Situation analysis¹

1. Most social indicators for children have much improved over the past several years. Child mortality had fallen to 22 deaths per 1,000 live births by 2009, from 39 in 2002. Poverty was reduced from about 22 per cent to 12 per cent during that same period. Overall school enrolment is high. Albania is moving energetically and single-mindedly towards its integration into Europe. This has led to the quick adoption of legislation and strategies required for accession to the European Union (EU), often with insufficient consideration of existing capacity, budgets or the needed longer-term change of attitudes and practices.

2. Improved average social indicators often disguise inequities. Not all groups benefit in equal measure from economic growth. The Government recognizes that social transfers do not reach all who are entitled and that the transfers are inadequate to help such people escape the conditions that create poverty. There is no tradition in the State Social Services to follow up with families who no longer can help themselves. Cash transfers to children with disabilities are more generous, but access to services is more difficult for this group. One positive aspect is that the number of children in institutions nationwide is low, about 600. Access to organized childhood care and better parenting practices is unavailable for most families, especially for vulnerable young mothers. Stunting among children remains alarmingly high, at 19 per cent. Informal payments requested by health workers hamper access to health services for the poor. Domestic violence towards women and children is widespread, and widely accepted. About half of all children have access to preschools, though children from marginalized groups normally do not attend. The Government is concerned about the number of children dropping out of school, but relevant programmes are not yet fully developed. Substance abuse among adolescents is growing. Children from Roma families are shown to be particularly disadvantaged in the analysis of almost all the above indicators, and it is often the same children who suffer from multiple deprivations. Though conditions in the juvenile prisons have improved as result of UNICEF assistance, a serious human rights issue remains: up to 70 per cent of alleged juvenile offenders are held in pretrial detention – when they should be considered innocent.

3. Public oversight institutions remain weak. The work of Parliament, for example, is hampered by the lack of constructive political dialogue between the majority and the opposition. Institutions such as the Office of the Ombudsman or Anti-Discrimination Commissioner need to develop greater capacity and begin to engage more on behalf of vulnerable children. Media could

¹ To be read together with the relevant parts of the common country programme document for the planned Government of Albania–United Nations programme of cooperation 2012-2016 (DP/FPA/OPS-ICEF-WFP/DCCP/2011/ALB/1), discussed by the UNICEF Executive Board at its annual session in June 2011.
improve objective reporting on the situation of the disadvantaged. More civic engagement would help to accelerate implementation of reforms for children.

**Results achieved in previous cooperation and lessons learned**

4. Previous cooperation between the Government of Albania and UNICEF led to important results in child protection. The law on the protection of children's rights, adopted in 2010, emulates the Convention on the Rights of the Child and establishes implementation and monitoring institutions. In addition, Child Rights Units now exist in 8 of 12 regions and collect and analyse information related to the situation of children to inform policy development. The capacity of the Institute of Statistics was strengthened, and the Institute prepared a comprehensive Demographic and Health Survey in 2009. Child Protection Units have been established in 16 municipalities. They identify and follow up on children at risk of abuse and neglect. A 2009 UNICEF-commissioned evaluation recommended that the units serve as a good example of embryonic social work units that should become statutory across the country. Another significant result was the fact that national authorities and all telephone providers in Albania collaborated to support a Child Helpline, which is accessible free of charge for all children, around the clock. The helpline receives several thousand calls from children every month; trained counsellors provide direct advice or refer children to available services in their town. In the area of juvenile justice, legislation has almost reached EU standards, and alternatives to detention have been successfully introduced, but are underutilized.

5. A key lesson is that the policies developed for all the people of Albania tend to leave out the same small percentage of children and families, while benefiting mainstream populations first and foremost. Instead, policies and interventions need to be designed specifically to address those who are difficult to reach.

6. In a highly politicized environment, long-term reforms for the poor need to be linked with some “quick wins”. A weak understanding of accountability at many administrative levels, and inadequate transparency on entitlements and service expectations contribute to the slow translation of policy into functioning programmes for the poor.

7. United Nations coherence efforts did not necessarily translate into a greater focus on children, though they did prioritize gender concerns across all agencies. There has been a coherence dividend from some donors who pooled their resources into a common fund, but dialogue with funding partners around child-related interventions has subsequently diminished. It is difficult to prioritize among the components of the One UN Programme that reflect the different mandates of the participating agencies. Transaction costs increased for the United Nations country team, and implementation modalities supported by different agencies were not always consistent.

**Programme strategy**

8. *Equity and social inclusion for children* is the leitmotif for UNICEF assistance to the Government of Albania. Support will be given primarily for policies and national and local initiatives focusing on the most vulnerable groups, as opposed to improving services for all. This will be the unique contribution of UNICEF to the Government of Albania – United Nations common country programme.

9. From conception to adulthood, children from minorities, disadvantaged areas or families in poverty face multiple obstacles to reaching their full potential. Social exclusion often starts when a child is born to a young mother from a poor family – who may still be a child herself. This child
must overcome many constraints as she or he tries to keep up with peers from better-off families, who can more easily provide a healthy and stimulating environment. By the age of three, a child from a difficult family background may have only reached the stage of development of a two-year-old child from a better-off family. Such deprivations accumulate and are irreversible throughout life. More often than not, it is the same child who is not registered at birth, who remains malnourished, who drops out of school, who may come into conflict with the law, and who remains jobless later in life.

10. Removing these barriers requires concerted efforts in many sectors, focusing on the same vulnerable groups. Addressing social inclusion requires consideration not only of sector strategies, but also the environment and social background of those at risk. Oversight systems and institutions need to be in place to ensure that the social inclusion of children remains a focus of policy makers and service providers.

Relation to national priorities

11. The goals and strategies of UNICEF assistance are supportive of the priorities of the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI), 2007-2013, and its attendant policies, especially the strategies for justice, social inclusion, social protection, health, basic education, and youth. The outcomes pursued with UNICEF assistance are organized according to the structure of the NSDI and align with the aspirations of Albania to accede to the European Union. This alignment ensures that national partners can readily relate to the intentions of the programme and integrate them into the overall national development effort.

Programme components

Good governance for children

12. This component aims to support the functioning of public oversight bodies and complaint mechanisms concerned with the rights and social inclusion of children. The capacity of the Child Rights Commissioner in the Office of the Ombudsman will be strengthened to successfully handle cases. The frequency of parliamentary hearings on children is planned to increase. Responsible civic engagement will be supported so that those who hold office are accountable for the implementation of legislation, strategies, programmes and action plans, such as the Roma Action Plan. Plans have also been made to strengthen institutions established under the anti-discrimination law and the law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child, which monitor the fulfilment of the obligations arising from the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principle of ‘no child left behind’.

13. Data collection systems on social inclusion typically report on the macro level regarding the extent of poverty or access to services but are seldom used to pinpoint the specific areas or neighborhoods where people lack assistance. Child rights monitoring units in regional councils and child observatories run by civil society in all 12 regions of Albania will be supported to enhance their skills in data collection and analysis and the preparation of periodic reports on the implementation of national, regional or local plans and policies for children. By identifying the exact locations where vulnerable children live, the programme will support developing measures tailored to specific institutions and neighborhoods, instead of general policies that tend to be applied only in the better-managed facilities and better-off neighbourhoods. Research will be supported, for instance, to pinpoint the specific constraints faced by children who have limited abilities and opportunities to participate in education and social life.
14. The component will help to further ensure justice for children who are offenders, victims and witnesses of crime, and will help to ensure that reintegration services for juvenile offenders are available and used. With the support of this programme, diversion measures for juveniles and the probation system are expected to become fully functional; the aim is to provide viable alternatives to incarceration.

**Inclusive and protective policies**

15. The component supports the development of national and local policy designed to specifically protect disadvantaged children. It will support the reform of social transfers to make them work for children, and thus help to stop the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next. The addition of specific benefits for children will be considered and tested for eligible families. It is expected that this component will significantly contribute to a reduction of child poverty.

16. Under this component, local governments will be assisted to build a system of statutory social services that protects vulnerable children from neglect and abuse, follows up on individual cases and reconnects children to relevant health, education, law enforcement, legal and other social services. These efforts include the development of standards for case management, and for assistance – including through civil society – to several groups of people. These include, for example, families with a propensity to domestic violence and substance abuse; the long-term unemployed; people with family members who are severely disabled; and children and others returning from detention. It is anticipated that by 2016 all municipalities will have functioning child protection services focusing on children and neighborhoods most at risk. Legislation and systems currently under development will be in place to promote foster-care arrangements for children out of parental care, thereby further reducing the number of children in institutions and the time they spend there.

17. The Ministry of Health, together with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, will be assisted to revive or introduce integrated services for young mothers, including first-time mothers, from disadvantaged backgrounds and neighborhoods, and those young mothers receiving social assistance. This will help to ensure that newborns will be registered, and that young families receive hands-on advice on good parenting and child care. Nutrition services currently tested under the 2006-2011 programme will be rolled out, aiming to reduce stunting and anemia by 30 per cent. Together with sister United Nations agencies, UNICEF will assist in refining the system of health insurance so that at least 80 per cent of vulnerable children will have access to a basic package of health care services and supplies.

18. Given the risk of inadequate physical, intellectual, emotional and social development of children from families with disadvantaged backgrounds, free access to quality crèches will be institutionalized as a priority in disadvantaged neighborhoods, with the expected result that 30 per cent of vulnerable children will benefit from crèches by 2016. Local authorities will introduce measures for early screening of young children so that corrective measures can be taken where possible. The Government will be supported in preparing budget models and prioritizing preschool enrolment, especially for children from marginalized families. Preschool education for such children is essential for socialization and intellectual stimulation during the formative years.

19. The component will assist the Government in its campaign for ‘zero dropout’ from compulsory education. Like all other measures in this component, the zero dropout campaign will
be linked to improved social services for families. This will be done in recognition of the fact that often the family situation prevents children from marginalized communities from taking full advantage of the health and education services or of development opportunities that might be available. It is expected that a manageable number of schools that currently have the majority of dropouts can be identified. Social workers in the identified municipalities will be oriented to work with adolescents most at risk of drug addiction and contracting HIV, as well as those already affected. The National Youth Employment Services, presently piloted, will be expanded to all major municipalities. The services not only help with finding jobs, but also provide career counselling and life-skills education for disadvantaged young people.

**Partnerships**


21. UNICEF will continue to co-chair, with the Ministry of Justice, the committee on Juvenile Justice of the International Consortium on Justice Reform. Several Sector Working Groups, under the leadership of respective ministries, are expected to coordinate sector assistance. UNICEF will also engage the existing and active network of national and international NGOs promoting child rights and the inclusion of children. Alliances will be sought with bilateral donors and the diplomatic missions to Albania of various countries, especially those supporting human rights, social inclusion and the welfare of children. Notable among these will be the Swiss, Austrian and Swedish cooperation, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the EU, the World Bank and the Embassies of the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the Unites States, as appropriate. Some donor agencies have come together as ‘Friends of the UN’ to advise on overall coordination in the context of United Nations reform.