

LEARNING STATE AND QUALITY IN SMALL SCHOOLS AND SATELLITE CLASSES

in the context of the current organization
of Kosovo's school network

Prishtina, August 2023



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Acronyms

PUE	Pre-university education
MED	Municipal Education Directorate
MTEF	Mid-Term Expenditure Framework
KEC	Kosova Education Center
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
MoF	Ministry of Finance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SC	Satellite Class
PS	Primary School
LSS	Lower Secondary School
USS	Upper Secondary School
SS	Small School
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Terms:

School network consolidation - Measures the MESTI or municipal education directorates can take to enhance the quality of educational services in small schools and ensure higher efficiency of school network operations. This term is used in this report to mean the merger, closer cooperation and restructuring of the management of one or more schools in an area, to ensure enhanced efficiency through economies of scale and better school management. Also, this term is used to avoid using terms such as school disbandment, closure, and dissolution, which do not reflect the complexity of the situation and possible solutions. The goal is to understand that educational authorities prioritize quality, stability, and better functioning of the education system - not administrative measures whose final goal are budget savings.

School network - the totality of institutions and school facilities through which educational services are provided in an educational system.

Governance - who brings, implements, and monitors the decisions that affect the organization of the school network, as well as the policy and legal basis on which these decisions are made.

Economies of scale - an economic term that means that as companies increase the amount of production, production costs per unit produced decrease. Translated into the circumstances of running schools, this can translate into smaller running costs of larger schools calculated per unit (number of pupils), since a number of expenses (utilities, internet, heating, maintenance, materials) remain approximately the same (McGee 2014).

Executive Summary

The main principles and prerequisites for the organization and (re)structuring of an efficient and effective school network at the pre-university level are: clear leadership and commitment, a systematic and planned approach, the existence of capacities and expertise at the relevant levels of educational authorities, active participation and consultation with key stakeholders, and the continued focus on ensuring the quality of education services.

In this study, the current situation in Kosovo's school network was analyzed, and the situation, actions, and attitudes of the main factors were evaluated against the principles and prerequisites necessary for the existence and creation of a functional school network.

The main findings of the research that preceded this study, show that the approach to the organization of the school network should be changed if we aim to ensure quality educational services and the development of children in pre-university education institutions in Kosovo. In the following sections, the main findings of the research regarding the state of teaching in Kosovo small schools and satellite classes in pre-university education, are briefly presented¹:

- The situation regarding working conditions and the quality of educational services in small schools (SSs) and satellite classes (SCs) is more serious than is usually thought.
- With some exceptions, the Municipalities do not have the capacity, the resources, nor the appropriate expertise for the consolidation of the school network. This is proven by the existence of small schools not in compliance with the parameters allowed under AI 104/2020, and by the implementation of combined class teaching.
- Municipalities declare themselves committed to implementing the current MESTI instruction on small schools (104/2020), however (with some rare exceptions), there is no systematic and planned approach to its implementation. The main reasons are related to the response of the community, but no dedicated efforts are observed to address the issues.
- Municipalities have no regulations in place on providing quality pupil transportation in the territory of the municipality. Currently, for the supervision of the quality of pupil transportation, the inspectorate and the traffic police rely on the conditions announced in the calls for the supply of transportation services. However, these rules are mainly technical conditions, and do not adequately provide for the protection of children's safety, health and wellbeing. The MESTI should help establish a national standard.

¹ Based on the literature review, as well as interviews and visits conducted in 12 schools in six municipalities of Kosovo.

- Despite the dedication of teachers and pupils in small schools and satellite classes, pupils are not even close to receiving quality educational services.
- In a number of small schools and satellite classes with fewer pupils - **combined teaching is still implemented!**
- The clear trend of total neglect of staff working and pupils learning in small schools/satellite classes, is disconcerting. Among the teachers and pupils of small schools and satellite classes, defined by their dull learning environment, absence of noise in the yard during breaks, absence of sports activities, uncertainty about the fate of their school is observed. This significantly affects the development and formation of children. The lack of technological equipment only adds to this subdued atmosphere. Small schools operate in a different reality - without the optimism and vitality of children.
- In small schools, there is a complete interruption of investments in equipment, materials, and sometimes even in renovations.²
- Hidden Problem: A 70-pupil school teaching pre-primary and nine grades (0-9) is no better off than a 20-pupil school teaching four grades (1-4). On the contrary, the more pupils in small schools (for example up to 100 pupils) the greater the number of children harmed by the lack of quality education, upbringing and socialization. Although in accordance with the law (number criterion for small schools in AI 104/2020), these institutions also violate the minimum criteria for quality assurance and for the wellbeing of children.

Better cooperation and coordination of efforts between the central and municipal educational authorities is recommended to ensure a more systematic approach to the consolidation of the school network and to the improvement of educational services in small schools and parallel classes.

² In one municipality, the small school building was so old and dilapidated that it was ineffective to make small renovations; at the same time, major interventions could not be done due to the small number of pupils.

Introduction

1

In the last 10 years in Kosovar education, there has been a visible trend of decreasing number of pupils in pre-university education. Such a trend has come as a result of the movement of the population and children who attended school from rural areas to urban areas, the migration of people towards the countries of Western Europe, as well as due to the general decrease in the demographic growth of the population (from about 30 per thousand in the nineties of the last century to 11 per thousand in 2022).³ The downward trend in the number of pupils in Kosovo is on average about 3% of the total number of pupils for each year during the last ten years.⁴ For example, in the 2012/13 school year, in pre-university education in Kosovo there were a total of about 421,277 children/pupils included in all levels of pre-university education (ages 1-5 and grades 0-12), meanwhile in the 2022/23 school year this number has dropped to 300,362 children/pupils (Agjencia e Statistikave e Kosoves 2023). That is, over the last decade, the number of pupils in Kosovar education has decreased by 120,000 pupils, or in terms of percentage there are about 30% fewer pupils compared to 2013.

The general downward trend in the number of pupils in the education system is not characteristic only for Kosovo. According to an OECD study, the member countries of this organization are also going through similar developments: *“Demographic developments, including regional and international migration and the continuous decline in the number of births, are an important factor in changing educational needs and requirements that affect the efficient organization of services by educational systems in OECD countries. Within the general trend of shrinking school population, there are significant differences between different countries, but also between regions within the same country”* (Responsive School Systems: Connecting Facilities, Sectors and Programmes for Student Success 2018).

Similar to OECD countries, the drop in the number of pupils throughout Kosovo has an uneven distribution, so that in rural areas it is significantly greater than in urban areas. In certain urban areas (for example Fushë Kosova and Prishtina) there is a trend of increasing number of pupils - educational population - in contrast to the general negative trend in Kosovo in terms of population growth and migration of the population towards western countries.

In 2022, the MESTI established a working group⁵ for the analysis of the situation and the drafting of a plan for the reorganization of the pre-university education school network in Kosovo. In support of the work of this working group, the Kosova Education Center (KEC) conducted the research for the drafting of this report to help the educational authorities in the drafting and implementation of a more systematic approach to the regulation of Kosovo's school network, building on good practices, at home and abroad.

3 Based on World Bank data. World Bank Open Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.CBRT.IN?locations=XK> accessed in August 2023

4 According to the data of the Kosovo Agency of Statistics and the statistical notes of the MESTI.

5 MESTI Decision no. 2/1034, of 16.05.2022, on the establishment of the working group for the Analysis of the situation of the school network in Kosovo and for the drafting of the plan for the reorganization of the school network.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to contribute to increasing the efficiency and quality of teaching organization in pre-university education in Kosovo by analyzing and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of (i) the organization of the school network and (ii) teaching in small schools (SSs) and satellite classes (SCs) in Kosovo. Also, through this study, it is intended to provide a guide for the consolidation of the network of educational institutions in pre-university education.

Objectives

The efficiency of teaching organization in small schools and in larger urban schools, has been analyzed and compared.

The benefits for and challenges to pupils from the organization of teaching in small schools/satellite classes, have been examined.

The situation in small schools/satellite classes, has been assessed.

Good practices in the region and around the world in the field of school network regulation, have been examined.

Research questions:

- How efficient and reasonable is the organization of teaching in small schools/satellite classes?
- What is the opinion of the community regarding the existence of SSs/SCs in their community?
- What are good international practices for school network organization?
- Are there better alternatives compared to the current organization of the school network in Kosovo?

Current state

From the point of view of the number of educational institutions, during this decade Kosovo has recorded a drop in the number of schools/educational institutions, from 1,174 in 2013 (Agjencia e Statistikave e Kosoves 2013) to 1,044 educational institutions in 2023 (Agjencia e Statistikave e Kosoves 2023). The general drop in the number of schools (of about 130) seems to be a reflection of the dissolution of satellite classes and small schools, as during this ten-year period there has been a downward trend (of about 31.5%) in the number of satellite classes, from 386 SCs in 2013 to 265 SCs in 2023.

Based on these data presented above, in the last ten years, the total number of school institutions has suffered a slight drop (about 9%), the number of pupils has decreased by about 30%, similarly to the number of satellite classes, which marked a decrease of 31.5%. During the same period, the number of parent schools has remained relatively stable, marking a slight decrease from 788 in 2013 to a total of 779 parent schools in 2023. That is, the significant decrease in the number of pupils corresponds approximately to the observed percentage of the decrease in the number (121) of satellite classes, while the number of parent schools has decreased slightly by only 9 schools in this period. This shows the trend of gradual dissolution of small parent schools and satellite classes in rural areas, as opposed to the maintenance or small increase in the number of parent schools in urban areas.

The demographic trend in education, including the decline in the number of pupils per class (from 23.8 per class in 2013 to 17.3 in primary and lower secondary education and 20.6 in upper secondary education in 2023)⁶, and the decrease in the pupil/teacher ratio (from about 19/1 in 2013 to about 13/1 in 2023), indicate a significant decrease in the efficiency of the organization of educational and teaching institutions in Kosovo in the last 10 years. This trend has resulted in a high number of teachers against the ever decreasing number of pupils. It should not be forgotten that the pupil-teacher ratio in Kosovo, apart from the demographic trend, was also affected by the inadequate planning of educational reforms. Thus, the introduction of the ninth grade into the system (2002) and the abolition of the thirteenth grade (2014), have influenced the increase in the number of teachers in the system.

However, Kosovo is not alone in this trend. According to an OECD study (OECD 2019), different countries (such as Kosovo and the countries of the Western Balkans, author's note) are currently facing the problem of maintaining the number of teachers in the system in circumstances of the decline in the number of pupils (e.g. Lithuania) or with the high number of graduates from teacher training institutions (Faculties of Education). However, pupil shortages and oversupply (of teachers) usually not only cycle (up and down) but also co-exist, as teachers are unevenly distributed across subjects and geographical areas. Today, simultaneously with the emptying of the population from remote rural areas, in Kosovo we observe urban areas overloaded with pupils (Prishtina, Fushë Kosova, Ferizaj) in which the pupil-teacher ratio is often higher than that defined in the legal provisions. Likewise, according to the aforementioned OECD study, even when there is a surplus of teachers, there are often shortages for specific subjects (e.g. math or science), specializations (e.g. special needs), and locations (e.g. in urban areas or disadvantaged urban neighborhoods). Consequently, Kosovo should deal with the issue of depopulation or overpopulation specifically and according to the nature of the problems and demographic trends.

⁶ Compare with OECD country averages for primary education (21 pupils per class) and for lower secondary education of 23.5 pupils per class. Source: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264306707-en.pdf>

Based on these data presented above, in the last ten years, the total number of school institutions has suffered a slight drop



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779

parent schools in 2023.

It seems that the intensive construction of school facilities (often without any stable concept and plan) and the extension of the school network after the war (in the period 2000-2010) did not take into account the projections of demographic trends. Such an approach has not brought about an improvement in the quality of education, but only an increase in the cost of educational services. The increased cost of educational services (the same number of schools and teachers for the significantly smaller number of pupils) is directly reflected in the quality of educational services due to the already imposed concentration of investment of funds reserved for education in school infrastructure and in salaries of educational staff. When to this is added the downward trend for the quality of education (see results of PISA tests 2015 - 2018 and the following findings of this research), the conclusion is that Kosovo must seriously review its pre-university education school network.

Such developments have resulted in a decrease in the efficiency of pre-university education in Kosovo, but also in disruptive phenomena with serious consequences for smooth operation of the educational process, as was the case with the absenteeism by several hundred pupils in the municipality of Kamenica in 2020-2021. The issue of the school network in Kosovo is one of MESTI's priorities this year as well. The MESTI has earlier (2022) established a working group for the drafting of a policy and relevant normative acts for the regulation of the issue of the school network, with a focus on small schools and satellite classes in Kosovo. This report serves to help the MESTI and the municipalities in making the most informed decisions for the consolidation of the school network in the following years.

Funding and decision-making in pre-university education:

Pre-university education in Kosovo is financed almost entirely from Kosovo's central budget. The transfer of funds from the central budget to the municipalities is done through the specific grant for education. This grant covers salaries, goods and services, and capital investments.⁷ Based on the data of the 2024-2026 Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), in 2024, the specific grant (for the municipalities of Kosovo) for pre-university education will amount to EUR 238.5 million, divided into categories as follows:



At the same time, the legal framework in force (see below the legal framework section) determines that municipalities have exclusive responsibility for the organization and management of education at the local level. That is, most of the funds for education are provided by the central budget, while decision-making in education, including the employment of personnel and the regulation of the school network, belongs to the municipalities. Such an arrangement, among other things, has resulted in significant irregularities regarding the employment of personnel and the construction/opening of new schools. The employment of personnel and the construction of schools at the municipal level has largely been done without proper prior planning and study of the needs for personnel and school facilities. This has led to the majority of funds (over 90%) in education being invested in salaries and capital expenditure. Consequently, due to the focus of funds on salaries, investments in working conditions and teaching tools have fallen, which has damaged the quality of teaching. On the other hand, after the movement of the population towards urban centers and western countries, a considerable number of school facilities are used below their designed capacity. All these changes have caused the education system in Kosovo to become extremely inefficient (increased expenses for the reduced number of pupils) and ineffective (decrease in quality and the impossibility of preparing children for life).

⁷ Usually, municipalities do not allocate own funds for financing education, with the exception of investments in equipment or in the construction of pre-school institutions or schools. Municipal investments in education usually occur in larger municipalities (such as Prishtina, Prizren, Peja), which have the opportunity to allocate funds from their own revenues to improve the situation in education.

⁸ Most of the capital expenditure in pre-university education is covered by the government grant.

Analysis of demographic and financial trends in pre-university education in Kosovo over the last decade

To provide a more dynamic perspective of the trends related to small schools and satellite classes, the statistical data of Kosovar education over the last decade have been compared. The main variables considered are the number of pupils, budget funds for school financing (goods and services, salaries, and capital expenditures) from the specific education grant for municipalities, number of teachers in primary and lower secondary education, pupil-teacher ratio, number of schools and satellite classes, as well as the number of classes of pupils in primary and lower secondary schools in Kosovo. The trends of these variables are expressed in numerical values and in percentages (to be distinguished from the values recorded during a decade).

Table 1. Demographic trends and investments in pre-university education in Kosovo over the last decade.

Year	Number of pupils	%	Financing in mil. €	Number of teachers	%	Teacher/pupil ratio	%	No. Schools/ SCs	%	No. of SCs, PLSS	%
2011	322507 t 302253 PLS 20254 PPE	- - -	€ 109.8 tot € 93.6 WS € 12.8 G&S € 3.2 CE	17856 PPE, PLSS		18.0		1228 1077 PLSS		13192	24.0
2013	306994 t 286677 PLS 20317 PPE	- 3% -	€ 141.1 m € 124.2 WS € 12.8 G&S	17663 PPE, PLSS		16.6		1174 998 PLSS 386 SCs		12935	22.1
2016	280119 t 258464 PLS 21655 PPE	- 8% -	€ 161.3 tot / /	17563 PPE, PLSS		15.8		1131* 969 PLSS 358 SCs		/	/
2019	256106 t 235161 PLS 20945 PPE	- 7% -	€ 184.9 tot € 169.7 WS € 11.1 G&S	17453 PPE, PLSS		14.3		1116 947 PLSS 332 SCs		12665	19
2023	231912 t 212967 PLS 18946 PPE	- 9% -	€ 194.6 tot € 178.4 WS € 13.6 G&S € 2.3 CE	17099 PPE, PLSS		13.5		1044 869 PLSS 265 SCs		12,321	17.3
2011 Vs 2023	- 25 %		+ 77 % + 90 % +6.2 % - 34 %	- 4.25		- 25%		- 19.3%		- 6.5%	

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics (Educational statistics for the years 2011, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2023; Ministry of Finance - Medium-Term Expenditure Framework 2011, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2022).

Key:

Number of pupils – the second column gives the total number of pupils in primary and lower secondary education (t), the number in primary and lower secondary schools (PLSS) and the number of children in pre-primary education (PPE).

Financial data are provided for the total value (t), wages and salaries (WS), goods and services (G&S), and capital expenditures (CE).

The table above shows a steady downward trend in the number of pupils in pre-university education in Kosovo of about 3% on an annual basis. From 2013 to 2023, the number of pupils in primary and lower secondary education has dropped from 306,994 to 231,912 pupils, which is 75,082 fewer pupils, and expressed as a percentage, 25% fewer pupils during a decade. The decrease in the number of pupils during this decade has also been reflected in the average number of pupils per teacher, from 16.6 to 13.5 pupils per teacher, because the dynamics of retirement and employment of teachers has not followed the trend of the decrease in the number of pupils. That is, in addition to the decrease in the number of pupils (of about 2.5 - 3.0% per year), the number of teachers in primary and lower secondary education has remained almost the same, marking a decrease of less than 0.25% per year, at the time when the number of pupils has recorded rates of decline up to ten times higher. Even the number of classes during this period shows stable values (with a decrease of only about 0.5% per year) compared to the up to six times greater decrease in the number of pupils. Namely, the number of classes has been maintained to cover the rates of the large number of teachers, despite the five to six times greater drop in the number of pupils during the same period (2013-2023).

As for the number of schools, a gradual downward trend (of about 10 schools or about 1% per year) is observed at the level of schools and satellite classes of primary/lower secondary level between 2013 and 2019. However, from 2019 to 2023, the dissolution of schools increases threefold, both in the total number of primary and lower secondary schools (from 947 to 869, or 78 fewer units), as well as in the number of satellite classes (from 332 to 265 units) at this level. As can be seen, most of these closed school facilities belong to the category of satellite classes (about 67 units or almost 20% fewer than the total number of satellite classes during three or four years). MESTI's data shows that, in addition to the satellite classes during this period, 11 small parent schools in all the municipalities of Kosovo have stopped their educational activity.

At the same time, funding in education has followed a not so remarkable trend, especially in terms of providing an enabling environment for quality teaching and learning. Quotas and basic criteria for financing education at the municipal level, respectively for financing the operation of schools, have not changed since the time when Kosovo education was administered by the UNMIK (until 2004). Thus, through the specific municipal grant for education⁹, schools in Kosovo today are financed based on the following quotas and criteria (Ministria e Financave 2022):

- EUR 23 per pupil for teaching in Albanian, and EUR 25 per minority community pupils for the category of goods and services,
- EUR 1,500 per primary/lower secondary school and EUR 3,250 per upper secondary school and vocational school (also for the category of goods and services),
- seven Euros per pupil for capital expenditures, as well as
- quota of one teacher for 21.3 pupils for teaching in Albanian, 14.1 pupils for one teacher for teaching in the languages of minority communities and schools in hilly/mountainous areas, as well as 17.9 pupils for one teacher in vocational schools.

⁹ Funding dedicated to education that is transferred from central budget sources to cover personnel salaries, goods and services and capital investments for the organization of education at the municipal level.

For 15 years since the declaration of independence, salaries in pre-university education have increased



from about EUR 200 in
2010 to over

500 €

in 2023 (Kuvendi
i Kosoves 2023),

while the criteria
of EUR

23/25€

per pupil

**1500/
3250€**

per school (for goods
and services)

and EUR 7 per pupil for capital expenditures, have never been increased.

It should be noted that the trends in education in Kosovo, in particular the demographic (decrease in the number of pupils) and financial (increase in the total amount of funding) dimension, have changed to a large extent over the last two decades, while the criteria for funding school operations have remained the same. As will be seen below, all the changes have led to an increase in the participation of salaries in the total amount of school funding to the detriment of quality assurance, the provision of technology and teaching materials, and the creation of an enabling environment for teaching and learning. These trends have hit the quality and progress of education in small schools and in satellite classes the hardest.

Specifically, as proven above, the pupil/teacher ratio is 13.5 pupils for one teacher or about 40% below the level defined in MESTI's relevant legal provisions (MASHT 2013) of 21.4 for general education, and 17.9/14.1 for professional education and communities. For 15 years since the declaration of independence, salaries in pre-university education have increased from about EUR 200 in 2010 to over EUR 500 in 2023 (Kuvendi i Kosoves 2023), while the criteria of EUR 23/25 per pupil, EUR 1,500/3,250 per school (for goods and services), and EUR 7 per pupil for capital expenditures, have never been increased. So teacher salaries have more than doubled, while funding for goods and services, materials, educational technology, and capital expenditures, have declined in real terms (because they are based on declining pupil and school numbers).

More specifically, the participation of salaries in the total amount of the specific grant for education has increased from 85.9% in 2011 (Ministria e Financave 2010) to 91.6% in 2023 (Ministria e Financave 2022). At the same time, goods and services have almost halved from 11.65% in 2011 to 6.9% in 2023, as has capital expenditure which has fallen from 2.9% in 2011 to 1.1% (Ministria e Financave 2010) of the total amount of the grant in 2023. This trend has significantly influenced the possibilities of the municipalities to provide conditions for work, material means and equipment for quality development of learning.

To all this, we must add the fact that the criterion for EUR 1,500 per primary and lower secondary level school is not applied to satellite classes, but is calculated only for the number of parent schools.¹⁰ This approach has no support in the logic of the functioning of schools. Actually, the satellite classes are established by a special decision of the respective municipality (that is, they are a legal entity), have a separate school facility, and their structure of expenses is the same as the structure of expenses of a parent school. That is, satellite classes, just like parent schools, have utility expenses (electricity, water supply, internet), use funds from the goods and services line (consumables, hygienic, teaching materials), and have additional salaries for the maintenance staff. At a time when the aforementioned categories have not increased (almost at all) in the last two decades, the lack of payment for the operation of satellite classes only makes it difficult to create the right conditions for learning in satellite classes. Such a policy clearly discourages the operation of satellite classes and encourages the consolidation of schools, to encourage efficiency in the organization of learning (through economies of scale). However, while such discouragement has had little effect on the establishment of satellite classes, the lack of financial means for heating and utilities certainly has a significant impact on the quality of the learning environment and conditions for work and learning in satellite classes. That is, other forms should be considered to promote the consolidation of schools and to increase the efficiency of the organization of learning.

This trend has hit all schools in Kosovo, but its effect is felt more by small schools and satellite classes, since with the small number of pupils they contribute significantly less to ensuring the flow of funds in the specific grant for education for municipalities. The situation worsens even more, due to an instruction of the Ministry of Finance, which prohibits investments in schools with less than 100 pupils!¹¹ Thus, the created situation puts small schools in a vicious circle in which, due to the small number of pupils, there is no investment in infrastructure and quality, and as a result, the lack of investment worsens the lack of conditions and quality even more, so parents are reluctant to enroll their children in these schools, often moving their families to cities in search of better life and conditions. Consequently, most of these schools have entered a cycle of no prospects and loss of hope. This affects staff willingness to teach and pupil motivation to learn. All this may have also resulted in the neglect of small schools and satellite classes by municipal authorities, as evidenced by the parents, teachers and directors interviewed in the schools visited as part of the research for this report. This means that schools do not really contribute to maintaining the population in remote areas.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the collaborative approach (between central and local authorities) is the best way to improve the quality and increase the efficiency of the system. Likewise, local authorities have an irreplaceable role in determining the school network in their municipality. This is also emphasized in a study by Nusche et al., who found that: "Especially in countries with a developed tradition of local autonomy, the involvement of local communities in the restructuring of the school network can be more effective than directing the process through central regulations, since local involvement allows the peculiarities of local contexts to be taken into account. However, central authorities must ensure that school network structures are a priority on the local policy agenda and that they are guided by the quality of school services and the economic efficiency of their operation (Nusche 2009).

¹⁰ Based on the conversation with municipal education officials and with officials of the Ministry of Finance.

¹¹ The officials of the visited municipalities have mentioned such an instruction, but during the research for this report no written evidence was provided for such a thing. The corresponding question addressed to the Ministry of Finance also remained unanswered. The Medium Term Frameworks do not mention such guidelines.

Based on the results of the PISA test of Kosovar pupils in 2015 and 2018, it appears that the size of the class (number of pupils) has a strong correlation with the performance of pupils in the subject of mathematics, natural sciences and writing/reading. Thus, the performance of Kosovar pupils shows an increase in these three curricular areas according to the following table:

Table 2: Success of Kosovar pupils in the PISA test and average class size.

	Up to 15 pupils	16-20 pupils	21-25 pupils	26-30 pupils	31-35 pupils	36-40 pupils	41-45 pupils
Natural sciences							
Year	average	average	average	average	average	average	average
2018	341	344	347	360	383	378	369
2015	356	339	359	366	408	384	‡
Mathematics							
2018	340	343	347	358	387	386	370
2015	329	322	344	352	389	364	‡
Writing/reading							
2018	332	327	329	347	376	374	361
2015	307	305	322	332	380	360	‡

Source: PISA test 2015 and 2018, MESTI's Standards and Evaluation Sector

Based on this table, there is a strong upward trend in pupil scores in the PISA test in all three areas in accordance with the increase in the number of pupils per class. The best results for the three areas are achieved in the classes with 31-35 pupils, only to drop again in classes with 36-40 pupils; while the lowest results are achieved in classes with fewer than 20 pupils. It is important to note that the standard deviation of the results is also higher for smaller classes (about 8.0 points for classes with fewer than 20 pupils) or about 10 points for larger classes, compared to the standard deviation value of about 2-3 points for the results of classes with 31-35 pupils.¹² Although these results show the performance of pupils aged 15 (the age included in the PISA test), it still shows that the number of pupils per class/grade has a strong correlation with success in the three curricular areas assessed in the PISA test.

¹² Higher values of the standard deviation may indicate lower reliability of the results due to the smaller number of respondents in this category. This is normal since most 15-year-old pupils continue their education in secondary schools. At the same time, this data can be a good indicator for those 15-year-old pupils who are subject to the PISA test, but who continue to study in small primary schools (grade 9).

Closely related to the above results are also the results from the PISA test according to the location of the school where the tested pupils study. Pupils scores in the PISA test show a stable increase with the increase in the size of the settlement from which the tested pupils come.

Table 3: Pupil PISA scores by school location.

	Village	Small town	Town	City
NATURAL SCIENCES				
Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
2018	348	350	362	389
2015	356	367	380	395
MATHEMATICS				
2018	343	353	363	392
2015	339	350	363	378
READING				
2018	329	338	352	378
2015	320	333	348	370

Source: MESTI's Standards and Evaluation Sector

As can be seen from the table, the difference in PISA test scores between pupils from villages and cities differ by 40-50 points, which is equal to the knowledge acquired by a pupil for a full school year. It is also observed that even small towns do not perform well in PISA test scores, scoring only a little bit more than villages, and showing a significant difference with the results of pupils from cities. In this context, it would be important that the standardized tests in Kosovo (matura, achievement test and fifth grade test) also collect data differentiated according to the size of the class/grade and the location of the school.

The results from these two tables show that the size of the class and the location of the school have significant importance for the performance (success) of pupils in education. Pupil performance, also according to the national quality assurance framework, (MASHT 2016) is one of the main indicators of the quality and efficiency of the education system. Consequently, it is important for Kosovo to address the issue of the school network more seriously through consolidation of schools, restructuring of school management (individual and a group of schools), as well as cooperation between small schools and larger ones.

**Research
Methodology**

2

The research is organized in the form of (i) literature review and in the form of (ii) qualitative empirical research consisting of (a) observation of schools, (b) interviews with key actors, and (c) focus group discussions.

As part of the literature review, legal documents, main policies, various local and international reports, information on education in countries in the region and around the world, statistical data on the organization of pre-university education in the country and abroad, results of standardized tests, as well as good international practices, were analyzed.

As part of the empirical research, 6 municipalities and 12 small schools/satellite classes were visited. The following were met/interviewed/consulted: one mayor, ten municipal education directors, about twenty MED officials, six directors of parent schools, about thirty-five teachers, a considerable number of pupils (over 30), as well as over forty parents.

For the realization of the empirical research, (i) the observation protocol and (ii) the questionnaire for interviews with the focus groups, were designed. The observation protocol includes: observation and photo documentation of the external environment, fences, sports courts, common spaces within the school, classrooms, equipment and practical resources, maintenance, heating, water supply, sanitary spaces, and others. The semi-controlled interview questionnaire included questions related to working and learning conditions, quality in learning, challenges and possible ways to improve the quality of educational services in SSs and SCs.

The internal and external environment, working conditions, pedagogical documentation, regularity at work, conditions of the facility and operation of small schools and satellite classes, were observed and analyzed. During conversations with management, teachers, and pupils, topics such as learning conditions, work methodology, teacher attitudes regarding work in small schools, pupil satisfaction with educational and other services, socialization and well-being of pupils, demographic trends, as well as the different paths for quality teaching and learning, were discussed.

Also, four focus group discussions were organized with parents of pupils from a small school and three satellite classes. The importance, role and function of the school for the community and their children was discussed with the parents. Also, the quality of educational services, school infrastructure, as well as challenges and ways to ensure quality learning conditions for their children, were discussed.

**Main policies and
legal framework**

3

Law on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo

Under this Law (Article 5, paragraph 1 Duties of the Ministry), the MESTI bears the main responsibility for planning, setting standards and ensuring the quality of the pre-university education system, and for this purpose (sub-paragraph 1.1.) develops policies, as well as drafts and implements legislation for the development of pre-university education and training (Kuvendi i Republikës së Kosovës 2011). MESTI's responsibility for quality assurance is important, since according to the findings of the research on the operation of small schools, it is precisely the quality that is most hampered by the operation of small schools and satellite classes.

Meanwhile, Article 2 of this Law defines the goals of pre-university education and training. According to this provision, the main tasks of pre-university education, among others, are: *“(2.1.) to develop the pupil's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (2.2.) to promote the formation of basic scientific knowledge, communication, observation and analytical skills, creativity, autonomy and related learning competences; as well as (2.5.) to prepare the pupil for a responsible life”*. As will be seen in the following sections in this report, almost all the main tasks of these provisions remain unrealized in the small schools and in the satellite classes visited in the framework of the research carried out for this report. It is understood that the entire Kosovar education is weak in terms of most of these provisions, but the problems in small schools are magnified compared to the general situation in the pre-university education system in Kosovo. Also, further on in the report, it is emphasized that such an assessment of the situation is not a reflection of the quality of work and commitment of the majority of teachers in small schools.

Furthermore, Article 3 of this law defines the obligation of educational authorities to ensure the inclusion of all children in education, and the responsibility for the realization of children's education, emphasizing that: *“Pre-university education is a joint responsibility shared between **parents**, educational and training institutions, municipalities and government, according to the respective duties and functions set out in this Law”*. This provision obliges educational authorities to work for the smooth running of the educational system by cooperating in delivering common responsibilities. This provision simultaneously excludes the centralized and instructive approach in favor of coordinating efforts at all stages to achieve goals.

Article 13 regulates the establishment of educational institutions. Para. 1 of this article stipulates that primary schools (ISCED level 1) and lower secondary schools (ISCED level 2) are established in each municipality and that schools of these levels can be combined. This provision opens the possibility for municipalities to be more creative and flexible in establishing and operating/merging schools of these levels. For example, teaching at ISCED level 1 (grades 0-5) could be implemented in a more decentralized manner, while for grades 6-9 schools could be consolidated and pupils transferred to larger schools.

Para. 2 of the article states that “A municipality may establish and maintain satellite classes in ISCED Level 1 and 2 as a part of the school network in areas where it is not practicable to establish a main school, according to criteria determined by the Ministry through a bylaw”. The legal framework (see provisions 1 and 2 above) that gives local authorities - municipalities - the almost exclusive right to establish educational institutions, has resulted in investments without clear educational objectives, so that new schools have been opened in remote areas where there was no reason for such an action. Decision (AGJ 1977/22) of the Constitutional Court (Gjykata Kushtetuese e Republikës së Kosovës 2022), which gives the municipalities full right to establish and close schools, has only increased the impossibility of applying a systematic and planned approach to the consolidation of the pre-university education school network in Kosovo. In this

sense, an OECD study finds that *“Discrepancies between priorities and state policies on school networks and processes (regulations) for the establishment of new schools, [as is the case in Kosovo - note by the author of this report] can greatly limit the possibilities for strategic planning of the school network and seriously hamper efforts to reorganize and consolidate educational services”*.

LPUE Article 14 regulates the allocation of pupils in educational institutions. According to this provision, the municipality is responsible for allocating catchment areas (for ISCED Levels 1 and 2) for enrollment in education of the pupils in the respective areas. The municipality also has the possibility, in the best interest of the pupil and in special cases, to make exceptions from the designated area for the school enrollment. In fact, the research conducted in small schools and satellite classes has shown frequent exceptions in the implementation of the provisions of this article. There are three main findings related to this situation: (i) these omissions usually occur at the school level, (ii) there is a trend of enrollment of children in larger settlements (from villages to cities and from small towns to larger ones), and (iii) not infrequently, displaced pupils are kept in records of both the original school and the new school. The latter is perhaps done to nominally increase the number of pupils in the school and in the municipality, and is made possible due to the absence of a personal code for each pupil. Other reasons highlighted by the officials and teachers interviewed are parent workplaces (parent goes to work and the child to school at the same time), lack of adequate learning conditions in small schools and, sometimes, the quality of the teachers. The latter was not verified during the field research, since the teachers of the satellite classes visited have shown high quality and commitment.

Among the duties of the Ministry according to Article 5 of this Law are also included the drafting of a normative act for the regulation of (5.8.) licensing standards of educational and training institutions, including the standards mentioned in paragraph 7 (on school spaces). In the context of this study, this provision can also be read as an initiative for the revision of the relevant normative act for the licensing of educational institutions and the determination of the relevant minimum standard of equipment, teaching materials and practical resources for all educational institutions in pre-university education in Kosovo. That is, the municipalities must have a normative act defining the relevant minimum requirements for the operation of an educational institution. MESTI's instruction on the norms and standards of school buildings (MASHT 2015) prescribes only the descriptive norms and standards, but not the quantitative and qualitative aspects. For example, it foresees the size and characteristics of laboratory spaces, but not what laboratories school buildings should have and with what equipment inside them.

On the other hand, MEST Administrative Instruction 11/2012 on the criteria for licensing private educational institutions for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels and vocational training institutions, (MASHT 2012) regulates the administrative requirements for licensing without setting any standard required for qualitative operation of the educational institution. That is, in Kosovo's education system there are no standards for the quantity and quality of teaching spaces (laboratories, cabinets, workshops), equipment, materials, practical resources, through which the quality of operation and educational services would be assessed for general pre-university institutions. For example, municipal educational authorities and educational institutions (including private ones) have no reference document on how many and which cabinets the school should have as a minimum standard of its activity. Likewise, there is no document that determines which educational and professional services the school should offer (activities in clubs, career counseling, extracurricular activities, socialization activities, psychological, sociological support, ...) besides teaching. The interviewed MED personnel and the personnel of small and large schools did not have any orientation on which laboratories/cabinets/equipment the schools should have.

The
framework defines

5

evaluation
areas

25

criteria

and more than

110

indicators for
evaluating school
performance.

This is the main document that guides policies for quality assurance in pre-university education in Kosovo.

However, after about seven years of implementation, it seems that the Framework needs a revision, so that it can better guide the policies and practices of the authorities and educational institutions in Kosovo.

Educational Institution Performance Quality Assurance Framework¹³

This document (MASHT 2016) drafted and published by the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute, serves to guide the main policies for quality assurance in pre-university education in Kosovo. *With the Framework for ensuring the quality of school performance, the MEST defines the basic expectation from every school operating in the Republic of Kosovo, through **quality criteria** and school **performance indicators**. **These standards** will serve as a reference for evaluating the school's performance, its development planning, and the continuous advancement of school services* (from the Minister's note in the introduction of the document). The framework defines five evaluation areas, 25 criteria, and more than 110 indicators for evaluating school performance. This is the main document that guides policies for quality assurance in pre-university education in Kosovo. However, after about seven years of implementation, it seems that the Framework needs a revision, so that it can better guide the policies and practices of the authorities and educational institutions in Kosovo. The practice of its implementation has shown that it is very unclear and difficult to implement with the existing resources of schools and the educational inspectorate in Kosovo. However, in this case, only how clear the framework is in presenting the minimum infrastructural conditions necessary for learning and work in Kosovo's schools will be addressed.

For illustration, the language of the criterion (2.3.) and some relevant indicators for the work environment and culture in the school will be briefly analyzed. In this criterion it is emphasized that "The working environment and culture of the school are in function of integrated learning and the implementation of the curriculum". This criterion means that it defines the expectation and the minimum concrete conditions in the teaching infrastructure in order to enable integrated learning and the realization of the curriculum. Consequently, from the indicators of this criterion, the authorities and educational institutions must understand the minimum

¹³ [Korniza-per-sigurim-te-cilesise-se-performances-se-shkolles-ne-Kosove-2016.pdf \(rks-gov.net\)](#)

requirements regarding teaching spaces, laboratories, cabinets, practical resources, teaching materials for the realization of the curriculum and integrated learning. However, the wording of the main indicators in this field does not provide a clear overview of the minimum requirements and obligations of educational authorities and institutions. For illustration, in the indicator, 2.3.1, it is stated that *“Resources (human and financial) and teaching equipment and tools are sufficient to enable the realization of the teaching process **according to the requirements defined by the core curricula**”*. Under such a wording, the MESTI, municipalities, and schools, receive no clear obligations in terms of infrastructure and conditions for work and learning. The same appears when looking at indicator 2.3.4.: *“Teaching and learning are enriched by the adequate use of ICT, the surrounding environment and other resources outside the school”*. Here it is not clear which devices, in what quantity, and in what way should be used.

Further on, in indicator 2.3.5 it is stated that: *“Classrooms, laboratories, ancillary spaces (indoor and outdoor) and equipment, are in full function for the implementation of integrated learning and other activities of a cross-curricular nature”*.

In such circumstances, how will the internal evaluator, the external evaluator, or the school director know if the performance conditions for this criterion have been met (on one of the four scales)? How could municipal authorities plan investments in education? How would the most equitable learning conditions be ensured between schools and municipalities?

That is, the criteria and indicators should become more measurable, more concrete and standardized (how many computers per number of pupils) and not only as a field or content (sufficient equipment for the implementation of the curriculum). Consequently, it must be decided how many computers, how many laboratories, which laboratories, what laboratories, (it is not enough that the laboratories are in the function of the curriculum, it must be shown HOW they help the realization of the curriculum). Then, how is integrated learning realized in schools through laboratories? Which labs do integrated learning best?

Consequently, policies and relevant by-laws should be reviewed in order to define concrete minimum conditions for the provision of standardized educational services to all pupils in Kosovo. No regulations state exactly HOW and WHICH classrooms, laboratories, and ancillary spaces must be provided. For example, each primary and lower secondary school, as well as high schools, must provide regular teaching in laboratories and cabinets in the curriculum field of natural sciences, in the field of arts, in the field of information and communication technology (ICT), and also closed and open spaces for the subject of sports and physical education and others. It should also be determined how many laboratories of one type are sufficient for the respective size of the school – large schools require more such spaces.

Such formulation allows the standardization of working conditions and teaching activities in Kosovo schools. Most of the small schools and satellite classes visited (during the research) did not meet the basic conditions for qualitative development of teaching and for the realization of the curricula. The interviewed municipal and school directors did not consider it reasonable that all children should have the same learning conditions, regardless of the size of the school or the number of pupils. This is because no legal provision specifically obliges them to create optimal conditions for learning and work. On the contrary, according to the insistence of the educational officials of the municipalities visited during the research for this report, there are instructions from the central authorities that investments should not be made in small schools.

At the same time, the administrative instruction AI 17/2016 on the licensing of private educational and vocational training institutions¹⁴ (MASHT 2016) in articles 3-4 only the procedures and criteria (that is, the content of the evaluation) are provided, but not the minimum standards for licensing. For example, in para. 1.4 it is determined that cabinets, laboratories and teaching equipment are evaluated, but it does not determine what is the minimum content and quality of such equipment. For example, how many computers, projectors, smart boards, etc., should an institution have to meet the criterion of technological equipment. Consequently, this Instruction may need a revision in order to standardize and apply it beyond private educational and educational institutions.

Regarding the conditions for licensing educational institutions and ensuring the efficiency of their operation, an OECD study (OECD 2018, 101) recommends that licensing procedures should be harmonized with educational policy priorities. Otherwise, the efficiency of the system and the possibility of planning its development may decrease. Or, in other words, “the decision on the financing of educational institutions should be transparent and based on an assessment related to needs and quality. Only services and institutions of proven quality should be allowed to operate, as well as those that respond to clear needs for educational services. This is illustrated by the requirement that a school should not be financed by public funds, unless it is proven that it has secured a number of classes with a certain number of pupils. Today, a considerable number of small schools and satellite classes continue to operate in Kosovo, with a smaller number than the criteria allowed in the relevant MESTI provisions, but also significantly below the desired and permissible level of quality of educational and teaching services (analyzed below in this study).

MESTI Instruction No. 4/2017 on PUEEI Performance Evaluation

It is a document that regulates school performance internal and external evaluation procedures. Article 6 of this Instruction foresees four levels of performance quality referring to educational institutions Quality Assurance Framework. This Instruction is in full compliance with the criteria and indicators established in the Performance Evaluation Framework (discussed above). Even here, the minimum standards of technological equipment, tools, materials, types and quality of laboratories and workshops are not defined; that is, the basic conditions for the operation of an educational institution are not defined.

Law No. 03/L-068 on Education in the Municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo¹⁵

The provisions of this law (Article 4.1.) provide full and executive municipal powers related to education at the local level: *“Municipalities shall have full and exclusive powers, insofar as they concern the local interest, while respecting the standards set forth in applicable legislation with respect to the provisions of public pre-primary, primary and secondary education, including registration and licensing of educational institutions, recruitment, payment of salaries and training of education instructors and administrators”*. The exclusive rights of

¹⁴ <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=15135>
¹⁵ <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2543>

municipalities in education are further confirmed in the Law on Local Self-Government, Article 17, which reserves for municipalities full and exclusive rights in “the provision of public pre-primary, primary and secondary education, including registration and licensing of educational institutions, recruitment, payment of salaries and training of education instructors and administrators” (Kuvendi i Republikës së Kosovës 2008).

Regarding the network of schools and the establishment/dissolution of educational institutions, the wording of this and the following provisions defines the full and executive rights of the municipalities only at the general level. Thus, the concrete competences (Article 5) include: construction of schools, employment of personnel, appointment of school directors, supervision of schools, training of teachers, and others, but there is no provision regarding the concrete role of municipalities for the network of schools and the establishment/dissolution of educational institutions. For this reason, the provisions of the Law on Pre-university Education and the corresponding MESTI by-laws, remain meritorious provisions for the interpretation and implementation of these general provisions of these two laws regarding the network of schools and the establishment/dissolution of PUEEs.

Such a spirit of regulating the establishment and disbandment of PUEEs in Kosovo goes against positive international practices in this field. In OECD countries, the responsibility for the establishment/termination of educational institutions is determined by the source of funds for the operation of education. Thus, in the majority of OECD countries (12 out of 25 analyzed countries) funds for pre-university education are provided by central authorities and, at the same time, decision-making for the functioning of schools is largely centralized. Meanwhile, in countries where education is financed by provinces/regions (such as Austria, Canada, Germany, Australia, USA, and others), respectively by municipalities (as happens in Scandinavian countries), decision-making is also concentrated at these levels of power (Atkinson 2005). In this sense, Kosovo constitutes a relatively illogical exception because all funds for pre-university education are provided by the central budget, while all decision-making (except for quality assurance) is concentrated, *even exclusively*, at the local level. Such a situation can be explained by the strong influence of many international experts in the organization of education in Kosovo in the post-war period, as well as the compromises within the process of negotiating Kosovo's independence as concessions and guarantees for national minorities, and especially for the Kosovo Serb community.

Administrative Instruction (MESTI AI No. 10/2023) on the criteria and procedures for the establishment and termination of school activity

The establishment and termination of the activity of pre-university level educational institutions is regulated by MESTI Administrative Instruction No. 10/2023, which defines the minimum criteria for the operation of an educational institution and the relevant procedures for establishing and terminating its activity. Based on this Administrative Instruction (MASHTI 2023), the municipality, with the consent of the MESTI, establishes all institutions of ISCED levels 0-3. Since the focus of this document is the issue of small schools and satellite classes, here we will not focus on ISCED level 3 institutions where this phenomenon is not so pronounced. Instead, we will focus on the state of educational institutions at ISCED levels 1 and 2.

According to AI 10/2023, there are several main criteria for establishing a primary school (ISCED 1):

- at least one class for each grade 1-5 and one class for the pre-primary grade;
- at least 60 pupils;
- at least 30 pupils for schools in the languages of minority communities, and schools in mountainous or border areas, where
 - a mountainous area is called a rural area with an altitude of 700 or more;
 - border area is the location less than 5 km from the border line.

At the same time, for the establishment of a primary and lower secondary school (ISCED 1&2), the following criteria must be met:

- at least one class for each grade 1-9 and one class for the pre-primary grade;
- at least 100 pupils;
- at least 50 pupils for schools in the languages of minority communities, and schools in mountainous or border areas.

Meanwhile, the satellite class of a school can be established if the following conditions are met:

- The distance from the parent institution is not less than 4 km.
- The satellite class has at least 20 pupils, and at least 10 pupils for schools in the languages of minority communities, and schools in mountainous or border areas.
- The satellite class of ISCED level 1 has at least two classes for grades 1-5, while that of ISCED level 1&2 also has two classes for grades 6-9.
- Exceptionally, the satellite class can be established even without meeting the above criteria if the transportation of children from the catchment area of the satellite class to the nearest school is considered dangerous or takes more than 45 minutes in one direction.

During the research carried out in six municipalities of Kosovo (where teaching takes place mainly in the Albanian language), it was found that the municipalities are well informed about the relevant provisions of this AI. The difficulties of consolidating the school network are more complex and will be presented in the following situation analysis section.

MESTI's policy for small schools and satellite classes

**Presentation and
discussion of
research results**

4

Interview Results:

Municipal Education Directorates - directors and officials

At the level of municipal educational authorities, there is full awareness of the negative trend in the functioning of small schools and satellite classes. However, for various reasons such as: wrong investments in school infrastructure, excessive employment in education, lack of systematic and planned approach, unequal treatment of schools from different areas, lack of funds, resistance from the community and others, the problem with small schools has only continued to worsen in most municipalities of Kosovo.

In the conversations with them, the directors and municipal education officials declare themselves interested in implementing MESTI provisions for the establishment/termination of educational institutions. This means the termination of schools or satellite classes with less than 10 and 20 pupils, respectively. However, research findings show that the problems (especially with the quality of teaching) are deeper and go beyond schools with 20 pupils. Asked about the existence of independent development plans and regulations that would regulate the operation of schools, the supply of equipment, or the transportation of pupils, most authorities declare the absence of such documents. Exceptionally, some directorates declare that they have such plans, but until the drafting of this report there is no concrete document submitted as evidence for such a thing. Consequently, there is a lack of a systematic approach in the medium term for the regulation of the network of schools in municipalities. Instead, momentary approaches dominate, either as a commitment by the mayor or as a reaction to the gradual dissolution of small educational institutions.

According to a Shewbridge report on Czech schools, drafted for OECD needs, there are three main elements that are required by the responsible local authorities for the successful organization of the school network: adequate capacities (sufficient expertise and staff), clear leadership, and focus on educational quality (Shewbridge 2016, 62). In the municipalities where relative success has been achieved in the consolidation of the school network, we have mainly seen the element of determination of the leadership and less the appropriate capacities and the focus on quality. One gets the impression that efforts to consolidate the school network in Kosovo occur when municipal leaders are alarmed by the extreme inefficiency of the education system in the respective municipality. For example, in one municipality, the pupil/teacher ratio had reached 8 to 1 and at the same time the number of small schools had significantly increased. The same has happened in several other municipalities that have made efforts to consolidate their school network. However, in almost no case, network consolidation or merger is observed to have occurred as a result of focusing on the quality of educational services. Focusing on quality does not seem to be the primary preoccupation of parents either, at least from the interviews organized within this research (for more on parent attitudes, see the section on the results of conversations with parents).

Another important element for the successful reform of the school network is the participation of the community in each phase. Based on an OECD report on school resources, (OECD 2018, 70) *"An important element of the reform of registrations and the school network of the Flemish community in Belgium, was the degree of flexibility at the local level, based on the decisive role of consultations, which has significantly reduced the resistance to the implementation of the reforms"*. In Kosovo, in some cases it is observed that the determination of the leadership to implement reforms is not accompanied by active involvement of the community in extensive and patient consultations for reforms. Such approaches have produced serious consequences for the progress of learning and for children's education. In this context, it

should be remembered that community consultation and involvement is also a legal obligation in accordance with Article 3.2. of the Law on pre-university education, which makes parents one of the main factors responsible for the organization of education in Kosovo.

In two municipalities, the issue of small schools and satellite classes has been treated more seriously, as a result of the determination of the mayor or the municipal administration. In these two municipalities, the relative consolidation of the network of schools has been done with the energetic action of the municipal administration. However, even here, apart from the determination of the leadership, there is a lack of a systematic approach and medium-term planning (3-5 years) for addressing the issues. However, the decisive handling of the issue has resulted in relative results and has facilitated the functioning of schools. Also, according to the personnel of these municipal directorates, the reaction of the community and pupils has been positive after the end of the consolidation process¹⁶. According to them, crucial to the success of the merger were: determination, ensuring quality transport, securing teacher workplace, and communication with the community. In terms of community outreach, the importance and role of the school director, the clarity of the solutions offered and the safety of the pupils are emphasized.

Other municipalities point to the difficulties and resistance, often irrational, of the community or of the staff. In two or three of the visited municipalities, after several unsuccessful community outreach activities, the municipal officials request support from the MESTI for the consolidation and increase of the efficiency of the school network. This support, they think, can come from clearer policies on the one hand, but also with financial support for school supplies and transportation provision, on the other.

The trend of population movement (towards urban areas and western countries), the decrease in the number of pupils (especially in rural areas) and the appearance of a surplus of teachers, has brought schools and municipal authorities to serious dilemmas for further developments and for the organization of education in their municipalities. From the talks with the municipal authorities, the momentum for action has been created, but support is required from outside, first of all from the MESTI, in the form of funds and clear regulations. MESTI regulations are used by the municipal educational authorities as an argument for the need to consolidate the school network or to merge schools as it is preferred to be called at the municipal level.

It is impressive that the directors and municipal officials interviewed do not see the problems of the lack of quality of educational services in small schools, but rather see the issue from the administrative and functional side. The research carried out for this report has shown that the main problem of the development of learning in these schools is the damage caused to children in their educational development and in their psychophysical well-being due to the lack of learning tools and the lack of conditions for genuine socialization. This aspect requires actions for information and raising awareness, not only among municipal authorities, but also for parent awareness. In the context of the municipal level of education, the complete absence of active non-governmental organizations in the field of education is also impressive. In no municipality did non-governmental and municipal initiatives and activities emerge during the conversations with the community. The impression was gained that education is only the responsibility of the state authorities and not at all the responsibility of the community.

16 In the municipalities visited, the term merger is used for cases where a satellite class or small school is terminated.

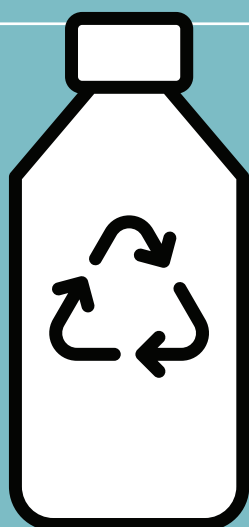
School Directors

As is known, school directors are the main link in the relationship between educational authorities and the community. Consequently, any action to ensure quality educational services in small schools, whether through merging or creating conditions in existing schools, should be focused around school directors. Currently, there is no stable link in operation between parent schools and satellite classes, especially in cases of areas with marked demographic movements and continuous decrease in the number of pupils. This is pointed out in the case of the report of MEDs with parent schools with a smaller number of pupils, and the impression is gained that satellite classes do not enjoy the full attention of the school management.

Teachers between the socio-cultural and the educational cause

All the teachers in the visited schools are worried about further developments in the schools where they work, but at the same time they maintain their dedication and love for the pupils and their work. While other actors see small schools as institutions, as problems for financing and management (municipal, central authorities, school management), or as monuments, missing infrastructure, or even as a cause that must be fought for at all costs (parents and the community), teachers see the issue from the aspect of working conditions and from the (lack of) possibility to provide quality educational services for their pupils. That is, the awareness and commitment to quality assurance is more pronounced among teachers than among other actors (authorities and the community). Exceptions are sometimes made by older teachers who are also part of the community and management of small schools. In these cases, the socio-cultural element prevails over the educational one. These teachers see themselves as municipal activists and the school as a cause of community survival in a particular, usually hilly, mountainous area.

In most small schools, teacher efforts were observed to compensate for the lack of laboratories, equipment and teaching materials by recycling materials from everyday life and using personal technological devices.



A good example for illustration was in the satellite class in Surdull, Podujeva. The teacher here had arranged a table of teaching tools (resource corner) that consisted of recycled bottles filled with water in different colors, plastic straws, sticks made by herself, plasticine, crayons and pencils of different colors, paper of different sizes, thicknesses and colors. The results of using these materials could be seen on the classroom walls decorated with colorful paper letters. Most of these learning materials were designed so that they could be used longer and for different learning content.

This approach, somewhere more and somewhere less, is observed in all the schools visited and this can be related to the enthusiasm of new teachers - who are usually sent to work in small schools and in satellite classes.

A good example for illustration was in the satellite class in Surdull, Podujeva. The teacher here had arranged a table of teaching tools (resource corner) that consisted of recycled bottles filled with water in different colors, plastic straws, sticks made by herself, plasticine, crayons and pencils of different colors, paper of different sizes, thicknesses and colors. The results of using these materials could be seen on the classroom walls decorated with colorful paper letters. Most of these learning materials were designed so that they could be used longer and for different learning content.

This approach, somewhere more and somewhere less, is observed in all the schools visited and this can be related to the enthusiasm of new teachers - who are usually sent to work in small schools and in satellite classes.

Janitors:

Janitors are the most present personnel in all the small schools visited during the field research. Often, the sense of ownership and identification with the school can be observed precisely in janitors. While other actors (municipal directorate, parent school management, and perhaps even teachers) show a certain emotional distance to the point of neglecting the small school or the satellite class, janitors show a little more commitment, connection with the school, with the well-being of pupils, teachers, and others. It is these workers (usually the only ones) who one runs across before and after the end of lessons; they are able to provide, often better than all others, all the information about the school, the teaching, the condition and the problems of the school; they directly face all the objective difficulties of the school's operation and the use of the infrastructure.

It should be noted that janitors in small schools work in more difficult conditions than their colleagues in other schools, precisely because of elements of neglect of these facilities by the authorities and school management. In the facilities of small schools, there is an increased use of water for cleaning and frequent improvisations in the arrangement of the school fence, concrete parts of the yard, glass and window frames, inventory, doors and others.

In today's context, their connection with the school is also reflected by their concern for the further operation of the school and for the eventual preservation of the workplace. Unlike teachers who regularly come from other settlements, janitors usually come from the village where the school operates. This makes it easier to carry out their work, but also a stronger connection with the continuation of the school's operation in the same facility. Such a thing makes them very interested and involved in any developments related to the respective school. Often their commitment is not directly observed during long conversations and communication about the operation of small schools and satellite classes, but they are very present objectively.

During conversations with them, janitors rarely express their concern about the demographic trend and endangered workplace. They are, without exception, polite and stand aside, letting others speak. However, their discreet commitment can be observed through the mobilization of parents, teachers or pupils in the direction of continuing the operation of the school. Because of this function and connection, janitors during the research process for this report have been an important link both in terms of informing, but also misinforming, the community regarding the developments around the school.

Lesson learned: Consequently, it becomes necessary to inform, communicate and involve janitors in all phases and options for regulating the conditions and quality of work of children learning in small schools.

Parents:

The law on pre-university education (Article 3.2.) places parents in charge of the entities responsible for the successful implementation of pre-university education. That is, parents are responsible for their children's education alongside other actors, including local and central authorities, not just education ones. For the proper implementation of this provision, the LPUE defines the duties and responsibilities of the Parents' Council as *"the main channel of communication and counseling between the Ministry, educational and training institutions, and parents"*.

During field visits, the importance of parents for any important action that affects the smooth running of work in educational institutions in Kosovo was confirmed. The interviews with the parents have shown three important aspects of the role of the parents in relation to the functioning of SSs and SCs:

- Parents are deeply concerned with the negative trend of the number of residents/children, respectively pupils in their community;
- They know best the situation and the opportunities that are offered in relation to the SSs and SCs in their community/area;
- They have a traditional and static approach regarding the mission of the school and the characteristics of quality education;
- Parents are not sufficiently informed about development trends in education, nor about the needs for the restructuring of the school network.

Presentation of results from conversations with parents

As noted in the methodology section, focused discussions were held within the study with four groups of parents of pupils from small schools and satellite classes. Perhaps due to the sensitive nature of the discussion topic, parents have come to these discussions very worried about the fate of their school and the conversation with them has not been easy at all. After the analysis, it turns out that such a thing happens as a result of the lack of real information, due to misinformation from people who are affected by the operation of small schools, due to the wrong communication of the school leadership with the community, and by the general uncertainty related to the demographic trend and the continuous decline in the number of children/pupils in these areas.

Below are some of the indicative elements that emerged during the research in support of the above-mentioned findings.

In the most general sense, parents are mostly aware of the importance of school in their children's education. However, out of all (14) schools visited, only the parents of one school see the school as important for the development of linguistic identity and for the integration of children into the community.¹⁷ Others, almost without exception, see school as an institution where children should learn. Asked about the other functions of the school, apart from teaching, they declare the importance of the school since its foundation, for the generations that grew up and were educated there, they also talk about the school as a temple of knowledge, and mention personalities who have been educated in that school and the time when the school was full of children, etc. However, their interpretations of the school's role remain limited to teaching and learning, leaving aside socialization, physical and mental development, their well-being, talent development, knowledge competition, interaction with other children, etc.

Asked about the possibility of organizing **quality education** in their school due to the small number of pupils, they emphasize that the education is of high quality and insist that it is not better even in other schools in the surrounding villages. While numerous studies on education in OECD countries (OECD p. 71) show that quality is the main criterion of parents when selecting the school in which their children will study, our interviews with parents do not see such a tendency. In these conversations, the main criterion is the preservation of the school - often even to the direct detriment of quality education¹⁸. They even add that because of the small number of pupils, children in small schools benefit more from their teacher. Some of them remember the time when, due to the large number of pupils when they were pupils, most of the pupils did not benefit from the classroom learning, as they did not get their turn to read or participate in class discussions. Also, parents think that the small number helps compensate for the lack of equipment and laboratories. For example, they show a case where the pupils of these schools have won second or third places in municipal competitions.

Such an approach of the interviewed parents corresponds to the findings of various researches in OECD countries where: *Even in cases where disadvantaged families had the right to choose schools for their children, they often lacked the knowledge, tools, time and social capital to gather sufficient information about school quality* (Nusche 2009).

Asked about **the lack of group work and knowledge competition** in the classroom, parents claim that these are shortcomings of learning in small schools, but this, however, according to them, is compensated by the diligent work of teachers. During visits to small school classrooms, the research team observed that in almost half of the classrooms, teachers used improvised practical resources to illustrate and apply the teaching content. Parents also admit that there is a lack of socialization and interaction with more children at school and at home. However, it is still insisted that even if they were to move to a nearby school, no more socialization or knowledge competition is guaranteed, since, according to them, the population has moved to cities everywhere in rural areas. Parents react positively to different ideas of cooperation and pooling of pupils from different schools for learning purposes to establish knowledge competition and to compensate for the lack of socialization and the limited use of equipment/practical application tools.

¹⁷ Here was a community that does not speak Albanian at home and see the school as an important place for learning this language or even as an easier path for the integration of their children in life.

¹⁸ Due to the lack of basic conditions for quality learning, including the lack of teaching equipment, group work, learning with projects, competition and competition of knowledge.

Regarding **the lack of equipment, laboratories and practical resources**, they blame the municipal and central authorities for the lack of investment. During the conversations with parents, teachers and school directors, a traditional approach to quality in education was observed. They consider that investments in tools and equipment are the main way to ensure quality in small schools. The interviewed parents do not have any solutions on how investments could be made in small schools in a way that the cost would be reasonable, for example providing a biology or chemistry cabinet for ten pupils of the lower secondary level. However, they insist, that perhaps in the case of lower grades, only computers and practical application tools can be provided instead of proper laboratories. For higher grades (6-9), it is agreed that in order to fulfill the curricular requirements, pupils can be sent regularly (once a week) to a larger school that has these facilities. For this purpose, they think that transportation should be regularly provided by the municipal authorities or the ministry.

Transportation

Regarding transportation, parents generally consider that it works well and that it is a great help for them, especially in cases where pupils of grades 6-9 are transferred to larger schools. Their main comments are related to delays in signing and starting the implementation of transport contracts at the beginning of the year, any delays in transport (especially in the afternoons), pupils who finish school early having to wait until other pupils finish their classes, and sometimes the condition of the vehicles used to transport pupils, etc. In some cases, parents complain that although they continue their education in satellite classes, young pupils often have to travel distances of more than one and a half kilometers loaded with heavy bags in remote areas (which pose various risks) and in severe weather conditions. They add that despite the functioning of the small school, they often have to escort the children to school and wait for them.

During the discussion of the possible solutions related to transportation, various proposals were given, including the organization by the school of supplementary learning activities for the pupils who are waiting until the transport arrives, the clear description of the conditions for the transport of the pupils, the collection and distribution of the children from school transportation as close as possible to the house, the organization of transportation for the realization of joint learning activities with pupils from other schools, the organization of transportation even for small schools when the atmospheric conditions are severe

Combines classes

During discussions with the parents, the issue of learning and combined classes was also addressed. Thinking that they were protecting the institution (small school) from eventual closure, a large number of parents continued to defend combined learning as well. In this sense, it was said that the children have learned in a combined class before and were successful, and then a name of a successful person - former pupil - from the area covered by the school was given. During the discussion, some of the difficulties of working in combined classes were presented, such as the interference of contents (mathematics and native language), discrepancies in the level of developed knowledge (for example, contents for grades two and four are developed at the same time), short available time, lack of group work, waiting until one group's turn comes, constant one-way communication with the teacher, lack of mutual learning (from peers) and others. Parents continued to insist that the dedication of the teachers compensated for the difficulties caused by combined teaching. There were also constructive proposals such as, for example, the separate teaching of two levels with

reduced hours, or the organization of teaching in blocks of hours (one day of mathematics, one day of language and so on) in separate groups. However, it seemed from the discussion that combined teaching has not been taken seriously by either the authorities or the parents. Also, it seemed that teachers, school management, and municipal authorities, did not work enough to inform parents about this form of learning.

Lesson learned: the main educational actors at the local level (school and MED) have a very tolerant attitude towards combined learning and are not aware of the degree of difficulties that combined learning causes in the educational and intellectual development of children. The MESTI should issue relevant decisions to raise awareness and stop this form of organization of teaching in schools.

How to improve the situation:

All the focus groups with parents were also asked about the best way out of the current situation – in terms of the development of teaching in very small schools and contrary to the legal provisions in force. The matter was handled in two ways by the parents. On the one hand, the irrational approach was observed, insisting on the preservation of the small school at all costs, despite all the facts that demonstrated the opposite, and on the other hand, rational proposals were given for getting out of the situation. In terms of the latter, parents mainly demanded the provision of better conditions for learning, the regulation of infrastructure, the provision of transportation, the elimination of injustices or omissions in the treatment of different areas/schools, general government interventions in all sectors (not only in education) for the improvement of living conditions, etc. Also, not infrequently, possible solutions for merging schools were discussed.

In this sense, it was proposed:

- To organize teaching in two small schools, so that one organizes teaching at the primary level, the other at the lower secondary level;
- During the eventual merger, the sensitivity of the communities should be taken into account, for example, the merger with the school in a neighboring village was not liked, but another village (sometimes even further away) was proposed;
- The eventual solutions should be qualitative and sustainable: a parent said, *"If it doesn't get much better, then don't make moves and shocks for half-assed solutions; if you send us to the neighboring village, the school there will also have to be closed after a short time"*;
- To take into account and not endanger the school personnel;
- In case of eventual merger, the issue of transportation (door to door) should be fixed in a stable manner;
- To eliminate unfair approach and political preferences in the treatment of schools; and other similar ones.

Regional affiliation:

During all conversations with parents, a new point was presented regarding the place of consolidation of schools in case of merging their school with another school: almost without exception, parents were against merging with the school of the nearest village/villages. The argument against the nearest/nearby villages was that the situation in them was not better either in terms of conditions or the number of pupils (in some cases it was the opposite); relations with the nearby village were not the best possible; the village at a greater distance (specific names were also mentioned) was said to offer better conditions; the distance to the parent school was often greater and the road more inconvenient than the distance/road to the next village, etc. Frequently, there were cases when it was emphasized that the investments in the nearest village were made for political motives, and not for merit, and this had an impact on the neglect of the school/village. This was often the reason for the rejection of integration with the respective school.

Not infrequently during the field research, interlocutors from the school and the community engaged in various improvisations such as preparing the children for a conversation with the researchers, insisting that they be present during the conversation with the children, doubting the sincerity of the research team, insisting on arguments in favor of protecting the school at all costs, warnings about the movement of the population in case of closing the school, reminding the research team about the need to protect the border, and other similar things.

Lessons learned:

- A** Parents should be consulted in any case about any merger between schools - they know much better the different circumstances related to history and relations that affect the degree of realization of certain solutions.
- B** Activities should be organized to make parents aware of the educational role of the school, in addition to its socio-cultural element.

Pupils

Conversations with pupils were the most difficult part of the whole field research. With or without intention, during the visit to these schools, the opportunity to talk with the pupils was somehow missed.¹⁹ The hosts usually directed the visit and the conversation away from the pupils. Out of a dozen schools visited, the researchers had the opportunity to talk with pupils in only three schools.²⁰ In one school, the meeting began with prepared accusations against the research team that they intended to manipulate the pupils in order to close the school; in another case, the teacher and community members insisted on being part of the conversation with the pupils; also, pupils were instructed on what to say in conversation with the researchers, and so on.

In the conversations that took place, the pupils spoke affirmatively about the school, about the teachers, about learning and working conditions. However, supplementary questions about socialization, group work, laboratory work, technological equipment, project development, sports activities, combined classroom learning and others remained largely unanswered. The impression was created that a whole spectrum of school life activities was missing in these schools - precisely those parts that affect the quality of learning and the development of the

¹⁹ It should be emphasized that all conversations with pupils were conducted with the presence of an adult from the school or community.

²⁰ In most cases, classes were over before the team arrived at the school. Especially in the case of second schools visited during the day.

child. The missing aspects are mainly related to the size of the school (number of pupils) and the technological equipment and practical resources. According to the pupils, the home-school route is one of their problems; then the absence of other children at school and the inability to compare themselves to other children. One pupil stated that he did not know how good he was at school because he had no one to compare himself to. Other children said that they do not have the opportunity to learn with modern equipment, computers and projectors. Transparency, information and communication appear essential in the interaction with parents in dealing with phenomena in their children's education.

Observation results:

The first impression upon entering a small school or a satellite class is the absence of liveliness and noise of children in the school and in the yard. Other impressions are neglect and emptiness. The school yard and the building do not give the impression of a "temple of knowledge" nor do they serve for motivation, for the promotion of ambitions, or for the realization of desires. The school grounds and gate are usually damaged and held in place with improvised materials. The grass is untrodden and covers the entire space of the yard, including sometimes the concrete parts, the alleys and the sports court. The school building is rather small and looks older and more depreciated than it really is, due to lack of use and regular maintenance. Window panes are often damaged and adjusted only to the extent necessary to prevent the penetration of atmospheric elements.

Teachers and pupils did not seem to have a sense of belonging and closeness to these facilities. One thing leaves a strong impression: these schools work according to the schedule of the two or three classes that are active. The school ends the lesson as soon as the timetable of the assigned class ends. There is no supplementary teaching or staying of the teachers, the person in charge or the director of the school after hours. The impression of the neglect of these schools is further strengthened by a tendency of teachers and pupils to leave the school. It seems that it is rare (specifically 1 case in 12 schools visited) that someone stays longer (in this case the janitor) taking care of the school.²¹ That is, instead of a warm environment, a meeting point, a space for activities with children and with the community, these schools (after hours) resemble an abandoned site.

The interior of the school is clean and meets the basic requirements for cleanliness on the floor and in the main parts of the spaces. However, there are usually secondary spaces, corners, walls, parts around stoves that could be better maintained. The main concern is sanitary fittings (which are often outdated or located outside the school premises) and stoves, which create an unhealthy environment with smoke, dust, ash, wood chips and shavings in the classroom. Rooms are usually heated with stoves and wood. Materials and tools for cleaning are probably insufficient because (especially in the corridors) there is an abundant use of water to compensate for shortages. In some cases, some classrooms are closed due to non-use, as a result of the rapid drop in the number of pupils. Parts that are not used are even more neglected and inventory is broken, doors damaged and windows simply adjusted to be closed. Some of the inventory is missing from these rooms because it was used in other rooms after the used inventory was damaged and broken.

21 Out of 12 schools visited, in four cases the schools/satellite classes were closed (before noon) because everyone had returned home immediately after the scheduled time.

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Classrooms are regularly small and constantly without equipment and, therefore, do not meet the requirements for quality teaching. Inventory is minimal in quantity and quality: green/blackboard, chairs and benches of various qualities and shapes, a stove (or stove place), and some damaged lockers. Without exception, there are no computers, projectors, or laboratory equipment in any of the small schools/satellite classes. On the walls, ceilings, windows, doors and in the inventory, untreated damage, perhaps for a longer time, is regularly observed. To write on the board, chalks are regularly used - even those mostly only in white.²² The walls of the classrooms are usually painted in light colors - but it is often noticed that they have not been painted for a long time.

In contrast to this gloomy picture of very minimal inventory, the walls are often covered with pupil works, some maps, photographs, letters made of paper and other materials, as well as various sayings about the importance of education. The teacher's desk is the place where the shortcomings of the system for the supply of small schools and satellite classes are compensated (within the possibilities of the teachers). On the desk one can see crayons and colored pencils, improvised tools for pupil work, white paper, notebooks, rulers, and other teaching tools. From the observations of the researchers and from the interviews, it was learned that these tools are supplied by the teachers themselves. Even the rare technology that is encountered during the lesson is the personal equipment of the teachers who work in these schools.

In general, small schools do not work for pupils. From the observations of the researchers, the only educational factor that is devoted to the pupils is the teacher, no one else. Neither the commitment of the parents, nor of the MED, nor of the parent school, is observed. The teachers are mainly young in age and profession.²³ There was a rule that young and inexperienced personnel should be sent to small schools! There was no explanation for this phenomenon from the municipal directorates. However, it is likely that such a paradigm

²² With a little more care, the municipality could supply these Schools much better.

²³ Of the 12 schools visited, all staff were young, with the exception of one English language teacher. The exception was the staff (slightly older) of the parent schools that had remained with a very small number (under 50) of pupils in the last four or five years.

for assigning teachers has produced the most positive effect (perhaps the only positive effect) regarding the quality of teaching in these schools! The new teachers had the right commitment and energy to deal with the many challenges of working in small schools. They tried to create a warm environment in the classroom, used improvised materials, applied friendly approaches and active methods in working with children. The lack of support from the authorities and educational institutions was not reflected in the enthusiasm, energy and commitment of the new teachers.

However, it seems that the teachers of the small schools visited have not yet found a solution for compensating the absences in the socialization of children and for fixing the problem with the development of learning in combined classes. That is, without proper support and in the absence of cooperation with other colleagues from other school(s), the teachers still seemed committed to looking for and applying solutions outside the narrow reality of the school. That is, the solutions for the small number of children, for the lack of appropriate laboratory equipment, for the lack of new technologies in one's school, should be sought where they are - in the parent school or in urban schools. For this purpose, not only the teachers, but also the school directorate should be engaged.

Separation from parent school: It is the latter, the directors of the schools visited, who apparently still do not see that they have an obligation to ensure the same learning conditions for all pupils of their school - including satellite classes. Socialization, practical application of learning, laboratories, work in groups of pupils, work in projects and others can be provided with a more creative approach in providing learning at the level of the parent school or even at the level of the municipality. The interviewed school directors and municipal directors did not speak of cases of such organizations, with the exception of ceremonies marking the School Day or other special days. The interviews show that the pupils of small schools/satellite classes are seen as a problem that will be solved only with the suspension of school activities.

The conditions described above are also reflected in the behavior of pupils of SSs/SCs. Learning for a long time in small classes has made these children more closed, with fewer words, and less dynamic. In the schools visited, the children's noise is absent, the breaks between classes are silent; in fact, breaks between classes are not even noticed. A very disturbing thing throughout the research was that the pupils were not even considered, as if they were not there at all.

**Identification
and discussion
of key issues**

5

The main issues and problems identified during the research are presented below, organized in several main areas: law, child welfare, quality of educational services, infrastructure:

Improper enforcement of legal provisions

The conditions for the establishment, operation and termination of educational institutions of pre-university education are addressed in the provisions of MEST Administrative Instruction 104/2020. The situation on the ground in some of the schools visited indicates the failure to enforce the following provisions of Article 4 on the conditions for the establishment (and operation) of a school:

- Para. 4.1.1.: the teacher-pupil ratio is not in accordance with the MESTI standard (MASHT 2013)
- Para. 4.1.3.: the infrastructure is below any standard; missing equipment, laboratories/cabinets, materials; in most cases, the facility is in deplorable conditions due to lack of investment (the Ministry of Finance does not allow investments in schools with less than 100 pupils); without exception, in all the small schools visited, the facility is neglected.
- Para. 4.1.4.: lesson plans comply with the curriculum, but their implementation (in terms of teaching methodology, assessment, practical application, etc.) is objectively and practically difficult.
- Para. 4.1.5. in SSs and SCs the appropriate investments are not made, despite the existence of funds from the specific grant for education. Only the basic functions (teaching, maintenance, heating) are financed, but the elements that ensure quality are not financed.
- Para. 4.1.6.: SSs and SCs are not at all profitable from an economic point of view. The cost of maintaining them is much higher (maintenance, depreciation, utilities, extremely low teacher/pupil ratio) than their effect on quality educational services (no condition is met for the development of quality learning with an interactive approach, learning in cooperation, practical application of learning experiences, learning in the laboratory/cabinet, work in projects, use of modern technologies, etc.).
- Most of these institutions are also in violation of para. 2 of Article 4 regarding the criterion of the minimum number for the operation of the school/satellite class both for lowlands and in mountainous and border areas.
- A significant number of these schools would have to be treated according to Article 9 of AI 104/2020 on the termination of the activity of educational institutions.

However, the biggest shortcomings in these schools are not the financial, economic or material issues. As can be seen from the presentation of the results (4.1. above), the biggest problem is the lack of quality and well-being of children/pupils in these schools.

The constitutional provision (Article 47) on the right to education is not even approximately applied in the visited SSs and SCs: "Public institutions ensure for each person equal opportunities to be educated, according to their special abilities and needs" (Kuvendi i Republikës

se Kosoves 2008))²⁴. Children in small schools do not appear to have equal opportunities to be educated as those in larger rural and urban schools; educational services in these schools are not in line with either the abilities or the needs of the children in these schools”.

Many aspects of the operation of small schools seem to be in contradiction with Article 1.2.1. on the purposes of pre-university education (Kuvendi i Republikes se Kosoves 2011) which emphasizes *“the development of the pupil's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”*. In small schools, there is a lack of socialization, interactive learning, competition of knowledge, and other aspects that enable the full development of children's potential and well-being.

The situation in small schools is problematic even based on the provisions (Article 37.2) of the Law on Child Protection (Kuvendi i Republikes se Kosoves 2019): “The relevant Ministry of Education must ensure comprehensive access and attendance of **free and quality education**, based on **equal opportunities and without discrimination**, in accordance with age and ability to understand at all levels of pre-university education” . This provision determines that the MESTI, (perhaps in cooperation with the municipalities) is obliged to provide quality education and equal conditions of education for all children, including those in small schools.

Dimensions at risk

This organization of learning in small schools and in satellite classes endangers the main dimensions for which learning is organized:

Child wellbeing

- **Socialization of children:** There is a complete lack of socialization of children. SS and SC pupils cooperate with other children only when marking important days or national holidays. Even in these cases there is no integrated approach – they are mostly spectators at these events. Pupils mainly communicate with the same 2-3 children at school and at home.
- **Great intellectual pressure:** children are constantly (for 45 minutes) under the supervision of the teacher and cannot maintain focus to follow the lesson. According to theories, young children can stay focused for about 7 to 10 minutes. Due to their small number, teacher demand greater attention. This causes great fatigue and insecurity in the child, since the teacher is the only point of reference and comparison for the child.

24 Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, accessed in May 2023.

Learning quality: :

- **Knowledge competition:** lack of competition and exchange of ideas and learning experiences. For example, children state that they never know how much they know, because they have no one to compare with;
- **Monotonous learning:** Due to the small number of pupils (especially in classes with combined learning), group work, interactive learning and attractive work methods are missing. Learning is mainly face-to-face and with individual work tasks.
- **Combines classes:** The way of organizing learning in combined classes does not conform to any of the modern forms and theories of learning development. Learning performed in combined classes should be counted **as lost time** for children who have followed such form of learning.

Infrastructure - working and learning conditions

- **Working and learning conditions:** there are no laboratories, cabinets, technological equipment, there is not even a computer or projector. practical application tools and teaching materials are also missing. No investments are made in these schools (they are not allowed for schools with less than 100 pupils).
- **Big differences** up to discrimination - regarding the conditions for the development of learning between schools in rural and urban areas of the same municipality. For various reasons, differences are also observed in the way schools are treated in different rural areas. In the municipalities visited, there is a lack of a standardized approach to creating equal working and learning conditions. Some schools are new and well equipped, while others (not far from these) have significant shortages in the supply of material tools, equipment, and cabinets/laboratories.

Other findings from the interviews

From the interviews with parents and other actors in the organization of the learning process at the school level, a dichotomy can be observed between the socio-cultural role and the educational role of the school. Often, during the conversations, the separation between the role of the school as an element of emancipation of the community (but also of competition with the nearby village) and the role of the school for the education of the children of that community is not noticed. The following discussions deal with this dichotomy and the need for the renewal of the school's educational mission in the current Kosovar situation.

Municipalities declare themselves committed to implementing the current MESTI instruction on small schools (104/2020), however (with some rare exceptions), there is no systematic and planned approach to its implementation. The main reasons are related to the response of the community, but no dedicated efforts are observed to address the issues.

Municipalities have no regulations in place on providing quality pupil transportation in the territory of the municipality. Currently, for the supervision of the quality of pupil transportation, the inspectorate and the traffic police rely on the conditions announced in the calls for

the supply of transportation services. However, these rules are mainly technical conditions, and do not adequately provide for the protection of children's safety, health and wellbeing. The MESTI should help establish a national standard.

The clear trend of total neglect of staff working and pupils learning in small schools/satellite classes, is disconcerting.

Among the teachers and pupils of small schools and satellite classes, defined by their dull learning environment, absence of noise in the yard during breaks, absence of sports activities, uncertainty about the fate of their school is observed. This significantly affects the development and formation of children. The lack of technological equipment only adds to this subdued atmosphere. Small schools operate in a different reality - without the optimism and vitality of children.

Hidden Problem: A 70-pupil school teaching pre-primary and nine grades (0-9) is no better off than a 20-pupil school teaching four grades (1-4). On the contrary, the more pupils in small schools (up to 150 pupils) the greater the number of children harmed by the lack of quality education, upbringing and socialization. Although in accordance with the law (number criterion for small schools in AI 104/2020), these institutions also violate the criteria for quality assurance and for the wellbeing of children.

**Best
practices:**

6

Best practices abroad

Around the world, there are different experiences in facing this trend of the decrease in the number of pupils. In some cases, states establish licensing criteria for educational institutions, supporting cooperation between schools by providing assistance in equipment, management and administration of some institutions. Some others create new institutions providing assistance to the private sector, etc. Such examples can be found in the Flemish Community in Belgium, in Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia and other countries. Some countries have applied a more systematic approach to the consolidation of school networks.

Norway – Practice of establishment of private schools financed by the state (according to the Montessori method) in the case of the limitation of the school network and the impossibility of providing educational services in areas where there has been a decrease in the number of pupils (OECD 2018, 65).

Denmark: Municipal authorities have independently implemented the consolidation of their school networks to ensure economy of scale: decrease in the cost of activity per unit - in the specific case, pupils - since the fixed costs remain the same), decrease of spending on lower secondary education by organizing learning in larger schools, as well as increasing pupil performance through improving the learning environment (Nusche 2009, 81). Between 2007 and 2013, for example, Danish municipalities responded to the reduction in group/pupil numbers by closing smaller schools and reorganizing school management, so that some schools were united under the same leadership. As a result, they managed to reduce the total number of municipal schools by more than a fifth and increased the average size of a Folkeskole (public primary and lower secondary school) from 362 to 442 pupils.

Czech Republic: In the Czech Republic, municipalities are responsible for primary schools, while regions are responsible for the operation of upper secondary schools. When the number of pupils began to decline, the municipalities were able to follow this trend by having the appropriate authorizations for planning the number of personnel and the network of schools. At the same time, the funding formula set at the central level and based on funding per number of pupils, also provides incentives for the consolidation (gathering) of schools into larger units. On the other hand, the management model of schools and different school facilities as a legal entity has allowed the modular operation of schools and the reallocation of services between different schools (Shewbridge 2016). This model could also help in Kosovo (especially in rural areas), so that investments are organized in such a way that the schools of an area cooperate in using their own resources and advantages. In this case, one school would have designated laboratories, another the information technology equipment, the third would offer the sports hall, and so on. This form of cooperation would save repeating the same investments in three or four schools. Also, consolidating the management of three or four schools could overcome the problem of investing in schools with less than 100 pupils (due to the use of equipment by pupils of all consolidated schools under the same management).

United States of America: In the United States of America, there is an original approach to the organization and handling of the school network. In US states, transportation of children/pupils from home to school, especially outside urban areas, is of great importance.²⁵ By providing transportation “from the door of the house” the safety of children has been increased and an efficient pupil/school ratio (526), pupil/teacher (16)²⁶ and pupils/class (24)

²⁵ We have all seen the yellow buses - as a safety sign - that serve to transport pupils to and from school in all US states.

²⁶ Source, OECD: <https://data.oecd.org/teachers/students-per-teaching-staff.htm>; accessed in August 2023

has been achieved)²⁷. All these figures in the richest country in the world exceed the average values of Kosovo (the poorest country in Europe) where we find less than 300 pupils per school, respectively 17.3 and 20.1 pupils per class and 13.5 pupils per teacher. It should be remembered that all the mentioned indicators in Kosovo have a negative trend of about 3% per year. From this we learn that a possible way to improve these indicators is for Kosovo to invest more in the systematic development of the pupil transportation system. However, in order to realize such a thing, in addition to financing, planning and drafting of the legal framework for the component of the transportation of pupils/children in Kosovar education is also required. Currently, neither at the central level nor in the municipalities there is a specific regulation for the regulation of procedures and conditions for the transportation of pupils in Kosovo.²⁸ While in Kosovo only the technical conditions of the vehicles are regulated, the transportation of children requires specific conditions such as: safety of children and vehicles, description of vehicles, behavior of participants in the process before and during the transport of children, reception of children at school and after school, etc.

UNESCO's School Network Planning Model

Monitoring and forecasting mechanisms play an essential role in consolidating the school network in each country and in creating conditions for the provision of quality educational services. Without such a mechanism, educational authorities will engage in short-term and unsystematic actions in the management of the school network, as happened in Kosovo in the post-war period. This has caused a number of schools (especially in urban areas) to be overcrowded, while a large number of school facilities in rural areas remain abandoned or with a very small number of pupils.

The OECD study on the governance of school networks assesses that “the strategic planning of the development of school infrastructure relies on effective monitoring and forecasting mechanisms that enable systemic approaches based on sufficient and qualitative data. Through them, priorities can be set and decisions can be made about specific investments. Based on these, policy-makers can carry out interventions to increase efficiency, cooperation between schools, network consolidation and expansion of the construction of new school facilities” (OECD 2018, 73).

One of the biggest deficiencies related to the school network in Kosovo is the lack of a systematic and planned approach in responding to demographic, social and technological trends at all levels of educational authorities in Kosovo. There are two efforts in the education system in Kosovo for a systematic approach: the first (in 2016) is the creation of a GPS-based map of school facilities²⁹ and MESTI's Policy on dealing with schools with few pupils in Kosovo (in 2023).³⁰ Both of these documents can be a good basis for improving the planning of the school network in Kosovo. Such an action would also ensure a more systematic approach, since it would offer support to municipalities in the main dimensions they lack: data and expertise for information-based decision-making.

27 Source: <https://research.com/education/american-school-statistics#:~:text=The%20national%20average%20for%20the,ratio%20of%2016%20to%20201.> Accessed in August 2023

28 Transportation regulation models are available in different countries. For example, the relevant regulations from the state of Georgia in the USA <https://www.gadoe.org/Finance-and-Business-Operations/Pupil-Transportation/Pages/Electronic-Form-Guides.aspx>.

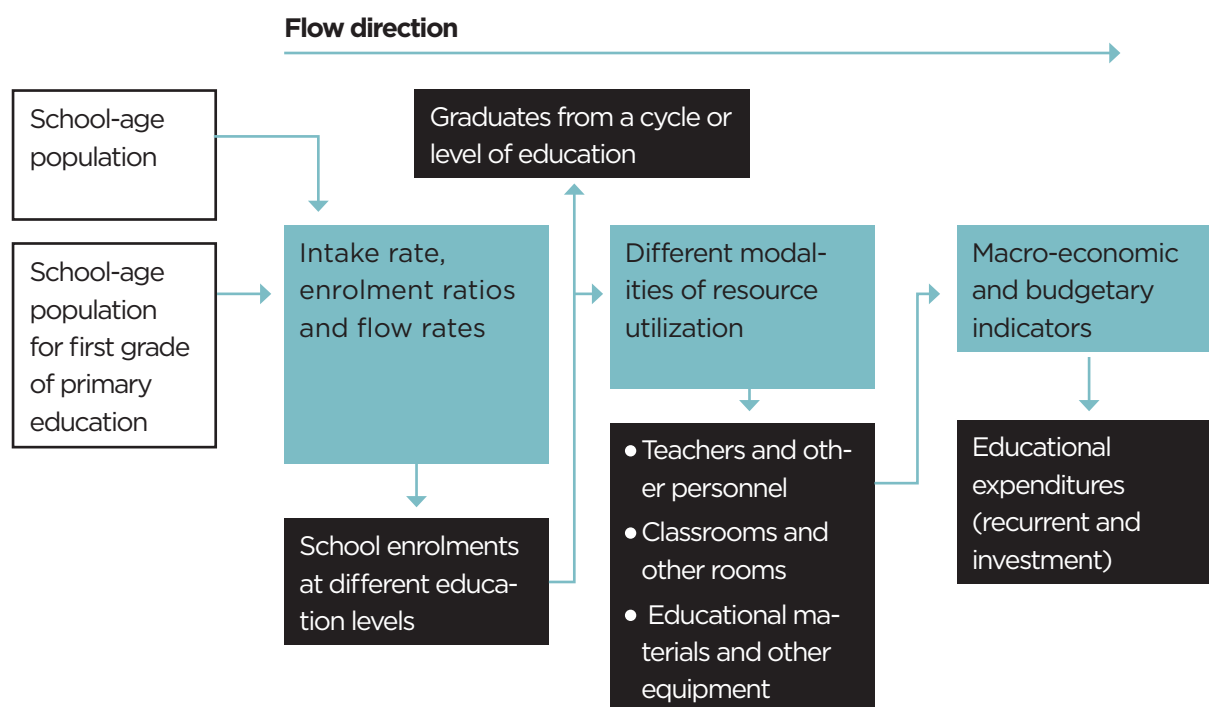
29 This document includes a digital sketch of the location and main characteristics of each school facility in Kosovo. Unpublished document, MEST 2016.

30 Unpublished MESTI document that constitutes a Concise Analysis of the situation of small schools and satellite classes, and a Roadmap for the consolidation of Kosovo's school network. This document relates to the proactive approach of the municipalities in dealing with the issue of Ss and SCs.

The second document (Policy) has served to inform the work of the MESTI working group in support of municipalities for dealing with negative demographic trends and for the consolidation of the school network (at the municipal level) in primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo.

In this context, Kosovo could benefit greatly from an app developed by UNESCO to facilitate the planned approach to the development of education. This simulation model of strategic planning is mainly based on demographic data/trends and available resources to facilitate the planning of interventions in education. In this app, pupil enrollment targets serve as the basis (independent variable), while the inputs (resources and funds) used to achieve them are seen as the authorities' response to their achievement. Since it is based on the demographic model, this app is also very useful for planning the school network.

Figure 1. below briefly presents the main elements of this app:



As shown in Figure 1.1, EPSSim calculates projected intake, enrollment and inflow rates based on population data, all in the context of enrollment-related policy options. The subsequent number of enrollments by level and type of education, combined with current and future modes of resource utilization (teaching staff, equipment, infrastructure, etc.), enable the generation of estimates of future requirements for teachers, non-teaching staff, teaching materials, school facilities etc. These projected requirements, together with the required expenditure parameters and data, show the needs and potential financial gaps for achieving the educational policy objectives (UNESCO 2005).

It is preferred that in Kosovo this model is applied by the MESTI in support of the municipalities, since for the realization of the projections generated by this app (simulation model) expertise and a solid data base, which are not available to the municipalities, are required. The MESTI could engage external expertise for the use of this app until building its own capacities for sustainable planning of educational resources and Kosovo's school network.

Best practices in Kosovo:

Municipalities can learn a lot from each other. In each municipality visited as part of the research, problems were encountered, but also original strategies in response to those problems. In some cases, there is a more proactive and independent approach of the municipalities, such as Drenas, Gjakova and Istog. In others, MESTI's external initiative for the consolidation of the school network (2022-2023) has had a positive impact. Below are some good examples from the municipalities visited.

A municipality, with determination, good transport planning and investments in transportation, has managed to consolidate the school network by merging the satellite classes/small schools in that municipality. The main role here has been played by the determination of the municipality's leadership.

Another municipality, with a planned approach, with systematic work with the community and with investments in transportation, has managed to merge most of the small schools or satellite classes during 2022-2023. The main burden in these actions has been borne by the MED and the directors of parent schools. Indeed, it seems that even in this segment of educational activity, school directors are the most stable link for work with the community.

Two or three teachers in the visited schools, in cooperation with other teachers, have united the children of the small school with those of the larger school. The children were impressed. Such cases in other schools only occur when marking school days or important dates. However, these teachers have united the pupils in order to use technologies and for the realization of common learning activities.

A music teacher in a school organizes hands-on and interactive learning with children. The MED supports its work to create the same learning conditions even in the satellite classes where she works to fulfill the work rate. This was an example where good practices - attractive and interactive teaching are provided with the support of municipal education authorities. For the organization of these good initiatives, elements such as: the provision of transportation, materials, permission for the organization of activities, technological equipment (in this case an instrument and a CD-player) are essential. Cooperation between schools contains considerable (untapped) potential for improving the quality of teaching in small schools.

A teacher of a separate class in the village of Surdull had created conditions for learning by improvising teaching materials with recycled items (for more, see Interviews - Teachers section). The teacher's solutions were to enable sustainable learning and personalization of learning experiences. Providing more support and replicating the teacher's approach (through collaboration and training) would help increase quality in small schools with very little investment.

Conclusions and Recommendations



Conclusions:

From the findings of the research for this study, the situation in Small Schools and Satellite Classes in Kosovo is more serious than it is thought. The problems in SSs and SCs are multi-dimensional:

- With some exceptions³¹, at the municipal level there is no necessary expertise, nor a systematic and planned approach to deal with the problem of SSs and SCs. Usually, the approach is piecemeal and interventions occur only when they become necessary. Mainly, the municipalities show commitment, but they also expect MESTI's help in dealing with the issues of the school network and the schools before their termination, as a reason for the decrease in the number of pupils. More active municipalities could serve as a model for dealing with the problem of small schools.

- Mainly, based on the information gathered from the research, the following rights are not realized in small schools:

- right to quality education,
- right to the development of the child based on their needs and opportunities,
- right to development of the full potential of the child,
- likely, due to the lack of socialization and constant communication with only one teacher³² the complete psychic well-being of children in small schools may not be realized either.

Based on a MESTI analysis³³ "62 parent schools do not meet the criteria of Administrative Instruction 104/200 to function as such, while out of 187 satellite classes examined, 72.7% do not meet the criteria". The number of schools that do not meet the criteria should be greater, since not all (254) satellite classes in Kosovar education have been examined.

- In principle, municipal authorities declare themselves in favor of implementing the provisions of AI 104/2020, but they do not have a planned and sustainable approach to dealing with problems. A large number of small schools operate in violation of the provisions of this Instruction.
- The biggest deficiency in the operation of small schools is **the lack of conditions for work and quality learning**. The field of quality in education is the joint responsibility of the MESTI and the municipalities. The MESTI is obliged to help municipalities (through policies and normative acts) to ensure quality and equal conditions for learning for all children.
- The dedication of teachers and children are important positive elements in the schools visited.

³¹ In two of the six municipalities visited, a more planned and systematic approach is observed in dealing with the problems of small schools and satellite classes.

³² Article 35.4. 3 of the Law on Child Rights

³³ MESTI policy on dealing with schools with few pupils in Kosovo, unpublished document, MESTI, December 2022.

Recommendations

The MESTI and the municipalities must build a consensus for the consolidation of the school network through a systematic and planned approach. Regarding the implementation of the appropriate approach in dealing with the issue of the school network in the context of the negative demographic trend (drop in the number of pupils), the OECD study on the school network suggests that “Before the planning and coordination of the development of the school network from the central, regional, or local level, we must understand that the success of the authorities in meeting local needs depends on a real social process of joint consultations and reviews. This process should involve the active involvement of stakeholders, instead of turning into a technical and administrative process” (OECD 2018, 99). In Kosovo, we have witnessed the failure of school network reforms in cases where the administrative approach was applied without the active participation of parents and the community. Even the best-intentioned initiatives fail in administrative enforcement contexts. Such administrative and technical approaches have not only harmed the pupils, but have harmed the relations of different levels of educational authorities, creating negative precedents for the consolidation of networks in other environments.

Below are some main suggestions³⁴ according to the levels of organization of educational authorities:

The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation is expected to:

Build capacities at relevant decision-making levels for school network planning based on reliable data. Here, work should be done on the advancement of the MESTI app (School Map) for school facilities from 2016³⁵.

Support MEDs for monitoring, evaluation and planning of the network of schools in the respective municipalities (see the UNESCO model in 6.1. above).

Support MEDs in the horizontal mutual coordination of activities and exchange of experiences for monitoring, evaluation and planning of the school network.

Revise the Regulation for the financing of schools in order to increase investments in goods and services and capital expenditures, and the inclusion of satellite classes to the criterion of EUR 1,500/3,250 per school.

In the absence of sufficient MED capacities, design a flexible approach to centralizing the governance of the school network (OECD 2018, 99).

(As an institution responsible for quality assurance, the MESTI is required to) Draft and adopt the policy on improving the quality of educational services through *the consolidation of the school network - to include schools of 50 to 100 pupils in a three-year term*.

³⁴ The relevant recommendations from the OECD study on “Responsive Educational Systems”, OECD 2018, have also been integrated into the recommendations.

³⁵ MESTI app completed in 2016 for the location and characteristics of all schools in Kosovo - the app is not published.

Draft policy/administrative instruction on standardization (setting the minimum level) of learning conditions, including specifically for the establishment of new schools and for small schools/satellite classes.

Draft pedagogic-methodological guidelines for the development of teaching in small classes, including the elimination of combined class teaching.

Standardization (instruction or normative act) of pupil transportation conditions at the country level, as well as allocation of a special fund for the improvement of pupil transportation conditions. There are good experiences around the world in this sense.

Funding of projects with curricular and extracurricular activities involving children from small schools on a national scale: technology camps, competitions in various subjects, joint projects between schools, colonies of young artists, camps of observers, activities in clubs etc.

The Municipal Education Directorates - Municipalities are expected to:

Engage in the mutual exchange of challenges, successes and experiences.

Demonstrate higher determination to implement policies to consolidate the school network for the benefit of pupils by moving beyond unequal treatment and preferences in favor of individual schools.

Better process management and medium-term planning for school network consolidation.

Draft and implement the policy on standardization of educational services in all schools in the Municipality to avoid inequality in educational conditions and services between schools in the same municipality. A possible approach would be the consolidated investment with equipment and laboratories/cabinets in one third of the schools in the municipality and then the organization and cooperation of groups of schools in the organization of learning activities in those spaces and with that equipment.

Enable all children to enjoy the right to interactive and attractive learning, to work in laboratories and cabinets, to learn with new equipment and technologies, to compete and have competition of knowledge - REGARDLESS OF THE SIZE OF THE SCHOOL. Municipalities (with the help of the MESTI) **must ensure equal conditions** for learning.

The organization of the lesson - at least once a week - in classroom conditions, with new technologies, group work, practical work, work with practical application tools and others, inside the school facility or outside it (in another school) for all pupils in the respective municipality.

Immediate suspension of instruction in combined classes. It is suggested to work with only one group in a term – even with a shortened schedule (2 full classes or four classes of 25 minutes).

Municipalities should allow more flexible approaches to the planning of catchment areas, and investments should follow pupils in schools that create better learning

conditions. This approach should be complemented by the provision and implementation of a minimum standard of learning conditions in all schools (see above).

Municipalities should facilitate joint LEARNING activities among pupils of different schools with the participation of teachers and pupils from small schools/satellite classes to ensure socialization and attractive teaching for the children of these schools. This should be done at least once a week until a more permanent solution to the problem of socialization and interactive learning is achieved. This does not mean just marking holidays – but learning activities. Around the world there are good examples of the organization of a group of schools which also benefit from the relevant investments in equipment and teaching activities.

Draft genuine regulations of procedures and conditions for the transportation of pupils.

Funding of projects with curricular and extracurricular activities involving children from small schools at municipal/regional level: technology camps, competitions in various subjects, joint projects between schools, colonies of young artists, camps of observers, activities in clubs etc.

School Directors:

They must treat the pupils and teachers of satellite classes in the same way as the pupils of the parent schools. If there are no conditions for learning in the satellite class, pupils must use the infrastructure of the parent school at least once a week. If the parent school also does not have the conditions, the school director must cooperate with other schools and with the MED to ensure that the children of the school and SC have access to cabinets, laboratories, practical application tools, technological equipment, at least once a week. Such solutions should continue until the permanent solution, namely until optimal working and learning conditions are created.

In order to socialize, joint learning activities (not only national holidays) should be organized at least once a week. Professional activities: teachers and school management are responsible for planning and carrying out such activities at least once a week.

Involvement of the teachers/pupils of the satellite classes in all the bodies of the school: management council, parents' council, pupils' council, professional activities, commissions and working groups of the school.

Research difficulties

Despite some exceptions, at all levels there is a tendency for improvisations in order to provide an “embellished” picture of the situation when visiting certain schools (sometimes a deliberate avoidance of a school is organized). Often a tour itinerary is given that promotes good schools and hides problems with numbers, school equipment and quality in other schools. Schools are warned in advance about the visit and then an improvised situation is created that does not coincide with the current conditions and situation. This shows a lack of commitment to the fundamental implementation of relevant policies in the interest of pupils. Special difficulties are encountered in communication with the pupils of most schools since (with some exceptions) there is a clear tendency to influence the pupils to promote an agenda, which does not always coincide with the interests of the children. Consequently, it is necessary to continue with a genuine research of the perceptions and points of view of pupils and parents.

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