

Albania: first national policy document on ageing

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With its National Action Plan on Ageing (NAPA) 2020-2024, Albania introduces a series of measures and actions that aim to ensure a healthy long life and provide full coverage of health and social services for elderly persons in need.



Description

In Albania, there is no official definition of long-term care (LTC). Provisions on LTC can be found in different laws, such as those related to healthcare, social care and social insurance. Though still one of the countries with the youngest populations in Europe, Albania has already started to show the first signs of ageing, caused by declining fertility rates, increasing life expectancy and high levels of emigration. The population has decreased from 3.06 million in 2001 to 2.86 million in 2019, while the share of people aged 65 or more increased dramatically over the same period, from 7.5% to 14%. The old-age dependency ratio, i.e. the ratio of the number of persons aged 65+ to the number of working-age persons (15-64), has increased from 11.3% in 2001 to 21.6% in 2019. According to INSTAT (2019) projections, by 2031 the population will decrease further but more slowly (it should reach 2.74 million), while the old-age dependency ratio will jump (to 32.7%). By the same year, the share of people aged 65+ is expected to reach 21.8% of the total population.

These demographic changes have triggered government efforts to develop the LTC system. In December 2019, the Government approved the first National Action Plan on Ageing (NAPA) 2020-2024. By the end of 2024, the NAPA aims to ensure a conducive environment that supports and assists older women and men to integrate into society, while preserving human dignity, regardless of their health status or functional

autonomy. The social and healthcare system is expected to be a municipal system, guaranteeing quality services for all elderly people in need of care. The NAPA also anticipates greater focus on prevention, through increased disease awareness and the reduction of inequalities in the treatment of older people's needs.

The implementation of the NAPA includes regulation of the caregivers' profession and aims to facilitate labour market access for informal caregivers aged 50 years or above. Support for adequate standards, care protocols for medical staff and nurses as well as training in LTC are envisaged. About 100,000 older people will benefit from the provision of integrated social-health services (Ministry of Health and Social Protection [MoHSP], 2020). Responsibility for the implementation of the action plan lies with the MoHSP as well as its subordinated agencies, such as the Institute for Public Health, State Social Services and Healthcare Services. Local governments are expected to play an essential role in establishing and administering community social services in cooperation with the central government institutions. Currently, LTC-related services are financed through taxation, and the cost of implementing this plan, amounting to 0.2% of GDP, will also be covered in this way.

Representatives from the opposition have stated in various public appearances that the country does not need another strategy or plan on paper but rather concrete actions. They have asked the government to consider

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developing the missing legal framework for LTC and to draft a law on improving the quality of life and addressing the needs of the elderly - setting up the institutional infrastructure and encouraging preparedness of society, while shifting towards a system that promotes independent living and active participation in social and economic life. Furthermore, the opposition has also stressed that the government has to determine the minimum living standards in the country, which would then help define the level of different benefits for the elderly as well as for all other groups. These issues, as well as others such as the minimum living standard, increasing pensions, improving access to transport for the elderly, integration activities at the local level, support to families caring for elderly people with chronic illnesses and housing provisions were raised by the key stakeholders' groups during the consultations on the NAPA with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

Outlook and commentary

The elderly in Albania represent 14% (400,000) of the total population, with 60% of them living in remote and isolated areas (MoHSP, 2020). Research highlights elderly persons' feelings of abandonment and detachment from "modern" society at large; a lack of receiving and giving intergenerational care, and a generalised sense of loneliness due to the loss of close family relations (Conkova et al, 2019).

The NAPA has partially incorporated some of the requests made by stakeholders' groups, such as approval of the minimum income, improvement of minimum pensions and their harmonisation with the minimum income and subsidised urban transport for the poorest elderly people (i.e. recipients of social pensions). However, as 12 out of 18 indicators do not have baseline figures, it is imperative to conduct assessments which could help to define these baselines, adjust realistic targets and enable a proper monitoring of implementation progress.

Several cross-cutting reforms, imperative for the successful implementation of the action plan, are being implemented simultaneously - such as social care reform, healthcare reform - thus putting pressure on a system with limited capacities and significant financial gaps. The financial mechanisms need to be revised in order to support the establishment of social care services for the elderly, community centres, mobile teams and home care services, all of which are urgently needed.

The government has adopted two packages of social and healthcare services for the elderly, which include a definition of the competences and different tasks needed at all levels to provide them with quality services (MoHSP, 2015 and Government of Albania, 2018). These important policy measures require certain steps to have been taken, such as implementation of the law on social enterprises, funding of the agreed basket of services, operationalising the Social Fund, procurement of social care services - all still under implementation.

Standards for services for the elderly, an outline of the typology of services, and profiles of multidisciplinary team members were approved in 2006. Yet the staff working in the public centres are mainly medical staff and nurses, even though the profession of social worker is foreseen in the approved structure. Therefore, the success of the implementation of the action plan depends very much on progress in and successful implementation of the social care reform and the relevant policy documents.

Further reading

Conkova, N., Vullnetari, J., King, R. and Fokkema, T. (2019), "Left Like Stones in the Middle of the Road: Narratives of Aging Alone and Coping Strategies in Rural Albania and Bulgaria", *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences* 2019, Vol. 74, No 8.

[INSTAT \(2019\), Population projections](#)

Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP), "National Action Plan for Aging", 2020.

Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) (2015), "Basic Package of Services in Primary Health Care".

Government of Albania, Council of Ministers Decision no. 518, date 04.09.2018, on Social Care Community based and Residential Services, criteria, procedures for benefiting from them and amount for personal expenses for beneficiaries of organised services.

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