

**Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe**  
**Survey on elementary school children parents' attitudes towards and views**  
**on parental participation in schools.**

Albania

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Prepared by Center for Democratic Education*

**Acknowledgments**

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**Acronyms and Abbreviations**

CDE	Center for Democratic Education
OSI	Open Society Institute
Unicef	United Nations Fund for Children

**Purpose**

The purpose of this survey was to explore parents' views on the parents-school partnership, their participation in school life, as well as the relationships between school and families.

**Methodology**

The universe of the survey were parents of elementary school children from mainstream schools (sample A), parents members of school structures (councils, boards, associations)

(sample B), school principals of each school in the survey (sample P), and socially excluded parents (sample E).

The sample involved 30 schools in total. The total number of participants is shown in the table no 1 below.

Table 1. Weighted sample according urban/rural area

<i>Geographic location</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Total</i>
North	84	141	225
Center	139	112	251
South	148	205	353
Tirana	212	82	294
Total Albania	583	540	1123

We used a stratified random sample. Stratification considered both relevant geographical regions and the urban/rural dichotomy. Random selection was performed proportionally according to the size of the school. The school size was defined based on the student population indicator. The data analysis combines findings from interviews conducted with parents and school principals. This report reflects only statistically significant findings.

## **Findings**

### *Findings from composite variables*

- The principal ways in which parent say they take part in school are attending parent’s meetings, reading school written materials and helping children with homework. Taking part in school decision-making such as school financial management, extra curricular activities, educational issues and others, are seen as important by most of the parents, but especially from those parents who are not counted as socially excluded (5% of the survey sample).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> With socially excluded parents, we mean parents of children who live in families with irregular income, from families with a single parent, families with a parent who works abroad, family where both parents work in another country, who come from residential care institutions, who belong to ethnic minorities, who are Roma and who have special educational needs.

- Parents who think of themselves as capable and competent to participate in school life are more likely to be mothers, to live in Tirana and be parents who are not socially excluded.
- Generally parents see benefits from participating in school life such as the benefit of their child being happy at school. However, this is not always the case for socially excluded parents.
- Parents' representatives feel capable and competent in all participation dimensions, such as attending meetings, helping in homework, taking part in extra-curricular activities and the like. They perceive more benefits in participating and view themselves capable for contributing in school life.
- Most parents believe that it is both their role and the role of school's to secure child happiness at school. However, parents view child's rearing as their direct responsibility. Socially excluded parents expect the school to ensure happiness of the child more frequently than the other parents.
- According to parents, children whose parents are representatives at school show higher level of satisfaction in attending school. Lower satisfaction is found among children from mainstream parents and even lower level of satisfaction when it comes to children of socially excluded parents.
- Parents from mainstream schools<sup>2</sup> are satisfied with communication in school. However, parent representatives and those living in urban area rate their communication with school more positively than others.
- Parents in rural areas accept school invitations to meetings more often than those in urban areas. They read school information more often, and think more positively about the communication with teachers and school principal compared to urban based parents.
- Parents opportunity in influencing school decision making such as on school financial management, organization of school events, educational issues and pupil discipline issue is rated more highly by parents' representatives compared to the rest of the parents.

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<sup>2</sup> Parents in mainstream schools (see Sample A on Methodology section of this summary).

There is a strong correlation between the perception of the benefits of participation and the sense of duty to participate in school life.

### *Main findings*

Formal parent participation such as representation in school structures goes along with other variables, such as: children being happier with school; children having better performance at school, and having more books at home. Parents who are representatives in school structures tend to have university or post university education and have higher aspirations for the child's future education.

Another picture is drawn with findings on socially excluded parents: their children tend to dislike school more often and have lower school results. Many of them do not have a single book at home. Parents from this group aspire that their child finishes just the high school. These parents generally have a minimum level of education and hence they do not believe strongly in school participation.

### *Participation dimensions*

- According to the survey schools tend to invite socially excluded parents less frequently to class parents' meetings and individual meetings than other parents. The survey indicate school tendency in inviting only parents who are already part of representative school structures. On the other hand, when they are invited, excluded parents say that they accept school invitations less often than the rest of the parents. Moreover, they have less confidence than other parents that such meetings will actually help their child. Furthermore, they do not view themselves as capable of making the best use of these meetings.
- Parents' representatives tend to receive more often written information from school and they are more likely to read them compared to the rest of the parents.
- Schools rarely invites Roma parents to provide volunteer work such as helping with maintenance or improving school infrastructure, with sport, social and cultural activities, with lessons and with school services such as library. In contrast parents representative tend to be invited more often to such activities.

- Socially excluded parents do not expect that the school should consult their opinion in taking decisions on most areas such as financial management, extracurricular activities, organization of school events, health,safety and discipline issues.. They do not believe in their ability to contribute. On the other hand, the other parents, especially parents’ representatives feel more confident with regard to their contribution in school decision making process.
- Most parents have never taken the initiative to get organized in order to influence something in school life.
- Generally, Roma parents were never asked to become part of school or class structures such as class parental council or school board. At the same time, a majority do not feel able to take over a role as parent representative in these structures .

#### *Predicting and mediating factors*

- Compared to the rest of the parents interviewed, Roma parents rate school openness at lower level. About half of Roma parents say that their children experience difficulties studying at home since nobody can help them. These parents believe that school shall do more in order to help their kids.
- Parents’ representatives in school structures do not receive the highest evaluation from the rest of the parents especially in terms of contacting them regularly or in terms of how effective they are in representation. On the other hand, representative parents have a higher self opinion regarding their performance of representative functions. However they believe that their voice is not heard by the school administration. Generally, they were not asked to participate in major decision making occasions such as financial management or educational issues such as text content and teachers’ assessment.
- Parents’ attitudes are biased towards a traditional view. They believe that issues like: the quality of teaching, the organization of extracurricular activities and school safety are the school’s responsibility, while what regards child’s rearing and helping with homework is considered mainly as a parent responsibility. Nevertheless, they view themselves and the school as co-responsible for a number of issues such as: child happiness at school, child good achievement at school and motivation to learn.

## Recommendations

*School based programmes that address root causes.* Programs for raising awareness among parents may be needed for targeting the root causes with regard to problems related to quality and participation. Such causes are based on such beliefs as: “school does not invite parents”, “school does not involve parents in key decision making”, “we are not able to contribute as parents”, or “intellectual parents are the ones needed here.” In this context, awareness programs focusing parents (especially those who are excluded) teachers and educational managers implemented by the school might be helpful. It is important that such programs originate from the school, as it is closer to the community.

*Participation starts with participation.* In any current or upcoming programmes and initiatives which encourage participation, parents must be part of them from the beginning. They shall be viewed as an important actor with regard to the designing, implementing and monitoring of such programs and initiatives. Parents need to feel that decision makers and school managers do consult their opinion. It is important to make parents participate in such ways which are useful for the school, the child and the parent. Most of the socially excluded parents did not feel capable of making the best use of participation in schools (for example school meetings). It is important to explore initiatives which would increase socially excluded parents interest and belief toward the benefits coming from their participation in the school life. Moreover, parents being part of the school representative structures might be involved in ensuring that more and more parents become active participants in the school and/or class meetings, in providing volunteer work or helping with organizing school activities.

*Eye on the excluded.* It seems quite difficult to break the resistance of parents in fully understanding their role in the school life. This seems especially difficult in the case of socially excluded parents. It is recommended that schools and different interest groups such as organizations who promote the socially excluded persons rights or the community groups

must work especially with the excluded parents, in order to help them in building self confidence with regard to their ability to contribute in school matters.

*Breaking inertia for change.* The current status of participation does not improve only by increasing the self confidence of socially excluded parents. One of the reasons why these parents do not feel capable to contribute is because they say that they are not invited as often as other parents. The school and its administration need to break the pattern of engaging only parents “who come”, or “parents who are interested”. School needs also those parents who don’t come and who never read their child report card, so that the school delivers its services in the best way. Education experts and schools must find proper and creative ways in order to increase parents’ awareness.

*Small things bring change.* School must be aware of other independent factors that influence or coexist with the issue of low participation. School therefore must try to engage parents gradually and not forcefully. Such factors are wealth of families, which is positively related to mother’s education level, high results of the child, satisfaction from school etc. School must penetrate beyond these factors and understand how they relate, and find ways to involve more excluded children and parents affected more significantly by the above factors. For example, low grade students who have few books can be engaged more often in the school library or other students may be asked to lend them books. Small gestures may initiate big changes.

*Rejuvenating parents structures.* Parents’ structures need to be functioning appropriately not only in order to gain trust and support of other parents, but, above all, to influence the school life, thus fulfilling the mission they are created for. The school must be supportive, and objective in helping parents to fulfill their representative role. Moreover, these structures must focus and work towards their purpose. They must not be distant from the rest of parents, but in contrary they need to keep permanent relationships with the group they represent in order to ensure that their needs are met. They cannot exist as structures per se. They should represent as effectively as possible the parents community.