

PEOPLE IN FOCUS



United Nations
ALBANIA

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Delivering development results to Albania, enhancing our contribution to human development, keeping up to our commitment—this is the focus of the United Nations agenda.

Driven by national priorities, UN's work is wide ranging from rule of law, governance, economy, environment, regional and local development and inclusive policies.

We are pleased to present to you this set of stories which illustrate impact we have achieved. People are the main highlight of this publication. They speak out!

We leave it up to you, dear reader, to judge our work in Albania.

*United Nations
Country Team
Albania*



PEOPLE IN FOCUS



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Redrawing the map: Coordinating the Territorial-Administrative Reform in Albania

The United Nations Development Programme is helping Albania to undertake the country's first territorial-administrative reform in decades by coordinating the assistance provided by several international partners

During communist rule, Albania was one of the most centralized countries in Europe. When the regime collapsed in 1991, the country was faced with the dilemma of how to structure a local government system with a degree of autonomy.

To do this, the first central government that emerged from the multi-party elections in 1991 used the administrative lines of agricultural cooperatives, an economic unit created in the 1960s and '70s, as a model for the establishment of new administrative units. In a country of only 28,700 square kilometres, 373 administrative units of local government (LGUs) were created, and further divided into municipalities and communes.

By 2003 however, the administrative division of the country had become clearly ineffective as the majority of small local government units lacked capacity, multiple analyses argued, including

the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s 2002 regional Human Development Report.

Local government units had lost up to eighty percent of their population in little more than a decade as a result of migration; many communes were left with a population of only a few hundred people.

In order to resolve the administrative fragmentation of the country, in 2003 Albania initiated a territorial reform process. However, that first attempt failed because of a lack of agreement among the political parties.

It has taken more than a decade for another initiative to redraw the map.

The creation of new LGUs essentially means rebuilding the functions and capacities of the



INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS COMMIT TO TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN ALBANIA.

State. It is a complex process and it has costs.

“Development partners were invited in September 2013 to support the government’s priority for the process of drafting and implementing a territorial reform, and UNDP volunteered to coordinate the donor contribution,” explains Vladimir Malkaj, Programme Officer with UNDP in Albania.

To support this major reform of local government, the international community agreed to establish a multi-donor funded project under the management of UNDP entitled “Support to Territorial and Administrative Reform” (STAR).

International partners – including USAID, Sweden, Switzerland, and Italy – joined forces to assist the government in this sensitive process. UNDP is managing and coordinating the use of funds and is supporting the project’s implementation.

In recent years, territorial reform has been common across Europe often to reduce the number of local administrative units, with the

main aim of increasing efficiency. In many cases political disagreements accompany such reforms.

“The development partners and UNDP do not decide how the territorial reform is done. We simply support a nationally driven process and help finance it,” Malkaj notes.

In July 2014, the Parliament of Albania approved the law on administrative reform, dividing the country into 61 units. In the context of the local elections in 2015, implementation of the new law has become a matter of urgency.

Despite the major task at hand, the new municipalities will help strengthening local economic development and efficiency in Albania. Meanwhile, the STAR project is helping to make this a reality.

“Larger administrative areas create the appropriate framework for further decentralisation and empowerment of local governments to engage in more effective planning and promote economies of scale,” Malkaj concludes.

The Bread with the White Heart

Klodeta Hoxha is 25 years old. She graduated from university as an elementary school teacher three years ago but had difficulty in finding a job. Now, she produces and sells bread and other bakery products. Her life would have been very different if she had not contacted Mrikë Cara and Greta Kokalari from the Informal Areas Integration Association (IAIA, SHIZI in Albanian), which operates mainly in the suburbs of Tirana, the capital, where social problems are among the hardest in the country.

Presently, Klodeta is one of the few bakers who manage to have a normal life thanks to a project coordinated and funded by UN Women. Since 2010, this project has established in four cities of Albania – Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan and Vlora – a network of activists who have managed to turn words into deeds, training into production activities and, finally, dreams into reality. Klodeta is one of many women in need who have been trained and later employed thanks to the initiatives coordinated by SHIZI and the network

of civil society organisations (CSOs) in all regions in Albania.

Klodeta says, “When I completed my university studies, I felt as if my life ended there: I couldn’t find a job, my parents were also unemployed and everything seemed dark. But, fortunately one day I learned that an association, SHIZI, had launched a series of trainings on the bakery profession for us, women in need. So, it happened that, with many others like me, I was trained in how to make dough, for bread mostly. Days later, of the many women and girls that were trained, four of us were chosen, and we opened our first shop named White Heart, in Paskuqan, near my house. Since then my life has changed. I feel useful, a woman that is helping herself and also others, the family and the community. I get really tired, but I feel much better. Recently, we have been feeling successful with the other women in the bakery because sales have increased. Everybody has learned the true purpose of this activity in our neighbourhood and therefore they help us as

much as they can.”

Mrikë Cara, SHIZI's Executive Director, has a long experience in dealing with problems for newcomers to the suburbs of Tirana. She and the coordinator of the project, Greta Kokalari, know that it is not easy, but the results, which are starting to be visible, give them optimism.

“We have come a long way,” says Mrikë. “It has not been easy to shake off lethargy and the disregard of people, many of whom are poor. But with the help of UN Women, with some patience initially, we understood the priorities of the women in the area, and after discussions and

with the cooperation of the local authorities, we managed to establish this social business, where now Klodeta and her friends are working. Our organisation has led the work in other districts as well, where the same type of bakeries has been opened. The results are very encouraging and show the true value of the citizen's voice and the cooperation with local government that has proven to be successful in Paskuqan.”

Greta has another concern. In her opinion, the biggest problem in such situations is the level of contact among people in need, represented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the local government. “For a long time,”

EMPOWERING WOMEN ECONOMICALLY-ONE
STEP TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY



she says, “we have tried to institutionalize the relationships between local communities and the local government, what we call Community-Based Scorecards (CBS). This is related to the awareness of ordinary people, as well as of the local leaders, to cooperate and listen to each other. So, the types of business such as White Heart have depended on the goodwill of one local leader or another. There is no law in Albania at the moment that regulates or supports the social businesses that we want to promote, and the mission they bear.”

Greta is optimistic about the progress of the social businesses, because now they have the possibility of financial support from a government grant—Start Up Women—managed by the Ministry of Economy and the Foreign Investments Agency.

In Shkodra, a similar story is told by Donika Selimi, director of Human Dimension, and Zenepe Dibra, president of Shkodra Intellectual Women, part of the network of organisations working to implement CBSs. A similar bakery has been opened there, with the same name.

“At first we did thirteen trainings for women in need. A list of their names was given to us by the social welfare office in the municipality. From them we selected two women to start working with White Heart. The Prefect of Shkodra, Paolin Radovani, who is also an entrepreneur, helped us a lot. So we set up the first bakery, in the industrial area of Shkodra. We are making progress. The bakery has begun to supply the workers around here with its products. Thanks to UN Women and cooperation with Swisscontact, an expert has come from Switzerland and is training the women we work with, constantly, in all districts. We have trained two other women who are now ready to work and everything looks fine, but...”

This ‘but’ was explained by Zenepe, who emphasises once again that, “It is time that these businesses are regulated by their own law. Then it will serve their category of women in need, as well as others in need. Another problem we are focused on is implementation of the CBS results. In this area we have encountered many difficulties, but also many successes. It is a long road.”

The road is long indeed. As we were talking, Klodeta and her friends ran to their bakeries. Now it is clear to them: the future is their work, under the name White Heart. The greatest challenge is not only the success but also the sustainability of these social businesses, in achieving the most essential purpose: increasing the number of employed women.

SHIZI, in collaboration with CSOs in Tirana, Elbasan, Shkodra and Vlora and with the support of UN Women Albania, has implemented the project Lobbying with local authorities and monitoring of the Community Based Scorecards results. One of the main activities of the project is the start-up of four social enterprises for women and girls in the four regions mentioned above, as a public-private partnership between CSOs (the citizens) and local authorities based on successful models for women’s economic empowerment applied in the EU. These enterprises produce and sell dough products under a common brand in the four regions: White Heart. The need for social entrepreneurship was born from communication between the citizens and the local government realised through the method of CBS, which found that women’s unemployment was of major concern for the citizens and local administrators in all regions. Hence the support of these social businesses helps not only these women, but also many other families in need.



DRITA AT THE PASKUQAN BAKERY IS SO HAPPY SHE CAN WORK AND PROVIDE FOR HER FAMILY

Tackling Albania's Youth Unemployment Crisis

By strengthening cooperation among local institutions, a project implemented by the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organization in some of the poorest areas of Albania is helping ease the high level of unemployment among disadvantaged youth.

Until two years ago, Jorilda and Edi Pepa were working in the bustling tourism industry of the Aegean Island of Santorini. But then the global financial crisis came knocking at the door of Greece. With no job prospects in sight, the couple decided to return to Albania and open a coffee shop in the town of Lezha.

Edi's family own a piece of land of size 1.5 hectares in their home village of Malci, in the commune of Kolsh. This land has not been used for several years and making it profitable required know-how and a significant investment, both of which the couple lacked.

Despite the challenges in transforming the land into arable land, the hardworking couple was not discouraged. With the help of experts from the Local Level Responses to Youth Unemployment



JORILDA PEPA PLANNING ON HOW TO MAKE HER FAMILY'S PIECE OF LAND MORE PROFITABLE

Challenges project, they will harvest their first sage crop this fall.

Through the training delivered by the project, they were introduced to sage as a crop, gained knowledge on cultivation of medical and aromatic plants and on how to set up a business. In addition, the project supported the purchase of sage stems for planting in their plot of land.

“Another goal for next year is to plant lavender and start a small bee colony,” Jorilda explains.

The 26-year-old woman is one of the estimated 130,000 Albanian emigrants that have returned home in the last three years, particularly from Greece and Italy, where the global crisis has pushed the two countries into a lengthy economic slowdown.

According to Albania’s Institute of Statistics, INSTAT, the returnees, many of them young people, face an uphill battle to re-enter the job market here.

A study conducted by INSTAT in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) suggests that half of all migrants who have returned home are unemployed. Data show that unemployment in Albania is 17.7 percent of the workforce. However, the level among 15–29-year-olds is nearly double that rate, at 33.5 percent.

The Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)-funded project supported implementation of the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) in three northern counties, Shkodra, Lezha and Kukës. TEP is a contractual partnership between different

Project beneficiaries

Blerta Curraj, 24 years old, is one of the 340 beneficiaries of the active labour market measures the project implemented in collaboration with the National Employment Service. The ten-month programme consisted

of three months of on-the-job-training followed by regular employment for the remainder of the period. "I have been employed through a fixed-term contract since July and I am very happy this opportunity opened up for me," Blerta says.

actors at the local level that helps them address key issues in their communities in a coordinated and participatory manner.

Through the project the two agencies, which work together under the UN as One, have strengthened cooperation among local government institutions through a best practices framework to help reduce unemployment in some of the country's poorest areas. "The project has raised the capacities at the local level to recognize and address youth unemployment as an issue, while at the same time it has provided

practical examples how this can become a reality," says Teuta Zejno, the ILO National Project Coordinator.

The establishment of Regional Employment Boards (REBs) has been supported in each region, leading to improved dialogue among local actors on local economic development, with particular focus on youth unemployment. "The ILO expertise helped us building the decision-making bodies to address the problem of unemployment," said Andrea Jakova, a member of the Shkodra REB at Shkodra Regional Council.



YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVE TRAINING ON ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS

Fatjon Perjaku, from Lezha, is another beneficiary who has found a job after receiving training through the project. A graduate of the Economics Department at Tirana University, Fatjon participated in a three-month training programme hosted by the Albanian Tourism

Association, in the framework of the TEP for Lezha, and now works as a manager in a resort in the seaside town of Shëngjin. "Although I hold a degree in business management, tourism is a field that requires specialized know-how," Perjaku explains.

"We can attract more funds and could even benefit from EU social cohesion funds in the future," he added.

Through implementation of the TEPs and active labour market measures, the project has directly supported the private sector employment of more than 420 youths, the self-employment of 166 individuals and the establishment of several enterprises.

Jak Gjini, the local coordinator for the project in the region of Lezha, says that in order to implement pilot initiatives aiming to tackle unemployment through training, apprenticeships and seed capital, the project first had to identify priority sectors in each region. "We identified tourism and agriculture as priority sectors and then drafted the TEP for Lezha. This comprised several actions targeting the increase of youth employment and reduction of the incidence of informal employment," Gjini said.

In Kukës, a mountainous area on the border with Kosovo, arable land is difficult to find. In the village of Shtiqën, Erlis Shehu had to clear a plot that his father had bought in 1995, to turn it into pasture, painstakingly removing the rocks. However, Shehu's hard work has now paid off. With the technical know-how and financial support from the project for the purchase of sage

stems, he has now planted his small field of 0.3 hectares with sage.

"The good part is that sage does not need particularly fertile land to grow," he says. "It's one of the best ways to make use of this land, planting it with a cash-crop that makes money," Shehu adds.

Like Erlis, Ingrid Shyti is also from Kukës and has the same entrepreneurial spirit. He is a graduate of the Economics Department at the University of Tirana. However, his real passion is web technology. After working for several years for large media companies in Tirana, he has returned to his home town, teaming up with his friend Gentian Guska, a student of economics at Kukës University, and, with the help of the UN project, is training local youths in web development. They won the competition Generating ideas for sustainable entrepreneurship launched in the framework of the TEP in Kukës.

"The plan is that I do tech support for clients in Tirana, while Gentian and the crew back in Kukës will manage the web pages," Ingrid says. Based on the business plan they submitted, the project provided Shyti with funding that would cover one year of rent and the costs of purchasing several computers for their office, helping him start a high-tech company and transfer his know-how, where everyone would least expect it.

Squeezing New Energy out of Albania's Olive Oil

Vladimir Pasmaçiu smiles with pride as he shows me the old millstone that was once part of his grandfather's oil mill and is now on display in his modern oil processing plant in the village of Ndroq, outside of the Albanian capital Tirana.

"I remember this mill from when I was a child," he says. "It required animals or a very strong man to make it work," he recalls.

According to Pasmaçiu, in the old days once the olive fruit (called dupes) were crushed by the wheel, the paste was spread out on fibre disks and placed in a wooden press to squeeze out the oil.

The village of Ndroq has a centuries-old tradition in the cultivation of olives and takes particular pride in its indigenous variety, the Tirana white olive.



VLADIMIR PASMAÇIU IS VERY PLEASED WITH HIS GRANDFATHER'S MILLSTONE

A project by the United Nations Organization for Industrial Development is helping Albanian olive oil producers transform waste into renewable energy



OLIVE TREE GROVES IN NDROQ

Pasmaçiu has now replaced his grandfather's old stone mill with an olive oil processing plant that he imported ten years ago from Italy.

"This plant has a capacity of 2,000 kilograms per hour and produces quality olive oil through cold extraction," he says, noting that the process guarantees extra virgin quality. "I bought it ten years ago with financing and it has borne fruit through hard work," Pasmaçiu adds.

Olive oil is not the only source of revenue for Pasmaçiu. He uses the seeds and pulp of the olives, which he dries in his own backyard to create biomass for boilers.

Now, a project by the United Nations Organization for Industrial Development (UNIDO), funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and called Biomass energy for productive use for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), is helping Pasmaçiu and other oil producers treat the waste they produce in a more efficient way in order to turn it into renewable energy.

The project aims to increase the use of biomass in 15 pilot SMEs in the oil industry in Albania in order to produce energy through the efficient management and modern use of the olive and wood waste they generate. Based on the experience of the pilots, the approach will be replicated in other agricultural subsectors, such as fruit processing and wine making.

Albania currently has 5.2 million planted olive trees in production, occupying an area of 44,000 hectares. Apart from the olive trees already in production, a few years ago the government initiated subsidies schemes for new plantations, aiming to multiply the number of olive groves in

the coming decades.

Olives are processed in a large number of medium and small plants spread across Albania and account for a sizable share of the income generated by farmers in low-lying areas of the country.

The project aims to transform the market for using organic waste from olive oil and other industries for energy production. It aims to achieve this through triggering investment in organic olive and other industry waste-to-energy projects through market demonstrations, development of appropriate financial instruments, capacity building and strengthening of the policy and regulatory environment.

Pasmaçiu explains that currently the oil producers sell the olive stones together with the pulp, because they have no capacity to process them separately. He hopes that with the help of the UNIDO-GEF project he will buy a machine to divide the stones from the pulp and thus produce pellets.

"Normally 60 percent of the waste is pulp and 40 percent is stones," he explains. "They can be burned together, but if we are able to divide them we can earn more," he added.

According to Pasmaçiu, after installing the machine that separates the pulp from the stones, he will use the stones as biomass for energy and the pulp as food for his livestock, raising his company's productivity.

Pasmaçiu wants to further expand his output by producing wood pellets, a highly efficient way to use the waste that comes from cropping and pruning.

“We actually have a lot of waste from trimming the trees and clearing the olive groves,” he says. “By recycling something that goes to waste, we will generate more money and prevent pollution by not burning the waste in the open,” he added.

In the last few years, the spike in the olive oil price has forced a number of agricultural enterprises—greenhouses and dairies—to use pellets as an alternative to gas or diesel, and the demand for pellets has grown.

According to analysis undertaken by UNIDO, the biomass generated by the processing of olive-oil bio-products would enable Albania to cover part of its national energy consumption, which now comes through imported oil, thus increasing energy security and improving the competitiveness of the national economy.

Albania’s Mediterranean neighbours (particularly Greece, Italy and Turkey) have already benefited from such use of olive oil waste, a solution that helps eliminate pollution and makes use of a renewable energy source.

Pasmaçiu believes that the new machine that he will buy to separate the olive stones from the pulp will create a new source of revenue for his village by making use of all the waste produced by pollarding the nearby fruit trees through the production of pellets.

“Despite the loans, I am proud of what I have achieved in my life and with this new assembly line for pellets a few more people will be employed in the village,” Pasmaçiu said. “My grandchildren, I believe, will remember me just as I remember my grandfather’s mill,” he says with pride.

Equal Education Opportunities for Every Child!

Motivated by the desire to provide her children with better opportunities in life, Fatime, a member of the Roma community in Albania, shows up at the premises of one of the municipal units in Tirana to ask for a document required to register her daughters Romina and Katerina in a kindergarten.

Romina, 5, and Katerina, 6, wander the streets of Tirana each day, begging. Now their mother Fatime has resolved to take them off the streets and put them in a kindergarten where they can learn to read and write like other children.

“I want to be in the kindergarten to play with a lot of friends and to have real toys,” says Katerina. However, the path towards participation of Roma children in the pre-school system in Albania is strewn with obstacles, ranging from discrimination to material shortages and lack of resources for books, clothes and transportation. In addition, things are made worse by the constant movement of the Roma, the social stigma of children who have grown beyond the years of compulsory education, the need to work to support family members, language difficulties, and the parents’ tendency to keep girls at home for their security.

As with other Roma, Fatime is beleaguered with such issues, but thanks to the serious efforts of the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, coupled with technical support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), these barriers are now being removed for communities in need, including Roma people.

CHANGES UNDERWAY

To increase the access of Roma to social services, Children’s Human Rights Centre of Albania (CRCA), the Albanian Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the Observatory for the Rights of the Child have come together to support local networks in Albania with early childhood education and integration of Roma children into the pre-school system.

This initiative is primarily geared to focus on early childhood in order to help overcome the phenomenon of non-attendance of kindergartens by Roma children of age 3–6 years. At UNICEF, this is considered as an innovative intervention for early inclusion of Roma children that aims at increasing accountabilities of local service providers to ensure a good start in life for every child.

Thanks to the joint efforts of civil society organizations (CSOs) and close cooperation with social service delivery structures at the local government level, as well as the Regional Education Directorates (REDs) and child protection and child care structures, the situation has been improving. Fatime and her children can now enjoy the services they are entitled to. Moreover, this initiative is strengthening the partnership between CSOs and decision makers towards upgrading the quality of pre-university education in Albania.

Unlike in the past, when their parents could not place Romina and Katerina in pre-school due to



EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT
TO A QUALITY EDUCATION

their inability to pay registration and food fees, now the obstacle has been the parents' inability to obtain a document testifying that they were residents of Municipal Unit No. 9.

In cooperation with the REDs, from the month of June 2014 onwards, CRCA, Albanian YWCA and the Observatory for the Rights of the Child have worked with people at kindergartens, schools and in the community to bring institutions closer to the citizens in order to draw their full attention to compulsory pre-school attendance.

REMAINING CHALLENGES

UNICEF and the three partner organisations are working on the ground for better integration of Roma children into the pre-school system. As a result, enrolment rates have gone up in 2015, says Mersila Ballo, Programme Manager at CRCA.

"With regard to attendance rates, we try to work closely with parents by going to where they live, increasing local contacts and holding meetings with stakeholders in the neighbourhoods and in the settlements. We identify the local stakeholders that work for inclusion of Roma children in

the kindergarten and pre-school system, and collect best practices created in the course of implementation of the initiative Every Roma Child in Kindergarten. In this process, we pay due regard to building dialogues with leaders at the local and regional government levels towards improving social services for Roma families regionally and locally with priority emphasis on the health care and education services. Part of our job is also keeping track of enrolment and attendance rates for Roma children in kindergartens and the pre-school system. All this information will be featured in a consolidated analytical report on the early inclusion of Roma children in the pre-university system, and other services delivered at the local level, particularly the health care delivery system. This report will be published shortly," says Ms Ballo.

With good political will and increased awareness on the part of stakeholders and local government units about the initiative Every Roma Child in Kindergarten, the first phase of this partnership is already bearing fruit. Up to now, more than 400 Roma children have been registered in and attend the pre-school, as a result of the initiative.

Youth Educating Their Peers

Ada is one of the volunteers trained by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in life skills education. This includes not only sexual and reproductive health, but also communication and management. Ada is 17 years old and for a few years now has been a member of the school health club at Sami Frasheri high school in Tirana.

“I am part of the health club and this has helped me take some very important decisions in my life. I know what my rights are, including my sexual health rights, and I have received this information from my school doctor.”

But not all youngsters are open to discussing their sex life. Internet, friends and the media are the main source from where they get their information, without being afraid of meeting



BLERTA SHEHU AND MARXHINO STAROVA,
NATIONAL YOUTH-PEER TRAINERS AT WORK

I felt more grown-up and responsible in my relationship after we talked to the school doctor about sex. We have chosen to use condoms and both feel comfortable with the choice



DIEGO SALA, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT IN TIRANA

prejudice.

Nearly one in five (19.5percent) 15-year-old adolescents who go to school have had sexual intercourse. Of these 95percent are boys and 5percent are girls. Among school children of age 11–15 years, the most common declared age of first sexual intercourse is 14 or 15 years.

Health clubs are a component of the effort to increase outreach to youth. These volunteer-run high-school groups are established by school doctors and students, and encouraged by government health agencies. They carry out awareness-raising activities on reproductive health issues in collaboration with the youth centres, supported by UNFPA and the Albanian Centre for Population and Development (ACPD).

Bela, 18, and her friends volunteer at a high-school health club in Tirana. Those who are sexually active say the dual protection concept, which targets preventing both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), has made their lives better and safer. “The discussions I had with the school doctor removed barriers and the fear of doing something wrong. I use dual protection: condoms and pills. I know this is the best choice for me,” Bela says.

64.7percent of 15-year-old adolescents that have had sexual intercourse have used contraceptives. 66percent of the boys and 40percent of the girls used a condom in the last sexual intercourse.

Diego Sala, also 18, has been one of the most active students in the health club since joining two years ago. “I felt more grown-up and responsible in my relationship after we talked to the school doctor about sex,” he says. “We have chosen to

use condoms and both feel comfortable with the choice.”

The number of young people using contraceptives in Albania is on the rise, according to UNFPA, which supports an initiative with young activists and peer educators who offer friendly, high-quality counselling in youth centres.

“I am happy I can share information with other young people, so they don’t have to resort to the Internet or rely on rumours,” says Blerta Shehu, 23 years old, a member of the Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER). She volunteers at the youth centre in Tirana that provides sexual and reproductive health services and counselling for youths up to 24 years of age.

Y-PEERs like Blerta work to promote healthier lifestyles and empower young people so they can make responsible decisions.



MEMBERS OF “SAMI FRASHERI”
HIGH SCHOOL HEALTH CLUB

Although a few young people can now openly discuss issues about their sexuality, many still have only their conversations with friends as a source of information and avoid the services that are available, including medical advice, leaving themselves vulnerable to unintended pregnancies and STIs.

Adolescent pregnancy is a challenge. Marxhino Starova, another Y-PEER and a volunteer at the Aulona youth centre in Vlora in southern Albania, says that adolescents avoid bringing up the subject within their families, even among more educated segments of society.

“A friend of mine, a 16-year-old daughter of physicians, got pregnant. It was very difficult for us to talk to her parents about this. We wish she had the information before it happened. The centre doctor helped us.”

Nowadays, youth centres offer a friendlier approach to the issues that concern young people. “Now we know more about sexual relations and protection. I feel psychologically and physically safer,” explains Marxhino.

School remains one of the most trustable sources of information young people can have, with correct information provided about their sexual and reproductive health. UNFPA has partnered with the Ministry of Education and Sports in reviewing pre-university school curricula to include comprehensive health information, including sexual and reproductive health, so that such information reaches youngsters from the first levels of education, adapted to their age and grade. UNFPA views this as a way to disseminate proper information and provide young people with life skills and educate them to take healthy decisions in their lives.



TEUTA PIA, SCHOOL DOCTOR, IN ONE OF HER INFORMATION SESSIONS ON CONDOM USE

Tackling Family Planning in Albania



ANXHELA AND ERION, A TEENAGE COUPLE FROM THE ROMA COMMUNITY IN FUSHE-KRUJE, AND THEIR BABY GIRL

ADDRESSING CHILD MARRIAGE

Anxhela Muhaxhi and her husband Erion were married when she was just twelve years old. Early marriage and childbearing are common in her Roma community in Fushë-Krujë, 25 kilometres from the Albanian capital city, Tirana. In such a situation, many girls end up abandoning school.

The young couple now has a one-year-old baby girl that they struggle to provide for. Erion, 18, managed to get a summer job this year, but his situation is very difficult during winter time.

“Some days he works, some days he doesn’t have anything to do,” says Anxhela, 14.

Anxhela regrets the fact that she got married at such a young age. “I was a child, I should have waited a few more years,” she says. “I want my daughter to marry when she is older than I was, not suffer like I have.”

In 2005, the average age at marriage for Roma girls was 15.5 years, and the average age of Roma mothers at the birth of their first child was 16.9



MIRANDA HAJDINI, NATIONAL COORDINATOR
AT THE INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

years, according to data published in *Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From social exclusion to social inclusion* (H. De Soto, S. Beddies and I. Gedeshi, 2005). More recently, *Mapping Roma Children in Albania* (Centre for Economic and Social Studies, 2011) reported that 31 percent of 13–17-year-old Roma girls were married or in a partnership.

In order to improve access to information and services on family planning among Roma and other marginalised groups, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and its national

partners are working through an alternative approach entitled Total Market Approach (TMA) for Family Planning and Reproductive Health Commodity Security. This approach engages the public sector, commercial suppliers and non-governmental organisations to ensure that reproductive health supplies are reliably available at prices everyone can afford. Currently, just 25 percent of Roma in Albania have enough money to buy medicines and contraceptives, and many are even more vulnerable as health care services are cut back in rural areas.

INCREASING ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTIVES

The government spends 80,000 USD annually procuring and distributing free male condoms, birth control pills, Intra Uterine Devices (IUDs) and injectable birth control at 431 public health centres across the country. The National Contraceptive Security Strategy's goal is to increase the rate of usage of modern contraceptives by 30 percent. That rate was just 11 percent in 2008–09, when the last Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) was conducted.

“Every couple, every woman and every man can have the opportunity to choose the most appropriate method of contraception and find it for free in the public sector,” says Dr Miranda Hajdini, the national coordinator of the state-owned Logistic Management Information System, which is responsible for coordinating the nationwide distribution of contraceptives.

Work to increase access to contraceptives through a Total Market Approach also includes social marketing and private market components, such as partnerships with pharmacies, which advise clients on family planning and make sure they have access to a range of contraceptives at various prices.

OPENING THE DOOR OF TRUST FOR THOSE IN NEED

For 15 years now, Dr Lindita Myzyri has been working in one of the health centres in the suburbs of Tirana. Hundreds of females have received services from this centre and talked about their intimate and private sexual issues with its medical staff and counsellors.

“It is difficult for a person to talk about their sex



DR. LINDITA MYZYRI VISITING LULJETA MUSTAFA AT A HEALTH CENTER IN TIRANA

life. Hence, there is a need to talk openly with clients and make them trust you, otherwise they may never return to the centre. I take time to talk to them and try to respond to every question and to explain every doubt. This is why in 90 percent of cases, the women and girls come back to the centre and start taking contraceptives.”

“A child is a life we celebrate,” says Dr Lindita. Dozens of women and girls line up outside her office every day to get counselling and contraceptives. “I have 400 regular patients. Sixty percent of them come from poor, uneducated families,” she says.



Public family planning centres provide four modern contraceptive methods: male condoms (the most common method), pills, IUDs and injectables.

Meanwhile, the fertility rate in Albania has been dropping to 1.6 – below the replacement rate – according to the DHS.

One of Dr Lindita's patients, Luljeta Mustafa, is 32 years of age and expecting her third child, a girl. Luljeta decided to start using the pill after receiving counselling at the health centre. "I am very happy I was able to choose, together with



AFRIM AND KIMETE AND THEIR TWINS ASSISTED BY A NURSE

my husband, not only the number of children we wanted, but also when we wanted them," she says.

Dr Lindita explains that there are still issues to be addressed. Continuous investments in increasing health care providers' capacities in service delivery and in providing information and counselling for young mothers and women are needed to achieve the expected results and indicators in providing quality health services.

CHOOSING WHEN TO HAVE CHILDREN

TMA in Albania also supports couples who want a pregnancy, such as Afrim and Kimete, whose premature twins have been receiving constant medical supervision at a maternity hospital in Tirana for a month since their birth.

The twins' parents are happy to have been able to have children after years of trying.

UNFPA and its partners are working to expand the possibilities for women and young people to lead healthy and productive lives.

The Right to a Name and an Identity!

When a child is born, his or her entire future may depend on a simple piece of paper called a birth certificate. Without it, the child's political, social and economic rights are restricted and he or she may be denied access to education, health care and other social services. Moreover, without it, a child may be exposed to abuse, trafficking and exploitation.

Registration of all children born in Albania is still unfinished business. According to a recent United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey, 5.7 percent of Roma children are still not registered, for various reasons ranging from constant demographic movements of the Roma population to lack of awareness of relevant procedures and lack of applicable documentation, and to issues that can only be resolved in court.

Some Roma parents ignore this daunting task, some

others are reluctant to fill in the application forms, others do not realize the importance of registration for their children's future, and still others, often members of the more disadvantaged groups, are unable to write or read. However, what at first sight appears to be just a simple piece of paper is, in fact, the most important document that is first provided for a child immediately after he or she is born.

This is what the members of the Tirana Legal Aid Centre (TLAC) were trying to explain to a young woman who had shown up for assistance and was complaining, "There are many letters and documents that I need to collect. I am unemployed. I don't have the documents and I have very little money." She was expecting her third child and had kept moving from town to town, preventing her from completing the civil registration process. Even now she had not registered as a resident of the city of Tirana where she is now living and, as a consequence, her children remain unregistered.

The volunteers at the centre explain that many other young mothers have experienced the same problems caused by the lack of a birth certificate for their children. Without this document, a child may lose everything, from enjoyment of the basic legal, political, social and economic rights to accessing health care and education services, to which they would otherwise be entitled by law.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Following an interview with the young mother, the centre's volunteers proceeded to the maternity home where the woman had given birth to her child. The maternity administration provided the centre with a copy of the birth assistance certificate delivered to new mothers and a very important testimony for the civil registration.

The initial document used for registration of a new-born baby with the civil registration office is furnished by the health institution that provided assistance at the birth of the child. An authorized



ROMA CHILD IN TIRANA

member of staff duly fills in the form, which is then designed and approved by the Ministry of Health. This same form, which is the first piece of evidence of the act of birth, is subsequently handed by the parents to the relevant civil registration office that carries out the final registration of the child. Upon registration, the office finally issues the important document—the birth certificate—referred to in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Article 7 of the Convention enshrines the following as an obligation of the state: The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

CHANGES UNDER WAY

The issue of birth registration has brought together the ministries of Health, of Interior, of Social Welfare and Youth, UNICEF and Civil Society Organisations to discuss what needs to be done to make birth registration accessible to all. The experts agree that there is a need to establish an electronic system for reporting each birth, as it occurs through the use of modern technology that enables the tracking of every birth, following up those that remain unregistered. Also the capacities of the health workers to record births electronically need to be increased, while joint plans and coordination has to be improved among different sectors over the registration of the most vulnerable and excluded children, such as Roma children. Finally, legal aid needs to be provided for free and civil registration offices should adopt a more proactive approach, by reaching out to the most vulnerable communities.

UNICEF and TLAC have been making progress in this area, just as they have done in the case of the young mother described above. In this particular case, the Centre's employees found that the young woman's mother (VM) was living in Greece. Following a number of telephone calls, with the Centre offering to pay for her journey, VM was

persuaded to travel to Tirana. As it happens, VM had been registered at the civil registration office of the town of Pogradec, so the young mother's birth certificate could be issued by that same office. VM, the young woman and her husband travelled to Pogradec at the expense of TLAC, and eventually the woman's registration was completed, which is when VM's mission ended.

"However, the young mother was faced by yet another step. She had to apply for an ID card, and was supplied with a birth certificate and a family certificate featuring her as a member of her mother's family. Once she married EK, from Cerrik, near Elbasan, she could finally obtain the copies of the birth assistance certificate for her two children," Mrs Bozo from TLAC recounts.

This lengthy and tiring process that the Centre and its employees had to go through finally brought a resolution to this particular case. The young woman is now a registered citizen in her own country and can apply for employment, housing, economic aid, health care services, insurance, her children's registration, education and all other rights granted to her by the constitution of Albania. She is, eventually, a citizen of the Republic of Albania and entitled to all benefits and rights to which every citizen in this country is entitled.

Other similarly complex cases involving unregistered children are now being resolved daily, based on an increased accountability of civil registration and the other sectors involved in having each child registered. Child protection units, social services, civil society, police and the health sector are all more mobile and aware of their roles in resolving birth registration cases.

The electronic registration system for birth registration tracking and the provision of free legal aid are two important steps that would greatly facilitate the whole process and deliver sustainable changes for an effective system of birth registration.

The Women Entrepreneurs of Dibra

Shpresa Tomçini is from Staravec village near Peshkopi. She has raised three healthy children and been a good housewife, and now she has established a small business that generates sustainable income for her family. Twenty-four years ago, when she was 32 years old, she used to work as a saleswoman in the local state-owned fruit market, receiving a monthly salary of 390 ALL (less than USD 5.50). With the change of the political system, her situation became difficult, posing new challenges for her. At that time, no-one in this region ever thought that women could be successful entrepreneurs.

“It is one year now that, together with 19 other women from Staravec and Begjunec village, we formed an Economic Cluster supported by UN Women. We collect herbs, medicinal plants, fruits and vegetables from our own lands. With our own produce we prepare jufka, jam and compotes that we sell in trade fairs or in other markets. We have been guided and assisted by the Cluster in our efforts to earn revenues for ourselves and our families.”

Shpresa and the other 19 women have been able to produce, not just a wide assortment of products, but also sufficient quantities to



LOCAL SEASONAL PRODUCTS FROM THE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS OF DIBRA

conclude contracts with traders and companies. Currently, they can proudly state that they are the initiators of a business activity that supports at least 70 percent of their families.

The 53-year-old explains that in the autumn they collect seasonal products such as hazelnuts, beans and cornels. They have to work hard, but this is the only way they can show their husbands and the entire community that women can be successful entrepreneurs.

Unlike many years ago, Shpresa is now supported and helped by her husband, Muharrem, who says, “In these areas, public opinion is often rather prejudiced against women who work and travel unaccompanied. With the passage of time, this situation has changed somewhat. Personally,



I highly appreciate the work and efforts put in by my wife and the other women who are in constant need of technical assistance. They do a great job, their products are tasty and of high quality, but they don't have a place to sell them, and wait mostly for the trade fairs. Our village is only one kilometre from the city centre, but the road is very bad, which is why they often hesitate to take their products to the market."

Majlinda Hoxha is the leader of the association Argitra Vision, which aims at improving the economic situation of women around Peshkopi. Last year, she was closely assisting the Cluster project, through which she can help women enter the market as one group with a common business plan and strategy.

"This project helps women to work together in processing and selling their products. In this way, it is easier to prepare a business plan and identify markets to sell tens of quintals of products rather than just one quintal. With the support of UN Women, we have assisted them to increase their capacities to collect and process medicinal plants and forest fruits, although 70 percent of their income is still generated from the marketing of fruits and vegetables."

Through their work and continuous training, these women have been able not only to enhance their self-confidence, but also to win the respect and appreciation of their spouses, who through their important contributions have often become an important part of their wives' business activity. The 45-year old Majlinda considers this a big achievement for them.

"Now they are able to sell their products not only in the city, but also elsewhere. The profit made from this activity helps them meet their family needs. Today, these women need a storage facility, which would help them make better and more profitable deals. This activity was initiated by these women, but now all their families take part in it, since there are few or no employment alternatives. This is the only way for them to generate incomes."

The Cluster economic project aims at bringing women together, training them and providing opportunities for them to invest the income they generate. Furthermore, it supports and helps the women of Dibra region to increase their production and market their produce. At the same time, it will promote the community support and ensure the economic sustainability for these women, the family farms and the women artisans.

Protecting biodiversity in Albania

Albania has nine coastal protected areas, as well as one maritime protected area. The area of Karaburun–Sazan contains some of the most beautiful ecosystems in Albania. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and Albania’s environmental authorities, are seeking to double the protected maritime reserves of the country and improve their management, in cooperation with the communities themselves.

Ardit, a 32-years-old fisherman from Orikum, a town in the south of Albania, considers himself a living testimony of the fact that things have taken a turn for the better with regard to the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in Albania.

“I remember, there were only soldiers and a couple of shepherds at the military base. Nobody else could get close to it. The military base of Pasha Liman used to control the sole path to the Karaburun peninsula in Vlora. Ironically, in doing so it preserved the habitats of the area, along with the flora and fauna,” says a ranger serving in the Marine Park pointing towards Orikum.

Karaburun, Albania’s largest peninsula, and Sazan, the uninhabited island lying just next to it, were saved from the encroachment of construction, this phenomenon that has devastated much of

the northern coastline.

Albania’s maritime ecosystems are under further pressure from human aggressiveness. With disregard for the intrinsic values of ecosystems and the consequences of the loss of biodiversity and natural habitats, various construction companies have tried to transform the area with luxury resorts, even though environmental advocates and civil society actors are constantly warning that these ecosystems are important not only for health, well-being and the lifestyle of



A VIEW OF KARABURUN-SAZAN

Albania is seeking to double its protected maritime reserves and improve their management, in cooperation with the local communities themselves



MARITIME ECOSYSTEM

individuals, but also for tourism.

All of the above have served as incentives for the Ministry of Environment, UNDP and GEF, to design a programme entitled: “Improving coverage and efficiency of management of maritime protected areas in Albania” which addresses practices for management and conservation of maritime ecosystems, while also operating as a pilot for improved management of the maritime protected area of Karaburun–Sazan.

The project has served as a catalyst to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders and the local government.

Research undertaken regarding the biology of the area has shown the strong potential for ecotourism development which would promote the natural, cultural and traditional values of the marine park and its buffer zone.

At the local level, Orikum Municipality, a programme partner, is working to improve the legal framework for the zone management, and bring local communities closer to the issue.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Environment, with support from UNDP, has launched a series of measures aimed at ensuring long-term preservation and conservation of the unique coastal and maritime biodiversity of Albania, continuing the tradition and in line with the efforts of the network of terrestrial protected areas.

Intensified efforts are put in place to minimize

illicit actions such as arson, illegal logging and illegal fishing. A number of public hearings with local community members have been organized by the Municipality. Actions are undertaken to clean the maritime debris, plant trees, raise public awareness and provide support for surveys and monitoring of the protected areas.

All measures undertaken have had a visible impact on the situation of the ecosystems in the country.

Over the last 20 years, Albania has witnessed dramatic changes, different to those of other economies of the region. The effects of this transformation are tangible in terms of the spread of human activities and living standards



ORIKUM BEACH

in urban areas, in particular in the areas where development has been the most rapid.

Against this backdrop, this project becomes particularly important due to its large impact on Albania's coastal areas, given that much has not been developed.

The Director of the National Agency of Protected Areas Mr. Zamir Dedej highlighted: "With the establishment of the National Agency of Protected Areas, the Albanian Government marked a big step towards the conservation and management of natural resources. We have placed priority on the marine and coastal protected areas and we are committed to establish new ones and manage them in

accordance with international standards.

We are counting on the partnership with local communities to use the natural resources in a sustainable manner to benefit the present and future generations. In this way we are also contributing to the global network of marine and coastal protected areas and play our active role in the Mediterranean basin. We are faced with a number of challenges but we have a bold vision to make these highly concentrated biodiversity areas one of Albania's attractions for sustainable tourism."

Visible results achieved include the designation of the Karaburun–Sazan area as Maritime National Park with a total size of 12,571 hectares.

This Marine Protected Area includes unique wetland maritime habitats and capes home to globally endangered or threatened species such as sea turtles (green turtle and leatherback turtle), Mediterranean seal, Dalmatian pelican, various other bird species, corals, date mussel, gorgonians, sponges, cnidarians, molluscs, crustaceans, and other important species.

The Ministry of Environment and UNDP are working to further expand the Marine Protected Areas in line with their international commitments.

Up and until 2015, around 10 percent of the Albanian coastal and marine protected areas is being preserved. Institutions and systems are put in place to ensure their long term protection.



Helping Revitalizing Albania's Aquaculture

In the 1970s, Albania's communist government undertook a major investment to create new reservoirs for irrigation purposes. Nearly 670 small and medium artificial lakes, with a total surface area of 2,700 hectares, were dug across the country, a good many of them in remote rural areas. An estimated 118 of these lakes were used also for fishing.

The new lakes were populated with carp fingerlings imported mainly from Hungary and some from China, in addition to other freshwater fish species.

With the collapse of the communist regime in 1991, the country struggled to adapt to managing this resource within the new environment of a competitive market and



By providing support to Albania's authorities to develop the aquaculture sector, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is helping alleviate poverty, improve diets and boost employment in the fishing industry



burgeoning capitalism.

Much of the technology employed to exploit the fishery resources was very old and uncompetitive, and collapsed along with the regime, while some of the fish hatcheries were privatized.

As the system of management of freshwater fish farms collapsed many of the lakes were depopulated and annual production fell drastically, from 2–3,000 tons in 1990 to less than 300 tons in 2000.

Over the last decade, however, freshwater fish farming in Albania has made a comeback and many families across the country have created new river farms, pushing back production to 2,000 tons per annum. Nevertheless, several large artificial lakes created during communism are still not being used.

“After 2007, the process of replenishing these lakes with fingerlings was interrupted,” explains Mimoza Çobani, a fishery and aquaculture specialist at the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration.

To revitalize the use of these lakes, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is helping Albania’s authorities develop its aquaculture. The effort will also alleviate poverty and improve the dietary intake in some of the country’s poorest areas.

During the last twenty years, aquaculture in Albania has experienced the introduction of new structures and technology as a means of meeting commercially the demand for fish and creating benefits for fish farmers, creating new employment opportunities, increasing incomes, widening the spectrum of the types of protein

available, and, for the first time, providing incomes through the export of highly sought-after fish species.

Apart from the lagoons distributed along Albania’s west coast, freshwater aquaculture centres are mostly concentrated in the centre and south of the country. The favourable climate and wealth of water resources here, as well as the relatively higher economic position of the inhabitants since the development of tourism, which is also concentrated here, have enabled and attracted investments in aquaculture.

According to FAO, the contribution of aquaculture to food security has become and will remain important across the whole country, especially in eastern Albania where penetration of fish to the market is limited.

“The artificial reservoirs and lakes are in remote mountainous areas and their revitalization boosts self-employment, reduces poverty and improves the diet of the residents of these areas,” Çobani explains.

FAO is helping the Albanian authorities build a functional regulatory and institutional framework for fishery management, bridging the gap between the private use of natural resources and the need for laws, regulations and public investments.

“FAO funds have helped to put back in to work the national system of fingerling production and to train fishermen, as well as provide equipment for organisations for fishery management with the goal of raising the scale of fish processing and added market value,” Çobani says.

One of FAO’s interventions includes the provision



ALBANIA'S SOUTHERN COASTLINE

of equipment for production of smoked fish fillets by the Organisation for the Management of the water basin of Lake Shkodra and the River Buna.

“Freshwater fishery infrastructure currently lacks sophisticated processing lines for fish conservation, reducing the value chain of the industry,” Çobani explains.

Although there are now in Albania three or four hatcheries producing carp fingerlings, with a total surface area of about ten hectares and an annual production of about 2 million fingerlings, according to FAO the continuing shortfall in fingerling production leads to poor stocking levels of the reservoirs and natural and artificial lakes, reflected in a comparatively poor fish catch.

Vasjar Shermadhi is the owner of a hatchery, fish farm and restaurant in the village of Lumas in Elbasan County. With the support of FAO, he has been able to expand his production. “With the help of FAO, we were equipped with a Zuger incubator for reproduction of carp through the method of compression,” Shermadhi says.

The new fingerlings Shermadhi produces will help create the necessary infrastructure for annual replenishment of the lakes, to the benefit of the nearby communities.

“Aquaculture is a complex process that requires know-how but also is a valuable intervention to protect the environment,” Shermadhi says, while explaining that many lakes have become mesotrophic during the last few years due to the absence of fish.

Without fish, many lakes have been left unattended and have become overgrown, reducing the water available for irrigation; moreover, the amount of micro-organisms in these lakes has grown exponentially.

“The replenishment of the lakes with fish creates a multi-plan product almost for free,” Shermadhi says. “Albania is rich in high quality freshwater resources and I am convinced that many farmers will secure a good standard of living as a result of this industry,” he concludes.

Great job! A better future is working for people with disabilities in Albania

Sidrit Dedja is an amazing person: curious, equipped with a good sense of humour, and a real sense of purpose. He is 25 years old, and was born in the town Shkodra, Albania, with a significant motor disability. Despite this, he was able to complete his primary education. For

Sidrit, this was when his journey to self-discovery began:

“After I completed eight years of school, I spent my days at home, reading and watching

TV programmes, especially the ones related to science and computers. Soon I started loving these machines, which seemed to do wonders. I told myself: ‘One day I will learn to use these machines’ - and this became my purpose in life. My friends would share their books and other computer manuals with me. My parents used to worry how I would chase my dream, but I never let my disability bog me down, I just kept working hard towards that end.”

On his 21st birthday, he woke up in the morning

to find a surprise: a brand new computer in his living room, a gift from his supportive sister. It wasn't long before Sidrit was formatting, programming, and making repairs.

One day, he heard about an eight-week course offered by the regional employment office in collaboration with the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation, preparing people to enter the local labour market.

Determined to transform his life for the better, he participated in the programme and subsequently was selected to participate in on-the-job training programme developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for people with disabilities.

After the training, he began working as a computer technician at a civil society organization in Shkodra. For Sidrit, this was nothing short of a miracle: “What I valued most is not only the possibility to do something useful but also to feel accepted by my friends and society at large. Disability should not be viewed



SIDRIT DEDJA, EMPLOYED AT
"KOLPINI FOUNDATION" IN SHKODRA

as inability. Miracles happen, one must only believe in them.”

Sidrit and other young people in Albania face great employment challenges. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 40 percent of Albania’s youth are unemployed. Young employees are also more exposed to the informal economy than adults. In 2009, 46 percent of all young male employees were informal workers.

Young people face a number of challenges when it comes to seeking gainful employment, such as a lack of skills and education to respond to the market needs. These challenges are compounded for youth with disabilities, who have even more limited access to higher education.

Since 2009, UNDP in Albania has embarked on a variety of interventions to address these barriers. The latest project, implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, aims to improve youth employment opportunities in three selected regions of the country where the rates are currently highest: Lezha, Kukës, and Shkodër.

The project works to enable local actors to identify and address youth employment challenges, improve collaboration between local actors as a means to reduce youth unemployment as well as boost the National Employment Service’s capacity to provide quality employment services to citizens.

As UNDP Programme Officer Eno Ngjela says: “Employment promotion and skills development should be seen as closely linked to private sector needs and to local economic development

“What I valued most is not only the possibility to do something useful but also to feel accepted by my friends and society at large. Disability should not be viewed as inability. Miracles happen, one must only believe in them”

challenges and opportunities. To this end, UNDP has introduced modalities to improve both private sector participation and the involvement of all relevant actors to address youth employment issues.”

The project is actively targeting youth with disabilities in order to shatter the long-standing belief that people with disabilities can only be



YOUNG PEOPLE BENEFITTING FROM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING



passive recipients of social welfare payments. By engendering employment opportunities, the project aims to encourage more than just income generation, but true and lasting social inclusion.

So far over 500 youths have received on-the-job training and have subsequently gained employment. Over 350 men and women have

received training on entrepreneurship and business plan development.

This intervention is funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation and is enabling Sidrit and those like him not just to put their skills to good use, but perhaps even more importantly, to have a hope for a better life.

Giving Roma and Egyptians in Albania an economic boost

Firdes Tole, a divorced mother of three in the Roma community of Pogradec, could barely make ends meet cultivating sage for three months a year as a seasonal worker at her neighbor's farm.

Due to lack of access to basic services such as health and education, poor income and living conditions, and long-standing social exclusion, the level of poverty in Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania is estimated to be three times higher than that of other parts of the population.

One day, Tole heard about a training on medicinal plant cultivation offered to the members of the Roma community living in her neighborhood. Part of a project funded by the European Union and implemented by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth





in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the initiative supports the social inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities by providing vocational trainings to increase their employability and strengthen artisan and entrepreneurial skills, especially for women and girls.

Tole was among the first to join the training. For a week, participants were trained on the techniques needed to cultivate, collect and dry medicinal plants. They also learned about concepts of entrepreneurship and how to start up a business.

Sage seeds were also given for free to women who owned a piece of land to help them start up a business.

“When I first heard about the training, I got

Highlights

> 100 Roma and Egyptian women were trained on medical plant cultivation.

60 women were provided with sage seeds for free to help them start up a business. The level of poverty in Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania is estimated to be three times higher than that of other parts of the population

90% of Roma and Egyptian workers do not make social security contribution, that 40.3 percent of Roma and 12.7 percent of Egyptians are illiterate, while

21 percent of Roma and 11 percent of Egyptians live in shacks.

2500 families have benefited from 9 infrastructure interventions identified by Roma and Egyptian Community Counseling Forums such as multifunctional community centers, kindergartens, road rehabilitations etc.

12 training manuals (consisting in 12 topics i.e. advocacy and lobbying, human rights, human resources management, fundraising, financial management of NGO, etc) has been prepared. The project has worked to build capacities among Roma and Egyptian NGOs.

really excited. I was collecting sage to make a living, but I knew there were so many other things I needed to learn. Most importantly I learned how to manage my own business," says Firdes, who became an employer instead of an employee less than six months after the training.

Sage cultivation specialists were recruited by UNDP to assist farmers throughout the cultivation process and support them in timing their sales and marketing the product.

With the revenue from her first harvest, Firdes purchased larger quantities of sage seeds and grew her production. She soon realized she needed more hands to do the job and recruited a Roma woman. Today she provides a job to four women.

"I never thought I could be my own boss and that one day I would not only manage to provide a decent living for my family, but also jobs to other women like me. I realize how

important training can be. It can change your life."

"What makes this intervention unique is the involvement of women in business dominated and run by men," says Luan Ahmetaj, Director of the Medicinal Plant Institute in Tirana, Albania. "This contributes to empowering those communities economically and helping them change their life style".

Firdes was one among sixty Roma and Egyptian women who were provided with sage seeds to enable them to start up a business. Today they are considered role models in their communities.

"Studies undertaken by the project showed that cultivating sage plants is the most appropriate economic activity for Roma and Egyptians living in the area. Once you plant the seeds you can get production twice a year for almost 10 years in a row," says Bujar Taho, UNDP Project Manager.

Albania has a huge potential for the medicinal

15 Roma and Egyptian NGOs have benefitted from small grants following a competitive process, after having undergone intensive training and coaching by UNDP.

100 Employability and Entrepreneurship innovative ideas on self-employment with practical guidelines on preparation of business plans has been prepared in a manual.

90 Roma and Egyptian Artisan have benefitted from training on innovative ideas to market their products.

plant industry. The country is the biggest sage exporter to the United States. According to the US Agricultural Department, 57 percent of the sage imports in the USA come from Albania. In order to support the development of this industry, the

Government has undertaken several initiatives such as a subvention scheme for farmers who cultivate medicinal plants. Roma and Egyptian families are encouraged to apply and benefit from this initiative.

Around 300 members of Roma and Egyptian communities in the regions of Berat, Korça and

Vlora are now benefiting from the initiative, among them 50 percent are women. The project also supports the Government of Albania in its efforts to achieve the objectives set forth in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 - 2015 while promoting respect for human rights and appreciation for cultural diversity, as prerequisites for the country's EU accession.

To be a Woman in the Police Force

Florida Metko is an Albanian police woman. She decided to join the police force driven by a strong desire to fight crime and enforce the law. Inspired by heroic books and movies, the girl from Libonik near Korça, after graduating in English Language, made a very important decision: to follow the one-year police course, linking her future with the police.

“I’ve been a member of the police force for ten years now. I work as a controller in the Border Commissariat at Mother Teresa Airport at Rinas. My dream had been to work in the criminology sector, in the field, where I could face those who violate the law, but things have worked out differently.”

The 34-year-old talks with great passion about her work. Although she affirms that many people regard her profession as a masculine domain, she would never abandon it.

“Women in the police are still discriminated. I still hear people say that police women must be very rough to be working with men. But this won’t stop us; it will not make us give up our work. I have deliberately chosen it and made sacrifices for it. I remember the year when I had to train a police dog. It was difficult: my hands were bleeding from constantly pulling on the leash,” says Florida smiling.

The Commissariat Chief Inspector, who wears the police uniform so well and commands respect at the same time, confirms that sexual harassment exists also in the police ranks. “There is sexual harassment. Often disciplinary measures are taken; suspensions; transfer from one work place; however, no prosecutions have been made.”

Florida confirms the difficulty for women to be promoted in this profession. “There are very few women in leading positions in the police force. I don’t know of any woman appointed as chief of a commissariat. It is very difficult for anyone to gain promotion in this profession, but particularly for women. Nevertheless, recently there has been an increase in the number of women joining the police force, as well as a strengthening of their role in the organisational structure,” she says.

The model of the Albanian police should be based on communication and cooperation, not on strength. Therefore, the presence of women is vital to increase the communication capacities both within and outside of the police force, particularly for giving impetus to the development of community policing.

UN Women and the Police Women’s Forum, in cooperation with the leading structures of the State Police, are working closely, not only to increase the number of young women wishing to enter the Police Academy, but also to create suitable conditions for them to remain and build a career.

Currently, efforts are being made to try to penalise any individual who undertakes sexual harassment in the force, and a draft policy has been developed stipulating such harassment as punishable. The form and manifestations are explained in the policy, along with the steps to be followed and the disciplinary measures taken for anyone who abuses their office.

Chief Commissar Edlira Zoto, who is also a project



POLICE OFFICER DURING A TRAINING SESSION IN TIRANA

manager in the Police Women's Forum, collaborated closely with UN Women in compiling the draft.

"We have worked hard for the number of women entering the police force to be equal to that of men. And we have achieved this equality in all the recent recruitments. However, we have now to work hard to create suitable conditions for them to feel comfortable and build a career," says Zoto.

The 38-year-old is mother to two children. After many years of working her way up through the police ranks, she has now attained the rank of Chief Commissar. Nevertheless, her biggest regret remains the field: the opportunity denied her to experience the difficulties at first hand, to face those who break the law, and to investigate criminal cases.

"When it comes to advancing a career within the force, many of us do not aim for a leading position, because the pressure is huge. Although there are many women in the police force who want to hold a leading position, they do not have the required rank. Men seem to be privileged. If there is a vacancy, a male vice commissar might be appointed, but for a woman with the same rank it would be much more difficult!"

The figures support these claims. At the national level there are some 600 women working in the police

force. However, of these only ten hold top ranks.

Edlira affirms for us that, "Female promotion to and representation in the higher ranks is poor. Support and protection mechanisms for women in the police need to be strengthened. Nevertheless, we have worked hard, and with the support of UN Women we have made a significant improvement in the number of women enrolled in the Police Academy. Meanwhile, the departure of women from the force remains a challenge. Difficult shift work, lack of information, an old mentality, family obligations and pressure are some of the factors that create an unfavourable environment for women in the police."

Although the new measures are only just starting, the sanctioning of sexual harassment in the police force and the awareness of staff and the public on gender equality constitute the foundation for the representation and role of women in the police at all levels.

UN Women and the Police Women's Forum will continue to work for the inclusion of more women in the police force. However, the development of policies that will target and support increasing the number of women in leading positions in the police remains a necessity and the focus of the on-going efforts.

Albania: Fighting Drug Trafficking

Containerized cargo allows goods to be transported across the world, however many containers continue to be compromised for illicit trafficking. A number of these containers reach Albania through the Port of Durres, which, however, is not their only entry point into the country.

Combatting drug traffickers routing containers through the Port of Durres is one of the challenges faced by Albanian authorities. During 2013-2014, 1400 kilograms of cocaine were shipped to Albania from Latin American ports.

In January 2015, the State Police undertook a number of coordinated actions in partnership with German Police. As a result, approximately 21 kilograms of cocaine and other substances used in the production of cocaine were seized in the village of Xibrakë, Elbasan, during warehouse inspections.

Eleven individuals, including two Columbian nationals who had entered the country pretending to be football players, were arrested.



In the course of these operations, police found traces of narcotics in sacks originating from Bolivia, in another warehouse in Durres. The sacks had officially entered Albania as chemical products for leather tanning, but further investigation found that they had instead been used as raw material for the extraction of cocaine by the two Columbians.

This significant police action demonstrated that international organized crime groups are trafficking narcotics from Latin America to the Balkans, with Western Europe as the final destination.

Albanian authorities in cooperation with the United Nations Offices on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are working to address this challenge. Around 650 containers move through the world's ports every year, however only 2 percent of those are inspected. Selection of containers is done

according to a number of risk factors including country of origin, with shipments from Latin American countries considered to be high risk.

In 2004, UNODC and the World Customs Organization launched the Container Control Programme (CCP), now operational in 28 ports across the world, to help Member States to identify and disrupt illicit trafficking. Since 2013 the CCP has been working with Albanian authorities at the Port of Durres, where a Port Control Unit has been established to monitor the movement of containers through the Port, allowing for close cooperation between customs and police experts.

So far, operations at the Port of Durres have contributed to the seizure of 1375.7 kilograms of cocaine sent from Latin America to Albania.

In 2014, all shipments destined for Albania from which cocaine was seized were expected to transit through the ports of Ecuador. Thanks to the container profiling efforts carried out by Albanian, Ecuadorian and Montenegrin authorities, numerous shipments have been seized and confiscated. In total, 610,653 kilograms of cocaine, part of which included Albania as its final destination, were seized last year alone. In 2013 the amount of cocaine destined for Albania was higher; 765 kilograms of cocaine destined to arrive at the Port of Durres were seized at ports in Latin America.

Between 2013–2015 (till July) successful container control operations in Albania have enabled seizures of drugs worth 10 million USD. So far, 5.6 tons of marijuana, 31.2 kilograms of heroin, 194.645 USD counterfeit goods and 46.000 false Euro and arms were sized at the Port of Durres. Following State and police intervention to stamp out cannabis production in Lazarat, a village believed to produce 900 tons of cannabis annually, trafficking of cannabis originating from Albania has decreased significantly.



CONTAINERS WAITING TO BE INSPECTED AT THE PORT OF DURRES

Helping Refugees Integrate into Albanian Society



PROVIDING A SAFE HAVEN FOR REFUGEES IN ALBANIA

By partnering with local institutions and civil society organizations, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is supporting Albanian authorities to provide assistance and care to the growing influx of refugees in the country.

When Ayoob Mohamed and his companions arrived in Albania in 2005, their arrival hit international headlines. Mohamed was part of group of five Uighurs, ex-Guantanamo Bay prisoners, who were considered innocent and were relocated to Tirana, when a US Court in

Massachusetts ruled on their release. The Uighurs are a Turki-speaking, mainly Sunni Islamic ethnic group with a long history in Central Asia.

Since his arrival in the country, Ayoob struggled to integrate and build a new life in Tirana. Nine years after his arrival, he feels safe, confident and speaks at length about the assistance he received from the Government of Albania, UNHCR and a local NGO called “Refugee Migrant Services in Albania”.

He says: “After attending a course in Albanian



Language and a series of counseling sessions with social workers, I initiated a Bachelor Programme in Business Administration, at the New York University of Tirana, one of the country's private education institutions. Initially I was lucky enough to get help for my studies from a compatriot living in the US and later UNHCR stepped in to help me with a scholarship so that I could complete the programme. I could not expect better support. In my country we say that when somebody helps you to get education, that somebody has given you a life".

In 2010, Ayoob married a compatriot and they

have a son. Today he has his degree and is looking for a full time job to support his family.

Many of the refugees that arrive in Albania come from war-torn countries like Syria, Iraq or Somalia. They need help to adapt. They face challenges which range from securing documents, getting access to education or finding employment. Albania, like other countries in the region, is coping with rapidly rising migratory flows from Africa, Asia and the Middle East, who transit through the country on their way to Western Europe.

Only in the last two years, the country has been approached by large flows of migrants in need of international protection.

The Albanian Authorities have addressed their situations in line with the referral mechanisms in place giving priority to the most vulnerable categories and groups. They benefit from several training programmes aiming to build their skills in several professions such as electrician, auto-mechanical, plumber, computer programmer and many more.

In order to assist local institutions to provide support based on international standards for those who choose to seek asylum in the country, the UNHCR has helped Albanian authorities over the past decade to build an asylum and migration system in line with international and EU standards. This is done through adopting appropriate legislations,

enhancing the institutional capacities of authorities in charge of asylum, compiling relevant rules and regulations, and setting up basic infrastructure.

Albania has also signed major relevant international conventions ensuring the protection of human rights and support for asylum seekers and refugees in the country.

Primary beneficiaries of the UNHCR programs in Albania are asylum seekers and refugees who are accommodated at the National Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Tirana. In 2014, nearly 500 people were assisted by UNHCR in Albania through its annual program.

UNHCR's door is always open to Ayoub and hundreds of other refugees who seek shelter as they flee from their countries of origin due to repression and discrimination.



A DRAWING FROM A REFUGEE CHILD



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