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COUNTRY SHEET ALBANIA

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Our local partners in Albania are:

- Albanian Centre for Population and Development (ACPD): a national NGO active in promoting equal chances for vulnerable groups and women, providing empowerment training and awareness rising activities, especially in the field of reproductive health and rights
- Albanian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR): a national NGO active in the promotion of human rights, providing information and training on human rights conditions and abuse

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CHAPTER I

1. Access to territory (from country of asylum to return area)

In March 2005, Albania signed the agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the readmission of persons residing without permission (illegal residents), through which an EU Member State can ask Albania to readmit any of its nationals.¹

The purpose of the agreement is to establish rapid and effective procedures for the identification and return of persons residing without authorization on the territories one of the Member States.

Since 1 January 2008, Albanian citizens enjoy the benefits of a visa facilitation agreement with the European Union. This agreement provides simplified procedures for issuing visas, including a visa fee waiver for a broad range of categories of citizens including students, sportsmen and sportswomen, cultural workers, journalists, people visiting family members living in the EU, people in need of medical treatment, businessmen etc. Up to 50% of Albanian citizens can currently be exempt from the visa fee. People who pay for visas are charged the special reduced rate of EUR 35 instead of EUR 60.

The EU initiated further steps towards the liberalisation of its visa regulations when on 28 January 2008 the General Affairs and External Relations Council asked the Commission to present a detailed roadmap. The roadmap should set clear and transparent conditions for countries in the region to get further visa alleviations. In March 2008, the dialogue on visa liberalisation with Albania was launched, and in June 2008 the Roadmap document was officially installed.²

1.1 Documentation

Based on the article 100 of the Constitution, and article 83 of Law No. 8492, 27.5.2000 "For foreigners", foreign citizens who enter or leave the territory of the Republic of Albania, are obliged to pass the border only through the Border Pass and Control Points (BPCP).³ All other passing of the state border is considered as illegal, except for the cases foreseen in bilateral or multilateral agreements (concerning defined border incidents).⁴

¹ European Council. EC Decision 2005/371/EC, OJ L 124, 17.05.2005, http://EURlex.EURopa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!DocNumber&type_doc=Decision&an_doc=2005&nu_doc=371&lg=en, last accessed May 2007

² Press Release of the Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, June 3, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.EURopa.eu/en/press_releases/roadmap_on_visa_free_travel_opens_eu_door_s_to_albania, last accessed October 2008

³ More information is available at the official homepage of the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <http://www.mfa.gov.al/>, last accessed October 2008

⁴ Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 439, 4.8.2000, "On the Entrance, Stay and Treatment of Foreigners In the Republic Of Albania"

1.1.1 Travel documents needed for returnees

To enter Albania, an international recognized passport is necessary. Every Albanian citizen older than 16 years has the right to obtain a passport or, if out of country, at all Albanian diplomatic and/or consular offices around the world. For citizens younger than 16 years, Albanian authorities provide passports which are valid for a five-year period, while all other passports have a validity period up to ten years.⁵

The regular passport is the main document requested for a returnee. When taking the written declaration to the border control, the returnee should also declare the financial means, and the address of the place where he/she will stay in the Republic of Albania. The returnee should also declare the state where he/she coming from, the activity in the country of origin and other documents that certify his/her stay in the country of origin. All the acts should be up to date (produced and issued in the last three months, from the date of their submission at the local police commissariat).

1.1.2 Documents needed in the country of return

Documents required by the police (border or local police) are the following documents:

- the request for entry permission: purpose of the return and residence in the Republic of Albania;
- passport and a notarized photocopy of the pages of the passport that holds data of concern (the page containing the photo and the generalities of the holder, the page that contains the Albanian visa, as well as the page containing the dated entry stamp). The photocopy is kept in the file;
- declaration of return, stamped by the country of return;
- good behaviour letter by the police authorities for the last six months;
- proof of address;
- family certificate if the person is married;
- financial documents, bank guarantees, savings records showing that the returnee has already an activity in the country of origin⁶;

The Ministry of Interior collaborates on the issue of returnees to Albania with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Prosecutor's Office, the State Information Service, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice. This collaboration is regulated in joint acts, issued for the application of the law, and introduces concrete measures for the returnee's engagement into Albanian society.⁷

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Albania (MFA). Directive no. 7677, date 03.12.2002

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Albania (MFA). Directive no. 7677, date 03.12.2002

⁷ Republic of Albania. The Administrative Code of Albania, Law Nr 8485,12-05-1999, Official Bulletin, Nr 19, p. 578

The foreign citizens who enter in the territory of the Republic of Albania must present to the border police international recognized travel documents.⁸

1.1.3 How to obtain necessary documents

A returnee can apply for a regular passport at the Police commissariats, allocated at his/her place of settlement. The application forms and instruction are free of charge, but the passport fee is 5.000 ALL⁹, payable to any police commissariat when applying.

All Albanian citizens residing abroad can submit the necessary documents at the Albanian Consulates in form of a written request, a birth certificate and 3 pass photos (4 x 5 cm). Further information provides the consulate offices of the Albanian embassies.¹⁰

1.1.4 Price of necessary documents

All Albanian citizens living abroad may apply for a 10 year Albanian Passport providing the following original documents:

- one Albanian birth Certificate (issued within the last 3 months)
- five photographs (50x40 mm, face must cover white background for 70%)
- a personal request addressed to the Embassy with the own personal details; actual residence, profession, family status, contact telephone number
- the passport fee (The fee depends on the respective consulate. The Albanian Consulate in Berlin/Germany calculate a fee of EUR 80 + EUR 50 shipping costs = EUR 130¹¹)

An Albanian citizen under 16 years of age who has never married is regarded as a child. A parent or another person who carries responsibility for the child must lodge a passport application for a child. A child cannot be included in an adult's passport. Each child, including a newborn infant, must be issued its own passport. The validity of a child's passports (up to 16 of age) is normally valid for 5 years. For such a procedure the following documents are required:

- the child's full original Albanian birth certificate. Documents other than the original are not acceptable.
- a family certificate
- five Passport Photos (50x40 mm, face must cover white background for 70%)

⁸ Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 439, 4.8.2000, "On the Entrance, Stay and Treatment of Foreigners In the Republic Of Albania"

⁹ ALL= Albanian LEK. 100 ALL is approximately USD 1 or 0.8 EUR (exchange rate, November 2008)

¹⁰ Most Albanian embassies have no own websites. An exception is the Albanian embassy in Berlin/Germany. Its website provides practical information of the consulate: http://www.botschaft-albanien.de/sherbimi_konsullor_legalizime.htm, last accessed October 2008

¹¹ Albanian Embassy, Berlin/Germany, Veprime Me Pasaportat, http://www.botschaft-albanien.de/veprime_me_pasaporta.htm, last accessed October 2008

- a written consent of all the persons who carry responsibility for the child is needed. In most cases these are the child's natural parents.
- the passport fee

Table: Diplomatic Missions of Albania in EU-countries¹²

<p>Austria Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Austria Prinz Eugen Str. 18/1/5, A-1040 Wien Tel.: +43 13288656, Fax : +43 13288658 Email: embassy.vienna@mfa.gov.al</p>	<p>FRANCE Embassy of the Republic of Albania in France 57, Avenue Marceau 75116 Paris Tel.: +33 147233100, Fax: +33 147235985 Email: ambassade.paris@mfa.gov.al</p>	<p>NETHERLANDS Embassy of the Republic of Albania in the Netherlands Anna Paulownastraat 109 B, 2518 BD The Hague Tel.: +31704272101, +31703632021 Fax: +31704272083 Email: embassy.hague@mfa.gov.al</p>
<p>BELGIUM 30, Rue Tenbosch, 1000 Bruxelles Tel.: +3226403544, +3226401422, Fax: +3226403177, 03126402858 Email: ambassade.bruxelles@mfa.gov.al</p>	<p>GERMANY Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Germany Friedrichstr. 231, D-10 969 Berlin Tel.: +49302593040, Fax: +493025931890 E-mail: embassy.berlin@mfa.gov.al</p>	<p>POLAND Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Poland Ul. Altowa 1, 02-386 Warszawa Tel.: +48228241427, Fax: +48228241426 E-mail: embassy.warsaw@mfa.gov.al</p>
<p>BULGARIA Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Bulgaria 10 Krakra Str. 1504 Sofia Tel.: +35929433857, Fax: +35929433069 E-mail: embassy.sofia@mfa.gov.al</p>	<p>GREECE Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Greece 87, Vekiareli GR. 15237 Filothei, Athens Tel.: +302106876200, Fax: +302106876223 E-mail: embassy.athens@mfa.gov.al</p>	<p>ROMANIA Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Romania Str. Duiliu Zamfirescu no.7, Sector1 , Bucuresti Tel.: +4012118743; Fax: +40212108039 E-mail: embassy.bucharest@mfa.gov.al</p>
<p>CZECH REPUBLIC Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Czech Republic Pod Kstansky 22, 16000 Praha 6 Tel.: +42 0233370594, Fax: +42 0233377232 E-mail: embassy.prague@mfa.gov.al</p>	<p>HUNGARY Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Hungary Gabor Aron u. 55, Budapest 1026 Tel.: +36 13268905, +36 1326 8906, +36 13266336 Fax: +3613268904 E-mail: embassy.budapest@mfa.gov.al</p>	<p>UNITED KINGDOM Embassy of the Republic of Albania in United Kingdom 2nd floor , 24 Buckingham Gate London SW1E 6LB, UK Tel.: +44 2078288897 Fax: + 44 2078288869 E-mail: embassy.london@mfa.gov.al</p>
<p>DENMARK Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Denmark NY Ostergade 7, 5th, 1101 Kobenhaven K. Tel.: +45 33917070, +45 33917979, Fax: +45 33917969</p>	<p>ITALY Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Italy Via Asmara, 5-00199 Roma Tel.: +390686224120, Fax: + 39 0686216005 Email: embassy.rome@mfa.gov.al Consulate Bari:</p>	<p>SPAIN Embassy of the Republic of Albania in Spain C/Maria de Molina 64-5 B, 28006 Madrid Tel.: +34915612118, +34915616985 Fax: +34915613775, Cel.:</p>

¹² Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.al/web/DIPLOMATIC_REPRESENTATIV_15_2.php, last accessed October 2008

Email: embassy.copenhagen@mfa.gov.al	General Consulate in Bari Corso Vittorio Emanuele 171, 70122 Bari Tel. Tel. +39 080 5727647, +39 080 5289728 Fax. +39 080 5283335 cel: +39 329 667 2460 Email: consulate.bari@mfa.gov.al	+34617400594
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1.2 Travel to country of origin

Albania is reachable by air, by sea and by land.

1.2.1 By air

The only international airport of Albania is the "Mother Theresa International Airport" (<http://www.tirana-airport.com.al/>), located 25 km northwest of Tirana. Transportation between Tirana and the airport is provided by a shuttle bus-service, the Tirana Rinas Express, running between Skanderbeg Square and Mother Theresa Airport (single fare: 250 ALL/October 2008). Taxi service to and from the city cost about 2.000 ALL (about EUR 17).¹³

Approximate prices of airline-tickets to Albania depend on the airline, departure airport and the season. Prices are starting from EUR 120 for flights from Greece, Italy and Austria and at about EUR 250 for more northern European countries. There are only few airlines flying directly to Albania. Most flights are via Vienna, Frankfurt, Budapest, Rome or Milan. Luggage limits when travelling by air are specified by the respective agencies and vary from 20 to 25 kilograms.

Table: Airlines operating Tirana International Airport¹⁴

	Airline	Website	Contact
1	Adria Airways	www.adria-airways.com	Tel: 00 355 422 272 666
2	Albanian Airlines	www.albanianairlines.com	Tel: 00 355 422 230 857
3	Aegean Airlines	www.aegeanair.gr	Tel: 00 355 422 274 666
4	Alitalia	www.alitalia.com	Tel: 00 355 422 230 023
5	Austrian Airlines	www.aa.com	Tel: 00 355 422 235 029
6	Belleair	www.belleair.it	Tel: 00 355 422 240 194

¹³ Information according to the official airport-site. See additional Information with Taxi fares to different cities in EUR: <http://www.tirana-airport.com/files/downloads/pdf/TAXI%20OPERATING%20COSTS.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁴ For more information see <http://www.tirana-airport.com.al/>, last accessed November 2008.

7	British Airways	www.britishairways.com	Tel: 00 421 2 5710 2020
8	Bulgarian Airlines	www.air.bg	Tel: 00 355 422 230 410
9	JAT Airways	www.jat.com	Tel: 00 355 422 251 033
10	Lufthansa	www.lufthansa.com	Tel: 00 355 422 258 010
11	Malev Hungarian Airlines	www.malev.hu	Tel: 00 355 422 228 960
12	Turkish Airlines	www.turkishairlines.com	Tel: 00 355 422 234 902

1.2.2 By land

Albania has borders with Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo and Greece. From Greece several bus lines maintain daily services to Albania. Tickets cost about EUR 35 to 40, travel time is expected to be from 10 - 12 hours and there are no luggage limitations.¹⁵

The border crossings to Albania:

From Montenegro

Hani I Hotit, leading to the Northern City of Shkodra and Lake Shkodra.

Murriqan-Sukobina, which links Shkodra with Ulcinj in Montenegro.

Recently opened is Vermoshi, which links the region of Kelmendi in Albania with Plava and Gucia (Gusinje) in Montenegro.

From Macedonia

Qafe Thana pass, leading to Pogradec, Librazhd and Elbasan.

Tushemisht, at the Southeastern end of Lake Ohrid, leading to Pogradec.

Billata, leading to Peshkopi or Bulqiza and Burrel.

Gorica, leading to the northern shores of Lake Prespa.

From Kosovo

Morina pass, which links Kukes, Albania, with Pristina, Kosovo.

From Greece

Through Kapshtica, leading to Korca.

Kakavija, leading to Gjirokastra.

Qafe Boti Konispol, leading to Filat.

Tre Urat, connecting Permet with Konica.¹⁶

There are regular bus services between the following cities:

Tirana - Tetova, Macedonia, through Qafe Thana

Tirana - Prishtina and other towns in Kosovo through Morina

Korca - Thessalonica, Greece, through Kapshtica

Tirana - Athens through Kakavija

Tirana - Sofia, Bulgaria, and Istanbul from Qafe Thana

¹⁵ More information on local transport can be found at <http://www.albanianyellowpages.com/infopages.html>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶ Albanian Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports. Available at: <http://www.albaniantourism.com/>, last accessed November 2008.

Table: Main Transport Travel Agencies operating in Albania (according to the website <http://www.albaniantourism.com/>)

ROY- 2" (Tirana - Pristina; Tirana- Peje) (Tirana- Athens) Address: Bul. "Zogu I", Tirana Phone & Fax 04 262 509	"VJOSA TRAVEL" Address: "Willson" Square, Tirana Fax 04 253 929, mob. 068 202 238
"KLID BALLKAN INTERBUS" (Tirana- Athens -Tirana) (Tirana- Skopje- Tirana) Address: "Murat Toptani" Str. n 26, Tirana Phone 04 235 491, Fax 04 222 228	"JOY TRAVEL" (Tirana - Athens - Tirana) Address: "Selman Stermasi" Stadium Phone & Fax 04 273 030 / 272 932
"SKENDERBEU" (Tirana -Thessalonica - Tirana) Address: "Mine Peza" Str P. 139 Phone & Fax 04 234 629 ¹⁷	

1.2.3 By sea

Albania can be accessed by sea through its two main ports:

- Durres, provides linkages with the Italian ports of Ancona, Bari, Brindisi and Trieste
- Vlora, provides linkage with the Italian ports of Bari and Brindisi

And through two further local ports:

- Shengjin, provides linkage with the Italian port of Bari
- Saranda, provides daily connections with the Greek Island of Corfu.

Departure times, costs and other actual information about travelling to Vlora and Durres are accessible via the "Ferry Guide 2008/2009: Albania".¹⁸

Contact: main ports

- Port of Durres Phone 052 220 28
- Port of Vlora Phone 033 245 21 / 294 18
- Port of Saranda Phone 0732 2734

1.3 Entry procedure

Albanian citizens entering the Republic of Albania, either by air or land or sea, have to possess a regular passport. The only reported problem entering the country is the still

¹⁷ Albanian Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports. Available at: <http://www.albaniantourism.com/>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁸ Ferry Guide 2008/2009: Albania, http://uk.geocities.com/my_ferries/albania.html, last accessed November 2008

widespread corruption among the border police. Especially while crossing the land borders, travellers are often forced to pay bribes.¹⁹

Vulnerable groups

The Albanian government considers any person in Albania with Albanian parents to be an Albanian citizen. All citizens - as well those with dual nationality - are subjected to the Albanian law. This means for male Albanian citizens among others that they are subjected to military service. Not to attend the military service is chargeable by law. Albanians abroad in conscription age should inquire their status at an Albanian Embassy or Consulate before returning to Albania.

1.3.1 By air

Upon arrival at Tirana Mother Theresa (currently the only operating passenger airport), the returnee has to proceed to the passport desk to report his purpose of visit.

1.3.2 By land

While travelling by land, the foreigners pass through pass controls at the border police.

1.3.3 By sea

This above rule applies when travelling by sea as well.

1.4 Impacts of former acts and statuses upon entry

1.4.1 Impacts of former refugee or subsidiary protection status

There are no reported negative impacts of former refugees or people with subsidiary protection status returning to Albania.

¹⁹ Addressed as a serious problem of his country by Gent Strzimiri, Deputy Minister of Interior of the Republic of Albania in a speech to an OSCE-conference, September 15, 2008, http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2008/09/33033_en.pdf, last accessed November 2008.

That the country makes in general sustainable progress in fighting corruption documents the newest corruption report of Transparency International, *Albania Shows Marked Improvement*, September 24, 2008, http://www.transparency.org/news_room/latest_news/press_releases_nc/2008/2008_09_23_albani_a_cpi, last accessed November 2008

1.4.2 Impacts of former unsuccessful asylum claim

There are no reported negative impacts of failed former asylum claims of returnees to Albania.

1.4.3 Impacts of former illegal exit from country of origin

According to the Albanian law the illegal exit from the country is an offence and is sentenced by penalties, but in practice those cases have been ignored and penalties have never been applied by the judicial system. There are no precise figures on the significant Albanian migration movement in the 1990s. Most of these migrants left the country illegally and resided in their host countries mostly as well illegally. For example, officially only 4.300 Albanians possessed a residence permit in 1997 in Greece. But when the country adopted a regularisation programme for undocumented immigrants (between November 1997 and May 1998), 239.000 Albanian citizens applied.²⁰ Hence, behind the official figures, there are a rather large number of undocumented migrants not only in Greece but elsewhere in Europe also, particularly in Italy. About 20% of the population has been living abroad, rendering Albania one of the countries with the highest migration flows worldwide.²¹

1.4.4 Impacts of crime committed outside the country of origin

Albania has signed extradition treaties with the EC and other countries. Returnees wanted by international warrant of arrest will be detained while entering Albania.

The criminal law of the Republic of Albania is applicable to an Albanian citizen who commits an offence within the territory of another country, when that offence is concurrently punishable, unless a foreign court has given a final sentence (Article 6 of the Criminal Code). The law applies as well for Albanians with dual citizenship.²²

Article 7 of the Criminal Code declares the jurisdiction of Albanian courts on criminal acts committed by foreign citizens (Letter "d" amended by Law No. 8733, date 24 January 2001, article 2) in Albania. Article 7 declares jurisdiction on foreign citizens committing crimes outside the Albanian State if these crimes are:

- crimes against humanity;
- crimes against the Albanian independence and its constitutional order;
- terrorist acts;

²⁰ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) *Trends in International Migration*, 2000, pp- 23-197

²¹ International Monetary Fund (IMF), Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 32, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²² Albanian Criminal Code, accessible via: <http://www.legislationline.org/>, last accessed November 2008

- crimes which aimed on organizing prostitution, trafficking of human beings, production and illegal trafficking of weapons, drugs and other narcotic and psychotropic substances, nuclear substances, pornographic material and illegal trafficking of art works and objects with a historical, cultural, and archaeological value;
- hijacking airplanes or ships;
- falsifying the Albanian state seal, Albanian currency, or Albanian bonds or stocks;
- crimes which affect the life or health of Albanian citizens, which the law sentence with punishments of five years or more.

If offenders are already convicted abroad it is not legal to convict them for the same crime in Albania. Albanian offenders, which were convicted abroad, have the right to request a transfer to Albania to serve the sentence there.

If acts of Albanian citizens are not considered as a crime in the legislation of the country where the act is carried out but may be considered so according to the Albanian legislation, the person becomes liable to prosecution in Albania. All cases are judged on an individual basis.

Article 11 of the Albanian Criminal Code specify the extradition of persons which have been charged of crimes abroad but remain free in Albania. On application these persons can be arrested by the Albanian authorities and extradited to the respective country. All cases are considered on an individual bases.²³

1.5 Customs regulation

The customs regulations are very much depending on the means of transportation. Albania's customs authorities may enforce strict regulations concerning temporary imports into or from Albania of some items.²⁴ Albania observes the standard European limits on duty-free goods. Restricted firearms, explosives, unregistered military equipment as well as unregistered antiques (for export) are prohibited to be carried. Pets must be accompanied by veterinarian health certificate issued at point of origin. Pets may enter as passenger's checked baggage, in the cabin or as cargo. Article 28 of the Customs Code fixes customs tariffs in the Republic of Albania.²⁵

1.6 Access to return area

Most Albanians travel the country in private minibuses (*furgons*) or state-owned buses, and they are frequent, cheap and comfortable. Bus service is available between all

²³ Interview of the Albanian NGO "Albanian Institute for International Studies" (AIIS) with Prof. S. Kaçupi, Law Faculty, Tirana University, January 22, 2007. Contact information of AIIS in Appendix I

²⁴ Federation of International Trade Associations (FITA), *Import Regulations and Customs Duties, Albania*, http://www.fita.org/countries/marche_85.html, last modified in May 2007, last accessed November 2008

²⁵ For current values, see www.dogana.gov.al/doc/nk2004tarifa2006_new.html, last accessed November 2008

major cities but limited almost exclusively at daytime. Many Albanians looking for public transport prefer to use privately owned vans, which function as an alternate system of bus routes and operate almost entirely without schedules or set fares.

There are no commercial domestic flights and few rail connections. A limited railway network operates, with daily passenger trains leaving Tirana for Shkodra, Fier, Ballsh, Vlora and Pogradec. Albania's standard-gauge rail lines link Shkoder with Durres, Tirana, Elbasan, Pogradec, Ballsh, and Vlore. The country's only international rail link, opened in 1986, connects Shkoder with Montenegro.²⁶

1.6.1 Limitations on internal travel

There are no internal limitations to travel within Albania. The "Corridor VII" and the investments in the Road Durres- Kukes- Morine have facilitated travelling to the southern and northern parts of Albania. The term "Corridor VIII" or "the Corridor" refers to a West-East link between the Pan-European Transport Areas, Adriatic/Ionian Seas and the Black Sea which is defined as the main line that connects Bari Brindisi-Durres/Vlore-Tirana-Cafasan-Skopje-Sofia-Plovdiv-Burgas/Varna.

During wintertime, dangerous snow and ice conditions make roads difficult to access throughout the mountainous regions in northern Albania.

Internal travel in Albania has become secure in almost the whole territory. Former common criminal activities on the roads which are connecting Albanian cities and the heartland have almost disappeared.

1.6.1.1 Administrative restrictions

There are no identified administrative restrictions when travelling within the Albanian republic.

1.6.1.2 Practical obstacles

Weather and geological conditions can cause practical obstacles. Since Albania has a mostly mountainous terrain, which generate very low temperatures and heavy snow during winter periods, it could be difficult to access some locations in the northern and south-eastern part of Albania, in the administrative areas of Dibra, Kukesi, Bajram Curri, Kruma, and Kolonja in the southeast region of the country.

²⁶ More information on local transport can be found at http://en.allexperts.com/e/t/tr/transport_in_albania.htm, last accessed November 2008

1.6.2 Territories impossible or dangerous to approach

Mine and unexploded ordinance (UXO) are still forming a threat in certain regions of Albania. Affected areas are the border region to Kosovo where former Republic of Yugoslavia Forces established minefields during the Kosovo crisis in 1998-1999. Furthermore, the former Republic of Yugoslavia Forces carried out artillery strikes with cluster bombs up to 20km inside Albanian territories along the border to Kosovo and there are as well remnants of ordinance released by NATO aircrafts in the war with Serbia. In the largely rural prefecture of Kukes, one of the poorest in Albania, mines directly affect 39 villages. Since 1999 210 mine/uxo accidents were registered in which 238 persons were injured and 34 killed, a third of them children. The thread hindered as well the agricultural use of land, exacerbating poverty in the region.²⁷ Since 2006, however, no fatal victims are reported.²⁸

Under Article 5 of the "Mine Ban Treaty", which Albania signed in 1998, the country is obliged to destroy all antipersonnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction as soon as possible, but no later than 1 August 2010. Albania aims to complete mine clearance operations by 2009, one year before the treaty deadline. The international campaign to ban landmines, "Landmine Monitor" estimates the likelihood of meeting the treaty deadline to clear all mines in Albania as "high".²⁹

Due to the massive explosion at the munitions depot in Gerdec near Tirana in March 2008 the vicinity of the depot is still not accessible without risk. The incident itself killed 24 people, injured about 300 further and destroyed about 400 homes.³⁰

1.6.3 Means of internal travel

The road network, involving all kinds of terrestrial roads, is about 18.000 km long, out of which 3.636 km are national roads. 40% of the national roads are classified as primary roads and the other part as secondary roads. If the quantity of the roads comparable with the neighboring countries, the quality is far behind.

The current state of roads network is quite poor with only 32% of national roads in a decent situation, as shown in the table. It becomes even more aggravated because of lack of maintenance. There are about 290.000 vehicles in Albania, most of which are

²⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Albanian Mine Action Programme (AMAP) - Support to Completion Programme for a Mine Impact Free Albania (November 2005 - June 2007)*, <http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=projects/project&id=69>, last accessed November 2008

²⁸ Landmine Monitor, *LM Report Albania 2007*, <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/albania.html>, last accessed November 2008

²⁹ Landmine Monitor, *LM Report Albania 2007*, <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/albania.html>, last accessed November 2008

³⁰ Albanian daily "Panorama Newspaper", "Mëkatarët" do pastrojnë Gërdecin ("Sinners" will clean Gerdecin"), April 25, 2008, <http://www.panorama.com.al/index.php/index.php?id=13558>, last accessed November 2008, US daily "New York Times, *After Munitions Explosion, Albanians Ask Why Danger Was Placed So Near*, April 19, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/19/world/europe/19albania.html>, last accessed November 2008

second hand cars. The annual average growth is relatively high - 7,5%, though the mechanization level remains rather low - 9%, while the Europe's average is 60/100.³¹

The index of fatal road accidents in Albania is estimated to be the highest in Europe for 2005 with the values of 15/10.000. Apart from other reasons, the poor quality and insufficiency of roads is estimated to be an important reason for this high fatal numbers of accidents.

Table: Victims of traffic accidents in Albania, first six months of 2008³²

Month	Fatal	Minor wounds	Serious wounds	Total
January	32	41	9	82
February	13	49	11	73
March	18	63	20	101
April	12	56	21	89
May	24	49	29	102
June	22	56	22	100
Total	121	314	112	547

Over the last years, the government has invested in national highways running West-East and North-South. Internal travel in Albanian territories has been decentralized and is been conducted by private and state individuals. Public transport means exist only in major Albanian cities: Tirana, Elbasani, Durrresi, Vlora, Korça.

One of the Government's priorities is the Durres - Kukes - Morine corridor. The area covered by this corridor is 5.760 km², 20% of the total area of the Albanian Republic. The population on the area of the Durres - Morine (Kukes), corridor counts 1.076.032 habitants (41,1% of the Albanian population). The new road in the corridor aims to improve the traffic from Italy via the port of Durres in Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and other countries in the region.³³ The Albanian government spent in 2008 almost 89% of its capital expenditures for the highway alone, which is scheduled for the summer 2009. The project is shadowed by massive corruption-accusations in the context of not correctly booked expenditures of EUR 230m.³⁴ It is not yet predictable, if these accusations, which are brought to charge, will have a negative impact on the finalisation of the project.

³¹ Albanian Ministry of Public Affairs, Transportation and Telecommunication, *Transporti Rrugor dhe Sfida e Integritimit Pan-Europian (Road Transport and the Challenge of the Pan-European Integration)*, <http://www.mpptt.gov.al/transportet/sfida.php>, last accessed November 2008

³² Albanian Ministry of Public Affairs, Transportation and Telecommunication, *Aksidentet rrugore 6 mujori pare 2008 (Traffic accidents in the first six months of 2008)*, <http://www.mpptt.gov.al/transportet/garkullimi.php>, last accessed November 2008

³³ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, Albania 2008 Progress Report, p. 37, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

³⁴ News portal "AEnews" (Albanian Economy.com), Power Abuse Charge for Albanian Minister, November 25, 2008, <http://www.albanianeconomy.com/news/2008/11/25/power-abuse-charge-for-albanian-minister/>, last accessed November 2008

Swiss daily "Neue Züricher Zeitung" (NZZ), *Anlauf zum Reinemachen in Albanien. Korruptionsbekämpfung bringt die Regierung Berisha unter Druck*, November 25, 2008

Interurban travel is possible through private bus lines, minibuses, taxi- and train-services. Indicative costs, as observed in October and December 2008 and expressed in ALL, are as follows³⁵ :

<i>For South Albania:</i>	<i>For North Albania</i>
Tirana- Saranda 1.000 ALL	Tirana - Shkodra 500 ALL
Tirana - Gjirokastra 800 ALL	Tirana - Malesia e Madhe 600 ALL
Tirana - Vlora 500 ALL	Tirana - Tropoja 800 ALL
Tirana - Fieri 400 ALL	Tirana - Puka 700 ALL
Tirana - Lushnja 300 ALL	Tirana - Hasi 700 ALL
Tirana - Kavaja 200 ALL	Tirana-Kukesi 700 ALL
Tirana - Durres 150 ALL	Tirana - Peshkopia 700 ALL
Tirana - Elbasani 300 ALL	Tirana - Korca 800 ALL

The increase of fuel price has influenced the increase on the prices of transports as well as on the other economy fields. The prices of the tickets are increased with 50-200 ALL more than 1 year before.

The system change which Albania underwent after 1990 had severe consequences to the railways in Albania. The annual subvention for the Albanian railways amounts to around USD 4 m for operational activities and USD 3-4m for capital investments. The investment is insufficient to allow an urgently needed modernization of the railways. The Albanian railways generate an annual loss of around USD 1m.³⁶

³⁵ Please note that all enlisted prices are only indicative and are subject of change according to the transport mean selected. All prices are indicative only for travelling by bus and mini vans; taxi rates vary from 2.000 to 5.000 ALL, depending on the destination.

³⁶ Albanian Ministry of Public Affairs, *Transportation and Telecommunication, Train Traffic - Reality and Development Strategy ("Transporti Hekurudhor - Realiteti dhe Strategjia e Zhvillimit")*, http://www.mpptt.gov.al/transportet/trans_hekurudhor.php, last accessed November 2008

Table: Destinations and prices of train' tickets for traveling in Albania³⁷

Destination	Ticket-price in ALL	Destination	Ticket-price in ALL
Tirana-Durres	70	Durres-Vlore	205
Tirana-Lezhe	95	Durres-Peqin	95
Tirana-Shkoder	145	Durres-Elbasan	145
Tirana-Kavaje	95	Durres-Librazhd	190
Tirana-Rrogozhin	130	Durres-Prrenjas	230
Tirana-Lushnje	160	Durres-Pogradec	250
Tirana-Fier	205	Shkoder-Lezhe	85
Tirana-Vlore	250	Shkoder-Laç	95
Tirana-Peqin	145	Vlore-Shkoder	335
Tirana-Elbasan	190	Vlore-Pogradec	310
Tirana-Librazhd	265	Vlore-Elbasan	120
Tirana-Prrenjas	265	Vlore-Lushnje	120
Tirana-Pogradec	295	Vlore-Fier	70
Durres-Laç	95	Fier-Pogradec	265
Durres-Lezhe	120	Fier-Shkoder	295
Durres-Shkoder	160	Fier-Lushnje	70
Durres-Kavaj	55	Elbasan-Pogradec	130
Durres-Rrogozhin	85	Elbasan-Librazhd	55
Durres-Lushnje	120	Elbasan-Fier	160
Durres-Fier	160	Elbasan-Lushnje	120

³⁷ Albanian Ministry of Public Affairs, Transportation and Telecommunication, *Railway ticket prices*, <http://www.mpptt.gov.al/transportet/cmimet.php>, last accessed November 2008

CHAPTER II

2. Physical security (in return area)

The political transition in Albania has been followed by a cluster of insecurities, which have often degenerated in different forms of corruption, breakdown of law and order, even delinquency. These insecurities have been combined with other factors such as the inadequacy of the state to properly address the concerns of the citizens and the lack of strong institutions and law enforcement practices.

Since 1997, physical security in Albania has improved considerably. Already by 2003 the percentage of people who felt unsafe at home reduced to 14% and those who felt unsafe on the street to 20%.³⁸ Levels of violence in the communities have decreased remarkably, mainly due to the increased efficiency of police forces. This progress is also confirmed by the "Albania 2008 Progress Report" of the Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania.³⁹

According to the European Commission, Albania has "an extensive framework on promoting and enforcement of human rights". The EC stated that the government is willing to guarantee human rights and appreciate the strong position of the independent Human Rights Ombudsman of the country.⁴⁰ Nevertheless there are still deficits in respecting Human Rights in Albania, especially on the fields of preventing torture and trafficking.

2.1 On-going armed conflicts

There is no on-going armed conflict In Albania.

2.2 Regions with high security risk

Albania is a highly ethnically homogenous country (around 95% of the population are Albanians, 3% Greek, other nationalities 2%). There are at the moment no serious interethnic or inter-religious tensions in Albania.

Security risks in terms of political destabilization are low. Although polarization of the political system becomes periodically intense (especially during electoral periods), political conflicts were carried out peacefully.

³⁸ Albanian Institute for International Studies, *Human Security in Albania*. Tirana, April 2004. (last accessed August 2008)

³⁹ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁴⁰ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, p. 12, last accessed November 2008

Since the fall of the communist regime, the country has become part of most Conventions of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.⁴¹ The Albanian Constitution guarantees equal rights for all citizens and freedom of religion.⁴²

A certain security risk will remain in some north eastern districts of Kukës, Has and Tropojë due to remaining mines and UXO's. As mentioned before (subchapter 1.6.2), Albania aims to complete mine clearance operations by 2009.

Due to the explosion of the ammunition depot of Gerdec, the affected area is still not safe to return.

There are some toxic hotspots around industrial centres from the communist time, in particular the copper smelter in Rubik, the nitrate fertilizer Plant in Fier, the chemical plant in Durrës and the Ballsh oil refinery. It is not advisable to resettle in the vicinity of these hotspots.⁴³

In the whole northern region a number of families are affected by the phenomenon of blood-feuds. According to the EC there is not a governmental strategy to deal with blood-feuds nor reliable data on the dimension of the problem.⁴⁴ According to the Albanian NGO "Soros"-Foundation, the problem of blood-feuds is affecting a total of 1.376 families, living in 746 villages and 17 cities. Blood feuds would affect the lives of 711 children under 18 years.⁴⁵

2.3 Crime

The overall security situation in Albania continues to improve after the riots of 1997. The Albanian government has improved the country's law enforcement and security institutions and criminal activity has been greatly reduced. The statistic of homicides

⁴¹ Among the Conventions signed and ratified by the Republic of Albania are: UN Convention Against Genocide, UN Convention against all forms of racial discrimination, Economic, UN Cultural and Social Rights Convention, UN Convention on Political and Social Rights, Convention Against Torture and other forms of inhuman treatment, European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom, etc.

⁴² See text of the Albanian Constitution at the website of the President of Albania at: <http://www.president.al/english/pub/kushtetuta.asp>, last accessed November 2008

⁴³ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 38, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁴⁴ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 11, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁴⁵ The data are based on information given at the national conference "Together Against the Blood Feud", held in Tirana, March 28, 2007: Soros-Foundation Albania, *The Civil Society is in Favour of the Creation of a State Committee Against Blood Feud*, March 28, 2007, http://www.soros.al/en/28mars_gjakmarrja.htm, last accessed October 2008

reflects this tendency clearly: in 1999, 458 homicides were recorded, in 2000, 258, in 2005, 131, in 2006, 199 and in 2007, 87.⁴⁶

Albanian police forces have become increasingly successful at combating the illegal arms trade.

While overall criminal activity has decreased in recent years, reports of domestic violence and sexual assault have increased. However, it is unclear whether there is an actual increase in these criminal acts or if there is just an increase in reporting. Domestic violence is not specifically prohibited by the Albanian Criminal Code and few cases ever reached the courts. In June 2008 a new Civil Law came in power, which aims to protect victims.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, domestic violence can be described as the most virulent security risk in Albania and many of the reported capital crimes are directly linked with domestic violence.⁴⁸ At the moment the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the United Nations in Albania are conducting a survey on domestic violence which will form the first ever database on these crimes in Albania.⁴⁹ The Albanian government estimated in November 2008, that a third of the women in the country had experienced domestic violence - a phenomenon which apparently increase.⁵⁰

The Albanian government has established in May 2008 a new unit on domestic violence but not at the Ministry of the Interior but within the Ministry of Labour. The Albanian authorities organised in 2007 with the cooperation of several UN agencies, capacity building activities for social and health workers, the police and local authorities.⁵¹

Armed robberies have slightly decreased in Albania since 2007.⁵²

The organised crime has furthermore a negative impact on public security in Albania. The economical influence of the organized crime is significant. According to different Albanian economic reviews, legal investments average amounts some EUR 200m since 2003, while illegally invested funds are in excess of EUR 1bn. According to Transparency International, 80 percents of the Albanian economy is a "parallel one" with strong

⁴⁶ Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), *Albania 2008 Crime and Safety Report*, published June 22, 2008, <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=87906>, last accessed November 2008

⁴⁷ Amnesty International (AI), *Albania - Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/albania/report-2008>, last accessed November 2008

⁴⁸ Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), *Albania 2008 Crime and Safety Report*, published June 22, 2008, <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=87906>, last accessed November 2008

⁴⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *INSTAT to Develop Database on Domestic Violence in Albania: Survey to Help Design Policies*, October 4, 2007, <http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=detail&id=65>, last accessed November 2008

⁵⁰ Amnesty International (AI), *Albania - Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/albania/report-2008>, last accessed November 2008

⁵¹ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 15, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁵² Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), *Albania 2008 Crime and Safety Report*, published June 22, 2008, <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=87906>, last accessed November 2008

influence of organized crime activities.⁵³ This data demonstrate the strong dependency of many employees and workers, especially in the construction sector, on highly criminal employers.

Albanian organised crime groups, have reinvested their illegal gains in drug dealing. Moving from marginal roles to more central ones, Albanian criminals are nowadays relevant players in drug trafficking.⁵⁴

Organised crime remains an ambiguous concept in Albanian society, which is still seen as ethnically homogeneous and formally and hierarchically structured like the Cosa Nostra. In addition, it is less condemnable by society than other criminal offences such as murder, rape, etc.

Vulnerable groups

Domestic violence in a large scale makes many women and children extreme vulnerable. But the lack of exact data makes it impossible to specify the risk profile.

The Delegation of the EC to Albania stated that there is a general hostility toward the members of the lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in public and in the media which make members of this group extreme vulnerable against all sorts of crime. There are reports of violence and arbitrary arrests of LGBT persons, which have already led to the emigration of leading activists.⁵⁵

2.3.1 Regions with an extremely high level of crime

According to the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Human Rights" (AHCR),⁵⁶ the cultivation and trade of cannabis is being revived in the southern part of Albania (Lazarat neighbourhood in Gjirokastra City). The NGO considers the area to be a threat to the physical security.

2.3.2 Risk of becoming a victim of human trafficking

Albania is considered as a country of origin of victims of human trafficking but not any more as a transit country for human trafficking.⁵⁷ Albanians are trafficked for

⁵³ News Agency "Worldpress", *Albania and ERUOPOL Sign Agreement on Organized Crime*, March 7, 2008, <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/2705.cfm>, last accessed November 2008

⁵⁴ Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS), *The Albanian Organized Crime: Emergence of a Dynamic Organized Crime Network Across the Euro-Land*, by Ioannis Michaletos (2007), p. 3, <http://rieas.gr/images/rieasorgcrime.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

⁵⁵ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 16, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁵⁶ Contact information of AHCR in Appendix I

⁵⁷ US State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2008*, published June 4, 2008, p. 54, <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2008/>, last accessed November 2008

sexual- and labour-exploitation to other European countries via the national border crossings. According to the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Human Rights" (ACHR), high ranking police officers of the border guard are involved in these illegal practices. This point of view was confirmed indirectly by the Albanian Deputy Minister of the Interior, Iva Zajmi, by describing the border points of Albania as the weakest link in the fight against human trafficking.⁵⁸ The governmental efforts to combat human trafficking are described by the US embassy in Tirana as "unsatisfactory".⁵⁹ The US State Department "Trafficking in Persons Report 2008" confirmed the critic of its embassy in Tirana by stating that the Albanian Government failed in its efforts to identify, refer, protect, and reintegrate victims of trafficking.⁶⁰ However, according to the same report, the government maintains an own victim-care shelter in Tirana and is supporting at least sporadically the four other ones in the country, managed by NGO's. In 2007, the Albanian government identified only 13 women and 7 children as victims of human trafficking, whereas in the shelters run by NGO's 146 victims were reported for the same period.⁶¹ Amnesty International blamed the weak witness protection as a main reason why the majority of the victims of human trafficking would not report their abuse to the police.⁶²

The Albanian Department for Border Police and Migration has installed a database on victims of trafficking which could be an effective tool in combating the crime. However it is not yet operational.⁶³ The national coordination centre of the fight against human trafficking ONAC has signed in 2007 and 2008 agreements with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo on exchanges of information regarding human trafficking and other cross-border criminal activities.⁶⁴ In February 2008, the Albanian government ratified a European convention to fight human trafficking and protect the victims.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Transnational daily "Southeast European Times", *US Diplomat Says Albania Remains Base of Human Trafficking*, May, 28, 2008, http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/newsbriefs/setimes/newsbriefs/2008/05/28/nb-08, last accessed November 2008

⁵⁹ Transnational daily "Southeast European Times", *US Diplomat Says Albania Remains Base of Human Trafficking*, May, 28, 2008, http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/newsbriefs/setimes/newsbriefs/2008/05/28/nb-08, last accessed November 2008

⁶⁰ US State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2008*, published June 4, 2008, p. 54, <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2008/>, last accessed November 2008

⁶¹ US State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2008*, published June 4, 2008, p. 54 et seq., <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2008/>, last accessed November 2008

⁶² Amnesty International, Albania - *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/albania/report-2008>, last accessed November 2008

⁶³ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 49, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁶⁴ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 49, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁶⁵ Amnesty International (AI), *Europe Moves to Protect Trafficked People*, February 1, 2008, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/good-news/europe-moves-protect-trafficked-people-20080201>, last accessed November 2008

Nineteen Albanian NGO's created a network called "BKTF-Coalition" ("All Together Against Child Trafficking") aimed to fight against child trafficking

Vulnerable groups

According to the US State Department "Trafficking in Persons Report 2008" and the annual progress report of the Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, half of all Albanian trafficking victims are under age of 18.⁶⁶ The children are mostly forced for begging in Western European countries but also for forced prostitution.⁶⁷ There is a lack of monitoring of these practices especially in remote areas of the country.⁶⁸ According to the Albanian NGO "Amaro Drom", it is widespread among pauperized Roma, especially among single mothers, to send their children abroad to work, mostly for begging. These children were sent of their own or given to adults to "care" for them - in both cases the children are prey to all form of abuses.⁶⁹

2.3.3 Risk of becoming a victim of forced prostitution

The Criminal Code prohibits forced prostitution in Albania. The crime is intrinsically tied to the crime of human trafficking and the same remarks made in the subchapter 2.3.2 are valid for subchapter 2.3.3 as well.

⁶⁶ US State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2008*, published June 4, 2008, p. 54, <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2008/>, last accessed November 2008

Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 49, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

International NGO "Terre des homes" (Tdh), Albania : *Actively Fighting Child Trafficking*, ongoing project of Tdh, <http://www.tdh.ch/website/tdhch.nsf/pages/albaniaE>, last accessed November 2008

⁶⁷ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 49, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁶⁸ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 49, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁶⁹ The Union of Albanian Roma, Amaro Drom, *Information: The Current Situation of the Roma Minority in Albania*, (periodical updates), <http://www.unioniamarodrom.org/eng/cursit.htm>, last accessed November 2008

See as well: NGO-Network "All Together Against Child Trafficking (BKTF), *Evaluation of The Anti-Begging Campaign*, November 2007, <http://www.bktf-coalition.org/eng/Evaluation%20of%20Anti-Forced%20Begging%20Campaign%20BKTF.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

Vulnerable groups

According to the Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, the most vulnerable groups for forced prostitution are women and children of the Roma minority.⁷⁰

2.3.4 Effectiveness of protection

Corruption remains an issue of considerable importance for human security since it affects almost all aspects of the social, economic and political life of the country. Furthermore, infringements on the law and the level of corruption have seriously damaged governance performance and the functioning of state institutions.

The public trust in the state institutions continues to be low. According to the annual "Corruption in Albania" survey of the Institute for Development Research and Alternatives (IDRA), the majority of the Albanian population regard the main state institutions - except the military and the president - as highly corrupt. Customs officials, tax officials, parliamentarians, and ministers are seen as the most corrupt public servants. This view is shared even by public sectors employees.⁷¹

However, the public perception of corruption appears to be highly correlated with the individual political orientation. While 61% of left-leaning respondents say that corruption among public officials increased during the last year, only 38.5% of the right-leaning respondents share this opinion.⁷²

The results of the survey are backed by the "Corruption Perception Index 2008" of Transparency International which ranks Albania 85 out of 180 countries.⁷³ In

⁷⁰ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 49, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

See as well: The Union of Albanian Roma, Amaro Drom, *Information: The Current Situation of the Roma Minority in Albania*, (periodical updates), <http://www.unioniamarodrom.org/eng/currsit.htm>, last accessed November 2008

And: Report by Nicole Itano, *Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania*, December 8, 2007, published at "Womens E News", <http://www.womensnews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>, last accessed November 2008

⁷¹ Institute for Development Research and Alternatives (IDRA) Albania, *Corruption in Albania. Perception and Experience. Survey 2008. Summary of Findings*, presented May 7, 2008, p.7 pp, http://www.idra-al.org/pdf/en/IDRA-CPE-2008-Survey_Summary-of-Findings_EN.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁷² Institute for Development Research and Alternatives (IDRA) Albania, *Corruption in Albania. Perception and Experience. Survey 2008. Summary of Findings*, presented May 7, 2008, p.11, http://www.idra-al.org/pdf/en/IDRA-CPE-2008-Survey_Summary-of-Findings_EN.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁷³ Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2008*, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2008, last accessed November 2008

comparison with the previous index, which ranks Albania 105 of 179 countries,⁷⁴ a certain progress is indicated. However, the "International Monetary Fund" (IMF) speaks about a deterioration of the situation by stating: *"The increase of corruption to a very dangerous degree, the surrendering of markets to monopolies, the weak and distorted implementation of the law, as well as delays in the introduction of reforms, have resulted in the loss of trust among Albanians in state institutions. Previous governments have brought about a dramatic withdrawal of the forces of the state from law implementation everywhere not only because of their inability to introduce reforms but particularly because of their lack of will and conflicts of interest at all levels."*⁷⁵

Furthermore, there are accusations of corruption against key figures of the government. In November 2008, the Foreign Minister Lulzim Basha, brought to charge by the General Prosecutor Ina Rama in cause of massive reproaches of corruption and power abuse. Ms Rama investigates as well the allegation of money-laundry activities against a close business partner of Mr Basha and the family of the Prime Minister. The intention of the government to react on the activities of Ms Rama by limiting the competence of the General Prosecutor has been only prevented by a direct intervention of the US ambassador in Tirana.⁷⁶

According to information provided by the Albanian migrant organisation "Konitza" in Brussels it is possible to prevent the obligatory military service by paying a bribe sum of about 300.000 ALL.⁷⁷

2.3.4.1 Police forces

The Albanian police have a visible presence throughout Tirana and the other main cities of Albania. Due to limited resources and manpower, their response on emergency calls is often delayed. This is the fact in most rural regions but it occurs even quite often in the capital itself.⁷⁸

A major concern regarding police performance is their low salaries between USD 300 and USD 500 per month, which makes the police forces generally vulnerable to

⁷⁴ Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2007*, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007, last accessed November 2008

⁷⁵ International Monetary Fund (IMF), Albania: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 29, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

⁷⁶ Swiss daily "Neue Züricher Zeitung" (NZZ), *Anlauf zum Reinemachen in Albanien. Korruptionsbekämpfung bringt die Regierung Berisha unter Druck*, November 25, 2008, http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/international/anlauf_zum_reinemachen_in_albanien.1.1314199.html, last accessed November 2008

⁷⁷ Konitza asbl, *Avis sur les groupes vulnérables au retour en Albanie*. Brussels, June 11, 2008. Contact information Konitza in Appendix I

⁷⁸ US governmental organisation "Overseas Security Advisory Council" (OSAC), *Albania 2008 Crime & Safety Report*, <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=87906>, last accessed November 2008

corruption.⁷⁹ The anti-corruption unit “Office of Internal Control” (OIC) in the Ministry of the Interior has taken disciplinary measures against 100 policemen in 2007 on bribery charges.⁸⁰

According to the US Government, the Albanian police improved in 2007 their capabilities, especially due to counter-narcotic and organized crime trainings.⁸¹ But especially in combating organized crime and more specific human trafficking, the police forces show still shortcomings. In response to these deficits, the European Union launched in January 2008 an EU police-mission to Albania which should support the fight against the organized crime.⁸²

In the past, Albanian NGO’s collected several severe cases of torture and other violence of the police forces against suspects and detainees. These human rights violations were in 2007 less frequent but nevertheless still existing.⁸³ The Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) stated that inhuman treatment and even torture of suspects and detainees took place most frequently during the time of arrest or the initial detention of suspects.⁸⁴ Amnesty International stated that in 2007 no police officer was known to have been convicted for torture or ill-treatment against detainees or suspects.⁸⁵ According to the Delegation of the EC to Albania, the General Prosecutor brought to charge in 2008 four senior officials of the Intelligence Service and police officers for “abuse of office.” There is no information how many police officers were brought to charge and about the specific accusation against them.⁸⁶

Vulnerable groups

AHC identified Roma, Balkan-Egyptians, and homosexuals as particularly vulnerable to police abuse against suspects. Furthermore, AHC criticized in November 2007 the conditions in Albanian prisons, especially in the city of Vlora, where 92 detainees

⁷⁹ US governmental organisation “Overseas Security Advisory Council” (OSAC), *Albania 2008 Crime & Safety Report*, <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=87906>, last accessed November 2008

⁸⁰ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 12, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁸¹ US governmental organisation “Overseas Security Advisory Council” (OSAC), *Albania 2008 Crime & Safety Report*, <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=87906>, last accessed November 2008

⁸² UK news portal “Contingency Today”, UK Leads EU Police Mission to Albania, February 26, 2008, http://www.contingencytoday.com/online_article/UK-leads-EU-police-mission-to-Albania/1009, last accessed November 2008

⁸³ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 13, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁸⁴ US State Department, Albania. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007, published March 11, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100544.htm>, last accessed November 2008

⁸⁵ Amnesty International, Albania - *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/albania/report-2008>, last accessed November 2008

⁸⁶ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 13, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

were locked up in cells with a capacity of only 46 persons.⁸⁷ Amnesty International reported similar grievances from the Tirana police headquarter, where 16 detainees were held in four cells designed for only one person each.⁸⁸ An effective system of monitoring for prisons does not exist.⁸⁹ The International Monetary Fund sees fundamental need of reform for the whole prison and pre-detention system and the framework of guaranteeing the fundamental rights of detainees.⁹⁰

The Albanian Helsinki Committee criticized furthermore the fact that minors were imprisoned together with adults in one cell, a clear violation of law.⁹¹ In this aspect all suspects in police custody but especially minors, could be described as a vulnerable group in aspect of ill-treatment by police officers.

2.3.4.2 Judiciary

Albania's civil law system is similar to that of other European countries. The court structure consists of a Constitutional Court, a Supreme Court, and multiple appeal and district courts. The Constitutional Court is comprised of nine members appointed by the Assembly for one 9-year term. The Constitutional Court interprets the Constitution, determines the constitutionality of laws, and resolves disagreements between local and federal authorities. The Supreme Court is the highest court of appeal and consists of 11 members appointed by the President with the consent of the Assembly for 9-year terms. The President chairs the High Council of Justice, which is responsible for appointing and dismissing other judges. The High Court of Justice is comprised of 15 members: the President of the Republic, the Chairman of the High Court, the Minister of Justice, three members elected by the Assembly, and nine judges of all levels elected by the National Judicial Conference.

The remaining courts are divided into three jurisdictions: criminal, civil, and military. There are no jury trials under the Albanian system of justice. A college of three judges, who are sometimes referred to as a "jury" by the Albanian press, render court verdicts.

The courts in Albania are independent. However, there are frequent attempts of the government to exert influence on the judiciary. In November 2008, the Prosecutor General Theodor Sollaku was dismissed on, what Amnesty International

⁸⁷ US State Department, Albania. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007, published March 11, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100544.htm>, last accessed November 2008

⁸⁸ Amnesty International, Albania - *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/albania/report-2008>, last accessed November 2008

⁸⁹ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 13, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁹⁰ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 26, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

⁹¹ US State Department, Albania. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007, published March 11, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100544.htm>, last accessed November 2008

described as “questionable legal ground.”⁹² The new Prosecutor General, Ina Rama, is the first woman in a high-ranking position in the prosecutor service. However, she stands as well under intense political pressure since she brought close allies of Prime Minister Berisha to charge - the same money-laundry-charge, which cost Mr Sollaku his position in November 2007. Mr Berisha described the well founded investigation of Ms Rama against a business partner of his daughter and against his Minister of Foreign Affairs as a “violation of the constitution.”⁹³

The public trust in the judiciary is low. According to a representative poll in 2008, almost 60% of the respondents stated that they have little or no trust in the judicial system. Over a third of the respondents think that judges are not impartial in conducting trials.⁹⁴ Even worse, the poll surveyed as well Albanian judges. Almost half of them described corruption as a serious problem. More than 55% of the surveyed judges stated that lawyers approach them outside the court to influence their decision. 41% of the judges were already approached with direct bribe offers by different conflict parties.⁹⁵

Vulnerable groups

The Albanian legislation provides free legal aid on courts but according to the Delegation of the EC to Albania, the system does not work effectively. In particular, minorities and especially Roma would often have no access to free legal aid.⁹⁶

⁹² Amnesty International, Albania - *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/albania/report-2008>, last accessed November 2008

⁹³ Swiss daily “Neue Züricher Zeitung” (NZZ), *Anlauf zum Reinemachen in Albanien. Korruptionsbekämpfung bringt die Regierung Berisha unter Druck*, November 25, 2008 http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/international/anlauf_zum_reinemachen_in_albanien_1.1314199.html, last accessed November 2008

⁹⁴ Institute for Development Research and Alternatives (IDRA) Albania, *Corruption in Albania. Perception and Experience. Survey 2008. Summary of Findings*, presented May 7, 2008, p.20, http://www.idra-al.org/pdf/en/IDRA-CPE-2008-Survey_Summary-of-Findings_EN.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁹⁵ Institute for Development Research and Alternatives (IDRA) Albania, *Corruption in Albania. Perception and Experience. Survey 2008. Summary of Findings*, presented May 7, 2008, p.22, http://www.idra-al.org/pdf/en/IDRA-CPE-2008-Survey_Summary-of-Findings_EN.pdf, last accessed November 2008

⁹⁶ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 13, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

CHAPTER III

3. Social security and reintegration

3.1 Regions with no reintegration and return opportunities

Natural disasters, such as floods and heavy snow have endangered the security of people and consequently local development. These are evident in the northern regions of Albania such as Tropoja, Kukesi, Dibra, Malesi e Madhe, or even Shkodra. Environmental issues such as air and water pollution, the reduction of green spaces, poor urban planning, and sewage are the most critical sources of concern. These factors are evident more or less all over the country, illustrating lack of investments. Access to safe drinking water has improved in the last years but the further amelioration is hindered by the slow pace of reform.⁹⁷ Insufficient water supply in rural areas of the country can hinder reintegration opportunities seriously.⁹⁸

Dangerous air pollution exists in the Tirana, Durres surroundings, Elbasan surroundings, Fushe-Kruja, where different activities and factories are producing steel and pesticides without taking the environment into consideration. The monitoring of air quality in 2007 in several cities showed that the levels of PM10 (the respiratory dust particles) are 4-5 times higher than the normal levels (according to the standards of Institute of Public Health and WHO) in Tirana. Also other cities like Elbasan, Korce, Shkoder, Durres, Vlore have registered high levels of air pollution.⁹⁹

The lack of a stable energy supply all over the country is still hindering the development of the economy. Reintegration opportunities are touched when the establishing of a small business is planned by the returnee. The acquisition of a private emergency generator is advisable. In November 2008, the Albanian government signed a contract with the Italian energy supplier ENEL to erect a large energy park close to the port city of Durres to solve the acute energy crisis of the country. However, the plan foresees the construction of several power plants and it will take years to make them operational.¹⁰⁰

Some regions of Albania, especially the mountainous areas and Dibra, Kukesi, Elbasani and Shkodra, offer little or no opportunity for return or reintegration because of extreme

⁹⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Millennium Development Goals in Albania*. (2007), http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=MDG/mdg_albania, last accessed November 2008

⁹⁸ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 44, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

⁹⁹ Interview by the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Development and Population" (ACPD) with Mrs. Narin Panariti of the Ministry of Environment, July 2008. Contact-information of ACPD in Appendix I

See as well: European Environment and Health Committee, Albania. Reporting Back to the Intergovernmental Mid-Term Review (IMR) in Vienna, 13-15 June 2007 on CEHAPE Regional Priority Goal III on Air Quality, June 2007, http://www.euro.who.int/eehc/implementation/20071217_3, last accessed November 2008

¹⁰⁰ News portal "AEnews" (Albanian Economy.com), *Albania Eyes New Energy Park*, November 11, 2008, <http://www.albanianeconomy.com/news/2008/11/11/albania-eyes-new-energy-park/>, last accessed November 2008

poverty and the lack of basic services.¹⁰¹ In some regions the phenomenon of blood feuds can hinder or prevent reintegration opportunities.¹⁰²

Despite poverty figures improved in recent years, approximately 3,5% of the population still lives in extreme poverty (less than USD 1 per day). Given the fact that especially in the north of Albania a significant percentage of the population is considered as “poor” and given the significant disparities in development between urban and rural areas in general, bigger cities provide principally more reintegration possibilities as rural areas.¹⁰³ The living standard in rural areas is significant lower than in urban areas by means of low income levels per capita, undeveloped medical and education services and insufficient public services. There is a high poverty risk for returnees which seek their source of income in agriculture.¹⁰⁴

The level of chemical pollution of the country is low. However, the vicinity of the few heavy industry of the communist area centres should be avoid as resettle location.¹⁰⁵

3.2 Housing, accommodation

The political change and the radical, fast transition to a market economy had important direct consequences for the housing sector. The first change was the lifting of the restrictions on the free movement of people, which resulted in an uncontrolled and massive influx of people into cities and illegal settlements. The second one was the structural reform that included the privatisation of the public housing stock that had direct repercussions on the Government’s housing policy. The third was the restitution of property¹⁰⁶.

The massive and uncontrolled internal migration to the urban centres put an extreme pressure for the creation of new settlements in the cities itself and in their suburbs. In many cases land was illegally occupied and built upon. Owners of housing in illegal settlements have a certain risk of expropriation. However, the phenomenon is widespread and a large scale dissolving of the settlements is not likely. In 2008 the government regularised about 100.000 illegally built houses, mostly around major urban

¹⁰¹ Swiss governmental organisation “Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation – Swisscontact”, *Projekte 2008: Albanien: Die Bildung reformieren*, http://www.swisscontact.ch/deutsch/pages/PR_Dn/PR_Dn_013_img.php, last accessed November 2008

¹⁰² See Chapter 2.2: “Regions with high security risk”

¹⁰³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Albania: Poverty Reduction* (2008), http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=WWD/p_red, last accessed November 2008

¹⁰⁴ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 74, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁰⁵ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 46, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁰⁶ International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Development Association (IDA), *Joint Staff Assessment of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Prepared by the Staffs of the International Monetary Fund and the International Development Association*, May 28, 2002, http://poverty2.forumone.com/files/Albania_JSA_of_PRSP_Supplement.pdf, last accessed November 2008.

centres.¹⁰⁷ In Tirana there is a legal framework to regularize illegal settlements via the ALUZINI-standard form. In December 2008 a new standard form was introduced which has to be used (ALUZINI-t).¹⁰⁸

While the construction-quality of illegal settlements improved in the last years, many of them have no access to basic infrastructure. The integration of these settlements in urban plans is a slow progress.¹⁰⁹

The private ownership of housing was considered a right that the urban population of Albania had been deprived of for the previous 50 years under the communist regime. The housing stock was privatised in 1993 under the Law on the Privatisation of State Housing (No. 7652, December 1992). The Law No/9232/2004 was a new effort to put the housing requests on a new level: developing mechanisms to reach the needs through identification of the housing requests and financial assistance to social housing. The municipalities and local governmental authorities have started the initiative of registering the homeless and people in need. In Tirana the Mayor has signed in 2007 a contract to build 4.500 apartments to be distributed to homeless and people in need.¹¹⁰ The last nationwide Housing Census in 2001 showed that the vast majority of dwellings are in private hands (93,5%). The census showed as well a close connection between poverty and housing conditions in Albania: 12,5% of the population had no adequate housing and almost the half of all dwellings in rural areas (47,2%) did not meet basic needs of its inhabitants.¹¹¹

Vulnerable groups

Poverty is widespread in Albania, especially in rural areas. Over 45.000 families in Albania are officially registered as homeless.¹¹² Returnees without savings or a local network are in great risk to live in dwellings without basic supplies. Especially vulnerable in this aspect are members of the Roma minority. Although 88% of the Roma in Albania are owner of the dwelling they are living in, the majority of these housings are inadequate and many of them are situated in illegal settlements.¹¹³ Roma which are renting a dwelling are especially vulnerable towards widespread discrimination and

¹⁰⁷ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 17, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁰⁸ Albanian daily "Shekulli", *ALUZINI - New Legalization Standard Form*, December 4, 2008 <http://www.shekulli.com.al/news/101/ARTICLE/37147/2008-12-04.html>, last accessed December 2008

¹⁰⁹ International Monetary Fund (IMF), Albania: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 27 et seq., <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹¹⁰ Tirana Municipality, Inclusive Social Housing. Available at: <http://www.tirana.gov.al/?cid=1,161>, Last accessed July 2008.

¹¹¹ Albanian Statistical Institute (INSTAT), *Albania. Census Atlas 2001. Population and Housing Census*, Tirana 2004

¹¹² Amnesty International, Albania - *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/albania/report-2008>, last accessed November 2008

¹¹³ Albanian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, *Progress Report on the National Strategy "On Improving the Living Conditions of the Roma Community"*, December 2007, p.13 et seq. <http://europeandcis.undp.org/poverty/mdghdpm/show/B954E273-F203-1EE9-B28319AB82C06004>, last accessed November 2008

there is no legal framework which would protect them.¹¹⁴

3.2.1 Property restitution and/or compensation

Uncertain property rights hampered the economic growth in Albania since its transformation into a democratic state. Several land and property reforms, including the privatisation of land, housing and other properties took place but there is still uncertainty on this field;

In September 2006, the Parliament amended the Law no. 9583, 17.07.2006, "On the restitution and Compensation of Former Property Owners,¹¹⁵ through which the Albanian government should compensate eventual private losses due to land and property reforms.

The "State Committee for Restitution and Compensation of Property" has been set up in 2005 to decide about eventual compensations. During 2005 the Committee compensated the loss of 30 subjects only in Tirana with the value of 200m ALL. In 2007 this State Committee has changed name and is called now "Agency on Property Restitution and Compensation". The committee has continued the procedure of file evaluation and ownership documentation, and compensated in that year 36 owners in Tirana and 21 owners in Kavaja. The compensation depends on the budget of the Commission which has been 500m ALL for 2007. During 2007 the process covered 6 Districts and 4 cities, and 120 owners in total profited. The budget of the commission for 2008 is 500m ALL as well. In August 2008 all applications were filed in with the compensation expected for December 2008. All compensations reached meanwhile the value of USD 4bn.¹¹⁶

In Albania, unoccupied land (with restrictions concerning size) and unaltered buildings that had been nationalized, expropriated or confiscated by legal or sub-legal acts and court decisions after 1945 were directly returned to their former owners or their descendants by the "Law on the Restitution of Property and the Compensation for Former Property Owners." However, if the value of the property has risen by more than 50% of the original value by measures taken by the new owners, only a co-ownership of the former owner is allowed. The compensation is paid either in form of state bonds or a piece of unoccupied land.¹¹⁷ However, the "European Court of Human Rights" found in several decisions against the state of Albania violations in the form of improper proceedings and lack of enforcement in the compensation procedures. Unresolved property issues

¹¹⁴ Albanian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, *Progress Report on the National Strategy "On Improving the Living Conditions of the Roma Community"*, December 2007, p.55, <http://europeandcis.undp.org/poverty/mdghdpm/show/B954E273-F203-1EE9-B28319AB82C06004>, last accessed November 2008

¹¹⁵ Official Bulletin of the Parliament of Albania: 2006, NO 81 , page 2786

¹¹⁶ Interview of the Albanian NGO "ACPD" with an expert of the Agency on Property Restitution and Compensation, Tirana, August 2008. More information can be purchased via the office of ACPD, contact: Appendix I

¹¹⁷ The World Bank Office, Tirana, *Status of Land Reforms and Real Property Markets in Albania*, Tirana 2006. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTALBANIA/Resources/Status_of_Land_Reform_and_Real_Property_Markets_in_Albania.pdf , last accessed November 2008.

are according to the European Union a major obstacle to establish a functional land market and for foreign investments.¹¹⁸

3.2.2 Housing programmes by return areas

There are no specific housing programs designed for returnees. There are limited housing programs for homeless people in Tirana.¹¹⁹ The Albanian government secured in 2007 international funding to develop housing program which aims to construct 4.000 new apartments for rental to low-income families. All apartments aimed to be ready to rent by 2010.¹²⁰

3.2.3 Opportunities of building a house

The opportunities to build a house legally are due to uncertain property rights are limited. However, many low income families build affordable houses illegally. According to real estate experts, the construction of a one-family house in an informal and not legalized urban area cost about USD 5.000 to USD 6.000.¹²¹

3.2.3.1 Conditions of obtaining land property

In Albania the legal process of acquisition of real estate ownership constitutes two steps: the conclusion of a purchase contract and the registration of the purchase contract with the real estate register¹²². According to the Albanian Civil Code, a real estate property purchase contract must be concluded in the form of a notarial deed (the purchase deed). The purchase deed is a special form of purchase contract executed by the parties before a notary. As a purchase contract, the purchase deed has to stipulate the essential terms, such as the purchase price and a definition of the object being purchased. A certificate issued by the Real Estate Registration Office, certifying that ownership title to the real property is clear as of the date of the transaction, has to be attached to the purchase deed. The parties determine the real property handover date. Unless otherwise agreed to, the handover takes place immediately upon obtaining the parties' signatures on the purchase deed, and

¹¹⁸ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 17, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹¹⁹ Tirana Municipality, Inclusive Social Housing. Available at: <http://www.tirana.gov.al/?cid=1,161>, last accessed November 2008.

¹²⁰ Amnesty International, public statement: Albania: Respect the Right of Orphans to Housing, November 21, 2007, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=ENGEUR110082007>, last accessed November 2008

¹²¹ Information gathered by the Albanian NGO ACPD, contact: Appendix I

¹²² Republic of Albania. Official Bulletin 1994, "The Civil Code of the Republic of Albania", Law Nr 7850 Date 29-07-1994 No 11, page 491

complete payment of the purchase price. Regarding the right to acquire real property in Albania as part of an investment, foreigners intending to invest are permitted to acquire construction land if the value of their investment on the land triples the value of that land. Furthermore, this investment will be subject to prior approval.

In Albania, there is no special land transfer authority exclusively responsible for issues regarding land transfers. In certain cases, the acquisition of real property in Albania requires the approval of competent state administration bodies. In particular, according to Law 7980 On the Acquisition of Construction Land, foreigners intending to purchase construction land in Albania are only allowed to do so upon prior approval. However, because the Construction Land Acquisition Law states that Albanian persons may freely acquire land for construction without any prior authorization, it can be inferred that, if a foreign investor operates through an Albanian legal entity (that is, a company established and existing under Albanian law, such as a subsidiary), the acquisition of construction land would not be subject to prior approval. This interpretation has also been supported in practice. If prior approval is required, the application should be filed directly with the respective competent state administration body, which must grant its approval if the investment:

- represents an investment with an economic interest;
- triples the value of the land, as certified by the competent authority;
- is carried out in compliance with the relevant building permit;
- after the competent authority has granted its approval, the parties can enter into the relevant purchase deed.

Law 7843 regulates the registration of real estate on registration of real estate. The competent authority for registering real estate is the Real Estate Registration Office, a separate authority subordinate to the Council of Ministers, and established on the basis of the Real Estate Registration Law. The Real Estate Registration Office consists of departments responsible for¹²³:

- real estate registers, in which tables of public and private real estate ownership are stored;
- maps of real property situated in an administrative area;
- filed contracts on ownership transfers, tribunal decisions, mortgage deeds, inheritance deeds, registration indices, and other legal acts affecting rights to real estate.

Upon payment of a fee, any information contained in the real estate registers will be available to any interested person who requires it. The information that is available to the public is only general information concerning the title and location of the property. All documents affecting ownership rights (sole ownership or co-ownership) are the legal basis for registering relevant rights and must be entered into the Real Estate Register. Pursuant the Real Estate Registration Law, any interested party may file a claim for indemnification with the immovable property registration office in relation to any damage caused from receiving incorrect information on any property registered with this office.

Landownership rights in Albania are included in the Interim Constitution and specified in the Civil Code (mainly concerning agricultural land). The Law on the Purchase and Sale of Land for Construction specifies the conditions for the purchase

¹²³ Government of Albania, Law 7843 On registration of real estate, Official bulletin 1994, No.10, page 123

of land inside and outside the boundaries of cities/municipalities, which at the time of the transaction, is or will be used for construction and does not have the status of agricultural land.¹²⁴

According to the Law, Albanian natural persons and legal entities are entitled to buy and sell land for construction from and to each other without any limitations, while foreign legal entities and natural persons are entitled to purchase State-owned or privately owned land for construction only in connection with foreign investments. The Government sets the sales price for State-owned land; while for the sales price of privately owned land the contracting parties should agree freely. In the meanwhile the Albanian state deserves the legal right to sell/transfer unoccupied land to private owners according to Law No. 7980/1995 only for the construction of housing by the National Housing Agency or by others if the housing is intended for "homeless" households and households living in houses that have been returned to their former owners, or for very important national investments following a government decision.¹²⁵

Since 1995 all immovable properties in both agricultural and urban areas have to be registered in the Immovable Property Registries (IPR).

For those who possess property in conformity with the law but do not possess an ownership document, application for registration should contain a notarised personal declaration of ownership and a notarised declaration by neighbours on the accuracy of the stated boundaries. Publication of the first provisional registration should be made at the relevant place for public examination for a period of 90 days. Registrars are obliged to correct any errors and resolve any disputes arising from conflicting claims at first registration. The first registration is free of charge, but any further registration (transfer of ownership) requires payment of a fee representing 0,5% of the property's value (agreed price) for values up to 200.000 ALL and 1% of the property's value when it is higher than 200.000 ALL. Due to this progressive rating of registration fees, sales agreements often stipulate prices below the ones really paid. The Immovable Property Register can only issue certificates of ownership, lease, mortgage, etc. at the request of the owner or his/her proxy.¹²⁶

3.2.3.2 Relevant approximate prices

It is difficult to offer estimations on official building ground in Albania. Prices depend greatly on the region and environment (urban or rural environment, tourist areas, etc.). In general, prices in remote areas in the North are the lowest, in Tirana, at the sea side or at lake Ohrid the highest. Websites like "Off Plane Property"¹²⁷ or "Albania-Estate"¹²⁸ offer some impression on prices but with a

¹²⁴ Government of Albania, Law No. 7980 On the Acquisition of Land, 27.07.1995

¹²⁵ Government of Albania, Law No. 7980 On the Acquisition of Land, 27.07.1995

¹²⁶ Interview with Mr. E. Vokopola - Head of the General Registry Office in Tirana, April 4, 2007
Further information can be found at the websites the Ministry of Finances and Ministry of Economy, as well as in the Albanian Registration units in Tirana, Elbasan, Shkodra, Vlora, Korca.

¹²⁷ Off Plan Property, http://albania.offplanproperty.info/offplan_page2.html, last accessed November 2008

¹²⁸ Albania-Estate, <http://albania-estate.com/ezrealty/land.html>, last accessed November 2008

strong focus on Tirana and the sea-side. Prices for official building ground with all legal permissions start at these sites in November 2008 at EUR 35/square meter. There is as well an informal land market without legal security.

3.2.3.3 Available credits, subsidies and other forms of help

The state does offer credit facilities to Albanians-migrants working in different parts of the world for buying houses and properties in Albania, through specific programmes with the National Trade Bank (BKT, alb)¹²⁹, through a written agreement. According to this agreement, the person has to fill in an application and declare his activities, income, properties and other persons under his responsibilities in order to benefit a loan with low interests (from 4,5 % up to 8%). Almost the same conditions are offered by the private Raiffeisen Bank Albania for Albanians living abroad.¹³⁰

However, Albania lacks in principally a proper investment framework in finance and many dubious financing institutions offering their service without transparency in their conditions. According to EUROPOL, "Albanian citizens are prey to groups that are financing outside the legal banking system, often with practices not far from racketeering."¹³¹

3.2.4 Opportunities of buying real estate

Prices in housing have risen more than the income of the population. The official housing market aimed mostly on the upper social classes with the consequence of a wide gap between demand and affordable housing. The need has been mostly answered by the informal housing market with insecure owner rights, lack of infrastructure and sometimes even lack of construction safety.

Like mentioned before, the still widely unsolved question of ownership of land turned out to be an effective obstacle for investments in the construction sector. Like the mayor of the city of Fier told in an interview to the newspaper "Shekulli" in July 2008, his city lost in recent year twenty foreign investors due to unsolved property questions.¹³²

Vulnerable groups

A report of EU-experts in summer 2007 showed that only few Albanians can carry the burden of a loan for buying an apartment. Even for this small group a double income

¹²⁹ National Trade Bank (BKT), <http://www.bkt.com.al/> last accessed November 2008

¹³⁰ More information at Raiffeisen Albania, <http://www.raiffeisen.al/>, last accessed November 2008

¹³¹ Quoted at the Internet daily "Worldpress", *Albania and EUROPOL Sign Agreement on Organized Crime*, March 7, 2007, <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/2705.cfm> last accessed November 2008

¹³² Albanian daily "Shekulli", No. 2363 (3734), 31 July 2008, <http://www.shekulli.com.al/news/45/ARTICLE/29594/2008-07-31.html>, last accessed November 2008

is seen as necessary. The report came to the conclusion that therefore, the most state employees including teachers, most employees in the private sector and workers would not be able to buy an apartment.¹³³

3.2.4.1 Legal conditions

Starting from 2001 with the process of decentralisation of the powers, it is under the municipalities' responsibility to identify and register the homeless, overcrowded households, families with one parent etc.

The figures of local authorities' reports of 2004 show 46.149 households registered by local authorities, nearly 6% of the total. The variation is greater at district level, and in Tirana – despite its high house prices – the number of registered homeless people corresponds to less than 4% of its housing stock.

The highest priorities for the Government have been families subject to displacement because of restitution. Around 2000 restitution claims are for land that includes dwellings, and an average of 2.5 dwellings per claim would mean that up to 5.000 families might need to move. Tirana municipal officials reported some 1.200 households subject to restitution.¹³⁴

3.2.4.2 Eventual obstacles for certain groups

Not applicable.

3.2.4.3 Relevant approximate prices

According to the Albanian statistical service INSTAT, the selling index in the private construction sector has decreased in the first quarter of 2008 by 27,9% compared to the prior three months. By comparison with the same period of 2007, the index increased by 39,7%.¹³⁵

The INSTAT Report of 2005¹³⁶ has evaluated the selling price of a 75-90 m² flat in Tirana from EUR 45.000 up to EUR 80.000, with an average of EUR 650-1.300/m².¹³⁷

In 2007-2008 these prices are still common in Tirana. The uncontrolled movement of people is still continuing with the focus on Tirana. The Capital

¹³³ Albanian daily "Shekulli", EU: *High Prices, State Administration Workers are Homeless*. July 8, 2007 Shekulli Newspaper. Available at: <http://www.shekulli.com.al/news/47/ARTICLE/12620/2007-07-08.html> Last accessed November 2008.

¹³⁴ Municipality of Tirana. www.tirana.gov.al last accessed October 2006.

¹³⁵ National Institute of Statistic (INSTAT), *Albania Index of Selling*, first quarter of 2008, available at: <http://www.instat.gov.al/>, last accessed November 2008

¹³⁶ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). www.instat.gov.al/ - last accessed November 2008

¹³⁷ Newspaper *Çelësi*, Tirana, April 4, 2007

City of Albania is getting larger and larger each day. Another factor that indicates the flat prices is the location of the building. More centralized areas of the city are more expensive, and usually the prices are around EUR 900 - 1.500- 1.800/m².

Naturally, actual costs are dependent on the area of the city. Some indicators of approximate prices in Tirana:¹³⁸

Area	approx. prices EUR/square meter
1) Lake district	1.500 - 2.000
2) Bus Station area	700 - 900
3) "Kinostudio" area	700 - 800
4) Yzberishtit area	450 - 600

According to INSTAT, the prices for real estate are still rising due to several reasons:¹³⁹

- the uncontrolled intern migration to urban centres, most of all to Tirana, Durres, Elbasani and Vlore, create a general increase of demand;
- legal construction ground in the cities is limited and therefore expensive;
- insufficient building permissions due to insufficient performance of the administration and due the inappropriate legal framework on property.

However, the Bank of Albania and INSTAT reckon that the increase of prices in 2008 will slow down in reference to 2007.¹⁴⁰ It is not possible to create a general picture of price developments in the real estate sector, despite an increase in prices of 20% per year since the beginning of the century.¹⁴¹ Several regions, like Elbasani and Lushnja have seen a dramatic increase in prices, whilst in others, like in Korça, Gjirokastra and Saranda, prices even decreased. Prices are especially high at the sea side or other tourist sites. In Pogradec, Ohrid Lake-district, prices for new apartments vary in 2007 and 2008 between EUR 500-700/square meter and in Saranda new apartments at the sea side vary between EUR 300-800/square meter.¹⁴²

Vulnerable groups

Especially in Tirana, the housing costs increased enormously during the last years. In the same time the offer for housing affordable to low income families decreased significant. Low income families are definitely a vulnerable group in the major cities of Albania in the aspect of housing, but first of all Roma. The National

¹³⁸ All price-information are the result of research at several real estate agencies, carried out by the Albanian NGO ACPD in August 2008, contact-information: Appendix I

¹³⁹ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Albania Index of Selling*, first quarter of 2008, available at: <http://www.instat.gov.al/>, last accessed November 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Report of the "Albanian Bank" and INSTAT, *Market Trends on Real Estate Prices during 2007, and Projection on 2008* by Bardhyl Qilimi, 24 October 2007. http://www.greenhours.net/file/greenline/27_Mbi%20ecurine%20e%20tregut%20te%20tokes%20e%20te%20pasurive%20e%20paluajtshme.pdf, last accessed November 2008.

¹⁴¹ Research at several national real estate agencies, carried out by the Albanian NGO ACPD in August 2008, contact-information: Appendix I

¹⁴² Research at several national real estate agencies, carried out by the Albanian NGO ACPD in August 2008, contact-information: Appendix I - see as well the specialised website: <http://www.realestateinalbania.com/>, last accessed November 2008

“Social Inclusion Strategy, 2007-2013” stated, that 65% of the Roma population in Albania lives in insufficient housing in slum-like conditions.¹⁴³

3.2.4.4 Available credits and subsidies

The state does offer credit facilities to Albanians and migrants living abroad for buying houses and properties in Albania.¹⁴⁴

3.2.5 Opportunities of renting a house or apartment

During the communist era property could not be traded so there was no market for housing, and property exchange was controlled by the State. Rents for public sector flats were largely symbolic, with no relationship to the costs of providing housing or to variations in demand or quality.

In Tirana there are many real estate agencies that have offers for rents. The most popular real estate agencies have published their contacts in the “Çelesi”- Tirana’s Guide Book, which is easily accessible to people for a price of 250 ALL (equivalent to EUR 2). Many newspapers include pages of information and contacts to rent a house or apartment, such as newspaper “Shekulli”, newspaper “Çelesi” (the Key), etc.

However, the renting market is very limited. According to the National “Social Inclusion Strategy, 2007-2013”, only 5% of all housing in Albania is for rent.¹⁴⁵

Vulnerable groups

Due to the fact that the renting market is limited and that a large part of the official renting market belongs to the high-price segment, all returnees without social network or own savings are a vulnerable group in the aspect of housing, especially in Tirana.

3.2.5.1 Relevant approximate prices

Prices for rental vary from region to region and in cities from district to district. Like for real estates, prices in the North of the country are generally the lowest and in Tirana, the other major cities, at the sea side or at lake Ohrid the highest.

Some approximate prices in legal settlements - official rental market (November 2008):¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Albanian Government, *Social Inclusion Strategy, 2007-2013 - 2 draft (Strategjia e Perfshirjes Sociale 2007- 2013)*, <http://km.gov.al/UserFiles/File/DSDC/Crosscutting%20strategy%20-%20Social%20inclusion%20-%20Nov%202006%20-%20Albanian.pdf>, last accessed November 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Official website of the Albanian Government. www.keshilliministrave.gov.al, last accessed April 2007.

¹⁴⁵ Albanian Government, *Social Inclusion Strategy, 2007-2013 - 2 draft (Strategjia e Perfshirjes Sociale 2007- 2013)*, <http://km.gov.al/UserFiles/File/DSDC/Crosscutting%20strategy%20-%20Social%20inclusion%20-%20Nov%202006%20-%20Albanian.pdf>, last accessed November 2008.

City	<u>Minimum</u> prices 2-bedroom apartment
Tirana	Outskirts: EUR 200 Centre: EUR 420
Durres	Outskirts: EUR180 Centre: EUR 300
Shkodra	Outskirts: EUR 120
Kukes	Outskirts: EUR 80
Elbasani	Outskirts: EUR 120

3.2.5.2 Available subsidies

One of the facilities to get family loans and subsidies is through the declaration of the place of work and the family income. The beneficiaries who work for the public administration are only considered in case both are "state-paid". This rule however creates difficulties for those families who cannot declare their places of work and income.

3.2.6 Other middle-term accommodation possibilities

There are no middle term accommodation possibilities except private hostels and other cheaper dormitories.

However, there are several organisations which provide assistance on re-integration in Albania. The Albanian NGO "Hope for the Future" ('Shpresë për të Ardhmen') is since 1999 specialised on re-integration programs for returnees. The NGO is focussed on assistance of returnees and on their re-integration in the national labour market.¹⁴⁷

A further provider for re-integration programs are:

The local office of the "International Organization for Migration (IOM) which has since 2003 a project on return and reintegration of Albanian victims of human trafficking. The project addresses the complex issue of social stigmas attached to victims of trafficking and promotes the Albanian government's recognition of the trafficking problem in order to advance their participation in potential solutions. It is the intention of IOM Tirana to provide services to facilitate the return and reintegration. Two Reintegration Centres for temporary protection, medical and psychosocial

¹⁴⁶ Results of Research of Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen by telephone and internet at several Real Estate Agencies in Tirana, Durres and Shkodra, November 2008

¹⁴⁷ NGO "Shpresë për të Ardhmen" (Hope for the Future), website http://www.shprese.org/index_al.htm, last accessed November 2008, contact information: Appendix I

counselling, and return and reintegration assistance to Albanian victims of trafficking are opened in Tirana and Vlora.¹⁴⁸

Caritas Albania which provide via 7 local offices (Caritas Tirana, Caritas Shkodra, Caritas Pult-Bajza, Caritas Sapa, Caritas Lezhë, Caritas Rrëshen and Caritas South) social assistance and training programs for returnees.¹⁴⁹

Two NGOs, "Ndihmë për Fëmijët" (Assistance for Children) and "Terre des Hommes", run programmes for Albanian children (primarily boys) who were trafficked to Greece. These NGOs have been working for over five years on education and reintegration programmes for trafficked and at-risk children in Elbasan, Korça, Berat and Tirana. In Albania Terre des hommes (TDH) works to prevent child trafficking by means of preventative campaigns, schooling programs and social support at a communal level as well as by the repatriation and social or family reinsertion of children.¹⁵⁰

Vulnerable groups

Especially elderly returnees are a high risk group in aspect of an adequate middle term accommodation. There are just a few residential centres that offer services for elderly people (five are supported by the state funds). There is no residential centre which would be able to take care on chronically ill elderly. Most of the care for elderly people comes from the families. The greater risk of poverty and social exclusion is for those elderly living alone.¹⁵¹

3.2.7 Temporary shelters available until being able to ensure long-term accommodation

There are no temporary shelters for returnees except for victims of human trafficking.

3.3 Livelihood - basic "survival"

Albania is facing serious skill mismatches in the labour market, which threatens to become worse due to deficiencies in national education and training systems. It is crucial to improve the access, quality and effectiveness of the education system. In

¹⁴⁸ More information on the website of IOM Albania, http://www.iomtirana.org.al/index.php?page=projects_in_albania, last accessed November 2008.

¹⁴⁹ More information at the website of "Caritas Albania", <http://www.caritas-al.org/faqet/Historiku.htm>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵⁰ International NGO "Terre des homes" (Tdh), Albania: *Acively Fighting Child Trafficking*, ongoing project of Tdh, <http://www.tdh.ch/website/tdhch.nsf/pages/albaniaE>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵¹ Albanian Government, *Social Inclusion Strategy, 2007-2013 - 2 draft (Strategjia e Perfshirjes Sociale 2007- 2013)*, <http://km.gov.al/UserFiles/File/DSDC/Crosscutting%20strategy%20-%20Social%20inclusion%20-%20Nov%202006%20-%20Albanian.pdf>, last accessed November 2008.

order to achieve this, increasing public investment in education is necessary both at a central and local level.

In Albania, unemployment is a cause of poverty. The level of unemployment benefits and social assistance are insufficient. The inadequacy of benefits is a stimulus for unemployed persons to seek additional income in the informal sector and avoid turning to the public employment services.

Albania is still one of the poorest countries in Europe. The annual per capita income has risen significantly but is with USD 3.500 still very low even in comparison with neighbouring countries.¹⁵² The average per capita income in 2007 was about 22% of the average of the 27 EU countries (in 2006: 21%)¹⁵³

However, the economical situation in Albania has since 1997 significantly improved with an annual growth rate of 5-6% (in 2007: 6%).¹⁵⁴ The growth of 2007 has been realised in spite of notorious electricity shortages and in spite of a severe draught in the summer - which is remarkable given the fact that agriculture is still an important industry¹⁵⁵ (20,7%,¹⁵⁶ according to other sources 24% of the national GDP has been comprised in 2007 by the agricultural sector).¹⁵⁷

The gross domestic product per capita in 2007 was 309.611 ALL or about 9,1% higher than in 2006. The IMF stated that the macroeconomic situation of the country is sustainable.¹⁵⁸ The Human Development Index 2008 of the UNDP indicates that the economical growth has positive influence of the average living standard in Albania. The index, calculated by compare the different levels of health care, education and living standards, rank Albania for the first time at the category of countries with a "High Human Development" (rank 68 of 177 countries).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² US Department of State, *Background Note: Albania*, November 2008, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵³ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 20, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵⁴ World Bank, *Data and Statistics for Albania 2007*, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/ALBANIAEXTN/0,,menuPK:301437~pagePK:141132~piPK:141109~theSitePK:301412,00.html>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵⁵ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 20, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵⁶ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 25, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵⁷ US Department of State, *Background Note: Albania*, November 2008, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵⁸ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 8, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁵⁹ UNDP, *Human Development Index 2007/2008*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>, last accessed November 2008

For detailed information see: UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/2008. Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in ad Divided World*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/>, last accessed November 2008

The most expanding sectors of the economy are the construction sector and the service industry, the latter boosted by growing tourism from the neighbouring countries. The importance of remittances from Albanian working abroad is still significant and account to approximately 12,8% of the GDP.¹⁶⁰

3.3.1 Employment

The agricultural sector of the economy is still the backbone of the labour market. About 58% of all people employed in Albania worked in 2007 there.¹⁶¹ However, far more dynamic are other sectors of the economy, especially the construction (11% of the GDP) and service industries (approximately 39% of the GDP), where the demand on qualified labour is the highest.¹⁶² According to INSTAT, the increase of employment was in the second quarter of 2008 the highest in civil engineering with 113,5% compared with the second quarter of 2007.¹⁶³

Table: Statistical data of key sectors of the Albanian industry (2nd quarter 2008 in comparison with the 2nd quarter of 2007) :

Sector	Turnover	Employees	wages
Manufacturing industry ¹⁶⁴	In total: +4% (in manufacturing of Food, Beverages and Tobacco: 30,2%)	-6,9%	-19,9%
Wholesale ¹⁶⁵	+35,3%	+65,2%	+68,0%

¹⁶⁰ US Department of State, *Background Note: Albania*, November 2008, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶¹ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 21, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalib.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

US Department of State, *Background Note: Albania*, November 2008, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶² US Department of State, *Background Note: Albania*, November 2008, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶³ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Statistikat Afatshkurtra* (Short Term Statistics), Second Quarter 2008, p. 11, <http://www.instat.gov.al/graphics/doc/downloads/Statistikat%20Afatshkurtra.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶⁴ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Statistikat Afatshkurtra* (Short Term Statistics), Second Quarter 2008, p. 5 et seq., <http://www.instat.gov.al/graphics/doc/downloads/Statistikat%20Afatshkurtra.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶⁵ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Statistikat Afatshkurtra* (Short Term Statistics), Second Quarter 2008, p. 13.,

Construction ¹⁶⁶	+28.5%	+51,0%	+51,7%
Extracting industry ¹⁶⁷ (mostly chrome)	+50,8%	+10,5%	+20,5%
Hotel business (mostly seasonal) ¹⁶⁸	+45,8%	+2,3%	+0,5%

The figures show on one side the high dynamic and on the other hand high risk factors of the Albanian economy. The growth of the extracting industry in the first quarter of 2008 depended on the growth of the world economy in the same period. Meanwhile, there is a contraction of demand. The world wide recession since autumn 2008 will aggravate the trend.

There is a high risk that the construction industry will be highly affected by the financial crisis in 2008.

The growing perspectives for the consumption industry and for tourism depend on a further growth of the average income not only in Albania itself but in the neighbouring countries as well.

Table: Structure of the employment level according to official data of INSTAT:¹⁶⁹

Sector	Percentage of all employed men in %	Percentage of all employed women in %	Total in %
Public sector	15,1%	15,4%	15,2%
Agriculture, private sector	36,7%	60,4%	47,2%
Non-agricultur, private sector	48,3%	24,1%	37,6%

Individuals with higher education have a much higher employment rate (70%) than those with less education. 62% of the employed had full-time jobs and 39% had part-

<http://www.instat.gov.al/graphics/doc/downloads/Statistikat%20Afatshkurtra.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶⁶ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Statistikat Afatshkurtra* (Short Term Statistics), Second Quarter 2008, p. 11, <http://www.instat.gov.al/graphics/doc/downloads/Statistikat%20Afatshkurtra.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶⁷ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Statistikat Afatshkurtra* (Short Term Statistics), Second Quarter 2008, p. 5, <http://www.instat.gov.al/graphics/doc/downloads/Statistikat%20Afatshkurtra.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶⁸ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Statistikat Afatshkurtra* (Short Term Statistics), Second Quarter 2008, p. 14, <http://www.instat.gov.al/graphics/doc/downloads/Statistikat%20Afatshkurtra.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁶⁹ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Forca punës* (Labour Force) (2007), <http://www.instat.gov.al/graphics/doc/tabelat/NEW/LFS2007.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

time jobs, and a much larger share of men (70%) than women (51%) had full-time employment.¹⁷⁰

However, the official data do not reflect the economical reality in Albania. An important part of the business life is informal and does not appear in any statistic. According to the "International Labour Organization" (ILO), about 55% of the workers in the non-agricultural sector are engaged in low productive jobs in the informal economy. The congruent percentage in the agricultural sector is estimated to be much higher.¹⁷¹

Vulnerable groups

People engaged in the informal economy are in many aspects (social security, security of wages, possible exploitation, etc.) vulnerable.¹⁷² According to the ILO, the likelihood to find work in the informal sector is most of all correlated with the age of the work seeker. Approximate 70% of all workers in the informal sector are under 25 years of age. ILO stated, that the mobility between the official and informal labour market is generally low and therefore the risk is high that young people employed in the informal sector will not succeed in changing to the official labour market.¹⁷³ Given the fact that the average age of the Albanian population is 31 years this specific vulnerable group on the labour market is significant.¹⁷⁴ The economic growth and diversification will create new job opportunities but mostly for a high skilled labour force. The low qualitative Albanian education system is still not able to answer this need. Especially graduates of schools in rural areas will have big chances for high skilled jobs in the urban centres.¹⁷⁵

Among the specific vulnerable group of young people the Roma are the most vulnerable. Given the fact that 48% of all Roma men and even 57% of all Roma women never have been to school, which is a dramatic decline in comparison with the

¹⁷⁰ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Albania in Figures*, Tirana 2007, p.13. The full Report on Employment and Unemployment can also be found at the INSTAT-website, <http://www.instat.gov.al>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁷¹ International Labour Organization (ILO), Albania. *Decent Work. Country Programme Document 2008-2010*, p. 2, http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/budapest/download/dwcp/dwcp_albania.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁷² For background information see: Sustainable Economic Development Agency (SEDA), *A Profile of Poverty in Albania* by Albana Mustafaraj, <http://www.seda.org.al/NHDR/CH3.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁷³ International Labour Organization (ILO), Albania. *Decent Work. Country Programme Document 2008-2010*, p. 3, http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/budapest/download/dwcp/dwcp_albania.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁷⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO), Albania. *Decent Work. Country Programme Document 2008-2010*, p. 1, http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/budapest/download/dwcp/dwcp_albania.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁷⁵ International Monetary Fund (IMF), Albania: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 56, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

communist area. Their chances on the working market are - even without a widespread discrimination - very limited.¹⁷⁶

A second significant vulnerable group on the labour market are women. During the transition period the statistics reported a large reduction in female employment - a trend which is not stopped yet.¹⁷⁷ Women constitute 50,1% of the Albanian population, 60,3% of the overall number of students and even 71% of the graduates. Despite these data the unemployment rate among women is 17,2% against 12,1% among men. The monthly wage of women is 35% lower than that of men. Women occupy only 26,8% of senior managerial positions in the public sector. So we can speak about a clear discrimination of Albanian women in employment and salary.¹⁷⁸

A further possible vulnerable group are construction workers. According to EUROPOL, the Albanian construction sector is "heavily involved in the money laundering industry." The livelihood of a significant number of construction workers would therefore be connected with a highly corrupted economic structure.¹⁷⁹

3.3.1.1 Unemployment

The labour market conditions improved in 2007 slightly and the unemployment rate dropped from 13,9% in 2006 to 13,4% in 2007 (according to other sources to 13,2%)¹⁸⁰ and to 13,0% in March 2008.¹⁸¹

It is often argued that registered unemployment in Albania is not an appropriate measure of real unemployment and does not reflect the real tensions in the labour market. Some of the reasons for this opinion relate to the large informal economy, the importance of emigration, the high rate of hidden unemployment in agriculture and the significant number of jobless people who failed to register.¹⁸²

The State Committee for Equal Opportunities implements policies to promote gender equality. It drafted the Platform for Women 2002-2005, which promotes

¹⁷⁶ Nicole Itano, *Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania*, December 8, 2007, published on "Womens News", <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁷⁷ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 56, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁷⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNDP and Durres University Talk About Gender Equality and Domestic Violence, March 30, 2007, http://www.undp.org.al/content/print_news.php?id=47, last accessed November 2008

¹⁷⁹ Quoted at the Internet daily "Worldpress", *Albania and EUROPOL Sign Agreement on Organized Crime*, March 7, 2007, <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/2705.cfm> last accessed November 2008

¹⁸⁰ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 9, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁸¹ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 21, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁸² International Institute for International Studies. "Human Security in Albania. Appendix I - Survey Results." Tirana, 2004

gender equality in power and decision making, economic and social affairs, health and education. The platform focuses especially on rural women, who experience greater discrimination than urban women and who are isolated from the political and social life because of lower educational levels and prejudice.¹⁸³

Unemployment benefits and the eligibility conditions are defined in a Law on Social Insurance of 1993. All persons meeting the following conditions are eligible: (i) they have contributed to the social security system for a period of at least 12 months; (ii) they have certificates from the labour offices attesting that they are unemployed (iii) they are willing and available for training or retraining and they do not receive any other benefit under this law, with the exception of partial invalidity payments¹⁸⁴. Under this legislation, the unemployment benefit is a flat rate payable for up to 12 months or for a total of 365 calendar days where there are temporary periods of employment (it is calculated according to the number and age of family members, house, etc). Those that attend training or retraining but do not receive stipends or wages have the right to draw benefit over the whole training period up to a limit of 18 months.¹⁸⁵

The benefit must be at least equal to the monthly minimum standard of living, as decided by the Council of Ministers. This minimum standard of living is fixed at 4.360 ALL (about EUR 35). There is a supplement for each child younger than age 15 of the unemployed person which amounts 5% of the benefit up to a maximum of 20%. Benefits are indexed annually according to price increase.¹⁸⁶

Vulnerable groups: see subchapter 3.3.1

3.3.1.2 Labour market programmes

In January 2003, the "Strategy on Employment and Vocational Training"¹⁸⁷ described the missions of the National Employment Service and priority areas for improvement of performance. The National Employment Service (NES) has 12 regional branches (Regional Labour Offices, RLO) and 24 local branches (Local Labour Offices, LLO) in addition to the General Directory operating at central level. The Vocational Training Centres are also under the administration of the National Employment Service.

¹⁸³ International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *Albania Gender Profile*, <http://www.ifad.org/english/gender/cen/profiles/alb.htm> Last accessed November 2008

¹⁸⁴ The Government of Albania has adopted a Law on Assistance and Social Help (December 2004); approval of the changes on the Law on Promotion of Employment (April 2005) and amendments on the Law for Social Insurance in Albania (2005)

¹⁸⁵ More information on the website of the "Ministry for Labour, Social Welfare and Equal Opportunities," www.mpcs.gov.al, last accessed November 2008

¹⁸⁶ US Social Security Administration. *Office of Policy, Social Security Programs Throughout the World: Albania 2008*, (released September 2008), p. 30, <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2008-2009/europe/albania.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁸⁷ EUROpean Training Foundation, *Vocational education and training against social exclusion: Albania*. 2001.

Based on The Law the Employment Encouragement, the National Employment Service (NES) can, through its regional and local offices, mediate for work abroad, based on existing labour agreements with other countries. The NES is a public autonomous service with the ranking of a central state administration, that is accountable to MoLSA¹⁸⁸. The services provided by the National Employment Service include the following: registration of jobseekers, cash payment of unemployment benefit, advising and counselling jobseekers, mediation (matching the offer of and the demand for work), and collection of information on the labour market and implementation of the four employment promotion programmes.

Services to clients are administered manually.

The National Employment Service mainly covers urban/peri-urban areas while rural areas are out of its reach, unless jobseekers in the countryside move to urban areas where they can register with the National Employment Service and obtain unemployment benefit. The possibility of obtaining unemployment and other benefits with the National Employment Service in urban areas is obviously not the main factor for migration but it does nothing to reverse the situation. There are very few private employment agencies, registered and operating through the Directorate of Employment at the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues dealing mainly with placement of workers abroad¹⁸⁹.

There are special state vocation programmes for vulnerable groups on the labour market, especially for women and Roma. The impact of these courses is very limited, given the fact that all over Albania only 55 individuals have benefited from the so called "Employment Encouraging Programmes."¹⁹⁰

3.3.1.3 Labour conditions

Vulnerable groups

Labour conditions in many sectors of the Albanian economy are dangerous due of insufficient controls and lack of investments, especially in the construction, chemical and mining industry.¹⁹¹ Chrome miners protested in June 2007 against the insufficient security in the sector which claimed the live of four workers in spring

¹⁸⁸ Republic of Albania. National strategy on migration (Approved by the Albanian Council of Ministers Decision No. 760, 19.11. 2004) and the National action plan of migration (Approved by the Council of Ministers Decision 296, 06.05.2005), page 64.

¹⁸⁹ More information on the website of the "Ministry for Labour, Social Welfare and Equal Opportunities," www.mpcs.gov.al, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹⁰ Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, *Information on the report to be submitted in the 18th meeting of the consultative group Task Force EU-Albania*, p. 6, April 2008, <http://demo.itent.hu/roma/portal/downloads/13th%20ISC/Albania%20Country%20Report.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹¹ Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), *Any Worker is Entitled to Just Conditions of Work*, February 11, 2008, <http://www.ahc.org.al/kshh/eng/ark/2008/1102worker.html>, last accessed November 2008

2007.¹⁹² The situation did not improve since 2007 and especially at the Bulqize mine, fatal accidents happen repeatedly.¹⁹³

Although child labour is forbidden by law, it is common in Albania. Children are working in many sectors of the economy, especially in the agriculture, under precarious conditions. The law enforcement is insufficient concerning child labour.¹⁹⁴ In the last years the phenomenon of child labour increased. According to the Delegation of the European Commission to Albania, the number of children working in the formal sector increased significantly in 2007 in comparison to 2006. Most of these children are girls working in the fish processing and in the clothing industry.¹⁹⁵ However, the numbers indicated by the EC are extremely high (737.000 in 2007) and obviously do not respond to the UNICEF-definition of child labour (5-14 years). According to UNICEF, the percentage of children working in the formal sector in Albania has been 12% between 1999 and 2006 (population under age 18 in 2006: 1,03m).¹⁹⁶ According to a Report of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in 2004, 32% of the children aged 6 to 17 worked in the formal sector.¹⁹⁷

For the official labour market the Albanian law introduced minimum wages. There are no regular negotiations between government, trade unions and employers' representatives on the minimum wage, and its level has been adjusted intermittently by government decision. The current minimum wage has been changed in February 2008 to 16.000 ALL (about EUR 129).¹⁹⁸

In November 2008 the Minister of Finance promised significant higher salaries for state employees and higher pensions for 1st of May 2009.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-CSI-IGB), 2008. *Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights: Albania*, <http://survey08.ituc-csi.org/survey.php?IDContinent=4&IDCountry=ALB&Lang=EN>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹³ Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), *Any Worker is Entitled to Just Conditions of Work*, February 11, 2008, <http://www.ahc.org.al/kshh/eng/ark/2008/1102worker.html>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹⁴ Education International, *Albania: Teachers's Union Work on Child Labour Prevention in Rural Areas*, May 15, 2007, <http://www.ei-ie.org/childlabour/en/newsshow.php?id=480&theme=childlabour&country=albania>, last accessed November 2008

Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), *Any Worker is Entitled to Just Conditions of Work*, February 11, 2008, <http://www.ahc.org.al/kshh/eng/ark/2008/1102worker.html>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹⁵ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 15, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹⁶ UNICEF, Albania: Statistics, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/albania_statistics.html, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹⁷ International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), *Child Labour in Albania*, by Samuel Grumiau, October 2004, p. 3, <http://www.icftu.org/www/PDF/AlbaniareportEN.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹⁸ Federation of European Employers, (fedEE), *Legal Minimum Wages, Europe*, (permanent updated) <http://www.fedee.com/minwage.html>, last accessed November 2008

¹⁹⁹ News portal "AEnews" (Albanian Economy.com), *Minster of Finance Promises Higher Wages for Public Servants*, November 5, 2008, <http://www.albanianeconomy.com/news/2008/11/05/minister-of-finance-promise-higher-wages-for-public-servants/>, last accessed November 2008

According to the labour code, there are 14 public holidays and four weeks paid legal holidays per year. According to the Albanian legislation working hours in public administration are 40 while this figure is very relative when applied to private sector businesses. Normally the private employer covers work security, while in the public sector the employees are fully covered by the state's social security system.²⁰⁰

3.3.1.4 Accessibility of short-term / occasional jobs

There is a high demand for short term/occasional jobs in the construction industry, in agriculture and most of all in the tourism industry. The number of visitors to Albania has been for the first time more than two million and the turnover reached in 2007 EUR 1bn.²⁰¹

The Ministry of Labour provides the main contact point and resource through employment agencies and directories. But, there are local newspapers that publish occasional vacancies (for drivers, cleaners etc.) such as Çelesi, Shekulli, Gazeta Shqiptare etj

3.3.1.5 Lack (high demand) in specific professions

There is a general lack of high qualified labour force in Albania, especially administration experts, engineers, computer experts, etc.

3.3.1.6 Practical and contact information

The Shekulli Newspaper's website is www.shekulli.com.al; other Albanian newspapers are accessible through the BalkanWeb site www.balkanweb.com. Also visit <http://www.fleteteverdha.com>, the website of the Albanian Yellow Pages. The Çelësi Newspaper is accessible through its website <http://www.celesi.info>. Other information about job opportunities, real estate market, etc. is available through <http://www.njoftime.com>. The daily news can be consulted at www.korrieri.com.

²⁰⁰ Government of Albania. Law no.8087, See also VKM nr.561, date 12.8.2005 "Per caktimin e pagave referuese per llogaritjen e pensioneve", date 13.3.1996

²⁰¹ International Monetary Fund (IMF), Albania: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 77, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

3.3.2 Contact information relevant to the issue of recognition of degrees obtained elsewhere

Regarding the issue of higher education degrees obtained outside the Albanian republic, their equivalence to the Albanian education system and their official recognition from the Albanian state, information can be obtained at the specialized office of the Albanian Ministry of Education.²⁰² Generally, degree recognition is necessary for job applications in public administration (in a broader sense, in the public sector), while for the private sector degrees obtained outside Albania don't need state recognition. Regarding the recognition procedures, in order to apply, the following documents are needed:

- a request for degree recognition, addressed to the Directorate for the Recognition of Degrees (which can be obtained at the time of application);
- photocopy of the degree (translated and notarised);
- a full transcription of subjects (translated and notarised), According to the international agreement of the Hague, that Albania signed, documents should be sealed by the ministry of the foreign affairs (or other appropriate authority) of the country where the applicant obtained his/her degree;
- a detailed summary of all subjects studied;
- a birth certificate;
- the application form (provided by the office);
- a payment mandate from the Raiffeisen Bank for the fee of 10.000 ALL to the account number of the Ministry of Education and Science.

The process of evaluation is expected to be from 6 to 12 months, while the applicant receives a certificate for being under administrative procedure from the Ministry, which gives him/her the right to apply for a job at the public sector.²⁰³

3.3.3 Education and retraining programmes

The opportunity to acquire basic skills during formal education by attendance at vocational education and training (VET) facilities was seriously reduced in the 1990s due to lack of government spending on education in general and in VET in particular. Faced with a range of demands from mainstream educational commitments, funding for VET has had a relatively low priority. In addition, as many as 2.000 teachers left the country since 1991 and many others moved from rural schools to the town. Given low wages and little career prospects, most remaining VET teachers used whatever skills they possessed to find more remunerative employment.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Ministry of Education. Contact address: Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkencës, "Rruga e Durrësit", Nr. 23, Tirana, Albania. Website address: www.mash.gov.al, last accessed November 2008
More specific information about degree equivalence can be found at: <http://www.mash.gov.al/struktura/njohja%20e%20diplomave.html>, last accessed November 2008

²⁰³ Interview with Mr. Y. Jani at the High Education Department, MoES, January 17, 2007. <http://www.mash.gov.al> last accessed November 2008

²⁰⁴ Interview with Mr. Arben Iliriani, Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, Tirana, July 2008

So far only 38 vocational education and training schools remain, of which 25 are 3-year vocational schools and 13 are 5-year technical schools.

There is a lack of a national qualification framework. Moreover, there are serious gaps in the training of teachers and the availability of teaching material.

The vocational training system in Albania consists of nine public training centres located in the main cities (Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Vlora, Shkodra, Kavaja and Tepelena) providing training for about 8.300 people.²⁰⁵ They provide short-term courses (from 6 weeks up to 4 months) in, inter alia, foreign languages, computer skills, tailoring, hairdressing, plumbing and secretarial tasks. The most sought-after courses are foreign languages and computer skills, and this reflects the new labour market demands. The trainees are generally registered jobseekers but also workers at risk of becoming unemployed and seeking to improve their employment prospects. They are mainly young and female.

In the vocational education and training system, there is some evidence of gender stereotyping, which encourages young women to train in traditional female activities which may not help to improve their future employability and earnings. The training expenses are covered by the Albanian Government.

There are also further 63 private VET and NGOs reaching another 9.000 people. Many of VET programmes are of short duration and suffer from a lack of funding and certified teachers or instructors. The absence of recognised certification has also hampered their ability to promote trainees for employment.²⁰⁶ The government realised the deficits in this important sector and implemented in 2007 various programs to improve the quality of VET's.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ More information on the website of the "Ministry for Labour, Social Welfare and Equal Opportunities," www.mpcs.gov.al, last accessed November 2008

²⁰⁶ Research of the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Development and Population" (ACPD) in August 2008, contact: Appendix I

²⁰⁷ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 34, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

Table: main features education system, Albania²⁰⁸

Albania's education system
• Age at which compulsory education starts: 6
• Age at which compulsory education ends: 15. If a pupil fails, he/she is obliged to remain at school until age 16.
• Structure of the primary and secondary education system: Education is free at all levels. General education consists of: Lower Primary (4 years); Upper Primary (5 years); (Non-compulsory); Secondary General (4 years); Secondary Vocational (after primary, 3 and 5-year vocational and technical secondary, 5-year programmes lead to Maturity exams).
• Higher education: 4-, 5- and 6-year university courses in 11 institutions (39 faculties/schools); non-university courses (avg.) 3,5 years, in 3 institutions. Total enrolment 1999/00: 40 000, 15% of 18-23 age groups. Growth mostly in part-time students: from 20% of total in 1990/91 to 45% in 1999/00.
• Schooling expectancy for average Albanian 6-year old child (excluding pre-school): 9.5 years (1998), 2 years less than in 1989 and 6 years less than the average for OECD countries.
• Education attainment rates: 9 years (compulsory basic education) for 59% of the population; secondary education for 33% of the population (20-59 year olds, 1999).

During the transition period in the 1990's inequalities in education among the various population groups increased. Children from poor families have the lowest rate of enrolment in schools. There are also marked differences between rural and urban areas, males and females. Inequalities are even more pronounced in secondary and tertiary education. In challenge of transition there has been various groups among working force for which persistent direct and indirect employment discrimination against these groups have been exacerbated by limited access to training. Among these groups we can count women, young workers, Roma and persons with disabilities. Enhancing the access to training for vulnerable groups has been part of the effort from various organizations to address the problem of high unemployment and underemployment of these groups.

Nevertheless some progress has been made in recent years. The education budget for 2008 increased by 12% in comparison with 2007 and there are same-scale increases scheduled for 2009-2011. The money has been mostly invested in higher teacher salaries. The "National Council of Pre-University Education" was established to be composed of independent experts and representatives of the national and local administration. The Council acts as an advice body for the government.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ International Labour Organization and Council of Europe, *Employment Policy Review on Albania. 2003-2004*, http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/budapest/download/empl/albania_epr.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²⁰⁹ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 34, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

The right to education for children has significantly improved since the late 1990s and the enrolment rate for 2008 in primary schools reached 92%.²¹⁰

Vulnerable groups

Despite this high average percentage the rate can go down in areas populated by Roma to 13%.²¹¹ Only 48% of all Roma men and 57% of all Roma women never attended school.²¹² Legal regulations for enrolment, such as required vaccination certificates act as barriers for the school attendance of Roma.²¹³ A further serious obstacle for the education of Roma girls is the low average age of marriage in the Roma community which dropped significantly to 15 years since the end of the communist rule (average marriage age of the female population of Albania is 23 years).²¹⁴ According to World Bank data, the average education of Roma women has dropped from 6,2 years under the communist rule to less than 4 in 2007.²¹⁵

Albania has the lowest secondary school enrolment rate of all its neighbouring countries. Especially in rural areas the secondary school enrolment is alarmingly low. Deficits there are deteriorated by a very low student-teacher ratio and poor transport infrastructure.²¹⁶

Children in rural areas, especially girls, are in a clear disadvantage regarding their education possibilities in comparison with children in urban centres.²¹⁷ Especially the poor population in rural areas is considered as extreme vulnerable in the aspect of their access to education and training. The Swiss government supports therefore

²¹⁰ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 16, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²¹¹ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 16, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²¹² Nicole Itano, *Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania*, December 8, 2007, published on "Womens News", <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>, last accessed November 2008

²¹³ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 15, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²¹⁴ Nicole Itano, *Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania*, December 8, 2007, published on "Womens News", <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>, last accessed November 2008

²¹⁵ Nicole Itano, *Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania*, December 8, 2007, published on "Womens News", <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>, last accessed November 2008

²¹⁶ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 67, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²¹⁷ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 67, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 34, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

the Albanian Ministry of Education and Science in the establishing of mobile education centres in the Northern areas, like Puke, Kukes, Tropoje and Burrel with EUR 3m.²¹⁸

Regarding the fact, that child labour is significant (see subchapter 3.3.1.3 “Labour Conditions”, “Vulnerable groups”) working children are an important vulnerable group in the aspect of their legal right of education.

3.3.3.1 By government

The right to have free access to public education programmes at all levels is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Albanian Republic. According to the new system of education the compulsory education continues up to ninth grade.

Table: Education system of Albania:

age	grade	Post-graduate Education	Higher Education	Non-University
25				
24				
23		Higher Education - University	Vocational/Technical Education	Art/Social School
22				
21				
20				
19	XIII			
18	XII	Comprehensive Secondary Education		
17	XI			
16	X			
15	IX			
14	VIII			
13	VII	Upper Primary Education		
12	VI			
11	V			
10	IV			
9	III			
8	II	Lower Primary Education		
7	I			
6				
5		Pre-school Education		
4				

²¹⁸ Ministry of Education and Science, *Zvicra grant 3 mln Euro për zhvillimin e Arsimit dhe Formimit Profesional shqiptar*, 23 korrik 2008, <http://www.mash.gov.al/LAJMET%20E%20DITES/23-korrik.htm>, last accessed November 2008

During the school-year 2007/2008, 72.600 children had been enrolled in Pre-Primary Education, 410.077 pupils in Primary Education and 144.824 pupils in Secondary Education. Public expenditure in tertiary education is low compared to several other countries in the region. Spending on education has been reduced to bare essentials, at the expense of important needs that generate no immediate return such as maintenance and teacher training. State Universities do not enjoy enough autonomy with respect to managerial and financial aspects. Universities lack a strong unified management. No university is run based in strategic plan. The mechanism for funding Albanian higher education institutions has preserved a very large discretionary power of the state authorities.²¹⁹

Albania developed the "National Education Strategy 2004-2015", which focuses on pre-university education. The Strategy identifies four priority areas, and establishes related objectives, indicators to measure achievement and the timetable for implementation. The four priority areas include: (i) governance - reforming and strengthening management capacity, (ii) improving the quality of the teaching and learning process, (iii) financing pre-university education, and (iv) capacity building and human resource development. This Strategy provides a credible roadmap to help strengthen the sector's performance and serves as a basis for concerted efforts to achieve better learning outcomes in a more equitable and efficient manner.²²⁰

Taking in to consideration some socially excluded groups of the population, a programme having an employment component, was elaborated in 2003: the National Strategy for the Improvement of the Living Conditions of the Roma Minority. The Strategy highlights the need to tackle long-term unemployment among Roma communities, by a combination of vocational training, active measures and participation in public works. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities provides the licensing and accreditation of private centres.²²¹ There are 150 licensed private centres.²²²

3.3.3.2 By private firms

In Albania, private education was re-established after 1996. The Law on Pre-University Education allows the opening of private schools in all levels of pre-university education (main legal framework: Law no. 8461/1999 on Higher Education in the Republic of Albania, Prime Minister Decision No. 303/1999, and the Council of Ministers Decision No. 156/2001 on Higher Non-Public Schools in

²¹⁹ UNESCO, *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*, 2007, p. 26 et seqq., <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001511/151100e.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²²⁰ Ministry of Education and Science, *National Education Strategy 2004-2015*, http://www.mash.gov.al/bashkpunimi_nderkombetar/EEEP%20PHRD%20Grant%20TA%20Info%20Sheet.htm, last accessed November 2008

²²¹ European Training Foundation, "Albania's Vocational Education and Training Reform Policy, Peer Review", February 2003 <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UNTC/UNPAN014798.pdf> last accessed November 2008

²²² Ministry for Labour, Social Welfare and Equal Opportunities, <http://www.mpcs.gov.al/license-per-formim-profesional>, last accessed November 2008

the Republic of Albania).²²³ The Ministry of Education and Science approves the education plans and curricula of these institutions. According to the law, every private education institute should comply with the national education standards. These private establishments have organizational and functional autonomy (setting of fees, recruitment of teachers etc). The setting of fees and financing is the affair of each school. The fees for the first level of education (first four years of education - kindergarten and primary school) vary from EUR 100 to 200 per month. For the "mid-level" (that is pre-university education) prices vary from EUR 200 to 450 per month, according to the private institution. During the recent years (mainly from 2001 and on) there has been a "boom" of private universities in Tirana. This can be mainly attributed to the political decision of the Albanian government for the liberalization of the higher educational system. Prices per year vary from EUR 2.000 to 4.500 a year, depending on the university standards.²²⁴

However, the state indirectly finances the private education system. Considering the small number of pupils and students involved in private schooling, the total financial resources are small in comparison to the overall financial resources for education. There is no substantial information about the quality of the private education system in Albania, and evaluation studies are not available.

3.3.3.3 By international organisations or NGOs

There are several international providers in the VET field, including, DVV-International,²²⁵ Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC),²²⁶ KulturKontakt,²²⁷ GTZ,²²⁸ and others. The GTZ will offer in 2009 support for VET-courses in rural areas in North-East Albania.

The Albanian NGO "Shpresë për të Ardhmen" (Hope for the Future), offers VET-courses addressed to returnees.²²⁹

The World Bank supports the improvement of the Albanian Education system with a budget line of USD 75m for the period of 2006 to 2010.²³⁰

²²³ UNESCO, *The Rising Role and Relevance of Private Higher Education in Europe*, 2007, p. 17 et seqq. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001511/151100e.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²²⁴ A full list of all Public and Private Universities can be obtained at the following website of the Albanian Ministry of Sciences and Education: http://www.mash.gov.al/arsimi_larte/home.html, last accessed November 2008.

²²⁵ Programs of DVV-International for Albania: <http://www.parsh.org.al/>, last accessed November 2008

²²⁶ Programs of "SDC" for Albania: <http://www.swisscooperation-albania.ch/>, last accessed November 2008

²²⁷ Programs of "KulturKontakte" for Albania: <http://www.kulturkontakt.or.at/page.aspx?target=230536>, last accessed November 2008

²²⁸ Programs of "GTZ", <http://www.gtz.de/en/weltweit/europa-kaukasus-zentralasien/648.htm>, last accessed November 2008

²²⁹ NGO "Shpresë për të Ardhmen" (Hope for the Future), website http://www.shprese.org/index_al.htm, last accessed November 2008, contact information:

3.3.4 Starting a new business and legal conditions

Albania reformed the tax regime and the fiscal burden for Small and Medium Enterprises. The Government has approved an action plan on removing administrative barriers, through establishing “On-Stop Shops” for registering the businesses, and simplifying the legal requirements. In support of this process the Business Registration Component of the Millennium Challenge Albania Threshold Agreement project supports the Government of Albania to establish the National Registration Center (NRC) providing a “one stop shop” process for business registration, featuring IT system and one day registration permitting new companies to register their business, register with the tax authorities, with social insurance, and the labour incorporate.²³¹

On September 3, 2007 the National Registering Centre has established a new Law on business registration. Law 9723 “On the National Registration Center”, as a new central public institution. It is an initiative being taken by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy (METE) reforming the business registration procedures, reducing the time required to register new businesses to one day, and combining all registration steps—including tax registration—in a single procedure.²³²

The Government has established a new umbrella organization, Albinvest, integrating the Albanian Investment Agency (ANIH), the Small Medium Enterprises Agency (SMEA) and the Albanian Export Agency (ANE), and reporting directly to the Minister of Economy, Trade and Energy. This new structure is in line with government policy to reduce the operational costs of public administration and is expected to enhance sustainability.²³³

Registration procedures

For companies (apart from small business) to acquire legal personality they must register with the Commercial Register which is being held by the Tirana Court. A judge is appointed to consider the registration of the new company, by assessing the registration and various documents pertaining to its formation. Such documents include Articles of Association, Articles of Memoranda (also known as Articles of Foundation) and a Bank Certificate proving the payment of initial capital. Registration with the commercial register at the Tirana Court should be finalized within a legal term of eight days. However, in practice this procedure takes about two to three weeks.

²³⁰ World Bank, Programs Albania, *Education Excellence and Equality Project* (Project ID: P078933), <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=64283627&piPK=73230&theSitePK=301412&menuPK=301443&Projectid=P078933>, last accessed November 2008

²³¹ USAID, *Millennium Challenge Albania. Program 2006-2008* <http://albania.usaid.gov/spaw2/uploads/files/MCC/POD-DF-07-03-30-BR%20Fact%20Sheet%20ENG.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²³² Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy (METE), *Business Registration Reform: A Major Benefit for Business in Albania*, <http://www.mete.gov.al/mat.php?idm=337&l=a>, last accessed November 2008

Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 27, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²³³ More information on the website of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy (METE): <http://www.mete.gov.al/> last accessed July 2008

There are various other public bodies the company must register with to become operative:

- the labour office or labour inspectorate (the process takes one to two days);
- the city municipality where the company's registered office is located (one to two days);
- the tax authority of the city where the activity is carried out (five days); and
- the Chamber of Commerce of the city where the registered office is located (within one day).

Forms of Company

Under Albanian company law a company may have one of four forms: (i) general partnership; (ii) limited partnership; (iii) limited liability; or (iv) joint stock. The first two proposed legal forms are not very practicable in Albania; this is probably because liability remains with the capital holders or the partners. A special form of limited liability company is sole proprietorship. Investors may also form a partnership to do business in Albania. This is an unincorporated type of partnership which is formed, operated and liquidated according to the Albanian Civil Code. Partnership is also used as the main legal ground for forming unincorporated joint ventures.²³⁴

Starting a new business in Albania will require the following standard legal conditions:²³⁵

Legal Form: Limited Liability Company (Shpk). Minimum Capital Requirement: 100.000 ALL (approximately EUR 817).

Registration requirements:

- Search for a unique company name (time to complete 1 day - cost to complete "no charge").
- Deposit the initial capital in a bank and obtain a bank statement (Deposit of the initial capital may also be completed in front of a notary public. A fee of 4.000 ALL (approximately EUR 32) applies.
- Notarize the incorporation documents. Cost of procedure will be approximately 10.500 ALL (EUR 85), and include 2.500 ALL (EUR 20) for the notarization of articles of incorporation. Notarizing the request for the company's registration to court costs also 2.500 ALL. An eventual special proxy to an attorney is 3.000 ALL (EUR 24). The legal fee for drafting the articles of incorporation and statute varies greatly, from EUR 100 to over EUR 1.000, depending on the services of the legal counsellors. The above-mentioned professional fees are mostly charged in EUR.
- File the documents with the Office for the Registration in the Local District Court and obtain a registration number. This procedure will require a proceeding time of 20 days and will cost 1.500 ALL (EUR 12). Attached to the request and deposited in the register's appendix are also: articles of incorporation, constitution act signed in the presence of a public notary; the act for the appointment of the administrators; documents reflecting the capital disbursement, etc. Registration fee is paid directly to the Commercial Registry.
- Register the company at the Labour Inspectorate Office. This procedure can be completed within one day and without fee.

²³⁴ IFLR 1000 - Guide to the World's Leading Financial Law Firms, *Piercing the Corporate Veil* by Ardjana Shehi, Kalo and Associates, Tirana, (2008) <http://www.iflr1000.com/default.asp?page=38&CH=3&Index=2&CountryID=27>, last accessed November 2008

²³⁵ Republic of Albania. Civil Code of Republic of Albania, Law No 7850 Date 29-07-1994: 1994, No 11, page 491, and the Law of functioning of trade companies and agencies

- Pay the local fees and tariffs, and obtain a final statement on the payment of local fees and tariffs at the office of Alba Post SHA. This procedure can be completed within a day and cost 25.000 ALL (EUR 204).
- Register with the tax office and obtain a company tax number. This procedure will take 7 days.
- Register with the Public Institute of Social Security for social security and health insurance. This procedure is completed with no charge.²³⁶

The overall registration and set-up process still involves 7 steps (11 with compulsory licenses included) and an average time of 41 days. There is no online registration and no silence-is consent principle. Concrete steps to strengthen the Business Advisory Council remain to be taken. Albania has adopted a law on e-signature.

The new leasing law, adopted in 2005, is now being implemented as a financing alternative for Small and Medium Enterprises. Albania is at an early stage in improving the business environment for industry and Small and Medium Enterprises. Actually Albania eased the tax burden by amending depreciation rates and reducing labor taxes and contributions.²³⁷

Albania signed a USD 13.85m Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Program to tackle corruption and improve the environment for businesses to operate.²³⁸

To support Albania's fight against corruption, the Government of Albania has proposed a Threshold program that will reform tax administration, public procurement and business registration.

Threshold Program Overview

The Government of Albania has requested MCC assistance to fund three specific initiatives, highlights of which are listed below:

Reduce Corruption in Tax Policy and Administration:

- Limit tax officials' personal interaction with taxpayers and their discretion in tax assessment and collection;
- Broaden the tax base by including a larger percentage of the economy;
- Improve tax collection by upgrading information technology applications;
- Upgrade technical expertise and improve procedures by providing training and manuals to tax collectors, internal auditors and the judiciary;
- Create a better and more efficient legal tax environment.

Reduce Corruption and Realize Transparency in Government Procurements:

- Improve transparency and facilitate public scrutiny of procurement procedures;
- Enhance institutional mechanisms to detect, deter, and punish corrupt practices;

²³⁶ Interview with Dr. Artan Hajdari at Hajdari & Haxhia Law Firm, Tirana, April 5, 2007, information verified by the Albanian NGO Albanian Centre for Development and Population (ACPD) in August 2008, contact: Appendix I

²³⁷ World Bank, *Albania: Doing Business 2008*, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/ALBANIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21487005~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:301412,00.html?cid=3001>, last accessed November 2008

²³⁸ USAID, *Millennium Challenge Albania. Program 2006-2008* <http://albania.usaid.gov/spaw2/uploads/files/MCC/POD-DF-07-03-30-BR%20Fact%20Sheet%20ENG.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

- Bring the existing public procurement system into fuller compliance with the 1995 public procurement law;
- Strengthen technical capacities at the Public Procurement Agency to enable it to function as an oversight body over other government procurement entities;
- Provide continuous, professional and sustainable training for procurement officers at all procuring entities to elevate skill levels and strengthen commitment to the enhanced procurement process.

Combating Corruption in Business Entry and Registration in Albania -- Establishment of a National Business Center (NBC):

- Create a unified registration form and simplified registration procedures;
- Establishment of a single office (the NBC) where businesses can file electronically all documents needed to set up a new enterprise or renew the registration of an existing one;
- Revise administrative rules so that approval is automatically granted if a relevant agency does not respond within a given time.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supervises the implementation of the program on behalf of the Government of Albania.²³⁹

3.3.4.1 Credits and subsidies and access to them

Businesses in Albania receive significant financial support from the international community, which is regulated in various international agreements, with the World Bank and the European Union as the most important donors. These financial incentives usually take the form of guarantees, like those offered by the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency of the World Bank (MIGA) and the European Investment Bank (EIB), or grants, loans and soft-loans, like those of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), World Bank (IBRD, IFC), EIB, European Investment Fund (EIF), etc., that finance between 25 and 50% of the total project cost. Moreover, the EU JOP Phare programme gives support to the internationalization of SMEs and is structured in 4 facilities providing essentially grants. The Albanian Reconstruction Equity Fund (AREF) of the EBRD is a venture capital fund that provides support to private investments in the productive and service sector. The Albanian Government is already working with IMF, World Bank and other donors on the necessary improvements of tax administration, with a view to both encouraging businesses and improving the effectiveness of tax collection.

Since 2002, the USAID "Small Business Credit and Assistance-Program" (SBCA) is in action, which has been implemented in two phases: The first lasted from March 2002 to February 2005, and the second from March 2005 to February 2007.²⁴⁰

In Cooperation with "Opportunity International" (IO), the Albanian organisation "Parnteri Shqiptar ne Mikrokredi (PSHM) provides micro credits to small businesses.

²³⁹ Millennium Challenge Corporation, United States of America, *Fiscal Year 2009. Country Indicator Data*, <http://www.mca.gov/countries/albania/index.php>, last accessed November 2008

²⁴⁰ Development Consultant Jeff Houghton, USAID: Albania Small Business Credit and Assistance Programme, http://www.jeffhoughton.co.uk/project_info.php?id=2, last accessed November 2008

In 2007, PSHM had 13.311 active clients. The average credit size has been USD 3.072. 38% of the loans were made to women.²⁴¹

3.3.5 Social security

Albania has a social security system. The current law on social insurance dates back to 1993 with amendments in 1995 and in 2007. Covered are all official employed persons and self-employed persons. A voluntary coverage is possible. Civil servants including military personnel benefits form a separate system.

Employed persons contribute with 8% of their monthly wage, self-employed persons with 33,2% of the minimum monthly wage (16.000 ALL, about EUR 129) and voluntarily insured persons with 3.140 ALL (about EUR 25) per month. The distribution of employers to the social security system is 21,7% of the covered monthly payroll. The government has to cover possible deficits and is responsible to insure persons in compulsory service. The government guarantees state pensions and insurance for civil servants.²⁴²

Vulnerable groups

The social security system does not cover the existence minimum of social vulnerable groups, especially Roma but as well other socially outclassed people. The average benefit is equal to less than 15% of the poverty line; therefore beneficiaries need to find additional sources of support.²⁴³

Beside the issue of social security insurances, the opportunities of participating in the development of the society are not equally for different groups:

- Children: Albania has a policy of obligatory vaccination and an average high level of immunisation of children. However, children of some minorities are not vaccinated to the level of then national average. There are no legal measures against parents who abandon their children or parents who are not enrolling their children in school. The legal framework to provide aid for children who fall victim to exploitation, abuse or domestic violence is insufficient.
- Roma: One in four Roma is according to the IMF illiterate. 20% of Roma children (up to age 14) are not vaccinated (in comparison the national average: 3%). High mobility, early marriages and ignorance of the law mean that the Roma are often not officially registered and have therefore no access to legal benefits.
- Disabled: The number of recipients of the disability allowance increased significantly in recent years but efforts to aim on rehabilitation are insufficient.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Opportunity International, Albania: *Partneri Shqiptar ne Mikrokredi (PSHM)*, <http://www.opportunity.net/partners/partner.profiler.asp?partnerSelect=29>, last accessed November 2008, contact information on PSHM: Appendix I

²⁴² All information based on: US Social Security Administration, Office of Policy, *Social Security Programs Throughout the World: Albania, 2008* (released September 2008), pp. 2-31 <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2008-2009/europe/albania.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²⁴³ International Monetary Fund (IMF), Albania: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 60, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²⁴⁴ International Monetary Fund (IMF), Albania: *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, pp. 60-62, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

3.3.5.1 Unemployment benefit and access to it

Unemployment benefits and the eligibility conditions are defined in a Law on Social Insurance of 1993. All persons meeting the following conditions are eligible: (i) they have contributed to the social security system for a period of at least 12 months; (ii) they have certificates from the labour offices attesting that they are unemployed (iii) they are willing and available for training or retraining and they do not receive any other benefit under this law, with the exception of partial invalidity payments²⁴⁵. Under this legislation, the unemployment benefit is a flat rate payable for up to 12 months or for a total of 365 calendar days where there are temporary periods of employment (it is calculated according to the number and age of family members, house, etc). Those that attend training or retraining but do not receive stipends or wages have the right to draw benefit over the whole training period up to a limit of 18 months.²⁴⁶

The benefit must be at least equal to the monthly minimum standard of living, as decided by the Council of Ministers. This minimum standard of living is fixed at 4.360 ALL (about EUR 35). There is a supplement for each child younger than age 15 of the unemployed person which amount 5% of the benefit up to a maximum of 20%. Benefits are indexed annually according to price increase.²⁴⁷

Table : Number of beneficiaries of the unemployment benefit in 2007²⁴⁸

1 st Quarter	2 nd Quarter	3 rd Quarter	4 th Quarter
11.090	9.739	9.649	9.534

3.3.5.2 Sickness benefits and access to them²⁴⁹

The sickness and maternity benefits are regulated in the social insurance law of 1993. Every person, residing legally in Albania is covered by the medical benefits. Employed persons are contributing with 1,5% of their covered earnings and with 1,7%, if they live in urban areas.

²⁴⁵ The Government of Albania has adopted a Law on Assistance and Social Help (December 2004); approval of the changes on the Law on Promotion of Employment (April 2005) and amendments on the Law for Social Insurance in Albania (2005)

²⁴⁶ More information on the website of the "Ministry for Labour, Social Welfare and Equal Opportunities," www.mpcs.gov.al, last accessed November 2008

²⁴⁷ US Social Security Administration. *Office of Policy, Social Security Programs Throughout the World: Albania 2008*, (released September 2008), p. 30 et sqq., <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2008-2009/europe/albania.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²⁴⁸ National Institute of Statistic (INSTAT). *Shqipëria në Shifra 2007 (Albania in Numbers 2007)* Tirana 2008, p,10

²⁴⁹ US Social Security Administration. *Office of Policy, Social Security Programs Throughout the World: Albania 2008*, (released September 2008), p. 30 et sqq., <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2008-2009/europe/albania.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

Sickness benefits: In the case where the insured has contributed for less than 10 years, the benefit is equal to 70% of his/her average daily wage (more than 10 years: 80%). The first 14 days of sickness are paid by the employer, from the 15th day of medical certification, the insurance will pay up to 6 months with a possible extension of 3 months if the public "Medical Experts Committee certifies the likelihood of recovering within this period.

During hospitalisation, the benefit amounts to 50% of the average daily wage of the insured with possible extra payment if there are dependents.

Maternity benefit: Up to 365 days of paid maternity leave is provided with a minimum of 35 days before the expected delivery and 42 days after. The monthly benefit amounts to 80% of the last average wage of the insured up to 150 days after the birth of the child and 50% after this period. For multiple births, the benefit can be extended to a maximum of 390 days. Benefits are also paid in the case of child-adoption. For employers and self-employed persons, the benefit is equal to the flat-rate old-age pension.

Birth grant: A lump sum equal to 50% of the minimum wage (2008:16.000 ALL, about EUR 129)²⁵⁰ set by the Council of Ministers is paid to insured persons with a minimum of 12 months of contributions.

Workers' Medical Benefits: All general medical services are free. For all other treatments there is a reimbursement from 35% to 100%. For several types of examinations the insured has to pay 10% of the costs. There is no limit of duration.

Dependents' Medical Benefits: Same conditions as above. Exceptions: free benefits for babies (up to 12 months), disabled persons, war veterans, and persons with specified serious illnesses.

3.3.5.3 Family allowances and access to them

The first and current law that regulates the family allowances is of 1993 (financial aid and social services). It covers families residing in Albania. This set of rights does not apply for the insured persons, self-employed, employers etc. but applies in the form of family allowances (social assistance) for those families residing in Albania with low or inadequate income or with a member who is disabled or blind. Financial aid is provided to eligible families²⁵¹ through the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities. General Administration of Social Assistance and Services administers the program at district level.

The regulatory framework on family allowances is based on the Law of 1993 on Financial Aid and Social Services. It consists of financial aid provided by the Albanian state to these families.

Based on this law, the Social Assistance is a cash benefit for poor families which is distributed every month. It may be partial or full according to the family incomes.

²⁵⁰ Federation of European Employers, (fedEE), *Legal Minimum Wages, Europe*, (permanent updated) <http://www.fedee.com/minwage.html>, last accessed November 2008

²⁵¹ World Bank, *Social Assistance in Albania Decentralization and Targeted Transfers, 1998* http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer?WDSID=IB/1998/07/01/000009265_3980929125507/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf, last accessed November 2008

There are two national social assistance programs in Albania: The institute of Social Insurance which provides retirement pensions to workers employed in the formal sector and *Ndihma Ekonomike* (NE, the national cash assistance program), which provides cash assistance to needy families. In the end of the fourth quarter 2007 a total of 95.112 families were assisted, which was a decrease of 16.205 families compared with the same period of the pervious year. In the spring of 2008 the number increased to a total of about 103.000 families.²⁵²

However, the number of assisted families in the prefectures Shkoder, Kukes, Diber and Elbasan are fare above the average.²⁵³

Table: Families, assisted by Social Insurance, fourth quarter of 2007²⁵⁴

Families by size	Total	Partial Assistance	Full Assistance
Total	39.719	7.121	32.598
With 1 member	4.033	277	3.756
With 2 member	3.872	416	3.456
With 3 members	6.062	816	5.246
With 4 members	13.057	2.140	10.917
With 5 members	7.616	1.726	5.890
With 6 members	3.038	975	2.063
With over 6 members	2.041	771	1.270

3.3.5.4 Other benefits in the social welfare system²⁵⁵

Old-age pension: For age 65 (men) or age 60 (women) with at least 35 years of contributions and with retirement from an economic activity. In the case of mothers a pension is accessible at the age of 50 when the person contributed at least 30 years and has six or more children older than age 8. For persons with less than 35 years of contribution a partial pension is foreseen. There are no early pension programmes in Albania. The pension is not payable abroad.

²⁵² Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 16, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²⁵³ National Institute of Statistic (INSTAT), *Quarterly Statistical Bulletin*, 4th Quarter 2007, Tirana 2008, p.11.

²⁵⁴ National Institute of Statistic (INSTAT), *Quarterly Statistical Bulletin*, 4th Quarter 2007, Tirana 2008, p.11.

²⁵⁵ US Social Security Administration. *Office of Policy, Social Security Programs Throughout the World: Albania 2008*, (released September 2008), p. 30 et sqq, <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2008-2009/europe/albania.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

The benefit is a flat-rate which is equal to the fixed minimum standard of living (4.360 ALL=EUR 35), plus an earning related payment equal to 1% of each contribution year. The maximum benefit is twice the flat rate. Partial pension: a certain percentage is paid according to the contribution years. The benefit is indexed annually.

Disability pension: The degree of disability is assessed by the "Medical Experts Committee" and the applicant has to be declared to be incapable of performing any work. A *partial disability pension* is accessible for persons, which are declared by the Medical Experts Committee" as incapable of performing their last work but capable of work under special conditions. The disability pension is a flat-rate pension, equal in payment to the old-age pension. In the case of the *partial disability pension* the pension is 50% of the insured's full disability pension (the flat-rate plus the insured's earnings-related pension). Disability benefits are not payable abroad.

Widow's and orphans' pension: The surviving spouse receives 50% of the deceased's old-age pension and each orphan or dependent receives 25% of it but may not exceed 100%. The pension may not exceed 50% of the deceased old-age pension in the case that the surviving spouse is working or receiving an own pension. The pension ceases in the case of remarriage. The pension is not payable abroad.

Full-orphan's pension: 50% of the deceased's old-age pension for a single full orphan provided there are no other eligible dependents. Full orphans are eligible for the pension entitlements of both parents.

Death benefit: A lump sum equal to one monthly old-age flat-rate pension.

Work injury benefit: Eligible are employed persons, apprentices and students in vocational training. There is no possibility of voluntary coverage. Self-employed persons are not eligible. The costs are covered only by the employer contribution of 0,5% of the payroll. *Temporary disability benefit:* 100% of the insured's average wage of the last 3 years for a maximum of 12 months. *Permanent disability benefit:* For a loss of working capacity of at least 67%, the benefit is equal to 80% of the average wage of the insured during the last 3 years. For a loss of at least 33% of the working capacity, the covering is equal to 50-80% of the average wage of the insured during the last 3 years. For a working capacity loss between 10-33%, a lump sum is paid according to the legal schedule.

3.3.5.5 Special benefits for returnees

Not applicable.

3.3.6 Charity organizations with a general scope

A considerable number of charity organizations are located in Albania and differ in scope, means, territorial coverage and structures. The most important ones, dealing with returnees in one way or another, are:

- International Organisation for Migration; Rruga "Brigada e Tete", Vila no. 3, Tirana, Albania; Tel: +355 42 57836; Fax: +355 42 57835; iomtirana@iomtirana.org.al;

- Albanian Caritas / Karitasi Shqiptar; Rruga Don Bosko , Tirana; Tel. +355 4 230-088; <http://www.caritasalbania.org>;
- The Albanian Red Cross /Kryqi i Kuq Shqiptar; Sheshi Karl Topia, Tirana, Tel. +355 4 225-855
- The Albanian Health Forum / Forumi Shëndetësor Shqiptar; Rruga Shinasi Dishnica 71, Tirana, Tel. +355 4 229-557
- “Shpresë për të Ardhmen” (Hope for the Future), Shpresë për të Ardhmen Bulevardi "Gjergj Fishta" Kulla 8, Ap. 11, Tiranë, Tel/Faks +355 4 224 033, kape@shprese.org, http://www.shprese.org/index_al.htm

3.3.7 Useful data to calculate the cost of living ²⁵⁶

The legal minimum wage in 2008 is 16.000 ALL (about EUR 129).²⁵⁷

The Consumer Price Index for the month October 2008 reaches 101,3% (December 2007=100, as reference month for the calculation of the index), recording an increase of 0.1% compared with September 2008. Regarding the index for food and non-alcoholic beverage, the index increased by 0,8%. The largest increase, equal to 5%, was recorded for vegetables. The index for tobacco and alcohol was stable, in transportation there was a decrease of 1,5%. The inflation rate in the October 2008 has been 2,8%.²⁵⁸

Table: Price-examples for elementary products in Tirana, January 5, 2009.²⁵⁹

Product	Approximate price (in ALL)	
loaf of bread (600gr)	70	
Coffee (1kg)	1.000	
Gasoline (1l)	130	
Diesel (1l)	114	
Quality meat	Veal (1kg)	750
	Pork (1kg)	400-700
Sugar (1kg)	80	
Flour (1kg)	90	
Cigarettes (packet)	100-200	
Raki (1l)	800	

²⁵⁶ Information based on articles and commentaries of newspapers and bulletins of the newspaper Shekulli, Korrieri and the Albanian Economy.

²⁵⁷ Federation of European Employers, (fedEE), *Legal Minimum Wages, Europe*, (permanent updated) <http://www.fedee.com/minwage.html>, last accessed November 2008

²⁵⁸ Italian News Agency “ANSamed”, Albania - October Inflation Reaches 2.8%, November 21, 2008, last accessed November 2008²⁵⁹ Research of Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen in Tirana, January 2009. For further information on prices see chapter 1.6.3 “Means of internal travel” and chapter 3.2.5.2 “Relevant approximate prices” (rental)

3.4 Health

The general health indicators are in general positive in Albania. The live expectancy at birth has been estimated in 2008 at 77,8 years (men: 75,12 years, women: 80,71 years). In comparison: the average of the EU-member states is estimated in 2008 at 77,32 years. The death rate is with 5,44 deaths/1.000 inhabitants in 2008 very low (EU average: 10,38/1.000) and the country has a high birth rate.²⁶⁰ The vaccination rate of the population is high and just 3% of all children are not vaccinated - most of them are Roma (20% of Roma children are not vaccinated).

Table: Low level of Vaccine-preventable diseases: Reported infections in Albania 2005-2007²⁶¹

Disease	2007	2006	2005
Diphtheria	0	0	0
Measles	35	68	0
Mumps	824	236	1.696
Pertussis	13	0	15
Polio	0	0	0
Rubella	0	0	0
Rubella (CRS)	0	0	0
Tetanus (neonatal)	0	0	0
Tetanus (total)	2	2	1

The infant mortality rate, being one of the most important indicators for the general health situation, is high in comparison with the EU-average. In 2008 the infant mortality is estimated at 19,31 deaths per 1.000 live births. The EU-average is 6,38/1.000.²⁶²

According to the Ministry of Health, the main causes of death are diseases of the circulatory system (285,4 deaths per 100.000 inhabitants), cancer (92,8/100.000), accidents and injuries (38,9/100.000), diseases of the respiratory system (30,5/100.000), of the nervous system (13,8/100.000) and infections (3,1/100.000).²⁶³

A serious health threat emanates from the interaction of fast growing amount of waste and the insufficient waste-management in which little progress has been booked in the

²⁶⁰ CIA Factbook, *Albania* (regularly updated), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>, last accessed November 2008

²⁶¹ WHO, *Vaccine-Preventable Diseases: Monitoring System 2008. Global Summary: Albania*, http://www.who.int/immunization_monitoring/diseases/en/, last accessed November 2008

²⁶² International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, pp. 60-62, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²⁶³ WHO, *Country Cooperation Strategy: Albania*. (periodical update), http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccsbrief_alb_en.pdf, last accessed November 2008

last years. The widespread uncontrolled dumping and/or burning of all sorts of waste represents serious health hazards.²⁶⁴ Several industrial plants of the socialist time are still forming a serious health risk, first of all the copper smelter in Rubik, the nitrate fertilizer plant in Fier, the chemical plant in Durres and the Ballshi oil refinery.²⁶⁵

3.4.1 General health situation

After the communist fall, almost a quarter of the city health centres and two thirds of the village health posts have been closed or are in bad conditions. Disease surveillance, water purification and human waste disposal need funding.

As Albania has moved during the last decade towards a national health care system that emphasizes the development of primary care, there's a public debate going on about the guarantee of quality in the health sector.²⁶⁶

Health care in Albania is provided by polyclinics (first aid) and by hospitals for longer and specialised treatment. The quality of the polyclinics declined in recent years. The coverage of hospitals is sufficient (at least one in each district). In 2008 there are 36 hospitals with 9.586 beds (average: 1 bed for 322 habitants) which is a high standard. In 2007, only 50-55% of the total capacity was used. In many rural areas access to hospitals is limited due to the insufficient status of the street network.²⁶⁷

Despite progress achieved, Albania's health outcomes are behind those of other countries in the South East European region. Many medical facilities are limited beyond rudimentary first aid treatment. Emergency and major medical care requiring surgery and hospital care are inadequate due to lack of specialists, diagnostic aids, medical supplies, and prescription drugs. Electricity shortages result in sporadic blackouts throughout the country, which can affect services.²⁶⁸ Public expenditures for health care amount to 2,7 % of the GDP.²⁶⁹

Vulnerable groups

People in rural areas, especially in the northern mountain areas, have no adequate access to high quality health care. Because of the relative low salaries paid in the health sector, corruption is widespread and limits equal access to health services.

²⁶⁴ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 37, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²⁶⁵ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 38, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²⁶⁶ D. Glaros and others, *Health care in Albania: What is the future?*, in: The Lancet , Volume 357 , Issue 9261, Pages 1047 - 1047

²⁶⁷ Presentation "New Methods of Financing the Health System in the Republic of Albania, given by Ms Elvana Hana, General Director of the Albanian Health Insurance Institute, Tirana, June 9, 2008

²⁶⁸ Information by the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Human Rights" (ACHR), contact: Appendix

²⁶⁹ Presentation "New Methods of Financing the Health System in the Republic of Albania, given by Ms Elvana Hana, General Director of the Albanian Health Insurance Institute, Tirana, June 9, 2008

The most vulnerable group in this aspect are low-income families.²⁷⁰ Roma have frequently no access at all to the public health care due to their lack of registration. In consequence, the infant mortality among Roma is estimated as much higher than the national average.²⁷¹

Due to insufficient education, the youth has just limited knowledge about protection against drugs, alcohol, tobacco and sexual diseases like HIV/AIDS.²⁷² According to the Albanian migrant organisation "Konitza" in Brussels, there are cases of social exclusion of HIV/AIDS patients. Konitza refers especially to a case at a school in Tirana where parents demanded in 2008 the exclusion of an infected child from the institution.²⁷³

3.4.2 Drinking water and sanitation; heating systems

Albania faces a water distribution problem, not a water production problem. Studies indicate that available sources of supply could provide more than enough to satisfy the country's overall water demand. In many cities, water availability at the source is about 500 to 700 litres per capita per day, but leaks and waste make that only a small fraction of the water produced is actually consumed.

Access to safe drinking water has improved in the last years, especially in form of an increase of monitoring stations,²⁷⁴ but the further amelioration is hindered by the slow pace of reform.²⁷⁵ Water supply and sanitation systems are still outdated and there is just one water treatment plant in the whole country, with four others under construction.²⁷⁶ Water supply in almost all urban areas is insufficient due to the outdated water infrastructure. The infrastructure is in critical state, resulting in a massive water loss of estimated 43% of the water production in all cities. The many illegal settlements in the urban centres, mostly in Tirana, are often not connected

²⁷⁰ Nicole Itano, *Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania*, December 8, 2007, published on "Womens News", <http://www.womensnews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>, last accessed November 2008

²⁷¹ The Union of Albanian Roma, Amaro Drom, *Information: The Current Situation of the Roma Minority in Albania*, (periodical updates), <http://www.unioniamarodrom.org/eng/currsit.htm>, last accessed November 2008

²⁷² International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Albania: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - National Strategy for Development and Integration* (=IMF Country Report No. 08/269), August 2008, p. 58, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08269.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

²⁷³ Konitza asbl, *Avis sur les groupes vulnérables au retour en Albanie*.

Brussels, June 11, 2008. Contact information Konitza in Appendix I

²⁷⁴ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 38, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalib.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²⁷⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Millennium Development Goals in Albania*. (2007), http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=MDG/mdg_albania, last accessed November 2008

²⁷⁶ Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Albania, *Albania 2008 Progress Report*, p. 38, published November 5, 2008, http://www.delalib.ec.europa.eu/files/albania_progress_report_2008.pdf, last accessed November 2008

with the central water supply. Furthermore, the drinking water quality is compromised by insufficient filtration and disinfection. Gastroenteritis is therefore a recurrent health problem.²⁷⁷

Vulnerable groups

Low water quality affects most of all the population of urban centres. In rural areas the water supply is still based on local natural sources with far better water quality. However, there is no coordination in rural areas in the aspect of using natural water sources which makes a water management impossible.²⁷⁸

3.4.3 Health care system

The Institute of Public Health (IPH)

Under the Ministry of Health, the IPH is responsible for health protection (particularly the prevention and control of infectious diseases and the national vaccination programme), environmental health and the monitoring of drinking water and air quality. It works mainly through the district public health services. Monitoring of food quality is a responsibility that both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health share.²⁷⁹

Health Insurance Institute (HII)

Albania supports a national health insurance scheme that is managed by the Health Insurance Institute (HII). The HII was established in 1995 and initially focused on reimbursing pharmacies for essential medicines, contracting individual general practitioners and family doctors.²⁸⁰

HII enrolment varies among different population groups. Most of the unwaged, including children, women who work at home and the elderly, are automatically covered by the state budget.²⁸¹

Private sector

Private health services reappeared in Albania in the beginning of the 1990's. New legislation and the reform of the health sector paved the way for the development of

²⁷⁷ European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC), Albania. Progress toward CEHAPE Regional Priority Goal I on Water and Sanitation, (periodical updated, last update: May 30, 2008), http://www.euro.who.int/eehc/implementation/20061014_13, last accessed November 2008

²⁷⁸ European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC), Albania. *Progress toward CEHAPE Regional Priority Goal I on Water and Sanitation*, (periodical updated, last update: May 30, 2008), http://www.euro.who.int/eehc/implementation/20061014_13, last accessed November 2008

²⁷⁹ More information at the website of the Ministry of Health, <http://www.moh.gov.al/indexi.php>, last accessed November 2008

²⁸⁰ Presentation "New Methods of Financing the Health System in the Republic of Albania", given by Ms Elvana Hana, General Director of the Albanian Health Insurance Institute, Tirana, June 9, 2008

²⁸¹ Ministry of Health, *Organizimi i sistemit shendetesor*, (periodical update), <http://www.moh.gov.al/faqet/msh/organizimi.htm>, last accessed October 2008

various types of private services and facilities.²⁸² Today the private sector provides the following health services:²⁸³

- *Drug distribution.* Most of the drug distribution system in Albania is private. A dozen wholesale companies import most of the drugs, biological products and diagnostic equipment in the country. A network of about 750 private pharmacies and pharmaceutical agencies ensure a good distribution of drugs all around the country, including rural areas. The establishment of the health insurance scheme and the subsidizing of essential drugs have strengthened the development of the private drug distribution network.²⁸⁴
- *Dentistry services.* Dental care is private, with the exception of emergency dental services and services provided in school to children up to age 18. Both of these public services are free.²⁸⁵
- *Medical care.* Private medical care has been developing rapidly, despite the country's difficult economic situation. Most private services are provided in diagnostic centres and specialized outpatient clinics located in large urban areas, particularly Tirana. Albanian legislation does not allow doctors employed in the public sector to practice medicine privately, except for professors from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Tirana. However, the rapid expansion of the private sector makes it more likely that some public doctors are moonlighting. There are no private hospitals or inpatient facilities yet in Albania. Most private sector facilities are well equipped and organized. Some of these health services are financed and organized by foreign NGO's, private agencies or religious bodies such as the Roman Catholic Church or the Christian Orthodox Church. However, there are no mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of services offered by private facilities. In addition, there is no exchange of information between private and public facilities²⁸⁶.

Infectious and parasitic diseases no longer present a major cause of mortality, but remain a significant morbidity burden. Vaccine preventable diseases appear to be largely under control. After the last outbreak of polio in 1996, Albania was declared a polio-free country in 2002. The last nationwide measles epidemic took place in 1989-1990. Measles has since continued to circulate, with sporadic and limited outbreaks but causing no deaths. The Government's National Vaccination Program aims at completely eradicating measles by 2010.²⁸⁷

Albania ranks low among HIV/AIDS prevalence rate countries, but it exhibits all risk factors that may lead to a rapid increase in the disease. During the first evaluation

²⁸² South East Europe Review. Bajram Hysa. *Liberalisation and reform of the health service in Albania*, 1/2004, p. 137. www.ceeol.com/aspx/getdocument.aspx?logid=5&id=027929B4-46E9-41C9-AA1F-BDCE79B838F9, last accessed November 2008

²⁸³ Ministry of Health, Ligji Nr.8167, 21.11.1996, <http://www.moh.gov.al/ligjHTM/13.htm>, last accessed November 2008

²⁸⁴ Ministry of Health, Ligji Nr. 9323, 25.11.2004, <http://www.moh.gov.al/faqet/proclit/aktprivat.htm>, last accessed November 2008

²⁸⁵ Ministry of Health, Ligji Nr.8167, 21.11.1996, <http://www.moh.gov.al/ligjHTM/13.htm>, last accessed November 2008

²⁸⁶ Ministry of Health, *Tregues të Përgjithshëm* (Global Indicators), <http://www.moh.gov.al/faqet/baza/statistika.htm>, last accessed November 2008

²⁸⁷ Albanian Health Reform Project, *Towards a Healthy Country with Healthy People. Public Health and Health Promotion Strategy 2002-2010*, http://www.moh.gov.al/PdfStrategji/strategjia_versioni_i_fundit.pdf, last accessed November 2008

period of HIV/AIDS infections (1993-2000) the average number of reported HIV/AIDS cases has been 6-7 cases per year. In the second period (2001-2003) a significant increase has been registered (10-20 cases). In 2007 the reported cases further increased 44 (31 men and 13 women).²⁸⁸ The national AIDS program has started to process the revision of the National HIV strategy following the draft law on HIV/AIDS prevention and control, which is currently discussed in the parliament for its approval.

Vulnerable groups

Public health care is theoretical free, but in practice, bribes in order to get access to treatment are common. This practice makes low-income families in some hospitals of the country vulnerable. General access to the health care systems demands a proper registration which most Roma do not possess.²⁸⁹

3.4.3.1 Health care infrastructure

The quality of health care in Albania is low compared with other countries in South East Europe, particularly at primary care level. Physical and human resources in the health sector need to be aligned with the population's health needs.

Public health care facilities are insufficient and low-income groups are not well protected.

Further, there is large contribution evasion in the health insurance, decreasing the number of beneficiaries from health coverage.²⁹⁰

Albanian health care services are delivered in poor facilities with inadequate equipment. A basic primary health care system orientated towards Medical Clinical Health was established prior to 1990. Most of the doctors have not been trained in general practice. A typical health post is staffed by a nurse or midwife and provides maternity care, child health services²⁹¹ and immunizations. Rural health services have ceased to function in some areas, due to equipment shortages and staff resignations.

In urban areas, large polyclinics provide specialist outpatient care but are also used by people as their first point of contact with medical care. Previously, patients had to use General Paediatricians (GP) to obtain a referral to specialists, even though GPs were not highly respected as health professionals. This referral system is no

²⁸⁸ UNAIDS, *Country Progress Report: Albania 2008*, http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2008/albania_2008_country_progress_report_en.pdf, last accessed November 2008

²⁸⁹ Nicole Itano, *Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania*, December 8, 2007, published on "Womens News", <http://www.womensnews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>, last accessed November 2008

²⁹⁰ World Bank, Health System Modernization Project 2006-2010, (Project ID: PO82814), <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=64283627&piPK=73230&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=228424&Projectid=P082814>, last accessed November 2008

²⁹¹ GJONÇA, A., *Communism, Health and Lifestyle: the Paradox of Mortality Transition in Albania, 1950-1990: Studies in Population and Urban Demography*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001

longer functioning. The Ministry of Health has introduced fees for those who bypass their GPs but, so far, this disincentive has had little effect²⁹².

Dental care has been almost entirely privatised, although free dental care is still available in emergencies and for children up to the age of 18 in school-based clinics. These clinics suffer from a shortage of good equipment however, and their staff lack adequate training²⁹³.

"People are raising their expectations," says Dr. Alban Ylli of the Institute of Public Health and Hygiene. "They want better, more accessible health services. The Ministry of Health is trying to keep pace with those expectations, but there are problems." One problem is the growing number of cancer-patients. More than 4.000 new cases are diagnosed every year - a number which the current infrastructure is not able to cope with.²⁹⁴

Tertiary care remains quite limited in Albania and is located mainly in Tirana. It is provided by the following facilities:

- Tirana University Hospital (also called Mother Teresa), with around 1.600 beds the largest hospital in the country, offering secondary and tertiary care;
- Tirana Obstetric and Gynaecology Hospital, offering secondary and tertiary care;
- Lung Disease Hospital, offering secondary and tertiary care and long-term treatment for tuberculosis patients;
- The Military Hospital, under the Ministry of Defence, specializing in traumas and containing the university orthopaedic department.

In addition to the elderly, other risk groups also need special attention and care that basic social services can provide. They include mentally and physically disabled people, children and youth at risk, women and families at risk, etc.²⁹⁵ The existing services have limited capacity compared to the demand, and consequently, people are being excluded. Moreover, the services are not comprehensive, and they do not combine rehabilitation and therapy with information, prevention and integration.

Hospitals remain publicly owned, most of them by the Ministry of Health. It plans to reorganize hospitals at three levels: national, regional (prefecture) and district.

Health centres are supposed to be on separate sites than polyclinics, medical centres and hospitals. Many health centres were renovated and re-equipped in the period 1999-2000, and the Ministry of Health is rebuilding others.

Health centres in rural areas have a limited number of beds, most of them for maternity care. In 2005 the country had 671 health centres, 1.675 ambulances, 50 policlinics, 1.845 child consulting rooms, and 51 hospitals with a total of 9.284 beds.²⁹⁶

²⁹² Bulletin of the Institute of Public Health, Nr. 1, 2001

²⁹³ Bulletin of the Institute of Public Health, Nr. 1, 2001

²⁹⁴ Interview of the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Human Rights", with Dr. Alban Ylli, head of the Institute of Public Health and Hygiene, September 2008, contact: Appendix I

²⁹⁵ Interview of the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Human Rights", with Dr. Alban Ylli, head of the Institute of Public Health and Hygiene, September 2008, contact: Appendix I

²⁹⁶ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). Social Indicators Yearbook. Tirana, 2005, p. 21.

District directorates and the Tirana Regional Health Authority (TRHA)

Health directorates used to be organized around separate vertically integrated services, such as maternal and child health (MCH), but they have been replaced with a hospital directorate and a PHC directorate. The directorates are administered primarily through the Ministry of Health district bureaucracy.

3.4.3.2 Eligibility criteria and access to health care services

While the state remains the major source of health care financing, its contribution shrank as other funding, especially out-of-pocket payments, increased.

Eligibility for health care is now based on both citizenship and payment of insurance contributions. Access to free primary care and pharmaceuticals is restricted to patients (and their dependants) who have paid their insurance contributions. During their first year, children are automatically insured by the state and receive free essential drugs.

There are also co-payments for abortions.

All dental care has been privatised, except for emergency dental care and patients under the age of 18.

3.4.3.3 Costs of healthcare

Albania has a policy of free health care. However, informal payments to medical personnel in Albanian government health facilities are common.²⁹⁷ According to the National Strategy for Development and Integration, approved in March 2008, investments on public health and services will help sustain economic growth, reduce significant costs to the economy and meet EU standards.²⁹⁸

3.4.3.4 Discrimination in health care system

The main discrimination remains the salary level compared to the phenomena of brain drain in Albania. The medical staff remains underpaid, and discriminated. The issues of Roma minorities is covered by a special document produced by the Albanian Government in 2003, the National Strategy for Roma minorities, through

²⁹⁷ Information provided by the Albanian Ngo "Albanian Centre for Human Rights", September 2008, contact: Appendix I

Nicole Itano, *Conditions Worsen for Roma Women in Albania*, December 8, 2007, published on "Womens News", <http://www.womensnews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3274/context/archive>, last accessed November 2008

²⁹⁸ Republic of Albania, Council of Ministers, *National Strategy for Development and Integration 2007-2013* (March 2008) <http://www.km.gov.al/skedaret/1221549788-NSDI.pdf>, last accessed November 2008

which the state provides special education and creates facilities and representation at all levels. The reality shows that there are only few cases when individuals of this minority group have completed the necessary education. This issue covers also the access to health care services.

3.4.3.5 Services of non-state agents in health care

Due to the country's current economic and political condition, private insurers have not sought to enter the health insurance market. External aid accounts for a considerable proportion of Albanian health care funding. External aid to Albania comes from foreign governments and NGO's. There are many NGO's and international organisations²⁹⁹ active in the Albanian health sector, among others the WHO or the Albanian Red Cross which has branches and volunteers in every district of the country.

The Austrian NGO "Volkshilfe" initiated in autumn 2007 a mobile health service in the remote northern Albanian region of Puka, addressing children up to 5 years. The "hospital on wheels" which is manned by a doctor and a nurse, is three times a month on route in mountain areas around the villages Blerim, Gjegjan, Iballe and Fierze. 1.100 children aged under five lived in January 2008 in this area. 14% of them are undernourished and the average income of their families amount to EUR 60 per month.³⁰⁰

Other NGO's such as the Albanian Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture etc. provide services free of charge, through donations.

3.4.3.6 Diseases that cannot be effectively treated in the country

The statistics reported by the Ministry of Health show that diseases that need long and expensive treatments such as blood related diseases, X-ray treatment, and intensive care cannot be effectively treated in Albania.³⁰¹ Like mentioned in subchapter "3.4.3.1 Health care infrastructure", the health infrastructure can not cope with the growing number of cancer-patients and mentally disabled persons.

²⁹⁹ Many NGO's in the health sector are members of a large umbrella organization set up for the purpose of information exchange and coordination. Professional associations such as the Order of Physicians, the Nurses' Association, the Dentists' Association, the Family Doctor Association, etc serve the health professions.

³⁰⁰ Volkshilfe Österreich, *Mobile medizinische Versorgung in Albanien gestartet*, February 11, 2008, http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung.php?schluessel=OTS_20080211_OT0033, last accessed November 2008

³⁰¹ Information provided by the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Human Rights" (AHCRC), contact: Appendix I

3.4.3.7 Supply with standard medicines

In 1994, an essential drugs list of 174 products was drawn up, adapted from the WHO Essential Drugs List.³⁰² The Health Institute only reimburses the pharmaceuticals on this list, either in part or in full. The list was expanded to 308 drugs in 2001. Drug reimbursement absorbed 70% of the HII budget in 2002, when it had reimbursement contracts with 754 pharmacies and pharmaceutical posts.

As of August 2008, only infants under one year old, invalids and war veterans received full subsidies for essential pharmaceuticals. Other subsidies are categorized by therapeutic application, for example, drugs used for cancer or tuberculosis.³⁰³

Hospitals purchase essential drugs three months in advance based on anticipated need. A key issue is the efficiency and effectiveness of public procurement systems, specifically whether procurement agents obtain the best prices. As funding is very limited, they often run out of drugs before new supplies arrive, so that patients must often buy their medications from private pharmacies.

Private pharmacies, which number more than 500, are well stocked and better managed than hospital dispensaries. There is no shortage of essential drugs, but the absence of a good regulatory framework allows poor practices to continue, such as the dispensing of drugs that are inferior quality, outdated or unregistered.

However, the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes the supply with standard medicines in Albania as insufficient and advises his citizens to carry an own supply of medicines needed while being in the country.³⁰⁴

³⁰² WHO, *Country Profiles: Albania* (last update: December 15, 2006), www.euro.who.int/pharmaceuticals/Topics/Overview/20020430_12, last accessed November 2008

³⁰³ Information provided by the Albanian NGO "Albanian Centre for Human Rights" (AHCR), contact: Appendix I

³⁰⁴ Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Reiseinformationen, Albanien (last update: December 15, 2008), http://www.bmeia.gv.at/aussenministerium/buergerservice/reiseinformation/a-z-laender/albanien-de.html?dv_staat=2, last accessed December 2008

Appendix I - Contact information

Name	Type of organisation	Address	Contact	Website
Albanian Centre for Human Rights ACHR	NGO	Rruga "Kont Urani", nr.10 Tirana, Albania	Ms Erinda Bllaca (ebllaca@yahoo.com) Tel: +355 4 230630/239922 Fax: +355 4 239121	www.achr.org
Albanian Centre for Population and Development (ACPD)	NGO	Bulevardi "Gjergj Fishta", Kompleksi "Tirana 2000", Kulla 4, Tirana, Albania	Ms Elona Gjebrea Hoxha (executive director)(egjebrea@acpd-al.org) Tel: +355 4 253839, +355 4 251475 Fax: +355 4 251475	http://www.acpd-al.org/
Albanian Helsinki Committee	NGO	Rr. Gjini Bue Shpata, Pll. 5/1, Ap. 4, Tirana-Albania. P.O.Box / Kutia Postare No.1752.	Tel/Fax: +355 (0) 4 233671 E-mail: office@ahc.org.al	http://www.ahc.org.al/kshh/eng/def.html
Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS)	NGO	Rr. "Dëshmorët e 4 Shkurtit" Nr. 7/1 Tirana, Albania	Tel.: +355 4 270337 Mail: aiis@aiis-albania.org Tel.: +355 4 246 267	http://www.aiis-albania.org/
Partneri Shqiptar ne Mikrokredi (PSHM)	Institute for micro-credits	Rruga Gjini Bue Shpata Nr 7/1, Tirana	Fax:+ 355 4 246 268 E-mail: pshm@pshm.icc-al.org	-
"Shpresë për të Ardhmen" (Hope for the Future)	NGO	Bulevardi "Gjergj Fishta" Kulla 8, Ap. 11, Tirana	Mrs Irena Dono (executive director) (irena.dono@shprese.org) Tel.: +355 4 224 033	www.shprese.org

AppendixII: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACHR Albanian Centre for Human Rights	MoI Ministry of Interior
ACPD Albanian Centre for Population and Development	MoPO Ministry of Public Order
AHC Albanian Helsinki Committee	NEA National Employment Agency
ALERT Albanian Epidemiological Reporting Tool	NES National Employment Service
ALL Albanian Lek	NHA National Housing Agency
ECA EUROpe and Central Asia	OECD Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
EPP Employment Promotion Programmes	PHC Primary Health Care
EU European Union	PISS Public Institute of Social Security
GDP Gross Domestic Product	RLO Regional Labour Offices
GP General Practitioner	SEE South East Europe
GPRS Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy	Shpk Limited Liability Company
HIF Health Insurance Fund	SMEs Small and Medium size Enterprises
HII Health Insurance Institute	TRHA Tirana Regional Health Authority
HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus	UNDP United Nations Development Programme
HLCS Household Living Conditions Survey	UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
HR Human Resources	USAID United States Agency for International Development
ILO International Labour Organization	VET Vocational Education and Training
IMF International Monetary Fund	WDI World Development Indicators
INSTAT Institute of Statistics	WHO World Health Organization
IPH Institute of Public Health	
IPR Immovable Property Registries	
LGBT-people lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people	
LIO Labour Inspectorate Office	
LLO Local Labour Offices	
LSMS Living Standards Measurement Survey	
MDGs Millennium Development Goals	
MoE Ministry of Education	
MoES Ministry of Work, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities	
MoF Ministry of Finance	
MoFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs	