



COVID-19 RESPONSE

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Along with the United Nations globally, the UN Country Team in Albania has followed with concern the growth of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Country team is fully supportive of the rapid and strong measures that the Government has taken. In support of those measures, and with a commitment to staff safety, the UN in Albania has shifted to a working-from-home modality except where critical programmes require otherwise.

The UN in Albania – as globally – is working to prioritize support to the Government’s Covid-19 response, to keeping all programmes running as much as possible, and to initiating processes that look at how programming can be adjusted or expanded to assist with recovery. All UN agencies have undertaken comprehensive public awareness and information campaigns specifically tailored for target groups and aiming to inform, engage, educate the public on the preventive measures against infection from Covid-19 as well as messages in support of the measures to reduce the spread of the virus.

EMERGENCY PUBLIC HEALTH

The WHO office in Albania is the lead technical UN Agency to provide support to the country’s response to the Covid-19. WHO as a member of the Task Force led by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, is working 24/7 to provide support to the development and implementation of the Country Preparedness and Response Plan.

WHO provides continuous assistance to health authorities using up to date received guidance from the global and regional WHO, strengthen the capacity of identifying and diagnosing cases, as well as provide training of health care providers for an effective response to the emergency situation in the country.

EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH SUPPLIES

UN Albania is coordinating efforts with development partners for the procurement of urgent health commodities for the health authorities. As of March 26th, 4 million Euros have been pledged by EU for procurement of intensive care medical devices and personal health equipment to be procured by the UN. A UN procurement task force has been established, with technical leadership by WHO. Swiss Embassy has pledged 300,000 Euros to UNDP for purchasing ventilators.

UNICEF has raised a supply order for oxygen therapy equipment to strengthen the response capacities of the Pediatric Hospital at the University Hospital Center in case management

IMMEDIATE SOCIAL SUPPORT BY JOINT UN ‘LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND’ PROGRAMME

UNDP is currently running an emergency food and hygiene items assistance operation targeting the most vulnerable groups under ‘Leave no One Behind Programme’ funded by the Swiss Government as well as its own resources. To date 700 households from Roma, Egyptians and vulnerable groups have benefited from this assistance

GENDER CONCERNS REVIEWED BY JOINT UN ‘ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN’ PROGRAMME

COVID-19 self-isolation measures creates fertile grounds for increase of violence incidents against women and girls in family settings, UNDP, UN Women and UNFPA – under the joint UN programme “Ending Violence Against Women” funded by Swedish Government are working with central and local authorities to prevent and tackle cases of domestic violence.

UNDP has provided written recommendations to MoHSP, Mol and the State Police to pay adequate attention to identifying violence situations. The Department of Gender Equality in MoHSP has communicated with all 61 local Domestic Violence Coordinators on how to carry forward these recommendations, how to work with the State Police and other actors during the isolation period, and any other support to be received from the ministry. The State Police has officially asked all local structures and local operative units to treat DV/GBV cases with priority and services provided to them to be continuous and without time limitations (beyond the 1PM curfew). An informative memo has been circulated to all local police units indicating/informing on state obligations towards DV/GBV victims. Lawyers, Psychologists and CRM members have been reached with the same recommendations in 15 municipalities as well as instigated to ensure an immediate access of DV/GBV victims to lawyers, psychologists and CRM support services.

UN Women is assessing the situation of GBV by keeping regular contact with Albanian State Police regarding reporting of cases and CSOs for availability of services. A public outreach campaign has started targeting domestic violence cases in isolation conditions due to pandemic containment measures. The first message was published on social media was circulated with the group of journalists established under the EVAW project. In addition, an article was published in written and online media (as well as UN Women website) on the impact of COVID-19 situation on women and girls with key messages including on VAW.

Access article here: <https://albania.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/03/news-womens-needs-and-leadership-in-covid>

EDUCATION

UNICEF is working to mitigate secondary impacts of the outbreak and related control measures on children, including school closures, the burden on local health systems for the delivery of primary care, protection risks and economic pressures felt by some families. "Key messages and actions for COVID-19 prevention and control in schools" developed by WHO, UNICEF and IFRC, are shared with the Institute of Public Health to support the work of health promotion specialists and school health personnel.

The guidance on safe schools and COVID is released with the networks of schools. Support is provided to the Ministry of Education with packages for education response products and tools to support the continuation of the learning process through ensuring an online learning platform. UNICEF has shared important messages for positive parenting through the networks of Parliament of Students and parent clubs.

The launch a U report poll will help to assess common knowledge and understanding on important information on COVID19, so as to reinforce important messages about preventive measures and where to call to get support. Actions are coordinated between different partners, and advocacy to establish response protocols for protection risks is taking place through the activated Child Protection Sub-Working Group, led by UNICEF. Also support is provided to child protection workers to ensure continuity of service.

CHILD PROTECTION

UNICEF is working in collaboration with MoHSP, civil society and development partner organizations, to establish a dedicated COVID-19 response protocol for the child protection system aimed at a stronger focus on children at risk. An advocacy case and intervention plan is being prepared, to make sure that the case management of children at risk of abuse, neglect and violence is considered a matter of critical importance especially in the COVID-19 emergency.

UNICEF is supporting the Agency on the Rights and Protection of the Child with the guidelines on how to implement the child protection measures during the COVID-19 situation. The guidelines will explain how the children most at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect are provided with adequate protection, while also ensuring that the child protection workforce protects themselves from the contagion.

SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

UNHCR and IOM are working closely with the relevant government and international partners to ensure that the requirements of Ministry of Interior Directorates with asylum-related and mix migration functions are included in the national needs' assessment and response. UNHCR's partners Caritas and Refugee and Migrant Services in Albania (RMSA) have supplied reception facilities at border areas and in Tirana with relevant hygiene and cleaning materials.

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC IMPACT IN THE MEDIUM-TERM

As the pandemic brings spread risks, concerns have shifted to socio- economic impact, especially for low income and vulnerable groups.

The Government has announced a series of significant measures. The EU and UN will start a discussion with development partners working in social protection and to identify joint analysis that can be undertaken to help define/refine programmes and identify ways to support government efforts to mitigate socio-economic impacts.

The Leave No One Behind Joint UN programme is convening to see how it can address the issue.

FAO is evaluating the impact of the Covid-19 crisis to the food supply, food security and food production with specific monitoring of agricultural production, livestock sector and agritourism.

ILO has prepared a preliminary global assessment of the impact of COVID 19 on jobs.

Locally, ILO can provide a multidisciplinary team of national consultants and ILO specialists to assess and develop measures on impact on the jobs in specific sectors (automotive, hospitality, tourism, health, etc.) and implications for various employment-related services.

UN BUSINESS CONTINUITY CRITICAL PROGRAMMES AND STAFF SAFETY

The UN family has remained operational through activation of Business Continuity Plans with staff working from home and fully respecting measures taken in the country.

All critical programmes are running in pace and staff is provided with the necessary guidance and resources to support on such circumstances of a substantial change of lifestyle and workstyle.



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