might require the involvement of other local departments of the civil community.

Finally, it can be affirmed that the commitment to ensure equity in education and to increase the awareness towards educational inclusion has been overall institutionalized. During the spring of 2017, 75 School PRTANs in 14 municipalities have been trained; despite the budget included training only for two educators per municipality, an increasing number of additional PRTANs

requested to participate in the upcoming peer trainings, suggesting that workshops generated satisfactory impressions. In the summertime, 7 additional municipalities were included in the program, counting a total of 44 School PRTANs trained. Exploiting summer closure of school, a monitoring phase was developed, in regards of the work and functioning of schools and municipal teams. In that circumstance, ECMI Kosovo and MEST submitted a questionnaire for monitoring purposes. Different evaluations throughout the region have resulted, even though the process proved to have achieved the third type of good practice empowerment concerning the capacity building of the involved stakeholders.

Bearing in mind the initial reluctance of municipalities to invite the experts, due to a cynical skepticism towards the proposed mechanism, the final success of the workshops demonstrates that a positive increase of awareness has been reached. The practical orientation of the workshops concretized on an evidence-based approach, through the description and the discussion of real cases. To sum up, taking into account the good outcomes of training sessions, it can be affirmed that the institutionalization of a uniform system in the management of specific cases has been achieved to a certain extent. In addition, the integration of out-of-schools children through a non-formal education has also been presented as a sustainable solution among local stakeholders.

A final consideration regards students with special education needs; in 2011, only 33% enrolled in pre-university education. Currently, the efforts towards an improvement of this educational category have incremented the inclusion of these students in regular classes, even if a lack in the implementation of the standard procedure can be observed. Overall, the conditions for an inclusive educational environment in Kosovo have been successful. Nonetheless, the results still appear to be very much diversified within the municipalities. For the sake of this research, the existing obstacles will be highlighted in the next section.

Challenges on the fieldwork

Deadlocks have been pointed out in almost all the phases, slowing down the implementation of the process. The obstacles encountered in the first phase of the application of the AI 19/2012 have been generally overcome. Starting from the resistance of municipal officials to be trained, up until the serious negligence of not establishing the PRTANs in the first cycle of the project. The difficulty to raise the awareness of the local stakeholders affected the coordination among the social actors and limited the development of the municipal action plans. While progress has been made in the establishment of PRTANs, in some cases their functionalization never launched. The effort of assimilating the explanations provided during the training session and to put them into practice was often considered overly demanding. If on one hand many schools showed a firm engagement in the application of sustainable solutions, on the other the dedication varies among municipalities. The need of a long-term involvement in training PRTANs and in the monitoring process to achieve a systemic approach, has been very demanding for some municipal officials. Nevertheless, the participation and support of MEST's authority facilitated the activities on field.

Focusing on the technical aspect of the realization of the directive, the main problem was the correct use of the instruments provided for the case management (identification sheet and EWS) or even their non-application in the process. This particularly affected the identification of students at risk of dropout and a lack of reporting activities by School PRTANs. The relevance of generating a database of case managements has been underestimated by municipalities, resulting in a lack of capacity in establishing a system of precedents that is necessary for the treatment of future

situations. Even the process of drafting meeting minutes was hardly implemented, penalized also by irregular roundtables. Giving these circumstances, the development of school action plans has been in many cases discontinuous and unavailing. The deficiency of an effective reporting structure –also due to problems of understaffing at the municipal level, have been recently the greatest complication. A need of engagement of responsible bodies from the community authorities (such as police, social workers, Youth centers, medical and psychological support) has been pointed out in the mechanism to keep back a child from dropping out.

CONCLUSIONS

As claimed by the Global Initiative on Out of School Children, inclusive education is a current priority within the contours of children's human rights. Once established the correlation between educational level and unemployment rates, it is a civil and political duty to guarantee a free and equal access to education. UNICEF has recently modeled a new approach to tackle the issue, based on prevention and ad-hoc support. The Early Warning System (EWS) and the Education Management Information System (EMIS) are the current methods exported and structured in the targeted countries, such as Kosovo. Although the rate of dropout has significantly decreased from 0, 48% in 2011 to 0,12% in 2014, the risk of school abandonment still represents a fundamental challenge in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021.

The aim of this analysis carried out by ERAC seeks to track the progress of the institutionalization of sustainable solutions conducted by the involved stakeholders through a decentralized process. From the findings collected on the field by MEST and the ECMI Kosovo team, it can be concluded that the policies for the prevention, identification, treatment and referral of cases at risk of dropping out and those who have dropped out of school are quite consolidated and substantive. The established School and Municipal PRTANs are trying to help the identified students at risk of dropping–out to complete a basic cycle of primary school in order to give them a range of future opportunities. Despite the relevance of educational inclusion in the social context, policies, mechanisms and instruments designed to improve primary school retention and progression did not get enough attention at the local level.

ECMI Kosovo through the UNICEF-funded project has built a sustainable partnership with MEST in offering an adequate support to structure a sustainable and permeable system for dealing with children at risk of dropping out, children that have been registered but fail to attend, children that have attended the school but fail to learn and children that are enrolled for several years but fail to progress.

In order to fully implement this prevention system as pledged in the recently amended Administrative Instruction, it is an utmost priority to support schools as the primary sources of the Action Plans and identification of cases. In the same way, MEDs need to focus more on fostering cross-sectorial co-operation, especially considering the type of the referred cases which might require a coordinated involvement of other municipal departments.

In general, all actors at all levels should have the right responsiveness concerning the roles, duties and responsibilities in ensuring inclusiveness in education, according to human rights framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcomes of this investigation will be gathered in a list of recommendations based on the practical work on field carried out by ECMI experts and outlined in full coordination with MEST officials. The aim is to strengthen the mechanisms for prevention and response towards abandonment and non-registration in compulsory education, as established in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021.

Recommendations for schools

1. **Enhancement of full awareness at the school level.** Administrations in schools must enable a total access to the EMIS system for school prevention teams. School directors should engage intensively in order to keep PRTANs active and functional, starting from the establishment of regular relations and meetings with the civil community and other relevant non-school factors in order to address all cases and ensure retention at school of those children at risk of dropping out.

2. **Teachers' effective involvement in the prevention mechanism.** Educators should engage constantly in the early identification of children at high risk of dropping out and address them timely to the School PRTAN — specifying in detail the identified problems.

3. **Ensuring effective inclusive practices in the learning process.** School level PRTANs, in coordination with the school authorities, should promote their work in terms of preventing and responding effectively to abandonment and non-enrolment. Heading towards an equal inclusiveness, the attention should also be extended to the cases of children who attend but present difficulties in the learning process, children who are enrolled for several years but fail to progress and children with special needs.

4. **Increase the involvement of School Councils.** School directors should commit more to ensure active and effective cooperation with parents and students councils in order to create a proper network towards a joint commitment for the prevention and response to abandonment and non-enrolment, as well as other cases of children with learning disabilities who attend but fail to learn and children with special needs.

Recommendations for MEDs

1. **Functionalization of Municipal PRTANs.** Ensuing a malfunction of the Municipal PRTANs operations, the commitment of municipal PRTANs must be strengthened as the second ultimate authority on field. MEDs shall ensure the institutionalization of municipal teams as well as the effectiveness in handling the cases addressed by schools. The process must include an appropriate contribution of other social sectors (welfare, health, safety etc.), depending on the specifics of the referred case.

2. **Implementation of the Action Plans.** Regular meetings at the municipal level are mandatory for an evidence-based approach of the Action Plans. MEDs shall integrate the issue of prevention and response to abandonment and non-enrolment in compulsory education in the municipal plan or draft a special Municipal Action Plan – MAP, in order to address the barriers to access to education.

3. **Support School PRTANs.** MEDs should provide a budget to support the activities of school level PRTANs, especially in those schools where there is a large number of cases to be addressed.

4. **Build local capacity.** A higher involvement of civil and local stakeholders is required, by promoting the educational relevance in the community and the need of an inter-sectorial cooperation to tackle dropouts. MEDs should identify and co-ordinate with civil society partners to support policy implementation for addressing the problem of dropout.

5. **Foster cooperation with School Councils.** MEDs should commit more to ensure active and effective work of parents and students councils in order to create a proper partnership in joint commitment to prevention and response to abandonment and non-enrolment as well as other cases of children problematic indicators who attend but fail to learn, and children with special needs.

Recommendations for MEST

1. **Empowering PRTANs.** MEST should pay greater attention to the empowerment of PRTANs at the national level, including all the necessary multidisciplinary mechanisms.

2. **Increase monitoring mechanism.** MEST, respectively the department of the inspectorate, should increase the supervision on the implementation of national policies against abandonment and non-enrolment of compulsory education. In the specific, the potential implementation of the new Law on Inspection represents a future starting point for the execution of monitoring mechanism as well as for the coordination between municipal and school action.

3. **Empowering human resources.** MEST should support MEDs and schools to strengthen the respective PRTANs, to make them operative and competent to perform their duties according to their mandate. Taking into consideration the current lack of coordination between municipal and school stakeholders, MEST should guarantee the effective execution of the adopted regulations against the phenomena of dropout towards a social holistic approach.

4. **Strengthen cooperation.** MEST should continue to coordinate with its partners in addressing the problem of abandonment and strengthening the early warning system against abandonment and to foster the cooperation between MEDs, municipal and school PRTANs.

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RELEVANT LITERATURE

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