



Akelius



This report details the implementation and impact of the Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative in Albania, which provides accessible language education to marginalized children, including refugees and migrants, through digital tools integrated into the national education system.

# DOCUMENTATION REPORT

The use of education technology to support disadvantaged children's language learning in Albania

November 2024

---

# Documentation Report

The use of education technology to support disadvantaged children's language learning in Albania

This document was prepared by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights under the program "Reaching the Unreached 2", supported financially by UNICEF and Akelius Foundation implemented by Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sport.

All rights to this Document, including copyrights, are owned by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights and are protected by applicable laws of the Republic of Albania and international ones. This Document may not be copied, shared, translated into another language, or adapted without prior permission by the Observatory for the Rights of Children and Youth.

All rights reserved.

The information and views expressed in this Document are of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of UNICEF.



Correspondence should be addressed to:

Observatory for Children and Youth Rights

Rruga Brigada e VIII, Pall. LID, K.1, Z.1,

Tirana, Albania

[info@observator.org.al](mailto:info@observator.org.al)

[www.observator.org.al](http://www.observator.org.al)

@observatorialbania on Instagram

@observatoripertedrejtatefemijevedheterinjve on  
Facebook

© 2024 Observatory for Children and Youth Rights

## Acknowledgements

This Documentation Report is prepared as part of the implementation of the "Reaching the Unreached 2" program, financially supported by UNICEF and the Akelius Foundation, and implemented by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sport.

This Report has been made possible through the collective efforts of numerous individuals, institutions, and organizations committed to enhancing educational access and language acquisition for marginalized children in Albania. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Akelius Foundation for its vision and support, which have enabled the Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative to take root and flourish in Albania.

We also express our sincere appreciation to UNICEF for its guidance, technical support, and commitment to inclusive education, which have been crucial to the success of this initiative. We are grateful to the Ministry of Education and Sport for their invaluable partnership, which has facilitated the integration of the Akelius platform into the national education system, aligning it with Albania's educational objectives and ensuring a sustainable and impactful program.

Our acknowledgment also goes to the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education in Albania for its dedication to teacher training, empowering educators to effectively adopt and implement digital tools in their classrooms.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to each of the schools participating in this project, including At Zef Pllumi (Shëngjin), Gjergj Fishta (Lezhë), Mustafa Myrteza Kaçaçi (Krujë), Bakushe Visha (Fushë-Krujë), 31 Korriku (Burrel), Haki Stërmilli (Melan administrative unit, Dibër), Demir Gashi (Dibër), Hamit Mullisi (Elbasan), Jorgji Dilo (Elbasan), Sulë Harri (Elbasan), Sul Domi (Elbasan), Shaqe Mazreku (Durrës), Neim Babameto (Durrës), Kongresi i Manastirit (Tiranë), Ardian Klosi (Bregu i Lumit – Tiranë), Androkli Kostallari (Shkozë – Tiranë), Lidhja e Prizrenit (Tiranë), as well as the Hotel and Tourism vocational school of Tirana. Also, a special thanks goes for 2 reception centers for refugees' children (RMSA and Babrru - Tiranë), - dedication of whom has been vital to bringing the Akelius platform to life in both urban and rural areas, ensuring that all students have access to quality language education.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our local partners, community organizations, and NGOs for their invaluable efforts in reaching vulnerable groups, including refugee and migrant children, and for their ongoing collaboration in creating safe and supportive learning environments. Finally, we express our deep appreciation to the students and families who have engaged and contributed to this journey, embodying the true spirit of learning and resilience.

This Report stands as a testament to the shared commitment and partnership of all those involved. We look forward to continuing this journey toward an equitable and accessible education for every child in Albania.



## List of acronyms

---

<b>Akelius</b>	Akelius digital language learning course
<b>AQI</b>	The Accelerating Quality Initiative
<b>ASCAP</b>	The Quality Assurance Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
<b>CEFR</b>	The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
<b>EdTech Communities</b>	Education Technology Communities
<b>GDPR</b>	The European General Data Protection Regulation
<b>ICT</b>	Information, Communication Technology
<b>MoES</b>	Ministry of Education and Sport
<b>NAES</b>	The National Agency for Employment and Skills
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>Observatory</b>	Observatory for Children and Youth Rights
<b>RMSA</b>	Albania Migrants Assistance Centre
<b>UNICEF</b>	The United Nations Children’s Fund

---

# Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
List of acronyms .....	4
Contents.....	5
Executive summary .....	6
I. Introduction.....	9
II. The Akelius digital learning initiative in Albania .....	11
<b>2.1 Flowchart of Processes for Implementing the Akelius Initiative in Albania.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.2 The Akelius digital application .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.3 The educational settings and target groups of Akelius .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.3.1 Educational Settings .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.3.2 Target Groups .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.4 The partnerships for sustainability of Akelius .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.4.1 Strategic national partnerships.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.4.2 Community-based partnerships .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.4.3 International and donor partnerships .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.4.4 Technological partnerships .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.5 The integration of ICT in schools .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.5.1 Leveraging existing infrastructure .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.5.2 Devices management and accessibility .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.5.3 Addressing Connectivity Challenges .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.6 Establishing Secure and Supportive Digital Environments .....</b>	<b>21</b>
III. Programme effectiveness .....	27
<b>3.1 Learning outcomes .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3.2 Pathways to learning – motivation, confidence and autonomy in learning .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>3.3 Newly arrived students.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.4 Children with disabilities .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.5 Children from Roma community .....</b>	<b>30</b>
IV. Conclusion and recommendations.....	31
<b>4.1 Recommendations for school-level actions.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>4.2 Recommendations for classroom-level actions .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Role of UNICEF in Facilitating Partnerships.....	35
Role of the Observatory in Implementing the Akelius Project in Albania .....	35
V. Annexes .....	37
<b>5.1 Annex 1: Implementation settings .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>5.2 Reference List.....</b>	<b>38</b>

## Executive summary

The Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative in Albania represents a transformative educational effort, providing marginalized children, including refugees, migrants, and children with special needs, with access to quality language education through innovative digital tools. Launched in June 2020 under the "Reaching the Unreached 2" program and financially supported by UNICEF and the Akelius Foundation, this initiative has significantly contributed to bridging the gap in language acquisition for vulnerable groups in Albania. Implemented by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights (Observatory) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sport, the program has grown to encompass 18 schools, including one vocational high school and two reception centers for refugee children, effectively impacting education in both urban and rural settings.

The Akelius initiative utilizes a flexible, digital learning platform that offers language courses in 11 languages, structured to align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The platform employs interactive, gamified content to foster motivation, confidence, and autonomy in learning. Its design ensures inclusivity, featuring multimedia elements that cater to diverse learning needs, including those of children with disabilities. The platform's content is accessible both online and offline, addressing the challenges posed by inconsistent internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas.

### *Integration into the National Education System*

A key strength of the Akelius initiative lies in its successful integration into Albania's national education system. The partnership with the MoES has facilitated the alignment of the program with national education goals, such as introducing English as a compulsory subject from grade 1 and enhancing teachers' Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) skills. The integration of Akelius into the national teacher training framework has empowered over 672 teachers across Albania, equipping them with the skills needed to effectively blend digital tools with traditional teaching methods. In-service training, developed in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-University Education (ASCAP), has ensured that teachers are well-prepared to use the Akelius platform to enrich classroom learning experiences.

The program's implementation also emphasizes the establishment of "Akelius Teaching Clubs" within after-school programs, such as those at "Demir Gashi" in Dibër and "Androkli Kostallari" in Shkozë, Tirana. These clubs leverage Akelius teaching infrastructure to enhance teaching practices, involving new teachers and providing students with additional opportunities to develop their language skills. The initiative's integration into the practical training of language students from the Faculties of Foreign Languages in Tirana, Elbasan, and Durrës further strengthens its impact, fostering a new generation of educators skilled in digital language instruction.

### *Reaching Marginalized Groups*

The Akelius initiative specifically targets marginalized groups, including refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities, and children from the Roma community. By providing these children with an engaging, interactive way to learn languages, the initiative facilitates their integration into the formal education system. Afghan refugee children residing in Shengjin have particularly benefited from the program, with 131 students currently attending the Akelius language program at "At Zef Pllumi" school. The initiative's commitment to inclusivity extends to children with disabilities, who have shown notable improvements in language skills, motivation, and self-confidence through their use of the platform.

The program's flexibility allows it to be used in both formal and non-formal educational settings, making it accessible to students in diverse learning environments. Supplementary learning centers and after-school programs, often serving marginalized communities, provide safe spaces for children to learn and practice language skills outside of the traditional classroom setting. This dual approach ensures that the initiative reaches children who may not have consistent access to formal schooling, thereby broadening its impact.

### *Program Reach and Impact*

Since its launch in June 2020, the Akelius initiative has expanded to reach approximately 1,452 students across Albania. The program encompasses 18 schools, including one vocational high school and two reception centers for refugee children. Notably, 131 Afghan refugee children residing in Shengjin are currently attending the Akelius language program at "At Zef Pllumi" school.

The initiative has also focused on teacher training, with over 672 teachers trained to integrate the Akelius platform into their teaching methods. This training has enhanced teachers' ICT skills and enabled them to blend digital tools with traditional approaches, ultimately enriching the learning experience for students. Participating schools have established ICT hubs and dedicated language labs, creating focused environments for digital learning. Secure storage solutions for ICT equipment and centralized device management protocols have been implemented to ensure consistent access to the technology needed to use the platform effectively.

### *Partnerships for Sustainability*

The sustainability of the Akelius initiative in Albania is supported by strategic partnerships at the national, community, and international levels. Collaboration with the MoES and ASCAP ensures alignment with national education policies, while partnerships with local NGOs and community organizations help reach vulnerable populations. The involvement of UNICEF and the Akelius Foundation has been instrumental in providing the resources and strategic guidance necessary for the initiative's success.

Technological partnerships have also played a crucial role in the initiative's sustainability. Additionally, the initiative has fostered a community of practice among teachers through virtual networks and local communities of practice, promoting collaboration and continuous improvement.

### *Impact and Future Directions*

The Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative has had a significant impact on the educational landscape in Albania, enhancing language learning outcomes and promoting digital literacy among marginalized groups. Students using the platform have demonstrated improvements in vocabulary acquisition, reading, and listening skills, as well as increased motivation and confidence in learning. The program's emphasis on interactive content has made language learning enjoyable and engaging, fostering a positive learning environment for all students.

Looking ahead, the initiative aims to expand its reach by establishing additional ICT hubs and language labs in schools, as well as providing ongoing teacher training to maintain high-quality digital education. The success of the Akelius project in Albania serves as a model for integrating technology into the education sector, demonstrating how digital tools can support equitable learning outcomes and enhance opportunities for vulnerable groups. By continuing to build on these achievements, the Akelius initiative is poised to make a lasting impact on the future of education in Albania, contributing to a more inclusive and accessible learning environment for every child.



## I. Introduction

**The Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative** is currently active in Albania, beyond 11 other countries worldwide. In Albania it started since June 2020. It aims to improve second- and foreign-language learning outcomes among marginalized children and adolescents, including migrant and refugee children, through a digital application that supports language acquisition across 11 different languages, designed to support second- and foreign-language acquisition. These courses are structured with multimedia content that fosters engagement and helps students build vocabulary, improve grammar, and develop listening and speaking skills. The content is organized according to the CEFR, offering learners a standardized approach to language proficiency without rigid alignment to any one country's language curriculum. This flexible structure makes the platform adaptable to the needs of children and adolescents in Albania, where educational challenges for migrant and vulnerable groups often include language barriers that hinder integration and social inclusion.

*The first phase* of the Akelius digital language learning initiative in Albania was implemented over a period between June 2020 and December 2021, as an e-learning response to the Covid-19 crisis. It was implemented in 14 public schools as an e-learning solution and at 2 reception centers for refugee children, addressing gaps in education access for marginalized students amid pandemic restrictions.

*The second phase* of the Akelius digital language learning initiative in Albania lasted from March 2022 to December 2024. It is implemented in the context of the new government Education Strategy (2021-2026), which priorities are (i) to empower teachers to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (including ICT skills), and (ii) to put languages at the heart of learning. Accordingly, the decision made by the government in 2021 to introduce English as a subject in primary school from grade 1 started to be implemented at school level and was initially supported by the UNICEF-Akelius digital language learning initiative in 14 public schools. At the last moment of the second phase, Akelius is expanded in 18 public schools (out of them one vocational high school in the capital of Albania).

This phase aligns with the specific objective A4 "Digitalization of the education" of Albania's Education Strategy (2021–2026), which emphasizes *the development of digital competence through the best use of technology information and communication for teaching and learning*. Through the Akelius initiative, the government's policy of introducing English as a compulsory subject from grade 1 is reinforced, demonstrating a coordinated approach to enhance Albania's educational standards.

A significant component of Akelius in Albania was the integration of the platform into the national teacher training framework, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to incorporate digital tools into their classrooms. In partnership with the ASCAP, an in-service training course was developed, specifically aimed at preparing teachers to use the Akelius platform effectively and to merge digital content with traditional teaching. Over 672 teachers, including English and ICT educators, have been trained in blended teaching techniques, gaining the skills to facilitate interactive, digital-supported learning experiences for their students. By enabling teachers to integrate Akelius content into their lesson plans, the initiative supports sustainable improvements in language education, fostering a consistent and engaging learning environment. Another contribution of this project is the establishment and development of "Akelius Teaching Clubs" within after-school programs. These clubs have been set up at "Demir Gashi" (Dibër) and "Androkli Kostallari" (Shkozë – Tiranë), leveraging the Akelius teaching cabinet infrastructure and involving new teachers (students from the English Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages) to enhance their teaching practices through the Akelius platform with after-school program students. The initiative also fosters student engagement through peer-led support, creating a collaborative and interactive learning environment.

The program also focuses on vulnerable groups, including Afghan refugee children currently residing in Albania, with 131 Afghan students in Shëngjin benefiting from the language resources provided by Akelius. Additionally, the platform reaches children from the Roma community and those with special educational needs, illustrating the initiative's commitment to inclusive education. By offering digital resources that are accessible online or

offline, Akelius addresses connectivity challenges, ensuring that students in remote or underserved areas can participate in language learning activities. This flexibility allows Akelius to function in various educational settings across the country, extending beyond city centers to reach children in suburban and rural communities.

Through its multifaceted approach, including partnerships with local education authorities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and international donors, the Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative has established itself as an integral part of Albania's education landscape. Its alignment with national priorities and its capacity to adapt to the diverse needs of Albanian students underscore Akelius's role in providing equitable educational access, fostering digital literacy, and supporting the social integration of marginalized communities.

This Report provides a comprehensive overview of the Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative, detailing its implementation phases, integration into Albania's education system, and the partnerships that have ensured its sustainability. The following sections will explore the key achievements and challenges encountered during the program, focusing on teacher training, program reach, and the impact on marginalized groups. We will also discuss the technological infrastructure established to support the initiative and the strategic national and community partnerships that have played a crucial role in its success. The Report concludes with an analysis of the lessons learned and recommendations for scaling and sustaining the initiative in the future, aiming to contribute to a more inclusive and accessible educational landscape in Albania.

## II. The Akelius digital learning initiative in Albania

The **implementation and context of the Akelius initiative in Albania** reflect a well-coordinated effort to use digital technology to enhance language learning, especially for marginalized groups. Here are the main elements that characterize this aspect in Albania:

- 1. National teacher training integration:** One of the standout components of the initiative in Albania has been the integration of Akelius into the country's teacher training framework. The initiative partnered with the ASCAP, which developed an in-service training course aimed at preparing teachers to use digital learning tools effectively. This course not only familiarizes educators with the Akelius digital platform but also enhances their digital pedagogical skills, positioning teachers to integrate Akelius content seamlessly into their classroom routines. Teachers in Albania are not only trained in the use of the application but also supported in adapting it to fit curriculum requirements. By helping teachers blend Akelius content with their lesson plans, the initiative supports more coherent and sustainable integration, enhancing both teachers' confidence and students' engagement with digital learning. A total of **672 teachers** (English teacher and ICT) were trained in using the Akelius application and in blended teaching techniques.
- 2. Focus on vulnerable groups:** In Albania, Akelius also targets vulnerable groups, including refugee and migrant children, alongside other students in mainstream classes. The initiative aligns with Albania's education policy priorities of inclusive and equitable access to quality education. This focus helps address language barriers that refugee and migrant students often face, thereby facilitating their integration into the formal education system. The Akelius platform is currently used by **3,136 users<sup>1</sup>**, of which 1,614 boys and 1,522 girls, in both non-formal learning centres and formal primary and secondary schools. **131 Afghan children<sup>2</sup>** currently living in Shëngjin are attending the Akelius language program at "At Zef Pllumi" school.
- 3. Flexible use across educational contexts:** The Akelius platform is used in both formal and non-formal educational settings, offering a flexible learning solution that adapts to various classroom environments. This dual approach supports diverse learning contexts, enabling its implementation in regular school programs and supplementary educational centers, which often serve marginalized children. This flexibility allows the application to reach children who may not always have consistent access to formal schooling. Currently, **Akelius platform is being used in 17 public schools and 1 vocational high school in the capital of Albania**. Another aspect that is evident is the *wide geographical extent of Akelius beyond city centres* in one of third of Akelius schools.

Within the context of formal education, the program integrates children in mainstream classes while also addressing the needs of children with disabilities. Non-formal education is another crucial component, targeting learners outside the traditional schooling framework. Additionally, the initiative extends its efforts to refugees and migrant children, reflecting a commitment to support vulnerable populations in emergency contexts. This multi-faceted approach demonstrates the initiative's alignment with inclusive education principles, aiming to provide tailored educational opportunities for diverse groups of children, irrespective of their circumstances.

- 4. Collaboration with local education authorities:** The implementation process in Albania also involves close collaboration with local education authorities. This partnership helps ensure that the Akelius initiative is aligned with national education standards and policies, further facilitating its integration into existing educational frameworks. Local authorities play a critical role in promoting the initiative within schools and encouraging buy-in from school administrators, teachers, and the community. *The training module of the course has been accredited for 4 years (20.05.2022 – 20.05.2026) with the theme "Combined Learning in Foreign Language Subject through Akelius Platform"*, through Decision No. 127 of the Accreditation programmes/modules Commission of ASCAP in Albania. The module is completed in 36 hours and has 2 credits (while in Albania one teacher must be trained and receive at least one credit per year). Also, during

<sup>1</sup> Data of September 2024

<sup>2</sup> Data of September 2024

the implementation of Akelius in Albania, *a closely collaboration is made with the Faculty of Foreign Languages in Tirana, Elbasan and Durres* to promote the realization of practices by students in pilot schools, which currently have Akelius digital classes in use.

The Observatory has been instrumental in the successful implementation of the Akelius project in Albania, playing a multifaceted role across planning, stakeholder engagement, execution, monitoring, and adaptation phases.

In the **planning phase**, the Observatory worked closely with UNICEF to ensure that the project aligned with Albania's Education Strategy 2021–2026. This collaboration was critical in setting clear objectives and ensuring the initiative addressed national education priorities effectively. By integrating the project's goals with strategic government policies, the Observatory helped lay a solid foundation for the program's success.

**Stakeholder engagement** was another key area where the Observatory excelled. It facilitated collaboration among schools, government bodies, and international partners, creating a broad and inclusive network of support. This engagement ensured that the initiative reached diverse groups, including marginalized and vulnerable populations, while fostering ownership and commitment among local stakeholders.

During the **execution phase**, the Observatory managed the logistical aspects of the project, including the distribution of digital resources and the setup of digital language labs in schools. Alongside these efforts, the Observatory provided continuous support to teachers, helping them integrate the Akelius platform into their classrooms through training and mentoring. These activities ensured the seamless rollout of the initiative and empowered educators to utilize the technology effectively.

**Monitoring** played a critical role in assessing the project's impact and ensuring its objectives were met. The Observatory conducted field visits to schools and developed comprehensive reports to evaluate the initiative's effectiveness. This monitoring process provided valuable insights into student engagement, teacher experiences, and the overall functionality of the Akelius platform.

Finally, the Observatory demonstrated adaptability by **integrating feedback from monitoring activities** to refine teaching approaches. This iterative process allowed for improvements in the program and supported its expansion to new schools across the country. By addressing challenges and implementing lessons learned, the Observatory ensured the sustainability and scalability of the Akelius initiative.

Through its comprehensive and strategic involvement, the Observatory has been pivotal in making the Akelius project a model for successful educational innovation in Albania.

## 2.1 Flowchart of Processes for Implementing the Akelius Initiative in Albania

The implementation of the Akelius Initiative in Albania follows a structured process to ensure effective delivery and sustainability. The framework is divided into five core stages: (1) planning, (2) stakeholder engagement, (3) execution, (4) monitoring, and (5) adaptation and expansion. Each stage is carefully designed to build on the previous one, creating a seamless and impactful implementation process.

**The planning stage** lays the foundation for the initiative. It begins with robust partners collaboration involving UNICEF, the Observatory, and the MoES. Together, these stakeholders conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the digital infrastructure requirements and target beneficiary groups. This initial phase is critical in aligning goals and establishing a shared vision for the project's success.

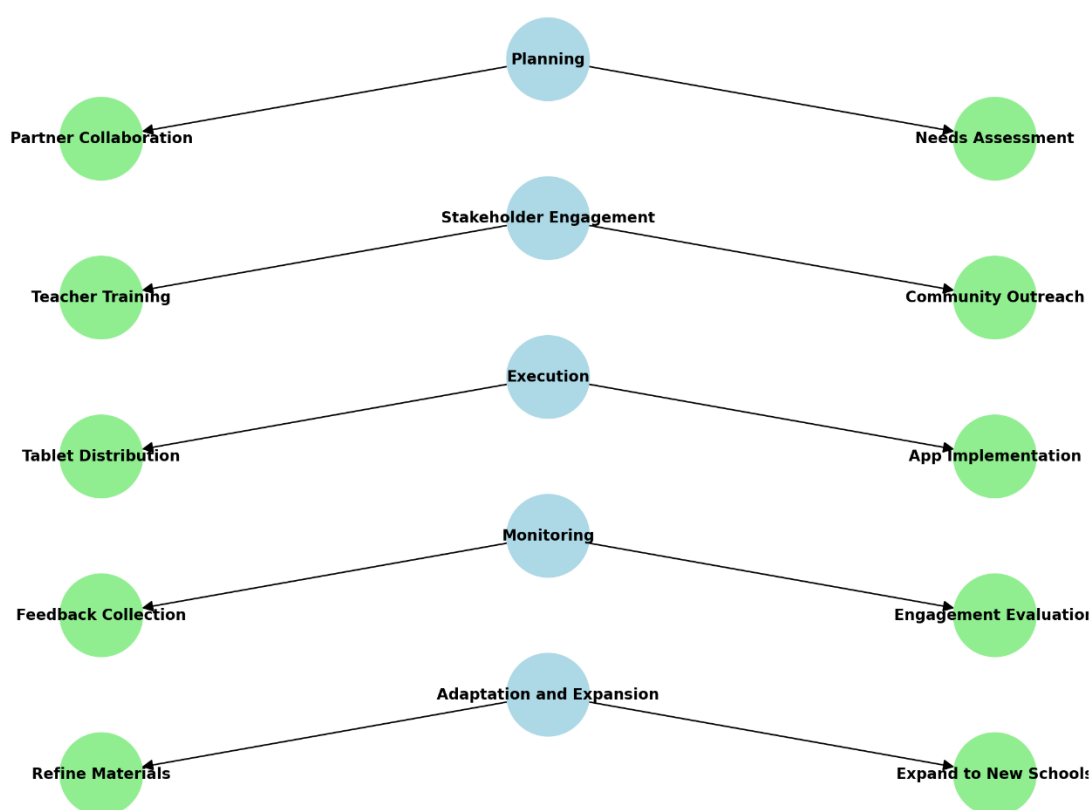
**Stakeholder engagement** follows, focusing on building capacity and fostering inclusivity. Training sessions are conducted for teachers and school directors to familiarize them with the Akelius platform and its teaching methodologies. Parallely, community outreach efforts aim to integrate marginalized groups, such as refugee children and those from vulnerable communities, into the educational ecosystem. This stage ensures that all

stakeholders are adequately prepared and invested in the program.

The **execution** phase operationalizes the initiative through the distribution of interactive white boards, tablets safety and charging stations finalized with the establishment of digital language labs in selected schools. The Akelius app is implemented in classrooms, with lesson planning and usage guidelines tailored to meet the students' and teachers' needs. This phase marks the transition from preparation to active learning, bringing the digital tools and content into use.

**Monitoring** plays a vital role in assessing the program's effectiveness. Regular feedback is collected from teachers and students to understand their experiences and challenges. Additionally, the evaluation of student engagement and learning outcomes provides valuable insights into the initiative's impact, guiding improvements and adjustments as needed.

The final stage, **adaptation and expansion**, focuses on refining and scaling the program. Training materials are updated based on feedback to address identified gaps and enhance learning experiences. The initiative is expanded to include new schools, integrating Akelius content into formal curricula for greater reach and sustainability. This stage ensures that the initiative remains dynamic and responsive to the evolving educational landscape.



**Figure 1:** Flowchart of Processes for Implementing the Akelius Initiative in Albania

## 2.2 The Akelius digital application

The digital application currently comprises 11 digital language courses: Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swedish. 11 Courses are organized by levels, from 200 to 4,000 words, following the CEFR but not matching a specific country curriculum for language learning. New content and features are regularly added to the application based on a co-creation process between Akelius and UNICEF that invites teachers and implementing partners to make suggestions for improvement.

The language courses offer multimedia interactive content structured around thematic chapters comprising a mix of interactive lessons focusing on drills and vocabulary practice, games, songs, grammar and quizzes. The application uses a gamified approach where learners gain virtual coins that can be traded in exchange for decorative accessories for their digital avatar.

The application is free to use, contains no advertising, requires no prior user information to access and fully complies with the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements, including when learners create accounts and log in to track their progress. The sign-up and login functions for the application do not require any personal information. Content can be accessed online – on a computer via a web browser or on mobile technologies such as tablets and mobile phones through an application – or offline, through the application when content is pre-downloaded or channeled through an offline classroom server.

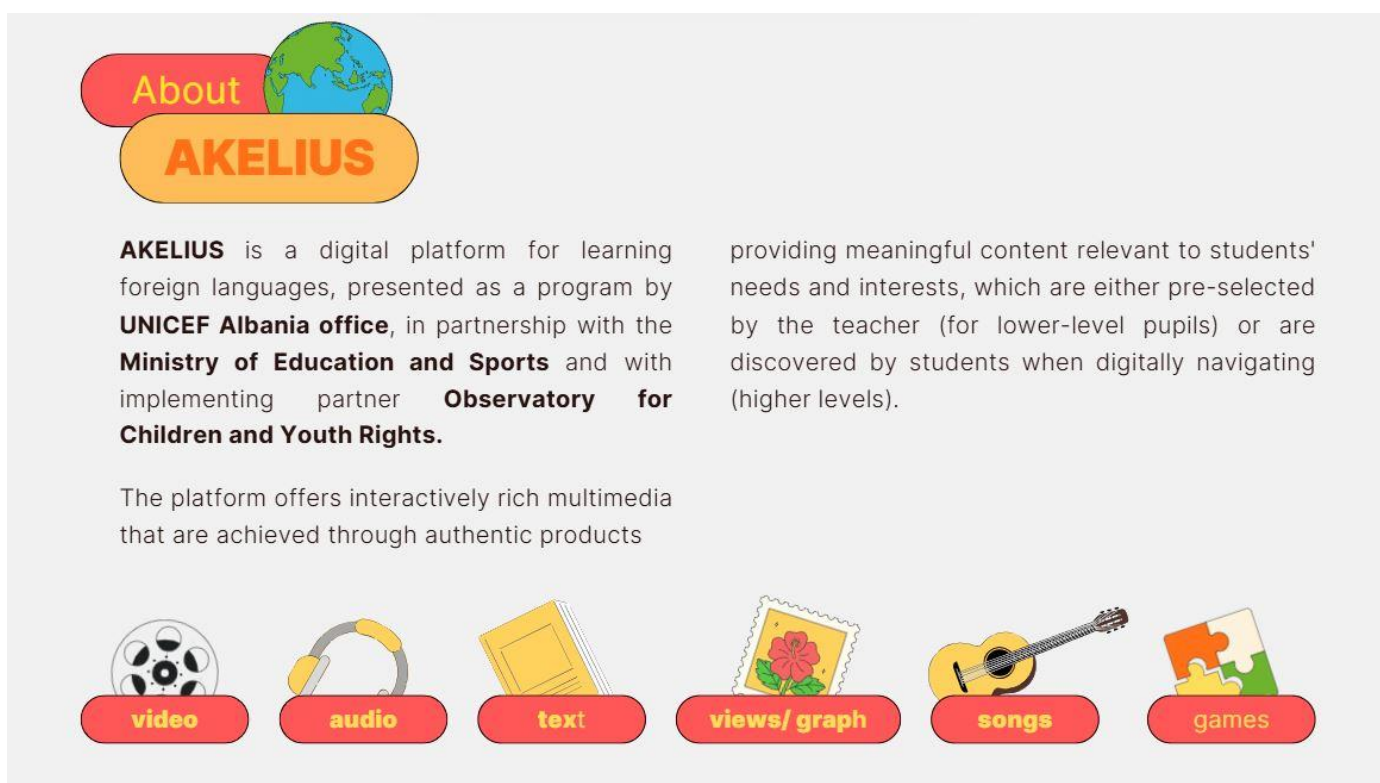


Figure 2: Akelius example of language chapter content

## 2.3 The educational settings and target groups of Akelius

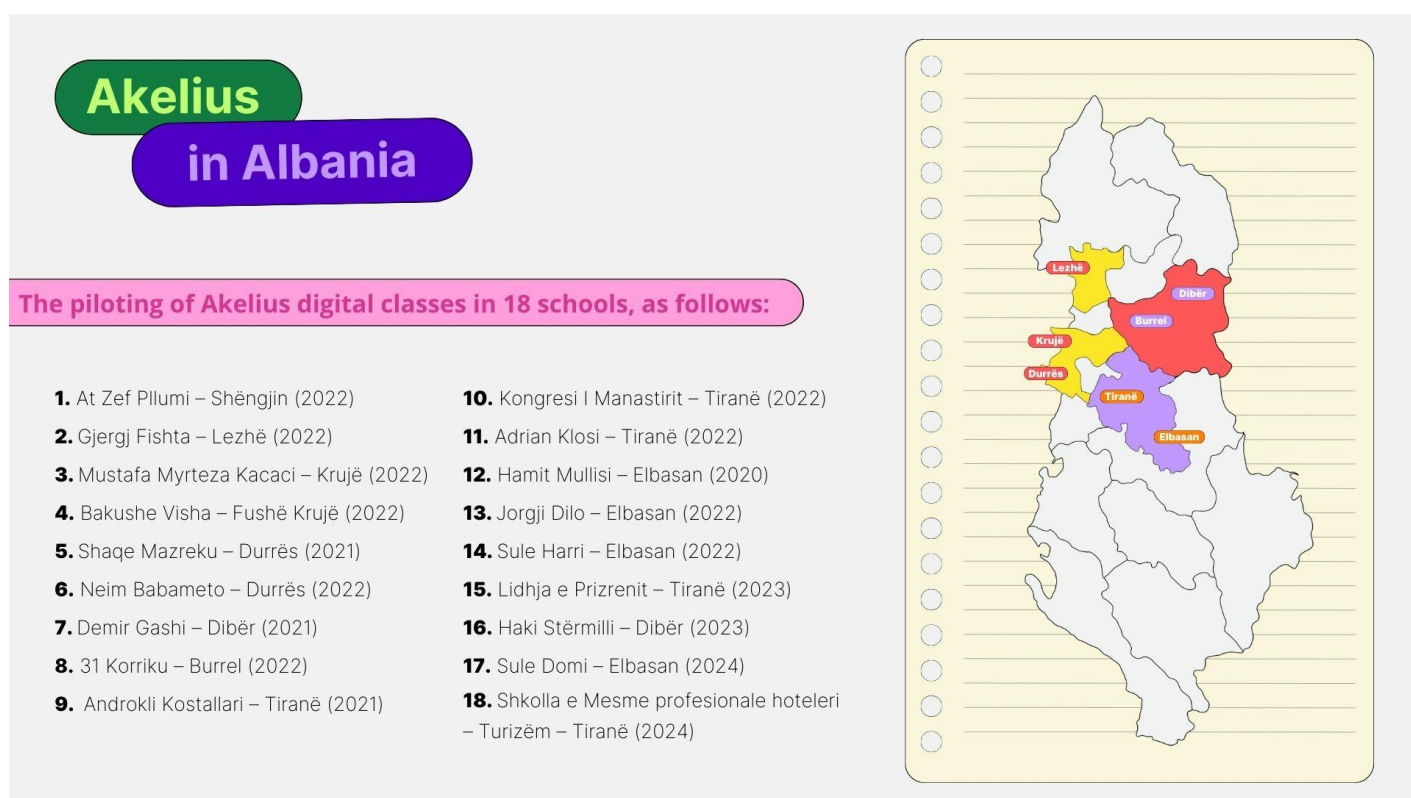
The **educational settings and target groups** for the Akelius initiative in Albania reflect a commitment to inclusivity and adaptability, aiming to address the specific needs of diverse student populations. Here's a detailed exploration of these elements:

### 2.3.1 Educational Settings

#### 1. Formal education:

- a. **Integration in schools:** The Akelius platform has been implemented in various formal education settings, including primary and secondary schools across Albania. These schools are integral to the national education system and cater to a wide range of students, from those in mainstream classes to those who require additional language support. Currently, **Akelius platform is being used in 17 public schools and 1 vocational high school in the capital of Albania**. What is noted is the **wide geographical extent of Akelius beyond the city centres**, namely in 7 schools as below:

- Haki Stërmilli – Melan Village, Dibra
- Sul Domi - Suburban area, Elbasan
- At Zef Pllumi – Small town, Shëngjini
- Kongresi i Manastirit - Suburban area, Tirana
- Ardian Klosi – Suburban area, Bregu i Lumit, Tirana
- Androkli Kostallari - Suburban area, Shkozë, Tirana
- Neim Babameto - Spitalë, Durrës



**Figure 3:** Formal and Non formal Education Settings of Akelius implementation in Albania

The **Accelerating Quality Initiative (AQI)** is a focused effort within the Akelius Digital Language Learning Project that aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of digital language education in selected schools. In Albania, AQI represents an intensified phase of the Akelius initiative, with additional resources and targeted strategies to improve educational outcomes and support the integration of technology in language learning.

#### **Key Aspects of AQI in Albania:**

- **Targeted school support:** AQI provides additional funding and resources to a small number of schools (4 AQI schools in Albania) to serve as model sites for implementing the highest standards of digital language learning. These schools, located in cities like Tirana (Lidhja e Prizrenit), Dibra (Demir Gashi), Durrës (Shaqe Mazreku), and Elbasan (Hamit Mullisi), are equipped with specialized digital labs, smart boards, and tablets for students to access the Akelius language learning app.
- **Enhanced teacher training and mentoring:** Teachers in AQI schools have received intensive training, coaching, and mentoring to improve their skills in blended teaching—

combining digital and traditional methods. Mentoring extends to school administrators to support overall digital integration and effective classroom management.

- **Improving classroom practices:** AQI emphasizes blended learning techniques, where teachers use both the Akelius digital app and traditional teaching tools, creating an interactive learning environment. Teachers are trained to alternate between guided and independent student activities, using tools like smart boards and tablets, which enhances student engagement.
- **Resource provision:** AQI schools have benefited from additional materials, such as the Akelius 400-word English Book, and support for classroom technology needs. This focused investment ensures that resources are sufficient to foster high-quality language learning and provide each student with access to digital tools.
- **Modelling success for broader expansion:** The AQI schools serve as models of successful implementation, demonstrating the benefits and best practices of digital language learning. The insights gained from these schools, help inform the potential for scaling up the program to other schools and contribute to a sustainable digital learning framework in Albania.

**b. Language labs:** In some schools, dedicated language labs have been established, facilitating an environment where students can use the Akelius application more intensively. These labs serve as focused spaces for language acquisition, allowing teachers to manage resources more effectively and minimize distractions during lessons. Currently, **8 schools have dedicated labs for Akelius:**

- Androkli Kostallari, Tiranë
- Lidhja e Prizrenit, Tiranë
- Shaqe Mazreku, Durrës
- Neim Babameto, Durrës
- Demir Gashi, Dibër
- Hamit Mullisi, Elbasan
- Sul Domi, Elbasan
- Jorgji Dilo, Elbasan

Also, in 2 (two) reception centers for refugees children in Tirana were set up a language lab, respectively:

- RMSA
- Babrru center

## 2. Non-formal education:

**a. Supplementary learning centers:** The Akelius initiative is also active in non-formal educational contexts, such as learning centers that provide additional support for students outside the traditional classroom setting, as it is a "Akelius Teaching Club". These centers often cater to marginalized children, including refugees and migrants, offering them a safe space to learn and practice language skills.

### 2.3.2 Target Groups

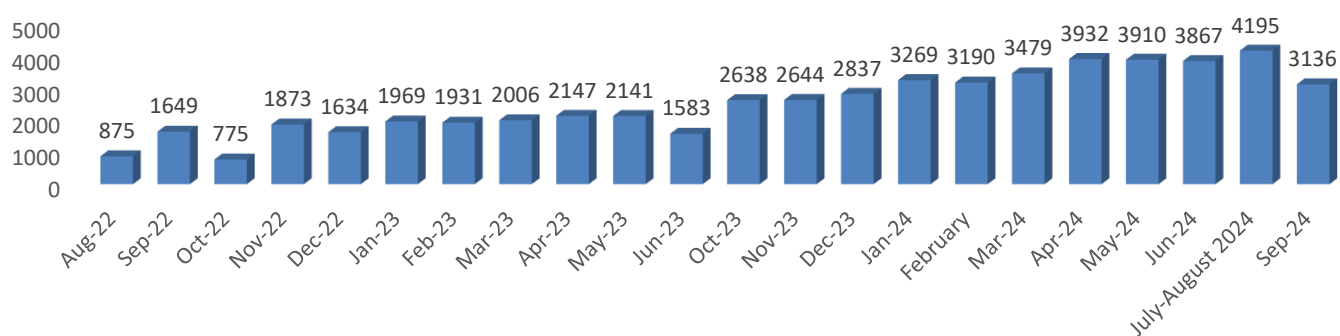
#### a. Refugee and migrant children:

- An important focus of the Akelius initiative is on refugee and migrant children who often face significant barriers to education, including language difficulties and social integration challenges. The digital application provides these students with an interactive and engaging way to learn the language of instruction, which is crucial for their academic

success and social integration. Currently, **131 Afghan children** currently living in Shëngjin are attending the Akelius language program at "At Zef Pllumi" school.

#### b. Children in mainstream classes:

- The initiative also targets children in mainstream classrooms who may need additional language support. This includes students from different linguistic backgrounds or those who struggle with second-language acquisition. By offering resources that cater to various proficiency levels, Akelius helps ensure that all students can participate fully in their education. The AKELIUS platform is currently used by **3,136 users**, of which 1,614 boys and 1,522 girls, in both non-formal learning centres and formal primary and secondary schools. The Observatory has tracked monthly the number of children and adolescents using Akelius language platform. The current number of Akelius users, separated into months, is reflected at Graph no.1.



**Graph 1:** The current number of Akelius users in Albania, separated by month

#### c. Children with disabilities:

- Efforts were made to include children with disabilities in the initiative. The Akelius application's flexible and interactive format allows for differentiated instruction, making it accessible to learners with diverse needs. This commitment to inclusivity aligns with broader educational policies aimed at providing equitable access to quality education for all children. The cases of children with disabilities using the Akelius platform have served as success models for many other children. Many of these cases have turned into [inspiring success stories](#), which have been shared and promoted in other schools.

#### d. Children from Roma community:

- In Albania, one of the strong points of the Akelius platform is the stimulation** for Roma community students not to abandon school. The Akelius platform has assisted children of the Roma community in providing more access to interact effectively with technology.

#### e. Older youth and adolescents:

- In addition to younger learners, the Akelius initiative also supports older youth and adolescents who may require language skills for further education or employment

opportunities. By catering to a broader age range, the initiative promotes lifelong learning and equips students with essential language skills for their future. During the last year of program implementation, Akelius is introduced and expanded in 1 vocational high school in the capital of Albania (Hoteleri-Turizëm, Tirana).

## 2.4 The partnerships for sustainability of Akelius

**The partnerships for sustainability** aspect of the Akelius initiative in Albania plays a pivotal role in ensuring the long-term success and scalability of digital language learning in the country's education system. Here are the primary components of how these partnerships contribute to the sustainability of the initiative:

### 2.4.1 Strategic national partnerships

- a. **MoES collaboration:** The partnership with the MoES is foundational to the Akelius initiative in Albania. By working directly with the Ministry, the initiative aligns with Albania's national education priorities, particularly around inclusive and digital education. The Ministry's involvement ensures that the Akelius program is recognized within official educational frameworks, enhancing its reach and integration into school curricula. This support from the Ministry also facilitates policy alignment, which is essential for sustaining the initiative across educational institutions nationwide.
- b. **ASCAP:** Another crucial partnership for sustainability is with ASCAP. Through these partnerships, Akelius has been integrated into teacher training programs, ensuring that educators across the country are well-equipped to use digital learning tools effectively. ASCAP provides ongoing professional development, helping teachers adapt to evolving digital education needs and enabling the consistent use of the Akelius application in classrooms. This ensures that trained teachers can continue to implement the initiative's goals long after the initial program launch.
- c. **Faculties of Foreign Languages of Tirana, Elbasan and Durrës:** This collaboration focuses on integrating Akelius into the practical training of language students from these faculties, allowing them to gain hands-on experience in digital language instruction within pilot schools currently utilizing Akelius digital classes. By involving future educators in the use of educational technology for language acquisition, this partnership not only prepares them for modern pedagogical methods but also contributes to the program's broader goals of inclusive and technology-enhanced education. This collaboration helps to bridge academia with real-world application, fostering a generation of teachers equipped to address the needs of marginalized and diverse student populations in Albania.
- d. **The NAES** is a key pillar in Albania's vocational education and training (VET) system. Its mission is to cultivate a skilled and competitive workforce capable of driving the country's economic growth and development. In alignment with NAES's objectives on labor market linkages, which focus on strengthening the connection between VET programs and labor market demands to ensure the relevance of taught skills, the Akelius digital teaching platform serves as a valuable tool. It equips VET students with essential foreign language skills, enhancing their preparedness for roles in increasingly globalized industries.

### 2.4.2 Community-based partnerships

**Local NGOs and community organizations:** The Akelius initiative collaborates with community-based organizations that work closely with marginalized populations, including refugees and low-income families. These partnerships help identify children who can benefit most from language support and facilitate access to the Akelius application in both formal and non-formal educational settings. By engaging local NGOs, the initiative can reach communities that may not have regular access to the formal school system, thus broadening its impact and fostering community support for ongoing digital

learning initiatives.

### 2.4.3 International and donor partnerships

- a. **UNICEF and Akelius Foundation:** UNICEF and the Akelius Foundation are key partners in implementing and sustaining the initiative in Albania. UNICEF provides strategic guidance, to ensure that the initiative aligns with both national and global education standards. Through UNICEF's local presence and expertise, the initiative benefits from a strong support network for monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement. The Akelius Foundation's commitment to providing high-quality digital learning tools without cost to users strengthens the program's accessibility and sustainability, making it possible to expand the initiative to more schools and communities over time.

### 2.4.4 Technological partnerships

- a. **ICT support:** Recognizing that digital learning requires reliable technology infrastructure, the Akelius initiative in Albania has engaged with its experts and partners to support ICT infrastructure in schools. This collaboration ensures that students and teachers have the necessary technology resources to use the Akelius application effectively, supporting its integration and long-term use in schools. For each school's **unique scan codes** are assigned by streamlining digital learning and enhancing accessibility. Scan codes allow students quick access to the platform, minimizing classroom disruptions by reducing login troubleshooting and maximizing learning time. Furthermore, scan codes enable administrators to monitor platform usage across schools, providing valuable data on engagement levels and areas requiring additional support, allowing resources and training to be tailored to specific needs. Additionally, unique codes improve device accountability and security by enabling better tracking, helping to prevent misuse and unauthorized access while safeguarding data privacy.
- b. **Teacher and education technology (EdTech) communities:** The Akelius initiative has fostered a community of practice among teachers who use the platform. Virtual networks, such as the "[Akelius Teachers Albania](#)" group on Facebook, allow teachers to share insights, challenges, and best practices, creating a collaborative environment that supports both teacher engagement and the continued relevance of the Akelius application in classrooms. This network also serves as a feedback channel to EdTech developers, ensuring that the platform remains responsive to the needs of Albanian educators and students. Albania implemented the innovative microteaching method for its in-person local communities of practice (see Box 1) and supported larger peer learning workshops.

#### BOX 1

### Microteaching experiment in Albania

Every two months, teachers from four Akelius schools participate in coaching sessions organized by the teacher training partner in the Initiative based on the microteaching technique. Sessions comprise a series of 10-to-15-minute mini blended English lessons taught by teachers to a group of volunteer students and observed by other teachers. The objective is to provide opportunities for teachers to practice specific blended teaching and pedagogical integration skills. The teaching session is followed by a discussion between teachers and trainers, where the best practices and areas for improvement are identified. Teachers found these sessions useful and inspiring. Trainers have observed greater creativity and mastery of blended teaching skills among beneficiaries.

## 2.5 The integration of ICT in schools

**The integration of ICT** in Albanian schools through the Akelius initiative is a comprehensive process involving infrastructure enhancement, device management, connectivity solutions, and secure storage. By creating a structured environment for digital learning and addressing common challenges, the initiative builds the foundation for sustainable ICT use in Albanian education. Here's a detailed look at how ICT integration is facilitated and managed within Albanian schools through the Akelius initiative:

### 2.5.1 Leveraging existing infrastructure

- a. **ICT Hubs in Schools:** In collaboration with UNICEF and other donors, many schools in Albania have been equipped with dedicated ICT hubs. These hubs are specifically designed to support digital learning and serve as spaces where students can engage with the Akelius application. These hubs are often outfitted with tablets, computers, and other essential equipment, creating an environment optimized for focused digital language acquisition. By leveraging these existing infrastructure investments, the initiative maximizes resource use and ensures that students have consistent access to digital learning tools. **6 out of 18 project schools are tech hub schools.**
- b. **Language labs:** Some schools have set up dedicated language labs as part of their ICT integration efforts. These labs are equipped with devices and internet connectivity that allow students to use the Akelius application in a more controlled, focused environment. Language labs facilitate group learning sessions and help teachers manage resources efficiently, especially when devices are limited. Students attend sessions in these labs specifically for language practice, which helps improve engagement and outcomes. **8 schools have dedicated labs to Akelius.**

#### QUOTE

All students are aware of the schedule of the language lab, which they remind their teacher of and are excited about.

- *Adelina, English Teacher, Shaqe Mazreku school, Durrës*

### 2.5.2 Devices management and accessibility

- a. **Centralized devices management:** Schools participating in the Akelius initiative follow standardized protocols for managing ICT equipment, ensuring that devices are securely stored, maintained, and made accessible to students as needed. This includes systems for charging and updating devices, as well as organizing schedules for device use. Schools often appoint a designated staff member or ICT coordinator to oversee device management, reducing the risk of technical disruptions and ensuring that devices are ready for student use during lessons.
- b. **Classroom-level use of technology:** The Akelius initiative encourages teachers to integrate available technology, such as projectors or smart boards, alongside tablets in the classroom. This approach facilitates group learning when individual devices are limited, allowing teachers to project the application's interactive content for the entire class to engage with collectively. By combining individual and group learning, the initiative accommodates schools with varying levels of ICT resources while still enabling meaningful access to the Akelius platform.

### 2.5.3 Addressing Connectivity Challenges

- a. **Young ICT students assisting teachers at Akelius school:** In Albania, proficient young ICT students assist teachers with managing tablets, including software downloads and updates.
- b. **Offline functionality:** In educational centres where good connectivity is available, online use remains the preferred option for teachers, as it reduces the time needed for pre-downloading the content for offline use. Evidence from the Initiative in Albania, shows the link between good Internet and enhanced usage of the Akelius application, to the benefit of learners. Recognizing that some schools may lack consistent internet access, the Akelius platform supports offline functionality, allowing students to access pre-downloaded content. This feature ensures that digital learning can continue uninterrupted, providing flexibility for schools in regions with limited connectivity. Offline access also reduces dependence on constant internet availability, making it easier for teachers and students to integrate ICT into their learning routines without technical setbacks.

## 2.6 Establishing Secure and Supportive Digital Environments

- a. **Equipment security and storage:** Schools have implemented secure storage solutions for ICT equipment, including lockable cabinets and secure charging stations, to protect devices from theft or damage. This secure storage is especially important for tablets and other portable devices used in the Akelius initiative.
- b. **Digital learning routines:** The initiative emphasizes the establishment of routines around digital learning. Teachers and school administrators are encouraged to incorporate device use into regular classroom schedules, creating a structured approach to ICT integration. These routines help students become accustomed to using digital tools as part of their learning experience, enhancing their comfort and familiarity with technology over time. By embedding ICT use into daily activities, the initiative supports sustainable digital integration that benefits students beyond the duration of the project.



### III. Programme effectiveness

#### 3.1 Learning outcomes

Evidence ensured from interviews ([videos of Akelius use in various schools of Albania](#)) and human stories, demonstrated that students had positive experiences using the platform across the various types of classes. During interviews, students highlighted their achievements in vocabulary acquisition, reading and digital skills. These positive changes were noted in English classes where the digital learning application was used.

#### QUOTE

Akelius Laboratory in our school is equipped with smartboard, tablets and internet line. This allows us to work with interactive grammar exercises, listen to exercises with audio, read texts and practice games. We've learned something interesting as a tablet's connection to the smartboards. I'll show you the steps below: 1. Press InstaShare 2. And then this link. Press Device board and Start now. Open the Akelius platform at level A1, lesson 12, the games section and start the game "Bingo". To get the connection, we go back to the InstaShare 2 icon and press Disconnect and finally OK.

- *Hana (student), Lidhja e Prizrenit school, Tirana*

Akelius had an especially large impact on children's ability to speak and pronounce words. The platform has a strong focus on audio content, speech, songs and exercises, which encourage students to practice speaking words out loud. These features offer students considerable support with improving pronunciation, which was observed for English language.

#### QUOTE

Students learn new vocabulary by using tablets, games, quizzes and songs. For teachers it is easier to explain unfamiliar concepts and words through the Akelius platform.

- *Flora, English Teacher, Lidhja e Prizrenit school, Tirana*

Improvements in reading, comprehension and writing were also reported. While students do not practice handwriting within the platform, it contains exercises where jumbled letters need to be placed to make a word. Frequently, teachers would instruct students to pair these exercises with writing down new words in a notebook, transitioning understanding from the use of the digital learning application into real world use.

## QUOTE

Combining various exercises, which take students through multiple different methods to repeat, write and spell a word, helped them to memorize new vocabulary quickly.

- *Nevila, English Teacher, Lidhja e Prizrenit school, Tirana*

Using the digital learning platform is associated with greater gains in reading and listening compared with other competencies.

## QUOTE

Students have been incredibly willing and very much interested in using the platform, by improving their listening skills. Based on this fact and since they had an immense desire to use this classroom and Akelius platform, we were obliged to create a timetable regarding the frequency of use of Akelius classroom.

- *Adelina, English Teacher, Shaqe Mazreku school, Durrës*

### 3.2 Pathways to learning – motivation, confidence and autonomy in learning

Qualitative evidence from the direct interviews with teachers and students indicates that increased motivation, confidence and autonomy in learning are potential factors that drive improvements in language learning. The following section dives into improvements in learning practices associated with the use of the digital learning application.

## QUOTE

The use of the digital learning platform in classes improved students' autonomy and self-reliance to learn, increased their motivation to learn and improved their confidence.

- *Adelina, English Teacher, Shaqe Mazreku school, Durrës*

Students' great enthusiasm and engagement is observed by teachers across different implementation settings.

Utilizing the digital learning platform on tablets was a new learning experience for students, who had previously only used the smartboard as a digital device in a classroom. The digital learning application's gamified content helped increase students' engagement and enabled them to acquire new knowledge by having fun.

### 3.3 Newly arrived students

Reports from teachers show that the digital learning application was especially useful for newly arrived students. Several teachers reported that, in such challenging situations, the digital learning application was particularly effective. First, the course is user-friendly and does not require advanced digital skills, so the students can start using it immediately and proceed with learning in an autonomous way. Second, the students do not need support with the translation, as the content has a visual and audio focus. Third, the course helps students and teachers by providing a productive and autonomous activity that a newly arrived student can do while he or she is waiting for a teacher, who may be busy helping other students. Teachers reported that this positively affects students' self-esteem and confidence and their communication with teachers and peers. This gain in confidence is especially important for newly arrived students.

#### QUOTE

S. is a wonderful Afghan student known for her kindness and willingness to help new classmates. She actively participates in school activities, particularly in painting competitions, showcasing her talent as a great painter. Alongside her passion for art, S. is also dedicated to her English studies, and since joining Akelius, she has made impressive strides. Her intonation and pronunciation have improved remarkably, reflecting her commitment to learning.

- *Arta, English Teacher, At Zef Pllumi school, Shëngjin*

### 3.4 Children with disabilities

Teachers reported that children with disabilities who used the digital learning application experienced positive, tangible learning and non-learning outcomes. Teachers observed that the application's visual, clear, down-to-earth tasks and repetitions were particularly useful for children with disabilities. Teachers reported improvements in students' vocabulary acquisition, writing, speaking and pronunciation as well as increased enthusiasm and motivation to learn. Students with disabilities became more autonomous, calm and confident when using the digital learning application. In English classes, teachers noted that, by working on the same device as other students, students with disabilities felt more included in the class.

## QUOTE

Julken has special needs and lives with his parents and two brothers, one older and one younger than him. He is showing steady improvement and often demonstrates abilities with his classmates. His face lights up with joy whenever he successfully completes a certain level or wins a game, and he eagerly shares these achievements with his friends and teacher. Thanks to Akelius, he feels motivated and included, gaining confidence that he, too, can succeed. He continues to learn new words, pronounce them accurately, and use them in conversations with his friends and teachers.

- *Marjana, English Teacher, Demir Gashi school, Dibra*

### 3.5 Children from Roma community

In Albania, the Akelius platform serves to different vulnerable communities, such as: Afghan children temporarily located in Shëngjin, Roma community children in Elbasan, children with disabilities in various Akelius schools. One of the strong points of the Akelius platform in Albania is the stimulation for Roma community students not to abandon school.

## QUOTE

The Akelius platform has assisted children of the Roma community in providing more access to interact effectively with technology.

Second, students can learn English freely and mostly independently.

Children memorize, repeat and reinforce simple words and structures in practical dialogue situations, but also with play, songs and exercises.

- *Fatjona, English Teacher, Hamit Mullisi school, Elbasan*

## IV. Conclusion and recommendations

The Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative in Albania has proven to be a transformative tool in enhancing language learning among marginalized students, including refugees, migrants, and underserved groups. With the support of UNICEF, the Akelius Foundation, and collaboration with the MoES, this initiative has effectively integrated digital learning within the Albanian educational framework, reaching a diverse array of students across urban, suburban, and rural settings. The platform's gamified, multilingual structure has significantly contributed to student engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension, facilitating a more inclusive educational experience. Furthermore, the training provided to over 672 educators has enabled the seamless blending of digital resources with traditional teaching methods, fostering a sustainable, technology-driven approach to language education in the country. While the program has yielded positive outcomes, challenges remain, notably regarding internet connectivity, device availability, and the need to expand support for additional vulnerable groups.

### 4.1 Recommendations for school-level actions

By implementing the school-level actions, schools can optimize the use of the Akelius platform, enhance digital learning outcomes, and foster a sustainable, supportive environment for language acquisition that benefits both students and educators. Expanding the program to high schools, particularly those with vocational programs, will empower a broader segment of youth with vital language skills, equipping them for a competitive and globalized workforce.

- a. **Strengthen ICT infrastructure in schools:** Schools participating in the Akelius initiative should prioritize the development of robust ICT infrastructure to facilitate uninterrupted digital learning. This includes securing additional devices such as tablets and computers, establishing reliable internet connections, and creating dedicated digital learning hubs or ICT labs. These spaces would enable focused, resource-supported learning, allowing students to use the Akelius platform consistently and effectively. Schools should also consider introducing a designated ICT coordinator responsible for device management, connectivity troubleshooting, and overall technical support to ensure seamless integration of digital tools into daily routines.
- b. **Establish clear protocols for managing technology across classrooms with distinct rules and responsibilities.** The topics these protocols should cover include:
  1. Scheduling when different classes will use the technology.
  2. The process for collecting devices before a class (including both tablets and headphones).
  3. Returning, securely storing and charging tablets after a class.
  4. Scheduling periodic reviews of the technology to assess for damage, maintenance and replacement, providing special attention to headphones which are prone to damage with sustained use.
  5. Conducting software updates and ensuring that the content required for classes is downloaded (for use offline).
- c. **Expand offline access capabilities:** For schools in areas with limited or intermittent internet connectivity, investing in offline capabilities is crucial. Schools can consider pre-loaded devices with offline versions of the Akelius content or setting up local servers that allow students to access the platform without needing continuous internet access. This measure would help prevent interruptions in learning and ensure that all students, regardless of location, can benefit from the platform's resources. Regular updates and maintenance of these offline resources will also be essential to keep the content aligned with the most recent program developments.
- d. **Increase teacher training and continuous support:** Schools should continue to provide teachers with

advanced, ongoing training on the use of Akelius and other digital tools. This training should cover not only platform functionalities but also effective digital pedagogical techniques and blended learning strategies that can enhance classroom interactions. To support teachers in adapting these digital resources to varying classroom dynamics, schools could establish a mentorship system where more experienced Akelius users can support newer educators. Additionally, regular workshops or refresher courses will help teachers stay updated on the platform's features and strengthen their confidence in utilizing these tools.

- e. **Incorporation of language labs for enhanced focused learning:** Where possible, schools could set up dedicated language labs equipped with devices specifically for language acquisition. These labs would serve as focused environments where students can engage deeply with the Akelius platform, practicing language skills without distractions. Teachers can use these labs to conduct group language activities, vocabulary exercises, and pronunciation practice, ensuring that students receive targeted support. By centralizing language learning in a designated space, schools can improve resource management and foster an immersive, language-rich environment.
- f. **Fostering student engagement through peer-led support:** Schools can encourage student engagement and ownership by establishing peer-led support groups, where more digitally proficient students assist their peers with using the platform. This approach promotes collaboration, reduces teacher load in managing technical issues, and boosts confidence among students who may initially struggle with digital tools.
- g. **Expand Akelius platform to high school level based on existing model:** Building on the success at Hoteleri-Turizëm, a vocational high school in Tirana, it is recommended to extend the Akelius program to other high schools across Albania. This expansion would address specific language needs for vocational students, particularly in sectors like hospitality and tourism. Schools can replicate elements from Hospitality and Tourism by customizing language content to include industry-specific vocabulary, which would support students' professional and academic development. Establishing language labs in high schools can provide focused environments for digital language practice, while teachers could receive additional training on blended and vocational-focused digital pedagogy. Collaboration with local industry partners, such as those in tourism, would further enhance the program's relevance, preparing students for real-world applications. Monitoring systems should also be established to evaluate the impact on students' vocational language skills, thereby contributing to career readiness and employability.
- h. **Integration of continuous monitoring and mentoring mechanisms:** To track the program's progress at the school level, schools should implement regular monitoring and mentoring mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of Akelius in improving language skills. Schools can establish monthly reviews of students' language progress, collecting feedback from both students and teachers on learning outcomes and platform usability. This data-driven approach would allow schools to adjust implementation practices as needed and ensure that the platform is meeting educational goals. Additionally, insights gained from monitoring can be shared with regional education authorities to support broader program enhancements.

## 4.2 Recommendations for classroom-level actions

By adopting the classroom-level recommendation actions, teachers can optimize the use of the Akelius platform, foster active student engagement, and ensure that digital language learning is integrated seamlessly within classroom routines. This approach not only supports individual student needs but also creates a collaborative, goal-oriented environment that enhances language acquisition for all students.

- a. **Integration of blended learning strategies:** Teachers should incorporate blended learning techniques that combine digital and traditional instruction, enhancing the learning experience and catering to diverse student needs. By alternating between Akelius digital activities and in-person language exercises, such as vocabulary games, group discussions, and role-playing, teachers can engage students in an interactive environment that reinforces language skills. Using smart boards or projectors

to display Akelius content during group activities can facilitate collaborative learning and ensure that students without personal devices still benefit from digital resources.

- b. Developing routine-based access to digital learning:** Establishing consistent routines for accessing the Akelius platform helps students develop a sense of structure around digital learning. Teachers should assign specific days and times for using the platform, allowing students to know when to expect digital lessons and reducing disruptions. This routine also encourages students to view digital learning as an integrated part of their education rather than an occasional activity, fostering continuity and reinforcing learning outcomes over time.
- c. Promote goal setting and tracking progress:** Teachers can motivate students by encouraging them to set personal learning goals related to language acquisition, such as mastering a set number of new words or completing specific chapters within the Akelius platform. Providing tools for students to track their progress—like individual progress sheets or visual classroom charts—can enhance students' sense of accomplishment. Recognizing achievements, whether small milestones or significant progress, also builds motivation and reinforces students' commitment to their language learning journey.
- d. Providing differentiated learning activities:** Given the range of language proficiencies and learning paces within a classroom, teachers should tailor digital activities on Akelius to meet individual needs. For students who need extra support, teachers can assign foundational or beginner-level exercises, while more advanced learners can be given challenging vocabulary or comprehension tasks. This approach ensures that all students are engaged at an appropriate level, maximizing the platform's effectiveness in catering to diverse language skills within the same classroom.
- e. Integrating collaborative and peer-led exercises:** Collaboration in language learning encourages students to practice communication and apply new vocabulary in real-world contexts. Teachers can assign group activities on the platform, where students collaborate to complete exercises, quizzes, or games, sharing knowledge and supporting each other's learning. Additionally, setting up peer-led sessions, where advanced students mentor peers who may struggle with certain concepts, reinforces understanding for both mentors and learners. Peer interaction also builds classroom community and fosters a supportive, inclusive environment.
- f. Incorporating real-life contexts and role-playing:** Teachers can enhance engagement by connecting Akelius content to real-life scenarios relevant to students' interests or future aspirations. For example, in a lesson focused on vocabulary, teachers might simulate a real-world situation such as shopping, ordering food, or traveling, encouraging students to use the platform's content in these simulated interactions. Role-playing and scenario-based exercises deepen comprehension and help students understand the practical applications of their language skills, making learning more relevant and enjoyable.
- g. Establishing positive reinforcement and feedback mechanisms:** Regular feedback on students' progress is essential for continuous improvement. Teachers should observe students' interactions with the platform and provide constructive feedback, emphasizing both achievements and areas for growth. Positive reinforcement, such as praise or small incentives (e.g., stickers, badges, or classroom recognition), encourages students to remain engaged and focused on their language goals. This approach fosters a positive learning environment where students feel supported and motivated to improve.
- h. Integrating continuous monitoring of student engagement:** To assess the effectiveness of the Akelius platform in meeting classroom objectives, teachers should regularly monitor student engagement and comprehension. Observing students during platform use, noting any difficulties, and tracking their responses to various activities provides valuable feedback for adjusting instructional strategies. By identifying students who may need additional support, teachers can make real-time adjustments to lesson plans, ensuring that every student can succeed.
- i. Facilitating parental involvement for extended learning:** Engaging parents in their children's language learning journey can strengthen learning outcomes. Teachers should inform parents about the Akelius

platform and encourage them to support their children's use of it at home, where possible. Providing parents with updates on their children's progress, offering simple language practice activities to do at home, and encouraging parental praise for achievements on the platform can create a supportive environment that reinforces classroom learning.

## Role of UNICEF in Facilitating Partnerships

UNICEF has played a pivotal role in facilitating the connections between all partners involved in the Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative in Albania. As the key orchestrator, UNICEF has ensured that collaboration between Akelius, the MoES, local education offices, and schools is smooth and effective. By leveraging its established relationships and expertise in the education sector, UNICEF has connected stakeholders at both the central and local levels, fostering a cohesive environment for the implementation of the initiative.

UNICEF's role extended beyond coordination; it also provided technical support and guidance, ensuring that the Akelius platform met the educational needs of marginalized groups while aligning with Albania's national education policies. Through continuous dialogue with the MAS, local school offices, and Akelius representatives, UNICEF was instrumental in ensuring that program objectives were consistently met. Their involvement also helped to build local capacity by facilitating regular training sessions, workshops, and technical discussions between stakeholders, ensuring that all partners were adequately prepared and motivated to contribute to the success of the initiative.

By bridging the gaps between Akelius, local education authorities, and individual schools, UNICEF has ensured that the initiative not only meets its educational goals but also has the potential for scalability and sustainability within the national education framework. This interconnected approach has been crucial in overcoming challenges such as infrastructure gaps, teacher training needs, and the integration of digital tools in traditional classrooms.

## Role of the Observatory in Implementing the Akelius Project in Albania

The Observatory has been instrumental in the implementation of the Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative in Albania. As the primary executing partner on behalf of UNICEF, the Observatory has leveraged its extensive experience in child rights advocacy and education to ensure the program's success.

### Key Contributions

*Program Coordination:* The Observatory has managed the day-to-day operations of the Akelius initiative, coordinating activities across 18 schools, including one vocational high school and two reception centers for refugee children. This coordination has been crucial in adapting the program to both urban and rural educational settings.

*Teacher Training:* In collaboration with the MoES, the Observatory has facilitated the training of over 672 teachers. These training sessions have equipped educators with the skills to integrate the Akelius digital platform into their teaching methodologies, enhancing the overall learning experience for students.

*Community Engagement:* The Observatory has engaged with local communities to promote the Akelius initiative, ensuring that marginalized groups, including refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities, and children from the Roma community, have access to quality language education.

### Comparison with Other Initiatives by the Observatory

Beyond the Akelius project, the Observatory has been involved in various initiatives aimed at improving the rights and well-being of children and youth in Albania. These initiatives include:

- *Youth Build Sustainable Environmental Solutions:* In partnership with the Forum for Equitable Development, the Observatory is implementing a project titled "Youth Build Sustainable Environmental Solutions" from April 2023 to October 2025. This initiative, financed by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, focuses on empowering youth to develop sustainable environmental practices.
- *Act Now for Ensuring Human Dignity:* Supported by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, this project was implemented from January to March 2015. It aimed to strengthen the role and responsibility of

local actors in preventing and addressing domestic violence, which could lead to early child marriage and/or prostitution.

- *Monitoring and Advocacy:* The Observatory has been actively involved in monitoring the situation of children and youth at both national and strategic levels. This includes conducting surveys, such as the one involving 1,100 young people in various municipalities, to gather data that informs policy and advocacy efforts.
- *Integration of Digital Tools in Education:* The Akelius initiative stands out among the Observatory's projects due to its emphasis on integrating digital tools into education. While other initiatives have focused on social issues, environmental sustainability, and advocacy, the Akelius project leverages technology to enhance language learning. This approach aligns with global trends in education, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy and access to quality education for all children, regardless of their background.

*In summary, the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights has played a pivotal role in implementing the Akelius Digital Language Learning Initiative in Albania. This project complements the Observatory's broader efforts to promote child rights and education through innovative and inclusive approaches.*

## V. Annexes

### 5.1 Annex 1: Implementation settings

Table 1: Statistical data at Akelius school level, September 2024

Location	School/s	# of teachers	# of English teachers	# of students		
				Current users (who used Akelius at least once on Sep '24)	New users (who used Akelius at least once on Sep '24)	Subtotal of current users per location
<b>BURREL</b>	31 Korriku	35	3	0	74	<b>74</b> students in Burrel
<b>DIBRA</b>	Demir Gashi	48	4	259	67	<b>325</b> students in Dibra
	Haki Stërmilli	23	2	66	19	
<b>DURRËS</b>	Neim Babameto	39	4	80	0	<b>105</b> students in Durrës
	Shaqe Mazreku	45	4	25	0	
<b>ELBASAN</b>	Hamit Mullisi	21	2	44	15	<b>526</b> students in Elbasan
	Jorgji Dilo	46	3	291	84	
	Sul Domi			65	12	
	Sul Harri	40	3	126	0	
<b>KRUJA</b>	Bakushe Visha	28	3	70	28	<b>123</b> students in Kruja
	Myrteza Mustafa Kacaci	40	3	53	0	
<b>LEZHA</b>	Gjergj Fishta	35	4	78	21	<b>78</b> students in Lezha
<b>SHËNGJIN</b>	At Zef Pllumi	15	1	93	22	<b>224</b> students in Shëngjin
	Afghan school		3	131	105	
<b>TIRANA</b>	Androkli Kostallari	25	3	474	0	<b>1,118</b> students in Tirana
	Ardian Klosi	42	3	184	40	
	Kongresi i Manastirit	87	7	180	90	
	Lidhja e Prizrenit	48	3	280	60	
<b>TOTAL</b>	17 public compulsory schools	617 teachers	55 English teachers	<b>2573 students</b>		

## 5.2 Reference List

- Akelius Foundation & UNICEF (2023-2024). *UNICEF - Akelius global partnership: Accelerating quality guidelines and SoPs webinar.*
- Observatory for Children and Youth Rights (2021, June). *E-learning response to the COVID-19 crisis in Albania - Akelius digital language initiative.*
- Observatory for Children and Youth Rights (2024, September). *Informacion përmbledhës për Akelius në Shqipëri.*
- UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight. (2024, October). *Making digital learning work: Lessons from the UNICEF–Akelius digital learning initiative in 12 countries.*
- UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight. (2023, February). *Unlocking learning: The use of education technology to support disadvantaged children's language learning and social inclusion in Italy.*
- UNICEF (2024, April 15–18). *Mission report: Akelius-UNICEF digital language learning project in Albania.*
- National Education Strategy 2021-2026, April 2021



Akelius



Documentation Report  
The use of education technology to  
support disadvantaged children's language  
learning in Albania