

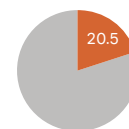
“Country recommendation

Albania needs to take the rights of the child seriously. The current system of child protection, despite all the improvements, is not able to fully provide care, protection and all the needed support to vulnerable children, or those who become victims of crimes or difficult social realities.

Country Profile 2023



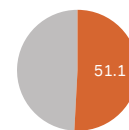
Albania



Child Population:

579,203

20.5% of total population (2021)



Child Poverty:

304,204

51.1% (2020)

▼ -2.6% compared to 2019

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Child Rights Centre Albania](#)

Children's Rights in Albania

At national level, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is responsible for children's rights in Albania. There is also a Minister of State for Children and Youth (without portfolio) working to support the government in areas related to children and youth's rights.² The aim is to strengthen youth involvement in decision-making processes and protect the rights of young people.

The Minister of State for Youth and Children also has as its mission to protect the rights of young people and to guarantee their participation in social life, through drafting, developing, and monitoring youth policies, and coordinating issues related to the protection, care, health, welfare and well-being of children. The [Children's Agenda](#)

(2021-2026) is the main policy tool related to the wellbeing and protection of children.

Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA) identified several key areas related to children's rights.

Child participation

Although child participation still represents a new concept for the Albanian government and society at large, in recent years more attention is being given towards the acceptance and respect of children's views and opinions. In 2017 the Albanian Parliament adopted the Law No. 18/2017 on the Rights and Protection of the Child, which sets out the rights and protections enjoyed by every child, the responsible mechanisms, and authorities. The Law effectively guarantees the exercise, respect, promotion of these rights, as well as the

special protection of the child in application of the Albanian Constitution, and in alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Schools are required to establish children's governments and elect representatives for the School's Senate, which gives children and young people the possibility to participate. However, these participation mechanisms often do not function appropriately due to a lack of sufficient interest and support by adults.

Child safety and well-being online

Child safety online presents one of the most challenging issues for the protection of children's rights and their well-being. Albania does not have a well-developed legislation for protection of children from online crimes, and the criminal legislation is not in

compliance with EU acquis. The current criminal code does not protect children from several forms of online sexual abuse or extreme online bullying. Moreover, child sexual abuse materials are only partially regulated, while the authorities lack the capacities and technologies for further advancement in this regard.

Albania must ensure their legislation is in line to the existing and upcoming EU legislation, especially the proposed EU Regulation to Prevent and Combat Child Sexual Abuse to avoid becoming a hub for criminals abusing children online.

Since 2009, a national child helpline has been established to provide support to every child and young person to report child sexual abuse incidences and receive the necessary guidance. Despite this, the authorities are not prepared to provide sufficient

² The Minister of State for Youth and Children's mission is to protect the rights of young people and guarantee their participation in social life, through the drafting, development and monitoring of youth policies, and the coordination of issues related to protection, care, health, well-being and good education of children. For more visit the following link: <https://riniafemijet.gov.al>.

services to child victims of online violence, as lack of technical skills and resources makes it difficult for teachers and child protection officers to be able to respond to the situations.

Child protection systems

Albania has made remarkable efforts in recent years to establish the fundamental pillars for the Child Protection System. The core legislative and policy framework around child protection was significantly reinforced in 2017, with the adoption of the new Law on the Rights and Protection of the Child and the Criminal Justice for Children Code. The process is aligned with an approach to gradually build a system of child protection, focused on addressing root causes of children's vulnerability, rather than symptoms alone, and working across different sectors working with children.

Children in migration and refugees

Albania continues to be a country of origin and transit for migration and refugees towards Western Europe, including unaccompanied children. Between 2015 to 2022, more than 60,000 Albanian children applied as first-time asylum seekers in European Union. During the last two years, migration has reduced drastically but still it continues.³ Unfortunately, Albania's child protection system is not ready to adequately respond nor protect foreign unaccompanied children.

A [monitoring report](#) on the situation of foreign unaccompanied children in Albania, prepared by CRCA/ ECPAT Albania, found that at least 80 unaccompanied children had disappeared from their shelter. Albania needs to take serious measures to overhaul its system of care and protection of

foreign unaccompanied children migrating to or transiting through the country.

Climate change and environmental impacts

Despite Albania being considered at high risk from climate change, neither the government nor the population are aware of environmental protection. Legislation, policies and practices do not meet the obligations coming from international conventions, such as [UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters](#), despite Albania's ratification.

Children's mental health

The mental health care system is in need of reform, as practices and instructions are outdated and overall lacking. CRCA is criticising that mental health is mostly adult-

focused in Albania and lacking the perspective of children. Moreover, evidence is lacking - there are no reports or data on children being affected by mental health and thus no knowledge of the real situation on the ground.

Child victims of sexual violence

A [new report](#) analysing the cases of sexual violence against children found that most of the local and national authorities in Albania are unable to provide social care services or compensation. Currently, most social care services are provided by civil society organisations (CSOs) with foreign funding, such as Barnahus Albania that provides trauma and long-term support to child victims of sexual violence. CRCA/ECPAT Albania and Barnahus Albania have requested the government to introduce a nationwide system of care and protection which, however, has not been successful.

³ All data is drawn from Eurostat: [Enlargement countries - statistics on migration, residence permits, citizenship and asylum](#), May 2023. Also, see [Child Rights Centre's Albania statement](#); and Eurostat data for [Children in migration - asylum applicants](#).

Poverty and Social Exclusion – Experiences of children, families, and communities

Child poverty in Albania

Albania has a total child population of 579,203, of which 51% live at risk of poverty and social exclusion as of 2020⁴. This amounts to an estimated 304,204 children in need in Albania. The rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion has decreased over the last couple of years, as a result of positive economic development.⁵

Around 7% of Albanian children are forced to work as they grow up in poverty⁶, with 15,000 children not attending school at all which is most often related to the financial income of the families.⁷ Moreover, almost 22% of Roma children in Albania

between 10 and 18 years have never been to school.⁸

According to Child Rights Centre Albania the groups of children most in need in Albania are children living in extreme poverty, Roma and Egyptian children, and children without family care. The services urgently needed to support these (groups of) children are a functioning child support system, appropriate housing, and adequate social care measures.

To help alleviate child poverty and social exclusion, the Albanian government should establish a National Programme with the overall goal of reducing children in poverty to zero. Moreover, appropriate housing and free education and support for every child is needed.

Countries in Accession

Every year, the European Commission publishes the Enlargement Package that assesses the state of play in accession countries, including progress concerning upholding human rights and children's rights. Eurochild and its members contributed to the [2023 consultation on the Enlargement Package](#) to provide a children's rights perspective and insights on the situation for children in need.

As a country in accession, Albania created the [National Agenda for the Rights of the Child \(NARC\) 2021-2026](#). It is a commitment to achieving children's rights in Albania between 2021 and 2026.

For Child Rights Centre Albania, an essential service missing in the NARC is the provision of free meals in educational institutions

to all children as well as a functioning child support scheme. A significant step forward could also be achieved by offering free tablets to children starting school for the first time. That way, access to online education would be significantly eased.

Civil society is actively involved in meetings consulting the state of the implementation of the NARC, however CRCA criticises the formality of these meetings and the lack of inclusion of civil society in the actual implementation thereof.

The NARC should be the backbone of all measures to support and advance children and their rights. Yet, CRCA criticises that these policy documents are often used only for publicity purposes, rather than actively using them as transformative tools to progress the situation.

⁴ Latest data for the number of children in Albania available from Eurostat is for 2021, yet the latest AROPE data is for 2020.

⁵ World Bank, *Poverty and Equity Brief*, April 2023.

⁶ National Agency for Child Rights in Albania, *Annual Report on the Situation of Children in Albania 2015*.

⁷ UNICEF, *Albania: The Cost of Underinvestment in Education: And ways to reduce it*, 2017.

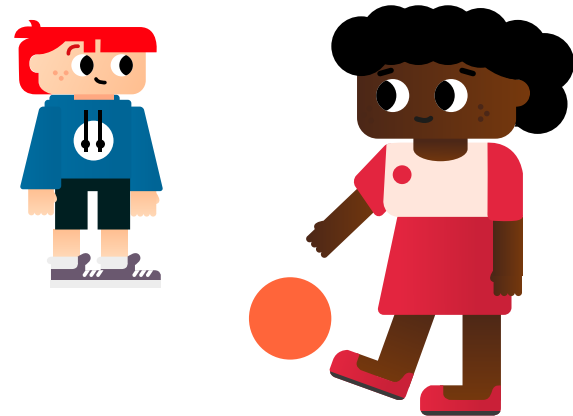
⁸ *Roma Census 2014*, Study of Albanian Communities, Open Society Foundation in Albania (Soros), Tirana 2014.

It is crucial that Albania increases its national budget for children, in particular to eliminate child poverty and support children's education. Moreover, the government should guarantee access to social care services for all children, no matter their background. Lastly, mental health disorders are on the rise following the Covid-19 pandemic⁹. In CRCA's opinion, and in accordance to the discussions during the [World Health Organisation's meeting to address mental health in the Western Balkans](#), Albania needs to update its public health legislation and offer children free medical treatment and medication at least until the age of ten years.

When it comes to shaping national policies, CRCA confirmed that this happens mostly through annual consultations on implementation

of national policies for children through the National Council for Children.¹⁰

To ensure a positive impact on children's rights, CRCA recommends that Albania should align with the EU Child Guarantee Recommendation, appoint a Child Guarantee Coordinator and develop an Albanian National Action Plan together with all relevant stakeholders.



⁹ Euronews Albania, Mental health disorders surging in Albania, amplified by Covid-19 pandemic, 2023.

¹⁰ The body established by the Law on the Rights and Protection of Children in Albania to oversee the implementation of the law, the work of the public institutions and to recommend measures, priorities and policies to the Albanian government to address issues related to the respect of children's rights or child protection.

Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.



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