

# 3 Assuring high quality teaching

## Introduction

Research has repeatedly suggested that, in terms of educational inputs, the quality of teaching is one of the most important factors in improving student outcomes (Hanushek, 2011<sup>[1]</sup>; Hattie, 2009<sup>[2]</sup>; Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain, 2005<sup>[3]</sup>). As a result, economies around the world, including those in the Western Balkans, have increasingly introduced policies that aim to improve the quality of teaching. Regional teaching reforms are wide reaching and varied, but broadly emphasise the need to use more modern teaching practices that have been shown to support learning for all students. To help achieve this goal, all economies in the region have created modern teacher standards that spell out expectations for teachers. These standards help inform initial teacher education, certification, appraisal and professional development by aligning institutions and practices around a new, shared vision of teaching.

This chapter uses PISA data to shed light on the types of practices that teachers in the Western Balkans commonly use to instruct students and to what extent they are consistent with system-wide expectations. It then examines how quality assurance mechanisms are functioning in the region and whether they might be reinforcing or complicating the implementation of the standards and desired teaching practices. By analysing these findings alongside insights from OECD-UNICEF policy reviews, this chapter also identifies policies that regional economies can consider to make teaching more effective.

## Teaching practices

Teachers in the Western Balkans continue to rely heavily on traditional pedagogy, such as lecturing to students and encouraging them to memorise information set out in the curriculum. Research suggests that these practices, however, might not be as well-suited to developing some important competencies, such as those set out in recently introduced curricula in the region. In particular, international studies indicate that active, student-centred approaches might better help students develop so-called “21st century” competencies, such as creativity, critical thinking, collaborative problem solving and communication (Peterson et al., 2018<sup>[4]</sup>; Jacobs and Toh-Heng, 2013<sup>[5]</sup>). Moreover, traditional teaching practices can stand in the way of the personalised types of instruction that allow students to learn at their own pace and in different ways, which is especially important to make education inclusive regardless of factors such as gender and family background (OECD, 2012<sup>[6]</sup>). In response to these demands, many Western Balkan economies are taking steps to modernise teaching practices and adapt instruction to individual needs.

International experience shows that changing teachers’ classroom practice can be very challenging. One reason education systems often struggle to implement modern practices is because providers of initial teacher education (ITE) might not equip teacher candidates to use new approaches. Many Western Balkan economies lack instruments, such as programme accreditation and robust certification requirements, which can help to align ITE with national teaching standards. Another reason is that more experienced teachers might be hesitant to adopt newer approaches or lack the support to do so. Many practising teachers were trained using very different pedagogical methods than what is expected of teachers today, and the former education culture of competition and selection of the communist period continues to influence teaching

practices and beliefs. Evidence from PISA and OECD-UNICEF policy reviews indicate the extent of these challenges, as well as some of the ways in which they might be overcome.

### Data from PISA

*Pedagogical methods in the Western Balkans (as perceived by students) are still largely traditional and are associated with lower student performance*

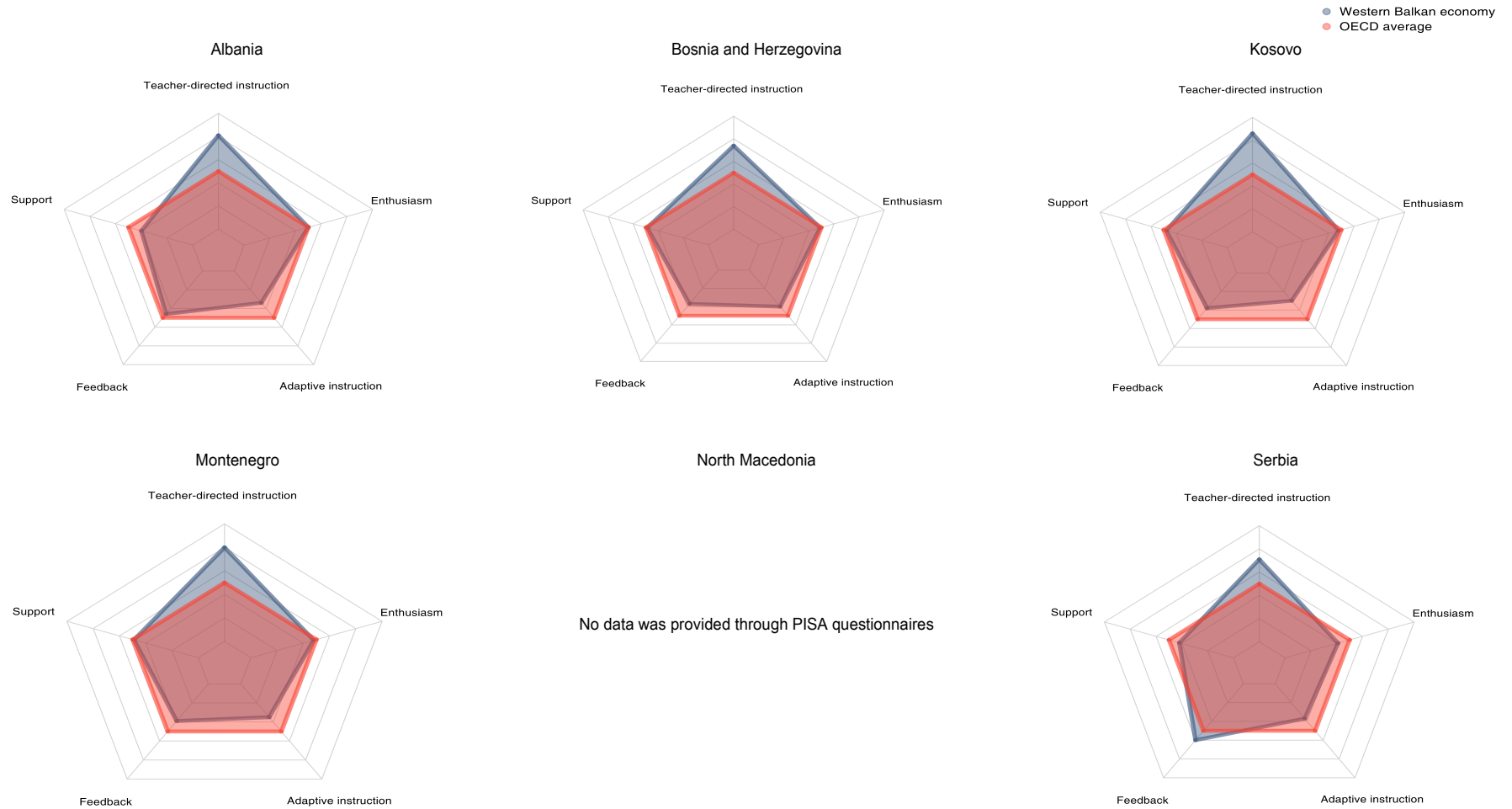
PISA 2018 can help illustrate the extent to which teachers in the Western Balkans are still using traditional pedagogical methods. The student background questionnaire of PISA 2018 asked several questions about instruction in reading classes, the responses of which comprised five indices about teacher practice (Table 3.1). All indices are calculated to have an average of zero and standard deviation of one across OECD countries. Positive values in the indices mean that students perceived their reading teachers to be more enthusiastic, provide greater support or use certain teaching practices more frequently than what was reported by the average student across OECD countries (OECD, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>). The adjusted results<sup>1</sup> for these indices are shown in Figure 3.1, which represents the extent to which each practice is more or less common relative to the others (and to the OECD average).

**Table 3.1. Indices of teacher practice**

Index name	Student prompt	Example questions
Teacher enthusiasm	Do you agree (“strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree”, “strongly disagree”) with the following statements about the two language-of-instruction lessons you attended prior to sitting the PISA test?	It was clear to me that the teacher liked teaching us. The enthusiasm of the teacher inspired me.
Teacher support	How often (“never or hardly never”, “some lessons”, “most lessons”, “every lesson”) do the following happen in your language-of-instruction lessons?	The teacher shows an interest in every student’s learning. The teacher gives extra help when students need it.
Teacher feedback		The teacher gives me feedback on my strengths in this subject. The teacher tells me in which areas I can improve.
Teacher-directed instruction		The teacher asks questions to check whether we have understood what was taught. The teacher tells us what we have to learn.
Adaptive instruction		The teacher adapts the lesson to [my] class’s needs and knowledge. The teacher changes the structure of the lesson on a topic that most students find difficult to understand.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

Figure 3.1. Teacher practices

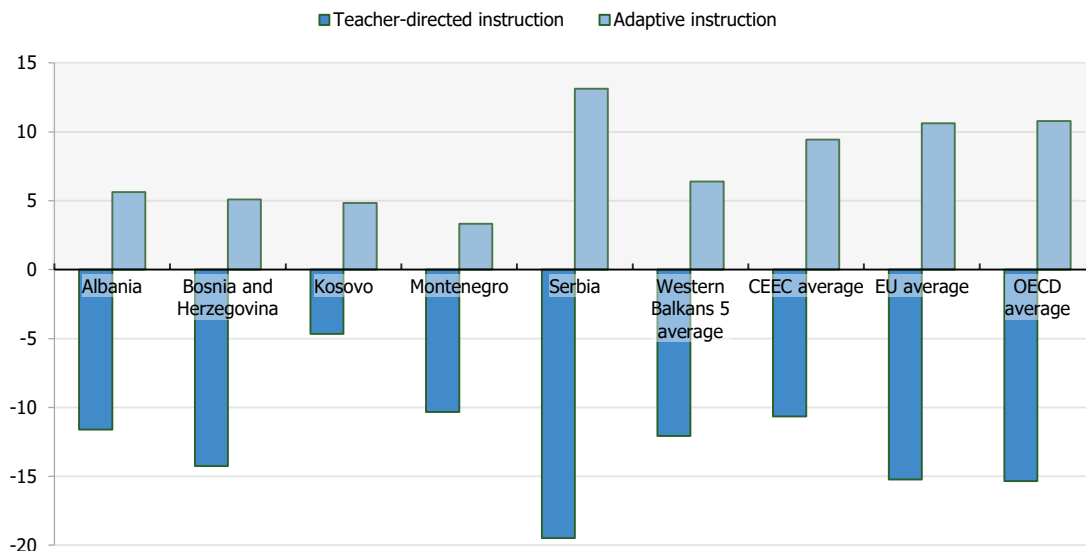


Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

Across all Western Balkan economies, data suggest that teachers are using less adaptive instruction and more teacher-directed instruction compared to OECD countries. This finding is important because students who reported a higher frequency of teacher-directed practices in language-of-instruction lessons tend to score lower in reading, even after accounting for gender and socio-economic status (Figure 3.2). In other words, teachers in the Western Balkans are less likely to use the practices that are more strongly associated with better student outcomes.

**Figure 3.2. Teacher practices and reading performance**

Change in reading performance associated with greater student reported exposure to:



Note: Results based on linear regression analysis after accounting for gender and students' and schools' socio-economic status.

All values are statistically significant.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

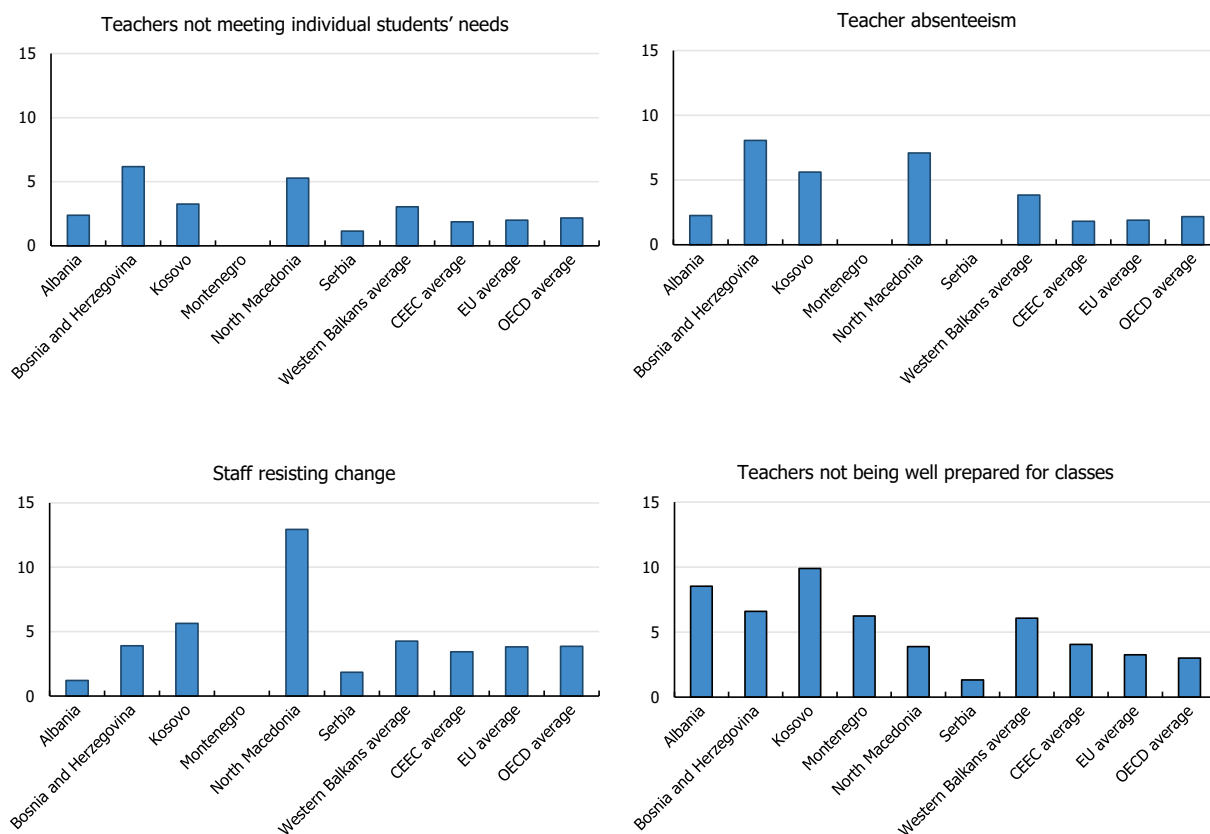
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### *Some teacher behaviours and practices may hinder student learning*

Teachers not only have to be skilled in pedagogical methods, they also need to have the right outlook and mentality to work closely with students in potentially difficult environments. PISA 2018 asked school principals about the extent to which certain teacher behaviours and practices, such as teachers' resistance to change, unpreparedness, strictness and absenteeism, can create an unpleasant school climate and hinder student learning. Compared to international benchmarks, teachers in Western Balkan education systems consistently show higher rates of absenteeism and unpreparedness. In some systems, such as North Macedonia, principals also regard teachers as resistant to change (Figure 3.3). These findings raise important questions about why teachers might not be demonstrating professional behaviours, signalling the need to look more closely at teacher working conditions and pay and the adequacy of policies related to teacher accountability and ethical conduct.

**Figure 3.3. Teacher behaviours and practices that may hinder student instruction**

Percentage of students in schools whose principals reported that the following behaviours hinder student learning a lot



Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

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## Policy implications

### *Teacher standards can help set out desired teaching practices*

All Western Balkan education systems have created system-wide teacher standards to help guide the profession (Table 3.2). Most of these standards positively feature key pedagogical knowledge and skills and highlight important practices, such as individualised and adaptive instruction. However, findings from OECD-UNICEF policy reviews have revealed that there is often a lack of clarity about how teachers should demonstrate increased mastery of the standards over time. Moreover, there is rarely a clear relationship between the standards and career progression. For example, Serbia has a merit-based career structure for teachers but teacher standards are not used explicitly as a reference in promotion decisions, nor are higher levels of proficiency rewarded with higher pay (Maghnouj et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). This disconnect limits teachers' incentive to continuously develop their practice. Providing more detail about core teaching competencies, setting out a road map for how they can be developed, and linking greater mastery with progress along the teacher career path (reflected in both differentiated roles and remuneration) will be important if teacher standards in the Western Balkans are to be used effectively as a lever for reform.

**Table 3.2. Teacher standards in the Western Balkans**

	Year when teacher standards were introduced
Albania	2013, revised in 2016
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2016-17 (inconsistently implemented)
Kosovo	2004, revised in 2017
Montenegro	2016
North Macedonia	Developed in 2016, but not implemented
Serbia	2011

Sources: Rexhaj, Mula and Hima (2010<sup>[10]</sup>). Mapping policies and practices for the preparation of teachers for inclusive education in contexts of social and cultural diversity. [https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/C12578310056925BC125772E002C487E\\_NOTE85SBG9.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/C12578310056925BC125772E002C487E_NOTE85SBG9.pdf) (accessed 8 September 2020).

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018<sup>[11]</sup>). Teaching Careers in Europe: Access, Progression and Support.

Montenegro Institute of Education (2017<sup>[12]</sup>). Competence standards for teachers and directors in educational institutions. <http://www.zzs.gov.me/naslovnna/168346/NACIONALNI-SAVJET-ZA-OBRAZOVANJE-USVOJIO-STANDARDE-KOMPETENCIJA-ZA-NASTAVNIKE-I-DIREKTORE-U-VASPITNO-OBRAZOVNIM-USTANOVAMA.html> (accessed 8 September 2020).

### *Professional codes of conduct can complement teacher standards*

To address behaviours that may hinder student learning, Western Balkan education systems can consider developing a code of professional conduct for teachers. Internationally, a growing number of education systems have developed a professional code for teachers, which accompany their teacher standards. For example, in Scotland (U.K.), the teacher code of conduct defines core principles and values for registered teachers and sets clear boundaries for professional behaviour (GTC Scotland, 2012<sup>[13]</sup>). Other education systems, including in Singapore, conduct interviews to assess teachers' motivation and temperament as part of the teacher certification process. These codes can help develop awareness among teachers about what the core values of the profession are and how they are expected to conduct themselves.

Establishing codes of conduct might be especially relevant in the Western Balkans because there are concerns about the integrity of processes around appointing and dismissing teachers. Relations with the teaching profession are also sometimes politicised, which can put teachers into uncomfortable partisan roles. A code of conduct might help protect teachers from having to assume such a position.

### *Consistent communication can help teachers feel more motivated to adopt reforms*

Most countries in the Western Balkans have embarked on frequent, major changes to important components of their educational systems, in particular their curricula. Nevertheless, consistently changing the educational landscape can make teachers feel unsettled and reluctant to alter their practices according to the newest change. Explaining how new methods of teaching relate to the shift in focus in student learning from knowledge memorisation to higher order competencies, and also explaining why this matters for students and societies, can help encourage a change in teaching practices and attitudes. North Macedonia, which has seen regular changes to its curricula over the past five years and which has the highest regional rate of teacher resistance to change, used the launch of its OECD-UNICEF review to catalyse communications with educators and stakeholders. Other Western Balkan systems can consider similar actions to communicate the intent of reforms, encourage teachers to participate in policy development, and motivate teachers to align their behaviours around common goals.

## Teacher certification and qualifications

There are several ways in which countries can help to make sure that teacher candidates have the competences needed to teach in the classroom. A common approach is to require that teachers hold a minimum educational qualification. While requiring teachers to have high levels of education does not necessarily imply higher quality teaching, most OECD and EU countries oblige teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree, though master's degrees are increasingly mandatory to teach certain subjects or grade levels. Other common approaches used to develop and validate the competences of new teachers include raising the quality of initial teacher education (ITE)<sup>2</sup> programmes, requiring ITE graduates to pass a certification examination and/or implementing compulsory probationary periods. Examples of these types of quality assurance mechanisms are present in the Western Balkans (Table 3.3). However, in many parts of the region, teacher certification and qualification requirements are not applied with sufficient rigour and consistency to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

**Table 3.3. Requirements to become a fully certified teacher in the Western Balkans**

In addition to completing ITE (for primary- and lower-secondary-level teachers without subject-level specialisations)

	Level of education		Passing a central examination after ITE	Completion of a probationary period	Passing a central examination after probation
Albania	Master			X	X
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bachelor			X	
Kosovo	Bachelor			X	X
Montenegro	Bachelor			X	X
North Macedonia	Bachelor			X	X
Serbia	Master			X	X

Notes: Bosnia and Herzegovina's policies differ according to administrative authority. In all areas, teachers must pass an examination after probation, but the examinations are not centralised.

Albania has a one-year internship before a probation year. Candidates take two central examinations after their internship but before their probationary year.

Sources: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018<sub>[11]</sub>). Teaching Careers in Europe: Access, Progression and Support.

World Bank (2019<sub>[14]</sub>). Bosnia and Herzegovina: Review of efficiency services in pre-university education.

<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719981571233699712/pdf/Bosnia-and-Herzegovina-Review-of-Efficiency-of-Services-in-Pre-University-Education-Phase-I-Stocktaking.pdf> (accessed 8 September 2020).

Mehmeti, Rraci and Bajrami (2019<sub>[15]</sub>). Teacher professional development in Kosovo. [https://www.keen-ks.net/site/assets/files/1467/zhvillimi\\_profesional\\_i\\_mesimdhenesve\\_ne\\_kosove\\_eng.pdf](https://www.keen-ks.net/site/assets/files/1467/zhvillimi_profesional_i_mesimdhenesve_ne_kosove_eng.pdf) (accessed 8 September 2020).

## Data from PISA

*Teachers in the Western Balkans are less likely to be certified and hold a master's degree*

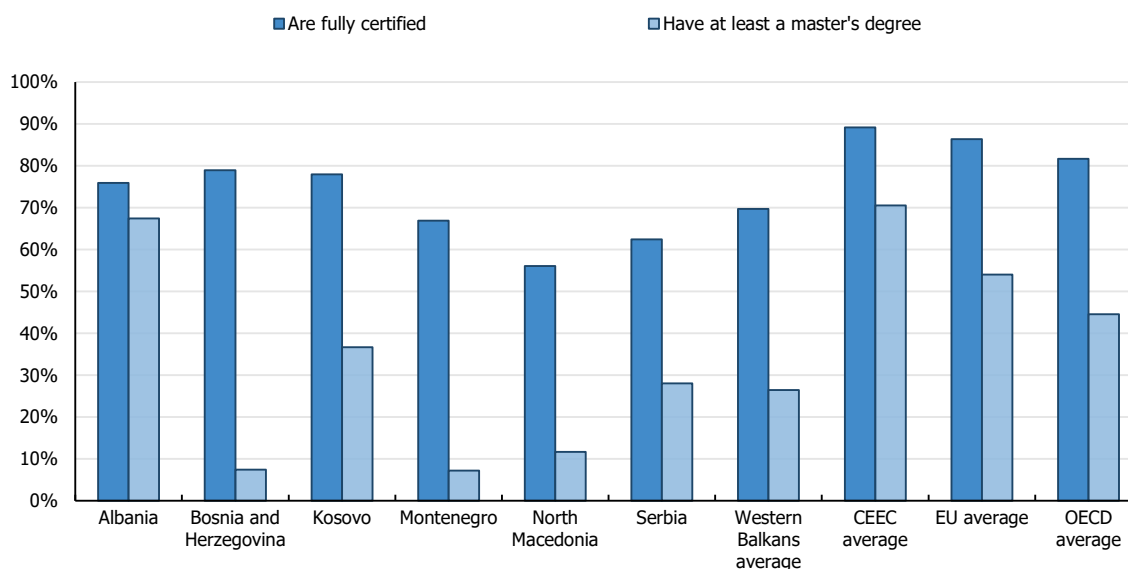
To better understand the relationship between student performance and the certification and qualification of teachers, PISA 2018 asked school principals to report the number of teachers in their schools who are “fully certified by an appropriate authority”, and the number of teachers who hold advanced qualifications<sup>3</sup>. The data show that, compared to teachers in OECD and EU countries, Western Balkan teachers are less likely to be certified and hold a master's degree (Figure 3.4). However, both indicators reveal significant variance among regional economies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, almost 80% of teachers are reportedly certified, which is similar to the OECD average (82%) but much higher than Serbia's share (63%).

It is important to note that education systems define their own credentials for “full certification” in PISA, meaning that requirements can vary across systems. For instance, certification could signal that a teacher

has received an ITE qualification, accumulated a minimum number of student-teaching hours, passed an exam, some combination of these criteria, or none of them.

Around the world, a growing number of countries have made holding a master's degree<sup>4</sup> a certification requirement (as only holding the degree is not sufficient to become certified), especially for upper-secondary teachers who are expected to have deeper content knowledge. This requirement is the case in Albania, where a master's degree is already needed to teach in many contexts and where 67% of teachers reportedly hold a master's degree (Figure 3.4). In comparison, on average 45% of teachers in the OECD hold a master's degree. However, overall in the region, PISA data reveal relatively low qualification levels, notably in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where less than 8% of teachers reportedly hold a master's degree.

**Figure 3.4. Teacher qualifications**



Note: Teacher certification in North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina is highly decentralised and in most cases consists of simply completing ITE. Given this context, it is possible that principals from these systems had difficulty interpreting whether their teachers were “fully certified” and thus North Macedonia’s results should be interpreted with caution.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

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Teachers with low educational qualifications could have implications for the effectiveness and professional status of the teaching workforce. However, what is more important than simply holding an educational qualification is the quality of the ITE programme that led to the qualification. Findings from OECD-UNICEF policy reviews reveal that many essential features of ITE programmes are not present in the Western Balkans. For example, while higher education accreditation processes exist in many parts of the region, ITE programmes usually do not undergo robust accreditation that is specific to teacher education and aligned with teacher standards (OECD, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>). Moreover, the length of the teaching practicum can vary within systems and there are few if any guidelines given to providers on how to design these programmes well (Maghnouj et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). As a result, there is no way for educational authorities in the region to ensure effective quality control of the content and structure of ITE programmes.



*There is no relationship between teacher qualifications and the use of modern practices or student outcomes in the Western Balkans*

Implicit in policies about teacher qualifications is the belief that better qualified teachers help produce better student outcomes. Countries trust that quality assurance mechanisms, such as certification and educational requirements, reliably signal that a teacher is capable of helping students learn. Internationally, PISA data show that this signalling is generally accurate. Students from schools with greater shares of teachers who are certified and who have master's degrees tend to have higher performance, even after accounting for the students' and schools' socio-economic status. In the Western Balkans, however, the relationship is inconclusive or even negative (Figure 3.5). Furthermore, there is no relationship between teacher qualifications and the use of the modern teaching practices, even though such practices feature prominently in many regional teacher standards (Figure 3.6). These findings provide further evidence that certification and educational requirements in the Western Balkans are not sufficient and highlight the need for mechanisms that more accurately signal high quality teaching.

**Figure 3.5. Teacher qualifications and student outcomes in reading**

Change in reading performance for every 10% increase in the share of teachers who are:



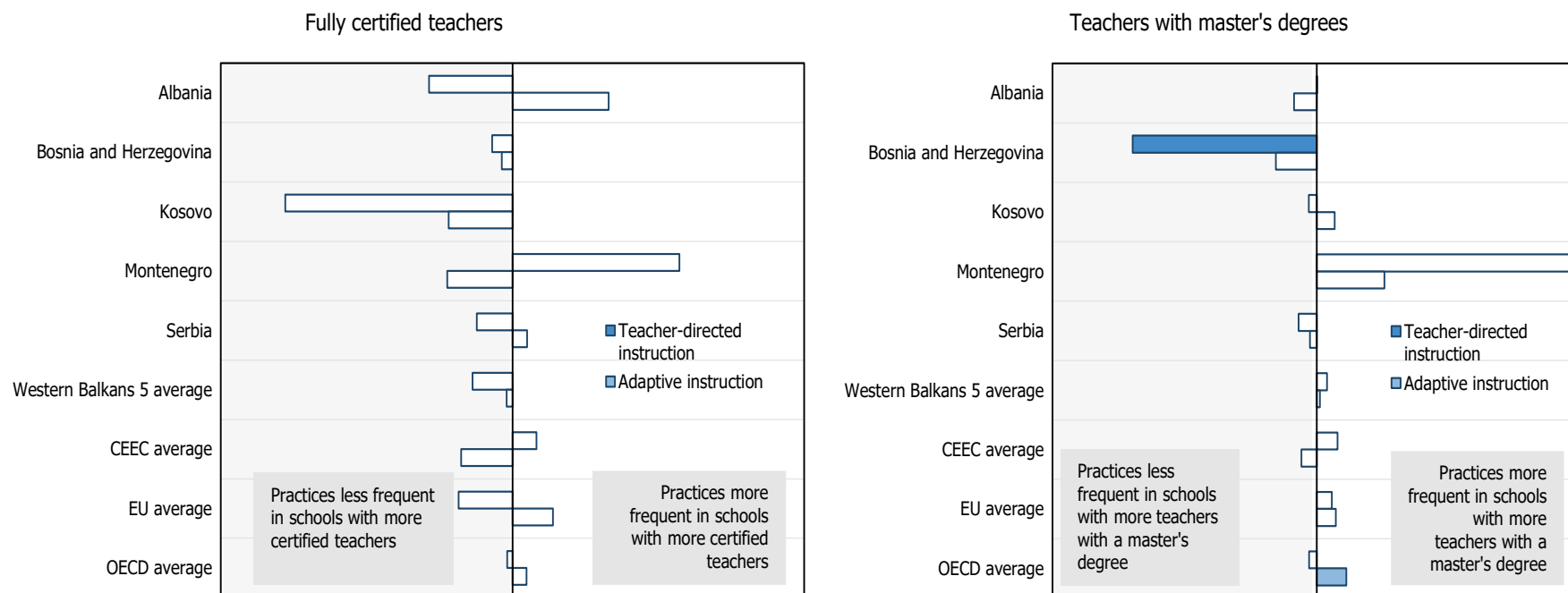
Note: Results based on linear regression analysis after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic status. Values that are statistically significant are shaded.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934200090>

### Figure 3.6. Teacher qualifications and teacher practices

Change in teacher practices for every 10% increase in the share of teachers who are:



Note: Values that are statistically significant are shaded.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

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## **Policy implications**

### *Raising the quality of initial teacher education programmes can help promote the use of modern instructional practices*

Simply raising the minimum qualification needed to become a teacher is unlikely to improve teaching and learning outcomes in the Western Balkans if education systems do not simultaneously address the issues that are currently undermining the value and quality of ITE. Notably, all systems examined by OECD UNICEF policy reviews reveal that entry into regional ITE programmes is not selective, which is partly a reflection of the perceived status of the teaching profession in the region. This situation prevents authorities from ensuring that only candidates with strong academic skills and a clear motivation to teach are granted study places in ITE. Some economies in the region are already taking steps to strengthen ITE entry requirements, such as Albania, which has raised the prerequisite grade point average for entry into some ITE programmes (MoESY, 2018<sup>[17]</sup>). Another measure commonly used by OECD and EU countries to increase the calibre of ITE candidates involves conducting interviews to evaluate applicants' motivation and socio-emotional skills before granting them acceptance into ITE programmes.

Efforts to raise the bar for entry into ITE should be accompanied by measures to improve the quality of ITE programmes. However, findings from OECD-UNICEF policy reviews suggest that ITE programmes in the Western Balkans are often fragmented and vary in quality (OECD, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>; Maghnouj, 2020<sup>[18]</sup>). To address these issues, many OECD and EU countries have introduced specific guidelines and quality assurance mechanisms for ITE programmes. These measures typically set out mandatory accreditation criteria for ITE programmes that align with teacher standards (see above) and describe requirements related to the teaching practicum. Strong accreditation processes give ITE providers a common reference point around which to build their curricula and similar approaches could help Western Balkan systems raise the quality of ITE.

### *Rigorous certification processes can help signal high quality teaching*

In addition to tightening regulations for ITE programmes, education systems can use certification to help improve the quality of ITE and ensure that all teacher candidates are ready to teach. An important feature of many certification processes, including those in the Western Balkans, is the use of examinations (Table 3.3). While examinations can influence the content of ITE programmes and help reinforce minimum standards for novice teachers, evidence from OECD-UNICEF policy reviews finds that certification examinations in the region tend to measure theoretical knowledge rather than practical pedagogy (Maghnouj, 2020<sup>[18]</sup>; Maghnouj et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). As a result, certified teachers may enter the classroom with advanced understanding of an academic discipline, but unsure about how to impart that same understanding to their students.

To address some of the limitations of their certification examinations, all Western Balkan economies have introduced mandatory probation periods for new teachers. These periods are a positive feature of teacher certification in the region because they help verify some of the more practical aspects of teaching that cannot easily be measured by an examination. However, some of the elements that can support effective probation are missing, such as adequate time, support for beginner teacher mentorship, and clarity and rigour in the process for taking a final decision. Moreover, some systems in the Western Balkans administer certification examinations after the probationary period, rather than before teachers enter the classroom (Table 3.3). In a context where ITE quality assurance is weak, this measure can expose students to teachers who do not have a minimum level of competence. It can also focus the probation on passing an exam, rather than developing and demonstrating teaching abilities.

## Teacher appraisal and professional development

Education systems need to ensure that teachers keep their skills up to date vis-à-vis system-wide goals. It is therefore crucial that teachers receive regular feedback about their practice and have access to meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities. Together, these efforts can help establish a coherent professional learning process that aligns with teacher standards and broader education goals. However, data from PISA and OECD-UNICEF policy reviews reveal that systems of teacher appraisal and professional development in the Western Balkans often struggle to encourage student-centred teaching practices. Without greater alignment of these policies, education systems in the region will likely have continued difficulty in improving teaching and learning.

### **Data from PISA**

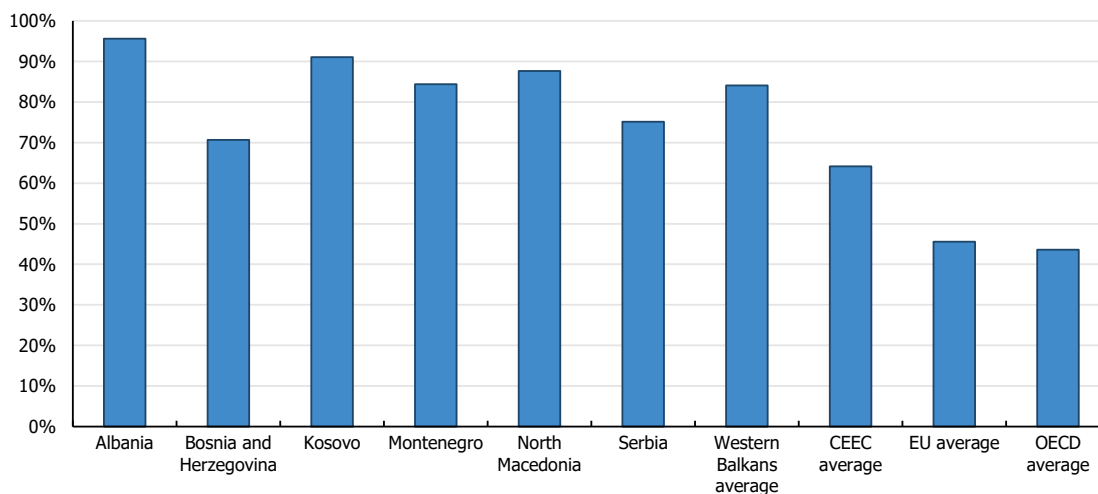
*Teacher appraisal processes in the Western Balkans do not capture how well they help students learn*

How teachers in the Western Balkans are evaluated might be hindering the adoption of more student centred teaching practices. Countries with well-balanced and formative teacher appraisal systems typically rely on a range of evidence<sup>5</sup> to make informed, qualitative judgements about how teachers support student learning. In the Western Balkans, however, education systems judge effectiveness according to the numbers of papers teachers present (as is the case in Albania), and the existence (but not quality) of teacher portfolios (as is the case in North Macedonia) (Maghnouj, 2020<sup>[18]</sup>; OECD, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>). These types of appraisal measures do not provide authentic and accurate indicators of teacher effectiveness because they measure a teacher's level of activity, but the completion of those activities does not necessarily indicate improved student learning.

An unusually common (when compared to international benchmarks) measure of teacher effectiveness in the region is student results in academic competitions (Olympiads) and summative tests (Figure 3.7). Compared to more authentic measures of teacher effectiveness, this metric is particularly problematic because it depends on students' background, their previous preparation and other circumstances that are beyond the teacher's control. Using student assessment results to judge teacher effectiveness can be especially unfair towards teachers who teach more disadvantaged students, and it could incentivise teachers to help high-achieving students excel rather than helping all students learn.

**Figure 3.7. Using student assessment to appraise teachers**

Percentage of students in schools whose principals report that student assessment results are used to appraise teachers



Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

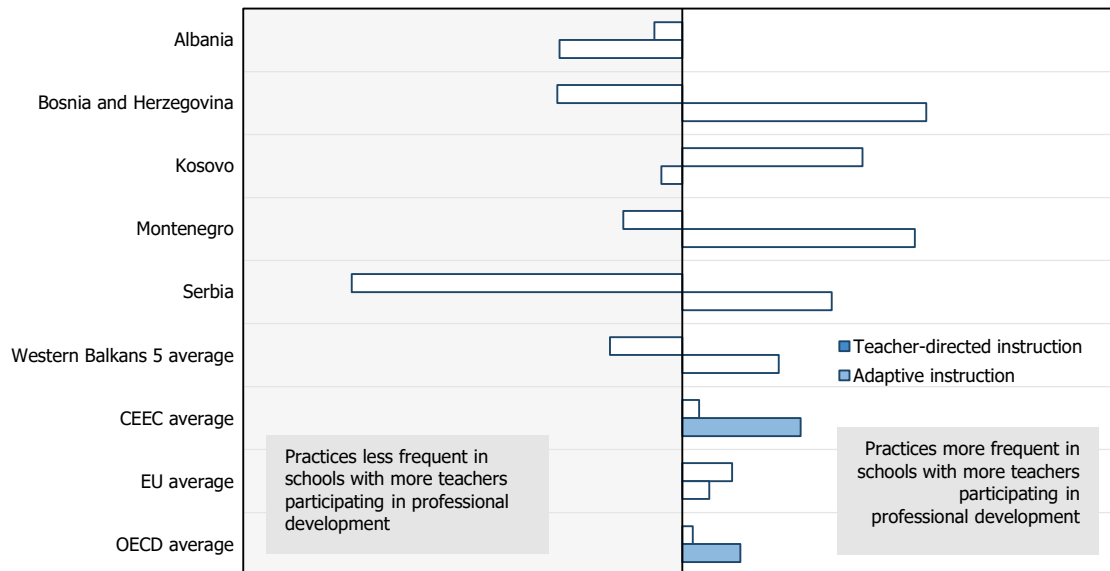
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*Links between professional development and desired teaching practices are weak*

Across the OECD, and especially in CEEC countries, data from PISA reveal a positive association between the amount of professional development teachers receive and how frequently they use adaptive instruction (Figure 3.8). However, these findings are less conclusive in the Western Balkans. While there is generally an association between more professional development and greater usage of adaptive instruction, the Western Balkans demonstrate greater variance both across and within systems, suggesting that the effectiveness of professional development may be inconsistent. These findings help explain why associations between professional development and adaptive instruction are not statistically significant. In some areas, teachers appear to be trained successfully in using adaptive instruction, while in others, often within the same economy, they are not.

### Figure 3.8. Professional development and teacher practices

Change in teacher practices for every 10% increase in the share of teachers who participate in professional development



Note: Values that are statistically significant are shaded.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

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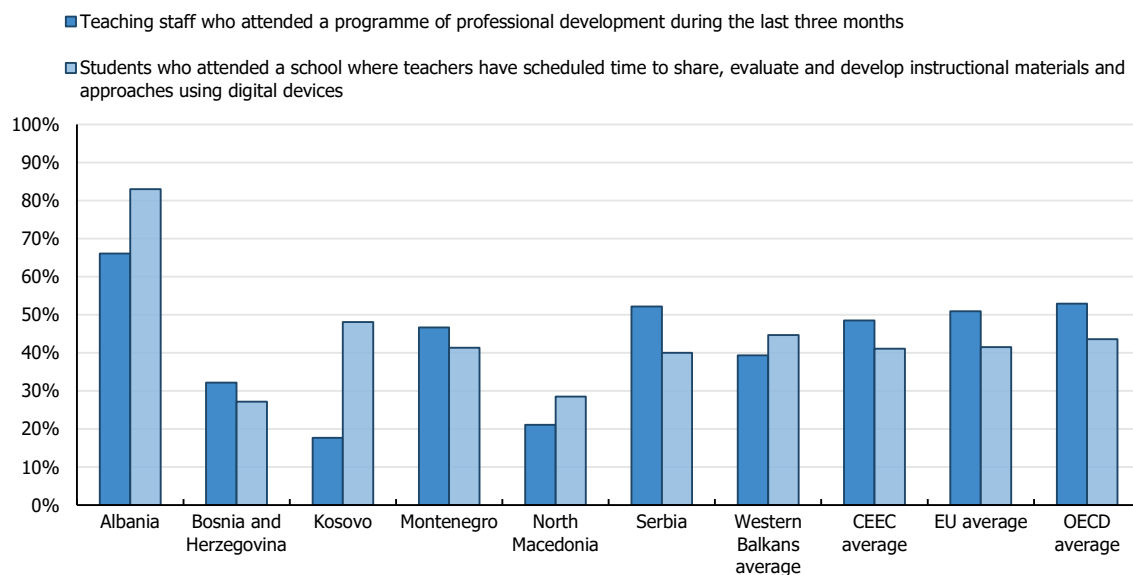
Findings from OECD-UNICEF policy reviews offer several possible explanations for these observed differences. Primarily, professional development in the region sometimes fails to address key gaps in teachers' knowledge and skills, such as understanding system-wide teacher standards and expected practices (OECD, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>; Maghnouj et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>). Some teachers might also have a hard time accessing professional development, either because they have little time to do so or because the relevant opportunities are not available to them (see following section). Finally, teacher appraisal in the region appears to further exacerbate these issues because current measures and evaluations of teacher effectiveness do not systematically inform teachers' professional development needs nor identify which teachers may need additional or specific training. As a result, teachers who may need support in using adaptive instruction might be trained in unrelated topics or not receive any training at all.

#### *Teacher participation in professional development, and having the time to do so, varies across and within Western Balkan economies*

An important question regarding professional development is to whom it is made available. Availability is particularly important for teachers who work in disadvantaged environments, as they might need more support to effectively teach their students. Results from PISA 2018 suggest that, on average, teachers in the Western Balkans participate in professional development, and are given opportunities to do so, at comparable rates to international benchmarks (Figure 3.9). Nevertheless, there is considerable variation across economies. In Albania, almost 70% of teachers participated in professional development in the three months leading up to PISA 2018, and over 80% have scheduled time to develop themselves, rates that are well above international benchmarks. In Kosovo, however, less than 20% of teachers recently

participated in professional development, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina less than 30% of teachers have scheduled time to develop themselves, rates that are well below international benchmarks. These results suggest that, in many areas, much more can be done to ensure that teachers have time to develop themselves and have access to professional development opportunities.

**Figure 3.9. Professional development**



Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

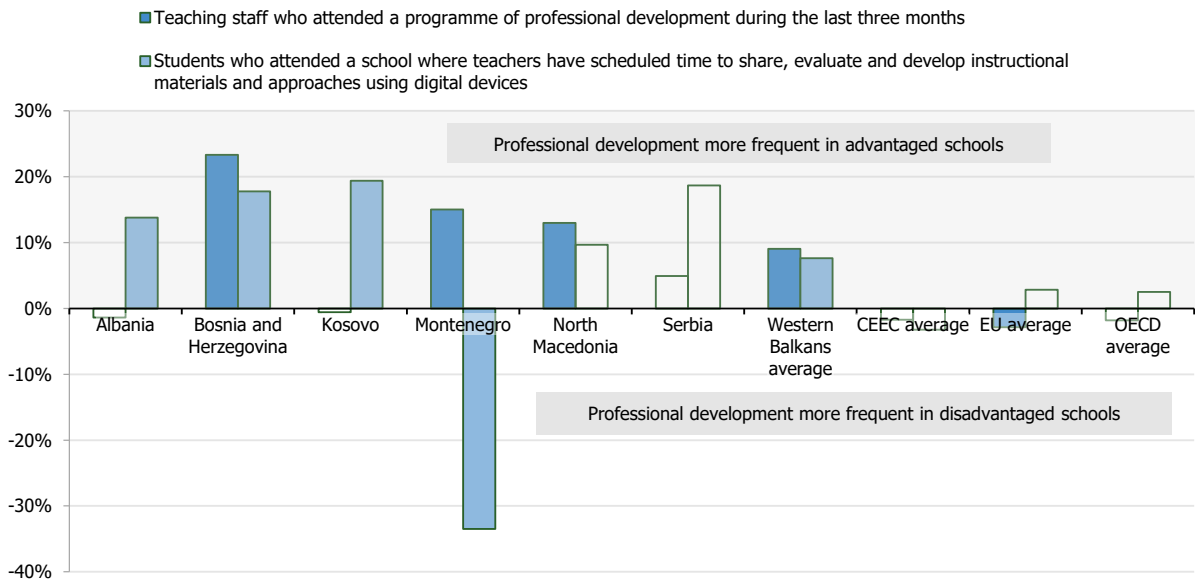
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PISA data also show that there is significant variation within Western Balkan school systems in terms of teachers' access to professional development. Teachers who work in schools with more socio-economically advantaged students are both more likely to participate in professional development and have more time to develop themselves than teachers in schools with more socio-economically disadvantaged students (Figure 3.10). In comparison, internationally, teachers in schools with more disadvantaged students are on average equally likely to participate in professional development and have time to do so. Across EU countries, teachers in schools with more disadvantaged students are actually more likely to participate in professional development.

In the Western Balkans context, teachers that instruct in different languages present a unique set of development challenges because they might need professional training in the different languages. PISA data show, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Montenegro, there are considerable differences in participation in professional development according to teachers' languages of instruction (Figure 3.11). These findings are worrying because they suggest that teachers who likely need more support are actually receiving less, which might exacerbate already concerning equity issues.

**Figure 3.10. Professional development for teachers in schools with more advantaged and disadvantaged students**

Difference between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools according to:



Note: Values that are statistically significant are shaded.

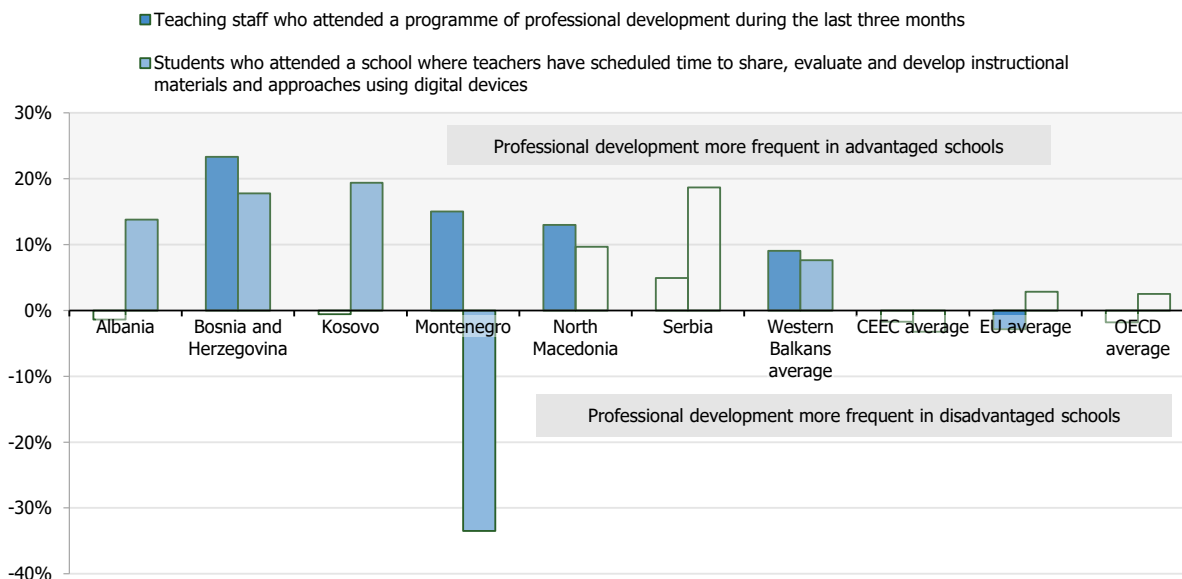
Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

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**Figure 3.11. Teacher participation in professional development according to their languages of instruction**

Teaching staff attended a programme of professional development during the last three months



Note: Values represents shares from each linguistic group.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934200204>

### *Holistic approaches to teacher appraisal can help promote desired teaching practices*

Evidence from PISA and OECD-UNICEF policy reviews highlights the need to promote a more balanced approach to evaluating teacher quality in the Western Balkans. In particular, indicators and techniques used to measure teacher effectiveness need to go beyond student test scores and results in academic competitions. They should place greater emphasis on the quality of teachers' interactions with students and their ability to create an inclusive classroom environment where each student is encouraged to do his or her best. There are several policy options that Western Balkan systems can consider in order to promote more authentic measures of teacher quality.

First and foremost, the processes used to assess teachers and teaching practices – both by principals and external evaluation agencies – need to reinforce a more holistic approach. However, principals in the region typically lack central guidelines that help them evaluate teachers in ways that reflect teacher standards. In the absence of such guidance and support, principals may sometimes create their own appraisal criteria or fall back on familiar techniques (i.e. using student test scores). This situation risks that teachers' strengths and weaknesses are not correctly identified, which could lead to a misallocation of professional development resources and create equity issues with respect to where the best teachers can be found (Box 3.1). Developing central guidelines to help principals appraise teachers, which is underway in Albania, can help principals appraise teachers more authentically (Maghnouj, 2020<sup>[18]</sup>). Another way to improve the feedback teachers receive is to develop the instructional leadership skills of school principals. Albania's School of Directors, which was recently established as a structured programme for school principals, provides a promising example of this approach (MoESY, 2018<sup>[17]</sup>).

Education systems in the region also could align the rewards offered to schools and teachers with a more holistic understanding of teacher effectiveness. For example, current practices, such as giving bonuses to teachers and schools whose students perform well in Olympiads, do not promote more authentic measurement of quality teaching. Alternatively, regional education systems could require schools and teachers to demonstrate how they are helping struggling and disadvantaged students to succeed and bridging gaps in learning outcomes.

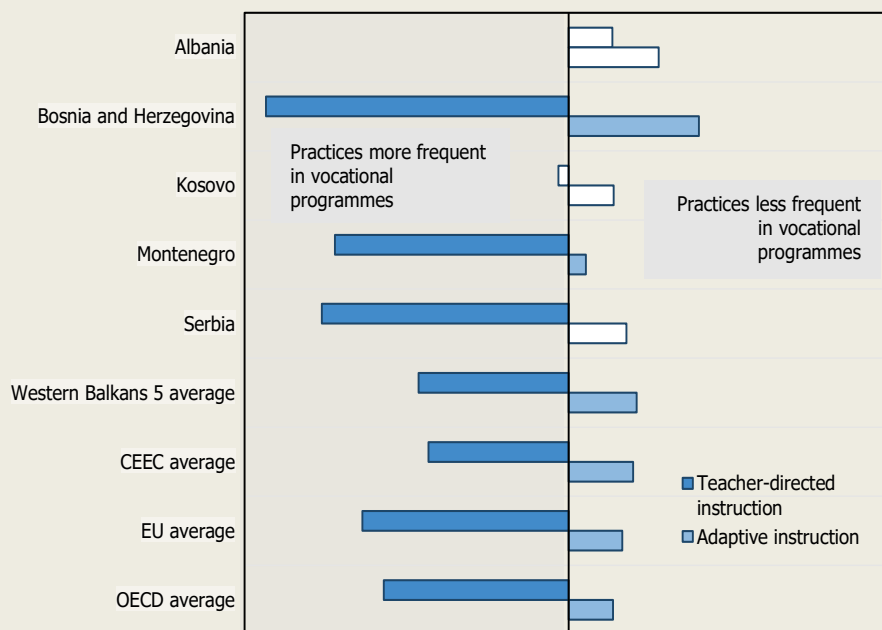
### Box 3.1. Teaching practices in general education and vocational schools, and in advantaged and disadvantaged schools

Not being able to identify the best teachers can be problematic from the perspective of equity. Teaching in disadvantaged environments is challenging and, without suitable incentives, teachers might be hesitant to teach in schools with large shares of disadvantaged students. On the other hand, those same schools are where the very best teachers can contribute to student learning the most. Given these circumstances, it is vital that education systems be able to properly identify who the best teachers are so they can provide them with incentives to teach in difficult contexts.

In the Western Balkans, certification requirements, educational qualifications and teacher appraisal mechanisms are unable to reliably capture effective teaching practice. In the absence of this information, it is more difficult for education systems to ensure that all students have access to good teaching. PISA 2018 data show that the teachers who use adaptive instructional practices are distributed very inequitably throughout the region (Figure 3.12). In almost all economies, teachers who use more modern practices that are associated with higher outcomes are more likely to teach in general education programmes and advantaged schools, while teachers who use more traditional practices are more likely to teach in vocational programmes and disadvantaged schools. These findings are worrisome because they indicate that existing inequities are at real risk of being further exacerbated.

Figure 3.12. Teacher practices in general education and vocational schools

Only students in upper-secondary school

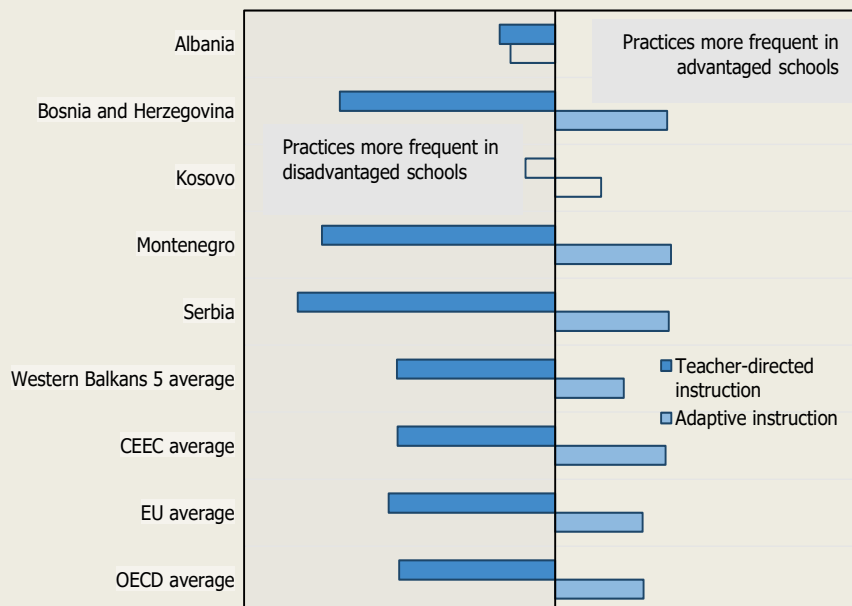


Note: Values that are statistically significant are shaded.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934200223>

Figure 3.13. Teacher practices in advantaged and disadvantaged schools



Note: Values that are statistically significant are shaded.

Source: OECD (2019<sup>[8]</sup>). PISA 2018 Database. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed 17 November 2020).

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934200242>

*Facilitating access to professional development opportunities can help teachers strengthen their practice, knowledge and skills*

Findings from OECD-UNICEF policy reviews reveal that funding is one of the biggest barriers to the participation of Western Balkan teachers in professional development opportunities. While central and/or local governments usually provide some financial support, at least for priority training areas, these funds do not always cover the number of mandatory credit hours teachers must complete each year. Some teachers then have to cover the costs of formal training out-of-pocket, including transportation costs, which exacerbates inequity because teachers from more advantaged schools can more easily fund raise (Maghnouj, 2020<sup>[18]</sup>; Maghnouj et al., 2020<sup>[9]</sup>; OECD, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>).

In response to these challenges, some Western Balkan systems are introducing innovative methods for facilitating access to professional development for teachers. Serbia, for instance, is delivering professional development electronically, which makes it cheaper and more convenient for teachers to access training (Velickovic, 2020<sup>[19]</sup>). Albania has introduced professional learning networks, which provide teachers with training in national priority areas (though the use of a train-the-trainer method might be problematic given extant capacity concerns). North Macedonia requires schools to prepare four year professional development plans for teaching staff (OECD, 2019<sup>[16]</sup>) (Maghnouj, 2020<sup>[18]</sup>). While these approaches can help align school (and system) training goals, minimise expenditure and are considered effective ways to facilitate professional learning, resource-restrained Western Balkan systems should take care to avoid passing on full responsibility for professional development to schools.

*Raising the quality and relevance of professional development opportunities can help increase teacher participation*

Evidence from OECD-UNICEF policy reviews reveal that teachers who do participate in professional development do not necessarily demonstrate better practice. This finding suggests that in addition to facilitating access to professional development, education systems in the Western Balkans should take steps to make training offers more relevant and effective.

Western Balkan systems can consider several approaches to strengthening professional development. As mentioned, many Western Balkan economies require teachers to complete a set number of training credits each year. However, these requirements, when they are actually fulfilled, may lead to a box-ticking exercise whereby teachers participating for credit accumulation rather than for genuine learning and development opportunities. Basing career progression upon demonstrated evidence of helping students learn, instead of a raw count of completed activities, can help align professional development offerings with teacher interests and system-wide expectations.

Another method of assuring the quality of professional development opportunities is to establish accreditation procedures for providers. In North Macedonia, the government accredits training programmes through the Bureau for Development of Education. In Albania, the Quality Assurance Agency also accredits teacher training modules. These efforts can help teachers determine which programmes are considered to be high quality, which is even more important considering the resource limitations of the region.

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## Notes

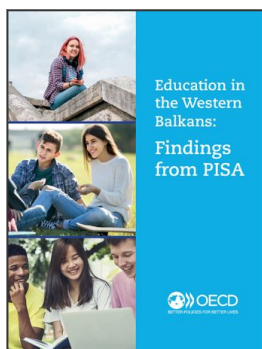
<sup>1</sup>To account for differences in response style across countries and economies (e.g. if students from a country tend to respond more positively or negatively in general), OECD analysts adjusted the value of each individual index according to the average response across all indices.

<sup>2</sup> Since only one Western Balkan economy took the PISA teacher questionnaire in 2018, this paper does not discuss teachers’ own experiences with ITE.

<sup>3</sup> Level of qualification refers to bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, or doctoral degree.

<sup>4</sup> Broadly speaking, education master’s programmes are typically offered as either concurrent or consecutive models. Concurrent programmes provide pedagogical and practical training together with subject area knowledge, leading to a master’s degree. Consecutive programmes organise pedagogical and practical training during the years of master’s level studies, following the attainment of a bachelor’s degree in a subject area.

<sup>5</sup> Sources of evidence for teacher appraisal may include classroom observations (often conducted by school principals) and reviews of teachers’ lesson plans and classroom assessments (OECD, 2013<sub>[20]</sub>).



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