UNICEF Annual Report 2014

Albania

**Executive Summary**

The year of 2014 started for Albania full of hopes and expectations, as the new Government (in office since the parliamentary elections of summer 2013) demonstrated its readiness to go the extra mile to address the country’s many socio-economic challenges and chronic unresolved issues. Important decisions to accelerate the public service reform, promote the rule of law, fight corruption, introduce new administrative and territorial division, stimulate investments and activate labour policies were accompanied by a comprehensive revision of Albania’s overall development and sector-specific strategies.

The effort yielded appreciation and support by the European Union (EU) countries who in June 2014 voted for granting to Albania a long-awaited EU candidate status. In September 2014, the international spotlight turned on Albania, as a country model of peaceful co-existence of religions and inter-faith solidarity, when Pope Francis visited Albania, symbolically chosen for his first visit to a European country. International recognition of the country’s commitment to social progress, tolerance, good neighbourly relations and universal values was behind Albania’s election, for the first time in its history, to become member of the UN Human Rights Council, in October 2014. Earlier in the year, a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Albania’s human rights commitments took place and recommendations to the Government were issued.

The country’s socio-economic situation continued to be affected by the global recession. Economic growth proved fragile with the gross domestic product annual growth estimates ranging between 1.3–2.1 per cent and remittances from Albanians working abroad stalled for most part of the year (after a dramatic decline in 2013). Against this background, the focus of UNICEF Albania Country Programme on social protection and inclusion strengthened its relevance, in line with the intent of the Government to build a modern system of social protection, combining cash and care (services) components. Drafting of the national Social Protection Strategy for 2015-2020, adoption of the Law on the Order of Social Workers and the announcement of de-institutionalization plans in relation to children in residential care should be considered as cornerstone developments in the social protection reform, made possible thanks to UNICEF’s advocacy and substantial technical assistance. Similarly, the role of UNICEF was central in paving the ground for recent decisions of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to expand the scope of pre-school education, modernise national Early Learning and Development Standards, and ensure that every young Roma child has access to kindergarten. Standardization of Mother and Child Care services, based on UNICEF-supported protocols and modules, should also be mentioned as one of the key results of 2014, contributing to the national public health care system strengthening.

To promote, sustain and finance child-focused reforms across sectors, of paramount importance was a renewed commitment of Albanian legislators to children’s rights, sealed by the establishment of a Child Rights Caucus in the Parliament, announced in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Caucus is also expected to be instrumental in addressing certain constraints requiring political will and decisions. From the onset, UNICEF has underpinned its support to the Caucus to tackle the weakness of key social
sectors in monitoring the performance of services and respective outcomes, coupled with the overall scarcity of disaggregated data to capture social inequities masked by averages in the context of a middle-income country.

The “Delivering as One” (DaO) UN Programme of Cooperation with the Government of Albania (GoA) continued to provide a framework for UNICEF’s programme of cooperation to the country. The Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the DaO Programme suggested the simplification of the programme structure and the reduction in the number of pursued results, with a more explicit focus on human rights, social inclusion, democratic governance, regional development and environment. Internally, the UNICEF Albania office underwent considerable changes, including the abolishment of nine posts following the Programme Budgetary Review (PBR) in June and the recruitment of staff for six newly established positions. Upgraded Job Profiles reflect UNICEF’s transforming engagement in Albania and, more broadly, in Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS). Regional context-specific core roles of UNICEF implying the highest calibre of expertise in policy design, legal analysis, public finance management and knowledge generation, as well as in advocacy, convening and networking, have been driving the process of change and search for human resources with a combination of necessary skills and experience. Since September 2014, the UNICEF Albania Office was headed by a new Representative.

**Humanitarian Assistance**

UNICEF Albania Office did not provide humanitarian assistance in 2014.

**Equity Case Study**

In Albania, early learning systems have limited capacities to identify disadvantaged children, to understand how multiple forms of disadvantage interact and how to organise a coherent package of support. UNICEF Albania (guided by the CEE/CIS Regional Call for Action: Education Equity Now!) therefore prioritized the development of a more detailed and nuanced understanding of children’s different types of needs for early learning and school readiness, concentrating efforts on ethnic minority children, namely Roma, recognized as the most excluded group in the Albanian society.

The identification of gaps and barriers preventing Roma children to access services was undertaken as part of the Roma communities mapping (accessible online on a UNICEF-managed site of “Social Inclusion Data on Children in Albania” at www.sidalbania.org) which represented a new tool helping officials, beneficiaries, service providers and civil society to make strategic use of information on vulnerable groups and available services. The tool democratized the gathering and use of information and innovatively presented data for local authorities and central managers.

As part of the mapping exercise, 108 Roma settlements were identified and surveyed with a total population of approximately 15,000 people, of whom one-third were children. A very high incidence of poverty (78 per cent), high illiteracy rate (up to 70 per cent), far from universal birth registration, low preschool enrolment (26 per cent against the national average of about 50 per cent) and other huge gaps in terms of Roma’s living standards and access to basic services were revealed. While these data served to create a picture of where/how the Roma communities live and who is – in principle - accountable for providing them with access to services, it also identified the lack of pressure by the communities, civil society, NGOs, media and other actors, to demand local politicians, government structures and service providers to act efficiently so that Roma families are assisted in their most fundamental concerns.
Analysis of the past interventions led the UNICEF Albania team to the conclusion that the previous efforts in early inclusion of Roma had predominantly been donor driven, not sustainable and contributed to a parallel system. As a result, a new approach was adopted to mainstream Roma children within the current system of preschool, centred on working with authorities to create awareness and develop capacities to fulfil their accountability to enrol the Roma children in the existing facilities. The definition of the policy issue right at the start, under the advocacy slogan “Every Roma Child in Preschool”, focusing on a prevailing and determinant issue, and targeting specifically on the matter, turned out to be a successful equity-driving nation-wide initiative.

UNICEF partnered with three NGOs as advocacy messengers and local dialogue facilitators, to assist in this nation-wide initiative, namely: Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Child Rights Observatory (CRO) and Children’s Rights Centre Albania (CRCA). Each brought a wealth of local knowledge, expertise and networking skills, acquired on the basis of their past working experiences and field-level presence in key geographical areas of Albania. In displaying the role of credible partner, UNICEF was able to convene and bring together duty-bearers and right-holders (i.e. Child Protection Units, Roma community leaders, NGOs, local departments of education, health, etc.) to join efforts to assess the situation and track the advancement (or non-advancement) of early learning inclusion of Roma children. Networks of government and non-governmental actors were set up in Roma localities working together to produce evidence, filter best practices and identify gaps in policies in support of the design of local solutions.

Following identification of a Roma child not enrolled in kindergarten, the following steps are taken: i) In collaboration with the Roma families, capacities were developed to prepare children to attend kindergarten (clothing, daily hygiene, etc.); ii) In collaboration with the health sector, the immunization card was made available; and in cases in which a child had not undergone the vaccinations compulsory for enrolment in kindergarten, the health centre took appropriate measures. Provisions were made to ensure the child underwent medical tests free of charge in all the health centres; iii) In collaboration with the education sector, each kindergarten was visited to ensure that a child-friendly environment was created for the integration of the child; and iv) In collaboration with kindergarten director and educators, assistance was provided to support the daily inclusion of children and their continuous attendance.

The production of “evidence packages” in each locality was followed-up with advocacy to raise the awareness and equip civil society with tools to pressure for more accountability of local governments to address the early inclusion of Roma children in Albania. The access to services component was designed with a twofold strategic approach; firstly, it aimed to raise the demand of families and parents towards accessing preschool; and, secondly, to ensure that this demand was well received by local duty bearers, whose capacities were being developed to work with vulnerable families to adequately deliver on early learning services, and by increasing the capacity of preschools to apply inclusive and child centred approaches.

The results of the first 12 months have been promising: out of 1,061 Roma children (of early/primary school age) identified in October 2013 as missing their schooling and denied their right to education, 409 children have been enrolled in preschool and 74 in primary school. A newly issued MoES’ regulation further institutionalized the work facilitating Roma children’s access to early learning. Qualitative changes have also been observed in the attitudes of service providers and Roma parents. Systematization, documentation and dissemination of results, for scaling up the initiative, will be prioritized by UNICEF in 2015, together with the continuing support for mature and sustainable results.
Summary Notes and Acronyms

ADA - Austrian Development Agency
AMP - Annual Management Plan
ARV - Antiretroviral
BCP - Business Continuity Plan
CEE/CIS - Central and Eastern Europe / Commonwealth of Independent States
CLEEN - Child-Led Environmental Education
CMT - Country Management Team
COMBI - Communication for Behaviour Impact
CPMP - Country Programme Management Plan
CPU - Child Protection Unit
CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRC - Contract Review Committee
CRO - Child Rights Observatory
CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRU - Child Rights Unit
CSO - Civil Society Organisation
DaO - Delivering as One
DevInfo - Development Information (database)
DCT - Direct Cash Transfer
EC - European Commission
ECD - Early Childhood Development
EU - European Union
FACE - Funding Authorisation and Certificate of Expenditure
FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization
GAP - Gender Action Plan
GIS - Geographic Information System
GoA - Government of Albania
HACT - Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers
HIV/AIDS - Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HR - Human Resources
ICT - Information Communication Technology
IDE - Institute for Development of Education
IMEP - Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
INSTAT - Albanian Institute of Statistics
IP - Implementing Partners
LGU - Local Government Unit
LTA - Long-Term Arrangement
MCH - Mother and Child Health
MDG-F - Millennium Development Goal Fund
MoES - Ministry of Education and Sports
MoH - Ministry of Health
MoI - Ministry of Interior
MOSS - Minimum Operating Security Standards
MoSWY - Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
MoU - Memorandum of Understanding
MTR - Mid-Term Review
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
OOSC - Out-of-School Children
Capacity Development

In the context of Albania, UNICEF’s investment in capacity development in 2014 was primarily related to the upstream level, addressing the ability of line ministries and other national institutions to develop, implement and monitor policies for better health, educational, child and social protection outcomes. UNICEF’s core role in policy advice and technical assistance was central for progress achieved during the year by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MoSWY) in introducing new legislation to regularise and strengthen the “social work” profession. The establishment of an inter-sectoral collaboration mechanism, led by the MoES (involving the Ministries of Health, Interior and Social Welfare) to collect, analyse and use disaggregated data on out-of-school children was facilitated through the networking and leveraging role of UNICEF staff and coalesced through international technical cooperation provided. Similarly, a combination of technical inputs and strong coordination support from UNICEF was key for the success of the MoH’s comprehensive review of health indicators and their alignment with EU health data standards.

All these processes – although aiming at achieving a particular policy-related result – contained a considerable element of capacity development, where all government officials and civil society partners participating in various discussions, technical consultations and workshops acquired valuable exposure to new trends and knowledge in their respective areas. More specifically, the strategic participation of Albanian nationals in regional conferences and meetings, organised in 2014 by the UNICEF Regional Office, contributed to the expansion of technical capacities. The latter was testified by the subsequent development of follow up plans with new visions and ideas in relation to national de-institutionalization and social protection policies, strengthening of the child protection system, identifying out-of-school children, and commitment to overall improvement of statistical and administrative data collection and management.

In health, UNICEF’s technical assistance was recognised as critical for the finalisation of care standards and protocols on Mother and Child Health that will be used by practitioners in all
Women and Children’s Consultation Centres, with a view to strengthening their performance in preventative care and introducing elements of child protection to their work.

**Evidence Generation, Policy Dialogue and Advocacy**

Evidence generation driving UNICEF’s advocacy and policy dialogue with partners remained one of the key strategies applied by the office in 2014. The organization’s core role in child rights monitoring and evaluation has been reflected across all programmes supported by UNICEF in the country. A comprehensive analysis of Albania’s policies and reforms and their impact on children was completed in 2014 and provided a critical assessment of the country’s achievements and equity gaps, with particular focus on the situation of children with disabilities, in residential institutions, from Roma minority and with vulnerable socio-economic family backgrounds. UNICEF-supported surveys on street children and those living in residential care finalised in 2014 have started being converted into specific national plans and actions (such as the activation of the State Social Services’ outreach function or the commitment to halt the institutionalization of children aged 0-3). Knowledge from a qualitative assessment of the situation of children with disabilities produced with UNICEF’s technical support will be combined with quantitative data from a nation-wide child disability survey planned by World Vision international, to be further translated into specific action plans, in coordination with UNDP who are leading the DaO UN assistance to Albania in the area of disability.

Many of UNICEF-supported evidence generation activities produce not only traditional paper-based reports but also increasingly yield innovation under the form of interactive web-based tools, such as mappings of various social services intended to become policy planning instruments at both central and local levels. Solid evidence makes UNICEF’s voice stronger and contributes to advocacy success. For example, in 2014 the MoSWY announced a number of adjustments to the national cash assistance scheme, aimed at strengthening the role of mothers and tying assistance to children’s school attendance and immunization calendar compliance, which was reflective of UNICEF’s earlier research and recommendations.

**Partnerships**

UNICEF’s partnership with civil society in Albania has been central for testing many new approaches in social policies, including the notion and content of “social work”, the modality of outreach, “case management” techniques, and collaborative interventions with local communities, mother support groups, psycho-social counselling, referral assistance, child help line, dialogue with children and youth. All of these policy elements and mechanisms are still relatively innovative for Albania and rely heavily on commitment and dedication of non-governmental actors. In 2014, UNICEF continued to collaborate with NGO partners, many of whom are irreplaceable when it comes to bringing assistance to difficult-to-reach populations. For example, birth registration on Roma children is still very much dependant on UNICEF and its NGO partners’ support with necessary paperwork: 181 cases were successfully processed out of up to 500 unregistered births identified in 2014 only.

A particularly impressive example of an effective multi-actor partnership was provided by the “Every Roma Child in Kindergarten” nationwide initiative, supported by UNICEF in its overall design and with technical guidance. During the year, three NGO partner organizations worked with local authorities across the country in major areas of Roma settlements concentration, bringing to kindergartens or primary school around 40 per cent of the 1,061 young Roma children identified as missing their early education. It is worth mentioning that Roma were mainstreamed into existing educational facilities, so no extra resources were required from local administrations for their accommodation. A regulation issued by the MoES in August 2014
sealed the Government’s commitment to early inclusion of Roma.

Partnering with academia has also been critically important, in light of the Government’s massive need of high-calibre technical expertise for developing new sectoral strategies. In 2014, a tripartite partnership was formed between UNICEF, the MoSWY and Albania’s Institute of Contemporary Studies, to develop a decentralised social care service delivery model. The Ministry of Local Government Affairs and the Ministry of Finance have increasingly engaged in support of this initiative with UNICEF’s partnership efforts.

**External Communication and Public Advocacy**

During the year communication efforts increased UNICEF’s visibility in relation to key issues affecting children in Albania. The media became more knowledgeable about UNICEF-supported interventions through major events, such as the launching of the “Every Roma Child in Preschool” initiative by the Minister of Education and parliamentarians; the national conference of the State Social Services opened by the Prime Minister in the context of the social care system reform; and the commemorative CRC@25 session of the Parliament chaired by the Speaker and attended by about 200 children and youth.

The 25th anniversary of the CRC offered an opportune occasion for young people to have more dialogue with decision-makers. A live TV talk show brought together the Minister of Education and Sports, the Head of the EU Delegation in Tirana and UNICEF Albania Representative who had a very informative exchange with the young audience on issues of most concern of Albanian youth. The Minister of Education and Sports promised to her young interlocutors to move faster from policy design to action in the reforms of the education sector.

The International Human Rights Festival that UNICEF Albania has been supporting over the years in collaboration with the Marubi Film and Multimedia School, was conducted in 2014 with a cross-cutting theme of "Don’t be silent". The festival offered an arena to advocate for those whose rights are denied and helped deepen the understanding of human rights issues – in particularly of the right to information – among the public.

Throughout the year the use of social media has intensified, with a total approximate audience of 3,600 people reached since March 2014 when UNICEF Albania opened its accounts in Instagram and Facebook. UNICEF Albania took part in the global #IMAGINE initiative, and was joined by several well-known Albanian celebrities who raised their voice with UNICEF to imagine a better world for children. Discussions are underway with the Cineplex company and the Albanian Football Federation about a joint awareness campaign in support of the most marginalized children of Albania.

**South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation**

The Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda (RKLA) provided a solid framework for UNICEF Albania to tap from the experience of other Country Offices and their partners of the CEE/CIS region. Of particular relevance and benefit for UNICEF’s advocacy and policy work in Albania was the participation in the RKLA Reference Groups’ discussions and networking events, coupled with access to resource materials, in the following areas:

- RKLA 1, A child’s right to a supportive and caring family environment;
- RKLA 2, Justice for Children: enabling justice systems to respect and protect child rights;
- RKLA 3, A child’s right to early learning;
- RKLA 4, A child’s right to inclusive quality education;
High-level meetings and conferences organised as part of the RKLA implementation should be particularly commended, as they helped solidify UNICEF Albania’s alliances with key decision makers thanks to joint participation in such events and the wealth of substantive discussions within and in the margins of their official agendas.

In 2014, UNICEF Albania took part in a Multi-Country Evaluation of the Impact of Juvenile Justice System Reforms on Children in Conflict with the Law (2006-2012). Although the results are yet to be published, high expectations have already been associated with the evaluation and its boosting effect on national policies, especially as the progress and bottlenecks in Albania are being analysed in comparison with other regional examples.

UNICEF Albania participated in the preparation of a new multi-country CEE/CIS proposal to the European Community (EC) on preventing violence against children and continued to chair the RKLA Reference Group on Social Protection. The Albania Office also coordinated the financial management of a multi-country programme on social protection on behalf of several RKLA Group members.

**Identification Promotion of Innovation**

In 2014, UNICEF continued to assist national partners in the development of new tools to facilitate their policy and programme planning. Of particular interest and demand in the past few years have been interactive mappings based on geo-tagging of various social services or locations/concentration areas of specific vulnerable groups (such as Roma or street children). A mapping of children in street situation was completed in 2014 as part of a nation-wide survey, conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MoSWY), State Social Services (SSS), Save the Children and the Albanian Association of Social Services for Youth.

The map allowed local branches of the SSS to keep abreast of situations when children are being neglected, abused or forced to work, and speed up their reaction.

Also, at the request of the State Probation Service, a mapping of their regional offices and NGOs certified to provide social rehabilitation and follow up support to young people in conflict with the law (those sentenced to public works or to other measures alternative to detention) was produced. The mapping was placed for hosting on the Probation Service web-site, to facilitate the management of the caseload and, to the extent possible, assign young people to serve their sentences in locations where other opportunities – educational, job-related, family reintegration, etc. – could be maximized.

There are other mappings accessible online on a UNICEF-managed hub of “Social Inclusion Data on Children in Albania” (www.sidalbania.org), including maps of Roma settlements, social services, kindergartens, maternity facilities and civil registration centres. Thanks to interactivity (each point indicated on the map can be opened as a file describing the location/facility), policy planners get exhaustive information directly on their computers. The technology is simple enough for information updates to be collected with rather ordinary mobile phones (see attachment on Innovations for more technical details).

**Support to Integration and cross-sectoral linkages**

In 2014, UNICEF Albania became the first country office in the CEE/CIS region to formalise an inter-sectoral collaboration mechanism for addressing the issue of Out-Of-School Children
(OOSC). As part of the global UNICEF/UNESCO OOSC initiative (facilitated in the region by the RKLA on Inclusive Quality Education), this work led to the signing (in December 2014) of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministries of Education, Health and Interior, which specifies the format, timelines and accountabilities for regular data collection on children left out of the school system. Technical assistance from the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) was also mobilised by UNICEF to validate the feasibility of proposed mechanisms for quality data collection. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth is also part of the OOSC network, as their social workers’ presence on the ground is key for reaching out to parents whose children do not attend school.

During the year, UNICEF Albania was also active in promoting cross-sectoral work and synergetic approaches in the design of future national policies on social protection and inclusion. UNICEF continued to advocate for explicit commitments of respective line ministries to cooperate and align their actions to be reflected in the Social Protection Strategy 2015-2020 (drafted through UNICEF’s technical assistance) and Social Inclusion policy framework. The process has not been easy, as both political and technical limitations preventing sectors from cooperating more systematically are still many. Positive examples of the cross-sectoral work and its results will be prioritised in UNICEF’s communication agenda in 2015. Champions from amongst national partners who can lead a multi-actor effort and inspire others by example will be identified, and their readiness to work “out of their own institutional box” supported.

**Service Delivery**

In Albania UNICEF is not involved in direct service delivery to beneficiaries, except indirectly through technical and limited financial support extended to selected government and NGO partners in their testing of new or modernised techniques and methodologies of service provision (in health care, Early Childhood Development, child protection, juvenile justice). Nevertheless, the service of UNICEF Albania Supply Unit in facilitation of the MoH’s procurement of vaccines and antiretroviral (ARV) medicines through the Supply Division in Copenhagen continues to be substantial in terms of the staff workload and important for the country in terms of the impact. In 2014, the volume of ARV and vaccine procurement reached US$109,892 and US$3,079,016, respectively. The vaccine procurement, representing 90-95 per cent of the total amount of public spending on children's vaccines, is based on a long-term Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the MoH and UNICEF Supply Division.

**Human Rights-Based Approach to Cooperation**

UNICEF Albania has been consistent in integrating human rights principles into all programmes and projects supported throughout the entire programme cycle of 2012-2016. The accountability of duty-bearers and democratic oversight in relation to their actual performance form the essential two pillars (and shape the Outcome level results) of UNICEF Albania Country Programme addressing, respectively, the inclusiveness in social services provision and appropriate governance to ensure such services are accessed by all children, particularly the most marginalised. The ability of the right-holders to claim their rights is also incorporated in programme design, albeit to a less extent.

In preparation for the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 2014, UNICEF steered a dialogue with civil society and facilitated coordinated action planning around the CRC Committee’s Concluding Observations issued in 2012 on Albania’s national report on the Convention's implementation. UNICEF also facilitated the dissemination of the CRC Committee recommendations and successfully advocated for the establishment of a Child Rights Caucus at the Parliament.
The UN DaO framework has facilitated an exhaustive approach to human rights based programming with comparative value added by each UN agency, based on specific technical expertise. This has allowed for the incorporation of the respective human rights dimension in the joint UN-GoA work plans, as well as in providing expert advice in the formulation of national policies and their practical implementation. This approach will be further strengthened in 2015-2016, in line with the MTR of the DaO Programme of Cooperation in Albania, which deliberated on adding an explicit joint UN Output Result to assist Albania fully adhere to international human rights commitments; improve the quality and timeliness of normative reporting and contribution to periodic reviews; strengthen national tracking mechanisms; integrate the recommendations of human rights treaty bodies into national strategies and sectoral plans; and engage in effective ongoing dialogue with all societal groups to change practice.

Gender Mainstreaming and Equality

Since UNICEF Albania is part of the “Delivering as One” UN programming framework, gender-focussed initiatives are strongly present in joint UN work plans, reflecting the division of labour among UN agencies based on their comparative technical strengths, under the overall leadership of UN Women. This work has been financially supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), channelling their resources through the UN Coherence Fund. During 2012-2014 (coinciding with the first three years of the programme cycle), UNICEF Albania spent about US$99,000 on gender-focussed initiatives (including US$30,267 in 2014). UNICEF-supported activities included:

- An analysis of the impact that the ECD care services have on the empowerment of women (including, economic empowerment though productive employment);
- Exploring the feasibility of regularising the work of small-size privately-managed day care groups (“child minders”), as well as acknowledge and professionalise the role of women offering care in such groups;
- Preparing inputs to the MoES’ policies aimed at expanding the availability of psycho-social counselling in schools and equipping school psychologists with necessary knowledge on Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

This work has been coordinated by a Gender focal point in UNICEF Albania, since the office does not have a dedicated gender specialist post in its structure. Close coordination with UNICEF Early Childhood Development (ECD) Officer and UN Country Team member agencies active in gender programming was ensured through the mechanism of Joint UN Annual Work Plans.

Environmental Sustainability

In 2014, UNICEF efforts focused on ensuring that the legacy of the Child-Led Environmental Education (CLEEN) initiative (described in more detail in the Result Assessment section of this annual report) fed into the formulation of the new sectoral strategies for education and environment, respectively. As a result, CLEEN training modules for teachers were accredited and teachers can now rely on these resources to enrich their qualifications. The new school curricula based on competencies, which is being developed by the MoES and the Institute for Development of Education (IDE), includes environmental education and awareness throughout the education cycle. The Ministry of Environment continued to air the CLEEN TV spots during the annual spring campaigns of “Let’s clean Albania in a single day”. The child-to-child communication methodology utilised by the project has been recognized by IDE and used as part of various teacher training packages.

During the remaining two years of the current country programme (2015-2016), UNICEF will
ensure that its environmental education experience and technical resources, developed and adjusted to the context of Albania, are made available to the DaO partner UN agencies and national stakeholders working jointly towards the country’s environmental conservation and sustainability targets.

**Effective Leadership**

In September 2014 the leadership of UNICEF Albania Country Office was transferred to the new Representative who, among the priority responsibilities, took over the coordination of the restructuring of the Office (abolishment of nine posts and establishment of six new positions as described in more detail in the HR section of this report) in line with the Programme Budget Review (PBR) recommendations, reflecting the need to better align staff profiles with UNICEF’s core roles in a middle income country. Transition of leadership was supported by the Country Management Team (CMT) and the Staff Association, with continuity in the established governance systems. The governance structure of UNICEF Albania Office was described in detail in the Annual Management Plan (AMP) – a key internal management document outlining agreed annual priorities in programme, operations and communication and assigning respective accountabilities. The oversight structures, as part of the Office governance system, were described in the AMP, including the role of all statutory committees and their composition, which were reviewed in 2014.

Progress towards achieving the AMP objectives was regularly monitored by the CMT which remained the central management body advising the Representative on policies, strategies, programme implementation, resource utilization, management and performance. The CMT was also the primary recipient of various management reports (including the Monthly Monitoring Report produced by the RO) based on UNICEF’s key performance indicators. In 2014, five CMT meetings took place; their deliberations were communicated to all staff and addressed in general staff meetings.

Intra-office communication channels also included programme and operations management meetings to address different issues, including the concerns of staff related to UNICEF’s transformational agenda and programmatic and staffing implications of the MTR in 2014. The latter was a two-track process, composed of a formal DaO MTR exercise, paralleled by the Country Office internal review. Discussions on the transforming engagement of UNICEF in Albania started in early 2013 and continued throughout 2014. In April 2014, the UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Director’s visit to Albania offered an opportunity to discuss the existing programme content and its future evolution. The draft Country Programme Management Plan (CPMP) was prepared consequently, suggesting changes in the Office structure and organigram. The CMT ensured that the principles of participation and transparency be observed and followed up on staff concerns related to post abolishment, separation procedures and termination indemnities.

The Office continued to apply standard UNICEF financial and administrative control systems to ensure good management of financial and other assets. The degree of delegation is determined in the Table of Authority revised in 2014. The Business Continuity Plan (BCP) was updated in 2014. No specific preparedness initiatives or emergency simulations were undertaken during the year. UNICEF participated in UN Country Team security meetings and trainings; all staff were regularly informed on security and safety issues accordingly. The Office continued to be UN Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) compliant. A joint UN BCP for the UN House was developed and operationalized, with UNICEF’s active engagement in “One UN” business continuity planning.
Financial Resources Management

UNICEF Albania continued to apply standard corporate financial and administrative control systems to ensure good management of financial and other assets. In 2014, the expenditure levels of allocated annual amounts of Regular and Other Resources (OR) reached 100 per cent and 96 per cent, respectively. The CMT routinely reviewed all “red flag” areas, including the Grant expiry dates, Direct Cash Transfers (DCT) liquidation status and level of programme expenditure.

In 2014, the Office disbursed US$652,054 to 25 implementing partners (IPs) as DCT. No partner or organization received over US$100,000; 14 IPs (56 per cent) received between US$20,000 to US$100,000 each, and 11 IPs (or 44 per cent) received less than US$20,000 each. The management of DCT liquidations improved in 2014; however, some difficulties still persist due to small and dispersed cash transfers at sub-national level; low absorption capacity of many implementing partners; and delayed liquidations by some public institutions as a result of procedural changes put in force by the State Treasury. The Office’s response included: monitoring of DCT liquidation status on a weekly basis and as a standing item in monthly CMT meetings; reinforcement of DCT management accountabilities of Programme Officers; spot checks of implementing partners’ business practices and records.

All funding requests and liquidations were processed using the Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) modality and Funding Authorisation and Certification of Expenditure (FACE) forms. With the leadership of UNICEF, the HACT webpage was created within the UN Albania Intranet; it contains the list of partners, their respective assessments and risk level profiles. The webpage is accessible at http://intra.un.org.al/hact.php by all UNDG agencies resident in Albania.

Bank transaction optimization and proper cash forecasting continued to remain among the Operations Section priorities. The Office always met its closing bank balance targets. Bank reconciliations were prepared on a monthly basis, in compliance with deadlines established by the HQs. There were no un-reconciled items.

Fund-raising and Donor Relations

By the end of 2014, the amount of OR raised by UNICEF Albania Office for the programme cycle of 2012-2016 had reached US$7.3 million, equivalent to 27 per cent of the Executive Board-approved US$27 million OR ceiling for the country programme cycle. The largest donors to UNICEF in Albania are the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), and the UNICEF National Committees of Sweden and the United Kingdom. Reforming Albania’s system of social care services, combatting violence against children, education and social inclusion of Roma have been among the thematic areas of main concern of donors. Grants managed by UNICEF Albania have been utilised close to 100 per cent within expiry dates, based on the office’s efficient system to monitor expenditures (by a dedicated focal point/Programme Assistant, in addition to the staff in charge of specific programmes). The timely re-phasing of OR between budget years has been used to flexibly regulate allocations. Of five donor reports due for submission in 2014, four were prepared and sent on time. The quality assurance mechanism included the review of all donor reports by the Deputy Representative and, for contributions exceeding US$500,000, by Regional Office advisors.

During 2014, the UNICEF Albania team continued to be part of a regional experiment,
dispatching UNICEF Set-Aside allocations received within the Social Protection RKLA Group to other participating Country Offices. Re-programming of unutilised balances close to the Grants expiry dates proved to be cumbersome in such a multi-country set up.

**Evaluation**

In the absence of a dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation post in UNICEF Albania in 2014 (the new Statistics and Monitoring Officer post is introduced as of January 2015 and the recruitment process is underway), the corresponding functions were a part of the Deputy Representative’s portfolio. The CO’s Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP) was prepared on time and shared with the Regional Office. It is an ambitious plan, given that most of UNICEF-supported activities in Albania are directly or indirectly connected to knowledge generation as a base for national policy making.

No evaluations were conducted in 2014. However, the findings of the analyses supported by UNICEF in previous years have been actively utilised as inputs to Albania’s newly shaping national strategies and action plans. The evaluation of the national Social Inclusion Strategy (2007-2013) completed by UNICEF in 2013, proved to be instrumental for the formulation of the country’s new approach to social inclusion, prompted the design of clearly explained mechanisms of cross-sectoral collaboration, strengthened the need for measurability, stressed the importance of well-defined accountabilities of each sector (including health, education, labour, protection, justice, housing) for inclusiveness in their respective policies. Similarly, the findings of the evaluation of the UNICEF-led Joint UN Child Nutrition project (2013) were used in the preparation of a new Inter-sectoral Strategy for Agriculture and Rural development (2014-2020).

UNICEF Albania has been respectful of the corporate standards in evaluation. Management responses for all evaluations of 2011-2013 have been followed up and properly reflected in the global evaluation database. Advice obtained through the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS) on the Social Inclusion Strategy evaluation has been particularly valuable, in light of the overall complexity of assessing the effectiveness of an inter-sectoral effort.

**Efficiency Gains and Cost Savings**

Thanks to the Office’s proactive use of modern technologies and software packages allowing free of charge communication (such as Skype, Viber and Outlook) installed in all UNICEF mobile devices, communication expenses dropped by about 10 per cent. In addition, the annual cost of internet connectivity was reduced as a result of a special agreement negotiated with two internet provider companies used by the office, where an advance payment by UNICEF is bringing discounts of 10-15 per cent. The expenses for fuel were reduced by almost 30 per cent, mainly due to a lower number of activities implemented at the sub-national level, compared to previous years.

A small cost reduction was related to a more economical use of paper and cartridges. The Office continues to recycle paper, plastic and cartridges in cooperation with a Roma NGO. Making UNICEF Office more “green” proved to be an inspiring example now followed by other UN agencies.

At the same time, due to staff reductions in all UN agencies in 2014, the cost share for common services proportional to agency headcount, such as security and medical care, has increased. In general, no cost savings could be reached through common services with other UN agencies.
Although common UN Long Term Arrangements (LTAs) for fuel procurement, travel booking, printing services, stationary supplies and event management do save time for staff, overall efficiency gains from common arrangements are not convincing, in comparison with similar LTAs that could be managed solely by UNICEF.

Supply Management

The total volume of UNICEF procurement in 2014 reached US$628,392, with 88 per cent of the amount related to the cost of technical expertise procured to support programme interventions. Out of 50 contracts processed in 2014, 30 were for the engagement of institutional or individual expertise, another nine dealt with programme supplies, and only 11 were linked to operational/administrative needs, thus bringing the ratio of programme vs. operational procurement contracts to 78 per cent vs. 22 per cent. Most procurement in 2014 was from local vendors, although several international expert contracts were also processed. In total, 10 Contract Review Committee (CRC) meetings with 11 submissions took place in 2014.

UNICEF Albania continued to assist the MoH in procuring antiretroviral (ARV) medicines and vaccines through the Supply Division, with the volume of ARV and vaccine supplies in 2014 reaching US$109,892 and US$3,079,016, respectively. The vaccine procurement is based on a long-term MoU signed by the MoH and UNICEF Supply Division.

UNICEF Albania Supply staff actively participated in the preparation of new UN common LTAs and the evaluation of existing ones. As part of the financial year closure, the Office completed all VISION activities related to the verification of accuracy of equipment inventories and intangibles. UNICEF Albania does not have a warehouse. All the supplies received were initially registered at the “virtual” warehouse in VISION and immediately delivered to the partners.

Security for Staff and Premises

UNICEF Albania closely monitored the security situation, which is generally stable. The office continues to be MOSS compliant.

Overall, the cost of security-related expenses during 2014 increased by about 17 per cent compared with 2013.

Security-related activities completed in 2014 included: i) Staff training on safety and security – conducted by UNDSS in March 2014 and in October 2014; and ii) Updating of the Warden System and training of wardens and their alternates in June 2014.

Human Resources

As part of the MTR process in 2014, UNICEF Albania identified the need to strengthen programme results in relation to children’s access to justice and to inclusive social services and reflect the core roles of UNICEF and the level of required expertise commensurate with the middle-income status of Albania. Consequently, the office’s capacity gaps in legal expertise, experience with public governance reform and public finance management, as well as in the area of statistics and monitoring were identified. The articulation of respective results for UNICEF Albania in 2015-2016 required considerable changes in the office structure that were presented in a revised Country Programme Management Plan (CPMP) in June 2014. UNICEF
Regional Office's valuable advice on programmatic and operational aspects of the transformation should be particularly acknowledged. Following the approval of suggested changes by the PBR, nine posts were abolished and six new posts created.

The essence of the change consisted in the development of new job profiles to comply with the increased expectations from UNICEF in terms of the in-house knowledge and high-calibre skills in the areas of legislative and governance reforms, networking and alliance building at the highest political levels, strong exposure to and connectivity with the work of other international and national stakeholders. Following the PBR approval, five staff members separated from UNICEF; four of them opted for an early separation. The process was managed with due respect to the interests of separating colleagues and maximum facilitation in procedural and human aspects.

Changes in UNICEF Albania staffing also involved the arrival in September 2014 of a new Representative, who was able to participate in the recruitment of new staff. By January 2015, five new posts have been successfully filled (with two internal candidates re-employed in new positions); the post of Statistics and Monitoring Officer will be re-advertised in early 2015 due to the failure in identifying a suitable candidate in the first round. RO advisors invested heavily in the recruitment process as Subject Matter Experts. Facilitated by the RO, the temporary deployment to Tirana of UNICEF Operations staff from Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina Offices greatly assisted in the process.

Individual performance planning was delayed in 2014, due to late finalization of Annual Work Plans with the newly-formed Government. By February, only 24 per cent of the staff’s Performance Appraisal System (PAS) forms were duly completed. The situation improved in the following months with close monitoring by the CMT. Work/life balance arrangements (flexi-time and work from home) are respected by the management. Staff are encouraged to continuously invest in professional education, to strengthen skills of a specific technical or functional nature, in support of UNICEF priorities. Online trainings and e-courses were also strongly recommended by the management.

UNICEF colleagues in Albania are aware of peer counselling resources available locally. Staff members participated in two “UN Care” trainings on HIV/AIDS prevention organized for the UN staff and family members.

**Effective Use of Information and Communication Technology**

By the end of 2014 a migration to the Office 365 was completed for all Office users. This switch to cloud-based storage allowed easier access to UNICEF emails, documents and collaboration tools. Smart mobile phones were purchased in advance of this move, to comply with the current corporate standards and allow access to emails and documents on-the-move.

Earlier in the year, successful negotiations with the primary internet provider company made possible a two-fold increase of the bandwidth (from 4 Mbps to 8 Mbps) without incurring any cost to UNICEF. This upgrade increased the speed of connectivity to public internet and allowed faster performance of UNICEF corporate software applications after the move to Office 365.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) support was provided on-site to UNICEF Montenegro to facilitate the re-location of their office to a new UN House. Colleagues in Montenegro were also assisted in moving users to Office 365, following the global rollout of the new framework. Whenever necessary, user support and maintenance of servers of UNICEF
Montenegro Office was done through remote access, thus eliminating possible travel costs.

It is particularly noteworthy that, as in previous years, UNICEF Albania has been actively engaging the offices’ in-house ICT expertise in programme activities. In 2014, technical guidance and support were provided by the UNICEF Albania ICT Assistant to Child Protection programme partners in geo-tagging the areas with particular concentration of children in street situation. Similarly, the State Probation Service benefitted from the UNICEF’s assistance in preparing a map with geo-locations of the local Probation Service centres and other public and non-governmental organizations hosting adolescent law offenders serving their probation terms. Such visualization of local resources is expected to raise the effectiveness of action planning and monitoring by stakeholders involved in the implementation of the national juvenile justice initiatives.

Programme Components from RAM

ANALYSIS BY OUTCOME AND OUTPUT RESULTS

OUTCOME 1 GOVERNANCE FOR CHILDREN Effective public oversight and monitoring of institutions help to ensure implementation of policies and programmes addressing the needs and rights of marginalized children.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
The year of 2014 became the first one to put under scrutiny and reality testing the full scope of the ambitions of the new Government brought to power by the parliamentary elections of 2013. With most nominations and staffing changes completed during the first half of the year, a comprehensive revision of the country’s national development agenda – including strategies, targets, indicators and their priority order – became one of the main tasks of Albanian policy makers in all sectors without exception. The new generation of Albanian politicians has come on board, with a lot of new energy and commitment to generate a real and long lasting change. Assisted by a cohort of international advisors, the Government was able to formulate the key elements of its “roadmap”, where the country’s full and soonest integration with the European Union clearly represents the ultimate destination point. Acknowledging Albania’s progress achieved so far, as well as the commitment and dynamism of the reform agenda driven by the country’s new leadership, Albania was granted the EU candidate status in June 2014, marking a critical milestone on the path towards European integration. Five areas of priority action were identified as pre-requisites for opening the EU accessions negotiations, as the next phase, urging Albania to:

- continue to implement public administration reform with a view to enhancing professionalism;
- take further action to reinforce the independence, efficiency and accountability of judicial institutions;
- make further determined efforts in the fight against corruption, including towards establishing a solid track record of proactive investigations, prosecutions and convictions;
- make further determined efforts in the fight against organised crime, including towards establishing a solid track record of proactive investigations, prosecutions and convictions;
- take effective measures to reinforce the protection of human rights, including of Roma, and anti-discrimination policies, as well as implement property rights.

The above requirements of better governance for all citizens and full respect of their rights and freedoms seamlessly fit with the core agenda of UNICEF of promoting the equitable enjoyment
of children’s rights, to be guaranteed by an effective, transparent and democratic system of
government mechanisms, from the central to sub-national and local levels. In practical terms,
there seems to be much stronger understanding and appreciation of the practical regulatory role
that various human rights instruments and frameworks adopted internationally (including the
CRC, CEDAW and CRPD) should play in shaping national policies, legislation, budgets and,
ultimately, action of those accountable to deliver for and protect children and families.

Thus, for the first time since the adoption of the framework legislation on child rights monitoring
and protection in Albania in 2010, the State Agency for Child Rights Protection has linked its
annual reporting on the status of child rights with a thorough analysis of budgetary expenditure
on children, to respond to one of the key observations issued by the CRC Committee in 2012.
Supported by UNICEF and Save the Children, such details of budgetary flows at central and
local levels will inform technical discussions and public debate on the preparation of the state
budget. UNICEF’s convening and advocacy roles have also been critical in fostering a renewed
commitment of Albania’s parliamentarians to the realisation of child rights, as a Child Rights
Caucus (including 26 members of the Parliament) was officially announced by the Speaker
during a special session on 18 November dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the CRC. An
open dialogue with children and young people invited to this parliamentary forum was held
during the session.

Advocacy, knowledge products and technical assistance of UNICEF have been crucial for the
national effort to shape the contours of the future social protection system re-designed to fit
Albania’s newly adopted territorial set up, with 61 municipalities formed instead of 373
previously existing local government units. A complex set of political, functional and fiscal
considerations are being reflected in the draft versions of Albania’s Social Protection Strategy
and Social Inclusion cross-cutting policy until 2020, with UNICEF playing one of the central roles
in conceptualising new approaches, focussed on equity, cross-sectorally and largest possible
involvement of civil society in policy design and implementation discussions. The RKLA
Reference Group on Social Protection has been an important source of regionally accumulated
experience for UNICEF Albania, inspiring a more systematic and expanding programmatic
engagement in the areas of decentralised governance and public finance management.

At the same time, an important constraint related to data unavailability and overall lack of culture
and capacities to measure institutional changes and the ultimate impact of introduced policies –
especially, at sub-national level – has been acknowledged by virtually all development actors.
This major bottleneck is being addressed by UNICEF and UN partners by advocating for
administrative data collection (in health, education, protection, justice and other social sectors)
to be put at the centre of Government and donors attention, to complement the existing capacity
of the INSTAT to collect macro data through nation-wide surveys.

Democratic governance, rule of law, respect of human rights and gender equality remain among
the key pillars of the UN agencies’ cooperation with the Government of Albania in 2015-2016,
as defined by the mid-term programme review process undertaken in 2014. The UNICEF
country programme will continue to support better governance for children promoted and
ensured by increasingly coherent efforts of the State and non-governmental entities, including
the Government, Parliament, Ombudsman’s office, civil society organizations, media, children
and youth, as well as international cooperation actors.

OUTPUT 1 Public oversight bodies related to children, including the Parliament, Ombudsman's
Office, Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, civil society organizations and the media, increasingly
demand accountability of duty-bearers for better governance results for children.
Analytical Statement of Progress:
In 2014, the State Agency for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SAPRC) experienced considerable staffing changes, as part of the reorganization in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. A newly appointed head of the Agency came on board with strong background in human rights and experience of collaboration with child rights treaty bodies and monitoring mechanisms. Supported by UNICEF, the SAPRC strengthened its role in using Albania’s international legal obligations as benchmarks and instruments to leverage the advancement of the child rights protection agenda nationally. In April 2014, the SAPRC took part in the hearings of Albania’s UPR report that shaped the content of a special meeting between children and legislators (including, the Speaker of the Parliament) organized in June in collaboration with the Parliamentary Committee on Labour, Social Affairs and Health issues. Another discussion between parliamentarians and children was held in November when, in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the CRC, about 200 children and adolescents submitted their recommendations to the newly established Child Rights Caucus in the Parliament. The recommendations were formulated through an extensive series of nation-wide consultations led by children and youth.

Early in 2014, the SAPRC reported to the Lanzarote Committee on the implementation of the Council of Europe’s Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and, since April 2014, has been a member of the Lanzarote Committee’s Executive Board. It has also strengthened its collaboration with the civil society organisations and mapped out those working with children and families; as of end-2014, the list of NGOs licensed to provide services to children includes 116 organizations. The number of Child Protection Units in municipalities and communes reached 196 in 2014, i.e. 53 per cent of local administration units in Albania (under the old territorial division) had a dedicated social or child protection worker. However, according to the SAPRC’s Annual Report released in November 2014, only about 20 per cent of this workforce were professionally equipped to effectively deal with child protection issues and follow up on individual cases. At the regional level, Child Rights Units (CRUs) are present in all 12 Regional Councils, although their capacity to deliver on their monitoring and policy influencing mandate also varies from region to region. Despite a series of trainings for SAPRC and CRUs on child rights monitoring offered by UNICEF in 2012, capacity gaps remain and will be prioritized in UNICEF cooperation plans for 2015

OUTPUT 2 National policies and mechanisms established to institutionalise the participation of adolescents and youth in decisions affecting their lives.

Analytical Statement of Progress:

OUTPUT 3 National media encouraged and supported to bring human rights, equity, gender equality, children’s and women’s issues and accountability of duty-bearers/government at the centre of public attention.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
In 2014, UNICEF Albania’s advocacy agenda continued to be anchored to issues of national importance and concern. Various events organised by UNICEF, other UN agencies and Albanian partner organizations were used as channels to portray issues related to child rights protection and call for a stronger equity focus in national policy vision and implementation. UNICEF Albania launched its presence in social media (Facebook, YouTube and Instagram), thus allowing more space to influence and interact with public opinion and increase the awareness on the situation of children nationally, regionally and globally.
To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, around 200 adolescents and young people aged 15-18 participated in a series of consultations under the theme “Is Albania now a better place for children?” which took place in seven regions of the country. On 18 November 2014, the participants of these consultations were in Tirana to take part in a special plenary session of the Parliament convened by the Speaker to celebrate the Convention and announce the establishment of a Child Rights Caucus. The young generation of Albania took the floor to pose questions on the status of child rights in the country and share their ideas and suggestions in relation to the CRC Committee recommendations (issued in October 2012). The UNICEF Representative addressed this special gathering of the Parliament to reflect on child rights successes and challenges ahead in Albania’s journey towards European integration and, more generally, a country better fit for children.

The CRC@25 celebratory events included a TV talk show with the participation of the Minister of Education, Head of the State Agency for Child Rights Protection, Head of the EU Delegation and the UNICEF Representative. The talk show was broadcast live from the EU Information Centre in Tirana where the officials met with young people and had an informal discussion of various sensitive issues, such as Roma discrimination, violence, gender inequality, reflecting the hopes and concerns of Albania’s youth, as they embark on the path of adulthood. UNICEF also supported two events of the MoSWY organized within the stream of CRC@25 initiatives and dedicated to public discussion of Albania’s approaches to protecting and budgeting for children.

UNICEF video features condemning child discrimination, abuse, neglect and violence against children were aired by a private DigitAlb TV channel on a pro bono basis during the 2014 World Football Cup, thus having reached the largest possible national audience. Collaboration with DigitAlb TV will continue in 2015 and other private sector partnerships will be explored.

**OUTPUT 4** Key policy research and monitoring institutions, as well as central, regional and local government entities, effectively manage data related to children and women and periodically report on the situation of marginalised children and families, implementation of child-related legislation and international conventions.

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
During the year, UNICEF facilitated the discussion between the SACRP, the CRO, INSTAT and the MoSWY on bottlenecks in the existing mechanism for decentralized data collection on children (as per the Decree of the Council of Ministers No. 267 dated 12.04.2012 “On methodologies, indicators and data to produce children’s statistics at the national and regional level”). As confirmed by the CRO, in spite of UNICEF’s long-term technical and financial support and the CRO staff’s consistent efforts, only about 40 indicators out of the approved national list of more than 100 could actually be collected from local health, education and social protection administrations on a regular basis and with sufficient assurance of data accuracy. At the same time, the SACRP’s own capacity to collect, analyse and disseminate data on children is acknowledged as still being "work in progress", although the 2014 round of annual reporting on the situation of children in Albania was accompanied by a better supply of data from line ministries and other state institutions.

UNICEF Albania has been successful in engaging INSTAT more closely in administrative data collection on children. The Institute’s technical advice has been critical in establishing mechanisms of collaboration between education, health and civil registry authorities (supported by a MoU signed by the MoES, MoH and MoI in December 2014) in identifying out-of-school children. This work has been unfolding as part of a multi-country effort shaped by the Regional
Knowledge and Leadership Agenda, with the UNICEF Regional Office coordinating the Reference Group on “Inclusive Quality Education” (RKLA 4). Consultations with the INSTAT management on joint action planning for 2015 took place during and after a regional meeting of the CEE/CIS national statistical offices convened by UNICEF Regional Office in November 2014. INSTAT and the State Agency for Child Rights Protection expressed their renewed interest in promoting an upgrade and utilization of the TransMonEE (Transformative Monitoring for Enhanced Equity) database in Albania, in terms of both supply of and demand for such consolidated and systematized data by national policy-making entities. UNICEF’s commitments to support this intent in 2015 will be coordinated with the "Delivering as One" partner agencies of UN Women, UNDP and others, as well as with key donors to Albania active in the field of statistics, such as SIDA, SDC and the EU.

OUTPUT 5  Juvenile offenders or victims of crime are treated in accordance with international standards, including a/ shortened pre-trial period, b/ education opportunities for all children in detention, c/ re-integration pre- and post-trial, including diversion and/or alternative sentencing, and d/ social support and rehabilitative measures for children under 14 years of age.

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
Rule of law and equitable access to justice have featured prominently in the Government’s agenda in 2014. Many legislative and operational initiatives emerged or received a confirmation of support from donors, boosted even further by Albania’s acquiring the EU candidate status in June 2014. With UNICEF’s advocacy, technical assistance and convening role, the adoption of a national Strategy on Juvenile Justice for 2015-2020 was included in the new legislation development plan of the Ministry of Justice. The synchronization of Albania’s advocacy with a multi-country UNICEF effort, as part of the Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda (Key Result Area 2 on “Access to Justice”) has been a factor of success. UNICEF Albania has also assisted in the preparation of amendments to be introduced to the Code of Criminal Procedure addressing children not only in conflict but also in contact with the law.

During 2014, the implementation of alternatives to detention for juveniles, strongly advocated for and technically assisted by UNICEF, has been expanding. Since the establishment of the State Probation Service in 2009, it has handled more than 11,000 alternative sentences. In 2014, the Service took care of about 300 probation sentences for young law offenders (compared to 109 in 2009), with UNICEF directly supporting NGOs to follow up on each case and ensure social re-integration. UNICEF launched the initiative of a GIS mapping of all organizations accepting juveniles sentenced to community works – as a tool to facilitate the Probation Service’s work planning and monitoring. More than 60 organizations were mapped as possible assignment sites, formally accredited with the Probation Service, to follow up on alternative verdicts, including 22 local offices of the Service itself, with the total capacity of more than 500 cases to follow.

Little progress was noted with regard to the length of detention/investigation for juveniles. According to the latest available data, of 234 juveniles awaiting trial in pre-detention in 2013, 68 per cent stayed in prison for more than 90 days, including 46 percent for more than half a year. In the absence of a computerized information system, monitoring the case flow within the judiciary is difficult and tends to further mask the system inefficiencies.

In 2015, UNICEF’s advocacy and assistance will be focussed on solutions facilitating children’s access to justice (in criminal, administrative and other legal proceedings), in a cooperative and mutually reinforcing effort with the DaO UN partner agencies.
OUTPUT 6 National response mechanisms strengthened to protect children from trafficking, sale and/or commercial exploitation.

Analytical Statement of Progress:

OUTPUT 7 Barriers to women's empowerment in the transition society context are analysed, with a particular focus on women's roles in family and community life.

Analytical Statement of Progress:

As a contribution to the UN agencies’ extensive work on gender issues in Albania, UNICEF focussed in 2013-2014 on generating specific evidence to better understand the correlation between access to early childhood care services and economic and social empowerment of Albanian women. The analysis was based on primary data collected through 490 household questionnaires, in addition to structured and semi-structured interviews with policy-makers and service providers, in four regions of the country (Tirana, Elbasan, Fier and Kukes). This first attempt to look into the economics and social value of ECD, as perceived or experienced by ECD service clients, represented an important exploratory step in the direction of relatively less understood demand aspect of ECD service delivery.

As far as the supply side is concerned, some low-cost alternatives to early childhood care were identified, similar to the so-called “child minders” (small privately-led day care groups) model that many European countries have adopted as a cost-effective solution. “Child-minder” day care groups do not normally require heavy infrastructure; they are flexible in meeting the needs of families and children in their localities and do not bear substantial cost for the Government. Based on the evidence collected in Albania, a set of policy options and budgetary estimates for the “child minders” model in Albania (including regularisation of the “child minders” managers’ professional activity) were developed by UNICEF and discussed with the Government in 2014.

UNICEF’s accumulated experience in CEE/CIS countries in relation to young child’s comprehensive well-being and early learning, as part of the Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda (KRAs 3 and 7), will be tapped into, in order to suggest an optimal model for Albania that could balance considerations of the best interest of the child with the opportunities for economic activity and income generation for women (both mothers and caregivers). The simultaneous development of the country’s new social protection, social inclusion, education, health and employment strategies offers a unique window of opportunity in 2015 to add new elements to national policies taking into account a harmonious combination of the mother’s and the child’s interests.

In accordance with the MTR 2014 recommendations, a revised Outcome/Output structure will be used for the DaO- and UNICEF-supported interventions in 2015-2016. Gender will be mainstreamed in all UNICEF’s Outputs and the present dedicated Output discontinued.

OUTCOME 2 Children from vulnerable groups are assisted, through specific policy measures and government programmes, to be healthy and take full advantage of all learning opportunities.

Analytical Statement of Progress:

Lately, the subject of social inclusion has been present in Albania’s public discourse considerably more than before. Although the notion of equity is still not conceptually and operationally embraced in Albanian policies, the political pressure on the Government (in office since September 2013) to deliver on its electoral promises is heavy, so various manifestations of the vulnerability, exclusion and unmet expectations of such social groups as Roma, the
elderly, the disabled, the poor, etc., more and more often get to the centre of the media and public attention, debated in increasingly equity-sensitive terms. In response to such pressure, as well as to comply with the EU requirements and standards in light of the country’s recently acquired candidate status, the Government initiated a complete overhaul of its economic and social strategies and approaches to many chronic problems that failed to be resolved by the health, education, social protection and labour policies of the previous decade(s).

Of the new sector-specific plans currently in the making, UNICEF Albania Country Office has been the main provider of technical expertise for the formulation of the social protection strategy, articulating the commitment of the Government to complement cash-based assistance with a state-regulated services component (currently taken care of by the NGO sector, with donors’ support). The adoption of the Law on the Order of Social Workers, drafted with UNICEF’s active involvement, became an important milestone of the social care service reform. Other elements of the reform addressing legislative, fiscal, institutional and capacity bottlenecks continue to be based on UNICEF’s technical and financial assistance (the latter guaranteed by the Swiss Development Cooperation grant), facilitation and political support, as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the MoSWY in July 2014.

Evidence on social inequities and possible solutions has been provided in abundance by UNICEF’s child protection programme in Albania. In 2014, surveys and assessments were completed to describe the situation of children in the street, in residential care and with disabilities. Based on this up to date knowledge, immediate measures have been put in place by the State Social Services to address the phenomenon of children in street situation. In addition, national plans for de-institutionalisation of care for children without parental support or with disabilities are being informed with UNICEF’s research and technical cooperation in data collection and analysis.

In the area of education, UNICEF’s advocacy and expertise have been key in convincing the MoES to address early education as one of the new education sector strategy’s explicit priorities. Joined forces with the World Bank in evidence generation and advocacy for Early Childhood Development resulted in a recent decision by the Ministry to introduce the pre-primary school year (“zero grade”) as a mandatory step for all children, with the view of increasing school readiness and performance. The revision of early learning and development standards and exploration of cost-effective models of early care were also made possible thanks to UNICEF’s technical support. A UNICEF-initiated nation-wide campaign for bringing “Every Roma Child to Preschool” connected more than 500 Roma children to early learning in the past twelve months, and is now supported by the MoES.

In health, UNICEF Albania successfully completed a multi-year effort in developing a set of new service standards and protocols for Mother and Child Health care facilities. Fully endorsed and owned by the national policy-makers and practitioners, the new standards combine a preventive public health care approach with elements of child protection, probing the front line care providers to look at the wellbeing of the child in a comprehensive manner (health, nutrition, growth, likely treatment in the family, etc.).

It is noteworthy that, unlike the previous generation of Albania’s strategy documents (that have never been in deficit in terms of their number), the newly formulated plans have a chance to really be transformed into operational tools, as the results-based approach and accountability are quite strongly enforced by the new Government. On the other hand, the realization of the binding nature of strategy statements made many of UNICEF’s interlocutors and partners become more cautious in their target-setting, reflective of serious capacity and resource constraints at various governance levels, including planning and management. Very much the
same constraints are hindering effective inter-sectoral collaboration. Having no doubt about the value of multi-sectoral efforts in principle, in practical terms government professionals have embraced policy reforms from their own sectoral perspective at this stage, being preoccupied with their immediate tasks and accountabilities. In 2015, UNICEF will engage with partners to address these challenges and identify entry points to catalyse multi-sectoral collaboration premised on cost effectiveness and efficiency considerations.

The year 2014 also opened a process of fundamental importance for the delivery of social services – namely, the reform of Albania’s territorial and administrative division. The drastic reduction in the number of Local Government Units (LGUs) – from 373 to 61 – was approved in July 2014, to provide a new map for the country’s local elections in summer 2015. The work has been initiated, under the coordination of the Ministry of Local Governance, to review the functionality and fiscal base of the new Municipalities. The process has been full of challenges, given the traditional weakness of LGUs and high degree of concentration of power and resources in Tirana. UNICEF has been assisting the MoSWY and the State Social Services in defining their vision of the future social protection services’ decentralised set up. The impact of the decentralization reform on the health and education sectors will have to be analysed in detail in 2015.

UNICEF-assisted interventions have been aligned with the DaO work on social inclusion, whereas several UN agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, UN Women, WHO, UNFPA, ILO, IOM, UNHCR, UNODC, UNAIDS) jointly plan and coordinate their activities aimed at promoting the adoption of special inclusion (support and positive discrimination) measures in the sectors of each agency’s technical focus. Since 2013, the UN assistance coherence in this area has been financially backed up by the Swiss Development Cooperation.

OUTPUT 1 National mechanisms of social inclusion and protection are evaluated and income support system enhanced to make it better work for children.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
In collaboration with the State Agency for Child Rights Protection and the Child Rights Observatory (CRO), UNICEF continued testing a “one stop shop” approach which was launched in 2013, in organising informational and referral services for families with children at local (regional) level. In the towns of Kukes, Fier and Shkodra, the State Agency’s sub-national branches of Child Rights Units and the CRO merged their local offices, in buildings offered by municipal governments, and started operating as single offices where children and families in need of assistance, advice, and counselling could get immediate help and/or advice. The type of support varied, starting from completing the paperwork for cash assistance applications to referrals to specialized centres/NGOs offering services to children, women and families. Local authorities’ political commitment and support proved to be a powerful factor to activate local networking and engagement of government and NGO organizations.

Although not formally evaluated yet, the testing phase demonstrated a lot of potential in terms of local capacity mobilization and possibilities to raise the profile of children’s issues in the agendas of regional and municipal administrations, so far not yet sufficiently sensitized about their accountabilities in that regard. The “one stop shop” experience will be summarized by partners, with UNICEF’s support, as an input to the national debate on the new contours of decentralized governance in Albania, as part of the ongoing administrative/territorial reform that has reduced, as of July 2014, the number of LGUs from 373 to 61.

Regarding the Economic Aid (“ndihma ekonomike”) reform, the research of UNICEF in 2011
proved that it was not reaching children (or effective for them) in the past. Since 2012, the Government of Albania has been working to reform its Economic Aid programme, with the support of a World Bank loan. In 2014, UNICEF’s advocacy with the new leadership of the MoSWY led to the recent decision of the Government to start distributing economic aid to mothers/women, instead of male heads of households. According to INSTAT, about 74,000 households in Albania were receiving cash assistance in the last quarter of 2014, which may represent up to 15 per cent of the country’s population.

As of 2015, social protection and inclusion issues will be incorporated in a single Output linked to UNICEF’s support to the social protection sector, as suggested by the MTR in 2014.

OUTPUT 2 The system of social care services is reformed to effectively address the needs of the most vulnerable families and children.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
Throughout 2014, UNICEF was engaged in strengthening the normative policy framework in support of Albania’s Social Care Services reform. UNICEF contributed to drafting of the Law on the Order of Social Workers, approved by the Parliament in December 2014, which marked an important step towards institutionalization of the “social work” profession (and clarifying the difference as compared to the existing “social administrator” functions, mainly related to the disbursement of Economic Aid and other cash allowances).

The future of the profession is inseparable from the role and functions of the State Social Services (SSS) discussed during a two-day national convention, organised in December with UNICEF’s support. The convention was addressed by the Prime Minister Edi Rama, as a confirmation of the importance of social protection amongst government priorities. About 250 participants representing the SSS’ management and field workers contributed to articulating the new mission and architecture of this institution, and its frontline role in the provision of social services to the most disadvantaged populations of the country.

The new vision of the SSS in the context of Albania’s re-dressed system of social protection is being shaped with the help of high calibre technical expertise mobilised by UNICEF internationally, regionally and nationally. Taking into account the fundamental changes in the country’s administrative/territorial division (i.e. the recent amalgamation of 373 local government units into just 61 municipalities, accompanied by a comprehensive revision of their functional and fiscal frameworks), UNICEF seized the opportunity to influence the design of governance mechanisms at central, regional and municipal levels, namely in relation to planning, budgeting, delivering and monitoring of social protection measures.

To cement a new vision, a draft Social Protection Strategy for 2015-2020 was finalized in December 2014, with technical and financial inputs from UNICEF. The draft Strategy reflects the highest political commitment of the Government of Albania to offer effective social support – in the form of both cash assistance and care services – to the most vulnerable categories of the population. These include families struggling with economic hardship, persons with disabilities, marginalized Roma, victims of domestic violence, street children, unemployed youth or any individual or family in difficult life circumstances. This work has been closely aligned with the DaO UN agencies’ activities promoting socially inclusive policies in health, education, justice and housing sectors and encouraging greater coherence between sectors (horizontally) and various governance layers (vertically).
OUTPUT 4 Child protection mechanisms and services enhanced to effectively reach and support children and families in situations of particular vulnerability.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
With the aim of making Albania’s social protection system child-sensitive and taking into account the ambitious scope and dynamic pace of the national social protection system reform, UNICEF initiated a comprehensive mapping and assessment of the existing child protection mechanisms. The analysis will draw pathways to establish an effective child protection system to better address vulnerabilities; it will also identify opportunities and specific entry points for bringing about more synergies between the child protection system and the broader social protection system in Albania. The practice of child protection services, approaches and instruments supported by UNICEF in previous years, such as Child Protection Units established in 196 LGUs, children in street situation initiative, Child Helpline, child protection worker course curriculum and protocols, will feed into the analysis process.

To close the remaining gaps in relation to child protection needs and responses, a “stock and flow” analysis of the child population in all of Albania’s 32 residential institutions was finalized in 2014. The total of 989 children were identified in residential care, including 154 children with disabilities. Very few of them have benefited from other forms of care. UNICEF is now working with the MoSWY to develop a comprehensive national plan of de-institutionalization in Albania to transform the actual residential institutions into community- and/or family-based services (such as foster care already tested in Albania). Measures to stop the institutionalization of children in the 0-3 age group, who represent over one-thirds of the children in residential care are already in place. Preventing abandonment of babies and institutionalization of children with disabilities, currently representing 16 per cent of those in institutional care, is a priority of the plan.

To complement this newly collected data, a more in-depth assessment of the situation of children with disabilities, totalling up to 18,500 persons in 2013) was conducted by UNICEF in 2014. The analysis identified a number of priority areas to intervene, such as early identification and assessment, access to integrated services, overcoming barriers toward social inclusion, regulatory framework and data gathering. Based on the findings, UNICEF is working to design an intervention plan to be launched in 2015. Coordination with UNDP and the World Bank leading the assistance to the GoA in relation to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) action planning and disability benefits reform, respectively, will be crucial.

OUTPUT 5 Education, health and protection policies improved and budgeted for to support social inclusion of children in early years, especially those with vulnerable backgrounds, such as Roma.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
In 2014, many years of advocacy and technical assistance of UNICEF finally resulted in the formal commitment of the Government to make the pre-primary school year (“zero grade”) mandatory. Pre-primary classes had originally been introduced in the 2007-2008 academic year through coordinated projects of the World Bank and UNICEF; as of 2014, they continue to be funded by the MoES reaching almost 10,000 children in Albania every year. The commitment to introduce a “zero grade” in all schools is included in the draft education sector strategy as one of the priorities and planned to be reflected in Albania’s National Strategy for Development and Integration for 2015-2020. The existing Pre-University Education Law is being revised accordingly, with UNICEF’s technical support. The process of change has been highly
participatory, and the convening energy and facilitation of UNICEF have been appreciated by national stakeholders.

International expertise mobilized by UNICEF was also central in equipping the MoES with different scenarios of how access to preschool education could be expanded by maximising the utilization of the existing capacity of kindergartens, given the sector’s overall limited resources. The quality of preschool education has also been addressed. In 2014, a new preschool standards framework was developed with UNICEF’s assistance and approved by the Ministry. A set of revised Early Learning and Development Standards is being developed, as a multi-sectoral exercise involving education, health and protection practitioners, thus paving the way to the revision of the pedagogical education and in-service teacher training curricula planned for 2015. A strong boost towards a more articulated vision of and national commitment to early education in Albania came recently from the World Bank’s SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) assessment report that focussed on ECD issues and was prepared with UNICEF’s assistance; the report was launched at the highest political level by the Minister of Education and the Prime Minister.

UNICEF’s engagement with national policy making was combined with an active presence on the ground through capacity development efforts for local authorities’ to ensure adequate support to particularly vulnerable children. The “Every Roma Child in Kindergarten” nation-wide initiative promoted Roma children’s access to early education: out of 1,061 Roma children (of early/primary school age) identified in October 2013 as missing their schooling, 409 and 74 children are now enrolled in preschool and primary school, respectively. A newly issued MoES’ regulation will further institutionalise the work facilitating Roma children’s access to early learning.

OUTPUT 7 Financial barriers in access to health services are analysed.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
Under the leadership and with extensive technical assistance of UNICEF, a major pre-requisite step for an accurate costing of the MCH services in Albania was completed in 2014, consisting in the development and official introduction of a comprehensive set of 18 treatment protocols and standards of care covering specific subjects of children’s antenatal and postnatal care, nutrition, growth and development. This new regulatory framework is instrumental for the revision and modernisation of the entire national primary health care system launched by the MoH in July 2014. The new package of the MCH standards addresses issues related to the existing fragmentation of services, varying costs, lack of preventive approach to public health and disconnection of health services from ECD and child protection. New standards’ dissemination and enforcement modalities have been agreed between the MoH, Health Insurance Institute, National Centre for Quality Control and Accreditation of Health Institutions and UNICEF, with the first batch of 1,000 manuals printed and being distributed to all health centres in the country.

As the new health care strategy of Albania is still under development, the public health care financing model to be ultimately chosen by the Government is still to be identified. While UNICEF is advocating for universal and equitable access to health care, standardization of the package of services delivered to the client remains a critical nucleus around which other elements of the system will be built, such as the service costing, human resources capacity, data collection and monitoring. In 2015, the content of the Health Insurance Institute’s contract with health service providers will be reviewed, to reflect the reorganization of MCH services based on the new standards.
UNICEF has played a central role in the system upgrade by providing direct technical expertise to develop and publish the standards, convening the alliance of stakeholders, advocating for a broader vision of child care and development involving health, protection, economic and social aspects and determinants, and underlying the importance of preventive care versus treatment. As a part of the DaO UN programme of cooperation with the Government of Albania, this work also embraced technical inputs of UNFPA and WHO. The Mid-Term Review of the DaO programme framework undertaken in 2014 confirmed the commitment of the UN agencies to assist in designing selected blocks of national health care policies, with a special emphasis on access of particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups to quality health care.

As of 2015, public health financing issues will be incorporated in a single Output related to UNICEF’s support to the health sector, as suggested by the MTR in 2014.

OUTPUT 8 Improved child feeding practices and access to commodities and services.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
This Output dedicated to child nutrition had been primarily connected to a Joint UN Programme on Child Nutrition implemented in 2010-2013 by UNICEF, WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) under the overall management and coordination of UNICEF, with financial resources provided by the Government of Spain and channelled through the MDG Fund.

As confirmed by the programme evaluation in 2013, it was relevant in its concentration on food security and nutrition since these were sufficiently addressed issues in the context of Albania, with the country’s upper middle-income status masking some serious inequities. The Joint Programme provided critical pieces of analysis and research; outlined particular vulnerabilities of specific social groups; drafted a national Food and Nutrition Action Plan for 2013-2020; established a number of cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms bringing together health, education, social protection, agriculture and finance experts; tested new ways to strengthen food security at the community level and improve nutrition patterns in households, relying on better utilisation of local agricultural tradition and resources. The Programme introduced a new set of child growth monitoring indicators being now tracked by the MCH practitioners; designed elements of a child nutrition surveillance system; developed nutrition education modules for school curriculum; analysed the impact (and revealed the inefficiency) of the present economic aid system in relation to the nutritional status of children in recipient families. High-level advocacy by UNICEF facilitated the inclusion of the “promotion and support of food security programmes for children living in poor families and in remote areas regardless of family income” in the programme of the Government of Albania for 2013-2017.

In 2014 the analysis of child nutrition habits was continued by a Health Behaviour of School Children survey, conducted jointly by UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which provided a better understanding on the health and nutrition status of school children (including adolescents), supported evidence-based policy making and supplied standardized and internationally comparable data. As a reflection of UNICEF’s focus on equity, an additional module was introduced to capture the impact of socio-economic determinants (mirrored in the perceived family income/wealth status) on health and wellbeing of children. Although only 8 per cent of surveyed adolescents aged 11, 13 and 15 acknowledged being hungry at least once before going to school or at night, almost 56 per cent of children appeared not to be eating breakfast regularly. Fathers of 24 per cent of surveyed school children were reported unemployed, while for mothers this indicator reached as high as 58 per cent.
In 2015-2016 child nutrition issues will be incorporated in a single Output related to UNICEF’s support to the health sector, as suggested by the MTR in 2014.

**OUTPUT 9** Key elements of national HIV/AIDS prevention policies for children and most at risk adolescents are strengthened.

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
According to the MoH, the country registered 774 cases of HIV/AIDS between 1993 and 2014; in 2014 75 new cases were identified compared to 93 in 2013. As of end-2014, there were 39 children with confirmed HIV infection (including 5 new cases registered since January 2014). Blood infusion and injecting drug use have been implicated in only 1.6 per cent and 1 per cent of HIV infections, respectively. Based on officially-registered cases, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Albania remains low at 0.027 per cent. The Government provides ARV treatment free of charge, and there are Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) centres established in each of Albania’s 12 regions, although their utilization by the population is still low.

UNICEF’s programmatic engagement in the area of HIV/AIDS has been focussing on supporting the communication and outreach work of regional VCT centres and helping the Ministry of Health to review their ARV procurement process. In 2014, UNICEF continued to collaborate with UNAIDS and other UN agencies, contributing to technical or political discussions at the country level ensuring that the rights of children and women affected by HIV are protected. UNICEF provided support to the MoH in planning, procuring and managing ARV supplies and, as a result, all adults and children in need received treatment in due time and free of charge. UNICEF also continued to maintain a seat in the national dialogue related to HIV prevention. During 2014, UNICEF contributed to all the national processes that helped develop the National Strategy for HIV prevention in 2015-2020 and prepare Albania’s submission to the Global Fund against HIV/AIDS and TB.

As of 2015, UNICEF’s position and knowledge on HIV/AIDS issues will be shared with government partners, as required, within the format of the DaO and corresponding UNICEF’s Outputs addressing health sector policies, as suggested by the MTR in 2014. Overall leadership on HIV/AIDS issues in the DaO programme will remain with UNAIDS.

**OUTPUT 10** Children and young people of vulnerable families have equal access to health services, and the health of young children is monitored.

**Analytical Statement of Progress:**
The focus on UNICEF-supported activities has been on testing new approaches of Mother and Child Health (MCH) services provision in the local context of Albanian towns and villages. In the region of Durres, the work of a city-based Baby-Friendly Hospital work was complemented by a Baby-Friendly Community initiative, based on partnerships between health care providers, mother support groups and local community governance structures to create supportive environments for infant and young child feeding at the community level and prioritize Roma and other vulnerable children. Monitoring of child nutritional status and utilization of growth charts by health care practitioners, as per the new updated MCH service standards, have been taking place in 86 per cent of monitored practitioners’ performance cases by 2014, in comparison with only 52 per cent in 2010.

The challenge of data collection and monitoring within the health sector in general has become one of the most pressing priorities of the MoH in 2014. With UNICEF playing an active
facilitation and convening role, a critical analysis of the national health information system was conducted and a revised list of core health indicators was developed in alignment with the European Community Health Indicators (ECHI). The Institute of Public Health technically led this activity, in close collaboration with the Albanian Institute for Health and Social Development, the Health Insurance Institute and INSTAT. Further to the MoH’s endorsement of the draft list, the generation of suggested indicators from administrative data sources will be tested in 2015. So far, the new leadership of the MoH has been demonstrating a strong commitment to enhance the quality and availability of health-related data for better policy making and monitoring.

UNICEF has also been active in facilitating the cooperation between the MoH, the Albanian branch of the International Baby Food Action Network and the National Health Inspectorate in monitoring the implementation of national commitments to promote breastfeeding. A study launched in 2014 indicated that more than 95 per cent of the maternity facilities in Albania have been applying rooming-in and early start of breastfeeding. At the same time, numerous violations of the existing Law for the Promotion and Protection of Breastfeeding have been registered on behalf of the infant formula producing and trading companies. Free samples of breast milk substitutes continue to be distributed to mothers via different channels; in 45 per cent of cases the use of the infant formula was recommended by a doctor, nurse or a pharmacist.

In 2014, limited progress was noted in the preparation of legislation on flour fortification in Albania. In spite of discussions with the MoH, no focal person has been appointed yet to steer the process and liaise with the Ministry of Agriculture.

OUTPUT 13 Education decentralization policies effectively connect to local contexts and ensure marginalized children participate in quality compulsory education.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
In response to the Regional Call for Action for “Including all Children in Quality Learning”, UNICEF Albania country programme interventions in Basic Education were focussed on:

Improving data collection system and monitoring mechanisms for children out-of-school, drop-outs and those at risk-of-dropping-out:
The regional Out-of-School Children (OOSC) initiative that Albania is part of, together with other UNICEF Country Offices in the Reference Group of Key Result Area 4 on “Inclusive Quality Education”, aims at ensuring that every child not only is identified and registered in school, but also is attending school and monitored properly to prevent the risk of dropping out and receiving quality education through specific teachers’ attention. After an agreement reached in 2013 between the four ministries (including the MoES, MoH, Ministry of the Interior-MoI and MoSWY) a national cross-sectoral network of practitioners and ministry experts was established, with UNICEF’s active support and central convening role. The network also involved INSTAT, local government officials and school administrations.

In 2014, the OOSC network identified system barriers and developed a set of specific guidelines related to data collection and respective roles of each sector. Albania’s action plan was validated during the Bucharest conference of OOSC initiative participating countries, in light of UNICEF’s experience in CEE/CIS consolidated as part of the Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda. In December 2014, a formal protocol was signed by the MoES, MoI and MoH identifying inter-sectoral accountabilities, timelines, data collection formats and mechanisms to become operational in 2015 to identify and respond to the situation of out-of-school children. The MoSWY’s decision on participation is pending, subject to delineation of the
Providing technical assistance on selected topics to strengthen the sector’s regulatory base:

Based on the analysis supported by UNICEF in 2012-2013 which assessed the effectiveness of the MoES’ special measures aimed at facilitating school attendance by children with particularly vulnerable backgrounds (Roma, Egyptians, children from impoverished families) with UNICEF’s technical support, two new MoES instructions were issued in 2014 to enhance the Ministry’s “free transportation” and “free textbooks” policies. Also, the “child-friendly school” norms promoted by UNICEF were converted into a set of guidelines adjusted to the context of Albania by the team of experts representing the MoES, Institute for Development of Education, National Education Inspectorate, and Regional Education Departments in Korça, Durres and Berat, representatives of school administrations.

UNICEF’s “child-friendly school” vision has been reflected in the set of standards developed by IDE (in cooperation with Save the Children) for the Albania’s “Schools as Community Centres” initiative. In Korça, Durres and Berat new curricular modules on Roma culture and history have been tested in Grades 1-9.

OUTPUT 14 Violence against children is recognized and increasingly addressed as a harmful social phenomena.

Analytical Statement of Progress:

Elements of the Communication for Behaviour Impact (COMBI) initiative, addressing violent treatment of schoolchildren by teaching personnel in schools, have been put together (including tools, communication materials, change measurement methodology) and are ready to be certified as an official teacher training programme. Anti-violence measures tested by the COMBI initiative in 2012-2013 in public schools and kindergartens (reaching up to 90,000 children and 800 teachers) are now a part of the MoES’ annual instructions and monitoring routine by the State Inspectorate of Education.

Based on the 2013 measurement of the COMBI intervention effectiveness, the percentage decrease in the incidence of violence in teacher-to-student communication and interaction in public schools was low, at about 10 per cent. This limited decline of violence against students by teachers in schools confirms the difficulty of engaging with behaviour change targets that generally require substantial time, massive resources and systematic effort in order to be achieved.

However, the programme has had influence in raising the profile in Albania of harmful but socially accepted phenomenon such as inter-personal violence. The voice raised by UNICEF to condemn violence against children (through COMBI and other VAC-related initiatives) has definitely been heard. A parliamentary resolution on child rights protection adopted on 26 November 2013 highlighted, among other provisions, the need to protect children against violence and acknowledged the accountability of the state to establish, maintain and finance appropriate services and mechanisms. This commitment of Albanian legislature was reinforced in 2014 when, in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the CRC, the Speaker of the Parliament formally announced the establishment of the Child Rights Caucus. The role of the Caucus is to propose new initiatives and to promote tools to enhance the protection of children against violence, abuse and exploitation. The 26 parliamentarians who are members of the
Caucus represent the voice of awareness for the protection and respect of children and their rights within the Albanian Parliament and beyond.

The UN Delivering as One programme Mid-Term Review determined the need to dedicate a special Output result to joint UN activities addressing violence in the Albanian society, in the context of human rights respect and protection. As a member of this Output working group, UNICEF will continue the discussion with the MoES and other national stakeholders on how to expand and systematise a nation-led response to manifestations of violence in the society.

OUTPUT 15 Children in compulsory schools act for environmental protection.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
The Child-Led Environmental Education (CLEEN) project had been implemented by UNICEF in 2009-2012. A full package of environmental education teaching materials for primary school was developed and successfully tested in about 15 per cent of Albanian schools, in 10 out of the country’s 12 regions. The introduction of environmental education modules in grades 1-5 and complementing textbook-based knowledge with a variety of outdoor activities enriched the classroom experience of young children and reflected in better grades in subjects such as science, as well as in math and reading, for example, as confirmed by the project evaluation. Collection and recycling of plastic garbage was part of the project and enthusiastically appreciated by children and school personnel. It took into account and involved traditional Roma family businesses related to waste recycling, and established cooperation modalities between schools and Roma communities. CLEEN has been recognized globally as a comprehensive and tested programme for environmental education in UNICEF’s Child Friendly Schools Manual.

In 2014, UNICEF efforts focused on ensuring that the CLEEN project legacy feed into the formulation of the new sectoral strategies for education and environment, respectively. As a result, CLEEN training modules for teachers were accredited and teachers can now rely on these resources to enrich their qualifications. The new school curricula based on competencies, which is being developed by the MoES and the Institute for Development of Education (IDE), includes environmental education and awareness throughout the education cycle. The Ministry of Environment continued to air the CLEEN TV spots during the annual spring campaigns of “Let’s clean Albania in a single day”. The child-to-child communication methodology utilised by the project has been recognized by IDE and used as part of various teacher training packages.

In 2015-2016, UNICEF will ensure that its environmental education experience and technical resources, developed and adjusted to the context of Albania, are made available to the DaO partner UN agencies and national stakeholders cooperating towards common targets established in relation to the country’s environmental conservation and sustainability policies.

OUTCOME 3 Effective and efficient office and financial management, Information Technology systems and Human Resource practices are in place and contribute to the realization of UNICEF’s commitments to the programme of cooperation in Albania, in compliance with UNICEF policies and procedures.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
All major operational benchmarks and objectives of the year 2014 have been met. Important staffing changes took place in 2014, further to the MTR process and PBR approval, including the abolishment of nine and establishment of six new posts, as of January 2015. The assistance and facilitation of the Regional Office was crucial to secure for the process of change to happen smoothly, with utmost attention to the interests and concerns of the Albania office staff.
Participation of Regional Advisors as Subject Matter Experts in the recruitment process is particularly acknowledged and appreciated, as well as the facilitation of the RO Human Resources specialists in all procedural aspects. Missions and assistance to Albania of UNICEF Operations Officer from Montenegro and UNICEF HR Officer from Bosnia and Herzegovina allowed the Office in Tirana to complete the recruitment for vacant positions in a short period of time, so that any interruption in terms of staffing capacity between 2014 and 2015 was avoided. Since September 2015 UNICEF Albania Country Office is led by the new Representative. The Operations section continues to aim for efficiency in providing support to programme development and delivery by ensuring that human, financial and physical resources are appropriately used for the achievement of programme targets and that strategic inputs are consistently provided to programme in a cost-effective and timely manner.

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

Analytical Statement of Progress:
With the 2014 Annual Management Plan developed and approved in early March 2014, governance structures and systems were established to properly manage risks and achieve program results. The oversight structures – as part of the Office governance system – were also described in the AMP, including the role of all statutory committees and their composition. The office had defined appropriate management indicators, regularly monitored performance against these indicators and took the necessary corrective action as needed. Progress towards achieving the AMP objectives was regularly monitored by the CMT. In 2014, five CMT meetings took place and they systematically monitored:

- DCT status
- Program implementation
- Budget implementation
- Security
- ICT issues
- UNCT feedback

The CMT deliberations were communicated to all staff in general staff meetings. Intra-office communication channels included programme and operations management meetings which among other things also discussed the concerns of the staff related to UNICEF’s transformational agenda and programmatic and staffing implications for the Albania office of the MTR in 2014. The draft CPMP was prepared consequently, suggesting changes in the office structure. The CMT ensured that the principles of participation and transparency were observed; it also followed up on staff concerns related to post abolishment, separation procedures and termination indemnities. The Institutional Budget (2014-2017) was submitted to the PBR Committee in June 2014 and new proposed staff structure is being implemented. The PBR Budget submission, budget analysis and reporting were timely completed.

The Office continued to apply standard UNICEF financial and administrative control systems to ensure good management of financial and other assets. Albania is not an emergency country and the overall risk level of natural or man-made disasters is considered low to minimal. Minimum recommended procedures and practices were implemented by the Office, and the Business Continuity Plan was updated in 2014. All staff are regularly informed on security and safety issues. The Office continues to be MOSS compliant. A joint BCP for the UN House has
been developed and operationalized, with UNICEF’s active engagement in the “One UN” business continuity planning.

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

Analytical Statement of Progress:
UNICEF Albania continued to apply standard corporate financial and administrative control systems to ensure good management of financial and other assets. In 2014, the expenditure levels of allocated annual amounts of Regular and Other Resources reached 100 per cent and 96 per cent, respectively. The CMT routinely reviews all “red flag” areas, including the Grant expiry dates, DCT liquidation status and level of programme expenditure.

In 2014, the Office disbursed US$652,054 to 25 IPs as DCT. All funding requests and liquidations are processed using the HACT modality and FACE forms. With the leadership of UNICEF, the HACT webpage was created within the UN Albania Intranet. The total volume of UNICEF procurement in 2014 reached US$628,392, with 88 per cent of the amount related to the cost of technical consultancy expertise procured to support programme interventions. Out of 50 contracts processed by the Supply unit in 2014, 30 were for the engagement of institutional or individual expertise, another nine dealt with programme supplies, and only 11 were based on operational/administrative needs, thus bringing the ratio of programme vs. operational procurement contracts to 78 per cent vs. 22 per cent.

Bank transactions optimization and proper cash forecasting continued to remain among the Operations Section priorities. The Office met its closing bank balance targets. Bank reconciliations were been prepared monthly, with respect to the deadlines established by the HQs. There were no un-reconciled items.

OUTPUT 3 Human Capacity. Effective and efficient HR management practices, ensuring that the required human resource capacities are identified, managed and fostered, to ensure that the right skill-sets are available in support of the achievement of programme and management results.

Analytical Statement of Progress:
UNICEF Albania has deployed all efforts to deliver HR services in a timely and effective manner. Following the approval of suggested changes by PBR process, nine posts have been abolished and six new posts created. The process of recruitment has been on track. Since September 2015, UNICEF is led by the new Representative who came on board in time for actively participating in the recruitment process for the newly established positions. The assistance and facilitation of the Regional Office was also crucial to secure for the process of change to happen smoothly, with utmost attention to the interests and concerns of the Albania country office staff. The investment of time required from the Regional Advisors in their capacity of Subject Matter Experts was substantial (as it involved both written testing and competency-based interviewing) and their role in the successful and timely completion of the recruitment process is particularly acknowledged and appreciated. The facilitation of the RO Human Resources specialists in all procedural aspects cannot be underestimated either, including their prompt and effective facilitation of the staff exchange arrangements, to assist with the recruitment formalities. Missions and assistance to Albania of UNICEF Operations Officer from Montenegro and UNICEF HR Officer from Bosnia and Herzegovina allowed the Office in Tirana
to complete the recruitment for vacant positions in a short period of time, so that any interruption in terms of staffing capacity between 2014 and 2015 was avoided.

Servicing and management of entitlements of national and international staff was completed on time. Performance management continued to pose a challenge both in terms of timely completion and quality of Performance Appraisal System (PAS) inputs. Only 24 per cent of the staff’s PAS forms were duly completed by February 2014, but the situation improved in the following months (also thanks to close monitoring by the CMT). Work/life balance arrangements were fully respected and encouraged by the management. Staff members were permitted to take time for learning. Options of flexi time, work from home and learning days were used by some staff members.

OUTPUT 5 Other Cross-Sectoral programme areas.

In 2014, this Output result was associated with UNICEF Albania’s dispatching role in managing, on behalf of other Country Offices, of UNICEF’s 7 per cent Set Aside funds allocated to the RKLA Reference Group on Social Protection (chaired by UNICEF Albania) based on a jointly agreed project proposal. UNICEF Albania followed up on timely approval of fund commitments to be used by other country offices and facilitated inter-country re-programming of Grant balances towards the end of the year.

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