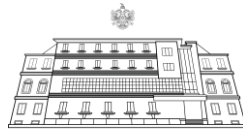




Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRIË
MINISTRIA E SHËNDETËSISË
DHE MBROJTJES SOCIALE



UNITED NATIONS
ALBANIA



UN JOINT PROGRAMME LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Phase 2

01.08.2021 – 31.07.2025



ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT AUGUST 2022 – JUNE 2023

Submitted by LNB2

August 2023



Leave
No One
Behind

United Nations House
"Skanderbej" Street, Gurten Building, 2nd Floor, Tirana, Albania
Tel.: +355 (4) 2250 205, 2250 224, 2250 234

Executive Summary

This report covers the main developments and achievements under LNB 2 programme during its second year of implementation (August 2022-June 2023).

In May 2023, local elections took place, which according to preliminary findings of the international monitoring mission were generally “well-administered”. The process of the negotiations in the context of EU accession remains a strong driver for reforms, including in the area of social inclusion and protection. Despite pessimistic expectations due to international turmoil, the economy showed resilience with 4.8 GDP growth in 2022 and no significant change in poverty rate (22%).¹

The legal framework on social protection and social inclusion is already in place. Some positive progress has been noted on the implementation of the strategy on social protection, but the spending in this area (at around 9,6% of GDP in 2022) remains significantly lower than the EU average. Cash transfers constituted about 95 % of social protection sector’s overall budget in 2022. Despite a 2.3% increase in the number of social services in 2023 (a total of 391 social care institutions) compared to the 2021, demand for services remains high, particularly childcare facilities, support services for persons with disabilities or the elderly, making the ongoing social protection reform a priority for the country and LNB 2 interventions very relevant. During the second year of implementation, work has successfully progressed towards the programme’s goals and objectives.

Under **Outcome 1**², the programme focused on: (i) empowering women and disadvantaged communities, including persons with disabilities and Roma and Egyptian communities to demand and access services and increase their participation in decision making processes; (ii) increasing capacities of civil society organization in their advocacy and service provision roles (iii) offering tested inclusive services, including those targeting women and girls, as well as inclusive education, services for the elderly, and health care in several municipalities; (v) supporting municipalities to establish and fund innovative social service delivery; and (v) improving systems of collaboration among local mechanisms in the areas of child protection, health care and social services.

Under **Outcome 2**³, LNB strengthened its collaboration with 32 municipalities towards: (i) supporting their staff to assess and improve social planning, including in the area of social housing, services for the elderly and from a gender equality perspective; (ii) strengthening capacities of local service providers in areas related to Integrated Social Service Model, disability assessment reform, and service provision for persons with disabilities through community centers; and (iii) facilitating support mechanisms for exchange of experience and learning among providers of social services of different targeted municipalities, particularly of those serving in community centers for persons disabilities.

¹ 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>; 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

² 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.

³ 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.

Under **Outcome 3**⁴, the programme has supported national institutions with: (i) development and implementation of social inclusion frameworks including the National Youth Strategy and Action Plan, 2022-2029 (approved), draft Social Inclusion Policy Document 2022 – 2026 (finalized), and draft of the new Social Protection Strategy with a strong gender component; (ii) development of a digital mapping of social care services (iii) operationalization of the Social Fund; (iv) development of monitoring mechanisms of social inclusion frameworks and increasing capacities at the local level on disaggregated data collection and use of gender statistics; (v) support to institutional development of Directorate of Inspection of Social Services Standards to implement quality inspection and monitoring systems and support on the negotiation process with the EU on Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment of the EU *acquis*; (vi) support capacities of Universities and Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP) in development of the continuing education/ qualification system, training curricula and standards on inclusive and gender sensitive education programmes.

The programme maintains a strong gender focus and strives to improve governance of social protection and social inclusion. Efforts have been made to address challenges associated with the political, economic and social context in Albania as well as those related to implementation modalities.

Chapter 1: - Introduction

1.1 Context:

The following information is an update of the most recent political, economic and social developments in Albania, which are relevant or have an impact on the LNB 2 programme's implementation process.⁵

Political context

In May 2023, local elections took place, which according to preliminary findings of the international monitoring mission were generally “well-administered, competitive, and held with the participation of the key political forces, but the process was characterized by continued polarization between the main political parties and deep division within the opposition”.⁶ The ruling socialist party won the elections (53 out of 61 municipalities) and previous mayors were reconfirmed in some of the municipalities supported by the programme, while in others new mayors have been elected.⁷

Disadvantaged groups remained largely unrepresented during these elections. For example, 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.⁸ In general, accessibility and participation of persons with disabilities in elections remains a concern, including restrictions on voter registration related to

⁴ 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

⁵ This section includes an update of the information provided in the Context section of the LNB 2 Annual Progress Report August 2021-July 2021 and includes primarily data for 2022 and the first half of 2023 when available

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

⁷ New mayors have been elected in the municipalities of Bulqize, Delvina, Divjaka, Fushe-Arrez, Konispol, Mirdite Patos, Peqin, Puke, Sarande, Shkoder, and Vlore.

⁸ Ibid. Information on the number of members of the Roma community who were actually elected is not yet available. Perhaps this and information about participation of persons with disabilities will be available in the final report of the elections' International Monitoring Mission

intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, which is incompatible with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other relevant international standards.⁹

With regards to women's equal political participation only 15 of the 144 mayoral candidates were women, of whom only 8 won their electoral races¹⁰, which represent 13% of total mayors, showing no progress compared to the previous local elections. Latest data from the Central Election Commission indicates that 42% of the 1613 elected councillors are women, compared to 44% in the previous elections.¹¹ Women made up only around 31 % of voters.¹² In addition, women from disadvantaged communities, including Roma and Egyptian women and women with disabilities, continue to be unrepresented at the central and local levels elected and governance bodies. This has been recurring observations from international human rights mechanisms in their recommendations addressed to Albania.¹³

The process of the negotiations in the context of EU accession (opened officially in July 2022) continues to remain a strong driver for reforms as the European Commission is assessing the state of preparedness of the country in specific areas including those relevant to LNB2 such as social protection and social inclusion. In May 2023, the first bilateral meeting between the Albanian Government and the EU Commission took place on Chapter 19 - Social policy and employment. LNB 2 supported the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) with the screening of Chapter 19 and preparation for presentations focused on issues related to social aspects of employment, equality, inclusion, care, anti-discrimination and anti-corruption. The European Commission is expected to prepare and share the assessment report on each chapter in autumn 2023, based the respective roadmaps for implementation.

Economic context

The most recent data indicate that the economy showed resilience despite the international turmoil with 4.8 GDP growth in 2022 and 3% expectations for 2023, due to contribution of tourism, domestic consumption and construction sectors.¹⁴ Public expenditures (as percentage of GDP) reached 30.5% in 2022, a slight decrease from 32.1% in 2021, and public revenues (percentage of GDP) decreased to 26,8 % from 27.5% in 2021.¹⁵

With regards to unemployment rates, Albania saw improvements in 2022 with an average of around 11 % compared to 12 % both in 2021 and 2019 (for the age group 15-64).¹⁶ Unemployment rate continued around 11 % during the first quarter of 2023 and Albania and Montenegro are the only countries in the region where employment levels continued to grow in 2022.¹⁷ Inclusion of vulnerable people in the labour

⁹ Article 29 of the CRPD requires States Parties to "guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others". Also Paragraph 48 of General Comment No. 1 to Article 12 of the CRPD. Paragraph 7.3 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document provides that OSCE participating States will "guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens".

¹⁰ The municipalities where a female mayor was elected are: Bulqize, Dimal, Durrës, Klos, Kurbin, Lushnjë, Përmet, Roskovec

¹¹ Central Elections Committee, Initial Information on Local Elections 2023, <https://iemis.kqz.gov.al/results2023/results2023.htm?lang=AL>

¹² Central Election Committee, Participation: <https://iemis.kqz.gov.al/results2023/results2023.htm?lang=AL>

¹³ CEDAW Concluding Observations, 2016; UPR Recommendations addressed to Albania, 2019

¹⁴ 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>

¹⁵ World Bank, Western Balkans Regular Economic Report: Spring 2023, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099042023104012719/pdf/P179478085f70601a0aac3035c4560691ca.pdf>

¹⁶ INSTAT, Labour Force Survey, Unemployment rate, Q1 2019 - Q1 2023, <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/employment-and-unemployment-from-lfs/#tab2>

¹⁷ World Bank, Western Balkans Regular Economic Report: Spring 2023

market remains a challenge with more than half of the poor population inactive, unemployed, nor in education, and people living in remote areas often completely excluded. Also based on INSTAT data, women's labour participation for the 15-64 age group is lower by 15.9% points compared to men's labour participation. In addition, the gender pay gap in 2022 was 4.5%, lower by 2% compared to the level of 2021 (6.6%) and this does not account for women involved in informal work. In general, access to employment opportunities continues to be constrained by gender roles and patriarchal norms. The gender disparity in unpaid work is stark in Albania, where women devote 21.74% of their daily time to unpaid tasks like cooking, cleaning, and childcare, while men contribute just 3.47%¹⁸.

The overall improved outlook may still face uncertainties due to several factors, including inflation, an escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine and unfavorable weather impacting electricity production.¹⁹

Social context

Many people in Albania remain vulnerable to social exclusion and are unable to fully participate in society, having limited access to resources, rights and services available to the majority population. According to the latest EU-SILC 2021 survey (published in December 2022), at-risk of poverty rate in Albania in 2021 was 22%, experiencing a slight increase by 0.2% points compared to 2020 (the poverty rate for the age group 0-17 has increased by 0.1 % and for the age groups 18-64 years old and 65 years old and above has increased by 0.2 %). On the other hand, the number of individuals at risk of poverty has increased by about 0.2 %. with 622.705 individuals were living below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold compared to 621.504 individuals in 2021. SILC 2021 presents also compelling evidence on the increased vulnerability of girls and women to poverty when compared to men. While 43.4% of the population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, women and girls are disproportionately affected with 44,5% women vs 42% men. Families with children also continue to be at greater risk of poverty, as the at-risk-of-poverty rate for households without dependent children was estimated to be 12.8%, while among those with dependent children was estimated to be 25.9%.²⁰

The legal framework on social protection and social inclusion is already grounded on the Law on Social Care Services, adopted in 2016 and further developed through a set of policy documents, including the National Strategy on Social Protection 2015-2020 extended until 2023 with the support of the LNB programme, the new National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians 2021-2025, the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025, the National Agenda on Children's Rights 2021-2025, the Deinstitutionalization Action Plan 2020-2022, the Strategy on Social Housing 2016-2025 updated in 2021, the cross-sectorial National Strategy For Gender Equality 2021-2030, National Action Plan on LGBTI+ persons 2021-2027 and the National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons 2021-2023.

Some positive progress has been noted on the implementation of the strategy on social protection, in particular regarding the roll-out of the reform on the bio-psychosocial assessment of people with disabilities and outreaching more beneficiaries through social care services. Another positive step was

¹⁸SDG Study, 2023 based on data from Time Use Survey, <https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/06/developing-a-case-for-investing-in-free-universal-childcare-in-albania>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 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

made on the establishment of the legal framework for the Order of Social Workers, which will help speed up efforts to strengthen social care and social protection workforce. However, public spending on social care services programmes continues to be modest and there is yet no mechanism for monitoring the situation of those who are vulnerable and with no access to such services. In addition, monitoring of implementation of the local social plans, budget allocation to social services from the local government and guidance to local government are crucial. The social care services National Electronic Register (NERSCS) is not yet fully operational and the procurement processes associated with installing the register have been delayed.²¹ However, the MHSP, in close collaboration with the National Agency for Information, restored the system and is working with the municipalities to continue the data entry.

Municipalities have made progress with regards to adoption of social care plans with the support of donors and civil society organizations. As of July 2023, 36 municipalities have ongoing social plans, while the plans of 24 municipalities have expired. However, the majority are in the process of renewal, primarily with the support of LNB 2 (15 municipalities).²²

Spending on Social Protection and Social Services

Spending on social protection in Albania remains among the lowest in Europe, at around 9,6% of GDP in 2022²³ and significantly lower than the EU average of 20.5% (2021)²⁴. Spending is dominated by social insurance outlays (contributory program), which account for over 80% of total spending between 2015 and 2022.

At the central government level, social protection budget continues to be heavily dominated by cash benefit outlays, which accounted for more than 95% over the years and have been projected to remain at similar levels in the medium term²⁵. The cash benefit programme is composed of: (i) cash benefit payments for poverty alleviation (social assistance – ndihma ekonomike NE); and (ii) cash payment benefits for persons with disabilities²⁶ Since 2019, a third cash benefit programme was introduced, a one-time baby bonus awarded to families, which has increased from 2.3 billion in 2019, to 3.1 billion ALL by 2022.

Social assistance spending remains significantly low at 0,33% of GDP in both 2021 and 2022, despite its increase since pre-pandemic levels (0.25% of GDP in 2019). In response to the COVID 19 pandemic, the government temporarily doubled the amount of social assistance benefit for all households eligible for the programme during March to May 2020 and again during January to June 2021²⁷. As of January 2022, the level of benefits was permanently increased for several eligible categories²⁸. Following the introduction of additional social protection measures in the spring of 2022 to mitigate the effects of the war in Ukraine, new and permanent increases to social benefits amounts were enforced in September 2022.

²¹ EU Progress Report on Albania, 2022

²² Data collected in the framework of the programme

²³ This includes contributory and non-contributory social protection schemes; employment programmes as well as emergency relief spending. It excludes social housing expenditure, which accounts for an additional less than 0,01% of GDP until 2021 and 0,026% of GDP in 2022.

²⁴ Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG).

²⁵ Albanian Government Budget 2023,

²⁶ These include benefits for people with disability as well as caretakers.

²⁷ In addition to temporary relaxation of eligibility rules for households close to the eligibility threshold.

²⁸ Benefit amounts were doubled for households with three or more minor children (23% of the beneficiaries in 2021) and orphan children; tripled for women and girls victims of trafficking or violence and increased by 10% for all other beneficiaries.

Concerns have been raised increasingly with regard to the adequacy of social assistance benefits and the role of the programme in lifting people out of poverty. In 2022, approximately 64 thousand households were eligible for the social assistance scheme, although at-risk-of poverty levels before social benefits (excluding pensions) were estimated at 24.8% of the population in 2020 (SILC), or over 150,000 households. The social assistance programme is effective in reaching the poorest quintiles of the population: 45% of benefits in 2019 were received by the poorest 10% of households (WB, 2022), but coverage remains very limited. Moreover, the purchasing power of social assistance benefits has eroded over time. Even following the recent increases, the maximum amount of benefit would hardly exceed ALL 12,000 (EUR 100) for a household with three or more dependent children, whereas the poverty threshold for a household with two dependent children was of a monthly amount of ALL 33,563 in 2021 (SILC 2021).²⁹

Informality remains also a concern for Albania with a considerable part of the working population that tends to be invisible and among the most vulnerable. According to the Labour Force Survey, 2020-2021, in 2021, around 29,4 % of the working force were estimated to work in the informal sector (excluding agriculture).³⁰ In addition to fewer social protection rights including benefits from social insurance scheme, very problematic for these individuals remain their exclusion from financial and other support benefits in times of crisis.

Non-cash social protection expenditure, including delivery of social care services as well as administration and management activities linked with the State Social Service and Agency for the Protection of Children Rights, have slightly increased in nominal terms (1.3 billion ALL in 2022 versus 988 million Lek in 2019); yet, their relative weight to the overall programme budget remains very modest.

Mapping of Social Services

The Social Services Mapping, conducted in the context of the LNB2 Programme in May 2023, utilized quantitative and qualitative research method and provided significant insights into social care institutions, the services provided to beneficiaries, and the social care workforce. The study identified a total of 391 social care institutions operating in Albania. (30 % public, 39% non public, and 31% mixed-type Institutions represented). In terms of service distribution, Tirana stood out as the primary provider, offering over one-fifth (23%) of the services. Korça and Shkodra each accounted for 11% of the services, followed by Elbasan with the same percentage. Collectively, the remaining districts contributed approximately 35% of the services.

When categorizing services, "Pre social" services constituted one-fifth (21%) of the total, followed by "Community-based" services (14%) and "Daily Centers" (13%). Meanwhile, "Shelters" and "Alternative Care" represented the least prevalent services, each at 3%. Approximately one-third (29%) of the services were directed towards "Families in Need," making it the most addressed group. The second most served group was "Children with Disabilities" (22%). These two categories combined encompassed 51% of all services, while the remaining services constituted 49%. Groups such as youth in conflict with the law,

²⁹ Information based on the "Review of local budget spending on social care services", 2022, developed in the context of LNB2 (draft not yet published)

³⁰ Labour market in 2021, INSTAT

trafficking victims, and young individuals facing social and economic challenges received the least amount of attention and support through social care services.

The social workforce consisted of 3,753 employees responsible for planning, administering, providing, and delivering social services. Of these employees, 78% (2,916) were directly involved in the functioning of social care services within institutions, while 22% (837) supported the operation of the social care service system at the municipal level.

Despite a 2.3 increase in the number of social services compared to the 2021 assessment, the demand for services remains high. Individuals and families in need (NE) constitute the group with the largest proportion, accounting for 31%. They are followed by the "Elderly" category at 24% and "Adults with Disabilities" at 18%. Qualitative assessment emphasizes the necessity for the establishment of an additional 384 social services.

It is worth highlighting that the beneficiaries of social care services only represented 3.4% of the recipients of cash benefits. This underscores the need to prioritize the strengthening of existing services and the development of new services to address the identified gaps.³¹

Satisfaction with social services

During the reporting period, with the programme's support, the third round of Social Services survey took place.³² This round collected data on elderly, as well as women, children, families and youth in need, in addition to persons with disabilities and Roma and Egyptian communities, which were at the focus of the two previous surveys).³³ The survey covered 530 beneficiaries receiving services from around 57 public and non-public service providers in 26 municipalities. Participants spent an average of 4.38 hours per day in social centres and 41.7 used services every day and 4-5 times per week. The most frequent services include food provision, entertainment activities, counseling, information, advice, and speech therapy. Study participants assigned the mean value of 1.55 (SD = 0.4) to the quality of services. In general, non-public service providers were better rated than public service providers. Children in need, Egyptians, persons with disabilities, and older adults—on average—assigned lower scores to satisfaction with social services, while women/girls—on average—reported higher levels of satisfaction with social services than men/boys.

Some encouraging results, which highlight the importance of inclusive non-cash services to lift people out of poverty, include the high percentage of participants (around 66 %), who perceived their life fully changed after receiving services in the center and 32.20% partly changed. Improvements were reported in areas such as physical activity, socialization and interaction with others, school attendance and performance, nutrition, security, behavior management, performance of daily activities, physical conditions, mental health, financial situation, speech and communication, and quality of life. In addition, 87.81% of study participants reported that they are knowledgeable about their rights.³⁴ More than 75% said that the center held discussions on the improvement of services, and less than half of study participants reported that they have provided suggestions for service improvement. On the other hand,

³¹ Report on Social Services Mapping in Albania, June 2023 (draft), UNDP with the support of LNB 2 programme

³² The first round of data collection—conducted in 2018—established baseline data, which focused on persons with disabilities, Roma, and Egyptians. The second round of data collection—conducted in 2020—tracked changes over time.

³³ It also compared data on persons with disabilities and Roma and Egyptian communities with the results of first and second rounds of data collection.

³⁴ Some of the rights that were mentioned by study participants included: the right to demand and obtain services, to be informed, to complain, to be equal with other service beneficiaries, to not be discriminated against, to freely express opinions, to be treated with respect and dignity, to participate in activities, and to be treated with respect.

80.27% of study participants reported that they have not participated in budget discussions held in the municipality. Overall, study participants demanded the expansion of existing services and the development of new services³⁵.

Social Fund

In the context of decentralization reform, local government is responsible for social service delivery, but its financial and technical capacities are limited. The Social Fund is as a competitive grant mechanism to allocate funds from the central budget to municipalities with approved social care plans managed by the MoHSP. Since 2019, when the Fund became operational, an average of between 150 and 200 million ALL have been appropriated annually in the budget of the MoHSP, but less than 140 million ALL were allocated to municipal budgets between 2020 and 2022. Based on the monitoring report of the National Strategy on Social Protection for 2022, new social care services through the Social Fund were established in 20 municipalities.³⁶

According to analysis of the legal framework and operational modalities of the Social Fund, conducted in the context of the LNB 2, around 41 % of municipalities consider the fund a useful mechanism for financing social services. Around 50% of municipalities confirmed the usefulness of the social fund but pointed out the need for improvement to become more effective. Only 9% of municipalities reported that the social fund represents difficulties in financing social services. Some of the challenges addressed in this study include limitation of the financial support provided through the fund; insufficient local capacities for the development and costing of social plans; problems related to procurement of social services; and discrepancy between timing of application and allocation of funds. In addition, it is recommended a revision of the legal framework and secondary legislation, which would include more clarity and guidance on the social fund.³⁷ Addressing these and other challenges has been one of the priorities of the programme during the reporting period.

In general, local government expenditure on social care services has increased considerably. In 2021 and 2022, local governments spent 2,2% and 2,8% of their total budget in the social sector (1,5% in 2017). Local spending from discretionary resources (unconditional transfer and own-source revenues) is bigger than central government spending on social care services. Local governments continue to depend on state budgets to be able to fund services in a sustainable and predictable manner. Despite significant attention given to social issues at the local level, there is still needed to develop a functioning network of services and case management practices, including inter-alia through transparent and effective financing mechanisms. Financial support for smaller and/or remote municipalities with limited financial and human capacities is a pressing issue.³⁸

Gender equality

Albania has shown improvement in various areas of gender equality. According to the UNDP Gender Equality Index, the country's score improved from 0.330 in 1999 to 0.144 in 2021. The INSTAT's Women

³⁵ Satisfaction with Social Services: Baseline and Midline data for Leave No One Behind (Phase 2), UNDP, July 2023 (draft not yet published)

³⁶ Durrës, Gjirokastra, Lezha, Rrogozhina, Elbasan, Korça, Vlora, Librazhd, Belsh, Tirana, Prrenjas, Kukës, Malësi e Madhe, Tepelena, Patos, Kolonja, Saranda, Shkodra, Devoll, Delvina.

³⁷ Analytical Report on Legal Framework and Challenges on the Implementation of the Social Fund at the Local Level, UNDP with the support of LNB 2, January 2023

³⁸ Review of Local Budget Spending on Social Care Services 2023, June 2023, UNDP with the support of LNB 2 programme

and Men publication for 2022 highlighted advancements in reproductive health, political representation of women, educational outcomes, and women's participation in the labour market. The 2022 EU progress report for Albania also recognized the alignment of the country's legal framework on gender equality with international standards and improvements in costing, budgeting, and the implementation of national strategies and plans, including gender-responsive budgeting. Furthermore, in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum, Albania was listed among Europe's three most-improved countries, alongside Iceland and Luxembourg.

However, the country still faces well-documented challenges in implementing gender equality legislation and policy.³⁹ Women and girls are particularly impacted by poverty due to structural discrimination and the intersection of poverty, marginalization, and vulnerability. The economic situation of women residing in rural and disadvantaged areas is further challenged by the impact of climate change. Additionally, addressing gaps in gender statistics is crucial to better understand and respond to the specific needs of women and girls, thereby tackling persistent inequalities.

Education

The Law on Pre-University Education 69/2012 as amended, requires and emphasizes the importance of inclusion of all children in the education system, especially those from vulnerable groups. The Law states as well states that Special Schools for children with disabilities should be transformed into Resource Centers and all children with disabilities should be included in public schools. However, no specific legal provisions on how to carry out this transformation are in place.

Efforts to prevent dropout rates have been made through the Early Warning System and Social Emotional Learning approaches in various regions of Albania. A total of 587 scholarships were distributed nationwide during 2022-2023, providing support for at-risk children to continue their education compared to the year before where 141 students received scholarships. Another important step towards inclusive education has been the increase in assistant teachers in the Pre-University System. In 2017-2018, there were 700 assistant teachers, whereas in 2022-2023, there were 1902 assistant teachers. The number of children with disabilities registered in pre-university education also increased from 4,402 in 2017-2018 to 4,786 in 2022-2023.

Health

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection increased focus on Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Services by establishing a unit for reproductive health including MCH, at the ministry level. Considering the importance of integrating health and social services, the MOHSP has decided to include the job position of the social worker at the Primary Health Care level. The first 50 social workers were appointed during the reporting period in primary health care centres across the country. The standard protocols for child growth and development, and vision and hearing screening for children under 5 years, were approved by order 406/2 date 02.12.2022. They will guide the work of the family doctors and staff at the well-baby clinics engaged in the home visiting interventions as well. The Reproductive Health Action Plan for 2023 - 2030 was recently approved.

Disadvantaged communities

³⁹ See, among others: List of issues and questions in relation to the fifth periodic report on Albania, CEDAW Committee, March 2022, available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fALB%2fQ%2f5&Lang=en; Albanian Parliament and Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2020), Parliamentary Oversight of the Implementation of the Law on Gender Equality in Albania/ Kontrolli post-legjislativ i ligjit për barazinë gjinore në shoqëri, <https://www.parlament.al/Files/Lajme/Dokument/raportbarazie.pdf>

LNB key target groups run the risk of being most affected by the current global crisis, making the ongoing social protection reform a priority for the country and LNB 2 interventions very relevant. In addition to persons or families lacking minimum subsistence means (i.e. living below the poverty line) because of personal and social conditions) other groups at risk vulnerability include persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian minorities, children and women from these communities, victims of violence, victims of trafficking; adults who have drug/ alcohol addiction; pregnant girls or single parent of a child up to one year old; older people; and members of the LGBTIQ people. Despite the robust social inclusion policy framework adopted specifically for inclusion of marginalized communities, their members face multiple challenges in fully accessing and benefiting from all support and services they are entitled to, including social protection.

With regards, to the rights of *persons with disabilities*, thanks to the LNB programme, progress has been noted in some areas, including the roll out of the biopsychosocial assessment with 21 multidisciplinary commissions being established in 9 regions across the country during 2022, bringing the number to 36 multidisciplinary commission in total. In addition, the number of community centers working with children and youth with disabilities supported by the programme has increased to 16 and capacity of their staff has been strengthened. On inclusive education, the 2020 guidelines on assistant teachers decreasing the ration teacher/pupil with disabilities to 1 for 2 to 3 pupils, at national level is under implementation and the number of teacher assistants has increased. However, according to the latest EU Report on Albania, more robust efforts are needed to address discrimination and violence against persons with disabilities, to improve overall accessibility, promote employment, to collect statistical data on their situation. Lack of access of children with disability to inclusive education remains problematic and the number of teacher assistants remains insufficient in the pre-university education system. Particularly, the 40 % gap in funding for the 2021-2025 national action plan for people with disabilities remains to be addressed.⁴⁰

Albanian government has made efforts to improve the living conditions of the *Roma and Egyptian minorities* and their integration to the Albanian society. Some positive results were noticed in the areas of civil registration, housing, education and employment during the implementation process of the previous Action Plan (2016-2020).⁴¹ Roma and Egyptians continue to benefit from a 5% quota through implementation of the law on social housing. Access to personal documents has improved for both communities. Roma and Egyptian children have also continued to benefit from scholarships and part-time education programmes, as well as free textbooks and transportation to remote schools. However, other barriers such as the lack of digital skills and access to technology continue to prevent Roma and Egyptian people from fully enjoying their rights and accessing most public services, which are now digital (healthcare, education, employment, social protection etc.). Segregation in schools continues to remain an issue that should be systematically addressed. Overall, additional efforts and resources are required to accelerate the inclusion of Roma and Egyptians, tackle antigypsyism and discrimination and reduce the gap with the rest of the population.⁴²

⁴⁰ EU Commission, Albania Status Report, 2022

⁴¹ EU Progress Report, Albania 2021; Progress Report of Roma and Egyptian NAP (2016-2020) for the period 2019-2020.

⁴² Ibid.

The third round of Social Services of 2023 (previously mentioned), which compared data with previous surveys on persons with disabilities and Roma and Egyptian communities, did not indicate substantial improvements. The percentage of respondents who reported that they used services every day in 2023 (22.62%) was higher than in 2020 (10.27%) but lower than in 2018 (25.41%) and no substantial differences concerning the types of services that respondents used in 2018 and 2020. On a positive note, in 2023—compared to 2020 and 2018—a higher percentage of study participants fully agreed that services fulfill their needs and the physical environment is suitable for persons with disabilities; the way they are treated in the center make them feel good with themselves; staff members are polite; conditions are suitable; services are provided on time; they can connect with the center through telephone; and their life changed after receiving services in the center.⁴³

⁴³ Satisfaction with Social Services: Baseline and Midline data for Leave No One Behind (Phase 2), UNDP, July 2023 (draft not yet published)

1.2 Intervention logic

The intervention logic in the approved project document remains still valid. The programme's outcomes and outputs are closely linked and support the national reforms, development goals/ strategies of the Government of Albania regarding social protection and inclusion, and the wider framework for human capital and social development. LNB 2 builds on the solid policy and legal framework for social inclusion set up in previous UN projects, including LNB 1 programme⁴⁴. During the second year of the programme's implementation, the aim is to further improve the results orientation of this flagship project by scaling up the social protection and inclusion reform roll-out and increasing capacities of local government to provide decentralized services for women, children, and men in their communities.

The principle of "Leave no one Behind" has been at the focus of LNB 2, based on the relevant SDC guidance, recommendations of international human rights mechanisms related economic and social rights of disadvantaged groups⁴⁵ as well as relevant government's commitments in the context of EU accession and SDGs agenda.

Currently, the programme collaborates with 32 municipalities and during the reporting period, it has strengthened relations with 25 municipalities⁴⁶ involved in Phase 1 and fostering relations with the new 7 municipalities⁴⁷ selected after a comprehensive Mapping of The Social Care Services in Albania conducted during May – September 2021.

The Results Framework (RF) is closely aligned with Albania's UNSDF (2022-2026) and the SDC Cooperation Strategy for Albania. The logframe was completed with all baselines and target values, including with information from studies, conducted during the reporting period to assess progress in the area of social protection and social inclusion. These include the reports on Social Services mapping; satisfaction with Social Services (baseline and midline data for LNB 2); and review of local budget spending on social care services.

Additional indicators (and means of verification) have been included to reflect the "positive change effect" dimension of project impact. Monitoring Factsheets are included in the results framework which provide additional explanations on the indicators to be measured and the data to be collected. These fact sheets are considered working documents and may be reviewed and adapted by the Technical Committee according to ground realities and any changes to context.

During the second year of its implementation, the programme has also shown flexibility to adopt to priorities and needs of its partners and adjust accordingly to avoid overlapping and maximise resources. For example, some of the planned activities, which has not been considered a priority have been removed from the workplan after discussions or upon request of partners, such as collaboration with State Social Services (SSS) to guide municipalities to develop service models for independent living for adult persons with disabilities, since SSS informed that they envisage implementing it using the expertise of their own staff. Instead, the programme has been requested to provide support in conducting a survey to assess the status of children with disabilities in the public residential centers with the aim of progressing towards deinstitutionalization. Or the activity related to support MoHSP in establishing a sustainable statistical system to measure monitoring indicators related to and compliance with SDG indicators on disability, which the MHSP has not considered it any more necessary for the time being.

On the other hand, several new activities have initiated this year, including support to the MoHSP on the reporting process to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and monitoring the implementation of the National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities, integrating gender in the draft National Social Protection Strategy, provision of psycho-social support for Roma and Egyptian women and girls victims or at risk of gender-based violence, development of a digital national map of social care services, and support to the government in their efforts to prepare for negotiations of Chapter 19 as part of the EU accession process.

1.3 Synergies with development partners

LNB 2 is a Joint Programme, being implemented through the modalities of the Delivering as One (DaO) mechanism, under the framework of the Government of Albania-UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026. The joint participation of four UN agencies in line with their mandate and expertise ensures coordination and complementarity with their other initiatives at implemented at the central and local levels. The use of the UN SDG Acceleration Fund – in support of the DoA approach – further incentivizes UN cooperation and strengthens its policy and advocacy voice vis-à-vis communities, government partners, donors, civil society, and other international organizations.

LNB 2 is being implemented in synergies with other programmes, policies, and strategies directly related or relevant to social inclusion and protection, including the EU Programme on Technical Assistance to Support the Implementation of Reform in the Area of Social Inclusion, which is part of the EU Technical Support for Social Inclusion in Albania.⁴⁸ In this context, regular coordination meetings are organized with the EU4SI expert team and MHSP officials to maintain synergies and avoid overlap.

In addition, LNB 2 has aimed to create synergies also with other ongoing initiatives in the areas of social protection, inclusive education, VET and employment, gender equality, gender responsive budgeting, elimination of gender-based violence and other projects that are also working on the empowerment of communities and local government.⁴⁹ For example, the establishment and infrastructure of the multifunctional center of Devoll municipality was supported through the UN Joint Programme "Improve

⁴⁴ (1) Empowered vulnerable people; (2) Enabled municipalities and social service providers; (3) Strengthened national institutions

⁴⁵ Persons in difficult economic situation, Roma and Egyptian communities, persons with disabilities, persons living in remote and rural areas and particularly women and children from these groups

⁴⁶ Berat, Bulqize, Dimal, Diber, Divjake, Durres, Elbasan, Fier, Kamez, Korce, Kruje, Lezhe, Lushnje, Maliq, Mirdite, Permet, Pogradec, Puke, Patos, Roskovec, Sarande, Shijak, Shkoder, Vlore, Tirane

⁴⁷ The new LGUs are: Dropull, Delvine, Konsipol, Tropoje, Rrogzhine, Fushe Arrez, Peqin

⁴⁸ The EU for Social Inclusion (2020-2024) aims to strengthen the capacity of the Government of Albania to successfully implement reforms in the area of social inclusion, through social care services, inclusive education, and VET and employment.

⁴⁹ Social Assistance Modernization Project (2012-2022) implemented by the World Bank; 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) i funded by the ADA, Sustainable Economic and Regional Development, Employment Promotion and Vocational Education and Training Programme (ProSEED - 2017-2022) co-funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (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); EU for Gender Equality (EU4GE – 2021-2023), a joint UN Project (UN Women, UNFPA) funded by the EU; Transformative Financing for Gender Equality towards more Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans (2020-2024), financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and implemented by UN Women; Improving the Response of Responsible Local Institutions to Gender Based Violence Survivors (2019-2022), financed by the ADA.

Municipal Social Services" – with the SDGs funds, while the LNB program is increasing capacities of the staff that provides services for children with disabilities. Or, in the context of the support on the development of the National Strategy on Social Protection (2024-2030), consultation meetings have been organized with World Bank mission in Albania to discuss at the technical level the priorities and linkages to the World Bank support to the MoHSP as well as EU funded technical assistance to ensure synergies with the plans and activities implemented by them. Moreover, the coordination of participatory budgeting efforts across five municipalities has been harmonized with ongoing initiatives on Gender-Responsive Budgeting, including a meticulous process of addressing the concerns of vulnerable women during municipal meetings.

LNB has further consolidated its partnership with the strategic government partners and other entities. The participating agencies closely cooperate with the focal points in Ministry of Health and the Social Protection, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Ministry of Finance and Economy, INSTAT, State Social Services, State Inspectorate of Labor and Social Services (SILSS), Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education, Universities of Tirana, Shkodra and Elbasan, Order of Social Workers to coordinate and implement interventions in target areas and ensure that the target groups are supported in a holistic way.

The LNB programme is contributing to capacity building and organisational development of national and local government structures and service providers including CSOs, which will be an on-going process to consolidate the achieved results and scale-up of good practices. To this end, the programme's institutional partnerships with relevant stakeholders are being further consolidated at central and local levels, and continuous consultation mechanisms are in place to support the transfer of the project results to be embedded within the partners' organisation.

Chapter Programme implementation

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.

During the reporting period, the programme worked directly with communities as well as national and local CSOs and service providers and made important progress to:

- Raise awareness on provision of assistive devices for persons with disabilities among organizations of persons with disabilities and provide specific recommendations on the State's obligation to ensure coverage for these devices;
- Empower persons with disabilities and increase their participation in decision making process - 5 community-based groups of activists with 40 members established have reached out 360 persons with disabilities and their families in Rrogozhine, Divjake, Patos, Kruje, Kamez, in addition to thousands through social media;
- Provide psycho-social support to Roma and Egyptian women and girls, victims or at risk of gender-based violence - 40 women and girls are receiving these services;
- Empower disadvantaged communities through support to increase literacy and other skills to access services - 112 Roma and Egyptian women of Tirana, Elbasan, and Vlora are receiving these services;
- Strengthen capacities of CSOs in advocating for gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring the provision of social services - 23 CSOs benefited from capacity building;

- Develop and disseminate IEC50 related to SRHR⁵¹, HIV, AIDS and STD⁵² among disadvantaged communities, persons who use drugs and persons in penitentiary centers - around 1000 people reached) and provide counseling and testing for different health issues to youth with risky behavior (250 youth);
- Strengthen capacities and support organizations of persons with disabilities to implement projects on different human rights issues - nine organizations have received grants;
- Improve health and development of children/students from disadvantaged communities through sports activities - 204 students are benefiting in the municipality of Diber;
- Increase participation of disadvantaged women and youth in participatory budgeting processes - 500 women and girls raised around 52 issues related to public spending municipalities of Vau i Dejes, Fushe-Arrez, Gjirokaster, Delvine and Dropull, of which 73% have been addressed/accepted;
- Offer integrated social services to disadvantaged communities in Lushnja, Divjaka Durres and Tirana municipalities - 532 families (2,432 individuals) are benefiting from different counseling services; 300 children are being supported with school attendance; 10 household and youth beneficiaries found employment, 31 beneficiaries enrolled in VET courses, 26 households and youth registered as jobseekers; 100 families supported in establishing informal income-generating activities and six new formal micro-businesses; 360 persons participated in community-development activities;
- Increase capacities of educators on inclusive education - 210 school headmasters, teachers and leaders of professional development networks of assisting teachers have benefited;
- Increase capacities of health providers in Shkodra and Vlora to ensure access to quality SRHR services for young girls and women with disabilities - 97 health care personnel and care givers have benefited;
- Initiate the process of establishing new models of community services in Divjaka and Patos;
- Develop a training program for Albanian Sign Language Interpreters” and initiation of the programme by the first cohort of interpreters;
- Provide grants to 16 municipalities to establish and maintain new social services for individuals and families in need of social protection, as established in Law 121/2016 for Social Welfare Services;
- Engage children and local CSOs in Korça in the implementation process of the Local Plan on the Child Rights in the municipality of Korca - 60 children and adolescents, including boys and girls from rural areas and Roma/Egyptian communities and 6 local CSOs;
- Raise awareness, including through social media campaigns to prevent the drop out of students at risks though the scholarship programme for students from disadvantaged communities - 65 professionals of education from different sectors trained in Diber, Elbasan, Kruje and Durres and 587 scholarships distributed country-wide;
- Increase capacities of health care providers and consolidate the implementation of the Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV) methodology - 13,214 home visits were conducted reaching 3,303 children under 5 years old (1519 girls), 144 cases of children at risk were identified during home visits in Tirana, Korca, Vlora, Elbasa and Lezha;
- Implement the community-based model of support for the disadvantaged communities through provision of 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.

⁵⁰ Information, Education, Communication Materials

⁵¹ Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights

⁵² Sexually Transmitted Diseases

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

2023: 36,642 (53%F, 47%M) - Families in need 42% (66%F, 34%M), Children with disabilities 7% (45%F, 55%M), Elderly 10% (42%F, 58%M), Victims of domestic violence 6% (100%F), Adults with disabilities 6% (38%F, 62%M), Children out of parental care 9% (39%F, 61%M), Victims of trafficking 1% (100%F), Roma & Egyptian ethnic minorities 9% (37%F, 63%M), Young people from marginalized families 6% (25%F, 75%M), Young people in conflict with the law 3 % (4%F, 96%M)

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

657 individuals (90% of which women) and 72 CSOs engaged in LGU social inclusion policy consultation event

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

70 issues raised on Local participatory budget process and 76% addressed

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) The rights and the services they are entitled to are communicated to marginalized and vulnerable persons and groups.

- Support the community of persons with disabilities to advocate for assistive devices with the purpose to improve their level of accessibility, thereby contributing to their social inclusion.

LNB continued its partnership with an organization of persons with disabilities to promote and advocate for State's coverage of assistive devices. Following the development of two essential materials on best international practices for devices on persons with disability⁵³ and WHO Priority List of Assistive Products⁵⁴, 4 work meetings were held during the reporting period respectively with high-level officials from key institutions.⁵⁵ The objective was to advocate for and raise awareness on necessary systems for ensuring availability of assistive devices for persons with disabilities, in accordance with relevant international and national legal and policy obligations⁵⁶. Overall, the institutions' representatives have been open and positive to discuss and find solutions on this matter. Additionally, 55 representatives (65% women) of 30 organizations of and for persons with disabilities in Durres, Tirana and Shkodra have been trained on

⁵³ "Broshurë e praktikave të mira në garantimin e mjeteve ndihmëse për personat me aftësi të kufizuara" published at: <https://sebashku.org/2022/07/16/broshure-e-pratikave-te-mira-ne-garantimin-e-mjeteve-ndihmese-per-personat-me-aftesi-te-kufizuara/>

⁵⁴ "Dokument Informues Mbi Mjetet Ndhmëse Për Personat Me Aftësi Të Kufizuara" published at <https://sebashku.org/2022/06/09/dokument-informues-mbi-mjetet-ndihmese-per-personat-me-aftesi-te-kufizuara/>

⁵⁵ the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP), State Social Service (SSS), Social Insurance Institute (SIO) and Compulsory Health Care Insurance Fund (CHCI).

⁵⁶ 7 issues were raised on assistive devices for PwD

assistive devices and technology, as per WHO Priority List of Assistive Products⁵⁷, and best similar practices of other countries in the region.

The partner organization during the whole project implementation published a total of 73 posts in the social media platforms reaching more than 100,000 people, and had 10 media appearances (TV and written media) to bring at the public attention the importance of assistive devices for persons with disabilities, and produced a *video divided into five segments*, highlighting the challenges of not having assistive devices and the benefits of having them for the individual and for society. (The links are included in the Annex on visibility).

A project concluding event, considered as the “First national conference on assistive devices in Albania” took place in March 2023, with the participation of 51 persons representing state institutions, organizations of persons with disabilities throughout Albania and other CSOs as well as academia. During the event, the General Director of SSS offered a panorama of the distribution of wheelchairs through the regional social services branches, and representatives of CSOs shared experience on donating assistive technology to persons with disabilities in their communities (Shkoder and Durres) and related challenges. Experts of the LNB partner shared key findings of the best practice document for the provision of assistive technology in the region and WHO priority list on assistive products. The partner organization submitted also an official communication to authorities highlighting these needs and specific recommendations.⁵⁸

- *Provide information and awareness on Social Care Services rights and entitlements of PWD in at least 5 targeted municipalities*

Another disability rights CSO, partner of LNB, continued its activities reaching out persons with disabilities, especially those living in remote and rural areas in the municipalities of Rrogozhine, Divjake, Patos, Kruje, Kamez. The aim is to empower individuals to speak up for themselves and constantly engage in decision-making processes, especially those related to availability and accessibility of quality services for persons with disabilities. During the reporting period, an information package on the legislation and models of social care services for persons with disabilities, including versions in accessible formats for persons with hearing and visual impairments and persons with intellectual disabilities has been distributed in hard copies during training events and information sessions. The package is also uploaded to the section dedicated to the LNB partner’s website⁵⁹, which is visited by around 8500 users and shared through ADRF Facebook page, counting 2898 followers.⁶⁰

In addition, 5 community-based groups of activists with disabilities have been established in each of the targeted municipalities, including around 40 members in total. The capacities of these groups are being increased to engage them in information sharing, awareness raising and advocacy activities, as well as in a sustained dialogue with the local authorities.⁶¹ The activists and LNB partner have already reached out

⁵⁷ “Dokument Informues Mbi Mjetet Ndhimëse 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/>

⁵⁸ Including the establishment of a country-wide distribution system of assistive devices for persons with disabilities in all their diversity; planning of adequate funds from the state budget; adoption of a list of assistive devices; approval of public procurement procedures to ensure quality assistive devices according to international standards; organization of public consultations with persons with disabilities when designing and approving the system of assistive devices; and provision of instructions for the medical personnel and health care service professionals regarding the use of assistive devices.

⁵⁹ <https://adrf.al/index.php/sq/projekt/309-informim-dhe-fuqizim-i-personave-me-aftesi-te-kufizuara-per-te-kerkuar-dhe-per-te-marre-sherbime-te-kujdesit-shoqeror;>

⁶⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3249084045362990>

⁶¹ <https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3268479716756756>

<https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3287258988212162>

<https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3285143741757020>

<https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3298152507122810>

to **360 persons with disabilities** (151 women) and their family members in 40 out of 60 targeted administrative units or villages and have shared with them information about the rights they are entitled to and mechanisms for claiming these rights.⁶² These sessions served as fora for the participants to present and discuss the challenges they face to fulfill their rights, with a view of finding the best strategies of addressing and bringing them to the attention of the relevant responsible institutions at the local level.⁶³

- *Provide psycho-social support for Roma and Egyptian women and girls who are victims of domestic violence or at risk of gender-based violence*

An intervention dedicated to improving social services and reducing the vulnerability of Roma and Egyptian women and girls has been successfully started in the Kamza and Kruja municipalities. The kick-off meeting, held in Kruja (Fushe-Kruja Administrative Unit), played a pivotal role in facilitating valuable discussions and active engagement from local stakeholders. Currently, 40 vulnerable Roma and Egyptian women and girls have been identified (25 located in Fushe-Kruja and 15 in Kamez). Through a thorough evaluation of their social and economic needs, the primary objective is to enhance their access to services and provide direct support tailored to their specific requirements. Additionally, the initiative has initiated the establishment of two psycho-social support clubs that are dedicated to assisting these women and girls. These services will significantly contribute to promoting inclusivity and fostering long-lasting positive impacts within the targeted group.

- *Support participatory research and capacity building initiatives targeting youth at risk of exclusion to claim rights and services*

Addressing the needs of the most marginalized communities, specifically those encountering challenges in literacy and numeracy skills, as well as limited access to social services, is a key priority of the programme. A concrete intervention has been launched to empower individuals through education and opportunities to access to services. This intervention aims to disrupt the cycle of poverty and vulnerability. The primary focus is on Roma and Egyptian communities residing in peripheral areas of Tirana, Elbasan, and Vlora (Novosele).

During the reporting period, kick-off meetings were organized in the three targeted areas, which brought to light several concerns related to social services and beyond. These include the need for improved and comprehensive social services, inadequate living conditions (Tirana and Novosela), a lack of electricity affecting a portion of the R&E community (Elbasan), limited access to employment opportunities due to low literacy skills, challenges in accessing healthcare services, and the importance of ensuring quality education. Local mediators, supported by professional social staff in targeted municipalities and stakeholders, have initiated actions to address these needs and concerns for services. As of now, 112 women and girls have been identified and have initiated their sessions to enhance their literacy, soft skills, and competencies. Furthermore, assistance has been provided to 5 individuals to ensure access to other vital social services.

- *Improve mechanisms for community dialogue by capitalizing the local community networks, through inclusive media, communication, capacity building, volunteering and social mobilization events, targeting inclusion of citizenry, particularly women and girls in decision making processes*

LNB 2 maintained its partnership with grassroots organizations that are members of the PRISMA Network to continue its efforts in participatory budgeting processes. The primary objectives were to activate

⁶² <https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3282422995362428>
<https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3293839677554093>

⁶³ 8 issues were raised and addressed at the local level on access to rights and services for PwD in 5 targeted municipalities.

women and youth, enhance public discourse with Local Government Units (LGUs), and ensure the proper implementation of participatory public processes that include all groups in the target municipalities.

A two-day training/workshop on Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in monitoring social services for vulnerable women and girls took place in Durres. The training aimed to strengthen the capacities of CSOs and promote their involvement in budgeting processes from a gender perspective. The training was attended by 32 participants from 23 entities, including CSOs, a university, an alliance of women councilors, and a women entrepreneur. Participants represented a diverse range of organizations (14% men and 86% women).⁶⁴ Among the participating CSOs, 15% were led by men.⁶⁵

During the discussions, several key issues and concerns were raised, including coordination and linkage between local social plans, gender local plans, and strategic plans, the importance of conducting regular needs assessments and mapping services to ensure gender equality, optimizing budget planning for services through funding or partnerships with NGOs, and challenges related to public procurement and its application to social services. The training significantly contributed to strengthening the capacities of CSOs in advocating for gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring the provision of social services. The recommendations and conclusions drawn from the training will guide future actions and collaborations within the PRISMA network to further promote gender equality and inclusive budgeting processes.

- *Develop and disseminate in target municipalities of IEC (information, education, communication material) packages for all targeted groups.*

LNB has started a number of initiatives to share IEC materials with different groups. These include efforts to empower persons with disabilities, Roma communities and rural populations in Tirana, Durres, and Fier through information sections and community mobilization to enable them to make informed decision on their Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and to increase access to quality SRHR, HIV and sexual and gender-based violence services. In this context, 8 informative sessions were organized with 129 participants (37 men and 92 women), with majority being from Roma community. Three implementing partners are engaged to carry out this work.

Part of these effort focus also strengthening the national response to prevention and control of HIV and AIDS and STIs, through deployment of outreach teams in drop-in centers⁶⁶ as well as in hot spot areas where drug users and their sexual/injecting partners and other vulnerable groups socialize. The main services provided during the reported period include distribution of risk reduction packages (condoms, IEC materials, and other paraphernalia that reduces transmission of HIV/STI due to unsafe sex and injecting practices; and advice on minimizing the harm done by drugs and how to avoid and manage an overdose).

The sharing of IEC packages is taking place also in prison settings, where LNB partner in close collaboration with the social-medical team of prisons of Fier and organized weekly information sessions with prisoners, particularly those of young age and a substance abuse history or those involved in unprotected sexual relationships with many partners (MSM, SW, etc.). Information sessions covered issues on HIV/STI and

⁶⁴ Including social care service providers, emergency and GBV (gender-based violence) services, disability services, humanitarian-based organizations, community-based organizations, human rights-based organizations, gender-based organizations, faith-based organizations, women-based organizations, youth-based organizations, children-based organizations, rural organizations, legal framework organizations, academia, women councilors, a trade union, advocacy organizations, CSOs resource centers, culture and art organizations, entrepreneurship organizations, and activists.

⁶⁵ Engaged across various sectors, including CSOs resource centers, trade unions, culture and art, humanitarian aid, and rural organizations.

⁶⁶ Drop-in centres, also known as “safe spaces”, are premises that provide key population with a comfortable place to get information, receive programme services, and interact with each other and with other professionals working in these centers.

overdose prevention and management. Special attention has been placed to inform prisoners and make them familiar with the concept of pre and post-transition and follow-up care model, which is an approach that helps prisoners, particularly those with a history of substance abuse and involvement in other risky behaviors to easily access and utilize sexual and reproductive health services and the substance abuse prevention one as soon as they are released from prisons. A leaflet named “Transitional Care” has been developed and distributed among prison staff and prisoners who took part in the awareness sessions.

Through this initiative (Aksion +), the total number of beneficiaries receiving services in drop in centers until the end of September 2022 was 882 (841 men and 41 women), while the number of persons receiving therapy in prisons was 129 women and 127 males. In total the number of people who use drugs that have received the therapy of methadone has been 1011 persons (43 women, 968 men). 295 psychological counseling sessions were carried out; 373 beneficiaries have been tested for HIV and STIs of whom 295 are individuals tested for the first time.

In addition, 250 young people who are involved in substance abuse risky behaviors have been supported with various services in three regions, respectively in Tirana, Durres and Elbasan. During the outreach work, nearly 95 of them have been tested for HIV and Hepatitis C and also have received pre and post-test counseling. Two field visits have been carried out in 8 prisons and nearly 600 prisoners have been reached during the awareness sessions on HIV/AIDS and STI prevention. Two advocacy meetings with General Prison Administration have been carried out in September 2022. 15 health providers in prison settings have been reached and informed about the pre- and post-release transition care approach, particularly for young people with a substance abuse history.

Young key population in the community and prison settings have been reached with information and services. An MoU was signed between General Directory of Prisons⁶⁷ and a CSO partner of the programme aiming to sustainability and quality improvement of programmes implemented in prison settings.

Another key initiative during the reporting period, is the development of the National Action Plan on Drugs Prevention, Treatment and Harm Reduction. And, finally, a short movie titled “It’s time” on the rights of the girls and women with disability has been produced and it will be screened in selected targeted regions of LNB 2 in the coming months within 2023.

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

- *Strengthen the organizations of/for persons with disabilities (OPDs) in developing and implementing tailored advocacy and policy monitoring actions that reflect their priorities and contexts*

From September to October 2022, LNB launched a “Call for Proposals to Support organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in developing and implementing tailored advocacy and policy monitoring actions that reflect their priorities and contexts”. Following a selection process, 10 out of 20 project proposals were recommended for funding and during April – May 2023 the programme entered in partnership with nine organizations.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Intervention implemented in 7 male prisons (“Jordan Misja” and “313” in Tirana, Rrogozhina, Fier, Berat, Peqin, Fushe-Kruje and Reç, Shkoder)

⁶⁸ One organization could not sign the agreement due to administrative obstacles on their part.

These initiatives focus on: empowerment of persons with disabilities at risk of poverty and exclusion, to advocate for their rights⁶⁹; inclusion of deaf people in the labour market⁷⁰; establishment of a model of monitoring the public services by parents of children with disabilities⁷¹; establishment of a network of CSOs and increasing their capacity to conduct evidence-based advocacy⁷²; informing and empowering parents of children with disabilities with advocacy skills to ensure their children's rights are fulfilled⁷³; increasing the capacities of young people with intellectual disabilities to represent their interests in decision-making processes at the local level⁷⁴; empowerment of blind young people to seek and access education, employment and other services⁷⁵; and improving accessibility of the Albanian postal services to ensure persons with disabilities receive essential services, such as payments of disability allowances on an equal basis with others⁷⁶.

- Promote participation and improve health and development through sport activities targeting socially excluded or at risk of exclusion school-age children in Kamza municipality

The programme is partnering with a local CSO to implement the project "Sport for Health", which aims to be a model of promoting participation and improving health and development through sports activities targeting school-age children excluded or at risk of exclusion in the municipality of Dibër. Usually these children find it difficult to participate in social, cultural or sports activities, as a result they cannot benefit from the developmental, health, social and emotional advantages that such activities offer

The project is based on direct students' involvement in the sports ground of Myslim Shehu 9-year school located in the suburban area of Dibër Municipality, where there is a concentration of internal migration and a high level of vulnerability. The school counts 204 students, of which 94 from households in social assistance (ndihma ekonomike) scheme, 9 from the Egyptian community and 2 with disabilities. The specialized staff of the project is working closely with the school leadership, teachers and the community, in line with the "School as a Community Center" initiative, to offer children, students and young people the opportunity for quality sport activities in the discipline of Tennis. This project will harness the power of sport to help children improve their health and develop social, educational and leadership skills while playing and having fun.⁷⁷

- *Increase participation of vulnerable women and girls in the participatory budgeting practices to better respond to their needs for social services, including during emergency situations.*

During the reporting period, LNB continued its partnership with a women's rights organization to promote the participation of disadvantaged women and girls, or those at risk of vulnerability, in participatory budgeting practices. The aim was to improve mechanisms for community dialogue in 15 municipalities across Albania.

In the targeted municipalities of Vau i Dejes, Fushe Arrez, Dropull, and Delvine, Gjirokaster, 500 women and girls raised their voices in local participatory budgeting processes. The participants represented various demographics, including 40% employed women, 18% from the Greek minority, 12% from the

⁶⁹ All Together NOW! project, implemented by the Association of Para and Quadriplegics of Albania in Kukës

⁷⁰ "Toward employment through accessible information" project, implemented by Albanian National Association of the Deaf (ANAD),

⁷¹ "Empower the parents' network to be a voice in local decision-making policies" project, implemented by MEDPAK Association

⁷² "Promoting the access to services through a systematic approach (PASS)" project, implemented by Shkodra branch of Para and Quadriplegics Association

⁷³ "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 Dejes Municipality

⁷⁴ "Youth with intellectual disability standing for their rights" project, implemented by Help the Life Association in Vlora, Durrës and Tirana

⁷⁵ "Empower the future" project, implemented by the National Association of Blind Persons

⁷⁶ "The Albanian Post accessible for persons with disabilities" project, implemented by Together Foundation

⁷⁷ This activity was relocated from Kamza to Dibra as the Local Education Office in Kamza, despite the school cooperative attitude, did not authorize the project access to the school premises even during the after-school hours.

Roma community, 10% rural women or villages, 8% women who are heads of households, 6% women entrepreneurs, 5% divorced/survivors of domestic violence, and 2% retired women.

Through their participation in approximately 15 consultation meetings, these women and girls raised around 52 issues related to public spending. Out of these issues, 73% were addressed and accepted as priorities in the municipal budgets, while the remaining issues were identified as priorities for the medium term or required funding/grants to be addressed. This demonstrated the impact of their engagement in shaping local priorities.

In addition, a youth engagement program was developed, alongside the detailing of a community mobilization plan, involving a collaboration with the University of Gjirokastra to promote participatory budgeting, social dialogue, and gender equality. As part of this initiative, a draft memorandum of understanding was prepared, outlining the university's contribution to civic actions. Throughout all the activities, youth represented 30% of the total number of participants, out of which 28% were boys, and 7% came from municipalities beyond the five targeted areas for women and girls. The evaluation feedback from participants indicated that 86% of them considered it necessary for women and young people to have a voice in the local budget process, highlighting the importance of their inclusion and representation

Output 1.2: Roma, Egyptians 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.

- *Implement integrated social services model for vulnerable children and their families (R&E) in Tirana, Durres, Lushnje and Divjaka: school support, facilitation of VET and (self) employment, families counseling and awareness raising, development of income generation schemes, community development.*

The Integrated Social Services Model provides tailored and high-quality services to families in need continued to be implemented in Lushnja, Divjaka⁷⁸, Durres (Sukth), and Tirana municipalities, using an inclusive and holistic approach. By integrating social protection and care services with other public and non-public sectors such as social housing, education, employment, self-employment and micro-business support, vocational training offices, and healthcare, this model contributes significantly to enhancing the well-being of vulnerable families. A key element of delivering a comprehensive package of Integrated Social Services is the efficient coordination among local service providers, including the private sector, ensuring that the services are personalized to meet the specific needs of individuals requiring services.

A total of 532 families (2,432 individuals) are currently benefiting from integrated social services, with 302 families identified as targeted beneficiaries (including 121 from Roma and Egyptian communities). Additionally, 230 other families have accessed the services through local offices established in each municipality, leading to a positive development in the project by increasing the number of people receiving adequate support. Furthermore, families are being assisted in accessing e-Albania services and referred to local government structures for obtaining requested services. The beneficiaries have received counseling services on various crucial issues, including family dynamics, women and girls' participation in decision-making, child education, and accessing essential services like employment and healthcare. The counseling also covered awareness-raising on positive parenting. Additionally, beneficiaries were guided on managing economic activities and income generation schemes.

⁷⁸ Upon the request of the Municipality of Divjakë, in March 2023, the community center, that has been established in Tërbuf, was transferred to Grabjan Administrative Unit, as the greatest number of beneficiaries, around 90%, live in Grabjan.

Between September 2022 and July 2023, the project closely supported 300 children, ensuring regular school attendance and improved performance. 66% (216) of them showed enhanced academic results, and parental involvement with schools increased. The project organized 22 school activities focusing on inclusion, equality, and diversity. Additionally, 325 children aged 7 to 15 actively participated in a 10-day summer camp held from 3rd to 14th July 2023, enjoying various enriching activities in each project location

The project continued to provide services for youth empowerment, skills development, internships, and family economic empowerment. This led to 10 household and youth beneficiaries finding employment, 31 beneficiaries enrolling in VET courses, and 26 households and youth being registered as jobseekers. Additionally, 100 families were supported in establishing informal income-generating activities, and six new formal micro-businesses were set up in targeted areas with technical expertise and necessary equipment provided for their success.

Community development, awareness-raising, and social and cultural activities play a vital role in the Integrated Social Services Model. Throughout the reporting period, 16 community development activities with approximately 360 participants were organized in various project locations, focusing on economic aid, employment benefits, equal rights in schools, reproductive health, and family planning. Additionally, ten awareness-raising activities engaged 162 participants, addressing topics such as professional training, parent-child relationships, domestic violence, racial discrimination, income management, and environmental awareness. The project also organized 8 cultural and social events, with 140 participants celebrating Women's Day, International Family Day, Workers' Day, and World Day Against Child Labor. On Women's Day, women in Lushnjë shared inspiring life stories, raising awareness about women's rights. The mayor of Lushnja municipality attended this activity where five women shared their life stories to inspire other women and emphasize the importance of their voices. In Tirana, discussions centered around women's empowerment. In Sukthi, the focus was on women's rights and equality, and in Grabian, the challenges faced by Roma women were highlighted.

In parallel with providing integrated services to the current project beneficiaries, the project team and municipal social workers have identified new families who will join the project in September 2023. During the second round of service provision, Tirana will have 100 new beneficiary families, Divjaka will have 60 new beneficiary families, Sukthi will have 60 new beneficiary families, and Lushnjë will have 80 new beneficiary families.

- *Support local authorities, including educational authorities to develop models for inclusive education.* LNB has been supporting the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to ensure inclusive education, as one of the main priorities of the Albanian National Education Strategy. In collaboration with the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP), the focus of the program during the reporting period has been the strengthening of professional capacities of 210 school headmasters, teachers and leaders of the professional development networks from municipalities of Diber, Durres, Kamez, Elbasan and Kruje on how to implement inclusive policies and practices in the schools so that every child might be included and have access to quality education. The training modules, developed with the support of national experts in collaboration with the University of Education in Zurich, are very relevant to the Albanian context and currently are accredited by the MoES. The main themes of the training modules include introduction to inclusive education; Inclusive education in Albanian context; inclusive teaching standards; focus of inclusion on systems and of persons with disabilities; and practical activities to support children's participation and the creation of coalitions for inclusion.
- *Support CSOs to implement integrated social care services for older persons in the target municipalities and in partnership with municipalities and Social State Services (SSS).*

The programme is contributing to the implementation of actions under the National Action Plan for Older Persons (2020-2024) in partnership with the municipalities of Durres, Rrogozhine, Vlore, Tirana and engaged in piloting the long-term care for older persons. During the reporting period, focus was placed on raising awareness about demographic resilience, on population ageing, intergenerational solidarity and advancing commitments taken in Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA+20).

Following the Report on Long Term Care and its recommendations, the first pilot exercise initiated in Sukth administrative unit of Durres, where a database of older persons was established to register their needs and health situation in order to develop individual tailored support measures. The information on the tool was also shared with participants during the Health Conference, organized by the MoHSP, where the issue of integrated care for older persons was discussed in a dedicated session moderated by the deputy Minister of Health. In addition, support has continued to Vlora Day Care Centre - the first of its kind in the city of Vlora, established by the municipality in collaboration with LNB and one of its CSO partners to provide services to older people.

LNB 2 and one of its CSO partners are advocating for the establishment of an “All Party Parliamentary Group in Albania for Population and Development”. An official request is sent to the Speaker of the Parliament with a draft proposal of the regulatory documents. The Parliamentary Group is expected to be formalized in the following months, including the implementation of several activities planned for 2023.

The programme continues to support the magazine "Demographic Studies" and the first issue 2023 contains study articles by authors from fields such as: demographic, social, economic, educational and health. The authors are professors from universities as well as other researchers with work experience in public and private institutions.

The first pilot exercise initiated in Sukth administrative unit of Durres, where a database of older persons was initiated to register their needs and health situation in order to develop individual tailored support measures. This particular exercise was made possible through ILO’s funding under SDG financing project. LNB contribution focused on increasing capacities of the municipality to deliver integrated care and long term-care for older persons. As a result, all older persons of Sukth - a total of 1,218 persons – were contacted and their needs/priorities, social and health conditions were registered in the database. The median age of the samples is 73.2 years. 37% (413) are under 70 years old, 43% (481) are 70-79 years old and 20% (222) are 80 years or older. The model used with support of ILO will be extended under LNB to all pilot municipalities in 2023. The work and findings were shared with all municipalities, which showed great interest to embrace this process. LNB and its implementing partner are looking at new partnerships that will be established during the rest of the year.

Dedicated meeting with all LGUs and State Social Services were organized about the implementation the National Action Plan on Ageing and two-days training were organised in Tirana, Gjirokaster and Durres with participation of 136 representatives (25 men/111 women) from administrative units, social and health services during October to December 2022.

In addition, support was provided to strengthen capacities of Vlora Day Care Centre - the first of its kind in the city of Vlora, established by the municipality in collaboration with LNB and one of its CSO partners to provide services to older people. Around 25 people receive daily services from the center, while 200 older people attended the event on 1st October, International Day of Older People and another 200 people end of year activities. On the 7th October, a group of 20 young people from “Youth Act Centre” engaged in an SDC funded project with the purpose to increase the engagement of young people in

volunteerism, solidary and support visited the Vlora Centre and organized activities with the older persons of the centre.

- *Pilot and fund innovative inclusive social services targeting vulnerable women and girls at the local level*

A mapping exercise aiming at identification of main gaps and challenges related to vulnerable women to access to social services was conducted in the municipalities of Shkodra, Vau i Dejes, Fushë-Arrëz, Delvinë, Dropull, Vorë, and 4 rural administrative units in Tirana (Pezë, Baldushk, Kashar, Dajt). The mapping identified gaps and proposed specific interventions, which when piloted can address social gaps pertaining to women in these territories. LNB has been instrumental in leading this process and will follow through until funding of pilot initiatives takes place.

The programme also focused on mentoring and coaching of Social Services and Project and Donor coordination teams in municipalities of Delvine, Vau Dejes, Maliq, Elbasan, Gjirokaster, Roskovec, Tropoje and Fushe Arrez, Maliq and Elbasan on piloting gender responsive social services, which aim to better understand and identify the specific interventions addressing needs of women and girls.

In addition, the programme has been providing support to LGUs and social service providers to implement inclusive social care plans and pilot innovative social services for vulnerable women and girls, including development of gender-sensitive project proposals. The municipalities of Delvine, Vau Dejes, Maliq, Elbasan, Gjirokaster, Roskovec, Tropoje, and Fushe Arrez were actively involved in these sessions.

- *Support CSOs to reach out the most vulnerable R&E and Key Population groups to benefit from the community-based model support at primary health level care.*

Under this activity, LNB is working to strengthen and expand community-based model at primary health care level, which aims to ensure access to quality RMNCAH services (Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, Adolescent Health) for the most disadvantaged groups. During the reporting period, the Training Package on RMNCAH was completed and a survey took place on the utilization and access to RMNCAH services at Primary Health Centres (PHC) for disadvantaged communities in rural and urban regions of Vlore, Fier and Lezhe (Municipalities of Vlora, Saranda, Delvina, Fier, Lezha, and Mirdite). 33 facilities (9 urban and 24 rural) providing RMNCAH services at the Primary Health Centres (PHC) level were selected to be part of the survey.⁷⁹ Its findings and recommendations will be consolidated in close collaboration with key stakeholders and be inform further interventions in this area.

In addition, the programme is increasing capacities of health providers to ensure access to and utilization of quality SRHR services for young girls and women with disabilities. During the reporting period, trainings on "Sexual and Reproductive Health for People with Disabilities" were organized in Shkoder and Vlora. 97 health care personnel and care givers (9 doctors, 38 nurses, 14 psychologists, 12 social workers, 27 caregivers/guardians) who provide direct services to persons with intellectual disabilities in hospitals and community / daily / residential mental health care centers (depending on NJVKSH or Municipalities) received information on issues affecting access to SRHR services for persons with disabilities.

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

- *Support to at least 5 LGUs to establish new models of community services for target groups, in particular people with disabilities and other vulnerable people.*

⁷⁹ 10 rural, 7 urban Health Centres (HC) in Vlora; 7 rural, 2 urban PHC in Saranda; 3 rural, 1 urban PHC in Delvina; 14 rural, 5 urban PHC in Fier; 8 rural; 9 rural, 1 urban PHC in Lezhe; 5 rural, 2 urban PHC in Mirdite.



After a meticulous identification process, Divjaka and Patos are two of the 5 new targeted municipalities that LNB will support to establish new models of sustainable community services for disadvantaged communities, with a particular focus on persons with disabilities. The programme is currently collaborating with the staff of both municipalities on the technical aspects of centers' design in accordance with the agreed typology and models of services that will be offered, primarily to persons with disabilities, children up to 16 years old and their family members, women victims of gender-based violence, individuals in a social emergency situation and elderly people in need of home assistance (the last category only in Divjaka).

- *Implement capacity building project for up to 15 sign language instructors; Train and certify up to 15 sign language interpreters.*

LNB and its partner continued collaboration to address the lack of sign language interpreters for the deaf community. During the reporting period, work focused on the development of a relevant training program and more specifically, the "Standards for the Professional Development and Certification of Albanian Sign Language Interpreters". These standards define the criteria of professional interpretation, including the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that a sign language interpreter must demonstrate in practice. They also aim to generate a clear understanding among members of the deaf community on their expectations from a professional Albanian sign language interpreter.

A first group of 15 interpreters have been identified to follow the course, initially shared within family members and relatives of the deaf community with basic knowledge of sign language and then with the public for other interested individuals. The group is composed of hearing people with good skills of understanding sign language and visual interpretation as well as non-hearing people.

In addition, the LNB 2 partner: a) completed the elaboration of the training course by developing the curricula for level B1-B2 and C1-C2 linguistic competences; b) developed and distributed the student's handbook with information on the organization of the initial (A1-A2) level course; and c) successfully implemented the training for the group of students of the initial level.⁸⁰ The course is designed to equip students with knowledge, techniques and skills in an interactive interpreting way in a myriad of fields such as legal, education, medicine, business, governance, mental health, and so forth. In developing and implementing the course program and the evaluation tests, ANAD has benefited from the expertise of a professional sign language interpreter and trainer from Kosovo.

The final tests/exams of the A1-A2 level are developed individually with each student and aim to assess components such as: producing, understanding, and interaction skills. The current 15 students (11 women) entering the A1 and then A2 level tests have successfully passed them.

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

- *Initiate at least 10 innovative services at local level projects in line with the grant scheme's regulations*
- Based on LNB programme guidelines for grants for community-based social services, including the selection criteria⁸¹, the first call for proposals for innovative services was published. In addition, information sessions were organized for all 61 municipalities to provide detailed information on the grant scheme and its priorities.

⁸⁰ 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.

⁸¹ Guidelines for grants for community-based social services prepared by LNB in phase 1 and are endorsed by Steering Committee

The Grants Management Committee received 37 proposals. After careful review, 16 proposals from municipalities have been approved by the GMC, and 14 have already received grants to establish and maintain new social services for individuals and families in need of social protection, as established in Law 121/2016 for Social Welfare Services.

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

- *Assist the Municipality of Korca for the establishment of a mechanism that includes CSOs around planning and monitoring issues that affect children.*

During the reporting period, efforts continued to consolidate the implementation of the initiative 'Bashki mike e femijeve', in Korça municipality, as part of the National Action Plan for Child Rights 2021-2026. In this context, six CSOs in Korca, very active in their role as members of the steering committee, collaborated with the Municipality staff to engage 60 children and adolescents, including boys and girls from rural areas and Roma/Egyptian communities (40 girls in identifying the priority investments in their localities which would contribute to the fulfillment of their rights. This consultation was followed by an extended meeting of the steering committee with the mayor and members of the Municipal Council, where children and adolescents themselves brought up their priorities and proposed solutions and lobbied for their voice to be heard. Information on steps undertaken by the municipality to deliver on under-taken commitment will be provided in the next reporting cycle.

- *Strengthen local mechanisms to implement early warning system in support of out of school children (Korce, Diber, Tirana, Skrapar, Elbasan, Fier, Durres)*

LNB has been supporting the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) for the implementation of the Order No. 666, dated 10.10.2019 on "Financial quotes with and scholarships for students at the Pre-University Institutions" with the aim of preventing the drop-out of the students at risk.⁸²

During the reporting period, awareness raising meetings were organized with teachers/caregivers from Diber, Elbasan, Kruje and Durres regions to inform them on the opportunities that the most vulnerable children have to access the education funds (scholarships). In addition, capacities of around 80 professionals were raised from different sectors (education, health, protection, employment) and they were engaged to address the gaps in implementing the mechanism of scholarships. A [dedicated webpage](#) was created to disseminate information about OOSC (Out-of-School Children) to a wider audience. The page aims to promote and guide individuals towards continuous education opportunities, spanning from primary to secondary education, as well as future prospects in the labor market. Thanks to a [social media awareness campaign](#), this initiative reached out over 5,000 individuals. As a result of this intervention, a total of 587 scholarships were distributed nationwide, providing support for at-risk children to continue their education.

- *Strengthen multisectoral mechanisms at local level to plan and deliver comprehensive child health and social services through established services delivery platforms (UPH) 5 districts: Tirana, Korca, Elbasan, Vlore, Lezhe*

LNB continued its support to the National Operator of Health Service and local health authorities in 5 regions of Albania (Tirana, Korca, Vlora, Elbasan, Lezha) to consolidate the implementation of the

⁸² Children that are in a distance of more than 5 km from the school, students of families with economic aid, students without parental care, children with disabilities and children from Roma and Egyptian community).

Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV)⁸³. As a result, during the reporting period 13,214 home visits were conducted reaching 3,303 children under 5 years old (1519 girls).

At the same time, the focus has been on capacity building of health professionals in child development, supporting parenting skills and parental wellbeing, addressing early detection of disabilities, challenging harmful gender norms, and fostering intersectoral collaboration.

50 health service providers increased their knowledge and skills to support and engage parents, provide holistic and family centered child health care, while reaching out to the most vulnerable families and children in Lezha region.

To support the health personnel who participated in the previous training sessions, around 100 supervisors in Tirana, Korca, Lezhe, Vlore, Elbasan were trained and coached in supportive supervision techniques by the UPHV national master trainers. 48 supportive supervision visits, based on standard supportive supervision methodology, reached around 325 health professionals in 5 target regions with coaching and advice support for UPHV implementation.

In addition, seven intersectoral coordination meetings between health and social services, reaching around 80 professionals, were organized in the target regions to discuss support for identified cases of families and children at risk during UPHV. Health and social services providers, based on established coordination frameworks, exchanged information on health, wellbeing and social protection of vulnerable children and families and addressing multiple layers of deprivation by intersectoral teams. 144 cases of children at risk were identified during the home visits and then discussed at the multisectoral teams using structures established by the Law 18/2017 on Child Rights and Child Protection and the DCM 353 one the functions of the intersectoral technical working groups on child protection.

- *Scale up the health and care community-based model of support for the most vulnerable in targeted municipalities.*

Based on the community-based model of support for the disadvantaged communities, LNB is providing information to people in several regions on their right to health and access to health services. During the reporting period, multiple activities were organized in the regions of Berat, Korca and Tirana to raise awareness and empower communities through information sharing and engagement in health education activities. In Berat, a total of 393 people (287 women and 106 man) in Korca 224 people (190 women and 34 men) and in Tirana 96 people (82 women and 14 men) participated in 49 information section.

Topics discussed varied from region to region, but in generally they included information about breast cancer and the importance of mammography; HIV-AIDS and sexually transmitted infections; youth friendly services; care for children and healthy nutrition; drugs consequences & abuse; problems of limited ability in terms of health; family planning and contraceptive methods; hygiene and care for persons with disabilities; cervical cancer and the importance of HPV test and Pap Test; care for the elderly women; and vaccination of children. These sessions led to important results for many of participants:

- In **Berat**: 45 women from Roma and Egyptian Community took the mammography test; mothers of 5 newborns were assisted / referred to receive health care services for their newborns; 120 women from Dimal signed a petition to the MHSP asking for the improvement of Mammography Mobile Service; 215 women requested to receive cervical cancer (65 from Roma and Egyptian communities;

⁸³ This is an effective methodology for improving health, development and well-being indicators of children and the focus has been on implementation of UPHV modalities, using standard guidelines and checklists, based on the national protocols and the UPHV methodology developed by UNICEF Regional Office in Europe and central Asia.

and 33 young people from Roma and Egyptian community visited PHC centers to receive youth friendly services.

- In **Korça**: 12 women from Roma and Egyptian communities took the mammography test; 3 newborn were referred for assistance to the PHC and hospital; 95 women required the HPV test and PAP Test; and 45 women HPV screened for cervical cancer.
- In **Tirana**: 12 women from Roma and Egyptian Community took the mammography test; 25 women from Roma and Egyptian communities have requested to receive HPV test and 17 young people from Roma and Egyptian community visited PHC centers to receive youth friendly services.

Following these events, advocacy meetings were organized with representatives of the MHSP who took in consideration the inclusion of indicators from the community model work into performance indicators' list at the primary health care level.

In addition, 14 health education teams, composed of primary health care providers and community volunteers (including health mediators from Roma and Egyptian communities) have organized 30 community-based activities reaching 355 community members including from the most disadvantaged groups. Following these meetings, 72 women from disadvantaged groups have been assisted and received sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services at primary health care level.

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.

In parallel with efforts to reaching out and empowering key LNB target groups, under Outcome 2 the programme focused in fostering further relationships with local authorities to advance the implementation of the legislation and policy reform on social protection and inclusion. Interventions has particularly advanced towards:

- Improvement of local social planning - fifteen municipalities⁸⁴ are actively involved in the process of updating and costing their local social care plans, with a strong emphasis on incorporating a gender perspective;
- Increasing capacities of local authorities to advance the implementation of social housing legislation and policy reforms - five-year Social Housing Plans have been adopted in 17 municipalities of Shkodra, Puka, Tropoja, Mirdita, Kamza, Divjaka, Delvina, Tepelena, Berat, Elbasan, Librazhd, Lushnje, Maliq, Kolonje, Devoll, Pogradec, and Sarande and 100 housing experts from 61 municipalities trained;
- Support the implementation of the National Action Plan for Older Persons (2020-2024) at the local level in the municipalities of Durres, Rrogozhine, Vlore, and Tirana;
- Support social service providers to implement inclusive social care plans, including development of gender-sensitive project proposals in the municipalities of Delvine, Vau Dejes, Maliq, Elbasan, Gjirokaster, Roskovec, Tropoje, and Fushe Arrez;
- Sharing best practices and tested methodologies for the provision of integrated services for the elderly – 31 local representatives from different municipalities benefited from capacity building activities;
- Strengthening capacities of local social services on family integrated social services delivery - 67 staff from local social services trained and 12 high-level municipal officials and other stakeholders participated in an exchange visit in Basel, Switzerland;

⁸⁴ Diber, Korçe, Patos, Divjaka, Vlore, Berat, Roskovec, Dimal, Kucove, Bulqize, Pogradec, Maliq, Belsh, Permet and Tropoja

- Capacity building of the staff of community centers working with children and youth with disabilities - staff from 16 centers serving to around 400 children and youth with disabilities participated in four trainings, study visit in Switzerland and individual coaching and mentoring.
- Increasing capacities of Multidisciplinary Disability Assessment Commissions (MDAC) on assessing the needs of persons with disabilities for mobility devices – 151 staff trained and as a result, 163 persons with disabilities (70 women) have been equipped with wheelchairs and 92 with walking frames.
- Supporting the rolling out of the disability assessment reform in all regions of Albania - 585 doctors, and social workers part of the MADC have been trained and 198 social administrators and staff of social services have been informed on the role of MADCs to create synergies between the different services in the regions of Fier, Berat, Gjirokaster, Diber and Kukes.
- Strengthen capacities of the staff of municipal social service to engender social care plans- social care planning, policies, and funding mechanisms have been review/assessed from a gender perspective with the aim of identifying and addressing gaps in 8 municipalities (Diber, Korce, Shkoder, Divjake, Mirdite, Sarande, Delvine, Permet)

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
37 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

In 2023, 35 municipalities (submitting 37 project proposals) applied for the social fund, and 14 new services were supported. During this year, the central government has been financing 49 social services the central government has financed a total of 49 social services, including continuous support for services in their second or third year (34 at the local level and 15 social services at the regional level).

2.3 - # of LGU that have developed and adopted a social care plan and/or social housing plan.

17 municipalities have a social housing plan
 8 municipalities supported to engender social care plans
 5 municipalities supported to conduct participatory budgeting processes
 15 municipalities are developing their social care plans.

2.4 # of LGUs applying to and # supported by LNB grants scheme

2023 - 37 applied and 14 supported

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

2021: ALL 456 mil (own sources) in 61 LGUs; 2022: ALL 476 mil (own sources) in 61 LGUs

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

14 municipalities established NARU⁸⁵

2.7 - # LGUs using the MIS for social care services

61 LGUs using MIS

⁸⁵ Mapping of Social Services in 61, June 2023

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.

- *Assist State Social Services (SSS) in supporting/guiding municipalities in developing (and implementing) service models for independent living for PWD over the age of 21 who live in residential facilities or alone*

This activity has been removed from the current work plan since SSS informed that they envisage implementing it using the expertise of their own staff. Instead, the programme has been requested to provide support in conducting a survey to assess the status of children with disabilities in the public residential centers with the aim of progressing towards deinstitutionalization.

- *Support municipalities to monitor the implementation of social care plans and update them accordingly (8 targeted municipalities).*

Fifteen municipalities⁸⁶ are actively involved in the process of updating and costing their local social care plans by the end of 2023, with a strong emphasis on incorporating a gender perspective. These documents are being developed through a consultative and inclusive planning process that includes municipalities' needs assessments to identify vulnerabilities and social services mapping to understand the dynamics within the communities. The primary objective is to improve and expand social services for various vulnerable groups, such as families in need, children, women, persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptians, elderly, and vulnerable youth. Various workshops and trainings have been organized to strengthen municipal capacity in planning, costing, implementation, and monitoring of service delivery.

Additionally, the programme assisted the Department of Social Protection and Social Inclusion of Tirana Municipality in procurement procedures for the provision of social services in cases of partnerships with CSOs. The document, among others, examines the challenges faced by local government units in the procurement and implementation of contracts for social services and offers recommendations for their solution. The document proposes steps for the development of the procurement procedure for contracts with a value of less than 20 million ALL, considering the involvement of CSOs in the provision of services to the public.

- *Assist targeted municipalities in designing the social housing 5-year plan (SHP) in line with the National Strategy and the Law on Social Housing (Shkodra, Puka, Tropoja, Mirdita, Kamza, Divjaka, Delvina and Tepelena) and conduct training on its implementation and monitoring.*

With the support of LNB2, 17 municipalities⁸⁷ developed five-year Social Housing Plans to ensure social inclusion and address the needs of disadvantaged groups for affordable housing. Efforts were made to ensure the plans' development through a participatory and transparent process with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in each planning step. A detailed data collection methodology was used to ensure reliable analysis. 150 municipal officials were trained (81 women) and 75 representatives of 14 civil society organizations were actively involved in the planning of the municipal social plans. The process of drafting

⁸⁶ Diber, Korce, Patos, Divjaka, Vlore, Berat, Roskovec, Dimal, Kucove, Bulqize, Pogradec, Maliq, Belsh, Permet and Tropoja

⁸⁷ Shkodra, Puka, Tropoja, Mirdita, Kamza, Divjaka, Delvina, Tepelena, Berat, Elbasan, Librazhd, Lushnje, Maliq, Kolonje, Devoll, Pogradec, Sarande

the social housing plans highlighted some of the challenges in implementation and made the municipal staff aware of their own responsibilities for the implementation stage.

In addition, the program focused on fostering further relationships with local authorities to advance the implementation of social housing legislation and policy reforms. To this end, 100 housing experts from 61 municipalities were trained in the application of 6 social housing programs for families in need.

- *Strengthen capacities of municipalities to address older persons needs and support in their plans and actions.*

During the reporting period, the programme and one of its CSO partners organized a workshop to discuss the experience of LGU of Sukth (Municipality of Durrës) on provision of integrated services for the elderly. The objective was to identify opportunities and challenges, as well as encourage other municipalities to follow suit and build similar databases with information on different population groups related to their health and social care services. Participants (a total of 31, including 28 women and 3 men) included managers and specialists of local and central institutions, responsible for the drafting and implementation of policies on health care services. Some of the recommendations included:

- The importance of expanding the model of the registry to other LGUs of Durrës and the rest of municipalities in Albania.
- Inclusion in the model of a short annex - a 10 minute geriatric screening tool - as a good option for standardized evaluation of functional capacities of the elderly people. However, to improve its validity, it is important that its application is supported by proper training and monitoring.
- Adoption of a normative framework to facilitate inter-institutional information sharing and accurately identifying the key actors and their contribution towards building the aging database. This strategic approach will guarantee the long-term sustainability of the initiative as well as the institutional contributions to the information flow.
- The need to enhance the administrative and professional capacities of health and social institutions involved in the creation and sustainability of the integrated services for the elderly, which could effectively contribute to the provision of comprehensive services for older adults.

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

- *Build capacities of LGUs (Tirana, Durrës, Lushnjë and Divjaka) to implement the model of family based integrated social services for R&E and other vulnerable families.*

In addition to implementing the Integrated Social Services Model (see Activity 1.2.1) support was provided to the local level social sector in four targeted municipalities to enhance their capacities in delivering integrated social services to disadvantaged families. This support aimed to prepare professionals for a new way of working and foster mutual understanding. A total of 67 social workers and psychologists (80% women and 20% men) increased their knowledge and skills in needs assessment and case management through training, including through on-the-job coaching.

To further strengthen the implementation process of the model, 12 high-level municipal officials, representatives from the social and finance sectors and MHSP participated in an exchange visit in Basel, Switzerland, where they had the opportunity to learn in an interactive way about the practical aspects of the Swiss social services model such as access to social services, family services, social service delivery mechanisms, as well as the role CSOs as providers of services within the system. This exchange visit aimed to inspire and inform the stakeholders to optimize the effectiveness of the Integrated Social Services Model.

- *Strengthen the capacities of municipal service providers (Korce, Maliq, Roskovec, Puke, Shkoder, Vlore, Kamez, Lushnje, Pogradec, Sarande, Bulqize, Shijak, Diber, Permet, Kruje, Ure Vajgurore) on working methods with children with disabilities (local expertise and in partnership with the University of Lucerne)*

The staff of community centers serving to around 400 children and youth with disabilities underwent through a series of trainings and study visits organized throughout the reporting period, including:

- Training on clinical autism and relevant intervention strategies, as well as the application of the TEACCH approach⁸⁸, visual strategies, and social stories. - 46 (professionals) 38 women from centers of 15 municipalities⁸⁹
- Training on: i) professional resilience, i.e. preventing burnout through prevention and self-care strategies, and ii) the creation of synergies among community social care centers, mainstream schools and assistant teachers for a better and integrated support for the education and development of children/students with disabilities. - 60 professionals (53 women)
- Training about the implementation of the multidisciplinary work model in the centers, in contrast to the transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams, to clarify the roles of the staff in the design and implementation of the therapeutic plan. Part of the training was also the familiarization of the participants with the "updated political and legal framework in the field of disabilities, work standards, work ethics and the principles of working with children with disabilities". - 85 professionals (76 women)
- Training/workshop facilitated by two professors from the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Lucerne, focusing on (i) crisis intervention and (2) de-escalation programme Ki-Pro/Dee-Pro according to Prof. Dr. Ernst Wüllenweber. The two methods address strategies of the handling of conflicts, crises and behavioural problems and offer a wide range of pedagogical and methodological approaches to strengthen the confidence of employees. The last day of the training, participants attended a Training of Trainers programme, helping them practically on how to transfer the gained knowledge and skills to the other colleagues in the Community Centers.⁹⁰ 32 professionals (28 women)
- Study visit in Lucern, Switzerland during 30 January – 3 February 2023 to expose them to good Swiss practices and help participants to gain and share experience, look into the design and delivery of services for persons with disabilities, and learn about ways of cooperation between the public authorities and non-public service providers for the inclusion of persons with disabilities - **11 practitioners**

In addition, during January - June 2023, over **80 employees** in 16 targeted municipalities have benefited individual and team support through live consultation, guidance, coaching and mentoring, on:

- Teaching children the skills they need to function independently in their daily lives (Kruje, Bulqize, Pogradec, Puke, Roskovec)

⁸⁸ TEACCH - Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communications Handicapped Children – tries to respond to the needs of autistic people using the best available approaches and methods known so far, for educating and teaching autonomy. his method relies on five basic principles; physical structure, scheduling, work system, routine and visual structure.

⁸⁹ Bulqizë, Dibër, Kamëz, Korçë, Krujë, Lushnjë, Maliq, Përmet, Pogradec, Pukë, Roskovec, Sarandë, Shijak, Shkodër, Dimal

⁹⁰ The need for this training has been identified during the training needs assessment conducted in 2022.

- Utilizing communication, cooperation, and motivation strategies for parents (including addressing resistance, providing transparent information, supporting acceptance of diagnosis), and helping parents implement the programme at home (Bulqize, Diber, Dimal, Kamez, Korce, Lushnje, Maliq, Shkoder)
 - Identifying, analyzing and managing crises and aggressive behavior, the most challenging situations faced by staff members (Kamez, Korce, Sarande, Permet, Roskovec)
 - Getting familiar with portage method for children - approach, instruments, and activities (Lushnje, Maliq, Pogradec, Puke, Permet, Sarande, Kruje, Shijak, Bulqize)
 - Utilizing components of ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) method including positive reinforcement to encourage desired behaviors and create a positive learning environment, and behavior support strategies, such as visual schedules and social stories (all centres).
- *Provide training to 15 municipalities (TBD) on the implementation of laws and regulations on the accessibility of buildings and public spaces.*

Terms of Reference for this activity are being drafted.

- *Build/strengthen the capacities of municipal social administrators in 6 regions on assessing the needs of PWD for mobility devices and subsequently their provision.*

LNB 2 and its partner CSO are working to increase the capacities of Multidisciplinary Disability Assessment Commissions (MDAC) on assessing the needs of persons with disabilities for mobility devices and ensuring their provision as well informing persons with disabilities about their rights to benefit from these devices. During the inception period, contacts were created in the five targeted regions where MDAC have been established (Durrës, Elbasan, Lezhe, Korce and Vlore) and the LNB partner developed a factsheet⁹¹ a video for persons in need of wheelchairs to be disseminated through the members of the disability assessment commissions, community-based groups of activists with disabilities and social media platforms.⁹²

In parallel, 61 (47 women) staff of the biopsychosocial disability assessment commissions and municipal social administrators in Elbasan, Lezhe and Durrës Regions have been trained⁹³ to provide the “wheelchair service”, including personalized needs assessment and service referral and provision with the adequate wheelchair or other mobility devices. As a result, 90 persons with disabilities (39 women) have been provided with wheelchairs in the project targeted municipalities/regions. Furthermore, 90 (74 women) staff of the biopsychosocial disability assessment commissions and municipal administrators in Vlora and Korca have been trained to provide the “wheelchair service”, including personalized needs assessment and service referral and provision with the adequate wheelchair or other mobility devices. As a result, **163 persons with disabilities** (70 women) have been provided with wheelchairs in (all) the project targeted municipalities/regions, 110 others have been assessed but not yet provided with a wheelchair and **92 people** have been provided with walking frames.

- *Build the capacities of municipal and regional welfare and health staff for a coordinated and proper implementation of the new disability assessment system.*

⁹¹ https://www.adrf.al/images/publications/Sherbimi_karriges_me_rrota_ne_Shqiperi.pdf
<https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3255237424747652>

⁹² <https://www.facebook.com/100007842792050/posts/pfbid0F5rVnJierUWmb6HQdEM6nEcoiZEP7NUubeQvx5F4vFWCoJUn9LYTffut3ZiLQenm/>

⁹³ <https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3299877853616942>
<https://www.facebook.com/adrf.adrf.16/posts/3298788847059176>
<https://www.facebook.com/artur.guni/posts/10222843200373880>

LNB is supporting the MHSP to implement the disability assessment reform, which consists of shifting from the medical to the *bio-psycho-social* model in line with international standards (ICF) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Following the successful intervention during the first year of the programme to build the capacities of all relevant social and social welfare staff in the regions of Lezha, Shkodra, Vlora and Korçe, the LNB2 continued the replication of the capacity-building model in the remaining regions of Fier, Berat, Gjirokaster, Diber and Kukës.

The LNB 2 project has been supporting MADCs in these regions through training and mentoring of professionals, including social workers and medical personnel. Orientation and outreach work has involved **198 social administrators and staff of social services** (94 men and 104 women) with a focus on raising awareness and sharing information the roles of MADCs and building linkages with other services. The manual for the MADC training is accredited by the National Center for Quality, Safety and Accreditation of Health Institutions (NCQSAHI) with 4 credits. The project provided trainings for **585 doctors**, including family doctors and social workers part of the MADC in these five regions. In addition, the information and communication materials are published in 4000 copies and distributed to 5 project districts.

The main focus of the project in the upcoming period will be on providing mentoring and case discussions to the MDACs members and organization of a forum of Directors of Social Services at the municipal level. The objective is to raise their awareness and capacities in supporting the MDAC members in establishing linkages with other services of the referral mechanism alongside with the communication and awareness raising.

- *Strengthen the capacities of the staff of municipal social service providers to engender social care plans.*

During the reporting period, the programme supported gender-responsive social care planning, policies, and funding mechanisms in 8 municipalities (Diber, Korçe, Shkodër, Divjake, Mirditë, Sarandë, Delvinë, Permet). A desk review has been conducted to assess the status and identify the main challenges municipalities are facing in this regard.

The findings indicate that all targeted municipalities have drafted and approved social plans, each including three to seven social services, but four out of eight municipalities have not made public their action plans and no monitoring report exists for the social plans which timeframe has expired. Seven out of eight municipalities have applied to the Social Fund, three of which were selected for financing. However, only one has made it to the final stage of financing and implemented the project while the rest have not been qualified.

The municipalities encounter several challenges including lack of human resources and limited capacities in place to advance the social care reforming agenda. This initial screening will support the work of the next phase, which will focus on capacity building and training, based on identified challenges. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of gender-sensitive social services comprehensively through integration of gender-inclusive elements into social care plans.

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.*

- *Facilitate peer support coaching and mentoring for community centers' staff working with children with disabilities (Diber, Permet, Kruje, Ure Vajgurore, Korce, Maliq, Roskovec, Puke, Shkoder, Vlore, Kamez)*

During the reporting period, around 46 professionals (38 women) from LNB-supported community centers in 14 municipalities⁹⁴ received detailed information about Saranda's community center good practice of service delivery for children with disabilities. The visit in Saranda center also provided the opportunity for a peer exchange among the participants on issues of common interest (shared challenges) such as the work with various typologies and age-groups of service recipients, the work with parents and families, the interrelations with municipality authorities and education institutions, and the administrative matters related to community centers management.

The multifunctional center of Devoll municipality is a new center that started operating in March 2023 and offers services for several categories of people in need. UNDP supported the establishment of the center, including the infrastructure, through another project⁹⁵ while through the LNB program it is supporting the capacity building of the staff that provides services for children with disabilities. While the staff center participated in the trainings organized for professionals of all centers, dedicated and tailored support was provided through exchange of experience with staff of other centers in the region (Pogradec, Maliq and Korce).

- *Support networking among social service providers for people with disabilities to improve quality of services and accessibility to remote communities*

A Concept Note on the programme's approach in implementing this intervention has been drafted and discussed internally and with the staff of the centres for persons with disabilities. The LNB programme considers "networking" among social service providers for persons with disabilities as an important mechanism for **knowledge learning/sharing** among municipalities to improve services (including lessons learned, good practices, technical tools). Additionally, it is believed that this mechanism will help networking members build team spirit, prevent burnout, and improve emotional well-being.

LNB 2 intends to promote the networking of 16 UNDP-supported community centers in the municipalities of Bulqiza, Devoll, Dibër, Dimal, Kamëz, Korçë, Krujë, Lushnje, Maliq, Përmet, Pogradec, Pukë, Roskovec, Sarandë, Shijak, Shkodër, comprising more than 80 professionals who are social workers, psychologists, developmental educators, speech therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists. To this end, the Programme envisages initiating a first event to take place in late autumn with the participation of all professionals. A couple of network facilitators will guide the group in the network self-organisation and the development of a plan of activities for the next meetings/period.

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.

LNB support to central authorities is critical to complement any efforts and progress at the local level under Outcomes 1 and 2. LNB interventions in the framework of Outcome 3 have particularly focused on

⁹⁴ Bulqizë, Dibër, Kamëz, Korçë, Krujë, Lushnjë, Maliq, Përmet, Pogradec, Pukë, Roskovec, Shijak, Shkodër, Dimal

⁹⁵ UN Joint Programme "Improve Municipal Social Services" - SDG fund

support for the improvement of the legal and policy framework on social inclusion and protection; and strengthening collaboration among regional and local institutions, which are responsible for supervising and coordinating the implementation of gender responsive social services on the ground. Identifying and addressing the gaps related to funding of social services through the social fund mechanisms has been another priority. During the reporting period, work has advanced towards:

- Advocating with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to adopt legislation to regulate the provision of sign language interpretation services in Albania, based on best international practice, including in the region;
- Finalization of the draft of the Social Inclusion Policy Document 2023 – 2027, based on a participatory consultation process;
- Development of a digital mapping of social care services;
- Support the drafting of the new Social Protection Strategy and ensuring gender mainstreaming in the Strategy;
- Development of regulatory frameworks for child development, integrating health and social services - Standard protocols on child growth and development monitoring, as well as vision and hearing screening for children under 5 years old adopted;
- Adoption of the National Youth Strategy (2022-2030);
- Support the improvement of the regulatory framework of the Social Fund;
- Revisioning of the Law no.22/2018 on Social Housing;
- Support the national reporting on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and monitoring of the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities;
- Development of a guide for dentistry service providers on specific behavioural and communication approach to children with disabilities;
- Support the functioning of the Directorate of Inspection of Standards of Social Services
- Provide technical support to the MHSP to prepare for the negotiation process with the EU on Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment of the EU *acquis*;
- Supporting the monitoring process of the National Agenda for Child Rights 2021-2026;
- Support the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP) to: strengthen the professional competencies of assistant teachers working with students with disabilities, and to support schools meeting the indicators of inclusive education;
- Fostering partnership with the Universities of Tirana, Shkodra and Elbasan to develop the curricula for social work and psychology students of the bachelor's and master's levels, as well as ensure integration of gender equality principles in these programmes;
- Collaborating with ASCAP for increasing the capacities of teachers on ICTs - 54 professional development network leaders and 348 teachers trained in Durres, Krujë, Has, Kukes and Kamza.

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

No sub-legal issues resolved during this reporting period.

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

8 new pieces of policy/ legislation/ regulation/ instructions/ national standards on social inclusion measures adopted during this reporting period:

- *Decision no. 768, dated 15.12.2021, of the Council of Ministers on ‘Determination of the types of social services and other specific services, the types of special services for which the right of participation of organizations in public procurement procedures may be reserved, as well as the detailed rules for their procurement.’*

- *Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 692, dated 26.10.2022 “On the Approval of the National Strategy on Youth and its Action Plan” 2022-2029.*
- *Order no. 29, dated 20.01.2023, of Minister of Education and Sports approving ‘The professional standards of assistant teachers in pre-university education’.*
- *VKM no. 436 dated 22.06.2022 “On determining the rules, procedures and criteria for providing services for independent living for persons with disabilities”*
- *VKM no. 470 dated 06.07.2022 “On determining the rules, procedures and criteria of supported decision-making for persons with disabilities”*
- *Revisioning of the Law no.22/2018 on Social Housing, approved 22.06.2023.*
- *Two sub-legal issues on Social Housing*

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

LNB 1 supported the establishment the following financing mechanisms:

Social Fund: for 2023, 209 million ALL has been allocated through the Social Fund with 8837 beneficiaries

Social Housing: in 2023, 2,490 million ALL and a total of 21,914 families benefited

Social Enterprise: for 2021, 120 million ALL has been allocated and in 2022, 80 million

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

Not yet started

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

102 social workers improved qualifications in social services delivery.

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.

- Support the MoHSP with technical expertise on drafting the Law on Sign Language Interpretation in response to the evolving related context

In parallel with efforts to deliver a training programme to 15 sign language interpreters (see Activity 1.2.2), LNB partner is advocating with the MoHSP to adopt legislation to regulate the provision of sign language interpretation services in Albania. To this end, a study/review of the legal frameworks that regulate the issue in the Balkans and European countries, including Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Greece, has been conducted with the expertise of a human rights consultant from Kosovo. During review process, LNB partner organized two discussion/ consultation meetings with the MoHSP and the study has been shared with this Ministry for comments and/or follow-up.

The results of the study are expected to inform the initial drafting of specific legislation for the provision of sign language interpretation services in Albania. In the long term, the adoption of a national law on sign language interpreting services will support the formalization of the profession of sign language interpreting, the continuous training of sign language interpreters, and the creation of employment

opportunities for these interpreters, thus helping to ensure access to communication and information for persons with hearing impairment in accordance with the CRPD Convention and Albanian legislation.

- *Support the MoHSP to develop the new Social Inclusion Policy Document 2022 - 2026 in follow-up of the current Document's evaluation recommendations*

The draft of the new Social Inclusion Strategy Document (SIPD) was finalized in October 2022 with the support of the LNB programme. The overall objective of the SIPD is to achieve a balanced and sustainable framework for ensuring that Government's social inclusion actions are adequately measured, monitored and reported through a robust set of indicators. In addition, efforts are made to ensure that social inclusion measures are linked to the broader Government's development policies and reforms towards EU accession. The draft strategy was shared for consultation in December 2022 with a broad range of key stakeholders who have a key role in its implementation. The strategy has been posted to the electronic public consultation registry and is expected to be approved in the fall.

- *Provide technical assistance to MoFE to: develop a methodology and subsequently conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the new social housing legal framework as foreseen in the revised NAP (and requested by EU Commission) and complete the subsidiary legislation; conduct a needs assessment for the construction of specialized housing and the preparation of standard project ideas of their construction; draft a practical guide for the implementation of 6 housing programs.*

LNB has assigned an expert to assist the Ministry of Housing (MoFE) for the amendment process of the Law No. 22/2018 "On Social Housing" and ensure full compliance of the government program with the law. Possible amendments include expanding the possibilities of social housing for vulnerable young people and strengthening the rules for the digitalization of social housing programs.

- *Support development of a national map of social care services which is accessible online*

Over the last 15 years the Government of Albania has committed to reforms around digital public services or eGovernment, which refer to the use of technology to provide services to citizens at the local and national levels. This became a priority particularly in view of COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the MHSP is committed to design and make public a digital mapping of social care services available in the country, indicating their distribution at the regional and municipal level, including exact location, address, contact modalities and at the same time capturing the typology of service, funding source, human resources available and beneficiary groups for age group. Such a digital map will provide enhanced accessibility and transparency by allowing users to actively engage with the data. The digital mapping will be a reflection/snapshot of all the social services that are offered, according to geographical distribution, level of government (national, regional, or local) as well as the type of services and their typology, as per the provisions of Law 121/2016 on "Social Care Services" including pre-social services, residential services, community services, family services, specialized services, emergency services, alternative care services etc.

To this aim, two implementing agencies of the LNB 2 have successfully collaborated to support the MHSP in this process. UNDP initiated with the development of the "mapping exercise" of the social services throughout Albania (as reported in previous sections). Then, all database, including even details of interviews and data analysis have been shared with UNICEF, which has engaged a company, to support the development and visual presentation of an accessible and user-friendly e-map. Currently the data model and database design are in process and by the end of June, beginning of July it will be ready to be handed over to the MoHSP. The digital map will be available before the end of 2023.

- *Support MHSP to develop the policy vision for the new social protection strategy.*

The MoHSP has started the drafting process of the new National Strategy on Social Protection 2024-2030, with the support of LNB 2. A group of experts is contracted to support the process in coordination with the institutional working group of the strategy at the MoHSP. Furthermore, specific gender expertise is being provided to ensure gender mainstreaming in the strategy (see below). In parallel, the MoHSP finalized the annual monitoring report for year 2022 of the current strategy which will inform and serve as a basis for the situational analysis of the new strategy.

During the reporting period, two internal interinstitutional meetings were organized discussing: a) the needs and priorities for the new strategy and b) strategic directions and interlinkages with other strategies. Consultation meetings are organized with World Bank mission in Albania to discuss at the technical level the priorities and linkages to the World Bank support to the MoHSP. The MoHSP has shown commitment to build an efficient system to: better address poverty; integrate a shock responsive approach, prioritize deinstitutionalization of residential care system, and further consolidate the decentralization of social care system, building on the current good practices and lessons learned.

The Strategy's two main proposed strategic directions are: a) poverty reduction for families in need and improvement of living conditions and rights for people with disabilities through adequate, transparent, well targeted financial schemes which are able to respond to various risks and shocks and b) expanding integrated social care services, accessible and qualitative alongside with advancing the work on deinstitutionalization in partnership with local government and other key actors. The MoHSP supported by the team of experts is planning to start broad consultation meetings during July, engaging representatives from local government, civil society organizations and other partners to discuss key pillars and priorities of *the new strategy*.

- *Support to MoHSP to validate actual social policy guidelines and establish gender markers (Social Fund guidelines) and engendering of Social Protection Strategy.*

As explained above, efforts are being made to ensure gender mainstreaming in the new Social Protection Strategy. A national consultant has been engaged, who is provide the necessary expertise to the MoHSP to review existing drafts and documents from a gender perspective and, alignment with international standards, and compatibility with other relevant gender equality policies and plans. In addition, an analysis to assess the current situation of the social protection system from a gender perspective was conducted. This analysis identified gender disparities, intersectional discrimination faced by women, and the specific vulnerabilities and risks they encounter. It also considers new methods of measuring poverty and deprivation with a gender lens. Based, on the analysis specific recommendations will be provided to integrate gender considerations and address gender disparities through the strategy's goals, indicators, targets, and implementation mechanisms.

- *Revision of the regulatory framework (protocols and guidelines) for child development, integrating health and social services.*

The MoHSP approved the standard protocols on child growth and development monitoring, as well as vision and hearing screening for children under 5 years old (Order 406/2 date 02.12.2022) to support the work of primary health centers and well-baby clinics. The protocols provide standardized guidance on key development milestones, algorithms and clinical pathways for monitoring of child growth and development. LNB 2 support will continue in 7 more districts (Tirana, Korca, Vlora, Elbasan, Lezhe, Berat and Kukës) to build capacities of front-line health professionals for enforcement of this regulatory framework. During June 2023, 15 local trainers from Lezha, Kukës and Berat attended a 5-day accredited training on the importance of early interventions, the role of the home visitor, monitoring of child growth

and development and early identification of disabilities, child protection from violence, abuse and neglect, gender mainstreaming and intersectoral collaboration.

In addition, LNB 2 continued support on the operationalization of the intersectoral mechanisms for exchanging information on health, wellbeing and social protection for vulnerable children and families and addressing multiple layers of deprivation by multisectoral teams.

- *Support development of the National Youth Strategy to ensure that the rights and priorities of most advantaged young people are reflected in it and their needs budgeted for.*

LNB 2 supported the State Minister for the Children and Youth to draft the National Youth Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2029) and ensured that the rights and priorities of most disadvantaged young people are included. The Strategy was approved with the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 692, dated 26.10.2022

In addition, in the context of work targeting the youth, a National Action Plan on Drugs Prevention, Treatment and Harm Reduction has been drafted with the support of the programme, which is expected to be finalized and approved within 2023.

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.

- *Support the MoHSP to operationalize the Social Fund in full compliance with the approved regulatory framework, including a national conference for the modernization of the Social Fund.*

The programme organized a broad consultative meeting in 2022 to discuss about the Social Fund, where the necessity for improvement of strategies, legislation, and practice was highlighted as very important. To this aim LNB programme contracted two experts to provide technical assistance to the MHSP in analyzing the existing legal framework of the Social Fund, in order to ensure that it enables the proper functioning of this mechanism and its goal to meet the social service needs of vulnerable groups throughout the country. The report analyzes the legal framework and practice related to the establishment and functioning of the social fund and social plans at the local level; identifies the challenges in the functioning of the social fund at the local government level; offers concrete recommendations for legal and practical improvements regarding the financial support from the social fund for social care services at the municipality level.

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.

- *Support MoHSP with technical assistance in monitoring and subsequent preparation of the narrative and financial report on the implementation of the Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025.*

ToRs have been developed and agreed with the MHSP and will be readvertised.

- *Provide technical assistance to the MoHSP in the preparation of the second progress report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of PWD.*

Two national consultants are working under the guidance of the MHSP to compile a report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in Albania during the period 2019-2023. While coordinating with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (in charge of reporting on International Treaties) to receive updated specific instructions from the Committee of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding the development of the periodic report, the MHSP agreed to continue the collect of information from respective institutions. This process will be an

important opportunity for the Albanian authorities to take stock of the progress and identify remaining gaps on the implementation of the UNCRPD. Very importantly, this monitoring and reporting process would benefit the policy makers and the executive government agencies to adjust and improve the national measures for a better social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Albania.

- *Support MoHSP in establishing a sustainable statistical system to measure monitoring indicators related to and compliance with SDG indicators on disability. Train staff responsible for collecting disability statistics.*

This activity has been removed from the work plan since the MHSP considered it no more necessary for the time being.

- *Support the development of a guide for dentistry service providers on the specific psychosocial approach to dealing with children with disabilities in accordance with the specific actions of National Action Plan on Persons with Disability (APPWD).*

A local consultant is developing a guide for dentistry service providers on specific *behavioural and communication approach to children with disabilities* especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Hyperactivity, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders, intellectual disabilities, paraplegia and tetraplegia, for an effective dental treatment. The Guide will be also disseminated among parents to raise their awareness on the importance of having specialised services for child patients with disabilities. This intervention is in line with the NAPPWD 2021-2025, which under its strategic goal related to health sector, sets the objective of facilitating the provision of health services for persons with disabilities, particularly dental health services for children with disabilities.

- *Support for data collection and statistics at local level: Support statistical institutions and LGUs in strengthening capacities for data collection and piloting digitalization of data at the local level.*

LNB 2 has contracted a national consultant to support improvement of disaggregated data collection and use of gender statistics at the local level. These data will inform development and implementation of policies, plans and programs on social protection and inclusion at the local level, as well as improved monitoring, and accountability of LGUs on service delivery and access to services by women and men, boys, and girls in their diversity, including the most vulnerable. The intervention includes provision of technical assistance to support relevant statistical institutions/offices and LGUs in strengthening capacities for improved data collection including through piloting digitalization of disaggregated data. As a next step, an assessment of the relevant administrative data as primary data sources to inform gender responsive planning, monitoring and evaluation of sectorial policies at central, local level in 15 LNB 2 targeted municipalities will be conducted, followed by specific recommendations for improved data disaggregation and use.

In addition, the work on monitoring the National Action Plan for Older Persons has already initiated. Meetings have been carried out with representatives of the MoHSP and two experts were identified to work on the document. After the official notice from the MoHSP on the working group of experts, the work has started and monitoring report 2020-2023 will be drafted in the following months.

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



- *Provide technical support to State Inspectorate of Labor and Social Services (SILSS) for the establishment of Social Care Services Inspectors at regional level; capacity building of inspectors including a study visit; and establishment of an internal database.*

The Directorate of Inspection of Standards of Social Services, which is part of the State Labour and Social Services Inspectorate, has been technically supported to ensure its institutional development at the central and regional levels. During the reporting period, a report/analysis has been developed providing evidence-based recommendations for the operation of the Inspectorate. The Report bases the recommendations on findings from an in-depth analysis of: the legal framework that regulates the field of social services and inspection; the directorate's workload, examining the inspection process and the director's approach during the exercise of its functional task related to the oversight of public and non-public of social care service providers; the capacities, from a legal perspective, of the structure in view also of the position of the Regional Inspector of Social Care Services, including the legal recruitment modalities.

The findings of the report, which was shared with MHSP and the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), served as the basis for the drafting of a Decision of the Council of Ministers for the "Creation, Organization and Functioning of the Inspectorate of Social Care Services (ISCS)". The DCM places this institution under the responsibility of the minister responsible for social issues, while, at the regional level, it delegates the function of inspection to the Regional Council institution. The draft DCM defines the mission and functions of ISCS, its organization and functioning, including the duties and responsibilities of the Inspector at the central and regional level. According to this DCM, the MHSP, the MFE and the Department of Public Administration are in charge for its implementation. The draft DCM has been submitted to both ministries in December 2022 for comments and/or endorsement.

In this framework, technical support has also been also provided to: a) draft the work description of the Inspector of Social Care Services at the regional level, including the mission, purpose, duties and responsibilities, as well as aspects related to representation and cooperation, decision-making process, management, problem solving, and supervision; and b) establish the selection criteria of the Inspector of Social Care Services at the regional (district) level, including the recruitment procedure, as well as general and special criteria for the application, including education, experience, knowledge and skills requirements and the evaluation system.

- *Assist the State Social Service (SSS) in developing a methodology for monitoring the implementation of social service delivery standards and in providing relevant training to its practitioners at the central, regional, and local levels*

TORs for national consultancy have been drafted, agreed with the State Social Service and advertised at UNDP website.

- *Assist a series of policy dialogue with the main stakeholders to agree on monitoring of core health and social indicators with focus on older persons, young key population and other most vulnerable; Capacity development (INSTAT, Health Operators, Health Insurance Fund and IPH) on the core indicators.*

LNB supported the participation of the Government and representatives of CSOs working on the rights of the elderly to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Ministerial Conference on Ageing, related to Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA+20). A National Report on

MIIPA+20 was prepared and shared with UNECE. The poster, developed by UNFPA Albania, was selected to present the work done so far to advance work on supporting healthy ageing.

The National Reproductive Health Committee has provided leadership and coordination in the finalization of National Action Plan on Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights 2022 – 2030, the National Action Plan on Health Promotion 2022 – 2030 and the National Action Plan on Contraceptive Security 2022 – 2026, ensuring that Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized are well reflected in these National Strategic Documents. Work on the new Reproductive Health Law which has been initiated by reviewing the existing Law, gaps and models from other European countries, will be finalized during 2023. The new Law will improve / guarantee access to SRHR services from all population groups, with particular focus the most vulnerable and marginalized.

- *Support to MHSP in their efforts to open chapter 19 as part of the EU accession process*

During the reporting period, LNB 2 provided support to the MoHSP to prepare for the screening process of Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment of the EU *acquis* (on aspects related to social policies). The focus has been on issues related to legal gaps and identification of discrepancies between the Albanian and the EU legislation. In this context, support has been provided to review all the documents that Albania has produced with regards social protection, which provide a comprehensive preliminary screening alongside with recommendations for the approximation of the legislation. In addition, meetings with the responsible staff of the Ministry were organized to discussing presentations and the process of the dialogue on technical issues.

During August-September 2023, the EU is expected to share with the Government of Albania (GoA) the assessment screening report for each chapter, including chapter 19. Based on this report, the MoHSP will start the process of preparing the roadmap for implementing recommendations as part of the alignment process. LNB 2 plans to continue such support in particular in the view of ensuring alignment and reflections of recommendations with the new national strategy on social protection.

- *Support INSTAT and relevant ministries to produce and communicate the annual publication of official statistics, including SDGs for children, adolescents and youth.*

With the support of LNB, the National Statistics Institute (INSTAT) published the '[Children, Adolescents and Youth-Focused Wellbeing Indicators 2017-2021](#)' Report⁹⁶. The report has been instrumental to the MoHSP to initiate the drafting of the mid-term monitoring report for the National Agenda for Child Rights 2021-2026 (supported through LNB). Currently, the inter-ministerial working group is analyzing data and information received from line ministries, municipalities, and local government. In addition, on order to ensure an inclusive process, which takes into account the needs of beneficiaries, consultations on the implementation of the Agenda of Children have been organized with approximate 110 boys and girls⁹⁷.

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.

⁹⁶ <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-rinjve-n%C3%AB-shqip%C3%ABri-2017-2021/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/unicefalbania/posts/576353654658284>
<https://www.facebook.com/unicefalbania/posts/pfbid04UYij6JbUgKNHoN6H6426Jfv4V4otTnSnanemCK8Pk4deLVJ8QkiNLS1wN6qXhtrl>
<https://www.facebook.com/unicefalbania/posts/573855744908075>

- Assist Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP) to build professional capacities of assistant teachers on working with students with disabilities at pre-university education system & support transformation of special schools for children with disabilities into resource centers for mainstream schools

LNB continued its collaboration with the ASCAP to support inclusive education of children with disabilities through professional development of assistant teachers. In January 2023, the Ministry of Education and Sports approved through Minister's Order No. 29 dated 20.1.2023, the Professional Standards of Assistant Teachers, which constitute the foundation of the professional development system including performance evaluation for assistant teachers.⁹⁸ ASCAP is expected to organize three rounds of training for all assistant teachers in the country (divided in four regions⁹⁹). These are envisioned as cascade trainings, whereby a group of teachers (leaders and members of assistant teachers' networks) will receive a training of trainers (ToT) by ASCAP and deliver the programme to all other assistant teachers. ASCAP will closely monitor the cascade training.

During the reporting period, the first round of training took place. 245 teachers from five Regional Departments of Education (Korce, Lezhe, Fier, Tirana and Durres) received the ToT based on the module "Strategies and protocols used by assistant teachers" and were awarded a 1 credit certificate.¹⁰⁰ From November 2022 to March 2023, the trainers delivered the cascade training to 1126 assistant teachers representing 65 professional networks of assistant teachers in the country, who also received 1 credit certificate.¹⁰¹ The second round¹⁰² started in May 2023 with the ToT for 65 network managers/leaders and 26 assistant teachers and specialists from educational offices (in total 91 persons of whom 87 women).

The topics to be used for the cascade trainings of the second and third round have been selected based on the assistant teachers' training needs assessment, conducted in 2020 with LNB support. They have been developed into training modules and are accredited by Commission for Accreditation of Program Training (CAPT).¹⁰³

In addition, a **school guide** was developed for self-assessment of Schools-Community Centers (SCC) in meeting the indicators of SCC standards & indicators for inclusive education and respect for diversity in

⁹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/ASCAP2020/posts/pfbid047sxTiNXeLMYCFa3XfjZcTvidnyGHTVJfzvGHPa8vZ4nzf7YZofHmrSvtP84V8jI;>
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CoExKsfKGrp/?igshid=MDJmNzVkJMjY=>

⁹⁹ These regions are different from 12 administrative regions of Albania.

¹⁰⁰ This programme is accredited by the Accreditation Commission of Training Programs in the MoES. The training focused on issues related to the functioning of professional networks of assistant teachers and work priorities for the school year 2022-2023; teaching strategies and techniques for creating learning tools for every child with disability; assessment of students with disabilities, documentation and connection with individual education plan (PEI).

¹⁰¹ <https://www.facebook.com/ASCAP2020/posts/pfbid05WH6dER52kjafMM2WgWSCsbHV3oMH3uF4NmT5eNAteXaRP8KLS24u2KgC7KtrvrUl;>
<https://www.facebook.com/ASCAP2020/posts/pfbid05WH6dER52kjafMM2WgWSCsbHV3oMH3uF4NmT5eNAteXaRP8KLS24u2KgC7KtrvrUl;>
<https://www.facebook.com/ASCAP2020/posts/pfbid027x7wZgidc82oEYHqtotvpamo6pQ2a8JNoHggPQ6vmivkqi9JvTVybd91ZysWPmKDI>
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid037NhePgWXw22r9CyNBbhaSK8dqXcb6cz56aN1dRtUefgQxhUT6ti5s7Bs3xnrApJ8I&id=100088333023247
<https://www.facebook.com/mimozatosku/posts/pfbid0369pkx9goRHqCVvj3y37QuX8pwoYiD7prP3yEYtQ5f6WhK5KtCSZRQdXbcSGKZZBulhttps://www.facebook.com/ASCAP2020/posts/pfbid027x7wZgidc82oEYHqtotvpamo6pQ2a8JNoHggPQ6vmivkqi9JvTVybd91ZysWPmKDI>
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid037NhePgWXw22r9CyNBbhaSK8dqXcb6cz56aN1dRtUefgQxhUT6ti5s7Bs3xnrApJ8I&id=100088333023247;

<https://www.facebook.com/ASCAP2020/posts/pfbid02tgfzBoj1e7c5dyvezdKiUhtzfXWBcMpUGUgCtLnc5KNSRsMc1k2dQ2Q461GjiZEUKI>
<https://www.facebook.com/mimozatosku/posts/pfbid0369pkx9goRHqCVvj3y37QuX8pwoYiD7prP3yEYtQ5f6WhK5KtCSZRQdXbcSGKZZBul>

¹⁰² Lezhe, Korce, Tirana and Durres

¹⁰³ The three modules are on: 1. Arts as effective therapy for the emotional, intellectual and physical development of children with disabilities; 2. Ethics in the process of educating and supporting the development of children with disabilities; 3. Assessment and treatment of children with autism spectrum disorders. The modules comprise theoretical introductions of key concepts and practical activities, the latter making it easier the delivery of training by network leaders as local trainers and/or the self-training.

school. SCC is an initiative which aims to promote the school-family-community partnership by turning schools into open institutions and serving all children and cooperating with the community stakeholders.¹⁰⁴ During February-March 2023, the guide served as a basis for building the capacities of SCC's coordinators, school leaders and assistant teachers in fulfilling the inclusive education indicators. The participants represented **48 SCC** in the municipalities of Korce, Maliq, Pogradec, Shijak and Dimal.¹⁰⁵ The project was also introduced through a series of consultation meetings **to 85 representatives** of the municipal community centers for children with disabilities and representatives of local education offices to strengthen and escalate their cooperation in supporting the development of children with disabilities, including by developing joint activity plans with SCCs for the academic year 2023-2024.¹⁰⁶

- *Support the capacities of ASCAP in quality and inclusive curricula and teacher training.*

LNB has been providing support to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in their efforts to ensure inclusive education, which is one of the main priorities outlined in the Albanian National Education Strategy. In partnership with the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP), the programme has been actively involved in strengthening the capacities of **200 school assistant teachers and classroom teachers** across the municipalities of Diber, Durres, Kamez, Elbasan, and Kruje. The objective has been to equip these teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to implement inclusive policies and practices in schools, thereby ensuring that every child has equal access to quality education.

During the training program, the participants delved into various key topics, including inclusive education in the Albanian context, inclusive teaching standards, the importance of focusing on both systemic inclusion and individuals with disabilities, as well as engaging in practical activities that support children's participation and foster the creation of coalitions for inclusion. Following the training sessions, all assistant teachers and classroom teachers began implementing a range of inclusive education activities with their students. To support them in their practical work and address any challenges they encountered, ASCAP staff engaged in classroom observations and provided continuous mentoring. The mentoring sessions primarily focused on facilitating effective collaboration between teacher assistants and classroom teachers. The aim was to ensure the equal inclusion and progress of all children, allowing them to thrive and achieve based on their unique abilities and differences. To share the positive experiences and insights gained from inclusive education practices, information was collected from various schools and subsequently disseminated among the professional development teachers' network across different municipalities.

- *Support to curriculum of Faculty of Social Work to build an adequate social protection workforce, including curriculum on evidence-based policy management and evaluation*

¹⁰⁴ In this transformation process, schools have to refer to and work for meeting defined standards and indicators. "Inclusion and respect for diversity in school" is one of the five areas covered by (7) standards and (38) indicators that imply the creation of appropriate conditions for the development and education of children with disabilities. The guide will help schools to have a clear understanding of relevant standards and indicators, build and implement school self-evaluation instruments, and identify community stakeholders to cooperate in supporting the development of children with disabilities.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/ASCAP2020/posts/pfbid0ypLJidYSjFPdRfjBozqb9Ysqom6SSVsjEg6Mmwd7v5KvbfLhpJc7oUN9qXv6r7Fxl>
<https://www.facebook.com/qendra.speciale.3/posts/pfbid02iQzbuauqEVNk2x41bKTLombNygZF5exguFijaPbCaR8mmSjsZFddUDNs5BatnEY3l>
<https://www.facebook.com/myredin.bashalli.3/posts/pfbid0bTnr4ZL58915orSKzDWG6Tva48SviCrz8mqNffL1ixbV6heBug3UxW4crnYzSf4vI>
<https://www.facebook.com/qendra.speciale.3/posts/pfbid0jvFgEiqvRwxzFXzPGQyLSBQrj9W5utkueLASggaPZCNaNiUctDKH7bUYSiSzUbdI>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/ASCAP2020/posts/pfbid0ccfhEhMcCqZgeRYx3ouVCTcXcHZMn6xHpR4zhmW9yYPMqaaqV5dHEX9FdlJy1LVHl>

LNB 2 is supporting the Department of Social Work and Social Policies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana in strengthening the social work curricula and more specifically the Master on Social Work Curricula and three specific directions of the syllabus of the Bachelor program of social work. The analysis on the revision of the curricula and required alignment with the legislation on higher education is finalized. Further to the analysis, a database of three programmes was established with the aim of registering all syllabus courses in alliance with a set of knowledge and skills required for students to better respond to the profiles of the master's degrees. Furthermore, a new space/ online platform - [Kendi digjital](#) (Digital corner) is established and integrated on the website: www.sociale.al. The platform serves as an online community or forum of discussions on different themes of common interest amongst professionals such as: social workers and emergency situations, professional burn out, migration and social work, integrated health and social services.

In addition, a series of videos focused on the role of social workers, their contribution and practice are developed as a tool to raise the awareness on the role of social work profession in different settings (two videos on social workers serving to the LGBTIQ+ community, one video on social workers in health care services and one video on women victims of domestic abuse). These videos are prepared in close cooperation with the Order of Social Workers and are promoted through social media channels.

- *Build partnership with Faculties of Social Sciences to improve scientific research and internship programme, and develop new curricula for pre- and in- service social workers; facilitate exchange with the University of Applied Sciences of Lucerne.*

LNB 2 and Universities of Tirana, Shkodra and Elbasan entered a 24-month programme partnership in September 2022 with the aim of further developing the curricula for social work and psychology students, designing and delivering tailored continuous training for in-service social workers, improving the students' education practice (internship), and upgrading ethical requirement in the scientific research.

In this context, with the support of Lucerne University (HSLU), the programme organized a study visit for eight academic staff from the three Albanian Universities, including the head of the Albanian Social Work Order, to present them with experiences and practices of Swiss academia and discuss about concrete areas of cooperation and needs for support from Lucerne University. During the visit, Albanian professors were introduced to the organizational aspects of the host University, its educational pillars, programmes, curricula and modules of relevance to social work. They could visit various service providers that received students from Lucerne School of Social Work for practice/internship purposes, or employed social workers graduated at this School.

Following the visit, a team of Albanian professors conducted a detailed review of existing literature used for the bachelor's and master's level for social work and psychology branches (in all three Albanian universities), with the participation of students and field service professionals. The report was shared with colleagues from Lucerne University, who provided their feedback and suggestions, including through online meetings, in the five proposed curricula areas: Introduction to Social Work, Scientific Methods & Evidence-based Practice, Methodology of Social Work; Organizing and Developing Social Work; and Ethics as a cross cutting issue. The Albanian Universities are currently considering the proposals and received feedback to make a final decisions.

Progress has been also noted regarding the improvement of the internship program for students, university professors, and supervising coaches, including the development of a module to train coaches

from host institutions. During an online workshop with representative from the three Albanian Universities, HSLU colleagues presented their Internship platform with its main tools for students and professors and jointly identified and discussed how some of these tools could be adopted to the Albanian context. Tirana University has also advanced in the preparatory work for the establishment of the Ethics Committee of Scientific Research in Social Sciences.

- *Support the capacities of ASCAP in quality and inclusive curricula and teacher training*

During the reporting period, LNB continued its collaboration with ASCAP for increasing the capacities of 54 professional development network leaders and 348 teachers on how to use ICTs during the learning process in Durres, Krujë, Has, Kukes and Kamza. The ICT training module developed by ASCAP contains elements of inclusive Education. In addition, ASCAP continued to support the ICTs teachers by conducting mentoring sessions with them face to face and online and various meetings were organized with teachers to share their experiences.

- *Partnership with Social Work Faculty on establishment of Internships / bootcamps with focus social integration of vulnerable women and girls*

A partnership between LNB 2 and the Department of Social Work and Policy, has also been established in view of the important role this institution plays in preparing the future social workers to provide adequate social care services for women and girls. The collaboration focuses on improving the skills and professionalism of social workers to provide inclusive services that respect diversity, including working closely together to adapt and refresh the social work curriculum. In March 2023, a workshop was organized with the staff of the Department of Social Work and Policy to determine key actions and identify areas of collaboration. The workshop aimed to draft a working plan for the year 2023 and the suggestions put forth by the faculty will guide the joint efforts in improving social care services from a gender perspective.

In addition, an open auditorium titled "Respecting Diversity Through Social Inclusion" was jointly organized by the programme and the Faculty in Tirana. The primary objective was to facilitate discussions on the difficulties and challenges associated with providing gender-responsive services to vulnerable groups. Furthermore, best practices in delivering gender responsive services while respecting the diversity of vulnerable groups were also explored. The Open Auditorium event provided a platform for exchanging knowledge, experiences, and expertise in this field.

While these events have contributed to strengthening collaboration and identifying key areas of focus, work will continue to adapt and update the social work curriculum, ensuring that social workers have the necessary skills to provide inclusive services that respect diversity, with the final goal to improve social care services for women and girls, particularly women from disadvantaged communities and promote gender-responsive approaches.

Chapter 3: Gender Equality and Good Governance

3.1 Gender Equality

Advancement of gender equality is at the core of LNB 2 programme. Work in this area is based on previous gender analysis about inequalities that women face across sectors, including in the area of social protection and social inclusion. The programme contributes directly to several priorities of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality 2021-2030, especially those related to women economic empowerment and fulfilment of women's economic and social rights, increased public and political participation of women and strengthening of social services for women victims of gender-based violence.

The programme employs different strategies to involve women and girls, such as information campaigns, training programs, and consultation meetings. Particular focus has been to target women facing intersectional discrimination in accessing services such as women in difficult economic situation, Roma and Egyptian women and women with disabilities. LNB collaborates closely with various stakeholders including the Department of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality at the MHSP, specialists of Gender Equality and Domestic Violence at the municipality level, women municipal councilors, women groups, and civil society organizations (CSOs).

In this context, LNB has taken a threefold approach to gender mainstreaming through:

- *Targeted interventions* to promote gender equality at the policy level and empower women at the local level including through capacity increase on gender-responsive budgeting (see activity 1.1.1); involvement of women in participatory budgeting processes (activity 1.1.2); piloting of gender responsive social services targeting women and girls in several municipalities (activity 1.2.1); use of gender statistics at local level to inform development and implementation of policies (activity 3.1.3); provision of psycho-social support for Roma and Egyptian women and girls victims, or at risk of, gender-based violence (activity 1.1.1).
- *Integrated interventions (engendering)* that aim at addressing gender inequalities in various programme's interventions such as analysis of local social care planning, policies, and funding mechanisms from a gender perspective to identify and address gaps (activity 2.1.2); mainstreaming gender in the draft of the new National Social Protection Strategy (activity 3.1.1), disaggregated data collection and use of gender statistics at local level to inform development and implementation of policies, plans and programs on social protection and inclusion at the local level (activity 3.1.3); and fostering partnership with the University of Tirana to ensure integration of gender equality principles in the academic programme of the Department of Social Work and Policy (activity 3.2.1)
- Ensuring equal access to both women and men, as well as young girls and boys, in various activities and resources of programme. LNB 2 has established a gender disaggregated data collection system for its activities which are regularly reported in the annual reports and semi-annual reports and PMF. For example, out of 635 vulnerable persons who were actively engaged in LGU social inclusion policy consultation events, 90 percent were women; and out of 3 550 people reached via awareness raising events to be informed about their rights, more than half were women.

Various contextual factors and local conditions, including harmful gender norms and stereotypes may pose barriers to progress. Therefore, it is crucial to understand these factors and tailor interventions accordingly to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. Supporting advocacy efforts to raise awareness about gender equality and mobilize stakeholders at the local level is a sustainable approach. This involves community outreach campaigns, public dialogues, and awareness-raising initiatives to promote gender-responsive practices and address societal barriers.

In addition, many municipalities continue to face limitations in terms of human resources capacities. This can hinder the effective planning, coordination, and execution of gender-responsive programs and services. Additional support and capacity-building efforts may be required to address these limitations and strengthen the local workforce. Providing targeted training and capacity-building programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of local stakeholders, including government officials, civil society

organizations, and community leaders. This will enable them to effectively implement gender-responsive policies and programs.

3.2 Good Governance

The improvement of governance of social service provision and social inclusion is at the centre of the LNB 2. The programme takes a human rights-based approach to influence governance stakeholders as duty bearers to ensure respect of human rights, including key principles of effective participation, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, and elimination of discrimination. Equally, the programme works to empower communities as duty-bearers through facilitating their access to knowledge, information and education.

Examples during the second year of LNB 2 implementation include:

- support to grass root organizations and communities to clearly articulate their demands and advocate for dedicated services for persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian minorities and children from these communities, in accordance with the Albanian legislation and international human rights commitments undertaken by Albania;
- efforts to create mechanisms for continuous dialogue such as participatory budget processes and multi-stakeholders' supervisory bodies of local government policy implementation (e.g. on gender equality and children's rights)
- improvement of legal, policy and planning frameworks on social protection associated with adequate budgeting (revision of the Law on Social Housing, development of the new Social Protection Strategy; improvement of the Social Fund mechanism to expand social care services for disadvantaged communities);
- building capacities of local officials to provide efficient integrated community services that go beyond economic aid and enable their participation in the labour market and public life;
- creating efficient modalities for coordination among providers of services across sectors such as social services, health, education and employment in provision of integrated social services
- increasing capacities of state authorities in charge of monitoring standards of social services

Despite these efforts, influencing transformative processes within governance systems takes place amid inherent challenges within the system, particularly in the context of Albania's fiscal and administrative decentralization reforms. Local government and regional bodies have been entrusted to plan and deliver essential public services that are key in addressing poverty and social exclusion. Yet, local government units (LGUs) still lack sufficient financial resources and administrative capacity to exercise their duties effectively. Local elections also impacted official commitments to the reforms. Addressing these gaps will continue to be a priority of LNB in synergy with other interventions implemented by UN agencies and other organizations that promote good governance. The programme is also capitalizing on the EU accession requirements in the area of governance and rule of law, which are expected to increase public officials' response and commitment to capacity building interventions, including in the area of social protection and social inclusion.

3.3 Internal Monitoring

LNB2 management conducts regular monitoring and evaluation of programme activities to assess progress, ensure quality of activities and inter-agency coordination and identify bottlenecks and challenges to improve programme implementation.

LNB2 utilized a set of key tools to support programme monitoring and steering:: i) Performance Monitoring Framework based on programme's logical framework; ii) Annual Work Plans and Semi-annual and Annual Reports, iii) programme's budget; iv) on site field visits; v) regular internal monitoring and meetings, internal quarterly reports, vi) analysis of risks and updated risk log; vi) the Annual Steering Committee review of the programme's progress and results, discussion and endorsement of the LNB Annual Report and next Annual Work Plan. These tools are used to ensure regular track of results progress, analysis of evidence against defined baselines and targets, and regular capture of knowledge, good practices and lessons learned. Implementing partners and partners are supported to have a good understanding of monitoring and evaluation process in the framework of LNB Programme.

During July 2023 a field visit of the Ambassador of the Switzerland in Albania and heads of four UN implementing agencies of the Programme took place in four targeted municipalities. The objective was to showcase the joint work of the LNB2 through the mechanisms of "delivering as one" and provide examples of collaboration with other partners, including national and local governments, beneficiaries, civil society organizations, the private sector and other development actors, to support the development of local policies, social service delivery, best practices and the promotion of inclusivity. The 2-day visit included meetings with the mayors of Roskovec, Dimal, Berat, and Lushnja, and other municipal staff involved in the planning and delivery of social services. Participants also met with beneficiaries, including women, the elderly, people with disabilities, youth, Roma, and Egyptians, as well as representatives of NGOs, civil society, and other professionals in the fields of education and health.

Chapter 4: Major challenges and mitigation measures¹⁰⁷

LNB2 during its second year of implementation faced a series of challenges, but efforts are being made to mitigate and address them.

Challenges related the Political and Economic Context

The growing political polarization and local elections of May 2023 have impacted the implementation's pace of certain activities and local officials' engagement. For, example, the elections slowed down the process of the engaging local stakeholders as part of the Child Friendly Municipality initiative and activities were diverted to the engagement of children and adolescents. In addition, the local leadership changes in some of the targeted municipalities may have an impact on the progress and implementation of ongoing interventions. New leaders may have different priorities, approaches, and levels of commitment to existing initiatives. This could potentially slow down the pace of progress or even hinder the implementation of certain activities. In this context, the programme is actively screening specific municipalities to assess the situation and determine the required assistance. This process aims to gather information on the current status of initiatives, local capacities, and barriers to progress. The findings will

¹⁰⁷ This will be reported semi-annually

inform the design and implementation of future interventions to address the identified gaps and support local-level work.

In addition, the global economic turmoil had an effect on the economic situation of Albanian families, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged communities, which the project targets. During the first half of the project's implementation, municipalities were obliged to focus meeting demands from a broader vulnerable population, not only from those identified and targeted by the project. For example, in the municipalities where the project offers integrated social services for disadvantaged communities, the demands from these communities, including Roma and Egyptian increased on a wider range of services due to the negative consequences of the basic food basket increase of prices and other living costs too. In addition, families and individuals, who were previously more stable have been requesting more services as well and overall vulnerability expanded and included other groups such as the elderly, particularly those living alone, people with chronic disease, or those suffering from mental health and depression, women victims of gender-based violence, people unemployed and rural youth.

The government measures to provide cash support to vulnerable families, those in the economic aid schemes and others, could not decrease the high number of unsatisfied citizens, those who do not see a prosperous future in their country. In this context, the emigration trend and numbers of youth who have emigrated or plan to emigrate soon have increased. Many of them they reveal complete loss of hope for their future lives and often plan illegal emigration, "as most of their friends did before". Therefore, frequent individual and small group counselling sessions were focused on the risks and consequences of illegal versus legal emigration.

Challenges related to implementation modalities and partners capacities

The majority of programme's planned activities have initiated and are in the course of implementation. Certain delays have been encountered in the selection process of implementing partners and consultants due to specific selection procedure of UN agencies and capacity assessment process of partners CSOs, required to ensure the quality of service delivery. Efforts have been intensified to make sure that in the following months all planned interventions are in their full course of implementation.

Generally, the capacities and resources of public administration in charge of social protection and social services remain limited at all levels, both in terms of staff, technical capacity and financial allocations despite increases of budgets for social services. In addition, social services do not rank high the hierarchy of municipal priorities. Other key challenges include insufficient human resources, and weak accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation. Services to address gender-based violence are still inconsistent, and so are those to support and empower rural women and women from disadvantaged groups. Gaps in gender statistics need to be addressed to better respond to the specific needs of women and girls to persisting patterns of inequalities.

Another challenge relates to government's partners unequal level of availability and efficiency in undertaking different activities. For examples, teachers consider the capacity building in Inclusive Education as one of their top 3 priorities for professional development as assessed by the Ministry of

Education and Sport and the Agency of Pre-university Education. However, the new teachers entering the system do not have the right practice and preparation to make sure that Inclusive Education is applied with students when they start working in school. Thus, the programme is working closely with MOES and partners such as EU to explore the curriculum revision and its adaption best on the best international practices.

On the other hand, activities to develop local social housing plans revealed that this sector in Albania is still highly dependent from national funding. The municipalities are lacking clarity on the legal amendments that are currently underway and do not have any prior experience in implementation of social housing programs. Even though trainings on different aspects of the legislation have been organized regularly, there still seems to be a lack of knowledge and ownership of the processes, because of the relatively small can organize training sessions for municipal staff and other stakeholders on social housing policies, regulations, and best practices.

Also, the health sector at the beginning of the reporting period continued to struggle with the competing priorities and balancing emergency response and development interventions, therefore some of the personnel from the well-baby clinics especially in major cities including Tirana, were from time to time were involved in COVID-19 vaccination. Meetings were held with the Operator of the Health Services and local branches to identify case by case solutions and identify any support the programme could provide for the emergency response related activities.

To address these challenges, LNB 2 is ensuring continuous capacity-building and coordination among various stakeholders (municipalities, civil society, donors), which is instrumental to maximize resources and complement limited local budgets, reach out and support with public services the most vulnerable groups. LNB 2 maintains regular contacts with representatives of partner institutions at the central and local levels to discuss any challenges and delays related the programme's implementation and find relevant mitigation measures and strategies.

Chapter 5: LNB contribution to SDGs – assess whether the programme's goal and outcomes and progress done so far are contributing to SDGs progress.

LNB with its support at community, municipality and policy level and close partnership authorities, CSOs and donors is contributing to Albania's progress in achieving the SDGs, particularly SDGs 1-5 (no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDGs 16-17 (peaceful and inclusive societies, global partnership).

LNB is clearly designed and guided by the principle of "Leave no one Behind" of SDGs in the identification and active involvement of the 'left behind' communities population in Albania, including women and men with low income and from rural areas, persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, who are the main target groups and beneficiaries of the programme.

Specific examples of this contribution include:

- SDG 1- Poverty eradication (Targets 1.1, 1.2, 1.3) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), through activities that offer integrated social services and empower disadvantaged communities; adoption of inclusive social care planning at the central and local levels, such as the development of the strategies on social inclusion and social protection, national strategies on ageing and youth, improvement and implementation of the legislation on social housing, improvement of the Social Fund and others
- Goal 3 – Good health and nutrition (target 3.8), through the support for implementation of Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV) taking a holistic approach for child health and development, focusing on the most vulnerable groups and contributing to the quality of care of maternal and child health services.
- Goal 4- Quality Education (targets 4.1 and 4. B), through support to inclusive education, including the reduction of drop out of students from schools and efforts to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
- SDG 5-Gender equalities through targeted and integrated interventions that ensure women and girls have equal access to services and participate actively in empowerment project activities.
- SDG 10-Reduced inequalities (target 10.2, 10.3) through activities that aim to empower and ensure equal access to services for persons with disabilities
- SDG 17- Partnership for the Goals through activities aiming at building a wide partnership with national and local level institutions, academia and civil society organizations toward advancing the agenda on social inclusion.

Both results and challenges from this joint programme contribute to strengthen discussion and evidence serving to the country's higher-level coordination forums and/or thematic/sectorial forums. The programme also plays an important role to promoting SDG progress within Albania's policy processes and dialogue.

Chapter 6: Communication and Visibility

- Please provide information on dissemination/publication of results and lessons learnt.

LNB 2 programme adheres to the Communication Plan and Visibility Guidelines, as well as logos, letterheads/PPP templates, and disclaimers, which were updated to ensure all LNB implementing agencies communicate as one under LNB Programme. Communication focal points from each implementing agency have shared them with any implementing partner organization as relevant.

Important programme activities and events were widely promoted on social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn reaching out to the direct beneficiaries and the wider public.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ UNICEF: Facebook Followers: 27966; Instagram followers: 9261; LinkedIn followers: 6417; Twitter Followers: 1671; UN Women: Facebook: 18,000 followers; Twitter: 4370 followers; Instagram: 1079 followers
Facebook: 249,813 Reach; Twitter 101,200 impressions; Instagram: 129,229 reach (July 2022-july2023)

Several fact sheets, manuals, and brochures resulting from different partnerships with implementing organizations were produced and published in respective websites of the LNB programme implementing agencies and its partner organizations, or further spread through postings in different social media platforms.

All links to social media publications are provided in Annex 2.

Chapter 7: Finances

Overall financial delivery (disbursed and committed) till July 31st is USD 3,041,877.89

	Funds allocated in USD	Disbursed*	Commitments*	Total Disbursed and Committed USD	Total Disbursed and Committed USD in %
UNDP	2,354,162	1,625,510	447,345	2,072,855	88%
UNICEF	666,174	486,624	65,318	551,942	82.9%
UNW	350,381	167,883	66,986	234,869	67.0%
UNFPA	182,212	182,212	0	182,212	100%
Totals	3,552,929	2,462,229.13	579,648.76	3,041,877.89	86%

Abbreviations:

ABA – Applied Behavior Analysis

ADRF – Albanian Disability Rights Foundation

AIDS – acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

ALL – Albanian Lek

ANAD – Albanian National Association of the Deaf

ASCAP – Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education

ASPA – Albanian School of Public Administration

AU – Administrative Unit

CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CSO – Civil Society Organisations

DoA – Delivering as One

DCM (VKM) – Decision of the Council of Ministers

DPO – Disabled Peoples Organizations

EU – European Union

EU4SI – European Union for Social Inclusion

EU SILC – Statistics on income and living conditions

GoA – Government of Albania

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GMC – Grand Management Committee

GRB – Gender Responsive Budgeting

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency virus

HSLU – HOCHESCHULE Luzern

IEC – Information, Education, Communication Materials
 ILO – International Labour Organization
 INSTAT – Albanian Institute of Statistics
 ISCS – Inspectorate of Social Care Services
 LGU – Local Government Units
 LGBTIQ – Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transexual Intersex Queer
 LNB 2 – Leave No One Behind Programme second phase
 MCH – Maternal and Child Health
 MDAC – Multidisciplinary Disability Assessment Commission
 MIPAA+20 – Madrid Inter International Plan of Action on Ageing
 MIS – Management of Information Systems
 MoES – Ministry of Education and Science
 MoFE – Ministry of Finance and Economy
 MoHSP – Ministry of Health and Social Protection
 MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
 MSM – Men who have Sex with Men
 NAP – National Action Plan
 NAPPWD - National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities
 NCQSAHI – National Center for Quality Safety and Accreditation of Health Institutions
 NE – Economic Aid
 NERSCS – National Electronic Register on Social Care Services
 NGO – Non-Governmental Organizations
 OOSC – Out of School Children
 OPDs – Organization of Persons with Disabilities
 PHC – Primary Health Centers
 PwD – Persons with Disabilities
 R&E – Roma and Egyptians
 RMNCAH – Reproductive Maternal Newborn Child Adolescent Health
 SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
 SDG - Sustainable Development Goals
 SCC – Schools Community Centers
 SHP – Social Housing Plan
 SILSS – State Inspectorate of Labour and Social Services
 SIPD - Social Inclusion Policy Document
 SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
 SSS – State Social Services
 STD – Sexually Transmitted Diseases
 STI – Sexual Transmitted Infection
 SW – Sex Worker
 ToRs – Terms of References
 ToT – Training of Trainers
 UN – United Nations
 UNECE - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF - United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNSDF – United Nations Sustainable Development Framework
UPHV – Universal Progressive Home Visiting
VG – Vulnerable Group
VET – Vocational Education Training
WB – World Bank
WHO – World Health Organization

List of annexes:

Annex 1: Updated Performance Monitoring Framework (Programme log frame)

Annex 2: Communication and Visibility

Annex 3: Risk Analysis

Annex 4: LNB2 Target municipalities