

REPORT FORM

Focus Group Discussion with youth for the Transforming Education Summit "Reimagining my Education in Albania"

This report records the outcomes of the consultation "Focus Group Discussion with youth for the Transforming Education Summit 'Reimagining my Education in Albania'".

1 - TES NATIONAL CONSULTATION PROCESS

Convenor's Name: Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania

Number of consultations (if more than one consultation takes place): 3 consultation processes up to date and two other major processes of consultations to follow within June 2022.

Basic information on the consultation convened

Date(s)	10 th of May 2022 17 th – 22 nd May 2022 31 st of May 2022
Title(s)	1. Development's Partners meeting to ensure support for the National Education Strategy 2. U-Report launch poll for youth to prioritize interventions in education as per areas of the Transformation Summit of Education (TES) 3. National Consultation Focus Group Discussion with youth for the Transforming Education Summit "Reimagining my Education in Albania".
Types (e.g. National/Subnational)	National
Geographical Focus	National
Number of Participants for each consultation	30 308 24
Language used	Albanian and English

Total number of participants:

Age range of participants:	
0 - 17	19
18 - 29	5
30 - 59	28

60+	2
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Gender Participants:	
Male	11
Female	13
Prefer not to say	

Number of Participants from each sector:			
Education	54		Nutrition
Child Protection			Communication
Health			Information technology
Labour			Social Protection
Environment			Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
Finance			Other: 24 – adolescents/ youth groups

Number of Participants from each Stakeholder group:	
	– Teachers, educators, facilitators, and professors
24	– Youth and students (including children and adolescents)
	– School leaders
	– City and local government representatives
	– Parents and caregivers
	– Small/ medium enterprises/ unions
	– Large national businesses
	– Members of Parliament
	– Multi-national corporations
	– Local authorities
5	– Government and national institutions
	– Public servants
	– Regional economic community
10	– Local Non-Governmental organizations
	– International and/ or Regional financial institutions
20	– International Non-Governmental organizations
	– Indigenous people and community leaders
	– Scientific community, academic, universities and research institutes
	– Media
34, 434	- Other: (Reach through the dedicated posts for TES as per statistics of UNICEF through its social media channels on Facebook 26, 395, Instagram 6, 731 , Twitter 1, 308)

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

How did you organize the consultation to ensure the following principles of national consultations?	
√	<p>A whole-of-government approach</p> <p>The process in Albania is being led by the Government of Albania (GoA) under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), closely supported by the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UN RC) in Albania and UNICEF. The first event launching the consultation processes and focus on Education action tracks started with the Partner’s Coordination Meeting lead by the MoES and bringing together key agencies, partners, international and national stakeholders working in education in Albania. A focus on topics related to inclusion, health and safety in schools; learning skills for life; teachers and teaching profession; digital learning and transformation and sharing of priorities for financing of these crucial interventions was at the core of this high-level meeting organized on the 10th of May 2022.</p> <p>To ensure that national consultations have cross-sectoral representation, the design and organization of events planned for the period May-June 2022 in Albania has aimed and aims to mobilize the engagement of other stakeholders, beyond the education sector like representatives from the Ministries of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Ministry of State for Youth and Children. Other key stakeholders to be involved in two other key consultation processes are education practitioners, Disabled People’s Organizations (DPO’s), Roma and Egyptian representative organizations, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), private sector, academia etc.</p> <p>To date, all national consultations are organized under the leadership of the Albanian Government, led by the Minister of Education and Sports. Further, UNICEF has led a meeting with Member of Parliament in Ali Demi high school in Vlora https://www.instagram.com/p/Ceig9gDNX37/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=).</p>

<p>√</p>	<p>Inclusion and equality</p> <p>In order to ensure commitment of education stakeholders to take forward the Education Agenda, and gain insight on approaches that could effectively integrate efforts of multiple stakeholders in the area of education and sub topics related to it, the Development's Partners Meeting was organized as explained before</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/kushievis/videos/1917421921786065/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN_GK0T-GK1C</p> <p>This event highlighted education problems and identified areas of potential contribution, aiming to achieve unity of effort towards providing joint solutions, by mobilizing commitment and concrete action to progress education.</p> <p>The principle of inclusion and equality has been core to the design of the activities already organized and those expected to be organized in the following weeks. Inclusion of government officials, key international and national partners, CSOs, DPOs, academia, private sector and most importantly youth participation are indicators of and inclusive process promoting equality among stakeholders involved in prioritizing key action tracks in prioritizing education.</p>
<p>√</p>	<p>Focusing on youth as 'agents of change'</p> <p>A U-Report poll, prioritizing interventions as per five key priority areas of transformation of education, was launched from May 17th – 22nd, 2022. The poll was completed by 308 youth part of the U-Report community, to help shape preparations for all national consultations to follow (https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/opinion/2891/).</p> <p>A national consultation process organized in the format of an interactive Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was organized with the main aim of articulating youth recommendations for improving the future of Education. In this event participated 24 youth representatives, representing key youth groups active in civic engagement in Albania (Upshift, IMPACT, UN Youth Group, Students Parliament of Albania)</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/1418333835086895/posts/3172687106318217/.</p> <p>This FGD served to validate findings of the U-Report poll and represented the first planning phase of the overall action that will address the future of education. Involvement and engagement of youth as key participants of this activity ensured to lay the grounds and foundation for future consultations to follow.</p> <p>With youth being key stakeholders of the activity, it is ensured that their primary needs and priorities are recognized and will be aligned with education priority actions at all levels, across all dimensions of development.</p> <p>Following this consultation process, 10 youth volunteers will engage in producing youth led video messages outreaching peers in their schools and community members on raising awareness on the five key priority areas of transformation of education in their respective communities.</p>

	<p>From the same process, another group of 10 youth will prepare their advocacy messages based on their priorities and engage in a dialogue process with the Members of Parliament group “Friends of Children” supported by UNICEF.</p>
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3. CONSULTATION FOCUS AND OUTCOMES

- A. What was/were the main area(s) of focus of the national consultation(s), based on the TES five thematic action tracks* and the issues outlined in the Discussion Papers and the Futures of Education Briefing Notes?

I. Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools

Focus areas and key trends

- a. **School physical infrastructure:** A primary identified issue is lack of adequate physical infrastructure that allows for equal participation and engagement of all students, from diverse backgrounds and children and adolescents with disabilities. Promotion of values related to inclusiveness, equality, safety and healthy practices in schools, requires concrete investments in physical infrastructure as a first condition for facilitating academic learning, and allow students to harness their potential.
- b. **Openness to diversity and change:** School environments in Albania, despite all changes happened in policy level regarding inclusion and inclusive school culture, in local level, still more work needs to be done regarding acceptance towards what’s different and diverse. One of the factors leading to this, is a hostile mentality to accepting change. It is strongly evident the need to be more receptive and open minded to new approaches. Schools should improve on encouraging students to take innovative initiatives for the future. Bullying is also another risk factor affecting the overall health and wellbeing of children and adolescents.
- c. **Child Friendly Spaces:** Supporting students well-being in schools is critical as heightened during the consultations, but currently the support system is lacking in numbers and capacities to provide well for them. Mental health matters represent a key component of well-being but are not yet fully addressed in schools. Despite the increase in numbers of professionals in the psycho-social education system by the Ministry of Education and Sports, still there is the need to provide more capacity building to these

professionals as well as provide spaces in schools to offer psycho-social support to children and adolescents. One of the initiatives is the creation of protocols defining the rules and regulations for the professionals of the psycho-social services in schools. During the past three years, after facing the consequences of two consecutive emergencies (earthquake and Covid-19), there have been organized sessions on the importance of mental health and socio-emotional wellbeing of children and adolescents, especially in emergency situations/ contexts.

- d. **Safe spaces - belonging, equality and involvement:** Schools should represent more than just a space for academic learning, to help students prepare and gain life competencies that will support them throughout their life. Schools should offer a joint space that targets commitment and engagement of students, teachers and school directors, and parents, for inclusiveness and opportunities for development, so that students can become successful in the outside world. One aspect highlighted and prioritized was regarding after school activities providing civic engagement opportunities and skillset for children and adolescents.
- e. **Active engagement:** Creation and the active engagement of students' clubs is seen as an effective mean for meaningful decision making among adolescents. There is a need to revive existing students' clubs, but also initiate formation of new ones, including sports clubs. Parents' engagement in school activities could have a special role and contribution, not only as a target support to their own children, but also serve as institutional support to invest in development projects that impact all students.

The data of U-report poll show that for 36% of participants the cooperation among teachers, peers, parents and community was the main element required to be prioritized for school's transformation to better respond to every student need (inclusive, safe and healthy schools that promote equality) and for 30% of the participants priority was the adequate physical infrastructure and appropriate teaching tools and methods¹.

Recommendations

- ✚ Empower "Schools as Community Center" initiative to enhance students learning and development,
 - Equip teachers with the skills and abilities they need to perform their facilitator functions and roles in coordinating and managing the engagement initiatives,
- ✚ Place a special emphasis on development of arts and sport activities within the school setting, as a mean to promote active citizenship values,
 - Enhance cooperation with civil society organizations for the implementation of a broader scope activities within school, including provision of soft skills trainings,
- ✚ Strengthen the role of "Students Parliament and School Boards" to have a meaningful role in representing, advocating and lobbying for improved educational practices and setting standards in support of student's achievement,

¹ <https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/opinion/2891/>

- ✚ Increase funding in education to further invest in development of inclusive environments that offer more than just an academic setting, including accessible physical infrastructure for all, child friendly and safe spaces, supports teachers, arts and sports, and material facilities,
- ✚ Provide free books and education resources to all students, from elementary to high school.
- ✚ Taking education further by improving students-teachers-parents' relationships.

II. Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development

Focus areas and key trends

- a. **Traditional teaching methods:** Despite the several teachers' training and all the efforts done in the framework of implementing the competencies'-based curricula to enhance the teachers' skillset to organize more interactive and contemporary teaching classes, there are still cases when learning is focused on the use of traditional teaching methods when student learn by memory. This impact student's analytic and critical thinking as well as competencies needed for the future of labor market or employment. Changes in the teaching approaches focusing on diverse learner's needs, links to digitalization are all priorities highlighted to advance and to respond to current and future development trends.
- b. **School curricula:** The actual curricula of sciences and texts are translated and adapted from texts from Pearson's, Oxford and Cambridge in the past years, so still more work need to be done to see reflected what the school curricula is providing in regard to the gained 21st Century skillset for children and adolescents in Albania. While subjects such as social science, career orientation modules, information, and communication technology (ICT), are all subjects which need more attention and financing in the near future to shape a new generation to meet the demands of a dynamic time and future employment.
- c. **Access to information and opportunities:** Access to digital opportunities and information as well as active recreational opportunities are available mostly in the cities while more attention needs to go towards rural schools too. There are still schools in the country are not exposed and don't have access to programs and practices that promote beyond traditional academic learning, preventing them from taking advantage of current and available opportunities for development. In this regard, after school activities, recreational, sports, arts and crafts opportunities are considered as a priority by children and adolescents and are among the strategic plans of the Ministry of Education and Sports in the framework of the new National Education Strategy 2021- 2026.

When surveyed in the U-report poll how can schools better promote/support "lifelong learning", 30% of participants report on the need to update the teaching curriculum including topics related to critical thinking and skills for life and labor market, 25% report on the need to create a system of credits for extracurricular modules and activities focused on environment and green economy, entrepreneurship, employment

opportunities and 19% report continuing professional development of teachers based on needs, students' age development, growth, and assessment².

Recommendations

- ✚ Continue investing in the implementation of the competency-based curricula to better respond to the needs of the labor market and ensure cross sectorial collaboration to facilitate the transition to the labor market,
 - Incorporate career orientation/ education into the school curricula, and add dedicated career modules and opportunities for the primary and secondary education system, besides the cross-curricula orientation program which is already implemented in Albania
 - Add a professional practice component to bring professions closer to school students,
 - Focus on building the digital skillset since early ages as well as focus on providing foreign languages education since early ages.
- ✚ Design and develop extra-curricular activities in support of learning and skills for life,
 - Offer additional learning classes to those left behind, or those who ask to take further their development (talented students),
 - Support development of youth programs and activities with a focus on start-ups, green skills, soft skills learning, participation in decision-making, and activism,
- ✚ Increase investment in school physical infrastructure and recreational spaces, like laboratories, sport spaces, other recreational areas,
- ✚ Invest in making vocational education and training more attractive as an essential opportunity for professional and sustainable development,
- ✚ Improve and simplify access to information on educational opportunities and make it readily and easily available for all,
- ✚ Continue investing in the education system, within the subject "Education for Entrepreneurship" and not only with focus on increasing cooperation and collaboration with other external stakeholders (like i.e. private businesses) to ensure a smoother transition from the education system to the labor market and increase the dialogue of the competencies needed and skillset between the education system and the labor market.

III. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

Focus areas and key trends

- a. ***Teachers teaching style:*** School curricula covers a wide range of themes, and in the past years has been more focused on competencies-based skills even though there are still some challenges from teachers to adapt the learning style from a more theoretical one to building competencies. An important focus is

² <https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/opinion/2891/>

placed on learning by memory, while there is an important aspect lacking, how to learn. Focus should continue to develop and implement strategies that enhance learning and intelligence, building of applied competencies in different situations of learning and engagement in community life.

- b. **Lack of adequate support to diverse peer groups:** Children with disabilities, those who are from minority groups, or belong to those living in difficult socio-economic context, still not have enough support to enhance their development and learning aspects even though there is an increase of support teachers (1 teacher for 3 children with disabilities). The current context has made evident lack of adequate services, and the high need for improvements in services provision. Better coordination is needed from education and social care structures both in local and central level to provide a continuum of services needed to enhance both developmental and learning outcomes for these children.
- c. **School curricula:** The school curricula need to be more focused on the demands of the labor market demands. What is being taught in schools, needs to be more intentionally linked to what are the strategic areas for future employment and link the skillset build in schools with the needs of the labor market. Besides this, building soft skills among children and adolescents is another priority which needs more attention. Modules focusing on youth activism, professional development, and psychosocial development need to be more accessible for all children and adolescents in the pre university education system.
- d. **Teachers digital competencies:** COVID-19 pandemic revealed gaps in the digital competence of academic teachers at a time when teaching shifted to digital distance learning. The crisis pandemic showed that teachers had little to no experience in distant teaching and use of digital/ technology tools.

In terms of quality teaching the U-report poll data show that 30% of participants report as important the development and implementation of teaching programs focused on recent developments based on student's individual needs and 40% report upgrade of physical infrastructure and basic equipment (laboratories, libraries, gyms, etc.)³

Recommendations

- ✚ Continuous training of teachers in professional teaching competencies, also adding development of digital competencies,
- ✚ Ongoing qualification of teachers to adapt to new developments and use new teaching methods and strategies,
- ✚ Investment in physical infrastructure, focusing on building of laboratories to support practical learning, and teachers teaching equipment (computers, projectors, and other),
- ✚ Create more opportunities of twinning of education programs between schools in Albania, within the Western Balkans or with European Union schools to enable furthering exchange of experiences, practices and education opportunities. Build upon the existing best practices from implementing E-Twinning, ASPNET network etc and other initiatives supported by development partners.

³ <https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/opinion/2891/>

- ✚ Increase teacher's salary to ensure high quality teaching workforce, and design compensation systems.

IV. Digital learning and transformation

Focus areas and key trends

- Availability of digital/ technology tools in schools:** Schools still use old and traditional technology tools and equipment, used only for basic teaching purposes. There is lack in quality and quantity of tools and equipment that could be used to enrich teaching and learning. Adding to that, not all schools have the same resources, with those located in rural and remote areas having less to no resources especially in digital related technologies.
- Make school laboratories functional:** At present, not all laboratories all over Albania are operational and they are lacking internet access. Acknowledging their role in supporting practical education and learning, efforts should be made to revive them as interactive knowledge educational spaces.
- Lack of teachers with "authentic" technology expertise:** Information technology module has been taught by teachers with no experience or expertise in technology. There are some cases when this curriculum has been assigned to teachers only to complete their teaching calendar/ timetable.

When asked in the U-report poll how can the technology and digitalization be better used to support teaching and learning, 28% report hybrid teaching (combining classroom and online teaching) and creating flexible teaching spaces in emergency situations and beyond, 26% report training of teachers to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in improving teaching and 28% report establishment of supplementary educational platforms supporting "lifelong learning"⁴.

Recommendations

- ✚ Adapting technology and digital tools to enhance teaching and learning, using technology to attract students interest, but also have more interactive classes,
- ✚ Add digital and technology learning as dedicated modules in secondary and high school program to support future careers and professional development for the students.
- ✚ Establish adequate infrastructure for students digital learning (school and after school programs and equipment, especially for those in need and without digital access at home), including broadband connection coverage for all,
- ✚ Investment in distant learning to ensure education and learning for all, and design and development of new online platforms in support of education and lifelong learning,
- ✚ Intense training and qualification of academic teachers to adapt with new forms of technology and digitalization.

⁴ <https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/opinion/2891/>



V. Financing of education

Focus areas and key trends







- a. Lack of education resources and recreational and psychosocial spaces,
- b. Creation of a culture of teaching and learning, increasing motivation and interest by incorporating and presenting new experiences in schools,
- c. Reactive spaces and laboratories,
- d. Build skillset in children through school curricula and competencies since earlier education stages,
- e. Enrich teaching and learning methods focusing on digital tools and use of technology, and design and development of new modern methods, platforms and applications.

When asked if financing in the field of education should be increased, majority of participants (87%) respond yes. Regarding the most important component where the government should increase its financing in education they have mentioned:

- education system digitalization (14%);
- Creating educational and friendly spaces for children (after school courses, sports, cultural, art and crafts spaces, etc.) (18%);
- Continuing professional development and growth of teachers (digitalization, inclusion, new curriculum evaluation, etc.) (15%);
- Benefits and incentives of attending school (scholarships, payment of school fees) for students in need for decreasing school dropout and for excellent students (15%);
- motivating talented students and increasing quality in students' achievements and supporting vulnerable groups, as well as the talented ones (10%);
- Curriculum equipping students with skills for life and being active citizens in school and community (19%)⁵.

Recommendations

Increase share of government funds to be spent in education in the following areas prioritized:

-  *School physical infrastructure and educational resources, and digitalization,*
-  *Continuous qualification of academic teachers and incentives,*
-  *Incentivize school attendance, especially for the most vulnerable,*
-  *Quality education in rural and remote areas, including ensuring transportation and other facilities,*
-  *Create educational, friendly and safe spaces for all children,*
-  *Building a culture of learning.*

⁵ <https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/opinion/2891/>

B. What are the main outcomes regarding the four key components* of the national consultation(s)?

Transformation of education [medium-longer-term]

Possibilities for system change:

- #1 Changes in the teaching and learning methodology and experiences, focusing on harnessing digital technology,
- #2 Establishment of new partnerships, between schools, government institutions, private business, civil society organizations and community,
- #3 Spread of blended learning (classroom and distant learning).