UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind" (LNB2) In Albania – Phase 2

01.08.2021 – 31.07.2025

Mid Term Evaluation

Final Report

18 December 2024

Prepared by:

Laurent Ruedin and Blerjana Bino

Commissioned by: UNDP in Albania

Project/outcome Information	
Project/outcome title	Leave No One Behind phase 2 UNDP-ALB-00126393
Atlas ID	00134935 and 00138488
Corporate outcome and output	OUTCOME 1
Country	Albania
Region	RBEC
Date project document signed	29 July 2021
Project dates	Start 01.08.2021 / Planned end 31.07.2025
Total committed budget	8.000.000 CHF
Project expenditure at the time of evaluation	5,711,263 USD
Funding source	Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTF) 30000
Implementing party130	

Evaluation information	
Evaluation type (project/ outcome/thematic/country programme, etc.)	Midterm Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind" Phase 2 (LNB2)
Final/midterm review/ other	Midterm evaluation
Period under evaluation	**Start** 01/08/2021 / **End** 31/07/2024
Evaluators	Laurent Ruedin and Blerjana Bino
Evaluator email address	l.ruedin@net2000.ch / blerianabino@gmail.com
Evaluation dates	**Start** 18-Jun-2024 / **Completion** 15-Dec-2024

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Acronyms

ANAD	Albanian National Association of the Deaf
ASCAP	Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education
ASPA	Albanian School of Public Administration
AWP	Annual Work Plan
COVID	Coronavirus disease
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DaO	"Delivering as One" mechanism
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
EQs	Evaluation Questions
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoA	Government of Albania
INSTAT	Albanian Institute of Statistics
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
HSLU	Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts
IPA	(EU) Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPMG	Integrated Planning and Management Group
IRCA	Institute of Romani Culture in Albania
JP	Joint Programme
LNB	Leave No One Behind
LGU	Local Government Units
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MIS	Management Information System
MFE	Ministry of Finances and Economy
MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
MTE	Midterm Evaluation
NAP	National Action Plan
NAPPWD	National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities
NARU	Need Assessment Referral Unit
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPF	Ndihme Per Femijet
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee
OPD	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
PRISMA	Promoting Rights, Inclusion, Social Mobilization, and Accountability
PUNO	Partner UN Organizations
PWDs	Persons with disabilities
QAPE	Quality Assurance and Performance Evaluation
R&E	Roma and Egyptians
SC	Steering Committee
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SILC	(EU) Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
SILSS	State Inspectorate of Labor and Social Services
SIPD	Social Inclusion Policy Document
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
SSS	State Social Services
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNSDCF	Albania-United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
VG	Vulnerable Groups of persons

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Executive Summary

This Midterm Evaluation (MTE) evaluates the performance of the "Leave No One Behind" (LNB2) Phase 2 Joint Programme in Albania, which is a four-year initiative (2021-2025) jointly implemented by four UN partner agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and UNFPA). The LNB Phase 2 aims to ensure that vulnerable groups in Albania have equal access to public services and opportunities, with a strong focus on social care and service provision for marginalized groups. This phase builds upon the achievements of the first phase (2017-2021), with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), totaling CHF 8.0 million for Phase 2 (CHF 16.0 million for both phases).

The programme is aligned with Albania's national priorities under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022-2026 and focuses on three main outcomes: (1) empowering vulnerable populations to access gender-responsive services and participate in decision-making, (2) enabling municipalities to establish, manage and scale up integrated community-based services, and (3) supporting national institutions in implementing policies that ensure social inclusion and gender-responsive services. The MTE highlights the programme's significant contributions to addressing social exclusion and poverty in Albania, with particular emphasis on improving access to social services for vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Purpose of MTE

The purpose of the MTE of the LNB Phase 2 (2021-2025) is to provide an independent analysis of the progress made during the first three years of the programme's implementation. The MTE aims to assess the programme's results in improving social services in Albania, reviewing the successes and challenges faced during this period. Additionally, the evaluation focuses on lessons learned, early indicators of programme effectiveness, and any risks to the sustainability of interventions. The findings will inform necessary updates to the programme's theory of change and strategic recommendations for the remaining phase, with an eye toward ensuring long-term impact and considering the formulation of a potential third and last phase. The MTE follows the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, focusing on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, and it also addresses cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, human rights, and contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The primary audience for this evaluation includes the programme's key stakeholders, such as donors, government institutions, CSOs, service providers, and UN agencies.

Approach and methods

The MTE was conducted using a participatory and evidence-based approach, involving consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including national and local government representatives, social service providers, civil society organizations, and final beneficiaries. Data were collected through a combination of document reviews, interviews, focus group discussions, and site visits across 11 municipalities, ensuring a comprehensive assessment. Preliminary findings were shared during a debriefing session with UN partners in Albania, highlighting achievements, risks, and priorities for the programme's next phase. The evaluation provides

conclusions and recommendations aligned with the evaluation questions (EQs) tied to sustainability, effectiveness, relevance, and efficiency, with a particular emphasis on gender-responsive governance and the inclusivity of service delivery. The draft report, commissioned by UNDP as UN organization leading the Joint Programme will be reviewed by the four participating UN agencies and the SDC and feedback will be incorporated into the final MTE report to ensure its accuracy and utility.

Findings and conclusions

The relevance of the LNB Phase 2 is rated as highly satisfactory, given its strong alignment with national and international priorities. The programme builds upon Albania's progress in reducing poverty and inequalities while addressing remaining gaps in the country's social protection and social inclusion system. By consolidating the results of Phase 1, LNB Phase 2 focuses on implementing the Law on Social Care Services, enhancing capacity building, and developing decentralized mechanisms for social service delivery. The project is fully aligned with the strategic priorities of the UN, EU, and World Bank, supporting Albania's development goals, particularly as the country moves towards EU accession. The programme's emphasis on social inclusion, local governance, and reinforcing national frameworks directly supports the country's preparations for EU membership, contributing to the broader objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In the current context, Albania faces significant demographic challenges due to an aging population, low birth rates, and high levels of out-migration, leading to negative population growth. These demographic shifts place considerable strain on the economy and the social care system. Out-migration, coupled with a mismatch between education and market needs, creates labor force challenges that could potentially weaken both the pension and health insurance systems. The LNB2 programme's relevance is further underscored by these challenges, as it supports social care reforms that aim to create a more resilient system. European integration remains a major driver of reform in Albania, and LNB Phase 2 is well-aligned with these priorities. Feedback from interviews with governmental representatives, both at local and central level, and focus group discussions with project partners, CSOs, stakeholders, and final beneficiaries during the field phase consistently confirmed the relevance of the programme's goals and approach in addressing Albania's social inclusion needs.

Overall, the effectiveness of the LNB Phase 2 progress towards results achievement is rated as satisfactory. This is evidenced across all three programme outcomes, with highly satisfactory progress at the community level, particularly in empowering vulnerable groups. The results achieved and the contribution of LNB2 are visible throughout Albania, in all municipalities, and in terms of a wide range of issues and specific target groups, such as persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, and women affected by gender-based violence. Nevertheless, challenges exist, particularly concerning the timely achievement of results at the national (system) level and in the further roll-out of specific social services at the municipal level.

The LNB2 programme has effectively empowered vulnerable groups through advocacy, awareness-raising, and capacity-building initiatives. The programme has facilitated the access of marginalized groups in social services. For example, over 1,500 Roma and Egyptian individuals

were supported through the Integrated Social Services Model, while 1,200 women and girls participated in gender-responsive budgeting processes in five municipalities. Also, 500 women and girls raised their voices in local participatory budgeting processes in Vau i Dejes, Fushe Arrez, Dropull, and Delvine (Gjirokaster). Moreover, the programme has expanded access to quality social services for vulnerable groups, with around 4,110 individuals benefiting from new or expanded community-based services, including home-based care for the elderly and specialized services for children with disabilities.

At the municipal level, progress has been made in capacitating local government units (LGUs) to manage and deliver inclusive social services. All 61 municipalities in the country have developed their Social Care Plans with 43 municipalities having developed or updated their Social Care Plans with support of LNB1, 15 have updated them with LNB2 support and 22 municipalities received funding from LNB2 grant scheme for 27 social service projects , covering a wide range of vulnerable groups. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding the full operationalization of Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs), with only 14 municipalities having fully functional units. Additionally, the underutilization of the Management Information System (MIS) has limited the ability of municipalities to effectively track and manage social care services. Despite these challenges, the programme has laid a strong foundation for future sustainability, with municipalities already allocating more of their own-source budgets to social services, resulting in a notable increase in local government spending on social care. The LNB2 programme has made significant progress in supporting central authorities to further strengthen the legal and regulatory framework for social inclusion and social care reforms. This consolidation is essential in complementing the efforts and advancements made at the local level. Additionally, the programme has placed a strong focus on identifying and addressing gaps in funding for social services, particularly through the Social Fund mechanisms.

The efficiency of the LNB Phase 2 project management and results delivery is rated as satisfactory, particularly in its use of resources, including human, financial, technical, and knowledge inputs. The multi-agency collaboration, involving UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, and UNFPA, facilitated the effective coordination of efforts to address social inclusion, poverty reduction, and gender equality. The governance structure, steered by a multi-level system including the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP), has supported effective decision-making, while ensuring coherence and synergy between various stakeholders. The efficiency of financial management of the programme is reflected in the 99.5% disbursement and commitment rate by mid-2024, ensuring that resources are closely aligned with planned objectives.

Despite the overall efficient use of resources, several challenges affected the programme's efficiency, particularly at the municipal level. Leadership changes in partner municipalities following the 2023 local elections and the government reshuffle slowed collaboration with key ministries, impacting the speed of programme implementation. Additionally, high staff turnover, particularly among specialized professionals such as physiotherapists, psychologists, speech therapist, occupational therapist etc. as well as transportation barriers and stigma in rural areas, hindered the delivery of critical services to vulnerable populations. Nevertheless, the programme has been adaptive, adjusting activities in response to these challenges and maintaining strong communication with local institutions to ensure continued progress.

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The LNB Phase 2 program progress towards the sustainability of its results is rated as satisfactory. Through its strong collaboration with government institutions and local stakeholders and by aligning its efforts with Albania's national policies on social inclusion and social care, the program has played a vital role in supporting the ongoing reform process. At both the central and local levels, the programme has enhanced the capacities of government bodies to design, implement and monitor social services, ensuring that the systems in place will continue beyond the programme's duration. A key aspect of this success is the decentralized service delivery model, which transfers responsibilities to local governments through mechanisms such as the Social Fund. This focus on local ownership and responsibility has allowed municipalities to establish sustainable social services that meet the needs of vulnerable populations, with the programme providing technical assistance and capacity building along the way.

Additionally, the programme's participatory approach has been crucial for fostering a high level of ownership among stakeholders. Empowering civil society organizations and beneficiaries to advocate for their rights has strengthened accountability mechanisms at the local level. Furthermore, the programme's investment in professional development for social care workers and the establishment of knowledge-sharing platforms among municipalities have created a foundation for the long-term professionalization and sustainability of social care services. Municipalities' commitment to covering ongoing operational costs for newly introduced services demonstrates their dedication to continuing these efforts. By embedding these practices within the national and local governance frameworks, the LNB Phase 2 has set up a sustainable infrastructure for continued social service delivery and reform.

Despite the positive strides made towards sustainability, the LNB Phase 2 faces several challenges that could impact the long-term continuation of its results. A key challenge is the limited fiscal capacity of municipalities, which constrains their ability to sustainably finance and expand social services. While the Social Fund has provided critical support, its budget remains insufficient to meet the growing demand for social care, and many municipalities are heavily reliant on external funding. Additionally, high staff turnover, particularly in social care services, poses a significant threat to maintaining the skills and capacity developed through the programme's training and capacity-building efforts. This is further exacerbated by lower wages for social care staff compared to other public sectors, such as education and healthcare. The reliance on international donor funding for CSOs that provide essential services also raises concerns about the continuity of these services once external financial support ends. Lastly, administrative barriers, such as procurement laws, limit the ability of municipalities to form long-term partnerships with specialized CSOs, hindering sustained service provision for vulnerable populations. Addressing these systemic challenges will be crucial to ensuring the lasting impact of the programme.

The LNB2 programme integrates gender equality and good governance as cross-cutting themes, ensuring a rights-based, inclusive approach across all activities. It has empowered vulnerable groups in Albania—such as persons with disabilities (PwD), Roma and Egyptian communities (R&E), elderly individuals, vulnerable children, youth, families in need as well as women and girls at risk of gender-based violence—by establishing social care services tailored to their needs and raising awareness of their rights. The programme promotes gender-sensitive policies, supporting 15 municipalities in updating social care plans with a focus on women's concerns, and has

strengthened the professional practice of social workers with human rights principles. Through its inclusive, participatory and transparent approach, the programme ensures that vulnerable populations are actively involved in both decision-making processes and service delivery and enhances governance by building the capacities of local authorities and aligning with Albania's EU accession goals and the UN SDGs.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop a Comprehensive Sustainability Strategy in Preparation for a Potential Third "consolidation" Phase.
Recommendation 2: Strengthen collaboration and build synergies with EU initiatives
Recommendation 3: Focus on Unfinished Businesses and Support Left-Behind Municipalities.
Recommendation 4: Strengthen the Social Fund to Ensure Financial Sustainability of Social Care Services.
Recommendation 5: Strengthen Cross-Sectoral Collaboration for Holistic Support.
Recommendation 6: Strengthen the Role of NARUs in Social Service Delivery.
Recommendation 7: Continue Professionalizing the Social Care Workforce.
Recommendation 8: Strengthen the Role of Civil Society in Social Care Service Delivery.

1. Introduction and overview

This Evaluation Report builds on what was put forward in the ToR (Annex 1) and the Inception Report explaining the main aspects important for the assignment.

The purpose of evaluation was to provide an impartial review of the Project "Leave no One Behind in Albania, Phase II" in terms of its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability as well as the overall performance. The evaluation is being conducted at this stage to ensure the project remains aligned with its original objectives and goals, allowing for necessary course corrections to enhance its effectiveness and sustainability. The MTE has a formative nature and findings and recommendations generated by the evaluation should help to improve the programme's performance in the remaining phase.

The primary audience for this evaluation includes the programme's key stakeholders, such as donors, government institutions, CSOs, service providers, and UN agencies. The evaluation questions were selected to address the specific needs of key stakeholders. Focusing on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, these questions ensure the project meets its objectives and uses resources effectively. Additionally, the evaluation assesses the programme's adaptability, scalability, and its potential for sustainability to ensure it continues delivering benefits beyond the current phase.

The findings, lessons learned, and recommendations will be used by the LNB Programme and its partners to strengthen the implementation of the remaining phase or guide future interventions. By applying a participatory review approach, the report generates genuine feedback by all relevant stakeholders on the results achieved and change influenced by the programme. It also identifies priority areas and strategic interventions to inform the formulation of a potential next and exit phase, which would be a consolidation and sustainability phase, for the LNB2 programme.

To ensure clarity and consistency, this report uses key terms as defined by Albania's legislative framework and the LNB2 programme as working definitions. Social Services encompass a broad range of organized efforts to enhance societal well-being, focusing on health, education, housing, and community-based support. Social Care Services are a subset, providing tailored care and assistance for vulnerable individuals, such as children, elderly persons, and those with disabilities. Social Protection Services refer to economic measures aimed at reducing poverty and vulnerability, including cash transfers, pensions, and reintegration programmes. Finally, Social Inclusion represents the process of integrating marginalized groups into social and economic systems by removing barriers to participation. These definitions align with Albania's national legislation, including the Social Care Law and the National Social Protection Strategy. Detailed explanations can be found in the Glossary in Annex 11.

The Evaluation Report has eight chapters, executive summary and annexes. First five chapters are related to brief overview of the intervention evaluated, evaluation scope, objectives, approach and methodology. The core of the evaluation is in its last three chapters where findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned have been provided. While the executive summary provides an overview of key features the evaluation came across, the attached annexes

enclose additional information on the evaluation process and ease overall understanding of the Evaluation Report and the Project evaluated.

2. Description of the intervention

2.1 Overview of the programme and implementation context

The LNB2 programme is implemented by the UN Team in Albania through the modalities of the Delivering as One (DaO) mechanism, under the current Albania-United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022-2026. The programme is financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

The LNB2 programme is jointly implemented by four UN partner agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, UNFPA), in close partnership with relevant governmental bodies and civil society organisations (CSOs) at the central and local levels, with UNDP the lead UN agency for overall implementation and coordination of the programme. During Phase 1 & 2 of the programme – from June 2017 to May 2025 – SDC contributed to the programme at the amount of CHF 16.0 million. It is envisaged, subject to future decision-making considerations and outcomes that a third (and last) four-year phase of the LNB2 programme be undertaken, over the period 2025 to 2029, also financed by the SDC. The programme covers all of Albania by improving social service provision across all 61 municipalities, as well as at the central (system) level, however specific geographic focus is also maintained by reacting to specific needs and challenges in selected municipalities.

This evaluation concerns the LNB2 project, which is part of the United Nations support activities within the GoA- UN Sustainable Cooperation Framework 2022-2026 under GoA priority A: Human capital development and social inclusion, Outcome A and Output 1: Social protection systems and mechanisms are strengthened to increase the coverage, quality, and monitoring of cash benefit and social care services and housing for vulnerable groups. An overview of the projects under this output, closely linked to LNB, and their financing is presented in the Annex 9.

The overall goal of Outcome 1 under the UNSDCF is: "By 2026 there is increased and more equitable investment in people, removing barriers and creating opportunities for those at risk of exclusion" which coincide with the overall goal of LNB 2.

With regard to the global policy framework for international development, the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", and LNB2's contribution to supporting Albania's progress in achieving the SDGs, the LNB2 programme identifies linkages related to its contributing to SDGs 1-5 (no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality), to SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and to SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 16 (inclusive societies and institutions).

2.2 Development context

Albania has made notable progress in poverty reduction mainly driven by economic growth since the transition in the early 1990s. Despite these achievements, Albania continues to face significant challenges, especially in terms of regional disparities and social inequalities. Following the challenges of the 2019 earthquake, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a cost-of-living crisis, the government is now prioritizing full recovery, implementing structural reforms aimed at fostering

equitable growth, enhancing productivity, creating jobs, and improving governance. However, the benefits of the growth have not been evenly distributed, leading to persistent regional disparities. The upper-middle-income poverty rate remains high at 34.2%, indicating that a significant portion of the population still lives below the poverty line of $6.85 per day, according to the World Bank 2023.[1] A large segment of the population remains vulnerable, particularly those with low levels of education and employment instability. The disparities between urban and rural areas are pronounced, with rural populations facing greater challenges in accessing quality education and healthcare services. Vulnerable groups in Albania, particularly the elderly, children, and women, face significant challenges related to poverty and social exclusion. The demographic transition is expected to further increase the proportion of older adults living in poverty. In addition, vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptians, and children often experience barriers to accessing essential services.

In 2022, the percentage of persons 'at risk of poverty' in Albania was 20.6%, while the 'severe material deprivation' rate was 33.2%, and the 'at risk of poverty or social exclusion' rate was 41.6%.[2] In 2022, Albania recorded improvements in some aspects of material deprivation, but challenges remain for vulnerable populations. For instance, many households still struggle to afford unexpected expenses or maintain adequate living conditions. In 2022, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for individuals in households with dependent children was 24.4%, a slight decrease from 25.9% in 2021.[3] Additionally, rural-urban disparities persist, with poverty rates higher in remote areas than in urban centers. Albania's poverty profile has improved steadily in recent years, but progress remains uneven, and the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and previous natural disasters, such as the 2019 earthquake, have had a lasting impact on many households.

In 2022, the at-risk-of-poverty rate in Albania showed significant variation across age groups and genders, highlighting ongoing disparities. Among children (0-17 years), the rate stood at 27.4%, a slight improvement from 28.5% in 2021.[4] Within this group, gender disparities were evident, with boys at 26.3% and girls at 28.6%, indicating that girls face higher poverty risks. For adults (18-64 years), the at-risk-of-poverty rate decreased from 21.8% in 2021 to 20.2% in 2022, with men at 19.8% and women slightly higher at 20.5%, reflecting persistent gender inequalities. Among the elderly (65 years and over), the rate was 13.9%, with men at 13.0% and women at 14.7%, showing that elderly women are particularly vulnerable.[5] These figures underscore the need for targeted interventions to address poverty and reduce gender disparities across all age groups.

Albania's efforts to develop systems that provide social protection, employment opportunities, and inclusive education to populations at risk of poverty or social exclusion have encountered various challenges. These include limited coverage, inadequate mechanisms for ensuring inclusivity, and inefficiencies in resource allocation and technical implementation. In recent years, the Albanian government has introduced several key strategies and action plans aimed at reforming social protection and promoting social inclusion. Additionally, it has established a legal framework for the social protection system with the goal of delivering integrated social services that ensure the

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[1] Work Bank, available at https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/share-living-with-less-than-550-int--per-day?tab=chart&country=~ALB
[2] INSTAT. SILC 2022. Available at https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13064/silc-2022_final_anglisht_ezh.pdf
[3] INSTAT. SILC 2022. Available at https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13064/silc-2022_final_anglisht_ezh.pdf
[4] INSTAT. SILC 2022. Available at https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13064/silc-2022_final_anglisht_ezh.pdf
[5] INSTAT. SILC 2022. Available at https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13064/silc-2022_final_anglisht_ezh.pdf

inclusion of all vulnerable groups across the country. Substantial work remains to create a more equitable and effective system that ensures all citizens, especially vulnerable groups, have access to essential services and opportunities.

Key strategies and action plans adopted by the Government in regard to social protection and social inclusion policy include the: National Social Protection Strategy (2024-2030), Social Inclusion Policy Document (2022-2026), National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptians (2021-2025), National Action Plan on Elderly (2020-2024), National Action Plan for the LGBTI community (2021-2027), National Strategy for Social Housing (2015-2025), National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities (2021-2025), National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021-2030), National Action Plan for Drug Prevention, Treatment and Harm Reduction (2023 - 2026), National Action Plan on Sexual and Reproductive Health (2022 - 2030). Other key strategies and action plans related to social inclusion and protection include: National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 and its action plan; Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2023-2024; National Education Strategy 2021-2026; Health National Strategy 2021-2030; Intersectoral Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance 2023-2030 and its action plan 2023-2025.

The Law on Social Care Services, adopted in November 2016, laid the groundwork for establishing a locally based system of integrated social services in Albania, marking a significant advancement towards a modern social protection framework. This law delineates clear roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders at both central and local government levels regarding the provision and financing of social care services. The responsibilities of local government units (LGUs), established during the territorial reform in 2016, are articulated also within the context of the Intersectoral Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance 2023-2030. This updated strategy emphasizes enhancing local governance, improving service delivery, and promoting citizen engagement in decision-making processes.

Albania's ongoing fiscal and administrative decentralization has delegated essential public services, critical for reducing poverty and social exclusion, to both regional bodies and local governments. Regional bodies, such as those focused on employment and inclusive education, address broader, cross-municipal challenges, while local governments are responsible for the direct provision of social care services tailored to community-specific needs. This distinction highlights the need for clear coordination mechanisms between regional and local levels to prevent overlaps and ensure service integration. However, these shifts have introduced challenges related to limited fiscal autonomy and uneven administrative capacities. Local governments often face resource constraints in financing and managing decentralized services, while regional bodies may lack the necessary integration frameworks with municipalities. Addressing these issues requires innovative funding mechanisms, such as performance-based grants or public-private partnerships, and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen governance at both levels. Effective strategies are essential to ensure that decentralized services meet the needs of vulnerable populations and support Albania's broader social inclusion objectives.

The National Social Protection Strategy 2024-2030 builds on the lessons and good practices from the LNB project, aiming to strengthen the institutional framework for social protection and institutionalize effective approaches identified in the field. It emphasizes advancing the sustainability of the system through enhanced financing mechanisms, integrated service models,

and support for the deinstitutionalization (DI) reform.[6] The strategy complements these efforts by focusing on delivering integrated social services that address the needs of vulnerable populations, including children with disabilities, women at risk, and marginalized communities such as the Roma, while ensuring a robust and sustainable framework for long-term social inclusion.

Despite these advancements, government structures at both central and local levels often struggle to implement social policies effectively and meet the needs of marginalized groups, particularly Roma and Egyptian communities (R&E) and persons with disabilities (PWDs). Challenges such as limited resources, insufficient technical capacity, and fragmented service provision hinder progress. As Albania transitions from the initial rollout phase of its social protection reform to scaling up these efforts, enhancing knowledge management, resource allocation, and inter-municipal cooperation will be critical. Establishing robust funding mechanisms, such as the Social Fund launched in 2019, aims to support LGUs in developing essential social care services at the community level. While Albania has made significant strides in shaping its social protection system through legislative frameworks and strategic initiatives, ongoing challenges must be addressed to ensure that all citizens can access quality social care services effectively.

Between 2021 and 2023, Albania made significant strides in expanding its social care services, as evidenced by the 16% increase in the number of social care institutions and the 2.3-fold rise in services provided. In 2023, 391 institutions delivered 1,147 services to 36,642 beneficiaries, highlighting a substantial improvement in service availability. The role of non-public and hybrid institutions has grown, accounting for 46% of all services and serving a large proportion of the population.[7] This expansion demonstrates progress in increasing access to social services for vulnerable groups such as individuals in economic need, children with disabilities, and the elderly, particularly in regions like Tirana, Korça, and Shkodra.

Despite these advances, key challenges persist. The distribution of services remains uneven, with some municipalities—such as Libohova, Këlcyra, and Dropull—still lacking any social care provisions, as was the case in 2021. Vulnerable groups like youth in conflict with the law and victims of trafficking remain underserved, receiving only minimal support. Additionally, 22% of institutions remain unlicensed, and financial and staffing limitations continue to hinder the full realization of social care reforms, particularly at the local level.

The 2021 Mapping Social Services[8] report highlighted gaps in institutional capacities at the local government level, such as the lack of Child Protection Units (CPUs) and Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs), emphasizing the need for their establishment across municipalities. These gaps were seen as critical barriers to effective service provision for vulnerable groups. By 2023, the updated mapping report - 2023 Mapping Social Services - provided specific data, showing that these challenges remained, with 34% of LGUs still lacking CPUs and only 26%

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[6] DI is a social care reform process aimed at transitioning from a reliance on institutional care (such as large residential facilities) to more community-based, family-oriented, and person-centered care systems. It focuses on providing vulnerable groups, including children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, with care and support in environments that promote their integration into society rather than segregating them in institutions.

[7] UNDP. 2023. Mapping of Social Services in Albania. Available at https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/mapping-social-services-albania-0?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[8] UNDP. 2021. Mapping of Social Services in Albania. Available at https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/mapping-social-services-albania

having established NARUs.[9] Furthermore, 44% lacked monitoring systems for children at risk, showing that critical gaps remain. Similarly, only 28% of LGUs had monitoring systems for violations of minority rights, and just 21% had drafted plans for Roma and Egyptian integration. A more positive development is seen in the appointment of local gender equality coordinators, with 84% of LGUs having them in place by 2023. The comparison highlights that while there have been efforts to improve local governance and social services, many gaps persist. While all municipalities have local social plans, the monitoring of the plans is still not taking place regularly.

As of 2024, Albania's EU integration process is advancing, with the country actively working to align its policies and practices with European standards. The opening of accession negotiations in July 2022 marked a significant milestone, and since then, Albania has made notable progress in implementing reforms across various sectors, including governance, rule of law, and social protection. In July 2023, the European Commission submitted to the Council the screening report on Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, including benchmarks for opening accession negotiations on this cluster. The Second Intergovernmental Conference held on 15th October 2024 and Albania has now opened negotiations for the Cluster 1 – Fundamentals.[10] This is an opportune moment for the LNB 2 to increase mobilization of government partners in the area of social inclusion and social protection.

LNB 2 has actively contributed to creating synergies between Albania's social protection and inclusion agenda and the EU integration process. The program's two-fold strategic focus—strengthening social protection at the policy level while enhancing the rights of vulnerable groups at the local level—directly supports EU Acquis Chapter 19 (Social Policy and Employment) and Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights). Between August and December 2023, LNB 2 provided technical support to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) to prepare for discussions with the EU on these chapters, particularly in programme-relevant areas. This included identifying policy priorities related to social inclusion, obligations stemming from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and other human rights mechanisms. The finalization of the pre-screening process provided a foundation to assess progress on Albania's social protection legislation, policies, and institutional reforms. The programme supported the integration of recommendations from the screening process into the new National Social Protection Strategy. These efforts position LNB2 as a critical contributor to Albania's alignment with EU standards on social protection and inclusion.

2.3   Programme description and strategy

The LNB2 programme interventions are all designed to support the implementation of Albanian policies and strategies relevant for the social inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups of people of all genders. Reflective of the increased levels of vulnerability to social exclusion of PWDs, and the R&E communities, the programme provides specific focuses to supporting these persons as its target group.
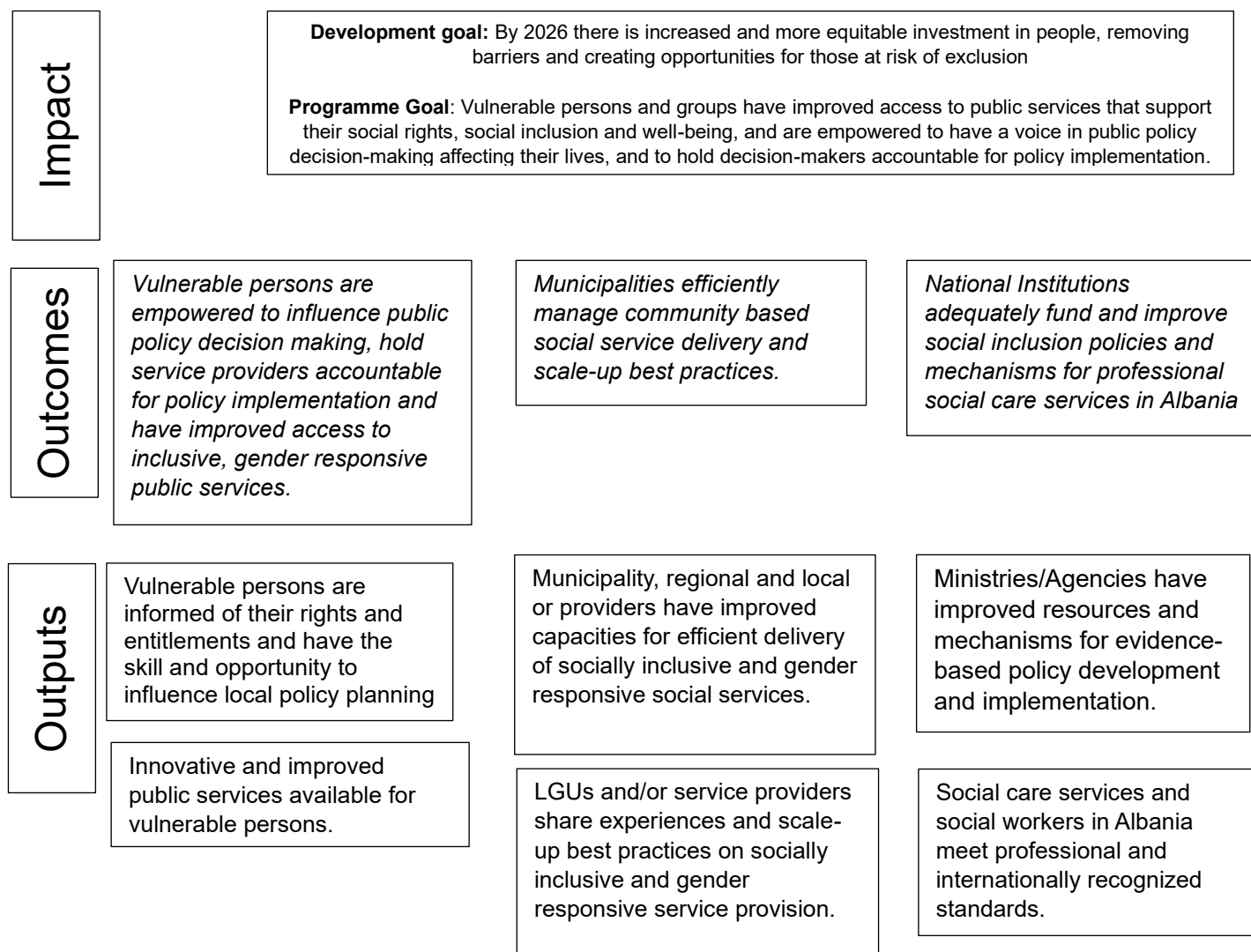
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[9] UNDP. 2023. Mapping of Social Services in Albania. Available at https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/mapping-social-services-albania-0?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[10] Council of the European Union. 2024. Second Accession Conference with Albania, 15 October 2024. Available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-ministerial-meetings/2024/10/15/

The LNB2 programme adopts a systemic approach and supports the strengthening of the country's social services system and the promotion of social inclusion. LNB2 operates at micro level (vulnerable groups and CSOs), at meso level (LGUs and CSOs) and national level (central government and national institutions). The programme covers the whole of Albania, supporting the country's 61 municipalities and building the capacity needed to establish, monitor and finance an appropriate framework of social policies and strategies.

Intervention logic of the programme[11]

Impact

> **Development goal:** By 2026 there is increased and more equitable investment in people, removing barriers and creating opportunities for those at risk of exclusion
>
> **Programme Goal**: Vulnerable persons and groups have improved access to public services that support their social rights, social inclusion and well-being, and are empowered to have a voice in public policy decision-making affecting their lives, and to hold decision-makers accountable for policy implementation.

Outcomes

Vulnerable persons are empowered to influence public policy decision making, hold service providers accountable for policy implementation and have improved access to inclusive, gender responsive public services.	*Municipalities efficiently manage community based social service delivery and scale-up best practices.*	*National Institutions adequately fund and improve social inclusion policies and mechanisms for professional social care services in Albania*

Outputs

Vulnerable persons are informed of their rights and entitlements and have the skill and opportunity to influence local policy planning	Municipality, regional and local or providers have improved capacities for efficient delivery of socially inclusive and gender responsive social services.	Ministries/Agencies have improved resources and mechanisms for evidence-based policy development and implementation.
Innovative and improved public services available for vulnerable persons.	LGUs and/or service providers share experiences and scale-up best practices on socially inclusive and gender responsive service provision.	Social care services and social workers in Albania meet professional and internationally recognized standards.

Cross-cutting issues: governance and gender equality

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[11] Based on the simplified log frame approved by the Steering Committee (Jan 22)

The programme's overall goal (impact) is to bring about system change in the field of social protection and social inclusion in Albania via the provision of quality integrated social services, with a particular emphasis on social services reaching vulnerable persons and disadvantaged groups. The programme's intervention is closely correlated to national reforms regarding social protection and inclusion, and the wider framework for human capital and social development. The national policy framework is defined in a range of significant strategies and action plans in regard to the priorities for poverty alleviation, social protection reform and the promotion of social inclusion.

Since service delivery is realized mostly at local level, LNB2's intervention focuses on the local level. Two of the three outcomes reflect this thrust – by empowering the beneficiaries in need of measures for their access to public services (outcome 1), and by capacitating municipalities and the service providers to provide and scale up services (outcome 2). The third outcome reflects the need to ensure the anchoring of LNB2's interventions at system level; it is to contribute to the further development and implementation of policies relevant for social inclusion, including their funding.

The project delivery is mainly through Capacity Building (mainly training for staff of LGUs, CSOs) and Organisational Development (support to strengthen the institutional capacities of partner organisations); supported by continuous "Policy Dialogue" with key partners and other actors. A "Grant Scheme" is also provided to Municipalities complementing and supporting the implementation of the Social Fund provided by the central government in order to introduce innovative social services that draw on community mobilisation, and for the rehabilitation of social services facilities. LNB2 provided grants to 22 municipalities for 27 social service projects. These grants helped to establish new or expand existing community-based services, benefitting over 4,110 individuals. These services primarily target vulnerable groups, aiming to improve their access to social care services and enhance their social inclusion.

The project is thus providing support at national (system) level, municipal level and community level, supporting the design / planning / monitoring and funding of social policies, promoting capacity and institutional development of partners, including advocacy capacities of CSOs.

The main types of activities are:

- Facilitate participatory policy influencing processes focusing on strengthening the voice of target groups in policy processes that affect them.
- Support the elaboration of innovative models for outreach services to most vulnerable populations.
- Support participatory gender responsive budgeting at municipal level.
- Building capacities for inclusive education.
- Strengthen the capacities of service providers to respond to the specific needs of the vulnerable individuals.
- Support integrated social services model for target population (children, older person).
- Fund innovative services at local level to support the implementation of the social fund.
- Support municipalities to establish new models of social care services for vulnerable groups.

- Improve the method for the development of Social Care Plans and establish a mentoring support system for LGUs to develop Social Care Plans.
- Strengthen capacities of municipal service providers on specific working methods for target groups, on data collection and use of statistics.
- Support networking and exchange of experience among social service providers.
- Support with technical expertise and evidence the drafting of relevant laws, policies, strategies and related action plans.
- Support the policy dialogue and build capacities at different levels on monitoring of health and social indicators with a focus on vulnerable groups.
- Support key institutional actors to build professional capacities for social care workers.
- Creating learning resources, training teacher network leaders and strengthening the capacities of assistant teachers who are serving children with disabilities, vulnerable children and families in need across Albania.
- Equip assistant teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge; on improving curricula and integrating gender equality principles across academic programmes, ensuring that future professionals are well-prepared to provide inclusive education.
- Enhance curricula for social work and psychology students, design tailored continuous training for in-service social workers, improve student internships, and strengthening ethical standards in scientific research of Social Sciences Faculties of the Universities of Tirana, Shkodra, and Elbasan, with support from Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts.
- Support the implementation of a Community-Based Healthcare Model.

2.4   LNB2 programme budget –overview

The budget for the LNB Phase 2 programme is allocated across key outcomes and fees as follows: Outcome 1 receives the largest share with 4,030,000 CHF, focusing on empowering vulnerable populations to access social services. Outcome 2 is allocated 1,715,000 CHF, aimed at strengthening municipalities' capacity to manage social services. Outcome 3 has 1,662,407 CHF, dedicated to supporting national institutions in implementing social inclusion policies. Additionally, 74,074 CHF is set aside for administrative fees, and 518,518 CHF is allocated for management fees.

Figure 1: Budget breakdown by outcome.
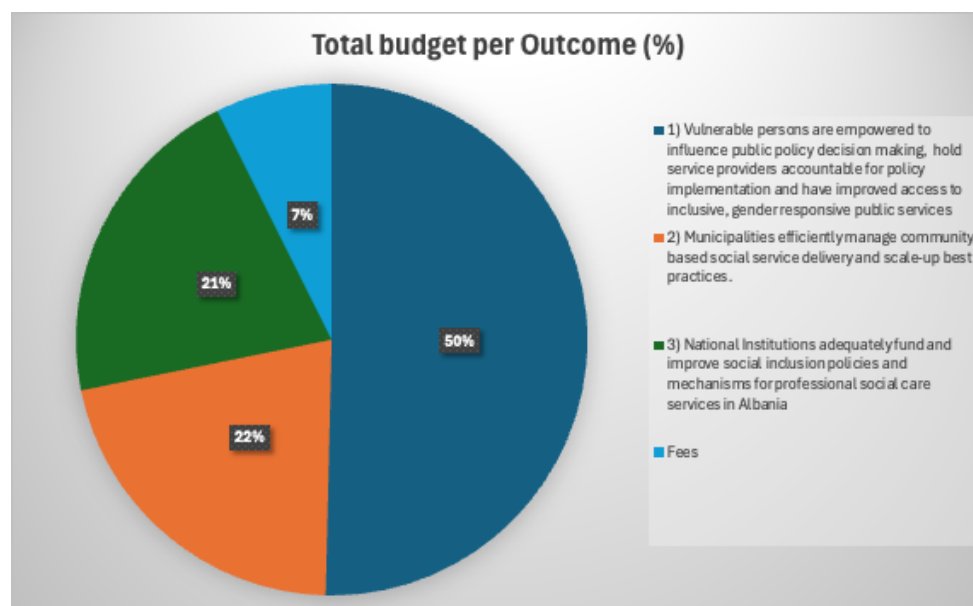
The LNB Phase 2 programme budget is distributed among the implementing agencies as follows: UNDP receives the largest share with 5,300,779 CHF, followed by UNICEF with 1,500,000 CHF. UN Women (UNW) is allocated 788,940 CHF, while UNFPA receives 410,280 CHF.

2.5   Implementation setup

LNB2 is a Joint UN Project implemented by four UN partner agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and UNFPA), in close partnership with relevant governmental bodies and CSOs. UNDP is the leading UN agency for overall implementation and coordination of the programme. Each participating UN agency implements activities and outputs, in line with their mandate and expertise, as defined and agreed in the respective joint work plans. In addition to the involvement of the UN partner agencies, the local CSO "Ndihmë për fëmijët" (NPF) – "Help for Children Foundation" – has been engaged by the UNDP as an implementing partner for the delivery of specific actions (regarding Integrated Social Services Model) under LNB2.

The project management structure for the LNB2 programme consists of a Steering Committee (SC) to oversee and coordinate the operations of this intervention, plus a Technical Committee (TC) to ensure a coordinated approach in the implementation of the programme. The SC oversees and coordinates the operations of the programme. Based on the programme's initial plan and budget as well as on monitoring data, the SC oversees the programme's implementation and takes strategic decisions. It provides policy guidance and recommendation regarding the programme strategy and objectives, receives, and comment annual reports, approves annual plans of operation and reports. The SC meet once a year, and upon necessity.

The SC is composed of SDC representative, the UN Resident Coordinator, senior representatives of the participating UN agencies, senior representative of the MoHSP, senior representatives from other selected ministries (MES, MFE), selected LGUs representatives benefiting from the

programme, and at least two representatives of civil society organizations. The SC invite WB and EU representatives with the status of observers for building synergies of the interventions in the area of social inclusion. The SC is co-chaired by SDC, MHSP and UN Resident Coordinator senior representatives. The procedural change for the steering committee meeting is changed. The co-chairs of the Steering Committee, along with the heads of the participating UN Agencies, convene at the conclusion of the session to reflect on the Steering Committee discussions and submitted documents, and to make decisions regarding the Annual Report and Annual Work Plan. Therefore, the current structure of the Steering Committee emphasizes a stronger decision-making role.

To ensure a coordinated approach in implementation of the programme a Technical Committee (TC) is established, consisting technical experts of the participating agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNWOMEN and UNFPA). Its main mandate is to guide implementation of the programme, to coordinate the practical implementation of programme interventions by the UN agencies and to ensure that results are delivered timely and efficiently delivered. The LNB2 programme itself is managed by a dedicated project team of experts responsible to coordinate the implementation, monitoring and reporting of all the programme components.

2.6   *Main stakeholders and target groups*

The main stakeholder partners and direct beneficiaries of the LNB2 programme include:

- Government of Albania: primarily the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES), the Ministry of Finances and Economy (MFE) and from September 2023 Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation and then Ministry of Finance, the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), and the State Social Service (SSS), the Faculties of Social Sciences, the Orders of Professionals.
- Local Governmental Units (LGUs): while a range of programme actions are focused in specific LGUs, all 61 LGUs in Albania are partners and beneficiaries of the programme (e.g. via training actions, sharing of good practice, and local policies development) to implement activities linked to their responsibility for social service provision and coordination with other local authorities.
- Social service providers: public and CSO social service providers supported by LNB2.
- CSOs: at national and local level representing the interests of different vulnerable and marginalised groups, via advocacy, lobbying, networking, and awareness raising actions promoting social inclusion and social services at the national and/or local level. Some CSOs and NGOs also specialize in providing specific services to meet the unique needs of certain categories of vulnerable people[12].

The principal target group(s) of final-users, direct or indirect, of the LNB2 programme include:

- Marginalised and vulnerable families, women and men, children/ youth including young key population, elderly,
- persons with disabilities (PWDs), and Roma and Egyptians (R&E) across Albania.

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[12] The distinction between advocacy CSOs/NGOs and service CSOs/NGOs is not clear-cut, and a number of these organizations are engaged in both activities.

These target groups are reached via municipalities' social services departments and CSOs providing social services and representing the interest of the marginalised and vulnerable. While a focus is put on PWDs and R&E, a wider circle of marginalized and vulnerable groups also receives special attention and more broadly, the final beneficiaries of LNB2 are all citizens/ residents in Albania whom indirectly benefit via the existence of a strengthened system for social service provision and support.

3. Evaluation scope and objectives

The purpose of the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) is to provide an independent analysis of progress midway through the implementation of Joint Programme (JP) LNB phase 2 (2021-2025), to assess and present the results of the programme, including an assessment of how the results have contributed to social services improvement in Albania. This exercise will assess the performance across all programme areas during the first three years (August 1, 2021 - June 30, 2024) of implementation (backward-looking) and update the theory of change if necessary. The MTE assesses lessons learnt and early signs of programme successes and/or failures and reviews the progress and potential risks to the sustainability of its interventions. It also includes planned approaches for the remaining programme implementation and strategic positioning for long-term support (forward-looking).

The MTE evaluates programme successes and shortcomings to identify necessary changes for achieving intended results, including gender equality and women's rights advancement. The MTE also reviews the programme progress, and potential risks to the sustainability of its interventions. Overall, the MTE has a formative nature, aiming to improve the programme's performance in the remaining phase. It also identifies priority areas and strategic interventions to inform the formulation of a potential next and phase, which would be a consolidation phase, for the LNB2 programme. In this perspective, a particular emphasis has been put on the sustainability of the achieved results.

The detailed scope and objectives of the MTE is defined in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the assignment – see Annex 1 – and specifically so in the context of the evaluation questions (EQs) that form the framework for the research undertaken and the analysis presented. The set of EQs is detailed in the context of the Evaluation Matrix for the MTE – see Annex 3.

The Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) has examined the following criteria based on the OECD/DAC evaluation guidelines:

- Relevance: Evaluates the alignment of the development intervention's objectives with national and local policies, the priorities and needs of intended beneficiaries, as well as the policies of partners and donors.
- Effectiveness: Assesses the extent to which results at various levels, including outcomes, have been achieved according to the planned activities.
- Efficiency: Analyses how well and productively the programme has utilized its resources to achieve the defined goals.

- Sustainability: Reviews evidence of how likely the programme's results are to be sustained beyond its duration at both the community and government levels, and provides recommendations to enhance sustainability.

While a full impact assessment could not be conducted at this stage of implementation, the MTE identifies changes attributable to the programme intervention thus far.

Additionally, the MTE addressed several cross-cutting issues, including gender equality and human rights, contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and support for inclusive development that empowers the most disadvantaged populations.

4. Evaluation approach and methods

The overall approach and methodology of the MTE follows the relevant guidance provided in the "UNDP Evaluation Guidelines" (2021), plus the requirements specified in the MTR's ToR. The MTE was conducted by an International Consultant (Team Leader) and a National Consultant (Team Specialist) and included the following approaches, methods, and activities:

- The MTE is an evidence-based assessment, founded on a collaborative/ participatory approach in terms of its engagement with the diverse range of programme partners: institutions and individuals that have been involved in the design, or the implementation, and/or supervision of the programme, at central (national), municipal and local levels. In addition to government (national and municipal) and donor partners, this also involved consultations with local social service-providers, civil society advocates, and final-users.
- The MTE builds upon: (a) the review of relevant sources of programme information (e.g. project document, progress reports, key studies), and the review of available country/ local context documents and statistical sources – see Annex 6 for a list of key documentation; (b) semi-structured interviews conducted with key informant persons and via Focus Group Discussions with key partners/ stakeholders undertaken during the field mission and site-visits – see Annex 2 for a summary of the field phase itinerary and Annex 5 for the list of partners interviewed/ consulted for their feedback; (c) the detailed assessment of the programme's progress versus the results framework.
- The main field mission phase consultations were undertaken between 9-16 July 2024, to conduct interviews/ Focus Group Discussions, and also to undertake site-visits to municipalities. During this period 23 meetings, interviews, FGD were held. The national consultant made further site visits before and after the visit of the international consultant and in total site visits took place in 11 municipalities (Shijak, Durres/Sukth, Tirana, Pogradec, Maliq, Korca, Lushnje, Patos, Kruja, Bulqiza, Dibra).
- The evaluation team presented a 'Debriefing' of the preliminary findings/ achievements, risks, issues and priorities for the current and next LNB2 phase, at UN in Albania, on 15/07/2024.

Linked to each of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, and specific horizontal issues, the MTE provides conclusions, lessons learnt, and recommendations linked to a set of specified evaluation questions (EQs): 3 EQs linked to sustainability, 5 EQs linked to effectiveness, 2 EQs linked to relevance, 2 EQs linked to efficiency, and 3 EQs linked to horizontal issues. Each EQ was broken

down into several sub-questions to guide the investigation during document review, interviews, group discussions or observations. The specific EQs and sub-questions are detailed in the Evaluation Matrix Annex 3. The Evaluation Matrix also sets out the sources of information, and methodology for data-collection and analysis per EQ. To ensure inclusion, accuracy and credibility, a diverse range of data sources and processes have been employed to allow for triangulation and validation. The methodology employs a combination of established data collection techniques and analytical tools, including documentation review of primary and secondary sources, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, stakeholder analysis, results analysis, and final beneficiary interviews. This approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods, utilizing triangulation extensively to consolidate insights effectively.

The Draft Evaluation (MTE) Report is submitted to the UNDP for its review of the validity of the MTE's factual, technical, and evidence-based assessment. It will subsequently be shared by the UNDP with the four JP PUNOs delegated programme staff, the donor, SDC to obtain their feedback on the Draft Evaluation (MTE) Report. Based on the 'comments' received from all on the Draft, a detailed "Audit" of the process of 'comments treatment' will be provided to UNDP, alongside the preparation and submission of the Final MTE Report.

5. Data analysis

The data analysis procedures for the MTE of the LNB2 programme followed a systematic, multi-phase approach designed to thoroughly address the evaluation questions and provide accurate, evidence-based findings.

5.1 Data Collection and Inception Phase

The data collection process for the evaluation began with an Inception Phase, which involved an extensive review of core programme documents. This review included documents such as the LNB2 Project Document, LNB2 Annual and Semi-Annual Reports, briefs about municipalities, key national strategies and policy documents related to social inclusion and social protection, and key publications produced by the LNB2 programme. In addition to document reviews, the evaluators conducted an initial online briefing meeting with the LNB2 Programme Coordinator, which helped to clarify the field mission plan (Annex 2) and resources needed. Meetings were also held between the International Consultant (IC) and National Consultant (NC) to establish a coherent approach based on the Terms of Reference (ToRs) in Annex 1.

Based on the comprehensive review of these documents and consultations, the evaluators developed an Evaluation Matrix (Annex 3). This matrix mapped the evaluation questions to specific data sources and outlined the methodologies to be used for gathering and analyzing the required information. The matrix provided a clear framework to guide the evaluation and ensure that all relevant areas were covered systematically. Additionally, the matrix informed the development of the Inception Report, which served as a foundational document for the entire evaluation process, outlining the approach, tools, and timeline for the field visits and stakeholder engagement.

5.2 Field phase and data gathering

The Field Phase (9 July – 16 July 2024 see Annex 2) was the central component of the data collection process for the evaluation. This phase involved an extensive combination of key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and site visits, conducted across 11 municipalities. The objective was to gather a wide range of perspectives from various stakeholders, including central and local government officials, LNB2 team, civil society organizations, project partners, donors, social service providers, and beneficiaries, ensuring the collection of multi-dimensional data. In total, 38 individuals were engaged through interviews and meetings. In addition, 2 focus group discussions were organized involving 12 CSOs and service providers. Additionally, interviews were conducted with 18 individuals from local government units (LGUs), community centers, and other relevant local stakeholders, while approximately 50 beneficiaries (including parents, children, elderly, people with disabilities, and members of the Roma and Egyptian communities) were also interviewed to capture their experiences and perspectives. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the programme's performance from the grassroots level to higher-level governance structures.

The evaluation team made concerted efforts to create an enabling environment for participation, adopting confidentiality measures to ensure that respondents felt comfortable sharing candid feedback. This approach facilitated the gathering of qualitative insights that would be critical for the subsequent data analysis. In addition to capturing facts, knowledge, and experiences, the field phase also emphasized the importance of recording perceptions, critical reflections, and attitudes from both beneficiaries and implementing partners.

From a data analysis perspective, the evaluation process followed a systematic approach to ensure accuracy and reliability of the findings. On 15 July 2024, the evaluators presented the preliminary findings in a debriefing session to the LNB2 JP technical committee, where key lessons, challenges, and initial recommendations were shared. This early feedback session enabled the evaluators to adjust and refine their data analysis based on real-time input, ensuring alignment with the programme's strategic objectives. A similar debriefing session was conducted with SDC, including the Ambassador and Programme Officer, on 17 September 2024, allowing further high-level insights to be incorporated into the ongoing analysis.

During the Synthesis Phase (23 August – 30 September 2024), the data collected from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and site visits were carefully triangulated with secondary data and programme documentation. This phase involved consolidating data from various sources to validate and cross-check the information, ensuring that any emerging patterns or discrepancies were thoroughly examined. Additional consultations were carried out with programme stakeholders to confirm the validity of the findings. The Draft Report was submitted on 7 October 2024 for review.

In the upcoming Commentary Phase (October 2024), the four LNB2 JP PUNOs will provide feedback on the draft. The evaluators will incorporate these comments, ensuring that all insights

are addressed before finalizing the report. This iterative process ensures that the final analysis is robust, reflects multiple perspectives, and addresses any potential data gaps or limitations.

5.3 Analytical steps and addressing evaluation questions

To address the evaluation questions, a structured analytical approach was followed, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate interpretation of the data. The data were triangulated through several key steps:

Data Validation: Information gathered through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and site visits was systematically cross-checked with programme documentation, quantitative data from reports, and official statistics. After each meeting or interview, detailed notes were kept and transcribed to maintain a clear record of the discussions. If additional information or clarifications were required, follow-up meetings or consultations were conducted. This thorough process of cross-referencing and validation allowed the evaluators to identify patterns, align findings, and address any discrepancies across data sources, enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the conclusions.

Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis: A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to analyze the data. Quantitative data, such as social service coverage rates, budget allocations, and the number of beneficiaries, were compared against programme targets and key indicators (See Annex 7 Progress Towards Results). These quantitative findings were enriched by qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups, which provided in-depth perspectives on the programme's impact and relevance (see Annex 5 and Annex 6). This dual approach enabled the evaluators to measure outcomes objectively while also capturing the personal experiences and reflections of various stakeholders.

Disaggregation of Results: To assess the programme's inclusivity and effectiveness in reaching vulnerable groups, data were systematically disaggregated by gender, social group, and geographical area. This disaggregation allowed the evaluation to examine the programme's success in addressing the needs of specific target groups, such as women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and the Roma and Egyptian (R&E) communities, other. Additionally, it helped identify any disparities in service delivery or outcomes across municipalities, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the programme's reach and equity in its interventions (See Annex 7 Progress Towards Results).

The appropriateness of the analysis was guided by the evaluation matrix, which ensured that each evaluation question was addressed through a combination of documentary review, quantitative analysis, and qualitative feedback. For instance, relevance was assessed by comparing the programme's objectives with the priorities outlined in national policy frameworks,

stakeholder feedback, and the evolving social protection needs of vulnerable groups. Effectiveness was measured by analysing programme outputs and outcomes against planned activities, using data on service provision, stakeholder feedback, and field observations. Similarly, sustainability was evaluated by examining the programme's support for institutional capacity building, the integration of social services, and financial sustainability, with contributions from local governments and national institutions. This comprehensive approach ensured that the analysis was aligned with the programme's objectives and the broader context of Albania's social protection landscape.

Overall, no major weaknesses were identified that would compromise the evaluation's accuracy or outcomes.

6. Findings and Analysis

6.1 Relevance

Relevance
How relevant and valid is the programme in the current context, considering its alignment with the Government of Albania's policies, UN and donor policies, the needs of main stakeholders, and its contribution to the SDGs, particularly the principle of "Leave No One Behind"?
How internally consistent are the programme's activities and outputs with the expected impact?
Evaluation questions
 • To what extent are the objectives of the programme still valid? • To what extent is the programme aligned with the policies and strategies of the country, Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs) in the program and donors? • How relevant is the programme to target groups', including central and local governments', needs and priorities? • How relevant is the programme to other key stakeholders' (executing agencies, partner organizations, including other UN agencies, NGOs etc.) needs and priorities? • To what extent is the program contributing to country system development? • To what extent was the programme's contribution relevant in the context of the SDGs, with a particular focus on the principle of "leaving no one behind"? • Are the activities and outputs of the programme consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives? • Are the activities and outputs of the programme consistent with the intended impacts and effects?

6.1.1 Project design

The relevance of the programme and the quality of the design of the action is rated as highly satisfactory.

Albania has made important progress in terms of reducing poverty and inequalities in the last decades, it has also set important milestones as basis of a well-functioning social protection system. LNB2 has built on the achievements of previous programmes and efforts supporting the government in establishing a solid policy framework for social inclusion and social protection. Building on- and strengthening the results of Phase 1, LNB 2 focuses on the consolidation of the roll-out of the social protection and social care reform process: full implementation of the Law on Social Care Services, including capacity building, organizational development at the central level

and further development of policies, strategies, regulatory frameworks and funding mechanisms for decentralized social service delivery.

LNB 2's objectives are fully aligned with human development priorities of the UN, EU and World Bank, their collaboration is fundamental and complementary to deliver on shared priorities, including the 2030 Agenda and the EU accession pathway of Albania. The project is designed to support Albania's national social inclusion objectives by strengthening mechanisms and frameworks at both national and local levels, aligning with the National Strategy for Development and European Integration 2022-2030 (NSDEI) and sectoral strategies related to social protection. A key focus is on promoting social inclusion, improving local governance, and reinforcing national frameworks for social care services, which directly supports the country's preparations for EU membership. Following the territorial reform, the Albanian government has decentralized the responsibility for social care services to municipalities. In this context, the project helps municipalities develop and extend social care services, building local capacity to deliver these services to marginalized groups.

Over the past decade, Albania has emphasized public sector reforms aimed at enhancing service delivery, with a significant milestone being its attainment of EU candidate status in June 2014. Progress in EU membership is contingent on further reforms, particularly in public administration and the judiciary, aligning closely with the government's European Integration priorities. Ensuring quality and inclusive public services at the local level is crucial for guaranteeing women's rights and access to basic social rights for vulnerable groups. The government's citizen-centric approach seeks to improve service access and quality, strengthen the rule of law, combat corruption, and align with global initiatives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The project, in this broader reform context, plays a vital role in supporting Albania's efforts to meet these objectives, especially in social care services.

Further, the latest census results provide a strong rationale for increased investment and reform in social protection programmes, and therefore provide further validation of the project's objectives.

Over the past decade Albanians have seen impressive gains in life expectancy, education, and parliamentary representation of women. Albania's economy grew by over 2% per year, led by the services sector, especially tourism, agriculture, industry and construction. Despite this progress, at-risk of poverty rate in Albania, in 2022, was 20.6 % (SILC2022). The country is ageing quickly with low birth rates and high out-migration contributing to negative population growth. These have multiple effects upon the economy and social care. Out-migration and mismatch between education and market needs create labour force challenges that have the potential to weaken pensions and the health insurance system. European integration is a main driver of reform in the country and a shared political and public priority.

Table 1: Planned chain of results for Outcome 1

Activities	Outputs	Outcome
Their rights and the services they are entitled to are communicated to marginalized and vulnerable persons and groups.	*Marginalized and vulnerable persons and groups of all genders throughout Albania and selected municipalities are informed/ aware*	Vulnerable population requests and receives

Existing CSOs supporting marginalized and vulnerable groups are supported.	*of their rights and entitlements about accessing social care and support services and are empowered to exercise their rights and entitlements and/or supported in their access to social services.*	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.
Models of tested inclusive services provision implemented at local level. Support to selected municipalities for establishment of innovative social services delivery. Projects are supported for new innovative services at local level. Local mechanisms are strengthened and scaled up in selected municipalities	*Roma, Egyptians, and persons with disabilities throughout Albania and in selected municipalities are supported to access social services.* (LNB2 key target groups)	

Table 2: Planned chain of results for Outcome 2

Activities	**Outputs**	**Outcome**
The structures and mechanisms of social service provision at municipal level are supported in their organizational development. The staff of municipal social service providers are supported through capacity development.	*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.*	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.
Mechanisms are established and operational for knowledge learning/ sharing among municipalities regarding the management of or the provision of social services. Periodic presentations are provided (by university partners, professional associations), for knowledge learning by municipalities regarding emerging academic research and analysis in the field of social work/ social services, and about the development of the national policy framework	*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.*	

Table 3: Planned chain of results for Outcome 3

Activities	**Outputs**	**Outcome**
MHSP, MOES, MFE, and SSS supported in the development of and in implementing their social inclusion legal, policy, and regulatory frameworks. MHSP supported in the further development of the Social Fund to promote/ expand/ scale	*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*	National institutions efficiently and effectively implement their policy framework for

up social care services targeted to vulnerable groups. MHSP, MOES, MFE, SSS, and INSTAT supported in the development of and in implementing social inclusion policy and strategy monitoring mechanisms. MHSP (and MFE), in cooperation with SSS and SILSS, supported in the development of and in implementing social service quality inspection and monitoring systems	*evaluation (and reporting) systems to guide evidence-based policy and strategic decision-making.*	ensuring social inclusion and adequately fund gender responsive social services through improved policy monitoring and evaluation
Professional associations (Orders), Universities, ASCAP supported in development of the continuing education/ qualification system, training curricula and standards. National capacities are built, in partnership with ASPA and other training partners, for the development, implementation, and monitoring of social inclusion policies/strategies.	*Further development of the educational/ continuing education, training-provision and qualifications system, to ensure workforce professionalization is supported*	systems, updated quality professional standards and empowered citizens and sustainable financing mechanisms.

The result chain is coherent and the activities, outputs and outcomes consistently contributing to the overall goal. At micro level, the project is working on both the demand and the supply side. This includes both, empowering vulnerable persons by making them aware of their rights and on the offer of social care services on one hand and developing the social care offer and capacities of the service providers on the right holder side. This approach, which was followed during the first two phases of the project, is beginning to have an observable impact on the ground. Demand, which was initially non-existent, is now observable. At municipal and national level, capacity development and organizational development activities are consistently linked with support to policy development / implementation / monitoring and funding.

While LNB (Phase 1) was focused on supporting partners during the initial phase of roll-out of the social inclusion and social care reform measures, the focus of LNB (Phase 2) is on the consolidation of the reform roll-out, strengthening/building on the results achieved in Phase 1.

Outputs 1.1 and 2.2 target all 61 Albanian municipalities and are to benefit all marginalized and vulnerable groups of persons, as well as state administrative units and services and specialized CSOs providing services for marginalized and vulnerable groups of persons. Output 3.1 targets national authorities and output 3.2 professional public-oriented partners (e.g. Orders, universities), to benefit all marginalized and vulnerable groups of persons. As LNB (Phase 1) partially followed a geographic focus to concentrate the actions targeted to PWDs and R&E[13], LNB (Phase 2) has continued consolidating its existing partnerships (existing 25 LGUs, and 7 new via tailored capacity building measures, pilot test mechanisms) and securing long-term sustainability of the results of the partnerships. As certain, notably smaller and/or rural LGUs, are at risk of being left behind, as too complex to support or overseen within the wider process of reform, a small number of them have been supported to become active player.

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[13] In Albania, the Roma population in majority is concentrated in a limited number of municipalities

Further, the EU's assistance for social inclusion measures at the local level, the recently lounged programme EU for social care targets 14 Municipalities. While LNB (Phase 2) continues to provide requested support to its existing partner LGUs that have also been prioritized by the EU, the programme isn't extending its geographic focus to new LGUs that are covered by EU.

The intervention objectives and implementation strategy of the LNB2 programme remain valid.

6.1.2 Alignment with national policies, need and priorities

As described above, the LNB2 programme is supporting the country system at different levels to improve the social inclusion and better respond to the needs of most vulnerable groups of population. The programme is thus closely aligned with national policies, needs and priorities linked to the promotion of social inclusion and the reduction of the number of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The LNB2 programme specifically focuses on the strengthening of social care service provision, as part of the wider development of the social protection system in Albania.

As evidenced in by the World bank, reforming social protection systems has become more important recently due to various global crises[14], drawing attention to this unfinished agenda in the Western Balkans countries. This is particularly the case in Albania still suffering from the impact of Covid 19.

The LNB2 programme continues to be highly relevant to the needs and priorities of social service and social inclusion policy partners at national and local levels, including central and local governments (LGUs), social service providers, health and education deconcentrated services at local level and civil society partners. The LNB2 programme is providing vital support to the different partners in the process of roll-out of significant social care reforms in Albania, including integrated social services.

The LNB2 programme specifically supports the implementation of the following key national strategies and frameworks:

- National Social Protection Strategy (2024–2030): The programme contributes directly to this strategy's goal of ensuring accessible, gender-sensitive, and inclusive social care services. By enabling municipalities to develop and operationalize social care plans, LNB2 addresses gaps in service provision for vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities, the elderly, and marginalized women.
- National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030): LNB2 integrates gender-sensitive principles into its activities, including gender-responsive budgeting processes and targeted support for marginalized women, such as Roma and Egyptian women. This supports the national commitment to achieving gender equality and addressing intersectional vulnerabilities.
- National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptians (2021–2025): The programme aligns with this plan by improving access to education, employment, and social services for Roma

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[14] *Advancing Social Protection in the Western Balkans: Opportunities for Reform"* (WB:2023).

and Egyptian communities. Specific initiatives include vocational training and literacy programmes tailored to these groups.

▪ National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities (2021–2025): LNB2 has contributed to disability-inclusive reforms, including the roll-out of bio-psychosocial assessments and targeted interventions for children with disabilities.

▪ National Action Plan on Elderly (2020–2024): The programme supports aging population policies by helping municipalities incorporate elderly-focused services into their social care plans and piloting initiatives such as home-based care.

▪ Intersectoral Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance (2023–2030): LNB2 enhances local governance by building the capacities of LGUs to manage and deliver inclusive social services. This effort aligns with the decentralization strategy's goals of promoting citizen engagement and equitable service provision at the municipal level.

The programme's relevance has been validated through interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including national policymakers, LGU representatives, social service providers, and civil society organizations. Beneficiaries consistently expressed strong support for the LNB2 programme's goals and approaches, noting its effectiveness in addressing Albania's pressing needs in social inclusion and poverty reduction. Stakeholders emphasized that the programme's alignment with both local priorities and national strategies has been instrumental in advancing social care reforms and fostering sustainable development outcomes.

Furthermore, the programme aligns strongly not only with Albania's national social inclusion priorities but also with Albania's commitments to global and regional normative frameworks. These include the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)[15] and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)[16], which emphasize gender equality and the rights of vulnerable groups. Additionally, the programme contributes to Albania's adherence to the Istanbul Convention[17] on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and the associated monitoring report by GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence)[18].

From an EU integration perspective, the programme's focus on social protection and inclusion aligns with the requirements of the EU Acquis, particularly Chapters 19 (Social Policy and Employment) and 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights). The alignment with the EU Gender Acquis ensures that gender-sensitive reforms are embedded into national policies and frameworks. These commitments position the LNB2 programme as a contributor to the social services reforms that support Albania's progress toward EU accession and fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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[15] More https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/
[16] More https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf
[17] More https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention
[18] More https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio

6.2 Effectiveness

Effectiveness
To what extent have the expected outputs, outcomes, and goals been achieved or are likely to be achieved, and what are the major factors and remaining barriers influencing their achievement or non-achievement?   How effective is the current coordination setup, including coordination among PUNOs and with other projects (Swiss and EU-financed) in terms of synergies and avoiding duplication?   To what extent is the programme applying an inclusive and participatory approach ensuring quality participation of all stakeholders?
Evaluation questions
• To what extent have the expected outputs, outcomes and goal been achieved or are likely to be achieved?   • What are the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the outcomes/expected results/outputs?   • Identify remaining barriers to achieving the programme objective during the remaining implementation timeframe.   • To what extent does the project contribute to different aspects of disability inclusion and the empowerment of persons with disabilities.   • Did the programme contribute to capacity building and organisational development as planned?   • To what extent have PUNOs coordinated effectively and created synergies in the delivery of assistance?   • Is the current coordination set up producing the intended results?   • Coordination with other projects: How has the program interacted and coordinated with other Swiss/non-Swiss project implementers and vice versa? Is there room for improvement and closer collaboration?   • To what extent did the programme engage or coordinate with different beneficiaries (men and women), implementing partners and national counterparts to achieve results? How were synergies ensured in relation to EU IPA[19] funding?   • Are all key stakeholders sufficiently and effectively involved? Are their expectations met and are they satisfied with their level of participation?   • To what extent have the perspectives of those who could influence the outcomes and those who could contribute information or other resources to achieve the stated outcomes been taken into account in project planning?

6.2.1 Management of the project and the effectiveness of results achievements

At impact level, the picture is mixed. The at risk of poverty rate is steadily declining. On the other hand, the human development index, and the gender development index, for which the most recent known values date from 2022, show a slight deterioration, which may be caused by the effects of COVID19 on Health and Life Expectancy, on the economy and on its impact on education. While General government expenditure on Social Protection as a % of GDP has increased compared to 2019, spending for social care services for vulnerable groups from central government budget (without cash programme) have remained modest over the reporting period. This is worrying considering the demographic trends of an ageing, shrinking and increasingly urban population, because the needs for social care increase while the fiscal resources decrease.

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[19] Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)

Albania's public expenditure in key social sectors, including social protection, health, and education, significantly lags behind EU standards, highlighting the critical need for interventions like the LNB2 programme. Public expenditure on social protection in Albania was approximately 9.6% of GDP in 2022,[20] far below the EU average of 19.5% of GDP.[21] In health, Albania allocated 2.98% of GDP in 2022,[22] which is markedly lower than the EU average of 7.7%.[23] Similarly, in education, Albania's spending constituted 2.9% of GDP,[24] compared to the EU average of 4.7%.[25]

Results achievements at outcome level has been overall satisfactory:

Community level: Several participatory processes were facilitated where vulnerable groups could meaningfully contribute to decision making affecting their lives.

- As for example CSOs of PWD were involved in the process of elaboration of a shadow report on the implementation of the CRPD. This has been discussed and enriched during a National Forum and two major events and finally submitted to a large audience. Participatory dialogue forums where PwD could engage directly with LGUs, focusing on better access to services as for example, the lack of assistive devices, leading to LGUs addressing these concerns in their social care plans.
- Participatory Budgeting Process in which representatives from Roma and Egyptian communities raise their concerns about social housing and access to public services, leading to integration of the issues into the municipality's Social Plan / Social Housing Plan
- Community of Practice of social workers working at community centers where practitioners exchange issues of concern, share good practice and provide peer support to less experienced staff, or that established by PRISMA network to facilitate advocacy at both national and regional levels. This involved providing support and training to members, allowing them to enhance their advocacy efforts, particularly around social services, public procurement, and public consultation laws.
- Gender Participatory Budgeting Processes: In 10 municipalities, women were actively engaged in participatory budgeting processes, where they influenced budget priorities. Public hearings were organized to follow up on their proposals and check their uptake. These processes ensured that women's voices were integral in shaping budget decisions and aligning allocations with gender-specific needs and priorities. This approach directly addressed gender equity, empowering women to advocate for resources that meet their unique needs, particularly in social and public services.

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[20] Spending on social protection in Albania remains among the lowest in Europe, at around 9,6% of GDP in 2022. Spending is dominated by social insurance outlays (contributory program), which account for over 80% of total spending between 2015 and 2022. Source: https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/public-expenditure-social-care-services-june-2023

[21] General government expenditure in the EU on social protection stood at €3 098 billion or 19.5 % of GDP in 2022. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Government_expenditure_on_social_protection

[22] Public Expenditure in Health for 2022 represent 2.98 % of the total GDP. Source https://www.instat.gov.al/media/12769/albania-in-figures-2022.pdf

[23] General government expenditure in the EU on health amounted to €1 221 billion or 7.7 % of GDP in 2022. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Government_expenditure_on_health

[24] Public expenditure on education represents 9.7 % of total public expenditure in 2022 and constitute 2.9 % of total GDP. Source: https://www.instat.gov.al/media/12769/albania-in-figures-2022.pdf

[25] General government expenditure in the EU on 'education' amounted to €746 billion or 4.7 % of GDP in 2022. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Government_expenditure_on_education#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20general%20government%20expenditure,accounted%20for%201.7%20%25%20of%20GDP.

Innovative social services (as Integrated social services for individuals and families in need, social, health and home-based services for the elderly, specialized home-based and community services for children with disabilities, social services for Roma and Egyptian communities) have been established, expanding the existing community-based services and addressing the specific needs of different vulnerable groups.

Municipal level: Establish mentoring support and capacity building in the monitoring, implementation and updating of social care plans. LNB2 support social services in several municipalities to develop inclusive social care plans, pilot innovative services, and secure funding for initiatives that specifically target vulnerable categories of person. Training for municipal staff in social care service planning, costing, and budgeting, service delivery, monitoring, and quality control. Strengthen capacities of staff at municipal level

- to address older persons needs and support in their plans and actions.
- to implement the model of family based integrated social services for R&E and other vulnerable families.
- on working methods with children with disabilities, including peer coaching and mentoring for community centers' staff working with them.
- on assessing the needs of PWD for mobility devices.
- on the implementation of laws and regulations on the accessibility of buildings and public spaces.
- to monitor the implementation of social care plans and update them accordingly.
- in designing the social housing 5-year plan in line with the National Strategy and on its implementation and monitoring.

Over the last five years, the central government has been financing through the Social Fund 71 social services in 51 municipalities and 8 regions. Municipalities have made progress with regards to adoption of social care plans with the support of donors and civil society organizations. 43 LGUs have adopted a Social Plan and 18 are in the updating process. 23 municipalities have adopted social housing plans with LNB support. Concerns have been raised regarding the sustainability of social care services funded through the Social Fund and the predictability of funding streams for the sector[26]. LNB2 supports LGUs through a grant fund in improving and expanding community-based social services for vulnerable groups: expanding the offer addressing the needs of more vulnerable groups, scaling up practices that were successful in other municipalities and encouraging innovative solutions that integrate services across sectors such as health, education, employment, and social care. The LNB2 grant scheme provides additional financial resources to municipalities to support their social services initiatives, which complements the funding allocated through the government's Social Fund. This helps local governments expand and improve their services for vulnerable groups. The grant scheme supports municipalities in preparing and submitting applications to the Social Fund by building their capacity in project planning, budgeting, and implementing social services. Services initiated

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[26] EU Delegation in Albania, AIDE MÉMOIRE, Briefing Note on Conclusive Assessment Report, Technical assistance on Compliance Review and Monitoring of the EU Support to Social Inclusion Programme.

through the grant can be sustained over the long-term using government resources once the grant funding ends.

National (system) level

LNB2 supports to central authorities have made good progress to further consolidate the legal and regulatory policy framework for social inclusion and social care reforms. This is critical to complement any efforts and progress at the local level. The programme has also put emphasis on identifying and addressing the gaps related to funding of social services through the social fund mechanisms.

In different areas of intervention (promoting inclusive education, establishing a system of sign language interpreters, strengthening community-based healthcare model for the disadvantaged population, strengthen organizations of/for persons with disabilities on advocacy and policy monitoring, prepare standard protocols for child growth and development) the programme supported key actors in the system with substantial capacity building and organisational development, at national, and local levels, of governmental, civil society, and social service partners.

The LNB2 implementation team's management and coordination are highly effective in supporting project execution and achieving results. During the field visit, all partners interviewed emphasized that the systemic and participatory approach, combined with the programme's responsiveness and flexibility in ensuring consultation, inclusiveness, and stakeholder engagement, significantly contributed to the attainment of the intended outcomes. This approach also played a key role in developing local capacities and fostering a sense of ownership.

A coordinated approach by PUNOs in the field of social inclusion is essential for achieving results effectively. Each participating United Nations agency contributes within its area of expertise and specialization (particularly in the implementation of proven practices and international standards) in a complementary, coordinated, and coherent manner. The role of each participating UN agency in executing the programme, in line with its mandate and technical expertise, is defined in the project document and in the annual work plans of the LNB2. The evaluation acknowledges that for many local partners, the unity of the LNB2 programme is not clearly perceived (their reference point being the individual UN agency with which they have a specific partnership). However, this perception did not appear to impact the program's outcomes or the beneficiaries. Decision-makers at the national and local levels, as well as key stakeholders, demonstrated a clear understanding of the programme's overarching goals and objectives. Beneficiaries continued to receive coordinated and targeted services, which suggests that the structural complexity of LNB2 did not diminish its effectiveness at the community level. For the next phase, LNB2 should enhance the practical integration of its existing coordination mechanisms by conducting regular cross-partner reflection sessions to identify and address gaps in collaboration. Establishing a centralized feedback loop where partners and local stakeholders can provide input on programme cohesion could improve the perception of unity. Additionally, ensuring consistent communication of programme-wide achievements, rather than specific activities, will help stakeholders see the collective impact of LNB's efforts.

The common UN approach and the coordination between agencies ensure the necessary coherence for the different contributions to produce results effectively. The coordination among the UN partner agencies for implementing the LNB2 programme is efficiently managed through regular information sharing on the implementation of actions, supporting the identification of potential obstacles, emerging needs, and areas for coordinated action to maximize potential synergies in delivering assistance, particularly at the local level.

The LNB2 programme coordinates proactively and effectively with other donor financed actions in the field of social inclusion and social development. Primarily, as a driving force for the Output 1 on social protection contributing to the Outcome 1 "human capital" under the UNSDCF, this is achieved within the UN in terms of the programme's coordination, when thematically appropriate, and for avoiding the duplication of UN programme/project efforts.

LNB2 is ensuring coordination with the new EU initiatives in the field of social inclusion:

- EU for social inclusion (2020-2025 under IPA II/2019) which aims to expand coverage, inclusiveness, effectiveness and emergency responsiveness of social care services, pre-university education and employment opportunities for youth and adults in Albania, including populations at risk of exclusion.
- EU for Youth (under IPA III 2022) which aims to support competitiveness and Inclusive Growth, Education Policies, employment, social protection, inclusive policies and health.
- EU for Social Care (2024-2027) which aims to enhance social care services in 14 municipalities across the country, addressing the needs of vulnerable groups such as populations at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including children, youth, women, people with disabilities, and minorities.

Coordination meetings have ensured that interventions at the policy level are grounded on the same understanding of challenges and priorities for the Albanian social and inclusion reforms. In addition, the project has directly contributed to support Albanian institutions achieve several objectives of the EU financial support on Social Inclusion and has provided data on governance compliance with project' indicators, necessary for the allocation of future EU funds.

With its strong focus at municipal level on the development of social care services, empowering vulnerable groups to formulate their needs and influence decision making, there is a strong level of synergy with the Swiss projects undertaken to strengthen governance capacities, participation and accountability mechanisms for stronger municipalities. This were highlighted to the evaluators by representatives of municipalities, emphasizing the readiness of the municipal council to be responsive to needs of citizens expressed in participatory budgeting processes. Synergies are also being explored with the Swiss Project in the health sector providing home care for the elderly. Insofar as social inclusion is a cross-cutting theme of the Swiss programme in Albania, the project, through its support for the most marginalised groups, is helping to create favourable conditions for these people and groups to benefit from Swiss projects aimed at contributing to their social and economic inclusion and well-being.

6.2.2 Analysis of progress towards outcomes – Micro (community) level

> 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.

Progress towards achieving Outcome 1 has been highly satisfactory. LNB2 contributed to successfully inform and sensitize vulnerable groups, develop capacities of CSOs and service providers to facilitate access to quality social services at local level. The programme was also very effective on empowering these population groups, through advocacy and awareness raising about their rights, enabling active participation in policy and budget decisions affecting their lives at local level, leading to adoption of a high percentage of the issues raised by vulnerable persons or their representatives at decentralized consultative discussions by LGUs in annual plan or budgets.

Summary of results achieved for Outcome 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.

Through program support, disability rights CSO informed and empowered individuals to speak up for themselves and engage in decision-making related to accessibility of services for persons with disabilities. About 500 PwD (219 women; targeting both urban and rural areas) and their families were sensitized about their rights regarding social care services, including in rural areas by 40 trained activists with disabilities. Their needs were discussed with municipal authorities. Many more were reached through social media and an information package on the legislation and models of social care services.

Through the programme support, an organization of persons with disabilities promoted and advocated for coverage by the State of assistive devices for persons with disabilities involving more than 100 persons representing state institutions, organizations of persons with disabilities throughout Albania and other CSOs as well as academia.

The programme supported the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by supporting an ad hoc coalition of Organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) to draft a Shadow report on Albania's progress from 2019 to 2023 in the implementation of CRPD. The draft was discussed in a National Forum and other events, was officially submitted to the CRPD Committee and shared widely, reaching an audience of 30,000 people, providing an independent overview and recommendations for reforms.

A training programme has been developed for Albanian Sign Language Interpreters by a first cohort of 12 interpreters, enhancing their skills for professional interpretation in various fields (legal, education, medicine, business, governance, etc). The programme also established

certification standards and linguistic curricula for higher levels. The use of sign language among the deaf community and their family members were promoted.

In addition, a training programme has been delivered for the first five Albanian Sign Language Instructors, graduated in June 2022 upon successful completion of the unified and accredited course on the Albanian Sign Language Instructor profession that included 8 months of intensive theoretical and practical training. This course is an innovation for vocational education and training system and guarantees the improvement of communication capacities of the deaf persons themselves as well as the continuous training in sign language for the sign language interpreters, teachers, parents of deaf children and other professionals in the field of education. The design and implementation of this training programme also involved the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications, Swisscontact, and the 'Finnish Association of the Deaf, along with the Albanian National Association of the Deaf (ANAD) and UNDP/LNB programme.

The project has provided psycho-social support to access social services, and economic empowerment to over 42 Roma and Egyptian women and girls who are victims of domestic violence or at risk of gender-based violence in two municipalities (Kruja and Kamza), promoting long-term inclusivity and empowerment. This included access to counselling and support networks. Economic aid was provided as part of integrated social services, particularly in the form of small business grants, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support. For example, in some municipalities, women received business start-up assistance and three months of mentoring to help sustain economic activities. The programme engaged women in information sessions about human rights and services available to them, addressing domestic violence, property rights, and legal proceedings around divorce.

The programme raised awareness about Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) for persons with disabilities through a movie and theatre play, reaching over 1,600 participants across 4 municipalities. The initiative also supported elderly people through collaboration with the Pensioners Network, which engaged older persons in activities like fairs and poetry events, promoting intergenerational solidarity. Events for both the elderly and youth included the launch of "The elderly need our support" initiative, encouraging interaction between generations. Additional awareness activities such as World Diabetes Day and cultural events were organized, fostering community engagement and inclusion.

The programme has implemented targeted interventions for young key populations in community and prison settings. These include peer-led outreach on HIV/AIDS, STIs, and COVID-19 prevention, and the development of the Action Plan for the Prevention, Treatment, and Reduction of Drug Harm (2023–2026). Capacity-building initiatives were carried out for socio-health staff in prisons to improve service delivery, while harm reduction methodologies such as storytelling and artivism were used to empower and educate young key populations. Additionally, the establishment of the HIV Voluntary Counselling and Testing Center (VCTC) in Berat Male Prison ensured access to essential health services for incarcerated individuals with histories of drug abuse.

The LNB2 programme has contributed significantly to supporting Albania's aging population. It has supported the implementation of the National Action Plan for Older Persons (2020–2024),

providing a comprehensive framework to address aging challenges. At the municipal level, the programme piloted a Needs-Based Registration Tool for older persons in six municipalities, enabling more targeted support and integration of their needs into local social plans. Additionally, a manual for informal caregivers was developed, enhancing the quality of care provided to older persons. A policy document on long-term care was also drafted, guiding national strategies for sustainable services. Advocacy efforts raised awareness of demographic resilience, promoting tangible actions to improve the well-being of older persons and ensuring that national frameworks translate effectively into community-level impact.

The LNB2 programme has achieved notable progress in advancing children's rights and social inclusion such as strengthening inclusive education by training assistant teachers to support children with disabilities, improving their access to quality education in mainstream settings. Efforts to bolster child protection services have resulted in enhanced capacities of Child Protection Units (CPUs) in several municipalities, although gaps remain in ensuring universal coverage. The programme has also supported the deinstitutionalization of children, transitioning them to family- and community-based care models, thereby upholding their right to a nurturing and inclusive environment. Furthermore, LNB2 facilitated participatory processes involving children and their families in social care planning, ensuring their voices are represented in decision-making. By addressing child poverty through targeted measures aligned with the EU Child Guarantee model, the programme has strengthened the social protection framework to reduce exclusion and promote equity. These achievements underscore the programme's critical role in safeguarding children's rights and enhancing their access to essential services.

However, many municipalities lack functioning CPUs. Children remain disproportionately affected by poverty, with 27.4% of children at risk of poverty, compared to 22% for adults. This disparity is exacerbated by rural-urban divides and barriers to accessing quality education, healthcare, and social services. Despite efforts to transition children without parental care and children with disabilities to family- and community-based care, progress is slow. Limited alternative care options and resources, particularly in remote areas, hinder full implementation. While intersectoral mechanisms have been established in some regions, their functionality remains inconsistent. The integration of health, education, and social care services is yet to be fully completed, particularly in addressing children's developmental needs.

The programme strengthened the capacities of CSOs in advocating for gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring the provision of social services. Further, in partnership with PRISMA Network, it advanced participatory budgeting processes by developing five watchdog reports on inclusive social services for women and girls, which led to tailored advocacy efforts, including a National Dialogue to promote implementation of key recommendations. Additionally, PRISMA's advocacy resulted in the Albanian Parliament approving amendments to the Law on Public Procurement, improving social service provision for disadvantaged groups. Targeted activities have also strengthened the participation of disadvantaged women and youth in participatory budgeting processes in 10 Municipalities. Women and youth have actively voiced their priorities for inclusion in municipal budgets. Municipal representatives engaged in these activities, allowing the formulated priorities to be heard.

Through the programme, the community-based healthcare model for disadvantaged communities was strengthened and extended to 17 municipalities. This model enhances networks of health educators to better inform and engage communities in health promotion activities, focusing on access to services and healthcare rights, while providing direct referral, assistance, and support to the most vulnerable populations, including Roma, Egyptian communities, and persons with disabilities. Additionally, capacity-building support was provided to healthcare workers and caregivers of persons with disabilities. Capacities of health service providers in 7 target regions were strengthened to support and engage parents, provide holistic and family centered child health care, while reaching out to the most vulnerable families and children, including Roma and Egyptian, through Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV). Additionally, around 4000 vulnerable children were reached through the UPHV (universal progressive home visiting) in 7 target regions. Furthermore, 249 health professionals were trained to deliver holistic, family-centered child healthcare, improving outreach to vulnerable children, including those from Roma and Egyptian communities.

Capacity strengthening and support has been provided to a wide range of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPD) to implement projects on different human rights issues. Through project grant support, 9 OPDs implement projects on various disability-related activities related to advocacy, capacity building, monitoring, and provision of access to services. These included media campaigns, training, and information sessions on employment, self-representation, and rights for persons with disabilities, benefiting over 500 individuals. Key achievements included increased participation of persons with disabilities in advocacy and decision-making, improved accessibility in public services like the Albanian Post, and the direct support of individuals in accessing employment, education, and social services. Monitoring efforts also assessed the implementation of local social plans, disability rights laws, and the National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities.

Roma, Egyptians and persons with disabilities throughout Albania and in selected municipalities are supported to access social services. **(LNB key target groups)**

The project supported the Integrated Social Services Model offer (developed via the NPF to support families with complex long-term needs with 3500 beneficiaries) for marginalized individuals and families including from Roma and Egyptian communities in four municipalities (Lushnja, Divjaka, Durres/ Sukth, and Tirana), following a tailored and comprehensive approach and delivering high-quality services to families in need. These services are interconnected and coordinated to provide holistic assistance and support, addressing various priorities of marginalized individuals and families. Collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, CSOs, healthcare providers, educational institutions, private sector, and community members, facilitates access to social protection and care services, quality education, social housing, employment, self-employment opportunities, micro-business support, vocational training, and healthcare services.

In the area of inclusive education, LNB2 has supported 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 programme 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. Additionally, the programme has strengthened local mechanisms for identification and support out-of-school children in Korca, Tirana, Skrapar, Fier, Diber, Elbasan and Durres and prevent school drop-out through promotion of the scholarship programme for students from disadvantaged communities.

LNB2 support has laid the groundwork for creating inclusive education in the country, focusing on the professional development of teachers and the capacity of assistant-teachers who are serving children with disabilities across the country. The role of the assistant teacher in inclusive education in Albania is to provide individualized support to students with special needs, facilitating their integration and participation in mainstream classrooms and ensuring they have equal access to learning opportunities. For the 2023 – 2024 school year, the assistant teacher-to-pupils ratio for students with disabilities was 2.5:1, compared to the previous year's 3:1.

The programme has supported the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education (ASCAP) in building the professional capacities of more than 1000 assistant teachers nationwide working with students with disabilities in the pre-university education system. It contributed to creating learning resources, enhancing the skills of professional networks and trainers, and improving the competencies of assistant teachers to adapt mainstream curricula for the specific needs of students with disabilities. This included training assistant teachers and special school teachers, expanding cooperation models between assistant teachers and social care staff, and building capacities in inclusive education practices. The programme also facilitated the development of protocols for teachers working with children with disabilities and promoted effective collaboration between assistant teachers and classroom teachers. Through these efforts, the program has strengthened the implementation of inclusive policies and practices, ensuring that students with disabilities have better access to quality education.

By supporting infrastructure projects (community centre), the project allowed 2 LGUs to establish new models of community based social services for vulnerable groups with a focus on PWD.

Through the Community-Based Social Services Grants Scheme, 22 municipalities received grants for 27 social service projects (integrated social services for families in need in 3 municipalities, social services for elderly in 5 municipalities, social services for children in need in 3 municipalities, home based services for elderly in 5 municipalities, specialized home based services for CwD in 4 municipalities, community based services for CwD in 3 municipalities, social services for R&E in 4 municipalities). This allowed to establish new or expand existing community-based services to over 4,110 individuals. While sex-disaggregated data for this figure is not available, the program consistently emphasized gender equity in service delivery. For instance, related initiatives reached approximately 53% women and 47% men across various beneficiary categories, suggesting gender-balanced outcomes. Additionally, around 4000 vulnerable children have benefited from the Home Visiting Programme.

6.2.3 Analysis of progress towards outcomes – Meso (municipality) level

> **Outcome 2**: Municipalities efficiently and effectively manage and scale up effective models of quality support and integrated community based social services.

Overall, progress towards achieving Outcome 2 has been satisfactory, with municipalities demonstrating significant improvements in providing integrated, rights-based social services. The LNB2 programme has supported municipalities in scaling up community-based social services to reach vulnerable populations. A total of 38 municipalities are now providing services to at least three at-risk categories, including persons with disabilities, children from vulnerable families, and victims of domestic violence. The Social Fund has been instrumental in supporting 51 out of 57 municipalities that applied for financial assistance, allowing them to expand and strengthen their service provision.

Municipalities have benefitted from targeted capacity-building activities to support the development of social care plans, with 43 municipalities either developing or updating their plans. This demonstrates growing capacity among local governments to plan, implement, and monitor social care services. However, some challenges persist, such as the slow operationalization of the Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs), with only 14 municipalities having fully functional units. This has impacted the ability of these municipalities to effectively assess and address the needs of vulnerable populations.

Despite the positive steps taken in capacity building, local government units (LGUs) and service providers still face challenges in fully implementing the bio-psychosocial assessment for persons with disabilities and other social inclusion measures. Many municipalities lack the specialized staff or resources to provide comprehensive, integrated services, particularly in remote or economically disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, the operationalization of special schools as resource centers for inclusive education requires ongoing support, particularly in terms of professional development for teachers and staff.

The meso-level analysis highlights the significant efforts of the LNB2 programme at the municipal level to strengthen local governance and actively engage vulnerable groups in policymaking processes. A key focus has been building the capacity of municipal staff and structures to ensure inclusive planning, budgeting, and decision-making. Through targeted training, mentorship, and technical assistance, municipalities have integrated social care plans into local governance frameworks, aligning them with the needs of vulnerable populations, including Roma and Egyptian communities, persons with disabilities, and marginalized women and children. For example, in Korça Municipality, the programme facilitated the drafting and monitoring of the Child-friendly Local Plan 2023–2025, achieved through direct engagement with local CSOs, parents, children, and adolescents from vulnerable communities and using the latest local data.

While 61 municipalities have adopted the Management Information System (MIS) for managing social care services, its full potential remains underutilized, with slow data population limiting its impact. The system is designed to enhance transparency and monitoring but has yet to be fully integrated into municipal workflows, with only partial adoption by local governments. Gender-

responsive social services have been a key focus, with 43 municipalities incorporating gender perspectives into their social care plans. These plans have facilitated the inclusion of services for women, particularly victims of gender-based violence, and have empowered municipalities to better address the needs of vulnerable women and girls.

Despite the overall satisfactory progress, challenges remain. The slow operationalization of NARUs and the underutilization of the MIS system are critical barriers to scaling up services effectively. Additionally, concerns about the sustainability of services funded by the Social Fund persist, as many municipalities rely heavily on this external support. Addressing these barriers will be essential in the remaining implementation period to ensure that municipalities can continue to provide and expand high-quality social services for vulnerable populations.

The Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs) play a pivotal role in the implementation of Albania's social care strategy as they are responsible for identifying the needs of vulnerable groups, assessing those needs, and referring individuals to appropriate social services. Their establishment and functionality are crucial for ensuring that individuals receive timely and effective support. Additionally, NARUs facilitate coordination between various sectors, such as health, education, and employment, making them a key element of a comprehensive social protection system by ensuring that services are delivered in an integrated and efficient manner to address the diverse needs of vulnerable individuals. Their central role extends to the preparation of costed local social plans, which are essential for municipalities to effectively manage and implement social care services and to ensure that local resources are utilized optimally. Furthermore, the integration of data management systems within NARUs enhances transparency, safety, and the use of evidence-based information, which is critical for social care service planning and decision-making at both local and national levels. These combined functions make NARUs a cornerstone of Albania's efforts to strengthen its social protection system and provide targeted support to those most in need.

LNB 2 programme has meaningfully contributed to establish functional Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs) in municipalities by
- providing training and technical assistance to municipal staff,
- facilitating the integration of NARUs into the local social services framework, ensuring that the units are part of the municipal service delivery system.
- Working to transfer the implementation of these units to local authorities. By securing financial support from municipal budgets, the project has laid the groundwork for the sustainability of NARUs beyond the project duration.

In the municipalities where NARUs are functional, this has contributed to improve service coordination and responsiveness, leading to better outcomes for vulnerable groups, and the units being now able to identify and address the needs of individuals more effectively.

While the programme has made significant progress in this area, it is unlikely to meet its target of establishing functional NARUs in all municipalities. Furthermore, progress in making functional the established NARUs is reported to be slow. The main reasons for the delay in establishing functional NARUs include a shortage of qualified social workers at the administrative unit level

and the need to hire additional personnel, which has strained the municipal budget beyond its capacity. Some LGUs have been able to adjust their existing personnel.

To achieve the coverage and functionality of Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs) across all municipalities in Albania, the following challenges still need to be addressed.
- While NARUs have been established in several municipalities, not all of them are fully operational or able to provide comprehensive services due to limited capacity and resources, some municipalities have yet to fully integrate these units into their local service provision frameworks.
- The successful operation of NARUs requires sustainable funding and adequate staffing. Many municipalities still lack the necessary financial resources to support these units, which can affect the availability and quality of services provided.
- The coordination between NARUs and other social service providers, such as employment offices and local organizations, needs to be enhanced to ensure efficient service delivery. This involves better integration of NARUs within the broader social service infrastructure at the local level.
- There is a need for ongoing capacity building and standardization of the assessment and referral processes across municipalities to ensure consistent service quality.

The programme assistance will be needed beyond the agreed timeframe.

Linked to NARUs, the Management Information System MIS is also central for social inclusion as it plays a critical role in improving the collection, management, and utilization of data for decision-making and service delivery.

It is essential for gathering accurate and disaggregated data on the social needs of various vulnerable groups. It is a platform for monitoring and evaluating social services, used to identify service gaps and ensure that social care services are tailored to meet the needs of different population groups. Facilitating Coordination and Integration of Services ensuring that different actors—such as health services, employment offices, and local government units—can access and share relevant information, leading to more effective and integrated service delivery. The use of MIS to monitor service delivery and social fund allocations also improves transparency and accountability, enabling both local and central authorities to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups are addressed in a timely and effective manner.

The programme provided training on the MIS to local government staff in all 61 LGUs, complemented by direct mentorship and guidance to ensure effective MIS integration into local operations. Advocacy with MoHSP has been central to these efforts. As a result, the MIS is now managed by the National Agency for Information (AKSHI), with MoHSP providing ongoing support to the regional offices of the State Social Service (SSS) and municipalities for system implementation. This includes training, mentoring, and monitoring to ensure consistent and effective usage. The MIS has the potential to become a critical tool for municipalities to develop and update their social care plans based on real-time data, enabling LGUs to prioritize and allocate resources more effectively and enhance the impact of social services. Where NARUs

are functional, integrating the MIS with NARUs has streamlined the referral process, improving coordination and enabling timely responses to the needs of vulnerable populations. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, including outdated IT infrastructure, the need to manage multiple systems simultaneously by case managers and social workers, and staffing shortages in some LGUs. Addressing these barriers by the MoHSP, AKSHI and LGUs will be crucial to fully leveraging the potential of the MIS to improve social care delivery and ensure its sustainability at the local level.

Despite of these progress, many municipalities continue to face limitations in terms of human resources and technical capacity. This lack of trained personnel makes it difficult for LGUs to effectively plan, coordinate, and execute social services using the MIS. LGUs often lack the financial resources needed to sustain the MIS. There is a need for stronger ownership and commitment from municipalities to regularly use and populate the MIS with accurate and up-to-date information. Political changes, such as local elections and leadership shifts, have also impacted the pace of implementation and the prioritization of social care reforms at the municipal level. For the MIS to be fully functional, it needs to be integrated with other data systems at the local and national levels, such as those related to health, education, and employment. This integration will ensure that social care services are delivered holistically and based on comprehensive data.

6.2.4 Analysis of progress towards outcomes – Macro (central) level

Outcome 3: National institutions efficiently and effectively implement their policy framework for ensuring social inclusion and adequately fund gender responsive social services.

Progress towards achieving Outcome 3 has been highly satisfactory. The LNB2 programme has made substantial contributions to the effective implementation of Albania's policy framework for social inclusion, particularly in ensuring gender-responsive social services. National institutions, supported by the programme, have efficiently adopted and started implementing critical reforms, such as the National Strategy on Social Protection (NSSP) 2024–2030, which focuses on providing both cash assistance for vulnerable individuals and households and the expansion of accessible, integrated social services. This strategy is explicitly gender-sensitive, incorporating a thorough gender analysis, gender-specific indicators, and a costed action plan to ensure equitable service delivery. These gender-focused elements were developed with technical assistance from UN agencies, reinforcing the commitment of national institutions to prioritize inclusivity and gender responsiveness in the expansion of accessible, integrated social services. These reforms reflect the strong commitment of national institutions to social inclusion, with gender responsiveness at the core of service delivery.

A key success under this outcome is the transformation of special schools into resource centers, reinforcing inclusive education throughout Albania. This initiative, supported by amendments to the Pre-University Law, has ensured that children with disabilities are integrated into mainstream public education. By prioritizing the professional development of teachers and school staff, the programme has empowered them to provide quality education for all children, further embedding inclusive practices within the education system. The partnership with the Ministry of Education

and Sports (MoES) has been instrumental in implementing these reforms, establishing a solid foundation for inclusive education in the country, such as the development of the SIPD and the Mid-term review of the NAPPWD 2021-2025.

Expansion of Social Services and Gender Responsiveness: The NSSP reforms have significantly advanced gender-responsive social services, particularly for vulnerable women and children. Fifteen municipalities have been actively engaged in updating and costing their local social care plans for the 2024–2027 period, with a strong emphasis on incorporating gender perspectives. These plans are ensuring that the needs of women, especially victims of gender-based violence and marginalized women, are prioritized within the local social service framework.

Sustainability and Funding: The central government's allocation to the Social Fund continues to support social services across Albania, with 5 services funded at both the local and regional levels. The predictability of funding remains a concern, particularly for municipalities reliant on this external financing. However, the programme has contributed to creating a more sustainable financial framework for social services by supporting the adoption of the Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) 224/2024, which introduces a calculation methodology for the Social Fund. This measure is expected to improve the financial sustainability and predictability of social services funding.

Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening: LNB2 has further consolidated its partnership with 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. Through LNB2's partnership with the University of Lucerne, 15 decision-makers and social service professionals, including MoHSP representatives, participated in a study visit to Bern. The visit provided insights into the Swiss social protection system, showcasing comprehensive services for vulnerable groups such as youth, the homeless, and persons with disabilities. The programme has also been successful in strengthening the capacities of key social protection actors, particularly through training and professional development initiatives aimed at social workers. Around 550 social workers have now received their licenses, and the consolidation of the Order of Social Workers has further enhanced the professionalism and quality of social services delivery. Moreover, the roll-out of the bio-psychosocial assessment for persons with disabilities has improved service accessibility and responsiveness, contributing to the overall efficiency of the social protection system. The LNB 2 partnership with the Social Sciences Faculties of the Universities of Tirana, Shkodra, and Elbasan, with support from Lucerne University, focuses on enhancing curricula for social work and psychology students, designing tailored continuous training for in-service social workers, improving student internships, and strengthening ethical standards in scientific research.

The partnership between the LNB2 programme and the University of Tirana's Faculty of Social Sciences has contributed to advancements in social work education and professional development. The Programme and Policy Evaluation course was revised to include modern evaluation methods and ethical practices, enhancing students' capacities to assess social policies effectively. The Master curricula were upgraded with two new directions, Clinical Social Work and Social Policies and Human Development, alongside the development of a new Master on Sustainable Development, addressing themes like digitalization, migration, and shock-responsive

social protection. Additionally, the <u>Digital Corner</u> platform was launched, engaging 375 professionals through webinars and forums, while a Professional Practice Manual was introduced to standardize student internships. These initiatives combine academic improvements with practical professional development, strengthening Albania's social protection workforce.

While the law of Preuniversity Education provides the legal set up for this reform, the need to develop a full-fledged roadmap for the transformation of all special schools in resource centers is evident including mapping of specialized worked force, costing of the services and working with changing the attitudes and increasing the capacities of teachers who would work in a new role work in the resource centres. These changes will ensure that Albania aligns with CRPD General comment No. 4 (2016) Article 24: Right to inclusive education and confidently pushes the Inclusion agenda towards EU Chapter 26.

Additionally, the programme worked closely with INSTAT and key ministries to improve the use of evidence in shaping national strategies. This collaboration supported the integration of enhanced data collection and analysis into policy frameworks, strengthening the alignment of national strategies with evidence-based practices. The partnership facilitated cross-sectoral dialogue, ensuring that revised policies, such as the National Social Protection Strategy, were informed by reliable data and targeted the needs of vulnerable groups effectively. These combined efforts reflect a comprehensive approach to building institutional capacity and improving social protection systems in Albania.

While the Social Fund has been instrumental in supporting the provision of social services across Albania, many municipalities remain heavily dependent on this external funding source. The unpredictability of financial allocations raises concerns about the sustainability of these services once the LNB2 programme or other international funding sources end. Ensuring a more consistent and reliable flow of funds is crucial for maintaining and scaling social services at both local and national levels. Although the Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) 224/2024 has introduced a methodology for calculating the Social Fund, ensuring municipalities have the capacity to generate and allocate sufficient resources locally remains a challenge.

While gender-responsive social services have been integrated into policy frameworks and social care plans, gaps remain in operationalizing these services on the ground, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Many municipalities struggle to effectively implement gender-sensitive programmes, especially for marginalized women, victims of domestic violence, and women in rural areas who face access barriers. Furthermore, women experiencing intersectionality—the overlapping and interconnected forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status—face compounded challenges that current systems often fail to address. Strengthening local capacities to deliver, monitor, and adapt services is critical for ensuring that gender inclusivity becomes a reality across all regions. An inclusive social protection system must go beyond addressing gender disparities to explicitly account for intersectionality, ensuring that the overlapping vulnerabilities of women are effectively addressed to promote equity and sustainable social inclusion and ensuring that gender inclusivity becomes a reality across all regions.

Despite the progress made in inclusive education and gender-responsive services, there are still significant barriers to accessing social services for vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities. Geographic disparities, limited transportation options in rural areas, and insufficient outreach efforts have restricted the full inclusion of these groups in many regions. Continued efforts are needed to ensure that national policies reach the most marginalized and vulnerable communities, particularly in remote or underserved municipalities.

The LNB2 programme has played a critical role in facilitating legal changes in social housing laws in 2023, supporting parliamentary processes, and guiding municipalities in navigating new regulations. The LNB2 programme has provided consistent support, including organizing training for municipal staff on implementing social housing policies and decentralizing services. This support extends to helping municipalities develop and implement local social housing plans. The LNB2 programme has supported the adoption of social housing plans by 23 municipalities. Also, the 2023 state budget allocated 2,490 million ALL, which benefited a total of 21,914 families across Albania. These are important septs towards addressing housing needs, particularly for low-income families, marginalized groups, and individuals with specific vulnerabilities, such as persons with disabilities or those affected by violence.

However, demand for social housing continues to outpace supply, and without additional funding and a more strategic approach, certain municipalities may struggle to address the housing shortages, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Despite the increased budget allocation, social housing and state-subsidized rental programmes remain underfunded, particularly for specialized housing services such as those for disabled persons and victims of violence. Coordination between various ministries, including the Ministry of Interior, is needed to address these gaps.

Another challenge is the significant staff turnover due to the restructuring of the Social Housing Department, now under the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation (MEKI). Since the retirement of the head of the Housing Department in July 2023, the position has remained unfilled, resulting in the department currently being staffed by only three junior specialists. The other four positions require new staff who need additional training. This high turnover disrupts continuity and requires ongoing capacity-building efforts. In June 2023, Law No. 22/2018 on social housing and two subordinate regulations were enacted with technical support from LNB2. At the request of the Housing Department (MFE), the LNB2 extended assistance in two areas: 1) assessing the implementation of the social housing legal framework, and 2) developing practical guidelines for implementing each housing programme within the new framework, focusing on priority categories such as the Roma minority, women victims of violence, female heads of households, and persons with disabilities. Due to staffing shortages and the unexpected absence of the housing department head, the completion of this work would not have been possible; consequently, the MFE declared that it was not necessary to proceed.

According to interviews with interlocutors at the governmental level, municipalities often lack the necessary staff, including engineers and legal experts, to properly identify housing needs and apply for funding. Also, they noted that effective interinstitutional coordination with all 61

municipalities remains difficult, with many municipalities relying on basic tools like Excel and phone calls to track housing needs. A more streamlined, digitized system is needed to improve communication and data management. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive housing database to track homeless populations and guide policy decisions is another gap that needs addressing.

6.3 Efficiency

Efficiency
To what extent has the programme made the best use of available human, technical, technological, financial, and knowledge inputs to achieve its desired results, considering its management structure, implementation strategy, execution, and timely delivery? How effective and efficient are the M&E systems of the LNB2 JP in ensuring programme management, risk assessment, and risk management?
Evaluation Questions
- Are the available technical and financial resources adequate to fulfil the program framework?   - To what extent was the project management structure as outlined in the project document efficient in generating the expected results?   - To what extent has the programme implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?   - Is the programme implemented in the most efficient way, making best use of available human, technical, technological, financial and knowledge inputs to achieve its desired results?   - To what extent have programme funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?   - Following up on risk management, how the risk is assessed? and how the risk is managed?   - To what extent do the M&E systems utilized by the LNB2 JP ensure effective and efficient programme management?

6.3.1 Project management arrangements and the efficient delivery of results

The LNB2 programme has made effective use of available human, technical, technological, financial, and knowledge inputs to achieve its desired results.

The Leave No One Behind (LNB) Phase 2 programme is implemented under the Delivering as One (DaO) mechanism within the framework of the Albania-United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022–2026, which ensures that the programme is aligned with Albania's national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) provides the financial support for the programme, contributing CHF 16 million over the two phases (2017-2025). The programme is jointly implemented by four UN agencies—UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and UNFPA—with UNDP serving as the lead agency, and it collaborates closely with both governmental bodies and civil society organizations (CSOs). The programme adopts a joint delivery model that aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly targeting SDGs 1, 4, 5, 10, and 11, and 16 which relate to poverty reduction, inclusive education, gender equality, and reduced inequalities. This integrated approach has facilitated coordination at multiple levels, allowing the programme to address national and local needs while contributing to the broader SDG framework.

The management structure of the LNB2 programme has been efficient in ensuring effective coordination and delivery of results. The programme is steered by a multi-level governance system, including a Steering Committee co-chaired by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP), the UN Resident Coordinator, and SDC, which plays a critical role in strategic decision-making and monitoring the progress of the programme. The involvement of PUNOs (Participating UN Organizations) ensures that the programme leverages the technical expertise of multiple agencies, enhancing the overall efficiency in addressing social inclusion and social protection issues. This setup has allowed for coherent planning and synergy-building, thus minimizing duplication of efforts among UN agencies, government bodies, and CSOs.

The project management arrangements under the LNB2 programme have been well-organized and efficient, enabling the successful delivery of key outcomes related to social inclusion and gender-responsive services. The Delivering as One mechanism, combined with strong inter-agency coordination, has allowed for efficient resource use, while the flexible management structure has ensured that the programme can adapt to emerging needs. The role of each participating UN agency in delivering the LNB2 programme, aligned with their respective mandates and technical expertise, was established during the programme design phase and documented in the project plan. Each agency is responsible for implementing its designated activities and outputs, as outlined and agreed upon in the LNB2 annual work plans. UNDP engages the local CSO, Help for Children (NPF), as an implementing partner for specific actions using the NGO Implementation Modality. As the lead agency, UNDP oversees the overall implementation and coordination of the programme, supported by a dedicated LNB2 project team. This team manages all aspects of the programme, including delivery, monitoring, reporting, coordination, and visibility. The project management arrangements are well-structured, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all implementing partners, ensuring effective coordination of their activities.

The programme has successfully utilized human resources, particularly through the capacity building of social workers and other local actors involved in social service provision. The programme has effectively transferred knowledge through capacity-building efforts, including the development of guidelines, training, and tools for social service providers. These efforts have equipped local actors with the necessary skills to deliver high-quality, rights-based social services. The programme has also contributed to policy development at the national level, particularly in the areas of inclusive education, disability inclusion, and gender-responsive services, reinforcing the capacities of both national and local institutions. The programme has supported the LGUs staff with trainings for use of the MIS for social care services. This system, designed to improve data collection and monitoring of services at the local level, has the potential to help municipalities track social service provision. Despite its potential, the slow population of data in many municipalities indicates that the MIS has not yet reached its full capacity. The digital mapping of social care services was a significant technological input, but continued efforts are required to ensure its full utilization across all municipalities.

6.3.2 Utilization of budget till 30.06.2024

The overall financial delivery of the LNB2 Joint Programme till June 30, 2024, shows an efficient use of the allocated funds, with a nearly full disbursement and commitment of resources across the participating UN agencies.

Table 4: Budget Utilization

	Funds allocated in USD	Disbursed*	Commitments*	Total Disbursed and Committed USD	Total Disbursed and Committed USD in %
UNDP	3,801,422	3,394,296	515,713	3,910,010	103%
UNICEF	1,075,716	882,647	48,543	931,190	86.6%
UNW	565,784	519,799	56,035	575,834	101.8%
UNFPA	294,230	294,230	0	294,230	100%
Totals	**5,737,152**	**5,090,972.28**	**620,291.38**	**5,711,263.66**	**99.5%**

99.5% of the total allocated funds ($5.71 million) have been disbursed or committed, indicating efficient financial delivery and close alignment with the budgeted resources.

Implementation of the programme is undertaken by UN agencies in close cooperation and dialogue with partner organizations and stakeholders on the Albanian side, including central and local government, social service providers, and CSOs. Feedback gathered during the field phase mission from project partners and stakeholders highlighted strong satisfaction across the various organizations regarding their collaboration with UN agencies. They emphasized the participatory and consultative approach taken by the UN agencies in providing support, technical analysis, and advice. This inclusive approach has been crucial in fostering local ownership and building the capacity to develop appropriate technical solutions, while also ensuring the absorption and sustainability of programme results.

The LNB JP Phase 2 has encountered several efficiency challenges during its implementation. The 2023 local elections, which brought leadership changes in partner municipalities, caused delays in some programme activities. The programme mitigated these disruptions by strategically avoiding major milestones during the electoral period and prioritizing other processes to ensure that timelines were maintained. Additionally, the government reshuffle in September 2023, which led to new leadership at the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, slowed down some of the ongoing activities, without impacting significantly the efficiency of the programme.

Other efficiency challenges include the high turnover of specialized staff, particularly in disability services, where limited staff capacity and a lack of adequate resources hinder service delivery. Transportation barriers, particularly in rural areas, and stigma around disabilities have further complicated the provision of services to vulnerable children. Furthermore, the migration of young Roma beneficiaries has affected the efficiency of interventions aimed at improving employment and education outcomes, reducing the programme's ability to generate sustained impacts. Turnover among assistant teachers in inclusive education has also disrupted established

professional networks, requiring continuous efforts to rebuild capacity and maintain programme momentum. Despite these challenges, the programme has adapted by adjusting its activities and maintaining strong communication with local institutions to ensure continued progress.

6.3.3 Monitoring and evaluation, project steering, and risk management system

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system of the LNB2 is designed as an integral part of programme management, with four primary objectives: steering the programme, ensuring quality assurance, fostering learning, and maintaining accountability. The system gathers data that inform strategic and operational decisions, facilitate continuous monitoring, and ensure accountability to stakeholders. M&E is also utilized to drive learning, helping the programme improve its processes and capacities by identifying and sharing lessons learned.

The M&E system emphasizes results-oriented reporting, relying on predefined indicators to measure progress. Key tools for monitoring include the programme's performance framework, annual work plans, budget tracking, field visits, risk monitoring, and the Steering Committee's reviews. Regular monitoring and reporting on programme outcomes, efficiency, and cooperation between actors ensure that challenges are addressed promptly, and improvements are made.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems of the LNB2 have been designed to ensure effective programme management, risk assessment, and risk management. Structured Framework for Monitoring and Reporting: The LNB2 benefits from a well-structured M&E framework aligned with the Delivering as One (DaO) mechanism and guided by the UNSDCF 2022–2026. The M&E systems allow for a cohesive and consistent approach in collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. The programme's annual work plans and reports provide a clear structure for tracking progress and monitoring the achievement of outputs and outcomes.

The performance monitoring framework of the LNB2 is structured around 27 indicators of achievement, some of which include sub-indicators. These indicators are divided across different levels, with 16 focused on outputs, 7 on outcomes, and 4 on impact. The output-level indicators measure the immediate results of the programme's activities, while the outcome-level indicators track the broader effects on beneficiaries, such as improvements in service provision and social inclusion. The impact-level indicators measure the long-term changes brought about by the programme, such as reductions in vulnerability and enhanced social protection. Baseline data and targets are set for each indicator, allowing for effective tracking of progress. The monitoring and reporting on these indicators take place through both annual and semi-annual reports, ensuring that the programme's progress is regularly assessed, and any necessary adjustments are made to achieve the desired results.

Overall, the specified indicators and targets of achievement within the LNB2 are designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the programme's impact, providing measurable data points along with insights into the lived experiences and broader context in which the programme operates. The indicators are closely linked to the programme's goals of improving social inclusion and enhancing social services, as well as addressing the broader country context. By capturing data from both

numerical trends and qualitative assessments, the framework ensures a robust evaluation of progress towards these objectives, enabling informed decision-making and timely adjustments to the programme's strategies.

The risk assessment process of the LNB2 is a crucial component of its management and implementation strategy. The programme's Steering Committee, along with other involved actors, is responsible for continuously monitoring and assessing potential risks that could hinder its success. Key risks identified include financial sustainability, capacity limitations within governmental partners, and staff turnover, all of which can affect the effective implementation of social inclusion policies. To mitigate these risks, the programme incorporates capacity-building activities and aligns its efforts with national policies and strategies, ensuring that partners are equipped to handle challenges. The risk assessment is embedded within the programme's monitoring and evaluation framework, allowing for regular updates and adjustments to minimize potential negative impacts and support the programme's long-term sustainability.

The risks identified in the LNB2 project document largely align with those emerging from the field visits. Financial sustainability remains a significant challenge, with municipalities heavily reliant on donor funding and struggling to maintain services independently. Staffing issues, particularly high turnover among specialized professionals like physiotherapists, have proven to be more severe than expected, disrupting service continuity. Accessibility, especially in rural areas, continues to hinder equitable service reach, confirming the planned risks around logistical barriers. Additionally, consistent quality standards and robust monitoring and evaluation across all social services remain ongoing challenges, particularly as the social and political context evolves.

The efficiency of the LNB2 programme's risk management system has been demonstrated through its proactive identification and mitigation of key risks, particularly in the socio-political, economic, and operational areas. The risk logs from the programme outline several medium to high-probability risks that could affect the achievement of its objectives, including limited political support, financial uncertainty, and capacity limitations within governmental partners. The programme's response to these risks includes sustained advocacy efforts and policy dialogue, ensuring continuous engagement with key stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP). The programme has also supported local authorities in building capacity to integrate social inclusion policies, a key strategy to mitigate risks associated with the operationalization and sustainability of services. While the programme's mitigation strategies have been largely effective in addressing financial and policy-related risks, ongoing efforts are required to ensure that local governments can maintain the innovations introduced and scale them effectively without external dependency.

6.4 Sustainability

Sustainability
How sustainable are the programme results? Consider the factors influencing sustainability, the level of stakeholder ownership, and the degree of commitment to maintaining these results.
What should be the main elements of a general sustainability strategy for LNB2?
What are the most relevant and strategic programme areas needing consolidation, and what key development needs or priorities will require support beyond the project's end?

Evaluation questions
- Are the approaches and methods used likely to ensure a continued benefit after the end of the programme?
- What are the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme?
- What is the risk that the level of stakeholder ownership (including ownership by governments and other key stakeholders) will be insufficient to allow for the programme's outcomes/benefits to be sustained?
- Are lessons learned being documented by the LNB2 JP technical team on a continual basis and shared/ transferred to appropriate parties who could learn from the programme and potentially replicate and/or scale it in the future?
- What changes should be made and/or improved in the current set of programme partnerships in order to promote long term sustainability?
- How does the programme relate to the social fund set up by the government?
- How does the services established through the programme grant fund ensure sustainable financing?
- Does the programme help to create the right system to support sustainable capacity building?
- What could be done to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability in order to support programme beneficiaries as well as marginalized groups?
- Which programme areas are the most relevant and strategic for future scaling up or consider going forward?
- What type of interventions would need further programme assistance beyond the agreed timeframe?

6.4.1 Sustainability of the project results

The current progress of the LNB2 programme in securing the sustainability of its results and achievements after the programme concludes is satisfactory.

The project has focused on collaborating closely with the country's system by partnering with government institutions at various levels, enhancing their capacities, and supporting institutional development through a systemic approach. This holistic strategy, adopted by the LNB2 programme, addresses the macro, meso, and micro levels, which contributes to long-term sustainability. By engaging with central government bodies, national services, local governments, and service providers, the LNB2 programme supports systemic change. It contributes that social inclusion policies are effectively integrated, promoted, monitored, and financed at both the system and operational levels.

The alignment of LNB2 with national and local policies is a major factor contributing to the sustainability of the results. The results of the LNB2 programme are highly relevant to the country's policy reform and legal framework on social inclusion, social care and social services

supporting partners in terms of the further implementation and consolidation of the reform and legal framework. The project has been supporting GoA for the roll-out of the social protection and social care reform process, therefore supporting the strengthening of the country system.

The programme is also meaningfully supporting the local self-government reform process and consolidation of the territorial and administrative reform, including further decentralisation and transfer of functions and competences from central government to the LGUs, leading to sustainable achievements in the reform process. The LNB2 programme has contributed to the development of models (UPHV) that integrate social components into the health service delivery, aligned with the strategic goal of the MOHSP to integrate health and social services and establishment of Health and Social centers with recently appointed psychosocial personnel.

Social services have been established at municipal level which are highly relevant to the needs of a variety of vulnerable groups (R&E communities, PWDs, elderly and other marginalised communities). These beneficiaries and CSOs representing them have been empowered and their capacities strengthened to claim for their rights and hold the local government to account. Mechanisms for ensuring inclusive participatory policy and budget decision processes have been established and used in several Municipalities. Altogether, this is strongly contributing to make the achieved results sustainable.

LNB2 programme has also achieved relevant results in terms of addressing the needs of the LGUs (capacity building, financial support, collaboration with CSOs as service providers; infrastructure; models of social service delivery, standards and procedures; intersectoral collaboration) to be able to provide social services as envisaged in the policy and legal framework. These results have enabled local authorities to make sustainable progress in the provision of the much needed social care services.

The project's collaborative approaches and methods, which promote strong cooperation with central and local authorities, CSOs, and other stakeholders, have ensured active consultation and participation in the design and implementation of activities. This has significantly contributed to a high level of ownership among stakeholders, as clearly reflected in interviews conducted with project partners. Such an inclusive approach is essential for fostering a sense of shared responsibility, achieving intended outcomes, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of results.

As mentioned to the evaluators in a number of interviews at both local and central level, confidence, trust is another element which shouldn't be underestimated in the sustainability of results. With the establishment of social services and the flexible and participatory approach of the programme, vulnerable citizens, CSOs, municipal staff and social care providers have gained mutual trust which is central to future collaboration. In the same spirit, more synergies and collaborations have been built between the local and the policy level through various consultations involving face to face meetings. As a result, policies and strategies are not only more grounded and evidence-based, but also foster successful dialogue and collaboration among actors at different levels.

For all the new services or activities introduced in the LGUs as part of the programme, the municipality commits to covering the salaries and recurring costs. These are systematically included in the municipality's budget, so the project never finances salaries or running costs. This is a very important aspect of the sustainability of the results achieved by the project.

As the programme is essentially provided via technical expertise and capacity development, establishing function of knowledge management, learning and sharing is essential to building the longer-term sustainability and the potential for scaling up of the results. In that regard, the programme has established several mechanisms for sharing good practices and lessons learnt between peer practitioners of different fields of activities, including community of practice of social care staff at community center, among LGUs on issues related to social care plans submitted for funding by the social fund. Regular identification of good practices and analysis of lessons learnt during project implementation at local level have also led to learning translated into impactful advocacy efforts and policy influencing. By establishing knowledge exchange networks of practitioners working in community centers and exchanging on challenges and good practice, but also extensively promoting mentoring and peer coaching at different levels, LNB2 has also introduced important elements of knowledge management, instrumental for the sustainability of results achieved in terms of capacity building and institutional development. Capacity development of health professionals through accredited trainings by the National Center for Quality Assurance of Health Institutions, and establishment of a supportive supervision mechanism, based on standard supportive supervision methodology contribute to the sustainability of the interventions.

The programme has been actively supporting the government for the establishment of the social fund and the stepwise improvement of its regulatory framework. The project's grant for LGUs is closely aligned with the Social Fund, and it complements and strengthens the fund's objectives by supporting the development and implementation of social services at the local level. Whereas the grant scheme is a one-off donation, the social fund is a degressive but sustainable form of financing[27]. The project's grant scheme is launched simultaneously as the Social Fund – and integrate representatives of the MoHSP in its decision committee for the allocation of the grants - allowing to make the best use of the complementarities between both (as for example the grant scheme is asked for refurbishing a centre for elderly people and the municipality ask the government to fund an additional social worker).

6.4.2 Factors influencing the risks of non-achievement of sustainability of the project results

The level, continuity and predictability of funding for social care services to LGUs are fundamental factors for the sustainability and quality of social care service delivery at local level. The Social Fund is an essential financial mechanism for funding social care services at the regional and local levels, in compliance with the decentralization approach. While for 2023, the Social Fund's budget increased to EUR 2.8 million, 50% increase compared to 2022, this remains largely insufficient

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[27] SF financing is of 90% for the first year, 60% for the second year and 30% for the following years.

and local governments frequently lack the funding and resources to effectively set up manage and implement social services. This is critical as LGUs have a limited fiscal space to ensure an inherent year-after-year increase in the financing of social services and analyses indicate that the fiscal space will remain limited, regardless of the trend of tax increases. Although the capacity of municipalities to generate own revenues varies among different municipalities, these remain quite low and insufficient in all cases.

Different factors like the migration of qualified staff and the low level of salaries of community center (paid through the municipal budget) in comparison to their colleagues working in the education and health sectors (paid through central government budget) tend to increase the staff turn-over in social care services. This makes it difficult to internalize capacity development results and maintain a competent, well-trained workforce, particularly in remote areas.

Civil society is an essential component of a country system from the point of view of social inclusion, whether in terms of CSOs providing services or advocating for the rights of vulnerable people. However, funding for CSOs remains a major problem in Albania, where most of them depend on funding from international cooperation. From the point of view of establishing a sustainable system of social care services, it is essential that CSOs with a large constituency of vulnerable people and/or specialized in providing services to these populations find sustainable sources of funding. Although this is only part of the problem, the administrative obstacles posed by the law on public procurement prevent municipalities from entering into long-term partnerships with specialized CSOs. The project has engaged in policy dialogue on this issue and some progress has been made, but it is still not enough to remove the main obstacles.

While many of these issues fall outside the direct control of the programme; they can be influenced through continued policy dialogue and potential technical support to partners.

6.4.3 Strengthening the sustainability of project's results

Key elements of the professionalization of the social care services staff and establishment of a continuous education system for social workers have been put in place by the project by
- developing and strengthening the curricula for pre- and in- service social workers,
- supporting the Order of Social Workers in the process of licensing for social care professionals,
- increasing capacities of pre-service professionals in monitoring and evaluating programmes, policies, and strategies;
- developing different training programmes focusing on service provision aspects, professional practice, the development of integrated services models, and case management and ensuring that the training modules provided for social workers are accredited and meet national and international standards.

These training modules were integrated into the educational programmes of the Social Work Faculties at the Universities of Tirana, Elbasan, and Shkodra, ensuring the sustainability of workforce professionalization. The partnership with HSLU strengthens this effort by facilitating

ongoing collaboration in curriculum development and training, supporting continuous education and long-term professional development.

However, much still need to be done for Albania to have a full-fledged continuous education system ensuring a complete professionalization of social care workers. There is still a need for a comprehensive framework to assess the social services staff and their skills profiles, and to establish a unified system for continuous professional education and development.

There is also a lack of a complete assessment of the social services staff, their profiles, as well as a comprehensive framework for the development of basic essential skills for the provision of social services. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) is developing qualification frameworks and accredit training programmes. However, ongoing monitoring and improvement of these programmes are necessary to ensure quality and alignment with national standards. Further refinement of the regulatory framework is required, specifically in licensing, accreditation of training programmes, and defining professional standards. Partnerships with professional bodies such as the *Order of Social Workers* and the *Order of Psychologists* need to be strengthened to formalize these processes. A robust monitoring and evaluation system is needed to track the implementation and impact of continuous education programmes. This system should include periodic assessments of social workers' competencies, the quality of training provided, and mechanisms to update training content based on evolving social care needs. Sustainable funding mechanisms need to be secured to support the continuous professional development of social workers. A dedicated financial framework is essential to ensure continuous education is an integral part of the professionalization of social care staff.

6.5 Risk Assessment and Management

The LNB2 has implemented a comprehensive risk management strategy to address potential challenges across socio-political, economic, operational, and strategic dimensions. Socio-political risks, such as limited government prioritization of social inclusion policies and inconsistent societal ownership of reforms, pose medium to high threats to the programme's objectives. The evaluation confirms that political will and institutional buy-in are critical for sustaining reforms, particularly during transitions like elections that often result in staff turnover. To mitigate these risks, LNB2 leverages advocacy through the UN to promote social inclusion within Albania's EU accession agenda. It also engages stakeholders in participatory planning processes to build alignment and ensure accountability across all levels of governance. The evaluation finds that LNB2's advocacy efforts have played a crucial role in advancing social inclusion and human rights-based approaches.

Economic uncertainties, such as constrained public budgets and global economic pressures, are identified as medium-level risks with potentially significant implications for long-term sustainability. Rising public debt and the socio-economic fallout from external factors, including the Ukraine war, threaten the stability of social protection funding. However, LNB2 has successfully demonstrated the benefits of its initiatives through evidence-based advocacy, ensuring continued government commitment to social service funding. By collaborating with the MoHSP and showcasing the programme's alignment with international priorities like the SDGs and CEDAW, LNB2 has

mitigated these risks effectively. The integration of programme innovations into local government plans, supported by capacity-building efforts, reflects a deliberate focus on embedding sustainability within Albania's institutional frameworks.

Operational and sustainability risks, such as limited partner capacity and insufficient institutionalization of programme innovations, remain high-priority concerns. Challenges like the migration of beneficiaries and persistent gaps in service delivery, especially in rural areas persist. LNB2 addresses these risks through targeted capacity assessments, tailored training, and communication strategies that engage vulnerable groups, including Roma and Egyptian communities. LNB2's ability to anticipate and address risks ensures that its interventions remain impactful and sustainable.

6.6 Cross-cutting themes

Cross-cutting themes
To what extent and in what ways has the programme applied and promoted the cross-cutting issues of gender equality and human rights within and across the programme, as a matter of principle.
To what extent has the programme's goal and outcomes and progress done so far contributed to SDGs progress of Albania
To what extent has the programme advocated for the principles of equality and inclusive development and has contributed to empowering and addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in the Albanian society.
Evaluation questions
• To what extent does the project contribute to gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights-based approach?
• To what extent and in what ways the cross-cutting issues of LNB2 JP – good governance and gender equality - are applied/promoted?

The programme is integrating two cross-cutting themes throughout its operations: gender equality and good governance.

As described under Effectiveness, the programme has substantially contributed to the empowerment of most vulnerable groups of people in Albania (such as PwD, R&E, elderly people, women and girls victims or at risk of gender-based violence, youth at risk of exclusion, vulnerable children) and the establishment and functioning of social care services which are highly relevant to the needs of these groups.

Across its activities, the programme is consistently addressing human rights issues and following a rights-based approach by empowering rights holders and building the capacities of duty bearers. The programme has also contributed in a variety of specific aspects linked to the implementation of human rights in Albania as for example it has:
• contributed to increase human rights monitoring and reporting capacities of CSOs/OPDs,
• widely informed vulnerable groups across Albania about their rights with information sessions on human rights, children's rights, and rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality, and accessing public services,
• supported the MoHSP in the preparation of the progress report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of PWD,

- supported the order of social worker to develop tools and procedures for professional practice, ensuring the integration of human rights and gender quality principles in their work.

The programme has promoted gender equality in the entire project implementation and interventions have been designed to be gender sensitive, thus promoting the gender dimension of social inclusion. The project's monitoring indicators measuring progress at people level are systematically disaggregated by gender and to a large extent also by vulnerability category – PwD, R&E, and other relevant categories.

The programme has supported the government at different levels to integrate a gender perspective into policymaking processes, ensuring that women's voices and concerns are appropriately represented and prioritized. Outcomes and lessons learned from these initiatives, with the support of the programme, have led to impactful advocacy efforts. Technical assistance has also been provided to MoHSP in integration of a gender perspective in the development and implementation of social inclusion legal, policy, and regulatory frameworks. The programme actively contributed to the development and implementation of gender-sensitive frameworks such as the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021-2030) and the Social Protection Strategy (2024-2030). These strategies incorporate gender analysis and costed action plans, aligning programme activities with national and international commitments to gender equality, including the CEDAW framework and the EU Gender Acquis. An analysis identified gender disparities and specific vulnerabilities faced by women in the context of social services, providing guidance on enhancing the strategy's gender responsiveness, aligning it with international standards, and ensuring its compatibility with existing gender equality policies.

Fifteen municipalities[28] were actively engaged in the update and costing of their local social care plans for the years 2024 to 2026/2027, placing a strong emphasis on incorporating a gender perspective. The programme's engagement of over 1,200 women in participatory budgeting across five municipalities demonstrates progress in integrating gender perspectives into local governance. However, barriers such as limited transportation and socio-cultural constraints continue to impede women's full participation in rural areas. Additionally, the programme interventions have addressed issues of intersectional discrimination, recognizing that women experienced multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination based on gender, socioeconomic status, and other factors. The programme addressed intersectional vulnerabilities, particularly for Roma women and women with disabilities, by tailoring services to their specific needs. For example, Roma women benefited from entrepreneurship training, and gender-sensitive disability services reached rural areas where women face additional access barriers. Despite these achievements, gaps remain in the operationalization of gender-sensitive services at the local level, particularly in underserved areas. Ensuring sustainable funding and institutional capacity for these interventions remains critical. Programmes must also embed comprehensive sex-disaggregated data collection as a standard practice to enhance gender impact analysis.

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[28] Diber, Korce, Patos, Divjaka, Devoll, Berat, Roskovec, Dimal, Kucove, Bulqize, Pogradec, Maliq, Belsh, Permet and Tropoja

Midterm Evaluation, UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind Phase" (LNB2) Report

The principle of "Leave no one Behind" is at the focus of LNB2, based on the relevant SDC guidance, recommendations of international human rights mechanisms related to economic and social rights of disadvantaged groups[29] as well as relevant government's commitments in the context of EU accession and SDGs agenda.

The LNB2 programme has a potential causal connection to 20 of the SDG targets[30], and is also clearly designed with a focus on the principle of "Leave no one Behind" in terms of the identification of the 'left behind' communities and vulnerable population in Albania, marginalised and vulnerable families, women and men, and PWDs, and the R&E communities.

Good governance has also been applied and promoted in a consistent way. Through its focus on capacity building and organizational development, but also addressing entrenched discrimination, the programme is convincingly addressing key dimensions of governance, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of governance structures and institutions. Through its participatory and inclusive approach empowering vulnerable groups, it has also systematically promoted central principles of democratic governance as transparency, accountability and citizen participation. Transparency is also enhanced through the dissemination of LNB2 activities, events, publications and other outputs and promotion of a culture of knowledge-sharing, collaboration and openness though the involvement of stakeholders.

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[29] 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

[30] **Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere**: 1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere; 1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions; 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable; 1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services…
Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture: 2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round; 2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including… stunting and wasting in children… the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons
Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages: 3.2 By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality… and under-5 mortality…
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all: 4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes; 4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls: 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; 5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights…
Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries: 10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status; 10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices…; 10.4 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality
Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable: 11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums; 11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries
Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels: 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development: 17.15 Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development; 17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries… to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts

More specifically, over 15 municipalities have updated their local social care plans with the support of LNB2, incorporating participatory approaches that actively engage vulnerable groups, including women, PwDs, and R&E communities. Participatory budgeting processes enabled over 1,200 women to influence local policy decisions, reflecting the programme's commitment to embedding gender-sensitive governance at the local level. LNB2 also promoted collaboration between CSOs, local governments, and service providers through structured consultation forums. These efforts supported 262 CSOs, including several women-led organizations, to effectively advocate for and monitor social inclusion policies. Moreover, LNB2 supported policy accountability mechanisms, such as monitoring progress on the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (NAPPWD) and contributing to Albania's State Report on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The programme applied a rights-based approach by empowering rights holders and building the capacities of duty bearers to fulfil their obligations. A total of 26,581 people were reached through 1,024 awareness raising events about their rights, including access to public services, gender equality, and disability rights, including 24% persons with disabilities, 26% Roma and Egyptian community members, 25% youth, and 25% women. Additionally, LNB2 enhanced the professional capacity of social workers by providing training on integrating human rights and gender equality principles into service delivery, supported by tools such as professional practice manuals. By June 2024, the programme had improved the qualifications of 789 social care workers and trained 1,665 students of social sciences (65% female) using adapted or new curricula. These efforts were part of a broader strategy to embed inclusive, gender-responsive, and rights-based approaches into Albania's social care services.

7. Conclusions

The Leave No One Behind (LNB) Phase 2 Joint Programme has made significant strides in promoting social inclusion and strengthening Albania's social protection system. Implemented by four UN agencies—UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and UNFPA—under the Delivering as One (DaO) mechanism, the programme aligns with the national development goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The programme's multi-faceted approach supports both central and local authorities in building capacity, improving regulatory frameworks, and ensuring the effective delivery of decentralized social services. LNB Phase 2 results are visible across all targeted municipalities, particularly in addressing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations. This comprehensive evaluation assesses the programme's **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability** to date.

7.1 Relevance

The LNB2 programme builds on Albania's progress in reducing poverty and inequalities by supporting the government in establishing a social protection system. Through its focus on the roll-out of social protection and social care reforms, LNB Phase 2 aligns with national development goals, promoting social inclusion and the effective implementation of the Law on

Social Care Services. The programme has made relevant contributions in strengthening the capacity of both local and central authorities, advancing the development of policies, strategies, and regulatory frameworks, and creating funding mechanisms that support and expand the delivery of decentralized social services. By building on the achievements of the first phase, LNB2 has provided crucial support for the consolidation and scaling up of the reform process.

The design of the programme is highly relevant to the needs of its beneficiaries at the different levels of intervention—national, local, and community. At the community level, the project empowers marginalized and vulnerable groups by raising awareness about their rights and improving access to essential social services. At the local level, it supports municipalities in enhancing their capacity to deliver these services, particularly in rural areas at risk of being left behind due to limited resources or capacities. At the national level, LNB2 strengthens policy frameworks and institutional capacities, ensuring that reforms in social care services are effectively implemented and monitored. This multi-level approach directly contributes to Albania's social inclusion objectives and its preparation for EU membership.

The LNB2 programme provides support to all 61 Albanian municipalities, with a special focus on capacity building, organizational development, and extending social services to marginalized populations. It promotes the development of social care services by enhancing the capacities of local service providers and municipalities to meet the needs of vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities, and Roma and Egyptian communities, elderly, youth at risk of exclusion. Simultaneously, at the national level, LNB2 contributes to the creation of robust regulatory frameworks, improves mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, and strengthens the capacity of central authorities and professional organizations to implement and oversee these reforms. This multi-layered approach ensures that the programme's impact is contributing to systemic change and long-term sustainability.

The programme's participatory and inclusive approach has been fundamental to its success. By actively involving a diverse range of stakeholders—including central and local authorities, civil society organizations, vulnerable population groups and international partners—LNB2 has fostered a collaborative environment for the design and implementation of its activities. Through mechanisms such as knowledge-sharing networks, communities of practice, and capacity-building initiatives, the programme has facilitated the exchange of good practices and lessons learned, while also promoting mentoring and peer coaching. This collaborative approach has led to strong partnerships and a high level of ownership among stakeholders.

Feedback received from project partners, stakeholders, and final beneficiaries consistently highlights the programme's relevance in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable groups and supporting national and local social service policies.

The relevance of the programme and the quality of the design of the action is rated as highly satisfactory.

7.2 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the programme is rated as satisfactory. The LNB2 programme has been highly effective in advancing social inclusion and rights-based services at the local level, making significant progress toward achieving Outcome 1. The programme has successfully informed and empowered vulnerable groups by raising awareness of their rights and enabling their active participation in local policy and budget decisions. This has led to the inclusion of a large percentage of issues raised by vulnerable groups in annual plans and budgets of local government units (LGUs). Additionally, the programme has strengthened the capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs/OPDs) and service providers, facilitating better access to quality social services for marginalized populations. Advocacy and awareness-raising efforts have enabled vulnerable groups to participate more actively in decentralized consultative discussions, leading to more responsive local governance. This empowerment has been critical in ensuring that vulnerable groups can influence decisions affecting their lives, marking a key success in the programme's efforts to promote inclusive and rights-based governance.

In terms of progress towards Outcome 2, the LNB2 programme has been instrumental in improving the ability of municipalities to provide integrated, community-based social services. Currently, 38 municipalities are offering services to at least three at-risk categories, including persons with disabilities, vulnerable children, and victims of domestic violence. The Social Fund has been vital in supporting 51 municipalities, allowing them to expand services, though concerns remain about the sustainability of these services due to reliance on external funding. Capacity-building activities have been crucial in helping 43 municipalities develop or update social care plans, demonstrating increased capability in planning and delivering social services. However, challenges persist, particularly with the slow operationalization of the Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs), limiting some municipalities' ability to effectively assess and address the needs of vulnerable populations. Additionally, the underutilization of the Management Information System (MIS) for social care services hampers full monitoring and data-driven decision-making, indicating areas that require further support for effective service delivery.

Progress towards Outcome 3 has been highly satisfactory, with the LNB2 programme making significant contributions to advancing Albania's social inclusion policy framework. Key achievements include the adoption and initial implementation of the National Strategy on Social Protection (NSSP) 2024–2030, which emphasizes gender-responsive service delivery and the expansion of integrated social services for vulnerable groups, including children. Despite the progress made in inclusive education and gender-responsive services, there are still significant barriers to accessing social services for vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities, marginalized women and children. Continued efforts are needed to ensure that national policies reach the most marginalized and vulnerable communities, particularly in remote or underserved municipalities.

7.3 Efficiency

The efficiency of the JP LNB Phase 2 is evident in its well-structured project management arrangements, which have enabled effective coordination and delivery of results. Implemented under the Delivering as One (DaO) mechanism, the programme aligns with Albania's national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach ensures that resources, including human, financial, and technical inputs, are used optimally to achieve key outcomes related to social inclusion and gender-responsive services. The joint delivery model, which involves four UN agencies—UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and UNFPA—allows for synergy-building, reducing duplication of efforts while enhancing collaboration with government bodies and civil society organizations. The Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the UN Resident Coordinator, and SDC, ensures effective governance, enabling timely decision-making and monitoring of programme progress.

In terms of efficient delivery of results, the LNB2 programme's management framework has proven adaptable, allowing it to respond effectively to emerging needs and challenges. The use of annual work plans, combined with a performance monitoring framework built around 27 indicators, ensures a clear structure for tracking progress. Each participating UN agency contributes to the programme's implementation according to its specific expertise, while local CSOs are engaged to help deliver targeted activities. Capacity-building efforts have been particularly effective in equipping local social workers and service providers with the skills needed to deliver high-quality, rights-based services. This integrated and responsive management structure has ensured that the programme remains aligned with its goals, contributing to the efficient achievement of desired outcomes.

However, certain risks have impacted the efficient delivery of results. Financial sustainability remains a significant challenge, as many municipalities continue to rely on donor funding, making long-term service provision uncertain. High staff turnover, particularly among specialized professionals such as physiotherapists, disrupts service continuity and hampers efficient service delivery. Accessibility issues, especially in rural areas, also hinder equitable access to social services, limiting the programme's reach. Furthermore, ensuring consistent quality standards and robust monitoring across all municipalities has proven to be an ongoing challenge.

The efficiency of the programme is rated as satisfactory.

7.4 Sustainability

The programme is conceived as to support the roll-out of the social protection and social care reform process, contributing to build a system of social care services and as such it is fully aligned with national policies and needs, which is an important factor of sustainability of the results.

The systemic approach of the programme, working on the demand side by empowering right holders while strengthening the supply side of services by developing capacities of duty bearers and supporting the improvement of the regulatory framework also contributes to sustainability.

The programme has achieved results and facilitated change that are highly relevant for target groups at micro level, address the needs of municipalities and are highly relevant for at national level for country policy reform.

The project's collaborative and inclusive approach, engaging central and local authorities, CSOs and OPDs, and final beneficiaries, has fostered strong ownership and shared responsibility, ensuring effective implementation and sustainability of results.

The programme's focus on knowledge management and capacity development has established effective mechanisms for sharing good practices and lessons learned across various sectors, promoting peer learning, mentoring, and advocacy. These efforts have been instrumental in ensuring long-term sustainability, institutional development, and the potential for scaling up results.

In its various areas of interventions, the programme is consequently following a "graduation approach," integrating a stepwise transition from project-led implementation to full government ownership: piloting, building capacity, identifying gaps in the existing regulatory framework, developing institutional frameworks, supporting the establishment of sustainable financing mechanisms, providing technical assistance for policy design, supporting reform to the systems and mechanisms in place, support formalization and standardization of services and procedures, building capacity for monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based decision-making to continually adapt and improve the system.

The main factors which influence the non-achievement of sustainability of the programme results are financial sustainability, strong and independent civil society actors defending the rights of vulnerable groups and providing specialized services, the capacity of government actors to ensure the roll-out of social inclusion and social care reform, high staff turnover.

While many of these issues fall outside the direct control of the programme; they can be influenced through continued policy dialogue and potential technical support to partners.

It is important at this stage of the programme implementation to have for each area of intervention of the programme in-depth reflection in consultation with the relevant partners to develop sustainability strategies to support the full transfer of the results and their sustained operation by the partners.

The sustainability of the programme is rated as satisfactory.

7.5 Cross-cutting themes

LNB2 has made substantial progress in embedding gender equality and good governance as core principles within Albania's social inclusion efforts. By empowering vulnerable groups and strengthening the capacities of key stakeholders, the programme has significantly enhanced access to gender-sensitive, rights-based social care services. It has fostered sustainable change through its participatory approaches, impactful advocacy, and alignment with Albania's national

and international commitments. The programme also addressed intersectional vulnerabilities by tailoring services to the specific needs of marginalized groups. However, gaps remain in operationalizing gender-sensitive services in underserved regions, emphasizing the need for sustainable funding, institutional capacity, and comprehensive sex-disaggregated data collection to enhance impact analysis and secure long-term results. The programme's legacy is firmly rooted in its commitment to the principle of "Leave No One Behind," ensuring that Albania continues to advance toward its social inclusion and equity goals.

8. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are provided. They are categorized into two groups: those aimed at enhancing LNB2's performance during the remaining period of the current phase 2, and those focused on guiding the programme's direction in a potential consolidation phase.

8.1 Recommendation for the remaining of the ongoing phase

LNB2 needs to develop a clear results achievement and sustainability strategy. This should differentiate between short (end of this phase, 31 July 25), middle (potential end of the project 2029) and long-term perspective and should provide perspective allowing to answer questions like who is going to do - and who is going to pay for - what the project is currently doing and paying now, provided there is still a need for these activities. As several activities/models have been implemented in some municipalities, the question arises of how to replicate the results in others. These reflections on replication and scaling up are an integral part of the institutionalisation processes to be described in the exit strategy.

Recommendation 1: Develop a Comprehensive Sustainability Strategy in Preparation for a Potential Third "consolidation" Phase. As the LNB programme approaches the end of its second phase, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive strategy to ensure the sustainability of its achievements and focus further on what is strategic for the sustainability of the social protection system in preparation for the possible third phase. The strategy should outline clear roles and responsibilities for the government, local authorities, and other stakeholders in taking over programme activities, particularly in scaling up successful models and ensuring financial and operational sustainability. The sustainability strategy should focus on transitioning leadership to local and national actors, ensuring that ongoing services and reforms continue without reliance on external support. The programme should gradually hand over successful models of service provision to the government or other stakeholders, focusing instead on addressing the strategic needs of municipalities and populations that have not yet been reached. In this phase, efforts should be concentrated on making these services sustainable by supporting municipalities in taking over the running and funding of social care services, integrating them into local budgets and policy frameworks. Documentation and capitalization of learning and experiences should be central to the transferability approach, ensuring that valuable insights are effectively shared and utilized for future.

Principal Addressees: LNB2, MoHSP, LGUs, SDC, Beneficiaries

8.2 Future perspective

As the programme enters its final phase, it is essential to focus on ensuring the long-term sustainability of its results. The ongoing EU accession negotiations present a unique opportunity to advance social inclusion and social care reforms, further strengthened by the substantial support the EU is providing to the Government of Albania in these areas. Instead of continuing to invest in scaling up and rolling out proven models, these efforts should now be handed over to the government or other stakeholders, allowing the programme to concentrate on addressing remaining gaps. This includes piloting measures in underserved municipalities and reaching out to populations still lacking access to social care services. The programme can take pride in having significantly contributed to establishing a functional social care system. While this system is operational, it remains in an early stage of development and still requires ongoing improvements and reforms. There are several strategic areas related to its functionality and sustainability that need continued support to ensure the system's long-term success.

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made to the programme implementation partners:

The opening of accession negotiations with the EU in 2022, is a leverage for acceleration of social protection and social inclusion reforms, as they are strongly related to the EU accession process. As the EU has entered the social inclusion reforms with a strong presence, LNB2 programme should proactively build on complementarities with EU and build synergies.

Recommendation 2: <u>Strengthen collaboration and build synergies with EU initiatives.</u> To maximize the impact of the LNB programme, it is essential to strengthen collaboration with EU-funded social inclusion and protection projects and align its activities with the broader EU accession process. This includes fostering partnerships with EU institutions and programmes to ensure complementarity, avoid duplication, and build on best practices. Specific attention should be given to ensuring that LNB initiatives are aligned with key EU frameworks, such as the EU Gender Acquis, to support Albania in meeting its commitments on gender equality and inclusivity as part of its social protection reforms. These efforts will contribute to harmonized and impactful reforms in Albania's social protection system, supporting its EU integration goals.

Principal Addressees: LNB2

While the coverage of the population with social services has increased over the years both from the beneficiary and from the geographical point of view (from 10,000 beneficiaries in 2019 or 0.35% of the population to 42,553 beneficiaries in 2022 or 1.5% of the population) the coverage in rural areas remains low. The single most frequent issue mentioned by the beneficiaries of social care services to the evaluators were the problem of lack of transport for people living in remote areas, particularly for women. This issue compounds existing intersectional vulnerabilities, as women in rural areas often face overlapping forms of discrimination, including limited economic opportunities and restricted access to social support systems. Mobile services to support rural and remote areas, family-based services and specialized services remain insufficient to cover

the needs. This is a key area of support where quality, cost effective and gender-sensitive mechanisms still need to be explored and put in place.

LNB2 could make the best use of its privileged position as a trusted partner of the government at different levels (MoHSP, LGUs) and having expertise about UN standards and international good practices, to collaboratively develop adapted, cost-effective mechanisms of outreach services for those still excluded from social care services they need.

Recommendation 3: <u>Focus on Unfinished Businesses and Support Left-Behind Municipalities</u>. While the programme has achieved significant results, there remain municipalities and populations that are left behind in terms of social care access and service provision. The final phase should focus on piloting innovative models and mechanisms to address these gaps, especially in rural and remote areas. The LNB2 programme should prioritize ensuring that all municipalities, particularly those lagging behind, are supported in developing inclusive social care services, ensuring no one is left without access to needed services. The programme should focus on reaching out to those still left out (individuals, VG, LGUs) by exploring and pilot testing further models / mechanisms to address priority systemic issues. Focus on piloting innovative, gender-sensitive social care models in rural areas to address the unique challenges faced by women and girls, particularly those in marginalized communities. This should include capacity-building for local stakeholders to integrate gender equity into service delivery models. Mechanisms like the grant scheme, prioritizing marginalized and vulnerable municipalities to specifically address the needs of those left behind could also be used.

Principal Addressees: LNB, MoHSP, LGUs

Recommendation 4: <u>Strengthen the Social Fund to Ensure Financial Sustainability of Social Care Services.</u> The sustainability of social care services at the local level hinges on the adequacy, predictability, and equitable distribution of funding through the Social Fund. The programme should continue to work with the government to reform the Social Fund, ensuring that it is not only adequately resourced and strategically used but also designed to address the imbalances between municipalities. Currently, the competitive nature of the Social Fund may disadvantage less-developed municipalities with lower capacities. Introducing an equity dimension to the fund would ensure that all municipalities, regardless of their starting point, have fair access to the necessary resources. This equity dimension should include gender-sensitive criteria to ensure that funding prioritizes services addressing the needs of women and girls, particularly those in marginalized communities, with disabilities and in rural areas. Additionally, capacity-building support for local governments to navigate procurement procedures, incorporate gender-responsive budgeting, gender-disaggregated data and manage social services effectively should remain a priority to enhance equitable access to social care.

Principal Addressees: LNB2, MoHSP, MFE, MECI

According to the last census data, the population in Albania is shrinking and experiencing rapid aging. The country is facing a growing challenge in providing care for its aging population and

adults with disabilities, as the traditional family-based care model weakens due to high emigration and a lack of formal support systems. With only a small fraction of elderly individuals receiving formal care, most depend on family members for support. This burden disproportionately falls on women, who often act as primary caregivers in the absence of adequate formal support. A gender-sensitive approach is crucial to addressing these challenges, ensuring that both women caregivers and elderly women have access to quality and affordable care through expanded and integrated social and health services. Leveraging the raw data from the last census to analyze regional and demographic trends can help design targeted, evidence-based interventions that address these challenges. Albania needs to invest in expanding its social care services and integrate health and social services to ensure that all elderly have access to quality and affordable care.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen Cross-Sectoral Collaboration for Holistic Support

To provide comprehensive and integrated support for vulnerable populations, the LNB2 programme should promote stronger collaboration between sectors such as health, education, and social protection and employment. This approach will ensure that services are aligned to address the multifaceted needs of marginalized groups. The programme should pilot integrated service delivery models that combine health and social care services, particularly targeting the elderly, people with disabilities, women (particularly those from traditionally marginalized communities such as Roma and Egyptians, women with disabilities, and rural women) and other vulnerable groups. These models would foster better coordination between service providers, improving the quality and accessibility of care. In the area of inclusive education, the programme should capitalize on the results already achieved by the programme in raising the capacities of school staff in inclusive education and finalize the reforms by developing a roadmap for transformation of special schools in inclusive schools which includes costs, standards, profiles of teachers and specialized staff, capacity building, administrative set up and linkages and coordination with other sectors.

Principal Addressees**:** LNB2, MoHSP, MoES, LGUs, Healthcare Providers

NARUs play a critical role in coordinating service delivery to address the diverse needs of vulnerable individuals, strengthening intersectoral collaboration, and ensuring efficient planning and management of local resources. Moreover, they are key to using evidence-based information for informed decision-making and effective planning of social care services. Despite their central importance, the establishment of NARUs has progressed more slowly than anticipated, and their functions require further refinement to fully realize their potential in supporting the reform objectives.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen the Role of NARUs in Social Service Delivery

Needs Assessment and Referral Units (NARUs) are key to coordinating social services and ensuring that vulnerable populations receive the support they need. The LNB2 programme should continue to focus on strengthening NARUs and ensuring their full functionality across all municipalities. This includes providing technical assistance, capacity building, and ensuring sustainable funding for these units to perform their critical role in service delivery.

Principal Addressees: LNB2, MoHSP, LGUs

Another central element of the sustainability of the achieved results by the programme so far is about building the capacities and motivation of the social care workforce. As capacity building of social care staff is widely considered one of the most important area of results of the programme and as the needs for such support are still very high due to high staff turn-over, a continuation of the support to the professionalization of the social care services staff would be highly relevant. While establishing a full-fledged continuous education system for the social care workforce is far beyond the reach of the current programme, a range of important results have already been achieved in this perspective which would need further consolidation.

Recommendation 7: Continue Professionalizing the Social Care Workforce. The sustainability of social services relies on a well-trained and motivated workforce. The programme should continue investing in the professionalization of social care staff by strengthening continuous education systems and supporting the development of accreditation and qualification frameworks. Partnerships with universities and professional bodies like the Order of Social Workers should be further developed to institutionalize professional development and maintain high standards in social service delivery.

Principal Addressees: LNB2, MoHSP, MoES, Universities, HSLU, Order of Social Workers

Recommendation 8: Strengthen the Role of Civil Society in Social Care Service Delivery

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are essential actors in the provision of specialized social care services and advocacy for vulnerable populations. The LNB2 programme should focus on enhancing the systemic role of CSOs by supporting the diversification of funding sources, strengthening their capacity to sustainably manage social services, promoting constituency building, conducting advocacy actions, and encouraging volunteerism, which are crucial for ensuring long-term sustainability and community engagement. The programme should also work towards formalizing partnerships between municipalities and CSOs through structured contracts and agreements, ensuring that CSOs are recognized as integral service providers within the social care system. Furthermore, the programme should engage in policy dialogue to advocate for improvements in the procurement law, facilitating easier and more transparent engagement of CSOs in delivering social services at the local level. Also, the programme should support the oversight role of CSOs clearly defining their roles in monitoring and evaluating policy reforms and service standards, ensuring transparency and alignment with the needs of vulnerable populations. By institutionalizing CSOs as key partners in service provision and supporting them in accessing other funding sources, these organizations can better focus on their critical external oversight role at both local and national levels. In that way, the LNB programme can strengthen accountability mechanisms, enhance service quality, and ensure that municipalities meet established standards of care in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Principal Addressees: LNB2, MoHSP, MFE, LGUs, CSOs

9. Lessons learned

Drawing from the evaluation findings and conclusions, the following lessons learned are presented to the UN implementing partners for future reference and consideration.

- Coordinated Expertise Brings Complementary Strengths**:** Coordinated expertise from UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, and UNFPA ensured a broad range of technical knowledge, reinforcing the programme's multi-faceted approach. Regular coordination and the Delivering as One mechanism minimized duplication and maximized impact. However, local partners often saw the programme as fragmented due to direct interactions with individual agencies, highlighting the need for a more unified presentation at the local level.
- Systemic Approach is Essential: The programme's multi-level approach, working on both the demand side by empowering vulnerable groups and the supply side by building service providers' capacity, has been crucial for addressing social exclusion. This approach should be replicated in similar interventions for effective systemic change.
- Capacity Building Remains Critical: Continuous capacity building, particularly for social workers and local government staff, is vital for the sustainability of social services. High staff turnover and gaps in specialized skills remain barriers, necessitating ongoing support and professional development.
- Coordination and Synergy are Crucial for Success: Effective coordination among UN agencies, government bodies, and CSOs has been a strength of the programme. Maintaining strong partnerships and avoiding duplication of efforts are essential for maximizing impact.
- The programme's focus on gender-responsive budgeting and inclusive education has shown measurable success. Over 1,200 women participated in participatory budgeting processes across five municipalities, directly influencing budget allocations to address gender-specific needs. Additionally, the programme promoted inclusive education by supporting capacity-building for assistant teachers and incorporating gender-sensitive principles into local social care plans. However, gaps remain in operationalizing these frameworks in underserved areas, particularly for marginalized women such as Roma women and women with disabilities. Addressing these gaps requires sustained municipal capacity-building and equitable resource distribution to ensure that the programme's gender responsiveness translates into tangible benefits for all vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the lack of consistent sex-disaggregated data across some activities limits the ability to comprehensively evaluate the programme's gender impact. Future efforts should embed robust monitoring frameworks to track gender outcomes and enhance accountability.
- Persistence in working with decisionmakers: Advocating for policy change, particularly in the context of social inclusion, is a long-term effort. The programme learned that continuous engagement with policy makers, supported by data and evidence, is essential for advancing reforms. Working closely with national and local governments has been key to advancing social care reforms. Establishing clear roles, regular communication, and joint ownership of initiatives have ensured smoother policy implementation. Future programmes should continue fostering these partnerships to maintain political buy-in and enhance the impact of reforms.
- Using Albania's EU integration process to mobilize partners on the social inclusion / social protection agenda. The programme should continue to work both on government side and be still more proactive in promoting alliances / coalitions to increase pressure for the social

inclusion agenda. The mobilization of government partners will largely depend on Albania's negotiation position, once it becomes public, and the measures outlined in the roadmap for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals. It is essential to emphasize the link between the reforms under Cluster 1 and social inclusion, as these are integral to governance and rule of law, directly influencing Albania's overall progress in the EU accession process. Building alliances with key international stakeholders: EU, WB, CH etc. for example highlighting the links between social inclusion and Human Capital development. Catalyzing initiatives with internal political actors like the all-Party Parliamentary Group for Population and Development. The publication of important findings from INSTAT making available critical data on the demographic challenges of social inclusion/social protection to support advocacy by civil society players. Overall, the potential of the EU accession negotiation should be used more consistently and systematically in collaborating more consistently with the EU (recommendation 1).

▪ Cross-sectoral collaboration - Effective social service delivery requires collaboration across sectors such as education, health, and social protection and employment. The project highlighted the importance of integrating services, particularly for vulnerable groups like the elderly, persons with disabilities, children, and women (women from rural areas, women with disabilities, R&E women).

10. Annexes

Annex 1 Terms of reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE

International Consultant:	Team Leader for the Midterm Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind" (LNB2)
Duty Station:	Home-based with one 5-day maximum mission to Tirana, Albania
Duration:	25 working days, in the period between June – October 2024
Type of Contract:	Individual Contract
Post Level:	International Consultant
Expected starting date:	June 2024

I.   Programme Background

Leave No One Behind (LNB2) is a Joint Programme (JP), 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 **goal of this programme** is to empower vulnerable persons and groups to have improved access to public services that support their social rights, social inclusion and well-being, and are empowered to have a voice in public policy decision-making affecting their lives, and to hold decision-makers accountable for policy implementation.

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. LNB2 builds on the solid policy and legal framework for social inclusion set up in previous UN projects, including LNB1 programme[31]. In full alignment with relevant Albanian policies and legislation and with an evidenced contribution across Albania, the 1st phase supported the making of a national social protection system and the design of an adequate social services model (a national mechanism of Social Fund coupled with local social plans supports the delivery of decentralized social services). During the 2nd phase, the aim is to further improve the results orientation of this flagship programme 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 programme's target groups who directly and indirectly benefit from improved access to social services, are: (1) marginalized and vulnerable families and persons, of all genders and of all ages, and (2) persons with disabilities, and Roma and Egyptians. The improvement of their social inclusion will be supported by interventions at macro level (central

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

authorities), at meso level (municipalities and civil society organisations) and at micro level, actively involving the target groups into the programme's implementation. While the programme covers all of Albania, by empowering vulnerable people and by promoting systemic reform of social service and inclusion provision countrywide, the programme adopts geographic foci to ensure that 30 (of a total of 61) municipalities are suitably capacitated to provide a system of integrated social services to cover the needs of the vulnerable population. The programme primarily uses instruments for capacity building and organizational development.

The **three main outcomes of the second phase (2021-2025**) are to:

- strengthen the vulnerable population to request and receive adequate social services from local authorities that support their social inclusion,
- help municipalities to effectively manage the provision of social services and promote social inclusion,
- support national institutions to implement their policy framework for providing social services and adequately fund social services.

The second phase of the LNB2 programme is financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) with CHF 8.0 million and is implemented with the joint participation of UN organizations, including UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA, and in close partnership with Ministry of Health and Social Protection and other relevant governmental bodies at the central and local levels. The current second phase of the programme started on 1 August 2021, and is in its 3rd year of implementation.

UNDP is the lead UN agency for the overall implementation and coordination of the LNB2 programme. The joint participation of the four UN agencies listed above in line with their mandate and expertise ensures coordination and complementarity with their other initiatives implemented at the central and local levels. The use of the UN SDG Acceleration Fund – in support of the DaO 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. Strategic steering of the programme is assured by the **Steering Committee**, which is co-chaired by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, SDC, and UN Resident Coordinator, and composed of representatives of the implementing UN organizations and civil society.

The programme supports Albania's progress in view of achieving the SDGs, especially SDGs 1 through 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 SDG 16 (Peaceful and Inclusive Societies). The complete programme document can be found here:

https://www.undp.org/albania/projects/leave-no-one-behind-programme-phase-two-lnb2

This TOR sets out the expectations for the programme's midterm evaluation (MTE).

II.   Midterm evaluation purpose, scope, and objectives

The purpose of the MTE is to gain an independent analysis of the progress mid-way through implementation of LNB2 phase 2 (2021-2025). The scope of this exercise is both backward- and forward-looking: the MTE is expected to provide a performance assessment of the LNB2 JP in all areas covered by programme during the first 3 years (01/08/2021-31/07/2024) of implementation (backward-looking), as the basis for updating the theory of change (if/as relevant), including the planned approaches for the rest of programme implementation and strategic positioning for longer term support in this area (forward-looking). The MTE will assess programme successes and/or shortcomings with the goal of identifying necessary changes to be made in order to set the programme on-track for achieving its intended results including contribution to gender equality and the advancement of women's rights. Overall, the MTE is intended to have a formative nature and it intends to improve the programme's performance in the remaining implementation phase. The MTE will also identify priority areas and strategic interventions that should feed in the formulation of a potential next phase for the Leave No One Behind programme.

A team of two consultants will conduct this MTE assignment – one international and one national consultant (to be contracted separately). The team of two consultants will hereinafter be referred to as the *Consultants*. The International consultant (to be recruited under this vacancy) will be the evaluation team leader and fully responsible for the below listed deliverables. A detailed methodology and data collection methods will be included in the Inception Report (for further details see section on deliverables). The MTE will be based on UNDP Evaluation Guidelines (2021)[32], the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (2019)[33] and UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016)[34].

III. Evaluation criteria and key guiding questions

Using some of the following guiding questions, which are based on the OECD/DAC[35] evaluation criteria and cross-cutting themes, the midterm evaluation of the JP will provide an assessment of the:

- **Relevance** - to what extent are the objectives of the development intervention consistent with national and local policies and priorities and the needs of the intended beneficiaries, the needs of the country and the policies of partners and donors?
- **Effectiveness** - the extent to which progress has been made in achieving programme outcomes at various levels, based on planned activities.
- **Efficiency** - how well and productively the programme has used its resources to achieve the specified outcomes.
- **Sustainability** - What preliminary evidence is there on the extent to which programme outcomes are likely to be sustainable beyond the programme's lifetime (both at community and government level) and what recommendations are there to strengthen sustainability?

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[32] United Nations Development Programme - Evaluation Guidelines (undp.org)
[33] OECD-DAC https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm
[34] UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914
[35] UNDP Evaluation Guidelines recommend applying the OECD/DAC criteria of 'Coherence' only if pertinent. As such, it is not included in the requirements for this evaluation. In addition, the application of the 'Impact' criteria is premature given that it is not yet possible to determine the long-term effects of the project.

Midterm Evaluation, UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind Phase" (LNB2) Report

The MTE will present any changes that can be attributed at programme intervention till this stage of implementation. <u>For each of these criteria, the midterm evaluation report should contain conclusions, findings and recommendations on the questions listed below</u>. The list of questions is not exhaustive and therefore, the consultant is expected to suggest the adjustment of this list within the Inception Report. The final list of questions and the evaluation methodology will be discussed and be agreed with the assigned management structures of this MTE. The entire evaluation process will be guided by principles of human rights, gender equality and the integration of people with disabilities.

Sample (<u>indicative</u>) **midterm evaluation questions to be revisited in the inception phase:**

<u>Relevance</u>

- To what extent are the objectives of the programme still valid?
- Are the activities and outputs of the programme consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives?
- Are the activities and outputs of the programme consistent with the intended impacts and effects?
- To what extent is the programme aligned with the policies and strategies of the country, Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs) in the programme and donors?
- How relevant is the programme to target groups', including central and local governments', needs and priorities?
- How relevant is the programme to other key stakeholders' (executing agencies, partner organizations, including other UN agencies, NGOs etc.) needs and priorities? Are all key stakeholders sufficiently and effectively involved? Are their expectations met and are they satisfied with their level of participation?
- To what extent is the programme contributing to country system development?
- To what extent was the program's contribution relevant in the context of the SDGs, with a particular focus on the principle of "leaving no one behind"?
- To what extent have the perspectives of those who could influence the outcomes and those who could contribute information or other resources to achieve the stated outcomes been taken into account in project planning?
- To what extent does the project contribute to gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights-based approach?
- To what extent does the project contribute to different aspects of disability inclusion and the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

<u>Effectiveness</u>

- To what extent have the expected outputs, outcomes and goal been achieved or are likely to be achieved?
- What are the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the outcomes/expected results/outputs?

- Identify remaining barriers to achieving the programme objective during the remaining implementation timeframe.
- Did the programme contribute to capacity building and organisational development as planned?
- To what extent and in what ways the cross-cutting issues of LNB2 JP – good governance and gender equality - are applied/promoted?
- To what extent have PUNOs coordinated effectively and created synergies in the delivery of assistance?
- Is the current coordination set up producing the intended results?
- Coordination with other projects: How has the programme interacted and coordinated with other Swiss/non-Swiss project implementers and vice versa? Is there room for improvement and closer collaboration?
- To what extent did the programe engage or coordinate with different beneficiaries (men and women), implementing partners and national counterparts to achieve results? How were synergies ensured in relation to EU IPA[36] funding?

Efficiency

- Are the available technical and financial resources adequate to fulfil the programme framework?
- To what extent was the project management structure as outlined in the project document efficient in generating the expected results?
- To what extent has the programme implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?
- Is the programme implemented in the most efficient way, making best use of available human, technical, technological, financial and knowledge inputs to achieve its desired results? Have there been any unforeseen problems? How well are they resolved?
- Following up on risk management, how the risk is assessed? and how the risk is managed?
- To what extent have programme funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?
- To what extent do the M&E systems utilized by the LNB2 JP ensure effective and efficient programme management?

Sustainability
- Are the approaches and methods used likely to ensure a continued benefit after the end of the programme?
- What are the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme?
- Which programme areas are the most relevant and strategic for the programme to scale up or consider going forward?
- What is the risk that the level of stakeholder ownership (including ownership by governments and other key stakeholders) will be insufficient to allow for the programme's outcomes/benefits to be sustained?

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[36] *Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)*

- Are lessons learned being documented by the LNB2 JP technical team on a continual basis and shared/ transferred to appropriate parties who could learn from the programme and potentially replicate and/or scale it in the future?
- What changes should be made and/or improved in the current set of programme partnerships in order to promote long term sustainability?
- What type of interventions would need further programme assistance beyond the agreed timeframe?
- How does the program relate to the social fund set up by the government?
- Does the programme help to create the right system to support sustainable capacity building?
- What could be done to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability in order to support programme beneficiaries as well as marginalized groups?

<u>**Lessons learned**</u>
- Provide a list of lessons learned that can inform the remainder of the programme, as well as future programming and planning, in order to ensure accountability and efficiency of the programme.
- Based on lessons learned, come up with potential improvements that can be used for the remainder of the programme, as well as in future scale-up interventions.

The **midterm evaluation report** should also address:

Questions on LNB2 contributions to SDGs, assessing whether the programme's goal, outcomes, and progress done so far are contributing to SDGs progress.

Questions on LNB2 contribution to the Government of Albania - UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026[37], particularly Output 1.1 on Social Protection.

Questions on LNB2 cross-cutting issues, assessing whether cross-cutting issues related to human rights, governance and gender equality are addressed/promoted as an articulation of human rights principles.

The evaluation process will be guided by principles of human rights and gender equality. Since Albania has ratified the international conventions on human rights, it is expected that a human rights-based approach, including the right to life and security, to address inequities, discrimination, marginalization, and vulnerabilities will be applied in all phases of the project's evaluation. Furthermore, the midterm evaluation report should assess the extent to which LNB2 initiatives have considered addressing gender equality issues in the design, implementation, and outcome of the initiative and if both women and men can equally access the programme's benefits to the

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[37] https://albania.un.org/en/153115-government-albania-united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-2022-2026

degree, they were intended **through gender analysis process**. Finally, the midterm evaluation report should also address the extent to which LNB2 JP programme has advocated for the principles of equality and inclusive development and has contributed to empowering and addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in the Albanian society.

Based on the analysis across the above-mentioned elements, *the Consultants*, under the lead of the team leader shall provide findings, lessons learned, overarching conclusions on the programme outcomes, as well as recommendations on how the programme could adjust its programming, partnership arrangements and capacities to ensure that the programme portfolio fully achieves the currently planned outcomes and is positioned for sustainable results in the future.

Annexes of the MTE report: At a minimum, the annexes should include a. TOR for the evaluation, b. Evaluation Methodology, c. Evaluation matrix and data collection instruments, d. List of individuals or groups interviewed or consulted, and sites visited, e. List of supporting documents reviewed.

IV.   Methodology of midterm evaluation

These TOR suggest an overall approach and method for MTE. However, it is the Consultants' responsibility to propose the final, specific design and methods for the evaluation taking into account what is appropriate and feasible for meeting the evaluation's purpose and objectives. The Consultants are expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach that ensures close engagement with LNB2 Technical Committee members composed of all four PUNOs, and the LNB2 JP implementing team, implementing partners, a wide array of stakeholders and beneficiaries, donors, government at all levels where programme is being implemented. The final methodological approach including interview schedule, field visits and data to be used in the MTE should be clearly outlined in the inception report and cleared by the Evaluation Management Group (EMG – duties outlined in Section VI of these TOR).

The MTE is expected to take a **"Theory of Change" (TOC)** approach to determining causal links between the interventions that LNB2 has supported and observed progress at the national and local levels. The midterm evaluation will also propose **a rating scale** in order that Performance rating will be carried out for each midterm evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

Evidence obtained and used to assess the results should be triangulated from a variety of sources, including verifiable data on indicator achievement, existing reports, and technical documents, stakeholder interviews, and other means available. The steps in data collection are anticipated but not limited to the following:

Desk review: The Consultants shall collect and review all relevant documentation including, but not limited to, the following: Project document and budget (contribution agreement); Government of Albania-UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026; Theory of change

and results framework; End of first phase report (LNB1); Consolidated semi-annual and annual progress reports; Programme quality assurance reports; Annual workplans; Activity designs; Highlights of programme Steering Committee meetings; Technical/financial monitoring reports.

Stakeholder interviews and meetings: The Consultants will conduct face-to-face and/or online interviews with relevant stakeholders, including: i) UN Resident Representative, PUNOs (responsible managers and programme/project specialists will be met separately to have the adequate space and time to interact.), members of LNB2 technical committee members, and ii) implementing partners and key government counterparts, donor and development community members, representatives of key civil society organizations, policy makers, beneficiary groups, various relevant local government representatives. All interviews should be undertaken in full confidence and anonymity. The final midterm evaluation report should not assign specific comments to individuals.

Field visits and on-site validation of key tangible outputs and interventions.

Gender and human rights lens. All midterm evaluation products need to address gender, disability, and human right issues.

V.   Midterm evaluation products (deliverables)

MTE Inception Report (up to 15 pages). The inception report be based on the desk review, should reflect consultations and feedback from the Evaluation Management Group (EMG), and should be approved by EMG before the start of the MTE field work (i.e., before any formal evaluation interviews, survey distribution or field visits) and prior to the scheduling of the mission of the international consultant (team leader). As per the *UNDP Evaluation Guidelines*, the inception report should include an evaluation matrix presenting the evaluation questions, data sources, data collection, analysis tools and methods to be used (Annex). The inception report should detail the specific timing/work plan for evaluation activities and deliverables and propose specific stakeholders to be interviewed.

MTE field work (data collection and mission): Upon the approval of the Inception Report and the evaluation work plan, the Consultants are expected to carry out the evaluation activities. To collect data and insights on the JP, the Consultants will undertake field missions to at least one third of LNB2 target areas and interview with relevant stakeholders as agreed in consultation with EMG, including central and local government, PUNOs, beneficiaries, and community members. The international consultant, as team lead, will be in charge of leading the meetings with all LNB2 key stakeholders in Tirana. The LNB2 implementation team will provide support in the organization of meetings and logistical arrangements as necessary.

MTE debriefings. The EMG may ask for an initial/periodic debriefing of the MTE findings. This will be agreed between the EMG and Consultant at the MTE inception. A debriefing will be

scheduled at the end of the field mission. If applicable, this task may be completed either in person, or via other agreed online forms.

Draft MTE report. Based on the findings generated through desk review and data collection missions, the Consultants will prepare the draft MTE report and submit to the Evaluation Manager and EMG. The draft MTE report is expected to provide evidence-based information that is reliable, credible, and useful.

The Consultants will revise the MTE report based on the EM and EMG feedback until finalization.

Audit trail for the MTE report review process: Comments, questions, suggestions, and requests for clarification on the draft MTE report will be submitted to the Consultants to be addressed in an agreed timeframe. The Consultants should reply to the comments through the evaluation audit trail document[38]. If there is disagreement in findings, these should be documented through the evaluation audit trail, while effort should be made to come to an agreement.

Final MTE report including lessons learned (with a main body of minimum 30 pages): The narrative report should be logically structured, containing data and evidence-based findings, conclusions, lessons, and recommendations, and be presented in a way that makes the information accessible and comprehensible. Finally, based on the evaluation findings and in a distinct report section, the Consultants will provide forward-looking actionable recommendations, outlining key strategic priorities to be addressed in any potential programming.

Table of deliverables with respective timeline

The MTE process is expected to take up to 25 working days and will be conducted between June and October 2024. The following table provides an indicative breakdown of activities and delivery:

No.	Deliverable	Description	Timing
1	Review of background documentation and develop methodology and work plan	Desk research	*Week 1-2 after signing of contract*
2	Inception meeting	Online meeting with the Evaluation Management Group	*Within 2nd week of signing of contract*

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[38] Template available at http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/documents/PDF/UNDP_Evaluation_Guidelines.pdf,

3.	Draft Inception Report that includes the midterm evaluation matrix	**Deliverable 1** of contract, which is intended to clarify the methodology to be used and workplan. The Inception Report needs to be approved by EMG for field work to begin.	*Within 3rd week of signing of contract*
4.	Conduct MTE field work	**Deliverable 2** of contract, Data collection, mission to Albania, meetings with counterparts and stakeholders	*After approval of Inception Report*
5.	Conduct Debriefing meeting(s)	**Deliverable 3** of contract. At a minimum, one debriefing meeting will be held at the conclusion of the field work. Subsequent meetings will be agreed with EMG.	*End of the midterm evaluation field mission*
6.	Draft MTE report	**Deliverable 4** of contract. Submission of draft evaluation to EMG for comments. EMG will provide feedback within 1 week from receiving the draft report.	*Within the second week of September*
7.	Audit Trail	**Deliverable 5** of contract. EMG reviews the draft evaluation report and provides an amalgamated set of comments to the evaluator within an agreed period of time, as outlined in these guidelines. Comments and changes by the evaluator in response to the draft report should be retained by the evaluator to show how they have addressed comments.	*End of September*
8.	Final MTE report completion	**Deliverable 6** of contract. Revised report including audit trail detailing how all the received comments have / have not been addressed in the final report	*Within 1 week of October*

VI.   MTE Team composition and required competencies

The Midterm Evaluation Team will be composed of two independent external evaluators, jointly referred to as 'the Consultants'. The evaluation team leader (recruited with the present Terms of Reference) will be an international consultant. S/he is expected to possess extensive evaluation expertise in development projects/programmes. S/he will be supported by an evaluation team

member – a national consultant – to be recruited separately. The evaluation team leader will lead this consultancy to complete the abovementioned tasks and deliverables.

Division of Responsibilities of the Evaluation Team

Responsibilities of the Evaluation Team Leader (international consultant):

The evaluation team leader is accountable for overseeing the entire midterm evaluation process.

- Fulfil the contractual arrangements under the TOR.
- Develop the MTE Inception Report, including a timely work plan for the MTE process, as well as an evaluation matrix and a gender-responsive methodology, in line with the TOR, UNEG Norms and Standards, and ethical guidelines.
- Conduct the field work according to the TOR requirements and Inception Report work plan.
- Produce draft MTE report adhering to UN evaluation templates and brief the TM and EMG on the progress and key findings and recommendations.
- Consider gender equality and women's empowerment and other cross-cutting themes, check that all evaluation questions are answered, and relevant data, disaggregated by sex, is presented, analysed, and interpreted.
- Reflect EMG feedback in the revision of the draft MTE report.
- Coordinate with his/her team member to ensure all assignment components are completed.
- Monitor the MTE process progress and address any issues that may arise during the implementation.
- Facilitate effective communication with national consultant/team member and with external stakeholders.
- Engage constructively with the programme's stakeholders at the national level during the assignment.
- Gather feedback from stakeholders and incorporate it into the midterm evaluation process.
- Communicate any necessary adjustments to the MTE timeline to the TM and EMG, and manage expectations accordingly.
- Address and resolve any issues or conflicts that may arise during the assignment.
- Implement effective problem-solving strategies to overcome obstacles.
- Ensure ethical standards are maintained throughout the final project evaluation.
- Address any ethical concerns raised by the team member or stakeholders.

Responsibilities of the Evaluation Team Member (national consultant):

- Assist the evaluation team leader in compiling and analysing relevant programme data, and documents for evaluation purposes.
- Collect and organize programme-related information and data.
- Conduct thorough analysis to provide insights into programme performance.
- Provide input for the preparation of the Inception Report, draft and final MTE report, ensuring accurate and comprehensive documentation.
- Assist in organizing programme products and documentation.
- Help gather feedback from MEM and programme's stakeholders for the MT evaluation process.

- Facilitate interviews/feedback sessions with external stakeholders to capture diverse viewpoints.
- Support the evaluation team leader in ensuring the quality of assignment components for the MT evaluation.
- Collaborate with the evaluation team leader to address quality concerns and implement enhancements.
- Assist in coordinating meetings and discussions related to the MT evaluation process.
- Monitor progress against deadlines and report any potential delays.
- Support the evaluation team leader in adhering to the established timeline for the evaluation.
- Help identify and report any issues or challenges encountered during the MT evaluation.
- Actively communicate concerns or obstacles faced by the team during the MT evaluation.
- Collaborate with the evaluation team leader in developing solutions to address identified problems.
- Support the engagement with stakeholders during the field missions.
- Assist in organizing stakeholder feedback sessions and ensuring effective communication.
- Help gather stakeholder input and integrate it into the MT evaluation process.
- Uphold ethical standards in all aspects of the MT evaluation process.
- Report any ethical concerns or violations observed during the evaluation.

VII. Core Values, Competencies, and Critical Success Factors

Core Values

Integrity:

- Demonstrate consistency in upholding and promoting the values of UN in actions and decisions, in line with the UN Code of Conduct.

Professionalism:

- Demonstrate professional competence and expert knowledge of the pertinent substantive areas of work.
- Cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity:
- Demonstrate an appreciation of the multicultural nature of the organization and the diversity of its staff;
- Additionally, the individual should have an international outlook, appreciating differences in values and learning from cultural diversity.

Core Competencies:

Communication:

- Facilitate and encourage open communication and strive for effective communication.

Planning & Organizing:

- Develops clear goals in line with agreed strategies, identifies priorities, foresees risks and makes allowances accordingly.

Organizational Awareness:

- Demonstrate corporate knowledge and sound judgment.

Teamwork:

- Demonstrate ability to work in a multicultural, multi-ethnic environment and to maintain effective working relations with people of different national and cultural backgrounds.

Accountability:

- Takes ownership of all responsibilities and delivers outputs under agreed time, cost and quality standards.

Functional Competencies:

- Strong analytical and M&E skills;
- Demonstrates leadership, team building and coordinating skills;
- Plans and produces quality results to meet established goals;
- Generates innovative, practical solutions to challenging situations;
- Conceptualizes and analyses problems to identify key issues, underlying problems, and how they relate;
- Demonstrates substantive and technical knowledge to meet responsibilities and post requirements with excellence;
- Demonstrates strong oral and written communication skills;
- Demonstrates openness to change and ability to manage complexities;
- Responds positively to critical feedback and differing points of view;
- Knowledge about gender equality, and disability inclusion in the Albanian/regional context would be highly desirable.

VIII.   Required qualifications skills and experience of the Evaluation Team Leader

The MTE will be led by an international consultant who fulfills the following requirements:

Academic qualifications

- Postgraduate degree in social and development sciences, economics, public policy, public administration, regional development/planning, or related areas in sustainable development.

Experience

- Substantial technical knowledge of monitoring and evaluation of development projects/programmes and at least 10 years of relevant international working experience.
- Sound knowledge of results-based management systems as well as monitoring and evaluation methodologies.
- Previous experience in evaluation of social inclusion / social protection programmes, human rights and gender equality.
- Technical knowledge and experience in other cross-cutting areas such equality, disability issues, rights-based approach, and capacity development would be an asset.

- Proven experience in international evaluations of programs financed by Swiss Development Cooperation.
- Proven analytical skills and ability to conceptualize and write concisely and clearly.

<u>Language Requirements</u>

- Full working knowledge of English is essential.

IX.   Evaluation Ethics

The midterm evaluation must be carried out in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation' and sign the Ethical Code of Conduct for UNDP Evaluations[39]. The Consultants must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees, and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing the collection of data and reporting on data. The Consultants must also ensure the security of collected information before and after the evaluation to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. Consultant must be free and clear of perceived conflicts of interest. To this end, interested consultants will not be considered if they were directly and substantively involved, as an employee or consultant, in the formulation of project strategies and programming relating to the outcome and programme under review. The code of conduct and an agreement form to be signed by consultant will be part of this ToR.

X.   Management and Implementation Arrangements

Midterm Evaluation Task Manager (ETM) is responsible for managing the entire process: ensuring that the evaluation is properly conducted, managing the validation and quality-control process, and making sure that the report fulfils the terms of reference. UNDP, being the lead UN Agency for the overall management of this UNJP will task the Cluster Programme Specialist to be the ETM of this programme evaluation.

The Evaluation Task Manager will work in coordination with the ***UNDP Quality Assurance, Monitoring, and Evaluation Analyst*** *(QAME Analyst)*, which will ensure that all stages of the evaluation process – from evaluability assessment and preparation to implementation and use – are conducted in full compliance with the Guidelines and <u>UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation</u>.

The Evaluation Task Manager will be also supported by the UNJP technical team, composed of designated representatives from all JP PUNOs and LNB2 implementing team[40].

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[39] <u>UNDP_Evaluation_Guidelines.pdf</u>
[40] The UNJP / LNB technical team is composed of one Programme Specialists in charge of social inclusion and protection portfolio from each UN participating agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA) and the LNB Programme Coordinator.

The Evaluation Task Manager will:

- conduct the preparatory work needed to define the scope and the evaluation questions by mapping activities, stakeholders,
- draft the terms of reference, circulate them to the EMG for comment and obtain approval from the latter and the UNJP co-chairs and donor of the UJP Steering Committee,
- foster efficient coordination and information flow throughout the MTE process,
- maintain direct communication with the Consultants,
- manage the MTE process in coordination with the QAME Analyst, provide strategic guidance and support to ensure the MTE meets its objectives,
- lead the review and approval of MTE products, including but not limited to the draft inception report, the draft final report, the final report, the audit trail documents, as well as the Management Response document.

Evaluation Management Group (EMG)

The Evaluation Management Group (EMG) comprising of senior management of the four JP PUNOs and their delegated programme staff, and a representative of the JP donor, SDC, will be established to oversee the evaluation process, make key decisions, quality assure, and jointly approve MTE deliverables. The EMG will be the main decision-maker in the evaluation of applications for both consultancy positions for this assignment, in coordination with the UNDP Procurement team.

EMG members are expected to strengthen the quality and credibility of the evaluation. EMG members will be expected to:

- Review and approve the MTE Inception Report,
- Participate in debriefing meetings, as required,
- Review and provide feedback to draft MTE report,
- Contribute to Management Response,
- Approve final MTE report,
- Disseminate and promote the use of the evaluation findings and recommendations (After the MTE conclusion).

XI.   Evaluation Procedure

UNDP applies a fair and transparent selection process that would consider both the technical qualification of Individual Consultants as well as their financial proposals. The contract will be awarded to the candidate whose offer:

- Is deemed technically responsive / compliant / acceptable (only technically responsive applications / candidates will be considered for the financial evaluation)
- And has obtained the highest combined technical and financial scores.

The LNB implementing team hired by UNDP as the leading agency in charge is composed of dedicated staff including the LNB programme coordinator, the monitoring coordinator, and information and communications associate that are tasked to coordinate the implementation, monitoring, and reporting of all programme components.

Technical Criteria - 70% of total evaluation – max points: 70

> **Criteria A:** Compliant educational background– max points: 15

> **Criteria B:** Professional-level (international) experience (at least 10 years) related to national monitoring and evaluation of development projects/programmes preferably within UN system – max points: 25

> **Criteria C:** Theoretical and practical familiarity with social inclusion/social protection and social care services in a developing country context – max points: 30

Financial Criteria - 30% of total evaluation – max points: 30

Candidates obtaining a minimum of 70% (49 points) of the maximum obtainable points for the technical criteria (70 points) shall be considered for the financial evaluation.

XII.   TOR annexes
- Evaluation matrix template
- Outline of the evaluation report format
- Audit Train template
- Pledge of Ethical Conduct

Annex 2 MTE field-mission itinerary

MTE field-mission itinerary of the International Consultant (IC) Mr. Laurent Ruedin and Dr. Blerjana Bino

Arrival in Tirana: **9th July at 13.50** ; Departure: **16th July 2024 at 14.35**

Time	Institution	Potential Contact Person(s)	Department/ Position	Contact details/venue	Evaluator	actions
Tuesday 9 July 2024						
15:30 – 16.00	UNDP Quality Assurance, Monitoring, and Evaluation Analyst	Abi Dodbiba	UNDP Quality Assurance, Monitoring, and Evaluation Analyst	UN House Rr. Skenderbej	International Consultant (IC)	
16.00 – 17.00	LNB2 coordination team Initial meeting to discuss agenda of meetings, logistics etc.	Entela Lako Anduena Shkurti	UNDP Prog. Specialist LNB2 programme coordinator	UN House Rr Skenderbej	International Consultant (IC)	
17.00 – 18.00	Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), Swiss Embassy	Silvana Mjeda	Programme Officer, SDC	Colosseo Hotel, Rruga e Durresit **https://maps.app.goo.gl/puMbPc 56YQp9KjsJ7**	International Consultant (IC)	
Time	**Institution**	**Potential Contact Person(s)**	**Department/ Position**	**Contact details/venue**	**Evaluator**	**actions**
Wednesday 10 July 2024						
09:00 – 09:30	UN Team Meeting with UNRC and Heads of Agencies participating in the programme	Fiona McCluney, Monica Meriono, Murat Sahin, Manuela Bello, Michele Ribotta Entela Lako	UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNW Midterm Evaluation Task Manager (ETM)	UN House big conference room Tel: 355 69 209 4758 Entela	IC and NC	

Midterm Evaluation, UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind Phase" (LNB2) Report

Time	Institution	Potential Contact Person(s)	Department/ Position	Contact details/venue	Evaluator	actions
11.30 – 12:30	INSTAT	Elsa Dhuli	Staff linked to social inclusion/ SILC statistics/Children and Youth	INSTAT: 3, Bulevardi Zhan D'Ark, Tiranë Email: edhuli@instat.gov.al	IC+NC	
13:30 – 14:00	Ministry of Health and Social Protection	Denada Seferi	Deputy Minister, MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection. Rr Kavajes. Secretary: +355 67 356 7995	IC	
14.00 – 14.30	Ministry of Health and Social Protection	Nertila Topulli	Head of Social Protection Policies and Development	Email: nertila.topulli@shendetesia.gov.al Tel: 355 68 268 6474	IC	
14.30 – 15.00	Ministry of Health and Social Protection	Etleva Sheshi	Head of the Social Inclusion and Gender Equality Policy Department	Email: Etleva.sheshi@shendetesia.gov.al Tel: 355 68 402 7021	IC	
15:30 – 17:00	Meeting with the LNB2 Technical Committee members composed of all four PUNOs and with LNB2 implementing team	Entela Lako, Anduena Shkurti, Enkelejda Bregu, Mirlinda Bushati, Mariana Bukli, Elda Denaj, Dorina Tocaj, Elsona Agolli, Estela Bulku, Besmira Kuka, Mirela Bylyku, Dhurata Vrenozi, Shpresa Spahiu	UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNW	UN House big conference room	IC and NC	
Thursday 11 July 2024						

Time	Institution	Potential Contact Person(s)	Department/ Position	Contact details/venue	Evaluator	actions
09.00 – 10.00	Site-visit to partner municipality – Shijak	Staff of the municipality responsible for social services planning/monitoring;	Head of the Cabinet Municipality	Departure to Shijak 08:00 Tel: +355 67 433 9462 Email: celiku.manjola78@gmail.com Separate agenda for the site visit	IC	
11.00 - 13.00	Site-visit to partner municipality – Durres/ Sukth	Meme Xhaferraj Staff of the municipality responsible for integrated Social Services	Head of Social Services Department	Contact person: Shpresa Spahiu Tel: +355 69 229 5971 Separate agenda for the site visit	IC	
15.30 – 16:30	Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-university Education QAPE / ASCAP	Gerti Janaqi Albana Markja	Head of QAPE Head of Head of Teacher Qualification and Professional Development Sector	UN House big conference room	IC	
16.30 – 17.30	University of Tirana Faculty of Social Science	Eliona Kulluri and/or Daniela Kalaja and Rudina Rama	Head of Social Work Department Deputy Dean	UN House big conference room	IC	
Friday 12 July 2024						
09.00 – 10.00	Healthcare Services Operator	Markens Shllaku	Deputy Director, Healthcare Services Operator. (MoHSP)	Tel: 355 69 258 1454	NC	

Time	Institution	Potential Contact Person(s)	Department/ Position	Contact details/venue	Evaluator	actions
10:00 – 11:00	EU/IPA programme for Social Inclusion (EU4SI)	Michael JOHNSON	PROJECT MANAGER Education and Employment Promotion	Meeting at LNB2 office Tel (Albania only): +355 69 568 6848 michael.johnson@gopa-group.org	NC+IC	
11.15 – 12.15	Ministry of Economy Culture and Innovation	Dardana Grabova Boriana Hasanllari	Specialists, Social Housing Department	Rr. Deshmoret e Kombit Boulevard Email: Dardana.grabovaj@meki.gov.al Boriana.hasanllari@meki.gov.al Tel: +355 68 838 9049 (Dardana)	NC	
12:30 – 13:30	State Social Service (SSS)	Aida Cavo	Deputy Head of State Social Service	Rr. Durresit. Nr.83 Tirana Email: aida.cavo@sherbimisocial.gov.al Tel 355 69784 8537	NC + IC	
15.30 – 17.00	Site-visit to partners – Tirana Albanian National Deaf Association (ANAD)	Florjan Rojba Albanian Sign Language Interpreters	ANAD executive director	Rr. Myslym Shyri. Nd 60. H5. Ap4 Tirane Email: anad.coordinator@gmail.com Tel: (text only): 355 68 318 6043	IC + NC	
Monday 15 July 2024						
09:00 - 10.00	Municipality – Tirana	Anisa Subashi Staff of the municipality responsible for social services planning/monitoring;	Head of Social Services Department	Municipality of Tirana Rruga Abdi Toptani "Torre Drin" 2nd floor. Tel: +355 69 677 0799	IC + NC	
10.30– 11.30	Ministry of Finances	Fran Brahimi	Head of Local Finances Department	Ministry of Finance and Economy Deshmoret e Kombit Boulevard Tel: 355 68 206 3048 Email:	NC	

Time	Institution	Potential Contact Person(s)	Department/ Position	Contact details/venue	Evaluator	actions
11:30 – 13:00	2 Focus Group Discussions (at UNDP) with key local CSOs – service providers/ innovators and advocacy partners	All partners of PUNOs to be added here	Staff linked to social care/ inclusion and its financing (by state or local level), plus the social care reform	UN House big conference room More partners to be added following consultations with UN partners organizations	IC + NC	
14:00 – 16:30	Meeting & preparation of "Debriefing"					
16:30 – 18:00	MTR "Debriefing" presentation, consultations/feedback	UN participating agencies representatives and their technical team, SDC, Government Partner (MoHSP)		Full list of invitees to be prepared on site during the mission days ETM Entela Lako can participate online	IC + NC	
Tuesday 16 July 2024						
09.00 – 12:00						
12.00	**Departure to Airport**					
after 16ᵗʰ July meetings						
12ᵗʰ september	Lucerne School of Social Work	Institute of Sociocultural Development Prof. Peter Stade Lecturer and Project Manager Peter Stade		Online meeting T direct +41 41 367 48 07 peter.stade@hslu.ch Werftestrasse 1, Postfach, 6002 Luzern T +41 41 367 48 48 hslu.ch/social-work	IC	
17th September	Debriefing with Swiss Embassy	Ruth Huber Silvana Mjeda	Ambassador Programme Officer SDC	Swiss Embassy office Tel: 355 686033123 Email: silvana.mjeda@eda.admin.ch	IC and NC	

Time	Institution	Potential Contact Person(s)	Department/ Position	Contact details/venue	Evaluator	actions
25th September	Delegation of the European Union to Albania	Bernard SEGARRA Programme Officer-Operations Section Sustainable Economic and Social Development		Online meeting ABA Business Center, Rruga Papa Gjon Pali II, k.17 Mobile: +355 69 4052456 Telephone: (+355) 4 2228 320 (ext 330) E-mail: bernard.segarra@eeas.europa.eu	IC and NC	

Agenda for the Field Visits to Partner Municipalities

Time	Institution	Contact Person (s)
Pogradec, Friday 28th of June 2024 Blerjana Bino (LNB2 National Consultant)		
07:30– 10:00	Travel to Pogradec, Community Center PwD	Location https://maps.app.goo.gl/2Eh3c9dpRqbjjZPEA
10:00– 11:00	Visit to the Pogradec Community Centre	Meeting with **Anila Bebri**, responsible for the Centre Cel: 0672640760 Email: anilabebri@yahoo.com
11:00-13:00	Municipality of Pogradec, including a visit to the Elderly Center	Pogradec Municipality Meeting with **Ivana Capollari**, Director of Social Services Cel: 0692527228 Email: ivana.capollari@gmail.com
13:00	**End of Visit**	
Kruja, Wednesday 3rd of July 2024 Blerjana Bino (LNB2 National Consultant)		
09:00-10:00	Travel to Kruja, Multifunctional Community Center	Location: https://maps.app.goo.gl/9BS4EuPgXoTMZdsq5
10:00-11:00	Visit the Multifunctional Community Center	Meeting with **Perparim Copani**, responsible of the Centre Cel: 0692194124 Email: rimico41@gmail.com
11:15-12:30	Municipality of Kruja	Meeting with **Ilira Suta**, Director of Social Services Cel: 0695147292 Email: ilira.suta@yahoo.com
12:30	End of visits	
Maliq & Korce, Friday 5th of July 2024 Blerjana Bino (LNB2 National Consultant)		
07:30-10:30	Travel to Maliq, Community Center	Location: https://maps.app.goo.gl/tC2KQJYe3Q9LvWj28
10:30-11:30	Visit to the Community Centre	Meeting with **Grisilda Hyskolli**, responsible of the Centre Cel: 0684161181 Email: hyskolligrisilda@gmail.com
11:30-12:30	Municipality of Maliq	Meeting with **Ermanda Petriti**, Director of Social Services Cel:0696699260 Email: ermanda.petriti@yahoo.com
12:30 – 13:00	Travel to Korca, Community Center	Location https://maps.app.goo.gl/3i24yL72StfSnTBK6
13:00-14:00	Visit to Community Centre	Meeting with **Dhimitra Palla**, Responsible of the Centre Cel: 0692318827

		Email: dhimitra.palla@hotmail.com
14:10-15:30	Municipality of Korca	Meeting with **Mariana Lara**, Director of Social Services Cel: 0692504959 Email: mariana.lara_tdh@yahoo.com
15:30	End of visits	
Lushnje & Patos, Monday 8ᵗʰ of July 2024 Blerjana Bino (LNB2 National Consultant)		
08:00-09:30	Travel to Lushnje, Development Center	Location: https://maps.app.goo.gl/QM8Ycvij6EsifTbY8
09:30-10:30	Visit to the Development Center	Meeting with **Mani Musai**, responsible of the Centre Cel: 0694580361
10:30-12:00	Multifunctional Center for Families, including visits to two beneficiaries	Meeting with **Teuta Korreshi**, responsible of the Centre Cel: 0684061670 Email: teutaknpf@gmail.com
12:00-13 :00	Travel to Patos, Municipality	
13:00:14:30	Municipality of Patos	Meeting with **Ina Sauli**, Deputy Mayor Cel: 0674049228 Email: ina.sauli@bashkiapatos.gov.al And with Grisilda Bektashi, specialist Social Services Cel : 068 385 5526
14:30	End of visits	
Bulqize & Diber, Thursday 18ᵗʰ of July 2024 Blerjana Bino (LNB2 National Consultant)		
08:00-10:00	Travel to Bulqiza, Community Center	Location: https://maps.app.goo.gl/F7a6KWfCbELsyTmQ9
10:00-11:00	Visit to Community Centre	Meeting with **Eurora Hasa**, responsible of the Centre Cel: 0684419726 Email: jonihasa12@gmail.com
11:00-12:00	Municipality of Bulqiza	Meeting with **Vilson Sula**, Director of Social Services Cel: 0685369611 Email: vilson.sula@live.com
12:00 – 13:00	Travel to Dibra, Community Center	Location: https://maps.apple.com/place?ll=41.678990,20.426038&q=Dropped%20Pin&t=h
13:00-14:00	Visit the Community Centre	Meeting with **Nila Kuci**, Responsible of the Centre Cel: 0683211909 Email: nilakuci4@gmail.com
14:00-15:30	Municipality of Dibra including a visit to the Elderly Center	Meeting with **Abedin Paci**, Director of Social Services Cel: 068 498 9702 ; and Ardit Vranci 068 591 9120 Email:

15:30	End of visits	
26 July 2024	Deputy Mayor of Korca Benila Terova	Online meeting

Annex 3 Evaluation Matrix

Relevant evaluation criteria	Key questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
RELEVANCE	How relevant and valid is the program in the current context, considering its alignment with the Government of Albania's policies, UN and donor policies, the needs of main stakeholders, and its contribution to the SDGs, particularly the principle of "Leave No One Behind"?	1. To what extent are the objectives of the program still valid? 4. To what extent is the program aligned with the policies and strategies of the country, Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs) in the program and donors? 5. How relevant is the program to target groups', including central and local governments', needs and priorities? 6. How relevant is the program to other key stakeholders' (executing agencies, partner organizations, including other UN agencies, NGOs etc.) needs and priorities? 7. To what extent is the program contributing to country system development? 8. To what extent was the program's contribution relevant in the context of the SDGs, with a particular focus on the principle of "leaving no one behind"?	Program document and results framework (and any amendments), and national and local strategies and plans linked to social inclusion; National strategies, plans and progress reports linked to the SDGs (notably linked to SDGs 1-5, 10, and 11), and to the principle of Leave no one Behind	Document review Interviews, site-visits	Program objectives and benefits generated remain relevant to needs Program results framework and theory of change remain relevant, and the identified assumptions true The extent to which the target groups and other stakeholders assess the program as relevant to their needs and priorities, and development plans. The extent to which the program is closely aligned, and reflects the strategies and goals of Albania, and is closely aligned with the strategies and goals of donor partners. The extent to which other key stakeholders assess the program as relevant to their needs and priorities, and development plans The extent to which Albania's plans linked to the SDGs reflect on the principle Leave no one Behind and	Qualitative and quantitative analysis and disaggregation Data synthesis Contribution analysis Triangulation

Relevant evaluation criteria	Key questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
					information on the LNB2 program	
	How internally consistent are the program's activities and outputs with the expected impact?	2, Are the activities and outputs of the program consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives? 3, Are the activities and outputs of the program consistent with the intended impacts and effects?	Program document and results framework (and any amendments), and national and local strategies and plans linked to social inclusion	Document review Interviews, site-visits	Program results framework and theory of change remains relevant, and reflects the added value of LNB2 to promote systemic change and the identified assumptions true	
EFFECTIVENESS	To what extent have the expected outputs, outcomes, and goals been achieved or are likely to be achieved, and what are the major factors and remaining barriers influencing their achievement or non-achievement?	12, To what extent have the expected outputs, outcomes and goal been achieved or are likely to be achieved? 13, What are the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the outcomes/expected results/outputs? 14, Identify remaining barriers to achieving the program objective during the remaining implementation timeframe. 11, To what extent does the project contribute to different aspects of disability inclusion and the empowerment of persons with disabilities. 15, Did the program contribute to capacity building and organisational development as planned?	Program results framework, progress reports, and stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews	Assessment of the likelihood that end-of-program targets can be achieved Assessment of reasons for the overachievement and the underachievement of progress towards meeting the program targets Assessment of the main barriers/ constraints to achieving the program objective to promote systemic change in social inclusion. The extent to which key partners for disability inclusion assess the program as relevant and effective in promoting the implementation of CRPD. The extent that capacity building and organisational	Qualitative and quantitative analysis and disaggregation Data synthesis Contribution analysis Triangulation

Relevant evaluation criteria	Key questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
					development has occurred due to the program	
	How effective is the current coordination setup, including coordination among PUNOs and with other projects (Swiss and EU-financed) in terms of synergies and avoiding duplication.	17, To what extent have PUNOs coordinated effectively and created synergies in the delivery of assistance? 18, Is the current coordination set up producing the intended results? 19, Coordination with other projects: How has the program interacted and coordinated with other Swiss/non-Swiss project implementers and vice versa? Is there room for improvement and closer collaboration? 20, To what extent did the program engage or coordinate with different beneficiaries (men and women), implementing partners and national counterparts to achieve results? How were synergies ensured in relation to EU IPA[41] funding?	Program progress reports, information on donors' cooperation/ consultations linked to their development actions in Albania, LNB2 coordination platform minutes, and stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews	The extent to which the partner agencies coordinate and review their actions and the timely delivery of these under the program Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of coordination set up. The extent to which the program is judged by other donors and project implementers as relevant to their specific project(s) portfolio (e.g. potential synergies with LNB2) The extent to which the LNB2 team consults/ coordinates with donors. The extent that synergies exist of LNB2 & EU IPA, and not duplication, and that a cooperation plan agreed	

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[41] Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)

Relevant evaluation criteria	Key questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
	To what extent is the program applying an inclusive and participatory approach ensuring quality participation of all stakeholders.	6'. Are all key stakeholders sufficiently and effectively involved? Are their expectations met and are they satisfied with their level of participation? 9, To what extent have the perspectives of those who could influence the outcomes and those who could contribute information or other resources to achieve the stated outcomes been taken into account in project planning?	National strategies, plans and progress reports	Document review Interviews	The extent to which key stakeholders assess their involvement in the program as meaningful. The extent to which those who could contribute judge their level of participation in project planning as satisfactory.	
EFFICIENCY	To what extent has the program made the best use of available human, technical, technological, financial, and knowledge inputs to achieve its desired results, considering its management structure, implementation strategy, execution, and timely delivery?	21, Are the available technical and financial resources adequate to fulfil the program framework? 22, To what extent was the project management structure as outlined in the project document efficient in generating the expected results? 23, To what extent has the program implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective? 24, Is the program implemented in the most efficient way, making best use of available human, technical, technological,	Project document, progress and financial reports, LNB2 steering committee minutes, stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews	The extent that the resources have been deployed in line with budget, and results are in line with targets Milestones within annual plans are consistent with results framework Assessment of reasons for over- and under-achievement of progress Assessment of the main barriers/ constraints & unforeseen problems	Qualitative and quantitative analysis and disaggregation Data synthesis Contribution analysis Triangulation

Relevant evaluation criteria	Key questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
		financial and knowledge inputs to achieve its desired results? 26, To what extent have program funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?			that hinder program efficiency Evidences of steering committee considerations and decision-making	
	How effective and efficient are the M&E systems of the LNB2 JP in ensuring program management, risk assessment, and risk management?	25, Following up on risk management, how the risk is assessed? and how the risk is managed? 27, To what extent do the M&E systems utilized by the LNB2 JP ensure effective and efficient program management?	Project document, progress reports, LNB2 steering committee minutes	Document review Interviews	Evidences of risk assessments conducted by the program team, & steering committee consideration	
SUSTAINABILITY	How sustainable are the program results? Consider the factors influencing sustainability, the level of stakeholder ownership, and the degree of commitment to maintaining these results.	28, Are the approaches and methods used likely to ensure a continued benefit after the end of the program? 29, What are the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the program? 31, What is the risk that the level of stakeholder ownership (including ownership by governments and other key stakeholders) will be insufficient to allow for the program's outcomes/benefits to be sustained?	Program progress reports, info. on sustainability planning actions, national/local partners' actions and plans for continued sustainability, stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews, site-visits	The extent to which the program results have been institutionalised by partners (national and local) Evidence of sustainability planning Assessment of major factors that promote or hinder the achievement of sustainability and the process of sustainability planning by partners The extent to which stakeholders feel ownership of the results of the LNB2 program and support the process of post-program sustainability planning and funding	Qualitative and quantitative analysis and disaggregation Data synthesis Contribution analysis Triangulation

Relevant evaluation criteria	Key questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
	What should be the main elements of a general sustainability strategy for LNB2?	32, Are lessons learned being documented by the LNB2 JP technical team on a continual basis and shared/ transferred to appropriate parties who could learn from the program and potentially replicate and/or scale it in the future? 33, What changes should be made and/or improved in the current set of program partnerships in order to promote long term sustainability? 35, How does the program relate to the social fund set up by the government? How does the services established through the program grant fund ensure sustainable financing? 36, Does the program help to create the right system to support sustainable capacity building? 37, What could be done to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability in order to support program beneficiaries as well as marginalized groups?	Program progress reports, information on knowledge-management and learning actions, the extent of outreach to relevant partners and their utilisation of good practice, and stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews	Evidences of knowledgemanagement and learning actions Evidences of lessons learned (incl. good practice) being shared with partners via the program actions The extent to which stakeholders are aware of the lessons learned Assessment of the measures that can be taken by each key partner, notably over the remaining period of LNB2, to contribute to the sustainability of the intervention, where this is not already assured. Information on the Social Fund (and related government funds for social inclusion) and budget allocations Evidences of Social Fund budget allocations and linkages of the Fund to LNB2 Evidences of LNB2 capacity building actions (e.g. training, operational, knowledge-management/ sharing)	

Relevant evaluation criteria	Key questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
					being institutionalised at national level and/or by local partners Evidences of LNB2 establishing exit strategies with key partners and the extent to which those strategies are responsive to the needs of marginalized groups.	
	What are the most relevant and strategic program areas needing consolidation, and what key development needs or priorities will require support beyond the project's end?	30, Which program areas are the most relevant and strategic for future scaling up or consider going forward? 34, What type of interventions would need further program assistance beyond the agreed timeframe?	National strategies, plans and progress reports, program progress reports, and stakeholder feedback, National and local strategies and plans linked to social inclusion, and statistics (poverty/exclusion trends)	Document review Interviews, site-visits	Assessment of development needs/ priorities (medium-term) re. social inclusion, and types of intervention	
	To what extent and in what ways has the program applied and promoted the cross-cutting issues of gender equality and human rights within and across the program, as a matter of principle.	10, To what extent does the project contribute to gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights-based approach? 16, To what extent and in what ways the cross-cutting issues of LNB2 JP – good governance and gender equality - are applied/promoted?	Project document, progress reports, documents linked to design/ implementation of the set of actions supported by the program, stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews	Assessment of the extent to which the cross-cutting themes gender equality and the human rights-based approach are mainstreamed within and across the program, as a matter of principle The extent that the cross-cutting issues are referred to/ reflected in the program and actions'	

issues

Relevant evaluation criteria	Key questions	Specific sub-questions	Data sources	Data collection methods/ tools	Indicators/ success standards	Methods for data analysis
					design, monitored during implementation, and considered in decision-making	
	To what extent has the program's goal and outcomes and progress done so far contributed to SDGs progress of Albania		Project document, progress reports, documents linked to design/ implementation of the set of actions supported by the program, stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews	N/A	
	To what extent has the program advocated for the principles of equality and inclusive development and has contributed to empowering and addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in the Albanian society.		Project document, progress reports, documents linked to design/ implementation of the set of actions supported by the program, stakeholder feedback	Document review Interviews	N/A	

Annex 4 Data collection Tools

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews to commence with brief introductory as to purpose of the interview linked to the MTR of the LNB2 programme, implemented by the UN, in Albania, plus issues of confidentiality etc.

Municipality partners (officials/ staff of the LGU, of CSOs service-providers or advocacy)

1	Could you, please, briefly summarise your institution's role in terms of providing social care services, as you understand it?
2	From your own perspective, how do you rate your overall level of awareness about the LNB2 programme / reform of the social services in the country, its overall and specific goals, and its range of activities? Options: (4) Very much aware/informed, (3) Broadly aware (2) not much aware (1) not aware at all, (0) N/A (If N/A briefly explain why?)
3	How relevant are LNB2 programme actions and results to your institution/ municipality? *-What are the key priorities of your municipality, linked to promoting social services that the programme specifically seeks to address?* *-Why is it important for Albania to focus on and prioritise the strengthening of social inclusion?*
4	From your own perspective, what are the key results that the LNB2 programme has achieved or helped to achieve for your institution/ municipality? *Possible areas of key results (to be used only so that the person does not forget anything):* • *Establishing, or developing and delivery of new Social Services in the municipality* • *Informing, sensitizing and empowering of vulnerable groups* • *Training, strengthening the capacity of municipal staff / service providers* • *Advise and support on the organisation of municipal services* • *Develop or adapt funding* • *Other support to municipal contribution to social inclusion of VGs* • *Sensitize municipal staff and service providers on gender equality* • *holding the government to account in relation to vulnerable groups of citizens* *Have the expected results been achieved, or are likely to be achieved?*
5	In your opinion, to what extent will the above-mentioned results last beyond the end of the project? [*Explore the answer to this question for the main answer given in 4*] What steps have been taken (or are planned) by your institution/ municipality to take up/ embed the results delivered via the programme, to sustain and further promote them longer-term? *Do you feel it is institutionalized? It is based on laws and policies, citizen and municipal staff perceive it as part of Albanian normal way of working, the funding is secured.*

	If not fully owned and sustainable, what should be done to promote long-term sustainability?
	Alternative question: What are the key factors that support the sustainability of results?
6a	Which of the implementing agencies is directly supporting your institution/ municipality (UN, NPF, other executing NGO)?
	From your own perspective, how effectively and efficiently has the implementing partner been in implementing the programme / supporting you so as to achieve the results in a timely manner?
	Possible areas of implementation (to be used only so that the person does not forget anything):
	- *regularity/ frequency of consultations and support suitable?*
	- *outputs delivered relevant, of appropriate quality, met local expectations?*
6b	In your opinion, has the project been sufficiently coordinated with other relevant stakeholders, and has it sufficiently engaged the public, the CSOs and the authorities at different levels?
7	If relevant to your institution/ municipality, what has not happened/ not been delivered as anticipated in terms of results?
	Do you see any risks that the results linked to your institution/ municipality will not be fully achieved and sustained by the end of the programme?
	If the person answers with some shortcoming / risk è follow up question:
	What are the key factors that could hinder the achievement or sustainability of the results?
8	Looking forward, what do you think are the key challenges for Albania (and for your institution/ municipality in particular) still to address linked to promoting social inclusion?
	What are the priority issues for the LNB2 programme to address going forward, and via what type of support actions?
9	Do you feel that you were sufficiently/adequately involved in the design and implementation of the project?
	From your own perspective, are there other key stakeholders in the municipality or beyond in the country who have not been sufficiently involved in the project, in promoting social inclusion in Albania?

Final beneficiaries/ final-users of the social services support

1	Could you, please, briefly summarise how you (and/or family) have been assisted via the delivery of local social inclusion/ social care support measures and services?
	-Has this involved your engagement with the LGU? Which department(s)/unit(s)?
	-Has this involved your engagement with local service-providers? Which provider(s)/ services?
2	From your own perspective, what are the direct results (benefits) that have occurred? What has changed (what is different) in your circumstances (socio-economic benefit)?

3	From your own perspective, do you feel that you are now suitably informed about your rights, aware of how to access, and engage in, local social services delivery/planning? *[(4) Very much aware/informed, (3) Broadly aware (2) not much (1) not aware at all, (0) N/A (If N/A why?)]*
4	From your own perspective, are there any aspects of the support measures/ services that have been difficult for you to access, or that were not delivered in a timely and an appropriate manner? *Comments could relate to the LGU and/or the service-provider(s)*
5	From your own perspective, how do you rate "satisfaction" with the services received? *[(4) Very much Satisfied, (3) Broadly Satisfied (2) partially Satisfied (1) not Satisfied, (0) N/A (If N/A why?)]*
6	Looking forward, what further steps do you think are necessary to improve local social services provision, to promote social inclusion of vulnerable persons, and equality? Are there specific issues (social challenges) that you face that are not presently addressed via the available social services/ support that you receive/ received?
7	*Do you think particular attention should be paid to the different needs of men and women? Has the project contributed sufficiently to addressing these differences?* *In your opinion, has the project contributed enough to addressing the needs of people living with disabilities? Same question about Roma and Egyptians*

Ministry and government agency partners

1	Could you, please, briefly summarise your institution's role in terms of the social inclusion policies framework, and/or delivery of social inclusion measures/ services?
2	At the macro-level/ societal-level, how relevant are the goals and intended results of the LNB2 programme to the needs of Albania now and over the medium-term future? *-What are the key needs/ challenges that the programme specifically seeks to address?* *-Why is it important for Albania to focus on and prioritise the strengthening of social inclusion?*
3	How relevant are the actions and results of the LNB2 programme to your institution? *-Which policy strategies/ action plans, and operational or organisational development priorities of your institution does the LNB2 programme directly align with/ support implementation of?* *-How does social inclusion rank as a priority within the institution's overall frame of priorities?* Options: (4) Very high priority, (3) Priority among other (2) not much a priority (1) no priority at all, (0) N/A (If N/A briefly explain why?)
4a	From your own institutional perspective, what are the key results (outputs/ outcomes) that the LNB2 programme has achieved/ contributed to (notably for your institution)? *Possible areas of key results (to be used only so that the person does not forget anything):* • *Social Policy (mapping, monitoring, innovation, evidence-based policy dialogue)?* • *Capacity Building/ Organisational Development?* • *development/ adaptation of Financing mechanisms/funding support?* • *development/ adaptation of local Social Services delivery and offer?* • *promoting awareness, advocacy, the empowerment of vulnerable groups?* • *social inclusion of Roma /Egyptians of PwD, gender equality?* *-Have the expected results been achieved, or are likely to be achieved?*

4b	In your opinion, has the project been sufficiently coordinated with other stakeholders, and has it sufficiently engaged the public, the CSOs, the authorities and other international stakeholders? • What were the synergies with EU IPA funding and other EU funded initiatives promoting social inclusion in the country? • What were the synergies with the cash transfer / social assistance side of social protection and the World Bank Social Assistance Modernization Project?
5a	In your opinion, to what extent will the above-mentioned results last beyond the end of the project and what are the key challenges for their sustainability? [*Explore the answer to this question for the main answer given in 4a*]
5b	What steps have been taken (or are planned) by your institution • to take up/ embed the results delivered via the programme, to sustain and further promote them longer-term? • to ensure regulatory, institutional, technical, and financial capacity in the future) Specifically, how will results/measures be financially maintained/ sustained/ further enhanced, through: • State/ministry budget? • Social Fund (or other mechanisms)? • LGUs budget? • Donors? • Other? To what extent do you think the results achieved will last beyond the end of the project? Is what has been put in place by the project now sufficiently owned by Albanian stakeholders and are the funding and coordination mechanisms sufficient to ensure its long-term continuation?
5c	*What should be done (change) in an consolidationphase to strengthen the sustainability of results and ensure that the needs of marginalised groups are taken into account?*
6	From your own perspective, how effectively and efficiently has the programme been managed and implemented by the UN so as to achieve the results in a timely manner? *Possible areas of implementation (to be used only so that the person does not forget anything):* - *regularity/ frequency of LNB2-team's consultations with your institution suitable?* - *outputs delivered technically relevant, of appropriate quality, to meet expectations?* *-How do you rate your overall level of satisfaction about LNB2's range of activities and results?* Options: (4) Very satisfied, (3) Broadly satisfied (2) not very satisfied (1) not satisfied at all, (0) N/A (If N/A briefly explain why?)
7	If relevant to your institution, what has not happened/ been delivered as anticipated in terms of the LNB2 programme's results? Do you see any risks that the results linked to your institution/ municipality will not be fully achieved and sustained by the end of the programme?

	If the person answers with some shortcoming / risk è follow up question:
	What are the key factors that could hinder the achievement or sustainability of the results?
8	Looking forward, what do you think are the key challenges for Albania still to address, linked to promoting social inclusion, over the period up to 2030?
	If you would have to prioritize programme areas, which one would you select as priority for the LNB2 programme to address going forward, and via what type of actions?

UN – UN Team leadership

1a	From your institutional perspective, how do you overall rate the results achievement to date of the LNB2 programme and of its contribution to country development results?
	Options: (4) **Very satisfactory**. [on track] No needs to adjust plans and strategies; (3) **Satisfactory**. [on track] Minor problems may arise and small adjustments in implementation may be necessary; (2) **Less satisfactory**. [off track] Adjustments to plans and / or strategies are necessary; (1) **Unsatisfactory**. [off track] The relevance / sustainability of the activities is in jeopardy. Major adjustments / re-organisations are necessary], (0) N/A (If N/A briefly explain why?)
1b	*Have the expected results been achieved, or are likely to be achieved? What, in your opinion, influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the expected results?*
2	To what extent are the specific goals and intended results of the LNB2 programme still relevant to the needs of Albania, and to UN, now and over the medium-term future?
	-Are there any aspects regarding the programme design that, with hindsight, could have been alternatively designed (e.g. enhanced or diminished as an action, result, or financial budget)?
3a	From your perspective, how effectively and efficiently has the programme been utilised and implemented by the Government so as to achieve the results in a timely manner?
	What are the most significant achievements and how did LNB2 contributed to it?
	-What are the key achievements/ contribution of LNB2 to country system development?
	-What steps have been taken (or are planned) by the Government to take up/ embed the results delivered via the LNB2 programme, to sustain and further promote them longer-term?
	Specifically, how will results/measures be financially maintained/ sustained/ further enhanced, through:
	• *State/ministry budget?* • *Social Fund (or other mechanisms)?* • *LGUs budget?* • *Donors?* • *Other?*
3b	From your own institutional perspective, what are the key results (outputs/ outcomes) that the LNB2 programme has achieved/ contributed to?
	Possible areas of key results (to be used only so that the person does not forget anything):
	• *Social Policy (mapping, monitoring, innovation, evidence-based policy dialogue)?* • *Capacity Building/ Organisational Development?* • *development/ adaptation of Financing mechanisms/funding support?*

	• *development/ adaptation of local Social Services delivery and offer?* • *promoting awareness, advocacy, the empowerment of vulnerable groups?* • *social inclusion of Roma /Egyptians of PwD, gender equality?* *-Have the expected results been achieved, or are likely to be achieved?*
3c	*From your opinion, how does social inclusion rank as a priority within the Government's overall frame of priorities?*
3d	*How cost-effective has been the implementation strategy?* *What can be said afterwards that could have been done better in terms of cost-effectiveness?*
3e	*Was the project management structure appropriate for the expected results?* *Has the monitoring system enabled effective (and efficient) management of the project?* *How far has the* programme *management be adaptive and could integrate learning from implementation, monitoring and evaluation in the design and operations (steering)?*
4	How does the LNB2 programme (goals and operations) align/ link/synergise with other projects?
5	What are the key factors that support or hinder the achievement or sustainability of the results?
6	Looking forward, what do you think are the key challenges for Albania still to address, linked to promoting social inclusion, over the period up to 2030? What are the priority issues for the LNB2 programme to address going forward, and via what type of actions? If you would have to prioritize programme areas, which one would you select as priority for the LNB2 programme to address going forward, and via what type of actions? *Which programme areas would you recommend to up-scale and how would you up-scale?*

Swiss Embassy

1	From your institutional perspective, how do you overall rate the results achievement to date of the LNB2 programme and of its contribution to country development results? Options: (4) ***Very satisfactory***. *[on track] No needs to adjust plans and strategies; (3)* ***Satisfactory***. *[on track] Minor problems may arise and small adjustments in implementation may be necessary; (2)* ***Less satisfactory***. *[off track] Adjustments to plans and / or strategies are necessary; (1)* ***Unsatisfactory***. *[off track] The relevance / sustainability of the activities is in jeopardy. Major adjustments / re-organisations are necessary],* (0) N/A (If N/A briefly explain why?)
2	To what extent are the specific goals and intended results of the LNB2 programme still relevant to the needs of Albania, now and over the medium-term future? *-Does the programme still address key needs/challenges for Albania linked to social inclusion?* *-Are there any aspects regarding the programme design that, with hindsight, could have been alternatively designed (e.g. enhanced or diminished as an action, result, or financial budget)?*

		-How does the LNB2 programme (goals and operations) align/ link/synergise with other projects?
3a		From your perspective, how effectively and efficiently has the programme been utilised and implemented by the Government so as to achieve the results in a timely manner?
		What are the most significant achievements and how did LNB2 contributed to it?
		-What are the key achievements/ contribution of LNB2 to country system development?
		-What steps have been taken (or are planned) by the Government to take up/ embed the results delivered via the LNB2 programme, to sustain and further promote them longer-term?
		Specifically, how will results/measures be financially maintained/ sustained/ further enhanced, through:
		• *State/ministry budget?* • *Social Fund (or other mechanisms)?* • *LGUs budget?* • *Donors?* • *Other?*
3b		From your own institutional perspective, what are the key results (outputs/ outcomes) that the LNB2 programme has achieved/ contributed to (notably for your institution)?
		Possible areas of key results (to be used only so that the person does not forget anything):
		• *Social Policy (mapping, monitoring, innovation, evidence-based policy dialogue)?* • *Capacity Building/ Organisational Development?* • *development/ adaptation of Financing mechanisms/funding support?* • *development/ adaptation of local Social Services delivery and offer?* • *promoting awareness, advocacy, the empowerment of vulnerable groups?* • *social inclusion of Roma /Egyptians of PwD, gender equality?*
		-Have the expected results been achieved, or are likely to be achieved?
3c		*From your opinion, how does social inclusion rank as a priority within the Government's overall frame of priorities?*
4a		*In your opinion, has the project been sufficiently coordinated with other stakeholders, and has it sufficiently engaged the public, the CSOs, the authorities and other international stakeholders? What were the synergies with EU IPA funding?*
4b		From your perspective, what has not happened/ been delivered as anticipated in terms of the LNB2 programme's results to date? Are there any risks that the overall results will not be fully achieved and also sustained by partners by the end of the programme?
		-What are the key factors that support or hinder the achievement or sustainability of the results?
5		*Was the project management structure appropriate for the expected results? Has the monitoring system enabled effective (and efficient) management of the project?*
6		From your perspective, how effectively and efficiently has the programme been utilised and implemented by the Government so as to achieve the results in a timely manner?
		-What steps have been taken (or are planned) by the Government to take up/ embed the results delivered via the programme, to sustain and further promote them longer-term?

	-Specifically, how will results/measures be financially maintained/ sustained/ further enhanced (e.g. State/ministry budget, Social Fund (or other mechanisms), LGUs, Donors, etc.)?
	-What are the key factors that support or hinder the achievement or sustainability of the results?
	To what extent do you think the results achieved will last beyond the end of the project? Is what has been put in place by the project now sufficiently owned by Albanian stakeholders and are the funding and coordination mechanisms sufficient to ensure its long-term continuation? What should be done (change) in an consolidationphase to strengthen the sustainability of results and ensure that the needs of marginalised groups are taken into account?
7	Looking forward, what do you think are the key challenges for Albania still to address, linked to promoting social inclusion, over the period up to 2025? What are the priority issues for the LNB2 programme to address going forward, and via what type of actions? *Which programme areas would you recommend to up-scale and how would you up-scale?*

EU Delegation

1	Could you, please, briefly summarise EU initiatives and programmes in terms of the social inclusion policies framework, and supporting delivery of social inclusion measures/ services?
2	At the macro-level/ societal-level, how relevant are the goals and intended results of the LNB2 programme to the needs of Albania now and over the medium-term future?
3a	From your own institutional perspective, what are the key results (outputs/ outcomes) that the LNB2 programme has achieved/ contributed to?
	Possible areas of key results (to be used only so that the person does not forget anything):
	• *Social Policy (mapping, monitoring, innovation, evidence-based policy dialogue)?* • *Capacity Building/ Organisational Development?* • *development/ adaptation of Financing mechanisms/funding support?* • *development/ adaptation of local Social Services delivery and offer?* • *promoting awareness, advocacy, the empowerment of vulnerable groups?* • *social inclusion of Roma /Egyptians of PwD, gender equality?*
	-Have the expected results been achieved, or are likely to be achieved?
4b	In your opinion, has the project been sufficiently coordinated with other stakeholders, and has it sufficiently engaged the public, the CSOs, the authorities and other international stakeholders?
4c	In your opinion, what were the synergies with EU IPA funding and other EU funded initiatives promoting social inclusion in the country?
5a	In your opinion, to what extent will the above-mentioned results last beyond the end of the project and what are the key challenges for their sustainability? [*Explore the answer to this question for the main answer given in 3a*]
5b	How will results/measures be financially maintained/ sustained/ further enhanced, through: • State/ministry budget? • Social Fund (or other mechanisms)? • LGUs budget?

	• Donors? • Other? Is what has been put in place by the project now sufficiently owned by Albanian stakeholders and are the funding and coordination mechanisms sufficient to ensure its long-term continuation?
5c	*What should be done (change) in an consolidationphase to strengthen the sustainability of results and ensure that the needs of marginalised groups are taken into account?*
6	From your own perspective, how effectively and efficiently has the programme been managed and implemented by the UN so as to achieve the results in a timely manner?
7	Looking forward, what do you think are the key challenges for Albania still to address, linked to promoting social inclusion, over the period up to 2030? If you would have to advise on prioritizing programme areas, which one would you select as priority for the LNB2 programme to address going forward, and via what type of actions?

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group – CSOs / service delivery

1. What are the key results of the project?
   - How do these results translate to citizen empowerment?
   - What level of impact have these results had on citizens?
   - How accountable have the local government units (LGUs) been in providing social services to citizens?
   - How well the needs of the Vulnerable Groups have bene addressed? (People with disability and Roma and Egyptian)

2. Which results do you consider the most important and why?
   - How sustainable are these key results?
   - What are your thoughts on the long-term sustainability of these outcomes?

3. Were there any planned aspects that have not been accomplished?
   - What were the reasons for these gaps?

4. What risks threaten the sustainability of the results?
   - Are there any risks that might prevent the full achievement of the results?

5. What have been the main challenges encountered during the project?

      o   How were these challenges addressed?

6. How do you perceive the role of the Government, Ministry, and LGUs in service delivery?
   o Are social services prioritized by these entities?

7. What do you see as the key priorities for the future?
   o How should future efforts be directed to ensure sustained and improved service delivery more broadly focusing on social inclusion and protection?

Focus group – CSOs / Advocacy

1. How well the needs of the Vulnerable Groups have bene addressed? (People with disability and Roma and Egyptian)?
2. How relevant is the project to the context and needs of Vulnerable groups, LGUs and central government?

3. What are the key results? Which results do you consider the most important and why?

   o How do these results translate to citizen empowerment?

   o How accountable have the local government units (LGUs) been in providing social services to citizens?

   o Evidence for results – stories

4. How sustainable are these key results? What are your thoughts on the long-term sustainability of these outcomes? What risks threaten the sustainability of the results?

5. In your opinion, has the project been sufficiently coordinated with other relevant stakeholders, and has it sufficiently engaged the public, the CSOs and the authorities at different levels?

6. Were there any planned aspects that have not been accomplished?

   o What were the reasons for these gaps?

6. What have been the main challenges encountered during the project?

   o How were these challenges addressed?

7. How do you perceive the role of the Government, Ministry, and LGUs in service delivery?

   o Are social services prioritized by these entities?

8. What do you see as the key priorities for the future?

   o How should future efforts be directed to ensure sustained and improved service delivery more broadly focusing on social inclusion and protection?

Annex 5 List of individuals and groups interviewed / sites visited

Respondent	Position	Institution	Sex
Abi Dobdiba	Quality Assurance, M&E Analyst	UNDP	W
Entela Lako	Program Specialist	UNDP	W
Anduena Shkurti	LNB2 Program Coordinator	UNDP	W
Mirela Bylyku	LNB2 Program Team	UNDP	W
Dhurata Vrenozi	LNB2 Program Team	UNDP	W
Fiona McCluney	UN Resident Coordinator	UN	W
Monica Meriono	Resident Representative	UNDP	W
Murat Sahin	Representative	UNICEF	M
Manuella Bello	Head of Office	UNFPA	W
Michele Ribotta	Country Representative	UNWomen	M
Elsa Dhuli	Director General	INSTAT	W
Denada Seferi	Deputy Minister	MoHSP	W
Nertila Topulli	Head of social protection Policies	MoHSP	W
Etleva Sheshi	Head of Social inclusion and Gender equality policy department.	MoHSP	W
Enkelejda Bregu	Social Policy Specialist	UNICEF	W
Mirlinda Bushati	Education Specialist	UNICEF	W
Mariana Bukli	Health Program Specialist	UNICEF	W
Elda Denaj	Child Rights Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist	UNICEF	W
Dorina Tocaj	Sexual & Reproductive Health and Youth Programme Analyst	UNFPA	W
Elsona Agolli	Programme Analyst	UNFPA	W
Estela Bulku	Head of Programs	UNWomen	W
Besmira Kuka	Programme Assistant	UNWomen	W
Shpresa Spahiu	Executive Director	NPF	W
Meme Xhaferraj	Responsible for integrated social services	Municipality of Durres / Skuth	W
Albana Markaja	Head of Teacher Qualification	QAPE/ ASCAP	W
Rudina Rama	Deputy Dean Social Work department	University of Tirana	W
Michael Johnson	Project Manager	EU/IPA GOPA EU4SI	M
Dardana Grabova	Specialists, Housing Department	MEKI	W
Boriana Hasanllari	Specialists, Housing Department	MEKI	W
Aida Cavo	Deputy Head of State Social Service	SSS	W
Florjan Rojba	Executive Director	ANAD	M
Anisa Subashi	Head of Social Service Department	Municipality of Tirana	W
Fran Brahimi	Head of local finances Department	MFE	M
Esjola Mullaymeri	Staff local finances Department	MFE	W
Peter Stade	Lecturer and project manager	HSLU	M
Bernard Segarra	Program Officer	EU Delegation	M
Ruth Huber	Ambassador	Swiss Embassy	W
Silvana Mjeda	Program Officer	Swiss Embassy	W

CSOs representatives to the Focus Group Discussion

Representative	Organization	Sex
Zela Koka	Defending the rights of PwD	W
Suela Lala	Together Foundation	W
Blerta Cani	Albanian Disability Rights Foundation	W
Bledar Taho	IRCA	M
Manjola Veizi	Roma Women's Rights Center	W
Juna Mali	Albania Center for Population and Development	W
Arian Boci	Institute for Health, Social Policy and Research Development	M
Fabiola Egro	Today for the Future	W
Aurela Bozo	The Center for Legal Civic Initiatives	W
Elma Tershana	Observatory for Children's Rights	W
Meriglena Rusta	ASET Center	W
Elena Polo	HDPC	W

Site visits

Respondant	Position	Administrative unit	Sex
Manjola Celiku	Responsible for social services	Shijak	W
Meme Xhaferraj	Responsible of integrated social services	Durres/Sukth	W
Anila Bebri	Responsible of the community Center	Pogradec	W
Ivana Capollari	Director of Social Service	Pogradec	W
Ermanda Petriti	Director of Social Service	Maliq	W
Grisilda Hyskoli	Responsible of the community Center	Maliq	W
Mariana Lara	Deputy Mayor	Korca	W
Dhimitra Palla	Responsible of the community Center	Korca	W
Renard Korreshi	Responsible of the development Center	Lushnje	W
Shpresa Spahiu	Responsible of the community Center	Lushnje	W
Ina Sauli	Deputy Mayor	Patos	W
Perparim Copani	Responsible of the community Center	Kruja	M
Ilira Suta	Director of Social Service	Kruja	W
Eurora Hasa	Responsible of the community Center	Bulqiza	W
Vilson Sula	Director of Social Service	Bulqiza	M
Nila Kuci	Responsible of the community Center	Dibra	W
Abedin Paci	Director of Social Service	Dibra (Elderly center)	M
Benila Terova	Deputy Mayor of Korca	Online, Korca	W

Annex 6 List of documents relevant for the evaluation

LNB 2 programme documents
- Joint Programme Document (ProDoc)
- Annual Progress Reports: August 22-June 23 issued August 23; August 21-June 22 issued September 22; July 2023 – June 2024.
- Semi-annual Progress Reports: July-December 23, issued January 24.
- LNB 2, Plans of Activities: 2021-2022, 2023, 2024.

Partner documents
- Joint Workplans including Common Budgetary Framework: 2022-2023, 2024-2025.
- Government of Albania-UN "Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework" 2022-2026.
- Government of Albania-UN "Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework" 2022-2026 – Progress Reports: 2022, 2023.
- UN Joint workplan 2022 – 2023
- UN Joint Workplan 2024 – 2025
- Swiss Cooperation Programme Albania 2022–2025
- Compliance and Review of the EU support to Social Inclusion Programme (EU)
- Independent Evaluation of SDC's Performance in Social Protection 2013-2017
- National Social Protection Strategy 2024 – 2030
- National Strategy for Development European Integration 2022-2030
- National Agenda on the Rights of the Child 2021-2026 – LINK
- Monitoring Report of the National Agenda on the Rights of the Child – LINK
- Local Plan of Korca Child Friendlier Municipality 2023-2025 – LINK
- Local Social Pan Tirana Municipality

Studies
- Satisfaction with Social Services: Baseline and Midline data (LNB2, June 23)
- Mapping of Social Services (LNB2, May 23)
- Link to Statistical Dashboard for Children – State Agency for the Rights of the Child
- Link to the INSTAT official statistics child- and youth- focused

Annex 7 Progress towards results (as of 30/06/2024)

Table 1. Impact (Overall Goal)

Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Targets	Value of indicator July 2022	Value of indicator June 2023	Value of indicator June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
By 2026 there is increased and more equitable investment in people, removing barriers and creating opportunities for those at risk of exclusion	**1** - % Population at risk of poverty[4243]	2019: 23.0%; 23.8% F, 22.2% M	Decreasing trend by 2025	2020: 21.8%; 22.3% F, 21.4% M	2021: 22.0%; 22.5% F, 21.5% M	2022: 20.6%[4445]; 21.1% F, 20.1% M	Decreasing trend	INSTAT: SILC		N/A
	2 - Human Development Index (HDI)	2019: 0.795 2020: 0.794	Increasing trend	2021: 0.796	2021: 0.796	2022: 0.789[46]	Slightly decreased in 2022	-UNDP: HDI		
	3 - Gender Development Index (GDI)[47]	2019: 0.967	Increasing trend	2021:1.007	2021:1.007	2022: 0.977	Slightly decreased in 2022	-EU: Annual verification reports of the public policy context		
	4 - General government expenditure on Social Protection as a % of GDP	2019: 9.47%	Increased % expenditure	2021: 9.6%	2022: 9.6%	2022: 9.6%[48]	Increased by 0.13% compared to baseline	-SSS: Annual Reports and/or Social Protection MIS	*Indicators 4&5: LNB2 study- 'Review of central and local budget spending on social care services', June 2023*	
	5 - Spending for social care services for VGs from central government budget (%) (without cash programme)	2019: 0.21%	Increased % of spending	2020: 0.18%	2021: 0.16%	2022: 0.15% [49]	Slightly decreased	- LNB2: Review of local budget spending on social care services		

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[42] At-risk-of-poverty threshold is defined as 60% of the median equivalised disposable income for all households
[43] In 2021, Gini coefficient is estimated 33.0 %. decreased by 0.2 percentage points from 2020, (EU-SILC) 2021
[44] SILC in Albania published on 29 February 2024
[45] In 2022, Gini coefficient is estimated 31.0 %, decreased by 2 percentage points from 2021.
[46] Human Development Report 2023-24, published on March 2024

[47] The EIGE Gender Equality Index can be also considered. It has 8 domains for the computation: work, power, time, money, health, knowledge, time, violence against women and intersecting inequalities.
[48] Review of central and local budget spending on social care services', June 2023
[49] Ibid.

Table 2. Outcomes

Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
Outcome 1: Vulnerable persons are empowered to influence public policy decision making, hold service providers accountable for policy implementation and have improved access to inclusive, gender responsive public services.	**1.1** - # vulnerable persons that receive social services by LGUs and other relevant service providers[50] – (dis. by gender & vulnerability category – PwD, R&E and type of service)	2021: 42,553 (21%F, 79%M) - Families in need 63%, Children with disabilities 9%, Elderly 5%, Victims of domestic violence 4%, Adults with disabilities 4%, Children out of parental care 4%, Victims of trafficking 2%, Roma & Egyptian ethnic minorities 2%, Young people from marginalized families 1%, Young people in conflict with the law 1%	Increased # of persons (Disaggregated by category)	NA	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	NA	Between 2018 and 2023, the number of beneficiaries grew from 10,955 to 36,642—a 234.5% increase—this is a spin-off of LNB2's system-building approach.	-SSS: Annual Reports and/or Social Protection MIS	*1.1 'Mapping of Social Services in 61 municipalities', June 2023*	Assumptions: -Government (central & local) continues to prioritize the provision of adequate local social service solutions/ responses to address vulnerable people and needs -The social service support received contributes to improved social inclusion -Effective cooperation of civil society with local authorities/ service providers, via

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[50] As per definitions in Law 121/2016 and DCM No. 518, dated 04.09.2018 (does not include cash beneficiaries)

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Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
					law 3 %(4%F, 96%M)		<td style="background:green"></td>	-LNB2: Satisfaction Survey - Minutes of the meeting - Focus group discussions with CSOs	*1.2 LNB2 study: 'Satisfaction Survey', July 2023*	participatory policy consultations, to identify further needs/ local priorities Risks: -Requesting services leads to frustration or apathy, because service providers cannot satisfy expressed needs and/or access to services is limited or distant
	1.2 - % increase of recipients who believe services received are satisfactory (dis. by gender & vulnerability category – PwD, R&E, etc and type of service) based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 very dissatisfied	2020: 1.55 Overall; 1.51 PWDs; 1.54 Roma, 1.68 Egyptians; 1.55 Women; 1.54 Men;	2.8 Overall in 30 targeted LGUs	NA	2023: Overall 1.70; PWDs 1.61; Roma 1.71; Women 1.7; Men 1.7 (Baseline:[51] 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)	NA	<td style="background:orange">Overall satisfaction with social services increased by 0.15 points, or about 9.68%</td>	- Minutes of the meeting LGU budgets -Focus group discussions with CSOs		

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[51] This baseline, first established during LNB2, measures the satisfaction with social services of various groups in need, including PwD, R&E, the elderly, women, children, families in need, and vulnerable youth.

Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
	to 5 Very satisfied)									
	1.3 # vulnerable persons or their representatives and number of CSOs actively engaged in LGU social inclusion policy consultation events disaggregated by type of representative and type of event	2020: 8,500 individuals (50% F) and 150 CSOs;	17,000 individuals (50% F), 200 CSOs	16,097 individuals (47%F) and 154 CSOs (Added in Y1: 7'597 vulnerable persons (45%F), 4 CSOs[52])	16,754 individuals (49%F) and 226 CSOs (Added in Y2: 657 vulnerable persons (90%F), 72 CSOs[53])	17,494 individuals (50%F) and 262 CSOs (Added Y3: 740 individuals (68% F) and 36 CSOs[54])	Achieved			
	1.4 - # issues raised by vulnerable persons or their representatives at decentralized consultative discussions and % addressed by LGUs in annual plan or budgets	2020: 430 issues raised (60% by vulnerable women) and 30% issues addressed;	Increased # of issues raised and at least 30% addressed	434 issues raised and 30.5 % issues addressed (Added Y1:4 issues raised and 100 % addressed 3 issues raised on Local plan for	504 issues raised and 37.5% addressed (Added Y2: 70 issues raised 80% adressed. 52 issues raised on the Local participatory budget process (73% addressed)	596 issues raised and 42% addressed (Added Y3: 92 issues raised and 65% incorporated by municipalitie	Increased number of issues raised and % addressed			

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[52] 7000 PwD and 2 CSOs actively engaged in advocating for improved access to rights and services for PwD; 597 VGs including R&E engaged in advocating for Integrated social services; 1 CSOs engaged in the consultation process for the Local Plan on Child Rights in the municipality of Korca.
[53] 500 women 52 CSOs engaged in the participatory budgeting process; 97 VGs and 14 CSOs engaged in social housing planning; 60 children and 6 CSOs local engaged in the Local Plan on the Child Rights in the municipality of Korca.
[54] 350 VGs and 36 CSOs engaged in Local Social Planning in 15 minucipalitites; and 390 women engaged in the participatory/consultation budgeting process in five municipalities.

Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
				children and adolescent [55]) 1 issue has been raised about social housing/Divjaka municipality)	3 issues have been raised about social housing and addressed in Social Housing Plans 7 issues raised and addressed on assistive devices for PwD 8 issues raised and adressed on access to services for PwD in 5 municipalities	s in their updated social care plans)				
Outcome 2: Municipalities efficiently manage community based social service delivery and scale-up best practices	**2.1** - # of municipalities providing community-based social services for at least three 'at risk' categories such as people with disabilities, children, youth at risk, elderly, women	2020: 35 LGUs	45 LGUs	36 LGUs[56]	37 LGUs[57]	38 LGUs[58]	On track	- SSS: Annual Reports/Municipalities official records - MHSP: data on Social Fund	*2.1 Mapping of Social Services to be completed by June 2023*	Assumptions: -Government (central & local) continues to prioritize the provision of adequate local social service solutions/ responses to address vulnerable

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[55] 1. Strengthening the participation and contribution in the action plan in regard to vulnerable communities; 2. Strengthening the dialogue among the steering committee members on the priorities that the Action plan should focus on; and 3. Strengthening outreach and communication efforts of the activities, messages and targeted groups.
[56] Divjaka municipality added
[57] Dimal municipality added
[58] Puka municipality added

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Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
	2.2 - # of LGUs applying to and # supported by Social Fund	2020 - 40 applied and 16 supported	61 applied and 61 supported	2022: 42 applied and 26 supported (8 new municipalities for 2022)	2023: 49 municipalities applied and 38 supported (12 new municipalities for 2023)	2024: 57 municipalities applied and 51 supported (15 new municipalities for 2024)	On track	-LGUs: Social Care Plans. Social Housing Plan		people and needs -Effective cooperation of civil society with local authorities/ service providers, via participatory policy consultations, to identify further needs/ local priorities
	2.3 - # of LGU that have developed and adopted a social care plan and/or social housing plan.	2020: 60 have a Social care plan and 5 have a social housing plan;	61 LGUs have a Social care plan updated and 10 have a social Housing plan	61 LGUs have a Social care 22 municipalities have social housing plans, 17 new [59] municipalities supported by LNB2	61 LGUs have a Social care (15 municipalities updated their social plans with LNB2 support) 22 municipalities have social housing plans	43 LGUs have a Social Plan (18 in the process of updating their social plans,[60] one supported by LNB2 - Tirana municipality) 23 municipalities have social housing plans	Social Plan, on track Social Housing achieved	LNB2 reports - LNB2: Review of local budget spending on social care services -SSS: Annual Reports	*2.5 LNB2: Review of local budget spending on social care services tob e completed by June 2023*	-Availability of sufficient financial means to sustain the extent of and the quality of services and their further development Risks: -Frequent changes in

[59] Shkodra, Puka, Tropoja, Mirdita, Kamza, Divjaka, Delvina, Tepelena, Berat, Elbasan, Librazhd, Lushnje, Maliq, Kolonje, Devoll, Pogradec and Sarande
60 17 municipalities are supported by TA EU4SI

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Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
	2.4 - # of LGUs applying to and # supported by LNB2 grants scheme	2020 - 28 applied and 10 supported	45 applied and 20 supported	0	2023: 37 applied and 15 supported	2024: 40 applied and 12 supported (7 new municipalities)	Achieved	and/or Social Protection MIS -LNB2: programme implementation data -MIS records	*2.6 Analytical report on NARUs 2022 2.7 MIS populated with 2,398 cases*	service portfolio and responsibilities of the key actors (staff rotation, staff turnover) -Authorities fail to effectively build local ownership for social services expansion
	2.5 - Amount of local budget funds allocated annually for social care services of VGs	2020 : ALL 398 mil (own sources) in 61 municipalities	Annually increasing trends of budget allocations	2021 : ALL 456 mil (own sources) in 61 municipalities	2022 : ALL 476 mil (own sources) in 61 municipalities	NA	Increasing trends			
	2.6 - # of LGUs with a functional Needs Assessment and referral Unit (NARU)	2010: 0	61 LGUs	2021: 252 NJA out of 399 have established NARU[61]	2023: 14 municipalities established NARU[62]	NA	Progress in making functional the established NARUs is slow.	(1668 users in MIS)		
	2.7 - # LGUs using the MIS for social care services	2020 - 40 LGUs	61 LGUs	32 LGUs using MIS	61 LGUs using MIS	61 LGUs using MIS	In all 61 municipalities, MIS for social services is up and running, with a total number of 1'668 users			

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[61] Social Care in the Municipality: Opportunities and Challenges in Building Supportive Structures/NARUs
[62] Mapping of Social Services in 61 Municipalities, June 2023

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Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
							having friendly access to it. However, the process of populating it with data is slow.			
Outcome 3: National Institutions adequately fund and improve social inclusion policies and mechanisms for professional social care services in Albania	**3.1** - # of issues for sub-legal acts addressed in Law on Social Care Services	2020: 12 sub-legal issues resolved	24 issues fully addressed	21 sub-legal issues resolved	0	21 sub-legal issues resolved (DCM 150, related to the public social fund, has been revised and replaced by DCM 582/5, effective April 11, 2024, with LNB2 support)	On track	-MoHSP and data on the legal framework and Decisions of the Council of Ministers		Assumptions: -Government (central & local) continues to prioritize the provision of adequate local social service solutions/ responses to address vulnerable people and needs
	3.2 - # of pieces of policy/ legislation/ regulation/ instructions/ national standards on social inclusion	2020: 38[63]	53 (Baseline included)	38	47 in total (9 new in Y2: **-3** of pieces of policy/ legislation/ regulation/ instructions/ national standards on	51 in total (4 new in Y3: Methodology for monitoring the implementat	On track	-Data from MoHSP, MoESY, MoFE (and their agencies/ services) -INSTAT -Studies and reports of	3.3 SF 10,744 beneficiaries in total	-Effective cooperation of civil society with national authorities, via participatory policy consultations, to identify

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[63] 6 by-laws, Law on social enterprise; 6 by-laws Law on Social Services; Law on Social Housing and 23 by-laws, Covid Protocols PwD; Law on Youth

Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
	measures adopted				social inclusion measures adopted[64] **-2** sub-legal issues addressed in Law 93/2014[65] -Revisioning of the Law no.22/2018 on Social Housing, approved 22.06.2023 **-2** sub-legal issues on Social Housing) -All-Party Parliamentary Group in Albania for Population and Development, Order, Nr. 43 date 18.07.2023	ion of social service delivery standards. -A manual for informal caregivers for elderly people. - Approved amendments to Public Procurement Law No. 162/2020 concerning social services for vulnerable groups. -A Scholarship Guideline has been adopted for the implementation of the		specialized CSOs -Reports of multilateral agencies/ bilateral donors -MFE: Central Budget -MHSP: Budget -MESY: Budget - Order of Social worker annual reports		further needs and priorities for reform/ funding -Availability of sufficient financial means to sustain the extent of and the quality of services and their further development Risks: -Frequent changes in service portfolio and responsibilitis of the key actors (staff rotation, staff turnover) -Authorities fail to build effective

[64] - 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'
[65] - 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"

Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
						Order No. 666, dated 10.10.2019				societal ownership for social services expansion
	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	2020: Social Fund/SF = ALL 200 mil Social Housing/SH = ALL 2,629 mil Inclusive Education= ALL 2.2mil Social Enterprise Fund/SE = ALL 537.7	Increasing trends of budget allocations	SF 2022 = ALL 196 mil, 584 beneficiaries SH 2021 = ALL 3,510 ml, SH 2022 = ALL 3,420 ml, 21,914 families benefited SE 2021 = ALL 186 ml 2022 = ALL 80 ml	SF 2023 = ALL 209 mil, 8,837 beneficiaries SH 2023 = ALL 2,490 ml SE 2023 =NA	NA	Increasing trend for public Social Fund			
	3.4 - # Professional associations and universities who deliver programmes on social care work in line with international standards	2020: 0	2	0	0	3 Universities (Tirana, Shkodra and Elbasan) -2 Master curricula developed, UNI Tirana[66] 1. Course on Programme and Policy Evaluation, part of the	Achieved			

[66] Master curricula in two directions: Master on Clinical Social Work and Master on Social Policies and Human Development.

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Strategy of Intervention	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
						Master's program in Administration of Social Services. 1'Professional Practice Manual' developed				
	3.5 - # of social care workers <u>in the workforce</u> with improved qualifications (disggregated by gender)	Baseline: 182[67]	Target: 2000	224	284	789[68]	On track, considering the ongoing work for training professional social care workers.			

Table 5: Outputs per Outcome

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
Outcome 1: Vulnerable persons are empowered to influence public policy decision making, hold service providers accountable for policy implementation and have improved access to inclusive, gender responsive public services.										

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[67] Baseline established using LNB1 data.
[68] Of these, 375 professionals benefited from the learning platform Digital Corner

Midterm Evaluation, UN Joint Programme "Leave No One Behind Phase" (LNB2) Report

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
Output 1.1. Vulnerable persons are informed of their rights and entitlements and have the skill and opportunity to influence local policy planning	**1.1.1** - # of awareness raising events conducted by LNB2-partner CSOs and # people reached, (dis. by gender, vulnerability category – PwD, R&E & location)	2020: 15,437 people reached via 575 events (25% PWD, 25%R&E, 23% youth, 27% women)	30,000 people reached (25% PWD, 25% R&E, 25% youth, 25% women) reached via increasing number of events	15,684 people reached via 581 events PWD, 26% R&E, 25% Youth, 23% Women 27%	20,259 people reached via 764 events PWD, 24% R&E, 24% Youth, 25% Women 26%	26,581 people reached via 1,024 events PWD, 24% R&E, 26% Youth, 25% Women 25%	On track	-LNB2: Annual CSOs Survey -CSOs: Progress reports		Assumptions: -Target groups are interested in their empowerment and receptive to engage with or participate in the programme -CSO partners are receptive for external support and can absorb it effectively -Civil society (local citizens and CSOs) is interested in cooperating with local authorities in view of improving social service provision and social inclusion -Local innovative measures to empower target groups in their access to services contribute to
	1.1.2 - # of vulnerable persons or representatives trained on policy planning & M&E (dis. by type of person/ representative, gender, and type of training)	2020:258 people trained (45% F, 55% M);)	1500 people trained (at least 50% F	NA	626 VGs trained (47%F) Y2: 368 VGs trained on policy planning & M&E (81 persons - 50% + F, representatives of 30 organizations trained on assistive devices for PwD 29 representatives 85% F, of 18 CSOs trained on GRB and the role of CSOs in monitoring social services and 258 persons (46%F) trained on disability rights, DPOs.)	1,130 VGs trained (49%F) Y3:504 people trained (20 PRISMA members trained on GRB with a focus on legislation implementation; 484 persons trained (50%F) on disability rights, DPOs;	On track	-LNB2: Annual CSOs Survey -CSOs: progress reports		
	1.1.3 - # of public participatory dialogue/ consultations	2020: 6 forums in 45 LGUs	8 forums in 61 LGUs)	7 forums in in 45 LGUs	9 forums in in 52 LGUs	NA	On track	-LNB2: Annual CSOs Survey -CSOs: progress reports -LNB2: Annual		

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Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
	forums operational locally for vulnerable persons & CSOs to engage with LGUs			Y1:1 Streeing board in 1 LGU[69]	Y2:1 community - based activist in 5 LGUs 1 MEDPAK forum in 9 municipalities focused on monitoring of local social plans			LGUs Survey		improved social inclusion Risks: -Requesting services leads to frustration or apathy, because service providers cannot satisfy expressed needs and/or access to services is limited or distant -Cooperation of civil society with local authorities and service providers is ineffective and/or inefficient, and not taken into consideration by authorities in the assessment of policies/plans
Output 1.2 Innovative and improved public services available for vulnerable persons.	**1.2.1** - # vulnerable persons targeted/ supported via <u>innovative models for service delivery</u>	2020: 2800 PWDs (35% F), 7700 R&E (45% F) and 2300 Others (50% F) supported	3500 PWDs (50% F), 9,000 R&E (50% F), and 9,000 Others (at least 50% F)	3,470 PwD (35%F) 8,661 R&E (50%F) 5,180 other (52%F)	4,031 PwD (40%F) 10,166 R&E (50%F) 9,203 other (55%F)	5,945 PwD (43%F) 12,121 R&E (50%F) 15,070 other (55%F)	Achieved	-LNB2: Annual CSOs Survey -CSOs: progress reports -LNB2: Annual LGUs Survey -ROMLAB		
	1.2.2 - # of vulnerable persons (dis. by gender) supported by LNB2-partner CSOs to access social services	2020: 1050 individuals supported (30% F);	5000 individuals supported (at least 50% F)	1500 individuals (50+%F)	5,322 individuals (50+%F)	7,755 individuals (50+%F)	Achieved			
	1.2.3 # of new innovative models that provide integrated services between health, education, employment and/or municipal units	2020: 1	2025:3	1 new model in four LGUs that provide integrated services	3 new models Y2:2 new models 1 new model in seven municipalities that provide home visiting, 1 new model in 12 municipalities that	3 new models	Achieved			

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[69] A steering board has been established in the municipality of Korca to oversee the planning and implementation of the local plan for children and adolescent

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Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
					provide community-based services on SRHR					
Outcome 2: Municipalities efficiently manage community based social service delivery and scale-up best practices										
Output 2.1 Municipality, regional and local social service providers have improved capacities for efficient delivery of socially inclusive and gender responsive social services.	**2.1.1** - # of partners & staff trained on applying standards/processes for needs assessment, case management and referral, budgeting and planning	2020: 650 staff trained from 4 partner institutions	1,500 staff trained from 5 partner institutions	1,150 staff trained (60%F) from 5 partner institutions Y1: 500 (60%F) local staff trained on MIS (1 partner)	1,651 staff trained (56%F) from 6 partner institutions Y2: 501 staff trained 198 MADCs (65F), 100 social housing, 136 NAP on Ageing 67 (53 F) case management	1,737 staff trained (66%F) from 6 partner institutions Y3: 86 staff trained 75 (55F) municipal staff trained in social service planning, costing and budgeting 11 (10F) staff trained on disaggregated data at the local level	Achieved	- Contractor: progress reports -LNB2: Annual LGUs Survey - Contractor: progress reports -LNB2: Annual LGUs Survey		Assumptions: -Partners are interested to develop the quality and extend the range of social services -Partners are receptive and can absorb external support -Authorities are effective to inform all about their policy/ services -Effective donor coordination
	2.1.2 # of partners & staff trained on applying standards/processes of service provision	2020: 2,560 staff trained from 4 partner institutions	5,500 staff trained from 7 partner institutions	2,725 staff trained (70%F) from 5 partner institutions Y1:165 staff trained (75%F) -157 health professionals	4,350 staff trained (72%F) from 7 partner instituions Y2: 1625 (75%F) staff trained	5,713 staff trained (74%F) from 8 partner instituions Y3: 1,363 (75%F) staff trained from -418 (75%F) assistant teachers and	On track			Risks: -Limited coordination or coherency between different local policy initiatives -Partners lack financial capacity

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
				(75% F) trained on HV -8 social staff trained on providing Integarted social services	1126 (75%F) assistant teachers trained.[70] 77 (66F) community centers staff working with children and youth with disabilities -97 health care personnel and care givers trained on SRH -325 health professionals enhanced capacities in UPHV.	classroom teachers trained on inclusive policies -60 professionals trained in scholarship mechanisms -577 health care personnel and care givers trained on SRH -249 health service providers enhanced knowledge and skills on UPHV[71] -59 social staff trained on providing Integrated social services				
Output 2.2 LGUs and/or service providers share experiences	**2.2.1** - # of peer-exchange meetings between LGUs and/or service providers and participants	2020: 49 peer-exchange meetings, with 290 participants, from 14	45 peer-exchange meetings for 450 participants,	Y1: 2 exchange visits with 40 participants from 9[72] municipalities	6 study/exchange visits with 116 participants from 14 municipalities Y2: 4 study/exchange	49 study visits/ exchange meetings with 715 participants from 61 municipalities	Achieved	-LNB2: programme implementation data		Assumptions: -Partners are receptive to exchange knowledge and to

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[70] 847 assistant teachers trained and awarded 1 credit
[71] The training package was accredited with 30 credits by the Agency for Quality Assurance of Health and Social Care Institutions
[72] Bulqiza, Shkoder, Puke, Permet, Roskovec, Korce, Dimal, Maliq, Diber

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
and scale-up best practices on socially inclusive and gender responsive service provision.		municipalities organizations	from 30 municipalities		visits with 76 participants. -2 study visits in Switzerland, Basel, &Lucerne related to ISS, and PwD-24 participants from 9 LGUs; -1 study visit between HSLU and three Albanian universities (Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan) to explore potential areas of collaboration-8 academic staff participated -1 exchange visits with 46 participants from 14[73] municipalities (community-based centers)	Y3: 43 study visit with 599 participants -1 study in Switzerland, Bern 12 decision-makers and social service professionals participated and learned about the ISS -15 Experience sharing events for scaling up of UPHV with 153 participants -12 regional forums covering all 61 municipalities and around 379 professionals engaged in the implementation of bio-psycho-social assessment 15 joint activities with 55		- Contractor : progress reports -LNB2: Annual LGUs Survey		learn from good practices -Good practices exist that can be scaled up (by other partners, regional/ national) -LGUs and Universities cooperate to build local knowledge/ policy analysis Risks: Partners lack the financial capacity to sustain knowledge learning mechanisms

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[73] Bulqizë, Dibër, Kamëz, Korcë, Krujë, Lushnjë, Maliq, Përmet, Pogradec, Pukë, Roskovec, Shijak, Shkodër, Dimal

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
						participants expanded the cooperation model between assistant teachers and social care staff in 5 targeted municipalities.	(green)			
	2.2.2 - # of partnerships of LGUs & universities in the field of socially inclusive and gender responsive service provision	2020: 0	10	0	0	0	Not yet initiated			
	2.2.3 # good practices in service provision that are scaled up by LGUs/ partners	2020: 12 good practices scaled up by 25 partner organizations (LGUs/ providers)	15 good practices scaled up by (30 LGUs / organizations)	14 good practices scaled up by 30 LGUs (Y1: 2 good practices in 5 LGUs[74])	15 good practices scaled up in 31 LGUs (Y2: HV scaled up in 6 more municipalities[75] 1 good practice on community-based SRH)	15 good practices scaled up in 31	Achieved			
Outcome 3: National Institutions adequately fund and improve social inclusion policies and mechanisms for professional										
Output 3.1: Ministries/Agencies have improved	**3.1.1** – # tools and mechanisms developed to support effective	2020: 43 products	15 new products	46 in total Y1: 3 new products:	53 in total Y2: 7 new -Intersectoral mechanism/Coordi	63 in total Y3: 10 new -5 watchdog reports focusing	Achieved	-Data from MHSP, MESY, MFE (and	*Assessment of the challenge	Assumptions: -Government priorities and strategic

[74] 1.'Integrated social services' (Tirana, Durres, Lushnje and Divjake); 2. 'Universal home visiting methodology' (Lezhe)
[75] Tirana, Korca, Vlora, Elbasan, Berat and Kukes

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Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
resources and mechanisms for evidence-based policy development and implementation	implementation of social inclusion policies (incl. legal and operational tools, funding mechanisms, analytical reports, etc)			-1 analytical report to assess the capacities of LGUs to establish NARU -1 analytical report on challenges of SF implementation -An Operational Protocol for effective collaboration between SSS, regional and local employment offices, and SS directorates in municipalities	nation mechanisms between health and social services established in four regions Tirana, Korca, Lezhe, Vlore -The standard protocols on child growth and development monitoring (Order 406/2, 02.12.2022) -1 analytical report on SF mechanism -1 analytical report on procurement of social services -1 national report on MIIIPA+20 -'Children, Adolescents and Youth-Focused Wellbeing Indicators 2017-2021' Report -Support to the MoHSP for the screening process of Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment of the EU acquis (on	on 'Inclusive social services for women and girls' -INSTAT 'Children, Adolescents and Youth-Focused Wellbeing Indicators 2017-2021' Report -Progress Report on implementation of NAP for Older Persons 2020-2022 -Alternative report on the implementation of the CRPD -The Action Plan For The Prevention, Treatment And Reduction Of Drug Harm In Albania 2023-2026 -State Report CRPD finalized -The mid-term monitoring report		their agencies/ services), and INSTAT -Studies and reports of specialized CSOs -Reports of multilateral agencies/ bilateral donors -Contractor: progress reports -LNB2: programme implementation data	s and opportunities of LGUs to finance social care services (supported by SDGs financing in Albania)	orientations are stable -Authorities are receptive and can absorb external support - Authorities are effective in communicating their policy reforms. -Effective donor coordination Risks: -Delays in the adoption of secondary legislation/ regulation/ service standards

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
					aspects related to social policies).	of the NAPPWD 2021-2025 finalized in June 2024 -Mid-term monitoring report for the National Agenda for Child Rights. -Platform (dashboard) of the Child-specific Indicators -Report summarizing the assessment process of people with disabilities over the age of 18 who are cared for in two development centers in Berat and Korça, focusing on their integration into community.				
	3.1.2 - # of social inclusion strategies/ NAPs that operate standardized and	2020: 5 strategies/ NAPs);	All strategies/ NAPs	7 NAPs in Y1 NAPIRE 2021-2025 NAPPD 2021-2025	4 NAPs in Y2 NSY 2022-2029 NAP SRH NAP Health Promotion	7 in Y3 -National Strategy on Social Protection 2024- 2030	On track			

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
	disaggregated data collection systems for monitoring/ reporting on social inclusion policies and strategies			NARC 2021-2025 Strategy on Social Housing 2016-2025 NSGE 2021-2030 NAP on LGBTI+ persons 2021-2027 NAP on Aging 2022-2024	NAP on Contraceptive Security	-Social Inclusion Policy Document 2023 – 2027[76] -The National Strategy for Development and Integration 2030 -The National Plan for European Integration (NPEI) -The Cross-Cutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance 2023-2030 -National Education Strategy 2021-2026 - The National Agenda for Children's Rights				
Output 3.2: Social care services and social workers	**3.2.1** - # of civil servants trained in the development, implementation,	2020: 201 staff trained	500 staff trained (disgregated by Gender)	201 staff trained (135F)	937 staff trained in total	1078 staff trained in total Y3: 141	Achieved	-LNB2: programme		Assumptions: -Government priorities and strategic

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[76] National Strategy on Social Protection 2024-2030 and Social Inclusion Policy Document 2023-2027, supported by LNOB, both approved by the Council of Ministers of Albania

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Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
in Albania meet professional and internationally recognized standards.	monitoring of social inclusion policies.				Y2: 151 (121F) of MDAC[77] trained (wheelchair service) 585 (390F) of MDAC trained	122 (70F)health professionals increased capacities on child growth and development monitoring, hearing, and vision screening 19 central and regional social service staff trained to monitor service delivery standards		implementation data -ASPA -ASCAP - Contractor: progress reports -Data from MHSP, MESY (and their agencies/ services)		orientations are stable -Partners are receptive for external support and can absorb it effectively Risks: -Limited cooperation between partners
	3.2.2 - # of service providers (state and public service institutions) supported to further develop the continuing education, training-provision and qualifications systems	2020: 3 service provider partner[78]	7 service provider partners	5 service providers (2 new: University of Elbasan, University of Shkodra)	5 service providers	6 service providers (one new - Health Operator[79])	On track	- Professional 'Orders' - Universities		
	3.2.3 - # of professional	2020: 2 products	7 Products	2 products (baseline)	9 products (Y2:7 new)	16 products (Y3: 7 new)	Achieved			

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[77] Multidisciplinary Disability Assessment Commissions
[78] University of Tirana, ASPA, ASCAP
[79] LNB supports the National Health Service in strengthening the Universal Progressive Home Visiting (UPHV) model.

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
	standards, procedural/ operational systems, university training courses and curricula adapted or developed for operation of the occupational standards, education and certification of qualifications process/ system				-ASCAP - 'The professional standards of assistant teachers in pre-university education.' -5 modules on inclusive policies and practices (ASCAP) -The standard protocols for child growth and development, and vision and hearing screening for children under 5 years. - 5 accredited training modules on inclusive education: An introduction to inclusive education; Inclusive education in Albania; Inclusive teacher standards; Focus of inclusion on systems and persons; Practical activities to support children's participation and the creation of	ASCAP, 4 new modules: 1.Arts as an 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 disorder. 4. 'Implementation of the Official Curriculum for Children with disabilities in Pre-University Education' -1 training package on		-Studies and reports of specialized CSOs -Reports of multilateral agencies/ bilateral donors - Contractor: progress reports		

Outputs	Indicators	Baseline	Target 2025	Progress status July 2022	Progress status June 2023	Progress status June 2024	Progress to target June 2024/Comments	Sources, Means of Verification	Comments	Assumptions and risks
					coalitions for inclusion.	integrated SRHR accredited from National Centre for Continuous Education with 62 credits. -4 modules for the continuous training of the in-service professionals developed[80] -Digital Corner- https://digjitale.sociale.al integrated on the website: www.sociale.al [81]				
	3.2.4 - # of social care workers enrolled in training on the adapted/ new course curricula/ offer: pre-service and in-service	2020: 600 students of social work enrolled in training	2000 students/staff enrolled in training) (disggregagted by gender)	798 students of social work (65%F)	965 students of social work (65%F)	1,665 students of social sciences. (700 new [82] 65%F)	On track			

[80] The 4 modules have been submitted by the three Albanian Universities separately to the Quality Assurance Agency of Health and Social Care for accreditation
[81] An online community of practice where professionals can learn, discuss and interact with each other on different contemporary relevant topics
[82] 700 students in the social sciences faculties of the Universities of Tirana, Shkodra, and Elbasan are benefiting from revised syllabuses.

Color-code for Progress to target: Green: achieved or on track; orange: no change or a mixed picture with some risk of not reaching the target; red : not on track / at risk of not achieving target

Annex 8 Rating scale definitions

Highly Satisfactory	The project is expected to achieve or exceed all its major objectives, and yield substantial benefits, without major shortcomings. The project can be presented as "good practice".
Satisfactory	The project is expected to achieve most of its major objectives, and yield satisfactory benefits, with only minor shortcomings.
Moderately Satisfactory	The project is expected to achieve most of its major relevant objectives but with either significant shortcomings or modest overall relevance or Project is expected not to achieve some of its major objectives or yield some of the expected benefits.
Moderately Unsatisfactory	The project is expected to achieve its major objectives with major shortcomings or is expected to achieve only some of its major objectives.
Unsatisfactory	The project is expected not to achieve most of its major objectives or to yield any satisfactory benefits.
Highly Unsatisfactory	The project has failed to achieve, and is not expected to achieve, any of its major objectives with no worthwhile benefits.

Annex 9 Overview of projects financed under UNSCDF related to LNB

Overview of the projects financed under UNSCDF output 1, Outcome A, human capital and social inclusion, closely related to LNB

Government of Albania and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), 2022-2026						
NATIONAL PRIORITY A: Human capital development & social inclusion						
Outcome A : By 2026 there is increased and more equitable investment in people, removing barriers and creating opportunities for those at risk of exclusion						
Output 1 : Social protection systems and mechanisms are strengthened to increase the coverage, quality, and monitoring of cash benefits and social care services and housing for vulnerable groups.						
The projects/programmes/interventions presented below show operational projects that will continue implementation under Outcome A of UNSDCF. Financial data show aproximate values in USD*.						
UN Agency	**Projects**	**Project Acronym**	**Donor**	**Funded***	**In pipeline**	**Status Ongoing/completed**
UNDP, UNICEF, UNW, UNFPA	Leave No One Behind (second phase)	LNB2	Switzerland	8 700 000		Ongoing
UNDP	Strengthen national and local systems 4 socio-economic integration of returnees in Western Balkans" - RRR	RRR	EU	1 350 000		Ongoing
UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, ILO	Municipal Social Protection Service Delivery	IMSPSD	SDG fund	1 800 000		Completed
UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA	Support to Joint SDG Financing	SDG Financing	SDG fund	800 000		Completed
UNW	Regional GRB "Transformative Financing for Gender Equality in the Western Balkans"	Regional GRB	Sweden	884 320		Ongoing
UNDP	Expanding Free Legal Aid Services to Vulnerable Women and Men	EFLAS	Austria	2 200 000	1 300 000	Ongoing
UNDP	Legal aid support through e-services	GRoL	UNDP	200 000		Ongoing
UNDP, UNICEF, UNW	Earthquake recovery support - Social Protection, gender equality & child protection.	Earthquake, CP	Albania SDG Acceleration Fund	3 345 000		Completed
UNICEF	Support to recover from COVID	Covid-19	USAID & EU	450 000		Completed
UNICEF	Child and social protection	CP	regular	1 600 000		Ongoing
UNDP	Improving Community Resilience	ICR	USAID	3 000 000		Ongoing
UNICEF	EU for Social Care	EU4SC	EU	3 000 000		Ongoing
UNICEF	Qendro Project	Qendro	Italian Embassy	3 500 000		Ongoing
UNDP, UNICEF, UNWomen, ILO,	LEAP Albania - Lifelong Empowerment and Protection in Albania	LEAP	SDG Fund	1 800 000		
UNDP, UNICEF, ILO, UNWomen	Accelerating the transition towards a disability inclusive social protection system and the integration between the social assistance, social services and social insurance systems		SDG Fund		250 000	
Sub Total in USD	34 179 320			32 629 320	1 550 000	

* as of October 2024

Annex 10 Pledge of ethical conduct signed by the evaluators

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION

UNEG
United Nations Evaluation Group

PLEDGE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT IN EVALUATION

By signing this pledge, I hereby commit to discussing and applying the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and to adopting the associated ethical behaviours.

INTEGRITY

I will actively adhere to the moral values and professional standards of evaluation practice as outlined in the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and following the values of the United Nations. Specifically, I will be:

- **Honest and truthful** in my communication and actions.
- **Professional**, engaging in credible and trustworthy behaviour, alongside competence, commitment and ongoing reflective practice.
- **Independent, impartial and incorruptible.**

ACCOUNTABILITY

I will be answerable for all decisions made and actions taken and responsible for honouring commitments, without qualification or exception; I will report potential or actual harms observed. Specifically, I will be:

- **Transparent regarding evaluation** purpose and actions taken, establishing trust and increasing accountability for performance to the public, particularly those populations affected by the evaluation.
- **Responsive** as questions or events arise, adapting plans as required and referring to appropriate channels where corruption, fraud, sexual exploitation or abuse or other misconduct or waste of resources is identified.
- **Responsible** for meeting the evaluation purpose and for actions taken and for ensuring redress and recognition as needed.

RESPECT

I will engage with all stakeholders of an evaluation in a way that honours their dignity, well-being, personal agency and characteristics. Specifically, I will ensure:

- **Access to** the evaluation process and products by all relevant stakeholders – whether powerless or powerful – with due attention to factors that could impede access such as sex, gender, race, language, country of origin, LGBTQ status, age, background, religion, ethnicity and ability.
- **Meaningful participation and equitable treatment** of all relevant stakeholders in the evaluation processes, from design to dissemination. This includes engaging various stakeholders, particularly affected people, so they can actively inform the evaluation approach and products rather than being solely a subject of data collection.
- **Fair representation** of different voices and perspectives in evaluation products (reports, webinars, etc.).

BENEFICENCE

I will strive to do good for people and planet while minimizing harm arising from evaluation as an intervention. Specifically, I will ensure:

- **Explicit and ongoing consideration of risks and benefits** from evaluation processes.
- **Maximum benefits** at systemic (including environmental), organizational and programmatic levels.
- **No harm.** I will not proceed where harm cannot be mitigated.
- **Evaluation makes an overall positive contribution** to human and natural systems and the mission of the United Nations.

I commit to playing my part in ensuring that evaluations are conducted according to the Charter of the United Nations and the ethical requirements laid down above and contained within the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. When this is not possible, I will report the situation to my supervisor, designated focal points or channels and will actively seek an appropriate response.

10 July 2024

_____   _____ (Signature and Date)

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION

UNEG
United Nations Evaluation Group

PLEDGE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT IN EVALUATION

By signing this pledge, I hereby commit to discussing and applying the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and to adopting the associated ethical behaviours.

INTEGRITY

I will actively adhere to the moral values and professional standards of evaluation practice as outlined in the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and following the values of the United Nations. Specifically, I will be:

- Honest and truthful in my communication and actions.
- Professional, engaging in credible and trustworthy behaviour, alongside competence, commitment and ongoing reflective practice.
- Independent, impartial and incorruptible.

ACCOUNTABILITY

I will be answerable for all decisions made and actions taken and responsible for honouring commitments, without qualification or exception; I will report potential or actual harms observed. Specifically, I will be:

- Transparent regarding evaluation purpose and actions taken, establishing trust and increasing accountability for performance to the public, particularly those populations affected by the evaluation.
- Responsive as questions or events arise, adapting plans as required and referring to appropriate channels where corruption, fraud, sexual exploitation or abuse or other misconduct or waste of resources is identified.
- Responsible for meeting the evaluation purpose and for actions taken and for ensuring redress and recognition as needed.

RESPECT

I will engage with all stakeholders of an evaluation in a way that honours their dignity, well-being, personal agency and characteristics. Specifically, I will ensure:

- Access to the evaluation process and products by all relevant stakeholders – whether powerless or powerful – with due attention to factors that could impede access such as sex, gender, race, language, country of origin, LGBTQ status, age, background, religion, ethnicity and ability.
- Meaningful participation and equitable treatment of all relevant stakeholders in the evaluation processes, from design to dissemination. This includes engaging various stakeholders, particularly affected people, so they can actively inform the evaluation approach and products rather than being solely a subject of data collection.
- Fair representation of different voices and perspectives in evaluation products (reports, webinars, etc.).

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- Explicit and ongoing consideration of risks and benefits from evaluation processes.
- Maximum benefits at systemic (including environmental), organizational and programmatic levels.
- No harm. I will not proceed where harm cannot be mitigated.
- Evaluation makes an overall positive contribution to human and natural systems and the mission of the United Nations.

I commit to playing my part in ensuring that evaluations are conducted according to the Charter of the United Nations and the ethical requirements laid down above and contained within the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. When this is not possible, I will report the situation to my supervisor, designated focal points or channels and will actively seek an appropriate response.

6/7/2024 _____ L. Ruedi _____ (Signature and Date)

Annex 11: Glossary

The "Leave No One Behind" (LNB) programme utilizes key definitions based on national legislation and policy frameworks to ensure consistent terminology. This MTE Report uses same definitions, presented below:

- Social Services: Services provided by state, local governments, or authorized providers aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. These include health, education, protection, employment, legal aid and housing services and are designed to enhance social inclusion and well-being. .
- Social Care Services: A subset of social services focused on providing care and support for individuals unable to fully care for themselves due to age, disability, or other vulnerabilities, as established by Albania's decentralization reforms and the 2016 Social Care Law.
- Social Protection: Social protection is the set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty, deprivation or exclusion. Social protection systems provide contributory or non-contributory forms of income support that reduce and prevent poverty; ensures access to basic social services to all, especially for groups that are traditionally vulnerable or excluded; stimulates productive inclusion through the development of capabilities, skills, rights and opportunities for the poor and excluded; builds resilience and protects people against the risks of livelihood shocks throughout their lifecycle; and helps remove structural barriers, including barriers within the household, that prevent people from achieving well-being. Social protection systems can include various schemes and programmes, including universal schemes, social assistance, social insurance, and labour market and employment programmes/ measures.
- Social Inclusion: The process of integrating individuals or groups at risk of exclusion into the socio-economic fabric of society. It emphasizes removing barriers to participation in social, economic, and political life and is rooted in Albania's policy frameworks such as the Social Inclusion Policy Document 2022-2030.
- Integrated Social Services: Coordinated delivery of multiple services (social, health, education, employment, legal aid and housing) to address the multifaceted needs of individuals. These services are key to the National Social Protection Strategy and sectoral strategies and rely on collaboration among municipalities, NGOs, and central government.
- Vulnerable Groups: Individuals at heightened risk of poverty, exclusion, or marginalization, including children at risk, women at risk, persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, and elderly persons. Defined under Albania's National Social Protection Strategy and Local Social Care Plans, these groups are prioritized in social service delivery.
- Gender-Responsive Services: Services designed to address specific needs and inequalities faced by women and men, ensuring equity and inclusivity in access and outcomes. This is emphasized under the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030.