



# ALBANIA

## BACKGROUND

Since the end of communist rule in 1991, Albania has strengthened democracy and developed a market economy, while confronting multiple challenges including relatively high levels of poverty, unemployment, and corruption. In recent years, Albania has suffered from an economic slowdown, with growth falling to an estimated 2.6 percent in 2015,<sup>1</sup> unemployment increasing to 17.3 percent, and youth unemployment rising sharply to 32.1 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this, there were some positive developments in 2015. In May, an overwhelming major-

ity of the parliament approved a resolution recommending legal reform based on the 'National Plan of Measures on the Protection of LGBTI People (2012-2014)' launched by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth as a step toward EU accession. The parliament passed controversial legislation to open the files of the Sigurimi ('secret') police who are believed to have killed and deported thousands of Albanians during the communist period. Steps were also taken to prevent violent extremism, particularly amongst youth, and highlight Albania's history of religious tolerance, with a strategy on Countering Violent Extremism adopted and a Balkans Regional Summit held.

<sup>1</sup> The World Bank, "Albania Overview". Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/albania/overview> (accessed 10 June 2016)

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank, "Albania Overview". Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/albania/overview> (accessed 10 June 2016)

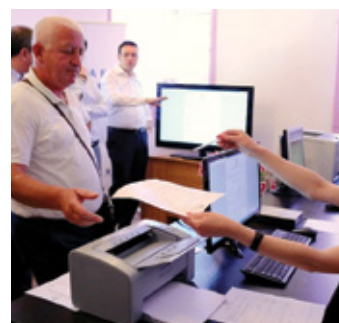
Albania held local elections in June 2015, completing a radical overhaul to local governance structures that resulted in 61 new consolidated municipalities. The elections were generally seen to be free and fair, with the participation of 63 political parties, 158 candidates for mayor and 36,341 candidates for local councils. All parties also met the new requirement for local council candidate lists to include equal numbers of men and women. However, the elections were not without issues, with OSCE election monitors noting “politicization of state institutions” and “many cases of group voting and some important procedural irregularities.”

A number of other challenges also remain. Corruption persists in many sectors, as is reflected by a score of 36/100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index.<sup>3</sup> To combat domestic violence and human trafficking, the Government has developed a number of initiatives and strategies, but implementation remains incomplete. Implementation of social policies for the inclusion of vulnerable groups, particularly the Roma and Egyptian communities, and people with disabilities, has also been inadequate. Finally, UNDP-supported Trust in Government surveys show very low levels of public confidence in many governmental institutions, including the Parliament, the judiciary and political parties.

## ASSISTANCE AND IMPACT

The successful local elections in 2015 were a milestone in the territorial and administrative reform process that was heavily supported through the flagship Support to Territorial and Administrative Reform (STAR) programme. In 2015, this programme focused on building the capacity of the new LGUs to ensure a smooth transition after the elections. Training was provided to 244 local professionals from 61 municipal working groups on how to perform municipal due diligence and engage in the amalgamation/consolidation processes for the new municipalities. A practical guide, tailored for each new LGU in accordance with their specific needs and characteristics, was provided to the new

mayors’ cabinets. These guides include detailed instructions for a smooth transfer of functions and responsibilities from the former LGUs. Support was also provided to 26 smaller LGUs in designing their short-term Local Development Operational Plans, which will serve as blueprints for the new municipalities for the next 2-3 years. Furthermore, the changeover is being used as an opportunity to modernize services, with one-stop shops offering services through a single desk piloted in two LGUs, and one LGU also piloting a new data management system and the digitization of their archives.



A man saves time and avoids costly travel by getting a document approved at a one-stop shop

Photo by: UNDP Albania

In a significant gain for gender equality, the Albanian Parliament legislated a 50 percent women’s quota for the candidates for the June 2015 local elections. UNDP’s support in this initiative included the development of the legislation, and the creation of advocacy and lobbying partnerships such as women’s organizations, parliamentary commissions and the women parliamentary caucus. The end result was a milestone achievement of women being elected in approximately 35 percent of all positions across the 61 municipal councils, as compared to around 12 percent in 2011. Female representation in the national parliament has also seen large improvements.

To assess the state of gender inequality in the court system, UNDP supported a review by a local NGO of 655 divorce case decisions from the Tirana District Court. The review showed that in

<sup>3</sup> Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2015”. Available from <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2015/#results-table> (accessed 21 June 2016)

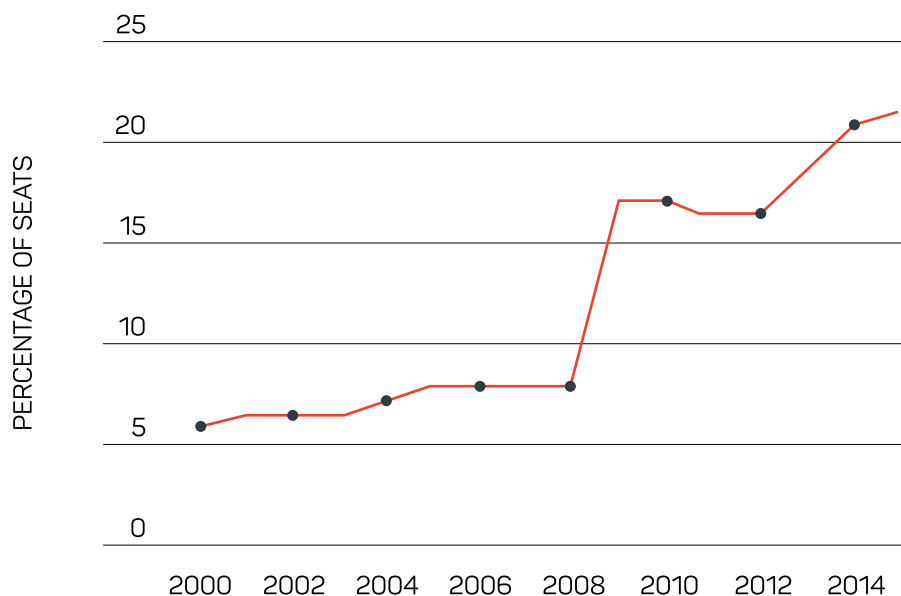
Voting in the June  
2015 local elections

Photo by: UNDP Albania



lishing coordinated community response mechanisms in four municipalities, with a focus on preventive action and systems of protection. In addition, existing mechanisms were expanded in two additional municipalities to cover a larger area due to the amalgamation of government units. As a result, in 2015 there was a 30 percent increase in reported cases, a 35 percent increase in requests for the State Police to issue Protection Orders from 2013, and a 24 percent increase in arrests for family crimes from 2014. Complementing this work, UNDP has also helped victims with rehabilitation and reintegration,

## FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ALBANIAN NATIONAL PARLIAMENT - 2000 TO 2015



Source: World Development Indicators, The World Bank<sup>4</sup>

82.9 percent of cases there was no enforcement of court orders on child alimony and no alternative support provided by law enforcement agencies. This often placed an additional burden on women who were typically already in a difficult socio-economic situation. The analysis also provided important insights into the unequal distribution of assets amongst men and women in divorce cases.

UNDP has also been active in the fight against domestic and gender-based violence, estab-

leading to 47 percent of victims being successfully employed as compared to 38 percent in 2014. Furthermore, UNDP supported NGOs and volunteers in the 16 days of activism campaign against gender-based violence. As a result, leaders of the five main religious communities signed cooperation agreements with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth to advocate for gender equality, fight against gender-based violence, and implement the national action plan to involve men and boys in these issues.<sup>5</sup>

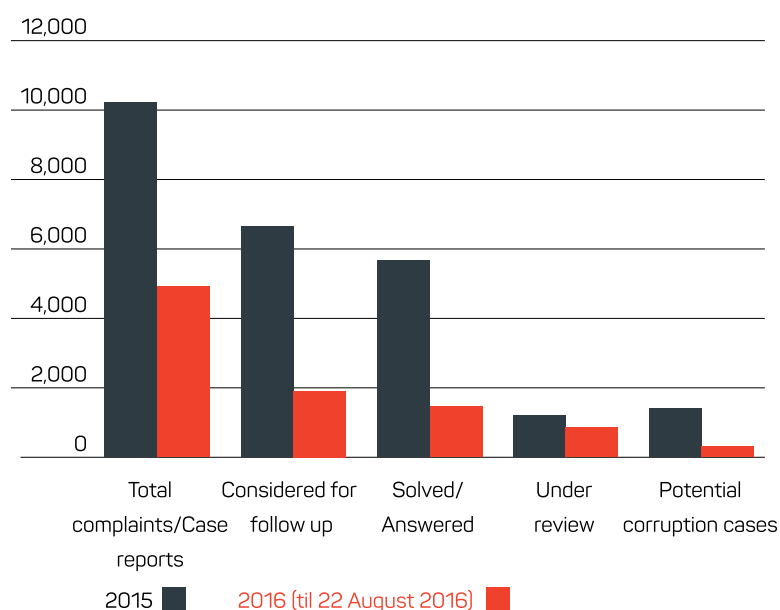
<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, "Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)". Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=AL> (accessed 1 September 2016)

<sup>5</sup> National Action Plan on Involvement of Men and Boys as Partners to Women and Girls in Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Combating Gender Based Violence

UNDP supported Roma and Egyptian communities and civil society organizations to help improve human rights and social inclusion. This included encouraging participation in local planning processes, the prioritization local infrastructure development, and, in partnership with NGOs, providing free legal aid to 165 Roma and Egyptians families in three municipalities. Activists were also supported within their communities to en-

izens to report corruption and service delivery failures. As a result, 10,214 reports were made using the portal in 2015, with 6,527 of these cases were referred for further action. An initial survey was also carried out to gauge public awareness of the portal and the level of confidence in these tools. The portal software was further enhanced in 2016 to further strengthen the function of the National Coordinator on Anti-Corruption.

## ANTI-CORRUPTION PORTAL STATISTICS - 2015 AND 2016



Source: Ministry of State on Local Issues<sup>6</sup> and StopKorrupsionin<sup>7</sup>

gage women in social change activities, such as UNDP facilitated forums for Roma and Egyptian women to discuss how to better advocate for their rights. Furthermore, a separate initiative provided job training and assistance to 341 people from the Roma and Egyptian communities in Korca, Berat and Vlora. All of these initiatives were complemented by a participatory process involving civil society, municipalities and line ministries which led to the finalization of the 'Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania 2016-2020'.

Finally, in efforts to combat corruption, UNDP assisted the National Coordinator for Anti-Corruption in setting-up a public portal for cit-

## CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD

The reform of the justice sector remains one of the main challenges facing Albania. Despite progress, the functioning of the justice system continues to be affected by politicization, limited accountability, a lack of cooperation between institutions, and corruption. These shortcomings are also reflected in the legal aid system where there are significant procedural, economic and physical barriers preventing vulnerable communities from securing access to justice.

Vulnerable communities also continue to face obstacles, such as finding housing solutions,

<sup>6</sup> Ministër Shteti për Çështjet Vendorë, "Portali antikorrupsion". Available from <http://www.ceshtjetvendore.gov.al/al/programi-transparences/portali-antikorrupsion> (accessed 1 September 2016)

<sup>7</sup> StopKorrupsionin, "StopKorrupsionin". Available from <http://stat.stopkorrupsionit.al> (accessed 1 September 2016)

employment and social inclusion, as well as accessing welfare and government services. Gender inequality, women's rights and domestic violence also remain significant issues, although it is hoped that a larger female representation in local councils and expansion of Coordinated Community Response Systems in the new amalgamated municipalities will help efforts to address these issues going forward.

UNDP will work with justice institutions to implement reforms and improve access to justice. With the results of the review of gender inequality in the justice system now completed, UNDP hopes to push for several reforms including alternative solutions for state compensation of child alimony in divorce cases, especially for victims of domestic violence.

UNDP also plans to continue supporting the increased effectiveness of municipal governance by working both at the local and national level. With the formation of the new larger municipalities,

these efforts will include expanded and improved initiatives to provide training, assist the development of operational plans, and modernize service provision. Going forward, UNDP and key partners will also increase assistance to local governance through measures aimed at strengthening local democracy and improving service delivery reorganization and efficiency of LGUs in reaching citizens. Partnerships with and training for civil society organizations will enable participation in decision-making processes and service delivery, as well as the assessment of the performance of service delivery, public administration, and anti-corruption and integrity initiatives. Anti-corruption work is also expected to be expanded, with citizen feedback to be used to push for meaningful reforms to address corruption and service delivery failures. Further research will be undertaken to see how UNDP can support the continued transition from the communist era, particularly with the opening of the Sigurimi files, as well as on how UNDP can support community efforts to prevent any emergence of violent extremism.

## Key results



*Assistance provided to new LGUs, including training for 244 local professionals on how to perform due diligence and how to self-assess performance*



*10,214 reports of corruption and service delivery failures were made through a newly established public portal*



*June 2015 local government elections result in 35 percent of elected representatives being female in local municipal councils*



*Job training and assistance provided to 341 people from the Roma and Egyptian communities*