



COVID-19 RESPONSE

Issue #2, April 15, 2020

This second issue of our COVID-19 dedicated newsletter [access the 1st issue [HERE](#)] provides new updates of the work of the UN Agencies in Albania in response to COVID-19 emergency in particular to reaching those furthest behind, advocating for women and children at risk and adjusting programmes to better assist Albania's response and recovery against Covid-19.

The second week of April 2020 saw a decline in new cases and hospitalizations related to COVID-19 in Albania, while positive trend has observed amongst neighboring countries as the height of their crises seems to be receding.

All UN agencies continued comprehensive public awareness and information campaigns specifically tailored for target groups and aiming to inform, engage, educate the public on the preventive measures against infection from COVID-19 as well as messages in support of the measures to reduce the spread of the virus.

The UN Country Team in Albania is fully supportive of the rapid and strong measures that the Government has taken so far. In support of those measures, and with a commitment to staff safety, the UN in Albania has continued to a working-from-home modality, while keeping all programmes running as much as possible.

EMERGENCY PUBLIC HEALTH

The WHO office in Albania is the lead technical UN Agency supporting country's response to COVID-19 providing continuous assistance to health authorities using up to date global and regional guidance. As member of the Task Force led by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, WHO is working around the clock to support the implementation of the COVID-19 Country Action Plan.

WHO supported health authorities to adopt 15 global guidelines and protocols in pilot areas including case management, surveillance, infection prevention and control, risk communication and coordination, among others. Strengthening the capacities of health professionals to identifying and diagnosing cases has been in the focus of work with over 7,000 health professionals from central and local levels having received training. Meanwhile, continuous information has been communicated to the public via social media campaigns and interviews in various media outlets, such as [Top Channel](#), [Klan](#), [ATSH](#), [News24](#), [EuroNews Albania](#), [Vizion+](#), [Report TV](#) etc.

EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH SUPPLIES

UN Albania is coordinating efforts with development partners for the procurement of urgent health commodities for the health institutions. A UN Procurement Task Team is operational with participation of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection focal point.

UNOPS has partnered with the European Union for 4 Million Euros emergency procurement and delivery of life-saving medical equipment and supplies for Albania to help the health authorities contain the spread of COVID-19. This includes CT scanners, ventilators, ambulances and mobile X-ray machines.



▶▶▶ The agreement of partnership was signed on 3 April 2020 by the EU Ambassador in Albania, UN Resident Coordinator and Albania's Minister of Health. ▶ [News link](#).

UNDP, in partnership with the Government of Albania, the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Norway, has initiated the procurement of 30 ventilators. The Government of Switzerland has pledged 330,000 USD, the Government of Norway 3,000,000 Krone, and UNDP 100,000 USD. ▶ [News link](#).

WHO will procure USD 700,000, received from USAID through the Global mechanism, equipment (such as GenXpert machine used for TB diagnosis), testing kits and lab materials.

IAEA is providing support to the Institute of Public Health with a pre-determined and standard set of equipment and materials for the detection of COVID-19. The set includes RT-PCR (Real-Time Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction) equipment, relevant personal protection equipment, diagnostic reagents and laboratory consumables, and it is sufficient for approximately 2,000 tests.

UNHCR and IOM in cooperation with OSCE have coordinated a sub-sector support to the Border and Migration Police (BMP), ensuring their needs are represented in government-level assessments and procurement processes. The three agencies are also coordinating with other organizations, PAMECA in particular, to provide wider support to the State Police. Personal Protection Equipment will be procured for the border police with the support of OSCE (20,000 EUR).

The UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme has provided Personal Protection Equipment as well as COVID-19 protection e-training and guidelines for border and migration police at Port Control Unit at Durres, Air Cargo Control Unit at Tirana International Airport and Border Crossing Points at the eastern green border of Albania.

IMMEDIATE SOCIAL SUPPORT BY JOINT UN 'LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND' PROGRAMME

The UN's joint 'Leave no One Behind Programme', funded by the Swiss Government, is focused on social protection and has met urgently to re-orient assistance where possible on Covid response. UNDP has provided assistance to 700 households from Roma, Egyptians and vulnerable groups. In addition, and outside of the 'Leave No One Behind' Programme, UNDP has also been able to mobilize emergency food and sanitary packages for 450 vulnerable households (300 in Tirana and 150 in Kamza).

UNDP is supporting the Albanian National Association of the Deaf (ANAD) to ensure the constant provision of reliable and updated information related to COVID-19 in sign language for the community of people with hearing impairments, as well as to establish and maintain a 24 hours hot line to receive requests/claims and provide information/referral services through video calls via WhatsApp for the same community.

UNDP has activated its network of professionals of development centers for children with disabilities operating in the municipalities of Pogradec, Lushnje, Bulqize, Diber, Shijak, Ura Vajgurore, Përmet, and Saranda to support them with methods of providing online specialized social services for these children during COVID-19.

ADDRESSING GENDER CONCERNS

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

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, in cooperation with UN Women, approved an Order last week issuing a dedicated protocol to ensure undisrupted provision of services by emergency shelters during the COVID-19 crisis. State social service, shelters and local government units are now tasked to implement the Order, which enters into force immediately.

► [News link.](#)

UNDP and UN Women continued working closely with Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Ministry of Interior and the State Police and CSOs to pay adequate attention to identifying violence situations and related response and advocate for necessary measures to tackle the situation of domestic violence

As part of the EU funded regional programme on ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, UN Women is also carrying out a mapping of needs of women's rights organizations who support survivors of violence.

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►►► UNICEF Albania Programme is integrating gender equality advocacy and programmatic actions into its COVID-19 response. A [Technical Note](#) on Gender Equality in the COVID-19 Response is issued for this purpose. UNICEF Albania has provided to all its NGO partners and humanitarian practitioners that are currently working to deliver essential support and services to children and their families during the pandemic, the [GBV Pocket Guide](#), including an [app](#), to provide them with concrete information on how to support and refer a survivor of gender-based violence, and particularly adolescent girls, who disclosed to them in a context where gender-based violence response and referral pathway might be compromised due to the pandemic.

EDUCATION

UNICEF is supporting financially and technically the Ministry of Education for offering distant learning through the Akademi.al platform and television. The platform will have a better reach of the most vulnerable children as lessons will comply with accessibility digital standards, will expand to include preschoolers and will prepare students for their end of the year exams.

UNICEF is also engaging with the Ministry of Education in a dialogue for ensuring that the most vulnerable children also have access to digital learning through provision of tablets for vulnerable children.

UNICEF has translated and shared guidance on safe schools and COVID with the networks of schools and Ministry in order to prepare the education system for the current situation as well as re-opening of schools <https://uni.cf/33hxaSd>.

An activity book for young children and health information leaflets are distributed in a supermarket chain in the country along with supply kits to the most in need families in Durres, Shkodra and Korca.

CHILD PROTECTION

UNICEF Albania is working to address the enormous challenges faced by children with disabilities and their parents, adding on to pre-existing barriers. UNICEF is developing intervention to directly help around 300 children with hearing impairment and their parents with accessible sign language information on the prevention measures and care needed to avoid COVID-19.

UNICEF is leading the Child Protection Emergency Working Group. The WG gathers around 10 international and local organizations operating in the field of child protection and is working to determine standard tools and protocols on addressing child protection needs in the context of the pandemic, while serving as a sharing and learning platform in this unprecedented crisis.

Ministry of Health and Social Protection has issued a Ministerial order, nr 253 of 11 April 2020, that will pave way for support for the most at-risk children during COVID-19 emergency. ►►►

▶▶▶ The Ministerial Order, prepared with the support of UNICEF, tasked the State Agency on Child Rights and Protection, Institute of Public Health and Child and Social protection system workforce to accelerate actions and to coordinate the services to ensure that no child is left behind.

The Order introduces measures for Child protection system that ensure that Child Protection Workers be equipped with the necessary personal protection equipment, as well movement permits from the police to allow them to move freely at any time, and that they are provided with the required logistics to make home visits. Other measures concern a dedicated National Child Counseling Line ALO 116 111 at the toll-free number 116 111 as well as the use of the online counseling platform at www.nukjvetëm.al. The platform provides counseling through texting, or individual therapy in chat sessions; UNICEF has proactively advocated with public authorities for the critical necessities of children's protection ([UNICEF statement](#)).

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC IMPACT IN THE MEDIUM-TERM

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

A dedicated IPMG meeting on Social Protection and Labor was organized on 8th April to discuss current social economic situation and need of partners engagement in cooperation with the Government for the coordination of socio-economic assessments, whose results will help to effectively delineate support programmes in response to COVID-19 situation.

The UN will be working to bring together the expertise of different agencies to undertake assessments in clusters. For example, in the area of socio-economic analysis, UNDP, FAO and ILO will be coordinating their expertise to look at different angles of impact.

UNDP will do a socio-economic impact assessment in Albania looking at the mid and long-term impact of adverse consequences of COVID-19, considering and/or building on methodologies of assessments on HDI, Earthquake and Peace Building globally. FAO is evaluating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis to the food supply, food security and food production with specific monitoring of agricultural production, livestock sector and agritourism.

The ILO Office for Central and Eastern Europe responded with a regional Task Force and a service offer to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most urgent request from the CEE countries is to get country-specific assessments on the economic and social impact of the pandemic.

In March 2020, the ILO Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) created a regional Task Force comprising of ILO/EBRD experts and policy advisors from the Western Balkans aimed to assess what the likely impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are on the labour markets over the short- and medium-term in each of the Western Balkan economies, and recommend policy responses that the Government and its social partners should consider in the short- and medium-term.

In order to generate additional data on the impact of the crisis on enterprises, the office is assisting the Employers' organizations in the region to run surveys among member companies. Read [more](#).

UN Women, in cooperation with UNFPA and FAO, is undertaking a rapid gender assessment to better understand the differential impact of coronavirus on women and men, and how the current emergency is affecting their livelihoods. The findings will inform prioritization of future action to make sure the Entity's work contributes to reducing vulnerabilities emerging from the health epidemic. ▶▶▶

ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND

UNICEF, through the U-Report platform is giving young people an opportunity to amplify their concerns and provide feedback on the COVID-19 poll (details in section on Assessments).

UNFPA, through its Y-PEER network is helping young people and women in 5 municipalities, Tirana, Shkoder, Korce, Elbasan, and Ballsh with specific information on how to reduce the risks of contracting COVID-19 and is running community engagement for primary COVID-19 prevention and stigma reduction. A dedicated poll was conducted amongst youth on needs and problems faced during this period especially needs on Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR). The Y-PEER in collaboration with UNFPA is preparing an Online Peer Education (PE) Plan to answer some of needs of the youth raised in the poll.

SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

UNHCR's partners Caritas and RMSA have supplied reception facilities at border areas and in Tirana with relevant hygiene and cleaning materials, whilst UNHCR has also coordinated the dissemination of translated WHO information materials in Arabic, Farsi, Dari and Pashto.

Caritas continues to provide regular food packages and hot meals to about 100 asylum-seekers accommodated at border facilities (mostly families), whilst RMSA is providing case management (including legal, administrative and psychological support) as well as counselling and guidance related to COVID-19 to refugees and asylum-seekers over the phone. With the support of UNHCR and Caritas, the Catholic Mission in Gjirokastra also organized child-friendly activities and donated relevant materials to the reception facility in Gerhot. Elsewhere, UNHCR continues to coordinate with the wider UN response to COVID-19 in Albania. UNHCR will prepare an advocacy report on the impact of measures taken on refugees and asylum seekers in Albania.

▶▶▶ UNICEF conducted through the U-platform a quick poll aimed to see the level of awareness among young people about symptoms, transmission and prevention. 512 young people have responded to what they are hearing and what their needs are. It is clear from the results, that the fear of contracting the virus is high among young people with 61 per cent, and 96 per cent of them, believes that physical distance is important. Learn more about the results [here](#).

UNEP is currently brainstorming on how it can support WB6 countries with focus mostly on environmental protection - waste and COVID; environmental health; green jobs, mismanagement of national parks, other. Interested to provide inputs to any joint assessments being made at country or regional level by UN agencies and/or partners.

UNESCO has undertaken various assessments on the impact of COVID-19 to cultural institutions and is organizing several ministerial meetings (education and science) at the global level on such issues. This work will be brought down soon at the regional and country level.

ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES

UN Albania has coordinated joint efforts of development partners in Albania towards raising public awareness on the protection measures against Covid-19. Two rounds of joint social media communications ([Round#1](#); [Round#2](#)) have focused on encouraging the public to stick to the protection measures while highlighting and praising the work of health professionals and other key workers standing on the first line of fighting the disease.

On occasion of World Health Day, UN Albania aired a short clip with [messages of support for doctors and nurses](#) from heads of UN Agencies. On the issue of gender-based violence in the current confinement circumstances, UN Albania has echoed the [global UN campaign](#) while voicing the concerns specifically related to Albania through various communication channels and [issued a statement](#) on behalf of all UN system in Albania.

An innovative campaign in form of a [challenge for gender equality](#) by asking men to post photos and videos of their household work (#MenEngage) that called for more engagement by men to support women in household chores received a wide social media attention and engagement by various organisations and their staff.

As part of its [engagement with private sector](#) to combat COVID-19, [UNDP launched a partnership with Telekom Albania](#) consisting of the joint communication campaign: "Spread the Word, not the Virus", including a free-for-all website, not requiring internet connection, as a virtual space offering Albanian-language information providing advice, tips and knowledge management on how individuals can act to significantly slow the spread of COVID-19. ▶▶▶

▶▶▶ This platform brings online medical sessions with a well-known Albanian pulmonologist to every citizen's screen.

On the occasion of the Roma International Day, UNDP rolled out a social mobilization campaign to mark the day and to attract the attention of the society on the additional challenges faced by the minority during the COVID-19 pandemic. A [live skype talk-show](#) was aired in Vizion+ to highlight some of the key messages around the challenges faced by these communities.

UNICEF has launched of the #LearningAtHome social media campaign which has mobilized well-known influencers from different disciplines of life (sport, art, TV anchors) all united to share their home-made videos to support parenting under COVID-19 social isolation. The strategy of the campaign is - one day, one challenge, one parenting tip. Along with public figures, the parents from Roma community or parents of children with disabilities are invited to share their learning and development's home experiences. A dedicated interview at National Public Television to echo the campaign is organized. See: [Ex National Football Captain with his son; TV anchor with her kids](#) ; [Opinion maker with her son](#)

UN Women is implementing a media outreach campaign (through both traditional and social media) to raise public awareness and attention on the gender dimensions of the epidemic, and particularly on the increased risks of domestic violence as a result of restrictions of movement and other containment measures.

UNFPA is working with their Y-Peers network to implementing an online campaign on COVID-19 information sharing through its social media channels [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#), reaching more than 5000 young people. "Youth Voice" network is implementing a COVID-19 information sharing campaign through its online portal Jotabu.al

UN BUSINESS CONTINUITY CRITICAL PROGRAMMES AND STAFF SAFETY

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

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



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