



**Government of Albania and United Nations
Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
2022-2026**

**2021 ANNUAL NARRATIVE PROGRESS REPORT
FOR THE ALBANIA SDG ACCELERATION FUND PHASE II**

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Executive Summary

Albania has been a Delivering as One country since its pilot phase started in 2007 and has completed three One Programmes cycles during 2007-2021. In 2021, UNCT Albania finalised the last year of implementation of the current Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development (PoCSD) 2017–2021, as well as preparations for a new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022–2026, which was signed on 25 October 2021 by the deputy prime minister, the UN Resident Coordinator and the heads of 19 UN agencies.¹ This new Cooperation Framework marks the fourth of its kind in Albania and builds upon significant experience and built-in adjustments² by the UN system in Albania as one of the first Delivering as One (DaO) pilot countries. UN Albania’s DaO approach is valued by the government and partners as helping to consolidate and harmonise UN programming, communications, advocacy, investment mapping and reporting. Lessons from the previous cooperation cycles using a DaO approach are embedded fully in the UNSDCF theory of change and configuration of the UN system, including existing mechanisms for joint work with government and other programme partners.

A key mechanism to support joint programming is the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund, established by the UN and the Albanian government in 2007 as the One UN Coherence Fund and rebranded in 2018 as the latter. The fund supports specific joint programmes, as well as the overall joint work planning process. In 2021, phase II of the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund was established to accompany UNSDCF 2022–2026 implementation, while the current fund, Albania SDG Acceleration Fund Phase I, closure date was extended to 31 December 2023, with decision of the Joint Executive Committee of 11 October 2021, to allow for implementation of the ongoing projects – reported under 2021 Summary Implementation Progress Report for the Albania SDG Acceleration fund Phase I.

In the initial year of the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund Phase II, the fund mobilized multi-year commitments of USD 9 million from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation and the Swedish International Development Cooperation.

Purpose

Further to the UN reform being implemented by the Secretary-General from January 2019, UN in Albania has an independent, empowered, and impartial Resident Coordinator and strengthened UNRCO able to lead the UN’s integrated and impactful contributions at country level. To deliver on such an ambitious reform agenda and to shape country-based programming, aligned with new UNSDCF 2022-2027 for Albania, the use of pooled funding mechanism – SDG Acceleration Fund for Albania Phase II – will aid to improve UNCT coordination, coherence, and alignment, better manage risks, and promote transformative change, while improving overall accountability for results and financial reporting.

The goal of the fund is to support the implementation of the UNSDCF (2022-2026) in the four outcome areas: 1. Human Capital Development; 2. Economic Growth, Innovation and Climate Change; 3. Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights; and 4. Gender Responsive Governance.

Until the end of 2021, two Joint Programmes benefitting from the support from the Phase II of the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund, ensuring strengthened UN coherence, coordination and collaboration in Albania, include:

Leave No One Behind (LNB) phase II – started implementation in the second half of 2021, through the modalities of Delivering as One mechanism, under the framework of the UNSDCF 2022-2026, with the joint participation of four UN agencies of UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA and in close partnership with relevant governmental bodies at central and local level. The Joint Programme’s overall

¹ Three UN agencies—ITU, UNDRR and UNV—that were not signatories to the PoCSD 2017–2021 signed the new UNSDCF and committed to delivering across its results. However, IAEA will not participate in the UNSDCF implementation.

² For example: 1, UN programme staff and partners have worked over two full previous cycles in joint inter-agency results groups and using JWPs where working methods and performance expectations are now considered ‘business as usual’; 2, A joint fund for strategic, coordinated UN system work has been in continuous operation since 2007 and is a preferred funding modality for government and offers broad appeal to the international community.

goal is: “Vulnerable persons and groups have improved access to gender responsive public services that support their social rights, social inclusion and well-being, and are empowered to have a voice in public policy decision-making affecting their lives, and to hold decision-makers accountable for policy implementation”. The focus of the Joint Programme second phase is on the consolidation of the social protection and social care reform roll-out (full implementation of the Law on Social Care Services) and strengthening results from LNB Phase 1. The Joint Programme has three outcomes: (i) to empower the beneficiaries to access and to contribute to their social inclusion; (ii) to enable municipalities and service providers to provide services; and (iii) to strengthen national institutions in the further development and implementation of social inclusion policies. This, in turn, is in line with the SDGs, and with Albania’s aspiration for EU accession. The Joint Programme is implemented under Outcome 1 Human Capital Development, Output 1.1 Social protection of the UNSDCF 2022-2026.

[Business Partnerships & Solutions for SDGs](#) - signed in December 2021 and will start implementation in January 2022. The Joint Programme is funded by Sweden, represented by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and will be implemented through the modalities of Delivering as One mechanism, under the framework of the UNSDCF 2022-2026, with the joint participation of four UN agencies of by UNDP, ILO, FAO and UNIDO to raise the awareness among private sector actors about SDGs and, in particular, ways business will benefit and contribute from their implementation in Albania. The Joint Programme will be implemented under Outcome 2 Economic growth, Innovation and Climate Change, Output 2.2 Sustainable and resilient economic growth and green and blue economy transition of the UNSDCF 2022-2026.

The focus of SDG work with the private sector in Albania will be placed on two sectors – agro-processing and textile sectors. The joint programme will seek to achieve this relying on the Swedish experience and investment focus and will facilitate business to business cooperation while at the same time supporting the private sector in delivery and monitoring of social and environmental impact. Making known good practices from Sweden will lead to better understanding and engagement on the SDGs and help identify opportunities to co-design and pilot solutions in the two selected sectors. The Swedish private sector will bring to the solution space attributes including expertise and technology to incubate innovation and help solve SDG related challenges through new partnerships in Albania.

These two Joint Programmes will be implemented by a large number of actors such as UN organisations, Albanian Ministries, Local Government Units, Private Sector, Civil Society Organisations and target groups. The private sector will include, but not be limited to, Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania (UCCIAL), Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tirana (CCIT), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), National Chamber of Garment Producers of Albania, Biznes Albania, Pro Export, Foreign Investor Association of Albania (FIAA).

In addition, the Swedish investors for Sustainable Development (SISD) which is a partnership comprising 21 of the largest financial actors on the Swedish market with Sida serving as a facilitator and catalyst will work through seven different thematic working groups to share ideas, experiences, and learning with the rest of the network. Other initiatives that could be relevant to this Joint Programme’s partnership base include the [Sweden Textile Water Initiative](#) and [Sustainable Brand Index](#).

Beyond the coordination among partners involved in the implementation of these Joint Programmes, results are substantiated by additional projects and/or initiatives undertaken by UN agencies under the above-mentioned outputs and synergies are actively sought for and used to achieve the relevant outputs and outcomes that these joint projects/initiatives fall under in the UNSDCF 2022 - 2026.

SDGs and social inclusion is a crosscutting theme in several policy documents, targeting social protection, health, housing, education, skills and employability, children, youth, ageing (older persons), gender, PWDs, R&E, and LGBTIQ, etc. The LNB Phase II and the Business Partnerships & Solutions for SDGs Joint Programmes will cross-communicate with the other outcomes (and outputs) of the UNSDCF 2022-2026.

- Increased, more effective investment in the quality and coverage of essential social services will depend upon efforts under outcome 2 Economic growth, Innovation and Climate Change of the UNSDCF to

support an effective economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, increased economic activity, reduced levels of informality and greater fiscal space;

- Results under outcome 1 Human Capital Development will also create a circular relationship wherein a healthy, fit population can engage more fully in a diversifying, knowledge-based economy with increased productivity and resilience;
- Efforts to strengthen governance of the social protection systems under outcome 1 will depend upon legislative and regulatory reforms to strengthen public administration under outcome 4 Gender Responsive Governance.

Administrative Elements of the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund Phase II

The Terms of Reference for the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund Phase II set out the modus operandum and the responsibilities of the Government of Albania, United Nations Albania as well as the contributing Development Partners towards the Fund's implementation.

The Joint Executive Committee (JEC)³, in its role as the overseer of the overall contribution of the UNSDCF 2022-2026, decides on specific allocations of resources from the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund Phase II. The allocation decisions are based on the relevant priority activities, including respective budgets and implementation partners, set out in the cooperation frameworks and government strategies in place.

The RC provides governance and oversight of the fund on behalf of the UN in Albania, and the fund is administered by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office in NY, as Administrative Agent, with UN Resident Coordinator Office serving as Secretariat.

All actions of the United Nations in Albania are organized through Outcome Workplans, corresponding to the two Outcomes in the UNSDCF mentioned above. Actions financed by the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund Phase II are included in these Outcome Workplans. The work plans are prepared jointly with the government counterparts and are signed by the UN Resident Coordinator, relevant line ministers and UN Heads of agencies, who co-chair the Outcomes, and all contributing UN agencies. Government has a critical role in the discussion of priorities, monitoring of progress and mid-course adjustment.


Core reporting is provided through the annual, joint UN Progress Report against the UNSDCF. Both these Joint Programmes within the SDG Acceleration Fund Phase II have established Steering Committees and agree to more detailed supplementary reporting, as agreed by the parties involved.

Assessment of Results

Amidst Covid-19 and the earthquake-related challenges facing the country, during 2021, the fifth and final year of implementation of the current Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development (PoCSD) 2017–2021 was conducted in close cooperation with government (central and local level) and partners.

By end-2021, taking into account the short implementation period of the Joint Programmes, several key achievements were evidenced, as reported below, and supported by UN in Albania.

Outcome 1—Human Capital Development

 **Social protection:** SDG targets: 1.3, 3.7, 4.1, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 10.2, 11.10, 16.6

Throughout the second half of 2021, under the LNB Phase II Joint Programme, UN Agencies complemented the government's efforts to roll-out the social protection reform by adopting a holistic and reinforcing support approach with technical assistance, capacity building, advocacy, research, and grant funding. Efforts focused on empowerment of vulnerable groups at community level to demand responsive

³ The JEC is co-chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the UN Resident Coordinator (and composed of Government and the UN Country Team).

and inclusive social care services, strengthening capacities of local governments in planning, budgeting and delivering adequate social care services including innovative services at local government level, and further elaboration of policy and legal framework on Social Protection and Social Inclusion supported with establishment of public funding mechanisms at national level.

Outcome 2—Economic Growth, Innovation and Climate Change

 **Sustainable and resilient economic growth and green and blue economy transition** — SDG targets: 8.2, 9.b, 12.8, 17.9

The implementation of the Business Partnerships & Solutions for SDGs Joint Programme will start in 2022. The work plan 2022, indicator performance framework will be developed in 2022Q1 and presented and endorsed by the Joint Programme's Steering Committee in Q2 2022.

Narrative Reporting on Implementation Progress

Leave No One Behind (LNB) phase II

The impact of poverty and social exclusion can be minimized, if not neutralized, with the adequate and proper social protection and social inclusion policies. The government has undertaken three ambitious vertical reforms in disability, cash assistance and social care services, but there is need for measures, tools, and standards for national and subnational authorities to deliver integrated social protection that addresses the needs of men, women, boys and girls. In Albania, national policies on social protection are not driven by periodical nationally approved measurements of household or child poverty; evidence on material and non-material deprivation does not directly feed the design of any social protection measure; national social protection policies do not include national poverty reduction targets in line with the SDGs. A comprehensive social protection system is still being developed; while national policies do outline a vision for an integrated social protection system, it is still fragmented by the other sectors (health, education, nutrition etc.) and the vision is not backed up by adequately financed measures to enable implementation of the vision and address the gender-based and social determinants of poverty and social exclusion. The national information system for social protection still lags behind and is not a unified database collecting information on children who are beneficiaries of social protection programming. Spending is low on social protection – on cash benefits for families and children and particularly on social care services – and all national and local institutions dealing with social protection lack adequate resources. Pressure for fiscal discipline and reducing public debt has become an obstacle to identifying fiscal space for proper social protection budgets or financing a social protection floor.

While the programme will cover all of Albania, by empowering vulnerable people and by promoting systemic reform of social service and inclusion provision countrywide, the programme adopts geographic foci to ensure that around 30⁴ (of a total of 61) municipalities are suitably capacitated to provide a system of integrated social services to cover the needs of the vulnerable population. Therefore, while LNB (Phase 2) will be focused on LNB's existing 25 Local Government Units (LGU) partners, a limited number of other LGUs will also be supported to become active players. The (existing and new) LGUs will be targeted for: delivering community-based social services, developing innovative delivery of social services, and mainstreaming social inclusion and gender equality in local policies.

Following up on the comprehensive Mapping of The Social Care Services in Albania conducted during May – September 2021, the programme set the following criteria to identify and suggest new target municipalities: lack/insufficient of social services and the need for (new) social services; not in the target of EU/IPA programme for Social Inclusion; commitment/willingness to prioritize social services and allocate more resources for sustainable interventions. In addition, the identification of target municipalities was informed from the field trips and consultations with local actors conducted during the period

⁴ LNB2 ProDoc

September- November 2021 in 14 Municipalities. The identification process and the selection of new target municipalities was consulted and agreed with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

Following the selection of Municipalities, throughout the second half of 2021, UN Agencies complemented the government's efforts to roll-out the social protection reform by adopting a holistic and reinforcing support approach with technical assistance, capacity building, advocacy, research, and grant funding. LNB Phase II complemented the efforts of LNB Phase I enabling the below achievements by the end of the year:

Empowerment of VGs at community level to demand responsive and inclusive social care services: Vulnerable groups particularly R&E, PwDs, youth and women and their CSOs are empowered with information, knowledge and advocacy skills on their rights and entitlements to social services and are actively engaged at local and national level in advocacy forums and public consultation mechanisms⁵ to demand their rights and influence policy planning and decision making, which resulted in improved and inclusive local policies (i.e. inclusive local social care plans, establishment of new social care services) responsive to the needs of the vulnerable communities. Supported by UNDP, more than 1800 Roma and Egyptian (371 Families) benefited from the implementation of integrated social services in Lezha, Kruja and Fier; 4 community centres for children with disabilities (Korca, Shkodra, Roskovec and Puka) become operational and 13 community centers' staff strengthened their capacity building through online training, and exchange visits; 6 organizations of persons with disabilities implemented small grant projects and strengthened their capacities for advocacy and networking and voicing the rights of their constituencies involving +400 persons with disabilities.

With the support of UN Women, over 1200 women and men in 12 municipalities raised their voice and partook in participatory budgeting processes; 840 vulnerable women and girls, including youth, older women, rural women, women with disabilities and unemployed women have benefited from training and awareness events and voiced their needs. About 20% of concerns raised were discussed with Municipalities and will become priorities in the future budget. In addition, capacities of local CSOs and LGUs were strengthened to activate, engage the community and women of all groups into participatory budgeting processes: involved 35 LGUs representatives from 12 target municipalities in elaboration of local priorities for public consultation with women, 30 representatives of local NGOs / activists and Prisma members engaged in participatory budgeting process.

Strengthened capacities of local governments in planning, budgeting and delivering adequate social care services including innovative services at local government level: All municipalities developed and costed social care plans and 36 of them (60%) were supported by LNB. 25 municipalities (40%) implemented several innovative services for VGs with the potential of scaling up in other municipalities enabling access to quality social care services to over 17,000 R/E, PwDs, women, youth, and children (UNDP). 11 municipalities⁶ were assisted to develop and approve social care plans fully costed and with clear targets to reach at least 60% of all children in poverty or vulnerable situation in the municipality, budget briefs that served to inform the decision making on the planning of expenditures for the financing of social care plan and social care services. All 61 municipalities have been supported through training and mentoring to populate and use the MIS for social care services (UNICEF). 5 municipalities⁷ were assisted to develop through consultative process 5-year local social housing plans allowing them to assess and address the social housing needs of the most vulnerable in their territory. (UNDP). Tirana Municipality is assisted to develop the Plan of Actions on Persons with Disabilities and of R/E that will be an integral part of the new Local Social Care Plan 2021-2025, which is also under development. (UNDP). 17 municipalities were supported in implementing social fund through grant funds allocated for innovative community-based social care services. In addition, protocols were developed for municipal social care service staff in the situation of COVID-19 and similar pandemics. (UNDP) Working together with the welfare staff of municipalities of Tirana and Shkodra, clear and practical work protocols for NARUs and social workers have been developed, so that they can offer quality family assessment and counselling even in a crisis like

⁵ Forums of PwDs, Participatory Gender Budgeting Network, Local Partnership Models on SRH and Rights, Local Social Dialogue Groups, National Advocacy Platform-Youth Voice Network

⁶ Tepelena, Pustec Himara, Devoll, Selenica, Klos, Kolonje, Vau i Dejes, Gramsh, Delvina, etc.

⁷ Tirana, Vlora, Korca, Vau i Dejes and Permet

COVID-19. The standards are being used to train the municipal staff of other municipalities. (UNDP/UNICEF)

Further elaboration of policy and legal framework on Social Protection and Social Inclusion supported with establishment of public funding mechanisms at national level: National institutions⁸ advanced their cross-sectoral cooperation in consolidation and further development of the legal and regulatory policy framework on social inclusion and social care reforms in Albania, the design and use of the standardized data collection systems and data sharing protocols for monitoring and analysis of national social inclusion policies and strategies. Recognizing that the achievement of social inclusion and social protection requires concerted and well targeted financial investments in the social sector over the longer-term, the LNB programme has provided valuable technical support and advice to the government linked to its development of state funding mechanisms for social inclusion. This includes support to the MoHSP for the monitoring of Social Inclusion Indicators (SIPD) and writing of the evaluation report with conclusions and recommendations (UNDP); support to MoFE for: (1) the completion of the social housing secondary legislation; (2) the monitoring of the Social Housing Strategy (SHS) and development of the new action plan of SHS for the period 2021 – 2025; (3) development of the guidelines for the development of the local housing plans (UNDP); provision of technical assistance to the State Social Service for the mapping of social care services nationwide with the aim to support the latter and other concerned government institutions to identify the gaps in the area of social care services, as well as to inform LNB’s internal planning of activities for further support to institutions providing social services for vulnerable groups at sub-national level. The mapping results are expected to serve as a good basis for government policy dialogue and for civil society engagement. (UNDP)

Other support, provided by UNDP, includes the strengthening of the partnership with academia and with QAAPE (Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-University Education) to (1) strengthen professional capacities of 1000 assistant teachers for children with disabilities and encourage their cooperation with the community-based centres and families and provision of integrated support services; (2) documentation and divulgation of good practices related to the cooperation of assistant teachers with families and social care service providers in supporting the development of children with disabilities.

Partnership with Faculty of Social Sciences, supported by UNICEF, contributed to strengthening the social protection workforce through pre-service and in-service curricula for social workers. The curricula of three social work programs in Tirana, Shkodra and Elbasan has been reviewed and revised to ensure that it reflects the social service legal framework, the new legal and professional requirement for the different types of social protection workforce working either at municipalities, or direct service provision. About 600 students graduating from social work bachelor degree will benefit from the new curricula during 2022-2024 and about 330 practising social workers have benefited from the training programmes.

With UN Women support, the results of social exclusion, vulnerabilities, and gender-based discrimination at the local level in 15 municipalities can finally be measured using the EU-SILC survey as a baseline. INSTAT finalized Gender Responsive Mapping of Linkages between Social inclusion and vulnerabilities. The report is a key resource for future policy makers in the field of social protection, highlighting the peculiarities of women’s poverty in Albania in 15 municipalities and providing evidence that income-based poverty measures, complemented with material deprivation and social exclusion, increase gender inequality.

Business Partnerships & Solutions for SDGs

The implementation of the Joint Programme will start in 2022. The work plan 2022, indicator performance framework will be developed in 2022Q1 and presented and endorsed by the Joint Programme Steering Committee in Q22022.

⁸ MoHSP, MoFE, MoES, INSTAT

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Leave No One Behind (LNB) phase II

The capacities and resources of the public administration responsible for social protection and social services remain limited at all levels, both in terms of the number of staff, technical capacity and financial allocations. This was particularly striking during Covid-19 lockdown, where the public administration at the central, but particularly the local, level showed weak disaster management capacities to identify vulnerable segments and respond to their needs quickly. An unclear division of roles was noted between national and local government that are a prerequisite for a well-coordinated and targeted response in emergency situations. The lack of clarity created difficulties in transferring the integration social service model to targeted municipalities, which faced increased demands from the R&E communities for a broad range of social services: health, education, social and economic. UN agencies maintained persistent communication and coordination with beneficiary municipalities to ensure that those most in need received adequate support.

The pandemic expanded the typology of vulnerable groups beyond the R&E communities, with the elderly, particularly those living alone, people with chronic disease, women victims of GBV, unemployed persons, people suffering from mental health and depression, and rural youth, and widened the existing gaps and inequalities. The municipal social care services lacked any additional financing to cope with the pandemic and increase their outreach and had to re-orient their approach by coordinating with service providers from the civil society sector and international donors to respond to the demands of multiple vulnerable groups. The municipalities were mentored to adjust to the new reality and were supported with participatory tools for ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable were accounted for in the response measures.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented serious challenges for the budgetary allocations as LGUs had to respond to the financial and health crisis burden on social spending and social protection budgets, so that gender budgeting became even more challenging to address.

Indicator Based Performance Assessment

UN in Albania interventions will attribute to, or contribute to, achievement of the indicators under the relevant outcomes and outputs during the UNSDCF 2022 - 2026 implementation.

Since the LNB Phase II implementation period was less than six months in 2021 and the Business Partnerships & Solutions for SDGs did not start implementation in 2021, the indicator-based performance assessment will be conducted in 2022 and reported by 2023Q2. It is worth mentioning that the LNB Phase II Joint Programme contributed to the achievement of the indicators of LNB Phase I, reported under the 2021 Summary Implementation Progress Report for the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund Phase I.

Annexes

Annex A: Progress against relevant UNSDCF results framework

To be completed in the next reporting period - April 2023