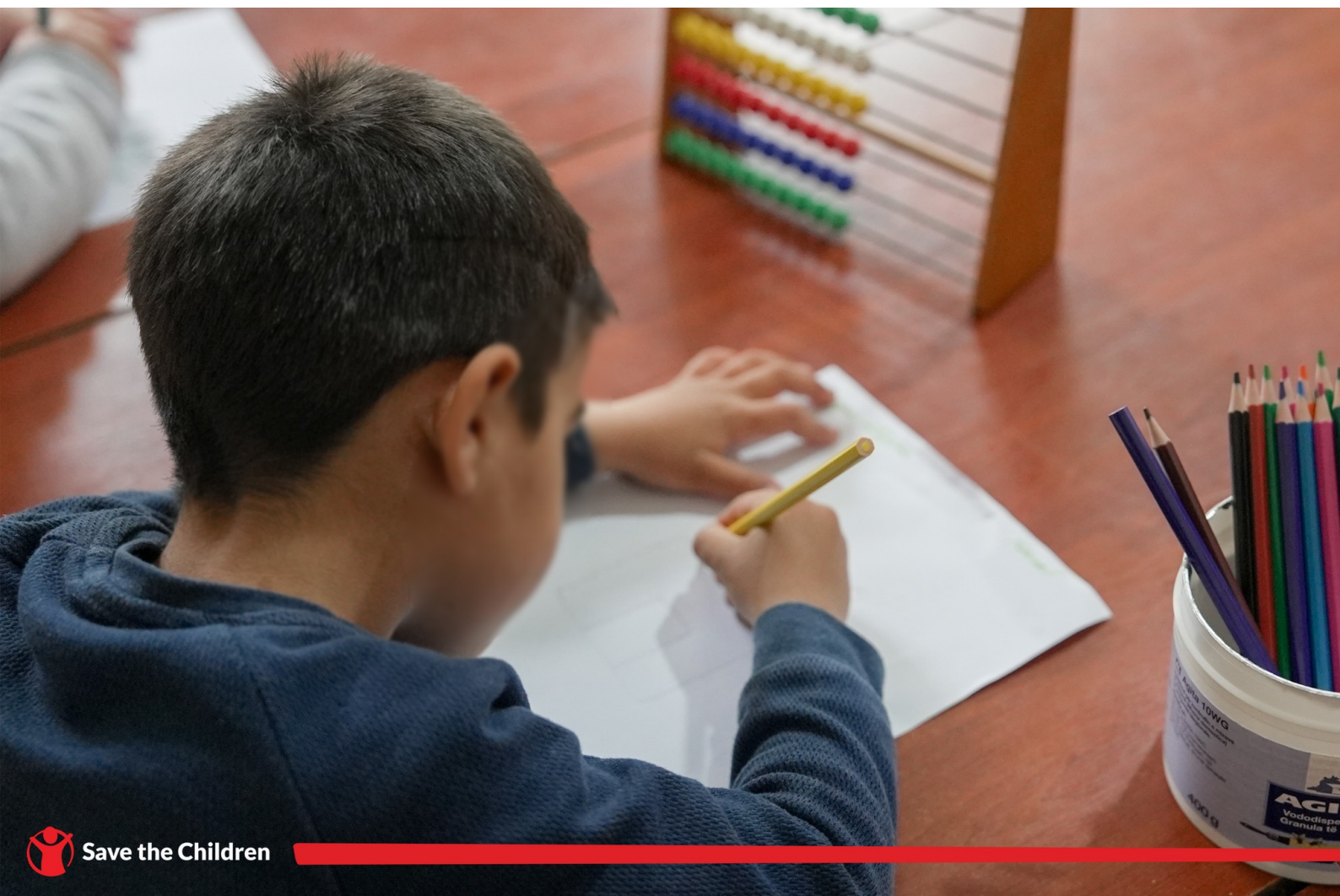




ASSESSMENT REPORT

Survey on Children Access to Pre-Primary Education and Transition to Primary Education

November 2021

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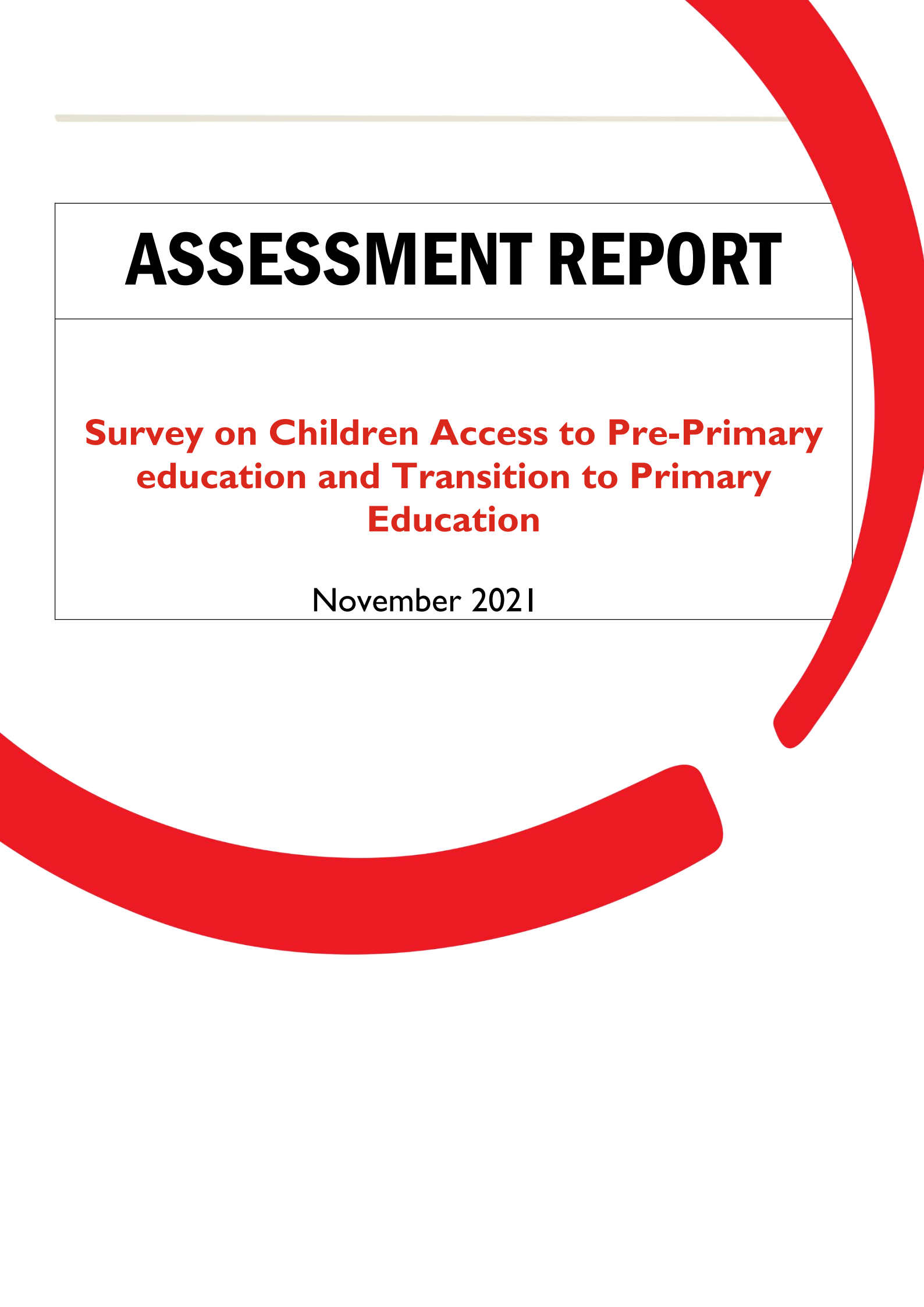
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List of Acronyms

ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Development
ES	Elementary School
GER	Gross enrolment ratio
INSTAT	National Institute of Statistics
MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
MoES	Ministry of Education, and Sports
NE	Ndihma Ekonomike (Social Assistance)
NER	Net enrolment ratio
RZVAP	Regional Office of Pre-University Education
SC	Save the Children
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZVAP	Local Office of Pre-University Education

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Executive Summary

In the framework of the project "Leave No Child Behind in Inclusive Schools and Kindergartens - Albania" implemented from 2019 to 2021 SC focused its work in ensuring a smooth transition for young children into early learning programs, and from early learning programs to primary school. Transition process is a critical component of a quality ECCD program.

The assessment "Children Access to Pre-Primary education and Transition to Primary Education", initiated and supported by Save the Children in Albania, aims to provide evidence based recommendations for policy makers regarding the development or improvement of transition policies of children 5-6 years old from preschool education/preparatory classes to primary education as well as raise awareness of central government, local governments, schools and parents, on early childhood education, as a shared social responsibility.

Nations around that world are becoming aware of the importance of early childhood education. According to UNESCO, "Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. ECCE has the possibility to nurture caring, capable and responsible future citizens."¹

To provide some evidence that shed lights on the critical concerns that may hamper the future of Albanian children as well as in fully alignment with key objective of "Save the Children Education program", notably: All children in Albania access inclusive quality ECCD/Basic Education with improved learning outcomes and meaningful participation", this assessment looks in depth to the below established objectives:

1. Access and participation of children 5-6 years old in pre-primary education and identify inequalities based on geography, living conditions and ethnicity.
2. Teachers 'and parents' perceptions of the challenges of the transition of 5-6-year-old children from preschool to primary education and the necessary interventions at central and local level to change or improve the relevant legislation and regulations to overcome the challenges and smooth transition
3. Actual institutional roles and responsibilities of MoES, MoHSP and LGs in the management of pre-primary education and coordination of the transition process and provide relevant recommendations to improve management and coordination.

Study is cross sectional and based in a combined quantitative and qualitative method for data gathering purposes. Variables are measured using 6 questionnaires to measure the access, participation, transition and cooperation and responsibilities of MoES and LGs. Parents and teachers/educators are considered a valued source of assessment results. Due to the impossibility of direct measurements of children aged 5-6, the assessment includes numerous sources of evidence, especially reports from parents and teachers in pre-primary and primary school.

Primary information is collected from 1,661 face to face interviews with parents of children aged 5-6 in kindergarten (third group) or in preparatory classes, 115 face to face interviews with primary school teachers and 139 teachers of kindergarten/preparatory classes. Triangulation of data from face-to-face interviews with educational staff with 8 focus group discussions (46 participants), served to complement and clarify the quantitative findings from face-to-face interviews. In addition to the focus group discussions, 8 key informants at central and local level were invited to participate in individual interviews, thus completing the qualitative part of the study. Key standards adopted.

The assessment methodology is designed on the application of the following fundamental criteria:

¹ <https://www.nu.edu/resources>



- All children 5-6 years old have access to quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help them to prepare for school, regardless geographical location (rural or urban), economic conditions (poor or non-poor) and ethnicity (Roma, Egyptians, Albanians).
- Pre-primary and primary school teachers work together to make sure that the school's programs are succeeding in helping children to smooth transition and meet developmental and educational expectations.
- Policy-makers at central and local level collaborate and share responsibilities regarding children access, education premises (kindergarten/schools), staffing, regulations & standards, support of professional development, integration of preschool education program with primary school curricula, pedagogical continuity and parents' information.

The assessment report utilizes 34 indicators that assess access, participation, transition, and roles of central and local government in management of pre-primary and primary education. The appendix I provides detailed information on indicators developed according to the above assessment criteria.

The report is composed of 6 sections, out of which sections 3 and 4 provide the data from primary and secondary sources of information to support the findings. Section 5, based on further elaboration of data establishes the most concerned issues that impact on present and future children's situation, while section 6 draws conclusions and formulates respective recommendations.

Regarding the established assessment objectives, the study argues that:

While the national data on ECCE confirm that children's enrolment (3-6 years old) in ECCE has slightly decreased from 2018 to 2020, from 78.3 to 76.9%², 10% of interviewed people acknowledge that access is not equally ensured to all children. More critical the situation appears in Lezha, Shkodra, Dibra, Berati and Gjirokastra. According to parents' opinions, access is significantly less possible (4 to 5 times lower) in rural than in urban areas (60 to 70% lower), especially in Durres, Elbasan, Fier, Lezhe and Tirana. Children with disabilities face difficulties to access school (9% of teachers, 10% of parents).

Access is hampered due to:

- The lack of didactic and learning materials (32% of teachers, 28% of parents);
- The lack of transportation (20% of teachers, 19% of parents).

Participation is neither equally ensured to all children according to the opinion of 10% of interviewed people. Teachers, especially in Vlora, Dibra and Korça, confirm that the support from assistant teachers to promote children's learning, is missing, while parents in Korça, Vlora and Gjirokastra, do not consider the infrastructure pertinent to allow children's active participation. Compared to urban areas (62%), schools and kindergartens in rural areas possess about half of space (38%), which directly impacts on children's participation to learning and social activities. In general, participation is hindered by:

- The lack of support by assistant teachers to promote children's learning and participation (8% of teachers).
- The lack of didactic materials" (7% of parents),
- The insufficiency of space to promote children's social engagement" (7%).
- Unclarities regarding the concept of "diversity as a value" (25% of parents either do not know or disagree).

² <http://statistikafemijet.gov.al/charts.php?ind=54>

In general, teachers and parents share the same opinions regarding transition from ECE to ES. On average, 4% of interviewed people do not consider the process of transition as pertinent and supportive. Transition from ECE to Elementary school is critical for children in the regions of Durrës, Korça, Lezha and Vlorë due to the “lack of information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten” and “lack of kindergarten and school teachers training to prepare children for first grade”. The transition from kindergarten to elementary school for children with special needs is denied due to the lack of special support, especially in Korça, Lezhë, Dibër, and Shkodër. Extremely difficult is the transition for children in Korça region due to the lack of established procedures and cooperation among kindergartens and schools regarding children's attainments and development; lack of coordination and harmonization between school curricula in ECE and ES, which impact on children's ability to adapt to the school environment when they start first grade.

The wide gap between parents' opinions in rural and urban areas remain a significant concern. The proportion of rural parents who agree on the statements is as low as 30% of urban parents.

Children's smooth transition is impeded by:

- The lack of visits of first grade teachers to the kindergarten to get to know the children (7% of teachers, 13% of parents)
- The lack of discussions among kindergarten's and first grade's teachers, to share achievements, skills and the need to support children enrolled for the first time (7% of teachers).
- Impossibilities of parents to visit the schools where their children will be enrolled in the first grade (11% of parents).
- The lack of information on the schools where children will be enrolled in the first grade (9% of parents).

11% of parents and 5% of teachers acknowledge the unclarities of procedures and rules as well as the overlapping among competences of Ministries and LGs regarding the management and coordination of the transition process from ECE to ES, especially in Berat (9% of parents, 22% of teachers), Dibër (10% of parents, 20% of teachers), Korçë (15% of parents, 6% of teachers) and Vlorë (15% of parents).

The impossibility of local government, especially in Lezha and Korça to provide food for children in need in kindergartens (17%) and the overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education (45%) are perceived as the most critical issues regarding management and operationalization of ECE.

There are very slight differences among parents' views, regardless their income, which guides us to the conclusion that there is not any significant influence of income into the children's enrollment and progress into ECE. This may be a result of social policies implemented by different municipalities to support the right of children to attend ECE.

Based on the findings of the report and considering the importance of ECCE for the present and the future of children, the team concludes that Albania still lags behind the established objectives of the strategy as well as of international standards.

Challenging the ECCE of the future requires a multidimensional approach in which the adoption of holistic and comprehensive policies is intertwined with capacity building and awareness raising of key stakeholders and networks to bear the burden of transformation and share common responsibilities.

Therefore, it is not sufficient that policies focuses on access and participation. First and foremost, a core policy issue would be the one that ensures collective action at the national and local level to facilitate the production of ECE as a public good.

The gaps that emerged from this analysis may be addressed by:

- Building of strong education sector plans for ECCE at local level, including improved system-level planning related to resource allocation, implementation and monitoring (Preparation of Local Strategies for ECCE)

- Peer learning and knowledge exchange on the effective design and implementation of ECCE curricula, including alignment with primary curricula and evaluation and assessment of curricula effectiveness and relevance.
- Shared knowledge on training and supporting the ECCE workforce and attracting and retaining qualified teachers and staff.
- Utilization of parents and communities as strategic partners to improve the quality of ECCE services and act as a network to support families and reduce inequity.
- Provision of technical support and training to collect data and monitor ECCE services, especially related to service quality and ECCE standards.
- Harmonization of ECCE policy with social policy, especially to tackle excluded groups and those at risk of exclusion.

Our cultural norms support parents and caregivers being involved in child's education. The intervention to ECCE policy may encourage, despite difficulties, communities, and families to play a stronger role. There have been some good models some 15 years ago, named "gardens of mothers and children". These models worked well in the poor and rural areas of the country. Perhaps it is the right moment to revitalize again the network of "gardens of Mothers and Children", under the guideline and supervision of SC. This component may harmonize with local social policy, which if effectively utilized may produce results for children and families.

Finally, despite the division of competences by law among national and local level, the centralization of budget and allocation mainly in the form of conditioned public expenditures, limit the capacities of local government to exercise its competences no matter of qualification, motivation, or sense of responsibility. Decentralization of competences associated with decentralization of transfers and funds will provide a window of opportunities to reform from scratch ECE.

This interesting explanatory and descriptive study, although does not provide direct and focused cause-effect evidence on the general hypothesis of the connection between ECE and Elementary School, it paves the way for further investigation, through a causal study, to explore the way in which access and participation are affected by the identified factors. This can be further analyzed by a pilot study in a limited number of municipalities.

The assessment meets the established standards because it brings founded evidence to address exclusion and to deal with discrepancies in the provision of ECE services. Thus, it lays the foundation to embark into the discussions on equity and equality and the pertinent policies to guarantee them. The challenge is to continue in this path.

Section I. Background

Save the Children in Albania is a long-term development programme and has established a high profile and sound reputation in child rights issues, particularly in the three thematic priority areas: Education, Child Protection and Child Rights Governance. Save the Children focuses its work on capacity building and strengthening of services for children and the creation of a policy and legislative environment which responds to key child rights issues in the country. To achieve our tasks, we primarily work with and through partners like non-governmental organizations (local and international), UN and the Government. This ensures that the rights of the greatest number of children are met in the best possible way. We constantly monitor and evaluate all projects to ensure quality in our work.

Save the Children through years of intervention in education system covering both pre-school and basic education has contributed to introducing Inclusive education concept by supporting Ministry of Education Youth and Sports with technical expertise to design legal framework, policy documents, preparation of manuals and capacity building of teachers in schools and kindergartens contributing in supporting and addressing needs and diversity of learners. During the implementation of SC strategic period 2019-2021 our work has been focused on ensuring a smooth transition for young children into early learning programs, and from early learning programs to formal school is a critical component of a quality ECCD



program. In normal times, this means supporting each child's holistic development during their baby, toddler, and preschool years; familiarizing preschool children with primary school teachers, classrooms, and academic routines before they start school; and working with the lower grades of primary school to create a more child-friendly, welcoming, and appreciative learning environment. Orienting parents on how to talk to young children about starting preschool or grade one and enabling them to support children to cope with their fears, is also important. With optimal transition initiatives in place, more children should be ready for school, and more schools should be ready for children.

Despite efforts in recent years to improve kindergarten infrastructure and to develop early learning standards and curricula for preschool, the physical conditions – buildings, furniture, didactic means and the quality of preschool teaching remain challenges to be met in Albania. The child/ teacher ratio in ECCD is high in main cities, instead in rural areas, preparatory classes are hosted to school buildings providing service only for 5-6 years old children. Data are not collected to measure child development in several categories neither on those who transit to basic education. There are no data collected on cognitive, linguistic, physical, or socio emotional levels of development among ECD aged children. Similarly, individual children's development outcomes are not tracked.

To fill the gaps, NCSS supported by Save the Children has conducted the Survey on Children Access to Pre-Primary education and Transition to Primary Education survey to provide evidence on:

1. Access and participation to pre-primary or in preparatory classes one year before Primary education and the potential inequalities based on geography, sex, age group, living conditions and other factors.
2. Perceptions and challenges related to transition of children from pre-primary to primary education and possibly inform on changes and improvements of legislation / regulation in central and local level.
3. Institutional roles and responsibilities in the management of the preschool system, coordination between Ministry of Education and Sport, Ministry of Health and Social Protection and local government, in order to advance the management of this education system.

Section 2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Scope, objectives and assessment criteria

Kindergarten and preschool programs are vital for the child development. The kindergartens and preschool programs support children to form friendships with peers, foster their social and emotional development, help them to be healthy and have strong friendships and positive social behaviours. In **kindergarten and preschool programs** children learn abilities to interact with others with care, empathy, respect, and cooperation. It also increases the child's senses of self, of belonging and overall well-being.

In the framework of the project "Leave No Child Behind in Inclusive Schools and Kindergartens - Albania" implemented from 2019 to 2021 SC focused its work in ensuring a smooth transition for young children into early learning programs, and from early learning programs to primary school. Transition process is a critical component of a quality ECCD program. At present the MoES has drafted the Pre-University Education Strategy 2021-2026 which is in the process of consultation with stakeholders. An important place in the strategy is occupied by preschool education and issues related to access and inclusion of all children 5-6 years old, including children with disabilities, in kindergartens or preparatory classes. In the draft strategy document, increasing the access and participation of 5-6-year-old children in preschool education are important objectives, but there is less attention in the process of transition of children from preschool to primary education.

This report focuses on the access, participation, and the transition process of children 5-6 years old from preschool education/preparatory classes to primary education and aims to increase attention of policy makers in the development or improvement of transition policies and consider transition as a shared responsibility among central government, local governments and parents.

More specifically this study aims to bring evidence on:

1. Access and participation of children 5-6 years old in pre-primary education and identify inequalities based on geography, living conditions and ethnicity.
2. Teachers 'and parents' perceptions of the challenges of the transition of 5-6-year-old children from preschool to primary education and the necessary interventions at central and local level to change or improve the relevant legislation and regulations to overcome the challenges and smooth transition
3. Actual institutional roles and responsibilities of MoES, MoHSP and LGs in the management of pre-primary education and coordination of the transition process and provide relevant recommendations to improve management and coordination.

Assessment criteria used in this report:

- 1) All children 5-6 years old have access to quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help them to prepare for school, regardless geographical location (rural or urban), economic conditions (poor or non-poor) and ethnicity (Roma, Egyptians, Albanians).
- 2) Pre-primary and primary school teachers work together to make sure that the school's programs are succeeding in helping children to smooth transition and meet developmental and educational expectations.
- 3) Policymakers at central and local level collaborate and share responsibilities regarding children access, education premises (kindergarten/schools), staffing, regulations & standards, support of professional development, integration of preschool education program with primary school curricula, pedagogical continuity and parents 'information.

Indicators used in this report:

Study uses 34 indicators that assess access, participation, transition and roles of central and local government in management of pre-primary and primary education. The appendix I provides detailed information on indicators developed according to the above assessment criteria.

2.2. Methodology, key instruments and sample size

Study is cross sectional and based in a combined quantitative and qualitative method for data gathering purposes. Variables are measured using 6 questionnaires to measure the access, participation, transition and cooperation and responsibilities of MoES and LGs. Parents and teachers/educators are considered a valued source of assessment results. Due to the impossibility of direct measurements of children aged 5-6, the assessment includes numerous sources of evidence, especially reports from parents and teachers in pre-primary and primary school.

Primary information is collected from 1,661 face to face interviews with parents of children aged 5-6 in kindergarten (third group) or in preparatory classes, 115 face to face interviews with primary school teachers and 139 teachers of kindergarten/preparatory classes. Triangulation of data from face-to-face interviews with educational staff with 8 focus group discussions (46 participants), served to complement and clarify the quantitative findings from face-to-face interviews. In addition to the focus group discussions, 8 key informants at central and local level were invited to participate in individual interviews, thus completing the qualitative part of the study.

The combined number of responders from the survey, focus group discussions and individual interviews stand at 1,969. The share of female responders from parents' group is 77%, while female responders among educators and primary school teachers is 98%.

From territorial point of view, the assessment is nationwide and draw information in 36 municipalities (from 61 in total) in the 12 Albanian counties.

Data collection took place during October 2021 and geographical distribution of responders covers both urban and rural areas. 10 % of responders from parents group come from poor strata supported with social assistance (Ndihme Ekonomike program), while 1,7% of responders report to belong to Roma and Egyptian ethnic minorities.

Sample size and the selection process of parents with children 5-6 years old. The sample size of 1,714 respondents from parent group is considered statistically significant sample at national level using a 95% of the confidence level, 5% relative precision including 3% margin for non-response.

Sample selection. A two stage stratified sample design was adopted for the parent's survey. Initially every region is selected as primary sampling units and then in each region, 35 municipalities with more than 0.5% of the share of children attending preschool education were selected. In the second stage in the selected municipalities, 88 kindergarten and schools with preparatory classes from both urban and rural areas were chosen. Than in each of kindergarten or school a list with 1,714 parents was prepared. The number of parents from urban and rural areas was based on estimations of urban and rural population share and net enrolment rates of pre-primary education in urban and rural areas. The list of parents (for each selected kindergarten or school) was prepared by preschool and primary school teachers. Participation of parents in the interviewing was with prior consent. The response rate for parent group was 97% allowing to get information from 1661 responders. Appendix 3 contains information on sample size for the parent's survey.

Interviews with preschool teachers and primary school teachers. The number of teachers also followed a two stage of selection. The municipalities and structures of pre-school and primary education were first identified and then the teachers who would be interviewed were identified. It was estimated that 140 preschool teachers (or 3% of kindergarten and preparatory teachers) and 120 primary teachers (first to second grade) would provide ample information for the purpose of this study. Teachers from urban and rural areas occupy 64% and 36%, respectively. The response rate for teacher's groups was 98%, respectively 99 % for kindergarten teachers and 96% for primary school teachers.

Six questionnaires with closed and open questions are used to collect information. Appendix I contains the questionnaires used during data collection process.

Table I provides a summary information on number and main characteristics of responders from parent's group and groups of teachers (pre-primary and primary education).

Table I: Number of face-to-face interviews and their features

Regions	Number of municipalities per county	Number of Face-to-face interviews with parents:				Number of Face-to-face interviews with:			
		Total	Out of them, females	Out of them in urban areas	Out of them in rural areas	Preschool teachers/ assistant teachers	Out of them in urban areas	Primary school teachers/ assistant teachers	Out of them in urban areas
Berat	3	70	58	40	30	2	1	3	2
Dibër	2	109	97	59	50	5	2	6	2
Durrës	2	121	227	79	42	4	2	9	7
Elbasan	3	245	35	186	59	32	22	8	5
Fier	3	206	87	150	56	12	11	8	7
Gjirokastrë	1	40	35	23	17	3	2	2	2
Korçë	4	96	87	59	37	6	2	2	2

Kukës	3	44	40	29	15	2	0	2	0
Lezhë	1	52	43	39	13	4	4	3	3
Shkodër	1	106	87	77	29	1	1	4	4
Tiranë	3	496	428	448	48	55	21	49	45
Vlorë	6	76	68	54	22	13	7	19	9
Total	32	1,661	1,292	1,243	418	139	75	115	88

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

The literature review, MoES reports, strategic documents on pre-primary education, and statistical data from INSTAT, MoES, Local and Regional Offices of Pre-University Education, international organizations like UNICEF, World Bank, IndexMundi, etc. served as secondary information source.

2.3. Audience and intended users

The target audience is Save the Children, which has initiated and is supporting this study, whereas the intended users are MoES, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP), Regional and Local Offices of Pre-University Education (ZRAP & ZVAP) as well as MoHSP and local government. Save the Children will use information, findings, and recommendations to improve or adjust future projects addressing ECE activities and particularly early education. Study provides inputs for MoESY and its executive offices at regional and local level for measuring and improving policy implementation. The study serves and provides a very good information to QAAPUE (ASCAP) to improve preschool education curricula, to identify the needs of leaders, teachers, students and parents to improve the preschool education system, to design standards for teachers, leaders, students in the preschool education system, to design modules and support materials for preschool teachers as well as to build the capacity of leaders and teachers for a better and more effective preschool education.

This study also opens new horizons to continue with the implementation of the National Education Strategy 2021-2026 and to meet the objectives set out in this strategy regarding preschool education.

This study also opens new horizons to continue with the implementation of the National Education Strategy 2021-2026 and to meet the objectives set out in this strategy regarding preschool education. MoHSP and LGs are also intended users. MoHSP and LGs should use the results and recommendation to improve social services that foster access and participation of poor children, children with disabilities and children from ethnic groups (Roma and Egyptian) in early education. The early education is the corner stone for the child future development and contribute to the equity advancing.

Results of the study also will be shared with parents as part of an ongoing process that aim to raise their awareness regarding child's education.

2.4. Study limitations

Study is based on the cross-sectional method and collects information at a specific point in time. The study does not provide information on the causes and effects of outcomes from parent responses. In the teaching staff of kindergartens and schools, this problem is corrected by conducting focus group meetings, but for the parent group it gives more description of the situation or actions and not information on the relationship and dependence between the variables.

Section 3. SITUATION ANALYSIS OF ECE

3.1. Overall assessment

3.1.1. Preschool education in the Republic of Albania

In Albania there are 2.063 educational institutions of preschool level, of which 1.901 are public and 162 private (Table 2). As it can be observed from the table, from 2014 to 2019 there is an increase in the number of public and private kindergartens.

Table2: Number of preschool educational institutions

KNSA	Education Institutions	School year									
		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
		Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
0	Kindergarten	1,751	106	1,773	124	1,831	133	1,777	142	1,901	162

Source: National Education Strategy, 2021-2026

While the number of pre-school educational institutions (kindergartens) has increased, the number of children in the last five years has decreased (school year 2014-2015: 82.494 children; school year 2018-2019, 78.942). This decrease is recognized not only in preschool education, but in all levels of pre-university education. Some of the reasons for this decrease are:

- ✓ Shrinkage of the resident population,
- ✓ Decreased fertility,
- ✓ Migrations (figure 1).

The number of preschool institutions has increased in both the public and private sectors. This creates opportunities for better conditions for children in kindergartens.

Figure 1. Number of children / students in pre-university education by levels



Source: MoESY data, 2020

Table 3 shows an overview of the net enrollment ratio (NER) by pre-university education levels. Comparing with UNESCO³ data, it is noticed that the participation in preschool education in Albania is of a

³ The total number of students of the respective age group for the given level of education in relation to the population of that age group. for example, the number of students aged 6-10 in primary education in relation to the population aged 6-10. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> - accessed 10 June 2020.

higher rate than in Serbia -61.9% (2018), Montenegro - 67.3% (2018) and Northern Macedonia - 35.5 % (2017).

Table 3: Gross (GER) and net (NER) enrollment ratio in preschool education

KNSA	Description	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
		GER	NER	GER	NER	GER	NER	GER	NER	GER	NER
0	Preschool Education	82.3	75.4	83.3	76.9	81.5	77.7	80.3	76.3	78.3	71.9

Source: MoES data

3.1.2. The pre-university education system and the place of pre-school education

Based on the strong tradition of the Albanian families to support children's education at an early age, the pre-university education system is established in fully accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Albania and the relevant legislation in force, whilst is gradually developed in compliance with the standards of a modern education system. The table below illustrates the compliance of international standards with the structure of the education system.

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)	The structure of pre-university education
ISCED 4	Post secondary Education, non-university
ISCED 3	Upper secondary Education Grades X – XII
ISCED 2	Low secondary Education Grades VI – IX
ISCED 1	Primary Education Grades I – V
ISCED 0	Preparatory class Preschool Education

Throughout the levels of formal education, students prepare for lifelong learning, for the world of work in the age of knowledge-based digitalization.

Pre-university education integrates:

- ✓ preschool education offered to children aged 3-6 years at pre-school institutions and children aged 5-6 years, in preparatory classes, at primary and 9-year schools;
- ✓ primary education offered from the first grade to the fifth grade;
- ✓ lower secondary education offered from the sixth to the ninth grade;
- ✓ upper secondary education offered in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades. This level includes gymnasium, vocational secondary education (vocational secondary education is available until the thirteenth grade) and oriented secondary education (oriented secondary education, in some branches extends to the thirteenth grade).

The following are some of the characteristics of preschool education:

Preschool education is the first level of education, during which children (ages 3-6) are educated in preschool institutions. Preschool education is based on the standards of development and learning in early childhood.

Preschool age represents a period of rapid physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of children. Given the importance of this period, exposing children to elementary learning processes focuses on fostering curiosity about themselves, society, nature, culture and new technologies. The aim of the educational work during this period is to stimulate creativity and enthusiasm for new experiences and life situations.

During this level of education, children are helped to develop communication skills and skills in their mother tongue, in simple everyday situations, to develop concentration skills and to develop basic social skills. Also, special attention is paid to physical development through physical activities, experiences that raise children's awareness of the need for their physical protection, as well as health care.

Pre-school education also includes preparatory classes. This class creates the conditions for children to know the basic elements of reading, writing and arithmetic. Children know the elements of letters and the structure of a simple text, using pictures / drawings and analyzing the elements of a painting. At this age, arts-related activities should be an important part of the program, to develop children's sensitivity and emotional sphere.

The preparatory class lasts one school year and is located in the physical premises of primary schools. Legally, this class serves to prepare for school children who have not attended pre-school education. The preparatory class can be especially favourable for children in rural areas, who find it impossible to go to kindergarten due to the physical distance from home to kindergarten, the lack of kindergartens in remote rural areas and the mentality in certain communities (staying with grandmothers at home). In urban areas it is noticed that parents choose for their children to attend the preparatory class, despite the fact that the children have been in kindergarten. They see this class as a good opportunity to prepare their children for school.

On the other hand, teachers of preparatory classes, being part of compulsory education, tend to develop a teaching process similar to school and not kindergarten, creating an unnecessary burden on children.

3.1.3. Preschool education curriculum

Preschool education is based on the characteristics of age development and learning of children 3-6 years old. This age represents an important period of rapid physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social development of children. The learning process will focus on fostering children's curiosity about themselves, society, nature, human knowledge, culture and new technologies, fostering creativity and the desire to have new experiences, and face daily life situations.

On the basis of learning through play, children are helped to develop communication skills in their mother tongue in everyday situations, to develop attention and concentration skills, and to develop basic social skills.

Most children come to kindergarten with a considerable volume of intuitive mathematical knowledge, which they have acquired through exploration of the environment, the use of formative games, cube constructions, etc. Learning mathematics in preschool education is built on this foundation and further develops mathematical concepts and skills.

Preschool children's curiosity and desire to explore their surroundings develop their ability to ask simple questions, measure, divide, classify, and share information about the world around them. Scientific



knowledge is of particular importance to be acquired by children of this age, in order to know and understand the life processes and properties of the materials with which children are in daily contact. Through artistic education, preschool children learn to recognize and understand the values conveyed by art. They express themselves through the various forms and ways that music, visual art, drama, and dance enable them.

Special attention in the years of preschool education is paid to the physical development of children through the organization of physical and sports activities, self-care, personal hygiene, physical well-being, health and safety of life. The written curriculum is translated and implemented by teachers through lesson plans. These plans define the learning content through which children's knowledge and skills are built and developed.

Teachers develop individual educational plans for children with disabilities or develop differentiated work to respect the pace, style and learning specifics of children with learning difficulties and linguistic minorities.

At the end of the pre-school education cycle, the child 3-6 years old is expected to have developed behaviours, reactions, actions that prove that he:

- ✓ knows and understands himself and others around;
- ✓ understands and accepts what is different or similar to objects, peers, etc.;
- ✓ creates a modest behaviour, through which it conveys tolerance, understanding, cooperation, etc.;
- ✓ expresses personal feelings and distinguishes the ways of expressing them from others;
- ✓ uses his / her mother tongue to express his / her feelings and thoughts;
- ✓ possesses simple communication and artistic skills;
- ✓ uses simple knowledge in everyday life;
- ✓ takes care independently of personal hygiene and the surrounding environment.

The preschool education curriculum is organized in levels. Each level refers to the common characteristics that accompany children's developmental processes. Levels serve as a reference point for defining the main competencies, which must be mastered respectively for each level. The organization of the curriculum in levels enables:

- ✓ Respecting the developmental characteristics of children during early childhood, in order to determine the specific pros o r du v a and the competencies that should be mastered by them;
- ✓ respecting the individual rhythms that each child presents towards mastering detailed competencies, at each level of the curriculum;
- ✓ flexibility in planning and organizing educational teaching procedures by extending the planning cycle from one school year to two and three school years;
- ✓ preparation of detailed instructions for the organization of teaching-educational work according to levels, emphasizing the flexibility of the daily regime, active learning methods, the combination of different types of educational, fun, recreational activities; monitoring, measuring and evaluating child development.
- ✓ strengthening the accountability of the educational institution and local education authorities for the quality of education provided at each level.

Early Childhood Education - Level 0 (ISCED⁴): This education covers the period from the birth of a child to the age of 5, during which children are supported:

- ✓ in general, individual development;

⁴ ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) is the reference international classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by levels and fields.

- ✓ in developing the skills to communicate in the mother tongue, through activities that help the correct pronunciation of words, enriching vocabulary and exercising the ability to listen to others;
- ✓ in physical development and exercise coordination of body movements, development of strength, balance, development of small muscles, eye-hand coordination and training ability to manipulate various objects of daily use;
- ✓ in gradual growth and development for oneself, for others and for the surrounding environment;
- ✓ in developing the skills to respect the rules, to distinguish right and wrong behavior;
- ✓ in encouraging to be involved in practical activities, to identify and assess the risks, as well as to respect the basic rules of hygiene and safety.

Level I - Basic Acquisition: This level corresponds to the preparatory class (age 5-6 years), class I and class II. At this level, concrete learning is deliberately organized and encouraged, through practical learning situations. The preschool child is oriented towards systematic and sustainable learning. The whole teaching-educational process focuses on:

- ✓ recognition and understanding of rights, duties and responsibilities in the group, in the garden, in the family;
- ✓ mastering the basic elements of reading and writing in the mother tongue;
- ✓ acquisition of basic elements of numerical calculations;
- ✓ systematic research of the physical and natural environment;
- ✓ Fulfilment of certain tasks against deadlines.

Preparatory class and normal kindergarten differ in implementing and challenges or gaps are identified considering that curricula foreseen a play based approach the program is organized in formal classes that leave no space for interaction and play.

3.1.4. Curricular reform in preschool education

In September 2013, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth undertook curricular reform in pre-university education. Curricular reform is based on enabling students to live and learn for life, in compliance with the Recommendations of the Parliament and the Council of Europe on basic competences for lifelong learning.

Building the curriculum of the pre-university education system on key competencies for lifelong learning enables the formation of a new generation capable of applying knowledge in practice, to face not only the challenges of its further education or life and employment today, but in particular, face the challenges of the future. Curriculum reform was carried out taking into account the Albanian context in relation to national priorities in the field of education, the degree of decentralization of the curriculum, etc. The national curriculum combines valuable content that derives from the traditions of Albanian education, as well as from each renewed element, in accordance with contemporary currents.

The reformed pre-university education curriculum places emphasis on the learning process and emphasizes the active role of students in the development of new knowledge and competencies. The philosophical approach of this curriculum has been accompanied by significant changes in the conception of the learning process, in teaching methodologies, in the philosophy and practices of student assessment; this approach enhances school autonomy and responsibility and prioritizes digital literacy.

Curricular reform in pre-university education also included pre-school education. The main reasons for the curricular changes in preschool education were:

- ✓ Curricular frameworks for preschool education were missing.
- ✓ The curriculum was built with cognitive field objectives.
- ✓ Content and achievement standards for preschool education were developed in different years.
- ✓ The curriculum was missing as a curriculum document.

- ✓ Learning areas in preschool education differed from learning areas of compulsory education.
- ✓ The documents produced, such as standards and preschool programs, lacked coherence and did not reflect developments in the international arena.

Curriculum reform included the preparation of a complete curriculum package for preschool education. This package ensures vertical and horizontal curriculum coherence for all levels of education: preschool education (including preparatory class), primary education, lower secondary education and upper secondary education.

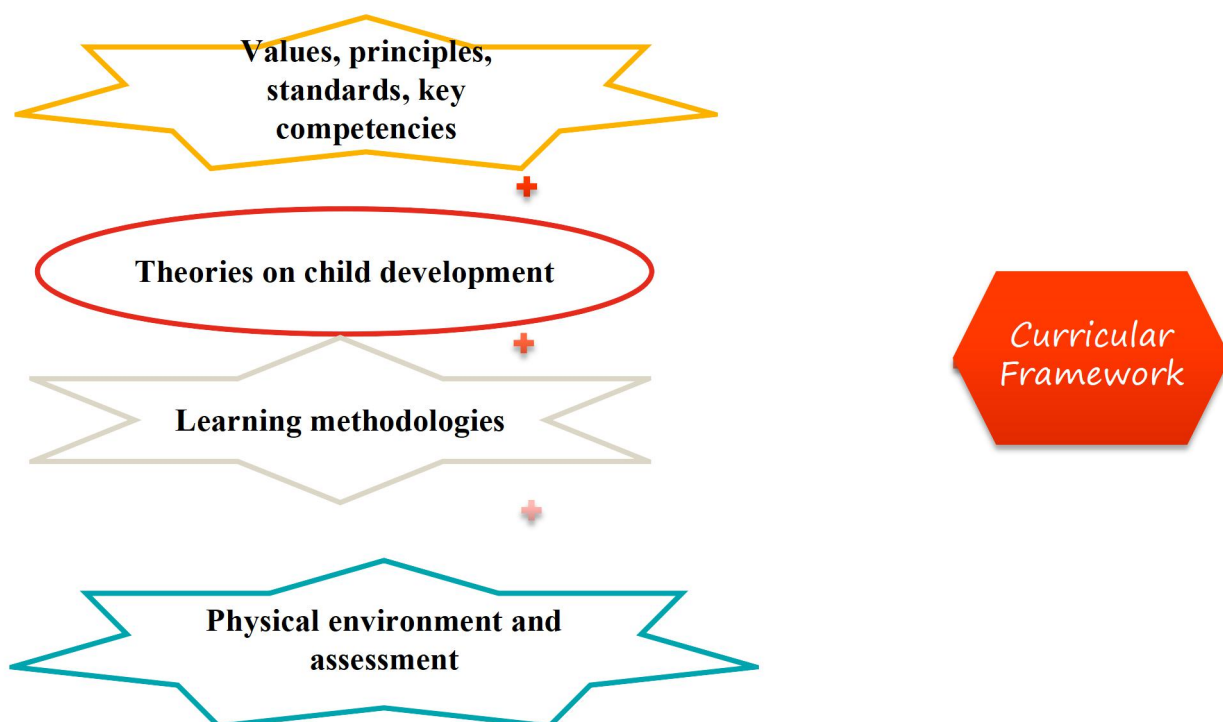
A written curriculum can be perfect but if not well understood by teachers, it is a failure. For this reason, the implementation of the competency-based curriculum is preceded by teacher training. Also, this curriculum has been piloted year after year to create the opportunity to reflect in it the suggestions and remarks of teachers.

However, there was a lack of sufficient support materials for teachers regarding the implementation of the curriculum in preschool education.

The curriculum package for pre-university education, prepared in the framework of the competency-based curriculum reform, includes:

3.1.4.1. The curricular framework of preschool education, approved by MoES in June 2016.

The Curricular Framework has as its central axis the basic competencies of lifelong learning, defined and accompanied by the relevant indicators in it. The preparation of this document went through a wide phase of discussions with RED / EOs, education leaders and specialists, university representatives, teachers, parents and other stakeholders.



3.1.4.2. Developmental and learning standards for children 3-6 years' old

Standards describe the behaviours, skills, and knowledge that children of this age group should have or be able to demonstrate. They define what children can and are able to do, say and demonstrate as they grow, develop and move from one age group to another.

Development and learning standards are grouped into five areas:

Fields
Health, physical well-being and motor development
Social and emotional development
Cognitive development and general knowledge
Language development, reading and writing
Approaches to learning

Assessment framework in preschool education. This document in preschool education is designed to support specialists, teachers and kindergarten staff in assessing the development and learning of preschool children aged 3-6. This framework contains key information and strategies that preschool leaders and teachers should be aware of when implementing and monitoring educational programs implemented in preschool institutions.

Curricula for the three groups of preschool education: Curricula are designed according to the subjects. The subjects and competencies that these subjects develop are the same as other levels of pre-university education.

Learning fields	Subjects in preschool education
Languages and communication	Albanian language
Mathematics	Mathematics
Natural sciences	Knowledge of nature
Society and the environment	Education for society
Arts	Music, Visual Arts (Theater and dance in Gr.3)
Physical education, sports and health	Physical education, sports and health

3.1.4.3. Teaching and learning in preschool education

It is difficult to give a single definition of what preschool learning is, when, where and how it develops. Children learn all the time. If we refer to the period when a baby begins to take the first steps, we remember how he was held behind a chair or other object, until he learned to walk on his own, independently. The preschool institution occupies a special place in the harmonious formation of the personality of children 3-6 years old. The educational activity of the kindergarten, as a complement to the

family activity and preparatory for the primary school, constitutes an important experience, which helps the child to grow. It aims to:

- ✓ comprehensive formation of a free, responsible individual and participant in social life;
- ✓ acquisition of communication, expressive, logical skills and competencies and
- ✓ action;
- ✓ development of psycho-motor, cognitive, emotional, social and moral skills of
- ✓ personality;
- ✓ Respect for equal opportunities for all children, despite the exclusion
- ✓ social and gender, racial, cultural discrimination.

It is important to understand why and when and how the child / preschooler learns. The child is born with the desire to learn through discovery. Interest and curiosity push the child to discover things and gain first experiences of the surrounding environment. Children are driven through information, toys, tasks and small tasks, in order to quench curiosity and learn by acting practically.

Childhood experiences and environments influence children's desire and development of learning skills. Children benefit from activities and experiences if they have a healthy childhood in the broadest sense of the word. A warm, cheerful atmosphere, in a relatively suitable physical space is important for the development and learning of children. In everyday life and in the environments where they are, children will find things that attract their interest in learning. They do not learn at the same time and in the same way.

There are different ways children learn:

- ✓ Through doing and proving in practice. A child learns more doing something, rather than showing how things are done.
- ✓ Through discovery and exploration. Seeing, touching and interacting with the environment, the child discovers how things work, how they behave, what happens to the things that surround it, also revealing cause-and-effect relationships.
- ✓ Through various questions and conversations. Curiosity and desire for it recognizing the world around him, directing the child to ask lots of questions, listening and develop speech.
- ✓ Through imitation and role play. When imitating actions and behavior of adults, children begin to play as such and, gradually, to understand relationships with each other.

The pedagogical methods used in preschool education are:

- Game based method
- Child-centered method
- Method based on thematic integration
- Project based method
- Multicultural method

Assessment of students in preschool education is based on the Assessment Framework in preschool education and curricula. This Framework contains key information and strategies for which preschool principals and teachers should have knowledge in the implementation and monitoring of educational programs implemented in preschool institutions. The main practices suggested in the Framework coincide with formative assessment, as is the case in EU countries, and take into account the basic development of children.

3.2. Access to education

The focus of education policies in Albania over the last decade has been to increase participation in early childhood education, as well as the participation in education of children from vulnerable groups. Thus, the



Ministry of Education and Sports, in 2016, approved the document "Education and training of teachers for inclusion - Profile of inclusive teachers" in order to identify the essential skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that need to have every teacher, both the one who is preparing to join the ranks of the teaching profession and the one who is in service, as a comprehensive professional. This has made the society aware of the need to include children from vulnerable groups, which has led to an increase in the participation of children with disabilities, as well as children from the Roma and Egyptian national minorities. MoES is committed to providing inclusive education for all children, but some important foundations still need to be laid for the participation in education of all children with disabilities.

Kindergartens still do not meet conditions of inclusion, such as infrastructure and physical facilities, curricula, assessment, equipment for the disabled. Development of multi-sectoral early childhood education policies is needed to coordinate activities in this area. In the field of infrastructure and public services, municipalities are responsible for the administration and regulation of the preschool education system in kindergartens and nurseries. Referring to point 12 of article 23 of law no. 139/2015, as amended, the administration and regulation of the preschool education system in kindergartens and nurseries are the responsibility of the local self-government units. Meanwhile, the preparatory classes are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Sports. The administration of pre-school education by local self-government units since 2015 has highlighted cases of non-coordination with central government structures. This does not create opportunities to provide quality services for children and that the available funds are not used depending on the needs of kindergartens.

The Pre-University Education Strategy 2014-2020 aims at 95% of children aged 5-6 years (including children with disabilities) to be included in preparatory classes, while 90% of children aged 3-5 years are involved in various forms of preschool education. Although these objectives have not been achieved, due to the lack of budget and efficient models, significant results have been achieved in advancing the quality of preschool education.

Thus, a new preschool education curriculum has been drafted, which includes:

- ✓ Curricular framework of preschool education
- ✓ Development and learning standards
- ✓ Curricula for age groups: 3-4 years old, 4-5 years old and 5-6 years' old
- ✓ Assessment framework for children in preschool education.

Also, for the first time, development and learning standards have been drafted for the age of 0-3 years. Between 2008 and 2017, Albania has impressively narrowed the gap in equality of access to education for children from the most vulnerable groups, although some critical challenges continue to exist, especially in the years when children attend preschool. The latest Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) shows that within the period 2008-2017, in rural areas, enrollment of students in pre-school and upper secondary education increased twice as much as that of students in urban areas.

3.3. Participation

The participation of children with disabilities in preschool education has increased from year to year (Table 4)

Table 4: Net participation rates by level of preschool education (%), 2008-2009 and 2017-2018

	Preschool Education	
	2008-2009	2017-2018
Gender		
Male	55	79
Female	59	80
Place of resident		

Urban	67	81
Rural	50	77

Source: MoES data

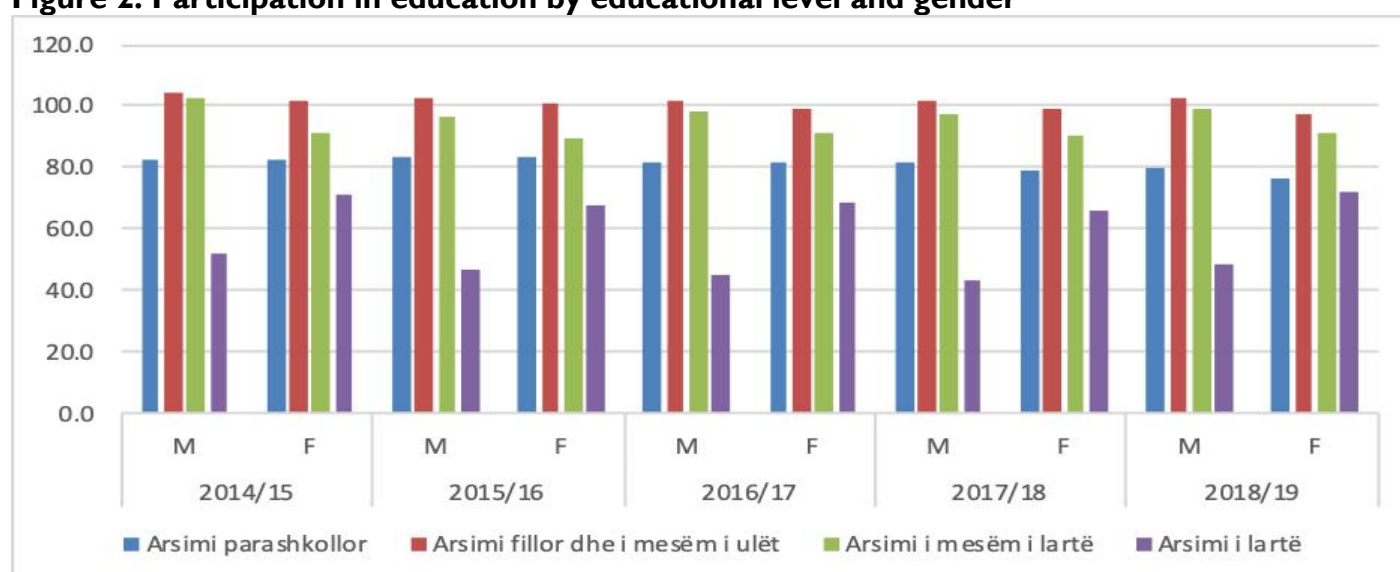
In 2013, MoES issued order no. 344/2013, through which psycho-social services were created for pre-university education institutions, an order that was changed in 2018 and 2020. These units operate under the supervision of regional directorates of pre-university education. In the 2018/19 school year, 577 psychologists and social workers worked in educational institutions (including kindergartens). According to the latest order, it is envisaged to hire a school / kindergarten psychologist or a social worker for 500-700 students, while schools with more than 700 students should have two psychologists or social workers.

3.3.1. Gender Equality Issues

The first report of the Gender Equality Index 2020 aims to document the achievements of the Albanian government regarding the progress made on women's empowerment and gender equality in Albania. The Gender Equality Index as an instrument of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) measures gender inequalities in the European Union (EU) in accordance with the context of EU policies. The overall Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania for 2017 marked 60.4, demonstrating a significant gender gap. This finding confirms the need to renew the commitments and efforts of various actors, including government, the private sector, civil society and citizens to achieve full gender equality. Indeed, the Gender Equality Index for Albania is 7 points below the EU-28 average (67.4), with the exception of the area of governance, where Albania has more gender equality than the EU-28. The biggest shortcomings compared to the EU-28 are encountered in the areas of knowledge, money and time, while the results in the field of work and health are similar.

In the area of knowledge, the score of 55.6 shows a still large gender gap in both of these sub-fields: achievement and participation, and division of labor. The percentage of people with higher education is higher among women than men (18.2 percent versus 14.5 percent). Although there are more educated women than men in Albania, they occupy a relatively smaller position compared to EU levels and national targets. The breakdown by field of education is still evident, with female students pursuing higher education focusing on education, health and well-being, humanities and the arts, while male students studying in these fields are few.

Figure 2. Participation in education by educational level and gender



Source: MoES data

Analysis of the GER by level during the school year 2018-2019, in Figure 2, shows that about 80.3% of boys and 76.3% of girls attend school in kindergartens. The level of gross participation in compulsory education is 102.6% for boys and 97.2% for girls. Participation in secondary education is also higher for boys than for girls, respectively 99.3% and 91.7%, while at the university level the ratio is reversed, where participation is higher for girls, at 71.8% than for boys, at 48.7%. Gender participation in educational cycles indicates the existence of gender differences in different levels of education. There is a higher ratio of boys compared to girls in pre-university education, while in higher education 59.7% of students in this cycle are girls.

3.4. Transition from early childhood to elementary school

The transition of children from preschool to primary education is an important stage in the life and formation of the child, which requires the involvement of many actors: teaching staff of kindergartens and schools, parents, local education offices, local government, etc. In the education systems of different countries there is research and experience that shows all the procedures and support given to children during the transition from preschool to primary education. In Albania there is no legal framework and procedures defined in relation to this issue.

3.5. Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders

Law no.139 / 2015 "On local self-government" regulates the organization and functioning of local self-government units in the Republic of Albania, as well as defines their functions, competencies, rights and duties and those of the relevant bodies. The law also defined new roles and responsibilities for local government. Specifically:

- Article 23, point 12 "Municipalities are responsible in the territory of their jurisdiction for the administration and regulation of the preschool education system in kindergartens and nurseries".
- Article 64, point h "The mayor takes measures for the qualification and training of the staff of the administration, of the educational, social, cultural and sports institutions.

Law no. 48/2018 "On some additions and changes to law no. 69/2012, "On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania", as amended "

Article 55/1

1. The director of the preschool educational institution is appointed by the chairman of the respective local self-government unit, upon the proposal of two candidates who are evaluated by open competition by the evaluation commission. The evaluation commission consists of a representative of the local self-government unit, the chairman of the institution's board, the chairman of the institution's parents 'council, a representative from the local education unit and a teacher elected by the teachers' council.

2. The candidate for director of the preschool educational institution must have at least five years of work experience as a teacher, be trained and equipped with the certificate of head of the pre-university educational institution and not be part, after appointment, in the leading forums of the parties politics.

Law no. 48/2018 "On some additions and changes to law no. 69/2012, "On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania", as amended "

Article 55/1

The mayor of the local self-government unit dismisses the director of the public preschool educational institution for violation of the provisions of this law and its bylaws, as well as for violation of ethics and conduct in the institution.

Article 22/2



The criterion of training and equipping with the certificate of the head of the preschool educational institution, according to article 15, of this law, enters into force 4 years from the entry into force of this law.

Article 17 (Appointment of teachers)

In a public educational institution, including a preschool one, the admission and appointment of a teacher to a vacancy is based on the principle of merit and the right to choose an educational institution.

The appointment of a teacher is made by the director of the educational institution, according to the ranking in the portal "Teachers for Albania". The procedures for admission and appointment of teachers in a vacancy, as well as the administration of the portal "Teachers for Albania" are determined by instruction of the Minister. (Chapter 10 of the instruction no. 13, "On the procedures for accepting the appointment of teachers in public educational institutions of the PA and the administration of the portal" MPS ").

Thus some of the responsibilities of municipalities for preschool education are:

- ✓ Providing and maintaining the infrastructure of preschool institutions.
- ✓ Providing the didactic material base
- ✓ Management of the competition for leaders of the preschool educational institution.
- ✓ Managing the employment of teachers according to the ranking in the portal "Teachers for Albania".
- ✓ Cooperation with the Labor Office for the recruitment of support staff in kindergartens.
- ✓ Supporting kindergartens in the implementation of educational reforms such as: curricula, professional development of teachers, etc.
- ✓ Increasing the number of students attending kindergarten.
- ✓ Improving the management of the education system at the municipal level, based on statistics.
- ✓ Creating opportunities for the protection of children 3-6 years old, as well as managing cases referred by kindergarten staff as "children in danger or need".

While the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Sports, based on law no. 69/2012, "On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania", as amended are:

- ✓ Preparation and implementation of policies and strategies of the education system, including preschool education.
- ✓ Preparation of laws and by laws of preschool education.
- ✓ Preparation and approval of curricular documentation, according to the provisions of law.
- ✓ Evaluation of the quality of educational service on the basis of indicators.
- ✓ Control of law enforcement.
- ✓ Drafting and implementation of professional development policies for educational staff and accreditation of training programs.

Analyzing the above situation, it can be said that:

- ✓ The dividing line of responsibilities between local and central government is still unclear.

The central government should determine how these functions should be funded, as well as the role and tasks for each of the institutions.

Public service providers at the local level, ie municipalities need to understand how services should be provided and delivered and how they can be better funded.

Both sides must present their positions to the citizens, but this is not happening because there is no clarity and no one takes responsibility and courage to present them.

3.6. Key observations and remarks

Challenges and objectives of the National Strategy for Education 2021-2026 for preschool education. Albania is focused on developing and directing its education policies in line with international programs, in particular European Union's Education Benchmarks for 2020 and SDG4-Education 2030 (Goals for sustainable Development-Education 2030) .

SDG4-Education 2030

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have the right to quality care and development in the early years of childhood and preschool education so that they are prepared for primary education.

By 2030, eliminate gender inequalities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education for people in need, including people with disabilities and children coming from families in need.

By 2030, ensure that all children and a stable number of adults, men and women, know how to read and count.

Build and improve equipment in education, tailored to age, gender, as well as for students with disabilities by creating a safe, non-violent, inclusive environment for all to learn effectively.

By 2030, significantly increase the supply of qualified teachers, including cooperation for teacher training with developing countries, especially less developed countries and small developing countries.

The Agenda for Sustainable Development also has objectives for preschool education. In coherence with this document, in the draft National Strategy for Education 2021-2026, some objectives have been set for this level of education.

Ensure inclusion and participation in the preparatory class, as well as increase access to preschool education. Although Albania has an enviable degree of inclusion of children aged 5-6 years in preschool education, it is intended that this inclusion be complete. "Preparatory class" means classes for children aged 5-6 years who have not attended preschool education, attached to the schools of basic education, but also the 3rd groups in preschool education, where they work with the same program. It also aims to increase access to preschool education for children aged 3-5. Special attention will be paid to girls and boys at risk of abandonment as well as those from vulnerable groups: children with disabilities and, in general, from marginalized social groups, girls and boys returning from emigration, child victims and victims of trafficking, children in conflict with the law, and members of the Roma and Egyptian national minorities. The educational institutions will also pay attention to foreign children and returned immigrants who have access to education by offering the possibility of free language courses for returned immigrants and foreigners, which would help them in the reintegration process, as defined in the Instruction no.10, dated 17.05.2021 of MoES, "On the registration and support in public pre-university educational institutions of children of persons in migration / asylum situation, refugees, unaccompanied foreign children, children returned from emigration, from conflict areas, or children victims of trafficking in the Republic of Albania ".

Also intended:

- ✓ Awareness of parents and the community about the importance of preschool education will be done through well-planned activities at the level of local education offices and preschool institutions, as well as schools of basic education to which preparatory classes are attached, in cooperation with the

government. local. Awareness-raising activities of civil society organizations and international partners will also be supported.

- ✓ Advancing the coordination between MES, MSSMS and local self-government units by re-evaluating the entire system of laws and bylaws in force for early childhood education, based on evidence and studies.
- ✓ Inclusion of all children aged 5-6 years in the 3rd groups in kindergartens or preparatory classes. In the next five years, conditions will be created for all children aged 5-6 to attend preschool education in the 3rd group in kindergartens, or in preparatory classes.
- ✓ Despite the continuous increase in the number of psychologists and social workers, psycho-social services in educational institutions are still unconsolidated, especially at the preschool level. It is therefore necessary to increase the quality of psycho-social service for all students.

Section 4. Main Findings from the field

4.1. According to teachers of early childhood education

This section further elaborates the main topics as they result from situation analysis, based on the data and information from face-to-face interviews with teachers of kindergartens.

4.1.1. Sample characteristics

In fully accordance with the TORs, 139 interviews were conducted with teachers from 52 public kindergartens and preparatory classes in 12 Albanian counties. The interviewed teachers are part of the public sector in 87% and private sector in 13%. All respondents belong to the female gender (100%). Location of the respondents' place of work is located in both rural areas (46%) and urban areas (54%). 12% of respondents hold managerial positions in ECE structures, while 88% are teachers. The study obtained the opinion of professionals from both kindergartens (81%) and preparatory classes (19%). Divided by qualification categories, hold the category I (highest category of professional qualification) 35% of respondents, the category II 25% of respondents, the category III, 21% of respondents and have no qualification, 18%.

4.1.2. Access to early childhood education

Access to early childhood education is assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions 9 to 15 of ECE teachers (Annex 2, Questionnaire 1), which constitute the ECE access assessment criteria. Each of interviewed teachers had to choose only one response among four alternatives, respectively: Fully agree, Agree, Disagree, Do not know. Table 5 presents a summary of data on the responses of all interviewed teachers according to each of alternatives.

Table 5: Responses of teachers according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions

Issues	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
School facilitates children's s enrollment	2	3	20	114	139
	2%	2%	14%	82%	100%
All children can access school	3	1	13	122	139
	2%	1%	9%	88%	100%
Children with disabilities are supported by an assistant	16	17	22	84	139
	12%	12%	16%	60%	100%
Transport is ensured for all children	28	28	20	63	139
	21%	20%	14%	45%	100%
Children are equipped with didactic means and learning materials	44	16	30	49	139
	32%	12%	22%	34%	100%
Children with disabilities enjoy infrastructure facilities	13	5	34	87	139
	9%	4%	24%	63%	100%

Infrastructure is improved in continuation	4	5	23	107	139
	3%	4%	17%	76%	100%
All criteria	110	75	162	626	973
	11%	8%	17%	64%	100%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 1, almost 80% of teachers fully agree and agree that access to ECE is ensured. Only 11% disagree, especially due to the “lack of transportation” (20%) as well as “difficulties to provide learning and didactic materials for children” (32%).

Table 6 provides information regarding teachers' disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. As we observe, teachers in 9 regions out of 12 confirm that it is unlikely to believe that children are equipped with didactic and learning materials by MoES or municipality, which addresses the provision of “learning and didactic materials” as a crucial impediment vis-à-vis the access to ECE (according to teachers). In addition, “transportation” is mentioned in 8 regions, while “infrastructure facilities for children with disabilities” is mentioned in 6 regions out of 12. Teachers in 3 regions (Korçë, Kukës and Shkodër) do not declare any problems with any criteria.

Table 6: The proportion of teachers who disagree with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	School facilitates children's' enrollment	All children can access school	Children with disabilities are supported by an assistant	Transport is ensured for all children	Children are equipped with didactic means and learning materials	Children with disabilities enjoy infrastructure facilities	Infrastructure is improved in continuation
Berat				50%	100%		
Dibër			20%	20%	100%	60%	
Durrës					25%		
Elbasan			9%	13%	38%	6%	6%
Fier		17%	17%	17%	33%	17%	8%
Gjirokastrë				33%	100%		
Korçë							
Kukës							
Lezhë	50%	25%		25%	75%	50%	
Shkodër							
Tiranë			13%	29%	20%	5%	22%
Vlorë			23%	15%	23%	8%	

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Due to high volume of data, in the report we present thorough analysis only of those data that express fully agreement on each of the selected criteria, whereas data on all responses are presented in the Annex 2.

Tables 7 and 8 bring information regarding those who fully support each of ECE access assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence.

Table 7: Number of respondents who fully agree, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of ECE access evaluation.

Regions	School facilitates children's enrollment			All children can access school			Children with disabilities are supported by an assistant			Transport is ensured for all children			Children are equipped with didactic means and learning materials			Children with disabilities enjoy infrastructure facilities			Infrastructure is improved in continuation		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0
Dibër	3	2	5	3	1	4	3	1	4	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	2
Durrës	2	2	4	2	2	4	1	2	3	2	1	3	0	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	4
Elbasan	9	15	24	9	21	30	6	14	20	9	12	21	5	11	16	8	13	21	8	16	24
Fier	1	9	10	1	8	9	1	7	8	1	5	6	0	3	3	1	7	8	1	7	8
Gjrokastër	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	2	3	1	2	3
Korçë	3	2	5	4	2	6	3	1	4	3	1	4	1	1	2	2	1	3	4	2	6
Kukës	2		2	2	0	2	1	0	1	2	0	2	1	1	2	0	0		1	0	1
Lezhë	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	2	1	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	1
Shkodër	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		1	0	1	0	1	1
Tiranë	26	20	46	31	18	49	15	15	30	9	5	14	12	8	20	19	17	36	32	17	49
Vlorë	5	5	10	6	5	11	5	3	8	5		5	2	1	3	3	4	7	4	4	8
Total	53	61	114	60	62	122	36	48	84	35	28	63	22	27	49	38	49	87	54	53	107
In percentage	46%	54%	82%	49%	51%	88%	43%	57%	60%	56%	44%	45%	45%	55%	35%	44%	56%	63%	50%	50%	77%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table 7 we observe that:

More than 80% of respondents support the idea that access to ECE is ensured for all children (88%), whereas it is school which facilitated children's enrollment (82%). More than 75% of teachers confirm that infrastructure has improved in continuation (77%). Less optimistic are teachers about disabled children's access to ECE. 63% of respondents support the idea that children with disabilities can enjoy infrastructure facilities, while only 60% of them admits that children with disabilities are supported by an assistant.

It seems that lack of transportation and didactic materials are two critical obstacles that deny children's enrollment to ECE. Less than half of teachers (45%) confirm that transport is ensured for all children, while only 35% of them accept that children are equipped with didactic materials, provided by MoES or Municipality.

There are significant differences among teachers' views in urban and rural areas. Apart from "Infrastructure", which seems to have equally improved either in urban or in rural areas, it is likely to believe that access to ECE is easier in urban rather than in rural areas, despite the impediments caused by "transportation" in urban areas.

Table 8: Proportion of respondents who fully agree, according to regions and criteria of ECE access evaluation.

Regions	School facilitates children's enrollment		All children can access school		Children with disabilities are supported by an assistant		Transport is ensured for all children		Children are equipped with didactic means and learning materials		Children with disabilities enjoy infrastructure facilities		Infrastructure is improved in continuation	
	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %
Berat	2	100%	2	100%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Dibër	5	100%	4	80%	4	80%	3	60%	0	0%	2	40%	2	40%
Durrës	4	100%	4	100%	3	75%	3	75%	2	50%	2	50%	4	100%
Elbasan	24	75%	30	94%	20	63%	21	66%	16	50%	21	66%	24	75%
Fier	10	83%	9	75%	8	67%	6	50%	3	25%	8	67%	8	67%
Gjirokastër	3	100%	3	100%	3	100%	2	67%	0	0%	3	100%	3	100%
Korçë	5	83%	6	100%	4	67%	4	67%	2	33%	3	50%	6	100%
Kukës	2	100%	2	100%	1	50%	2	100%	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%
Lezhë	2	50%	1	25%	2	50%	2	50%	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%
Shkodër	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%
Tiranë	46	84%	49	89%	30	55%	14	25%	20	33%	36	65%	49	89%
Vlorë	10	77%	11	85%	8	62%	5	38%	3	23%	7	54%	8	62%
Total	114	82%	122	88%	84	60%	63	45%	49	35%	87	63%	107	77%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021.

Table 8 reveals the teacher's views in different regions of the country, addressing the most critical regions vis-à-vis children's access to ECE. Despite the limited number of respondents, it is unlikely to believe that children in Lezha can access ECE since almost all respondents think that none of assessment criteria is implemented in the region. Although Shkodra appears much better than Lezha, still 3 out of 7 indicators are not confirmed by any of teachers. In Berati, none of teachers support the idea that children are equipped with didactic materials as well as that infrastructure has improved. Whereas in Tirana, a small proportion of teachers (25%) confirm that "transport is ensured for all children" and "children are equipped with didactic materials" (36%). In Dibër, Fier, Gjirokastër and Korçë, interviewed teachers fully agree on all indicators of access, except for "children's equipment with didactic materials. In Kukës, none of teachers agree that "children with disabilities enjoy infrastructure facilities", while in Vlora, lack of transportation seem critical. Only respondents of Durrresi and Elbasani fully agree on all ECE access criteria of assessment.

4.1.3. Participation

Participation to ECE is assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions from 17 to 21 of ECE teachers (Annex I, Questionnaire I), which constitute the ECE participation criteria. Like in the previous section, each of interviewed teachers had to choose only one response among four alternatives, respectively: Fully agree, Agree, Disagree, Do not know. Table 9 presents a summary of data on the responses of all interviewed teachers according to each of alternatives.

Table 9: Responses of teachers according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions

Criteria of assessment	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
Diversity is a value	2%	1%	11%	86%	100%
All children participate in activities	0%	0%	5%	95%	100%

School/kindergarten possess sufficient spaces for children's social activities	1%	0%	27%	73%	100%
School/kindergarten has sufficient didactic and learning materials to facilitate all children's participation	3%	0%	35%	62%	100%
Teachers use various interactive methods and strategies to promote children's learning and active participation	0%	0%	6%	94%	100%
Assistant teachers support the learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities.	8%	17%	13%	62%	100%
All criteria	2%	3%	16%	79%	100%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 9, almost 95% of teachers fully agree and agree that participation to ECE is ensured. Only 2% disagree, especially due to the “lack of support by assistant teachers to promote children’s learning and participation” (8%).

Table 10 provides information regarding teachers’ disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. As we observe, teachers in 5 regions out of 12 confirm that the support from assistant teachers to promote children’s learning, is missing. In these regions, especially in Vlora (50%), Dibra(33%) and Korça (25%), the proportion of those who see “the lack of assistance to promote children’s learning”, is significant. Again, the issue of didactic materials is strongly addressed, especially in Dibra (33%) and Lezha (25%). Teachers in 6 regions (Berat, Fier, Korçë, Kukës, Gjirokastër and Shkodër” do not declare any problems with any criteria.

Table 10: The proportion of teachers who disagree with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	Diversity is a value	All children participate in activities	School /kindergarten possess sufficient spaces for children's social activities	School/kindergarten has sufficient didactic and learning materials to facilitate all children's participation	Teachers use various interactive methods and strategies to promote children's learning and active participation	Assistant teachers support the learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities.
Berat						
Dibër	40%			33%		33%
Durrës			25%			
Elbasan				8%		8%
Fier						
Gjirokastër						
Korçë						25%
Kukës						
Lezhë				25%		
Shkodër						
Tiranë	2%			3%		15%
Vlorë						50%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Tables 11 and 12 bring information regarding those who fully support each of ECE participation assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence.

Table II: Number of respondents who fully agree, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of ECE participation evaluation.

Regions	Diversity is a value			All children participate in activities			School /kindergarten possess sufficient spaces for children's social activities			School/kindergarten has sufficient didactic and learning materials to facilitate all children's participation			Teachers use various interactive methods and strategies to promote children's learning and active participation			Assistant teachers support the learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities.		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	1
Dibër	1	2	3	3	2	5	1	2	3	1	2	3	3	2	5	2	1	3
Durrës	2	2	4	2	2	4	1	2	3	1	1	2	2	2	4	2	2	4
Elbasan	8	19	27	9	21	30	7	21	28	4	14	18	8	21	29	3	9	12
Fier	1	9	10	1	11	12	0	10	10	1	11	12	1	10	11	1	11	12
Gjirokastrë	1	2	3	1	2	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	1	2	3
Korçë	3	1	4	4	1	5	3	0	3	4	0	4	4	0	4	3	1	4
Kukës	2	0	2	2	0	2	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2
Lezhë	0	3	3	0	4	4	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	4	4	0	4	4
Shkodër	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Tiranë	28	19	47	33	18	51	21	16	37	20	11	31	33	20	53	20	14	34
Vlorë	6	7	13	6	7	13	3	5	8	5	6	11	6	7	13	3	3	6
Total	53	66	119	62	70	132	38	63	101	38	48	86	61	70	131	37	49	86
In %	45%	55%	86%	47%	53%	95%	38%	62%	73%	44%	56%	62%	47%	53%	94%	43%	57%	62%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table II we observe that:

About 94-95% of respondents support the idea that participation to activities organized in schools and kindergartens is ensured for all children (95%) and teachers use various interactive methods and strategies (94%) to encourage children's learning and participation. Less proportion of teachers agree that diversity is a value in our ECE system (86%) and that the schools possess sufficient spaces to organize children's activities (73%).

It is recognized that "participation" is hampered by two factors, respectively "lack of didactic and learning materials" and "lack of support by assistant teachers to facilitate all children's participation and learning". Only about 60% of teachers find sufficient the provision of didactic materials as well as of support ensured by assistant teachers.

There are significant differences among teachers' views in urban and rural areas. In particular, there is a significant gap among teachers' views in urban and rural areas with regard to "Sufficiency of school/kindergarten spaces for children's social activities". Compared to urban areas (62%), schools and kindergartens in rural areas possess about half of space (38%), which directly impacts on children's participation to learning and social activities.

Table 12: Proportion of respondents who fully agree, according to regions and criteria of ECE participation evaluation.

Regions	Diversity is a value		All children participate in activities		School /kindergarten possess sufficient spaces for children's social activities		School/kindergarten has sufficient didactic and learning materials to facilitate all children's participation		Teachers use various interactive methods and strategies to promote children's learning and active participation		Assistant teachers support the learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities.	
	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %
Berat	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	0	0%	2	100%	1	50%
Dibër	3	60%	5	100%	3	60%	3	60%	5	100%	3	60%
Durrës	4	100%	4	100%	3	75%	2	50%	4	100%	4	100%
Elbasan	27	84%	30	94%	28	88%	18	56%	29	91%	12	38%
Fier	10	83%	12	100%	10	83%	12	100%	11	92%	12	100%
Gjirokastrë	3	100%	3	100%	0	67%	0	0%	3	100%	3	100%
Korçë	4	67%	5	83%	3	50%	4	67%	4	67%	4	67%
Kukës	2	100%	2	100%	1	50%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%
Lezhë	3	75%	4	100%	3	75%	3	75%	4	100%	4	100%
Shkodër	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%
Tiranë	47	85%	51	93%	37	67%	31	56%	53	96%	34	62%
Vlorë	13	100%	13	100%	8	62%	11	85%	13	100%	6	46%
Total	119	86%	132	95%	101	73%	86	62%	131	94%	86	62%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021.

Table 12 summarizes the teacher's views in different regions of the country, addressing the most critical regions vis-à-vis children's participation to ECE. A general agreement on children's participation is observed in any regions, especially regarding the willingness of children to participate in activities (criteria 17).

Whereas more than 60% of respondents in any region strongly agree that "diversity is a value" and that "the teachers use interactive learning methods and strategies", exceptionally about 50% of teachers in Korça and Kukësi confirm the sufficiency of spaces to promote children's activities.

Like in the analysis of data from previous tables, the "provision of support by assistant teachers to encourage learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities" is noted as a concern in 3 regions, respectively in Berat (50%), Vlorë (46%) and Elbasan (38%). Slightly better is considered this situation in Korça (67%), Tirana (62%) and Dibër (60%), while in 6 remaining regions, notably in Durrës, Fier, Gjirokastrë, Kukës, Lezhë, Shkodër, all respondents confirm the provision of support and assistance to children's learning and participation.

4.1.4. Transition from early childhood to elementary school

Transition from ECE to Elementary school is assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions from 22 to 35 of ECE teachers (Annex I, Questionnaire I), which constitute the ECE transition assessment criteria. Table 13 presents a summary of data on the responses of all interviewed teachers according to each of alternatives, already explained in the previous sections.

Table 13: Responses of teachers according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions

Criteria of Assessment	Percentage				
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
There are instructions, orders or regulations of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth that define the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to primary school.	0	3	9	88	100
There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school.	3	6	12	79	100
MoES and local government orders / instructions for the transfer of children from kindergarten to school are coordinated or coherent.	1	7	17	76	100
Children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade	0	20	19	61	100
There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.	1	6	24	70	100
The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.	0	4	21	75	100
Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition	4	5	21	71	100
Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.	4	5	9	82	100
First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.	6	5	16	73	100
Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.	1	2	17	80	100
Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their willingness to move from kindergarten to first grade.	1	0	2	97	100
Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.	0	4	16	81	100
There is a harmonization or coherence between the written curriculum (curriculum framework and subject programs) and teaching in preschool education and the school curriculum.	0	1	14	85	100
Kindergarten and school' teachers are trained to prepare children for first grade.	4	2	27	68	100
All Criteria	2	5	16	77	100

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 13, more than 90% of teachers (93%) fully agree and agree that transition from early childhood to elementary school is supported and facilitated. Only 2% disagree, especially due to the difficulties of first grade teachers to visit the kindergarten to get to know the children. (6%).

Table 14 provides information regarding teachers' disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. Table confirms that transition from ECE to Elementary school is somehow critical in the regions of Vlora, Tirana, Korça, Durrës and Elbasan, whereas in the rest of the regions (7 regions), there are no disagreements regarding the smooth transition from ECE to Elementary School. More critical the situation appears in Vlora due to the "lack of information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten" (25%) and "lack of kindergarten and school 'teachers training to prepare children for first grade" (25%).

Table 14: The proportion of teachers who disagree with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school.	MoES and local government orders / instructions for the transfer of children from kindergarten to school are coordinated or coherent.	There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.	Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc.,	Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.	First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.	Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.	Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their willingness to move from kindergarten to first grade.	Kindergarten teachers and school teachers are trained to prepare children for first grade.
Berat									
Dibër									
Durrës								25%	
Elbasan					6%	6%			3%
Fier									
Gjirokastrë									
Korçë				17%	17%				
Kukës									
Lezhë									
Shkodër									
Tiranë	7%	2%		4%	2%	7%	2%		2%
Vlorë			8%	15%	8%	23%	8%		23%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Tables 15 and 16 bring information regarding those who fully support each of “Transition” assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence. Due to the large number of criteria, table 12 is presented in two parts, although the comments refer to the table as a whole.

Table 15: Number of respondents who fully agree, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of “Transition from ECE to Elementary school” evaluation.

Regions	There are instructions, orders and regulations of MoES that define the procedure for transferring children from preschool kindergarten) to primary school			There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school.			MoES and local government orders / instructions for the transfer of children from kindergarten to school are coordinated or coherent.			Children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade			There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.			The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.			Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
Dibër	3	1	4	2	2	4	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	2	5	2	2	4	3	1	4
Durrës	2	2	4	2	2	4	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3
Elbasan	8	19	27	8	15	23	5	15	20	5	15	20	6	15	21	9	13	22	7	14	21
Fier	1	10	11	1	10	11	1	7	8	1	7	8	1	7	8	1	9	10	1	8	9
Gjirokastrë	1	2	3	1	2	3	0	2	2	0	2	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	1	2
Korçë	3	0	3	3	0	3	2	0	2	2	0	2	4	1	5	4	1	5	2	0	2
Kukës	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2
Lezhë	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4
Shkodër	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
Tiranë	31	19	50	29	15	44	22	16	38	22	16	38	27	13	40	27	14	41	30	12	42
Vlorë	6	6	12	5	5	10	4	3	7	4	3	7	2	2	4	3	4	7	5	1	6
Total	58	65	123	53	57	110	37	48	85	37	48	85	48	49	97	51	53	104	53	45	98
in %	47%	53%	88%	48%	57%	79%	49%	51%	76%	44%	56%	61%	49%	51%	70%	49%	51%	75%	54%	46%	71%

Regions	Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.			Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.			Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten			Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their willingness to move from kindergarten to first grade.			Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade			There is a harmonization or coherence between the written curriculum (curriculum framework and subject programs) and teaching in preschool education and the school curriculum			Kindergarten teachers and school teachers are trained to prepare children for first grade		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	0
Dibër	3	2	5	2	2	4	3	2	5	3	2	5	3	2	5	3	2	5	2	2	4
Durrës	2	2	4	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	1	2	1	2	3	0	2	2
Elbasan	8	16	24	9	15	24	10	15	25	9	22	31	9	14	23	7	17	24	5	13	18
Fier	1	10	11	1	11	12	1	10	11	1	11	12	1	11	12	1	10	11	1	10	11
Gjirokastrë	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	0	2	2	1	2	3	1	1	2
Korçë	2	1	3	3	2	5	4	1	5	4	2	6	4	2	6	4	2	6	4	0	4
Kukës	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2		2	2	0	2	2	0	2	1	0	1
Lezhë	0	4	4	0	3	3	0	2	2	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4
Shkodër	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
Tiranë	29	18	47	24	14	38	28	15	43	33	20	53	28	17	45	29	16	45	26	16	42
Vlorë	4	4	8	4	1	5	5	4	9	6	7	13	4	4	8	6	6	12	2	3	5
Total	53	61	114	48	53	101	56	55	111	61	74	135	53	59	112	55	63	118	42	52	94
In %	46%	54%	82%	48%	52%	73%	50%	50%	80%	45%	55%	97%	47%	53%	81%	47%	53%	85%	45%	55%	68%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table I5 we observe that:

About 97% of respondents fully agree that children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their willingness to move from kindergarten to first grade. Whereas 80 to 90% of respondents agree that:

- ✓ There are instructions, orders or regulations of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth that define the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to primary school.
- ✓ Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.
- ✓ Schools consider information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.
- ✓ Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.
- ✓ There is a harmonization or coherence between the written curriculum (curriculum framework and subject programs) and teaching in preschool education and the school curriculum.

However, the respondents' attitudes vis-à-vis other criteria of assessment seem less optimistic, notably:

- ✓ Children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade (61%);
- ✓ Kindergartens and school's teachers are trained to prepare children for first grade (68%);
- ✓ There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children (70%);
- ✓ Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition (71%)
- ✓ First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children. (73%);

There are no significant differences among teachers' views in urban and rural areas in 9 out of 13 criteria. Whilst there is a gap among teachers' opinions in rural and urban areas in four criteria, respectively:

- ✓ Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition. (R54%, U46%);
- ✓ Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade. (R53%, U61%);
- ✓ Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their willingness to move from kindergarten to first grade. (R45%, U55%);
- ✓ Kindergartens and school's teachers are trained to prepare children for first grade. (R45%, U55%).

Table 16: Proportion of respondents who fully agree, according to regions and criteria of “Transition from ECE to elementary school” assessment.

Regions	There are instructions, orders and regulations of MoES that define the procedure for transferring children from preschool kindergarten) to primary school		There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school.		MoES and local government orders / instructions for the transfer of children from kindergarten to school are coordinated or coherent.		Children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade		There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.		The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.		Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition	
	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %
Berat	2	100%	1	50%	1	100%	1	50%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%
Dibër	4	80%	4	80%	1	40%	1	20%	5	100%	4	80%	4	80%
Durrës	4	100%	4	100%	3	75%	3	75%	2	50%	3	75%	3	75%
Elbasan	27	84%	23	72%	20	72%	20	63%	21	66%	22	69%	21	66%
Fier	11	92%	11	92%	8	75%	8	67%	8	67%	10	83%	9	75%
Gjirokastrë	3	100%	3	100%	2	100%	2	67%	3	100%	3	100%	2	67%
Korçë	3	50%	3	50%	2	83%	2	33%	5	83%	5	83%	2	33%
Kukës	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%
Lezhë	4	100%	4	100%	1	100%	1	25%	4	100%	4	100%	4	100%
Shkodër	1	100%	1	100%	0	100%	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%
Tiranë	50	91%	44	80%	38	80%	38	69%	40	73%	41	756%	42	76%
Vlorë	12	92%	10	77%	7	54%	7	54%	4	31%	7	54%	6	46%

Regions	Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.		Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.		Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten		Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their willingness to move from kindergarten to first grade.		Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade		There is a harmonization or coherence between the written curriculum (curriculum framework and subject programs) and teaching in preschool education and the school curriculum		Kindergarten teachers and school teachers are trained to prepare children for first grade	
	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %	Total	in %
Berat	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	0	0%
Dibër	5	100%	4	80%	5	100%	5	100%	5	100%	5	100%	4	80%
Durrës	4	100%	2	50%	3	75%	3	75%	2	50%	3	75%	2	50%
Elbasan	24	75%	24	75%	25	78%	31	97%	23	72%	24	75%	18	56%
Fier	11	92%	12	100%	11	92%	12	100%	12	100%	11	92%	11	92%
Gjirokastrë	3	100%	3	100%	3	100%	3	100%	2	67%	3	100%	2	67%
Korçë	3	50%	5	83%	5	83%	6	100%	6	10%	6	100%	4	67%
Kukës	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%	1	50%
Lezhë	4	100%	3	75%	2	50%	4	100%	4	100%	4	100%	4	100%
Shkodër	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%
Tiranë	47	85%	38	69%	43	78%	53	96%	45	82%	45	82%	42	76%
Vlorë	8	62%	5	38%	9	69%	13	100%	8	62%	12	92%	5	38%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021.

Table 16 summarizes the teacher's views in different regions of the country, addressing the most critical regions vis-à-vis children's transition to Elementary School. It is likely to believe that transition from ECE to elementary school is not a smooth process for children in:

- ✓ Vlora (7 criteria out of 13 got less than 55% of support);
- ✓ Korça (5 out of 13 criteria got less than 50% of support);
- ✓ Durrës (4 out of 13 criteria got 50% of support).

Although in the rest of the regions, the transition from ECE to Elementary school seem gradual and effective, still the analysis of data argue that the transition from kindergarten to elementary school for children with special needs is denied due to the lack of special support, especially in Korça, (33%); Lezhë, (25%); Dibër, (20%) and Shkodër (0%;).

4.1.5. Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders

“Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders” are assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions 36 to 44 from ECE teacher's questionnaires (Annex I, Questionnaire I), which constitute assessment criteria. Table 17 presents a summary of data on the responses of all interviewed teachers according to each of alternatives, already explained in the previous sections.

Table 17: Responses of teachers according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions

Criteria of Assessment	Percentage				
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
The local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed.	3	5	17	75	100
The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attend kindergarten / school.	3	4	17	77	100
The local government is responsible for the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs.	4	9	19	69	100
The local government provides food for children in need in kindergartens.	17	20	12	52	100
MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens.	0	1	6	94	100
MoES and its responsible institutions support the teaching staff of kindergartens with guides and support materials related to various topics related to education.	2	1	23	73	100
MoES and its responsible institutions assess the quality of educational services and childcare provided by kindergartens.	0	1	21	78	100
Teaching staff have clear duties and responsibilities of MoES and local government in relation to preschool education	1	8	91	0	100
There is an overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education.	0	2	2	3	7
All Criteria	4	8	26	62	100

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 17, around 90% of teachers (88%) fully agree and agree that key stakeholders exercise their roles and responsibilities. 4% disagree, especially due to the impossibility of local government to provide food for children in need in kindergartens (17%).

Table 18 provides information regarding teachers' disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. Table confirms that in general key stakeholders (Local government and MASR) are capable to exercise their duties and competences. The provision of food for the children in need appear

somehow critical in 7 regions out of 12, respectively in Berat, Diber, Elbasan, Fier, Gjirokaster, Korçë and Lezhë.

Table 18: The proportion of teachers who disagree with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	The local government provides kindergarten s with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed.	The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attend kindergarten / school.	The local government is responsible for the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs.	The local government provides food for the children in need in kindergartens.	MOES and its responsible institutions support the teaching staff of kindergartens with guides and support materials related to various topics related to education.	Teaching staff have clear duties and responsibilities of MoES and local government in relation to preschool education	There is an overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education.
Berat			50%	100%	50%		
Dibër			40%	100%	20%		20%
Durrës	25%					25%	25%
Elbasan	3%	3%		13%	3%		
Fier	8%	8%	8%	25%			8%
Gjirokastër				33%			
Korçë		17%		17%			17%
Kukës							
Lezhë			25%	50%			
Shkodër							100%
Tiranë	2%	2%					4%
Vlorë							8%
Total	3 %	3%	4 %	17%	2 %	1%	6%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Tables 19 and 20 bring information regarding those who fully support each of assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence.

Table 19: Number of respondents who fully agree, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of “Key roles and responsibilities” assessment.

Regions	The local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed			The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attends kindergarten / school			The local government is responsible for the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs			The local government provides food for the needy children in kindergartens			MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens			MOES and its responsible institutions support the teaching staff of kindergartens with guides and support materials related to various topics related to education.			MoES and its responsible institutions assess the quality of educational services and childcare provided by kindergarten			Teaching staff have clear duties and responsibilities of MoES and local government in relation to preschool education			There is an overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	1	1
Dibër	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	5	1	2	3	2	1	3	3	2	5	1	0	1
Durrës	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	0	1	1	1	2	3	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	0	0	0
Elbasan	7	17	24	9	16	25	8	17	25	6	13	19	9	19	28	7	15	22	6	18	24	9	18	27	7	16	23
Fier	1	6	7	1	8	9	0	6	6	0	5	5	1	9	10	1	9	10	1	9	10	1	11	12	1	5	6
Gjirokastrë	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	0	2	2
Korçë	4	1	5	3	1	4	3		3	2	1	3	4	2	6	4	1	5	4	0	4	4	2	6	1	0	1
Kukës	2	0	2	2		2	2		2	1	1	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2		2	2		2	1	0	1
Lezhë	0	3	3	0	4	4	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	4	4	0	4	4	3	0	3	0	4	4	0	3	3
Shkodër	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	19	0	19
Tiranë	27	18	459	28	16	44	26	19	45	16	14	30	34	21	55	24	18	42	28	15	43	31	18	49	-6	6	0
Vlorë	6	3	12	5	4	9	4	3	7	4	4	8	6	5	11	3	4	7	4	6	10	6	6	12	1	4	5
Total	50	54	104	51	56	107	45	51	96	31	41	72	62	68	130	45	57	102	53	55	108	59	67	126	25	37	62
In %	48%	52%	75%	48%	52%	77%	47%	53%	69%	43%	57%	52%	48%	52%	94%	44%	56%	73%	49%	51%	78%	47%	53%	91%	40%	60%	45%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table 19 we observe that:

About 90% of respondents fully agree that MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens (94%), while teaching staff have clear duties and responsibilities of MoES and local government in relation to preschool education (41%).

70 to 80% of respondents agree that:

- ✓ MoES and its responsible institutions assess the quality of educational services and childcare provided by kindergartens (78%).
- ✓ The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attends kindergarten / school (77%);
- ✓ The local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed (75%);
- ✓ MoES and its responsible institutions support the teaching staff of kindergartens with guides and support materials related to various topics related to education (73%);

Elaboration of data from respondents reveal the lack of support, especially with food for children in need, which is identified as the most critical issue, that demonstrates limited capacities of local government in some regions of the country.

45% of respondents confirm the overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education.

There are no significant differences among teachers' views in urban and rural areas in 6 out of 9 criteria. Whilst there is a gap among teachers' opinions in rural and urban areas in three criteria, respectively:

- ✓ The local government provides food for the children in need in kindergartens (R43%, U57%);
- ✓ MOES and its responsible institutions support the teaching staff of kindergartens with guides and support materials related to various topics related to education (R44%, U56%);
- ✓ There is an overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education (R40%, U60%).

Clearly, the situation appears more critical in rural rather than in urban areas, according to the data provided above.

Table 20: Proportion of respondents who fully agree, according to districts and criteria of assessment.

Regions		The local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed		The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attends kindergarten / school		The local government is responsible for the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs		The local government provides food for the needy children in kindergartens		MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens.		MoES and its responsible institutions support the teaching staff of kindergartens with guides and support materials related to various topics related to education		MoES and its responsible institutions assess the quality of educational services and childcare provided by kindergartens		Teaching staff have clear duties and responsibilities of MoES and local government in relation to preschool education		There is an overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education	
		Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %	Total	In %
Korçë	Berat																		
	Elbasan	29	21%	31	22%	28	20%	22	16%	36	26%	28	20%	30	22%	35	25%	25	18%
	Korçë																		
Fier	Fier																		
	Gjirokastrë	19	14%	21	15%	16	12%	15	11%	24	17%	20	14%	23	17%	27	19%	13	9%
	Vlorë																		
Lezhë	Kukës																		
	Lezhë	6	4%	7	5%	4	3%	4	3%	7	5%	7	5%	6	4%	7	5%	23	17%
	Shkodër																		
Durrës	Tiranë																		
	Durrës	50	36%	48	35%	48	35%	31	22%	63	45%	47	34%	49	35%	57	41%	1	1%
	Dibër																		
Total		104	75%	107	77%	96	69%	72	52%	130	94%	102	73%	108	78%	126	91%	62	45%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Table 20 reconfirms the most critical issues as they were picked from the data of table 16, but further elaborated as per the districts. As we observe from the table, the situation seems more critical in Lezha district (composed of Lezha, Kukës and Shkodra) since the proportion of those who fully agree isn't higher than 5% in 8 out of 9 criteria.

In the district of Fieri, composed of Fieri, Gjirokastra and Vlora, around 15% of respondents fully support 8 out of 9 criteria, supporting the statement that key stakeholders do not fully exercise their roles and responsibilities.

In the two remaining districts, respectively in Korça and Durrës the situation appears slightly better since more than 20% of responders agree on the truthfulness of statements of criteria.

Regarding the 9th criteria, notably “the overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education”, the data of the table confirms that in Durrës district there is no any evidence on the overlapping of competences, while in Korça and Lezha, less than 20% of responders think of mixture of responsibilities among central and local institutions.

Section 4.2. According to teachers at Elementary School

This section further elaborates the main topics as they result from situation analysis, based on the data and information from face-to-face interviews with teachers of elementary school.

4.2.1. Sample characteristics

In full accordance with the TORs, 115 interviews were conducted with teachers from 36 public schools and 1 private school, in 23 ZVA of 12 Albanian counties. The interviewed teachers are part of the public sector in 99% and private sector in 1%. 97% of them are females, while 3% are males.

The sample is composed of 76% of teachers living in urban and 24% of them living in rural areas. 64% of them teach in first grade, while the rest, 36% teach in the second grade of elementary school. Regarding qualification and job position, the sample is composed of 98% teachers, 1 % of assistant teachers and 1% of school's directors.

4.2.2. Transition from early childhood education to elementary school

Transition from early childhood education to elementary school is assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions 9 to 23 of Elementary School' teachers (Annex I, Questionnaire 2). Each of interviewed teachers had to choose only one response among four alternatives, respectively: Fully agree, Agree, Disagree, Do not know. Table 21 presents a summary of data on the responses of all interviewed teachers according to each of alternatives.

Table 21: Responses of teachers according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions

Criteria of Assessment	Percentage				
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
There are instructions, orders or regulations of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth that define the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to primary school.	0	5	17	78	100
There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school.	1	18	32	49	100
MoES and local government orders / instructions for the transfer of children from kindergarten to school are coordinated or coherent.	2	6	27	65	100
Children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade	0	4	19	77	100
The school enables the enrollment in the first grade of all children in the area it covers	1	0	10	90	100

There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.	2	9	27	63	100
The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.	1	3	25	71	100
First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.	9	4	23	63	100
Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.	3	3	26	67	100
Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their willingness to move from kindergarten to first grade.	1	0	24	75	100
Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.	0	0	27	73	100
There is a harmonization or coherence between the written curriculum (curriculum framework and subject programs) and teaching in preschool education and the school curriculum.	0	3	30	67	100
Integrative play-based teaching predominates during the first years of school	1	0	23	77	100
Kindergarten teachers and first grade teachers, meet together to share achievements, skills and the need to support children enrolled for the first time.	7	4	33	56	100
Teachers at the school are trained to prepare children for the first grade	4	0	23	73	100
All Criteria	2	4	24	70	100

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 21, almost 95% of teachers fully agree and agree that transition from ECE to ES is supported. Only 2% disagree, especially due to the “First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children” as well as “Kindergarten’s and first grade’s teachers, meet to share achievements, skills and the need to support children enrolled for the first time” (7%).

Table 22 provides information regarding teachers’ disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. As we observe, teachers in 4 regions out of 12 confirm that it is unlikely to believe that Kindergarten’s and first grade’s teachers, meet together to share achievements, skills as well as experiences to support children enrolled for the first time, which brings to the attention of policy makers the necessity to establish a nurturing environment to ensure a smooth transition from ECE to ES.

In addition, disagreement with “Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten” is mentioned in 3 regions, although the proportion of those who disagree is not significant. More critical appear the disagreement of teachers regarding the efforts of first grade teachers to get to know the children paying visits to the kindergarten, especially in Tirana and Durrës. (Criteria 16).

Table 22: The proportion of teachers who disagree with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school.	MoES and local government orders / instructions for the transfer of children from kindergarten to school are coordinated or coherent.	The school enables the enrollment in the first grade of all children in the area it covers	There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.	The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.	First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.	Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.	Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their willingness to move from kindergarten to first grade.	Integrative play-based teaching predominates during the first years of school	Kindergarten teachers and first grade teachers, meet together to share achievements, skills and the need to support children enrolled for the first time.	Teachers at the school are trained to prepare children for the first grade
Berat										0%	
Dibër	17%	17%						17%		0%	17%
Durrës						11%				11%	
Elbasan				13%						13%	
Fier							25%				13%
Gjirokastrë			50%								
Korçë											
Kukës											
Lezhë											
Shkodër											
Tiranë		2%			2%	18%	2%		2%	10%	4%
Vlorë				5%			5%			5%	5%
Total	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	9%	3%	1%	1%	7%	4%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Tables 23 and 24 bring information regarding those who fully support the smooth transition from ECE to ES based on the formulated access assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence.

Table 23: Number of respondents who fully agree, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of assessment.

Regions	There are instructions, orders or regulations of the MoES that define the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to primary school.			There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school.			MoES and local government orders / instructions for the transfer of children from kindergarten to school are coordinated or coherent.			Children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade			The school enables the enrollment in the first grade of all children in the area it covers		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	1	2	3	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	3	3	1	2	3
Dibër	2	2	4	2	0	2	1	1	2	3	3	6	2	2	4
Durrës	1	4	5	0	3	3	2	4	6	0	9	9	2	7	9
Elbasan	2	4	6	3	4	7	2	3	5	1	7	8	2	5	7
Fier	1	5	6	1	4	5	1	4	5	1	7	8	1	6	7
Gjirokastrë	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	1
Korçë	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	2
Kukës	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2
Lezhë	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3
Shkodër	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	4	0	4	4
Tiranë	2	36	38	0	28	28	3	33	36	4	45	49	3	40	43
Vlorë	0	15	15	4	5	9	5	6	11	5	14	19	10	8	18
Total	11	79	90	12	51	63	16	59	75	16	99	115	23	80	103
In %	10%	69%	78%	10%	44%	55%	14%	51%	65%	14%	86%	100%	20%	70%	90%

Regions	There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.			The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.			First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.			Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.			Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their readiness to move from kindergarten to first grade.		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	1	0	1	1	2	3	1	1	2	1	0	1	1	1	2
Dibër	1	2	3	2	2	4	2	2	4	2	0	2	2	2	4
Durrës	0	4	4	2	6	8	2	5	7	2	7	9	2	6	8
Elbasan	0	3	3	1	1	2	0	4	4	0	3	3	0	3	3
Fier	1	4	5	1	3	4	1	4	5	1	5	6	1	5	6
Gjirokastrë	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2
Korçë	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2
Kukës	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	1	0	1	2	0	2
Lezhë	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2
Shkodër	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	3	3	0	4	4	0	3	3
Tiranë	3	34	37	3	26	29	2	29	31	4	34	38	4	35	39
Vlorë	5	6	11	6	8	14	7	6	13	8	6	14	7	13	
Total	13	59	72	18	55	73	17	60	77	19	65	84	19	74	73
In %	11%	51%	63%	16%	48%	63%	15%	52%	67%	17%	57%	73%	17%	64%	63%

Regions	Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.			There is a harmonization or coherence between the written curriculum (curriculum framework and subject programs) and teaching in preschool education and the school curriculum.			Integrative play-based teaching predominates during the first years of school			Kindergarten teachers and first grade teachers, meet together to share achievements, skills and the need to support children enrolled for the first time.			Teachers at the school are trained to prepare children for the first grade		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
Dibër	2	0	2	1	1	2	3	2	5	3	2	5	3	2	5
Durrës	2	7	9	2	6	8	1	6	7	2	5	7	2	5	7
Elbasan	0	3	3	0	3	3	1	4	5	1	3	4	1	3	4
Fier	1	5	6	1	3	4	1	4	5	1	2	3	1	2	3
Gjirokastrë	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Korçë	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Kukës	1	0	1	2	0	2	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	2
Lezhë	0	2	2	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	2	2	0	2	2
Shkodër	0	4	4	0	3	3	0	4	4	0	1	1	0	1	1
Tiranë	4	34	38	3	32	35	4	35	39	4	22	26	4	22	26
Vlorë	8	6	14	8	6	14	7	6	13	6	4	10	6	4	10
Total	19	65	84	17	60	77	18	70	88	20	44	64	20	44	64
In %	17%	57%	73%	15%	52%	67%	16%	61%	77%	17%	38%	56%	17%	38%	56%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table 23 we observe that:

100% of respondents confirm that children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade, whereas 90% of them agree that the school enables the enrollment in the first grade of all children in the area it covers.

70 to 80% of respondents support that:

- ✓ Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their readiness to move from kindergarten to first grade. (81%)
- ✓ There are instructions, orders or regulations of the MoES that define the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to primary school. (78%)
- ✓ Integrative play-based teaching predominates during the first years of school (77%)
- ✓ Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade. (73%)
- ✓ Schools consider information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten. (73%)

Less than 60% of responders agree that:

- ✓ Kindergarten teachers and first grade teachers, meet to share achievements, skills and the need to support children enrolled for the first time. (56%)
- ✓ Teachers at the school are trained to prepare children for the first grade (56%)
- ✓ There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school. (55%)

Nevertheless, the deep gap between the proportion among teachers' views in urban and rural areas stand on as the most critical issue. In the best scenario (only two criteria), the proportion of urban teachers is as high as twice of those from rural areas, who support the statement. In the worst scenario the proportion among them stand as 5 to 1 (two criteria) or 4 to 1 (8 criteria), which argues that in rural areas the transition from ECE to ES is extremely difficult.

Table 24: Proportion of respondents who fully agree, according to regions and criteria of ES transition assessment.

Regions		There are instructions, orders or regulations of the MoES that define the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to primary school.		There are instructions, orders or regulations drafted by the local government regarding the procedures for transferring children from kindergarten to school.		MoES and local government orders / instructions for the transfer of children from kindergarten to school are coordinated or coherent.		Children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade		The school enables the enrollment in the first grade of all children in the area it covers	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Korce	Berat										
	Elbasan	11	85%	10	77%	8	62%	13	100%	12	92%
	Korçë										
Fier	Fier									26	
	Gjirokastrë	23	79%	15	52%	16	55%	29	100%		0%
	Vlorë										
Lezhe	Kukës										
	Lezhë	9	100%	5	56%	7	78%	9	100%	9	100%
	Shkodër										
Durrës	Tiranë										
	Durrës	47	73%	33	52%	44	69%	64	100%	56	88%
	Dibër										
Total		63	55%	63	55%	75	78%	115	100%	103	90%

Regions		There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.		The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.		First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.		Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.		Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their readiness to move from kindergarten to first grade.	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Korce	Berat										
	Elbasan	6	46%	6	46%	8	62%	6	46%	7	54%
	Korçë										
Fier	Fier										
	Gjirokastrë	17	59%	20	69%	20	69%	22	76%	21	72%
	Vlorë										
Lezhe	Kukës										
	Lezhë	5	56%	6	67%	7	78%	7	78%	7	78%
	Shkodër										
Durrës	Tiranë										
	Durrës	44	69%	41	64%	42	66%	49	77%	51	80%
	Dibër										
Total		72	63%	73	63%	77	67%	84	73%	73	78%

Regions		Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.		There is a harmonization or coherence between the written curriculum (curriculum framework and subject programs) and teaching in preschool education and the school curriculum.		Integrative play-based teaching predominates during the first years of school		Kindergarten teachers and first grade teachers, meet together to share achievements, skills and the need to support children enrolled for the first time.		Teachers at the school are trained to prepare children for the first grade	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Korce	Berat										
	Elbasan	6	46%	4	31%	9	69%	7	54%	7	54%
	Korçë										
Fier	Fier										
	Gjirokastrë	22	76%	20	69%	20	69%	14	48%	14	48%
	Vlorë										
Lezhe	Kukës										
	Lezhë	7	78%	8	89%	8	89%	5	56%	5	56%
	Shkodër										
Durrës	Tiranë										
	Durrës	49	77%	45	70%	51	80%	38	59%	38	59%
	Dibër										
Total		84	73%	77	67%	88	77%	64	56%	64	56%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021.

Table 24 reveals the teacher's views in different regions of the country, addressing the most critical regions vis-à-vis children's transition from ECE to ES. The data of the table show that children in Korça region seem disadvantaged alongside their transition from ECE to ES due to the lack of established procedures and cooperation among kindergartens and schools regarding children's attainments and development; lack of coordination and harmonization between school curricula in ECE and ES, which impact on children's ability to adapt to the school environment when they start first grade.

Slightly better appear the situation in Fieri region, while in Lezha and Durrës children's transition from ECE to ES seem more organized, gradual and effective thanks to the established procedures as well as their implementation which result to the rapid adaptation of children when they start the first grade of ES.

Section 4.3. According to parents and caregivers

This section further elaborates the main topics as they result from situation analysis, based on the data and information from face-to-face interviews with parents and caregivers of children at early age.

4.3.1. Sample characteristics

In fully accordance with the TORs, face to face interviews were conducted with 1.661 parents. 93% of their children study in public schools, whereas only 7% are enrolled in private education system. 72% of parents live in urban areas, while 28% live in rural areas. Children of 1.661 parents attend first grade (39%), preparatory classes (25%) and pre-primary school (kindergarten) 36%. 36% of interviewed parents are unemployed, 10% of families are covered by social assistance, while 1% of parents belong to Roma Cultural ethnicity.

4.3.2. Access to early childhood education

Access to early childhood education is assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions 15 to 21 of Parents and caregivers (Annex 1, Questionnaire 3), which constitute the ECE access assessment criteria. Each of interviewed parents had to choose only one response among four alternatives,

respectively: Fully agree, Agree, Disagree, Do not know. Table 25 presents a summary of data on the responses of all interviewed teachers according to each of alternatives.

Table 25: Responses of parents according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions

Criteria assessment	Percentage				
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
School / kindergarten enables the registration of all children	2	16	13	68	100
All children, regardless of gender, background, or need, have the opportunity to attend school	2	8	12	77	100
Children with disabilities are supported by an assistant teacher	4	21	10	65	100
Children are provided by the state with transportation (when needed) to kindergarten or school	19	26	10	44	100
Children are provided with didactic means by the state (pencils, notebooks, pens, teaching aids, workbooks, etc.)	28	10	25	37	100
Children / students with disabilities have the opportunity to move and function normally in the kindergarten / school environment (classrooms, corridors, toilets, playgrounds, etc.)	10	24	20	44	99
Kindergarten / school staff, in cooperation with the local government, make continuous improvements in the kindergarten / school infrastructure	5	12	25	58	100
All Criteria	10	17	16	56	100

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 25, less than 75% of parents fully agree and agree that access to ECE is ensured. 10% disagree, especially due to the “lack of didactic and learning materials provided by the school to children” (28%), “lack of transportation” (19%) as well as “difficulties to assist children with disabilities to access school” (10%).

Table 26 provides information regarding parents’ disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. As we observe, parents in all the regions confirm that it is unlikely to believe that children are equipped with didactic and learning materials by MoES or municipality, that the transportation is provided and that the infrastructure facilities for children with disabilities, are ensured. The situation appears more critical in Dibër, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier and Korçë, in which more than 30% of responders confirm that the three above mentioned criteria are the crucial impediment vis-à-vis the access to ECE.

Table 26: The proportion of parents who “disagree” with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	School / kindergarten enables the registration of all children	All children, regardless of gender, background, or need, have the opportunity to attend school	Children with disabilities are supported by an assistant teacher	Children are provided by the state with transportation (when needed) to kindergarten or school	Children are provided with didactic means by the state (pencils, notebooks, pens, teaching aids, workbooks, etc.)	Children / students with disabilities have the opportunity to move and function normally in the kindergarten / school environment (classrooms, corridors, toilets, playgrounds, etc.)	Kindergarten / school staff, in cooperation with the local government, make continuous improvements in the kindergarten / school infrastructure
Berat	4%	3%	1%	6%	17%	13%	7%
Dibër	2%	11%	6%	16%	39%	11%	6%
Durrës		2%	4%	21%	25%	8%	2%
Elbasan	2%	1%	2%	14%	28%	8%	4%
Fier	1%	2%	6%	17%	27%	10%	3%
Gjirokastrë	3%		3%	8%	33%	5%	3%
Korçë	3%	2%	10%	30%	39%	16%	6%
Kukës			2%	9%	48%	9%	5%
Lezhë				10%	17%	6%	2%
Shkodër				12%	22%	8%	8%
Tiranë	4%	3%	4%	26%	29%	10%	6%
Vlorë			1%	22%	22%	13%	11%
Total	2%	2%	4%	19%	28%	10%	5%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Tables 27 and 28 bring information regarding those who fully support each of ECE access assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence.

Table 27: Number of respondents who “fully agree”, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of ECE access evaluation.

Regions	School / kindergarten enables the registration of all children			. All children, regardless of gender, background, or need, have the opportunity to attend school			Children with disabilities are supported by an assistant teacher			Children are provided by the state with transportation (when needed) to kindergarten or school			Children are provided with didactic means by the state (pencils, notebooks, pens, teaching aids, workbooks, etc.)			Children / students with disabilities have the opportunity to move and function normally in the kindergarten / school environment (classrooms, corridors, toilets, playgrounds, etc.)			Kindergarten / school staff, in cooperation with the local government, make continuous improvements in the kindergarten / school infrastructure		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	27	30	57	27	29	56	21	30	51	21	14	35	16	14	30	18	14	32	20	22	42
Dibër	44	51	95	38	49	87	39	40	79	24	24	48	19	13	32	22	34	56	21	29	50
Durrës	35	57	92	38	66	104	30	51	81	15	32	47	15	35	50	24	35	59	29	54	83
Elbasan	50	122	172	54	146	200	44	116	160	35	73	108	20	68	88	23	74	97	33	118	151
Fier	52	94	146	51	120	171	40	103	143	32	69	101	23	62	85	36	71	107	42	102	144
Gjirokastrë	15	21	36	15	19	34	13	17	30	13	12	25	5	10	15	12	12	24	10	15	25
Korçë	32	37	69	34	50	84	26	26	52	18	20	38	8	21	29	21	15	36	26	32	58
Kukës	11	20	31	10	22	32	12	22	34	12	12	24	6	9	15	7	13	20	10	13	23
Lezhë	10	23	33	9	33	42	8	27	35	7	23	30	5	17	22	7	21	28	11	23	34
Shkodër	24	56	80	23	57	80	18	53	71	14	33	47	11	29	40	13	32	45	13	38	51
Tiranë	31	240	271	37	311	348	28	269	297	19	177	196	18	156	174	23	188	211	28	228	256
Vlorë	20	43	63	16	46	62	17	40	57	15	23	38	9	22	31	10	24	34	14	25	39
Total	351	794	1145	352	948	1300	296	794	1090	225	512	737	155	456	611	216	533	749	257	699	956
In %	31%	69%	69%	27%	73%	78%	27%	73%	66%	31%	69%	44%	25%	75%	37%	29%	71%	45%	27%	73%	58%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table 27 we observe that:

Less than 80% of respondents support the idea that “all children, regardless of gender, background, or need, have the opportunity to attend school” (78%), whereas it is school which facilitated children’s enrollment (69%), supporting also children with disabilities (66%).

Less than 60% of parents and caregivers agree that infrastructure has improved in continuation (58%).

Less than half of interviewed parents and caregivers confirm that:

- ✓ Children with disabilities have the opportunity to move and function normally in the kindergarten / school environment (classrooms, corridors, toilets, playgrounds, etc.) (45%)
- ✓ Children are provided by the state with transportation (when needed) to kindergarten or school (44%)
- ✓ Children are provided with didactic means by the state (pencils, notebooks, pens, teaching aids, workbooks, etc.) (37%).

Like in the section 4.1.2, it is strongly emphasized the lack of transportation and didactic materials as the two critical obstacle that deny children’s enrollment to ECE.

There are significant differences among parents' views in urban and rural areas in all the criteria of assessment. As we easily observe from the evidence of Table 27, not more than 1/3 of responders who agree with the statements of assessment criteria, are from rural areas with respect to 2/3 of responders who come from urban areas.

Table 28: Proportion of parents who fully agree, according to regions and criteria of assessment

Regions		Total respondents	School / kindergarten enables the registration of all children		All children, regardless of gender, background, or need, have the opportunity to attend school		Children with disabilities are supported by an assistant teacher		Children are provided by the state with transportation (when needed) to kindergarten or school		Children are provided with didactic means by the state (pencils, notebooks, pens, teaching aids, workbooks, etc.)		Children / students with disabilities have the opportunity to move and function normally in the kindergarten / school environment (classrooms, corridors, toilets, playgrounds, etc.)		Kindergarten / school staff, in cooperation with the local government, make continuous improvements in the kindergarten / school infrastructure	
			Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Korçë	Berat															
	Elbasan	411	289	70%	340	83%	263	64%	181	44%	147	36%	155	38%	251	
	Korçë															
Fier	Fier															
	Gjirokastrë	322	245	76%	267	83%	229	71%	164	51%	131	41%	165	51%	208	65%
	Vlorë															
Lezhë	Kukës															
	Lezhë	202	144	71%	154	76%	140	69%	101	50%	77	38%	93	46%	108	53%
	Shkodër															
Durrës	Tiranë															
	Durrës	726	458	63%	525	72%	455	63%	291	40%	256	35%	326	45%	389	54%
	Dibër															
Total		1661	1136	68%	1286	77%	1087	65%	737	44%	611	37%	739	44%	956	58%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021.

Table 28 reveals the parents' views in different regions of the country, addressing the most critical regions vis-à-vis children's access to ECE. While according to some criteria (criteria 15,16 and 17) the situation seems manageable, parents' views regarding transportation, didactic materials, infrastructure for children with disabilities and investments into infrastructure, demonstrate that these factors critically deny the children's right to education, especially in Durrës and Korça.

4.3.3. Participation

Participation to ECE is assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions from 22 to 27 of Parents (Annex I, Questionnaire 3), which constitute the participation assessment criteria.

Table 29: Responses of parents according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions.

Criteria assessment	Percentage				
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
Children's diversity (being different) is considered a value in kindergarten / school	8	17	24	52	100
All children actively participate in kindergarten / school activities	2	8	14	76	100
Kindergarten / school has enough facilities for all children to be active	7	5	25	64	100
Kindergarten / school has sufficient didactic tools in order for all children to be involved in learning activities	7	9	31	53	100
Teachers use various methods and strategies in function of the process of learning and active participation of children in kindergarten / school.	1	7	15	77	100
Assistant teachers support the learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities	4	18	16	62	100
All Criteria	5	11	21	64	100

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 29, almost 85% of parents fully agree and agree that participation to ECE is ensured. Only 5% disagree, especially due to the “lack of didactic materials” (7%) and “sufficient space to promote children’s social engagement” (7%), which reiterate again the attention of audience to these critical issues that limit children’s access as well as their participation.

Another discussable issue is the concept of “diversity” and parents’ attitudes versus it. While 17% of parents are not sure about it, 76% see diversity as a value, against 8% who disagree.

Table 30 provides information regarding parents’ disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. As we observe, parents in 12 regions confirm that didactic materials are missing, although in moderated proportions. There are parents in 11 out of 12 regions who do not believe that space is sufficient to promote children’s social interaction and participation. However, large proportions of parents are identified only in Korça, Vlora and Gjirokastra, where about 1/10 of parents do not consider the infrastructure pertinent to allow children’s active participation.

Table 30: The proportion of parents who disagree with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	Children's diversity (being different) is considered a value in kindergarten / school	All children actively participate in kindergarten / school activities	Kindergarten / school has enough facilities for all children to be active	Kindergarten / school has sufficient didactic tools in order for all children to be involved in learning activities	Teachers use various methods and strategies in function of the process of learning and active participation of children in kindergarten / school.	Assistant teachers support the learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities
Berat	4%	1%	4%	6%	3%	1%
Dibër	9%	5%	6%	5%	2%	7%
Durrës	9%	1%	5%	7%		6%
Elbasan	9%	3%	6%	6%	1%	3%
Fier	9%	1%	3%	6%	0%	3%
Gjirokastrë	3%		10%	5%	0%	3%
Korçë	10%	3%	13%	7%	4%	11%
Kukës			5%	5%		
Lezhë	4%		0%	2%		
Shkodër	3%	1%	6%	9%	2%	3%
Tiranë	9%	1%	8%	8%	2%	4%
Vlorë	5%		12%	9%		3%
Total	8%	2%	7%	7%	1%	4%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Tables 31 and 32 bring information regarding those who fully support each of ECE participation assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence.

Table 31: Number of respondents who fully agree, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of ECE participation evaluation

Regions	Children's diversity (being different) is considered a value in kindergarten / school			All children actively participate in kindergarten / school activities			Kindergarten / school has enough facilities for all children to be active			Kindergarten / school has sufficient didactic tools in order for all children to be involved in learning activities			Teachers use various methods and strategies in function of the process of learning and active participation of children in kindergarten / school.			Assistant teachers support the learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	21	24	45	27	34	61	20	29	49	17	24	41	26	35	61	21	27	48
Dibër	21	36	57	36	44	80	34	45	79	29	36	65	37	47	84	30	38	68
Durrës	24	38	62	34	65	99	30	56	86	23	47	70	35	61	96	31	54	85
Elbasan	27	91	118	41	148	189	42	119	161	38	106	144	45	148	193	39	120	159
Fier	43	82	125	48	121	169	47	97	144	35	83	118	47	130	177	37	100	137
Gjirokastrë	14	12	26	15	18	33	10	17	27	6	13	19	15	20	35	11	15	26
Korçë	20	29	49	34	44	78	21	34	55	23	30	53	30	43	73	25	28	53
Kukës	10	14	24	13	22	35	9	18	27	8	14	22	12	19	31	11	18	29
Lezhë	10	28	38	12	33	45	11	26	37	11	23	34	13	30	43	12	23	35
Shkodër	13	39	52	21	57	78	24	50	74	16	37	53	15	53	68	15	45	60
Tiranë	23	202	225	33	305	338	27	240	267	25	203	228	30	316	346	27	240	267
Vlorë	12	28	40	18	47	65	14	36	50	11	29	40	19	45	64	16	36	52
Total	238	623	861	332	938	1270	289	767	1056	242	645	887	324	947	1271	275	744	1019
In %	28%	72%	52%	26%	74%	76%	27%	73%	64%	27%	73%	53%	25%	75%	77%	27%	73%	61%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table 31 we observe that:

About 2/3 of respondents support the idea that all children actively participate in kindergarten / school activities (76%) and that the teachers use various methods and strategies to promote learning and active participation of children in kindergarten /school (77%). Less proportion of parents somehow agree that schools and kindergartens have sufficient space to encourage children to actively participate (64%) and that assistant teachers support children's learning (61%).

Around half of parents agree that diversity is a value in our ECE system (52%) and that the schools possess sufficient didactic materials to promote children's learning (53%).

Evidence provided in this section addresses “lack of didactic and learning materials” as a key factor that hamper children's participation and learning, although the attitudes versus “diversity” also have impact on children's participation.

There are significant differences among parents' views in urban and rural areas in all the criteria of assessment, like in the previous section. Less than 30% of responders who agree with the statements of assessment criteria, are from rural areas with respect to 70% of responders who come from urban areas.

Table 32: Proportion of respondents who fully agree, according to regions and criteria of ECE participation evaluation.

Regions		Total respondents	Children's diversity (being different) is considered a value in kindergarten / school		All children actively participate in kindergarten / school activities		Kindergarten / school has enough facilities for all children to be active		Kindergarten / school has sufficient didactic tools in order for all children to be involved in learning activities		Teachers use various methods and strategies in function of the process of learning and active participation of children in kindergarten / school.		Assistant teachers support the learning and participation of all children in kindergarten / school activities	
			Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Korçë	Berat													
	Elbasan	411	212	52%	328	80%	265	64%	238	58%	327	80%	261	64%
	Korçë													
Fier	Fier													
	Gjirokastrë	322	191	59%	267	83%	221	69%	177	55%	276	86%	215	67%
	Vlorë													
Lezhë	Kukës													
	Lezhë	202	114	56%	158	78%	138	68%	109	54%	142	70%	125	62%
	Shkodër													
Durrës	Tiranë													
	Durrës	726	344	47%	517	71%	432	60%	363	50%	526	72%	425	59%
	Dibër													
Total		1661	861	52%	1270	76%	1056	64%	887	53%	1271	77%	1026	62%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021.

Table 32 summarizes the parents' views in different regions of the country, addressing the most critical regions vis-à-vis children's participation to ECE. More than half of parents agree that participation is ensured in any region of the country. The only exception is Durrësi in which less than 50% of parents agree that children's diversity is a value, which help children's participation.



4.3.4. Transition from early childhood to elementary school

Transition from ECE to Elementary school is assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions from 28 to 38 of ECE teachers (Annex I, Questionnaire 3), which constitute the ECE transition assessment criteria from parents' views. Table 33 presents a summary of data on the responses of all interviewed parents according to each of alternatives, already explained in the previous sections.

Table 33: Responses of parents according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions

Criteria of Assessment	Percentage				
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
Parents are informed about the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to school	2%	5%	9%	83%	100%
Children with special needs are provided with special support	4%	28%	13%	55%	100%
There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.	5%	26%	15%	54%	100%
The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.	3%	21%	17%	59%	100%
Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition	9%	14%	17%	61%	100%
Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.	11%	16%	14%	59%	100%
First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.	13%	28%	13%	47%	100%
Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.	9%	21%	15%	54%	100%
Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their readiness to move from kindergarten to first grade.	2%	4%	13%	81%	100%
Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.	2%	8%	21%	69%	100%
Kindergarten lessons and school lessons are in coherence	2%	11%	21%	65%	100%
All Criteria	6%	17%	15%	63%	100%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 33, less than 80% of parents (78%) fully agree and agree that transition from early childhood to elementary school is supported and facilitated. 6% disagree, especially due to the difficulties of first grade teachers to visit the kindergarten to get to know the children (13%); impossibilities of parents to visit the schools where their children will be enrolled in the first grade (11%) and the lack of information on the schools where children will be enrolled in the first grade (9%). Table 34 provides information regarding parents' disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. Table confirms that transition from ECE to Elementary school is somehow critical in the regions of Vlora, Tirana, Korça, Lezhai and Elbasani, whereas in the rest of the regions (7 regions), there are very slight disagreements regarding the smooth transition from ECE to Elementary School. In the 5 mentioned regions, 10 to 20% of respondents confirm the lack of contacts, communication and information from kindergarten to school and vice versa, as the most critical impediments to support a smooth transition from ECE to ES.

Table 34: The proportion of parents who disagree with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	Parents are informed about the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to school	Children with special needs are provided with special support	There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.	The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.	Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition	Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.	First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.	Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.	Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their readiness to move from kindergarten to first grade.	Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.	Kindergarten lessons and school lessons are in coherence
Berat	3%	4%	1%	3%	6%	4%	7%	6%	1%	1%	6%
Dibër	2%	6%	4%	6%	4%	9%	1%	5%	2%	6%	1%
Durrës	1%	5%	1%	2%	2%	4%	6%	2%	1%		
Elbasan	1%	4%	3%	4%	10%	11%	14%	8%	3%	2%	2%
Fier		3%	5%	1%	5%	6%	8%	6%			
Gjirokastrë	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	5%	8%	5%		3%	
Korçë	6%	16%	5%	5%	8%	14%	17%	11%	2%	4%	4%
Kukës			2%	2%	11%	5%	11%	5%	0%		
Lezhë	2%	2%	8%	2%	6%	13%	12%	10%	0%	2%	2%
Shkodër	2%	2%	5%	2%	4%	7%	8%	8%	2%		
Tiranë	4%	4%	7%	3%	15%	19%	19%	14%	3%	3%	4%
Vlorë	1%	3%	1%	1%	4%	11%	13%	8%			
Total	2%	4%	5%	3%	9%	11%	13%	9%	2%	2%	2%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Tables 35 and 36 bring information regarding those who fully support each of “Transition” assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence.

Table 35: Number of respondents who fully agree, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of “Transition from ECE to Elementary school” evaluation

Regions	Parents are informed about the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to school			Children with special needs are provided with special support			There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.			The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.			Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	26	35	61	22	25	47	19	22	41	21	23	44	25	25	50
Dibër	42	52	94	32	38	70	30	29	59	27	33	60	34	38	72
Durrës	42	65	107	26	46	72	31	46	77	29	55	84	38	59	97
Elbasan	50	156	206	37	87	124	40	107	147	39	114	153	45	96	141
Fier	52	126	178	46	90	136	44	79	123	43	90	133	49	83	132
Gjirokastrë	14	20	34	13	14	27	8	12	20	12	14	26	13	16	29
Korçë	32	44	76	18	19	37	27	25	52	28	29	57	27	33	60
Kukës	14	21	35	11	15	26	9	16	25	7	15	22	14	17	31
Lezhë	13	35	48	9	26	35	12	23	35	12	25	37	11	18	29
Shkodër	24	62	86	14	46	60	13	36	49	13	43	56	20	45	65
Tiranë	39	336	375	23	190	213	24	191	215	23	221	244	29	204	233
Vlorë	22	50	72	13	29	42	13	29	42	14	33	47	17	37	54
Total	370	1002	1372	264	625	889	270	615	885	268	695	963	322	671	993
In %	27%	73%	83%	30%	70%	54%	31%	69%	53%	28%	72%	58%	32%	68%	60%

Regions	Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.			First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.			Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.			Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their readiness to move from kindergarten to first grade.			Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.			Kindergarten lessons and school lessons are in coherence		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	26	27	53	27	25	52	26	23	49	26	35	61	26	33	59	23	31	54
Dibër	35	35	70	31	31	62	32	40	72	43	48	91	42	38	80	34	36	70
Durrës	37	51	88	32	46	78	39	55	94	39	64	103	35	58	93	34	53	87
Elbasan	38	96	134	36	69	105	35	87	122	48	148	196	37	114	151	36	113	149
Fier	47	89	136	43	74	117	45	83	128	52	125	177	48	92	140	42	105	147
Gjirokastrë	15	17	32	15	12	27	16	15	31	16	18	34	14	16	30	14	16	30
Korçë	23	30	53	22	21	43	20	28	48	31	45	76	27	25	52	26	36	62
Kukës	11	16	27	13	13	26	12	12	24	13	27	40	14	19	33	12	22	34
Lezhë	8	18	26	9	11	20	8	14	22	13	32	45	11	27	38	12	21	33
Shkodër	20	39	59	16	29	45	20	37	57	19	59	78	24	58	82	17	45	62
Tiranë	31	219	250	21	133	154	26	174	200	34	316	350	28	267	295	34	244	278
Vlorë	15	33	48	12	29	41	11	38	49	18	47	65	20	44	64	17	38	55
Total	306	670	976	277	493	770	290	606	896	352	964	1316	326	791	1117	301	760	1061
In %	31%	69%	59%	36%	64%	46%	32%	68%	54%	27%	73%	79%	29%	71%	67%	28%	72%	64%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table 35 we observe that:

About 80% of respondents fully agree that parents are informed about the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to school (83%) and that the children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten (79%), whilst less than 70% agree that children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade (67%) and that the lessons in kindergarten and school are in coherence. (64%).

Whereas 50 to 60% of respondents agree that:

- ✓ Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition. (60%);
- ✓ Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade. (59%);
- ✓ The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points. (58%);
- ✓ Children with special needs are provided with special support (54%);
- ✓ Schools consider information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten. (54%);
- ✓ There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children. (53%).

Less than 50% is the proportion of parents who confirm that first grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children (46%).

However, the wide gap between parents' opinions in rural and urban areas remain a significant concern. The proportion of rural parents who agree on the statements is as low as 1/3 of urban parents.

Table 36: Proportion of respondents who fully agree, according to regions and criteria of "Transition from ECE to elementary school" assessment.

Regions		Total respondents	Parents are informed about the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to school		Children with special needs are provided with special support		There is ready documentation or formats (certificate / portfolio), which serve to exchange information between kindergartens and schools about the achievements and development of children.		The documentation (certificate / portfolio) is written in a clear and concise language and focuses more on the child's achievements than on the weak points.		Kindergartens inform parents about the school where the children will be enrolled in the first grade (location, school history, curriculum, etc.) through information sessions, guides, leaflets / brochures, etc., for a natural transition		Kindergartens and schools enable visits of children (and parents) to the schools where they will be enrolled in the first grade.	
			Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Korçë	Berat	411												
	Elbasan		346	84%	212	52%	242	59%	256	62%	255	62%	240	58%
	Korçë													
Fier	Fier	322												
	Gjirokastrë		284	88%	211	66%	191	59%	212	66%	221	69%	216	67%
	Vlorë													
Lezhë	Kukës	202												
	Lezhë		170	84%	124	61%	112	55%	118	58%	128	63%	112	55%
	Shkodër													
Durrës	Tiranë	726												
	Durrës		578	80%	364	50%	357	49%	396	55%	409	56%	410	56%
	Dibër													
Total		1661	1378	83%	911	55%	902	54%	982	59%	1013	61%	978	59%

Regions		Total respondents	First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children.		Schools take into account information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten.		Children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, as well as independence and curiosity to learn, which show their readiness to move from kindergarten to first grade.		Children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade.		Kindergarten lessons and school lessons are in coherence	
			Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Korçë	Berat	411										
	Elbasan		202	49%	221	54%	337	82%	267	65%	269	65%
	Korçë											
Fier	Fier	322										
	Gjirokastrë		187	58%	208	65%	278	86%	232	72%	238	74%
	Vlorë											
Lezhë	Kukës	202										
	Lezhë		93	46%	104	51%	164	81%	154	76%	132	65%
	Shkodër											
Durrës	Tiranë	726										
	Durrës		303	42%	371	51%	567	78%	487	67%	439	60%
	Dibër											
Total		1661	785	47%	904	54%	1346	81%	1140	69%	1078	65%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021.

Table 36 summarizes parents' views in different regions of the country, addressing the most critical regions vis-à-vis children's transition to Elementary School. It is likely to believe that transition from ECE to elementary school is not a smooth process for children in:

- ✓ Durrës (8 criteria out of 11 got less than 55% of support);
- ✓ Korça (5 out of 11 criteria got less than 60% of support);
- ✓ Lezha (5 out of 11 criteria got 60% of support).

In Durrës the proportion of parents who confirm that first grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children is extremely low, only 42%.

4.3.5. Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders

“Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders” are assessed through the elaboration of data from responses of questions 39 to 41 from parents' questionnaires (Annex 1, Questionnaire 3), which constitute assessment criteria. Table 37 presents a summary of data on the responses of all interviewed parents according to each of alternatives, already explained in the previous sections.

Table 37: Responses of parents according to alternatives, numbers, and proportions

Criteria of Assessment	Percentage				
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Total
The local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed.	6%	17%	18%	59%	100%
The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attends kindergarten / school.	6%	20%	17%	57%	100%
The local government responds to the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs.	10%	22%	24%	44%	100%
The local government provides food in kindergartens for the needy children.	18%	30%	12%	39%	100%
MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens.	3%	17%	15%	65%	100%
All Criteria	9%	21%	17%	53%	100%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

As we observe from the data of table 37, 70% of parents fully agree and agree that key stakeholders exercise their roles and responsibilities. 9% disagree, especially due to the impossibility of local government to provide food for children in need in kindergartens (18%).

Table 38 provides information regarding parents' disagreement views in every region with respect to each assessment criteria. Table confirms that in general key stakeholders (Local government and MASR) are capable to exercise their duties and competences. The provision of food for the children in need appear critical in all the regions and very critical in Vlorë (34%), Dibër and Kukës (32%), as well as in Korçë (28%).

There are parents in all the regions, although in moderate proportions, who disagree that Local Government is willing to cooperate with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attends kindergarten / school and that the local government responds to the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs,

Table 38: The proportion of parents who disagree with assessment criteria statements with respect to regions

Regions	The local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed.	The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attends kindergarten / school.	The local government responds to the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs.	The local government provides food in kindergartens for the needy children.	MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens.
Berat	7%	6%	7%	21%	4%
Dibër	6%	4%	6%	32%	1%
Durrës	2%	2%	7%	17%	2%
Elbasan	5%	5%	8%	16%	2%
Fier	4%	4%	10%	11%	
Gjirokastrë	3%	3%	5%	15%	
Korçë	8%	10%	19%	28%	7%
Kukës		2%	7%	32%	2%
Lezhë	10%	8%	10%	17%	
Shkodër	4%	7%	10%	24%	3%
Tiranë	7%	7%	11%	13%	4%
Vlorë	11%	8%	17%	34%	5%
Total	6%	6%	10%	18%	3%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Tables 39 and 40 bring information regarding those who fully support each of assessment criteria, disaggregated by regions and place of residence.

Table 39: Number of respondents who fully agree, according to regions, place of residence and criteria of “Key roles and responsibilities” assessment.

Regions	The local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed.			The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attends kindergarten / school.			The local government responds to the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs.			The local government provides food in kindergartens for the needy children.			MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens.		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Berat	20	21	41	22	21	43	13	14	27	8	12	20	24	23	47
Dibër	29	42	71	31	29	60	25	21	46	18	14	32	34	40	74
Durrës	26	47	73	30	52	82	21	48	69	12	39	51	32	55	87
Elbasan	38	126	164	38	111	149	30	88	118	18	85	103	39	132	171
Fier	42	95	137	42	87	129	35	74	109	12	71	83	46	105	151
Gjirokastrë	12	16	28	13	19	32	12	12	24	6	15	21	15	21	36
Korçë	24	29	53	24	28	52	14	21	35	5	23	28	18	34	52
Kukës	12	19	31	9	18	27	8	9	17	2	10	12	11	21	32
Lezhë	10	21	31	8	20	28	7	16	23	7	16	23	11	25	36
Shkodër	20	41	61	15	43	58	11	31	42	5	25	30	18	52	70
Tiranë	31	222	253	23	203	226	20	161	181	16	198	214	26	240	266
Vlorë	12	34	46	14	34	48	4	20	24	2	25	27	11	43	54
Total	276	713	989	269	665	934	200	515	715	111	533	644	285	791	1076
In %	39%	72%	60%	40%	71%	56%	39%	72%	43%	21%	83%	39%	36%	74%	65%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

From the table 39 we observe that:

Less than 70% of respondents fully agree that MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens (65%), while that the local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed (60%).

Around 50% of parents agree that the local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attend kindergarten / school (56%), while less than 50% support the opinion that the local government responds to the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs (43%).

Of concern is the evidence that only 39% of parents agree that the local government provides food in kindergartens for the children in need.

There is a wide gap between parents' opinions in rural and urban areas regarding the way in which institutions exercise their responsibilities. Like in the previous sections (section 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.4), the proportion of rural parents who agree on the statements is as low as 1/3 of urban parents.

Table 40: Proportion of respondents who fully agree, according to districts and criteria of assessment

Regions		Total respondents	The local government provides kindergartens with teaching staff (teachers / assistant teachers, principals) and support staff, as needed.		The local government cooperates with the kindergarten and the community so that every child attends kindergarten / school.		The local government responds to the kindergarten for any of its infrastructure needs.		The local government provides food in kindergartens for the needy children.		MoES and its responsible institutions provide the necessary instructions for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergartens.	
			Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Korçë	Berat											
	Elbasan	411	257	63%	248	60%	183	45%	153	37%	270	66%
	Korçë											
Fier	Fier											
	Gjirokastrë	322	209	65%	211	66%	158	49%	131	41%	242	75%
	Vlorë											
Lezhë	Kukës											
	Lezhë	202	123	61%	116	57%	83	41%	66	33%	140	69%
	Shkodër											
Durrës	Tiranë											
	Durrës	726	397	55%	374	52%	301	41%	305	42%	427	59%
	Dibër											
Total		1661	986	59%	949	57%	725	44%	655	39%	1079	65%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Table 40 reconfirms the most critical issues as they were picked from the data of table 36, but further elaborated as per the districts. As we observe from the table, the situation seems almost the same in all the regions, since the proportion of those who agree is between 50 and 65% for all the criteria, except for the “provision of food by the local government for the children in need”, which appear more critical in Lezha, where only 1/3 of parents agree and in Korça, where 37% of parents confirm the provision of food.

4.3.6. ECE for children in low-income families

Low-income families are considered families who rely on social assistance benefit. The analysis of data showed that almost 10% of interviewed parents belonged to NE beneficiaries, out of which 57% were families of rural areas, while 43% were families of urban areas. Unemployment is perceived as the key poverty factor. 84% of NE beneficiaries do not work. Children of NE beneficiaries attend public schools, respectively 47% are enrolled in kindergartens, 35% attend preparatory classes, whereas 18% are registered in primary grade.

To obtain a comparative picture regarding the impact of income on ECE, the summary of data on Access, Participation, Transition to Elementary School and Roles & Responsibilities are further disaggregated by “NE Families” and “All families”.

Table 41 shows the summary of opinions of parents from NE families as well as of all parents according to all criteria of evaluation. The careful observation of data clearly demonstrates that there are very slight differences among parents’ views, regardless their income, which guides us to the conclusion that there is not any significant influence of income into the children’s enrollment and progress into ECE. This may be a result of social policies implemented by municipalities to support all children’s attendance to ECE.

Table 41: Parents’ views from NE and Non-NE families regarding all criteria

Total respondents	Parents (NE beneficiaries)				All parents (NE beneficiaries & Non - NE beneficiaries)			
	All criteria				All criteria			
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree
Access	11%	14%	13%	62%	10%	17%	16%	56%
Participation	6%	12%	17%	66%	5%	11%	21%	64%
Transition	3%	13%	13%	71%	6%	17%	15%	63%
Roles & Responsibilities	11%	21%	15%	53%	9%	21%	17%	53%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

5. The most concerned issues that impact on target groups’ situation

Based on the detailed findings of Chapter 4, this chapter summarizes concluding remarks, addressing the most critical issues that hamper target groups’ opportunities to utilize basic services. As such, the remarks are organized around the following key issues, while the opinions of teachers and parents are considered, alike.

5.1. Access to early childhood education

Parents and teachers share almost the same opinions regarding access to ECE. Table 42 demonstrates that almost the same proportions of parents and teachers fully agree and partially agree that access is ensured to children. Only 1 in 10 people interviewed disagree. However, analysis according to regions shows that parents and teachers, especially in Korçë, Kukës, Durrës and Lezhë are not of the same opinion.

Nevertheless, regarding “Access to ECE”:

More than 80% of teachers fully agree and agree that access to ECE is ensured (88%), whereas it is school which facilitated children’s enrollment (82%). More than 75% of teachers confirm that infrastructure has improved in continuation (77%). Access to ECE is hindered by the lack of didactic and learning materials

(32%) as well as the lack of transportation (20%). Despite the impediments caused by “transportation” in urban areas, the study confirms that access to ECE is easier in urban rather than in rural areas.

Less than 75% of parents fully agree and agree that access to ECE is ensured. 10% disagree, especially due to the “lack of didactic and learning materials provided by the school to children” (28%), “lack of transportation” (19%) as well as “difficulties to assist children with disabilities to access school” (10%).

Table 42: Summary of opinions regarding “Access” to ECE

Regions	Parents				Teachers (kindergarten/preparatory classes)			
	All criteria				All criteria			
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree
Berat	6%	13%	20%	60%	21%	0%	21%	57%
Dibër	13%	15%	15%	57%	29%	3%	11%	57%
Durrës	9%	14%	16%	61%	4%	4%	14%	79%
Elbasan	9%	17%	17%	57%	10%	8%	12%	70%
Fier	9%	14%	14%	62%	15%	11%	12%	62%
Gjirokastrë	8%	9%	16%	68%	19%	0%	0%	81%
Korçë	15%	16%	14%	54%	0%	10%	19%	71%
Kukës	10%	17%	15%	58%	0%	0%	14%	86%
Lezhë	5%	12%	22%	62%	32%	4%	29%	36%
Shkodër	7%	19%	18%	56%	0%	43%	14%	43%
Tiranë	12%	21%	17%	50%	10%	6%	21%	63%
Vlorë	10%	13%	16%	61%	10%	14%	19%	57%
Total	10%	17%	16%	56%	11%	8%	17%	64%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

5.2. Participation to early childhood education

While less than 70% of teachers (64%) fully agree that participation to ECE is ensured, only 56% of parents share the same opinion. The proportion of those who disagree is almost the same among teachers and parents. However, like in the previous section, the overall results can't hide the discrepancies among regions and groups of interviewed people. There is no any compliance among interviewers' views, especially in Elbasan, Gjirokastrë, Korçë, Kukës and Lezhë (Table 43).

Table 43: Summary of opinions regarding “Participation” to ECE

Regions	Parents				Teachers (kindergarten/preparatory classes)			
	All criteria				All criteria			
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree
Berat	3%	5%	19%	73%	0%	8%	17%	75%
Dibër	6%	10%	19%	66%	13%	3%	10%	73%
Durrës	8%	19%	27%	117%	4%	0%	8%	88%
Elbasan	5%	10%	20%	66%	1%	7%	17%	75%
Fier	4%	7%	19%	70%	0%	0%	7%	93%
Gjirokastrë	3%	7%	20%	69%	0%	0%	22%	78%
Korçë	8%	10%	19%	63%	3%	3%	28%	67%
Kukës	2%	14%	21%	64%	0%	0%	8%	92%
Lezhë	1%	4%	20%	74%	4%	0%	8%	88%
Shkodër	4%	14%	21%	61%	0%	0%	17%	83%
Tiranë	5%	14%	25%	56%	2%	2%	19%	77%
Vlorë	4%	6%	16%	57%	4%	4%	10%	82%
Total	5%	11%	21%	64%	2%	3%	16%	79%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Hitherto, regarding “Participation to ECE”:

Almost 95% of teachers fully agree and agree that participation to ECE is ensured, due to the professionalism of teachers who use various interactive methods and strategies to promote children's learning and active participation (94%), consideration about diversity as a value (86%) and the sufficient spaces for children's social activities that school/kindergarten possess (73%). At the same time, almost 85% of parents fully agree and agree that participation to ECE is ensured, still, thanks to the capacity of teachers to use various methods and strategies to promote learning and active participation of children in kindergarten /school (77%).

The lack of support by assistant teachers to promote children's learning and participation is addressed as the most critical impediment that limits children's participation to ECE (8%, while parents share the opinion that the lack of didactic materials” (7%) and “sufficient space to promote children's social engagement” (7%), are the most critical impediment that limit children's participation. In addition, parents are bothered by the concept of “diversity”. They either are not sure about it (17%) or disagree (8%), although the rest see diversity as a value.

Teachers, especially in Vlora, Dibra and Korça, confirm that the support from assistant teachers to promote children's learning, is missing. There is a significant gap among teachers' views in urban and rural areas about “Sufficiency of school/kindergarten spaces for children's social activities”. Compared to urban areas (62%), schools and kindergartens in rural areas possess about half of space (38%), which directly impacts on children's participation to learning and social activities.

There are significant differences among parents' views in urban and rural areas in all the criteria of assessment, even for parents. Less than 30% of responders who agree with the statements of assessment criteria, are from rural areas with respect to 70% of responders who come from urban areas. Parents in Korça, Vlora and Gjirokastra, do not consider the infrastructure pertinent to allow children's active participation.

5.3. Transition to ES

The three categories of interviewed people share almost the same opinions about the criteria of assessment vis-à-vis transition to ES, with very slight discrepancies among regions (Table 44).

Table 44: Summary of opinions regarding transition to ES

Regions	Parents				Teachers (kindergarten/preparatory classes)				Teachers of Elementary school (first & second grade)			
	All criteria				All criteria				All criteria			
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree
Berat	4%	11%	11%	74%	0%	0%	14%	86%	0%	4%	36%	60%
Dibër	4%	14%	14%	68%	0%	9%	10%	81%	4%	1%	34%	60%
Durrës	2%	11%	13%	74%	2%	0%	25%	73%	1%	8%	12%	79%
Elbasan	6%	18%	16%	61%	1%	9%	17%	73%	2%	2%	46%	51%
Fier	3%	15%	12%	69%	0%	1%	13%	87%	3%	3%	28%	67%
Gjirokastrë	3%	6%	17%	74%	0%	2%	7%	90%	3%	3%	17%	77%
Korçë	8%	19%	14%	59%	2%	6%	20%	71%	0%	0%	17%	83%
Kukës	3%	15%	13%	68%	0%	0%	4%	96%	0%	0%	13%	87%
Lezhë	5%	15%	16%	64%	0%	0%	11%	89%	0%	4%	9%	87%
Shkodër	3%	18%	17%	61%	0%	7%	0%	93%	0%	10%	25%	65%
Tiranë	9%	21%	18%	53%	2%	3%	16%	79%	3%	4%	22%	72%
Vlorë	4%	12%	13%	71%	6%	10%	21%	62%	1%	4%	27%	68%
Total	6%	17%	15%	63%	2%	5%	16%	77%	2%	4%	24%	70%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

Regarding “Transition to Elementary School”, more than 90% of teachers (93%) fully agree and agree that transition from early childhood to elementary school is supported and facilitated. Only 2% disagree, especially due to the difficulties of first grade teachers to visit the kindergarten to get to know the children. (6%).

Transition from ECE to Elementary school is extremely critical in Vlora, due to the “lack of information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten” (25%) and “lack of kindergarten and school ‘teachers training to prepare children for first grade’” (25%). The transition from kindergarten to elementary school for children with special needs is denied due to the lack of special support, especially in Korça, (33%); Lezhë, (25%); Dibër, (20%) and Shkodër (0%;).

Almost 95% of teachers of ES fully agree and agree that transition from ECE to ES is supported due to the provision of social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten, 81%); the establishment of clear instructions, orders or regulations of the Ministry to facilitate the transfer of children from preschool (kindergarten) to primary school (78%); Inclusive play-based teaching methods application (77%); the quick adaptation of children to the school environment (73%), and the use of information about the child's achievements and development in kindergarten, from school (73%). Children with special needs are provided with special support during the transition from kindergarten to first grade, (100%), whereas 90% of responders agree that the school enables the enrollment in the first grade of all children in the area it covers.

Only 2% disagree, especially due to the “First grade teachers visit the kindergarten to get to know the children” as well as “Kindergarten’s and first grade’s teachers, meet to share achievements, skills and the need to support children enrolled for the first time” (7%).

Nevertheless, teachers are of opinion that in rural areas the transition from ECE to ES is extremely difficult, especially children in Korça region seem disadvantaged alongside their transition from ECE to ES due to the lack of established procedures and cooperation among kindergartens and schools regarding children’s attainments and development; lack of coordination and harmonization between school curricula in ECE and ES, which impact on children’s ability to adapt to the school environment when they start first grade.

Less than 80% of parents (78%) fully agree and agree that transition from early childhood to elementary school is supported and facilitated. About 80% of respondents fully agree that parents are informed about the procedures for transferring children from preschool (kindergarten) to school (83%) and that the children acquire social, emotional, mathematical and communication skills in kindergarten (79%), whilst less than 70% agree that children feel good and adapt quickly to the school environment when they start first grade (67%) and that the lessons in kindergarten and school are in coherence. (64%).

6% disagree, especially due to the difficulties of first grade teachers to visit the kindergarten to get to know the children (13%); impossibilities of parents to visit the schools where their children will be enrolled in the first grade (11%) and the lack of information on the schools where children will be enrolled in the first grade (9%). Transition from ECE to Elementary school is critical for children in the regions of Durrës, Korça and Lezha. The wide gap between parents’ opinions in rural and urban areas remain a significant concern. The proportion of rural parents who agree on the statements is as low as 1/3 of urban parents.

5.4. Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders

More than 70% of teachers and 50% of parents fully agree on the fact that institutions exercise their roles and responsibilities. While 1 in nine parents disagree, the proportion of teachers who disagree is much lower compared to the proportion of parents (table 45). In Korça, Kukësi, Lezha, Tirana and Shkodra , there are very significant discrepancies among teachers ‘and parents’ views.

Table 45 Summary of opinions regarding Roles and responsibilities

Regions	Parents				Teachers (kindergarten/preparatory classes)			
	All criteria				All criteria			
	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree	Disagree	Do not know	Partially agree	Fully agree
Berat	9%	18%	22%	51%	22%	0%	22%	56%
Dibër	10%	20%	18%	53%	20%	7%	29%	44%
Durrës	6%	15%	19%	60%	8%	17%	17%	58%
Elbasan	7%	19%	15%	58%	2%	8%	14%	75%
Fier	6%	19%	16%	59%	6%	14%	10%	69%
Gjirokastrë	5%	9%	16%	71%	4%	4%	0%	93%
Korçë	15%	22%	17%	46%	6%	6%	20%	69%
Kukës	9%	17%	20%	55%	0%	0%	6%	94%
Lezhë	9%	22%	15%	54%	8%	6%	11%	75%
Shkodër	9%	23%	17%	50%	11%	0%	0%	89%
Tiranë	8%	27%	18%	47%	2%	3%	20%	75%
Vlorë	15%	19%	14%	53%	1%	15%	18%	67%
Totals	9%	21%	17%	53%	4%	7%	17%	73%

Source: Field work, Survey, October 2021

With regard to “roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders”, the evidence argues that around 90% of teachers (88%) fully agree and agree that key stakeholders exercise their roles and responsibilities. 4% disagree, especially due to the impossibility of local government to provide food for children in need in kindergartens (17%), which is identified as the most critical issue, that demonstrates limited capacities of local government in some regions of the country.

45% of respondents confirm the overlap of responsibilities between MoES and local government in relation to preschool education. Clearly, the situation appears more critical in rural rather than in urban areas.

70% of parents fully agree and agree that key stakeholders exercise their roles and responsibilities. 9% disagree, especially due to the impossibility of local government to provide food for children in need in kindergartens (18%). Parents are of opinion that in general key stakeholders (Local government and MoES) are capable to exercise their duties and competences. Provision of food by the local government for the children in need”, appears more critical in Lezha, where only 1/3 of parents agree and in Korça, where 37% of parents confirm the provision of food.

There is a wide gap between parents’ opinions in rural and urban areas regarding the way in which institutions exercise their responsibilities.

5.5. Other issues

Regarding the correlation between NE and ECE, the careful observation of data clearly demonstrates that there are very slight differences among parents’ views, regardless their income, which guides us to the conclusion that there is not any significant influence of income into the children’s enrollment and progress into ECE. This may be a result of social policies implemented by municipalities to support the right of children to attend ECE.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The gaps that emerged from this analysis may be addressed by:

R.1: Building of strong education sector plans for ECCE at local level, including improved system-level planning related to resource allocation, implementation, and monitoring (Preparation of Local Strategies for ECCE).

This is especially important for municipalities which are poor in resources, where these systems may only partially be developed or not developed at all. Service provision is often more complex in the ECCE sector because of the varying types of service provision (public, private, nongovernmental), the various models and approaches used for curricula and pedagogy, and a lack of regulations and oversight. The private sector, both for-profit and not-for-profit, is often not included in government deliberations on regulation and information gathering. Relative to other areas of education, funding for ECCE is difficult to be planned as one consolidated figure for public spending at the national level and especially where financing is administered by different actors.

R.2: Peer learning and knowledge exchange on the effective design and implementation of ECCE curricula, including alignment with primary curricula and evaluation and assessment of curricula effectiveness and relevance.

Sharing of good practices and innovative approaches—to support the design and development of effective curriculum for the pre-primary subsector is of utmost importance to align with the curriculum for primary school. Determining a curriculum’s effectiveness and relevance is also challenging, especially if the existing one is not implemented as an evidence-based curriculum. Despite the ECCE evidence on child outcomes such as school readiness, little is known about the quality, curriculum, cost and implementation.

R.3: Shared knowledge on training and supporting the ECCE workforce and attracting and retaining qualified teachers and staff.

It is generally accepted that the professionalism of the ECCE workforce is a key factor in achieving quality services and plays a crucial role in ensuring process quality. Although studies are missing, it seems that Albania is in short supply of ECCE teachers. Apparently, they have low status with no defined career path, work for little money and may receive little mentoring on the job. ECCE practitioners with specialized training are more likely to provide children with the stimulating, responsive and supportive interactions that can lead to more positive learning and developmental outcomes.

R.4: Utilization of parents and communities as strategic partners to improve the quality of ECCE services and act as a network to support families and reduce inequity.

Our cultural norms support parents and caregivers being involved in child's education, although for working parents, it is difficult to find time to engage in the child's ECCE program and working mothers may want services for the whole day and even for children younger than 3 years. The intervention may encourage, despite difficulties, communities, and families to play a stronger role. There have been some good models some 15 years ago, named "gardens of mothers and children". These models worked well in the poor and rural areas of the country. Perhaps it is the right moment to revitalize again the network of "gardens of Mothers and Children", under the guideline and supervision of SC. This component may harmonize with local social policy, which if effectively utilized may produce results for children and families.

R.5: Provision of technical support and training to collect data and monitor ECCE services, especially related to service quality and ECCE standards.

The data collection and monitoring system is weak, especially to collect data on the quality of pre-primary services, including private providers. Monitoring practices and collection of data can provide feedback on what works and help identify areas of improvement and lead to higher quality. There is not yet consensus on which indicators of quality should be collected (although there is good understanding of what constitutes quality in early years' provision).

Despite the division of competences by law among national and local level, the centralization of budget and allocation mainly in the form of conditioned public expenditures, limit the capacities of local government to exercise its competences no matter of qualification, motivation, or sense of responsibility.

Last but not the least, decentralization of competences associated with decentralization of transfers and funds will provide a window of opportunities to reform from scratch ECE.

Regarding the core hypothesis of the strong cause-effect relation between ECE and primary school, the assessment does not provide direct and focused cause-effect evidence because this goes beyond the purpose. However, this interesting explanatory and descriptive study paves the way for further investigation, most probably through correlation research.

To follow up on the current findings, a causal study may be of help to explore the way in which access and participation are affected by the identified factors.

Then, a pilot study in a limited number of municipalities may be designed to help them in preparing ECE strategy, including fund raising, as well as to test some sort of best practices.

The assessment meets the established standards because it brings founded evidence to address exclusion and to deal with discrepancies in the provision of ECE services. Thus, it lays the foundation to embark into the discussions on equity and equality and the pertinent policies to guarantee them. The challenge is to continue in this path.

Appendix 1: Questionnaires

Appendix 2: Sample Size (Parent Survey)