



11

Lithuanian Education Policy for School Leadership

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1 Introduction

The National Education Strategy of Lithuania 2013–2022 states that education is a foundation for the future. While planning to increase the level of investment in education to 6% of GDP by 2022, the county faces two main demographic challenges: mass emigration from the

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country (working age population and families), which challenges the school network, and the low birth rate. This affects the efficiency of educational funding. The other important challenge, considering the above-mentioned conditions, is the management of teachers. Current teaching staff and principals are aging, and the current situation regarding teacher employability is not attractive to young talented professionals, as there are few vacancies, and new recruits are likely to receive the minimum salary (one of the lowest in Europe, according to the OECD). This also has an impact on teaching quality.

This chapter aims to provide information about and an analysis of changes in Lithuanian education policy regarding educational leadership, including school leadership.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, macro level challenges are presented, together with their impact on the education system of Lithuania. Next, Lithuanian education policy priorities and strategic aims that address the challenges are described. Finally, the national approach to school leadership is illustrated by a case study of the ‘Time for Leaders’ project.

2 Macro Level Challenges and Their Impact on the Education System

‘The goal of the school today is not to impose a certain worldview, but to open the mind of every student to the diversity of the world and to encourage each one to act according to their conscience and to find unifying threads among those fields of consciousness’ (Lukšienė 2014, p. 85). These words from the initiator of contemporary educational reform in Lithuania, Dr. habil. Meilė Lukšienė, spoken at a conference in 1990, demonstrate the philosophy of building a contemporary personality for the young man/woman. The school itself has to be different—free and innovative—for this task. ‘First of all, the school shall be not an object administrated by somebody from outside, but a subject or player with its own personality, traditions, pace’ (Lukšienė 1993, pp. 102–112). Neither should the task for the teacher be uniform:

‘the teacher must have thus much of teaching delicacy at school as to be able to deliver a different opinion equally impartially’ (Lukšienė 1994, p. 4).

After Lithuania regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, educational reform moved forward mostly on the track described above. Teachers and schools were given greater freedom to create, improvise and experiment. The provision already laid down in the General Concept of Education in Lithuania, approved in 1992, stated that ‘the result, and not the educational process, is centrally controlled’ (General Concept 1992). Teachers were permitted to choose educational methods for themselves. They were even encouraged to develop individual educational programmes in line with centrally set curricular content objectives and outcomes. Schools were allowed to choose their own methods of attaining the desired outcomes. The system of educational, non-controlling supervision was being developed at that time (Ugdomasis inspektavimas 1997). Special foundations, like the Open Society Foundation’s ‘Education for Lithuania’s Future’, the Education Development Centre, and the Education Exchanges Support Foundation, were established, where schools were eligible for funding for their school improvement projects.

These were the years of bursting initiatives and exploring the possibilities granted by democracy and freedom. However, over the years, the social mindset started to change. With the rapid changes in Lithuania’s society in general, and its education system in particular, some teachers, school heads and leaders of local education communities felt a yearning for stability, clarity, direction and explicitness. They became tired of being creators and started to feel the lack of centrally supplied methods, and even instructions on how and when to act. At the same time, the central level of education system governance also assumed greater regulation of the details of educational activities. Thus, the creative space shrank, and less creative activity is now observed in education. Life at school has become more stable, and, ipso facto, more dull. Although a certain proportion of more active stakeholders in education view regulation as a problem and see the restrictions it imposes, the remaining members of the education community have got into a rut and stick to

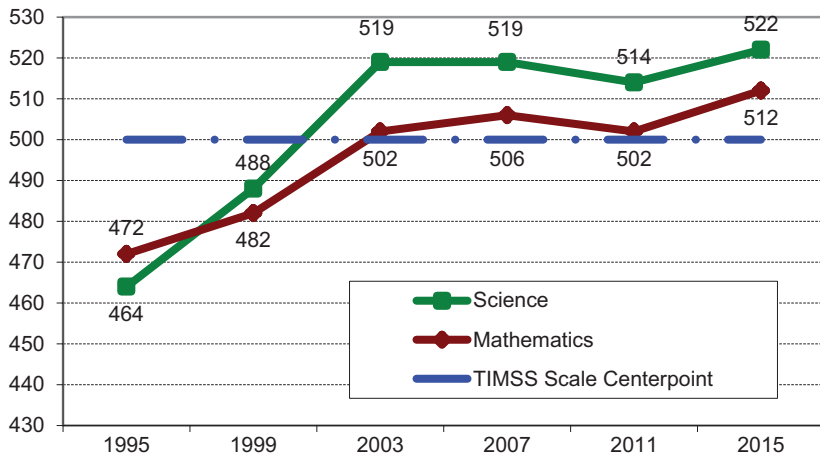


Fig. 1 Stabilisation of TIMSS outcomes following a rapid increase (Source Authors, based on IEA TIMSS, 2015)

observing the rules. The situation has had a negative effect on learning outcomes: a period in which the greatest global growth attained in learning outcomes announced by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (namely, +42–47 points between 1995 and 2007) was followed by a period of stagnating outcomes (+3–10 between 2003 and 2015) identified by TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) (Fig. 1).

No wonder that public confidence in education dropped from 70.5% in May 2004 to 40.6% in June 2011 (Fig. 2).

Lithuania's situation in general was getting worse. After a rather long-lasting economic upturn, Lithuania, like many other countries around the world, experienced an economic crisis. Over the period of a year and a half, the GDP per capita indicator dropped from EUR 2733.30 in the 3rd quarter of 2008 to EUR 2029.50 in the 1st quarter of 2010 (Portal of official statistics, Lithuania 2018 GDP growth).

The unemployment rate rose from 3.8% in the 3rd quarter of 2007 to 18.2% in the 1st quarter of 2010, with a particular rise among young

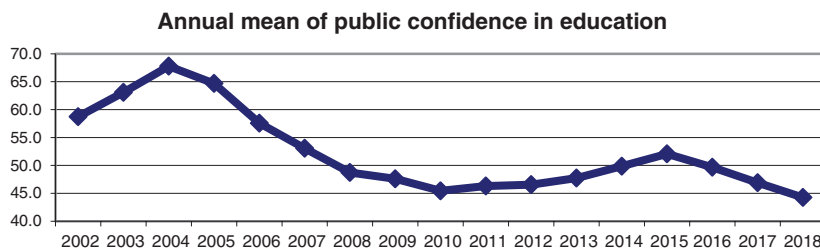


Fig. 2 Proportion of population having confidence in education, percent (Source Authors, based on VILMORUS, June 2002–February 2018)

Table 1 Educational indicators (prepared by authors, starting position = 100%)

Indicator	Before	After	Now
Year	2008	2010	2015
TIMSS mathematics (2003–2011–2015)	100	100	102
TIMSS science (2003–2011–2015)	100	99	101
Public confidence in education (2004–2010–2015)	100	67	77
GDP per capita	100	89	126
Unemployment in age group 25–29	100	341	161
Emigrants	100	323	173
Income per capita (lowest quintile)	100	81	125
Public expenditure on education	100	94	129

Source Portal of official statistics <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/>, 2018

people, from 5.3% in the 4th quarter of 2007 to 27.8% in the 1st quarter of 2010 in the 25 to 29 age group. The flow of emigrants intensified: rising from 25,750 residents in 2008 to 83,157 in 2010. A quintile of the poorest population, whose lot had started to improve (their monthly income increased 2.29 times between 2005 and 2009), fell back into the grip of poverty (27.8%). Budgetary allocations for education, which had been experiencing rapid annual increases before the slow-down, stopped growing and even shrank, while private investment in education was in general as negligible as usual. Consequently, the worsening social, economic and cultural context in the country presaged no bright prospects for educational success (Table 1).

3 Policy Priorities and Strategic Aims to Address Significant Challenges

In such a post-crisis situation, a different attitude and new ideas were desperately needed, not only in the area of education but also life in general in Lithuania. The significance of political leadership started to be reiterated more and more often in the process of restructuring strategic governance in Lithuania. In 2012, the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) adopted the National Progress Strategy ‘Lithuania 2030’, in which the ideas of smart society, smart governance and smart economy were put forward; in general, the individual was placed at the heart of all the developments and changes, the importance of which had been highlighted by Meilė Lukšienė, the initiator of educational reform, many years before. In the aforesaid Strategy, smart society is regarded as demonstrating solidarity, energy and learning. People should be proactive; they should unlock their leadership potential, be able to rally and consolidate people, learn how to improve and make improvements.

There has been common awareness that ‘education can successfully achieve its goals only when its development surpasses the development of society in general’ since the development process of the General Concept of Education in Lithuania (General Concept 1992). Consequently, it is no wonder that the ideas provided by the National Progress Strategy were adopted in the National Education Strategy 2013–2022. At first sight, the new Strategy represents little advance on the previous one (Fig. 3). The most clear-cut difference is the shift in priorities, while the principle that the ultimate goal is given the foremost priority is observed. The former Strategy included expectations that general governance problems in education would be rapidly settled, and the reform of the education system would be completed by restructuring it into a common educational space, and that only then would quality in education become the main focus of attention. At present, Lithuania lives in a context in which the predominant common perception is that the quality of education does not satisfy a modern society’s needs. In essence, all the objectives of the

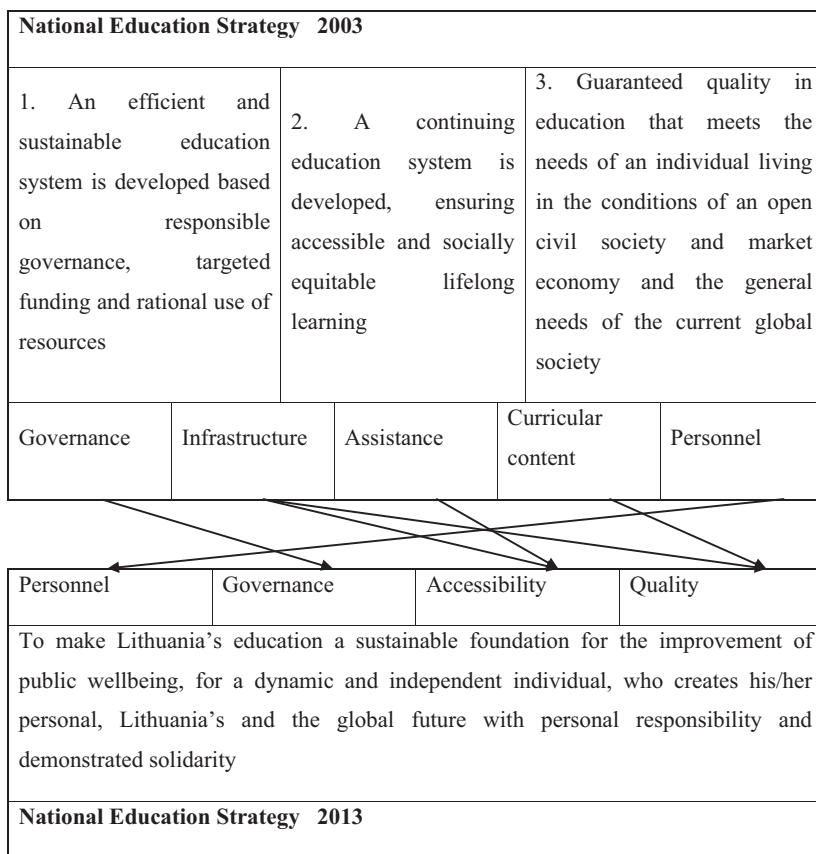


Fig. 3 Sustainability of the former and current education strategies (Source Ričardas Ališauskas)

new Strategy are targeted at education quality, though each of them in a different way.

The findings of numerous studies (Hattie 2012, pp. 14, 22) which reveal that quality in education depends on the teacher are taken into account here. The teacher's personality is, therefore, of great significance: a priority is the 'establishment of an educational community, where professional teachers and lecturers are reflective, constantly developing

and work in a highly effectively manner' (National Education Strategy 2014). Activities to achieve this objective are to be more competitive on the job market while seeking the attention and involvement of more gifted young persons with the aim of attracting them to choose a career in education. Plans are being devised to increase the demand for and attractiveness of higher education studies, where educators are prepared and formed. Methods will include employing the most renowned Lithuanian lecturers, inviting academics from abroad and turning these studies into universal, liberal arts-based studies designed to build society, culture and education. Plans also include the development of new and improved qualifications, in particular practical improvements (long-term traineeships, student exchange programmes, repeated studies at university, etc.). The aim is to raise the status of the teaching profession and strengthen confidence in education (by setting more stringent moral and personal requirements, disseminating positive educational practice success stories, intensifying the dialogue between professionals in education and members of society, and similar means).

On the basis of John Hattie (2012, pp. 174–175), and the evidence of research studies carried out by other scholars, the next important factor in education quality is the school head and, in general, school management and leadership. Therefore, a corresponding second objective is set: 'to introduce an education quality culture based on data analysis and self-evaluation to ensure coherence between the leadership of municipal authorities, social partners and school heads' (National Education Strategy 2014). The aim is to rally school communities and direct them to the expedient and purposeful attainment of measurable higher quality performance. To attain this objective, training in leadership is intensified, the search for independent solutions in cooperation with social partners is encouraged, and financial support for projects regarding school quality improvement is planned. At the same time, the monitoring of performance results is being improved, and supervision of learning outcomes, involvement and relations at school for better accountability is being upgraded.

In spite of great achievements in the accessibility of education in Lithuania, a number of problems still persist for certain categories of

students (in rural areas, among boys and adult males with special educational needs and other social groups). Therefore, a third objective is set:

to provide school children, students and young people with the most favourable opportunities to unlock their individual abilities, meet their special educational and study needs and provide effective educational and psychological assistance to pupils failing at school by ensuring the accessibility of education and equal opportunities, strengthening to the maximum the educational inclusion of children and young people. (National Education Strategy 2014)

It is also planned to address these challenges by means of ensuring quality in the first place, *videlicet*, the improvement of relationships in schools, the learning environment, an individualised approach and other qualitative factors. Plans have also been made to address problems with the direct accessibility of schooling, in particular in the fields of preschool and special education.

Finally, the direction taken in line with the fourth objective addresses issues of ensuring quality in education and executing direct or indirect orders in the public interest: 'while ensuring the effectiveness of the education system, to create a system of incentives and equal conditions for lifelong learning based on effective assistance in identifying oneself and choosing a path in the world of activity; to align personal choice with national planning' (National Education Strategy 2014). Besides the key competences that are developed within the scope of the third objective, efforts are being made to help an individual choose a career path and enrich it with the professional knowledge required for active work on the labour market and in individual business by providing the possibility to pursue continuous lifelong development.

However, these direct objectives do not reveal the entire construct of the Strategy (Fig. 4). In order to understand the latter, the Strategy should be viewed in the context of the National Progress Strategy 'Lithuania 2030'. This Strategy includes the following ideas:

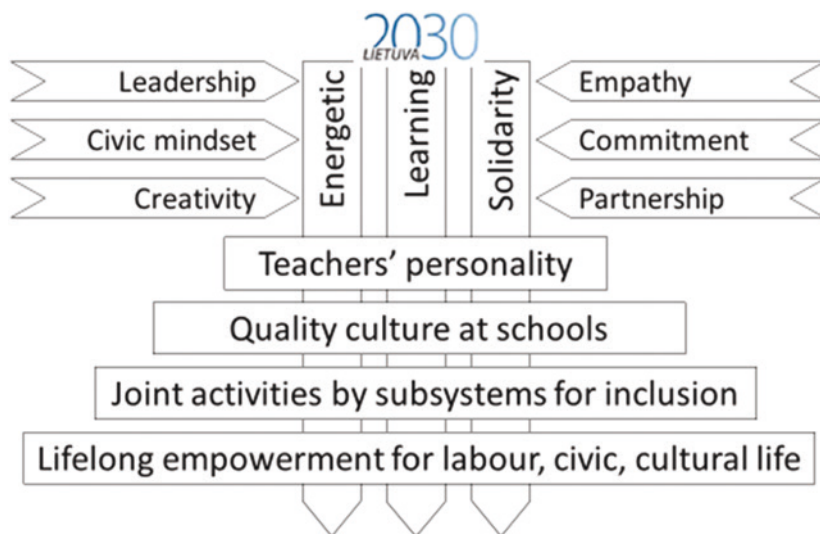


Fig. 4 Conception of the National Education Strategy (Source Ričardas Ališauskas)

to implement the vision of a smart society we need to pool our efforts and to implement major changes in the development of society: an energetic civil society (independent, healthy, confident, creative and proactive); ... a society with solidarity (consolidated, dignified, responsible for a common fate, brought together by the idea of 'Global Lithuania'); ... a learning society (modern and dynamic, ready for future challenges and able to perform in a ever changing world).

The National Education Strategy has adopted the following task of educating society: 'to consolidate the education community and all the people of Lithuania (solidarity) for purposeful education (learning) with a view to attaining individual and national success (energetic attribute)' (Valstybinė švietimo 2013–2020 metų strategija, 2014). The afore-said three components represent the axes that intersect in the Strategy. Actually, they are reflected in the vision of the Education Strategy:

every child, young person or adult in Lithuania is striving for, and can quite easily find, where to learn; the national education system is

comprised of public, municipal and independent educational establishments that are constantly improving, cooperating and maintaining cooperation with their partners, the personnel of which are highly respected members of society, who are involved in a continuous discussion on the development of national education, the success of the Lithuanian state and its people, as well as the development of its culture and economy, taking into account sustainable urban and rural development. (National Education Strategy 2014)

The success of this Strategy will depend on the extent to which these three components are inherent in the implementation of each objective: learning and energetic teachers with a sense of solidarity; learning and energetic schools with a sense of solidarity; education subsystems that are learning from one another and acting in solidarity and with energy; a continuously improving and learning education system, which meets public expectations with solidarity and which enables all people to act successfully in the area of culture, community and the economy.

This Strategy represents more than a formal set of objectives to foster leadership (see the 2nd objective above): once the idea of an energetic and learning society with a sense of solidarity—i.e. a smart society—has been adopted, it cannot be structured differently. Leadership grows in importance in each of the objectives: it is a quality that should be an inherent attribute of teachers, schools, subsystems and the entire education system.

An active, inviting and consolidating mode of leadership has never before been something strange in Lithuania. The very outset of reform was marked by the leadership demonstrated by its initiator, Meilė Lukšienė (Ališauskas and Dukynaitė 2017). An active group of citizens, invited and coordinated by the outstanding educator, not only outlined the desired future of education, but the majority of that team went on to be active participants in subsequent reform activities. The history of the reform witnessed active community movements, such as the movement of Lithuanian gymnasiums, the Association of Socially Responsible Schools and the Network of Quality-Seeking Schools. The Project on School Improvement, funded by a World Bank loan, was implemented in the 2002–2006 period, and had a considerable impact

on the processes of reform. The quality management system development component, which involved the assistance of professionals from Harvard University, several British universities and Her Majesty's Royal Inspectorate of Education, had the strongest impact in terms of management. The Project paved the way for activities aimed at fostering leadership that are being carried out in the current phase of the reform. A profound understanding that a set objective does not serve as a guarantee for greater leadership was reached. In order to strengthen leadership, we must invite and involve the greatest possible number of members of the education community, and prepare and empower them to be proactive, involving and enabling more people. It was not by accident that the National Education Strategy identified the key to success after the implementation of the Project on School Improvement: relying on the joint efforts of gifted and professional, spiritually rich and leadership-minded teachers, with the school and the education community acting as a whole in a rational way and with a sense of solidarity, to involve the Lithuanian population in active learning and to empower them to be successful in their personal life.

4 A National Approach to School Leadership: The Case Study of 'Time for Leaders'

Addressing the challenges and seeking to implement the strategic decisions taken, the national initiative 'Time for Leaders' was approved by a decree of the Minister of Education and Science for the period 2008–2013. It was a constituent part of the ongoing 'Project on School Improvement plus', and implemented the broader goals of the Programme—to encourage the independence of schools and to develop leadership in education. ES structural assistance was used to fund this project, to a total of EUR 5.7 million.

Based on the insights and input of D. Fink, A. Hargreaves, L. Stoll, S. Blandford, and C. Jackson, as well as other leading experts in the international field of educational leadership, and the authors of this study, the 'Time for Leaders' project aimed to develop an infrastructure which

would be supportive of leadership throughout the educational system of Lithuania. It was designed for leadership development in educational communities of all levels—national, municipal and individual schools. The main emphasis was placed on leadership for learning, the higher quality of learning and aspects of lifelong learning.

The project was planned in two stages. The aim of the first was to create and develop the conceptual frameworks and tools for the 15 components of ‘Time for Leaders’, which were later grouped into 5 main fields: consultancy for schools, a virtual platform, school development modelling, development of managerial and leadership competences (Master’s degree and non-degree programmes) and longitudinal research on the leadership index in schools. The policy context and legal basis for increasing school independence was also analysed. All the fields were interconnected, based on the same principles and focused on the same aim. Project leaders called upon devoted and professional partners from universities, the Scholl development centre, and consultancy agencies, building a strong team of more than 70 experts—practitioners, policy makers and academicians—who all worked together.

At the end of first stage, 2011, the planned outcomes had been reached in the form of leadership models for schools, frameworks and the contents of the competences development programmes, etc. Further work on ‘Time for Leaders’ went on from 2011 to 2015, aiming to pilot the stage I outcomes in 15 municipalities. The activities included training of consultants, with 75 students enrolled on the Educational Leadership Master’s studies programme, 235 participants in non-degree studies, and the active application and creation of unique leadership models in the municipalities involved. Both the outcomes and the achievements of stage II were reached and recognised by the social stakeholders involved, and reflected in a book *Time for leaders-2. A chance to participate in change* (Pranckūnienė et al. 2015). The authors claim: ‘Educational leadership development is a process involving all systems ... We hold to the principle that the changes in national education policy can be both initiated and implemented successfully only in collaboration with municipalities and schools. It should be confined neither to the offices of the Ministry, nor to classrooms and schools’. Thus, ‘Time

for Leaders-2' has initiated broad dialogue and discussion in the form of public consultations and leadership forums; it has implemented consultancy, degree and non-degree programmes, a virtual platform and library for competence development; it has studied current policy and prepared professional advice for necessary changes to the legal foundations; and it has involved the international dissemination of results (e.g. presentations at conferences and longitudinal research. The impact on the agents involved (municipalities, consultants, policy makers, principals and teachers) has been positive. Examples include reports of increased participative decision making in municipalities, career changes for teachers, increased use of consulting services, etc. The European Social Fund Agency recognised the efficiency of the project management. Lessons learned included the need to search for further professional inspiration, to continuously adjust the frameworks created and, most importantly, to build on the results achieved to ensure sustainability.

As momentum for the further implementation of the goals of 'Time for Leaders' was accelerating and confidence was growing, the Ministry decided to use a further EUR 5.3 million of ES structural assistance for 2017–2020.

The third stage is now underway, and continues the project's main aim—to strengthen the supportive infrastructure for leadership in Lithuania's education system, empowering national, municipal and school level communities to focus on success in learning outcomes for students. It reinforces the continuous renewal and higher culture of learning.

Conceptually, the third stage of the project is built on the theory of professional capital, developed by A. Hargreaves and M. Fullan (2012). It defines professional capital as a function of three other capitals: human capital (the quality of individual educators), social capital (interactions and relationships among staff), and decision capital (effective use of the two above) (Hargreaves and Fullan [2012]). Based on the above, the aims of 'Time for Leaders-3' are:

- to develop the decision capital of educational communities through leadership infrastructure improvement projects in municipalities. As piloting in 15 municipalities was successful at the previous stage, the third stage involves the remaining 45 municipalities, divided among

the regions of Lithuania (Southern, Western and Eastern). The time assigned for the creation and implementation of each municipality's change project is 22 months.

- human capital is built through an integrative approach at all levels of leadership competence development. The Educational Leadership Master's programme is offered as part of this, with plans for 210 in the degree programme and 600 participants in the non-degree programme, as well as non-degree training for Lithuanians living abroad, and non-education system employees (450 participants).
- social capital is increased by creating a professional sharing network. This includes possibilities for networked learning, knowledge sharing and cooperation, as well as mutual help and support both locally and internationally. The virtual platform www.lyderiulaikas.smm.lt is maintained for this purpose, project alumni networks are strengthened, forums on the most important ongoing changes in the education system are organised, and pre-existing and international networks are expanded.

5 Conclusions

Is leadership the issue? Yes, the *smart society* envisioned in 'Lithuania 2030' as an energetic and learning society with a sense of solidarity raises a demand for leadership. Ongoing educational reform, switching from strong centralisation towards empowered school leadership, calls more strongly for leadership. As educational policy and leadership are socially embedded (see Chapter 2 in this volume), leadership is understood as an inherent attribute of teachers, schools, subsystems and the entire education system in a continuous process of change. Various instruments are used in the country with the aim of strengthening school leadership, the most important being 'Project on School Improvement plus'. It involves actors at different levels, and has started producing positive results, such as the strengthening of the infrastructure for educational leadership in the 'Time for Leaders' project. This unique project is a success story of practice which should be shared with other small countries.

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