Albania

The country fact sheet was prepared by Travis Sanderson in the framework of an institutional collaboration between the European Centre of Social Welfare Policy and Research and the Central European University in April 2023. The content of the sheet does neither necessarily reflect the views of those institutions nor those of the respective Ministry/ies.

Policy Framework	Candidate Status in the European Union since 2014
	National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) II 2015-2020, with III in progress of preparation
	Albania Action Plan (2020-2022)
	National Education Strategy for 2021-2026
General situation across all policy areas	
Main challenges across all policy areas	Albania's lack of investment in social policy during the transition to a market economy has created a gap in all policy areas.
	Emigration remains high (7.1% decrease in population ages 20-24 in 2022) even as the population rapidly ages with the highest increase in the median age in Europe. Combined, these lead to a depletion of the labour force.
	High degree (56.7%) of informal work – – notably for youth, including in agriculture, retail, and construction – has major ramifications for all policy areas.
Main approaches to address challenges across all policy areas	Albania's Ministry of Health and Social Protection has overseen a holistic 10% increase in social assistance levels (non-contributory minimum income) for all beneficiaries beginning in 2021.The exact increases depend on special category. For example, the benefit level for female survivors of domestic violence was raised to ALL9,000, triple the original benefit.
	Since 2021, the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth (MoESY) has supported local K-12 public education institutions in designing digitalisation plans, as well as teacher competency trainings. In early 2023, the National Agency for VET developed an accreditation model to improve vocational education assessment to meet labour market needs.

Social policy specific situation	
Significant social trends	Emigration has remained high, as does the ageing population, since census data was last available in 2011. In 2022, Albania experienced the sharpest decrease in population (1.3%) in one year since the Second World War, as per estimates from Albania's Institute of Statistics, but information on overall demographics remains unavailable due to census delays. Decrease in poverty. Minimum wage increases (from ALL182.73 to ALL195.40 per hour) since 2012 combined with remittances have reduced poverty. A substantial portion of Albanians remain at risk. In 2021, employment rate has bounced back to pre-pandemic levels (11.4%), but those who remain unemployed tend to be unemployed long-term.
Key challenges specific to social policy	Government's spending on social protection remains low at 9.3% of GDP. As of 2019, 56.7% of the workforce works in the informal sphere, notably in agriculture, retail, and construction, and thus lacks access to national social assistance and labour protections. The decentralization of social care services has improved targeting, but the sector is still underfunded and unable to lift a sizable portion of the population over the at-risk-of-poverty line.
Main approaches to address social policy challenges	Improvements in social assistance levels. As of January 2022, the level of social assistance has increased by 10%, for both special categories and non-special categories. Adoption of legislation funding civil society projects that support minority rights. In municipal social welfare programs, the role of civil society organisations for outreach to vulnerable groups is increasingly stressed.
Target groups	Special categories for social assistance include Adults and children with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, children, and adults at risk for abuse and trafficking, orphaned children. Non-special categories for social assistance: Impoverished individuals and households who do not qualify for special categories.

Practice example	The following section provides a practice example of the region under scrutiny.
Name of the good practice	'Grandmother's House': Offering Alternative Services in Tirana
Policy areas	Please tick the relevant policy areas addressed by the good practice (one or more options are possible). X Social inclusion X Well-being
Description of the practice	The Municipality of Tirana partners with Different & Equal, an NGO. Different & Equal employees provide social and emotional support to children of trafficking and abuse victims on Monday through Saturday a space provided by the municipal authorities in Tirana. These services are conducted outside of official schedules of educational institutions and include psychological support, games, parenting support, and nutrition. In addition to providing the physical space for programming, municipalities helped design the program itself, alongside qualified service providers. The reason for the name "Grandmother's House" is that the environment was designed to resemble a home while parents are working overtime, to simulate a safe space conducive to service for domestic violence victims and their children.
Governance & funding	Jointly administered by local government units and "Different & Equal" NGO Funded by social services funds allocated to municipal governments and supplemented by donations from UNICEF and the British Embassy Tirana.
Innovation	Historically, collaboration between civil society organizations and government authorities has been rare in Albania. Experts have identified this as a major problem for effective social services. While coordination is understood as essential, as of 2023, cooperation between government units and civil society organizations remains a pressing need. The linkages between both remain not formalized and a comprehensive strategy is absent. Examples of successful collaboration between municipal units and civil society organizations – like Grandmother's House – represent a blueprint and model for the future of social welfare programming in Albania. Grandmother's House is distinguished as one such rare collaboration, of which very few exist, that has been both successful and sustainable. As a result, the program is an innovation in Albanian social services.

Challenges of implementation	Tirana's local government unit is cooperating successfully with civil society organisations to institute this program. Replicability across Albania is low and service coverage inconsistent, which may point to institutional difficulties in replicating the capital's success.
Outcome(s) and impact	Supervision, hygiene, and nutritional needs were met among 18 children in Tirana in 2021. According Different & Equal's 2021 Annual Report (Page 24), children show lasting improvement in their emotional and psychological well-being and achieve better results in school.
Main partner(s)/ stakeholders	Municipality of Tirana Different & Equal (CSO)