



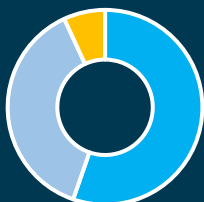
Albania Country Brief

Connectivity in Education

A Crisis of Learning in Education...

In Albania, there exists a crisis of learning in education. This is exemplified by out-of-school rates in the country, as well as those not achieving minimum proficiency. While 423,176 children and adolescents are enrolled in primary and secondary schools, **31,277 between the age of 6 and 17 are out-of-school**. Additionally, while UNESCO data show that the literacy rate for the 15-24 years age group in Albania corresponded to 99.3%, still approximately **40.6% of children and young people do not achieve minimum proficiency** in foundational skills needed for further learning and skills development.^{1,2}

- Enrolled, achieving minimum proficiency
- Enrolled, not achieving minimum proficiency
- Out of School



... becomes acute.

When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person learning in Albania starting in March 2020, the importance of devices and connectivity for the education system was placed in stark relief — as were the inequitable access to such crucial tools.

Increasing Importance of ICTs for Education

All strategies for continuing education during COVID-19 depended on ICTs as a medium for delivery. But **unequal preexisting infrastructure** in households and schools is also a major driver of the longer-term crisis of learning. Access to **connectivity** and **devices** is a **crucial enabler** of the learning process, particularly in:

1. allowing a more effective administration of education systems, and
2. developing digital skills to prepare students for the future workforce



COVID-19: Strategies for Distance Learning³



Creation of Akademi.al

17,000 video-explanations
190,000 virtual lessons
462,000 students reached
>33,000 teachers registered



Television Broadcasting to transmit lessons

What's been done?

Government Strategies Addressing Challenges

The forthcoming Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2021-2026 is a roadmap guided by three policy goals:

1. To provide high-quality and inclusive pre-university education that enables students to develop knowledge, skills attitudes, and values to thrive in a democratic society and contribute to personal and societal well-being;
To develop digital competency by utilizing information and communication technology better in teaching and learning.
2. To support effective and efficient management of the education system at all levels, based on functional mechanisms for quality assurance, transparency, and accountability;
3. To provide inclusive higher education that meets international quality standards and promotes the country's economic and social development.

In June 2020, the Albanian government adopted the National Plan for Sustainable Development of Digital Infrastructure, Broadband 2020-2026, with the aim to have 100% of schools connected with 1 Gbps broadband and access in every classroom by the end of 2025.

In terms of school governance, the Educational Services Centre (ESC) is developing a modern Education Management Information System (EMIS) called **Socrates** which, by the end of 2020, is set to store information related to students, teachers, curricula and schools in pre-tertiary education.



Many solutions involve digital technology. This, in turn, requires both connectivity and devices.



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What Gaps Remain?

Connectivity and Devices at Home⁴



627,440

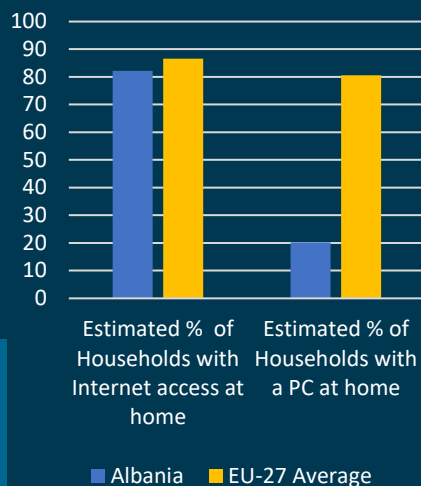
Albanian households are not in possession of a PC



140,033

Albanian households do not have access to the Internet

Contextualizing the gaps

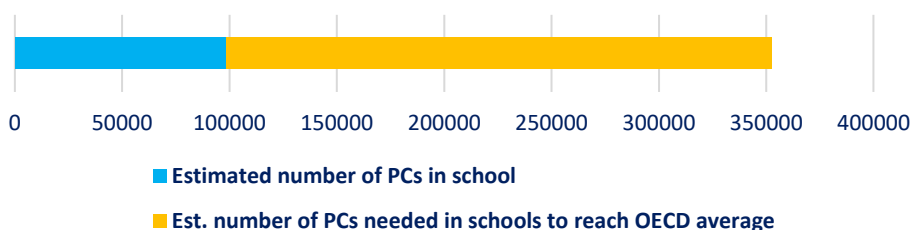


Exacerbating pre-existing inequalities:

The persistent lack of PCs in households is particularly significant when lockdowns triggered by COVID-19 facilitated the transition of economic activity to the digital sphere and transferred both educational and work activities to the household.

Connectivity and Devices at School

Computers per Student in School⁵



254,085 computers are needed in Albania to reach the OECD average.

According to OECD PISA estimates, there exists **1 device per 4 secondary school students** in Albania. The draft Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2021-2026 paints an even more concerning picture of devices per student. The ratio of computers per student stood at **1 device per 27 students**—far from the EU standard of 1 per 3-7 students. Of these devices, 25% are not fully operational, indicating a lack of maintenance and updates for computers which are out of use. The internet speed is also not always adequate for online learning, and devices are mainly concentrated in one laboratory rather than covering all school classrooms.

Mapping School Connectivity

Assessing the level and quality of broadband in schools, and proactively addressing infrastructure gaps, is increasingly important as students return to the classroom. This will ensure that connectivity is leveraged to deliver educational content and to manage the education system in an efficient manner, and that digital skills development is thoroughly included in curricula.



Filling the Device Gap in Schools

Low-Range Estimate⁶

\$18.7 million

to reach the OECD average of 0.83 PCs per student.

High-Range Estimate⁷

\$215 million

to reach the OECD average of 0.83 PCs per student.



To bridge learning gaps, devices are only as important as the connection that supports them and the access to high quality content and learning they enable. Investment in school and household connectivity as well as content development and robust digital education is vital and must be considered alongside device provision.

Funding remains a challenge.



In 2016, Albania's expenditure per student in secondary education was 9.82% of GDP per capita, while the EU countries' average for the same period was 23.02%.⁸

Albania has a successful history of leveraging innovative financing mechanisms and multistakeholder partnerships toward achieving appropriate levels of devices and connectivity in education. Two key examples are outlined below.



Albania Education Excellence and Equity Project (EEEEP)

By 2014, the **Albania Education Excellence and Equity Project (EEEEP)** supported the provision of over 24,000 computers and Internet connectivity to schools. The 75-million-dollar partnership between Albania's government, the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) **reduced the student-computer ratio from 46 to 14 in urban areas and from 133 to 13 in rural areas.**

Vodafone's #RedforKids

In April 2020, the Vodafone Albania Foundation launched the #RedForKids initiative. Partnering with the Albanian Ministry of Education, Vodafone Albania donated **15,000 smart devices** and SIM cards with **unlimited online learning data access** to those children most in need.



ITU and UNICEF are committed to helping the Government of Albania and other stakeholders achieve national objectives. School connectivity is widely recognized as a means to a more efficient administration of educational systems, a building block in supporting innovative ways to distribute education content and increase access, and — most importantly — a fundamental prerequisite to endow pupils with the digital skills necessary to thrive in the job market. The achievement of appropriate device and connectivity levels, both at school and in the home, thus remain priorities of both the ITU Office for Europe and UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Both offices cherish the opportunity to engage with partners and provide support through **technical assistance, capacity building and research**, as well as **knowledge exchange**

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Endnotes

¹ Data from UNESCO UIS Database. <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

² UNICEF calculation of the number of students in primary, lower and upper secondary not achieving minimum proficiency in math; Data for Albania is calculated using the latest figures available from UIS and PISA.

³ See: <https://gizmonova.com/the-online-platform-akademi-al-is-presented-for-all-students/>; Updated information from UNICEF Albania Country Office; <https://www.unicef.org/media/88896/file/ECARO-COVID-19SitRepNo.15-22Oct-25Nov2020.pdf>

⁴ ITU WTID Database.

⁵ PISA 2018 Results (Volume V); OECD 2020 (Figure V.5.4 School computers per student, school characteristics and reading performance).

⁶ This estimate is calculated using the cheapest smartphone available in the region, at \$73.60 per device. Price estimate is taken from A4AI price data, averaging the cost of the cheapest smartphones available in Georgia, Turkey and Ukraine. Although Smartphones are used as a proxy for the cheapest way to access online educational content and represent a baseline cost, they are not ideal for sustained learning nor comparable to PCs for educational purposes.

⁷ This estimate is calculated using using a price of \$850 per computer and monitor, which is a UNICEF price estimation of a high-end computer and monitor more suitable for learning. It thus represents the most expensive end of the spectrum.

⁸ See: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.SECO.PC.ZS?locations=EU-AL>