

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe MISSION IN KOSOVO

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Tracking School Dropouts and Non-attendance in Kosovo

Executive Summary

This paper presents the key findings of research carried out during 2011 by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission in Kosovo (OSCE) on school dropouts in Kosovo. It shows a significant lack of reliable, official data relating to school dropouts, largely due to inadequate monitoring mechanisms by schools and other responsible institutions. Aiming to raise awareness among key stakeholders on the need to strengthen their efforts to track school attendance and reduce dropouts, especially among vulnerable groups, the OSCE recommends relevant stakeholders to fully implement the legal and policy framework governing the right to education – including the Action Plan against School Abandonment 2009–2014.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right crucial to the full development of all children and the realization of numerous other human rights in Kosovo. A critical element of the right to education is the completion of free and compulsory primary schooling and by extension the reduction of dropouts. In Kosovo, there are indications that school dropouts occur particularly among marginalized and vulnerable groups or communities. In order to ensure full and equal attendance of all school-age children to primary education in Kosovo, institutions should record and closely monitor education data disaggregated by gender, community and other relevant factors.

OSCE monitoring activities and field research on school dropouts were carried out from April to November 2011. Information was collected through interviews with directors of 83 primary and lower-secondary schools operating under the Kosovo curriculum in 24 municipalities as well as with municipal directors of education, students, and representatives of MEST and other local and international organizations active in the field of education.¹

¹ Municipalities and schools were selected to ensure balance between rural and urban areas as well as between communities. Interviews were conducted in Dragash/Dragaš, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Hani i Elezit/Đeneral Janković, Kačanik/Kaçanik, Kamenicë/Kamenica, Klinë/Klina, Klokot/Kllokot, Malishevë/Mališevo, Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Pejë/Peć, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prishtinë/Priština, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, Skenderaj/Srbica, Štrpce/Shtërpçë, Suharekë/Suva Reka, Viti/Vitina and Vushtrri/Vučitrn. Schools operating under the Serbian curriculum were not included in the research. OSCE also interviewed representatives in Prishtinë/Priština of the Council of Europe, the United Nations Children's Fund, the German development agency Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the non-governmental organizations

After outlining the legal and policy framework on the right to education, this paper presents the key findings of OSCE research and highlights serious gaps in currently available data, as well as data collection and monitoring mechanisms. It concludes with a set of recommendations for each stakeholder concerned.

Legal and policy framework

Kosovo's legal and policy framework outlines the responsibilities of Kosovo institutions in the field of education that are relevant to the monitoring of attendance and reduction of dropouts. The Law on Primary and Secondary Education tasks MEST to “plan, co-ordinate and monitor the development of pre-primary, primary and secondary education” in co-operation with municipalities.² MEST is also mandated under the Law on Pre-University Education to develop and maintain an education-management information system to monitor school dropouts, among other patterns.³ The Action Plan against School Abandonment 2009–2014 further requires MEST to gather and process data and report on school enrolment and dropouts and requires schools – with the support of municipal directors of education – to monitor and report on student attendance at the end of each semester.⁴ In support of this, the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011–2016 foresees that all schools shall record “accurate evidence of all dropout cases”⁵.

Recognizing the relationship of education to employment opportunities, to an adequate standard of living and to other human rights, the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo 2009-2015⁶ further highlights the need to prioritize outreach to vulnerable communities – and women and girls among them – to ensure their equal access to education.⁷ The Strategy observes that such outreach is especially necessary to address the communities' low levels of attendance in compulsory primary education, as well as poor literacy and enrollment rates at higher levels, which reflect their unequal and inadequate access to education due to structural, social and indirect forms of discrimination.⁸

Kosovo's legal and policy framework is thus broadly in line with international standards on the human right to education which require not only compulsory and free primary education but also adoption of temporary special measures to combat dropouts and improve attendance levels especially among vulnerable groups and women and girls.⁹ Of special relevance to the

Balkan Sunflowers, the European Centre for Minorities Issues Kosovo, and the Roma, Ashkali Documentation Centre.

² Sections 11 and 18, Law No. 2002/2 on Primary and Secondary Education, as promulgated by UNMIK Regulation 2002/19, 31 October 2002.

³ Article 5.1.6, Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education in Kosovo, 16 September 2011.

⁴ Objective 2, Action Plan against School Abandonment 2009–2014, adopted by the MEST in 2009. MEST Decision 375/02-1 2006 also instructs school directors to report on school dropouts.

⁵ Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011–2016, p. 78, http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/2c_Kosovo_Education_Strategic_Plan_EN_FINAL_DRAFT.pdf (accessed 11 July 2012). The Education Strategic Plan incorporates the Action Plan against School Abandonment, *ibid*.

⁶ Office of the Prime Minister, *Strategy for the Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo*, December 2008.

⁷ Sections 1.2 and 2.2, *ibid*.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), GA Res 217A (III), 10 December 1948, A/810 at 71; Article 26, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966, 999 UNTS 171; Article 28, Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, 1577 UNTS 3; Article 10, Convention on the Elimination of All

European context, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities¹⁰ further provides for institutions “to promote equal opportunities for access to education at all levels for persons belonging to national minorities.”¹¹ In its second set of recommendations on the implementation of the Framework Convention in Kosovo, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers called on Kosovo institutions to “increase efforts to ensure equal access to education for all persons belonging to minority communities” in order to address clear and demonstrable inequalities in the education system through targeted institutional reforms.¹²

To implement this legal and policy framework and realize the human right to education, Kosovo institutions should methodically monitor and advance equal access to education through appropriate indicators and benchmarks based on the collection of disaggregated education data.¹³

Lack of accurate, complete and reliable data

According to MEST, the overall enrolment rate for lower secondary education has remained high over the past five years, and the official dropout rate in compulsory education has ranged from 0.6 to 0.8 per cent since 2006, largely under the regional average.¹⁴ However, the OSCE found in its research that those official statistics provide unreliable and incomplete information on school dropouts. In the 2008/2009 school year, the MEST reported 103.9 per cent of compulsory school-age children were enrolled in the first year of primary education.¹⁵

Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979, 1249 UNTS 13; Article 2, Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS 9). All of these provisions of international human treaties are directly enforceable in Kosovo courts, on account of their inclusion in the 2008 constitution of Kosovo. Providing more precise substance to authorities’ obligations under the UDHR, see also: Articles 13 and 14, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, 993 UNTS 3; and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General Comment No. 13: The right to education*, E/C.12/1999/10 (“CESCR, General Comment No. 13”).

¹⁰ Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 1995, 2151 UNTS 24.

¹¹ Article 12(3), *ibid.*

¹² Council of Europe, Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities “Second Opinion on Kosovo” (adopted on 5 November 2009) ACFC/OP/II(2009)004, Strasbourg, 31 May 2010 Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, second recommendations regarding the implementation of the Framework Convention in Kosovo, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 6 July 2011 at the 1118th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies, Strasbourg (the Committee of Ministers second recommendations). See:

http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_fcnmdocs/PDF_2nd_OP_Kosovo_en.pdf and
<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1812633> (accessed 11 July 2012).

¹³ As the relevant legal framework explicitly requires institutions to strive toward equal access to education for all individuals, communities and sexes – including through special measures to close any attendance gaps – any efforts to satisfy that framework require the tracking of enrolment by those respective groups through data disaggregated on those bases. For more on the nature of those process requirements, necessary to fulfil the right to education as provided by the UDHR see: CESCR, General Comment No. 13, paras. 37 and 52, note 9, *supra*.

¹⁴ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Kosovo Education in Figures 2008/09*. See: http://www.masht.gov.net/advCms/documents/Arsimi_i_Kosov%C3%ABs_n%C3%AB_shifra.pdf (accessed 1 August 2012). According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the dropout rate for primary education is 10 per cent in Albania (2003), 4.7 per cent in Romania (2003) and 5.6 per cent in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2005). See: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 1 August 2012).

¹⁵ Compulsory education in Kosovo curriculum schools consists of primary and lower-secondary education. Primary education includes grades 1 to 5 with students ages 6 to 11; lower secondary school is grades 6 to 9, ages 11 to 15. Section 7, Law No. 2002/2 on Primary and Secondary Education, as promulgated by UNMIK Regulation 2002/19, 31 October 2002; Article 9.2, Law on Pre-University Education, *ibid.* The 103.9 per

Moreover, 37 per cent of schools surveyed collect no data at all on dropouts or claimed to have had no cases of dropouts over the past three years – a perception that is largely unsubstantiated.¹⁶

Data gathered by municipal departments of education does not always correspond to what school directors reported to the OSCE, demonstrating flawed data collection methods and a lack of information sharing between institutions. For instance, in Prishtinë/Priština municipality, the director of education indicated that in one particular school there were two dropouts in 2008/2009 and four in 2009/2010, while the school director believed those same students to still be enrolled.

During the OSCE's research for this briefing, no municipal or school officials interviewed about the reasons for school dropouts could base their responses on concrete facts or figures. Although most schools surveyed seemed to keep some information on student enrolment, few had full records of dropouts.

The failure to disaggregate enrolment data also makes it difficult to draw any conclusions from the information that *is* available, such as the scale and causes of dropout and non-attendance trends, both in general and amongst any disproportionately affected groups or communities in various localities. To date, MEST has disaggregated enrolment data only on the basis of gender, though a variety of relevant performance indicators for equitable access are included in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan.¹⁷ Moreover, schools do not consistently disaggregate their total enrolment data into categories such as transfers, dropouts and new enrolments – meaning that schools are unable to track numerical changes among those categories.

Of the schools surveyed that kept any data on dropouts, they usually disaggregated it by gender though not always by community, even in those schools attended by students from several communities. For instance, in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Skenderaj/Srbica and Vushtrri/Vučitrn municipalities, none of the schools surveyed disaggregated data according to community. The majority of school directors interviewed likewise do not record and report when and why a dropout took place. Most data is currently collected in a format that only shows whether a child is in school or not, without reference to factors that contribute to dropouts or low attendance patterns. Under the existing system of data collection, education

cent number is based on a total enrolment of 176,469 students in the first grade of primary school; 169,887 represented approximately 100 per cent of 6-year-olds (the age of compulsory education), while the remaining 3.9 per cent included those who had enrolled before the age of 6 or after the age of 7. See Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Kosovo Education in Figures 2008/09*, p. 34. See: http://www.masht-gov.net/advCms/documents/Arsimi_i_Kosov%C3%ABs_n%C3%AB_shifra.pdf (accessed 1 August 2012).

¹⁶ The 37 per cent includes: all three schools surveyed in Dragash/Dragaš municipality, two out of three schools surveyed in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, all four schools surveyed in Kamenicë/Kamenica, two schools out of four surveyed in Klinë/Klina, the one school surveyed in Klokot/Kllokot, two schools out of four surveyed in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, one school out of two surveyed in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, one school out of four surveyed in Pejë/Peć, three schools out of four surveyed in Podujevë/Podujevo, three schools out of four surveyed in Prishtinë/Priština, four out of seven schools surveyed in Prizren, one school out of four surveyed in Skenderaj/Srbica, the one school surveyed in Štrpce/Shtërpçë, two out of four schools surveyed in Viti/Vitina and three schools out of four surveyed in Vushtrri/Vučitrn municipality.

¹⁷ Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011-2016, note 5, *supra*. See, e.g., “Chapter 7: Monitoring and Evaluating Education Sector Performance”, pp. 159-168. See: http://www.masht-gov.net/advCms/documents/KESP_2011_2016.pdf (accessed 1 August 2012).

institutions thus do not have the technical means to track those children who have never registered in school.

In particular, none of the surveyed municipalities where Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Ashkali or Kosovo Egyptians live has any data on the number of children belonging to these communities who are not enrolled in school at age 6, as is compulsory. In Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, the non-governmental organization Balkan Sunflowers observed high dropout rates – particularly among the Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Ashkali and Kosovo Egyptian communities – which were not apparent in the data provided to the OSCE by school officials.¹⁸ Such indications should prompt municipal- and central-level institutions to conduct outreach and adopt other measures necessary to ensure school-age children from vulnerable communities are enrolled on an equal basis, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds.

Inadequate monitoring system

The poor quality of education data demonstrates the inadequacy and unreliability of monitoring methods used by the MEST and municipal institutions to track school dropouts and non-enrolment. In the absence of a monitoring system that collects actionable disaggregated data, officials interviewed by the OSCE relied on anecdotal and unsubstantiated personal beliefs, rather than objective measurements of school dropouts and non-attendance. For instance, the belief that there are no dropouts is widespread. Consequently, about one-third of the schools surveyed that reported not keeping any data on school dropouts indicated their reason for not doing so was the supposedly low number of dropouts in their respective schools.¹⁹ Prishtinë/Priština municipality's director of education²⁰ and six school directors interviewed in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Prishtinë/Priština and Pejë/Peć municipalities²¹ further suggested that dropouts are a “cultural” phenomenon, primarily affecting Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Ashkali and Kosovo Egyptian communities. Others said students dropped out of school only during the higher grades of compulsory education.²²

Failing to respond to either trend – whether real or perceived – would likewise fail to comply with the legal and policy framework for Kosovo education institutions, which demands the proactive monitoring of dropouts and enrolment in compulsory primary education for children from all communities.

The issue of school dropouts is not clearly understood by all school and municipal officials in charge of addressing it. Dropouts are generally calculated based on the difference between the number of students registered at the beginning of the school year and the number of students remaining at the end of the school year. This method fails to account for other situations causing students to leave school – such as transfer to another school, death or

¹⁸ Interview with representative of Balkan Sunflowers, Prishtinë/Priština, 27 October 2011.

¹⁹ Two schools in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica municipality, one school in Prishtinë/Priština municipality, one school in Podujeve/Podujevo municipality, three schools in Dragash/Dragaš municipality, one school in Prizren municipality, and two schools in Viti/Vitina municipality.

²⁰ Prishtinë/Priština municipal director of education, Prishtinë/Priština, personal interview, 26 April 2011.

²¹ Six school directors in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Prishtinë/Priština and Pejë/Peć municipalities, personal interviews, April 2011.

²² Prishtinë/Priština municipal director of education, Prishtinë/Priština, personal interview, 26 April 2011. Interviews with four school directors in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica municipality and one school in Mamuşa/Mamushë/Mamuşa municipality, April 2011.

moving out of Kosovo – and consequently undermines the accurate calculation of school dropouts. Transfers of students from one Kosovo-curriculum school to another are not properly recorded as such and can increase or decrease dropout rates when counted among them incorrectly.

Despite MEST's introduction of a more sophisticated data collection system in 2002, inconsistencies continue to result from the lack of uniform, regular and effective monitoring protocols within the schools.²³ The failure of MEST to distribute clear guidelines on data collection and impose binding procedures for municipal officials and school directors further undermines compliance with the applicable legal and policy framework. Many school directors reported to the OSCE that they do not pay special attention to school dropouts because they have not received any relevant instruction from municipalities or the central level. Similarly, municipal directors of education do not systematically request data collection, archiving and information management from schools. The quality of reporting also correlates to the level of schools' institutional memory. The majority of newly-appointed school directors could only provide the data collected since the beginning of their assignments.

Recommendations

Based on research on school dropouts across Kosovo and challenges caused by the lack of an adequate data collection and monitoring system, the OSCE recommends that Kosovo institutions co-ordinate and increase their efforts at all levels to monitor and combat school dropouts and non-enrolment, in accordance with the human right to education as given effect by Kosovo's legal and policy framework. Full implementation of that framework, including all activities foreseen in the objectives of the Action Plan against School Abandonment, would contribute to better economic, security and public health outcomes. Ensuring that all children complete compulsory schooling is central to long-term political, economic and social development and is necessary for the full realization of numerous other interdependent human rights.²⁴ Improved mechanisms and protocols to collect actionable disaggregated data would not only help officials to monitor and respond appropriately to school dropouts but also would help to eliminate discrimination against women and disadvantaged communities by ensuring equal opportunities and a common background among different social groups within society.

In light of the above and with a view to guaranteeing the right to education for all children in Kosovo, the OSCE advises the relevant stakeholders to consider the following recommendations:

²³ Upon the initiative and support of the World Bank, MEST instituted an education management information system in 2002. It aims to gather, process, report, monitor, evaluate and distribute statistical data and relevant education indicators. However, the system was not extended to schools until September 2011, via a new software program. As a result, at the time of assessment school directors still used different templates for tracking dropouts. Among the schools surveyed that keep data on dropouts, some used the MEST's forms, some use the SOK's forms and some used their own registers. Eleven school directors reported keeping hand-written registers. This is due to the fact that they do not possess well-maintained electronic equipment or are not trained to use information technology. In addition, schools collected information on dropouts at different times throughout the school year: some at the end of the year, some at the end of each semester and some at the end of a school cycle. Rather, school directors – with the support of municipal directors of education – are obliged to collect information on dropouts continuously and report it at the end of each semester. See note 4, *supra*.

²⁴ See, CESCR, General Comment No. 13, para. 1, note 9, *supra*.

To the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology:

- Ensure implementation of the legal obligations of local education institutions to collect accurate qualitative and quantitative long-term data on dropouts, disaggregated by gender, community and any other relevant categories.
- Require the use of an education management information system in all Kosovo curriculum schools, with clear and direct standards about how schools should track dropouts.
- Ensure that school transfers and other reasons for students leaving school are properly and accurately recorded in all cases.
- Provide guidance to municipal departments of education on how to implement the data collection requirements and other elements of the Action Plan against School Abandonment.

To municipal departments of education:

- Work closely with all school directors to monitor school dropouts and attendance rates on a regular basis and systematically report to the MEST.
- Co-operate with both the MEST and with all school directors to raise awareness about and implement the data-collection guidelines in the Action Plan against School Abandonment.
- Pro-actively investigate and remedy cases of non-enrolment in schools, including by tracking the attendance of school-age children in the respective municipalities.

To school directors and teachers:

- Proactively monitor the occurrence of and reasons for non-attendance and dropouts on a daily, monthly and yearly basis – as well as within the school year cycle – and report those findings to the municipal departments of education each semester with data disaggregated by gender, community and any other relevant categories.
- Proactively seek out absent students and their parents to identify the factors behind a child's absence from school and encourage attendance.

To international and non-governmental organizations:

- Encourage and support Kosovo institutions to promptly and effectively monitor and combat dropouts, and to improve their capacities to track and respond to attendance gaps between different segments of the population.