

# Albania

Rezana Vrapì  
Agim Alia

## Introduction

### Overview of Education System

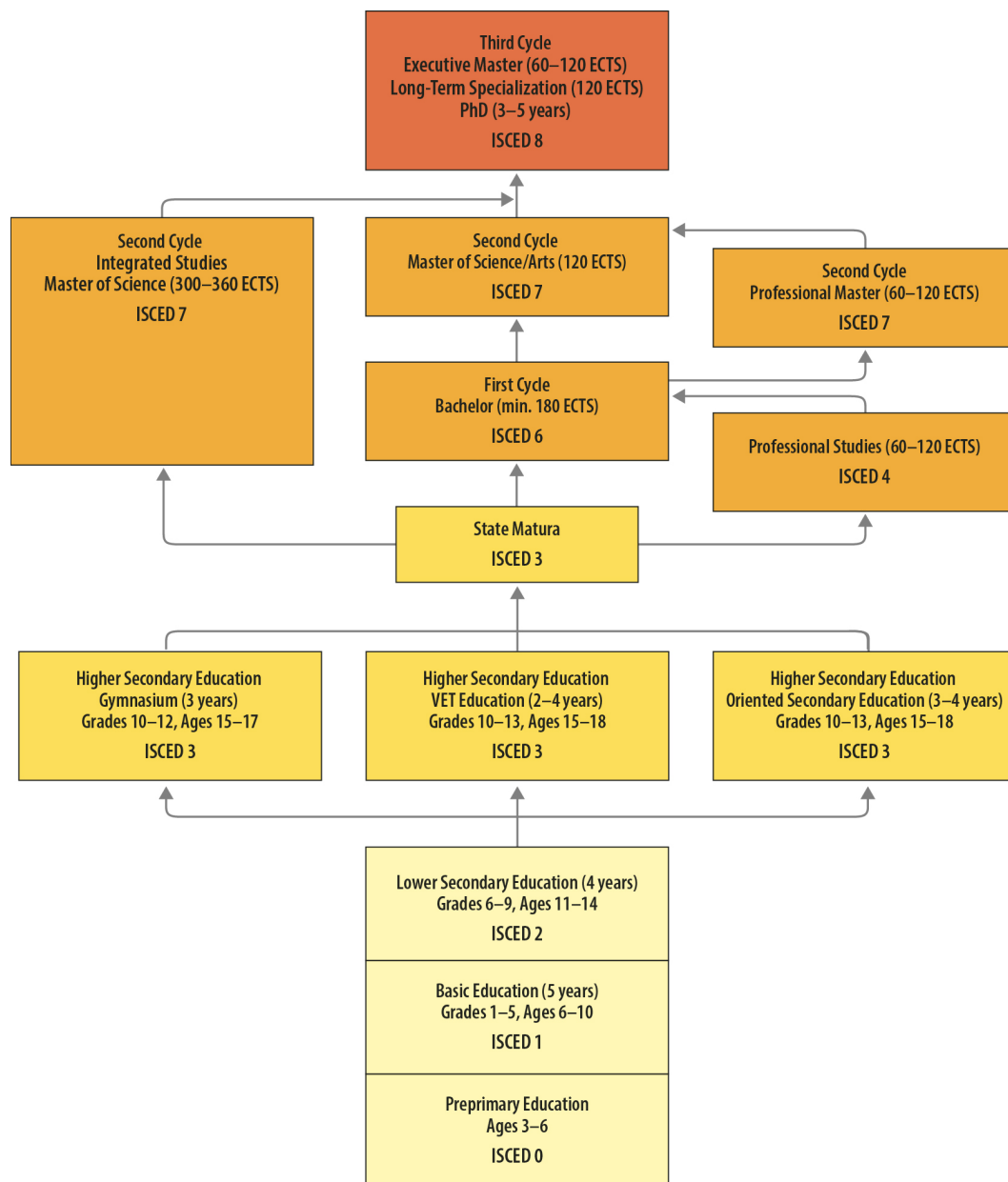
Albania has a shared vision to propel education into a better future. It has established long-term plans to link with European Union visions and at the same time respond to the needs of Albanian citizens. Albania is proactive in seeking to ensure that all students continuously improve and succeed.

Today the Albanian preuniversity education system is regulated by Law 69/2012, “On the preuniversity education system in the Republic of Albania” (as amended in 2015 and 2018). Preprimary education is attended by children ages 3 to 6. Children age 5 are able to attend the preparatory class at the basic education schools, aiming for their integration into the compulsory education system. Preuniversity education in Albania starts at the age of 6. In Albania, by law, everyone is obligated to continue compulsory full-time education up to age 16. Primary education consists of five grades, from first grade to fifth grade. Secondary education consists of two subgroups: lower secondary education and upper secondary education.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth is responsible for Albania’s education system and for implementing the government’s political program in preuniversity education. Other institutions dependent on the Ministry share responsibility for preuniversity education. The Education Services Centre is responsible for national assessments and examinations. The Agency for Quality Assurance of Pre-University Education provides the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth and all educational institutions with the highest professional level of expertise and advice, based on research, studies, and education practice. Other public bodies operate within the field of preuniversity education, such as general and regional directorates and local education offices.

Preuniversity education includes preschool education, basic education, and secondary education, provided in public and private education institutions. A summary of this system is presented in Exhibit 1.

**Exhibit 1: Albanian Education System**



With regard to the structure of the education system, in recent years there have been reforms for the development of education according to a coordinated planning, management, and evaluation model. The education system has undergone many changes to modernize the curriculum, develop human capacity in the system, expand access to compulsory education, and adapt national policy objectives to the European and international frameworks. From 2019 onward, a new competency-based curriculum has been implemented across the preuniversity education system, coupled with necessary improvements in student learning and assessment methodologies.

## Use and Impact of PIRLS

Albania participated in PIRLS for the first time in 2021. In recent years, several policy initiatives in Albania have sought to improve the achievement of students in language/reading. The reformed curriculum was implemented fully in 2019. PIRLS results will be used by Albanian authorities with the belief that the results will have an impact on education policies and reforms.

## The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

Albania implemented a reformed language/reading curriculum in 2014. The reformed curriculum of preuniversity education in Albania is based on a competency approach and is organized into a structure that supports student development in competencies, learning areas, and learning outcomes for competency and field. It develops key competencies (based on European guidelines) and is structured according to learning outcomes for competencies and learning areas. The key competencies in the reformed curriculum are organized into the following areas:

1. Communication and expression competence
2. Competence of thinking
3. Competence of studying to learn
4. Competence for life, entrepreneurship, and the environment
5. Personal competence
6. Civil competence
7. Digital competence

Learning areas, which separately or in an integrated way contribute to the development of key and subject competencies, are the basis for organizing the teaching-educational process at school for each level of education. The reformed curriculum is organized into seven areas of learning. Learning fields include one or more subjects. The subjects are based on the learning outcomes defined for each field. The learning areas are:

1. Languages and communication (Albanian language-literature, foreign languages)
2. Mathematics
3. Natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics)
4. Society and environment (history, geography, social science)
5. Arts (visual art, music, theater, dance)
6. Physical education, sports, and health
7. Technology and Information and Communications Technology

The new curriculum is structured into a core curriculum and an elective curriculum. The core curriculum consists of areas/subjects that society (the state) expects any student who completes preuniversity education to have studied. The core curriculum is the same for all students with

regard to type, number, and learning outcomes. The elective curriculum is provided by the school and is chosen by students according to the interests of their curriculum and career. The choice begins in first grade and advances throughout schooling.

The Albanian language subject is compulsory in basic education. It is taught in Grades 1 to 9 and comprises approximately 25 percent of the curriculum's instruction hours.

The fourth grade Albanian language curriculum was introduced in 2014.<sup>a</sup> Students speak, listen, read, and write Albanian for 5 lesson hours per week and 175 hours per school year. Students gain knowledge and skills about the language system, although the emphasis might be in one of the competencies. Exhibit 2 shows the number of hours for these competencies.

**Exhibit 2: Instruction Hours, Grade 4 Albanian Language**

Competency	Number of Hours
Listening to different texts	5
Speaking in order to communicate and to learn	5
Reading different literary and nonliterary texts	75
Reading for personal and functional aims	30
Right use of language	60
Total hours	175

## Professional Development Requirements and Programs

### Teachers and the Teaching Profession

In recent years, Albania has made changes to improve initial preparation of teachers, such as raising the bar for entry to teacher education programs. Public and private higher education institutions conduct the initial preparation of teachers. According to the requirements of the Bologna Declaration, all higher education institutions that prepare teachers have built initial training programs in two consecutive cycles. The first cycle and the second cycle provide opportunities for candidates to become teachers, to complete university studies, and then continue the procedures to obtain a teacher's professional license. Initial teacher preparation includes a full-time study according to Levels 6 and 7 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework. Upon successful completion of the state examination, new teachers apply on the Teachers for Albania portal to be employed at local education offices that have vacancies.

### Professional Development and Teacher Qualifications

The aim of continual professional development of educators is to update their knowledge and develop their competencies to provide all students with quality education services. This system is implemented within the period of time that teachers are at work using time frames when they are

<sup>a</sup> For more information, see <https://ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Gjuhe-shqipe-4-dhe-5-1.pdf>

not teaching. The legislation emphasizes that teachers and principals are trained at least three days a year and according to the “demand-supply” system, based on the needs of teachers and offers from accredited training agencies. The Accreditation Commission of Training Programmes accredits the training programs/modules provided by the training agencies, including higher education institutions. Therefore, all Albanian language teachers must be trained at least three days a year.

According to current legislation, the categories of teacher qualification are Qualified Teacher, Specialist Teacher, and Master Teacher. The promotion from one category to the next is realized through experience, education, and the successful completion of a final examination in the appropriate qualification category, and is accompanied by an increase in salary.

The qualification process is based on teacher education programs. The content of the programs includes the core areas a teacher must master: official documents related to teacher activity, subject-related programs, and general aspects of pedagogy and methodology in teaching and learning, as well as subject-specific programs, aspects of communication and ethics in the school, aspects of Albanian spelling, and the scientific content of the subject. Requirements for teacher qualification comprise two stages. The first stage is related to the professional portfolio of teachers, which consists of daily work documents. In the second stage, teachers are tested according to their respective profiles. The test contains requirements related to the general psychopedagogical training of the teacher as well as the scientific content of the profile.

Albania has made some changes to promote teachers’ collaborative learning. The method used to facilitate this process is through professional learning networks across the country. The teachers in these networks cooperate and share information with each other using the train-the-trainer method.

## Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

The primary purpose of assessment is the reliable collection of data (of any kind related to education), on the basis of which policymakers, education specialists, scholars, teachers, and other stakeholders will make important decisions regarding students or the education system in general. Therefore, to intervene in the system and to make appropriate changes, data and decisions are required.

### National Examinations

External student assessment is carried out through assessment of student achievement in primary education (end of fifth grade), National Basic Education Examinations (end of ninth grade), and State Matura examinations at the end of upper secondary education (end of twelfth grade). The other form of external evaluation is carried out with a certain number of students. The fifth grade assessment evaluates students in writing through an integrated test of their knowledge in Albanian

language, mathematics, and science. The National Basic Education Examination is mandatory and certifies completion of compulsory education but is not used for placement into upper secondary education. There are three examinations: Albanian language, mathematics, and foreign language.

State Matura examinations are mandatory, and students must pass them to certify the completion of upper secondary education. Students who pass the examination receive a State Matura Diploma, which is required for entry to a higher education institution. Starting with the State Matura reform in 2019, students take three mandatory tests (Albanian language and literature, mathematics, and foreign language) and one mandatory elective test to be chosen from lists of electives according to program type.

### School-Level Assessments

Starting with the 2014 curriculum reform, Albania endeavored to make some changes to the system of assessment. It introduced a new assessment framework in conjunction with a new curriculum framework. In Albania, there are three main modes of classroom assessments in Grades 4 to 12: continuous, end of term, and portfolio.

School-level assessments include formative assessments that take place in the classroom and summative assessments that are designed and administered in the classroom or at the school level. The main purpose of student assessment in the classroom is to improve the performance of learning outcomes and the learning process itself. Assessment is considered as the process by which data is collected and judged for the value of achieving learning outcomes based on achievement levels. It is based on student achievement levels, which indicate student performance in terms of learning outcomes according to subject-related competencies.

Albania uses data from national assessments and school-level assessments to monitor the education system. Assessment provides full and continual information about student learning and progress, serving as a basis for comparing achievements with expected learning outcomes. It creates a platform that serves teachers and parents to support students in further learning steps, as well as students themselves to develop in this process. Finally, information on achievements and other outcomes is reported to stakeholders, including students; parents; teachers; the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth; and subsidiary institutions.

## Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

### Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The global pandemic COVID-19 brought challenges to the education system in many countries, including Albania.<sup>b</sup> In March 2020, all lessons in Albania switched to online classes. Following the orders of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, preuniversity education institutions in the Republic of Albania used several platforms and other online tools to provide online lectures from

<sup>b</sup> For more information, see [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education_en)

March 2020 to September 2020. During the 2020–2021 academic year, teaching took place in school, online, or by combining the two methods. In February 2021, some lower and upper secondary education schools in major cities closed for two weeks (until the end of February) and conducted online lessons to cope with the effects of COVID-19 before reopening in March 2021.

### Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

Despite the involvement of all stakeholders in education, online learning was difficult for students in different schools and regions.

### Policy and Practice Changes

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, in cooperation with the Agency for Quality Assurance of Pre-University Education, supported schools by drafting guidelines to help teachers and school leaders, and conducting trainings for teachers to develop digital skills. Albanian Radio Television, with the maximum commitment of all teachers in record time, created a television channel dedicated to RTSH School to offer all students a way to attend classes at the same time. The Ministry also had a dedicated channel on YouTube for students to follow and repeat the learning topics at any time. Digital devices were donated to students in need.

At the end of the 2020–2021 academic year, reports on student achievement were studied to identify student needs for each subject and each class related to the curriculum. A specific program was developed dedicated to learning topics for which students needed repeated instruction.

Based on this situation, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth developed additional lessons from September 1–24, 2021, to enable all students to reinforce and improve their results. The new academic year started on September 27, 2021.

Guides for improving student achievement in primary education were drafted to assist school leaders and teachers in lower secondary education and upper secondary education as a result of COVID-19.

### Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

The global pandemic COVID-19 impacted PIRLS 2021 by causing school closures and affecting student proficiency. It was difficult to secure full cooperation of schools and students to be part of this international assessment due to COVID-19.

## Suggested Readings

Maghnouj, S., Fordham, E., Guthrie, C., Henderson, K., & Trujillo, D. (2020). *OECD reviews of evaluation and assessment in education: Albania*. OECD Publishing, Paris. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1787/d267dc93-en>