



UNITED NATIONS  
ALBANIA



# COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS 2020

UNITED NATIONS COUNTRY TEAM, ALBANIA

INTERNAL UN DRAFT - JULY 2020

Revised on November 2020



This document is a living document and the information contained herein is subject to change. The assessment was made based upon available research and using the most recent available data. This document reflects analysis emerging as part of Covid-19 Socio Economic Plan.



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# ACRONYMS

ADFD	Abu Dhabi Fund for Development
ADHS	Albanian Demographic and Health Survey
ALL	Albanian Lek
CAT	Convention against Torture
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CMW	Committee on Migrant Workers
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
DDGG	Department for Development and Good Governance
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GB–DV	Gender-Based and Domestic Violence
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GoA	Government of Albania
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
GVA	Growth Value Added
GW	Gigawatt
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSTAT	National Institute of Statistics
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in Rural Development
IPH	Institute of Public Health
ISARD	Inter-Sectoral Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development
KKT	National Territorial Council
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LGBTQI	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender, Queer and Intersex
MAPS	Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support
MIE	Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy

MoFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MTBP	Mid-Term Budget Programme
MW	Megawatt
NAPPWD	National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities
NDC	National Determined Contribution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NSDI	National Strategy for Development and Integration
NSGE	National Strategy on Gender Equality
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODHIR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PBF	Peace Building Fund
PBSO	Peace Building Support Office
PDNA	Post-Disaster Needs Analysis
PFM	Public Finance Management
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PPP	Private Public Partnership
PRTR	Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers
P/VoT	Potential/Victims of Trafficking
REA	Regional Economic Area
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SILC	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SSS	State Social Services
TAP	Trans-Adriatic Pipeline
TUS	Time Use Survey
UMC	Unaccompanied Migrant Children
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	UN Economic Commission for Europe
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VET	Vocational Education Training
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WB	World Bank
WBF	Western Balkans Fund
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

# Executive Summary

**A**lbania is an upper middle-income country on its path to European Union (EU) accession. European integration is the main driver of reform in the country and a shared political priority. An overwhelming majority of Albanians, more than 90 percent, are pro-EU<sup>1</sup>, and Schengen Area visa liberalisation, granted in 2010, has perhaps been the most significant event felt by an individual citizen since the fall of communism.

In March 2020, the Council of the European Union agreed to open accession negotiations with Albania, marking another milestone. Reforming the electoral code, completing key steps in the judicial reform implementation and continued progress on public administration reform, as well as combatting organised crime and corruption, are all necessary steps in the EU accession process. To date, all these areas have witnessed varying degrees of domestic political conflict.

The Council also notes the importance of human rights and of respecting the rights of persons belonging to minorities.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, reaffirming the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of human rights, democracy and rule of law,<sup>3</sup> the Commission proposes to include these areas under a common thematic cluster called “fundamentals”.<sup>4</sup> Negotiations on the fundamentals will be open first and closed last and the progress on these will determine the overall pace of negotiations. Therefore, the EU and the UN agendas in

Albania converge in the area of promoting realization of the human rights that are the basis of democracy and the implementation of the rule of law.

Albania is party to the nine core international human rights instruments, covering the full range of rights, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, though the country is yet to ratify the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Similarly, all the main Council of Europe human rights instruments are signed and ratified, including the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and its protocols, and conventions on the prevention of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, on the action against trafficking in human beings, and on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul convention).

Albania’s legislative harmonisation to the adopted international commitments is ongoing, in great part sustained by its commitment to the EU accession process. Yet, the full and consistent implementation of the existing legislation is insufficient, further preventing the systemic transformation of society that is needed to ensure the enjoyment of human rights to all people.

Albania is considered by most observers to be a hybrid democracy, in transition towards a market economy

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1. Balkan Barometer 2020

2. Council Conclusions on opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia [available here](#)

3. See Human Rights Council resolution 19/36 on “Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law”

4. Commission Communication on “Enhancing the accession process-A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans” of 5 February 2020



underpinned by the rule of law and democratic institutions. Judicial reform implementation has, since 2016, been slower than expected. Nevertheless, there is a strong consensus amongst international actors that the reform has been deep and meaningful and will result in a much stronger judicial system. Electoral issues have been a cause of contention in recent years in the country. The ability of Parliament—and political actors more generally—to contribute to democratic development is, however, constrained by political polarisation and, most importantly, weak accountability of elected representatives for failing to meet their obligations under international and domestic law in a human rights framework.

The ongoing transition and reform process have curtailed the focus placed on socioeconomic and environmental development agenda. Some of the key structural challenges Albania faces have been met by divergent approaches and responses that threaten to fragment the effectiveness instead of anchoring the country on the path towards structural transformation and building productive capacity. The third National Strategy for Development and Integration for 2021–2030 (NDSI) will be prepared in 2020 and will be supported by national interim targets for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This strategy has the potential of strengthening the interface between the socioeconomic and environmental targets and the overall governance reforms. The strategy will also play an important role for the development of the new Government of Albania (GoA) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022–2026, for which the preparations are under way. In addition, the UN in Albania has prepared a COVID-19 Socio-economic Recovery and Response Plan for the country, which includes actions in the short and mid-term to support the government's recovery efforts.

In light of the 2030 Agenda commitments, the country has established relevant oversight and technical mechanisms to guide achievement of the SDGs. Considerable efforts have been made to integrate and mainstream the 2030 Agenda across the national development policy framework, while progress on achievement of the SDGs is noted in the Voluntary

National Report (VNR) report,<sup>5</sup> which also indicates that 140 SDG targets (83%) are tied directly to specific components of the NSDI 2015–2020 pillars.

Albania's economy grew by an average of 2.4 percent over the past decade. The economy is dominated by the services sector, especially tourism, followed by agriculture, industry and construction. In 2020, the growth was expected to rebound to 3.4 percent following the earthquake reconstruction efforts and a return to normal hydropower production after a dry year. However, the cost of COVID-19 and the related restrictions are projected to cause GDP to contract by five percent in 2020. The recession and economic support measures are projected to increase the fiscal deficit to 5.4 percent of GDP in 2020, pushing government debt up to 75.8 percent of GDP.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Human Development Report 2019, Albania ranks 69th out of 189 countries and territories, with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.791, putting the country in the high category, and just short of the very high category. Between 1990 and 2018, Albania's HDI increased by 23 percent.

Despite the progress made, Albania is still one of the poorest countries in Europe, with an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 23.4 percent in 2018 (average of EU 28 countries, 16.9%). The national minimum wage is USD 232 and the average, USD 470 (31% of the EU average). Household consumption fuelled by remittances (9.4% of GDP in 2019) continues to be one of the main drivers of growth. Expansion of the tax base and reduction of the informal economy continue to be major government challenges. The unemployment rate continues to decline, reaching 11.4 percent in 2019, with youth unemployment reported at 21.4 percent (35% in Western Balkans). Unemployment in Albania is largely long term and structural as long-term unemployment (>1 year) represent 66 percent of the unemployed. Women, youth and those with limited education are more excluded from jobs. Agriculture continues to be one of the main economic pillars of the Albanian economy, contributing 19 percent to the country's GDP and providing jobs to one-third of employed people in

5. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20257ALBANIA\\_VNR\\_2018\\_FINAL2.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20257ALBANIA_VNR_2018_FINAL2.pdf)

6. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/457181588085856454/pdf/The-Economic-and-Social-Impact-of-COVID-19-The-Country-Notes.pdf>

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1:450,000



Albania. Migration of skilled workers, especially those with advanced education and skills, is impacting certain professions, such as medicine and information technology. A skills mismatch of labour market needs and what the labour force has to offer is persistent as the country's education institutions are struggling

to integrate vulnerable groups into the labour market and help boost economic growth and increase competitiveness.

The population of Albania on 1 January 2020 was 2,845,955 inhabitants, experiencing a decrease of

0.6 percent compared to 1 January 2019, with around 35 percent thought to live in the county (*qark*, local government unit; also prefecture at central level) of Tirana. The population has experienced negative growth since 1990, to a decrease of 0.91 percent every year between 2001 and 2011, with a trend that has continued. Over the past decade, Albania's population has decreased by nine percent, with a demographic trend offering both challenges and opportunities.

Migration has become the most important determinant of population size rather than fertility or mortality as previously. Emigration from Albania is driven primarily by economic reasons. The population will naturally continue its aging process, with the median age expected to reach 42.1 years by 2031. In addition to threatening the financial sustainability of retirement and of disability pensions, such a trend is expected to strain further the state's health insurance system finances.

Albania's social care and protection systems insufficiently protect people against poverty shocks, and struggle to help the poor find sustainably productive pathways. Investments in education, health care and social protection as a share of GDP are below EU averages. The current protection and inclusion schemes could be improved by better integration of the intersecting dimensions of poverty and deprivation: education, health care, and housing conditions, for example. Elderly people are faced with multi-dimensional exclusion, especially those who rely on economic assistance. While progress has been made on many fronts, Roma and Egyptian populations, disabled people including children, isolated rural communities and especially rural women, and at-risk children are categories who experience higher than average vulnerability, and are at risk of being left behind. The impact of COVID-19 and related response measures risk exacerbating poverty, inequality and vulnerability and very problematic increase the risk of gender-based violence.

Protection of the country's environment has not kept pace with its economic growth, and Albania ranks as one of the top ten countries in the world with the highest economic risk from multiple hazards. While Albania ranks as a low risk country in the

global INFORM Risk Index, the country remains exposed to earthquakes and floods, and faces the increasingly severe impacts of climate change. In the current COVID-19 context, Albania is not spared from the impacts of systemic risk, and the cascading impacts associated. The country is highly dependent on hydropower-generated energy, and is currently utilising approximately one-third of its hydro potential. There is also large potential for wind and solar power generation, especially along the Adriatic coast. Introduction of other renewable sources of energy, together with connection to natural gas following implementation of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline project, represent strategic opportunities for Albania to reduce its vulnerability from a sole source of energy. While the alternatives involve trade-offs, including trans-boundary issues, they can reduce negative impacts from hydropower. Meanwhile, liberalisation of the energy market remains a challenge. Apart from water-related environmental challenges, Albania faces challenges with regard to waste management and the application of sustainable production practices by the private sector.

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Strengthening regional cooperation rests at the centre of Albania's foreign policy and leads the country's constructive approach and active leadership in the region. Albania is part of the Regional Economic Area (REA) for the Western Balkans, and Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) for economic development in the region. The country hosts the secretariats of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and the Western Balkans Fund (WBF), highlighting the belief that neighbourly relations and mutual trust can strengthen the security and stability of the entire region.

# Process & Methodology

The CCA is a core analytical function carried out by UN Agencies in Albania which will serve to the development of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026. The CCA will serve as a basis for the CF prioritization exercise, the definition of outcomes, and subsequent development of the overall CF theory of change.

The CCA is prepared fully in-house with expertise from UN Agencies members of the UN Country Team, including non-resident agencies, secretariat departments such as UNDPPA, regional offices of UN entities such as

OHCHR, UNECE, UNDRR and others. The methodology was focused primarily on desk review, mapping and sourcing current reference data and material. The process was managed by the UNCT, CCA Task Force, and UNRCO to enable an independent,

collective, integrated, forward-looking, and evidence-based analysis of the country context. The ad-hoc CCA Task Force established by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) developed the scope, collated technical inputs, and RCO produced drafts of the CCA for UNCT review. The CCA report includes the assessment and

the analysis (examination of why things are the way they are) of the country development context. The assessment includes analysis of dimensions such as: progress towards the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the SDG financing landscape, leaving no one behind and multidimensional risks. The analysis emphasizes dimensions such as economic transformation, social exclusion, the environment and climate change, governance and institutional gaps, and humanitarian-development-peace collaboration.

The preparation of the CCA was undertaken during the Covid pandemic (March- July 2020) and this situation, reduced the face to face consultation opportunity with stakeholders. Multiple stakeholders were consulted including but not limited to Government institutions, development partners, NGOs. Further to this, CCA won't be considered as a one-time event. As such, the development of the UNSCDF will provide the opportunity to review the CCA and validate its analysis and make adjustments as appropriate in line with the set priorities. Analysis of relevant regional, sub-regional and cross-border dynamics, and their impact on achieving the 2030 Agenda in the country are integrated in this document to help identify opportunities for cross-border dialogue and collaboration between countries, including through South-South and triangular cooperation, and UN system-wide regional strategies. Furthermore, country-specific findings and recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review, the reports from

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other human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms provide an important basis for highlighting gaps and corresponding obligations. A gender-based analysis was conducted under the guidance of the UN Gender Thematic Group to feed into the CCA.

The review of data consisted of the assessment of quantitative and qualitative data from within and outside the UN system, including UN agencies surveys, assessments, reports, reviews, evaluations; development stakeholder documents; key national documents; data and surveys from INSTAT; national and sector strategies; national budget allocations; development financing from domestic and international, private and public sources; international obligations and human rights' treaties; regional assessments, analysis and reports. Disaggregated data, where available, was used to deepen the analysis of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and drivers of vulnerability, including also examination of social, cultural, economic, political, legislative and other systemic drivers of exclusion. In addition, the preparation of the CCA, aimed to ensure a diversity of data beyond national statistics can be garnered (i.e., MAPS, VNR, other).

Adherence to corporate guidelines (UNDSG latest guidance: Cooperation Framework Companion Package-Consolidated Annexes-July 2020) was ensured throughout the assignment, including for example SDGs interlinkages analysis, alignment to the Leaving no one behind approach and the Human Rights Based Approach, as well as incorporation of Gender Mainstreaming.

# 1. Country Context

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## 1.1 Demographic Context

### **Albania's population—from highest growth in Europe to negative growth in the last 30 years**

According to the latest annual report of the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), the population of Albania on 1 January 2020, was 2,845,955 inhabitants, a decrease of 0.6 percent over the previous twelve months. The sex ration of the total population in 2018 has also decreased to 100.1 men for 100 women, from 101.3 in 2017. From a very high growth rate of about 2.4 percent per annum prior to the collapse of the communist state in 1990, the population has been steadily falling, by an annual 0.33 percent from 1990 to 2001, to 0.91 percent from 2001 until 2011, with a trend that continues to the present day. The main component of this negative growth has been mass emigration. It is estimated that more than 700,000 Albanians left the country between 1989 and 2001, with a trend that continues to the present, with the population losing another 265,640 people in between the two censuses of 2001 and 2011 (2,802,100 according to Census 2011). Thus, one-third of the country's population have emigrated since 1989.

While population growth is negative and net emigration is very high, the level of fertility is very low. In 2018, Albania's overall fertility rate was 1.38 children per woman, one of the lowest in Europe. This is a dramatic change given the country had the highest

fertility rate on the continent when the communist regime collapsed. Meanwhile, the mortality rate is low, and life expectancy is continuing to increase, one of the highest in south-east Europe.

In sum, in 2020, Albania has a demography characterised by a low level of childbearing, long life expectancy and high rates of emigration.

### **Rapid reduction in fertility over a very short timeframe**

From having one of the highest fertility rates in Europe to one of the lowest, Albania experienced a massive reduction in fertility within a very short period, level of Total Fertility Rate (TFR) shifted from three children per woman in 1990, to 2.2 in 2000, 1.63 in 2010 and 1.36 in 2019. This dramatic reduction is seen at all child-bearing ages, in all years. There is no evidence of childbearing postponement in Albania as in most western societies, but rather having the first child in a woman's early 20s. This is supported by evidence from the Albanian Demographic and Health Survey (ADHS) of 2017–2018, which reports that the mean age at first child was 23.8 years. Also significant is that marriage continues to be the norm, with 68 percent of women of reproductive age in 2017–18 married (ADHS 2018) and with the mean age of first marriage of 22.4 years among females of age 15–49 years. This is one year less than mean age at first child, showing the pattern of an early marriage and early childbearing in a semi-traditional environment.<sup>7</sup> This finding is also apparent

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7. CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4 paras. 20 and 41: "The Committee is particularly concerned about the persistence of such harmful practices as child marriage... which remain prevalent in rural and remote areas and among minority communities." and "The Committee is seriously concerned about the practice of child marriage, especially among the Roma and Egyptian communities, often authorized by court decision as an exception to the minimum age of marriage of 18 years.

if one looks at how Albanians control fertility. Usage of modern contraceptive methods in Albania is probably the lowest in the region.<sup>8</sup> Only 9 percent of demand for modern family planning methods was found to be satisfied.<sup>9</sup> The most common means of contraception are traditional methods, with contraceptive use among only four percent of all women of age 15–49 years, and withdrawal being the main method, at 42 percent. The high level of abortion in the country (171 per 1,000 live births in 2017; Health For All, World Health Organisation 2020) suggests that the Albanian means of fertility control is more a mixture of traditional methods (with traditional contraception prevalence high) and an East European characteristic, where abortion is the most common means.<sup>10</sup> As evidenced in the 2012 World Vision-UNFPA study<sup>11</sup>, and by research conducted in 2018<sup>12</sup>, sex-selective abortion is practiced. According to administrative data of INSTAT, from 1990 onwards, in Albania there are born more males than females, surpassing the natural sex-ratio. Sex ratio at birth has increased, marking 109.0 in 2019, from 108.0 in 2018.<sup>13</sup> Districts such as Gjirokastra, Korça, Kukës and Lezha have a male-to-female sex-ratio of over 1,11 which means 111 boys are born for 100 girls, while the natural sex-ratio is 105 males for 100 females. Among medical staff participating in the research, 87 percent stated that couples show a pronounced preference for a male child, and this preference is particularly pronounced among men (i.e. in 75 percent of the cases). While the practice of selective abortion has been tentatively mentioned in the National Review for the implementation of Beijing+25<sup>14</sup>, it has not been addressed yet as violence against women and gender discrimination in relevant health and gender policy. Informative, educational and awareness raising

materials on sex-selective abortion are lacking. No further research has been conducted, and reporting by public hospitals, private clinics and the Institute of Public Health is insufficient and requires coordination. The practice of sex-selective abortion is yet to be addressed as violence against women and/or gender discrimination in relevant health and gender policy. Education and information on sex-selective abortion are lacking, and reporting by the Institute of Public Health, public hospitals, and private clinics on this matter is insufficient. While fertility during communism did fall during the final decade, as a result of a wide social agenda introduced by the government with female education and full employment as the main focus, it was mostly driven by the uncertainty among young people in the labour market, in general, and among young women, in particular.

### Continuous improvements in overall mortality, but not in neonatal mortality

Over the past two decades (2000–2018) mortality in Albania has continued to fall, with life expectancy increasing from 71.4 to 74.4 years for men, and from 76.9 to 80.6 years for women. Men's life expectancy is 1.5 years below the male EU average, whereas women's is 3.7 years below the EU average for women.<sup>15</sup> Mortality rate has improved among all age groups, with infant mortality falling, from 23 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000, to 10.3 in 2019. On the other hand, the maternal mortality rate (MMR) was 3.4 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2018, and 7 in 2019.<sup>16</sup> According to these administrative figures, Albania's MMR has doubled within a year. It terms of overall adult mortality,

8. [https://albania.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/what\\_has\\_changed-family\\_planning.pdf](https://albania.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/what_has_changed-family_planning.pdf)

9. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/AL>

10. CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4 paras.32 and 33 (a) The Committee is concerned about the excessive use of abortion as a method of birth control in the State party, including sex-selective abortion.

11. World Vision & UNFPA (2012). Sex imbalances at birth in Albania, [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA\\_report\\_Albania2012.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA_report_Albania2012.pdf)

12. Conducted by "Together for Life" organization in the framework of "Strengthening democracy in healthcare system through respecting human rights" project, with the support of MATRA program of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See: <https://togetherforlife.org.al/en/aborti-selektiv-baze-gjinore-ne-shqiperi/>

13. <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6850/population-on-1-january-2020.pdf>

14. [https://www.uneca.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM\\_Website/Albania.pdf](https://www.uneca.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/Albania.pdf)

15. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=AL-EU>

16. INSTAT (2020). "Women and Men in Albania". See: <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2020/women-and-men-in-albania-2020/>

Albania has long been recognised to have one of the lowest levels in Europe, similar to Greece and Italy, with a pattern typical of the Mediterranean paradox, where the level of economic development does not justify the level of low mortality, but is attributed to the major latitude-related geographical factor of sunlight, Mediterranean life style (for adult mortality), and some investment in health and social agenda, resulting in good health in low cost of living countries (with regard to infant and child mortality). This is long recognised in the literature as a significant achievement of Albania which continues to present day.

Having said that, one concern for policymakers should be that over the past ten years, the infant mortality rate has fallen only slightly, from eleven to eight deaths per 1,000 live births (EU-28 average, 3.6). Meanwhile, it appears that the neonatal mortality rate has not changed at all over the past two decades, with a value of 6.5 such deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018, representing more than 70 percent of all infant deaths. This unchanged trend suggests that more needs to be invested with regard to delivery facilities across the country and in improving care during pregnancy. Special policies addressing this issue are required.

### **Unprecedented emigration rates—main determinants of negative growth of population**

Continued emigration is a defining characteristic of contemporary Albania, with multiple effects upon demography, but also on the economy and social care, and breaking traditional norms and values. Migration is by far the most important demographic process over the past three decades, causing the population reduction since 1990. Both internal and external migration are unprecedented over this period. In terms of internal migration, there is a concentration of population in the main cities of Tirana and Durrës, with movements mainly from the

north of the country. It is estimated that one-third of Albania's population emigrated between the censuses of 1989 and 2011. Migration has affected more the reproductive age groups (active population), and the number of children born per woman has decreased. It has also affected the labour market, where for the first time a lack of labour force supply can be detected, with Albania unable to make use of the normal demographic dividend.

Demographically, migration has also affected another very important phenomenon: ageing of the population. While the number of the economically active has dipped due to emigration, the elderly population has increased as a result of improvements in longevity. Consequently, the proportion of the population older than 65 years has increased, from 5.5 percent in 1990 to 14.7 percent in 2019, and estimated to increase to 20.7 percent by 2030.

The level of migration and its importance for the demography, economy and social life of the country requires thoughtful policies that consider the promotion of circular migration, remittances, care for the elderly and economic and cultural preservation of towns outside of Tirana. While the Ministry of Internal Affairs collects, analyses and publishes data on migration, there is a lack of disaggregated information that would enable a full assessment of the profile of the migrant workers abroad to inform the development of national policies and plans of action to address the drivers of migration, including facilitating access to their rights in the areas of employment, education, housing and social services.<sup>17</sup>

### **Future direction in terms of population policies in Albania**

The 2021 census<sup>18</sup> will be able to shed more light on the analysis carried out above, and provide further tools for policy orientation in the coming years. In this respect, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination identified that the 2011 census

17. CMWC/ALB/CO/2 para. 20 "The Committee recommends that the State party improve, in accordance with SDG target 17.18, its data-collection system... The Committee also encourages the State party to compile information and statistics that are disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, ethnic origin, reason for entry and departure from the country, and the type of work performed, in order that the Committee may effectively assess the impact of relevant policies and the implementation of the Convention. The State party should also conduct thorough gender-responsive research and strengthen data collection, acquisition and analysis and accountability measures to highlight the contribution made by women migrant workers, as well as the gendered drivers of migration.

18. Likely to be postponed to second half of 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



did not provide a realistic picture of the ethnic or ethno-religious composition of Albania. As a result, reliable demographic data, disaggregated by ethnicity, religious practices and languages spoken, are lacking.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to ensure that the next census allows for a realistic estimation of national and ethnic minorities based on the principle of self-identification<sup>20</sup> to enhance the accuracy of the data pertaining to diversity in Albania. UN can extend its support to the government, inter alia, to enhance awareness on human rights standards in this area, share normative and policy advice on promoting and protecting minority rights, and provide capacity building on how to apply a human rights-based approach to data collection and analysis.

Albania has never had an integrated health and population policy. Rather, it has had a series of health interventions with an impact on the population. The same can be said about family planning and reproductive health rights. This has been the case in the past, and is the case at the present. The policies have also lacked a gender perspective. and, as identified by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,<sup>21</sup> they do not account for any connections between gender-related and racial dimensions; therefore, failing to address the multiple forms of discrimination affecting in particular women in the Roma and Egyptian communities. The introduction of childbearing bonus, in 2018 has not been accompanied with policies that support women's equality in private and public life and their inclusion in the economy.. These policies should go hand in hand in a unified approach.

It is time that policies aiming at increasing fertility should be accompanied with policies that enforce the application of the law on selective abortion.<sup>22</sup> With very low levels of fertility Albanians continue to select male births even though selective abortion is illegal. These two factors must be included in these policies as well. The creation of a Task Force in 2012 as a result of a report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on increased selective abortion among female births had some effect, but the issue has been left unaddressed since then and no actions have been taken so far by the government. This requires further investigation and a new approach by government and the international community, in line with international human rights norms affirming women's right to reproductive choice. There is a need for further research and policy briefs in this area.

In 2014, a new public health policy on regular, health check-ups for the adult population was introduced and its implementation is on-going. The National Programme of cervical cancer screening was approved by a government law and included in the 2019 budget of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. Women 40-49 years old are now offered free screening, based on high-risk HPV tests, at primary health care level. The National Programme of breast cancer screening was formalized on August 2020 and the technical frame is under formalization from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Institute of Public Health

This overall policy is expected to have positive results in preventing non-communicable diseases in the adult population in the following decades. Further research is needed to estimate the effectiveness of this policy on adult health and mortality and also to highlight the

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19. See CERD/C/ALB/CO/9-12\*, paras.7-8

20. United Nations Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, adopted by consensus in 1992, offers guidance to States in adopting measures to secure minority rights. Article 9 of the Declaration provides that "the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system shall contribute to the full realization of the rights and principles set forth in the present Declaration, within their respective fields of competence".

21. See CERD/C/ALB/CO/9-12, paras 21-22

22. E/C.12/ALB/CO/2-3 para. 33 The Committee is concerned about the distorted sex ratio at birth and its possible linkage to sex-selective abortions due to discrimination against women, including in inheritance, and son preference (Articles 3 and 12).

policy directions with regard to additional risk factors that need to be addressed.<sup>23</sup>

In the coming years, policies should focus on improving neonatal, as well as infant, mortality. The UN can support in further investigating the specific problem and challenges with neo-natal mortality, and initiating discussion on the appropriate policies. This will require an improved investment in primary care and more focus on the early weeks of birth. In this respect, the policies need to focus around pregnancy and delivery. Furthermore, in public health, there is increasing evidence that health reflects the enjoyment of many other human rights, including social determinants of health, whereas social inequality based on gender, ethnicity or disability affects the outcomes in terms of neonatal and infant mortality. Therefore, the policies and plans have to be compliant with the human rights obligation for addressing underlying inequalities and discrimination.

Addressing the needs of the increasingly ageing population will also be an area where further policy interventions are required. Most evidence so far indicates increased needs for health care for the elderly. This will require investment in tertiary care, as well as in prevention. In Albania, families – in particular female family members – have traditionally been the main provider of social care for the elderly. However, the high level of emigration and decreasing fertility rates mean that other means of support, i.e. social care services, will be needed in the near future, and immediate attention on this issue is required.

## 1.2 Political Context, Governance and Institutions

Albania’s political and governance environment is shaped by two broad trends: first, the construction of democratic institutions after the fall of communism in 1991, and second, the recognised pathway to becoming a member of the European Union.

Albania is considered by some observers to be a hybrid democracy,<sup>24</sup> in transition towards a market economy underpinned by the rule of law and democratic institutions. The UN in Albania’s current Programme of Cooperation includes a democracy score target, with Freedom House reports as the source of information (Table 1). Applying the revised scoring, the 2016 baseline was 3.86 with a 2021 target of 3.9.

In the course of the current Programme of Cooperation (2017–2021), the environment in Albania was marked by deep political polarization, electoral conflict and a continued focus on judicial reform. A unanimously supported judicial reform process kicked off in 2016, assisted by EU and US, with a set of constitutional and secondary reforms. Reform highlights included the independent vetting of judges and prosecutors, establishment of new judicial and prosecutorial councils with stronger institutional insulation from political interference, and of new structures, including a special prosecutorial council and a National Bureau of Investigation. Implementation has been significantly slower than expected. The large number of judges and prosecutors being vetted out—more than 50 percent—has resulted in a lack of quorum in key institutions

**Table 1.** Freedom House Democracy Score Ratings, Albania, 2005–2020

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Score	3.96	4.21	4.18	4.18	4.18	4.07	3.96	3.86	3.75	3.82	3.86	3.86	3.86	3.89	3.89	3.82

23. CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4 para. 32 “... It also notes with concern that women living in rural and remote areas and Roma and Egyptian women continue to have limited access to primary health care and sexual and reproductive health-care services, and are often unaware of the availability of such services. It is also concerned about the low budgetary allocations (2.6% of gross domestic product) for the health sector and the limited oversight of hospital facilities. Furthermore, the Committee is concerned about the increasing mother-to-child transmission of HIV, notwithstanding the preventive programmes adopted by the State party.”

24. Albania remains a hybrid regime and has lost points during 2019, according to the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). <https://www.eiu.com/n/>

such as the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court and the High Court. This has fuelled criticism of the reform from several quarters.

Additionally, the lack of a Constitutional Court means, in effect, that the constitutional arena and its political implications have no referee, hampering progress on key issues. Nevertheless, there is strong consensus among international actors that the judicial reform has been deep and meaningful, and will result in a much stronger judicial system.

While the UN has not been involved in the core elements of this process, it has been engaged through efforts to improve access to justice and delivery of justice with a greater respect for human rights, in particular for groups such as children and persons at risk of statelessness. There is potential for the UN to step up its engagement and complement the efforts of the international partners in this area drawing on recommendations by the UN human rights mechanisms.<sup>25</sup> The support could envisage legal and policy analysis of national legislation in terms of its compliance with the international human rights standards, raising human rights awareness amongst groups that face significant barriers in gaining access to justice, in particular women who are victims of discrimination and gender-based violence, and facilitating independent human rights monitoring.

Electoral issues have been a cause of contention in recent years in Albania. Parliamentary elections in 2017 resulted in a majority government for the Socialist Party. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)'s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) observers assessed that "Voting was conducted in a generally peaceful and orderly manner and counting was assessed positively overall, although several procedures were not always followed correctly". OSCE also noted that the elections were held in the context of a longstanding political divisions between the government and opposition and low public trust in the electoral process. There were widespread allegations of vote-buying, concerns

over abuse of state resources and workplace-related pressures on voters, which further reduced public trust. Women were also underrepresented during the campaign.

On its part, the opposition claimed voter fraud, in particular through vote buying, whose criticism has gained popular support through some video–audio tapes unearthed in 2018. Although vote-buying is explicitly illegal with stiff penalties, very few, if any, arrests, prosecutions or convictions have been made.

Institutions and mechanisms to democratise political power have also been evolving rapidly at the local (municipal) level. In 2015, the government undertook a deep territorial reform, modifying more than 350 communes into 61 municipalities with directly elected mayors and municipal councils. The councils are elected using a 'zipper' law<sup>26</sup>, promoting gender equality. The reforms included the devolution of many authorities and a new local financing law. These reforms are widely viewed as a significant advancement in the establishment of local democracy. The UN has been a leading partner in supporting government in its municipal governance efforts.

The conduct of public affairs is a broad concept that covers all aspects of public administration, including the formulation and implementation of policy at national and local levels.<sup>27</sup> There is space for context-appropriate UN interventions aimed at developing further knowledge and capacity of local representatives to abide by the human rights norms in the discharge of their functions. Such efforts should be complemented by interventions aimed at empowering rights holders to participate in public affairs. This includes measures aimed at enabling the equal participation of women and groups that are discriminated against, and strengthening the capacity of rights holders to organize and demand accountability. In this way, political accountability of local leaders through periodic elections will be complemented by ongoing social accountability efforts by collective actors, such as NGOs, community-based organizations, and the media.

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25. See CCPR/C/ALB/CO/2, para. 18 and CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4, paras. 12-13

26. Zipper system- All lists competing for local Councils should be in compliance with a gender quota of 50 per cent. Every second name on the list should be a woman for the list to be registered.

27. Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 25 (1996)

The 2015 Law on Local Self-Government (LSGL) substantially increased the role of democratically elected local governments in Albania by assigning to them several new own-functions<sup>28</sup>, including the provision of a number of social services. When the LSGL was passed, it contained a provision that allowed these new own functions to be financed by conditional grants (“Specific Transfers”) for three years. This transitional period was put in place to give the national government time to both harmonize sectoral legislation and to introduce changes in the inter-governmental finance system that would allow municipalities to pay for these new responsibilities from their general revenues. It was expected that municipalities would not only exercise greater managerial control over these functions, but start financing from their general revenues, i.e. from local fees, charges and taxes in combination with transfers they receive from the national government. This transition period expired at the end of 2019, and financing service provision at local government level has remained a major challenge. These relate to historical underfunding of particularly social services in general; the size of the Unconditional Grant that the national government is currently spending on these functions; collection of local own tax revenues; and limited Local Government Unit (LGU) familiarity with completely new social services that need to be established.

Tasks such as planning for gender equality, mainstreaming gender equality across governance areas including private sector development, gender-responsive resource allocation and budgeting (GRB), supporting services around sexual and reproductive health, and preventing and adequately responding to harmful practices (e.g. child marriage), require significant support, if improvements are to be seen in the near future. General awareness, knowledge

and skills among staff remain low. Relevant standard operational protocols and procedures still need to be fully operationalized. Good practice examples of addressing gender equality in all aspects of local governance – such as LGUs adopting and adhering to the articles of the European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life<sup>29</sup> and engaging in GRB as mandated by law—are just emerging and need to be promoted, supported, and sustained.

Additional reasons why measures and services promoting women’s rights remain particularly inadequate are (i) weak or missing gender-sensitive needs analysis, and (ii) limited information available on the related budgetary implications. For example, a number of municipal Social Plans have not been costed (or have been costed only partially), and in the absence of gender analyses and concrete figures, it is difficult for LGUs to make respective budget allocations. Technical support for costing of services is needed that is based on objective measures of need, such as a municipality’s population, composition, poverty level, and the territory it needs to cover with a particular service. However, respective accurate administrative data is currently unavailable. Availability of information on the estimated costs of service delivery is also essential for supporting a system, in which the national government allocates Unconditional Transfers to all local governments. It must therefore be based on objective measures of the relative needs of delivering these services across the country as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

The UN works with social partners i.e. employers’ and workers’ organizations as well as GoA to enhance tripartite social dialogue. The National Labour Council as the highest platform of social dialogue in Albania has not been effectively used to this end. Employers’ and workers’ organizations need to be fully consulted and the concerns and arguments put forward by social

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28. For example, running preschools, fire protection, irrigation and drainage, providing counselling services to farmers, and managing and maintaining forests, pastures, and rural roads.

29. See: [https://www.ccre.org/docs/charte\\_egalite\\_en.pdf](https://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf). Albanian signatories so far are Gjirokaster, Tirana, Shkodra, Korça, Durrës, Përmet and Elbasan (supported from UN Women), as well as Cërrik, Bulqiza, Kamza, Librazhd, Pogradec and Dibra (supported by USAID). Tirana, Shkodra, Korça, Elbasan and Durrës developed respective Local Gender Action Plans (LGAPs) 2018-2020 and approved them in their respective Municipal Councils in 2018. Cërrik, Bulqiza, Librazhd, Pogradec and Dibra developed the LGAPs for the period 2021-2023 and Cërrik, Pogradec, Bulqiza and Librazhd approved these plans in their respective Municipal Councils in 2020.

30. With regard to social services, related costing efforts have been undertaken in relation to pre-school provision, supporting a system in which the national government allocates Unconditional Transfers to all local governments based on objective measures of their relative needs. (USAID, 2015. Creating and equitable, transparent, and predictable unconditional grant formula). In addition to adding new funds into the system, municipalities need to be provided with legal authority and technical support. (USAID, 2018. Financing the new own functions of local governments in Albania).

partners be really taken into account. This implies that consultation must take place before decisions are taken and that the representatives of the employers' and workers' organizations should be provided with full and pertinent information. At the local level, the absence of the Regional Consultation Councils has made it difficult for the social dialogue to develop. Further, social partners need to coordinate to maximize their impact on their members and their role in the country's social, political and economic stability, equity and democracy.

The year 2019 should have witnessed an important milestone, with the June local elections for the first time being held as a judgement of the performance of the mayors elected in 2015. Unfortunately, political conflict at the national level had led the opposition to abandon Parliament in late 2018, with subsequent violent confrontations in Tirana and boycott of the local elections on 30 June 2019. Further tension and confusion were caused by the conflict between the Government and President who issued a decree to cancel the local elections in final weeks of the campaign. The decree was judged illegitimate by the Government who proceeded, with international actors' support, with the voting as scheduled. The ruling coalition also initiated a parliamentary impeachment process against the President which concluded, in July 2020, that though the President had overstepped

his constitutional authority, impeachment was not warranted. The election boycott resulted in one-sided victory of the ruling party in most municipalities. OSCE's observation mission of these local elections stated that "The 30 June local elections were held with little regard for the interests of the electorate". Some observers consider the mayors in place as not legitimate and in the absence of a functioning Constitutional Court which could arbitrate between the President and Government on the constitutionality of the elections.

In the spring of 2020, complex negotiations were re-launched between the parties in Parliament and the extra-parliamentary opposition in the framework of the Political Council on Electoral Reform, facilitated by external actors, to reform the electoral code in line with OSCE-ODHIR recommendations. In June 2020, a key cross-party agreement was reached on key issues such as the use of biometric IDs, depoliticization of electoral commissions, and vetting of judges in the Electoral College. The electoral amendments were adopted by the parliament in July. However, subsequently, the parliament adopted other constitutional amendments related to elections, including on opening the MP candidates lists and forming pre-election coalitions. These amendments were adopted without agreement in the Political Council leading to fresh rifts between the ruling party and the opposition, and renewed calls

**Table 2.** Trust in governance: institutional trust (%)

Institution	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
central government	30	37	34	44	47	42	41
local government	n/a	n/a	n/a	49	49	47	42
President	35	25	29	36	33	30	28
Parliament	24	29	22	27	34	30	28
Judiciary	19	18	17	23	x	x	X
Prosecution	x	X	x	x	22	28	27
Courts	x	X	x	x	21	28	27
Police	37	41	46	61	53	58	55
armed forces	n/a	44	46	55	63	63	59
political parties	17	19	15	23	21	22	23
health care	30	32	27	50	53	54	51
education system	38	37	33	59	63	64	57
Media	40	39	39	58	54	56	51
religious institutions	51	44	52	58	76	73	66
civil society organisations	39	34	38	46	57	57	56

*x, From 2017 onwards, Judiciary has been divided into Prosecution and Courts*

from international actors for inclusive electoral reform. The next national parliamentary elections will be held in April 2021.

These political and institutional developments have taken place against the backdrop of a broad desire—shared by political actors and the population alike—for EU membership. Surveys reveal an overwhelming majority of Albanians, more than 90 percent, wish to join the European Union. Schengen Area visa liberalisation—granted in 2010—is perhaps the most significant event felt by the everyday Albanian since the fall of communism. Consequently, the EU Commission’s guidance on issues related to the accession process, as well as the opinions of current EU member states, whose willingness must be unanimous to enable Albania to join the EU, carry outsized weight in Albania’s political arena. The most relevant set of current EU conditions are those issued by the EU Council in March 2020 when it agreed to open accession negotiations with the country, subject to reforming the electoral code, completing key steps in implementation of the judicial reform and continued progress on public administration reform, as well as combatting organised crime and corruption. These conditions were reinforced in the October 2020 EC progress report on Albania as key for convening the first Inter-Governmental Conference. In addition, issues of migration are never far from the minds of European political leaders, who continue to observe a very high proportion of Albanians seeking asylum in the EU. The Council also notes the importance of human rights and of respecting the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Albania is the first non-EU country to agree to the presence of FRONTEX officers on their territory.

The priorities and recommendations that emanate from the EU accession process prioritise those issues which are of relevance to becoming a member of the Union, and in particular those areas of legislation that need to be aligned with the 35 chapters of the *acquis*. There are, however, many areas of governance that are not of priority relevance for EU membership (i.e. not governed by the *acquis*), even if they are of critical importance to Albania’s citizens and broadly in line with European values. For example the financing and organisation of the delivery of high quality and equitable services, in areas such as health, education and social protection,

is not only a technical but also a governance and accountability challenge. Improvements in these areas are necessary if Albania is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN needs to continue to have a close relationship with the EU, highlighting the value of EU accession as an accelerator for SDG achievement. At the same time, the UN encourages the EU to include important issues related to the SDGs in its own advocacy efforts with government.

Since 2013, the UN has been undertaking with a local partner a regular Trust in Governance perception survey (Table 2), providing one view on progress of governance across a broad range of sectors. The UN—through all its programmes—seeks to promote the governance and performance of these sectors, which should hopefully be reflected in citizens’ perceptions. It is to be noted that in many surveys, those who have more recently interacted with a government service have a more positive opinion which may reflect on improving, service delivery,<sup>31</sup> though slightly decreased in 2019 versus 2018.

The Albanian Parliament has the potential to play a stronger role in democracy building by offering a forum for public debate, engaging more directly with the population represented by members and overseeing the government. Some notable steps that have been taken by the current Parliament (elected in June 2017) include: a more structured approach to engaging with independent institutions, notably the Ombudsperson’s office, as well as INSTAT, and the establishment of cross-party caucuses, in particular the Friends of Children Parliamentary Group and the Women’s Caucus, the establishment of the Sub-committee on gender equality and the prevention of violence against women, and the recent establishment of a Sub-committee dedicated to the SDGs, positioned under the Commission on Finance and Economy. Parliament also passed a unanimous resolution in December, 2016 to mainstream the SDGs, and adopt procedures requiring draft legislation to indicate its relevance to the Goals. These procedures however require further support in order to be effectively implemented. At the same time, another parliamentary resolution passed on measures to address violence against women and the establishment of a parliamentary sub-committee on gender equality and

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31. [https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/democratic\\_governance/-trust-in-governance--opinion-poll-2019-.html](https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/democratic_governance/-trust-in-governance--opinion-poll-2019-.html)

end of violence against women. The supervisory role of the sub-committee on governments measures to address VAWG is increasing and it engages frequently in consultations with civil society.

The ability of Parliament—and political actors more generally—to contribute to democratic development is, however, severely constrained by political polarisation. “Boycotting” parliament is seen by opposition actors as a tool to influence decision-making. The parliamentary opposition parties resigned their seats in late 2018 by, though not all members followed through.<sup>32</sup> Of 140 seats, 76 are held by the ruling Socialist Party while another 45 are held by former members of the opposition parties who refused to resign or by party members who replaced MPs that resigned their seats and who were not initially elected as they were in the lower part of the electoral lists. Meanwhile, 19 seats remain vacant. The situation has led to claims that Parliament is sitting unconstitutionally, which cannot be resolved legally without a quorum in the Constitutional Court. Meanwhile, the main opposition is sitting outside Parliament, making political negotiation and agreements even more complicated. Boycotting institutions of democratic governance, including parliament and elections, has been used as a tool of opposition parties across the region, with mixed results. In principle, the United Nations should be working with the full spectrum of political opinion in Albania to provide technical assistance and policy advice on all 17 SDGs and a range of human rights, social and economic issues. In reality, the highly politicised and polarised atmosphere hampers these efforts and makes it challenging to find a common basis for wider agreements needed for the development of the country.

Irrespective of the political divides, the adoption and revision of legislation depends both on political will and on a clear understanding of the nature and content of human rights obligations incumbent on law and decision-makers. The UN is well positioned to facilitate continuous training of parliamentary members and experts as necessary for the fulfillment of

their legislative and oversight tasks in alignment with the human rights norms and standards. In this context, human rights can provide the missing framework for consensus building. A higher understanding of human rights can lead in turn to an improved compliance with the recommendations put forward by the independent human rights mechanisms, such as the People’s Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, whose recommendations according to the findings of various UN human rights mechanisms remain in large part unaddressed.

Civil society in Albania is active, and the UN works with numerous civil society organisations (CSOs). There is space for stepping up UN engagement with civil society actors and creating wide avenues for civil society participation in decision-making processes, including for women’s organizations and women’s rights defenders. Sometimes characterised as overly politicised or under-developed, Albania’s CSOs work as think tanks, human rights organisations, service providers, or even all of these. On the political front, there is consistent advocacy from such organisations for deeper democratisation reforms and more public dialogue. A National Council on Civil Society exists, composed half of government and half of self-selected civil society representatives. However, it is under-utilised. Civil society does not often mobilise publicly, for example through demonstrations, and is not equipped with enough expertise and resources to objectively raise human rights concerns, engage in joint monitoring activities and report on the State’s responsibility to discharge its social, economic and cultural rights obligations under international and domestic law.<sup>33</sup> Notable exceptions to this are in the area of the environment and gender equality. On the former there is significant mobilisation against hydropower development and the importation of recyclable waste, and for the preservation of the national theatre that was demolished in May 2020. Women’s rights organizations and activists have also become more active in protesting against violations of women’s rights, including in particular gender-based violence. One other example of non-politically based

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32. With Albania’s list system of parliamentary democracy, when a member resigns from Parliament, other candidates further down the original campaign list have the option to take up the seat. Thus, when opposition party Members of Parliament followed the call to resign, some who then had the opportunity to take up a seat did so.

33. E/C.12/ALB/CO/2-3 para. 38 “The Committee encourages the State party to engage non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society in the process of discussion at the national level prior to the submission of its next periodic report.”

mobilisation was provided by university students in December 2018 and which triggered a governmental reshuffle, as well as promises by government to undertake a number of measures to improve university life. This movement, sought to keep independence from political parties and was able to gather broad popular support, both on the basis of its independence and on the perceived justice of the demands.

Nonetheless, the participation of Albanians in demonstrations, rallies and petitions remains relatively low. Citizens from urban areas and those who are members of political parties are more likely to attend a demonstration or rally or sign a petition. Participation in consultation remains low, particularly at the central level (10.7%). At the local level, 24.6 percent participated in a public consultation meeting. The main reason for low participation was a lack of trust in such processes.<sup>34</sup>

Looking forward, alongside repeated calls by civil society for enhanced democratic practices, the EU accession process provides a strong incentive for improvements in this area. Moreover, during the worst period at the start of the COVID-19 crisis, political actors aligned behind the government and internationally recognised best practice, demonstrating the capacity to collaborate when necessary. An optimistic scenario includes an agreement on electoral reform law, the appointment of judges and prosecutors in the key institutions to enable renewed judicial functioning, and new parliamentary elections (in April 2021), all of which could usher in a new era of democratic political development.

## **Gender accountability and public administration**

The Sector of Policies and Strategies for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality in the Ministry of Health and Social Protection lacks staff to adequately address the vast responsibilities stipulated in the Law 9970/2008 “For Gender Equality in Society”, including coordination and monitoring of the gender equality mechanism/machinery at local government unit (LGU) level. Over the past years, the formal power of this structure has been progressively weakened. In its current capacity, the Sector has neither political backing, nor the human and financial resources

to ensure co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming in policies and programs, including at the local level. Human and technical support, as well as adequate financial allocations, are required for Gender Equality Officers in ministries to effectively exercise their mandate and assume their intended role. With the aim of strengthening the overall national gender equality mechanism, in February 2018, the Prime Minister appointed the Deputy Prime Minister as the National Coordinator on Gender Equality. However, roles and responsibilities of this National Coordinator on the one hand, and the Sector of Policies and Strategies for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality on the other, have not been delineated and coordination still remains to be defined. At the parliamentary level, the sub-committee on Gender Equality and prevention of VAW was also established in December 2017. The National Council on Gender Equality-chaired by the Minister of Health and Social Protection, and composed of nine Deputy Ministers from all lines ministries and three representatives from CSOs-convenes according to statutes, yet assumes a minor decision-making and weak political role. In 2019, on the initiative of EUD and UN Women, gender donor coordination-which had been dormant for a decade-was resumed, but after a brief revival has been dormant again for more than a year.

Making sure that all citizens in need can access essential services and support poses a major challenge to local governments. The period after the November 2019 earthquakes and the current COVID-19-induced crisis show that any response needs to consider women's and men's particular circumstances and specific needs. Developing such socially- and gender-responsive measures, and delivering services to all citizens in need, requires human resources, specific skills, capacities, knowledge and decision-making authority embedded within the local administration. Ensuring that these tasks are supported, coordinated, and monitored in a professional and effective way, the legislation of European countries, including Albania, foresees dedicated human resources to operate in a specific position and function: the Gender Equality Officer (GEO).

The GEO function and position has – until now – received limited attention and remains a weak, under-

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34. [https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/democratic\\_governance/-trust-in-governance--opinion-poll-2019-.html](https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/democratic_governance/-trust-in-governance--opinion-poll-2019-.html)



sourced element within Albania's public administration. However, as revealed by a recent Functional Analysis of Gender Equality Officers at Local Government Unit level<sup>35</sup>, the dedicated GEO position would play an essential role within local government to respond to the manifold (post-) COVID-19 related challenges and thereby contributing to more self-reliant, thriving, and resilient communities.

GEOs at LGU level are a core element of the national gender equality mechanism. They are foreseen to work across sectors, coordinate integration of gender equality goals into local governance processes (planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting), and translate national gender policies, EU Gender Directives, and international obligations on concrete actions to achieve equality between women and men to the local level. According to the Albanian Gender Equality Law, GEOs are foreseen to hold a full-time dedicated position within the public administration.<sup>36</sup> A dedicated position is needed for effective implementation of the respective legislative goals, and-in line with the civil service law-such positions are naturally to be included as civil service positions. However, in the case of GEOs, the interpretation so far has been to consider both dedicated and non-dedicated positions as "acceptable" under the Gender Equality Law.<sup>37</sup> The majority of LGUs have not appointed a full-time person dedicated exclusively to gender equality issues. Instead, a full-time person, who in several municipalities lacks civil servant status, assumes a multi-functional role, primarily covering the duties and responsibilities of the Local Coordinator against Domestic Violence, combined also with the duties of the Specialist for Child Protection. In many cases, these individuals perform numerous additional tasks related to persons with disabilities, minorities, culture, education, etc. In particular the management

of domestic violence cases occupies a disproportionately large share of GEOs' attention and working time. In addition to the identified lack of a uniformed approach, a further challenge arises from the tendency of attaching both positions (LCDV and GEO) to the Social Service Sector/Directory of the municipality. This is in line with the finding that Gender Equality Officers are in fact required to dedicate a large part of their work to DV case management. However, when considering the concrete functions and activities of each of these two positions, only the LCDV is engaging in service delivery to citizens and consequently fits a service position. On the other hand, a Gender Equality Officer primarily engages in gender mainstreaming into policies, plans, processes, procedures and budgets, and therefore qualifies for a policy coordination position. A detailed set of concrete recommendations for required legal, policy, administrative, procedural, and budgetary changes has recently been tabled.<sup>38</sup>

Although not required by law (but foreseen in the European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life), some LGUs have established a Gender Equality Commission, and in a number of municipalities, self-organised Alliances of Women Councillors<sup>39</sup> exist as part of the Municipal Council (similar to the Alliance of Women MPs).

## Women in politics

Equal participation of women and men in political and public decision making in Albania continues to improve but more needs to be done. The country is signatory to several international frameworks, and in the past few years has worked to build an institutional framework for gender equality. The national framework includes the 1998 Albanian Constitution, which provides for

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35. USAID (2020). Planning and Local Governance Project: "Gender Equality Officers at local level: *condicio sine qua non* for gender mainstreaming in Local Government Units". Overall Report and White Paper. Key findings were presented in a high-level technical working meeting on 23 June 2020 in Tirana.

36. According to the Law no 9970 date 24.07.2008 "For Gender Equality in Society", Article 14, point 4 "Local government bodies appoint one or more local officials who deal with gender equality issues, next to them" (highlight added). According to Article 4, point 7 of the same law "An official who deals with gender equality issues, is a central or local public administration employee who has specific training and knowledge in the field of gender equality and devotes time to achieving gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the sector or territory covered". Hence, an official who deals with gender equality issues in line with these provisions is a "gender equality employee".

37. MoHSP data base, as of February 2020.

38. USAID (2020). Planning and Local Governance Project (PLGP) 2020. "Gender Equality Officers at local level: *condicio sine qua non* for gender mainstreaming in Local Government Units". Overall Report and White Paper. Key findings were presented in a high-level technical working meeting on 23 June 2020 in Tirana.

39. Established mainly with support of UN Women.

and guarantees equality between women and men and the prohibition of discrimination, the National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) 2016–2020, the Law ‘On Gender Equality’, adopted in 2008 and which provides for a minimum of 30 percent representation of women in all public sector institutions at national and local levels, and the Law ‘On Protection from Discrimination’, adopted in 2010. Notably, in 2015, the Electoral Code introduced a 50 percent gender quota for the municipal councillors lists, with gender alternating in every other position. The Gender Equality Index demonstrates that the current government is gender balanced, with also Parliament currently having the largest representation of women members in the last 30 years. In 2008, the assembly passed a quota of 30 percent representation of each gender in all bodies of the legislative, executive and judiciary, as well as in other public institutions. This was also adopted in the electoral code, requiring the inclusion of no less than 30 percent women candidates on the lists for parliamentary and local elections. However, during the 2017 parliamentary elections, the ODHIR Election Observation Mission Final Report observed that the biggest political parties did not always respect gender quotas. In addition, women received only 26 percent of the seats in the new Parliament, were under-represented and received little media attention despite being active in the campaign. Women were also under-represented in the election administration, including in decision-making positions.

In this regard, in May 2020, the Gender and Women in Decision-Making Working Group (GWDMG) submitted Unified Proposals on anchoring gender equality provisions in the Electoral Code, calling for a significant improvement in gender equality standards in the on-going electoral reform. The document builds upon the Unified Proposals of October 2018 and includes gendered proposals at both policy and technical levels, as well as specific recommendations in the Electoral Code under Reform Priorities 4 and 6. In particular, the GWDMG called for rejection of the list of parties that failed to comply with gender quotas as required by the Electoral Code and the Law on Gender Equality, and for this to take precedence over fines, which at times have been found to be ineffective. They also called for incorporation of the gender equality principle among the leading principles of the Electoral Code, for the 50 percent quota to be upheld, for GBV in elections to be defined in the Electoral Code, and for sanctions for violation of such provisions.

In addition, GWDMG called upon the Political Council to consider five specific recommendations to mainstream gender equality in the Electoral Code, as follows: 1) For the Central Election Commission (CEC) to engage in identifying new ways and means to inform and engage young voters, especially girls, on electoral education, rights and obligations; 2) For the Electoral Code to guarantee that the CEC engages in effectively informing citizens about Violence Against Women (VAW) in elections, including its various forms and manifestations. This includes drafting regulations and by-laws to ensure that professionals in all levels of electoral bodies are properly trained on the issue of VAW in elections; 3) For the gender quota to be applied in the election of mayors to avoid any possible inequalities in rights and opportunities, and to strengthen the representative and elective functions of the municipal councils; 4) To enable women’s meaningful participation in the electoral competition by basing the Electoral Code upon a well-drafted package of criteria determined by experts and international organisations and institutions, and obliging political parties to provide for open democratic competition to uphold the gender equality quota; and 5) For students and lecturers from university and civil society to be taken on board in the electoral administration and for them to monitor elections, rather than political representatives or politically elected appointees.

The June 2019 local elections produced only eight women mayors among the country’s 61 municipalities. Women were better represented on local municipal council lists, comprising 49 percent of all candidates. Among the councillors elected, 44 percent were women, a result of the registration of only councillor candidate lists that included 50 percent of each gender, an observation made by ODIHR. Despite increased representation at the level of local municipal councillors, meaningful participation and representation does not rest solely on numbers. The level of engagement and space for women to influence local decision making is still wanting.

Despite having built on the national institutional framework for gender equality over the past few years, the UN Women report on Obstacles to Women’s Participation in Elections in Albania (2017) found that obstacles to women’s right to represent were significantly widespread across the country. While gender stereotypes and negative perceptions about

women's roles as representatives are still prevalent, factors impeding them from entering politics are also multi-faceted. For instance, legal obstacles are present, with women being put in a less competitive position to become representatives. Gender quotas in some cases have also been seen to work poorly, while women also struggle to wage their political campaigns due to threats and a lack of rights to express grievances about the electoral process, with the report finding that there is a sense that women candidates who file complaints are treated less fairly. Women also receive fewer electoral resources and have fewer donors than do men.

Violence against women during elections has not been specifically addressed, which has left it silent, unidentified and unreported. Rather than violence for political reasons, it constitutes gender-based violence aimed at "...not just the individuals specifically targeted, but all women from expressing their political voice and agency".<sup>40</sup> It is manifested as physical, psychological, and sexual violence, hate speech, and discrimination on the grounds of gender. It prevents women candidates and those who exercise various functions from taking part in elections and politics, as well as women and girls at large from exercising their right to vote. To date, efforts of the Albanian lawmaker have narrowly focused on consolidating the gender quota system in elections. However, mechanisms are needed that will prevent and combat gender-based violence in elections and politics. Identifying, preventing and combating this type of violence, which is also perpetuated by the media<sup>41</sup>, remains one of the biggest challenges for the development of democratic elections and the realization of equal representation in decision-making. A set of respective recommendations for amending Albanian legislation and explicitly prohibiting harassment and violence against women during elections is available<sup>42</sup>, yet has not been reflected in the recently revised Electoral Code, into which normative standards on gender equality still need to be introduced.

The CEDAW Committee has expressed concern about the lack of participation in political and public life of women from disadvantaged or marginalised groups,

such as Roma and Egyptian women and women with disabilities, as well as the barriers that they face such as civil registration and physical barriers.

Evidence from the UN Women report on Gender Equality and Discrimination in Appointed Local Government Bodies (2019) also identifies shortcomings in the implementation of laws promoting gender equality and protection from discrimination. The report found non-compliance and ineffective implementation of laws and provisions for the inclusion and representation of women in local governance to be a recurring issue. As such, dedicated gender mainstreaming in local governance and public administration, continued monitoring, together with administrative incentive and sanctioning mechanisms are recommended to fulfil Albania's legal and policy commitments and the country's international obligations to gender equality.

According to INSTAT's *Women and Men in Albania 2020*, in the country's diplomatic missions around the world, there are fifteen women ambassadors (29.4%), six ministers (66.7%), seven counsellor ministers (53.8%), and eleven counsellors (55%). Women constitute the majority at lower levels of hierarchy, such as first secretaries (66.7%) and second secretaries (60.6%), with the exception of third secretaries (33.3%), where men constitute 66.7 percent. Similarly, there is only one (out of a total of 7) women with the position of High Director in the State Police; eleven women Directors compared to 97 male Directors; one woman Director versus 28 male Directors; 29 women Head Commissars to 310 male Head Commissars; and 65 women Commissars to 490 male Commissars. These figures reveal a persistently wide gender gap in leadership positions, especially in male-dominated areas where the empowerment and promotion of women in leadership remain a challenge.

The advancement of women's political participation and representation in decision making ranks highly in Albania's strategy and policy setting, primarily represented by increased representation in the composition of the current government. Strategic Goal

40. UN Women – OHCHR Expert Group Meeting on Violence against Women in Politics, 8 March 2018, New York.

41. Kosho, J. (2019). Gender inequality through the lenses of the Albanian media. *ANGLISTICUM. Journal of the Association-Institute for English Language and American Studies*, 8(1), 10-24. <http://anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/1823>, cited in: IDS HelpDesk Report (2020). Gender and the media in the Western Balkans.

42. UN Women (2020). Analysis of the Albanian legislation on protection from violence against women in elections.

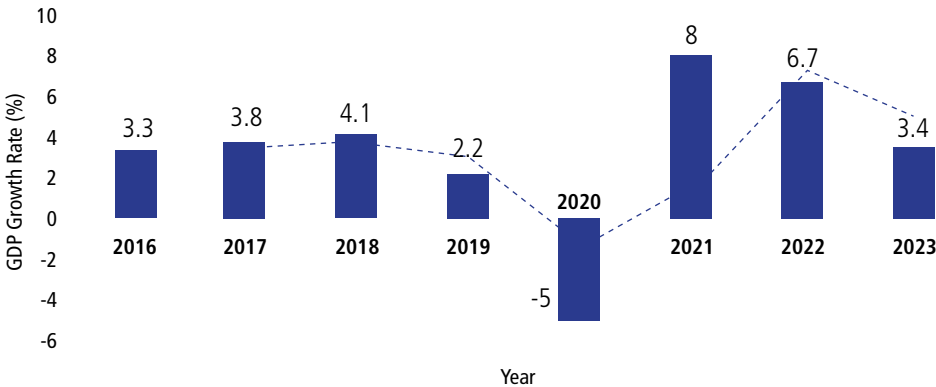
2 of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Action Plan 2016–2020 aims to ensure the equal participation and empowerment of women in political and public decision making. This foresees a 40 percent increase in women’s participation in all levels of decision making by the end of 2020. However, it should be noted that NSGE focuses primarily on numbers and far less on the safeguarding of women’s rights and needs and on enhancing their contribution to the political and policy processes in the country. Moreover the lack of funding remains another bottleneck in the implementation of the strategy. The prevalence of strongmen, pressure applied against women in politics, psychological violence and social media attacks have either kept women out of such competition and public office or seriously curtailed their ability to properly participate in decision-making processes, which at the present remain some of the biggest barriers to women’s political participation in Albania. While these issues have yet to be addressed at the national level, UN Women has been working with civil society and women’s organisations to introduce measures in the electoral law and other legislation regarding VAW in electoral processes and politics. This is especially significant amidst the current electoral reforms.

Between 2012 and 2017, UN Women implemented an intervention focused on women’s leadership and political participation (WLPP). This effort supported a diversity of areas (legislative, framework, institutional strengthening, capacity building, networking, awareness, election monitoring) that were conducive

to increasing women’s participation in decision making at central and local levels. A thematic evaluation of UN Women’s work on political empowerment (2018) confirmed that while the intervention was successful in most areas and produced best practices on WLPP, working with political parties to combat VAW in politics continues to be a major challenge, primarily as a result of political sensitivity and politicisation in Albania. Weak support for women from political parties was also revealed to be a major constraint to women’s participation in politics.

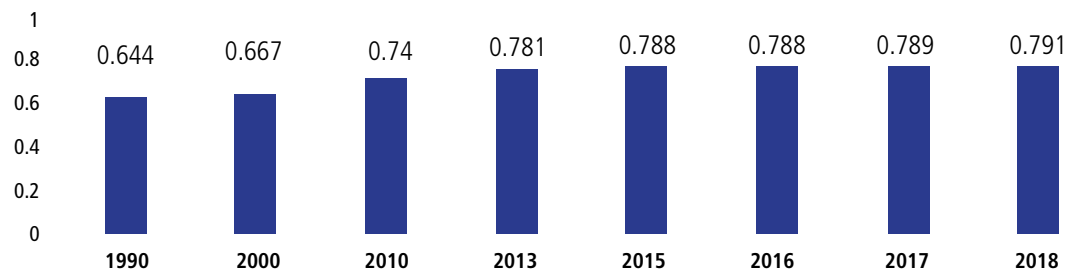
### 1.3 Economic Context

Albania is an upper middle-income country on its path to EU accession. GDP per capita in Albania in 2019 was USD 5,448 (current USD; WB), one of the lowest in the region and less than half of that of the new EU member states. In 2018, it stood at 31 percent, a slight increase on the level of 29 percent in 2010 (Eurostat). Over the past decade, Albania’s economy has witnessed a steady growth, by an annual average of 2.4 percent. In 2019, the country witnessed an economic slowdown, caused by weaker power production and a severe earthquake in November, and growth expanded only by 2.2 percent, compared to 4.1 percent in 2018. In 2020, the economy was projected to grow by an estimated 3.5 percent. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent containment measures,

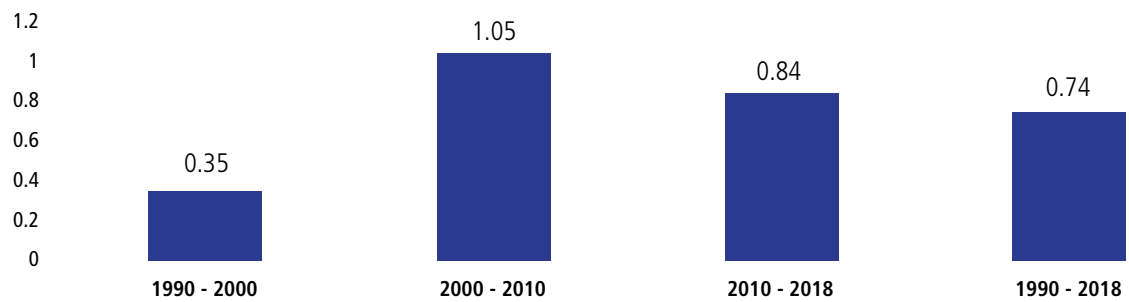


Source: IMF, modified by UNRCO

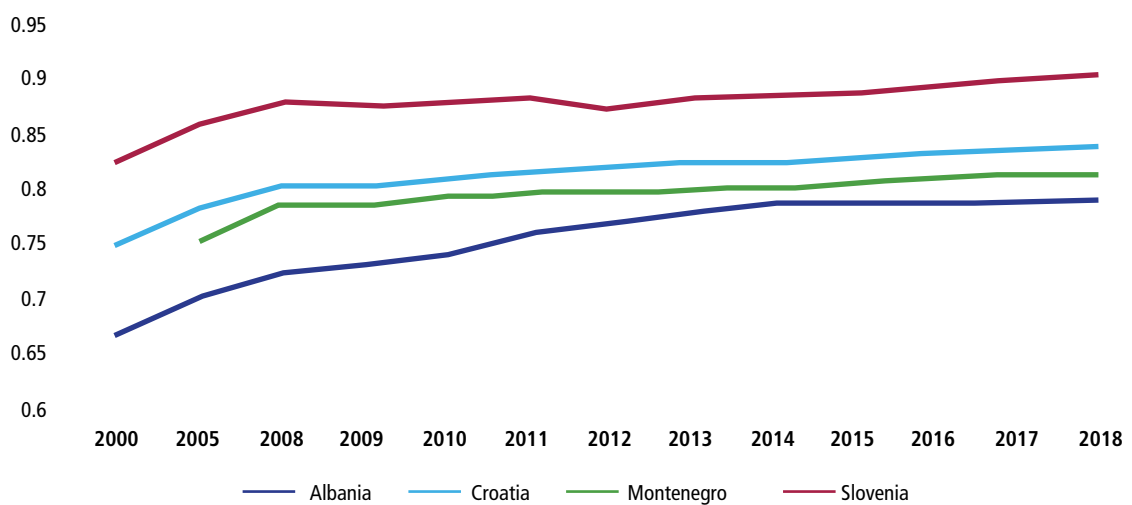
**Figure 2.** Human Development Index, Albania, 1990–2018



**Figure 3.** Average annual HDI change, Albania, 1990–2018



**Figure 4.** Regional trends in HDI, 2000–2018



Source: Human Development Report, 2019

the GDP is now expected to contract by five percent in 2020 (International Monetary Fund, IMF; Figure 1) and the economy is facing simultaneous demand, supply and financing shocks.

The demand for goods and services, both in the domestic and foreign markets, has experienced a rapid decline due to COVID-19. In April 2020, exports decreased by 44 percent from the level in April 2019, and imports by 37 percent. In 2019, remittances comprised 9.4 percent of GDP (WB), though they are now also expected to drop due to the global pandemic. In the short to medium term, post-earthquake recovery efforts and the COVID-19 economic stimulus packages are expected to give an additional boost to the economy and help the economy grow again.

In 2018, the country ranked 69th on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2019). The Human Development Index (HDI) has been improving over the past decades but remains one of the lowest in the region (Figures 2–4).

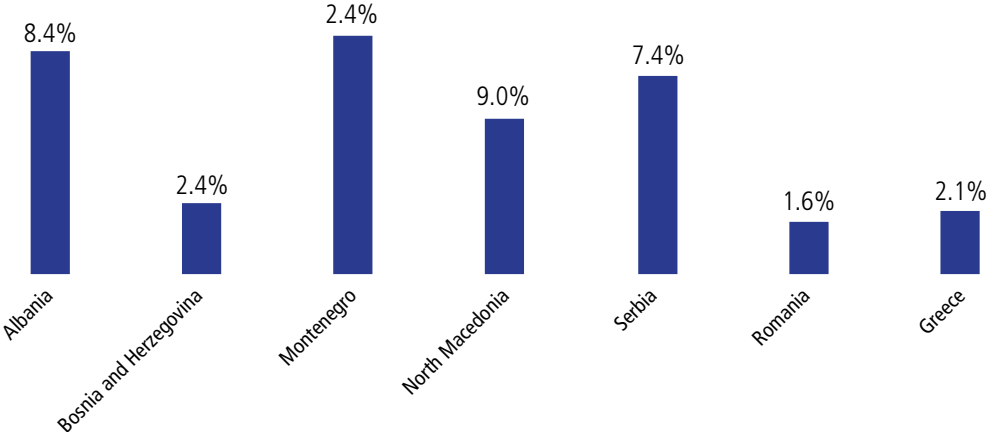
While Albania’s economic growth has been stable, its acceleration is paramount for achieving convergence with the aspirational EU standards as the country is still one of the poorest in Europe. In 2018, the at-risk-of-poverty rate in the population was 23.4 percent, while

the average of the EU-28 countries was 16.9 percent (INSTAT Survey on Income and Living Conditions, SILC 2019). Additionally, expansion of the tax base and reduction of the informal economy, where women are concentrated without adequate labour and social protection, are major challenges (WB Enterprise Survey 2019) that need to be addressed.

The national minimum wage is USD 232 and the average, USD 470 (31% of the EU average). INSTAT data indicate that average gross monthly wages in the formal sector in Albania were 6–8 percent lower for women than for men during 2014–2016 (SDG Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support, MAPS 2018). In the third quarter of 2019, the labour force participation rate for the population of age 15–64 years was 69.8 percent (INSTAT LFS). Data on the gender wage gap in the informal sector, where a large share of women are employed, is unavailable. Women’s labour force participation rate is 62 percent, while for men the figure is 77.7 percent. The registered unemployment rate has continued to decline and, in the third quarter of 2019, reached 11.4 percent for both men and women, with youth unemployment reported at 21.4 percent.

Migration of skilled workers, especially those with advanced education and skills, is affecting

**Figure 5.** FDI inflows as a percentage of GDP in Balkan countries, 2018



Source: UNCTAD

certain professions, such as medical personnel and information technology. Labour-intensive industries continue to be the main source of employment. A skills mismatch (labour market needs vs. what the labour force has to offer) is a persistent challenge. The education institutions also struggle to integrate vulnerable groups into the labour market and help boost economic growth and increase competitiveness. Decent working conditions and observance to safety and health (OSH) standards in the workplace need to be closely followed. The State labour Inspectorate monitors only 6% of businesses annually.

Albania is ranked 81st in the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Global Economic Competitiveness Index. The country scores well in terms of its human capital but is uncompetitive in terms of innovation, research and development capabilities, entrepreneurial culture and transport infrastructure.

Albania ranks 85th with the World Bank's Doing Business indicator. Persistent weaknesses in the legal framework (e.g., property rights and contract enforcement), along with known difficulties in obtaining construction permits, paying taxes, and accessing electricity affect the country's investment climate. Albania's net inflows from Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) have reached an average of 8.4 percent of GDP in 2018, being one of the highest in the region (Figure 5). FDI is concentrated mostly in electricity, extraction industries and telecommunications and sourced from a few countries (WEF, Growth Lab, CID Harvard).

The country is highly dependent upon hydropower-generated energy. The economic disruption caused by weak power generation in dry years when the country needs to rely on imports, underlines the need for urgent efforts to increase the share of renewable energy sources other than hydropower. Introduction of renewable sources of energy and connection to natural gas supplies from abroad following implementation of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) project are priorities. Liberalisation of the energy market remains a challenge.

The Albanian economy is dominated by services, including tourism, which contribute a large proportion to the country's GDP, reaching 47.9 percent in 2018, a

5.4 percent increase on the level in 2017 in real terms. Nevertheless, agriculture remains very important, accounting for 18.4 percent of GDP, a 1.4 percent increase on 2017. Both tourism and agriculture are characterised by a high of informality and a large female labour force. The other main contributors to GDP (21.3%) in 2018 were industry and construction. In the last two decades, emigration and urbanisation have created a structural shift away from agriculture towards industry and services, leading to diversification of services within the Albanian economy—including banking, telecommunications and tourism—while the manufacturing sector contributed 5.9 percent to GDP in 2018.

Albania's transition growth model has arguably reached its limit. In order to fulfil its potential, like other countries in the region, it needs to address the middle-income trap. While growth has been significant, there has been little diversification in the portfolio of goods that Albania exports: agricultural, food, garments and minerals. Such diversification is a key challenge for the country's economic growth. As most of these exports are easy to produce, new production lines with higher complexity will bring greater value to the economy. Innovation, smart skills and readiness to adopt the digital agenda will have to be the new drivers of economic growth.

In face of the wide range of socio-economic and environmental challenges to inclusive and sustainable industrial development caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a particular focus is needed for institutional transformation and innovation, innovative clusters and ecosystems, and industrial modernization of MSMEs, as well as inclusive capacity-building and technological training. Capacity-building in industrial security and safety, organisational resilience and innovation management, and promotion of knowledge exchange on business continuity and recovery are essential to support and stabilise the fragile business environment in Albania.

Further strengthening the ties of cooperation and interdependence within the Western Balkans region can support the economic growth of each country, including Albania.<sup>43</sup>

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43. See UNCTAD Investment Policy Reviews (IPR) of South-East Europe

## Sustainable Tourism

In recent years, tourism in Albania has been growing to become a main engine of the country's economic development. In 2018, the sector recorded a total contribution (including indirect multiplier effects) of USD 4.3 billion, accounting for about 27.3 percent of GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, WTTC, 2019; Post-Disaster Needs Analysis, PDNA, 2020), an increase on the level of 26.2 percent in 2017. The sector is now one of the main contributors to Albania's economic growth, and projections for 2028 show international arrivals increasing to 6.6 million. The contribution of the sector to total formal employment in the country in 2018 was 25.2 percent, while travel and tourism generated 54.2 percent of all exports in 2017. By November 2019, more than 6.1 million non-residents had visited the country, 8.3 percent more than in 2018. However, revenues per tourist have been declining as tourism receipts as a share of GDP have been stagnating, indicating that the sector's full potential is still to be reached. The tourism sector has been hit hard by COVID-19, highlighting the importance of diversifying the economy to make it more resilient to both internal and external shocks. At the same time, given the high degree of informality and women's significant engagement in this sector, integration of a gender perspective in Albania's tourism development policy is essential. Further contributing to resilience, stronger emphasis also needs to be placed on supporting the sector's potential to positively impact on economic empowerment, diversification of local value chains, and sustainable rural development.

The full potential of the tourism sector in Albania, is still to be reached. Tourism and the interconnected activities of restaurant, culture and leisure industries, can play a key role in the economy, as a source of income and employment. More investments are needed in eco-friendly infrastructure and climate and resilience need to be embedded into tourism sector strategies. Accordingly, environmental monitoring in the tourism sector needs to be stepped up to support policy development and strategic planning, and to manage tourism in a sustainable manner at the local level.

## Digitalisation

Digital infrastructure is a precondition for development of the digital economy and innovation in industry, e-Government, e-Health, provision of interoperable services and of cross-border services (Albania Economic Reform Programme 2019–2021). The advent of 5G has the potential to contribute to all the sectors of the economy, creating new jobs, stimulating economic benefits and providing a higher quality of public services, eventually paving the way for a qualitative policy debate towards the fourth industrial revolution. Given the importance of the agricultural sector for the Albanian economy and labour market, e-agriculture and promoting connectivity, digital infrastructure and skills among agro-business establishments and labour force bears an important potential for up-scaling this sector.

The telecommunication market has seen in the past few years an increase in bundled offers, particularly in the mobile-cellular market, but also in the fixed-line segment. Coupled with a downward trend in prices, this has led to a significant increase in the value for money obtained by Albanian customers.<sup>44</sup>

Internet access Albania increased from 45% per cent in 2010 to 71.8 per cent in 2017.<sup>45</sup> As regards the overall broadband connectivity, digital divide remains a challenge and fixed penetration is low (approximately 38% of households) with a large gap between urban and rural areas. The broadband connectivity in public schools and health institutions is concerning. The broadband connectivity in public education is far from 30 Mbps and the maximum bandwidth provided is up to 8-10 Mbps and half of schools are without or with very limited connectivity. Public health institutions experience similar situation, which makes implementation of e-Health services difficult, especially in country's remote areas.<sup>46</sup>

Albania adopted a new National Broadband Plan for Development (NBPD) for 2020-2025, in June 2020. The NBPD aims to further the development of broadband infrastructure throughout the country and address, in particular, the persistent digital divide. The four priority

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44. ITU: Measuring the Information Society Report 2018

45. Human Development Index 2019

46. Albania Economic Reform Programme 2019–2021



pillars that the new NBPD is built on are: (1) broadband infrastructure build-out, (2) strengthening of financing and broadening of funding basis, (3) spectrum management, and (4) sustainable competition. A new element in the NBPD includes the planned enablement of public funding through universal service obligations and State aid to further infrastructure coverage in rural and remote areas, mechanisms that were not available before. Gender differences exist in the distribution of use of technology within the household in favour of men.<sup>47</sup> This calls for dedicated reforms in the educational sector to pro-actively support girls' ICT skills, enhance their enrolment in STEM studies, and in particular support girls' school-to-work transition with the perspective to create equal opportunities for women on the labour market.<sup>48</sup> In 2017, the percentage of female graduates from STEM fields in Albania is as high as 49 percent, one of the highest in the region.<sup>49</sup>

Due to COVID-19, up-skilling and retooling programmes are also key to tackling gaps in digital skills and under-representation of women in digital industries, keeping up with the fast-changing industrial job market standards and building an inclusive and resilient workforce. As the country moves forward on its digital transformation, further attention is needed on online safety and security and privacy and data protection.

## Agriculture

Agriculture continues to be one of the main economic pillars of Albanian economy, contributing 19 percent to the country's GDP (INSTAT 2019) and providing jobs to one-third of the people employed in the country. Growth Value Added (GVA) in agriculture has increased by two-thirds since 2007, reaching about EUR 2.33 billion in 2018. In 2019, 41.6 percent of women and 32.3 percent of men were working in the agriculture sector, though land ownership continues to disproportionately affect women negatively, as titles are more often in the names of male relatives. In 2019, only 31 percent of women compared to 52 percent of men aged 15-59 years owned a house,

while 17 percent of women and 28 percent of men owned land, hence limiting women's access to economic activity. In the last decade, the sector has become more efficient, farms have become more productive and profitable, and labour productivity measured as GVA/full-time employee has more than doubled since 2005, while the number of agricultural holdings (farms) has decreased by six percent since 2005 (from 375,000 to 352,000). Despite these advancements, however, women continue to be left behind in a number of areas. Women continue to have limited access to technical agricultural information and business development services, markets and decision-making fora— primarily due to persistent traditional gender roles dictating that men engage in formal economic activities, while women and girls engage in unpaid agricultural work and household chores.

A favourable climate, an average annual temperature of 16 degrees Celsius in coastal areas, diverse micro-climates, fertile soil and abundant water, as well as advantages from preferential trade agreements with the EU, have all contributed to the steady growth of Albania's agricultural sector in the past five years.

The EU continues to be the country's main trade partner. During 2018 (January–September) around 66.6 percent of Albanian agricultural exports were destined for EU markets. The Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) accounts for 24.6 percent, and the rest of the world for 8.8 percent, of Albanian exports. Meanwhile, EU countries account for around 57.5 percent of the country's imports, with 12.3 percent originating from CEFTA countries and 30.2 percent from the rest of the world.

Exports of basic agricultural products in 2018 (January–September) were dominated by medicinal plants (39% by value), tomatoes (13%) and rawhides and skins of bovines and equines (8%). Imports of basic agricultural products were more diversified, with the top three import categories comprising cane and beet sugar (11%), coffee (10%) and animal feed preparations (9%).

47. INSTAT: Survey "Information and Communication Technologies usage in Households and by Individuals (ICT)" conducted in 2018/2019

48. UN Women: Country Gender Equality Brief Albania 2020, forthcoming

49. UNESCO: The Intersection of Gender Equality and Education in South-East Europe: A Regional Situation Analysis of the Nexus between SDG4 and SDG5, May 2019

The average farm size is 1.3 hectares (EU average, 14.2 ha; Eurostat 2019) and family owned and run. As a result, agricultural activity is made difficult, due to increased transport and production costs, limited maximisation of investment effects and the utilisation of advanced technologies virtually impossible. The agri-food sector in general is facing challenges in creating market institutions, improving the efficiency of distribution channels, meeting national and international quality and food safety standards and building an administrative capacity to support these processes. There are gaps in food safety standards throughout the food value chain.

Accelerating economic growth and reducing rural–urban disparities require the modernisation of Albania’s agriculture and agro-food processing sectors. Value chain development involving food production linked to tourism, promotion and development of local products, increased financial literacy and improved access to finance are some of the main drivers of rural development (SDG MAPS 2018). Although the biggest employer in Albania due to its predominant informality, the sector’s extensive potential for equitable growth cannot yet be achieved. To this end, the country’s long-term prospects are tied to prospects for moving away from labour models based upon extensive agricultural and predominantly female informal employment, towards formal jobs that are linked to the knowledge economy. Low productivity and incomes are reflections of structural, gender and physical barriers, including limited areas for cultivation (INSTAT data indicate that less than a quarter of the country is suitable for farming; another sixth is classified as pasture lands), highly fragmented land ownership,<sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup> and low levels of mechanisation and phyto-sanitary and veterinary controls, all of which limit agricultural exports. One of the consequences of the limited output is that Albanian agriculture cannot provide for even domestic demand, which has grown faster than domestic production in most sub-sectors. Thus, imports have increased drastically in recent years, resulting in a large, and increasing, trade deficit.

## Industrial sector

The industrial sector in Albania is characterised by low productivity, limited product or process diversification and sophistication, and weak competitiveness.<sup>52</sup> The sector almost collapsed during the transition to a market economy. Industry’s contribution to GDP (including construction) has grown steadily, from 13.8 percent in 2010 to 21.3 percent in 2018,<sup>53</sup> mostly through improved performance in extracting and mining, while manufacturing (especially textiles) has slowed due to weaker demand from Greece and Italy. The major industries in which Albania has a competitive advantage are mining, footwear, textiles and agribusiness. International Labour Organisation (ILO) data indicate that manufacturing jobs account for less than ten percent of total employment, with textiles, food processing and other relatively small-scale, low-pay and labour-intensive branches generating most of this employment. INSTAT 2019 data on the Textile and footwear subsector indicate that out of the 70,000 total number of workers, 60,000 are women and 95 percent of women are from suburban areas. In 2019, women made up 14.8 percent of those employed in manufacturing while men made up 7.9 percent. Men dominated the sub-sectors of construction (12.2 percent men compared to 0.6 percent women), as well as mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply (3.2 percent men compared to 0.8 percent women).

Almost two-thirds of the manufactured goods are of low value and low complexity due to out-dated technologies and lack of necessary skills and product-specific knowledge. There is a substantive trade deficit in manufactured goods and a negative balance sheet, especially in the chemical, mechanical, leather products, metals processing and building materials sectors.

The export offer is limited and dominated to a great extent by textiles and clothing, as well as leather and footwear. Almost 40 percent of exports are from textile & footwear subsector. Meanwhile, the country suffers

50. FAO data indicate that 86 percent of Albania’s 350,000 farms comprise two hectares of land or less; the average farm size in the EU in 2013 was 16 ha.

51. CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4 para. 41 “The Committee notes with concern that only a small percentage of women in the State party (8%) own land, that Law no. 33/2012, which provides for joint ownership by both spouses of property acquired during marriage, is not being implemented effectively and that women are frequently discriminated against in matters of inheritance.”

52. Industry’s contribution to GDP has decreased from around 45 percent before the 1990s, to 28.7 percent in 2010 and 21.3 percent in 2018, including from construction, <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2019/albania-in-figures-2018/>

53. <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2019/albania-in-figures-2018/>

from high energy use, low value added and highly labour-intensive production, skills mismatch, and poor environmental practices. Economic diversification is low due to limited access to finance and knowledge gaps. Linkages among companies are inadequate due to poor technological preparedness and low business sophistication and innovation. At the national level, although prioritised, industrial development lacks an overarching strategic framework. Industrial processes contribute 14.7 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions. The main source of such emissions is the energy sector (57.3% of the total), followed by transport and agriculture (16.9%). Albania has relatively low per capita emissions, but rather high per unit emissions as a proportion of GDP due to its low level.

## Trade

The total trade volume in 2017 amounted to EUR 1.23 billion, an increase of 15 percent compared to 2016. In 2017, Albania's exports of goods and services amounted to around 31.5 percent of GDP and imports of goods and services around 46.6 percent. Albania remains only partially integrated into regional value chains, because it suffers from limited connectivity, and the quality of infrastructure needs to be improved.

In 2017, the main exports in goods were textiles and textile articles (22% of the total value of exports), footwear (21%); mineral products (15.8%), and base metals and articles (15.3%). This export mix is

underpinned by a significant transformation away from the heavy concentration on textiles and footwear. The share of textiles and footwear was cut by half, from around 65 percent of total exports in 2000 to around 34 percent in 2014. These changes were underpinned by consistent export growth in the other sectors, particularly minerals, fuels and electricity. This impressive registered growth accounted for 34 percent of total exports in 2014, up from around three percent in 2000.<sup>54</sup> However, export markets are few and require diversification, with Albania primarily exporting to countries with which it has a free trade agreement. The EU stands as Albania's main trading partner, accounting for more than 90 percent of exports and 80 percent of imports.

As of 2017, 99.8 percent of active enterprises in Albania were MSMEs.<sup>55</sup> The trade sector has the largest number of such enterprises, with 41.4 percent, followed by services, at 20.8 percent. In 2017, 80.3 percent of Albanian employees were employed in MSMEs. Enterprises with more than 250 employees constitute only 0.2 percent of businesses in Albania yet they engage 19.7 percent of all employees, realise 39.9 percent of investments, 22.8 percent of turnover and 31.7 percent of value added. Table 3 reports the structure of enterprises, employment and value added in Albania and the EU-28.

In terms of ownership and administration, 25.4 percent of active enterprises in 2019 were owned or administrated by women, and 74.6 percent were

**Table 3.** Percentage and size, percentage of employees and value added, of MSMEs in Albania and in EU-28 countries, 2017

Enterprises size class	Enterprises		Employed		Value Added	
	Albania	EU (28 country)	Albania	EU (28 country)	Albania	EU (28 country)
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
SME (1-249 employed)	99.8	99.8	80.3	66.4	68.3	56.8
Micro enterprises	94.4	93.1	39.1	29.4	20.1	20.8
Small enterprises	4.4	5.8	19.5	20.0	23.8	17.6
Medium enterprises	1.0	0.9	21.7	17.0	24.4	18.3
Large enterprises (250 + employed)	0.2	0.2	19.7	33.6	31.7	43.2

Source: INSTAT and EU data, 2017

54. INSTAT.

55. [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/sba-fs-2018\\_albania.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/sba-fs-2018_albania.pdf)

owned or administrated by men. This is consistent to figures from 2018, though a decrease from 2017, where women owner/administered 29.7 percent and men 70.3 percent of active enterprises. Women make up 21.6 percent of trade, transportation, accommodation and food, and business and administrative services sector while men make up 31.7 percent.

The Business and Investment Development Strategy 2014 – 2020 identifies commitments to sustainable economic development by focusing on and augmenting the contribution that women make to the economy. The document contains the Women's Entrepreneurship Action Plan as an official Annex. However, the pace of women's economic inclusion through private sector development remains slow, especially for women in rural areas. This, much like many gender-based issues in Albania, is due to gender norms that largely result in discrimination, which can be found at all levels. For example, the existence of gender-blind policies and regulations, compounded by informal social norms and patriarchal practices, negatively influence women's position in enterprise development. Though unintentional for the most part, these ultimately restrict or exclude women, hence limiting their access to opportunities, resources, and power. In terms of institutional support for market development at the meso-level, women often do not have the same level of access to the same crucial economic resources as men. This includes social capital, market information, legal support, and benefits from enterprise development initiatives that do not take into account the different and specific needs of women and men. Ultimately, this lack of equal access to productive resources plunge women into a cycle of economic marginalisation and keep them within invisible roles in value chains, making them less influential than men.

Due to poor technological preparedness and an overall lack of business sophistication and innovation, the overall productivity of Albanian firms remains inadequate. Research and Development (R&D) is not promoted and almost no private enterprises make any R&D expenditures nor envisage such in the future. This is reflected in the low number of patent application (15 resident applications in 2018) and scientific and

technical journal articles (180 articles in 2018).<sup>56</sup> The ability of SMEs to innovate is limited due to the lack of professionals in technical fields and an underdeveloped innovation infrastructure. Examples include a lack of business incubators, accelerators, technology transfers and financing opportunities for innovative projects. According to a survey on "Innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises" by INSTAT, co-operation in innovation with other enterprises, institutions and universities remains modest and only 19.9 % of the surveyed innovative enterprises had co-operation in 2016-2018.<sup>57</sup>

## Infrastructure

Infrastructure remains a key development priority for governments around the world and is a core element of the SDGs, with infrastructure impacting the achievement of 92 percent of all SDG targets.

Infrastructure delivery is overseen by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy (MIE), though all levels of government are allocated infrastructure management and oversight responsibilities. As part of Albania's National Strategy, infrastructure is regarded as the highest priority area.

The ministry is mandated with addressing service delivery across electricity, water, wastewater services and industry, and are responsible for the outlining of strategic infrastructure asset development in accordance with the national plans. Although MIE is the overarching body associated with infrastructure delivery, local authorities at the municipal and county levels are responsible for elements of planning and service delivery.

Currently, the National Territorial Council (*KK7*) has the overall responsibility for the administration and approval of planning documents, whilst the approval process also includes MIE, Agency for Development of Territory, and the National Agency for Territorial Planning. The development and approval process for planning could be optimised by increased streamlining to reduce the number of institutions involved in the approval process to municipalities and MIE as line ministry.

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56. World Development Indicators, data downloaded in September 2020

57. INSTAT: Innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises, October 2019

Although there have been recent significant increases in infrastructure investments, previous political isolation has left Albania with a low level of infrastructure stock requiring prioritised capital spending. The quality and quantity of infrastructure assets in Albania lag behind those elsewhere in the region due to its protracted economic isolation, challenges related to the transition from communism to a market economy and the legacy of conflicts in the 1990s. Albania's move towards entry into the EU means there is a large focus on enhancing infrastructure assets and systems to facilitate economic development. In order to meet this growing demand for infrastructure services, Albania has earmarked specific funding sources for transport and energy to improve network linkages throughout the country. However, even with the focus on infrastructure, capital investment decreased by 17 percent between 2014 and 2017,<sup>58</sup> with high public debt continuing to pose challenges to efficient planning, delivery and maintenance of infrastructure assets. To address this challenge, government has looked to alternative forms of financing to facilitate infrastructure investment through development banks and PPPs. Albania's efforts have recently been rewarded as they have received funding to facilitate reconstruction and development through the EU, World Bank and Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD) to a combined value of USD 860 million.<sup>59</sup> Albania's geographic position poses risks to its aging infrastructure assets, with economic challenges hindering efforts to incorporate resilience into new builds.

Albania ranks as one of the bottom ten countries in the world with regard to economic risk, from multiple hazards, with 88.5 percent of generated GDP and 86 percent of total territory exposed to at least two disasters. The impact of disasters and the vulnerability of Albanian citizens affected by them are significantly compounded by a relatively high degree of poverty, lack of infrastructure maintenance, and unsafe building and land-use practices linked to rapid urbanisation and depletion of natural resources. According to INFORM Risk Index, Albania has 'lack of coping capacity' index of 4.2 out of 10, being the second highest in

the Western Balkans. Lack of institutional capacities and the absence of a dedicated National Platform as well as National Strategy for disaster risk reduction prevent from stronger resilience to disaster. Events of 2009, 2010, 2015 and 2016 (flooding) and the 2019 earthquake highlight the need for increased resilience of the private sector and strengthened capacities to mitigate, manage and recover from shocks. The impact of the November earthquake included recovery costs of EUR 1.1 billion (putting strain on an already overburdened public finance system), 51 deaths and approximately 17,000 injured civilians. At a donor conference, in February 2020, pledges to support the recovery efforts amounted to Euro 1.15 billion. The UN Country Team supported the authorities in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, as well as in the more long-term reconstruction efforts.

Gaps in risk management and absence of integrated resilience within the country's existing asset base make it harder to recover from such shocks and further undermine infrastructure resilience. Given the country's paucity of public financial resources, impacts from earthquakes and other natural hazards have a compounding effect of further impeding achievement of development objectives. Meanwhile, budgetary allocations are diverted to the restoration of already constrained economic infrastructure links. The lack of maintenance and the focus of government on replacing assets rather than determining root causes for failure and building back better may affect Albania's competitiveness and global market position.

The effect of Albania's level of resilience in critical infrastructure was seen clearly in the 2019 earthquake, which caused damage and economic losses of more than \$1B. An initial assessment<sup>60</sup> of Albania's infrastructure systems was carried out in 2020, recommending a holistic and evidence-based approach to manage risk in the built and natural environment. The assessment further indicates that Albania's infrastructure governance system faces multiple capacity challenges across the planning, delivery and management stages of infrastructure

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58. For concrete guidance on how to do this and for tools that can be employed, the UNECE publication "Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment: Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment" (2020) can be referred to.

59. <http://ebrd-beeps.com/data/beeps-v-and-mena-es-2012-2015/>

60. UNOPS: Thematic Brief on Albania, February 2020

development. Albania's reconstruction efforts are now under way and provide an opportunity for a "build back better" approach to ensure the sustainability of the next generation infrastructure. Adopting a build back better approach would ensure that climate and disaster risk are addressed during reconstruction efforts to strengthen the resilience of Albania's critical infrastructure to future shocks. Major investments by international partners in Albania's reconstruction efforts in the education and cultural heritage sector are underway and provide an opportunity to build back better and strengthen the capacity of Albanian government institutions for the planning, delivery, and management of infrastructure assets in these sectors.

## Energy

The energy sector is of key importance for Albania's economic, strategic and social development. The focus continues to be on the provision of primary energy sources and building of the infrastructure necessary for the safe supply of energy. Energy generation in the country is entirely dependent upon hydro resources. Historical unpredictability of hydropower has translated into output volatility and caused economic disruption during dry years when the country needs to rely on imports. Albania is considered a water-rich country with an Actual Renewable Water Resources per capita of more than 13,000 m<sup>3</sup>, and a total installed energy capacity of 1.8 GW, dominated by hydropower plants. Water resources are its most important natural resources and the general hydropower potential is assessed up to 4,500 MW. Currently, 35 percent of the hydropower potential is used.<sup>61</sup> However, the volatility linked to hydro and the environmental trade-offs underline the need for urgent efforts to increase the share of renewable energy sources other than hydropower. Albania has large potential for wind and solar photovoltaic power generation, especially along the Adriatic coast, with

solar power potential assessed at 1,500–1,700 kWh/m<sup>2</sup> per annum. It also has considerable potential of biomass from agricultural waste, assessed at approximately 2,300 GWh/year. Increasing the use of these alternative sources will increase the country's resilience to climate change.

The National Action Plan for Renewable Resources in Albania 2015–2020 has envisaged considerable expansion of hydropower stations, while other technologies such as wind, biomass and solar have until now played a limited role. However, diversification has started and the government has recently concluded an auction for a 140 MW utility-scale solar plant, for which construction is expected to begin in 2020. The auction for the solar plant was supported by EBRD and it resulted in price of EUR 24.89 per MW/hour, less than half price ceiling of EUR 55, and the lowest price in the Balkans.<sup>62</sup> Such efforts must be scaled up.

An expensive or unreliable supply of electricity is also a top concern for Albanian firms, according to the most recent Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey.<sup>63</sup> In developing and diversifying renewable energy sources, care should be taken at different levels—strategic planning, policy development and project design—to minimise trade-offs against environment protection and water management.<sup>64</sup> As the country has important infrastructure development and modernisation needs also in other sectors, seeking synergies with, e.g., irrigation, wastewater management and forestry may open opportunities for integrating renewable energy generation.<sup>65</sup>

Along with renewable energy, government is embracing energy efficiency as a means of mitigating dependence on energy imports in light of the growing energy demand. Energy efficiency is a priority across all sectors, and Albania sets out to achieve 25 percent energy savings in industry. The Law on Energy Efficiency addresses some

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61. National Action Plan for Renewable Energy Resources in Albania 2015–2020.

62. <https://www.ebrd.com/news/2020/albanias-first-solar-tender-generates-competitive-price-.html>

63. <http://ebrd-beeps.com/data/beeps-v-and-mena-es-2012-2015/>

64. For concrete guidance on how this can be done and for tools that can be employed, refer to the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE; 2020) publication *Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment: Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment*.

65. Assessment of the Water–Food–Energy–Ecosystems Nexus of Albania, involving an inter-sectoral dialogue and a study, to be undertaken in 2020–21 by the UNECE and the Global Water Partnership, is to look into such synergy opportunities.

important aspects of this, such as the development of national energy efficiency programmes, energy audits, energy labelling, financing through an energy efficiency fund, among others. However, this law has been poorly implemented. The energy intensity of Albania was more than double the EU average in 2000, though it has since decreased, from 4.5 (MJ/USD2011PPP) in 2000 to 2.9 in 2017<sup>66</sup>. The shift in the country's economic structure, from agriculture as the primary sector, to the less energy-intensive service sector, as well as to the production of higher value products, is reflected in the evolution of its energy intensity. To a lesser extent, the decrease of energy intensity can be attributed to the improvement of energy efficiency and the application of relevant measures. While renewable energy and energy efficiency activities are under way, there are also plans to use gas from Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), a key element of EU's and regional energy diversification strategy, which is close to completion. Negotiations are ongoing on the conditions for Albania to use a share of gas from the pipeline for its own consumption. The Vlora Thermal Power Plant (capacity 100 MW) would be retrofitted for this.

## Challenges to be addressed

In order to accelerate the pace of equitable growth, Albania needs to implement measures that will raise the productivity and competitiveness of its economy. Enhanced regional connectivity and access to regional and global markets, coupled with export and market diversification, including digital connectivity are the necessary prerequisites.<sup>67</sup> Sustainable and inclusive industrialisation is prioritised by government for

achieving sustained economic growth, providing equal opportunities and creating jobs, while at the same time paying due consideration to climate and environmental sustainability. Priority must be given to addressing low productivity, weak competitiveness, an enabling environment, insufficient diversification and out-dated technologies of the industrial sector. Sectors that have a strong potential in the medium- to long-term to create new jobs and stimulate growth include agri-business and improving linkages and overall competitiveness of MSMEs, digitalisation, sustainable tourism, as well as fully utilising the unrealised renewable energy potential and improving poor environmental practices.<sup>68</sup> These efforts will also contribute directly to increasing economic resilience by reducing economy's overreliance on one sector or very limited number of products. Focusing on building enabling environment, prudent macro policies and skills development will support these efforts. Moreover the direct and indirect discrimination against women in general,<sup>69</sup> and against minorities, migrants, and other often domestically marginalized groups,<sup>70</sup> as well as attention to other factors of vulnerability, need to be an integral part of any decisions, policies, and initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth and employment. Redressing systemic or underlying causes that leave some groups behind requires dedicated support to accessing productive resources, the application of "affirmative measures", adequate representation of the rights, needs and interests of groups left behind in decision making processes, as well as legal means to secure accountability and redress for violations.<sup>71</sup>

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66. Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report (2020)

67. See UNCTAD Investment Policy Reviews (IPR) of South-East Europe

68. MAPS Report 2018

69. CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4 paras. 30–31: The Committee notes with concern women's concentration in the informal labour market, especially in the textile and shoe industries, without adequate labour and social protection, and the lack of disaggregated data on the number of women in the informal economy. It is also concerned that the gender wage gap, notwithstanding reported positive developments, remains significant, in particular in the private sector, and that the minimum wage remains extremely low (approximately USD 180 a month), disproportionately affecting women. The Committee is further concerned about the limited access to the formal labour market for women belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities and women with disabilities, as well as about the lack of sex-disaggregated information on labour migration to third countries.

70. CRPD/C/ALB/CO/1 paras. 43–44 "legislation still allows for persons with disabilities to be declared lacking in capacity to work; persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, are particularly affected by unemployment; there are no comprehensive and comparable data on the situation of persons with disabilities employed in the public sector and on the impact of Law no. 15/2019.

71. E/C.12/ALB/CO/2-3 paras. 7–8: The Committee regrets the absence of information about the cases of direct applicability of the Covenant before the courts in the State party and the availability of remedies.

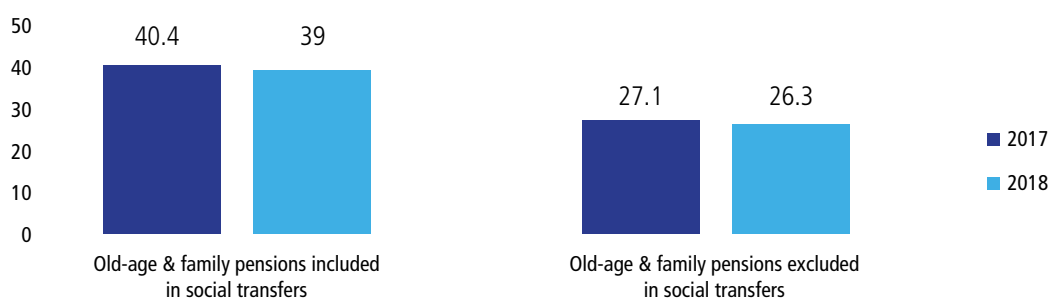
## 1.4 Social Context

The gap in economic and social inequality has widened and diversified even further. Poverty is one of the main indicators of unequal development. Until 2012, poverty in Albania was measured and reported by monthly consumption per family, while recently published data, from 2017 onwards, rely on income. In 2018, 23.4 percent of individuals were at risk of poverty (relative poverty rate), compared to 23.7 percent reported for 2017,<sup>72</sup> while the average rate across EU countries (28 countries) was 16.9 percent. Nevertheless, Albania is reported to have a lower rate than Serbia (24.3%) and Romania (23.5%).<sup>73</sup> The same source confirms that social transfers<sup>74</sup> have positively impacted the risks to poverty of individuals and households (Figure 6). However, among population categories, the unemployed and children (households with dependent children) are those most affected by (relative) risk of poverty (Figures 7–10). At risk of poverty or social exclusion refers to individuals who are at risk of poverty or severely materially deprived<sup>75</sup> or living in a household with very low work intensity.<sup>76</sup> In 2018, this indicator was estimated to be 49 percent compared to 51.8 percent in 2017. Although the percentage has decreased, the figures are high, representing half of the country's population.

Inclusion of vulnerable people in the labour market is a challenge; more than half of the poor population is inactive, unemployed or not in education,<sup>77</sup> and people living in remote areas are often completely excluded. In 9, the unemployment rate (15–64 years) fell to 12.2 percent (11.8 percent for women; LFS, INSTAT data 2019). The official youth (15–29 years) unemployment rate is 23.1 percent, having decreased by 2.8 percent since 2017. Unemployment in Albania is largely long term and structural as 66 percent of the unemployed have been unemployed for more than one year. Long-term unemployment remains to be addressed through more flexible and tailored policy interventions. Further, women in general, youth, and those with limited education are more excluded from jobs.

In 2018, there were 53,000 families in receipt of state economic assistance (including unemployment benefit and other forms of assistance for the poor), a number that halved over five years. However, the main reason for this important decrease is most probably the social assistance reform rather than a change in the actual number of unemployed or poor in Albania. Notably, unemployment benefit is received by fewer than ten percent of those who are looking for a job (INSTAT 2018). Among the total number of beneficiaries,

**Figure 6.** At risk of poverty (%), before and after social transfers, 2017 and 2018



72. These figures do not represent those individuals who are in poverty, but rather the number of them that have incomes below the defined poverty line (60% median equivalised disposable income for the household) and are at risk of poverty.

73. There are no comparable data for other countries in the region, since SILC is being implemented incrementally throughout it.

74. Old-age and family pensions included in social transfers.

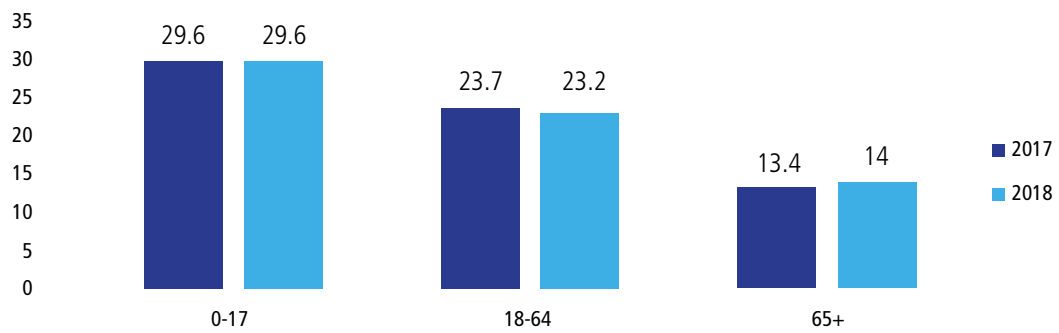
75. Severely materially deprived persons are those living in a household who cannot afford at least four of the nine categories of material deprivation related to assets or living conditions or financial aspects.

76. The work intensity of the household is defined as the ratio of the number of months that all household members have been working during the income reference year to the total number of months that could have theoretically worked during the same period.

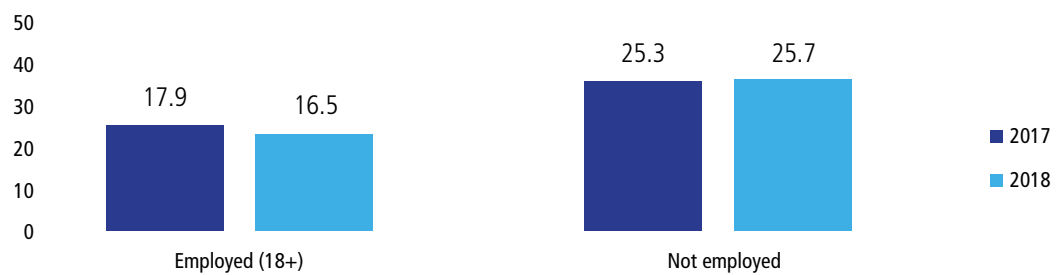
77. INSTAT, 2018. Labour Force Survey (LFS).



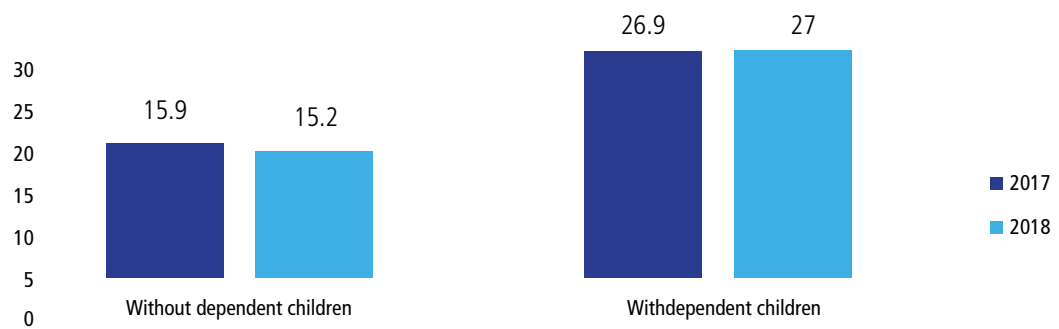
**Figure 7.** At risk of poverty (%), by age group (years), 2017 and 2018



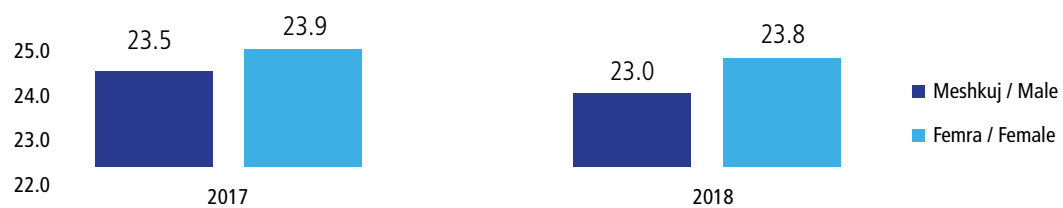
**Figure 8.** At risk of poverty (%), by employment activity status, 2017 and 2018



**Figure 9.** At risk of poverty (%), by household type, 2017 and 2018



**Figure 10.** At risk of poverty (%), by sex, 2017 and 2018



fewer than two percent are individuals (victims of violence, trafficking, or orphans), with the rest families. Among 82,483 families that received state economic assistance during 2017, 7,455 were poor with children of age less than 18 years, 11.6 percent were poor with a woman as family head, and 8.8 percent were poor and caring for a person with special needs (State Social Service).

The last (third) Universal Periodic Review of Albania highlighted that the social protection system in Albania still faces challenges and obstacles, and out of 197 recommendations released, 34 relate specifically to social cohesion and protection, 37 to child protection and 14 to health-care services. Other treaty bodies and Council of Europe mechanisms recently underlined the nexus between specific phenomena or groups targeted by a convention in need of social protection. The latest communication from the European Commission to the EU Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Albania (2019) notes that the social care services are currently undeveloped, underinvested and lacking in many areas.<sup>78</sup>

The most recent data indicate an increase in both infant mortality rate (10.3 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019 vs. 8.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018; INSTAT 2020) and under-5 mortality rate (10.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018 vs. 9.2 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017; INSTAT, 2019).

As for children's health, there is evidence of a slight increase in the percentage of vaccinated children in Albania in the past 5 years. It should be emphasized that, overall, the vaccination coverage in Albanian children remains very high (over 98%; IPH, 2020).

The (standardized) overall premature mortality rate has only slightly decreased during the period 2012–2017, with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and road injuries remaining to be leading causes. There is evidence of a decrease in the CVD mortality rate in all SEE countries, but the pace of decline in Albania is among the lowest in the region (only 8% decrease from 1990 to 2017). This burden of disease in Albania

is caused by a wide range of health determinants, but particularly, due to a high prevalence of high blood pressure (top risk factor for the Albanian population according to the GBD estimates), nutritional related risks (second), smoking (third risk factor), as well as overweight and obesity, high plasma sugar level and physical inactivity (GBD, 2017). Regarding the trend in the main conventional risk factors, the prevalence of smoking has slightly decreased in both men and women in the past few years. However, there is evidence of an increase in smoking prevalence among adolescents of both sexes in the past few years. On the other hand, the average alcohol consumption has increased by half a litre (per capita) in the past few years among Albanian individuals aged 15 years and above.

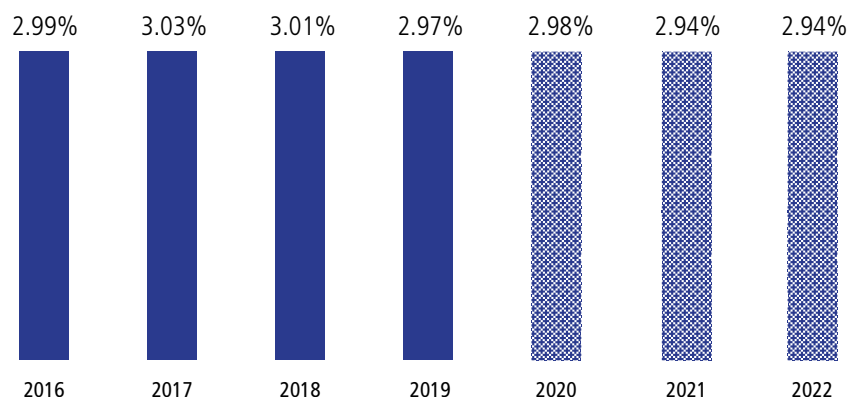
The considerable increase in the prevalence of obesity in both adult men and women in Albania over the past few years (overall, 28% increase) is an issue of particular concern. Conversely, there has been a slight decrease in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among male children.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic situation, as of 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020, Albania has reported 17,350 confirmed cases, 6,729 active cases, 10,167 healed, and 454 deaths. After an initial decline of the numbers in May, and some stabilization, after the lock-down measures, an acute resurgence of cases occurred. This puts the country in a difficult situation, as it must deal with an acute public health emergency while opening up socio-economic activities. Cases are being reported from all areas across the country. The most affected counties are Tirana, Durrës and Shkodra. The current testing capacity in Albania currently is approximately 2000 tests per day. The number of positive samples has increased significantly from an average of eight percent in early June to more than 20 percent. Following WHO guidance, positive testing should be below five percent. The number of hospitalised patients has also increased and is currently around 270 (total 553 beds). The numbers of health-care professionals tested positive is significant. Among the confirmed cases, 52 percent are women. However, the COVID-19 mortality rate is significantly higher for men (3.8 percent) than for women (1.73 percent).<sup>79</sup>

78. <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-communication-on-eu-enlargement-policy.pdf>

79. <https://globalhealth5050.org/the-sex-gender-and-covid-19-project/the-data-tracker/?explore=country&country=Albania#search>

**Figure 11.** Public spending on health as a share of GDP, 2016–2022



*Note: Values for 2020–2022 are forecasts; Source: Albanian National Health Strategy 2016–2020*

Budget allocation for COVID-19 will have long-term effects on health services and health care provision and will affect other sectors: USD 25 million were transferred from other sectors,<sup>80</sup> funds from specific budget health programmes were shifted to COVID-19 activities, and a range of health contracts were suspended. This is translated into loss in terms of missed diagnosis, missed prevention, missed treatment, and missed gain of healthy life years.

In 2019, public spending on health as a share of GDP was lower in Albania (2.97%) than in most South Eastern European countries and the EU, it may also result in the under-funding of key education, health, and other social services.

Projections for 2020–2022 show no significant change, with a slight decrease to 2.94 percent in 2022 (Figure 11).

WHO projection for 2020–2022 show that Albania will spend in the next three years less than ten percent on health from the overall public monies. The decline in the resources to primary care is concerning. The strategy on the development of primary care in Albania calls for 25 percent increase in the budget for this area. The important role of primary care is also important in the COVID 19 response and recovery is significant.

The basis for entitlement to HIF benefits is payment of contributions. As a result of high informality, a significant share of the population does not have access to all publicly financed health services, despite measures to offer access to basic health services for all. People not able to obtain HIF benefits tend to be women and men working in the informal sector, poor, women and men, women and men from the Roma community, and women and men living in under-served, poor rural and peri-urban areas.

The expansion of coverage to uninsured people in 2017 that allows free visits to the GPs is commendable. It lowers barriers to access care. Increasing target group coverage for the national check-up program and the breast cancer screening program is also visible. These are steps in the right direction, yet there is still potential to reduce the burden of out-of-pocket spending—even at the current low level of public spending on health—through better policies and improved targeting of the poor women and men and those in vulnerable situations. Coverage policy plays a key role in determining financial hardship, not just patterns of spending on health.

In 2017, the vast majority of the population over 16 years old perceived their overall health condition as ‘very good’ or ‘good’. Men seem to be more self-

80. DCM no. 205 of 9 March 2020: “On an additional fund in the 2020 budget approved for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to take measures to meet the initial needs because of COVID-19.”

satisfied than women about their overall health condition in both consecutive years.<sup>81</sup> However, men (21 percent) have a significantly higher likelihood to prematurely die from non-communicable diseases than women (13 percent).<sup>82</sup>

Unmet needs in health care and dental care are an issue. Both are far above the EU-27 averages. This unmet need is likely to have a disproportionate impact on poor people, uninsured people, minorities, and people with chronic diseases. Analysis of household budget survey data shows that financial protection is not sufficient in Albania in comparison to many other European countries. The share of out-of-pocket spending in Albania's total health spending is high compared to other countries in the WHO European Region.

Out-of-pocket health spending (formal and informal/bribes) is significant in Albania. This includes household spending on medicines, health products, outpatient and inpatient care services (including dental care) and other health services (such as medical laboratory services) that are not reimbursed by a third party (such as the government, a health insurance fund or a private insurance company). Women's unmet need might therefore be directly related to their financial situation and the (in)capacity to pay. Analyses of the impact of impoverishing health spending have so far focused on households only<sup>83</sup>, obscuring the gender-specific impact of out-of-pocket payments on women and men.

There are a several factors contributing to high out-of-pocket spending for medicines. This includes limitations in the design of coverage policy in Albania; mistrust around the quality of cheaper generic products along with consumer preference for imported branded products; limited negotiation on prices for medicines; application of retail margins that may reward the prescription and sale of higher priced products; use of external reference pricing to set prices rather than as the basis of further price adjustments and negotiation; high prices for single source products reflecting lack of competition in small markets.

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81. Albania Demographic and Health Survey II (2017-2018), October 2018.

82. WHO (2018). Noncommunicable Diseases Country Profile Albania. See: [https://www.who.int/nmh/countries/alb\\_en.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/nmh/countries/alb_en.pdf?ua=1)

83. WHO (2019). Primary Health Care on the road to universal health care coverage. 2019 Monitoring Report, Box 2.2. "Leaving no one behind in the World Health Organization European Region: how you measure matters", page 39. See: [https://www.who.int/healthinfo/universal\\_health\\_coverage/report/uhc\\_report\\_2019.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/healthinfo/universal_health_coverage/report/uhc_report_2019.pdf?ua=1)

## Environmental Context

As part of the EU accession agenda Albania needs to adhere to strong climate action, sustainable development and protection of the environment. The *EU acquis* contains provisions addressing climate change, water and air quality, waste management, nature protection, industrial pollution, chemicals, noise and civil protection. Progress is reported for alignment of the legislation and policy implementation in line with EU requirements. Further challenges include developing a national vision for 2030 and aligning the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation and monitoring efforts with the EU accession process.

Albania ratified the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in January 2019, while the draft law 'On Climate Change,' partly transposing provisions of the EU Emissions Trading Directive, is yet to be adopted. In July 2019, Albania became the first country in the region with an endorsed Strategy on Climate Change, and related Action Plan, presenting a general cross-cutting strategy with policy objectives and concrete actions, contributing to implementation of the Paris Agreement and the National Determined Contribution (NDC) target.

Administrative structures for handling climate change issues need to be strengthened and extended throughout line ministries. Albania is preparing its Fourth National Communication and its First Biennial Update Report and, as part of this process, intends to review the NDC in line with the EU green deal. The current NDC covers only energy and industrial processes and commits to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by up to 11.5 percent by 2030 compared to the baseline scenario, and does not cover Climate Change Adaptation, which is necessary for mainstreaming in planning and the mid- to long-term response in key economic sectors such as urban planning, tourism and agriculture at national and local levels. Findings from Albania's third National Communication show that the

coastal area is likely to become warmer over time due to the effects of climate change, while the Adriatic Sea has already experienced an average sea level rise of about 15 cm over the last century, leading to a retreat of the shoreline. Similarly, increased variation in annual and seasonal temperatures, both minimum and maximum, together with a gradual overall rise, are expected.

Implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and Strategic Environment Assessments in the trans-boundary context need to be strengthened to review and improve environmental and strategic impact assessments on existing and planned projects, plans and programmes, especially in the hydropower, construction, tourism and mining sectors.

The National Plan on Air Quality Management was approved in mid-2019 as the planning tool by which the Albanian government intends to implement the respective EU directives and in accordance with the requirements of the law 'On the Protection of Ambient Air Quality'. The plan pursues two objectives (i) Improving air quality in areas where the limits set by law have been exceeded, and in areas where there is a high risk of exceeding these limits; and (ii) Preserving the air quality level in the rest of the territory. Further efforts are needed to build capacity for development and implementation of air protection policies and measures at the regional and local levels. Another important area to take into account in addressing air quality and pollution are the sex and social-related differences that bring about varied impacts of air pollution on women and men. While there is a lack of national data on this, the Institute of Labour Economics has shown that the geographical distribution of pollution, the exposure to air pollution, and the type of pollution are able to highlight a number of gender inequalities, which are also related to the division of labour, demographic change, urban development, and health and cognitive performance.

Some positive steps have been taken towards Albania's alignment with the EU Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals, though the adoption of the implementing legislation and establishment of adequate administrative structures are still needed. In September 2019, a Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) was

adopted for the Chemicals Office envisaged within the structure of the National Environment Agency. Albania has conducted an initial assessment of the mercury and related inventory and prepared a ratification package for the Minamata Convention on Mercury factoring in future development of the country.

Water and air pollution, land degradation, biodiversity loss and waste management are Albania's key environmental challenges. Rapid urbanisation and increasing demand for natural resources has led to increasing depletion and degradation. Disaster risks and climate variability pose additional threats to the country. Water is used widely in the industrial and energy production sectors, and overexploitation of both surface and groundwater has led to difficulties in ensuring necessary water supplies for all users at the required time, in terms of both quantity and quality. In addition to water-related environmental challenges, the country is experiencing challenges with waste management and the application of sustainable production practices by the private sector. In view of the scarce integrated waste management in Albania, disposal at waste dumps is widely applied. There are 78 such open waste dumps in the country, mainly in the outskirts of the cities, towns and villages, and in many instances beside rivers. In Albania's industrial sector, the promotion of best available technology (BAT) and best environmental technology (BET) is beginning in manufacturing processes for preserving the environment and saving energy resources.

The legal framework for waste management is partially aligned, while the draft National Strategy for Integrated Waste Management is in the approval phase. Further efforts are needed to close the at-least 200 non-compliant landfills and dumpsites, and to start implementing separate collection of waste streams, increase recycling and reuse, and start composting bio-waste. Only 65 percent of waste is collected and there is no recycling of demolition waste. Economic instruments to promote recycling and prevent waste generation remain limited. Notably, gender differences exist in different steps of waste management cycle defined by women's primary household responsibility, by different perceptions on what is waste and what is not, on consumption behaviours between men and women, and other factors. Waste and wastewater treatment

processes impact production, industrial pollution, household behaviour, etc., and as a consequence women and men are differently affected. Women are more affected by the lack of wastewater treatment and by an inoperative sewerage system as women's contamination risk is greater than men.

Agriculture production and arable land in Albania are also the first affected by waste treatment processes such as incineration. As the Albanian Helsinki Committee shows (2019: 39), there is a decrease of agriculture production in the Verri Village of Fiër in Albania, because of the incinerator vicinity to the arable land. This concern was addressed especially by the women of this area, who felt the consequences that the construction of the incinerator would bring in their daily lives. The same report of civil society organisations for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Albania shows that consultative meetings organised on integrated management of recycled waste have been entirely formal meetings with no substantial participation of neither local women nor local community-based NGOs.

Alignment with the *acquis* in the field of nature protection, in particular the Habitats and Birds Directives, is well advanced. The law on protected areas was amended in 2018 to emphasise the planning and development of protected areas, while in 2019 a number of by-laws were approved that pave the way to the law's implementation focusing on financing mechanisms to improve the financial sustainability and law enforcement in protected areas. The National Agency for Protected Areas' Strategic and Financial Plan 2019–2023 has been developed, while in September 2019, the National Territorial Council approved extension of the Tomorri Mountain National Park, increasing to more than 18 percent the coverage of 799 protected areas.

The integrated water resource management strategy has been adopted, and the former technical water secretariat is now the National Agency for Integrated Water Resource Management. This structure has rapidly built its capacities and has made improvements, especially with regard to river basin management, the elaborated plans for which should be adopted promptly. The first Trans-boundary Diagnostic Analysis for the River Drini Basin is in place, as well as the Strategic Action Plan. The Drini Core Group

and respective expert working groups are shaping the trans-boundary cooperation in shared water resources management.

The National Forest Agency, established in mid-2019, has the main functions of ensuring performance in the forest sector, monitoring and control, and supporting the local government in exercising its functions in managing their forestry fund. Forests in Albania have become a net CO<sub>2</sub> emitter as a result of the reduction in the volume of forest cover, from 83 million m<sup>3</sup> in 2000 to 76 million m<sup>3</sup> in 2009.

Whereas adoption of the National Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2019–2023 opens new paths and creates opportunities for important decision making for tourism and eco-tourism development in Albania, the strategy fails to mention the contribution of women and girls in the tourism industry, as well as the potential benefits of promoting women in tourism. The number of tourists in protected areas during January–September 2019 increased by 30 percent, to 916,660 individuals, compared to the number in 2018. Some 5.1 million foreign citizens visited Albania during 2017, while 58,000 people are employed in activities directly related to tourism. Thus, every employee in these activities serves and cares for an average of 88 tourists.

Despite the drafting and approval of a number of important strategies that address the environment and climate change adaptation these strategies are largely gender-blind and hence leave women vulnerable to a number of environmental and climate change-related problems. Such issues include further hindering of their ownership of assets such as land, forestry and pastures, and their access to more technological and extension of services. This situation ultimately undermines women and their families' potential for economic independence, and widens the gap between them and sustainable development.

A number of studies in developing countries have also shown that natural disasters have an increased effect on agriculture production-dependent economies. UN Women's 2015 Gender Assessment on the impact of floods revealed that the effects of climate change have a direct causal relationship to other serious forms of discrimination and marginalisation of women, as shown by the increase of women's experience

of domestic violence and disadvantaged treatment compared to men of aid distribution by municipalities. The earthquake in 2019 specifically shed light on Albania's lack of preparation to respond to natural disasters in a manner that ensures the protection and support to the most vulnerable groups such as rural women, who face increased risks of losing their subsistence agriculture production; single mothers or women heads of households who are at risk of losing their homes and falling into homelessness and poverty; and women victims of domestic and/or intimate partner violence among other forms of violence, and other groups with an increased vulnerability such as disabled women and men, LGBTI persons, elderly persons, and Roma and Egyptian women and men.

Albania has a high level of seismicity, as have other countries in the region: Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, southern Bulgaria and western Turkey. The country experiences an annual occurrence of at least one earthquake of magnitude 6.5. The seven largest cities at risk in Albania account for more than 75 percent of the urban risk. Being the most vulnerable to the climate change and disasters, cities should develop and implement local strategies that reduce disaster risk and increase resilience. Earthquake risk reduction is crucial as most strong earthquakes are accompanied by extensive land instability—liquefaction, ground subsidence, surface cracks, landslides and rockslides—and can be responsible for tsunamis, depending upon the location. No Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) or civil protection strategy is in place in Albania. The civil emergencies law passed in mid-2019 provides for establishment of a new National Agency for Civil Protection, but this agency currently has very limited administrative capacity. In the process of strengthening the institutional system for DRR, focus should also be given to strengthening resilience building at a local level, through the development of local resilience plans, including focus on the local public health systems, in line with SDG 11 and the Sendai Framework commitments.

Albania has made progress in developing a national disaster loss data accounting system, using UN methodology (DesInventar-Sendai), as well as

contributing to the monitoring of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction through the reporting of disaggregated loss data.<sup>84</sup> Albania is not yet a participating State of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and is not yet linked to the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS). In view of future participation in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the country needs to establish relevant Secure Trans-European Services for Telematics between Administrations (STESTA) connections as a precondition to connect to CECIS.

Increased use of early warning systems (EWS) could also increase the capacity to mitigate risks from natural hazards, especially with regard to agriculture. The technical and operational capacities of the Albanian institutions regarding forecasting, monitoring and warning of hydro-meteorological data are still considered to be insufficient in order to cope with the multitude of risks posed to the country.<sup>85</sup> Participation in regional initiatives for exchanging information on DRR and combining efforts in monitoring, forecasting and responding to disasters could be enhanced.

No information exists on the extent to which gender equality goals have been mainstreamed in the national legal and policy framework on environment and climate change. Law No. 10 431, dated 09.06.2011 "On Environmental Protection" does not include gender related provisions.

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84. Disaster loss data for Sustainable Development Goals and Sendai Framework Monitoring System <https://www.desinventar.net/>

85. FAO, Comprehensive analysis of disaster risk reduction and management system for agriculture in Albania, 2018

## 1.5 Human Rights Context

Albania is party to the nine core international human rights instruments covering the full range of rights, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>86</sup> The country is yet to ratify the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (OP-CRPD) and to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OP-ICESCR).<sup>87</sup> However, all the main Council of Europe human rights instruments have been signed and ratified, including the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and its protocols, as well as the conventions on the prevention of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, on the action against trafficking in human beings, and on the preventing and combating of violence against women and domestic violence. A high ratification rate and the issuance of a standing invitation to all Special Procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council are important indicators of Albania's commitment to abide by the international human rights standards, undergo regular scrutiny of the state's efforts, and receive support in fulfilling its obligations.

Albania regularly engages with the UN human rights mechanisms. However, the country displays a mixed record in terms of compliance with its reporting obligations to the corresponding UN treaty bodies.<sup>88</sup> It has three reports that are overdue, namely the CAT report, which was due in 2016, and the ICCPR and ICESCR reports, which were both due in 2018. Albania has still to present its follow-up response to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which was expected to be ready in 2019. The National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and civil society actors are consulted in the preparation of reports as a general practice. However, concerns have been raised that constructive feedback and inputs are not reflected into the final reports presented to the UN

human rights mechanisms.<sup>89</sup> Whereas there is a legal framework in place, meaningful participation of civil society in such decision-making processes is lagging behind.

CSOs regularly engage themselves through shadow reports: e.g., on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The principle of participation is reflected across all the SDGs, making essential the need to transition from mere consultation towards active and genuine involvement in public affairs.<sup>90</sup> The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances visited Albania in 2016 and will present a follow-up report in 2020. Albania was reviewed by the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and by CERD in 2018. The country was reviewed by the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2019.<sup>91</sup> Albania was also reviewed by GREVIO in its first evaluation report in 2017 and CEDAW's concluding observations were issued in 2016, with an upcoming review expected in 2020.<sup>92</sup> In addition, the country completed its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle in 2019, receiving a total of 197 recommendations, of which 186 were accepted.

The outcomes of these review processes that reflect on overall implementation can be searched for in the Universal Human Rights Index.<sup>93</sup> Some of the most persistent human rights issues coincide with SDGs 5, 10 and 16, and SDGs 1, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 13, which should be seen as inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing. Among the specific groups identified in the recommendations of the UN human rights mechanisms are migrants, irrespective of their status

86. Status of Ratifications OHCHR Dashboard, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

87. UPR 2019 Recommendations 95.2–95.3 (A/HRC/42/4), CMW paras. 14–15 (CMW/C/ALB/CO/2), CRPD paras. 9–10 (CRPD/C/ALB/CO/1)

88. Reporting compliance, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/LateReporting.aspx](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/LateReporting.aspx)

89. CED paras. 10–11 (CED/C/ALB/CO/1), CRPD paras. 7–8 (CRPD/C/ALB/CO/1)

90. Guidelines on the right to participate in public affairs, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/DraftGuidelinesRighttoParticipationPublicAffairs.aspx>

91. All reports and Concluding Observations, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/ALIndex.aspx>.

92. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/ALIndex.aspx>

93. <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en>



and ethnic and religious minority, Roma communities, people with disabilities, specific categories of women and girls, and children living in poverty. These groups have limited access to the enjoyment of basic rights, including to health care, education, housing options and social protection.

In addition to the direct applicability of international human rights instruments in the domestic legal order, Albania has undertaken a considerable amount of work in adjusting its national legislation to the adopted international commitments. Legislative harmonisation is ongoing and is in great part sustained by Albania's commitment to the EU accession process.<sup>94</sup> While the Albanian antidiscrimination framework allows for individual remedies, responsibility falls upon individuals to draw attention to discriminatory practices or policies and initiate lengthy and onerous legal procedures to achieve the recognition of harm suffered and remedies. Implementation of the existing legislation is insufficient, neither full nor consistent,<sup>95</sup> and further prevents the systemic transformation of society that is needed to ensure the enjoyment of human rights by all people. Legislative gaps remain in the areas of definition and criminalisation of enforced disappearance.<sup>96</sup> Major concerns have been raised regarding the important legislative gap regarding upholding the fundamental international protection principle of non-refoulement, which is enshrined in several key human rights instruments ratified by Albania.<sup>97</sup> This constitutes an indispensable component of the customary prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment, and therefore, Albania shall bring its legislation in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement and establish clear and specific

mechanisms, or procedures, or both, to assess and verify the risk of a person being subjected to refoulement.<sup>98</sup>

In the area of transitional justice, the parliament approved in July 2020, amendments to the law on the rights for information for "Sigurimi" files, recognizing for the first time missing persons during communism era as a defined category. According to the recent legislative changes, the Authority on Access to Information of the Former State Security Service established after the parliament passes a law in May 2015 to open up the communist era secret police files is tasked as the interinstitutional cooperation mechanism to coordinate and oversee activities related to the investigation and identification of all missing persons from the communism era. This is a critical step forward which requires adequate financial and human resources.

The continued use of hate speech and discriminatory statements in public discourse and the incomplete information on cases prosecuted and convictions obtained so far<sup>99</sup> point to the need for strengthening the legislative prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred,<sup>100</sup> and taking measures to prevent, investigate and sanction such cases. Together with the general obligation to combat advocacy of hatred, Albania needs to promote an enabling environment for freedom of expression and independence of the media.<sup>101</sup> Great care must be taken in any regulation of so-called fake news and disinformation, in line with the UN Secretary General's Call for Action to "increase UN support at field level for the promotion of laws and policies that protect the right to equal participation and civic space, including a free and independent media". The Assembly of Albania, at its plenary

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94. Chapters 23 and 24 on rule of law and fundamental rights. Full 2019 report of the European Commission, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

95. UPR 2019 Recommendations (A/HRC/42/4).

96. CED paras. 12–27 (CED/C/ALB/CO/1).

97. In particular CAT (Article 3), ICED (Article 16), the 1951 Convention on the status of refugees (Article 33). The principle of non-refoulement is universally recognised as a principle of international customary law.

98. CED paras. 28–29 (CED/C/ALB/CO/1), CMW paras. 32 and 72 (CMW/C/ALB/CO/2), CMW para. 32 (a) (CERD/C/ALB/CO/9-12).

99. UPR 2019 Recommendations 95.25 and 95.46–95.49 (A/HRC/42/4).

100. Pursuant to its obligations under the ICCPR art. 20. Under article 19(3), restrictions on the right to freedom of expression must be (1) 'provided by law', and necessary (2) 'for respect of the rights or reputations of others' or 'for the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health and morals'. Lastly, there is a requirement of (3) necessity and proportionality. The assessment of the proportionality of the measure under art. 19 (3) entails a requirement of the due process safeguards against abuse.

101. UPR 2019 Recommendations 95.57–95.59 (A/HRC/42/4)

session on 18 December 2019, approved a package of laws amending the law on audio-visual media service and the law on electronic communications in the Republic. The draft laws caused concerns among media organisations and international actors about their negative impact on freedom of expression. On 12 January 2020, amendments to the media law were sent back to the Parliament by presidential decree and subsequently brought before the Venice Commission for revision. On 19 June 2020, the Venice Commission adopted the official opinion “on draft amendments to law no. 97/2013 on the audiovisual media service”<sup>102</sup> which recognized the need to regulate electronic media but recommended that the draft laws be revised to avoid undue impact on freedom of expression.

CERD welcomed adoption of the Law on the Protection of National Minorities,<sup>103</sup> and recommended that Albania promptly elaborate and adopt the secondary legislation necessary to give effect to the new law, in order to ensure effective implementation.<sup>104</sup> Better efforts are necessary to revise the existing legislation in the area of disability and to bring it into full compliance with the international standards that provide for a human rights model of disability, reasonable accommodation and non-discrimination.<sup>105</sup>

Progress in building the national legislative framework for the protection of human rights needs to be accompanied by efforts to strengthen national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights and practical implementation of norms and standards. There is a need to follow the legislative work with consistent implementation through institutionalised practices, effective accountability mechanisms and independent monitoring.

Albania has no standing national mechanism on following up and reporting on implementation of its human rights obligations (so called National Mechanism for Monitoring and Follow-Up). In the absence of such an established structure with dedicated human and financial resources, government efforts to ensure systemic change in areas related to human rights (e.g. health and social services, administration of justice and education), eliminate discrimination and achieve de facto equality fall short of requirements. The whole of government coordination for human rights-related action in the different sectors and among all levels is key. Therefore, it is recommended that Albania consider establishing such a mechanism to enhance national coherence in the implementation of its human rights commitments. However, in late 2018, the government approved an action plan and set up a tracking mechanism<sup>106</sup> for monitoring of human rights compliance, especially UPR and CEDAW recommendations, making it the first country in the region with such a plan.<sup>107, 108</sup>

Moreover, human rights-based data in accordance with SDG target 17.18 should be used effectively to inform the design and implementation of policies and programmes, and assess their impact on groups that are at risk of being left behind. CERD found that reliable demographic data, disaggregated by ethnicity, religious practices and languages spoken, were not available in Albania and recommended that the 2020 census law respect the principle of self-identification.<sup>109</sup> The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities observed that Albania is not systematically collecting and analysing disaggregated data on the situation of persons with disabilities, including on victims of violence, including sexual violence and abuse, or multiple forms of discrimination, children

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102. For more see Venice Commission: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2020\)013-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2020)013-e)

103. CED paras. 4–5 (CED/C/ALB/CO/1).

104. CED paras. 12 (CED/C/ALB/CO/1).

105. CRPD paras. 5–6, 11–12 (CRPD/C/ALB/CO/1).

106. [http://tedrejtatenjeriut.punetejashtme.gov.al/UN\\_System/PAGE\\_konteksti\\_metodologjia/NA8AAL14mUhlTUN2SGxaUd3AAA?WD\\_ACTION=MENU&ID=M59](http://tedrejtatenjeriut.punetejashtme.gov.al/UN_System/PAGE_konteksti_metodologjia/NA8AAL14mUhlTUN2SGxaUd3AAA?WD_ACTION=MENU&ID=M59)

107. UN, December 2018. Albania launches platform to monitor implementation of human rights, <https://www.un.org.al/news/albania-launches-platform-monitor-implemantaion-human-rights>

108. Letter from the High Commissioner to the Foreign Minister, [https://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session33/AL/HC\\_letter\\_33rdSession\\_Albania.pdf](https://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session33/AL/HC_letter_33rdSession_Albania.pdf)

109. CED paras. 7–8 (CED/C/ALB/CO/1).

living in institutional settings, and the public resources allocated to inclusive education.<sup>110</sup> Progress has been made with the yearly publication of the *Men and Women* report, supported by UN, which contains sex-disaggregated data in several areas, most notably in judicial statistics and gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>111</sup> However, not all institutions at all levels collect sex-disaggregated data, regularly or ever. Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive, cohesive, regular and consistent data collection and publication.

Human rights-based and disaggregated data are important for identifying those who are left furthest behind.<sup>112</sup> For example, such data reveal the vulnerability of children with disabilities in rural areas that are far behind in the enjoyment of their rights and have limited access to the products, services and supports they need, even when these are normally available to others. These children are at risk of institutionalisation in long-term care facilities far from their communities to receive education, health, residential or palliative care services.

Given their unique mandate, NHRIs have a strong role in promoting respect for and compliance with human rights obligations. Albania's two NHRIs, namely the People's Advocate<sup>113</sup> (a status accreditation) and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination,<sup>114</sup> are in a unique position to act as both watchdogs and advisors in order to uphold the human rights embedded in the SDGs. However, the UN human rights monitoring bodies have indicated that the lack of sufficient human, technical and financial resources allocated to the two institutions undermines their work on rights promotion and protection. For example, the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families expressed concerns that the

Office of the People's Advocate does not have adequate financial and human resources to carry out its mandate relating to the rights of migrant workers and members of their families effectively.<sup>115</sup> CERD expressed concern at reports that the recommendations of the People's Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination remain unaddressed.<sup>116</sup>

A similar concern was echoed by the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2016, drawing attention to a lack of financial and human resources, and the need for heeding the recommendations issued by human rights institutions.<sup>117</sup>

Monitoring of detention and prisons facilities is undertaken by the People's Advocate in the framework of fulfilling its role as a National Mechanism for Prevention of Torture.<sup>118</sup> The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that Albania revise the current procedures for monitoring and inspecting social care homes and psychiatric institutions to prevent violence against and abuse of persons with disabilities, particularly children and women.

The gap that exists between the values enshrined and protected in legislative acts and policies and the progress made towards eradication of gender-based discrimination remains considerable. This is largely because the change towards equal gender relations is closely linked to stereotypes and attitudes that reflect a high tolerance of rigid gender roles and justifications of violence. Implementation of the legislative frameworks to prevent and address GBV remains weak, experiences of various forms of violence go unreported, and women have limited access to victim assistance and protection, health care, social security and other basic services.

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110. CRPD paras. 19 and 31–34, 39, 43–44, 51–52 (CRPD/C/ALB/CO/1).

111. <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2019/women-and-men-in-albania-2019/>

112. Guidance on human rights-based approach to data: leaving no one behind, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteon-ApproachtoData.pdf> and <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/documents.aspx>

113. Established under the organic Law on the People's Advocate.

114. Established under the Law on Protection against Discrimination.

115. CMW/C/ALB/CO/2, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CMW/C/ALB/CO/2&Lang=En](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CMW/C/ALB/CO/2&Lang=En)

116. CED para. 13 (CED/C/ALB/CO/1).

117. CEDAW, 2016. *Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report for Albania*, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARegion/Pages/ALIndex.aspx>

118. Pursuant to Law no. 8328 'On the Rights and Treatment of Prisoners' as amended.

## 2. National Vision for Sustainable Development

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### Country's Key Development Priorities: National Vision

The National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) II is concluding its cycle in 2020 and the Albanian government is in the preparatory phase for defining a Vision 2030 for the country. NSDI for 2030 will orient the development of Albania and ensure the country's priorities with respect to the development goals and the European integration process, intertwined with the SDGs.

The monitoring report shows that 42 percent of the NSDI II mid-term targets for the year 2017 have been successfully achieved, whilst substantial progress has been achieved in many policy areas covered by the strategy and particularly on striving to meet the conditions for opening the EU accession negotiations.

rations of NSDI 2030 and the preparations for other cross-cutting and sectoral strategies (~30), which aim to integrate the SDGs at the indicator level, including mid-term SDG targets (2023).

Meanwhile, government is working on a response plan to the COVID-19 outbreak, which will be long term, inclusive of the country's priority areas, and be synchronised with the new NSDI.

The Department for Development and Good Governance (DDGG) at the Prime Minister's Office is in charge of coordinating the prepara-

As part of the monitoring process, DDGG prepared a mid-term review of the current NSDI the results from which will feed into the new NSDI. The monitoring report shows that 42 percent of the NSDI II mid-term targets for the year 2017 have been successfully achieved, whilst substantial progress has been achieved in many policy areas covered by the strategy and particularly on striving to meet the conditions for opening the EU accession negotiations. Albania is at an important stage in its European integration process, which will drive the reforms and transformations in all policy areas, thus converging the results with the other ongoing processes, including the SDGs.

NSDI II currently comprises a set of more than 50 policy documents, including cross-cutting and sector strategies. While such a significant number of strategies is helpful for emphasising that all the possible policy areas both contribute to and are affected by the overall NSDI implementation, in practical terms a large number poses challenges, such as making more difficult the management of the monitoring and reporting processes, due to the complexity of the policy documents, inter-related reforms and the limited staff responsible for these processes. The intention of including most if not all policy areas under the umbrella of a national strategy might thus be counterproductive, making it difficult to focus on the key priorities.

NSDI is closely connected with the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2020–2022, which outlines the main macro-economic and fiscal policies that aim to establish a clear balance between the internal strengths and external threats, with a view to enabling sustainable growth, increased employment and reduced public debt.

The following objectives of the current NSDI will likely remain as key pillars of the new NSDI, while prioritising areas of development that boost the country's EU integration. These objectives include the following:

- Strengthen Democracy, Rule of Law and Good Governance (focusing on justice reform issues, good governance, human rights, decentralisation, local government, internal affairs, public administration, anticorruption, internal affairs, national security, disaster recovery and civil protection)
- Growth through macro-economic stability, increasing competitiveness, business development and innovation, and economic convergence (focusing on fiscal and macro-economic policies, business development and promotion, FDIs, e-Economy, rural and regional development, tourism and cultural heritage)
- Ensuring sustainable development of natural resources (focusing on connectivity areas, transport, energy, broadband, environment, waste management, water and sanitation, and water resources)
- Ensuring social cohesion and employment (focusing on employment and skills, social

inclusion and social protection, health, pre-university, university and vocational education, and culture).

NSDI is closely connected with the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2020–2022,<sup>119</sup> which outlines the main macro-economic and fiscal policies that aim to establish a clear balance between the internal strengths and external threats, with a view to enabling sustainable growth, increased employment and reduced public debt. However, due to the outbreak of COVID-19 the macro-economic and fiscal projections introduced are no longer valid. Nevertheless, the actions of the ERP aim for integration and efficient planning, while aligning the key government planning documents, such as NSDI II, sectoral strategies and the Mid-Term Budget Programme (MTBP), still remain relevant.

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119. <https://new.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Economic-Reform-Programme-2020-2022.pdf>

# 3. Country Progress towards Agenda 2030

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## Overview on Achievement of SDGs

During the second quarter of 2020, to respond promptly to the COVID-19 recovery needs, UN in Albania engaged heavily in the preparation of a Socio-economic Recovery and Response Plan, which includes UN actions in the short and mid-term to support government's recovery efforts.

In 2019, UN support to the Albanian government focused on the launch of an exercise for establishment of interim targets for the SDGs that would feed into preparation of the new NSDI, 2021–2030. In parallel, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was supported in conducting a mid-term review of the current NSDI that would also feed into the formulation of NSDI 2021–2030.

The support of previous years, 2016–2018, included preparation of the country's Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the SDGs<sup>120</sup> and its presentation by the deputy prime minister at the 2018 high-level political forum (HLPF).<sup>121</sup> The national statistical office, INSTAT, prepared a statistical annex that accompanied the review. During the HLPF, UNDP, Switzerland and the Albania Permanent Mission to the UN co-

organised a side-event that underscored the regional aspects of Agenda 2030 and especially the value of the EU integration process as an accelerator for the SDGs. With the participation of Montenegro and Serbia alongside Albania, the three cases focused on common SDG challenges across the Western Balkans and how EU accession can accelerate achievements.

The undertaking in 2018 of an SDG mission focused on MAPS, the first in the Western Balkans, by the UN, in collaboration with GoA, the EU and the World Bank, identified three main accelerators of SDGs in Albania: i) governance and the rule of law, ii) investments in an inclusive, green economy, and iii) investment in social and human capital. The MAPS report<sup>122</sup> was launched officially by the government on 19 September 2018,<sup>123</sup> and at the same time the UN and GoA announced the establishment of the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund. The Albanian government has committed itself to an annual contribution to the Fund of USD 2 million and, with this leading contribution, other, flexible, matching funds will be sought from partners. In 2018–2019, Sweden and Switzerland supported the Fund with contributions for gender equality and social inclusion. For the first time, the Government of Norway made a contribution, of USD 0.85 million, to the Fund for areas aligned to their overall development strategy for

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120. <http://www.un.org.al/publications/voluntary-national-review-sustainable-development-goals>

121. <http://www.un.org.al/news/albania-presents-voluntary-national-review-sustainable-development-goals-%E2%80%93-during-ecosoc-high>

122. <http://www.un.org.al/publications/mainstreaming-acceleration-and-policy-support-achieving-sustainable-development-goals>

123. <http://www.un.org.al/news/synergies-eu-accession-and-smart-investments-can-accelerate-achievement-agenda2030-albania>

## The engagement of Albania in reporting progresses against the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, supports consolidation of disaster risk reduction-related SDGs indicators, particularly of SDGs 1, 11, 13.

Albania (governance and democratic development, human rights and economic development). In 2018–2019, the governments of Sweden and Switzerland supported the Fund with contributions for gender equality and social inclusion. All actions supported by the Fund are in line with the accelerators of SDGs in Albania, identified in the MAPS report that was launched by GoA in September 2018.

In 2018, the UN Country Team (UNCT) undertook budget analysis of SDG-related spending in Albania (2015–2017)<sup>124</sup> to build evidence for investment trends in the SDGs, while UNDP undertook a needs assessment of INSTAT capacities so that they can better monitor and report publicly on the Goals. INSTAT was also supported in the launch of a dashboard of SDG data, hosted on the INSTAT website, and the establishment of an SDG Unit at INSTAT to support the institution in its SDG-related efforts. The joint UN–INSTAT Data Group (established in 2016) continued to meet quarterly. Joint efforts are progressing for preparation of the 2020 Albanian Population and Housing Census, and UN agencies are providing continuous support for capacity development of INSTAT, organisation of various statistical workshops in Albania, and participation of institute staff in

regional and global workshops, among other efforts. In addition to the support provided to INSTAT, UN agencies are assisting statistics development in various sectors and areas, including gender equality, GBV, child protection, health, migration, social inclusion, education, environment, agriculture, rural development, human rights, and employment, with focus on vulnerable or marginalised groups.

Year 2017 saw the establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee on the SDGs,<sup>125</sup> chaired by the deputy prime minister and featuring membership of development partners, civil society, academia and the private sector, and an inter-institutional working group for achievement of the SDGs. In December, Parliament unanimously approved a resolution<sup>126</sup> committing to the promotion, implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The engagement of Albania in reporting progresses against the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, supports consolidation of disaster risk reduction-related SDGs indicators, particularly of SDGs 1, 11, 13. In parallel with this approval, 25 Albanian universities signed a Declaration of Commitment<sup>127</sup> to play an active role in advancing the Agenda, while the National Council for Civil Society approved a declaration<sup>128</sup> in

124. [http://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/Final%20Report\\_SDG\\_Budget%20Analysis\\_1.pdf](http://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/Final%20Report_SDG_Budget%20Analysis_1.pdf)

125. <https://www.un.org.al/news/inter-ministerial-committee-sdgs-established>

126. <https://www.un.org.al/news/members-albanian-parliament-commit-play-active-role-support-implementation-agenda-2030-and>

127. <https://www.un.org.al/news/albanian-universities-sign-landmark-commitment-help-albana-achieve-global-goals>

128. <http://www.amshc.gov.al/kkshc/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018.06.22-Nr.-16-1-KKSHC-Deklarate-per-SDG-EN.pdf>

The Rapid Integration Assessment tool of UNDP has been applied and a report on the Harmonisation of the SDGs with Existing Sectoral Policies, finalised in 2017 and launched in February 2018, serves as a useful baseline.

support of the Goals. Moreover, the SDGs are integrated into NSDI and the National Statistical Programme 2016–2020.<sup>129</sup> Meanwhile, the Rapid Integration Assessment<sup>130</sup> tool of UNDP has been applied and a report on the Harmonisation of the SDGs with Existing Sectoral Policies,<sup>131</sup> finalised in 2017 and launched in February 2018, serves as a useful baseline. In 2020, a dedicated sub-committee on Sustainable Development was established within the parliamentary commission of economy and finance was established to follow up closely on SDG related aspects.

The mapping of SDG gender-related indicators<sup>132</sup> undertaken by UN Women and INSTAT identified that of the total 80 gender-related SDG indicators, roughly 26 indicators are readily available and for the remaining 54 additional efforts are required in terms of standardisation of the methodology and data-collection. The mapping was done on the basis of specific criteria which are crucial for drawing a clear picture of the situation on the ground. These criteria include availability and the latest year available, disaggregation into percentages of women and men where it is plausible, published/non-published status, current situation, and periodicity. Further criteria delve deeper by providing information on the current status of the level of disaggregation, primary data source (e.g. household survey, census, administrative data, etc.), institution responsible for data collection, and recommended actions for data-production, computation, and dissemination. Data limitations related to the SDG gender-related indicators are

linked to the entire statistical system. They are characterized by a significant gap between the data and information collected by institutions on the one hand, and the indicators required for monitoring international commitments to gender equality on the other. Furthermore, data is not standardized. Frequently, data collection is inconsistent and not sufficiently rigorous, making it difficult to monitor one and the same indicator over time. In addition, new policy agendas need to be reflected by the introduction of new indicators, and this particularly pertains to the SDGs.

## Status and Progress on SDG Nationalisation and Localisation

In 2019, UN support to the Albanian government focused on the launch of an exercise for establishment of interim targets for the SDGs that would feed into preparation of the new NSDI 2021–2030. Moreover, the government recently has identified 41 mid-term SDG indicators, out of 82 available in Albania, with mid-term targets defined, that will feed into the development of the new NSDI and more than 20 cross-sectoral strategies will be developed in the coming period. The mapping of SDG indicators relevant for children, adolescents and youth, undertaken by INSTAT and UNICEF, identified that 20 percent of the indicators are not measured or reported.<sup>133</sup> Overall, only 36.7 percent of indicators needed to monitor the SDGs from a gender perspective are available, with gaps in essential areas such as Violence Against Women, Key Labor Market indicators such as Gender Pay Gap and Skills in Information and Communication Technology (ICTs). A recent UN Women assessment of the indicators required for monitoring progress on SDG 5 (women's empowerment and gender equality) revealed significant gaps in the capacity of state institutions in producing SDG indicators. Only 50 percent of SDG 5

129. [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/376765/programi\\_kombetar\\_i\\_statistikave\\_zyrtare\\_2017-2021.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/376765/programi_kombetar_i_statistikave_zyrtare_2017-2021.pdf)

130. <https://un.org.al/sites/default/files/sdg%20NSDI%20report%20final%20draft%20%28Final%29.pdf>

131. <https://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/Albania%20Report%20on%20the%20Harmonization.pdf>

132. UN Women Albania, Country Gender Equality Brief (2020) <https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/-/media/5cf0f01aeaf445b38b678aa4a97f7abe.ashx>

133. INSTAT and UNICEF, 2020. *Well-being Indicators on Children, Adolescents and Youths*, <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/publikime/librat/>



The UN will continue to provide support to Parliament for implementation of its SDG Action Plan, including strengthening Parliament’s monitoring and oversight competencies, while close cooperation and support will be provided to the Sub-Committee on SDGs.

indicators can be obtained, and they are from data generated through surveys mainly funded by donors.<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, since accurate administrative data on municipalities’ population, composition, and poverty level is currently unavailable, effective localization and monitoring of SDG 5 at municipal and administrative unit level remains a major challenge.

Prior discussion was initiated with the PMO for the drafting of a Vision 2030 document that lays out longer term priorities for the country, and institutionalisation of monitoring and reporting alongside statistical capacity building. The UN also supported Albania’s chairmanship of the SDG Regional Forum of March 2019.

Extending partnerships with the private sector has been at the focus of the UN work throughout 2019, while promoting the SDG Global Compact to align the actions of companies with SDG-oriented actions. For example, in May 2019, on its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Albanian Association of Banks organised an international conference to discuss Banks for Sustainable Development. This event aimed to ensure the participation of reputable international institutions and national policymakers, financial institutions and the UN to discuss recent developments among a broad array of topics on sustainable development, as well as to rekindle the Global Compact.

The UN will continue to provide support to Parliament for implementation of its SDG Action Plan, including strengthening Parliament’s monitoring and oversight competencies, while close cooperation and support will be provided to the Sub-Committee on SDGs. In addition, nationwide awareness raising will continue, along with partnership building to deepen efforts, including through engagement with the private sector and the mobilisation of contributions to the SDG Acceleration Fund.

For deeper analysis please refer to Section 1.9 and Annexes B and C.

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134. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/albania>

# 4. Leave No One Behind

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## Marginalised Women

The main grounds for discrimination addressed in this section, including gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity, have been traditionally present in the Albanian society. The elimination of all these grounds for discrimination has been the focus of the work of UN agencies, civil society and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in Albania. In addition, the challenges these groups face have been raised in all key human rights mechanisms, including recommendations of the Universal Periodical Review (UPR) and relevant Concluding Observations of human rights bodies addressed to Albania. These groups include, women, children and adolescents, older persons, youth, persons with disabilities, Roma communities, LGBTQI persons, refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and migrants.

## Discrimination Against Women

### Including against women who are marginalised and vulnerable

Despite making significant progress in the area of legislation and commitments to gender equality in recent years, Albania continues to face a plethora of barriers to achieving gender equality. There still exists a clear distinction between the roles of men

and women in both private and public life: men are still widely considered to be the head of household in most Albanian families, with 83 percent headed by men and 17 percent headed by women, while women still have the burden of doing most of the domestic and unpaid care work. Gender inequalities persist in the domain of health care, specifically in health status, health-related behaviour and access to health care, putting Albania's index score in the domain of health at 81.8, 6.3 points lower than the EU-28 average. Due to rigid and traditional gender roles, gender-based social exclusion is still very much a reality for women in the country. Among the female population, several marginalised groups have been identified as key groups at risk of being left behind. These include older women, Roma and Egyptian women and girls, women with disabilities, girls in rural areas, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, women in detention, secluded women and asylum-seeking women.

The current data on poverty and at-risk-of-poverty provided by INSTAT based on EU-SILC 2019 show that, in 2017–2018, Albania had the same gender difference or trend in poverty indicator as the global level. Albania has a 23 percent poverty rate for males and 23.8 percent for females; globally, it is 12.1 percent for men and 12.5 percent for women. Further computation are requested in order to disaggregated by sex, based on inter-sectional discrimination and marginalisation, thus making it difficult to identify the needs of key groups of women who are at a heightened risk of being left behind.

ADHS 2017–2018 found that 82 percent of married women of age 15–59 years who receive cash earnings decide with their husbands or partners on how to use their money, while eight percent decide for themselves. For one out of 10 women, it is the husband who decides how her earnings are used.<sup>135</sup>

Data on the control over earnings of household members show that 82 percent of married women age 15-59, who receive cash earnings, decide together with their husband or partner how to use the money; 8 percent decide mainly themselves.

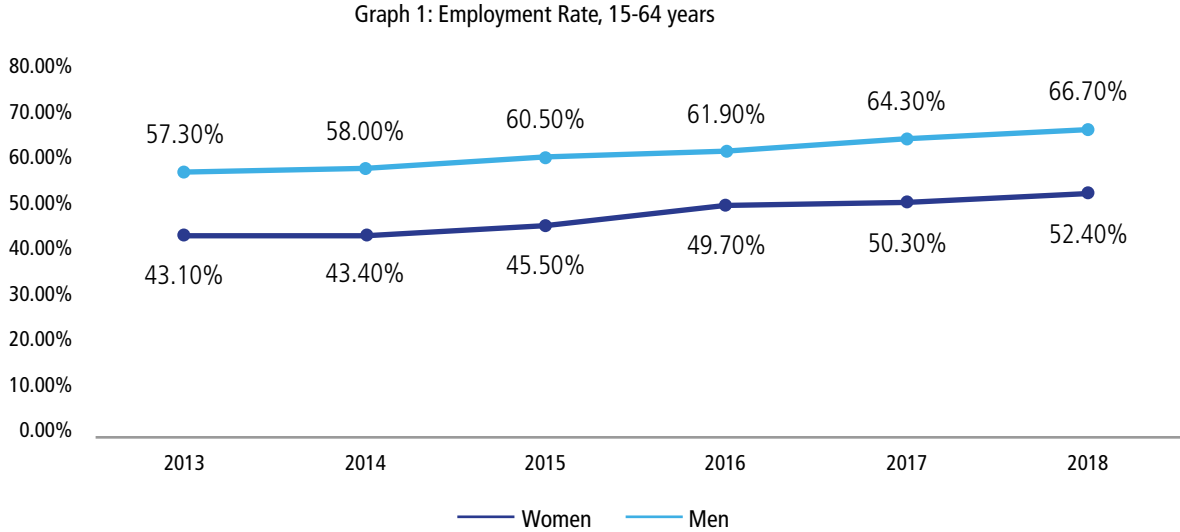
In Albania, the overall activity rate, for the population aged 15 to 64, has steadily increased over the period 2013-2019, reaching to 61.6 percent per cent in 2019. The activity rate shows the proportion of all people of working age who are either in employment or unemployed, and it is interchangeable with the term labor force participation rate. This increase occurred for both men and women participation in the labor market. Between 2013 and 2019 the proportion of both women and men in the labor market increased respectively from 50.1 to 61.6 percent and from 70.2

to 77.6 percent. Despite the increase of women’s activity rate, the gender gap remained persistent, at an average of 18 percentage points.

There are also issues around the concentration of women in sectors with a high share of informality, such as agriculture, tourism and the textile and shoe industries, where they lack adequate labour and social protection, an area where there is also limited disaggregated data. This lack of data ultimately contributes to excluding a significant number of women from social protection schemes, putting them at a higher risk of falling into poverty during child-bearing years, after divorce or death of husband, and especially in old age. In this regard, GoA needs to work on improving its national statistical analysis in order to encompass all areas, especially the informal sector where women are highly concentrated.

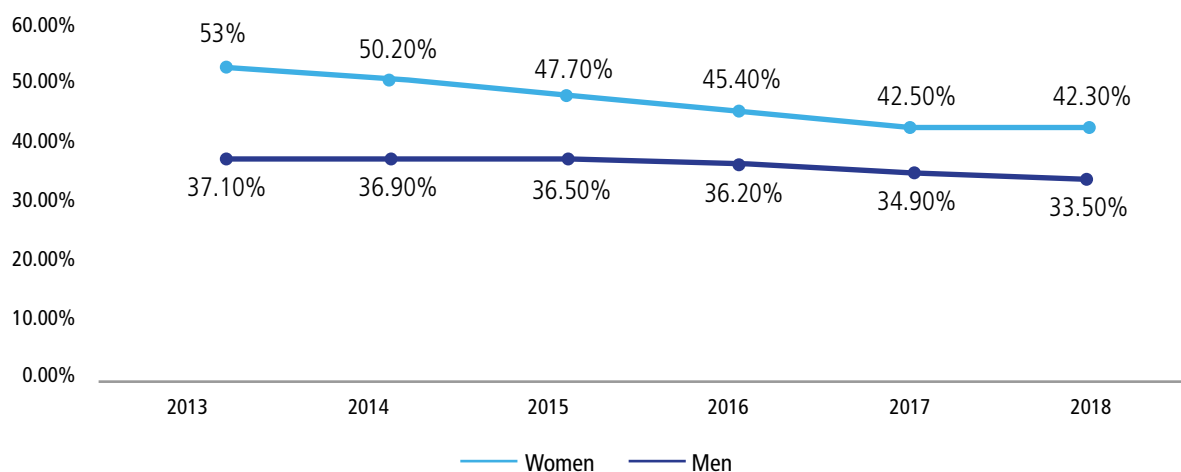
This pattern of reduced opportunities for income generation through employment, which is perpetuated by traditional attitudes, creates economic dependence and forces women to stay in violent relationships.

**Figure 12.** Employment Rate 15-64 years



135. Albania Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018, October 2018.

**Figure 13.** Income generation



The agricultural sector is characterized by subsistence farming, very low income and high informality, which are barriers for decent work. The vast majority of women work in unpaid, informal family jobs<sup>136</sup>, and their contribution is poorly compensated in money and their unpaid work is rarely recognized and appreciated. More than 80 percent of land titles are in the name of the 'head of household' or former head of household (husband, father-in-law, brother, father, grandfather), limiting women's entitlements to productive resources and services that directly derive from holding a land title (such as registering as farming business, credit, and extension service).<sup>137, 138</sup> Women in rural areas have limited access to agricultural and market information, and experience high levels of inequality in family decision-making.<sup>139</sup> They are rarely members of, or represented in, formal associations or committees. Furthermore, rural women have to deal with all household chores and farm duties, especially when male household members take on non-agricultural employment or emigrate in search of jobs.

Within the inactive population of age 15 years and older, 10.2 percent are men with permanent disabilities

and 4.8 percent are women with disabilities. Apart from these figures, there are no other national data regarding the employment and status of persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities, despite recommendations from the UN CRPD.

Existing legislation does not provide special protection for migrant workers, including domestic migrant workers. Internal migration is female-dominated, and migration abroad for employment is easier for women than it is for men due to employment in the care industry. This has led to an overrepresentation of women in the care industry in both internal and external migration. Despite encouraging employment, the care industry usually entails informality, instability, and very low wages, hence placing women in an increased vulnerable position. However, data on migration are yet to be disaggregated, especially with regard to women migrant workers, migrant workers abroad, the situation of returnees, migrant workers in transit, unaccompanied child migrants, and undocumented migrant workers. There is also an absence of data collection and analysis of gendered drivers of migration and the contributions of women migrant workers.

136. FAO (2018). Market and value chain analysis of selected sectors for diversification of the rural economy and women's economic empowerment, Budapest: FAO.

137. UN Women (2016). National study on economic diversification for women living in Albania rural areas, Tirana: UN Women.

138. UN Women & UNDP (2016). Gender Brief Albania 2016. Prepared by Monika Kocaqi, Ani Plaku and Dolly Wittberger. Tirana: UN Women.

139. UN Women (2016). National study on economic diversification for women living in Albania rural areas, Tirana: UN Women.

Despite the existence of the Law on Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of Persons Belonging to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, data on the employment and workplace discrimination faced by lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women is scarce. According to a 2017 survey one in four companies reported containing dispositions referring to sexual and gender identity regarding their employees. More than 60 percent also reported that they do not have mechanisms in place for reporting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. It should be noted that the majority of companies participating in the survey are large companies with more than 100 employees, indicating that the situation in smaller companies and businesses could be worse.<sup>140</sup> LGBTIQ+ individuals face multiple obstacles. On the one hand, they face barriers in entering the labour market and on the other, those who are employed face multiple forms of discrimination. In a survey conducted among LGBTIQ community members in 2019, 66 percent of respondents stated that they do not feel safe at their work place, where they had not come out openly as LGBTI+ because of pressure to conform to hetero-normative standards in behaviour and appearance.<sup>141</sup> Members of the community in working relations report to have experienced insults, gossip, ridicule and other forms of verbal abuse.<sup>142</sup> However, cases of discrimination are rarely referred to public institutions, including to the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination, out of fear of repercussions and further persecution or lack of information. Until now, no case has been referred to the Court.<sup>143</sup><sup>144</sup>

Women are more likely than men to become victims of sexual harassment in the workplace, along with members of the LGBTIQ community and migrants. In 2019, Albania initiated the process for the national ratification of the ILO Convention 190 “Stop Violence and Harassment in the World of Work”. The Convention recognizes that violence and harassment in the world of work “can constitute a human rights violation or abuse...is a threat to equal opportunities,

is unacceptable and incompatible with decent work.” It defines “violence and harassment” as behaviors, practices or threats “that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm.” It reminds member States that they have a responsibility to promote a “general environment of zero tolerance”.

A 2016 study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) found that only 19 percent of women from rural areas received maternity leave compared to 59 percent of their urban counterparts, largely due to the high levels of informal employment. It is also highly probable that women’s limited access to transportation in rural areas has direct implications for their access to health and social services, making them dependent on male relatives and putting them further at risk of marginalisation. In addition to health care, there are also disparities in accessing other basic services, such as education, employment, and participation in decision making between women who live in rural and remote areas compared their urban counterparts. This is especially alarming with the revival of patriarchal attitudes in rural areas, which often result in GBV. These phenomena should be addressed by implementing policies to ensure equal access to high-quality education, employment and health care, and support services for survivors of VaW and gender-based violence. More effective and concerted action is also needed to change traditional practice and perceptions of gender roles, especially with regard to dominant patriarchal values.

Generally, women remain out of the labour force mostly because they are busy with unpaid work at home (21.4%) or are attending school (22%). On the other hand, only one percent of men declare housework as the reason behind their inactivity, while 30.4 percent are students or pupils. An important aspect related to women’s limited participation in the labour market is the requirement of having to combine productive labour with care-providing obligations in the family. The lack of provision of support services

140. <https://theheadhunter.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/LGBTIQ-Index-Report-Albania-2017.pdf>

141. Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT (2020). SDGs implementation in the context of Albania – An LGBTI+ Perspective.

142. <http://irex-europe.fr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Annual-Report-2018.pdf>

143. Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT (2020). SDGs implementation in the context of Albania – An LGBTI+ Perspective.

144. <http://irex-europe.fr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Annual-Report-2018.pdf>

such as child and elder care is a major underlying reason for a significant share of women to withdraw entirely from the labour market. The labour market in Albania is strongly gendered, with a tendency of women working in lower-skilled, “traditionally female” jobs, higher female unemployment rates and lower earnings, in particular among low-educated women<sup>145</sup>. Women are particularly underrepresented in the IT sector and girls only make up 18% of all TVET students in all Vocational Secondary schools<sup>146</sup>.

A 2016 UNDP study on the perceptions of gender equality in Albania revealed that the findings from the 2011 TUS were still valid. More than 80 percent of respondents reported that household chores—ironing, cooking, cleaning, washing and washing dishes—were more likely to be done by women. Household chores that were usually reserved for men were related to house maintenance and finance handling, such as bills payments, with garbage disposal, shopping and caring for sick family members more likely to be shared between the two genders. The study found that, on average, women spent 4.66 hours on household chores alone, compared to 2.07 hours among men. There is also a statistically significant difference between regions: respondents in rural areas (both men and women) reported spending more time doing household chores than did their urban counterparts (3.86 hours and 2.96 hours, respectively).

Furthermore, the study found that differences in region and area correlate with perceptions. Those from regions with a lower socio-economic development were more likely to agree and abide by traditional gender roles. For instance, respondents in rural areas were more likely to agree that wives should obey their husbands in order to preserve family peace and well-being. The study also revealed that respondents with migration experience spent fewer hours on household chores (though these data are not sex-disaggregated). Meanwhile, individual income and the number of hours spent on household chores were negatively related: as individual income increases, the number of hours spent on household chores decreases.

Such data reveal trends in the heavily disproportionate distribution of work between men and women reflected in both urban and rural areas, with severe implications on the rights and freedoms of women across Albania. Having a skewed distribution of unpaid work ultimately means that women have fewer educational and economic opportunities, limited access to health care and social security, and an increased vulnerability to discrimination. It should be noted, however, that up-to-date national time-use data are lacking in Albania, with the latest being INSTAT’s TUS 2011.

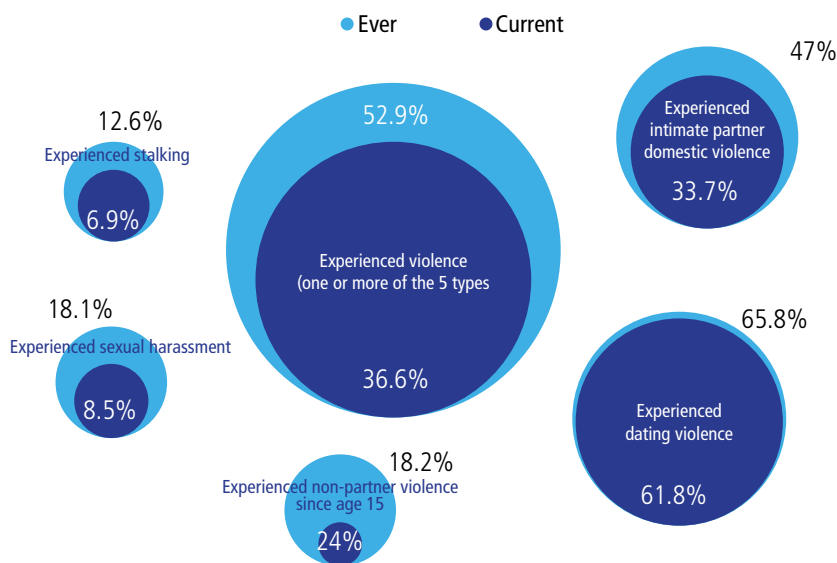
According to the Gender Equality Index, a large gap exists between women and men in Albania in the sub-domain of care activities, particularly in the share of persons reporting care work for their children, grandchildren, older people, or people with disabilities every day: 51.1 percent of Albanian women compared to 26.4 percent of Albanian men. Compared with the EU average where 37.5 percent among women and 24.7 percent among men are caring every day for children and family members, Albania’s gender gap is significant. Women also spend less time in the sub-domain of social activities, which include sporting, cultural or other leisure activities outside of the home: 31.4 percent of women to 43.9 percent of men. The overall Index score for Albania in the domain of time (indicative of the sub-domain of care activities and the sub-domain of social activities together), 48.1 percent, is lower than the EU-28 average of 65.7 percent, ranking Albania 27th out of 31 EU member states and two other EU candidate countries on the value of the domain of time.

The Household Budget Survey data from INSTAT record that in 2017 there were 769,494 house units in Albania, of which 86.3 percent were headed by men, and 13.7 percent by women. The data indicate that the number of women living alone is 2.4 times higher than the number among men. For age groups above 44 years the number of women living alone is 2.7 times higher than men. The number of women living alone with their children is higher than the number for men, under the same conditions for all age groups.

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145. *Labour market in Albania. Identifying the shortages of skills in the labour market.* Beluli, Rajmonda (2015), *European Journal of Sustainable Development* (2015), 4, 2, 379-392. *The Determinants of female employment in Albania.* García-Perreiro, Thais. (2016) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304335090>

146. Go Digital – preparing the Albanian VET system for digitalization. )June 2018= GIZ ProSEED Albania.



Note: Percentages will not total 100% as respondents may have experienced more than one type of violence

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) continues to be one of the most pervasive forms of violence in Albania, exacerbated by traditional perceptions of gender roles and patriarchal values. The 2019 VAWG Survey by INSTAT, UNDP and UN Women (Figure 14) found that one in three women of age 18–74 years (36.6%) recently experienced one or more of five forms of violence (intimate partner violence, dating violence, non-partner violence, sexual harassment, or stalking), while one in two (52.9%) have experienced it during their lifetime.

The study revealed that 52.5 percent of women of age 18–74 years believed that most people in their communities still believe that GBV and domestic violence are private matters and should be solved within the family; 46.5 percent believed that all or most people in the community believed that women should tolerate violence to keep their family together; and 27.5 percent believed that most people in the community believed that a woman is to blame if she is beaten by her husband. Within the first two months of 2020 alone, seven women were murdered by their husbands or family members. Two femicides—less than 24 hours from each other—occurred in broad

daylight and in a public space, one by the victim’s ex-husband and the other by her husband, both with protection orders against the perpetrator.

Although the Albanian legislation on domestic violence is generally in line with the Istanbul Convention, as GREVIO noted in its assessment report of 2017, the country fails to address in comprehensive way other forms of violence against women, including stalking, harassment and sexual violence.<sup>147</sup> The legislation does not create space for victims of these forms of violence to benefit from protection and prevention measures as well as services normally available for victims of other forms of violence. Also, the national local referral mechanisms rarely manage and deal with cases of non-family and non-partner violence. In addition, the Albanian Criminal legislation needs to be fully in line with the Istanbul Convention, in particular with regards to the definition of rape which remains forced-based and needs to change to consent-based.

In recent years, civil society, especially women rights organizations and gender activists have been particularly active in raising their voice not only domestic violence but other forms of violence against

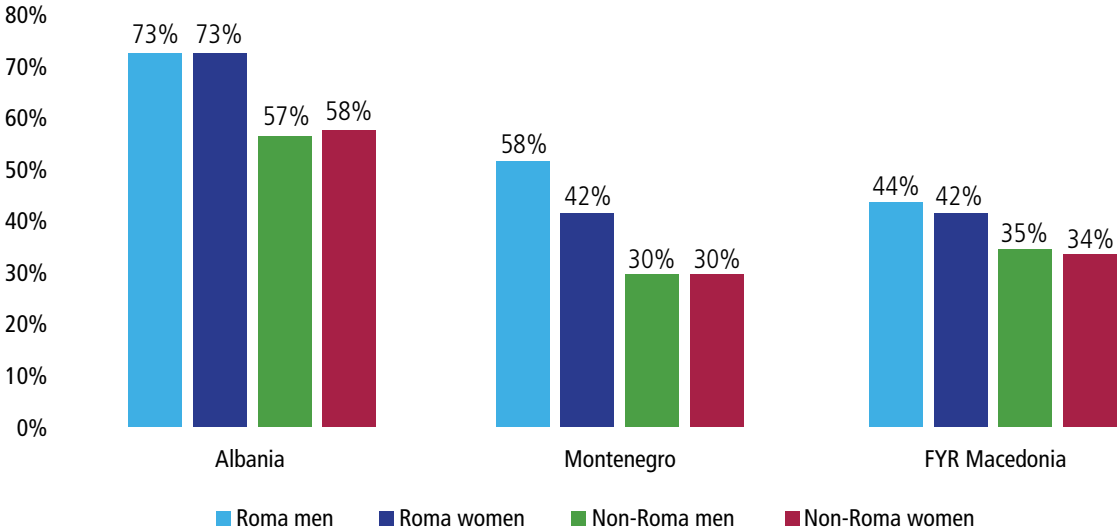
147. <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-first-baseline-report-on-albania/16807688a7>

women, such as rape and sexual harassment. These has been achieved not only through donor's oriented initiatives but also through spontaneous protests, including the latest one in June 2020 when thousands of citizens, human rights activists ,CSO members, young people, journalists, artists, and public figures joined massive protests in Tirana, Durres and other cities to strongly condemn sexual abuse of children and the culture of blaming the victims rather than the perpetrators following the revelations of the abuse of 15 year old girl by a school guard. Furthermore, the Government has been more open to consultations with women rights NGOs, particularly with regards to legal amendments and preparation of reports on the implementation of international human rights and policy obligations, including the Beijing+25 National Report. As an example, the 2018 amendments of the Law on Domestic Violence included several provisions recommended by members of the Monitoring Network on Violence against Women-a network of CSOs, established with the support of UN Women and the EU. Furthermore, the Parliamentary Sub-commission on Gender Equality and Preventing Violence Against Women holds regular consultations with CSOs and international organizations on GBV, but also on other GE issues.

Little is known of the particular ways in which women from marginalised groups in Albania are affected by violence as data are not collected and disaggregated regularly. A 2018 evaluation report by three women's organisations on access to services by marginalised women showed that women and girls from Roma, LGBT and disability communities in Albania do experience violence, though this is barely identified or reported. Forms of violence exerted against women and girls from these three disadvantaged communities are quite the same as those experienced by other women and girls. Moreover, the evaluation report shows that they experience additional types of violence, related to stereotypes, tradition, culture and health, social or economic status. The report shows that women and girls with disability, and those from Roma and LGBT communities are not informed on the phenomenon, are largely dependent on the perpetrator, and completely lack support services that would help them live self-sufficiently.

Although experiencing violence, women and girls from disabled, Roma and Egyptian and LGBT communities in Albania have traditionally not been paid sufficient attention in terms of inclusion in the legal and political framework, and its implementation towards the

**Figure 15.** Percentage of acceptance of bride kidnapping among Roma and non-Roma men and women in Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia





provision of necessary services in compliance with their specific needs. International reports set forth the need to intervene in improving standards and adjusting services to victims of domestic violence from these three communities. Other reports highlight the necessity for change to institutional mechanisms on a quantity and quality basis to cover the needs of female victims of violence from all corners of the country. This applies to Roma women and girls, where 60 percent of the Roma and Egyptian community respondents believe that girls belong in the domestic and private sphere. This also extends to women and girls' bodily autonomy, where one in two Roma and Egyptian women respondents believe that women should have sexual relations with their husbands regardless of their desire, which is also closely related to the practice of early marriage still prevalent in Albania. Similarly, bride kidnapping is still widely accepted in Albania (Figure 15), with 73 percent of Roma men—and women—agreeing with the act.

While several laws exist that protect against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), persistent social and cultural barriers continue to prevent LGBTI members—specifically lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender women—from having equal opportunities to cisgender women. While the laws on Health Care and on Public Health Care guarantee the right to health for all, LGBTI people continue to face discrimination from health professionals. Gender norms are still persistent, and non-conformity by lesbian, bisexual and transgender women still provoke verbal abuse, physical attacks and harassment, both from family members and in public spaces. Lesbian women are less visible than gay men in Albania and suffer a heightened level of violence from close family. While violence against women is pervasive in the country, lesbian women face double discrimination and violence as a result of their gender and minority sexual orientation, making them particularly vulnerable, often becoming invisible or dependent, or both. Many transgender women are at an increased position of vulnerability. Homeless transgender women are often forced into street sex work to make a living and are at a high risk of being exploited. Due to lack of protection from the police, transgender sex workers are often subject to rape and other forms of sexual violence, stalking, and sexual harassment. Unfortunately, no national statistical and analytical data exist regarding the state of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

According to data from INSTAT and a few other qualitative studies in the last five years, child marriage is a little-explored issue that affects girls from different social groups and is primarily driven by gender inequality, poverty and social exclusion, with harmful effects. Early marriage in Albania continues to persist. In 2018, the overall percentage of women and girls who were registered for marriage at age 19 years or younger was 16 percent, compared to one percent among such men and boys. Meanwhile, the proportion of girls married at the age of 18 was 9.2 percent, and 7.0 percent at 19 years. In contrast, there were no marriages for boys younger than 18, and the percentage of 18–19 year-olds that were married was less than one percent. A child marriage report by Observatory in 2018 revealed that girls in urban and rural Roma and non-Roma communities experienced a situation where an arranged marriage was the preferred option for them if their parents could no longer afford to send them to school.

Specifically, within the Roma community, 50 percent of marginalised Roma women of age 20–49 years reported they had been married before they turned 18, the highest proportion in the Western Balkan region, compared to only seven percent of neighbouring non-Roma women. This is a result of persistent traditional beliefs and perceptions of gender roles within the Roma community. Roma girls and women who live within settlement communities and are surrounded by these traditional views are often discouraged from gaining further education and participating in public life, but instead are encouraged to marry early. The situation is also due to high rates of poverty and economic exclusion. Outside of the Roma community, across both urban and rural areas, such harmful practices are still largely accepted and linked to the re-emergence of the codes of conduct that permit the killing of women and girls in the so-called name of honour. Albania needs to address these issues holistically, raise awareness of them, and strengthen the national strategy to eliminate all types of violence against women and girls.

There is a lack of sex-disaggregated statistics and gender data on access to health services, leading to a lack of understanding on the specific health needs of women, especially those with intersectional vulnerabilities. There are health disparities in gender, age, mentality, socio-economic level, geographic area, and place of residence. While universal health

care exists in Albania, there are underlying barriers to disadvantaged women's access to such care. The lack of integrated services results in health gaps that restrict sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and fuel stigma and discrimination against vulnerable groups, specifically vulnerable women. Women from rural areas have limited access to SRH services, while Roma and Egyptian women, women with different gender identities, sex workers, drug-addicted women, and women with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) are among those subject to multiple discrimination.

Roma women are largely unregistered in the civil register, leaving them without access to a health card. Data show that 51 percent of Roma women and 25.8 percent of Egyptian women who give birth receive no health control. The situation for many Roma and Egyptian women is exacerbated as many are affected by a range of health problems. For example, 19.2 percent of Roma women and 10.9 percent of Egyptian women have experienced the death of a baby. Their position is primarily linked to socio-economic factors and inadequate access to health care, which are also linked to lack of education. Women and girls with disabilities are at the intersection of discrimination on the grounds of gender and disability. Yet, both the National Strategy on Gender Equality and the Law "On the Protection from Discrimination" lack the notion of multiple discrimination with regard to women with disabilities. One of the most serious consequences is the violence women with disabilities face within and outside their families.<sup>148</sup> In addition, they do not receive the protection and support they are entitled to due to lack of accessibility to services as well as stigma and prejudice of public and non-public service providers.

They face severe obstacles in obtaining such aid, primarily due to the fact that family members and legal custodians are the main perpetrators of the

violence, and women with disabilities enter a long cycle of violence from which it is difficult to escape. This is exacerbated by insufficient provision of information to women with disabilities about reporting of violence and support services.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, the rights of women with disabilities are not in the focus of either Organizations of Persons with Disabilities or women's rights organizations. Administrative data on health-care accessibility for the gender diverse (LGBTI+ community is unavailable. Due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sexual characteristics, in addition to their economic status, background, gender, ethnicity and other characteristic that make them targets of multiple discrimination, LGTBIQ individuals keep encountering difficulties in accessing health care and medical services.<sup>150</sup> The lack of retroviral medications still remains a problem<sup>151</sup>, and HIV/AIDS testing in public health centers is not free from discrimination by medical personnel. The level of factually sound information in the field of health education and in particular sexual and reproductive health of LGBTI+ persons is insufficient, and the officially approved textbooks do not cover LGBTI+ oriented issues. For trans-gender individuals in Albania, there is no possibility to undergo hormonal therapy or sex reassignment surgery, and Albanian hospitals are technically unprepared to perform these interventions.<sup>152</sup> The situation of intersex individuals remains extremely vague, as the exact figures regarding the number of intersex born babies remains unclear, and information about the surgeries performed on them is unavailable. Health personnel generally lack information, training, and an understanding of intersex issues, and there no official medical protocol. At the same time, it is acknowledged that infantile surgeries performed on intersex children are common in Albania.<sup>153</sup>

Another area where women face significant difficulties is access to justice. According to a 2017 UNDP survey almost half of the population (48.7 percent of the

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148. According to the CEDAW Committee, violence against women is one of the most serious forms of discrimination against women, see CEDAW General Comments no. 19 and 35 in: CEDAW (2016). Concluding Observations on the 4<sup>th</sup> periodic report of Albania, 2016. See: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/840818?ln=en>

149. Evaluation Report: Violence against women and girls from disadvantaged communities- An overview of the phenomenon of violence against women and girls from Roma, LGBT and disability communities in Elbasan, Vlora and Shkodra municipalities, developed by Albanian Disability Rights Foundation, Roma.

150. Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT (2020). SDGs implementation in the context of Albania – An LGBTI+ Perspective.

151. ILGA Europe (2020) Report on Albania. See: <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Albania.pdf>

152. The Danish Institute- COWI; Study on Homophobia, Transphobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity-Legal Report: Albania. See: <https://rm.coe.int/study-on-homophobia-transphobia-and-discrimination-on-grounds-of-sexua/16809c908b>

153. Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT (2020). SDGs implementation in the context of Albania – An LGBTI+ Perspective.

respondents) has had legal problems in the last five years – out of which 43.7 percent are women. 77.9 percent of respondents from Tirana region said that the justice system does not protect their rights, out of whom 68.8 percent were women. Only 30 percent of women respondents said that they asked assistance from another person or institution to resolve their problem compared to 39.5 percent of men respondents. Also, according to this study, victims of domestic violence who are mainly women often lack economic means, which discourages them from seeking justice. They also lack information on their rights under the law and the functioning of the system of protection orders. Similarly, justice officials also lack information and do not apply the law on domestic violence consistently and the attitudes of justice officials can be dismissive and humiliating for victims of domestic violence.<sup>154</sup>

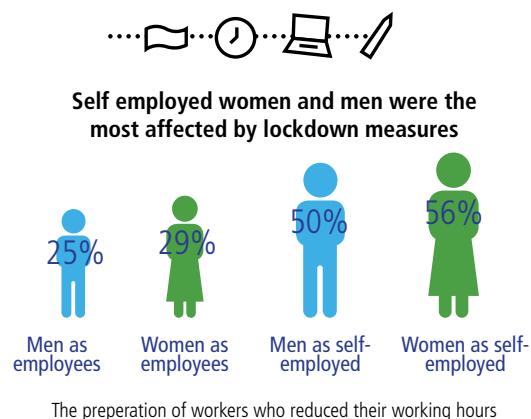
The execution of court decisions is an essential component of the right to a fair trial and access to justice. The persistent non-execution of court decisions in Albania—including orders concerning the payment of alimony—is highlighted by CEDAW as a widespread problem and one of the most concerning issues related to access to justice.<sup>155</sup> Administrative data from 2016 to 2020 indicate that the percentage of non-executed court decisions related to alimony varies from 25 to 40 percent with an increasing trend, in line with the increase of such court decisions. However, only a limited number of criminal charges have been filed against the debtor parent.<sup>156</sup>

The non-execution of court decisions granting protection orders (POs) to victims of gender-based violence is also one of the key observations of the recent GREVIO report, which calls on the Albanian

authorities to pay due diligence to all court decisions granting POs in the framework of protecting victims of domestic violence, who are overwhelmingly women.

The issue has also been raised in several reports of the office of the Ombudsperson, which has expressed its concern about bailiffs’ partial knowledge on the civil and procedural legislation in force, which affects citizens’ procedural rights.<sup>157</sup>

Further exacerbating the situation of women especially those in already vulnerable positions has been the impact of COVID-19 in the socio-economic area. UN Women’s Rapid Gender Assessment (RGA)<sup>158</sup> revealed the actual and expected socio-economic impacts of the combined results of the earthquake and COVID-19 on the empowerment of women and men.



According to the survey, the closure of non-essential businesses had an immediate impact in some industries and almost 15% of the population lost their job (at the time of the survey). Men faced a greater risk of unemployment (17%) than women (12%), partly due to a larger proportion of men having been employed in

154. <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/survey-on-access-to-justice-in-albania.html>

155. CEDAW (2016). Concluding Observations on the 4<sup>th</sup> periodic report of Albania, 2016. See: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/840818?ln=en>

156. For the period 01.07.2016-31.12.2016 there were 6100 cases out of which in 1593 cases the debtor has no ability to pay and 70 criminal charges have been applied for non-provision of means of subsistence; in 2017 there are 6132 cases of which in 1758 cases the debtor had no ability to pay and 80 criminal charges have been applied for non-provision of means of subsistence; in 2018 there were 6547 cases, out of which in 2488 cases the debtor had no ability to pay and 65 criminal charges have been applied for non-provision of means of subsistence; in 2019 there were 7221 cases from which in 2754 cases the debtor had no ability to pay and 55 criminal charges have been applied for non-provision of means of subsistence; for the period 01.01.2020-30.04.2020 there were 7309 cases out of which in 2824 cases the debtor had no ability to pay and 18 criminal charges have been applied for non-payment of means of subsistence

157. Ombudsperson’s Annual Report, 2018, p.36, accessible at <https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/Raport%20Vjetor%202018.pdf>

158. The impact of COVID-19 on women’s and men’s lives and livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia: Preliminary results from a Rapid Gender Assessment, UN Women, 2020 <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/the-impact-of-covid19-on-womens-and-mens-lives-and-livelihoods>



**More women than men anticipate difficulties paying essential outgoings if restrictive measures continue**

construction, manufacturing, and other highly cyclical sectors. As a result of lockdown prevention measures, the most affected are the self-employed population, out of which almost every second person was in a situation where they needed to reduce their working hours. The survey results also highlighted the disproportionate impact of lockdown on working time for employed women, particularly, the share of women that had to reduce working time exceeds by 4.7 percentage points in case of employee, and by 2.8 percentage points in case of self-employee.

The pandemic did not only bring fear, emotional stress, and loss of income, but also uncertainty and financial insecurity in sustaining basic daily needs in the near future. Overall, 71% of respondents reported concerns regarding their ability to cover basic expenses (food, hygiene, etc) if restrictive measures continue, and 74.2% reported to predict not being able to pay for rent and utilities. The economic insecurity will particularly impact women and female-headed households, who will face difficulties in paying for rent (85%) and keeping up with basic expenses (80%).

COVID-19 containment measures have also significantly increased unpaid domestic and care work by both women and men. While both women and men are both taking up these burdens, women are more likely to continue to perform the bulk of household chores and care work.<sup>159</sup>

One of the main challenges is the lack of data on women with intersectional vulnerabilities, specifically those with disabilities and the elderly. This lack of data is rooted in an absence of understanding of



**More women than men switched to home-based working**

**More women (51%) than men (27%) worked from home instead of their usual place of work during the outbreak.**



**As women's economic security was shaken, their share of unpaid care and domestic work increased**



**72% of women reported increased time spent on unpaid care work**

**76% of women reported increased time spent on unpaid domestic work**

**62% of men reported increased time spent on unpaid care work**

**66% of men reported increased time spent on unpaid domestic work**



**As a result of school and day-care closures, women and men spent more time playing with and teaching children**

**Gender discrepancies became more evident as the number of reported unpaid domestic activities increased:**

**27% of women reported increased time spent on the least three unpaid domestic activities**

**20% of men reported increased time spent on the least three unpaid domestic activities**

159. Factsheet: Albania: The impact of COVID-19 on women's and men's lives and livelihoods, UN Women, 2020 <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/07/factsheet-albania-fin-min.pdf?la=en&vs=1208>

how women from different marginalised groups and those with multiple vulnerabilities have different needs and experiences, inherently affecting their access to productive resources, justice and social rights. In addition to the existing perceptions, such factors further curtail gender equality by limiting access to equal opportunities. An overarching challenge is the gap between the legislation and its implementation, a gap that persists when addressing cross-cutting gender issues in Albania. While the government has made strides to put women at the forefront of national priorities linked to EU accession goals, the country still needs to improve on implementation, gender accountability and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that no one is left behind.

## Children and Adolescents

In 2018, children up to 17 years of age comprised 22 percent of the population of Albania, adolescents and youths, 25.1 and 22.4 percent, respectively. Administrative data indicate slight increase in child mortality and in neonatal deaths and a similar pattern for maternal mortality rates (Figures 16–25).<sup>160</sup>

However, issues regarding the correct registration and reporting of deaths remain prevalent and may raise doubts over the reliability of the data. ADHS 2017–2018<sup>161</sup> results indicate improvements in the prevalence of stunting, which has decreased from 19 percent in 2008 to 11 percent in 2018. However, the survey found that only one in three (38%) children born in the two years prior to the survey were exclusively breastfed in the first six months of life as World Health Organisation and UNICEF guidelines recommend, while 57 percent were breastfed within one hour of birth, and only 59 percent continued with breastfeeding at one year. Only 29 percent of children of age 6–23 months living with their mothers were fed a minimum acceptable diet in the 24 hours before the survey. One in four

(25%) children of age 6–49 months were found to be anaemic. Mostly affected are children belonging to households of the low wealth quintile. Moreover, nine percent of children in lowest wealth quintile had a diarrheal episode in the 2 weeks preceding the survey, compared with three percent of children in the highest quintile. Although national immunisation coverage rates remain satisfactory, with levels above 97 percent, there are lower coverage rates (94.1%) for the Measles, Mumps, & Rubella (MMR 1) vaccine.<sup>162</sup>

In 2019, INSTAT reported for the first time on child monetary poverty, using the EU indicator Children At-risk of Poverty, with the publication of data on the indicator for 2017 and 2018, when some 29.6 percent of Albanian children were reported to be at-risk of poverty in Albania, with girls affected more than boys (30.6% and 28.7%, respectively).<sup>163</sup>

ADHS results confirm that school attendance by school-age household members is high, with 95 percent of children attending primary school education (gross attendance rate, 99%), with no significant variation by gender, residence or wealth.<sup>164</sup> The figures are confirmed by administrative sources, indicating lowest enrolment for the pre-primary year and the upper secondary level, a reduction in the number of registered children per 1,000 inhabitants, an increase in the percentage of children repeating the academic year, and a slight reduction in the percentage graduating (Figures 24–28).

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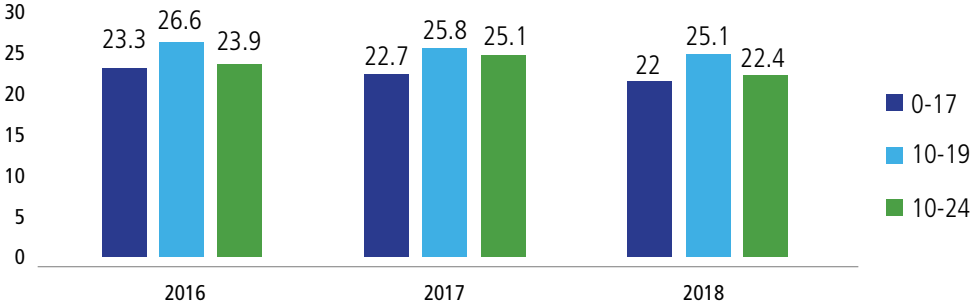
161. INSTAT, 2020. *Sustainable Development Goals Indicators*, <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6685/sdg-web.pdf>

162. INSTAT, 2020. *Sustainable Development Goals Indicators*, <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6685/sdg-web.pdf>

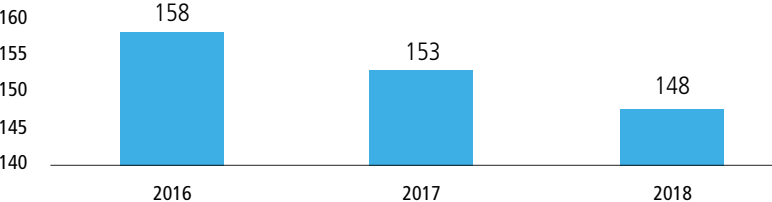
163. INSTAT, 2019. *EU-SILC Key Results 2017, 2018*, <http://www.instat.gov.al/temat/kushtet-sociale/anketa-e-t%C3%AB-ardhurave-dhe-nivelit-t%C3%AB-jetes%C3%ABs-aanj/publikimet/2019/anketa-e-t%C3%AB-ardhurave-dhe-nivelit-t%C3%AB-jetes%C3%ABs-2017-2018/>

164. INSTAT and IPH, 2018. *Albania Demography and Health Survey 2017–2018*. Tirana, Albania.

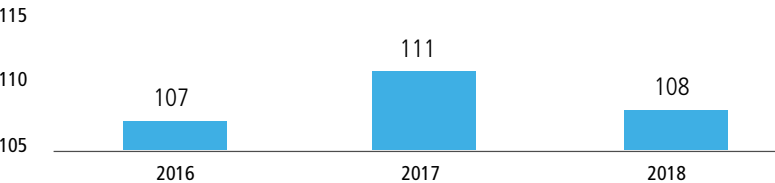
**Figure 16.** Percentage of child, adolescent and youth populations (years) in total population



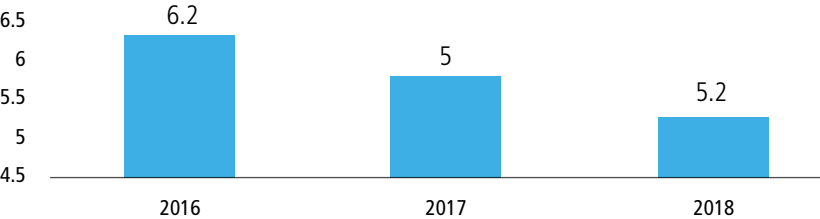
**Figure 17.** Number of registered children per 1,000 inhabitants



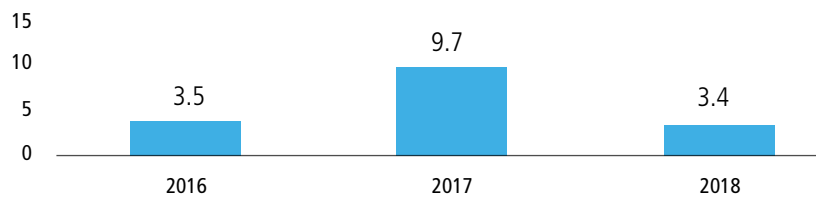
**Figure 18.** Gender ratio at birth



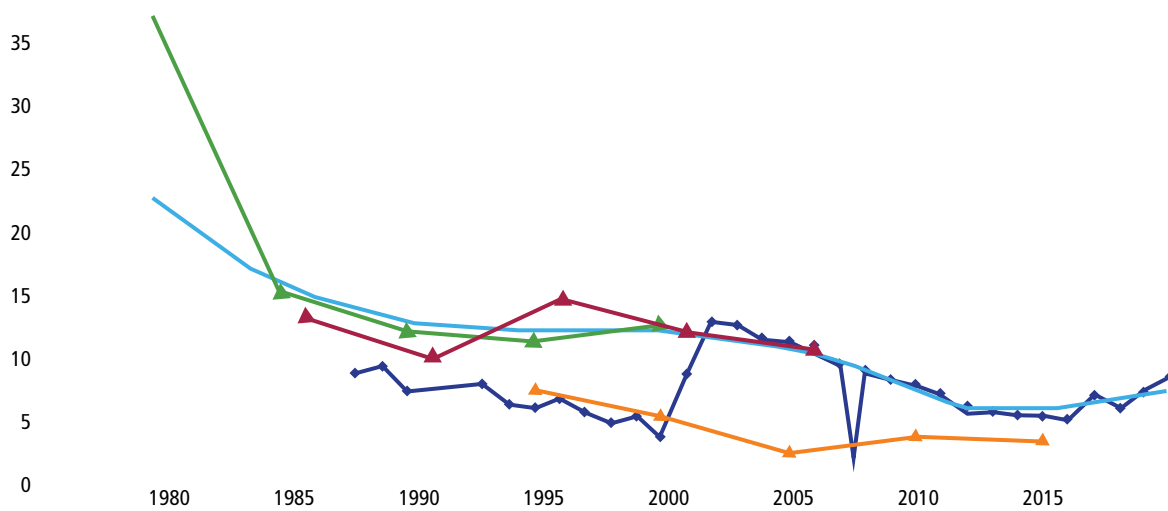
**Figure 19.** Fertility rate of women under 20 years of age



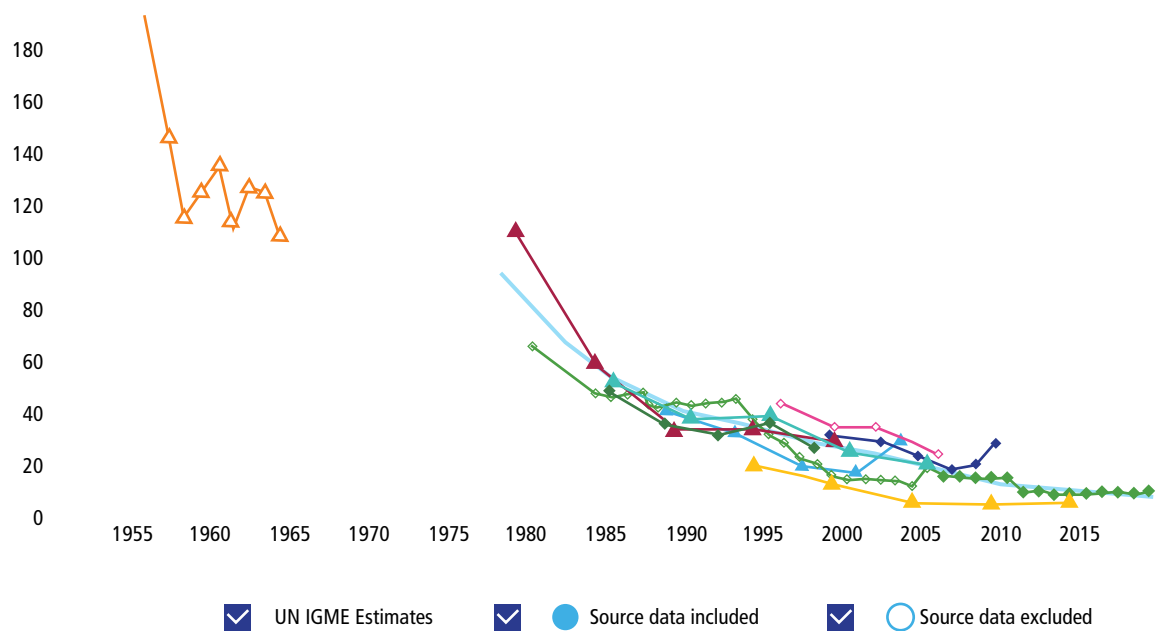
**Figure 20.** Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)



**Figure 21.** Neonatal mortality trend<sup>159</sup>

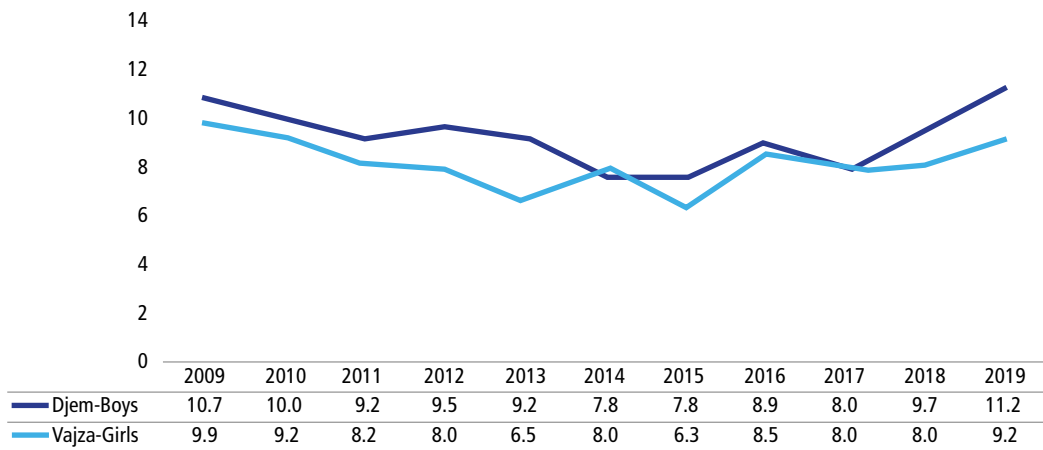


**Figure 22.** Under five mortality



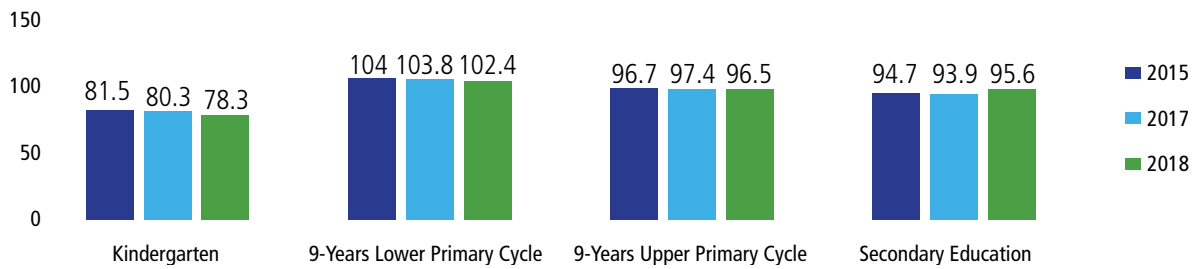
159. <https://childmortality.org/data/Albania>

**Figure 23.** Infant Deaths for 1000 live births

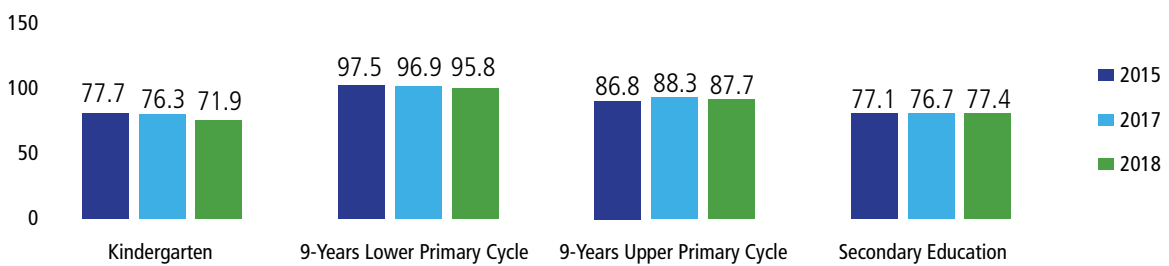


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Source: INSTAT

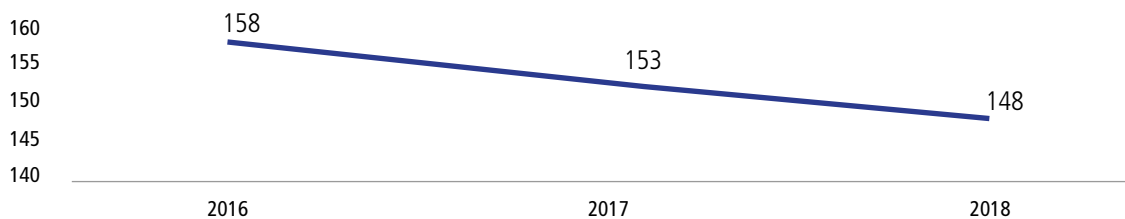
**Figure 24.** Gross enrolment rate at different levels of education (percentage)



**Figure 25.** Net enrolment rate at different levels of education (percentage)



**Figure 26.** Registered children at school per 1,000 inhabitants



Source: INSTAT/Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth

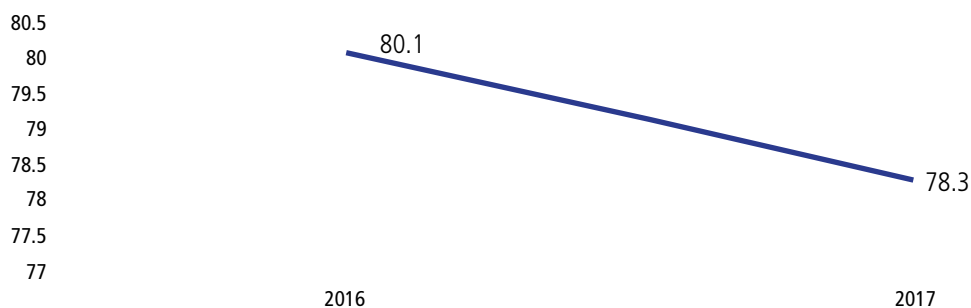


**Figure 27.** Percentage of children repeating the academic year



Source: INSTAT/Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth

**Figure 28.** Ratio of graduation



Source: INSTAT/Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth

Children with disabilities and Roma remain among those still facing challenges in attending school, regardless of improvements in previous years, e.g. access to Roma in education increased from 44 percent (2011) to 66 percent (2017).<sup>165</sup> The UNDP survey reveals that while these figures are average within the Western Balkans, most Roma aged 18-21 have still not finished a basic level of education, and a sizeable gap remains vis-à-vis neighboring non-Roma. Upper secondary education completion rates have also increased though levels remain low (15 percent for Roma women and Roma men respectively, and 73 percent for non-Roma women, 75 percent for non-Roma men), and the gap with neighboring non-Roma is still widening. Tertiary education completion rates among marginalized Roma remains to be extremely rare, with Roma women having a 1 percent completion rate and Roma men 2 percent

while non-Roma women have a completion rate of 39 percent and 14 percent for non-Roma men.

Data on drop-out continue to be under-reported, standing at a rate of 0.5 percent for the 9-year compulsory education and an average of four percent for secondary schools.<sup>166</sup> In 2018, students still scored less than the OECD averages for reading, mathematics and science, and, compared to the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, the country has made progress only in the results for mathematics<sup>167</sup> (Figures 29 and 30).

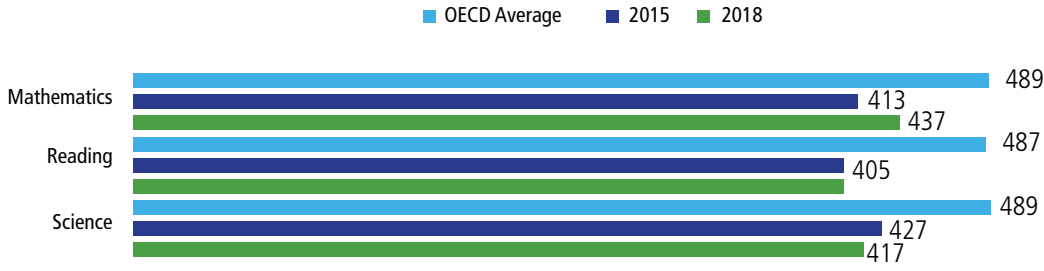
Children in Albania are expected to complete thirteen years of pre-primary, primary and secondary school by age 18. However, when years of schooling are adjusted for quality of learning, this is equivalent to

165. UNDP, World Bank and EC, 2017. *Regional Roma Survey, Albania*.

166. 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report of Government of Albania to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2019.

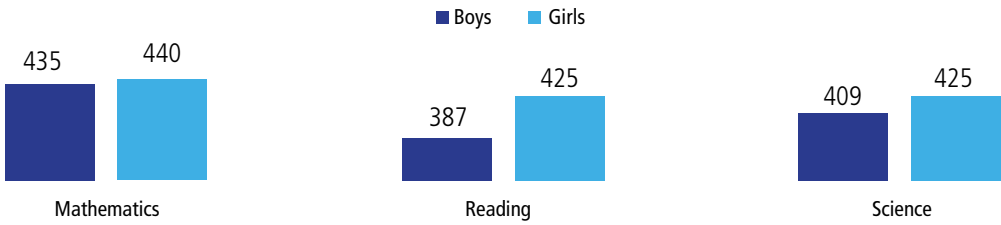
167. OECD, 2018. *Pisa Results: Albania*, <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=ALB&treshold=10&topic=PI>

**Figure 29.** PISA results 2015 and 2018, and OECD average values



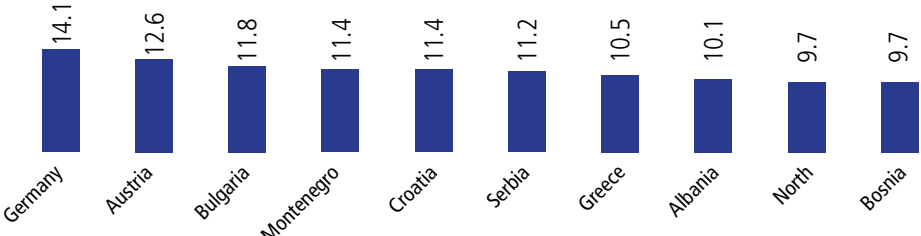
Source: PISA OECE 2015 and 2018, Albania

**Figure 30.** PISA results among boys and girls, Albania, 2018



Source: PISA 2018, Albania

**Figure 31.** Mean years of schooling completed among selected countries, 2018



Source: Human Development Report, 2019

only 8.9 years: a learning gap of 4.1 years, meaning that four years of schooling time does not result in learning.<sup>168</sup> Mean years of schooling completed over the past years it still remains low compared to many other countries in the region and in the EU (Figure 31).

The education system needs to address a range of issues, including to i) increase the levels of financing in

education (3.1% versus 5% in OECD countries), ii) use decentralisation processes as a means for increased efficiency and accountability in management and governance, iii) strengthen school leadership, iv) improve the Education Management Information System, v) increase focus on early childhood education programmes, vi) invest in the continual professional development and resources and Information and

168. World Bank, 2018. *Human Capital Index*.

Communications Technology (ICT) for improved curriculum implementation, and vii) continue investing in policy and school practices to ensure learning outcomes are improved for all children.<sup>169</sup> and viii.) improve the labour market relevance of vocational education and training (VET) and the provision of work-based learning opportunities to reduce skills mismatches.<sup>170</sup> There are also other key issues, which include improving the efficiency of the system, with more than 50 percent of schools operating with fewer than 50 children, improving the quality of schooling using multi-grade teaching (1 in 10 students study in a multi-grade class), increase the number of hours of instruction (300 hours less than OECD countries), increase the progression rate in terms of salaries compared to OECD countries,<sup>171</sup> and provide more leaning resources.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, the relevance of the education is low. Employers frequently point to persistent qualitative and quantitative skills mismatches and a shrinking pool of supply of skilled workers.<sup>173</sup> One in three companies in Albania attest that job applicants lack job-specific technical skills, as well as the inter-personal skills necessary to be effective at the job.<sup>174</sup> All of the above weaknesses with the education system call for improved 21st-century skill building throughout, by enhancing competency-based curriculum delivery, teacher training, and improving skills for life and employability.

The last two decades have seen significant strides taken in the fight against hazardous child labour. But the COVID-19 pandemic poses very real risks of backtracking. As highlighted in the ILO–UNICEF Declaration on the World Day Against Child Labour (12 June 2020) “Positive trends may falter, and child labour may worsen, especially in places where it has remained resistant to change... The pandemic has

increased economic insecurity, profoundly disrupted supply chains and halted manufacturing. When these and other factors result in losses in household income, expectations that children contribute financially can intensify. More children could be forced into exploitative and hazardous jobs. Those already working may do so for longer hours or under worsening conditions.”<sup>175</sup> Reliable data on the hazardous child labour remains a challenge for Albania.

The body of evidence that is available confirm that children in Albania face a range of types of violence and exploitation at home, at school, and in the community. Parents report that 37 percent of 2–14 year-old children have experienced non-violent methods of discipline, while 48 percent of children have been subject to at least one form of psychological or physical aggression.<sup>176</sup> One in four adolescents of age 11, 13 or 15 years report the experience of physical abuse once or twice in their lifetime, and six percent have experienced physical abuse many times during their life.<sup>177</sup> Some 22 percent of adolescents report having suffered at least one episode of bullying at school, with the prevalence being higher among boys than girls (24% vs. 20%, respectively) and among those aged thirteen years (24%). In 2018, children represented 71% of the total potential and victims of human trafficking in Albania.

The 2018 UNICEF survey on children’s experiences of Internet use reveal that three out of ten children have been exposed to real violence content; one in ten children reported at least one unwanted sexual experience through the Internet; one in four children reported they had at least one contact online with someone whom they had never met face-to-face before, and almost two in ten reported meeting in

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169. Wort M, Pupovci D, and Ikonimi E, 2019. *The Mid-term Appraisal of the Pre-University Education Strategy 2014–2020*.

170. ETF, 2020. *Developments in Vocational Education Policy in Albania*.

171. OECD, 2018. *Pisa Results: Albania*.

172. OECD, 2015. *Pisa Results: Albania*.

173. ETF, 2019. *Policies for Human Capital Development Sout Eastern Europe and Turkey*.

174. <sup>104</sup>World Bank, 2018. *Western Balkans demand for skills in Albania An analysis of the skills towards employment and productivity survey*.

175. ILO–UNICEF. *COVID-19 and Child Labour: A Time of Crisis, a Time to Act*, [https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS\\_747421/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_747421/lang-en/index.htm)

176. ADHS.

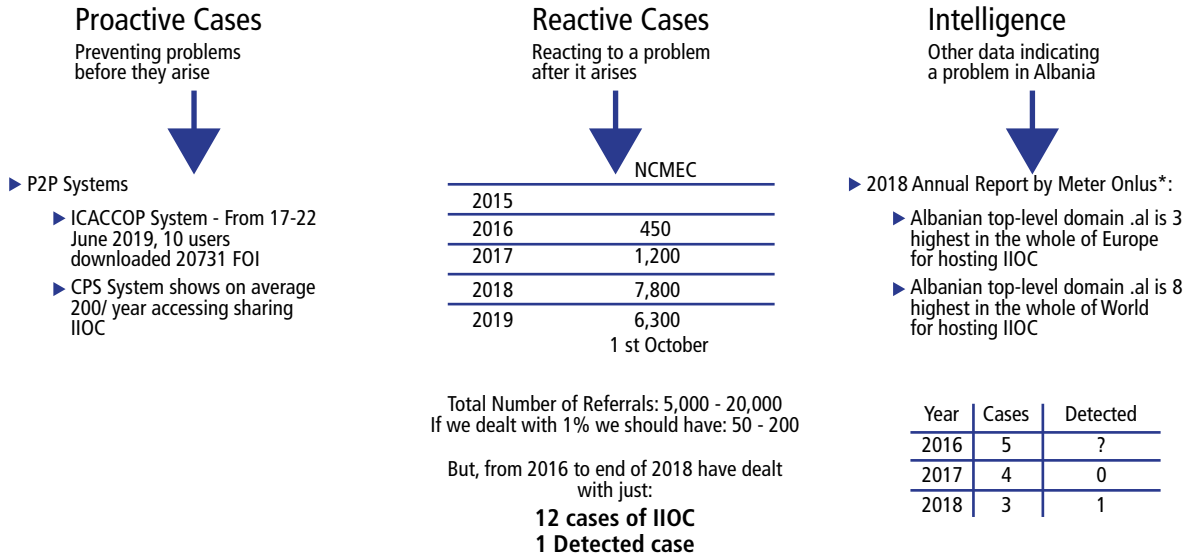
177. HBSC, 2017–2018. *Health Behaviour Survey of School-Age Children, 11, 13 and 15 years*.

person someone they had previously known only on the web.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, a UNICEF commissioned in-depth assessment<sup>179</sup> of the status of investigation of child online abuse cases, or rather its absence, revealed a staggering reality. According to data provided by the Cybercrime Unit from the Internet Crimes Against Children Child Online Protective Services system, within five days, ten individuals in Albania accessed 20,731 files of indecent images of children. Data from another (child protection) system (CPS), show some 200 users were active in Albania in accessing and sharing indecent images of children. Another reliable source from Italy, working to fight paedophilia, highlighted in their 2018 annual report that the Albanian top-level domain '.al' is the third highest in hosting indecent images of children in the whole of Europe and 8th highest in the world. Finally, around 5,000–20,000 referrals are sent to Albanian law enforcements per year from international partners such as Interpol, Europol and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, highlighting potential

access of indecent images of children in the country. In response, from 2016 through 2018, only twelve cases were put together in response to child sexual abuse related crimes in Albania, and only one was detected (Figure 30). And worryingly, once the consumption of sexual images of children is not satisfying enough perpetrators will consider and explore hands-on abuse.

The number of children in institutions is decreasing due to fewer children being admitted into institutional care in recent years, but the rate of decrease is slow (9% from 2014 to 2018).<sup>180</sup> In 2018, the latest figures available reported 703 children registered in residential care. The length of stay of children of age 0–6 years in residential institutions is on average 2–3 years, while for 6–18 year-olds the figure is 4–5 years.<sup>181</sup> The number of children separated from their families due to poverty is relatively high. Meanwhile, there is anecdotal evidence of incidents of abuse and neglect of children living in residential care institutions.

**Figure 32.** The reactive and proactive cases of children online sexual abuse that the Albanian State Police potentially could investigate



178. Dunja A, Gjergji O, Gvineria D, Hallkaj E, and Verzivolli I, 2019. *One Click Away: Children's Experience of Internet Use in Albania*. UNICEF in Albania & IPSOS Strategic Marketing, Tirana, <https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2486/file/one%20click.pdf>

179. Ali S, 2019. *Lost Cases*. UNICEF.

180. 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report of Government of Albania to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2019; figure refers to children in residential homes and developing centres (public and non public), for years 2014 and 2018.

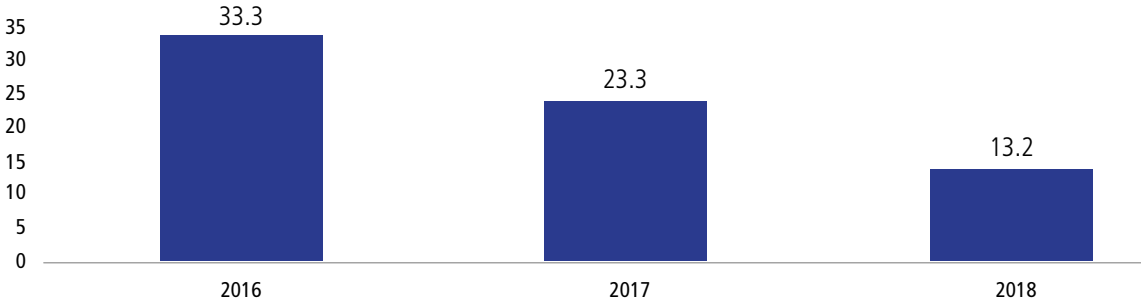
181. Ibid.

Whereas Albania once had the highest proportion of children in detention in the region, there has been a continual reduction in numbers since 2014. Comparison of the General Directory of Prisons data for October 2019 with October 2017 show a 32.5 percent decrease in the number of children in detention and pre-trial detention, the lowest over the previous five years.<sup>182</sup> However, despite improvements, the length of stay remains long and children in pre-trial detention (charged but still presumed innocent and awaiting trial) constitute more than 80 percent of those in conflict with the law who are deprived of their liberty. The majority of children in conflict with the law and of those deprived of their liberty are boys. Although the trend is improving, the justice system is still not fully adapted to children’s needs, with poor infrastructure, lack of tailored programmes and services, and lack of professional capacities to handle legal processes affecting children (Figures 33 and 34). A lack of culture of claiming violation of child rights remains persistent.

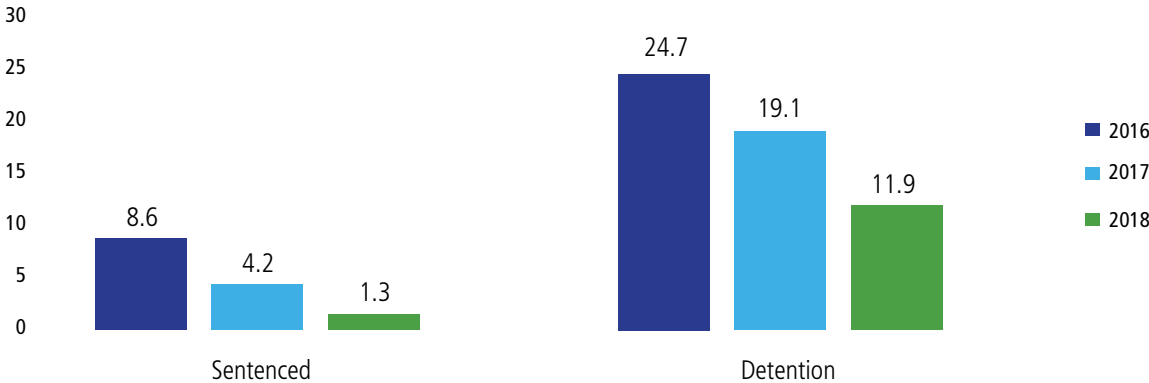
## Older Persons

Albania has started to experience the process of population ageing. Due to the combined effect of increasing life expectancy, reduced fertility and emigration of young adults, the proportion of older persons—defined as persons aged 65 and over—in the population increased from five to eleven percent over the period 1989–2011. In an overall declining population, the number of older people almost doubled in this period, to 318,000 persons. This ageing process will continue and projections indicate that older persons are expected to reach 591,000 in 2031, equivalent to one-third of the total population. Population ageing brings about a fundamental transformation of society. It is likely that in the coming decades the older population will build a significant presence in Albanian demographic statistics and in everyday life, becoming an important political, economic and social factor with specific needs and demands, as health problems of older persons tend to increase, and physical and mental

**Figure 33.** Number of children in detention per 100,000 children



**Figure 34.** Number of sentenced children per 100,000 children



182. General Directory of Prisons. Statistics accessed at <http://www.dpbsh.gov.al/newweb/index.php?fq=brenda&gj=gj1&kid=72>

capacities decline, and the population becomes more dependent on others. Such changes will bring multiple risks of social exclusion, with particular risk factors, including low retirement income, living alone without family support, poor health and physical distance from services. Due to their biologically determined higher life expectancy, the majority of elderly people will be women. With the emigration of the young population, large numbers of elderly women and men are left alone without a traditional family network to fill the gaps in the social protection system. Widespread poverty further worsens their situation. With a declining proportion of the working-age population compared with those 65 years and older, concerns arise as to the sustainability of social welfare systems, including the pension systems. The demand for health-care services is strongly related with age. The 2011 census recorded that 23 percent of the elderly—73,000 people—were disabled (compared to only 3% in the adult population below 65 years of age) and a 2008 survey reported that 77 percent of older people suffered from a chronic disease.

The 2016 Gender Brief Albania<sup>183</sup> highlighted the need for a gender review of the country's pension system, and an assessment of the crucial gender inequality features of the statutory old-age pension system and other social insurance programmes, including the consequences of women's engagement in informal employment and the gender wage gap, their care-providing obligations, and the issue of rural versus urban pension. Studies that investigate the linkages between significant gender inequalities in the labor market and their impact on contribution rates, retirement age, and pensions of women and men in Albania are still lacking. Thus far, analyses of the different implications of the current pension system on women and men, the gender-specific effects of pension scheme reforms, and the impact of old-age poverty have not been undertaken. A composite index of vulnerability using living arrangements, disability and income dependency as input variables, shows widespread vulnerability across the country, but with highest concentrations in the north-east. Bulqizë, Dibër, Has, Klos, Kukës, Mat and Pukë municipalities have the highest levels of vulnerability, a distribution likely to be related to the high numbers of young people who have moved out of these areas.

Older generations play an important role in the provision of care to their children and grandchildren, as well as their partners, older relatives, and relatives with disabilities. The long-term viability of such inter-generational support systems is debatable, as family size declines and women increasingly participate in the labour force, and for longer. The region's societies increasingly rely on informal care when confronted with population ageing and growing needs for long-term care. Middle-age women are likely to be the first responders to informal care needs, often bearing a triple burden, as they care for the young, the old and remain engaged in the labour force, with implications for their own health and well-being. Despite their predominant engagement in non-paid care, the capacity of older persons for community development remain high and can be utilised, e.g. through voluntarism. This would have a double impact, on the one hand through elevated development of the country and, on the other, through improved mental health of older persons. Figure 35 shows an increasing proportion of old-age dependency in the country.

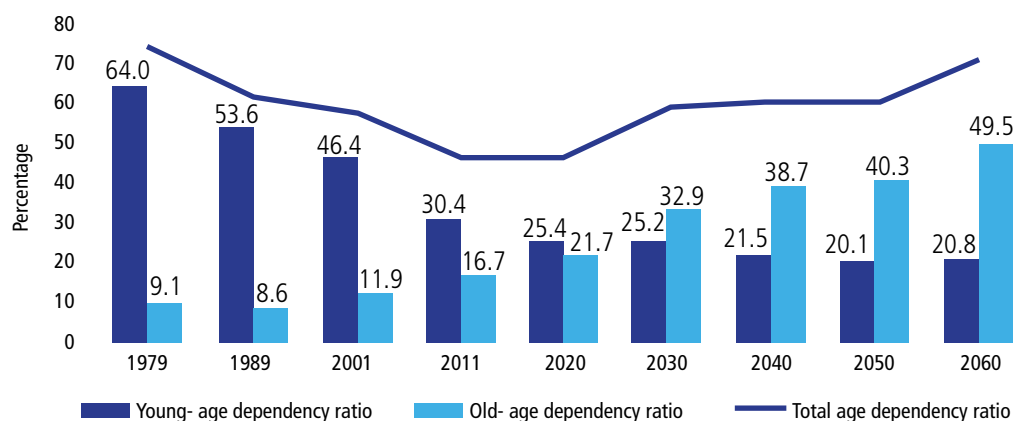
Meanwhile, population ageing is not gender-neutral. Men's higher mortality over the course of life means that women typically outnumber men at older ages, with a large difference among the oldest. Among all those 65 years and older, in 2011, there were about 91 men for every 100 women, but among those 80 and older, there were only 66 men for every 100 women (Figure 36). Assuming that recent mortality rates continue, it is expected that by 2060 there will be 98 men per 100 women 65 years and older, and 77 men per 100 women of age 80 and older.

The National Action Plan for Older Persons 2020–2024 already envisages the promotion of healthy lifestyles and behavioural changes across generations, including in dietary intake, alcohol consumption and smoking, as well as the eradication of inequalities and disparities in access to services that may serve as risk factors. Initiatives related to life-long learning and inter-generational support, as well as inclusion of older persons in community development through voluntarism are also planned.

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183. UN Women & UNDP (2016). Gender Brief Albania, pgs. 51-52 and 64. See: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/10/albania-gender-brief>

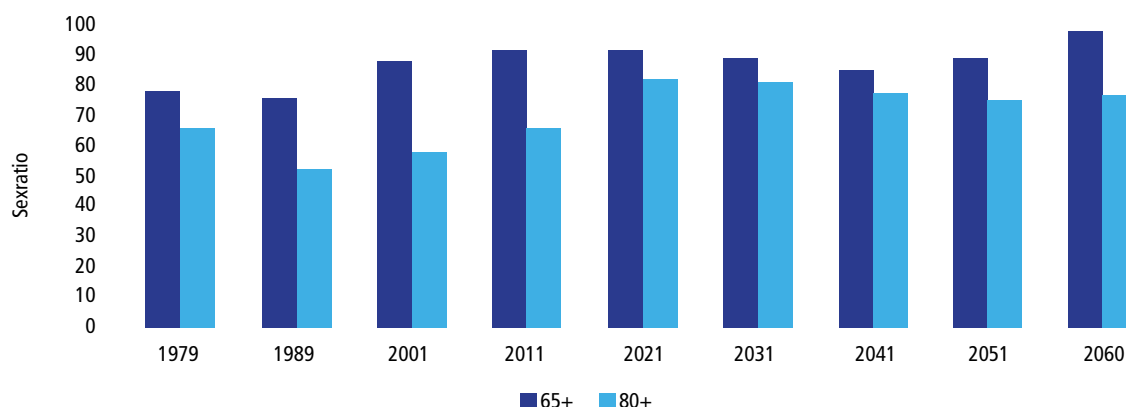
**Figure 35.** Total, young-age and old-age dependency ratios (%), 1979–2060



Source: Population and housing census and population projection 2011-2060

a The total dependency ratio is the ratio of the population aged 0-14 and 65 and over to the population aged 15-64. The young-age dependency ratio is the ratio of the population aged 0-14 to the population aged 15-64. The old-age dependency ratio is the ratio of the population aged 65 and over to the population aged 15-64. All ratios are expressed as a percentage.

**Figure 36.** Sex ratio (%) of population 65 years and older, and 80 years and older, 1979–2060



Source: Population and housing census and population projection 2011-2060

## Youth

### Demographic profile

The 2011 Population and Housing Census recorded 704,000 people of age 15–29 years, some 25 percent of the total Albanian population. With around 363,000 men and boys of age 15–29 years, against some 342,000 women and girls in that age group, males, at 51.5 percent, are slightly more represented among youths than among the total population. The largest overrepresentation of males is among 20–24 year olds (52.6 percent against 47.4 percent females).

### Albanian population among youngest in Europe

The age composition as recorded in the 2011 census implies that for every 100 persons in the economically most productive of ages (15–64 years), there are 47 persons in the dependent ages of 0–14 years and 65 and above. This total dependency comprises young-age dependency (30%) and old-age dependency (17%), while in EU-28 countries the young-age dependency ratio is less than the old-age dependency ratio.

Despite being formally declared a safe country Albania has the highest number of emigrants applying for

asylum in Europe. The emigration potential of young Albanians is very high. Albanian institutions should reconsider the laid-back approach they have taken towards this issue and come fully to terms with the likely long-term ramifications: the effect upon the pension scheme, lack of qualified medical staff and the brain-drain. It is at the very least baffling how young people can be intent on contributing all their positive traits and working hard to succeed at being valued in other countries yet not so at home. If inspiration to perform and behave at their very best domestically could be concentrated into life in Albania, many processes of change would arrive more quickly and more efficiently.

**Health, education, social protection and justice services** for children and young people continue to suffer from a lack of human, financial and technical capacities, as well as limited outreach and coverage. This is the case particularly for marginalised and vulnerable young people such as Roma, children from rural areas, children with disabilities and key young populations. Albania continues to have low levels of HIV, with concentration in the capital city, Tirana, where half of all HIV cases are registered. Data from IPH's National HIV Programme (2019 national report) show a total of 1,298 HIV cases, with 934 males, 364 females, including 45 children, 115 youths (16–24 years old) and 1,138 adults. Data confirm that Albania continues to be a low HIV prevalence country, at 0.046 percent.

**Intimate partner violence and sexual harassment among adolescents** has come to the forefront of public attention after several publicised cases. While regular data collection on violence among youth is missing, recent surveys paint a dim picture, with a high prevalence, acceptance of controlling behaviour, a positive correlation between violence at home and adolescent intimate relationship, and an unlikelihood of reporting of violence to relevant structures. According to a recent GBV survey slightly more than one in five girls have experienced intimate partner violence while dating. Even more prevalent are controlling behaviours, whereby the vast majority (>80%) consider such as normal in a relationship.

**Incest** remains a taboo. Data is not published, there are no studies on the issue, and duty bearers are ill-prepared to respond and provide adequate support. Recently, and following the COVID-19 induced

lockdown, numerous cases of sexual abuse of girls—particularly incest—have been reported, representing a warning sign that the real situation of violence against girls is highly critical.

**The level and quality of education**, considered to be strongly related to employment, remains an issue of persistent concern among Albanian youth. Their concerns about education are related not only to phenomena within the school, but also to the need to match education with labour market demands. According to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung survey *Youth of Albania 2018–2019*, 38 percent of young people claim to feel somewhat satisfied with the quality of education they have received, 54 percent that they have to pay for exams at university, 63 percent that the system of qualification, schooling and university studies is not tailored to the needs of the current job market, and 54 percent that they would find it very difficult to find a job after the end of their studies.

Data from INSTAT's Women and Men 2020 show that there are significant gaps between the educational attainment of boys and girls. While both are represented fairly equally from Pre-Primary to Upper Secondary schooling (consistently around 47 percent of girls to 53 percent of boys), the gender gap widens in the Tertiary level, with girls representing 59.7 percent of students and boys representing 40.3 percent. There are also significant gender gaps in the sectors that girls and boys graduate from. Between 2018 to 2019, girls made up for 81.4 percent of graduates in the education sector while boys made up for 18.6 percent. The same trends are seen in the education fields of health and welfare (79.1 percent girls, 20.9 percent boys), arts and humanities (78.2 percent girls, 21.8 percent boys), natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (76 percent girls, 24 percent boys), and social sciences, journalism, and information (75.2 percent girls, 24.8 percent boys). On the other end of the spectrum, girls only made up 26.4 percent of graduates in the services field while boys made up 73.6 percent; and 37.4 percent of girls graduated in engineering, manufacturing, and construction compared to 62.6 percent of boys. Data on gender differences in digital skills among Albania's population is unavailable, as are comprehensive studies on STEM- and ICT-related gendered employment outcomes, including in digital entrepreneurship, where women remain under-represented. According to INSTAT, the



proportion of school-age children in formal education is 84.4 percent, though in recent years, there has been an increase in the numbers in secondary education, especially in vocational education. This will better serve the needs of specialised professionals for the job market. The interest in pursuing higher education is particularly high, with the largest number of enrolled students in 2013–2014.

During the COVID-19-induced crisis, accessing online-schooling turned out to be jeopardized by unavailability of computers, laptops and tablets and connectivity to the internet in both urban and rural areas, and in particular among poorer and disadvantaged population groups. Schools had already been closed since the earthquake in November 2019. This raises serious questions not only on skill outcomes but also on the wider aspect of girls' socializing and peer interaction, since due to gendered norms, girls are far more confined to homes than boys.

Albanian universities apply study programmes following the Bologna system. The main directions in which higher education aims to develop is a demand for quality university studies, oriented towards scientific research. Among Albanian youth different genders continue to display different approaches over their studies, with different outcomes, attesting to a resistance to change. Nevertheless, despite an increase in numbers of those who undertaking vocational education, completing university studies remains a fundamental objective with the conviction that a university degree provides better employment opportunities.

In the educational system, bullying and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity continue to be widespread. As an illustration, out of the 421 cases of violence and discrimination reported to the LGBT Alliance in 2018, 25 percent of them occurred on the premises of educational institutions.<sup>184</sup> However, the number of reported cases of discrimination and violence to the school authorities is extremely low. Educational staff is ill-prepared to manage conflict and mitigate common gender stereotypes. Although revision of curricula and

a series of awareness-raising activities focusing on the education system are foreseen in the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2016-2020 and in the National Action Plan for LGBTI people 2016-2020, they remain unimplemented.<sup>185</sup>

**Youth employment** is a key element in the individual development and occupational future of the young. Youths are concerned that job offers in the labour market do not match their education qualifications, but yet they have no choice but to accept them. The number of youths since the 2011 census project considerable changes over a brief period. This will have significant impacts upon the supply of students in higher education and of manpower in future years. Thus, whereas there were around 483,000 persons in the economically productive ages of 20–29 years in 2015, there will be only 324,000—33 percent less—in 2031. Consequently, the education system, the labour market and policymakers will need to adapt. In choosing a job, people take into account the salary and working conditions, as well as relations with colleagues, which they consider to be a prerequisite for a positive environment that promotes career development. Youth engagement in unpaid volunteer work with various NGOs and institutions remains low, indicating limited social involvement.

Significantly, data from INSTAT show that there is a huge gap in employment for youth between the ages of 15-24, which includes the age of graduation, compared to other age groups. In 2019, only 22.2 percent of women and 31.2 percent of men from this age group were employed. This shows a slight increase from 2018, where 20.4 percent of women and 30.6 percent of men from this age group were employed. Employment within this age group is significantly low, especially when compared to other age groups. For comparison, 61.7 percent of women and 74.6 percent of men in the 25-29 year old age group were employed in 2019, which also increased from 2018's figures of 54.1 percent of women to 73.4 percent of men employed. Albania ranks first in the region with the highest % of NEETs (youth Not in Employment, Education or Training).

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184. Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT (2020). SDGs implementation in the context of Albania – An LGBTI+ Perspective.

185. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2019, Albania received 19 recommendations based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics, out of which five were rejected, among them revision of curricula and same-sex partnership recognition. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/ALindex.aspx>

Further analysis and qualitative research are needed to produce currently missing data and information on the gender digital divide. For example, the COVID-19-induced crisis revealed the limitations of online service provision, including tele-schooling, due to lack of computers, laptops and tablets at household level in both urban and rural areas, and in particularly among poorer and disadvantaged population groups. In addition to schools' limited ability to provide distance learning, access to that material has been a major concern, as unequal rates of ICT access, such as having a computer to use for school work, contribute to inequitable learning loss, with the greatest impact on the most vulnerable. Poorer children and those from disadvantaged families are much less likely to have access to this technology than their more advantaged peers. According to the World Bank, 97 percent or more of children in the top economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) quintile in Albania have a computer for schoolwork, compared to just 27 percent of children from the bottom quintile.<sup>186</sup>

**Young people continue to exhibit distrust and disinterest in the political process**, demonstrating general apathy and indifference. Yet, they remain active in elections, suggesting that they see the voting process as the main instrument with which to impact the political process. Albania also witnessed a wave of public youth dissatisfaction with students leading mass protests in late 2018/early 2019 against high tuition fees and the law on education. In addition, by listing economic well-being and employment as key elements to development, they demonstrate an acute awareness of the need for policies and priorities that can assist the country's socio-economic development. Their concept of human rights is in line with the norms of an open and liberal society. Meanwhile, they feel proud of their national identity and believe that their European identity will be complete when they feel they have achieved the same freedoms and rights enjoyed by other European citizens.

Policy implications not only stem from shifts in the relative sizes of different age groups; changes in absolute numbers can have major implications. Thus, the education system needs to prepare for a continuous reduction in students at all education

levels, and, consequently, reduction in the number of teachers, lecturers and facilities. At the same time, the health and pension systems need to prepare for larger service delivery to older persons. In general, the societal costs of supporting an older person is greater than the average costs of supporting a child. In the longer term the total labour force will probably contract due to the reduction in the working-age population size, a process that has already started for the youth labour force. The ageing of the labour force will also have implications for the fulfilment of jobs that specifically need younger persons, such as physically demanding jobs.

## Policy support

Albania has made efforts in a number of areas to support young people, for example through policies. The Political Programme of the Council of Ministers (DCM no. 84/2017) provides for enhancement of youth policies, aiming to improve the quality of life of young people. By DCM no. 246 dated 09.05.2018 'The National Plan for European Integration 2018–2020,' the umbrella plan, general measures on young people's employment and fostering child and young people's interest to participate in cultural and artistic life are foreseen. With UNFPA support the National Action Plan on Youth 2015–2020, adopted by DCM no. 383 dated 06.05.2015 has six general objectives and 29 specific objectives.

Meanwhile, there are a number of other policies and laws directly or indirectly targeting young people as a population group and contributing to their social protection, economic empowerment and social inclusion. For example, Law no. 65/2016 'On Social Enterprises' regulates the activity of social enterprises in order to protect and involve young people through employment and to ensure their economic and social integration. Law no. 45/2016 'On Volunteering' regulates the ways and conditions of engaging young people with free will by investing their time, knowledge and skills in volunteer activities. Law 22/2018 'On Social Housing' provides for social housing programmes for young individuals who are single parent, disabled, from families of the Roma and Egyptian community, from the LGBTI community,

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186. World Bank. (2020a). *Western Balkans Regular Economic Report No. 17: The Economic and Social Impact of COVID-19. Education.*

or victims or potential victims of trafficking. Law 121/2016 'On Social Services' regulates the provision and delivery of social care services to help the welfare and social inclusion of individuals in need, including juveniles and young people in conflict with the law. The health law provides for protection from tobacco products and the Law 'On the Protection of Minors' from the use of alcohol. Regarding the responsibilities of local government, Law no. 139/2015 'On Local Self-Governance', without making a dedicated reference to youth, defines the functions of local self-government units specifically in the field of culture, sports and entertainment services, social services, local economic development and public security.

UNFPA and other UN agencies in Albania (UNDP, UNICEF, ILO, UN Women) supported the development of the first ever youth law in Albania, based on the advocacy and repeated request of youth activist groups and organisations, and the practice of neighbouring countries. This law, no. 75/2019 approved on 4.11.2019,<sup>187</sup> determines the activities, mechanisms and authorities responsible for the protection and promotion of youths and their rights. The protection and empowerment of young people is based upon universally accepted principles, including equality of rights, non-discrimination, coordination of youth policies, harmonisation of national policies, guarantee of participation, and freedom of organisation and activism, as well as the principle of subsidiarity.

## Persons with Disabilities

Albania has made progress over the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. A set of policy and legal documents targeting, or mainstreaming, disability-related issues have been developed and approved in various sectors such as education, employment, justice, health, social care and protection, housing and territory planning and infrastructure. Government institutions and structures responsible for policy implementation

and monitoring are in place. The number of services delivered to persons with disabilities and the number of service recipients have increased, especially in education, social care, employment and vocational training. The national territorial-administrative reform and the national social protection reform are expected to positively affect the life of persons with disabilities by ensuring the provision of inclusive services closer to the community and aligning the service models to the new approach based on human rights and the social model. Public planning and budgeting for persons with disabilities at the national and local levels is improving. Civil society, including organisations of persons with disabilities, is involved in policy and legislation development processes, while the private sector is increasingly involved to take social responsibilities for persons with disabilities. Additional funding is needed for programmes and actions to the benefit of persons with disabilities, while awareness raising and capacity building for all stakeholders is promoted and supported, in particular for a more accessible environment and better community-based services.

## Accessibility

The 2014 Law 'On Inclusion of and Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities' makes provision in Article 10 for a multi-disciplinary commission to assess disability based upon the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. Yet, the medical assessment of disability prevails,<sup>188</sup> and children with mild to moderate disability are commonly not defined as having a disability through such assessment. This impacts the prevalence of children with disabilities and on the ability of families to access support and services for a child with mild or moderate disabilities.

The National Social Protection Strategy 2020–2023 indicates that, in 2018, the number of people administratively recognised as persons with disabilities was 141,740 (4.8% of the country's population). Of

187. Parliament Decision, <https://www.parlament.al/LibrariaAkteve/LibrariaAkteDetails/4901>  
*Fletore Zyrtare*: [http://qbz.gov.al/alfresco/api/-default-/public/alfresco/versions/1/nodes/7d10ef94-7c6e-4988-8c5d-362df7023217/content?attachment=true&alf\\_ticket=TICKET\\_527801bb723ad5c5670cec882a03898ef40f499f](http://qbz.gov.al/alfresco/api/-default-/public/alfresco/versions/1/nodes/7d10ef94-7c6e-4988-8c5d-362df7023217/content?attachment=true&alf_ticket=TICKET_527801bb723ad5c5670cec882a03898ef40f499f)

188. CRPD/C/ALB/CO/1 para. 5: The Committee is concerned about the insufficient efforts made to revise existing legislation and to bring it into full compliance with the Convention, in particular with regard to the State party's use and interpretation of the "bio-psycho-social model" in reforming disability assessment systems.

these, 73,425 are labour invalids, who benefit from both the social insurance scheme and supplementary payments from the social protection scheme, and 68,315 children and adults who receive disability allowance and other benefits in the social protection system. Of these, 19,060 (28%) also receive a payment to cover the personal assistant service. In 2016–2018, cash assistance amounting to ALL 20.5 billion constituted an average of 94.6 percent of the social protection programme, of which 78 percent (ALL 15.8 billion) was spent for persons with disabilities, and the remaining 23 percent for social assistance (economic aid). The disability assessment system reform, which consists of shifting from the medical model into a bio-psycho-social model of approaching disabilities, is progressively expanding in accordance with the related policy document and the associated action plan 2019–2024 adopted by DCM no. 380, dated June 5, 2019. The new system, expected to become fully effective across the country by 2024, promotes an increasing provision of integrated services for persons with disabilities. In 2019, State Social Service (SSS) data indicate that 1,964 people with disabilities (735 females), especially children, receive social care services through 27 public centres (of which 7 are residential) and 28 non-public centres (of which 11 are residential).

Based on Law no. 121/2016 ‘On Social Services’ and its by-laws related to the functioning of the Social Fund, municipalities are establishing community- and home-based services for persons with disabilities. However, a Needs Assessment for Social Care Services conducted in early 2019 by the SSS in the twelve counties of Albania found that those for people with disabilities account for 25 percent of the total number of care services, and that 37 municipalities (61%) do not provide services for people with disabilities. Moreover, services for adults with disabilities are missing in the country, except for some pilot model services supported by donors.

The proportion of clients of both residential and day services that are children with disabilities up to 16 years of age appears to have increased, from 28 percent

in 2015 to 49 percent in 2017, perhaps reflecting implementation of new policies that include measures to increase access to services. However, given the data gaps of the SSS, this cannot be considered a conclusive finding. A quantitative survey<sup>189</sup> conducted by World Vision and Save the Children in 2017 found that 106 children with disabilities of age 2–17 years were receiving social services, representing 7.8 percent of the 1,354 children whose parents say they experience “a lot of difficulty” or “severe difficulty” in at least one functional domain. Services for children with disabilities in rural areas are considerably worse than in urban areas.

At the same time, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities raised concerns about the insufficiency of effective measures taken to make urgent progress to deinstitutionalize persons with disabilities and the limited progress made in implementing independent living arrangements and the lack of programmes and in-home, residential and individualized support in the community.<sup>190</sup>

MoHSP supports every year 600–700 persons with disabilities by providing them with wheelchairs, while the Health Care Insurance Fund has to cover cochlear implants for children with hearing impairments based upon the related DCM no. 308/2014. However, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, while examining the initial report of Albania on implementation of CRPD in September 2019, expressed its concerns about the lack of a transparent system for providing assistive devices and aids, and training in their use without discrimination. It recommended among other things to legislate and take any other appropriate measures to ensure the creation of a fund to support personal mobility and to guarantee universal access to appropriate assistive devices, as well as to provide appropriate training in how to use them. The lack of systematic access to assistive devices and technology at an affordable cost for children with disabilities represents a major bottleneck in supporting inclusion and accessibility and fulfilment of rights to inclusive education (Article 24), independent living (Article

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189. World Vision and Save the Children, 2018. *Child disability in Albania: Prevalence and support service quality according to parents’ perceptions*. World Vision in Albania and Kosovo and Save the Children in Albania, Tirana.

190. CRPD/C/ALB/CO/1 paras. 33–34

19), personal mobility (Article 20) and several other rights under the UN CRPD.

In the area of education, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities observed that Albania lacked a comprehensive legislation and strategy for quality inclusive education and desegregation of students with disabilities. Another concern is the lack of data on the public resources allocated to inclusive education in primary, secondary and higher education institutions, as well as the absence of information on accessibility standards applicable to school infrastructure and to information and communications, including information and communications technologies. It also noted the limited accessibility ensured in higher education for students with disabilities and the decreasing number of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education.<sup>191</sup>

Accessibility to the external environment, including information and communication, remains a challenge for persons with disabilities in Albania. Despite a government initiative to declare 2019 as the Accessibility Year, little has been done to align with the related legislation requirements, especially DCM no. 1074, 23.12.2015 'On Accessibility'. Only the road infrastructure in Tirana and in a few other cities, the government websites for some features, the recently rehabilitated schools, and the renovated restaurant and hotel facilities mark some improvements regarding accessibility.

## Education

The precise level of under-provision of pre-school services for children with disabilities is not known, as official data are unreliable and require further investigation. With regard to education, during the academic year 2018–2019, 3,683 students with disabilities studied (an increase of 7% compared to the previous year) in the mainstream pre-university

education institutions, supported by 944 assistant teachers (increase of 35%). MoESY has accredited 36 training programmes for staff working with students with disabilities to be provided by 17 education institutions, and has planned dedicated budgets for the annual training of assistant teachers.

Students with disabilities in the pre-university education system receive also free transportation,<sup>192</sup> school text books and tuition,<sup>193</sup> while university students receive scholarships for their studies in public education institutions.<sup>194</sup> The representative household survey conducted by World Vision and Save the Children<sup>195</sup> found that 75.7 percent of 1,354 children with disabilities (from the perceptions of parents) of age 2–17 years were accessing pre-university education (kindergarten, school or technical education) compared to 93.1 percent of typically developing children. As documented by UNICEF's 2018 study,<sup>196</sup> school mainstreaming of children with disabilities does not imply access to quality education. Children with disabilities in Albania can be said to be primarily in special education or integrated education systems rather than truly inclusive education.

## Health care

The National Health Strategy 2017–2021 aims at universal coverage and treatment of vulnerable groups. The strategy goes some way towards supporting the call for the legal framework to provide for early identification. However, the absence of linked activities or indicators mitigates against the potential for this commitment to be translated into action:<sup>197</sup> the full scale of the need for early intervention services is not known as there can be a considerable wait for the identification of developmental delays and, therefore, monitoring the numbers of children needing support. In the absence of reliable data, planning for services

191. CRPD/C/ALB/CO/1 paras. 39–40

192. DCM no. 682, dated 29.07.2015, amended.

193. DCM no. 269, dated 29.03.2017.

194. DCM no. 903, dated 21.12.2016, amended.

195. World Vision and Save the Children, 2018. *Child disability in Albania: Prevalence and support service quality according to parents' perceptions*. World Vision in Albania and Kosovo and Save the Children in Albania, Tirana.

196. UNICEF, 2018. *We all matter*.

197. UNICEF, 2018. *We all matter*.

is constrained and delivery of important early intervention services, such as physiotherapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy, are either absent entirely in some areas or families have to travel considerable distances or incur considerable costs to access them. The World Vision and Save the Children 2017 survey found that cost is a considerable barrier to accessing health services and especially for children with high levels of reported difficulties (28%): parents reported cost as a major barrier to accessing health services, but, more importantly, 68 percent reported that inadequacy of service quality is the primary reason for not accessing public sector health services.<sup>198</sup>

The net of specialised mental health services has been strengthened. Mental health support houses and other community services for persons with chronic mental health disorders and residents of forensic hospitals have been set up in implementation of the Action Plan for the Development of Mental Health Services 2013–2022, which aims at fighting social exclusion and discrimination. In this regard, the Committee of the Convention is concerned about the insufficiently accessible health-care services and facilities in the community for persons with disabilities, particularly for those with intellectual disabilities and those that require extensive support. It is also concerned with the lack of information on achievements of the National Health Strategy (2017–2021) together with the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2016–2020) and Action Plan for the Development of Mental Health Services in Albania (2013–2022), particularly with regard to the sufficiency of programmes for early identification, for autistic persons and for persons with disabilities living in rural areas.

In the area of work and employment, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities notes with concern that the State party's legislation still allows for persons with disabilities to be declared lacking in capacity to work. The Committee is concerned about the fact that persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, are particularly affected by unemployment. The Committee is also concerned that there are no comprehensive and comparable data on the situation of persons with disabilities employed in the public sector and on the impact of Law no. 15/2019.

## Employment and skills

The Employment and Skills Strategy 2014–2020 promotes the employment of persons with disabilities through the implementation of active labour market programmes, vocational education and training (VET) and other social reintegration programmes. As result of implementation of the Employment Promotion Programme for Persons with Disabilities, and the creation of facilities for employers recruiting persons with disabilities and for self-employed people with disabilities as regulated by DCM no. 248/30.4.2014, the employment offices have succeeded in placing 176 unemployed jobseekers with disabilities compared to 86 in 2016. Meanwhile, the number of registered unemployed job seekers with disabilities increased from 472 in 2017 to 479 in 2018 and 496 in 2019. Vocational training is offered by ten public centres, located in the main cities of the country, delivering 52 different vocational courses. Moreover, a VET programme for sign language instructors has been accredited and is under implementation with the cooperation of MoHSP, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY), and the Albanian National Association of the Deaf. Textbooks and teaching materials for 42 VET courses have been reviewed in relation to the gender and sensitive language for persons with disabilities. Regarding vocational education, the enrolment of people with disabilities in secondary vocational education increased from 115 in the 2018–2019 academic year to 128 in 2019–2020. Law no. 15/2019 'On Employment Promotion' marks a step forward in the country's efforts for the employment of persons with disabilities by enlarging the eligible target group to include deaf persons, labour invalids and family members of persons with disabilities. It provides for the creation of a Social Employment Fund that will support implementation of the quota-levy system adopted by the country for promoting the social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

## Law and justice

Equal recognition before the law and access to justice are still matters of concern for persons with disabilities and the Committee of the Convention. Despite adoption of Law no. 111 dated 14.12.2017 'On Free

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198. World Vision and Save the Children, 2018. *Child disability in Albania: Prevalence and support service quality according to parents' perceptions*. World Vision in Albania and Kosovo and Save the Children in Albania, Tirana.

Legal Aid', there are no accurate data for beneficiaries with disabilities. The national legislation that denies or restricts the legal capacity of persons with disabilities, in particular, those with intellectual or psycho-social disabilities, including the Civil Code, Civil Procedure Code, Family Code and the Mental Health Law, has not undergone any changes. A comprehensive access to the justice system for persons with disabilities, such as free legal aid, accessible legal services and sign language interpreters in court rooms, police stations, procedural accommodations and prosecutorial authorities is still lacking. The situation of persons with disabilities in the penitentiary institutions and their treatment in special health institutions needs improvement.

## Social care

With regard to housing, persons with disabilities do benefit from state-supported social housing programmes. Some 230 persons with disabilities in 2018, and 248 in 2019, have benefited from social housing, rent bonuses, low-cost houses and funds for housing improvement, while 16 persons with disabilities received immediate grants.

Concerning provision of accessible transportation for all, the Minister of Health and Social Protection set up a working group, by Order no. 474, dated 24.06.2019, for the preparation of by-laws on categories entitled to free transportation. Private cars are purchased, owned, and used predominantly by men. Public transport is essential for women, children, youth, the elderly, and poorer segments of society. Access to affordable mobility is essential: it reduces dependency, cost, and time burden; it is a prerequisite for women to engage in the economy, and for rural areas to develop.

Meanwhile, local government and the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE) have still to define the share of reimbursements for private entities providing urban and inter-urban transportation services in order for them to implement the dispositions of Law no. 8308, dated 18.3.1998 'On Road Transportation', and Instruction no. 5627, dated 18.11.2016 'On the Establishment of Criteria, Rules and Documentation for the Issuance of Licences and Certificates for the Activity of Road Passenger Transportation within the Country'. The participation of persons with disabilities in the public life, namely in central or local elections is constrained by

physical barriers to voting polls for those with mobility impairments, voting sheets for those with sensory impairments and the removal of the legal capacity for those with intellectual or psycho-social impairments. Moreover, the Central Election Commission is unable to monitor or measure the participation of persons with disabilities in the elections. However, in the last elections, blind people could vote independently, thanks to braille voting sheets, and most of the voting stations were accommodated on the ground floor.

Participation of people with disabilities in art and culture recorded a few good practices, though inclusion of people with disabilities in sport activities is very limited.

The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination as a human rights institution vested with the competence to protect the rights and entitlement of persons with disabilities treated, during the period January 2016–May 2019, 61 complaints denouncing discrimination due to disability. Of these, 27 were formally recognised as cases of discrimination grounded on reasons of disability. The complaints mainly concerned the denial of reasonable accommodation or entitlements and services, as well as a failure to apply the legislation on inclusive education in public schools.

There is little information on women with disabilities and their situation regarding domestic violence and other factors exacerbating their vulnerability. However, the Recording violence in Albania (REVALB) system reports that in 2018, out of 668 cases of domestic violence, three cases were reported by women with disabilities and two cases by men with disabilities.

Almost all the above-mentioned areas, namely Accessibility, Education, Health care, Employment and skills, Law and justice, Social Care, and Participation in political and public life, are part of the National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities 2016–2020 (NAPPWD) adopted by DCM no. 483, dated 29.6.2016. In late 2018, NAPPWD underwent a mid-term monitoring and evaluation of its implementation. The evaluation report indicates that 116 (64%) of the 179 activities or measures anticipated in the plan have been realised, or are in process. The Committee of the Convention, while commending Albania for adoption of the NAPPWD is concerned about the lack of reliable information on the level of implementation and the results achieved.

Another important concern of the Committee relates to statistics, especially to the fact that Albania is not systematically collecting and analysing disaggregated data on the situation of persons with disabilities in close consultations with representative organisations with a view to design adequate public policies.

The draft Survey Report of the Trust in Governance Opinion Poll 2019 indicates that people with disability are part of the 65 percent of the Albanian resident population that do not feel safe in everyday life. Often-cited reasons for feeling unsafe are crime (assault, burglary), health-care issues, injustice and employment insecurity. The same report informs that people with a disability use social assistance services and social care services more often than people without a disability. Yet, people with a disability are more often “very dissatisfied” with the service delivery of social assistance services (29%) and social care services (25%) than respondents without a disability (17% and 13%, respectively).

## Roma

In recent years, Albania has marked substantive political and programmatic efforts with the economic and social inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities. Implementation of the 2016–2020 National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians is reaching its final year of implementation, and the progress reports for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 have been published by government. The findings have been evaluated as positive, measured through achievement of the action plan’s list of indicators, positively increasing over the years, from 3 to 3.8, measured on a scale of 0–5 points. While also noting the significant efforts to collect data on socioeconomic indicators, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination remains concerned that a strategy for objective evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the National Action Plan and other special measures seems to be lacking. It recommended that the State party reinforce the collection of relevant data and prepare a policy evaluation strategy in order to evaluate the effectiveness of those measures.<sup>199</sup> The electronic data collection system Romalb ([www.romalb.org](http://www.romalb.org)) is functional and in-service training is

provided continuously to hundreds of civil servants and local government officials. In 2019, RomAlb was linked with a dashboard, making data available for the general public, available at [dashboard.romalb.org](http://dashboard.romalb.org).

There is no dedicated structure at the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) in charge of the coordination of Roma-related policies. Rather, there is a small team within the Sector of Policies and Strategies on Social Inclusion and Gender Equality within the General Directory of Policies and Development of Health and Social Protection, limited in terms of human resources and charged, among other duties, with dealing with Roma-related issues. The legal framework and protection provided in the past few years regarding minorities has improved. A new Law on Social Housing was approved by Parliament in May 2018, addressing shortcomings in the field of housing and forced eviction. The law requires a quota of five percent of housing to be reserved for the most vulnerable members of the Roma and Egyptian communities. The related sub-legal acts still need to be enacted. Legal amendments to the country’s civil registration law in October 2018 provided a solution to the hundreds of unregistered children, the majority of whom are of Roma background. The fourth policy dialogue seminar on inclusion of Roma and Egyptians took place in December 2018 and made a number of recommendations to be implemented in the following years.

However, many Roma and Egyptians still face deep poverty, discrimination and exclusion in many spheres of life. Unemployment is particularly high among this community, and those who are employed occupy most often low paid positions. Poverty is widespread and many people do not have access to necessities such as electricity or even clean water.

According to the data of the Regional Roma Survey, only 22 percent (10% of Roma women and 33% of Roma men) of marginalised Roma of age 18–24 years are in employment, education or training compared to 58 percent of non-Roma. Only 18 percent of Roma of age 15–64 years are employed (11% Roma women and 26% Roma men), compared to 27 percent of non-Roma. The study reveals that informal employment continues to be very high among marginalised Roma. Close to 50 percent of the Roma women were engaged in informal work in 2017, compared to 69 percent of Roma men. In

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199. CERD/C/ALB/CO/9-12 paras. 20 and 21.



recent years, there has been a positive trend in Albania in the field of education. This is particularly the case with compulsory education enrolment of Roma children of age 7–15 years (currently at 66% for both Roma girls and boys) and who have completed compulsory education (43% in total, 40% Roma girls and 47% Roma boys). However, the gap between Roma and Egyptians and non-Roma children living in the same areas remains significant. The former continue to benefit from free textbooks and transportation to school in remote areas. Segregation in schools remains an issue that should be systematically addressed. In the area of health, less than one-third of marginalised Roma had access to health insurance in 2017. Eradicating poverty is one of the greatest global challenges, and requires leaving no one behind, including Roma and Egyptians. The SDGs cannot be achieved if substantial segments of the Roma and Egyptian population are systematically left behind due to historical disadvantage, multi-dimensional poverty and structural discrimination or prejudice experienced on a daily basis.

## LGBTQI Persons

Equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) is a major objective within the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. Albania has marked progress in protection of LGBTI rights, at legal and policy levels.<sup>200</sup> The Constitution establishes comprehensive rights for Albania's citizens and promotes equality without discrimination. Same-sex relations and expression of LGBTI identities are no longer a criminal offence. The Anti-discrimination Law includes sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) as prohibited grounds for discrimination. Hate crimes, where these are motivated by prejudices in relation to SOGI, are prohibited by the Penal Code. Discrimination in employment, moral and sexual harassment and derogatory comments against an employee on the grounds of SOGI are prohibited by the Labour Law. The Code of Administrative Procedures prohibits discrimination and shifts the burden of proof to the alleged perpetrator. The Law on Pre-University

Education also prohibits discrimination on the basis of SOGI. Free legal aid is provided to LGBTI people who are victims of domestic or sexual violence or trafficking, or who come from a low-income population. The National Action Plan on LGBTI People 2016–2020, commissioned by Parliament and adopted by government in 2016, constitutes the main policy document in protecting LGBTI human rights. It aims to improve such rights in several areas, including education, employment, health and housing. This strategic document brings also the establishment of a National Group on Coordination and Implementation, a structure that involves key governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

Despite substantial legal protections, discrimination against LGBTI people persists, including denial of the rights to marry and have a family, undergo reassigned gender surgery for transgender people, and to self-determination in relation to bodily integrity for intersex people. The UNDP-supported country report on the status of the LGBTI persons rights<sup>201</sup> highlights some key areas for legal framework improvements, including: i) revising criminal dispositions to remove offences relating to consensual same-sex conduct and other offences used to arrest and punish persons on the basis of their SOGI or expression, ii) criminalising the incitement of hatred on the grounds of SOGI and distribution of homophobic and transphobic materials to the public, iii) criminalising threatening with murder or grave harm on the grounds of SOGI as aggravating factors for purposes of sentencing, iv) criminalising transphobic hate speech, v) providing legal recognition to same-sex couples and their children, ensuring that benefits traditionally accorded married partners—including those related to benefits, pensions, and taxation and inheritance—are accorded on a non-discriminatory basis, and vi) issuing legal identity documents upon request that reflect the preferred gender, eliminating unnecessary preconditions.

There is a need for a law on gender recognition. In Albania, intersex persons are not visible in society and existing legislation and its implementation may be insufficient to protect them. Intersex or sex characteristics

200. CCPR/C/ALB/CO/2 para. 8 "While welcoming various legislative and institutional measures adopted to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons, the Human Rights Committee raised concerns at the prevalence of stereotypes and prejudices against LGBT persons. In this regard, the Committee condemned the negative statements by public officials against LGBT persons."

201. UNDP-supported report *Being LGBTI in eastern Europe: Albania country report Reducing Inequalities & Exclusion and Combating Homophobia & Transphobia experienced by LGBTI people in Albania*, <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/te-jesh-lqbt-ne-evropeen-lin-dore--raporti-per-shqiperine.html>

are not explicitly mentioned in the laws. The anti-discrimination law does not list sex characteristics as possible grounds for discrimination. There is an urgent need to adopt specific legal provisions to ensure that certain operations and practices are not performed before a child is of age to be consulted, and for the issuance of official documents on legal identity, reflecting the person's preferred gender. Recognition of gender characteristics as the basis for discrimination in the anti-discrimination law and other provisions dealing with discrimination need to be addressed. Efforts are made to raise awareness about intersex persons and to inform governments, key stakeholders and practitioners in the Western Balkans about current ethical and human rights developments, including current global good practices to protect and empower intersex people.<sup>202</sup>

Various analyses on the LGBTI community have shown there is an urgent need to improve the range and access to high quality SRH services to vulnerable groups and LGBTI people. Issues become more pressing and vulnerabilities more complex, especially the level of violence and discrimination, when individuals are at the same time commercial sex workers and injecting drug users. Stigma and discrimination are also another area for attention. When in contact with health-care services, LGBTI persons often face lack of confidentiality and do not trust the institutions. Generally, health personnel are not informed at all about LGBT issues and needs and procedures do not allow proper management of all health aspects of LGBT patients.<sup>203</sup> Access to SRH services must improve, and requires the improvement of existing services, as well as the provisions and support for SRH services for the LGBTI population and other vulnerable groups.<sup>204</sup>

LGBTI civil society organisations are a crucial component of the equality and human rights architecture in Albania. There are several active LGBTI people's organisations<sup>205</sup> focusing solely on the promotion and

protection of LGBTI rights, and on the provision of services on which members of the LGBTI+ community rely on, such counselling, legal aid, HIV testing, support in finding employment, and coaching. Responding to the high risk of violence and homelessness among LGBTI+ persons, STREHA, a shelter for LGBTI+ young people, opened as a pilot project in 2014 and became an independently operating entity in 2015. STREHA was the only one of its kind in the Balkans, providing a safety net and life-saving support to individuals who have suffered abuse, discrimination, and primarily homelessness. The shelter offers social services and equips residents with skills and resources that enable them to build a life of dignity and independence, as equal and productive members of society. There are other human rights organisations that have also been supporting the cause of LGBTI people. They voice their needs and address individual and group discrimination and human rights violations, and act as advocates for LGBTI people. Playing a valuable role as watchdogs on implementation of policy and legislation, they have a strong partnership with the human rights and equality statutory bodies of the People's Advocate and Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. Through advocacy and lobbying they have influenced the amendment of laws and policy design in the area of human rights and anti-discrimination for LGBTI people. The Human Rights Group role was vital in advocating for further legal and policy improvements and their adequate implementation, as well as in providing capacity building and support for LGBTI organisations and providing specialised support services to LGBTI persons. Last but not least, LGBTI CSOs have constantly engaged in carrying out research whose findings are informing legislative, policy and law enforcement agencies in improving the overall situation of LGBTI persons' rights.<sup>206</sup> Recently, the first monitoring report of the level of implementation of SDGs related to the current situation of the LGBTI+ community, has become available.<sup>207</sup>

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202. UNDP-supported *Intersex Research Study, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia*, <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/Intersex%20Research%20Study%20UNDP%202017.pdf>

203. Access to Health Services and Quality of Care for LGBT Persons in Albania, <https://www.lgbti-era.org/one-stop-shop/access-health-services-and-quality-care-lgbt-persons-albania>

204. UNCT Albania UPR 2018 Report.

205. Alliance LGBT, Pro LGBT, *Streha*, *Historia ime*, OMSA, Pink Embassy.

206. Pro-LGBT 2018 Annual Report on the Situation of the LGBTI Community in Albania.

207. Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT (2020). SDGs implementation in the context of Albania – An LGBTI+ Perspective.

# Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees and Migrants

## Migration dynamics

Albania remains predominantly a country of emigration. The majority of migrant communities are present in neighbouring countries—Italy and Greece—though many Albanians have been residing in other EU member states as well, and in North America, for the past two decades. Meanwhile, population projections indicate a long-term trend towards achieving a neutral migration balance.

Emigration from Albania is primarily driven by economic reasons. The phenomenon continues, in particular towards EU countries, despite the constant improvement of living conditions in their home country, a net stable growth of the Albanian economy and constant improvement in public safety. However, additional pull factors include higher quality of training and educational opportunities abroad. In turn, shortcomings of public services have served as push factors, adversely affecting migrants' efforts and chances to return and settle in Albania.

Another group of Albanian citizens living abroad comprises those whose asylum claims have been rejected or who otherwise are residing irregularly there. A recent trend has been noticed of significant returns of migrants from these groups. Albania is also increasingly becoming a country of destination for a range of categories of foreigners (including migrants in search of employment, students, asylum seekers and refugees), though the numbers are relatively small.

The country has now a comprehensive Policy on Migration Governance, legislation better aligned to the *EU acquis*, stronger support services for vulnerable migrants, more capacitated institutions and more capacities to deal with migration-related dynamics, all combined with a much more consolidated approach towards the development impact of migration and stronger engagement with the diaspora for the social and economic development of the country. Since 2019, there has been in place a new National Strategy on Migration and its Action Plan (2019–2022), developed with International Organisation for Migration technical and financial support in line with the Migration Governance Framework.

EU accession is the main strategic objective for Albania and entails the acceptance of adopted European values and standards across all areas. Migration management and governance is an important element of the EU integration path, with particular relevance to associated problems, needs and priorities, such as irregular emigration and the high flows of asylum seekers, unaccompanied migrant children, reintegration of returnees, integrated border management and management of mix migration flows, labour and human development, but also migrants rights and integration, considering that Albania is increasingly becoming a country of destination for migrants, combined with stronger institutions and capacities. All these objectives are embedded in the current National Strategy on Migration and its Action Plan (2019–2022), as well as in other sector strategies.

Like other Western Balkan countries, Albania has also been affected by mixed population flows, the reasons for which are not only socio-economic conditions but also the effects of various conflicts taking place around the world. The categories of foreigners arriving in the country include, inter alia, refugees and asylum seekers, migrants, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated minors, and stateless persons.

## Needs, gaps and capacities to be addressed

Implementation of the National Strategy on Migration (2019–2022) and its Action Plan remains the top priority under migration governance in the country. The actions foreseen cover four main areas:

- Strategic governance of migration by Albanian institutions
- Safe and orderly migration from, through and to Albania
- Effective labour migration policy and impact of migration on local development
- Migrant integration and protection of migrants' rights.

Given the high levels of emigration and asylum seeking among Albanian migrants in EU members states and their impact upon the visa free regime, prevention of irregular migration and awareness raising on the risks

associated with it form an immediate need along with the boosting of pre-departure orientation for potential migrants. Particular focus should be given to the prevention of migration of unaccompanied migrant children.

Migration data is another very important aspect that needs to be improved. INSTAT acts as reference and anchor points for the methodology, production and dissemination of statistical information. While there is already a comprehensive statistical programme, comprising economic and social statistics, environmental, entrepreneurship and demographics, along with several sectoral statistics, migration data and statistics are not factored into the statistical programme and are carried out on an ad hoc and project basis. In this regard, assessment of the impact of migration upon the labour market and related projections are very relevant for the migration dynamics of Albania. With regard to migration statistics in general, there is a need to strengthen further the capacities of the relevant institutions for data collection and generation of migration-related statistics through tailored training. Such training should focus on migration-related data collection and statistics and should take into account the roles of the different institutions and the type of data and statistics they will collect and prepare. The National Strategy on Migration (2019–2022) and its Action Plan foresee specific measures in this regard. Given the importance of remittances for the economy of the country, ways should be explored towards lowering the cost of transfer, as well as boosting the productive use of remittances.

According to various periodic reports of key monitoring foreign agencies,<sup>208</sup> trafficking in human beings remains an issue in Albania and continues to require the full attention and resources of government, as well as of local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and international organisations working in the country to advance human rights and social justice. The Office of the National Anti-Trafficking coordinator in the Ministry of Interior (Moi) is the institution responsible for coordinating actions to address this issue.

Registration and accommodation facilities for irregular

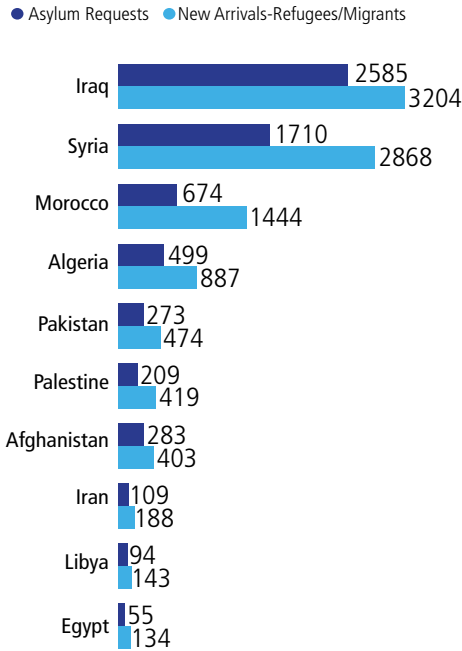
migrants detected at the border or in the territory should be expanded further. Albania does not have a centre for vulnerable migrants, particularly for Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UMC) and Potential/Victims of Trafficking (P/VoT). Currently, such cases are referred to the Social Services, which do not have any capacities in place. In this context, the establishment of a temporary protection-sensitive accommodation centre for UMCs and P/VoTs is an immediate need.

## Asylum dynamics

### Context

- ◊ In 2019, arrivals of refugees and migrants in Albania increased by 85 percent from the year before, totalling 10,557 individuals. Asylum requests increased correspondingly by 52 percent from 2018, totalling 6,677. Over a two-year period (2017–2019), annual figures increased ten-fold.
- ◊ As of February and March 2020, even sharper increases in arrivals and asylum requests were witnessed. This trend was interrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 emergency and the subsequent closure of land borders. As of 31 May 2020, 3,629 arrivals had been intercepted, of which 2,058

Identified Refugee/Migrants by Nationality (Top 10)



208. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-2018-26-alb-rep-en/168097fa81>

were referred to asylum procedures.

- ◇ An increase in the proportion of women, children and families arriving and requesting asylum in 2019 was particularly noted. They respectively constituted 24 percent and 36 percent of total figures. As of May 2020, 390 intercepted arrivals were women, 205 girls, 392 boys and 2,642 men. Asylum requests had been made by 328 women, 184 girls, 328 boys and 1,218 men.
- ◇ 70 percent of arrivals and 76 percent of asylum seekers in 2019 originated from countries with generally high protection rates (see figure for full breakdown).
- ◇ The flow remains transitory in nature, with approximately 99 percent of new arrivals requesting asylum but then leaving the country after a few days.
- ◇ By the end of 2019, Albania was hosting 142 refugees and long-term asylum seekers.

### **Main challenges and barriers affecting asylum seekers and refugees**

There is generally an insufficient number of Border and Migration officers, reception centre personnel and asylum officials to cope with the increased number of arrivals and asylum requests of recent years. Moreover, there are insufficient numbers of female Border and Migration officers and interpreters to conduct pre-screening procedures with arriving female refugees and migrants.

Under the current system, all new arriving asylum seekers are transferred to the National Reception Centre in Tirana. Due to under-funding, overcrowding and high turnover of residents, living conditions and security at the centre do not meet the required standards. In addition, this undifferentiated approach to reception arrangements contributes to a lack of specialised services for those with specific protection needs, including unaccompanied and separated children, women-at-risk, and sexual and gender-based violence survivors, while there is no counselling on prospects of integration for those willing to remain in the country. Many of the findings of the UNCT Joint Assessment on Asylum and Mixed Migration in Albania (December 2018) in relation to these issues are still pertinent.

There are lengthy delays to asylum procedures,

notably with regard to the formal lodging of claims of asylum seekers that have remained in the country and confirmed their intention to seek asylum here. Only 61 asylum applications were lodged formally in 2019. These delays, in addition to the deteriorating condition of some reception facilities in the country, and lack of state-provided free legal aid and interpretation, compound onward movement through the region, even among those who had an initial intention to stay on in Albania. By the end of 2019, several families that had remained in the country for a long time had left, reportedly due to delays in procedures, issuance of documentation (e.g. ID cards), and a lack of opportunities for reliable income generation and self-sufficiency.

For those granted international protection in Albania, integration and access to rights remain a longer term challenge, and many still rely upon financial and in-kind support from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) partner organisations. This has been particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 emergency, when a rapid socio-economic impact assessment conducted by UNHCR showed that only one previously employed refugee had been successful in securing financial assistance from the government, despite others being eligible for such assistance on paper.

### **Causes and factors influencing risks and exclusion**

Insufficient resources for the management of mixed movements and the asylum system lie at the heart of many of the challenges listed above, contributing directly to shortcomings in staffing and material resources, and subsequent delays and gaps in services.

Whilst the legislative framework allows for effective integration of refugees, legal and administrative barriers persist, most notably in the timely issuance of necessary documentation such as residence and work permits. A DCM issued in April 2019 was aimed at resolving the long-standing issue of refugees and asylum-seekers being provided with personal ID numbers incompatible with the state database. These ID numbers had prevented refugees and asylum-seekers from using their documentation to access relevant rights and services. However, to date the Decision has not been fully implemented.

Refugees are excluded from a number of state public

services, normally due to technicalities, contradictory normative and shortcomings (e.g. documentation, see above) or a lack of awareness amongst officials. This includes full access to employment schemes, social housing, education, and other such rights and services. The COVID-19 emergency has also further highlighted persisting gaps in this regard, especially with regards to inclusion in social protection systems and different forms of economic aid. In many cases, the legal framework exists however there are shortcomings in its full implementation.

### Gaps and capacities to be addressed

In 2020, a new Law on Asylum will be introduced, along with a revised pre-screening instruction. The piloting of a new approach to border, reception and asylum management in the country will aim to provide better protection services to those with specific needs and those with an intention to seek asylum and remain in Albania. This will require funding and support from a range of national and international donors and stakeholders. Two new reception centres at the border for persons with specific needs will become operational in 2020: a municipal social centre in Erseka (capacity 30) and a Caritas shelter in Gjirokastra (capacity 20). These will in part address concerns highlighted in the UNCT Joint Assessment of 2018 regarding the lack of specialised shelters near the border for women and children at risk.

The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 measures on refugees and asylum seekers needs also to be addressed, notably through ensuring their inclusion in ongoing national response plans, as well as addressing persisting gaps in the implementation of legal and administrative frameworks relevant to their access to rights and integration in the country.

## Other Factors of Vulnerability

The 6.4 magnitude earthquake that hit Albania on 26 November 2019 was the second earthquake to strike the country in the space of three months, was the strongest earthquake to hit Albania in more than 30

years, the deadliest in 99 years, and the world's deadliest earthquake in 2019. Eleven municipalities situated in three prefectures, with an approximate population of 1,185,286 persons, have suffered to varying degrees from the earthquake, with 202,291 people affected directly or indirectly. According to government sources, around 17,090 affected inhabitants had to vacate their homes. For the first time in recent history, GoA announced a State of Natural Emergency in the prefectures and counties of Durrës, Lezha and Tirana, as well as in eleven municipalities. Besides the damage that was caused, the November 26 earthquake provided a unique opportunity to reflect on how to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience at all levels. The events that followed the earthquake showed that there is an urgent need to stress test ability to reduce risk of hybrid threats and cascading disaster scenarios, strengthening disaster preparedness and risk management capacities, adopt adequate response systems and procedures, and improve the institutional capacity for DRR management, coordination and interaction between public levels of government, as well as with private and civil society actors. Such capacities are first required to be built and become functional across the government hierarchy to build a culture and practice of resilient and sustainable development.

The UNCT's PDNA<sup>209</sup> for the earthquake that hit Albania in November 2019 concluded that the aftermath of the earthquake and its negative consequences will most likely increase the burden on women, especially those living with their families. This is due to the likelihood of women to be pushed further towards traditional roles and activities such as caring for children and elderly, disabled or ill family members, as well as what is left behind from their houses.

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) adapted their activities to the post-earthquake situation and needs while providing specific services to targeted groups: children, women, people with disabilities, and youth. Those activities now include psychosocial services, after-school activities for children, and in-kind donations. In terms of recovery interventions, a specific line of intervention was allocated for four categories of vulnerable groups, specifically children,

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209. Albania Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, Government of Albania, UN Albania, European Union, and World Bank, 2020 [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/albania\\_post-disaster\\_recovery\\_a\\_v9.0.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/albania_post-disaster_recovery_a_v9.0.pdf)

women, persons with disabilities, and minorities. 280,000 EUR (0.28 in million EUR) was allocated for emergency response protocols working with different groups in disaster situations and developing protocols for the four mentioned categories.

So far, GoA prepared a National Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP)<sup>210</sup>, issued in February 2020 (pre-COVID-19), and initially drafted a National Response Plan (post-COVID-19), which has not been finalized. The normative acts that were approved during the recent period primarily focus on health-related measures and restrictions, and are in general gender blind or gender neutral. Until 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020, GoA had approved 23 measures/normative acts specifically related to social and economic security issues<sup>211</sup>, out of which nine address violence against women. Among the remaining 14 measures, only two contain gender-responsive elements.

COVID-19 lockdown did follow the earthquake only three months later. The Albanian government was at the verge of initiating the reconstruction plan for all people affected by the earthquake, when the COVID-19 health pandemic situation started.

In April 2020, UN Women conducted a Rapid Gender Assessment Survey<sup>212</sup>, which served to provide detailed information on the actual and expected impact of COVID-19 on women's and men's livelihoods in Albania. The Rapid Gender Assessment provided combined results of both effects of earthquake and COVID-19 pandemic. 15.8% of the sample declared to have experienced damages from the earthquake before the isolation of COVID-19 pandemic. The data show that 3% was already unemployed as a result of the earthquake. The prevalence of women reporting experiencing damages in their premises due to the earthquake is higher, while men reported a stronger negative impact on their employment due to earthquake.

The COVID-19 crisis revealed the limitations of outreach to citizens and the provision of essential services. This included in particular help for domestic violence cases and also, in more general terms, tele-schooling, due to the lack of computers, laptops and internet connection at household level in both urban and rural areas, and in particularly among rural, poorer and disadvantaged population groups.

Household safety nets remain an important coping strategy with the negative impact of COVID-19, while government's support is needed to level up the fear and uncertainty for the future. Coronavirus crisis brought not only fear, emotional stress and loss of incomes, but also uncertainty and financial insecurity in sustaining basic daily needs in the near future. Overall, 71% respondents reported concerns on their ability to cover basic expenses (food, hygiene, etc.), if the restrictive measures continue, and almost 74.2% indicated that they most probably will not be able to pay for rent and utilities. The economic insecurity will particularly impact women and female headed households, who will face difficulties in paying for rent (85%), while keeping up with basic expenses, will be a real challenge for another 80%. To respond to these challenges, women will rely mainly on support from relatives (72%) and/or local authorities (66%), while 63% are expected to take loans to recover the loss of income sources during the Coronavirus pandemic. Women in urban areas and those living in households with children have higher odds of feeling more uncertain about their ability to afford the needs for their families if compared to men or women from other demographic groups. As a consequence, women in general, and women from those two particular groups report a higher need for support either by friends, the Government or financial institutions.

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210. [https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Covid\\_AL-spreads.pdf](https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Covid_AL-spreads.pdf)

211. <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>

212. The impact of COVID-19 on women's and men's lives and livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia: Preliminary results from a Rapid Gender Assessment, UN Women, 2020 <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/the-impact-of-covid19-on-womens-and-mens-lives-and-livelihoods>

# 5. Commitments under international norms and standards

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## Implementation of Human Rights and Gender Equality Commitments

### Key Achievements and Implementation Gaps

This section includes a brief analysis of some of the main achievements and remaining gaps in areas of human rights, from the legislative perspective, that are sensitive for the country and important for achievement of the SDGs.

Over the last five years, Albania has made important progress with regard to the adoption of a robust legal and policy framework in accordance with international human rights standards. These include access to justice, gender equality, elimination of discrimination and protection of minorities and disadvantaged groups, rights of the child, social care and social protection.

In addition to some areas where legal improvements may still be necessary, the main priority remains effective and timely implementation of the adopted legislation, which is key to ensuring fulfilment

of the country's human rights commitments and achievement of the SDGs. In this context, the latest recommendations of international<sup>213</sup> and regional<sup>214</sup> human rights mechanisms, as well as reports of NHRIs and civil society, point out that despite progress Albania still faces many challenges related to implementation of the national legislation and its human rights commitments.

### Access to justice

Since 2016, the country has embarked upon a major reform of the justice system and adopted a comprehensive legislation, starting with amendments to the Constitution in 2016, to ensure an uncorrupted, effective, efficient, accountable and professional judicial system, which is key for enforcement of all other human rights. The judicial reform package includes important laws to ensure access to justice, particularly for disadvantaged groups, such the new Law on State Legal Aid, the Code of Criminal Justice for Children, amendments to the Criminal Procedural Code that expand protection measures for victims of human trafficking and sexual violence, and a Strategy on Legal Education of the Public.

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213. Latest UPR recommendations (2019) and Treaty Bodies Concluding Observations, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2019; Committee on Migrant Workers, 2019; Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2019, Committee on Enforced Disappearances, 2018 and Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2016.

214. Group of Independent Experts in Charge of Monitoring the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention); Council of Europe's Committee against Torture, European Court of Human Rights, etc.



The judicial reform package includes important laws to ensure access to justice, particularly for disadvantaged groups, such as the new Law on State Legal Aid, the Code of Criminal Justice for Children, amendments to the Criminal Procedural Code that expand protection measures for victims of human trafficking and sexual violence, and a Strategy on Legal Education of the Public.

Following a consultative process, the Council of Ministers adopted the first National Justice for Children Strategy in September 2018. The four-year costed Strategy and Action Plan includes objectives and actions to address both implementation of the Criminal Justice for Children Code, and children's equitable access to justice under civil and administrative law. Special measures for building a child-friendly justice system have been planned also under the National Agenda for Child Rights 2016–2020. However, by the end of 2018, only 17 percent of planned measures had been fully achieved, representing 17 percent of the budget planned.<sup>215</sup> Similarly, the Annual Report of the Action Plan to the National Justice for Children Strategy, pointed out that 40 percent of measures had been implemented, while the rest were either not implemented or in process and not yet finalised.

Key areas remaining a priority to ensure the operation of a child-friendly justice system include the following:

- ◇ Strengthening of inter-institutional coordination mechanisms at the central level and establishment of such mechanisms at the local level for implementation of the justice for children normative framework.
- ◇ Allocation of sufficient financial resources for implementation of the normative framework and appointing or recruiting of all professionals who will specialise in handling justice for children processes.

- ◇ Implementation of all measures necessary to divert juveniles from the criminal judicial process and further strengthen restorative justice. Also, a further reduction in the number of children in detention and a gradual transition towards open facilities.
- ◇ Planning and undertaking of sufficient training and specialisation of all law-enforcement, justice and other professionals interacting with the justice system who would handle child-rights cases, following a coordinated national plan for capacity building.
- ◇ Operationalisation of the online data system that can track children's cases in the justice system chain and provide necessary levels of disaggregation. In addition, the country needs to review the ways administrative data on justice for children are recorded, processed and published, and ensure that all justice system chain operators record disaggregated data based upon harmonised definitions of indicators.
- ◇ Adaptation of the law enforcement and justice system premises for children, and establishment of community-based rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for children in conflict and contact with the law.

Meanwhile, people continue to face obstacles to accessing justice due to delays in the judicial reform process, including the composition of some of the

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215. MoHSP and UNICEF, 2019. Mid-Term Implementation Report of the National Agenda for Child Rights 2016–2020.

key judicial bodies. Other factors that contribute to a fragile framework for access to justice in Albania include low levels of legal literacy, dubious attitudes on what is just, and a lack of trust in the justice system.

According to Albania's constitution, all binding human rights conventions become an integral part of its legal system, are directly applicable at the national level and have priority over the laws of the country that are incompatible with them.<sup>216</sup> Nevertheless, the UN human rights mechanisms have expressed regret over the lack of information on court cases in which the provisions of the international human rights courts were previously invoked, or applied, by domestic courts.<sup>217</sup> In line with SDG 16 and SDG target 17.16, Albania needs to take appropriate measures, including through training, to ensure that judges, prosecutors, lawyers and law enforcement officials have sufficient knowledge of the provisions of the international human rights instruments to enable them to evoke or apply the provisions in relevant cases.

In addition to human rights education for the judiciary, making legal services accessible is essential. The state legal aid system is not yet functional due to lack of funding and delays in adoption of secondary legislation affecting people in a difficult economic situation, children and marginalised and disadvantaged groups. The six Free Legal Aid centers established by the Ministry of Justice with the UNDP support proved a good practice for reaching out to the most marginalized men and women, but there is an urgent need for both primary and secondary free legal aid services to be available for most disadvantaged individuals around the country, particularly in remote rural areas. Even when legal aid is provided, the process of obtaining fee waivers and payments for court fees and experts' fees<sup>218</sup> - including compensation for victims of violence, divorce, alimony, division of property, and inheritance - remains difficult.<sup>219</sup> This is the result of noticeable cultural resistance among some judges and other duty-bearers to waive fees for low-income groups, court-appointed experts, and

other expenses. For example, the number of cases for protection order which are handled in the absence of a legal representative of the victim is considerably high. A monitoring exercise of the court orders of Tirana District Court, conducted by a civil society organization for the first six months of 2020, points out that in 162 cases related to protection orders, only 17 percent of victims were represented by a lawyer.<sup>220</sup> Furthermore, as pointed out in the discussion of the Annual Report of the Justice for Children Strategy (2019), no child has received any free legal aid as guaranteed by the state, despite the fact that 23 cases affecting children have been referred to the Free Legal Aid Department. These groups are also affected by lack of knowledge of the rights to which they are entitled. The need to establish an efficient legal aid system for marginalised groups and increase the capacities of members of the judiciary and lawyers are recommendations present in several human rights bodies reports (CEDAW 2016; UPR 2016, 2019; GREVIO 2017; CERD 2019; CRPD 2019) and a requisite for achievement of several SDGs, including Goals 1, 5, 10 and 16.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Child Rights, as part of the People's Advocate, and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination have been appointed. Opening of three local offices of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, in Gjirokastra, Korca and Shkodra, has been approved by Parliament. Nevertheless, the budget approved for the People's Advocate for 2019 has decreased over the previous year. Therefore, enforcement and strengthening of the role of the NHRIs in providing remedies and supporting children's access to justice remains critical, including the provision of these bodies with sufficient resources to play their roles and improving implementation by the government authorities of the recommendations issued by these human rights institutions.

In Albania, there is no special jurisdiction for adjudication of labour disputes, such as labour courts, therefore labour disputes are brought before the ordinary courts along with other civil disputes. Moreover, Albanian civil

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216. Albania Common Core Document paras. 105–109 ([HRI/CORE/1/Add.124](#)).

217. CED paras. 10–11 ([CED/C/ALB/CO/1](#)).

218. Expert fees can be so high as to cause clients to abandon legally valid claims.

219. For example, UNDP's implementing NGO partners report numerous cases of women giving up on divorce proceedings simply because of the inability to pay for court fees and expert services.

220. Monitoring Report of Court Orders of the Tirana District Court for January-June 2020, Human Rights in Democracy Centre (HRDC), unpublished.

courts are overloaded with labour litigations (more than 3,000 per year<sup>221(1)</sup>), many lasting over five years, which considerably delays the access to justice. Albanian judges handling labour disputes often lack advanced knowledge on fundamental labour standards. International Labour Standards (ILS) are important tools for the development of national labour legislation and can contribute to strengthening the domestic case law related to the application of labour rights. The Albanian judges need to be familiarized with ILS, as well as the fundamental principles developed by the ILO's supervisory bodies. The Labour Disputes Resolution System in Albania needs to be consolidated to both facilitate the quick and free of charge access to justice of the vulnerable workers esp. women, unexperienced young workers etc. and to enable peaceful workplaces and productive enterprises.

## Gender equality and violence against women

In the area of gender equality and ending violence against women, Albania is party to two of the most important instruments: the Istanbul Convention and the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Both instruments spell out key measures and commitments to be taken by signatory parties in ensuring gender equality, women empowerment and tackling of inherent injustices.

In recent years, the country has taken important steps towards the elimination of gender-based discrimination and gender equality. A National Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan (NSGE) was adopted for the period 2016–2020 and legal improvements have been made, including in the areas of labour law and property rights. The gender quota introduced in the electoral legislation and other measures to promote women participation in political life have placed Albania in a prominent position vis-à-vis many other countries, including in the EU.<sup>222</sup> Albania is taking steps on mainstreaming gender into policy planning and has made progress in the inclusion of Gender Responsive Budgeting in its Medium-Term Budget Programme. In 2019, the government adopted

an action plan 'On the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325: Women, Peace and Security', which, as its first-year monitoring report indicates, is being implemented accordingly.

Nevertheless, many gaps persist. There is no clear information from government on the level of implementation of NSGI and Action Plan 2016–2020 and efforts to close the financial gap of 37.2 percent identified when the strategy was adopted. Albania still has not revised the burden of proof in favour of claimants in cases of alleged sex-based or gender-based discrimination as recommended by CEDAW, and the national gender equality machinery was weakened after the 2017 elections. Intersecting forms of discrimination that many women face because of their gender and other grounds (ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic situation) remain unaddressed. Meanwhile, women from rural areas and various marginalised groups have a very low participation and representation in public and political life, poor access to social protection schemes and low access to formal employment and the formal economy.<sup>223</sup>

There is low implementation of improvements in the labour legislation, including measures introduced to avoid sexual harassment in the work place and lack of employment guarantee schemes for all groups of women of working-age.

The three parties in the labour social dialogue—government, employers organisations, and workers organisations—support the ILO Convention 190 (C190) on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. Initiation of the national ratification process of C190, will enable clearer standards and definitions to be mainstreamed into the relevant legislation and, therefore, a stronger legal basis and argumentation for gender-related issues in industrial relations.

In the area of health, a number of issues remain problematic, including lack of protection of pregnant women from discrimination and a lack of evidence-based information on the situation of women diagnosed with breast cancer and their discrimination

221. <sup>(1)</sup>Statistical data obtained from <http://www.gjykata.gov.al>

222. For the Gender Equality Index, Albania scores 60.9 in the area of power, ranking in 6th place, including among EU member states.

223. UNCT Analysis of the Beijing +25 National Review Process.

at work. Furthermore, as CEDAW noted, women and girls in rural and remote areas and Roma and Egyptian women continue to have limited access to primary health-care and sexual and reproductive health-care services and are often unaware of the availability of such services. Women also face significant challenges in relation to property rights. Although, the Albanian legislation recognises *de jure* gender equality, in practise its implementation has been too often hindered by discriminatory cultural and social attitudes and practices at the institutional and community levels, as well as women's lack of knowledge of their rights. Notaries had often failed to include the wife's name on the contract of ownership, and property was frequently registered under the male spouses only. In addition, the law on registration of immovable properties, while marking an important step towards guaranteeing women's right to joint property ownership, is not applicable to properties registered before 2012 and does not provide for joint ownership in the case of co-habitation. As a consequence, during the administration of the property, especially in the legalization of dwellings or civil contracts carried out by husbands, women were not registered as legal (co-)owners of property. This, *inter alia*, has affected women's inheritance rights. Being not entitled as co-owners, it has been impossible for women to make their own will, and the presumed share owned by the wife is not calculated during the division of the property among heirs.

Rural women in Albania have been particularly affected by the legislation on property registration and ownership rights, which foresees the issuing of the certificate of ownership of agricultural land in the name of the head of household only. Also with regards to the formalization of illegal properties, the Agency for Legalization, Urban Planning and Integration of Informal Areas/Construction (ALUIZNI) has followed an incorrect property registration practice, whereby informal property has been registered under the name of the so-called "head of household", discriminating against women in practice, since the vast majority of heads of household are men.

Some of these issues have been raised by the CEDAW Committee, which notes with concern that only a small percentage of women in Albania (8 percent) own land,

the legislation is not being implemented effectively, and that women are frequently discriminated against in matters of inheritance. CEDAW has also raised as a concern the incorrect registration practice of ALUIZNI.<sup>224</sup>

The adoption of the new Law on the Notary in 2018 aims at addressing some of these issues by establishing clear procedures for issuing of inheritance certificates, as well as procedures for the transfer of immovable property. The law makes it obligatory for the notary to cite as purchaser/co-owner the non-present spouse, *ipso jure*, due to gaining the ownership rights during marriage, in compliance with the Family Code. However, the 2012 Law on the Registration of Immovable Property still needs to be revised to regulate the registration of co-ownership of property earned during the period of marriage before its entry into force, as well as with regards to co-habitation property rights.

Moreover, violence against women puts their health and lives at risk, however, their access to medical and psychological rehabilitation services is insufficient.<sup>225</sup>

The law on domestic violence was amended in 2018 to bring it in conformity with the Istanbul Convention and efforts have been taken to extend the multi-sectoral mechanisms that address cases of violence in several municipalities. Other laws that reference domestic violence have been amended and approved, including the laws on Social Housing and on Free Legal Aid, which provide survivors with much needed social and legal services and support. The first crisis management centre for cases of sexual violence was established in 2018, and the advocacy and monitoring role of civil society in this area have become more prominent.

Nonetheless, the root causes of violence against women and domestic violence (VAW–DV) remain largely unaddressed, and this is one of the areas that received the highest number of recommendations from other states during the third UPR review. The number of women murdered by their partners and other family members has increased and the government's response to addressing the issue is considered by civil society to be inadequate.

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224. CEDAW (2016). Concluding Observations on the 4<sup>th</sup> periodic report of Albania, 2016. See: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/840818?ln=en>

225. CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4 para.22 (c)

Women, particularly from disadvantaged communities, in particular women belonging to minority racial or ethnic groups or those living with disabilities, face challenges to access support services. Also these women are at an increased risk of poverty, which has a compounding effect on violence. Poverty and unemployment force many women to stay in abusive relations and fear to report on perpetrators owing to financial dependence and lack of other source of subsistence outside the marriage.<sup>226</sup>In a self-perpetuating vicious cycle, gender based violence keeps women in subordinate roles and contribute to the low level of political participation and to their lower level of education, skills and work opportunities.

Additional causes for the inadequate response to VAW include low levels of understanding and varying effectiveness at the local level in the application of a multi-sectoral approach to preventing and addressing violence, lack of adequate and accessible specialist support services, including protection for victims of all forms of VAW–DV, and of rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators, as well as lack of civil and criminal responsibility of public officials and failure to fulfil their duties. Under general international law and specific human rights covenants, States may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation.<sup>227</sup>

GREVIO, CEDAW and UPR point to these and other capacity gaps, common in many sectors, but the judiciary and health system particularly lag behind with regard to the fulfilment of their legal obligations. In their assessment, CEDAW has acknowledged the efforts by Albania to raise awareness among the judiciary and law enforcement personnel of gender equality and non-discrimination. However, it remains concerned, that the provisions of the Convention have been invoked only in one court case, which indicates that there is inadequate knowledge of the Convention among legal professionals, such as judges and lawyers, within society and among women themselves.

Insufficient budgeting at the national and local levels to implement strategic and legal obligations related to VAW–DV is another reason for the inadequate response. For example, Strategic Objective III of NSGE, 2016–2020, related to GBV and DV, has the largest financial gap (64%), and yet the percentage budget expenditure in this area in some of the main institutions (MoHSP, Ministry of Justice) and largest municipalities of the country (Elbasan, Korça, Shkodër, Tirana, Vlora) was negligible for 2018. In such situation, Albania fails to live up to its international human rights obligation to take steps beyond passing legislation to guarantee that women enjoy protection from violence and have access to remedies when their human rights are violated. Although legislation and policy are central and indispensable steps, the allocation of resources and budgetary means for implementation should be appropriate, as well as the coordination among responsible entities and adequate monitoring of implementation of such laws and policies.

In terms of resource allocation, there are insufficient means provided for awareness raising and specialist support services, which would have a greater effect upon the prevention and empowerment of victims in the long term, supporting them from re-entering the cycle of violence.<sup>228</sup>

While the main focus of government response has been on domestic violence, other forms of violence—rape, sexual harassment and stalking—remain largely unaddressed by the general prevention, protection and support measures. The same applies to online violence against women, including hate speech, which is present in Albanian society and affects all women, in particular young women, human rights defenders, women in politics, including parliamentarians, journalists, bloggers, and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

Patriarchal attitudes, harmful gender stereotypes, prejudices, often present also in the media, are among the root causes of gender inequality and violence against women in Albania. There is a lack

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226. A/72/502, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

227. CEDAW General Recommendation No.19 para. 9

228. Findings from a forthcoming monitoring report of the People's Advocate on Gender Budgeting with regard to measures to address GBV–DV for the year 2018, drafted with the support of UN Women.

of information among women on anti-discriminatory legal provisions, particularly with regard to the private sector's obligations, and as a result minimal use of complaint mechanisms, such as NHRIs and judiciary. In this context, NHRIs and civil society need to become more active in raising awareness and bringing forward anti-discrimination cases.

Addressing such gaps in the area of gender equality and violence against women is key for achievement of Goal 5, while, in particular, accelerating efforts are needed to reach targets 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.6 and 5.A.

### **Anti-discrimination and disadvantaged groups**

The anti-discrimination legislation in Albania has been improved to bring it in to conformity with international standards. Specific strategies and action plans have also been approved to provide special measures for the elimination of discrimination, protection and promotion of the rights of specific disadvantaged groups and minorities, including Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities and the LGBTI community. Furthermore, in 2017, a law on Protection of National Minorities was adopted, which, inter alia, provides better protection for Roma and Egyptian minorities by eliminating the distinction in domestic law between national minorities and linguistic minorities.

Despite the positive development, the legislation pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities and LGBTI communities still needs significant improvement. Human rights mechanisms point to the inadequate efforts to combat structural discrimination against these groups and ineffective implementation of the existing legislation, strategies and action plans, as well as lack of objective evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of these strategies. There is also need for effective investigation and prosecution of incitement to racial hatred and hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identify, including hate speech, allegedly perpetrated by politicians and representatives of the media. Other specific human

rights concerns for these groups, as raised by human rights bodies, include the following:

- ◇ Barriers for Roma and Egyptian minorities to access services in the areas of employment, education, health, housing and justice, and the negative impact of forced eviction in the context of major infrastructure projects, lack of non-implementation of recommendations of NHRIs with regard to Roma and Egyptian communities, and absence of reliable information on the number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions obtained in cases of acts of racial discrimination.<sup>229</sup>
- ◇ Lack of protection for LGBTI individuals from bullying and discrimination in the educational system, non-legal recognition of same-sex partnerships, absence of legal provisions allowing for legal gender recognition for transgender individuals, and challenges faced by this community to access health-care services.<sup>230</sup>
- ◇ Delays with effective implementation of the CRPD, including lack of a clear prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of disability and the absence of sanctions and remedies in cases of discrimination and denial of reasonable accommodation, the use of derogatory language against persons with disabilities prohibited in the country's laws, policies and public discourse, including the Constitution, insufficient progress with amendments to the national legislation that deny or restrict the legal capacity of persons with disabilities, and lack of specific measures taken to ensure that persons with disabilities have comprehensive access to the justice system.<sup>231</sup>

There are multiple reasons for unequal treatment and structural discrimination of marginalised groups in Albania, at the root of which stand prejudice, stereotypes, racism, homophobia and an inability to accept those that are different from the majority. These are also reflected in the lack of political will to improve, implement and enforce the relevant legal and policy framework. Additionally, weak capacities of public officials and lack of funding to implement

229. CERD, 2019. *Concluding Observations on Albania*. UPR, 2019.

230. UPR, 2019.

231. CRPP, 2019. *Concluding Observations on Albania*. UPR 2019.

the necessary measures for addressing discrimination and inequalities further exacerbate the enjoyment of human rights by these groups. Addressing the gaps that impede elimination of discrimination and the realisation of the rights of minority and disadvantaged groups is essential for achievement of all SDGs, and one of the main requisites for delivering on the leave no one behind commitment.

## Child's rights and protection

The legislation on child's rights in Albania has improved, with important developments made, including the Law 'On the Rights and Protection of the Child' and the 'Code of Criminal Justice for Children', adopted in 2017. In addition, amendments to the Criminal Code include harsher punitive measures for child abusers, including those responsible for online abuse of children. Measures to protect children from economic exploitation and those in street situations have been implemented, and a plan for deinstitutionalisation of children in residential institutions approved. Albania had also made amendments to the law on civil status, addressing the causes of non-registration at birth and statelessness, and empowering courts to regulate the registration of Albanian children coming from other countries with inadequate information.

Despite these improvements, in 2019, the Mid-term Implementation Report on the National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child 2016–2020 has affirmed that only 28 percent of the actions planned in the past two years have been fully realised, corresponding to 51 percent of indicators achieved and expenditure of only 9.4 percent of the financial resources planned. The non-realisation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and other international human rights treaties is evident in the fifth and sixth State Reports of Albania to the Committee of the Rights of the Child (2019).<sup>232</sup>

## Emigration and asylum

Albania has in recent years advanced legal provisions related to the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and foreign citizens in accordance with international standards. Albania remains primarily a country of transit for mixed movements, with the majority of new arrivals leaving the country a few days after arrival to travel onwards through the region.

The detention of unaccompanied children has not been a practice since 2016, although a few cases have been sporadically reported and addressed by the authorities.<sup>233</sup>

Albania needs to further strengthen its measures to protect the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in accordance with recommendations of UPR and the CMW Committee. This includes strengthening the capacities of first line officers such as border and migration police, as well as those working in reception centres for irregular migrants and asylum-seekers. This would serve to improve the situation of victims of trafficking and their access to justice, the identification of vulnerable persons and those with specific needs, as well as the provision of tailored services and referral mechanisms. Other areas for advancement include legal and administrative measures to prevent and eventually punish hate speech and hate crimes against migrants—which to date have not occurred—, as well as full and effective implementation of legislation enabling inclusion of refugees and migrants in health, education, housing and other basic services.

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232. 5th and 6th State Report of Republic of Albania to the Committee of the Rights of the Child, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=801&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=801&Lang=en)

233. United Nations country team submission to the UPR, 2019.

## Other human rights issues

There are a number of other human rights issues that equally need to be addressed based on the 2019 UPR recommendations and those of other human rights mechanisms. These bodies have called on GoA to undertake the following:

- ◇ Provide additional human and financial resources to the Ombudsperson and the Commissioner against Discrimination, particularly to ensure they establish offices in different regions of the country.
- ◇ Fight against corruption in public administration, inter alia, by improving the efficiency and transparency of public service delivery, training civil servants, establishing more transparent recruitment procedures and strengthening the administration's capacity to undertake merit-based recruitment.
- ◇ Integrate environmental and climate considerations into the national regulatory framework and take into account the vulnerabilities and needs of marginalised women, children, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities and members of other marginalised groups in developing policies on climate change and disaster risk management.
- ◇ Address comprehensively the phenomenon of blood feud, and provide support to ensure access to services to the people affected, particularly women and children.
- ◇ Reform the penitentiary system in order to ensure humane conditions for detention in line with international standards, particularly those of prisoners with disabilities, and for prison confinement of persons with mental health problems who have been excluded from criminal responsibility.
- ◇ Step up efforts to detect and prevent cases of trafficking in human beings during border controls, paying particular attention to unaccompanied children and trafficking of women and girls.
- ◇ Take effective measures to strengthen freedom of expression and independence of the media, to ensure a safe environment for investigative journalists and their protection from intimidation and attacks and to improve their working conditions, while ensuring anti-defamation and slander laws cannot be used simply to launch prosecution campaigns against journalists.

- ◇ Implement the recommendations of OSCE–ODHIR for improving the conduct of elections in Albania.
- ◇ Consolidate the entrenchment of property rights, notably by advancing the revision of property deeds, implementing the compensation scheme and advancing the digitalisation and mapping of property.
- ◇ Ensure access to health care for all, including by addressing health personnel deficiencies in rural areas and making improvements in the health sector to address the concern raised by CEDAW regarding mother-to-child transmission of HIV.
- ◇ Facilitate access to compulsory and full-time education for all girls and boys, including members of minority groups, those with disabilities and those living in rural and remote areas, including, inter alia, through the improvement of school infrastructure, teacher training and the provision of human, technical and financial resources.
- ◇ Take further measures to implement fully the law on the protection of national minorities in Albania, to ensure that the rights of persons from national minorities are protected, including their rights to self-identification, to learn their mother tongue and to use their minority language.

Last but not least, it is important that special consideration is given to the impact on the enjoyments of all human rights of the deadly earthquake that hit Albania in November 2019 and the current events related to the measures to contain the global pandemic of Coronavirus. Particular attention should be placed on the rights of disadvantaged groups, who are often the most affected during emergencies.

## Human rights, good governance and the environment nexus

To protect the environment, safeguard human rights and build the resilience of communities, especially of groups in the most vulnerable situations, against increased environmental risks and pollution, efforts made to strengthen governance, the rule of law, and transparency in environmental matters should remain a priority in Albania. The country actively participates in work under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision



Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) ratified on 27 June 2001 and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) acceded on 16 June 2009. Both instruments can be used as procedural cross-cutting tools to support the country's efforts in the implementation, follow-up and review of a number of SDGs, in particular Goal 16, as well as Goals 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, in conjunction with Goal 17. To support their implementation, three Aarhus Centres were established in Albania with OSCE support to serve as a platform between public authorities, members of the public and business operators in addressing environmental matters and facilitating effective access to information and public participation. The country's efforts must be scaled up as indicated in the 2017 Aarhus Convention, the national implementation report on the Protocol on PRTRs<sup>234</sup> and studies on access to justice<sup>235</sup> in (a) promoting effective public access to environmental information online, including as open data and through the PRTR, and as a part of a multi-hazard early warning system, (b) strengthening capacities of public authorities to carry out public participation procedures, especially with regard to water- and energy-related decision making, and (c) raising awareness among the judiciary, review bodies and law enforcement about the Convention's obligations, including on article 3, paragraph 8, protecting the public against retaliation for exercising their rights, specialisation in environmental matters and promoting support to members of the public seeking justice on environmental matters. Pursuant to the call by the Convention's Meeting of the Parties, Albania shall proceed with accession to the amendment to the Aarhus Convention on genetically modified organisms without delay.

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234. See <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/national-reports>

235. See respective studies for Serbia, [www.unece.org/env/pp/tfaj/analytical\\_studies.html](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/tfaj/analytical_studies.html)

# 6. Cross-boundary, Regional and Sub-regional Perspectives

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## Regional Context

While the goal of EU accession is considered a main driving force behind economic transformation and stability of the region, the Western Balkans remains at a crossroads among global geopolitical forces.

Since the turn of the millennium, the Western Balkans have made much progress towards peace and stability. However, lack of trust and reconciliation, combined with persistent ethno-nationalist rhetoric and action, continue to pose a risk and an impediment for sustainable peace and development in the region. In light of this UN agencies, brought together under the Secretary-General's prevention platform, recommended the development of an UN-wide strategic approach to support the region in the areas of dialogue, trust-building and reconciliation to foster sustainable peace and support development. To that goal, an "Inter-Agency Task Force" (IATF), consisting of UN entities at headquarters and on the ground, developed an action plan to enhance UN-wide coordination on trust-building and reconciliation support. The Plan aims to illustrate how the UN can best complement and support initiatives already underway across the region, in close coordination with Member States and other key partners. Under the Plan, the UN is ensuring strong coordination and cooperation with international partners in the region in these areas, particularly the EU and the OSCE.

Despite the involvement of the UN Security Council, the establishment of an international criminal tribunal, enormous financial and human resources (including through the EU, OSCE and UN) and the EU's regional accession strategy pushing for, among other things, the strengthening the rule of law, divisiveness and social tensions remain. Several regional and bilateral disputes still simmer, many of them related to border demarcation, war-crimes jurisdiction and the interpretation of war history, the fate of missing persons, and ethnic minority rights. Kosovo's<sup>236</sup> status remains unresolved, splitting the region—and the international community—into those who recognise Kosovo, and those who do not. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as that in Kosovo, remain on the agenda of the Security Council whose meetings, which take place several times per year, regularly feature acrimonious debates with little progress recorded on the situation.

Albania has cultivated close ties with Kosovo. Albania supports Kosovo's international recognition and membership in regional and international organizations. Albania and Kosovo coordinate their foreign policy, including on issues affecting Albanian minorities in the region, co-locate diplomatic offices and hold regular joint government sessions. Notably, Albania's officials across the political spectrum spoke in defence of the former Kosovo Liberation Army leaders that have been indicted by the Specialist Prosecutor of the Kosovo

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236. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

A number of diplomatic initiatives launched in recent years have supported progress in regional cooperation, including the Berlin Process led by several EU member states, with the accompanying EU connectivity agenda and the EU Western Balkans engagement strategy, as well as the summit-level Brdo-Brijuni process meetings of Western Balkan leaders (led by Croatia and Slovenia), and others.

Specialist Chambers, asserting their innocence and questioning the credibility of the process. At the same time, relations suffer occasional strains, for example in the context of regional cooperation initiatives such as the “Mini-Schengen” proposal (see also below) which Kosovo had initially refused to join despite Albania’s support. The Kosovo issue remains a major obstacle in the otherwise improved relations between Tirana and Belgrade. Albania also maintains close links to Albanian communities in the region, including in Serbia and North Macedonia. In spite of overall positive relations in the region, the legacy of past disputes continues to impact on bilateral relations. During 2020, Albania and Greece resumed discussions on the delineation of the maritime border and agreed to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted further regional collaboration after demonstrating how interconnected and interdependent regional economies are. However, gaps in regional cooperation remain. From the very outset, the pandemic propelled protectionist measures across the Western Balkans, much like in the rest of world, including disruptions in transport links and supply chains and export restrictions on medical supplies and food products. The protectionist measures were later revisited, but the situation demonstrated the need for closer trade relations which could have, for example, assisted in the procurement and production of medical equipment.

Observers theorise that progress on the rule of law, increasing private-sector opportunities and allowing more media freedom, are slower than desired for the general population due to continued instrumentalization by leaders of legacy conflicts and ethno-nationalist narratives. This also limits the opportunities for a ‘wind of change’, including for more youth and women to be involved in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, the green light given to both North Macedonia and Albania to open EU accession negotiations, alongside a renewed effort on the part of EU (with its new Commission) to lead Belgrade–Pristina dialogue, offers opportunities to address democratisation challenges.

A number of diplomatic initiatives launched in recent years have supported progress in regional cooperation, including the Berlin Process led by several EU member states, with the accompanying EU connectivity agenda and the EU Western Balkans engagement strategy, as well as the summit-level Brdo-Brijuni process meetings of Western Balkan leaders (led by Croatia and Slovenia), and others. Albania plays a dynamic leadership role in fostering closer cooperation in the Western Balkans. This is evident through the country’s active engagement with several regional coordination mechanisms and processes in the fields of (among others) economic development and trade, strengthening transport and communications infrastructure and interconnectivity, and peacebuilding through dialogue with a focus

on youth. Examples include the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (based in Tirana and established in 2016), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Regional Cooperation Council (whose current Secretary General is a former Albanian Minister of EU Integration), the Multi-annual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans, and participation in sub-regional cooperation mechanism established with Serbia and North Macedonia known as “Mini-Schengen.” Regional cooperation has been made a priority during Albania’s OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office in 2020. Whereas the impact remains unclear, it is illustrative of a continuing rhetoric of sub-regional cooperation.

The Western Balkan economies are already closely integrated with the EU, which is their largest trading partner and largest source of incoming foreign investment and other financial flows (with the share declining in favour of China), including remittances. The EU is also the main destination for emigration, while monetary and financial systems are strongly dependent on the Euro.

The close economic relations with the EU have been boosted by, among others, the Stabilisation and Association Agreements between the EU and individual Western Balkan countries, which also include provisions for a free-trade area. Implementation of these provisions means elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers, liberalisation of trade in services and investment regimes, and far-reaching harmonisation of various trade and investment-related regulations and institutions, especially in the areas of competition policy, state aid and public procurement. The agreement with North Macedonia entered into force in 2004, with Albania in 2009, Montenegro in 2010, Serbia in 2013, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015, and Kosovo in 2016. In addition, the EU has promoted a network of horizontal free trade agreements between candidate countries using the umbrella of CEFTA, which currently involves all Western Balkan countries, as well as Moldova. Progress in EU accession can further strengthen economic ties between the Western Balkan countries and the EU, with benefits for both sides.

Meanwhile, some conflict-related cases are still pending with the International Residual Mechanism

for Criminal Tribunal and with local courts in the region. Tribunal officials have pointed out in the Security Council that denial and glorification of war crimes had been destabilising the Western Balkans and preventing reconciliation and called for “urgent political leadership” and for the international community to speak out on the issue. The region also faces other disconcerting human rights challenges, such as attacks on journalists, discrimination against minorities, and poor protection of migrants and refugees. According to government figures (2015), there are still some 300,000 internally displaced persons in the region, many of whom are subject to discrimination and economic insecurity.

While all Western Balkan countries have adopted a quota system for female parliamentarians, women continue to face obstacles to participating in politics and decision making. GBV is widespread, and there is little accountability for survivors of violence. Rule of law issues persist, and corruption is high. Under the 2018 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, evaluating countries on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean), Western Balkan countries all receive scores of between 36 (Albania) and 45 (Montenegro). With regard to migrants and refugees, numbers of arrivals in the region remain high since the peak of 2015/16 (although in Albania and other Western Balkan countries, numbers have also been increasing year-on-year since 2017). Mixed movements remain transitory in nature, as most travel through in order to reach EU Member States in Western/Northern Europe. However, in line with EU Accession aspirations, many Western Balkan countries have in recent years made efforts to enhance asylum systems and opportunities for effective integration, so that the region can also offer durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers. In some Western Balkan countries (particularly those with EU borders) mixed movements continue to face challenging conditions, especially in relation to reception and access to rights.

In the spring 2020, Western Balkan countries—like most of the world—needed to impose tight restrictions on economic life to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis has severe ramifications for the economies of the Western Balkans as both aggregate supply and aggregate demand contract simultaneously. Due

to the situation, according to the World Bank,<sup>237</sup> the WB region is projected to enter a recession in 2020, whose magnitude depends on the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe with a baseline scenario of GDP contraction of three percent, but with substantial differences among countries. These differences are based upon the economic structure and pre-crisis vulnerabilities of countries, with for Albania a downside scenario of GDP fall of about five percent in 2020, causing a more severe recession than the global financial crisis. The pandemic led to disruptions in the flow of goods and people due to the closure of EU and regional borders. At the same time, the leaders of the Western Balkan region took steps to enhance regional cooperation in the face of the pandemic. Leaders in the region agreed to work towards the free movement of goods, services, capital and people, including through maintaining “green lanes” established during the lockdown, and to pursue bilateral and multilateral agreements in this regard. Almost all Western Balkan states and Kosovo, which are mostly higher middle-income economies, are experiencing population decline due to falling birth rates and increased emigration. It is estimated that close to one-third of the resident population of the Western Balkans is living outside of the region. The World Bank has noted that in the long run, the loss of qualified workers and the shortage of skills may adversely affect competitiveness, growth and economic convergence. Education in many countries in the region perpetuates the status quo, as it is often segregated along ethnic lines, based on differentiated curricula with separate interpretations of history. There are also few opportunities at school for learning an additional language that is spoken locally or regionally. According to the World Bank, less than half (44%) of the working-age population in the Western Balkans has a job. Youth unemployment was at 35 percent in 2018 across the region, and the Western Balkans have some of the lowest female labour force participation rates in Europe.

In addition to economic risks, the region faces weather-related shocks putting pressure on the Balkan’s agriculture and forestry sector. The World Bank has found the Western Balkans to be emerging

as one of the planet’s warming hot spots due to climate change, with a risk of more frequent heatwaves and a significant increase in summer temperatures, and decline in rainfall, increasing the risk of wildfires. Water availability in the summer could decrease, and the region’s electricity supplies could be put at risk. Given the region’s predominantly rain-fed agriculture, the sector in the Western Balkans is vulnerable to changing rainfall patterns and increasing temperatures, putting crop yields at risk. Moreover, researchers predict increased flood risks, particularly along the Danube, Sava and Tisza rivers. Such climate-related disasters will have an adverse effect on the GDP of the various countries, on the agricultural and forestry sectors, as well as on peoples’ livelihoods. Economic growth in the region is dependent upon climate-sensitive natural resources, implicating high costs with regard to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Albania is a member of the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe (DPPI-SEE), based in Skopje, North Macedonia, that aims to address disaster risk reduction and preparedness measures at a sub-regional scale, facilitating cross-border cooperation. Engagement in the organization will contribute to a stronger focus on climate-induced risks at sub-regional scale and further strengthen relations among countries in the Western Balkans through regional cooperation, risk assessment and data sharing.

Whereas the countries in the Western Balkans share a high level of biodiversity compared to the rest of Europe, they also share environmental challenges. Pollution across the region threatens the health of people, causes damage to the economy, puts pressure on already strained economic resources and threatens the loss of resources in the future. Yet, a common regional response is missing. On the whole, only a small share of urban wastewater is treated before being discharged into rivers and the sea. The Adriatic Sea and its coastline are polluted by plastic waste and other pollutants entering from the rivers and coastal cities. Uncontrolled dumping of waste is still prevalent, and modern waste collection, recycling and sanitary landfills are still in the early stages of development. Pollution hotspots (contaminated soil

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237. [documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/301261588088338100/pdf/The-Economic-and-Social-Impact-of-COVID-19-Setting-the-Stage.pdf](https://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/301261588088338100/pdf/The-Economic-and-Social-Impact-of-COVID-19-Setting-the-Stage.pdf)

and chemicals) remain a concern across the region, and several cities in the Western Balkans rank among the worst in Europe in terms of air pollution. In 2019, UN Environment found air pollution to be responsible for up to one in five premature death in 19 Western Balkan cities, and on average people living in Western Balkan cities lose up to 1.3 years of life due to air pollution, mainly caused by emissions of thermal power plants that use lignite coal and household heating.

The region is prone to numerous natural hazards, including, but not limited to those of hydro-meteorological and geological origins, for example earthquakes, floods, droughts, forest fires and landslides. However, regional approach to monitoring, preparing and responding to disasters and hazards could be further strengthened. Regional coordination and cooperation, leveraging expertise, capacities, resources and information across the region and with EU counterparts would make the region better prepared for future disasters.

## Analysis of Relevant Regional, Sub-regional and Trans-boundary Factors and Trends

Regional economic integration and cross-boundary cooperation has been the main mechanism used during the last two decades of EU interventions in the post-conflict recovery of Western Balkan countries. The results of these efforts are most visible in the field of trade. The number of bilateral agreements on elimination of trade barriers and harmonisation of trade regulations were transformed in 2006 into CEFTA,<sup>238</sup> though more can be achieved, and there are still many barriers impeding progress towards economic integration.<sup>239</sup> These impediments include, among other things, unfair competition and non-tariff barriers, various constraints to the expansion of the private sector, investments and entrepreneurship,

and a lack of commitment and political will to deepen the cooperation. In general, the agricultural sectors of the Balkan countries compete with each other more than they complement each other.

Albania is a Party to the UNECE Convention on Long-range Trans-boundary Air Pollution (since December 2005), its 1985 Sulphur Protocol, on the Reduction of Sulphur Emissions or their Trans-boundary Fluxes by at least 30 percent (since June 2009), and its 1988 Protocol on NO<sub>x</sub>, concerning the Control of Nitrogen Oxides or their Trans-boundary Fluxes (since June 2009). While there have been positive developments in emissions reductions and in improvement of emissions inventories, some challenges remain. In particular, these relate to nitrogen oxides emissions, which are still high. Also, continuity is needed in the institutional arrangements for development of air pollutant emission inventories. Improvements are needed in the areas of accuracy, transparency, completeness, comparability and consistency. Correlation with the greenhouse gas inventory prepared under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is recommended.

Albania is also a Party to the UNECE Convention on Trans-boundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, which helps to protect people and the environment against industrial accidents by preventing such accidents as far as possible, reducing their frequency and severity and mitigating their effects. As a Party, Albania has an obligation to submit reports on implementation of the Convention. Due to its strong cross-border dimension, failure to provide information by one of the Parties has adverse effects on efforts to enhance the prevention of and preparedness for industrial accidents by other Parties, in particular neighbouring countries. Albania failed to submit its implementation report for the most recent ninth reporting period (2016–2018) by the deadline,<sup>240</sup> and is encouraged to do so without further delay. The country is also a beneficiary of the Convention's Assistance and Cooperation Programme under which it has been receiving assistance to enhance its capacities for the prevention, preparedness and response to industrial

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238. Members are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

239. In November 2018, Kosovo\* introduced 100 percent tariffs on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

240. Deadline for the submission of national implementation reports for the ninth reporting period was 31 October 2019.

accidents and trans-boundary cooperation in this respect. Albania is encouraged to enhance the level of the Convention's implementation as this will contribute to achievement of the priorities for action set out in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and attainment of SDGs relevant for the prevention, preparedness and response to industrial accidents and reduction of technological disaster risks.

As many of the country's major water resources are trans-boundary, implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Trans-boundary Watercourses and International Lakes by Albania, as a Party to this Convention, is important. To better deal with the challenges that such implementation requires, some recent donor initiatives include the following: i) a Climate Action Group, set up within the Energy Community of South East Europe and acting as a platform for cooperation between institutions in charge of energy, climate change and environment, ii) the Energy Community and the Balkan Green Foundation have set up the so-called Sustainability Forum, which brings together interested parties, focusing on transition towards sustainable energy, iii) the EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA) in the Western Balkans and Turkey, a project that seeks to be a major driver of reform and development in environmental governance through compliance with the EU environmental *acquis*.

# 7. Financing Landscape and Opportunities

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In line with the Addis Ababa Action Plan and the 2030 Agenda, to finance the global development agenda, the world must respond to a dual challenge: mobilising societies' resources for sustainability and doing so in a manner that leaves no one behind. All actors and stakeholders have a contribution to make, from governments to private sector representatives.

This section analyses the financial landscape in Albania and discusses the domestic, international and private and public financing flows. Together the COVID-19 pandemic and the earthquake in 2019 caused a major interruption in domestic and international flows in and out of Albania. The pandemic emerged at a time when the world was already on an unsustainable path towards achieving the SDGs. The pandemic has worsened existing vulnerabilities and the stimulus packages adopted by government have tightened the fiscal space in Albania. The country is further challenged by growing debt burdens and declining investment, trade and tourism, which collectively exacerbate the socio-economic situation. The analysis made in this section is based upon figures prior to COVID-19.

## Foreign Finance

### International private finance

Albania has experienced a stable but slow increase in Foreign Direct Investments over the past decade. In 2018, the inflow amounted to USD 1,294 million (7.9% of GDP), up from USD 974 million in 2008.<sup>241</sup> EU countries accounted for 38.5 percent of total FDI in 2017, a decline from the peak years mainly due to two large energy sector investments from non-EU countries. Further efforts are needed to support the diversification and attraction of FDI inflows, particularly in sectors such as tourism, manufacturing and agribusiness, to enable sustainable economic growth. In this regard, increasing investor confidence is critical and calls for further enhancements in the business environment.

Remittances peaked in 2008, when they totalled USD 1,866 million (Figure 37). Even if the inflow of remittances were to remain considerable, the total amount has been steadily decreasing from its peak years, to USD 1,450 million in 2018 (9.5% of GDP). The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to hit hard the remittance flows into Albania.

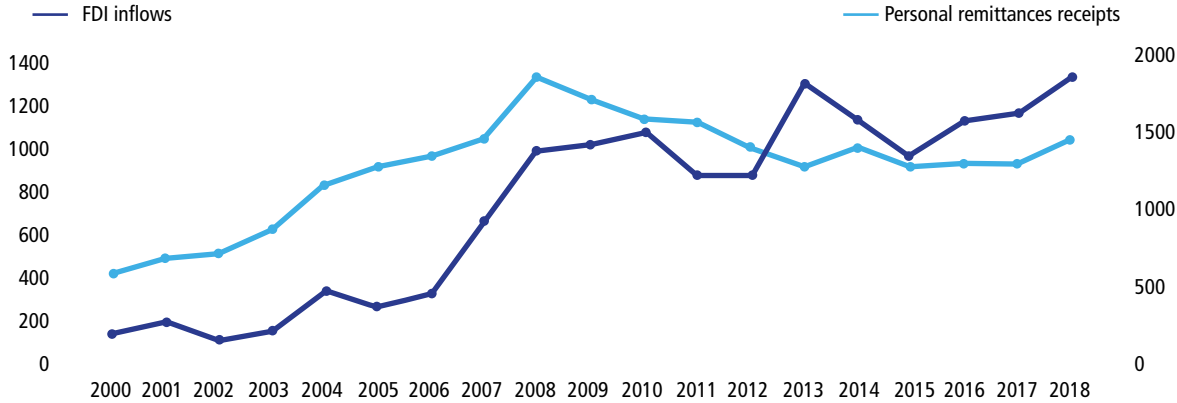
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241. UNCTAD, <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/CountryProfile/GeneralProfile/en-GB/008/index.html>



**Figure 37.** FDI and remittance flows (USD million) into Albania, 2000–2018 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD)

**Financial flows trends**  
(millions of US \$)



**International public finance**

The net Official Development Assistance (ODA) disbursements amounted to USD 342.9 million in 2018, representing 2.3 percent of Gross National Income (GNI), a sharp increase from 1.3 percent of GNI in 2017 when the net ODA disbursements were USD 168 million. In 2018, the bilateral share of the gross ODA of USD 464 million was 49.3 percent. In terms of sectoral allocations, 54 percent of the bilateral ODA went to other social infrastructure and services while 24 percent was directed to education.

Official data on the current percentage of either ODA for Albania or of private funds allocated towards gender equality and the empowerment of women is unavailable. ODA data on funds from the OECD DAC members<sup>242</sup> is tagged by the OECD’s Gender Marker, however, data is collected at the “commitment” level and does not reflect actual disbursement or receipt.<sup>243</sup> In the future, data on the actual amounts/shares of donor and private sector funds allocated towards gender equality and the empowerment of women is foreseen to become available through the External

Assistance Management Information System (EAMIS) database, which is operated by MFE and part of Albania’s emerging Integrated Planning System.

The top donors in Albania include the EU, Germany, Switzerland and the United States (Figure 38). The EU’s financing window Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) III for 2021–2027 is expected to increase the funding allocated to the Western Balkans. Whereas the main objective of the IPA III fund is to prepare Albania for EU accession, some of the objectives overlap with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Meanwhile, the IPA II envelope 2014–2020 for Albania totalled EUR 639 million.

The share of ODA is expected to increase as a result of the recovery efforts following the earthquake that devastated the country in November 2019. A donor conference organised in February 2020 raised EUR 1.15 billion for earthquake reconstruction and recovery.<sup>244</sup>

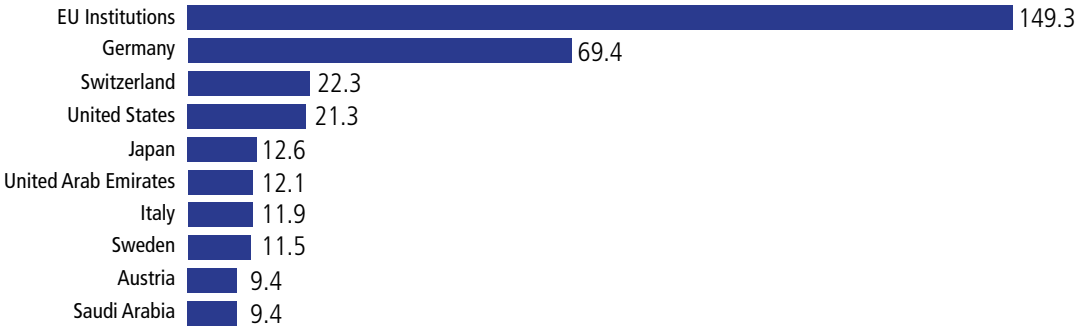
As the donor landscape changes, the role of development partners from the south is also evolving. Albania is receiving support from Turkey, China, the

242. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

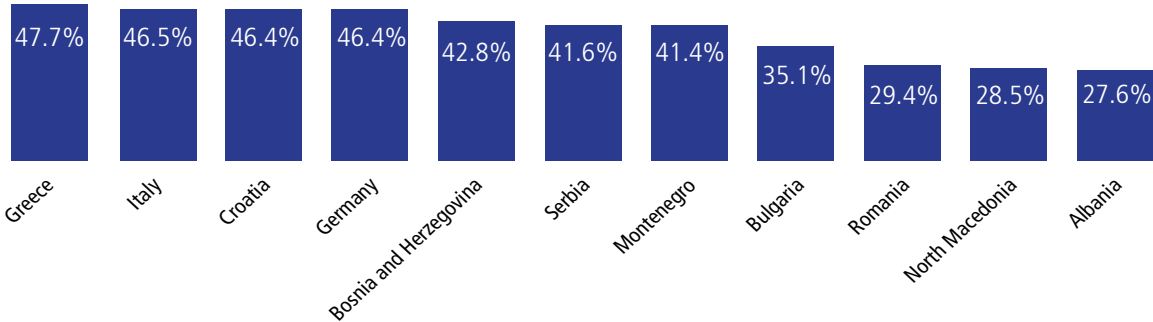
243. [https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DV\\_DCD\\_GENDER](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DV_DCD_GENDER)

244. [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pledge\\_statement\\_final\\_0.pdf#page=2](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pledge_statement_final_0.pdf#page=2)

**Figure 38.** Top ten donor countries to Albania (Gross ODA, USD million), 2017–2018 average (OECD, Development Assistance Committee, DAC)



**Figure 39.** Government revenue (% of GDP) in selected countries, 2018



Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, October 2019

Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD), Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (Islamic Development Bank Group), ADFD, Arab Fund for economic and social development, and the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID). Further efforts are needed to align their support more closely with the SDG goals and targets.

The International Financial Institutions are a major source of funds for Albania’s development projects, especially for infrastructure, and are increasingly tying their activities to the SDG objectives. Traditionally, loans from the World Bank, European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and Council of Europe Development Bank as well as from bilateral lenders, such as KfW and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), are lent for individual projects and managed by

government ministries. Such loans assist reform efforts and help prioritise governance improvements across the economy, private sector competitiveness, energy diversification and low-carbon transition.

## Domestic Incentives and Landscape

### Public and Private Finance

Albania has taken steps to modernise its tax administration. However, continuous efforts are still needed to further strengthen it, broaden the tax base and increase compliance, as tax evasion remains high and the country has one of the lowest government revenues in Europe (Figure 39). The reform against informality

**Table 4.** Albania's SDG-related expenditure, in decreasing order of GDP, 2017

SDG	% of GDP
3 Health	2.60
10 Reduced inequalities	2.49
9 Innovation and infrastructure	2.43
4 Education	2.38
16 Peace and justice	1.96
8 Economic growth	1.71

Source: UNRCO, *Budget Analysis of SDG Related Spending in Albania: 2015–2017, 2018*

should remain an ongoing priority, and inter-ministerial collaboration should be strengthened in this regard.

Albania's revenue performance increased between 2015 and 2018, supported by the growing economy. In 2018, tax revenue stood at 18.6 percent of GDP.<sup>245</sup> Although the revenue performance was above 2017 levels (+4.6%) it was still below target (-1.9%), due largely to underperformance of VAT and excises.<sup>246</sup>

According to the mid-term review of the 2014–2020 Public Finance Management (PFM) strategy, several challenges were encountered in public investment management, including fragmented approval, appraisal, selection and monitoring processes for public investment projects, Public-Private Partnerships and concessions, analysis of monitoring, reporting and mitigating fiscal risks, online access to the treasury for all budget institutions, and the creation of a separate pillar for Domestic Revenue Mobilisation. The new national PFM 2020–2022 strategy was recently approved and aims to address the challenges identified in this review. The level of public debt has remained high (67.8% of GDP in 2019) and is expected to rise further due to COVID-19. To support the financing needs, government successfully placed a EUR 500 million seven-year Eurobond in October 2018. In the midst of the COVID-19 response, the government plans to go ahead with issuing another seven-year EUR 650 million Eurobond, in June 2020.

## National Budget Allocations

With regard to the national budget allocations for SDG implementation, the Resident Coordinator Office carried out a study in 2018 to analyse domestic financing of the SDGs. The study analysed how the NSDI and government budget allocations aligned with the SDGs between 2015 and 2017. In 2017, out of 17 SDGs, the Albanian government allocated the largest shares (in decreasing order) to SDGs 3, 10, 9, 4, 16 and 8 (Table 4). According to the same study, allocation for achieving SDG 5 (gender equality), was only 0.05% of GDP in 2017. However, it is particularly difficult to identify gender-related spending. In this study, targeted expenditures which were identified and classified under SDG 5 in line with the general methodology for this analysis, are usually related with management and administration costs as well as particular events on gender issues. According to UN Women Albania, 24 budget programmes were engendered by 2017, constituting roughly 3,2% of the budget in 2017.

On the poverty reduction goal (SDG 1), the GoA spent on average 0.97 percent of GDP between 2015 and 2017.<sup>247</sup> Comparing the sectoral budget allocations in Albania with those of neighbouring countries, it becomes evident that some of the allocations are low. For example, in 2014, Albania spent 2.9 percent of GDP on public health, while Croatia and Serbia each spent 6.4 percent, and Montenegro, 3.7 percent.

245. World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GC.TAX.TOTL.GD.ZS?end=2018&locations=AL&start=1995&view=chart>

246. EU Annual Progress Report 2019.

247. Braho A, and Ymeri S, 2018. *Budget Analysis of SDG-Related Spending in Albania: 2015–2017*. UNRCO.

Similarly, Albania's share of GDP allocated to social protection between the years 1995 and 2015 was considerably less than in neighbouring countries.<sup>248</sup>

The national statistical agency, INSTAT, tracks achievement of the SDGs and the progress made towards achieving the targets.<sup>249</sup> In its 2018 report, the SDG with least progress was SDG 17 on Partnerships for the Goals, signalling that further efforts are needed to mobilise institutional, human and financial resources in the country for accelerating SDG implementation.

## Alternative Finance

New and innovative financing mechanisms must be found to help bridge the gap between what is available and what is needed to achieve the SDGs in Albania by 2030. There is an urgent need to strengthen and scale up existing innovative mechanisms and explore new ones.

There is little evidence of the use in Albania of alternative finance, such as impact investing, impact bonds (Social or Development Impact Bonds, Blue Bonds, Green Bonds), equity-based crowdfunding, forecast-based financial mechanisms, microfinance, or debt-for-nature swaps. Such instruments may have the potential for leveraging SDG financing, as well as supporting implementation of the national recovery efforts after two successive crises. In general, while some of these products have been used around the globe, the Western Balkans has seen limited access to them. In order to gain better access to international impact investors and funds, there is a need to enhance project preparation capacities, systematic monitoring and reporting, as well as overall coordination between donors and funding source.

## Forecasts for Potential SDG Finance Sources

International financial inflows, particularly remittances, have been fuelling consumption-based economic growth. However, current investment levels are too low to sustain growth over the long term. These financial sources appear insufficient to put Albania on the path to sustainable development, and the existing funds are insufficiently allocated towards achievement of the SDGs and the priorities set in the NSDI.

The government has set certain priority areas for COVID-19 recovery, including, among others, energy and digitalisation. Both areas present many new opportunities for mobilising finance. In the energy sector, the Climate Investment Platform launched at the Climate Action Summit 2019 could be used to facilitate access to project preparation funding and de-risking instruments to ensure bankability. Similarly, UNDP's De-risking Renewable Energy Investment could be used to promote and scale up private sector investment in the renewable energy sector.

With regard to digitalisation, technology and innovation, financial institutions play a key role in providing funds for technology development and innovation by using various funding lines and vehicles (e.g. corporate venturing, venture capital, innovation funds) for identifying viable and bankable innovations and business opportunities. Also, national budget allocation for R&D should be increased to support the level of innovation and economic competitiveness. According to various estimates, Albania devotes 0.2 percent of GDP to R&D, among the lowest allocations in the world.<sup>250</sup>

Going forward, it is important to maintain momentum with all parties towards achieving the SDGs and ensuring that financing the Goals is aligned with the ambition of Agenda 2030 and the country's current development priorities. The capacities of the government to identify and integrate into the

248. Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Albania, 2018.

249. INSTAT, 2018. *Sustainable Development Goals Report*.

250. UNESCO, <http://uis.unesco.org/apps/visualisations/research-and-development-spending/> MAPS Report pg. 19 [https://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/MAPS\\_Report\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/MAPS_Report_web.pdf)

national budgetary framework more equitable and adequate financing to achieve the SDGs need to be strengthened. Also, further efforts are needed in engaging with the private sector. The private sector can play a stronger role in the country's economic growth, as well as in channelling investments and funding towards sustainable development and the SDGs. To date, UNCT has had some success in involving private companies in successful SDG campaigns. Such efforts should be expanded.

In line with SDG 17, global partnership for sustainable development should be strengthened and with a focus on multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources. Multi-stakeholder partnerships in Albania, including public, public-private and civil society and foundations, are still an emerging concept. A recent example of successful partnership between the UN and Vodafone was established to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations. Strengthening partnerships with the private sector, civil society have a strong potential to raise awareness of the sustainable development agenda and to accelerate SDG implementation in Albania.

## Impact of Covid-19 on the Domestic Financing Landscape

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a severe challenge to the Government's ability to maintain macroeconomic stability. The Government has issued two fiscal stimulus packages (on 21 March 2020 and 13 April 2020), consisting of budget spending, sovereign guarantees, wage subsidies for those businesses and individuals in dire economic distress and a mixture of tax moratoriums. The two fiscal packages together, amounted to about 2.8 per cent of GDP. By September 2020, the national budget has been revised three times, to accommodate for the dynamic situation. According to the revised budgets in March and April, the fiscal deficit was set to reach 4 per cent of GDP, and then 8.9 per cent of GDP in July 2020, to finance the measures to cope with the impacts, of the coronavirus. Compared to the budget approved in December 2019, the revised budget sees a drop of LEK 63 billion in revenue. The first revision included spending reallocations, spending increases, especially

in the health sector, and sovereign guarantees to support affected businesses. The second revision included an increase of LEK 30 billion, to support the priority sectors through public investments. The government has also supported the economy through various tax deferrals and temporary suspension of requirements for loan classifications.

Public debt was first expected to rise to 68.8% of gross domestic product, up four percentage points from a budgeted 64.8% in December 2019, and it is now expected to increase to above 75%. To bridge the financing gap and to support Albania's macroeconomic stability, the IMF, WB, EU and EBRD and development partners, have stepped up their support. IMF has provided US\$190.5 million financial assistance, under the Rapid Financing Instrument. This support provides critical resources for the health care sector and supports jobs and businesses. It also limits the decline in international reserves. The European Union has provided EUR 4 million, to support the health sector, and EUR 46 million of budget support, to assist the social and economic recovery. The EU also provides support at the macro-economic level, through an additional amount of EUR 180 million, in favourable term loans.

Despite the swift national response to the pandemic, as well as the international support received to sustain macroeconomic stability, the global recession is hampering socio-economic development and the achievement of the SDGs. Education and health systems are suffering, inequalities are growing, unemployment is raising and at the same time fiscal resources are plunging and public debt is growing. Yet, at the same time, the SDGs can provide a path to tackling the very fragilities and shortcomings that the pandemic has exposed and therefore, reinforced efforts and increased ambition followed by coherent policy decisions are required to ensure the achievement of SDGs in Albania.

# 8. Analysis of Risks

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## Overview of Potential Risks

According to Coface,<sup>251</sup> and as described earlier in this report, Albania is regarded as a country with an uncertain political and economic outlook and a business environment with weaknesses that can have a significant impact on corporate behaviour.

The present CCA identifies and analyses a number of key risk areas, mainly political stability, economic policy and economic structure risks, institutional capacities, limits to democratic space and rights, inequitable and unbalanced growth, public health, environmental and climate risks, and sub-regional disputes. These risks are explored in a matrix form in Appendix A. Analysis of the risks, including mitigation actions, are important as they may affect negatively the country's development trajectory towards EU integration and achievement of Agenda 2030, as laid out below.

### Political risks

While there is broad consensus on the main political opportunities and challenges that Albania faces, the deep polarisation of the political class presents obstacles to progress. Conflict over each step of reform in areas such as election administration, judicial reform implementation and main national investment priorities dominate public debate, squeezing out longer term sustainable development policymaking.

### Economic risks

Two major factors—the devastating earthquake of November 2019 followed by the Covid-19 crisis—have significantly affected the economy with limited liquidity buffers. There will be a negative impact on the current account due shrinking exports and tourism industry—a driver of growth over the past two years. FDIs and remittance flows will also likely shrink. The associated risks related to the sustainability of public finance and high levels of government debt, which will likely reach 85 percent of GDP, might lead to an inability to implement PFM reforms, with reduced fiscal space and reduced budgeted and effectiveness of public services. Moreover, FDIs have in recent years been dominated by two large investment projects<sup>252</sup> that are now near completion. An improved rule of law and enabling business climate will be necessary to incentivise new investments after the pandemic

### Justice and rule of law

As analysed in the political section, the slow pace of implementation of the justice reform that was kicked off in 2016, as well as the current absence of three top-level courts, might compound the already low level of trust in justice, weaken the rule of law and be a critical factor in impeding the country's pursuit of other critical reforms.

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251. <https://globaleledge.msu.edu/countries/albania/risk>

252. Statcraft hydro dams and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline.

## Institutional capacities

Weak capacities of the public administration to implement policy reforms, widespread corruption, unaddressed skills gaps and limited commitment to implementing structural reforms all seriously risk retarding any reforms, reducing potential growth and social equity and risk further lowering public trust,<sup>253</sup> increasing emigration. Increased support for capacity building, addressing human rights, and creating space for increased effective services to the most vulnerable, would contribute to adverse risks and advance the country's development.

## Democratic space

Limits on democratic space constrain public participation, including that of civil society and of the most vulnerable, while lack of consensus on electoral processes and results undermine legitimacy. Recent protests by students, theatre alliance and, more recently, the Venice Commission stand on the anti-defamation law all show that there is present a risk to democratic and human rights institutions and to civil and political rights, resulting from the shrinking civic space. Such a situation adds risks to further exclusion, conflict and unbalanced development, ultimately contributing to perpetuation of corruption and impunity.

## COVID-19

In Albania, as in the rest of the world, the Coronavirus pandemic is placing health systems and services under tremendous strain. The health systems can quickly become overwhelmed by the COVID-19 outbreak, if not adequately supported. As pointed out in the situation analysis of the Socio-Economic Plan, deaths from the outbreak itself can quickly be exceeded by deaths from preventable or treatable conditions, no longer managed by a failing health system<sup>254</sup>. Establishing and maintaining effective health services is essential while trying to keep vulnerable groups in focus. Due to their working and living conditions they may not have equal access to timely, quality information on risks of infection and to quality preventive and curative health services.

## Social cohesion

Lack of progress made on social cohesion, gender equality and non-discrimination will result in stagnating or growing inequalities in income, increased emigration and poorer conditions for the most vulnerable. This situation will be combined with demographic risks and population dynamics, risks to social unity and equality resulting from trends in demographics and population dynamics, direct and indirect discrimination and horizontal inequalities. The pandemic and the earthquake disaster have increased risks of vulnerability to Roman and Egyptian minorities and other vulnerable groups with lack of proper access to services employment, education, health, housing and services.

## Environment and climate

Albania's exposure to natural hazards is evidently a high risk factor. The response to last year's earthquakes and to devastating flooding over the past decade demonstrate the fragility of the country's disaster risk reduction systems. A national policy framework is in place, and a dedicated national emergency agency established, but also a lack of coordination among responsible institutions, at both the central and local level, insufficient human and resource capacities to respond to the needs are other elements that determine the level of associated risks. Energy, water and other environmental risks, as well as the rural-urban divide, can further deepen inequalities.

## Regional stability

The legacy of regional issues related to recent conflicts, as well as current issues arising from unresolved disputes, slow progress with building trust, constructive dialogue, while in some contexts ethnic-nationalist rhetoric might bring risks to the consolidation of any gains made, ultimately stalling regional EU accession efforts.

## Risk Mapping

See Appendix A

253. <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/presentation-of-trust-in-governance-2019-opinion-poll-findings.html>

254. [https://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/Socio%20Economic%20Plan%20Albania\\_0.pdf](https://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/Socio%20Economic%20Plan%20Albania_0.pdf)

# 9. Gaps and Challenges towards Achieving Agenda 2030

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Accelerated economic growth and shared prosperity Albania will depend upon measures to raise productivity and competitiveness and improve wealth redistribution through quality, inclusive services and effective social protection. Sustainable and innovative industrialisation is a priority to provide equal opportunities and creating jobs, while addressing climate and environmental resilience. Greater accountability for human rights and the rule of law are essential to end discrimination against vulnerable groups and to ensure that drivers of vulnerability are addressed in policies and plans to promote economic growth and employment.

1. Major gaps and challenges are described below within the frame of the SDGs:

## **SDG 1 Poverty, vulnerability, and social protection:**

The country remains one of the poorest in Europe. Per-capita GDP is about one third the EU average and in 2017 more than 1 in 3 Albanians lived on less than US \$5.50 per day (PPP) – similar to 2008<sup>255</sup>. In 2018 the 'at-risk' of poverty rate was 23%<sup>256</sup> and 27%

among households with dependent children. One third of employment is informal<sup>257</sup> and many families struggle to meet their basic needs. In 2019, household consumption, fuelled by remittances, accounted for about 9% of GDP and expansion of the tax base and reduction of the informal economy are major policy challenges<sup>258</sup>. **Social protection:** Albania's social care and protection systems offer insufficient protection from poverty shocks. Albania invests about 12% of GDP in social protection, significantly lower than most of its neighbours and EU member states<sup>259</sup> and under-investment in social protection was a factor in simultaneously rising GDP and poverty headcounts between 2008 and 2012<sup>260</sup>. Current protection schemes do not reflect the integrated dimensions of poverty and deprivation: education, health care, and housing. Roma and Egyptian populations, persons with disabilities, isolated rural communities and especially rural women, and at-risk children are highly vulnerable.

## **SDG 2 Food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture:**

Malnutrition is a critical issue, especially for children and pregnant women; 11% of children

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255. World Bank, Systematic Country Diagnostic, 2019. 19, 49.

256. INSTAT data in UNCT, Common Country Analysis (CCA), 2020 (draft) 25; UNICEF SITAN, *ibid.*, ++

257. ILOSTAT data in World Bank, *ibid.*, 29.

258. CCA, *ibid.*, 5.

259. United Nations, Mainstreaming, Acceleration, and Policy Support for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Albania (MAPS-Albania), 2018, 15-16. In 2015: Croatia 22%; Greece 26%; Serbia 23%, based on ILO, World Social Protection Report, 2017-2019.

260. UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 14.



aged 6 to 59 months are stunted and 1 in 4 anemic<sup>261</sup>. The prevalence of obesity in both men and women has increased by nearly a third in recent years<sup>262</sup>. **Agriculture** contributes 19% of GDP and employs about one-third workers, but it faces declining importance in terms of government spending<sup>263</sup>. Most farms are family owned and the average size is 1.3 hectares compared to an EU average of 14 ha. Women head only 6.5% percent of all farms and are often excluded from decision-making<sup>264</sup>. The agrifood sector is characterized by a lack of market institutions, inefficient distribution channels, and struggles to meet national and international quality and food safety standards<sup>265</sup>.

**SDG 3 Good health and well-being:** Aspects of health system performance lag significantly behind the EU<sup>266</sup>. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and road injuries are the leading causes of premature mortality. The neonatal mortality rate at 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018 accounting for 70% of all infant deaths<sup>267</sup>. In 2019, public spending on health as a share of GDP was lower in Albania (2.97%) than in most South Eastern European countries and the EU<sup>268</sup>, with chronic under-funding of primary health care, especially maternal and child health and health information systems. Barriers to accessing quality health services are apparent in the high out-of-pocket

costs, estimated at more than half of household health expenditures. Major priorities include: (1) Ending preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age and improving coverage and quality of essential health care services for mothers and newborns; (2) *Ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services, in line with EU human and reproductive rights policies*<sup>269</sup>; and (3) *Halving deaths from road traffic accidents*<sup>270</sup>. Ensuring access to quality health services is especially important for persons with disabilities, Roma, and other marginalized communities<sup>271</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravates spotlights this situation, with the risk of an overloaded health system. The primary health care strategy calls to increase the health budget from approximately 10 to 25% of government spending and this is essential to respond effectively to this and future pandemics<sup>272</sup>.

**SDG 4 Quality education:** Despite major education reforms<sup>273</sup>, there are significant disparities in access to quality education, especially between rural and urban areas and between ethnic Albanian, Roma and Balkan Egyptian populations<sup>274</sup>. Current spending on public education is about 3.1% of GDP compared to an average of 5% in OECD countries. While access for vulnerable groups of children, especially children with disabilities and Roma, has increased, they still face

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261. UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Children (SITAN), 2019.; European Commission, COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Albania 2019 Report, Brussels, 29.5.2019, 93.

262. CCA, *ibid.*, 27.

263. FAO, 2020. Albania's *Agriculture orientation index* value of 0.14 in 2018 suggests significantly weaker orientation of government policy and spending toward the agriculture sector relative to its contribution to GDP. Index values for comparators: Croatia 1.59; Greece 0.17; Romania 0.64; and Serbia 0.28.

264. FAO, *Smallholders and family farms in Albania. Country study report*, 2020, 38.

265. CCA, *ibid.*, 20 based on Eurostat and INSTAT data.

266. UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 72. For example: infant and child mortality, deaths and injuries due to road traffic accidents, data on adolescent births access to modern contraception, access to treatment for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and hepatitis, and cervical screening and other aspects of gynecological health—particularly in rural and remote areas)

267. CCA, *ibid.*, 9.

268. CCA, *ibid.*, 27-28.

269. See, for example, *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*, European Parliament (Brussels, 2016).

270. UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 72.

271. UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 74.

272. CCA, *ibid.*, 28.

273. UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 19. Including: curriculum development, ICT in education, special curricula for pre-school education, teacher training for children with disabilities, and a single legal framework for all providers of TVET.

274. The EU's April 2018 annual report on EU accession notes that "the enrolment of Roma and Egyptians in pre-school education increased by 5%, in elementary schools by 25%, in middle school and high school by 27%, and in pre-university education by 22 %. However, their enrolment rates remain very low overall."

barriers and discrimination to school attendance and learning<sup>275</sup>. Children with disabilities face continuing barriers such as inaccessible infrastructure and a lack of differentiation in curriculum and teaching methods. Many schools and learning institutions lack basic infrastructure and services, especially ICT.

Renewed efforts are needed to strengthen the quality of the education system and improve learning outcomes which are not commensurate with investment<sup>276</sup>. Establishing a foundation for learning in the early years (pre-primary level) is essential for success<sup>277</sup>. Education and training systems need to focus on providing young graduates with the knowledge and skills for success in a dynamic EU-oriented labour market. This will require a greater emphasis curriculum and teaching methods that promote critical thinking, analytical skills, and problem solving, and implementation of comprehensive legislation and strategy for inclusive education. Expanded investment in the physical infrastructure must be paired with capacity development for teachers and school administrators, especially to employ ICT and digital learning resources.

**SDG 5 Gender equality:** Despite significant progress in the area of legislation and commitments to gender equality gender-based social exclusion is still a reality for most girls and women. This can be seen in key indicators including employment and labour force participation, access to and control of resources including land, violence against women and girls, and access to justice. Persistent barriers include: rigid and traditional gender roles in both private and

public life, inequalities in health care and education, and obstacles to women's participation in elections and to serve as political representatives<sup>278</sup>. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is pervasive, exacerbated by traditional perceptions of gender roles and patriarchal values: In 2019, one in three women ages 18 to 74 have experienced one or more of five forms of violence recently, while one in two have experienced it in their lifetime<sup>279</sup>. Several groups have been identified as especially vulnerable: Older women, Roma and Egyptian women, women with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, women in detention, and secluded women and asylum-seeking women. The gap between legislation and eradication of gender-based violence and discrimination remains considerable and these problems are compounded by a lack of data on women with multiple vulnerabilities and corresponding measures across sectors.

**SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth:**

Unemployment, largely long terms and structural was 11% percent in 2019, with youth unemployment at 21% percent<sup>280</sup>. The labour force participation rate was 70% in late 2019, and 62% for women. There is a skills mismatch and inclusion of vulnerable people in the labour market<sup>281</sup>. More than half of the poor population is inactive, unemployed or not in education<sup>282</sup> and people living in remote areas are often completely excluded. Unemployment and underemployment is particularly high among the Roma and Egyptian communities<sup>283</sup>. The pandemic has increased economic insecurity with risks that more children could be forced into exploitative and hazardous jobs<sup>284</sup>.

275. UNDP, World Bank and EC, 2017. Regional Roma Survey, Albania. Access of Roma in education increased from 44 percent (2011) to 66 percent (2017). But most Roma ages 18 to 21 have not finished a basic level of education

276. CCA, *ibid.*, 48. In 2018, students scored lower than OECD averages for reading, mathematics and science in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

277. CCA, *ibid.*, 49.

278. CCA, *ibid.*, 15. Including gender stereotypes, negative perceptions, and legal obstacles, contributing to lack of fairness in the electoral process and fewer electoral resources.

279. INSTAT, UNDP and UN Women, VAWG Survey, 2019. Forms of violence: intimate partner violence, dating violence, non-partner violence, sexual harassment, or stalking.

280. CCA, *ibid.*, 5. Persons unemployed for more than 1 year represents 66% of all unemployment.

281. CCA, *ibid.*, 18.

282. INSTAT, 2018. Labour Force Survey (LFS). Notably, unemployment benefit is received by fewer than ten percent of those who are looking for a job.

283. For example: 22% of marginalised Roma of age 18–24 years are in employment, education or training compared to 58 percent of non-Roma. Only 18% of Roma of age 15–64 years are employed, compared to 27% of non-Roma. CCA, *ibid.*, 61.

284. CCA, *ibid.*, 49.

While economic growth has been significant, there are few incentives for high technology adoption and little diversification in industry and exports beyond food, garments and minerals. Tourism is a growth engine, accounting for about 27% of GDP in 2019, but has suffered from the pandemic. In 2017, nearly all businesses were small and medium enterprises (SMEs), but they lack an innovation environment focused on smart skills and digital technologies will enable new production lines with higher complexity and greater value-added. Digital infrastructure is a precondition for development of the digital economy and innovation in industry, e-Government, e-Health, provision of interoperable services and of cross-border services.

**SDG 10 Reduced inequalities:** Rapid economic growth has not narrowed gaps in economic and social inequality. There are multiple reasons for unequal treatment of vulnerable groups: prejudice, stereotypes, racism, homophobia, and intolerance. These are also reflected in the lack of political will to implement and enforce legal and policy frameworks to combat discrimination<sup>285</sup>. A lack of progress toward greater cohesion, gender equality and non-discrimination will result in increasing deprivations (e.g health, education, housing, training, employment) and increased out-migration<sup>286</sup>.

**SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities:** Albania is highly exposed to disaster risks<sup>287</sup>: Average annual disaster losses have been assessed at 2.5% of GDP<sup>288</sup>. Vulnerabilities are compounded by high levels

of poverty, infrastructure deficits, rapid urbanisation and depletion of natural resources. Greater resilience is impeded by weak or fragmented institutional capacities and the absence of a national platform and strategy for disaster risk reduction (DRR), in line with the Sendai Framework<sup>289</sup>. Recent disasters, including the 2019 earthquake, highlight the need for increased resilience at community level and strengthened coordination and capacities to mitigate, manage and recover from shocks<sup>290</sup>. The focus on replacing assets rather than determining root causes for failure and building back better affect a range of issues including out-migration, tourism, and Albania's economic competitiveness

**SDG 13 Climate action:** In 2019, as part of its commitment to the Paris Agreement and emissions reduction targets (NDC), Albania was the first country in the region to adopt a national climate change strategy and action plan<sup>291</sup>. The current NDC address only emissions reduction and not adaptation measures and efforts are needed to integrate environmental and climate considerations into the national regulatory framework with measures tailored to the situation of vulnerable groups. For example: (1) Energy subsidies are unsustainable, skew pricing, discourage investments in energy efficiency, and crowd-out private investment; (2) Projected declines in precipitation underscore the need for climate-resilient adaptation for agricultural and water-management challenges<sup>292</sup>; (3) There is great potential for wind, solar, and biomass power generation<sup>293</sup>, greatly increasing the country's resilience to climate change<sup>294</sup>.

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285. CCA, *ibid.*, 71.

286. CCA, *ibid.*, 25, 82.

287. CCA, *ibid.*, 23. Nearly 90% of GDP and 86% of total territory has high disaster exposure. According to INFORM Risk Index, Albania's coping capacity index value of 4.2/10 is second highest in the Western Balkans.

288. UN. MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 58. See, for example, *Albania's Civil Protection System and Its Related Regional Cooperation*, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (Tirana), pp. 1, 3.

289. The global Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)

290. CCA, *ibid.*, 30. For example: the 2019 civil emergencies law establishes a new National Agency for Civil Protection but it has limited funding and capacity. Albania is not yet participating in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and is not yet linked to the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS).

291. CCA, *ibid.*, 29. A draft law 'On Climate Change' partly transposing provisions of the EU Emissions Trading Directive, is yet to be adopted.

292. UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 57.

293. CCA, *ibid.*, 230, 28. Estimated solar power potential assessed at 1,500–1,700 kWh/m<sup>2</sup> per annum; Biomass from agricultural waste, assessed at approximately 2,300 GWh/year; UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 77-78.

294. CCA, *ibid.*, 23, 28.

**SDG 15 Environmental sustainability:** Water and air pollution, land degradation, biodiversity loss and waste management are major environmental challenges. Rapid urbanisation and increasing demand for natural resources has led to increasing depletion and degradation. Across the Western Balkans urban residents lose an estimated 1.3 years of life due to air pollution, caused by the burning of lignite coal<sup>295</sup>. The importance of hydropower<sup>296</sup> and irrigated agriculture puts water at the heart of the country's energy and rural development challenges. Over-exploitation of surface and groundwater has reduced water quality and availability and projected declines in precipitation underscore the need for climate-resilient adaptation. Waste management is inadequate with municipal waste being disposed in 78 non-compliant municipal landfills. Despite the approval of important strategies that address the environment and climate change adaptation, there are significant gaps to comply with EU legislation and standards<sup>297</sup>. Most strategies are gender-blind and hinder access to and management of assets such as land, forestry and pastures, technology and extension services<sup>298</sup>.

**SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions:** Governance reforms are a priority of both government and people, including judicial reform, efforts to reduce corruption and organised crime, and better protect human rights. There is a stronger institutional framework for anti-corruption, but it is hampered by duplication, jurisdictional tensions, and information gaps. Effective coordination and management of existing anti-corruption structures and resources is critical<sup>299</sup>. The judiciary consistently receives the lowest public trust ratings and it is unable to defend the rights

or welfare of vulnerable groups<sup>300</sup>. For example, children face a range of types of violence and exploitation at home, at school, and in the community with 1 in 4 adolescents reporting physical abuse once or twice in their lifetime, internet bullying and sexual abuse is a significant issue, and in 2018 children represented 71% of the victims of human trafficking<sup>301</sup>.

Concerted implementation of accepted recommendations from the UPR and other human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms will better protect human rights, provide better access to justice, discourage corruption, promote foreign and domestic investment, and allow Albania to compete more successfully in the global economy. However, implementation of these measures remains inconsistent and under-funded<sup>302</sup>.

**SDG 17 Partnership for the goals:** ODA inflows are small relative to foreign direct investment (FDI) and remittances and government budget revenues. EU financing under the instrument for pre-accession (IPA) is the largest component of ODA at about \$100 million annually or 1% of GDP (MAPS 78). International financial inflows, particularly remittances, have fuelled consumption-based economic growth, but investment overall is insufficient to put Albania on the path to sustainable development. Most of the financing of legal and policy reforms, programming, and investments needed to achieve the SDGs in Albania is unlikely to come from ODA. Governance reforms to improve rule of law, reduce corruption, strengthen delivery of services and the country's investment climate are more promising<sup>303</sup>. Alternative financing instruments may have potential to leverage

295. CCA, *ibid.*, 76.

296. Government of Albania (GoA), *National Action Plan for Renewable Energy Resources in Albania 2015–2020*. Currently, 35% of hydropower potential is used. Environmental trade-offs underline the need for urgent efforts to increase the share of renewable energy sources.

297. The *EU acquis* contains provisions addressing climate change, water and air quality, waste management, nature protection, industrial pollution, chemicals, noise and civil protection

298. CCA, *ibid.*, 29-30.

299. UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 50-51.

300. UN, MAPS-Albania, *ibid.*, 50. The *Access to Justice Assessment* in Albania mentions that almost half of the population has had legal problems in the last five years, and that most of these have gone unresolved due to a lack of legal awareness in society and the underperformance of judicial institutions.

301. UNICEF, SITAN, *ibid.*, xx.

302. European Commission, COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Albania 2019 Report, Brussels, 29.5.2019, 7-11. Executive and legislative bodies do not pay sufficient attention to these oversight bodies and their recommendations, while the Parliament is yet to strengthen its public oversight role or hold the executive accountable for implementation gaps

303. UN, MAPS-Albania, 6, 20.

greater financing for the SDGs, as well as supporting implementation of the national recovery efforts from the 2019 earthquake and COVID-19 pandemic<sup>304</sup>.

For all priorities, effective policy and programme responses will depend upon the quality and availability of **statistics** to implement and monitor evidence-based policies and plans and nationalized SDG goals and targets to which they will contribute. Addressing data gaps is of critical importance and some gaps continuously recur in different policy areas across the SDGs and the EU accession agenda. These include health and well-being, employment, and education.

## Specific Risks on SDGs and Key Cross-sectoral Links between Targets

Establishing a national vision for the year 2030, particularly in the most relevant policy areas for Albania, identifying policy gaps and accelerating action in priority areas, prioritising the SDGs in the local context, strengthening institutional capacities of all key stakeholders engaged in the process, including the monitoring and reporting institutions, strengthening accountability mechanisms, placing a stronger focus on institutional coordination, enhancing results-oriented monitoring and evaluation systems and tools and performance-based budgeting and financing are key challenges Albania faces towards achieving Agenda 2030.

### Aligning the SDGs with national planning processes

#### Policy development framework

The Albanian central government policy development framework is streamlined through the Integrated Planning System, which comprises NSDI 2015–2020 as the core policy document and MTBP as the main budget document, along with the processes of European Integration and External Assistance. Despite progress

and improvements made, alignment and integration between policy development and budgeting needs still to be assured. Integration and potential benefits of implementation of NSDI have yet to be quantified in terms of efficiency gains, e.g. resources per outcome, time path to target, effectiveness, public service delivery, social development and well-being of citizens, as well as sustainability and resilience of national resources and development patterns. Meanwhile, MTBP continues to remain uninformed over true costs and benefits (e.g. outputs, outcomes) pertaining to the various programmes and institutions whose outputs are shared among more than a single sector.

### Coordination, management and leadership of the SDG implementation process

The institutional setting of policy coordination and implementation undergoes continuous changes following elections (national or local) in the country. Typically, they are accompanied by high staff turnover, a crucial challenge for achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Confluence of the on-going horizontal (redesign and functional review of the central apparatus) and vertical (decentralisation, territorial-administrative) governance reforms has introduced significant uncertainties into Albania's overall government structures.

Currently, the hierarchy of decision making over necessary corrections for improving the most likely outcomes is not entrusted to programme officials but to general directors, as there is no immediate hierarchical link between programmes and projects. This applies also at a higher level, that of strategies. Hence, it would be difficult to hold programme and strategy officials accountable because the degree of managerial authority, responsibility and autonomy for delivering performance clearly does not match the outcomes of their activity.

There is a high need for consolidation of Albania's public administration, decentralisation and other on-going governance reforms, to clarify roles, responsibilities and resources of key GoA development institutions. Combined with gaps in sustainable development data and monitoring and evaluation

304. CCA, *ibid.*, 80-1. For example: Impact investing (Social or Development Impact Bonds, Blue Bonds, Green Bonds), equity-based crowdfunding, forecast-based financial mechanisms, microfinance, or debt-for-nature swaps

systems, these issues risk pushing the effective design of a national roadmap for SDG implementation—featuring the designation of national SDG indicators, setting of baseline and terminal values, institutional responsibilities for reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and management of corresponding financial flows—further into the future.

### **Adequacy of financing**

As noted in the MAPS report, 69 percent of the national budget is relevant for achieving the SDG objectives. At the same time, government collects a much lower share of GDP for its budget revenues than its peers. Thus, the biggest impacts on increasing the funding available for the SDGs will be achieved by increasing government revenue collections from the registered economy, by capturing more of the grey economy and improving the efficiency of government programmes. There may be opportunities to reduce spending on SDG negative activities (for example, subsidies that promote fossil fuel usage should be replaced with subsidies that encourage renewable sources of energy or use of efficient transportation). Government should seek to leverage its resources to encourage better behaviours by investors and citizens.

### **Data-related issues and capacity of INSTAT and statistical departments in line ministries**

Systemic weaknesses are noted in collecting and analysing statistical data in Albania, making establishment of any kind of baseline challenging. The National Baseline Report on SDG alignment found that only 32 percent of the indicators can be monitored given the currently available national data. Coverage of the other indicators will require the introduction of new data collection activities and technologies, as well as better use of existing statistical methodologies, particularly in light of the reporting associated with EU accession.

While the collection of sex-disaggregated data has been mandatory in Albania since the 2008 law on gender equality, enforcement of the law has been inconsistent. The use of such data and gender statistics for policy development, budgeting and monitoring of national development priorities has remained far from satisfactory. Significant technical and capacity support at central and local levels are needed to

support better collection, analysis and use of gender- and age-disaggregated data and gender statistics, to ensure compliance with international and European standards.

Whereas NSDI is closely aligned with the SDGs at the target level, alignment at the indicator level is minimal. Less than one-third of the 232 global SDG indicators are used for tracking progress in implementation of NSDI II and other national development documents, out of more than 1,200 total indicators employed.

A positive trend in monitoring sectoral strategies with passport indicators has begun under the guidance and supervision of DDGG at the Prime Minister's Office, responsible for strategic planning. Further work remains to be done to clarify the link between the lower levels of indicators (measuring activities or outputs) and meta indicators in order to inform decision makers. The need for developing monitoring indicators and proper measurement guidelines, especially for meta indicators, based on international guidelines, is closely linked with the capacity of INSTAT to guide, support and manage the process, as the responsible authority for official national statistics.

In addition, other government entities have still to strengthen the process of generation and reporting of such data in line with INSTAT guidelines. Currently, internal capacities in public government institutions are inconsistent across the different line ministries and public agencies, and even within the PMO strategic planning unit. Whereas the agencies of education, health and agriculture have established statistical departments, the PMO still has no proper statistics or research-related department. This situation constrains the ability of central authorities to develop, argue, screen and select the best policy alternative measures on their own and increases the demand for donor-supported technical expertise.

### **Partnership and stakeholder participation in SDG implementation**

Currently, the involvement of stakeholders (government and international development partners) in the SDG implementation process remains inadequate. In addition, knowledge about the SDGs is limited among stakeholders, even at the governmental level (including local governments and citizens).



# Appendices

## **Annex A**

Risk Mapping — Multi-Dimensional Risk Analysis

## **Annex B**

List of indicators with a mid-term target (2024) established

## **Annex C**

Mapping of SDGs in NSDI II policy areas and Relative weight of contribution of spending



Risk areas	Key risk factors	Likelihood (high, medium, low)	Impact on results (high, medium, low)	Early mitigation and response measures	Risk monitoring
Political stability Risks to the stability of established political and governmental structures in the territory resulting from politically driven factors	Sustained political polarisation Non consensus on electoral reform brings risk of boycott by opposition of 2021 national elections Centralised political system Limited engagement with civil society Low accountability and transparency provides space for increased corruption Coronavirus pandemic response used to limit freedoms for assembly and political affiliation	high	high	Support gender quota as part of electoral system Support legal framework development and implementation for vulnerable groups Advocacy to ensure respect of human rights during coronavirus pandemic response Increase civil society engagement in UN's programme implementation Advocacy	RC, UNCT
Economic stability Risks to the economic, financial and fiscal stability of the country that could impact governance, social cohesion and people's ability to satisfy their needs	Decline in real GDP growth (WB forecast of -5% for 2020) At-risk of poverty increases, from 40% to 44% (return to 2005 situation) Sustainability of public finance and high levels of government debt, aggravated by Coronavirus stimulus spending Inability to implement required PFM reforms High debt financing costs further reduces fiscal space Reduced budgets and effectiveness of public services Significant fiscal risks and an enormous strain on local financial resources GBP measures reduced due to reduced budget	high	high	Socio-economic plan to support COVID-19 recovery with actions on supporting impact assessment of COVID-19 and policy options to sustain or expand health, education and social protection programmes Support economic diversification efforts Promote green economy transition and incentives for energy efficiency and renewable energy investment	UNDP, UNECE, UNICEF, RCO
Democratic space Risks to democratic and human rights institutions, and to civil and political rights resulting from shrinking civic space, exclusion, repression and intimidation	An increased stand-off between government and opposition could lead to more violent rhetoric and actions on both sides Threats to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the new anti-defamation package and rules for online media Weak institutions, protests could block the rule of law reform process, people's trust in institutions could erode further at a critical moment of judiciary reform Role of media and role of Parliament weak	medium	high	Implementation of supported UPR recommendations Transparent, fair Coronavirus pandemic recovery stimulus spending Gender mainstreamed assessment and monitoring of COVID-19 impact on vulnerable groups Strengthen youth engagement in UN processes through Youth Advisory Board	RC, UNCT
Environment and climate Risks to the ecology of the territory, its ecosystems and its people resulting from factors associated with environment, climate and natural resources	Natural hazards and lack of coping capacity Fragile environment created by large-scale disaster that has caused social and environmental damage and weakened institutions and stakeholders Inadequate waste management Deterioration of ecosystems and biodiversity; increased pollution	high	high	Support national and local DRR measures Mainstream climate change adaptation, mitigation policies and measures into national policy and budget-making processes Promote water-use efficiency, biodiversity protection, green technologies Support government and communities to minimise roll-back of existing nature conservation actions and urge continued investment in protected and conserved areas	UNDP, UNEP, UNECE
Justice and rule of law Risks to fair, effective and comprehensive implementation and application of the principles of justice, rule of law and accountability	Reduced trust in the perception of Albanian citizens regarding transparency and accountability of central and local government Coronavirus response measures may increase restrictions on citizens to exercise their rights to freedom of assembly and expression Decline in perception of role of Ombudsman and opposition parties in holding government accountable Access to justice for vulnerable groups, including Roma community members, LGBTI persons, PWD, elderly	medium	high	Measures above under (1) and (2) and (3)	RC, UNCT

<p>Public health Risks to the population, the economy and stability of the territory resulting from current and future public health emergencies</p>	<p>Coronavirus pandemic increases strain on health systems and services with potential for system collapse Challenge for health system from a recurring epidemic wave with compounding waves of mortality Shifting of funds from specific budget health programmes, including needed investments, to COVID-19 activities</p>	high	high	<p>Country-level coordination, planning, and monitoring: emergency operational unit in IPH, inter-action and post-action review of response Strengthen national laboratories, testing capacity, trained lab workforce Strengthen primary health care by strengthening human resources, infrastructure and diagnostics, services, financing and financial protection, and quality of care</p>	WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA
<p>Regional and global influences Risks to the integrity, stability, safety and prosperity of the territory and its people as a result of the actions of external actors, or the influence of external events</p>	<p>Major negative impacts from COVID-19 on travel, trade, tourism and commerce Unresolved regional disputes may bring further risks to regional stability Different status stage of EU integration talks might bring lack of cooperation Risk of increased level of asylum seekers and refugees, due to some Western Balkan countries' border closure</p>	high	high	<p>Support enhanced regional connectivity initiatives Support reconciliation initiatives through PBF funding projects Apply for regional eligibility programme to PBSO Strengthen regional cooperation element in subsequent cooperation framework Support to border authorities to determine permanent status of eligible cases, including capacity strengthening programmes</p>	RC, UNCT
<p>Social cohesion, equality and non-discrimination Risks to social unity and equality resulting from direct and indirect discrimination, inequalities and demographic trends</p>	<p>See Political stability and Democratic space (above) Additional risks: Social cohesion impacted by unaddressed grievances from the country's recent past and high public mistrust of institutions Slow down of social reforms due to political polarisation Negative demographic trend; increased emigration Weak situation of Roma and Egyptian minorities and other vulnerable groups: lack of proper access to employment, education, health, housing and services Weak national gender equality machinery, increased cases of domestic and sexual violence Coronavirus brings about insufficient social protection and exclusion of some vulnerable groups Significant number of families left without protection from economic shocks due to structure of social protection systems; paid leave and unemployment insurance excludes reach of schemes to farmers and rural areas Persistent educational and skills mismatches and low quality of educational outcomes impede socio-economic inclusion especially of the most vulnerable, while limiting local and national economic development. Side-lining of women's human rights and gender equality as a result of prioritizing economic goals in response to the COVID-19-induced crisis</p>	medium	high	<p>Policy development to establish comprehensive and shock-responsive social protection systems Strengthening national social protection system Improvements in regulatory and legal policy framework for adequate prevention and response to GBV–DV cases and support in implementation Support integration of social and health services at local level; use of innovative programmes Support strengthening of gender equality machinery Support consistent integration of gender equality goals across all sectors and levels of governance Support strengthening of education system, and ensure access to education for marginalised groups Strengthen capacities of social service providers at local level Support those in need, through livelihood and income-generating programmes Strengthen budgetary gender accountability (gender responsive budgeting in public finance management) through introduction of tracking system</p>	RC, UNCT UN Women

## List of indicators with a mid-term target (2024) established

1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age
1.a.2 Proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection)
2.2.1 Prevalence of stunting (height for age <-2 standard deviation from the median of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age
2.2.2 Prevalence of malnutrition (weight for height >+2 or <-2 standard deviation from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age, by type (wasting and overweight)
2.b.1 Agricultural export subsidies
3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio
3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel
3.2.1 Under5 mortality rate
3.2.2 Neonatal mortality rate
3.3.1 Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations
3.3.2 Tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 population
3.3.4 Hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 population
3.4.2 Suicide mortality rate
3.5.2 Harmful use of alcohol, defined according to the national context as alcohol per capita consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year in litres of pure alcohol
3.6.1 Death rate due to road traffic injuries
3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods
3.a.1 Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older
3.b.1 Proportion of the target population covered by all vaccines included in their national programme
4.b.1 Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study
4.c.1 Proportion of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country
5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18
5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments
5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions
6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services
6.2.1 Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water
7.1.1 Proportion of population with access to electricity
8.1.1 Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita
8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training
8.7.1 Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age
8.10.2 Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider
9.1.2 Passenger and freight volumes, by mode of transport
9.2.1 Manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP and per capita
9.c.1 Proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology
11.6.1 Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities
11.6.2 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)
14.5.1 Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas
15.1.1 Forest area as a proportion of total land area
15.1.2 Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type
17.1.2 Proportion of domestic budget funded by domestic taxes
17.8.1 Proportion of individuals using the Internet
17.13.1 Macroeconomic Dashboard

## Mapping of SDGs in NSDI II policy areas and Relative weight of contribution of spending

NSDI II	BASELINE MAPPING		Weighting assigned: Weighted contribution of NSDI policy areas to relevant SDGs		
	Linkages between NSDI-II pillars and SDGs	SDGs linked as per baseline mapping			
<b>7.0</b>	Albania's Overarching Goal: Accession to the European Union	n/a mainly EU-related	n/a	-	-
<b>8.0</b>	Foundations: Good Governance, Democracy and the Rule of Law				
<b>8.1</b>	An Open Judicial System with Equal Access for All	SDG 16	SDG 16: 100%	-	-
<b>8.2</b>	Strengthening Legislative and Electoral Processes	SDG 16 + 5 (ref. gender)	SDG 16: 100%	SDG 5: 30%	-
<b>8.3</b>	Integrated Border Management	SDG 16	SDG 16: 100%	-	-
<b>8.4</b>	The Fight against Organized Crime, Terrorism and Trafficking	SDG 16	SDG 16: 100%	-	-
<b>8.5</b>	Ensuring Public Order	SDG 3 + 16	SDG3: 10%	SDG 16: 90%	
<b>8.6</b>	Strengthening Human Rights	cross-cutting (1 + 10 + 16...)	SDG 1-17: 1/17 each	-	-
<b>8.7</b>	Reforming Public Administration and the Civil Services	SDG 16	SDG 16: 100%	-	-
<b>8.8</b>	Transparency and the Fight against Corruption	SDG 16	SDG 16: 100%	-	-
<b>8.9</b>	Decentralization and Local Government Reform		n/a		
<b>8.10</b>	Strengthening Albanian Statistics	SDG 17	SDG 17: 100%		
<b>8.11</b>	The Increasing Importance of Foreign Policy	SDG 10	SDG 10: 100%		
<b>8.12</b>	A Stronger Defence	n/a mainly NATO-related	n/a		
<b>8.13</b>	Civil Society	SDG 17	SDG 17: 100%		
<b>9.0</b>	Pillar 1: Growth Through Macro-Economic and Fiscal Stability				
<b>9.1</b>	Strengthening the Financial System and Monetary Policy	SDG 8 + 10 +17	SDG8:40%	SDG10: 40%	SDG 17: 20%
<b>9.2</b>	Strengthened Public Finance for Fiscal Stability	partially SDG 10	SDG 10: 100%		
<b>10.0</b>	Pillar 2: Growth Through Increased Competitiveness				
<b>10.1</b>	Assuring and Protecting Property Rights	SDG 1	SDG 1: 100%		
<b>10.2</b>	Promoting Business and Foreign Direct Investment	SDG 8	SDG 8: 100		
<b>10.3</b>	Expanding Scientific Research and Innovation	SDG 9 +17	SDG 9: 75%	SDG 17: 25%	
<b>10.4</b>	Investing in Information Technology and Communications	SDG 9	SDG 9: 100%		
<b>10.5</b>	Ensuring Consumer Protection and Market Surveillance	SDG 2 + 12	SDG2: 40%	SDG 12: 60%	
<b>10.6</b>	Protecting Competition and Providing for State Aid Control		n/a		
<b>11.0</b>	Pillar 3: Investing in People and Social Cohesion				

11.1	Expanded, Better Quality Educational Opportunities	SDG 4	SDG 4: 100%		
11.2	A Stronger, More Accessible Health Care System	SDG 3	SDG 3: 100%		
11.3	Expanding Employment Opportunities	SDG 8	SDG 8: 100%		
11.4	Strengthening Social Security		n/a		
11.5	Consolidating Social Protection	SDG 1 + 10	SDG1: 70%	SDG 10: 30%	
11.6	Building a More Inclusive Society	SDG 8 + 10	SDG 8: 50%	SDG 10: 50%	
11.7	Ensuring Gender Equality	SDG 5	SDG 5: 100%		
11.8	A Greater Focus on Arts and Culture	SDG 4 + 11	SDG4: 50%	SDG 11: 50%	
11.9	Strengthening the Role of Sports		n/a		
12.0	<b>Pillar 4: Growth Through Sustainable Use of Resources</b>				
12.1	Energy / Utilities	SDG 7	SDG 7: 100%		
12.2	Transport Infrastructure	SDG 9	SDG 9: 100%		
12.3	Agriculture and Rural Development	SDG 2	SDG 2: 100%		
12.4	Regional Development		n/a		
12.5	Environment	SDG 13 + 14 + 15	SDG 13: 33%	SDG 14: 33%	SDG 15: 34%
12.6	Mining	SDG 12	SDG 12: 100%		
12.7	Tourism Development	SDG 8 + 11 + 12	SDG 8: 33%	SDG 11: 33%	SDG 12: 34%
12.8	Water Supply and Sanitation/Sewage	SDG 6	SDG 6: 100%		
12.9	Integrated Waste Management	SDG 11 + 12 + 17 (PPPs)	SDG 11: 40%	SDG 12: 40%	SDG 17: 20%
12.10	Spatial Planning and Urban Development	SDG 11	SDG 11: 100%		





