

Universal Periodic Review 2024

Alternative report – Child Led Group Voice 16 + Albania

Introduction

This report has been prepared by three groups of children: Child Led Groups “Voice 16+”, Children’s Governance and children representatives of Eco Clubs. It was also informed by a nation- wide survey about children’s views on certain issues collected in 2021 within the scope of the project “Children Stand Up. The project supported the conduction of the survey “Air Pollution and its impact on children’s health”.

The Child Led Groups “Voice 16+” (CLGs) were established in 2000 in Albania with the support of Save the Children, as part of a project to re-write the Convention on the Rights of the Child in child friendly language. The group started its functioning by promoting children’s rights at school then addressing issues students were facing and continuing later with national level engagement to influence decision making. Over the years, some of the experiences turned into practices and now CLGs have a good mechanism to encourage new memberships; can conduct research studies and use it for advocacy; can develop and present national reports on fulfilment of children’s rights; can represent wider children’s views internationally by making use of international instruments.

In the framework of the implementation of the project “Eco schools for environment and climate change in Albania” Save the Children has established 9 Eco Clubs. These clubs serve as educational laboratories addressed to students from early graders up to 9th grade, empowering them to explore environmental concepts and actions beyond the confines of a syllabus or curriculum. On behalf of UPR process the project has conducted consultation with 9 eco clubs. 180 children involved (20 children per each eco-club).

Children Governments (CGs) existence is regulated by law and their establishment is mandatory for the whole pre-university system. Save the Children has a long experience supporting these school groups and strengthening their capacities in issues related to child rights violation.

Continuous remote capacity building on the process of UPR were organized with children of CLGs, although some children were already familiar with this process. The online trainings gave them information on the purpose of the UPR, the stages in the process, the value of their contribution and how to structure the submission of the report.

On 26th and 27th March 2024, 30 children participated in an online workshop and were divided into 5 working groups and selected the most critical environmental and climate changes issues that have considerable impact on children’s life. Each of the groups analysed all the addressed issues (in total 12) and identified the most critical ones (5 out of 12). Later each of the groups

analysed in detailed each of the identified issues and provided arguments regarding the challenges as well as the most pertinent solutions.

1. Waste collection:

Children’s final observations: Waste collection is a priority regarding “Environment protection”. There are policies in place, however there are very few measures adopted to implement it, therefore policies have to address measures that guarantee law enforcement. Local Government (LG) is the main institution that can monitor the situation as well as make decisions to implement policies. Children living in rural areas affirm that waste collection is a big issue in the areas they live, compared to the urban ones. They declare that areas near rivers are among the most polluted, which affect, water, soil and therefore quality of products planted. There is no division of waste, lack of collection bins. In villages the collection is randomly done (1 per week) They are thrown in random collection places by residents, and to reduce the amount they are burned. Children living in urban areas declare that in cities the local government to some extent pays attention to garbage collection, but despite this, waste collection bins are too old, they are opened and source of infection, no waste division. People from the poorest strata of the population often select cans/bins/plastic from the rubbishes to sell them and throw other waste without taking care of the environment.

“We respect the waste collection site and try to separate them into categories, but the collection machine puts them together again”.

In many villages there is more than one collection point and no measures have been taken to clean them.

Overall situation: Waste management in Albania is generally at a low level. The collection of municipal solid waste (MSW) is provided in most cities and towns but rarely in rural areas. The waste is mainly disposed of at municipal dumpsites. There are some managed landfill sites at Sharra, Bushat, Bajkaj, Maliq and Elbasan. In Elbasan there is also an incinerator near the landfill. The Sharra landfill is currently being rehabilitated because there is a plan to construct an incinerator nearby. There are no data available for industrial waste. In addition, people perceive an imbalance between the new legal framework that complies with EU standards and the limited human and financial resources and waste management practices available.

Since 2003, the legal framework is established based on EU standards. The Government has approved “the National Strategy and its National Action Plan of Waste Management:”, until 2025, which:

- defines the political direction regarding sustainable waste management.
- is based on governmental commitment to financing waste management.
- presents the main investment mechanisms in the waste sector.
- ensures separate collection of waste streams.
- encourages the development of businesses and markets for recycling and minimising waste.

Despite the progress as well as efforts, law enforcement remains critical, especially at local level. Based on Law No 139/2015 on Local Self-government, local government units are responsible for the implementation of legislation and achievement of objectives for integrated waste

management according to the National Waste Management Plan (NWMP), while the area waste plans are not yet prepared for 12 districts.

Recommendations:

- ✓ *Prepare the area waste plans for 12 districts.*
- ✓ *Raising public awareness related to waste generation.*
- ✓ *Set up the promotion action for waste reduction.*
- ✓ *Compiling regional waste management plans.*

2. Re-creational, development and entertainment facilities, Green Spaces, Sports facilities and Schools Infrastructure

Children's final observations: Lack of re-creational, development and entertainment facilities, lack of Green Spaces at schools as well as lack of sports facilities are seen as impediment to improve quality education of children, including the extension of knowledge on nature, environment, and earth. Children think that existing policies are obsolete, far from EU standards, that is why there is the need to revise and adopt comprehensive and relevant policies. Almost all schools are characterized with poor infrastructure, with no gym, or recreational place where children can entertain themselves. They lack laboratories where they can learn more on environment-related issues, Children say that the infrastructure of the school has not been reconstructed for years. Damaged walls, doors that don't close, outdated floors and ceilings. There are some green spaces at school premises, as often children and teachers take care to improve the surrounding environment, but still the local government and community should increase their efforts to improve this situation. Children living in rural areas declare that there are no re-creational and entertainment facilities where they can pass their free time and weekends. At urban areas, there are some entertainment facilities but are not near their homes. Local government units must increase funding and dedicate more attention to these aspects that affect children and elderly everyday life.

Overall situation: Regarding quality in education, progress is made with the appraisal of the current policy framework and drafting of the new National Strategy of Education and Action Plan 2021 – 2026, covering the stages from pre-school to higher education, the implementation of curricular and legislative frameworks and the delivery of free textbooks to pupils in primary education.

However, financial constraints limit the effects of the improved policy framework. Albania's budget allocation to education is very low at 2.7% of GDP in 2021, 0.6-point percentage lower than in 2019 and 1.9 point percentage below the EU-27 average (2018 figures), thus falling short of the prediction of the current National Pre-University Education Strategy, which has foreseen a 5 % share of GDP devoted to education. The budget in 2021, expected to drop at 3.5% of the GDP, should be enhanced to support the efforts to modernise the educational system and ensure quality and inclusiveness in education for all pupils. The expected school financial autonomy has

not progressed in 2020 as the sublegal acts and provisions for providing actual financial autonomy in the school were not developed despite the existing legislation.

The ministry, regional directorates and local education offices continue to make all decisions related to financial resources, and schools receive no discretionary funding, thus reducing their autonomy further. Even with limited budgetary discretion, schools' ability to reflect on their own policies and practices is crucial for making effective use of school resources, but the capacity for planning and self-evaluation remains weak in most Albanian schools.

Recommendations:

- ✓ *Revise fund raising policy to establish a supportive environment for infrastructure investments into schools, guaranteeing that municipalities can exercise their competences regarding construction, infrastructure, maintenance, and utilities.*
- ✓ *Establish dedicated funds to back Environmental Policy at Local Government.*

3. Dioxide carbon

Children's final observations: Children are aware of the risks that associate the high level of dioxide carbon across Albania. They are strongly convinced that policies need to be improved, whereas CG and LG alike have the central role. High rate of dioxide carbon presence, as during winter most houses and school too used wood as the main source of heating. In addition (Elbasan) there is a high presence of smog due to industry inappropriate gas emissions and an increase of the use of cars and bad quality of carburant used. In Elbasan the level of carbon dioxide is quite high due to the Metallurgical Combine and the Waste Incinerator, which cause quite high pollution in the environment. The level of carbon dioxide for children living in rural areas is low in comparison to cities, they argue that despite wood is the main source of heating during winter season, the fact that there are green spaces, more plants, few people living in rural areas and few cars in use, make their living much more comfortable.

Overall situation: In accordance with the World Health Organization's guidelines, the air quality in Albania is considered moderately unsafe. The most recent data indicates the country's annual mean concentration of PM2.5 is 18 µg/m³ which exceeds the recommended maximum of 10 µg/m³. Contributors to poor air quality in Albania include oil and gas extraction, inefficient technologies to heating homes, cement production, and an increase in vehicle emissions. Available data indicates that Tirana, Elbasan, and Korçë have consistently high levels of air pollution¹. Regarding air pollution, Albania ranks 55/ 106 countries, 2020.

Albania has taken very important steps towards policy documents and action plans on climate change, involving especially energy and transport sectors, but also agriculture, forestry, waste management, etc.

¹ WHO, 2021, <https://www.iamat.org/country/albania/risk/air-pollution>

The Paris Agreement was both a signal and a roadmap: a signal to the world that practices like deforestation and unsustainable energy use cannot continue; and a roadmap towards the goal of a zero-carbon, climate-resilient and sustainable future. Overall, if successfully implemented, the implications of the Paris Agreement for sustainable development will be profound and transformative.

As of July 2nd, 2019, the Government of Albania was the first country in the Region with an endorsed Strategy on Climate Change, and related Action Plans on Mitigation and Adaptation respectively, representing a general cross-cutting strategy with policy objectives and concrete actions to:

- ✓ *reduce Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions:*
- ✓ *Become resilient to climate change*

Implementation of Paris Agreement and the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) target are in the core of both National Strategy on Climate Change (NSCC) and its Mitigation Action Plan (MAP).

In line with EU efforts on climate change and our respective obligations in the EU accession process, the Law “**Climate Change**” is approved.

On the other hand, the country endorsed the **National Strategy of Energy 2018-2030 (July 2018) as the main energy policy document mainstreaming the climate change**. The new strategic framework is based on two main pillars: (i) the development of reforms to foster market liberalisation and regional integration, and (ii) huge investment on sustainable development driven by participation in the Energy Community initiative and in particular at international level by the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Furthermore, the Strategy foresees the preparation of the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan, as an engagement of the Republic of Albania at the Ministerial Meeting of the Energy Community, which preparatory work has started to ensure beyond the 2020 national targets and in line with the EU 2030 and 2050 agenda.

Recommendations:

- ✓ *monitoring of air quality in line with EU requirements, in every municipality of Albania.*
- ✓ *control and reduction of discharges of gases to the atmosphere by motorised vehicles.*
- ✓ *control and reduction of dust caused by construction.*
- ✓ *planning for air quality management at LG.*

4. School Curricula

Children’s final observations: Despite the fact that children recognize the extensive attention devoted to Environment and Environmental issues, still there is the need to strengthen school capacities to provide a comprehensive and inclusive education process focused on Environment, its potentials versus Economic and social development of the country.

Overall situation: Environmental education in Albania has been given a boost recently, with increasing emphasis being placed on it by the country's educational system. The formal education system in Albania is currently subject to massive reform. In this context several projects were and are still being implemented to improve the school curriculum from primary right through to tertiary level. Manuals and teaching materials for both students and teachers have been produced addressing different education levels and covering topics such as water, air, soil, etc.

Recommendations:

- ✓ *Alongside the process of Quality Learning, a strategic goal of Education Strategy, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport has to further invest to harmonize school curricula and extra-curricular activities, centred at environment protection and care.*
- ✓ *Parents as well as business sector have to strengthen cooperation with school, to support the organization of activities, aimed at the promotion of Environmental education, which at the same time will impact on citizens' awareness raising.*
- ✓ *Based on UNESCO ESD World Conference, ESD should be a core component of all education systems at all levels by 2025.*

5. Citizens' awareness raising

Children's final observations: Even though children recognize the extensive attention devoted to Environment and Environmental issues, still there is the need to strengthen capacities of all stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental alike, to raise awareness regarding environment protection. Although according to children's views, school is perceived as extremely important, still there is a big role to be played by Central Government and Local Government, too. Children take actions and organize awareness rising campaigns at the community they live, but still they notice that people should improve their knowledge on environment protection, reuse of materials, react when certain people do not behave as they should with the environment. They consider local government units (both at urban and rural areas) as key actors that can do more in this regard.

Overall situation: Informal education in Albania regarding environment is almost lacking. While information is rather poor, the few stakeholders already involved in "environmental issues" have limited possibilities to widen the cooperation and implement a coordinated and harmonized approach to sustain citizens awareness raising versus Environment protection and care.

Following the adoption of the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development after the UNESCO World Conference on Education Sustainable Development (ESD), all the UNESCO member countries will create networks of actors who can implement the vision for Education Sustainable Development, not as a privilege, but accessible to all citizens.

Recommendations:

- ✓ *Systematic, long-term adult education programme on the environment would be useful to raise local awareness (in rural communities) of the importance of protecting and sustainably using natural resources, and on the benefits of such environmentally friendly practices such as ecotourism and Eco agriculture.*
- ✓ *Support the further alignment, at global, regional, and national levels, of the education, environment, climate, sustainable economy, and other relevant development agendas, and enhance networking between different stakeholder groups in order to ensure that efforts are mutually supportive and complementary and support structural mainstreaming of Education Sustainable Development;*