

Education in FYR Macedonia

Context

FYR Macedonia has shown stable growth rates, averaging 3.5% a year between 2003 and 2006, as well as experiencing substantial political and economic reforms. However, strong economic growth has remained difficult to sustain and had led to little improvement of national living standards. The rate of job creation has not met the demand, so unemployment has remained one of the country's biggest challenges, increasing the level of poverty. An estimated 21% of the population lives below the absolute poverty line.¹ Along with unemployment, there have been increases in the level of income inequality, with the gini coefficient (measured on scale from 0 to 1) increasing from a level of below 0.3 in 1994 to 0.4 in 2006. Relative poverty has also increased from 19% of the population in 1997 to 30% of the population in 2005.²

The country's economic growth in the first half of 2008 reached a rate of 5.2%, which is higher than the rate achieved in previous years (4% in 2006 and 5.1% in 2007),³ and is rather close to meeting projections and expectations. Hence, analysed from a growth perspective, this period can be regarded as a successful one. On the other hand, although this real GDP growth is the highest in comparison to the country's recent history, it is still lower compared to the average GDP growth rate of the Western Balkan countries (6.5%).

In terms of economic sectors, a major part of the country's rate of growth in the first half of 2008 is the result of increased activity in construction and agriculture, while the transport and communication sectors have fallen behind. This has changed the previous dominance of the service sectors' contribution to GDP.



EU Accession

EU integration seems to be a goal shared by all political parties, and provides incentives for further economic reforms and for strengthening social inclusion and improved public finance management. In particular, the progress toward social inclusion and fulfilment of children's rights are amongst the EU's pre-conditions for accession, reflected in the Joint Inclusion Memorandum.

Quick Facts about Education in FYR Macedonia

	FYR Macedonia	South-Eastern Europe
Total Population	2	50.7
Youth unemployment rate as percentage of unemployment rate	x	x
Percentage of GDP spent on Education (2006)	2.9	4.07
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment, 2005 (<i>Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Girls/Boys)</i>)	32	55
Net Enrolment in Primary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	92	92
Net Enrolment in Secondary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	82 (.98)	82
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	30 (1.38)	35
Student/Teacher Ratio, 2005	19	18.2
Out of School Children (% girls)	3000 (45)	80,000
Number of refugees and internally displaced persons of concern	x	690,000
PISA Score (mathematics ((regional rank/17), reading (''''), science (''''))	x	x

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008; Innocenti Research Centre.

Education Reform

Education is one of the four strategic priorities stated in the National Programme for the Work of the Government, 2008-2012. The main initiatives supported by the Government are:

- Extending the duration of compulsory primary education from eight to nine years for all children from 6 to 15 years of age, organized in three periods;
- Revising primary education curricula;
- Introducing a life skills programme in all primary education grades (1-9);
- Introducing English language in grade one and a second foreign language from grade six;
- Increasing the number of physical education classes per week from two to three;
- Introducing ICT instruction in grades six to nine;
- Implementing “computer for every child” project;
- Constructing new schools and physically rehabilitating old schools;
- Introducing matura exams at the end of secondary education;
- Including teacher assessment in the new Law on primary education for the purpose of monitoring teachers’ work and consequently the awarding/fining/firing of teachers;
- Introducing religious education/history of religions as optional subjects in grade six and ethics as a compulsory subject in grade six.

Access

FYR Macedonia has accomplished much in the realm of primary school enrolment. In 2005, its net enrolment ratio (NER) was 92%, which is higher than all the countries in the Caucasus and the third highest in South-eastern Europe after Albania and Bulgaria. Its gross enrolment ratio (GER) is 98%. FYR Macedonia has achieved gender parity in primary school enrolment, making it one of the three countries in the CEE/CIS region to have done so.⁴ Furthermore, FYR Macedonia has made much progress in reducing the number of out-of-school children. 3,000 primary school age children are out of school in FYR Macedonia, which is the second lowest figure in South-eastern Europe after Croatia. See Figure 1.

The government has not been as successful in increasing enrolments in pre-primary, secondary and tertiary education. The net attendance rate for pre-primary school is 11%, which is among the lowest in the region and comparable to enrolment rates in Central Asia and the Caucasus.⁵ The upper secondary school NER is 72.6% and the secondary school attendance rate is 63%, which is just around the mean for the region. Only 3% of the population is enrolled in tertiary education and this figure has not changed since 1999. See Figure 1.

Equity

Equity poses a major challenge for the government of FYR Macedonia. Despite high national averages, there are large gaps in educational access and enrolment between sub-national groups. The most notable differences are between the country’s richest and poorest income quintiles, between those living in urban and rural areas and between Macedonian and Roma ethnicity groups. The patterns of inequity are complex (See Figure 1). In preschool the biggest gap in access lies between the richest and the poorest students, where the rich-

Figure 1. Net Education Enrolment Ratios in the FYR Macedonia, Southeastern Europe and the CEE/CIS Region

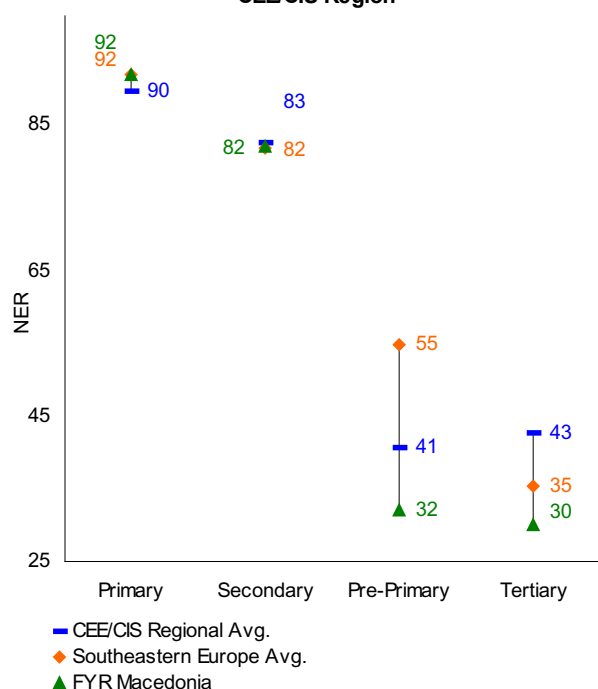
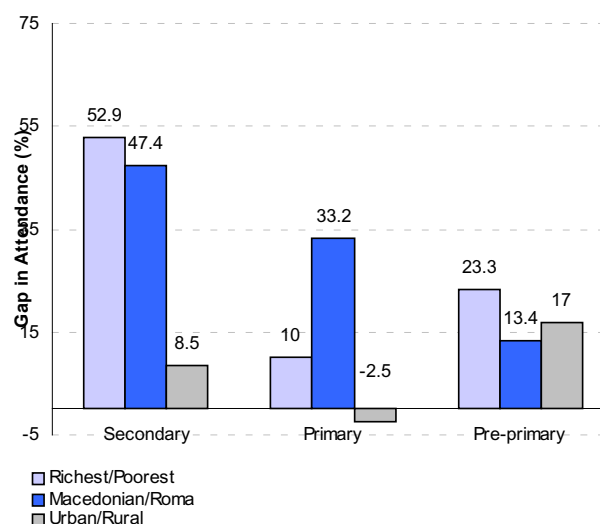


Figure 2. Sub-national Gaps in Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Attendance in Macedonia, 2005



est students have much higher attendance rates, but ethnic and regional gaps in attendance are also large. In primary school, ethnic inequities are the most pronounced, with Macedonian children two thirds more likely to attend than Roma children. By secondary school, wealth and ethnic divides are almost equally as pronounced with regional differences in attendance rates diminishing. The gender gap is not significant at any level of schooling with regard to attendance and enrolment.

Quality

The bulk of FYR Macedonia's challenges to improving its education lie in bolstering the quality and learning outcomes of its schools. Of all the countries in the region that participated in PIRLS 2006 and TIMSS 2006, FYR Macedonia scored last on both tests (See Figures 3 and 4), ranking below the international average in both literacy and mathematics achievement. The challenge these data pose is to make schools more effective. FYR Macedonia also participated in PISA 2000, although results were not reported.

Yet, currently, FYR Macedonia has a primary school completion rate of 92% and a repetition rate of just above zero.⁶ This indicates that almost all children are finishing school without repeating a grade but are not necessarily leaving school having mastered basic literacy and mathematics skills. Although FYR Macedonia's teacher/pupil ratio (19) is average for the region, teaching is thought to be largely ineffective because of outdated teaching methodologies that center around rote learning and because of low teacher support in schools.⁷

Government initiatives call for the introduction of basic learning standards for pre-primary and primary schools so as to ensure that students leave school with basic competencies and that children who are in need of special assistance are identified and serviced. The government has also identified inadequate instructional time, the lack of teacher professional development, out of date materials and the dearth of school libraries as contributors to poor school efficiency. School violence has also been identified as a problem effecting school quality.

Figure 3. Distribution of Overall Mathematics Achievement on 2003 TIMSS, grade 8

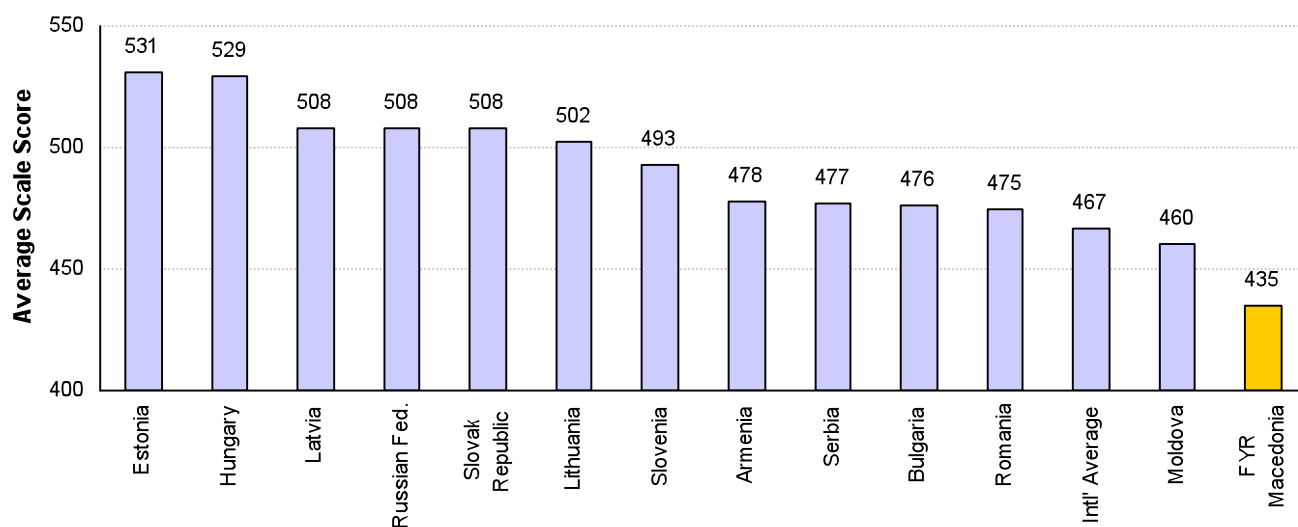
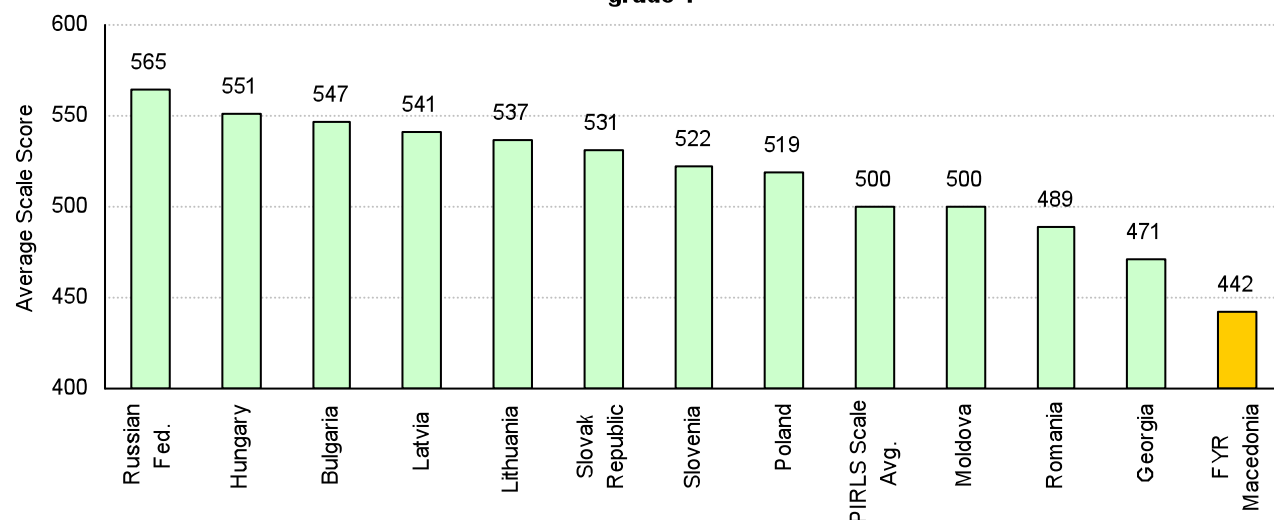


Figure 4. Distribution of Overall Reading Achievement on PIRLS 2006 in the CEE/CIS Region, grade 4



Education financing

The current government has pledged to increase total expenditure, and as of 2007, total expenditure in the sector was close to 6% of GDP, which is an increase from the 2005 rate of 3% and higher than the regional average showing an improvement with respect to previous years.⁸

UNICEF Priorities in FYR Macedonia

In partnership with the MoE, UNICEF aims to support the government's initiatives to:

- Increase the presence of child-friendly pedagogies in primary schools;
- To encourage inclusive schooling and the reduction of inequalities;
- Expand access and participation in early childhood education programmes;
- 'Modernize' school resources and curriculum;
- Support the introduction of life skills and the extension of compulsory schooling to 9 years; and
- Reduce school violence.

1 Human Development Report online.

2 Unicef 2007.

3 Source: State Statistical Office of the Republic of FYR Macedonia - estimations.

4 EFA GMR 2008.

5 EFA GMR 2008.

6 UNICEF Country Office.

7 UNICEF FYR Macedonia Annual Report 2007.

8 Transmonee database 2008.

Box 1. Roma Children in FYR Macedonia

Between 80,000 and 130,000 Roma people live in FYR Macedonia, making up about 2.7% of the population. The Roma population in FYR Macedonia is highly diverse, being composed of people from all over Southeastern Europe, including FYR Macedonia, Albania, Turkey, Kosovo, Croatia and Serbia. The Roma in FYR Macedonia mainly live in urban Roma settlements. The rate of poverty in these settlements is three times the national average, with approximately 90% of Roma people living below the poverty line.

Roma children have significantly less success in all phases of the education system than their Macedonian peers. While FYR Macedonia law guarantees Roma children the right to education, there are few schools that offer language instruction suitable to Roma. Roma children experience significant discrimination in schools from teachers, administrators and students. Furthermore, Roma children are often delegated to special schools, intended for children with mental or physical disabilities. These schools offer reduced curricula and have lower quality standards. The enrolment of Roma in these schools is significantly above the national average. Facing such challenges, only about 50% of Roma children in FYR Macedonia complete all eight years of primary school and only about 13% transition to secondary school and of those just over 50% graduate.

Source: Roma Education Fund. (2007). Advancing Education of Roma in FYR Macedonia: Country Assessment.