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Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

Education Strategy 2022-2026

Pristina, 2022

Education Strategy 2022-2026

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION
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Foreword of the minister

Education is an opportunity to achieve the highest human potential of an individual and, as such, is a very important resource for the social and economic development of the country. Therefore, each of us in our roles have a responsibility towards our children and youth to provide them with qualitative education and development.

The Strategy on Education, as a basic document for the development of the education sector in the next five years, is focused on the analysis of the situation in the areas of primary importance of the education sector, determined by the Government Program 2021-2025 and on other state policy documents as well as on the evaluation of the implementation of the preliminary strategy. The strategy expresses our determination for the Republic of Kosovo to be part of the global trend for sustainable development and has been drafted in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda approved by the United Nations, in particular the SDG4 objective: «Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all». As a result, the 2022-2026 Strategy is structured into five pillars.

The first pillar is early childhood education, where we aim to significantly increase the participation of children aged 0-5 years, but also improve the quality of services.

Qualitative early education, in addition to enabling children to prepare better and achieve better results later in school, also affects the reduction of inequality in society. Aware of the great impact that early education has, we consider investing in this area is essential for both social and economic development.

The next pillar is increasing the quality of pre-university education, where our focus will be on building and consolidating mechanisms for qualitative teaching and quality assurance. In this regard, we will improve the performance of school management, we will put into operation the systems for internal and external quality assurance in schools, we will ensure effective implementation of the new curriculum, paying special attention to the improvement of the quality of teaching and student assessment.

Harmonization of vocational education and training with developments in technology and the labour market, represents a backbone to ensure a qualified and well-prepared workforce that is a prerequisite for the overall development of the country. In addition to dual learning, which offers opportunities to combine theoretical learning with workplace learning, the Strategy foresees the improvement of governance and management in the field of vocational education and training, as well as the strengthening of quality assurance.

The fourth pillar is the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education. Through changes in the legislation, the Government will ensure the independence of the Kosovo Agency for Accreditation, as it is the main carrier of quality assurance in higher education. Meanwhile, through performance-based financing, the aim is to increase responsibility and accountability in public institutions of higher education. Also, the planned measures aim to institutionalize anti-plagiarism control, increase transparency in higher education, ensure access to contemporary digital literature, support students

through various scholarship schemes and develop international programs of academic and scientific cooperation, with purpose of further aligning the higher education sector with international standards.

In line with global trends and reflecting on past years› experiences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, special importance in the fifth pillar is given to the use of digital technology in order to improve services and quality in education. In this regard, there will be significant investments in equipping schools with technology. We aim for each school to have a local network with high-speed Internet access, while each classroom be equipped with the necessary technology for using digital resources. In addition, we will pay attention to the development of the digital competence of the new generations and teachers. Investments in this area will facilitate teaching and learning, provide efficiency in services and equal opportunities for pupils, students and teachers, as well as enable more cooperation between communities within the education system and beyond.

The Strategy on Education 2022-2026 is the result of the 9-month tireless work of about 150 specialists of various profiles representing all stakeholders: the government, local government, education workers, the academic community, civil society, businesses and developmental partners, who have brought their best experiences, knowledge and ideas for the advancement of the education system. The planning process is supported by the German Government through GIZ Kosovo

I would like to express my gratitude to all the collaborators for their valuable contribution and dedication during the drafting process of the Strategy and hope for further commitment and cooperation towards its implementation.

Best wishes for joint success,

Arbërie Nagavci
Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

Pristina, September 2022

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List of abbreviations

AGE	Agency for Gender Equality
HE	Higher Education
PUE	Pre-University Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETAE	Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
AVETAE	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
AGE	Agency for Gender Equity
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
AIS	Agency for Information Society
EU	European Union
CEEPUS	Central European Exchange Program for University Studies
MED	Municipal Education Directorate
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ENQA	European Network for Quality Assurance
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ET	Education and Training
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
HEI	Higher Education Institution
VETI	Vocational Education and Training Institutions
ETI	Educational and Training Institutions
PI	Preschool Institutions
KPI	Kosovo Pedagogical Institute
ISCED	International Standard for Classification of Education
CECT	Council of Experts on Curricula and Textbooks
ECEAC	Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee me
FSPC	Framework for Strategic Planning and Management
ECCDE	Early Childhood Care, Development and Education
LMS	Learning Management System
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
NARIC	National Academic Recognition and Information Centre
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
UN	United Nations Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
KESP	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
CET	Centre for Excellence in Teaching
GRK	Government of the Republic of Kosovo
CCD	Centre for Career Development
ES	Education Strategy
USESC	United Syndicate of Education, Science and Culture
SDEK	Strategy for Digitalization of Education in Kosovo
ESMS	Electronic Student Management System
NDS	National Development Strategy
EMIS	Education Management Information System
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
UMS	University Management System
EWS	Early Warning System
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
AI	Administrative Instruction
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
TPA	Teacher Performance Assessment
GEO	Gender Equality Office
OSP	Office for Strategic Planning
TPD	Teacher Professional Development

Executive Summary

The Education Strategy (ES) is the main document for developing the education sector in Kosovo for the period 2022-2026. The ES is based on the Program of the Government of Kosovo 2021-2025 and the situation analysis of priority areas of the education sector.

The preparation of the Education Strategy started in August 2021 when the Drafting Team and the working groups and thematic subgroups were established. The preparation process of the ES 2022-2026 was led by the Drafting Team of MESTI, while Working Groups and thematic groups were established at the level of priority areas and strategic objectives.

Also, the Education Strategy is drafted in accordance with the National Development Strategy 2030, namely the strategic and specific objectives and the impact indicators and products defined under the Second Pillar "Equal Human Development", General Objective "Accessible Quality Education". The ES Document is organized in five priority fields covering the levels of education in Kosovo:

Area 1: Early childhood education.

Area 2: Pre-university education.

Area 3: Vocational education, training and adult education.

Area 4: Higher education.

Area5: Digitalization of education.

ES has 5 strategic objectives, defined for the 5 priority areas. The strategic objectives address key problems of MESTI's priority areas and are broken down into specific objectives that correspond to the main causes of relevant key problems and aim for more concrete results in the short-term perspective. For each specific objective, the activities that lead to the achievement of the objective have been identified.

Strategic Objective 1:

Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) aims at the primary development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs, in order to build a strong and broad foundation for lifelong learning and well-being, therefore, equal inclusion and participation for all children in qualitative early education cannot be accomplished without the creation of adequate infrastructure. MESTI will initially make a thorough analysis for this level of education, in order to plan for overcoming the challenges facing ECE, such as: increasing the number of Preschool Institutions (PI) and organizing their adequate distribution; developing the legislative framework, curriculum for ECE and creating a qualitative education environment; creating infrastructure suitable for the children; and cross-sector support in provision of qualitative services in ECE.

Strategic Objective 2:

Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and the provision of quality teaching.

To improve the quality in pre-university education it is necessary to have a system that provides accountability at all levels of the education system. To this end, we must have effective and efficient management through the implementation and advancement of policies and legal framework in the field of education, capacity building and strengthening of transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the mechanisms for the implementation of the quality assurance system, internal and external evaluation of educational institutions with a focus on quality improvement, increase of the reliability of national tests and the use of results for data-based decision-making should be strengthened. Also, the advancement of the quality of pre-university education will be achieved through the effective implementation of the curriculum as well as strengthening of the functional mechanism to guide and implement it. To improve the students' results, among other measures, quality textbooks will be prepared in accordance with the curriculum and alternative teaching aids, materials and resources will be provided.

Strategic Objective 3:

Harmonization of the vocational education and training with the dynamic developments in technology and the labour market, in function of lifelong learning.

Insufficient quality of vocational education and training offer has resulted in a low level of employer satisfaction with skills/competencies acquired by VETI graduate candidates, as well as in a low degree of transition from school to work. Opportunities for lifelong learning and mobility are limited and are not in accordance with the need for continuous retraining of the workforce. Consequently, the main focus within this strategic area is to review the offer of vocational education and training as well as quality improvement, in order to develop transferable skills, digital skills, entrepreneurial skills and professional technical skills, in line with labour market needs and digital and green transformation trends.

Strategic Objective 4:

Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education.

This objective is formulated in response to structural shortcomings in the field of higher education and aims to improve the quality and integrity of higher education, through the implementation of the accreditation process in accordance with international quality standards, which, among other things, will enable the return of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency to ENQA and EQAR. Higher education reform is intended to be achieved through the advancement of the legal framework, capacity development of quality assurance mechanisms, increased participation in international programs and improved academic and research infrastructure. MESTI will regulate the legal basis and review the existing legislation regarding the financing formula and the development of an advanced higher education management information system.

Strategic Objective 5:

The use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends.

In order for Kosovo to move as quickly as possible towards digitalization of data, provision of digital services and automatization of processes in the field of education, as well as in order to increase the use of digital technology for educational needs in order to improve the quality of education, Kosovo, over the next five years, will work in five areas: (i) creating and functionalizing an inclusive and centralized digital platform for the field of education; (ii) preparing and producing multi-dimensional and qualitative digital teaching materials for different levels, grades, subjects and types; (iii) supplying ETIs and HEIs with quality internet networks and necessary technological equipment; (iv) cultivating the digital competence in all parties involved in the field of education and in all educational institutions of all types and levels; and (v) establishing institutional mechanisms that enable the implementation of digitalization and the use of technology in the field of education.

The action plan is developed for each strategic objective of the ES, with relevant activities and indicators, as well as relevant costs. The action plan, ES budget and indicators for each objective are presented in the annexes to this document. The budget of the ES 2022-2026 has a cost of 322,847,640 Euros.

1. Introduction

The new cycle of education planning begins in the period when the Republic of Kosovo is facing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly contributed to the slowdown in the pace of development of the country. The pandemic period resulted in significant disruptions of the educational process at all levels, producing significant learning losses by pupils and students.

The long-awaited normalization of the situation in educational and training institutions, as well as in higher education institutions, will make it possible to focus on solving of problems already identified in the education system through numerous education policy documents, in various reports and analyses and in the relevant legislation.

In the Program of the Government of Kosovo 2021-2025, education has been identified as an important opportunity and resource for the sustainable economic and social development of Kosovo. In this context, 5 areas have been defined as main orientations for intervention and development in the education sector:

1. Qualitative, comprehensive and digitalized education,
2. Harmonization of vocational education and training with the labour market demands,
3. Effective management of the education system at all levels,
4. Higher education with quality and integrity, in line with international standards,
5. Improvement of the research and innovation environment.

These areas from the government program, as well as findings and recommendations from other documents (strategies, policies, laws, research papers), have served as a starting point for the work of the Drafting Team and ES working groups from the initial stage of identifying priority areas and topics for certain levels and sectors of education in Kosovo up to the stage of preparing the action plan.

The strategic approach followed for better regulation of the planning process is concretized in the Framework for Strategic Planning and Management (FSPM). The FSPM defines the main elements of the reform in the planning process. Determining the hierarchy of objectives and performance indicators and defining the boundaries of sectors according to the classification of functions of government (COFOG), in addition to better monitoring and reporting, enables a more consistent connection of public policies with budget planning.

For this purpose, the NDS 2030 provides the basis for preparing the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), which allows interconnection of sectors and formulation of actions accompanied by codification, through the implementation of institutional plans by all budget organizations. Among other things, the FSPM defines the difference between long-term, medium-term and short-term objectives, which are broken down by other strategic documents, listed and explained in the following figure adapted from the NDS 2030 document.

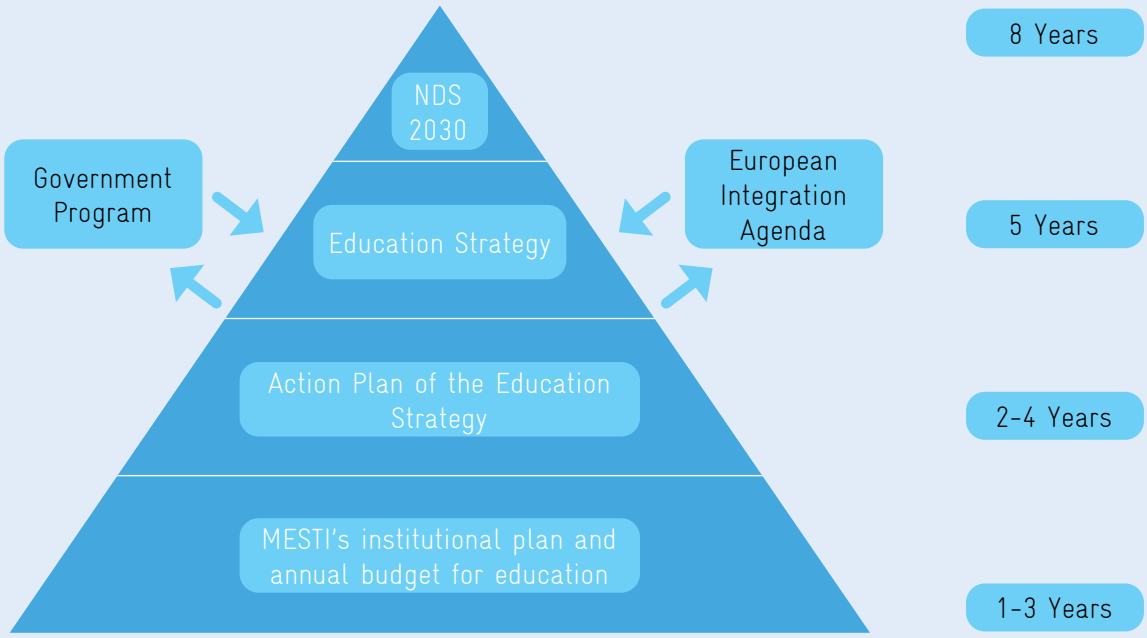


Figure 1: Breakdown of strategic documents under FPMS

It is important to emphasize that ES 2022-2026 was prepared in full compliance and in parallel to the National Development Strategy 2030, specifically the Development Goal: Accessible and quality education. Within this NDS development goal, there are four specific objectives related to the ES›s strategic objectives. Consolidation of the goals and objectives hierarchy to ensure consistency with the SDG follows a form of appropriate objective cascading from the SDG 2030 document to the Action Plan of the ES 2022-2026.

Table 1: Interconnection of the objectives of NDS 2030 and ES 2022-2026

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF NDS 2030	ES STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2022-2026
Increasing children's participation in quality early childhood education and care	Early childhood education: Increasing inclusion and equal access to early childhood education.
Improving the inclusiveness approach and education digitalization	Preuniversity Education: Increasing quality of preuniversity education by consolidating quality assurance mechanisms and providing quality teaching. Education Digitalization: Use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in accordance with digital transformation trends.
Better harmonization of education with the labour market needs	Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education: Harmonization of vocational education and training with the dynamic developments of technology and the labour market in view of lifelong learning.
Higher quality, integrity and competitiveness in higher education	Higher education: Improving the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education.

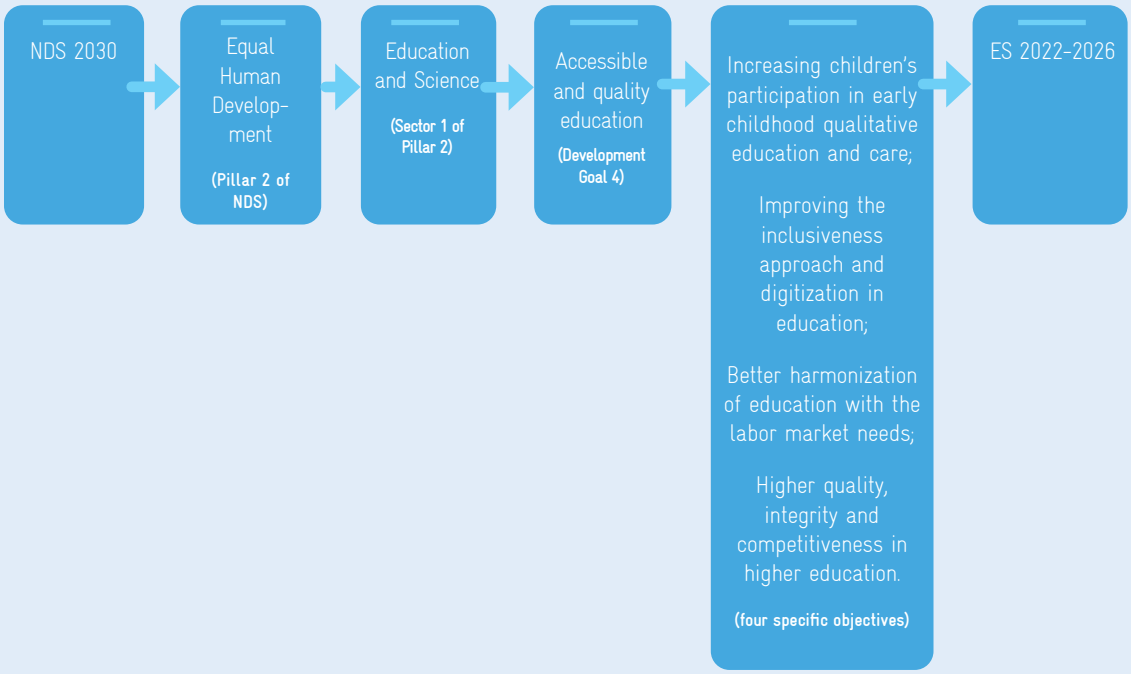
The Education Strategy (ES) 2022-2026 is a continuation of the strategic plans prepared for the period 2011-2016 and 2017-2021 and is in line with international documents that form the basis for building educational policies in the country. The Education Strategy relies on existing legislation and recommendations of research reports on education in Kosovo that have been carried out in recent years. The list of key policy documents, legislation and research reports on which the ES is based can be found in the annex to this document.

2. Methodology

The Education Strategy 2022-2026 was drafted in accordance with the concept on the strategic management framework, which foresees a top to bottom linking and cascading of objectives. In this regard, the NDS 2030 is the main strategy of all sector strategies and defines main strategic objectives that have translated into specific objectives under ES 2022-2026. Hence, the strategic ground for ES 2022-2026 is NDS 2030 – Development Goal "Accessible and Qualitative Education", under the pillar of "Equal human development".

This linkage is presented in the figure below and illustrates the top to bottom cascade of objectives (NDS 2030 – ES 2022-2026).

Figure 2: Top to bottom cascade of objectives (NDS 2030 - ES 2022-2026)



Source: NDS 2030..

According to the new Strategic Planning and Management Framework, NDS 2030 regulates inter alia the so-called "Horizontal Agenda", which represent an additional horizontal dimension of sector planning that requires cross-sector cooperation across the government. The main objectives included in the horizontal agenda will be accomplished simultaneously in several sectors, including public administration reform

process, by implementing a range of concrete actions, planned and dedicated in specific sector strategies and included in budgetary requirements by the organization in charge of implementation. The horizontal agendas must be used only for the purpose of coordination and monitoring.

Based on this, the NDS has identified objectives and indicators that determine four horizontal agendas: digital agenda, inclusiveness, green agenda and diaspora and migration. These agendas are included in the strategic and specific objectives of the ES 2022-2026 by planning specific activities for their implementation.

In determining the methodology for drafting the Education Strategy, the instructions and recommendations from the following documents have been taken into account:

1. Administrative Instruction (GRK) No. 07/2018 on Planning and Drafting Strategic Documents and Action Plans[1],
2. Manual for planning, developing and monitoring strategic documents and their action plans (GRK)[2],
3. Annexes to the Manual for planning, developing and monitoring strategic documents and their action plans.

MESTI has enabled wide participation of stakeholders in the process of drafting the ES, paying due attention to the quality of the product as well as the process itself. The drafting of the ES was carried out through a comprehensive process, to which many different institutions, organizations and individuals have contributed.

Initially, MESTI established the Drafting Team[3], as a team responsible for leading the strategic planning process. Then, working groups and thematic groups were established consisting of MESTI officials, field experts, representatives of line ministries and partner organizations[4]. Many other persons were involved in certain activities during the drafting of the Education Strategy, who have contributed within the four thematic groups representing different entities and stakeholders. On the other hand, the process of planning, drafting and finalizing the Education Strategy, including workshop preparations, facilitation of workshops, data collection, drafting the drafts and finalizing them, has been supported by external experts/consultants[5] engaged by GIZ and other MESTI partners.

The four working groups were: Working Group for Pre-University Education, Working Group for Vocational Education, Training and Adult Education, Working Group for Higher Education and Working Group for Education Digitalization. Within the Working Group for Pre-University Education, 3 subgroups have worked to better cover the thematic areas of interest. The whole Education Strategy preparation process was supported by GIZ technical assistance.

1 https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=18813

2 https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/MANUAL-PËR-PLANIFIKIMIN-HARTIMIN-DHE-MONITORIMIN-E-DOKUMENTEVE-STRATEGJIKE-DHE-PLANEVE-TË-TYRE-TË-VEPRIMIT.pdf

3 The list of members of the ES Drafting Team can be found in Annex 3 to this document.

4 The list of names of these persons who have contributed during the process of drafting the ES is found in Annex 3 to this document.

5 The list of names of external experts/consultants engaged for professional support during the planning, drafting and finalization of ES is found in Annex 3 to this document.

The preparation of the ES 2022-2026 was planned and carried out in five phases:

Phase 1 **Preparatory phase**

During this phase was established the Drafting Team as well the Working and Thematic Groups, consultations were held on the working methodology and strategy format, the thematic areas of the Strategy have been defined, as well as the plan for drafting the Education Strategy has been prepared.

Phase 2 **Situation analysis**

At this phase, policy and legislation documents, various reports and studies for the education sector were analysed, along with other sources with information on the current situation in education in Kosovo. Likewise, reports with statistical data from national and international sources were reviewed. Then, the factors that have a direct impact on developments in education, such as macroeconomic, demographic and political factors, were analysed. Special attention has been paid to the analysis of existing state policies for education, education expenditures as well as current system performance and capacity. During the workshops with the Drafting Team, the working groups and the thematic ones, the priority areas of Education Strategy were defined, the situation analysis was reviewed and complemented and additional data, information and other statistics provided by working and thematic groups were filled in. As a result of the work at this phase, two versions of the situation analysis have been prepared: one version of the extended analysis with detailed data for the five priority areas of the ES6 and the other one reduced and included in this document.

Phase 3 **Defining vision, strategic objectives, specific objectives, activities and indicators**

During this phase, the work in the working groups was based on the situation analysis, giving answers to problems already identified. Initially, the vision of the Education Strategy was defined with the Drafting Team. Then, five strategic objectives were set by prioritizing key actions to improve and advance the education system. During the workshops with the working groups, specific objectives, activities and indicators were defined for each strategic objective. The product of the third phase was a partial draft of the Education Strategy which was reviewed and approved by the Drafting Team.

Phase 4 **ES costing and implementation plan**

At this phase, in cooperation with MESTI officials, with the participation of working groups, the Education Strategy action plan has been drafted. Also, all planned activities have been costed. The action plan and costing were carried out according to the defined format, and with the active involvement of the Drafting Team and working groups. At this phase, several final amendments and supplements to the document have been made and as a result the Education Strategy Action Plan and final budget have been finalized.

6 The extended version of the situation analysis has been prepared as a separate annex to this document and is available at MESTI.

Phase 5 **Public consultation and finalization of the Education Strategy document**

Preliminary and public discussion is organized at this stage for the purpose of obtaining comments and inputs from stakeholders. Upon completion of the public consultation process, the final version of the Education Strategy document is drafted and published, which is submitted to the Government for approval.

During the first four phases of the Education Strategy planning process, a total of 40 workshops as well as dozens of consultative meetings with working groups were held.

3. Situation analysis

In the modern economy, education is a basic precondition for economic growth and for improving the standard of living. Kosovo›s effort to achieve these goals is related to the level of the workforce productivity. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) estimated the rates of return on education in Kosovo and concluded that they are consistent with the hypothesis that low quality education is the barrier that conditions economic growth. This shows that the problem of the skills gap is related to the levels of participation in education, with specific competencies and skills such as foreign languages, computer skills or so-called soft skills and the overall quality of education. Quality, degree of inclusion and number of years of schooling, they do not have only inevitably an impact on improving human capital and creating preconditions for social and economic development, but they also provide the basis for improving employment opportunities.

In 2018, Kosovo participated for the second time in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The PISA test assesses the ability of 15-year-old students to apply their acquired knowledge in the field of reading, mathematics and science, in everyday life situations. 15-year-old students continue to have low achievement in mathematics, science and reading compared to the regional average and they are well below the average of the OECD countries. In 2018, student achievement scores in mathematics and reading were slightly better than in 2015, while scores in the field of science have deteriorated. The average achievement in science in Kosovo is 365 points, which is 124 points below the OECD average, where 40 points are equivalent to one year of schooling. The average reading achievement in Kosovo is 353 points, which is 134 points below the OECD average, while the average achievement in mathematics in Kosovo is 366 points, which is 123 points below the OECD average.[7]

The result of the PISA 2018 test confirmed once again that the state of education in Kosovo is not at all satisfactory. In addition to the poor ranking of Kosovo in relation to other countries, a huge concern is the enormous percentage of students who have not reached the minimum level of skills to use the knowledge in life – in Reading: 78.7% (OECD average: 22.7%, Albania: 52.2%, North Macedonia: 55.1%, Montenegro: 44.4%); in Mathematics: 76.6% (OECD average: 23.9%, Albania: 42.4%, North Macedonia: 61%, Montenegro: 46.2%); in Natural Sciences: 76.6% (OECD average: 21.9%, Albania: 46.9%, North Macedonia: 49.4%, Montenegro: 48.2%).[8] This level is considered the basic level of skills needed for successful participation in economic and social life. The low reading achievement is of particular concern, as the ability of reading, comprehension and correct interpretation of what one reads are the basis for achievement in other areas.

7 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5f07c754-en.pdf?expires=1620417488&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=-2362B92E5C68479B14087D185FABAAE3

8 Ibid.

3.1. Macroeconomic and fiscal framework

During the period 2008-2019, Kosovo had a continuous growth of economic activities, with nominal value of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by about 5.501 million euros and with a real growth rate of 6.0 per cent (2014), while in 2019 the nominal value of GDP was about 7.066 million euros, with a real growth rate of 4.9 per cent.[9]

During these years, the economic growth was within the parameters that reflect a stable macroeconomic situation both in the fiscal and financial sectors. Despite the fact that Kosovo has continuously had an economic growth and an increase in per capita income, however, it remains far from GDP per capita of the Balkan countries,[10] as Figure 1 shows.

From 2008, budget revenues in Kosovo increased at an annual rate of 2-4 per cent, thus maintaining fiscal discipline and macroeconomic stability. Thus, the total revenues of the Government of Kosovo in 2017 were about 1.8 billion euros, for 2019 they reached the value of 2.3 billion euros, while for 2020 they were 2.6 billion euros.[11]

In general, remittances have a multiple impact on key aspects of development in Kosovo. Remittance income is increasing as a result of the growing trend of regular emigration for employment purposes. According to the data of the Central Bank of Kosovo[12] only during 2018, over 800 million euros were sent to Kosovo from the diaspora, which represents an increase of 5.3 per cent compared to the previous year.[13]

Regardless of other economic indicators, the creation of small and medium-sized businesses is considered a driving factor of development dynamics and they continue to be key drivers of job creation, although far from the desired dynamics. The main reason for this lies in the fact that over 90 percent of the registered businesses are micro-businesses, with less than 10 employees,[14] which are not expected to be bearers of the development of a modern economy. Despite improvement of conditions for doing business in Kosovo,[15] lack of skills required by the labour market has been identified as a continuing obstacle to private sector growth.[16] If we look at the problems in a gender perspective / gender context, women in Kosovo benefit significantly less from public funds. In 2017, women received 17 percent of the Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA) grants for their enterprises, and men 83 percent. Women-owned enterprises received 25 times less funding as subsidies, although the ratio of women-owned enterprises to those owned by men is one in six, suggesting that the distribution of funds is disproportionate.[17]

9 Kosovo Agency of Statistics: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Kosovo 2020. https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5492/vjetari-final-2020-per-web.pdf

10 CIA: The World Fact book 2016 – Central Intelligence Agency. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html

11 Ministry of Finance: Budget of the Republic of Kosovo 2020. https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/9D16B-ECD-DDF8-4144-BCBB-4CE9945F5CDD.pdf

12 Central Bank of Kosovo: Monthly Statistics Bulletin No. 225, 2020. https://bqk-kos.org/repository/docs/2018/BQK_BMS_225_al.pdf

13 Government Authority for Migration: Light Migration Profile 2017.

14 Kosovo Business Registration Agency (KBRA), MTI.

15 World Bank Group: Doing Business 2019 – Training for reform. https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/media/Annual-Reports/English/DB2019-report_web-version.pdf

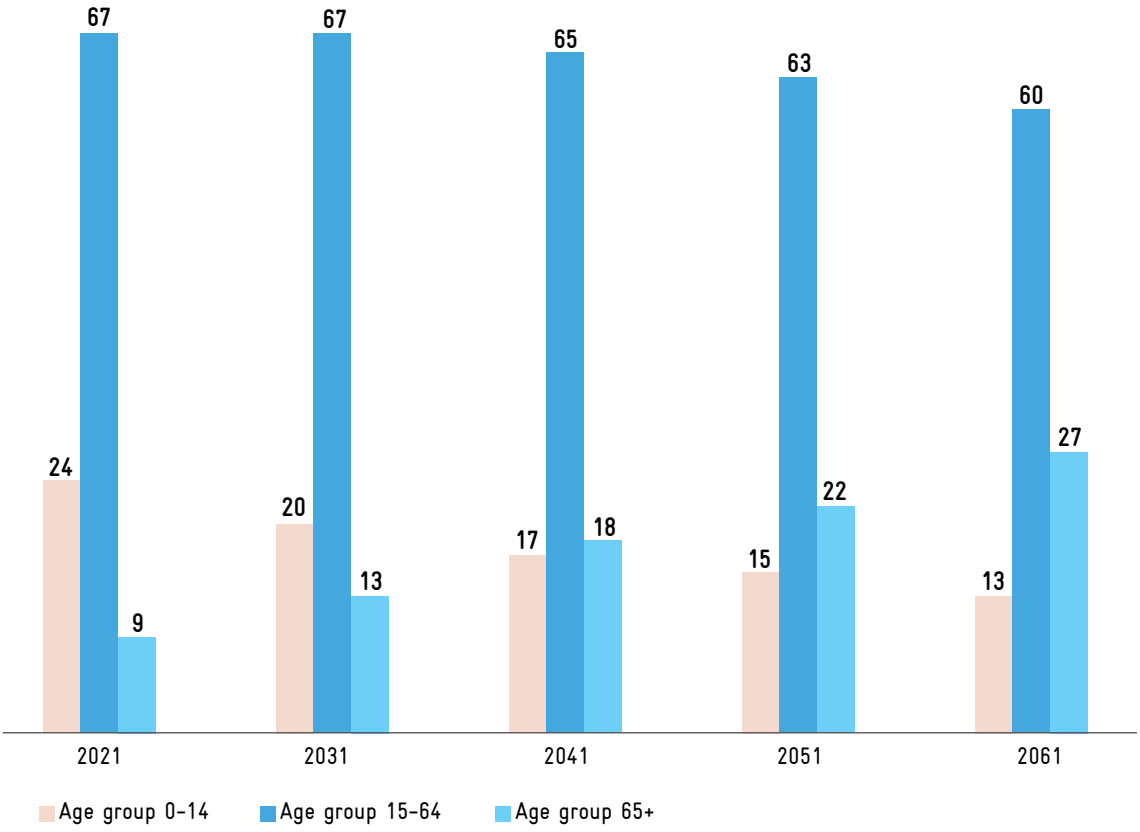
16 B. Krasniqi, IESB Institute: Labour Market and Skills Needs Analysis; Perspective for the future. Kosovo: Publication of "Aligning Education and Training with Labour Market Needs 2" project. ISBN: 978-9951-8990-0-0.

17 https://abgj.rks-gov.net/publikimet/107/programi-kosoves-per-barazi-gjinore, page 23,

3.2. Demographic picture

According to the results of the 2011 census, the number of resident populations in Kosovo was 1,739,825 inhabitants,[18] however, the residents of the municipalities of Leposavic, Zubin Potok, Zvecan and North Mitrovica were not included in this census. The population in Kosovo for 2019 is estimated to be 1,782,115 inhabitants. According to this estimate, 0-14 years old are 28 per cent, 15-64 years old are 65 percent and 65+ years old are 7 percent.[19]

Figure 3. Projection of age groups of the population of Kosovo by years in percentage (the medium variant)[20]



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Medium variant

Kosovo Population Projection for the period 2017 - 2061, the medium variant,[21] speaks of a slight increase in population by 2031, while from this year onwards to continue with the trend of its reduction until 2061. According to this projection, the population in Kosovo will have 1,809,458 inhabitants in 2021; 1,818,674 (2031); 1,759,492 (2041); 1,652,090 (2051) and 1,492,192 (2061).

18 Kosovo Agency of Statistics: Kosovo Population and Housing Census 2011, Final Results.

19 Kosovo Agency of Statistics: Kosovo population estimate 2019, 2020. https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5536/vleresimi-i-popull-sise-2019.pdf

20 The medium variant is one of the three options (high variant, medium variant and low variant) of demographic trends for the given period. For data utilization it is recommended that the medium variant be used during planning and various analyses and is considered more realistic by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics

21 Kosovo Agency of Statistics: Kosovo Population Projection 2017 – 2061, December 2017. https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/3742/parashikimi-i-popullsise-se-kosoves-2017-2061.pdf

The reason for the decrease lies in the clear trend of decreasing birth rates and increasing emigration due to economic conditions.

Kosovo›s population will undergo a drastic change in its age structure manifested through the reduction of the young population (from 0-14 years old) from 24 percent (2021) to 20 percent (2031) and 13 percent (2061). At the same time, the participation of the 65+ age group in the population structure will increase from 9 percent (2021) to 13 percent (2031) and 27 percent (2061), as shown in Figure 1.

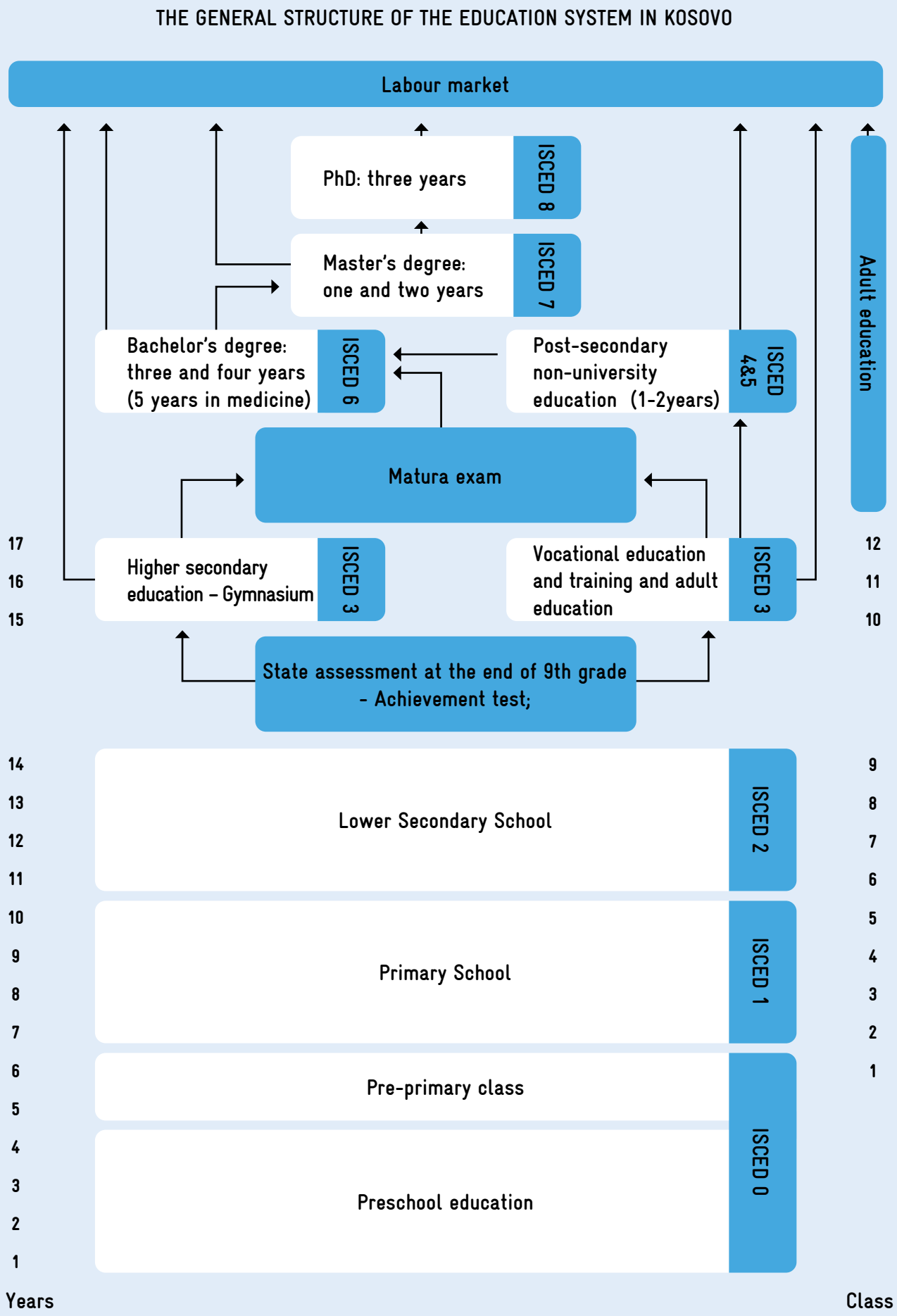
3.3. General information about the education system

The education system in Kosovo is organized at these main levels:

- Preschool Education (ISCED 0 - age < 6 years old).
- Primary Education (ISCED 1 - grades 1-5).
- Lower Secondary Education (ISCED 2 - grades 6-9)
- Upper Secondary Education (ISCED 3 - grades 10-12).
- Higher Education (ISCED 5-8, including short cycle of higher education (5), Bachelor level (6), Master level (7) and Doctoral level (8).

In addition to the education levels, qualifications are also linked to their programs and curricula. **Student Assessment Framework in Pre-University Education in Kosovo** describes the main features of the education system and has also helped to further refine the mapping between levels of education programs and the National Qualifications Framework of Kosovo (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 4. The general structure of the education system in Kosovo



Source: Student Assessment Framework in Pre-University Education in Kosovo

The basic laws in force in Kosovo that regulate the main aspects and levels of education are:

- Law on Preschool Education (No. 02/L-52).
- Law on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo (No. 04/L-032).
- Law on Education in the Municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo (No. 03/L-068).
- Law for Vocational Education and Training (No. 04/L-138).
- Law on Adults Education and Training in the Republic of Kosovo (No. 04/L-143)
- Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo (No. 04/L-037).
- Law on Education Inspectorate in the Republic of Kosovo (No. 06/L-046)
- Law on Gender Equality (No. 05/L-020)
- Law on National Qualifications (No. 03/L-060)

In addition to these basic laws, various aspects of the field of education are regulated by general laws that are not in the field of education, as well as by special laws in the field of education (national qualifications, regulated professions, state Matura, textbooks, education inspectorate, scientific research activity, etc.).

The main institutions responsible for organizing and managing all levels of education in Kosovo in accordance with applicable law and regulations are:

- Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI).
- Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA).
- National Qualifications Authority (NQA).
- Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE).
- Kosovo Pedagogical Institute (KPI).
- Municipalities and Municipal Education Directorates (MED).
- Educational and Training Institutions (ETI) – kindergartens, primary schools, lower secondary schools, general upper secondary schools (gymnasiums), vocational high schools, institutions that provide education and training for adults, etc.
- Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

Based on Kosovo Education Statistics 2020/21[22], it turns out that about 320 thousand children/students are included in pre-university education in Kosovo, of whom over 95% attend education/school in 1,052 public Educational and Training Institutions (ETI), where over 28 thousand people are employed as personnel of different categories; whereas 16,424 children/students attend education/school in licensed private ETIs.

In the academic year 2020/21, 95,335 students attend their studies in accredited institutions of higher education in Kosovo (57.4% in the public sector, 42.6% in the private sector), of whom 58.5% women/girls students. About gross 56.3% of students in the 18-22 age group attend higher education in Kosovo. Female student participation in higher education is at a satisfactory level. Women/girls students make up 59.5% of students in the public sector and 57.1% of students in the private sector. The gender parity index in higher education in Kosovo is 1.41.

22 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2021/08/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2020-21.pdf

3.4. Challenges and opportunities of the environment

The situation analysis was conducted at the level of macro-environment that includes external factors influencing the education sector, as well as the micro-environment where internal factors are involved. The PEST method was used for a more general macro-environmental analysis identifying political, economic, social and technological factors. Meanwhile, for an in-depth analysis of micro and macro-environment, a combined approach of analysis of documentation (reports and studies of recent years in the education sector) was applied along with the SWOT method to identify successes (strengths) and deficiencies (weaknesses) as internal factors, as well as opportunities and risks as external factors. Document review and SWOT analysis were performed by experts and working/thematic groups of ES 2022-2026.

3.4.1. Political factors

The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) sets out the framework for cooperation of Kosovo with the EU to enhance the quality of education at all levels, with the aim of improving skills, employability, social inclusion and promotion of economic development. It is expected that the cooperation between the EU and Kosovo will take the form of technical assistance for the implementation of certain ES measures. Therefore, the Education Strategy will be the subject of regular consultations with the EU and the subject of the review of progress reports. With the entry into force of the Law on Education in Municipalities of Kosovo, more than a decade ago, education in Kosovo has undergone a major decentralization, whereby many competencies and responsibilities have been transferred from the central level to the municipal level, with the aim of transferring some of them further down to the school level. The implementation of the Education Strategy depends, to a large extent, on the implementation capacity of municipalities, more precisely of the Municipal Education Directorates (MEDs). Municipal level, namely MEDs, in Kosovo have not been prepared and have not had and still do not have sufficient human and professional resources, neither financial ones, to carry the entire burden of competencies and responsibilities that decentralization has delegated to MEDs. In addition, the decentralization of education has provided for many competencies and responsibilities to be transferred to the school level, but also in this case it can be said that most schools lack human and professional resources to exercise these competencies and responsibilities. This affects the implementation of Education Strategy measures, as it is not possible for all measures to be implemented directly by MESTI, without solid support from the municipal level. Moreover, it is of great importance to foster a broad understanding of the fact that this increased autonomy at the local level should be accompanied by increased accountability and quality management. For this reason, Education Strategy contains measures for further capacity building in municipalities.

Serbian language schools in Kosovo continue to operate outside the Kosovo education system, despite the fact that the current legislation offers great opportunities to accommodate the specific needs of the Serb community. The Republic of Kosovo will continue its current efforts to integrate the Serb community with the assistance of international partners. Education Strategy measures are suitable for all communities, but if, at a later stage, there is a need to address specific issues related to the integration of the Serb community, MESTI will try to accommodate them in its annual action plans. Free movement within Europe›s borders is an opportunity for young people who have completed their education to look for work also outside Kosovo. Since such a move is expected to be possible in the near future, the education system must also adapt to the demands of the European labour market, focusing on quality enhancement, in order for graduates to meet the standards of employers from EU countries.

3.4.2. Economic factors

According to the Labour Force Survey, in the first quarter of 2021, two thirds of Kosovo population is of working age (15-64 years), whereas of the working age population, 60.5% is inactive (men/boys - 43.5%, women/girls 77.3%). The employment rate is 29.3% (men - 42.8%, women/girls - 15.9%). Kosovo still faces high unemployment rates -25.8% (men/boys - 24.2%, women/girls - 29.7%). Youth unemployment is very high in Kosovo. Among persons aged 15-24 and in the labour force, 48.6% are unemployed (men/boys - 46.1%, women/girls 53.5%). The number of young people aged 15-24 who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) is 29.8% (men/boys - 29.9%, women/girls - 26.6%). The data show that a low level of education diminishes employment opportunities. Unemployment rate is closely linked to educational level. The lowest unemployment rate is among those with tertiary education (19.2%) and those with vocational education (26.5%).[23]

Although in recent years the participation of girls in education is almost the same with the boys, the level of education among women aged 15-64 is significantly lower than that of men, negatively affecting their likelihood for employment. Data for Kosovo, but also the latest data for European Union countries, show that the employment rate is higher among graduates of vocational schools than those of general (gymnasiums). Vocational education would enable girls from the age of 18 to possess skills in a profession, enabling them to transition early from school to employment, helping their economic empowerment.[24]

The difficult socio-economic conditions in which a significant number of Kosovo citizens live imply some costs for addressing problems such as providing all students free textbooks for compulsory education which costs the state budget about 7 million EUR annually; then, subsidizing higher education and living in dorms through low fees that apply. If there is no significant improvement of the economic situation, the expenditure trend of this nature will inevitably continue, meaning that there will be less funds available for the Education Strategy implementation.

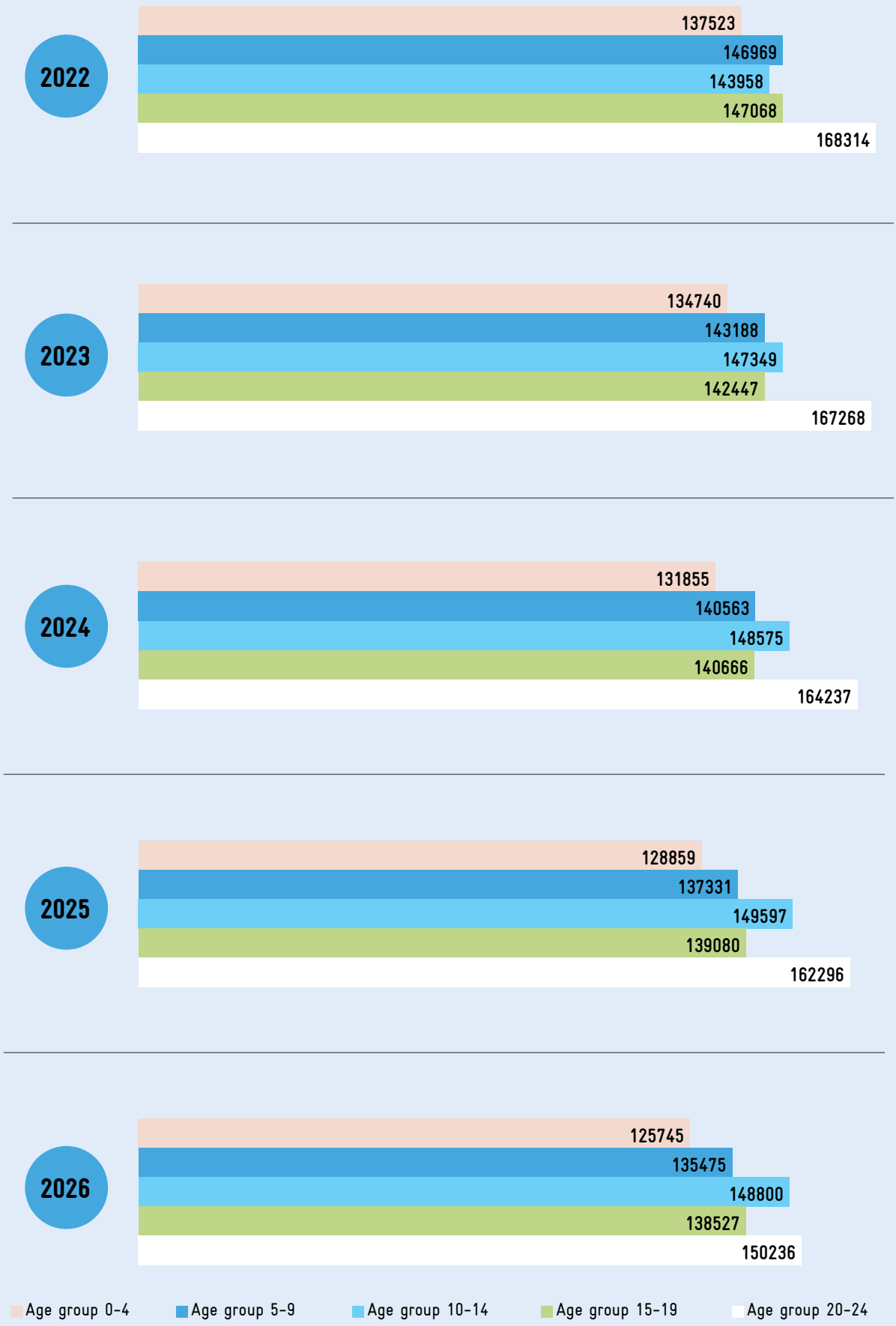
3.4.3. Social factors

Kosovo is going through a phase of significant demographic change. The effects of the declining school-age population are already beginning to be noticed in the decline of total number of students in pre-university education. In the school year 2010/11, the total number of students in primary, lower secondary and higher education was 410,756, whereas in the school year 2019/20 it dropped to 312,498, what represents a decrease of 23.9 per cent within less than a decade. Based on the KAS's projections 2022-2026, Kosovo is expected to have a significant decline in the age group 0-4 (preschool) due to the population's birth rate decline and migration of reproductive age-groups. A similar trend is foreseen for the age groups 5-9 years of pre-primary and primary education.

23 Social Statistics: Labour Force Survey Q1 2021, KAS https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6355/lfs-q1-2021.pdf

24 PKBGJ 2020-2024 https://abgj.rks-gov.net/publikimet/107/programi-kosoves-per-barazi-gjinore

Figure 5. Population projections by age groups 2022-2026



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics, medium variant

The number of students in lower secondary education is foreseen to increase by 2026, whereas in upper secondary education is foreseen the largest decline in the number of students. Meanwhile, the number of age groups corresponding to higher education is foreseen to increase. These developments will significantly affect pre-university education and higher education in Kosovo. The decrease in number of students will affect the reduction of class number in schools, reduction of need for teachers and, probably, reduction of the number of schools. On the other hand, the population movement from rural to urban areas will cause greater burden on urban schools and smaller number of students especially in remote rural areas. These demographic changes should be reflected in a significant rationalization of school network and in planning review during the strategic plan implementation period.

The COVID-19 virus escalated into a global pandemic in March 2020 and, as a result, governments around the world took various measures to prevent the virus spread and protect citizens' health. In this sense, in addition to measures of social isolation and distancing, governments closed schools and switched to distance learning, mainly using information technology (digital technology combined with the most traditional technology such as radio and TV) but also other approaches that support distance learning. This way of organizing the learning process required quick organization, without prior planning and, as a result, the quality of organizing the learning process and students' learning was impacted by different factors, depending on country and their previous developments.

Upon schools' closure and following the organization of learning in pandemic conditions, teachers in Kosovo have faced the challenge of switching to distance learning, which requires good knowledge and skills in using of information technology for quality and effective teaching. In this regard, although accurate data are missing, a significant number of teachers is estimated to have no previous experience in organizing distance learning or combined learning, whereas the use of technology during the learning process was extremely low and posed a challenge for the Kosovo education system even before breakout of COVID-19 virus. In addition, considering that distance learning depends on access to various technological devices, internet and Wi-Fi, their lack has further widened the inequalities in education, widening the knowledge gap between children at advantage and those from vulnerable groups, including children with low socio-economic status, children with special educational needs and children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities who for various reasons (lack of technological equipment and internet access, parental commitment and education, suitable learning environment etc.) failed to involve into distance education.

3.4.4. Technological factors

Based on the results of the Survey on Use of Information and Communication Technology 2020[25], 96.4% of households in Kosovo in 2020 had Internet access at home or apartment from any device. This makes Kosovo one of the countries with the largest internet penetration in the world. The data of this report show the internet users by age groups, where the leading age group with 19.5% are the age group of 35-44 years, followed by the age group of 45-54 years (18.9%), age group of 16-24 years (17.4%), age group 25-34 years (16.1%), age group 55-64 years (15.5%) and age group 65+ (10.1%). In terms of internet use by gender, men/boys lead with 57.4%, while women/girls stand at 40.2%. These data also show the intensive use of the Internet in Kosovo, where out of 95.6% of individuals

25 https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5804/anketa-e-p%C3%ABrdorimit-t%C3%AB-teknologjis%C3%AB-informative-komunikimit2020.pdf

who use the Internet, 92.9% of them use the Internet daily or almost every day, even most of them (91.4%) use the Internet several times during the day.

Based on the data from the Report on Internet Penetration and Usage in Kosovo 2019[26], beside home internet, over 40% of Kosovo citizens have prepaid internet access through telephone services (3G, 4G, LTE). According to this report, in terms of internet usage volume, but also internet quality, there is no major difference between urban and rural areas, although the situation is slightly better in urban areas. Worth mentioning is the fact that the data of this report show that the use of internet and computer is in direct proportion to the level of education, the more educated an individual is, the more they use internet and computer. Meantime, the computer is the digital device that mostly is used to work, whereas employees and students turn out to be the most regular computer users.

Regarding the possession of various digital devices, based on the findings of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in the Republic of Kosovo - MICS and MICS on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo 2019-2020[27], it turns out that almost all households in Kosovo have a television (98.9%) and a mobile phone (99.2%), whereas only 53.4% of them have a computer. When it comes to computer possession, it should be noted that the MICS study shows that there are large differences between communities and between families with different economic status. While at the level of Kosovo 53.4% of households have a computer, this percentage is only 23.8% among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. In addition, at the poorest families this percentage is 13.9%, whereas at the richest families is 88.9%.

Regarding the purposes of using the Internet, STIKK research shows that 93% of Kosovo citizens use the Internet for communication needs, 37% to listen to music, 35% to read information and curiosity in Google search, Wikipedia etc., 22% for reading news, 19% for reading/writing e-mails, 18% for finding materials for their research and studies, whereas a smaller percentage uses the internet for other purposes. It is concerning that internet and these digital devices in Kosovo are not used enough for educational, scientific and academic needs, although they have great potential and their use for these purposes could bring many positive effects in the field of education and science in Kosovo.

In 2021, MESTI prepared the Strategy for Digitalization of Education in Kosovo 2021-2026 in order to put technology in function of improving teaching and learning and for the development of digital competence at younger generations. The strategy has defined four strategic objectives and a detailed action plan has been drafted for implementation of the projected activities.

26 https://stikk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/STIKK_IK_Report_Internet_Penetration_V3-final-1.pdf

27 https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5765/republic-of-kosovo-national-and-roma-ashkali-and-egyptian-communities-2019-20-mics-sfr_albanian.pdf

3.5. Situation analysis for strategy areas

This part of the document includes a description and analysis of existing situation regarding the five areas of the Education Strategy 2022-2026 (ES), i.e.:

- Area 1. Early childhood education.
- Area 2. Pre-university education.
- Area 3. Vocational education and training and adult education.
- Area 4. Higher education.
- Area 5. Digitalization of education.

An extended situation analysis for each priority area of Education Strategy 2022-2026 has been prepared in a separate document attached to this document. The extended version includes data on a large number of projects that have been implemented or are being implemented by various institutions, organizations and donors and that directly or indirectly are related to the support for various levels and areas of education in Kosovo.

3.5.1. Early childhood education

Early childhood education

Despite the fact that early childhood education strengthens the country's economy, and being aware that this stage is considered to be the basis that determines the success of students in further education, this level has been accompanied by many challenges in recent years. This is best evidenced with the difficulties faced by ECE in Kosovo, including: inadequate distribution of preschool institutions in the country, small number of public preschool institutions (only 49 nationwide), lack of sufficient infrastructure for inclusion of children, lack of human resources for provision of integrated welfare, healthcare and education services for overall development of children.

Children inclusion in preschool education, especially among age group 0-4 years, is very low and represents challenge at the national level. This challenge translates directly into a low level of women's participation in the labour market, because the responsibilities of caretaking, in absence of preschool institutions, falls overwhelmingly on women[28]. In this regard, Kosovo continues to be the country with the lowest rate of children participation in preschool education in the region. The gross rate of inclusion of children in preschool education 0<4 is 6.7%, whereas at the pre-primary level the situation is significantly better where the gross rate of enrolment of children is 88.1%. In general, 19.5%[29] of children are included in all forms of preschool education. For children 0-2 years old, inclusion still remains particularly low, with a total of 3.9% included. Whereas for children 3-4 years old, inclusion stands at 15%.[30]

Children under 5 years old in rural areas are involved in ECE three times less than their peers in urban areas, because these services in rural areas are almost non-existent. In urban areas, 25.5% of children

28 Kosovo Women Network, "Pandemia nuk njeh gjini", 2020, fq. 78

29 Education Statistics in Kosovo 2020-2021

30 A Situation Analysis of ECD Services in Kosovo, World Bank, 2021

are included in ECE programs, whereas in rural areas only 7.9% are included in ECE.[31] . One of the main reasons for such low level of inclusion is the inadequate distribution of ECE institutions in rural areas, an element related to social and economic factors, particularly mother employment, knowing that ECE services have to be paid.

Private PIs in general, and especially licensed ones, are considered as great opportunity to provide services for children aged 0-5. According to data from EMIS, 6983 children of this age benefit from services in private institutions[32]. It should be noted that there is a large data gap as the number of children attending unlicensed private preschool/pre-primary institutions remains unknown. A total of 177 private PIs are licensed as of June 2021.

Pre-primary programs in public schools have a duration of 2 to 2.5 hours per day, reaching a maximum of up to 12.5 hours per week, whereas in PIs the duration is up to 8 hours per day or up to 40 hours per week. These programs are implemented and based on the Core Curriculum for Level 1 and Early Childhood Learning and Development Standards. Primary schools that provide pre-primary education (grade 0) for children 5 years old are the biggest providers of such programs. In the school year 2020/21, 88.1% of children are included in pre-primary programs in all forms of ECE.

Pre-school education is regulated under relevant legislation since 2006. MESTI, during 2021-2022 has reviewed the legislation, and the Draft-Law on Early Childhood Education was approved at government level in June 2022. Also, MESTI is in the initial phase of developing the core curriculum for ECE, aiming its approval in 2023.

Considering that the ECE sector is closely related to the health and social welfare services, the integration and coordination of these sectors still remains a challenge.

Due to the pandemic situation in the country caused by COVID-19, with the closure of all educational institutions in Kosovo, the preschool and pre-primary education was also affected. Distance education has been organized for ECE by launching the first online platform "Distance Education – Care, Development and Early Childhood Education for 0–6-year-olds". Through this platform, all children aged 0-5 years, with the help of parents and educators, have been provided access to early education services, which could be easily implemented in home environment for children that are not attending PIs. Based on the data of UNICEF Kosovo, there are over 2.5 million clicks/visitors in this platform, and over 223.000 unique user profiles have been created. Over 1600 educators have been trained on the use of the platform. The platform provides over 1000 daily activities, updated and classified by age-groups (0-2, 3-5) in Albanian, Serbian, Turkish and Roma language.

31 Ibid

32 Education Statistics in Kosovo 2020-2021

3.5.2. Pre-university education

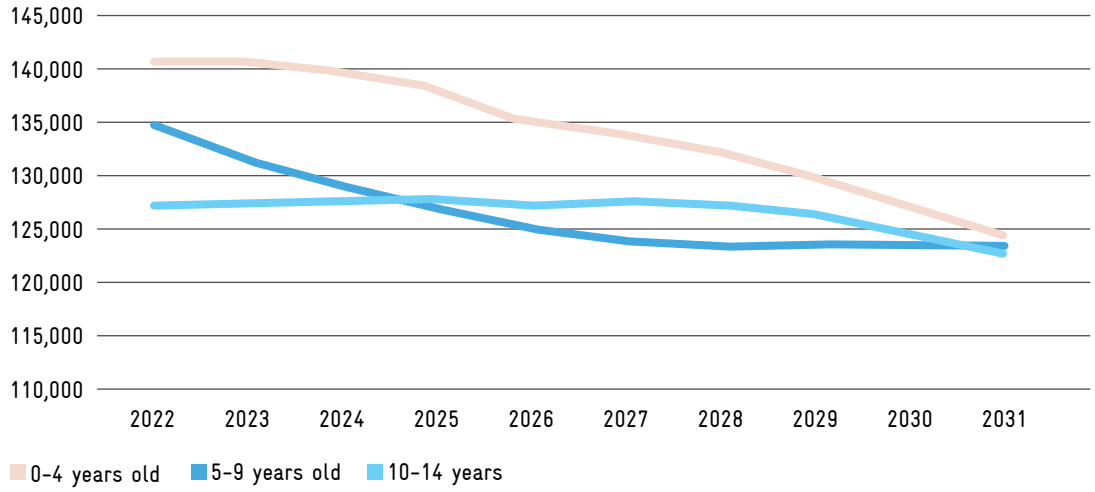
The situation analysis in the area of Pre-University Education (PUE) is based on the assessment reports on KESP 2017-2021, on the available research reports covering the topics of PUE and the analysis conducted within the two working groups for PUE. The analysis is focused on four thematic areas:

- Participation and inclusion in pre-university education.
- Management, quality assurance and accountability.
- Teachers.
- Implementation of competency-based curriculum.

Participation and inclusion in pre-university education

In general, the gross rate of inclusion of children/students compared to previous years has decreased at almost all levels of pre-university education. According to the statistical report 2020/21, compared to the previous year, the rate of inclusion of children in pre-primary education is 88.1%, with a decrease of 5% from the previous year, in secondary education 91.2%, with a decrease of 0.1% and in the upper secondary education 81.1%, with a decrease of 4.3%. In primary education alone, the inclusion rate is 101.2%, with an increase of 0.6% from the previous year.[33] In the last two decades a lot of work has been done, mainly building school facilities and renovating existing facilities. However, there are large differences in the number of students in rural and urban areas. Currently, about 60% of schools have less than 250 students and over 200 schools (satellite classrooms) work with less than 50 students or about 4 students per class.[34] Kosovo is also going through a stage of significant demographic change. Based on population projections, there is and will be a continuous decrease in the number of students at the primary and secondary level as seen in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Population projections for ages 0-4, 5-9 and 10-14 years (2022-2031) - medium variant



33 MESTI (2021) https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2021/12/raport-vjetor-statistikor-me-tregues-arsimore-2020-21.pdf

34 Kushtrim Bajrami: Evaluation of the implementation of the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 – Insufficient achievement (2021). http://kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Vleresimi-i-Realizimit-te-PSAK-2017-2021.pdf

These demographic changes result in the need for a significant rationalization of the school network and impose the need for planning review during the new strategic plan implementation period.

Communities such as Bosniaks, Turks, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians are integrated in the education system of Kosovo, so learning in Kosovo is conducted in four languages (Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian and Turkish). Data on the number of ethnic Serb students remain not reported regularly by Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. Children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities continue to face various challenges in terms of their access to education. Despite progress in increasing their inclusion at all levels of pre-university education, compared to the national average, this participation remains low. This difference is most noticeable in preschool education, where 7.6% of children in these communities receive services, compared to the general population percentage which is 15%, as well as in the upper secondary level where only 31% of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians pupils are included, compared to 86.8% amongst the total population.[35]

Learning Centres have been established in various municipalities in Kosovo where Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities live, in order to include the children of these communities in the education system. Initiatives for the establishment of learning centres by local and international non-governmental organizations take into account the low level of attendance and completion of education by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children, the unsatisfactory level of their performance in school and the lack of social inclusion. In 2018 was approved the AI 17/2018 on Establishment and Functioning of the Learning Centres, which helps children increase learning performance and prevent dropout.[36] Thanks to learning centres, the rate of enrolment in compulsory education increased while dropout was greatly reduced, although their funding is not sustainable.[37] MESTI, municipalities and development partners have taken measures to improve the inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the education system where, for the continuation of upper secondary education, during the period 2017 - 2021, 507 scholarships have been allocated to the students enrolled in upper secondary education.

The inclusion of students with disabilities remains a major challenge at the national level, who are considered to be very underrepresented within the education system, with approximately 2.1% of such students included in school, whereas they are estimated to be about 15% of the population. It is estimated that 38,000 children with disabilities in Kosovo do not attend school.[38] The latest data for the 2019/20 school year show that a total of 3,903 children with disabilities are included in regular classes and 349 in resource centres. Compared to the data from previous years, we notice an increase in the number of students in regular classes and a decrease in the number in the resource centres.[39]

35 MICS (KAS and UNICEF, 2020)

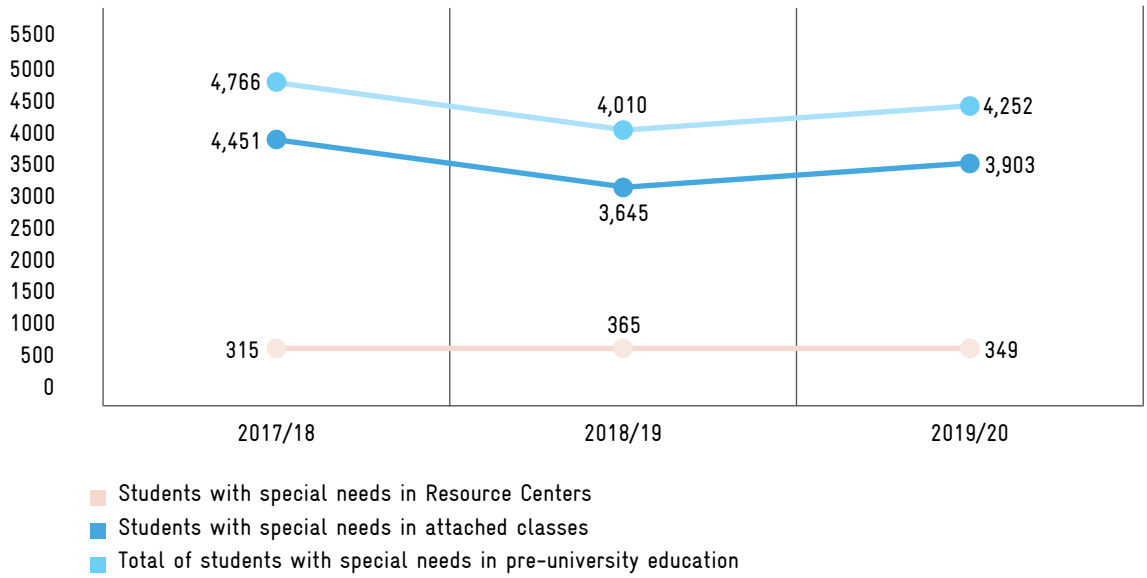
36 National Program for the Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (NPISAA) 2021-2025.

37 Ibid. .

38 EU Kosovo Report.

39 GIZ-MESTI – Assessment Report for 2019 on the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021.

Figure 7: Participation of children with special educational needs



Source: Evaluation of KESP 2017-2021

Lack of data is the main obstacle in addressing the needs of this category of children, as well as the lack of definition of the disability they have. Data collection becomes even more difficult because there is no harmonization of mechanisms and systems between ministries. Information collected at the school level that may be used in the future for funding purposes may not be reliable as it lacks relevant supporting documentation.[40] Although legal acts stipulate that every municipality should have Municipal Teams for assessing children with disabilities, often these children are identified only when they reach school age and try to enrol in school and the intervention is already too late to have a lasting impact on their development. Moreover, very often, existing practices do not lead to individualized plans that respond to each child›s impairment and environmental obstacles.

Another challenge faced by children and parents but also schools is the low number of support teachers and assistants who work with children with special educational needs. In addition, a package has been drafted, harmonization of pedagogical documentation for all resource centres has been implemented and the funding parameters for pupils with disabilities have been drafted. Therefore, for children with disabilities, challenges remain in the form of limited access to adequate education, health and rehabilitation services, and barrier-free access to public facilities and services.[41]

40 Hunt P.F.; Belegu-Caka V.: Situation analysis: Children with Disabilities in Kosovo, Prishtina: UNICEF, 2018. https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/216/file/KOS-SITAN-ENG.pdf

41 https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/1141/file/SITAN.pdf.

According to official data, school dropout is low and as a phenomenon is considered more present in the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. According to official data, school dropout has marked a slight decline and as a phenomenon is considered to be more present in the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community. According to the EMIS, in the school year 2020-2021, there were a total of 67 drop-out students from these communities (28 girls and 39 boys). However, data on school dropout remain quite incomplete, as reports of school dropouts remain incomplete. It is generally estimated that one of the main challenges in preventing school dropout is the lack of reporting made by schools to the EWS (Early Warning System). In order to reduce and control dropout, a two-year work plan of the National Team against dropout and a monitoring framework was drafted, while over 80 schools were supported in the implementation of legal obligations in 10 municipalities (Peja, Prishtina, Prizren, Fushë Kosova, Obiliq, Podujeva, Gjilan, Ferizaj, Mitrovica and Vushtrria).[42]

In order to identify and provide support to children with extraordinary intellectual potential and special talents, the AI 14/2019 on children/students with extraordinary abilities, special gifts and talents and the guide for its implementation were adopted.[43] However, the implementation of this AI remains a challenge due to the lack of capacities for students' identification and assessment and lack of specialized public institutions to support this area. Based on data from the ATOMI Institute, during 2017-2020, based on criteria and test results, 116 students with extraordinary intelligence, special gifts and talents were identified and supported.

In recent years, the migration and later return of large numbers of Kosovo citizens has posed challenges in integrating returned children into the education system. 240 repatriated students were included in the supplementary classes in 16 municipalities. To regulate the integration of returned children, MESTI has drafted AI No. 86/2020.[44] In cooperation with MIA and GIZ, special textbooks have been provided for repatriated students.

Regarding supplementary classes in diaspora, the data show that unification of the curriculum for teaching Albanian language and culture in diaspora has been completed and standards have been prepared for Diaspora teachers which will serve as a referring model for the registry of diaspora teachers. MESTI has prepared 3 textbooks and 19 workbooks for teaching and learning the Albanian language.

Management, quality assurance and accountability

The pre-university education management is shared between the central level (MESTI), local level (municipality - MED) and the ETI. The process of decentralization of responsibilities in education and the curricular reform have increased the opportunities for increasing responsibilities and the accountability degree in all education levels. However, these opportunities have not been used properly due to human capacities and frequent changes in the staff of PUE in MESTI and the functioning structure of municipalities - MED.

Despite the legal regulation, the ETI director's recruitment process is still followed by a lot of challenges, due to influence of municipal government, political influence and lack of development of educational policies for career school directors. This has made the ETI leadership to focus on performing administrative tasks and less on leading the teaching and learning processes that are conducted in school. On the

42 GIZ-MESTI – Assessment Report for 2019 on the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021.

43 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2019/09/udhzimi-administrativ-me-nr-14-2019-per-fnxajdht-rotated.pdf

44 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/10/udhzimi-administrativ-me-nr-86-2020-per-sistemimin-e-nxensve-ne-shkolla-te-cilete-jane-kthyer-pas-migrimi-dhe-u-mungojn-dokumetacioni-perkates-arsimor-rotated.pdf

other hand, the beginning of the new educational policy for the evaluation of the school management's performance has not been adequately accompanied by capacity for standardized evaluations.

In most schools, as part of middle management, there are professional departments organized by subject areas or classes, however, in many cases, their operation is relatively informal and with no major impact on the quality of school teaching. This is particularly affected by the fact that working hours for leading this mechanism are not included in the teachers working hours (quota) and no compensation is provided for department leaders.

Despite the fact that expenditures have been continuously increased in recent years, Kosovo stills remain on the list of countries with low costs per student. The two categories where spending is concentrated are mainly on wages and salaries and capital expenditures and as a result there is a lack of investment for projects related to quality in education and implementation of curricular reform.

Although the legislative framework provides school autonomy regarding financial management, schools still do not have a budget code nor are they able to manage budget. Municipalities manage, through MEDs, budget codes, forcing schools to provide budget requests in the municipality even for minor repairs. In such a situation, MEDs often serve as procurement centres for the schools' network under their supervision, thus diverting attention from strategic issues of the education sector at the local level, such as policy planning and monitoring.

The legal framework for quality assurance in educational institutions is mostly completed. However, failure to complete the staff of pedagogical inspectors, as provided by the Law on Education Inspectorate, failure to appoint a quality coordinator in MESTI, formal appointment of quality coordinators in MEDs and ETIs, without fully understanding the coordinator's role and responsibilities, has made inoperable the quality assurance system in PUE. This has led to the stagnation of ETI (internal and external) performance assessment and development planning, and them becoming processes that are characterized by formalism and without clear correlation between them and without impact on ETI performance, i.e., students' achievement.

Based on the educational policy framework, two national assessments are organized and administered each year, the Achievement Test and the State Matura Exam. The parties' trust in the results of these national tests has marked a significant progress. In addition to measures for better administration of national assessments, changes have been made in the structure and content of tests. The training of the DQASEL (Division for Quality Assurance, Standards, Evaluation and Licensing) staff and their collaborators on the principles of statistical analysis and reporting with special emphasis on calibration of questions was also conducted. However, the main challenge is administering the tests and preventing the cheating that occurs in schools during the testing process and administration. The lack of a Centre for Assessment and Standards has resulted in insufficient capacity and challenges in the smooth running of sound national assessment processes and the analysis of results from national and international assessments.

Data provision and management for PUE has made significant progress. The indicators framework is now made according to the UNESCO, EUROSTAT and OECD requirements and a guide has been drafted for the calculation of indicators of public expenditure for pre-university education in Kosovo. The EMIS covers important activities in schools, but there are challenges in collecting reliable data on pupils with special educational needs, children out of school and who dropped out the education system and limited data on teacher activity, especially in relation to the professional development.

Teachers

Despite efforts, pre-service teacher training continues to be greatly challenged by the qualities of admission/enrolment in teaching profession, capacities of faculties that prepare teachers in approximation of programs and institutional practices leading to the development of the required professionalism of teachers and current approaches to quality assurance of teacher preparation. Professional gender stereotypes and lower salaries seems to limit men's readiness to attend studies in the Faculty of Education in the Pre-University Department. Cultural perceptions of predominantly male and female roles (e.g., men as professors, and women as caregivers) are strengthened generation after generation, confirmed by a lack of male models in early education and female teachers in upper secondary education[45]. Preparation of future teachers in the Faculty of Education is expected to take on a new dimension with the development of the document *Policy on improvement and quality assurance in teacher preparation in Kosovo.* [46]

Despite legal regulation, the current level of licensing system implementation does not enable professional advancement, does not ensure the connection of licensing with the teacher payment system and does not provide grading of teachers in the career system. The TPD component continues to be challenged in coordinating and taking the lead at all three levels of PUE management, as well as in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of TPD programs, etc. On the other hand, teacher performance assessment (TPA), as a component of the teacher licensing system, has failed to be implemented in the intended dynamics and perform the intended function, including the function of teacher grading as well as the categorization of teachers' promotion. According to reports, up to March 2020, only 755 teachers have been assessed.

Based on the reported data on teacher involvement in training, the rate of teacher involvement in PD has continuously decreased in recent years, due to lack of funding, but also due to non-implementation of the teacher licensing system. The rate of involvement of teachers in professional development in 2019 was 24.70% of the total number of teachers. This rate is significantly lower than in 2015 (54%). MESTI has invested in software for the teacher licensing system, but the system is not regularly maintained and the database population is not updated in relation to the TPD.

Implementation of competency-based curriculum

The curricular reform in the PUE in Kosovo is competency based, approximately in line with the recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council on Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning. The subject curriculum development cycle is completed in August 2021, starting with curriculum implementation in 5th grade. It is worth mentioning that in the framework of the curricula development, the unification of the curriculum for teaching and learning the Albanian language and culture in diaspora has been completed, and the standards for the teachers in diaspora have been prepared.

The curriculum implementation process was accompanied by teacher training for curriculum implementation, a process led by MESTI in cooperation with MEDs. According to reports from the MESTI's Division on TPD, the number of teachers involved in trainings on new curriculum implementation in the period 2016-2020 is over 24,000. Other forms of teacher support for curriculum implementation have started in some municipalities by establishing professional support teams for teachers, which are not sustainable due to lack of legal regulation.

45 Kosovo Women Network,

46 Faculty of Education (2021) https://edukimi.uni-pr.edu/desk/inc/media/84FF287A-D6AB-4ACC-85CF-11F278D41156.pdf

Referring to the reports related to the curriculum implementation, some of main challenges identified in the implementation of curricular reform are: fragmented and incoherent approach to the implementation of elements of curricular reform, failure to consolidate mechanisms of supervision, support and accountability in the process of curricula implementation, insufficient orientation and support to teachers and schools in planning and implementation of learning processes based on the Curriculum Framework principles and assessment of students based on competencies, insufficient use of school autonomy for the curriculum implementation in accordance with specific conditions and needs of students etc.

The curriculum implementation process has also been accompanied by institutional commitments on new textbooks provision. New textbooks have been drafted and approved, but not with the dynamics of extending the implementation of the curriculum nationwide. The quality of textbooks remains a challenge in itself. Although new texts have been developed late, they are described as having many problems and shortcomings of various natures, in approach, in purpose, in form and in content. Despite its efforts, CECT, as an internal mechanism of MESTI, despite its efforts, has not managed to supervise and support the process of drafting/rewriting textbooks according to the scope of curriculum implementation. On the other hand, the lack of textbook officials in MESTI has resulted in lack of coordination and delays in preparation of textbooks according to the dynamics defined by the Roadmap on Curriculum Implementation 2016-2021. The selection procedure and the work of the reviewers remain a challenge, along with the lack of responsibility and accountability for the quality of textbooks. On the other hand, in previous textbooks, in addition to other quality problems, there were significant problems with gender stereotypes and in addition to comprehensive curriculum documents and textbook standards where gender equality is a general standard, the Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) in cooperation with the Curriculum Division and Gender Equality Office (GEO) in MESTI (with funding from the Swedish Government), has drafted the Manual for the Prevention of Gender Stereotypes in textbooks.[47] In this regard, new textbooks do not contains stereotypes but are dominated by male authors, whereas female experts of different fields are rarely consulted.[48] .

47 https://abgj.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/ALB-Manual%20SteriotipetGjinore-ALB(1).pdf

48 https://abgj.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/Programi%20i%20Kosov%C3%ABs%20p%C3%ABr%20Barazi%20Gjinore%202020-2024%20-%20SHQIP%20-%20FINAL.pdf

3.5.3 Vocational education training and adult education

In the area of vocational education, training and adult education, the situation analysis addresses three thematic areas of interest for this sector of education:

- Governance and quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training (VET).
- Linking vocational education and training with the labour market.
- Adult education.

Governance and quality assurance in VET

Young people's interest in vocational education and training schools has increased in recent years and the level of students' orientation in vocational high schools and gymnasiums is balanced. Statistics from 2020/21 show that 53% of students in upper secondary education attend vocational education and training schools. Disaggregated by gender, the data show that compared to girls, boys are more likely to enrol in vocational education and training schools. About 42.3% of students in vocational education are girls. The gender analysis of the orientation in vocational education shows the tendency of the orientation of girls in the profiles of health and well-being, business, administration and justice. Boys tend to orient themselves in the profiles of engineering, manufacturing and construction, information technology and communication. The rate of orientation of girls in technical profiles (area of engineering, manufacturing and construction) is 22.5%.

Table 2. Enrolment in secondary vocational education by ISCED-F field and gender

ISCED-F fields	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls
Human sciences and arts	1,323	832	1,558	1,024	1,448	1,023	1,568	1,067	1,546	1,059
Business, administration & justice/law	13,550	6,346	13,817	6,609	12,381	5,762	10,920	5,023	10,005	4,616
ICT	5,460	1,729	5,299	1,602	4,772	1,388	4,148	1,132	3,857	929
Engineering, manufacturing & construction	15,342	3,595	15,288	3,578	14,534	3,391	13,179	2,960	12,389	2,638
Agriculture, forestry, fishery and veterinary	1,301	404	1,824	656	1,541	536	1,333	442	1,227	466
Health and Welfare	7,152	4,822	7,591	5,161	8,022	5,495	8,839	6,123	8,912	6,330
Services	1,258	363	1,306	338	1,087	319	830	212	842	256
Other	0	0	83	24	18	2	0	0	72	33
Total	**45,386**	**18,091**	**46,766**	**18,992**	**43,803**	**17,916**	**40,817**	**16,959**	**38,850**	**16,327**

Source: EMIS/MESTI

Despite recent data showing an increase in enrolment in vocational education and training schools and positioning Kosovo close to the average of developed EU countries, vocational schools continue to generally remain as a second choice, especially for students who could not enrol in gymnasiums. Enrolment in vocational schools does not have any specific criteria for admission and this has an impact in attracting low-achieving students or students who cannot enrol in gymnasiums.

Public educational institutions of vocational education and training, except Centres of Competence, are under the direct supervision of municipalities which exercise this role through municipal education directorates. The central government is responsible for making education policies, funding and inspection. Within this system, educational institutions have very little managerial and financial autonomy.

The authority of municipalities, which are in charge of managing gymnasiums and vocational schools, has made it very difficult for students to move from one municipality to another. This has led some small municipalities to establish gymnasiums or certain professional education profiles even if they don't have infrastructural and professional conditions to do so. In addition, municipalities are not flexible in changing the profiles in vocational schools, to address inter alia the problem of surplus teaching staff. On the other hand, the capacities of the municipal education directorates to supervise the educational institutions are more than limited and the MEDs do not have any organizational structure in accordance with their function. Moreover, the line of authority from the municipal education directorates to the MESTI is missing.

AVETAE manages six VETI (Centres of Competence), although the legal framework and the budget needed are not adopted to enable AVETAE to manage all vocational schools while its capacity to fulfil this function remains a challenge. On the other hand, the capacities of the National Qualifications Authority are limited to respond to the dynamics needed for the validation and accreditation of new qualifications and for the approval of occupational standards.

At the vocational school level, apart from limited managerial and financial autonomy, no organizational structure is defined. Consequently, the mechanisms for quality assurance, career guidance, cooperation with businesses and school-based TPD differ between schools.

In terms of VET financing, the current financing level does not meet the needs of vocational schools. VET funding has not increased significantly in recent years, whereas the current funding formula is generalized and counted per student and not with any differentiation of expenditures according to the profile specific needs. Budget execution is largely carried out by municipalities, including the management of procurement and payments. This causes many practical problems for schools, especially when faced with emergency needs, and burdens education officials in the municipality with meeting the daily needs of educational institutions, ranging from minor repairs to larger investments. The situation is the same with the schools which are under the AVETAE authority. Although there is a regulation on the planning and spending of own source revenues realized by the institutions of vocational education and training and adult education, in practical terms they face difficulties in managing own source revenues. Recently, MESTI has started work on preparing a formula for financing vocational education and training.

The legal framework on VET turns out to be complex, fragmented and deficient in addressing some issues, leading to a fragmented approach between the institutions responsible for external QA processes in the VET system and enabling a systematic and comprehensive approach. In this context, while the National Qualifications Framework recognizes a broader QA system in VET (including the role of the Education Inspectorate for VETI external evaluation), the bylaws governing QA processes in general education do not cover vocational schools, limiting the responsibility for external quality assurance in vocational schools only in the NQA. The authority for the validation of curricula between MESTI and NQA is not clear, whereas the link between the right to provide VET and accreditation is not regulated for public VET institutions. Mechanisms for QA at the system level are not defined. As a result, there is a lack of systematic monitoring of the VET system and regular reporting on quality and development of VET at the system level, which would inform and facilitate the drafting and planning of strategic VET policies at the country level. Procedures for regular collection of feedback from VET providers, as a basis for the continuous development of the National Quality Assurance Framework, are not defined.

Internal quality assurance mechanisms have not yet been fully consolidated and self-assessment processes are largely conducted formally (just to fulfil an obligation) but without significant impact on quality improvement. In this way, the interest of vocational schools in conducting internal evaluation of the school has decreased. On the other hand, the opportunities for continuous professional development of Quality Assurance Coordinators are limited, while the available guidelines for internal quality assurance processes do not sufficiently address the needs of schools for adequate implementation of the quality cycle. In this context, quality management at the level of vocational schools and at the level of the system is not functional and efficient in monitoring quality, identifying intervention priorities for quality improvement and implementing them.

Linking vocational education and training with the labour market

Secondary vocational education is supposed to train and prepare students in many different professions and crafts to enter the labour market upon completion of secondary vocational education. But many estimates show that vocational high schools in Kosovo do not satisfactorily meet this goal. In general, the condition and quality of these schools is not at the right level, because these schools face many challenges, such as lack of proper cooperation with businesses, insufficient adaptation to the labour market, insufficient infrastructure and equipment, lack of laboratories and workshops, lack of practical teaching and learning and on-the-job training, lack of teaching materials and lack of career guidance and counselling services in the preliminary school cycle.

Currently, a significant number of qualifications offered in vocational schools are not based on labour market needs, the occupational standards are missing for many profiles, curriculum for general subjects is not updated and decisions to open certain profiles are made without any proper analysis of labour market needs. The new curricula approval and implementation commencement was pushed with the idea to initially finalize and approve the Core Curriculum for VET, intensify the process of drafting occupational standards and on that basis unify the approach and structure of curricula designed for professional profiles, as well as to ensure the interconnection with the labour market needs.

Labour market research is not supported by the labour market information system which does not provide data that is updated and relevant to the labour market (i.e., employers) needs and requirements. On the other hand, there is a lack of a standardized methodology for labour market research and forecasting the labour market needs.

Career counselling and guidance remains a challenge and the services provided are still limited to some municipalities. In some municipalities there are career counselling and guidance centres at the municipal level or career counselling and guidance offices are located within schools. In recent years, several training programs have been implemented for vocational school teachers for career counselling and cooperation with employers, as well as investments in career centres in several vocational schools. However, not enough progress has been made in appointing counsellors for career guidance and orientation.

Teaching is mainly theoretical whereas opportunities for teachers' professional development in improving pedagogical skills and conducting practical teaching and learning are limited. Even the path of professional preparation of (pre-service) teachers for VET is not clear.

Another VET challenge remains in conducting practical teaching and learning (at school and in workplace). Workshops for many profiles are missing, even if they exist, they cannot be fully utilized due to outdated (or lack of) equipment, lack of raw material (consumables) needed for practical training and insufficient preparation of instructors for conducting practical teaching and learning. On the other hand, dual education piloting has not started yet. The challenges in delivering work-based learning are different, both on the part of schools and employers. Despite the willingness of employers to admit students for work-based learning, they generally do not have capacity to accommodate a large number of students. Most Kosovar enterprises are micro and small and have vision for short-term development. Moreover, even in cases where students conduct work-based learning at an employer, it is rarely is done with proper planning based on curriculum requirements. Other challenges that hinder the conducting of work-based learning are lack of long-term development plans in most enterprises, lack of coordinators in schools who would serve as facilitators between schools and employers.

In 2020, MESTI has approved the AI 137/2020 work-based learning in vocational education and training institutions[49], which regulates the way of organizing, conducting and evaluating students during the conduction of work-based learning. The regulation 135/2020 on the protection and preservation of students' health during practical training at school and in the workplace has been approved . However, there is still no instrument for stimulating enterprises to cooperate with schools in conducting work-based learning.

MEST has approved the AI 136/2020 on establishing an incentive structure to support the education of students in deficient profiles and for girls/women in technical profiles in vocational education and training institutions. In this regard, scholarships are allocated for girls attending vocational schools in the profiles of food technology and agribusiness and for girls who enrol in technical courses in vocational schools.

The legal framework for tracking graduates from the VET system at the national level is missing and consequently the data on employment of graduates and the compliance of their skills with the labour market demands are missing.

49 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/12/udhzimi-administrative-me-nr-137-2020-te-mesurit-ne-vendin-e-punese-ne-iaap.pdf

Adult education

Lifelong learning as an approach, special competence and basic principle for reforming and reorganizing the education system has not yet found proper implementation. Provisions on adult education tend to focus only on formal compensatory accelerated education, not regulating other modalities of adult education that may be provided by vocational schools (e. g. short-term courses based on RPL or based on specific requirements of interested candidates). The close connection of AE with formal education does not reflect the international meaning of lifelong learning that goes beyond the economic or employment perspective and includes aspects of personal, civic and social learning. Furthermore, there is still no specification/regulation of which profiles are eligible to be provided as formal programs for AE.

Opportunities for progress and mobility within the education system for lifelong learning and adult education and opportunities/offers for qualification, upgrading qualification and re-qualification are limited. Despite some positive developments during the last period in terms of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) regulation, so far only 4 institutions have been accredited for RPL by the NQA. Limited capacities prevent vocational schools from developing/providing new profiles for AE, whereas insufficient NQA capacities for the validation and accreditation process (including verification and approval of occupational standards) are an obstacle to respond quickly to dynamic changes occurring in the labour market.

Regarding the professional development of AE teachers, AE teacher training programs offer is insufficient. In addition, teachers' opportunity to participate in various mobility programs and learn from good practices in other countries is very small, because VETIs are to a very small extent part of projects that support mobility. Another challenge is the lack of an occupational standard and a proper curriculum for the AE staff qualification.

Data collection for adult education and lifelong learning still remains one of the main challenges as the capacity to collect and process developments in the non-formal sector is limited. The labour market barometer provides data only on the number of persons attending formal adult education in VET schools in Kosovo, but not of other VET institutions. There is also a lack of data on the tracking of persons who have completed AE programs.

Regarding public funding for AE, a separate budget line for AE is missing; in VET public schools the funds are distributed as part of the overall VET budget. In general, the planning and implementation of AE promotion measures is hampered by financial constraints and depends on continuous donor funding.

3.5.4. Higher education

Regarding higher education, the situation analysis is focused on three comprehensive topics:

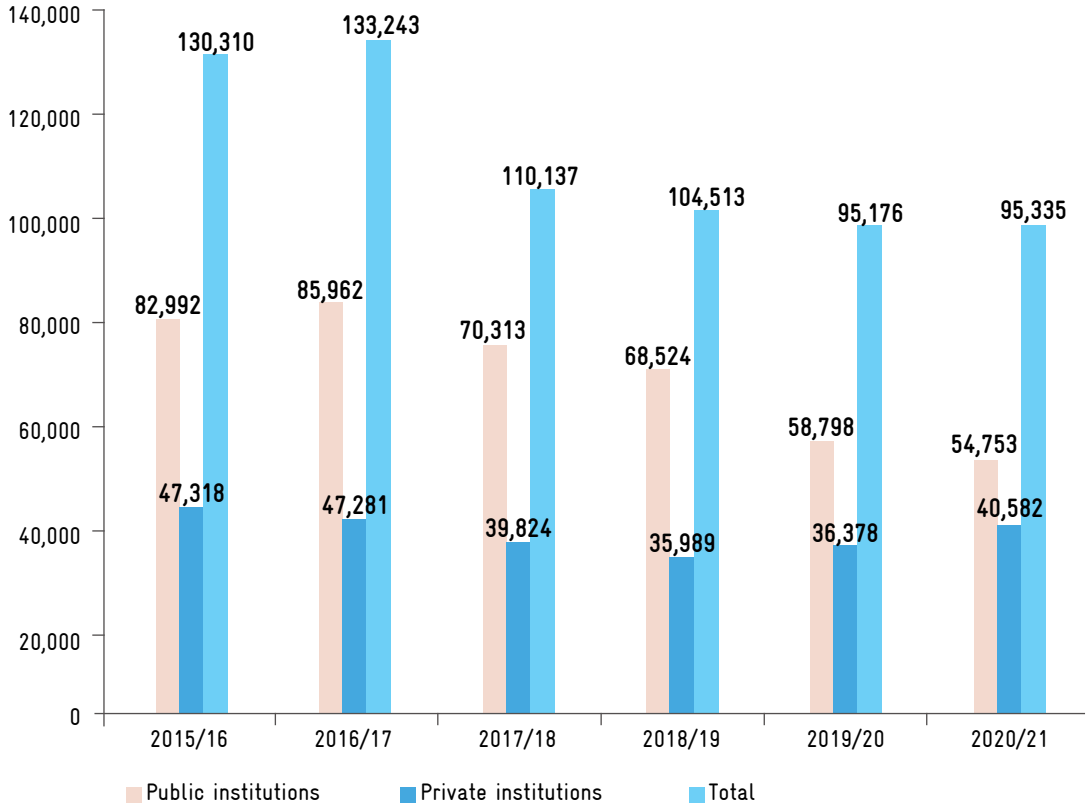
- Quality assurance in higher education.
- Innovation, interconnection with the labour market and internationalization.
- Governance, funding, integrity and transparency.

Quality assurance in higher education

In the academic year 2020/21, the higher education system in Kosovo consists of 24 accredited higher education institutions, of which 9 public institutions and 15 private institutions. To this number should be added the University of North Mitrovica, which offers programs in Serbian language, but continues to operate within the Serbian education system. With this number of higher education institutions, Kosovo continues to be one of the countries with the largest number of higher education institutions per 1 million inhabitants. Accredited higher education institutions in Kosovo, in the academic year 2020/2021, offer 400 study programs of which 236 study programs are of bachelor level, 156 study programs are of master level and 8 study programs of PhD level.

In recent years, the number of students in higher education is declining and this decline is greater in public higher education institutions in Kosovo. In the academic year 2020/21, 95,335 students (57.4% in the public sector, 42.6% in the private sector) attended studies in accredited higher education institutions in Kosovo, of which 58.5% are women/girls. Based on the latest 2020/21 data, about gross 56.3% of students in the 18-22 age group attend higher education in Kosovo. Women participation in higher education is at a satisfactory level. Women/girls make up 59.5% of students in the public sector and 57.1% of students in the private sector. The gender parity index in higher education in Kosovo is 1.41.

Figure 8. Studentët në institucionet e arsimit të lartë në gjashtë vitet e fundit



Source: Education Statistics 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/2020, MESTI

During 2019/20, about 13,792 students graduated at the bachelor and master level in various study programs in the public and private sector. The private sector contributes with 44.2% of graduates. The data show that women/girls respond better to their obligations than men/boys, where 66.2% of graduates in the academic year 2019/20 are women/girls. The rate of timely graduation of Kosovar students is not satisfactory.

According to data in 2020/21, in public higher education institutions in Kosovo, in full-time employment are 1,369 members of the academic staff and 722 external associates, while in private higher education institutions, in full-time employment are 1,906 members of the academic staff and 701 external associates. The professor-student ratio in public institutions is 1:42, with University of Peja being in a more difficult situation. The professor-student ratio in public institutions, despite the improvement, continues to be high compared to universities in the regional countries. This ratio improves to some extent when considering the academic staff engaged on a part-time basis, although one should not overlook the fact that a good share of them may be the same people, who work simultaneously in several higher education institutions. Insufficient number of qualified academic staff directly affects the quality of higher education. In this regard, another risk posed by the insufficient number of qualified academic staff are the large groups of students, where teachers fail to pay due attention to the individual needs of students, while the knowledge assessment process may be conducted superficially.

The quality assurance system in Kosovo is characterized by the same specifics as European countries that have been through transition process, such as the uncontrolled growth of higher education institutions, the lack of internal quality assurance mechanisms and unclear policies for the development of academic and scientific staff.

In Kosovo, the accreditation process is applied based on the quality assurance approach or meeting the minimum quality criteria set out in the domestic legislation. The accreditation process is a legally binding process and higher education institutions have legal consequences if they fail to obtain accreditation. Although the accreditation process has had a significant impact on quality improvement in higher education institutions, the quality assurance system has not matured yet enough to implement a system based on a quality enhancement approach or quality culture as it happens in the developed countries of Europe. In general, higher education institutions still do not understand internal quality assurance as a regular process of their institution which should serve them as a guide for decision making and strategic planning, but they understand it more as an instrument of decision making for accreditation.

Apart from the accreditation process which is followed by many challenges, in Kosovo, the monitoring system is not applied as a continuous quality assurance process which controls whether the institution continues to maintain the quality standards with which it was initially accredited. Due to lack of human resources, the KAA fails to ensure whether the specific recommendations or requirements of accreditation experts are addressed by higher education institutions to ensure that the quality criteria and accreditation conditions are consistently maintained by them. The licensing process as a control and monitoring mechanism for higher education institutions is considered as a technical process and without any substantive evaluation. The mechanism of the process of accreditation, monitoring, development, inspection and the licensing process in the long run should be seen as an interrelated process and should be harmonized with each other in the context of deadlines, review of applications, monitoring and decision making.

The internal quality assurance system continues to be one of the weak points of higher education institutions in Kosovo, which is also reflected in the quality of teaching. Higher education institutions do not have fully operational quality assurance offices, they are challenged with limited capacity of staff dealing with quality assurance aspects, self-assessment processes are mainly conducted only for purposes of accreditation and not for institution internal improvement, whereas quality assurance instruments, in most cases, are limited only to the evaluation of the academic staff by the students. Moreover, these institutions lack academic staff, research and scientific capacities, financial autonomy, as well as internationalization and exchange of students and academic staff.

KAA has reviewed the accreditation standards, a process which was conducted in response to the demands and needs for changing higher education institutions but also the system as a whole. Now, the accreditation standards aim to consolidate the internal quality system of higher education institutions as well as to support higher education institutions in quality enhancement and continuous development of their operations.[50] KAA has made operational the electronic platform «E-Accreditation», through which many processes related to the evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions, such as declaration of academic staff hired in institutions, are carried out electronically. Exclusion of KAA from the two key assurance mechanisms in Europe, ENQA and EQAR, has caused irreparable

50 Strategic Plan of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency 2021-2024.

consequences for the higher education system. Political interventions in the past into independent quality assurance institutions testify about the fragility of the higher education system in Kosovo.

From many surveys with students, it turns out that many professors still use classical lecturing techniques without any interactive student involvement. In addition to the obvious shortcomings in teaching, students› involvement in practical work is superficial with no significant incentive for critical and creative thinking. The large number of students within classes and groups disables an effective teaching process, does not foster critical and creative skills and does not increase interactivity with students.

Currently, only the University of Prishtina and the University of Gjakova have established and made operational the Center for Teaching Excellence, which have development strategies. None of other public higher education institutions in Kosovo have established/operationalized such offices to provide academic staff with academic development services, namely various training programs related to new teaching methodologies and research. In most cases, academic staff development is a purely voluntary process of individuals rather than an institutional approach which is implemented on the basis of a plan consistently published and applied. Other activities related to the assessment of needs of academic staff for professional development, drafting of plans for the professional development of the academic staff and the development of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the work of the academic staff are formally carried out in higher education institutions in Kosovo, but still remain at a limited level of implementation.

Despite the fact that scientific research is an important aspect of higher education development, it is still not sufficiently integrated in the activities of higher education institutions. Teaching is the main activity of the academic staff, while the research work is conducted on ad-hoc basis, without any scientific research discussion platform.

The main challenges for scientific research in Kosovo are related to human resources, infrastructure and non-functional equipment. Higher education institutions face lack of space, laboratory equipment and instruments. The lack of adequate infrastructure for research work presents a challenge and shortcoming for participation in the program «Horizon 2020», since the construction of cooperation consortia takes into account the conditions for research work in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions have no adequate research strategies and limited funding and capacity in order to be involved into international cooperation projects.

In accordance with the current opportunities for scientific research work, there are publications in many journals and symposia of local and international character. In recent years, as a result of individual and team engagement of researchers, a considerable number of scientific publications in international journals have been identified. According to World Bank data on the number of scientific publications (2018), the number of scientific publications from Kosovo in international indexed journals has gradually increased since 2009.[51] The number of scientific/technical publications in international indexed journals has doubled compared with 2015. However, in many cases, they remain on the margins of publications at will and mainly for obtaining academic titles, but not as part of the academic culture to research and generate new knowledge that helps the development of the country or institutions in particular.

51 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IP.JRN.ARTC.SC?end=2018&locations=XK&start=2000&view=chart

Innovation, interconnection with the labour market and internationalization

The provision of study programs that do not reflect the real needs of the labour market remains a structural shortcoming of higher education. At the same time, these programs lack interdisciplinarity, the part of practical learning, as well as the linkage with scientific research. About 60% of the study programs offered are in the fields of education, arts and human sciences, social sciences and services. The largest number of students and educational programs are in the category of social sciences and law studies. Student orientation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics remains low. A noticeable difference is noticed in orientation in certain fields of study in higher education by gender. Girls tend to be oriented (over 90%) to programs in education, natural sciences, social sciences, medicine, communication and linguistics. Boys dominate in the fields of computer science, humanities, geography/geology and engineering/technology. A balanced gender orientation is observed in the fields of architecture, business and justice. The degree of student orientation in the fields of study in social sciences, humanities, business and law is very high compared to market dynamics.

Industrial advisory boards exist in almost all academic units of public higher education institutions. Based on accreditation assessment reports, experts have noted that in most cases boards are formally established, their meetings are irregular, and that there is no systematic communication between universities and employers. In addition, there is no cooperation in terms of involving relevant stakeholders in other strategic planning and decision-making processes of higher education institutions in Kosovo. For example, there are no cases when subject-matter or occupational experts participate in the process of drafting strategic plans, study programs, or other professional commissions of higher education institutions which would enable the university to better respond to the local and domestic needs of the labour market.

Student's internship remains an undeveloped aspect. Study programs do not formally envisage internships for students as part of the curriculum and engagement in internships is done individually by students and not in a way controlled by the institution. In addition to specific study programs where internships are unavoidable, in most other study programs, higher education institutions do not provide internships. Moreover, student career guidance and counselling services remain quite limited.

Kosovo participates in academic mobility schemes such as: CEEPUS, Erasmus + and benefits from various forms of bilateral and multilateral support in higher education. Mobility opportunities for staff and students are numerous, although insufficient knowledge of English by staff and students limits the opportunities to use these schemes. In the Erasmus + program, Kosovo participates in the actions of «Key 1 - Exchanges and joint degree programs» and in the actions «Key 2 - in the action for capacity building in higher education» and in the period 2015-2019, 2,763 members of academic staff and students from Kosovo have received mobility scholarships, while Kosovo has hosted 1,414 mobilities.[52] Since 2008, Kosovo participates in the Central European Exchange Program for University Studies (CEEPUS), which supports the cooperation partnership between the universities of Central and Southern Europe and promotes inter-university cooperation through the exchange of academic staff, researchers and students. 220 student mobilities and 196 academic staff mobilities have been implemented through the CEEPUS program.

Kosovo participates with a small number of projects in the EU program for financing research and innovation «Horizon 2020». In the period 2014-2021, there are 113 applications from Kosovo, of which 104 were eligible applications. Compared to other Western Balkan countries, Kosovo›s

52 http://erasmuspluskosovo.org/en/erasmus/projects/

participation in this program remains quite low. Insufficient capacities for scientific research and international networking are the factors that affect the low level of participation. Kosovo has the lowest applications in the region (113), as well as the lowest supported applications (19). During the analysis of the required contributions by type of organization, it is noticed that the applications from Kosovo are mainly from NGOs, small and medium enterprises, or from individuals/groups of researchers. To date, only the University of Prishtina and the University of Prizren have won a grant under the Horizon 2020 program.

Higher education institutions in Kosovo have, traditionally, various bilateral agreements with university partners throughout Europe. Bilateral agreements are the first step towards joining efforts to apply for state, European or other funds. For example, the University of Prishtina has almost 400 such bilateral agreements with higher education institutions and institutes in Europe and the USA. However, most bilateral agreements remain a manifestation of goodwill of cooperation, but not accompanied by a budget for implementation.

Governance, funding, integrity and transparency

The process of reviewing the Law on Higher Education has been prolonged over the years and this has greatly influenced the dynamics of drafting other legal acts at the level of higher education institutions. The Law on Scientific Innovation, Transfer of Knowledge and Technology was adopted in November 2018, while the draft law on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency is in the final stage of approval. Moreover, MESTI has initiated the procedures for the establishment of the National Science Council, which will be responsible for the preparation of the National Science Program.

The Law on Regulated Professions, despite the identified shortcomings and the approval of some related bylaws, has not yet started to be implemented. The State Council for Regulated Professions is in the process of defining regulated professions. The small number of staff and limited capacities remain among the main challenges of the Division for Regulated Professions within the MESTI.

Small number of staff, lack of full digitalization of services, diplomas obtained in foreign countries which for various reasons remain in the process or cannot be recognized, diplomas obtained in Kosovo which for various reasons cannot be validated, are just some of the problems that hinder the efficient functioning of the National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC), which provides information on procedures for recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications as well as information on the system of pre-university and higher education and qualifications in Kosovo at the request of other states. Lack of human capacity makes it difficult for NARIC to provide information and timely processing of requests, due to the large volume of cases.

In the period 2015-2017 was developed the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), which makes it possible to follow the trends of enrolment in higher education institutions. However, HEMIS lacks on-going technical support to address barriers to data entry and does not make it possible to generate the data needed to analyse the situation in this sector and to have informed decision-making.

Most higher education institutions have formally established procedures and mechanisms for implementing ethics principles in the teaching and research process. However, the existence of these bodies is not known to the entire academic community, the ethics committees are not all functional, and the application of Code of Ethics procedures is not done in a transparent and public manner.[53] There are various reports from civil society regarding doubts about the authenticity of the scientific work of the academic staff.

Kosovo has not yet developed a methodology for financing higher education institutions that promotes effectiveness and accountability, despite the fact that the legal framework for higher education sets out the development of effective performance-based funding mechanisms. Funding of higher education institutions is not done on the basis of a performance plan which would enable the monitoring of their work and would encourage the building of a culture of responsibility and accountability.

The University of Prishtina continues to be in a special budget category while other public universities are like financial sub-programs of higher education of MESTI. The budgets of these universities are prepared on a historical basis where the amount initially allocated is used as a starting point. Moreover, the adequate costing of the respective sub-programs was not possible to be done so far due to the lack of agreement on how to structure the branches and faculties of the universities, and how to limit the total number of students in these universities (required due to limited financial resources that are allocated to higher education). Universities lack the basic data needed to develop a system based on their funding formula. This is one of the main obstacles to implementing formula-based funding and decentralizing budget execution.

53 ASAK (2021). Platform for Education Recovery in Kosovo.

3.5.5. Digitalization of education

Digitalization of education is a multidimensional process of systematic adoption of digital technology for the purpose of advancing education. In the Kosovar context, digitalization means significant investments in infrastructure, as well as in the creation of digital services and digital materials. Attention should be paid also to the development of the digital competence to all categories of users of digital technology, including: children/pupils/students, teachers, education administrators, parents, etc. Regarding digitalisation, the situation analyses if focused on five inclusive topics:

Digital data and services

Although in Kosovo work has been done towards the digitalization of data and services in the field of education, especially in higher education, there is still much work to be done on the complete digitization of data and their integration into a comprehensive digital platform, so that they enable the automatization on of processes and the provision of digital services to all stakeholders for all needs in the field of education, including all levels of education, from preschool to university level, including the public, non-public and private sector of education in Kosovo.

The digitalization of data in the field of education in Kosovo has mainly been reduced to the electronic collection and processing of data for educational institutions, including data on attendees, staff and, to some extent, the infrastructure of institutions. At present, this data is managed by two systems operating within the MESTI: the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS).

In addition, MESTI has other platforms for various services, such as: Naric-ks.Online[54], GIS application, etc.

In addition to MESTI, KAA also has digitized some data and offers some digital services through its website[55] as well as through the E-accreditation web platform[56]. Meanwhile, the Electronic Student Management System (ESMS) and the University Management System (UMS) are electronic systems used by public HEIs in Kosovo, through which various online services are provided for students and staff.

Shkollat.org is a landing page owned by MESTI since 2018. Two powerful platforms interact within it:

1. The Learning Passport, established globally by a partnership between UNICEF, Microsoft and Cambridge University; and
2. Microsoft 365 for Education.

The interaction of these two powerful platforms within shkollat.org offers opportunities for collaboration and communication and an exceptional teaching and learning experience. Also, digital material and content is provided in mega terabit space, through more than 30 integrated applications which interact with each other, where the Microsoft Teams for Education application as well as

54 https://naric-ks.online/

55 https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/

56 https://e-akreditimi.rks-gov.net/

the Learning Passport are the most used ones. So far, we have over 200,000 users and over 14,000 video lectures, quizzes, questionnaires and gamification and this number is constantly increasing. The implementation of these platforms is supported by the Agency for Information Society (AIS) and UNICEF Kosovo.

In addition to those mentioned above, there are platforms, applications and other projects in this regard, but all these are just a few small links of the digitalization process, which are not integrated with each other and with a central system/platform. This disables process[57] automatization and the provision of multiple digital services to parties. Therefore, they need upgrades and completion with other parts, as well as integration into a central system/software. In addition, here we must take into account the fact that Kosovo public ETIs and MEDs have no digital data at all and offer almost no digital services so far.

Digital teaching materials

There are still no multi-dimensional digital learning materials in Kosovo, which, depending on and in accordance with the specifics of the subject, curricular area, class level, will have their contents available in several different formats, including textual and audio - visual parts of different levels (differentiated learning), interactive didactic apparatus, virtual laboratory, animations, exercises and homework of different levels (differentiated learning), as well as educational games for students. These materials would provide options for evaluation done by teachers and options for self-assessment done by students, options for the teacher to add additional materials, options to connect to various online platform resources, options to connect to teacher›s technology equipment and students' technology equipment in the classroom and at home, etc. These teaching materials would have to go through the evaluation filters of the ministry›s mechanisms so that they could be used nationwide. Such digital teaching materials should be institutionally developed, in accordance with state curricula, subject programs and curricula, which have passed the relevant MESTI control filters and have been approved for use for pre-university education institutions in Kosovo.

The only teaching materials are those that were produced during the Covid-19 pandemic period, aimed to provide distance learning for children/students of different levels and categories of pre-university education, but looking at the long-term plan and from the perspective of quality and multidimensionality of genuine digital teaching materials, it can be said that these materials are relatively poor, one-dimensional and of unsatisfactory quality.

It is important to note that the development and production of digital teaching materials is not well regulated even by legislation and this should precede the development of these materials.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services and tools

Kosovo has a high degree of internet penetration at home, while its citizens have access to digital devices and technologies, which they use for the needs of daily life. Unlike the situation at the general level, the situation with these aspects in educational, training, scientific and academic institutions does not seem to be so good, especially in those of pre-university education.

57 Digital Process Automation (DPA) means the use of technology (software) to perform many processes and tasks automatically (which are usually performed manually by humans).

According to the data provided by MESTI - EMIS for the needs of this analysis (September 2021), it turns out that 118 or 15.1% of Kosovo›s public ETIs[58] do not have access to the Internet (out of 786 in total). According to the EMIS, 235 or 83.33% of the Satellite Classrooms of Kosovo public ETIs do not have internet access (out of 282 in total). In summary, out of the total number of public ETI facilities in Kosovo, which is 1,058 (main and satellite classes), 705 of them or about 66.64% have internet access, while 353 of them or about 33.36% do not have internet access. In addition, ETIs that have access to the Internet, in most cases, do not provide Internet throughout the school space, but only in certain staff offices and eventually in ICT cabinets.

As for the number of computers (desktops and laptops), according to data provided by EMIS for the needs of this analysis (September 2021), the total number of computers[59] in all public ETIs of Kosovo is 9,138, or 1 computer per approximately 35 students in public ETIs of Kosovo[60]. These ratios are not comparable to those in EU countries where a school computer is available for 3 to 7 students. In addition to computers, according to the partial EMIS data provided for the purposes of this analysis (September 2021), in all public ETIs there are 1753 projectors, 191 Smart Boards, 502 Smart TVs, 727 photocopy machines, 851 printers, 247 tablets, 11 scanners, etc[61]..

According to data collected from seven public HEIs[62] (November 2020), almost all public HEIs provide internet access for staff and students throughout the university premises. Public HEIs mainly provide cable internet in offices and cabinets, while in other spaces (lecture halls, libraries, corridors, etc.) they provide wireless internet.

Digital competence

"Digital competence" is one of the eight competencies included in the European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning[63]. Digital competence is the ability to use and interact confidently, critically and responsibly with digital technology for the purpose of learning, performing work tasks and participating in society. It includes understanding information and data, communication and collaboration, media understanding, digital content creation (including coding), security (including digital welfare and internet security), issues related to intellectual property, and problem solving and critical and creative thinking. Therefore, the cultivation of digital competence among all citizens is of great importance and the main burden for this is borne by the education system and educational institutions of all levels.

58 Public ETIs include all public pre-university educational and training institutions, including pre-school institutions, primary and lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools (gymnasiums, vocational schools and competence centres) and resource centres/special schools.

59 There is no data on how many of these devices are functional or in what technical condition these devices are.

60 A total of 319,153 children/students in all public ETIs of Kosovo in the school year 2020-2021 (according to EMIS data for the school year 2020-202).

61 There is no data on how many of these devices are functional or in what technical condition these devices are.

62 The data were reported by the General Secretaries of seven public universities: 1) University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina", 2) University of Mitrovica "Isa Boletini", 3) University of Peja "Haxhi Zeka", 4) University of Gjakova "Fehmi Agani", 5) University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti", 6) University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj and 7) University of Gjilan "Kadri Zeka".

63 Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (2018/C 189/01). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN

Regarding the level of digital competence of the various categories affected by the education system, it is impossible to draw a grounded conclusion, because so far in Kosovo there are no such assessments. However, if we take into account the developments at European and global level, it is estimated that Kosovo should invest in order to increase digital competence in all categories: children/pupils/students, educators and teachers of all levels, as well as all staff of educational institutions of all types and levels of education. However, it should be noted that before any intervention in this direction based on this assumption, first proper analysis, research or evaluation should be done and only after that the necessary measures should be taken or appropriate interventions should be made.

For all these interventions, three European documents should be taken as reference: European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp), European Framework for the Digital Competence for Teachers (DigCompEdu) and European Framework for Digitally Competent Educational Organizations (DigCompOrg).

Institutional mechanisms for the implementation of digitalization

To the poor situation in terms of digitalization and use of digital technology in the field of education in Kosovo also contributes the fact that so far in Kosovo there is a significant lack of institutional mechanisms and staff needed to plan and implement digitalization in the field of education and to encourage the training of stakeholders in the use of digital technology for educational purposes. Currently MESTI does not have a department, a division, or even an official responsible for digitalization and use of digital technology in the field of education. The situation is similar in MEDs, ETIs, HEIs, Agencies, etc. In addition, at the level of MEDs, namely ETIs, IT specialists who would take care of the maintenance of technological equipment found throughout the ETIs are missing.

Therefore, in order for the country to move faster and better in terms of digitalization and use of digital technology in the field of education, it is estimated that Kosovo needs to establish institutional mechanisms that enable the implementation of digitalization and use of technology in the field of education effectively and efficiently.

4. Strategy Vision

ES Vision:

Quality and inclusive education, which develops the potential and competencies of individuals, as well as encourages lifelong learning, in line with global transformation trends

Education has been identified as an important opportunity and resource for the sustainable economic and social development of Kosovo. Education is the key sector in NDS 2030, where the aim is to improve access and quality in education. The interconnection between the ES and NDS 2030 is also reflected in the ES vision and throughout the document.

The Education Strategy's vision highlights the development of a quality and inclusive education system ensuring equal access and participation in education for all children, pupils and students. Quality assurance in educational institutions and the improvement of teaching, learning and educational work are an integral part of ES. Therefore, improving organizational performance, improving forms of management in education and building a system of responsibility and accountability at all levels of education are prerequisites for quality in education.

The sustainable economic and social development of the country is based on the opportunities created for the development of the full potential and necessary competencies of individuals. These opportunities are provided through an education system that encourages lifelong learning starting from early childhood education and covering all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal. Creating opportunities for lifelong learning is also included in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Adapting and developing education to prepare individuals ready for inclusion in the labour market, in line with global transformation trends, contributes to improving individual and collective well-being. Therefore, ES envisages the improvement of infrastructure and effective use of digital technologies in order to develop digital competence in all categories of digital technology users, including: children, pupils, students, teachers, education administrators and parents.

Improving the quality and integrity of higher education, in line with international quality standards, linking higher education programs with the labour market and improving the research environment will contribute to Kosovo›s integration into the European research area.

Also, it must be emphasised that the interconnection of sport to education and healthy life is considered as a very important matter. This interconnection will be done to other strategic documents of relevant ministries in this fields, as is foreseen under Strategic Objective 7 "Active and Creative Society".

5. Objectives

The Education Strategy 2022-2026 has 5 strategic objectives, defined for 5 priority areas. Each strategic objective addresses the key problem of the respective priority area. The ES's Strategic Objectives are interconnected to Specific Objectives of NDS 2030 under the Framework for Strategic Planning and Management (FSPM) to create a hierarchy of implementation and reporting

Strategic objectives are broken down into specific objectives that correspond to the main causes of the relevant key problems and aim at more concrete results in the short-term perspective.

For each specific objective, the activities that lead to the achievement of the objective are defined.

Each strategic and specific objective is accompanied by at least one indicator that serves to track the process and success. The indicators selected to monitor implementation of ES are interconnected to the indicators for monitoring the NDS 2030. Furthermore, the final objectives (2026) in the ES are interconnected to interim objectives of NDS 2030 to ensure a better connection of implementation and fulfilment of objectives.

Activity-related indicators identify the direct products of those activities.

Outcome indicators correspond to specific objectives and present the short-term effects of the set of activities related to the respective objective.

Meanwhile, the impact indicators are related to the general and long-term effects of achieving specific outcomes.

The following section presents the relationship between key issues and strategic objectives, while other elements are addressed in the following section where strategic objectives, specific objectives and activities are presented in narrative form.

Scheme 1: Key problems and strategic objectives

Area 1: Early childhood education	
The key problem:	**Overall objective:**
Low involvement and participation of all children in ECE and inadequate services to ensure equal access and opportunities.	Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education.

Area 2: Pre-university education	
The key problem:	**Overall objective:**
Low quality of pre-university education due to non-consolidation of mechanisms for quality assurance and effective teaching.	Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and the provision of quality teaching.

Area 3: Vocational Education, Training and Adult Education	
The key problem:	**Overall objective:**
Skills mismatch between education offer and labour market changes and insufficient opportunities for lifelong learning.	Harmonize vocational education and training with dynamic developments in technology and the labour market, in function of lifelong learning.

Area 4: Higher Education	
The key problem:	**Overall objective:**
Insufficient quality in higher education, limited capacities to address aspects of ethics and academic integrity, lack of data on higher education and scientific research, low correlation of study programs with labour market demands, limited opportunities for student internships, limited mobility of academic staff and students, and low participation in international higher education and scientific research programs.	Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education.

Area 5: Digitalization of education	
The key problem:	**Overall objective:**
Scarce digital services and low level of use of digital technology for quality education.	Use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends.

5.1. Strategic Objective 1 - Early childhood education

Strategic Objective 1:

Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education

Early Childhood Education aims at the primary development of a child›s social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs, in order to build a strong and broad foundation for lifelong learning and well-being, hence equal involvement and participation for all children in preschool education cannot be implemented without the creation of adequate infrastructure. It is necessary for MESTI to make a thorough analysis of services and investments in ECE, in order to plan the overcoming of challenges faced by preschool education, such as: increasing the number of Private Institutions (PI), and organizing their adequate distribution; development of legal framework, ECE curriculum and creating a qualitative environment; creating infrastructure suitable for the children and cross-sector coordination for delivering qualitative services in ECE.

Quality in ECE, is expected to be achieved by completing legislation, creating a sustainable system of external and internal evaluation and building/developing human capacities at this level.

The ECE sector is closely linked to health and social welfare services, the integration of these services enables the efficient use of resources, as well as the collection, analysis and evaluation of data to enable the development and achievement of the full potential of children. To achieve all these goals, the social awareness on the importance of ECE must be much higher.

Specific Objective 1.1:

Creation of healthy environments with adequate conditions for ECE and provision of human resources

In order to increase access and involvement in preschool education, a situation analysis is needed for the adaptation of existing school spaces into kindergartens and the construction of new facilities for ECE services, which will be distributed throughout priority designated locations.

This is organized through a national capital investment plan, which would also enable the engagement of new staff for new or re-functionalized facilities, as well as the engagement of support educators and assistants for children with disabilities as their lack makes it difficult for this category to be included in the ECE.

A thorough cost analysis of current forms of ECE services is planned. This analysis aims to identify the relevant approach in the development of policies for the most appropriate forms of support for non-public IP services. For private PIs, as the largest providers of preschool services, it is necessary to provide some support, both in the licensing process and in supporting the development of professional capacity. Another form that affects the growth and inclusion of preschool children is the modality of community-based kindergartens, which can be seen as an alternative form that would contribute to the inclusion of a significant number of children.

When it comes to vulnerable children, as a sensitive category of the society, it is necessary to treat them with priority in order to provide forms of relief such as appropriate physical access or suitable equipment for children with disabilities. Also, continuous monitoring of facilitating policies for the enrolment of children from vulnerable groups, especially for children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, who are almost unrepresented in the PIs, is a solution to ensure that these children are integrated in the educational system.

Specific Objective 1.2:

Improvement of the legal infrastructure and provision of quality services in ECE

MESTI is in the process of reviewing primary and secondary legislation for ECE. Also, the Core Curriculum for Level 0 is in the development phase. Among other things, this legislation aims to develop necessary mechanisms to ensuring quality of services for ECE. Another priority remains the creating of a stable system of external and internal evaluation, which requires the profiling of inspectors and officials for this level, as well as building the capacity of PIs management through a proper program of effective management of the educational process in PIs, as well as the engagement of professional associates.

Preschool education must also meet international norms for this age, especially in equipment with inventory, toys and other educational tools which need to be standardized with a document that defines the criteria for them. The spaces that provide ECE services should be regularly equipped with inventory and equipment suitable for young ages.

Another precondition for quality development is the development of the curriculum, and building professional capacity to meet its requirements. This requires adequate training, which must first be piloted and evaluated before introducing the ECE curriculum nationwide. This should be followed by the harmonization of existing programs for the professional development of educators, who need to adapt to the elements of the new curriculum for ECE. The process of evaluating the performance of educators is more than necessary to ensure quality in ECE, therefore educators need to understand and be well acquainted with their competencies, through a program, which would help developing their capacities. It is also necessary to review the pedagogical documentation, which in order to adapt to the requirements of the time must also be digitized and a well-organized system must be developed.

The level of education for ages 0-<2 remains the most underdeveloped segment in pre-primary education. Educators are still employed in PIs, who do not have academic development. Therefore, the design and implementation of a program for their retraining is necessary to develop their professional capacities.

The entire PI personnel are expected to be upgraded with current programs in order to help the development and overall welfare of every child and to emphasise their role in these processes. The training will focus on topics such as: child protection, inclusion, emergency response, gender equality and healthy eating. These are achieved through the design and implementation of guidelines and trainings with contents adapted to the age of pre-schoolers.

In order to provide children with as much as possible quality development and education, all preschool service providers should be regularly equipped with books and teaching aids adequate for certain age groups.

Distance education, which proved to be very necessary, especially with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, created opportunities for professionals and parents to be constantly informed, thus such platforms enable access to services, and, over the years, their regular maintenance should be organized in all languages.

Specific Objective 1.3:

Provision of opportunities for the development and achievement of full potential of children, through integrated cross-sectorial services

The proper development of children and the achievement of their full potential requires the establishment of cooperation mechanisms between MESTI, MoH, MFLT and Association of Kosovo Municipalities, therefore it is necessary to establish cross-sectorial groups at both central

and local level, which is regulated by an action plan. So far, there has been no system for collecting data on children from the relevant ministries, therefore MESTI should initiate the regulation of this system, through inter-ministerial cooperation, as well as training of responsible persons in all relevant ministries, for documenting data and their integration into a unified digital system. There is also a need to create and monitor the implementation of national policies for professionals who are engaged in ECE for all sectors, which are monitored through cross-sectorial cooperation and knowledge of forms of professional development by the relevant ministries.

It is necessary that collaborations take place at all levels and therefore there is a need to strengthen networking at the level of institutions or responsible staff, which would enable the development of human capacity and the goal of raising quality. The Coordination Body for Early Childhood Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) composed of various institutions, agencies, organizations and professionals, as well as the Collegium of Directors are intended to be strengthened and more active, as mechanisms that serve to coordinate investment of activities and projects.

A large category of children, especially in urban areas, receive day care from nannies who are mostly unqualified. Therefore, it is more than necessary to create a policy for setting criteria for nannies, as well as their training through a program dedicated to them, which includes the health, welfare and education of children.

Specific Objective 1.4:
Raising social awareness for early childhood development

In order to increase social awareness on the importance of development in ECE, it is necessary to organize conferences and campaigns that would open discussions at the central and local level and that facilitate the creation of opportunities for active involvement of the society.

While there are still an extremely large number of parents whose children are not involved in any form of ECE, especially from rural areas, it is an obligation to invest in informing them through various parenting awareness programs and packages which facilitate care and education in the home environment. Creating information opportunities through the media, brochures and other forms of information helps raise awareness of the wider community about the importance of development and education in Early Childhood. Also, parents of vulnerable children, namely children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, remain uninformed about the opportunities that MESTI policies provide for the enrolment of their children in the PI, therefore organizing awareness events for this category is seen as necessary.

One issue that ECE is facing and in this regard has a lot to do with social tradition, is the creation of the belief that ECE studies are only for women, therefore as a society we need to make men aware of the importance and opportunities of developing a career in ECE.

Impact indicators:

- Percentage of children involved in ECE (age group 0 to <5), broken-down based on gender

Outcome indicators:

- Percentage of involved children aged 0-4), broken-down based on gender
- Percentage of children involved in pre-primary level, broken-down based on gender
- Percentage of involved children aged 3-5, broken-down based on gender
- Percentage of involved children aged 0-2, broken-down based on gender
- Completed legal infrastructure (Law on ECE, bylaws, Curriculum for ECE)

- Evaluation Framework document, with accompanying documentation drafted and approved
- Cross-sectorial mechanisms for ECE at central and local level are operational
- Functionalization of mechanisms reporting to EMIS
- The mechanism for stakeholder's involvement in ECE awareness activities is functional.

5.2. Strategic Objective 2 - Pre-university education

Strategic Objective 2:

Objective 2: Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and providing quality teaching

The quality of pre-university education in Kosovo, despite the work and efforts that have been made so far, is still not at the desired level. Evidence of this are the results of the international PISA test that measures the ability of 15-year-olds to apply knowledge in practice. This test in 2015 and 2018 ranked Kosovo among the last three participating countries.

To increase the quality of pre-university education, it is necessary to have a system that provides accountability at all levels of the education system. To this end, we must have effective and efficient management through the implementation and advancement of policies and legal framework in the field of education, capacity building and strengthening transparency and accountability. Moreover, the mechanisms for the implementation of the quality assurance system should be strengthened, internal and external evaluation of educational institutions with a focus on quality improvement as well as increasing the reliability of national tests and the use of results in addition to the international ones for decision-making based on data.

Also, through an effective infrastructure management system that ensures healthy, safe and student-friendly environments, the quality of teaching at all levels of the education system will be improved. The inclusion of students with special needs as well as members of marginalized social groups will also be improved. To this end, a rationalization of expenditures is needed through the optimization of school networks that would increase the budget with a focus on quality teaching.

The quality of pre-university education is not possible without effective curriculum implementation, just as it is not possible to implement curricular reform without a functional mechanism to guide, coordinate and build capacity for curriculum implementation. In order to increase pupils' results, among other measures, quality texts are needed in accordance with the curriculum; alternative teaching tools, materials and resources. To achieve this, MESTI must adjust the legal basis, build mechanisms and capacities for their development and use in order to increase the quality of teaching and learning.

On the other hand, the quality of pre-university education can take the right direction when the system provides adequate qualifications for young teachers, provides continuous professional development, feedback and provides support for meeting teaching standards by assessing teacher performance.

Specific Objective 2.1:

Increase of efficiency and effectiveness in management by strengthening transparency and accountability

In the circumstances where the education system is decentralized, in addition to the existence of full financial and professional autonomy, advancements in education depend mainly on the development of management

capacities at the central, municipal and school levels. To ensure quality and effective management in the pre-university education system, it is necessary to implement and harmonize primary with secondary legislation.

At the municipal level, a restructuring of MEDs and capacity building is needed. For this purpose, it is necessary to draft a standard guide that would contain existing and new regulations and laws that define the scope and work of MEDs and specific areas of management of the education system. Mechanisms for effective communication and coordination between different stakeholders in the system through reporting and coordination processes should also be developed and strengthened.

For a professional and responsible school management, the recruitment of school principals/deputy principals, management staff should be ensured based on professional standards and based on performance appraisal and gender equality. Inclusion regardless of gender should also be provided in the professional development programs of principals and deputy principals and teachers aiming for a management career. Middle management needs to be strengthened by strengthening the role of the School Governing Board and the Parents' Council and their more active role in continuous improvement in schools. Sharing good experiences with learning communities would help share experiences and increase school performance.

The rationalization of expenditures through the review and proper implementation of the funding formula based on school reorganization considering data on the infrastructure situation and demographic trends in the country, to determine the most effective model of school network management. This requires capacity building in schools and MEDs for financial management and drafting of financial management guidelines.

The use of reports on the education system by relevant sectors for policy making and decision making is also of particular importance.

Specific Objective 2.2:
Strengthening of mechanisms and capacities for the implementation of the quality assurance system

Quality assurance is one of the weakest points of pre-university education in Kosovo. In order to make the quality assurance system functional, it is necessary to build capacities at all levels. The limited number of inspectors has presented a constant challenge to carry out external and internal evaluations in order to improve the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it is planned not only to increase the capacity for inspections and monitoring but also the continuous preparation and professional development of inspectors. Support for this process will be provided through the establishment of professional teams but also the strengthening of the role of professional departments and quality coordinators in schools, municipalities and MESTI.

Municipal education development plans should be in line with school development plans in accordance with quality areas. In addition, each municipal education plan should reflect the development priorities of the municipality, and as such, serve as a basis for the future development of school plans.

Furthermore, awareness-raising activities based on various studies on the performance of the education system will be needed to create an environment where accountability is promoted. In this regard, an overview of school performance through School Reporting Cards would enable reliable data and more transparent and effective monitoring of school progress not only by schools but also by the community.

Specific Objective 2.3:

Increase of the involvement and active participation of pupils from marginalized groups through the creation of a stimulating and supportive climate

Increasing the involvement and active participation of pupils from marginalized groups will be aimed by creating a stimulating and supportive climate. In this regard, support services are planned for pupils who have learning difficulties. For pupils with disabilities, each municipality should form and operationalize professional teams (pedagogical evaluation teams) but also provide support teachers and assistants who are necessary to support these children but also for children who have difficulties in achieving learning outcomes in the different fields.

Dropout is an issue that is a challenge especially for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and especially for girls but also among children/pupils with low socio-economic status and for this purpose measures are needed for prevention and effective response and support, but also awareness for stakeholders and parents.

For the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, based on the strategy for this issue, it is planned to support secondary education by providing scholarships for pupils but also support for learning centres, harmonization of programs and expansion of teaching Roma language nationwide.

Support will be provided for the identification and support of pupils with extraordinary abilities, talents and special talents by supporting, among others, various organizations. National and international competitions will be organized and various prizes will be offered, not only monetary but also other non-monetary opportunities.

Another important aspect of inclusion is the support for repatriated and foreign children, initially with their proper systematization and the provision of programs for accelerated learning but also monitoring of planned activities as well as the preparation of teachers and officials of MEDs to get acquainted with their processes and responsibilities regarding these children. Furthermore, the system for the organization and progress of teaching in the diaspora should be supported.

Specific Objective 2.4:

Provision of healthy, safe and appropriate school environments according to norms and standards, which enable quality teaching and learning

From the infrastructural point of view, as a priority will be considered the provision and maintenance of sufficient functional space and of safe and healthy environment which will be achieved not only through renovation and construction of new school buildings but also by equipping schools with adequate inventory thus providing conditions for quality and inclusive teaching in schools.

This infrastructure should take into account the norms applicable to the educational infrastructure and be adapted for the access of pupils with physical disabilities. Also, schools should have facilities for laboratory and cabinet work, physical education halls that enable physical and health development, leisure and recreation corners for pupils and libraries enriched with adequate literature.

Identification of locations for the construction of new schools should be done based on needs assessments and according to applicable norms and standards and expected demographic changes.

Mechanisms for promotion of the health component at the municipal and school level should be established, as well as cross-sectorial groups which aim the promotion of health in schools. Furthermore, materials for healthcare education, including sexual and reproduction health and the school environment should be drafted. The needs for drinking water and sanitary facilities should be analysed, and mechanisms for their maintenance should be developed. It is also necessary to draft a safety and emergency response guide.

Activities that contribute to the implementation of measures to prevent and report all forms of violence (physical, psychological, sexual, neglect, sexual harassment, and exploitation), homophobia, bullying, hate speech and extremism in schools should be planned. Also, activities related to the obligations of educational institutions to identify, refer and support children who, potentially, are direct victims of domestic violence, or witnesses of domestic violence, in their own homes.

Specific Objective 2.5:

Increase of the reliability of national test results and their use for policy making, in addition to international test results

The lack of an Assessment and Standards Centre has resulted in insufficient capacities and challenges in terms of smooth implementation of national assessment processes and the analysis of results from national and international assessments. Therefore, it is necessary to establish this Centre through which sufficient human capacities will be provided that will increase the reliability of national tests and their use for policy making.

Adequate measures should be undertaken to ensure the smooth running of the testing process, including ensuring the safety and transparency of the entire process through training of administrators and reporting from this process in order to improve the quality and reliability of national tests.

In order to increase the quality of test items, the capacity building of the drafters of test items will continue and the items bank will be created with auxiliary materials with question types models, with question models that measure different knowledge and skills and with test models for all subjects.

Kosovo will continue to participate in the international PISA assessment (15-year-old children), TIMSS and PIRLS (grade IV) and will also start with the ICILS assessment (grade VIII) for the ability of 8th grade pupils to use information technology (ICT). An international evaluation / study by TALIS is also planned that focuses on the work of teachers and principals of the schools where they work, their working conditions, learning opportunities, teaching practices and beliefs about teaching and learning.

National tests, such as the Achievement and Matura tests but also international ones such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS are seen as important instruments for quality assurance, as they provide systematic information on system and curriculum anomalies and, as such, should be used for the taking of steps to avoid them.

Specific Objective 2.6:

Effective implementation of all elements of the pre-university education curriculum

The lack of a professional mechanism that leads and coordinates the developments of curricular reform and capacity building for curriculum implementation has resulted in a fragmented, uncoordinated and poorly controlled approach in terms of quality and content implementation of all curriculum elements. Given the great need for and importance of establishing a professional institution, there is a need to first analyse all existing mechanisms of pre-university education and to prepare a concept

paper on the role that KPI can take in this area. On the other hand, in order to address the limited human capacity at the MED level to support schools and teachers in implementing the curriculum, it will be necessary to support MEDs to engage and employ pedagogical officials / advisors with priority for the curriculum areas: Languages and communication, Mathematics and Natural Sciences.

Within this strategy, special attention will be paid to the review of curricula based on the analysis of the state of their implementation and directions of development in relevant areas, such as rapid developments in the curriculum area Life and Work, respectively the ICT subject curriculum, as well as appropriate support for advanced teaching, improvement of pupils' assessment practices and the use of results in pupils support activities. Further, the forms of support and training of teachers and school principals for the implementation of the curriculum will be improved and advanced, as a special priority within this objective, as well as inter-institutional cooperation and cooperation with parents will be strengthened. Mechanisms for continuous monitoring of curriculum implementation will also be strengthened, in order to timely identify challenges and problems and take the necessary measures to overcome them.

Compensation for learning losses and reduction of learning inequalities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, MESTI will address in cooperation with supporting partners, while coordinating the development and providing of additional pupils' support programs. Also, an effective and appropriate mechanism will be developed to assist schools in assessing learning losses and providing long-term pupils' support.

Specific Objective 2.7:
Provision of quality textbooks, resources, tools and teaching materials in accordance with the relevant curriculum and standards

The effective implementation of the pre-university education curriculum, among other things, depends on the quality of textbooks, teaching materials and tools, but also didactic and professional materials for teachers. In order to meet the system requirements in this area, MESTI will pay special attention to all these aspects initially by completing the Unit for textbooks and teaching materials in MESTI or within the responsible institution. An additional measure will be the adoption of the law on textbooks and bylaws that enable its effective implementation. Special attention will be paid to the building of mechanisms and capacities for quality preparation of textbooks and teaching materials, printed and digital, in accordance with the relevant curriculum and standards including gender equity[64], in official languages, foreign languages, in the languages of non-majority communities, as well as for different categories of students with special needs.

The process of using textbooks and teaching materials will be supported with professional and didactic materials for teachers and training of teachers will be conducted to use and develop teaching materials (printed and digital). In addition, work will be done to improve access to textbooks and teaching resources and materials, the schools will be supplied with minimum teaching packages, which is defined by a sub-legal act and accompanied by instructions for its use.

In order to increase the opportunities for active involvement of society, the involvement of the academic level and teachers in the development of textbooks and the production of teaching materials, continuous debates will be organized with wide involvement. Also, the organization of events at national and international level will be supported, with producers of printed and digital teaching materials. Such events will be carefully planned to be in function of achievement of this objective.

64 https://abgj.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/ALB-Manual%20SteriotipetGjinore-ALB(1).pdf

Specific Objective 2.8:

Full implementation of the teacher licensing system and increase of opportunities for teachers' professional development and advancement based on teaching standards

An important aspect of the education strategy is the focus on teacher career development, through the implementation of the teacher licensing system, performance assessment and career advancement. The current level of implementation of the licensing system does not enable professional advancement and promotion of teachers in the career system. To ensure the improvement of the implementation of the teacher licensing system, readiness and support from the MESTI is needed, as well as a change in the approach of the implementation of this system.

Initially, MESTI will analyse the possibilities of full implementation of teacher performance assessment. Then, a concept for the future of the teacher licensing system will be developed by completing the necessary legal basis. The functionalization of the software for the licensing system database, the review of the strategic framework for teacher development based on EU documents to support the development of teachers› competencies, implementation of the Law on Regulated Professions, as well as building of an introductory program for beginner teachers, as well as the preparation and participation of the system in the international evaluation/study for teachers - TALIS, are some of the important activities of MESTI for this area of intervention.

Building of the financing mechanism of the TPD and providing the necessary budgetary means to link the teacher licensing system with the payroll system is another measure that MESTI will address and regulate.

Increasing the professionalism of teachers as a priority guides all institutional engagement in the framework of TPD activities. MESTI will define priority areas and programs for teachers' professional development by providing training and guidance based on standards for teachers and in line with the philosophy of the competency-based curriculum. Supporting the implementation of procedures for professional development of school-based teachers, creating and supporting professional networks and centres for professional development at the municipal level, promoting the teacher career development, supporting schools to participate in Erasmus+ projects related to teacher training, as well as encouraging teachers to establish teacher associations are important measures for MESTI.

These measures should be supported by capacity building of MEDs and school principals, better planning and coordination between educational institutions and support partners in this field, and through the instrument for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of TPD programs approved by MESTI.

Specific Objective 2.9:

Qualitative preparation of pre-service teachers who competently adapt to curriculum requirements and practical needs of working with children/students

Pre-service teacher training for all levels of pre-university education, including vocational school teachers, is done by public institutions of higher education. Although the role of MESTI and the Faculties that prepare teachers is regulated by the relevant legislation, there is a need to make an analysis of the implementation of those policies and to review and coordinate the actions of MESTI and the Faculties, in order to improve the quality of policies and programs for teacher preparation and development.

Faculties that prepare teachers will harmonize the programs/curricula with the standards for teachers and with the philosophy of the curriculum offered in pre-university education (relevant levels). This process will be supervised by MESTI through State Council for Teacher Licensing (SCTL) and KAA.

In addition to harmonizing programs/curricula, the respective faculties will pay special attention to capacity building of academic staff to improve teaching practices, develop professionalism, link scientific work with the education system - pre-university education and promotion of research work in the field of education.

Also, faculties that prepare teachers will take special measures to advance the practical part of the study to make more relevant the teaching profession and preparation for entry into the profession by providing continuous mentoring during the professional practice of students, the establishment of practical laboratories where students will be trained for practical work, development of teaching materials, demonstration and their use, etc. In this regard, cooperation with schools and municipalities will be ensured, as well as cooperation with the office of Erasmus+ project. This cooperation will provide opportunities for inclusion in mobility programs for future teachers, as well as promote research work in the field of education. Pre-service teacher training is done by higher education institutions; therefore, this process is necessarily related to the strategic objective for higher education.

Specific Objective 2.10:
Promoting multiculturalism and diversity in pre-university education

Insufficient level of treatment of issues related to multiculturalism and diversity in pre-university education has contributed to the increase of inequalities in pre-university education. Therefore, addressing and promoting these aspects through building effective mechanisms, capacity building and securing relevant resources is more than necessary.

Initially, programs and modules will be developed for communities in national subjects. Also, opportunities will be planned and provided for learning the Roma language through supplementary education and other alternative forms, in regular schools and learning centres.

Albanian language learning programs and activities for minority communities will be supported with relevant teaching materials and professional support for schools where these opportunities are offered. Socialization between students of different communities in multi-ethnic schools will be enabled through the establishment and functioning of different clubs, learning the language of the surrounding and other activities at the school level.

Drafting, reviewing, translating and adapting textbooks as well as preparing teaching materials (printed and digital) in the languages of non-majority communities will be continuously planned and subsidized.

Impact indicators:

- Public spending on pre-university education as a percentage of GDP (%)
- Percentage of educational institutions (ETI, MED, EI, MESTI) that fulfil their role for quality assurance
- Students' results in literacy, mathematics and science in international tests (PISA), broken-down on gender basis.

Outcome indicators:

- Primary and secondary legislation is developed, reviewed and implemented
- Percentage of implementation of the plan for reorganization of the schools' network
- Percentage of leaders in educational institutions who are selected and perform based on professional standards
- Percentage of schools that have a budget code and manage their budget
- Number of new inspectors hired and trained (hiring according to Law on Gender Equality, and division by percentage and gender)

- Number of evaluated principals/deputy principals (selection according to the Law on Gender Equality, and division into percentages by gender
- Number of schools subject to Internal and External Performance Assessment
- Number of municipalities that have drafted integrated municipal development plans
- Percentage of dropouts in compulsory and upper secondary education
- Inclusion of children with special needs in compulsory and upper secondary education
- Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in compulsory and upper secondary education focusing on girls from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities
- Number of children with special talents identified within the education system
- Number of schools built and renovated
- Number of ETIs that meet the hygienic-sanitary conditions
- Percentage of managed cases of all forms of violence, including sexual abuse and harassment, bullying and extremism identified in schools
- The degree of implementation of measures taken to ensure the reliability of the results of national assessments (grades 9 and 12)
- Results from the international PISA assessment
- Percentage of test items in national competency-based assessments
- Percentage of municipalities that have hired 3-4 teachers in official positions for curricula/pedagogical advisors.
- Percentage of subject curricula for revised classes based on revision decisions.
- Number of teachers and school principals, education officials in municipalities and MESTI, involved in additional training and other forms of support for the implementation of curriculum reform.
- Curriculum implementation monitoring reports reflect a positive trend of implementation of all competency-based curriculum elements.
- The planned documents for the legal regulation are drafted and implemented on the basis of the new Law on textbooks, resources, materials and teaching aids.
- Textbooks and teaching materials developed, revised or adapted based on new legislation, are in line with the relevant curriculum and standards.
- Percentage of meeting the needs with textbooks and teaching materials for the different categories of students with special needs and for foreign language subjects.
- Over 60% of schools are equipped with a package of teaching aids and materials by curriculum area.
- Licensing system sub-legal framework reviewed and advanced.
- Percentage of teachers, divided by gender, who participate each year in professional development programs.
- Number of teachers, divided by gender, who have undergone external performance appraisal.
- Percentage of teachers, divided by gender, evaluated who have completed at a high-level the standards/competencies for teachers and have progressed to levels of career advancement.
- Percentage of beginner teachers, divided by gender, offered mentorship according to the entry program in profession.
- Number of affirmative measures to increase the number of women and girls in managerial positions in pre-university education.
- Percentage of re/accredited pre-service teacher training programs that are in line with the standards for teachers and the philosophy of the curriculum offered at the respective PUE levels.
- Percentage of graduates in teacher education programs who demonstrate professional competence in the assessments of the entry phase in the teaching profession.
- Percentage of schools that have benefited from programs and other forms of support for promoting multiculturalism and diversity.
- Number of programs/modules, textbooks and teaching materials (printed and digital) developed, revised and adapted for teaching in the languages of non-majority communities.

5.3. Strategic Objective 3 – Vocational education, training and adult education

Strategic Objective 3:

Harmonization of vocational education and training with dynamic developments in technology and the labour market, in function of lifelong learning

Insufficient quality of vocational education and training offer has resulted in a low degree of employer satisfaction with the skills/competencies achieved by VETI graduate candidates, as well as a low degree of transition from school to work. Opportunities for lifelong learning and mobilities are limited and do not keep pace with the need for continuous workforce retraining. Consequently, the main focus within this thematic area is the review of the offer of vocational education and training as well as the improvement of quality, in view of the development of transferable skills, digital skills, entrepreneurial skills and professional technical skills, in accordance with the needs of the labour market and with digital and green transformation trends.

Specific Objective 3.1:

Improvement of the governance, funding and information management system of vocational education, training and adult education

For a quality and effective management of vocational education and training, a review of the legal framework is needed to ensure that all functions of the vocational education and training system are covered comprehensively, including a clear definition of responsibilities, lines of authority and accountability between all institutions of the vocational education and training system. Through sub-legal acts, among others, the content of qualifications provided by VETIs will be standardized in accordance with the NQF. The reorganization of the network of vocational education and training institutions will be done in accordance with the needs of the labour market and at the level of the seven main regions of Kosovo. Furthermore, the categorization and standardization of the internal organization of VETIs will enable the functioning of all necessary bodies and services within these institutions.

In order to provide the necessary budget for improving the quality of vocational education and training, the financing formula will be revised based on the real cost model for each qualification, while to guarantee relevant and up-to-date data on labour market needs, the system for VET and labour market information management will be improved and integrated. Special attention will be paid to the human capacity building of the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) and the leadership of the VETIs to fulfil all the functions expected by them.

Specific Objective 3.2:

Consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms, at central, local and VETI level, to enable systemic access to quality management

Effective quality assurance implies a culture of quality assurance and a multi-level approach to quality management, which includes the NQA, the Education Inspectorate, the AVETAE and the MEDs. Although the National Qualifications Framework acknowledges a broader external quality assurance system in VET, this approach is not sufficiently supported by the legal framework. To ensure a balance between the control approach and the developmental approach to quality assurance, the role of each external QA mechanism will need to be defined. In this regard, while the focus of the NQA is on quality control through quality assurance of qualifications (accreditation, validation, verification of assessment and award of approved qualifications), the focus of the Education Inspectorate, AVETAE

and MEDs should be in quality improvement, through monitoring and support of quality assurance processes in the VETI system. This systematic and comprehensive approach to quality assurance should be further defined in the NQF, in the Law on VET as well as through bylaws that define the procedures for quality assurance in VETI.

To support internal quality assurance processes, relevant functions should be institutionalized and regulated by relevant legislation, including: the position of Quality Assurance coordinator, the duties and responsibilities of school management, governing bodies, professional bodies and services, and teachers. In addition to consolidating the quality assurance system, special attention should be paid to capacity building of all quality assurance institutions.

Specific Objective 3.3:

Finalization of the curriculum package for qualifications offered by vocational education and training institutions, in accordance with the needs of the labour market and transformation trends

In order to improve the offer for the development of competencies for life and work, the Curriculum Framework for VET will be finalized while the dynamics of drafting, approving and verifying the standards of the profession will be accelerated, to lead the process of finalizing/designing core curricula for all profession profiles provided by VETIs. The core curricula will reflect the philosophy of the Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education, expressed through its principles, will be guided by the VET Curriculum Framework and will be in full compliance with the NQF and the standards of the profession. Review of administrative and pedagogical documentation for VETIs and development of digital teaching and learning materials are other necessary measures for the completion of the VET curriculum package.

In order to address the professional development needs of VET teachers, the regulatory bases will be completed through the sub-legal act on VET teacher qualification criteria and the VET Teacher Professional Development Framework. Pre-service professional development will be enabled through the preparation and provision of a training program for VET teaching staff, while for the continuous professional development of VET teachers, VETIs will be supported for the implementation of school-based professional development. For this purpose, in addition to practical guidelines for the identification of needs, planning and organization of school-based TPD activities, special attention will be paid to the preparation of mentor teachers in each VETI for the planning and implementation of the new curriculum, for the implementation of practical teaching and learning, design of teaching materials, application of innovative teaching and learning methods in line with the EU agenda for digital and green education (including the application of digital teaching materials, use of smart technological equipment and reality platforms added).

Establishment of networks of VETI leaders and professional VETI bodies and services for the exchange of information and experiences in the form of learning communities, as well as support for VETIs to participate in international cooperation programs and mobility for VET, are other necessary measures to contribute to the continuous professional development of the VETI leadership and teachers, in view of advancing the management of VETIs, services and learning processes.

Specific Objective 3.4:

Provision of opportunities for the implementation of practical learning and the functionalization of career counselling services

In order to address the difficulties faced by VETIs in the implementation of practical training, an assessment of the immediate needs for consumables, equipment and adequate space for the implementation of practical training in VETI workshops will be made. Based on this, the necessary budget for addressing these needs will be planned and allocated.

In addition to the functioning of the services needed for cooperation with enterprises (within SO1), special attention will be paid to the assessment of enterprises' capacities for work-based learning and dual learning modalities, capacity building of leaders, teachers and instructors for the organization and implementation of work-based learning, as well as for the implementation of the VET entrepreneurial school model. Budget allocation and arrangements necessary for accident insurance and transportation of VETI students, especially for women and girls, for work-based learning are other necessary interventions to enable work-based learning and dual-learning modalities.

Given the fact that career counselling and guidance is very important for a functional VET system in the country, the sub-legal act on career counselling services will be drafted, the quality standards of career counselling services will be defined and the capacities of VETIs for career counselling and guidance services will be increased. Special measures will be taken to promote the importance of VET as an attractive training solution for work and life as well as to encourage the participation of students from vulnerable social categories, especially for women and girls, young people with disabilities, and under-represented groups through scholarships and other incentives.

Specific Objective 3.5:

Improvement of supply and increase of participation in AE

Promoting lifelong learning in the context of ever-changing labour market demands is at the core of interventions within this thematic area. The main focus within this objective will be on validating the competencies achieved through non-formal and informal education, raising the quality and fulfilling the offer for AE, promoting the importance of lifelong learning and encouraging participation in AE programs.

The lack of a qualification program that prepares teachers for adult education has led to the teaching staff for AE not having the necessary qualifications and capacities to provide and implement AE, therefore special attention will be paid to the preparation and delivery of a qualification program for the teaching staff for AE.

As the current AE programs offered at VETI through accelerated/compensatory learning are based on the same curricula that apply to regular education, MESTI will prepare special AE curricula for primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and post-secondary levels. In addition, educational institutions should develop and offer short-term qualifications and non-formal courses that enable continuous professional development, retraining, knowledge and skills for progress in life, work or education. To this end, the PLR should start to be implemented and the capacity of VETIs to implement AE and PLR programs should be increased. On the other hand, in order to complete the offer for AE programs, MESTI on an annual basis should announce a bid for project proposals for formal and informal providers and allocate funds for the provision of AE programs.

In view of inter-institutional coordination to improve supply and encourage participation in AE, AVETAE and VETIs should cooperate with the Employment Offices (EOs) and Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) to exchange information on opportunities of provision of various programs. AVETAE and VETIs should also organize various campaigns to promote participation in AE in order to inform

citizens about the advantages of AE as an opportunity for personal development of the individual and facilitate the transition to the labour market, as well as for the offer that is available.

In order to have easier access to information about the programs that are available for AE, a register of formal and informal AE providers will be created and the same will be made available to citizens to facilitate the circulation of information for interested. To stimulate citizens' interest in AE, it is also necessary to allocate a certain budget that offers various incentives to encourage participation in AE. Increasing the inclusion of persons from vulnerable groups, people with disabilities, especially women and girls, will receive special attention through the provision of scholarship benefits and other incentives for enrolment in AE programs.

Another important element for AE is internationalization; educational institutions that offer AE will be supported to join various international organizations for AE, in order to promote the mobility and participation of students and teachers in various international projects.

Impact indicators:

- Percentage of formal and non-formal qualifications offered by VETIs, registered in the NQF qualifications register.
- Percentage, divided by gender, of participation in deficit professions.
- Percentage, divided by gender, of placement of VETI graduates, in relevant professions and in higher education.

Outcome indicators:

- The governance and management system of VET and AE has been reorganized. The level of funding of VETIs meets their needs.
- The network of vocational education and training institutions has been reorganized in accordance with the needs of the labour market.
- Data integrated into the Education Management Information System, the Kosovo Labour Market Barometer and Graduates Tracking are relevant and up to date.
- Quality assurance mechanisms are operational at all levels.
- Percentage of VETIs that have registered a positive trend of performance improvement.
- Percentage of qualifications offered by VETIs for which the new curricular package has been approved and started to be implemented.
- Percentage of VETI teachers who have participated in continuous professional development programs.
- Percentage of qualifications offered by VETIs for which opportunities for practical training are provided.
- Percentage of VETIs providing career counselling and guidance services.
- Percentage of VETIs that apply the VET entrepreneurial school model.
- Number of VETIs implementing PLR.
- Increase of participation in adult education.

5.4. Strategic Objective 4 - Higher education

Strategic Objective 4:

Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education

This objective is formulated in response to structural shortcomings in the field of higher education and aims to improve the quality and integrity of higher education, through the implementation of the accreditation process in accordance with international quality standards, which will, among other things, enable the return of Kosovo Agency for Accreditation in ENQA and EQAR. Higher education reform is intended to be achieved through advancing the legal framework, developing the capacity of quality assurance mechanisms, increasing participation in international programs, and improving the academic and research infrastructure.

Insufficient quality of study programs and limited quality assurance capacities and the need for improvement of the governance and financing of higher education necessarily raise the need to strengthen the quality of the KAA oversight mechanism, promote teaching excellence and implement high standards of institutional evaluation and study programs. In this context, MESTI should regulate the legal basis and review existing legislation, develop a funding formula and develop an advanced information management system.

Among other things, the envisaged measures aim to institutionalize anti-plagiarism control, increase transparency in higher education, provide access to contemporary digital literature, support students through various scholarship schemes, develop international programs of academic and scientific cooperation, link higher education programs with the labour market and provide internship opportunities for students, with focus on women and girls.

Specific Objective 4.1:

Increase of the quality of higher education through the review of study programs, the advancement of academic infrastructure, the promotion of excellence in teaching and research, and the implementation of high standards of institutional evaluation and study programs

Insufficient quality of study programs, lack of academic infrastructure, limited capacity for quality assurance and professional development of academic staff, limited number of publications in international journals and unfavourable ratio of academic staff - students, necessarily require increased quality of higher education through the review of study programs, the advancement of the academic infrastructure, the promotion of excellence in teaching and research, and the implementation of high standards of institutional evaluation and study programs.

KAA standards are mainly based on meeting the minimum criteria for accreditation and re-accreditation of programs and institutions. KAA standards will be reviewed to implement a system based on a complementary approach/quality expansion.

The new study programs of HEIs are accredited in accordance with the quality standards set by the KAA. The review of previously accredited programs and on-going new programs will provide an increased effort towards expanding the quality culture, which can serve as a guide for decision-making and strategic planning. Also, the establishment of joint doctoral level programs of high quality with international higher education institutions will be supported, in accordance with the needs for professional academic staff.

The academic infrastructure is considered outdated and deficient to ensure the provision of quality academic services. The needs for investments in the academic infrastructure will be assessed and consequently the investment plan in all HEIs, which also includes investments in laboratory equipment and capacity building of staff for the use of this equipment. MESTI will provide subscriptions of academic staff to international electronic libraries.

Kosovo does not have national indicators for higher education, which would enable the continuous identification of measures to be taken in higher education and would provide quantitative and qualitative data, divided by gender, to inform policy-making and enable evidence-based decision-making. MESTI will develop national indicators that will serve their purpose of providing objective information that promotes quality measurement, improvement and innovation.

Offices for quality assurance and academic development in HEIs have been established but operate at different levels of quality and capacity. The staff in these offices will attend specialized trainings in order to support HEIs for the continuous review of quality metrics in their institution, as well as completing and monitoring the implementation of requirements arising from institutional accreditation processes and programs.

KESP evaluation reports show that there is little progress in the functioning of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching (CET) in HEIs. CETs should be established and operationalized to continuously identify the professional development needs of the academic staff and to develop and provide programs and services of academic development, respectively various training programs related to new teaching methodologies and scientific research.

Scientific research work is considered insufficiently integrated in teaching activities and professional engagements of academic staff. HEIs generally do not include research in the contractual obligations of academic staff and offer limited opportunities for funding scientific publications and attending scientific conferences. Sustainable funding schemes for publications in international journals and participation in international conferences will be further developed to foster academic culture to research and generate new knowledge that helps develop the country or the institution in particular.

The exclusion of KAA from the two main quality assurance mechanisms in Europe, ENQA and EQAR requires increased efforts to meet the recommendations of ENQA and EQAR as essential opportunities for the quality of the higher education system in Kosovo.

Specific Objective 4.2:

Improvement of the governance and funding of higher education through review of legislation, development of advanced information management system, increase of professional capacities, improvement of services for students and ensuring academic integrity, transparency and accountability in higher education

Improvement of the governance and funding of higher education will be done through the review of legislation, the development of an advanced information management system, the improvement of student services and the provision of academic integrity, transparency and accountability in higher education.

The implementation of legislation on higher education, such as the Law on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, the Law on Higher Education and the Law on Regulated Professions will be supported by the review and development of sub-legal acts to enable the implementation of actions related to improving governance and funding in higher education.

Open Data regulations will be drafted to support public oversight of HEIs, monitoring of activities and quality, as well as to enable greater transparency. HEIs in Kosovo lack Open Access to the use of laboratories and technological equipment. Therefore, special regulations and protocols will be drafted for the use of laboratories and technological equipment approved in all HEIs.

The revision and approval of the codes of ethics and the codes of academic integrity will be carried out and the Ethics Councils will be established / functionalized in all HEIs. Also, long-term contracts will be secured for the use of anti-plagiarism programs and their regular use will be encouraged in order to monitor plagiarism and meet ethical standards during research and academic work.

The collection and processing of information is important for the implementation of the funding formula and the promotion of quality in higher education. The strategy envisages the development of guidelines for data collection and analysis and the training of officials at the central level and at the level of HEIs for the use of HEMIS. Similarly, it will be invested in the register of scientific researchers to provide relevant information to researchers.

The Department of Higher Education at MESTI and the National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC) at MESTI operate with a small number of staff in addition to the responsibilities that these two units have. Therefore, the number of staff employed in these offices will increase.

The Rectors' Conference, as an advisory body, assists MESTI in orienting the program policies of HEIs and in other organizational aspects of joint responsibilities. The Rectors' Conference as a mechanism will be supported and strengthened in drafting policies and recommendations, as well as in attending meetings organized by international associations of higher education.

The methodology of financing HEIs is lacking, despite the fact that the legal basis for this mechanism exists. Therefore, a methodology for financing HEIs will be developed, which will be formalized through a sub-legal act, capacity building at the central level and at the level of HEIs for this methodology and the development of a mechanism for the implementation of the new funding formula based on monitoring and performance evaluation.

Starting with the definition of criteria for supporting outstanding students, doctoral students, students studying in deficient and STEM fields, with a special focus on women and girls, as well as students from vulnerable social categories and underrepresented communities, and then depending on the number of students who meet these criteria, it will be possible to support students through the provision of scholarships. In addition, a database of scholarship recipients will be developed in various higher education schemes.

Specific Objective 4.3:

Better connection of higher education with the labour market through harmonization of study programs, increase of opportunities for practical work of students, cooperation with enterprises and increase of interdisciplinary programs and STEM programs

Low correlation of study programs with labour market demands, limited offer of interdisciplinary study programs, limited opportunities for practical work of students and lack of cooperation of HEIs with enterprises, requires better correlation of higher education with the labour market through harmonization of study programs, increase of opportunities for practical work of students, with a special focus on women and girls, cooperation with enterprises and increase of interdisciplinary study programs.

New professional level 5 programs will be developed in all public HEIs, thus increasing the number and type of programs offered and the number of students attending them.

The programs offered in HEIs and the knowledge/skills acquired by students are not always in line with the needs of the labour market. Therefore, regular research will be conducted by HEIs on the programs offered and the needs of the labour market, where within the entirety of the research, and the opportunities of orienting knowledge and skills towards the needs of the labour market and self-employment aimed at the classes in need such as women and girls and communities are also addressed. Based on the data collected from these researches, the current programs will be reviewed and new programs will be designed that are in line with the demands of the labour market.

The Career Development Centres (CDC) in HEIs operate with limited staff capacity, and the number of beneficiaries of their services is small. Structures such as CDCs are needed to foster entrepreneurship and labour market interconnection, like this will be support the growth of staff employed in these centres, and build their human and organizational capacity to provide guidance and counselling services in student careers.

Joint development projects between HEIs and enterprises are almost non-existent. Grant schemes will be provided to encourage and support joint projects of HEIs with enterprises.

The HEIs lack interdisciplinary programs, which aim to develop more competencies in line with the needs of the local and international market. Therefore, based on labour market research, interdisciplinary study programs will be developed that will be offered in public HEIs.

Specific Objective 4.4:

Internationalization of higher education through joint study programs, increase of participation in international programs of academic and scientific cooperation, as well as integration in the European Higher Education Area

Limited capacities of HEIs for project development and management and building international partnerships, lack of joint study programs, limited mobility of academic staff and students, as well as low participation in international programs for higher education and research require increased efforts to internationalize higher education. This will be done through joint study programs, increased participation in international programs of academic and scientific cooperation, as well as integration into the European Higher Education Area.

HEIs in Kosovo lack structured efforts for internationalization and concrete action plans in this regard. Internationalization strategies will be drafted and approved in each HEI.

Currently in Kosovo there are no joint interdisciplinary study programs with international HEIs. The application of HEIs in international grant schemes (dual/joint degree) will be supported to provide funding for international academic cooperation projects, including joint interdisciplinary study programs with international HEIs.

Centres for project development and coordination in HEIs are not functional in all HEIs. Structures like these are needed to support academic staff in developing academic and research projects, as well as building international partnerships. Therefore, their establishment and functioning will be initiated, and their human and organizational capacities for providing services to academic units and academic staff will be initiated.

Mobility opportunities for academic staff and students in Kosovo are numerous. HEIs statistics show that the number of users of these mobilities in addition to the offer is small. Efforts to increase the mobility of students and academic staff through participation in international academic cooperation programs will be strengthened and encouraged.

Kosovo has a low level of participation in the EU program of higher education. Efforts to increase participation in European higher education and research programs will be strengthened.

Impact indicators:

- Percentage of study programs implemented in accordance with quality standards.
- The degree of implementation of the financing methodology of HEIs based on performance.
- Availability of data for educational institutions and the general public.
- Degree of compliance of study programs that are in line with the demands of the labour market.
- Number of joint projects of HEIs with enterprises.
- Number of joint international projects for higher education and scientific research.

Outcome indicators:

- All study programs of HEIs are in line with quality standards.
- Infrastructure and technology for teaching and research in HEIs are advanced.
- Quality assurance mechanisms in higher education are fully functional in all HEIs.
- Mechanisms for professional development of the academic staff of HEIs are fully functional.
- The number of scientific publications in indexed international journals of the academic staff of HEIs increases by 10% every year.
- The ratio of academic staff - students in public HEIs is at least 1:30.
- KAA is a full member of ENQA and EQAR.
- Consolidated legal framework in higher education that guarantees the institutional and financial independence of the KAA, as well as institutional autonomy and academic independence of HEIs.
- Mechanisms for issues of ethics and academic integrity are fully functional in all HEIs.
- By 2023, the Higher Education Management Information System is fully operational. .
- By 2023, the Register of Scientific Researchers is fully operational.
- By 2024, the implementation of the performance-based financing methodology of higher education institutions begins.
- The staff of DHE/MESTI and KAA grows and develops continuously through professional training.
- Various scholarship schemes are offered to students in higher education.
- Study programs are in line with labour market demands.
- Career development mechanisms are fully functional in all HEIs.
- Increased opportunities for internships for students.
- Joint projects of HEIs with enterprises are implemented.
- The number of students attending study programs in STEM fields increases.
- Increased participation of girls in STEM programs, through motivation with scholarships.
- HEIs offer joint study programs with international universities.
- Mechanisms for project development and coordination are fully functional in all HEIs.
- The mobility of academic staff and students in higher education increases.
- Participation in international programs for higher education and research increases.

5.5. Strategic Objective 5 - Digitalization of education

Strategic Objective:

The use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends

With the aim for Kosovo to move as quickly as possible towards digitalization of data, provision of digital services and automatization of processes in the field of education as well with the aim to increase the use of digital technology for educational needs and the aim to improve quality in education, Kosovo over the next five years will work in five areas:

1. Creation and functionalization of a comprehensive and centralized digital platform for the sector of education.
2. Preparation and production of multi-dimensional and quality digital teaching materials for different levels, classes, subjects and types.
3. Supply of ETIs and HEIs with quality internet networks and necessary technological equipment.
4. Cultivation of digital competence of all parties involved in the field of education and in all educational institutions of all types and levels.
5. Establishment of institutional mechanisms that enable the implementation of digitalization and the use of technology in the field of education.

All these actions are foreseen within the five specific objectives, which will be presented and briefly described below, while the details for all activities that will be undertaken in order to achieve these specific objectives and meet the strategic objective are presented in this document's action plan.

Specific Objective 5.1:

Digitalization and integration of data and processes in view of improvement of the quality of services and increase of well-informed decision-making, transparency and accountability in the field of education

As it can be noticed from the situational analysis, in terms of digitalization of data services and automatization of processes in the field of education, much work remains to be done on the complete digitalization of data and their integration into a comprehensive digital education platform, in order to then enable the automatization of processes and the provision of digital services to all stakeholders for all needs in the field of education. Therefore, this platform should be created with elements of e-Government in education, Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), School/Education Management Systems (SMS/EMS), Learning Management Systems (LMS), a platform for organizing and publishing digital teaching materials, etc., in order to include all levels of education, from preschool to university level, including the public, non-public and private sector of education in Kosovo. This platform should be integrated with all other digital platforms of all Kosovo institutions. More details on what this platform should contain are included in the separate appendix along with the extended situational analysis. This platform should also be translated into the official languages and languages of the communities living in Kosovo. Normally, the creation of the digital platform should be accompanied by the introduction of digital data of all levels of education in the digital platform, so that then the automatization of some processes can be implemented and the provision of digital services in the field of education for all parties.

Such a platform would ease the administrative burden of institutions, reduce the possibility of human error and unprofessional interference in important processes in the field of education, would enable decision-making based on complete data, would facilitate receiving services from all stakeholders, etc. All of these increase transparency and accountability in the field of education, as well as the quality of the education system in general in Kosovo.

In order to regulate the legal aspect of digitalization in education, the general aspects of digitalization and documentation in digital format in the field of education, such as pedagogical and administrative documentation, etc., should be included and regulated by the relevant law on textbooks, teaching materials and pedagogical documents (which is under review). In addition to the law, MESTI should draft Administrative Instructions that regulate all issues related to digitalization, process automation, digital services, digital documents, etc.

The building of this platform should be preceded by a detailed situation analysis and the drafting of the Terms of Reference for the digital platform in detail. Terms of reference should include a description and specification of each functionality for each module. This description should also include the UX/Mockup for each function and should also include an assessment of where to set the cut-off ("Day Zero") and the migration of preliminary data. After this, the selection of the entity that will build this platform should be done through international competition.

After the creation, testing and functionalization of this platform, in the upcoming years this platform should be maintained and updated as needed by any entity selected for this purpose. This platform should be developed and functionalized in close cooperation with the Agency for Information Society (AIS), so that this platform is placed on state servers, to provide data storage and security, etc.

In order to inform/train other parties on the use of the digital education platform, various guidelines should be developed and published. The digital education platform should also have a permanent user support service that provides clarifications and guidance to all users of the digital platform as needed.

Since for many providers and users of education services in Kosovo digitalization can be a relatively new practice, there is a need for proper preparation and training of all parties to contribute to the process of data digitization, automatization of processes as well as in the provision and use of digital services in the field of education.

Specific Objective 5.2:

Development and use of digital teaching materials in view of increasing the quality of teaching and learning

Taking into account the latest developments in the field of technology and its use for educational needs in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, it is more than necessary for Kosovo to start working towards the development of digital teaching materials for all levels and types of pre-university education, in line with state curricula, subject programs and curricula. These digital teaching and learning materials will be multi-dimensional teaching and learning materials, which depending on and in accordance with the specifics of the subject, curricular area, class level, the contents will be available in several different formats, including textual and audio-visual parts of different levels (individualized and differentiated learning), interactive didactic apparatus, virtual laboratory, animations, exercises and homework of different levels (individualized and differentiated learning), as well as educational games for pupils. These materials will provide assessment opportunities by teacher and self-assessment

opportunities for pupils, opportunities for the teacher to add additional materials, opportunity for connectivity to various online platform resources, connectivity to teacher's technology equipment, and pupil technology equipment in the classroom and at home, etc. These teaching and learning materials would have to go through the evaluation filters of the ministry's mechanisms, so that they could be used locally, and after purchase would be public property. These materials would eventually be published on a platform, which should be integrated into the digital education platform (included in specific objective 5.1), to which all parties (pupils, parents, and teachers) have access. These materials will be systematically improved and updated.

These digital teaching and learning materials will start to be produced for different levels of general pre-university education (preschool, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary - gymnasium), for vocational secondary education, for different categories of pupils with special needs, etc. Also, these materials, in addition to the Albanian language, will also be in the languages of the communities living in Kosovo.

The production of these digital teaching and learning materials must be preceded by a series of preparatory activities. MESTI should regulate the legal basis in the relevant law on textbooks and teaching materials (which is in the process of revision), in order to specify the form, content, standards and procedures for the preparation and approval of digital teaching and learning materials in the new law. The role of the parties involved, their obligations, the right of use and access to these materials should be regulated by accompanying sub-legal acts. In order to determine the standards for the preparation of teaching and learning materials, the format that these materials should have, and to ensure their quality, MESTI will draft a sub-legal act, based on the best experiences from countries that have a tradition and quality system for preparation and use of digital teaching and learning materials. The full and fair implementation of this act will be enabled through various guidelines for the preparation of digital teaching and learning materials. In addition to this, special attention will be paid to the preparation and publication of various models of digital teaching materials for certain levels as well as for different fields and subjects, which will serve as examples and guidelines for the form, content and the possible structure of digital learning materials for different stakeholders for their preparation.

Since the access to these digital teaching and learning materials requires technological equipment and not all pupils have the necessary financial means, then it is envisaged that a number of pupils (with priority those in difficult economic situation and families with large number of pupils) be supplied with technological equipment by institutions (MESTI and MEDs). To this end, MESTI will determine the criteria for pupils who will receive technological equipment from state institutions.

In addition to the development and publication of digital teaching and learning materials, special attention will be paid to the training of teachers, pupils and parents to use these materials. In order to address the training needs of teachers for the use of digital teaching and learning materials, training for teachers/educators will be provided, which will be accompanied by practical instructions and examples, illustrative photos, as well as video tutorials for the use of digital teaching and learning materials, including technical, technological, pedagogical and methodological aspects. Mentoring and monitoring will also be part of the training. In order for digital teaching and learning materials and other digital teaching and learning resources to be used effectively by pupils and parents, MESTI will design and publish various guidelines for pupils and parents, in the official languages and in the languages of the communities in which digital teaching and learning materials and other digital resources are developed. The guidelines will be accompanied by step-by-step explanations, illustrative photos, as well as video-tutorials, for both, pupils and parents.

Specific Objective 5.3:
Provision of opportunities for effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) in ETIs and HEIs

Digitization of education and use of digital technologies for educational needs is not possible if educational institutions do not have access to quality internet and adequate ICT equipment.

Thus, it is initially planned to provide dedicated broadband internet access of at least 100 Mbps for all ETIs in Kosovo, respectively in all ETI premises. In order for the Internet to be used effectively, it is necessary for each ETI to have an internal network (LAN) with cable and/or wireless, with access to all learning spaces, including: classrooms, libraries, cabinets, laboratories, corridors, offices, etc.

As public pre-university educational institutions have different needs in terms of ICT equipment, the drafting of a standard for their equipment with ICT equipment will begin, which will clearly define what kind of equipment should be provided and where they should be placed. Such a standard should provide that each room where the lesson takes place (about 9 thousand of them) has at least one projector, smart TV or interactive whiteboard, as well as a computer that will be used for teaching purposes. In addition, depending on the number of pupils, schools should also have a certain number of computers available to pupils in suitable spaces such as ICT cabinets, libraries, laboratories, etc. Based on this, then educational institutions will be equipped with computers, interactive whiteboards, smart TV, projectors and other accessories. In addition to pre-university education institutions, if necessary, public HEIs will be supplied with various ICT equipment.

Given the limited financial capacity, it will be necessary for teachers and pupils/students to use their personal equipment within the educational institution. To regulate this issue, MESTI will issue a sub-legal act on the use of personal equipment in pre-university institutions, which, if necessary, will be followed by more detailed instructions. Recognizing the importance of the use of digital technology by teaching staff (even outside the regular working hours) and students, MESTI, in cooperation with SBASHK and student organizations, ICT businesses and commercial banks, will develop a lending scheme for the purchase of personal computers for pre-university teachers and for higher education students. This scheme will make it possible for every teacher and student, once in 3 years, to buy a personal computer with affordable payment terms.

The Kosovo experience shows that the maintenance of ICT equipment at the ETI is one of the key problems at the pre-university level (in HEIs the situation is better, as they employed IT officials), and this problem will become even more apparent when ETIs become even more equipped with ICT equipment. Therefore, to address this, in the municipalities (at the level of MEDs) special units of ICT/IT specialists will be created, who will have the task of maintaining ICT equipment and internet network at the ETI (for more information see specific objective 5.5.). In addition to specialized teams, student clubs for basic maintenance of ICT equipment will be set up in schools. These clubs will be made up of pupils who express an interest in ICT and will be led by ICT teachers. Clubs will operate on a voluntary basis, while training programs will be designed for pupils, where equal gender participation is also aimed. Also, the clubs will have direct communication with the municipal teams of ICT/IT specialists.

Equipping ETIs (including HEIs) with many ICT devices means that licensed software negotiated for educational purposes must be provided for their use. Therefore, it is envisaged that licensed software (operating system and other necessary software packages) will be provided for these devices at an

affordable cost, provided that these licenses will be free of charge for pupils and students. In addition, the culture of using "open source" software, which is free of charge, will be gradually cultivated for teachers, pupils and students.

Specific Objective 5.4:

Development of digital competence of all parties in view of the successful digital transformation of education and general social development

Taking into account the latest global and local developments in the field of technology and estimating that the future generations of Kosovo can be considered "digital natives", and thus it becomes clear that Kosovo must work to the maximum in the development of digital competence of all its citizens through the education system. Digital competence is one of the eight competencies included in the European Framework of Key Lifelong Learning Competencies and concerns the ability of the individual to use and interact confidently, critically and responsibly with digital technology for the purpose of learning and performing work tasks and participation in society. It includes understanding information and data, communicating and collaborating, understanding the media, creating digital content (including coding), security (including digital welfare and internet security), intellectual property issues, as well as problem solving and critical and creative thinking. Therefore, the cultivation of digital competence among all citizens is of great importance when the main burden for this is borne by the education system and educational institutions of all levels.

Initially, MESTI will define and formalize the basic documents, which will serve as an orientation for the development and cultivation of digital competence of all parties. These documents are the three main EU documents on digital competence, namely these three documents are as follows:

1. European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp).
2. European Digital Competence Framework for Teachers (DigCompEdu).
3. European Digital Competence Framework for Educational Organizations (DigCompOrg).

After their officialization, these documents will be translated and adapted into Albanian and the languages of the communities. Then practical guidelines will be drafted for the implementation of these three frameworks, including the categorization of different levels of mastery of different competencies for each category, as well as the creation/adaptation of instruments for the assessment of digital competence in different categories in accordance with these three frameworks.

For the development of digital competence of all parties (teachers, academic staff, pupils, students, other staff of institutions in the field of education, etc.) and in accordance with the three documents mentioned above, different interventions are provided at different levels and forms, but it should be noted that before any intervention in this regard, first proper analysis, research or assessment of the level of this competence will be made and the needs and ways of its development in different categories, and only after that, the necessary measures will be taken or the necessary interventions will be made.

The development of digital competence of current teachers of pre-university education is expected to be realized mainly through training programs, which will be conceived and prepared for this purpose, so that teachers are trained to use digital technologies for educational needs and at the same time to cultivate pupils' digital competence. While, for the development of digital competence of future

pre-university teachers, it is foreseen to intervene within the respective study programs, where these students are prepared for future teachers. Whereas, regarding the preparation of future ICT teachers, for this purpose, the development and opening of a new Bachelor program at the Faculty of Education at the University of Prishtina is foreseen.

Regarding the development of digital competence of the academic staff of HEIs, at the policy level it is foreseen that the digital competence of the academic staff is introduced as a requirement - a new standard in the respective AI that regulates this issue , while in their plans for professional development of academic staff they will be required to include the field of digital competence for teaching and research, in order to provide training opportunities for academic staff for the development of this competence.

For the development of digital competence, pupils are provided with various interventions that include: greater inclusion of learning content that develops digital competence of pupils within all subjects; by reviewing and updating the teaching contents of the ICT subject so that it is in line with the needs of pupils for the development of digital competence of them; the beginning of the cultivation of digital competence of pupils at the youngest possible age through existing subjects or through new subjects, such as coding, programming, etc . In addition, there will be a systematic assessment of the level of digital competence of pupils, in order to continuously improve practices. Also, institutions from the level of the ministry to the level of ETI will organize various activities that contribute to the development and promotion of digital competence among pupils.

In addition to the focus on developing digital competence of pupils, we will work with HEIs on the development of digital competence of students, so that students of all programs are able to use digital technology in their future profession. For its implementation, it is foreseen that MESTI makes mandatory the inclusion and development of digital competence of students through the change of the respective AI, as a condition for accreditation for each study program of HEIs. This will be accompanied by more detailed instructions related to the inclusion of digital competence of students as cross-curricular issues in academic programs, assessment of digital competence in students, and how to report on the development of digital competence in students by HEIs in self-assessment reports of HEIs and in KAA reports.

In addition to the above categories, digital competence is expected to be developed to administrative, managerial, leading and professional non-teaching staff of all educational institutions (MESTI, MED, ETI, HEI, Agency, Institute, etc.). This is expected to be done mainly through training programs. In addition, MESTI is expected to develop a guide for the preparation and delivery of training programs in the field of digital competencies for educational organizations (including their staff), which will contain guidelines for the digital plan of the educational institution, digital leadership, evaluation of the institution, quality assurance in this field, adequate gender mainstreaming, involvement and support of parents in digital education, etc.

Specific Objective 5.5:

Establishment of institutional mechanisms that enable effective and efficient realization of digitalization and the use of technology in the field of education

The implementation of digitalization and the use of digital technology in the field of education in Kosovo, as provided by this document, are not possible without the establishment of appropriate institutional mechanisms that enable the implementation of digitalization and the use of technology in the field of education both effectively and efficiently. Therefore, for this is foreseen the establishment

of the Division for Technology and Digitalization in the Ministry of Education and the employment of Officers for Technology and Digitalization in MESTI. It also envisages the employment of Technology and Digitalization Coordinators by MEDs to support ETIs in the use of technology and digitalization in education. In addition, it is envisaged that other institutions (HEIs, Agencies, Institutes, etc.) will hire or appoint Coordinators for Technology and Digitalization.

Whereas, as mentioned in the specific objective 5.3, for the needs of network maintenance and technological equipment in the ETI, IT Officers will be employed by MEDs, respectively in the municipalities (at the level of MEDs) special units of ICT/IT will be established, whose task is the maintenance of ICT equipment and the Internet network at the ETIs. The organizational structure of these units will be defined by a special sub-legal act, based on the number of ETIs that the respective municipalities have and the digital technology that they possess. Such teams should serve the ETIs of the respective municipality either online or will intervene in person at the school premises when the need arises. Also, teams should have a budget for spare parts, or the municipality should contract a company for local equipment repair when spare parts are needed.

During the recruitment process, it is foreseen to train the employed staff in the Ministry, MED, HEI, Agency, Institute, so this staff is responsible for the realization of digitalization and use of technology in the field of education in Kosovo.

Impact indicators:

- Availability of data, services, and digital processes in the area of education offered in the inclusive digital education platform.
- Number of teaching hours for which digital teaching and learning materials have been developed.
- Number of new technological devices for educational purposes purchased for ETI and HEIs.
- Percentage of teachers, management and administrative staff of educational institutions and pupils, divided by gender, who demonstrate basic digital competence in relevant fields related to their role.
- Number of employees at different levels and types of institutions that enable the implementation of digitalization and use of technology in the education area.

Outcome indicators:

- Drafting and implementation of legislation on digitalization and documentation in digital format.
- Percentage of population of digital education platform with data for all levels and types of institutions.
- Number of users of the digital education platform by categories (pupils/students, staff of ETIs/HEIs, citizens, officials, etc.).
- Number of key staff proving competence to contribute to digitalisation in the education area, in the processes for which they have institutional responsibility.
- Drafting and implementation of legislation and standards for digital teaching materials.
- Classes, levels, categories, for which digital teaching materials have been produced and approved.
- Number of pupils supplied by MESTI and MEDs with technological devices (laptops) within the year.
- Number of teachers trained in the use of digital teaching materials in the education process.
- Percentage of ETIs that have broadband internet access and that have internet network extension up to class level.
- Pupil-computer ratio in pre-university education.
- Number of licenses paid per year for users / computers for educational purposes.
- Number of pupils and students who receive free licenses per year for computers for educational purposes.
- Percentage of in-service teachers/educators and those in pre-university education who demonstrate

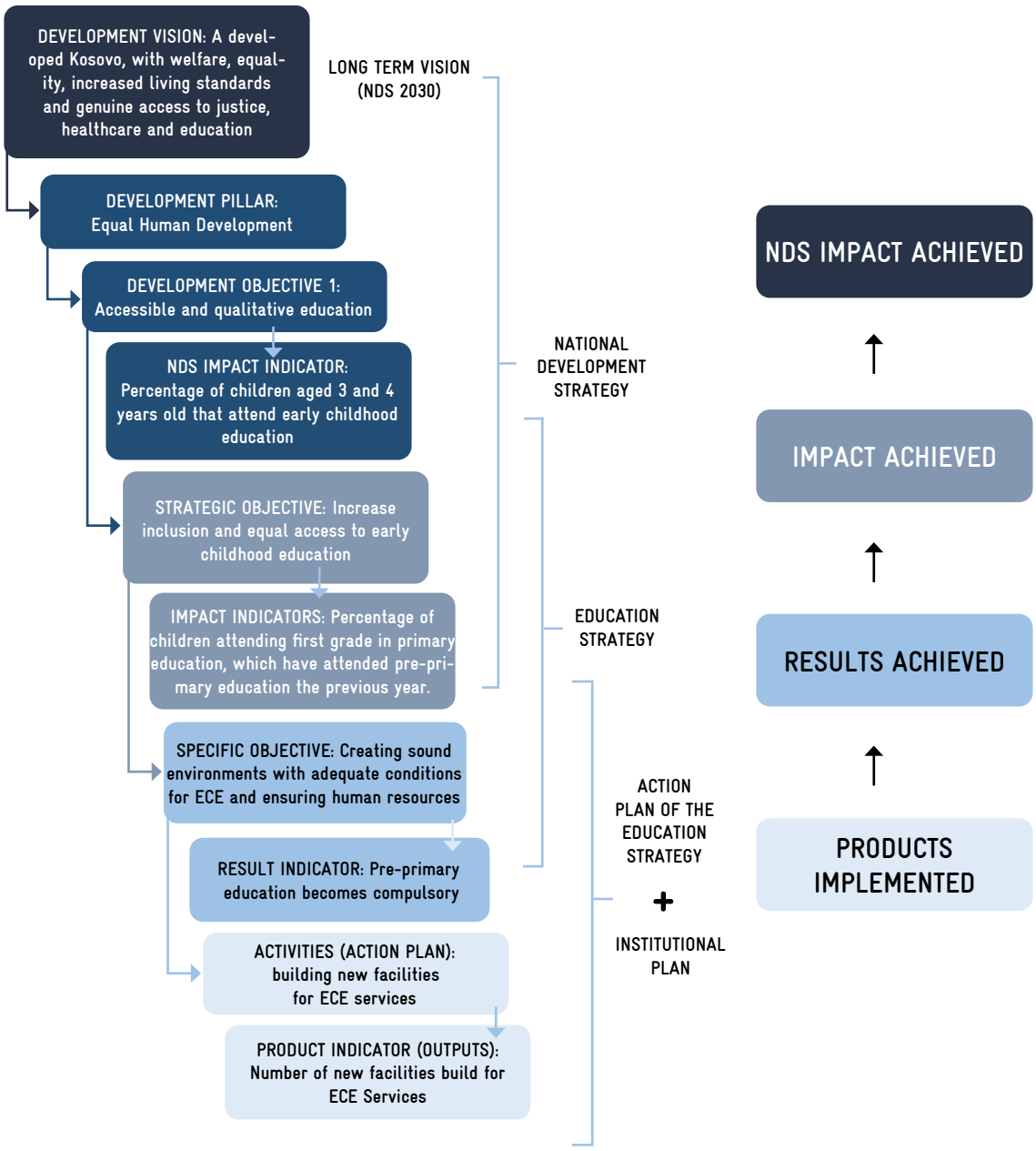
a basic level of digital competence knowledge for teachers (based on DigCompEdu).

- Number of academic staff in HEIs that is trained/advanced for the use of digital technology for teaching and research and for the cultivation of digital competence among students.
- Percentage of pupils who demonstrate a basic level of digital competence for citizens (based on DigComp) at the end of the ninth grade and an average level at the end of the twelfth grade.
- Percentage of educational institutions (ETI, HEI, MED, MESTI, Agencies, Institutes) that meet the basic requirements of digital competence for educational organizations (based on the DigCompOrg framework).
- Number of Technology and Digitalization Officers in education employed in the Ministry.
- Number of IT Officers employed by MEDs for network maintenance and technological equipment across ETI.
- Number of Technology and Digitalization Coordinators employed by MEDs to support schools in the use of technology and digitalization in education.
- Number of Technology and Digitalization Coordinators assigned/employed by HEIs, Agencies, Institutes, etc.

6. Implementation, monitoring and reporting

The process of implementation, monitoring and reporting of ES 2022-2026 is interconnected and coordinated with the same process of NDS 2030. To ensure the consistency of this process, ES follows the form of cascading by being interconnected with NDS 2030 as in the figure below.

Figure 9.: The cascade of interconnection between the ES and NDS



6.1. Mechanisms for implementation

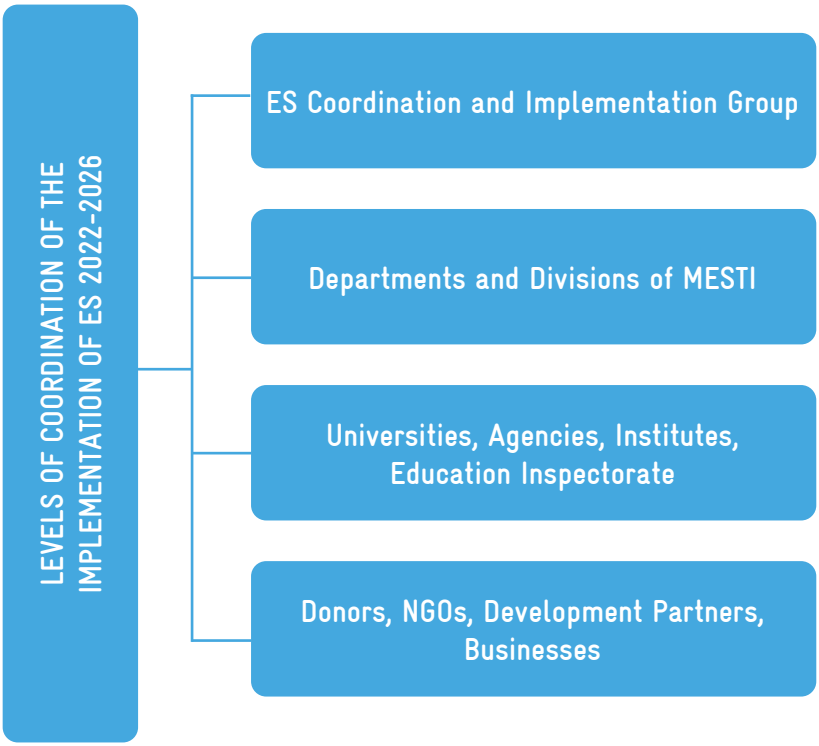
The primary responsibility for the implementation of the Education Strategy lies with the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), whose role is to develop and implement educational policies in the country. Depending on the strategic objectives, the line ministries, universities, institutes, agencies and other relevant institutions in Kosovo should be involved in the process. It is important to also involve actively in the process municipalities, which are responsible for the functioning of pre-university level institutions within their territory, as well as the pre-university and higher education institutions themselves as members and direct beneficiaries of the activities of ES.

MESTI should ensure good and efficient coordination with the initiatives of the Government's development partners, which include donors, as well as local and international organizations that, in one way or another, express willingness to contribute to the implementation of ES.

Also, within its organizational structure, MESTI should ensure the empowerment of certain divisions and departments in order to provide the necessary professional capacity for the successful implementation of ES. For this reason, in the framework of the internal restructuring process, MESTI will plan the engagement and employment of relevant staff in certain areas/sectors of its activity.

MESTI will establish the ES Implementation Group which is headed by the Minister (or Deputy Minister on his/her behalf); coordinated by the General Secretary and composed of the responsible officials of the organizational units of MESTI in charge of implementing the activities of the ES, as well as representatives from the Office for Strategic Planning and the Ministry of Finance.

Figure 10: Institutional framework for monitoring and reporting



The duties and responsibilities of this group are:

- Drafting annual action plans for the implementation of ES;
- Drafting the annual budget for the implementation of ES within the budget limits set by the MTEF and the relevant budget circular;
- Analysis of progress in the implementation of ES, based on information collected from MESTI and other sources;
- Review and approve additional measures to ensure the implementation of ES;
- Drafting requests for support from donor programs in order to ensure the implementation of ES.

This group will meet at least once every two months, and technical support will be provided by the Office of the General Secretary or the organizational unit designated by the Secretary.

At least twice a year, the meetings of the ES Implementation Group will be held in an expanded composition, with the participation of representatives of HEIs, Agencies, Institutes, the Association of Kosovo Municipalities, development partners and other stakeholders that are invited by the chairperson.

In each municipality an official responsible for coordinating the implementation of ES activities within the municipality will be appointed in order to coordinate municipal development plans with ES activities. Communication with these municipal officials will be the responsibility of the Department/Division primarily responsible for education planning at MESTI.

6.2. Monitorimi dhe raportimi

Monitoring should be understood as an on-going process that aims to provide information to MESTI and stakeholders on progress towards achieving strategic objectives. Reporting is an integral part of monitoring, with the aim of providing essential information in a systematic and timely manner at regular intervals.

ES monitoring will be done at two levels:

1. **Monitoring of activities** by which it is determined whether the activities have been carried out at the right time and in the right quality. The main tool for monitoring activities is the action plan, which sets out the implementation calendar for each activity. Whenever different activities deviate from their schedule, it should be checked whether there are consequences for other activities and resources. The reasons for such deviations should be analysed, while the implementation plan should be corrected in terms of time. If the delay of activities affects the schedule of implementation of other activities, then MESTI should respond by adapting the plans and redistributing existing resources. Resources must be available at the right time, and be of appropriate quality and quantity. The time required to secure resources is often underestimated. This has to do with human and physical resources. To ensure the liquidity of the implementation, the amount of funds available should be constantly monitored, including the situation in the public budget, etc. If other partners contribute to the financing of ES activities, we must ensure that they meet the financial requirements. ES management should ensure that activity planning reflects the time required for resource mobilization.

2. **Monitoring of objectives** is based on their indicators. The indicators have the base value, the intermediate target and the target for the last year in accordance with the period of the strategic document. For monitoring to be effective, intermediate goals must be set on an annual basis, becoming part of the annual work plan. The conclusion is then drawn by comparing the present value with the intended purpose.

Good monitoring means the continuous collection of data related to ES, whether through field visits, meetings with relevant parties or analysis of available documentation and reports.

As required by Article 16 of the Administrative Instruction, MESTI will prepare 2 reports:
- Semi-annual report on the implementation of the SA action plan
- Annual report on the implementation of SA.

1. **The semi-annual report** is prepared to follow the implementation of the action plan. It is prepared by the end of the month following the reporting period. The first half-yearly report covers the first 6 months of the year, while the second half-yearly report covers the period of 12 months. The report focuses on the completion of actions as set out in the action plan, the reasons for the delays, the risks associated with implementing the actions and the next steps. The following is the general format of the semi-annual report:

- Work plan for the reporting period.
- Narrative description of the work currently done.
- Description of problems encountered and explanations of major deviations from the work plan.
- Summary of planned expenditures for the semester accompanied by any comments or explanations.
- Recommendation for improving the implementation plan, changing measures, budget, etc. and
- Work plan for the next six months.

2. **The annual report is** prepared to give an account on the implementation of the strategic document. It is prepared by the end of the first quarter of the following year. The focus of the annual report is as follows:
- Achieving the objectives compared to the objectives of the indicator (at least for the last two years);
- Timely completion of actions taken;
- Use of financial resources;
- The main obstacles in implementation; and
- Improvement measures.

The general format of the annual report is given below:

1. Executive Overview.

2. Work plan for the reporting period and target values of strategic and specific objectives.

3. Summary of the implementation of ES activities (in tabular form):
    a. Description of any problems encountered and explanations of major deviations from the work plan. and

    b. Summary of planned annual expenditures accompanied by any comments or explanations.

4. Summary of the fulfilment of the objectives, comparing the target values of the indicators with the current ones and eventual comments for deviation from the planning.

5. Recommendation for improving the implementation plan, changing activities, budget, redefining their objectives or indicators.

6. Work plan for the upcoming year.

7. ANNEX: Data required to document the achievement of indicators (e.g., number of facilities built for ECE services, number of teachers trained by municipalities, list of schools equipped with internet, etc.)

6.3. Evaluation

Evaluation is the most detailed process of analysing the success of strategy implementation, identifying what went wrong, examining the reasons behind what went wrong, and then re-adapting the strategic direction accordingly. The design and execution of the evaluation phase is usually independent of the regular monitoring and reporting framework. Evaluation involves compiling evaluation questions, collecting and analysing data to obtain answers to these questions, and gathering evidence to formulate conclusions and recommendations.

MESTI will seek the assistance of development partners to conduct three external evaluations of ES, after the end of the second, fourth and fifth/sixth year of ES. The dimensions of the evaluations will be as follows:

1. **Relevance** - compliance of the goals and objectives of the program with the needs of citizens and the priorities of the Government;

2. **Effectiveness** - matching the achieved results of the strategy with the planned results as well as the needs of direct and indirect beneficiaries;

3. **Efficiency** - achieving results with the lowest costs (the ratio of results to costs (resources) required or used to achieve them, must be determined);

4. **Implementation** - the quality of the implementation process and structures;

5. **Impact** - intentional and unintentional influences;

6. **Sustainability** - long-term results and impacts on strategy.

An important source of information for such evaluations will be the semi-annual and annual progress reports produced by MESTI.

7. Strategy Budget

The Education Strategy costing is implemented based on methodologies and practice of budget planning of strategic documents. This approach has enabled the determination of the cost for the implementation of ES and the financial gap in relation to the budget planned in the MTEF 2022-2024 and funding from donors.

Initially, the expenditures for each activity were identified by classifying them according to predefined expenditure categories. For costs that recur over the years, standard costs have been determined through market research and expert consultation e.g., costs for training, salaries, equipment, and other services. Then, the cost is calculated by years, being vigilant that the financial gap for the years 2022-2024 be as small as possible. The prices for the calculation of the standard cost of ES activities have been determined in the period January-March 2022 in the workshops of the Drafting Team.

The total cost for the implementation of the ES is 322 847 140 Euros, out of which 35 640 159 Euros (11%) for Early Childhood Education (Strategic Objective 1), 161 839 199 Euros (50%) for Pre-University Education (Strategic Objective 2)), 19 024 719 Euros (6%) for Vocational Education, Training and Adult Education (Strategic Objective 3), 54 678 312 Euro (17%) for Higher Education (Strategic Objective 4) and 51 664 751 Euro (16 %) for the Digitalization of Education (Strategic Objective 5) (Table 3)

Table 3. Budget of ES for 2022-2026 by years

Strategic objective	Total 2022-2026	Year 2022	Year 2023	Year 2024	Year 2025	Year 2026
1. Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education by providing safe, supportive and stimulating environments as well as integrated and quality services	35 640 159	13 425 175	4 023 041	5 309 926	6 246 008	6 636 010
2. Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and the provision of quality teaching	161 839 199	24 444 395	36 115 785	35 846 775	32 639 470	32 792 773
3. Harmonization of vocational education and training with dynamic developments of technology and labour market, in view of lifelong learning	19 024 719	200 513	4 961 240	4 770 057	4 584 651	4 508 257
4. Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education through the implementation of high-quality standards, excellence in teaching and research, interconnection with the labour market and internationalization	54 678 312	8 351 506	14 294 008	13 449 573	9 377 413	9 205 813
5. The use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends.	51 664 751	74 547	7 492 672	10 466 559	15 990 472	17 640 502
Total	**322 847 140**	**46 496 135**	**66 886 746**	**69 842 889**	**68 838 014**	**70 783 355**

For the period of implementation of ES 2022-2026, from the total cost of 322 847 140 Euros, it is planned that 185,520,615 Euros (57%) will be covered by the State Budget, 33,500,989 Euros (10%) will be provided by foreign financing, while the financial gap is 103,826,036 Euros (32%) of the total cost (Table 4). Given that the Government is reviewing the MTEF 2023-2025 it is assumed that for certain categories of the ES budget additional funds will be available from the State Budget and from foreign financing. Therefore, it is assumed that the financial gap can be reduced even further.

Table 4. Funding sources and financial gap for ES 2022-2026

Strategic objective	Total 2022-2026			
		Source of coverage		
	Indicative cost	State budget	Foreign financing	Financial gap
1. Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education by providing safe, supportive and stimulating environments as well as integrated and quality services	35,640,159	20,310,359	5,508,215	(9,821,585)
2. Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and the provision of quality teaching	161,839,199	122,155,108	14,580,329	(25,103,762)
3. Harmonization of vocational education and training with dynamic developments of technology and labour market, in view of lifelong learning	19,025,219	1,034,349	3,318,325	(14,672,545)
4. Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education through the implementation of high-quality standards, excellence in teaching and research, interconnection with the labour market and internationalization	54,678,312	41,500,798	10,049,120	(3,128,394)
5. The use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends.	51,664,751	520,000	45,000	(51,099,751)
Total	**322,847,640**	**185,520,615**	**33,500,989**	**(103,826,036)**

Table 5 presents the financial gap over the years. The financial gap is smaller in 2022 – 407 685 Euros (0.88% of the indicative cost for this year) because the planning for 2022 is done very close to the current budget of MESTI. However, for the following years, the financial gap has a progressive increase of 14,516,262 Euros or 21.70% of the indicative cost for year 2023, 25,601,414 Euros or 36.66% of the indicative cost for 2024, 30,619,997 Euros or 44.48% of indicative cost for 2025, and 32,680,178 Euros or 46.17% of the indicative cost for 2026. In relation to GDP, the financial gap of 103,825,536 Euros constitutes 1.24% of the funds planned for education with MTEF 2022-2024.

Table 5. Financial gap for the budget of ES 2022-2026 in years

Strategic objective	Total 2022-2026	Year 2022	Year 2023	Year 2024	Year 2025	Year 2026
1. Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education by providing supportive and stimulating environments as well as integrated and quality services	(9 821 585)	(250 310)	(1 229 442)	(2 377 827)	(2 781 945)	(3 182 062)
2. Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and the provision of quality teaching	(25 103 762)	(93 999)	(1 605 708)	(8 370 484)	(7 496 437)	(7 537 134)
3. Harmonization of vocational education and training with dynamic developments of technology and labour market, in view of lifelong learning	(14 672 045)	(12 750)	(3 738 105)	(3 622 245)	(3 659 004)	(3 639 940)
4. Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education through the implementation of high-quality standards, excellence in teaching and research, interconnection with the labour market and internationalization	(3 128 394)	(41 080)	(950 335)	(764 300)	(692 140)	(680 540)
5. The use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends.	(51 099 751)	(9 547)	(6 992 672)	(10 466 559)	(15 990 472)	(17 640 502)
Total	**(103 825 536)**	**(407 685)**	**(14 516 262)**	**(25 601 414)**	**(30 619 997)**	**(32 680 178)**

The Education Strategy costing is made for each specific activity, determining the type and category of expenditures in accordance with the implementation plan of the activities over the years. Table 6 shows the indicative cost of ES 2022-2026 for each strategic objective in relation to the type of expenditure. From the total cost of 322,847,640 Euros for the ES 2022-2026 30,381,204 Euros (9%) are planned for the category of salaries, 105,372,310 Euros (33%) for the category of goods and services, 169,097,125 Euros (52%) for capital expenditures and 17,997,000 Euros (6%) for the category of subsidies.

Table 6. Budget of ES 2022-2026 according to the type of expenditures

Strategic objective	Total 2022-2026				
	Indicative cost	Salaries	Goods and Services	Capital expenditures	Subsidies
1. Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education by providing safe, supportive and stimulating environments as well as integrated and quality services	35,640,159	10,403,529	1,349,130	23,887,500	0
2. Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and the provision of quality teaching	161,839,199	13,307,939	77,593,635	68,287,625	2,650,000
3. Harmonize vocational education and training with dynamic developments of technology and labour market, in view of lifelong learning	19,025,219	333,534	3,648,285	14,556,400	487,000
4. Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education through the implementation of high-quality standards, excellence in teaching and research, interconnection with the labour market and internationalization	54,678,312	1,299,522	1,681,590	36,837,200	14,860,000
5. The use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends	51,664,751	5,036,681	21,099,670	25,528,400	0
Total	**322,847,640**	**30,381,204**	**105,372,310**	**169,097,125**	**17,997,000**

8. Action Plan

The action plan of the Strategy has been prepared according to the format defined by AI no. 07/2018 on Planning and drafting of strategic documents and action plans and the relevant Manual. The action plan presents strategic objectives, specific objectives, activities, indicators, costing of activities and other issues related to stakeholders and reference documents. The plan also includes activities without financial costs for implementation which are considered necessary to maintain coherence and strategic link between certain activities.

The Education Strategy 2022-2026 has 5 strategic objectives and 28 specific objectives presented in Table 6 below.

Table 7. Strategic objectives and specific objectives of ES 2022-2026

Strategic Objectives	Specific Objectives	NDS – Specific Objectives	NDS
1. Increase inclusion and equal access to early childhood education	1.1. Creation of healthy environments with adequate conditions for ECE and provision of human resources	Increasing children's participation in quality early childhood education and care	
	1.2. Improvement of the legal infrastructure and provision of quality services in ECE		
	1.3. Provision of opportunities for the development and achievement of full potential of children, through integrated cross-sectorial services		
	1.4. Raising social awareness for early childhood development		

Strategic Objectives	Specific Objectives	NDS – Specific Objectives	NDS
2. **Improve the quality of pre-university education through the consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms and provision of quality teaching**	2.1. Increase of efficiency and effectiveness in management by strengthening transparency and accountability	Improving inclusive access and digitalization in education	
	2.2. Strengthening of mechanisms and capacities for the implementation of the quality assurance system		
	2.3. Increase the involvement and active participation of pupils from marginalized groups through the creation of a stimulating and supportive climate		
	2.4. Provision of healthy, safe and appropriate school environments according to norms and standards, which enable quality teaching and learning		
	2.5. Increase of the reliability of national test results and their use for policy making, in addition to international test results		
	2.6. Effective implementation of all elements of the pre-university education curriculum		
	2.7. Provision of quality textbooks, resources, tools and teaching materials in accordance with the relevant curriculum and standards		
	2.8. Full implementation of the teacher licensing system and increase of opportunities for teachers' professional development and advancement based on teaching standards		
	2.9. Qualitative preparation of pre-service teachers who competently adapt to curriculum requirements and practical needs of working with children/pupils		
	2.10. Promoting multiculturalism and diversity in pre-university education		

Strategic Objectives	Specific Objectives	NDS – Specific Objectives	NDS
3. **Harmonization of vocational education and training with dynamic developments in technology and labour market, in view of lifelong learning**	3.1. Improvement of the governance, funding and information management system of vocational education and training and adult education	Better harmonization of education with the needs of the labour market	
	3.2. Consolidation of quality assurance mechanisms, at central, local and VETI level, to enable systemic access to quality management		
	3.3. Finalization of the curriculum package for qualifications offered by vocational education and training institutions, in accordance with the needs of the labour market and transformation trends		
	3.4. Provision of opportunities for the implementation of practical teaching and learning and the functionalization of career counselling services		
	3.5. Improvement of supply and increase of participation in AE		
4. **Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education**	4.1. Increase of the quality of higher education through the review of study programs, the advancement of academic infrastructure, the promotion of excellence in teaching and research, and the implementation of high standards of institutional evaluation and study programs	Higher quality, integrity and competitiveness in higher education	
	4.2. Improvement of the governance and funding of higher education through review of legislation, development of advanced information management system, increase of professional capacities, improvement of services for students and ensuring academic integrity, transparency and accountability in higher education		
	4.3. Better connection of higher education with the labour market through harmonization of study programs, increase of opportunities for practical work of students, cooperation with enterprises and increase of interdisciplinary programs and STEM programs		
	4.4. Internationalization of higher education through joint study programs, increase of participation in international programs of academic and scientific cooperation, as well as integration in the European Higher Education Area		

Strategic Objectives	Specific Objectives	NDS – Specific Objectives	NDS
5. **The use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends**	5.1. Digitalization and integration of data and processes in view of improvement of the quality of services and increase of well-informed decision-making, transparency and accountability in the field of education	Improving inclusive access and digitalization in education	
	5.2. Development and use of digital teaching materials in view of increasing the quality of teaching and learning		
	5.3. Provision of opportunities for effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) in VETIs and HEIs		
	5.4. Development of digital competence of all parties in view of the successful digital transformation of education and general social development		
	5.5. Establishment of institutional mechanisms that enable effective and efficient realization of digitalization and the use of technology in the field of education		

9. Annexes

9.1. Annex 1 - Policy documents, legislation and research reports

Policy documents

Documents reviewed:

1. The Kosovo Government Programme 2021-2025 https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Programi-i-Qeverise-se-Kosoves-2021-2025.pdf
2. 2Strategic and Operational Plan of Kosovo Government https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Plani-Strategjik-dhe-Operacional.pdf
3. Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/repository/docs/PLANI_STRATEGJIK_I_ARSIMIT_NE_KOSOVE.pdf
4. Platform for the Recovery of Education in Kosovo (KASA, 2021) http://www.ashak.org/repository/docs/Platforme_per_rimekembjen_e_arsimit_ne_Kosove_811324.pdf
5. Statistics of education in Kosovo 2020-2021. https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2021/08/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2020-21.pdf
6. Annual statistics report with education indicators. https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2021/12/raport-vjetor-statistikor-me-tregues-arsimore-2020-21.pdf
7. Economic Reform Programme 2021-2023 https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/E3E6B52B-7C91-43CE-9CDE-559A0053A89E.pdf
8. Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2020-2022 https://uni-pr.edu/desk/inc/media/D7EAE629-A39D-4D4C-A598-93B7B5227EDB.pdf
9. EU Framework for supporting teacher competence development for better learning outcomes https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/teacher/teachercomp_en.pdf
10. Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48584/st06289-re01-en21.pdf
11. Kosovo Country Report 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/kosovo_report_2020.pdf
12. Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52010DC2020&from=EN
13. Government of the Republic of Kosovo. Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo Society 2017 - 2021. Prishtina, April 2017 https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/docs/ANG-STRATEGJIA_PER_PARFSHIRJEN_E_KOMUNITETEVE_ROM_DHE_ASHKALI_NË_SHOQËRINË_KOSOVARE_d7-20
14. MEST: Strategic framework for teacher development in Kosovo, 2017 https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/04/kornize-strategjike.pdf
15. MEST: Quality Assurance Strategy for Pre-University Education in Kosovo https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2016/12/libri-b5-shqip.pdf
16. National Program for the Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (NPISAA) 2020 - 2024, pp.6,209,211 http://www.mei-ks.net/repository/docs/1%20PKZMSA%202020-2024%20Final%20Tejapproved % 20Government]% 20ALB.pdf
17. Communication- European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9723
18. Strategy for Digitalization of Education in Kosovo 2021-2026 (Draft document), MESTI 2021.

Legislation

Legislation reviewed:

1. Law on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo, MEST 2011, https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/1-ligji-per-arsimin-parauniversitar.pdf
2. Law on Vocational Education and Training, MEST 2013, https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/ligji-per-aftesimin-profesional-2013-alb.pdf
3. Law on Adults Education and Training in the Republic of Kosovo, MEST 2013, https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/ligji-per-arsimin-dhe-aftesimin-per-te-adritur- ne-republiken-e-kosoves-2013-alb.pdf
4. Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo, MEST 2011, https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/2-ligji-per-arsimin-e-larte.pdf
5. Law on Scientific-Research Activities, MEST 2013, https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/ligji-per-veprimtari-kerkimore-shkencore-2013-alb.pdf
6. Law on the Regulated Professions in the Republic of Kosovo, MEST 2016, https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2018/01/ligj-per-professions-regulated-ne-republiken-e-kosoves-gznr38-21-nentor-2016.pdf
7. Law on National Qualifications, MEST 2008, https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/11-2008-03-l-060-lkk-qualifications-komb.pdf
8. Law on Education in the Municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, MEST 2008, https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/9ligji-i-arsimit-ne-komuna2008-03-l068-al-arse-kom.pdf
9. 9. Law on the Education Inspectorate in the Republic of Kosovo, MEST 2018, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=17744

MESTI is in the process of preparing several new laws, such as: Law on Higher Education, Law on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, Law on Early Childhood Education, Law on Textbooks and Teaching and Learning Materials. Upon their approval, the follow-up activities will be reflected in this Education Strategy document.

Research reports

Research reports reviewed:

1. KESP Evaluation 2017-2021, GIZ, Strategic Education Plan Implementation Evaluation Report, 2021
2. Kushtrim Bajrami: Evaluation of the implementation of the strategic education plan in Kosovo 2017-2021 - Insufficient achievement (2021). http://kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Vleresimi-i-Realizimit-te-PSAK-2017-2021.pdf
3. Selim Mehmeti, Ema Rraci, Kushtrimi Bajrami: Teachers Professional Development in Kosovo (2019) http://mail.kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Zhvillimi-Profesional-i-M%C3%ABsimdh%C3%ABn%C3%ABsve-n%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%AB_ALB.pdf
4. Jeta Aliu, Ema Rraci, Kushtrim Bajrami: Management of Pre-University Education in Kosovo (2018).http://www.kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Raporti-per-menaxhimin-e-arsimit-parauniversitar-ALB.pdf
5. Lindita Boshtrakaj, Ema Rraci, Kushtrim Bajrami: Quality of textbooks in Kosovo (2019). https://www.keen-ks.net/site/assets/files/1466/cilesia_e_teksteve_shkollore_ne_kosove_alb.pdf
6. Mehmeti S. et al: The Competency-based Curriculum – Implementation experience, challenges and opportunities, and the need for continuous support of teachers (Albanian), Prishtina: IPK, 2019.

7. Selim Mehmeti, Lindita Boshtrakaj, Kushtrim Bajrami: Medium Term Assessment: Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo (2020). http://www.kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Vler%C3%ABsim-afatmes%C3%ABm-i-PSAK_ALB.pdf
8. OECD (2020), Education in the Western Balkans: Findings from PISA, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/764847ff-en.
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10. Implementation of quality assurance at the level of VET providers in Kosovo: State of play (ALLED2, 2021) http://alled.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Quality-assurance-ALBw.pdf
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9.2. Annex 2 – List of contributors

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