

VULNERABLE GROUPS IN ALBANIA AND THEIR PROTECTION

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Abstract

In early 1990s, Albania begins to make political and economic reforms toward democracy. Among others, reforms to improve the economy and to protect the rights of its citizens were of the immediate need, and they started to show improvements in Albanian society. However, the economic and social reforms in Albania are accompanied with an increase in the number of people who are considered at risk or outside the mainstream of the society.

The treatment of social protection issues for vulnerable groups in Albania has not been systematically examined despite their vital importance to poverty reduction. In recent years, international development discourse has started to recognize more fully the importance of adequate social protection.

There is no guarantee that social protection and equity issues will come higher up the agenda of the democratization of Albania, not least because the international institutional context in which they are being developed which historically has not prioritized social protection. While civil society involvement has varied substantially, civil actors are often some of the strongest advocates of inclusive and equitable development policies, including adequate social protection in Albania.

At the end, this paper is primarily based on documents of state institutions and international organisms working in Albania.

Keywords: Poverty, vulnerable groups, social protection, economic support

Introduction:

In early 1990s, Albania began making political and economic reforms by protecting the rights of man and improving the economy. During this period, the economic and social situation in Albania was very sensitive; from 1990 – 1992 the economic situation continued

to weaken, and in 1993 the first results of privatization were evident with some slight improvements in the economic level. This critical situation of this period caused the charting of social and political forces to lower the poverty by creating economic help scheme. Nearly one in three Albanians or 917,000 were poor, while 500,000 were considered very poor¹. This poverty is the result of many complex factors going back from the former system of governance adding other causes occurred during the transitional period. According to statistics, 29, 6 % of the population was living in relatively poor conditions, while half of this group was considered extremely poor.

The liberalization and privatization reforms in Albania – one of the most centralized economies of the former communist block, led to the entire transformation of the national production structure. This process had a tremendous impact on the country's economic and social affairs. This complex situation came about partly as a result of the institutional failure. Social protection was among many aspects of socio - economic life where institutions failed to provide a solid frame for transitional reforms. Vulnerable social groups “at risk” of being excluded or fall into the poverty trap could not be properly dealt by social policies and social protection, thus leading to widening gaps between those groups and the rest of society².

Seventeen years from the fall of communism, following the completion of many reforms and improved economic conditions, the need for qualitative social services and protection has become more prominent. Efforts to improve social protection and inclusion are being intensified. This has brought the need for monitoring especially in terms of the link between poverty reduction and social exclusion, so that reducing poverty does not bring more social exclusion and social gaps between different social groups.

Albania has experienced a sustainable pace of economic growth at an average annual rate of around 6%.³ Although reforms have tackled all sectors of economy and education, health and social care, insurance and other protection systems, government structures are still not able to respond adequately to the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups due to limited financial and human resources as well as inefficient institutional capacities. Therefore, Albania today is facing important challenges on social protection, fight against poverty, inequality and the need to modernize the health and social protection systems based on European standards.

¹ “Buletini statistikor” 2011 , APNSHS

² Hulme, D., A. Shepherd and K. Moore, (2001) *Chronic Poverty: meaning and analytical frameworks*, Working Paper, Chronic Poverty Research Centre, University of Manchester.

³ Annual INSTAT (2011). Reports. Tirana.

1.1 Informal economy

Informal economy constitutes a serious issue in Albania and the measurement of its size is a real challenge. Albania's informal sector is believed to range between 30 to 60 percent of the nation's GDP and is present in agriculture, construction and microeconomic businesses. Despite the economic growth, Albania is still one of the poorest countries in Europe. Although the country moved into the group of countries with a high human development index as reported by the UNDP's Global Human Development Report 2007 (68th position with a HDI of 0.801), Albania's GDP per capita stands at 5316 USD (PPP)⁴ which is well below the countries of the region. Unemployment in Albania, though high by western European standards, is lower than in many neighboring countries, (Macedonia 36 percent, Serbia 24 percent, and Bosnia 32 percent). Data are supplied from administrative sources that indicate a sharp increase of unemployment during the early 90s.

1.2. Poverty

Poverty also brings a lack of basic social, political and economic rights for marginalized or isolated social groups. According to statistics⁵, 75 % of poor families deal with other problems in additions to their economic struggles. Poverty is not just a lack of income, it also include a wider base of social needs, including education, living conditions, hygiene and discriminations for this vulnerable segment of the population. In other words, poverty means deprivation of basic human rights.

1.3. Emigration

Emigration has been one of the main characteristics of the economic and social changes that have taken place in Albania since 1990. It is estimated that more than 25 per cent of Albanians live abroad⁶. No other country in East Central Europe has been affected so much by emigration, and in such a short period of time. One of the most direct effects of migration abroad was the flow of remittances to emigrants' families. One in three households has declared to have someone of its family as an emigrant abroad while more than 65 percent of these households receive remittances⁷. Remittances have had an important influence in the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ King R and Vullnetari J, Migration and development in Albania. Working papers, Sussex Centre for Migration research, 2003.

⁷ LFS 2007: individuals working in their small farms that do not sell their products, but produce them only for their own consumption, are considered as self-employed. www.instat.gov.al.

economic life of the country at microeconomic and macroeconomic levels⁸. Since the emigration is relatively among young people, had brought some other social problems such as: departure of unaccompanied children, abandoning school, growth in the number of single parent families, abandoned children and lonely elderly people, etc.

1.4. Urbanization and chaotic movement

Urbanization and chaotic movement of the population results in rapid transition, like the Albanian transition to democracy. It has occurred primarily informally through the creation of illegal housing by low – income families. This social phenomenon is accompanied by increasing economic poverty, lack of employment and difficulty of adjusting to urban life raises the risk of young becoming involved in criminal activity, children quitting school because of poverty and limited educational possibilities in the new area, etc.

1.5. Low public security service

Low public security service is another result of this transition period, where the conditions for crime can raise. The vulnerable groups like: children, women and girls and more exposed at crimes. Trafficking of people, in particularly of girl, women and children was a severe social problem. During the past years, Albania has become a place from which human beings are trafficked to other places. There are no accurate statistics for this phenomenon, both national and international institutions reveal that the problem is greater than the official statistics would imply⁹.

2. Poverty and social exclusion- a gross violation of basis human rights

2.1. Human right based approach

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are considered entitled. These rights represent entitlements of the individual or groups vis-a-vis to the government, as well as responsibilities of the individual and the government authorities¹⁰. Some rights are ascribed "naturally," which means that they are not earned and cannot be denied on the basis of race, creed, ethnicity or gender. These rights are often advanced as legal rights and protected by the rule of law. Various "basic" rights that cannot be violated under any circumstances are set forth in international human rights documents.

⁸ King R and Vullnetari J, Migration and development in Albania. Working papers, Sussex Centre for Migration research, 2003.

⁹ "Mid-term country strategy of social services 2003- 2007" Ministry of Labor and social services

¹⁰ *Understanding human rights – Manual on Human Rights Education* (2003) Human Security Network, Graz, Austria 2003

While human rights are not always interpreted similarly across societies, these norms nonetheless form a common human rights vocabulary in which the claims of various cultures can be articulated. Having human rights norms in place imposes certain requirements on governments and legitimizes the complaints of individuals in those cases where fundamental rights and freedoms are not respected. Many believe that the protection of human rights is essential to the sustainable achievement of the three agreed global priorities of peace, development and democracy. Respect for human rights has therefore become an integral part of international law and foreign policy. The specific goal of expanding such rights is to increase safeguards for the dignity of the person.

In order to address human rights violations, we must strive to understand the causes of these breaches. These causes have to do with underdevelopment, economic pressures, social problems and international conditions. Indeed, the roots of repression, discrimination and other denials of human rights stem from deeper and more complex political, social and economic problems.

2.2. Principal of equality and non-discrimination

Human rights apply to all people simply because they are human. But some people, or groups of people, face particular difficulties in realizing their rights because of who they are or what they believe. People are discriminated against on a wide range of discrimination grounds such as their gender, race, and ethnicity, lack of citizenship, sexual orientation, health, property, age or disability. People belonging to these groups have certain common characteristics or are in a situation that have been shown to make these people more vulnerable to discrimination. Many people suffer from discrimination on a number of grounds at the same time. This is often referred to as “multiple discrimination”.

Discrimination may directly result from discriminatory legislation or regulations, in which an explicit distinction is made on the basis of ethnic background for example. Legislation or regulations may also indirectly discriminate against particular groups of people. Indirect discrimination may occur when apparently neutral rules and practices have negative effects on a disproportionate number of members of a particular group irrespective of whether or not they meet the requirements of the job. Governments as well as non-state actors such as companies may sustain discriminatory practices even if they do not intend to do so.

Being discriminated is an abuse of a person’s dignity and worth. In addition, people who are discriminated against will have increasing difficulty realizing other human rights like access to health care facilities, access to housing, to work, to a fair trial, to redress, etc.

2.3. International legal framework

Article 2 of the UDHR states that everyone is entitled to the rights it proclaims “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. This principle is reflected in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). In addition to this, United Nations have expanded on the right to freedom from discrimination in the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

2.4 Regional legal framework

Based on the experience of contrasting sex discrimination, a consensus emerged in the mid-1990s around the need for the European Community to tackle discrimination on a number of additional grounds. The result of this process was the inclusion of Article 13 in the EC Treaty, to take action to deal with discrimination on a whole new range of grounds, including racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disability and sexual orientation. This led to the adoption by the Council in 2000 of two directives that have raised significantly the level of protection against discrimination across the EU. The first directive bans direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment and instructions to discriminate, on grounds of racial or ethnic origin. It covers employment, training, education, social security, healthcare, housing and access to goods and services. The second directive establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation as well as vocational training. It deals with direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment and includes important provisions concerning reasonable accommodation, with a view to promoting access of persons with disabilities to employment and training. In July 2008 the European Commission has adopted a proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation outside the field of employment. The proposal covers access to goods and services, social protection, health care and education, but does not cover purely private transactions between individuals.

2.5. Social exclusion

The concept of social exclusion¹¹ is new to post communist Albania. Social exclusion comes as a result of poverty, weak governance, slow decentralization, insufficient social policies, inefficient targeting of poor households as well as inadequate implementation of laws. There are considerable gaps between people living in urban and rural areas, between those living in the north and those in the rest of the country, and particularly between Roma/Egyptians and the rest of the population. According to various studies and policy papers, the most affected groups in Albania are children in need, exploited women, disabled (mentally/or physically) people, unemployed persons; pensioners and elderly people as well as Roma and Egyptians.

The calculation of absolute poverty line in Albania is based on the World Bank methodology with the data collected through the LSMS¹². The percentage of population under poverty absolute line has decreased significantly during the period 2002 – 2005. Indeed, the number of people below the national poverty line fell from 25.4% of the population in 2002 to 18.5% in 2005¹³. This reduction is explained by the sustainable growth rate experienced during this period accompanied by the high level of remittances. The reduction of poverty in absolute terms has been more significant in urban rather than in rural areas.

On the contrary, poverty measurement according to the EU Laeken methodology shows that poverty rates have increased between 2002 and 2005. However, there is a substantial difference between the poverty situation in the rural and urban areas.

After 2005, social policies documents have tried to target all vulnerable groups in view of EU objectives on poverty and social exclusion and taking into consideration the Laeken indicators as a tool on describing and monitoring poverty reduction and exclusion¹⁴. Laeken indicators are partially used but still in these documents poverty measurement and its assessment refer to the absolute poverty line. This is the reason why it is possible to observe a

¹¹ The Social Inclusion Strategy, approved on January 2008 by the Council of Ministers, is one of the most important government policy document and also an imperative strategic document in Albania's way towards integration to the European Community. In this framework, Social Inclusion is considered as one of the priorities of the current government, with poverty reduction as its main focus, which will be ensured not only through economic development. It focuses on poverty and social exclusion risks that remain even after the onset of economic growth. As a crosscutting strategy, it is fully consistent with the underlying sector strategies and in particular those policies and institutional arrangements described in these strategies that aim to assist vulnerable individuals, families and groups in the community so that they are able to operate on their own, to be self-sustaining and to have the same rights as other members of society.

¹² LSMS – Living Standards Measurement Study of World Bank

¹³ Institute for Contemporary Studies (ISB) "Social Inclusion and social protection in Albania", European Communities, 2008

¹⁴ Social Inclusion Crosscutting Strategy 2007–2013 of MoLSAEO, approved on 2 February 2008.

significant reduction of poverty in the country. However, relative poverty definition shows an increase of poverty.

3. Empowering the Vulnerable groups

3.1. Women

The criminal code penalizes rape, including spousal rape; however, victims rarely reported spousal abuse, and officials did not prosecute spousal rape in practice. The concept of spousal rape was not well established, and authorities and the public often did not consider it a crime. The law imposes penalties for rape and assault depending on the age of the victim. For rape of an adult, the prison term is three to 10 years; for rape of an adolescent between the ages of 14 and 18, the term is five to 15 years and, for rape of a child under the age of 14, the sentence is seven to 15 years.

Domestic violence against women, including spousal abuse, remained a serious problem. During the year police reported cases of domestic violence and the government pressed charges in cases. The Department of Equal Opportunities at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunity covers women's issues, including domestic violence.

The government did not fund specific programs to combat domestic violence or assist victims, although nonprofit organizations provided assistance. NGOs reported that an estimated eight domestic violence hotlines operated. The hotlines, serving mainly the northern part of the country, each received approximately 25 calls per month from women reporting some form of violence. NGOs operated four shelters for battered women in Tirana, Vlora, Elbasan, and Gjirokaster. During the year NGOs and police noted a substantial increase in reports of domestic violence, primarily due to increased awareness of services and more trust in the police.

According to government figures, there were 1,744 cases of domestic violence reported during the year, compared with 1,063 in 2009. Often the police do not have the training or capacity to deal with domestic violence cases.

In many communities, particularly those in the northeast, women were subjected to societal discrimination as a result of traditional social norms that considered women to be subordinate to men.

Reproductive rights are generally respected by the government. Couples and individuals have the right to decide freely the number, spacing, and timing of their children and have the information and means to do so free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. Citizens have access to contraception. Under the law, health care is provided to all citizens;

however, the quality of and access to care, including obstetric and postpartum care, was not satisfactory, especially in the remote rural areas. According to 2008 UN estimates, the maternal mortality rate in Albania is 31 deaths per 100,000 live births. Women are equally diagnosed and treated for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

The law provides equal rights for men and women under family law, property law, and in the judicial system. Neither the law nor practice excluded women from any occupation; however, they were not well represented at the highest levels of their fields. The law mandates equal pay for equal work; however, the government and employers did not fully implement this provision.

3.2. Children

The Albanian parliament has approved the law "For the Protection of the Rights of the Child." This law provides the legal and institutional framework for protecting children's rights.

In general parents must register their children in the same community where they are registered. However, according to the Children's Rights Center of Albania (CRCA), children born to internal migrants or those returning from abroad frequently had no birth certificates or other legal documentation and, as a result, were unable to attend school. This is a particular problem for Romani families as well, who often marry young and fail to register their children.

The law provides for nine years of free education and authorizes private schools. School attendance is mandatory through the ninth grade or until age 16, whichever comes first; however, in practice many children left school earlier than the law allowed to work with their families, particularly in rural areas. Parents must purchase supplies, books, uniforms, and space heaters for some classrooms, which was prohibitively expensive for many families, particularly Roma and other minorities. Many families also cited these costs as a reason for not sending girls to school.

As in previous years, child abuse, including sexual abuse, occurred occasionally, although victims rarely reported it. In some cases children under the age of 18 engaged in prostitution. The penalties for the commercial sexual exploitation of children range from fines to 15 years' imprisonment. The country has a statutory rape law and the minimum age of consensual sex is 14. The penalty for statutory rape of a child under the age of 14 is a prison term of five to 15 years. The law prohibits making or distributing child pornography, and the penalties are a fine of one to five million leks (\$10,000 to \$50,000) and a prison

sentence of one to five years. Child marriage remained a problem in many Romani families and typically occurred when children were 13 or 14 years old.

3.3. Persons with Disabilities

The constitution and law prohibit discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities; however, employers, schools, health care providers, and providers of other state services sometimes discriminated against persons with disabilities. The law mandates that new public buildings be accessible to persons with disabilities, but the government only sporadically enforced the law. Widespread poverty, unregulated working conditions, and poor medical care posed significant problems for many persons with disabilities.

During the year the ombudsman continued to inspect mental health institutions and found that while physical conditions in facilities in Vlora and Shkoder had improved, they were not in compliance with standards and remained understaffed.

Inspections of the Tirana Psychiatric Hospital found that specific windows and doors needed to be replaced for safety reasons. The ombudsman regularly conducts inspections throughout Albania and recommended a major legal, organizational, and budgetary review of the country's mental health care system. The admission and release of patients at mental health institutions was a problem due to lack of sufficient financial resources to provide adequate psychiatric evaluations.

3.4. National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

As visible minorities, members of the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities suffered significant societal abuse and discrimination. The law permits official minority status for national groups and separately for ethno linguistic groups. The government defined Greeks, Macedonians, and Montenegrins as national groups; Greeks constituted the largest of these. The law defined Aromanians (Vlachs) and Roma as ethno linguistic minority groups. In 2005 the Council of Ministers approved the National Action Plan for the Roma and Egyptian Involvement Decade for 2010-15. The total budget for implementing the five-year plan was expected to be nearly 2.5 billion leks (\$23 million)¹⁵.

The ethnic Greek minority pursued grievances with the government regarding electoral zones, Greek-language education, property rights, and government documents.

¹⁵ Annual State Budget, 2009

Minority leaders cited the government's unwillingness to recognize ethnic Greek towns outside communist-era "minority zones"; to utilize Greek in official documents and on public signs in ethnic Greek areas; to ascertain the size of the ethnic Greek population; or to include a higher number of ethnic Greeks in public administration.

During the year government prosecutors continued to appeal the dismissal of charges against Vasil Bollano, the ethnic Greek mayor of Himara, who was found guilty of abuse of office, but whose conviction was overturned on appeal in June 2009. The court convicted Bollano of destruction of government property after he ordered the removal of several new road signs in the Himara district because they were written in Albanian and English but not Greek.

3.5. Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

There are no laws criminalizing sexual orientation, and the law does not differentiate between types of sexual relationships. There were lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizations in the country. The groups operated without interference from police or other state actors. There were reports that individuals were beaten, fired from their employment, or subjected to discrimination due to their sexual orientation. Often these cases went unreported. NGOs claimed that police routinely harassed LGBT persons and transgender sex workers.

4 Social protection policies

4.1. Identification of the contributing factors to increased vulnerability of individuals or groups

Poverty is one of the main contributing factors to increased vulnerability of becoming a human right violation victim. Nevertheless, a multidimensional approach should be considered when assessing the poverty factor. The factors can be divided in the levels of economy, education, ethnicity, and on social level. However, poverty remains one of the crucial factors which is in tight correlation to the other mentioned factors. Answers show that the reasons and contributing factors to increased risks are as follows,: low educational level, bad economic situation, juvenile marriages, unemployment, lack of parental care, unawareness of the human rights, war conflicts, etc.

The big challenge for an adequate social protection system is the financing, the funding sources of social protection system. Indicators on the efficiency of the system on allocating funds are analyzed in the view of the objective of implementing a social policy that complies with national and EU objectives of social inclusion and protection. From these analyzes, the need for cooperation between different institutions of the system, and different actors emerges as the first conclusion. In order to support government resources in both local and regional lever has to be forged with a close partnership with NGOs and business communities.

The extension of the social protection system with family and child benefits, as part of the social assistance or social insurance system should be put forward as a recommendation. The social intervention on children will have effects on family poverty, access in female employment, education and health.

Also cash benefits should be integrated with community programs/services for children where the role of social workers and psychologists to be the main one, instead of that of nurses and educators. Educational and recreational activities for children will facilitate the engagement of mothers in the economic and social life.

On the other hand, there is a need for new schemes for protecting family and children in particular. In the context of economic and social problems, traditional values and roles in the family, isolation and lack of proper education/ health and other services, as well as demographic tendencies of reducing birth rates are asking for intervention on family support, on parenting supporting and early child development¹⁶. The fact that women are increasingly employed in the informal sector, or in unpaid family-based activities, women's unpaid care responsibilities on children and elderly are asking for new forms of social protection schemes. Reforms to tackle informal economy constitute now an important challenge for Albania. Education and the quality of education system in all levels is the element for combating poverty, empowering women, protecting children from hazardous and exploitative labor and sexual exploitation¹⁷. In order to cope with the impact of migration from rural to urban areas there is an immediate need to build new education infrastructure facilities in ratio with the actual trends of migration.

¹⁶ Institute for Contemporary Studies (ISB) "Social Inclusion and social protection in Albania", European Communities, 2008

¹⁷ OECD (2007) *Reviews of National Policies for Education: South Eastern Europe: Vol. 1: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia and Kosovo*, Paris.

It is important to ensure the participation and integration of people with disabilities through the implementation of legislation provisions that guarantee the application of their rights on employment, easy access to public services and public infrastructure. Implementation of the national Strategy for People with Disabilities and individual programs aiming at the social integration of people with disabilities, most preferably with the active participation of their associations should be promoted. The government protects people with disabilities through subsidizing policies, especially for medical services and public transportation. However, it is necessary to allocate the appropriate budget for the implementation of measures/initiative defined by the national strategy.

People living in rural areas, unemployed people living with and older people face a higher poverty risk than the general population. Reforms have to aim at achieving adequate and a sustainable health insurance and social system. This requires a strategy to raise employment and reform the social protection systems.

4.2. The definition of Social Inclusion in Albania

The Social Inclusion Strategy, approved on January 2008 by the Council of Ministers, is one of the most important government policy document and also an imperative strategic document in Albania's way towards integration to the European Community. This strategy remarks a qualitative time in the government social policies and a very important step in crossing towards integrated, preventive and active social policies. It aims our investment and commitment in the social inclusion widening instead of the struggle against social exclusion. In this framework, Social Inclusion is considered as one of the priorities of the current government, with poverty reduction as its main focus, which will be ensured not only through economic development¹⁸. It focuses on poverty and social exclusion risks that remain even after the onset of economic growth. As a crosscutting strategy, it is fully consistent with the underlying sector strategies and in particular those policies and institutional arrangements described in these strategies that aim to assist vulnerable individuals, families and groups in the community so that they are able to operate on their own, to be self-sustaining and to have the same rights as other members of society.

¹⁸ Albanian Institute for Public Policies (December 2006) *Një sistem monitorimi për Strategjitet Rajonale*.

Conclusion:

The transition period accompanied with critical social and economic situation has influenced planning for determining social policies and decreasing poverty. What remains crucial for Albania is the fact that there is a lack of specific studies concerning vulnerable groups. Referring to World Bank studies, the Albanian government has identified a number of groups called “at risk”: children, women, youth, elderly people and people with disabilities. Almost two decades after democracy and privatization were supposed to deliver undreamed-of advances, life in today’s Albania is marked by massive unemployment and disillusionment. So it is not surprising that disappointment and low expectations pervade conversations with many men and women. At the beginning of transition, a legal framework was established to provide for the possibilities of structural changes and state property privatization. However, the legal framework itself wasn’t sufficient to respond to the fast political and economic changes that were brought about by the re-emergence of the private sector and capitalism in Albania.

The term ‘social security’ is hardly ever used either in the Albanian literature on social protection or in the relevant legislation. This is mainly due to the absence of any social right to social security, guaranteed by the Albanian constitution as well as to the predominant socio-political objectives that relate the scope of the social protection to the coverage of working people and needy persons and not to the coverage of the whole population.

The state is the main financial and institutional factor in dealing with these needs which are in the process of changing according to different needs. From this point of view, the existing social services are not able to meet the needs for these services. Tackling social problems through proper policies and institutions is being ranked high at the national political agenda, as a result of many factors related to the country’s stage of transition and economic development as well as Albania’s efforts to get closer to the EU accession.

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