arise Action for Reducing
Inequalities in Education

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**Comparative report for
Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North
Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey**

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ARISE Consortium

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List of Abbreviations

ALL	Albanian Lek (currency)
BD	Brčko District
BED	Bureau for Education Development, North Macedonia
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CEP	Centre for Education Policy
ChA	Child Allowance
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CPU	Child Protection Units
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
ESRP	Employment and Social Reform Programme
EU	European Union
EWIS	Early Warning and Intervention System
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEM Report	Global Education Monitoring Report
GNAT	Chairmanship of Grand National Assembly of Turkey
HE	Higher Education
ICT	Information and communications technology
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IIE	Institute for Improvement of Education, Serbia
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISC	Inter-sectoral committees
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LoFES	Law on Foundations of Education System
LSG	Local Self-Government
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics

KCF	Kosovo Curriculum Framework
KEC	Kosova Education Center
KODA	Village Schools Transformation Network
LEO	Local Education Office
MES	Ministry of Education and Science, Kosovo
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoESTD	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
MoNE	Ministry of National Education in Turkey
MSWY	Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
NARNS	The National Association of Parents and Teachers of Serbia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLN	Professional Learning Networks
RED/LEO	Regional Education Directorates or Local Education Offices
RSD	Serbian dinar
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEDS	Strategy for Education Development in Serbia
SES	Socio-economic status
SILC	Survey on income and living conditions
SIPRU	Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit
SORS	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
SWC	Social Welfare Centres
TEC	Temporary Education Centres
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TPCD	Teacher Professional and Career Development Project
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Introduction

The ARISE project was implemented to reinforce the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) in identifying needs and proposing data-driven solutions for some of the key societal challenges – to secure equity in education and to improve inclusion of children from families with low socio-economic status (SES).

This comparative report was produced in order to underline the issues in participating countries and to demonstrate what countries can do to support all of their students, regardless of their SES or any other background.

In the first chapter, the general education context relevant for equity in each of the countries is presented covering aspects like legislation, most relevant definitions, and data. The second chapter is more focused on issues related to equity in education and presents how poverty affects students and how resilient the education systems are. It also presents situation related to the education of students with SEN and students with disabilities and multilingual education, describing how health and social welfare sectors contribute to equity in education and which complementary measures are used in order to support it. Finally, in the third chapter, main conclusions and recommendations covering both policies and practices are provided.

Methodology. Prior to this report, countries' information and data from different sources were collected in order to have a clear overview of the situation in each country regarding inequalities in education and existing mechanisms for their reduction, including mapping the existing gaps and room for improvements. The methodology is created in such a way to allow the analysis of educational systems support to enhance opportunities for the most vulnerable children/students in these societies.

In more concrete terms, within the first phase of the project, national researchers completed questionnaires developed by CEP and KEC dedicated to the collection of information on general equity context, poverty, education equity, data from international surveys, descriptions of health, and social welfare systems, etc. After several reviews of collected information most important topics were selected for each country that researchers explored further.

Additional data were collected through interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders groups. Findings collected during this phase were integrated into the national reports along with data collected through questionnaires. Lead researchers relied on national reports as well as on questionnaires in the process of compiling information for this report.

Data-driven policy recommendations in this report aim to support social recognition of the importance of equity in education among educational stakeholders and policymakers. Reaching consensus about sources and causes of inequalities in education should lead towards further policy improvement.

Also, except for the presentation of data and information from a comparative perspective, this report includes identified good practices and promising solutions for mitigating adverse effects of poverty.

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1. General context in the countries relevant for equity

Structure of education systems. In order to better understand equity in education in respective countries, it is important to present the main characteristics of the countries' education systems. Therefore, the table below gives information on the educational levels of each country's education system with groups per age within pre-school education and grades (duration) within primary and secondary levels of education. Mandatory levels of education systems are marked in pink.

All the information sets provided within this chapter are based on the legislation of respected countries and national reports.

Table 1: Structure of education systems

	Preschool (Groups per age)	**Primary**[1] (Grade)	**Secondary** (Grade)
Albania	• Nursery – 0–3 • Kindergarten – 3–5 • Preparatory Classes – 5–6	1–9 (two cycles 5 + 4)	1–3 or 4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	• Nursery – 0–3 • Kindergarten – 3–5	1–9 (two cycles 5 + 4)[2]	1–3 or 4[3]
Kosovo	• Preschool – 0–5 • Pre-primary – 5–6	1–9 (two cycles 5 + 4)	1–3 or 4
North Macedonia	• Nursery – 0–3 • Kindergarten – 3–5.5/6[4]	1–9 (two cycles 5 + 4)	1–3 or 4
Serbia	• Nursery – 6 months-3 • Kindergarten – 3–5.5	1–8 (two cycles 4 + 4)[5]	1–3 or 4
Turkey	• Pre-primary – 3–5.5	1–8 (two cycles 4 + 4)	1–4

Source: Countries' reports

In Albania primary and lower secondary education is compulsory and free of charge for students between the ages of 6 to 16. Preschool education (which consists of nursery, kindergarten and preparatory classes

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1   Cycles in primary education correspond to primary and lower secondary education in some countries and international practice.

2   There are mandatory Preparatory Classes during the year before school.

3   Mandatory secondary education exists in some cantons.

4   Preschool education can be implemented by Early childhood development centres.

5   There is Mandatory Preschool Preparatory Programme (9 months duration) that can be implemented by preschool institutions or primary schools.

before the students start primary education) is optional. According to legislation, students who are above the age of 16 and have not completed lower secondary education may continue their education in part-time schools. Education at all levels is either public or private, and it includes special education schools. At the upper secondary level, students may enrol on one of the following: general education (gymnasium), oriented education, and vocational education. There is also home tutoring for the students who cannot attend school for several reasons such as illness.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, compulsory education starts at the age of 5–6 at the preschool level, i.e., children have to go to school the year before they start primary education. Primary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is compulsory and free of charge. Secondary education is free of charge and not mandatory except in three cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Bosnian-Podrinje, Una-Sana cantons) where secondary education is mandatory for the first two years. There are general secondary schools, vocational secondary schools, technical schools, art schools and other less common school types (religious schools and secondary schools for children with special needs).

In Kosovo, there are specialized preschool institutions for children aged 0–5. However, the coverage of this age cohort is very low because of limited intake capacities. Also, the majority of primary schools provide preparatory programmes that are not mandatory. According to the Constitution and Law on Pre-University Education in Kosovo, primary and lower secondary education (grade 1 to 9) are mandatory and free of charge for children aged 6–14. Upper secondary education is not mandatory and there are general secondary education and vocational education schools.

In North Macedonia, according to the Laws on Primary and Secondary Education, both primary and secondary education is compulsory and free of charge for children aged 6–18. Children under the age of 6 attend public or private kindergartens or early childhood development centres. Secondary education options are general secondary, vocational, art, and education for students with SEN and students with disabilities.

In Serbia, preschool preparatory programme and 8 years of primary education are compulsory and free of charge for children aged 5.5–14. Preschool education and care is available for children from 6 months until the compulsory preschool preparatory programme. There are two cycles in primary education (grades 1–4 and 5–8). As for secondary education, there are general education, art education and vocational education options. Vocational schools are offering profiles that last three or four years, while some schools for students with SEN offer two-year vocational education. Although secondary education is not mandatory, making it mandatory is being considered by policymakers. Preschool education institutions, primary and secondary schools can be both private or public, but all need to be accredited by the Ministry of Education.

In Turkey, compulsory education covers primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education, it lasts 12 years, and it is free of charge. There are public and private schools at all levels. Pre-primary education in Turkey is not free of charge or compulsory, except for students with special needs. Pre-school education is compulsory for children with special needs who are 36 months (3 years) old or above. The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services offers care services and preschool education programmes for children aged between 0–36 months (0–3 years old). The Ministry of National Education operates classes for children between 3–6 years as part of independent kindergartens, nurseries within primary schools, or as practice classes affiliated to other educational institutions. Preschool preparatory class is not mandatory in Turkey. However, there are many private kindergartens available. There are general schools and vocational schools for second-

ary education. There are also lower and upper secondary schools for imams and preachers, as well as a lower secondary option for individuals above compulsory education age.

For all presented countries, besides regular primary and secondary schools, there are different kinds of schools such as primary and secondary schools for students with SEN and students with disabilities, compensatory primary schools for adults, and music and ballet schools.

Education as a universal human right. The right to education is affirmed in numerous human rights treaties and recognized by governments as pivotal in the pursuit of development and social transformation. Several conventions[6] placed binding commitments on ratifying countries to ensure the universal and inalienable right to education for their citizens. With that in mind, states operationalized such rights, goals, strategies and targets within their legislation, so most countries have some kind of regulation on equity in general, equity in education in particular, prohibition of discrimination, etc.

However, in the national legislation of studied countries, equity in education is not equally defined. Sometimes it is used alternately with terms like equality and fairness, although they qualitatively differ, and these nuances are reflected in the way policies are designed. Most reviewed country legislations place equity in relation to exercising human rights and protection from any kind of discrimination. More often, equity is implied but not specified as a term or defined. In such cases, national constitutions refer to the prohibition of discrimination or universal access to services, including education and institutions, which are interpreted as the guarantee of equity. However, the guarantee of access for all is only a precondition for ensuring equitable education, and how this right is exercised in practice depends on a much broader legislative framework. Also, phrases that refer to discrimination 'based on' or 'irrespective of' specific characteristics are not as broadly defined in all countries. In some social status is mentioned, but in others, they mostly cover race, colour, sex, language, religion, political belief, etc. Poverty is perceived as part of the social status implicitly, but different definitions of poverty cause this category to be vague.

Also, criteria for defining disadvantaged students vary to some degree from country to country. In some countries, disadvantaged students are identified as those at risk of dropping out or underachievement, in other countries they are also recognized as at risk of social exclusion based on migrant status or disability, while some definitions cover social, economic, cultural, ethnic, family characteristics or geographical location (e.g., living in a remote area).

All the reviewed countries have references to equity in their constitutions and education strategies. Also, all the countries have a law on anti-discrimination.

Terms defined in national legislation create a framework that guides all policies and measures developed and implemented. Therefore, the way specific terms are defined is as equally important as whether they are addressed at all. For example, if equal access to education is guaranteed by the fact that compulsory education is free of charge for all the children, it addresses only one barrier. For many families, poverty means a lack of basic living conditions, including access to health services or having personal documents, so children are unable to attend school based on other requirements than paying for school.

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6   E.g., United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Some national research shows that different groups from the same country identify inequity and discrimination in different areas. E.g., in Turkey, International Social Survey Programme discovers that employment, school enrolment and promotion at work are the areas where discrimination happens the most. Stakeholders involved in this research believe that discrimination based on sex is more prevalent than discrimination based on race or religion. What is interesting is that they mention 'objective' and 'perceptive' discrepancy within cultural groups – while the respondents who are a part of a minority group do not report at a higher rate than the other respondents that they experiencing discrimination, when asked about their perception of discrimination against minority groups, they report it at higher levels (Kalaycıoğlu & Çarkoğlu, 2009). Therefore, it can be concluded that discrimination against a specific group is a complex phenomenon where representatives of a specific group can be perceived differently depending on variables like education level, SES, etc.

In national education strategies and umbrella laws, equity is either addressed as a crosscutting topic, interrelated with coverage, quality or efficiency (Serbia) or addressed partially, targeting specific dimensions like sex and gender equity (North Macedonia). A common approach is that education laws prescribe prohibition of discrimination or unequal treatment in reference to access to education and obligatory support to certain groups of students.

However, during field research in all countries, stakeholders' opinions on equity in legal frameworks are similar – what is 'on paper' is not fully implemented in practice. For example, in Turkey, participants in field research pointed out that legal and official documents are comprehensive but do not produce any regulatory enforcement practices for ensuring equity, and therefore remain unimplemented.

Implementation in practice fails for various reasons, some are related to lack of enforcement measures, others to lack of sufficient knowledge of the issue among public servants and the general public, while sometimes low SES students are not recognised as vulnerable groups who need additional support. In all countries, stakeholders agree that there is a need for strengthening the monitoring, inspection and enforcement instruments for better compliance with the legal framework. Other reasons for inconsistent policy implementation are inadequate financial mechanisms, conflict with other policies or slow reform processes.

Public and private schooling. Private schools are present in all countries and are usually considered of better quality since they have smaller classes, specialized programmes, additional extracurricular activities, and parents think that students will have better chances of enrolling in more elite institutions in the next education level. However, private schools are usually out of reach for students from vulnerable groups unless some kind of scholarship programme is available. The existence of private schools is not a matter of concern unless they become a parallel elite system deepening further the disparities, so this report also gives an insight into the current state of play in analysed countries.

In Albania, around 9% of basic education schools are private. The share of students in basic education attending private schools has increased over time, with 4% in 2006–2007 compared to 7% in 2016–2017. Private funding of education is increasing; private schools are a growing component of the Albanian pre-tertiary education system. Between 2005–2006 and 2014–2015, enrolment in private schools grew faster than in public schools at the basic education level. Furthermore, Albanian law allows financial support to be provided to private, not-for-profit pre-university education institutions that have been operating for at least five years; even though this provision has not yet been implemented due to budget constraints. (Maghnouj et al., 2020).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no data about the percentage of private preschool, primary and secondary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this number is very low, and schools are mainly situated in larger cities. All schools are obliged to follow legal requirements, but they are not funded by the state.

In Kosovo, there are 133 licensed private preschool institutions and 18 licensed private institutions which provide all levels of pre-university education, from primary to secondary education. Private education institutions in Kosovo must be licensed by the Ministry of Education and Science, although they are funded by users and thus financially autonomous. Percentage of students registered in private schools is 55.6% in preschool; 8.41% in pre-primary; 2.24% in primary (grade 1 to 9); and 4.47 % in upper secondary education (grade 10 to 12) (Kosovo Agency of Statistics – KAS, 2020a).

In North Macedonia, there are no private primary or lower secondary education institutions and almost all students (97%) attend public schools in upper secondary education.[7] However, there are 16 private upper secondary schools in the country. The students have the legal option to enrol into the private upper secondary schools which are officially recognized by the Macedonian educational system.

In Serbia, private schools are funded from private sources, users usually pay scholarships. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia collects data about the number of private schools per level. In the school year 2020/2021, in total there were 456 preschool institutions, of which 162 were state and 294 private schools (SORS, 2021a). There is no available statistical data about the number of private primary schools in Serbia. In the school year 2020/2021, there were in total 518 secondary schools (VET and general education schools), 454 were state schools and 64 were private. About 2.4% of students attended private secondary schools (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia – SORS, 2021b).

In Turkey, private schools operate under the Law on Private Educational Institutions no. 5580 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey, 2007) based on tuition fees which are mostly paid by the families. Private schools have the autonomy to form and manage their budgets but are obliged to follow national regulations regarding requirements and the organization of the learning processes (Eurydice, 2012). Supporting mechanisms and incentives for private education are considered a strength under the MoNE's 2019–2023 Strategic Plan. Increasing the share of the private sector in education constituted a policy focus for MoNE within the last 5–10 years. In line with this policy, the share of students enrolled in private education institutions increased to 8.7% in the 2019–20 academic year from 3.3% in 2012–13, with the most drastic increase happening in secondary education. The highest share of students in private education institutions is observed at the secondary level (22.1%), followed by the pre-primary level (16.5%).

We see from the data presented above that some countries invest in private education, and it operates under some form of public-private partnership. Effects of that kind of approach would have to be carefully analysed from an equity perspective in order not to compromise quality education for all for the excellence for some.

Coverage. There is a kind of paradox when it comes to implementation of policy and legal provisions. In more concrete terms, policy or legal acts may be implemented correctly and uniformly, but that turns out to be the exact reason why some people face discrimination, i.e. people may face indirect discrimination when treated in the same way as everybody else, yet their needs are not taken into account. So, the manner

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7   While the Constitution does not allow the establishment of private primary schools in the country, there are currently a small number of experimental private institutions.

they are treated may be equal, but the consequences of that treatment are different. We can recognize such situations in cases where school enrolment is free of charge, but the necessary textbooks and other school materials are not, or attendance is free of charge, but not transportation to the school. Without support measures targeting families with low SES, equal rights do not guarantee equal treatment.

The table below reviews coverage rates per educational level in all the studied countries.

Table 2: Coverage rates (%)

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey
Preschool (0–5/6)	81%	25%[8]	38%[9]	40.2%	66.4%[10]	41.80%[11]
Primary education	96% (first cycle) & 86% (second cycle)	97.6%	96%	92.97%	93.9%	93.60% (first cycle) & 95.90% (second cycle)
Secondary education	75%	84.6%	82.5%	69.63%	87.4%	85%

Source: For Albania – ARISE National Report for Albania; for Bosnia and Herzegovina – Situation Analysis of Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNICEF, 2020); for Kosovo – Annual Statistical Report with Education Indicators 2019/20 (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kosovo, 2020); for North Macedonia – ARISE National Report for North Macedonia; for Serbia – Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, DevInfo database; for Turkey – National Education Statistics: Formal Education (MoNE, 2020b)

Marginalized groups appear to be disadvantaged compared to their peers coming from dominant groups in all countries.

If we separate enrolment rate only for marginalised groups these numbers are lower.

In Albania, for instance, the share of children aged 3–4 attending preschool education was 73% in the school year 2017–2018 which is a significant increase of 18% over the last 10 years. However, these figures hide a significantly lower (by more than 20%) enrolment rate of children from marginalized groups compared to children from wealthier families or from families where parents have a university degree. Nevertheless, the attendance of Roma children (3–6 years) in early learning services increased substantially to 66% in the school year 2016–2017 compared to only 26% in 2011 (European Commission, 2019).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the preschool enrolment rate for children 3 to 6 years of age is the lowest in Europe (up to 25%). There are significant inequities in access, with children from rural areas making up about 0.5%, and children from families with unemployed parents representing only 2% of all those attending preschool. Similarly, the attendance rate for Roma children is less than 2%. Of all children enrolled in ECEC, only 2% are those with SEN and disabilities. On the positive side, priorities in admission to public kindergartens are given to children with SEN those with disabilities, children from single-parent families, children belonging to families with low socio-economic status, beneficiaries of social allowances, child allowances benefi-

8   Age cohort – 3–6
9   Age cohort – 3–6
10   Age cohort – 3–5.5
11   Age cohort – 3–5

ciaries, children whose parents belong to ethnic minorities. The overall access to primary and secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is satisfactory, with 97.6% of children attending primary and 84.6% attending secondary education (UNICEF,2020). Nevertheless, school attendance rates are considerably lower among certain marginalized groups – e.g., in accordance with MICS 4 (2011/12) among Roma children, 69% attend primary and 23% secondary education (the attendance of girls is 67% in primary and only 18% in secondary education) (UNICEF, 2013b).

In Kosovo, enrolment in preschool education is 7.6% for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities whereas enrolment to preschool education in Kosovo, in general, is 15%. Enrolment to primary and secondary school among Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students is 84.1% compared to 94.1% in Kosovo in general. Students from marginalised groups are even more underrepresented in lower secondary (63.7% compared to 93.7%) and upper secondary education (31% compared to 86.8%) (KAS & UNICEF, 2020).

In North Macedonia, there is only data on the number of students in primary and secondary education segregated by ethnicity, although there is no data for the last few years. Albanian minority represents the biggest share among non-Macedonian student with 32.5% in primary and 30.9% in secondary education. Still, it is noticeable that the share of Roma students is much lower in secondary than in primary education. While 4.9% of Roma are in primary school, they represent only 1.94% of the student population in secondary school (State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia – SSORM, 2018).

In Serbia, 66.4% of children aged 3 to 5 are attending preschool education, among them only about 11% from the poorest families. Data on children from Roma settlements shows that only 7.4% of children between 3 to 5 years old attend preschool education, among which 3.3% are from the poorest families. Mandatory Preschool Preparatory Programme is attended by 76.8% of Roma children. At primary school age, 92.3% of Roma children attend primary or lower secondary school. The percentage falls dramatically in secondary school 28.4% (UNICEF, 2021).

In Turkey, data available on Syrian children is as follows: the number of school-age children living under temporary protection is 1,197,124, but only 64.6% of Syrian children attend education. This rate is 28% in preschool education, 79.9% in primary school, 78.1% in lower secondary school, and 39.9% at the upper secondary education level (MoNE, 2020c). According to the latest data of the Turkish Statistical Institute, the number of school-age children in Turkey is 16,457,000. 4.3% of the age population (720 thousand children) is working. 34.3% of working children (247 thousand) do not attend school (TURKSTAT, 2020b). The number of children with SEN and disabilities enrolled in schools dramatically decreases after the end of lower secondary schools. Only 7.7% of people with SEN and disabilities are high-school graduates (Engelli Çocuk Hakları Ağı, n.d.).

Achievement gap. For this report, countries reported their results in relevant international and national surveys. The available international surveys cover two important time points in a student's career: the fourth grade, which is typically part of primary education (through TIMSS), and age 15 (through PISA) when students are in lower or upper secondary education (in some countries like Serbia, lower secondary education is equivalent with primary education).

Across all countries, differences in achievement on PISA surveys between disadvantaged students and the general population are visible. These are sometimes greater in Science than in Math, as in North Macedonia, but generally range from 30 to 50 points in different domains. The first thing explored was the interrelation-

ship between student performance and socio-economic background, if possible measured by the PISA index of economic, social, and cultural status or based on national research. Secondly, the proportion of the variance in student performance between schools that is attributable to students' socio-economic backgrounds is explored and followed by considerations on equity in the distribution of learning opportunities.

The variance of achievement explained by SES in ARISE countries is lower than the OECD average. This means that disadvantaged students have better access to quality education than on the OECD average, but PISA indicators should be taken with some caution. There is also a possibility that if a significant number of students from low-income families drop out of school early because of low school performance, only those disadvantaged students with the highest performance are sampled for the PISA assessment.

Table 3: Effect of SES and drop-out rates.

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey
% of variance explained by SES	7.8	7	5	10–11[12]	8–9	11(11.4)[13]
Reported dropout rates from primary (and lower secondary) education	5.5%	0.08%[14]	0.10%	1.37%	0.6%	No data

Source: For Albania – OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education (Maghnouj, S. et al., 2020) & UNESCO database; for Bosnia and Herzegovina – Bosnia and Herzegovina: Student Performance (PISA 2018) (OECD, 2019a); for Kosovo – Kosovo Country Note PISA 2018 Results (OECD, 2019b); for North Macedonia – North Macedonia Country Note PISA 2018 Results (OECD, 2019c); for Serbia – Serbia Country Note PISA 2018 Results (OECD, 2019d) & Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, DevInfo database; for Turkey – Turkey: Variation in Reading Performance Explained by Students' and Schools' Economic, Social and Cultural Status (ESCS) (OECD, n.d.)

In Albania, the national assessment showed that Roma students have 30% lower literacy rate (Maghnouj et al, 2020). In Bosnia and Herzegovina it was noticeable that differences were biggest among the lowest income level i.e., at the bottom of the distribution, while in the other three quarters differences are relatively small (OECD, 2019a). It is worth noticing that some countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo or North Macedonia have smaller score differences between disadvantaged and advantaged students than the OECD average (OECD average is 89 points).

Dropout rates in these countries seem low, but dropout rates among students from marginalised groups are higher than that of the general population. E.g., according to the data from the national questionnaire, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. over 50% of children who completed primary education and who come from low SES families do not continue their education. In Serbia, 92% of Roma children are enrolled in primary school whereas only 28% are in upper secondary education (UNICEF & Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). In Turkey, the overall education coverage rate of Syrian children is 64.6%. This rate is 28% in preschool

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12   Vary for different domains
13   Vary for different domains
14   Dropout rate from primary and lower secondary education is 0.08%, while dropout rate from upper secondary education is 0.57%.

education, 79.9% in primary education, 78.1% in lower secondary education, and 39.9% in upper secondary education level (MoNE, 2020c). Important points to keep in mind when analysing dropout data are that a) data refer to children enrolled but then dropped out of education and not to those never enrolled in education and b) methodology for calculating dropout at national levels is not always the same.

Also, in reviewed countries, migrant students, students with SEN and students with disabilities usually underperform compared to the rest of the population.

Another worrisome issue is related to the fact that the higher the academic segregation between schools is, the wider the gap between high– and low-achieving students, and the greater the impact of socio-economic background on student achievement. In Serbia and North Macedonia, between school variance in achievement (e.g., in reading literacy) is bigger than the OECD average, which indicates that there is a higher concentration of disadvantaged students in the same school, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo it is lower (National reports & PISA 2018 Database). Schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students are at greater risk of low performance, and low performing disadvantaged schools often lack the internal capacity or support to improve. There is often a combination of factors such as school leaders, teachers and the environments of schools that fail to offer a quality learning experience for the most disadvantaged (OECD, 2012).

OECD average shows that one in ten disadvantaged students was able to score in the top quarter of reading performance in their countries (known as academic resilience[15]) but in countries analysed for this report, this percentage was higher – Bosnia and Herzegovina 11%, North Macedonia 11%, Serbia 13%, Turkey 14% (PISA 2018 Database).

After all the presented results, it can be concluded that the term equity is mentioned in top-level policy documents and all countries have at least one major policy initiative in place to promote equity in education or to support disadvantaged students. Still, across all countries, it is noticeable that students from low socio-economic background have lower enrolment rates, lower achievement and are less likely to obtain higher levels of education.

Families with migrant status or lower levels of SES and education often lack both the cultural capital that the school system values and the resources and social capital (networks) to acquire it, and this influences how such children perform in schools (Lynch & Baker, 2005). This, in the future, leads to lower qualifications when children leave the school system but also lower students' expectations and ambitions (thus the conception of achievable possibilities), further limiting students' options (Parker et at., 2018). Research also shows that in education systems where the impact of students' socio-economic background on their performance is already high at lower levels of education, this tends to remain high in later years as well (Eurydice, 2020a).

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15   Academic resilience reflects the extent to which performance is associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

2. Equity in Education – comparative perspective

A child with more and high-quality education is more likely to secure a high-skilled job in the future, which in turn translates to better chances for securing a higher income. In addition, increasing educational attainment contributes to productivity growth, higher national income, and healthier societies with greater social cohesion (UNESCO-UIS, 2018).

The equity approach in education research began to take the spotlight at the beginning of the 21st century. What 'equity' actually means is frequently investigated by researchers. Some authors propose a conception of equity that includes opportunity – or legally recognised rights; access – to school; treatment – or educational models and measures; and results – or opportunity for success. Others propose the classification: a) equity as equal opportunities for all; b) equity as equal treatment for all; and c) equity as equal results for all. In definitions used by international organizations such as OECD and UNESCO the following approaches to equity are found: a) equity in learning opportunities and education results: supporting the disadvantaged; b) equity in compensatory measures for resources: study support; c) equity in access to education: participation in primary, secondary and tertiary education; and d) equity as inclusion (Castelli et al., 2012).

Even with equal distribution of resources and access to them, equity is not guaranteed in all parts of the education path. Research identifies four ways that equity can be applied to education policy and practice (Castelli et al., 2012)

- ▶ Equity of access or equality of opportunity: Do all individuals (or groups of individuals) have the same chance of progressing to a particular level in the education system?
- ▶ Equity in terms of learning environment or equality of means: Do all individuals enjoy equivalent learning conditions?
- ▶ Equity in production or equality of achievement (or results): Do students all master, with the same degree of expertise, skills or knowledge designated as goals of the education system?
- ▶ Equity in utilizing the results of education: Once they have left the education system, do individuals or groups of individuals have the same chances of using their acquired knowledge and skills in employment and wider community life?

2.1. Poverty as a source of inequity
(data and research findings on poverty as the cause of inequity)

Definitions of poverty and low SES. Definition of low SES vary, but in most countries, SES is commonly understood in relation to family income, education level, and occupation, but there are different thresholds. E.g., in North Macedonia low socio-economic status is defined by the Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office as a 'rate of serious material deprivation' and it is presented as a percentage of the population with an enforced lack of at least four out of nine material deprivation items in the 'economic strain and durables' dimension. The nine items considered are: 1) arrears on mortgage or rent payments, utility bills, hire purchase instalments or other loan payments; 2) capacity to afford to pay for one week's annual holiday away from home; 3) capacity to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every other day; 4) capacity to face unexpected financial expenses; 5) household cannot afford a telephone (including mobile phone); 6) household cannot afford a colour TV; 7) household cannot afford a washing machine; 8) household cannot afford a car and 9) ability of the household to pay for keeping its home adequately warm. In other countries like Serbia, in addition to the official definition, low-SES is also defined by indicators of socio-economic status such as educational level and total family income but also includes self-perception i.e., satisfaction with the financial situation of the family or employment status.

Low socio-economic status is referred to in the legislation of all the countries as a protected characteristic based on which a person cannot be discriminated against.

Also, most countries have a definition of poverty related to income and usually, it has several levels. Poverty is defined either by the threshold in monthly income or by the ability to satisfy basic living needs (with income available).

Poverty rates and the population at risk of poverty are presented in the table below (Table 4) in which we see similar patterns of high risk of child poverty across countries. Also, it is visible that Roma, rural population and those with low education levels are most frequently among the population with low SES. Consequences of this can be observed later in life within the same groups in lower enrolment rates, higher dropout and unemployment rates, lack of availability of healthcare services, lack of motivation and ambition, etc.

Although all the reviewed countries are classified as upper-middle-income, poverty is a challenge in all of them and most have adopted strategies or national plans for poverty reduction.

Education is seen as a powerful 'tool' for breaking the circle of poverty and countries undertake different measures in order to increase coverage and attainment of the most disadvantaged population.

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey	OECD average
Poverty rate	39.1%	23%	18% (5.1%[16])	21.6%	7%[17] (23.2%[18])	21.3%[19]	12%
Population at risk	Children, children from Roma and Egyptian communities, children with SEN and children with disabilities, women, rural population	Children, children with SEN and children with disabilities, Roma, children from communities with low SES and those from single-parent households, children from families with three or more children	Rural population, women, children, unemployed, ethnic minorities	Children, Roma, unemployed	Those up to the age of 14 and youth (15–24), multi-person households, rural population, persons living in households where the head of the household has a low education level, and/or unemployed	Refugees, rural population, children, persons with low education level	Children, women, minorities, rural population

Source: For Albania – European Social Policy Network – ESPN Thematic Report on In-work poverty Albania) (Jorgoni, 2019); for Bosnia and Herzegovina – Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2011–12) & Bosnia and Herzegovina, Report on the Situation of Roma Children and Families in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNICEF, 2013); for Kosovo – Kosovo Country Note PISA 2018 Results (OECD, 2019b); for North Macedonia – Standard of Living Laeken poverty indicators in 2019 (Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2020); for Serbia – Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia database; for Turkey – SILC (TURKSTAT, 2020); for OECD average – How's Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being – Highlights (OECD, 2020a)

2.1.1. Main barriers low SES students face in education

Often, when barriers for students with low SES or other disadvantaged groups are discussed, limited access is the first thing analysed. Equitable access is *conditio sine qua non*, but equity in progression and attainment are equally as important and we cannot claim that the education system is equitable unless every student has the same chances for successful completion of the education level.

Barriers in access. All reviewed countries have high coverage with compulsory education, however, the majority of the children who are not enrolled and/or dropped out are from disadvantaged groups, especially Roma, children with SEN and children with disabilities and those with low SES. The current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic additionally aggravated access problems since most countries launched some form

16　Extreme poverty
17　Absolute poverty
18　At risk of poverty
19　According to 60% of median equivalized household disposable income defines the 'at-risk-of-poverty-rate', the poverty rate in Turkey is 21.3%

of online education. Such children may not have access to the devices necessary for online learning, or parents who are able to offer them support, and consequently, they may end up being unable to keep up with their education at home.

Putting aside the current situation with the global pandemic, poverty affects a child's chances of enrolling in several ways. In all countries, it is reported that even with free education prescribed in legislation, there are still significant costs for families regarding textbooks, school materials, transportation, etc. Those are only school-related costs, but extremely poor families struggle to meet basic living needs, so children face a lack of food, clothes, hygiene, and appropriate housing. For some families, this means that the whole family, including the child, has to work to provide a livelihood. Some would send their child to school if they had shoes and clothes. On a system level, many families with low SES do not have personal IDs, health insurance, or legal address which in most systems makes them invisible or unable to exercise basic rights, including those related to education.

On the level of early childhood education and care, which in most countries is not compulsory, the enrolment gap between the extremely poor and general population is even more obvious, as presented in Chapter 1. It is notable that Roma children are less represented in all countries. Also, in some countries children from national minority groups face more challenges in enrolment. This might be caused by reasons other than financial issues, like lack of education provided in a minority language, poor access to information or segregated living.

Barriers in attainment. Barriers in attainment to all education levels are mostly related to insufficient, inadequately targeted and/or poorly managed social assistance to children and families, lack of educational support or lack of dropout prevention mechanisms in school. Even when support measures like meals, clothing and school supplies are provided, they are often not provided systematically. In most countries, local authorities are not obliged to provide full support to families with low SES. In Serbia provision of meals and transportation is obligatory on the primary level but not on secondary, while clothing and school supplies are often distributed by NGOs, or schools organize humanitarian events. The problem with targeting financial social assistance is reported in some countries, like Serbia, where criteria for access to child allowance (ChA) are not comprehensive enough, so many families in need cannot apply for it. Lack of links between centres for social work and schools leads to the situation where school attendance conditionality has not been consistently applied and managed for child allowance beneficiaries. Also, one of the issues mentioned by various stakeholders in Serbia is that financial support is part of a local budget that differs from one LSG to another. I.e., poor LSGs with large numbers of students with low SES often cannot provide more than legally obliged and even then, some are running late with their contributions.

Not all risks of dropping out are related to student background. Some risk factors come from the school environment, quality of teaching and learning and school capacities to mitigate adverse effects of poverty. In deprived regions schools are also facing a lack of funds, so often facilities are in poor condition, and teachers are less motivated to work there, which results in a high turnover or less competent staff. Working with students from deprived families often demands much more than pedagogical skills, since schools become places where they can also satisfy some living needs like getting at least one meal or having a warm place to stay. In poor municipalities sometimes schools cannot provide that kind of support so students with an already low value for education are even less keen on attending school.

Differences in achievement between students from rural and urban environments are very evident in countries like Turkey and Albania and students dropout more often. This is related to a range of factors, including poor teaching quality in rural areas, as well as logistical issues like lack of transportation and distance from home to school which make it harder for students to attend regularly or have additional remedial classes.

One aspect that is highlighted in some countries, like Albania, Kosovo and Serbia, is the lack of parental involvement. Although not of recent date, research conducted in Eastern European countries on the involvement of parents from disadvantaged groups, and especially Roma, (Kovacs-Cerovic et al., 2011) also indicates that these parents are less frequently involved in their child's education and school life. Reasons are multiple, including low educational level and low value for education, lack of school strategy for their involvement, a certain sense of embarrassment because of their poverty, or lack of language skills, working away from home, etc.

Barriers in progression. Countries' related data sets show that transition rates are lower for students with low SES, and especially Roma, than for the general population. In countries where grade repetition is a common practice for underachieving students, it can be highly demotivating for students that already have little value for education and when there is a lack of professional guidance and career counselling often, students fail to stay in school. A decision not to continue education can come from different reasons, but for students with low SES insufficient finances to continue education or the necessity to work full time are very common. Dropping out can also be caused by students missing a lot of lessons and if there are no remedial classes available, they accumulate a knowledge gap that cannot be compensated.

There are also less obvious barriers such as the enrolment process to the next level of education. At the upper secondary level, the academic selection is applied in most education systems, often with different procedures and requirements for different types of schools and programmes (e.g., for enrolment in general programmes requirements are higher than VET). Nevertheless, academic selection poses several challenges. In systems where differences in academic performance are great between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students, selection based on academic achievement may increase differences, especially if selection takes place at an early age. The situation is even more worrying if there is a limited number of places for students to be enrolled, since students with low SES will more likely have worse grades from previous levels and less likely to be able to pay for private tutoring or exam preparation. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, e.g., the findings of the survey by Silova (2010) suggest that private tutoring is not accessible to all students, and approximately 67% of the respondents from the study believe that private tutoring is expensive.

In Serbia, schools are obliged to provide remedial teaching and preparatory classes for graduation exams, but families often opt for additional out-of-school support, and consequently, private tutoring is widespread. In Kosovo, admission to secondary education also depends on the test but schools have an option to choose whether they will provide preparatory classes. In 9.2% of households in Turkey, there is at least one child who participated in either private tutoring or private school in order to have better results in entrance exams, the one after 8th grade that serves as the entrance exam for high schools, and the second one that takes place in the 12th grade and presents a university entrance exam.

In almost all countries, some secondary schools enrol more students from disadvantaged groups. Those are usually VET schools, and in some countries VET programmes that are shorter and/or not in high demand by

the labour market. This has several consequences, and the most common one is dropping out of high school due to the lack of motivation and faith that it can lead to employment.

Secondary education in most countries is free of charge but there are so-called hidden costs related to admission, other than exams and preparation, such as medical exams that are compulsory for some secondary education programmes. E.g., most VET schools provide students with materials needed for practical work, but additional items like safety equipment, uniforms, etc. are often not completely free. Issue of transportation is also prevalent since secondary schools of choice may be located in another city or municipality and families have to pay for monthly tickets themselves.

Systemic/Structural barriers are divided into several groups and more detailed information on each of the structural barriers per country is presented below.

Equity in education financing is not only a matter of how much is invested but also how available funds are distributed. **In Albania,** only 5% of the education budget goes to ECEC, which is around 0.16% of GDP, and it is significantly below the EU average (0.7% of GDP). The consequence of such a low investment in ECEC is that kindergartens in urban centres have insufficient capacity, while kindergartens are almost non-existent in some isolated areas (European Commission, 2019). Based on different data sources, in Albania the percentage of GDP expenditure in education in 2016 was 4.0%, which was lower than the average in the OECD (5.4 %) and the EU (5.1%). Based on 2015 UNESCO data, the share of total government expenditure that Albania allocated to education in 2016 was 13.6%, higher than in the EU (11.8%) and slightly higher than on average in OECD countries (13.2%). Spending in primary education is dominated by teachers' salaries, which make up approximately 96% of total current expenditure in the primary education programme. Spending on non-wage items is extremely limited and may affect the quality of teaching (Save the Children & ISB, 2015).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to Article 44 of the Framework Law on Preschool Education, the competent social welfare authorities are obliged to co-finance or fully finance the costs of preschool education for the following groups of children: children without parental care; children with SEN; children of persons with disabilities; children of civilian victims of the war; children of single parents; children of social welfare beneficiaries; and children of full-time students.

Education is mainly financed from the entity and cantonal budgets, the budget of the Brčko District and municipal budgets, depending on the authority. This means that there are thirteen separate budgets for education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: two at the entity level, one in Brčko District (BD) and ten cantonal budgets (Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2014). Budget planning is performed at the level of the relevant ministries of education, while financing of preschool institutions is mainly at the level of the local communities, except in the Sarajevo Canton and the Brčko District. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, on average, 5% of the gross domestic product (GDP) is allocated to education in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina Federal Statistical Office, 2015), around 4.8% of the GDP in the Republic of Srpska (Republic of Srpska Statistical Office, 2015) and 11.2% in the Brčko District (Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2012) of the overall District budget. About 88% of the cantons' and entities' budgets have been spent on salaries, 8% for maintenance costs, while capital investment amounted to only 4% of the total education budget. Very limited funds are dedicated to improving education quality, professional development of teachers and school equipment.

In Kosovo, under Law No. 02/L-52 on Preschool Education, public preschool institutions are funded by municipalities, which cover costs of maintenance and salaries, whereas parents pay a fee which is determined by the municipality according to a scale, based on family incomes as compared to the average wage. Regarding social care measures directed towards preschool education, children from marginalised groups, including children from families receiving social assistance, children with special educational needs, children without parental care, and children of war veterans are exempted from any payment. In addition, municipalities are obliged to provide a place in preschool institutions and subsidize the children released from payment.

Since education is one of the main priority areas of the government for the coming years in Kosovo it is reflected in the 2018–2020 Medium Term Expenditure Framework – the core document which lists Government's main funding priorities. In this regard, based on the Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law No. 07/L-001 on Budget Appropriations for the Budget of Kosovo for the Year 2020, around 299.5 million EUR or around 11.5% of Kosovo's budget will be allocated for education. Approximately 77% of the budget goes to salaries and allowances, which constitutes the largest category of expenses followed by 9.6 % in goods and services, and 9.2% in capital expenditures.

In North Macedonia, public spending on education and training was 3.7% of GDP in 2019. Government investment in early childhood education and care increased and 1284 additional public preschool places were made available in 2019. However, the overall level of enrolment remains low – only 40.2% of children from 3 to 6 years in North Macedonia were enrolled in early childhood education and care institutions in the 2019/2020 school year (European Commission, 2020).

The provision of financial resources for goods, services and salaries in the public education sector is provided from the budgets of the municipalities that passed the second phase of the decentralization. Until December 2016, 83 out of 84 municipalities in the country completed the transition into the second phase of decentralization. In total, the state budget foresees allocation of around 408 million EUR for the educational sector, which is about 8.5% increase compared to 2016[20]. Funding is focused on the public sector, although there are some examples of support to private providers. It is specifically allocated against the objectives of sectoral programmes.

In Serbia, financing preschool education according to legislation is a local level responsibility, while parents participate with a minimum of 20% in the preschool costs per child enrolled. Exemption from parental contribution is regulated by the legislation in the area of social protection i.e., within the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children. The eligibility criteria are set differently for children with SEN attending the regular preschool group and for the children attending the so-called 'developmental group' – a preschool group that is reserved exclusively for children with SEN.

The level of public expenditure on education in Serbia has always been an issue since it was constantly at around 4–5% of GDP (e.g., 4% of GDP in 2015, and it remains lower than the OECD average (5.3%)) (Maghnouj et al., 2020). The share of total government expenditure allocated to education also remained low and mostly unchanged over the past decade (10% in 2007 and 9% in 2015) similar to OECD countries (12.7% in 2007

20 Data on the internal distribution of the education budget is not available. Since education is funded not only through the education budget line but through other lines as well, it is impossible to arrive at precise information about the education budget distribution.

and 13% in 2015). Financing of the schools in Serbia is based on the number of students/classes, so specific needs of schools are not considered and not addressed accordingly. More than 90% of the ministry's budget goes towards teacher salaries, higher than in neighbouring countries where 70% of recurrent government expenditure goes to salaries. In addition, only 5.7% of total government expenditure is designated for capital spending (Maghnouj et al., 2020).

In Turkey, pre-primary education is compulsory for children with special needs, and the families receive monthly support to cover education and rehabilitation expenses. The Minister of Family Labour and Social Services announced that in 2020, 84,000 children benefited from private kindergartens, day-care, and children's libraries, where more than 3,000 benefited from those free of charge services in 2019. Furthermore, 1,367 children in 2019, and 2,024 children in 2020have enrolled free of charge in private schools for early childhood education (Ministry of Family Labour and Social Services, 2019).

Compared to the OECD countries and economies analysed in Education at a Glance 2019, Turkey has the lowest proportion of public resources allocated for education institutions. Despite this lowest proportion, the spending of education institutions overwhelmingly comes from public resources that constitute 75% of all education spending in Turkey. The total public education budget designated for education is 16.2% of the central administration budget and 3.7% of the gross domestic product (GDP) The economic distribution of MoNE's budget for 2020 shows that the greatest proportion of the budget is allocated for personnel expenses and social security premiums, totalling 84.4%. 1,027,885 people are on the MoNE's payroll (Korlu, 2020). Although this category includes payments to personnel who are not teachers, teachers represent the majority.

In conclusion, it should be underlined that the empirical analysis revealed that a higher public expenditure per student can reduce the student achievement differences between schools which, in turn, reduce the achievement gap between low– and high-achieving students in primary schools (Eurydice, 2020). What is important to note is that higher spending per student does not mean higher spending in general. This highlights the need for a sensitive financing formula that could be adjusted or adapted to specific needs of schools enrolling a higher or lower number of students from disadvantaged groups. For example, in Serbia for many years per capita financing is on standby and 90% of the budget is used for salaries while the rest is distributed only based on the number of classes in school. The funding formula is not sensitive to specific school needs which makes it hard for schools to ensure adequate support to students. For instance, vocational schools have additional needs for purchasing materials that would enable them to do the practical learning at school. Similarly, schools that provide services for children with special educational needs, have specific demands which also need to be considered. Talking in their interviews about measures taken at the school level to support children from low SES families, school representatives reported that the lack of budget and inability to manage budget limits their ability to organise activities or undertake measures to support children from low SES families, such as the organization of extra-curricular activities, support with school materials, or other needs. As a result, schools' governing boards collect voluntary contributions from parents, which are then disbursed to children in need, used to purchase additional school material, or cover expenses for extracurricular activities (e.g., school excursions).

What is very common in all countries is that majority of the education budget is spent on teacher salaries and general maintenance costs.

School network is one of the structural elements that affect equity in education in the way that it is closely linked to access to education. The school location, transportation, profiles/programmes offer, the quality of education the school is offering, enrolment and admissions criteria, educational support, and even tuition fees applicable, are all important factors to be considered when deciding on the selection of the school. For poor families, any of these things can mean that the child will drop out of school or will not even be enrolled. When it comes to primary education in Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Albania students are assigned, at least in the initial/application phase, to schools based on geographical/residence criteria (usually according to the home address). In a situation where students have to travel to more distant schools due to lack of available places in the nearest school or have chosen another school in a different municipality, in case free transportation is not provided, lower SES families face significant monthly costs. In Turkey, different rules apply to government-dependent private schools and some public-school types. Turkish model of government-dependent private schools is interesting because it ensures some form of quality assurance for private providers but also allows for diversified offers. Under this approach, the government can contract education colleges and education unions for more effective management. The private sector can also provide educational materials such as textbooks, and operate buildings, canteen services, and transportation services. In addition, if governments enact good regulations that include a core curriculum and transparency of administration, religious groups, diverse cultural groups, and some organisations can build and operate schools. In this way, they can share the educational cost of governments and meet the needs for diversity in society (Cinoglu, 2006).

Policy coordination among sectors is a weak link in all countries. This lack of cross-sectoral cooperation between sectors of vital importance for equity, such as social, education and health sector, decrease the efficiency of support or prevention measures for students and families. Schools as institutions do not have jurisdictions or 'tools' to address all problems students face and often run out of legal instruments they can use to make sure that children stay in school. It also makes data collection and exchange less efficient and relevant, which consequently makes policy implementation monitoring less reliable. Poor information exchange especially hinders the timeliness of interventions. Police and medical centres are also important partners, since children from deprived families are more often victims of domestic violence or abuse than the general population, so the exchange of information between these sectors can determine whether a child gets appropriate support or not. However, in some countries (reported in Serbia and Turkey), there are local action plans in place targeting poverty reduction or antidiscrimination aimed at creating synergy among sectors.

Lack of timely and accessible information refers to the fact that although support measures or policies are in place, this does not mean that it is sufficient to implement them in order to ensure their effectiveness. Many materially deprived families, with low or no education, lack the basic competencies to go through administrative procedures needed for acquiring social welfare assistance. Many of them lack personal documents or are not aware of the options offered. In most countries, participants in this research agree that information on available support should be clear and accessible in places that are most likely visited by such persons/families. This means that information regarding health, social welfare, and education should not be available only in one type of institutions that are part of the specific sector but in all relevant institutions, i.e., in social welfare centres, medical centres and educational institutions, places which are the most frequented by families. Lack of appropriate information often leaves poor children without meals or material support that could be available.

Indirect discrimination is often present and not addressed. As discussed in the previous chapter, sometimes equal treatment creates inequalities. Many school practitioners fear that they will be judged by other parents or colleagues for treating students differently even if there is a justified reason. Insufficient education of school staff on different forms of discrimination and how to address harmful attitudes or stereotypes can be detrimental to any good equity measure. Such situations also frequently occur when it comes to the education of national minorities or migrants since there are examples that the general population is against providing special conditions for enrolment or attainment for these students. Indirect discrimination may be observed also in terms of non-inclusive curriculum, and insufficient representation of different groups within the teaching force.

2.2. Policies and practices promoting equity

This chapter examines policy measures and school practices that target to reduce inequity and enable inclusion in each country and discusses the extent to which they are effective.

In more concrete terms, recent reform initiatives aiming at reducing inequity in each project country will be investigated firstly, followed by analysis of the different ways educational content is constructed.

To explore support provided to teachers working with students from marginalized groups, a part of this section of the report will be dedicated to the professional development of teachers. Thereafter, provision of financial/material support measures as well as the support provided to students with SEN and students with disabilities will be studied.

The final part will examine how multilingualism is handled in the educational practices of the project countries.

2.2.1. Recent changes in policy

In Albania, the Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities (2016–2020) (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2016) as well as the Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians (2015–2020) (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2016) are important reform elements accompanied by additional practical initiatives, including the establishment of multi-disciplinary commissions in each education office, appointment and increased number of assistant teachers in the schools where there are children with special needs, and increased number of psycho-social services employees in schools who offer additional support to various marginalized groups, pedagogical staff and parents.

Furthermore, the establishment of an identification mechanism of out-of-school children and enforcement of their registration: provision of free textbooks to children from marginalized groups at all levels of pre-university education and all children from 1st to 7th grade are positive initiatives aiming at reducing inequality.

These policy measures and initiatives have improved access to education and raised students' learning outcomes, as shown by the results of PISA 2018 compared to previous ones. However, educational attainment and performance continue to be strongly influenced by students' background characteristics. Equity is still a concern, with continued disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes relative to ethnic background and geographical region, which limit the employment and life chances of many individuals and negatively affect national development (Maghnouj et al., 2020).

Also, securing equity requires a more strategic investment in the successful implementation of current policies and initiatives toward quality educational opportunities for all children through the improvement of institutional inter-sectoral cooperation, enhancement of human capacity and financial resources, and strengthening coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted four state-level frameworks related to equity in education. The Framework Action Plan on the Educational Needs of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period from 2018 to 2022 was adopted at the 155th session of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, held in September 2018. Before that, in 2017, the Council of Ministers adopted the Platform for the Development of Preschool Education for 2017–2022. This is the first state-level strategic framework in education to be adopted in the last few years, and it harmonizes preschool education policies with international standards.

Framework Law for Preschool Education adopted in 2007, envisages for the first time free compulsory preschool education in the year before starting school (Article 16). Having in mind extremely low access to preschool education for children from low SES, this law makes it possible to overcome, at least to a certain extent, the difference in terms of opportunities for acquiring the necessary competencies between children from rural and urban areas, and children from high and low SES families. The implementation of this legislation has been very slow, but for the recent positive trend regarding the enrolment of children five years of age in the obligatory preparatory preschool programme. According to the UNICEF estimation for the school year 2018/19, the proportion increased from 31% in 2011/2012 to 54% in 2016/2017, and an estimated 78% in 2018/2019.

In North Macedonia, one of the most significant innovative measures introduced in the last 20 years was the increase in the duration of compulsory education. As of 2008, education is mandatory from the beginning of primary to the end of secondary education. The decision to introduce compulsory secondary education for all children had a positive impact on progression rates from primary into secondary education, which rose to, as reported by the State Statistical Office, 95% in 2011, as well as on the decrease in the attrition/drop-out rates in primary education to 1.37%, and in secondary education to 2.26% in 2017.[21] This decrease in drop-out rates was expected, taking into account the supplements and amendments to the Law on Secondary Education that provide penalties for parents who do not ensure their children's regular attendance in secondary education and also the introduction of positive measures for supporting at-risk groups, including free transportation, scholarships, and free textbooks.

The current National Strategy for Education (MoES, 2018) envisages a further increase in the duration of mandatory education by making the final year of preschool education (age group 5–6 years) compulsory. This reform should help increase the coverage of children in preschool education thus helping children acquire basic competencies before they enter primary school.

The government has introduced several initiatives for encouraging more equitable education of different ethnic groups. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) adopted the Concept for Intercultural Education (2016), which is a normative document aimed at promoting diversity in education and cooperated with USAID (2017–2022) in strengthening interethnic integration, by improving curricula and textbooks, and renovating schools. The most targeted group in the past were Roma, as the most marginalized population group,

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21 The drop-out rate is recorded as students who have officially left school, i.e., withdrawn their documents in the course of a school year.

whose low SES exerts a dominant and adverse effect on the educational participation of Roma children and youth and the quality of their lives. To this end, the state signed in 2005 the Declaration for joining the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*, thus committing itself to paying due attention to improving the participation rates of Roma in the country's social and economic life by introducing measures for improving their education, employment, health care and housing measures. The measures defined within the Roma Decade are still in force and implementation and have been augmented by additional ones.

Kosovo has a legal framework that aims to ensure education equity. The provision of education to all students regardless of race, ethnicity, family income, and ability is stipulated in all education laws and bylaws. The Curriculum Framework approved in August 2016, also, addresses the needs of all students.

Moreover, intending to integrate students with special needs in mainstream classrooms, in 2014 the Ministry of Education adopted Administrative Instruction No.24/2014 on the conversion of specialised classrooms to resource rooms. Resource rooms within mainstream schools serve for individual work with students with special educational needs, as well as provide other resources for their successful integration in mainstream classes.

Administrative Instruction No. 19/2018 on Establishment and Functioning of Learning Centres determines the criteria and procedures for the establishment, functioning and financing of the Learning Centres which provide additional learning support and organize different educational activities for children who need them. The first learning centres were established in 2001 and, in two decades, their number increased to around 80. Learning centres mainly operate in settlements where Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian live, or in schools attended by students from those communities. In most cases, the learning centres are run by grassroots civil society organizations and funded by international donors. The Government of Kosovo has recognized the role of learning centres in narrowing the education gap between Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians and other communities in Kosovo.

In Serbia, since 2009 the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (LoFES) has provided the legal framework for inclusive education by introducing easier school enrolment procedures, affirmative actions for those from 'vulnerable groups', and defined additional support for all the students that might need it. In the context of the law, inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to a diversity of needs of all children, youth, and adults through increasing participation in learning and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. The same approach to education is evident in all the bylaws and strategic documents directly or indirectly addressing education.

Regarding the various measures introduced, it is worth noting that affirmative actions for enrolment of Roma students in secondary schools have been fully regulated by law since 2017 and their application has shown good results – the number of Roma students at the level of secondary education is increasing every year. Also, the introduction of pedagogical assistants in the education system took place, i.e. persons that work with Roma and other students that need additional educational support by assisting teachers, pre-school educators and psychologists/pedagogues in deciding on proper support measures for students and providing them.

Turkey has an ever-changing education policy context, where many reforms and changes in various aspects of the education system are always underway. Reforms and projects related to girls' education, expanding mandatory education to 12 years, changes in the national placement exams for transition between educa-

tion levels, emphasis on early childhood education during the recent years, along with the introduction of the tuition support incentive system to increase the share of the private sector in education are factors that have influenced equity in education. Increasing the compulsory education duration contributed positively to school enrolment rates of both boys and girls. However, the enrolment rates at primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education levels still have not reached 100%. Furthermore, the intermittent structure, which allowed specialization in religious or vocational and technical education at early ages, was criticized by many stakeholders of education on the basis that transition age was too young and that it could lead to increasing inequalities in education.

The MoNE introduced a preschool education programme in 2009. Turkey's Tenth Development Plan 2014–2018 set the target for the preschool enrolment rates of the three– to five-year-old at 70% (Batrya, 2017). The MoNE aimed for the same rate of enrolment in the 2015–2019 Strategic Plan (ERI, 2019). Other higher level policy documents, such as the Medium-Term Programmes 2017–2019 and 2018–2020, New Economy Programme 2020–2022 (Medium Term Programme), and Turkey's Education Vision 2023, also included goals to increase the preschool education enrolment rates. Although preschool education enrolment rates have been increasing, they are still below the set objectives and the OECD averages. The importance of early childhood education and its relationship to socio-economic status, both as a contributing factor and as being affected by it, is increasingly acknowledged (ERI, 2019). Therefore, the issue must gain salience and priority in policymaking.

The School Profile Assessment plan was announced in March 2019 (MoNE, 2019a) and it aims to reduce inequalities between schools, ensure a holistic improvement of the school system throughout the country, and contribute to data-driven decision-making processes (MoNE, 2019b). The Assessment consists of monitoring, evaluation, and support stages, and focuses on 1) academic achievement, 2) social, sports, and cultural activities, 3) projects, 4) institutional capacity, through evaluating approximately 50 indicators (MoNE, 2019b). After a school's profile is determined, an action plan for improvement needs to be created and implemented by school principals and teachers, with 'improvement teams' joining at a later stage.

2.2.2. Educational content

Analysis of policies and practices in the project countries reveals that educational content, when adapted to the diverse needs of students, is one of the crucial components which contribute to the reduction of inequity. Therefore, the following section will first review the policies and practices related to the curricular aspect of inclusion. In this regard, the flexibility of the curriculum and the autonomy of teachers to adapt the curriculum to the needs of students become crucial. Hence, the matter of an inclusive curriculum will be explored in relation to the issues of autonomy and flexibility. Finally, it is worth mentioning that delivering the content through supplementary classes may serve as a basic strategy with a considerable potential for enabling inclusion. Thus, in the final part of the section, we will briefly touch upon some country-specific data on supplementary classes.

2.2.2.1. Inclusion in curriculum

In Albania, schools play an active role in developing and adapting the curriculum and environment to students' needs. Within their pedagogic autonomy, teachers are in charge of defining the teaching methods in the classroom, according to the set pedagogic principles. They also decide on teaching and learning materi-

als and didactic resources. Teachers can make their own methodical and didactical decisions, by respecting both the agreements made at the school level and requirements established by relevant education authorities (Eurydice, 2020b).

Although Albania's Curricular and Assessment Framework, which guides teaching and learning, emphasizes that schools have some flexibility in implementation and that they can adapt the curriculum according to the needs of the students up to 10%. Field data gathered from teachers and school principals as part of the ARISE Project reveals that this 10% of adaptation generally includes postponing or switching two topics when more time is needed for a certain topic or adding additional hours. This kind of adjustment is not sufficient on its own to address the needs of students with lower achievements.

The new competency-based curriculum and current educational goals require a total transformation from a teacher-centred to a child-centred teaching and learning approach that gives more space and opportunities to students and is based on the belief that each student can succeed if provided with the needed support. This is accompanied by the new evaluation framework, which assesses student progress and makes possible identification of their needs, helping the teacher in an adjustment of teaching and learning programmes and providing better support to all students, especially students from lower SES families. Individual support to students is provided through Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the school as a public institution organises educational work according to the prescribed curricula adopted by the cantonal/entity/BD Ministry of Education on the proposal of the Pedagogical Institute and aligned with the Common Core Curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The school ensures the implementation of prescribed curricula, while the 'amount' of adapted content in each subject can be up to 20%, with previous MoE approval. Although teachers are free to choose teaching approaches, methods and strategies, they are obliged to deliver prescribed curriculum content.

Within the Common Core Curriculum, implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and respect for diversity among children is important. The implementation of the principles is achieved by providing equal opportunities for the full and optimal development of each child, without discrimination on any basis. In doing so, children's differences in development and learning are taken into account. The objectives of the Common Core Curriculum include ensuring optimal conditions for each child that will allow the full development and enjoyment of the rights of each child following the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The document states that inclusion is a pedagogical, social and psychological process of engaging all students. Presenting diversity as quality is the basis for inclusive work, but this principle is not reflected in the curriculum. Culturally diverse curricula could promote pride in cultural differences and make minority students feel more accepted and equal in school.

In Kosovo, Curriculum Framework (KCF) (MES, 2016) along with core curricula for each ISCED level is developed by the Ministry of Education in close cooperation with other education stakeholders, including municipal education directorates, schools, NGOs, and other partners. In addition, based on the law for pre-university education in Kosovo, the core curriculum and school curriculum are integral parts of KCF, which in turn serves as a basis for the development of the subject program. Following this, educational institutions, both state-funded and private have the autonomy to develop their school-based curriculum and subject program to enable the development of student competencies as determined by the curriculum and ensure its proper implementation at the school level. Nevertheless, according to Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-Universi-

ty Education in the Republic of Kosovo (2011), the school-based curriculum must be in accordance with the core curriculum developed at the national level. In practice due to the lack of capacities at the school level (state-funded education institutions), both school-based curriculum and subjects' program are developed by the Ministry.

As already mentioned, the Curriculum Framework of Kosovo, with its competency-based approach, has crucial importance in enabling equity as it aims to address the needs of all students. It shifts the focus from the pure acquisition of knowledge through content-based learning to the development of several competencies that enable students to creatively use their acquired skills to solve practical problems in daily life.

Also, individual education plans are prepared based on student/children needs.

In North Macedonia, as the country is in the process of decentralisation, governance in education is still centralized to a high degree. Education policies are the responsibility of Parliament and the Government through the Ministry of Education and Science. Ministry's responsibilities include the adoption of subject programmes and curricula and the approval of textbooks. Within this context, the curriculum is predefined, and teacher autonomy is limited to the methods applied in class. Although the curriculum is defined at the national level, curricula and subject programmes for secondary education may also be proposed by the schools themselves, as well as enterprises, institutions or certain associations, in order to meet their requirements. Students with special needs follow an adapted curriculum. Also, as previously mentioned, the Concept for Intercultural Education, published by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2016 is relevant as it aims to promote diversity in education by improving curricula and textbooks. The goals of intercultural education should initiate the changing and upgrading of upbringing and educational practice in North Macedonia through a personal and institutional transformation as a basis for wider social changes in the future, through the building of educational policies and strategies for equal opportunities for all in the field of upbringing and educational activity; assuring the rights of each individual in the context of cultural diversity; promoting tolerance, mutual trust, respect, equality and non-discrimination in multicultural communities and environments; enabling social participation of each individual in the intercultural community; fostering dialogue between upbringing and educational entities of different ethnic, gender, social, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds; achieving social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (Nansen Dijalog Centar Skopje, 2018; Muray, 2018).

In Serbia, the subject curriculum (i.e., subject plan and programme) is centrally determined. Institute for the Improvement of Education is responsible for the development of each of the subject's plan and program, through organizing expert working groups, while the National Education Council and Council for VET and Adult Education have an advisory role before MoESTD makes a final decision on a subject plan and program adoption. According to PISA 2012 data, 61 % of school principals in Serbia reported that educational content is determined completely on a central level, compared to 24% across OECD countries. According to TALIS 2013, school principals state that they have limited autonomy for determining educational content and curriculum (51,3%) (OECD, 2014).

Teachers can choose textbooks and other materials but are also limited by plans and programmes for each subject. They can adapt content to a certain extent, while teaching methods can be chosen freely to fit the needs of students with Individual Education Plan (IEP).

There is a National Curriculum Framework – as the foundation of teaching and learning, and plan and programme for each school subject.

For students with learning difficulties or high ability learners, teachers need to produce individual plans: IEP1 (adapted work programme), IEP2 (modified work programme) and IEP3 (enhanced and expanded programmes for high ability learners). Within IEP1 the change usually refers to the teaching material or conditions in which learning is organized (learning in Brail, making sure that child has relevant assistive technology, light adjustments etc.). For IEP2 curriculum/ plan and programme are amended as well as outcomes of education for one or more subjects. IEP3 includes additional lessons or activities in some subjects or faster progression.

The whole education process in Serbia is implemented in Serbian and other eight languages of most represented national minority communities (Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovakian). Students can choose if they want to be educated in Serbian or in their mother tongue language. Students who are members of national minorities and receive education in the Serbian language can attend the elective programme 'Mother tongue with elements of national culture', while if studying in their mother-tongue language they can attend classes of Serbian as non-mother-tongue language. Serbian students who attend education in Serbian but live in environments with a high representation of national minorities may attend classes of the so-called language of the environment.

For migrant children, Serbian as a foreign language is offered.

In Turkey, the curriculum is prepared centrally by the MoNE. The textbooks and school programmes are prepared by the Board of Education (BoE). Teachers are expected to follow the curriculum content closely without major changes. However, it is possible to differentiate teaching strategies to meet the needs of the students in the classroom. In schools, IEPs are developed for children with special needs in close cooperation between the principal, parent, teachers, and school counsellor who determine the need of the child and make a study plan accordingly. According to the TALIS 2018 findings, teachers' impact on designing the curriculum is very limited in Turkey. Only 4.3% of lower secondary principals, in comparison to 41.8% in OECD average, believe that teachers in Turkey have an impact on school policies, curriculum, and instruction.

2.2.2.2. Supplementary classes

Supplementary classes, which function as compensatory measures exist in all the reviewed countries and are implemented in more or less different modalities. **In Bosnia and Herzegovina,** for instance, schools are obliged to provide additional classes and support for children with low achievement. In a broader sense, support for students with low SES is often provided by other parents individually or through the Parents' Council, or with support from the municipality or community. These support activities are usually initiated by the school. Similarly, **in Albania,** each school is expected to provide additional support to students with learning difficulties or low achievement including various marginalized groups through extra after-school consultation hours, and additional extra-curricular or after-school activities. **In North Macedonia,** on the other hand, it is left to the teacher's initiative to provide any additional support to students they see as needing extra assistance. **In Serbia,** full-time teachers work 40 hours per week, and along with other activities their work assumes remedial teaching that is organized per subject and per grade. It is pretty much the same in the **Kosovo** education system – supplementary classes are prescribed by legislation and such classes are to be organised and implemented for students who need additional support. Nevertheless, CSO

representatives who participated in interviews within the ARISE project emphasised that this practice is not common in all Kosovo schools, that it depends greatly on the willingness and motivation of teachers and that there is no regular monitoring on behalf of school management, local or central authorities if supplementary classes are conducted.

The situation is different in **Turkey** since there are three types of supplementary classes: Remedial Education Programme, Orientation/Compliance Classes, and Support and Education Courses. The Remedial Education Programme was first implemented nationwide in the 2018–2019 academic year. The programme is open to both Turkish and refugee children and aims to improve the basic literacy and numeracy skills of students in the 3rd grades (Ministry of Family and Social Policy, 2017; ERI, 2018). Implemented in 2019, the Orientation/Compliance Classes primarily seek to increase the Turkish language proficiency of children and integrate Syrian children into the Turkish education system (MoNE, 2019c). Depending on their need for language support, students are referred to orientation classes for one or two semesters and transferred back following the completion. Support and Education Courses are operated by school administrations and overseen by the MoNE. Students in 7th, 8th, 11th, and 12th grades of lower and upper secondary schools, as well as the graduates of formal and open education institutions, can be enrolled in these courses (MoNE,2020a). Support and Education Courses were offered in a wide range from English to Music until the 2020–2021 academic year. However, the Court of Accounts criticized this wide range of courses, stating that their primary objective is the preparation for the entrance exams for upper secondary schools and universities (Court of Accounts, 2020) Following the 2020–2021 academic year, it is expected that the range of courses will be narrowed down to include only courses relevant for entrance exams (MoNE, 2020a). Students will select courses based on their needs. For these courses, students or their parents do not make any financial contributions, and teachers receive additional service points as well as economic contributions (MoNE, 2019a). Field data gathered as part of the ARISE Project shows that teachers see these courses as beneficial and crucial for students with low SES background, especially in the preparation process for entrance exams. Also, additional points granted to teachers make the courses attractive for teachers.

An example of NGO-based supplementary classes existed **in Kosovo**. Namely, there are so-called Learning Centres established (and until recently managed) by NGOs with the support of international donors that are aiming to provide help to children with low achievement and children from marginalized groups, in particular children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Learning Centres can be either community-based or school-based and provide different types of additional learning support and educational activities for children in need, e.g., preschool programmes for children aged 3 to 5, additional learning classes, help with homework, etc. Along with such education-related activities, the centres are implementing different social activities. A recent positive step, which was also praised by participants in the field research, was development and the adoption of the Administrative Instruction No.19/2018 on Establishment and Functioning of the Learning Centres, which recognizes the work of Learning Centres in improving academic performance and school attendance of their beneficiaries, and regulates the process of their establishment, management and sustainable funding. In this regard, there is consent among the education community that Learning Centres have played a major role not only in improving participation of children at all levels of education but also their school performance, and that they represent really good practice example. Nonetheless, until recently, Learning Centres have operated mainly through donor financial support, which was not sustainable. Although some measures have been taken towards the implementation of this by-law, central authorities

have not allocated a budget for such means, which highly impacted the functioning of the Learning Centres. Currently, due to the lack of funds, many of them are not operational.

Table 5: Section summary – Curriculum and Supplementary classes

Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey
Curricular and Assessment Framework gives autonomy and allows flexibility to schools to draft their curriculum. Competency-based curriculum: child-centred approach Enables identification of students' needs, adjustment of teaching and learning programmes to meet the needs of all students. Provision of individual attention through Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and multi-disciplinary support. **Supplementary classes:** Extra after-school consultation hours, additional extra-curricular or after-school activities.	The school ensures the implementation of prescribed curricula. The amount of specific content in each subject can be up to 20% with MoE approval. **Supplementary classes:** Schools are obliged to provide additional classes and support for children with low achievement.	Educational institutions have the autonomy to develop their school-based curriculum and subject syllabi as long as they do not deviate from the core curriculum developed at the national level, but in state schools, common practice is that both school-based curriculum and subject syllabi are developed by the Ministry. The competency-based approach has crucial importance in enabling equity as it aims to address the needs of all students. **Supplementary classes:** Supplementary classes are prescribed by legislation and such classes are to be organized and implemented for students who need additional support, but in practice, implementation depends on the willingness and motivation of teachers. Learning Centres are established by NGOs with the support of international donors to provide help to children with low achievement and to improve participation and school performance.	The curriculum is defined at the national level. Curricula for secondary education may be proposed by the schools themselves. Students with special needs follow an adapted curriculum. The concept of Intercultural Education aims to promote diversity in education by improving curricula and textbooks. **Supplementary classes:** It is up to teachers to decide if the provision of additional support to students is needed.	Centrally determined, but methods of implementation are up to teachers. According to PISA 2012, 61% of school principals in Serbia reported that course content is determined completely on a central level, compared to 24% across OECD countries. There are legally prescribed three types of IEP intended for students that need additional support in education as well as for talented students. **Supplementary classes:** Within working hours of teachers, remedial teaching is mandatory, and it is organized per subject and per grade.	Prepared centrally by the Ministry. In schools, IEPs are developed in close cooperation between principal, parent, teachers, and school counsellor who determine the need of the child and make a study plan accordingly. Teachers have little impact on school policies and curriculum. **Supplementary classes:** The Remedial Education Programme is open to both Turkish and refugee children and aims to improve the basic literacy and numeracy skills of students in 3rd grades. Orientation and Compliance Classes seek to increase Turkish language proficiency and integrate Syrian children into the Turkish education system. Support and Education Course. mainly prepares students for the university entrance exams. Additional points granted to teachers make the courses attractive for teachers.

A common practice in Albania and Kosovo is the competency-based curriculum which has considerable importance in enabling equity. Individual education plans in Albania, Serbia and Turkey are yet another enabling tool as they tailor the educational content to meet the diverse needs of students. The degree of autonomy granted to schools and their staff varies in project countries, although autonomy is an important

factor in promoting equity. In parallel, the capacity of schools needs to be increased as well for the school autonomy to be carried out. Finally, supplementary classes that exist in different forms in all the countries are important for ensuring equity while specific examples in Kosovo and Turkey serve also as useful tools in meeting the needs of students who are otherwise left behind.

2.2.2.3. Professional development of teachers

As is well known, teachers have a key role in organising the daily practices in the school to support students coming from marginalised groups and thereby contribute to developing social justice and inclusion (Pantic & Florian, 2015). This points to the importance of teachers' professional knowledge and skills, as it is fundamental for teachers to become professionally equipped in meeting the diverse needs of students. Consequently, presented below in this section is a review of various practices of professional development of teachers, as well as an illustration of how the project countries incorporate issues related to inclusion in their training content.

Albania has made important efforts to improve teaching quality, including updating teaching and teacher professional development standards, raising entry requirements and working toward the standardization of curriculum content for certain Initial Teacher Education programmes, implementing a state exam for new entrants to the teaching profession, and establishing Professional Learning Networks (PLN) (OECD, 2020b). PLNs, according to the guidelines developed by Institute for Education Development, are established by Regional Education Directorates or Local Education Offices (RED/LEO) in the geographical area that they cover aiming at: the professional development of the educational staff through information and consultation regarding innovations and developments in the reforms of pre-university education; training of network members on topics related to their needs; exchange of positive and successful experiences among network members on topics of their every-day work, although not yet directly focused on issues of supporting students with low SES. As stated by a school practitioner during the field research carried out as part of the ARISE project, trainings organized by PLN are based on the needs of new teachers especially and they are mainly focused on scientific content. Even though these training seminars support everyday teaching, they fall short in contributing to teachers' professional development in the areas of inclusive teaching methods and/or effective strategies of supporting students with low SES. In short, more efforts and investments are needed as, among other things, there is still a need for improvement of the quality of teachers, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas (OECD, 2020b).

In Albania, teachers are obliged to participate in continuous professional development (CPD) through in-service teacher training organized in various forms (seminars, horizontal learning, workshops). These training seminars include the scientific content related to subjects' and curricula content, although there is no information if education equity is specifically covered. However, inclusive education-related topics are addressed in some schools through different projects. Regarding the financing of in-service teacher training, it comes from the individual contributions of those employed in educational institutions, state budget, projects of local and foreign non-profit organizations, foundations, institutions and other legal sources, as the budget allocated to teacher training is insufficient to meet the needs. During the group interviews, school principals and teachers stated that they usually had to pay for training themselves. Free training for teachers is offered by NGOs in the framework of different projects. Also, PLN offers free training which focuses on the curricula, teaching methods and the assessment of students. The Local Education Office encourages professional networks to be as effective as possible.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina,** in line with the Framework Law and all other laws on education, teachers have the right and obligation to attend in-service training. However, apart from programmes on the inclusion of children with special needs, there are no training programmes directly related to inequality, neither in pre-service nor in-service training. In-service teacher training seminars organised by the pedagogical institutes are financed through canton, entity and BD Government funds. Therefore, the amounts and allocation of funds vary significantly. Although the laws and by-laws prescribe that expenses of mandatory in-service training shall be borne by the founder, it does not guarantee that the funds will be allocated from the budget. Pedagogical institutes manage to obtain some funds for the organisation of mandatory in-service training, but those funds are rarely sufficient. Some training programmes implemented by the pedagogical institutes are financed by international organisations, agencies and other donors.

The obligation of professional development of teaching staff in the field of educational inclusion is also defined by the regulations on the upbringing and education of students with special educational needs, but none of them defines the scope or type of professional development.

According to education laws, all details about the procedures and the implementation of in-service teacher training are to be defined through by-laws passed by ministries of education/ Department for Education of the Brcko District. While several cantons have not yet adopted separate by-laws on in-service teacher training, the ones already adopted differ considerably, and general specific requirements, such as a number of mandatory hours or procedures for accreditation of training programs, etc., have not been defined. Some rules were adopted more than a decade ago, which indicates that the prescribed procedures and practices in the field of in-service teacher training have not significantly changed.

In Kosovo, actors interviewed during the field research stress the importance of the role of teachers in the classroom and state that there is a need for continuous improvement of teaching practices through teachers' professional development programmes. They add that this is critically important in achieving equitable outcomes as it not only enables teachers to acknowledge student identities but also raises awareness about different ways students learn best.

In-service teacher training seminars are usually provided by NGOs but without a cohesive plan of action. This has resulted in a fragmented understanding and practices of inclusive education. In-service training programmes include, but are not limited to the following: 'Inclusive Education'; 'Education for Social Justice'; 'Multicultural and Multi-ethnic Education; 'Education for Democracy and Human Rights 'Inclusion and Teaching for Students with Special Needs'; 'Inclusion of Children in Pre-Primary Education'; and 'Individual Education Plan'. There is no information on whether teachers must complete certain training programmes on inclusion. Even though the process of teacher professional development is regulated with primary and secondary education-related legislation its implementation in practice remains a challenge. Moreover, training programmes have not been evaluated and prioritized based on teachers' needs and in alignment with four career stages (e.g., career teacher; advanced teacher; mentor teacher and merit teacher).

In North Macedonia, strengthening the quality of teachers has been constantly at the focus of education policies. Several initiatives have been implemented related to the development of standards of teacher competencies (most notably in initial teacher training), systems for career advancement and systems for teacher support and assessment. Teachers are expected to participate in at least 60 hours of professional development over three years, but due to limited funding, this does not take place in practice.

According to the legislation, the Bureau for Education Development (BED) is responsible for in-service training. The BED has the mandate to assess teacher needs for training, organize, and deliver teacher training. In addition, they provide ongoing monitoring and support to the implementation of reforms in schools. The capacities and the budget for this type of support are limited in terms of insufficient staff and funding allocated by the Ministry. Such activities are therefore to a large extent supported by donors. The topic of social inclusion is part of professional in-service training organized at the national and/or regional level. Moreover, since 2012, the Teacher Professional and Career Development Project, (USAID, 2014) which aims at upgrading and improving the Teacher Professional and Career Development (TPCD), is being carried out. The Project defines three levels of career development of teachers: teacher, teacher-mentor, and teacher advisor. Sets of competencies have been developed for all three types of teachers that should be achieved through initial and/or in-service education and training. The basic professional competencies for teachers are grouped in a wide range of areas, including: 'familiarity of the students and meeting student needs'; 'social and educational inclusion'; 'communication and cooperation with the family and community; 'professional development and professional collaboration', which all serve to cater for the diverse needs of students.

In Serbia, CPD is recognized as one of the elements that contribute to education quality and all teachers are obliged to participate in CPD. Teachers are required to complete 64 hours of continuous professional development per year – 44 hours conducted within the school and 20 hours conducted outside the school that are accredited by the Institute for Improvement of Education (IIE) – Centre for Professional Development of Employees in Education. An hour of attending professional training has the value of a point.

It is in the competence of the school to adopt an annual CPD plan for the staff and integrate it into the school's annual work plan. Also, this plan should be harmonized with the so-called School Development Plan and the results of self-evaluation and external evaluation of the institution.

Local self-government provides funds for CPD. However, these funds are insufficient, and as a consequence different projects at the local and national level often cover these costs, but this can affect which training will be offered.

The priority areas for CPD are set by the Minister. Currently, one of the priority areas is related to the work with children with SEN or children with disabilities. Participation in CPD is one of the criteria for teachers' career advancement. Teachers and schools keep a record on the number of credits earned in a 5 years period by a teacher, and if he/she is eligible for career advancement school provides this record as evidence. In a 5 years period, teachers should achieve at least 100 points attending various forms of CPD, but at least 80 points out of 100 should be from accredited professional development training programmes.

Finally, the Network for Support of Inclusive Education, composed of 120 practitioners and experts for inclusive education, covers the entire territory of Serbia. The Network fosters horizontal learning as a platform to disseminate best practice and peer learning as well as establishing communities of practice.

In Turkey, teachers in public schools have to participate in professional training for four weeks throughout the year. There are voluntary in-service training programmes carried out by the MoNE as well. These professional and in-service training programmes are organized centrally and funded by the MoNE's budget. Additionally, there are some in-service programmes carried out in provincial directorates as well. For certain projects, funding from international organisations such as UN organisations might be utilized.

The curricula of education faculties include elective courses related to inclusive education, poverty, and inequality. Novice teacher training programme, which all teachers appointed by the MoNE have to attend,

includes topics related to cultural pluralism, and inclusion of children with special needs. In-service teacher training provided by the MoNE includes a module on inclusive education. Also, teacher training programmes targeting village teachers are part of the project carried out in collaboration with Sabancı Foundation and KODA (Village Schools Transformation Network) and aim to contribute to the solution of the problem relating to the educational attainment of children, which is exacerbated in rural areas due to the frequent rotation of teachers. The primary objective of the project is to reach 7,000 teachers working in multi-grade classrooms in villages and improve the professional skills of teachers (MoNE, 2019c). One-on-one interviews carried out with parents as part of the ARISE project point out the education inequality between rural and urban areas, and this highlights the importance of the project even more clearly.

Table 6: Section summary – Professional development of teachers

Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey
Teachers are obliged to participate in CPD. Content mainly focuses on subject related matters and not on inclusion or supporting students with low SES. The topic of inclusive education has been developed in some schools through different projects. Training is generally not free of charge although there are some provided by NGOs and PLNs that are.	Teachers are obliged to attend in-service training. Only programmes about the inclusion of children with special needs. Although mandatory, in practice there is no guarantee that the funds will be allocated from the budget. Some training programmes implemented by the pedagogical institutes are financed by international organisations, agencies and other donors.	Teacher professional development is regulated with primary and secondary education-related legislation but there is a gap between policy and practice. A critical role of teachers in the classroom in enabling equity is recognised, thus the need for continuous improvement of teaching practices should be intensified. In-service training programmes have been provided by many NGOs over the years and include modules on inclusive education but without a cohesive plan of action. Need for effective monitoring and evaluation of the training programmes.	Teacher empowerment has been the focus of education policies. The topic of social inclusion is part of professional in-service training. The basic professional competencies for teachers are defined and include some related to inclusion in general and inclusive education in particular. There is limited state funding for teachers' professional development activities thus such activities are to a large extent supported by donors. This is a challenge and causes an implementation gap between policy and practice.	Teachers are obliged to participate in CPD. Teachers' in-service professional development training seminars include topics on inclusion and such topics are officially declared as a priority for teacher professional development. Teachers are required to complete 64 hours of continuous professional development per year. Recent improvement on strengthening the quality of teaching in diverse classrooms. Network for Support of Inclusive Education: the Network fosters horizontal learning; disseminates best practices; facilitates peer learning; establishes communities of practice.	Teachers in public schools have to participate in professional training for four weeks throughout the year. Elective courses related to inclusive education, poverty, and inequality in education faculties. Novice teacher training programme includes topics related to cultural pluralism and the inclusion of children with special needs. In-service teacher training provided by the MoNE includes a module on inclusive education. Mostly organized centrally and funded by the MoNE's budget. Teacher training programme targeting village teachers: aiming to increase the educational attainment of children in rural areas.

In conclusion, it should be noted that implementation gaps between policy and practice are present in almost all countries mainly due to the lack of funding. Also, ensuring accessibility of training programmes for all teachers emerge as an issue that needs to be addressed. Finally, capacity building of the teaching staff and continuous professional development are not limited to pre-service and in-service training pro-

grammes. Various mechanisms which fit the needs and particularities of project countries should be developed. A good example of this is professional learning networks such as the Network for Support of Inclusive Education in Serbia. The Network fosters horizontal learning as a platform to disseminate best practice and peer learning as well as establishing communities of practice. Albania also has professional learning networks, which train teachers on topics related to their needs and open up space for the exchange of positive and successful experiences among teachers. Arguably, PLNs have the potential to empower teachers in their endeavour to support students with diverse backgrounds if they bring up issues related to inclusion to their agenda (Sachs, 2003).

2.2.2.4. Roles and responsibilities of school participants

Inclusive education and ensuring equity in education require close cooperation of all school participants. Therefore, this section of the report is devoted to the review of the roles and responsibilities of main actors at the school level. In order to be able to play their roles in promoting inclusive practices, school staff needs to be allowed a certain degree of autonomy. Thus, the degree of autonomy exercised by the school principals and the teachers is briefly addressed. Depending on country-specific practices, not only the roles and responsibilities of the school principals and teachers are examined but, also, the roles played by parents, school support staff, including psychologists, pedagogues, and mediators are investigated.

In Albania, the school principal is the highest representative of the institution and works in close cooperation with the Local Education Office and educational staff; collaborates with Child Protection Units (CPUs), parent councils (school and class-based), student parliament, psycho-social services and the school board. Also, according to the legislation, in cooperation with the Local Education Office (LEO), teachers, parents and psycho-social workers, the school principal provides conditions and offers equal opportunities for the participation and involvement of all students in the educational process and extracurricular activities with a special focus on children coming from marginalized groups, including students with learning difficulties and special needs, as well as Roma and Egyptian students.

Teachers have a high responsibility to contribute to the promotion of equity for all the students including providing extra support to students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This is mostly related to the methodological approach to teaching and learning, the ability to build an inclusive classroom through fostering principles and values of inclusion, respect for diversity, and encouraging cooperation and solidarity. This is further strengthened through closer communication and cooperation with students' parents through the application of various effective methods of parent involvement and through close collaboration with other colleagues and management team in a joint effort to create an inclusive school culture, policies and practices that help all children succeed.

Schools are in charge of establishing all the appropriate conditions that guide the learning process in a way that will be more meaningful and relevant to all. In this context, almost all schools in Albania have either a social worker or a psycho-social support teacher, or both. Social workers play a significant role in facilitating inclusion and assisting children from marginalized groups.

Based on legislation and education policies, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of parental involvement, resulting in the increased level of participation of parents and cooperation of schools with their students' caregivers. Field data gathered for the ARISE project points out that there is still a consid-

erable gap between legislation/policy and implementation. School principals and teachers highlight a serious need for finding effective methods of parental involvement, which is still considered as one of their biggest challenges. Also, both parents and teachers underline the importance of cooperation between the parents and the school representatives to enable student support. Their recommendations regarding strengthening cooperation can be summarized as follows: awareness-raising on the importance of parent involvement in school; training on effective methods of communication and cooperation; parental involvement in consultations and decision-making processes related to school improvement and student support; and introduction of effective support measures for students related to successful completion of homework, etc.

Students have the right to express their opinion and concerns about education quality and everything related to school life and have the obligation to provide their support to the overall progress of their school. Through participation in the Students' Parliament and its representation in the School Board, they are involved in the design and implementation of the School Development Programme and Annual Plan as well as in the decision-making process. However, School Boards are generally weak structures that need continuous training, mentoring and support for the consolidation of their role in school life, and consequently more active representation of the students' voice. Also, steps forward were taken towards strengthening the students' participation, such as the establishment of the National Students' Parliament, with representatives from each school. This structure will also serve as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth on tackling issues that directly affect students and their education. Students require more training and consultation as well as financial support in order to be able to implement their initiatives.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to legislation, the school principal is responsible to assure that no child is discriminated against based on socio-economic status regarding enrolment in school and participation in the education process. Schools collect data related to students with low SES, but only those recognized by social welfare centres, and provide those data to MoE and other relevant institutions for further actions. In practice, the majority of school principals take action to provide additional support to children and families with low SES, but there are no legal obligations to do so.

School principals and teachers have defined responsibilities, but their autonomy is very restricted. As mentioned earlier, teachers are free to choose teaching approaches, methods and strategies, but they are obliged to deliver prescribed curriculum content. School principals implement activities from approved annual plans and have freedom in managing everyday activities in accordance with legal requirements. The school principal provides an annual report to the School Board who adopts it, based on the realisation of activities included in the approved annual plan. There is no legal obligation for teachers to support students from low socio-economic backgrounds. As with school principals, teachers have to follow the general law concerning the prohibition of discrimination.

There are no systematic approaches or legal solutions to facilitate the inclusion of all groups of all children from low SES families in schools. In some primary schools, there are multidisciplinary teams, but every school has employed a pedagogue who monitors students and provides support. If a primary school has a multidisciplinary team, it consists of a pedagogue-psychologist or pedagogue, special educator, and speech therapist.

Schools are obliged to establish a Parents' Council. Parents' Council is composed of representatives of parents from all classes in school. The Parents' Council participates in creating and proposing solutions to issues related to the improvement of the educational process and working conditions, cooperation with the community and other institutions in charge of teaching or extracurricular activities, electing a parent representative to the School Board, and participation in school projects.

The school is required to provide support and assure the establishment of the Students' Council, composed of selected students from each class. Students' Council represents students in decision making and proposes their ideas and solutions concerning the teaching process and extracurricular activities, organization of field trips and excursions, cooperation with the community, preventing violence etc. The president of the Students' Council may attend sessions of professional bodies at the level of the school if issues important for students are discussed but without the decision-making right.

In Kosovo's decentralized education system principals have the autonomy and responsibility to develop and implement school development plans which can include different aspects such as quality assurance, teacher professional development, infrastructure development, implementation of curriculum, and school management. In this regard, school principal has autonomy in daily decision-making processes, whereas, for other major decisions concerning school, he/she should consult and receive the approval of the school Steering Council.

Teachers, on the other hand, have the autonomy to find and use different learning materials and teaching methods deemed as necessary during their classes. In addition, concerning decision-making, representatives from the Teachers' Council are also members of the school Steering Council, which is the highest advisory and decision-making body in the school. In terms of inclusion and equity, teachers are required to have positive attitudes by promoting values and excluding negative stands which stem from prejudices. Moreover, they are expected to respect their students and value their diversity. Also, they need to be capable of creating and sustaining safe, inclusive and challenging teaching and learning environment (Administrative Instruction No. 03/2016 Steering School Council, 2016).

The lack of professional services (provided by psychologists and pedagogues) at the school level is a challenging issue. Currently, there are only 81 psychologists and 69 pedagogues for all public educational institutions in Kosovo. However, such services, in particular those to be implemented by psychologists, are very important in supporting students' ability to learn, succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. In this regard, the participants in ARISE field research all agree that the provision of support services is necessary for children from low socio-economic background to succeed academically and emotionally.

Each school should also have a Parents' Council which participates in important decisions related to the quality of teaching and school environment. Issues related to support provided to marginalized groups and especially students with low SES are discussed in formal and informal meetings.

According to the Law on Pre-university Education in Kosovo, each school should have a Students' Council which consists of one representative of every class. In this respect, it can be argued that students have the autonomy to establish a Students' Council to work on improving the school environment and making sure that students' voice is heard. In addition, one representative from the Students' Council is also delegated as a member to the School Steering Council which is the main body responsible for ensuring proper school management and teaching quality.

Cooperation with parents and their involvement in the educational process is equally important in achieving students' educational goals. Thus, as suggested by the field research participants, school governing bodies, namely, Steering Council, Parents' Council and Students' Council need to be strengthened since they are not functional in the majority of schools, in particular those in rural areas. Cooperation between these three bodies is essential in supporting all children, including those of low SES background.

In North Macedonia, the school principal is responsible for the overall planning and execution of all aspects of the education process at the school level. The degree of autonomy is not defined, which results in many principals not assuming responsibilities beyond the minimum requirements for running the school.

Teacher autonomy is limited to the methods applied in class. As mentioned earlier, the curriculum is pre-defined as well as the number of lessons and their distribution throughout the year. Schools have available only 2 days per year for activities of their own choice, that are usually used for extracurricular activities. Teachers participate in the governance structures of the school, i.e., they are members of the School Management Board.

There is a specific stipulation in the Law on Teachers and Professional Support Staff that defines one of the teacher competence areas as 'social and educational inclusion'. Teachers and all other school staff are required to treat all students equally, to support all children, to recognise their differences and respect the child's best interest, taking into account the family environment. Specific provisions related to the students with SEN exist. In practice, however, most teachers do make additional effort to help students who struggle, including those coming from low SES families. There is no reward or recognition (financial, or time off/release from other duties), if a particular teacher has many low SES students in the class or if he/she makes additional effort to support them. The adopted professional competencies and standards for teachers (MCGO, 2016a) and professional support staff (MCGO, 2016b) include their competencies in the area of quality, inclusion and social justice.

Mentors and mediators need to be mentioned among crucial support staff in the North Macedonia context. In order to facilitate communication between schools and parents, cooperate with teachers and decrease drop-out among Roma, the 2019 Law on Primary Education introduced education mediators and mentors (Council of Europe, 2020). Education mediators undertake activities for informing families on the opportunities for and access to education and organise regular meetings aimed at sensitising beneficiaries and teachers about the specificities of this marginalised group that impact their education.

Each school is required to set up a School Inclusion Team with a 3-year mandate, consisting of the school principal, pedagogue, psychologist, social worker, special educator, two teachers and two parents. They are responsible for designing special responses and measures to ensure the inclusiveness of the whole school and the teaching process. In practice, very few schools have all positions filled, in particular related to the last two groups of actors.

School Management Boards are designed to be an effective tool to enhance school autonomy. School Management Boards and community involvement in schools are considered to be means towards the enhancement of democratic processes on a grassroots level, fostering a participatory approach, and a partnership

between government institutions and citizens. The School Board is the management body of the institution. It consists of representatives of teachers and other staff, as well as the founder of the school and the parents.

According to the Law on Primary Education, the Parents' Council is composed of one representative from each class who is elected by the parents at the class parent meeting.

In addition to the manner of their participation described above, parents can also participate in school life within projects and experimental programmes.

Students participate in the work of educational institution bodies only in higher education. In primary and secondary education, student's interest is represented through appointed representatives (parents) in the School Board.

In Serbia, the school principals are responsible for all the aspects of the everyday work of the school. Also, the principal has to make sure that all relevant participants are informed and involved, in line with their jurisdictions, in the decision-making process at the school level. Principals should observe and analyse instruction, identify both positive and problematic trends across classrooms, and be engaged in solving issues that might appear in teaching and learning which puts them under pressure, especially knowing that most of them are either not trained to do all aforementioned tasks or lack time.

Schools are entitled to have professional staff such as psychologist, pedagogue, special pedagogue, pedagogical assistant, or social worker. The number of professionals schools can hire depends on the number of classes and additional criteria such as number of students with SEN in classes, or in the case of pedagogical assistant, the number of Roma students. Pedagogical assistants and social workers usually work with students and families from low SES while psychologists and pedagogues in schools provide support to teachers besides working with students and families. Nevertheless, it needs to be added that they are often burdened by other administrative tasks, which results in implementation gaps.

In all schools in Serbia, mandatory teams for Inclusive Education are established (teachers, psychologists, and pedagogues).

As for other school support staff, the introduction of pedagogical assistants to the Serbian education system has proven to be efficient. At first, they were Roma mediators, assigned to schools with a high percentage of Roma students but now they work with other students who need additional educational support as well. They offer support to teachers, preschool teachers and psychologists/pedagogues in deciding on proper support measures for students. The MoESTD finances the work of the pedagogical assistants from the state budget as well as all other school staff. In the 2019/2020 school year, a total of 261 pedagogical assistants were engaged, 221 in primary school and 40 in preschool institutions (MoESTD, 2020). The work of pedagogical assistants contributed to the increase in the coverage of Roma children in education (Bibija, 2015).

The National Association of Parents and Teachers of Serbia (NARNS) aims to promote and strengthen the co-operation of parents, teachers and schools to successfully initiate changes in education and resolve specific issues faced daily by all stakeholders in the educational process.

For students at risk of dropout, which are usually students coming from low SES families and the Roma community, individual dropout prevention measures are developed and implemented by school staff. These usually include learning support, material support, peer support, work with the family and other partners such as centres for social welfare. Professional staff usually helps teachers plan and monitor these measures and provide individual support to students as well as some group activities such as work-shops, etc.

Parents can participate in school life through formal bodies like the Parents' Council and by being members of the School Board or on individual terms by being part of event organisation, lectures, extracurricular activities, etc. However, low SES parents and/or parents of students from marginalised groups are rarely part of formal bodies and active in school life. They sometimes participate in less formal gatherings or come to school when invited by teachers but generally do not participate often in decision-making or teaching and learning processes.

Students in primary and secondary schools have Students' Parliaments but they only recently received more attention through projects targeting their capacity building. They are mostly formal, not truly engaged in school decision-making. Most often they have a role in deciding on extracurricular activities or events, but not as much on the teaching and learning process.

In Turkey, since social workers are not employed in schools, teachers, school counsellors, and school principals are responsible for flagging the students in need and informing the responsible authorities. In addition, teachers and school principals are materially and financially supporting students from low SES families through the resources of school-family unions. Although the role of psychological counsellors is critical in providing support to students, their administrative workload usually prevents them from undertaking this task.

Parents can participate in educational activities by joining school-family unions and being a 'class mother'. The Regulation on School-Family Union (MoNE, n.d.) points to the role of school-family unions to contribute to achieving equity in education and outlines their function. Besides the formal participation enabled through the school-parent unions, parent participation in education processes happens by individual initiative taking.

There are currently no procedures through which students can take part in decision-making processes in their schools. Democracy Education and School Governments Project was initiated in 2004 by the Chairmanship of Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) and MoNE with the goals of developing a culture of democracy and helping students gain skills in democratic participation processes through student elections. The project was conducted only by MoNE from 2013 to 2019, as GNAT decided to withdraw in 2013. In 2019, it was rescinded, and Turkey Student Parliament practices were terminated (ERI, 2019).

Table 7: Section summary – Roles and responsibilities of school participants

Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey
School principals are the highest representatives of the institution and cooperate with the Local Education Office, teachers, parents and psycho-social workers. **Teachers** are responsible for the promotion of equity and cooperate with parents, colleagues and school administration. Almost all schools have **support staff** – either a social worker or a psycho-social support teacher. They have a significant role in the implementation of inclusive education principles and assist children from marginalised groups. Importance of **parents'** role, parental involvement and cooperation between teachers and parents are recognised in policy documents but there is the gap between policy and practice. **Students** participate in school life through Students' Parliament and the National Student's Parliament but need financial support and training for effective implementation of student initiatives.	**School principals** are responsible to assure that no child is discriminated against, and they take actions to provide additional support to children from low SES families although not obliged by legislation. **Teachers** are obliged to act following legislation that prescribes the prohibition of discrimination. **Support staff** is generally a school pedagogue, but some schools have multidisciplinary teams consisting of a pedagogue-psychologist or pedagogue, special educator, and speech therapist to facilitate inclusion. **Parents** participate through Parents' Council. **Students** participate through Students' Council which ensures their involvement in decision-making and proposing solutions concerning the teaching process and extracurricular activities.	**School principals** -have the autonomy in daily decision-making processes but need to consult the School Steering Committee, as the highest decision-making body, for all major school decisions. **Teachers** are required to promote inclusive values and practices and have a representative in the School Steering Committee. **The support staff** is lacking – although perceived as of critical importance for students with low SES to succeed. **Parents** are involved through Parents' Council which participates in important decisions related to the quality of teaching and school environment. Issues related to support provided to vulnerable children are discussed in formal and informal meetings. **Students** participate through the Students' Council which can delegate one representative to the School Steering Committee. Such councils are not functional in the majority of schools, in particular those in rural areas.	**School principals** are responsible for the overall planning and execution at the school level, but the degree of autonomy is not defined so many principals do not take responsibilities beyond minimum requirements. Community involvement is secured through their participation in the School Management Board. **Teachers'** autonomy is limited but they participate in the governance structures of the school. Most teachers do make additional efforts to help students who struggle but there is no reward or recognition in return. **Support staff** include mentors and mediators for supporting Roma students. There are also School Inclusion Teams to ensure the inclusiveness. A gap between policy and practice is present. **Parents'** participation is secured through Parents' Council. **Students** do not have a body through which they participate directly. Their interest is represented by parents in the School Board.	**School principals** are responsible for all the aspects of the everyday work of the school and are in charge of informing all other actors involved in the decision-making process. One of the challenges is a lack of training or time for the completion of assigned duties. **Support staff** – every school has a psychologist or a pedagogue or both (depending on the number of classes). There are mandatory teams for Inclusive Education in all schools (teachers, psychologists, and pedagogues) and dropout prevention teams in some schools. In all schools with a high number of students from vulnerable groups (especially Roma students), pedagogical assistants are employed. **Parents** participate through the Parents' Council that nominates three parents to become members of the School Board. There are examples of parents' involvement in school events or extracurricular activities. Parents from marginalised groups and those with low SES background are rarely part of formal bodies and are inactive in school life. The National Association of Parents and Teachers of Serbia (NARNS) is established and aims to promote and strengthen the cooperation of parents and teachers. **Students** are participating in school processes through Students' Parliaments, which exist in every school but are not very effective.	**School principals and teachers** are responsible for flagging the students in need and informing the responsible authorities. They support students with low SES through the material and financial resources of school-family unions. **Support staff** does not imply social workers employed in schools. Psychological counsellors are employed in all schools and have a critical role in supporting students. However, administrative workload results in implementation gaps. **Parents** are participating by joining school-family unions and being a 'class mother'. Family unions also contribute to equity. **Students** are not participating in decision-making processes.

Although school participants are expected to promote inclusion and equity, there are gaps between policy and practice. A review of the roles and responsibilities of the school participants in project countries has shed a light on several points that could contribute to closing the implementation gap. First, parental involvement emerges as a crucial component in supporting all students. That said, adequate mechanisms which enable parental participation are needed. Schools sometimes fail to find constructive ways to involve parents from vulnerable groups that might need a less formal or just different approach and shift the blame to families for not participating (Flecha & Soler, 2013). It is crucial to consider this perspective while creating mechanisms for participation. Second, the key role played by the support staff needs to be highlighted. Hence, it is necessary to pave the way for the support staff to contribute to inclusion. Moreover, teams that are directly concerned with inclusion and equity in the school should allow students of all backgrounds to be supported. Multidisciplinary Teams in Bosnia and Herzegovina, School Inclusion Teams in North Macedonia and Serbia are good examples, but their functionality and effectiveness should be secured. Although not primarily focused on inclusion, structures such as the National Association of Parents and Teachers of Serbia are also promising as they develop solutions to problems encountered in everyday school practices. Third, cooperation between school participants emerges as yet another critical issue, as it improves school practices to better benefit children. Fourth, effective mechanisms of motivation need to be put in place for teachers who teach in challenging circumstances. This would contribute to mainstreaming inclusive education for all. Finally, students' participation occurs to various degrees in different project countries. Here, what needs to be underlined is that the schools need to make sure children's involvement is not trivialised and genuine participation is taking place (Hart, 1992).

2.2.2.5. Material support

In Albania, social protection programmes are mainly focused on cash transfers for poverty alleviation and social security disability insurance. The NE (Economic Aid) programme is allocated to household and the maximum size of benefit per household is about 65 EUR, calculated at a maximum of 26 EUR per parent and only 6 EUR per child in the household, which needs to be increased to cover some of their most basic needs. The NE programme supports about 20% of the families with children under 18 years of age or 85,000 out of the 144,000 children coming from lower SES (Save the Children & ISB, 2015). Textbooks are free of charge for students from certain groups for all grades of primary and secondary education and all students from first to seventh grade. Similarly, transportation is covered for some students, which is determined through the decision of the Council of Ministers, whereas free meals are not provided in school, as this is not offered as a service at all.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the budget for equity measures, such as procurement of free textbooks, is not included in the general budget for education, but allocated from the government budget (capital investment); from the budget of the Ministry of Transport or the budget of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska. Free of charge textbooks are usually provided for primary school students, mainly for those in lower primary grades, and even then, only for certain percentages of children, i.e., those from families with low SES or families with three or more children. As for the transportation of students, it is the obligation of the MoE to provide free transportation to all students who live more than two kilometres away from school. However, authorities often do not have relevant and up-to-date information necessary for effective budget planning, so a significant number of students are not provided with free transportation, and the approved funds are insufficient. Support is also offered by municipalities that provide a small amount of monthly scholarship mainly to secondary school students and university students. There is

no available data on the percentage of beneficiaries of free meals, free textbooks and free transportation, nor data on the percentage of beneficiaries of scholarships or the selection process. According to UNICEF, schools in rural communities are significantly disadvantaged compared to schools in urban areas. The lack of financial assistance often compromises the realisation of the right to education for children from families with low income.

Intending to reduce the cost burden for parents and provide opportunities for all children to go to school, regardless of their socio-economic background, **Kosovo** provides free textbooks (including textbooks in Bosnian and Turkish Language) for all children enrolled in compulsory education. On the other hand, the provision of one free meal to all students is a practice found in some municipalities/schools of Kosovo; however, this is not always the case as it depends on the willingness and management of the municipalities, which, as part of the overall decentralisation reform in the country, are responsible for the management of pre-university education. By the Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo (2011), municipalities are also required to provide and arrange free, safe and suitable transport for children living within four kilometres distance from the school, which usually includes students living in rural areas, which in turn are associated with higher levels of poverty. Even though some participants in this research confirmed that their municipalities organise safe and suitable transport for children according to the legislation, this cannot be considered a good practice followed by all municipalities of Kosovo. In this regard, education experts and CSO representatives stated that only a few of the municipalities organise free transport for students, whereas for others the provision of transport remains a challenge. Although legislation foresees the provision of such measures they are not implemented in practice, which shows another example of a policy that remains only words on paper.

In North Macedonia, measures have been undertaken in the form of financial incentives for students from marginalised groups through securing state scholarships, free textbooks in primary and secondary education, free transportation and accommodation for students whose primary or secondary school is in a location different from their home. All these measures and activities have been yielding positive results and will continue to be implemented in the coming years. For instance, as of 2009, the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme helped increase the participation of students from low SES families in secondary education. Thus, financial incentives are being provided to families at social risk who receive social welfare, and whose children regularly attend primary and secondary school (at least 85% of the scheduled lessons).

In Serbia, teachers and professional associates in schools have to recognise, identify and support students at risk of dropping out. Accordingly, schools are obliged to undertake preventive and compensatory measures for all students struggling, however, most schools have limited possibility to provide financial assistance. Material support is usually provided to families through donors or humanitarian actions. The local act on extended social entitlements defines services and benefits to be funded from local budgets (these may also include support such as free meals, free transportation, free textbooks, and scholarships to Roma and groups with low SES). Some schools organise catering or have their own kitchen and serve meals to students from low SES families if they are social welfare beneficiaries. Sometimes, local funding allocated for school meals is not sufficient to cover meals for all the students in need. Also, in some cases, families do not satisfy formal criteria and cannot apply for free meals even though they are below threshold of low SES. This is encountered especially in rural areas where families are not entitled to social benefit because they own agricultural property.

At the end of 2017, the Rulebook on Student Loans and Scholarships was amended, so now the ministry allocates 10% of the total amount of student loans and scholarships as well as 10% of places in dormitories for students from marginalised social groups (materially deprived families, children without parental care, single-parent families, Roma national minority, persons with disabilities, persons with chronic diseases, persons whose parents disappeared or were abducted on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija and the territory of the republics of the former Yugoslavia, refugees and displaced persons, returnees under the readmission agreement and deported students, etc.). Also, more lenient criteria have been established for scholarships for certain groups of secondary school students (e.g., Roma students) where excellent academic achievement is not the main criterion, but the fact that they come from low SES families. It is salient that a continuously higher number of scholarships are granted to girls (over 60%). Bearing in mind that the participation of Roma girls in secondary education is significantly less than for Roma boys, granting more scholarships to girls supports their inclusion in secondary education and reduces the existing gender gap.

Procurement of textbooks funded from the national budget continues, thus in the school year 2018/2019, free textbooks were procured for about 16% of primary education students in Serbia (around 830.000 textbooks). The right to free textbooks is granted to students from families with low SES (beneficiaries of financial social assistance); students with developmental difficulties and disabilities (including those who need customised textbooks, e.g., large-print, Braille, electronic form, etc.); primary school students who qualify as third or any subsequent child in a family.

In Turkey, to ensure the access of students with low SES and those with special needs to schools, the MoNE implements several education assistance programmes. In the academic year of 2009–2010, 16,658,076 students were enrolled in formal education at all levels, excluding open and tertiary education institutions; 1,152,520 out of aforementioned students benefited from transportation services and free school meals;[22] 278,896 students at the primary and secondary level received a monthly scholarship of 36 EUR; 328,141 boarding students received support for room, allowance, clothing, and stationery (MoNE, 2020b). Similar financial and material support, as well as transportation services, are also provided to Syrian students under the project, namely the PIKTES.

Currently, all students, regardless of economic background, who are eligible for free transportation and boarding services, receive free school meals. Also, those students who do not benefit from free transportation and boarding services may receive free school meals if the school principal finds that the economic situation of the family is bad. For the latter, receiving free school meals is restricted to schools that have students benefiting from free transportation and boarding services, and therefore offer free school meals. A subsidised category for free school meals does not exist. Officials from the MoNE will not be able to initiate the Free School Meal Programme in the 2020–2021 academic year if the budget negotiations are not finalised in time.

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22 Currently, all students, regardless of economic conditions, who are eligible for free transportation and boarding services receive free school meals. A subsidized category for free school meals without benefitting from transportation and boarding services does not exist.

Table 8: Section summary – Material support

Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	North Macedonia	Serbia	Turkey
Social protection programmes mainly focused on **cash transfers** for poverty alleviation and social security disability insurance. NE (Economic Aid) programme supports about 20% of the families with children under 18 or 85,000 out of the 144,000 children from lower SES families, but the amount of money received through this programme needs to be increased to cover most basic needs. **Free textbooks** for students from certain groups of students of all grades, and all students from first to seventh grade. **Free transportation** for some students. **Free meals** not provided.	Support is offered by municipalities that provide a small amount of monthly **scholarship** mainly to secondary school students. MoE is obliged to provide **free transportation** to all students who live more than 2 km away from school, but there is no up-to-date information necessary for effective budget planning. **Free textbooks** are usually provided for primary school students, mainly those in lower primary grades, and only to certain percentages of children from low SES families or families with three or more children.	**Free textbooks** for all children enrolled in compulsory education. **Free meals** in some municipalities/ schools. **Free transport** for children living within 4 km distance from the school according to the legislation but in practice, not all municipalities follow the legislation.	State **scholarships**, **free textbooks** in primary and secondary education, **free transportation and accommodation** for students whose primary or secondary school is in a location different from their home. **A Conditional Cash Transfer** Programme is in place and contributes to the increase in attendance of low SES students in secondary education.	**Free transportation, free textbooks, and scholarships** to Roma and students from low SES families. Meals are available for children with low SES if they are social welfare beneficiaries. In some cases, families do not meet formal criteria and cannot apply for **free meals** even though they are coming from low SES background. The ministry allocates 10% of the total amount of student loans and **scholarships** as well as 10% of places in **dormitories** for students from marginalised groups. Granting more **scholarships** to girls supports inclusion in secondary education and reduces the existing gender gap.	All students eligible for **free transportation and boarding services** receive **free meals**. In the 2009–2010 academic year, out of 16,658,076 students enrolled in formal education, 1,152,520 benefited from **transportation services and free school meals**. 278,896 students at the primary and secondary level received a monthly **scholarship** of 36 EUR; 328,141 boarding students received **support for room, allowance, clothing, and stationery**.

The project countries are making efforts to provide material support such as cash transfers, scholarships, free transportation and accommodation, free textbooks, and free meals. These measures are efficient to a certain extent. For instance, in North Macedonia, as of 2009, the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme helped increase the attendance of students with low SES in secondary education. However, some crucial problems remain and require attention. These include lack of funding and the lack of updated information resulting in ineffective budget planning and the inability of the municipalities to implement all available measures prescribed by legislation. In addition, in Serbia, even though schools are obliged to undertake preventive and compensatory measures for all students, most schools have limited possibility to provide financial assistance. Thus, the issue of material support seems to be yet another area where considerable implementation gaps are observed.

2.3. Education of students with SEN and students with disabilities

According to the GEM Report 2020, students who are likely to be excluded from education are also disadvantaged in other areas such as language, gender, and ethnicity. Data from more than 20 countries demonstrate that 'hardly any poor rural young woman completed upper secondary school' (UNESCO, 2020). This is the

reason why the remaining two sections will address two intersectional aspects of inequities: disability and language. Following section will be devoted to the education services and practices available for students with SEN and students with disabilities.

In Albania, the number of students with SEN and students with disabilities attending mainstream schools has increased recently. In mainstream schools, those students are integrated into the same classes as other students. There are also special schools. Important public policy measures include: assignment of assistant teachers for students with SEN and students with disabilities in schools; provision of individual attention through Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and multi-disciplinary support; provision of psycho-social service at school and local education office level; and provision of free textbooks to children from marginalised groups, including Roma and Egyptian communities, families with social assistance, children with SEN and children with disabilities, and so on, at all levels of pre-university education and to all children from grades 1 to 7.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to legislation, children with special educational needs are enrolled either in special schools or in mainstream schools. Children are enrolled in special schools based on the recommendations of the expert team that generally consists of a pedagogue or psychologist, educator-rehabilitator, speech therapist, teacher, and in some cases parent. The type of programme assigned to a student depends on the opinion of the expert team after several months of observation of the student, and the opinions and findings of the commission on categorisation and sorting. For students enrolled in special schools, the professional team conducts individualised work programmes which besides education often includes a training and rehabilitation programme.

For students who are enrolled in mainstream schools, the professional team determines customised programmes or regular programmes with an individualised approach. The professional team develops customised curricula based on the recommendations and opinions of the expert commission. The programme is conducted by a teacher with the help and intervention of educators-rehabilitators, and possibly, a teaching assistant. Students with SEN and disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools are educated in the same class as other students.

In Kosovo, inclusive education is understood as the provision of access to education to children with SEN (i.e., enrolling children with SEN in mainstream schools, often in attached classes) and not as ensuring the conditions for full participation of those children in the teaching/learning process. There is no common understanding of inclusive education among stakeholders and thus no agreement as to a way forward in developing inclusive practices. Early childhood development, school readiness, preschool and kindergarten are not included within the broad understanding of inclusive education and are not taken into consideration when developing education plans.

In North Macedonia, traditionally, children with SEN were educated in special schools or special classes within mainstream schools (usually in smaller towns without special schools). The 2019 Law on Primary Education positioned inclusion as one of the pillars of the country's education system, requiring full educational inclusion of all the students in mainstream schools and transformation of special schools and special classes into resource centres by 2023.

In Serbia, legislation supported the enrolment of all children in the mainstream school system and defined additional support to education for students with SEN, students with disabilities and other students from

vulnerable groups. Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. However, special schools still exist although the number of students attending such schools is decreasing. For students with SEN enrolled in mainstream schools, in planning and implementing education process teachers are using IEPs.

In Turkey, students with SEN are educated in both types of schools. They can either go to mainstream schools with complimentary classes under individualised education programmes or to segregated schools which only admit students with SEN.

Network for the Rights of Children with Disabilities published a shadow report on the current situation of children with SEN and children with disabilities in Turkey. The network argues that Turkey's commitment to ensure an equal environment for children with SEN and children with disabilities remain on paper.

Several challenges resulting from the lack of inclusive education practices are encountered in Turkey. First, as the grades get higher, the enrolment rates of children with SEN and children with disabilities become lower, and the children are more likely to drop out (Ergün & Arık, 2020). Especially in the COVID-19 period, socio-emotional difficulties were experienced more intensely among students with SEN and students with disabilities than their peers without SEN and disabilities (EÇHA, 2020). Finally, the deficit-based approach in education, which focuses on what the students cannot do while ignoring the role of the systemic influences, prevents the child from enjoying rights to education (Akhtar, & Jaswal, 2013). The deficit model results in a common perception that students belonging to certain social groups have the right to receive an education more than others. This also has implications for segregation, i.e., education in separate settings, which inhibits social contact and interaction between students with and without SEN and disabilities.

Although in some project countries students with SEN and students with disabilities are educated in both types of schools – special and mainstream schools, there are positive developments reported in Albania and Serbia where the number of students with SEN and students with disabilities attending mainstream schools has increased. North Macedonia also demonstrates a commitment to inclusion through the transition to mainstream schools and the transformation of special schools by 2023. Lack of access to school and full participation seem to be among the challenges encountered.

2.4. Multilingual education

This section will explore the extent to which education systems in the project countries permit multilingualism. It is important to address this issue as multilingual education has a liberating and transformative role in the lives of students from ethnolinguistic communities (Benson, & Kosonen, 2013) and it has the potential to 'act as a source of inclusion (UNECO, 2009).

In Albania, significant advancement has been made in the legal and policy framework toward equity in education for minorities, with a special emphasis on the language of instruction. While the national official language of instruction is Albanian, the law states that national minorities are provided with opportunities to learn or receive instruction in the minority language. Regarding the Greek minority, in 2017, there were 42

classes instructed in the Greek language and the students studying in public schools are provided with free textbooks (Council of Europe, 2017) based on mutual agreement between the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Greece. Macedonian minority had 19 classes in three villages with a higher density of Macedonian minority. In addition, while significant efforts have been made to improve the general and educational situation for Roma children in recent years, it is still challenging to have classes instructed in Roma language in schools with a higher concentration of Roma children. The establishment of a Department of Roma Language Teaching at the University of Elbasan City[23] is a significant step forward, even though the number of students is low and the professional development of the professors of the Romani language is still urgently needed (Avery & Hoxhallari, 2017).

On the other hand, official recognition of the Albanian Sign Language in 2014 is another step forward toward inclusion and equity in education relating to students with hearing impairments.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are three official languages, which are also the languages of instruction: Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. The Law on Rights of National Minorities (2003) stipulates that persons belonging to national minorities may study language, literature, history, and culture in their language, while the authorities are obliged to provide education in the language of national minorities if they make up at least a third of the school population. If they make up at least one-fifth, members of a national minority have the right to attend additional classes about the language and culture of that minority. The authorities are also obliged to provide funding for the education of students belonging to national minorities, including education in the minority language and the printing of appropriate textbooks. However, the Law is not completely clear when it comes to funding, i.e., it is not defined who is responsible for finances bearing in mind the complex structure of the education system and diverse authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, cantons, the Republic of Srpska and Brcko District).

In Kosovo, Albanian and Serbian are the official languages, and the language of instruction in public education is one of these languages. Curricula for pre-university education in Turkish and Bosnian were developed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and these two communities have access to education in their languages. Also, the Romani language classes are introduced at the primary level. Nevertheless, insufficient provision of textbooks in Bosnian and Turkish languages and lack of staff qualified in teaching in those languages appear to be some of the main challenges in the area (OSCE, 2018).

In North Macedonia, following the 2001 crisis and the adoption of the Ohrid Agreement, the language issue took on a new, more concrete dimension, and as a result, Albanian became the second official language in North Macedonia, while the creation of legal ground for education in one's mother tongue is envisaged for other communities as well.

The teaching in Macedonian schools is delivered in four languages. Apart from the Macedonian language, the students have the option to select primary and secondary school instruction in Albanian, Turkish or Serbian. Approximately one third of all schools are bilingual or trilingual. In some schools, the students also have the option to select non-compulsory (elective) subjects on the 'culture and language' of the Roma.

. . . .

23   Since the academic year: 2015–2016

In Serbia, in order to secure equity in education Law on Fundamentals of Education System prescribes that the education in Serbia is carried out in Serbian language and Cyrillic script, but for national minorities, education is to be conducted in their mother tongue or bilingually. Therefore, education can be carried out in Serbian, Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovakian and Croatian languages. Students who attend education in the language of the national minority have the Serbian language as a non-mother tongue language as a mandatory subject. All the students that attend education in Serbian, can attend elective subjects called Mother tongue language with elements of national culture. This elective subject exists for the following languages of national minorities: Bosnian, Bunjevac, Hungarian, Macedonian, German, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovak, Slovenian, Croatian, Ukrainian, Vlach and Czech.

In Turkey, although Arabic, Kurmanji, Zazaki, and Laz languages are among the main languages spoken in the country, the official language as well as the language of instruction is Turkish. In line with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, Turkey recognizes Armenians, Rum Orthodox Christians (Greeks) and Jews as minority groups, which means that only these groups are allowed to open their schools and provide education in their mother tongue. Also, it needs to be mentioned that Turkey hosts a large number of refugees, mainly from Syria. Until 2020, in Temporary Education Centres (TECs) targeting Syrian children, the language of instruction was Arabic with special emphasis on Turkish language courses. Currently, TECs are closed down and students in these centres are integrated into mainstream schools. The broad range of problems related to multilingualism in Turkey include, but are not limited to, legislative restrictions, the social hierarchy of languages spoken in the country, lack of materials in 'non-dominant languages', and lack of teaching staff (Kosonen, 2010).

How multilingualism is treated seems to vary in project countries. Promisingly, significant progress is observed in the area of multilingualism in Albania. This includes official recognition of the Albanian Sign Language and the establishment of a department of Roma language teaching at the university level. In contrast, Turkey is far from meeting the needs of its multilingual pupils. Finally, the lack of textbooks in the languages of the ethnolinguistic communities and lack of staff proficient enough to teach languages of ethnolinguistic communities are among the issues that need to be addressed in the area of multilingualism.

2.5. Social welfare and health policies/measures relevant to education

Students from marginalized groups have diverse needs and it would be wrong to focus only on the education system as a resource for addressing all of them. In more concrete terms, although this report is predominantly focused on current educational measures, the impact of relevant social welfare and healthcare measures should not be neglected. The institutional framework for addressing the issue of education of children and youth affected by poverty or facing other kinds of risks of exclusion exceeds the boundaries of the institutions responsible for education and encompasses the sphere of the institutions responsible for social policy, health and other bodies not covered by this report. This chapter presents the most important aspects of health and social policies that countries introduced in order to ensure equitable access to health and social services.

*Table 9: Section summary – social welfare and
healthcare policies/measures relevant to education*

Healthcare Services	Social Care Services
Albania	
The Law on Social Care Services (2016) defines those under 'social protection benefits from public services such as health and education' and the cost of the services is covered by the State Budget. So, the children from low SES families are included in the social protection scheme and have free access to healthcare services. Vaccination is free of charge for all children and is issued by primary healthcare services. Albania's immunisation coverage rate for children is above 97%.	Central and local governments are responsible administrative units in providing social care and assistance schemes. The legal framework of social assistance is regulated by the Social Protection Strategy 2015–2020 that includes cash assistance schemes, assistance to people with disabilities, and integration of these services at the local level (SDC & MoLSA, n.d.). The legislation draws the boundaries of child protection, and for that purpose, Units for Protection of Children's Rights are established with a legal obligation to coordinate among local and central authorities in child protection. Under the current state of the CCT programme in Albania, the highest amount a household can receive from this programme is only 8,000 ALL, and only 700 ALL per child. Therefore, the Cash Transfer Programme in Albania is considered insufficient to meet the children's needs. At the school level, vulnerable children only receive free textbooks under social assistance schemes. Excluding schools with dormitories, schools do not provide free food services to those in need.
Bosnia and Herzegovina	
All children up to the age of 15 should have compulsory health insurance (linked to primary education, which is compulsory by the law), or, until the age of 18 if they are in regular schooling and if the parent/guardian of the student receives regular income or is registered by the employment office. Nevertheless, practice across the country varies. For example, on the federal level, the Law on Healthcare maintains that 'all children at the entity level have equal rights to treatment, including the accessibility of free drugs' even though the law emphasises that the economic capacity of cantons is crucial in providing free medication. Healthcare centres perform mandatory immunisation based on annual immunization plans. For primary school students, upon notification of health authorities, schools are obliged to bring in all students who are subject to immunisation against certain infectious diseases. Immunisation of children is mandatory and is free of charge for all children. With 68%, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest immunisation coverage rate for children among the participating countries. This rate is critically lower in vulnerable communities – **the Roma community has only a 4% immunisation coverage rate for the diseases such as tuberculosis**, diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus, etc. Some of the reasons for such a situation might be the lack of health insurance since Roma children have poor access to services and negative attitudes towards public institutions (Krajišnik, 2020).	The social welfare authorities are responsible for financing or co-financing the cost of preschool education. Social protection services are mostly based on financial assistance, but care services are often overburdened due to the limited resources. The minimum of financial social assistance is not clearly defined by law. The criteria for granting cash social assistance are uneven at the cantonal and entity levels and are not clearly defined by law. Other social assistance activities are observed in some schools and municipalities, but these are not undertaken systematically. Despite the legally established right to child allowance, a large number of families or children in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not receive it or receive it in amounts that vary. By legislation, the right to child allowance belongs to every family living in a state of social need (i.e., families whose income of individual household member does not exceed 15–20% of the average salary). However, in most of the country, only certain groups of children received it, such as children without both or one parent and children with physical or mental disabilities.

Healthcare Services	Social Care Services
Kosovo	
The Law on Health prescribes that all citizens have access to health care services. People receiving social assistance are expected to pay for the cost of healthcare services. For the specific minority groups, such as Roma, Askhalis, and Egyptians, the local and national authorities conduct medical visits in order to improve their access to healthcare services (Ministry of Health, 2016). Also, according to the Law on Asylum (2018) documented migrants and those with refugee status are included in healthcare services. Although people in Kosovo have access to free healthcare, the infrastructure of healthcare services does not meet their needs. As a result, many travel to neighbouring countries for medical treatment, but the persons with low SES do not have the financial resources to do so. Vaccination is free of charge for children and the immunisation rate is 95%. **However, it is low among certain groups such as Roma, Askhali, and Egyptian.**	Kosovo has decentralised social care activities since 2009, thus the local authorities are responsible for delivering social services. However, the budget local governments allocate to social assistance programmes is funded by the central government. The Social Assistance Scheme is the most important cash transfer programme in Kosovo that evaluates the financial and material situation of households and creates a point-based system accordingly. Households, depending on the number of family members and their needs, receive financial support from 50 EUR to 150 EUR (KAS, 2020) Kosovo, also, implements a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme for education that monthly grants 5 EUR to children under the age of 18 and expects the beneficiary children to attend school regularly (World Bank, 2019). Preschool education is free of charge for children from vulnerable groups, children included in social assistance programmes, children with special needs, and children without parental care.
North Macedonia	
All children, irrelevant of their SES background, have access to free healthcare services. The government also implements projects to increase the access of the Roma community to healthcare services, but the country does not have a CCT programme for health. Vaccination is mandatory and free for all children until the age of 18. The immunisation coverage rate is approximately 95%. **The country also sets specific programmes to increase the vaccination rates among vulnerable communities like the Roma community and those with low SES.**	The Law on Child Protection sees early childhood development and preschool education as a type of child protection, thus providing all children access to preschool educational institutions. Central and local authorities are responsible for different social assistance programmes, including child allowance, child disability allowance, assistance for children without parental care, housing assistance, and a CCT programme for education. Free school meal services are made available in the country, but they are not implemented systematically. In 2009, a Centre for Integration of Refugees and Foreigners was founded through the collaboration between the UNHCR and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Centre aims to assist registered migrants and those with different types of refugee status in accessing social protection services such as health and education. There is a National Action Plan for the Integration of Refugees and Foreigners 2017–2027.
Serbia	
The country provides free healthcare to children, students, and unemployed youths until the age of 26 as well as for those whose monthly income is below the poverty line. **Serbia seeks to improve the health conditions of the Roma community but is not implementing a CCT programme for health.** According to the UNICEF data, Serbia has a declining trend in immunisation rates among children. The vaccination rate for measles, mumps, and rubella was 95.7% in 2010, but it dropped to 81% in 2016. This fall might be caused by the shortage of vaccines in the public supply chain between 2010 and 2014 and growing negative public attitudes towards vaccines.	Several legal documents regulate the social and welfare services in Serbia and make the central and local authorities, such as the Republic Institute for Social Protection and Social Welfare Centres, responsible for carrying out these activities. For preschool education, the state financially supports the access of children without parental care, children with SEN and children with disabilities, and children with low SES. Serbia also executes a CCT programme for education and includes children from financially deprived families. In return, these children are expected to regularly attend schools. The monthly amount of the CCT programme is 25 EUR.

Healthcare Services	Social Care Services
Serbia	
	Moreover, the state also assists households with financial social assistance and one-time assistance programmes, including food, medicine, heating, footwear, clothing, etc. LSGs also allocate funds for other types of support to their citizens, e.g., monthly bus tickets, excursions, summer vacations, scholarships, population policy benefits, etc. Their implementation across Serbia – criteria, target groups (whether poor, Roma, talented, merit-performance) and disbursement procedures (whether through CSW, or school or directly by local social office) vary significantly.
Turkey	
Turkey's legal and strategic documents show a strong commitment to the principle of equality and equity in healthcare services. All registered children in Turkey, including documented migrant and refugee children, until the age of 18 have access to free healthcare services. **Turkey implements a CCT programme for health, not only for its citizens but also for refugee children**. This is crucial for encouraging parents to visit doctors regularly for their children to be eligible for financial support. The vaccination programme for children is free of charge, mostly conducted in grade 1 and 8. The DTP coverage rate in Turkey is almost 99% (UNICEF, 2020). Despite the high vaccination and coverage rates in Turkey, the country faces an anti-vaccination campaign. A recent ruling of the Constitutional Court of Turkey found the vaccination of children without the permission of parents as violating the constitution which may negatively affect the vaccination rates of children in the future.	Although local governments are steadily more active in the social policy field in recent years, Turkey, as a centralised country, mostly develops its social care services at the ministry level as well as in collaboration with UNICEF and the Turkish Red Crescent. Preschool education is mandatory only for children with SEN and children with disabilities. Parents with children with SEN and children with disabilities receive financial support. Moreover, private institutions need to 'save' 3% of places for low SES children and their education in these schools is free of charge. However, in 2020, only 2.024 children were enrolled in private educational institutions. Turkey also implements a CCT programme for education, not only for Turkish children but refugee children as well. Children are expected to attend school regularly to receive the monthly allowance (Korlu, 2020) Apart from CCT programmes, Turkey also gives monthly allowance to students with low SES and free transportation services to children living in remote areas. Free school meals are available, but they are restricted to boarding schools and students benefiting from free transportation services.

Legally, all participating countries show a clear commitment to the equitable access of children to healthcare services. This commitment is regulated in several legal and strategic documents, e.g., Law on Public Health in Albania, Law on Health Care in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Law on Health in Kosovo, the Law on Health Care in North Macedonia, the Law on Healthcare in Serbia, Social Security and Universal Health Insurance Law in Turkey. However, there are also differences and country-specific approaches to regulating healthcare services, including vaccination strategies, projects for the inclusion of vulnerable communities, as well as challenges countries have faced. For some families, the inability to access all health services like vaccination and medical insurance means that children encounter issues when they need to enrol in school, apply for a specific profile or obtain assistive equipment like hearing aids, or wheelchairs. Even glasses can be unaffordable for some families so children without medical insurance have problems keeping up with the class in school due to impaired vision. As seen from the data presented above, the percentage of vaccinated children is in all countries lower for Roma and some other minorities. Countries like North Macedonia and Serbia are trying to actively increase the percentage of vaccinated children but it's a challenging process.

Social care services are established in all countries and education is seen as an integral part of support to families. There are CCT for children that attend school and different options for additional material support that families can benefit from. However, families with low socio-economic status need a better support system to cover the indirect costs of education in a foreseeable and respectful manner, to abolish the barriers related to lack of textbooks, school materials, dormitories, etc. Measures should also target education at non-compulsory levels that might be otherwise out of their reach, but they rarely do. That means that on top of measures like the provision of textbooks and teaching materials, access to student loans, scholarships, dormitories and mentoring should be part of social support services. Often benefits are merit-based and not targeting the poor (e.g., scholarships in Serbia were previously conditioned on grade point average), or the benefits are universal – available to all children (free excursions, free meals at local level that have more fund) which opens an issue of efficient use of already scarce local finances.

The effectiveness of addressing the education of children from vulnerable groups and low socio-economic status families depends on coherent action of complementary mandates of all relevant institutions, clear communication and decision-making channels inside one sector and between sectors, timely and strategic data gathering, evidence-based policy-making, sharing information and capacity building of all these stakeholders.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

Through the analysis of the institutional, legal and policy frameworks, as well as the measures and their implementation affecting the education of children from low-SES families and other vulnerable groups, this report provides insights into a variety of gaps in the evolving equity policy of the education systems in the project countries.

As mentioned, the main goal of this report is to provide policymakers with enough data, information and examples for informed policy-making. Conclusions and recommendations presented here are based on conclusions provided in country reports, complemented by evidence from relevant research. Some recommendations are broader and are important for most countries while some are situation specific.

The general conclusion is that, if the education systems strive to be equitable, they need to be based on a comprehensive rights-based approach, they must be dynamic, accounting for different learning environments and different learners, and the complexity of the barriers some children face need to be well acknowledged. The education system does not operate in a vacuum, and it is influenced by the greater context. Therefore, if countries wish to achieve equity in education, their policies and practices have to address the needs of all children, including traditionally marginalised groups, such as children from socially deprived families, children from remote settlements and rural areas, street children, migrants, refugees and nomadic populations, individuals with SEN and disabilities, linguistic/cultural minorities and girls and women. Needless to say, this list is by no means exhaustive – policymakers should always be on the lookout for emerging crisis or new groups at risk of discrimination or exclusion and align legislative framework and actions with the new context.

Regarding challenges, one of the most challenging aspects of achieving equity in education is to ensure it both on 'paper' and in action, i.e., in policy and practice. Also, many countries still struggle with one dimension or the other. Schools cannot be inclusive without inclusive schoolbooks and subject curriculum. Nor can they be inclusive unless accessibility is ensured. Teachers need to be trained and supported for working in a diversified classroom but also the teaching force should represent different populations. Equity needs to be embedded in values, norms and ethos, as well as in legislation and procedures.

Bearing the aforementioned in mind, key conclusions and recommendations are the following:

All countries have made progress towards the establishment of inclusive education in the last 10 years and put it high on the policy agenda. Despite the strong commitment to the idea of inclusive education, financial funds are not sufficient, education staff is not always fully trained, communication between stakeholders needs to be improved and some forms of separate provisions are still present in countries (based on disability or language spoken).

Recommendation

Transition to a more inclusive school that can address the diverse needs of students has to be accompanied by the reform of financing mechanisms, increasing and empowering human resources, the transformation of existing special schools and ensuring participative decision-making processes. The transition process is not just a matter of changing legislation and system design, it should also be followed by strong advocacy and education of the whole population. Education for all has to be incorporated as a guiding principle in financing formulas, teacher training programmes, curriculum, as well as media narrative.

Also, attitudes do not change easily so wide stakeholder involvement is key to ensure ownership and shared understanding of inclusive education principles. Planning has to start with the student in mind and not with the idea that all existing structures have to be kept as they are (financing mechanism, school network, training programmes, etc.).

All countries address equity in their national legislation but there are differences in how they conceptualise it. For instance, some conceptualise it as equal rights, whereas others as the absence of discrimination. Discrimination against specific groups is prohibited in all countries and they all have a definition of inclusion that embraces multiple social groups, but some lists are more comprehensive than others.

Recommendation

Laws usually list several characteristics based on which people cannot be discriminated against. These lists are not always exhaustive enough. It is notable that there is a lack of policies or action plans explicitly addressing and prohibiting school bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and/or variations in sex characteristics but there are also differences among countries regarding what characteristics are on the list. If the country takes up this kind of approach, the decision on characteristics that will be included has to be made in broad consultations.

As well intended as they may be, support measures still include targeted and exclusionary approaches that dominated when the deficit model was the most common, and what is considered to be inclusive pedagogy may instead be a medically defined focus on disability. Inclusive education relies on the principle that 'every learner matters and matters equally'. It is not only about academic achievement but also focused on social and emotional development, self-esteem and peer acceptance. Ensuring student diversity in mainstream classrooms and schools can reduce prejudices and stereotypes and contribute to preventing discrimination. Recognition of difference and representation of diverse groups in education policies and practices are crucial in the struggle against social exclusion.

Therefore, systems should continue towards eventually moving away from any form of categorical or group-based definition or learner identification in order to achieve real inclusion.

Legislation and policies often remain disconnected from the realities in everyday school practices.

Recommendation

The existence of a legal framework does not guarantee that its prescriptions will be implemented. It depends significantly on national contexts and political will to include disadvantaged groups.

It is vital to establish good cooperation between policymakers and practitioners on the local and the national level in planning and implementing policies, measures and resources in accordance with the real needs.

> Support systems are getting broader and more flexible over the years, but the issue of universal policies and equitable implementation of policies remains.

Recommendation

Information on the support measures need to be easily accessible and, most importantly, tailored to the potential beneficiaries. Focusing on financial support to students and families, irrespective of who is providing, it should be easily accessible to all children at risk of social exclusion. Legal and administrative procedures and criteria need to be updated and revisited to enable the coverage of all children in need. For the potential beneficiaries that are not covered by support systems measures, more proactivity is expected from the institutions that administer the measures and who are accountable for the persons in need.

Also, all support measures delivered as CCT call for a proactive approach towards students and their families by the institutions involved, i.e., the school, centres for social welfare, etc. Communication and reporting channels of the institutions concerned with the child's schooling progress could start with an early reporting of child's unjustified absenteeism by the school to the centres for social welfare or other local institution which should issue a warning but, ideally, help the child and family with available social support to overcome the difficulties that lead to absenteeism.

Satisfying a child's basic needs is the first condition that has to be met in order to keep children in school. Meals and clothing represent basic needs for the children from poor families and their systematic provision needs to be ensured on a national level. Currently, there are a variety of ways these basic needs are being addressed in all countries: through soup kitchen programmes, one-off social assistance, Red Cross/Crescent and NGOs activities, from local budgets and through school initiatives. However, the implementation of these measures is not systemic everywhere and, in some countries, there is no accountability in case the provision is missing. Only with a clear definition of the final accountability and clear budget allocations will the provision of measures to ensure basic needs be in place. This also refers to free textbooks and school supplies.

> Inter-sectoral collaboration on data exchange and coordination of policies need to be strengthened in all countries.

Recommendation:

Each country should have a detailed education system database fully developed and linked with the social welfare and health systems database. Such a database would allow large scale secondary analysis and data disaggregated by SES and disadvantaged groups which would contribute to better informed policies. Also, procedures that will secure that data collection always take into consideration child wellbeing and careful use of data need to be developed.

Policy coordination can be ensured through active cooperation between representatives in social welfare, health care and education in the joint topics.

> Inclusive curriculum is equally important as inclusive policies and infrastructure.

Recommendation

An inclusive curriculum needs to be accessible for all and take into consideration the diverse backgrounds of students. It should reflect population diversity and make each student feel equally acknowledged. Teachers need to have enough freedom and autonomy to be able to make necessary adjustments, as opposed to imposing a strict core curriculum that must be followed precisely. Besides, it needs to be stressed that even in countries where flexibility is granted to teachers on paper, in practice teachers are not doing so. Therefore, there is a need to bridge the gap between policy and implementation.

> Supplementary/remedial classes, in different forms, are available in every country, but this resource is not used to its full potential due to organisational constraints.

Recommendation:

Remedial teaching should become a preventive and flexible mechanism and thus contribute to success in education for all children. Remedial teaching should replace the widespread practice of private tutoring and ensure that all children can access additional support throughout the education system and not outside of it. Teachers should foresee the risks in achieving desired outcomes and act preventively. Remedial instruction should use a variety of teaching methodologies and, if needed, teachers should try a different approach than the one applied during the regular class. The motivational value of remedial teaching should be one of the main goals. The appropriate time in the timetable should be found which is not jeopardised by transportation constraints or any other organisational problem or it should be complemented by distance/online learning. Remedial teaching should also be organised as preparation for school examinations or preparations for class examinations in case of failing grades. Information about the schedule and content should be available in advance and the most appropriate format that both students and parents could easily access.

> Initial teacher education does not fully equip teachers for working in diversified classrooms, but in-service training can increase their competencies significantly if they are of good quality and planned strategically.

Recommendation

Teachers need proper training to be able to work in diversified classrooms. That does not entail introducing one specialist subject or module but making these competencies the core element of their initial and continuous education. Competencies related to inclusion are not always required as part of CPD or for teacher licensing and certification. Each country has to revisit their initial teacher training programmes from this perspective and gradually shift the paradigm from traditional subject-oriented, to the students at the centre of the learning process. Also, teacher training programmes must promote an inclusive education approach and discard the deficit model which highlights students' inadequacies and disregards the role of the education systems.

Recommendation

A review of the participation of school participants in the project countries shows the existence of regulation of their roles and responsibilities but the gap in implementation. Therefore, realistic mechanisms which enable parental participation are needed, and it is necessary to pave the way for the support staff to contribute to inclusion. Moreover, teams that are directly involved in activities related to inclusion and equity issues in the school should be strengthened in a way to support all the students.

Cooperation among school participants (as well as between school participants and the wider community which the school is part of) arises as yet another critical issue, as it improves school practices to better benefit children.

Effective mechanisms of motivation need to be put in place for teachers who teach in challenging circumstances. This would contribute to mainstreaming inclusive education.

Finally, children's participation occurs to different degrees in different project countries. Here, what needs to be underlined is that the schools need to make sure children's involvement is not trivialised and genuine participation is taking place.

COVID-19 education crisis only reinforced existing inequality and it is creating new gaps.

Recommendation

COVID-19 hit the whole planet, but while one part was able to transfer most of their school or work-related activities to an online environment, those families that lack basic living conditions or have very low incomes became even more segregated. One part of the problem students from low SES families faced is most certainly lack of ICT equipment or internet connection, but the other is losing regular school support they previously had. This does not refer just to learning support but also to maybe only proper meal students had during the day that was provided by schools. Therefore, a new risk variable should be introduced in all methodologies used for determining students that need support. Lack of ICT equipment, learning support at home or situations directly caused by the pandemic (parents in the hospital or passed away) should make it to the priority list of eligibility criteria for support.

Schools also need to find ways to reach students that cannot access online learning and engage peers in supporting them. The situation in all countries is fast-changing and schools are either partially opened or fully closed, so sets of measures have to also be flexible in order to minimize education discontinuity for students from vulnerable groups. Many international donors changed their programmes in order to provide ICT equipment, so quick reallocation of resources, coordinated by the national governments should be one of the main actions.

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