

## Implementation Progress

UN agencies' support in 2020 aimed to advance and mainstream human rights and improve the role of institutions responsible for overseeing their application, and CSOs to strengthen monitoring and accountability of these institutions.

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and state institutions will be able to provide evidence-based reporting, advocacy and policy dialogue supported by data collection that focuses on human rights thanks to the signing in September of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the People's Advocate (PA) and INSTAT, facilitated by UNFPA in cooperation with OHCHR, and the drafting of ToR by UNFPA and PA to improve the data collection system DocuLive. In addition, INSTAT published 'Children, Adolescents and Youth-Focused Well-being Indicators', supported by UNICEF with contributions from the government of Switzerland, marking the starting point in improving the official statistics around children, adolescents and youth in Albania, including those reporting on progress with regard to SDG indicators. Meanwhile, the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection set up a Visualisation Platform for 58 child-specific statistics, aiming to enhance the accountability of relevant institutions to report quality statistics on children and adolescents.

The annual Human Rights Academy, with the theme 'Covid-19 and Human Rights', organised by UNFPA and the Albanian Human Rights Group, addressed issues on (i) LGBTI rights in times of the pandemic, (ii) policies on gender equality (especially the role of men in relation to this phenomenon during the pandemic), and (iii) mental health of young people during the pandemic. The outcome was the preparation of a policy paper by the Academy that focused on the response of state institutions to engage actively young people in civic participation.

UN Women in collaboration with the Dutch Embassy and Civil Society supported the drafting of the second monitoring report of the National Action Plan on Implementation of Resolution 1325 that will serve to inform the drafting of the second National Action Plan. The report shows that 86 percent of plan has been achieved. UNICEF, with contributions from the government of Norway to the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund, supported the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) to compile a draft Implementation Report on the National Action Plan for the Right of the Child 2016–2020, to be finalised early in 2021, combined with an analysis of the situation of children and adolescents, serving as the cornerstone by government to prepare the new National Action Plan for Children.

In 2020, through contributing to the achievement of SDG targets 10.3, 16.3 and 16.a, UNDP and UNICEF laid the solid foundations for an effective institutional cooperation with the People's Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) to improve access to justice for vulnerable and marginalised groups, through the following:

- With contribution from the government of Norway, CPD increased its outreach to vulnerable groups, as customers of services provided under domestic laws, especially in remote areas, to address challenges to equal and unhindered access to basic services. This was enabled through the conducting of a study on 'customers in need status' covering eight municipalities,<sup>1</sup> supported by UNDP in cooperation with local grass-root organisations. The action will serve to initiate approval of by-laws complementing the Law 'On the Electricity Service' to determine the status of 'Customer in Need' for marginalised minority groups such as Roma and Egyptians.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, 407 vulnerable individuals from Roma and Egyptian families in need in the eight municipalities were informed of this CPD initiative and the advocacy campaign undertaken by grass-roots organisations.

<sup>1</sup> Namely Berat, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Korce, Pogradec, Shkoder and Tirane.

<sup>2</sup> It will ensure Roma and Egyptians' right to access affordable electricity through strengthening the legal framework in fighting all forms of discrimination and inequality in accessing basic services.

- With contribution from the government of Austria, UNDP supported the PA in providing remedies and upholding human rights standards and gender considerations through development and implementation of a joint UNDP–PA work plan to support the PA in (i) strengthening dialogue with the public administration in ensuring implementation of the PA’s recommendations, (ii) reaching out to vulnerable communities, with a keen focus on women, Persons with Disability, Roma and Egyptians, and LGBTI to encourage their use of the PA in seeking redress for violations of human rights of women and men, and (iii) strengthening the policy framework in fighting all forms of harassment and sexual harassment in the public administration. In addition, with UNDP support, the PA is developing a national study on minimum subsistence, to help responsible state institutions respond accordingly to its recommendations, that is expected to be launched in early 2021.

With contributions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway to Children’s Access to Justice, the SDG Acceleration Fund (with contributions from the Embassy of Norway) and UNICEF Thematic Funds on Education, UNICEF supported the People’s Advocate and the Child Rights and Promotion Commissioner within the PA’s office in exercising their oversight and remedy-provision functions for violations of child rights. The Ombudsperson’s monitoring of the conditions and treatment of children deprived of their liberty, as well as information and awareness activities in schools during 2019 and 2020, brought directly a 26 percent increase in the number of child rights violations cases handled by this NHRI in 2019 compared to the previous year. Moreover, the People’s Advocate developed and consulted with children and education professionals a ‘Manual on child rights integration in education curricula’. The PA published its Annual Report (2019), increasing the transparency and awareness of the public, including children, on the work of this NHRI. Investment of People’s Advocate in information, awareness and outreach to children and their families made 2020 the second year in a row (since its establishment in 1999) that the PA received complaints directly from children about violations of their rights. UNICEF, PA, ECARO and the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children initiated a Child Rights Impact Assessment regarding the government’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic, whose results will be shared in 2021 and will enable this NHRI to inform the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the upcoming consideration of Albania’s CRC report, to be prepared in 2021.

The support to the human resources of the Child Rights Section, despite the lower budget this independent institution received in 2020, played a role in the successful application of the People’s Advocate of Albania to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) for maintaining the Status ‘A’ in compliance with the Paris principles, with a positive recommendation of the Sub-Committee on Accreditations. The official granting of Status A is pending upon expiration of the required procedural timeline. This is a direct contribution to the relevant SDG 16 indicator regarding NHRIs.

UNICEF continued to act as an important partner to Albania’s Parliament in strengthening governance for children. In the light of increased risks of online violence and sexual abuse against children, as well as domestic violence, primarily affecting women and children, during the pandemic, Parliament, with the assistance of UNICEF and contributions from the government of Norway to the Albanian SDG Acceleration Fund, has overseen the government measures and organised two dedicated Parliamentary hearings with Minister of Education, Sports and Youth and Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection regarding the fulfilment of the rights of children, as well as their protection during the pandemic. The PA and the Commissioner for the Promotion and Protection of Child Rights also shared the findings of their monitoring of child rights in the country during natural disasters and recommended legal, policy, administrative and budgetary measures. With UNICEF advocacy in the background, Parliament adopted the Universal Salt Iodisation law, despite strong lobbying from the food processing industry. Stronger awareness of child rights created a critical mass of supporters within Parliament, evident during approval of amendments to the Domestic Violence Law and to the Anti-discrimination Law, designed to increase remedies, protection and services for victims.

UNHCR provided technical comments and recommendations to the Parliamentary Commission on National Security on the draft Law on Citizenship, approved on 29 July by Parliament and entering into force in October. The new law addresses effectively several remaining legislative gaps that had allowed the risk of statelessness in the country. Its alignment with the 1954 and 1961 conventions on Statelessness fulfils one

of Albania’s pledges at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness. In line with SDG target 16.9, UNHCR and its partner TLAS provided training and engaged 238 key government decision makers on the successes and challenges of implementing the 2018 revised Law on Civil Status. Also, UNHCR assisted with administrative and judicial procedures 470 persons at risk of statelessness (244 of whom have Roma or Egyptian origin) and 342 pro bono lawyers (128% increase from target) trained in the prevention and reduction of statelessness (SDG targets 16.3 and 16.9).

### Implementation Challenges

The Covid-19 lockdown and lesser restrictions impacted the advancement of the work and mobility of all institutions, including NHRIs. Delays were also witnessed on the part of government in relation to courts and legislative processes (e.g. delays in approval of sub-legal acts), which correspondingly led to some postponements in planned UN and partner activities (e.g. related to addressing the risk of statelessness in the country). The PA, CPD, CSOs and other local partners used online platforms and telecommunication to facilitate communication, coordination and implementation of actions and planned interventions. As per UN’s global commitment to stay and deliver, the UN agencies’ office in Albania reprioritised programming and swiftly implemented Business Continuity Plans for itself and its partners. Alternative modalities for core activities—for instance, remote monitoring of border protection developments—were implemented while travel restrictions remained in place.

**Output 1.4**  
**Access to Justice**

**Children and vulnerable adults and groups have equitable access to a friendlier justice system, and juvenile justice is administered to international standards**

### Implementation Progress

The jurisdictions of Berat and Gjirokaster, assisted by UNICEF and its partner Save the Children, with contribution from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, built an inter-disciplinary practice of case management for children in conflict or contact with the law, benefitting 296 children with free legal assistance, psychosocial counselling, restorative justice services, economic reintegration support, and referral to service providers, 204 parents with positive parenting programmes, and 62 professionals with training in inter-sectoral case management for children in conflict or contact with the law. Aiming towards sustainability, UNICEF’s work with authorities of these two jurisdictions also focused on developing tools and practices of working together in a cross-disciplinary fashion. As a result, thirteen state public agencies<sup>3</sup> signed a Justice for Children (J4C) MoU in Berat and Gjirokaster, committing to the inter-disciplinary case management and planning a set of services tailored to children in conflict and contact with the law. Advocating for national replication, UNICEF and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) organised an online conference, in which 96 professionals and representatives of public agencies participated, to share lessons learned from these positive experiences. Moreover, for the first time, the Albanian government is able to track children’s cases, from the moment they first interact with the police, until the final link in the justice chain. The government is now also able to support inter-agency case management, through infrastructure for the online Integrated System of Data on Criminal Justice for Children ([www.drejtisipertemitur.gov.al](http://www.drejtisipertemitur.gov.al)) set up by MoJ and six state public agencies,<sup>4</sup> supported by UNICEF with contribution from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With UNICEF support and contributions from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the ‘Access to Justice for Children’ regional project, the UK government, as part of the global ‘Eliminate Violence against Children’ and local ‘Ending Human Trafficking in and from Albania’ projects, and the government of Norway, through the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund, seven out of twelve regional police departments established child-friendly interview units.<sup>5</sup> These units are set up to ensure recording and

<sup>3</sup> These were the signatories of the J4C MoUs: municipalities of Berat and Gjirokaster; Regional Police Departments; Judicial District Courts; Judicial District Prosecution Offices; local Bailiffs Service; Medico-Legal Institute (national); local Bar Association Branch; Order of Psychologists (national); Chamber of Mediators (national); Public Health Department of Berat and of Gjirokaster; State Social Services Department; local Education Department; Regional Department of Employment and Skills.

<sup>4</sup> For the first time, the professionals in the justice system—MoJ (and the Centre for Prevention or Juvenile Criminality within it), the court, prosecution, Probation Service, General Directorate of Prisons, and police—will interact with each other through the Integrated Criminal Justice for Children Data System.

<sup>5</sup> [UNICEF Shqipëri inauguron Dhomën Miqësore për Intervistimin e Fëmijëve për Policinë e Shtetit në Komisaratin e Policisë Korçë](#)

reduce the number of times children will be interviewed, as part of criminal justice or domestic violence processes, with 20 police officers trained in the use of the equipment and the spaces. In addition, at least 200 attorneys, prosecutors, police officers and other professionals involved in legal processes affecting children were informed on the new normative framework on justice for children through relevant information published or provided by UNICEF. Thanks to UNICEF technical support and advocacy, Albania has increased by 1,092 percent the number of magistrates tasked with justice for children cases (from 12 in 2018 to 143 in 2020).

In response to practical difficulties in the identification and referral of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) at the entry border areas with Greece, highlighting shortcomings in national and central and inter-institutional coordination in this area,<sup>6</sup> UNHCR and UNICEF convened several meetings with the ministries of Interior, and Health and Social Protection, the National Agency for Child Rights and Child Protection, IOM and Caritas Albania to discuss the lack of a specific system for managing the arrival, identification and referral of UASC, especially in relation to safe and separate accommodation. Building upon this dialogue, a high-level meeting between key stakeholders was convened in October by the deputy minister of Health and Social Protection, where UNHCR and UNICEF presented a detailed proposal for the setting up of a national UASC protection system that incorporates best interest processes and specialised accommodation. In parallel, UNHCR supported the National Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Tirana with the refurbishment of accommodation for 30 persons with specific needs (including UASC), as well as a dedicated child-friendly space.

### **Implementation Challenges**

The vetting process, as part of the justice system reform, impacted the time available and the interest of the magistrates in capacity building. Also, Covid-19 negatively impacted planned interventions related to boosting law enforcement and justice sector capacities. In response, UNICEF prioritised first those professionals less affected by the reform, reserving the support in 2021 to the Magistrates School, employed whenever possible online trainings, and prepared the curricula content for these professionals in support of training institutions.

**Output 1.6**  
**Migration and Asylum**

**Government authorities have strengthened capacities to enhance effective migration and asylum management**

### **Implementation Progress**

IOM's support to government on implementation of the National Strategy on Migration (2019–2022) and Action Plan and legislation improvement, resulted in (i) completion of an in-depth institutional assessment, highlighting the need for ensuring good migration governance in Albania, (ii) the start of preparations for development of a migration governance Training of Trainers for government officials, (iii) activation of support, with contributions from GIZ, for the establishment of a Coordination and Monitoring System of the National Strategy on Migration, and (iv) drafting of a new Law on Aliens, with contribution from IPA II regional funding. IOM contributed to the improvement of migration data that can be used for policy development and implementation, with the following: (i) Household Migration Survey completed and published, in cooperation with INSTAT and with contribution from GIZ; and (ii) Data collection finalised on mix migration flows to Albania in the entry and exit land border and continuous assessment of the situation of mixed movements at the border.

The government of Albania and the diaspora engagement institutions were supported by IOM, with contribution from the government of Italy, to implement a comprehensive approach towards the diaspora's engagement for development in line with the overall policy framework. Several results were noted, including, to name a few: (a) Diaspora Mapping and Profile research, completed in five regions of Italy, as well as in Belgium and France; (b) Connect Albania (CA) Office established, under the Albanian Diaspora Business Chamber; and (c) the Connect Albania investment boosting platform,<sup>7</sup> launched on 18 December,

<sup>6</sup> In 2020, the arrival of UASC was largely dealt with through ad hoc approaches and solutions (especially in terms of accommodation).

<sup>7</sup> The 'Connect' idea is based on the central role of the Albanian Diaspora members as Development Agents, who will intermediate and facilitate foreign direct investments to Albania; i.e., will put in contact, accompany and follow-up a foreign direct investment. This is the first programme that will serve directly potential investments through members of the Albanian Diaspora; <https://www.adbc.al/en/connect-albania-eng/>

International Migrants Day and National Diaspora day. The campaigns carried out for the promotion of the platform reached more than 450,000 Albanian Diaspora members and entrepreneurs, mainly in Italy. This is the first programme that will serve to bring directly to Albania potential investments through members of the diaspora.

In 2020, as Albania witnessed an increase in the number of arrivals (despite border closures for 2.5 months), but with a noticeable decrease in the number of asylum requests, UNHCR provided practical recommendations to relevant government authorities to ensure access to the asylum procedure was upheld for those in need. In October, UNHCR conducted a survey on access to the asylum procedure in border areas to better understand the current use of the pre-screening procedure and the voluntariness of returns, with key findings being communicated to high-level government and international counterparts in November. In addition, UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior signed an MoU in July, defining closer operational cooperation on all relevant asylum matters in support of Albania's pledges at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum and the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. Also, UNHCR submitted its comments on the draft Law on Asylum to relevant parliamentary commissions in autumn 2020.

With contribution from the government of Norway to the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund, UNHCR initiated the consultation and drafting of a Strategy on the Integration and Inclusion of Refugees and Persons Granted Protection in Albania, for implementation in 2021. The agency met on several occasions with officials from the European Asylum Support Office in order to discuss complementary priorities and areas of work in relation to the Office's upcoming Albania Roadmap. Meanwhile, 210 UASC were supported with child-friendly services thanks to UNICEF intervention and support to child protection system strengthening and partnership with UNHCR.<sup>8</sup> Also, 25 UASC were supported by UNICEF and its partners directly, with longer term accommodation and multiple core services lasting for a few months. Some 33 frontline protection workers were supported to better deliver services to vulnerable groups of refugees and migrants, with a focus on UASC and Victims of Trafficking, also with contribution from the UK government. Capacities of Border and Migration Police and other stakeholders in border areas were enhanced, with UN Women support, to ensure that vulnerable groups of irregular migrants arriving in Albania have reinforced access to rights, as well as social and health services.<sup>9</sup> Gaps were identified in the existing legislation regarding access to services for survivors of violence among mix migration flows, and a legal analysis was prepared for consideration by the Albanian government.<sup>10</sup> These results directly contribute to SDG targets 5.2, 8.7, 16.2, 16.3 and 17.18.

## Implementation Challenges

Although access to territory was not limited under the State of Natural Disaster, UNHCR and partners observed that it was generally constrained by additional border management measures between March and May 2020. Interceptions and a more systematic use of pre-screening picked up again in May, though with reports of persons (including UASC) being returned to Greece despite having expressed an intention to seek asylum in Albania but with a lack of safeguards in these cases. By the end of the year, only 50 asylum referrals had been made since April, limiting the scope of support that UNHCR and partners were able to provide to asylum seekers present in the country. UNHCR continued to engage and advocate with high-level counterparts in coordination with key international partners (e.g. EU Delegation). However, this in itself was hindered by turnover of some key officials and counterparts at various points in the year.

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<sup>8</sup> These services were delivered with the pro-active engagement of statutory child protection work force from the Greece border adjacent regions of Korçe and Gjirokastër and strategic work with the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection.

<sup>9</sup> A two-day workshop held jointly with service providers in two border municipalities (Gjirokastër and Korçe) highlighted the needs on the ground for those working directly with irregular migrants

<sup>10</sup> The support to the legal and policy framework was carried out both through extensive consultation and expertise sharing with other implementing UN agencies, as well as through operational activities on the ground, where discussion with relevant local stakeholders during scoping missions and round tables revealed a number of legal gaps. In this regard, between September and November 2020, several UN joint field missions were held in the border adjacent areas of Gjirokastër and Korçe that assessed the current situation on the identification and referral mechanisms of persons or groups with specific needs, by BMP, as well as the services provided to them by local institutions in the border adjacent area. Findings from the joint missions were used to adapt operational activities and normative support provided to the government. One of the findings of the coordinated missions and round tables organised with local stakeholders in Gjirokastër and Korçe, revealed legal gaps that prevent several categories of migrants from accessing services, which was addressed with a thorough legal analysis conducted by the CO and agreed upon with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. Another important finding from the ground was the lack of female interpreters and psychologists in the border reception centres, which the CO is addressing in consultation with UNHCR and its partner organisations working at the border.

The Covid-19 emergency also inevitably led to the postponement of some previously planned activities and initiatives for both UNHCR and government counterparts. Various regional (Western Balkan) IPA II activities were postponed to early 2021. These include full implementation of the regional Quality Assurance project aimed at enhancing government capacities on asylum decision-making principles and procedures—a pledge also made by the Albanian government at the Global Refugee Forum. By the end of 2020, groundwork for this initiative was in place, and activities will be rolled out early next year, in parallel with ongoing support to the full resumption of asylum procedures in the current Covid-19 context.