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# POLICY BRIEF

## Ensuring all children enrol, attend and complete education

2014

# POLICY BRIEF, KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

## Ensuring all children enrol, attend and complete education

**Education is a human right. It is also the foundation for children to grow, develop and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to develop their full potential and live as productive members of the society. In Kosovo, not all children enjoy their right to education. Some enrol late in school and others drop out before completing their nine years of compulsory education.**

Who are these children? Why are they not in school? How well is the system identifying them and responding to their needs? What could be done differently to ensure that all children enrol, attend and complete education?

Drawing from a recent baseline study on non-enrolment and dropout prevention and response practices commissioned by UNICEF and conducted by the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute, from two UNICEF multi-country evaluations on education inclusion and school readiness and from a range of reports from ministries, international agencies and NGOs, **this policy brief explores possible policy options and response to address the issue of out-of-school children and student dropout in the diverse context of Kosovo.**
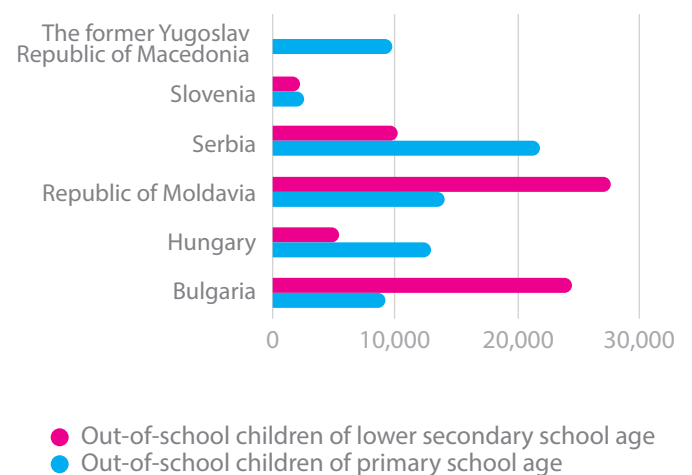
# BACKGROUND
## *Out-of-school children and student drop out*

In Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia 2.5 million children are out of primary and lower secondary school and 12 millions of adolescents are out of secondary school[1]. The situation varies across countries (Fig. 1).

In Kosovo* there is no official data on the number of children of compulsory school age not enrolled in school. This is a significant knowledge gap on a fundamental right such as education.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014) reveals that not all children of primary school entry age enter Grade 1 on time with a net intake rate in primary education of 91.6%. While the primary school net attendance ratio reaches 98%, the lower secondary education net attendance ratio is 95.9% and the upper secondary school net attendance ratio is 82%.[2]

*Figure 1: Number of out-of-school children in selected countries (2012)*



● Out-of-school children of lower secondary school age
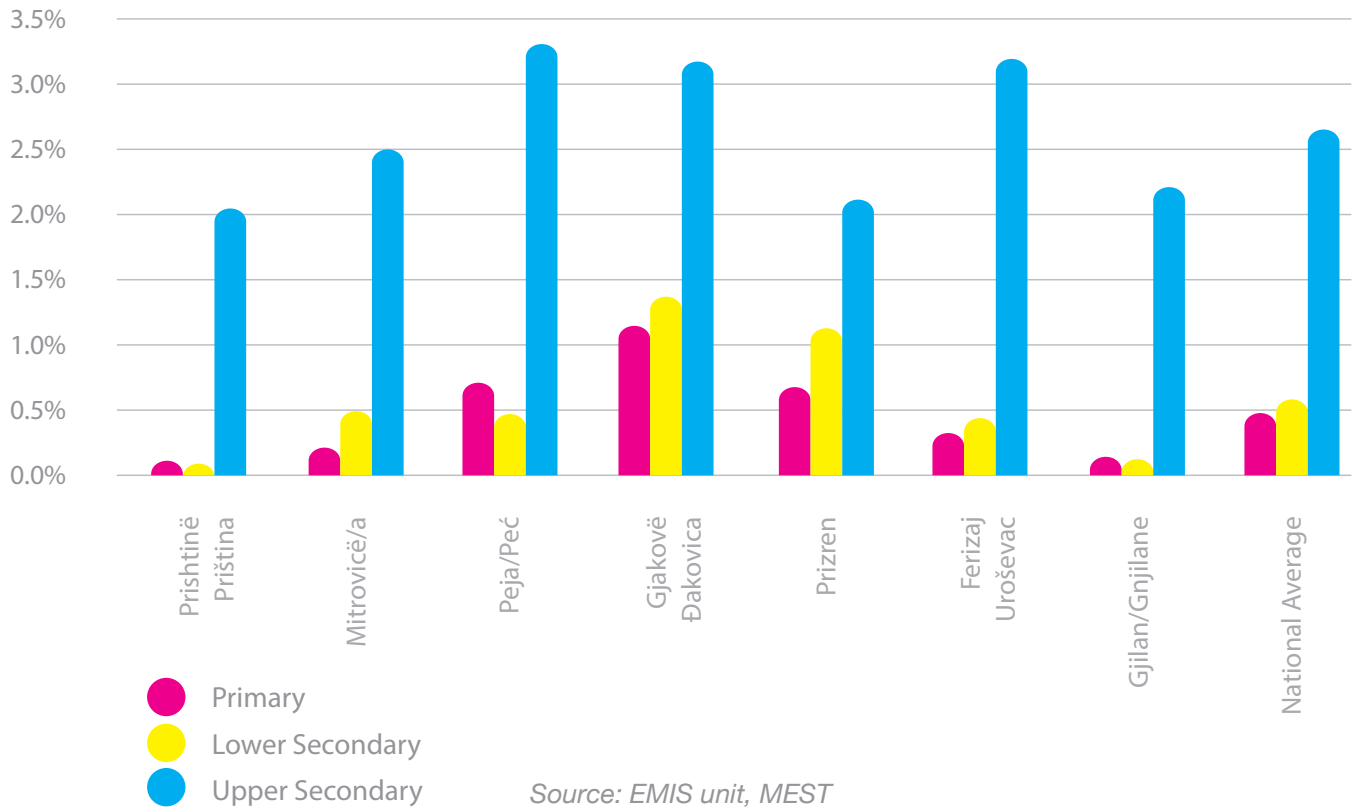● Out-of-school children of primary school age

*Source: UNESCO UIS*

In 2010-2011, 1,117 students dropped out of primary education, 1,086 of lower secondary and 4,011 of upper secondary education in Kosovo. Data, however masks local disparities (Fig. 2) and does not capture well children missing long periods of their education and students in and out of school.

*All references to Kosovo are in the context of UNSCR 1244 (1999)

## Figure 2: Drop out rate per region in Kosovo in 2010-2011



Primary
Lower Secondary
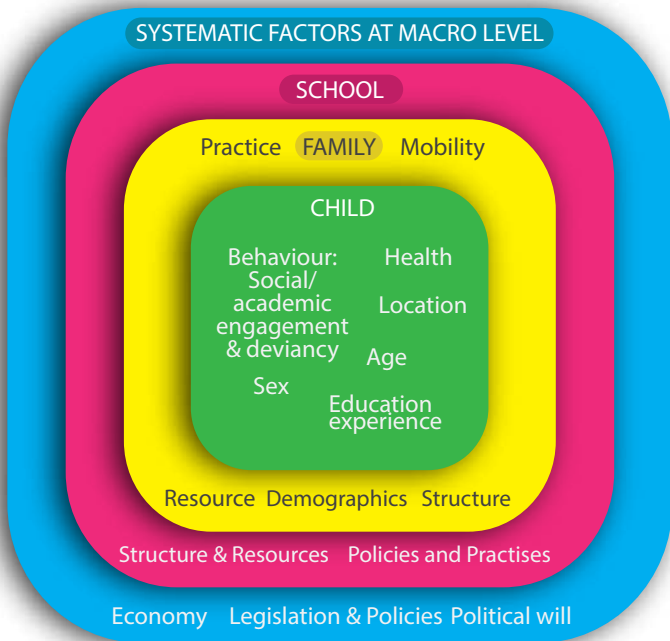Upper Secondary

*Source: EMIS unit, MEST*

Even regional data masks significant discrepancies between municipalities. Gjakovë/Đakovica, Novobërdë/o, Suharekë/ Suva Reka are affected by drop-out at all levels. Deçan/Dečan, Prizren, Pejë/Peć, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Dragash/Dragaš, Rahovec/ Orahovac, Malishevë/Mališevo, Klinë/a, and Shtime/Štimlje are particularly affected by drop-out both at primary and lower secondary education. Junik, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje and Obiliq/ć show dropout rates higher than the national average for primary education. In Mamushë/Mamuša, Hani i Elezit/Đeneral Janković, Skenderaj/Srbica and Istog/k, the dropout rates are higher than the national average for lower secondary education.
Other research conducted on drop out in Roma Ashkali and Egyptian communities confirm the high rate of drop out in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Obiliq/ć, Prizren and Ferizaj/Uroševac. [3]

## Profile of children out of school

Studies conducted in Kosovo in the past decade have revealed that there is a combination of risk factors that prevent children from enrolling and remaining in schools. These factors include individual, family, school and systemic barriers at macro and micro levels.

Studies show that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, including children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, children with disabilities and other children exposed to vulnerability factors such as high mobility, migration, extreme poverty and dysfunctional families (in which conflict, misbehaviour, and child neglect occur) are particularly at risk of not being or not remaining in school.

## Figure 3: Risk factors for out-of-school children



SYSTEMATIC FACTORS AT MACRO LEVEL

SCHOOL

Practice  FAMILY  Mobility

CHILD

Behaviour:
Social/
academic
engagement
& deviancy

Health

Location

Age

Sex

Education
experience

Resource  Demographics  Structure

Structure & Resources    Policies and Practises

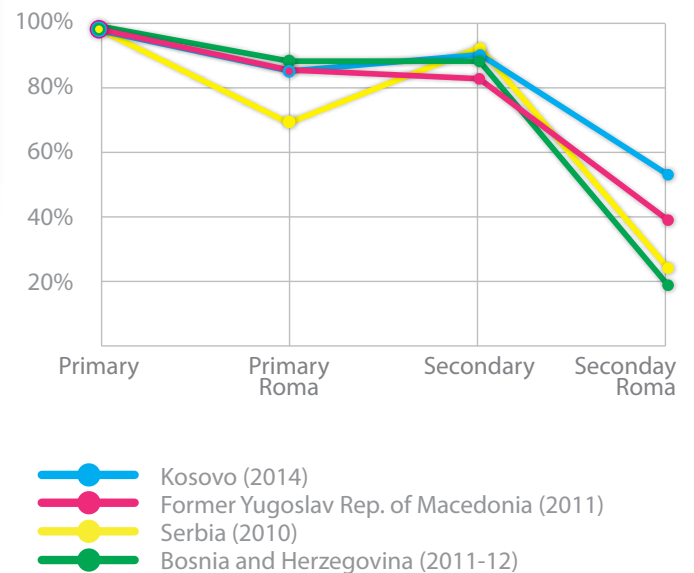Economy   Legislation & Policies  Political will

*Source: Adapted from Lyche, 2010*

Barriers to access, such as lack of appropriate cloths and shoes, lack of school supply, language barrier, distance to school, accessible transports, administrative hurdles for returnees and children without documents, discrimination from school staff, lack of adequate mechanisms and resources to support overage children and children lagging behind in their learning; to address the disconnect between curricula and the skills required to enter the job market will particularly affect these children and adolescents.[4]

Only 33.4% of children with disabilities were enrolled in pre-university education in 2011-2012 in Kosovo, although the trend has been slowly increasing in recent years (MEST, 2014). Disability therefore remains a major barrier to access education.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014) clearly shows that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children enter school later than their peers (net intake rate in primary 68.1%). The primary school net attendance ratio is 85.3%, decreasing significantly in lower secondary (65% school net attendance rate) and upper-secondary (30.3%).
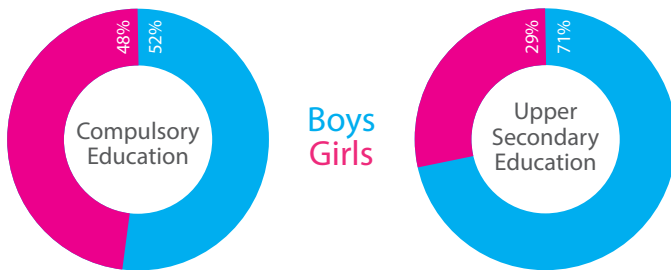
## Figure 4: Net Attendance Ratio from MICS data (general data and Roma component)



Kosovo (2014)
Former Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia (2011)
Serbia (2010)
Bosnia and Herzegovina (2011-12)

*Source: MICS data from the four countries.*

Several studies show that the most common reasons for non-enrolment, non-attendance and drop out are all related to lack of financial means.[5] There are many poor children who live in extreme poverty in Kosovo: respectively 32.8% and 11.6% in 2011. Families with four or more children face a greater likelihood of being poor or extremely poor.[6] In addition to income poverty, material deprivation is another risk factor to education enrolment and retention. Working children, particularly boys, are at risk of dropping out of school.

**Figure 5: Drop out and gender**



48% 52%
Compulsory Education

Boys
Girls

29% 71%
Upper Secondary Education

*Source: MEST, 2013*

Girls' transition rate from lower to upper secondary is however lower than boys' (89% vs 94%) and fewer girls attend upper secondary than boys (83% vs 80%).[7] In Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities more girls than boys enter primary on time (76% vs 60%) and more girls transition to lower secondary education than boys (93% vs 89%).[8] Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian girls are however dropping out[9] more than boys with only 27% of them attending upper-secondary against 34% for boys.

As children maximise their education and life outcomes when attending early childhood education programmes,[10] children missing out on one year of pre-primary education before entering primary should be considered as out-of-school.

There has been a steady progress in the past three years in the gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education in Kosovo, from 68.6% (2009) to 74% (2010). The gross enrolment rate for preschool (0 to 6 years old) is however much lower, only 15.5% in 2011.[11]

## *The importance of education enrolment, retention and completion*

Evidence shows that school dropout affects countries both economically and socially. In Europe, children dropping out of school struggle to find a job and have a higher cost for the health and social welfare systems than their peers. In the Netherlands, drop out students are twice less likely to find a job and the crime rate is five time higher among them.[12] Studies on the cost of drop out also reveal that drop out before completion of secondary education costs between 100,000 € to 200,000 € per person to the state. In Finland, the cost of drop out is 1.1 million € per person.[13]

Other studies have explored the cost of young people between 16 and 18 years old not in education, employment or training as a share of GDP: some countries are paying a high price, such as Bulgaria, where the cost of these young people reaches 2.6% of GDP,[14] Hungary with 1.6% of GDP and Cyprus with 1.3%. The EU21 average is 1.1% of GDP. Burden on social benefits, health, justice, unemployment services, loss of family income and loss of income taxes explain such high figures.

While comparable studies have not yet been conducted in Kosovo, there is strong evidence that links low levels of education to poverty: recent data shows that about two third of the poor have less than secondary education.[15] According to the 2012 Kosovo Labour Force Survey, people with only basic education face a higher unemployment rate than those with upper secondary education. In a context where the youth unemployment rate (15 to 24 years old) is estimated at 73%,[16] completing an education of quality has become even more critical.

Youth surveys show that 75% of young people want both a formal and informal education of quality[17] and that they are expecting schools to provide them with more practical opportunities and to ensure more linkages with the job market.[18] 79% of drop-out youth from primary and secondary education want more education.[19]

# THE STUDY

Supported by UNICEF, the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute conducted a baseline study on the identification, referral, monitoring and support practices for children not enrolled and dropping out of school.[20] The baseline was conducted in seven municipalities: Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Obiliq/ć, Malishevë/Mališevo, Klinë/a, Istog/k, Pejë/Peć and Ferizaj/Uroševac. The study not only focused on education and school actors but also included respondents from Centres for Social Work, the health authorities, civil registry offices, the police, NGOs and parents and children.

## *Legislative and policy framework in Kosovo*

The study shows that Kosovo has a well-developed legislative and policy framework relating directly or indirectly to the enrolment and retention of children in school.
The Kosovo Education Sector Plan emphasises the importance of pre-primary education and inclusion. The National Plan against Drop Out, ending in 2014, provided guidance on critical steps to support enrolment from textbook schemes to the creation of municipal and school Prevention and Response Teams Against Non-Enrollment and drop out (PR-TANs). Kosovo has improved its framework for inclusion, developing child-friendly school standards, strengthening its legislation on the identification of children with disabilities and their education and making provision for the education of returnee children.
The Strategy and National Action Plan on Children's Rights in Kosovo has also prioritised drop out and the integration of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in education.

The social protection system includes social benefits for poor families, a disability allowance and social services. Among the eligibility criteria we find large size families and number of children under five years old.

## *Policy implementation and local practices*

While policies are in place, and equitable by design, their implementation is not sufficiently translated into a significant reduction of equity gaps in education. Current evidence shows that municipal and school practices regarding drop out prevention and response are not systematic and consistent.

***Data and records.*** While data systems have improved, such as the Education Management and Information System (EMIS) but also other social data systems, major data gaps remain: there is no data on out of school children or records of who they are, drop out data is inconsistent due to definitional aspects and the lack of harmonization of indicators. EMIS data produced by schools and municipalities lacks accuracy and schools do not benefit from school-level data analysis. School absenteeism data is particularly weak as schools interpret justified and non-valid reasons for absences differently. The EMIS is not yet collecting data at the level of the pupil, which prevents the automatic identification of children dropping out of school, of children chronically absent or of children at risk of dropping out.

The information on children collected by different agencies has improved but it is not triangulated. Civil registry offices, social benefits, children with disabilities, health registries,

working children, returnee children: these records and databases do not capture information on school attendance hence not enabling the identification of children out of school.

To date, the identification of children not enrolled in school still very much relies on civil society organisations, particularly for Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali children and children with disabilities.

*Enforcement of PRTAN legislation.* Two years after their creation, the PRTAN teams have not been established or are not functional in every municipality and every school. Where they exist, their capacities are weak in terms of resources, knowhow and networks with other players namely NGOs, the police and Centres for Social Work.

The PRTAN regulation puts a significant burden on school teams to identify children not enrolled in school while the role of the municipal PRTAN remains unclear. The study found no systematic processes for identification, recording and managing the cases of children out of school, children who dropped out and children at risk of dropping out.

There was little evidence of municipalities and schools planning or implementing drop out prevention and response interventions. Muncipal and school PRTANs also lacked dedicated budgets for dropout prevention and response.

*Coordination of drop out prevention and response.* The research emphasizes the fragmented identification and response mechanisms for children not enrolled or dropping out of school. As the number of local actors working with children has increased, particularly since the creation of Case Management Round Tables, PRTANs and mediators, cross-sector coordination is even more a priority.

*School practices.* While the segregation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students in education has mostly disappeared and while more children with special educational needs are included in regular education, schools still lack systematic approaches and capacities to provide small group and individual support to students who need it most. The absence of psychologists in the vast majority of schools adds to the weak planning and management for drop out prevention and inclusion.

*Quality education.* The Study reveals that students are requesting more discipline in school, more learning support and more inspiring school environments.
As for parents, they would want schools to perform better, to collaborate more meaningfully with them and to provide a more supportive environment for their children.

*Enrolment in Grade 1.* The study shows that municipal education authorities cooperate little with civil registration offices and other municipal bodies having access to local population data to establish the list of children in age of enrolling in primary school.
The study also reveals that many children drop out from Grade 1 a few weeks or months after the start of the year and NGOs have confirmed that many children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities[21] tend to delay the entry of children in Grade 1.
These elements all indicate the need for a greater focus on Grade 1 enrolment, whether it is children's school readiness, parental awareness or institutional mechanisms to identify 6 years old.

## Conclusion

The normative framework has been strengthened over the years and steps have been taken by some municipalities and schools to address the issue of children not enrolled or not attending education and dropping out of school. But a lot remains to be done so that good initiatives become the norm rather than the exception and so that efforts of all actors are coordinated and supported to accelerate results for children.

Kosovo is not facing major policy design flaws with regard to ensuring that all children enroll, attend and complete education: but policy delivery is an issue. Resource allocation and management, targeted support, delivery strategies, interagency collaboration and data sharing, those factors are slowing down progress and results.

Prevention and response interventions are often poor, scattered and lack coordination and accountabilities of the many actors involved. Data gaps weaken targeting, prioritization and decision-making. Weak resource utilization at municipal and school level hamper the development of innovative, flexible and responsive interventions.

This points out the absence of a common vision, weak leadership and institutional capacities at both central and municipal levels to address the multifaceted issue of out-of-school children and drop out.

Children not enrolled in school or at risk of dropping out are the most vulnerable children, socially and economically: only complex, holistic and consistent response could address the identified risk factors and barriers to quality inclusive education and to break the cycle of social exclusion and poverty.

# POLICY OPTIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy implications and recommendations respond to the current situation in Kosovo and the study insights. They draw from the global and regional experience and knowledge of UNICEF on the issue of out-of-school children and school dropout.

*Increased leadership and accountability* for out-of-school children and drop out is needed at central level. This could be easily achieved by ensuring that the Annual Plans for the Kosovo Education Sector Plan includes a specific focus on the issue of out-of-school children and drop out. Progress indicators linked to PRTANs and number of children out of school could be included in the results framework to measure the effectiveness of policies implementation.

Municipal leadership and accountability could be advanced by including a compulsory component on non-enrolment and dropout prevention and response in Municipal Education Department's annual plans. A similar approach could be used for schools which are required to produce a school development plan based on a self-evaluation and a dropout prevention plan (as per PRTAN Administrative Instruction). By combining these two planning exercises, schools would integrate absenteeism and dropout prevention in their regular activities, maximize the work of the PRTANs and use resources more effectively.

The monitoring of school performance would be enhanced. Institutionalizing dropout prevention and response in central, municipal and school planning practices will demonstrate political will and enable authorities at all levels to be held accountable for programme implementation.

*Greater coordination between actors and across sectors* is vital to identify, refer and respond better to the needs of out-of-school children and drop out students. The education sector needs to join forces with social protection, child protection, health and Internal Affairs actors, as well as civil society organizations to address the issue of out-of-school children.
The short term priority is a clear identification and referral mechanism for cases of children out of school so that all professionals, when identifying a compulsory school age child not in school, can report the case and be ensured that it will be dealt with in a systematic and effective manner. The system will have to be recognized and used by PRTANs, civil society organizations, social workers, community police, officers for communities and returnees, home visiting nurses and other health professionals and mediators. This will require some harmonization in job descriptions and the dissemination of a simple referral chart and form among professionals.

The medium term priorities are greater and more effective collaboration between PRTANs and the Case Management Round Tables or other child protection bodies and a much stronger link between social assistance and professional social services for children and their families so that overlapping needs can be addressed consistently and holistically.

*Addressing the multiple vulnerabilities of out-of-school children* is critical to tackle factors pushing children out of education. This should be done through a combination of individual and family social benefits and targeted support programmes in schools located in the most deprived areas. In the short term, budget allocations to municipalities and then to schools should direct resources where there is the highest number of out of school children and dropout. Existing scholarship schemes, currently mostly ad-hoc or donor-driven, could also be regulated, systematized and extended to target children at risk of dropping out in both compulsory and secondary education. Evidence from other countries suggest that scholarships are more effective when coupled with other support interventions such as mentoring or structured learning support.

In the medium term, the social benefits structure should be reviewed to ensure that they reach all vulnerable children, particularly at key points in their schooling, such as entry in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education.

*More reliable, integrated and sensitive data collection systems* are critical to assess, monitor and respond to children out-of-school and at risk of dropping out. In the short term, the accuracy of EMIS data could be strengthened by improving the oversight mechanisms, including random checks in schools, sanctions for misreporting and additional technical support during data entry. In the medium term, the EMIS system could collect data at the level of each child, which would enable to identify those who are dropping out or getting lost in the system when transferring schools, or who are at-risk of dropping out.

In the longer term, it is suggested to harmonize data collection systems, to integrate and triangulate different data records including the

civil registry, databases on repatriated and re-turnees, working children and family doctors' records. Careful considerations will have to be given to data protection safeguards when storing and dealing with individual information on children.Kosovo should also consider to calculate the Early School Leaving indicator as defined by Eurostat.

More performant data systems will not only facilitate the identification of out-of-school children but will also improve evidence-based policy decision-making and education sector plans.

*Maximising the potential of preschool and particularly of pre-primary* is key to improve school readiness for children, to ensure their timely enrolment in Grade 1 but also to start identifying children at risk of low education and life outcomes and their families. In the short term, municipalities should work more systematically with civil registry offices to draw lists of children in age of entering pre-primary and Grade 1. They should also develop sound strategies to raise parental awareness of the importance of preschool and to increase the number of facilities and human resources needed to reach the full coverage of pre-primary age children.

In the medium term, preschool professionals should be equipped to identify children with learning difficulties and at risk of low life outcomes and be able to refer them to appropriate social services. Early identification and early response interventions are the most effective.

Increased preschool participation will give children (and their families) a stronger foundation for school and life. Evidence from other countries show a correlation between preschool attendance and the reduction of dropout rates throughout education.

*Investing in professionals' capacities at school and municipal level* is key to translate policy decisions into concrete and effective practices. In the short term this means taking action to train both municipal and school PRTAN members. It also means providing schools with much greater support to implement language classes, catch up programmes and on-going learning support for children lagging behind.

Lastly, it means creating spaces for professionals to come together and discuss dropout prevention and response strategies in a meaningful and creative way, including how to maximise the participation of students in interventions.

In the medium term, planning and management capacities of schools and municipalities could be enhanced through programmes in pre-service and in-service teacher and manager training focusing on school effectiveness, school climate, inclusive practices, parental and student participation and drop out prevention and response including the functioning of PRTANs. The potential of distance learning might be further explored to broaden the audience reach.

In the long term, the issue of additional education support staff, namely school psychologists, school social workers and school nurses should be raised and addressed so that teachers and managers can be supported by professional staff when tackling the complex issues faced by children.

Equipping education professionals with the knowledge and skills they need to create and manage inclusive and responsive schools will improve school environments and students' attendance, behavior and academic performance

*Second chance education programmes* are necessary compensation measures for drop out children. This area requires careful thinking and examination to avoid drop out youth enrolling in a parallel education system with lower standards.

Second chance education programmes are most effective when they focus on older youth (16 and above) to help them gain a Grade 9 equivalent certificate in their endeavor to enter the job market or to continue their education. They are also valuable when enabling adolescents to follow a condensed curriculum in view of reintegrating mainstream education as soon as possible. Second chance education programmes can only succeed if adequately funded and complemented with life skills education and strong outreach activities with parents and communities.

A priority for Kosovo is the development of mechanisms enabling to recognize out-of-school children's previous knowledge and skills in order to support their placement in mainstream education. This would ensure that more children can be educated in mainstream education and that second chance education programmes are only a last resort option.

*Enforcing equity-based policy measures* is a moral imperative in Kosovo. While policies are in place to support out-of-school children, these are partially implemented and yielding limited results.

The Ministry of Education and municipalities should take immediate action to enforce existing equity-based measures, including the establishment and monitoring of PRTANs and the development of dropout prevention and response interventions from pre-primary onwards. A deliberate policy action for the most vulnerable will accelerate progress in education system.

*Strengthening the continuum compulsory education, post-compulsory education and transition to the world of work* is important when framing drop out prevention strategies. Efforts to address drop out should not be limited to primary and lower secondary education but start from preschool onwards. It is critical to integrate technical and vocational schools and general secondary schools to ensure adolescents are well equipped to enter the job market.

[1] *UNICEF (2014) Education Equity Now! A regional analysis of the situation of out of school children in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Global Out-Of-School Children Initiative.*

[2] *Agency of Statistics of Kosovo (2014) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in Kosovo.*

[3] *Balkan Sunflowers Kosova (2012) School's Out: An Education Survey in Ashkali, Egyptian and Roma Communities in 9 Kosovo Municipalities.*

[4] *Balkan Sunflowers Kosova (2012) Ibid.*

[5] *UNICEF (2011) Youth perspectives of education quality in Kosovo: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region.*

[6] *World Bank and Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2013) Consumption poverty in the Republic of Kosovo in 2011. March 2013.*

[7] *Agency of Statistics of Kosovo (2014) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in Kosovo.*

[8] *Agency of Statistics of Kosovo (2014) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in Kosovo.*

[9] *Balkan Sunflowers Kosova (ibid).*

[10] *Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: "Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children."*

[11] *Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2013) Kosovo Education Indicators.*

[12] *Regional Ministerial Education Conference (2014) Including All Children in Quality Learning, Istanbul Conference 2013. Presentation from the Netherlands.*

[13] *Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving of the Education and Culture DG:  Overview and examples of costs of early school leaving in Europe. ICF GHK.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *World Bank and Kosovo Agency of Statistics (Ibid.)*

[16] *European Commission (2013) Kosovo\* 2013 Progress Report. Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014.*

[17] *European Commission (2013) Ibid.*

[18] *UNICEF (2011) Youth perspectives of education quality in Kosovo: A case study of education quality for youth in the CEECIS region.*

[19] *UNICEF (2011) Ibid.*

[20] *Pedagogical Institute of Kosovo (2014) Out-of-school Children in Kosovo. Baseline study on the practices of prevention and response to dropout and non-enrollment in school.*

[21] *Balkan Sunflowers Kosova (2012). Ibid.*