

Albania

Executive Summary

In promoting the realization of the rights of all Albanian children, throughout 2015, UNICEF continued to support Albania in its course towards further democratization of its governance objectives and mechanisms, in alignment with international human rights and development standards and the European Union (EU) integration normative framework.

Commendably, the draft National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI), which is in effect until 2020, includes human development and social cohesion as one of the five pillars of the country's socio-economic development, making explicit references to particularly vulnerable children and equity considerations. Under the NSDI umbrella, new strategies and action plans were developed to guide national reforms in the justice, social protection, education and health sectors – all of these new frameworks having benefited from UNICEF's technical assistance and policy advice on child rights. Importantly, the democratic dimension of decentralized governance and citizens' participation in defining and implementing policies affecting the well-being of families and children has become increasingly prominent in the policy development discourse, cemented by the successful round of municipal elections this past summer. Strides have also been made towards improving the qualifications of professional service providers across the social sectors and towards better defining and monitoring accountabilities related to child rights.

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Programme of Cooperation (PoC) between the United Nations (UN) and the Government of Albania (GoA) suggested an optimized set of PoC results and elevated the overall supervision of the PoC outcome results to the level of the United Nations heads of agencies, with UNICEF leading in social inclusion. An independent evaluation of the PoC in 2015 informed the draft Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2017–2021.

The following results can serve to highlight UNICEF's contributions to Albania's human rights and development achievements, which have been shaped by the agency's Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda (RKLA):

- Gradual reduction of the number of children in residential care institutions, as part of the Government of Albania's (GoA) commitment to a systematic de-institutionalization plan (RKLA 1);
- Expanding access to early learning, including for Roma children; Government's decision to introduce new Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and to make the pre-primary school year mandatory (RKLAs 3 and 4);
- Adoption of the Social Protection Strategy, which runs until 2020 and combines pro-poor cash assistance measures with the expansion of community-based social care services for the most vulnerable children and families (RKLA 8); and
- Increasing application of alternative detention measures alternative under the Government's commitment to develop a special juvenile justice law (RKLA 2).

At the same time, a number of shortfalls, compared with the planned results, signal that further

efforts will be required in 2016. Among these are:

- Young law offenders continue to be subjected to long pre-detention;
- Violence against children continues to be socially acceptable and is often practiced at home and in institutions; and
- Sector-based systems of administrative data collection are weak, and not always fit to supply regular and sufficiently disaggregated data, thus preventing targeted responses.

In achieving results for children in Albania, UNICEF's collaborative partnership with the parliamentary Friends of Children group/caucus has been particularly important. UNICEF engagement in various Parliament Commissions has served to highlight children's rights in both the legislative and democratic oversight roles of the Parliament. The State Agency for Child Rights Protection (SACRP) has been an active engine for child-focused policies and practical measures. The inter-ministerial National Child Rights Council chaired by the Minister of Social Welfare and Youth has been vocal in transmitting to the public the issues of particular concern in relation to the situation of children in Albania. Twenty-three Partnership Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) concluded with civil society organizations (CSOs) offered an effective conduit for delivering UNICEF's technical assistance in policy development, child rights monitoring and capacity development.

In alignment with the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014–2017, emphasis was increasingly made on barriers and bottlenecks stemming from the demand side. For example, the capacity of rights holders to claim their rights has been promoted in juvenile justice (stimulating the utilization of the national human rights institutions to seek protection and redress of rights). Furthermore, demand from Roma parents for early education opportunities for their children, parenting skills for better health and development of young children have been increasingly promoted and supported.

Humanitarian Assistance

In February 2015, in the aftermath of heavy rains, floods affected several regions in the central and southern parts of Albania. Although no state of emergency was officially announced by the Government of Albania and authorities at the central and local levels managed to respond to the events in a timely manner, thereby avoiding the loss of human lives, the damage to the infrastructure and farmers' assets in the affected areas was considerable. More than 1,000 households were affected, including about 600 families that were forced to evacuate from their homes.

Together with the United Nations agencies, EU delegations and the World Bank, UNICEF took part in the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) exercise. Missions to the affected areas initiated by UNICEF were undertaken with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and Ministry of Health (MoH), to assess the damage in schools, kindergartens and public health centres. High waters blocked the access, damaged the infrastructure, destroyed educational materials and disrupted normal daily routine in 18 schools and pre-school facilities, affecting up to 3,000 children from age 3 to 18. Most of those children also suffered a strong stress induced by the emergency.

Informed by the assessment conducted jointly with the MoES, UNICEF prioritised the provision of psycho-social assistance to children, using the Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS) model. The interventions were aimed at restoring the feeling of normalcy for children through play and creative activities, reducing harmful levels of accumulated stress and teaching new positive

coping strategies by socializing with other children and adults in supportive environments. In particular, Child Friendly Spaces were set up in four schools in Darzeze, Fitore, Morave and Pjeshkore, Morave (Central Albania, municipalities of Berat, Fier and Vlora); 143 children were supported with psycho-social counselling; 71 teachers, school psychologists and other professionals were trained on emergency response and methods of psychological support, to enhance children's and families' coping ability with the emergency situation; 90 parents participated in the workshops increasing their knowledge of children rights, positive disciplining methods, actions in emergency situations, and so on; and 113 students in Grades 8 and 9 were trained on the provision of psycho-social support to their younger peers through games and sports. As part of the project activities, 455 children in the abovementioned areas attended summer camps where structured play and continuous interaction with trained counsellors and pedagogues contributed to their psycho-social and emotional rehabilitation.

Organizational support was provided through partners to children and parents who volunteered to help with the restoration and making the schools more child-friendly. These interventions are estimated to have reached more than 1,100 children. UNICEF also supplied selected educational materials to the most affected schools, with 150 School-in-a-box, early childhood development (ECD), science and math kits. However, the length of the process and high cost of the freight (some kits were shipped directly from their production site in China) may prompt UNICEF to opt for local procurement in similar situations in the future. In total, resources invested to respond to the post-floods emergency assistance amounted to US\$140,000, including the generous contribution of US\$40,000 mobilized by the UNICEF Office in Croatia (from fundraising efforts in relation to frequent floods in the region).

In relation to the migrant and refugee crisis in the region, to date Albania has not experienced an influx of migrants to transit through its territory towards the EU countries, like other neighbouring countries in the region. Nevertheless, the UNICEF Country Office (CO) has been on high alert and maintained a necessary degree of preparedness, in close coordination with national partners, United Nations agencies, the EU delegation and the UNICEF Regional Office (RO). In 2015, the RO mobilized short-term missions of emergency and supply planning staff to assist COs in preparing their response. Also, part-time local consultants have been hired to support UNICEF, as well as government and CSO partners, in humanitarian monitoring (the RO provided funding allocation of US\$5,000 for this purpose). Such monitoring also includes Albanians returning back to the country after their applications for asylum in the EU countries were rejected. Given their growing numbers, especially in the last months of 2015, a targeted programmatic response will be developed in 2016 to address the needs of this – often extremely vulnerable and deprived – category of the population.

Summary Notes and Acronyms

ADA -- Austrian Development Agency
AMP -- Annual Management Plan
ARV -- Antiretroviral
BCP -- Business Continuity Plan
CEDAW -- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEE/CIS -- Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States
CF -- Coherence Fund
CFC -- Child-Friendly City
CMT -- Country Management Team
CO -- Country Office
COMBI -- Communication for Behaviour Impact

CPMP -- Country Programme Management Plan
 CPU -- Child Protection Unit
 CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child
 CRC -- Contracts Review Committee
 CRO -- Child Rights Observatory
 CRPD -- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
 CRU -- Child Rights Unit
 CSO – civil society organization
 DaO -- Delivering as One
 DCT – direct cash transfer
 EC -- European Commission
 ECD - Early Childhood Development
 ELDS – Early Learning and Development Standards
 EU – European Union
 FACE – Funding Authorisation and Certification of Expenditure
 GFP – Gender Focal Point
 GoA - Government of Albania
 GS - General Service
 GSSC – Global Shared Services Centre
 HACT – Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers
 HIV/AIDS - Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
 HR - Human Resources
 HRBA – Human Rights Based Approach
 ICT - Information Communication Technology
 IMEP - Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
 INSTAT - Albanian Institute of Statistics
 IP - Implementing Partner
 JJ – Juvenile Justice
 KPI – Key Performance Indicator
 LGU – Local Government Unit
 LTA – Long-Term Arrangement
 MCH - Mother and Child Health
 MoES - Ministry of Education and Sports
 MoH - Ministry of Health
 MoI - Ministry of Interior
 MOSS - Minimum Operating Security Standards
 MoSWY - Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
 MoU - Memorandum of Understanding
 MTR - Mid-Term Review
 M&E - Monitoring and Evaluation
 NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
 NOB - National Officer (Level 2)
 NOC - National Officer (Level 3)
 NSDI – National Strategy for Development and Integration
 OOSC – Out-Of-School-Children
 OR - Other Resources
 PAS - Performance Appraisal System
 PCA - Partnership Cooperation Agreement
 PDNA – Post-Disaster Needs Assessment
 PoC – Programme of Cooperation
 PRIME - Plans for Research, Independent Monitoring and Evaluation

RBM - Result-Based Management
RKLA - Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda
RO – Regional Office
RR - Regular Resources
SACRP – State Agency for Child Rights Protection
SD – Supply Division
SDC - Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIDA - Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SMT – Senior Management Team
SRA – Security Risk Assessment
UN - United Nations
UN RCO - United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office
UNCT - United Nations Country Team
UNDAF – United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP - United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS - United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNICEF - United Nations Children’s Fund
VAC – Violence Against Children
VAR – Vaccine Arrival Report
VISION - Virtual Integrated System of Information
WHO - World Health Organization
WCCC - Women and Child Consultation Centre

Capacity Development

In 2015, the UNICEF CO in Albania followed a multi-pronged strategy of capacity development. The development of new national strategies, action plans and normative standards in health, education, justice and social protection sectors – all supported by UNICEF in various respects – offered an opportunity to key managers and technical staff in partner ministries and other state institutions to get exposed to a structured planning process. Such a process was often facilitated by top-notch international expertise, and was always based on the latest available evidence and statistical information. It benefited from consultations with civil society and local actors, who were guided by result-based management (RBM) principles, and highlighted the value of clearly defined accountabilities.

In addition to these processes taking place in the national government’s offices, UNICEF counterparts also extensively participated in a series of workshops that accompanied the evaluation of the current United Nations-Government of Angola Programme of Cooperation (PoC), preparation of the Common Country Assessment and drafting of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2017–2021. All of these processes included a distinct result-based management training component appreciated by the Government and participants from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

With Albania’s decentralization reform unfolding, UNICEF has also been increasingly involved in scaling up the application of the new normative frameworks by the front-line service providers at the local level. Trainings have been supported for teachers (on inclusive education methods), doctors and nurses (on the new mother and child health-care protocols), law enforcement, and social protection workers (on measures alternative to the imprisonment of juvenile law offenders). An ambitious training programme has been designed for a selected number of municipalities to start testing, in 2016, a decentralized way of planning and delivering social-care services.

Capacity development support has also been offered to government and NGO partners in humanitarian monitoring, in the context of the region's refugee and migrant crisis.

Evidence Generation, Policy Dialogue and Advocacy

Evidence generated with UNICEF's support contributed to the formulation of new policies and their enhanced implementation. In child protection, up-to-date knowledge on the situation of street children and those in residential care shaped the advocacy messages and directed the elaboration of specific measures of social outreach and targeted family support. This in turn resulted, in 2015, in reduced numbers of children begging/working in the streets and/or left without family care in residential institutions. A critical analysis of Albania's child protection system elements conducted by UNICEF in 2015 prompted the Government's decision to revise the framework law on child rights protection.

Similarly, in the justice sector, the Government's commitment to adopt a new juvenile justice (JJ) law and review its entire approach to justice for children has been strongly influenced by a UNICEF-supported multi-country evaluation of the juvenile justice progress in the region and research on children's access to justice (both led by the UNICEF RO).

In education, nationwide monitoring of early education access among Roma children, in collaboration with national NGOs, led to the improved enforcement of the school administrations' accountabilities to reach out to vulnerable children in their catchment areas and contributed to the increased enrolment of Roma in kindergartens and pre- and primary schools.

In health, UNICEF assisted its partners to publish a comprehensive National Health Report that included – for the first time in the sector – the information on some health indicators where a controversy has existed between national and international estimates, thus highlighting the need to further align the national data collection and interpretation process with international standards.

In social protection, development of tools to gauge the poverty and deprivation profiles at the local level will assist the newly elected administrations in Albania's 61 municipalities in designing their context-specific, equity-oriented social protection plans.

Partnerships

To promote an integrated multi-sectoral effort, UNICEF continued to invest in building partnerships with government and NGO actors, aimed at achieving specific common purposes. Many of these partnerships get to the stage of formal institutionalization as inter-sectoral working groups. For example, the development of Albania's new Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and the reform of the early learning curriculum were made possible through a joint effort of partners representing various sectors and levels of governance. A partnership arrangement between Government entities, NGOs and telecommunication industries – facilitated by UNICEF – has been moving forward the agenda of children's online safety, within the #WeProtect Children Online global initiative. A partnership between UNICEF and the Albanian state agency for child rights protection, Terre des Hommes was central to the successful completion of the national child protection system mapping. The same partners cooperate closely in strengthening the child protection network in Albania's capital, under a memorandum of understanding signed with the municipality of Tirana.

The role of UNICEF's partnerships in delivering technical assistance to the Government is worth particular highlight. Due to the currently very limited participation of government institutions in

cash transfer arrangements directly with UNICEF, most of the jointly agreed interventions are operationalized through Partnership Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with CSOs. Providing the necessary operational framework to implement the UNICEF-Government of Albania work plans, the PCAs would usually leverage additional resources for children, in the form of the CSO's local outreach capacity, knowledge of the context, reliance on qualified workforce, connectivity to professional networks, exposure to the regional and international best practices, etc. During the year, UNICEF entered into more than 20 PCAs, applying the newest corporate guidance that prioritizes results-oriented programming.

UNICEF's partnering with academic institutions (including the University of Tirana) and national think tanks have also been promoted.

External Communication and Public Advocacy

Promoting the Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda (RKLA) and guided by the corporate Communication and Public Advocacy Strategy, the UNICEF CO in Albania continued to place equity for children at the heart of its advocacy agenda. Targeted advocacy and communication efforts have reinforced UNICEF's position on key issues affecting children in Albania, galvanizing public support, and key media players have become more knowledgeable about UNICEF-supported programmes through major advocacy events. Such issues as child-friendly justice, child poverty, access to education by Roma children, the street children phenomenon and violence against children are now more frequently reported in the media, informing and enlisting civic engagement for the much-needed child-rights driven reforms in public policies and societal practices.

In cooperation with the State Agency for Child Rights Protection (SACRP) and civil society partners, a dialogue with media representatives has been organized on ethical reporting – which remains a challenge in the country's highly politicized media environment. Promoting ethical reporting will be even more important in 2016, when the political campaigning for the parliamentary elections of 2017 will start.

With UNICEF's support, 300 young Albanians took part in a worldwide competition of one-minute videos, with three Albanian short movies making it on the list of the best 15 shown at the international 'One-Minute Junior Award' ceremony in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. This impressive result confirmed the young Albanians' creative talent and capacity to self-advocate, using the power of visual arts. The videos are also being used in UNICEF's online and offline advocacy messages, echoing the powerful role children and adolescents have played in the country's democratic transformation.

During 2015, the Albania CO website, Facebook and Instagram accounts reached about 120,000 people with every posting. A company was hired to monitor the impact of UNICEF's corporate advocacy, in accordance with the established Key Performance Indicators.

South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation

UNICEF Albania considers South-South cooperation a key strategy in the country programme. In most instances, horizontal exchanges have been facilitated through networking in respective RKLA areas, including:

– RKLA 2: To promote the development of a juvenile justice law in compliance with international standards, UNICEF organized an exchange visit of a delegation from Georgia (headed by the Deputy Minister of Justice) to Albania, offering Albanian legal professionals an opportunity to

learn about the recently adopted juvenile justice code in Georgia and jointly strategize for the Albanian case;

– RKLAs 3 and 4: UNICEF teams in Albania and Kosovo,* together with their national counterparts, participated in the process of developing Albania’s new ELDS and a preschool curriculum (for children 3–5 years old) based on the ELDS, jointly tapping from the top-notch expertise of the Columbia University Teachers College brought to the region by the UNICEF team in Tirana;

– RKLAs 6 and 7: Albania’s experience in developing the national Food and Nutrition Action Plan and implementing the nutrition programme was shared with Kosovo* through a technical exchange visit;

– Child Protection: Albania’s delegation headed by the Deputy Minister of Education and Sports attended a regional conference on preventing violence against children in Zagreb, Croatia, to learn from other countries’ experience and present Albania’s approach to addressing violence in schools;

– Child Protection: An SACRP delegation attended a conference on preventing sexual exploitation of children in Bucharest, Romania, and committed to prioritize the issue in the agency’s work plans in 2016;

– Emergency Preparedness: Albanian partners participated in trainings for first-line responders conducted in Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in the context of the regional refugee and migrant crisis.

* Under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

Identification and Promotion of Innovation

In 2015, the Albania CO assisted UNICEF Supply Division in testing a new smartphone-based application intended to facilitate the preparation and transmission of the Vaccine Arrival Report. The purpose of this new mobile application connected to the online portal database is to shift from paper-based reporting on vaccine shipments to monitoring that is more direct, easier, accurate and faster.

The selection of Albania as a pilot country was based on the strength of its immunization programme and familiarity with information technology and communications technology. As in previous years, in 2015, the total requirements of children’s vaccines for Albania were procured by the Government through UNICEF procurement services (amounting to approximately US\$2.4 million).

Pilot testing has been continuing over the year, supervised by the Supply Division, in coordination with the Health Specialist and the Information Technology Officer in the UNICEF CO, and in close contact with Albania’s Institute of Public Health, which has been managing the national immunization programmes. Feedback was provided to the Supply Division on the application’s technical performance and quality of the end-user interface. Data requirements and workflow time consumption have been analysed to further improve the tested application and convert it into a more refined and stable solution.

As a result, Albania is now applying an electronic Vaccine Arrival Report system, which offers the possibility of creating reports electronically and also generates timely notifications upon the

arrival of shipments. The system has served to streamline the workflow by reducing the time it takes to process the documentation of shipments and improving the data entry accuracy.

Considering the benefits that this innovative solution has been providing to improving the Vaccine Arrival Report workflow processes in global vaccine procurement transactions, the Albania CO and the Institute of Public Health staff are eager to be part of similar testing exercises in the future, adding their modest contributions to global initiatives for improving health services for children worldwide.

Support to Integration and Cross-Sectoral Linkages

Supporting integrated programming for children addressing inter-sectoral issues has been a cornerstone principle of UNICEF's approach in Albania consistently applied in all programme areas. Thus, in child protection, the work of the multi-sectoral taskforces at the local level crystallized around the child protection units in municipalities has been governed by an operational protocol that harmonized the respective accountabilities between the ministries of social welfare and youth, health, education and the interior.

A formal cooperation mechanism between the same four ministries and their institutional branches at the local level, facilitated by UNICEF, allowed Albania to improve its tracking of out-of-school children as a basis for more targeted and coherent national policies in relation to children and adolescents outside the educational system.

Very often the same out-of-school children cohort becomes exposed to situations of conflict in the law; a coordinated effort of law enforcement and social-care professionals has been nurtured by UNICEF, to ensure necessary social rehabilitation environment for young law offenders and assist their reintegration either back to school or to the labour market.

Child protection considerations have also been weaved into the new mother and child health-care standards and guidelines, emphasizing the role of outreach and family visits to spot and address instances of child neglect and/or abuse and actively promoting good parenting. Also, UNICEF facilitated cooperation between the ministries of health and the interior (civil registry) for the timely automated birth registration of newborns.

Cross-sectoral work with government ministries of welfare, local governance and finance allowed UNICEF to develop and bring to formalization a number of important institutional decisions paving the way towards a national system of social-care services provision (planning, delivery and monitoring) at the decentralized level, as part of the newly defined accountability of Albania's reformed municipal governance.

Human Rights-Based Approach to Cooperation

The human rights-based approach, as a cross-cutting normative principle, is central to the design of the United Nations-Government of Albania PoC (2012–2016) and its mid-term review and evaluation in 2014–2015, as well as to the development of Joint United Nations Annual Work Plans and related reporting documents. UNICEF contributions to these strategic planning efforts, as well as related implementation and reporting, are entirely inspired by and based on the provisions the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as on the respective treaty bodies' concluding observations and recommendations.

In 2015, UNICEF supported SACRP in monitoring the situation of children in the country, in correlation with the CRC committee's concluding observations, and participated in the preparation of the United Nations Country Team's confidential report to the CEDAW committee. UNICEF's support to the country's round of reporting on CRC implementation will be programmed in 2016 and 2017, given that the report is due in 2017.

Accountability of duty bearers and democratic oversight in relation to their actual performance form the two essential pillars – and shape the outcome-level results – of the UNICEF country programme in Albania for 2012–2016. In 2015, UNICEF further strengthened its cooperation to the rights holders, as a reflection of an increasing demand of Albanian citizens for stronger United Nations focus on the rights holders' voice and ability to claim their rights. (This was clearly emerging from the nationwide series of consultations preceding the Post-2015 Agenda and the formulation of the new United Nations-Government of Albania PoC for 2017–2021). For instance, street law activities and visits by community members to law-enforcement and justice system institutions have contributed to increased awareness and heightened demand for children's rights, expanding the use of available redress mechanisms. The ability of right holders to claim their rights was also supported through UNICEF focus on child participation and communication initiatives, as well as strategic litigation for children's rights.

Gender Mainstreaming and Equality

In 2015, in coordination with other United Nations agencies, UNICEF prioritized mainstreaming gender equality in areas where it has a comparative advantage and stronger expertise – namely, in building education curricula and teachers' capacities, as well as in promoting a stronger gender-equality emphasis in parenting clubs for the Roma communities. UNICEF was allocated US\$50,000 from the United Nations Coherence Fund, in recognition of the importance of advocating for concepts of gender equality, inclusion and non-discrimination at the earliest age possible. In consultation with the Regional Gender and Early Childhood Development Adviser, and based on regional funds (US\$10,000), an agreement with the National Institute of Education Development was established to develop the preschool curriculum, with adequate attention given to gender equality elements. Albania is apparently the first country in the Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) region to review its preschool curriculum from a gender-equality perspective. Lessons learned from this exercise may potentially influence similar endeavours by other countries.

To support the CEDAW committee's review of Albania's periodic report, UNICEF joined forces with the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women to develop the United Nations Country Team's Confidential Report to the CEDAW committee, using the technical expertise of the staff to shed light on the life-cycle aspects of gender inequalities and discrimination in the country.

In addition, further relying on its in-house gender expertise, UNICEF provided comments, suggestions and other input to the draft National Strategy of Pre-University Education Development, Social Inclusion Policy Paper, National Strategy for Development and Integration and the White Paper on Child Protection, thus supporting the Government in strengthening gender mainstreaming into these important policy documents. Similarly, UNICEF's comments to the sub-legislation on occupational health and safety and on reconciling parenthood with labour responsibilities contributed to strengthening the gender-equality elements of these documents.

The UNICEF Gender Focal Point was selected to participate in a regional Training-of-Trainers programme for gender mainstreaming in the United Nations Development Assistance

Frameworks. In Albania, technical input on gender aspects was provided to the evaluation of the current PoC, to the Gender Position Paper as part of the Common Country Assessment, and to the facilitation of a dedicated gender mainstreaming workshop for the new Framework.

Environmental Sustainability

During the country programme cycle of 2012–2016, UNICEF has been assisting Albania in promoting environmental education and awareness among schoolchildren and their parents. By 2015, UNICEF-supported environmental education programmes have become part of the new curriculum introduced by the MoES. Environmental awareness has been included as one of the seven key competencies in the curriculum for Grades 1–9, under the ‘competences for life, entrepreneurship and environment’ section. Increasingly, environmental awareness is becoming an integral part of the learning process for an increasing number of Albanian students, and is being mainstreamed into other school subjects as well. In 2015, UNICEF facilitated the showcasing of Albania’s environmental education programme, as part of the 3rd Dialogue on Article 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Bonn.

UNICEF has been committed to the concept of stimulating environmental awareness starting from a child’s early years, enhanced by the opportunity of Albania’s new ELDS and the fact that the preschool curriculum is being developed (also with UNICEF’s central role in the provision of technical advice). Both the draft ELDS and the curriculum will examine how to make children aware of and care about the environment from the very early years of their lives.

In 2015, as part of a corporate initiative, UNICEF conducted an analysis of the UNICEF Albania CO’s greenhouse and carbon emissions, including emissions generated by the staff’s air travel. The response strategy includes prioritization of Web-based conferencing and learning opportunities, optimizing the heating/cooling temperatures in the office, minimizing the usage of hot water and some other measures.

Effective Leadership

Internal governance and management systems were strengthened to make more efficient use of UNICEF resources and be more effective in programme and managing for results for children. The CO’s Annual Management Plan was developed reflecting the programme and management shifts emerging from the 2014 mid-term review of the UNICEF Albania PoC. The CO’s nine statutory committees were recomposed, with their respective terms of reference revised and approved in light of staffing changes. The Table of Authority was also updated to reflect staff changes and to uphold the principled requirement of segregation of duties within the CO. The Table of Authority was approved by the representative; the proposal on the delegation of financial signing authority was shared with each respective staff member and formal acceptance was ensured.

During the year, Country Management Team (CMT) and Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings took place regularly, ensuring effective follow-up and monitoring of all planned activities, as per the Annual Work Plans signed with the Government of Albania. In 2015, the CMT and SMT met seven and eight times, respectively, monitoring progress towards the Annual Management Plan’s targets, particularly in terms of programme implementation, funds utilization, observance of Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers standards, quality of research and human resources management. Financial implementation reports (by output) were generated from the Management Dashboard and shared within the CO every Monday; a standard list of Key Performance Indicators (or KPIs, compiled on the basis of the corporate list of indicators reported annually) were reviewed by every CMT meeting as a standing agenda

item.

The Business Continuity Plan was updated twice during the year and its testing in the context of a fire drill exercise was conducted in December 2015. Timely security advisories were provided to the staff during the reporting period, in coordination with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS).

Financial Resources Management

Standard KPIs on financial and administrative controls continued to be reviewed at every CMT meeting. In 2015, the expenditure levels of allocated annual amounts of Regular and Other Resources reached 100 per cent. Financial controls were used to identify and prevent possible gaps. Daily review of the UNICEF Management Dashboard for the Albania CO has helped to ensure that all alerts are addressed in due course. Direct cash transfers (DCTs) were closely monitored. During the reporting period, the CO disbursed a total amount of US\$977,153 to 23 Implementing Partners (IPs). Only 1 IP received more than US\$100,000 during the year, 10 IPs (or 43 per cent) received between US\$20,000 and US\$100,000, and 12 IPs (or 52 per cent) received less than US\$20,000. All fund requests and liquidations were processed under the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers modality, and the Funding Authorization and Certification of Expenditure form was universally used. The DCT liquidations management improved in 2015 and increased timeliness in liquidation was observed.

Closing bank balance targets were met, with monthly bank reconciliations always submitted prior to the deadlines established by UNICEF headquarters. The mid- and end-year closures of accounts were run within the corporate deadlines. The CO has always ensured matching between the bank and Virtual Integrated System of Information (VISION) data. An assets inventory was performed in mid-2015; all items correspond to VISION records. The volume of small transactions remained significant: 326 out of 730 payments (45 per cent) corresponded to amounts less than US\$500.

In 2015, the Albania CO contracted a local branch of the Moore Stephens firm (holder of a global Long-Term Agreement, or LTA) for micro-assessing and auditing of IPs. In all, 48 programmatic visits and 2 spot checks took place during the year.

Fund-raising and Donor Relations

By the end of 2015, the amount of Other Resources raised by the UNICEF CO in Albania for the programme cycle of 2012–2016 had reached US\$10.2 million (as reflected in the Management Dashboard records), equivalent to 38 per cent of the Executive Board-approved US\$27 million OR ceiling for the country programme cycle. The largest donors to UNICEF in Albania have been the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Austrian Development Agency, the UNICEF National Committee of Sweden and the Government of the United Kingdom. Among the main thematic areas of concern for donors are reforming Albania's system of social-care services, promoting education and social inclusion of Roma, combating violence against children and ensuring children's safety online.

In 2015, the UNICEF CO was successful, together with the United Nations agencies in Albania, in applying to the Delivering Results Together Fund; US\$490,050 is being used in health, education and juvenile justice programmes.

Grants managed by the UNICEF CO in Albania have been utilized up to 100 per cent within their expiry dates, based on the CO's efficient system of monitoring expenditures (by a

dedicated focal point/programme assistant, in addition to the staff in charge of specific programmes). Timely re-phasing of OR between budget years has been used to flexibly regulate allocations, subject to the re-phasing proposals' submission to and endorsement by the CMT.

All nine donor reports due for submission in 2015 have been prepared and sent on time. The quality assurance mechanism included the review of draft reports by the deputy representative and subsequent clearance by the representative. Quality review by the RO was provided on the final report to the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF on the project 'Towards child friendly schools and systems: Combatting school dropout in Albania', with positive feedback.

Evaluation

In 2015, the UNICEF CO in Albania participated in a joint United Nations exercise of evaluating the Delivering as One PoC between the Government of Albania and the United Nations in 2012–2016. Among the key recommendations of the evaluation are:

- Close alignment of the future PoC 2017–2021 with Albania's sector-specific plans, targets and management mechanisms, including United Nations support to close capacity gaps in planning and coordination;
- anchoring the future PoC 2017–2021 targets to outstanding recommendations on Albania by the human rights treaty bodies;
- Strengthening the result-based management approach, in close alignment with nationally established development results and targets;
- Linking capacity development assistance with formal capacity gaps assessments and practical tasks at hand;
- Providing greater direct technical advice and support to the Albanian Institute for Statistics;
- Exploring ways for the Government of Albania to co-share the cost of agreed programme interventions;
- Revisiting the Joint United Nations Resource Mobilization Strategy, including the future role of the Coherence Fund, capitalizing on the good practices of the 2012–2016 PoC;
- Exploring the expansion of joint United Nations business operations beyond the scope of the currently shared services and vendors, based on the transactions cost analysis; and
- Assessing the feasibility of environmental targets mainstreaming in and across sectors.

Guided by the evaluation findings and recommendations, a formal management response has been prepared, under the overall leadership of the United Nations Country Team and with facilitation of the Resident Coordinator's Office. The content of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2017–2021 has been extensively informed by the evaluation, and the UNICEF CO has been an active participant in the process, contributing its substantive inputs throughout the various stages of the exercise. The quality of the PoC evaluation terms of reference, draft and final reports also benefited from the assurance reviews by the 'Universalia' firm, through a contract managed by the RO.

Efficiency Gains and Cost Savings

In 2015, the UNICEF Albania CO undertook targeted cost reduction measures that resulted in savings, mainly through the reduced cost of communications, fuel and stationary. Thanks to the CO's proactive use of modern technologies and software packages allowing free-of-charge communication (such as Skype, Viber and Outlook) installed in all UNICEF mobile devices, communication expenses dropped further, by about 13 per cent, in comparison with the previous year. The 10–15 per cent reduced cost of Internet connectivity was negotiated with two

Internet provider companies used by the CO. The expenses for fuel were reduced by 20 per cent, and a small cost reduction related to more economical use of paper and cartridges was also registered. As in previous years, the CO continued to recycle paper, plastic and cartridges by involving an NGO supporting Roma communities. This approach continued to be used as a good practice by a few other United Nations agencies.

Throughout 2015, there was no evidence of costs savings due to joint United Nations operations. The cost of common security services increased during 2015, as a consequence of the new Albanian legislation regulating the base salaries in private security firms. Common LTAs for fuel procurement, travel booking, printing services, stationary supplies and event management continued to be used by the United Nations agencies, UNICEF inclusive. While they do save time for programme and operations staff, a combined efficiency gain effect from common arrangements still needs to be proven (based on a thorough calculation of all cost variables, including the cost of the working time of the United Nations staff), in comparison with similar LTAs that could be managed solely by UNICEF. As in previous years, UNICEF staff of the Albania CO were requested to devote considerable time to management coordination meetings and exchanges with other United Nations agencies.

Supply Management

The total volume of procurement for UNICEF country programme and operations needs in 2015 reached US\$555,417, which was about 12 per cent less than in 2014 (explained, primarily, by a noticeable increase in programme expenditure channelled through DCTs to partners, in comparison to contracting). About 81 per cent of the above amount was related to the cost of technical expertise procured to support programme interventions.

UNICEF Albania continued to assist the Ministry of Health in procuring antiretroviral medicines and vaccines through the Supply Division, with the volume of such supplies in 2015 reaching US\$38,700 and US\$2,419,781, respectively. The vaccine procurement is based on a long-term memorandum of understanding signed by the Ministry of Health and the UNICEF Supply Division.

The CO has completed all VISION-based activities for the equipment and intangibles inventory in a timely manner. Since UNICEF Albania does not have a warehouse, all of the supplies received were initially registered at the 'virtual' warehouse in VISION and immediately delivered to the partners.

UNICEF Albania 2015	Value in US\$
Contracts w/institutions for programme needs	270,253
Contracts w/consultants for programme needs	180,846
Programme supplies	63,888
Total for programme	514,987
Contracts w/institutions for operational needs	32,673
Contracts w/consultants for operational needs	4,738
POs for assets and attractive items	1,504
POs for consumables	1,515
Total for operations	40,430
Total for Albania Country Office	555,417

Type of supplies and services procured for the Government	Total in US\$
Immunization, cold chain and devices, freight	2,419,781
HIV/AIDS and malaria drugs	38,700
Total procurement for the Government during 2015	2,458,481

Security for Staff and Premises

The safety and security of UNICEF staff and CO premises continued to be constantly monitored during the year, in close coordination with UNDSS and the United Nations Security Management Team. In close collaboration with UNDSS, a security risk assessment of UNICEF premises, located in the United Nations House, was conducted with the main risk identified consisting in medium- to large-scale earthquakes that may affect Albania, as a seismic-prone country. Informed by the assessment, two earthquake preparedness trainings were conducted for UNICEF staff. As per the security risk assessment recommendations and to fully comply with the Minimum Operating Security Standards, the need to install shatter-resistant film on the windows and all glass elements of the CO was identified, and a request for special security funds was submitted in December 2015.

In the meantime, the Special Purpose Security Funds (amounting to US\$12,100) allocated to the CO earlier in 2015 were used during 2015 to:

- Cover the increased cost of the United Nations House LTA on security (as a result of the 60 per cent newly legislated increase in the base salary of security guards nationwide);
- Procure individual earthquake survival kits for 18 staff members;
- Contribute to the shared United Nations costs of introducing electronic entrance cards for the staff; and
- Buy some other items (such as an additional fire extinguisher), as per the Minimum Operating Security Standards.

Moreover, the CO updated its warden system, the fire safety and emergency evacuation plans, which were tested in December. Security advisories were provided to all staff in a timely manner, based on the information communicated by UNDSS and their monitoring of the situation in the country and the capital.

The United Nations Security Plan, the Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan and the Business Continuity Plan were regularly updated in 2015, as per United Nations/UNICEF guidance and standards.

Human Resources

In 2015, UNICEF CO in Albania completed the recruitment process resulting from the 2014 mid-term review's programme budget review, for the posts of a Child Protection (Justice for Children) Specialist, Statistics and Monitoring Officer and Finance and Human Resources Assistant. The recruitment process for a Temporary Appointment Child Protection Specialist also took place. Moreover, in line with programme budget review requirements, the job descriptions of Programme Assistants were updated and classified.

The Information Communication Technology Assistant continued to support the Montenegro Office remotely, based on the agreed 10 per cent cost-sharing arrangement. Following a

request from headquarters, the Assistant was selected for an assignment of two months with the Global Shared Services Centre in Budapest.

In addition, servicing and management of entitlements of national and international staff were completed on time.

Although only 20 per cent of performance evaluation reports had been duly completed by February 2015, total completion was ensured by the extended deadline of the end of March, supported by a close monitoring of the progress by the CMT.

A survey conducted in the CO in April 2015 revealed the general perception that UNICEF staff members in Albania enjoy a respectful relationship with one another. The main issues of concern were: uneven workload distribution, insufficient staff motivation and lack of active promotion of work-life balance measures. A staff team-building retreat outside of Tirana was held in June 2015, facilitated by an international human resources consultant, to address the above concerns.

Training and information sessions on HIV for United Nations staff and their family members were organized by the Resident Coordinator's Office, based on the 10 minimum standards on HIV in the workplace. UNICEF staff in Albania are aware of staff counselling resources available locally, such as the peer volunteer modality.

Effective Use of Information and Communication Technology

With the implementation of the Microsoft Office365 suite and different automation tools initiated since 2014, the UNICEF CO in Albania required more bandwidth capacity, which was increased from 8 to 12 Mbps during 2015, while maintaining the same cost. The easy and cost-free use of Skype for Business gained uptake among staff not only for video and voice communication with colleagues in other COs, but also for the ability to share screens and make use of the remote control when support is needed. In addition, all staff were equipped with smartphones by the CO, allowing them access to other Office365 applications and services, in addition to email exchanges.

In 2015, the Albanian language version of the UNICEF CO website was completed and published online, while the social media presence in both Albanian and English and the continuous content publishing increased the attraction of visitors to the website. To improve the monitoring of the number of visitors to the website, pages mostly visited and the trend of virtual traffic, a new analytical service provided by Google replaced the old Urchin tool.

The installation and use of the local Citrix application, since mid-2015, on all staff laptops provided easier access to VISION and other UNICEF services, enabling staff to continue working with UNICEF business applications in a remote manner, if and when required.

It should be noted that the practice promoted by UNICEF headquarters and the RO, to use SharePoint team sites for sharing content, has encouraged UNICEF staff in Albania to discover the benefits of also adopting the cloud-based solutions in their daily work for storing data.

Analysis by outcome and output results

OUTCOME 1: Governance for children: Effective public oversight and monitoring of institutions helps to ensure implementation of policies and programmes addressing the needs and rights of marginalized children.

Analytical statement of progress:

In 2015, the UNICEF CO in Albania further consolidated its interaction with and intensified support to the national government and human rights institutions, to strengthen the system of democratic governance in support of the realization of child rights, especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children, providing necessary remedies to addressing inequity and neglect in their fulfilment.

The RKLA provided a solid framework for a systematic effort of UNICEF and its partners in Albania towards common objectives related to children's rights to: grow in a family environment (RKLA 1); be protected by child-friendly justice (RKLA 2); benefit from early learning, within an inclusive and quality education system (RKLAs 3 and 4); have access to health and early care (RKLAs 6 and 7); and benefit from measures of social protection (RKLA 8).

Contextualizing the RKLA targets for Albania, UNICEF worked closely with the Parliament and its various statutory committees, the national Ombudsman's Office (People's Advocate), the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, SACRP, and the Child Rights Observatory in ensuring that children's rights were placed on the country's political agenda. UNICEF also worked with those partners in law-making initiatives and respective technical plans, as well as in informing the continuous multi-sectoral policy dialogue between the legislators, government authorities and the civil society with proven evidence and principled approaches deriving from international norms and standards.

The Government of Albania should be praised for making the CRC and its respective recommendations a guiding framework in analysing the country's progress in protecting children's rights, as reflected in the 2015 annual report of the SACRP, applying the same methodological approach as the 2014 report, which was prepared and published with considerable UNICEF assistance. The regularity of such national reporting, established during previous years through a collaborative effort with UNICEF, has become an increasingly important factor influencing the mind-sets of decision makers and shaping social policy priorities, thereby promoting collaboration between different sectors and governments at various levels.

This past year has also demonstrated a strengthened national culture of evidence-based policymaking, with key UNICEF-supported research and analysis products from previous years put to good use as foundations for various strategies and action plans in the health, education, justice and social protection sectors. It should be particularly noted that all national planning documents prepared under the framework of Albania's draft National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) for 2015–2020 have been supported by a budgetary estimate, and UNICEF's assistance in generating knowledge to calculate the cost of projected child-focused interventions has also been crucial in this realm.

In assisting national partners to improve governance for children in Albania, the following *core roles* of UNICEF have been particularly prominent:

- Direct contribution by UNICEF staff (both management and specialists) was key in maintaining high-level *policy dialogue* and *providing expert advice*, to influence the development of important normative frameworks (described in detail in Output Result statements) affecting children's rights, in compliance with international standards adhered to by UNICEF corporate policies.
- A newly mobilized dedicated capacity in statistics and monitoring helped the CO systematize its efforts in *knowledge generation, utilization and child rights monitoring*; strengthen the connectivity between the research and its immediate practical utilization for policymaking and action-monitoring purposes; and enhance UNICEF's capacity-building assistance to partner organizations, capitalizing on the best practices and experience within the CEE/CIS region.
- UNICEF's *independent advocacy voice and position* transmitted at various events and occasions – including through the statements of the representative, presentations by the staff, posts in social media, and publications in the press – played an important role in mobilizing political will and dialogue on social issues, social norms, behaviours and attitudes, in order to positively impact the realization of the rights of all children and adolescents. Importantly, UNICEF's role as an international standard-setting child rights organization, upholding the CRC and its normative function, has been continuously highlighted, leading to UNICEF overcoming its often present misperception as a donor agency.
- In the context of the ongoing territorial and administrative reform aimed at optimizing and strengthening the sub-national/local governance structures and mechanisms, following the June 2015 municipal elections, UNICEF grasped a strategic opportunity to *establish a partnership* with the Albanian Prime Minister's Office, enlisting its support on behalf of an innovative Child-Friendly City (CFC) initiative that aims to *leverage resources for children* from the country's Regional Development Fund. Thanks to UNICEF's effective team efforts, a comprehensive and unique CFC planning framework, with a budgetary component, has been developed for Albania within a very short period of time, to leverage and converge actions and investments for children at the municipal level.
- UNICEF has promoted *horizontal cooperation beyond borders*, with partners supported in their exposure to the best practices available in the region, through exchange visits, participation in conferences and workshops. For example, the experience of Georgia in establishing a solid national system of juvenile justice has been inspiring for the Albanian policy makers and cemented their commitment to the immediate reform steps in this area.

OUTPUT 1: Public oversight bodies related to children, including the Parliament, Ombudsman's Office, Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, CSOs and the media, increasingly demand accountability of duty bearers for better governance results for children.

Analytical statement of progress:

In support of the entire range of RKLAs targets pertinent to Albania, UNICEF and the Albanian Parliament have collaborated on a working agenda of the parliamentary group Friends of Children, which has included, inter alia: the child-friendly justice reform; the draft new child protection law; the new law on social services; the online safety legal framework; and parliamentary hearing sessions with children and young people.

These important legislative reform efforts are bringing the child rights laws in Albania in line with international standards. Under the influence of UNICEF's continuous advocacy, Albania's Parliament, although primarily focused on its more classical, *legislative* role, has increasingly

developed its *democratic oversight* role in relation to the situation of children. In particular, highlights for 2015 include:

- UNICEF has encouraged the Parliament to review the People's Advocate (national Ombudsman) thematic reports and to organize joint hearings on child rights at least once a year. As part of this initiative, in 2015, a public discussion was held on Albania's 'blood feud' phenomenon and its impact on children. In addition, health, education and social services have been alerted on the need to reach out to affected families, while journalists have been urged to refrain from sensationalizing the issue.
- UNICEF contributed to the discussion of the draft Strategy of Pre-University Education held at Parliament with the Minister of Education. Technical inputs by UNICEF have strengthened the Strategy's focus on the equitable access to education for children with disabilities, from poor families, in detention, from Roma communities, etc.
- In collaboration with UNICEF, the parliamentary group Friends of Children organized a hearing session with civil society to gather citizens' views on children's rights issues to be addressed as a matter of priority in 2016, when key legislative reforms are due to be finalized.
- UNICEF provided substantive recommendations to the Parliamentary Commission on Laws, Public Administration and Human Rights on: Albania's draft Labour Code; draft amendments to the Law on the Rights and Treatment of Prisoners; and the draft Family Code and adoptions legislation. UNICEF's technical advice informed public hearings and standing committees' debates and ultimately contributed to better-informed decisions of parliamentarians, with due consideration of child rights.

Following the amendment in late 2014 of the Law on People's Advocate (national Ombudsman) to establish a special Commissioner on Children's Rights, UNICEF advocated strongly on the relevance of filling this key position. However, as the appointment is to be made by Parliament, while providing guarantees, the selection process has been delayed and the position remains vacant. Nevertheless, a tripartite workplan – resulting from a new partnership forged by UNICEF – was developed between the People's Advocate Office, UNICEF and the Child Rights Observatory, with a focus on monitoring children's rights in detention and in residential care facilities.

Similarly, UNICEF entered into a new partnership with Albania's Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination to expand cooperation in schools and judicial proceedings.

OUTPUT 2: Expected standards for private-sector (including media) engagement and corporate social responsibility were established and published by authoritative institutions (government or regulatory bodies).

Analytical statement of progress:

Promoting the targets of the RKLA agenda in the context of Albania and guided by the corporate Communication and Public Advocacy Strategy, the UNICEF CO in Albania continued to place equity for children at the heart of its advocacy agenda. Targeted advocacy and communication efforts have promoted UNICEF's position on key issues affecting children in Albania, galvanizing public support; and key media have become more knowledgeable about UNICEF-supported programmes through major advocacy events. Such issues as child-friendly justice, child poverty, Roma access to education, the street-children phenomenon and violence against children are now more frequently reported in the media. Also, several human interest stories on selected topics (such as child abuse, human trafficking and Internet safety) commissioned by UNICEF have been featured in key media outlets. An interview with the Deputy Minister of

Interior on preventing human (including women's and children's) trafficking has been organized and published.

During 2015, the UNICEF CO has regularized the frequency of its weekly messages and digital posts. The use of the Albania CO's website, Facebook and Instagram accounts allows UNICEF to reach an audience of about 120,000 people with every posting. A professional media monitoring company has been engaged to regularly assess the strength of UNICEF's corporate voice and the degree of its outreach in the country, in accordance with the established Key Performance Indicators in UNICEF's communication. Regular analytical reports from the company will inform future planning of activities and influence how, when, to whom and through which channels UNICEF CO will communicate.

In cooperation with the South African Children's Resiliency Project and civil society partners, discussion with media representatives has been organized on ethical reporting – which remains a challenge in the country's highly politicized media environment. Promoting ethical reporting will be even more important in 2016, when political campaigning for the 2017 parliamentary elections will begin. A child-friendly version of the CRC printed in 2015 will be used in communication and advocacy events with schoolchildren and adolescents. At the same time, An Agenda for Every Child flyer was produced to remind government officials, parliamentarians, civil society activists, media and other duty bearers of Albania's commitment to child rights.

In 2015, UNICEF's advocacy agenda gave a special focus to the voices of young Albanians. Some 300 young Albanians took part in a worldwide competition of one-minute videos, with 3 Albanian short movies making it on the list of the best 15 shown at the international 'One-Minute Junior Award' ceremony in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. This impressive result confirmed the young Albanians' creative talent and capacity to self-advocate, using the power of visual arts. The videos are also being used in UNICEF's online and offline advocacy messages, echoing the powerful role children and adolescents have played in the country's democratic transformation by tackling pertinent challenges with innovative solutions to redress inequities and improve the situation of all Albanian children.

OUTPUT 3: Key policy research and monitoring institutions, as well as central, regional and local government entities, effectively manage data related to children and women and periodically report on the situation of marginalized children and families, implementation of child-related legislation and international conventions.

Analytical statement of progress:

UNICEF's assistance to national policy research and monitoring institutions in 2015 has been instrumental in advancing the achievement of targets shaped by RKLAs 1, 2, 3/4, 6/7 and 8. UNICEF's newly mobilized statistics and monitoring expertise strengthened the knowledge generation effort across programmes and sectors and contributed to the approach's systematization and integration.

During 2015, the design of Albania's national development strategies and policies has been extensively informed by UNICEF-led research. A National Health Report (2015) supported by UNICEF provided evidence for the draft strategies on health promotion, reproductive health and non-communicable diseases – all due for finalization in 2016. UNICEF's Situation Analysis (2014) and the 'Stock and flow analysis of children's population in residential care' (2014) were used to develop a national de-institutionalization plan. A study on Roma Access to Preschool (2014) informed the draft Strategy of Pre-University Education and the national Action Plan for Roma. The 'Children in street situation' survey (2014) laid the foundation for the respective

national Action Plan. Albania's draft Social Protection Strategy for 2015–2020 was largely informed by the Situation Analysis and multiple pieces of UNICEF-generated research (including on public financing, institutional set-up and decentralized governance aspects) conducted in 2014 as part of the technical assistance to the national social-care services reform.

Concurrently with nationwide planning, UNICEF assisted the Government in mobilizing knowledge for decentralized action. Under the CFC framework, UNICEF engaged internationally renowned experts, in collaboration with local specialists, to develop a concrete Action Plan and consolidate a repertoire of local projects. The Action Plan will be submitted for funding from Albania's Regional Development Fund in 2016. The CFC programme intends to strengthen a multi-sectoral approach to the emerging sub-national and local funding opportunities that have been accompanying Albania's ongoing territorial and decentralization reform. Importantly, prioritization of plans under the six CFC pillars of *play, participation, health, learning, sustainability* and *safety* has been done based on a series of structured consultations with municipal stakeholders, civil society and children themselves.

Together with informing the Government's future actions, UNICEF's assistance has been central in monitoring the implementation of already approved policies in selected areas. For example, in collaboration with the State Health Inspectorate (a new body established in 2014), UNICEF supported a comparative analysis of the national measures and provisions of the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, which served as the basis for drafting the legislative changes to Albania's regulatory framework on the issue, to enhance its enforcement and reduce violations.

In 2015, UNICEF was actively engaged in monitoring and analysis of migration-related issues, by contributing to the ['country of origin' report on Albania](#) intended to provide immigration officers in EU countries with reliable and specific reference information necessary for the 'best interest' determination in cases involving Albanian migrant children. At the same time, UNICEF is working with its partners to establish a special reporting structure to monitor the situation of Albanians returning to the country after having been refused asylum status in EU countries.

OUTPUT 4: Juvenile offenders or victims of crime are treated in accordance with international standards, including: a shortened pre-trial period; education opportunities for all children in detention; re-integration pre- and post-trial, including diversion and/or alternative sentencing; and social support and rehabilitative measures for children younger than 14 years of age.

Analytical statement of progress:

UNICEF's support to promote the juvenile justice agenda in Albania is based on the RKLA 2 conceptual frame and aligned with its targets, with a particular focus on: ensuring that procedures and practices in the justice system adhere to international standards; increasing the percentage of children's cases handled by specialized professionals; and reducing the rate of children in detention.

Signs of the Government's renewed political commitment to develop a specific juvenile justice law – which UNICEF has strongly advocated for – have emerged in 2015. The law represents a more ambitious piece of legislation than the previously contemplated juvenile justice chapter to the Criminal Procedure Code. It will ensure that children in conflict and in contact with criminal law are treated per international standards, benefit from diversion and stop being subject to lengthy pre-trial detentions.

To solidify this commitment, UNICEF organized an exchange visit of a delegation from Georgia (headed by the Deputy Minister of Justice) that shared its experience in the development of Georgia's newly adopted juvenile justice code with Albanian counterparts.

UNICEF supported the Parliamentary Commission on the justice reform to integrate a child-rights perspective into this major national reform, which is key to Albania's progress and EU integration. The result of this advocacy is the inclusion of a specific juvenile justice law; a strategic document on justice for children; and a revised free legal aid law as explicit objectives in Albania's justice reform strategy.

The Parliamentary Commission and UNICEF also began public consultations on child-friendly justice. In a round table organized in August, UNICEF shared the voices and views of children – through a video message – on justice reform. The Ministry of Justice and UNICEF launched the findings of the regional study on 'Children's Equitable Access to Justice' (in Albanian) and discussed the recommendations that will inform the strategic document on justice for children.

In 2015, UNICEF also identified a pool of legal experts who provided guidance in various programme areas, enabling UNICEF to support the country in legislative reforms across sectors and mainstreaming the child rights and equity perspective in the normative frameworks related to health, education, social and child protection.

UNICEF committed to support the Ministry of Justice in developing an online tool to track juvenile cases from the moment a child enters into contact with the law, and until s/he leaves the justice system. This will reduce gaps and inconsistencies in official statistics, help the country design evidence-based policies, and monitor progress with clear accountabilities.

Partnerships with NGOs diversify the mosaic of services for juveniles in: mediation and reconciliation as part of restorative justice (25 of 26 cases resolved positively so far); programmes for abusive parents and family members of juveniles in conflict with the law (established for the first time in Albania and expected to reach 150 parents); aiding the Probation Service (35 cases) and detention facilities (120 cases) with accompanying, psycho-social and economic reintegration services for juveniles; and influencing the attitudes and practices of courts by providing specialized legal assistance to juveniles (22 cases in process).

OUTCOME 2: Child well-being data collection and management infrastructure in 12 Child Rights Units and 12 Child Rights Observatories fully established and 50 people trained, with a special focus on capturing social exclusion and marginalization (RKLA 8).

Analytical statement of progress:

The UNICEF CO's efforts in promoting inclusive social policies in Albania, building on the corporate good practices and lessons learned in the CEE/CIS regional context, have been effectively guided by the RKLA, explaining ways and connectivity points between system-level results in terms of improved performance of the institutions and impact changes in the lives of children and families.

In 2015, of particular relevance to UNICEF's work in Albania were the following RKLAs related to children's rights: to grow in a family environment (RKLA 1); to be protected by a child-friendly justice (RKLA 2); to benefit from early learning, within an inclusive and quality education system (RKLAs 3 and 4); to have access to health and early care (RKLAs 6 and 7); and to benefit from measures of social protection (RKLA 8).

As part of the Government of Albania's 'road map' plan adopted in 2014 to guide the country's efforts towards EU integration, a comprehensive revision of all national strategies and development targets, including in the social sector, took place in 2015. UNICEF, together with the United Nations agencies, has been active in contributing to the content of Albania's main planning framework of the NSDI until 2020. UNICEF has also played a prominent role in assisting the Government with preparing sector-specific plans in social protection, education, health and justice, continuously insisting on the need to articulate the commitment of duty bearers to address children's rights, particularly for the most vulnerable and/or excluded children.

UNICEF's ability to convincingly engage in *policy dialogue* supported by evidence and *high-quality technical advice* was the main factor in the successful introduction of new types and standards of services in social protection, early education, mother and child health care and child protection. To effectively perform this *core role*, the UNICEF CO in Albania has been fostering its teamwork, combining the efforts of its various programmes and partners in different sectors, in promoting national policy change.

To encourage and/or maintain political will and government commitment to policy upgrades, UNICEF's *independent advocacy voice and position* served in many instances as a game changer. The challenging process of converting Albania's services of primarily residential care into an open, community-based, equitable and family oriented social protection and support system has been untiringly backed by UNICEF's advocacy and encouragement, at central and local levels, in government and CSO meetings and debates. At the same time, UNICEF has made it clear that the protection of children from various hazards and threats to their well-being requires focused attention and approaches, due to the specificity of the youngest citizens' issues and situations – ultimately coming to a consensus with national stakeholders on the need to revisit Albania's child protection normative framework.

To monitor the coverage and quality of services delivered to children and families, regular *knowledge generation and utilization* has been of paramount importance. Acknowledging multiple weaknesses of the respective management information systems, UNICEF has been assisting the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Justice in filling capacity gaps in data collection and management, in order to inform policy and service provision decisions. In particular, UNICEF has highlighted the need to disaggregate information by age, ethnicity, gender and social status in order to target and trace responses to particular groups of vulnerable children living in situations of exclusion. In promoting administrative data collection as a nationally owned and sustainable way to maintain regular information flows, UNICEF has been facilitating the interaction between planning teams in the ministries and Albania's national Institute for Statistics, to ensure timely guidance and quality assurance on statistical matters.

At the core of UNICEF's support on behalf of inclusive social policies and services were *capacity development programmes for professionals*, for the improved development, implementation and monitoring of inclusive, rights-based, child-friendly policies and services. These programmes were implemented in close collaboration with government and non-governmental partners, leveraging additional resources in the form of local outreach, capacity, knowledge of the context, reliance on workforce and connectivity to professional networks. The programmes are proving successful in enlisting innovative ways to maximize effectiveness and ensure greater impact of service delivery within the new Local Government Units (LGUs).

UNICEF's exposure to regional and international best practices proved to add value to such

capacity development efforts. Moreover, during 2015, *horizontal cooperation beyond borders* continued to be promoted by the UNICEF CO in Albania. Professional contacts between key Albanian stakeholders and their homologues in Croatia, Georgia, Kosovo (under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244), Macedonia and Romania have been fostered through exchange visits and participation in joint workshops, and by sharing experiences in conferences. Thematic areas have included child protection from violence, juvenile justice, health, early learning and inclusive education.

OUTPUT 1: The system of social-care services is reformed to effectively address the needs of the most vulnerable families and children.

Analytical statement of progress:

In 2015, UNICEF continued to be closely engaged with the RKLA 8 Reference Group on Social Protection (chaired by the UNICEF Representative in Albania) and capitalized on the extensive experience accumulated in the CEE/CIS region in supporting social protection through a combination of cash assistance- and service-based measures.

During 2015, UNICEF achieved significant progress in finalizing necessary elements of the normative policy framework in support of Albania's social-care services reform. The reform process is a very complex undertaking that UNICEF has been engaged with since 2012. In addition to the mobilization of substantive financial resources and solid technical expertise, the process has required continued negotiations and advocacy by the UNICEF team to sustain the political commitment of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth through leadership changes, including a change in minister in 2015, and translate it into concrete plans, actions and decisions.

The highlight of the year was the official approval, in December 2015, of a national Social Protection Strategy for 2015–2020 that was developed with UNICEF's extensive technical assistance, in close collaboration with a wide range of government and civil society stakeholders at national and local levels. The Strategy is accompanied by a detailed Plan of Action, with each target matched by a costing estimate. For the first time in Albania, the Strategy clearly articulates the need to harmonize different instruments of social protection, recognizing that cash assistance alone cannot address the complex needs of vulnerable families and children.

Other key milestones in building a solid and comprehensive social-care services system, reached with UNICEF's support, include:

- i. A draft law on social-care services developed to set the legal basis for the system to embrace a combined 'cash and care' approach and articulate equity-sensitive targets;
- ii. Clarification of accountabilities and roles of the newly defined 61 municipalities in relation to planning and managing social-care services and inclusion of respective provisions in the draft law on local governance;
- iii. An inventory of human resources dealing with social protection in the previous and newly established municipalities/LGUs, informing a strategy of on how to preserve and efficiently use such resources;
- iv. A proposal on the functionality of new departments of cash- and service-based social protection in LGUs, with a dedicated governance unit to be established for the first time at the local level;
- v. A standard package ('basket') of social protection services, with their costing estimates, established to help the planning process at the local level;

- vi. Development of tools to equip respective staff in central and municipal governments for effective planning, delivering and monitoring of social protection policies and measures; and
- vii. Preparing for testing and fine-tuning of the above tools, starting in early 2016, in the municipalities of Durres, Elbasan and Tirana, to inform the future scaled-up training and capacity-building programme for all LGUs in the country.

OUTPUT 2: Child protection mechanisms and services enhanced to effectively reach and support children and families in situations of particular vulnerability.

Analytical statement of progress:

In accordance with the RKLA's principle of an integrated multi-sectoral approach to addressing child vulnerability and exclusion, the UNICEF CO in Albania actively contributed to the development and adoption, in February 2015, of a detailed operational Protocol on Child Protection endorsed by the Ministries of Social Welfare and Youth, Ministry of Health, MoES and Ministry of Interior. The Protocol outlines the details of cooperation between various central and sub-national entities in following up on specific cases requiring special protection measures. It may serve as a prototype mechanism to regulate complex multi-sectoral accountabilities and operational relationships in social policy issues.

Such multi-sectoral effort has already started bringing results – in particular, in addressing the phenomenon of children in street situations (national action in this area has been informed by a 2014 UNICEF study and then supported technically and financially). Thus, in Durres, Elbasan, Fier and Tirana, 485 children in street situations have been identified between January and September 2015, and for approximately 45 per cent of these children, targeted protection measures proved effective in bringing them either back to school or to regular employment.

Similarly, a 'stock and flow' analysis of the numbers and situation of children in residential-care institutions conducted by UNICEF in 2015 served to steer the development of a national de-institutionalization plan, supported by UNICEF. While the plan's full operationalization is still pending, expansion of family support services (including, through UNICEF-funded interventions) started converting into tangible results. Between 2014 and 2015, the number of children in residential care decreased from 989 to 761, and the number of infants aged 0–3 abandoned during the year fell from 99 to 88. Since the application of foster care in Albania has proved less accepted culturally than kinship care (as confirmed by a UNICEF evaluation in 2013), the latter has been promoted, with 80 children currently placed in kinship care.

Acknowledging the essential contribution of professional social workers and qualified psychologists to the outreach, referral and counselling work in child protection, UNICEF provided technical expertise and facilitated a highly participatory process for the development of the laws on the status of psychologists (submitted to Parliament for review) and on the Order of Social Workers (adopted in 2014).

In collaboration with a broad range of government and CSO partners, UNICEF supported a comprehensive mapping of Albania's child protection system elements. Recommendations based on the analysis include: (i) mainstreaming child protection in the work of all social sectors; (ii) adopting a social risk management approach to child protection; (iii) combining social transfers with services; (iv) establishing governance mechanisms in child protection; and (v) strengthening the child protection workforce. Informed by the mapping, a document outlining the vision on the country's future integrated child protection system was launched by the

Government in December 2015, and a decision was made to review and upgrade the current Law on Child Rights Protection (adopted in 2010).

OUTPUT 3: Education, health and protection policies improved and budgeted for to support social inclusion of children during the early years, especially those with vulnerable backgrounds, such as Roma.

Analytical statement of progress:

In 2015, the UNICEF CO in Albania continued to closely align its work with the theory of change and targets of RKLAs 3 and 4, articulating children's equitable access to good-quality schooling starting from an early age, inclusive of all children and governed by effective and efficient accountability mechanisms.

UNICEF provided technical assistance in the drafting of a new Pre-university Education Strategy. The Strategy presents a vision of the sector's evolution until 2020 and seals the national commitment to promote early childhood learning and development, add a mandatory pre-primary year to the schooling cycle and provide opportunities for inclusive teaching and learning, starting from preschool and through post-secondary education.

Long-term advocacy by UNICEF on the benefits of investing in early childhood development resulted, in 2015, in the adoption of respective targets in Albania's draft National Strategy for Development and Integration until 2020. For the first time in national planning, the Strategy prioritizes the expansion of preschool education among the national development goals. The reform of Albania's preschool education will be built on a solid foundation of the newly approved [ELDS](#), guided by the high-calibre international and national expertise mobilized by UNICEF.

The principle of inclusiveness in education is achieved through developing appropriate pre- and in-service professional teacher development programmes. A qualification system to embrace the inclusiveness requirements is being set up through collaboration among the MoES, the Institute for Education Development and UNICEF, with the aim to provide Albania's children with life skills focusing on both academic achievements and non-cognitive competencies. By the end of 2015, 11,000 teachers of Grades 1 to 6 (constituting 100 per cent of the overall teacher workforce for these grades) had participated in a massive on-the-job training exercise to build their capacity in implementing the new competency-based curricula.

[The nationwide Every Roma Child in Kindergarten initiative](#) continued to unfold in 2015, highlighting the local authorities' accountability to ensure Roma children's access to early learning and leading to an estimated 50 per cent of young Roma children accessing preschool in 2014–2015, compared with only 26 per cent in 2011. As part of this initiative, a positive parenting programme was developed and is awaiting formal approval by the MoES.

Technical support facilitated by the RO was provided for the upgrade of the education management information system, to better capture and track out-of-school children. Collaboration between the education, health and social protection sectors, local authorities and civil registry offices (based on the multi-partite memorandum of understanding signed in 2014) in relation to identifying and assisting out-of-school children was documented. The national assessment system was supported to provide data on education quality, especially for the most vulnerable children, resulting in a clear geographical mapping of needs for quality improvement (with the poorest results demonstrated in Diber and Durres).

A review of the national Schools as Community Centres initiative was conducted at the request

of the MoES, to provide a basis for improved policy and practices of this important initiative implemented in 180 schools.

OUTPUT 4: Children and young people of vulnerable families have equal access to health services, and the health of young children is monitored.

Analytical statement of progress:

The targets of UNICEF regional RKLAs 6 and 7 on young child health and well-being have been highly pertinent to the country programme in Albania, calling for a particular focus on effective outreach (home visiting), comprehensive (health, development and protection) approaches, and prioritization of the most vulnerable.

UNICEF's technical assistance was central in culminating a multi-year effort aimed at developing the new regulatory framework of the Women and Children Consultative Centres. The complete package (approved in 2014) included clinical practice guidelines; 18 standard protocols; performance indicators and international standards for antenatal and post-natal care; mother and child nutrition; and child development. Fully endorsed and owned by the national policymakers and practitioners, the new standards combine a preventive public health approach with elements of child protection, probing the front-line care providers to look at a child's well-being (embracing health, nutrition, growth, likely treatment in the family, and other aspects) in a comprehensive manner.

The new operational standard for the Women and Children Consultative Centres was reflected in joint UNICEF/United Nations Populations Fund support for the revision of Albania's Basic Package of Primary Health Care services, approved by the Government in 2015. The Package, in turn, provides an administrative basis for a contractual agreement between the Compulsory Health Care Insurance Fund and health-care providers, under the national health insurance scheme. To further support the application of these standards, international expertise was provided by UNICEF to develop a comprehensive estimate of the mother and child health services cost for the areas covered by the new guidelines, with this work to complete in 2016.

Moreover, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the NGO Partnership for Development, UNICEF started working on the enforcement mechanisms, in order to scale up the new standards. The first group of 74 health-sector managers is scheduled to be trained in the utilization of the new standard enforcement and monitoring tools. In addition, 180 front-line mother and child health-care providers in the region of Durres were selected to be trained in the implementation of the new service protocols.

In support of evidence-based policymaking and based on a formal agreement on the national list of core health indicators (revised with UNICEF's assistance in 2014), the development of a comprehensive manual to guide the collection of data was initiated in 2015, to feed the country's health information system. In the meantime, available health statistics were compiled in a [National Health Report](#), prepared and published with UNICEF's support. Serving as a much-needed reference source for policymakers and practitioners, the report also offered an opportunity to develop national capacities for generating, analysing and utilizing data on the population health status and the health system's performance.

In 2015, UNICEF contributed to the revision of Albania's regulatory framework for the marketing of breast-milk substitutes. To align local law enforcement practices with international standards, in collaboration with the State Health Inspectorate (established in 2014), the capacities of 82 health inspectors were strengthened.

Jointly with the United Nations agencies, UNICEF contributed to the organization of the European Immunization Week (April 2015) and the National Public Health Conference (May 2015).

OUTPUT 5: Violence against children is recognized and increasingly addressed as a harmful social phenomenon.

Analytical statement of progress:

Guided by the parameters and approaches of the emerging RKLA on preventing violence against children, UNICEF continued its advocacy for placing the issue at the forefront of decision-makers' agendas in Albania, with prevention champions including the parliamentary group Friends of Children, SACRP, the People's Advocate's Office, the MoES, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and the Minister of Public Administration and Innovation, as well as a number of CSOs. By forging this coalition of partners, UNICEF advocates to address the issue as a multidimensional phenomenon that requires an inter-sectoral approach.

To address violence against children in schools, UNICEF mobilized the international expertise to develop a new Communication for Behaviour Impact (COMBI) programme for 2015–2016 engaging the MoES, SACRP, other institutions, NGOs working in the field, teachers and parents. The new COMBI programme is based on lessons learned during the preceding phase in 2012–2013. The programme has already been integrated as a key component of the MoES's national Stop Violence at Schools plan.

To guide the teachers' in-service training, a COMBI manual will be utilized upon completion of its accreditation process. UNICEF also worked with the Social Science Faculty at the University of Tirana to adjust the Department of Pedagogy's curriculum based on the COMBI principles. To ensure the sustainable monitoring of disciplining practices in schools nationwide, the State Education Inspectorate initiated the review of school monitoring checklists to reflect the COMBI components and include measures to address non-compliance.

Informed by the UNICEF-supported Child Protection System Mapping and Analysis for Albania, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth drafted a Child Protection White Paper to outline the vision of necessary legal and policy changes, adopting an integrated perspective of violence against children and recommending cross-sectoral actions. As an immediate practical response in 2015, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth revealed and prosecuted cases of violent treatment of children in residential-care facilities, conducted formal testing on the staff's skills and committed to a nationwide communication campaign targeting violence against children in 2016.

During the year, UNICEF continued to strengthen national capacities to report on cases of violence against children, by supporting the National Child Helpline, ALO 116. Regular reports prepared by the helpline team constitute reliable evidence to portray manifestations of violence against children and stimulate timely and comprehensive response to identified cases.

Supported by the Global Fund on Child Protection Online, UNICEF promoted a comprehensive national agenda for child online safety and acted as a broker for an alliance of partners, including the National Agency for Cyber Security, the Minister of Public Administration and Innovation, SACRP, communication industries and CSOs. The alliance will be institutionalized in 2016 as an inter-ministerial working group tasked to elaborate mechanisms and policies to address child protection online – being the first initiative of this kind in Albania. In November 2015, the Government of Albania was represented by the Deputy Minister of Interior at the

#WeProtect Abu-Dhabi Summit and joined the Statement of Action committing the country to preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse in the virtual space.

OUTCOME 3: Effective and efficient office and financial management. Information and technology systems and human resources practices are in place and contribute to the realization of UNICEF's commitments to the PoC in Albania, in compliance with UNICEF policies and procedures.

Analytical statement of progress:

Internal governance and management systems were strengthened to make more efficient use of UNICEF resources and be more effective in programme management for results for children. The CMT and CO statutory committees met regularly to monitor compliance with corporate performance benchmarks and guide necessary action. The Annual Management and Business Continuity Plans provided an up-to-date framework for UNICEF operations in Albania. The facility of the Management Dashboard provided a handy tool to keep track of the CO's Key Performance Indicators status and introduce immediate corrective measure, as appropriate.

UNICEF operations provided essential support to the programme delivery in managing cash transfers to partners and mobilizing necessary technical expertise through contracts. In 2015, DCT disbursements reached approximately US\$1 million, while the amount of purchase orders rose in relation to the technical expertise contracting was about US\$450,000. A combination of VISION-generated and Management Dashboard reports was used to monitor the performance of the contracts and timely liquidation of advances to partners. Continuous guidance was provided to the partners on management issues concerning UNICEF funds, in order to ensure compliance with new guidance on cooperation with CSOs and the upgraded PCA policy. Spot-checks, micro-assessments and audits of CSO partners were conducted, as planned.

The UNICEF programme in Albania continues to rely heavily on donor funds. The largest donors to UNICEF in Albania have been the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Austrian Development Agency, the UNICEF National Committee of Sweden and the Government of the United Kingdom. A joint United Nations fund-raising effort resulted in about US\$450,000 allocated to UNICEF from the Delivering Results Together Fund. Donor grants management and reporting fully complied with the CO performance standard.

The evaluation function in the CO has been strengthened with the recruitment, in mid-2015, of a Statistics and Monitoring Officer. UNICEF's standards in designing, managing and utilizing knowledge products have been increasingly enforced; participation of the national stakeholders in research and analysis was formalized through steering/working groups. The status of the CO Plans for Research, Independent Monitoring and Evaluation was reported at every CMT meeting, as a standard agenda item. Independent evaluation of the Delivering as One United Nations PoC conducted in 2015 informed the preparations for the next programme cycle of 2017–2021.

UNICEF continued to providing critical assistance to the Government of Albania in procuring vaccines for the national immunization programme, for a total amount of approximately US\$2.4 million. Also, antiretroviral medicines were procured through UNICEF.

The safety and security of UNICEF staff and CO premises continued to be constantly monitored during the year, in close coordination with UNDSS and the United Nations Security Management Team. Business continuity and emergency preparedness planning were informed by appropriate security and situation assessments.

The staff recruited as per the programme budget review decisions of 2014 joined UNICEF as planned. The RO provided valuable support in the job induction process. In June 2015, a staff retreat provided an opportunity for the team members to get to know one another better and to discuss a number of concerns reflected in the staff survey conducted in April.

OUTPUT 1: Effective and efficient governance and systems. The governance system ensured the appropriate sharing of information-wide consultations within the office, transparency, as well as informed and timely decisions. Weekly senior management meetings were held to further discuss strategic concerns, including those raised in the CMT or other statutory bodies.

Analytical statement of progress: With the 2015 Annual Management Plan developed and approved in the first quarter of 2015, the UNICEF CO's governance structures and systems have been reviewed and their compositions updated, as appropriate, to properly manage risks and achieve programme results. The CO's nine statutory committees have been re-composed and their respective terms of reference revised and approved on 2 April 2015. The Table of Authority was reviewed to reflect staffing changes and the segregation of duties within the CO. The Table was approved by the representative and the delegation and acceptance of the Delegation of Financial Signing authority shared and signed by the respective staff members.

CMT and SMT meetings have been taking place regularly, ensuring effective follow-up and monitoring of all planned activities, as per the Annual Management Plan and the Annual Work Plans. During the reporting period, the CMT met seven (7) times and the SMT met eight (8) times, monitoring the progress towards the objectives of the Annual Management Plan, particularly in terms of programme implementation and managing human and financial resources. The CMT and SMT have systematically monitored the defined management indicators and KPIs. The Programme Implementation Report (by Output) has been shared regularly within the CO on a weekly basis. The Management Dashboard information and alerts have been monitored regularly and corrective action taken quickly, to comply with the corporate performance standard and regional benchmarks. CMT deliberations were further communicated to all staff in general staff meetings. Intra-office communication channels included programme and operations management meetings.

Recommended security and business continuity procedures and practices are implemented by the CO, which continues to be compliant with the Minimum Operating Security Standards. The Business Continuity Plan was updated twice, in April and July 2015. The Plan's test and a fire drill exercise, which simulates a real-case scenario, were conducted in December 2015. Timely security advisories were provided to staff members during the reporting period.

OUTPUT 2: Financial resources and stewardship. Effective and efficient management and stewardship of financial resources, including administration, finance, office security and equipment maintenance and vehicles.

Analytical statement of progress:

Standard KPIs on financial and administrative controls continued to be reviewed at every CMT meeting. In 2015, the expenditure levels of allocated annual amounts of Regular and Other Resources reached 100 per cent. Financial controls were used to identify and prevent possible gaps. Daily review of the UNICEF Management Dashboard for the Albania CO helps to ensure that all alerts are addressed in due course. In addition, DCTs were closely monitored.

During the reporting period, the CO disbursed a total amount of US\$977,153 to 23 implementing partners. Only 1 implementing partner received more than US\$100,000 during the year, while

10 such partners (or 43 per cent) received between US\$20,000 and US\$100,000, and 12 (or 52 per cent) received less than US\$20,000. All fund requests and liquidations are processed under the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers modality, and the Funding Authorization and Certification of Expenditure form is universally used. The DCT liquidations management has improved in 2015 and timely liquidation was observed; on average, not more than two or three DCTs have been outstanding over a six-month period (still, below the KPI ceiling of 1 per cent).

Closing bank balance targets were met, with monthly bank reconciliations always submitted prior to the deadlines established by UNICEF headquarters. The mid- and end-year closure of accounts was run within the corporate deadlines. The CO has always ensured matching between the bank and VISION data. An assets inventory was performed in mid-2015; all items correspond to VISION records. The volume of small transactions remained significant: 326 out of 730 payments (45 per cent) corresponded to amounts less than US\$500.

In 2015, the Albania CO contracted a local branch of the Moore Stephens firm (holder of a global LTA) for micro-assessing and auditing of implementing partners. In total, 48 programmatic visits and 2 spot checks took place during the reporting period.

OUTPUT 3: Human capacity. Effective and efficient management of human capacity, including human resource management, staff development and learning, staff well-being and staff-related security costs.

Analytical statement of progress:

In 2015, the UNICEF CO in Albania has completed the recruitment process for the posts of a Child Protection (Justice for Children) Specialist (NO-C level), Statistics and Monitoring Officer (NO-B level) and Finance and Human Resources assistant (GS level). Also, the recruitment process for a Temporary Appointment Child Protection Specialist (P3 level) was initiated and is ongoing. In line with the programme budget review recommendations of 2014, the job descriptions of Programme Assistants were updated and classified.

The Information Community Technology Assistant continues to support the Montenegro Office remotely, based on the agreed 10 per cent cost-sharing arrangement. Following a request from headquarters, the Assistant was selected for an assignment of two months with the Global Shared Services Centre in Budapest. Servicing and management of entitlements of national and international staff was completed on time.

Although only 20 per cent of Performance Evaluation Reports had been duly completed by February 2015, total completion was ensured by the extended deadline of the end of March, supported by a close monitoring of the progress by the CMT.

A survey conducted in the CO in April 2015 revealed the general perception that UNICEF staff members in Albania enjoy a respectful relationship with one another. The main issues of concern were: uneven workload distribution, insufficient staff motivation and lack of active promotion of work-life balance measures. A staff retreat outside Tirana was organized in June 2015. An international consultant was hired for a team-building exercise and to address some of the above concerns.

Training and information sessions on HIV for United Nations staff and their family members have been organized by the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, based on the 10 minimum standards on HIV in the workplace. UNICEF staff in Albania are aware of staff counselling resources available locally, such as peer volunteers.

OUTPUT 4: Other cross-sectoral programme areas.

Analytical statement of progress:

Cross-cutting programme activities during the year primarily included the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the areas in central and southern Albania that suffered a series of floods during the heavy rain season in February 2015. Rehabilitation of schools and kindergartens in four locations, together with the establishment of Child-Friendly Spaces and summer camps, targeted more than 1,000 children. UNICEF also supplied selected educational materials to the most-affected schools, including 150 School-in-a-Box, early childhood development, science and math kits. In total, resources invested to respond to the post-floods emergency assistance amounted to US\$140,000, including the generous contribution of US\$40,000 mobilized by the UNICEF Office in Croatia from fund-raising efforts in relation to frequent floods in the region (more details are provided in the Humanitarian Assistance section of the Annual Report).

Document centre

Evaluation and research

Title	Sequence number	Type of report
Evaluation of the Government of Albania and United Nations Programme of Cooperation 2012–2016	2015/001	Evaluation

Other publications

Title
National Health Report
A Post-2015 World Fit for Children (in English and Albanian)
Children's Equitable Access to Justice
Convention on the Rights of the Child (child-friendly version in Albanian)
Convention on the Rights of the Child (pocket size)
Report of the National Convention of State Social Services.
National Report on the Situation of Children's Rights in Albania