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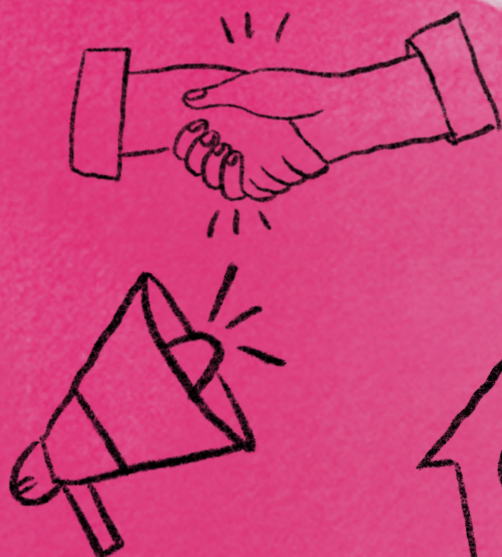
Leave No One Behind

Phase II

August 2021 —→ December 2025

Final Report

January 2026





**Leave
No One
Behind**

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General Information

This is the final report of the Leave No One Behind (LNB2) Phase II Programme in Albania (2021–2025), jointly implemented by four UN partner agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, and UNFP, in collaboration with the Government of Albania and with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Fully consistent with national legislation and policy priorities, the programme expanded the reach of social protection and inclusion reforms, while enhancing the capacities of municipalities to deliver decentralized, gender-responsive services for women, men, and children across the country. Main population groups that benefited directly and indirectly from improved access to social services, including people with low income and at risk of exclusion and marginalization of all genders and of all ages, and specific groups, such as persons with disabilities and Roma and Egyptian communities.

Main outcomes of the LBN 2 were:

- Empowering vulnerable populations to access gender-responsive services and participate in decision-making
- Enabling municipalities to establish, manage and scale up integrated community-based services
- Supporting national institutions in implementing policies that ensure social inclusion and gender-responsive services

This report provides a consolidated overview of the Programme's impact and key achievements in advancing social inclusion and social protection in Albania. It begins with an analysis of the political and socio-economic context over the past five years, highlighting key developments, progress, and challenges relevant to programme implementation. This is followed by a description of the Programme's intervention logic and its synergies with other development partners.

The report then presents the main achievements at impact, outcome, and output levels, including a concise overview of activities implemented during the 2021–2025 period. A more detailed and chronological account of all programme activities is provided in Annex 4.

The final chapters examine the Programme's consistent integration of gender equality and good governance principles, as well as its contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Albania. The report also reflects on key implementation challenges encountered across different phases, lessons learned, the way forward, and concluding considerations.

Executive Summary

The Leave No One Behind (LNB) Phase II Programme focused on advancing equitable and accessible public services in Albania, with a strong emphasis on social care and inclusive service provision for marginalized populations. It built on the achievements and lessons learned during Phase I (2017–2021) of LNB, while further strengthening institutional capacities and service delivery systems.

LNB Phase II was implemented during a period marked by the opening and acceleration of negotiations with the EU, as well as two election cycles, which resulted in political continuity at both central and local levels. While trends of economic growth and poverty reduction remained positive, structural challenges persisted, including labour market informality, demographic decline driven by migration, persistent gender and regional inequalities that particularly affected disadvantaged groups. The social protection reforms and its implementation advanced, yet public spending and social care service coverage remained low by European standards and uneven across municipalities. In this context, LNB Phase II responded to growing demand for inclusive, community-based services and supported institutional capacities to address compounded vulnerabilities among the most disadvantaged groups.

At the **impact level**, the Programme contributed to measurable progress in improving vulnerable groups' access to public services and participation in policy processes. The population at risk of poverty declined throughout the implementation period, alongside improvements in human development. However, gender and child poverty gaps persist, and financing for social care services remains limited despite stable overall social protection spending. These trends confirm the Programme's continued relevance in promoting inclusive, gender-responsive, and sustainable social investment.

Under the first **Outcome**, key indicators show important progress. By 2025, a total of 39,091 vulnerable persons (52% women) accessed social services delivered by LGUs and other providers, with the largest beneficiary groups being families in need (44%), older persons (15%), children and adults with disabilities (16%), Roma and Egyptian minorities (9%), young people in need (7%), and survivors of domestic violence (5.8%, overwhelmingly women). Satisfaction with services increased across all groups compared to baseline levels, with notable improvements among persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, women, and youth, indicating strengthened quality and responsiveness of service delivery. Participation in local social inclusion governance expanded significantly, with 18,694 individuals (57% women) and 262 CSOs actively engaged in LGU consultation processes, alongside increased engagement of women through participatory budgeting mechanisms. Accountability at local level improved, as 628 issues raised by vulnerable groups were reflected in planning and budgeting processes, with higher responsiveness observed in participatory budgeting initiatives.

Under the second **Outcome**, from 2021 to 2025, the programme had helped consolidate a nationwide system of evidence-based local social planning, reinforced institutional accountability, and increased municipal ownership over service delivery. The consolidation of the Social Fund financing mechanisms and use of Management Information System (MIS) enabled municipalities to better target vulnerable groups and ensure financial sustainability of social services. 40 municipalities were providing community-based services for at least three vulnerable groups, while the Social Fund expanded its reach to 60 applicant municipalities, of which 51 received support, signaling growing national ownership. Local planning capacity

advanced, with 43 municipalities adopting social-care plans and 23 approving social-housing plans, complemented by stronger case-management systems through 15 functional Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUS) and full MIS usage by 61 municipalities. Importantly, municipalities allocated ALL 456 million from their own budgets for social-care services in 2022, confirming a shift toward local financing.

Finally, the achievements under **Outcome 3** demonstrate a decisive shift from fragmented interventions to a coherent, well-regulated, and data-driven social-protection system, in line with EU accession priorities, gender equality, and the principle of leaving no one behind. By 2025, 21 sub-legal issues were resolved under the Law on Social Care Services, which among others made it mandatory and regulate the modalities for the establishment of local social funds, thereby reinforcing local accountability and sustainability. In addition, the operationalization of the legal framework advanced around 51 pieces of policy/legislation/ regulation/ instructions/ national standards on social inclusion adopted from 2021 to 2025. In addition, national allocations on the Social Fund, which reached ALL 369 million for 2025, demonstrating continued state financing for social inclusion. Professionalization in the sector deepened: 1,227 social-care workers upgraded their qualifications, and the Order of Social Workers sustaining its role as the key professional body aligning national standards with international practice. In addition, Facilities of Social Sciences of the Universities of Tirana, Shkodra and Elbasan deliver programmes on social care work in line with international standards, thanks also to the collaboration with the University of Lucerne, enabled by the programme.

LNB Phase II promoted gender equality by combining targeted support to disadvantaged women, increasing women's participation in local decision-making and integration of gender-responsive approaches in social protection policies, planning, and budgeting at national and local levels. In parallel, the Programme advanced good governance by applying a human rights-based approach to strengthen transparency, accountability, and institutional capacities for inclusive and integrated service delivery.

Implementation took place in a challenging context marked by fiscal and administrative decentralisation, limited municipal capacities, electoral cycles, migration, and growing social vulnerabilities. Rising living costs and demographic change increased demand for social services, while constrained budgets and staff turnover affected sustainability, particularly at local level. Despite these constraints, the Programme contributed to more coherent and data-driven social protection and social inclusion systems and supported Albania's progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals—especially SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, and 17—through an integrated “Leave No One Behind” approach.

UN partner agencies in the LNB Phase II initiated preparations for the final consolidation and exit phase (2026–2027) following a mid-term evaluation completed in December 2024. The evaluation informed the development of the LNB3 exit strategy and programme design, supported by consultations with national and local stakeholders and validated through a participatory workshop in June 2025. The LNB3 Programme focuses on consolidating results, transferring ownership to national and local partners, and scaling up proven social care service models.

Chapter 1: - Introduction

1.1 Context:

Political context

Over the past five years, Albania has made steady progress toward European Union accession, with EU integration remaining a key national priority. The LNB 2 implementation period coincided with Albania's opening of EU accession negotiations in 2022 and a sustained political ambition to advance the process. While momentum was maintained, EU assessments continued to highlight the need for faster and deeper reforms, particularly in the areas of rule of law, governance, and public administration, to translate commitments into tangible progress.¹ In 2025, the accession process accelerated with the opening of all six negotiation clusters, including progress under Chapter 19 on Social Policy and Employment. With programme support, national authorities assessed the alignment of legal and policy frameworks with EU standards in areas such as the care economy, disability, equality, anti-discrimination, and alternative care. Despite these advances, parliamentary oversight and media scrutiny of social policy remained limited, and Albania is assessed as moderately prepared in this area.²

During the programme's implementation period, Albania held local elections in May 2023 and general elections in May 2025, which resulted in continuity of the governing party, retaining control in the majority of municipalities (53 out of 61 municipalities) and the national parliament. Overall, the programme maintained stable cooperation with central and local institutions, despite two changes in political leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in 2023 and 2025, which did not affect the main policy directions in social protection and social inclusion. The name of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) changed to Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MHSW) in 2025, reflecting an administrative adjustment rather than a substantive change in the mandate or policy direction of the institution, which continue to cover health, social protection, and social inclusion responsibilities. In 2025 a Deputy Minister of Health and Social Welfare from the Roma community was appointed, responsible for social inclusion.

Both electoral processes highlighted structural limitations in inclusive political participation, with disadvantaged groups remaining largely unrepresented. For example, during the 2023 local elections, out of 23,763 candidates for the 1,603 councilor positions, only nine were members of the Roma community and there is no information on candidates with disabilities.³ On the other hand, during the electoral campaign on the general elections 2025, voter education initiatives targeting Roma communities increased compared to previous elections, but gaps remained, with Roma voters in some areas still lacking familiarity with electoral procedures and access to targeted voter education.⁴ In addition, the Central Election Commission (CEC) made an effort to improve accessibility at voting centres for persons with disabilities,

¹ EU progress reports on Albania

² European Commission. 2025. Progress report on Albania, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

³ OSCE/ODIHR, Council of Europe, European Parliament: Albania, Local Elections, 14 May 2023, Preliminary Conclusion, , May 2023, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/b/543561.pdf>

⁴ OSCE/ODHIR, Parliamentary Elections Albania, May 2025, Final Report, <https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/0/c/600028.pdf>

but on election day, more than half of the polling stations observed were not adequately accessible for persons with disabilities to vote independently. On a positive note, some parties demonstrated inclusive practices by including candidates with disabilities on their lists.⁵

Economic Context and Employment

Over the four-year implementation period, Albania's economy demonstrated resilience amid multiple external shocks, including the post-pandemic recovery, rising global inflation, and the impacts of Russia's war in Ukraine. Following a robust rebound in 2021, when real GDP increased by 8.5 %⁶, economic growth was moderate but remained positive in subsequent years. GDP growth reached 4.8 % in 2022⁷ and remained around 3.4-3.5% from 2023-2025, supported by strong foreign demand and a slight moderation in domestic demand.⁸

Despite sustained economic growth and a decline in unemployment from 11.5 %⁹ in 2021 to around 8.5 % in 2024¹⁰ employment recovery did not keep pace with economic growth, and labour market inclusion remained uneven. Challenges persist, particularly high youth unemployment, gender and rural disparities, long-term unemployment, and a substantial informal labour sector.

Youth (15-24 years old) unemployment rate remains high at 22.8 % in 2024 and 22.2 % percent of young people aged 15–29 were not in employment, education, or training.¹¹ Women's unemployment decreased from at 12.4 % in 2021¹² to 9.2 % in 2024¹³; however, the labour force participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 69.6 %, with a gender gap of 12.4 percentage points compared to men.¹⁴ Although the gender pay gap declined from 6.6 % in 2021 to 4.9 % in 2024, this figure does not capture women's extensive participation in informal work, which accounted for 24.7 % in the non-agriculture sector in 2024.¹⁵

In particular, inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labour market remained a key challenge. Overall, persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, and other disadvantaged groups encounter multidimensional barriers to employment, requiring targeted local-level employment and skills services supported by CSO partnerships. The country faces skills mismatch issues, with many overqualified for their jobs. Education quality is a concern. VET system can fill most job needs, but younger workers face precarious work and potential automation. Older workers may face manual work challenges and automation risks. In addition, digitalisation of public services poses accessibility issues for vulnerable communities due to education, skills, and financial constraints.¹⁶

In response, Albania advanced employment and skills reforms, particularly from 2023 onward. The adoption of the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023–2030 and amendments to the Law on Employment Promotion strengthened the policy and legal framework, including measures targeting inclusive

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ World Bank, Western Balkans Regular Economic Report: Spring 2022

⁷ IMF End-of-Mission Press Release on Albania, June 2023, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/06/21/pr23222-albania-imf-staff-completes-a-staff-visit-to-albania>

⁸ <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/albania#tab-economy>

⁹ INSTAT (2022), labour market in Albania, 2021, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/10021/press-release-labour-market-2021.pdf>

¹⁰ INSTAT (2025), Labour Market in Albania, 2024, https://www.instat.gov.al/media/ebwma5bq/tregu_i_punes_2024_final.pdf

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² INSTAT (2022), labour market in Albania, 2021, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/10021/press-release-labour-market-2021.pdf>

¹³ INSTAT (2025), Labour Market in Albania, 2024, https://www.instat.gov.al/media/ebwma5bq/tregu_i_punes_2024_final.pdf

¹⁴ INSTAT (2024), Labour Market in Albania, 2023, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13552/tregu-i-punes-2023.pdf>

¹⁵ INSTAT (2025), Labour Market in Albania, 2024, https://www.instat.gov.al/media/ebwma5bq/tregu_i_punes_2024_final.pdf

¹⁶ Government of Albania and United Nations Country Team in Albania, Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, Draft roadmap of Albania (Draft, January 2024).

employment for persons with disabilities through the Social Employment Fund. Complementary initiatives, including the piloting of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, aimed to improve access to employment for young people.

Demographic

In June 2024, Albania published the results of the Population and Housing Census 2023, which is the main statistical activity conducted by the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) every decade. The total resident population of the country is 2,402,113 persons, a decrease of around 420 thousand since the 2011 census, where Albania had a population of 2,821,977 persons. This confirmed the concern raised over the last decade over the rapid decline of the Albanian population, attributed mainly to migration and lower fertility. The immigration trend has been also affected LNB targeted areas, particularly among the youth of Roma communities.¹⁷

Poverty

Albania has made some progress in reducing poverty through economic growth and reforms in social protection. The at-risk-of-poverty rate¹⁸ has steadily declined from 22%, in 2021¹⁹ to 19.2 % in 2024, yet it continues to remain higher among women (19.5%) compared to men (18.9%), and it is particularly severe among children (26.6%)²⁰. At the same time, the share of the population “at risk of poverty or social exclusion”²¹ remains widespread, affecting 40.5 %²² of people in 2024, which is almost double the EU average (21%) and especially pronounced in rural areas and among vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, older persons and others. Families with children also continue to be more vulnerable. The at-risk-of-poverty rate for households without dependent children decreased from 12.8% in 2021 to 10.5% in 2024, while among those with dependent children decreased from 25.9% to 24.8%²³. With the support of the programme and other actors, Albania continued the implementation of the social protection and social inclusion reform, which has helped reduce poverty and inequalities.

Social Protection and Social Inclusion Framework

The key legislation in the area of social protection and social inclusion consist of the Law on Social Care Services (2016), the Law on Local Governance (2005) and Law on Social Assistance (2019). The first two established the basis for a decentralized and integrated system of social services in Albania, clarifying the roles and financing responsibilities of central and local authorities. The Law on Social Assistance aims to reduce poverty and social exclusion by providing economic assistance and disability-related benefits to individuals and families in need. In addition to the core legal framework, social protection and social

¹⁷ <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2024/albanian-population-and-housing-census-2023/>

¹⁸ The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfer) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers.

¹⁹ INSTAT, Income and Living Conditions Survey in Albania (EU-SILC) 2021, published in December 2022 https://www.instat.gov.al/media/11137/silc-2021_final_anglisht.pdf

²⁰ INSTAT, Income and Living Conditions Survey in Albania (EU-SILC) 2024, published in October 2025, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/gsf15zlg/silc-2024.pdf>

²¹ At risk of poverty or social exclusion, abbreviated as AROPE, corresponds to the sum of persons who are either at [risk of poverty](#), or [severely materially and socially deprived](#) or [living in a household with a very low work intensity](#). People are included only once even if they are in more than one of the situations mentioned above.

²² INSTAT, Income and Living Conditions Survey in Albania (EU-SILC) 2024, published in October 2025, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/gsf15zlg/silc-2024.pdf>

²³ Ibid.

inclusion in Albania is guided by a comprehensive set of sectoral and cross-cutting policy strategies and action plans.²⁴

An important achievement during the programme's implementation has been the adoption of the National Strategy on Social Protection (NSSP) 2024-2030 in January 2024, with the support of the programme, following a comprehensive consultation process.²⁵ The vision is to ensure social protection for every person in need, guaranteeing a dignified life throughout the life cycle in an enabling and empowerment environment.

Spending on Social Protection

Between 2021 and 2025, Albania's overall spending on social protection remained broadly stable at around 9.5–9.6 per cent of GDP²⁶. While this level represents a modest increase compared to the pre-pandemic period, it remains among the lowest in Europe and far below the EU average (around 27,3% of GDP in 2024).²⁷ At the central government level, social protection budget continued to be heavily dominated by cash benefit outlays, which accounted for more than 95% between 2015 and 2022, falling down to 94% in 2023 and 2024 (decrease in relative terms, nominal expenditure has increased)²⁸. The cash benefit programme is composed of: (i) cash benefit payments for poverty alleviation (social assistance – *ndihma ekonomike NE*); (ii) cash payment benefits for persons with disabilities²⁹; (iii) the one-time baby bonus awarded to families, which has increased from 2.3 billion in 2019, to 3.3 billion ALL by 2023, falling down to 2.2 billion in 2024. Since 2023, a new programme paying social insurance for unemployed mothers with low income and with three or more children was introduced (ALL 780 million in 2023 and ALL 860 million in 2024).³⁰

Despite these improvements, persistent concerns remain regarding the adequacy of social assistance benefits and the extent to which the programme effectively supports households in escaping poverty, as also recognised in the NSSP 2024–2030.³¹ These concerns are further compounded by the absence of an officially defined minimum standard of living, which limits the ability to systematically assess the poverty-alleviation impact of economic assistance.

Social Care Services

²⁴ Including the National Social Protection Strategy (2024-2030), Social Inclusion Policy Document (2022-2026), National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptians (2021-2025), National Action Plan on Elderly (2025-2039), National Action Plan for the LGBTI community (2021-2027), National Strategy for Social Housing (2015-2025), National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities (2021-2025), National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021-2030), National Action Plan for Drug Prevention, Treatment and Harm Reduction (2023 - 2026), National Action Plan on Sexual and Reproductive Health (2022 - 2030). Other key strategies and action plans related to social inclusion and protection include: National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 and its action plan; Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2023-2024; National Education Strategy 2021-2026; Health National Strategy 2021-2030; Intersectoral Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance 2023-2030 and its action plan 2023-2025

²⁵ Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 152, dated 13.3.2024 "On the adoption of the national social protection strategy 2024 - 2030 and the relevant action plan pursuant thereto".

²⁶ Based on the analysis of Budget Law for respective years.

²⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20251107-2>

²⁸ Albanian Government Budget Law 2023

²⁹ These include benefits for people with disability as well as caretakers

³⁰ Ministry of Health and Social Protection (2024), Comprehensive national-level review for the implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing+30 https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/b30_report_albania_en.pdf

³¹ Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 152, dated 13.3.2024 "On the adoption of the national social protection strategy 2024 - 2030 and the relevant action plan pursuant thereto".

Social care services are a core part of the social protection system, addressing vulnerabilities linked to poverty, health, housing, and social exclusion that cannot be resolved through cash support alone. These services are essential for promoting inclusion and wellbeing of disengaged groups. Over the years, Albania has made important progress in expanding and diversifying social care services, with both phases of LNB 2 playing a key role in this process. LNB supported the State Social Service conduct regular mapping of social services in 2019, 2021, 2023 and 2025. In 2023, Albania had around 391 public and non-public social care services institutions (an increase of 16% since 2021)³² and in 2025, the number of service providers increased to 439 or 13 % higher than 2023.³³ These services are offered by public³⁴ and non-public³⁵ service providers, the total number of which during the 2021–2025 has increased by 29 per cent, a growth mainly attributed to public providers.³⁶ These 439 institutions provide 1.669 social care services for 39.091 individuals in need. Public institutions providing social care services comprise 59 % of the total number, serving 44 % of the individuals in need, and “non-public” institutions account for 41 % the total number, providing services for 56 % of beneficiaries.³⁷ (In previous mappings of 2021 and 2023 a third category of hybrid institutions -combined public and non-public- was included, which does not feature in the last one).

However, the 2025 mapping reveals that while service provision is increasingly oriented toward addressing needs, social care services at the local level still remain limited in both scope and coverage and their distribution uneven across the country. For example, in 39 municipalities—or 64 per cent of all municipalities—less than 10 per cent of social care needs are met, while only 6 municipalities meet more than 25 per cent of these needs.³⁸

The Social Fund and Local Planning

Since its establishment in 2018, with support from LNB 1, the Social Fund has become a central financing instrument for decentralised social care service delivery. Annual allocations have gradually increased, while important governance reforms, particularly the adoption of DCM No. 224/2024 on the Social Fund calculation methodology, have strengthened transparency and predictability. The MHSP oversees policy delivery and the Social Fund, while local governments are responsible for implementing community-specific services. The MHSP follows closely with the municipalities the implementation of the DCM no. 613/2024 focused on the obligation of the local government units to establish the local social fund, contributing to further building synergies between the Local Social Plans and local budgeting, thus ensuring the financial support and long-term sustainability of social care services.

During the three years of implementation of the Social Fund mechanism, 40 new services were established in 32 municipalities.³⁹ By 2025, the Social Fund financed more than 70 social care services across over 55 municipalities and regions, enabling the establishment of new community-based services, supporting

³² UNDP (2023), Mapping of Social Services in Albania. See: <https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/mapping-social-services-albania-0>

³³ UNDP (2025). Mapping of Social Services in Albania (final report not published as of July 2025).

³⁴ Public providers are all those who are funded and administered by public sources (central, regional, local government, foreign aid, mixed public sources)

³⁵ Non-public providers are all those who are supported by non-public sources (foundations, associations, private donors, NGOs, international organizations operating outside the context of official development aid, mixed non-public sources, etc

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Social Fund in Figures, MHSP, developed with the support of LNB, 2022

thousands of beneficiaries, and engaging hundreds of social care practitioners.⁴⁰ The Government plans to scale up financing for social care, with the Social Fund budget expected to grow by 7% annually. From 2026, municipalities are required to establish Local Social Funds to consolidate and manage social care funding from national, local, and donor sources⁴¹.

Progress has also been made in local planning, with a growing number of municipalities adopting social care and social housing plans, often with donor and civil society support. 43 municipalities have adopted Social Plans and 18 are in the updating process. 23 municipalities have adopted social housing plans with LNB support.

However, despite progress, implementation challenges persist. Many municipalities lack fully staffed Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs), and designated personnel for vulnerable groups remain absent in several localities⁴². The national Management Information System (MIS), though installed across all municipalities, is underutilized, limiting data-driven planning⁴³. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have become increasingly active in advocacy and service delivery, though many require strengthened capacity, coordination, and policy engagement to support participatory governance and social inclusion goals⁴⁴. CSO involvement remains vital in expanding access to innovative, community-based services.

Addressing regional disparities, ensuring the operational capacity of municipal systems, and expanding investment in tailored, accessible services are essential to meet the needs of all vulnerable Albanians. The EU Commission in its two last assessment reports reiterates the same recommends that the Government of to Albania: further increase budget allocation, social services provision and monitoring of the Social Fund, strengthen the capacity of local governments to secure sufficient funding, and develop a coordinated social service referral system, consistently implemented at local level.⁴⁵

Inclusive Education

During the programme's implementation period, efforts have been made in advancing inclusive education and child centered practices, a key priority of the National Education Strategy (2021-2026) and reinforced through the amendments to the Law on Pre-University Education 69/2012 in 2023. During 2024-2025 academic year, around 5 233 students with special needs were attending 78 inclusive classes, 16% more than in 2023 (4 507). Only 453 students with special needs attended special schools in 2024-2025 (518 in 2023). The percentage of students with disabilities attending inclusive education represented 92% of students with special needs compared to 8% of those attending special education. Moreover, 2 266 assistant teachers (14% more compared with 2023) were employed in the public pre-university education system.⁴⁶ Teacher training on inclusive practices has expanded, and adapted national exams now allow greater participation, with 18 deaf students taking the Matura for the first time in 2024-2025.

⁴⁰ MHSP, Social Fund Reports 2023–2025.

⁴¹ Ministry of Finance, Medium-Term Budget Projections, 2024.

⁴² MHSP/NARU Municipal Capacity Assessments, 2024.

⁴³ MIS Progress Report, 2024.

⁴⁴ UN Albania, Civil Society Engagement Reports 2023–2024.

⁴⁵ European Commission. 2024. Progress report on Albania, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf; European Commission. 2025 Progress report on Albania, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

⁴⁶ European Commission. 2025 Progress report on Albania, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

Despite these improvements, disparities remain. Educational attainment among persons with disabilities is substantially lower than among the non-disabled population: only 31.9 per cent of persons with disabilities aged 15 and over have completed upper secondary or tertiary education, compared to 56.6 per cent of those without disabilities. At the tertiary level, completion rates are 6.1 per cent for persons with disabilities versus 21.2 per cent for the non-disabled population.⁴⁷ Gender gaps persist within these groups, with girls with disabilities and girls from Roma and Egyptian communities more frequently experiencing school drop-out, segregation, and low academic performance.

In parallel, efforts to prevent school drop-out continued through the Early Warning System, Social Emotional Learning approaches, and the scholarship programme for students from disadvantaged communities, supported by the Programme. During 2024-2025 around 130 Roma and Egyptian children were registered in pre-university education compared to 12 508 in 2023. To facilitate communication and co-operation between vulnerable groups and schools, 13 mediators and 100 qualified teachers of Roma and Egyptian background are employed.⁴⁸

Immigration has also affected the education system, contributing to a sustained decline in student enrolment over recent years across all levels of formal education. Student attendance in formal education has declined by around 8,5 % from 2021-2021 to 2024-2025 academic years.⁴⁹ During 2022, only 79.5 percent of children 3-6 years old were registered in kindergartens.⁵⁰ The quality of education has also decreased with the average PISA 2022 results among 15-year-olds were considerably down compared to 2018.⁵¹ The estimated public spending on education in 2024 represented 2.6% of GDP compared with 2.1% in 2023, remaining under the EU average of 4.6%.⁵²

In vocational education, enrolment remains highly gender-segregated, with boys accounting for around 84 per cent of students. This reflects persistent social norms, the male-dominated environment of vocational schools, the type of curricula offered, and limited employment prospects for girls, which continue to associate vocational pathways with traditionally “male” professions.

Health

Albania is implementing a policy for the establishment of patient-centered primary healthcare (PHC) to address health inequalities, based on the e Strategy for the Development of Primary Health Care Services 2020-2025. A network-based PHC model is being established, integrating primary care services with mental health and social services⁵³. In addition, LNB 2 continued its support to consolidate the implementation of the Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV), as a methodology for improving health, development and well-being indicators of children.

⁴⁷ INSTAT (2024), Population and Housing Census 2023

⁴⁸ European Commission (2025)

⁴⁹ INSTAT (2022), Education enrolment statistics 2021-2022; I <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/education/publications/2022/education-enrollment-statistics-2021-2022>; INSTAT (2025), Education enrolment statistics 2024-2025 <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/education/publications/2025/education-enrollment-statistics-2024-2025/>

⁵⁰ Only a one percent increase from 2021 NSTAT, 2022

⁵¹ PISA is the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment. PISA measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.

⁵² European Commission. 2025 Progress report on Albania, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

⁵³ Around 100 Primary Health Care Centers have already expanded their teams with psychologists / social workers and speech therapists, towards a risk-stratified model of care in which multidisciplinary PHC teams provide coordinated care, including home care.

From 2020 to 2024 a National Action Plan on Aging was in force, and a monitoring report for the Action Plan pointed out that COVID-19 pandemic was a serious barrier on the Plan's implementation during 2020-2022 and many of its activities had to be redesigned. In 2025, with the support of the programme, the Albanian Government approved a new Action Plan on the Aging 2025-2030.⁵⁴ The document establishes a policy framework for responding to population ageing and the growing needs of older persons by promoting active, healthy, and dignified ageing through a coordinated, approach.

A National Action Plan on Prevention, Treatment and Harm Reduction from Drugs 2023 – 2026 has been adopted, aiming to improve health and well-being outcomes through socio-health interventions, as well as establishment of services for treatment, rehabilitation and integration of drug users. Some progress has also been noted in family planning services and increased access to contraceptive methods, based on an improved normative framework.⁵⁵ A new draft law on Reproductive Health, pending approval aims to regulate the full range of reproductive health issues.⁵⁶ The programme provides important contribution on awareness raising on Reproductive Health Services and Rights (SHRS) for young population, including referral to services.

Nevertheless, the annual spending, roughly 2.9%, of GDP on health remains insufficient.⁵⁷ Given the high levels of informal employment, a significant share of women and men remain without health coverage.⁵⁸ Albania is also facing migration of health personnel in EU countries, which has created disparities in availability and access to health services, particularly out of the capital and major cities. Challenges remain in ensuring universal access to high quality health care; integrating primary health care services; generating data for planning and reporting; monitoring quality of care; and availability, retention, upskilling and distribution of sufficiently skilled health care workforce.⁵⁹ Women from disadvantaged communities and rural areas, face particular challenges for access in primary and sexual and reproductive health care.

Gender Equality

Albania continued its efforts to improve the legal and policy framework on gender equality. A new Law on Gender Equality was adopted in December 2025 amid strong opposition from conservative forces.⁶⁰ The Law represents a key step in Albania's efforts to institutionalize gender equality across governance systems. The Law reinforces provisions included in the previous Law (2008), which already guaranteed equal rights, opportunities, and treatment between women and men and introduces mechanisms to ensure better implementation and increased accountability, in accordance with international standards.

In particular, the new law strengthens the policy-making process by requiring all public institutions to conduct Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) for draft laws, strategies, and policies (Article 11) and by mandating the systematic use of gender-disaggregated data and measurable indicators to inform policy

⁵⁴ <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/118177/ALB-118177.pdf>

⁵⁵ National Action Plans on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights 2022 – 2030, Action Plan on Health Promotion 2022–2030, and Contraceptive Security Plan 2022–2026

⁵⁶ Such as safe motherhood, breast and cervical cancers and reproductive health, menopause and andropause. Furthermore, reference to sexual orientation, gender identity, or the health needs and rights of LGBTIQ persons needs to be included.

⁵⁷ <https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Buxheti-per-Qytetaret-Ministria-e-Financave-2025.pdf>

⁵⁸ WHO (2022). World Health Statistics 2022. The 2019 UHC Service coverage index for Albania was 62 compared to the EU-27 average of 80. see: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/356584/9789240051140-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁵⁹ UN Country Team Submission to the Universal Periodic review (UPR) mechanism, April 2024

⁶⁰ Law Nr. 64/2025 https://qbz.gov.al/alfresco/api/-default-/public/alfresco/versions/1/nodes/b69d770a-44f9-4a06-990c-64b22c7f1d09/content?attachment=false&alf_ticket=TICKET_baacf20eab6c6e0757a71d34fe6dba484f13089e

Mapping of social services in 2025 indicate that women and girls represent 52 % of beneficiaries of social services. However, social care services are not always addressed specifically at priorities of certain groups of women and not fully aligned with local social and economic needs. For example, only 11 per cent of services are dedicated to women victims of violence and just 6 per cent of all service beneficiaries are victims of violence.⁶⁵

The global trend of shrinking civic space and weakened multilateralism has also started to manifest in Albania, where civil society organizations, particularly those advocating for women's rights, face increasing challenges in securing funding and political support, with cases of negative media and social media campaigns against women activists. The reduction in international development assistance (ODA) and shifting donor priorities, have led to shrinking resources at global, regional and country level. The decline in support has already led to the closure of essential programs in critical areas for the country's development as well as the disruption of services for disadvantaged groups⁶⁶. With Albania already facing a limited donor base, competition for resources is likely to stay, potentially leading to funding gaps.

1.2 Intervention logic

The intervention logic of the programme was anchored in the development goal of achieving increased and more equitable investment in people by removing barriers and creating opportunities for those at risk of exclusion. At the impact level, the programme intended to improve access for vulnerable persons and groups to public services supporting social rights, inclusion, and well-being, while strengthening their capacity to participate in public policy decision-making and hold decision-makers accountable. At the outcome level, the programme aimed at ensuring that: (i) vulnerable persons were empowered to influence public policy decision-making, hold service providers accountable, and have improved access to inclusive and gender-responsive public services; (ii) municipalities efficiently managed community based social service delivery and scale-up best practices; and (iii) national Institutions adequately funded and improved social inclusion policies and mechanisms for professional social care services in Albania. To achieve these results, the programme pursued several outcomes.⁶⁷ The programme integrated gender equality and good governance as cross-cutting themes, ensuring a rights-based, inclusive approach across all activities.

This intervention logic remained valid and consistent throughout the implementation period. The programme's outcomes and outputs were closely linked and aligned with Albania's national reforms, development goals, and strategies in the areas of social protection, social inclusion, and human capital development. LNB2 built on the solid policy, legal, and institutional framework for social inclusion established under previous UN-supported initiatives, including the first phase of the Leave No One Behind programme (2017-2021), which contributed to the establishment of a national social protection system and the development of a decentralized social services model anchored in the Social Fund and local social planning

⁶⁵ UNDP (2025). Mapping of Social Services in Albania (final report not published as of July 2025).

⁶⁶ National Resource Centre. (2025, March 4). Public call to EU institutions and member states. <https://resourcecentre.al/public-call-to-eu-institutions-and-member-states/>

⁶⁷ Informing vulnerable persons of their rights and entitlements and providing them with skills and opportunity to influence local policy planning; Innovative and improved public services available for vulnerable persons; Improved capacities of municipality and regional providers for efficient delivery of socially inclusive and gender responsive social services; Share experiences and scale-up best practices among LGUs and/or service providers on socially inclusive and gender responsive service provision; Improved resources and mechanisms for Ministries/Agencies on evidence-based policy development and implementation; Social care services and social workers in Albania meet professional and internationally recognized standards.

mechanisms. Phase 2 aimed to further strengthen the results orientation of this flagship intervention by scaling up the rollout of social protection and social inclusion reforms and enhancing the capacities of local governments to plan, finance, and deliver decentralized social services for women, children, and men in their communities.

Throughout its implementation, the programme was firmly guided by the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination in line with SDC guidance, recommendations of international human rights mechanisms on the economic and social rights of disadvantaged groups, Albania's commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals, and the EU accession process. The programme consistently targeted persons in difficult economic situations, Roma and Egyptian communities, persons with disabilities, and people living in remote and rural areas, with particular attention to women and children facing intersecting forms of disadvantage.

At the local level, LNB2 built on partnerships with municipalities supported in Phase 1⁶⁸ and gradually expanded to new municipalities⁶⁹, selected based on a 2021 mapping of social care services, reaching a total of 33 municipalities. Engagement with municipalities was informed by field consultations and focused on strengthening local capacities for efficient, inclusive, and gender-responsive social service delivery.

The programme's Results Framework (approved by the Steering Committee in January 2022) was aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Framework (2022–2026) and the SDC Cooperation Strategy for Albania and provided a coherent structure linking outputs, outcomes, and impact. In the first year, the framework was finalized with baselines and targets, and additional indicators were introduced to capture qualitative change. In the second and fourth year, the framework was further informed by analytical work, including social services mappings (2023 and 2025), beneficiary satisfaction survey (baseline and midline data for LNB 2); and reviews of local budget allocations for social care services.

The programme was implemented through a flexible and approach, allowing adjustments in response to evolving institutional priorities, reform dynamics, and complementarities with other initiatives. While the overall intervention logic remained stable, specific interventions were periodically reoriented, streamlined, or expanded based on consultations with national partners and emerging needs, ensuring relevance and avoiding duplication.

Across the implementation period, the programme progressively shifted focus from initial piloting and design toward strengthened policy support, monitoring, and system-level reforms, and in the final phase toward consolidation, sustainability, and transition. Adjustments enabled the programme to respond to new policy priorities, strengthen alignment with national strategies and EU accession processes, and reinforce institutional capacities, while ensuring continuity of core objectives related to social inclusion, disability, gender equality, and social protection system strengthening.

Finally, an external mid-term evaluation was completed in December 2024, covering the first three years of implementation. The evaluation assessed progress against intended outcomes, effectiveness and

⁶⁸ Berat, Bulqize, Dimal, Diber, Durres, Elbasan, Fier, Kamez, Korce, Kruje, Lezhe, Lushnje, Malesi e Madhe, Maliq, Mirdite, Permet, Pogradec, Prenjas, Puke, Roskovec, Sarande, Shijak, Shkoder, Vlore, Tirane

⁶⁹ Divjake, Dropull, Patos, Delvine, Konsipol, Tropoje, Rrogozhine

efficiency of interventions, early signs of impact, and risks to sustainability. Its findings informed refinements to the programme's theory of change, reinforced the emphasis on institutional ownership and sustainability in the final year, and provided strategic recommendations to guide the exit phase and the design of the third phase of the programme (2026-2028). The review rated the relevance of LNB Phase 2 as highly satisfactory, noting its strong alignment with national and international priorities. Effectiveness in progressing toward results achievement was assessed as satisfactory overall, and highly satisfactory at the community level. The review also assessed project management efficiency, results delivery, and progress toward sustainability as satisfactory. According to the evaluation, results achieved and LNB2's contribution are visible across Albania, reaching all municipalities and addressing a wide range of issues and target groups.⁷⁰

1.3 Synergies with development partners

LNB 2 is implemented as a Joint Programme under the Delivering as One (DaO) mechanism within the Government of Albania–UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022–2026. Across all years, the joint participation of four UN agencies has ensured coordination, complementarity and alignment with Albania's EU accession priorities, the 2030 Agenda, other programmes implemented individually or jointly by agencies as well as programmes of other development partners. The use of the UN SDG Acceleration Fund further strengthened UN coordination and joint policy and advocacy engagement with government, donors, civil society and communities.

Throughout implementation, LNB 2 maintained close coordination with EU Delegation and World Bank, particularly during the preparation and adoption of the National Strategy on Social Protection 2024–2030, ensuring shared understanding of reform priorities and alignment on areas such as shock-responsive social protection, links to employment, child benefits, standards for social care services, and workforce development. The strategy was also consulted with the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development office in Albania and the regional network of social inclusion.

In addition, the programme was implemented in alignment with multiple programmes and initiatives implemented by UN agencies and other development partners in different areas related to the LNB 2, including:

- *Social Protection, Social Care and Local Service Delivery*: LNB 2 created strong synergies with various other programmes in this areas, including EU Action for Employment and Social Inclusion (IPA II/2019⁷¹; IPA/2024⁷²), the World Bank Social Assistance Modernization Project (2012–2022) and WB Country Programme (2023–2027), UNICEF programme on social care - EU for Social Care⁷³ (LNB and EU4SC share knowledge and information with the EU technical assistance on EU for Social Inclusion, during the functional review of the State Social Services and initiating the

⁷⁰ Final Report, Mid Term Evaluation, UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind" (LNB2) In Albania – Phase 2 (December 2024)

⁷¹ The action aims at contributing to strengthening social inclusion by increasing coverage, inclusiveness and effectiveness of social care services, the provision of inclusive education and employment opportunities in 19 targeted municipalities.

⁷² The action aims at enhancing governance systems and delivery instruments for better jobs and employability of the labour force and improving the adequacy of social protection measures and accessibility and quality of integrated social care measures

⁷³ The programme works on enhancing and expanding the current social care services, while fostering an enabling environment for partnerships between local governments and CSOs. The programme works in 14 targeted municipalities to extend social care services. LNB and EU4SC share knowledge and information with the EU technical assistance on EU for Social Inclusion, during the functional review of the State Social Services and initiating the dialogue on the local financing.

dialogue on the local financing), and UN Joint Programme “Lifelong Empowerment and Protection in Albania” (LEAP).⁷⁴ In addition, LNB 2 has directly contributed to support Albanian institutions achieve several objectives of the EU financial support on Social Inclusion and has provided valuable data on governance compliance with project indicators, necessary for the allocation of future EU funds.⁷⁵ At the local level, coordination avoided overlap with EU-prioritized municipalities and focused on complementary geographic coverage. LNB 2 supported integrated service delivery models, social care planning, institutional development, and workforce capacity building), while contributing governance compliance data relevant for future EU funding allocations.

- *Inclusive education:* LNB 2 synergies consistently addressed inclusive education and skills development through coordination with EU-funded initiatives, such as EU Support to Inclusive Education in Albania (EU4Schools – 2020–2022). Support to inclusive education, particularly through teacher training and transformation of special schools into resource centers, created a pool of professionals that enabled further reforms implemented through EU funding and UNICEF support. Coordination with VET and employment programmes continued to support school-to-work transitions and employability, particularly for youth at risk of exclusion.
- *Skills development and youth:* Across implementation years, LNB 2 aligned with EU, ILO, World Bank and other UN agencies initiatives addressing employment policies, vocational education and training, skills development and youth employability.⁷⁶ These synergies strengthened links between social protection, education and labour market activation for young people not in education, employment or training.
- *Gender Equality:* LNB 2 established sustained synergies with programmes addressing gender equality, gender-responsive budgeting and gender-based violence throughout its implementation. These include UN Joint programmes on EU4Gender Equality (2022–2024), Joint programme on Ending Violence against Women (UNJP on EVAW Phase I and II) and projects addressing GBV through gender-responsive governance (2019–2022), UN Women’s regional programme on Transformative Financing for Gender Equality in the Western Balkans (2020–2024), UN Women’s regional programme “Transformative Financing for Gender Equality in the Western Balkan. Both programmes reinforced each other each other by aligning inclusive service models with gender-responsive financing strategies, promoting systemic reforms that are both socially equitable and fiscally sustainable. In addition, participatory budgeting processes supported by LNB were systematically aligned with gender-responsive budgeting initiatives, ensuring that priorities raised by women at municipal level were integrated into medium-term budgets.
- *Health–Social Protection Integration and Community-Based Services:* Finally, LNB 2 strengthened synergies between health and social protection. For example, support provided by the Programme to consolidate the Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV) in 7 regions was

⁷⁴ Funded by the UN Joint SDG Fund. LEAP is a strategic intervention designed to enhance social protection systems and employment opportunities for marginalized populations in Albania.

⁷⁵ Indicator 3. Number of Municipalities using systematically the National Electronic Register of Social Care Services (NERSCS); Indicator 4. Number of municipalities providing community based social services² for at least three categories (people with disabilities, children and youth at risk, elderly, women; Indicator 5. Number of municipalities using resources and procedures of the Social Fund; Indicator 6. Number of girls and boys with disabilities attending mainstream public pre- university education; Indicator 7. Number of psychologists and social workers serving in public pre-university schools

⁷⁶ The Employment and Social Affairs Program (2016–2022), funded by the EU and implemented by the ILO; Skills Development for Employment programme (2019–2022), implemented by UNDP with financial support from the SDC; Education, Employment, Partnerships and Gender Equality: (Win-ForVET – _2020–2022), funded by ADA, Sustainable Economic and Regional Development, Employment Promotion and Vocational Education and Training Programme (ProSEED - 2017–2022) co-funded by BMZ and the EU, and implemented by GIZ; EU4Schools (2020–2022), funded by the EU and implemented by UNDP; 21st Century Schools (2018–2022) funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and is implemented by the British Council; Regional Local Democracy Programme (ReLoaD II–2021–2024, Bashki te Forta (2017–2022), financed by the SDC; Social Rights for Vulnerable Groups (SoRi – _2019–2022), funded by the BMZ and implemented by GIZ, the Regional Development Programme, Albania (RDP 4), Promoting Good Governance and Roma Empowerment at Local Level (ROMACTED II (2021–2024).

coordinated and integrated with other interventions implemented by UNICEF office including those related to postpartum depression that used home visiting as an important platform to reach out women during pregnancy and postpartum, as well as exploring links between primary and secondary care to ensure continuity of care, as part of new born health interventions. During a mapping of UPHV conducted in 2023, links and synergies with the Swiss Project HAP providing home care for the elderly, were explored. The implementation of UPHV was aligned with the priorities of the WHO and MoHSP, included in the Strategy for Primary Health Care and Social Protection Strategy and contributed to the integration of health and social services and establishment of family medicine centers.

Chapter 2: Programme implementation

Impact level implementation

Over the implementation period, the programme has contributed to gradual but measurable progress towards its overall goal: vulnerable persons and groups have improved access to 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.

National data show a steady decline in the population at risk of poverty, from around 22 per cent in 2021⁷⁷ to 19.2 per cent in 2024⁷⁸, indicating overall improvement, despite gender and age disparities. Poverty rates remain higher among women than men and particularly elevated among children, underscoring the continued relevance of targeted and gender-responsive social protection measures. (for more, see context above).

Human development outcomes have also improved. Albania's Human Development Index (HDI) increased from 0.796 in 2021 to 0.81 in 2023⁷⁹. The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living. Albania's HDI value for 2023 puts the country in the "Very High" human development category, positioning it at 71 out of 193 countries and territories.⁸⁰

On the other hand, the Gender Development Index (GDI), which measures disparities in the three areas of HDI by gender (the closer the ratio of GDI is to 1, the smaller the gap between women and men), decreased slightly from 0.967 in 2019 to 0.963 in 2023⁸¹. Nevertheless, Albania is still classified in Group 2, which comprises countries with medium to high equality in HDI achievements between women and men.

In terms of public financing, between 2021 and 2025, Albania's overall spending on social protection remained broadly stable at around 9.5–9.6 per cent of GDP⁸². While this level represents a modest increase compared to the pre-pandemic period, it remains among the lowest in Europe and far below the EU

⁷⁷ INSTAT, Income and Living Conditions Survey in Albania (EU-SILC) 2021, published in December 2022 https://www.instat.gov.al/media/11137/silc-2021_final_anglisht.pdf

⁷⁸ INSTAT, Income and Living Conditions Survey in Albania (EU-SILC) 2024, published in October 2025, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/gsf15zlg/silc-2024.pdf>

⁷⁹ Human Development Report published on May 2025

⁸⁰ <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/ALB>

⁸¹ Human Development Report published on May 2025

⁸² Based on the analysis of Budget Law for respective years.

average (around 27,3% of GDP in 2024).⁸³ At the same time, spending on social care services for vulnerable groups (excluding cash transfers) has shown a declining trend as a share of the central government budget from 2019 (0.21%) to 2022 (0,15%), reinforcing concerns about the adequacy and sustainability of funding for non-cash, community-based services.

Overall, the indicators point to incremental progress in poverty reduction and human development, alongside continued challenges related to gender gaps, child poverty, and the limited fiscal space for social care services. These trends confirm the programme's continued relevance in supporting evidence-based policy dialogue, strengthening social services, and advocating for more inclusive and equitable social investment.

Outcome 1: Empowering vulnerable populations to access gender-responsive services and participate in decision-making

Outcome 1: Vulnerable population requests and receives adequate gender responsive social services from local authorities, aimed at increasing their social inclusion and minimizing vulnerability, and holds decision-makers and service providers accountable for policy delivery.

The status of indicators for Outcome 1 is as follows:

1.1 - # vulnerable persons that receive social services by LGUs and other relevant service providers

2025: 39,091 (52%F, 48%M) - Families in need 44% (58%F), Children with disabilities 10% (37%F). Elderly 15% (34%F), Victims of DV 5.8% (94.2%F), Adults with disabilities 6% (52%F), Children out of parental care 3% (40%F) R&E minorities 9% (60%F) Young in need 7% (35%F)

1.2 - % increase of recipients who believe services received are satisfactory

2023: Overall 1.70; PWDs 1.61; Roma 1.79; Egyptians 1.71; Women 1.7; Men 1.7

Baseline for all social services: Overall 1.56; PwD 1.48; Roma 1.72; Egyptians 1.44; Elderly 1.56; Women in need 1.82; Children in need 1.44; Families in need 1.63; youth in need 1.69

1.3 - # vulnerable persons or their representatives and number of CSOs actively engaged in LGU social inclusion policy consultation events

18,694 individuals (57%F) and 262 CSOs (Added Y4: 1200 individuals (75% F)⁸⁴

1.4 - # issues raised by vulnerable persons or their representatives at decentralized consultative discussions and % addressed by LGUs in annual plan or budgets

628 issues raised and 44% addressed (Added Y4: 32 issues raised in participatory budgeting practices and 73% addressed

⁸³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20251107-2>

⁸⁴ 1,200 individuals, including over 680 women and girls and 299 youth engaged in participatory budgeting practices

Under the Outputs of Outcome 1, the programme worked with communities, national and local CSOs and service providers and made important progress, in the following areas:

- Increased awareness on provision of assistive devices for persons with disabilities among organizations of persons with disabilities and State authorities;
- Persons with disabilities empowered to participate in decision making processes: 40 community-based activists reached out around 500 persons with disabilities.
- A dictionary for the deaf community and their families in Albania has been developed, featuring 310 new signs in 19 categories.
- Human rights monitoring and reporting capacities of CSOs increased: alternative report developed to provide independent information to the CRPD Committee on the status of the implementation of the CRPD.
- Psycho-social support provided to Roma women and girls, victims or at risk of gender-based violence : 42 women and girls received these services in the municipalities of Kamza and Kruja.
- Disadvantaged communities engaged, empowered and supported to access services: around 350 individuals benefited in the municipalities of Tirana, Elbasan, and Vlora. Over 500 community members were engaged in 12 local initiatives.
- Inclusive IEC⁸⁵ materials were developed and disseminated among persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, youth, elderly people, people who use drugs, prisoners and other vulnerable groups,
- Participatory governance and citizen engagement were strengthened through community dialogue and increased participation of women and youth in decision-making and budgeting in 15 municipalities in Albania,
- Community-based healthcare model for the disadvantaged communities strengthened and expanded in 13 municipalities of Albania
- Organizations of Persons with Disabilities increased capacities to implement projects on various disability-related areas: 10 organizations received grants and implemented multiple activities related to sports activities, advocacy, capacity building, monitoring, and provision of access to services.
- Children in Dibra municipality benefited from social integration and physical well-being through sports and social activities: 360 children, including from vulnerable households benefited from structured sports sessions and inclusive events
- An innovative personal assistance service model for persons with disabilities was piloted and improved based on identified needs and it is now available online, providing a strong foundation for establishing a national service.
- Models of civic engagement and volunteerisms among youth to support persons with disabilities are being used and promoted in Korça municipality.
- Disadvantaged women and youth have become more involved in participatory budgeting processes: around 1,300 individuals, including over 680 women and girls and 299 youth, were engaged through awareness meetings, consultations, and community forums. Five watchdog reports were developed, and 32 civic actions facilitated. The activity also contributed with recommendations to legal processes, including amendments to the Public Procurement Law, to increase CSO access to public contracting and Social Care Services Law to enhance the responsiveness of local systems to women's needs
- Young Key Population have been engaged and informed about SRHR, HIV/STIs and fatal overdose and received services: 1,500 young people received Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT)

⁸⁵ Information, Education, Communication Materials

centers and mobile out-reach. In 2023 alone, 777 beneficiaries (745 men and 32 women) accessed MMT services; 1,456 psychological counseling sessions were provided, and 1,325 individuals were tested for HIV and STIs.

- Integrated social services have been provided to disadvantaged communities in Lushnja, Divjaka Durres and Tirana municipalities: around 3,300 individuals (1,616 women), or 659 families benefited from integrated social services including 219 individuals from Roma and Egyptian communities and 92 persons with disabilities. Among these, 671 children received educational support; 135 individuals enrolled in VET courses, 70 beneficiaries found employment, while 291 families started their own small scale economic activities supported by the income generating schemes.
- School drop-out has been further prevented through promotion and monitoring of the scholarship programme for students from disadvantaged communities: from 2021 to 2025, 4,531 students benefited from the government funding for scholarships, leveraged by the Programme and thousands of individuals increased awareness on the initiative.
- Capacities of local authorities on social service provision for persons with disabilities and in particular women with disabilities increased: 36 social service staff of six administrative units of Elbasan, Delvina and Maliq received training on assessing needs of beneficiaries; a needs assessment process for 330 persons with disabilities conducted to inform municipalities in tailoring their interventions; one community mobilization initiative was organized in Maliq creating an advocacy group.
- Provision of integrated services for the elderly have been provided: around 500 senior citizens benefited health and psychosocial services in Vlora Day Care Center. Commitment from main stakeholders to continuation of the services was received.
- New models of community services established in Patos and Divjaka and their professional staff, trained and mentored by LNB to deliver integrated services for communities in both municipalities.
- Training program of the first cohort of 12 interpreters for Albanian Sign Language has been finalized with a graduation ceremony.
- The Community-Based Social Services Grants Scheme was managed, providing opportunities to municipalities to apply for the Social Fund and establish new community based social services in 22 municipalities, serving a total of 4,110 individuals (52% women); 26 new municipal staff were recruited to assist in the implementation of these projects.
- Children and adolescent including from rural areas and Roma/Egyptian communities were engaged by the municipality of Korca in identifying the priority investments in their localities which would contribute to the fulfillment of their rights. (60 participant, including 40 girls).
- A community-based model of support for the disadvantaged communities provided information to communities on their right to health and access to health services - 713 people were reached through 49 information sessions in the regions of Berat, Korca and Tirana.

Output 1.1: *Marginalized and vulnerable persons and groups of all genders throughout Albania and selected municipalities are informed/ aware of their rights and entitlements in regard to accessing social care and support services and are empowered to exercise their rights and entitlements and/or supported in their access to social services.*

Activity 1.1.1) *Their rights and the services they are entitled to are communicated to marginalized and vulnerable persons and groups.*

Key initiatives under this activity focused on informing and empowering marginalized and vulnerable about their rights, access essential services, and participate in decision-making through awareness-raising,

community engagement, targeted support services, and strengthened local governance and health systems. More specifically:

The community of persons with disabilities have increased capacities to advocate for assistive devices and improve accessibility. The programme supported the establishment of a national advocacy platform to promote the State's responsibility to ensure access to assistive devices for persons with disabilities in Albania, combining research and advocacy, capacity building, and public awareness. Through partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities, resources aligned with WHO and EU standards were developed to inform institutional dialogue⁸⁶. Advocacy was intensified through high-level meetings with national authorities, and public outreach was expanded via media and social campaigns⁸⁷, culminating in the First National Conference on Assistive Devices in 2023 and the submission of formal recommendations to decision-makers, bringing together 51 participants from state institutions, CSOs, and academia.

Persons with disabilities are more informed and aware of their rights. LNB strengthened awareness and understanding of social care rights and entitlements among persons with disabilities through a partnership with a disability-focused think tank, combining accessible information materials, community-based activism, and local advocacy, using widely the social media.⁸⁸ For three years, inclusive resources were developed and widely disseminated, community groups of activists with disabilities were established and around 419 persons with disabilities and family members (219 women) were reached across 60 administrative units. In addition, structured dialogue with local authorities was facilitated to identify service gaps and promote more responsive social care services at municipal level.

Deaf people and their families are more informed about, and have increased access to, the Albanian Sign Language. The programme established a national partnership with an organization of persons with hearing impairment and formed a multi-municipal working group trained in sign-language research and documentation, leading to the identification and validation of 310 new signs uploaded to the official online ASL dictionary. In parallel, training sessions in multiple cities increased sign-language skills among deaf individuals and parents, particularly those with limited prior access to structured learning, while national-level dialogue with public institutions highlighted the need for sustained institutional support for the standardization, teaching, and interpretation of Albanian Sign Language.

CSOs have increased capacities on human rights monitoring and reporting. With the support of the programme, an ad-hoc coalition of CSOs⁸⁹ was established to prepare a shadow report on Albania's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The report covering the period 2019–2023, was discussed and validated through a National Forum and additional consultation events with organisations of persons with disabilities, public authorities, civil society, international partners, and the media. The process was supported by targeted social media outreach⁹⁰, and the final report

⁸⁶ Dokument Informues Mbi Mjetet Ndhmëse Për Personat Me Aftësi Të Kufizuara” -printed in 200 copies and published at <https://sebashku.org/2022/06/09/dokument-informues-mbi-mjetet-ndihmese-per-personat-me-aftesi-te-kufizuara/> “Broshurë e praktikave të mira në garantimin e mjeteve ndihmëse për personat me aftësi të kufizuara”

⁸⁷ 73 social-media posts reached over 100,000 people, 10 media appearances (TV and print) highlighted the issue, and a five-part video series portrayed both the challenges faced by persons without assistive devices and the societal benefits of ensuring access

⁸⁸ In the partner's website with around 8,500 visitors and shared on the ADRF Facebook page, reaching 2,898 followers

⁸⁹ Down Syndrome Albania (DSA), Albanian National Association of the Deaf (ANAD), Defending the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (MED-PAK), “Help the Life” Association, Caritas Albania, led by “Së Bashku/Together” Foundation.

⁹⁰ There were also 5 media appearances and 17 social media posts to promote further its findings and recommendations. (reaching out an audience of 30,000 people)

was officially submitted to the CRPD Committee and shared widely with national and international stakeholders to inform dialogue and reforms.⁹¹

Roma women and girls who are victims of, or at risk of, gender-based violence in the municipalities of Kamëz and Krujë received specialized services through a combination of psycho-social assistance, legal support, and empowerment measures. In 2023, 40 vulnerable Roma and Egyptian women and girls were identified and supported through needs assessments and the establishment of two psycho-social support clubs. In 2024, the initiative expanded to address broader structural barriers, with over 42 women participating in six rights-focused information sessions and receiving continued psychosocial and legal support. In parallel, separate economic empowerment activities supported women and girls through vocational training and small business assistance, including tailored entrepreneurship mentoring for 16 beneficiaries.

Women and youth at risk of exclusion were supported in the municipalities of Tirana, Elbasan, and Vlorë (Novoselë) to claim, and strengthen access to, rights and services. The activity contributed to the social inclusion and empowerment of Roma and Egyptian women and youth in marginalized areas through a combination of education support, access to services, and community mobilization, with 350 direct beneficiaries and over 500 community members engaged through 12 local initiatives. Key results included improved literacy skills for 112 women and girls, support to 102 Roma community members to access social services, and training on active citizenship for 30 Roma women and youth.⁹²

Vulnerable groups were informed about their rights to access services in several municipalities. During the second and third years, the programme expanded outreach to persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, youth, elderly people, people who use drugs, and prisoners through accessible IEC materials⁹³ on SRHR, HIV, substance use, and gender-based violence, reaching thousands of beneficiaries. Key actions included information sessions and community outreach in several cities, harm-reduction and counselling services in drop-in centres and prisons, as well as art and media-based initiatives promoting inclusion and dialogue, and collaboration with networks of older persons to support intergenerational engagement and information sharing.

Mechanisms for community dialogue on gender-sensitive social policies were strengthened in 15 municipalities⁹⁴. Over four years, the activity enhanced participatory governance and citizen engagement through inclusive consultations and evidence-based advocacy, in close cooperation with CSOs, municipalities, and local networks of the PRISMA platform. Initial efforts focused on mapping community actors, establishing cooperation with local authorities, and building capacities of grassroots organizations, including through national-level training on gender-responsive budgeting and social service monitoring involving over 30 participants from CSOs, academia, and local government. In the following years, the initiative progressed from capacity building to concrete advocacy and social mobilization. Watchdog reports, advocacy plans, national and local dialogue events, and the establishment of a Community of Practice

⁹¹ Here is a link of the report in English: <https://sebashku.org/2024/02/09/alternative-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-un-convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-albania/>; Here is the link of the report in Albanian: <https://sebashku.org/2024/02/22/raport-alternativ-mbi-zbatimin-e-konventes-per-te-drejtat-e-personave-me-afetsi-te-kufizuar-ne-shqiperi/>

⁹² Women and youth were trained as community mobilizers and led five local initiatives, such as: 1. Green Warriors (environmental action in Elbasan); 2. Birch Processing Workshop (promotion of traditional Roma crafts in Elbasan); 3. My Community (art exhibition in Novoselë with students and local authorities); 4. Community Clean-Up Action (Novoselë); and 5 Roma Culture and Tradition (Tirana).

⁹³ Information, Education, Communication Materials

⁹⁴ Shkodra, Vau i Dejes, Fushë-Arrëz, Fier, Divjakë, Roskovec, Dimal, Berat, Gjirokastrë, Delvinë, Dropull, Konispol, Vorë, Maliq, and Tirana (4 rural administrative units of Pezë, Baldushk, Kashar and Dajt)

strengthened coordinated action and contributed to tangible policy outcomes, including amendments to the Law on Public Procurement to facilitate contracting of social services.⁹⁵ Citizen engagement was further expanded through participatory consultations in several of targeted municipalities, informed by over 1,300 community questionnaires, public dialogues, communication campaigns, and youth-focused transparency sessions, fostering accountability, responsiveness, and sustained citizen participation in local governance.

The most vulnerable populations, including Roma were reached through the community-based healthcare model. The programme expanded access to quality services related to Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) through a combination of structured capacity building, on-the-job training, and community outreach, progressively establishing and scaling the model across 13 municipalities. Around 740 healthcare providers and caregivers benefited from accredited and specialized trainings on SRHR, disability-inclusive health services, and cancer prevention, while health education teams were mobilized to deliver awareness-raising sessions, referrals, and direct services to hundreds of people from disadvantaged communities, including Roma communities and women with disabilities. In parallel, the initiative contributed to system strengthening through policy-level inputs aimed at improving performance indicators and continuous professional education for health personnel.

Activity 1.1.2) Existing civil society organizations supporting marginalized and vulnerable groups are supported

Under this activity CSOs' capacities to design, deliver, and scale inclusive services for persons with disabilities, women, youth, and other vulnerable groups across multiple municipalities. The following are some of the key interventions implemented from 2021 to 2025.

Capacities of organizations of and for persons with disabilities (OPDS) were strengthened to develop and implement tailored advocacy and policy monitoring actions reflecting their priorities and contexts. Over four years, the programme supported OPDs to engage in rights-based advocacy, monitor policy implementation, and participate in structured dialogue with public institutions, promoting inclusive participation and improved accessibility. Through a competitive process, 9 OPDs received grants to design and implement context-specific initiatives including advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities⁹⁶; inclusion of deaf people in the labour market⁹⁷; monitoring the public services⁹⁸; establishment of a network of CSOs and increasing their monitoring capacities⁹⁹; empowerment of parents of children with disabilities¹⁰⁰; increased participation of young people with intellectual disabilities¹⁰¹; empowerment of blind young people to seek and access services¹⁰²; and improving accessibility to the Albanian postal services¹⁰³.

⁹⁵ In February 2024, the Albanian Parliament approved amendments to the 2020 Law on Public Procurement, integrating PRISMA's recommendations to align social-service procurement processes with DCM No. 150/2019 and enabling the contracting of specialized CSOs

⁹⁶ All Together NOW! project, implemented by the Association of Para and Quadriplegics of Albania in Kukës

⁹⁷ "Toward employment through accessible information" project, implemented by Albanian National Association of the Deaf (ANAD),

⁹⁸ "Empower the parents' network to be a voice in local decision-making policies" project, implemented by MEDPAK Association

⁹⁹ "Promoting the access to services through a systematic approach (PASS)" project, implemented by Shkodra branch of Para and Quadriplegics Association

¹⁰⁰ "Voice that bring change!" project, implemented by Jonathan Center and "Let us empower them today so that they can claim their rights tomorrow" project, implemented by the Association "Rreze Shprese" in 6 LGUs in Vau i Dejës Municipality

¹⁰¹ "Youth with intellectual disability standing for their rights" project, implemented by Help the Life Association in Vlora, Durrës and Tirana

¹⁰² "Empower the future" project, implemented by the National Association of Blind Persons

¹⁰³ "The Albanian Post accessible for persons with disabilities" project, implemented by Together Foundation

The interventions led to concrete improvements in access to employment, education, and services for persons with disabilities with 20 deaf people registering with employment offices, 5 entering vocational training and employment, 40 persons with disabilities in Shkodra accessing jobs, rehabilitation, assistive technology, social housing or health services, and targeted initiatives in Tirana, Korça, and Elbasan enabling 28 blind persons to enroll in education and 35 to register with employment offices.

Participation and health outcomes of socially excluded or at-risk school-age children were improved through inclusive sports activities. Implemented in Dibër municipality under the “Sport for Health” project, the intervention promoted physical well-being, social inclusion, and personal development through structured extracurricular sports integrated into school life. A total of 360 children, including many from vulnerable households, benefited from regular training sessions, inclusive sports events, and community activities, alongside awareness-raising with parents and engagement of teachers and local actors, strengthening children’s confidence, social interaction, and the school’s role as a community centre.

An innovative personal assistance service model for persons with disabilities was developed, tested, and promoted. This initiative addressed gaps in Albania’s existing personal assistance (PA) system by supporting a comparative legal and policy analysis in accordance with the CRPD as well as developing and piloting a new personal assistance model based on best practices from EU and regional contexts, adapted to the Albanian socio-legal environment.¹⁰⁴ Implemented through a partnership with a disability rights CSO, the model was developed through a participatory process involving persons with disabilities, families, personal assistants, and local stakeholders, and piloted in Tirana with seven persons with disabilities representing diverse needs and living situations. The pilot introduced innovative features responding to identified barriers, including flexible service hours, substitute PA mechanisms, strengthened training and monitoring tools, and empowerment of persons with disabilities as “work leaders” managing their own support. The finalized model was published online in in [Albanian](#) and [English](#) and presented at a national conference in June 2025, generating strong institutional support for national scale-up. In parallel, a Personal Assistance Checklist aligned with Article 19 of the CRPD was introduced as a monitoring and advocacy tool, applied through expert consultations and awareness sessions with OPDs, and used to inform evidence-based advocacy and policy dialogue at national and local levels.

Models of civic engagement and volunteerism among youth to support persons with disabilities were promoted at local level. Implemented in Korça municipality, this initiative piloted a community-based model that connected young volunteers with persons with disabilities to foster inclusion, empathy, and active citizenship. Through a partnership with a disability rights CSO and collaboration with the Local Youth Council and “Fan S. Noli” University, the initiative recruited and trained youth volunteers and supported 10 persons with disabilities through personalized assistance, accompaniment to social, educational, and recreational activities, and engagement with local service providers and employers.¹⁰⁵ The model was consolidated through community outreach, awareness campaigns, and institutional engagement and concluded with documentation and dissemination of good practices, including a handbook and documentary

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=863693062455861&set=pcb.863693105789190>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=925261819632318&set=a.623047963187040> ; <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=903752288449938&set=a.623047963187040>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/14mdWm6XmA/> <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/188rjto83f/> <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1L9ytXBR1V/>

film, and the establishment of a volunteer registry within the Municipality of Korça, providing a concrete foundation for replication and sustainability of inclusive volunteerism models.

Women and girls participated in budgeting practices, which ensure that local budgets respond better to their priorities and needs, including in emergency situations. Over four years, the initiative promoted gender-responsive participatory budgeting across 15 municipalities. A youth engagement component was developed in collaboration with the University of Gjirokastrë, which contributed to community mobilization plans and civic education efforts. In total, around 1,300 individuals¹⁰⁶, including over 680 women and girls¹⁰⁷ and 299 youth¹⁰⁸ were involved through consultations, community forums, and awareness meetings. Women from marginalized groups articulated priorities related to social services, childcare, safety, and employment, with a high share reflected in approved municipal budgets, while the activity also supported 32 civic actions¹⁰⁹, of which 73 percent were successfully addressed by local governments, resulting in tangible improvements in service delivery. Municipalities institutionalized participatory mechanisms through multi-sectoral working groups involving finance, social welfare, and EU integration offices. Members of the PRISMA network were central to these reforms, linking grassroots evidence with national-level advocacy.

Young key populations, including in prison settings, received qualitative services through strengthened service delivery, capacity building, and information sharing. The initiative enhanced access to SRHR, HIV/STI prevention, harm reduction, and psychosocial support through community- and institution-based outreach, reaching over 1,500 young people through methadone maintenance therapy and mobile services, alongside extensive counselling and testing. Capacities of health, social, youth, and prison staff were strengthened through targeted trainings and mentoring, while peer outreach, life-skills development, and awareness campaigns supported informed decision-making among beneficiaries. The activity also contributed to system strengthening, including expanded HIV prevention and testing in prisons and inputs to national policy frameworks supporting sustainable, youth-responsive health services.

Output 1.2: Roma and persons with disabilities throughout Albania and in selected municipalities are supported to access social services. (LNB key target groups)

Activity 1.2.1: Models of tested inclusive services provision implemented at local level.

This activity focused on piloting and implementing inclusive, integrated social service models at the local level to improve access to education, employment, social protection, and care services for disadvantaged groups. The following are some of the key interventions.

Vulnerable children and their families in Tirana, Durrës (Sukth), Lushnjë, and Divjakë (Grabian) received integrated support through the Integrated Social Services Model. The model combined education support, access to VET and employment opportunities, family counselling, income-generation schemes, and community development, and was applied as a tested framework for inclusive, community-based social

¹⁰⁶ Total individuals engaged combines 772 (Jul–Dec 2024) and 459 (Jan–Jun 2025).

¹⁰⁷ Includes 384 women/girls (Jul–Dec 2024) and 300+ women (Jan–Jun 2025).

¹⁰⁸ Includes 140 youth (Jul–Dec 2024) and 159 youth (Jan–Jun 2025).

¹⁰⁹ All civic actions initiated during Jul–Dec 2024 reporting period.

protection. Its implementation relied on strong inter-sectoral collaboration among municipal social services, education and health institutions, employment offices, VET centres, and civil society organizations. Between 2022 and 2025, integrated services reached around 659 families—approximately 3,300 individuals (1,616 women)—including 219 individuals from Roma and Egyptian communities and 92 persons with disabilities. Support covered educational, economic, psychosocial, and administrative services, with 671 children receiving educational assistance, 135 beneficiaries enrolled in VET programmes, 70 beneficiaries securing employment, and 291 families supported to initiate small-scale income-generating activities. The activity prioritized institutionalization and sustainability by embedding the model within municipal structures. By early 2024, municipalities assumed responsibility for social worker salaries and formally integrated the services into their mandates, establishing Integrated Social Service Centers and formal cooperation frameworks with education, employment, health, and VET institutions. Community development and social cohesion were strengthened through awareness-raising, advocacy, and social and cultural activities that promoted access to services, inclusion, and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, including Roma and Egyptian communities.

Local mechanisms for the identification and support of out-of-school and at-risk children were strengthened in several municipalities. The focus of the initiative was on preventing school drop-out through support on the implementation, and monitoring of the government scholarship programme for students from disadvantaged communities. The Programme provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Education for the implementation of Order No. 666 (10.10.2019) on financial quotas and scholarships in pre-university education. The Scholarship Guideline was reviewed to include a monitoring and evaluation component, enabling systematic tracking of attendance and academic progress and improving transparency and accountability. Awareness-raising and capacity-building activities engaged around 140 professionals across education, health, social protection, and employment sectors, in several municipalities¹¹⁰, while information campaigns and a dedicated webpage expanded outreach. Between 2021 and 2025, a total of 4,531 students from disadvantaged communities benefited from government scholarships supported and monitored by the Programme, contributing to strengthened early identification and prevention of school drop-out. The support provided under this activity also contributed to the mid-term review of the Pre-University Education Strategy, informing the development of measures to better identify and assist children at risk of exclusion.

Innovative, gender-responsive and inclusive social services were piloted and funded at the local level. The focus was on strengthening municipal capacities to plan and deliver tailored support for vulnerable women and girls, particularly women with disabilities, women heads of households, Roma women, survivors of violence, and older women. Initially, a mappings and needs assessments were carried out in 12 municipalities¹¹¹ to identify gaps in disability- and gender-inclusive social services and to guide local prioritization. Municipal social service teams received mentoring and coaching to design gender-sensitive interventions and develop pilot initiatives. Targeted capacity-building supported 36 social service staff from other municipalities¹¹² to strengthen rights-based needs assessment, while assessments covering 330 persons with disabilities informed municipal planning and costing of services. As a result, 32 women and girls

¹¹⁰ Dibër, Elbasan, Krujë, and Durrës

¹¹¹ Tirana – Pezë, Baldushk, Dajt, Kashar; Vau i Dejës; Fushë-Arrëz; Shkodër; Delvinë; Dropull; Maliq; Vorë; Konispol; Roskovec; Pogradec; and Lushnjë

¹¹² Elbasan, Delvinë, and Maliq

with disabilities received specialized assistive device services and community-based information sessions reached 135 persons with disabilities and family members. Additional support included digital literacy training for 35 women with disabilities, psychosocial and personal assistance services for women in Maliq, targeted household-level assistance, and the establishment of advocacy groups of women with disabilities, contributing to improved access to services, autonomy, and participation at the local level.

CSOs were supported, in partnership with municipalities and the State Social Services, to provide integrated social and health care services for older persons care. Through support to the Vlora Day Care Centre and cooperation with Vlora Municipality, integrated services reached around 500 senior citizens, including social activities, regular meals, basic medical care, and psychosocial support. During 2023–2024, elderly persons, including persons with disabilities and Roma community members benefited from daily and monthly services. Vlora municipality committed to institutionalize the centre, and the experience was shared with six other municipalities to replicate the model as well as establish local registries (piloted in Sukth municipality) to improve planning and coordination of services for older persons.

Activity 1.2.2: Support to selected municipalities for establishment of innovative social services delivery.

New models of community-based services for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, were established in Patos and Divjaka through the creation of multipurpose community centres. An initial mapping of several municipalities, identified Patos and Divjaka as the most feasible based on the absence of similar services, municipal commitment, and available infrastructure. Between 2024 and 2025, the Programme supported both municipalities to design, establish, and operationalize previously non-existent services, including infrastructure rehabilitation and staff capacity building, while municipalities assumed responsibility for management and recurrent costs. As a result, fully operational community centres were established in Patos (2024) and Divjaka (2025), with professional staff trained and mentored by LNB to deliver integrated services for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

A nationally accredited capacity-building programme for Albanian Sign Language was implemented, resulting in the training of the first cohort of sign language instructors and the certification pathway for professional sign language interpreters. Through a 24-month partnership between LNB 2 and the Albanian National Deaf Association (ANAD), Albania's first accredited training programme for Albanian Sign Language instructors was introduced, combining theoretical and practical modules. Five instructors successfully graduated in 2022, establishing the foundation for sustainable skills transfer and future interpreter training within the deaf community. In parallel, standards for professional development and certification of sign language interpreters were developed, and a first cohort of 15 students, mainly family members and peers of deaf persons, was selected and completed entry-level training.¹¹³ During 2024–2025, interpreter training progressed to intermediate level for 12 students, with curricula and methodologies adapted to strengthen quality through increased immersion and practical engagement with the deaf community. All trainees successfully passed the B2 examination. The initiative was further strengthened through the development of Albania's first Code of Ethics for Sign Language Interpreters, career-

¹¹³ The full course on the sign language interpretation has a delivery duration of 18 months and consists of 18 sequenced modules integrating theory and practice and providing three-level linguistic competences, initial (A1-A2), intermediate (B1-B2) and advanced (C1-C2) levels. The program of each level comprises a total of 414 hours spent for in-class learning, individual work, and evaluation tests.

counselling and awareness-raising activities, laying the institutional and technical groundwork for the long-term professionalization of sign language interpreting and improved access to public services for deaf persons.

Activity 1.2.3: Projects are supported for new innovative services at local level.

Under this activity, funding was provided to support municipalities in piloting innovative community-based social services, strengthening their capacity to access and implement the Social Fund at the local level. Through the Community-Based Social Services Grants Scheme, the Programme supported 22 municipalities in two rounds of calls, enabling the implementation of 27 innovative social service projects. These initiatives reached a total of 4,110 individuals (52 per cent women) and addressed a wide range of needs, including integrated family services, elderly care and health services, child protection and developmental support, home-based care for the elderly, specialized services for children with disabilities, and support services for Roma communities. The scheme focused not only on service delivery but also on strengthening municipal capacities and organizational systems to design, apply for, and manage Social Fund-financed services. As a result, municipalities established new community-based social services aligned with national legislation and social protection policies, including youth empowerment, parental support, elderly care, psychosocial and developmental therapies, and the provision of food and hygiene assistance. To support sustainability, 26 new municipal staff (13 women and 13 men) were recruited to deliver and manage these services, reinforcing local ownership and long-term implementation of Social Fund-supported interventions.

Activity 1.2.4: Local mechanisms are strengthened and scaled up in selected municipalities

Initiatives under this activity strengthened and scaled up local mechanisms in selected municipalities to promote the participation of children, adolescents, and disadvantaged communities, particularly those from rural areas and Roma and Egyptian communities in local decision-making and access to rights and services.

A participatory mechanism involving children and CSOs in the planning and monitoring of policies and investments affecting children and adolescents was established in Korça. Through the “Bashki Mike e Fëmijëve” initiative, six CSOs worked with municipal structures to engage 60 children and adolescents, including 40 girls and participants from rural and Roma/Egyptian communities in identifying priority local investments related to the fulfilment of their rights. The process created space for children and adolescents to directly present their priorities to the Mayor and Municipal Council and contributed to the establishment of a local steering board bringing together local government, civil society, academia, and the private sector to strengthen coordinated and inclusive planning for children and adolescents in Korça.

A community-based health model scaled up in three municipalities¹¹⁴ to improve awareness of health rights and access to primary health care services for the most disadvantaged communities. Through information and health education activities, the model reached around 700 people through 49 information sessions, with a strong focus on women and Roma and Egyptian communities. Sessions covered topics

¹¹⁴ Berat, Korça, and Tirana

such as SRH, cancer prevention, youth-friendly services, care for children and older persons, disability-related health needs, substance abuse, and vaccination. The activities resulted in increased uptake of health services, including mammography, HPV and Pap tests, referrals for newborn care, and access to youth-friendly services. The initiative also strengthened system-level linkages through advocacy with the MoHSP to integrate community-based indicators into primary health care performance frameworks. In parallel, 14 health education teams, including primary health care providers and community volunteers, including Roma and Egyptian health mediators, organized 30 additional community-based activities reaching 355 people, resulting in 72 women from disadvantaged groups accessing sexual and reproductive health services at primary health care level.

Finally, under this activity, efforts were made to strengthen the sustainability of Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT) services. Stakeholder coordination meetings addressed the transition of MMT centres from the support of the Global Fund on HIV/AIDS, which came to an end in 2024 to government management, highlighting key challenges such as weak inter-institutional coordination, staff turnover, limited CSO sustainability, and uncertainties related to funding and implementation of the transition plan.

Outcome 2: Enabling municipalities to establish, manage and scale up integrated community-based services

Outcome 2: Municipalities efficiently and effectively manage and scale up effective models of quality support and integrated community based social services to boost social inclusion that are gender responsive, and rights based and reflect internationally recognized standards.

The status of indicators for Outcome 2 is as follows

2.1 - # of municipalities providing community-based social services for at least three 'at risk' categories
40 municipalities providing community-based social services for at least three 'at risk' categories in need.

2.2 - # of LGUs applying to and # supported by Social Fund (MoHSP)
60 municipalities applied and 51 supported (15 new municipalities for 2024)

2.3 - # of LGU that have developed and adopted a social care plan and/or social housing plan.
- 43¹¹⁵ municipalities have a Social Plan, and 18 others are in the process of updating their social care plans, with the municipality of Tirana being supported by the LNB2 Programme.
- 23¹¹⁶ municipalities have social housing plans.

2.4 # of LGUs applying to and # supported by LNB grants scheme
 2023 - 37 applied and 16 supported
 2024: 40 applied and 12 supported

2.5 - Amount of local budget funds allocated annually for social care services of VGs

¹¹⁵ 15 municipalities updated their social plans with LNB2 support.

¹¹⁶ 17 new municipalities supported by LNB2

2022: ALL 456 mil (own sources) in 61 LGUs; 2022:

2.6 - # of LGUs with a functional Needs Assessment and referral Unit (NARU)

15 municipalities established NARU¹¹⁷

2.7 - # LGUs using the MIS for social care services

61 LGUs supported in using MIS

Under Outcome 2, the programme focused in fostering further relationships with local and regional authorities to advance the implementation of the legislation and policy reforms on social protection and social inclusion. Interventions include the following:

- Municipalities were supported with their local social planning: sixteen municipalities¹¹⁸ actively engaged in the update and costing of local social care plans for the years 2024 to 2026;
- The use of the Management Information System (MIS) on social care services was improved and around 500 social welfare staff of Municipalities were trained
- Local authorities increased their capacities to advance the implementation of social housing national framework at the local level: 17 municipalities¹¹⁹ developed Social Housing Plans have been adopted in 17 municipalities and 150 staff trained on social housing planning and 100 housing experts from all 61 municipalities trained on social housing programmes.
- Assessment of LGUs in 61 municipalities identified the gaps, challenges and capacities of LGUs to establish Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs).
- The roadmap on the support to expansion and operationalization of Needs Assessments and Referral Units was prepared followed by a mentoring and capacity building tool. 15 municipalities have established in total of 65 NARU structure and are supported to start becoming operational.
- Support was provided on the operational of the National Exit Program for Economic Assistance (NE) recipients.
- A Needs-based Registration established as a useful tool for Integrated Social Services working with the elderly - the pilot in the Sukth LGU promoted to be used in other municipalities through development of practical tools and capacity building of municipal staff¹²⁰;
- Mapping of Social Services in 2023 and 2025 were conducted, providing important policy insight and evidence for the future of planning and delivery of social services.
- MoHSP received targeted technical support to assess and plan for the integration of adults with disabilities in residential homes of Shkodra, Korca and Berat into community and working life. The individual assessment files and plans regarding deinstitutionalization and employment, as well as a report summarizing the assessment process, findings, and recommendations have been submitted to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the General Directorate of the State Social Service.
- Capacities of LGUs in Tirana, Durrës, Lushnjë, and Divjakë to implement the family-based integrated social services model were strengthened through training of over 400 professionals, establishment of a NARU in Divjakë, and institutionalization of services within municipal structures, including locally financed social workers.

¹¹⁷ Mapping of Social Services in 61 Municipalities, June 2023

¹¹⁸ Diber, Korce, Patos, Divjaka, Vlore, Berat, Roskovec, Dimal, Kucove, Bulqize, Pogradec, Maliq, Belsh, Permet and Tropoja

¹¹⁹ Shkodra, Puka, Tropoja, Mirdita, Kamza, Divjaka, Delvina, Tepelena, Berat, Elbasan, Librazhd, Lushnje, Maliq, Kolonje, Devoll, Pogradec, and Sarande

¹²⁰ Klos, Librazhd, Kolonje, Gjirokaster, Tirana and Durres.

- Capacities of municipal service providers in 18 municipalities¹²¹ were strengthened through multi-year training, mentoring, and partnership with the University of Lucerne. Over 80 professionals were trained in autism intervention, behavioural management, multidisciplinary teamwork, and mental-health support for more than 400 children with disabilities, complemented by individualized coaching and international study visits.
- Municipal social administrators and Multidisciplinary Disability Assessment Commissions (MDACs) members in five regions enhanced their ability to assess and deliver mobility aids for persons with disabilities through targeted training for 151 professionals. The initiative enabled the provision of 437 wheelchairs and 156 other assistive devices.
- The rollout of the new bio-psychosocial disability assessment system was supported through extensive training and mentoring of local welfare and health personnel across 12 regions. Over 780 multidisciplinary professionals, including 198 social administrators and 585 doctors, were trained on the new system's procedures, MDAC roles, and referral linkages, supported by accredited training manuals and awareness materials, establishing strong cross-sectoral coordination for effective implementation of the reform.
- Multisectoral mechanisms for child health and social services were strengthened through the scale-up of the Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV) model across seven regions¹²². Over 249 health professionals were trained on early child development, disability detection, and gender-sensitive care, while 70 supervisors conducted mentoring for 221 staff. Through more than 21,000 home visits, the programme reached 3,900+ children under five, identifying 150+ at-risk cases managed via inter-sectoral teams.
- The National Forum on Integrated Health and Social Services (2025) confirmed UPHV as a pillar of Albania's primary health care reform, advancing early intervention and coordination between health and social systems.
- Korça Municipality increased capacity to implement and monitor the Local Action Plan for Children and Adolescents through staff training, data-driven tools, and participatory mechanisms engaging children, parents, and CSOs. Updated statistics (2019–2023) on child wellbeing were compiled to guide evidence-based planning, while structured monitoring and consultation processes—such as youth and parent forums—ensured inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized children in local decision-making and service delivery.
- Eight municipalities¹²³ were supported to advance gender-responsive social care planning and budgeting through detailed situational analyses and targeted capacity-building design.
- The innovative community-based care models for older persons were advanced by supporting the establishment of the Burrel Elderly Center and strengthening the Vlora Day Care Center, both offering psychosocial, health, and recreational services.
- Best practices across the country in the implementation of the Integrated Social Services for Disadvantaged Groups were disseminated in a conference gathering 60 professionals from 17 municipalities with central model being the Swiss practices adopted to the Albanian context.
- A peer support and mentoring system was established and expanded among staff of community centers for children with disabilities across 14 municipalities. 46 professionals participated in cross-center exchanges and mentoring, strengthening practical skills, peer collaboration, and quality of services for children with disabilities.

¹²¹ Including Korçë, Maliq, Roskovec, Pukë, Shkodër, Devoll, Kamëz, Lushnjë, Pogradec, Sarandë, Bulqizë, Shijak, Dibër, Përmet, Krujë, Dimal, Divjakë and Patos

¹²² Tirana, Korçë, Vlorë, Elbasan, Lezhë, Berat, and Kukës.

¹²³ Dibër, Korçë, Shkodër, Divjakë, Mirditë, Sarandë, Delvinë, and Përmet

- A national professional network¹²⁴, was established, engaging over 80 professionals from 18 community centers to enhance service quality and accessibility for children and youth with disabilities. Through two national networking events and continuous peer exchange, members developed governance structures, thematic groups, and a two-year work plan (2025–2027) promoting inter-institutional cooperation, professional development, and community outreach.
- A Catalogue of Best Practices and a short documentary were produced, documenting 12 exemplary social-service models from 23 municipalities to promote transferability and learning across Albania. The initiative consolidated local innovations into a national knowledge resource to guide future community-based and inclusive service development.

Output 2.1. *Municipality, regional and local social service providers (public and non-public) are strengthened in their capacity for planning, providing and monitoring the scaling up/ extension of gender responsive social services, and the delivery of integrated social inclusion measures.*

Activity 2.1.1: The structures and mechanisms of social service provision at municipal level are supported in their organizational development.

Under this activity, municipal structures and mechanisms on social services were strengthened through targeted organizational development support. The following interventions improved local social planning, data use, and coordination through capacity building, support to social care and social housing planning, expansion of referral mechanisms, and evidence generation for more effective and sustainable service delivery.

Fifteen municipalities¹²⁵ were supported to update, cost and monitor Local Social Care Plans for 2024–2026/2027, through a gender equality perspective. The work was informed by a nationwide assessment on capacities and gaps of LGUs to on social service planning and delivery and social service mappings, which contributed to improved institutionalization of evidence-based, participatory, and accountable social care planning at the local level. In this process, 180 vulnerable individuals and 35 CSOs participated in consultations, and capacities of 75 municipal staff strengthened in planning, budgeting, monitoring, and quality control for social services. In 2024, the Programme expanded its support to the Municipality of Tirana by assisting in the preparation of Social Care Plan and complementary plans for persons with disabilities and Roma and Egyptian communities, also through participatory processes.

The Management Information System (MIS) on social services was strengthened to improve monitoring, reporting, and coordination at the local level. Technical support to the MPHS clarified institutional roles and improved MIS processes, while around 500 municipal and State Social Services staff were trained on data entry, monitoring, and reporting. As a result, all municipalities activated the MIS-SHKSH platform, supporting regular use of the system and contributing to the achievement of key social inclusion indicators, while also highlighting remaining challenges related to infrastructure, staff turnover, and system integration.

¹²⁴ “Zë që sjell ndryshim / Voice that Brings Change”

¹²⁵ Diber, Korce, Patos, Divjka, Vlore, Berat, Roskovec, Dimal, Kucove, Bulqize, Pogradec, Maliq, Belsh, Permet and Tropoja

Municipal capacities on planning and monitoring social housing policies were strengthened through targeted support for the design of five-year Social Housing Plans aligned with the national strategy and legal framework. Between 2021 and 2023, the Programme provided technical assistance to support 17 municipalities¹²⁶ in developing and adopting five-year Social Housing Plans in line with the National Strategy for Social Housing and the Law on Social Housing. The plans were prepared through participatory and transparent processes based on data collection and needs assessments, with the active involvement of municipal authorities and civil society. In parallel, capacity-building activities strengthened implementation readiness, with 150 municipal staff trained on social housing planning and monitoring, 75 CSO representatives engaged in the planning process, and 100 housing experts from all 61 municipalities trained on the application of social housing programmes, contributing to improved local ownership and more effective implementation of social housing policies.

Local capacities to ensure reintegration of vulnerable individuals and beneficiaries of economic assistance were strengthened. In the early years, the Programme supported the operationalization of the National Exit Programme for Economic Assistance recipients by assisting the MoHSP to develop an [Operational Protocol](#) and Individual Action Plan to guide coordinated service provision between social services and employment institutions. In 2025 further technical assistance was provided for the development of a coordination and communication framework for integrated social services in selected municipalities and regions¹²⁷, clarifying institutional roles, strengthening monitoring and follow-up mechanisms, and enhancing accountability in supporting beneficiaries' transition from social assistance to employment.

A model of needs-based registration tool to support integrated social and health services for the elderly was established. Initially, the Programme supported the establishment and piloting of a local registry for older persons as an evidence-based tool for needs assessment and service planning in Sukth (Municipality of Durrës). The model was promoted for replication in other municipalities through workshops, technical meetings, and capacity building of municipal staff to adopt similar approaches.¹²⁸ Complementary tools, including a Manual for Informal Caregivers of Elderly People and a standardized Needs Evaluation Matrix, were developed to further institutionalize person-centered and data-driven elderly care. Follow-up support in 2025 assisted municipalities in using registry data for planning and coordination, laying the foundation for more integrated, sustainable, and responsive services for older persons at the local level.

Evidence-based planning and policy development in the social care sector has been strengthened through regular national mapping of social care services. The Programme supported the State Social Service to refine the methodology and conduct the Mapping of Social Services in 2023 and 2025, providing comprehensive data on service provision, beneficiaries, providers, workforce, and system capacities across all municipalities. The updated mappings generated key policy insights on service coverage, gaps, geographic distribution, and the role of the Social Fund in expanding services, and introduced comparative analysis over time and indicators to assess municipal capacity to meet needs. The findings of 2025 mapping were

¹²⁶ Shkodra, Puka, Tropoja, Mirdita, Kamza, Divjaka, Delvina, Tepelena, Berat, Elbasan, Librazhd, Lushnje, Maliq, Kolonje, Devoll, Pogradec, and Sarande

¹²⁷ Tirana, Kamëz, Durrës, and Elbasan

¹²⁸ Klos, Librazhd, Kolonjë, Gjirokastër, Tirana, and Durrës

disseminated through a national launch event and promotional materials, reinforcing the mapping as a strategic tool for future planning and delivery of social care services in Albania.

Local government capacities have increased in establishing and operationalizing Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs). In 2025, the Programme supported the review and expansion of the national Manual and Roadmap on planning and designing social services, with detailed guidance on establishing and operating NARUs, including legal frameworks, staffing roles, inter-sectoral coordination, MIS integration, and referral pathways. Developed in consultation with municipalities, the updated tools were finalized and supported by a mentoring and capacity-building plan for scale-up in all 61 municipalities. For the time being, 15 municipalities received on-the-job training and mentoring for 489 municipal staff and partners, leading to the establishment of 65 NARUs that began becoming operational by the end of 2025. In parallel, a Manual on the establishment of the Local Social Fund was developed, with targeted support provided to municipalities to strengthen local social fund operationalization in coordination with central institutions.

Activity 2.1.2: The staff of municipal social service providers are supported through capacity development.

Under this activity, the programme, strengthened the capacities of municipal social service providers through targeted, multi-year capacity development support, enhancing professional skills, inter-sectoral coordination, and the quality and inclusiveness of social services at the local level. It focused on training, mentoring, and institutional support for municipal staff across social protection, health, disability, child protection, and elderly care services, contributing to improved planning, assessment, service delivery, and monitoring in line with national reforms and integrated service models. More specifically:

Capacities of central and local government increased on assessment and planning for the integration of adults with disabilities from residential institutions into community and working life. In 2024, specialized technical assistance was provided to the MoHSP to assess adults with disabilities residing in development centres in Berat, Korça, and Shkodra. Individual assessments were conducted for 105 persons with disabilities (45 women), aged 18–64, including 70 persons with severe or profound disabilities and 77% with a history of long-term institutionalization. Each assessment included a personalized deinstitutionalization and employment plan, informed by medical, functional, and social participation profiles. The assessment findings and recommendations were consolidated into a report and consulted with residential centres, municipalities, and employment and VET services, providing a concrete evidence base for future rights-based independent living measures.

Capacities of local government units were strengthened to implement the family-based integrated social services model for Roma and other vulnerable families. In parallel with community based services (see Activity 1.2.1), municipalities of Tirana, Durrës, Lushnjë, and Divjakë were supported with capacity building, coordination, and institutional development to operationalize family-based integrated social services. Over 400 professionals, including social workers, psychologists, teachers, and municipal specialists were trained through structured modules, and mentoring. Support includes also a study visit to Bern, Switzerland for 15 decision-makers and professionals, which strengthened understanding of integrated social protection models and informed municipal practices. A Needs Assessment and Referral Unit (NARU) was

established in Divjakë, while responsibilities for service delivery were progressively transferred to municipal structures, including the financing of four social workers from local budgets by early 2024. These efforts strengthened multidisciplinary collaboration, inclusive education practices, and municipal ownership of integrated service provision.

Capacities of service providers to work with children with disabilities in 18 municipalities¹²⁹, were strengthened through long-term training, mentoring, and international partnership. Community-based centres serving children with disabilities received multi-year capacity development in partnership with the University of Lucerne. Over 80 professionals benefited from structured training, individualized mentoring, and international study visits, strengthening competencies in autism intervention, behavioural management, multidisciplinary teamwork, sexuality education, and mental-health support. The support reached services working with more than 400 children with disabilities and included on-the-job coaching, crisis intervention methods, parental engagement techniques, and operational support for newly established centres, contributing to improved service quality and professional practice.

Local capacities in five region¹³⁰ of Albania were strengthen to assess and provide mobility devices for persons with disabilities. From 2021-2023, 151 professionals from municipal social services and Multidisciplinary Disability Assessment Commissions (MDACs) were trained on personalized needs assessment, referral pathways, fitting, and follow-up for mobility aids, strengthening intersectoral collaboration between health, social, and administrative actors. The intervention was complemented by the development and dissemination of awareness materials to improve public understanding of entitlements and access procedures. As a result, 437 persons with disabilities (190 women) received wheelchairs and 156 received other assistive devices, while an additional 110 individuals were assessed and placed on waiting lists, establishing a standardized and operational model for mobility aid provision at the local level.

The progressive implementation of the bio-psychosocial disability assessment reform was supported through capacity building and mentoring of welfare and health staff. Throughout the implementation of LNB 2, extensive training and mentoring was provided across 12 regions, aligning practice with the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) and CRPD frameworks. More than 800 multidisciplinary professionals, including social administrators and doctor were trained on assessment procedures, MDAC roles, referral mechanisms, and inter-institutional coordination. The training manual for MDACs was accredited by the National Center for Quality, Safety and Accreditation of Health Institutions (NCQSAHI) with 4 continuing education credits. During 2024–2025, implementation was further consolidated through continued mentoring, case-based learning, and practical guidance. Twelve regional forums and a national event engaged over 350 professionals, while specialized mentoring reached 122 practitioners nationwide. Additional capacity building supported 496 social administrators and 153 social workers, introduced standardized templates for Individual Service Plans, strengthened follow-up of MDAC recommendations, and developed child-friendly guidelines and regional service maps, reinforcing consistency, accountability, and integration with municipal social services.

¹²⁹ Including Korçë, Maliq, Roskovec, Pukë, Shkodër, Devoll, Kamëz, Lushnjë, Pogradec, Sarandë, Bulqizë, Shijak, Dibër, Përmet, Krujë, Dimal, Divjakë and Patos

¹³⁰ Durrës, Elbasan, Lezhë, Korçë, and Vlorë

Multisectoral mechanisms for integrated child health and social services were strengthened through the scale-up of the Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV) model. The UPHV model was expanded across seven regions of Tirana, Korçë, Elbasan, Vlorë, Lezhë, Berat, and Kukës, strengthening coordination between health and social services for early childhood development and protection. Over 249 health professionals were trained on early child development, disability detection, and gender-sensitive care, while 70 supervisors conducted mentoring for 221 staff. Through more than 21,000 home visits, the programme reached 3,900+ children under five, identifying 150+ at-risk cases managed via intersectoral teams. Overall, UPHV implementation has evolved into a national model of integrated early childhood service delivery, ensuring that vulnerable families are reached with timely, coordinated, and preventive care.

Korça Municipality increased capacities to implement and monitor child-focused policies through data-driven tools and participatory mechanisms. The programme provided technical support on the implementation and monitoring of the Local Action Plan for Children and Adolescents through staff training, updated child wellbeing statistics (2019–2023), and structured participation of children, parents, and CSOs. Youth forums, parent consultations, and CSO engagement ensured that vulnerable and marginalized children were included in planning and monitoring processes. The collaboration between municipal staff, CSOs, and local service providers has thus evolved into a structured monitoring mechanism, ensuring that the most marginalized children are visible in local policies and services.

*Local capacities to integrate gender perspectives into social care planning and budgeting were strengthened in eight municipalities.*¹³¹ An initial assessment focused on situational analyses on the status of local social care plans, costing, monitoring, and access to Social Fund financing. The findings of the assessments informed tailored capacity-building interventions, which aimed at strengthening gender-responsive planning, budgeting, and monitoring skills of local staff, as well as addressing gaps in transparency and implementation. The support also promoted synergies with Local Gender Action Plans and inclusive consultation processes, contributing to more systematic integration of gender analysis into social care planning, budgeting, and service delivery for vulnerable women and girls.

The community-based elderly care was strengthened through the establishment of the Burrel Elderly Center and continued strengthening of the Vlora Day Care Center. Both centres provide psychosocial, health, and recreational services for older persons, supported through grants, equipment, and partnerships with municipalities, CSOs, and health institutions. These interventions contributed to expanded access to integrated care services for older persons and reinforced local models for active and dignified ageing.

Output 2.2: *Knowledge management/ learning mechanisms ensure that lessons learned and ‘good practice’ models and tools linked to service delivery is appropriately shared between LGUs/ and service providers and ‘good practice’ is effectively scaled up.*

Activity 2.2.1: *Mechanisms are established and operational for knowledge learning/ sharing among municipalities in regard to the management of or the provision of social services.*

¹³¹ Dibër, Korçë, Shkodër, Divjakë, Mirditë, Sarandë, Delvinë, and Përmet

This activity focused on establishing and operationalizing structured mechanisms for peer learning, knowledge exchange, and networking among municipalities and social service providers, with the aim of improving the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of social services within Albania's decentralized social protection system. More specifically:

Best practices emerging from the implementation of integrated social services for families in four targeted municipalities (see Activities 1.2.1 and 2.1.2 above) were documented and shared with others. In 2025, a national conference convened around 60 professionals, including heads and staff of social services from 17 municipalities, to reflect on lessons learned from integrated service models implemented in four municipalities and other programme-supported locations. The discussions highlighted innovative approaches tested under the LNB programme, including an integrated social services model developed by a partner organization and adapted from Swiss practice to the Albanian context. The conference facilitated peer exchange on transferable approaches, replication potential, and the role of decentralization in strengthening the reach and effectiveness of social services.

A peer support and coaching mechanism was introduced to strengthen professional learning among staff of community centers for children with disabilities. During the first year, selected practitioners from LNB-supported centers were identified and prepared to act as peer mentors, facilitating capacity building, knowledge sharing, and exchange of good practices across municipalities. The approach expanded through experience-sharing visits and cross-center mentoring, engaging professionals from multiple municipalities in structured peer exchanges. 46 professionals (38 women) from LNB-supported centers in 14 municipalities participated in a peer exchange hosted by Saranda's community center, recognized for its good practices in service delivery for children with disabilities. These activities addressed operational challenges related to service delivery, parent engagement, cooperation with local authorities, and center management, while supporting rapid learning and integration of newly established centers into regional service networks.

Structured professional networking among social service providers for persons with disabilities was established. The programme developed and validated a Concept Note outlining the approach for promoting networking among service providers, defining networking as both a professional learning mechanism and a wellbeing-support tool. Networking was recognized as essential for knowledge exchange, dissemination of good practices, and development of technical resources across municipalities. The initiative became operational through national networking meetings bringing together multidisciplinary professionals from community centers across multiple municipalities. Participants formally established the professional network "Zë që sjell ndryshim / Voice that Brings Change," adopted its internal regulations and governance structure, and developed joint work plans. Subsequent networking events reinforced collaboration, peer learning, and structured professional development, including the preparation of a two-year work plan for 2025–2027.

A systematic approach to documenting and capitalizing on effective social service practices was implemented. This initiative focused on identifying, analysing, and showcasing effective social service practices developed across LNB partner municipalities, with the goal of promoting transferability and informing future interventions. Evidence was collected through desk research, questionnaires, consultations, and

field visits in 23 municipalities, resulting in detailed profiles of social-care practices. A bilingual Catalogue of Best Practices, was compiled, complemented by a short documentary video illustrating the selection process. These knowledge products are intended to serve as a national resource for municipalities, civil society, and programmes seeking to expand inclusive, community-based social services and will be formally launched under LNB Phase 3 to support dissemination and uptake.

Outcome 3: Supporting national institutions in implementing policies that ensure social inclusion and gender-responsive services

Outcome 3: National institutions efficiently and effectively implement their policy framework for ensuring social inclusion and adequately fund gender responsive social services through improved policy monitoring and evaluation systems, updated quality professional standards and empowered citizens and sustainable financing mechanisms.

The status of indicators for Outcome 3 is as follows:

3.1 - # of issues for sub-legal acts addressed in Law on Social Care Services

21 sub-legal issues resolved Y4: Revised: DCM no. 613/ 2024 on the obligation of the local government units to establish the local social fund)

3.2 - # of pieces of policy/ legislation/ regulation/ instructions/ national standards on social inclusion measures adopted

No policies or regulations adopted during the reporting period.

3.3 - Evolution Increased amount of state budget/funding for social services and social inclusion of vulnerable persons – funds allocated (annually) via key financing mechanisms

Social Fund for 2025: 369,376,221 ALL

3.4 - # Professional associations and universities who deliver programs on social care work in line with international standards

1 Professional associations, 'Order of Social Workers'

3.5 - # of social care workers in the workforce with improved qualifications

1227 social care workers in the workforce improved qualifications in social services delivery (438 Y4).

LNB support to central authorities was critical to complement any efforts and progress at the local level. Program's interventions in the framework of Outcome 3 have advanced towards several achievements:

- MoHSP received technical and analytical support to advance the legal and policy framework for sign language interpretation services.

- The Social Inclusion Policy Document, developed with the support of the programme, was approved by the Albanian Government¹³²
- The new Social Protection Strategy (2024-2030) adopted through a broad consultative process and in alignment with the EU related policies .
- A functional review of the State Social Services was conducted with the main focus on supporting strengthening the role and capacities of the institution.
- Gender equality was mainstreamed across Albania's social protection and inclusion frameworks, embedding gender-responsive goals, indicators, and budgeting mechanisms within the Social Protection Strategy 2024–2030 and the Social Inclusion Policy Document.
- MoHSP and local authorities were supported to strengthen coordination between health and social services and to implement new child health and protection prevention protocols nationwide.
- Albanian Government is more prepared for the EU accession process in areas related to social inclusion and social protection: the roadmap of actions for implementation of acquis related to Chapter 23 and Chapter 19 on Social Policies and Employment, EU Pillar for Social Rights is being finalized.
- The Table of Concordance (ToC) for Directive (EU) 2019/882 on accessibility and the relevant Annex on "Accessibility Requirements for Products and Services" were developed and MoHSP was supported in aligning Albania's disability legislation with the EU acquis under Chapters 19 and 23
- Increased accountability on the implementation of obligations related to the rights of persons with disabilities: the monitoring report of the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities and the national reporting on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities developed.
- State Minister for Children and Youth supported in developing and launching the National Youth Strategy 2022–2029 and its Action Plan
- Regulatory framework of the Social Fund improved with the approval of a Decision of Council of Ministers¹³³ (DCM) on the calculation methodology of the Social Fund approved and a revised DCM¹³⁴ on operation of the Social Fund.
- Enhanced local data systems by supporting 15 municipalities and national institutions to strengthen gender-responsive data collection, digitalization, and use for social protection planning: Draft indicators for Social Protection Strategy were developed, SDGs indicators were mapped under the Social Inclusion Policy.
- Volunteerism as a driver of social cohesion was enhanced by building local capacities, sharing tools, and facilitating peer learning, culminating in a 2025 conference that generated shared insights and showcased pilot projects across 15 municipalities.
- Standard protocols on child growth have been implemented: capacities of 122 health professionals from Korca, Vlora, Elbasan and Tirana increased on child growth and development monitoring, hearing, and vision screening;
- Advanced multisectoral dialogue and data-driven policymaking on health and social inclusion, contributing to the UNECE MIPAA+20 process, establishing the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population

¹³² <https://kryeministria.al/newsroom/vendime-te-miratuar-ne-mbledhjen-e-keshillit-te-ministrave-date-28-gusht-2024/>

¹³³ DCM No. 224/2024,

¹³⁴ DCM No. 111/2018,

and Development, and strengthening municipal and institutional capacities to map and monitor health and gender-responsive services for older persons, youth, and vulnerable groups.

- INSTAT, with LNB's technical support, strengthened Albania's child and youth statistics system through the publication of the Children, Adolescents and Youth-Focused Wellbeing Indicators 2017–2021 report and the development of the 2023 Census-based Children and Youth Thematic Report and Wealth Index, enhancing evidence-based and equity-focused policymaking for children, youth, and older persons.
- Albania's institutional framework for quality assurance in social service delivery strengthened. State Inspectorate of Labor and Social Services proposed the establishment of regional social care inspection units, developed inspectors' job descriptions and selection criteria, and drafted the DCM on the creation and functioning of the Social Care Services Inspectorate.
- State Social Service assisted in developing a comprehensive methodology for monitoring social service delivery, accompanied by a training-of-trainers process for central, regional, and municipal staff, thus enhancing institutional capacity and promoting a unified, evidence-based approach to service quality
- Deinstitutionalization reform for children with disabilities has initiated: assessment of six public development centers for 39 children with disabilities took place aiming to establish child and family Hubs and support services.
- Increased accountability on the rights of elderly: a progress report on the implementation of the National Action Plan for Older Persons (2020-2024) was developed and a new Action plan 2025-2030 was developed and launched. Also, a manual on Primary Health Care for Older Persons was developed.
- Capacities of Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP) to ensure inclusive education strengthened:
- Universities of Tirana, Shkodra and Elbasan on social studies have improved scientific research in collaboration with the University of Lucerne.
- The programme strengthened Albania's social protection education and professional ecosystem by revising Master's curricula in social work and policy, establishing a digital learning platform with over 375 users/
- The Order of Social Workers has become fully operational with a considerable number of licensed professionals; a Commission for the State Exam on Social Work is established and a national Assembly of Social workers was gathered, electing the new chair and council members.
- An accredited training module is established on Shock responsive Social Protection and around 48 multisectoral professionals have been trained in shock-responsive social protection.
- Collaboration with the Department of Social Work and Policy at the University of Tirana strengthened gender-responsive education.
- The LBN 3 "exit phase" document was formulated according to all inclusion and consolidation standards. The signing ceremony for the implementation of LBN3 program was held on November 12th, 2025, marking the formal launch of the consolidation phase.

Output 3.1: Ministries/ Agencies are supported in their further development of and in their implementation of gender responsive policies, strategies, regulatory frameworks, operational tools, funding mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation (and reporting) systems to guide evidence-based policy and strategic decision-making.

Activity 3.1.1) MHSP, MESY, MFE, and SSS supported in the development of and in implementing their social inclusion legal, policy, and regulatory frameworks.

This activity strengthened Government capacities to develop, implement and monitor key social inclusion and social protection frameworks, through targeted technical assistance, evidence, consultations, and support to EU accession process, while integrating gender and social inclusion of disadvantaged communities. The following are some of the main relevant interventions.

The foundation for legal regulation of sign language interpretation services has been established. The programme supported an initial analytical review of international experience and a comparative legal study, which examined regulatory frameworks from several countries in the region.¹³⁵ The review focused on legal provisions, institutional models, funding arrangements, and interpreter training and certification. Findings were discussed through two consultation meetings with MoHSP and formally shared for feedback. The study and its recommendations were presented at a national consultation event in Tirana, attended by government institutions, civil society, and representatives of the deaf community, highlighting the need for a dedicated law, a national programme and budget line, integration of interpretation costs into public event budgets, a central accreditation mechanism, and broader awareness of the right to communication access..

Social Inclusion Policy Document 2024-2028 was adopted with the LNB2 support. Technical support informed the revision of the SIPD, building on the evaluation and monitoring findings of the previous policy cycle and ensuring alignment with Albania's government and EU accession priorities, and international commitments. These inputs supported the review of policy pillars, indicators, and intersectoral linkages. Consultations with line ministries and stakeholders helped agree on the revised structure, priorities, and monitoring framework, followed by public consultations. The Social Inclusion Policy Document was approved by the Government in 2024.¹³⁶

*The National Social Protection Strategy 2024–2030 was adopted through a broad participatory process and technical expertise provided by the programme.*¹³⁷ Support started in 2022, including coordination with key partners, and use of annual monitoring reports of the previous strategy as an analytical foundation. Two national consultation rounds were held in July 2023 (55 participants) and October 2023 (85 participants), involving central and local institutions, municipalities, CSOs, and development partners. The draft strategy was discussed within national coordination platforms, engaging around 150 stakeholders, and benefited from structured youth engagement, including 326 young people providing online inputs and a dedicated dialogue between the UNICEF Youth Advisory Board and the Government. During the final year, follow-up support included initiation of a functional review of the State Social Services, development of reform scenarios, and preparation of a roadmap and costing, alongside preparatory work for a training strategy.

Gender responsiveness was systematically strengthened across social inclusion and social protection frameworks. LNB 2 support focused on integrating gender perspectives into policy content, financing mechanisms, and monitoring systems. This included a review of Social Policy Guidelines and Social Fund regulations to identify gaps limiting gender responsiveness and preparatory work to introduce gender

¹³⁵ Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Greece

¹³⁶ <https://kryeministria.al/newsroom/vendime-te-miratuara-ne-mbledhjen-e-keshillit-te-ministrave-date-28-gusht-2024/>

¹³⁷ . DCM No. 152/2024

markers in Social Fund Guidelines. Gender equality was embedded as a cross-cutting principle in both the National Social Protection Strategy 2024–2030 and the Social Inclusion Policy Document, informed by gender analysis highlighting persistent and intersectional inequalities affecting women with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian women, and single mothers, as well as gendered vulnerabilities linked to unpaid care work and poverty. Technical inputs supported the integration of gender-responsive objectives, indicators, and targets, improvements in gender-disaggregated data and expenditure tracking, and the strengthening of Gender-Responsive Budgeting practices.

*Intersectoral coordination between health and social services was strengthened to improve early prevention and child development outcomes in four regions*¹³⁸ The programme supported both mechanisms through facilitation of regular joint meetings at municipal level, clarification of operational modalities, and case coordination between frontline professionals. An Address Book mapping available health and social services was prepared and distributed, and standardized data-sharing forms were developed and piloted. National protocols on child growth and development monitoring and vision and hearing screening for children under five were approved by MoHSP.¹³⁹ Implementation support was extended to seven regions¹⁴⁰, alongside accredited training of 15 local trainers covering early childhood interventions, monitoring developmental milestones, early identification of disabilities, child protection, gender mainstreaming, and intersectoral coordination.

Targeted support was provided to strengthen the social housing legal framework Support focused on amendments to Law No. 22/2018 “On Social Housing,” aimed at strengthening compliance with the government programme, including expanded access for vulnerable young people and improved digitalization of social housing programmes.¹⁴¹

Social protection and inclusion reforms were aligned with the EU accession requirements. The programme provided technical inputs to support the screening processes under Chapters 19 and 23 of the negotiation framework, including review of national policy and legal documents, identification of gaps vis-à-vis EU legislation, and preparation for technical dialogue with the European Commission. Support also integrated recommendations from UN treaty bodies, particularly the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The screening process informed key reform priorities incorporated into the National Social Protection Strategy 2024–2030, including measures on child poverty in line with the EU Child Guarantee, acceleration of de-institutionalization, updating the legal framework on alternative care, strengthening disability inclusion, improving intersectoral coordination and outreach to rural areas, and reinforcing financing mechanisms for local social services. In the final year of the programme’s implementation, support continued through preparation of implementation roadmaps and Tables of Concordance, including for the Law on Alternative Care adopted by Parliament by the end of 2025.

Progress has been made toward aligning Albanian disability legislation with EU accessibility requirements. Support included the development of the Table of Concordance (ToC) for the EU Directive 2019/882 the

¹³⁸ Tirana, Korça, Lezha, and Vlora

¹³⁹ Order No. 406/2, dated 02.12.2022

¹⁴⁰ Tirana, Korça, Vlora, Elbasan, Lezha, Berat, and Kukës

¹⁴¹ The amendments were adopted through Law No. 48/2023.

accessibility requirements for products and services and included preparation of a Regulatory Impact Assessment assessing policy options, financial implications, and expected social, economic, and gender impacts. In addition, amendments to Law 93/2014 on Inclusion and Accessibility of Persons with Disabilities and relevant bylaws were drafted to expand obligations for public and private service providers and strengthen accessibility requirements for products and services, supporting closer alignment with EU acquis and standards.

Monitoring of the National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities (2021–2025) was completed, and preparation of the next action plan for 2026–2030. The monitoring process began in December 2023, with the mid-term monitoring report finalized in June 2024, and assessed progress against 188 measures, 23 objectives, and eight priority areas. Data were collected through questionnaires and participatory consultations, including four regional meetings.¹⁴² The monitoring highlighted both progress and persistent challenges, including limited standardized statistical data, weak information on disability-related budget expenditures, institutional delays, and limited human resources dedicated to disability policies, particularly at local level. These findings informed the drafting of the new National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities 2026–2030, which outlines strategic objectives, measures, indicators, and preliminary budget estimations and is expected to be finalized in early 2026.

The National Action Plan for Older Persons (2025–2030) was adopted. During the third year of implementation, support to MoHSP focused on reviewing and monitoring the National Action Plan on Older Persons 2020–2024, through consultation among different institutions including social services, civil society, and health providers. The review highlighted delays linked to COVID-19 and identified key gaps related to coordination between health and social policies, participation of older persons, geriatric care capacities, and monitoring arrangements. Building on the review and final evaluation of the 2020–2024 Plan, technical and consultative support contributed to drafting the new National Action Plan for Older Persons 2025–2030.¹⁴³ The Plan was finalized through a participatory process and establishing updated objectives, measures, and monitoring mechanisms to strengthen coordination, geriatric care, active ageing, and social inclusion of older persons.

Support was provided to the Minister for Children and Youth on development and early implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2022–2029¹⁴⁴ and to youth-related measures under the National Action Plan on Drugs Prevention, Treatment and Harm Reduction, approved in 2023. The National Youth Strategy ensures the inclusion of youth from rural areas, Roma and Egyptian communities, and youth with disabilities. Additional support contributed to dissemination and early implementation through national youth forums, strengthening the engagement of young people, local authorities, and civil society in implementation and monitoring.

Activity 3.1.2) MHSP supported in the further development of the Social Fund to promote/ expand/ scale up social care services targeted to vulnerable groups.

¹⁴² In Vlora, Shkodra, Korça, Tirana with 105 participants, and five focus groups involving 41 participants from 16 organisations of persons with disabilities and six service providers.

¹⁴³ Approved by the Council of Ministers in June 2025 (Order No. 315),

¹⁴⁴ Decision No. 692, dated 26.10.2022

This activity focused on strengthening the Social Fund as a key instrument for expanding social care services for vulnerable groups, while also reinforcing national and local capacities for data-informed planning, monitoring, and community and volunteer engagement.

The Social Fund was strengthened and operationalized in line with its approved regulatory framework. In 2022, a national event convened by the MoHSP brought together representatives from all 61 municipalities, social care service providers, civil society, and development partners to review implementation practices, identify challenges, and agree on priorities to improve fund management and efficiency. Building on a legal and operational review initiated in 2022, targeted support contributed to updating the regulatory framework, including the approval of DCM No. 224/2024, introducing a calculation methodology for transparent and equitable resource allocation, and the revision of DCM No. 111/2018 regulating the Social Fund. These measures supported more effective governance and implementation at local level.

Local capacities for collecting and using disaggregated data to inform social protection and inclusion policies were strengthened. During the third year of implementation, support focused on improving the collection and use of administrative data at municipal level, with emphasis on gender-disaggregated data. An assessment of administrative data was carried out in 15 LNB-supported municipalities, informing gender-responsive planning, monitoring, and evaluation at local and central levels. In parallel, a draft list of indicators for the Social Protection Strategy was prepared, and SDG indicators were mapped within the Social Inclusion Policy Document. To strengthen practical skills, LNB, together with INSTAT, organized training on gender statistics for municipal staff from Pogradec, Delvinë, and Fier, covering core gender concepts, gender indicators, and use of statistical platforms such as PX-WEB. Support was also provided to establish the Inter-agency Group on Gender Statistics, co-chaired by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and INSTAT, to improve coordination and use of gender data for evidence-based policymaking.

Capacities of social workers to promote and manage volunteer work were strengthened through practical learning and exchange of best practices. During the fourth year of implementation, capacity-building efforts focused on strengthening the role of volunteer work in social development through practical tools, knowledge exchange, and collaboration with the University of Applied Sciences of Lucerne. The support aimed to equip local actors with concrete approaches to promote volunteerism as a contributor to community well-being and civic participation. A conference held in February 2025 brought together around 50 social workers from 15 municipalities to exchange experiences on volunteer work, discuss key benefits and challenges, and review five pilot volunteer initiatives through peer learning and reflection.

Activity 3.1.3) MHSP, MESY, MFE, SSS, and INSTAT supported in the development of and in implementing social inclusion policy and strategy monitoring mechanisms.

Under this activity, work focused on strengthening national monitoring mechanisms for social inclusion policies, including at the international level, through a combination of reporting, data, and coordination measures. More specifically:

Albania prepares its second progress report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). With the programme's support, during the second year of the implementation, the MHSP compiled the national report, covering the period 2019–2023. The report was

developed through the Inter-Ministerial Working Group¹⁴⁵ and coordinated by the MhSP and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Europe. The report documents progress in legal, policy, and institutional frameworks while highlighting persistent gaps, including in relation to the rights of women with disabilities, accessibility barriers, and limited information on disability-related budgets.

Implementation of integrated child development protocols linking health and social services was strengthened. Following the approval by the MoHSP of standard protocols on child growth and development monitoring and vision and hearing screening for children under five (Order No. 406/2, dated 02.12.2022), support continued to strengthen their application in practice. During 2023–2024, capacities of 122 health professionals from Korça, Vlora, Elbasan, and Tirana were strengthened in child growth and development monitoring and screening. The implementation demonstrated a tested model for improved coordination between primary health care and local social services, supporting early identification, monitoring, and follow-up of children most at risk and in need of care and protection.

Foundations for improved local-level data collection and coordination were established to support evidence-based social protection and inclusion policies. During the first year of implementation, consultations with INSTAT focused on defining a common methodology for local-level data collection, clarifying municipal roles, and exploring synergies with other similar initiatives. The work aimed to support standardized and gradually digitalized data collection across municipalities, strengthening the capacity of statistical institutions, municipal administrations, and local gender focal points to use data for policy development, gender-responsive planning and budgeting, and accountability. In parallel, technical support contributed to piloting digital tools and developing standardized templates and minimum quality standards for administrative data. Work was also initiated on monitoring the National Action Plan for Older Persons 2020–2023, including the establishment of a working group with the MoHSP and the launch of the drafting process for the monitoring report, applying improved coordination between local and national levels.

Policy dialogue and coordination on monitoring core health and social indicators for vulnerable groups were strengthened. The activity supported Albania's engagement in policy dialogue on ageing and vulnerable populations, including participation in the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing under the MIPAA+20 framework¹⁴⁶. With the programme support, Albania prepared and submitted its National Report on MIPAA+20 in 2023, presenting progress on healthy ageing, long-term care, and social inclusion of older persons, and highlighting national achievements and challenges. At national and local levels, dialogue and coordination were further strengthened through the establishment of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development¹⁴⁷ and through mapping of health and gender-related services for young people in Tirana and Korça. The mapping process strengthened the capacities of 40 municipal staff, supported digitalization of service information, and improved access to youth-friendly and gender-responsive services, reaching around 200 young people directly and approximately 1,000 indirectly through awareness activities.

Availability and use of official statistics on children, adolescents, and youth were strengthened to support evidence-based policies and programmes. Since 2021, one of the aspects of the programme's support to INSTAT focused on strengthening child, adolescent, and youth wellbeing indicators through analytical work and institutional collaboration. In 2023, INSTAT published the report "Children, Adolescents and

¹⁴⁵ Established by Prime Minister's Order No. 112/2014

¹⁴⁶ Ministerial Conference on Ageing, within the framework of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

¹⁴⁷ Formalized by Parliamentary Order No. 43, dated 18 July 2023

Youth-Focused Wellbeing Indicators 2017–2021”¹⁴⁸, covering 120 indicators across key sectors and informing MoHSP’s mid-term monitoring of the National Agenda for Child Rights 2021–2026. The report was developed with contributions from municipalities, civil society, and around 110 adolescents and approved by the National Council on Child Rights. In parallel, the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection updated its digital dashboard, expanding child-specific indicators from 58 to 62 and integrating data from over 15 institutions. During 2024–2025, INSTAT prepared a Children and Youth Thematic Report based on the 2023 Population and Housing Census, finalized in Albanian and English and planned for publication in early 2026, introducing new equity-based analysis and supporting more targeted and inclusive policymaking.

Activity 3.1.4) MHSP (and MFE), in cooperation with SSS and SILSS, supported in the development of and in implementing social service quality inspection and monitoring systems

The inspection system for social care services was strengthened at central and regional levels. Support focused on reinforcing both the inspection and monitoring functions of social care services, through parallel assistance to the State Inspectorate of Labor and Social Services (SILSS) and the State Social Service (SSS). Technical support to SILSS strengthened the establishment of social care service inspection functions at regional level, informed by analysis of the legal framework, inspection workload, and institutional arrangements, and contributed to drafting a Decision of the Council of Ministers defining the mandate, structure, and roles of the Inspectorate at central and regional levels, alongside job descriptions and selection criteria for regional inspectors. In parallel, support to SSS focused on developing a unified methodology for monitoring the implementation of social service delivery standards, including a conceptual framework, standards, indicators, and monitoring tools. Capacity building accompanied the rollout of the methodology through training for central, regional, and municipal staff. Together, these interventions clarified and strengthened complementary oversight roles, while highlighting remaining challenges related to capacity constraints, coordination between inspection and monitoring functions, and the need to formalize monitoring tools and use evidence systematically to improve social care policy and service quality.

Assessment and care planning for children with disabilities in residential institutions were strengthened to support deinstitutionalization. During the last two years of the programme’s implementation, a comprehensive assessment was conducted in six public developmental centres¹⁴⁹, covering 39 children with disabilities. The assessment examined individual needs, family and socio-economic factors, and the availability of community-based services and education, using UNICEF’s Technical Guidance on Deinstitutionalization for Children with Disabilities. The findings informed individualized care and transition planning from institutional to family- and community-based services and were submitted to MoHSP and contributed to the development of the National Plan of Action on the transformation of residential institutions into family-based alternative care services for children, including children with disabilities.

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.instat.gov.al/al/publikime/librat/2022/treguesit-e-mir%C3%ABqenies-s%C3%AB-f%C3%ABmij%C3%ABve-adoleshent%C3%ABve-dhe-t%C3%AB-rinje-n%C3%AB-shqip%C3%ABri-2017-2021/>

¹⁴⁹ Shkodër, Tiranë, Durrës, Berat, Vlorë, and Korçë

Output 3.2: Further development of the educational/ continuing education, training-provision and qualifications system, to ensure workforce professionalization is supported.

Activity 3.2.1) Professional associations (Orders), Universities, ASCAP supported in development of the continuing education/ qualification system, training curricula and standards.

Professional capacities of assistant teachers and schools to support inclusive education for children with disabilities were strengthened at national and local levels. Through a 30-month partnership with the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-University Education (ASCAP), support focused on improving the professional practice of assistant teachers and strengthening cooperation between schools and local social services. A key result was the development and formal adoption of the Professional Standards for Assistant Teachers establishing a national framework for roles, competencies, and responsibilities.¹⁵⁰ Professional development was delivered through three national cascade training rounds between 2022 and 2024, combining Training of Trainers and structured professional network meetings. In total, more than 3,000 assistant teachers were trained and certified nationwide, supported by over 460 trainers who received the ToT. The programme also developed and published accredited training modules and practical guides, including the Assistant Teachers' Manual and a curriculum adaptation guide for children with disabilities. At local level, capacities of Schools as Community Centers were strengthened in five municipalities¹⁵¹, improving coordination with social care services, while special schools were supported to function as resource centers, enabling ongoing professional exchange and support for inclusive education practices.

*In parallel, capacities of ASCAP and education practitioners to promote inclusive and quality teaching were strengthened across multiple municipalities.*¹⁵² Support focused on strengthening inclusive education practices through partnership with the Ministry of Education and ASCAP, in line with the National Education Strategy 2021–2026. Between 2021 and 2024, capacity-building activities targeted school leaders, professional network leaders, assistant teachers, and classroom teachers in the first targeted municipalities, with later expansion in others. A total of around 1500 professional network leaders, school principals and teachers were trained, followed by continued training and mentoring of teachers on inclusive education standards, classroom diversity management, and support for students with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Accredited training modules and e-learning courses ensured sustainability, while mentoring and classroom observations supported practical application. In addition, ASCAP supported the development and piloting of teaching protocols for working with children with disabilities, strengthened professional networks, and promoted peer learning through documentation of good practices. The initiative also contributed to system-level reforms, including support to the transformation of special schools into resource centers and inputs to the mid-term evaluation of the National Education Strategy. By 2025, ASCAP continued mentoring professional networks and a Compendium on the transformation of special schools into resource centers was developed to guide future policy and capacity-building efforts.

A set of initiatives jointly focused on strengthening the academic institutions responsible for social work education in Albania, with particular emphasis on Faculties and Departments of Social Work, to modernize

¹⁵⁰ Approved by the Ministry of Education and Sports through Ministerial Order No. 29 of 20 January 2023. This provided, for the first time, a nationally recognized framework defining the role, competencies and professional responsibilities of assistant teachers working with children with disabilities, creating a common reference point for training, supervision and performance.

¹⁵¹ Korçë, Maliq, Pogradec, Shijak and Dimal.

¹⁵² Dibër, Durrës, Kamëz, Elbasan, and Krujë

curricula, strengthen professional standards, and improve the link between academic training, social protection policies, and service delivery. More specifically the programme supported :

- *Strengthening academic partnerships and curricula through collaboration between the Faculties of Social Sciences of the Universities of Tirana, Shkodra, and Elbasan and the University of Applied Sciences of Lucerne.* The partnership supported curriculum review for pre- and in-service social workers and psychologists, improvements to internship and supervision systems, and the introduction of ethical and scientific standards for social sciences research. It delivered concrete outputs, including the translation and integration of four core textbooks into bachelor's and master's programmes, their adaptation into accredited continuous training modules, development of a Professional Practice Manual, guidance for an Ethics Committee on Social Sciences Research, and organization of the International Conference on Social Work in 2024, with materials integrated into 47 academic courses and accredited trainings reaching 255 professionals.
- *Advancement of social work professionalization and social protection competencies through targeted support to the Department of Social Work and Social Policy (DSWP) at the University of Tirana.* In this context, the programme focused on revising and approving new Master's programmes in Clinical Social Work and Social Policies and Human Development, aligning Bachelor curricula, and strengthening teaching on monitoring and evaluation of public policies and evidence-based policymaking. In parallel, it supported the professionalization of social work through collaboration with the Order of Social Workers, contributing to the establishment of licensing mechanisms, creation of the State Exam Commission, organization of the first national licensing examination in July 2025, and the licensing of 575 social workers, strengthening the education–practice–policy continuum.
- *Practice-based learning and gender-sensitive social work education* through collaboration with the DSWP at the University of Tirana to develop internships and experiential learning formats focused on the social integration of vulnerable women and girls. This included joint planning workshops, an Open Auditorium on social inclusion, a three-day Social Work Bootcamp in October 2023 engaging 42 Master's students, and translation of student-led advocacy ideas into a public awareness initiative implemented on International Women's Day 2024. The partnership evolved toward sustainability through the decision to develop an open-access university textbook on gender equity and gender-based violence, aligned with national frameworks and aimed at strengthening gender-responsive social work education.

Professionalization and licensing of social workers were advanced through sustained institutional support and national-level engagement. Support focused on strengthening the Order of Social Workers as the core professional body regulating social work practice in Albania. Early support contributed to the organization of the first National Assembly of Social Workers in December 2021, which brought together around 1,000 registered social workers to formally establish the Order and elect its governing bodies.¹⁵³ The establishment of the Order enabled the development of a licensing framework, leading to the licensing of approximately 500 social workers by the end of 2023. Additional efforts supported professional visibility and recognition, including awareness initiatives linked to World Social Work Day and the organization of the

¹⁵³ <https://www.facebook.com/unicefalbania/posts/3055248091395453>

First National Forum of Social Workers in March 2024, which convened over 200 social workers to exchange experiences and discuss professional challenges and priorities.¹⁵⁴

Chapter 3: Gender Equality and Good Governance

3.1 Gender Equality

Over the four years of implementation, the programme implemented multiple actions to uphold gender equality across its interventions, combining targeted support to vulnerable women, participatory and gender-responsive budgeting, gender integration in policies and planning, and measures to strengthen participation, accountability and capacities of central and local authorities.

Targeted support: throughout the implementation period of LNB 2, specific initiatives focused on women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including women victims of violence, Roma women, rural women, women with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, improving access to health and social services, non-formal education programmes and employment opportunities. In addition, women's participation and empowerment were promoted through information campaigns, training programmes and consultation meetings, with particular focus on women from desiderated groups.

Gender integration in policymaking and budget: Throughout the programme period, gender-responsive approaches were integrated into policy development through close collaboration with MHSP, other central institutions and local government, ensuring that gender considerations were embedded in economic and social policies at both central and local levels. Results were shown during the third year of implementation, with the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming in the National Strategy on Social Protection (2024-2030), support to fifteen municipalities to update and cost local social care plans for 2024–2026/2027 with explicit gender considerations and collaboration with Local Government Units and social services in several municipalities to develop proposals and secure funding for initiatives that specifically target vulnerable women.

In addition, the programme supported participatory budgeting processes at municipal level, ensuring that women, particularly those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, as well as youth were meaningfully involved in identifying local priorities. In the later phases, these processes were more systematically aligned with other gender-responsive budgeting initiatives, strengthening follow-up mechanisms, improving the translation of women's priorities into concrete budget lines, and enhancing transparency and accountability in local public finance management.

Capacity-building: In parallel, the programme collaborated with local governments to strengthen effective, inclusive and gender-responsive governance practices at community level. In the final years of implementation, this work increasingly shifted toward embedding capacities within local institutions, improving coordination between technical and political levels, and supporting the uptake of gender-responsive practices within regular municipal planning and governance processes. At the national level, partnerships with academic institutions continued to foster innovation and youth engagement, while cooperation with women's groups and civil society organisations was reinforced to sustain advocacy and monitoring

¹⁵⁴ <https://urdhriipunonjesvesociale.al/dita-boterore-e-punes-sociale/>

beyond the programme cycle. In the later years, partnerships with municipal gender equality mechanisms and women municipal councillors were further strengthened, enabling more structured engagement of women in local decision-making and policy dialogue.

Challenges: Despite sustained efforts, the programme faced persistent and evolving challenges in relation to gender equality. Entrenched social and cultural norms continued to limit the effective implementation of gender-responsive policies, while coordination constraints at local level were compounded by limited capacities and resources. In the later years, external factors further affected progress: the evolving political climate, including the 2025 general elections, diverted the attention of many Local Government Units, causing delays in participatory processes and the adoption of gender-responsive initiatives at municipal level. Coordination with national institutions was also affected by high turnover of government officials and the EU accession screening process, which shifted ministerial focus toward policy alignment with EU directives rather than the development of new initiatives. At the same time, a shrinking donor landscape and increased competition for resources constrained funding for social protection and inclusive services, placing additional pressure on civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations, which faced polarised public discourse and negative social media narratives undermining their advocacy efforts. In response, the programme strengthened partnerships with municipalities and CSOs, applied flexible approaches to participatory budgeting, and leveraged synergies with regional programmes on gender-responsive financing to sustain momentum and advance progress toward gender equality.

3.2 Good Governance

The improvement of governance has been at the centre of the LNB 2 programme throughout its implementation, recognizing that effective social service provision and social inclusion depend on an efficient and accountable public sector. Across all years, LNB 2 has applied a human rights-based approach, working with governance stakeholders as duty bearers to promote participation, transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination, while empowering communities through access to information, knowledge, and education.

The programme consistently supported grassroots organizations and marginalized communities, particularly persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, as well as women and children, to articulate their demands and advocate for dedicated services in line with Albanian legislation and international human rights commitments. It facilitated mechanisms for continuous dialogue, including participatory budgeting processes, multi-stakeholder supervisory bodies, forums of persons with disabilities, and participatory local social plans. In parallel, LNB 2 contributed to strengthening legal, policy, and planning frameworks linked to adequate budgeting, including revisions to the Law on Social Housing, the development and implementation of the Social Protection Strategy (2024–2030), and improvements to the Social Fund mechanism to expand social care services.

At both central and local levels, the programme built the capacities of public officials and service providers to deliver integrated community services that go beyond economic assistance, promote labour market and public participation, and improve coordination across social services, health, education, and employment sectors. It also strengthened state capacities for monitoring social service standards and supported accountability mechanisms, including monitoring national action plans, contributing to CRPD reporting processes, and supporting civil society shadow reporting.

In the last two years, following the adoption of the Social Protection Strategy, LNB supported institutional reforms such as the functional review of State Social Services, alignment of local social plans with national priorities, expansion of Needs Assessment and Referral Units, and improved use of management information systems for data-driven planning and monitoring.

Throughout implementation, LNB 2 operated in a challenging governance context shaped by fiscal and administrative decentralization, limited local government capacities, and electoral cycles. While LGUs were entrusted with key responsibilities for service delivery, gaps in financial and administrative resources persisted. Addressing these constraints remained a priority, pursued in synergy with other UN and partner interventions and leveraged through Albania's EU accession process, particularly governance and rule of law requirements. By combining national policy reforms, local capacity-building, participatory planning, and civil society engagement, LNB 2 contributed to a governance model that links grassroots priorities with systemic change, promoting more equitable, transparent, and sustainable social protection and social inclusion systems in Albania.

The programme also strengthened transparency and accountability through its own management practices, including clear grant procedures, reporting to the Steering Committee, dissemination of knowledge products, and systematic coordination with partners and donors.

3.3 Internal Monitoring

Throughout all four years of implementation, LNB 2 management has conducted regular monitoring of programme activities to assess progress, ensure quality of implementation, strengthen inter-agency coordination, and identify bottlenecks and challenges in a timely manner.

Across the implementation period, LNB 2 consistently applied a comprehensive set of monitoring and steering tools, including a Performance Monitoring Framework based on the programme's logical framework; Annual Work Plans; Semi-annual and Annual Reports; budget monitoring; regular field visits; internal monitoring meetings and quarterly reports; systematic risk analysis through an updated risk log; and annual reviews by the Steering Committee, including endorsement of Annual Reports and subsequent Work Plans. These tools enabled continuous tracking of results against defined baselines and targets, evidence-based assessment of progress, and regular capture of knowledge, good practices, and lessons learned. Implementing partners were supported to strengthen their understanding and application of monitoring and evaluation processes within the LNB framework.

Field visits played an important role in internal monitoring and learning. High-level visits by the Swiss Development Cooperation and UN implementing agencies in different years provided opportunities to assess programme results on the ground, engage with local authorities, service providers, civil society organizations, and beneficiaries, and showcase the programme's "Delivering as One" approach. These visits contributed to identifying good practices, strengthening partnerships, and informing future priorities in social service delivery and local policy development.

From Year 3 onwards, preparations for and implementation of an external mid-term evaluation further strengthened the programme's learning and accountability framework. The evaluation, concluded in

December 2024, provided an independent assessment of progress achieved during the first three years, reviewed successes and challenges in improving social services, and identified lessons learned, early indicators of effectiveness, and risks to sustainability. Its findings were intended to inform updates to the programme's theory of change, guide strategic adjustments during the remaining phase, and the design of the third phase of the programme. The review rated the relevance of LNB Phase 2 as highly satisfactory, noting its strong alignment with national and international priorities. Effectiveness in progressing toward results achievement was assessed as satisfactory overall, and highly satisfactory at the community level. The review also assessed project management efficiency, results delivery, and progress toward sustainability as satisfactory. According to the evaluation, results achieved and LNB2's contribution are visible across Albania, reaching all municipalities and addressing a wide range of issues and target groups.¹⁵⁵

Overall, LNB 2's internal monitoring system ensured continuous oversight, supported adaptive programme management, and reinforced transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making throughout implementation.

Chapter 4: Major challenges and mitigation measures

Across the four years of implementation, LNB2 faced a combination of political, economic, institutional, and structural challenges that influenced both the pace and scope of programme delivery. Political polarization, post-election transition periods, local elections, and changes in government leadership at central and municipal levels periodically slowed engagement, decision-making, and continuity of reforms. Electoral cycles and leadership changes in some of the partner municipalities affected prioritisation and ownership of interventions, while government reshuffles, particularly within the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, required renewed coordination. Maintaining close collaboration with technical staff at central and local levels, as well as with civil society organisations, proved critical in ensuring continuity of activities despite these disruptions.

Persistent capacity constraints within public administration remained a major challenge throughout the programme. At both central and local levels, institutions responsible for social protection and social services continued to face limited human resources and technical capacity, and insufficient financial allocations. Social services consistently ranked low among municipal priorities. Although budgets for social services increased over time, funding remained limited in real terms and insufficient to meet growing demand. The Social Fund, while an essential mechanism for expanding social services beyond cash assistance, continued to face challenges related to its limited budget, uneven municipal capacity for implementation, and long-term sustainability.

Economic situation, including the post-pandemic recovery period, global inflation, and rising food and living costs, expanded vulnerability among the programme's targeted groups. Demand for social services increased not only among traditionally disadvantaged groups but also among new groups, including the elderly (especially those living alone), people with chronic illnesses or mental health problems, unemployed persons, rural youth, and women survivors of gender-based violence. Cash support measures were unable to adequately counterbalance rising costs and socio-economic pressures, leading to dissatisfaction and a growing sense of insecurity.

¹⁵⁵ Final Report, Mid Term Evaluation, UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind" (LNB2) In Albania – Phase 2 (December 2024)

Migration emerged as a cross-cutting challenge throughout implementation, particularly among Roma and Egyptian communities and youth in vulnerable households. Programme partners repeatedly reported a strong tendency among beneficiaries, especially young people to migrate or plan irregular emigration due to limited employment prospects and loss of confidence in future opportunities in Albania. While the programme organised individual and group counselling sessions on the risks of illegal migration and provided information on existing employment and training opportunities, these measures had limited impact in changing migration intentions. In some cases, beneficiary families who emigrated were replaced with new households to ensure continuity of service delivery.

Roma and Egyptian communities continued to face multiple, interconnected challenges that could not be fully addressed through programme interventions alone. These included high adult illiteracy, school drop-out rates, limited access to formal employment, dependence on informal and low-income activities (particularly in rural areas), poor housing conditions, environmental health risks, and persistent gender inequalities. Early marriage, gender-based violence, and school drop-out among girls remained significant barriers to the empowerment of Roma and Egyptian women and girls. Where direct service provision was not possible, the programme focused on referrals, information provision, and practical support to access existing public services, including assistance with documentation through the e-government platform.

With regards to interventions related to the rights and services for persons with disabilities, field visits to community centres highlighted recurring challenges across all years. These included insufficient staff capacities for rehabilitation work with children with disabilities, lack of specialised equipment and materials, limited transportation for children living in remote areas, and weak collaboration with parents. Stigma and reluctance among some parents to acknowledge disability further limited impact of services provided. The programme addressed these issues through recommendations to municipalities and service providers, awareness-raising campaigns, targeted outreach to parents, enhanced collaboration between staff and families, and continued investment in staff training. Support to the drafting of Albania's report under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) also revealed weak inter-institutional coordination and the absence of a harmonised data system on disability, including budget allocations and expenditure tracking.

Challenges also persisted in inclusive education. While capacity-building for assistant teachers was identified as a priority, frequent turnover and replacement of professional network leaders disrupted continuity of training. New teachers entering the system often lacked adequate preparation for inclusive education practices. The programme mitigated these challenges by providing training materials to new leaders, ensuring continuous mentoring, engaging external expertise where needed, and working with the Ministry of Education and Sports and ASCAPs to explore curriculum revisions aligned with international standards.

Implementation modalities and partner capacities also had an impact on the progress of programme's activities. Delays in selecting implementing partners and consultants occurred due to UN agency procedures and CSO capacity assessments. Uneven responsiveness among government partners, competing institutional priorities, and administrative constraints, particularly procurement rules limiting long-term partnerships with specialized CSOs also affected implementation. In sectors such as social housing, municipalities faced limited experience, unclear legal amendments, and high dependence on national funding, despite repeated training efforts.

In the final year, sustainability challenges became more pronounced. Limited municipal fiscal space, high turnover of social care staff, relatively low wages in social services compared to other sectors, and the heavy reliance of CSOs on donor funding raised concerns about the continuation of services beyond the programme period. As LNB2 approached its exit phase, efforts focused on strengthening institutional ownership, enhancing coordination mechanisms, transferring knowledge and tools, and promoting conditions for the long-term resilience of Albania's social protection and social inclusion systems.

Chapter 5: LNB contribution to SDGs

Throughout its implementation, LNB2 has contributed consistently and substantively to Albania's progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). LNB2 is clearly designed and guided by the SDG principle of "Leave No One Behind", reflected in the identification, prioritisation and active involvement of marginalized and vulnerable groups as the programme's main beneficiaries. These include women and men with low incomes, people living in rural areas, persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, the elderly, youth at risk, and other vulnerable population groups. The programme is closely aligned with Albania's national and international development frameworks, including the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Albania (2022–2026), as well as national strategies on development, social inclusion, social protection and gender equality.

- Across all years, LNB2 has contributed to **SDG 1 (No Poverty)** and **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)** by supporting the expansion of integrated social services for disadvantaged communities, strengthening inclusive social care planning at national and local levels, contributing to the development and implementation of social inclusion and social protection strategies, improving the Social Fund mechanism, and supporting reforms in social housing and services for ageing and youth. These interventions have aimed to reduce poverty, mitigate vulnerability, and improve equitable access to services.
- In relation to **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)**, the programme supported the implementation of Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV) using a holistic approach to child health and development, with a strong focus on vulnerable families. It also contributed to integrated health service models, maternal and child health services, reproductive and sexual health information and services, outreach to disadvantaged communities, support for youth and people who use drugs, and implementation of standard protocols for child growth and development monitoring, as well as services targeting the elderly.
- Under **SDG 4 (Quality Education)**, LNB2 supported inclusive education through interventions aimed at reducing school dropout and strengthening the capacity of the education system to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, with particular attention to children with disabilities and those from marginalized communities.
- The programme contributed to **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** through targeted and integrated interventions ensuring women's and girls' equal access to services and active participation in empowerment initiatives. The programme also strengthened women's civic participation through participatory budgeting and decision-making processes, piloting inclusive and gender-responsive social services, and providing technical assistance to institutionalise gender-responsive policies. These efforts complemented national reforms and contributed to embedding gender equality within local governance and service delivery frameworks.
- Contributions to **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)** were reinforced through focused support for persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities and other groups. aimed at improving

access to services, promoting inclusion, and addressing systemic barriers to social, economic and political participation. The programme also supported broader inclusion efforts for all marginalized groups, regardless of gender or social status.

- Finally, LNB2 has consistently advanced **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)** by fostering strong partnerships among central and local government institutions, civil society organisations, academia, donors and international partners. Both programme results and implementation challenges have informed evidence-based dialogue in higher-level coordination mechanisms and thematic forums, contributing to policy learning, coordination and national SDG dialogue.

Overall, across the four years, LNB2 has played an important role in advancing SDG implementation in Albania by linking service delivery, policy reform, and partnership-building within a coherent “Leave No One Behind” approach.

Chapter 6: Lessons Learnt and Way Forward

The evaluation of Phase 2 of the LNB Programme identified a set of key lessons emerging from implementation experience at national and local levels. These lessons reflect both strengths and areas for further consolidation in the joint agency delivery model and systemic approach to social inclusion. These lessons informed decision-making during the programme’s exit phase and aim at supporting the sustainability of results and the effective transition of responsibilities to national and local partners.¹⁵⁶

- *Interagency collaboration and coordinated expertise adds value:* The combined expertise of UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, and UNFPA strengthened the programme’s multi-sectoral approach and helped reduce duplication through regular coordination. At the local level, a more unified programme presentation would further enhance coherence and visibility.
- *Systemic approaches are effective:* Working simultaneously on empowering vulnerable groups and strengthening service providers proved important in addressing social exclusion and supporting sustainable change.
- *Capacity building remains a priority:* Continued capacity development for social workers and local government staff is essential, particularly given staff turnover and ongoing gaps in specialized skills.
- *Coordination and partnerships matter:* Strong collaboration among UN agencies, government institutions, and civil society organizations has been a key strength and remains critical for maximizing impact.
- *Interventions on gender responsiveness should focus on all disadvantaged groups:* The programme supported gender-responsive budgeting and inclusive education, increasing women’s participation in local decision-making and strengthening inclusive practices. Further efforts are needed to operationalize these approaches in underserved areas and to strengthen sex-disaggregated data for monitoring results.
- *Sustained engagement with decision-makers is needed:* Experience shows that advancing social inclusion reforms requires continuous dialogue with national and local authorities, supported by evidence and shared ownership of reforms.
- *EU accession as a strategic lever:* Albania’s EU integration process offers opportunities to advance the social inclusion and social protection agenda by linking reforms under Cluster 1 –

¹⁵⁶ This section is based on the findings of the Mid-term Evaluation Report of the UN Joint Programme ‘Leave No One Behind’ (Phase 2).

Fundamentals to governance, rule of law, and human capital development, alongside proactive coalition-building.

- *Cross-sectoral collaboration is essential*: Integrated approaches across social protection, education, health, and employment are critical for effective service delivery, particularly for vulnerable groups.

UN participating organisations of the LNB 2 programme, went through the process of planning the final “exit phase” to be implemented over the period 2026-2027. Four main implementing UN agencies of LBN2 (UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA) undertook in April 2025 a process of consultations with the partners and stakeholders in Albania at national and at local level, public and non-public, followed by the program formulation which was validated through a participatory validation workshop on June 17th, 2025. The draft LNB3 Programme Document was shared in July 2025 with the SDC, for their review and feedback.

The focus of LNB3 remains on supporting the partners to strengthen their provision of social care services in Albania, to deliver sustainable local social services responsive to the needs of the users of local social services. More specifically, LNB3 will ensure: a) Full transfer of the LNB results to the Albanian programme partners, to ensure the continued operational and financial sustainability (and further development) of the programme results at the local and national level; b) Capitalization (replication/ scaling-up) of the LNB results by programme partners.

The signing ceremony for the LNB3 Programme was held on 12 November 2025 at the UN House, marking the formal launch of the consolidation phase. The event brought together the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Welfare, the Ambassador of Switzerland, the UN Resident Coordinator, and Heads of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women, who reaffirmed the programme’s role in strengthening inclusive social services nationwide.

Chapter 7: Communication and Visibility

During implementation of Phase 2, the LNB Programme strengthened its communication and visibility efforts to ensure a coherent “Delivering as One” approach across all implementing agencies. The Communication Plan and Visibility Guidelines, including common logos, templates, and disclaimers, were updated and systematically applied by all partners.

Key programme activities and milestones were actively promoted through social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn), helping to reach both direct beneficiaries and the wider public. These included major events such as conferences and Social Fund promotion activities, the launch of municipal partnerships for social care services, and initiatives highlighting inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

A range of communication products—fact sheets, manuals, brochures, videos, and documentaries—were produced and disseminated through agency and partner websites and social media channels. Media outreach was further strengthened through a press trip for journalists to community-based social services, resulting in dedicated media coverage that showcased programme results, sustainability, and good practices during the second year of implementation. Overall, communication activities supported visibility, knowledge-sharing, and broader awareness of the programme’s impact and lessons learned.

A full list of all posts in social media can be found in Annex 2.

Chapter 8: Finances

Overall financial delivery 1 August 2021 – 31 December 2025

	Funds allocated in USD	Disbursed	Disbursed in %
UNDP	5,759,988	5,759,988	100%
UNICEF	1,629,946	1,629,946	100%
UNW	857,286	857,286	100%
UNFPA	445,823	445,823	100%
Totals	8,693,042	8,693,042	100%

Abbreviations:

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ANAD	Albanian National Association of the Deaf
ASCAP (QAAPE)	Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-University Education
CEDAW	Committee on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DCM	Decisions of the Council of Minister
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSLU	Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts
INSTAT	Albanian Institute of Statistics
LGU	Local Government Units
LNB	Leave No One Behind
MIS	Management of Information Systems
MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
NARU	Needs Assessment Referral Unit
NSSP	National Strategy on Social Protection
OPDs	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
PHC	Primary Healthcare
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SILSS	State Inspectorate of Labour and Social Services
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health Response
SSS	State Social Service
STI	Sexual Transmitted Infection
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UPHV	Universal Progressive Home Visiting
UT	University of Tirana
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VG	Vulnerable Group

List of annexes:

Annex 1: Updated Performance Monitoring Framework (LNB2 Programme logframe)

Annex 2: Communication and Visibility

Annex 3: Updated Risk Analysis

Annex 4: Detailed description of all activities implemented from 2021 to 2025.

