

ALBANIA

NATIONAL POLICY BRIEF



The objective of this policy brief is to present the current situation and progress made in family support on behalf of the children's rights in Albania towards achieving quality standards using the quality assurance protocol for family support services developed by the 19 countries participating in the COST Innovators Grant IG18123, QA[4]EuroFam. The aim is to provide key messages on current strengths as well as recommendations to key audiences, bringing relevant views and appraisals from the group of interdisciplinary experts, representatives of various sectors in the field at national level.

National Working Group

Consensual responses were provided by members of Albanian National Working Group comprising 13 researchers and coordinators of services and social entities at national, regional, and local levels in social, education, health, and community sectors.

1. Contextualization and characterization of family support in Albania



Q Definition and understanding of family support: Family support in Albania encompasses a variety of programs and services across social, health, employment, and education sectors, all outlined in several strategic documents and sectoral laws. The Albanian government's commitment to family support is evident through initiatives led by ministries like the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, reflected in strategic documents such as the "Social Protection Strategy 2024-2030," the "Social Inclusion Policy Document 2023-2027," and the "National Agenda for Child Rights and Protection 2021-2026." These cross-sectoral strategies include measures and objectives aimed at supporting children and families in diverse contexts. Ensuring the protection and care of mothers and children is crucial for promoting good nutrition and health, improving the well-being of mothers and their children, reducing poverty and vulnerability, and achieving gender equality in the labor market.

Q Family support services in context: Family support services in Albania are primarily funded by central and local state budgets in collaboration with civil society. The sector is undergoing decentralization, diversification, and deinstitutionalization. The coverage of social services has expanded significantly, growing from 10,000 beneficiaries in 2019 (0.35% of the population) to 42,553 beneficiaries in 2022 (1.5% of the population), surpassing the 2023 social protection strategy target of 0.5%. While the number of municipalities providing community social services for at least three beneficiary categories (People with disabilities, children, elderly) has increased to 25 (41% of the total), coverage in rural areas remains limited. Of the 493 social services offered by 339 institutions in 2021, 46% are provided by public institutions, 42% by non-public institutions, and 12% by mixed institutions. Service types include community services (21%), pre-social services (17%), emergency services (14%), residential services (14%), family services (11%), and less than 10% each for alternative care, online counseling, and specialized services. Social services mainly support families in need (20%) and children with CA (17%).

Q Political perspective on family support: The provision of family support services is primarily the responsibility of local government, which, with increased funding, should enhance cooperation with civil society. The Social Fund, activated in December 2019, provides dedicated funding for municipalities to develop social services. By 2022, the fund aimed to support 35 municipalities, prioritizing those without existing services. From 2019 to 2022, the Social Fund disbursed 539 million ALL to local governments. In collaboration with local and international NGOs, the Fund established 40 social care services, benefiting 10,744 individuals, including children at risk, persons with disabilities, the elderly, victims of violence and trafficking, Roma and Egyptian families, and LGBTI+ individuals.

2. Key messages from the National Strengths and Recommendations Report



Families and Children

STRENGTHS

1. Families and children show exceptional resilience, enabling them to adapt and thrive despite challenges. Their ability to overcome difficulties and maintain stability amidst adversity is a key strength.
2. The development of an integrated model for health and social protection services ensures continuity in education and effective coordination between social, educational, and health services for children benefiting from economic assistance.
3. Expand support networks for families and children by increasing access to parenting and financial assistance programs. Strengthen social care staff through enhanced training, a comprehensive continuing education framework, and improved alignment between academic qualifications, licensing, and professional development.
4. Prioritize early childhood intervention with a comprehensive health package and integrated family visits for children aged 0-5 years. This strategy addresses the needs of vulnerable children, monitors early development, identifies limitations promptly, and promotes intersectoral cooperation for ongoing support.
5. Effective measures are in place to alleviate poverty and empower individuals, including those with disabilities. Transparent and gender-responsive financial schemes enhance living conditions and integration, improving resilience and crisis management capabilities.
6. The expansion of integrated, accessible, high-quality, and gender-responsive social services represents a key strength. Advancements in deinstitutionalization and collaborations with local governments and stakeholders ensure a comprehensive approach to supporting families and children.
7. Significant improvements have been achieved in the geographical coverage, diversification, accessibility, and digitization of social care services. Enhanced gender sensitivity in service delivery ensures that these services effectively address the diverse needs of families and children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase access to parenting and financial assistance programs. Strengthen social care staff through enhanced training, a comprehensive continuing education framework, and improved alignment between academic qualifications, licensing, and professional development.
2. Continue prioritizing early childhood intervention with a comprehensive health package and integrated family visits for children aged 0-5 years. This approach should focus on monitoring early development and promoting intersectoral cooperation for effective support.
3. Enhance and expand measures for poverty alleviation and empowerment, ensuring that financial schemes remain transparent, gender-responsive, and capable of effectively integrating and supporting individuals, including those with disabilities.
4. Further develop and expand integrated, accessible, high-quality, and gender-responsive social services. Continue advancements in deinstitutionalization and strengthen collaborations with local governments and stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive support approach.
5. Focus on improving the geographical coverage, diversification, accessibility, and digitization of social care services. Ensure that these services remain gender-sensitive and effectively address the diverse needs of families and children.
6. Foster and maintain robust cross-sectoral cooperation, especially with a focus on the NE program and the Children's Guarantee plan, to ensure a more integrated and effective response to children's needs across various sectors.
7. Strengthened cross-sectoral cooperation, with a focus on the NE program and the Children's Guarantee plan, has been a key strength. This collaborative approach fosters a more integrated response to the needs of children across multiple sectors.



Professionals

STRENGTHS

1. Strengthening the capacities and status of social care professionals ensures the delivery of high-quality, effective, and gender-responsive services. Enhanced training, improved working conditions, and robust support systems collectively contribute to better service outcomes and greater professional satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To further enhance the effectiveness of social care services, it is recommended to invest in comprehensive professional development programs that include ongoing training, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities. Improving working conditions and support systems will not only elevate service quality but also boost job satisfaction and retention among social care professionals.



Policymakers

STRENGTHS

1. The initiative to fund 51 municipalities in establishing community services effectively supports socio-economic integration and promotes social enterprises, thereby enhancing community support and employment opportunities.
2. Enhanced capacity to address vulnerabilities during crises ensures that financial benefits and support systems are more agile and responsive, improving protection and support for individuals in urgent situations.
3. Efforts to improve the performance and transparency of the disability assessment scheme ensure more effective, gender-responsive management of individual needs and timely support during crises.
4. Reinforced cooperation and support for the Social Employment Fund significantly enhance its impact, promoting better inclusion and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
5. Strengthened cross-sectoral cooperation, particularly through the NE program and Child Guarantee plan, ensures a more integrated and resource-efficient approach to addressing children's needs across various sectors.
6. The increase in resilience-focused social care services provides enhanced support for families and individuals, improving their ability to cope with and recover from challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to increase and streamline municipal funding to ensure that community services are effectively established and maintained, with a focus on long-term sustainability and impact.
2. Further develop and refine crisis response mechanisms to ensure even greater agility and responsiveness in financial benefits and support systems, incorporating feedback from affected individuals.
3. Continue to enhance disability assessment practices by incorporating feedback from stakeholders and ensuring that the system remains transparent, equitable, and responsive to diverse needs.
4. Increase support and resources for the Social Employment Fund to broaden its reach and effectiveness, ensuring that people with disabilities have ample opportunities for employment and integration.
5. Enhance collaboration across sectors to improve the integration of services and resources, with a particular focus on children's programs to maximize their impact.
6. Build on the success of resilience-focused social care services by developing new strategies that address emerging needs and enhance support for families facing diverse challenges.



Academics

STRENGTHS

1. The expansion of community-based services, including parental support, strengthens local support networks, offering families and children greater access to tailored resources and services.
2. Academics contribute valuable research and expertise to the field of family support, driving evidence-based practices and policy improvements. Their work enhances the understanding of family dynamics, informs the development of effective support systems, and supports the implementation of innovative strategies in social services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to expand and improve community-based services, ensuring that they are accessible and responsive to the specific needs of families and children in various local contexts.
2. Academics should focus on conducting rigorous research to identify effective family support strategies and outcomes. They should advocate for evidence-based practices, contribute to policy development, and engage in interdisciplinary collaboration to advance the field and enhance the impact of family support services.

3. Insights and lessons learned regarding the quality of family support

1 Providing consistent and comprehensive family support—integrating emotional, financial, and educational assistance—substantially enhances family resilience, stability, and child development. This highlights the critical importance of a holistic approach in effectively addressing the multifaceted needs of families.

2 Collaborative community networks and accessible resources are essential for addressing diverse family needs and promoting overall well-being. These elements play a critical role in ensuring that support systems are effectively tailored to enhance family resilience and stability.

3 The Social Fund is a vital financing mechanism for regional and local social services, aligning with the decentralization approach. However, other local-level funding, typically from donor projects, often lacks the sustainability needed for long-term social care services. There is a need to complement and enhance the Social Fund's impact by ensuring additional local funding contributes to sustainable social care initiatives.

4 Providing consistent and comprehensive family support—integrating emotional, financial, and educational assistance—substantially enhances family resilience, stability, and child development. This highlights the critical importance of a holistic approach in effectively addressing the multifaceted needs of families.

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