Executive summary

The first year of the 2017-2021 Albania Country Programme for UNICEF witnessed remarkable progress in further strengthening of the country’s policies and institutional mechanisms aimed at ensuring the realization of children’s rights, especially of the most vulnerable and/or excluded. Some of the highlights are presented below.

The new Law on Child Rights and Protection was adopted in February 2017, and the Criminal Justice for Children Code was adopted in March 2017. Both were developed with extensive technical support from UNICEF Albania and in close consultation with a broad range of government and civil society partners. The new legislation (accompanied by the ongoing development of multiple sub-legal normative acts) has been made compatible with international standards in the area of justice for children and provides ample detail on mechanisms of child protection, including in relation to local service provision by child protection workers/units established in municipalities.

Efforts to address the harmful phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and abuse in the virtual space received an additional boost in May 2017, with UNICEF Albania being awarded a three-year grant by The Global Partnership to End Violence against Children to implement a comprehensive national action plan for a safer Internet for children in Albania. This was based on a number of fundamental legislative shifts already initiated with UNICEF’s support.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda was incrementally adapted to the Albanian context and actively supported by UNICEF and other United Nations (UN) agencies through the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) of 2017-2021. Joint UN efforts contributed to the preparation of the SDG national baseline report, the launching of the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda, and the adoption in December 2017 of a Parliamentary Resolution on Albania’s commitment to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. UNICEF technical and financial resources were critical for the implementation of Albania’s Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2017-2018, which will provide data for “domesticated” SDG target-setting.

The SDG motto “Leave No One Behind” provided the name for a new Joint UN Programme (made up of the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [UN Women]) aimed at helping Albanian municipal authorities to implement the promise made to citizens through the country’s newly adopted legislation on social and child protection. The focus is on community-based services to complement existing cash-based assistance schemes for vulnerable populations. The Programme will be implemented in 2018-2020, with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). A total of US$1.4 million will be made available for UNICEF-supported interventions. These will be framed by the ‘Social Pact for ImPact’, a mutual commitment of central and local (municipal) authorities to make Albania’s new legislation on reformed social care services work effectively for vulnerable children and families.
With UNICEF’s support, the national ‘Every Roma Child in Preschool’ initiative achieved a visible increase in Roma children’s access to early education, as 66 per cent of young Roma (three to six years of age) attended early learning services in the academic year 2016-2017, compared to only 26 per cent in 2011. Parenting skills of Roma families were strengthened and more than 200 parent clubs were established. Valuable evidence on local decision-makers’ attitudes, resources and overall social dynamics in multi-ethnic communities was generated.

A certain slow-down in programme implementation during the year was caused by the re-organization of the central Government (including re-distribution of ministerial portfolios), following the parliamentary elections in summer 2017. The capacity of municipalities to deliver on their newly defined mandates, including decentralized social services, remained limited. Massive and systematic training of civil servants is required to a scale far beyond existing rather fragmented project-bound initiatives. To encourage the new Government to consider cooperating with the UN through the harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) to government partners (complementing the current dominant modality of programme delivery through civil society organization [CSOs] or directly sub-contracted expertise), further follow-up is needed by the UN Country Team. These will capitalize on initial discussions launched in 2017.

In achieving results for children, UNICEF’s maintained critical collaborative partnerships with the State Agency for Child Rights Protection, Parliament, two independent human rights institutions – the People’s Advocate (Ombudsman) and Anti-Discrimination Commissioner – the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), and the Ministries of Justice, Interior and Finance. Partnership cooperation agreements with CSOs and with organizations of persons with disabilities continued to remain the key channel for delivering UNICEF’s technical assistance in policy development, child rights monitoring and capacity building, alongside contracting technical expertise services.

**Humanitarian assistance**

In December 2017, UNICEF Albania provided humanitarian supplies (winter clothes for children, basic health emergency kits, first aid kits, tents and baby blankets) to families affected by floods for a total value of US$107,000. Humanitarian assistance was distributed by UNICEF from its pre-positioned stocks based on requests and in close coordination with the Government of Albania (GoA). Despite the success of the distribution operation (conducted swiftly and smoothly, with clear targeting), concerns remained that the approach of the Government to emergencies is still reactive, with the necessary elements of solid preparedness and disaster risk reduction policies still missing at central and particularly local levels. The recurrent nature of some emergencies in the country calls for a much more systemic effort and response planning.

**Emerging areas of importance**

**Greater focus on the 2nd decade of life.** Based on exploratory work and consultations with UNICEF Country Programmes in the Europe and Central Asia region undertaken in 2017, UNICEF Albania committed to join a regional “U-Report” initiative aimed at mobilizing the voices of young people as regular transmitters of knowledge on issues concerning their lives, as well as on matters of general societal interest and value. Using information communication technology (ICT) to reach out to young citizens, the initiative will give them a voice and space for expression of their opinions and give a boost to youth-sensitive programming in Albania.

**Support “movements” to accelerate results for children.** The operationalisation of policy frameworks, designed with extensive support by UNICEF Albania and other UN agencies during
the 2012-2016 programme cycle, was at the centre of the UNICEF 2017-2021 Country Programme and the ‘Delivering as One’ UN effort. Improved governance, especially at the decentralized level of Albania’s administrative regions and municipalities, was the key objective of a new Joint UN ‘Leave No One Behind’ project aimed at converting the Government’s social inclusion targets into tangible and accelerated results at the local level.

The experience UNICEF gained through the implementation of its support to the Government-led reform of social care services in 2013-2017 will be particularly valuable, especially in terms of building the alliance of stakeholders – national and local alike – that took place under the motto ‘Social Pact for ImPact’. With UNICEF’s assistance in designing the format of the ‘Social Pact for ImPact’ movement, the Pact was symbolically signed in January-March 2017 by the central Government (represented by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth [MoSWY]) and leaders of the country’s 61 municipalities. The purpose of this initiative was to gain the support of local authorities for the ongoing social care system reforms, since they are expected to be the key players in planning and delivering social care services in their constituencies, as per Albania’s new Law on Social Care Services. UNICEF also invested in capacity building of local actors in social care planning and budgeting, as well as facilitated their interaction with non-governmental service providers (including the possible sub-contracting mechanisms).

**Financing for children.** In 2017, UNICEF continued to be increasingly involved in the issues of financing for children and child-relevant services. Budgeting issues were analysed in an in-depth manner in health (to pave the way for increased resource allocation for maternal, newborn and child health [MNCH] care), education (advocating for prioritization of early care and learning in state budgets), and social protection (exploring ways to mobilize resources for newly established social care services and overcome over-dependence on donor project funding).

**Greater social inclusion for children with disabilities.** UNICEF’s Country Programme for Albania 2017-2021 focuses on supporting the country’s efforts to accelerate the universal realization of child rights by fostering greater social inclusion, especially of the most vulnerable and excluded children such as children with disabilities. The undertaking of the Country Situational Analysis (SitAn) for children with disabilities was ongoing as of the end of 2017. It aims to contribute to the generation of evidence-based knowledge and identification of critical information gaps to stimulate dialogue on, and serve as a basis for, rights-based and child-centred/sensitive policy making. This process also marked a significant expansion of UNICEF’s partnership scope, which now includes the network of Albania’s disability persons organisations and growing collaboration with the European Disability Forum.

**Communication for development (C4D)** is another programmatic terrain that needs further technical enhancement and capacity building in Albania, although many organizations and donors regularly engage in communication initiatives, events and campaigns of all sorts. In 2017, UNICEF offered specialized technical assistance to partners to strengthen their ability to develop a solid C4D framework targeting the attitudes of parents and educators regarding the attendance of Roma children in mainstream schools. This recent experience will be valuable for outlining UNICEF Albania future C4D strategies.

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<th>Summary Notes and Acronyms</th>
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<td>ARV</td>
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<td>CMT</td>
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In 2017, capacity development remained one of the key programme delivery strategies for UNICEF in Albania. UNICEF Albania continued to be engaged with partners in identifying and addressing capacity gaps in data collection, evidence and results-based planning, budgeting, service delivery (based on case management and active outreach approaches) and monitoring across all thematic areas of UNICEF’s programmatic engagement. Training programmes continued to be delivered to service practitioners in health (on child nutrition status monitoring and data generation), education (on inclusive education classroom techniques and new early development standards) and child protection (on case management and multisectoral team work). Policy-makers from the social protection and justice sectors benefited from exposure to and direct participation in UNICEF-supported processes for developing Albania’s new social protection and juvenile justice strategies and legislation.

These capacity-building initiatives were implemented in close coordination with government structures at central (Institute for Public Health [IPH], Institute for Education Development [IED], State Social Services, State Agency for Child Rights Protection) and local levels (regional and municipal authorities). However, government-owned mechanisms for scaled up nationwide capacity building programmes do not yet exist in all sectors, leading to fragmentation of training resources and programmes and overall weak sustainability and consistency of efforts. The situation is aggravated by a relatively high civil service staff turnover in many government
entities. A positive example in this context is offered by the collaboration of UNICEF with the IED, as a result of which several of UNICEF-supported innovative approaches and programmes were formally accredited as part of the education professionals’ training curriculums. In addition, selected training programmes (including on-the-job capacity and qualifications upgrade) were brought to a nationwide scale by the IED.

**Evidence generation, policy dialogue and advocacy**

In 2017, UNICEF Albania supported evidence-generation exercises on the situation of children with disabilities; child poverty and multidimensional deprivations; and the child marriage phenomenon. These were undertaken in close coordination with national partners, as well as UNICEF knowledge networks and resources (including the Innocenti Research Centre in Florence). Albania’s annual Transformative Monitoring for Enhanced Equity (TransMonEE) report analysed national monitoring of children’s access to justice. UNICEF-supported analysis of the country’s investment in education revealed serious under-financing of the sector, especially in relation to early education, compared with internationally agreed standards. This paved the way for important policy debate and advocacy that will be continued in 2018.

Substantial resources (about US$230,000) were invested or committed by UNICEF in support of Albania’s DHS 2017-2018, including a cash component and supplies for various field work measurements. This DHS round (managed by UNFPA) is critically important for filling a data gap formed since the last survey of 2008-2009.

UNICEF was an active contributor to the UN Country Team (UNCT) effort in contextualizing the SDG agenda in Albania: a baseline assessment was conducted by UNCT on “domesticated” SDG targets and their measurability. Several high-profile advocacy events were organized jointly by the UN agencies to raise public awareness on SDGs. UNICEF was active in fostering linkages between the SDG framework and measurement of progress in various child-specific indicators, as envisaged by Albania’s National Plan of Action for Children 2016-2020 and the recently amended (expanded) scope of the country’s official statistics.

**Partnerships**

Programme implementation under the ‘Delivering as One’ (DaO) format in Albania in 2017-2021 continued to be based on a well-established partnership mechanism between the UN agencies and the Government, providing space for joint action planning, monitoring and reporting through UNSDF Output and Outcome Working Groups. Theme-specific steering committees were also supported and coordinated collaborative arrangements between national stakeholders, UN agencies and international development partners.

The SDG motto ‘Leave No One Behind’ provided the name for a new Joint UN Programme (made up of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women) aimed at fostering social inclusion action at the local level. This will help Albanian municipal authorities and civil society actors implement the promise made to citizens through the country’s recently adopted legislation on social and child protection. The focus will be on community-based services to complement the existing cash-based assistance schemes for vulnerable populations. The Programme will be implemented in 2018-2020, with financial support from the SDC. A total of US$.4 million will be made available for UNICEF-supported interventions.

In 2017, Joint UN Annual Work Plans remained the key instrument for formalising and monitoring partnership arrangements with the Government. UNICEF-specific Plans (in their internal versions) proved to be useful for overall budget management and progress monitoring
purposes, with their scope and formalization with the Government to be informed by the latest UNICEF procedure on workplanning.

In the context of a regional European Union-funded IPA-II project, a new and promising partnership also began to emerge with the European Disability Forum, the lead European platform advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. This partnership also facilitated a significant expansion of UNICEF’s active role in the development of the national disability agenda.

External communication and public advocacy

In 2017, UNICEF Albania used the momentum of several global communication and public advocacy initiatives to contextualize messaging for the situation and advocacy needs in Albania. For example, the #Early moments matter global campaign was echoed through use of social media platforms. The #ENDviolence campaign materials were used to strengthen the voice of UNICEF in advocating for the rights of children to be protected from various forms of abuse and exploitation, including in the virtual space.

Independent advocacy remained a key strategy to encourage and/or maintain political will and government commitment to policy upgrades and sustainable action. During the year, multiple opportunities presented themselves to articulate the position of UNICEF on various child-related issues, drawing from UNICEF global and regional experience and adjusting UNICEF’s messaging to the local context. Press releases and interventions of the UNICEF Representative at multiple forums, events and workshops covered such themes as protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation; situation of children with disabilities; children in residential care, in conflict or in contact with the law; restorative justice; access to quality education; and the role of parents in promoting socially inclusive education system, among others.

Having been present on social media since 2014, UNICEF Albania had gained 10,111 followers on Facebook and 1,971 followers on Instagram by the end of 2017. Based on the positive experience of 2016, when UNICEF Albania’s presence in Albania’s media space was monitored on a daily basis by a contracted specialized company, a decision was made to continue with this arrangement in 2018.

For additional detail, please see the relevant Output Result summary of the Report.

South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation

In 2017, UNICEF Albania continued to actively engage in experience exchanges within the Europe and Central Asia region on social protection and juvenile justice issues, as part of the reference groups in the thematic areas of the Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda. Cooperation (including multi-country initiatives coordinated by the UNICEF Regional Office) expanded in health, education, child protection and social inclusion of Roma. South-South cooperation was promoted among key stakeholders through their participation in regional conferences and workshops on issues such as national statistics on children; home visiting for child health, protection and development; early learning; inclusive education; school drop-out prevention; protecting children from violence; and social protection for children.

Identification and promotion of innovation

Since 2017, UNICEF Albania, in cooperation with Harvard University (offering pro bono expertise to UNICEF), has been exploring innovative ways to use ICT to expand access to
quality learning for children in isolated rural areas of the country. In addition, a sub-regional U-Report initiative is planned to be tested in Albania in 2018 to give young people a public voice using ICT on issues affecting their lives. Having benefited from a new US$1 million grant from the End Violence Global Fund, UNICEF Albania continued in 2017 to expand its support for national efforts to combat child abuse online, a relatively new child protection area for Albania. Close collaboration with the Fund’s Headquarters, UNICEF’s Innocenti Centre and UNICEF Montenegro contributed to effective absorption of globally and regionally identified best practices.

Support to integration and cross-sectoral linkages

UNICEF Albania’s active involvement in the formulation of the country’s national Action Plan for Child Rights and Protection for 2016-2020 (also referred to as the Agenda for Children and adopted in April 2017) exemplified the promotion of a cross-sectoral approach to child-related issues. UNICEF provided extensive technical and financial support to the Agenda’s drafting process, having ensured its highly participatory and consultative nature. All key line ministries and CSOs, as well as UNFPA, UN Women, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) were active contributors to the Agenda’s content. Importantly, a multi-sectoral approach to the issues of disability, migration, adolescent health and gender were embedded in the Agenda. A detailed monitoring framework and costing estimate (with 60 per cent of the Agenda interventions funded from the state budget) are expected to facilitate its effective implementation in terms of matching resources with results.

The health, social protection and child protection portfolios were merged under the responsibility of a newly established Ministry of Health and Social Protection as of September, 2017. This is expected to provide additional opportunities for UNICEF to promote linkages between health and protection issues, especially when addressing cases of violence against children, as well as promoting early identification of disabilities among children.

Although the latest Albania’s SitAn (2014) was not designed as an explicitly integrated analysis, a rather strong commonality of barriers and bottlenecks across sectors was revealed at the time. In 2017, a SitAn on children with disabilities was launched. It was designed in an explicitly and consistently integrated way to look at barriers and bottlenecks across sectors, and, most importantly, to bring in the voices of children with disabilities and their families as a central qualitative component of this exercise.

Service delivery

In 2017, UNICEF Albania continued to assist in reinforcing systems/accountability structures in health (MNCH care services), social protection (local social care planning), early and inclusive education (revised curriculum and re-training of teachers on new standards) and child protection (case management). Few elements of service delivery through partner civil society organizations (CSOs) remained focused on social inclusion of Roma children through access to early learning and education. Support was also provided to national stakeholders in strengthening national information systems to monitor and report on service delivery to the most vulnerable (in the health and education sectors).

UNICEF was increasingly involved in budgeting of these services and identifying their financing mechanisms. For example, a budgeting tool was developed in 2017 to inform the Mid-Term Budgeting Framework of financial needs for preventive MNCH services. UNICEF continued its collaboration with the State Health Inspectorate as well as with other national inspection bodies tasked to monitor and review the quality, timeliness and effective reach of services.
On its own, UNICEF Albania was not involved in direct service delivery in any sector except health, where UNICEF facilitates the procurement of vaccines and antiretroviral (ARV) medicines through the UNICEF procurement services modality, based on a memorandum of understanding with Albania’s Ministry of Health.

**Human rights-based approach to cooperation**

Albania’s Country Programme Document for 2017-2021 and country programme management plan fully reflect human rights as a core accountability at the leadership and programme staff levels. Human rights principles are fully integrated into the new country programme, including: alignment to national development targets and Albania’s human/child rights obligations; emphasis on accountability of duty-bearers and democratic oversight in relation to their actual performance; supporting the ability of rights-holders to claim their rights; and highlighting inequities through disaggregated data.

In 2017, UNICEF Albania formally committed to supporting the GoA in preparing the state party periodic report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the Committee on Rights of the Child (postponed for submission until September 2018). A preliminary mapping of country progress in comparison with the latest set of Concluding Observations (2012) was conducted.

During the year, UNICEF provided support to the People’s Advocate (Ombudsman) Office in Albania, in strengthening capacity in data/situation monitoring and reporting on child rights violations in various settings. In the last quarter of 2017, UNICEF led and facilitated, on behalf of the UNCT, the preparations for a major national conference of the People’s Advocate. Presentations made during this high-profile forum included issues related to a child rights legislative framework; equitable access to justice; children affected by migration, in residential care and in detention facilities; child-relevant statistics; child-sensitive budgeting; addressing violence against children and women; gender equality; and empowerment of women. Cooperation between various branches of the government, legislature and civil society was also discussed.

**Gender equality**

The UNSDF for 2017-2021 was informed by the common country assessment, which included a special gender-focused analysis of the situation and challenges in Albania. Gender gaps and under-empowerment of women were identified among the major drawbacks of Albania’s current socio-economic development model.

UNICEF Albania has a gender focal point who during the reporting period was among the first cohort of UNICEF gender focal points to be accredited (programme to complete in 2018). UNICEF is contributing to gender-specific results of the UNSDF 2017-2021, while also participating actively in the UN Gender Thematic Working Group. During the year, UNICEF Albania continued to contribute to the global gender priorities, as outlined below.

To promote gender-responsive adolescent health, the system of child protection work was strengthened, based on case management and active outreach, to identify and respond to cases of gender-based violence. Child protection units (CPUs), the national ALO 116 Child Helpline and the ISIGURT online platform (www.isigurt.al) benefited from UNICEF’s continuous support, to ensure protective services to vulnerable children, with a particular focus on girls.
In relation to ending child marriage, a joint UNICEF-UNFPA qualitative survey was implemented on knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) and social norms regarding the child marriage phenomenon in Albania (due for completion in 2018).

The empowerment of girls and women was systematically promoted in all UNICEF-supported interventions. Gender equality was a particular focus in social protection (access to decision-making on social protection benefits), monitoring of the rights of boys and girls, judicial procedures affecting boys and girls, protection from gender-based violence, revision of the education curriculum, capacity-building programmes for school headmasters, and addressing family roles/stereotypes and parenting practices, particularly by enabling home-visiting trainers (health workers) to build their knowledge on gender issues in early childhood and parenting.

**Environmental sustainability**

As per the new Albania UNSDF for 2017-2021, UNICEF committed to contributing to the outcome result addressing environment and climate change. Disaster risk reduction in schools and environmental education were used as entry points in addressing environment-related risks for children, with UNICEF working hand-in-hand with other UN agencies.

This engagement capitalized on the achievements of the previous 2012-2016 programme cycle, during which UNICEF-supported environmental education programmes had become part of the new school curriculum. The Education for Sustainable Development standards for grades 1-12, formally endorsed in 2016, are based on the experience of the child-led environmental education (CLEEN) programme implemented by UNICEF in 2009-2012. Environmental awareness was included as one of the seven key competencies of schoolchildren, in the section of ‘competences for life, entrepreneurship and environment’. Albania’s Early Learning and Development Standards and the preschool curriculum (developed with UNICEF’s central role in the provision of technical advice and financial resources) are also explicitly sensitive to making young children aware of environmental considerations and sustainability challenges.

In 2017, UNICEF also supported the development of School Guidelines for Disaster Risk Preparedness (currently in the process of approval by the MoEYS) and updated the CLEEN methodology in alignment with the new, competency-based national curriculums. Capacity-building support was offered to local departments of education to revitalize this methodology and ultimately use it in primary schools and in teacher training.

Based on the analysis of UNICEF Albania’s greenhouse and carbon emissions (in 2016), a response strategy was developed and implemented during the year, including optimizing the heating/cooling temperatures in the office, upgrading of the lighting system with energy-saving light-emitting diode (LED) lamps, and minimizing the usage of hot water. The cost of utilities was reduced by 19 per cent compared to 2016. A water and energy consumption audit conducted in 2017 will inform further action in 2018.

UNICEF is part of the UN-Tirana municipality initiative of promoting biking instead of car usage. About 50 trees have been planted in the main park of the Albanian capital to offset the environmental footprint of the UN agencies car fleet.

**Effective leadership**

Operations and programme management systems were further strengthened in 2017 to ensure a continuously enabling environment for delivering results for children in a risk-informed, efficient and effective manner. The country management team (CMT) monitored performance
through the various tools available (including UNICEF Manager’s Dashboard and Key Performance Indicators [KPI] Scorecard), which aim to encourage continuous improvement and sensitize each member of the Albania team on their individual accountabilities for contributing to UNICEF Albania’s overall performance management goals. Bottlenecks were addressed to put improvement and corrective measures in place as a team effort. Performance was further managed in accordance with staff supervisory roles and through established office oversight mechanisms.

The country management team as well as other committees met regularly, ensuring effective follow-up and monitoring of all planned activities, as per the targets identified in the annual management plan and annual work plans. Financial implementation reports (by Output) were generated from the Management Dashboard and shared on a weekly basis. Standard corporate KPIs were reviewed at every country management team meeting as a standing agenda item.

The UNICEF Albania risk library was updated, based on an office-wide discussion and participatory exercise. Risks associated with the direct cash transfers (DCT) management by civil society organizations and government partners were identified and addressed with mitigation measures, as per the UNICEF HACT policy.

### Financial resources management

Standard key performance indicators on financial controls continued to be reviewed at every country management team meeting, in addition to regular monitoring of alerts displayed on the UNICEF Manager’s Dashboard. The expenditure levels of the 2017 allocations of regular and other resources (OR) reached 100 per cent. The “greening and accessibility” funds were implemented at 92 per cent for the LED lighting project, and at 100 per cent to improve the office’s accessibility for persons with disabilities. In 2017, UNICEF Albania disbursed about US$208,000 to implementing partners in DCTs, using the HACT modality and funding authorisation and certification of expenditure (FACE) forms. The DCT liquidations management improved, although capacity gaps remain in many partner organizations. The reluctance of government partners to accept UNICEF DCTs (due to cumbersome national Treasury procedures) remained one of the key barriers to higher absorption of funds.

UNICEF Albania operated successfully with the Global Shared Service Centre (GSSC) on invoice processing and master data management; 98 percent of the UNICEF Albania interactions/transactions with the GSSC were within the established performance and timeliness standards. The return rate of incomplete/erroneous submissions to GSSC was at ten per cent in 2017, still above the maximum five percent target.

Accurate cash flow forecasting and careful consideration of the exchange rate fluctuations allowed UNICEF Albania to assure currency gains of US$ 3,309.

All monthly, mid and end-year reconciliations and closures of accounts were effected within the first three days of the month, and alignment of the bank and Virtual Integrated System of Information (VISION) data was always ensured. An inventory of assets was performed in October with all items corresponding to the VISION records. Compared to 2016, the volume of small transactions increased, with 291 of 430 payments (67 per cent) for amounts less than US$500.

### Fundraising and donor relations
By the end of 2017, the total allotment of Other Resources (OR) to the country programme had reached US$1.8 million, with another approximately US$2 million committed by donors. The total is equivalent to 33 per cent of the Executive Board-approved US$12 million OR ceiling for the five-year programme cycle. UNICEF Albania will prioritize the development and implementation of its fund-raising strategy in early 2018 to ensure that planned results in all programme areas are supported by adequate financial resources.

In 2017, UNICEF donors to Albania included the Governments of Sweden, Switzerland and the United States, as well as the European Commission. Valuable resources were offered by UNICEF National Committees of Sweden and the United Kingdom. In close collaboration with the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, UNICEF Albania benefited from the donor support of Deutsche Telekom and The David Beckham UNICEF Fund. Reforming Albania’s system of social care services, promoting early education and social inclusion of Roma, combating violence against children and ensuring their internet safety were among the thematic areas that benefited from the generosity of UNICEF donors (see UNICEF Transparency Portal for details: http://open.unicef.org/map/).

Timely utilization of OR grants was closely monitored. The only grant extension request submitted in 2017 was related to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) contribution to the One UN Coherence Fund and the agreed arrangement of the donor with the UNCT.

All seven donor reports due for submission in 2017 were prepared and sent on time. The quality assurance mechanism included the review of draft reports by the Deputy Representative and review/clearance by the Representative. Quality review by the Regional Office included, in 2017, the final report to the SDC detailing UNICEF support to the Government in reforming the national system of social care services in 2013-2016.

**Evaluation and research**

In 2017, UNICEF Albania completed a summative evaluation of the three-country project ‘Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion for Roma Children through Early Childhood Development and Education in Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia’, funded by the Austrian Development Agency. Despite the challenging nature of the task to lead and coordinate the implementation of a multi-country evaluation, the UNICEF Albania team succeeded in producing a report that received an overall “satisfactory” rating (scoring 3.45 points of a maximum 4.00) by UNICEF’s global quality assurance facility. An appropriate management response was developed by the programme section and uploaded to the corporate plans for research, impact monitoring and evaluation (PRIME) platform.

In 2017, PRIME continued to be used as a strategic planning instrument to prioritize resources on critical knowledge generation exercises in order to contribute to programme learning, understanding of emerging issues, and identification of long-term strategic needs. Over the year, PRIME was regularly updated and reviewed, with progress of various research activities diligently monitored by the country management team.

Standard operating procedures for research/studies/evaluation, approved recently by the Regional Office, were disseminated among programme specialists to encourage strong management of evidence-generation activities. Particular attention was paid to the procedures of appropriate internal and external reviews of draft reports. UNICEF team members were
extensively engaged in capacity development of implementing partners/collaborators, with a view of ensuring high-quality knowledge on children.

**Efficiency gains and cost savings**

In 2017, UNICEF Albania succeeded in reducing the cost of utilities (19 per cent compared to the previous year) and stationery (44 per cent). The reduction in the expenditure for utilities was attributed to the installation of LED lights in the office, as well as to more economical use of energy and water. Thanks to continuous use of modern technologies and software packages, allowing free-of-charge communication tools (such as Skype for Business and Viber) to be installed on all UNICEF mobile devices, as well as tariff reduction, communication expenses dropped by about 11 per cent compared with 2016. Two internet providers maintained their discounted prices for UNICEF of about 10-15 per cent. Nevertheless, the expenses for Internet are expected to increase due to the need of enhanced internet traffic capacity to support the implementation of the LIGHT pilot.

As in previous years, UNICEF Albania continued to recycle paper, plastic and cartridges by involving a CSO supporting Roma communities. Common UN long-term arrangements (LTAs) for fuel supply, travel, printing, stationery procurement, design and video production, security, mobile communication, translation and interpretation, and events management were used by UN agencies, including UNICEF. One LTA was managed by UNICEF in 2017. As in previous years, UNICEF staff members were requested to devote considerable time to managing coordination meetings and exchanges with other UN agencies. Efficiency gains from joint UN operational arrangements – in terms of working time usage – are not evident without a dedicated in-depth analysis.

**Supply management**

The value of goods and services procured by UNICEF Albania in 2017 reached about US$549,000 (as per the data generated from the Supply Dashboard on 10.01.2018), with programme and operational needs (goods and services included) making up approximately 70 per cent and 30 per cent of the total respectively (this distribution is based on the office’s records and manual calculations). In absolute terms, programme delivery through procurement of services exceeded DCTs commitments to partners by approximately two times.

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<tr>
<th>Procurement for own office</th>
<th>US$548,694.76</th>
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<tr>
<td>Programmatic supplies including PS-funded</td>
<td>US$63,044.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Channelled via programme</td>
<td>US$63,044.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational supplies</td>
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<td>Services (for both Programme and Operations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL procurement performed by the office</td>
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<td>Programmatic supplies including PS-funded</td>
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<td>Channelled via regular procurement services</td>
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<td>Channelled via programme</td>
<td>US$80,713.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational supplies</td>
<td>US$72,953.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>US$412,696.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International freight</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL supplies and services received (i.e. irrespective of procurement location)</td>
<td>US$3,245,769.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total inventory in controlled warehouses</td>
<td>US$119,072.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-positioned</td>
<td>US$119,072.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL supplies managed in UNICEF Albania’s controlled warehouses</td>
<td>US$119,072.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2017, UNICEF Albania continued to assist the national health authorities in procuring ARV medicines and vaccines valued at US$2.7 million through UNICEF procurement services. The vaccine procurement is based on a long-term memorandum of understanding signed by the Ministry of Health and UNICEF Supply Division.

UNICEF Albania ensured the timely completion of all VISION activities related to the verification of accuracy of equipment inventories and intangibles. This is critical for the successful closure of accounts for 2017 and confirmation that the office asset records are correct.

**Security for staff and premises**

Safety and security of UNICEF staff and office premises continued to be constantly monitored during the year, in close coordination with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the UN Security Management Team. The UN Security Plan, Fire Plan, Disaster Recovery Plan, Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan and the Business Continuity Plan were regularly updated in 2017 to reflect changes in the office staff list, including staff from other officers on stretch assignments to UNICEF Albania, as per UN/UNICEF guidance and standards. Moreover, UNICEF Albania updated its warden system accordingly (including staff on temporary and stretch assignments).

Due consideration was given to the safety and security of staff members, the premises, including their secure access, and the overall environment. The surveillance system to monitor access to the UNICEF Albania office was upgraded, and a new software for video-monitoring was installed. As per recommendations and the Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) compliance standards, three panic buttons were purchased and distributed to staff. A new rescue and evacuation chair was purchased, as well as one defibrillator. Fire extinguishers were replaced accordingly. Basic security in the field training was completed by staff members as per the established corporate policy.

Security advisories were provided to UNICEF staff in a timely manner, based on UNDSS monitoring of the situation in the country and the capital. UNICEF Albania continues to comply with the MOSS. In 2017, all staff members participated in training conducted by UNDSS for UN personnel on “active shooter incident response”.

The replacement of the office emergency evacuation ladder was postponed until 2018, subject to obtaining a required construction permit from the local authorities.

**Human resources**

Management of human resources continued to be a prominent feature of UNICEF Albania’s performance in 2017, in light of the tasks accompanying the onboarding of a newly recruited international child protection specialist and the recruitment of a national child protection officer. In addition, consultants were identified and mobilized to ensure that UNICEF Albania’s technical expertise and capacity correspond to the programmatic ambition of the new country programme.
Staff exposure to other UNICEF country offices and NY Headquarters experience was promoted, as UNICEF Albania welcomed three colleagues on stretch assignments to Tirana during 2017 and released three staff members (one in the general service category and two in the professional category) to work on stretch assignments in other locations. These opportunities were highly appreciated and welcomed by all staff members involved as a unique way to learn about the diversity of UNICEF programmes and work.

The staff members’ performance evaluation reports were drafted and finalized on time in 2017, in conformity with the established regional and global deadlines. The results of the Global Staff Survey (GSS) showed that UNICEF Albania has room for improvement in some areas, such as overall job satisfaction, availability of career development opportunities, satisfaction with work environment and adequacy of knowledge sharing. Concerns revealed by the GSS were discussed extensively at the country management team meetings, and an action plan was finalized by the Staff Association Board by the end of 2017, with input from all staff.

**Effective use of information and communication technology**

In 2017, UNICEF Albania migrated to LIGHT infrastructure, reducing not only the environmental footprint and electricity and maintenance costs of its data centre equipment, but also the degree of the office’s reliance on local infrastructure. This in turn has a direct effect on business continuity.

In addition, the internal telephone system was discontinued, with the office migrating to Skype for Business telephony, which provides phone connectivity to every staff member, no matter where they are physically located. This technology was implemented without incurring any cost to the office, while increasing mobility and reachability of the staff, whenever needed.

The official UNICEF Albania website was enriched by the introduction of an Albanian version of its webpages in order to increase the number of readers of UNICEF online materials. The social media channels continued to be maintained with the HootSuite technology, enabling easier and faster posting of new content, while tracking other relevant social media sites.

**Programme Components from RAM**

**ANALYSIS BY OUTCOME AND OUTPUT RESULTS**

**OUTCOME 1  Strengthened Governance for Equity and Social Inclusion**

Outcome Result: By 2021, children in situations of particular vulnerability enjoy equitable access to quality health, education and social protection services supported by effective governance mechanisms

Analytical statement of progress

For the first year of the new Country Programme cycle of 2017-2021, the Outcome 1 annual result was established as follows (as reflected in the Annual Management Plan for 2017):

- **By end-2017, tools reflecting new norms and standards for planning, budgeting and delivery of inclusive services in health, education and social protection sectors (including the enforcement and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms) are packaged and validated – thus paving the ground for further scaling up of upgraded service standards, based on a renewed commitment to social inclusion by the new GoA**
The achievement of the result was planned to be supported by a combination of strategies, including:

- validation and dissemination of knowledge obtained from the documented programmes and initiatives implemented during the programme cycle of 2012-2016; strengthened understanding of the local governance specificity, by sector;
- mobilization (in consultation with UNICEF NY Headquarters) of high-quality technical expertise to develop missing elements of child-sensitive governance mechanisms at central and particularly local levels;
- identification and promotion of cross-sectoral cohesion opportunities, using case management and community outreach techniques as entry points to systematically map and effectively address situations of particular vulnerability of children and families;
- mainstreaming the issues of disability, gender- and/or ethnicity-based exclusion into UNICEF-supported analysis, work plans and messaging;
- advocacy with the central and local government authorities in support of domestically resourced sustainable mechanisms to scale up the operationalisation of innovative approaches and techniques generated through UNICEF-supported projects; and
- raising public awareness of both duty-bearers and rights-holders of the new child rights-focused and equity-sensitive normative frameworks and services.

Several indicators were agreed upon with national partners, to measure annual progress towards the overall Outcome objective, namely:

- by end-2017, at least two (or 16 per cent) of Albania’s 12 regions were expected to have developed equity-focused MNCH quality improvement plans.

  The actual status achieved by December 2017 – donor funding has been mobilized by UNICEF in 2017 to assist a selected number of regions with MNCH quality improvement plans in 2018;

- in at least three regions (out of 12), mechanisms will be designed and operational to prevent and respond to school drop-out and out-of-school children phenomena.

  The actual status achieved by December 2017 – appropriate mechanisms were developed, approved by the MoEYS and operationally tested in Tirana, Korca and Berat regions; national definitions of drop-out and school absenteeism were revised and aligned with international standards;

- secondary legislation defines referral mechanisms between the social cash transfers system and social care services.

  The actual status achieved by December 2017 – political commitment was made at the sub-national level to institute social protection coordination mechanisms as the Social Pact declaration of commitment was signed by all 61 municipalities in Albania. The development of secondary legislation reached an advanced stage, with draft normative documents available for expert consultations.

More details on progressive developments in the thematic areas are provided in the Output-related sections below.
By 2021, healthcare policymakers and service providers are equipped with knowledge, guidance, tools and mechanisms to effectively scale up and implement the new MNCH normative framework, focused on the most marginalized groups.

**Analytical statement of progress**

Continuing its advocacy for adequate resource allocation for MNCH services, UNICEF Albania supported the dissemination of key findings from the MNCH costing analysis conducted in 2016, and facilitated consensus on further actions among key stakeholders representing health authorities at the national and local levels, as well as the UN agencies. A budgeting tool was developed in 2017 to inform the Mid-Term Budgeting Framework of financial needs for preventive MNCH services.

UNICEF supported partners to strengthen capacities for continuous monitoring of child nutrition status, based on administrative and DHS data. The Ministry of Health and the IPH were supported to strengthen quality assurance mechanisms through a special web-based data collection system and training of 44 health statistics personnel representing all 12 regions of the country. On-the-job capacity building included supportive supervision, coaching, review of interim data reports, feedback for quality improvement, and troubleshooting of problems with data collection, analysis and reporting. This experience was summarized in an analytical technical paper on the status of Albania’s child nutrition monitoring system. In the longer term, this intervention will contribute to further strengthening of the national health information system, and provide a necessary knowledge base to monitor the SDG indicators that UNICEF is a custodian of.

Similarly crucial for SDG monitoring and knowledge generation overall was the partnership of UNICEF with the Ministry of Health, the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), IPH, and UNFPA, in the implementation of Albania’s DHS 2017-2018. In 2017, UNICEF provided technical and financial support for planning the survey; revising the survey tools and implementation plan; securing equipment and materials for the biomarkers, including anthropometry, anaemia and iodized salt; and field work logistics. In addition to the core questions on child health and nutrition, the DHS tool included tailor-made questions on early childhood development and child protection.

Following UNICEF’s advocacy for an enabling environment for successful breastfeeding and technical support, the Council of the Ministers and the Minister of Health approved, respectively, a Decree on Breastmilk Substitutes (BMS) labelling (order No. 116, dated 15.02.2017) and a ministerial order regulating the contents and approval of infant and young child feeding (IYCF) education materials (order no 179, dated 13.04.2017). These by-laws complete the revised legislative framework for BMS marketing, along with Law #53, approved in 2016. During 2017, the State Health Inspectorate issued three administrative measures for violations of these laws.

In April 2017, UNICEF was the main partner of the Ministry of Health, alongside the World Health Organization (WHO), in celebrating European Immunization Week. This opportunity was used to advocate for addressing the emerging vaccine hesitancy phenomenon, among other issues. Another important advocacy platform was offered by Albania’s annual Public Health Conference, supported jointly with other UN agencies and international development partners. At this event, the experience of UNICEF and its partners in the areas of home visiting, early intervention and IYCF was shared.
In 2017, UNICEF continued to offer procurement services to the Government by supplying childhood vaccines and ARV medicines, in close interaction with UNICEF Supply Division in Copenhagen.

**OUTPUT 2**

1.2 By 2021, education sector policymakers and practitioners at central and local levels are equipped with knowledge, guidance, tools and mechanisms to effectively implement and scale up the reformed, Early Learning and Development Standards-based and equity-sensitive, early learning education framework

**Analytical statement of progress**

In April 2017, the MoEYS and IED, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNICEF, launched SDG 4 on Education at a high-level event to promote awareness of the SDG 2030 Agenda, including the goal to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. The occasion was used to present Albania’s Education Policy Review report and reconfirm the commitment of the GoA to an equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Building on Albania’s new Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) developed with UNICEF’s technical assistance in previous years, a national preschool education curriculum framework and a corresponding programme for teachers’ professional development were prepared and approved by the MoEYS. Collaboration with the Ministry continues in order to strengthen teachers’ skills in mastering the new curriculums using pre- and in-service training channels.

With UNICEF support, the national “Every Roma Child in Preschool” initiative achieved a visible increase in Roma children’s access to early education, as the percentage of young Roma (three to six years of age) attending early learning services increased to 66 per cent in the academic year 2016-2017, compared with only 26 per cent in 2011. The project contributed to strengthened parenting capacities of Roma families. A special parenting education toolkit was designed and more than 200 parent clubs were established. The initiative continued to generate evidence on local decision-making (attitudes, resources, social dynamics), which is important for future early childhood development programming. In 2017, communication for development training was provided to government and CSO partners within a #shkollaime=shkollajote (#yourschool=myschool) campaign, to combat discriminatory social norms and attitudes and support inclusion of Roma children in mainstream schools.

Albania’s Inclusive Education Teacher Profile was made part of the effective leadership training programme that reached 360 school headmasters by the end of 2017. With UNICEF support, inclusive education teacher training modules were tested in four of the 12 regions of Albania and awarded a full-fledged accreditation by the MoEYS in December 2017. Schools were assisted to design and implement “inclusive school” action plans. In cooperation with the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, a regional workshop on inclusive education as a corner stone of pre-service teacher training was conducted in June 2017. Faulty from six Albanian universities attended.

UNICEF continued to facilitate the implementation of the existing inter-sectoral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on out-of-school children. The guide on the roles of each actor to implement the MoU was used to develop capacities of local authorities and service practitioners all over the country; 1,900 stakeholders received 6,168 text reminders and awareness messages regarding their roles in the implementation of the agreement. UNICEF support was
also crucial for testing (in Tirana, Berat and Korca regions) and approval of a mechanism for early identification of school drop-out, as well as for the nationwide adoption, from September 2017, of new definitions of drop-out and school absenteeism aligned with international standards.

A UNICEF-supported analysis of costs of under-investment in education triggered a national debate on the need for higher and more efficient education budgets, contributing to increased budgets for the most vulnerable children.

**OUTPUT 3 1.3 By 2021, social protection policymakers and practitioners are equipped with knowledge, guidance, tools and mechanisms to effectively implement the reformed social protection policy (combining cash assistance with decentralized care services)**

**Analytical statement of progress**

In 2017, UNICEF continued to support the GoA in establishing coordination mechanisms for social protection and making them functional for children and families. The adoption of the Law on Social Care Services in November 2016 set the foundations for a system of integrated services to be planned and implemented at the local level for vulnerable families and children. However, there is a challenge translating such legislation into concrete action. Therefore, the focus of UNICEF’s assistance during 2017 was on supporting national partners’ action planning and undertaking gradual but steady steps towards making the system work.

In early 2017, the MoSWY was supported by UNICEF to design a ‘Social Pact for ImPact’ campaign (the motto being ‘Let’s make a Social Pact to achieve ImPact’) aimed at bringing on board social care system reforms in all of the country’s 61 municipalities. This included a symbolic signing of a formal Social Pact for ImPact Commitment to implement the Law on Social Care Services and build the necessary structures and systems. Between January and March 2017, the Pact was signed between the central Government (represented by the MoSWY) and leaders of the 61 municipalities that are expected to be key players in planning and delivering social care services. The Social Pact seeks to coordinate efforts of all actors, namely the central Government, local governments and international development partners, to create the necessary environment for the establishment and operation of integrated social services tailored to the needs of people in various social categories. At present, it represents a mechanism to bring together all agencies operating in this field, with a view to ensuring that each citizen has equal access to services offered by the state and/or other providers that have obtained licenses for such purposes.

The signing of the Social Pact covered the country, with 70 new services established, in particular in 27 municipalities where no social services had previously been offered. Future actions will include the completion in 2018 of secondary legislation to support the implementation of the Law on Social Care Services (with extensive support from UNICEF), establishment of appropriate social protection structures in municipalities, and the recruitment of qualified personnel, thus allowing the establishment and functioning of integrated social protection programmes for families and children. Starting from 2018, this work will be further enhanced through a coordinated effort with UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women, under the umbrella of a Joint UN “Leave No One Behind” project funded by the Government of Switzerland.

Last but not least, UNICEF’s advocacy aimed to place child poverty concerns higher on the national development agenda. Work is underway, in collaboration with INSTAT, to understand how the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data (which will be released in 2018)
can be further disaggregated and analysed so that better data on child poverty and different monetary and non-monetary deprivations are made public and can inform policy decisions in social protection and other sectors.

OUTCOME 2 Protection and Justice for Children
Outcome Result: By 2021, children's rights to justice and protection from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect are effectively supported by a comprehensive system of multisectoral prevention and response mechanisms

Analytical statement of progress
For the first year of the new Country Programme cycle of 2017-2021, the Outcome 2 annual result was established as follows (as reflected in the Annual Management Plan for 2017):

- By end-2017, the building blocks of the national child protection system are consolidated, with the Child Rights and Protection Law and the Criminal Justice for Children Code adopted and by-laws and normative standards defining their enforcement mechanisms developed; tools and mechanisms for translating relevant legislation and policies into increased capacity of child protection workforce are consolidated, packaged and ready for scaled up utilization

The achievement of the result was planned to be supported by a combination of strategies, including:

- mobilization (in consultation with the UNICEF Regional Office/NY Headquarters, as appropriate) of high-quality technical expertise to develop law enforcement frameworks and mechanisms for child protection and justice, at central and particularly local levels. More specifically:
  - Albania’s Parliament and line ministries to be provided technical support to develop relevant sub-legislation and provisions in line with the best international standards and the European Union acquis;
  - Local government and the State Agency on Child Rights Protection to be provided with technical support to efficiently translate the new legal requirements related to child protection case management and referral processes at the municipal level;
  - The MoSWY to be supported to finalize and prepare for the operationalisation of the National De-institutionalisation Plan;
  - Albania’s independent human rights institutions, such as the People’s Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, to be supported to improve monitoring and handling complaints related to violations of child rights;
  - the Government to be assisted in the creation of an effective management information system on case management for children who are at risk or victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

- strengthening of cross-sectoral cohesion opportunities, using child protection case management and community outreach techniques as entry points;
- mainstreaming the issues of disability, gender- and/or ethnicity-based (Roma children) exclusion into UNICEF-supported analysis and research, workplans and messaging;
- continuous generation of knowledge through systematic documentation and validation of the best programmatic interventions and practices; and
• learning and domesticating innovative approaches and techniques generated through
UNICEF-supported child protection programmes and initiatives globally and regionally.

Several indicators were agreed upon with national partners to measure annual progress
towards the overall Outcome objective, namely:

• by end-2017, at least three legal/normative instruments are in place to facilitate the
implementation of Albania’s new legal framework for child protection.

  The actual status achieved by December 2017 – up to 20 by-laws and normative acts on
child protection were being developed, with at least a third at an advanced stage (draft
texts made available to expert community for consultations);

• at least a quarter of established CPUs effectively use case management techniques to
identify and support children at risk and/or in need of protection.

  The actual status achieved by December 2017 – 38 per cent of child protection workers
reported their application of the case management approach to the State Agency for
Child Rights Protection (latest data produced in June 2017); the number of managed
cases and overall quality of work varied considerably;

• at least 60 per cent of the planned deliverables under the KAP study on Child Marriage
and Children with Disabilities SitAn are completed, thus contributing to new knowledge
on children with disability and child marriage.

  The actual status achieved by December 2017 – an estimated 40 per cent of planned
deliverables of the two research exercises completed.

More details on progressive developments in the thematic areas are provided in the Output-
related sections below.

OUTPUT 1 2.1. By 2021, social and child protection practitioners have increased capacity to
assist families in situations of particular vulnerability/at risk of separation to provide care for their
children, preventing institutionalization

Analytical statement of progress
The year 2017 witnessed remarkable legislative progress, with the adoption of Albania’s new
Law on Child Rights and Protection (February 2017) and the Criminal Justice for Children Code
(March 2017), both of which were drafted with UNICEF’s extensive support. A dedicated
institutional entity – the State Agency for Child Rights Protection – expanded its local/municipal
network of CPUs and child protection workers. The Agency’s staff embraced a system building
approach to child protection and understood the need to address root causes of children’s
vulnerability, rather than symptoms alone.

However, the entire system is still in its infancy and requires significant support, especially at the
local level. By the end of 2017, 219 CPUs had been established at the municipal level, which
 corresponds to 50 per cent of the need, as per the criteria established in the new Law. Only 30
per cent of child protection workers had social work background and experience, as required by
the new legal framework. The fragility of the system, in addition to the obvious quantitative and
qualitative deficit in terms of available work force, was reflected in very uneven distribution of the needed resources and capacities, resulting in massive disparities in numbers of cases managed and reported by different child protection workers per year.

To address this capacity gap and shortcomings in 2017, UNICEF worked in close partnership with local CSOs and succeeded in providing CPUs and multi-disciplinary teams in eight municipal units (# 1,2,5,6,7 and 8 in Tirana, as well as Devoll and Diber Municipalities) with on-the-job mentoring/coaching (114 meetings), 24 hours of online professional support (965 online consultation/guidance) and targetted technical workshops (13 workshops). These efforts resulted in identifying and addressing 86 new cases of violence against children and offering emergency services to 201 children at high risk.

UNICEF continued its cooperation with the municipal “House of Colours” multi-functional centre in Tirana, offering 24/7 support and emergency response services to children. Based on this partnership:

- 462 children in vulnerable situations could access and benefit from legal support, psychosocial counselling, recreational and education activities, basic hygiene and health services; and
- 157 children, survivors of violence and abuse, were identified and provided emergency/immediate and long-term support by the “House of Colours” staff and specialists.

In 2017, UNICEF invested significantly in establishing a solid evidence base for further child protection programming. UNICEF-supported analysis of the situation of children with disabilities (due for completion in 2018) aims to overcome narrow sectoral perspectives, include issues related to governance decentralization, and add the voices and opinions of children themselves.

Research on the child marriage phenomenon in Albania (being conducted jointly with UNFPA) responds to the latest Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committees Concluding Observations to Albania. In 2017, qualitative KAP study instruments were developed and field work was completed. The final data and related report will be finalized in spring 2018.

**OUTPUT 2**

By 2021, child protection practitioners are empowered with legal and normative frameworks, operational standards and tools to effectively prevent and address situations of child abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation

**Analytical statement of progress**

The child protection system in Albania witnessed an unprecedented boost in 2017, which was largely due to UNICEF’s strong advocacy efforts, direct technical and financial assistance and collaboration with the Government and Parliament. Solid partnerships with civil society brought remarkable value to these efforts as well and in particular to the implementation of a range of activities with the aim of strengthening child protection systems that prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse of children and ensure justice for children.

With the adoption of Albania’s new Law on Child Rights and Protection and the Criminal Justice Code for Children, the national legal framework removed a significant legal and normative barrier and allowed for the establishment of coherent structures, functions and capacities that can prevent and respond to all child protection concerns.
In addition, a multi-year comprehensive national Action Plan for Children (also referred to as “Children’s Agenda”), which was also developed with UNICEF’s direct support to the MoSWY, was endorsed by the Council of Ministers. Based on the now child-friendly legal framework, the implementation of the Agenda is expected to contribute to overcoming the rather fragmented and disjointed nature of child protection interventions, bringing instead a system approach, stronger coordination and solid sustainability.

The next critical milestone, which is guiding UNICEF’s further efforts and focused support in this area, is the development of secondary legislation that would enable the implementation of the new Law. To address this ambitious challenge, UNICEF has been partnering with the best local expert groups and organisations specialized in child rights and legal matters. Moreover, UNICEF re-emphasized the need for a wider coordination and transparency of the process, and together with the newly established Ministry of Health and Social Protection called a major stakeholder coordination conference on the joint approach to development of the normative and legal tools for the Law on Child Rights and Protection.

Lastly, tapping into these positive developments and in close collaboration with CSOs, UNICEF provided technical and financial support to CPUs and child protection workers that are spread out across the country and represent the first line responders to child protection matters at the grassroots level. Since the national child protection legal framework is very new, the majority of relevant professionals and community members are not conversant with these legal provisions, and most aspects of their work are not guided by manuals or written rules and regulations. UNICEF has begun mobilising strategic alliances of partners, along with financial resources, with a view to addressing this critical gap through engagement and empowerment of key stakeholders, which is the current priority area in the roll-out and implementation of the Law and relevant policy framework at the sub-national and local levels.

OUTPUT 3 2.3. By 2021, justice sector policymakers, practitioners and independent human rights institutions have the capacity to fully align the Justice for Children normative framework to international standards and to effectively protect the rights of children in conflict and in contact with the law

Analytical statement of progress
Advocacy by UNICEF was crucial in ensuring adoption of the new Law on Child Rights and Protection. The right of the child to be heard, stipulated therein, extends to every judicial and administrative process. This represents a major step towards equitable access to justice for children. With UNICEF’s support, the drafting of the secondary legislation of this new law started in 2017.

The Criminal Justice for Children Code – developed, publicly consulted and advocated for with UNICEF’s extensive technical and financial assistance – was reviewed and adopted by Parliament in March 2017. This marks an unprecedented legal development and a philosophical shift in approaching children’s treatment within the criminal justice system in Albania. For the first time, children in contact with the law are not treated as adults, and alignment with international standards on juvenile justice, as well as on children victims and witnesses of crime, has been ensured. The Code also stipulates the establishment of an integrated electronic tracking system for the collection and reporting of data for children in conflict/contact with the law. This provision makes it mandatory for the law enforcement and justice system operators to
use the system (developed by UNICEF in 2016), and opens the legal path towards full government takeover of the system in the years to come.

Also in 2017, support was provided to the Ministry of Justice to develop and cost a national Justice for Children Strategy, the first policy document at the executive level in Albania dedicated to child-friendly justice. At the end of 2017, the document was going through a public consultation process prior to adoption.

The State Probation Service (SPS) began testing the mechanism for sub-contracting non-governmental service providers for socio-economic reintegration and restorative justice services to children in 2016. This yielded results during 2017 as follows:

- Approximately 200 children were assisted with services to ease their peaceful and effective reintegration into the community;
- Collaboration of the SPS with local government and stakeholders was strengthened, more strongly positioning the Service in the mosaic of authorities that help reintegration of children and their removal from the entrapment of crime;
- Probation officers’ efforts were complemented by other professionals to ensure a multidisciplinary approach to juveniles’ case management;
- Restorative justice techniques and practices were promoted at the local level; and
- The SPS capacities to administer resources and sub-contract services were strengthened to assist with the implementation of the new Code.

A new People’s Advocate (Ombudsperson) was appointed by Parliament. UNICEF coordinated the support provided by the UN agencies to the Ombudsperson’s office, which culminated in an Annual Conference on Human Rights. Anchored to the ‘Leave No One Behind’ Agenda, it focused on the rights of children and women and advocated for the full reflection of the UN standards and recommendations in the upcoming five-year Strategy of the People’s Advocate. In addition, UNICEF advocated for parliamentary support and commitment to appoint the Commissioner for the Promotion of Child Rights within this institution, a position that had been vacant for three years.

OUTCOME 3 Management Outcome

Analytical statement of progress

For the first year of the new Country Programme cycle of 2017-2021, the Outcome 4 annual result was established as follows (as reflected in the Annual Management Plan for 2017):

- **Country Office’s staff, structures/systems and processes are effectively managed individually, as well as collectively in compliance with UNICEF’s programme and operational policies and procedures, to enable the achievement of results for children in the country**

The achievement of the result was planned to be supported by a combination of strategies and approaches, such as:

- Facilitation of effective application of rules, regulations and procedures by UNICEF Albania staff by providing guidance and space for learning in keeping with the overall organizational goal of improved simplification and streamlining of processes;
• Reviewing and keeping up-to-date the table of authority and regular monitoring of the segregation of duties and users;
• Strengthening the oversight function and active participation of the office committees through improved follow-up of decisions supported by timely documentation and communication of actions taken;
• Conducting self-assessment prior to the UNICEF Albania Audit (in October 2018); identifying and addressing procedural gaps with support from the UNICEF Regional Office and best practices from other UNICEF country offices;
• Supporting and strengthening quality assurance of implementing partners in alignment with the HACT framework and through the implementation of relevant risk management and mitigation measures, supported by ongoing sensitization and capacity development of staff and partners to HACT guidelines and policy;
• Developing and implementing action plans in response to the feedback and inputs from micro-assessments, programmatic visits and spot checks of implementing partners;
• Close monitoring of KPIs and score card performance indicators as well as annual management plan management indicators as an individual and collective responsibility;
• Developing and implementing an annual staff well-being plan in coordination with all staff; and
• Ensuring actions are taken to support the timely completion of performance evaluation reports, including individual and office learning plans.

Management performance indicators monitored by UNICEF Albania during the year were provided by the standard UNICEF KPI Scorecard, the status of which was reviewed on a monthly basis by the CMT, as a standing agenda item.

More details on progressive developments in various aspects of UNICEF Albania management practices are provided in the Output-related sections below.

OUTPUT 1 Human Resources Management

Analytical statement of progress
Operations and programme management systems continued to be strengthened in 2017 to ensure an enabling environment for delivering results for children in a risk-informed, efficient and effective manner. The country management team monitored performance through various tools (including the Insight Manager’s Dashboard and UNICEF KPI Scorecard) to encourage continuous improvement and sensitize each staff member on their individual accountabilities for contributing to UNICEF Albania’s overall performance management excellence goals, at both the programme and operational levels. The country management team was responsible for monitoring performance and identifying bottlenecks, and putting improvement and corrective measures in place on a timely basis whenever necessary. Performance was further managed in accordance with staff supervisory roles and through other established oversight mechanisms.

A robust set of key performance indicators was used to reference collective and individual performance of UNICEF Albania against established UNICEF standards. The country management team, as well as other statutory committees, met regularly on a monthly basis, ensuring effective follow-up and monitoring of all planned activities, as per the annual work plans signed with the GoA. Progress towards annual management plan targets was monitored, particularly in terms of programme implementation, funds utilization, HACT standards observance, quality of research and human resources management. Financial implementation reports (by Output) were generated from the Management Dashboard and shared within the
office on a weekly basis. Standard corporate KPIs were reviewed at every country management team meeting as a standing agenda item.

The business continuity plan was kept up to date. In September 2017 it was reviewed for quality assurance by the Emergency Field Coordinator (on multi-country assignment to assist Country Offices in the Europe and Central Asia region in preparedness matters). Timely security advisories were provided to staff during the reporting period, in coordination with UNDSS. The risk library was updated, based on an office-wide discussion and participatory exercise. Risks associated with the DCT management by CSO and Government partners were identified and addressed with mitigation measures, as per the UNICEF HACT policy.

OUTPUT 2 Human Resources Management

Analytical statement of progress

Standard key performance indicators on financial and administrative controls continued to be reviewed at every country management team meeting. A continuous review of UNICEF Management Dashboard information helped to ensure that all alerts were addressed in due course. The expenditure levels of allocated annual (2017) amounts of regular resources and OR reached 100 per cent. The “Greening and Accessibility” funds awarded to the office were implemented at 92 per cent for the LED lighting project and 100 per cent for the office accessibility for people with disabilities. In 2017, UNICEF Albania disbursed approximately US$208,000 to implementing partners as DCTs. All fund requests and liquidations were processed under the HACT modality using funding authorisation and certification of expenditure (FACE) forms. The DCT liquidations management improved, although capacity gaps remained in many partner organizations. The reluctance of Government partners to accept UNICEF DCTs (due to cumbersome national Treasury procedures) remained one of the key barriers to higher absorption of funds.

The value of goods and services procured by UNICEF Albania in 2017 reached approximately US$563,000, with programme and operational needs accounting for 72 per cent and 28 per cent of the total respectively. In absolute terms, programme delivery through procurement of services exceeded DCTs to partners by approximately two times.

UNICEF Albania operated successfully with the GSSC on invoice processing and master data management. The return rate of incomplete/erroneous submissions to GSSC was low in 2017, at 10 per cent; 98 per cent of the interaction/transactions with the GSSC were within the performance and timeliness standards established by the Service Level Agreement.

Bank transaction optimization and proper cash forecasting continued to remain a priority for the operations section. Realistic cash flow forecasting by UNICEF Albania and careful consideration of the exchange rate fluctuations allowed for currency gains of US$3,309.

All monthly, mid- and end-year reconciliations and closure of accounts were effected within the first three days of the month, and alignment of the bank and VISION data was always ensured. An assets inventory was performed in October with all items corresponding to VISION records. Compared to 2016, the volume of small transactions increased, with 291 out of 430 payments (67 per cent) for amounts less than US$500.

UNICEF assets (such as equipment, vehicles and office space) continued to be managed and maintained in accordance with corporate regulations.
OUTPUT 3 Human Resources Management

Analytical statement of progress
In 2017, one recruitment process was carried out by UNICEF Albania, for the position of child protection officer (at NOB level), using the UNICEF e-recruitment system. The duration of the process (up to the expected onboarding date) was 83 days. The selection report and the entire recruitment process were approved without comments by the UNICEF Regional Office. However, this new recruitment did not improve the gender balance in the national officer category, which is currently 100 per cent female. UNICEF Albania has shown improvement in this area overall, since more males have been hired recently in the international professional category and the percentage of male staff increased to 33 per cent.

Staff exposure to other UNICEF country offices and NY Headquarters experience was promoted, as UNICEF Albania welcomed three colleagues on stretch assignments to Tirana during 2017 and sent three staff members (one in the GS category and two in the professional category) to work on stretch assignments in other locations. Since stretch assignments represent a great opportunity for staff members to develop their careers by learning new skills outside of their duty station, they were appreciated by staff. New colleagues who joined the Albania team from other UNICEF country offices helped to create a more diverse international environment, giving and receiving feedback and sharing valuable work experiences with their colleagues.

The staff members’ performance evaluation reports were drafted and finalized on time in 2017, in conformity with the established regional and global deadlines. Despite the challenges associated with staffing changes that occurred during the year, staff were advised to maintain a continuous dialogue and open discussions with their supervisors on their performance. Additional orientation sessions on performance management in UNICEF (taking into consideration the ongoing human resources reform and policy changes) will be organized in early 2018.

The results of the Global Staff Survey (GSS) showed that UNICEF Albania had room for improvement in some areas such as job satisfaction, availability of career development opportunities, satisfaction with the work environment and adequacy of knowledge sharing. Concerns revealed by the GSS were discussed extensively at the CMT meetings and an action plan was finalized by the Staff Association Board by the end of 2017 with inputs from all staff. A milestone activity of the plan will be the organization of a staff retreat in January 2018 to set the scene for progress towards programme delivery targets in a genuinely collaborative, mutually empowering and professionally rewarding atmosphere. An international consultant was identified to facilitate the retreat based on the agenda developed jointly with all staff.

The UNICEF Albania learning plan was developed, and follow-up mandatory learning activities during the year were planned. Despite this effort, some training activities had not been completed by all staff as planned by the end of 2017. Staff may need additional support and guidance on better time planning in 2018 to accommodate necessary learning activities in their schedules.

OUTCOME 4 The GoA-UNICEF Programme of Cooperation is effectively designed, coordinated, managed and supported to meet quality standards in achieving results for children
Analytical statement of progress
For the first year of the new Country Programme cycle of 2017-2021, the Outcome 1 annual result was established as follows (as reflected in the Annual Management Plan for 2017):

- During 2017, quality standards in achieving results for children are maintained, based on guidance, tools and resources put in place to effectively and efficiently design, monitor and communicate the outcomes of UNICEF-supported interventions

The achievement of the result was planned to be supported by a combination of strategies, including:

- supporting and promoting the highest possible level of technical expertise in programme result planning, management, monitoring and communication, committed to the UNICEF Programme of Cooperation by the Deputy Representative, monitoring and evaluation and communication office (with additional consultancy capacity, if and when appropriate);
- articulating and maintaining a strong advocacy position on child rights issues in Albania, with timely and appropriate contextualization of UNICEF’s global and regional communication strategies and initiatives, as well as incorporating messages and programmatic content of UNICEF-supported programme and projects in the country;
- strategic generation and utilization of knowledge on the situation of children and their rights in Albania, to advocate for continuous national commitment to the child rights agenda, strengthening of result-based management approaches, expansion of evidence-based policy making and accountability monitoring; and
- mainstreaming emergency preparedness and response in the country programme and partners’ planning frameworks and approaches, accompanied by the allocation of appropriate resources.

Several indicators were agreed upon internally to measure annual progress towards the overall Outcome objective, namely:

- programme budget utilization (Regular Resources, OR regular, OR emergency) to correspond to corporate quarterly targets at all times.

The actual status achieved by December 2017 – programme budget utilization was monitored, as a standing agenda item, by the CMT on a monthly basis; by end-2017, the utilization rates of Regular Resources, OR regular and OR emergency reached 100 per cent (as per Europe and Central Asia regional update of 31 December, 2017);

- 100 per cent of donor reports submitted on time.

The actual status achieved by December 2017 – all seven donor reports due for submission in 2017 were prepared and sent on time;

- Early Warning Early Action system update score maintained as “high” during the year.

The actual status achieved by December 2017 – “high” degree of emergency preparedness reported on the UNICEF Office Management Dashboard (88.5 per cent score, as of January 2018)
evaluation coverage and management response are in line with corporate standards of timeliness and quality (as per established evaluation-specific UNICEF KPIs).

The actual status achieved by December 2017 – during the year UNICEF Albania remained compliant with the corporate KPIs related to evaluations, both in terms of coverage (one evaluation completed in 2017), quality assurance (global quality assurance mechanism was used) and timeliness (management responses updated on time).

More details on progressive developments in the thematic areas are provided in the output-related sections below.

**OUTPUT 1**

**3.1. Guidance, tools and resources to effectively and efficiently design and manage the programme of cooperation are available to UNICEF and its partners**

**Analytical statement of progress**

In 2017, UNICEF programme coordination was ensured to: align UNICEF-specific Annual Work Plans with Joint UN Work Plans; launch the new structure of the Country Programme for 2017-2021 and complete the recruitment of key UNICEF staff and consultants in alignment with the new country programme objectives; promote the SDG agenda in Albania and explore, jointly with the UNCT, possible entry points to sensitize national decision makers of its importance and value; ensure the provision of consolidated inputs to the annual European Union assessment of Albania’s progress towards development and European integration targets; prepare final donor reports on several flagship programmes in social protection, child protection and early education; contribute to the evaluation of a multi-country programme on early education and social inclusion of Roma children; engage with sister UN agencies, INSTAT and other national stakeholders on the implementation of Albania’s DHS 2017-2018; support the multi-agency initiative of a new Joint UN project on social inclusion, under the ‘Leave No One Behind’ motto (to be funded by the Government of Switzerland through the UN Coherence Fund); contribute to the preparations and implementation of an internal UNICEF Albania audit; coordinate the provision of emergency assistance to families and children affected by the floods in December 2017; and provide input to the action plan to respond to the findings of the Global Staff Survey.

Special arrangements were put in place in the second half of 2017 to ensure the smooth transition of the office to the new management organisation, with the positions of UNICEF Representative and Deputy Representative awaiting new incumbents approximately at the same time in early 2018.

**OUTPUT 2**

**3.3. Guidance, tools and resources to effectively generate, analyse, and utilize statistical and qualitative information for a child rights monitoring system are available in the country**

**Analytical statement of progress**

Supported by UNICEF Albania, the capacities of INSTAT were strengthened in designing and planning of Multiple Cluster Indicators Surveys/DHSs, as the Institute’s specialists participated in a regional workshop organized by UNICEF on the subject. This technical capacity-building opportunity proved to be particularly timely, as it came on the eve of Albania’s embarking on a DHS 2017-2018. Recognizing DHS as a source of statistically sound and internationally comparable data on issues that directly affect the lives of women and children, UNICEF
allocated resources to procure measurement equipment for DHS data collection. UNICEF technical advice also contributed to the DHS preparations, based on corporate knowledge and expertise in household surveys.

As part of the regional Transformative Monitoring for Enhanced Equity (TransMonEE) analytical exercise, UNICEF Albania, in close collaboration with INSTAT, assessed and documented data management systems and processes of several line ministries and their subordinate agencies, as well as of Albania’s independent human rights institutions, in relation to the subject of children’s access to justice. The innovative approach of the assessment consisted of reviewing non-traditional metrics, and linking welfare and well-being indicators with the traditional juvenile justice statistics. The assessment informed in-depth discussions with relevant stakeholders, aiming to ultimately improve the overall quality of data. Importantly, the assessment equipped INSTAT with knowledge essential for strengthening its role, which had been rather limited, in producing good quality official data in this particular area.

In line with the commitments of Albania’s Programme of Official Statistics for 2017-2021, UNICEF Albania supported INSTAT to improve child rights data reporting. Owing to the technical advice and advocacy efforts, the annual publication of “Women and Men in Albania” was enriched with 15 additional child-specific indicators in the areas of demographics, health, justice, education and labour.

In addition, a child-focused module of indicators was drafted as a component of INSTAT’s overall system of data reporting. Its finalization will require a process of consultation with relevant stakeholders in 2018. Subject to the timeline of data release by respective sources (being administrative or INSTAT-supported surveys), corresponding figures will be added, providing an increasingly comprehensive volume of child-specific data in Albania.

The child rights monitoring agenda was reinforced with the approval of the Law on Child Rights and Protection and its implementing instrument of the national Action Plan for Child Rights and Protection until 2020 (referred to as Albania’s Agenda for Children). The accountabilities of key duty-bearers are specified with a considerably higher level of detail compared with previous regulatory frameworks.

As part of the “Delivering as One” programme framework, UNICEF contributed to the collective effort of the UN to foster the GoA’s commitment to implement the SDGs. UNICEF played an active role in a technical SDG Task Force that was established by the UNCT and worked in close coordination with the established Government mechanisms to promote the SDG agenda.

During 2017, UNICEF Albania continued to report on indicators established by UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office to monitor the evolvement of the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe.

**OUTPUT 3**

3.4. Strategies to address cross-cutting issues related to child rights are developed and applied throughout the programme of cooperation

**Analytical statement of progress**

In 2017, resources allocated to the Cross-Sectoral Support Output of the UNICEF Country Programme were central to ensuring a smooth management of DCTs to the implementing partners (Government and CSOs), in line with HACT. HACT training was delivered to partners in a workshop and individual coaching formats. Cooperation with other UN agencies on HACT
matters was enhanced, although UNICEF remains the main promoter and follower of this programme delivery modality. This could create a tension with the main government partners, who still largely prefer a less cumbersome modality of UN agencies implementing programmes directly through specially created Project Management Units.

UNICEF’s support to the GoA remained central in procuring vaccines for the national immunization programme, as well as ARVs for the nationally adopted human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) treatment programmes. Details of this support are provided in the section of the Annual Report describing the performance of the supply function in 2017.

UNICEF’s humanitarian assistance to Albania was limited in 2017 to the distribution of selected pre-positioned supplies (including children's clothes, emergency aid kits, blankets) to areas that suffered from heavy rains and floods in December 2017.

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### Evaluation and research

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### Other publications

- UNICEF Albania Calendar 2017

### Programme documents

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