



IN BRIEF

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION OF ALBANIA

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This brief presents the key conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation for the **UN Women Albania Country Office Strategic Note 2017–2021**. A CPE is a systematic assessment of the normative, coordination and operational aspects of UN Women’s contributions to development results with respect to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level.

About gender equality and women’s empowerment in Albania

Although an upper-middle-income country, Albania has one of the lowest GDP per capita 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. Since June 2014, Albania has been undertaking reforms as part of progress towards European Union (EU) accession. In the last two years, Albania has faced two devastating crises in quick succession that have negatively impacted its economic and social progress: an earthquake in November 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite ongoing improvement and consolidation of the normative framework on gender equality and the empowerment of women, women in Albania continue to struggle with social norms and patriarchal views of the role of women. There are high levels of gender-based violence

and limited economic opportunity and social services. The employment rate for women is lower than that of men. 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, which had been present in the country since 2007. The Strategic Note 2017–2021 reflects implementation of UN Women’s integrated mandate and is aligned with the country’s Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017–2021. The Country Office’s programmatic portfolio is concentrated in the thematic areas of Ending Violence against Women and Planning and Budgeting, with smaller interventions in 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 and staffing levels have remained relatively consistent, with both experiencing a slight increase in 2020.

The analysis and recommendations of the evaluation are those of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN WOMEN. This is an independent publication by the UN WOMEN Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS).

Evaluation purpose, objectives and methodology

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was as a primarily formative (forward-looking) evaluation to support the strategic learning and decision-making of the Country Office and stakeholders for the next Strategic Note, set to start in January 2022. The evaluation has a secondary summative (retrospective) perspective, to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The Country Portfolio Evaluation examined 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. 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 applied 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 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" to generate forward-looking and actionable recommendations. 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, four 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

Key achievements highlighted by the evaluation

The UN Women Albania Country Office has a commitment to alignment with national, international and United Nations Country Team (UNCT) priorities and a **dedicated focus on the needs of the most vulnerable women and girls in Albania.**

The UN Women Albania Country Office has **supported a network of civil society organizations** that conducts monitoring and shadow reporting to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

The UN Women Albania Country Office **influenced the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment principles in the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework**, including through its work on a Gender Equality Brief, a Rapid Gender Assessment and a high-quality Common Country Analysis.

The UN Women Albania Country Office's **active coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment** supported the UNCT in mainstreaming gender equality (UNCT reported meeting or exceeded 87 per cent of the UNCT System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAP) indicators) and **engaged extensively in joint programming, bringing innovative and adaptive approaches.**

Tangible results are evident in the thematic area of Ending Violence against Women, with evidence of change in social dialogue and behaviour and systemically entrenched protections and where the UN Women Albania Country Office has spearheaded normative changes and improved service delivery. In addition, the Country Office has supported the training of over 700 service providers on their legal obligations related to ending violence against women and provided anti-sexual harassment training to 420 police officers.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting remains a flagship programming area, and the Country Office has made use of its success in this area as a calling card for its expertise and as a means of increasing impacts in other thematic areas.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.