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Replies of Albania to the list of issues in relation to its fourth periodic report*, **

[Date received: 8 March 2024]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The annex to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



Introduction

1. This document is drafted by coordinating and including the contribution of the central institutions, such as Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education and Sport, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Tourism and Environment and Institute of Statistics. This document also includes the contribution of the independent institutions, such as the People's Advocate of Albania and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination.

A. General Information

Reply to paragraph 1 of the list of issues (E/C.12/ALB/Q/4)

2. Law No. 111/2017 "On Legal Aid guaranteed by the State", was one of the laws adopted in the framework of the reform, the entry into force of which brought a profound reform of the legal aid system bringing a new spirit in terms of organization, operation, and provision of state-guaranteed legal aid. The adoption of this law led to the drafting of a package of bylaws which aim to regulate in detail any process on legal aid guaranteed by the state.

3. The main purpose of this law is to provide free legal aid to all categories, which due to the conditions in which they are, find it impossible to provide this service. Special attention has been paid to the categories of beneficiaries, focusing on the expansion of the circle of subjects as well as the sanctioning of vulnerable groups as direct beneficiaries of the free legal aid system.

4. Law no. 111/2017 on State Guaranteed Legal Aid (Law on Legal Aid) foresees a comprehensive system of:

Primary Legal Aid

Primary legal aid is one of the forms of free legal aid guaranteed by the state. This form of service is provided by Nonprofit Organization, Law Clinics at Higher Education Institutions, and Primary Legal Aid Service Centers, as follows:

- Already operational, 20 Centers of Primary legal aid service (see below);
- Authorized for the first time by the Minister of Justice, 15 (fifteen) non-profit organizations which operate in Tirana, Vlora, Berat, Elbasan, Shkodër (Innovation, public-private partnership in fulfilment of the joint mission: "Equal access to justice for categories in need and vulnerable groups");
- Are signed with Legal Clinics 12 (twelve) Cooperation Agreements which are operating in Tirana, Vlora and Shkodër;

Secondary Legal Aid (representation by an advocate in a court procedure)

- Referring to the provisions of Law no. 111/2017 "On Legal Aid Guaranteed by the State", secondary legal aid is one of the main forms of legal aid services guaranteed by the state and as such, is provided in cooperation with several institutions;
- Secondary legal aid is provided by advocates included in the list approved by the National Chamber of Advocates upon the request (according to the form) of the person entitled to receive secondary legal aid. The request has to be addressed to the competent court. The court has to decide within 5 days from the date of receipt of the request, when the request has been submitted;

Exemption from payment of court fees and court costs, according to law and exemption from the obligation to prepay the fee for the enforcement of the execution order.

Law no. 111/2017 on State Guaranteed Legal Aid (Law on Legal Aid) foresees Groups of persons who qualify for legal aid (Article 11 and 12):

- People with insufficient Income and Property;
- Specific Groups of Beneficiaries (Victims; Children; Other vulnerable persons).

5. Beneficiaries from the system of free legal aid are persons in case of insufficient income and property and special categories according to the law no. 111/2017. The groups covered by Article 11 can be divided in subgroups as follows:

Victims

- Victims of domestic violence;
- Sexually abused victims and human trafficking victims, at any stage of a criminal proceeding or minor victims and minors in conflict with the law, at any stage of a criminal proceeding;

Children

- Children living in social care institutions;
- Children under guardianship who request to initiate a proceeding without the approval of their legal guardian or against their legal guardian;

Other vulnerable persons

- Persons that benefit from the payment for disability in compliance with the provisions of the law on social aid and services, including also persons that benefit from the status of blindness;
- Persons undergoing involuntary treatment in mental health service institutions according to the provisions of the legislation in force on mental health;
- Persons undergoing voluntary treatment in mental health service institutions for serious mental diseases;
- Persons against whom the removal or restriction of the capacity to act is requested, at any stage of this proceeding;
- Persons with removed or restricted capacity to act who request to initiate a proceeding against their legal guardian, for regaining the capacity to act without the approval of the legal guardian;
- Persons who are beneficiaries of social protection programs;
- Persons to whom the right has been infringed through an action or inaction that constitutes discrimination on the basis of the decision of the competent organ, according to the legislation in force for protection from discrimination.

6. These data were administered during the year 2023.

7. As for the categories of free secondary legal aid answers, in total it is evident that 43% of the winners are disabled, such as income and property awards, 44% include legal categories such as victims of violence, beneficiaries of schemes. social and other, while 13% of them are undefined categories. In terms of gender, 71% of the applicants are women and 29% are men.

8. According to the scope of court cases that citizens have requested secondary legal assistance, it is evident that they are mainly civil cases. Out of the total number of requests for legal aid of 773, 647 of them are civil, where the main ones are marriage settlement, pension benefits and property conflicts. While the other categories are 50 are criminal, 71 are administrative cases and in 5 decisions the type of case is not identified.

9. Regarding the type of free secondary legal aid requested, out of 773 decisions in total, 124 of them are for requests to benefit from a lawyer, 79 to benefit from coverage of court costs and 570 are requests for benefit from a lawyer and coverage of costs judicial, of which 31 requests were dismissed and 13 were return of acts/dismissal of cases.

Reply to paragraph 2 of the list of issues

10. Recommendations of People's Advocate are considered accordingly and outlined in the policy objectives and areas of implementation of strategic documents and National Action Plans of gender equality, children, social inclusion of Roma and Egyptian minorities, LGBTI, persons with disability and older persons as well as on the National Strategy of Health 2021-2030.

11. Ministry of Education and Sport has fully implemented the recommendations issued by the People's Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. Please find in Annex the replies by the People's Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination.

Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues

12. The Albanian government with the approval of the National Determined Contribution (NDC) aims to reduce Greenhouse Gases with 20.9% until 2030. The government committed to achieve the target through the implementation of the measures mainly in the energy, transport, forest and waste sector through various projects financed by the Albanian government, international financial mechanisms, and different donors. The NDC implementation monitoring report will be drafted during 2024 before the revision of the document.

13. We are making efforts to diversify energy sources in our country, having a long-term strategy and an action plan for increasing the generation capacity of renewable energy sources by installing new capacities of solar and wind power plants. We can mention the pilot initiative of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy for solar panels for families, in the scheme for 2000 users, 1040 units have already been installed. In 2023, the government allocated 8 million euros in subsidies for this purpose, in order to cover 20,000 beneficiaries.

14. The government has approved seven projects during the past year, with a total capacity of 300 MW and a total value of 180 million euros.

15. In this context, 2 auctions were successfully held for photovoltaic parks in Karavasta and Spitalë with an installed power of 140 and 100 MW, respectively. Production is expected to begin within 2024.

16. In July 2023, the auction was held for the construction of the first wind farms in Albania, where 3 projects with an installed power of 222.6 MW/hour in total were declared winners. The wind farm will be operational in 2025. One of the largest investments in the energy sector, the Skavica Hydropower Plant, is expected to provide additional electricity supply as well as improve the management of the Drini cascade as well as reduce downstream flooding from high levels of seasonal rainfall.

17. Albania has shown its efforts to address the adverse effects of climate change on economic, social, and cultural rights, especially for vulnerable populations, by taking a range of measures, such as:

- Climate Resilience Programs: Implementing initiatives to enhance the resilience of communities in disaster-prone areas through infrastructure development, early warning systems, and community-based adaptation projects. Such as Kune Vain Lagoon, a project implemented by UNEP;
- Social Safety Mechanisms from the Civil Protection Agency: Establishing social protection mechanisms to support individuals and groups affected by climate-related disasters, ensuring access to basic needs and services;
- Community Engagement: Different projects on climate adaptation involve local communities, particularly marginalized groups, in decision-making processes and empowering them to participate in sustainable development practices;
- Education and Awareness: Promoting awareness and education on climate change impacts, adaptation, and mitigation measures, especially in vulnerable areas;
- Healthcare Access: Ensuring access to healthcare services and addressing health challenges exacerbated by climate change, such as increased disease vectors and extreme weather events;

- Land Use Planning: extension service offered from public institutions for implementing sustainable land use planning to minimize vulnerability to climate-related risks, including regulations on construction in high-risk areas;
- International Collaboration: Engaging in international collaborations and partnerships to access resources, technology, and expertise for effective climate action.

B. Issues relating to the general provisions of the Covenant (arts. 1–5)

Maximum available resources (art. 2 (1))

Reply to paragraph 4 of the list of issues

Table 1

The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line

	2021
The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line (60% of the median equivalized disposable income)	22.0 %

Source: Income and Living Conditions Survey 2021.

Table 2

Yearly growth rate of the share of equivalized disposable income among the bottom 40 per cent of the population and the total population and the proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median equivalized disposable income

	2021
Yearly growth rate of the share of equivalised disposable income among the bottom 40 per cent of the population and the total population	0.3 %
Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median equivalised disposable income	15.0 %

Source: Income and Living Conditions Survey 2021.

Table 3

The unemployment rate 15+

	2022		
Age group	Male	Female	Total
15+	10.6	11.4	10.9

Source: Labour Force Survey 2022.

Table 4

Young people who are not in employment attending education or training by gender, age and year

	2022		
Age group	Male	Female	Total
15–24	21.4	25.2	23.3
15–29	22.6	27.8	25.2

Source: Labour Force Survey 2022.

18. Tax rates during the last 10 years regarding Personal Income Tax and Corporate Income Tax, are as follows:

Personal Income Tax rates

From 2014 to 2018, income from employment was subject to a progressive tax regime:

- 0% tax rate on income up to 30,000 ALL/month;
- 13% tax rate on income over 30,000 to 130,000 ALL/month; and
- 23% tax rate on income over 130,000 ALL/month;

From 2019–2021, income from employment was subject to a progressive tax regime:

- 0% tax rate on income up to 30,000 ALL/month;
- 13% tax rate on income over 30,000 to 150,000 ALL/month; and
- 23% tax rate on income over 150,000 ALL/month;

From 2022–2023, income from employment was subject to a progressive tax regime:

- For income up to 40,000 ALL/month tax rate is 0% on income up to 40,000 ALL/month;
- For income over 40,000 to 50,000 ALL/month, tax rate is progressive 0% on income up to 30,000 ALL/month; and 50%*13% on income over 30,000 ALL/month; and
- For income over 50,000 ALL/month, tax rate is progressive 0% on income up to 30,000 ALL/month; 13% on income over 30,000 to 200,000 ALL/month; and 23% on income over 200,000 ALL/month;

From 2023 up to date, income from employment is subject to a progressive tax regime:

- For income up to 50,000 ALL/month tax rate is 0% on income up to 50,000 ALL/month;
- For income over 50,000 to 60,000 ALL/month, tax rate is progressive 0% on income up to 35,000 ALL/month and 13% on income over 35,000 ALL/month; and
- For income over 60,000 ALL/month, tax rate is progressive: 0% on income up to 30,000 ALL/month; 13% on income over 30,000 to 200,000 ALL/month; and 23% on income over 200,000 ALL/month;

Corporate Income Tax

From 2014 to 2015, the profit tax rate and simplified tax rates are as follows:

- 25,000 ALL/year flat rate for taxpayers with a turnover up to 2 mln ALL;
- 7.5% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover over 2 mln ALL to 8 mln ALL;
- 15% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover over 8 mln ALL;

From 2016 to 2018, the profit tax rate and simplified tax rates are as follows:

- 0% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover up to 5 mln ALL;
- 5% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover over 5 mln ALL to 8 mln ALL;
- 15% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover over 8 mln ALL;

From 2019 to 2020, the profit tax rate and simplified tax rates are as follows :

- 0% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover up to 5 mln ALL;
- 5% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover over 5 mln ALL to 14 mln ALL;
- 15% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover over 14 mln ALL;

From 2021 to 2023, the profit tax rate and simplified tax rates are as follows:

- 0% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover up to 14 mln ALL;
- 15% tax rate for taxpayers with a turnover over 14 mln ALL;

Starting from 1 January 2024

Since 1 January 2024 up to date, the new law 29/2023 “On income tax”, applies the taxation depending on their legal form or registration, not on their turnover:

- The tax rate of entities is 15% but until the end of 2029, for entities (other than professional services) with a turnover up to 14 mln ALL, a reduced tax rate of 0% is applied:
- A progressive tax system is applied on natural persons as follows:
 - 15% for profits up to 14 mln ALL;
 - 23% for every profit over 14 mln ALL but until the end of 2029, for natural persons (other than professional services) with a turnover up to 14 mln ALL, a reduced tax rate of 0% is applied.

Public expenditures

Expenditures by functions year 2013–2024

(in million lek)

From 2013 to 2018

	2013 Actual Budget	% of GDP	2014 Actual Budget	% of GDP	2015 Actual Budget	% of GDP	2016 Actual Budget	% of GDP	2017 Actual Budget	% of GDP	2018 Actual Budget	% of GDP
Total	394 118	29.2%	438 820	31.4%	437 403	30.5%	433 697	29.5%	461 411	29.8%	476 139	29.1%
General Public Services*	79 271	5.9%	93 889	6.7%	91 141	6.4%	88 331	6.0%	85 237	5.5%	86 126	5.3%
Defense	12 302	0.9%	12 756	0.9%	10 623	0.7%	10 338	0.7%	10 949	0.7%	11 109	0.7%
Public Order and Safety	20 224	1.5%	24 199	1.7%	25 159	1.8%	25 447	1.7%	26 730	1.7%	28 526	1.7%
Economic Affairs	51 410	3.8%	50 873	3.6%	58 376	4.1%	45 483	3.1%	53 616	3.5%	50 577	3.1%
Environmental Protection	624	0.0%	917	0.1%	1 383	0.1%	2 729	0.2%	2 857	0.2%	1 416	0.1%
Housing and community amenities	23 856	1.8%	30 607	2.2%	28 226	2.0%	27 902	1.9%	38 250	2.5%	39 249	2.4%
Health*	35 391	2.6%	41 881	3.0%	39 475	2.8%	41 802	2.8%	45 352	2.9%	49 004	3.0%
Recreation, culture and religion	4 018	0.3%	6 031	0.4%	6 517	0.5%	6 356	0.4%	6 440	0.4%	7 378	0.5%
Education*	44 131	3.3%	46 208	3.3%	44 760	3.1%	46 079	3.1%	47 914	3.1%	51 605	3.2%
Social Protection	122 891	9.1%	131 356	9.4%	131 743	9.2%	139 230	9.5%	144 066	9.3%	151 149	9.2%
<i>The reserve fund, the Contingency of Debt Risks and the new salary increase policy</i>			103	0.0%			0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<i>PBB Nominale</i>	<i>1 350 053</i>		<i>1 395 305</i>		<i>1 434 307</i>		<i>1 472 480</i>		<i>1 550 644</i>		<i>1 636 731</i>	
<i>Health % to total expenses</i>	<i>9.0%</i>		<i>9.5%</i>		<i>9.0%</i>		<i>9.6%</i>		<i>9.8%</i>		<i>10.3%</i>	
<i>Education % to total expenses</i>	<i>11.2%</i>		<i>10.5%</i>		<i>10.2%</i>		<i>10.6%</i>		<i>10.4%</i>		<i>10.8%</i>	
<i>Social Protection % to total expenses</i>	<i>31.2%</i>		<i>29.9%</i>		<i>30.1%</i>		<i>32.1%</i>		<i>31.2%</i>		<i>31.7%</i>	

Continues (from 2019 to 2023)

	2019 Actual Budget	% of GDP	2020 Actual Budget	% of GDP	2021 Actual Budget	% of GDP	2022 Actual Budget	% of GDP	Budget 2023	% of GDP
Total	491 897	29.1%	536 278	32.6%	595 969	32.1%	651 015	30.4%	698 117	30.2%
General Public Services*	84 438	5.0%	83 742	5.1%	91 318	4.9%	93 489	4.4%	118 753	5.1%
Defense	13 337	0.8%	12 610	0.8%	14 034	0.8%	15 531	0.7%	25 920	1.1%
Public Order and Safety	30 908	1.8%	32 336	2.0%	34 652	1.9%	36 531	1.7%	39 314	1.7%
Economic Affairs	50 333	3.0%	60 194	3.7%	72 376	3.9%	106 171	5.0%	90 466	3.9%
Environmental Protection	2 997	0.2%	5 298	0.3%	5 532	0.3%	7 035	0.3%	6 034	0.3%
Housing and community amenities	36 754	2.2%	51 755	3.1%	67 823	3.7%	56 743	2.7%	55 790	2.4%
Health*	51 182	3.0%	51 590	3.1%	63 570	3.4%	63 792	3.0%	67 291	2.9%
Recreation culture and religion	7 310	0.4%	6 842	0.4%	7 542	0.4%	10 673	0.5%	8 150	0.4%
Education*	55 684	3.3%	54 150	3.3%	58 402	3.1%	62 966	2.9%	69 016	3.0%
Social Protection	158 954	9.4%	177 760	10.8%	180 724	9.7%	198 087	9.3%	205 884	8.9%
The reserve fund the Contingency of Debt Risks and the new salary increase policy	0	0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	11 500	0.5%
PBB Nominale	1 691 903		1 647 431		1 856 172		2 138 339		2 311 673	
Health % to total expenses	10.4%		9.6%		10.7%		9.8%		9.6%	
Education % to total expenses	11.3%		10.1%		9.8%		9.7%		9.9%	
Social Protection % to total expenses	32.3%		33.1%		30.3%		30.4%		29.5%	

Continues (from 2024 to 2026)

	<i>Budget 2024</i>	<i>% of GDP</i>	<i>Budget 2025</i>	<i>% of GDP</i>	<i>Budget 2026</i>	<i>% of GDP</i>
Total	737 378	30.3%	762 434	29.8%	805 606	29.9%
General Public Services*	124 916	5.1%	122 753	4.8%	125 250	4.7%
Defense	33 487	1.4%	37 000	1.4%	39 500	1.5%
Public Order and Safety	42 027	1.7%	42 514	1.7%	44 450	1.7%
Economic Affairs	75 770	3.1%	87 466	3.4%	97 622	3.6%
Environmental Protection	6 841	0.3%	6 184	0.2%	7 120	0.3%
Housing and community amenities	41 968	1.7%	40 790	1.6%	43 180	1.6%
Health*	72 247	3.0%	77 575	3.0%	82 500	3.1%
Recreation, culture and religion	8 702	0.4%	8 150	0.3%	9 506	0.4%
Education*	78 894	3.2%	81 716	3.2%	86 820	3.2%
Social Protection	238 027	9.8%	246 086	9.6%	259 058	9.6%
The reserve fund, the Contingency of Debt Risks and the new salary increase policy	14 500	0.6%	12 200	0.5%	10 600	0.4%
PBB Nominale	2 434 311		2 557 741		2 690 518	
Health % to total expenses	9.8%		10.2%		10.2%	
Education % to total expenses	10.7%		10.7%		10.8%	
Social Protection % to total expenses	32.3%		32.3%		32.2%	

19. In the framework of COVID-19 pandemic, the first fiscal package introduced by the government of Albania included measures as follows:

Extension on the deadline to submit the financial statements, for 4 months

- The accounting balance sheet, together with its annexes, shall be submitted by July 31, 2020; (due date is 31st of March);

Deferral to pay profit tax for taxpayers with turnover up to 14,000,000 ALL

- For taxpayers with turnover up to 14,000,000 (fourteen million) ALL, the tax calculated on the basis of the annual profit tax return, shall be paid, within the second half of 2020; (normally paid on 31st of March);

Deferral on the prepayments of profit tax instalments for taxpayers with turnover up to 14,000,000 ALL

- For taxpayers with turnover up to 14,000,000 (fourteen million) ALL, the profit tax instalments of the first and second quarter of 2020 are prepaid to the account of the tax authorities, within 31 December 2020. Instalments of the tax on profit, of the third and fourth quarter of 2020, are prepaid to the account of the tax authorities, within 31 December 2020; (normally paid at the last day of each quarter);

Deferral on the prepayments of simplified profit tax instalments for taxpayers subject to simplified profit tax

- The payments of simplified profit tax prepayment instalments shall be paid by October 20 for the first and second quarter of 2020, and within December 20 for the third and fourth quarter of 2020; (normally paid on the 20th day of the following month of each quarter.

20. In the framework of COVID-19 pandemic, the second fiscal package introduced by the government of Albania included measures as follows:

Waiver of the prepayments of profit tax instalments for taxpayers with turnover up to 14,000,000 ALL

- For taxpayers with a turnover of up to 14,000,000 (fourteen million) ALL, the prepayments of profit tax instalments for the 2020 will not be paid;

Waiver of the prepayments of simplified profit tax instalments for taxpayers subject to simplified profit tax

- The prepayments of simplified profit tax instalments in 2020 are zero;

Deferral on the prepayments of profit tax instalments for taxpayers with turnover over 14,000,000 ALL

- For taxpayers with turnover over 14 000 000 (fourteen million) ALL profit tax instalments for the tax periods of the second and third quarter, April-June and July-September 2020, will not be prepaid. Payments for these instalments are postponed to April-September 2021. This exemption does not apply to taxpayers conducting economic activities in the field of banking, telecommunications, trade in pharmaceuticals, consumer food products;

Deferral on the prepayments of profit tax instalments for specific sectors

- Profit tax instalments for tax periods April-December 2020 for taxpayers conducting economic activities in the field of tourism, active processing with ordering material, and call centers, will not be prepaid. Payments for these instalments are postponed to April-December 2021;

Extension on the deadline to submit the Individual annual income statement, for 3 months

- The submission of the individual annual income statement of 2019 to the tax administration and the payment of the obligation if it results, is made no later than July 31, 2020; (due date 30 April).

21. The legal amendments that are in force from January 1, 2021, which were taken as incentives for the recovery of economic after the impact of the pandemic are as follows:

- Taxpayers with a total annual income from ALL 5 million up to ALL 14 million (EUR 113,200) are subject to a 0% rate on profit tax (they were taxed at a 5% rate);
- The increase of the VAT threshold from 2 mln ALL to 10 mln ALL.

Non-discrimination (art. 2 (2))

Reply to paragraph 6 the list of issues

Implementation of National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptian minorities

22. Albania has a comprehensive legal and policy framework on human rights and anti-discrimination, specifically addressing Roma and Egyptian minorities. Law No. 96/2017 “On Protection of National Minorities” and sub-legal acts on the right of minorities and Law No. 10221/2010 “On protection from discrimination”, (as amended) include legal clauses on non-discrimination in all areas of life for national minorities.

23. Ministry of Health and Social Protection is the national authority for coordination of monitoring and implementation of strategic policy objectives and legal framework for Roma and Egyptian minorities. This process is conducted through monitoring of National Action Plan (NAP) for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians 2021–2025 in cooperation with all responsible institutions and stakeholders. The National Action Plan includes seven priority sectors aiming to achieve equality, participation and inclusion of Roma and Egyptian minorities in regard to access to education, justice, employment, social housing, health, social services and overall participation in society. The measures of the NAP 2021–2025 are based on the results and evaluation of the previous action plan 2016–2020. Ministry of Health and Social Protection has completed the yearly reports for National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians 2016–2020. NAP has been monitored at a national level through the Rom-Alb electronic system, generating data for all areas of implementation, policy objectives and measures.

24. This process has been extended with the training and capacity building for reporting the indicators of the NAP for over 200 focal points on R/E in central and local level (November to December 2023).

25. In the field of social protection, Ministry of Health, and Social Protection, through the Social Fund, has provided financial support to municipalities, emergency centers and multifunctional community centers. Roma and Egyptian families are also beneficiaries of the economic assistance scheme. The number of families in the end of 2023 is 2536, showing a decrease from the first half of 2023. Families in economic assistance benefit from integrated social services, employment and vocational training aiming to exit from economic assistance.

26. In the area of education, there is a commitment to guarantee inclusive education for Roma and Egyptian minorities in the National Strategy on Education 2022–2026 and in the NAP for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021–2025 policy objective for education. According to Decision no. 666, dated 10.10.2019 of the Council of Ministers “On financial quotas for food in canteens and dormitories, determining the criteria for benefiting from scholarships and payments for students of pre-university education in public educational institutions”, as amended, setting the role of mediators in education, supporting the Roma and Egyptian boys and girls were enrolled and attended pre-school education and compulsory education in 2022–2023 school year, in total 10, 539 pupils. The aim is for mediators for inclusion of Roma and Egyptian minorities to further increase the attendance of the educational process. There have been 40 mediators placed under this provision. Additionally, scholarships have been provided in education for Roma and Egyptian pupils and students, including higher education; free textbooks and free transportation; priority registration of Roma children in kindergartens and for the provision of basic and part-time education.

27. In the framework of the European Union (EU) integration process, Fifth Albania-EU Policy Dialogue Seminar on the inclusion of Roma and Egyptian national minorities was organized on April 20, 2022, in Tirana. The Policy Dialogue Seminar resulted in operational conclusions and measures and Final Recommendations to be implemented in the timeframe 2022–2024. The Eu-Albania Policy Seminar Dialogue Recommendations 2022–2024 have

been consulted with representatives of central and local government, representatives of the civil society and international organizations.

28. The Policy objective on employment and VET has focused on Roma and Egyptian employment and vocational training. The amendments to Law No. 15/2019 “On Employment Promotion” (approved by the Parliament in June 2023) addressed vulnerable groups including Roma and Egyptian minorities, recent programs for promotion of employment and approved the EU Youth Guarantee. In cooperation with public, non-public and private providers, employment promotion and training programs are designed and implemented for vulnerable groups, such as young people (as part of the Youth Guarantee scheme), persons with disability (as part of Social Employment Fund), beneficiaries of working age from families supported with economic assistance, long-term jobseekers, and in particular ethnic minorities such as Roma and Egyptian community.

29. Roma and Egyptian jobseekers have received employment and mediation services from regional employment offices and are registered in vocational training centers. About 300 Roma and Egyptian individuals have been integrated into the labor market through the employment promotion programs. The Intensified Job Counselling Program improves the technical and managerial capacities of the vulnerable groups with the aim of inclusion in employment programs of National Agency for Employment and Skills.

30. Concerning social housing, the provisions of Law No 22/2018 “On Social Housing” (as amended), foresee that above 5% beneficiaries of all programs of social housing must belong to Roma and Egyptian minority.

31. Ministry of Interior has reported trained 138 civil servants in 6 districts to build capacities on civil registration regulations, with an impact on Roma and Egyptians. To this purpose, were conducted 10 training programs (online) on identification and registration of Roma and Egyptians.

32. Access to free legal aid is provided in 14 functional centers of the Primary Legal Aid Service, covering most of the territory through primary and secondary legal aid service. Free legal services were provided to members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities by 15 Non-Profit Organizations.

33. Antigypsism is a separate component of the NAP for Equality, Inclusion and Participation, 2021–2025, aiming to recognize antigypsism in public policy. Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA) has organized the online training “Protection from discrimination of Roma and Egyptian minorities” (March 2023) on the legal framework for protection from discrimination with a focus on Roma/Egyptian ethnic origin; forms of discrimination and ensuring basic rights a During 2023, access to civil registration and access to legal aid has improved for both Roma and Egyptian minorities in Albania.

34. Social support has been provided for the category of Roma returnees in 6 municipalities (Tirana, Lezhë, Fier, Elbasan, Durrës, Devoll). These municipalities drafted local social/Roma and Egyptian plans with a focus on returnees from emigration or asylum and reintegration of returnees.

Implementation of Law No. 93/2014 “On inclusion and accessibility of Persons with Disability”

35. Policies and strategies for social inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwD) are in line with objectives of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Disability Strategy 2021-2030. Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) has endorsed the National Action Plan on Disability 2021–2025, which has been approved by the Government with DCM Nr. 276, Date 12/05/2021.

36. The National Council for Disability and the Technical Secretariat for Disability monitor the implementation of Law No. 93/2014 in collaboration with the focal points in line ministries, central and local government units and civil society. Law no 93/2014 guarantees the rights of persons with disabilities in all areas of disability inclusion, cooperation with interest groups to encourage promotion of inclusion and elimination of stigma from the society.

37. This law also provides legal definitions for accessibility, reasonable accommodation and independent living in all categories of disability. MoHSP is working toward

strengthening the monitoring process for disability for focal points for social inclusion of PwD in local level in all 61 municipalities. In the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2025, accessibility is a primary policy goal accompanied with cross-cutting measures.

38. In regard to infrastructure, MoHSP has improved the situation of health centers and to a high extent building accessibility standards in health facilities. 340 centers and ambulances have been reconstructed at the national level. There have also been improved standards in physical accessibility in the schools restored post-earthquake from the programme “EU4Schools”, implemented by UNDP in cooperation with the Albanian Government. This has expanded in eleven affected municipalities, namely: Kruja, Durrës, Kurbin, Kamza, Kavaja, Tirana, Mirdita, Lezha, Rrogozhina, Shijak, Vora. Accessibility in socio-economic development and local plans is a priority of the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities. The local accessibility plans in Pogradec, Përmet and Lezha are the first models of accessibility plans in implementation of national legislation. In the timeframe 2021–2025 all institutions have committed to measures on accessibility in construction, infrastructure, transport, communication, and accessibility information in all spheres, education, employment, services, tourism.

39. According to the provisions of Law No 22/2018 “On social housing” (as amended), the social housing legislation for categories in need address also Persons with Disabilities. There are programs such as: rent bonus application scheme; immediate grant; improvement and adapting housing conditions; investment in low-cost housing.

40. The Ministry of Education and Sport has supported the professional networks of assistant teachers for training and professional development in the inclusion and quality education for children with disabilities. At the same time, there is an increase in the number of psycho-social workers for 2022–2023 school year with 747 psycho-social service employees in the education system; 469 psychologists and 278 social workers who cover all educational institutions in the country, offering psycho-social support to students, teachers, and parents. In support of students with disabilities part of the education system for the school year 2022–2023, there are 1650 assistant teachers.

41. Participation in society, in political and public life includes a focus in art projects, culture and cultural heritage, as well as participation in cultural and sports activities by the Ministry of Education and Sport. In the National Action Plan, participation in public life will be further enhanced in audio-visual media and participation in the electoral process in order to put into use the best practices especially through accessible information for all categories. Central Election Commission provided accessible formats in the last elections, spots in sign language and assistance for Pwd. In areas of culture and sports the elements of accessibility are a precondition for inclusion.

With regards to LGBTI

42. The basic rights and freedoms of the individual are guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, without exception, distinction, or discrimination for individual reasons, including sexual orientation and the expression of gender identity. “National Action Plan for LGBTI persons, for the years 2021–2027”, the third action plan at the national level, was approved by Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 700, dated 18.11.2021. This plan focuses on protecting rights, providing quality services, raising awareness, and reducing the level of society’s unacceptability towards LGBTI persons in Albania, focusing on stronger measures against discrimination and hate crime against LGBTI people across the country.

43. On February 14, 2022, the LGBTI+ Plan 2021–2027 was presented by Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) in a launch event, with the participation of institutions, NGOs on the ground and international partners. Regarding the protection from discrimination for LGBTI persons, the implementation of the National Action Plan for LGBTI+ Persons, 2021–2027 continues.

44. In the framework of the International Day Against Homophobia and the 13th Festival of Diversity, a meeting was held in the premises of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection regarding the presentation of the National Platform “REPORTO: Language and Hate Crimes”, in cooperation with the ISIGURT National Platform AL and Pink Embassy. Also on September 23, 2022, in the meeting hall of the MoHSP, a round table was held on hate crimes against LGBTI persons in Albania, organized by the Ministry of Education and

Culture and the Council of Europe, with the participation of international organizations, NGOs, as well as representatives of institutions.

45. During 2022 and 2023, the MoHSP has been part of the activities developed in the framework of IDAHOT, where throughout the month of May a large number of activities have been developed in cooperation and with the participation of civil society organizations, international organizations that work for human rights in Albania, as well as various institutions. On December 19, 2023, a workshop was organized on the topic “Elimination of discrimination against LGBTIQ+ persons in the private sector in Albania”. This activity, organized by the MoHSP in cooperation with UNDP and other partner organizations, aimed to promote diversity in the workplace and eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues

46. Pursuant to law no. 10/2021, “On Asylum in the Republic of Albania” Instruction no. 72, dated 18.05.2022, “On the Procedures for the Equipment with Electronic Notification Letter and Travel Document of persons who have benefited from the Refugee Status and Supplementary Protection in the Republic of Albania”, it is provided:

- The person who has acquired refugee status or supplementary protection in the Republic of Albania submits the request for equipment with an electronic identity card and/or travel document to the authority responsible for asylum and refugees;
- The provision of an electronic identity card and/or travel document is made within 15 days from the date of application;
- During 2023, at the authority responsible for asylum and refugees, following the request submitted by this category, 15 people were provided with an electronic identity card (ID card) and 3 people with a travel document.

47. Pursuant to law no. 79/2021, “For Foreigners”, in the Republic of Albania Directive no. 87, dated 21.06.2023, “On the Documentation and Procedure for the Application, Evaluation, Approval and Rejection of the Request for Declaration of Statelessness”, it is provided that:

- Foreign persons who are in the territory of the Republic of Albania can submit a request to the authority responsible for asylum, foreigners, and citizenship, to the ministry responsible for matters of order and public security, for the declaration of statelessness;
- The instruction provides the steps and deadlines that will be followed from the submission of the request until the decision on the status of statelessness is made by the authority;
- Since the entry into force of this instruction, no request of this category has been submitted to the authority responsible for asylum, foreigners, and citizenship.

Equal rights of men and women (art. 3)

Reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues

Implementation of Strategy of Gender Equality

48. The “National Strategy for Gender Equality and its Action Plan 2016–2020”, was prepared and approved in October 2016 (NSGE 2016–2020). This strategy contained four strategic goals and thirteen specific objectives. Based on the evaluation carried out on the implementation of the NSGE 2016–2020 and its action plan, it results that the measures have been implemented up to 80%, highlighting major achievements in terms of women’s empowerment, advancement towards gender equality, and reduction of gender-based violence and domestic violence. The implementation of the 2016–2020 strategy and the measures envisaged also have a significant impact on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially of the SDG 5 “Gender Equality”.

49. The following National Strategy for Gender Equality (NSGE) 2021–2030 approved by Decision of the Council of Ministers No.400, dated 30.06.2021 was conceived in

continuity to the previous Strategy for Gender Equality 2016–2020. NSGE 2021–2030 constitutes a guideline towards a society whereby all individuals, women, men, young women and young men, girls and boys, irrespective of age, gender, place of birth or residence, ethnic or social group, disabilities, religious affiliation, gender identity or sexual orientation, as well as other individual characteristics, are provided with equal opportunities.

50. NSGE 2021–2030 was drafted based on the findings and recommendations of the “Evaluation Report: The Implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality and its Action Plan 2016–2020”, and therefore aims at further expanding and enhancing the envisaged and not fully implemented measures, or those implemented measures that require support for long-term sustainability, in line with the strategic goals previously laid down in NSGE 2016–2020.

51. NSGE 2021–2030 aims a society which values gender equality and gender justice as fundamental conditions for sustainable, social, economic and political development of the country, empowers all individuals to enjoy equal rights and opportunities in all walks of life, does not allow anyone to be left behind, and which relies on the principle of zero tolerance against harmful practices, gender-based violence and domestic violence, through sanctions for perpetrators and protecting, rehabilitating and reintegrating abused persons.

52. In the strategic goal 1 of the NSGE 2021–2030 is foreseen “Fulfillment of economic and social rights of women, young women, girls, and men, young men and boys in the society and the empowerment of women, young women, and girls in all their diversity, aiming at an improvement and sustainability of environmental (green) economy and their equal participation in the digitalization process” and in specific objective 1.3 “Reduction of barriers keeping women, young women, and girls away from the labor market and increased access to decent work, including non-traditional (in particular science, technology, engineering, mathematics, etc.) for women, young women, and girls in all their diversity.” Under this specific objective is foreseen as a measure creating an enabling and encouraging environment for the inclusion of women, young women, and girls in all their diversity, in decent work in non-traditional sectors, in accordance with the actions provided in the National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2019–2022. At the local level, during the year 2022, the support of the municipalities continued regarding the drafting of plans for the social and economic integration of women and girls victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence in areas that include employment.

53. At the beginning of 2023, the implementation of Government Decision No. 646 (Coding Program) commenced. During the period January–December 2023, this program was attended by 1290 participants, of whom approximately 40% were girls. Despite the perception that this program may be more associated with men, it has had a significant percentage of involvement from girls. There is also a rising trend regarding the attendance of courses by girls and women in public vocational training centers.

		2021	2022	2023
Total	Registered Participants	6 631	9 398	10 547
	Girls	3 144	4 757	5 769
	%	47%	51%	55%

54. Along with the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030, the NSGE Action Plan was also approved. “NSGE 2021–2030” is the fourth of its kind and reflects the special priority and attention that the Government of Albania devotes to achieving gender equality, as well as reducing gender-based violence and domestic violence, considering the proper addressing of them as conditions towards sustainable development.

55. In strategic objective III, the NSGE envisages the reduction of all forms of harmful practices, gender-based violence and domestic violence. During 2022, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection undertook a series of measures related to domestic violence and gender-based violence. Important in this direction were the measures taken to increase the capacities of local coordinators against domestic violence and police officers regarding the correct implementation of the changes that the law “On measures against violence in family relations” has undergone in the years 2020/2021.

56. In relation to the above, during 2022, the Ministry of Health and Social protection has continued to work on building the capacities of the Interdisciplinary Technical Teams and

local coordinators against domestic violence, police officers related to the implementation of legal changes in the Law “On measures against violence in family relationships (amendments of 2020) and DCM no. 327/2021 “On the mechanism of coordination of work between the responsible authorities, for the referral of cases of violence in family relationships as well as its processing, for the support and rehabilitation of victims of violence”.

57. During the period January–December 2022, 50 Referred Coordination Mechanisms (RCMs) were supported in order to increase the effectiveness of their work and 15–20 members from each RCM were trained. 58 Coordinators from 42 Municipalities were trained by MHSP with the assistance of UNDP/PNUD on the difficulties and challenges in managing cases of violence against women. In six municipalities, the role of the Local Coordinators against violence was separated from that of the Gender Officer and the worker for the protection of children’s rights, and it is in the process of taking measures to extend this measure to other municipalities as well. During the same period, almost 400 police officers were trained in 9 Municipalities of the country regarding the correct implementation of legal changes, the issuance of preliminary protection orders as well as the monitoring of the implementation of Protection Orders and Immediate Protection Orders. The State Police has developed a series of trainings, which have consisted in the recognition and implementation of legal changes and by-laws in its implementation on domestic violence, drawing up the risk assessment report and issuing the Order with Preliminary Immediate Protection Measures as well as the treatment and referral of victims of domestic violence.

58. In February 2022, the Assembly approved Law no. 13/2022 “On the ratification of Convention 190 of the International Labor Organization “Convention on Violence and Harassment” which marks an important step regarding the protection of women, girls, men and boys from harassment and violence in the field of employment. In terms of collecting and processing data related to domestic violence and gender-based violence, the General Directorate of the State Police has improved the computer system for processing statistical data collected regularly on a monthly basis. Also, the State Police, in accordance with the legal changes, has implemented the “risk assessment” analysis in the treatment of all cases of domestic violence.

59. In some municipalities of the country during 2022, activities were held with women where their rights and protection from gender-based violence were discussed. Meetings were held with the network of local coordinators for the referral and management of cases of domestic violence to strengthen their capacities and share good practices.

60. On October 2–6, 2023, the representative delegation of GREVIO, an independent monitoring body of the Istanbul Convention, held evaluation meetings with the responsible institutions in Albania. This evaluation concluded the first round of the thematic assessment for monitoring Albania’s implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). The first round of the thematic evaluation aimed to address how national laws and policies in States Parties build confidence, provide support, and provide access to justice for women victims of violence. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, as the main authority responsible for the issues of gender equality, gender-based violence and domestic violence, coordinated the process to ensure the success of this mission in Albania.

61. On October 18, 2023, the Albanian Government presented the fifth periodic report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Discrimination against Women to the CEDAW Committee.

62. The organization of a two-day training with the network of local coordinators for the referral and management of cases of domestic violence on November 1–2, 2023. This training was organized as a continuation of the ongoing work to strengthen the network and was intended to provide a platform which serves to increase the capacities of Coordinators for the most effective management of survivors of various forms of violence, to promote cooperation between Coordinators and sharing best practices and challenges encountered in the work process.

63. Ministry of Health and Social Protection has organized the Sensibilization Campaign “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence”. This campaign started on November 24, 2023, and ended on December 10 on International Human Rights Day. For 2023, the theme of the campaign was “Invest to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls”

and focused on the importance of funding various prevention strategies to prevent the occurrence of violence. Within the campaign for 2023, 183 activities were organized.

64. The National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 1325 “Women, Peace, Security in the Republic of Albania” was approved with Decision No. 732, date 13.12 in Republic of Albania. The Resolution underlines the importance of women’s participation in peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations and promotes a gender perspective for women’s equal and meaningful participation in peace and security processes.

65. The meeting of the National Council of Gender Equality took place on December 15, 2023. In this meeting, the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee for the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) were presented after the report developed in Geneva on October 18, 2023. Also, the steps for drafting the work plan in implementation of the recommendations given by the CEDAW Committee for Albania were presented.

66. Doubling and then tripling financial assistance support for cases of domestic violence with protective orders, giving priority to women heads of households, combined with the operation of specialized support services for protection from domestic violence and gender-based violence. During 2022, 34 services have functioned as specialized support services for persons experiencing situations of vulnerability to gender-based violence or domestic violence. These services are organized in temporary shelters (16 centers at district and municipal level) and 2 national residential centers. These services include housing, health, legal and psychosocial counseling, protection, security and anti-trafficking services, education, and childcare.

67. From January 2022, the Government Social Resilience Package in response to the crisis has financially supported all beneficiaries of the economic assistance scheme with an increase of 20% for all beneficiaries, doubled for 15,000 families with 3 or more children; doubled for 5700 women heads of households with up to 2 children and 5200 family members over 65 years old, tripled for 771 orphans, victims of domestic violence and victims of trafficking.

C. Issues relating to the specific provisions of the Covenant (arts. 6–15)

Right to work (art. 6)

Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues

68. A special incentive program developed in response to the COVID situation, which included a 12-month information program. The program is explained by the services/incentives. The statistical data are provided below:

<i>Program's/ Year</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>
V.K.M 608 (Program 4 months)	30	284	20	0
V.K.M 608 (Program 8 months)	1 129	1 575	515	51
V.K.M 608 (Program 12 months/ Informality)	563	828	466	133

Right to just and favourable conditions of work (art. 7)

Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues

69. The minimum wage should be reviewed regularly and adjusted based on guidance in implementing the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 26 and 131 of the ILO on the minimum wage. Wage and income policies are particularly important in times of economic crisis. ILO has provided policy advice on ways of mitigating the impact of the global economic crisis in Albania since 2011. A tripartite review of how a wage guarantee fund can contribute to reducing wage arrears and its negative social impacts could be helpful. The ILO will provide technical support for the effective implementation of the Protection of

Workers' Claims (Employers' Insolvency) Convention, 1992 (No. 173) and eventually its acceptance vis-à-vis the ILO.

70. About minimum salary:

Article 111 (Amended by Law no. 136/2015, dated 5.12.2015, Article 51):

- The salary may not be lower than the minimum salary set by the DCM;
- The minimum salary shall be set on the basis of:
 - The economic factors, the demands of the economic development and the decrease of unemployment, the increase of production;
 - The needs of the employees and their families, taking into consideration the general level of living of the employees in the country, the income benefited from social insurance and the living standards of different social groups;
- The Council of Ministers may set a lower salary than the minimum salary at national level for the cases of learning the profession in the system of education and professional training in a double form.

Reply to paragraphs 11 and 12 of the list of issues

71. The State Inspectorate for Labour and Social Services (SILSS) reports its work data based on Convention 81, on an annual basis, on its website: www.inspektoriatipunes.gov.al. SILSS from 2019–2023, has carried out a total of 46,203 inspections. Labour inspectors have taken the following measures for violations of labour legislation during the years 2019–2023: 5623 Warnings, 627 Fines, 5290 Suspensions of Work (emergency measures for labour relations and for issues of safety and health at work). The data for inspections in years, inspections for accidents as well as administrative measures can be referred to for the last 5 years according to the tables below:

Year	Number Inspection	Number of accident-related inspections	Number of injured workers	Number of deceased workers	Urgent measure /suspension	Penalty/total	warning/tot
2019	13 079	197	176	38	1 719	157	1 694
2020	5 993	201	182	36	840	85	700
2021	7 039	207	187	31	578	102	760
2022	10 154	208	184	32	1 038	135	1 226
2023	9 938	218	168	30	1 115	148	1 243

	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Injured employees	Death employees	Injured employees	Death employees	Injured employees	Death employees	Injured employees	Death employees	Injured employees	Death employees
Agriculture fishing forests	1	0	2	0	5	1	1	0	0	0
Mining career	27	7	28	5	22	4	30	5	26	1
Manufacturing Enterprise	39	2	48	8	37	4	50	5	38	3
Electricity gas water	9	3	11	1	7	6	7	1	7	1
Trade Hotel Bar Restaurant	12	4	10	1	20	0	17	0	11	2
Construction	45	17	39	10	36	6	29	10	32	8
Transport, telecommunications	1	0	4	1	4	2	4	0	8	3
Finance, services	0	0	3	1	4	0	2	0	2	1
Other activities	42	5	37	9	52	8	44	11	44	11

	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	<i>Injured employees</i>	<i>Death employees</i>	<i>Injured employees</i>	<i>Death employees</i>	<i>Injured employees</i>	<i>Death employees</i>	<i>Injured employees</i>	<i>Death employees</i>	<i>Injured employees</i>	<i>Death employees</i>
Total	176	38	182	36	187	31	184	32	168	30

Trade union rights (art. 8)

Reply to paragraph 14 of the list of issues

72. The Albanian State joins the states, where the right to trade unions is protected by law, cited in the Labor Code, specifically in article 10 Trade Union Freedom and Collective Negotiations, also articles 176–187 of the Trade Union Organizations.

Right to social security (art. 9)

Reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues

73. The “Mapping of Social Services in Albania”, June 2023, presents the distribution of social care services by typology, source of funding, beneficiary groups, and provider institutions, using administrative data from all 61 municipalities. It assesses service accessibility and evaluates administrative, institutional, human, and financial capacities to ensure effective system functioning. It also provides an assessment of the need for social care services by municipality. This study aims to support policy developers and implementers at both central and local levels in planning, providing, and monitoring the delivery of social services.

74. The need assessment for social services in the 12 regions shows that there are in total 391 care institutions or 16% more than in 2021 providing 1,147 social care services, public, non-public, residential and non-residential social services, or 2.3 times more than in 2021 (493 services), for 36,642 beneficiaries, individuals in need out of 10,000 in 2019.

75. For further information please refer to the link below:

<https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/mapping-social-services-albania-0>.

Reply to paragraph 16 of the list of issues

76. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection has carried out the process of legal analysis of the Law on the status of orphans, within the framework of the Deinstitutionalization reform. This analysis aims to provide a brief overview of social protection policies, focusing on “orphaned” children:

- Reforms undertaken to date, related to sectoral social programs, such as: social services, employment, social housing, payment schemes, educational program, for all levels;
- The term “social orphan”, which is not an official term and/or used in administrative and procedural communication, has been replaced in all legal or political/strategic documents, with the term “child without parental care”;
- Resulting in a series of legal acts, accompanied by by-laws, that regulate the protection of children’s rights, including children without parental care. The legal study comprises the analyses of the Law 18/2017 “On the Rights and Protection of Children”; as well as Law 121/2016 “On social care services in the Republic of Albania”; Family Code; Law no. 9669, dated 18.12.2006 “On measures against violence in family relationships”; which directly impact the applicability of Law no. 8153, dated 31.10.1996 “On the status of orphans”.

77. The analyses shows that the current law on the status of orphans does not respond to the changes in the legal situation, as well as in terms of the social policies in force. The Ministry has come up with the proposal and has foreseen in its agenda the drafting of a new legislation dedicated to the guardianship of children without parental care, based on the principle of “the best interest of the child”, and the broader meaning of the term “child

without parental care”, which means the creation of a new culture of family understanding, better development of social policies, better management of services and social practices by the actors involved: central, local and civil society level.

Protection of the family and children (art. 10)

Reply to paragraphs 17 and 18 of the list of issues

78. Law no. 10/2021 “On asylum in the Republic of Albania”, which is aligned with the 5 directives of the European Union, provides that the family reunification of refugees and persons with complementary protection, in which it is cited that: The request for family reunification is submitted to the authority responsible for asylum and refugees from the refugee or person with complementary protection status.

79. The refugee or the person with the status of complementary protection submits the request for family reunification to the authority responsible for asylum and refugees, completing the special request form which was approved by order of the Minister no. 249 dated 03.06.2021, only if he has legally stayed in the territory of the Republic of Albania for a period not longer than 2 (two) years, before joining his family members.

80. Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP), through the strategic document of the National Agenda for Children’s Rights 2021–2026, implements measures for comprehensive and friendly services and the protection of children’s rights. This document contains a special strategic goal related to the elimination of all forms of violence against children, including children in street situations and economically exploited.

81. MHSP as the coordinating authority and State Agency for Child Rights and Protection (SACRP) implements Law 18/2017 “On the rights and protection of the child”. Towards improving the quality of implementation, recently was approved Guideline No. 767, dated 28.12.2023, of the MHSP on the “Methodology of quality control of the work of child protection structures at the local level” monitoring the quality of the work of child protection structures by the State Agency for Rights and Child Protection, was carried out with 10 meetings at the local level and 1 promotional activity at the national level. In the same way, field monitoring of 200 cases of children taken into protection by child protection workers was carried out, based on the newly approved methodology.

82. Children under the age of 16 have full access into the health system starting from vaccination and immunization according to the National Vaccination Program from 0–18 years of age and free health checkup and visits at the family doctor and specialized doctors through the referral system. In 2019 for the first time the Ministry introduced the reimbursed medical devices program for diabetes stripes for children from 0 years and youth up to 25 years of age. In April 2022 the Ministry introduced for the first time the National Eye Screening Program for children 6–14 years of age. The program is enrolled in all 9th grade public schools in Albania. In 2023 the Ministry introduced a new National program on dental care screening also dedicated to 9th grade school age children 6–14 years and is enrolled on national level. Moreover in 2024 the Ministry aims to introduce a new screening program for children 5–14 years of age that is the National Screening Program for scoliosis and national screening program on hearing impairment for children from birth that will be also in line and in accordance with the another program that has been implemented in public hospitals for children with hearing impairment that is the cochlear implant that is reimbursed 100% by the state budget.

83. All the above programs also contain promotional and raising awareness activities on the importance of health and health knowledge in children. In this context, the protection of children from economic exploitation is provided as a category of children for whom special protection must be ensured Chapter V of Law 18/2017 “On the rights and protection of the child”. The protection of this category is provided in article 24 and 64 of Law 18/2017:

84. The child is protected from economic exploitation, according to the provisions of the Criminal Code, which includes performing any work that:

- Poses risks for physical and mental health, well-being and overall development;
- Violates education;

- Is forced.

85. Employment of children under the age of 16 is prohibited. The child can perform light work, which does not harm his health, his education or remove him from school, according to the provisions provided in the Labor Code. The child is protected from economic exploitation, as well as from performing any forced work within his family, at school, rehabilitation, and punishment institutions, or in cultural, artistic, sports, modeling or advertising purposes, which poses a risk, violates education, harms his physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social health or development. Any practice by which the child is forced to perform the actions mentioned above, regardless of the knowledge or not of the parent or guardian, as well as regardless of whether or not it is against reward, is prohibited.

86. In the event that a child, within the age for which compulsory education is provided for, avoids education, in order to carry out prohibited activities, according to the law, the educational personnel immediately notifies the parent or guardian, as well as the child protection unit, who take measures immediate for the child to return to school.

87. Child protection structures actively identify and prioritize any reported cases of child exploitation, including children in street situations. These structures are responsible and have the right to undertake concrete actions, with the support of the State Police bodies, to remove the child from the situation of economic exploitation or the street situation. After evaluating each case, the child protection worker, in cooperation with the case evaluation and referral unit, as well as the cross-sectoral technical group, includes in the Individual Protection Plan, but not limited to:

- Taking one of the protection measures provided for in this law;
- The child's enrolment in school and/or regular attendance of the educational program;
- Teaching support, through special teachers or integrated classes;
- Not attending certain places;
- Psychological counselling;
- Health treatment, if necessary.

88. The child protection worker, based on the child's family situation, if they notice the exploitation of children by family members, can report the parents to the police and prosecutor's office or determine a plan for parenting training of the child's parents, which contains, but not limited to:

- Attending parenting training courses;
- Attending courses against alcoholism or programs against narcotic and psychotropic substances;
- Support to register in the relevant local unit and register all family members in civil status;
- Help to integrate into the economic aid scheme;
- Assistance for accessing the labour market;
- Any other necessary intervention, which helps to improve the family situation, creating premises for the protection of the child from exploitation.

89. The Child Protection Worker is responsible for implementing and monitoring the progress of the Individual Child Protection Plan, as well as for its change, adapting or removing any measure or intervention if the situation that led to their establishment has changed.

90. Sub-legal acts in implementation of the Law, which deal with the issues of protecting children from economic exploitation:

- Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 129, dated 13.3.2019 "On procedures for the identification, immediate assistance and referral of economically exploited children, including children in street situations";

- Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 578, dated 3.10.2018 “On referral procedures and case management, the design and content of the individual protection plan, the financing of expenses for its implementation, as well as the implementation of protection measures”;
- Guide “For labor inspectors regarding unacceptable child labor in Albania”. This document was drafted by the Labor Inspectorate in cooperation with the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection and with the support of the OSCE. The Guide creates a functional link of cooperation, between labor inspectors and child protection workers at the local level, related to the identification, referral and protection of economically exploited children.

91. Child protection structures have been set up in all municipalities, with 241 employees responsible for managing the cases of children in need of protection, including children identified in a situation of economic exploitation. Under the coordination of the State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child, trainings were carried out with the aim of increasing the capacities of professionals for the protection of children from economic exploitation. The State Agency for Child Rights and Protection collects data from child protection workers at the local level on all children in need of protection, including children in street situations and children exploited for labor.

92. Referring to the statistical data of the State Agency for Children’s Rights and Protection, child protection workers in each municipality manage about 230 cases of children in street situations every year, with the highest figures being reported during the summer. For the period July December 2023, child protection units report that a total of 55 adults, mainly their parents, who used their children for begging on the street, were prosecuted for child exploitation.

Reply to paragraph 19 of the list of issues

93. From the reports received by the Child Protection Units in all municipalities, it results that the phenomenon of forced early marriages is not a widespread phenomenon. Child marriage has been softening and has recently become a very rare phenomenon.

94. There are several cases of cohabitation of minor girls with peers or older people, which have been influenced by parental neglect, feeding with traditional or community culture. In general, these cases belong to the Roma and Egyptian minorities due to their culture, traditional norms, poverty, etc. However, a very big change has been noticed in this community as recently many girls and boys are aware, attending school or professional training courses.

95. In the educational system, in extracurricular classes, topics related to the elimination of gender inequalities, gender stereotypes, discrimination, and the phenomenon of early and forced marriages are developed. In the same way, the right support is provided so that all families, especially those in economic difficulties, can send their children to school. In cooperation with the education structures, Child Protection Units identifies children who are not enrolled in school or who have dropped out of school and works with the family for their enrollment and return to school. Child Protection Units cooperate with health care centers in order to promote the reporting of cases of domestic violence, or other incidents that can prevent the phenomenon of early marriages.

96. The State Social Service has intervened to provide services and medical checks for girls and women in need as well as legal support with legal and psychological services. For any health problem, including sexual and reproductive health, girls and women are referred to the health center near the residence where they live, to receive free health services, as well as to be directed to specialized services according to their needs.

97. During 2022, no girl under the age of 18 was married in Albania. According to official data, 18,782 marriages were registered during the year 2022 and for the first time there is no marriage under the age of 18 (case of success).

Right to an adequate standard of living (art. 11)

Reply to paragraphs 21 and 22 of the list of issues

98. Ministry of Health and Social Protection has monitored the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation. This strategic document contains a policy objective for social housing, which emphasizes the importance of housing conditions for Roma and Egyptians as a precondition of social inclusion of Roma in the Society. This is implemented in coordination with the institutions responsible for Strategy for Social Housing and Law No. 22/2018, “On social housing”, (as amended).

Right to physical and mental health (art. 12)

Reply to paragraphs 23 and 24 of the list of issues

99. The national health strategy 2021–2030 reflects our governing program “Albania 2030” assessing health as part of cross – cutting policies and aiming to protect and preserve the health of citizens, as well as providing effective treatment for all problems encountered throughout the life course. Over the past few years, we have taken steps forward in steadily increasing public funding for health and improving the quality of health service. Public health protection programs have been expanded through safe and effective vaccination against communicable diseases and implementation of successful population-based screening programs for non-communicable diseases, aiming at the early diagnosis and timely treatment. Investments in primary health care have included the rehabilitation of over 400 primary health centers by 2025.

100. Moreover, we have invested in the modernization of the Obstetric and Gynecologist Hospital network by starting with the civil works and new medical equipments in 6 hospitals followed with major investments also in 4 Pediatric Hospitals. Meanwhile the Ministry is in the process of the law on reproductive health and for the first time we start in 2024 the procedure of fertilized in vitro at one of the public hospitals from which benefit free service every couple that falls within the age and medical criteria. Support for health professionals was and still is a priority within the establishment of better working conditions, continuous education and specific trainings are carried out by biomedical engineers on the user manual of every new medical equipment installed.

101. Universal Health Coverage remains our main goal and guides our work to strengthen the integrated health system, to strengthen the preparedness and response to emergencies, and improve digital health. In order to achieve this goal our continues challenge remains to build on sustainable health policies that have a direct impact on increasing health coverage for our citizens, improving the health and well – being of the population by fulfilling their rights to good health. Thus our work is focused on the following objectives: improving quality of health care by ensuring full access for all Albanian residents based on stable financial system, increasing the number of healthy life years of the Albanian population; modernization of infrastructure and increased safety and quality of hospital care; improving medicine quality and safety in line with EU standards; develop and integrate and better coordinated approach to health care and enhance transparency and accountability and restoring public confidence in health care system.

102. In the field of drugs and pharmaceutical services the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is in the final legal processes of sending for approval at the Council of Ministers the revised Law on Drugs and Pharmaceutical Services, the new amendments to the existing law that was approved in 2014 aim at a further approximation of the existing legislative act to the EU Directive. Also, the ministry has approved in parliament the revised law on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic substances according to the recommendations of the 13th meeting of the Subcommittee of EU under chapter 24 Justice, Freedom and Security, the revised law will be published for consultations and within this year will also be send for approval at the Council of Ministers.

103. From 2013 until now have increased by 25% the dedicated funds for the reimbursement of drugs from the list, by guaranteeing not only a full drug package that is offered free of charge to all our citizens with chronic disease but also we have included in the list innovative therapies for which 8 years ago citizens had to pay out of their family

budget. We have tripled the financing of drugs for the treatment of cancer patients and we now guarantee 100% free treatment with drugs for patients with breast cancer and blood malign cancer. Moreover, we have invested in the modernization of radiotherapy department and from 2019 also children with brain tumors get full radiotherapy treatment. From 2014, there are 600 thousand uninsured citizens that receive medical treatment in all the levels of the public health system covered 100% by the state budget. 450 thousand chronic patients receive free of charge the first alternative drug from the Reimbursement Drug List.

104. Health care contributions in 2023 amount to 17.077 billion ALL and the projection for the next three years foresees a progressive yearly increase of health contributions at an average of 8%. The projection is that in 2024 health contributions will be 20,153 billion ALL, in 2025 health contributions will be 18,956 billion ALL and in 2026 health contributions will be in the amount of 19,960 billion ALL or an increase of 16.8% compared to 2023. Moreover from 2018 apart from the centralized procurement procedure of drugs the Ministry of Health and Social Protection has guaranteed the treatment of patients with patent drugs for specific diseases through the legal instrument of Management Entry Agreements.

105. For the period 2018–2023 the Reimbursement Drug List has been enriched by new drugs and alternatives, by guaranteeing the treatment of a broader spectrum of group therapies for the patients that are diagnosed with cancer. Today we can cover at 100% the full treatment with the first and second line of medication for 43 diagnoses.

106. In 2022 was approved the Law on Drugs and pharmaceutical services, amended that brought changes in reference to the inclusion for the first time of the concept of Management Entry Agreements with the aim of providing an opportunity to attract pharmaceutical companies that develop innovative drugs by balancing cost-effectiveness and adding the concept of the Local Marketing Authorization Holder that will provide an opportunity to legal representation of international MAH to be themselves as MAH by ensuring the quality, efficiency of drugs registered in the Republic of Albania and by having an impact on price reduction of drugs, registration costs, and higher access of drugs in the local market. At the same time there will be a reduction of drug production costs, quality ensuring and more favorable prices by increasing the disposability of drugs in our market and reducing drug demand reduction.

107. For the first time in 2018 we included in the reimbursement scheme also the reimbursement of medical devices. And since 2018 all children and youth till the age of 25 benefit for free the diabetes stripes. In 2022 we decided to increase the age group of citizens who will benefit from the reimbursement scheme of free diabetes stripes that will be implemented in 2023 for every Albanian citizen + 65 years of age. For 2023 there are 51 483 patients out of which 540 patients age group 0–25 years old and 50,943 patients + 65 years of age.

108. In regard to the improvement of the health of the population we will continue the financing and increasing of health packages with the aim of increasing access to medical treatments and providing more health services close to the place of residence, with a special focus on the vulnerable groups. In order to provide health care services to the disable, the elderly and patients with severe health care problems we are applying from 2021 in primary health care the Home Base Care Model and in 2023 in joint cooperation with Health of All Project, financed by the Swiss Agency and the National Operator of Health Care the model is implemented in total of 59 primary health care centers.

109. In 2022 we have introduced psychological and social services within primary health care through the introduction of integrated socio-health care model. Until the end of 2022 the number of psychologists employed in primary health care is 50. In 2023 with the employment of 50 social workers/psychologists, 17 physiotherapist and 17 logopedics in primary health care through a transparent process we have established 100 primary health care centers that provide the integrated model of social and health care.

110. From the state budget more than 85% of the needs of the population for treatment of cardiovascular and kidney diagnoses is fully covered and the aim is to increase the coverage by 5% until the end of 2024 by expanding the packages with the dedicated health packages for rehabilitation, palliative and geriatric care.

Right to education (arts. 13–14)

Reply to paragraph 25 of the list of issues

111. During the COVID 19 pandemic the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES) has considered with particular attention the wellbeing and protection of children by adapting remote learning to combine teaching with learning, including knowledge on spread and prevention of infection, drafting guidelines for closure and re-opening of schools based on need in case there was an increase in cases of infection in community. To avoid the regress in learning for students, as well as to create the chance for them to finish their respective school year after the whole teaching process has passed from physical to remote. Ministry of Education and Sport in cooperation with dependent institutions took the necessary measures for offering teaching sessions recorded and transmitted on channel *RTSh Shkolla* in the public television as well as in the respective official YouTube channel of MES, the online teaching platform *academia.al* was created; trainings with teachers for developing their digital competences, use of social media and different platform in function of teaching and learnings also took place; the creation of virtual classes was also enabled (google classroom, google hangout, edmodo, zoom whatsapp etc). For all students in need and merely those coming from rural areas tablets and free internet were distributed so that they could follow online learning and remote learning.

112. Teachers were assisted by means of MES guidelines and ASCAP ones in regarding easing of their learning hours in terms of content. They were flexible and saw with priority the easing of content in relation to students focusing instead on repeating gained knowledge and on the training on some knowledge and key skills. To ensure efficiency during teaching and learning at home teachers through messages; PowerPoint presentations or videos gave instructions, tasks, exercises, extra reading materials, mini tests etc., based on respective teaching subjects and subject specification as well as answered to the questions of students regarding teaching subjects and difficulties and uncertainties that they had.

113. During the timeframe 1–24 September 2021, extra teaching hours were organized in all pre-university education institutions in compliance with respective guidance of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ASCAP) “On the improvement of students’ achievements as a result of the situation created by COVID-19 pandemic” aiming to enforce and improve students’ achievements with lacks identified in the past school year. During the extra-teaching hours special care was exercised for students with limited abilities (AK). Schools moreover developed an inclusive programme with leisure activities and sports activities for the students. To avoid changes in situation in relation to COVID 19, during the school year 2021–2022, the Ministry of Education and Sports prepared 3 scenarios: (teaching at schools, combined teaching and online one) that were set at disposal of all education institutions, to be used in a flexible way based on the conditions that will be presented by the pandemic in specific areas. MES and ASCAP guidelines have assisted education institutions to take measures on the way how teaching and learning will take place in a temporary situation where the offered alternatives were more suitable considering the conditions of schools and post-COVID 19 situation.

114. By means of guideline on the school year in pre-university education system, directors of pre-university education institutions are oriented for efficient enforcement of the policies and initiatives of MES and for the creation of a friendly and inclusive environment for students. In this document institutions were instructed also for the registration with priority of children with special needs, reduction of school dropout, reduction of bullying, reduction of violence and extremism, gender equality and conducting of awareness rising activities on these phenomena. Moreover, this guidance states also the taking of necessary measures for the creation of an external and internal school environment that is safe in cooperation with parents and community to protect students and staff health based on COVID-19 situation protocols.

115. Regarding protection of children from violence, bullying, extremism, trafficking, and education for sustainable development:

- The competence based curricular reform undertaken in pre university education (from 2014 onwards) aimed to appoint students with skills of future. The reformed competence-based curricula (from preparatory class to class 12) aimed to appoint students with lifelong learning skills, to prepare them for the labor market and to

enable them to face future challenges. The reformed competence-based curricula (from preparatory class to class 12) enable students to gain respective knowledge and skill to promote sustainable development including human rights, gender quality, support for a peace culture; global citizenship and appreciation for diversity of cultures and contribution that culture provides in sustainable development. Inclusion of extracurricular subjects such as environment, sustainable development, interdependency, peaceful co-existence, human rights, national identity and knowledge of cultures of all subjects/areas of learning has further developed the increase in skills for teachers, school text authors and other stakeholders through different activities;

- The creation of a system to identify, prevent and report violence, bullying, violent extremism and minimization of hate speech at schools is at the focus of MES. In cooperation with partners, MES has drafted inclusive protocols for prevention and reporting of all types of violence (physical, psychological sexual, neglect, sexual abuse, exploitation), homophobic, bullying, hate language and extremism at schools;
- Psychosocial workers and security officers in pre-university education institutions undertake different awareness rising campaigns and information campaigns aiming to prevent the phenomena of violence inside and outside school premises including all the possible forms. The coordinated mechanism for referring to cases of violence at family premises is in place at each municipality to treat and prevent respective cases;
- For prevention of violence at school institutions, MES has issued guidance no.23 dated 21.11.2023 “For the definition of the penal actions that constitute an obstacle to work in pre-university education system” where it is predicted that for cases where a person cannot apply in the competition for working as a teacher or for any other position related to a school institution.

Cultural Rights (art. 15)

Reply to paragraph 26 of the list of issues

116. The Ministry of Education and Sport is focused on supporting the education of children from national minority groups. In the public pre-university education system there are education institutions where students of Greek and Macedonian national minorities study. Currently the education institutions where members of Greek minority are registered as students are supported by Local Pre University Education Offices of (ZVAP) of Finiq-Dropull; Gjirokastrë-Libohovë; Sarandë-Delvinë-Konispol and pre-university education institutions that include members of the Macedonian minority are supported by ZVAP Korçë-Pustec.

117. In article 10 of Law no. 69/2012 “For the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania” as amended, it is predicted that for persons who belong to national minorities, specific conditions shall be created so that they can learn their mother language, history and culture based on teaching plan and programmes. For this reason, based on the new curricula the following is approved:

- Guideline No. 20, dated 19.07.2022 “On defining the teaching subject that are conducted in Albanian language and in mother language from the students coming from minorities in basic education in Albania”;
- Guideline No. 531, dated 9.09.2022 “For defining the teaching plan for national minorities in basic education”.

118. Based on above-mentioned guidelines it has been possible that 70% of teaching subjects for students that belong to the Greek and Macedonian minorities in basic education take place in their mother tongue.

119. Based on Law No. 69/2012 “For pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania” as amended students that belong to national minorities are guaranteed the respective conditions for teaching the Albanian language and for knowing the history and culture of Albania to enable for active and equal participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the Republic of Albania and so that they can be assessed in national tests of

basic education in the subjects of Albanian language, respective language, and based on their will also in a foreign language.

120. In the guidance of school year 2023–2024, education institutions where students of ethnic minorities are enrolled are oriented to support these students for following and completing the education and for the organization of activities that promote language, culture and traditions of respective minority. To support preuniversity education institutions where students of Greek ethnic minority learn for the first time in 2019 it was made operational a specific ZVAP (Finiq-Dropull) which is led by members of Greek ethnic minority. In the guideline no. 14, dated 10.7. 2023 “On the number of students per class and teaching hours in pre-university education institutions” it is defined that in classes 1–9 for national minorities the learning in specific classes despite the number of students per-class. This enables that classes composed by ethnic minority students are opened and are functional despite the number of students.

121. Teachers of ethnic minorities are trained each year from the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ASCAP) for teaching based on the competence-based curricula. Since 2015, school texts in mother tongue for Greek and Macedonian minorities are renewed based on the new competence based curricula. Based on DCM No. 227, dated 17.4.2019, “Pon preparation, publishing and distribution of school texts of basic education for students in public pre-university education” for students of pre-university education institutions that belong to minorities” also for school year 2023–2024 texts in mother language were prepared printed and published and distributed by MES. Students of national minorities are given free texts funded by state budget.

122. In relation to measures that support children in need, the following acts are approved:

- Regarding Decision on National Minorities No. 511 of the Council of Ministers, dated 27.07.2022 “On some amendments and changes to Decision No. 666, dated 10.10.2019, of the Council of Ministers “On financial quota for food in canteen and dormitories and for defining the criteria to benefit scholarships and payments for students of pre-university education that study in public pre-university education institutions as amended”. Amongst other things this by law act defines that: “Vulnerable groups of students benefit in accordance with paragraph 1 of this decision support from specific employee appointed from local education institutions responsible for pre-university education, in the role of mediator for these groups, to support them in function of awareness rising and improvement of their access in education. Mediators serve to improve communication and cooperation between vulnerable groups and pre-university education institutions in function of increasing access to the learning process;
- Local education institutions responsible for pre-university education based on point 1 of this decision offer to Roma and Egyptian students’ specific programmes after school hours to conduct homework or to take extra hours of fulfilling lectures.”. Children in need are supported also with free of charge texts based on Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 486, dated 17.6.2020, “For publication, distribution and selling of school texts of pre-university education system” as amended;
- On the other hand, guidance no. 25 dated 1.12.2023, of Minister of Education and Sport “For the piloting of the teaching at disposal scheme and its tasks in the public pre-university education institutions” which aims that the teacher at disposal substitutes the subjects where there are missing teachers due to health, administrative leave or without the right to be paid. On the other hand, the teacher at disposal will realize extra hours with students with low achievement for respective subjects where this is requested.

Reply to paragraph 27 of the list of issues

123. The National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (NSSTI) 2017–2022 was approved by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 710 dated 01.12.2017. The strategy is accompanied by the action plan, according to which the strategy has defined the most important activities that have been carried out during the period of extension of this strategy 2017–2022, through the institutional structure that is part of the scientific research

ecosystem in Albania, the policy-making institutions, the executing institutions/financing, universities, scientific research institutions, business, and non-profit organizations.

124. NSSTI 2017–2022 is organized into four (4) strategic priorities, eight (8) strategic goals and twenty (20) objectives, the progress of which is intended to be measured through the realization of forty-five (45) products and the achievement of sixteen indicators of the result for a period of five years. The strategy has been monitored and evaluated according to a monitoring plan, throughout its execution. Monitoring and evaluation is based on a set of indicators for measuring the performance of the strategy (realization of policies, goals, strategic objectives, and their impact on society) as well as a series of indicators that measure the implementation of activities as part of the action plan.

125. The National Strategy of Scientific Research, Technology, and Innovation 2017–2022 reflected and included the six ERA Priorities. It also relied on the priorities defined in the 21st UN Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Monitoring reports have documented several achievements in the field of science, technology and innovation:

- Drafting of the Recommendation document on reforming the institutional system of scientific research in Albania;
- Financing of 6 projects, in the 6 areas of National Research and Development Programs, as well as 15 scientific research projects;
- Creation of the “Student Database” on the state data of students who study abroad and foreign citizens of Albanian origin who benefit scholarships from the Republic of Albania;
- Approval of the methodology for the evaluation process of the scientific research activity of the basic units of higher education institutions. (Approved by decision no. 165, dated 21.03.2018);
- Approval of the instruction for the creation of the National Register of Scientific Journals and the criteria that must be met by the Journals to be registered in the national register of the Republic of Albania”;
- Setting up the scientific research portal (research-scientific.arsimi.gov) whose purpose is to collect, analyze and process data in the service of developing and increasing the quality of scientific research in the country;
- Approval of Law 25/2022 “On the Support and Development of Start UPs”;
- The Albanian Government made the total fund of 194,000,000 ALL available to support Small and Medium Enterprises, within the framework of increasing cooperation between the scientific research community and business;
- The General Directorate of Industrial Property has signed several agreements with Higher Education Institutions in Albania, in order to determine the ways and modalities for increasing awareness of the concept of industrial and intellectual property as a whole, informing and raising the awareness of students and academic staff involved in research and scientific work.

126. The evaluation report highlighted some lessons learned from the implementation of the 2017–2022 National Strategy of Scientific Research, Technology, and Innovation, through which several recommendations were drawn up for issues that should be addressed by the new 2023–2030 strategy:

- Completion of the legal framework for science, with an emphasis on the adoption of the law for science, the completion of by-laws related to the regulatory framework for issuing joint grants between the community of scientific researchers and businesses;
- Review of the budget fund planned in the PBA in accordance with the planning in the strategy for achieving public funds for scientific research up to 1% of GDP;
- Inclusion in the annual plans of units covering the field of Scientific Research in MAS and dependency institutions;
- Increasing cooperation and information sharing between units covering the scientific research sector in MAS and dependent institutions;

- Integration of goals, strategic objectives, and products in the PBA of the budget program ‘Scientific Research’;
 - Carrying out the assessment and improvement of the national scientific research infrastructure by creating the National Map of the Scientific Research infrastructure as well as the national investment plan for the research infrastructure;
 - Following measures to ensure open online access to all scientific publications financed with public funds;
 - Revision of the by-laws for the creation of legal and fiscal incentive mechanisms for the financing of scientific research by business;
 - Taking measures within the framework of improving Albania’s inclusion in the Horizon Europe program and cooperation with European partners to engage in joint international research;
 - All the lessons learned from SKKSHTI 2017–2022 are included in the National Strategy of Scientific Research, Technology, and Innovation 2023–2030
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