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Independent Country Programme Evaluation

ALBANIA

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADISA	Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services in Albania
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ALMP	Active labour market programme
ASPA	Albanian School of Public Administration
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPD	Country programme document
CRM	Coordinated referral mechanism
CSO	Civil society organization
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
EU	European Union
FLA	Free legal aid
FLAD	Free Legal Aid Directorate
GBV	Gender-based violence
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIS	Geographic information system
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action Against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
ICT	Information and communication technology
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IGEO	Institute of Geosciences
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMWGCC	Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Climate Change
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
IPA III	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
KEQ	Key evaluation question
LAP	Local adaptation plan
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoEI	Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure
MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
MoI	Ministry of Interior

MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MPA	Marine protected area
MPTF	Multi-partner trust fund
MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprises
NAES	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NAIS	National Agency for Information Society
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NAPA	National Agency for Protected Areas
NAPIRE	National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians
NAVETQ	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training Qualifications
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NCPA	National Civil Protection Agency
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NESS	National Employment and Skills Strategy
NFA	National Forestry Agency
NIM	National Implementation Modality
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDNA	Post-Disaster Needs Assessment
PV	Photovoltaic
RAPA	Regional Agency for Protected Areas
REVALB	Local Information System for Registering Cases of Domestic Violence
ROAR	Results-oriented annual report
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEESAC	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
ToC	Theory of change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VET	Vocational education and training

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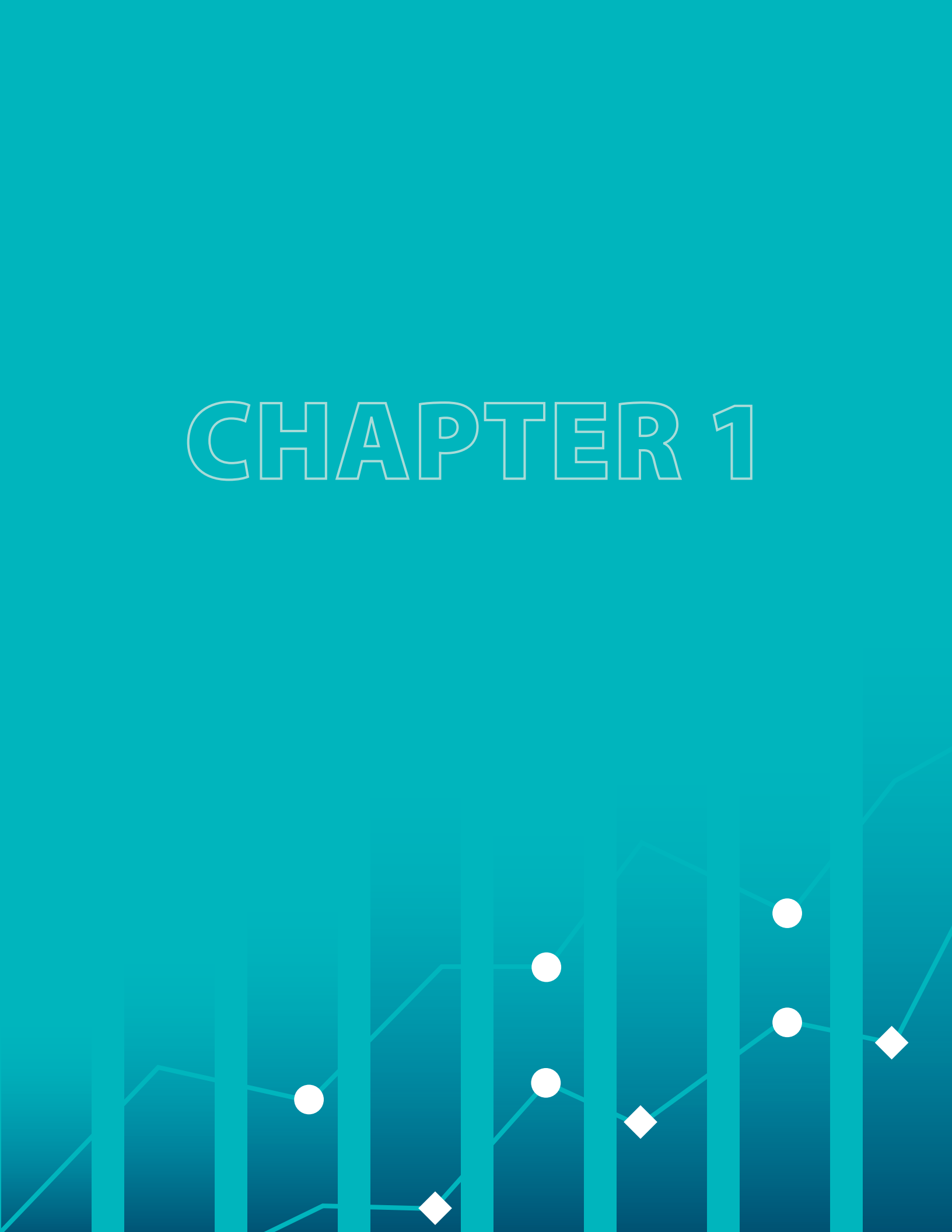
CHAPTER 1



CHAPTER 1.

Introduction, methodology and context

Introduction

Objective and scope

Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) assess the contribution of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to development results at the country level. They offer evidence-based insights into the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability of the work of UNDP, examining how well its interventions align with and strengthen nationally led efforts to achieve sustainable development.

ICPEs are conducted by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), in accordance with the UNDP Evaluation Policy[1]. They have a dual objective to strengthen accountability to national stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board, and to contribute to learning that will inform the design of the next Country Programme Document (CPD).

This is the second ICPE conducted by the IEO in Albania, after the Assessment of Development Results in 2015. It covers the work of UNDP under the 2022-2026 CPD, up to November 2025[2]. As outlined in the evaluation terms of reference, the scope includes the entire UNDP programme during this period, along with relevant interventions initiated in the previous programme cycle and continuing into the current one. The ICPE made a conscious effort to

evaluate the entirety of long-standing and multiple-phase interventions that started in previous CPD cycles, to enable demonstration of long-term development gains for Albania[3].

Approach and questions

The ICPE was conducted in line with the established IEO process and adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The evaluation assessed programme performance using the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. It addressed four overarching questions:

1. To what extent has the UNDP country programme strategically addressed key national development priorities and the needs of its main stakeholders, notably those at risk of being left behind?

2. To what extent was UNDP able to adapt its positioning and programmatic response to shifts in context and other changes in the operating environment, leveraging comparative strengths?

3. To what extent were UNDP approaches and interventions successful in achieving the intended objectives of the country programme and contributing to broader, longer-term national development goals?

4. To what extent did internal and external factors influence the ability of UNDP to deliver its programme efficiently and maximize contributions?

Methodology

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, drawing on multiple sources of information that were systematically cross-referenced to ensure accuracy and reliability of findings. All data sources were systematically triangulated to strengthen the credibility and robustness of the evidence base.

Theory of change review: The soundness of the ToC was evaluated based on the documentation reviewed and stakeholder interviews to accurately capture the programme's logic. This critical reflection of the ToC served as the foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions in achieving the intended outcomes.

Document review: A thorough analysis of strategic and programmatic documents, including the UNDP CPD 2022–2026, results-oriented annual reports (ROARs) for 2022-2024, project documents for selected key interventions, monitoring and evaluation reports and UNDP audit reports.

Stakeholder interviews: A total of 226 interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders (152 women and 74 men) (see Table 1).

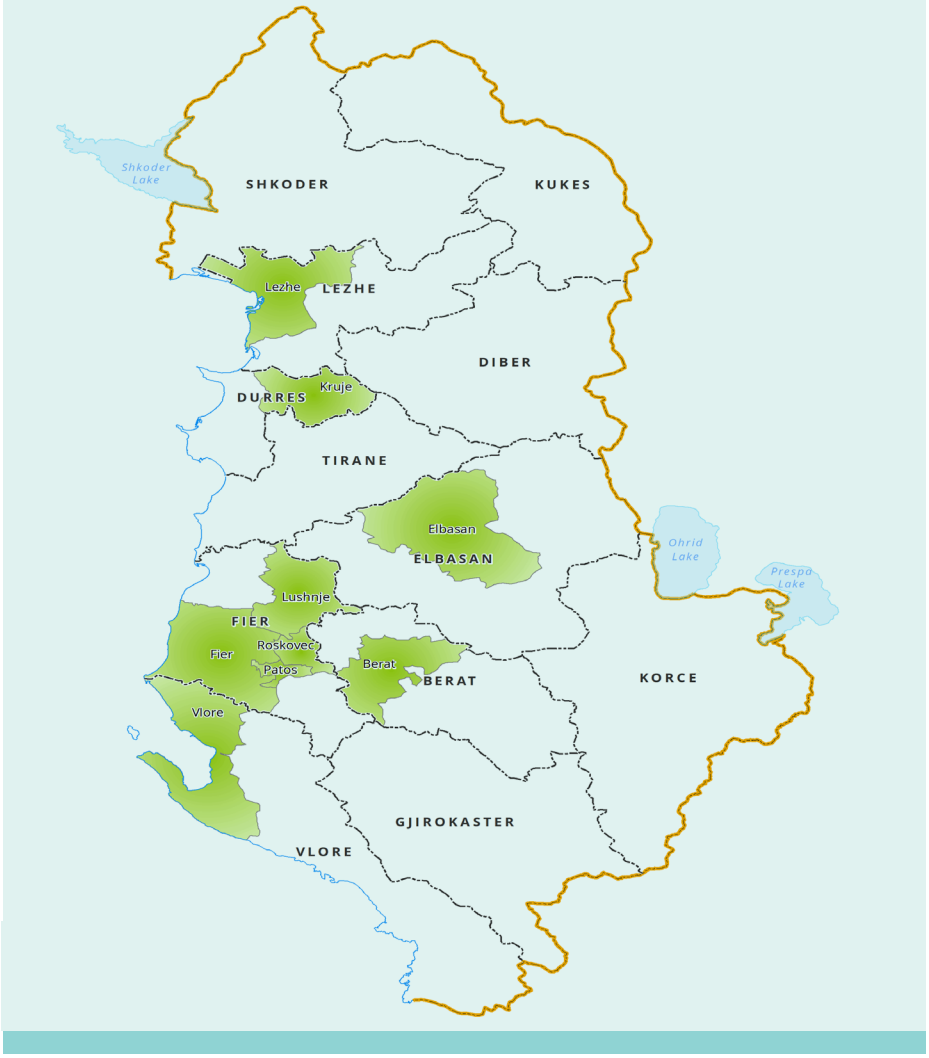
The draft report underwent internal and external quality assurance reviews before being shared with the UNDP country office, Regional Bureau and the Government for comment. A stakeholder debriefing offered an additional opportunity to discuss the evaluation findings and explore possible ways forward.

Table 1. Stakeholder engagement

Type of Stakeholder	F	M	Total
Academia and think tanks	4	7	11
Beneficiary	28	4	32
CSO	14	10	24
Government of Albania	31	14	45
Other United Nations agencies	11	4	15
Private sector	2	4	6
UNDP country office	15	5	20
Technical and financial partners	11	8	19
Municipalities and regional authorities	36	18	54
Grand Total	**152**	**74**	**226**

Field visits: The evaluation team visited nine municipalities — Lushnja, Berat, Kruja, Elbasan, Vlora, Fier, Patos, Lezhë and Roskovec — to collect perspectives on programme contributions and the sustainability of results.

Figure 1. Field visit map



Challenges and limitations

Challenges	Mitigation measures
The evaluation team had a narrow field visit window, due to the national elections held on May 11, 2025. As a result, many evaluations were conducted in June 2025 (including the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework - UNSDCF - evaluation) which confused stakeholders who had to respond to multiple interview requests in the span of a few weeks.	The UNDP team chose different municipalities than those visited by the UNSDCF team. Where national-level stakeholders did not want to be interviewed twice, the team relied on the UNSDCF evaluation report as it related to United Nations coordination, triangulated with interviews with other national level stakeholders.
Some stakeholders were on summer break in June, which left data collection incomplete. Although the elections were won by the incumbent party, the expectation of rotations and post changes reduced the incentive of some of the stakeholders to engage. There were rapid institutional changes in the post-election period which meant some public agencies were changed, abolished or merged.	The evaluation team continued remote interviews in September/ October 2025 for stakeholders not available due to summer holidays or affected by new political appointments and institutional changes.
Attributing results was challenging given the system-wide nature of reforms in which UNDP played a significant but not exclusive role. As a result, the evaluation could assess only the UNDP contribution but not attribute higher level results exclusively to UNDP.	This limitation was mitigated through triangulation and focusing on the results framework of UNDP interventions to assess the scale of UNDP contributions.

Country context

Albania is a developing country with an upper-middle income economy and a multi-party parliamentary system. It has a population of 2.4 million and a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of US$ 10,526 in 2025 and a high ranking on the Human Development Index (0.81).[4]

The country became an official candidate for membership in the European Union (EU) in 2014. The European Council launched formal accession negotiations in 2020 and the first chapter on accession negotiations (Fundamentals) was opened in 2024.[5] Between 2021 and 2024, the EU committed around 455 million euros of financial and technical assistance to Albania under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)[6]. The country was expected to absorb even larger funds as the EU Growth Plan envisaged 922 million euros in non-repayable grants and favourable loans to the Albanian Government for accession readiness by 2030.[7] Albania made significant progress in implementing its Reform and Growth Agenda for EU accession, fulfilling 21 of 41 planned reform measures between December 2024 and June 2025, and was the top performer in the region for the 2025 reporting period.[8]

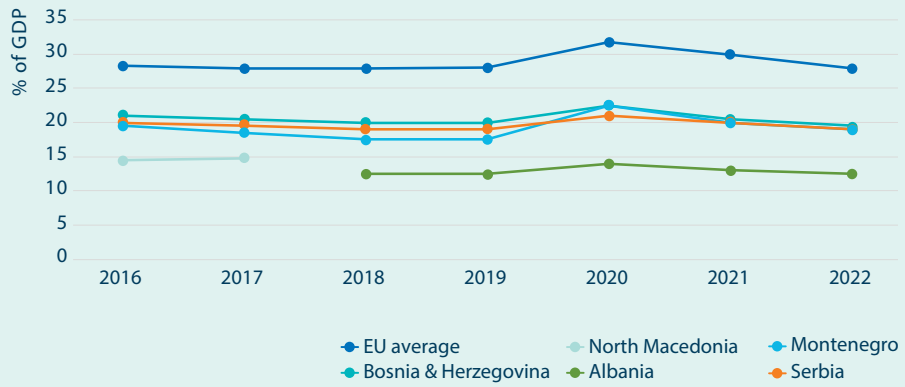
Outcome 1: Social inclusion

Albania reduced poverty and expanded social protection in recent years. The at-risk-of-poverty rate declined from 23.7 percent in 2017 to 19.7 percent in 2023.[9] Nevertheless, families with children and marginalized groups—such as women, Roma, Egyptians, youth and people with disabilities—continued to experience disproportionate hardship.[10] Albania implemented reforms and expanded its legal framework for social protection. Social service coverage grew from 10,000 beneficiaries in 2019 to over 39,000 by 2022, though the coverage met only 12 percent of needs.[11]

Albania's 2024–2030 social protection strategy aimed to reduce poverty and expand inclusive services. The Strategy focused on poverty reduction and inclusive, gender-responsive social services. Public spending on social protection increased from 9.1 percent of GDP in 2015 to 10 percent in

2022, primarily due to increased social insurance spending.[12] However, public expenditure on social care decreased from 5.16 percent in 2015 to 4.8 percent in 2022, representing 0.04 percent of GDP, among the lowest in the region.[13]

Figure 2. Albania has the lowest social protection expenditure compared to its neighbours



Source: Hohmann, J et al. (2025) Improving social protection in the Western Balkans: Analysis of the regional/national situations, and recommendations.

Albania introduced a new financing mechanism to ensure equitable access to social services. The Government set up the Social Fund to allow every municipality to develop new social services, with development costs partially covered for the first three years. To support the rollout, the workforce and capacity of state social services were strengthened, and new case management-related processes introduced. In 2025, the Social Fund supported 78 social service providers, reaching 15 percent of all social services users in the country, though access to funding was uneven, and service quality varied across municipalities.[14]

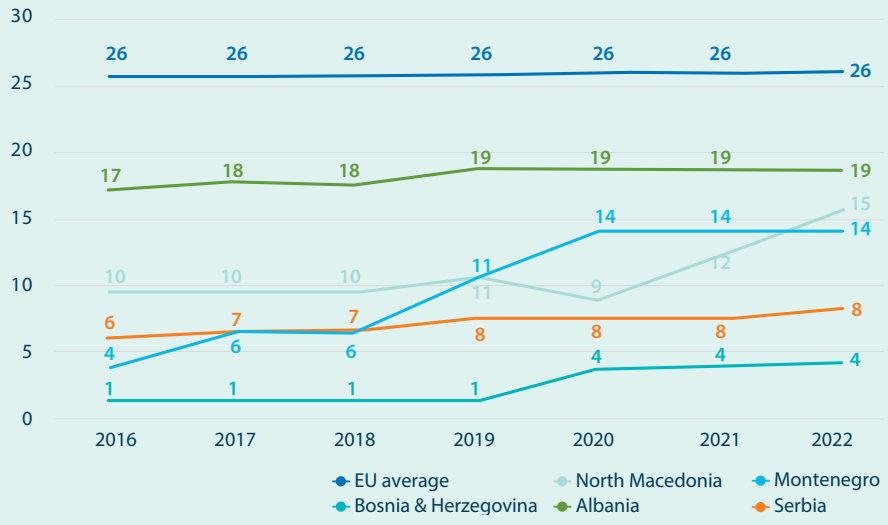
Outcome 2: Inclusive growth and environment

According to the 2024 World Risk Index, Albania was the fifth most disaster-prone country in Europe. The November 2019 earthquake was a turning point, exposing the country's vulnerability and lack of preparedness in terms of disaster management capacity and construction regulations.[15] Law 45/2019 'On Civil Protection' was adopted just before the earthquake, in July 2019, but lack of harmonization with complementary legal architecture at different levels contributed to an *ad hoc* operational response. The

Government subsequently established the National Civil Protection Agency (NCPA) for centralized coordination of disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts and increased its staffing. The country was still testing the new, streamlined emergency response system, with significant investment in professional capacity at national and local levels.

Albania made considerable progress in environmental protection and nature conservation over recent decades, meeting the 2020 Biodiversity Aichi Target of protecting 17 percent of land area, and creating the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA) in 2015. Since then, the effectiveness of the protected area management system increased (from 34 percent to 58 percent in 2019), and the implementation of management plans improved from 19 to 53 percent over the same period (see Finding 7).[16] Growth in the tourism sector, which contributed 21 percent of GDP in 2024, could represent a threat to biodiversity conservation if the principles of sustainable tourism are not properly embedded in laws, policies and implementation.[17]

Figure 3. Albania is significantly better than its neighbours in share of land that is protected, but below EU average



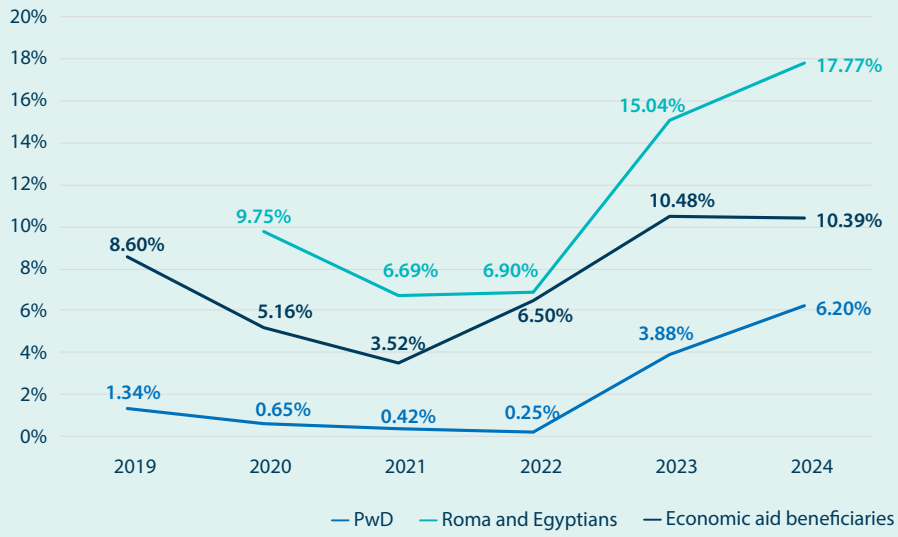
Source: World Database on Protected Areas, World Bank (2025)

Albania increased its ambitions related to climate change mitigation, through successive Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) stages. Albania revised its NDC CO_2 emissions reduction target from 11.5 percent in 2015 to 20.9 percent in 2021, and to include more sectors.[18] The 2021 NDC referred to adaptation measures for the first time, but the country lacked a comprehensive, cross-sectoral and coordinated approach to adaptation. Under NDC 3.0, the country built stronger institutional and coordination frameworks by operationalizing the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Climate Change (IMWGCC) and adopting a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2026-2036 with stronger integration across sectoral strategies and cross-sector ownership.

Employment rates improved significantly, but gender inequality and high youth unemployment remained significant challenges. While employment among people aged 15-64 rose from 52.9 to 68.6 percent over the decade to 2025, there was a 12.5 percentage-point gap between men and women.[19] Though youth unemployment decreased from 39.6 percent in 2015 to 25 percent in 2024, it was still more than double the rate of the general working-age population at 10 percent. The Government accelerated its efforts to tackle youth unemployment by piloting innovative schemes such as the Youth Guarantee.[20]

Albania accelerated its efforts to increase the employment of vulnerable groups. Historically, unemployment rates disproportionately affected ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups.[21] With the rollout of significant active labour market programmes (ALMPs) for economic aid beneficiaries, Roma and Egyptian minorities and people with disabilities, there was a noticeable increase in the employment of these vulnerable groups.

Figure 4. Percentage of vulnerable groups registered at NAES who found employment shows positive trend



The private sector played a central role in the Albanian economy, but its growth potential remained constrained by structural challenges. Most firms operated in low-productivity sectors and face barriers to innovation, skills and finance. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of the economy, accounting for 99.9 percent of active enterprises, 82.5 percent of employment and 78.2 percent of added value in the economy.[22] In recent years, Albania launched a range of reforms to improve the regulatory environment, promote access to credit and align with EU acquis on competition, state aid and MSME policy.[23] Since 2020, the Government and the Bank of Albania also provided substantial financing schemes and credit lines to support MSMEs, and businesses affected by the earthquake and COVID-19 pandemic.

Outcome 3: Governance

Albania streamlined its local government system over the last decade. The 2014 Territorial and Administrative Reform, restructured the local governance landscape, reducing the number of municipalities from 373 to 61, establishing the foundation for decentralization. Subsequent supporting strategies included the National Crosscutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance 2023–2030, which emphasized local autonomy, digital transformation and participatory governance. However, decentralization was partial and uneven, particularly in relation to local fiscal capacity and clear allocation of administrative responsibilities for service delivery and citizen engagement.[24]

Albania reinforced its legal aid architecture with a state-funded model of free legal aid (FLA) centres across the country. The 2017 law on legal aid strengthened the legal framework for FLA, and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and UNDP supported the establishment of 20 FLA centres. Access to legal aid remained highly uneven, due to limitations in geographic and digital coverage and profile of legal aid recipients, including victims of trafficking and undocumented migrants.[25]

Civil society in Albania was relatively vibrant, especially youth and issue-based organizations, but remained structurally dependent on foreign funding, with public funding for CSOs and social enterprises considered insufficient for their sustainability.[26] Unlike other Western Balkan countries, Albania did not have national legislation for civil society funding, which limited the potential for sustainable support.[27]

The Government adopted an ambitious public sector modernization programme, to increase the integration of new technologies into all government functions, and digital transformation became a defining feature of national development. Digital transformation was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of the 2022 – 2026 National Digital Agenda. Starting in 2022, all services of public institutions were conducted exclusively through the "e-Albania" platform, and the country ranked 8th in Europe for digital public services. However, a 2022 cyberattack on public systems disrupted national digital systems, exposing vulnerabilities in digital governance. The Ombudsperson also highlighted inequalities in access and increased risks to privacy and data protection.[28]

Outcome 4: Gender equality

Albania ranked 23rd in the world in terms of gender parity, according to the Global Gender Gap Index.[29] Albania fared better than the EU average in the representation of women in decision-making, with around one third of members in parliament and half of ministerial positions occupied by women in the last two legislatures. Women's representation in policymaking consistently increased after the introduction of the 30 percent gender quota in 2008.

Gender-based violence (GBV), particularly domestic violence, remained widespread. A 2018 survey on GBV revealed that at least 53 percent of women in Albania had experienced some form of abuse and 18 percent had experienced physical abuse.[30] A 2024 evaluation by the Group of Experts on Action Against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) found that Albania had made commendable changes to legislation and protocols, and expanded municipal-level coordinated referral mechanisms (CRMs), but noted persistent implementation gaps.[31] There was also limited capacity and sustainable financing for specialized services for survivors of trafficking and GBV. Beyond emergency protection, the long-term recovery of survivors of GBV, including housing stability and economic reintegration remained critical challenges.

UNDP in Albania

UNDP has a long history of cooperation with the Government of Albania, engaging on diverse reform agendas requiring cross-party consensus. The UNDP country programme was outlined in the 2022-2026 CPD, in alignment with the National Strategy for Development and European Integration 2022-2030, and the 2022-2026 UNSDCF, contributing to four of its outcomes. Table 2 summarizes the outputs, outcomes and resources for UNDP work in Albania.

Table 2. UNDP CPD 2022-2026 in a snapshot

CPD outputs	UNSDCF outcomes	Expenditures
» Social care and inclusion » Education » Gender-inclusive community engagement	UNSDCF Outcome 1 Human capital development and social inclusion	$ 70 Million 69 % of CO expenditures
» Environment and climate change » Disaster risk reduction » Water resource management and blue growth » Employment and skills development » Economic development and SME development » Data-driven innovation	UNSDCF Outcome 2 Sustainable, resilient and green economic growth and resource management	$ 18.1 Million 17 % of CO expenditures
» Good governance, participation and voice » Data and evidence » Public sector accountability and quality services » Human rights and access to justice	UNSDCF Outcome 3 Effective, people-centred governance, rule of law, human rights	$ 9.5 Million 9 % of CO expenditures
» Legal, policy and institutional reforms for gender equality and response to GBV	UNSDCF Outcome 4 Gender equality	$ 3.4 Million 0.3 % of CO expenditures

Outcome 1: Human capital development and social inclusion. UNDP aimed to support increased and more equitable investments in people by removing barriers and creating opportunities for those at risk of exclusion. UNDP work focused on strengthening Albania's social care system, enhancing the capacity of local authorities, and promoting participatory governance with CSOs representing vulnerable groups. This outcome represented 69 percent of country office expenditure.

Outcome 2: Sustainable, resilient and green economic growth and resource management. UNDP aimed to accelerate sustainable, productive and inclusive economic development by integrating innovative policy solutions that enhance climate change adaptation, mitigation and the transition

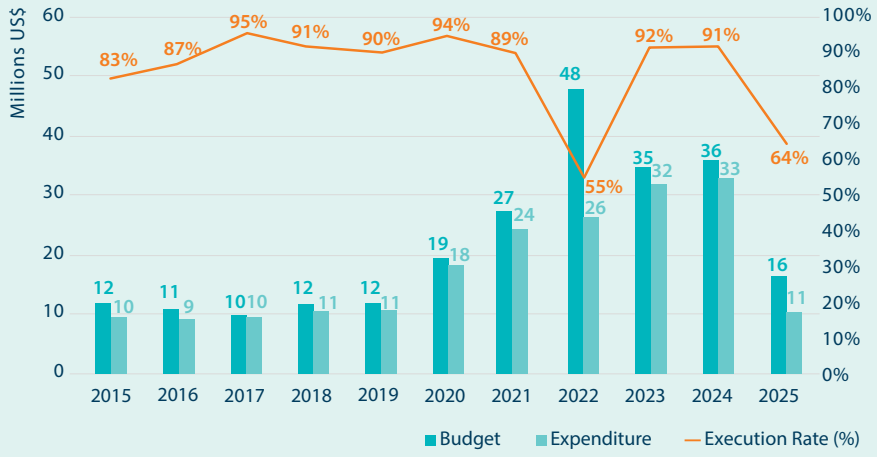
to a green and blue economy. UNDP supported Albania in advancing environmental protection, DRR and climate change adaptation, while promoting employment and skills development, private sector engagement and water resource management. This outcome represented 17 percent of expenditure.

Outcome 3: Effective, people-centred governance, rule of law and human rights. UNDP aimed to make governance more transparent and accountable, enabling all people—including those at risk of exclusion—to enjoy quality, inclusive services and enhanced rule of law in line with Albania's human rights commitments. UNDP played a key role in Albania's decentralization reform, supporting the development of local governance systems, institutional integrity, digital transformation and access to justice. This outcome represented 9 percent of country office expenditure.

Outcome 4: Gender equality. UNDP prioritized the response to GBV, supporting the translation of international standards into national law and practice, and building a coordinated, survivor-centred system linking policy reform with local implementation. This outcome represented 0.3 percent of country office expenditure.

CPD finances: The estimated budget target for the CPD 2022-2026 was $111.5 million. As of 30 October 2025, UNDP had mobilized $134 million (120 percent of the target). Figure 5 presents the CPD budget, expenditure and programme delivery by year and outcomes. An analysis of resource mobilization from 2015 to 2025 showed an annual budget of $11-12 million and annual expenditure of $10-11 million. There was a sharp rise (to $48 million) in 2022, in the aftermath of the 2019 earthquake, mainly from the EU for construction of educational facilities.

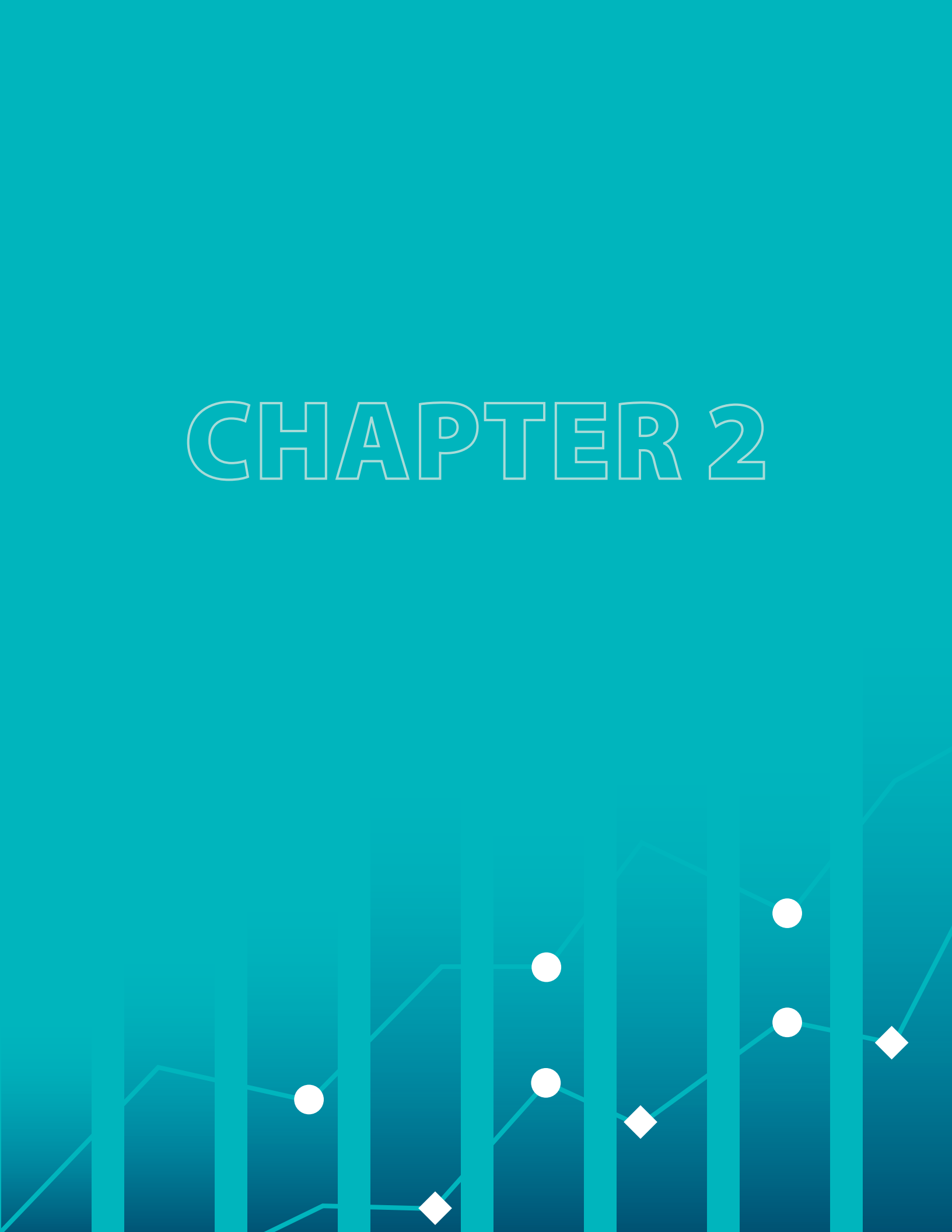
Figure 5. Albania had a relatively stable funding/ expenditure rate which spiked due to earthquake reconstruction efforts



UNDP resource mobilization was sufficiently diversified, with the greatest volume from the EU. This was due to the large reconstruction programmes in the education sector that required considerable resources. 63 percent of country office expenditure was financed by the EU, followed by 13 percent by the multi-partner trust fund (MPTF) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Accelerator Fund. Government cost-sharing was negligible at 0.01 percent (Figure 6). Some historically important bilateral donors to UNDP Albania were expected to scale back or exit, either because of moving to regional operations with less dedicated funding for the country (e.g. Swiss Development Cooperation), scaling down their support as EU funds increase (e.g. Sweden), or, in the case of USAID, suspending their operations in 2025.

Figure 6. EU was the major donor to Albania followed by the MPTF SDG Acceleration Fund

CHAPTER 2



CHAPTER 2.

Findings

Finding 1.

UNDP remained relevant in the Albanian context and adjusted well to a dynamic political landscape. The ability of UNDP to adapt to external shocks opened new avenues of programming that further highlighted its relevance.

UNDP has accompanied the Government of Albania in some of the most important reform agendas over the last decade. Its sustained support underpinned the country's ambition to move from fragmented local administration (including through the territorial administrative reform) towards a more coherent, transparent and citizen-centred system of municipal governance. UNDP support put Albania at the forefront of biodiversity preservation in the region in protected area management and helped the country to formulate its climate ambitions in a structured way through NDC and NAP processes. It also supported the creation of a stable state-funded scheme for legal aid and access to justice.

UNDP programming was highly relevant to the needs of those left behind. To strengthen the voice and participation of vulnerable groups, UNDP played a critical role in the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in planning, decision-making, implementation and monitoring of social policy and services in Albania. It produced in-depth analysis and

evidence that identified critical gaps in the coverage, quality and funding of social services, to ensure they reached those most in need. UNDP also supported the Government to design and implement ALMPs for youth, women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and economic aid beneficiaries.

UNDP responded strategically to the 2019 earthquake, laying the foundations for DRR architecture. UNDP supported community resilience and preparedness through local-level emergency social service protocols, emergency social plans and livelihood support schemes. As co-lead in the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), UNDP provided first-hand analytical insight into the impact of the earthquake on enterprises and productive sectors and identified critical recovery and resilience gaps. The PDNA process positioned UNDP as one of the key interlocutors for the Government and donors in designing and implementing enterprise support schemes.

UNDP also skilfully navigated the rapid digital transformation of government services and turned them into opportunities. When the Government shifted policy in 2022 from physical service delivery to online service provision via the e-Albania digital public service portal, UNDP adapted swiftly, redirecting resources from infrastructure to diagnostics, capacity development and coordination with the National Agency for Information Society (NAIS). To facilitate access to justice, UNDP developed a web-based national legal aid database integrating service directories, eligibility assessment tools and case registration.

Finding 2.

UNDP aligned its programming with the EU accession agenda, articulating its added value in EU terms across employment, biodiversity and quality education standards. Through technical assistance and direct implementation, UNDP demonstrated how pre-accession funding translates into ground level preparation for EU membership. However, deeper alignment would have required more explicit linkages with broader EU policy instruments and efforts to strengthen government systems for the implementation of EU reforms.

The UNDP strategic positioning during the evaluation period reflected deliberate alignment between Albania's development priorities and critical EU accession requirements across multiple negotiating chapters.

- EU4Youth was designed to address Chapters 19 (Social Policy and Employment) and 26 (Education and Culture) through the EU flagship Youth Guarantee, while targeting Albania's high rate of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), at 25.2 percent.
- EU4Nature was structured around Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change), targeting gaps identified in EU assessments regarding Natura 2000 designation and transposition of the Birds and Habitats Directives under IPA III.
- EU4Schools was positioned to address Chapter 26 through embedding EU quality standards on seismic resistance, energy efficiency and full accessibility into post-earthquake educational reconstruction. This framed the largest EU education investment in Albania's history as a demonstration of accession standards in practice.

UNDP aimed to add value at two levels: delivering technical compliance with specific chapter requirements; while demonstrating the potential of EU integration frameworks to tackle Albania's priority development challenges by addressing institutional capacity gaps, strengthening governance structures and establishing local delivery benchmarks. In each case, UNDP positioned itself as the actor that could translate EU policy commitments into functional systems at the ground level.

- EU4Youth recognized that Albania's challenge was not the lack of a Youth Guarantee policy, but of inter-institutional coordination and local delivery systems to operationalize it and target operations effectively.
- EU4Nature was designed to bridge the gap between existing legislative approximation and the necessary institutional capacity for effective protected area management and biodiversity monitoring.
- EU4Schools was framed as an opportunity to establish reference models for EU-standard infrastructure through emergency reconstruction.

Challenges and future opportunities

By the conclusion of accession chapters with the EU, with a preliminary deadline of 2027, Albania will need to incorporate the entire body of EU law (the acquis communautaire) into national legislation. The EU acquis sets the legal foundation for accession, focusing on laws ensuring legal and regulatory compliance, and aligning institutions with EU standards. It is technical, dealing with detailed legislative harmonization. However, broader EU policy instruments define the EU vision for inclusive growth, social cohesion and equal opportunities, including the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Social Fund+ framework, the European Skills Agenda, and the EU Gender Equality Strategy. These frameworks influence EU funding priorities, shape structural reforms and guide Member States towards sustainable social and economic development.

UNDP already aligned with the European Skills Agenda by working on the Youth Guarantee, but further avenues exist, especially for support to the long-term unemployed, digital literacy and green skills, women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and partnerships with the private sector. Field visits also demonstrated that, while UNDP invested in social policy through its work in Outcome 1, this could have benefited from further alignment with European Quality Framework for Social Services.

In the EU accession process, strategic emphasis shifted from the traditional project implementation approach of IPA III to the Growth Plan performance-based model for reform delivery[32]. This transition positions UNDP as an enabler of government-led reform delivery, rather than an implementer of externally funded projects. This aligns with the Growth Plan emphasis on national ownership as well as the EU requirement that Albania's own institutions must be capable of implementing the *acquis*.

Based on this scenario, the comparative advantage of UNDP increasingly lies in strengthening the Government's reform delivery systems. This includes supporting the cross-sectoral coordination needed for integrated reform packages, building monitoring and evidence-generation capacity to document progress of reforms for the Growth Plan verification cycles, and preparing national institutions to manage the transition from donor-funded implementation to domestically led reform delivery.

Outcome 1.
Human capital development and social inclusion

OUTCOME 1	OUTPUT 1.1	14 projects
By 2026, there is increased and more equitable investment in people, removing barriers and creating opportunities for those at risk of exclusion.	Social care and inclusion	69 percent of country office expenditure
	OUTPUT 1.2	
	Education	
	OUTPUT 1.3	
	Gender inclusive community engagement	

Planned budget	Actual budget	Resource mobilization	Expenditure	Execution rate
$56.1 million	$88 million	156 percent	$70 million	80 percent

Figure 7. Outcome 1 budget expenditure and execution rate,

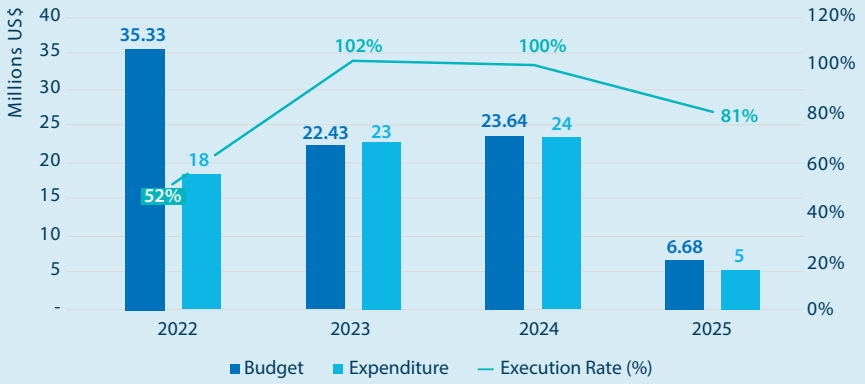
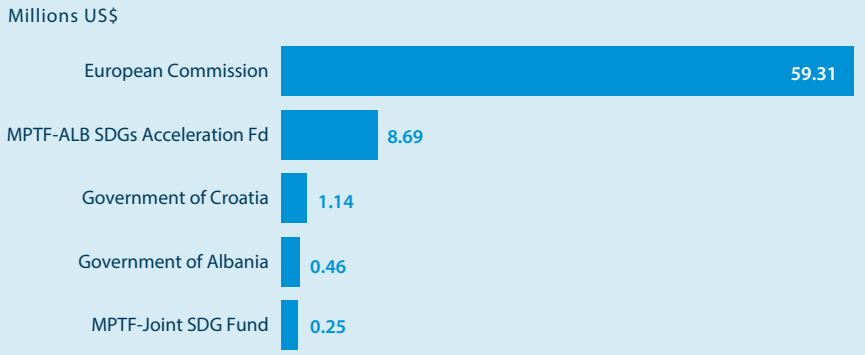


Figure 8. Outcome 1 top Donors 2022-2025



Finding 3.

UNDP played a catalytic role in strengthening Albania's social care system by generating robust evidence, supporting policy and regulatory reform, and piloting innovative service models that expanded access and shifted care towards community-based approaches. Overall, UNDP interventions laid a strong foundation for systemic change, but long-term impact depended on addressing quality, coherence and funding challenges.

Upstream, UNDP played an important role in creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment for social care in Albania. UNDP achieved this through regular mapping of social services, monitoring reports, expenditure studies, beneficiary satisfaction surveys, and support for drafting strategies, action plans and by-laws. These activities helped identify coverage gaps, informed government decision-making and strengthened the policy framework for social protection, laying the groundwork for downstream interventions where UNDP provided grants, piloted services, and assisted municipalities to plan more effectively, and communities to hold the government to account. UNDP contributions included research-to-policy support, technical guidance on municipal planning, and pilot models that informed government approaches.

UNDP provided a robust evidence base highlighting systemic gaps in service coverage, quality, and funding. By leveraging evidence from regular mapping of social services, monitoring reports on policy implementation, studies on public expenditure for social protection, and beneficiary satisfaction surveys, UNDP successfully advocated for and assisted the Government in meaningful improvements:

a. enhancing the regulatory framework—evidenced by the adoption of by-laws on social housing and the 2024 government decisions amending the Social Fund regulation to expand services to disadvantaged communities and support decentralized delivery;

b. strengthening the policy framework—through the development and updating of key documents, including overarching social protection and inclusion strategies, as well as targeted action plans for people with disabilities, Roma, and Egyptians.

These interventions reflected the capacity of UNDP to translate evidence into actionable policy changes, although the long-term impact on vulnerable populations remained to be fully assessed.

The partnership between UNDP and the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) strengthened the integration of data into policy frameworks, including the National Social Protection Strategy, enabling evidence-informed decision-making. UNDP policy monitoring reports proved valuable in identifying implementation bottlenecks and corrective actions, as in the case of the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians (NAPIRE)[33].

Downstream, UNDP primarily engaged where municipalities faced capacity gaps, whether in planning, service delivery or emergency response, that prevented vulnerable populations from accessing essential services. UNDP provided technical guidance, grants and capacity-building support to municipalities that lacked the tools, trained staff or administrative systems to implement integrated social services, maintain quality standards or respond to crises like the 2019 earthquake and COVID-19. These measures were designed to bridge immediate implementation gaps, build municipal absorption capacity, and provide evidence and models that the Government could scale and institutionalize over time.

Resources provided by UNDP, including grants for innovative social services, capacity-building and guidelines, enhanced the planning and implementation capacity of 33 of the 61 local government units. This support resulted in the development and adoption of key local planning documents, including costed social care plans, social housing plans, emergency response plans and social inclusion plans for Roma, Egyptians and people with disabilities. A 2024 government decision institutionalized the structure of social care plans as part of the Social Fund methodology, marking a shift from descriptive documents to integrated management tools characterized by participation, results orientation and financial transparency.

UNDP strengthened the operational capacity of local authorities, training municipal staff and professionals on regulations, standard operating procedures and technical protocols for integrated social services, including responses to emergencies such as the 2019 earthquake and COVID-19. UNDP partnered with leading Albanian universities to modernize pre-service and in-service curricula and provide accredited training, leading to the licensing of 550 social workers and the creation of a knowledge hub (www.sociale.al), further supporting professional learning and knowledge sharing.

UNDP support played a catalytic role in fostering the expansion of social services in Albania. Between 2018 and 2024, the number of social service beneficiaries rose from 11,000 to over 39,000, and the number of service providers (public and non-public) grew from 28 to 439.[34] This reduced the number of municipalities without social services from 21 to just two. The change in the model of care was equally significant, driving a shift from residential to community and family-based care. The expansion of community

centres, mobile services, home-aid support and daycare centres demonstrated a deliberate and effective move towards community-rooted service models that were more inclusive and accessible.

Challenges and future opportunities

UNDP monitoring support was valuable but somewhat fragmented and tended to focus on individual policy documents rather than assessing the overall coherence and cumulative effectiveness of legal and policy frameworks on social protection, social inclusion and human rights. Interventions were designed to be systemic and sequenced and supported by coordination mechanisms, but this did not consistently translate into system-level monitoring and learning, with limited evidence of cross-policy analysis or assessment of cumulative effects on coverage, quality, equity or fiscal sustainability over time. As a result, though the approach enabled targeted and timely adjustments, it may have overlooked opportunities to capture systemic interdependencies and combined effects that could strengthen long-term policy coherence.

Sustainable financing was essential for long-term impact. However, advocacy for expanding social fiscal space was not sufficiently prioritized by UNDP or other United Nations agencies in their engagement with the Government.[35] Municipalities struggled to maintain services amid declining public spending and donor support, and with 42 percent of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and only 12 percent of people in need served, expanding coverage remained a critical goal. The Social Fund was an important mechanism for expanding local service provision, but its scope covered mainly recurrent costs, highlighting gaps in financing. UNDP provided targeted technical assistance to help municipalities with weaker administrative capacity to access funding, but without alternative financing strategies, the three-year funding cycle increased the risk of service discontinuation.

Quality assurance frameworks were not in place to match the expansion of social care services. UNDP invested in strengthening the capacity of monitoring and oversight institutions, including the State Social Services and the State Inspectorate of Labour and Social Services, but the effectiveness was unclear[36]. Feedback from beneficiaries indicated

dissatisfaction with the quality of services, suggesting that gains in the quantity of service provision outpaced quality enhancements[37]. A UNDP social mapping acknowledged that "approving social care service standards that are unified and equally applicable to both public and non-public" was essential to improve the quality of citizen-centred services.[38] A notable gap remained in aligning quality assurance with the European Quality Framework for Social Services, which could limit Albania's preparedness for EU accession standards.

Finding 4.

The UNDP earthquake response enhanced resilience and modernized the education infrastructure in affected provinces, providing an innovative model for institutionalization.

UNDP programming was largely determined by the priorities outlined in the 2020 Albania PDNA, co-led by the EU, United Nations agencies and the World Bank and aligned with EU standards for rehabilitating educational infrastructure and promoting inclusive learning environments. EU4Schools was a large infrastructure programme to address gaps identified in the PDNA, implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Government. The EU selected UNDP to implement the programme due to its strong local knowledge and its trusted partnerships with local stakeholders. Given the constraints of national procurement procedures, the timely intervention of UNDP proved crucial to ensuring an effective response.

UNDP demonstrated high operational efficiency. Within four years and two phases of the programme, UNDP repaired, reconstructed and refurbished and equipped 67 educational facilities and 54 information and communication technology (ICT) laboratories across 11 of the most affected municipalities.[39] UNDP made a key contribution to enhancing the digital content of the national online training tool (www.openakademi.com), developed in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which had been accessed by over 34,000 teachers and educators. Aimed at advancing modern teaching skills, including digital

competence, effective assessment methods, and inclusive pedagogy, this initiative demonstrated the commitment of UNDP to modernizing Albania's education workforce.

UNDP interventions adhered to the principles of "Building Back Better" and "Building Back Together". Compliance with Eurocode 8 for earthquake-resistant design reflected technical rigour, while co-design with communities demonstrated high responsiveness to the needs of those left behind. Communities were actively involved from identification of priorities to selection of design and monitoring of implementation, enhancing the accountability and legitimacy of interventions. UNDP developed a public portal (https://eu4schoolsportal.al) with comprehensive information on rehabilitation efforts, contributing to transparency, and establishing a replicable model for documenting post-disaster reconstruction. As a result of investments in inclusive learning environments, including infrastructure, resources and training of support teachers and psychologists, 24,913 students were able to benefit from modern, EU-compliant learning environments in earthquake-affected communities.[40] For example, UNDP partnered with the Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-University Education to create a cadre of around 1,000 assistant teachers to support students with special education to participate in mainstream education[41]. No rigorous assessment was available, but stakeholders expressed that investments in education infrastructure, including ICT, laid the foundation for modern teaching methods, contributing to potential long-term improvements in student achievement.

The UNDP approach was replicated by at least two municipalities. Durrës municipality repaired two education facilities from its own resources using the same community engagement and technical design features. Tirana municipality used the process, layout and project design learnt from UNDP to repair a further nine education facilities not affected by the earthquake.

Challenges and future opportunities

Education facilities rebuilt under EU4Schools and related projects incorporated earthquake-resistant design, inclusive accessibility features and ICT laboratories, and planned specialized resource and psychosocial rooms. While municipalities were responsible for ongoing maintenance, many (especially smaller municipalities) lacked predictable budgets, technical staff, and planning tools to sustain these enhanced features over time.

Finding 5.

UNDP enhanced the role of CSOs in the planning, decision-making, implementation and monitoring of social policy and public services in Albania, which led to measurable improvements in participatory governance. CSOs representing vulnerable groups, such as Egyptian and Roma people, people with disabilities, women and youth, exerted tangible influence in the formulation of local plans.

UNDP strengthened the pathways for CSO engagement within existing municipal planning and monitoring processes, particularly in the development and review of social care plans. It also enabled CSOs representing vulnerable groups to engage more regularly in local monitoring and accountability related to social service delivery. UNDP enhanced the operational capacity of CSOs to monitor human rights and influence social policy through grants, capacity-building, networking opportunities, resource materials and study visits. UNDP assisted 29 CSOs to form multi-stakeholder partnerships for planning and delivering social services, reflecting a strategic approach to collaborative governance. The engagement of CSOs representing Roma and Egyptian communities, people with disabilities, vulnerable women, youth and parents in forums and debates with local authorities demonstrated meaningful participatory governance in practice, with monitoring of local and national action plans contributing to improvements in service delivery and responsiveness.

A UNDP satisfaction survey of social service beneficiaries found growing understanding among vulnerable groups of their rights, with 88 percent of respondents reporting awareness of their entitlements, including the rights to access services, express opinions freely, and be treated with dignity and equality[42]. Over three-quarters of respondents acknowledged that service centres facilitated discussions on service improvement, and nearly half provided suggestions, of which 74 percent were reportedly considered (meaning that about 37 percent of all respondents had their suggestions acted upon). Despite this, beneficiary satisfaction with the quality of public service provision was low though in some cases this reflected unmet expectations rather than poor quality. Participation in municipal budget discussions was limited (20 percent), but those who did engage raised critical and relevant issues affecting marginalized populations, such as social housing, disability services, family support and transportation. Importantly, more than one-third of these participants confirmed that their concerns were addressed, suggesting that UNDP contributed to initial steps indicating measurable progress towards more inclusive, accountable and responsive governance.

Outcome 2.
Sustainable, resilient and green economic growth and resource management

OUTCOME 2

By 2026, innovative and integrated policy solutions accelerate sustainable, productive and inclusive economic development, enhancing climate change adaptation and mitigation and transition to a green and blue economy.

OUTPUT 2.1
Environment and climate change

OUTPUT 2.2
Disaster risk reduction

OUTPUT 2.3
Water resource management and blue growth

OUTPUT 2.4
Employment and skills development

OUTPUT 2.5
Economic development

OUTPUT 2.6
Innovation

23 projects

Environment representing 72 percent of the budget

Economic development and employment representing 28 percent of the budget

17 percent of country office expenditure

Planned budget	Actual budget	Resource mobilization	Expenditure	Execution rate
$38.77 million	$26.5 million	68 percent	$18.7 million	68 percent

Figure 9. Outcome 2 budget expenditure and execution rate

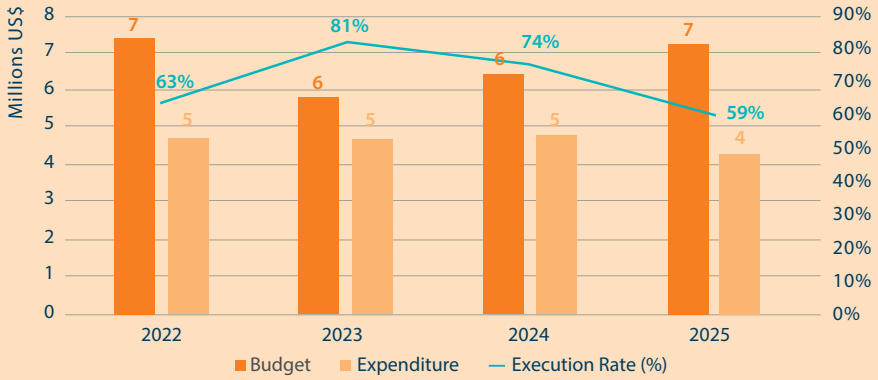
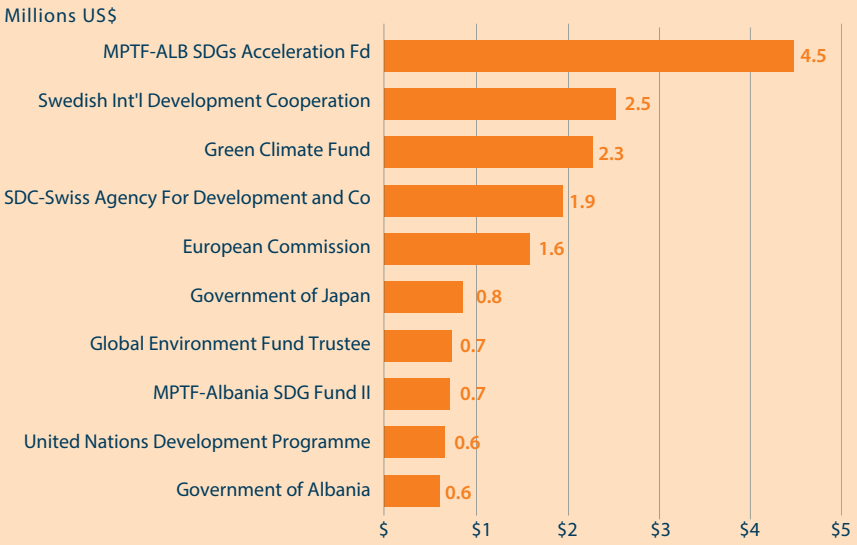


Figure 10. Outcome 2 top donors 2022-2025



Finding 6.

The UNDP role in climate change evolved from helping the Government formulate its climate ambitions to supporting their implementation on the ground. In support of the current NDC 3.0, UNDP increasingly focused on the NAP and moved climate adaptation from isolated initiatives into mainstream governance, finance and planning systems at national and local levels.

UNDP Albania provided long-term, strategic support for climate action by developing and updating the country's National Communications and NDC. UNDP supplied the analytical foundation for mitigation targets, through studies on greenhouse gas emissions inventories, mitigation analysis, measurement, reporting and verification, climate scenarios, vulnerable sectors and adaptation measures. With support from the UNDP Climate Promise, the revised NDC was submitted in October 2021 with enhanced targets, expanded sectors, inclusion of greenhouse gases under the mitigation section and an additional section on adaptation.[43]

Through its Climate Promise, UNDP piloted initiatives in solar photovoltaic (PV) and forestry to support Albania's NDC targets. Typical of Climate Promise initiatives, they were modest in size and duration and therefore did not lead to higher-level results. However, they were instrumental in creating awareness on concepts such as payments for ecosystem services or fuelwood efficiency, and piloting renewable energy applications such as PV panels on local government buildings that did not previously have much traction in the Albanian context.

In the case of solar, UNDP developed key bylaws necessary to operationalize the Renewable Energy law. UNDP demonstrated the concept through prototypes of solar PV in local government buildings in four municipalities and a solar PV manual for municipal decision-makers. Fieldwork showed up to 70 percent energy bill reductions for the buildings with installed solar panels.

UNDP partnered with National Forestry Agency (NFA) to support sustainable forestry management and enhance the sector's role as a carbon sink, in line with NDC targets. The approach included: capacity-building for NFA and municipalities overseeing the implementation of forest management plans; fuelwood efficiency demonstrations; small grants to CSOs to demonstrate reforestation as part of ecosystem-based services; and legislative work on ecosystem services payment and forest user rights.

The 2021 revised NDC referred to adaptation measures for the first time, but implementation of adaptation was limited by fragmented institutional coordination, limited technical capacity, weak data systems, lack of integration between climate adaptation and national development planning and budgeting, and insufficient financing mechanisms. As part of NDC 3.0, UNDP built government capacity to formulate, finance and implement medium- and long-term climate adaptation strategies in sectors such as water, agriculture,

forestry, tourism and infrastructure. It established stronger institutional and coordination frameworks by operationalizing the IMWGCC, clarifying its mandate and reporting framework.

UNDP developed and validated the NAP Strategy Document with Implementation Plan, which included a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, a gender action plan with gender-sensitive indicators, and vulnerability assessments for five priority sectors. Alongside the Strategy was a financing plan and concept notes, to better position Albania to mobilize and absorb climate finance. Ministries related to priority sectors began to integrate adaptation measures into their sectoral strategies and budgets, demonstrating cross-sector ownership.

Field visits showed that those ministries with a greater role in NDC implementation, such as the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure (MoEI), found the NAP process extremely useful. They recognized benefits including strengthened capacity for climate change adaptation through structured training programmes, improved coordination between line ministries and incorporation of matching measures within existing sectoral documents to help avoid double-costing. They also appreciated the financing dimension, that introduced cost-benefit analysis with short, medium and long-term costing of measures and identification of implementing partners and potential financial sources. Ministries considered NAP to be more focused and practical than the NDC, with more specific measures which facilitated resource mobilization.

Importantly, NAP was conceived as a programme not only at national level but also at local level. Of the eight pilot municipalities where Local Adaptation Plans (LAPs) were formulated, six were formally adopted through the municipal councils. The preparation of plans at local and national levels was highly consultative. Local government stakeholders showed appreciation of the comprehensive data collection process which convened local institutions around one plan, the broad stakeholder engagement in formulating LAPs, the funding leverage they provided to municipalities, their integration with other plans (i.e. social and gender equality plans) through incentive mechanisms, and their practical application. All LAPs prioritized actions, giving local governments greater leverage to mobilize funding for large-scale projects[44].

Challenges and future opportunities

Energy efficiency was identified as an important area across both EU accession and the NDC. While the municipalities piloting solar PV installation were aware of maintenance needs and discussed budget allocation with mayors, there was no guaranteed ongoing government funding for renewable energy applications. UNDP could have conceptualized solar PV applications within the larger framework of energy efficiency of buildings to increase impact and relevance.

The UNDP sustainable forestry management initiative faced a short timeline relative to the complex capacity gaps in NFA and municipalities. The initiative remained largely at the level of concepts and awareness level rather than achieving deep, practical change. The field mission showed that stakeholders understood new concepts but needed significant additional support and capacity to reflect this in their work.

UNDP invested heavily in capacity-building during the NAP process, but the retention of knowledge and capacity varied according to the expertise and commitment of participating institutions. While commanding institutions of NAP implementation, such as MoE and MoEI, were clear about the practical implications of learning from the NAP process, this was not true for other ministries. This is in line with the findings on the heavy reliance of many climate change initiatives on external consultancies, which accelerated technical outputs but left ownership uneven across non-environmental ministries. In terms of the implementation of LAPs, while senior leadership showed strong ownership and clearly articulated how LAPs were to be used in practice, the more junior staff responsible for implementing and monitoring these programmes needed further capacity-building particularly given that local-level monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were only developed after LAP adoption.

Finding 7.

The legacy of UNDP in biodiversity protection in Albania was systemic and durable, facilitating the legal and strategic framework for protected area governance, and strengthening institutional sustainability through improved management effectiveness and financial sustainability through a Special Fund.

Since the creation of the first Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2010, in Karaburun-Sazani, UNDP has been working closely with national authorities to define the legal framework and develop necessary legislation in alignment with international treaties. Long-term UNDP collaboration with the Government, which started with support for Albania's commitment to the targets in the Convention on Biological Diversity/ Aichi, evolved into support for EU accession through revision of the 'Law on biodiversity', establishing the Natura 2000 framework.

UNDP also helped the Government by institutionalizing protected area management and preparing key strategic planning documents at national and regional levels, including the Strategic Plan for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas and the Management Plan for Karaburuni-Sazani MPA, which was integrated into the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). UNDP support to the revision of NBSAP was crucial, transforming marine conservation into a central component of Albania's national environmental policy, and helping the country meet both its international obligations and EU accession requirements. Other contributions included the Medium-term Strategic Plan for NAPA and Medium-term Financial Plan for the National Protected Areas System (both 2019-2023). UNDP also helped build institutional capacity to implement these strategies and established multi-stakeholder arrangements to involve local communities and businesses in the management of protected areas. For example, UNDP supported a partnership between the Vlora Regional Administration and the University of Tirana for scientific training and monitoring, small civil society grants for environmental awareness, training for local businesses in sustainable tourism practices and economic opportunities from invasive species management. UNDP also introduced the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) for protected area self-assessment and capacity tracking, alongside an e-learning

programme (https://learning.akzm.net/) accredited by the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA), covering environmental management and legislation[45].

UNDP support contributed to scientific and monitoring advancements, including species monitoring that restored Albania to Mediterranean monk seal monitoring maps, systematic marine litter protocols and reporting and a database of underwater shipwrecks supporting both tourism and conservation.[46] UNDP also invested strategically in infrastructure for scientific monitoring, including essential equipment such as motorboats for monitoring, mooring systems for park boundaries and water quality monitoring equipment. New climate change monitoring systems were built to implement temperature and water quality monitoring for climate impact assessment. Field visits confirmed that UNDP support was crucial in increasing the capacity of Regional Agencies for Protected Areas (RAPAs) for monitoring according to scientific protocols.

UNDP made a significant contribution to protected area management through a sustainable revenue generation model and the creation of a Special Fund. In 2025, total revenues from protected areas quadrupled compared to 2021 and doubled compared to 2023, with 15 percent of annual revenue transferred to the Special Fund for Protected Areas.[47] UNDP provided NAPA staff with financial management tools and training, improving system-wide financial management and strengthening the financial sustainability of NAPA.[48] The funding gap for the protected area system reduced from $5.15 million to $2.12 million per annum.[49] However, stakeholders confirmed that RAPAs and MPAs faced challenges, as while fee collection mechanisms, where they existed, benefited the national management system, the distribution system did not serve all the needs of individual RAPAs.

The average METT score for pilot protected areas and NAPA exceeded targets, sometimes by over 20 percentage points, demonstrating improved management competency at different levels.[50] There were no post-training assessments on the use of e-learning platforms and tools by protected area staff, but interviews with Vlora Regional Protected Area management confirmed that METT calculations helped staff to identify and address weaknesses. However, progress in building capacity to meet Natura 2000 requirements was slower, with significant gaps in biodiversity monitoring and conservation practices compounded by persistent staff turnover and attrition in Albanian public administration.[51]

Challenges and future opportunities

The work of UNDP with the private sector was not sufficiently extensive or impactful to shift the incentive structures for meaningful private sector integration into protected area management. UNDP initiated the Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Coastal Development and Planning for Sustainable Tourism Development project to address this gap, but initiation delays meant that this was in inception phase during the fieldwork, with no results to report. The UNDP code of conduct for tourism operators relied on voluntary compliance, which was not closely monitored, and a hotel certification programme lost momentum following transfer to government management. Marine disaster programmes (i.e. oil spills) were heavily focused on building public response capacity but failed to address private sector accountability (i.e. polluter pays principle).

Community engagement was a hallmark of RAPA management plans and UNDP interventions, but deeper, longer-term community engagement mechanisms were needed to increase the impact of both. Small grant sizes and short-term engagement with community organizations constrained reach and impact. This was particularly significant given that community engagement and monitoring had become indispensable to conservation as mass tourism expansion increased the risks to biodiversity. UNDP was preparing to test various pilot community-based monitoring programmes on coastal pollution, with potential to turn into more holistic programmes with longer-term funding.

Finding 8.

UNDP played a crucial role in defining the strategic framework for disaster management in Albania and addressing implementation capacity gaps at national and local levels. This was achieved through enhanced coordination, real-time emergency monitoring, targeted training and equipment support. UNDP engagement at both upstream and downstream levels strengthened the overall coherence of disaster management in Albania.

National level: UNDP was a pioneer during the 2019 earthquake PDNA, a turning point for DRR in Albania. The distinctive value added by UNDP was its direct institutional support and comprehensive approach to developing the nascent NCPA. UNDP helped NCPA prepare key strategic documents including the National DRR Strategy, National Risk Assessment Document and National Civil Emergency Plan. Technical capacity enhancements enabled NCPA to report successfully to Sendai frameworks in 2022 and 2023. The evaluation field visits confirmed that these strategic contributions of UNDP were instrumental in Albania joining the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in 2022. Taken together, these upstream contributions provided the institutional backbone for Albania's evolving disaster risk management system and supported Albania's integration into European civil protection cooperation frameworks.

Local level: UNDP assisted one prefecture and seven municipalities to produce complete disaster risk management packages, including local disaster risk assessments, DRR strategies and civil emergency plans with comprehensive public consultation processes. These documents constituted the strategic foundation for DRR at local level and were developed using extensive local data. These nascent systems were tested during actual emergencies, demonstrating enhanced coordination and geographic information system (GIS)-based real-time monitoring. Smaller municipalities gained access to additional DRR funding through NCPA and municipal allocations.

Capacity development: UNDP delivered comprehensive training programmes with institutions at all levels, including preparation for Continuity of Operations and Continuity of Government, and regional training covering 12 prefectures and all 61 municipalities. Fieldwork confirmed the utility of simulation exercises for wildfire and winter storms, which tested inter-institutional collaboration and the effectiveness of Albania's National Civil Emergency Plan.

Equipment support: Support to the Institute of Geosciences (IGEO) was timely, crucial and impactful, with ten new seismic stations doubling earthquake monitoring capacity and enabling Albania to contribute to international seismological cooperation. The system proved its value during subsequent seismic episodes, providing detailed forecasting and impact assessments.

Challenges and future opportunities

UNDP support included the construction/ reconstruction of firefighting stations, the provision of vehicles and equipment to ten municipalities, and training for over 245 firefighters, with high satisfaction scores (4.73-4.9 out of 5). However, the selection of municipalities lacked structured consultation with technical stakeholders. Field visits suggested that several municipalities with higher operational needs or risk exposure were not prioritized, partly due to insufficient engagement at the design stage. Some end users reported that equipment and vehicles were outdated or low quality, although other items met expectations. A more coordinated and systematic approach to targeting and technical specification could have enhanced effectiveness and sustainability.

The fieldwork confirmed continued needs, particularly in smaller municipalities facing significant human resource constraints and staff turnover, limited technical expertise and infrastructure gaps. Smaller municipalities preferred prefectures to assume certain functions to achieve greater efficiency of scale in DRR coordination.

Finding 9. Water resource management and blue growth.

UNDP investments in data systems, tools, plans and assessments enhanced Albania's analytical foundation for evidence-based planning and disaster preparedness in water resource management. However, the sustainability and operational impact of these achievements depended on deeper institutional ownership, more hands-on capacity-building and ongoing support to ensure that technical tools and models were fully integrated into the day-to-day practice of institutions.

UNDP work on water resource management had two distinct streams of work. One centred on managing flood risks related to the Drini basin and continued to deliver results. The other aimed to mobilize resources for Albania's underdeveloped maritime sector to lay the groundwork for a Blue Economy programme and had concluded by the end of 2022. Though

limited in duration, scope and ambition, UNDP successfully developed The Blue Economy Programme for Albania, along with a set of project proposals to execute the programme. The Office of the Prime Minister subsequently developed this into a Blue Economy National Strategy with World Bank support. Fieldwork confirmed that this work was highly valued by government partners and was cut short due to donor funding issues and institutional changes, rather than poor performance.

Since 2015, UNDP consistently supported flood risk management in the Drini Basin. Formal transboundary governance of the basin was established under the 2011 Drin Memorandum of Understanding, which created the Drin Core Group and expert working groups, supported by a dedicated Secretariat. UNDP did not hold the leadership or convening functions within this transboundary framework, but played a long-standing enabling role through: supervision of successive Global Environment Facility supported projects; contribution to the development and ministerial endorsement of the Drin Strategic Action Programme; and sustained technical assistance to Albanian institutions to strengthen nationallevel water management, hydrological forecasting and local flood planning capacity.

UNDP helped the Water Agency with the development of extensive flood hazard maps and flood risk management plans for six of the seven flood risk areas in the Albanian part of the Drin Basin. These were aligned with the new Water Law of Albania (2024) and the EU Floods Directive. UNDP supported socioeconomic and vulnerability assessments with door-to-door data collection and consultation with communities in the flood hazard zones, resulting in a GIS-based community flood risk prioritization model, the first community-level analysis of monetary flood risk in the Western Balkans.[52] These assessments were expected to help local authorities develop more accurate predictions on the scale of damages and reparations for livelihoods and key economic sectors in the case of a major flood, although it was too early to report on results at the time of the evaluation.

Working with IGEO, UNDP strengthened data and early warning systems by developing a basin-wide hydrological model and digitizing historical data for enhanced flood forecasting. UNDP also invested in a data centre for IGEO (a high-performance computing cluster) to boost flood prediction accuracy. This strategic investment significantly increased the

speed of updating and rerunning the hydrological model. This data centre also monitored and stored seismic data, which helped IGEO across a broad range of DRR functions beyond flood prediction.

Challenges and future opportunities

Stakeholders valued UNDP technical assistance, while highlighting the need for more sustainable, hands-on capacity-building approaches that support long-term operational independence. One limitation identified during fieldwork was the reliance on standalone models that were not in day-to-day institutional use. National partners expressed a preference for engagement as partners throughout the process, rather than simply receiving finished products, noting that this would have enabled institutions to replicate work independently without external expertise.

Stakeholders also raised the need for ongoing monitoring assistance to track implementation, coordinate with stakeholders and prepare progress reports for senior government officials. This reflected a gap between receiving training and tools and having sustained support for practical application. This was echoed by the Drini Basin project evaluation which recommended bilateral coordination mechanisms with key national partners and tailor-made training plans addressing the specific needs of individual implementing partners, including support for using advanced tools.[53]

Finding 10.

Upstream, UNDP policy advice, technical assistance and capacity-building strengthened the institutional framework for employment and skills development in Albania. However, downstream challenges persisted in securing long-term employment for certain vulnerable groups through ALMPs and achieving meaningful private sector engagement.

The long-standing engagement of UNDP in employment and skills development was effective in strengthening the policy and institutional architecture governing Albania's employment and skills ecosystem. Government counterparts repeatedly highlighted several key reforms and results achieved with UNDP support.

Legal and regulatory developments: Following the adoption of two cornerstone laws on Vocational Education and Training (15/2017) and Employment Promotion (15/2019), UNDP provided technical assistance to draft the secondary legislation necessary to operationalize them. This secondary legislation supported effective implementation across institutions and clarified extended mandates for existing institutions, such as the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) and the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training Qualifications (NAVETQ).

Institutional transformation and policy reform: UNDP played a key role in supporting the functional review and transformation of the National Employment Service into NAES, in alignment with the European Network of Public Employment Services standards. NAES became the central institution for implementing the country's labour market policies, bridging employment services and VET governance and ensuring greater coherence and responsiveness to labour market needs.

Skills intelligence and labour market monitoring: UNDP was an active policy partner, consistently supporting Albanian institutions to design and implement evidence-based employment and skills policies. UNDP conducted skills needs assessments in 2017 and 2025 and developed the Labour Market Information and Skills Observatory as a permanent platform for labour market

intelligence. The Observatory fostered a culture of policy learning and continuous improvement by producing regular labour market intelligence and analytical reports.

Policy coordination and monitoring: UNDP provided technical assistance for the development of the NESS, both 2019-2022 and 2023-2030, providing on-demand support to the intergovernmental Integrated Policy Management Group through technical secretariat and donor coordination functions.[54]

VET quality assurance and qualifications framework: UNDP supported NAVETQ to establish a comprehensive quality assurance framework for the VET system, as the foundation for a culture of quality improvement. The self-assessment process of the framework was rolled out across all public VET providers, while 13 VET providers were accredited and five more had begun the process. With UNDP support, Albania reached a major milestone in 2021 by referencing the Albanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework, a significant step towards Albania's alignment with European standards and the development of a coherent lifelong learning policy.

ALMPs: UNDP supported comprehensive reform of Albania's ALMPs, shifting towards individualized and human-rights-based services placing the needs of each jobseeker at the core of programme design and delivery, and providing for workers impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Additional types of ALMPs were developed including tailored basic literacy, numeracy and digital literacy for the long-term unemployed, and integrated case management was introduced to support the integration of beneficiaries of cash assistance to the labour market. Most significantly, the new Decision of the Council of Ministers on outsourcing training to private providers was finalized. By 2025, eight ALMPs had been fully implemented nationwide, with new and tailored programmes under development. UNDP supported the integration of gender and Leave No One Behind (LNOB) to the design of ALMPs, supporting NAES to introduce vulnerability-informed profiling and case management to tailor counselling for women, youth, Roma and Egyptian communities and people with disabilities.

BOX 1.
Key Active Labour Market Programmes rolled out with UNDP support

Social Reintegration Programme: rolled out in 2024 to support the integration of unemployed jobseekers into the labour market, specifically beneficiaries of economic aid, Roma and Egyptian communities, people with disabilities, rural women and other vulnerable groups. The programme was managed by NAES in cooperation with public institutions and CSOs. The services included specialized advice for employment and self-employment, referral and coordination between employment and social services, and the development of individual reintegration and employment plans.

Youth Guarantee: piloted by Albanian government institutions in Tirana, Shkodër and Vlorë, with technical assistance from UNDP and UNICEF (through EU4Youth), to combat high youth unemployment rates. The Youth Guarantee was a commitment to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 years receive a quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. EU4Youth support aimed to strengthen inter-institutional capacity to manage and implement the Youth Guarantee in Albania, foster effective local partnerships to integrate vulnerable NEET youth into the labour market, and enhance the responsiveness of VET systems to produce a skilled workforce aligned with the green economy. By the end of 2024, 560 NEET youth were confirmed in the scheme, with 88 percent achieving positive outcomes in employment, education or training.

Self-Employment Programme: a UNDP flagship initiative launched in 2016, which has enabled over 130 young people to start their own businesses. The Programme continued to deliver results after its handover to NAES, reaching 45 beneficiaries in 2021, 242 in 2022 and 120 in 2024.

Challenges and future opportunities

The integrated case management supported by UNDP aimed to strengthen coordination between social care and employment services, though implementation revealed persistent institutional fragmentation at the local level. This involved cooperation between the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP), NAES and state and municipal social services. NAES and CSO stakeholders noted that social services sometimes referred individuals without adequate assessment of their job readiness. Political pressure to move beneficiaries off cash assistance outpaced the development of support systems. The main sustainability challenge was that when the beneficiaries of economic aid completed ALMPs, they struggled to remain employed. Addressing these gaps will require institutionalized local-level coordination structures, joint monitoring systems, and evidence-based feedback mechanisms to align ALMP design with broader social inclusion objectives.

Private sector engagement across skills development, employment promotion and enterprise support was not addressed in a fully systematic and structured manner. While UNDP supported systemic reforms in both employment services and VET, including demand driven approaches, employer engagement and strengthened quality assurance, the downstream connection between skills supply and enterprise demand remained weak. Private sector participation in VET delivery and employment promotion varied significantly by target group and intervention type and was structurally constrained for low-skilled and long-term unemployed beneficiaries. Fieldwork confirmed that private sector engagement in VET and UNDP employment promotion programmes was sporadic, despite positive examples under Youth Guarantee and supplier development programmes.[55] Interviewees highlighted that "institutions are not able to engage businesses meaningfully," and "skills mismatch persists because employers are rarely consulted in curricula design". At the same time, initiatives focused on private-sector development, such as MSME support, were not consistently linked to employment generation and skills development objectives. As a result, positive examples of private sector engagement did not yet amount to a coherent, economy-wide approach connecting enterprise competitiveness, skills development and inclusive job creation.

Finding 11.

In the area of economic development, UNDP interventions progressively evolved from emergency recovery assistance towards a broader economic development and private sector engagement agenda. Nascent UNDP private sector work delivered efficiency gains at the level of businesses and provided them with relief during shocks and crisis. However, sustainability prospects were limited as there were no scale-up plans in place.

The private sector received increased attention in UNDP programming following the 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic, through relief for MSMEs. A pilot MSME recovery and value-chain strengthening programme reached 150 MSMEs across five municipalities with tailored support through the In Motion methodology. A further 15 businesses benefited from the Supplier Development Programme and Growing Your Business pilots in two municipalities.[56] Although these represented a small fraction of local MSMEs, the pilots generated measurable results including an average 43 percent increase in monthly sales, 171 jobs created or stabilized and stronger branding and management capacity.[57] At meso level, the project's main value lay in testing and localizing the methodologies. Municipal actors confirmed the adaptability and replicability of the grant methodologies introduced under these programmes, particularly for women- and youth-led enterprises into their existing municipal programmes and cited measurable capacity gains among local enterprises.[58].

Similarly, joint programming with other United Nations agencies marked the first structured attempt by UNDP to integrate MSMEs into sustainable value chains and enhance alignment with EU standards, building on the growing network of UNDP private sector partners and the SDG Business Pioneers Network. The scale was modest and the cost per enterprise was high, but the initiative demonstrated feasible models for linking municipal recovery efforts with MSME support and laid the groundwork for broader replication under future programmes.[59]

UNDP raised awareness and generated momentum around responsible business conduct and the EU Green Agenda by producing analytical outputs such as the Stocktaking Report on SDG-aligned practices in agro-processing and the Zero Roadmap for SDGs and European Green Deal

adoption. It also launched the SDG Business Pioneers Award, recognising 130 companies for sustainable practices. However, the impact of these initiatives remained primarily at the level of advocacy and knowledge-sharing.

Challenges and future opportunities

UNDP engagement remained largely downstream, at the project-delivery level, rather than influencing systemic policy shifts. Pilot MSME programs were explicitly designed to generate wider demonstration and value-chain effects beyond the supported enterprises. However, the evaluation did not find sufficient evidence to systematically document broader transformative impacts at sector or system levels, in part due to the modest scale of intervention and the absence of explicit mechanisms for scaling up or integrating the models into national support schemes. Government counterparts showed openness to scaling tested "champion models" but acknowledged that no plans for scale-up existed at the time. Additionally, the unit cost per beneficiary enterprise (calculated on direct support to enterprises) remained relatively high, reflecting the intensive and tailored technical-assistance model.

UNDP engagement with business organizations and chambers was mostly limited to outreach and communication rather than sustained co-creation of policy or service models. Stakeholders emphasized future opportunities in cluster development, integration into EU value chains, and green and digital transitions, aligning with Albania's Smart Specialization Strategy.

Finding 12.

UNDP analytical work in SDG financing introduced Albania to international good practices and expanded policy discourse on financing for development. However, the transformative potential of this work was constrained by limited political traction and institutional uptake.

UNDP sought to strengthen Albania's institutional and analytical foundations for financing and implementing the SDGs, through an integrated approach that combined data innovation, policy design and financing strategies. UNDP introduced the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), a tool designed to map, align and mobilize public and private finance for sustainable development. The Development Finance Assessment completed under the INFF process provided the first comprehensive mapping of financial flows against SDG priorities, while the SDG Investor Map identified key investment opportunities for private capital aligned with national goals.[60] Together, these tools offered a diagnostic of Albania's financing landscape and practical entry points for aligning domestic and international resources with sustainable development priorities.

In parallel, UNDP helped establish new entry points for policy integration and interagency collaboration. The analytical work on SDG financing and the INFF process brought together UNDP technical assistance on budgeting and data with UNICEF expertise on social sector costing and International Labour Organization (ILO) expertise on social protection financing. This multidimensional engagement strengthened cross-agency coordination, building on collaboration with INSTAT, which had benefited from UNDP support for SDG indicator development and participation in international data initiatives in previous CPD cycles. From a coherence and strategic alignment perspective, support to the SDG framework has been conceptually consistent with the UNDP integrator role within the United Nations system.

Challenges and future opportunities

Parliamentary and private sector representatives recognised the quality of the analytical work of UNDP but noted the absence of a clear institutional home for the INFF and limited political momentum. The INFF diagnostic was completed, but its Financing Strategy was not finalized due to insufficient political commitment and coordination across ministries. Stakeholders observed limited understanding of the SDGs, noting that the enabling environment for reform remained fragile. Similarly, the tools developed under this output were not fully leveraged to engage the private sector or financial institutions in co-financing schemes, as initially envisaged.[61] International financial institutions played a major role in Albania, particularly in infrastructure, climate and public service reforms. UNDP with its SDG integrator role and its convening power could co-develop the governance model and the monitoring systems that ensure delivery of SDG-related outcomes, and co-develop financing schemes with the Ministry of Finance, targeting priority sectors.

Outcome 3.
Effective, people-centred governance, rule of law, human rights

OUTCOME 3

By 2026, governance is more transparent and accountable, enabling people (women and girls, men and boys, and persons at risk of exclusion), to enjoy quality, inclusive services, enhanced rule of law and access to justice in line with Albania's human rights commitments

OUTPUT 3.1

Good governance, participation and voice

OUTPUT 3.2

Data and evidence

OUTPUT 3.3

Public sector accountability and quality services

OUTPUT 3.4

Human rights and access to justice

15 projects

9 percent of country office expenditure

Planned budget	Actual budget	Resource mobilization	Expenditure	Execution rate
$13.4 million	$15.4 million	114 percent	$9.5 million	62 percent

Figure 11. Outcome 3 budget, expenditure and execution rate 2022-2025

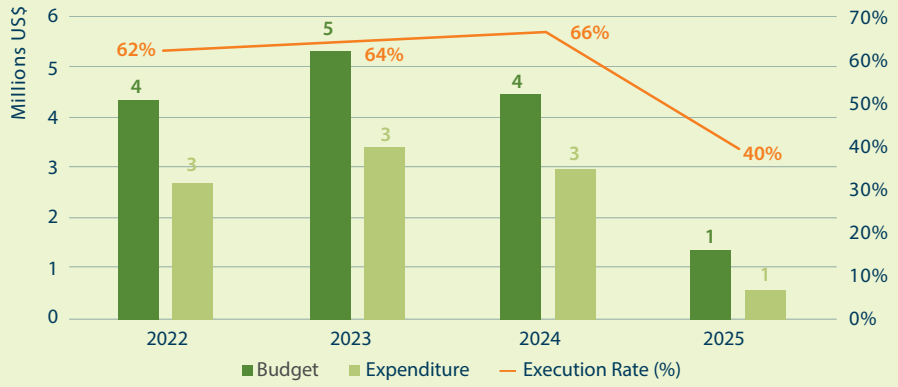
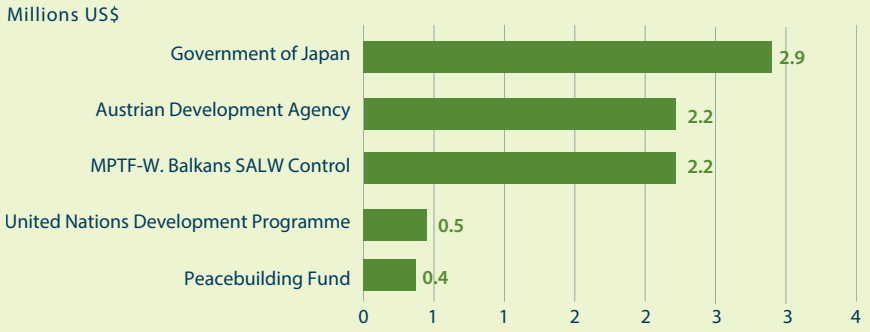


Figure 12. Outcome 3 top donors 2022-2025



Finding 13. UNDP was a key partner in Albania's decentralization reform.

The role of UNDP evolved from structural reform to system strengthening and institutional behaviour change. Its interventions put governance innovation at the heart of public administration, with an increasing focus on quality, ethics and the user experience. The institutionalization of integrity planning, at both central and local levels, represented one of the most durable UNDP legacies in the governance area.

UNDP had a long history in assisting the Government of Albania in local governance reform. It was first entrusted to support the territorial and administrative reform in 2014, including advice on the development of the reform roadmap, public awareness and consultations, as well as preparing the legal framework for reform. Subsequently, support focused on preparing local government to amalgamate and implement the necessary due diligence for consolidation. Following the local elections of 2015, UNDP focused on assisting newly formed municipalities to establish unified financial, human resource and service-delivery systems, develop the first municipal performance monitoring tools and support open government and citizen participation mechanisms.

Under the current CPD, the UNDP programme shifted from structural consolidation to institutional integrity, service quality improvement and digital governance at local level. At policy level, UNDP contributed to the National Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance (2023–2030) and supported the Minister of State for Local Government to align municipal performance measurement tools and benchmarks with national decentralization objectives. This entailed the establishment of a coherent framework for the measurement of municipal performance in areas ranging from financial management to service delivery and good governance; with a view to establishing minimum governance and health and safety standards for services; provide support for municipalities that are left behind; and inform policies. Downstream, UNDP interventions included training, development of integrity plans, digital readiness assessments and the design of quality standards and certification mechanisms for public services.

At policy level, UNDP made a tangible contribution by helping the Government articulate its first unified framework for service quality, through the Policy Document on Public Service Standards approved by Council of Ministers Decision 204 of April 2023. This document codified principles of accessibility, timeliness and accountability, and introduced quality assurance mechanisms aiming to shift the administrative culture from a compliance-based to a performance- and citizen-oriented mindset. In parallel, UNDP piloted a performance cascade model in key institutions, linking organizational objectives to individual staff performance and creating a foundation for a more coherent performance appraisal system within the civil service. The emphasis on learning and on-the-job mentoring was positively

received and generated strong engagement, with the aim of fostering a new generation of reform-minded public managers. However, institutional follow-up was suspended due to lack of resources.

At operational level, UNDP deepened the citizen-centric approach that was pursued under previous interventions, supporting the expansion of customer care standards in one-stop-shops in 14 municipalities. One-stop-shops, physical spaces which provided multiple services, increased efficiency and convenience for citizens and expanded access to local-level service delivery reaching 378,496 residents in 14 municipalities.[62] The Government shifted policy in 2022, from physical one-stop-shop expansion to full digitalization via the e-Albania public service digital portal. UNDP adapted swiftly to this change, redirecting resources from infrastructure to diagnostics, capacity development and coordination with NAIS, and working closely with the Minister of State for Service Standards on service review and quality management across five central government agencies. Fieldwork showed that the one-stop-shop model, customer service delivery and digital functionalities developed were highly effective and tailored for municipal purposes, and some municipalities continued to maintain the physical one-stop-shops from their own budgets after discontinuation of central ADISA structures, until the central server was discontinued in 2024, suggesting institutional absorption and sustainability.

UNDP also supported digital transformation within its governance programming. UNDP assisted the MoEI in aligning broadband expansion with state aid rules to support universal access to online services. UNDP also developed a framework and action plan for digital literacy of people over 45, addressing a critical inclusion gap in Albania's rapid digitalization drive, though implementation of the pilot had not begun at the time of the evaluation. These efforts complemented the national e-Albania platform. Stakeholders confirmed that UNDP played a crucial role in helping NAIS introduce user-assistance tools such as the Diella chatbot and in developing a methodology for quality certification of services". The annual Trust in Government surveys showed a steady rise in citizen satisfaction with service quality, from 35 percent in 2021 to around 40 percent in 2024, suggesting improved accessibility and responsiveness in service delivery.[63]

Integrity planning became a criterion in the municipal grant performance system, signalling a notable systems shift from *ad hoc* compliance to structured prevention. Integrity plans aimed to assess risks which could

compromise the ability of institutions to perform in an accountable, effective and responsive manner; and to prepare a set of actions and steps to address these risks. As such, the integrity plan was an important tool to prevent corruption. In cooperation with the General Anti-Corruption Directorate and the Institute for Democracy and Mediation, UNDP developed and piloted Albania's first methodology for integrity risk assessment and planning, filling an important institutional gap. Initially tested in a small number of central institutions, the methodology was later adopted by the MoJ and rolled out across 11 central ministries, before being embedded in the State Anti-Corruption Strategy as a mandatory preventive measure. UNDP also piloted and supported the adoption of integrity risk assessment and planning in 28 municipalities. This rollout also helped make integrity planning an institutional requirement for local administrations.

Challenges and future opportunities

Institutional restructuring and the reassignment of mandates, including the creation of new institutions following electoral cycles, have been a recurring feature of the Albanian public administration landscape. These shifts had, at times, influenced the pace of implementation for UNDP governance initiatives. The delineation of a stable central authority for service standards was not always clear, making it difficult to anchor reforms within institutions. In several ministries, the introduction of new performance systems and quality management tools progressed gradually, reflecting the need to adapt to existing administrative practices and strengthen technical capacity.

The shift to full digital service delivery left behind citizens with low digital skills or limited access to broadband, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

Finding 14.

The sustained engagement of UNDP in legal aid moved Albania from legislative provision to functional, state-funded services, improving equity and access. However, outreach and digitalization efforts did not fully overcome barriers for marginalized groups.

The sustained engagement of UNDP in access to justice was instrumental in transforming the 2017–2018 legal aid legislation from a formal legal provision into a functional and expanding national system. UNDP supported both the institutional architecture and the enabling environment required to make the right to legal aid effective for citizens, particularly poor and marginalized groups.

At policy and institutional level, the upstream work of UNDP with the MoJ and the Free Legal Aid Directorate (FLAD) helped operationalize the state-funded legal aid scheme. Key outputs included: the development of the national legal aid management platform (CLEAN database) to register, track and monitor cases; the design and adoption of service delivery standards, operational guidelines and a national monitoring framework for legal aid; and the creation of structured indicators on access, timeliness, inclusiveness and user satisfaction. UNDP also provided technical guidance for FLAD staff and accredited legal aid providers and standardized data collection formats. This institutional backbone enabled the MoJ to coordinate services more systematically across the country.

UNDP expanded the reach of FLA by establishing and supporting over 20 legal aid centres in all 12 regions of Albania. These centres offered primary legal aid services (legal information and advice), whereas secondary services (representation in court) were provided by court-appointed lawyers and CSOs. Centres were staffed by civil servants and supported by trained professionals and civil society partners, ensuring local outreach. UNDP further strengthened this network by developing training curricula and certification modules for legal aid centre staff and CSO providers, and by facilitating peer learning and supervision mechanisms. Between 2021 and 2025, 24,972 beneficiaries received primary and secondary FLA services.[64] 12 out of 20 FLA centres transitioned to being funded from the state budget, though funding gaps persisted for outreach and monitoring activities.[65]

UNDP developed a web-based national legal aid database integrating service directories, eligibility assessment tools and case registration. The platform, submitted to NAIS for integration with e-Albania, aimed to digitize access and improve data-driven case management. The full operationalization of the database was delayed due to interoperability issues between state IT systems and limited digital literacy among target users.

To mitigate this and avoid digital exclusion, UNDP maintained a dual-access model combining digital entry points with in-person legal education and assistance through the legal aid centres.

Coordination between the MoJ, the People's Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination was strengthened, while partnerships with CSOs helped identify systemic barriers such as lack of documentation, complex eligibility criteria or gender bias in court procedures, with evidence fed back into policy. The introduction of state accreditation for CSOs as legal aid providers increased the diversity of service channels and expanded outreach beyond the formal justice system.

Challenges and future opportunities

UNDP invested in awareness raising to inform vulnerable citizens of their rights and available legal redress, and the availability of FLA services, working with FLA staff, municipal social workers, media and CSO partners. Despite these efforts, a 2024 national access to justice survey revealed that only 29 percent of respondents were aware of their right to FLA, with lowest awareness among older women and minorities in remote areas.[66] The shift towards digitalization risked widening exclusion for the same groups who had limited digital access.

Several systemic constraints limited the consolidation of the legal aid system. The national budget for legal aid remained insufficient to meet growing demand, and secondary legal aid services were scarce.

Finding 15.

UNDP work on civic engagement and youth inclusion created new participatory spaces for young people, amplifying their voices, and strengthened transparent civic funding mechanisms, linking civil society to local decision-making. However, institutional embedding and ownership remained incomplete.

UNDP interventions advanced civic engagement by strengthening the capacity of youth, media and public institutions to counter divisive narratives and promote inclusive dialogue. At community level, UNDP fostered youth engagement mechanisms across diverse geographic contexts through peer-to-peer engagement, media literacy and creative civic expression. The UNDP multi-channel approach, combining digital outreach with localized community dialogue platforms, demonstrated scalability in reaching both online and offline audiences. UNDP engagement with the media sector addressed vulnerabilities in the information ecosystem, building professional capacity for ethical journalism and media literacy. At institutional level, youth offices in pilot municipalities received targeted capacity-building on community engagement, participatory planning and gender-sensitive programming, to help them organize municipal-level 'youth dialogue days'.

UNDP focused on creating an enabling environment for civil society participation in local governance. This was tested in 18 municipalities in Albania, where UNDP supported the adoption and implementation of the Local Democracy methodology for the transparent allocation of municipal funds to CSOs. This included developing or revising municipal regulations and grant-making procedures, establishing evaluation committees, and providing training for 200 municipal staff and 300 CSO representatives on project cycle management, proposal writing, financial reporting and gender mainstreaming. As a result, 17 municipalities launched public calls for CSO proposals aligned with their local development plans. 137 CSO projects were financed during the first and second grant cycles, covering areas such as youth engagement, environmental protection, gender equality and social inclusion.[67] UNDP also facilitated joint planning and public consultation sessions between local governments and CSOs, improving mutual trust and accountability. Partner municipalities co-financed grants (at least 20 percent contribution), and several introduced digital publications of calls and results, enhancing transparency.

At national level, UNDP supported the Ministry of State for Youth and Children and National Youth Agency in adopting the Local Democracy methodology for their own calls for proposals, thus extending the model beyond local government.[68] UNDP provided technical advice on NYA organizational restructuring, helping define clearer lines of accountability and introducing a new structure for youth programme management.

The combined effect of these initiatives was to expand civic space and embed transparency standards within CSO and youth engagement processes. Youth organizations that previously depended on donor support gained access to structured municipal funding and capacity to implement public-interest projects, while municipal administrations applied transparent, competitive and gender-responsive funding procedures.

Challenges and future opportunities

These interventions enhanced the visibility of young people, yet many youth activities remained episodic, lacking the institutional funding for continuation. Smaller municipalities exhibited low absorptive capacity, limited human resources for grant management, and weak CSO ecosystems, resulting in uneven results across the country (e.g., limited uptake in Tropoja and Dibra versus strong performance in Shkodra and Tirana). Despite progress, no permanent legal framework existed to ensure predictable financing for CSOs.

Finding 16.

UNDP was effective in modernizing Albania's small arms and light weapons (SALW) control system, strengthening forensic capacity, border cooperation and public safety infrastructure.

Since 2019, UNDP implemented a comprehensive portfolio of SALW control under the Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap, covering institutional reform, cross-border cooperation and infrastructure modernization. The portfolio positioned UNDP as a central technical partner to the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Albanian State Police in advancing national and regional security priorities.

At the operational level, UNDP interventions focused on modernizing forensic and investigative capacity and improving arms and ammunition stockpile security. UNDP equipped the Institute of Forensic Police and crime scene investigation units with advanced ballistic and evidence management tools to enhance crime scene analysis and traceability. Standard operating procedures were revised to harmonize investigative practices with

EU standards, and Albania's ballistic sector introduced EvoFinder technology, compatible with EU and neighbouring countries, supporting regional ballistic data exchange.

UNDP also helped strengthen the physical security of police armament facilities, rehabilitating ten regional storage depots, installing surveillance and fire-protection systems, and delivering metal safes to secure firearms in 62 priority evidence rooms nationwide. These upgrades brought police storage in line with international safety standards, directly addressing diversion risks. UNDP supported the MoI to digitize the national weapons registry and prepare for the issuance of 100,000 digital firearm licenses, despite setbacks caused by the 2022 cyberattack.

UNDP supported Albania's integration into the Western Balkans SALW Roadmap framework, coordinating with the Southeastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), the MoI of Kosovo and the Customs Authority to conduct joint police training, study visits, risk analysis and patrol coordination exercises along the green border with Albania and Kosovo. These initiatives strengthened bilateral trust and aligned Albania's law enforcement practices with EU and regional standards on trafficking prevention.

UNDP influenced policy planning, institutional culture and regional cooperation. The MoI confirmed that UNDP helped integrate infrastructure rehabilitation and stockpile management into national budget planning, created a Central Firearms Unit with analytical capacity and reinforced Albania's National SALW Commission as a coordination body across police, customs and prosecutors. The Roadmap mechanism, coordinated through SEESAC, also established a national and regional task force that enhanced donor coordination and monitoring of Albania's progress under Roadmap goals.

Outcome 4.
Gender equality

OUTCOME 4

By 2026, gender responsive governance strengthens equality and non-discrimination, promotes women's empowerment and human rights, and reduces violence against women and children

OUTPUT 4.1

Legal, policy and institutional reforms enhanced to remove structural barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment and prevent and respond to all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls

2 projects

0.3 percent of country office expenditure

Planned budget	Actual budget	Resource mobilization	Expenditure	Execution rate
$3.3 million	$4.14 million	125 percent	$3.4 million	83 percent

Figure 13. Outcome 4 budget expenditure and execution rate 2022-2025

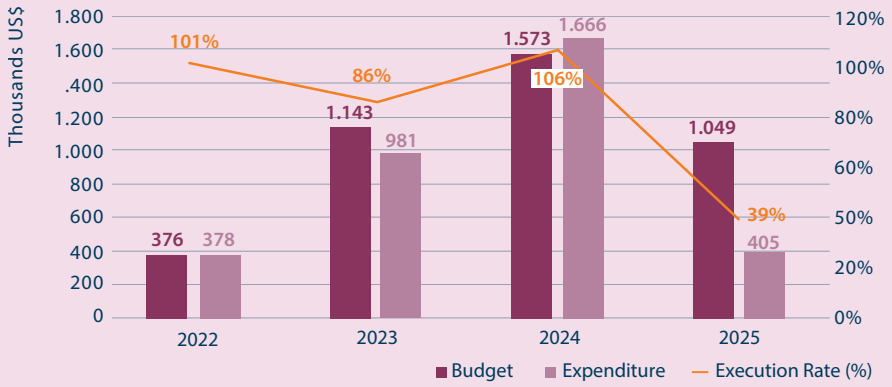
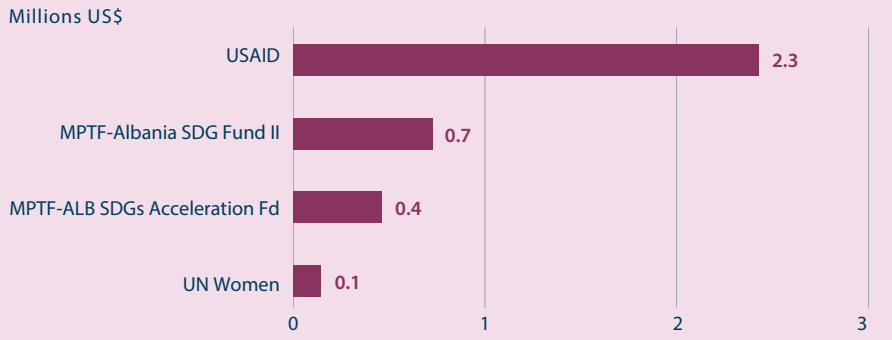


Figure 14. Outcome 4 top donors 2022-2025



Finding 17.

The UNDP GBV response in Albania has been instrumental in translating international standards into national law and practice and building a coordinated, survivor-centred system that links policy reform with local implementation. UNDP prioritized the GBV response as an entry point for gender responsive programming but engaged less with broader gender equality and women's empowerment objectives.

UNDP interventions supported national efforts to eliminate GBV by: strengthening government accountability and service provider capacity for prevention, protection and response; enhancing access to adequate, survivor-centred services; and promoting CSO advocacy and community mobilization.

UNDP targeted municipalities across the country, establishing or reinforcing 28 Coordinated Referral Mechanisms (CRMs), multisectoral systems facilitating timely service delivery to survivors of violence or trafficking. Key implementing partners included the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, law enforcement bodies, judicial institutions and CSOs. UNDP contributed to standardizing operational protocols, facilitating training through ASPA and the School of Magistrates, and strengthening accountability systems by defining roles and responsibilities. Support to parliamentary oversight bodies, the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination, Ombudsperson and CSOs strengthened their capacity to monitor the implementation of GBV legislation.

The introduction of the Local Information System for Registering Cases of Domestic Violence (REVALB) digital case-management system represented a major systems innovation. The nationwide online tracking enabled municipal GBV coordinators to register and monitor GBV cases and protection orders and became mandatory with the adoption of Decision of the Council of Ministers 327/2021 on CRMs. Managed by the MoHSP with UNDP technical support, REVALB was used across all municipalities. While data completeness and municipal uptake remained uneven, with REVALB capturing 14.2 percent of total reported GBV cases in 2024, down from 21.2 percent in 2020, REVALB enhanced transparency, accountability and the national visibility of GBV trends.[69]

The contribution of UNDP was instrumental in translating international standards, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), GREVIO and the Istanbul Convention, into Albania's domestic legal, policy and operational framework. UNDP contributed to the ongoing legislative drafting and consultations on the legal framework on GBV and gender equality, and the ongoing revision of the Criminal Code (pending adoption) to include femicide, digital violence and workplace harassment. UNDP also supported MoHSP and Parliament to conduct legal gap analyses in response to CEDAW

and GREVIO observations and to prepare submissions for the 2024 Universal Periodic Review (UPR).[70] These efforts positioned Albania's legal framework closer to EU and international standards.

UNDP worked closely with the Albanian State Police to operationalize the GBV legal framework through training, procedural manuals and interagency coordination. This improved the consistency of the police response and strengthened links between law enforcement and municipal CRMs, although high staff turnover continued to pose challenges.

UNDP progressively linked normative and institutional pillars of the GBV response with inclusive local service provision and the expansion and professionalization of survivor-centred services. This included the establishment of the Lilium Centre, a multisector centre for survivors of sexual violence based in the Tirana University Hospital, and the Resilience Centres in Durrës, Kurbin, and Lezhë.[71] MoHSP and municipal interviewees credited these centres with demonstrating a functional, inclusive model that connects social protection, health, education and employment services. 14 Needs Assessment and Referral Units were also established, providing early-warning and triage functions that complement municipal CRMs. Despite positive early results, the programme was suspended by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in January 2025. In mid-2025, the Durrës centre had already secured co-funding through the Social Fund, with the municipality of Lezhë assessing the viability of continuing services through its own resilience centre. The other centres were discontinued due to the lack of funding, highlighting the fragility of donor-driven local services.

The comparative advantage of UNDP was its bridging role between policy reform and local implementation. The CRM and REVALB systems became institutional pillars of Albania's gender-equality architecture, while the Resilience Centres demonstrated how survivor-centred protection could evolve into a broader community resilience agenda.

Challenges and future opportunities

A 2023 assessment of the CRM confirmed that around two-thirds of municipalities held regular coordination meetings and followed standard procedures, while the others struggled with irregular reporting, weak monitoring and insufficient resources.[72] It noted that the quality of case management depended heavily on the commitment of local leadership and the availability of trained staff, concluding that "the CRM structure was legally consolidated but functionally fragile in practice."

Resilience Centres were too costly and resource-intensive to be maintained within the existing fiscal and administrative framework of local governments, underscoring the challenge of transitioning donor-funded pilots into nationally owned systems.

While REVALB was embedded in government systems, it relied on external technical assistance for maintenance and data-quality assurance. High staff turnover among local coordinators and police officers created a recurring need for induction training and weakened institutional memory. The MoHSP made efforts to integrate REVALB into the national IT infrastructure and institutionalize refresher training through ASPA, which were positive steps that nonetheless remained incomplete.

Multiple management information systems coexisted without clear interoperability, including the Social Care Service Register and the Economic Aid Registry, both mandatory for municipalities. This fragmentation partly stemmed from limited cross-departmental coordination in MoHSP, as well as a lack of programmatic integration within the UNDP portfolio, as GBV-related systems (under Outcome 4) and social care systems (under Outcome 1) evolved separately.

UNDP partially neglected the broader gender equality and women's empowerment agenda due to this exclusive emphasis on GBV. Women's economic participation and the care economy, as well as closer alignment between social protection, employment and gender equality policies were equally important objectives that were not prominent in UNDP programming.

Cross-cutting findings

Finding 18. Sustainability

UNDP Albania was instrumental in establishing robust legal, policy and institutional frameworks across social services, inclusive growth, environment, governance and gender equality. However, the long-term sustainability of these achievements was constrained by partial institutional embedding, persistent reliance on external funding, and uneven domestic ownership and capacity.

Legal and policy sustainability: This has been the strongest dimension in all UNDP interventions. In the social services field, UNDP clarified service delivery standards through the development and updating of key documents, including social protection and inclusion strategies, as well as targeted action plans. In inclusive growth, UNDP technical assistance was pivotal in the adoption of the laws and regulations on vocational education and employment creation. The National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023–2030 (NESS) and related secondary legislation guided sectoral reforms. In environment and climate, UNDP supported the drafting and revision of the Law on Biodiversity, the NAP and NDCs, and secondary bylaws for renewable energy and ecosystem services. In governance, UNDP work led to the operationalization of the National Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance (2023–2030), the Law on Legal Aid and national service quality standards, embedding principles of decentralization and citizen-centred service delivery. In gender equality, UNDP was instrumental in the development and revision of the Law on Gender Equality, and amendments to the Criminal Code.

Institutional sustainability: The sustained engagement of UNDP strengthened institutional capacity in certain areas at national and local levels. Capacity-building efforts, e-learning and multistakeholder partnerships contributed to institutional maturity, particularly in vocational education, protected area management, DRR and legal aid. Achievements included the transformation of key agencies (e.g., NAES, NAVETQ, FLAD), the establishment of quality assurance (VET) and monitoring systems (biodiversity, GIS-based for DRR), and the operationalization of coordination bodies (IMWGCC), digital platforms (REVALB for GBV case management, CLEAN for legal aid) and e-learning platforms for protected area management. UNDP supported service quality and

integrity through the development of municipal integrity plans, performance cascade models, enhancing transparency and accountability in public administration. The CRM network, REVALB and standard operating protocols were integrated into Albania's national architecture in response to GBV.

Financial sustainability: There were notable examples where UNDP was able to secure financial commitment. The most enduring UNDP legacy in financial sustainability has been its support to design the Special Fund for Protected Areas. This mechanism increased revenue generation (e.g., quadrupling protected area revenues) and reduced funding gaps. The handover of legal aid centres to the Government marked another transition to a state-funded model. In certain areas, UNDP contributed to the ability of public administrations to leverage external funding, though these examples were more limited, including financing strategies to leverage funding for climate adaptation measures at national and local levels.

Challenges and future opportunities

Despite these achievements, UNDP programmatic objectives were limited by sustainability challenges that were partially outside its sphere of influence, especially in terms of financial sustainability.

Legal and policy sustainability: Some legal and policy innovations remained only partly codified or harmonized across sectors, limiting scalability and consistent application (e.g., integrated social-service approaches). Newly adopted frameworks (e.g., NAP, LAPs) required ongoing government commitment and effective enforcement to realize their full impact. The absence of comprehensive legal frameworks for civil society constrained the full realization of accountability objectives.

Institutional Sustainability: Many reforms and innovations remained project-dependent, with limited mechanisms or scale-up within permanent government structures. High staff turnover, shifting mandates and uneven absorptive capacity, especially at the municipal level, undermined the internalization and continuity of new practices. Persistent reliance on UNDP for coordination and technical support (e.g., secretariat functions, system maintenance) signalled functional dependency and highlighted the need for clear exit and transition strategies. Fragmentation in data systems and parallel reporting obligations further constrained efficiency and integration, particularly in social protection and gender equality (e.g., between REVALB, Social Care Register, and Economic Aid Registry).

Financial sustainability: The greatest constraint to UNDP reform efforts was financial, largely outside its sphere of influence. Most interventions and service models continued to rely on project-based or external funding, with minimal cost-sharing or national co-financing agreements. Declining social protection budgets, varying municipal fiscal space and limited government budget flexibility posed risks to the continuity of results. Financial sustainability required the integration of successful models into regular government budgets, the development of cost-effective service models and the establishment of long-term funding mechanisms at both central and local levels. International financial institutions played a major role in Albania, particularly in infrastructure, climate and public service reforms, but UNDP did not capitalize on opportunities to engage the private sector and financial institutions in the co-design of SDG-aligned investment pipelines and sectoral strategies.

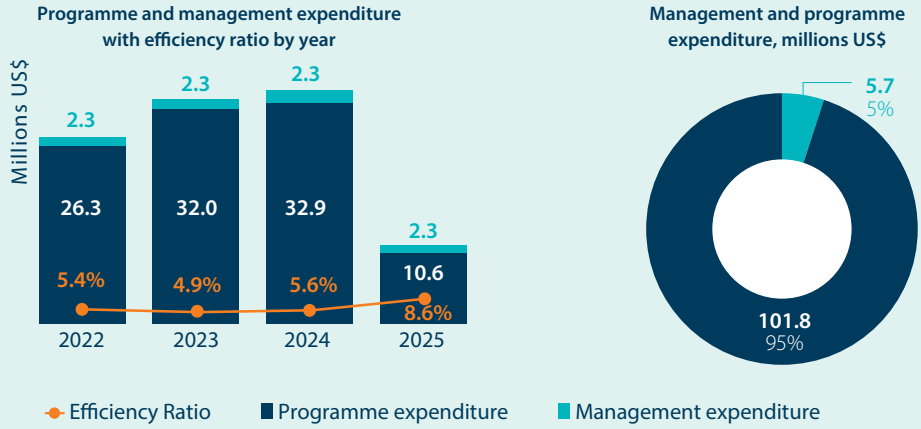
Finding 19.

Programme delivery and efficiency were generally high, with stable management and effective resource mobilization. Nonetheless, high-cost pilots limited scale-up prospects, and delays in expert recruitment slowed implementation under certain outcomes.

Resource mobilization efforts of UNDP were successful in the current CPD. The estimated budget target for the CPD 2022-2026 was $111.5 million. As of 30 October 2025, UNDP mobilized $134 million (120 percent of the target) and achieved a delivery rate of 75 percent. Outcome 1 had the largest share of resources (65 percent), followed by Outcome 2 (19 percent), Outcome 3 (11 percent) and Outcome 4 (0.03 percent). UNDP managed a diverse portfolio of 77 projects (with 54 distinct project awards) across social care, inclusive growth, environment, governance and gender equality, with some projects continuing from the previous programme cycle.

UNDP management efficiency was aligned with operational benchmarks. An analysis of UNDP management efficiency showed that, between 2022 and 2025, for every dollar spent on management, $17.7 was directed towards programme implementation. During the same period, 95 percent of total expenditure ($101.8 million) was allocated to programme activities, while 5 percent ($5.75 million) covered management costs. This performance aligned with the benchmarks set in the UNDP Cumulative Review of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, which reported that 92 cents of every dollar reached programmes in 2024.[73]

Figure 15. For every $1 spent on management, $17.7 was spent on programme implementation



Stakeholders highly appreciated the stable and reliable human resource of UNDP, especially in the context of constant staff turnover in Albanian bureaucracy. UNDP core staff remained intact throughout successive phases of public administration, making it a preferred policy advisor at national level. Equally, the strong UNDP presence at local level made it a preferred agency for piloting downstream interventions.

Challenges and future opportunities

The delivery rate of UNDP Albania has been consistently strong since 2015, ranging between 83 and 94 percent with a temporary drop in 2022 to 55 percent (see Figure 5). The low execution rate in 2022 resulted from the difficulty of executing the substantial budget allocated to infrastructure and the construction of earthquake-resistant educational facilities, linked primarily to external factors, including delays in securing permits to commence civil works and a cyberattack on the relevant administrative systems in 2022.[74]

Difficulties with finding the right expertise slowed down implementation and delivery under the environment outcome. Interviewees noted that UNDP procurement rules, especially for hiring national experts, caused some delays. Repeated readvertisements for various consultancies, in the

absence of qualified national experts, slowed down project implementation under this outcome. As a result, many of the interventions were delayed in launching, and multiple no-cost extensions were required. Interviewees suggested that UNDP create a roster to speed up recruitment in this area.

Some of the models proposed by UNDP were too costly for the Government to maintain or scale in the long term. Given financial sustainability challenges, UNDP downstream pilots needed to be cost efficient and replicable. Some of the proposed models, such as Integrated Resilience Centres in GBV, were too costly for local governments to maintain. Similarly, the cost-per-beneficiary of MSME support grants was too high, and participating MSMEs were unable to continue purchasing mentoring services once support stopped.

Finding 20. Implementation approach

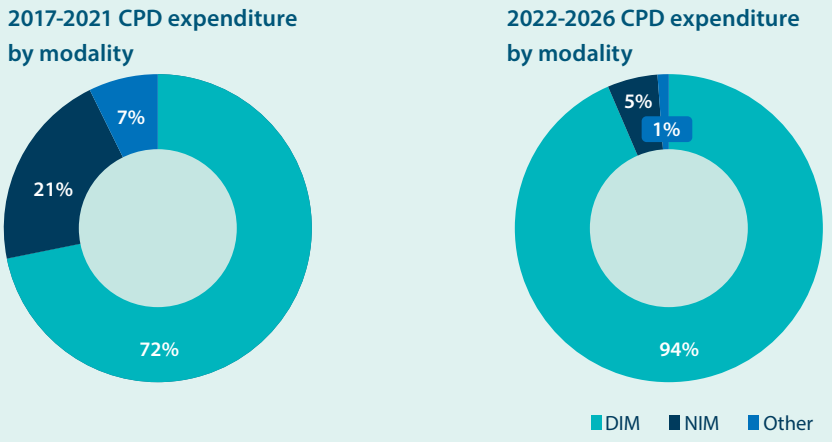
The preferred use by UNDP of direct implementation modality (DIM) ensured reliability and technical competence, especially in crisis contexts. As EU accession accelerated, this approach faced increased scrutiny, highlighting the need for transition strategies towards greater national ownership.

UNDP predominantly used DIM, meaning it retained full responsibility for procurement, contracting and project execution in most of its programmes. This decision reflected a consensus between the Government and UNDP, based on the reliability and effectiveness of the UNDP team, its consistent presence at national and local levels, and its flexibility and willingness to accommodate government needs where institutional capacity was limited. UNDP was also able to leverage donor funding to contribute to Albania's development objectives where fiscal space was constrained.

A comparison of the current and previous CPDs showed that the share of DIM in UNDP expenditure increased from 72 to 94 percent. This was partially due to the large education infrastructure programme, where the constraints of national procurement procedures led to UNDP direct implementation, and which proved crucial to the effective response. Cost-sharing and national

co-financing were minimal overall (0.01 percent of the overall UNDP budget). Public official interviewees cited "public-procurement sensitivities" and "limited budget flexibility" as barriers to government cost-sharing.

Figure 16. There is an increasing trend in Direct Implementation Modality as a % of expenditures in UNDP programmes.



Challenges and future opportunities

As Albania moves closer to EU accession, EU funds will increasingly be channelled through Albanian government structures rather than through international organizations. This shift is known as "indirect management with beneficiary", where the beneficiary country (Albania) will be entrusted with managing the funds, but under EU supervision and with ongoing capacity checks. The goal will be to prepare Albania to handle the much larger volumes of EU funding it will receive as a Member State, to ensure transparency, accountability and alignment with EU rules.

As the EU shifts towards direct budget support, the UNDP implementation approach will also need to evolve. Fieldwork revealed that the donor community expected United Nations agencies, including UNDP, to pivot towards supporting the Albanian Government to build the systems, skills and controls needed to manage funds according to EU standards. This included providing policy advice, training and institutional strengthening, rather than hands-on project delivery.

While the donor community encouraged United Nations agencies to move from implementer to strategic facilitator, the appropriateness of using National Implementation Modality (NIM) as a tool would depend on existing institutional capacity. In areas with weaker national systems, there could be opportunity to use hybrid approaches, combining UNDP technical oversight with government execution, especially during the transition to full national ownership. There could also be opportunity for UNDP to implement projects directly in areas where government capacity was not yet sufficient, or in crisis situations.

Finding 21. Theory of change and integrated programming

The ToC underpinning the CPD lacked clear complementarities and pathways for synergy across outcomes, coupled with siloed team structures that undermined opportunities for integrated programming. Project-based approaches inhibited interoperability and cross-outcome learning.

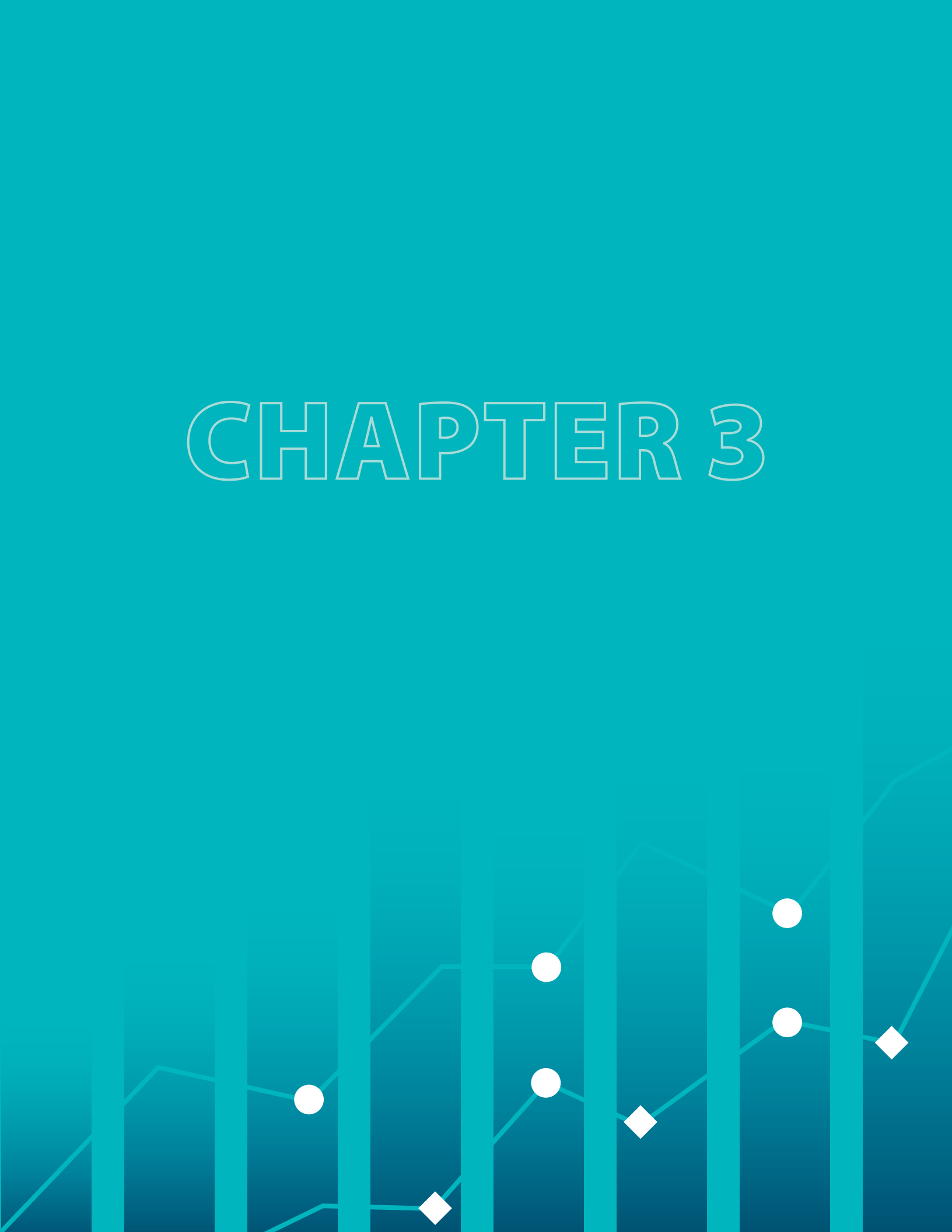
ToC design. The CPD ToC lacked clear causal pathways to connect the objectives of different outcomes in an integrated manner (Annex 10). Four outcomes had four different intervention pathways, even when there were clear thematic complementarities or when outcome objectives intersected. For instance, Outcome 1 had a strong emphasis on enabling CSOs representing vulnerable groups to participate in decision-making related to social services. Outcome 3 pursued a broader objective of strengthening civic participation and local democracy across a wide range of sectors. While these objectives served different policy purposes, civic participation could have been more clearly conceptualized as a cross-cutting principle across outcomes. The absence of a shared conceptual framework and coordination mechanism led in some cases to repetition of participation-related activities across projects under different outcomes, rather than to mutually reinforcing interventions. Certain outputs of the CPD, such as "Data and Evidence" under Outcome 3 or "Innovation" under Outcome 2, could also have been conceptualized as enablers across outcomes.

Team structures and siloed implementation. The outcomes were managed in relative isolation, reflecting long-standing team structures with boundaries set long before the current CPD. While this brought predictability and

efficiency to the internal working of each outcome, it stifled cross-outcome synergy, which would enable richer and more integrated programming. This was most evident in the execution of Outcome 2, which required an approach which pursued economic development and environmental objectives jointly, but in practice was implemented by two parallel teams working in silos, causing programmatic gaps identified during field work. For example, many respondents noted that they expected UNDP to do more on the circular economy and sustainable tourism that jointly addressed the objectives of economic growth and climate change mitigation. Better integration of the work with the private sector and the climate change workstream could also have contributed to "the green economy" objective of Outcome 2.

Project-based approaches and interoperability. The project-based funding architecture, with earmarked budgets, distinct counterparts and separate objectives for each team, created organizational incentives that favoured standalone interventions over integrated approaches. This inhibited the ability of UNDP to promote interoperability between public authority systems. UNDP undertook targeted interventions to strengthen the delivery of integrated social and employment services and referral and cooperation mechanisms at regional and local levels. However, overall, Outcome 1 on human capital development was not well linked to Outcome 2 on employment and green skills, and multiple management information systems coexisted without clear interoperability, including the Social Care Service Register and the Economic Aid Registry, both mandatory for municipalities. This fragmentation partly stemmed from limited cross-departmental coordination within the MoHSP, and partly from a lack of programmatic integration within the UNDP portfolio.

CHAPTER 3



CHAPTER 3.

Insights and conclusions

The following conclusions reflect on what UNDP has achieved, where tensions have emerged, and what these patterns reveal about choices ahead for each key evaluation question of this evaluation.

Insights

Insight 1: UNDP has been a trusted partner of Albania in advancing reforms. Its orientation shifted towards alignment with EU accession agenda.

UNDP has been a strategic partner to the Government of Albania, helping build systems across territorial administration, environmental stewardship, employment and skills development, access to justice, social inclusion and education. UNDP was able to remain a trusted partner through Albania's reform-intensive decade, due to its credibility, neutrality and technical depth. The agility of UNDP in responding to the 2019 earthquake and in adapting to digital-governance reforms confirmed its relevance. The programmatic orientation of UNDP increasingly reflected alignment with EU frameworks and priorities, influencing both upstream policy support and downstream implementation.

Insight 2: UNDP programmes balanced upstream policy assistance with downstream local-level delivery.

UNDP programming was shaped against the backdrop of territorial administration reform where more responsibilities were devolved from national to local level. UNDP contributed to an enabling policy and regulatory environment by supporting major laws, reforms and policies at the national level. UNDP also stepped in where municipalities, prefectures or regional administrations faced capacity gaps, whether in planning, service delivery or emergency response. The strongest results came where upstream policy reforms were accompanied by municipal pilots and feedback loops. When these linkages were consistent, reforms were institutionalized; when absent, replication remained uneven.

Insight 3: Inclusion efforts combined strong participation with fragile financing and limited institutional capacity.

UNDP support was crucial for helping the Government of Albania articulate and expand its policies vis-à-vis vulnerable groups. UNDP was also largely successful in connecting disadvantaged groups with decision making. Reforms in social protection, employment policy and GBV achieved legislative and procedural milestones, but relied heavily on donor funding and fluctuating local capacity. The public sector was constrained by limited capacity to apply inclusive methodologies. The endurance of these gains depended on consistent fiscal commitment and retention of trained personnel at national and subnational levels. These problems were exacerbated by the constant change in the names, duties and jurisdictions of institutions, resulting in uneven progress across UNDP interventions.

Insight 4: EU accession increasingly favoured nationally led modalities.

UNDP assumed full responsibility for project execution in most of its programmes**.** This modality was based on a consensus between the Government and UNDP, grounded in the reliability, efficient delivery and effectiveness of the UNDP team, its flexibility to accommodate government needs, and its ability to leverage donor funding where public fiscal space was limited. This operational model reflected a tension between strong delivery of project results and uneven institutional embedding and ownership after projects

ended. The preference for direct implementation ensured reliability and technical competence, particularly in crisis contexts, but also limited the pace of transition towards nationally led systems. This pattern suggested that, as Albania advances towards EU accession and shifts to budget support mechanisms, the future effectiveness of UNDP will hinge on its ability to recalibrate delivery approaches, embed reforms within government structures and strengthen financing strategies that reduce dependency on project-based modalities.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Key evaluation question (KEQ) 1. To what extent has the UNDP country programme strategically addressed key national development priorities and the needs of its main stakeholders, notably those at risk of being left behind?

The strategic positioning of UNDP Albania over the evaluation period has been largely effective in responding to national development priorities, particularly as the country advanced towards EU accession. The programme demonstrated a clear alignment with government reform agendas, including territorial administration, national skills agenda, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion. UNDP was able to remain a trusted partner due to its credibility and technical expertise, especially during periods of rapid change such as the post-2019 earthquake recovery and the digital transformation of public services. The ability of UNDP to adapt its programming to shifting priorities, most notably the increasing emphasis on EU frameworks, was a key factor in maintaining relevance and influence. UNDP support for vulnerable groups such as Roma, Egyptians, women, youth and persons with disabilities, was instrumental in expanding participation and access to services in social care and skills development.

While UNDP interventions addressed a broad spectrum of development challenges, the programme's strategic coherence was sometimes undermined by fragmentation across outcomes and limited integration between workstreams. Opportunities to leverage synergy were not fully realized, particularly between inclusive growth, environment and climate resilience, constraining the potential for holistic impact.

Conclusion 2: KEQ 2. To what extent were UNDP approaches and interventions successful in achieving the intended objectives of the country programme and contributing to broader, longer-term national development goals?

The experience in Albania showed that lasting impact relied on embedding local successes within robust national systems. UNDP made good progress when the collaboration involved a comprehensive, systems-based approach that prioritized institutional strengthening at the central level alongside expansion to municipalities. The UNDP approach was most successful where upstream policy reforms were paired with robust local-level pilots and feedback mechanisms.

In the environment field, disaster management, protected area management and the NAP process were good examples of this approach; whereas in forestry and firefighting services deeper engagement using this dual approach could have yielded stronger results. In the employment field, working with NAES and NAVETQ to set standards and quality frameworks and then replicating ALMPs at the local level together with local governments and public employment services produced significant results. In the governance field, UNDP supported reforms in territorial administration at the national level and then aligned municipal performance with these reform objectives at the downstream level through municipal training, performance standards, development of integrity plans and one-stop-shop models to increase the accessibility and transparency of services.

Despite these important achievements, progress in ensuring the quality of downstream interventions was not always linear. Capacity and resource asymmetries between municipalities remained significant, affecting quality and coverage of services. This remains a concern, as evidenced in the UNDP social mapping study and the CRM assessment on local GBV services. In response, UNDP invested in structured partnerships with training institutions, embedding learning systems such as the e-learning programmes on social care and protected area management, and strengthened partnerships with leading Albanian universities to modernize pre- and in-service curricula and accreditation.

The sustainability of results was undermined by persistent reliance on external funding, limited domestic ownership and frequent institutional changes. In some cases, quantitative gains in service provision outpaced qualitative

improvements, as evidenced by beneficiary dissatisfaction and gaps in quality assurance frameworks. The lack of integrated programming and interoperability between public administration digital systems further limited the ability to generate cumulative impact and monitor progress across sectors. While UNDP contributions to legal and policy frameworks were robust, the long-term realization of national development goals will depend on deeper institutional embedding and financial sustainability.

Conclusion 3: KEQ 3. To what extent was UNDP able to adapt its positioning and programmatic response to shifts in context and other changes in the operating environment, leveraging comparative strengths?

UNDP demonstrated notable agility in adapting its positioning and programmatic response to Albania's evolving context. The organization responded effectively to external shocks, such as the 2019 earthquake, leading post-disaster needs assessments and supporting the development of DRR architecture. UNDP adapted swiftly to the Government's digitalization agenda, redirecting resources from physical infrastructure to diagnostics and capacity development, illustrating its ability to leverage comparative strengths in technical expertise and partnership building. The gradual alignment of programming with EU priorities further enhanced the strategic relevance of UNDP, increasing access to funding and positioning the organization as a key interlocutor for Government and donors.

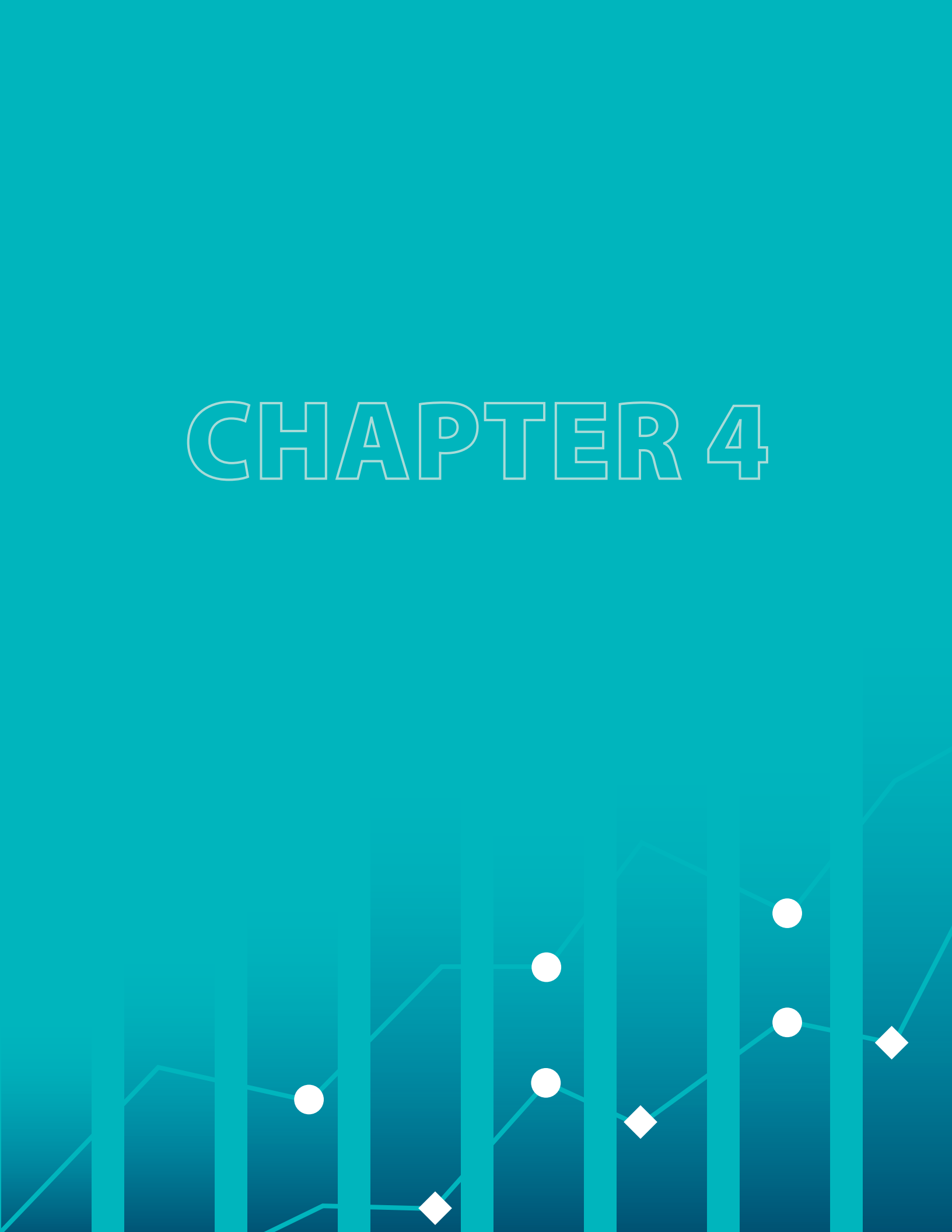
However, adaptation was not uniform across all areas. While UNDP excelled in responding to immediate needs and leveraging opportunities for innovation, some interventions struggled to maintain momentum amid rapid institutional changes and shifting mandates. The abolition and restructuring of government entities, high staff turnover and limited absorptive capacity at the municipal level posed recurring challenges to programme continuity and effectiveness. UNDP reliance on DIM, while effective in the short term, highlighted the need for a transition towards greater national ownership and embedding of reforms in permanent government structures as Albania moves closer to EU accession.

Conclusion 4: KEQ 4. To what extent did internal and external factors influence the ability of UNDP to deliver its programme efficiently and maximize contributions?

Internal management efficiency within UNDP Albania was generally strong, with stable core staff and effective resource mobilization contributing to reliable programme delivery. However, high-cost pilots limited scale-up prospects and expert recruitment within certain outcome areas could have been more streamlined. UNDP operational benchmarks were met, and its reputation for technical competence made it a preferred policy advisor and implementer, particularly in contexts where government capacity was limited. The ability of UNDP to mobilize resources and maintain high delivery rates, even amid external disruptions such as the 2022 cyberattack and delays in construction permits, reflected robust internal systems and adaptive management.

External factors significantly influenced the maximization of contributions. Despite positive examples such as the Special Fund for Protected Areas and the State-funded legal aid model, financial sustainability remained a challenge across most interventions, with continued reliance on project-based or external funding and minimal government cost-sharing. Declining social protection budgets, varying municipal fiscal space and limited budget flexibility posed risks to the continuity of results. Persistent fragmentation in data systems and parallel reporting obligations further constrained efficiency and integration, underscoring the need for more interoperable and integrated approaches in future programming.

CHAPTER 4



CHAPTER 4.

Recommendations and management response

Recommendation 1: Deepen engagement with broader EU policy instruments: Building on its demonstrated alignment with EU accession at the project level, UNDP should deepen its engagement with broader EU policy instruments in programme design, benchmarking and policy dialogue to strengthen its strategic relevance as Albania moves from accession preparation to reform implementation.

UNDP should draw more consistently on EU policy instruments such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Quality Framework for Social Services as reference frameworks to inform programme design, benchmarking and policy support in social protection, education and social inclusion. This would support the Government of Albania in translating EU accession requirements and policy ambitions into inclusive and implementable solutions.

UNDP should strengthen advocacy and policy dialogue to secure sustainable financing for social protection. UNDP should strongly advocate for, and engage more systematically in, policy dialogue to expand the fiscal space for social investment, promoting evidence-based budgeting, stronger resource mobilization and alignment of national financing frameworks with EU principles of social investment and sustainability, in particular the European Social Fund+ principles.

UNDP should continue to align with the European Skills Agenda for its employment and skills development initiatives. UNDP should leverage EU funding (IPA III and Growth Plan resources) for vocational training and workforce adaptability initiatives, especially for the long-term unemployed. This could be advanced by embedding digital literacy and green skills training into employment and education. Other opportunities could include women in STEM, large-scale partnerships with employers (Pact for Skills) and expanding adult learning and skills for life.

RECOMMENDATION 1.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: FULLY ACCEPTED

UNDP will deepen its engagement with key EU policy instruments to enhance strategic relevance as Albania advances EU accession reforms. In the forthcoming CPD, currently under design, UNDP will systematically integrate core EU frameworks—such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Quality Framework for Social Services—into programme design, benchmarking and policy dialogue across social protection, education, employment and social inclusion. This will support the Government in translating EU accession requirements into inclusive and implementable reforms. UNDP will also strengthen advocacy for sustainable social investment financing through evidence-based budgeting, resource mobilization and alignment with EU principles.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Integrate EU policy instruments (European Pillar of Social Rights, European Quality Framework for Social Services, European Skills Agenda) into new CPD programme design.	December 2026	UNDP Senior Management	EU policy instruments are systematically integrated into the new Cooperation Framework and CPD design, ensuring alignment with EU acquis priorities and accession reforms.	Initiated

Recommendation 1

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.2 Strengthen policy dialogue and advocacy for sustainable social protection financing, including evidence-based budgeting and alignment with EU social investment principles.	December 2027	Programme Cluster - Social Inclusion & Inclusive Economic Growth	Three advocacy actions and policy dialogue with Government and donor partners on sustainable social protection.	Initiated
1.3 Leverage EU funding opportunities to scale digital, green and inclusive skills initiatives, including women in STEM, adult learning and partnerships with employers	December 2027	Programme Cluster - Inclusive Economic Growth	The country office will build on current UNDP interventions to leverage future EU funding opportunities (e.g., EU4Youth) for scaling digital, green and inclusive skills initiatives.	Initiated

Recommendation 2: UNDP should prepare for new EU aid architecture by embedding its interventions into national planning processes and building sustainable State capacity.

UNDP should:

i. use EU accession as leverage for cost-sharing, framing capacity-building investments as essential preparation for managing much larger Growth Plan funds;

ii. invest in parallel systems strengthening, even when implementing directly;

iii. introduce exit benchmarks that condition handover on budget allocation and staffing plans;

iv. advocate for institutionalizing and expanding tested models (i.e. Youth Guarantee) through national budgets, sector strategies and EU accession instruments, ensuring continuity and implementation quality beyond project cycles;

v. support cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms needed for integrated reform packages that cut across individual accession chapters; and

vi. strengthen government capacity for monitoring and evidence generation to meet the Growth Plan's performance verification requirements.

RECOMMENDATION 2.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: FULLY ACCEPTED

UNDP will further embed its support within national systems to prepare for the evolving EU aid architecture. UNDP will prioritize upstream policy advisory, institutional strengthening, and co-implementation approaches that promote national ownership and sustainability.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Systematically link new CPD outcomes and outputs to EU Accession Clusters/ Chapters, particularly those where the Government specifically requested United Nations/UNDP support.	December 2026	UNDP Senior Management	See comment under Key Action 1.1.	Initiated
2.2 All projects will build in interventions to strengthen national capacities for monitoring, evidence generation and sustained investment.	December 2027	UNDP Senior Management		Initiated

Recommendation 3: Link inclusive growth with the environment. UNDP should explicitly link economic growth objectives with climate and environmental objectives in the next CPD.

Employment, skills and enterprise-support projects should be designed to contribute to Albania's low-carbon and circular economy objectives, including through green skills training, sustainable value-chain development and MSME support in renewable energy, waste management and eco-tourism.

UNDP should focus on the role of the private sector in sustainable tourism, pollution control, urban development and waste management interventions with more effective shared responsibility and compliance frameworks that are enforceable and sustainable.

RECOMMENDATION 3.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: FULLY ACCEPTED

The new CPD links inclusive growth with climate and environmental objectives by integrating green skills development, sustainable value chains, and MSME support aligned with Albania's transition to a low-carbon and circular economy. This includes supporting local companies to strengthen compliance and business management related to carbon markets, genetic resources, and sustainable forestry by adopting practices aligned with "Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade" and "EU Deforestation Regulation".

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Integrate green and circular economy objectives into inclusive growth, employment and MSME support interventions in the new CPD.	December 2026	Programme Cluster - Inclusive Economic Growth & Environment	Inclusive growth and environmental sustainability will be well integrated in the next phase of the CPD.	Initiated

Recommendation 3

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.2 Strengthen private sector engagement in sustainable practices to support Albania's low-carbon transition through effective shared-responsibility and compliance frameworks.	December 2026	Programme Cluster - Inclusive Economic Growth & Environment	In 2026, an intervention supporting the improvement of business management related to carbon markets, genetic resources and sustainable forestry was approved.	Initiated

Recommendation 4: Strengthen private sector engagement in economic development: UNDP should strengthen private sector engagement across the economic development and employment portfolios.

UNDP should prepare a private sector engagement strategy anchored in Albania's Smart Specialization Strategy and EU green transition objectives, ensuring that MSME support, value-chain upgrading and access to finance directly contribute to national competitiveness and innovation.

UNDP should extend outreach to the private sector beyond enterprise grants, to include systematic collaboration in skills identification, curriculum design and VET reform, ensuring that labour-market training responds to real industry needs. UNDP could play a catalytic role in enabling structured dialogue mechanisms between business associations, chambers of commerce and public employment and VET institutions, translating skills-demand analysis into concrete programmes and apprenticeships.

RECOMMENDATION 4.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: FULLY ACCEPTED

UNDP will strengthen private sector engagement across economic development and employment interventions. In line with Albania's Smart Specialization Strategy (S3), EU green transition priorities and national competitiveness objectives, UNDP will further align MSME support, value-chain upgrading and access to finance interventions with innovation, productivity and sustainable economic transformation.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Develop and implement a private sector engagement strategy aligned with Albania's Smart Specialization Strategy, EU green transition priorities and national competitiveness objectives.	December 2026	Programme Cluster - Inclusive Economic Growth		Initiated
4.2 Establish structured dialogue mechanisms with business associations, chambers of commerce and VET/ public employment institutions to align skills identification, curriculum design and apprenticeship programmes with labour-market needs.	December 2027	Programme Cluster - Inclusive Economic Growth		Initiated

Recommendation 5: Reinforce upstream – downstream bridge. UNDP should reinforce the bridge between policy reform and local implementation. UNDP should ensure that local-level implementation (e.g. municipalities, legal aid centres, regional protected area management, local NAES offices) continues to inform national policy dialogue. Strengthening data flows from local to national levels and embedding these into monitoring and evaluation systems would help close the feedback loop and demonstrate how reforms translate into tangible citizen outcomes.

UNDP should focus on upstream policy assistance, prioritizing policy and institutional capacity-building with national partners, notably the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the State Social Services. This should focus on enabling these institutions to modernize and maintain high-quality social and education services and implement robust social inclusion monitoring systems, fostering a culture of data-driven decision-making.

UNDP should advise and mentor local implementers to promote equitable access to quality social services across underserved regions and among vulnerable populations and communities. For instance, feedback loops between MoHSP, State Social Services, NAES and local municipal social services should be strengthened to track the effects of new services on vulnerable groups (i.e. integrated case management). This dual approach would help ensure that reforms are scalable at the national level and responsive to community needs.

RECOMMENDATION 5.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: FULLY ACCEPTED

Upstream engagement remains at the core of UNDP programme. UNDP is a trusted partner of the Government of Albania in supporting policy coherence, human-rights-based approaches, integrated planning and institutional strengthening at both national and municipal levels. UNDP will continue, in the current and next CPDs, to prioritize upstream policy advisory and institutional capacity-building with key national partners. As part of its communication and partnerships strategy, UNDP will continue to support evidence-based policy advocacy and dialogue with its key constituencies at the national and local level. This includes mentoring support to local implementation actors to ensure equitable access to quality social services across underserved regions and vulnerable populations.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Continue upstream policy advisory, technical assistance, and institutional capacity-building with key national partners.	December 2027	UNDP - all clusters		On an on-going basis in current and next CPD
5.2 Provide advisory and mentoring support to local implementation actors to promote equitable access to quality social services across underserved regions.	December 2027	UNDP - all clusters		On an on-going basis in current and next CPD

Recommendation 6: Foster integrated programming and break down silos across outcomes. UNDP should adopt a more integrated programming approach in the next CPD by systematically identifying and leveraging complementarities across outcomes and outputs. This requires:

i. Revising the theory of change to articulate clear causal pathways and synergy between outcomes, ensuring that enabling outputs (such as data systems, innovation and participation mechanisms) are positioned as cross-cutting enablers rather than separate outputs;

ii. Promoting the interoperability of digital systems by developing shared data standards and platforms that facilitate information flow and learning across teams and sectors; and

iii. Embedding integrated programming as a performance objective for team leads, with clear incentives for cross-team collaboration and shared results.

RECOMMENDATION 6.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: FULLY ACCEPTED

The new Theory of Change for the CPD 2027–2031 explicitly articulates synergies across outcomes including joint planning, shared results and cross-team collaboration. UNDP will strengthen integrated programming by systematically identifying complementarities and synergies among outputs and interventions. Across all three outcomes, UNDP will apply a complementary mix of strategies:

a. systems integration and policy coherence, aligning skills, employment, social protection, migration, green and digital transformation, climate resilience and public finance in line with EU accession and SDG targets;

b. strengthening institutional and local delivery capacity, including municipal institutions, digital governance, and data systems, to ensure effective implementation and reach for those furthest behind; and

c. innovation, financing, and partnerships for scale, leveraging digital and artificial intelligence (AI) enabled tools, people-centred innovation, SDG and climate aligned financing and partnerships with the EU, international financial institutions, private sector, civil society, and other United Nations agencies.

Recommendation 6

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
6.1 Embed integrated programming and cross-outcome collaboration as an objective in the new CPD, including joint planning, shared results and cross-team cooperation.	December 2026	UNDP Senior Management	The country programme will be implemented as an integrated framework in which inclusive human capital development, sustainable economic transformation, and governance reforms jointly address the interconnected drivers of inequality, vulnerability and weak institutional performance.	Initiated
6.2 Monthly Programme meetings with the Senior Management Team and project managers to identify and leverage	December 2026	UNDP Senior Management		Initiated
6.3 Monthly knowledge sessions with all programme teams to strengthen integrated programming and ensure coherent alignment across interventions.	December 2026	UNDP – all Clusters		Initiated

Recommendation 7: Continue to further LNOB and participation. UNDP should continue to advance LNOB through institutional accountability, disaggregated data and sustained civic participation mechanisms.

UNDP should promote civil society involvement through stronger institutional linkages with employment, skills and local development. UNDP should build on its civil society involvement initiatives to ensure that LNOB principles translate into durable institutional practice. Future programming could strengthen the bridge between municipal youth councils and CSO networks and skills, entrepreneurship and green-jobs programmes. At the same time, UNDP should capitalize on synergy between its youth and civil society programmes and its governance and integrity work, for example, integrating transparent CSO funding mechanisms and youth-led participation models into broader accountability and service quality reforms.

UNDP should continue to advance LNOB through data-driven institutional accountability. UNDP should help the Government move from inclusive participation to institutional accountability, where data, monitoring indicators and feedback mechanisms systematically measure who benefits from reforms and who remains excluded. For example, building on evidence from the legal aid studies on women and economic aid, UNDP can help the MoJ and other counterparts use sex- and vulnerability-disaggregated data to track access gaps and inform service delivery improvements. Monitoring frameworks could integrate longer-term reintegration indicators beyond short-term employment outcomes to capture complex socioeconomic, psychosocial, health and housing barriers affecting job retention.

RECOMMENDATION 7.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: FULLY ACCEPTED

UNDP will continue to advance LNOB, support disaggregated data systems, and strengthen sustained civic participation mechanisms in the forthcoming CPD, currently under design, to ensure that LNOB principles are embedded across all its support. The new programme reinforces civil society engagement through stronger institutional linkages with employment, skills development, entrepreneurship and local development initiatives. Policy advocacy on LNOB has been undertaken through extensive dedicated meetings and structured consultations with youth, persons with disabilities and CSOs throughout the development of the new UNSDCF and CPD, ensuring their priorities are reflected in programme design. UNDP has engaged a wide range of stakeholders through face to face consultations during the development of its new CPD and through online consultations. To maximize feedback, UNDP also conducted online consultations with broader audiences to ensure wider participation in shaping its new programming process.

Recommendation 7

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
7.1 Engage youth and civil society organizations in the consultation and formulation of the new CPD through a combination of targeted meetings and digital platforms to ensure broad outreach and meaningful participation.	February 2026	UNDP Senior Management	Youth, persons with disabilities, and civil society were actively and adequately consulted during the formulation of the new CPD.	Completed
7.2 Strengthen civic engagement through institutional linkages with employment, skills, and local development, and ensure the inclusion of LNOB groups by promoting the use of gender- and vulnerability-disaggregated data, monitoring indicators, and feedback mechanisms across all policy processes supported by UNDP.	December 2029	UNDP – all Clusters		Initiated

Recommendation 8: Transition strategy for GBV system and broader integration of gender. UNDP should develop a sustainability and transition strategy for the GBV coordination system and expand gender equality beyond GBV.

UNDP should retain its strategic engagement in the GBV response while progressively phasing out its operational role in sustaining CRMs, REVALB and local coordination structures, by defining a clear exit and transition strategy with the MoHSP. The focus of UNDP should now shift towards helping the Government assume full financial and administrative responsibility, through integration into regular MoHSP and municipal budgets, ASPA-certified training modules and strengthened monitoring by the gender equality machinery. Continued UNDP support would thus focus on targeting systemic bottlenecks rather than compensating for structural underfunding through open-ended project-based support.

UNDP should tailor future service models to Albania's institutional and fiscal context, avoiding complex or high-cost designs that are difficult to sustain. UNDP may continue piloting innovative models or establishing best practices, but should ensure that these are viable, scalable and further developed beyond the initial pilot phase.

UNDP should embed gender equality more deliberately across other outcome areas, not solely in GBV prevention. This would include further strengthening analytical and programmatic linkages with inclusive growth (i.e. care economy reforms, women in STEM) and governance. In the governance field, collaboration with national human rights institutions should continue to anchor equality monitoring within the broader governance and accountability framework. Building on successful cooperation with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the Ombudsperson, UNDP should institutionalize joint analytical work, data sharing and capacity-building mechanisms that link gender equality monitoring to broader human-rights reporting (CEDAW, GREVIO, UPR).

RECOMMENDATION 8.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: PARTIALLY ACCEPTED

UNDP acknowledges the importance of ensuring national ownership, institutional sustainability and financial responsibility of GBV response mechanisms in Albania. At the same time, several elements of the recommendation reflect approaches that are already being implemented and will continue to guide our engagement.

Recommendation 8

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: PARTIALLY ACCEPTED

Regarding the progressive transition of operational roles, UNDP clarifies that it is **not currently providing direct CRM support.** Our engagement is not providing any financial or operational assistance but is focused on policy support, strengthening institutional systems, capacities and coordination frameworks.

The new Law on the Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence expands the scope of protection to all forms of violence against women and provides the overarching framework for further strengthening the GBV coordination system. GBV response functions have been integrated into regular budgeting processes of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) and local municipalities, and UNDP is engaged in the policy dialogue to further strengthen their sustainability. UNDP has been working to ensure that service standards, tools and methodologies are embedded within national systems, including alignment with ASPA-certified training modules, and work is underway to integrate relevant components into the training programme of the School of Magistrates for judges and prosecutors. UNDP has progressively repositioned its support from direct coaching of local mechanisms towards a regional approach aimed at strengthening coordination, peer exchange and system coherence. This approach will continue, with future support focusing on the effective implementation of the new law, the development and operationalization of secondary legislation and addressing systemic bottlenecks, institutional capacities and policy coherence while supporting the policy dialogue and advocacy for increasing public funding for social services including for GBV. Concerning the tailoring of service models, UNDP notes that current and past interventions have been designed with sustainability and fiscal feasibility in mind. UNDP has not developed high-cost or complex service models that are difficult to sustain. All proposed and piloted models have been integrated within existing national and municipal financing mechanisms, particularly within Albanian municipal budgeting frameworks. Innovation and piloting will continue, but always with a clear pathway for scalability and integration into domestic financing systems.

On embedding gender equality across broader outcome areas, the recommendation is accepted in principle, as this reflects ongoing practice. Gender equality considerations are already integrated beyond GBV prevention, including within governance and inclusive growth portfolios notably through work on care economy reforms and women's participation in STEM. Collaboration with national human rights institutions—particularly the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the Ombudsperson—has been strengthened and will continue in the future. Building on this cooperation, UNDP will further institutionalize joint analytical work, data-sharing arrangements and coordinated capacity-building efforts that link gender equality monitoring to broader human rights accountability mechanisms, including CEDAW, GREVIO and UPR reporting processes.

In the new CPD, UNDP will continue its strategic engagement in support of national ownership, systemic reform and institutional sustainability, ensuring that future support remains catalytic, targeted, and aligned with Albania's institutional and fiscal context.

Recommendation 8

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
8.1 Ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed across all outcome areas in the new CPD which include human capital development, sustainable economic transformation and inclusive green growth and governance, rule of law and human rights.	December 2026	UNDP - all Clusters	The new CPD prioritizes gender equality, human rights and inclusive solutions to ensure that those most at risk of exclusion are not left behind across all areas.	Initiated
8.2 Support development and operationalization of secondary legislation under the new Law on the Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, to further consolidate institutional coordination and accountability within the GBV response system.	December 2026	Programme Cluster - Social Inclusion		Initiated
8.3 Support and strengthen the Women in STEM network as a platform for knowledge exchange and advocacy.	December 2027	Programme Cluster - Social Inclusion		Initiated
8.4 Develop a new programme on care economy with special focus on women empowerment.	March 2027	Programme Cluster - Social Inclusion & Inclusive Economic Growth		Initiated

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).

Annexes

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available here:
https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/25545

Annex 1. Terms of reference

Annex 2. Project list

Annex 3. Evaluation matrix

Annex 4. Documents consulted

Annex 5. People consulted

Annex 6. Performance rating

Annex 7. GIS

Annex 8. Country office at a glance

Annex 9. Status of country programme outcome and output indicators

Annex 10. CPD theory of change

Notes

1 UNDP Evaluation Policy

2 UNDP IEO (2015) Assessment of Development Results; Albania: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/7852

3 These including programmes on LNOB under Outcome 1, protection of biodiversity and employment and skills development under Outcome 2, local administration reform and access to justice reforms under Outcome 3, and GBV prevention under Outcome 4.

4 https://data.undp.org/countries-and-territories/ALB

5 At the time of writing, Albania had initiated negotiations on clusters: 1-Fundamentals, 2-External Markets, 3 - Competitiveness, inclusive growth, 4-Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity and 6-External Relations. Source: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/albania_en#key-milestones

6 This has been mainly in the areas of energy efficiency, renewable energy, youth employment, ICT infrastructure and environmental protection.

7 https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/eu-and-albania-factsheet_en

8 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/albania/eu-disburses-%E2%82%AC100-million-albania-under-eu-growth-plan_en?s=214

9 Eurostat database, INSTAT (2023) Income and Living Conditions in Albania.

10 UNDP (2025) Mapping of Social Services in Albania 2025.

11 Ibid.

12 ILO (2021) Review of social protection system in Albania. Coverage, expenditure, adequacy and financing; Government of Albania (2024) National Social Protection Strategy 2024-2030.

13 World Bank (2023) Advancing Social Protection in the Western Balkans: Opportunities for Reform; UNDP (2023) Leave No One Behind Infographic on public expenditures for social care services.

14 UNDP (2025) Mapping of Social Services in Albania.

15 https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/albania-post-disaster-needs-assessment

16 Source: https://iucn.org/news/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/201905/towards-natura-2000-albania

17 https://www.travelandtourworld.com/news/article/how-albania-montenegro-bosnia-and-herzegovina-serbia-north-macedonia-are-boosting-tourism-trends-and-predictions-for-2025/

18 Government of Albania (2021) Nationally Determined Contribution.

19 INSTAT. https://www.instat.gov.al/en/; European Commission, 'Albania 2023 Report', 2023. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_690 20Albania 20report.pdf

20 https://www.undp.org/albania/stories/youth-guarantee-four-month-promise-bridging-gap-albanias-youth

21 UNESCO (2024), Education sector analysis: Republic of Albania.

22 Instat, Small and Medium Enterprises Statistics 2023.

23 European Commission (2025) Albania 2025 Report; EBRD (2024) Albania Diagnostic 2024; World Bank (2022) Creating Markets in Albania; World Bank Group (2022) Creating Markets in Albania - Taking Advantage of New Trade and Investment Opportunities for a More Robust Private Sector.

24 EU Commission (2024) Albania 2024 Progress Report.

25 UNDP Albania (2024) Access to Justice in Albania: Legal Empowerment for All.

26 EU (2024) Albania Progress Report.

27 UNDP Albania (2019) ReLOaD Final Project Evaluation.

28 Republic of Albania People's Advocate (2024) Digitalization of Public Services and Protection of Human Rights in Albania.

29 World Economic Forum (2024) Global Gender Gap 2024.

30 UN Women data portal and Instat (2019) Violence against women and girls in Albania.

31 GREVIO (2024) First Thematic Evaluation Report "Building trust by delivering support, protection, justice" Albania.

32 Under the Growth Plan, EU funding flows directly to the Government based on demonstrated achievement of reform milestones verified on six-month cycles, rather than through multi-year project grants.

33 NAPIRE annual progress reports showed an increase from 3.68 in 2019 to 4.14 in 2024 on a 0–5 scale, where 0 means no progress and 5 means fully achieved.

34 UNDP Albania LNB ProDocs 2017 and 2021; UNDP (2025) Mapping of Social Services in Albania.

35 ILO (2021) Fiscal space for financing social protection in Albania and update in 2022. UN Albania (2022) Joint Programme Improving Municipal Social Protection Service Delivery in Albania Final Evaluation.

36 Capacity weaknesses of these two institutions were confirmed by a recent study done for the European Commission. Juergen Hohmann et al. (2025) Improving social protection in the Western Balkans: Analysis of the regional/national situations, and recommendations.

37 According to a 2023 UNDP survey, the average level of satisfaction of beneficiaries with the quality of services was 1.55 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant very dissatisfied and 5 very satisfied. Evaluation engagements in Lushnje, Kruja and Berat also revealed quality issues of public services and thus the need of beneficiaries and their carers to use private services.

38 UNDP (2025) Mapping of Social Services in Albania, Page 150

39 ROAR data for 2024 and EU4Schools project data.

40 UNDP (2025) EU4Schools Addendum 4, May 2025.

41 According to the Leave No Behind Phase II Mid-Term Evaluation report, the assistant teacher-to-pupil ratio for students with disabilities was 2.5:1 in the 2023 – 2024 school year compared to 3:1 the previous year.

42 The survey used a sample of 530 service beneficiaries (people with disabilities, Roma, Egyptians, older adults, and women, children, families and youth in need) in 25 municipalities which were beneficiaries of UNDP support through the Leave No One Behind project. 87.17 percent of service providers were public.

43 https://ndcpartnership.org/country/alb Mission Report Albania NDC enhancement coordination meeting and mission, page 11 and interviews with stakeholders.

44 For instance, one municipality successfully used the LAP to secure 2 million euros from Italy for water and waste treatment projects and described it as "a bible in their work" – meaning the LAP was used as reference for all project applications and funding requests

45 METT was first developed by WWF and the World Bank and follows the IUCN PAME Framework. The tool was also used extensively by other programmes such as NaturALB.

46 UNDP, 2022, "Karaburun-Sazan National Marine Park : A model of management in Albania for Marine Protected Areas" https://karaburun-sazan.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/MPA-model-of-management_in-Albania.pdf

47 UNDP Albania (2025) EU4Nature Progress Report 2025, page 6.

48 UNDP (2022) Terminal Evaluation of "Enhancing Financial Sustainability of the Protected Area System in Albania". Page 32,

49 Ibid. page 32.

50 Pilot protected area scores at programme completion against a target of 47 percent were: Dajti 52, Divjake-Karavasta 65, Llogara 59, Karaburuni-Sazani 66. The NAPA systemic score was 63 percent (target 42), institutional score 59 percent (target 45) and individual capacity score 46 percent against a target of 42.

51 Ibid, Page 33.

52 UNDP, Drin Flood Risk Management project: Results of the Socio-economic Risk Model to support the detailed engineering design of structural measures, page 6

53 Mid Term Review of Integrated Climate-resilient Transboundary Flood Risk Management in the Drin River Basin in the Western Balkans Project (page 52)

54 Integrated Policy Management Group is a mechanism for coordinating policy across government priority areas and sectors.

55 UNDP tried to deepen private sector engagement in both VET delivery and employment services, with an emphasis on dual VET models; implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning; developing an agile, flexible, and permeable VET system that meets emerging labour market needs; in addition to continued strengthening for VET quality assurance and ensuring their consistent implementation nationwide.

56 Growing Your Business is a UNIDO methodology designed to stimulate the growth and increase the sustainability of MSMEs by addressing their specific needs in finance, administration, marketing and production. See https://www.undp.org/albania/stories/growing-your-business-new-chapter-small-businesses-lushnja

57 UNDP Economic Recovery and Resilience Project (2021-2024) Final Report, page 13

58 The municipality of Tirana was using methodologies and knowledge acquired under the ERR and Reload projects in municipal led grants schemes for women and youth led enterprises.

59 United Nations Albania (2024) Earthquake Response Efforts Provided by the United Nations in Albania 2020-2024, Evaluation Report.

60 See: https://inff.org/resource/development-finance-assessment-for-albania and https://sdgprivatefinance.undp.org/leveraging-capital/sdg-investor-platform/country/albania.

61 Final Evaluation of UNSDCF for Albania (2022-2026)) also identified untapped opportunities in this area, such as supporting the co-design of SDG-aligned investment pipelines and sectoral strategies.

62 Final Evaluation of CSDA Project "Consolidation of Citizen Centric Public Service Delivery in Albania", 2024

63 Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2024) Opinion Poll 2023; Trust in Governance.

64 Source: UNDP Annual Result Oriented Reports 2021-2025

65 UNDP Final Evaluation Expanding Free Legal Aid Services For Vulnerable Women And Men In Albania
Project (EFLAS) Page 33

66 UNDP (2025) Study on Access to Justice in Albania.

67 Figures from UNDP country office List of supported projects ReLOaD1 and 2.

68 Methodology for Allocation of Funds to Civil Society Organizations practical guide: http://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/library/poverty/lod-methodology-for-allocation-of-funds-to-civil-society-organiz.html

69 In 2024, 774 cases of violence were reported through REVALB out of 5,445 total DV GBV cases (14.2 percent), up from 621 in 2023 (United Nations Joint Programme to End Violence Against Women in Albania (EVAWI II), 2024 Annual Report). However, the Final Evaluation Report for EVAWI I indicates that in 2020, 994 cases were reported through REVALB out of a total of 4,702 cases of DV GBV in the country reported by police (21.2).

70 See https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/accelerating-progress-on-gender-equality-in-albania-a-un-perspective-on-the-revision-of-the-law-on-gender-equality-in-society

71 The Lilium Centre provides immediate medical, legal, and psychological support through a multidisciplinary team. Between August 2024 and February 2025 it reached 996 beneficiaries, including 48 GBV survivors and 109 through mobile services. In 2025 two similar centres are expected to start operating in regional hospitals in Shkoder and Vlore.

72 UNDP (2023) Analysis of the functioning of the coordinated referral mechanism to domestic violence at the local level in Albania

73 UNDP (2025) Cumulative review of the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, and Annual Report of the Administrator for 2024.

74 A cyberattack in mid-2022 strained the administrative systems necessary for issuing construction permits and managing critical project paperwork, which delayed fund allocation and expenditure, forcing a postponement of millions of dollars of planned activity out of the 2022 financial year. This situation was quickly remedied in 2023.

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