Executive Summary

The year 2013 has been remarkably turbulent for the operational context of UNICEF in Albania, as the country has striven through months of political near-crisis that accompanied the parliamentary elections in June. The consequential major reshuffle of government offices, which was top-down, has had a profound effect on the continuity of donor-supported activities, with orientation of the new government interlocutors becoming the focus.

The new socialist-oriented government opened new opportunities to re-position the children's rights agenda, and UNICEF took a central role in mobilizing UN advocacy for human rights in front of the international and national human rights monitoring mechanisms (such as the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Universal Periodic Review; the EU annual reports on Albania; Post-2015 global consultations with civil society; and the country's Court of Justice and People's Advocate Office). Among other remarkable developments, a resolution was adopted by the Parliament in November to seal the new government's commitment to activate the CRC potential for advancing child rights and to explicitly link child protection measures to budgets.

Supporting the government in reforming the social care system remained the most significant activity undertaken by UNICEF. Approximately 20 different assessments and research projects have been contracted as part of a comprehensive diagnostic analysis of the current system and the feasibility of change. Close daily interaction with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth was key to ensuring that national partners had full ownership and continued to be motivated, despite the year’s political hiccups.

In contrast with the social welfare sector, where the strategic vision of the government is getting clearer (although it is not yet formalized, with the formulation of a national development and EU integration strategy postponed until 2014), national priorities in health and education have not been well identified, leading to fragmentation of international assistance and the yielding of only short-lived, small-scale results. Contributing to this dispersal of effort is the current cumbersome structure of programme of cooperation between the Government and the UN, an issue to be addressed during the Mid-Term Review in 2014.

There has not been a strong strategic focus by the Government on the above-mentioned areas nor a culture of evidence-based policy making overall. There is more work to be done by the Government in the collection of reliable, sufficiently disaggregated and regularly updated statistics on social issues. Huge internal and external migration shifts further blur the picture of the country’s demographics. Significantly improved data supply and utilization were emphasized among the most critical tasks that Albania’s new leadership is committed to.

Support from UNICEF’s closest partners has been central in promoting the equity agenda, including in relation to particularly vulnerable children and families. Collaboration with national and international NGOs (Child Rights Observatory, CRCA, BKTF Coalition, Save the Children and Terre des Hommes) and donors active in the social protection sphere (Switzerland, Austria and Sweden) was strengthened during the year and been instrumental in bringing the equity concerns to the attention of Albania’s new cohort of policy makers.

Country Situation as Affecting Children & Women

The negative impact of the global economic recession has manifested itself in Albania’s increasing poverty rates, reversing the poverty reduction trend that the country has been witnessing since the early 2000s. While poverty incidence reduced from 25.4 to 12.4 percent of the population between 2002 and 2008 respectively, the latest LSMS round of 2012 (with data released in 2013) revealed that 14.3 percent of Albanians (i.e. around 400,000 people) live in absolute poverty. The extremely poor, within the population, who are defined as those having difficulty meeting basic nutritional needs, increased from 1.2 percent in 2008 to 2.2 percent in 2012. Inequality is likely to grow among the poor themselves, as the poverty severity index increased from 0.7 to 1. Migration of the population from mountainous areas in Albania towards the coastal and central zones has been accompanied by the spill over of poverty, as the centres of demographic
concentration (like Tirana, Shkoder, Lezhe, Durres and Fier, for example) registered higher than average levels of poverty. Similarly, the relative weight of the poverty burden seems to be “migrating” from rural to urban areas. In 2002 about 70 per cent of the 800,000 poor lived in rural areas. In 2012 the distribution of the 400,000 poor is almost divided equally between urban settlements and villages. In absolute numbers, the poverty headcount in urban areas is now back to where it was about a decade ago, with more than 200,000 urban dwellers struggling below the poverty line.

The release of a complete set of LSMS 2012 data (expected in 2014) will allow for a more in-depth analysis, including on the situation of children. In the meantime, UNICEF supported the analysis of available statistics in a “report card” on child poverty and other deprivations produced by the Child Rights Observatory and published in November 2013. Providing a snapshot of childhood in today’s Albania, the report uses 26 indicators to describe the situation of children in five dimensions: material well-being; health and safety; education; risks and behaviours; and housing and environment. Benefitting from the Observatory’s unique access to sub-national and local statistics, the report highlights many challenges that the country will have to address. Serious concerns are raised in relation to children’s long-term poverty: (88 percent of children in the Mountain region live in families which have received economic aid for three or more years); health (infant and child mortality rates in the Mountain region being almost twice as high as the national average); early education (only between 21 to 39 percent of young children across Albania’s 12 regions benefit from early childhood development opportunities (ECD); basic education (between 30 to 49 percent of children aged 15-18 are enrolled in schools; and about one fifth of Albanians aged 15-19 are not engaged in education, employment or training).

Patterns of social exclusion follow not only geographical divides, but also ethnic and gender divides. As underlined in the Albania 2013 Progress Report issued by the European Commission in October, immediate measures are needed to improve the situation of Roma in the country, in line with the national action plan on the Roma Decade. For many Roma children, exclusion starts at birth as up to 6 per cent of Roma children are estimated not to have proper birth registration papers. Less than half of Roma appear to have a health card which is necessary for getting access to primary health care, while many would not even know where or how to obtain it. Currently, only 2-3 per cent of Roma children have access to crèches and neither additional quotas nor budgets at local level are available for young Roma children to participate in early education. Although Roma children need two full years of additional tutoring and support before they can start in mainstream primary school, as stated in the EU 2020 strategy, only one out of four Roma children in Albania benefit from some sort of school preparedness opportunities. Recent research by UNDP suggests that 36 per cent of Roma children aged 7-15 have not gone through a single year of schooling. In the last two years major cities witnessed the forced eviction and dismantling of Roma informal settlements, without the provision of alternative shelter or access to social housing programmes (only 4 per cent of Roma benefit from some form of social housing). In Tirana, there are approximately 175 homeless Roma families who do not have professional skills, and who are long-term unemployed, with only sporadic income generated through informal activities (such as scrap collection, begging, child exploitation, or pregnant women exploited for begging). Over 38 per cent of Roma and 45 per cent of Egyptian families live in old decrepit dwellings and a further 21 per cent of Roma and 11 percent of Egyptian families live in shacks. Many of these families do not have access to potable water, indoor toilets or waste water services. At the same time, 50 per cent of Roma and almost 70 per cent of Egyptians in Albania are not really migratory, as they declare to have lived in the same location for the past 20 years.

Social injustice or exclusion based on gender is widespread. Women’s participation in the formal labour market is low (at about half of the economically active age cohort) and jobs appear deeply segregated along gender lines as women do “women’s jobs” and men do “men’s jobs”. By type of activity, women contribute the majority of the labour force in health and social work, education and more than half of the agriculture labour force. Their contribution to traditionally male-oriented sectors is very low (e.g. only 1 per cent to mining, 4 per cent to construction, and between 13 per cent and 19 per cent to infrastructure). According to a study by UN Women, the wage gap remains, as women’s average salary is about 18 per cent lower than men’s. Women and girls’ enrolment to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system in its current form remains very limited. Gender stereotypes in the selection of the fields of study and in curricula itself are still strong. While women make 55 per cent of the agricultural labour force, 87 per cent of them work as unpaid family
workers being potentially or actually easy subjects for exploitation and abuse. This is aggravated by women’s limited property rights (over land or water resources) as a result of the failure to implement the co-ownership stipulations provided by the legislation. The practice of legalization/registration almost always defines the male head of the family, or the head of the family, as the sole representative and land owner.

Although many aspects of social exclusion and inequity in Albania are relatively well researched, there is no consolidated national vision of which vulnerable categories would require priority attention, how their needs should be addressed, what economic and especially political possibilities for pro-poor redistribution of public wealth are there, and so on. The document, known as the new Government Programme for 2014-2017, (presented to the Parliament shortly after the June 2013 elections) does not give all the answers as far as Albania’s future course towards a more equitable society is concerned. Identification of social exclusion profiles and development of coherent policies to connect all Albanian citizens to development opportunities that the country’s gradual modernization can increasingly offer will remain the task for the new Albanian leaders. to complete.

Country Programme Analytical Overview

For the planning cycle of 2012-2016 UNICEF country programme outcomes in Albania have been formulated as follows:

**Outcome 1:** Effective public oversight and monitoring of institutions help to ensure implementation of policies and programmes addressing the needs and rights of marginalised children.

**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.

The first Outcome broadly deals with the availability and effectiveness of independent democratic institutions, such as the parliament, the Ombudsman (People’s Advocate) Office, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and civil society networks, as channels to organise the dialogue and cooperation between citizens and the state. It should be remembered in that regard how new such instruments and possibilities still are for Albania. For example, it was only in 1990 that the defence lawyer’s function was re-introduced in court proceedings; release on probation for children in conflict with the law became possible in 2009; the recent history of the Parliament was marred with political boycotting and enormous challenges between 2009-2010; the appointment of the Ombudsman was blocked until 2012, and so on. In the last 24 years since Albania has been party to the CRC, the Government has reported on the country progress twice (in 2005 and 2012. In 2010 the framework law on child rights was adopted, and the national legal base is still to be reviewed in terms of compliance with the CRC norms. There is no national consensus on social vulnerability and exclusion profiles, with some forms of discrimination acknowledged more than the others. UNICEF will continue to promote democratic instruments, and to advocate for better outcomes for children through until the end of the cycle.

The second Outcome supports the development of specific policies targeting situations and groups of particular vulnerability – children in need of protection, young and/or first-time mothers, impoverished rural and suburban families, Roma communities, etc. Although this outcome accommodates interventions in different sectors (health, education and protection), it has become more obvious that the main components of systems of services are cross-cutting. With minor variations, UNICEF-supported activities are concentrated around determinants of the enabling environment, addressing such aspects of health, education and protection policies; as adequacy of laws and normative standards, allocation and disbursement of required financial resources, clarity of roles and accountability in governance, as well as social norms shaping the position of key actors. Although the depth of UNICEF’s engagement differs from sector to sector (with social protection being the centre of programme effort), prioritization of enabling policy reform over supply- or demand-related programme commitments is likely to persist until the end of the cycle in 2016.

Humanitarian Assistance

N/A
Effective Advocacy

*Fully met benchmarks*

Amidst the political turmoil of 2013, it was particularly important for UNICEF to keep its various audiences focussed on the trajectory of equity-sensitive reforms, especially the ones dealing with social protection and/or human rights promotion, given that these areas do not necessarily appear as strongly as other challenges (political, economic and financial) in the agendas of Albanian policy makers and their foreign interlocutors. Opportunities for the UNICEF Representative to open events or deliver speeches have been used to once again remind the Albanian policy makers, professional communities and public at large about the unfinished work in protecting children from violence, building an enabling environment for children with disabilities, empowering Roma families, addressing child poverty and deprivation, etc. In responding to these needs, UNICEF continuously emphasized the oversight role of democratic institutions, such as the Parliament, the Ombudsman (People’s Advocate) Office, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, coalitions of NGOs and other newly emerging channels of citizens’ exercising control over state authorities.

To illustrate the success of UNICEF’s advocacy effort, the adoption of a special parliamentary resolution on child rights protection (dated 26 November 2013) is an example of a breakthrough step of the government to acknowledge its responsibility to follow up on the recommendations of the CRC Committee and address the accumulated backlog of unresolved issues. The same resolution called for immediate action and outlined specific measures to confront violence against children - an accomplishment that should be credited to the joint CO/RO advocacy, in close collaboration with the EU partners in Tirana and Brussels.

In order to reach a greater degree of coherence in advocacy messaging between various UN agencies participating in the “Delivering as One” programme of cooperation in Albania, four thematic position papers have been drafted and discussed at a UN Country Team retreat in December. The papers addressed the issues of social exclusion (prepared by UNICEF), regional development, governance and rule of law, and environmental risks. The papers will contribute to the mid-term review of the cooperation programme in 2014 as an articulation of the common UN position on critical points of Albania’s development agenda.

Capacity Development

*Mostly met benchmarks*

Among the most promising changes already noticeable in many government entities are: the new style of the country’s leaders to interact with their cooperation partners, openly discussing g problems and removing barriers to more substantive discussions; and the articulation of their own intended reforms. This appears the best approach to increased national ownership over the country’s development agenda.

In 2013 the emphasis of UNICEF’s efforts was placed on building the capacity of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth to reform the national system of social care. The target audience for UNICEF during this process has been the Ministry’s technical leadership in departments and units dealing with economic aid (“ndihma ekonomike”), residential care services, community-based care and overall planning and strategy development. Rather than organizing one-time workshops or sporadic training sessions, this type of engagement required a lot of daily communication between UNICEF Country Office and the MoSWY, on-line availability of international expertise on a “whenever required” basis and intensive consultations on virtually every aspect of the reform action plan. The latter has been ambitious and covered such areas as service governance, public finance, HR management, training and licensing, digitalization of data flows, and some other areas - relatively new for the organization - where UNICEF had to learn together with national counterparts.

Another example of progress in capacity building comes from the health programme where public officials from health, agriculture, education and social protection sectors worked together to develop nation-wide and local action plans for better nutrition of young children. As a result, a new inter-sectoral Food and Nutrition
Action Plan (FNAP) for 2013-2020 has been developed, with the costing estimate of selected activities already introduced to the Medium Term Budgetary Framework by line ministries. At local level, fifteen communities that were part of the joint UNICEF/WHO/FAO project on Child Nutrition (implemented in 2010-2013 with the MDG-F grant) developed and launched their local food and nutrition action plans, which opened a totally new chapter in the practice of local government administrators, previously not concerned with food security and child nutrition issues.

One of the lessons learned throughout this experience is that the effectiveness of any capacity building initiative is directly dependent on the availability and guiding power of a relevant national framework. In other words, the appreciation of and responsiveness to capacity building opportunities seem to be much higher when national partners are very clear about the link between their upgraded skills and personal accountabilities.

**Communication for Development**

*Mostly met benchmarks*

During 2012-2013 the most comprehensive Communication for Behavioural Impact (COMBI) package was applied in UNICEF-supported programmes in Albania in relation to violence against children. New ways of disciplining (through respectful communication rather than giving orders or using physical violence) have been promoted in public schools, kindergartens and residential care institutions in order to reduce the incidence of violent treatment of children by adults. By the end of 2013 the first phase of the programme was nearing completion. The latest (fifth) wave of behaviour pattern measurement involved about 800 teachers and 90,000 students. Very gradual shifts in teachers’ behaviour have been registered, with less frequent occurrence of shouting or ear pulling, for example. However, perhaps the most important change that has been generated by the COMBI programme is related to a new mental -- non-violent -- paradigm in the minds of teachers, particularly valuable in light of Albania’s recent historic background, when violent treatment of the individual by those in the position of power was accepted as a societal norm. Work is currently underway to finalise the official accreditation of the anti-violence COMBI modules, with a view to include these techniques in the curriculum of pedagogical universities. Documentation and promotion of COMBI experience will continue nationally, as well as through UNICEF’s global campaign against violence.

Another large-scale communication campaign that continued in 2013 has been targeting mothers and their skills in feeding young children (including breastfeeding). A combination of media tools has been used, to reach mothers and families with messages on improved child rearing and feeding practices. The campaign’s branding included a central character, a logo, a tagline and a musical theme. A package of communication materials (6 TV spots, 3 radio spots, 5 posters and 4 leaflets) to promote “new and better” child feeding practices was prepared and distributed through national and local media, as well as in internal broadcasting systems at the health centres in the target areas. Other communication activities – such as promotional tours, mothers’ meetings, interaction of health professionals with mothers through Facebook and blogs, creation of a dedicated web-site on child feeding ([www.ushgyerjaefemijeve.com](http://www.ushgyerjaefemijeve.com)) – helped spread the messages around. About 1,900 mothers were involved in the “Mothers of the Year” competition, and some 900 mothers took part in the “Mothers’ Tour”.

At the same time it should be acknowledged that COMBI campaigns, as one of the C4D instruments, is an expensive engagement in all senses, requiring a long-term planning horizon and guaranteed supply of resources, to maintain the intensity of public communication and support necessary machinery for periodic behaviour change measurements. Unless a combination of resource-related prerequisites is in place, the application of COMBI approaches in the context of a middle-income country (with relatively limited UNICEF budgets) may become problematic.

**Service Delivery**

*Mostly met benchmarks*
The strategy of direct service delivery is utilised by UNICEF Albania to a limited extend (mainly targeting Roma), as a temporary solution pending institutionalization of appropriate mainstream services. In 2013, a few sub-contracted NGOs delivered family outreach and patronage support to 200 Roma families in Elbasan and Durres communities, facilitating children’s preparedness for school, promoting good parenting skills and conducting regular health check-ups. Home visits/patronage programme targeting Roma children and parents also continued to be offered to approximately 240 families in Roma settlements in the outskirts of Tirana. Home visiting protocols incorporating parenting education components have been approved recently by the Ministry of Health and should now become part of the routine practice applied by health care personnel in Women and Child Consulting Centres (WCCCs).

Some direct assistance was also offered to Roma families to follow up on their child birth registration paperwork (some 120 cases in processing); at the same time a technical and financial feasibility study has been conducted to explore the possibility of an immediate electronic registration of children born in maternity hospitals through an on-line connection with civil status registration offices.

The year 2013 was the last one when UNICEF offered financial support to the “House of Colours” municipal day care shelter for street children in Tirana. This well-established service, with the average capacity to host about 70 children every day, is expected to be supported, as of 2014, through a combination of the municipal and EU funds. A similar hand-over is planned with the national “ALO 116” child helpline in 2014, with the discussion of appropriate state financing raised to the level of the parliament in late 2013.

### Strategic Partnerships

**Mostly met benchmarks**

In 2013, the personnel-based composition of partnerships with the key partner ministries (of social welfare, health, education, justice and interior) have been undergoing a dramatic change, as the newly elected government started replacing the staff in virtually all positions in public service, from top management to lowest operational units. Many donors expressed their concern (including, in formal communications to the ministries) that the loss of experienced professionals might damage the quality and continuity of joint programmes. By the end of the year the process was largely over, and the new teams are now making hard efforts trying to catch up with the requirements of their jobs. The change brought into ministerial chairs and parliamentarian offices many energetic and forward looking individuals, some with the CSO background, who genuinely share the concerns of UNICEF and were ready to act swiftly. The fact that one of the first public hearing sessions of the new parliament was dedicated to combatting violence against children and protection of their rights, with explicit reference to the CRC Committee recommendations, showed a very positive development on the Governments behalf.

Throughout the period of these turbulent changes, UNICEF’s partnerships with the EU, key bilateral donor organizations (such as the Swiss Development Cooperation – SDC, Austrian Development Agency – ADA, Sweden International Development Cooperation Agency – SIDA) and international NGOs (Save the Children and Terre des Hommes) were of critical importance, as the alignment of messaging to the new Albanian interlocutors helped maintain the issues of human rights, equitable growth and social justice visible on the national agenda. As in previous years, UNICEF Country Office provided extensive inputs to the: EU annual assessment report on Albania’s performance and the EU investment plans in Albania under the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) facility.

On the UN cooperation side, most of the “Delivering as One”(DaO) normal mechanisms have settled close to the midpoint (in 2014) of the second DaO programme cycle. However, the emphasis of the DaO on joint UN business processes, rather than on programmatic and advocacy coherence, continued to weaken the potential of the UN system for advocacy on policy choices. For most of the DaO participating agencies, their programmes are too small and financially vulnerable to go beyond the modest scope of individual projects. Towards a mid-term review in 2014, the UN Country Team is making an effort to consolidate its position on issues of social inclusion, governance, regional development and environment that are likely to come across
as major themes in a simplified structure of the cooperation programme for 2014-2016, to rectify current fragmentation and lack of focus.

**Knowledge Management**

*Partially met benchmarks*

Overall, the supply of reliable data for social policy planning is rather poor in Albania. Electronic data management systems only starting to be established and used by education, health, social protection and justice professionals, and are closer to piloting mode than to a nation-wide application. There are multiple sources of analysis, but the quality is inconsistent and the demand from practitioners is not always there, as the strategic function of policy analysis and planning has not been so clearly assigned within most of ministries that UNICEF cooperates with. Evidence-based policy making has recently been declared a cross-cutting priority of the new government and some institutional adjustments could already be seen at the year’s end. To support this commitment, UNICEF will offer a number of internet-based information management tools, such as a [digital map of all Roma communities in Albania](#), [electronic registry of social care services](#), [combined map of maternity facilities and civil registry offices](#), and a [map of KG facilities](#). Given that intensive population migration (both internal and external) has been among the major factors in the country’s recent history, getting a realistic assessment of actual demographics against available (or needed) services is one of the critical (and extremely difficult) tasks that Albanian social policy makers are currently confronted with.

These electronic tools, together with copies of and links to a wide range of publications (of UNICEF and partners) will be assembled on a renovated UNICEF Albania web-site in 2014, as a modest attempt to arrange a “child policy resource corner” for child policy developers. An important addition to Albania’s knowledge base will be a UNICEF-commissioned analysis of national policies and reforms and their effects on children and families (expected to be completed in 2014).

**Human Rights Based Approach to Cooperation**

*Mostly met benchmarks*

In general, Albania should be commended for having strengthened its institutional infrastructure for human rights protection in the past few years, with the role of such institutions, for example, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and Ombudsman (People’s Advocate), becoming more vocal and influential, initiating inspections and revealing situations of discrimination. In 2013, UNICEF has intensified its cooperation with the Ombudsman Office. Specific plans to expand children’s effective access to justice are being prepared for 2014 and a possibility to establish a Child Commissioner’s function with the Ombudsman Office was being considered at the end of the year. On UNICEF’s request, the Supreme Court is also looking closely at the situation with the rights of young law offenders, especially when it comes to unnecessary (or prolonged) pre-trial detention.

Being the lead human rights agency in Albania’s international aid community, UNICEF Country Office has been invariably active in communicating its position and concerns through various monitoring mechanisms, such as the country progress review by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Universal Periodic Review (for which UNICEF coordinated the preparation of the UN Country Team analytical inputs in 2012 and 2013, respectively). UNICEF was the first UN agency to engage with the newly elected parliamentarians and successfully lobby the adoption of a special [resolution on child rights protection](#) in November 2013. In addition UNICEF supported the establishment of a child rights caucus in the parliament, spoke at the hearings on child protection from violence and abuse, and participated in public sessions to review the state budget for 2014. The need to systematically follow up on the CRC Committee recommendations (issued in October 2012) was also being emphasized in all formal and informal communications with the MFA, MoSWY, and State Agency for Child Rights Protection, other line ministries and stakeholders. Also, the set of the CRC Committee recommendations offers itself as a unifying platform for civil society advocacy.
At the same time UNICEF is fully cognisant of how much still needs to be done for human rights culture to be engrained in Albanian policies and practice. Although a number of national councils, state and inter-ministerial committees exist to protect human rights of specific vulnerable population groups (such as Roma and Egyptian minorities, people with disabilities, women and children, migrants, victims of trafficking and/or domestic violence, etc.), none of these bodies have been politically active and technically strong enough to ensure tangible and sustainable results of corresponding strategies and action plans to date. There has not been sufficient pressure coming from the previous parliamentarians nor from the society, as Albania’s public awareness and demand for human rights respect and active protection is still being formed.

With the parliamentary elections held in June 2013 and formation of the new government, Albania has a chance to revisit its national development priorities through the lens of human rights and democratic principles, to benefit the Albanian society and facilitate the country’s EU accession.

**Gender Equality**

*Mostly met benchmarks*

During 2013 UNICEF explored the correlation between access to ECD services and economic and social empowerment of women in Albania. This work 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 economic and social value of ECD, as perceived or experienced by clients, represented an important exploratory step in the direction of the relatively less researched demand aspect when it comes to service delivery analysis (with most research focused so far on the supply side). The economic empowerment equation (“income generated from women’s employment” versus “ECD service fees paid by families”) appeared to be a complex one to tackle; unless ECD facilities are of good quality and affordable/low cost, economic gains from employment might become questionable. Sociological observations urge for more thinking about how the demand is actually influenced by the weight of cultural and societal traditions. The study will be extensively reviewed through consultations with national stakeholders in early 2014. Additionally, within a broader spectrum of UN Country Team activities related to gender issues, the destructive influence of gender-based violence (GBV) on teenage girls has been addressed. Support was provided to build the capacities of school counsellors to identify, address and report gender-based violence that affects teenage girls, as well as boys. An action plan, which includes training, on the job support and mentoring, started to be implemented in 2013 in collaboration with the MoES, and will continue throughout the 2013/14 academic year.

**Environmental Sustainability**

*Mostly met benchmarks*

**South-South and Triangular Cooperation**

N/A
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Narrative Analysis by Programme Component Results and Intermediate Results
Albania - 0090

PC 1 - Governance for children

**On-track**

**PCR 0090/A0/04/001 PCR 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.

**Progress:** The overall technical quality and adherence to democratic values in Albania’s governance have remained very topical in public discourse throughout 2013, peaking around mid-summer when the parliamentary elections brought into power the former opposition party. Among the “first one hundred days” targets of the new government the enhanced oversight role of the parliament, human rights Ombudsman (People’s Advocate) and Anti-Discrimination Commissioner featured very prominently, with many previously dormant subjects unearthed and openly discussed in public hearings, round table discussions, televised debates, etc. Of particular importance is a renewed commitment of the government to revisit the unfinished agenda for children, as underlined in the recommendations of the CRC Committee, most of which have accumulated and remained insufficiently addressed in previous years, as the reviews of Albania’s national reports in 2005 and 2012 revealed. Also, for the first time in the practice of the parliament, open debates over the next year’s budget were organized at the end of 2013, with a particular emphasis on budgeting for children. The process of governing institutions opening up towards the opinion and input of the civil society was also fuelled by public activism around Albania’s post-MDG agenda, as the country joined the global round of public consultations on “The Future We Want”.

Among various initiatives of the new government, the administrative and territorial reform planned for 2014-2015 will be of critical importance, as it will affect the existing child rights architecture (Child Rights Units in regional governments) legislated to design regional policies for children and monitor their implementation. At the municipal and communal level, functioning of the existing more than one hundred Child Protection Units will also be affected, in the anticipation of considerable agglomeration of these territorial entities. The revision of the country’s administrative map will go hand in hand with the upgrade of the local government financing system, which remained very much underdeveloped with the failure to finalise and adopt appropriate legislation in mid-2000s. In general, UNICEF is well positioned to play an active role, alongside other key stakeholders, in helping to reform, with a focus on equity, policies in health, education, justice and social protection areas, taking into account the country’s new political context, although specific in-depth expertise in various aspects of child-sensitive governance and budgeting will have to be mobilised externally, as required.

The authoritative voice of UNICEF have also been well heard in various fora convened by the EU during the year, as well as reflected in several assessment reports on Albania produced by the UN and the European Commission. UNICEF has been consistent in making a point about the danger of neglecting the human rights and social protection commitments of the state, emphasising the need for an equitable growth model. UNICEF supported the amendments to Albania’s Criminal Code adopted in 2013 that promoted norms of equity and social justice. Once matched by appropriate revisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure expected in 2014, these legislative improvements will open a broader access to justice, especially for women, children in conflict or contact with the law and vulnerable categories of the population.

**On-track**

**IR 0090/A0/04/001/001** Public oversight bodies related to children, including 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.

**Progress:** An important political signal was sent by the new parliament when, amidst various financial, economic and political challenges that the new Government has to deal with, a special parliamentary hearing session was held in November, 2013 on the protection and guarantees of child rights in Albania. Following strong lobbying by UNICEF, the hearing session acknowledged the recommendations of the CRC Committee issued on Albania’s 2nd, 3rd and 4th combined CRC report reviewed in 2012 and adopted a resolution. Given the country’s overall inconsistent record of action towards standards established by various international human rights instruments, this document is perceived as a political breakthrough, by explicitly urging the state to provide enabling legal, financial and administrative frameworks to ensure necessary services are in place to meet the needs and protect the interests of children. Importantly, it highlighted the need to institutionalize the profession of social worker as a central element of the protection system at the local level, within the scope of the ongoing social care reform. State obligations in the area of juvenile justice and protection of children against violence have also been underscored.

The new Government has also initiated an ambitious administrative and territorial reform, which is expected to come up with a re-configured model of local governance. It will have implications on the Law No. 10347 “On the Protection of the Rights of the Child”, according to which the bulk of the national child rights machinery is pitched at the sub-national (regional and municipal/communal) level. The country’s new suggested administrative division should become clearer by mid-2014. In the meantime the experience of three regions (Fier, Kukesi and Shkodra) testing a “one stop shop” approach in their respective Child Rights Units (CRUs) is being gathered, with the CRUs acting as dispatchers for any individual and family needs related to economic aid (“ndihma ekonomike”), access to services, follow up on difficult social cases, etc.
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On-track

IR 0090/A0/04/001/003 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.

Progress: As of 2013, Albania's media market comprises more than 20 daily newspapers, about 200 print media of diverse periodicity and 70 TV stations. Much of this media power was focused on the parliamentary elections in June 2013, but still there were media queries and reports on women and child rights issues. UNICEF strategy was to keep the media informed on a regular basis through media briefings, press events, joint field trips and national conferences and encourage them to cover issues of UNICEF concern using data of various surveys and reports released. During 2013 UNICEF continued to strengthen journalists' capacities in investigative journalism. Several comprehensive articles were published during the year addressing various subjects such as: children lost in political agenda or how women and children fit in the political agenda; inequalities in the education system of Albania; and child labour. The domestic violence phenomenon has been selected as the topic of the annual International Human Rights Film Festival in Albania with youth debates organized to speak up on this issue. Overall, improved media understanding for their unique role in empowering citizens to claim their rights still remain a challenge for the country.

The UNICEF Representative continued to play a role of an active advocate for human and child rights, being invited as key-note speaker to multiple events during the year. For the CRC anniversary day in November 2013 UNICEF partnered up with the EU Information Centre and held a televised youth forum with panelists being the Head of the EU Delegation in Albania, Minister of Social Wellbeing and Youth and UNICEF Representative.

On-track

IR 0090/A0/04/001/004 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.

Progress: In collaboration with Child Rights Units in 12 Regional Councils, the Child Rights Observatories (CROs) staff continued to collect administrative data against the agreed list of statistical indicators, 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". The wealth of data that the CROs collect and manage at the sub-national level was consolidated and published in November 2013 using the standard UNICEF methodology of a child poverty report card. Providing a snapshot of childhood in today's Albania, the report uses 26 indicators to describe the situation of children in five dimensions: material well-being, health and safety, education, risks and behaviours, and housing and environment. This was the first time that Albania produced such a detailed review of various forms of deprivation in relation to children. The report represents a unique policy planning tool as it contains information at the national, regional and even municipal/communal (for some indicators) level. Even more data could be extracted from the CROs online database established on the platform of DevInfo. Easily accessible in both printed and electronic form, such information offers a good basis to plan/coordinate sub-national public policies that adopt a child rights-based approach.

Public opinion has welcomed the report as a much needed technical document, but also a as a symbolic step towards the government's increasing acknowledgment of many development challenges hidden behind national statistical averages. Multiple media emphasized the responsibility of society for taking concrete action, especially by government institutions, whose massive presence at the report launch was remarkable, in contrast with the previous years when such events would mainly be attended by the civil society.

On-track

IR 0090/A0/04/001/005 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 d/ social support and rehabilitative measures for children under 14 years of age.

Progress: According to figures released by the Ministry of Justice, utilization of alternative sentences (fines, community work or suspended execution of the sentence) has been expanding to reach about 67 per cent of cases involving juveniles in 2013 (estimate), which is an impressive achievement compared to the starting point of several years ago (Albania’s Probation Service was established in 2009) when almost 90 per cent of juvenile cases would end up with imprisonment. The revision of the Code of Criminal Procedure has been progressing, although at a slow pace. The new Government is now in place and positive about the revised Code to include a separate (already drafted) chapter on juveniles. Such a step would make significant progress in treating young people in conflict with the law, victims and witnesses of crime in a child-friendly manner.

Regrettably, parallel to these positive developments, juvenile delinquency has been increasing by a factor of 3.6 compared to 2007 (853 cases in 2012). Investigation and sentencing times remain unacceptably long: up to 65 per cent of juveniles actually complete their sentence while being in pre-detention. Physical conditions and treatment of young people in pre-trial detention (including, in the police stations) in many places are still far from the required standard. Pre-trial detention itself as a measure should be used less frequently - currently, it is applied to one third of convicted cases while 80 per cent of pre-trial detainees do not represent a particular danger to the society or are believed to put the investigation evidence at risk.

The present functioning of only six sections in courts for juveniles in the entire country hamper the access to justice for juveniles and their families. Establishment of the section for juveniles in all courts of the first degree would be a quick fix requiring no extra budget while having a direct impact, in particular for marginalised and rural communities. Limited progress is noted in ensuring equity in provision of services (psychosocial assistance and rehabilitation) to all juveniles in penitentiary. Dependence on external donor funding has yet to be overcome. After care support for juveniles is almost non-existent. The probation, social services and local government
need to work closely with penitentiary institutions in establishing viable after-care support programmes for the reintegration and prevention of juveniles becoming recidivist of crime.

Public financing mechanisms and budgetary allocations need to be streamlined to support interventions addressing educational, social rehabilitation and re-integration needs of the juveniles (including, implementation of alternative measures that rely heavily on donor assistance and services delivered by NGOs); the law on free legal assistance must be enforced and supported by actual budgetary disbursements. Similarly, the directive of the Ministry of Education and Science issued in 2012 to appoint teachers to all the penitentiary institutions was supported by the allocation of financial, human and material resources to guarantee compulsory education.

The formation of Albania’s new government as a result of the parliamentary elections in June 2013 presents an opportunity to advocate for more comprehensive national policies to offer young people better chances in life, proper education and job opportunities that would prevent them from slipping into conflict with the law, rather than deal with the consequences. The new government programme commits the country leaders to adopt a juvenile justice strategy and improve access to justice for vulnerable populations. UNICEF has re-confirmed its commitment to provide technical assistance, also in line with the latest EU assessment report of Albania that “urges the authorities to adopt the Strategy for Justice for Children”.

**On-track**

**IR 0090/A0/04/001/007** 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.

**Progress:** During 2013 UNICEF explored the correlation between access to ECD services and economic and social empowerment of women in Albania. This work 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 4 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 clients, represented an important exploratory step in the direction of relatively less researched demand aspect when it comes to service delivery analysis (with most research focused so far on the supply side). The economic empowerment equation (“income generated from women’s employment” vs. “ECD service fees paid by families”) appeared to be a complex one to tackle; unless ECD facilities are of good quality and affordable/low cost, economic gains from employment might become questionable. Sociological observations urge for more thinking about how the demand is actually influenced by the weight of cultural and societal traditions. The study will be extensively reviewed through consultations with national stakeholders in early 2014.

Additionally, within a broader spectrum of UN Country Team activities related to gender issues, the destructive influence of gender-based violence (GBV) on teenage girls has been addressed. Support was provided to build the capacities of school counsellors to identify, address and report gender-based violence that affects teenage girls, as well as boys. An action plan which includes training, on the job support and mentoring started to be implemented in 2013 and will continue throughout the 2013/14 academic year.

**PC 2 - Inclusive and protective policies for children**

**On-track**

**PCR 0090/A0/04/002** PCR 2 - INCLUSIVE & PROTECTIVE POLICIES Children from vulnerable groups are assisted, through specific policy measures and government programmes, to be healthy and take full advantage of all learning opportunities.

**Progress:** In 2013 the reform of social care services in Albania remained the most ambitious of all UNICEF-supported interventions in the country. Legal, institutional, HR and financial pre-requisites of the reform have been analysed, with multiple pieces of research produced tackling both “cash” and “care” components of social assistance that individuals and families in need might be (or actually are) seeking. With the arrival of the new government in mid-2013 and initiation of the local governance and financing reforms, the outline of Albania’s future social protection system is being revisited and adjusted, but the overall commitment of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth - MoSWY (a new name for the former Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities - MoLSAEQ) to the reform has become even stronger, as the new government has emphasised a socially inclusive transformational agenda in its program for 2013-2017. The adherence to the fundamental principles of social protection and inclusion is fully in line with the Europe 2020 strategy that will increasingly become reflected in Albania’s own development frameworks, as the country progresses towards its EU candidate status and beyond.

At this decisive moment of Albania’s identifying its social protection targets, UNICEF has been playing a central role in political lobbying, technical facilitation and partnership brokering. Being rather new for Albania in its very concept, the function of social workers managing individual cases and referring families and individuals to specialized services is gradually getting more acceptance and appreciation by the professional community and decision-makers in the social welfare domain. A similar logic of a flexible and client-centriced service is behind UNICEF’s support of family outreach methods used by the health care personnel in Women and Children’s Counselling Centres. In both cases, standardization of desired outcomes/results and corresponding performance of caregivers (formalized in operational protocols, job descriptions and monitoring indicators) is at the heart of the suggested systemic upgrades.

Through this work Albania Country Office is exploring relatively new grounds for UNICEF’s corporate presence and having a say in such areas as the decentralized governance/territorial reform. Public finance management. Nation-wide digitalization and unification of data.
flows, etc. This new engagement appears very much in line with the new Strategic Plan of UNICEF for 2014-2017, according to which effective utilization of high-calibre expertise is increasingly possible (and welcome) across the boundaries of UNICEF's traditional "compartmentalized" engagement, to systemically address bottlenecks related to legislation, budgeting, governance, social/cultural practices, etc.

On-track

**IR 0090/A0/04/002/001** National mechanisms of social inclusion and protection are evaluated and income support system enhanced to make it better work for children.

**Progress:** In collaboration with Child Rights Units in the Regional Councils, the Child Rights Observatories came up with an initiative in Kukes, Fieri and Shkodra to converge the capacity of the CRUs and CROs in a single "one stop shop" for families who may need information, guidance and follow up support in any issues regarding the welfare of children. The type of support may vary, starting from completing the paperwork for "ndihma ekonomike" (cash assistance) application to referrals to specialized centres/NGOs offering services to children, women and families. Activation of local networking and referral links proved to be vital for the success of this initiative, as well as the overall political commitment and support of local authorities. A detailed plan of action on how to transform existing institutions into a unified and sustainable government mechanism designed to ensure that no child remains excluded is formalized. This initiative provides an operational space to test the mechanisms of coordinated action between central and local authorities, and local authorities and NGOs, suggested in the Decrees of the Council of Ministers #264, 265, 266, 267 and 268 adopted in 2012 as sub-legal acts of the Law 10347 “On the protection of the Rights of the Child” (2010). The experience of effective services for children based on the coordination and harmonization of existing capacities is currently being collected, paving the way for the implementation of the "one stop shop" model. Practical recommendations from the initiative will be reflected in the Manual compiled as a result of the civil servants training on child rights undertaken earlier in 2013 in all 12 regions of Albania.

Regarding the reform of the Economic Aid ("ndihma ekonomike"), the new Government of Albania has expressed its willingness to adopt new principles, which have an impact on the improvement of the social situation of households, especially of children. UNICEF's suggestion to consider combining Economic Aid with food packages and nutritional status surveillance of vulnerable families (based on a feasibility assessment conducted in early 2013) is taken into account by the Government as an optional solution. Closer alignment of child-focused suggestions with the ongoing World Bank-supported reform of "ndihma ekonomike" will be pursued in 2014.

On-track

**IR 0090/A0/04/002/002** The system of social care services is reformed to effectively address the needs of the most vulnerable families and children.

**Progress:** As part of the national Social Care Service reform, dedicated technical expertise was contracted by UNICEF to draft Albania's Social Inclusion and Protection Strategy (SISP) till 2020. The initial outline of the document was made available for consultations with national and international stakeholders in early summer 2013, and this work will continue with the new Government (in place after parliamentary elections of June 2013). The challenge will now be to encourage (and achieve coherence with) an explicit "social inclusion" dimension in other sector-specific strategies, as well as to harmonize the SISP framework with the national Roma Decade targets. It may also become a strong communication and advocacy tool to influence the EU assistance strategy in Albania, including investment choices to be made for the 2014-2020 IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession) cycle.

On a lower level of national policy planning, an analysis of the institutional set up of regional structures (Social Care Departments and Needs Assessment Commissions at Regional Councils) responsible for planning and budgeting of social care services was conducted. Since there is a growing consensus that the level of municipalities and communes (with their current number of more than 360 units) can hardly be effectively empowered for all aspects of "de-concentrated" social service delivery, the upper-tier level of 12 (as of today) regions was suggested as more appropriate to house the planning and overall coordinating function. However, this would be conditional to a dramatic upgrade of the Regional Councils' and Needs Assessment Commissions' capacity, starting from clear identification of their tasks and description of work processes. This will be an important element fitting into a bigger process of administrative/territorial and local governance reform launched by the new Government in the second half of 2013.

As a first step towards better understanding of the fiscal dimension that the reform of social care services is likely to imply, an overview of existing laws on social assistance and services, national budgeting system, local governance and local finance has been completed. In spite of the fact that “social protection” appears to be the largest single line in Albania’s public expenditure (34 per cent in 2011 budget, or 108 in ALL), there are multiple areas where existing pieces of legislation are inconsistent or even contradictory. Some of legal provisions exist only on paper and have never been implemented in practice. Overall, the situation of local finance can be described as being in its very early stage of development, with many areas remaining unregulated, since the law on local government finance drafted in 2007 has never been approved.

Most importantly, a standard classification (standards) of services needs to be developed by the Ministry of Social Wellbeing and Youth (former MoSLAOE) before these could be converted into budgetary lines. The analysis of the situation from the fiscal perspective also presents some pros and cons behind different scenarios in the balance of “centralized vs. decentralized” functions and, correspondingly, budgetary responsibilities. Overall, it becomes increasingly clear that most of the questions asked in relation to the social care system financing could only be answered as part of a much broader effort for Albania to clarify (and politically agree on) the desired degree of decentralization of public governance functions.

An update of the national database of social care service providers ([http://www.sherbimeshogerore.gov.al](http://www.sherbimeshogerore.gov.al)) is being prepared. The tool has been developed by UNICEF in previous years; now the upgraded version should allow policy planners and care providers to add, modify and access the data in an easier and faster way, thus making the instrument "democratised" and ultimately used as widely as possible for local action. Information from the Demographic Census (2011) is being used to analyse trends in the location of social care services with the latest population distribution patterns.
Parallel to that, an analysis of the current status of State Social Services (SSSs) was conducted. The mapping of the SSS staff roles, duties and responsibilities has revealed a considerable amount of controversy and lack of clarity in the most fundamental aspects of the Services’ intended function, starting from the overall need to demarcate accountabilities at the central and local levels; to the absence of technical guidance and HR capacity for needs assessment, planning, service delivery, monitoring and quality control. An important highlight of the analysis was the need to develop standard definitions / registry of social services that would embrace the types of social work that emerged in the recent years, mainly from NGO-run and donor-supported pilots. An acute need for computerization of the SSSs work and regulation of information flows (including for control and inspection purposes) was also documented.

**On-track**

IR 0090/A0/04/002/004 Child protection mechanisms and services enhanced to effectively reach and support children and families in situations of particular vulnerability.

**Progress:** Within the ongoing Social Care System reform, a comprehensive set of normative documents has been drafted, to regularize the social work profession. These documents include the draft Law on Social Workers/ Social Administrators and Psychologists, their suggested job profiles, as well as standard education and training requirements. Discussions are currently underway with national counterparts on the best way to institutionalize suggested changes, in light of the new government’s plans related to civil service and local governance reforms. The latter is likely to affect the existing Child Protection Units too, since the CPUs/Child Protection Workers until now have been part of local administration at the municipal or communal levels.

Clarifying the role of local government units in social care provision (exact functions, accountability and funding schemes) is one of the critical questions to be addressed, as suggested by the completed evaluation of the first 80 pilot cases of foster care. The experience proved to be more successful for kinship care, and much less so when children were placed into non-related families. Municipal authorities did not have ownership (and appropriate mechanisms) to take over, once the externally funded “project” phase was completed. Using the example of foster care, the evaluation has once again confirmed that the prospects of an effective social care system are intrinsically dependent on how the country would identify the role of the local government tier in their future development strategies. Putting de-institutionalization efforts in a broader context of the Social Care System, reform should help in articulation of systemic bottlenecks.

In the meantime, evidence of existing practices and trends in residential care is being collected, through a “stock and flow” dynamic assessment of child population in all residential facilities in Albania. A similar lack of reliable quantitative information stimulated UNICEF, in collaboration with Save the Children, to embark on a nation-wide counting of street children. The latest round of surveying identified about 2,500 street children across the country but additional measurements will be conducted in early 2014 for a complete picture, with seasonal variations captured around the year.

**On-track**

IR 0090/A0/04/002/005 Policies improved and measures implemented to support social protection, inclusion and early development of children with vulnerable backgrounds, including Roma

**Progress:**

The work for ECD targets during 2013 has been designed and implemented based on two main pillars:

1. **Building the strongest possible foundations for physical survival and healthy development of young children by reducing stress in the life of young children and women**

As part of the Social Care System reform in Albania supported by UNICEF, activities under the first pillar were aimed at providing a system of social protection for the most vulnerable families. Access to equitable services since birth would augment the stress-buffering capacity of vulnerable children and families. UNICEF-supported ECD services are expected to serve as prototypes for the categories of social work/family outreach that the Government of Albania will eventually take over and finance, focussing on the most vulnerable children and increasing family resilience to economic and social hardships. Technical feasibility and costing estimate for an on-line service to ensure timely registration of every child was completed and presented to the new Government. Other technical assistance products finalised by end-2013 included home visiting guidelines (with a special focus on linking families to community resources and promoting health behaviours); standards for child care and preschool education; analysis of care givers capacity in relation to the age cohort 0-3; and analysis of how the availability of ECD services affects the empowerment of women. Some of these technical inputs are already close to or have become action tools, like the home visiting guidelines approved by MoH and shared with all mother and child health centres for implementation or the early literacy teaching methodology officially accredited by the MoES.

An innovative nation-wide program was launched in 2013 to track and enforce the accountability of local governments and service providers regarding Roma mainstreaming and early inclusion. It is implemented in about 100 neighbourhoods where Roma live – often, with only a handful of children. A network of mediators is activated to link NGO action to accountability of local authorities, for getting Roma children to kindergartens. Documentation of best practices is also underway.
2) Leveraging knowledge to increase interventions impact

"Greater financial returns will come from investing early in ECD policies and programs driven by science-based theory of change" has been the motto of the advocacy efforts of this IR during 2013, trying to influence the electoral program and the new Government which has spelled out the objective of increased investments for preschool. A coalition of Albanian NGOs (Education for All Coalition) has been mobilized to advocate with key actors, such as local and central governments, Ombudsman etc., for increased access to ECD with a focus on the most vulnerable groups, including Roma. Stimulating public demand for ECD services has also been the focus of the interventions, raising the awareness of parents and public at large of the importance of ECD for future children’s outcomes. A COMBI on ECD, targeting parents and caregivers of young children, is underway, displaying messages that promote good parenting practices on millions of “Trebeshina” mineral water bottles, as a joint initiative of UNICEF and the private sector.

On-track

IR 0090/A0/04/002/007 Financial barriers in access to health services are analysed.

Progress: In September 2013 a set of performance indicators for Women and Child Consulting Centres (WCCC) was approved by the Minister of Health (MoH Orders Nr. 470 dd 04/09/2013). The indicators addressed issues of clinical effectiveness, safety, client oriented service, motivation of health personnel, and efficiency. They were developed by a working group that involved professionals from the MoH, National Centre for Quality Control and Accreditation, Health Insurance Institute (HII) and health personnel working in WCCCs. Four clinical practice Guidelines for Antenatal, Postnatal care, Nutrition, and Child Growth and Development officially approved earlier in 2013 (MoH Orders Nr. 374 and 469), in addition to the evidence based clinical guidelines, contain an analysis of the cost implications for enforcement of the guidelines as well as the road map for implementation and monitoring of these clinical practices. A costing outline for each of the thematic areas of recommendations were part of the above documents and will contribute to the actual cost calculation of these services planned for first half of 2014. Standards of care were developed by a team of experts representing government institutions, health professionals and patient associations and were tested in 3 urban and 1 rural health centres in Tirana, and one urban health centre in Vlorë.

The above package of guidelines, protocols, standards and performance indicators provides the basis for accurate costing mother and child health preventive services (in WCCCs), as it introduces "counting units" for matching the service with the price. It is also expected to have a significant impact on the quality of care through more accurate measurements of quality of services, improved competency and performance of health personnel, promotion of best clinical practices, benchmarking, and more opportunities for the public to choose the service.

The current contract between the Health Insurance Institute (HII) as the purchaser of health services and the health service providers includes three MCH performance indicators: per cent of pregnant women who conduct the first ANC visit within the first trimester of pregnancy, per cent of children aged 0-1 reached by mandatory child monitoring visits, and immunization coverage of children aged 0-14. The MoH is committed to continue negotiations with the HII to increase the number and improve quality of performance indicators that are used to calculate the performance-based part of health providers’ salary.

UNICEF's further work in this area will be guided by the plans of the newly elected government regarding Albania’s future health financing strategy.

On-track

IR 0090/A0/04/002/008 Improved child feeding practices and access to commodities and services.

Progress: The final evaluation of the Joint MDG-F project on Child Nutrition implemented by UNICEF, WHO and FAO in 2010-2013 revealed its significant impact on the reform process and relevance to government priorities reflected in the National Strategy for Development and Integration. The expanded knowledge base on nutrition and the food security situation (especially in vulnerable population groups), causes of anaemia in women and children, cost benefit analysis of nutrition interventions and other nutrition-related research contributed to the advocacy for more nutrition investments and constituted the basis for the development of the new Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2013-2020. Coordination mechanisms used to develop and operationalise the MoU between 5 line ministries (health, education, social protection, agriculture, finance) and multi sectoral technical working groups, proved to be very effective at enabling experts to come together and formulate a comprehensive nutrition plan as well as to advocate for its placement high on Albania’s development agenda. This experience will provide the groundwork for continued inter-sectoral collaboration in food security and nutrition, as the programme of the new government highlights the commitment to ... favour cross-cutting coordination mechanisms .... when addressing major public health issues, such as .... food safety and malnutrition....".

Capacity development of health personnel in child growth monitoring and nutrition counselling, revision of supportive supervision framework, revised child nutrition surveillance system, led to improved quality of health service delivery and contributed to the health sector reform. Curriculum reform benefited from development of nutrition education modules in compulsory education. Inputs to the ongoing reform in social protection aimed at strengthening social protection programmes to enhance nutrition investments through proposals to combine cash transfers with nutrition services (growth monitoring and nutrition counselling) and products (food and supplements). The programme of the new government of Albania for 2013-2017 included the "promotion and support of food security..."
programmes for children living in poor families and in remote areas regardless of family income”. High level advocacy and follow up with government institutions is required to provide relevant support in this process.

The governance and accountability in more than 20 pilot LGUs (that were part of the MDG-F project framework) was strengthened through the participation of the LGUs in the programme. The project introduced changes in the institutional and social norms related to addressing nutrition and food security at the community level and the need to make more investments in nutrition. The nutrition programme faced challenges related to the conducting of activities in sectors that seldom coordinate with each other, the need to coordinate among various sectors (health, education, social protection, agriculture, finance) and national, regional and community levels, the need to identify accountability to improving nutrition and food security and the time needed to jointly plan multisectoral actions.

Capacity development of health personnel in six northern districts has contributed to the institutionalization of child growth monitoring and improved quality of nutrition counselling for pregnant women, infants and young children within primary health care. In addition to 435 health personnel trained in growth monitoring and nutrition counselling in target areas, teams of 2-3 trainers were prepared in all the remaining districts of the country and the Ministry of Health is committed to facilitate scaling up of these trainings – either by requesting financial support from other donors (possibly, Swiss Development Cooperation) or mobilizing other resources.

The framework of nutrition surveillance with child nutrition indicators was completed and officially approved by the MoH. Around 300 professionals from health centres, Women and Child Consulting Centres (WCCCs), maternity hospitals, statistical offices, family medicine sections at regional public health departments in 7 districts, were trained in the assessment, documentation, and reporting on the state of nutrition of the children using the software for child nutrition surveillance.

The Institute of Public Health (IPH) officially requested the districts to report on the indicators of child nutrition surveillance including child growth, breastfeeding and young child feeding indicators, as they will be part of the revised national health information system. This activity is coordinated with the work done in the framework of protocols and standards for WCCCs as child growth and nutrition are key responsibilities of these health institutions.

Based on previous achievements related to universal salt iodization (USI) legal framework (USI law approved in 2008) and strengthening of the integrated monitoring system for iodized salt, the sentinel surveillance system operated by the Institute of Public Health, has provided data for the most vulnerable areas of the country. According to sentinel surveillance during Dec 2011-Apr 2013, 43 per cent of school children and 55 per cent of pregnant women still suffer from IDD. Out of the total number of children with IDD, girls are affected by severe forms of IDD twice as much compared to boys (8.7 per cent vs. 4.8 per cent respectively). Recent data from the second phase of the sentinel surveillance indicate an increase in number of children with IDD, from 31 per cent in 2012 to 63 per cent in 2013. In the opinion of experts, this is linked to relaxed enforcement of the iodized salt monitoring and clearly indicates unfinished business with micronutrient deficiencies.

**On-track**

**IR 0090/A0/04/002/009** Key elements of national HIV/AIDS prevention policies for children and most at risk adolescents are strengthened.

**Progress:** The IR is planned for closure, with “Delivering as One” UN programme format to be used for optimization of inter-agency division of labour in the area of HIV/AIDS, as of 2014.

**On-track**

**IR 0090/A0/04/002/010** Children and young people of vulnerable families have equal access to health services, and the health of young children is monitored.

**Progress:** By the end of 2013 the communication campaign on "New and Better" infant feeding practices has reached around 270,000 people, mainly targeting new and future mothers and mothers-in-law. Nutrition counselling was provided by the Albanian Red Cross community volunteers in target areas, and mother support groups were established to provide peer counselling on breastfeeding and child feeding. Two useful tools for nutrition counselling were prepared and used in community based activities: a booklet of key messages for nutrition and child care and improved local recipes for young child feeding. Around 16,000 women in target areas were reached through counselling sessions at the health centre, home visits or community gatherings to discuss infant and young child feeding and cooking specifics.

Albania’s BFAN branch was supported to conduct the monitoring of implementation of the law on breast milk substitutes (BMS) and report on the Code and law violations. Promotion and protection of breastfeeding is part of the strategic priorities of the Albanian government for MCH, within the scope of the BMS marketing law. Intensified, more aggressive promotional activity of infant formula companies was noted with concern in the recent CRC recommendations for Albania. Promotional materials from Milupa, Humana, Nutriben and Hipp are often seen in the health centres, sometimes together with free samples of infant formula. Other Code violations were observed in the points of sale, urging the Ministry of Health to strengthen monitoring and enforcement of the BMS marketing law, in order to maintain past achievements and confront the aggressive campaigning of the infant formula producers.

Targeted interventions in Durres region with areas of high concentration of Roma and Egyptian communities focused on: a) capacity development of health professionals to identify vulnerable population groups and plan outreach activities according to their needs; b) plan and implement community based interventions for immunization, growth monitoring and nutrition counselling in close collaboration with Roma community leaders and mediators; c) and establish a collaborative environment between health social protection and education authorities. At the end of the intervention period around 100 health care providers were able to use the new growth
monitoring and counselling techniques and were exposed to innovative models of partnerships between health care providers, education / social protection professionals and communities, with the child being the pivotal point at the centre of services. 350 mothers and other direct caregivers were reached during the community based outreach activities. The above interventions were built on past achievements and experience for establishing "baby friendly communities” in the Durres region and will be useful models in the process of transformation of the role of Women and Child Consulting Centres (described in more detail in IR7) in respect to holistic treatment of the child (health, education and social protection sectors working hand in hand) and partnerships between professional care providers and communities.

A supportive supervision technique started to be used by the MoH to monitor the performance of health care personnel against clearly stated indicators. Utilization of child growth charts, continuous advice to mothers on optimal child feeding practices, accurate maintenance of records contribute to a more structured and systematic interaction between health care professionals and families.

On-track

IR 0090/AO/04/002/013 Education decentralization policies effectively connect to local contexts and ensure marginalized children participate in quality compulsory education.

Progress: While a number of the MoES policies addressing exclusion were analysed in 2012, in 2013 the policy action was oriented towards converting recommendations into sub-legal acts (Normative Provisions) integrating “child friendliness” principles. These were adopted in August 2013.

In addition, a set of standard forms (data collection instruments to be applied across education, health and social protection sectors, in collaboration with the civil registry) for the identification of out-of-school children were developed to improve the accuracy of education enrolment statistics. These instruments will help to detect and record children that remain “invisible” in official statistics. To make this happen, a MoU was signed among four line ministries in September 2013 to bring out-of-school children back to school. Each ministry should issue also new guidelines within April 2014. Information collected through these forms is planned to be uploaded to the school-based and central EMIS, as well as to the cross-sectorial MIS starting in April 2014 (as per the MoU, this is the time when the civil registry offices have to send pertinent information to the REDs). Meanwhile, all schools started filling the EMIS with data reflecting socio-economic vulnerability of families. Human resources are not appropriately trained across the sectors and challenges remain regarding poor accountability. A number of cross-sector institutional practices, cultural and financial challenges remain to address equity issues holistically in education. Human resources are not appropriately trained and challenges remain regarding poor accountability. There is also a need to align and strengthen the data collection work with the Child Rights Observatories.

The MoES has started to integrate into EMIS new indicators reflecting socio-economic vulnerability of families, including CwD. A regional expertise mission on OOS and at-risk children took place and a cross-sectorial network is established. A new report provides guidelines for the next phase, while recognizing the Albanian 4-Ministry Agreement as a relevant step and model for other countries in the region. To foster a “child-friendly school” (CFS) practice and create a CFS culture, a team of local trainers involved through Regional Education Departments (REDS) and Durres Teaching University trained teachers (on child centred teaching methods and techniques to address the “hidden drop-out”), school principals (on school management practice), as well as student and parents’ bodies representatives (on participation issues) in the target schools. A small intervention was supported too, to practice minimizing of school drop-out in three schools in Korça. This work was coordinated with an anti-drop-out cross-sectoral coordination board, headed by the Prefect. The work focused on marginalized families and lessons learned in inter-sectorial cooperation were used for policy change (and already reflected in the MoU). Another small “school-providing meal” feasibility study in Durres developed recommendations on inclusion issues. As a result of that, first signs of the Government’s commitment to financially support inclusion policies-policies were shown through a Council of Ministers sub-legal act approved in August 2013 for providing free meals to 312 Roma/Egyptian children in Korça for the entire school year of 2013-2014. This approach is being applied as a Municipality-RED cooperation.

The new Government priority is on school openness to communities and vice versa. These practices are expected to provide renewed knowledge into the "child friendly school" draft-standards, which should be developed further to transform schools in community centres to become accessible by all. The future CFS work will be devoted to develop a policy for mainstream schooling. Another MoES priority is to revitalise the sector-wide planning and initiate the process for establishing a Local Education Group in the framework of the Global Partnership for Education Initiative.

School drop-out rates comparing 2011-2012 vs 2012-2013:

in district level

- Berat: decreased from 0.7 per cent to 0.55 per cent
- Durres: decreased from 0.79 per cent to 0.08 per cent
• Korça: increased slightly from 0.9 to 1.2 per cent

**In 10 most problematic schools in target areas:**

• Berat: decreased from 2.5 per cent to 1.46 per cent
• Durres: decreased from 0.44 per cent to 0 per cent
• Korça: decreased from 1.8 per cent to 1.35 per cent

For the moment there is no reliable reporting on the OOSC. As per the MoU, the full process should start in April 2014.

**On-track**

**IR 0090/A0/04/002/014** All schools in Albania engaged in behaviour change campaign to reduce social acceptance of violence.

**Progress:** By the end of 2013 the first phase of the Communication for Behavioural Impact (COMBI) programme implemented in public schools in Albania was nearing completion. In the course of 2012-2013 new ways of disciplining (New Way Discipline – NWD) have been applied in schools, kindergartens and residential care institutions in order to reduce the incidence of violence from adults towards children. The latest (fifth) wave of behaviour pattern measurement involved about 800 teachers and 90,000 students. Very gradual shifts in teachers’ behaviour have been registered, with less frequent occurrence of shouting or ear pulling, for example. However, perhaps the most important change that has been generated by the COMBI programme is related to a new mental -- non-violent -- paradigm in the minds of teachers, particularly valuable in light of Albania’s recent historic background.

Work is currently underway to finalise the official accreditation of the COMBI programme suggesting techniques to address violence at schools, with a view to include the modules in pedagogical universities’ curricula. Documentation and promotion of COMBI experience will continue nationally, as well as through UNICEF’s global campaign against violence.

The subject of violence against children received the additional political resonance and attention of Albania’s Parliament when Tirana hosted a regional experts meeting on "Protection of children from violence in South East Europe” in November at the end of a two-year EU-UNICEF project. In-depth technical discussions between delegations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Turkey, Albania and other CEE/CIS countries were mirrored by similar discussions held on the same days in the Parliament, with parliamentarians providing feedback to and from the expert meeting sessions, thus using the momentum for certain decisions to be lobbied. 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.

**On-track**

**IR 0090/A0/04/002/015** Children in compulsory schools act for environmental protection.

**Progress:** Based on the progress of Child-Led Environmental Education (CLEEN) project (on-going since 2009) in curriculum development, teacher training, communication for behaviour change involving children and communities, the year 2013 was used to intensify schools and communities' efforts towards "green schools" - a concept which requires that many milestones are reached by schools and communities together in order to be awarded a "Green School" certificate. This process initiated by the CLEEN project has recently attracted funds by the private sector (one of Albania’s mobile telecom operators). Schools and children who participated in earlier CLEEN activities have actively joined a new initiative of the Albanian Government "Let’s clean Albania in one day".

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**PC 800 - Cross-sectoral costs**

**On-track**

**PCR 0090/A0/04/800 PCR 3 - CROSS-SECTORAL COSTS**

**Progress:**

All major operational benchmarks and objectives of the year 2013 have been met, as described in detail in the corresponding sections of the Country Office Annual Report.

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**On-track**

**IR 0090/A0/04/800/001 Governance and Systems**

**Progress:** The 2013 Annual Management Plan, as an important internal management document for UNICEF Albania, was prepared on time through a participatory process. The governance structure of the Office was described in detail in the AMP; the agreed annual priorities in programme, operations and communication were outlined and accountabilities clearly assigned. The oversight structures – as part of the Office governance system – are also described in the AMP; the composition of statutory committees was reviewed in
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, management and performance, and on how to keep human and financial resources focused on office priorities. The CMT is also the primary recipient of management reports based on UNICEF’s key performance indicators. In 2013 six CMT meetings took place; their deliberations were further communicated to all staff in six general staff meetings. Intra-office communication channels included a two-day staff retreat and several programme and operations management meetings, when different issues have been discussed and analysed, including the concerns of the staff related to UNICEF’s transformational agenda and possible programmatic and staffing implications for Albania CO of the Mid-Term Review in 2014.

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 2013. 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 are implemented by the Office; the Business Continuity Plan has been updated in 2013. No specific preparedness initiatives or emergency simulations have been undertaken in 2013. UNICEF is an active participant in UN security meetings and trainings and all staff are regularly informed on security and safety issues accordingly. 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.

On-track

**IR 0090/A0/04/800/002 Financial Resources and Stewardship**

**Progress:** UNICEF Albania Country Office continued to apply standard corporate financial and administrative control systems to ensure good management of financial and other assets. In 2013, the expenditure levels of allocated annual amounts of Regular and Other Resources reached 100 per cent and 84 per cent, respectively. The Monthly Monitoring Report issued by the Regional Office continues to be a useful tool, in addition to the internal system established to frequently check the status of Grants utilization, with core resources given priority attention.

Bank transactions’ optimization and proper cash forecasting continued to remain among the Operations Section priorities. The Office has met its closing bank balance targets. Bank reconciliations have been prepared monthly in due time, with respect to the deadlines established by HQs. There are no un-reconciled items. In budget control, the CMT reviews all “red flag” areas, including the Grant expiry dates, DCT liquidation status and level of programme expenditure.

On-track

**IR 0090/A0/04/800/003 Human Capacity**

**Progress:** UNICEF Albania Country Office has had neither new staff nor separations in 2013. The funding of one post (Justice for Children, NO-C) was moved from OR to RR after having received an approval from the RO. The post of a Child Protection Specialist (L4, funded by OR) is vacant. As per the May 2012 audit recommendations (closed in June 2013), some changes occurred in the reporting lines. For a closer connection between sector-specific interventions and a more general social policy perspective, the reporting line of the NO-C Social Policy Specialist position was moved from the Representative to Deputy Representative. Also in line with the audit advice, all SM reviewed and discussed their Job Descriptions with their supervisors, prior to finalization of updated JD versions by the Representative (no changes were made that would exceed the limit requiring post requalification).

During the reporting period, all travel arrangements and visa issues have been smoothly handled by the HR/Operations Section. Performance indicators related to closing and certifying TAs within the 15-days period have been monitored. Overall, the general perception is that staff members in UNICEF Tirana enjoy a tolerant and respectful relationship among each other. Work/life balance arrangements are fully respected and encouraged by the management. Staff members are permitted to take time odd for learning. Options of flexi time, work from home and learning days were used by some SM. UNICEF staff in Albania are aware of staff counselling resources available locally, like the peer volunteer.
Effective Governance Structure

The 2013 Annual Management Plan, as an important internal management document for UNICEF Albania, was prepared through a participatory process. The governance structure of the Office was described in detail in the AMP; the agreed annual priorities, operations and communication were outlined and accountabilities clearly assigned. The oversight structures – as part of the governance system – are also described in the AMP; the composition of statutory committees was reviewed in 2013, in consultation with the Country Office Association.

Progress towards achieving the AMP objectives was regularly monitored by the CMT which remained the central management body. The Representative on policies, strategies, programme implementation, management and performance, and how to keep management resources focused on office priorities. In 2013 six CMT meetings took place; their deliberations were further communicated through general staff meetings. Intra-office communication channels included a two-day staff retreat and several programme management meetings, when different issues have been discussed, including the concerns of the staff related to UNICEF’s agenda and possible programmatic and staffing implications for Albania CO of the Mid-Term Review in 2014.

The office continued to apply standard UNICEF financial and administrative control systems to ensure good management of assets. The degree of delegation is determined in the Table of Authority revised in 2013. Albania is not an emergency country – level of natural or man-made disasters is considered low to minimal. Minimum recommended procedures and practices for the Office; the Business Continuity Plan has been updated in 2013. No specific preparedness initiatives or emergency simulations undertaken in 2013. UNICEF is an active participant in UN security meetings and trainings and all staff are regularly informed about safety issues accordingly. The Office continues to be MOSS compliant. A joint BCP for the UN House has been developed, prepared and updated with UNICEF’s active engagement in the “One UN” business continuity planning.

As of January 2014, there has been no significant risk changes for UNICEF operations since the last Security Risk Assessment in 2013. However, the CO continuously and systematically monitored the security situation, in close collaboration with UNDSS. Security activities completed in 2013 included:
- updating of the Warden System and training of wardens and their alternates (June 2013);
- first aid training organized for all staff in two shifts (July 2013);
- training on mail handling and bomb threat reaction organized for receptionists, executive assistants and other staff (September 2013);
- development of the Fire Safety and Emergency Evacuation Plan using a new format suggested by the updated UNICEF Fire Safety (September 2013).

In response to the Country Office audit that took place in May 2012 the last CO report on outstanding recommendations from 2013, with the formal closure of all recommendations by the Office of Internal Audit and Investigation recorded in July 2013.

Strategic Risk Management

To mitigate against different risks, UNICEF Albania CO employs the Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) and Risk Control mechanisms. In 2013, the Office has updated its risk profile in accordance with the global ERM guidance and regional environment of UNICEF Albania operations is considered low to minimal risk. However, continuous observation of the risks associated with other UN agencies and UNDSS, is perceived critical in order to identify any potential new risks and manage them.

During 2013, UNICEF Albania CO has not faced any significant operational and financial risks related to VISION or other projects. DCT liquidations occurred either due to system bugs or technical mistakes transferred or inherited from the past systems being introduced and tested.

For a better and more effective use of office resources, the Operations Section conducted a comprehensive review of existing procedures and made necessary changes of roles. The policy on segregation of duties has been adjusted, in accordance with the regulations and procedures for designation and acceptance of delegation of financial signing authority completed. The CO’s efforts in the process of segregation of duties in the performance of its functions were reflected in zero conflicts or violations, as per the 2013 Violation reports.

To ensure a fair and transparent selection process, as well as aiming to cover the widest possible field of high quality candidates, UNICEF decided to streamline the involvement of Operations Section in the solicitation process for programme services (i.e. procurement of goods and services) and field support services. The proposal for this change, which involves a shift in responsibilities from operations to programme development, was prepared and accepted in consultation with the programme manager and programme office.
consultancy expertise through contracts). All bids and applications are now routed through Administrative and Supply Assistan
care of necessary VISION-based processing and document uploading.

The Monthly Monitoring Report issued by the Regional Office is analysed at each CMT meeting and necessary follow up steps/m easures are taken. Monitoring of performance indicators is done regularly.

Evaluation

In 2013, UNICEF Albania Country Office finalized two evaluations. One was the completion of the review, started in 2012 at the request of the national inter-sectoral social inclusion strategy for 2007-2013. Another one was a scheduled end-point evaluation of UNICEF/WHO/FAO project on Child Nutrition funded by the MDG-F facility in 2010-2013. Both evaluations were conducted to mobilize capacity (Albanian and international, respectively). Findings and recommendations of the two evaluations will be factored in, while assessing the consistency of the national stakeholders’ response to the content of both evaluations. Ambition of the new government programme objectives for 2014-2017 might not be fully in line with the previous government. Hence, the evaluations’ findings may acquire a somewhat different weight than previously.

On a more technical side, a lesson learned from these two evaluation processes is that a combination of international and local, the same assignment is likely to produce better quality analysis than relying exclusively on the national capacity. The recommendations on the draft Terms of Reference, for example, was not sufficient to guide the local field researchers. In tandem of “international plus national” expertise did. Such combined contracting of international and national experts was implemented following the newest policy on wireless service in UNICEF. This was done using Virtual Machines with Linux operating system, which considerably reduced the cost of the Office’s monthly phone subscription. In addition to the cost savings, a feature of electronic phone logs became possible, which was not in the service package of the previous provider.

The Wi-Fi connectivity in the Office was improved thanks to a better device covering the entire space of UNICEF premises. This was implemented following the newest policy on wireless service in UNICEF. This was done using Virtual Machines with Linux operating system, to limit Internet bandwidth for Wi-Fi users, and requiring the visitors to get a one-time voucher for their use which can be authenticated by UNICEF staff can authenticate themselves using their UNICEF credentials. This solution helped to avoid huge costs of equipment while fulfilling all the necessary wireless services needs of UNICEF visitors and staff alike.

Effective Use of Information and Communication Technology

In 2013, Internet services provided to UNICEF Albania CO by two ISP companies have been reviewed and negotiation was completed, reducing costs of Internet connectivity. In addition, six telephone lines were switched from the main national telephone company to one of the smaller providers; this decision considerably reduced the cost of the Office’s monthly phone subscription. In addition to the cost savings, a feature of electronic phone logs became possible, which was not in the service package of the previous provider.

The Wi-Fi connectivity in the Office was improved thanks to a better device covering the entire space of UNICEF premises. This was implemented following the newest policy on wireless service in UNICEF. This was done using Virtual Machines with Linux operating system, to limit Internet bandwidth for Wi-Fi users, and requiring the visitors to get a one-time voucher for their use which can be authenticated by UNICEF staff can authenticate themselves using their UNICEF credentials. This solution helped to avoid huge costs of equipment while fulfilling all the necessary wireless services needs of UNICEF visitors and staff alike.

ICT support has also been provided to the UNICEF Office in Montenegro to upgrade the Office software packages and hardware of a dedicated ICT staff there. In addition, whenever necessary, maintenance of computers and servers of the Montenegro office can be performed from Tirana Office through remote access, to perform the tasks required by the HQ ICT guidance, thus avoiding the need for travel to another country.

During the year the ICT Officer continued to follow up the recycling procedures for UPS batteries, printer cartridges and printing machines in Tirana Office are configured for double-side printing by default to decrease the amount of waste.

Expanding the practice of the ICT Officer’s involvement with programme activities, a modality was developed to facilitate the birth registration with the help of a smartphone application and geo-tagging of birth homes, maternity homes, hospitals and offices locations. Respective data visualization and analysis were presented to partners during a conference-to-assess both technical validity and financial implications of technology-based birth registration. Considerable support has been given to the development of a new website of UNICEF Albania CO, using the RedDot technology, in close collaboration with the Country Office.

Fund-raising and Donor Relations

By the end of 2013, the amount of ORR raised by UNICEF Albania Office for the programme cycle of 2012-2016 so far is not more than 74 per cent of the CO's funded programmable budget. Compared to the approved ORR ceiling, this amount does not
target. The largest single donor so far has been the Swiss Government who has generously entrusted UNICEF with US$ 1.9 million to support Albania’s comprehensive reform of the national social care system (so far the amount of US$ 1.9 million has been disbursed). About US$ 1.9 million was spent in 2012-2013 from the donation of the Spanish Government (through the MDG Fund) for a joint UNICEF–UNDP programme on child nutrition. More than US$ 800,000 has been received in 2012-2013 from the UN Coherence Fund (US$ 300,000 spent), and about US$ 450,000 was channelled to UNICEF Albania from the EU funds raised by the Regional Office as an initiative to address violence against children (programme completed in 2013). Other ORR funds come either from National Global Thematic reserves.

The ORR grants managed by the Office are being utilised close to 100 per cent by their expiry dates, as the Office has been monitoring the expenditure (by a special focal point, in addition to the staff in charge of specific programmes); a few grants that UNICEF has been part of in 2013 were generated by joint programmes/other participating agencies. All six donor submissions in 2013 were prepared and sent on time.

During the year the UNICEF Albania team has been part of a regional experiment of channelling Global Thematic or 777 funds to other Country Offices, allocated under the umbrella of the RKLA of social protection. Although such an arrangement has problems with VISION and day-to-day management of fund reservations, it does distort the ORR availability picture (e.g., the system) in individual COs, by under- or over-counting the amounts in, respectively, recipient and managing Offices.

In 2013 leveraging funds for other partners continued to be increasingly used by the Office as a strategy to mobilise additional funds. Thus, UNICEF has actively assisted UNDP and several other UN agencies in the preparation of a comprehensive project proposal to the SDC (and successfully approved), to complement the work of UNICEF on social care reform. UNICEF CO has been closely involved in the preparation of background documentation for the future EU IPA funds in Albania. Examples of successful lobbying for specific budgets for child rights protection purposes include the recent decision of the parliament to support two staff positions in the section of the Ombudsman Office, provision of state allowances to parents in the foster care pilot, continuation of support classes, and some others.

### Management of Financial and Other Assets

UNICEF Albania Country Office continued to apply standard corporate financial and administrative control systems to manage all of financial and other assets. In 2013, the expenditure levels of allocated annual amounts of Regular and Other Resources reached 100 per cent and 84 per cent, respectively. The Monthly Monitoring Report issued by the Regional Office continues to be a useful internal system established to frequently check the status of Grants utilization, with core resources given priority attention.

Bank transactions optimization and proper cash forecasting continued to remain among the Operations Section priorities, and closing bank balance targets. Bank reconciliations have been prepared monthly in due time, with respect to the deadlines. There are no un-reconciled items. In budget control, the CMT reviews all “red flag” areas, including the Grant expiry dates, status and level of programme expenditure.

The Operations staff have considering the effect of the exchange rate in the market when converting $US to local currency, and have taken steps to generate currency gains from these transactions.

In terms of DCT management, the Office disbursed a total amount of US$ 1,577,064 to 47 implementing partners, of which US$ 100,000 and 12 implementing partners received between US$20,000 to US$ 100,000. All fund requests for liquidations are processed under the HACT modality and the Funding Authorization and Certification of Expenditure (FAC) process, with the leadership of UNICEF, the HACT webpage was created within the UN Albania Intranet; today it contains the list of IPs, global thematic reserves, as well as the risk level profiles. The webpage is accessible by all UNDG ExCom Agencies resident.

The record of Albania CO in DCT liquidations management has improved in 2013; however, some difficulties remain due to - relatively high fragmentation of cash transfers due to decentralized health, education and social care systems in the country’s 12 regions; - modest absorption capacity of many implementing partners (for example, 30 IPs received less than US$ 20.000); - delayed liquidations from some Regional Councils due to problems with the treasury, after the parliamentary elections.

The Office’s response to this situation included:

- monitoring the status of DCT liquidations on a weekly basis;
- the DCT status review as a standing item in monthly CMT meetings;
- establishing the liquidation of DCT advances as a priority task for all Programme Assistants, supported by Programme Officers;
- regular spot checks of implementing partners’ business practices and records.

The Office is aware of the fact that about 62 per cent of its transactions are small payments of less than US$ 500, but at UNICEF offices as well, so more thought should be given to the way of doing business at the corporate level.

In the course of 2013 opportunities for some cost reductions were identified, resulting in savings in communication. Despite the service providers and wider use of Skype and other alternative free-of-charge communication channels, there was also a 12 per cent cost reduction related to more economical use of paper and cartridges. The recycling of paper and plastics was conducted successfully.

In total, 18 CRC meetings with 23 submissions took place in 2013. The quality of the inputs. Most of procurement in 2013 was from local vendors, although several international expert contracts were also processed.

During the year, the Office statutory committees met regularly, including 3 LPSB meetings, 6 CMT meetings, 15 SSA meetings (17 proposals reviewed) and 18 CRC meetings (23 submissions reviewed).

**Supply Management**

(For details on procurement volumes in 2013 please see the Table uploaded in the "Document Centre" section).

During 2013, the involvement of the Supply unit in the solicitation and procurement of services for programme purposes has been streamlined. The total annual volume of CO procurement has reached slightly under US$ 1 million, with 84 per cent of the cost of technical consultancy expertise procured as direct (often critical) inputs to support programme interventions. In the history of UNICEF Albania CO the share of programme funds channelled through competitive contracts in comparison to DCT advances has reached almost 60 per cent. Out of 71 contracts processed by the Supply in 2013, 46 (or 65 per cent) were intended for procurement of equipment inventories and intangibles, considering it as administrative procurement contracts to 75 per cent vs. 25 per cent. All but one contracts valued above US$ 10,000 were reviewed by Programme Officers; the remaining one was valued at US$ 9,000.

During the year UNICEF continued to support, as a facilitator, the Ministry of Public Health in procuring ARV medicines to about 160 AIDS patients in Albania. The support continued for MoH in procurement of vaccines as well, based on the signed MoU between the MoH and the UNICEF Supply Division in Copenhagen. At the same time a discussion was initiated with the Ministry of Education in continuing the provision of textbooks and educational materials for the new academic year of 2014.

Procurement of administrative purposes included the renewal of some IT items (laptops, printers and the server); the tender process was streamlined. The total annual volume of CO procurement has reached slightly under US$ 1 million, with 84 per cent of the cost of technical consultancy expertise procured as direct (often critical) inputs to support programme interventions.

For joint UN LTAs, UNICEF acted as a lead agency for contracting a provider of printing services (as a result, a multi-lateral tender process was conducted). The involvement during the process of completing of four other UN LTAs (for translation and interpretation, travel, event management and stationary supply).

The Office has completed all VISION activities related to the verification of accuracy of equipment inventories and intangibles for the successful closure of accounts for 2013 and confirming that the Tirana Office asset records are correct. In total, 18 CRC meetings with 23 submissions took place in 2013. The quality of submissions by the programme staff was improved, especially after the introduction of a scoring system for document quality evaluation.

The CO doesn’t have a warehouse. All the supplies received are initially register at the “virtual” warehouse in VISION and distributed to the partners. Packing and distribution of PFP products received in summer 2013 after the clearance of CO was conducted successfully.

There were no emergency interventions to support during the year.
Human Resources

UNICEF Albania Country Office has had neither new staff nor separations in 2013. The funding of one post (Justice for Children) moved from OR to RR after having received an approval from the RO. The post of a Child Protection Specialist (L4, further the May 2012 audit recommendations (closed in June 2013), some changes occurred in the reporting lines. For a sector-specific interventions and a more general social policy perspective, the reporting line of the NO-C Social Policy from the Representative to Deputy Representative. Also in line with the audit advice, all SM reviewed and discussed Descriptions with their supervisors, prior to finalization of updated JD versions by the Representative (no changes were required to exceed the limit requiring post requalification).

During the reporting period, all travel arrangements and visa issues have been smoothly handled by the HR/Operations Section on Human Resource management in light of the regional transformational agenda, Talent Mapping Initiative and the Dynamic Leadership Certificate Programme, Dimensions of Teacher Policy were introduced. Different e-courses were available locally, like the peer volunteer.

Staff were encouraged to continuously invest in professional education and to join and actively participate in professional associations in order to expand professional skills of a specific technical or functional nature in support of UNICEF priorities. Four different e-courses were strongly recommended by the management; courses completed online during the year included Dynamic Leadership Certificate Programme, Dimensions of Teacher Policy e-course and the Integrity Awareness Initiative. The AMP forms the basis for essential assignments to be reflected in the Performance Evaluation Reports and respectively in the PER.

The AMP was finalized in time but, again in 2013, there were delays with the completion of the PERs. Only 19 per cent of indicators related to closing and certifying TAs within the 15-days period have been monitored.

Overall, the general perception is that staff members in UNICEF Tirana enjoy a tolerant and respectful relationship at work. Staff balance arrangements are fully respected and encouraged by the management. Staff members are permitted to take some of flexi time, work from home and learning days were used by some SM. UNICEF staff in Albania are aware of staff career entitlements were considered by the staff as particularly useful.

In line with UNICEF corporate plans to move to an Electronic Record Management System (ERMS), the Country Office is updating the personnel files and prepared all documents for scanning.

Efficiency Gains and Cost Savings

In 2013, UNICEF Albania Country Office has undertaken some cost reductions measures that resulted in savings, mainly due to negotiations with the three service providers and wider use of Skype and other alternative free-of-charge channels, there was almost a 40 per cent reduction in the cost of landline calls (US$ 4,500 in 2012 compared to US$ 2,722 in 2013). A Joint LTA for security services signed by the UN agencies in May 2013 resulted in a slight reduction in the cost of mobile phone calls (US$ 8,655 in 2012 compared to US$ 5,491 in 2013). Since the Office was increasingly relying on the internet connectivity, a second ISP contract was upgraded to provide continuous connectivity, an advance payment was negotiated with both providers, on discounts of 10 -15 per cent.

During 2013, there was also a 12 per cent cost reduction of the consumed paper and cartridges, thanks to more efficient utilization of these materials. UNICEF’s negotiations with the Medical Response for Diplomatic Corps company resulted in a cost reduction for the 2013 savings of 17 per cent. A joint LTA for security services signed by the UN agencies in May 2013 resulted in a slight reduction in the cost of security service, considering a 24-hour service coverage.

Other than that, no direct cost savings could be observed through common services with other UN agencies. Because of UNICEF’s proportional share of the workload for the common services or undertakings (e.g. participation in various working groups, committee, and/or staff recruitment panels, review of common documentation, etc.).
**Changes in AMP & CPMP**

No significant changes to the Annual Management Plan or Country Programme Management Plan have been introduced during the year.

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**Summary Notes and Acronyms**

**Key data sources**


- Albania in figures - 2012. INSTAT, 2013

- Albania Statistical Bulletin – Q2 2013. INSTAT

- Albania Labour Market, Q3 2013. INSTAT


- A needs Assessment study on Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, UNDP, February 2012


- Gender Wage Gap in Albania. UN Women, 2011

- Women Entrepreneurship in Albania. Institute of Contemporary Studies (a study commissioned by UN Women). April 2013


- Gender Analyses of Extension Services for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection. UN Women Albania, 2013

**Acronyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMP</td>
<td>Annual Management Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>BKTF</td>
<td>Bashku Kunder Trafikimit Te Femijeve (“All Together Against Child Trafficking”) NGO coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEE/CIS</td>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe / Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
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<td>CF</td>
<td>Coherence Fund</td>
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<td>CMT</td>
<td>Country Management Team</td>
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<td>COMBI</td>
<td>Communication for Behaviour Impact</td>
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<td>CPMP</td>
<td>Country Programme Management Plan</td>
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<td>CPU</td>
<td>Child Protection Unit</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>CRO</td>
<td>Child Rights Observatory</td>
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<td>CRU</td>
<td>Child Rights Unit</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<td>C4D</td>
<td>Communication for Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>DaO</td>
<td>Delivering as One</td>
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<tr>
<td>DevInfo</td>
<td>Development Information (database)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCT</td>
<td>Direct Cash Transfer</td>
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<td>DHS</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Survey</td>
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<td>EC</td>
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<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization
FFI - Flour Fortification Initiative
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
GIS - Geographic Information System
HIV/AIDS - Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HR - Human Resources
ICT - Information Communication Technology
IMCI - Integrated Management of Child Illnesses
IMR - Infant Mortality Rate
IPSAS - International Public Sector Accountancy Standards
JCC - Joint Consultative Committee
LSMS - Living Standards Measurement Survey
MCH - Mother and Child Health
MDG-F - Millennium Development Goals Fund
MoES - Ministry of Education and Science
MoLSAE0 - Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (now MoSWY)
MoPH - Ministry of Public Health
MoSWY - Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (former MoSLAE0)
M&E - Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO - Non-governmental Organization
OR - Other Resources
PER - Performance Evaluation Report
RED - Regional Education Department
RBM - Result-Based Management
RR - Regular Resources
UN RCO - United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office
UNCT - United Nations Country Team
UNDP - United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF - United Nations Children’s Fund
U5MR - Under-five Mortality Rate
VCT - Voluntary Counselling and Testing
VISION - Virtual Integrated System of Information
VPN - Virtual Private Network
WHO - World Health Organization
WCCC - Women and Child Consulting Centre

**Evaluation**

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