

April 2009

**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW- HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
UNICEF INPUT - ALBANIA**

1. On 12 June 2006, Albania signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) which has been ratified by all EU member states. Albania joined NATO this April which was a significant achievement for the country.
2. Since 2000, Albania has managed to keep a steady growth rate of approximately 6 per cent, but the country remains one of the poorest countries in Europe. The size of the informal sector remains a concern. Including remittances, it is estimated to make up 30 to 50 per cent of GDP. Data of the most recent Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) show that the overall poverty rate declined from 25.4 per cent in 2002 to 18.5 per cent in 2005, and that child poverty declined from 33 per cent in 2002 to 24.7 per cent in 2005. Disparities continue to persist and are deepening.
3. While not yet suffering a significant impact during the initial phase of the global financial crisis, Albania is more and more affected due to a combination of declining exports, tax revenues and remittances and increasing domestic budget expenditures. The IMF has suggested that the government avoid increases in the domestic budget in anticipation of the decline in revenue.
4. Albania has made significant progress in addressing the realization of children's rights. The Committee on the Rights of the Child reviewed Albania's first report on January 28, 2005. Its recommendations pertained mainly to the national plan of action for children, coordination and allocation of resources:
 - i. The Committee urges the State party to ensure effective coordination of the implementation of the Convention among ministries, local authorities, representatives of non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders involved in its implementation and the clarification of the important role and responsibilities of local authorities in this respect.
 - ii. The Committee recommends that the State party review budgetary allocations and pay particular attention to the full implementation of Article 4 of the Convention by prioritizing budgetary allocations to ensure implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights of children, in particular those belonging to economically disadvantaged groups.
 - iii. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure that the planned revision of the National Strategy on Children 2006-2010 covers all areas of the Convention, that adequate financial and human resources are provided for its implementation, and that monitoring and coordination mechanisms are ensured.

5. In response to the comments of the CRC Committee and dialogue between UNICEF and government officials, the National Strategy on Children underwent major revisions and a comprehensive National Plan of Action for its implementation was formulated. Preparation of these documents was overseen by a team of experts appointed and supervised by the Deputy Prime Minister. The National Plan of Action for Children was prepared in full consideration with National MDG targets, and was approved in June 2005.
6. Significant steps have been taken to develop a policy framework for the monitoring of children's rights, including a methodology for monitoring the implementation of the NPA at national, regional and local level.
7. In March 2007, the government approved the establishment of the Inter-ministerial committee to oversee the implementation of the National Strategy for Children. The Committee is chaired by the deputy Prime Minister, and includes the Minister of Education, Minister of Health, Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Minister of Justice, Minister of Finance and Minister of Interior.
8. A Technical Secretariat for Children (TSC) was established to support the Inter-ministerial Committee. It is located in the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, as well as in four pilot regions and two municipalities. Four regional and two local plans of action (in the context of MDG Regional plans) for children are finalized. The third National Report on the NPA implementation was published on 1 June 2008 Children's Day.
9. The TSC is responsible for monitoring, evaluating and coordinating the activities of all institutions that contribute to the implementation of child rights at national, regional and local level. The TSC also collaborates with NGOs, civil society and all other stakeholders. The TSC reports to the Inter Ministerial Committee for the implementation of the National Strategy for Children and the NPA twice a year, and publishes annual progress reports.
10. For each of the twelve regions, a Child Rights Units (CRU) is planned to be established. The CRUs will monitor the implementation of the strategy and the plan of action as well as the realization of children's rights in general. So far, two CRUs are fully functioning. Two others are in the process of being established in Tirana and Durres. A Child Rights Unit is part of regional administrative structure and is in charge of:
 - Identifying the most critical children's issues and related institutional and legal gaps;
 - Cooperating and exchanging information with Statistics Office, Regional Primary Health Care Directorate, Regional Education Directorate, Civil Registry Office, Economic Support and Disability Payment Section in the City or Commune as well as with every other institution of the local government or civil society;
 - Working with the regional administration and policy makers on budgetary questions, harmonization of sectoral policies benefiting children, advocacy for increased participation of citizens in regional or local decision-making, and generally increasing the effectiveness of social policies for children;

- Proposing comprehensive children's social policies based on needs and opportunities.
 - Observing and evaluating the implementation of laws and policies pertaining to the protection of child's rights at regional level;
 - Reporting to the Regional Council on the progress vis a vis child's rights and exclusion.
11. In 2008 the government began to develop a Child Rights Code, in which the functioning of government mechanisms in charge of monitoring and reporting of child rights will be harmonised and rationalized in one place for better use by decision-makers and the public. The adoption of the Child Rights Code (expected to happen by end of June 2009) will contribute to:
- Harmonization of all legislation and policies relevant to the CRC giving priority to disadvantaged children in national social and economic plans with appropriate budgetary allocation.
 - Establishment and strengthening of an adequate monitoring, evaluation and reporting system with well defined indicators to monitor poverty and social exclusion.
 - Alignment of child rights policies and standards to National Strategy Development and Integration as well as to Mid Term Budget Framework.
12. The government of Albania is finalizing the second report to CRC, which was to be submitted by end of March 2009. The alternative report by civil society is almost finalized as well.
13. While Albania continues to make progress in realizing the rights of its children, much remains to be done. Despite broad legislative reform related to human rights in general and to the rights of the child in particular, the existing mechanism of sectoral social policy - due to their fragmentation and absence of coordination in their implementation - were inadequate to significantly reduce social exclusion among vulnerable and marginalized children.
14. Strengthening the capacities of the government at national and local level to be able to respond to requirements of EU accession and increase the efficiency of policy implementation from a child rights perspective is of particular importance. Availability of reliable data remains a critical issue. A comprehensive system of data collection that allows for disaggregation by income level, geographic location, ethnicity, and gender has to be established. Some efforts have been made to support learning programmes for public officials at national, regional and local level towards monitoring the realization of children's rights, including in the area of statistics.
15. Long term investment is required to set up appropriate mechanisms at central and local levels to be more results and performance oriented, with stronger capacities for policy development, coordination, analysis and reporting.

16. Participants of the November 2008 workshop on “Promoting Child Inclusion in Albania”, organized by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in consultation with the UN’s working group on governance, concluded, inter alia:

- Over the past ten years, dramatic political and socio-economic changes in Albania have increased the vulnerability of children to violence, exploitation, discrimination, abuse and neglect. Many Albanian children face a great risk of exclusion. Social protection expenditures have declined as a percentage of GDP and as a percentage of Government expenditures even though the overall number of beneficiaries has not decreased at the same rate;
- Families who are recipients of social assistance are the most vulnerable to social exclusion. There are 149,000 families¹ (280,000 children) who receive social assistance benefits. The likelihood of families remaining on social assistance is greater when the period of social assistance benefit is longer than four years due to inactivity and lack of vocational training;
- The existing social protection mechanism, while providing benefits, fails to promote the social integration of beneficiaries. The transformation of the current system into a social protection, integration and development mechanism is of utmost importance;
- Measuring the effect of poverty on children will help policy makers to plan the distribution of public expenditures, and to give priority to those policies that promote children’s rights.
- Reversing social exclusion is a long-term process which requires changes in social attitudes and power relations, as well as an understanding of the social and economic processes through which disadvantage is created, maintained and reinforced. Both the excluded and the excluding groups need to be targeted in response to social exclusion.

17. Sustaining previous gains, reducing disparities and reaching the “most difficult to reach” continues to be a challenge for Albania in reaching the national development goals and MDGs. The establishment and functioning of the TSC and the units at the regional level brings an important change, however, if they are not part of a cohesive national system, the impact they will have on policy improvements and implementation will be fragmented. Ensuring collaboration and functioning of the newly established institutions, supporting child’s rights alliance developments at all levels of governance, increasing children’s participation into decision making and strengthening evidence based policy impact analysis will lay the foundation towards sustainable progress vis a vis the realization of children’s rights.

¹ INSTAT – “Shqipëria në shifra”, 2007.