

# Albania

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## Introduction

### Overview of Education System

Albania's aspirations for a strong education system thrive when propelled by a long-term plan that is intricately woven into the fabric of the European Union (EU). This panorama has obviously been customized to meet Albanian citizens' needs and goals since Albania became a democracy. The country proactively strives to ensure that every actor and factor in the education field experiences continuous growth and success.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education and Sports took the helm to steer and revise Albania's education system and guide the preuniversity education (PUE) agenda, which was implemented with ambition by the Albanian government. The roles of the Educational Services Center are to ensure that the policies recommended and implemented by policymakers are followed rigorously and to administer national and international assessments. The Quality Assurance Agency of Pre-University Education (ASCAP) provides top-notch expertise in preuniversity policies and advises the Ministry and related educational institutions on the implementation and progress of the education agenda and curriculum. Public entities, including national, general, and regional directorates and local bureaus of education, are tasked with ensuring and monitoring the progress of each education policy, as well as enriching and supporting a clear PUE landscape.

Between 2005 and 2012, Albanian policymakers and education research organizations implemented a new national curriculum for the PUE system. This was accomplished by reorganizing the system's levels of education and by extending the period of compulsory education from 8 years to 9 years. The change affected all national public and nonpublic PUE institutions, including preschool, basic (primary and lower secondary), and upper secondary institutions.

Preschool education is the first level of education in Albania and includes kindergarten and preparatory classes that foster a strong cognitive foundation in children ages 3 to 6. The main goals at this level are to develop mother tongue fluency, foster self-control, and encourage socialization through play and physical activities. This level of education is not mandatory. Preparatory classes are included in basic education schools for children ages 5 and 6.<sup>1</sup> Preparatory class introduces literacy and numeracy skills to young children through visual elements like pictures, drawings, and other art-related activities.

Basic education is compulsory and starts when children are 6 years old. This education stage lasts 9 years, comprising primary education (Grades 1 to 5) and lower secondary education (Grades 6 to 9). Alternatively, this crucial foundation is offered to those age 16 and above who have not completed basic education.<sup>2</sup> Primary education focuses on honing reading and writing proficiencies as students develop their cognitive, socioemotional, and motor skills. There is also an emphasis on instilling attitudes conducive to learning.

Lower secondary education introduces students to a vast range of subjects and topics as they develop intellectual, social, ethical, physical, and spiritual capabilities. Students further develop their abilities in reading and writing while also integrating information, culture, science, and technology. A large effort is made to cultivate students' abilities to decode, interpret, and reveal unknown information in an effort to reconfigure perceptions and boost imagination.

Upper secondary education (USE) is delivered to students ages 16 and above in different ways depending on the profile of the institution. It includes general, vocational, technical, and specialized education to support various needs of the labor market and interests of the students. All students under 18 who have completed basic education are eligible to enroll in USE, regardless of the mode of attendance (e.g., part-time basis, full-time basis, remote). This flexibility ensures that students who may have different needs or circumstances can pursue USE if desired.

USE is based on a wider, deeper, and more targeted learning process that considers lifelong learning and students' orientation toward further studies and qualifications in the labor market. At this level, both in general secondary schools (gymnasiums) and in vocational schools, the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values are based on the need for young people to take responsibility for their lives, participate as active and competent citizens in social development, and successfully integrate into the labor market. This level of education offers students the opportunity to understand, develop, and communicate ideas and information in standard Albanian language; read, write, listen, and communicate ideas and information in at least one foreign language; analyze the main factors affecting the development of society; show understanding of the world as a set of interdependent systems; and receive, analyze, evaluate, and use information from various sources. Students are provided with in-depth knowledge of the social, natural, and cultural environment in which they operate and the use of the necessary skills, abilities, and attitudes to work and cooperate with others.

Another important document of the curriculum reform is the *Core Curriculum*, which is a basic document that regulates the progress of the teaching process based on Albania's curriculum framework. It describes the learning outcomes for each key competency and learning area according to the curriculum stages, curriculum implementation methodologies, student assessment, and time allocation (teaching plan) for each field. The *Core Curriculum* document helps in the design of other curriculum documents, such as subject programs and guidelines that inform the teaching and learning process.

With regard to the structure of the education system, in recent years, there have been reforms for the development of education according to a coordinated planning, management,

and evaluation model. The education system has undergone many changes to modernize the curriculum, develop human capacity in the system, expand access to compulsory education, and adapt national policy objectives to European and international frameworks. From 2019 onward, a new competency-based curriculum has been implemented across the PUE system, coupled with necessary improvements in student learning and assessment methodologies.

Albania’s goal for education is to encourage and commit to a brighter future for its learners. Exhibit 1 presents a description of Albania’s education system.

### Exhibit 1: Description of the Albanian Preuniversity Education System

Education Level	Age	International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level
preschool education (3 years)	3 to 6	0
preparatory year (1 year)	5 to 6	0
basic education (primary and lower secondary, 9 years)	6 to 15	1 to 2
primary education (5 years)	6 to 10	1
lower secondary education (4 years)	11 to 15	2
upper secondary education (3 or 4 years)	15 to 18/19	3
gymnasium (3 years)	15 to 18	3A
specialized secondary education (3 or 4 years)	15 to 18/19	3A
vocational secondary education (4 years)	15 to 18/19	3A
basic vocational education (2 years)	15 to 17	3C
profiled vocational education (2 + 1 years)	15 to 18	3C
technical/managerial (2 + 1 + 1 or 2 + 2 or 4 years)	15 to 19	3A

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) review and evaluation report for Albania’s education system indicates the need to provide the following:<sup>3</sup>

- equity and quality
- curriculum development with an eye toward the future

- implementation of information and communications technology (ICT) in education
- teacher and school leadership involvement in future policy changes

The report also includes the following objectives to guide the focus of PUE:<sup>4</sup>

- Enhance leadership, governance, and resource management capacities.
- Provide inclusive quality learning.
- Ensure quality performance according to EU standards.
- Provide ongoing and contemporary professional training and development of teachers and administrators.

Albania is committed to using a constructivist and student-based approach toward learning and teaching to develop a competency-based curriculum. The key document to ensure this is the *Curriculum Framework of Preuniversity Education in the Republic of Albania* published by ASCAP, which emphasizes the necessity of actor (an individual or group involved in the education process, including teachers, students, policymakers, and parents or guardians) and factor (element or condition that contributes to the success of the education system, including quality of curricula, resources, training, assessment and evaluation mechanisms, and support systems) in a successful system of lifelong learning.<sup>5</sup> The framework also includes recommendations pertaining to education from the EU's *Key Findings of the 2023 Report on Albania*.<sup>6</sup>

The curriculum framework includes various documents that are analyzed to make sure they reflect the future of national education, particularly PUE. The documents include the following expectations on a statewide scale:<sup>7</sup>

- PUE's general objective
- students' key competencies in the completion of USE
- development and implementation of key competencies in the curriculum
- detailed description of the PUE curriculum and curricular reform
- assessment process of learning and organization based on the curriculum's stages
- subjects and learning fields, according to stages, levels, and learning time in each field
- effective teaching and learning
- student achievement assessment frames
- curricular paperwork

PUE students should construct and develop cognitive knowledge, bravura, opinions, and values that a democratic and resilient society typically needs. Throughout their lives, students respond to information and services in different ways, so they need to gain specific competencies to adapt and help themselves and others.

The following key competencies are based on the curriculum framework:

- expression and communication competencies
- thinking competencies

- lifelong learning competencies
- environmental, life, and entrepreneurship competencies
- personal competencies
- civic competencies
- digital competencies

The Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) divides the PUE system into different categories and levels to mirror the ISCED framework. All levels of the curriculum and areas of learning offer students opportunities to achieve national qualifications based on the AQF.

### Use and Impact of TIMSS

Albania participated in TIMSS for the first time in 2019 before participating in TIMSS 2023. Since 2022, TIMSS has been conducted using computer-based assessment (CBA). TIMSS measures students' mathematics and science achievement. Policymakers will use TIMSS results to inform modifications to the current curriculum based on students' specific needs.

In an effort to increase the use of ICT devices among younger students (Grade 4) to learn mathematics and science, and as mentioned in the UNESCO report *Albania: Education Policy Review; Issues and Recommendations*,<sup>8</sup> Albania has committed to increase funding for enhancing and improving digitalization of the learning process. Albania “aims to transcend the digital gap and to empower the youth.”<sup>9</sup> As a computer-based assessment, TIMSS enables Grade 4 students to show their knowledge using digital technologies. CBA can also simplify the process of analyzing results.

## The Mathematics Curriculum in Primary and Lower Secondary Grades

In 2014, Albania implemented a mathematics curriculum reform within the PUE framework. This education initiative aims to support student development by integrating competencies into learning areas within a stimulus-based environment. Aligned with EU guidelines for education and the institutional PUE system, the reformed curriculum intentionally highlights the following key competencies:

- communication and expression
- thinking
- studying to learn
- life, entrepreneurship, and the environment
- personal
- civic
- digital

Learning areas, either independently or in an integrated manner, play a crucial role in fostering the development of essential competencies at various education levels. They form

the foundation for structuring the education process within schools. The revised curriculum is structured around seven distinct learning areas, each comprising one or more subjects aligned with specific learning outcomes defined for that particular field. The learning areas are as follows:

- languages and communication (Albanian language-literature; foreign languages)
- mathematics
- natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics)
- society and environment (history, geography, social science)
- arts (visual art, music, theater, dancing)
- physical education, sports, and health
- ICT

The updated curriculum comprises a core and elective structure. The core curriculum encompasses subjects mandated by society (the state) for all PUE graduates, maintaining uniformity in type, number, and learning outcomes. In contrast, the elective curriculum, determined by the school, allows students to choose courses that align with their academic and career interests. This elective decision-making process commences in Grade 1 and continues throughout the entirety of the education journey.

The Grade 4 mathematics curriculum was introduced in 2014.<sup>10</sup> The allocation of instruction time for mathematics is 16%, with mathematics being taught for 4 hours per week, or a total of 140 hours per academic year. In Grade 5, students receive initial instruction from mathematics subject specialists rather than general classroom teachers. Across Grades 3 to 5, the topic of numbers carries significant importance, around 54% of the instruction hours devoted to mathematics, while the topics of measure and geometry hold considerable weight in comparison with the topics of algebra and function, and statistics and probability.

### Exhibit 2: Instruction Hours, Grade 4 Mathematics

Topic	Number of Hours
Numbers	75
Measure	25
Geometry	24
Algebra and function	4
Statistics and probability	12
Total hours	140

The Grade 8 mathematics curriculum in Albania for 2024 focuses on strengthening students' foundational skills in core mathematical areas. These include algebra, geometry, data handling, and basic probability. Students are expected to develop problem-solving abilities, mathematical reasoning, and practical application skills, preparing them for higher levels of education. Exhibit 3 lists the Grade 8 mathematics topics.



### Exhibit 3: Instruction Hours, Grade 8 Mathematics

Topic	Number of Hours
Number	51
Measure	25
Geometry	24
Algebra and Function	20
Statistics and Probability	20
Total hours	140

The mathematics curricula for Grades 4 and 8 address the use of digital devices.<sup>a</sup> The Grade 4 mathematics curriculum includes the following digital competencies for students:

- organizing, collecting, and presenting data from electronic sources
- protecting personal data

## The Science Curriculum in Primary and Lower Secondary Grades

The Grade 4 science curriculum was introduced in 2014. Science is taught 2 hours per week with a total of 70 instruction hours per academic year. Exhibit 3 lists the Grade 4 science topics.

### Exhibit 4: Instruction Hours, Grade 4 Science

Topic	Number of Hours
Diversity	5
Cycles	5
Interaction	15
Systems	28
Scale and measure	17
Total hours	70

The Grade 8 science curriculum was introduced in 2014. It includes biology, physics, and chemistry.<sup>11</sup> Science is taught 2 hours per week with a total of 70 instruction hours per academic year.

The science curricula for Grades 4 and 8 address the use of digital devices. The Grade 4 science curriculum includes the following digital competencies for students:

- using digital media and informative environments to communicate and cooperate
- organizing and communicating information using appropriate means of technological communication (e.g., email, the Internet, videoconferencing, posters)

<sup>a</sup> The Grade 8 curriculum includes digital competencies for all students. The competencies are designed to equip students with the skills needed to navigate and use digital tools effectively in their education and everyday lives. This ensures students not only gain proficiency in subjects like mathematics and science but also in using digital platforms and tools, preparing them for a technology-driven future.

- developing cultural awareness and global understanding; engaging with students of different cultures through online communication
- organizing, collecting, and presenting data from electronic resources
- identifying and using secure, age-appropriate databases through electronic sources or media
- giving examples of using technology to solve problems in daily life
- demonstrating positive and ethical attitudes using technology as a means of communication, service, or product invention

## Teacher Professional Development Requirements and Programs

There are several categories of certification for teachers in Albania: skilled, professional, and master. These categories depend on how many years a person has taught and are based on passing an examination.

There are a variety of professional development programs and training opportunities available to practicing teachers, including the following:

- Vocational and general education teachers can attend ongoing professional development programs, workshops, and seminars to earn credits.
- Teachers can choose from a wide range of online courses offered by the government and by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to enhance their skills.
- Embassies and NGOs have invested in initiatives to support teaching bilingual and vocational education students at the upper secondary level.

## Monitoring Student Progress in Mathematics and Science

In Albania, the main types of evaluation are internal evaluation and external evaluation.

With the implementation of the curriculum with competencies in the Albanian education system in 2014, changes were also reflected in terms of assessment. Internal assessment is carried out through assessment **for** learning and assessment **of** learning.

The main purpose of assessment **for** learning is to monitor the student's progress during the learning process and gather information to facilitate and help decision-making to improve this process.

The main purpose of assessment **of** learning is to determine achievement at the end of a chapter, period, academic year, etc., to set grades and certify students for further learning. It is also used to judge the effectiveness of learning or the curriculum. The tests used in the classroom are designed by teachers.

At the end of each level of education, standardized state assessments are organized. These assessments are focused on measuring the demonstration of key competencies at each education level.



At the end of primary education (Grade 5), an assessment of the students' achievements is carried out through an integrated test in the subjects of Albanian language, mathematics, and science. This is a national assessment where the entire population participates and is not compulsory.

At the end of lower secondary education (Grade 9), an exam is held in each of the following three subjects: foreign language, Albanian language, and mathematics. These are compulsory exams that certify the successful completion of lower secondary education.

At the end of USE, the State Matura and State Vocational Matura exams are held. Students are obliged to take four exams, of which three are compulsory (foreign language, Albanian language and literature, and mathematics), as well as one exam from a list of optional subjects. The State Matura exams certify the successful completion of USE and serve as entry criteria for higher education institutions.

## Suggested Reading

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- <sup>6</sup> Delegation of the European Union to Albania. (2023). *Key findings of the 2023 report on Albania*. Retrieved from [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/albania/key-findings-2023-report-albania\\_en?s=214](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/albania/key-findings-2023-report-albania_en?s=214)

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