

Results for Children

ALBANIA, 2020

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Foreword



Roberto De Bernardi,
UNICEF Representative in Albania

The year 2020 was marked by a dramatic increase in humanitarian needs, largely due to the November 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. Right at the moment that our response was focused to mitigate the outcomes of the 2019 earthquake, we had to face the pandemic outbreak; the Albanian boy's and girl's wellbeing was challenged again.

COVID-19 damaged the Albanian economy and amplified existing disparities within communities. The impact of COVID-19 called for adjustments to respond to emerging needs, while ensuring achievement of results for children in alignment with the Government's priorities.

UNICEF, as one of the leading UN agencies for both post-earthquake recovery and COVID-19 response, has been collaborating with the Government, Civil society Organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure comprehensive and effective delivery of humanitarian and development assistance. UNICEF's agenda to address COVID-19 was mainly focused on keeping children healthy and well nourished; ensuring continuous learning for children; supporting families to cover their needs and care for their children; protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse; adapting safe outreach methods, and pioneering new approaches and innovations.

COVID-19 created an unprecedented situation for our generation. Responding to this situation, even the UNICEF team had to adapt to the 'new normal', as well as explore new ways of communicating, socializing and working together from distance.

As we mark UNICEF's 75th anniversary in 2021, and we keep on delivering results for children, in Albania we are paving the way for the new Country Programme covering the period 2022-2026, while together with the UN family we are contributing to the new cooperation framework, and we are supporting the country on its way to the EU accession.

In the report that follows, we are glad to share with you some of our achievements.

Please also allow me to express our gratitude to all our development partners, which made possible for UNICEF to contribute to the wellbeing of the most vulnerable children in Albania.

1. Update on the Context and Situation of Children

The November 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic further deepened pre-existing inequalities for children.

1.1 Challenges of Child Wellbeing in 2020

Increased Poverty

A significant number of families are at risk of being left without protection from economic shocks. Preliminary data from the World Bank reveal that extreme poverty in Albania could double in the short term, and without

response measures, poverty could increase from 40 percent to 44 percent.

Reduced Learning Opportunities

A total of 3,752 pre-university education institutions and 571,566 students across all levels of education interrupted their regular learning in Spring 2020. At least 11,000 children were at risk of not being able



to learn online. The most vulnerable were faced with additional risks linked to access to essential services, including school psychologists, after-hours programmes, information on disease prevention, referral for cases of violence, among others. Learning is estimated to drop by the equivalent of 9 PISA points overall. The percentage of students performing below functional literacy will increase by eight percentage points (World Bank, 2020). Absence of Internet-enabled devices at home, connectivity costs (mobile or broadband), coupled with a lack of digital literacy, has widened the gap between children and families who cannot afford and do not know how to follow online schooling, and the rest of the population

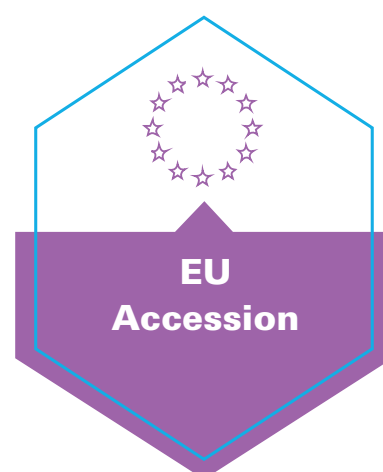
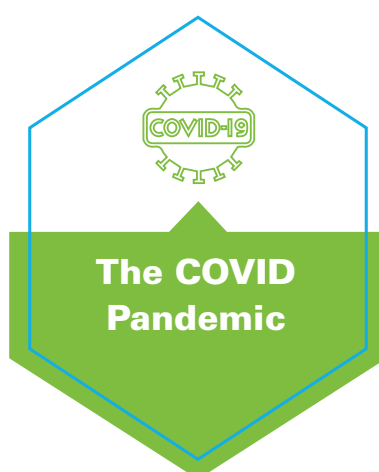
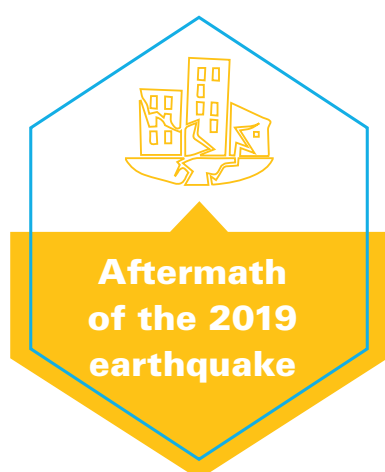
Increased Violence, Abuse, Neglect

Movement restrictions, closure of many community services; shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline workers; house lockdown anxiety and mental health issues; growth of violence against children; heightened exposure to online risks; increased children vulnerabilities. Parents and caregivers are now under enormous pressure to care for their children while at the same time trying to make ends meet. Children who were victims and witnesses of domestic violence found themselves in a more dangerous position because they were more likely to be locked inside with their abusers. COVID-19 also increased the risk for children on the streets, of child marriage, child labour and child exploitation, as many families see their income and livelihood sources diminish.

Temporary Closure of Health Facilities and Fear to Access Health Services

The movement restrictions and suspension of non-essential health care affected the delivery of essential health services. Ensuring the continued delivery of routine immunisation services has been challenged by the pandemic, and though immunisation services were not interrupted, they had to be reduced in order to ensure physical distancing and movement restrictions.

Our focus during 2020



2. Major Contributions and Drivers of Results

In 2020, the Country Office was focused on addressing the aftermath of the 2019 earthquake, the COVID pandemic and providing support to the country's reform efforts towards EU accession.

2.1 Every Child Survives and Thrives

Increasing the level of public spending on health remained in our advocacy agenda.

UNICEF contributed to infection prevention and control, hygiene promotion and risk communication by strengthening government capacities, developing norms and standards, **providing**

direct supplies and increasing community awareness. In thirteen municipalities, more than 150,000 vulnerable children and adults and 400 pre-school institutions received hygiene supplies and information on hygiene practices. Meanwhile, UNICEF provided PPE for 1,136 health-care workers and supplied disinfectants for more than 10,000 frontline health workers in 407 PHC Centres. UNICEF strengthened the case management of COVID-19 cases and provided medical supplies to the health structures.



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244.450

vulnerable children and adults received hygiene supplies and information on hygiene practices.



10.000

frontline health workers in 407 PHC Centres were provided with disinfectants



500.000

were reached through the [#SuperHeroesWearMask](#) [#WeHugwithHeart](#) campaign



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Through the communication campaign UNICEF reached more than 500,000 people.

UNICEF adopted and made available to Albania the Multi-Scenario Interactive Statistical Projection Tool, enabling the projection of COVID-19 spread and hospitalisation estimates.

UNICEF continued its support to the Institute of Public Health (IPH) for strengthening the national information management system to develop the web-based data

collection system for child (<5 years) nutrition monitoring and adjust reporting to COVID-19. More than 5,000 children were monitored, more than 4,500 mothers received advice on infant and young child feeding (IYCF), and more than 80 health professionals in thirteen districts were supervised and coached in data collection, analysis, reporting and IYCF counselling.

UNICEF continued to provide procurement services to government for a supply value of USD 3.53 million for childhood

5,000 BOYS AND GIRLS

were monitored for growth and feeding practices

4,500 MOTHERS

received advice on infant and young child feeding

80 HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

in 13 districts were supervised and coached

vaccines, influenza vaccine and antiretrovirals, expanding to anti-TB drugs, for around 200,000 children of age 0–6 years and more than 650 individuals living with HIV–AIDS.

Albania's Parliament approved the revised Universal Salt Iodisation (USI) law, strengthening monitoring and inspection for USI and introduction of the concept of traceability of iodised salt.

UNICEF engaged with the government partners to review food standards in schools, marketing of unhealthy food to children, and to draft standards and review the marketing regulation framework.

2.2 Every Child Learns

UNICEF is the sector lead agency for both post-earthquake recovery and COVID-19 response, and supported government in preparation of the PDNA education chapter, the COVID-19 Response Plan and **provided educational support** to approximately 462,000 children.

Public expenditure in the education system rose from 3.2 percent of GDP in 2018 to more than 3.6 percent in 2020. However, the education expenditure in Albania was still below the threshold of that in 26 member countries of the EU, where the average stood at 4.6 percent.

A National Strategic Plan for Education 2021–2026, from pre-school to higher education is being drafted with UNICEF's technical and financial support.

UNICEF, Save the Children and World Vision supported the development and roll-out of safety guidelines in 2,100 schools, where 462,000 boys and girls benefitted from COVID awareness materials and safety kits.

Continued learning, during school closure, thanks to the UNICEF-supported and scaled-up digital, disability friendly, interactive learning platform akademi.al.

The #LearningAtHome campaign reached more than 50,000 people through social media and TV and focused on increasing parental skills during lockdown.



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462,000

BOYS AND GIRLS

benefitted from continued learning, during school closure, thanks to the UNICEF-supported and scaled-up digital, disability friendly, interactive learning platform akademi.al.

50,000

PEOPLE

were reached through the [#LearningAtHome](#) initiative on social media and TV and focused on increasing parental skills during lockdown.

1,200
TEACHERS

were trained in new ICT standards

Through LearnIn, UNICEF partnered with the National Agency for Education Quality Assurance (ASCAP) to promote a system for teacher support, collaboration and skills development benefitting 350 teachers, while 1,200 teachers were trained in new ICT standards.

UNICEF continued its support to prevent and respond to levels and risk of out-of-school children (OOSC) and dropping out, adapted the Early Warning



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System, reached more than 360 students with socio-emotional support and 700 teachers and professional networks with professional development, and continued supporting implementation of the funding formula to address financial barriers to OOSC. UNICEF partnered Vodafone in providing learning devices to address learning gaps and prevent dropping out for 10,500 disadvantaged students, including Roma and children with disability.

Early Childhood

UNICEF, in partnership with ASCAP, developed a training programme to support 700 pre-school teachers to learn about inclusive, child-centred methodology, and drafted standards of Guidelines for Curricula and Pre-school Principles.

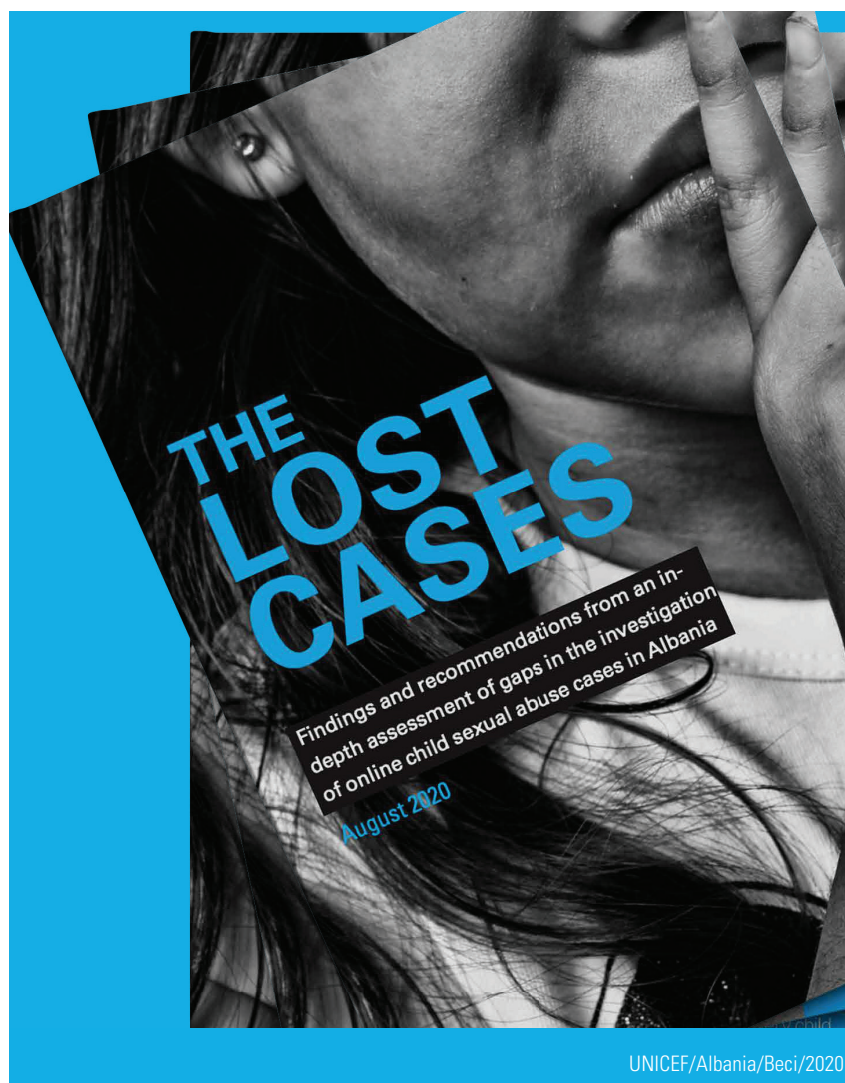
2.3

Every Child is Protected from Violence and Exploitation

UNICEF's ability to leverage resources and convene and lead strong coalitions were instrumental in addressing a rapidly deteriorating situation for children at risk of, or already affected by, violence.

UNICEF's sector leadership enabled around 20,000 children and 20,000 parents or caregivers affected by multiple adversities, **to receive emergency and long-term protection services.**

The **National DI Action Plan 2020–22** was endorsed by the Council of Ministers in September, reaching a remarkable milestone in the overall childcare reform where UNICEF led and directly



5,578 CHILDREN AND ADULTS

became involved in learning about digital safety and four public libraries turned into tech hubs for boys and girls through the [BiblioTechs initiative](#)

516,000 INTERNET REQUESTS

to access blacklisted websites were blocked thanks to the [The Friendly Wi-Fi](#) initiative pioneered in Tirana

development of a new National Action Plan on Anti-Trafficking 2021–23, and provided direct support to around 200 victims or potential victims of trafficking. As part of UNICEF's joint work with UNHCR, IOM, UN Women, WHO and other UN agencies, in response to the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe, UNICEF supported 210 unaccompanied and separated children with child-friendly services. UNICEF is providing psycho-social services to four children and their mother who were repatriated by the Albanian government from Syria's Al Hawl refugee camp.

System strengthening efforts resulted in the setting up of infrastructure for the online Integrated System of Data on Criminal Justice for Children (www.drejtisipertemitur.gov.al)

advised the government. The entire workforce of 236 statutory child protection workers was supported through on-the-job and online coaching including on mental health, psychosocial support and gender based violence organised jointly with WHO.

Launching of [The Lost Cases](#) assessment report further strengthened the programming focus and created a solid advocacy base for further interventions to online safety. As a result of the [BiblioTechs](#) initiative 5,578 children and adults became involved in

learning about digital safety and four public libraries turned into tech hubs for children. The Friendly Wi-Fi initiative pioneered in Tirana expanded its scope with 53 additional access points in eight additional public spaces in the capital, and managed to block around 516,000 Internet requests to access blacklisted websites.

UNICEF increased its engagement with regard to children on the move and generated valuable evidence about knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of youth towards human trafficking, supported the



UNICEF/Albania/Beci/2020

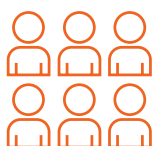
of the Ministry of Justice; seven of the twelve regional police departments established modern child-friendly interview units and 200 attorneys, prosecutors, police officers and other professionals benefited from capacity building, information on a new normative framework on justice for children, 296 children (including 65 girls) in conflict or contact with the law obtained free legal assistance, psychosocial counselling, restorative justice services, economic reintegration support and referral to service providers. As a result of UNICEF advocacy, the number of magistrates tasked with justice for children cases grew from twelve in 2018 to 143.



UNICEF/Albania/Beci/2020

2,800
CHILDREN IN
1,699
HOUSEHOLDS

benefitted from a one-time multi-purpose unconditional cash transfer (CT) in three municipalities (Durrës, Korçë and Shkodër)



About 600
STAFF OF SOCIAL
SERVICES

at subnational and local level have the knowledge and skills on how to use the MIS on social care services as part of the MIS social protection system



3/4 OF ALL
MUNICIPALITIES

have a costed approved social care plan meeting the needs of all children and families in need in their territories



UNICEF/Albania/Beci/2020

2.4 Every Child has an Equitable Chance in Life

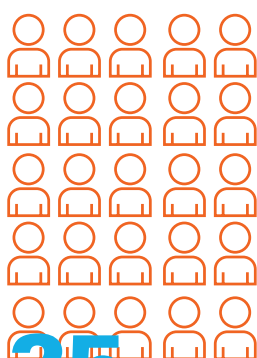
Leveraging its role in strengthening social protection systems for children in Albania UNICEF led the development of Pillar 2 of the UN Albania COVID-19 Socio-economic and Recovery Plan: Protecting People - Scaling Up and Expanding Resilient and Pro-Poor Social inclusion and Protection Systems and services.

UNICEF supported government in piloting humanitarian cash transfers and supported 2,800 children in 1,699 households, with a one-time multi-purpose unconditional cash transfer (CT) in three municipalities

(Durrës, Korçë and Shkodër). The municipalities developed a clear, simple and cost-effective feedback mechanism with UNICEF support to ensure that the money reached the targeted families. The process of distribution and use of cash was monitored by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights through a process of 622 random telephone calls with cash recipients in three municipalities. The pilot was presented at the international webinar <https://socialprotection.org/role-local-and-national-actors-linking-humanitarian-cash-and-social-protection-response-covid-19>

UNICEF co-led the Humanitarian Cash Transfer Working Group partnering SDC, UN Women, *Terre des Hommes* and IFRC, and developed COVID-19 joint Standard Operating Procedures.

UNICEF strengthened capacities for implementation of the normative framework for social care and sustainable planning and financing of social care services at the local level.



25
SOCIAL WORKERS
improved their skills on a core set of interpersonal communication and community engagement competencies.



UNICEF/Albania/Beci/2020

Advocacy efforts resulted in MHSP discussing the importance of integrating CT into emergency response and considerations to shock responsive social protection.

Following recent evaluation of the Social Care Reform (2019), UNICEF strengthened capacities for implementation of the normative framework for social care and sustainable planning and financing of social care services at the local level. In partnership with UNDP

it continued supporting the development of social care plans jointly covering 45 municipalities (out of 61). By the end of 2020, these were fully costed, gender-responsive, three-year social care plans. UNICEF supported the Faculty of Social Sciences in revising the curricula for the bachelor degree in social work, developed an [Online Platform on Social Protection and Social Services in Albania](#), providing social workers information on social protection and social services policies, laws,

standards, protocols and work manuals, and improved skills of 25 social workers on a core set of interpersonal communication and community engagement competencies.

Adolescents

In five municipalities UPSHIFT, Ponder and a programme on public speaking were launched, benefitting 100 adolescents (55 girls), and 105,000 young people were reached through social media, while 800 adolescents were engaged through nine polls of the U-report and have regularly shared their views on important matters such as national education strategy, environment, child rights and services for children and young people. Meanwhile, U-report has been used to gain understanding of what young people are feeling and living through during the pandemic, and for important programme decisions.

Advocacy and Communication

Continuous and streamlined advocacy helped us to reimagine education, health, social protection and child protection to ensure that systems respond effectively to the children's challenges due to COVID-19. On the International Day of the Girl a youth blog *Voices of Youth* was published on the Regional Office platform. On World Children's Day, UNICEF Albania, with the EU Delegation, Save the Children, World Vision and *Terre des Hommes*, through a joint statement, called on government to explore new ways of engagement to build a political space for children. The website, with more than 168,000 page views, (annual increase of 150%) emerged for government, stakeholders, academia and other individuals as a source of timely, reliable and updated information. UNICEF launched,



UNICEF/Albania/Beci/2020

jointly with mayors from eight regions, a major national awareness campaign, #TeBesoj (TrustMe), to increase disclosure and timely reporting of sexual violence.

Disability

Disability has been systematically mainstreamed into programming interventions, including policy design as well as direct support

for addressing concerns of around COVID-19 pandemic. The National Strategy of Education is being drafted with a strong focus on inclusive education. The online platform includes accessible modules, so that children with disabilities can equally benefit. Some 300 children with hearing impairment, drastically affected by COVID-19-caused confinement and isolation, their parents and caregivers, were supported with sign language,

UNICEF supported setting up the **infrastructure for the online Integrated System of Data on Criminal Justice for Children of the Ministry of Justice.**



7/12
REGIONAL POLICE DEPARTMENTS
established modern child-friendly interview units

296
BOYS AND GIRLS
(including 65 girls) in conflict or contact with the law obtained free legal assistance.

131
MORE MAGISTRATES
tasked with justice for boys and girls cases, from twelve in 2018 to 143.



UNICEF/Albania/Beci/2020

adapting twelve videos with information on seeking help, reporting abuse and violence, and addressing stigma.

Human Rights Treaties and Human Rights Mechanisms

UNICEF Albania has supported the National Human Rights Institutions (People's Advocate and Child Rights and Promotion Commissioner) in exercising their oversight and remedy-provision functions for violations of child rights. The Ombudsperson's monitoring of the conditions and treatment of children deprived of liberty, along with awareness activities in schools, directly brought about a 26 percent increase in the number of child rights violations cases handled by this NHRI. This is the second year in a row that the People's Advocate has received complaints directly from children. This support

played a role in the successful application of the People's Advocate of Albania in 2020 to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) for maintaining a Status A in compliance with the Paris principles.

The Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) published [Children, Adolescents and Youth-Focused Wellbeing Indicators](#), is based upon an internationally agreed methodology. As part of the National Official Statistics Plan, the publication will be annually produced, and represents the starting point to improve the official statistics around children, adolescents and youth in Albania, including reporting on progress with SDG indicators, and will be used to inform monitoring of implementation of policies targeting children and adolescents, and to compare the situation of realisation of their rights in different countries.

3. UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF in Albania is committed to the Delivering as One initiative, to intra-agency collaboration in programme delivery.

3.1 Deliver Together

United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Outcome and Output Working Groups, Theme-specific Results, Coordination Groups and Steering Committees have all been used as instruments to support collaborative arrangements among national stakeholders, UN agencies and

development partners. UNICEF Albania was engaged through the bi-annual Joint Work Plans to deliver on results defined in UNDAF and signed UN to UN agreements with ILO, UNDP and UN Women.

UNICEF also found allies in Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), private sector (Vodafone for Internet and STEM training), development partners, academia, media and communities.



UNICEF/Albania/Beci/2020

UNICEF Albania was engaged through the bi-annual Joint Work Plans to **deliver on results defined in UNDAF** and signed UN to UN agreements.

In the area of child protection, UNICEF **co-managed with World Vision the earthquake emergency response group** convening more than

20
ORGANISATIONS

Development of multifaceted partnerships, including coalitions with CSOs, allowed building upon comparative advantages, co-creation of programmes and increase of impact. In the area of child protection, UNICEF co-managed with World Vision the earthquake emergency response group convening more than 20 organisations. UNICEF led the key government institutions, civil society and private sector to work towards children and their online safety.

Partnership with sub-national governments, in the framework of Child-Friendly Cities Initiatives, contributed to the preparation of the Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents of Korca city and the drafting of the Child Friendly Action Plan.

Furthermore, with the successful roll out of the awareness-raising national campaign on child sexual abuse [#TeBesoj \(trust me\)](#) UNICEF is creating global awareness and advocacy for more engagement of sub-national actors and the private sector in addressing nationwide challenges. Albania's Parliament continued to act as an important partner in strengthening of governance and oversight for children rights.



UNICEF/Albania/Kokonozi/2020

4. Lessons Learned

Challenges of 2020 triggered flexible, innovative and adaptable programming in Albania.

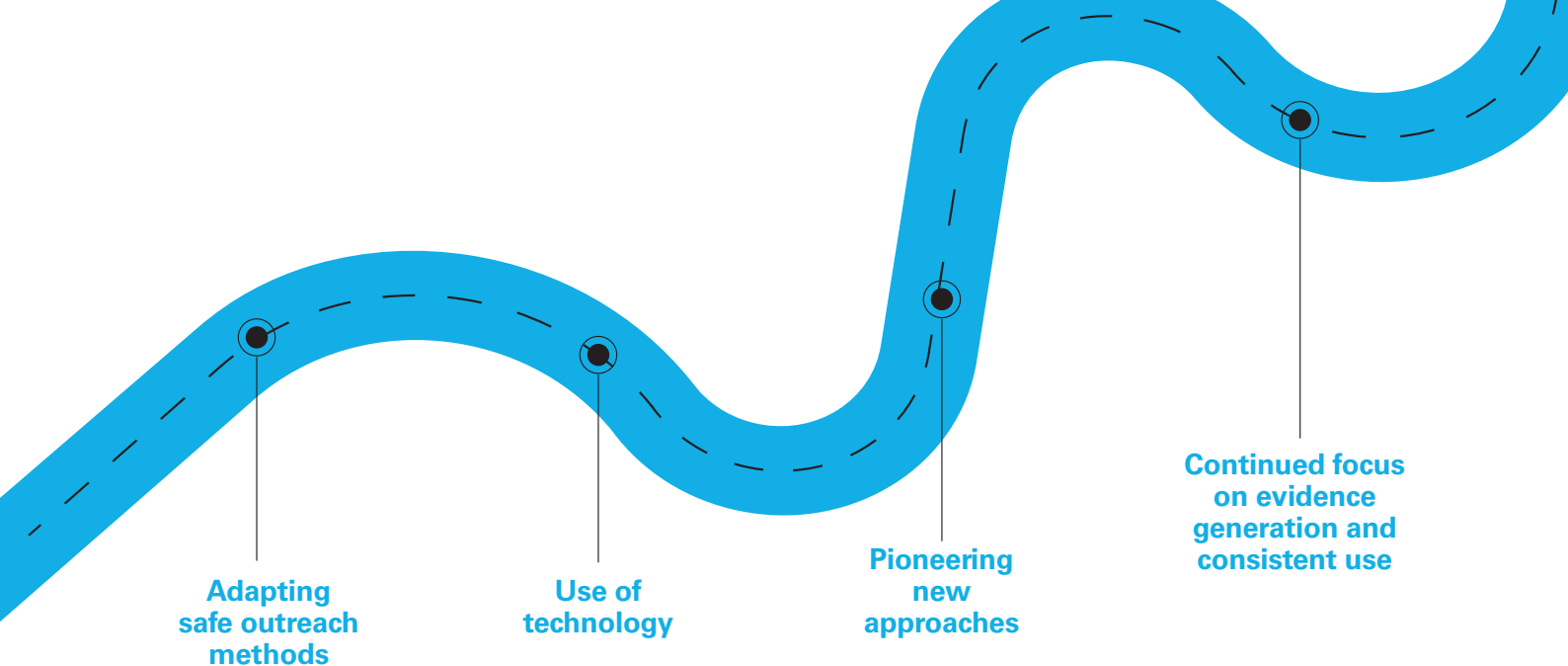
4.1 New challenges, new opportunities

Adapting safe outreach methods. UNICEF supported the government and partners with the introduction of mobile and rapid response child protection teams to reach the most vulnerable groups who were stuck at home. PPE was secured for teachers, health workers, and social and child protection workers to support continuation of service provision

in a safe environment. Additional support provided to shelters for survivors of violence allowed for broader accommodation of survivors. Child helplines and online counselling services became central as the need for such services rapidly increased and addressed movement restrictions and safety of helpline staff. UNICEF increased its support to the online professional MHPSS service, allowing more people to work in shifts. The number of beneficiaries tripled within 5–6 months.



UNICEF/Albania/Beci/2020



**Adapting
safe outreach
methods**

UNICEF supported the government and partners with the introduction of mobile and rapid response child protection teams **to reach the most vulnerable groups who were stuck at home.**

With the development and scaled-up digital, disability friendly, interactive learning platform (akademi.al) UNICEF secured the continued learning of more than
**HALF A MILLION
CHILDREN**

**Use of
technology**

Use of technology was applied in numerous ways. UNICEF supported key government partners at national and sub-national levels by facilitating access to and use of new technologies for coaching, communicating, organising online exchange sessions (including on breastfeeding, IPC and hygiene promotion), and online parliamentary sessions on the socio-impact of COVID-19 on children. UNICEF increased the use of the U-report platform to ensure engagement of adolescents in important processes and introduced telephone interviews. With the development and scaled-up digital, disability friendly, interactive learning platform (akademi.al) UNICEF secured the continued learning of more than half a million children.

Pioneering new approaches

UNICEF championed the work programmatically in a barren and unexplored area of online child abuse. Having little overall in-depth experience, lack of reliable examples from other parts of the world and almost non-existent political buy-in nationally, UNICEF established itself as a knowledge broker and thematic lead nationally and regionally.

**Pioneering
new
approaches**

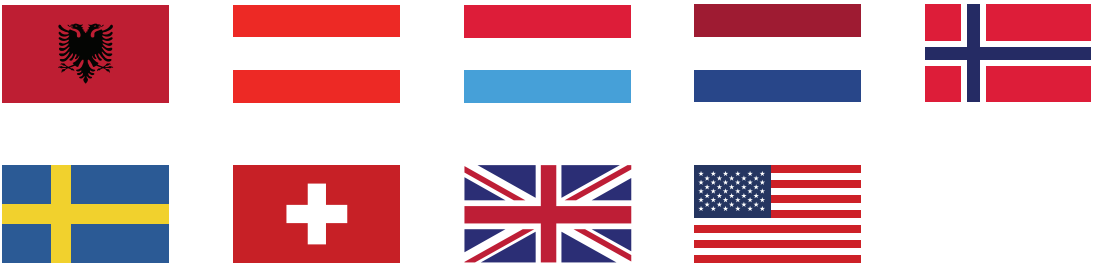
**Continued focus
on evidence
generation and
consistent use**

Continued focus on evidence generation and consistent use.

The *Evaluation of the UNICEF in Albania Programme 2016–2021* assessed UNICEF's performance and contribution towards national development goals, including.

UNICEF in Albania concluded the *Evaluation of UNICEF's contribution to the normative framework of social care services reform during 2013–2019*. Partnering with the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection to finalise the [Visualisation Platform for 58 child-specific Statistics](#), UNICEF transformed entirely the modality of how institutional (administrative) data are assembled, accessed and presented. The platform constitutes an innovation, considering that few Albanian authorities have invested so far in such tools. The platform and the stretched process for its development was converted by UNICEF and the State Agency into a journey of improving the quality of data reported.

Thanks to:



Published by UNICEF

UNICEF Albania Country Office
Skenderbej Street,
UN House Bld, 3rd floor
Tirana, Albania

Email: tirana@unicef.org

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), February 2021

