



COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

ALBANIA

Synthesis Report



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This evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service. The independent evaluation team comprised Isabel Suarez Garcia, UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist for Europe and Central Asia and team lead for this evaluation; Meredith Brown, International Evaluation Expert; Elida Metaj, National Evaluation Expert; and Genevieve Quinn, Research Assistant.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
1. COUNTRY CONTEXT	10
1.1 About Albania	11
1.2 Gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania	11
1.3 UN Women in Albania	14
SECTION 2: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH	19
2.1 Evaluation approach and methodology	20
2.2 Evaluation scope	20
2.3 Evaluation design	20
2.4 Strategic Note evaluability, limitations and risk-mitigation strategies	20
2.5 Data collection and analysis	21
2.6 Evaluation governance and quality assurance	21
SECTION 3: FINDINGS	23
3.1 Relevance	24
3.2 Coherence	29
3.3 Effectiveness	36
3.4 Efficiency	44
3.5 Sustainability	46
3.6 Gender equality and the empowerment of women, and human rights	48
SECTION 4: LESSONS LEARNED	52
SECTION 5. CONCLUSIONS	55
SECTION 6: RECOMMENDATIONS	57
ANNEXES	<i>Separate Volume</i>

ACRONYMS

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	civil society organization
CSAG	Civil Society Advisory Group
DRR	disaster risk reduction
EU	European Union
EVAW	Ending Violence against Women
EVAWG	Ending Violence against Women and Girls
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FPI	Flagship Programme Initiative
GDP	gross domestic production
GEEW	gender equality and the empowerment of women
GREAT	Gender Rural Equality and Tourism programme
GREVIO	Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action Against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
IADC	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
IEAS	UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
IES	UN Women Independent Evaluation Service
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex plus
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection

NSDI II	National Strategy on Development and Integration 2015–2020
NSGE	National Strategy on Gender Equality 2016–2020
OMT	Operations Management Team
P&B	Planning and Budgeting
PoCSD	Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely
SWAP	United Nations System-Wide Action Plan for Gender Equality
ToC	Theory of Change
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDOCO	United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
VAWG	Violence against Women and Girls
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WLPP	Women's Leadership and Political Participation
WPE	Women's Political Empowerment
WPS	Women, Peace and Security



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION OF ALBANIA

Photo ©UN Women Albania

This report presents the main findings, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation of the **UN Women Albania Country Office Strategic Note 2017–2021**, conducted between January and July 2021. This Country Portfolio Evaluation is a systematic assessment of the contributions made by UN Women to development results relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level and aims to contribute to the Country Office’s strategic learning, improve decision-making and support enhanced accountability.

Although an upper-middle-income country, Albania has one of the lowest per capita GDP rates in the Western Balkans region, with a fragile economy that is largely dependent on domestic consumption, remittances and tourism. Poverty is highest among the rural population, women, children, the Roma and Egyptian communities, and the elderly. In recent years, there has been an increasing migration trend of the young and highly skilled from the country. In June 2014, Albania received European Union (EU) candidacy status and undertook a series of reforms. Accession negotiations between the EU and Albania were opened in March 2020, as an acknowledgment of Albania’s progress and encouraging implementation of the reforms required for EU accession, particularly the fight against organized crime and corruption, and justice and electoral reform.

In the last two years, Albania has faced two major crises in quick succession that have negatively impacted its economic development: an earthquake in November 2019, which displaced over 17,000 people, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These crises have worsened the economic and social situation in the country in a context of polarized politics.

Albania has established a solid normative framework to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality and prohibit gender-based discrimination. It has made continuous efforts to align its normative framework with international standards, signing the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1993) and its Optional Protocol (2003), later reinforced by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Albania ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) in 2013. In support of these commitments, Albania introduced the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Gender Action Plan 2016–2020, now succeeded by the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030 and its Action Plan, as well as the National Action Plan 2018–2021 for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security.

Despite ongoing improvement and consolidation of the normative framework on gender equality and the empowerment of women, its implementation and de facto equality lag significantly behind. Women in Albania continue to struggle with social norms and patriarchal views on the role of women. There are high levels of gender-based violence and limited economic opportunity and social services, despite improved levels of women’s political participation. The employment rate for women is lower than that of men, and vulnerable women, including Roma and Egyptian women, women with disabilities, women from the LGBTQI+ community, and rural and elderly women, are particularly disadvantaged.

The UN Women Albania Country Office has been present in Albania since 2011, when UN Women transitioned from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which had been present in the country since 2007.

The Strategic Note that is the subject of this evaluation was drafted in 2016 to cover the implementation of UN Women's integrated threefold mandate during the period 2017–2021 and is aligned with the country's Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017–2021.

During this period, the Country Office's programming was concentrated in the thematic areas of Ending Violence against Women and National Planning and Budgeting, with these areas receiving the bulk of donor funding, resources and interventions. There was also programming in other thematic areas, including Women's Economic Empowerment; Women, Peace and Security; and Women's Political Participation. As a Delivering as One United Nations country, UN Women accomplished its in-country programming almost entirely through United Nations Joint Programmes. The Country Office also participated in key UN Women regional programmes on ending Violence against women and gender-responsive budgeting.

The total budget for the Strategic Note period (2017–2020) was US\$6.16 million, of which the Country Office delivered US\$6.0 million (a financial delivery rate of 97 per cent). The annual budget has remained relatively consistent, with a slight increase in 2020. Likewise, staffing levels have remained consistent, at approximately 15 personnel during the life of the Strategic Note, with 5 core staff. As of June 2021, the office had 17 personnel, including 5 core staff.

Evaluation purpose, objectives and methodology

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) in close collaboration with the Albania Country Office as a primarily formative (forward-looking) evaluation to support the strategic learning and decision-making of the Country Office and national stakeholders for the next Strategic Note, set to start in January 2022. The evaluation has a secondary summative (backward-looking) perspective to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The evaluation assessed the relevance of UN Women's interventions at national level and its effectiveness and organizational efficiency. It also analysed how a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated in the design and implementation of the Strategic Note. In addition, the evaluation also identifies lessons learned to help the Country Office improve its strategic positioning to foster greater gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level and provides actionable recommendations to support the development of the next Strategic Note.

The scope of the evaluation includes all activities undertaken by the Country Office under its current Strategic Note, including operational work, general support to normative policy and United Nations system coordination, and operational efficiency, from the period of January 2017 to the first quarter of 2021. UN Women's contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic response in Albania was also taken into account. Seven country-, regional- and corporate-level evaluations were reviewed and drawn upon as secondary material. The geographical scope of the evaluation spanned all of Albania, given the Country Office's work at the national and local levels across the country.

The evaluation applied a theory-based, contribution analysis and included outcomes mapping and outcomes harvesting. The evaluation team fostered a participatory approach aiming to provide opportunities for learning while still ensuring accountability for outcomes and identifying options for future decision-making.

The evaluation applied the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, with the additional criteria of human rights and gender equality. The evaluation was guided by the principles of gender-responsive evaluations and used a "utilization-focused lens" and a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate and verify data, increasing the reliability and consistency of findings.

Data collection was conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic and included the review of over 90 key documents, interviews with 76 informants, three focus group discussions, one workshop with Country Office personnel, two surveys, two in-depth case studies, and an analysis of financial and key indicator reporting.

Methodology



- Gender-responsive evaluation
- Used mixed-methods to triangulate evidence



- Theory-based and contribution analysis
- Outcomes mapping and utilization-focused

Conclusions

CONCLUSION 1



Working in a complex environment, the Country Office has been active in ensuring its work is aligned with partner priorities and the needs of women and girls in Albania. There is an ongoing need to refine this alignment to ensure it meets the ambitions of Albania for accession to the EU and the needs of the most marginalized women and girls.

The Strategic Note and its interventions were developed to directly support Albania's national and international commitments, UNCT outcomes as established in the Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017-2021, and the identified needs of women and girls in Albania. The Country Office worked throughout the Strategic Note period to validate this alignment, through constant partner engagement, consultation and ongoing research into emerging gender equality and women's empowerment issues.

While the work of the Country Office throughout the period was consistent in terms of its focus on the most marginalized women and girls, the Strategic Note lacked a specific and targeted cross-thematic approach. Likewise, it was not as specifically directed at Albania's EU accession ambitions as it could have been given this critical national priority.

There is opportunity to strengthen the next Strategic Note, through greater engagement with civil society with respect to the needs of target beneficiaries, to engage more actively in mainstreaming gender in the EU negotiations, and to ensure that the theory of change of the Strategic Note aligns directly with the key priorities of Albania.

Based on evaluation findings 1, 2, 3 and 21

CONCLUSION 2



The collaborative approach of the Country Office has been effective in meeting its United Nations system coordination mandate and supporting the implementation of joint programmes. There is room for the Country Office to expand its coordination impact by convening gender equality stakeholders across Albania.

The Country Office's strength in finding synergies between programmes and among partners has created a coherent approach across its portfolio, across the gender elements of the UNCT portfolio and between stakeholders in the sector. There is continued work to be done to ensure that civil society is well integrated into the dialogue, as well as to ensure that the gender elements of joint programmes are appropriately prominent.

A strengthened leadership strategy inside joint programmes and externally in convening the broader gender equality and women's empowerment community would support the Country Office's coordination mandate and increase opportunities for funding. This leadership strategy must include capitalizing on unique Country Office offerings, finding sustainable resourcing for key in-house positions and asserting leadership at key opportunities within the UNCT and with stakeholders.

Based on evaluation findings 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8



CONCLUSION 3

Country Office programming has made long-term gains for gender equality and women's empowerment in Albania. Capitalizing on these gains and expanding the reach of the portfolio will require innovative and strategic approaches to programming and partnership.

The Country Office's approach in Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting has been holistic, making tangible, long-term gains across normative, cultural and service delivery strata. The Country Office's horizontal approach to data and research across thematic areas has also been impactful. Other programming areas have seen smaller but still meaningful outcomes, although they have struggled from a lack of resourcing.

The programming successes have been meaningful, but they are conventional in terms of their approach and methodology. A broader impact, particularly with respect to shifting the popular discourse on the role of women in society, requires stretching beyond conventional approaches and thematic areas.

Work throughout the Strategic Note period has laid the foundation for a more aggressive and innovative approach to programming in the next period, engaging in emerging areas with a broader network of partners and seeking a deeper impact on cultural norms.

Based on evaluation findings 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15

CONCLUSION 4**There is room to optimize the strength of the Country Office team, including through strategic approaches to resource mobilization and allocation.**

The Country Office team is well regarded for its technical competence, flexible and respectful approach, and dedication. However, the team is underresourced and stretched. Resource mobilization during the period of the Strategic Note was low in key thematic areas and suffered due to leadership turnover and challenges.

As a result, the office lacked the cross-functional resourcing required to lift its capacity to a higher level and generate funding opportunities. It is however important to acknowledge a positive and promising trend in terms of resource mobilization and stabilized leadership during the last period of Strategic Note implementation.

A new strategic approach to resource mobilization and long-term internal sustainability, already underway in 2021, as well as improved “storytelling” capacities, will support the Country Office’s ability to perform at the high-functioning level that it is capable of.

Based on evaluation findings 16, 17, 18 and 19

CONCLUSION 5**As a result of the Country Office’s work, sustainable gender equality and women’s empowerment and support for the most marginalized women and girls have advanced in Albania. More focus is required to ensure the gender machinery and the national discourse continue this momentum.**

The Country Office’s work has advanced gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania across formal and informal systemic lines, through advances in the normative framework, including through the gender-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators, long-term capacity strength in partners and some shifts in the social discourse on gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Country Office has maintained a targeted and cross-portfolio focus on the needs of the most marginalized women and girls, an approach that has resulted in tangible gains and partner attention to these vulnerable groups. However, these gains are not guaranteed and there is still work to be done. In particular, the national gender machinery continues to require the support of the international community. Negative social and cultural attitudes towards women and girls remain pervasive.

Transformative change will require a stronger national gender machinery and an unrelenting focus on the national attitude towards gender equality and women’s empowerment

Based on evaluation findings 20, 21, 22 and 23

Recommendations

1. The Country Office should focus the next Strategic Note with a **clear theory of change that maintains its systems approach** and introduces an agenda for advancing visibility, leadership and impact.
2. The Country Office, in concert with the Resident Coordinator, should develop a **strategy to maintain UN Women’s strong position in the UNCT** and to continue supporting the meaningful contributions of UN Women to United Nations Joint Programmes.
3. The Country Office should **build an innovative culture in the office** and in the development of its Strategic Note, including in relation to UN Women’s gender equality and women’s empowerment coordination mandate within the United Nations system.
4. The Country Office should **find ways to build the capacity of its personnel in flagship areas** as well as in new and emerging topics in gender equality and women’s empowerment.
5. The Country Office should develop a more **strategic approach to resource mobilization**.
6. The Country Office should **continue to work with the national and local governments** to drive towards a sustainable model for the gender machinery in Albania.
7. The Country Office should **develop a cross-thematic approach to culture change** and shifting social discourse on the roles of women and men in Albania.
8. Building on its current success, the Country Office should ensure that the **needs of the most marginalized women and girls are directly targeted** in the next Strategic Note.



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COUNTRY CONTEXT

1.1 About Albania

Albania is situated in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula and has a population of 2,845,955 inhabitants.¹ Although an upper-middle-income country, Albania has one of the lowest per capita GDP rates in the Western Balkans region (US\$5,325²), with a fragile economy that is largely dependent on domestic consumption, remittances and tourism. Poverty is highest among the rural population, women, children, the Roma and Egyptian communities, and the elderly. Since 1991, the country has experienced a significant loss of population, with almost 40 per cent³ of the population (1.4 million) living outside the country, contributing to population decrease, loss of social capital and population aging. In recent years, there has been an increasing migration trend of the young and highly skilled from the country.

Albania joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 2009. In June 2014, Albania received European Union (EU) candidacy status and adopted a road map for approximation with EU laws and standards.

1.2 Gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania

Albania has established a solid normative framework to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality and prohibit gender-based discrimination. It has made continuous efforts to align its normative framework with international standards, including signing the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 and its Optional Protocol in 2003. This was later reinforced by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which committed participating States to taking steps towards achieving gender equality. Albania ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) in 2013, and efforts are being made to align the country's national gender equality legislation with its standards.

The CEDAW commitments and recommendations of the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, as well as other United Nations recommendations on women's human rights and gender equality, are included in the priorities of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Gender Action Plan 2016–2020⁴, in the new National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030 and its Action Plan⁵ and the National Action Plan 2018–2021 for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

Albania has undertaken and partly implemented a series of reforms that are significant steps in the EU accession process, including economic development, social protection and social inclusion, public administration, territorial organization and administration, local government and decentralization, regional development, public financial management and the justice system. The EU decided to open accession negotiations with Albania in March 2020, acknowledging its progress and encouraging implementation of the reforms required for EU accession, particularly the fight against organized crime and corruption, justice reform and electoral reform.

In the last two years, Albania has faced two devastating crises in quick succession that have negatively impacted its economic development: an earthquake in November 2019, which displaced over 17,000 people, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the loss of over 50,000 jobs. These crises have worsened the economic and social situation in the country in a context of polarized politics.

The EU has opened accession negotiations with Albania as of March 2020. As part of the EU accession process, Albania must comply with EU *acquis* (body of legislation and regulations), including gender equality *acquis*.

Despite ongoing improvement and consolidation of the normative framework on gender equality and the empowerment of women, its implementation and *de facto* equality lag significantly behind. The national gender machinery and the institutional mechanisms to coordinate the implementation of legislation, policies and action plans remain weak, understaffed and under-resourced. Women in Albania continue to struggle with social norms and patriarchal views on the role of women. There are high levels of gender-based violence⁶, with one in two (52.9 per cent) Albanian women reporting having experienced one or more forms of violence and limited economic opportunity and social services, despite improved levels of women's political participation in parliament (29.5 per cent) and the executive branch (57 per cent).⁷ The employment rate for women is 54.4 per cent, compared with 68.2 per cent for men.⁸ Vulnerable women, including Roma and Egyptian women, women with disabilities, women from the LGBTQI+ community and rural and elderly women, are particularly disadvantaged and struggle to access services and enjoy their social and economic rights.

1 INSTAT (2020), Population of Albania.

2 <https://worldbank.org/en/country/overview/Albania>.

3 World Bank (2011), Migration and Remittances Factbook.

4 The National Strategy on Gender Equality and Gender Action Plan 2016–2020 is evaluated with the support of UN Women.

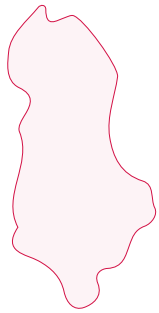
5 Drafting of the new National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030 and its Action Plan is supported by UN Women.

6 The third population-based national survey on Violence against women and girls was conducted in 2018 by INSTAT in cooperation with UNDP and UN Women, with financial support from UN Women, the Government of Australia and the Government of Sweden: <http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/national-population-survey--violence-against-women-and-girls-in-.html>.

7 INSTAT (2020), Women and Men in Albania: http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6661/gender_equality_index_for_the_republic_of_albania_2020.pdf.

8 Ibid.

ALBANIA COUNTRY CONTEXT



2.85M Population of 2,85 million, continuously decreasing due to outmigration and natural population decline.

50.1% 50.1 per cent of the population are **women** and 49.9 per cent men.

14.3% Absolute **poverty rate is 14.3** per cent and at risk of poverty rate is 23.4 per cent.



Ranked **69 of 189** countries in the Human Development Index 2021



Ranked **20 out of 153** countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020



VULNERABLE GROUPS

- Roma and Egyptians
- Elderly
- Persons with disabilities
- Persons with mental health problems
- Children
- LGBTQI
- Rural women



PRIORITY ISSUES IN GEWE

- Societal mindset on role of women and men in society
- Ending violence against women
- Women's economic empowerment
- Gender mainstreaming

POSITIVE TRENDS IN SDGS SCORES

On track or maintaining SDG achievement



In June 2014 Albania received **EU candidacy status** and with a perspective to open EU negotiations as of March 2020

Gender responsive governance

Women hold 29.5 per cent of parliamentary seats

57 per cent of ministers are women

Women's representation in local municipal councils reached 43.7 per cent in local elections in 2019.

Ending violence against women



52.9 per cent of women have experienced one or more types of violence during their lifetime (intimate partner violence, dating violence, non-partner violence, sexual harassment and/or stalking)



52.2 per cent of women maintain that all or most of people in community believe that violence against women is a private matter

Women's economic empowerment

54.4 per cent of women are employed vs 68.2 per cent of men

Women make up 41.6 per cent of agriculture workforce vs. 32.3 per cent of men

Women own and lead 25.4 per cent of businesses mostly micro enterprises in the service sector and located in the capital

Women earn 10.1 per cent less than men

EARTHQUAKE 2019 AND COVID-19 IMPACT IN ALBANIA



GDP in 2020 projected to **decline by 8.4%**. Poverty increased by **6%**.



The COVID-19 pandemic caused **50,000 job losses**.



Earthquake in November 2019 affected **202,291 people** and displaced over 17,000 people.



Both women and men experienced a **high burden of unpaid domestic and care work**, with women performing more time and care intensive tasks. **76%** of women reported an increase in providing unpaid domestic work compared with **66%** for men.



Industries of hospitality, garment, textile and agriculture **which provide employment mostly to women**, were severely affected.



COVID-19 deepened **gender inequalities**, disproportionately affecting women compared to men.



One in every two women reported **challenges in accessing medical supplies** and one in every five reported difficulty in accessing health services.



69% of women reported **higher rates of psychological and mental health issues** compared with men (**57%**) due to uncertainty created by the pandemic.



51% of women was **working remotely** compared with almost **27%** of men.



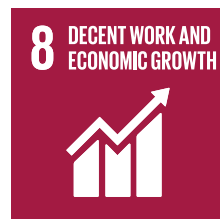
Share of women with reduced work time exceeded that of men by **4.7%** for employed workers and by **2.8%** for self-employed individuals leading to loss of income.



COVID-19 isolation had an **adverse impact in family relations**. The number of calls for help at the National Hotline for Domestic Violence tripled during March-May 2020 compared with the same period in 2019.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Strong negative effects on:



Negative impact will be reflected on:



1.3 UN Women in Albania

Background

The UN Women Albania Country Office has been present in Tirana since 2011, when UN Women transitioned from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which had been present in the country since 2007. The current Strategic Note of UN Women in Albania was drafted in 2016 to cover the implementation of UN Women's integrated threefold mandate during the period 2017–2021. It is aligned with the country's Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017–2021, which covers the same time period.

There were several external and internal priorities driving the approach of the development of the Strategic Note portfolio at the time:

- Alignment with the corporate strategic Flagship Programme Initiatives⁹;
- Albania's United Nations "Delivering as One" status and alignment with the Albania United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework;
- The EU *acquis communautaire*, and specifically the "gender acquis";
- A request by the Government of Albania that UN Women support reporting on CEDAW, Beijing +25, the Istanbul Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, and third cycle of the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review, as well as the enhancement of the gender machinery;
- Previous success in lobbying and building capacity for gender-responsive government tools, including statistics, budgeting and accountability.

In this context, UN Women in Albania adopted a systems approach, in line with the Delivering as One United Nations model, to determine activities and programming based on sharing programmatic work with other organizations according to their mandates, roles and capacities. Developing interlinkages between programmes and realizing benefits from interconnections between different impact areas were prioritized. The Country Office has

maintained alignment between its work, the Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017–2021 between the United Nations and the Government of Albania, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the commitments and priorities of the Government of Albania.

Programming under the Strategic Note is aligned with the four UN Women flagship programmes defined in 2017: Women's Access to Land and Productive Resources for Climate-Resilient Agriculture, Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership, Prevention and Access to Essential Services to End Violence against Women and Girls, and Transformative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

Programming was generally more concentrated in the thematic areas of Ending Violence against Women and National Planning and Budgeting over the period of the Strategic Note, with these areas receiving the bulk of donor funding, resources and interventions. As a Delivering as One United Nations country, UN Women accomplished its in-country programming almost entirely through United Nations Joint Programmes. It also participated in key UN Women regional programmes on Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting.

Women who face additional social disadvantages were identified in the Strategic Note and mapped to particular areas of vulnerability risk. These included:

- **Roma and Egyptian women** → social housing, economic aid, social services, early marriage and trafficking, domestic violence and Violence against women and girls;
- **Women with disabilities** → social services and employment opportunities, Violence against women and abuse;
- **LGBTQI+ community** → social services and employment opportunities, domestic violence and abuse;
- **Rural women** → social care and services, informal employment and burden of unpaid care work, weak property and land rights, domestic violence and Violence against women and girls.

⁹ The Flagship Programme Initiatives (FPIs) were developed in 2015 with the goal of creating high-impact, scalable initiatives that would build upon and supplement UN Women's ongoing programmatic work. The FPIs represent both operational and programming instruments, as well as a road map for the implementation of the thematic priorities of UN Women's Strategic Plan 2018–2021. The FPIs were envisioned as a new programming modality for UN Women to move away from a tradition of numerous, small-scale and fragmented interventions towards strategic, multi-year engagement frameworks delivered coherently across regions and countries, and at a requisite scale to achieve transformational changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women. The FPIs also aimed to further boost UN Women's resource mobilization and strategic partnership endeavours. UN Women (2020), Effectiveness and Efficiency Assessment of UN Women Flagship Programme Initiatives and Thematic Priorities of the Strategic Plan 2018–2021.

TABLE 1: UN Women programming during the period of the Strategic Note 2017–2021 (prepared by the evaluation team in consultation with the UN Women Albania Country Office)

ACTIVITY	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
COUNTRY PROGRAMMING					
Government of Sweden support to the gender outputs of the Government of Albania–United Nations Programme of Cooperation 2011–2016 on Women Economic Empowerment, Gender Responsive Budgeting, Women Leadership and Political Participation and Ending Violence against Women					
Government of Sweden support to Government of Albania–United Nations Programme of Cooperation, 2017–2018. Output 1.1: Women’s Leadership and Political Participation					
UN Women seed funds – Women’s Leadership and Political Participation					
Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT), 2021–2023					
United Nations Joint Programme on Ending Violence against Women in Albania, 2019–2021					
Government of Sweden support to Government of Albania–United Nations Programme of Cooperation, 2017–2018. Output 2.5: Gender-Based Violence					
Youth Project of the United Nations-Wide Innovation Platform, 2018–2019. (United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office Fund)					
Government of Sweden support to gender sensitive post-earthquake recovery					
Government of Norway contribution to the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund, Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development. Output 1.6: Migration and Asylum, 2019–2021					
Government of Norway contribution to the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund. Output 4.2: Green Economy, 2019–2021					
United Nations Joint Programme on Social Inclusion, Leave No One Behind, 2017–2021 United Nations Joint Programme on Social Inclusion, Leave No One Behind, 2017–2021 (Government of Switzerland)					
United Nations Joint Programme on Improving Social Protection Service Delivery, 2020–2021 (Joint SDG Fund)					
United Nations Joint Programme on Strategic Policy Options for SDG Financing, 2021–2022 (Joint SDG Fund)					
Local Gender Action Plans 2016–2017 (UN Women seed fund for the EU Gender Equality Facility programme)					
REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PROGRAMMES					
Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkan Countries and Turkey: Implementing norms, changing minds. Phase I, 2017–2020					
Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkan Countries and Turkey: Implementing norms, changing minds. Phase II, 2020–2022					
Promoting Gender-Responsive Policies in South-East Europe, 2017–2019					
Transformative Financing for Gender Equality Towards More Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans, 2020–2024					
Making Every Woman and Girl Count global programme, 2018–2021					

The Country Office conducted a mid-term review of the Strategic Note in September-October 2019. The review concluded that the Strategic Note is valid and the Country Office's approach to improving gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania is relevant and effective. However, it also noted ongoing challenges related to consistent and sustainable funding, external risks including government instability, and the ongoing need to ensure adequate coordination and mobilization of key partners. The UN Women Internal Audit Service also conducted an audit of the Albania Country Office in 2018, aiming to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance, risk management and control processes of the office. While making eight recommendations (seven medium priority and one high priority) to improve these processes, the audit's overall rating of the Albania Country Office was satisfactory.¹⁰ In other words, none of the issues flagged by the audit were considered significant enough to prevent the Country Office from fulfilling its duties and responsibilities effectively.

Budget and resource mobilization

The total budget for the Strategic Note period (2017–2020¹¹) was US\$6.16 million, of which the Country Office delivered US\$6.0 million (a financial delivery rate of 97 per cent). The annual budget has remained relatively consistent, with a slight increase in 2020. Likewise, financial delivery has tracked consistently at an average rate of 97 per cent. The staffing levels have remained relatively consistent, at approximately 15 personnel during the life of the Strategic Note, with 5 core staff. As of June 2021, the office has 17 personnel, including 5 core staff.¹²

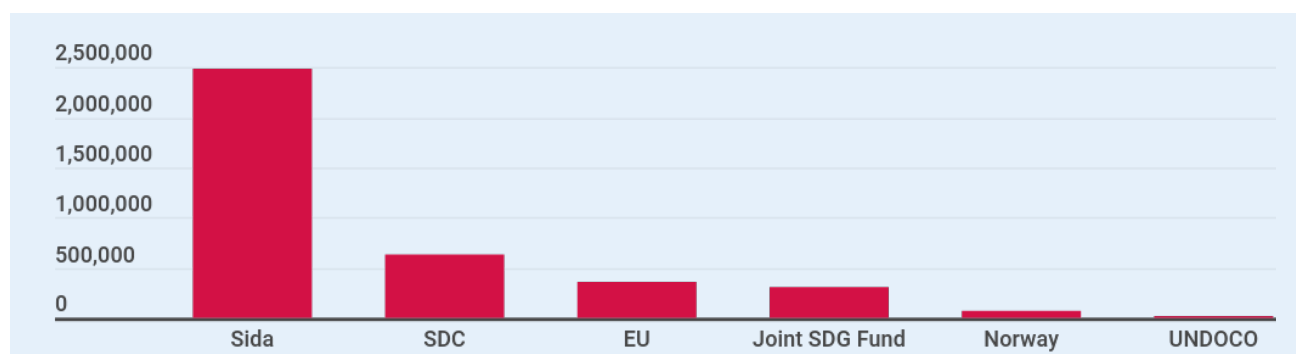
The mid-term review found that the staffing levels were sufficient to accomplish the Strategic Note. However, as reflected in the organigram below, the Country Office has

significantly relied on service contractors and consultants, which could potentially pose a risk in terms of personnel stability. The Country Office noted at the outset of the Strategic Note and during inception phase interviews that the main gaps in personnel were in the areas of coordination and monitoring/evaluation, for which there was no specific donor funding available. Personnel levels at the senior levels of programmatic and operational delivery were stable. There was significant turnover of the Country Representative position over the course of the Strategic Note, with five individuals serving in the position in some capacity (either full-time or as a temporary placement). The current Country Representative has been in the position for approximately 18 months, bringing consistency to the role.

The majority of the Country Office's funding (60 per cent) came from the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF). A breakdown of donor contributions to the MDTF is below, with Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) as the largest donor, contributing 65 per cent (US\$2,495,242) of the total funding UN Women received from the MDTF (US\$3,867,902).

In addition to the MDTF contributions, UN Women also received significant funding support from the EU and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) through the regional programmes and in late 2020, the Government of Italy became a new donor for the next five-year period.¹³ During the period of the Strategic Note, the thematic areas of Ending Violence against Women and Leadership and Governance were funded significantly more than the Women's Economic Empowerment thematic area, with Ending Violence against Women continuing to trend upward in terms of donor funding.

FIGURE 1: Overview of Donors' Contribution to MDTF



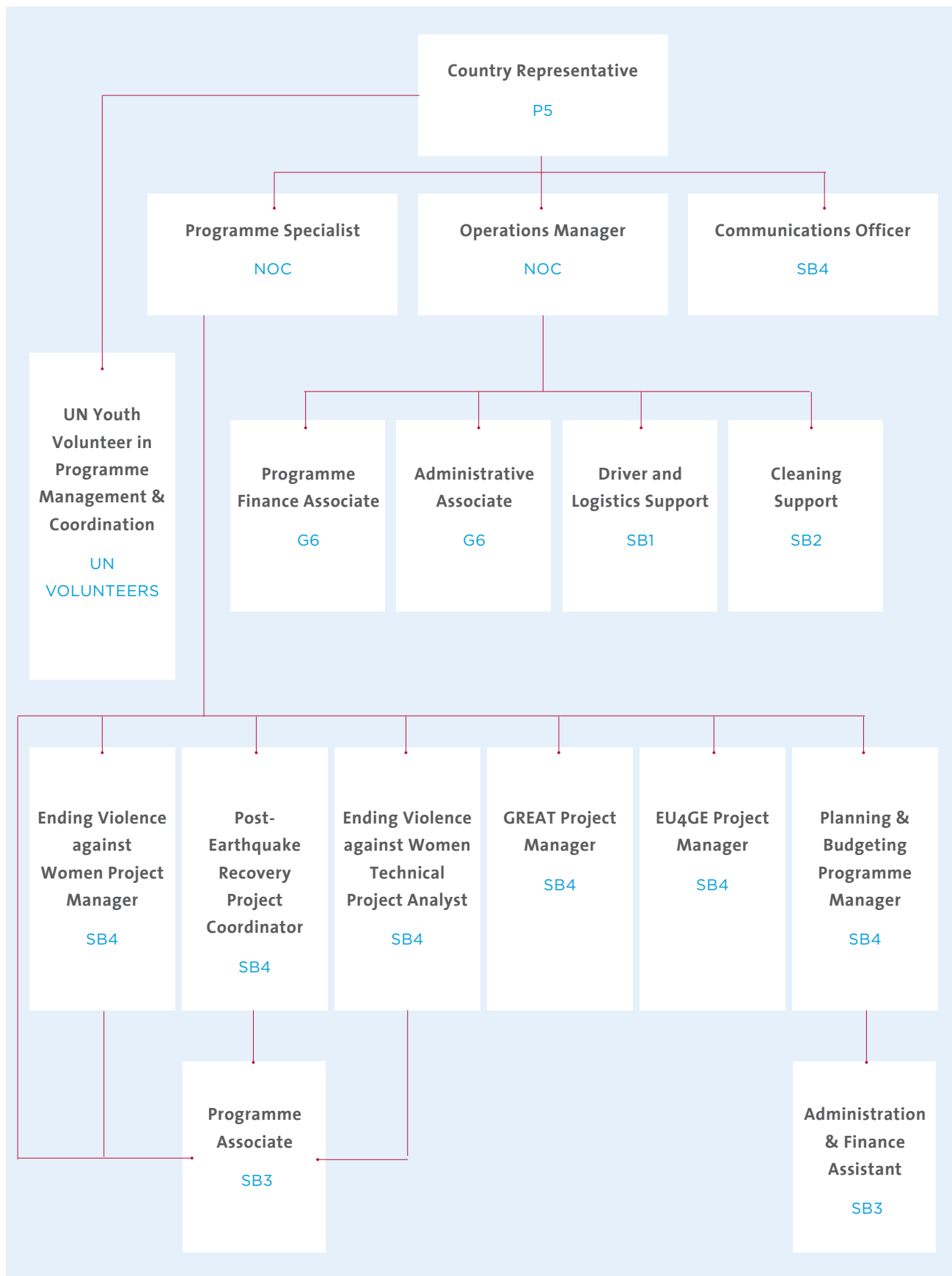
¹⁰ UN Women (2019), Audit of UN Women Country Office in Albania.

¹¹ This evaluation took place during the last year of Strategic Note implementation; hence the full 2017-2020 period is reflected.

¹² At the outset of 2021 and during the period of data collection, there were 12 personnel in the office, with 4 vacancies to be filled for future programming. This group of 12 contributed to data collection through interviews and the Country Office survey.

¹³ As of June 2021, the Government of Italy agreed to provide US\$1,350,000 in funding for the Country Office for the next five-year period.

FIGURE 2: Albania Country Office organigram (as of July 2021)



UN WOMEN IN ALBANIA

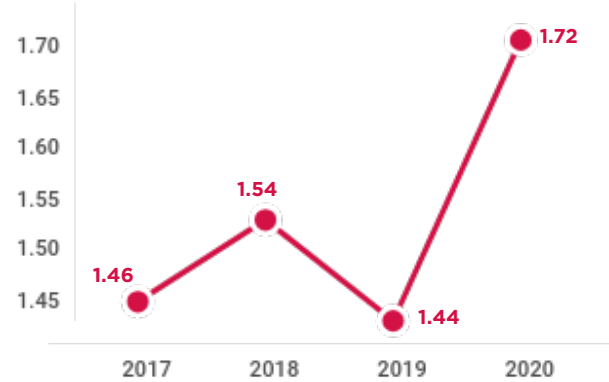
6.16 M

US\$6.16 million total budget for 2017–2020 (core and non-core)

17

Total Country Office workforce including staff and non-staff categories

CO Annual Budget US\$ M (2017-2020)



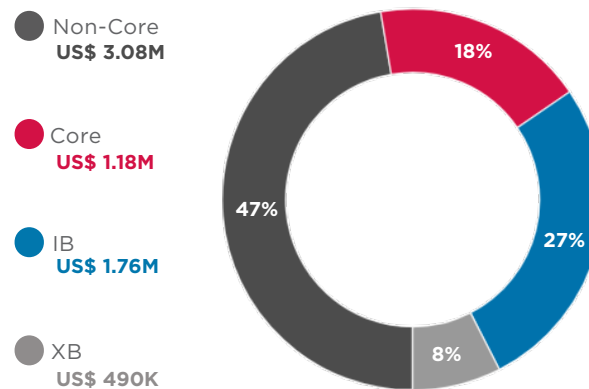
Top Thematic Areas in Albania (US\$)



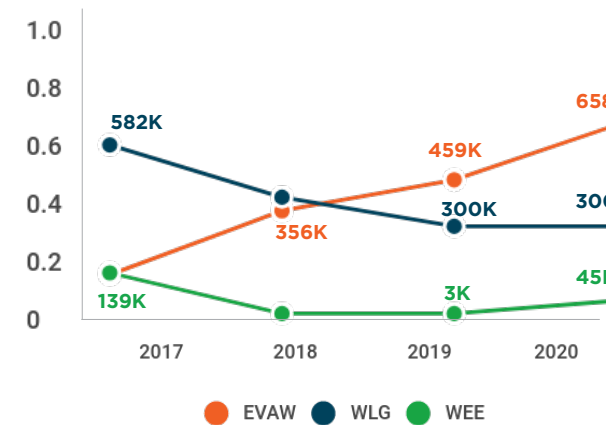
CO Human Resources (2017-2020)



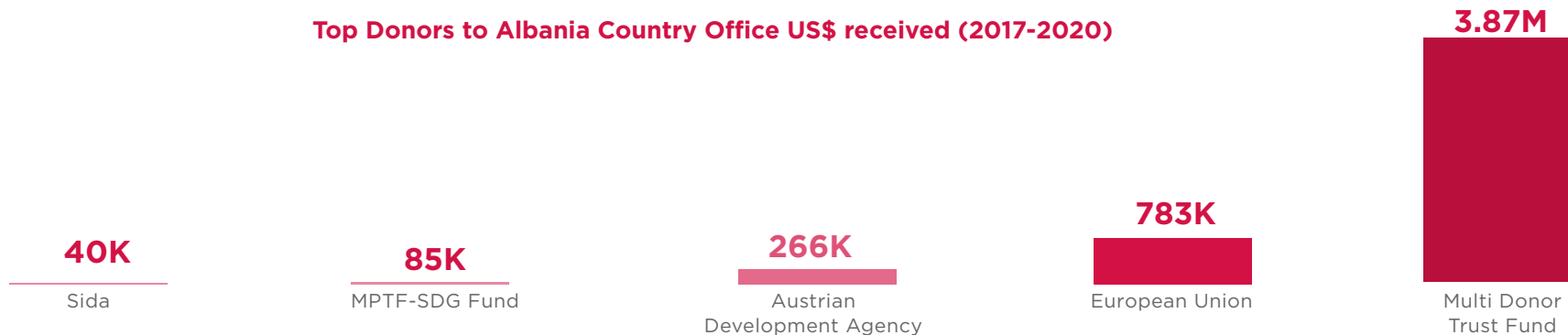
Type of Funding (2017-2020)



Thematic Trends US\$ M (2017-2020)



Top Donors to Albania Country Office US\$ received (2017-2020)



Sources:

"Project Delivery" and "Results monitoring" functions in UN Women Executive Dashboard.

AMOS DRONO
KOMUNIKO!



ARTIST FRANKO



ARTIST FRANKO



AMOS DRONO
KOMUNIKO!

Photo © UN Women Albania/Violana Murataj

2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

2.1. Evaluation purpose and objectives

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service in close collaboration with the Albania Country Office as a primarily formative (forward-looking) evaluation to support the strategic learning and decision-making of the Country Office and national stakeholders for the next Strategic Note, set to start in January 2022. The evaluation has a secondary summative (backward-looking) perspective, to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The evaluation assessed the relevance of UN Women's interventions at national level and UN Women's effectiveness and organizational efficiency and analysed how a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated in the design and implementation of the Strategic Note. The evaluation also identifies lessons learned to support the Country Office to improve its strategic positioning to foster greater gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level and provides actionable recommendations to support the development of the next Strategic Note of the UN Women Albania Country Office.

2.2. Evaluation scope

The scope of this Country Portfolio Evaluation includes all activities undertaken by the Country Office under its current Strategic Note 2017–2021, including operational work, general support to normative policy and United Nations system coordination, and operational efficiency, from the period of January 2017 to the first quarter of 2021. UN Women's contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic response in Albania was also taken into account. Six country-, regional- and corporate-level evaluations were reviewed and drawn upon as secondary material. The geographical scope of the evaluation spanned all of Albania, given the Country Office's work at the national and local levels across the country. A systematic assessment of the long-term impact of interventions on their beneficiaries and their contexts is not part of the scope of this evaluation, as this type of analysis requires resources and methods beyond the design of this evaluation.

2.3. Evaluation design

The evaluation fostered a participatory approach and applied a theory-based, contribution analysis and included outcomes mapping and outcomes harvesting. The evaluation team used the building blocks methodology developed by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service to reconstruct the Strategic Note's theory of change.¹⁴ Taking such an approach aimed for opportunities for learning while still ensuring accountability for outcomes and identifying options for future decision-making. The theory-based design assesses the performance of the Strategic Note based upon its stated assumptions about how change happens. These assumptions were challenged, validated or expanded upon by the evaluation.

The evaluation was framed under the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, with the addition of a gender equality and human rights criterion. The evaluation was guided by the principles of gender-responsive evaluations and used a "utilization-focused lens" and a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate and verify data, increasing the reliability and consistency of findings.

The inception phase included an evaluability assessment, a participatory workshop with Country Office personnel to gain an overview of the work and discuss the elements of a theory of change, and a stakeholder mapping exercise.

2.4. Strategic Note evaluability, limitations and risk-mitigation strategies

An evaluability assessment was conducted based on a review of the Development Results Framework and Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework performance indicators according to SMART and results-based management principles, a review of the availability and quality of relevant documentation and reporting (including prior evaluations), and an assessment of potential contextual limitations (e.g. the broader political context, restrictions due to COVID-19). The evaluability assessment was also informed by consultations with key UN Women personnel during scoping interviews. Taking these main factors into consideration, the overall evaluability of the Albania country portfolio was deemed "good/adequate".

¹⁴ UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (November 2020), Evaluating Impact in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, UN Women Working Paper.

During the inception phase of this evaluation, the evaluation team identified the following key limitations:

- **Time and COVID-19 challenge:** The evaluation was constrained due to complications caused by the COVID-19 crisis. As a result of the global pandemic, data collection was conducted remotely. To mitigate this limitation, online options for data collection were deployed.
- **Political context in Albania:** With parliamentary elections approaching in April 2021, the availability of government stakeholders to participate in the evaluation was considered a potential risk.
- **Conflicting priorities of the Country Office:** UN Women personnel in Albania have also had to take on extra responsibilities due to the pandemic, leaving the office overstretched and less time for personnel to engage in the day-to-day tasks associated with evaluation processes.

The evaluation team, in consultation with the Country Office, adapted the data collection plan and approach to ensure that the evaluation remained comprehensive, gender-sensitive and methodologically rigorous, while taking into account the changed global realities, including limitations on travel and in-person data collection. The initially identified risk related to the availability of stakeholders due to the political and pandemic context in Albania did not ultimately represent a challenge to scheduling the foreseen online interviews and focus group discussions with all relevant stakeholders. Similarly, all Country Office personnel were very committed to this evaluation process and provided continuous support.

2.5. Data collection and analysis

Using a mixed-methods approach, data collection included the following:

- A review of more than 90 documents, including key policy documents, UN Women programme documents and other reports from the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and donors, project progress reports, annual workplans, reports from partners, etc.;
- One all-personnel workshop;
- Online interviews with 76 key informants (66 women and 10 men);
- Three focus group discussions with the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG), the media and the private sector;

- Close review of seven past corporate-, regional- and country-level evaluations;
- Three online surveys of Country Office personnel, civil society organizations (CSOs) and UNCT partners;
- Two case studies on the joint programme implementation modality and on UN Women's support to gender data and statistics production (the spotlights are included in Annex 1 and Annex 2).

Multiple methods of data collection and analysis were carried out using both primary and secondary data to triangulate evidence. The evaluation also used the Gender at Work analytical framework¹⁵, and data collection methods ensured analysis of the Country Office's focus on women from vulnerable groups in Albania including members of the Roma and Egyptian communities, members of the LGBTQI+ community, women with disabilities, and women in rural and remote communities. The ethical approach of the evaluation process is aligned with the United Nations Evaluation Group's Ethical Guidance and Code of Conduct for evaluations in the United Nations system.

2.6. Evaluation governance and quality assurance

The evaluation team was composed of the Europe and Central Asia Regional Evaluation Specialist, who is a member of UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) and acted as the team lead for this evaluation process; an International Independent Evaluator; a National Independent Evaluator and a Research Assistant.

The Evaluation Management Group was comprised of the UN Women Albania Country Representative, the Country Office Evaluation Focal Point and the Regional Evaluation Specialist. The group was responsible for administrative and logistical support, contract management and accountability.

An Evaluation Reference Group was established to validate the evaluation report and is expected to facilitate evaluation use. The group comprised government partners, civil society representatives, development partners and donors, and members of United Nations entities in Albania. In addition, UN Women Albania Country Office personnel and relevant Regional Office personnel acted as the internal evaluation reference group for this evaluation.

IEAS provided quality assurance support to the process. The IEAS Director and the IES Chief provided oversight and methodological guidance, and an additional member of IES provided peer review support.

CPE METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

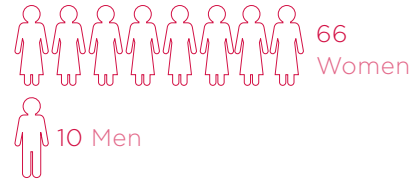
Albania CPE

The Albania CPE is a systematic assessment of the contributions made by UN Women to development results with respect to gender equality at the country level to contribute to the CO's strategic learning, improved decision-making and to support enhanced accountability.

Evaluation Process

- 1 Design
- 2 Inception: portfolio analysis
- 3 Data collection
- 4 Data analysis and reporting
- 5 Follow up and use

76 stakeholders interviewed



Preliminary findings validation and final validation workshops



+100 documents reviewed

Annual work plans, evaluations, project documents reports, financial documentation, meeting minutes, key national strategic documents, knowledge products etc.



3 online surveys

of Country Office personnel, civil society organizations (CSOs) and UNCT partners | 3 focus group discussions with the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG), the media and the private sector



2 case studies

on the joint programme implementation modality and on UN Women's support to gender data and statistics production | Review of seven past corporate-, regional- and country-level evaluations

Methodology



- Gender-responsive evaluation
- Used mixed-methods to triangulate evidence

- Theory-based and contribution analysis
- Outcomes mapping and utilization-focused



Scope of the evaluation



UN Women Albania CO Development Results Framework



5 outcome areas

UN Women's integrated mandates across the portfolio's 5 outcome areas



SN 2017-2021

Evaluation was conducted between January and July 2021



US\$ 6.16 million

including Core and Non-core resources

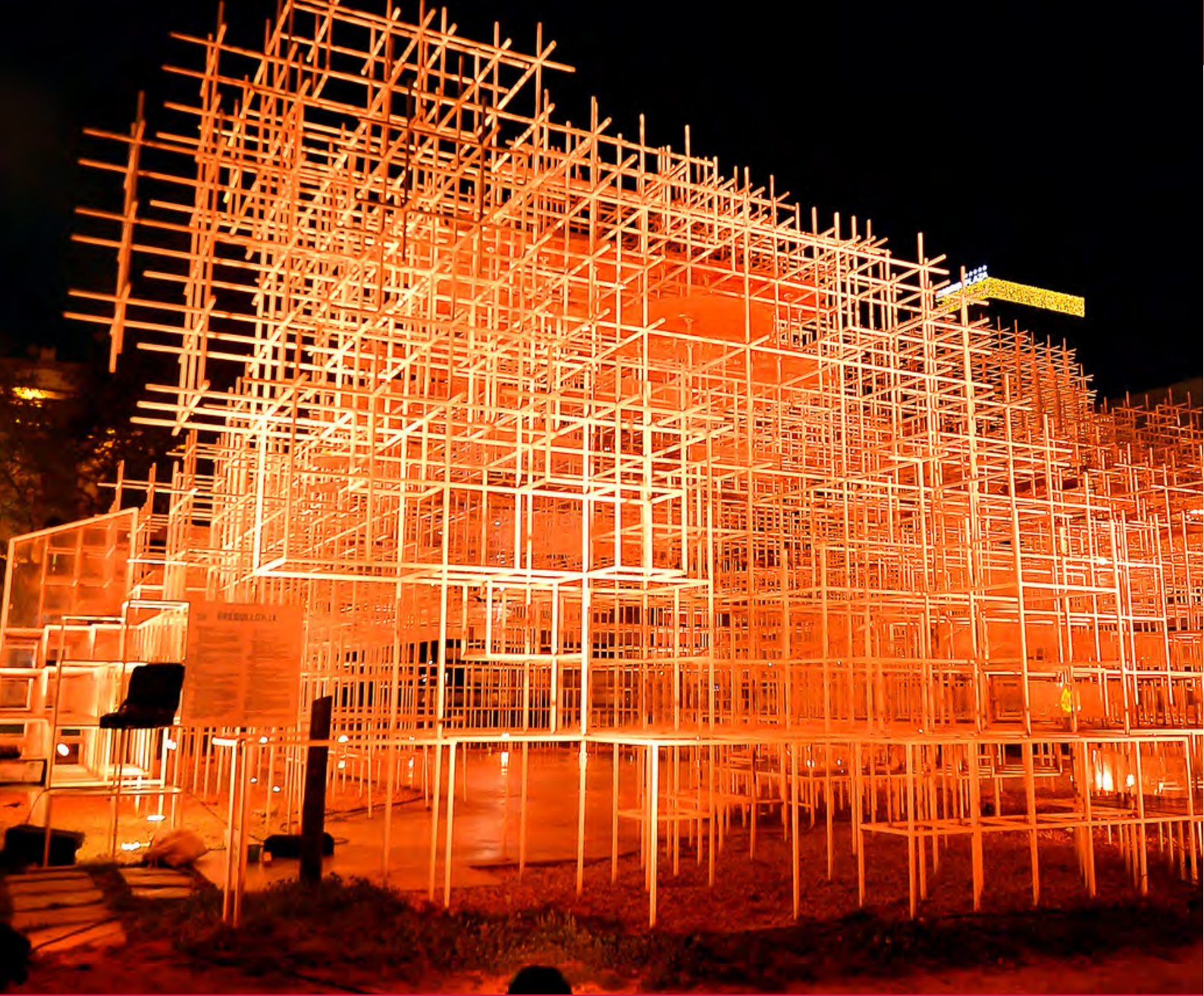


Photo ©UN Women/Eduard Pagria

3 FINDINGS

FINDINGS

The following findings assess the performance of the Country Office against the goals set out in its Strategic Note 2017–2021 against the evaluation criteria.

3.1 Relevance**FINDING 1**

A continuous validation approach, strong implementation of the UN Women normative mandate and relevant thematic choices have ensured that the Strategic Note is aligned with national, international and UNCT priorities and commitments, and the needs of women and girls in Albania.

UN Women in Albania was conscientious in the development of its Strategic Note to ensure that it aligned across national, international and United Nations priorities and that it addressed the needs of women and girls. This alignment has been validated throughout the period of the Strategic Note through regular engagement with partners and data collection/research.

UN Women's normative mandate guided the design and implementation of the Strategic Note, and its interventions have contributed to advancing and monitoring implementation of international gender equality and women's empowerment frameworks, including CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Istanbul Convention, United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and the SDGs, as well as human rights frameworks.

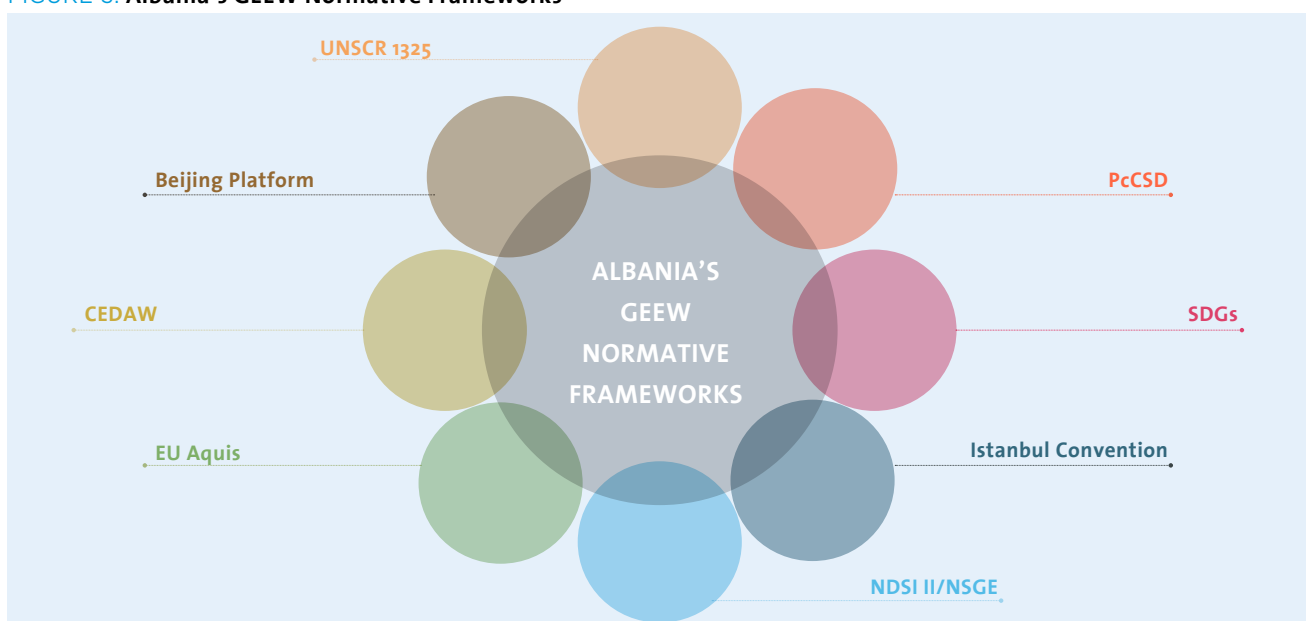
The Strategic Note is highly relevant to the national development priorities of Albania defined in (i) the National Strategy on Development and Integration 2015–2020

(NSDI II) and agreed between UNCT and the Government of Albania in the Programme of Cooperation and Sustainable Development 2017–2021, (ii) the objectives of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2016–2020 (NSGE) and its action plan and (iii) legal and policy frameworks on gender equality in Albania.

Table 2 presents an overview of Strategic Note alignment with national and international commitments.

The Strategic Note, with its basis in UN Women flagship programming (based on corporate priorities established in 2017), seeks to address a number of the underlying causes of gender inequality, targeting low political participation of women in decision-making, lack of economic opportunities, high incidence of Violence against women and girls, lack of institutional support to gender equality and the empowerment of women and the cultural mindset about the roles of women and men in Albania.

FIGURE 3: Albania's GEEW Normative Frameworks



Source: developed by the evaluation team

TABLE 2: Overview of Strategic Note alignment with national and international commitments

Strategic Note Impact Areas	Priorities of the Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017–2021	Priorities of the National Strategy on Development and Integration 2015–2020	Sustainable Development Goals	Objectives of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2016–2020
Women's Leadership and Political Participation	<p>Priority 1: Governance and rule of law</p> <p>Outcome 1: State and CSOs perform effectively and with accountability for consolidated democracy in line with international norms and standards</p>	<p>Foundations: Good governance, democracy and the rule of law</p>	SDG 5, 10, 16	<p>Objective 2: Guaranteeing factual and equal participation of women in political and public decision-making</p>
Women's Economic Empowerment	<p>Priority 3: Economic growth, labour and agriculture</p> <p>Outcome 3: Economic growth priorities, policies and programmes of the Government of Albania are inclusive, sustainable and gender-responsive, with greater focus on competitiveness, decent jobs and rural development</p>	<p>Pillar II. Economic growth, labor and agriculture</p>	SDG 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12	<p>Objective 1: Economic empowerment of women and men</p>
Ending Violence against Women	<p>Priority 2: Social cohesion: health, education, social protection, child protection and gender-based violence</p> <p>Outcome 2: All women, men, girls and boys, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable groups, are exercising their entitlements to equitable quality services, in line with human rights; and more effective and efficient investments in human and financial resources are being made at central and local levels to ensure social inclusion and cohesion</p>	<p>Pillar III: Investing in people and social cohesion</p>	SDG 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 16	<p>Objective 3: Decrease in gender-based violence and domestic violence</p>
Gender-Responsive National Planning and Budgeting	<p>Priority 1: Governance and rule of law</p> <p>Priority 2: Social cohesion: health, education, social protection, child protection and gender-based violence</p> <p>Outcome 1: State and CSOs perform effectively and with accountability for consolidated democracy in line with international norms and standards</p> <p>Outcome 2: All women, men, girls and boys, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable groups, are exercising their entitlements to equitable quality services, in line with human rights; and more effective and efficient investments in human and financial resources are being made at central and local levels to ensure social inclusion and cohesion</p>	<p>Foundations: Governance and rule of law</p> <p>Pillar III: Investing in people and social cohesion</p>	SDG 5, 10, 16, 17	<p>Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4: Empowerment of the coordination and monitoring role of the National Gender Equality Mechanism, as well as awareness-raising of the society on advancing gender equality</p>

Source: prepared by the evaluation team

FINDING 2

The theory of change developed at the outset of the Strategic Note is partially misaligned with the priorities and programming of the Country Office, with a goal statement that does not encompass the work done or the impact sought by the office.

The Country Office was deliberate in aligning its priorities and programming with the global and regional priorities and expectations of UN Women as a part of its Strategic Note development. The Strategic Note draws direct lines between the Country Office’s work and key flagship areas, including Women’s Political Participation, Women’s Economic Empowerment, Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting.

While the overall Strategic Note aligns fairly well with the priorities and goals of the Country Office for the period, the theory of change developed at the time of Strategic Note development does not completely match this alignment, nor does it accurately reflect the Country Office’s approach to impacting gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania or its work during the Strategic Note period. Rather, it has a high degree of focus on somewhat granular activities and misses critical areas of the Country Office’s approach, including the United Nations system coordination function, the importance of changing social norms and cultural perspectives about the role of women, and work in the areas of emergency and post-emergency gender-responsive support and women, peace and security. Country Office personnel informed the evaluation

team that the original theory of change was prepared with the understanding that it was a corporate instruction to specifically identify focal areas aligned with the corporate UN Women Flagship Programme Initiatives, such as women farmers and women as political leaders, as a part of the development of the goal theory of change statement. The specificity of the goal theory of change statement has meant that elements of the Country Office’s work during the Strategic Note period, such as women’s entrepreneurship and disaster response and recovery, are not included. In addition, the theory of change does not reflect the Country Office’s dedicated approach to the inclusion of the most marginalized women and girls.

Figure 4 presents the theory of change developed by the Country Office at the outset of the Strategic Note.

In order to better support evaluation and to provide guidance to the Country Office for the next Strategic Note period, the evaluation team reconstructed the theory of change, aligning the intervention logic with the building blocks methodology to create a conceptual model for exploring existing approaches to measuring impact in gender equality and the empowerment of women.









FIGURE 4: Original UN Women Albania Country Office Strategic Note Theory of Change

GOAL Equal rights and access to resources and opportunities become a reality for women in Albania.				
GOAL TOC STATEMENT	If (1) electoral frameworks and arrangements promote gender balance in elections and women are perceived as equally legitimate political leaders as men in society, and if (2) women farmers secure land tenure and equal access to productive resources and services and participate in agricultural value chains to their benefit, and if (3) the legislative and policy environment in line with CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention is in place and through capacitated and resourced institutions translated into action, and if (4) budgetary allocations on the national and local levels integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment with increased accountability on spending for results, then the goal has been reached.			
OUTCOMES	WEP Outcome 1.1 Electoral frameworks and arrangements promote gender balance in elections WEP Outcome 1.2 Women are perceived as equally legitimate and effective political leaders as men	WEE Outcome 2.1 An enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women’s access to land, property and other productive assets	EVAW Outcome 3.1 An enabling legislative and policy environment in line with CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention is in place and translated into action	P&B Outcome 5.1 National legal and policy frameworks adopt and mainstream gender equality principles P&B Outcome 5.2 Fiscal laws and policies prioritize revenue and budgetary allocations in favour of GEEW
FLAGSHIP PROGRAMMES	Women’s Political Empowerment and Leadership	Women’s access to land and other productive assets for climate-resilient agriculture	Prevention and Access to Essential Services to End Violence Against Women and Girls	Transformative Financing for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

OUTCOMES TOC	<p>If (1) women's participation is enabled through policy and legal frameworks, electoral arrangements, party selection processes, and increased public understanding of the benefits of women's leadership, then (2) women will run for election because (3) there is a more level playing field.</p>	<p>If (1) barriers to women's access to land and resources are removed and if an enabling legislative framework, supported by strong technical capacities, is in place, then (2) women's land tenure and income will increase because (3) discrimination against women to own, control and use land is eliminated.</p>	<p>If (1) women are engaged in developing and implementing EAW legislation, if reformed legislation is adequately resourced and monitored, and if institutions have the capacity to implement legislative and policy frameworks, then (2) an enabling legislative and policy environment on EAW and other forms of discrimination is in place and translated into action because (3) legislation is backed up by resources, capacity and oversight.</p>	<p>If (1) national and local governments integrate gender into fiscal laws and policies, and if they have the capacity to account for revenue spending, then (2) GEWE budgetary allocations will increase because (3) mainstreaming GEWE into governmental budgets will be part of the budgeting process/system.</p>
OUTPUTS	<p>Output 1.1.1 Strengthened legislative framework and electoral arrangements enable and enhance women's political participation and leadership.</p> <p>Output 1.1.2 Political party policies and procedures reformed to promote women candidates.</p> <p>Output 1.2.1 Civil society networks and media support established women politicians in their efforts to become successful leaders.</p> <p>Output 1.2.2 Political leaders, media and diverse civil society networks promote positive portrayal of women political leaders.</p> <p>Output 1.2.3 Increased understanding of gender equality and women's right to political participation by communities and civil society.</p>	<p>Output 1.1.1 Strengthened Output 2.1.1 Recognition of women's role in the rural economy and agriculture and favourable attitudes and practices towards women benefiting agriculture services promoted.</p> <p>Output 2.1.2 Regulatory framework for women entrepreneurs in urban and rural areas is improved.</p> <p>Output 2.1.3 Ministry of Agriculture and subordinate institutions have capacities to improve the quality and outreach of services to rural women entrepreneurs and small holders to move up the value chain.</p>	<p>Output 3.1.1 Capacity of key ministries and local governmental units to regularly review and reform legislation, policies and budgets on EAW strengthened.</p> <p>Output 3.1.2 Women's voices and advocacy strengthened to advocate for improvement and implementation of laws and policies on EAW.</p> <p>Output 3.1.3 Human rights institutions and justice sector have capacities to track and monitor implementation of international norms and standards on gender equality and EAW.</p> <p>Output 3.1.4 Favourable social norms, behaviours and attitudes to prevent violence against women are embraced by communities, the media and decision-makers.</p>	<p>Output 5.1.1 EU gender equality acquis embedded in national policies, programmes, plans, EU programming documents and funding instruments.</p> <p>Output 5.1.2 Public administration is capacitated to deliver and monitor implementation of international and national commitments and EU priorities on gender equality.</p> <p>Output 5.1.3 Quality, comparable and regular gender statistics are available to address national data gaps and reporting requirements under SDGs, CEDAW and BPfA.</p> <p>Output 5.2.1 National accountability on spending for gender-equality results is increased.</p> <p>Output 5.2.2 Local governmental units implement gender-responsive budgeting.</p>
KEY ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women candidates actually put on election lists • Voters familiar with concept of women as politicians • Environment actually more enabling • Processes and bodies of support in place • Role models existing • More women encouraged to enter politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women candidates actually put on election lists • Voters familiar with concept of women as politicians • Environment actually more enabling • Processes and bodies of support in place • Role models existing • More women encouraged to enter politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women candidates actually put on election lists • Voters familiar with concept of women as politicians • Environment actually more enabling • Processes and bodies of support in place • Role models existing • More women encouraged to enter politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women candidates actually put on election lists • Voters familiar with concept of women as politicians • Environment actually more enabling • Processes and bodies of support in place • Role models existing • More women encouraged to enter politics

Source: provided by UN Women Albania Country Office

FIGURE 5: Reconstructed Theory of Change aligned with the building blocks methodology¹⁶

BUILDING BLOCKS	ACTIVITIES	THEMATIC AREAS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE OF CHANGE	IMPACTS
Normative: Political, legislative, policy, institutional & financial frameworks	 Technical assistance to strengthen the political, legal/policy, institutional & financial frameworks	Gender Planning & Budgeting (P&B)	Norms, legislation and policies in line with Albania's international and national commitments	National legal and policy frameworks adopt and mainstream gender equality principles (P&B 5.1)	 Government actions, legal frameworks, actors and tools are gender-responsive	In society women are regarded as equal, empowered and valued contributors.
Coordination: Leadership, advocacy, partnerships, networks, mobilization & capacity	 Leadership, advocacy, brokering partnerships & networks, and mobilizing national actors	Women's Political Participation (WPP)	Organizations, policymakers, State institutions, service providers, civil society and media are able to fulfill legal and other normative commitments and account for their work	Fiscal laws and policies prioritize revenue and budgetary allocations in favor of GEEW (P&B 5.2)	 Capacitated civil society achieves accountability with national gender mechanisms	☆☆☆ Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from political and public life.
Operational: Mobilization, capacity, planning, design, implementation, data, information, monitoring & evaluation	 Mobilizing & developing capacity of women's organizations, communities, girls and boys, training to service providers, development of curricula, awareness-raising & outreach on service access	Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)	Women and girls are empowered to benefit from advanced enabling environment to participate in politics, benefit from their labour, protect themselves against violence and benefit from State and non-state services at all levels	Electoral frameworks and arrangements promote gender balance in elections (WPP 1.1)	 Women are perceived as equally legitimate & effective political leaders as men (WPP 1.2)	☆☆☆ Women and girls are empowered to seize social and economic opportunity.
		Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW)		An enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's access to land, property and other productive assets (WEE 2.1)	 Women can access training and financing	☆☆☆ Women and girls live free from violence.
		Emerging Areas: Women Peace and Security (WPS), Disaster Risk Recovery (DRR)		An enabling legislative and policy environment in line with CEDAW and Istanbul Convention is in place and translated into action (EVAW 3.1)	 Survivors of GBV can access multisectoral responses	

Source: developed by the evaluation team

FINDING 3

The UN Women Country Office in Albania has developed long-term, effective and trustworthy partnerships with diverse governmental and non-governmental stakeholders working on gender equality and women's empowerment and human rights.

A key strategic partnership is the Country Office's relationship with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP), the key institution responsible for the policy framework on gender equality and the empowerment of women and the national gender equality machinery in Albania. The Country Office was instrumental in ensuring that the MHSP was able to develop the central Government's National Strategy on Gender Equality and Gender Action Plan 2016–2020, its evaluation and the subsequent preparation of National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030 and its Action Plan, coordinate between the MHSP line ministries and local actors to implement policies especially with respect to gender-based violence, support national reporting on international conventions, and

coordinate gender equality and the empowerment of women across the central and local Governments and between Government and civil society.

The Country Office established a highly successful partnership with the Ministry of Finance and Economy through the Gender-Responsive Budgeting programme, and its relationships with the Ministry of Interior/State Police, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs are yielding strong results. The memorandum of understanding between the Country Office and Parliament, signed in 2018, included engagement with the parliamentary subcommittee on gender equality and the empowerment of women and ending Violence against women. The Country Office is

¹⁶ UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (November 2020), Evaluating Impact in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, UN Women Working Paper.

encouraged to continue to use these relationships to support political advancements in gender equality and the empowerment of women.

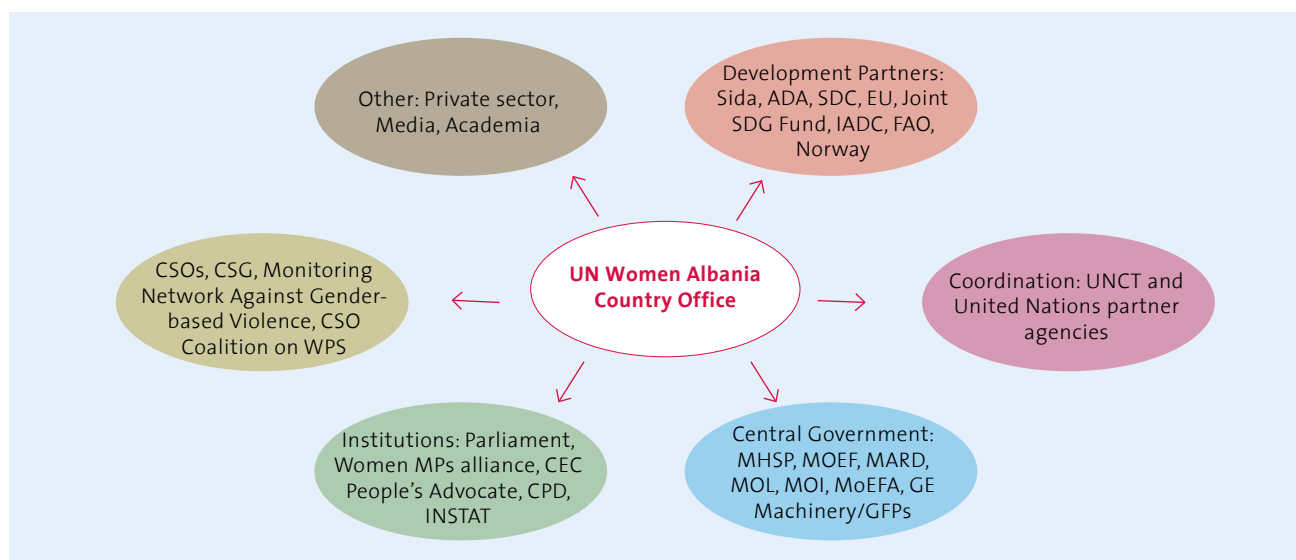
The Country Office's partnerships at the local level have primarily focused on the larger municipalities, with the most priority going to Tirana. The Country Office has recently begun partnering more extensively with smaller municipalities.

While the Country Office has strong relationships with CSOs in the area of Ending Violence against Women and is viewed by most as a trusted partner, there are fewer partnerships in other thematic areas. The Country Office re-established CSAG in 2018, with 10 members from a variety

of thematic CSOs. However, less than 50 per cent of CSAG members regularly attend CSAG meetings, and while the other 50 per cent are dedicated to the work, they appear to be underutilized. The Country Office would benefit from expanding its network of CSO partners across thematic areas to ensure it continues to include local and grass-roots organizations and to make the most of its current, positive relationships.

The evaluation team noted limited engagement with academia during the period of Strategic Note implementation. While individual academics took part in activities or projects and individual faculties are included from time to time, there was no concerted approach to this sector.

FIGURE 6: UN Women Albania Country Office Partnerships



3.2 Coherence

FINDING 4

The Country Office has capitalized on its strategy to build synergy between programmes and thematic areas, ensuring that the knowledge and skills developed in programming are shared across diverse stakeholders to maximize impact.

The Country Office adopted a systems approach to its portfolio, defining this as “on the one hand sharing programmatic work with other organizations according to their mandates, roles and capacities. On the other hand, the systems approach realizes and re-enforces benefits from interrelations between different impact areas.”¹⁷ For the Country Office, this approach has included participating in joint programmes, engaging partners across thematic portfolios, and using the internal expertise built in key thematic areas to expand the Country Office's presence and contribution in emerging areas.

The Country Office has been successful using this strategy, building a set of programmatic and cross-mandate linkages that have increased the impact of the portfolio. From a programming perspective, programmes on Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting have found synergies across programmes, between programmes and into other areas as well.

For example, the CSOs that are part of the Ending Violence against Women regional programme network clearly identified gender-responsive budgeting as a key tool in advocating for appropriate funding for municipal services for women survivors of violence. They indicated that they had taken part in reviewing local budget allocations and in participatory budget discussions at the local level. Synergy within the Ending Violence against Women portfolio, between the Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting portfolios, and between the Gender-Responsive Budgeting, Leave No One Behind and Women's Economic Empowerment portfolios contributed to a broader stakeholder base for programme interventions, more people impacted and greater sustainability of outcomes. As an example, within the Ending Violence against Women portfolio, three out of six CSOs engaged in the regional programme were also engaged in the United Nations Joint Programme on Ending Violence against Women to expand the good practices and experiences to additional municipalities. In addition, it is worth flagging

work through the Making Every Woman and Girl Count global programme (2018–2021) in Albania to align gender data and statistics across all areas.

The Country Office also used its systems approach to find synergy between elements of its work. Normative and research work was used to identify programming opportunities and make a compelling case to donors and stakeholders. This approach was also noted in the mid-term review.

Notably, the Country Office has used its expertise and knowledge across thematic areas to provide evidence-based technical advice on gendered issues to the UNCT and national governmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to mobilize quickly to provide direct, on the ground support to women in shelters.

The success of the systems approach is a strength, allowing the Country Office to introduce its areas of comparative advantage¹⁸ in new streams and expand its impact, including into statistics, agriculture, employment, and social protection and inclusion.

FINDING 5

The shared “ownership” of the United Nations Ending Violence against Women portfolio in Albania between UNDP and UN Women is disadvantageous to UN Women and not aligned with the global thematic leadership of UN Women in this area.

Leadership of the United Nations Joint Programme on Ending Violence against Women in Albania is explicitly split between UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), giving UNDP a leading oversight role in the engagement of local governments and service providers to manage coordinated referral and service delivery. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is also part of joint programming on Ending Violence against Women and supports interventions that align with its specific mandate.

This split between UNDP and UN Women appears to have originated prior to the arrival of UN Women in Albania, when UNDP was the primary United Nations entity. This arrangement has continued, apparently on the basis that the local presence of UNDP in Albania gives it a comparative advantage. The previous Resident Coordinator supported this rationale, and although the historic rationale is no longer as persuasive, the split remains.

Externally, stakeholders report that shared leadership does not dramatically impact the quality of the work, noting that UNDP and UN Women outwardly “make it work” and that breaks in programming coverage are limited. However, stakeholders, including donors, do comment that the split is confusing and question why UN Women does not have full ownership of the portfolio.

Internally, it is clear that this is an area of contention between the two entities, creating competition for funding and splitting the focus of stakeholders and beneficiaries. UN Women finds itself in a negative loop, as its limited resource capacity reduces its ability to secure greater engagement with development partners, but it cannot increase its capacity while it is competing with UNDP for leadership. This model contributes to unequal power relations between United Nations agencies by allowing the largest agency to assert control over a flagship portion of the mandate of UN Women.

¹⁸ National policy alignment with international norms and standards; gender-responsive budgeting; gender statistics; ending Violence against women and intersectionality; women in leadership; women, peace and security; women's economic empowerment; networking with CSOs on gender equality; policy monitoring; and advocacy on gender equality and gender-based violence.

There is a spillover effect beyond the Ending Violence against Women thematic area, creating a less effective environment for overall coordination of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the United Nations system in Albania.¹⁹

It is worth mentioning that this challenge affects UN Women's corporate coordination role in the Ending Violence against Women thematic area. A recent corporate evaluation of UN Women's United Nations coordination and broader convening role in ending Violence against women concluded that, corporately, "the lack of articulation of a concrete value proposition of UN coordination, with clear action areas, roles and responsibilities, and metrics to track contributions to development results,

has constrained the operationalization of UN Women's UN coordination role in thematic areas" and that "[...] implementing the [coordination] mandate demands appropriate investment in strengthening the legitimacy vested in the coordinating entity to 'lead, promote and coordinate' the UN system."²⁰ The historic division of the Ending Violence against Women portfolio in Albania needs to be reassessed to ensure an effective result for beneficiaries and clearly defined roles within the UNCT. It falls to the leadership of UN Women, UNDP and the United Nations Resident Coordinator to support a reassessment of the convenience and opportunities of this split.

FINDING 6

The Country Office has been effective in implementing its United Nations system coordination mandate, making good use of the UNCT gender mechanisms for gender mainstreaming across United Nations agency programming, to ensure the concerted support of the UNCT for Albania's response to international conventions.

The Country Office has a long history of working collaboratively and thoughtfully with its United Nations counterparts. As a result, the other United Nations agencies present in Albania acknowledge UN Women's coordination of gender equality and women's empowerment across the UNCT, and there is evidence that this is prominent in UNCT actions. Table 3 presents an overview of UN Women's coordination activities during the Strategic Note period.

Because of this attention to gender coordination, the UNCT gender mechanisms function effectively. The Gender Thematic Result Group is active, reviewing the annual workplans of each agency for gender markers and

engaging across agencies in support of Albania's response to international conventions including the Istanbul Convention, the Universal Periodic Review and CEDAW.

The first annual UNCT System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNCT-SWAP) was completed in late 2019.²¹ The UNCT-SWAP Gender Scorecard shows that the UNCT in Albania met or exceeded 87 per cent of the performance indicators, as set out in Table 4 below. The results of the scorecard were used as a motivating factor for the gender mainstreaming of outcomes in the Common Country Analysis/Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2022–2026.

¹⁹ UN Women (2016). Regional Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to UN System Coordination on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Europe and Central Asia.

²⁰ UN Women (2021). Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's UN System Coordination and Broader Convening Role in Ending Violence against Women.

²¹ UNCT-SWAP Gender Scorecard, Assessment Results and Action Plan, United Nations Country Team, Albania, December 2019.

TABLE 5: UN Women's coordination activities in Albania during the Strategic Note period

Coordination Activity	Selected Achievements	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Member of UNCT	New UNSDCF included dedicated gender outcome					
Lead of UNCT Gender Thematic Result Group	Annual workplans for each United Nations agency have gender markers, UNCT-SWAP Gender Scorecard, coordination on joint advocacy on International Women's Day and the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign activities (joint calendar of activities and key message), gender mainstreaming in joint programmes					
Co-chair of PoCSD Outcomes 1 and 3 and Chair of PoCSD Output 1.5 Working Group	Cross-agency work on Albania's response to international conventions					
Co-chair of Donor Coordination Group on Gender Equality	Coordination on gender equality priorities, implementation of gender equality, building synergy among donors and other stakeholders, communication, advocacy and sharing of best practices on gender equality					
Participation in UNCT joint advocacy, resource mobilization and joint programmes	Introduction of gender-focused response in key areas such as disaster recovery					
Member/Co-Chair of Operations Management Team	Contribution to United Nations Business Operations Strategies, analysis of United Nations Common Back Office Services, leadership of working groups on Human Resources and Procurement					
Member of United Nations-INSTAT Joint Data Group	Increased gender indicators and number of gender disaggregated statistics					
Member and Co-Chair of United Nations Communications Group	Contribution to United Nations communications strategy and annual workplans, coordination of joint advocacy campaigns					
Member of United Nations People's Advocate working group	CEDAW Alternative Reports, support to collect gender statistics					
Lead of UNCT-SWAP Gender Scorecard exercise and monitoring implementation	Completion of first UNCT-SWAP Gender Scorecard exercise (2019)					

Source: prepared by the evaluation team in consultation with the Country Office

TABLE 6: Albania UNCT-SWAP reported results 2019

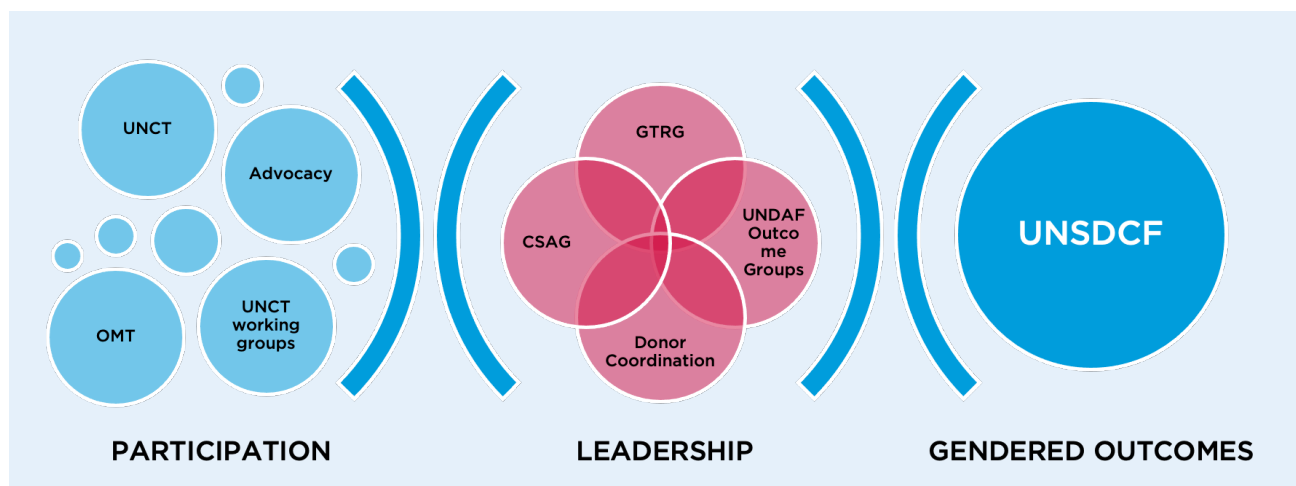
Indicator	Missing	Approaching Minimum Standards	Meets Minimum Standards	Exceeds Minimum Standards
1. PLANNING				
1.1 Common Country Analysis				✓
1.2 Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development Outcomes			✓	
1.3 Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development Indicators				✓
2. PROGRAMMING AND MONITORING AND EVALUATION				
2.1 Joint Programmes			✓	
2.2 Communications/Advocacy				✓
2.3 Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development, Monitoring and Evaluation				✓
3. PARTNERSHIPS				
3.1 Engagement with Government				✓
3.2 Engagement with CSOs on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment				✓
4. LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE				
4.1 Leadership				✓
4.2 Organizational Culture			✓	
4.3 Gender Parity			✓	
5. GENDER ARCHITECTURE				
5.1 Gender Coordination Mechanism				✓
5.2 Gender Capacity Development		✓		
6. RESOURCES				
6.1 Resource Tracking		✓		
7. RESULTS				
7.1 Gender Results			✓	

UN Women has been an active chair and co-chair of the previous outcome groups of the Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development, ensuring ongoing attention to gender. A strong testament to the impact of UN Women's recent coordination efforts is the new draft United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022–2026 (UNSDCF), which has the first standalone gender equality outcome (Outcome C2: By 2026, gender-responsive governance strengthens equality and non-discrimination, promotes women's empowerment and human rights, and reduces Violence against women and children) and sees gender mainstreamed across the other outcomes, including in new areas such as the environment. UN Women's advocacy across all outcome groups, as well as in response to the earthquakes and the pandemic, were significant contributors to the success of gender mainstreaming.

During the life of the Strategic Note, UN Women's coordination work was hampered at times by leadership challenges and turnover. However, this trend appears to be reversing as a result of the Country Office's work at the

leadership level and the ongoing positive approach of the team. UN Women's participation in other key coordination bodies, such as the Operations Management Team (OMT) and communications, also contributes to its credibility and coordination success. The new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework is a positive result of this work. UN Women's active contribution during the UNCT consultation phase, the UN Women Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020²² and the rapid gender assessment²³ in the new Common Country Analysis 2020 were pivotal in integrating gender equality and women's empowerment principles and the human rights-based approach. The inclusion of a stand-alone gender outcome for the first time provides a good opportunity to strategically position UN Women to further advance gender equality and women's empowerment in Albania and to strengthen its leadership and partnership within the UNCT and with national partners. This success is further demonstrated by the number of joint programmes that include a gender aspect and address key thematic areas for gender equality and women's empowerment. See Figure 7 below.

FIGURE 7: Impact of UN Women's Coordination Approach in Albania (prepared by evaluation team)



Source: developed by the evaluation team

FINDING 7

The joint programming modality has mixed results for the Country Office, increasing the number of programme engagements but limiting opportunities to assume a leadership role in programmes and to receive a larger share of programme funding.

UN Women in Albania operates in a Delivering as One United Nations context. Consequently, UN Women in-country programming in the period of the Strategic Note was accomplished almost entirely through United Nations joint programmes or participation in UN Women regional programmes. Sixty percent of the Country Office's

funding comes from the MDTF. From a UNCT perspective, the joint programming modality is expected and required for UN Women's portfolio in Albania. This is also true from the perspective of many donors in Albania that identify joint programmes as their preferred means of engaging with the UNCT.

²² UN Women (2020), Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020. Prepared by Monika Kocaqi, Agustela Nini-Pavli, Ani Plaku and Dolly Wittberger.

²³ UN Women (2020), The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's and Men's Lives and Livelihoods in Albania, Results of a Rapid Gender Assessment, <https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/the-impact-of-covid-19>.

The joint funding modality presents a number of benefits for the Country Office. It allows the Country Office, a relatively small office, to participate in a greater number of programmes across a larger number of areas (such as mixed migration, agriculture and the environment), thereby reaching a greater number of women and girls. At the conclusion of the Strategic Note, the Country Office had participated in eight joint programmes, arguably more than it could carry on its own.

The Country Office has developed a skill set for success in the implementation of joint programmes, with a collaborative and consultative approach to partners and the ability to insert its comparative advantage and expertise into programmes. In particular, donors note that UN Women brings an innovative and adaptive approach and indicate that they repeatedly request that UN Women be included in joint programmes proposed by other United Nations agencies. It is worth mentioning that UN Women in Albania has engaged in all United Nations joint programmes implemented in the country during the current Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development with only two exceptions.²⁴

However, the joint programme modality also presents a number of challenges for UN Women. Competition between United Nations agencies for a larger portion of funding does not always favour UN Women. UN Women's small size reduces its ability to contribute, and its personnel

frequently support multiple projects. As a result of the inability to compete with larger agencies, UN Women's role in joint programmes is frequently limited to one particular intervention with limited funding, as opposed to a larger convening or strategic leadership role in the programme as a whole. This limitation is compounded by the traditional structure of joint programmes, in which each agency operates in its own silo, rather than working across impact areas. Donors do not have visibility into UN Women's leadership contributions, perpetuating a cycle of visibility challenge.

As noted in the recent corporate evaluation of UN Women's United Nations coordination and broader convening role in ending Violence against women, this issue appears to be prevalent in the United Nations system, with larger agencies controlling the narrative on joint programming. However, this is balanced by UN Women's coordination mandate, which functions as a strategic asset that enables UN Women to engage and coordinate with several United Nations agencies.²⁵ In Albania, competition between agencies is seen unfavourably by donors and stakeholders, and at times United Nations agencies are less collaborative than would be optimal.

Annex 2: Spotlight on Joint Programmes Implementation provides an in-depth look into these findings.

FINDING 8

The Country Office's comparative advantage as a trusted, knowledgeable partner in gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania is well recognized by stakeholders and presents an opportunity for greater profile.

“Through capacity-building, support and funding, UN Women has played an important role for women's empowerment in Albania.”

CSO survey participant,
Annex 5

Despite the challenges of limited resources and leadership turnover and instability during a considerable portion of the Strategic Note implementation period, the Country Office team has showcased the comparative advantage of UN Women in Albania, and this advantage is recognized by stakeholders and donors.

UN Women brings a number of important and unique elements to efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania, including the power of an international organization with a global mandate, regional linkages, expertise and coordination capacity, and a strong technical skill set that is combined with a consultative, responsive approach and trust across governments, international organizations, stakeholders and local beneficiaries. Stakeholders view the link that the Country Office provides between governmental entities and civil society as a powerful role. The Country Office has added to its comparative advantage through the production of research reports and proactive leadership at critical moments, such as in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

²⁴ The projects “Enhancing Youth Cooperation and Youth Exchange in the Western Balkans” and the “Government of Albania contribution to the SDGs Acceleration Fund”.

²⁵ UN Women (2021), Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's UN System Coordination and Broader Convening Role in Ending Violence against Women.

According to surveys conducted by the evaluation team, stakeholders readily identify UN Women as the organization that should and does lead international efforts for gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania. Overall, UNCT partners consulted in the context of this evaluation strongly agreed that UN Women has a

comparative advantage in this area in Albania compared with other United Nations entities as well as other key stakeholders.²⁶ This widespread acknowledgement is a positive foundation as the Country Office begins to assert a greater strategic leadership position with its counterparts.

3.3 Effectiveness

FINDING 9:

UN Women programming in the Ending Violence against Women portfolio in Albania takes a holistic approach, successfully combining normative improvements, service delivery and culture change.

UN Women programming in the Ending Violence against Women portfolio is comprised of two major programmes: the UN Women regional programme entitled “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds 2017–2021” (funded by the EU) and the United Nations Joint Programme on Ending Violence against Women 2019–2021 (funded by Sida). These programmes work synergistically, engaging normative work, service delivery and cultural perceptions through governmental and civil society partners.

The impact of these programmes has been recently evaluated and is well documented.²⁷ The portfolio has reaped multiple tangible gains in ending Violence against women in Albania by adopting a holistic approach that crosses individual and system actions, and formal and informal systems of enforcement. Set against the building block methodology for analysis and, in particular, the 11 impact statements²⁸ that run across the normative, coordination and operational elements of UN Women’s mandate, this holistic approach can be assessed as having presented evidence of change, such as increased reporting of violence and the level of engagement with social media campaigns. Impact analysis of programming on Ending Violence against Women is summarized in table 5 below.

A strong normative approach has resulted not only in the development and implementation of laws that align with international best practices, but also in the creation of an effective monitoring and reporting approach for international conventions. Programming on ending Violence against women provided support to the Government for the development of national strategies for key international obligations as well as for subsequent reporting. Simultaneously, the Country Office worked with CSOs to create the Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based

Violence, a highly effective network of CSOs engaged in monitoring, shadow reporting and advocacy that is focused on using international conventions as a powerful tool to obligate governmental behaviour. A partnership with the People’s Advocate in Albania has institutionalized monitoring and reporting on international conventions and government action plans.

At the service delivery level, UN Women has worked extensively with police, medical professionals, locally coordinated referral mechanisms and local CSOs, including shelter operators, legal aid providers and psychosocial counselling services, to increase capacity through training, to expand service delivery through the provision of equipment and supplies, and to develop standards and protocols for multisectoral responses.

The service delivery model in Albania continues to rely heavily on CSOs. The Ending Violence against Women portfolio has been mindful of this, working extensively with CSOs to strengthen their programmatic and operational capacities, including in monitoring and evaluation, results-based management, communications, financial reporting and networking across the region.

The third prong of impact in the Ending Violence against Women portfolio is a targeted approach to culture and normative change. The programmes have worked with local and national CSOs, religious leaders, youth, media personalities and private companies to shift the social discourse with respect to Violence against women, to support increased reporting and to empower women in marginalized communities to assert their rights. Stakeholders report ongoing impact of this work as seen through social media dialogue, willingness of community leaders to engage in activities to end Violence against women and increased reporting of domestic violence.

²⁶ For survey results, refer to Annex 5.

²⁷ UN Women. Evaluation of the programme “Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkan Countries and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds, Phase I 2017-2020”.

²⁸ The 11 impact statements are: political consciousness and commitment; EVAWG systematically institutionalized in laws and policies; EVAWG systematically institutionalized in codes of conduct; EVAWG systematically institutionalized in budgets; EVAWG has leadership at all levels; EVAWG is coordinated; women and their representatives are central to decision-making supported by individual consciousness, awareness, skills and capacity; social norms, attitudes, consciousness and behaviour support EVAWG; women are central to decision-making and planning; behaviour and practice transformed; action on EVAWG is informed and monitored. Evaluating Impact in Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, UN Women Working Paper, Independent Evaluation and Audit Services.

TABLE 5: Impact Analysis of Programming on Ending Violence against Women (prepared by the evaluation team using the building blocks methodology developed by UN Women IES)²⁹

BUILDING BLOCKS	IMPACT	SELECTED EXAMPLES OF COUNTRY OFFICE INTERVENTIONS
Normative work: supporting architecture for ending Violence against women and girls		
Political context	Political consciousness and commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring more women participate in politics and ensuring that women politicians are engaged in efforts to end Violence against women and girls National participation in international conventions including CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention through commitment, reporting and monitoring
Legal and policy framework	Ending Violence against women and girls systematically institutionalized in laws and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislation on ending Violence against women and girls and on gender equality and women's empowerment is passed and implementation strategies are developed through MHSP
Institutionalized frameworks (including norms and standards)	Ending Violence against women and girls systematically institutionalized in codes of conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies to prevent sexual harassment, standard operating procedures and training for public officials/ service providers
Financial framework	Ending Violence against women and girls systematically institutionalized in budgets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synergies between interventions in Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting, particularly at the local level
Coordination work: actors involved in ending Violence against women and girls		
Leadership and advocacy	Work to end Violence against women and girls has leadership at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCT joint programming on Ending Violence against Women and Girls, Country Office work to coordinate donor groups on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, engagement with women members of parliament
Partnerships and networks	Work to end Violence against women and Girls is coordinated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for national implementation through MHSP and line ministries, coordinated CSO partnerships
Mobilization and capacity of national actors	Women and their representatives are central to decision-making, supported by individual consciousness, awareness, skills and capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for multisectoral responses, coordinated referral mechanisms, service providers
Operational work: processes, products and procedures guiding implementation and delivery of actions to end Violence against women and girls		
Mobilization and capacity of subnational actors	Social norms, attitudes, consciousness and behaviour support ending Violence against women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with community and religious leaders, private sector corporations, youth
Intervention planning and design	Women are central to decision-making and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultative programme-design process, programme adaptability to ensure service to survivors during pandemic
Intervention implementation	Behaviour and practice transformed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity-building for CSOs, service providers and civil servants
Data collection, monitoring, evaluation	Action on ending Violence against women and girls is informed and monitored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence Survey on ending Violence against women and support to INSTAT, online tool for tracking recommendations from human rights instruments

FINDING 10

Gender-responsive budgeting, a flagship area for the Country Office, has been sustainably incorporated into Albania's national and local decision-making processes, with the reallocation of governmental funding and an inclusive process for participatory budgeting.

UN Women's extensive experience in gender-responsive budgeting for regional programming in Albania was well documented in the evaluation of the programme conducted in 2019. In that evaluation, Albania was lauded as a model of gender-responsive budgeting implementation at the central level, with meaningful results leading to over US\$330 million in gender-responsive funding allocation and the sustainable adoption of gender-responsive budgeting at the central level. Since that time and with the launch of a new programme, the Country Office has continued its leadership in this area through its long-standing relationships at the national level with the Ministry of Finance and key line ministries, as well as at the local level.

The Albania Country Office has been part of a multiphase regional programme on gender-responsive budgeting since 2006, including Phase III of the regional programme on Promoting Gender-Responsive Policies in South East Europe 2017–2019, as well as the new regional programme Transformative Financing for Gender Equality in Western Balkans 2020–2024 during the period of Strategic Note implementation.³⁰ Programming in Albania has evolved from setting up the enabling legal and policy framework³¹ on gender-responsive budgeting at the central and local levels and its institutionalization in annual budget planning and the medium-term budget programme to consolidating its implementation and monitoring at central level and supporting its roll-out at local level. Over the years, and as a result of UN Women's ongoing direct engagement and the high-level engagement of government leaders, there has been a progressive increase in the number of institutions implementing gender-responsive budgeting across sectoral programmes, from only 2 line ministries in 2012 to 11 line ministries and 2 oversight budgetary institutions in 2020. Gender-specific budget allocations have increased from 2.3 per cent in 2012 to 7.2 per cent in 2020 and an estimated 9 per cent of the total budget expenditures planned for 2021.

Albania has recently introduced the Financial Management Information System along with key performance indicators to ensure efficiency, transparency of budget planning, and monitoring, execution and reporting on the impact of budgetary allocations on gender equality. The system is currently in its early stages of implementation.

The new regional gender-responsive budgeting programme Transformative Financing for Gender Equality in Western Balkans 2020–2024 aims to enhance systematic integration of gender equality at all stages of national and local policymaking and budgetary processes in the Western Balkans. The programme builds on successes achieved in gender-responsive budgeting at the legal and institutional levels and provides support to (i) systematic capacity-building on gender-responsive budgeting and its monitoring at the central and particularly at the local level to ensure implementation in compliance with the legal framework through the partnership with the Albanian School of Public Administration, (ii) enhancing the role of oversight institutions (Parliament, Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, People's Advocate's Office, State Audit) to strengthen their oversight function in monitoring budgetary expenditures with a gender lens and (iii) synchronizing efforts with the World Bank and other development agencies at the macroeconomic level (care economy) to address gender equality.

Since the evaluation period and through the evolution of the new programme approach, the Country Office has continued to work successfully with the central and local governments to continue the roll-out of gender-responsive budgeting, and policies, practices and experience are becoming more ingrained. Line ministries now have more than one budget cycle in which gender-responsive budgeting has been applied, and the national ownership for a sustainable gender-responsive budgeting format is entrenched.

³⁰ During the gap between regional programmes, the Country Office maintained continuity in gender-responsive budgeting work by supporting activities at the central level with core funding and at the local level through the regional programme on Ending Violence against Women and the Leave No One Behind joint programme.

³¹ Council of Minister's Decision on Integration of Gender Equality in the Mid-Term Budget Programme (2012), introduction of gender equality as a core principle in the Organic Budget Law in 2016, gender-responsive budgeting provisions in the Law on Local Finances in 2017, Budget Circulars for central and local level, Albania Public Finance Management Sectoral Policy 2019–2022, National Strategy on Gender Equality 2016–2020.

At the local level, while implementation remains a work in progress, success stories are also emerging in municipalities such as Elbasan, Durres, Pogradec and Korca. For example, in Korca, gender-responsive budgeting methods are being applied to assess the impact of programming choices on the unemployed, the Roma and Egyptian communities, people with disabilities and children.

Notably, the Country Office has used its success in this area as a calling card for its expertise and as a means of increasing impact in other thematic areas. Stakeholders from all thematic areas and across the spectrum of

organizations referenced the Country Office's expertise and impact in the area of gender-responsive budgeting. There is a strong crossover between programmes on Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Ending Violence against Women, with CSO partners in the Ending Violence against Women programme reporting that they use the gender-responsive budgeting principles taught to them by the Country Office as a key advocacy tool. The Country Office brings its gender-responsive budgeting capacity to other joint programmes, such as Leave No One Behind.

FINDING 11

Other thematic areas (Women's Political Participation; Women Peace and Security; Women's Economic Empowerment), while each showing some progress, had limited resource mobilization during the Strategic Note period and remain areas of strategic opportunity for the Country Office.

The Women's Political Participation; Women, Peace and Security; and Women's Economic Empowerment thematic areas covered by the Country Office portfolio were smaller (less funding, fewer resources) but still impactful over the period of Strategic Note implementation.

Work in the Women's Political Participation thematic area resulted in specific and tangible changes, including a higher number of women participating in elections. The Country Office contributed to strengthening the capacities of institutions and coalitions, including the Central Electoral Commission and the Alliance of Women Members of Parliament at the central level and the Alliances of Women Councilors at the local level, all driving towards a more gender-sensitive election, monitoring and policymaking agenda. This was enhanced by Country Office-supported legislative changes to the Electoral Code mandating a gender quota for participation. The Country Office is encouraged to continue its efforts in Women's Political Participation with a focus on engagement and support to women parliamentarians and elected officials.

In the early period of the Strategic Note, the Country Office was active in coordinating civil society's advocacy efforts at the national and local levels in support of a national response on United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, under the Women, Peace and Security thematic area. Results of this work are significant, including the establishment of a national coalition of CSOs on Women, Peace and Security, the development of the National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent monitoring of that plan. However, funding for this

work, which had come from the Fund for Gender Equality, ended in 2019. Since then, the Country Office has used limited core funds and staff knowledge to support partner efforts. The Country Office is encouraged to explore donor interest in this area, especially given its importance to the EU integration process.

During the Strategic Note period, the Country Office faced significant fundraising issues in the Women's Economic Empowerment thematic area. Donor interest was diverted, and the Country Office faced competition from other United Nations agencies and other international organizations already working in this field in Albania. The Country Office partially addressed this gap by building synergies across the Gender Responsive Budgeting and Ending Violence against Women programmes, such as developing programming for the socioeconomic reintegration of vulnerable women. The Country Office also participated in the Leave No One Behind joint programme, with a focus on women's entrepreneurship, and provided support to the Tirana Municipality through a Women Entrepreneurs Grant, a successful programme that has been incorporated by the municipality and replicated in the Rrogozhina Municipality. Each of these efforts has yielded results, albeit on a small scale. They have not met the expectations of the Country Office at the outset of the Strategic Note in this thematic area. The upcoming GREAT programme will enhance the Country Office's impact in Women's Economic Empowerment.

FINDING 12

While slow to start, new programming, such as the United Nations Joint Programme EU for Gender Equality and the GREAT programme, and new priority areas, including disaster response, promise to enhance the leadership role of the Country Office and strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment capacity in Albania.

The Strategic Note and work done in the early years of the Strategic Note period envisioned that the Country Office would be heavily engaged in the Gender Equality Facility programme and in the GREAT programme. The start of both of these programmes was significantly delayed, and in both cases the scope was substantially altered from the original intention. However, at the end of the Strategic Note period, both programmes were set to commence.

In addition, towards the end of the Strategic Note period, the Country Office mobilized resources for the implementation of other new activities that were not envisioned at the outset, including a post-earthquake recovery project that aims to support the Government of Albania to ensure gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, earthquake recovery and pandemic response, as well as engaging in a broader set of programmes on emerging issues, including Output 1.6 Migration and Asylum (2019–2021) and Output 4.2 Green Economy (2019–2021) of the Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Joint Programme on Improving Social Protection Service Delivery 2020–2021. These programmatic areas are also emerging areas under the new UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025, which was under development while this evaluation was being conducted.

The Country Office was also engaged in the development of the new phase of the United Nations Joint Programme Leave No One Behind (2021–2025) during the first half of 2021.

The Gender Equality Facility programme, which supports the engendering of the EU accession process and strengthening of the gender mechanism, started during the previous Strategic Note 2013–2017 with support from Austria, and efforts were made to scale up the project under the Strategic Note 2017–2021. A new United Nations Joint Programme, EU for Gender Equality, Equality in Albania: Implementation of the EU Gender Equality acquis, was developed and readjusted in light of the COVID-19 crisis and has recently been approved and funded by the EU. The programme focuses on the transposition of EU acquis on gender equality in sector reforms, strategies and post-COVID-19 recovery programmes at the central-government level and also supports local governments in performing their functions related to gender and socially responsive post-COVID-19 recovery, women's and girls' rights, women's economic resilience, and empowerment and social inclusion of adolescent girls and boys. The project is an important tool to strengthen the national

gender machinery and a key EU priority. The Country Office can benefit from its work on this project as a means of strengthening its relationship with the EU.

The GREAT programme diversifies the Country Office's donor network and is a promising return to the Women's Economic Empowerment thematic area. GREAT was developed in close cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. It aims to contribute to rural women's economic empowerment and strengthen their role and contribution to the sustainable economic development of rural communities and is complementary to the Government's four-year programme of 100 villages known as rural tourism destinations.

The Country Office played an active role in supporting governmental and United Nations agencies to mainstream gender in disaster response programmes, including the response to the earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensured that needs of women and girls were adequately taken into account. In particular, all partners, including the Government, donors, UNCT and CSOs, credited UN Women's contribution to understanding the disproportionate social, economic and psychological impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of women and girls compared with men through the rapid gender assessment conducted in April 2020. The key findings of the assessment highlighted the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women's psychological and mental health compared with men (69 per cent versus 57 per cent), the increased prevalence of gender-based violence, the increased burden of care and domestic work on women, and the reduced working time and incomes of employed and self-employed women compared with men.

The Country Office relied on data provided by the rapid gender assessment to (i) inform the development of the United Nations Socio-Economic Response Plan to COVID-19 to support the Government of Albania in guaranteeing that policy responses and interventions to emergency situations are guided by gender equality and women's empowerment commitments, (ii) orient UN Women interventions in providing legal support to MHSP to develop a protocol on the functioning of public and non-public shelters during the COVID-19 emergency and to support essential services provided by CSOs to survivors of domestic violence and (iii) support the Ministry of Finance in analysing the budgeting process, including in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to inform future budget planning and prioritization.

UN Women demonstrated strong leadership in disaster response, ensuring that the responses of the UNCT and the Government were sufficiently gendered, that needs were understood through a rapid gender assessment and

that direct emergency services were provided to shelters and women in need. This leadership has enhanced the visibility of the Country Office and its credibility as a go-to organization.

FINDING 13

The Country Office has established a reputation for producing and supporting the production of useful and reliable data and analysis that has been impactful across thematic areas.

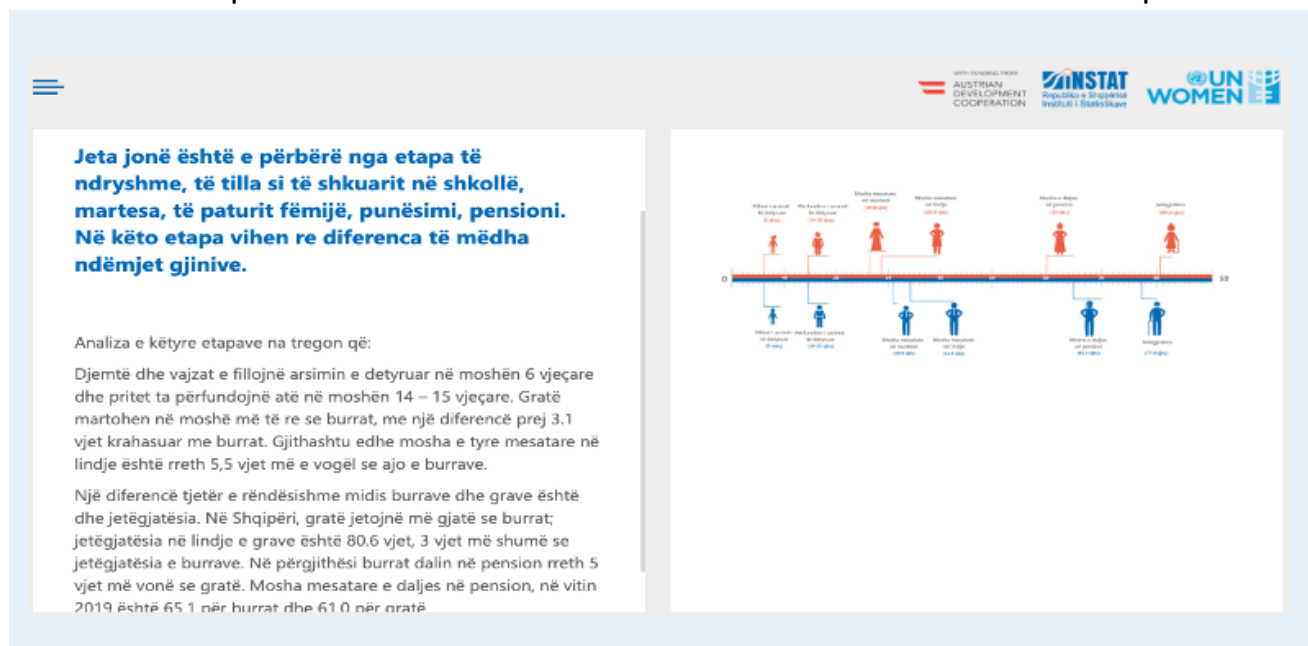
There are two elements of the Country Office's approach to data and research: its work with the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) on the collection and analysis of national gender statistics and its production of research reports.

The Country Office has a longstanding relationship with INSTAT, the national statistics office in Albania, including through its participation in the Making Every Woman and Girl Count global programme (2018–2021) during the period of the Strategic Note. The partnership with INSTAT has resulted in the ongoing evolution of the annual publication of the Women and Men in Albania report, the Gender

Equality Index, a survey on Violence against women and girls, a survey on income and living conditions, and the development of tools such as the interactive dashboard of gender disaggregated data on the INSTAT website.

This work has been extremely successful, with improvements in data collection methods, increases in gender indicators, increased users and the development of independent capacity of the INSTAT team. This work has also led to partnerships and data exchanges with other institutions such as the People's Advocate Albania.

FIGURE 8: Screen capture of a section of the INSTAT dashboard from the Women and Men in Albania report³²



Source: Women and Men in Albania report, 14 May 2021

This area continues to evolve, and the partnership with INSTAT should continue in the next Strategic Note period. The Country Office is encouraged to explore greater opportunities within the Making Every Woman and Girl Count global programme, including resourcing opportunities that might expand the Country Office's in-house technical expertise.

The production of research reports has been a feature for the Country Office during the period of its Strategic Note, allowing the office to showcase its expertise and providing evidence and justification for its work and the work of its partners in gender equality and women's empowerment. Box 1 summarizes key research reports produced by the Country Office during the life cycle of its current Strategic Note.

BOX 1: Key Research Reports Produced by the Country Office



- [National Study on Economic Diversification for Women Living in Albanian Rural Areas \(2017\)](#)
- [Obstacles to Women's Participation in Elections in Albania - A National Index of Women's Electoral Participation \(2017\)](#)
- [Standards of Representation of Political Parties In Albania \(2017\)](#)
- [Freedom of Vote and Family Voting in Albania \(2017\)](#)
- [Sexual Harassment and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence in Urban Spaces in Albania \(2018\)](#)
- [Violence against Women and Girls from Disadvantaged Communities- An Overview of the Phenomenon of Violence against Women and Girls for Roma, LGBT and Disabilities Communities \(2018\)](#)
- [The National Survey on Violence against Women and Girls in Albania \(2019\)](#)
- [Sexual Harassment and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence in Urban Spaces, Korca and Shkodra \(2019\)](#)
- [The impact of COVID-19 in women's and men's lives and livelihoods in Albania \(2020\)](#)
- [Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020](#)
- [Analyses of Albanian Legislation to Address Violence against Women in Elections \(2020\)](#)

The Government has used this reporting to draft and implement policy (e.g. the 2017 National Study on Economic Diversification for Women Living in Albanian Rural Areas used by the Ministry of Agriculture), and CSOs use the research to justify programming and funding requests and advocate (e.g. the 2018 Violence against Women and Girls from Disadvantaged Communities- An Overview of the Phenomenon of Violence against Women and Girls for Roma, LGBT and Disabilities Communities). UN Women's research and data support is rated highest by CSOs, at 80 per cent, followed by financial support, capacity-building and coordination at approximately 74 per cent to 75 per cent.

Recently, the Country Office's rapid gender assessment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and report on the impacts of the pandemic on women and girls have been critical documents supporting the national and international response.

In addition, in 2020 the regional programme on Ending Violence against Women conducted a rapid assessment to inform the revision of the programme in 2020 to address the needs of CSOs.

As above, the Country Office is encouraged to continue to weave research and reporting into its work. An innovative approach to resourcing may be required in order to ensure that the Country Office can continue to provide this key service and increase its visibility as a leader in knowledge and analysis.

FINDING 14

Normative work has been an area of strength for the Country Office over the Strategic Note period, with significant contributions to the gender equality and women's empowerment legislative framework and effective reporting and monitoring mechanisms.

“UN Women is best qualified to support the Government to build national policies that comply with international standards and normative frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment.”

UNCT survey

The Country Office has been a key enabler of the advances made in the gender equality and women's empowerment normative framework in Albania over the period of the Strategic Note. Its ongoing engagement with the Government, including the placement of qualified experts and the development of trusting partnerships, has advanced legislation, implementing

structures and reporting on international obligations, particularly in the top thematic areas of Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting.

Through its strategic partnership with the Government and CSOs, the Country Office provided technical support for key legislative amendments, such as the Electoral Code, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Domestic Violence, Decision No. 34 of the Council of Ministers on the functioning of coordinated referral mechanisms, the Code on Criminal Procedures, input for the new Law on Legal Aid and Social Housing, the legal framework on social enterprises, the Law on Local Finances, and the drafting of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Gender Action

Plan 2016–2020 and the new draft National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030 and its Action Plan. It also supported training for hundreds of public administration employees through the Albanian School of Public Administration at the central and local levels. It worked with the Government on normative reporting, including creating an online human rights platform with the UNFPA, supporting delegations and providing technical assistance for reporting for CEDAW, the Universal Periodic Review and the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action Against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). Through the Gender-Responsive Budgeting portfolio, normative work supported a large-scale shift in the model of budget allocation and tracking and changed financial allocations across national and local budgets.

One of the Country Office's most significant normative achievements in the period of the Strategic Note is its work through the Ending Violence against Women portfolio to build a monitoring network of CSOs, which conducts monitoring and shadow reporting on CEDAW and GREVIO and advocacy using the international response to the shadow reporting as a tool to influence government action. This network has advanced advocacy strength for civil society as a whole and increased the capacity of each organization. The Country Office also worked effectively with the People's Advocate to draft alternative reports for CEDAW and GREVIO.

FINDING 15

The Country Office's approaches to communications, community engagement and new partners have created a foundation for innovation and creativity that is ready to be enhanced.

Advancing innovative concepts and programming requires a supportive institutional and office culture. Past leadership challenges created a necessarily conservative mindset in the Country Office. In addition, personnel indicated that the confines of the UN Women system of indicators, resource allocation and donor expectations creates a limiting environment with a low tolerance for experimentation and failure.

However, despite these limiting factors, the Country Office has introduced a number of innovative approaches and explored innovative ways to reach women and girls in Albania, including through the use of social media, video, the engagement of young artists and exhibits.

UN Women partnered with Anabel magazine, a well-known feminist media portal in Albania, to produce the “Love Doesn't Hurt” mini-series portraying the cycle of violence in relationships and the first signs of Violence against women that many women and girls go through.³³

The mini-series was streamed on social media (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook) and addressed the misconception that violence occurs mainly in families with a difficult socioeconomic situation, highlighting that women and girls from all backgrounds could be at risk. The mini-series inspired some followers to share their stories about how they left violent relationships, which were collected in an article published online by Anabel magazine.³⁴

33 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=142463461007460>.

34 <https://www.anabelmagazine.com/news/54441/historia-ime-e-dhunes-t-i-thuash-jo-marredhenies-abuzive>.

The Country Office's partnerships with private sector companies, including Vodaphone, Anabel magazine and Bank Intesa, are noteworthy. Through these partnerships, communication to women about Violence against women and cultural norms and stereotypes is linked to other elements of social life. Now, people in Albania receive messages when they use an ATM or follow popular life-style social media accounts. Although these efforts are at an early stage, they have promise: When messages are combined with other elements of social life, they gain traction.

In other programming efforts, the Country Office's work to link the regional programme on Gender-Responsive Budgeting to support economic reintegration of survivors of violence is viewed as innovative within the region. In Ending Violence against Women, the engagement strategy with religious leaders is novel, challenging them to incorporate this issue into their community dialogue and to support women in their parishes who are experiencing domestic violence. The GREAT project will advance innovative components that cluster economic support for rural women. It is noteworthy that the Country Office participated in the regional innovation boot camp³⁵, introducing concepts such as behavioural science.

3.4 Efficiency

FINDING 16

The current corporate reporting mechanisms do not allow the Country Office to capture all of the impacts of the implementation of joint programmes, nor to tell a compelling success story to stakeholders.

The existing UN Women corporate reporting systems do not allow for fully capturing the results and impact of joint programmes, such as demonstrating how small results from these programmes link up with higher level outcomes and impacts for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Albania. For a Country Office with a large portfolio of joint programming, documenting and disseminating the successes of these programmes to the fullest extent possible is essential.

In addition, with current corporate reporting mechanisms (in particular, reporting against indicators in the Development Results Framework from year to year) it is difficult to systematically track Strategic Note progress and results over time. Self-reported progress on indicators appears strong. The indicators "significant progress" and "target reached or surpassed" are the most commonly reported year to year, with few instances of "regression"

or "no change". However, the evaluation team found that tracking progress over time was very difficult, as it is not clear if results carry over year to year to form new baselines, and if targets change based on results achieved. Often the value reported does not align with the qualifier description (i.e. value 2 = "significant progress", when value 2 was listed as the target goal).

One of the challenges with reporting and monitoring is the high workload and the lack of dedicated planning, monitoring and reporting personnel with the time to strategize and focus on how best to capture and demonstrate results for a wide audience. It is also important to recognize that challenges with optimally capturing results through reporting systems are not specific to the Albania Country Office but a broader challenge within UN Women.

³⁵ UN Women in the Europe and Central Asia region launched an innovation facility for the purposes of fostering innovative leadership and learning skills within UN Women and among its partners. To expand its innovation work in the area of Ending Violence against Women, the Country Office participated in the fall of 2020 in an Innovation Lab for Gender Equality boot camp run by the Regional Office, where the Country Office developed learning events to promote "outside the box" thinking on programming, including lessons from behavioural science.

FINDING 17:**The Country Office team is competent, dedicated and respected. However, leadership challenges and underfunding have stretched the team across projects, with insufficient support.**

Stakeholders highlighted the strengths of the Country Office personnel, including their technical expertise, relationship-building and engagement approaches. As individuals and as a team, they are respected by stakeholders and viewed as valuable contributors to gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania. It was clear to the evaluation team that personnel care deeply about the women and girls of Albania and have smart, creative contributions to bring to the work. Of particular note to the evaluation team were the skills of the Country Office team and their capacity to work collaboratively and in partnership with key partners in government and in civil society

It was also clear to the evaluation team that personnel are significantly stretched. Many team members are responsible for multiple projects or large portfolios with large numbers of interventions and stakeholders and lack meaningful support. It is clear that the team has compensated for this by relying heavily on outside consultants, many of whom have been associated with UN Women for years. While the core expert consultants bring a strong skill set and have done tremendous work for UN Women, reliance

on consultants is a challenging model to sustain. This situation is not unique to the Albania Country Office and is, at least in part, a limitation of the overall UN Women human resources structural model.

In addition, the Country Office does not have dedicated cross-functional positions to support key functions such as planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation, and coordination, and it has only one officer supporting communications. Frequently, these important tasks are split within the team and/or supported by temporary resources such as interns or UN Volunteers, which is an unsustainable model that is not necessarily helpful to the full-time officer.

The reliance on consultants and the lack of some key cross-functional positions, in combination with leadership turnover, has contributed to a conservative mindset and approach to programming at the office, despite the creativity of its personnel. This situation has not allowed the opportunity to advance specialized knowledge in flagship and emerging areas including public administration, climate change and data analysis. On a positive note, leadership of the office has stabilized and the office environment is shifting.

FINDING 18**While managing within the existing resource envelope, the Country Office missed opportunities for resource mobilization, limiting opportunities to increase staffing capacity and exert leadership in key thematic areas.**

The Country Office has undergone scrutiny in terms of its financial management and resource allocation, including through an internal audit conducted in 2018. The audit's overall rating was satisfactory, meaning "The assessed governance arrangements, risk management practices and controls were adequately established and functioning well. Issues identified by the audit, if any, are unlikely to affect the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area."³⁶ The audit made eight recommendations to more effectively manage risk and to strengthen governance, risk management and control processes. All recommendations have been reported as implemented.

The 2018 audit found that the Country Office's approach of combining seed funding, opportunities in the external environment and project design was a good practice, as the Country Office was able to advance results from its

seed-funded normative work to further advocacy and resource mobilization, leading to a new donor relationship and the development of the GREAT project.

However, the Country Office missed a number of critical opportunities for funding during the period of the Strategic Note, including opportunities for greater visibility and significant funding in the Making Every Woman and Girl Count global programme; greater participation in joint programming, particularly in the area of Women's Economic Empowerment; and directed funding for Strategic Note implementation, including cross-functional human resources that could have been potentially available from key donors. These opportunities occurred during a time of leadership challenges in the Country Office; therefore the gap does not rest entirely with the current personnel. New resource mobilization has already materialized in 2021.

3.5 Sustainability

FINDING 19

The internal stability of the Country Office has been challenged during the Strategic Note period as a result of limited resource opportunities, leadership challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic.

External challenges to the sustainability of the Country Office include competition for limited donor resources, including within the United Nations in Albania, and ongoing consideration by UN Women headquarters of country presence typologies in the field. These challenges could be offset by internal strengthening. During the period of the current Strategic Note, the office struggled internally with resource mobilization, leadership turnover and overstretched personnel.

Leadership challenges were reported to have led to reduced donor engagement, as well as personnel fatigue. Donors that were anticipated to contribute to programming during the Strategic Note period reduced their involvement in UN Women programming, leading to gaps in thematic areas such as Women's Economic Empowerment, as well as a slow and small start to critical programming such as

the Gender Equality Facility programme. The donor base for UN Women-only programming, as opposed to joint programmes, was reduced to a relatively small number of donors. Personnel were impacted, both in terms of their own low morale and because reduced funding prevented an increase in staffing, leaving the team stretched.

Over the last year of the Strategic Note, the Country Office leadership stabilized, and the new Country Representative is cognizant of the sustainability challenges. Moves to increase credibility and diversify the donor base are evident in new programming and have been noted by stakeholders. However, these efforts were tested by the COVID-19 pandemic, which stressed personnel, pulled stakeholder attention away from gender issues and decreased the economic stability of the country.

FINDING 20

While there is government ownership for gender equality and women's empowerment, outcomes at the national and local level, as well as the required infrastructure for implementation and strengthening of Albania's gender machinery, are works in progress.

The Government of Albania, at the central level and at the local level, is committed to gender equality and women's empowerment. It is rightly proud of the legislative, policy and budget amendments that have aligned the country with its international obligations and in many cases serve as an example of best practices in the region. The Government's ongoing partnership and positive relationship with UN Women is a contributing factor to this success

However, despite excellent efforts, implementation of the normative framework remains a challenge. At the national level, the gender machinery consists of a small unit in the MHSP, supported by a gender focal point in each line ministry. This structure is similar at the regional and local levels. While the personnel in these positions are committed, the Government at all levels continues to require UN Women's technical support. Likewise, the social model for service delivery, particularly in the area of Ending Violence against Women, remains heavily dependent on a combination of government employees and CSOs, supported by UN Women and other international agencies.

UN Women's work and partnerships with Government have improved the potential for sustainability, through widespread training of government employees and service providers (e.g. training 700 service providers on their legal obligations to address cases of Violence against women as part of the Ending Violence against Women regional programme in 2019 and providing sexual harassment training to 420 police officers in 2020), capacity support and development for CSOs (e.g. supporting four women's organizations to strengthen their capacities to advocate for gender-responsive budgeting at the local level in 2019, and supporting the training of 27 representatives (all women) of 10 CSOs to build their capacities on integrated social care services sector planning and expenditure monitoring in 2020³⁷) and the onsite support of UN Women-hired experts. UN Women's advocacy influenced the development and implementation of critical legislative changes related to women's political participation, gender-based violence, gender-responsive budgeting and responses to international commitments.

FINDING 21

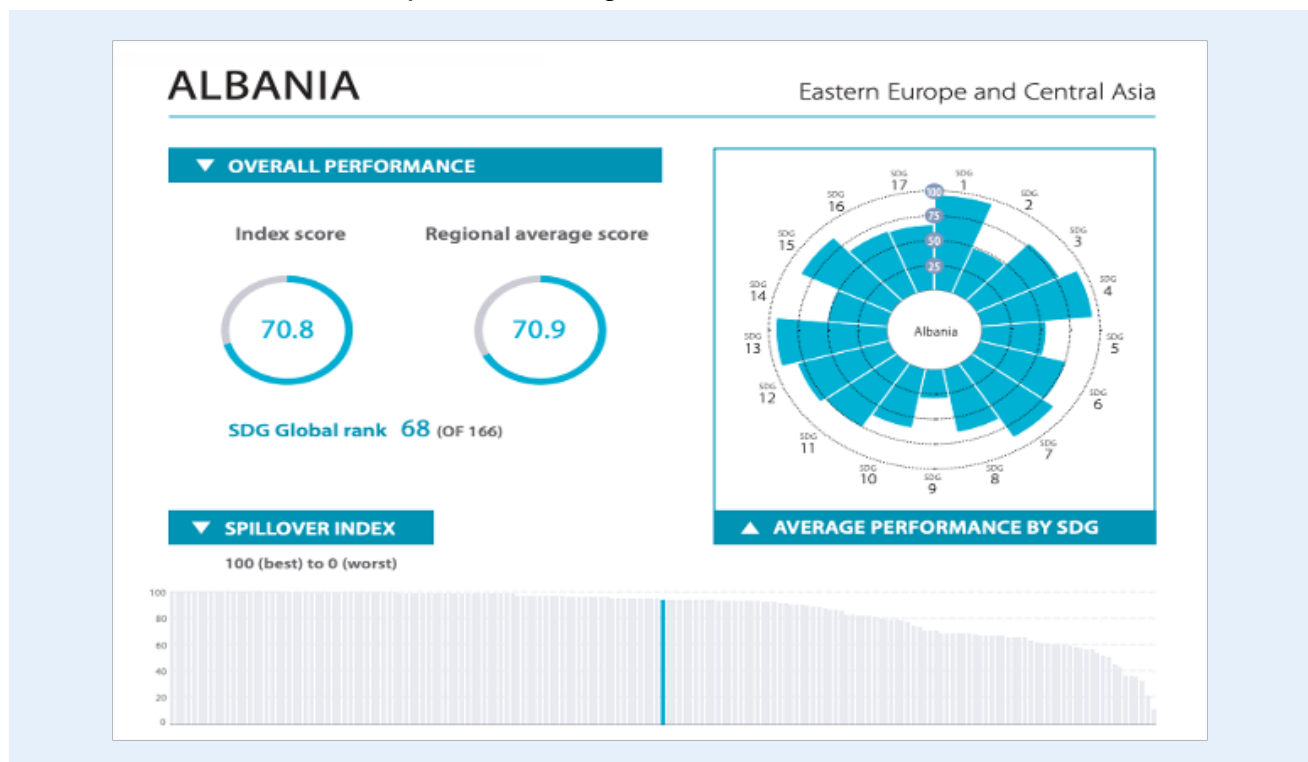
The portfolio of the Country Office has made a positive contribution towards achieving Albania's gender-relevant SDG commitments, including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Since 2015, when Albania committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the country has made continuous efforts with the support of the UNCT³⁸ to improve data collection, compilation and analysis to facilitate reporting on SDGs. Albania presented its first Voluntary National Report on SDGs in July 2018, which is the first attempt in tracking progress with implementation of Agenda 2030 by focusing on the six main priorities of the Government as presented in its National Strategy on Development and Integration 2015–2020, ongoing reforms and the EU integration agenda. Only 12 of the 50 high-level

National Strategy on Development and Integration 2015–2020 indicators are consistent with the SDG framework, posing challenges in monitoring.

The 2019 SDG Index and Dashboard Report³⁹ reveals that Albania ranks 68 out of 166 countries, with a national index of 70.8 per cent (measured as a proxy to the best possible outcomes across 17 SDGs), which is quite close to the average index at 70.9 per cent for Eastern Europe and Central Asia countries. SDG 5 (Gender Equality) scores in the middle (55 per cent). Figure below reflects Albania's performance by SDG.

FIGURE 9 : Assessment of Albania's performance on Agenda 2030 and the SDGs⁴⁰



Source: SDG Index and Dashboard Report 2019

The Strategic Note identified linkages between its impact areas, national development priorities in the National Strategy on Development and Integration 2015–2020 and the SDG goals. The portfolio, particularly through the thematic areas of Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting and participation in the Making Every Woman and Girl Count global programme,

has contributed to strengthening national data collection capacities through INSTAT, in engendering SDGs, and in increasing the number of SDG gender-related indicators, particularly SDG 5. INSTAT and its partners have developed a minimum set of SDG-related gender indicators included in the Women and Men in Albania 2020 publication. However, gaps in data and information collected continue to challenge these efforts.

38 (i) Setting up a joint United Nations-INSTAT data group in 2017, (ii) establishing a task force of Albania's Government and the United Nations for SDGs in 2017 for the preparation of a Voluntary National Report, public awareness and advocacy on the SDGs and Agenda 2030, as well as the drafting of methodology on costs estimation for national achievement of SDGs, (iii) launching the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund of United Nations Agencies in April 2018 in support of the implementation of the National Agenda 2030.

39 Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2019): Sustainable Development Report 2019. New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

40 Ibid.

In 2020, INSTAT published the Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania⁴¹, which is an instrument to measure gender inequalities in the EU in accordance with EU policy context in six main domain areas (work, money, knowledge, time, power, health) and two additional domains (intersecting inequalities and violence). Albania ranks in the middle of all countries that report on the Gender Equality Index, with 60.4 out of 100 points, which is seven points below the EU-28 average (67.4). There is a striking contrast across the index categories with women's formal representation in politics scoring 9 points higher than the

average EU-28 (60.9 versus 51.9), while the largest gaps to the EU-28 are in the domains of essential productive resources: time use (48.1 versus 65.7), money (59.6 versus 80.4), knowledge (55.6 versus 63.5) and narrower gaps in the domains of work (67.6 versus 72) and health (81 versus 88).

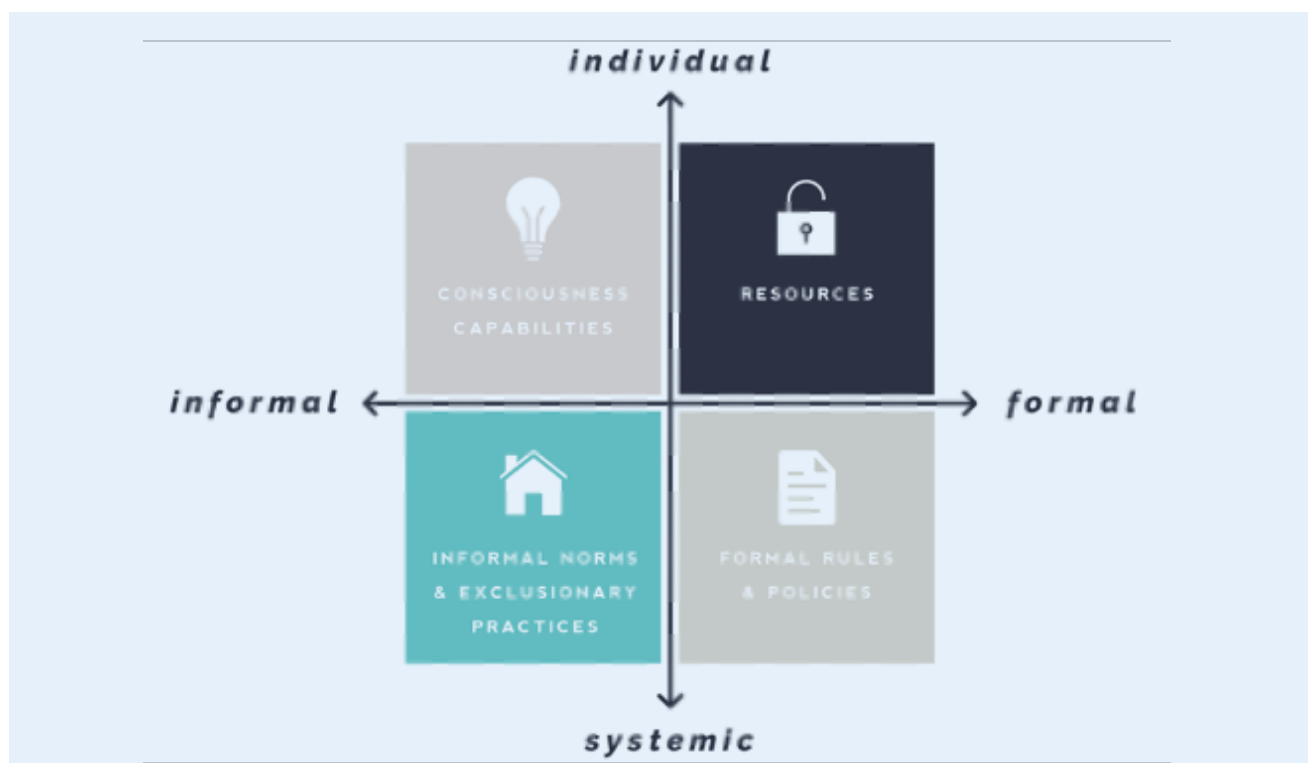
An assessment of the Country Office's contribution to the gender-relevant SDG indicators, by indicator, is provided in Annex 4.

3.6 Gender equality and the empowerment of women, and human rights

FINDING 22

While the Country Office's portfolio has been impactful at the formal systemic and service-delivery levels, more work is required to impact individual perception, empowerment and culture change.

FIGURE 10: Gender at Work Framework⁴²



Source: Gender at Work Framework, genderatwork.org/analytical-framework

The Gender at Work Framework, pictured in Figure 10, allows for an evaluation of the holistic nature of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment portfolio, assessing impact and the interrelationship between gender equality, organizational change and institutions, and the power dynamics within communities.⁴³

When the Country Office's portfolio is viewed across the four quadrants, two key conclusions emerge: (i) that the office has made substantial contributions to the formal quadrants and (ii) that work to impact the informal quadrant is long term and ongoing.

41 https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/system/files/events-files/gender_equality_index_albania.pdf.

42 Gender at Work Framework, genderatwork.org/analytical-framework.

43 Ibid.

With respect to the formal quadrants, it is clear that the normative improvements in legislation, policy and adherence to international conventions have been strongly impacted by the Country Office's work and advocacy, which itself is grounded in the recommendations of human rights treaty bodies. It is strengthened by UN Women's contribution to statistics, research and monitoring. The formal rules and policies are in place for gender equality and women's empowerment in Albania and, while implementation remains a work in progress, the structure is in place.

Likewise, UN Women's work has made substantial gains for service delivery and the resources available to women and girls across Albania, through support to CSOs and local multisectoral groups, the development of participatory and gender-responsive budgeting, and support focused on the most marginalized women and girls.

A substantial effort has been made by the Country Office to more directly impact the cultural norms that pervade Albania's ongoing gender equality challenges and to more directly empower women to act on their rights. Outreach and community gatherings on ending Violence against women; communications campaigns, particularly during the 16 Days of Activism; pilot programmes for women entrepreneurs and farmers; and training on women's political participation have all contributed to shifting the public discourse on the role and rights of women.

However, this work is far from complete. Almost all stakeholders interviewed as a part of the evaluation process indicated that the attitudes and perceptions about women in Albania remain one of the most significant challenges to improving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

FINDING 23

The Country Office has effectively incorporated attention to the needs of the most marginalized women and girls across the portfolio by ensuring that programme outputs specifically address marginalized women and girls and through knowledge development about the specific circumstances of key target groups.

A key focus on the needs of the most marginalized women and girls is a strength of the Country Office. It was apparent across the portfolio and from the responses of the spectrum of partners and stakeholders that the Country Office prioritizes the most marginalized women and girls.

Importantly, the Country Office ensures that programming explicitly contains interventions aimed at a variety of target groups including rural women, Roma and Egyptian women, the LGBTQI+ community and women with disabilities. Of particular note is the Ending Violence against

Women regional programme partnership between CSOs focused on women with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community and Roma and Egyptian women. It is important to note that, as per the donor agreement, over 65 per cent of the financial resources under the regional programme are allocated to CSOs and at least 30 per cent to minorities, fostering intersectional approaches. Partnering with these organizations enabled different groups to participate in a large programme and increased their impact, capacity and organizational strength.

TABLE 6: Leave No One Behind key focus areas in UN Women Albania country programming

PROGRAMME	OUTCOME	OUTPUT	INDICATORS
UN Joint Programme on Ending Violence against Women (2019–2021)	Outcome 3: Women, girls, men and boys and CSOs working on gender-based Violence against women and girls organize collectively to engage in prevention that builds the foundation for social change in ending Violence against women	Output 3.1: Women and girls, including those from disadvantaged groups, have increased access to information to identify violence, report it to authorities and escape from violent situations	3.1: Create and disseminate informational packages on access to services, customized to various marginalized groups; create innovative tools for information-sharing and awareness

PROGRAMME	OUTCOME	OUTPUT	INDICATORS
UN Joint Programme on Social Inclusion, Leave No One Behind (2017–2021)	Outcome 1: The vulnerable population requests and receives adequate social services from local authorities that support their social inclusion	Output 1.1: Marginalized and vulnerable persons and groups throughout Albania and in selected municipalities are empowered to request social inclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extent/level of participation of vulnerable population in the consultation process of planning and budgeting of social services 2. Extent of issues/needs raised by vulnerable population and addressed in planning and budgeting of social services in pilot municipalities
		Output 1.2: Roma, Egyptians and persons with disabilities throughout Albania and in selected municipalities are supported in their access to specific services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cases of requests by Roma and Egyptians and their organizations for improved service provision 2. At least seven grant fund projects, a majority of them for Roma and persons with disabilities, are realized every year starting in 2018 3. At least eight social services facilities are rehabilitated for providing new quality services
		Output 1.3: The capacity of groups of Roma, Egyptians and persons with disabilities as well as CSOs and researchers is improved in holding municipal service providers accountable	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policy dialogue mechanisms and monitoring mechanisms with participation of CSOs, community members in place and functional
		Output 1.4: Vulnerable and marginalized persons and groups, including Roma and persons with disabilities, participate in monitoring of the implementation of national policies and strategies relevant for social inclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of vulnerable group representatives trained in monitoring of social inclusion policies and strategies 2. Number of occasions in which representatives of target groups participate in monitoring of national policies 3. Number of (approved) recommendations made by representatives of target groups taking part and involved in monitoring/making decisions (by disaggregated data)
UN Joint Programme on Improving Municipal Social Protection, Service Delivery (2020–2021)	Outcome: All women, men, girls and boys, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable groups, are exercising their entitlements to equitable quality services, in line with human rights; and more effective and efficient investments in human and financial resources are being made at central and local levels to ensure social inclusion and cohesion		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proportion of population covered by social-protection floors/systems, by sex, gender, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable
		Output 4: Vulnerable communities (disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.) are empowered to actively participate in decision-making and make institutions accountable	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Extent/level of participation of vulnerable population in the consultation process of planning and budgeting of integrated social care services at municipality level (in three municipalities) 4.2 Number of projects implemented by CSOs representing vulnerable groups, demanding rights and holding municipal service providers accountable for quality social care services

PROGRAMME	OUTCOME	OUTPUT	INDICATORS
UN Joint Programme on Sustainable Development Goals Fund, Strategic Policy Options for SDG Financing (2020–2022)	Outcome 1: Institutional capacities at national and local level are supported to develop feasible solutions and identify fiscal space to progressively increase SDG-related spending for women, men, boys and girls in Albania.	Output 1.1: A national strategy for financing comprehensive social-protection floors is developed, discussed nationally and ready to be integrated in the Medium Term Budgeting Programme through national dialogue	1. Proportion of population covered by social-protection floors/systems, by sex, gender, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable
		Output 1.3: Innovative approaches and tools (micro-simulation, behavioural insights) and other mechanisms are developed to pilot and evaluate impact of fiscal policies	2. Proportion of government recurrent and capital spending to sectors that disproportionately benefit women, the poor and vulnerable groups

Source: prepared by the evaluation team

In addition, targeted research, such as the study “Violence against Women and Girls from Disadvantaged Communities- An Overview of the Phenomenon of Violence against Women and Girls for Roma, LGBT and Disabilities Communities (2018)”, highlighted the needs of key target groups, advocacy within the UNCT to ensure that intersectional disadvantage is recognized, innovative approaches

to finding women in remote or religious communities, and using social media and the private sector to reach women and girls with a wide array of messaging, has had a high impact on ensuring that marginalized women and girls have a voice in Albania.



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4 LESSONS LEARNED



LESSON 1: The flexibility and consultative approach of the Country Office increases credibility with stakeholders.

The Country Office has a strong reputation across stakeholders as a collaborative partner. Donors view its ability to work well with partner agencies and to be flexible in response to donor requests as a strength. As a result, donors request the participation of the Country Office in programming suggested by other United Nations agencies.

With respect to civil society, this approach has been particularly successful. There is a growing tension across the region with respect to the appearance of competition between UN Women and CSOs in interventions related to ending Violence against women. However, the Country

Office's approach to working with CSOs – that of a responsive partner interested in ensuring the success of the CSO – has maintained a positive and impactful relationship between CSOs and the Country Office in spite of this larger conceptual issue.

It is noteworthy that this approach has supported the ongoing positive relations the Country Office has maintained across its spectrum of stakeholders in the face of issues experienced during the period of leadership challenges in the Country Office.



LESSON 2: In crisis contexts, knowledge, tools and capacity to ensure a gender priority is maintained in the institutional and sector response make a fundamental difference.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021 presented enormous challenges, such as economic disempowerment and increased levels of gender-based violence and isolation for women globally, including Albanian women. UN Women in Albania was quick to demonstrate leadership at the outset of the pandemic, advocating with the UNCT and the Government for gender-sensitive policies to mitigate negative impacts on women. Both the Government and UNCT colleagues noted the long-term value of this leadership, which had a ripple effect across UNCT response planning.

The Country Office was also quick to engage directly with women through its rapid gender assessment and was the first in the region to produce its report. While the final production of the report was not provided to stakeholders until early 2021, the content was valuable in terms of understanding and highlighting the particular experiences of

women and supporting interventions by the Government, international agencies and CSOs. This report will have a long-term benefit, and the Country Office is encouraged to continue to augment the report as the pandemic and its implications evolve. Stakeholders commented favourably on the Country Office's role in providing direct emergency supplies to women in shelters and crisis centres, as well as to CSOs that support women in crisis.

The thoughtful and holistic approach taken by the Country Office in its response to the pandemic through policy, data analysis and direct support is impressive, especially considering that personnel were directly impacted by the pandemic as they worked from home, assumed childcare and home schooling responsibilities and, in some cases, contracted COVID-19 or cared for family members who fell ill.



LESSON 3: Short-term projects and pilots are less impactful for long-term culture and perception changes.

Programmes last only as long as donor funding. The benefits and challenges of this reality can be seen in the portfolio of the Country Office during the period of implementation of its current Strategic Note. Long-term programming, including through regional programmes on Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Ending Violence against Women, has achieved sustainable gains, national ownership and cultural shifts. In particular, these programmes have supported governmental institutions, service providers and CSOs through entire budget cycles,

rounds of case management and all the way through the international convention monitoring cycle from the start of monitoring to the point of receiving and using international feedback as an advocacy tool. This longer-term approach means that these organizations have developed internal tools and capacity and the benefits of the efforts have been realized, all contributing to the cycle of sustainability and long-term efforts in gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Conversely, programming in the Women's Economic Empowerment and Women, Peace and Security thematic areas was time-limited and/or pilot-based without realistic plans to scale up activities. As a result, strong gains in the area of Women, Peace and Security in the early part of the Strategic Note period decreased, and results diminished when funds ran out. In Women's Economic Empowerment,

although entrepreneurship grants were initially provided and the Country Office participated in joint programming, programming was small and time-limited. These areas were far less impactful as a result of these smaller, shorter interventions and did not succeed in achieving meaningful or transformative results.



LESSON 4: Partner collaboration allows smaller CSOs with vulnerable constituents to participate in programming and to expand the number of beneficiaries impacted.

In the context of implementation of the Ending Violence against Women regional programme in Albania, CSOs – including the Albania Disability Rights Foundation, Roma Women Rights Centre and LGBT Alliance – partnered to receive funding and conduct programme interventions. The partnership was constructed in order to allow two smaller organizations to participate through the strength of the third, larger organization.

The partnership in itself was unusual, as organizations with disparate beneficiary groups frequently find themselves competing for funding resources, rather than partnering. In this case, the organizations served quite different but equally marginalized populations that would rarely be seen in an intersectional manner: women with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community, and Roma and Egyptian women.

To the credit of the Country Office, the regional programme and the CSOs, this partnership has yielded efficiency gains. For the Country Office and the programme, the participation of these organizations allows programme funding to directly benefit specific marginalized women.

The CSOs noted the benefits of their partnership, including an increase in capacity, a broader stakeholder base for their work, a shared approach to best practices and collegiality between organizations. These organizations, and their target groups, may not have had the benefit of participation in the programme without this partnership. This kind of direct, intersectional benefit can be challenging for UN Women programming, especially with respect to engaging smaller, grass-roots or beneficiary-specific CSOs. The Country Office and the Regional Office are encouraged to analyse the specific structure and benefits of this partnership for replication.



LESSON 5: Capitalizing on strengths and showing leadership in critical gender equality areas requires a strategic resourcing model.

The Country Office developed a number of strengths during the period of the Strategic Note, including its singular relationship with INSTAT and its reputation for producing needs assessments and knowledge products. It also faced challenges in terms of “competing” with other United Nations agencies for the limited attention and resources of international donors, particularly in terms of its relative size and capacity.

Building on strengths would support a push for a greater leadership role in joint programmes as the Country Office establishes its competitive advantage in terms of understanding the gender equality and women's empowerment environment in Albania. However, this is a cyclical challenge. The Country Office is dependent on resourcing the data and research arm through project financing and

using an external consultant. More funding from joint programmes would allow the Country Office to bring that expertise in-house as a cross-thematic resource. However, without that resource in place, it is challenging for the Country Office to obtain these funds.

This lesson should be viewed as an opportunity for the Country Office to develop a strategic approach to in-house personnel growth (both in terms of expertise and number) through dedicated funding for the implementation of the Strategic Note. There is a business case to be made that this type of funding would help to significantly enhance gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania, through more knowledge, timely investigations into emerging issues, reliable gender disaggregated data and the credibility of an evidence-based approach.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Despite leadership challenges related to the turnover of Country Representatives (during the Strategic Note period the Country Office had three different Country Representatives and two interim periods with appointed officers in charge), the UN Women Albania Country Office has been largely successful in this period, with tangible gains set against a small resource envelope and a global pandemic in 2020–2021. Currently the leadership in the Country Office has stabilized, with a positive impact on the performance of the Country Office.

CONCLUSION 1



Working in a complex environment, the Country Office has been active in ensuring its work is aligned with partner priorities and the needs of women and girls in Albania. There is an ongoing need to refine this alignment to ensure it meets the ambitions of Albania for accession to the EU and the needs of the most marginalized women and girls.

The Strategic Note and its interventions were developed to directly support Albania's national and international commitments, UNCT outcomes as established in the Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017–2021, and the identified needs of women and girls in Albania. The Country Office worked throughout the Strategic Note period to validate this alignment, through constant partner engagement, consultation and ongoing research into emerging gender equality and women's empowerment issues.

While the work of the Country Office throughout the period was consistent in terms of its focus on the most marginalized women and girls, the Strategic Note lacked a

specific and targeted cross-thematic approach. Likewise, it was not as specifically directed at Albania's EU ambitions as it could have been given this critical national priority.

There is opportunity to strengthen the next Strategic Note, through greater engagement with civil society with respect to the needs of target beneficiaries, to engage more actively in mainstreaming gender in the EU negotiations, and to ensure that the theory of change of the Strategic Note aligns directly with the key priorities of Albania.

This conclusion is based on findings 1, 2, 3 and 21.

CONCLUSION 2



The collaborative approach of the Country Office has been effective in meeting its coordination mandate and supporting the implementation of joint programmes. There is room for the Country Office to expand its coordination impact by convening gender equality stakeholders across Albania.

The Country Office's strength in finding synergies between programmes and among partners has created a coherent approach across its portfolio, across the gender elements of the UNCT portfolio and between stakeholders in the sector. There is continued work to be done to ensure that civil society is well integrated into the dialogue, as well as to ensure that the gender elements of joint programmes are appropriately prominent.

A strengthened leadership strategy within joint programmes and externally in convening the broader gender equality and women's empowerment community would support the Country Office's coordination mandate and increase opportunities for funding. This leadership strategy must include capitalizing on unique Country Office offerings, finding sustainable resourcing for key in-house positions and asserting leadership at key opportunities within the UNCT and with stakeholders.

This conclusion is based on findings 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

CONCLUSION 3



Country Office programming has made long-term gains for gender equality and women's empowerment in Albania. Capitalizing on these gains and expanding the reach of the portfolio will require innovative and strategic approaches to programming and partnership.

The Country Office's approach to Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting has been holistic, achieving tangible, long-term gains across normative, cultural and service delivery strata. Its horizontal approach to data and research across thematic areas has also been impactful. Other programming areas have seen smaller but still meaningful outcomes, although they have struggled from a lack of resourcing.

The programming successes have been meaningful, but they are conventional in terms of their approach and methodology. A broader impact, particularly with respect

to shifting the popular discourse on the role of women in society, requires stretching beyond conventional approaches and thematic areas.

Work throughout the Strategic Note period has laid the foundation for a more aggressive and innovative approach to programming in the next period, engaging in emerging areas with a broader network of partners and seeking a deeper impact on cultural norms.

This conclusion is based on findings 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

CONCLUSION 4



There is room to optimize the strength of the Country Office team, including through strategic approaches to resource mobilization and allocation.

The Country Office team is well regarded for its technical competence, flexible and respectful approach, and dedication. However, the team is underresourced and stretched. Resource mobilization during the period of the Strategic Note was low in key thematic areas and suffered due to leadership turnover and challenges. As a result, the office lacked the cross-functional resourcing required to lift its capacity to a higher level and generate funding opportunities. However, it is important to acknowledge a positive

and promising trend in terms of resource mobilization and stabilized leadership during the last period of Strategic Note implementation.

A new strategic approach to resource mobilization and long-term internal sustainability, already under way in 2021, as well as improved "storytelling" capacities, will support the Country Office's ability to perform at the high-functioning level it is capable of.

This conclusion is based on findings 16, 17, 18 and 19.

CONCLUSION 5



As a result of the Country Office's work, sustainable gender equality and women's empowerment and support for the most marginalized women and girls have advanced in Albania. More focus is required to ensure the gender machinery and the national discourse continue this momentum.

The Country Office's work has advanced gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania across formal and informal systemic lines, through advances to the normative framework including through the gender-related SDG indicators, long-term capacity strength in partners and some shifts in the social discourse on gender equality and women's empowerment. The Country Office has maintained a targeted and cross-portfolio focus on the needs of the most marginalized women and girls, an approach that has resulted in tangible gains and partner attention to these vulnerable groups.

However, these gains are not guaranteed and there is still work to be done. In particular, the national gender machinery continues to require the support of the international community. Negative social and cultural attitudes towards women and girls remain pervasive.

Transformative change will require a stronger national gender machinery and an unrelenting focus on the national attitude towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

This conclusion is based on findings 20, 21, 22 and 23.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this section are to be addressed by UN Women in partnership and consultation with relevant national stakeholders in Albania.

Presentations of the evaluation's preliminary findings, discussion of lessons and high-level recommendations, along with final sessions to validate the report, took place with the Country Office and the members of the Evaluation Reference Group between April and June 2021 and informed the final recommendations below.

The Country Office and the Evaluation Reference Group reviewed the recommendations, and subsequent modifications were integrated, as appropriate. The Recommendations section of this report includes potential actions suggested by the Country Office, based on feasibility within its current programme of work. The level of assessed impact, priority, difficulty and suggested time frame are indicated below each specific recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Country Office should focus the next Strategic Note with a clear theory of change that maintains its systems approach and introduces an agenda for advancing visibility, leadership and impact.

Impact and priority

HIGH

Timeframe

IMMEDIATE

Difficulty

LOW

Actions for consideration

- Conduct an in-depth strategic planning session with Country Office personnel and key contributors as part of the development of the next Strategic Note to ensure that the Strategic Note and its theory of change capitalize on opportunities, advance partnerships, target the most marginalized women and girls and explicitly align with Albania's priorities, including EU accession.
- Strengthen civil society partnerships across thematic areas, exploring opportunities to reframe existing structures such as CSAG, identifying new partners in emerging areas and exploring a more robust partnership with academia.
- Assess the role/advantage of UN Women in less developed and emerging areas and develop a realigned strategic approach to engagement in these areas, including in dialogue with donors.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Country Office, in concert with the Resident Coordinator, should develop a strategy to maintain UN Women's strong position in the UNCT and to continue supporting the meaningful contributions of UN Women to United Nations Joint Programmes.

Impact and priority

HIGH

Timeframe

MEDIUM-TERM

Difficulty

MEDIUM

Actions for consideration

- Continue fostering UN Women's leadership on United Nations system coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of UN Women's participation in the UNCT, Gender Thematic Result Group and other inter-agency groups by determining key areas of support in the context of new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework implementation.
- In concert with the Resident Coordinator, develop an assertive approach to the role of UN Women in joint programmes that ensures that UN Women can continue to invest in and contribute to joint programmes while, at the same time, not penalizing its overall footprint and resources.
- Seek consultation with UNDP and the Resident Coordinator to reassess the split oversight of the Ending Violence against Women portfolio between UN Women and UNDP, considering opportunities for UN Women to play programming and/or thought leadership roles.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Country Office should build an innovative culture in the office and in the development of its upcoming Strategic Note, including in relation to UN Women’s gender equality and women’s empowerment coordination mandate within the United Nations system.

*Impact and priority***MEDIUM**

Actions for consideration

- Develop and introduce innovation concepts into dialogue with United Nations colleagues and donors in Albania.

*Timeframe***MEDIUM-TERM**

- Conduct regular innovation sessions with Country Office personnel to encourage the exploration of creative ideas.

*Difficulty***MEDIUM**

- Build opportunities to experiment into programming proposals and in dialogue with stakeholders and partners.
- Develop long-term, strategic partnerships with the private sector that support innovation through the transfer of ideas, expertise and resources.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Country Office should find ways to build the capacity of its personnel in flagship areas as well as in new and emerging topics in gender equality and women’s empowerment.

*Impact and priority***HIGH**

Actions for consideration

- Develop opportunities for all personnel to increase their gender expertise and stay current with new research, dialogue and approaches in the area of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

*Timeframe***IMMEDIATE**

- Build the knowledge of personnel in new and emerging areas such as climate change, disaster response, data analysis and digitalization.

*Difficulty***MEDIUM**

- As part of resource mobilization and planning for the new Strategic Note, seek funding for horizontal positions such as monitoring and evaluation, coordination, and data and reporting. Build staff capacity in the area of results-based management.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Country Office should develop a more strategic approach to resource mobilization.

*Impact and priority***HIGH**

Actions for consideration

- Conduct a mapping exercise of opportunities for diversified resource mobilization that considers donor priorities, global UN Women programming, new partnerships with the private sector and emerging areas and aligns these with the Country Office’s comparative advantage.

*Timeframe***IMMEDIATE**

- Leverage the high-quality production of technical expertise, research and reporting as a means of providing value added to donors and partners.

*Difficulty***MEDIUM**

- Develop strategic approaches to donors that allow UN Women to demonstrate its capacity for creating results, building on its proven successes in Ending Violence against Women and Gender-Responsive Budgeting.
- Working with the Regional Office and headquarters, the Country Office should assess its current structure and approach to ensure alignment with corporate modelling for office sustainability..

RECOMMENDATION 6**The Country Office should continue to work with the national and local governments to drive towards a sustainable model for the gender machinery in Albania.***Impact and priority***HIGH***Timeframe***LONG-TERM***Difficulty***LOW**

Actions for consideration

- In partnership with local and national Governments, conduct a mapping exercise of existing gender machinery roles, resources and needs, and a jurisdictional review of gender machinery models in other countries.
- Working in partnership with the Government, develop a strategy to expand national ownership for gender equality and women's empowerment through the strengthening of the current gender machinery, including leveraging the planned interventions in the EU for Gender Equality in Albania: Implementation of the EU Gender Equality acquis.

RECOMMENDATION 7**The Country Office should develop a cross-thematic approach to culture change and shifting social discourse on the roles of women and men in Albania.***Impact and priority***HIGH***Timeframe***MEDIUM-TERM***Difficulty***HIGH**

Actions for consideration

- Introduce interventions directly targeting social discourse into all programmes and projects, regardless of thematic area.
- Develop a specific strategy that supports the introduction of innovative approaches to impacting culture.

RECOMMENDATION 8**Building on its current success, the Country Office should ensure that the needs of the most marginalized women and girls are directly targeted in the next Strategic Note.***Impact and priority***HIGH***Timeframe***MEDIUM-TERM***Difficulty***MEDIUM**

Actions for consideration

- Develop a specific strategy in the next Strategic Note targeting interventions for marginalized women and girls across all thematic areas and using more expansive target groups of vulnerability, including by addressing the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.
- Expand outreach and support to the most marginalized women, grass-roots CSOs and communities in remote areas.
- Develop a strategic and targeted approach to private sector partnerships and working with the media as a means of impacting the social discourse about women in Albania.

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The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service is co-located with the Internal Audit Service under the Independent Evaluation and Audit Service. The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service's main purpose is to enhance accountability, inform decision-making, and contribute to learning about the best ways to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through the organization's mandate, including its normative, operational, and coordination work. The Independent Evaluation Service also works to strengthen capacities for gender-responsive evaluation within UN entities, governments, and civil society organizations.

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**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION
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GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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