



Republic of Albania

Improving Equitable Access to High Standard Public Services through
GovTech (P177845)

**Program for Result
(P177845)**

Environmental and Social System Assessment

November 2022

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADISA	The Agency for Delivery of Integrated Services Albania
AI	Artificial intelligence
AKEP	The Electronic and Postal Communications Authority
AKUM	National Agency for Water Supply - Sewerage and Waste Infrastructure
AS	The Agency for Standards
BC	Business Continuity
CCSD	Citizens-Centric Service Delivery
CSCs	Citizen Service Centers
CP	Core Principle
CPF	Country Partnership Framework
DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers
DLI	Disbursement Link Indicators
E&S	Environmental and Social
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ESSA	Environmental and Social System Assessment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoA	Government of Albania
GG	Government Gateway
GP	Government Program
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IDP	Information and Data Protection Commissioner
ICSs	Integrated Centers Services
IS	Information of the Society
LGUs	Local Government Units
MES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MTE	Ministry of Tourism and Environment
MSSS	Ministry of State for Standards and Services
NAIS	National Agency for Information Society
NCA	National Council of Accessibility
NEA	National Environmental Agency
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
NLA	National Licensing Agency
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OP	Operational Policies
OPG	Open Government Partnership
PAs	Protected Areas
PAP	Program Action Plan
PDO	Program Development Objective
PforR	Program for Results
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PwD	Person with Disabilities
SIA	Strategic Impact Assessment
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WB	World Bank

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

This Environmental and Social Systems Assessment (ESSA) has been prepared by World Bank Environmental and Social Specialists for the proposed project “Improving Universal Access to High Standard Public Services through GovTech” (P177845) in Albania, which will be supported by the World Bank’s Program for Results (PforR) financing instrument. The main purpose of this ESSA is to: 1) identify the program’s Environmental and Social (E&S) effects, 2) assess the legal and policy framework for E&S management, 3) assess the implementing institutional capacity and performance to manage potential adverse E&S issues, and 4) recommend specific actions to address gaps in the program’s E&S management system.

This ESSA assesses or considers the extent to which the program’s environmental and social management systems are adequate for and consistent with six core environmental and social principles of the PforR Policy: 1) Environmental and Social Management, 2) Natural Habitats and Physical Cultural Resources, 3) Public and Worker Safety, 4) Land Acquisition, 5) Indigenous Peoples and Vulnerable Groups, and 6) Social Conflict. From the ESSA assessment, the following core principles are relevant to this program: Environmental and Social Management, and Social Conflict.

2. Program Description and Potential Environmental and Social Effects

The proposed program is anchored in the new Government Program for 2021-2025, Reform Strategy, and the Albanian IT Policy. The new Government program, based in the newly approved strategy “Albania Digital Agenda 2022-2026”, sets the vision for the next phase of the country’s digital transformation. In addition to improving the quality of service-delivery, the strategy aims to radically increase the integration of new technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence and machine learning. The proposed GovTech Program rightly and timely addresses the key institutional challenges of digital transformation of education by bringing in the National Agency for Information Society (NAIS, or AKSHI, its Albanian abbreviation), the Ministry of Education and Sports and other stakeholders such as the Albania-American Development Foundation, to implement the digital agenda of the country, which is critical for building skilled human capital that would drive growth. The proposed Program will directly contribute to the draft CPF component for 2022-2026, entitled: “Digitalization and enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector”.

The Program will support the Government’s Digital Agenda 2022-2026 and is structured around three Result Areas (RA): 1) Enhancing E-Service Access and User Experience; Improving Skills and Digital Inclusion; and Strengthening Priority GovTech Enablers.

AKSHI is the implementing agency responsible for the achievement of the Program results, with the support of the Prime Minister’s Office. Other contributing implementing agencies on specific sub-RAs of the Program are the following: RA 1.2: Ministry of Finance and Economy, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and Ministry of Interior; RA 2.1: Ministry of Education and Sports. The following strategic partner agencies will closely collaborate in the implementation to support AKSHI in the achievement of the results: the Ministry of State for Youth and Children (MSYC); EU Chief Negotiator; Minister of State for Service Standards; The Co-Governance Department; and The Data Protection Commissioner’s Office.

A Steering Committee (SC) will ensure a strategic implementation overview, high-level inter-institutional coordination, and political ownership of the Program. A Technical Committee (TC) will oversee Program implementation and Technical Implementation Groups (TIGs) will coordinate the day-to-day implementation of sub-RAs and will be responsible for the achievement of related results.

3. Environmental and Social Effects

Consistent with the requirements of the Bank PforR policy, the proposed PforR operation does not support activities that pose high social and environmental risks. The activities to be supported by the program are likely to provide significant social benefits and pose moderate environmental and social impacts and risks. Hence the ESSA finds the program suitable for a PforR operation.

Most of the activities under the PforR will not pose any environmental risk. However, through the procurement of several types of Information Technology (IT) equipment items and devices (smart phones, desktop computers, laptops, printers, servers, scanners, wireless networking technologies, and so on) for use by the different implementing departments of the program, electronic waste (e-waste) is expected to be generated at the start of the program (replacing redundant Information and Communication Technology (ICT) equipment), by virtue of ICT equipment use. In addition, e-waste is expected by the end-of-life service of the procured equipment. E-procurement and other paperless measures in the office's operation will decrease the use of paper. These activities in their individual capacities, and as a whole at the program level, will result in positive environmental impacts in the form of a reduction in resource use and carbon footprints, except for a slight increase in electricity use.

There is a downstream probability of social exclusion of individuals and businesses due to low IT literacy, low IT access, and connectivity issues, particularly in remote and disadvantaged areas. In addition, persons with disabilities (PwD) can be further marginalized if the automation and computerization processes are not sensitive to their requirements. That is, they could not get access to online services.

Although equal chances on services, information, communication, and participation in decision making is predicted to be provided under a range of activities across all result areas of the Program, some groups or individuals may not have access to, or frequently use ICTs that would allow them to benefit from the ICT-based interventions under the Program. This includes poorer segments of the population, rural or mountainous area elderly residents, women (especially those in rural areas), PwD across all regions of Albania, taking into consideration their level of income, literacy level, and internet access. Women may also be less likely to benefit from Program activities, given the "gender digital divide" in Albania, and the gender difference in internet users during 2021: 80.3 percent of men and 78.3 percent of women from the age group 16-74. Therefore, there still exists the risk of inequalities in access to services in the context of the "digital divide". Former Agency for Delivery of Integrated Services Albania (ADISA) centers will partially function as Youth Innovation Centers and helpdesks to help this category of the population, as well as other vulnerable groups, with the online services. AKSHI will consider expanding the help to the population segments through an expanded network of Youth Innovation Centers, outsourcing the support through CSOs, and other methods of outreach in remote areas.

The environmental risk of the project is rated as low to moderate, since its potential adverse risks and impacts on human populations and the environment are likely to be negligible. There are no civil works of any kind included in the project. The social risk of the project is rated as moderate since the activities are not expected to pose adverse impacts.

The environmental and social management under the program is largely based on the existing legal, regulatory, and institutional system in Albania. The applicable environmental and social management systems need to be improved to address underlying environmental and social risks. The ESSA identified gaps in some areas, as summarized below, which will need to be addressed through the Program Action Plan (PAP).

Major findings indicate that current regulations lack specific provisions pertinent to e-waste management. Enforcement of these provisions is weak in the country, due to a lack of enforcement infrastructure and resources. There are no certified e-waste recycling facilities and recyclers in Albania for environmentally sound recycling of e-waste generated, but there are some private initiatives. The program implementing departments will be unable to deliver their e-waste to such recyclers or to such facilities.

It is assessed that AKSHI, being the implementation agency of the program, will work together with MoTE and AKUM to develop and implement Standard Operating Procedures for e-waste.

Albania has adopted a comprehensive set of laws and regulations which regulate the rights on social protection and inclusion. The social inclusion policy document covering 2016-2020 sets out how a balanced and sustainable social inclusion framework will be guaranteed. On anti-discrimination, the legal and policy framework is generally aligned with EU standards and was further improved with amendments to the Law on protection against discrimination. Regarding minority rights, additional by-laws, including on self-identification and use of minority languages, are still pending adoption. Albania's framework legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities is partially compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030), the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2025), and the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians (2021-2025), have all been adopted by the government. Similarly, guaranteeing social rights is one of the strategic goals set out in the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) document (2015-2020).

Regarding the constitutional right of access to public information, the legislative framework is in line with international standards in this matter, in particular with the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (Tromso Convention). A revised model for the institutional Transparency Program as well as for the Register of Requests and Responses was approved in 2020. The legal framework for oversight institutions (Law on the People Advocate) is in place, but its scope does not cover the entire executive.

The legislative framework on public service delivery in Albania is in place to ensure user-oriented administration and consists of three documents:

1. the Cross-cutting Public Administration Reform Strategy (PAMS) 2015-2020,
2. the Digital Agenda of Albania 2015-2020 (the New Digital Agenda and Action Plan 2022-2026,
- 3, the Long-Term Policy Document on the Delivery of Citizen-Centric Services.

There is a rich legal framework that directly and indirectly regulates ICT and information society in Albania. Albania has also been implementing a comprehensive strategic framework of public administration reform (SFPAR). The Albania Digital Agenda and Action Plan 2022-2026 was adopted in 2022, according to Decision No. 370. The legal framework for ensuring interoperability is in place.

While since the project has to do with the quality improvement of the provision of digital services to the population, the law of personal data is also relevant to this project. The general principle of the Law on Protection of Personal Data is that legal processing of personal data shall respect and guarantee the

fundamental rights and freedoms of persons and in particular their right to privacy. Albania also adopted a new Strategy on Cyber Security and an Action Plan for 2020-2025, which cover the relevant priorities in the field.

4. Approach for the ESSA

The ESSA is prepared through a combination of reviews of existing program materials and available technical literature, interviews with government staff, and consultations with key stakeholders and experts. The ESSA assesses or considers the extent to which the program's environmental and social management systems are adequate for and consistent with six core environmental and social principles contained in the paragraph of Section III of the PforR Policy (hereafter, Core Principles), as may be applicable or relevant under PforR circumstances. The Core Principles are listed below.

- a. Core Principle 1: **Environmental and Social Management**: Environmental and social management procedures and processes are designed to (a) promote environmental and social sustainability in program design, (b) avoid, minimize, or mitigate against adverse impacts; and (c) promote informed decision making relating to a program's environmental and social effects.
- b. Core Principle 2: **Natural Habitats and Physical Cultural Resources**: Environmental and social management procedures and processes are designed to avoid, minimize, and mitigate any adverse effects (on natural habitats and physical cultural resources) resulting from the program.
- c. Core Principle 3: **Public and Worker Safety**: Program procedures ensure adequate measures to protect public and worker safety against the potential risks associated with (a) construction and/or operations of facilities or other operational practices developed or promoted under the program and (b) exposure to toxic chemicals, hazardous waste, and otherwise dangerous materials
- d. Core Principle 4: **Land Acquisition**: Land acquisition and loss of access to natural resources are managed in a way that avoids or minimizes displacement, and affected people are assisted in improving, or at least restoring, their livelihoods and living standards.
- e. Core Principle 5: **Indigenous Peoples and Vulnerable Groups**: Due consideration is given to cultural appropriateness of, and equitable access to, program benefits, giving special attention to the rights and interests of indigenous peoples and to the needs or concerns of vulnerable groups.
- f. Core Principle 6: **Social Conflict**: Avoid exacerbating social conflict, especially in fragile states, post conflict areas, or areas subject to territorial disputes.

DISCLOSURE AND CONSULTATION

Disclosure: This draft ESSA will be disclosed in-country and on the World Bank's external website, prior to formal appraisal of the relevant PforR, to serve as the basis for discussion and receipt of formal comments. The ESSA will be consulted with relevant stakeholders with respect to institutional capacity for environmental and social aspects of the program.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Recommended Environmental Actions

- Recommendation 1: Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for environmental management of e-waste under the Technical Assistance component

AKSHI will work closely with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) and the National Environmental Agency (NEA) in developing SOPs for the management and disposal of e-waste. The SOP will follow the current World Bank’s Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) Guidelines, based upon general and industry specific examples of Good International Industry Specific Practices (GIIPs). The support on preparation of SOP should be part of the activities under the Technical Assistance, activities for capacity development. The SOP is expected to include procedures for: inventory-based record keeping of ICT equipment by the departments at the time of procurement of new equipment and sale of used equipment, material safety data sheets of new and old equipment, terms and conditions for the repurchase of new equipment at the end of life of the equipment, NEA licensed buyers of used equipment, proposed conditions for the environmentally sound recycling and disposal arrangements, and so on

- Recommendation 2: Training on e-waste SOPs

The program teams in AKSHI and partner departments, along with MoTE and NEA staff, should be made aware of the SOPs by organizing e-waste management training as part of the capacity-building activities under the program.

Recommended Social Actions

The Summary table reflects the WB team and the AKSHI agreed measures, to address social issues, to be reflected into PforR design:

Activities	Where integrated in PforR
Accessibility to Digital Services. Integration of the latest EU and international digital service accessibility requirements into: (i) online and mobile E-Albania; and (ii) the new multi-channel contact center (which includes the Helpdesk interface). This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.	Results Indicator in Results Framework (RF); action reflected in a DLI.
Expanded Channels of Delivery and Assistance. Expanded and improved channels to accessing digital services. Primary measures: (i) the upgraded mobile e-Albania will reach additional groups in areas of Mobile penetration; (ii) the new multi-channel Contact Center/HelpDesk system, call center and Albania Virtual Assistant will provide additional support to service users in their digital service applications and follow-up; (iii) the multi-functional Youth Innovation Centers will include an “ <i>Infopoint</i> ” that will provide information to help users resolve problems related to their online application. This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.	RF, DLI. Program Action Plan: the Infopoints will be provided, at a minimum, in 10 locations in the Youth Innovation Centers (in the former ADISA centers). During Program implementation, it is a strong recommendation that Infopoints (if effective) should be expanded to un-served geographical areas. In considering the expansion of the Infopoints, the Program could also consider using selected rural municipal offices who could potentially fulfil this Infopoint

	function in un-served geographical locations.
Leveraging CSOs. The Program will identify, reach out to, and provide training to selected Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations that are <i>already</i> engaged in supporting the targeted vulnerable groups. This training will focus on how to support such groups in making digital service applications and using existing digital interfaces provided by the AKSHI.	Program Action Plan. To map CSOS; to develop and implement and action plan for training
200 Education SmartLabs. The inclusion aspects will be dealt with by the following: (i) some of the selected schools will be in rural, poorer areas (including a collective school) and additional resources will be provided to those schools to ensure the labs are fully functional (e.g., additional electricity, connectivity, additional capacity building and so on); and (ii) the teachers in the SmartLabs will be provided with the tools and skills to provide additional support to students with learning difficulties (so they can make full use of the SmartLab facilities).	DLI and verification protocol will ensure such inclusion aspects are addressed. Program Action Plan: the client will develop a short action plan to ensure that inclusion issues are monitored and addressed effectively in the SmartLabs implementation.
Information, Education and Communications (IEC). This will include: (i) information campaigns to raise digital literacy of the population (such as, on how to use new E-Albania functionalities), with tailoring to specificities of vulnerable groups (namely rural and elderly women); and (ii) dissemination of user-friendly and actionable information on how to apply for e-services (available in appropriate channels and languages). This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.	Program Action Plan. Part of the IEC will also be funded via the IPF Sub-component which includes communications.
Public Servant Training. InfoPoint and Call Center staff trained in methods/tools to support the target groups. This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.	Program Action Plan. Training plan develop and delivered for selected staff. Part of this to be funded under the IPF Technical assistance sub-component.
Data Protection and Trust. Includes: (i) measures to increase data protection and data security; and (ii) financing trainings on data protection and data security for public sector staff. This leads to increased data privacy and trust building in the population.	RF, PAP, On-demand capacity building (IPF sub-component)

Report Outline

This ESSA is separated into six sections and a series of annexes. Section 1 provides introduction and the context for the ESSA. Section 2 provides country and sectorial context, the program objectives, the PforR scope, and identifies the Program’s main environmental benefits and potential risks and institutional arrangements. It also assesses the Albanian institutional and regulatory capacity to manage the environmental issues identified. Section 3 provides an assessment of the program environmental management system, and an assessment of the program social management system. Section 4 covers disclosure and consultation of ESSA, and Section 5 includes the recommendations of the ESSA for E&S Program action. The annexes provide supplementary information on specific issues and relevant initiatives. Prior to finalizing this document, the ESSA will be shared publicly for feedback and consultation. The feedback will then be incorporated, and the document finalized. Annual consultations will also take place with multiple stakeholders to monitor the ESSA’s progress and implementation, where relevant.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

A. Environmental and Social systems Assessment: Purpose and Objectives

This Environmental and Social Systems Assessment (ESSA) has been prepared by the E&S Team for the proposed Albania “Improving Universal Access to High Standard Public Services through GovTech (P177845), which will be supported by the World Bank’s Program for Results (PforR) financing instrument. In accordance with the requirements of the World Bank Policy Program-for-Results Financing (PforR Policy), PforRs rely on country-level systems for the management of environmental and social effects. The PforR Policy requires that the Bank conduct a comprehensive ESSA to assess the degree to which the relevant PforR program’s systems promote environmental and social sustainability and to ensure that effective measures are in place to identify, avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse environmental, health, safety, and social impacts. ESSA based on comprehensive assessment makes recommendations to enhance environmental and social management within the program as part of the overall management action plan.

The main purposes of this ESSA is to: (i) identify the program’s environmental and social effects, (ii) assess the legal and policy framework for environmental and social management, including a review of relevant legislation, rules, procedures, and institutional responsibilities that are being used by the program; (iii) assess the implementing institutional capacity and performance to date to manage potential adverse environmental and social issues; and (iv) recommend specific actions to address gaps in the program’s environmental and social management system, including with regard to the policy and legal framework and implementation capacity.

This ESSA assesses or considers the extent to which the program’s environmental and social management systems are adequate for and consistent with six core environmental and social principles contained in the paragraph of Section III of the PforR Policy (hereafter, Core Principles), as may be applicable or relevant under PforR circumstances. The Core Principles are listed below.

- a. Core Principle 1: **Environmental and Social Management**: Environmental and social management procedures and processes are designed to (a) promote environmental and social sustainability in program design, (b) avoid, minimize, or mitigate against adverse impacts; and (c) promote informed decision making relating to a program’s environmental and social effects.
- b. Core Principle 2: **Natural Habitats and Physical Cultural Resources**: Environmental and social management procedures and processes are designed to avoid, minimize, and mitigate any adverse effects (on natural habitats and physical cultural resources) resulting from the program.
- c. Core Principle 3: **Public and Worker Safety**: Program procedures ensure adequate measures to protect public and worker safety against the potential risks associated with (a) construction and/or operations of facilities or other operational practices developed or promoted under the program and (b) exposure to toxic chemicals, hazardous waste, and otherwise dangerous materials
- d. Core Principle 4: **Land Acquisition**: Land acquisition and loss of access to natural resources are managed in a way that avoids or minimizes displacement, and affected people are assisted in improving, or at least restoring, their livelihoods and living standards.
- e. Core Principle 5: **Indigenous Peoples and Vulnerable Groups**: Due consideration is given to cultural appropriateness of, and equitable access to, program benefits, giving special attention to the rights and interests of indigenous peoples and to the needs or concerns of vulnerable groups.
- f. Core Principle 6: **Social Conflict**: Avoid exacerbating social conflict, especially in fragile states, post

conflict areas, or areas subject to territorial disputes.

An additional purpose of this ESSA is to enable informed decision making by the relevant authorities in the borrower country and to aid the Bank's internal review and decision process associated with the GovTech. The findings, conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the World Bank. The recommended actions that flow from this analysis will be discussed and agreed with the Albanian government counterparts and will become legally binding agreements under the conditions of the new loan.

B. ESSA Methodology

The World Bank undertook the following actions as part of the assessment from April 2022- September 2022: (a) a comprehensive review of government policies, legal frameworks and program documents, and other assessments of Albanian government's environmental and social management systems (b) consultations were held with relevant experts and officials from Ministry of Environment ; Albanian Environmental Protection Agency; AKSHI; Ministry of Education and Sports and the Minister of State for Youth and Children) and, (c) the other government entities and stakeholders that deal with relevant issues, such as Service Standards (the Minister of State for Service Standards) and grievance redressal (the Co-Governance Agency).

Program's beneficiaries

The project is expected to yield substantial net benefits to Albanian citizens and the GoA. It is anticipated that 4,000 youth will benefit from training in advanced digital skills and 35,000 students with opportunities to learn in a Smart Lab. Beneficiaries are also the citizens by reduced administrative costs in accessing government services, an increased number of e-services by a simpler and more user-friendly user interface; increased speed of e-services. Administrative staff will save time through increased speed of e-services, and use of e-signature, among others. Establishing and operationalizing Helpdesks in underserved areas to ensure equitable access of all community groups to e-Albania services. Benefits that will come through reduced administrative costs and reduced time and travel costs of citizens accessing government services.

This report is prepared through a combination of reviews of existing program materials and available technical literature, interviews with government staff, and consultations with key stakeholders and experts. Findings of the assessment will be used in the formulation of an overall Program Action Plan (PAP) with key measures to improve environmental and social management outcomes of the program. ESSA will be consulted with all relevant stakeholders and feedback and recommendations from the discussions will be incorporated in the final draft of ESSA. The ESSA review process seeks to describe and assess the systems for managing environmental and social effects of a proposed program.

From May 2022-September 2022, the World Bank drew on a wide range of data, sources, and inputs during the ESSA review process, including the following actions:

Assessment of the environmental and social effects of the program: The ESSA Team assessed the potential for the program to cause adverse environmental and social effects, either due to its design and program components or due to gaps in program systems.

Comprehensive desk review of policies, legal framework, program documents, and other assessments of environmental and social management systems: The review examined the set of national/local policy and legal requirements related to environment and social management associated with the activities described under the program results areas. The review also examined technical and supervision documents from previous and ongoing World Bank projects and programs whereby ESSA was produced (PfoR for Water and Sanitation Project in Albania).

Institutional analysis: An institutional analysis was carried out to identify the roles, responsibilities, and structure of the relevant institutions responsible for implementing the GovTech funded activities, including coordination between different entities at the national and local levels. The assessment of the capacity of key institutions to implement required environmental and social management actions was assessed. An important input for this assessment was an evaluation of these institutions' previous track record in management of such risks in the context of previous projects and programs.

Consultations and interviews: The ESSA will be consulted with relevant experts and officials at AKSHI, of Ministry of Education and Sports and the Ministry of State for Youth and Children, and the other government entities and stakeholders that deal with relevant issues, such as Service Standards (the Minister of State for Service Standards) and grievance redressal (the Co-Governance Agency).

This ESSA will be updated based on the feedback and comments that will come as the result of consultation with stakeholders and experts prior to the finalization of the program. The final ESSA will be disclosed prior to the World Bank Board consideration of the program.

2. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL EFFECTS

A. Country Context

The Albanian economy in 2021 rebounded with a GDP growth of 8.5 percent. The impacts of the 2019 earthquake and COVID-19 have disproportionately affected the poor, which still constitute over 32 percent of the population (living on less than US\$5.5 per day) in 2022.

Employment and labor force participation is recovering, the unemployment rate has dropped from 11.7 percent in 2020, to 10.3 in 2022, and is expected to stay at that level for the coming years

For faster growth, Albania's development model would need to deliver more inclusive, climate-sensitive, and sustainable growth and to improve public sector efficiency and effectiveness.

Public sector efficiency and public service delivery are critical pillars of a strengthened Albanian development model, yet major challenges remain. The 2019 Update to the Systematic Country Diagnostic (2019) identified inefficiencies in service delivery, poor quality of services and unequal access to services, alongside bottlenecks in sectoral services, such as social protection, health and education. To respond to such challenges, the GoA, supported by the World Bank (WB) and other development partners, has implemented public service delivery modernization and digitalization programs. For example, the Citizen-Centric Service Delivery (CCSD) Project (2015-2020, P151972) made progress in improving public services.

B. Sectoral and Institutional Context

The GoA has made important investments to improve public service delivery through public administration modernization and digitalization. To lead the digitalization effort, the AKSHI was created in 2008.

As part of its effort to facilitate integrated online service delivery, AKSHI launched the e-Albania portal in 2012. This is the platform for Government institutions to provide their services online. The portal currently provides access for around 2.6 million registered users representing around 95 percent of all central Government public services.

In order to provide alternative channels for service delivery and to reach all citizens, one-stop-shop citizen service centers (CSCs) were also created. The Agency for Delivery of Integrated Services in Albania (ADISA) was established to provide service access points (CSCs) where citizens could have in person access in one place to hundreds of services which had previously been provided by a multitude of agencies.

Subsequently, in late 2019, the GoA shifted its emphasis towards an accelerated transition to "online only" service applications and in 2022 the GoA decided to close down and rationalize all service front offices. In 2022, the GoA also continued with the implementation of the PM order to close down all front offices by April 30, including the CSCs, to encourage users to apply "online only" and to reduce the incidence of corruption. As such, users could only access these services (i) by themselves, directly in e-Albania, or (ii) by paying a third party, such as a notary or lawyer, to access e-Albania on their behalf. Following this, the plan, in 2022, is to rationalize and re-open certain selected front offices under a new model of Youth Innovation Centers, as discussed below.

Albania's progress on the digital transformation of public service delivery has been recognized internationally. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) highlights Albania as a positive model for e-governance in the Western Balkans.

Progress has also been made in the education sector through modernization and digitalization efforts. Realizing the huge potential of digitalization of education, the National Education Strategy (NES) 2021-2026 in its Specific Objective 5 clearly commits to develop digital competence through better use of information and communication technology for teaching and learning. Although some progress has been made in implementing the Specific Objective 5, given the challenges in the education sector related to digitalization, massive efforts and resources would be required to achieve the stated goals. The proposed GovTech Program rightly and timely addresses the key institutional challenges of digital transformation of education by bringing in AKSHI, Ministry of Education and Sports and other stakeholders such as Albania-American Development Foundation together to implement the digital agenda of the country, which is critical for building skilled human capital that would drive growth.

The World Bank team held extensive consultations with a range of stakeholders, during two missions to Albania in 2021. Based on these consultations, the following root causes have been established to contribute to problems with digital transformation:

- a. The e-Albania platform is not sufficiently “user-centric”
- b. Digital services lack user-centric personalization and pro-activity
- c. Selected ICT infrastructure, the backbone of advanced digital services, is outdated and not fit-for-purpose
- d. The education system has space for improvement in building strong foundational and digital literacy from early grades
- e. Sub-optimal digital service delivery assistance and a digital divide
- f. Space for improvement in data governance
- g. Weaknesses in Priority GovTech Enablers

C. Government Program

The new Government Program for 2021-2025 places a special focus on the digitalization and modernization of all sectors and services. The Digital Agenda of Albania 2022–2026 approved by DCM no.370, date 6/2022 aims to promote investments in the key areas of advanced computing and data processing, artificial intelligence (AI), cyber security and advanced digital skills with the potential to connect businesses, public administration, and citizens with the latest technologies, thus leading the society towards Digital Transformation.

The cross-cutting Strategy "Digital Agenda of Albania 2015-2020" (with the extended Action Plan until 2022) played an important role in laying out and strengthening the foundations for the current advanced state of digitalized public services and digital society. The strategy did so by improving the national infrastructure of ICT, expanding e-government services and their level of automation, as well as advancing digitalization in sectors and the cadaster. The new Government program, based in the newly approved strategy “Albania Digital Agenda 2022-2026”, sets the vision for the next phase of the country’s digital revolution. In addition to improving the quality of service delivery, the strategy aims to radically increase the integration of new technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence and machine learning. The strategy will be guided under six principles: innovation; governance; data; risk; standards and transparency. The strategy aims to accomplish four key objectives:

- a. Objective 1: Digital Government - Enabling digital policies, intelligent processes, and advanced solutions on secure platforms
- b. Objective 2: Digital Business - Accessible, proactive services and ready-made business operations
- c. Objective 3: Digital Citizens - Citizens and privacy, transparency of data and services to citizens
- d. Objective 4: Digital Education and Digital Skills - Transforming Learning and Teaching.

Attached to the digital strategy GoA has produced an accompanying Action Plan that aims at the coordinated and efficient direction of investments and activities in the information and communication technologies sector.

Table 2. 1 The Government program and the Bank-financed Program (PforR) entitled Improving Universal Access to High Standard Public Services through GovTech Program

	The Government program (p)	The PforR (P)
Vision	A fully digitalized Albania by 2030 (based on the new Digital Agenda action plan)	Critical contribution to this vision
Objective	Improve the quality of public services and radically increase the integration of new technologies in the public sector.	Increase the equitable access to and quality of selected digital services (PDO).
Key Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Government • Digital Business • Digital Citizens • Digital Education and Digital Skills 	3 priority RAs supporting selected program objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RA1: Enhancing E-Service Access and User Experience • RA2: Improving Skills and Digital Inclusion • RA3: Strengthening Priority GovTech Enablers
Scope	National	National
Period	2022–30	2023–2027
Cost (US\$)	US\$243 million	US\$118 million (of which Bank contribution: US\$65million (including US\$ 6 million under the IPF component)

D. PforR Program Scope

The Program will support the Government’s Digital Agenda 2022-2026 and is structured around three Result Areas which are shown in the following table.

Table 2. 2 Main Result Areas and sub-activities of the Program and expected results

Result Area	Activities	Expected results
Results Area 1 (RA1): Enhancing E-Service access and User Experience	1.1 Re-Engineering E-Albania Portal based on User Experience (UX). 1.2 E Personalized and Pro-Active Event-based E-Service Re-organization 1.3 E-Services Backbone Upgrade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased speed, quality and efficiency of e-services • Reduced time for citizens to obtain services • Increased usability of digital services • Increased usage of e-Albania online and e-Albania mobile

<p>Results Area 2: Improving Skills and Digital Inclusion</p>	<p>2.1. Improved digital and Foundational skills Through establishment of the educational smart labs.</p> <p>2.2.Improved Customer Service and Digital Inclusion Through modernization of the customer services architecture to make it easier to access digital services, including amongst the target vulnerable groups, and will improve digital literacy in general population and amongst the youth.</p> <p>2.3. Strengthened Data Governance Objective is to strengthen data governance and transparency. Data governance will be strengthened by By (i) strengthening the legal framework for data protection (ii) enhancing interoperability through the alignment with new metadata standards, further automating data collection and extending data exchange protocols based on industry standards and EU interoperability framework (iii) creating a “Data Lake”¹ to store a large amount of data in their native format, available for advanced data analytics. And Data transparency is strengthened by(i) completing an updated Open Data Readiness Assessment (ODRA); (ii) upgrading the front-end interface of the Open Data (OD) portal based on UX (iii) upgrading the back-end of the OD portal (iv) publishing priority data-sets in OD format in priority public institutions (v) increasing OD usage and analytics through outreach and capacity building to state and non-state actors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved student usage of the smart labs • Broader access to digital services • Improved Customer Service and digital inclusion • Strengthened data governance and transparency
<p>Results Area 3: Strengthening Priority GovTech Enablers</p>	<p>3.1. Government Gov Tech Enablers Adopted (Standards, SQDNE, Edmrs) First, it will support the adoption and certification of new digital service standards in the most highly used digital services. Second, it will support the upgrade and expansion of the centralized system for electronic documents with electronic signature (SQDNE), with a particular focus on developing a real-time monitoring system to ensure full monitoring of the provision of digital services and pro-active issuance of management notifications to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved monitoring of the service delivery provision and accelerated transition to Paperless Government • Improved digital skills in the public administration • Increased awareness, uptake, and sustainability of the GovTech reforms

¹ A data lake or data space (that is, a repository that holds a vast amount of raw data in its native format for data analytics) supports Big Data analytics, AI, Machine learning and Analytics Sandbox.

	<p>public service delivery institutions.² Third, it will accelerate the transition to a Paperless Government by updating and extending the Electronic Documents and Records Management System (EDRMS), to achieve a 33% reduction in the time taken for public institutions to reply to other public institutions</p> <p>3.2. Selected Gov Tech policy Enablers adopted</p> <p>3.3. Selected Gov Tech Capacity enablers (IPF component)</p>	
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E. Proposed Development Objective

The Development Objective is to increase the equitable access to and quality of selected digital services. The following definitions apply to the PDO:

- “Selected Digital Service” are those services that are included in the PforR results, which were selected according to the following criteria: (a) services that are technically and implementation “ready” and have identified service providers/line ministries who own the reform, (b) services that have a high number of users and thus wide impact and, (c) services have clear positive impacts on the Program’s vulnerable target groups.
- “Access” is measured in terms of the *usage* of the priority digital services. Gains in “equitable Access” are measured in terms of access to services by targeted vulnerable groups. In the context of Albania, the priority targeted vulnerable groups are: (i) poor; (ii) rural residents; (iii) women; (iv) disabled; (v) Roma; (vi) elderly; and (vii) youth.
- “Quality” can be measured along different dimensions. In this PforR, quality is defined in terms of two dimensions: (i) first, from an objective standpoint, usually in terms of reductions in the time needed to receive selected services; and (ii) from the perspective of the user, usually understood in terms of user satisfaction with the service. It is understood that user satisfaction is subjective, so it is combined with the other indicator of quality

Excluded activities. The Program will exclude activities that do not align with the World Bank policy on eligibility requirements for PforR financing. Specifically, the Borrower shall ensure that the Program excludes any activities which, in the opinion of the World Bank, are likely to have significant adverse impacts that are sensitive, diverse, or unprecedented on the environment and/or could affect people, as defined in the World Bank policy on PforR financing, and Works, Goods, and Consultancy contracts above the Operational Procurement Review Committee (OPRC) thresholds. Assessment of government procurement plans over the last three years and types of expenditure anticipated under the Program indicate that estimated monetary values of activities under the program will not exceed OPRC threshold.

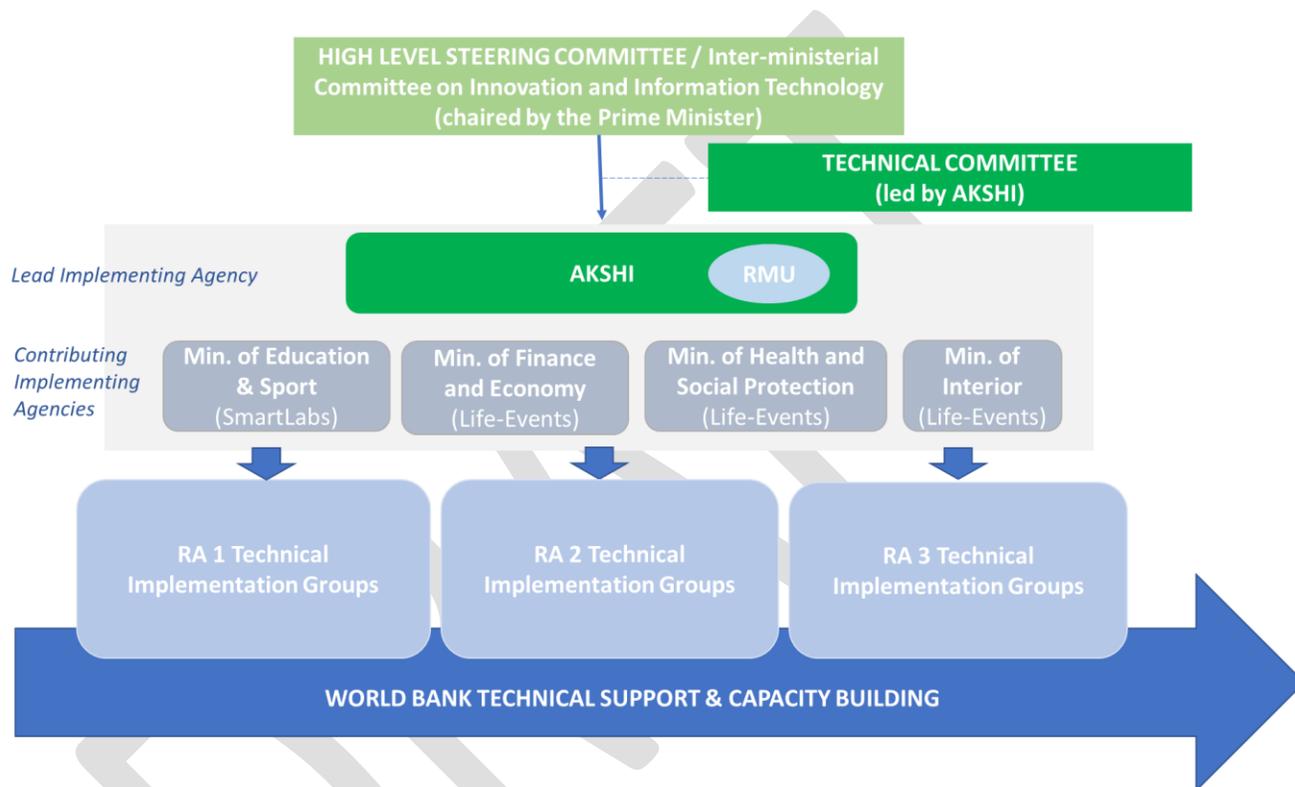
F. Institutional and Implementation Arrangements

The institutional arrangements have been discussed with the Albanian authorities and are based on the principles of transparent governance and accountability with well-defined roles and responsibilities (see

² This includes: i) hardware and software upgrades and expansion of storage, ii) monitoring of the provision of public services whose applications are being made via e-Albania and processed within the backend systems of the institutions, iii) implementation of customized workflows, configurable document templates, electronic signing by general directors etc., iv) establishment of an electronic protocol.

Figure below). Informed by a background political economy analysis conducted between April and June 2022, the implementation arrangements will: (i) address key implementation capacity and coordination risks; (ii) ensure transparent and well-defined roles and responsibilities; (iii) ensure a balanced representation across ICT and sectoral service delivery expertise throughout implementation; (iv) provide adequate change management support; and (v) leverage service contracts and private experts to support implementation, where needed. The arrangements will be further detailed in the POM.

Preliminary Implementation Arrangements



AKSHI is the implementing agency responsible for the achievement of the Program results. AKSHI is directly mapped to and enjoys the support of the Prime Minister’s Office. Its main responsibilities include: (i) promoting new technologies, and designing strategies and action plans for policy implementation in the field of ICT and electronic communication (e-gov); (ii) developing policies and strategies in the information society sector and, in particular, ICT, as well as encouragement of investments in the field of information society; (iii) being the coordinating regulatory authority responsible for government databases; (iv) providing digital services through ICT solutions; (v) contributing to the design of the GoA’s digital agenda; (vi) defining the standards for digital services in compliance with international and European standards, to be followed by both, public administration and private entities, and so forth.⁷⁴ The AKSHI has a competent and technically qualified team which is highly committed to implementing the new Digital Agenda for Albania 2022-2026. AKSHI will set up a dedicated Results Monitoring Unit (RMU) to support the overall monitoring of the proposed Program, including data collection, implementation of the M&E plan, verification of DLIs and fiduciary responsibilities. The RMU will also be in charge of procurement and financial management for 95% of the Program for Results Portion of the loan (the remaining 5% will be managed by the MoES). Housed within the RMU, a smaller Program Implementation

Unit (PIU) will manage all procurement and financial management for the IPF component, even though other institutions can be beneficiaries of the TA and capacity building.

Other contributing implementing agencies on specific sub-RAs of the Program are the following:

- RA 1.2: Ministry of Finance and Economy, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and Ministry of Interior: based on delivery agreements to be signed with AKSHI, they will lead (on behalf of relevant service providers mapped to them) the reorganization and rationalization of services around the six life-events, which AKSHI will further automate and organize around LEs.
- RA 2.1: Ministry of Education and Sports: will lead activities on the SmartLabs from a sectoral perspective, including the diagnostic, learning content development and deployment, teachers' capacity building and curriculum upgrading, as well as the learning monitoring and accountability system.

The following strategic partner agencies will closely collaborate in implementation to support AKSHI in the achievement of the results:

- Minister of State for Youth and Children (MSYC): will be closely involved in the implementation of the SmartLabs (RA 2.1);
- EU Chief Negotiator: will be involved in the overview of achieving the policy triggers (RA 3.2) related to the EU accession process (Chapter 10);
- Minister of State for Service Standards: as the designated entity to develop, monitor and publish (with support from AKSHI) public services standards, will support AKSHI in the development of the new Digital Service Standards; recently designated as the lead entity on the Open Government agenda, the MSSS will be also involved in some non-technical components in RA 2.3 on data governance; and,
- The Co-Governance Department: as the entity in charge of collecting user grievances on public services, (through the "*Shqiperia qe duam*" and monitoring timely service delivery by service providers, it will play a role in notifying relevant institutions on service delivery delays, as per the new monitoring functionality of the SQDNE.
- The Data Protection Commissioner's Office: as the independent entity in charge of supervising and monitoring the protection of personal data and the right to information by respecting and guaranteeing the fundamental human rights and freedoms in compliance with the legal framework, it will play a role in ensuring alignment with the data protection obligations for the relevant institutions.

A Steering Committee will ensure strategic implementation overview, high-level interinstitutional coordination and political ownership of the Program. The Inter-ministerial Committee on Innovation and Information Technology established in February 2022, chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of the General Directors of SASPAC, AKSHI and all ministers, will act as the program's Steering Committee. The SC will overview Program implementation from a strategic and policy perspective, monitor potential synergies with other strategic projects and facilitate interinstitutional co-operation and coordination. The SC may periodically invite key partners in government and donors.

A Technical Committee (TC) will oversee Program implementation. The TC will be led by AKSHI and will consist of high-level representatives of the contributing implementing agencies. Meeting monthly, the TC will oversee Program implementation at the technical level, report on progress to the SC, and solve implementation bottlenecks. As head of the TC, the AKSHI will lead and support interinstitutional

coordination and stakeholder engagement among all contributing implementing agencies. Communication and stakeholder engagement activities will be supported from the IPF component.

Technical Implementation Groups (TIGs) will coordinate the day-to-day implementation of sub-RAs and be responsible for the achievement of related results. These interinstitutional TIGs will: ensure the deployment of the necessary know-how; provide technical inputs to the procurement documents; and provide day-to-day oversight of the sub-RA's implementation.

G. Results Monitoring and Evaluation

The Program supports the RMU, housed in the AKSHI, in setting up a strong and sustainable M&E system for service delivery. This is financed under RA3 and the IPF component. The RMU will be responsible for project monitoring and evaluation activities (M&E), drawing data from its own systems, as well as from the relevant Ministries (line ministries, MSSS). The results framework in Annexes 1 and 2 summarize the Program's M&E plan and the DLI verification protocols.

Monitoring instruments include bi-annual progress reports on Program implementation, and output and outcome indicators. As an important element of the monitoring and evaluation, the project will collect and disaggregate data by gender and the target vulnerable groups. The design and adoption of the Digital Service Standards and monitoring dashboard, the upgrades of the various ICT systems (e-Albania, SQDNE, Open Data Portal) will further improve GoA capacity to monitor digital delivery, and therefore contribute to the sustainability of M&E of service delivery.

H. Disbursement Arrangements

Disbursements will be made based on verified results, as measured by DLIs. For the vast majority of the DLIs, allocated amounts, baselines, yearly targets, requirements of achievement, advance payments, prior results financing, deadlines for achievement, and determination of the amount to be disbursed have been defined (Annex 2). For selected indicators, the baselines will be finalized as a prior or early result. The GoA will be asked to demonstrate, through regularly prepared financial statements, that the Program's net expenditure is equal to or more than the amount of the Bank's Program financing. The Program's financial statements will be audited annually by the State Audit Institution (SAI). Prior results financing amounting to a maximum of US\$4 million is envisaged for this operation. It is also expected that there will be advances of up to US\$12 million (18 percent of loan amount for advance payment based on cash flow needs assessment and prior results in total) to ensure that activities are implemented in a timely manner. The amount of the advance and the specific DLIs to which it relates will be indicated in each withdrawal application. The disbursement deadline date will be six months after the closing date stated in the loan agreement.

I. . AKSHI Mission

As main agency for implementing and achieving the result of the program National Agency was created according to "Decision no. 673, dated 22.11.2017 "On the Reorganization of the National Agency of the Information Society". This agency became functional with the appointment of its General Director in September 2007.

The objectives of the NAIS/AKSHI activity are:

- a. Implementation of politics and strategy, for the development of Information of the Society (IS) and overall for the Information Technology and Communication (ITC);
- b. Coordination of the programs in the field of IS and in ITC;
- c. Inciting of investments in IS;
- d. Planning of actions for implementation of Ministerial competences, given by the legislation in the field of electronic communication;
- e. Promotion of new technologies in the field of IS;
- f. Contribution on education and inciting of using of the ITC from the public.

The unique multifunctional government portal e-albania.al, which is administered and developed by the AKSHI, serves as a gateway through which any interested person can receive via the Internet, electronic services provided by public institutions in Albania. The government portal e-Albania (some information on e-Albania Platform is given in Annex 2) is connected to the Government Interaction Platform, which is the basic architecture on which interaction with the electronic systems of public institutions is enabled.

The main vision of e-Albania is to become the main channel for receiving online services of public administration. In the framework of the program for “Improving Universal Access to High Standard Public Services through GovTech (P177845)” the GoA and AKSHI are focused on:

- Upgrade e-Albania service and functioning, by increasing and acceleration of the e-service, digitalization of Priority Sectorial Delivery Processes. GoA will also address digital devices – Universal access to services of high standards, by improving helpdesk model, customer care, accessibility, staffing, and so on.
- Improve service standards and connectivity government network (GovNet) and Government Gateway.
- Catalyzing Innovation: New Technologies and Data-Driven Service Delivery, by Fostering Digital Skills and Digital Innovation, Improving Data, Data Governance and Accountability,
- Strengthening the GovTech Enabling Environment and Technical Support by Legal and Policy reforms and Technical Assistance.

The Electronic and Postal Communications Authority (AKEP) is the regulatory body in the electronic communications and postal services field, which supervises the regulatory framework provided for in the law on electronic communications and the law on postal services, and development policies defined by the Council of Ministers. The institutional role, functions, and competencies as a regulatory body in the electronic communications and postal services field are focused on electronic communications and postal services in the Republic of Albania. AKEP is a legal, public, non-budgetary subject person, headed by the Steering Council, which is independent in making decisions and abides by its own adopted internal regulation. The Steering Council comprises 5 members appointed by the Parliament upon the proposal of the Council of Ministers.

J. Identification of Environmental and Social Effects as result of Program activities.

Potential Environmental risks: Consistent with the requirements of the Bank PforR Policy, the proposed PforR operation does not support activities that pose high environmental or social risks. The activities to be supported by the Program are likely to provide environmental and social benefits, and low adverse environmental and social impacts and risks.

Potential Environmental Risks and Benefits: The activities supporting are also expected to produce substantial environmental benefits. The e-office system will enhance efficiency and productivity of the public departments. Citizen services will be enhanced through digitizing the database. E-procurement and other paper less measures in the office's operation will decrease the use of paper. These activities in their individual capacities and as-a-whole at the program level will result in positive environmental impacts in the form of reduction in resource use and carbon footprints, except slight increase in electricity use. E-based activities provide the opportunity for concerned implementing departments to internalize adequate e-waste management procedures. It will also provide an opportunity to bring to the attention of decision makers the need for formulating pertinent national and provincial e-waste regulations and procedures to satisfy related international environmental obligations and donor requirements.

Some of the potential negative environmental impacts are:

- a. Generate small amount of e-waste that will come as a result of procurement of several types of IT equipment items and devices (smartphones, desktop computers, laptops, printers, servers, scanners, wireless networking technologies and so on) for use by the different implementing departments of the program, at the start of the program (replacing redundant ICT equipment) and by the end-of-life service of the procured equipment.
- b. Increase energy consumption, by using of electronic equipment for digital communication, in Albanian families and institutions. According to USA EPA, a very powerful desktop, needs 234 KWh, which is at last 3 time higher than energy needed to charge laptops or about 10 times higher than energy needed to charge mobile phone, iPads, and so on.

Some of the environmental benefits will be:

- a. The new government program, Albania 2030, has a vision for a fully digitalized and totally "paperless" government by 2023. E-procurement and other paperless measures in the office's operation will decrease the use of paper. These activities in their individual capacities, and as a whole at the Program level, will result in positive environmental impacts in the form of a reduction in resource use and carbon footprints, except for a slight increase in electricity use.
- b. The elimination of paper documents due to the implementation of electronic document management systems by the Government will contribute to energy savings (from reduced use of printers) as well as greater absorption of CO₂ by saving the trees cut, and tons of neutralized carbon and tons of CO₂ emissions saved per km citizens not traveled for services. The calculations of carbons footprint reduction can be obtained estimating the kilometers saved as well as the paper saved for instance.
- c. Reducing tree-cutting for paper production purposes (save trees and prevent deforestation)
- d. Reduce generation of CO₂ by transport used from beneficiaries to transport hard copies.

Potential Social Risks and Benefits: The overall objective of Program-financed activities is to increase the equitable access to and quality of selected digital services. The social systems assessment reveals that Program activities have a number of potential social effects, benefits, and risks, which are assessed below through two themes; Equity and universal access; Quality (Data protection). A Preliminary Risk Screening and Overall Assessment in terms of Environmental and Social Context and according to the Bank Policy Program for Results Financing is given in ANNEX 3.

Theme 1: Equity and Universal Inclusion

One of the main issues that emerge from the ESSA relates to digital divide and inclusion. Improvement of equitable access through GovTech will eliminate discrimination in the provision of services for all, including vulnerable categories and groups. The program will achieve this through all three Result Areas RA1: Enhancing E-Service Access and User Experience, RA2: Improving Skills and Digital Inclusion and RA3: Strengthening Priority Gov Tech Enablers. The RA2 directly addresses the digital divide, the inclusion issue

Potential social benefits: The Program activities proposed across the 3 Result Areas will provide improving universal and more equitable access to high standard public services in Albania. More precisely, activities proposed under RA2 mainly address the social divide issues and ensure universal access, for citizens, businesses, and vulnerable groups – such as the poor, women, elderly, disabled or the Roma, those who lack the skills, capacities, ICT means and opportunities to easily access digital services. The New/Upgraded Electronic Helpdesk System and Contact Center will provide real-time in-person troubleshooting to users applying for e-services. The activities under RA2 (second result area) will provide service for certain users who prefer to access services physically (such as at a service center – info center) and/or with human assistance (such as via a call center), thus avoiding resistance to change in the way. In Albania, citizens also have the constitutional right to choose whether to access services in person or directly online. Establishment of new Helpdesk centers in selected remote/un-served locations will provide access and assistance for those who live in remote areas and have low digital skills. A Chatbot with an Albanian Virtual Assistant would assist citizens and businesses in utilizing public e-services. Establishment of a light-touch kiosk/desk in Youth Innovation Centers will support service users with e-service applications as needed, to teach and support certain groups to access E-Service. Program activities under this RA also focus on addressing women’s needs in accessing services through mainstreaming certain gender-based mechanisms (gender sensitivity mechanisms within the Helpdesks to ensure the integration of gender perspectives and the exclusion of gender stereotypes; communication campaigns to address specific needs of women in terms of access to public services; surveys, focus group discussions to deepen engagement with women, and so on).

Information campaigns on e-service will improve digital literacy on the use of e-services of the entire population targeting all service users, including vulnerable groups and remote areas.

Activities proposed under RA1 related to re-Design and periodic improvement of E-Albania for improving user interface and enhancing user-friendliness will improve accessibility, usability for all beneficiaries and especially for the Vulnerable “special needs” groups, such as the disabled, elderly, illiterate or Roma communities and those with a low level of education.

Expanding opportunities to learn digital skills through the design of education smart labs (RA 2.2) will improve the knowledge and digital skills among all Albanian children through effective use of digital technology and provide better learning outcomes for pupils. This would also contribute towards making the education system resilient, enabling it to deliver quality learning to all children during disasters. There could also be lifetime increases in earnings of people benefiting from opportunities to obtain ICT skills through staff training.

Adoption of the necessary regulatory reforms (under RA3), such as adoption of the Paperless Government and Universal Accessibility Reforms would address reducing the digital divide and access to the other electronic services, and standards for information safety.

Potential Social Risks: Although it is expected that there will be equal opportunities for access to services, information, communications, and participation in decision making across all result areas of the Program,

some groups/individuals may have not access to, or frequently use, ICTs that would allow them to benefit from the ICT-based interventions under the Program. This includes poorer segments of the population, rural/mountainous area elderly residents, women (especially those in rural areas) and PWD across all regions of Albania. Therefore, there remains some risk for inequalities in access to services in the context of the “digital divide”. At least 10 info point will be established in the Youth Innovation centers to help with use of the e-service (helpdesks to help vulnerable groups). The program will consider possibility those in rural areas to benefit, through help established in former commune administration centers, which now serve as deconcentrated local government administrative units within rural areas.

Some additional expenditures may burden low-income groups for two reasons; a lack of clear knowledge of the procedure to be applied (due to limited-service delivery user orientation); and a lack of ICT equipment or knowledge about the existence of the Youth Innovation center/helpdesk. Therefore, it is possible people will pay for third parties to assist in processing applications – which is not necessary. This is currently happening to certain groups of people who do not have the means or do not know how to access the services offered in e-Albania and are not well oriented. Despite information campaign proposed under the Program, it is possible that the outreach will not get to all vulnerable populations, including those in remote areas.

Children in rural areas in Albania seem to be more disadvantaged compared to those living in urban areas, in terms of equitable distribution of program benefits. In Albania there have historically been large differences between urban and rural localities in terms of access to educational services. The enrollment rate in rural areas is lower and this is related to lower subsidies for basic education compared to urban areas. In rural areas and especially deep mountainous areas, school buildings are less well maintained, there is a lack of laboratories and materials, and insufficient teaching. There is a risk that education SmartLabs in schools located in rural areas will not be fully functional due to infrastructure, facilities, and connectivity. This could perpetuate the issue of unequal access and unequal benefits from new digital skills and better learning. However, it should be mentioned that works for the construction of the network infrastructure, including electrical connections, have begun for schools around Albania which are planned to be equipped with SmartLabs in the future, so that all institutions will have the same standards.

Theme 2: Quality (Data Protection)

The provision of improved quality of service delivery will reduce time and travel costs of citizens accessing Government services, reduce administrative costs of the Government and lead to greater trust and satisfaction by citizens of the Government.

Potential Social Benefits: Most of the activities proposed under Result Area 1 of the PforR Program involve GovTech innovations: upgrades; improvements of the E-Albania portal and E-services; defining e-services standards based on best practices; upgrading, strengthening, and enhancement of the government gateway; and expansion of E-Albania Infrastructure with new hardware and network equipment and automation improvement. The focus of the activities proposed under this RA is to increase the speed, efficiency and quality of e-services (including selected priority sectors) and to make the e-Albania platform even more usable and accessible for all citizens, drawing on the latest innovations in e-service and social media platforms and ensure pro-active services in a reliable manner even in the face up systems disruptions.

Expansion and Enhancement of E-Services through the increased number of e-services, digital access to previously physical archives and registries and access to e-signature and legalized digital seals, will reduce

time and travel costs of citizens accessing Government services. It will allow for a faster, more reliable and more secure communication between public institutions including education and health care service providers, as well as local Government units.

Improving user interfaces and public access to performance data through transparency may enhance public trust and satisfaction of citizens in the Government leading to the formation of a nascent social contract around the role of the state in service provision.

The proposed Program will mainstream the latest and most relevant citizen engagement tools and approaches selected from innovations in GovTech and CivicTech, in order to ensure that citizen engagement closes the “accountability loop”. By bringing decision-making about the provision of public goods and services closer to citizens, people, especially the poor, will be able to express their concerns more clearly; the program will also facilitate communication and information flows between policymakers and their constituents, thus fostering improved accountability.

Data Architecture Reforms (RA 3) for alignment of e-Albania with GDPR and the latest version of the EU inter-operability framework (EIF) will ensure protection of peoples’ personal data, thus strengthening citizens' rights and building trust. User privacy mechanisms (RA1) (enhanced authentication through digital ID, digital delivery, face authentication, two-factor authentication, and so on) would provide tools for citizens to gain control of personal data and for improved data privacy.

Potential Social Risks: While there are a range of potential benefits, some risks are also predicted in terms of data protection. Despite the fact that personal data will be used and managed in line with the national law on personal data protection and Policy reform (RA3) to ensure full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation and enhanced authentication (RA1), there are still concerns regarding misuse and leakage of personal data. This judgment is based on insufficiencies on Albanian data privacy and data protection measures, as demonstrated by data leakages via e-Albania in 2021 and a cyber-attack in July 2022. Although there is no overt social conflict anticipated due to the program, any other disclosure of personal data and information leak and data privacy misuse may cause aversion to the government. Data privacy also remains a concern as citizens give their username and passwords for their e-Albania accounts to either service center clerks or third-party kiosks or notaries. The judiciary still has not managed to regain public trust, although compared to 2017, the situation has slightly improved. Failure to implement a transparent process to address any cases of leakage of personal data and non-implementation of relevant sanctions for those responsible for data leakage due to political influence can lead to greater aversion and mistrust of the government. On the other hand, some users may continue to not trust e-Albania to keep their data private in case the standards of privacy and security are not be clearly communicated to the public.

Environmental and Social Impacts Risks Rating: The environmental risks of the project are rated as low to moderate since its potential adverse risks and impacts on human populations and environment are likely to be negligible. There are no civil works of any kind included in the project. The procurement of ICT equipment will generate e-waste which can pose low environmental risks if these waste are not handled in environmentally sound way. The e-waste impacts would be low due to low quantity and long and variable life of each equipment.

The social risks of the project are rated as moderate. The social risks will not pose adverse impacts. The social risks on vulnerable groups with regard to e-services and exclusion are manageable due to the new project design of the project (the Component 2/ Results Area2) and the proposals of the program actions.

Bellow is the table (2.7) summarizing potential social risks and benefits from the program, whereby the section four has summary of the table listing the actions, which are part of the project design and input s to the project , to address the inclusion because of the digital divide and the trust and data protection issue.

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Table 2.3 : Summary of Main Activities and Main Social Risks

Program Results Areas	Key Activities	Potential Social Benefits	Potential Social Risks according to population segments and barriers
<p>RA1: Enhancing E-Service Access and User Experience</p>	<p>E-Albania User-Centric and User Experience (UX) Upgrading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and Periodic Improvement of E-Albania based on evidence-based UX design • New User-Oriented and State-of-the-Art E-Albania Capabilities (Enhanced authentication, Business intelligence and analytical capabilities, monitoring of service delivery, Citizen Feedback Mechanism, CRM software, chatbots, social media, Integration of the Universal Accessibility/Special Needs Features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-Albania portal more easily accessible • Improved services through efficiency gains and reduced opportunities for systematic manipulation • Improved protection of data privacy, gain in citizens’ trust • E-Albania portal more easily accessible • Improved service provision and improved transparency, especially for vulnerable groups. • More responsive management decisions are made and improved decision making • State-citizen dialogue and trust is built • Facilitation of access for disabled • Increased accessibility of services for persons with low education level/ICT skills • Decrease in average actual time taken to deliver digital services • Increased user satisfaction with e-Albania for selected e-services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups with limited Internet access, those not having smart phone/computer and have low digital skills and education level risk being excluded or risk additional expenditures to receive services • Some users may continue not trusting e-Albania to keep their data private; the standards of privacy and security may not be clearly communicated to the public • Concerns about data privacy, as citizens have to give their username and passwords for their e-Albania accounts to either service center clerks or third-party kiosks or notaries who may be irresponsible and not comply with personal data privacy regulations • Employees might not willingly adopt the new system, or certain service providers, who will be subjected to more rigorous monitoring, may oppose its effective implementation. • Adverse impacts on those office employees and field staff who have a low level of IT literacy may not be involved in mainstream tasks but only in more trivial work. • Some users are unaware of their entitlements to provide feedback • Some citizens’ feedback may not be included because data is not collected due to lack of ICT access, limited Internet access or low digital skills

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-Albania ICT Infrastructure Upgrading and Business Continuity • Government Gateway ICT Infrastructure Upgrading • Upgrade and Enchantment of Backend Systems Automation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased efficiency, accessibility, quality, and pro-active services in a reliable manner, even in the face up systems disruptions • Promotion of citizens' trust and increase communication and connectivity security between public sector institutions • Reduce administrative costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups with limited Internet access, those not having smart phone/computer and those with low digital skills and education risk being excluded • Risk to integrity and privacy of the individual and household data being managed by the department or hosted on the State Data Platform. • Departmental unwillingness to implement proactive disclosure
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade and Enhancements of SQDNE • Re-Organization of Selected Digital Services for Life Events and Digital Service Standards • Improved Rationalization and Increased Automation for Pro-Active and Predictive Digital Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved services through efficiency gains and reduced opportunities for systemic manipulation • Increased transparency in relation to performance and quality of E-services • Improved quality of e-services • Reduced time in service provision • Improved quality, efficiency, and security of relevant online services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups with no or limited Internet access, those not having smart phone/computer or those with low digital skills and education risk being excluded • Employees or certain service providers/line ministries might continue to not adopt the new system, as they would be subjected to more rigorous monitoring and thus oppose its effective implementation • Actions not taken to improve e-Albania users' pathways
<p>RA2: Improving Skills and Digital Inclusion</p>	<p>Improved HelpDesk and Omni-Channel Service Delivery System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatbot with Albanian Virtual Assistant • New/Upgraded Electronic Helpdesk System and Contact Center • Youth Innovation Centers • Information, Education and Communications • Outreach Mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased accessibility by targeted vulnerable people (who lack the skills, capacities, and opportunities to easily access digital services (vulnerable groups, addressing gender-divide) • People without ICT access or those needing face-to-face support are served • Increased accessibility of e-services for those who live in remote areas, • Increased opportunities for Youth employment • Improved digital literacy • Awareness raised and services accessed more easily • Remedial actions are taken to address problem services in term of social challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some groups may be excluded as they are unaware of the existence of the new helpdesk/Youth Innovation center • Some groups may not be able to chat with the virtual civil servant due to literacy or educational constraints • Some groups may not have good access to phones/PC or internet connections • Certain poorer or remote geographical areas will not have a Youth Innovation center • Young in rural areas may be excluded from benefits in Youth Innovation centers • Some citizens (especially those vulnerable) still lack adequate information on how to access digital services

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved transparency • More responsive management decisions are made and decision making improved • Increased number of people served by service outreach solution 	
	Education Smart Labs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostics, Development of ICT curricula and digital education content • Design and Roll-Out of customized SmartLabs • Teacher Training • Design and Roll-Out of Monitoring, Evaluation, Support, and Accountability System • Capacity building of the MOES and evidence-based scaling up of SmartLab 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Foundational and Digital Skills of learners benefiting 200 SmartLabs covering all territory of Albania • Essential life skills enhanced (tools to make decisions, solve problems and manage complex tasks) • Improved digital skills of teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow progress in digitalization of education in rural areas could widen the digital divide
	Open and Big Data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Data Readiness Assessment (ODRA) and Increased Open Data Availability and Usage • Data Lake and Data Standards/Inter-Operability • Re-Design and New Functions of the Open Data Portal based on User Experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved availability of high-quality Open Data and increased usage • Increased transparency in service delivery • Data Privacy Protection improved • Interoperability improved and strengthened • Government responsiveness improved • Improved efficiency of e-services at local levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups with no or limited Internet access, those not having smart phone/computer, those who lack the skills, knowledge, and digital literacy/skills to seek information risk being excluded • Information may not be understandable or “user-friendly” for certain groups • Risk of public and administrative officials’ unwillingness to implement proactive disclosure • People may be unaware that the Open Data Portal exists •
Results Area 3: Strengthening Priority GovTech Enablers	Strengthened GovTech Enabling Reforms and Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened provisions on implementing data privacy and protection, accountability, addressing digital divide and ensuring equal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some users are unaware of their entitlements and right to provide their feedback • Risk that feedback is not considered and not integrated into decision-making

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extending Paperless Government (EDRMS) • Data Architecture Reforms • Universal Accessibility Reforms • Open Data 	<p>possibilities in access to modern technologies of each social – demographic group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation process continues to not be organized efficiently • Even with information and feedback received, decision making may not improve
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a Results Monitoring Unit • Technical assistance and Capacity • Communications and Change management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced digital skills/literacy for the sector officials • Awareness raised on e-services • Citizens and businesses navigating more easily e-services • Increased possibilities for citizens and staff to adapt to changes on selected GovTech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain users resist change as they are used to accessing services in physical service windows. • Employees or certain service providers/line ministries might continue to not adopt the new system, as they would be subjected to more rigorous monitoring, and thus oppose its effective implementation

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3. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Introduction

The Program for Results policy requires the proposed program to operate within an appropriate environmental and social management system capable of managing the environmental and social impacts identified during the ESSA process. These include (a) appropriate legal and regulatory and institutional frameworks to guide environmental and social assessment and management of environmental and social impacts, and (b) Sufficient institutional capacity to effectively implement the requirements of the system.

This section assesses whether the program's environmental and social management systems are consistent with the core principles and key planning elements contained in the PforR and whether the involved institutions have the requisite capacity to implement these systems' requirements. Both elements (such as, program system and capacity) are needed to ensure that the environmental and social effects resulting from program activities are managed effectively. The ESSA identified gaps in both areas, conferred in Section V: Contribution to the Program Action Plan.

A *program system* is constituted by rules and "arrangements within the program for managing environmental and social impacts," inclusive of "institutional, organizational, and procedural considerations that are relevant to environmental and social management" and that provide "authority" to the program involved institutions "to achieve the environmental and social objectives against the range of environmental and social impacts that may be associated with the program." The above encompasses the current legislation, the policies, regulations, procedures, implementing guidelines, that are pertinent to the program or to the management of its environmental and social impacts.

The *program capacity* is the "organizational capacity" of the competent authorities/institutions to carry out the environmental and social management actions to effectively achieve "the environmental and social objectives against the range of environmental and social impacts that may be associated with the program." This ESSA, among other things, has examined the capability of such capacity by considering, the following factors:

- a. The competence of human resources (as well as in terms of training and experience), budget, and other implementation resources allocated to the institutions.
- b. The appropriate institutional organization set up and the division of labor among institutions.
- c. Efficiency of inter-agency coordination and provisions wherever multiple agencies or jurisdictions are involved; and
- d. The degree to which the institutions can demonstrate prior experience in efficiently managing environmental and social impacts in the context of projects or programs of similar type and magnitude.

The ESSA reviews and discusses only those aspects of the proposed program's environmental and social management systems and the related competencies that the ESSA team considers relevant based on the identified environmental and social impacts.

3.1. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM'S ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Assessment of Key Environmental Management Capacity and Performance in Albania

The Constitution of Republic of Albania provides the legal foundation for the environmental protection. "The State aims at a healthy and sustainable ecological environment for the present and future generations, and the rational utilization of natural resources on the basis of the principle of sustainable development," is emphasized in Article 59 of the Constitution, and the aim is to ensure:

- a. A healthy and environmentally sustainable environment for present and future generations
- b. A Rational use of forests, waters, pastures, and other natural resources based on the principle of sustainable development

The national environmental legislation is under an intensive transposition phase through the inclusion of the EU Environmental Directives. The key principles of EU on the environment, are already transposed into Albanian legislation. The legislation also reflects the requirements of the conventions to which Albania is a signatory party.

Environmental Management System

Environmental Institutional framework

The highest authority on Environmental Protection and Management in Albania is the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE). The MTE is a public institution responsible for Tourism Development, formulation and implementation of policies related with environment, nature protection, waste management, environmental monitoring, forests, water quality, protected areas and so on. It is under this Ministry that related agencies such as the National Environmental Agency, the National Agency for Protected Areas, National Agency for Tourism, the Coastal National Agency, and the National Agency of Forests are operating. Under the National Environmental Agency there are 4 Regional Environmental Agencies operating, and that are responsible for the Environmental Administration of 12 Albanian Prefectures/municipalities.

Each of the Prefectures has the obligation and is responsible for the Solid Waste Management. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy is the highest national body, responsible for territorial planning and waste infrastructure, policies and their management, that are technically supported by the National Agency for Water Supply-Sewerage and Waste Infrastructure (AKUM), in accordance to the legislation and policies of the Government set out sector strategies. According to the Minister's Order No. 88, date 24.02.2020, on "Adoption of Regulations for Organization and Functioning of AKUM", and Decision No. 431, date 11.07.2018, the Council of Ministers of Albania, AKUM, through its legal and technical authority, coordinates and monitors all the sectorial activities of water supply and sewerage, wastewater treatment, territorial planning, and waste infrastructure, in cooperation with all institutions of the country at the central and local level. AKUM technically supports the implementation of policies and strategies in the field of water supply and sewerage, wastewater treatment, territorial planning and waste infrastructure.

Environmental Regulatory Framework

In general terms, the Albanian Constitution that was adopted by Albanian Parliament in 1998 requires institutions to maintain a healthy environment, ecologically suitable for present and future generations. In the last decade and especially since 2001, number of laws and other legal acts on the environment have been drafted and approved. The Albania national legal framework is largely harmonized with EU

legislation. The Albanian legal framework regarding environmental and socioeconomic issues is based on the Constitution of the Republic of Albania and consists of laws and regulatory acts, such as Decisions of the Council of Ministers (DCM), ministerial acts, regulations, guidelines and standards.

The main legislature/regulations relevant to this ESSA, in general, are aligned with the EU environmental directives and standards, and are summarized in the following table.

General information on the management of e-waste

There are no data on the amount of e-waste recycled or reused in Albania because municipalities and private entities do not regularly report to NEA. Management objectives on e-waste are included in the Solid Waste Management Strategy and other related sectorial strategies. So far, based on the licenses issued by NEA (License, III.2.B “For collection, transferring, saving/storing, recycling, treatment or extermination of different waste”, for the Codes that include/cover electronic waste (According to the waste catalog) there are 9 entities in Albania that operate with e-waste. These companies operate with governmental institutions at the national and local level, and less with private entities, which generate e-waste. Some of the Governmental Institutions, for example AKSHI, donate their electronic equipment (when these should be replaced by new ones) to other interested subjects, that have no such strict requirement on updating of electronic facilities.

The municipalities and local authorities are the entities responsible for the management of municipal solid waste. However, in the sites for the disposal of urban waste, there are no separate cans/bins or places for e-waste. Thus, the citizens, in most cases dispose of the e-waste (ex. Out of use computers), close to such sites, and individuals dealing privately with waste collection/scavengers, take these and sell/deliver them to recycling companies. Waste, thrown in cans, which is not collected from individuals, is mixed with other municipal waste and discharged at solid waste disposal sites, incinerators, and so on. Another selection of the e-waste happens in the waste disposal site from the individual waste collectors/scavengers who collect the e-waste from disposal sites, transport it, and sell the same to e-waste recycling companies. Most of these individuals are not trained in safety, and they do not wear, for example, appropriate protective clothes for this job. Some shops, mainly in the cities, are dealing with trade of used desktops, laptops, mobiles, iPads, and so on, and with repairing such damaged devices. Those are some points which serve for e-waste reuse.

Expected effects by the increase of the amount of e-waste during the program implementation.

The Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018, indicates that 96,9 percent of Albanian citizens, possess a mobile phone and 44.4 percent of citizens possess a computer (Desktop or Laptop). Hence, it looks that the implementation the program will not significantly increase the amount of e-waste. There are likely environmental risks associated with e-waste generation if such waste is not handled and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner. E-waste would be generated at the start of the program when already existing redundant ICT equipment will be replaced with advanced ICT equipment, and at the end of the use of the new ICT equipment procured for the implementing departments engaged in this program. Though the environmental impact would be insignificant based upon the expected small quantity of ICT equipment but still such e-waste would need to be managed in an environmentally sound manner.

Expected effects by the Increase of energy consumption

The increase in energy consumption can be accounted as another negative impact of the program development. This increase will occur by use of the electronic equipment for digital communication, in Albanian families and institutions. The Albanian citizens are massively using the electronic equipment, prior to the start of the digital communication agenda. Therefore, it is not expected to be a major increase

in energy consumption by the implementation of program for Digital communication. The impact by the program development related to this indicator, seems to be insignificant. This impact is considered as negligible and will not be considered at the Chapter of the Environmental Action Plan, of this ESSA.

According to the above analyses, it results that the environmental effects of the Program Implementation will be low and negligible.

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Table 3. 1 : Summary of Environmental Management Framework related to impacts considered in the ESSA

Institutional Framework	Description and Relation to PforR
Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE)	The Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) is a public institution responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies related to the environment, nature protection, waste management, environmental monitoring, forest, water quality, protected area and so on Four national bodies operate under the Ministry as National Agencies, respectively: the National Tourism Agency (AKT); the National Coastline Agency; the National Agency of Protected Areas (AKZM); and the National Environment Agency (NEA), with its Regional Environmental Directorates.
National Environmental Agency and Regional Environmental Agencies	The National Environment Agency is a central public institution under the MoTE, which exercises its jurisdiction throughout the territory of the Republic of Albania, through the NEA head office and regional branches in the regions, which are the Regional Environmental Directorates. NEA and regional authorities give their opinion on Environmental Permits/Declaration, evaluate the EIAs for the activities, or initiatives that require Environmental Permit/Declarations. For issuing the Environmental Permit NEA undertake the consultation of the proposed initiatives with related national or regional authorities (for example, the Ministry of Public health, Universities, research institutions, NGOs, and so on) and organize the public hearings when this is required.
Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy	The Ministry is responsible for territorial planning and infrastructure of urban waste, and coordinates politics on waste infrastructure, their implementation, including management, administration, supervising and technical standards of the infrastructure of solid waste disposal sites, which are supported by Agency for Water Supply and Sewerage and Waste Infrastructure (AKUM).
All Regional authorities	Regional authorities that administrate Albanian Municipalities and related local administration. NEA regional authorities give permits for development or construction and activities that don't require Environmental or Territorial permits. Such Municipalities administrate their own solid waste, with the assistance of the AKUM.
National Agency for Territorial Planning	AKPT is an institution subordinate to the Ministry of Urban Development and has coordinating and supporting functions for planning authorities of every level and follows the progress of the process of drafting territorial planning instruments. It also examines the compliance of the request for development or the implementation of development with the mandatory provisions of planning instruments, building regulations, environmental conditions, sustainability, protection of natural and cultural heritage and other specific conditions defined under the Law on Planning and Territory.
Ministry of Education and Sports	MESY drafts and follows up the implementation of educational national strategies of the legal drafts for education, the issue of bylaw acts, plans the budget, as well as cooperates with the basic units of the local governance. The MESY sets the curricula, administrative and infrastructure standards, and drafts the policies of professional development. MESY will give permits for using and updating spaces in the schools that will be used as helpdesk.
The Electronic and Postal Communications Authority (AKEP)	Is the regulatory body in the electronic communications and postal services field, which among others supervises the regulatory framework provided for, in the law on electronic communications. Responsible for covering all Albanian Republic Territory with internet and define if the program implementation will require installing of additional digital antenna.

Legislation Framework	Focus
The Law on Environmental Protection”, no. 10 431, dated 09.06.2011	The Law on Environmental Protection establishes national and local policies on environmental protection, requirements for the preparation of environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments, requirements for permitting activities that affect the environment, prevention and reduction of environmental pollution, environmental norms and standards, environmental monitoring and control, duties of the state bodies in relation to environmental issues, the role of the public, and sanctions imposed for violation of the Law.
Law no.12/2015 for some changes on the Law no.10440 “Environment Impact Assessment” (2011)	All projects associated with potential impacts on the environment, shall be subjected to an EIA prior to starting the implementation. The EIA report and other necessary documents will be submitted to the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) who will transfer the project files to the NEA for review. The project shall be approved with Environmental Decision/ Declaration of the NEA and MoTE. The procedure of EIA is detailed in the DCM No. 686 dated 29.07.2015 “On the rules, responsibilities, timelines for the EIA procedure and the transfer procedure of the decision for the environmental declaration” amended. This Law lays out the framework for the requirements, responsibilities, rules, and procedures for the evaluation of the negative environmental impacts, which may be caused by e-waste generation, in case of construction/renovation of buildings for helpdesks or installing of additional Digital Antenna, and so on. The two annexes of this law describe the types of activities that are classified in Preliminary EIA and Profound EIA.
Law No. 52. 2020, “For some changes in the law No. 10 448, of 2011 on Environmental Permit”	The Law No. 10448, dated 14.07.2011, “On Environmental Permits”, gives rules and procedures related to the EIA process, categorization and permits. Describes the types of Environmental Permits, defines the competent authority for verification of each type of license, provides consultation procedures, and so on. The Law also describes the required documentation needed to be delivered in the Nacional Centre of Licensing for the request of an Environmental Permit in respect with all EIA categories is also shown in the Law. The law categorizes activities in terms of issues, discharges, and risks into three classes: A, B, and C. Regarding impact significance, the Law defines three level of Environmental Permit: a) Permit of Type A, obligatory for activities listed in category A (annex 1/A of this Law); b) Permit of Type B, obligatory for activities listed in category B (annex 1/B of this Law); c) Permit of Type C, obligatory for activities listed in category C (annex 1/C of this Law);
DCM No. 418, date 27.05.2020 on “Approval of the Document of Strategic Policies and National Plan for Integrated Management of Waste for 2020-2035	The DCM is based on Environmental Protection Law, mentioned above, as well as on Act 11, of Law no. 10463, date 22.09.2011, on “Integrated Management of Waste”. The DCM categorize the waste hierarchy, defines National Sectorial, Regional, and local plans and responsibilities, for waste management, and Institutional and legal framework of integrated waste management, toring, and inspection agencies, and so on. The DCM, define the NEA, as responsible for inspection and monitoring of solid waste management. Gives the obligation of the Regional/Local governments for supervising and reporting of the implementation of waste management actions. Define the Responsibility and structure of the Committee for Integrated Management of Waste and the obligations of AKUM for waste infrastructure and spatial management.
DCM No. 957, date 19.12.2012, on “Waste from electric and electronic equipment”	This DCM among others, defines what are considered e-waste, the responsibilities of governmental institutions, the responsibilities, obligation of e-waste generators, and so on. The DCM classifies the e-waste, obligation of e-waste generators, the obligation of municipalities for e-waste temporary disposal, their

	management and financial obligations, registration, and monitoring of e-waste management, and so on.
Law No. 8216, date 13.05.1997, on Albanian adherence in Basel Convention for “Controlling Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Waste and their Disposal”	This Law in respect of Basel Convention defines hazardous waste, which may be object to transboundary movements and obligations of Albania in respect of the Convention. Parts of e-e are considered as hazardous as described in the Chapter on the Environmental effects of e-waste on this ESSA.
Law No. 10463, dated in 22.09.2011, on “Integrated Management of Waste”	According to the article 33 of this Law: 1. The Council of Ministers encourages the design and manufacture of electrical and electronic equipment in ways that take into account and facilitate disassembly and recovery, in particular, the reuse and recycling of waste, component parts and their materials. 2. The Council of Ministers, with the proposal of the minister, approves such requirements, based on which manufacturers are not allowed to give the project or production such features or processes that prevent the reuse of electrical and electronic equipment, if these features specifics do not provide significant advantages, in relation to environmental protection and/or safety requirements. 3. The Council of Ministers, with the proposal of the minister and the minister responsible for the economy, approves requirements for the prevention of electrical and electronic waste, reuse, recycling and other forms of recovery of this type of waste, in order to reduce the waste intended for was annihilated.
DCM No. 99, date 18.02.2005, on “Approval of National Catalog of Waste”	The catalog is fully compiled in respect of “EU Catalog of Waste”. The catalog has 4 annexes where is defined the waste classification, characteristics of hazardous waste, the nature and characteristics of activities that generate waste, compounds/elements included in waste, and so on. In this DCM are given conditions for subjects that deal with e-waste and codes according to a waste catalog
Minister order No. 88, date 24.02.2020, on Approval of Regulations for Organization and Functioning of AKUM	This Order gives to the AKUM the responsibility for planning of waste infrastructure and management.
Law No. 9863/2008 health and safety	The State Sanitary Inspectorate aims to protect workers from the impacts of adverse working conditions, such as exposure to toxic substances, radiation, unworkable noise, vibrations, unfavorable microclimate, and controls the level of occupational diseases and accidents as a result of adverse conditions
Law No. 10237/2010 (18/02/2010); health and safety	“On Safety and Health at Work” - This law regulates the framework of health and safety in the workplace and determines the roles of each party subject to the law.
DCM No 312, date 5.05.2010, on the Approval of the Regulation on “Site safety”	The DCM define minimal requirements of health and safety of workers on the site, and general measures for inspection of safety and health conditions. The DCM gives general rules on safety and health of workers, that should also orient the workers in e-waste recycling, selection and so on, as well as the ways to inspect workers health.
DCM No. 842/2014 (3/12/2014)	For the health and safety and protection of the employee from noise risks in the working places” requires the employer to assess the noise levels at the working place and ensure the protection of its workers

Capacity and Performance

It can be said that the legal/Institutional framework and strategies are running better in comparison to their effective implementation. The national institutions at the satisfied level are covering the requirements of the legislation. The weak points are the regional institutions (municipalities) and their collaboration with the central government. As mentioned above, in inhabited areas, there are no defined spaces/sites or containers/cans for disposing of e-waste, and those are mixed with paper, glass, plastic, and other waste. There is no formal weight/measurement of the different municipal solid waste. Thus, from this point, it is difficult to have the exact data on e-waste generated. The collaboration of AKSHI with MoTE and NEA to prepare the SOP will help on e-waste management.

Also, the good cooperation of local and national level agencies and institutions will have an good impact on program effectiveness.

Risk Assessment

In terms of program systems and capacity, the major findings indicate that current regulations at both local and national levels lack specific provisions pertinent to e-waste management. In Albanian waste catalog, there is no specific reference/code for e-waste, rather different hazardous chemicals and heavy metals are mentioned which can be part of the e-waste or released during dismantling, burning, chemical processing or disposal on the land. Enforcement of these provisions is weak in the country, and this is due to lack of enforcement infrastructure and resources. There are few certified e-waste recycling facilities and recyclers in Albania, therefore the program implementing departments will need good collaboration to be able to deliver their e-waste to such recyclers or to such facilities with the confirmation/collaboration with MoTE, NEA, and all agencies, municipalities.

The strengthening of the Regional/local authorities regarding the solid waste management/reporting and the improvement of their coordination with the national authorities in the implementation process, including a category for e-waste in the National Catalogue of waste, will benefit for the e-waste management.

3.2. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM SOCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

This section summarizes the assessment of the Program's social management system. It presents Program's social context and outlines its potential social effects. It then assesses the social management system's capacity and planned Program activities to manage relevant social issues. As per the Bank's PforR Financing policy the Program will not fund any activities involving high social risks.

In line with the policy, two core principles are most relevant for the GovTech Program in Albania from social aspect: Core Principle 1; Core Principle 5; whereby Core Principle 6 is not relevant given that the potential resistance to change to provision of services in electronic form cannot lead to social conflict as the resistance is mostly related to digital divide.

- CP 1. Program E&S management systems are designed to (a) promote E&S sustainability in the Program design; (b) avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts; and (c) promote informed decision-making relating to a Program's E&S effects. The legal and regulatory framework for the PforR implementation is adequate and largely conducive to address the types of social issues likely to emerge from the Program's activities, however some improvements are needed. Activities

proposed under Result Area 3 of the program are of the nature for adoption of key policies/regulations with the aim to put in place enable conditions for the activities results under RA1 and RA2 and are not expected to carry any social risk. Some additional technical assistance, capacity building and change management for the public sector and service users will ensure effective uptake of these GovTech innovations, likely to address some of the social capacity gaps.

- CP 5. The importance of giving due consideration to the cultural appropriateness of and equitable access to, Program benefits, giving special attention to the needs or concerns of vulnerable groups. The activities proposed under the Result Area 2 of the Program aim to support reducing the digital divide in service delivery and ensuring universal access, for all citizens and businesses. However, still exist the risk for exclusion of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including: persons from rural or high mountainous regions, , persons with disabilities (PWDs), children with disabilities (CWDs) and/or with other special education needs, ethnic minorities especially Roma, the elderly, women and girls, youth who are not in education, those without internet/device connections, the poor, especially those persons who have lower education levels and those living below the poverty line, older employees who tend to be less well-versed in the use of technology.

The social assessment has revealed a number of social effects, challenges, and risks that can be separated into two overlapping themes:

- *Equity and universal access*: the extent to which Program benefits and dissemination of information are likely to be shared equitably and by targeted vulnerable groups.
- *Quality*: the extent to which Program benefits are likely to be shared in a high standard quality (reduced time to obtain service and easily understood by users, dissemination of information is shared effectively and in a culturally appropriate manner, and data privacy protection and transparency is improved. Transparency is seen as a means to an end for improved service quality and improved accountability).

3.2.1 Social Context

Program activities for supporting a GovTech will be focused on: providing high-quality, efficient, user-centric, and universally accessible digitally- enabled public services to ensure that all user groups, especially the more vulnerable, have access high quality services; catalyzing innovation and digital literacy for public sector and the population; and, increasing transparency across government, so that transparency in service delivery is improved and also the trust of citizens in the government is strengthened. Therefore, the overall impact of Program-supported activities is expected to be beneficial. The GovTech Program in Albania will be implemented in a broader social context with a number of complex and interrelated dynamics; thus, statistics data on main social indicators mentioned below are important to monitor and identify social system and to consider while recommending actions alter the course of social development challenges. The social context is presented bellow in the chapter through sections on Social Delivery; Quality of e-services through perceptions of the citizens; Selected Social Indicators; More on poor, vulnerable and excluded; Gender and Geographic Disparities; and Social dimensions in ICT

Service Delivery

Albania made progress in improving public sector efficiency and public service delivery through the modernization and digitalization of the public sector and public services. The e-Albania portal was launched in 2012, to facilitate integrated online service delivery. The portal currently provides access for around 2.6

million registered users (2,409,493 individuals and 208,002 businesses) for more than 1,225 e-services³. The Prime Minister's Order No. 158 of November 25, 2019, mandated that, as of January 1, 2020, applications to all services had to be done online via e-Albania. In 2022, the GoA also continued with the implementation of the PM order to close down all front offices by April 30, including the CSCs, to encourage users to apply "online only" and to reduce the incidence of corruption. As of April-June 2022, the provision of public services, that used to be delivered physically and through the platform e-Albania, are being provided only via the platform and it requires digital identification. As such, users can currently access these services (i) by themselves, directly in e-Albania, (ii) by contacting free the number 0800 0118 or the chat on ADISA website, for information only (<https://www.adisa.gov.al/>), (iii) or by paying a third party, such as a notary, lawyer or office supply and print stores.

Quality of e-services according to citizens perceptions

Albania's progress on the digital transformation of public service delivery has been recognized internationally. The WB GovTech Maturity Index (GTMI) categorizes Albania within Group A (the first most advanced of four groups) and the country's example was highlighted among the 22 good practice cases globally.⁴

There are different statistics data on perception of population regarding the accessibility and satisfaction with digital public services. The European Policy Center 2020 report on citizens' perception on service delivery shows improvements since before 2020, in terms of ease for accessing services and reduce time⁵.

According to Sigma Monitoring Report 2021, perceived satisfaction with public service delivery throughout Albania is the weakest aspect of service delivery, with 35% of the respondents (including respondents who have been in contact with government services) reporting they were mostly or very satisfied. Perceived accessibility to digital public services throughout the population is 53 %. Finally, perceived time and cost of accessing public services by citizens was rated as good or very good respectively by 74% and 72% of respondents.

Meanwhile, data published by InStat on the Survey on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) usage in Households and by Individuals in 2021 indicates that 97.5 percent of individuals that have interacted with public authorities through internet are satisfied with the services offered on the internet.

In addition, a survey conducted by the Minister of State for Standards and Services (MSSS) (2021) showed that only 50 percent of the existing service standards meet the criteria established by the Ministry. Also, in 2020 fewer citizens (35 percent) reported that they were asked for feedback on administrative services, compared to 2017 (43 percent).

The data indicates that quality and access to digital public services remains uneven throughout the country. Socio- economic and spatial inequalities in access to services are affecting the less well-off and vulnerable population sub-groups, such as rural residents, women, elderly, person with disabilities and the Roma population.

³ AKSHI data as of June 8, 2022

⁴ [GovTech Maturity Index: The State of Public Sector Digital Transformation](#) and [2020 GovTech Dataset](#).

⁵ 63 percent of Albanian citizens perceive that dealing with public administration has become easier; 62 percent of Albanians consider that the time needed to obtain administrative services has decreased; 62 percent of Albanians find that there have been efforts by governments to make administrative procedures simpler for citizens and businesses;

However, it should be noted that there has been good progress on the complaint mechanism's management of grievances. Over the last four and a half years, the co-governance platform has tackled a total of 153,469 problems and complaints filed by citizens over the public services, by providing real-time replies and by providing final solution to more than 61 percent of complaints. The System of Circulating the Documents bearing e-Signature has helped public institutions, the citizens, and businesses in their daily work⁶.

Selected Social Indicators

The population of Albania on 1 January 2022 was 2,793,592 inhabitants: female population being 50.3 percent of the total population⁷. The age group 60-85+ years are 22.6 percent, while the young population 0-14 years accounts 16.6 percent. In 2011, the population living in rural areas was estimated as 46.5 percent⁸ of the total population, while in 2020 rural population is 38 percent, and this is due to high emigration and internal migration towards urban areas. About 21.8 percent of population⁹ in Albania lives with household income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

Only 51.2 percent, of the population aged 15 and over in Albania, completed primary and lower secondary school, whereas 27.9 percent of the same population completed upper secondary school and 9.7 percent have completed university. According to the latest data, 44,114 people in 2018 aged 15 and over are illiterate, 59.6 percent of them are women. While, dividing this data (the illiterate group) by the age group, the elderly population (age 65+) counts 59.6 percent and the young population 7 percent¹⁰. Despite the fact that the education is compulsory until the age of 16, poverty and distance from school are the main reasons why children drop out of school before the end of the 9th grade (age 14-15). Illiteracy is most prevalent in the Roma community and among those with disabilities. The following table shows data on participation in education level for 2020-2021.

Table 3. 2.1 : Gross enrolment ratio (GER) 2020-2021

Participation in education by education level /gross enrolment ratio (GER) 2020-2021			Gender Parity Index (on ratio of female to male enrollment ratio for education)
Education level	Boys	Girls	
Pre-primary	78.5	75.2	
Primary + lower secondary	99.9	94.2	0.94
Upper secondary	96.8	90.1	0.93
Tertiary	46.7	71.9	1.54

Source; InStat, the Report Albania in Figures, 2020

The Poor, Vulnerable, and Excluded

In Albania, about 43.4 percent of individuals are at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion, which refers to the individuals who are at risk of poverty or severely materially deprived.

According to the data of Survey on Income and Living Condition, in 2020, the inequality in income distribution was at the level of 33.2 percent. Meanwhile, monthly mean disposable income per capita was

⁶ <https://kryeministria.al/en/monitorimi-i-sherbimeve-online/>

⁷ Press release, InStat, Tirane, on 15th April 2022: http://www.instat.gov.al/media/9829/population-on-1-january-2022_final-15-04-2022.pdf

⁸ Census 2011, InStat and World Bank data on rural population Albania

⁹ Survey on Income and Living Condition, Press release, InStat Tirane 22/12/2021

¹⁰ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/al>, <https://knoema.com/atlas/Albania>.

ALL30,169 (about EUR247). According to this data and those of Eurostat, Albania ranks among the first Balkan countries at risk of poverty. Poverty is related to a variety of causes, including labor market situation (unemployment and inactivity), age structure of the population, geographical position, ethnicity, level of education and other factors¹¹. Population groups that face the highest risk of poverty are the unemployed persons, people with low education achievements, persons living in the rural and remote areas, and persons who use farming for personal needs. People who are working could also potentially be poor if they are working for small wages. There are considerable gaps between people living in urban and rural areas, between those living in the north and those in the rest of the country, and particularly between Roma/Egyptians and the rest of the population. Girls and women also have a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion (22.3 percent of women versus 21.4 percent of men) which come as result of gender inequalities in terms of wage (as women are paid less than men), discrimination, and women participation in formal labor market (they spend more time providing unpaid work). Poverty, insufficient social policies, inefficient targeting of poor households as well as inadequate implementation of laws are among the main factors contributing to social exclusion.

Law no. 7995, article 2/20 dated 20.9.1995, as amended in 2019 'On Promoting Employment' and DCM no. 56, dated 31.1.2018 'On the Definition of Concrete Categories of Disadvantaged Groups'¹² give a wide range of categories of disadvantaged groups. But, according to various studies, the most vulnerable groups in Albania are children in need, women (especially those living in rural areas), disabled (mentally/or physically) people, unemployed persons; pensioners and elderly people; Roma and Egyptians; and, people living below the poverty line. In the context of the Program, within the above-mentioned vulnerable groups and according to the DCM no.56 there are also: persons who have not attended compulsory education and are illiterate; individuals living in rural and remote areas; and those with low digital skills. All the aforementioned categories of vulnerable groups may face difficulties to benefit from the program's digital public services for the following reasons: they have weak internet access; low mobile internet use; low education level; low digital literacy; the costs of internet/mobile internet are high; a lack of resources; and, low access to adapted information channels so that people may be able to obtain information in a form that can be used by elderly (such as adequate language).

According to the last Census data, Roma population accounts for 0.30 percent of the total population in Albania and Egyptian population accounts for 0.12 percent. The tables below show the number of beneficiaries of age pensions and beneficiaries of disability payments and economic aid disaggregated by prefecture in Albania. In 2020, the prefecture with most beneficiaries of pensions per 1000 inhabitants

¹¹ National Strategy on Social Protection 2015-2020

¹² According to the law 7995/1995 as amended in 2019 and DCM no. 56/2018, disadvantaged groups in Albania are considered the following categories; Beneficiaries of economic assistance and disability in active working age; Persons who have not attended compulsory education; The self-employed or family farm workers in agriculture, who are exposed to unsafe and unstable work; persons living in rural areas without land, who face many difficulties for providing livelihood means; Individuals up to 24 years of age or persons who have completed higher education studies of not more than two years and have not started a job; Migrant workers who relocate or have been internally displaced; persons belonging to national minorities (Roma and Egyptian communities); Any head of household who lives alone or is single, who has at least one child in his care, Mothers with many children; Persons aged over 55 years; Long-term unemployed jobseekers; Women living in rural areas, where the average unemployment rate exceeds 50% of the national average for at least two calendar years and where female unemployment is above 150% of the average male unemployment rate for at least two of the last three calendar years; Refugees and asylum seekers; Family below to the poverty line of Albania; Victims of trafficking; Girls/mothers unemployed; Divorced women with social problems; Former-prisoners; Juveniles and young people in conflict with the law; victims of trafficking, victims of gender-based and domestic violence; mothers under 18 years of age; Persons with protection; Stateless persons; Homeless people; Persons with different gender identities and different sexual orientations;

was Gjirokastrer with 441 beneficiaries, while the prefecture with the lowest number of beneficiaries was Tiranë with 179 beneficiaries for one thousand inhabitants.

Table 3.3 : Number of beneficiaries of old pensions and beneficiaries of disability payments/economic aid in Albania, disaggregated by prefecture 2020

Prefecture	Number of beneficiary households of economic aid	Beneficiary households by type, in %			
		Households with persons with disabilities	Households with persons of Rom nationality	Households with female head of household	Other households
Berat	1,743	13	4	12	72
Dibër	10,444	10	0	9	81
Durrës	755	21	6	16	58
Elbasan	16,107	18	2	10	70
Fier	2,211	9	7	12	72
Gjirokastrër	919	9	5	5	82
Korçë	8,415	13	7	11	69
Kukës	8,320	8	0	8	84
Lezhë	2,683	14	3	11	72
Shkodër	4,443	16	1	15	68
Tiranë	3,346	15	6	15	64
Vlorë	2,058	9	3	22	66
Albania	61,445	13	3	11	73

Average numbers of beneficiary households of economic aid by type of household and prefecture, 2020

Prefecture	Old age pensions		
	Urban	Rural	Total
Berat	23,810	6,757	30,567
Dibër	12,203	6,095	18,298
Durrës	40,140	8,018	48,158
Elbasan	34,684	12,588	47,272
Fier	49,933	14,390	64,323
Gjirokastrër	17,844	4,680	22,524
Korçë	41,346	9,684	51,030
Kukës	7,852	3,225	11,077
Lezhë	17,227	5,138	22,365
Shkodër	32,405	9,456	41,861
Tiranë	119,298	15,046	134,344
Vlorë	43,464	8,674	52,138
Albania	440,206	103,751	543,957

Urban and rural old age pension by prefecture, 2020

Source; Regional Statistical Yearbook 2021, InStat. Beneficiaries of economic aid by type include: Orphans out of institutions; Mothers who have born more than two children; simultaneously Victims of violence or trafficking; Children in custody service. Beneficiaries of disability payments include the following category of disability beneficiaries; Blind; Paraplegics, tetraplegics; Mental and physical inability

Gender Disparities

Despite the effort to address gender inequality in Albania, the Gender Inequality Index during 2020 scored 0.06¹³, indicating that still higher effort is needed to achieve full gender equality. The picture revealed by the Gender Equality Index indicates uneven achievements in key areas (work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health). Women are less likely to participate in the labor market (women participation rate in 2020 was 61.2 percent), mostly due to household responsibilities (household chores and child-care). 18.8 percent of women are busy with unpaid work at home or 20.9 percent are attending school. The structure of employees shows that 43.3 percent of women in the labor force are employed in paid positions while 22.8 percent of them engage in unpaid work in the family business. There is a gender gap in terms of wages between women and men of 6.6 percent, which means men have average monthly gross wage of 6.6 percent higher than women. In the domain of politics, there is a high participation rate of women, as shown in the following table.

Table 3.4 : Gender Inequality Index 2020

Gender Inequality Index	Maternal mortality ratio (Deaths per 100,000 live births)	Adolescent birth rate per 1.000 females	Parliamentary representation	Attainment at secondary and higher education	Labor market participation rate

¹³ <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/8713/burra-dhe-gra.pdf>

Men			70.5	0.9	0.67
Women	3,60	3,60	29,51	0,94	0,52
Gender Inequality Index			0,06		

Source: Women and Men in Albania 2021

Geographical Disparities

The socio-economic situation of Albania differs according to the prefectures. There are differences between prefectures in terms of main indicators of development, such as: GDP per capita, consumer spending per capita, inequalities in wealth distribution, in education, in internet connection, in primary care with doctors and nurses. Differences exist also between rural and urban areas. Availability and quality of rural infrastructure and basic services are still significantly lower in rural areas, and especially in remote and mountainous areas, which suffer from unstable electricity supply, lack of access to drinking water, road, and internet network.

The following paragraphs and tables show disparities on some of the main development indicators.

The highest level of GDP per capita, was in the Statistical Region Center¹⁴ for 2019. GDP per capita for this region is 20.10 percent above the national average. GDP per capita for North region is 18.78 percent, while for South region is 9.61 percent, for both regions is below the national average. Regarding the consumption expenditures at the prefecture level, it is almost the same trend as per the GDP per capita, the highest value is recorded in Prefecture of Tirana (Region Center) and the lowest value are registered in Kukes and Diber Prefecture (North Region).

¹⁴ Statistical regions in Albania are defined according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). Albania is currently divided into 3 macro regions (North, Center, South), and into 12 regions corresponding to the NUTS 3 level (please see fig X. GDP per capita by Statistical Region). The 12 regions under level 3 are the prefectures. The 3 macro regions are aggregates of prefectures based on geographic criteria.

Table 3. 5 : Monthly consumption expenditures by prefectures and GDP per capita by Statistical Region

Prefecture	Year			Code	Statistical Level 2/3	GDP per capita (ALL)	GDP per capita (ALL)
	2018	2019	2020				
Berat	72,597	74,183	76,248	AL	Republic of Albania	571,011	592,717
Dibër	60,380	67,805	71,135	AL01	North	461,583	481,402
Durrës	77,645	76,418	76,554	AL011	Dibër	434,333	434,068
Elbasan	65,889	68,903	73,719	AL012	Durrës	560,172	593,219
Fier	72,942	79,620	79,839	AL013	Kukës	362,850	359,447
Gjirokastrë	68,201	72,923	76,025	AL014	Lezhë	404,529	427,164
Korçë	76,125	82,224	83,160	AL015	Shkodër	410,005	427,185
Kukës	67,817	69,763	70,252	AL02	Center	692,197	711,835
Lezhë	74,796	75,978	76,827	AL021	Elbasan	398,818	412,375
Shkodër	75,802	76,295	77,261	AL022	Tiranë	783,474	802,447
Tiranë	90,531	98,402	98,737	AL03	South	512,178	535,744
Vlorë	70,477	70,091	72,428	AL031	Berat	463,561	470,301
Albania	77,864	82,235	83,475	AL032	Fier	601,683	640,762
				AL033	Gjirokastrë	571,991	617,526
				AL034	Korçë	420,198	441,635
				AL035	Vlorë	486,367	492,758

Table 0.1 Average monthly consumption expenditures by prefectures, 2018-2020

Table 0.2 GDP per capita by Statistical Region (Albanian Average = 593 thousands ALL)

Source: Regional Statistical Yearbook 2021, InStat

The highest values of GDP and expenditures in the country are recorded in regions where the education rate of households is high and where the percentage of population in the higher quintile of wealth (assets) is higher. The highest values of expenditures in 2020 are recorded in the category with university/post-university education in the prefectures of Shkoder and Tirane.

The uneven distribution of wealth varies markedly across prefectures, the lowest value (0.26) is also noticed in Diber (North region)¹⁵. The wealth, resources, and economic opportunities tend to concentrate in urban areas, 30 percent of households in urban areas are in the highest wealth quintile, compared with only 5 percent of households in rural areas. Inversely, only 5 percent of households in urban areas are in the lowest quintile, compared with 42 percent of households in rural areas. The following table shows distribution of wealth and Gini coefficient by prefecture and residence.

¹⁵ Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018, page 10. <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/5050/adhs-2017-18-pdf.pdf>

Table 3. 67 : Percentage distribution of the de jure population by wealth quintiles, and the Gini coefficient, according to residence and region, Albania 2017-18

Residence/region	Wealth quintile					Total	Number of persons	Gini coefficient
	Lowest	Second	Middle	Fourth	Highest			
Residence								
Urban	5.0	12.5	24.0	28.4	30.1	100.0	31,058	0.05
Rural	42.2	31.0	14.1	7.6	5.1	100.0	21,069	0.15
Prefecture								
Berat	25.8	23.1	22.1	20.3	8.7	100.0	2,321	0.13
Dibër	58.3	19.8	12.0	7.9	2.0	100.0	2,264	0.26
Durrës	6.0	22.5	34.9	24.1	12.5	100.0	5,170	0.06
Elbasan	41.2	26.1	16.4	12.1	4.2	100.0	5,069	0.19
Fier	22.7	28.9	19.9	16.8	11.7	100.0	5,339	0.16
Gjirokastrër	26.9	16.5	17.7	23.7	15.1	100.0	1,182	0.15
Korçë	29.0	28.9	20.7	17.3	4.1	100.0	4,336	0.16
Kukës	47.0	26.4	17.2	7.6	1.8	100.0	1,422	0.16
Lezhe	29.1	25.9	19.8	14.2	11.1	100.0	2,266	0.16
Shkodër	22.9	22.7	23.1	20.7	10.6	100.0	3,653	0.14
Tirana	5.1	9.7	16.2	24.6	44.4	100.0	15,899	0.12
Vlorë	11.0	19.8	22.4	27.8	19.0	100.0	3,206	0.11
Total	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	100.0	52,128	0.11

Source: Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018, Instat

The differences also exist in relation to access to the education, and this is strongly linked to the economic dimension. Access to education correlates highly with wealth. The proportion of respondents who have more than a secondary education increases markedly with wealth, from 6% in the lowest quintile to 55% in the highest quintile among women, and from 6% in the lowest quintile to 43% in the highest quintile among men. There is considerable regional variation in educational attainment. According to the Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018, the largest proportions of women and men with more than secondary education are in the Region Center, in Tirana (38% of women and 31% of men) and the lowest proportions are in North Region, Prefecture of Diber (12% of women and 9% of men)¹⁶.

Table 3. 8 below shows notable disparities in education attainment between urban and rural areas in Albania. More than 36% of urban women aged 15-49 have more than secondary education, compared with 13% of rural women; among men, these proportions are respectively 27% and 10%. The median number of years of schooling completed among women and men aged 15-49 in 2017-18 was 14.4 and 14.6, respectively.

Table 3. 8: Percent distribution of men and women aged 15-49 by highest level of schooling attended or completed, and median years completed, according to background characteristics, Albania 2017-18

Highest level of schooling							
	No education	Some primary	Completed primary	Some secondary	Completed secondary	More than secondary	Median years Completed
Residence	Women						
Urban	1.1	3.3	24.4	15.1	20.4	35.7	15.4
Rural	0.6	3.9	51.7	17.1	14.1	12.5	8.0
	Men						
Urban	1.1	2.3	24.5	21.3	23.6	27.3	15.2
Rural	1.0	3.8	40.3	25.7	18.6	10.5	12.8

Percentage of the school-age population that attends primary or secondary school according to region and the residence is shown in the following table. The lowest value regarding school attendance in primary

¹⁶ Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018, page 28-29. <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/5050/adhs-2017-18-pdf.pdf>

level are noticed in the North region, Lezhe (88.0 percent) and Kukës (75.9 percent), while for secondary school the lowest values are in Diber (88.0 percent) and Kukës (65.9 percent). The data indicates the correlation between school attendance and wealth indicator.

Table 3. 9: Net attendance ratios (NAR) by the level of schooling; according to background characteristics, Albania 2017-18

Prefectures	Primary school	Secondary school
Berat	95.0	78.4
Diber	92.0	63.8
Durrës	93.7	77.6
Elbasan	94.7	70.8
Fier	91.0	78.3
Gjirokastër	93.3	78.8
Korçë	96.2	85.8
Kukës	75.9	65.9
Lezhe	88.0	84.5
Shkoder	93.7	78.7
Tiranë	92.9	85.2
Vlorë	95.0	81.6
Residence		
Urban	93.4	82.0
Rural	91.4	76.0

Source: Demographic and Health survey 2017-2018.

Disparities also exist in the provision and quality of basic public services. The delivery of education, health, and other services by the private sector is mainly concentrated in the urban areas and differ among regions. Regarding the education prefectures of Shkoder, Fier, Vlorë, Lezhe and Tirane have the highest percentage of private upper secondary education, while in prefectures of Gjirokastër, Elbasan, and Berat, private education represents only a small percentage¹⁷. In Kukës and Diber prefectures, there is no private primary and upper secondary education. Mainly public institutions provide health services. Private health institutions (hospitals) in the country provide services only for urban areas and most of them are concentrated in Tirana Prefecture.

The quality of water supply and sewerage service is not the same between urban and rural areas. Rural areas with a population of less than 2000 do not have sewerage coverage.¹⁸

There is a gap also in relation to internet penetration infrastructure between regions and between urban and rural areas. Only 3.7 percent of rural areas are connected to the internet through fixed internet-broadband penetration. In most rural areas there is no or only one operator, whereas in urban or suburban areas, there is competition between local operators and at least one national operator. There is an absence of investment in rural areas due to low or no profitability.

The mobile penetration rate at the end of 2020 was 70 percent compared with 61.8 percent at the end of 2019¹⁹. Based on regional data for 2020, the regions with the highest urban penetration are Tirana and

¹⁷ Regional Statistical Yearbook 2021, Instat

¹⁸ Albanian Regulatory Authority of the Water Supply and Waste Water Disposal and Treatment Sector, Performance Report 2020

¹⁹ 2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, Albania 2021 Report

Korça with 40.18 percent and 25.55 percent respectively. On the other hand, Durres is the region with the highest rural penetration rate of some 21 percent, followed by Tirana and Shkodra with 10 percent and 8 percent²⁰.

Social Dimensions of ICT

Most of the activities for the GovTech Program in Albania rely on ICT interventions to improve universal access in public service delivery through GovTech, thus consideration of socioeconomic aspects of ICT use in Albania are important. ICT use in Albania has increased, although there is evidence of a “digital divide” that is influenced by geographic location, socioeconomic status, and age-group and gender.

According to data of Instat on ICT in household, about 88.3 percent of Albanian households have access to the internet, compared with 83.3 percent in the previous year. About 78.3 percent or 530,755 households have fixed broadband internet access (optic fiber or cable network, ADSL, and so on), and this indicator is increasing annually. The access through mobile broadband is higher, 99.1 percent of households have internet through mobile broadband connection (3G / 4G, tablet, and so on) compared with 90.7 percent in 2020, which shows fast penetration, annually of the mobile broadband as well

Lack of infrastructure and lack of institutional capacities, but also affordability, for both fixed and mobile broadband access, especially in rural (please refer to the paragraph above on geographical disparities) and low-income areas are the reason of the digital divide. In urban areas there is a wide range of broadband speeds on offer at prices and speed better than the rural areas.²¹ The gap in both broadband and mobile coverage is significant between rural and urban regions. 4G technology is widespread by population, but the quality and speeds remain unsatisfactory in rural areas. Many areas remain largely uncovered outside of urban centers, such as in Gjirokaster (44.2 percent), Korce (35.5 percent) and Berat (36.3 percent).

A study conducted by IDRA shows that 84 percent of 18 - 25-year-old age group respondents have internet access at home, while only 45 percent of over 64 year old age group have internet access. Similarly, 89 percent of respondents under 55 years old have a smartphone, while only 56 percent of respondents over 55 years old have one.

The same IDRA report found that there are significant differences between economic strata. Only 43 percent of the poor strata declare to have internet access at home, a percentage which increases to 70 percent for the middle strata and as much as 90 percent for the rich strata. Having a smartphone appears to be more common, as 59 percent of the poor strata have one, and 95 percent of the rich strata have one. Internet usage is much higher for the rich strata: only 56 percent of the poor strata use the internet from any device, while around 94 percent of the rich strata do the same.

In case of Roma population, 21.5 percent of the respondents have an internet connection at home, and 46 percent of the respondents own a smartphone, as shown in the IDRA report. Both numbers are considerably lower than the Albanian average. Similarly, 44 percent of Roma survey respondents use the

²⁰ Electronic Postal Communications Authority, Annual Report 2020

²¹ National Plan For Sustainable Development Of Digital Infrastructure, Broadband 2020-2025

internet, whether using it at home in their computer, remotely with their smartphone or someplace else offering internet access²².

According to Instat publication, during 2021 about 79.3 percent of individuals aged 16 - 74 years old used the internet²³. Individuals who use the internet more frequently are the young aged 16 - 24 (96.7 percent); meanwhile the percentage of individuals in the age- group 65 - 74 years old who never used internet during 2021 was 51.1 percent. The reason for this figure may be dependent upon ICT literacy. According to the Survey on ICT in households there is also a gender divide in terms of internet usage. During the 2021, 80.3 percent of men and 78.3 percent of women in the age-group 16-74 were internet users. This is not a very high figure in terms of digital divide, however it should be mentioned that still socio-cultural barriers exist.

98.7 percent of individuals who accessed the internet used a mobile phone/smart phone to access it. Meanwhile, 22.8 percent of the population use the Internet via laptop and 8.8 percent via tablet. 98.3 percent make calls / video calls (via Skype, Viber, WhatsApp). Internet usage is lower among the vulnerable groups: 12 percent less among the poor, 7 percent less among women and almost 50 percent less in the age group 45-54 than in the one 15-24²⁴.

Despite being not up-to-date, the following table presents the percentage of households possessing mobile phone and computer, by residence, in 2017-2018.

Table 3. 10: Percentage of households possessing mobile phone and computer, by residence, Albania 2017-2018

Household possession	Urban	Rural	Total
Mobile phone	97.4	96.2	96.9
Computer	54.4	27.8	44.4

Source: Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018), pg. 19, Instat

In terms of private sector enterprise ICT use, survey data from Albania’s Institute of Statistics (“INSTAT”) shows that enterprises that used the computer for work purposes, during 2021, represent 98.5 percent of economic enterprises with 10 or more employed, meanwhile 98.4 percent of enterprises use computers for work purposes with internet access. 27.8 percent employees used the computer for work purpose and 26.2 percent of them used computers with internet access.

²² IDRA Research & Consulting. 2020. Citizen-Centric Service Delivery Model for Albania – Final Assessment. <https://www.adisa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Final-Assesment-Final-Report.pdf>

²³ According to the Survey on Information and Communication Technology in the family, Instat Press release 13/12/2021. * Usage of the internet “in the last three months”. The interview was conducted throughout the year 2021

²⁴ World Bank, Citizen-Centric Service Delivery (CCSD) Project (P151972), PAD1344, p. 19.

3.2.2 Assessment of Key Social Management Capacity and Performance

This section assesses the Program institutions' social management system and their capacity and performance in addressing the social issues discussed in the previous sections. Both elements (such as program systems and capacity) are necessary towards ensuring that the identified social effects are effectively managed. The analysis identifies gaps in both areas and those are addressed in Section 0: Recommended Actions.

A Program system is constituted by the rules and "arrangements within a program for managing social effects," including "institutional, organizational, and procedural considerations that are relevant to environmental and social management". This provide "authority" of institutions involved in the program to achieve environmental and social objectives against the range of environmental and social impacts that may be associated with the program. Social Management System includes existing laws policies, rules, regulations, procedures, implementing guidelines, applicable to the program or the management of its social effects. It also includes inter-agency coordination, arrangements if there are shared implementation responsibilities in practice.

Program capacity is the "organizational capacity" of the institutions authorized to undertake social management actions to achieve effectively "social objectives against the range of environmental and social impacts that may be associated with the program." This ESSA has examined the adequacy of such capacity by considering, among other things, the following factors:

- 1) Adequacy of human resources (including in terms of training and experience), budget, and other implementation resources allocated to the institutions.
- 2) The adequacy of institutional organization and the division of labor among institutions.
- 3) Effectiveness of interagency coordination arrangements where multiple agencies or jurisdictions are involved; and
- 4) The degree to which the institutions can demonstrate prior experience in effectively managing social effects in the context of projects or programs of similar type and magnitude.

It is the Borrower responsibility to implement the recommended actions and ensure compliance with the Social Management System.

Social Management System

Social Regulatory Framework This section provides a summary of the main relevant laws, regulations, national policies which are applicable to address the types of social issues in relation to the activities proposed for each of the PforR result areas, mainly focused on; freedom and rights, social inclusion; public consultation and information, education, employment, public service delivery, transparency and accountability and personal data protection.

Personal, economic, social, and cultural freedoms and rights, the right for information including the principles for non-discrimination and equal access to various social fields are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Albania. Albania complies overall with international human rights instruments and has ratified most international conventions.

Albania has a adopted a comprehensive set of laws and regulations which regulate the rights and social protection and inclusion. The social inclusion policy document 2016-2020 explains how a balanced and sustainable social inclusion framework will be guaranteed for all citizens. On anti-discrimination, the legal

and policy framework is generally aligned with EU standards and was further improved with amendments to the Law on protection against discrimination. Regarding minority rights, additional by-laws, including on self-identification and use of minority languages, are still pending adoption. Albania's framework legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities is partially compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Strategy on cross-sectorial National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030, National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025 and National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians (2021-2025) are adopted. Guaranteeing social rights is one of the strategic goals set out also in the NSDI document (2015-2020).

Regarding the constitutional right of access to public information, the legislative framework is in line with international standards in this matter, in particular with the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (Tromso Convention). A revised model for the institutional Transparency Program as well as for the Register of Requests and Responses was approved in 2020. The legal framework for oversight institutions (Law on the People Advocate) is in place, but its scope does not cover the entire executive.

The legislation framework on public service delivery in Albania is in place to ensure user-oriented administration and consists of three documents: the Cross-cutting Public Administration Reform Strategy (PAMS) 2015-2020, the Digital Agenda of Albania 2015-2020 and its extended action plan (2020 – 2022), the New Digital Agenda and Action Plan 2022 - 2026 and the Long-Term Policy Document on the Delivery of Citizen-Centric. There is a rich legal framework that directly and indirectly regulates ICT and information society in Albania. It includes the National Interoperability Framework and legal acts as mentioned in the following table.

Albania has been implementing a comprehensive strategic framework of public administration reform (SFPAR). The Code of Administrative Procedures provides the legislative framework for simplifying administrative procedures in line with international standards. As regards to public service and human resources management, the legislation in force for Civil Servants is aligned with the core principles of merit-based recruitment and fully applied in practice, but despite the progress in merit-based recruitment, it is necessary to address the fragmentation of the legislative framework and applying uniform standards across the entire public administration.

The Law on the protection of personal data define the rules for the protection and legal processing of personal data. Albania also adopted a new Strategy on Cyber Security and an Action Plan for 2020-2025, which cover the relevant priorities in the field.

Albania Digital Agenda and Action Plan 2022-2026 was adopted in 1.6.2022 according to the decision No. 370. The legal framework for ensuring interoperability is in place. The following table indicates laws, polices and regulations which cover the social aspect for the program.

Table 3. 11: Key Social Management Policies, Acts, and Guidelines in Albania

Legislative framework and national policies	Description and relation to the PforR
Law 119-2014 on 'the Right of Information'	The law aims to promote integrity, transparency, and accountability of public authorities. It regulates the right to know the information produced or held by public authorities. The rules provided in this Law intend to guarantee public's understanding of the information and forming views on the state and the society.
Law No. 146/2014 'On Public Notification and Consultation'	Regulates the process of notification and public consultation of draft laws, draft national and local strategic documents, as well as policies of high public interest. Consultation process should have a comprehensive and non-discriminatory participation
Order no.3 on the Guideline of Public Consultation Process	Public consultation requirements and procedures are set out in this order. Under the existing regulation, public consultation is required for draft laws and draft policy strategic documents of major public interest. It defines the responsibilities of ministries and other public bodies for the organization and management of consultations, determines the time limits, methods, and actors
New E-Government Law (Under Consultation)	<p>This draft law defines the general principles of electronic government, the obligations of public authorities and private entities, in the provision of electronic services, the rights of natural persons, private entities and public authorities to communicate with each other through information technology, the functioning and interaction between public authorities and subjects private for electronic government, the infrastructure of electronic services and the electronic Document Administration and Protocol System for State Administration institutions at Central and Local level.</p> <p>This law is foreseen to be applied by public authorities and private entities, for the exercise of their duties in the provision of public services electronically using information systems and networks. This law shall regulate the electronic provision of public services for the receipt/benefit of which the physical presence of the applicant is not necessarily required.</p>
Law no. 9887, dated 10.03.2008, "On the protection of personal data", amended by law no. 48/2012	Aim to define the rules for the protection and legal processing of personal data. Article 27 of the law sets out the measures for the security of personal data. According to Article 28 controllers, or other persons who are aware of the processed data, during execution of their functions are obliged to maintain confidentiality and reliability even after completion of their function.
Law no. 9918/ 2008, as amended "On electronic communications in the Republic of Albania	The purpose of this law is to promote efficient infrastructure in electronic communications and to guarantee appropriate services in the territory of the Republic of Albania through the principle of technological neutrality. According to Article 102/1 AKEP, where appropriate, sets out through a regulation the requirements to be met by entrepreneurs providing publicly available electronic communications services, to ensure that users with disabilities have equal access to electronic communications services.
Council of Ministers Decision No. 495/2017 on the Adoption of Rules to Benefit from Electronic Public Services,	Defines the rules on the way of communication and interaction of the systems, which dispose of the state databases and the documents that are produced through
Law No. 273/2010 on Electronic Documents as amended in 2016	The law regulates the use of the electronic document by natural, legal, public and private persons, whose programs and electronic devices enable the realization, production, transmission, reception, storage and security of electronic

and DCM No. 357/2013 on Management of Electronic Documents in the Republic of Albania	document information. The DCM determine the general rules for the use of the electronic document, in accordance with law no. 10273/2010 "On the electronic document", which, saving time and financial costs, ensures that these documents are available, authentic, accessible during their life cycle. Defines the duties and responsibilities of the institution on the management of the Management System of Electronic Document (MSED) and the Functions of the MSED
Law No. 325/2010 on State Databases,	This law defines the basic rules for the creation, administration of state databases and the interaction between them, to ensure their effective use, for public interests and services, by any interested entity. It defines the Responsibilities of the Coordinating Regulatory Authority
Law No. 9880/2008 on Electronic Signatures comply with Directive 1999/93 /EC.	The purpose of this law is to create the necessary legal framework for the recognition and use of electronic signatures in the Republic of Albania.
DCM No. 252, dated 29.4.2022 On Procedures for Providing on-Line Services by Service Institutions and Methodology for Monitoring and Control of Administrative Activity of Their Provision	The law ensures the electronic services provision of state institutions to be of the highest quality. It regulates: the procedures of providing the service of the state institutions in electronic way; the deadlines for the exchange of documents between the institutions, as well as the methodology of monitoring and control of the administrative activity, the consequences for the responsible employee and/or the head of the administration if ascertained violations in the deadlines and procedures set out in this decision.
Law no.7895, dated 27.1.1995 'on Albanian Penal Code', as amended	The Code discusses offences where public or private properties and/or human lives are affected due to intentional or accidental misconduct of an individual or body of people. The Code defines the penalties for violations concerning data protection. Regarding CYBER CRIME Article 186/a of the criminal code defines penalties in cases of computer forgery, Insertion, change, deletion or removal of computer data, without right, or creation of false data. Article 192/b defines the penalties in cases of unauthorized computer access to a computer system of national security, or any other computer system of public importance
DCM No. 673, dated 22/11/2017, as amended in 2019 'On The Reorganization of The National Information Society Agency'	Defines the competencies, duties, and responsibilities of AKSHI
Decision No. 56, Dated 31.1.2018 'On the Definition of Concrete Categories of Disadvantaged Groups	Defines the categories of disadvantaged individuals and social enterprises responsibilities to contribute to the social protection and support of these groups of disadvantaged individuals through employment and facilitating access to the labor market.
Law no. 93/2014 'on the Inclusion and Accessibility of Persons with Disabilities'	Aims to guarantee the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities to enable their full and effective participation in all spheres of society, equal with the others. The law defines the responsibility of all public and non-public structures, in implementing the principles of inclusion and accessibility to reduce, to remove, barriers for persons with disabilities, and enable equal participation.

Law No. 9970, dated 24.7.2008 on 'Gender Equality in Society'	Define the measures for guaranteeing equal opportunities between women and men, to eliminate gender-based discrimination, in whatever form it takes; as well as defines the responsibilities of state, central and local authorities, to draft and implement normative acts, as well as policies that support the development and promotion of gender equality in society.
Law no. 96/2017 "On the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania",	Regulates the exercise of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in Albania. According to Article 8, public, central and local institutions should adopt and implement the necessary measures to guarantee full and effective equality for the national minority. The Committee for National Minorities ensure the protection and promotion of the rights and interests of national minorities
The Law no.8454 "on the People's Advocate" as amended	Protect the rights, freedoms, and lawful interests of individuals from unlawful and improper actions or failures to act of the organs of public administration as well as third parties acting on their behalf
Law no. 10221 'On Protection from Discrimination'	Enforces and respects the principle of equality and non-discrimination in relation to race, ethnicity, color, language, citizenship, political, religious, or philosophical beliefs, economic, educational, or social status, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, sex, age, place of residence, health status, genetic predisposition, disability, belonging to a particular group, or for any other reason.
Law No. 69/2012 "On the Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania" as amended	The law aims to define the basic principles for the structure, activity, and governance of the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania and to guarantee the constitutional right to education. With the amendments of the law in 2015 digital competence was included as one of the basic competencies for all students.
Law no. 75/2019 'on Youth'	Aims to protect the rights of young people in a comprehensive way, participation and support of young people applying the principle of equal opportunities in the fields of education, employment, volunteering, protection and social inclusion, health, and so on.
Law no. 44/2015 on approval of The Code of Administrative Procedure	The objective of the Code is to ensure effective implementation of public functions for citizens and the protection of their legal rights. According to Article 17 the public body exercises its activity in accordance with the principle of equality. Also, according to Article 9 every public servant must apply the principle of data protection during the lawful and fair processing of personal data to take measures related to protection, non-disclosure, and confidentiality.
Law No. 13 on Public Service Delivery at the Front Office Level in the Republic of Albania	Defines the rules for the provision of public services by removing administrative burdens and ensuring fast, efficient, transparent and higher quality services. It identifies and defines the role of ADISA; the principles, channels of public service delivery; the rules on cooperation among different institutions, and the rules on the organization of service windows and ADISA's operations.
Law No. 107/2021 on Co-Government	Defines the rules for co-governance with citizens through their inclusiveness in policy-making, guaranteeing their participation in administrative decision-making procedures, increasing the responsibility and accountability of the state administration through the platform "Me ty per Shqiperine qe duam". It defines the way of organization, operation, and powers of the Agency for Dialogue and Co-governance.
The National Education Strategy (NES) 2021-2026	One of the main focuses of the Strategy is the development of digital competence through better use of information and communication technology for teaching and learning.

National Strategy on Social Protection 2015-2020 extended until 2023 with the support of the LNB Program	The strategy aims to improve the physical, social, and economic well-being of individuals, children and families, especially those in socially or economically disadvantaged conditions, guaranteeing equal opportunities and principles of social justice
Social Inclusion Policy Paper (DPPS) 2016-2020, extended until 2023	The vision of the Policy is to guarantee a system for monitoring and measuring social inclusion in all areas of poverty reduction and social protection policies, employment and skills for entrepreneurship, education and training, health, housing and basic needs, and human rights participation. It also aims to promote transparency and accountability in the way on how social inclusion is measured and used to inform the performance of social services.
National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025	The plan aims to continue promoting and supporting the integration of persons with disabilities into the socio-economic life of the country, in order to meet the obligations of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It determines that public equipment and services be accessible by persons with visual impairments, by those with hearing problems using universal icons. programs that enable reading for the visually impaired; iii) audio equipment; iv) have programs that enable visually impaired users to increase the font and size of icons; v) have Braille code readers and printers (in a reasonable number)
The cross-sectorial National Strategy For Gender Equality 2021-2030	The strategic goals of NSGE 2021-2030 includes: Fulfillment of economic and social rights of women, young women, girls, and men, young men and boys in the society to improve (green) economy and their equal participation in the digitalization process; ensuring the equal participation, representation, and leadership rights of women and men, in all their diversity in political and public decision-making at the local level; application of gender mainstreaming to achieve gender equality and gender justice in society
National Action Plan For Equality, Inclusion And Participation of Roma And Egyptians In The Republic of Albania (2021-2025)	Vision of the Plan is to enable the adequate conditions to achieve equality, participation, and inclusion of Roma and Egyptian minorities in the Republic of Albania, in all aspects of social life, to improve the quality of life and well-being. The plan includes a specific Objective to increase the access of Roma and Egyptians to social care services and to design new community-based services to access public services and following measures: (i) capacity building; (ii) operation of mobile teams at LGUs with the participation of Roma and Egyptians conducting field assessments for services; (iii) establishment of new community-based social services to empower the individual, family, and community; (iv) improving services in residential centers.
DCM no. 370 on approval of Inter-sectorial Strategy Albania Digital Agenda and Action Plan 2022-2026, dated 1.6.2022	Aims to track the path and investments in the key areas of advanced computing and data processing, artificial intelligence (AI), cyber security and the advanced digital capabilities needed to develop them. The vision of the agenda is "services without limits". The agenda envisages the implementation of special functionalities in the Government Portal and official websites, inclusive environment and access to public services among stakeholders with disabilities. A special focus of the strategy is to create the necessary control instruments, processes, standards, and greater transparency in the use of personal data, to increase trust between the citizens. The strategy also aims transformation of learning and teaching and to establish community technology centers for extracurricular activities and education on technology for children, youth, and adults, providing access to online and onsite courses for all ages.

Social Institutional Framework

A range of Institutions and departments deal with addressing social issues which may arise from implementation of PforR activities and those are shown in the following table.

Table 3. 12: Key Albania Institutions Dealing with Identified Social Issues

Institutional Framework	Description and relation to the PforR
The National Agency for Information Society (NAIS/AKSHI) IT Sectors in all state administration institutions or bodies under the responsibility of the Council of Ministers	NAIS/AKSHI is the core institution in Albania in terms of ICT. It administers any ICT system used by state Administration institutions or bodies under the responsibility of the Council of Ministers. ICT units in line Ministries follow the implementation of specific projects/programs and identify new opportunities to improve the services provided by this directorate in coordination with other NAIS/AKSHI directorates or IT staff within government institutions. The e-Gov Research and Development Directorate in cooperation with the e-Gov Security Directorate and the e-Gov Infrastructure Directorate prepares proposals for ICT standards in public administration at the beginning of each year.
Ministry of Health and Social Protection Directorate of Policies and Development of Health and Social Protection Sector of Policies and Strategies for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality,	The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, is the leading institution in the health care sector and has the leading role in managing policy on people with special needs, social protection, and inclusion. The Sector of Policies and Strategies for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality has the responsibility to design, develop and coordinate policies and strategies that address the social inclusion for groups at risk of exclusion; monitors and controls the implementation of policies and strategies, prepares concrete proposals, in order to update strategies for social inclusion and gender equality. The State Social Service under the MHSP implement policies, economic assistance legislation, payment for people with disabilities and social services throughout the country for Social Care Institutions, for 12 Regional Directorates, Central Administration of the State Social Service as well as, for 61 local government units. The Social Protection, Social inclusion and Gender Equality and the Child Protection Sectors are established in every municipality.
Ministry of Education and Sports (MES)General Directorate of Pre-University Education (DPAP) - 4 regional directorates and Local Offices of Pre-University Education in all municipalities Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP)	The higher national authority which provides politics and strategies programs and projects and set the standards for licensing and control policies, and so on, on Education and Sports. DPAP - implements curriculum and standards; provides technical assistance to schools, teacher employment and coordination with local authorities. ASCAP-i responsible for evaluating the performance of the education system, curriculum design and professional development of teachers and quality assurance in education.
Ministry of State for Service Delivery and Standards	Is responsible for ensuring standards, increasing the quality of services in every public sector; facilitating the provision of public services; and, for increasing the effectiveness of services to guarantee the access of citizens to public services.
Minister of State for Youth and Children	Its mission is to protect the rights of young people and guarantee their participation in social life, through the design, development, and monitoring of youth policies, and the coordination of issues related to the protection, care, health, well-being, and education of children
The Electronic and Postal Communications Authority (AKEP)	The regulatory body in the electronic communications and postal services field, which between others supervises the regulatory framework provided in the law on electronic communications.

The People's Advocate	The People's Advocate exercises his activity for the protection of human right and freedoms as defined by the constitutional provisions and by the laws. According to article 12 of the law on People Advocate; each individual, group of individuals or non-government organization, who pretend that his/their rights, freedoms, or lawful interests have been violated by the unlawful, improper actions by public administration body, shall have the right to complain or notify the People's Advocate and to request his intervention to remedy the violation of the right or freedom.
The Information and Data Protection Commissioner I. General Directorate of the Right to Information Department on the Transparency Program Monitoring Complaint Handling Department II. General Directorate of Personal Data Protection Complaints and Harmonization Department	The Information and Data Protection Commissioner is the responsible, independent authority that oversees and monitors, in accordance with the law, the protection of personal data, and the right to information. In case of serious, intentional violations by a controller or processor, the Commissioner publicly denounces or reports the matter to the Assembly and the Council of Ministers. The Commissioner also examines the requests of persons who claim that their rights have been violated; examines the complaints; put on administrative sanctions in accordance with the provisions of the law on the right to information; promotes the principle of transparency for the work of public authorities, raise awareness and inform on issues on the right to information;
Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination	Each individual or group of individuals claiming to have been discriminated against, may lodge a complaint with the available evidence before the commissioner. Some of the competencies of the commissioner include: review complaints; monitor the implementation of the law; conduct administrative investigations; conduct surveys related to discrimination; publish reports and make recommendations on any kind of issue related to discrimination;
DoPA	Department of Public Administration (DoPA) is the key institution, responsible for co-ordination of policy implementation. Prepares and supervises the implementation of policies in the civil service, supervises the implementation of civil service legislation in state administration institutions, approves and monitors the implementation of training programs in the civil service.
Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government	The coordinators of the Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government (under the Prime Minister) continuously monitor the whole process from application to the delivery of a certain public service, as well as the complaints about the delivered services.
The Albanian School of Public Administration	Focused on professional training of central government officials, local government, as well as independent institutions
All municipalities The Social Protection, Social Inclusion and Gender Equality and the Child Protection Sectors are established in every municipality Directorate of Education and sports	The municipalities are governed by the law 139/2015 on local self-government. In the field of social services they are responsible through actions and decisions to makes possible the provision of social assistance; establishment and administration of social services for individuals and groups in need, development of personal skills and maintaining integrity and social inclusion in local level. The municipality interacts with MHSP to determine: Assistance policies and social services; Programming and control of funds; Monitoring standards for these services; The responsibilities of the municipality in the field of education include, inter alia; design in cooperation with MES, its subordinate agencies, and Regional Education Directorates projects for the development of the education, youth, and sports sector, create the necessary infrastructure; Continuous improvement of the quality of educational service. Municipalities, also according to the

	law on youth, already have a specialized worker for dealing with youth issues.
The Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government	Is responsible for co-governance with citizens through inclusiveness of their participation in policy-making, for guaranteeing their participation in administrative decision-making procedures, as well as for increasing the responsibility and accountability of the administration. The Agency administers the data of the General National Complaint System

Under each public authority is appointed the role of the coordinator for the right to information, which coordinate the work for guaranteeing the right to information. The coordinator has the obligation for each applicant access to public information.

Capacity and Performance

Despite that Albanian has a solid policy framework, a well-suited institutional set-up and strong political leadership to implement the program activities there are still gaps, challenges and capacity constrains to achieve a universal access to high standards public services.

In general, the citizen-oriented service delivery in Albania made high progress with regard to the quality of public services. Institutions and laws for an effective public service delivery are in place to ensure user-oriented administration. The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Service Delivery and e-Governance was established pursuant to Order No. 15 of the Prime Minister of 18 January 2018. The Committee aims to facilitate the implementation of the reform of public services and electronic governance, through policy making and harmonization of the approaches to implementation in defined areas. Starting from May 1, 2022, all public services provided on-line in e-albania.al (95 percent of the services) are accessed by the portal, however not for all services the procedure begins and ends online. Monitoring service delivery functions well and has proved useful in providing information about the need to make corrections at the level of individual public institutions. The compliance of government websites with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines is poor, with 35 errors on average, which limits accessibility for users. Albania has not defined or adopted digital service standards to ensure a standardized and user-centric approach to the rationalization and organization of digital services.

The legal framework for ensuring interoperability (DCM 673/2017 as amended on the Reorganization of the National Information Society Agency) is in place, however the interoperability framework needs to be updated in line with the new EU inter-operability framework. In addition, a draft 5G road map is under preparation. The policy leadership in the service delivery area is secured and the Minister of State for Service Delivery and Standards was appointed.

AKSHI (the agency responsible for the implementation and achievement of Program results) has a competent and technically qualified team which is highly committed to advancing the digitalization agenda, its strategies are strongly aligned with sectorial strategies, policies, and governance arrangements relevant to the operation.

The new Albanian Digital Agenda 2022-2026, which is consulted with the interested parties is approved. It contains a special chapter on innovation in the public sector, new technologies, artificial intelligence, and so on. AKSHI is certified with ISO 27001 for managing information security. Also as of 2020, AKSHI is certified with ISO 9001:2015 - Quality management systems and ISO/IEC 20000-1:2018 - Information technology. According to the National Authority for Electronic Certification and Cyber Security (NAECCS) AKSHI is one of 2 entities in Albania which provides trusted services to civil servants but also to the private

sector. Regarding the data protection, the regulation on privacy policies can be found on the website of AKSHI and E-Albania and has as its object the information of subjects on the way personal data are collected, processed, disseminated, storage and security measures that have been taken for their data. AKSHI²⁵ applies the law on personal data protection in case of misuse of personal data by employees. All employees recruited by AKSHI have specified in the contract the preservation of confidentiality and sanctions are imposed. Also, to ensure security of information, all employees are equipped with security certificates of different levels. To prevent information leaks, the institution is audited every year for policy audit. In January, a new security regulation was adopted that includes measures to be implemented by all institutions and based on this regulation, AKSHI also acts for monitoring. AKSHI has carried out ongoing training for administration employees related to ICT and for components related to the citizens' privacy data. The Agency has a policy and plan for continuity of work and storage of information in cases of emergencies which are covered by the policy of the ISO standard for which the institution is audited every year. The Agency also has functional systems to ensure continuous back up and Disaster recover for each system.

As regards to cyber security, the National Strategy for Cyber Security 2020 – 2025 and its Action Plan were approved in December 2020, but further steps need to align the law on Cyber security with the EU Directive on security of network and information system. The cyber-attack on e-Albania and all government websites in July 2022 caused all services to be temporarily out of service, affecting many individuals and companies in the country. The services were temporarily offered physically in the respective offices. AKSHI team in collaboration with experts from Microsoft, FBI, CISA and in coordination with NATO were able to resolve the situation and return it to normal and to protect the data. Data privacy reform needs also to be aligned with the EU GDPR.

Some progress was achieved by AKSHI regarding inter-institutional cooperation to address the accessibility issues of vulnerable groups. AKSHI has set up a working group with the MoH and representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities to determine the standards the website and the e-Albania portal should have in order to continue with the implementation of these standards and another working group for accessibility. The institution maintains continuous relations with some organizations dealing with PwD and other donors such as UNDP to implement some projects for people with disabilities, and also regarding practices/mechanisms to be applied for the inclusion of vulnerable groups, people who lack ICT equipment, connectivity, and digital knowledge for obtaining electron services, and data are being collected to address different issues. Despite that, the EU Accessibility Directives has not yet been transposed and implemented. AKSHI has planned to implement an accessibility statement on the e-Albania website to communicate and demonstrate commitment to accessibility and to users with disabilities. The Agency aim to develop WC3 (World Wide Web Consortium accessibility web standard) standards in relation to accessibilities. In 2019, a test was performed on the accessibility of its services by the working group to assess how easily people with disabilities are able to access services. AKSHI has also established special functionalities on the websites of the line ministries to facilitate access for people with disabilities, such as; zoom (for the visually impaired); contrast (which helps categories of dyslexic persons); sailing with TAb (helps categories of paraplegic persons).

With regard to feedback and complaint mechanism, AKSHI has a dedicated staff and budget to respond to complaints/comments or evaluation, but there is no sector that deals with the analysis of complaints.

²⁵ Consultation with AKSHI representatives, May 12, 2022

Citizens can provide 10-star rating, comments/feedback in the e-Albania helpdesk for any service received and these are reviewed at the Prime minister level, properly staffed department.

ADISA Call Centre assists citizens to provide quick information to different categories of society, such as the rural population, elderly people, minorities, people with disabilities, and so on. It operates as an information channel from 7 am to 9 pm on weekdays and from 7 am to 2 pm on Saturdays and Sundays, saving citizens looking for information about public services both time and money. The policy and legal framework on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and non-discrimination is in place and further elaborated with the vision of providing integrated social services capable to ensure the inclusion of all vulnerable groups and persons in Albania. Legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities is partially compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Further efforts are needed, to improve overall accessibility (including services and information) and to collect statistical data on their situation. Positive outcomes on the inclusion of people with disabilities have been achieved in the course of implementation of four-year National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities. The Plan contain clear and actionable activities related to digital transformation which are focused on; gradual application of accessibility standards on the portal <https://e-albania.al> and all other portals interacting with the public; inclusion of accessibility concepts for people with disabilities in the legal regulatory framework of electronic communications and applicable, for: mobile telephony services, emergency services; customer care, customer support centers, websites and points of sale. It also proposes encouraging the provision of equipment for persons with disabilities, including basic telephones, feature telephones, smartphones, tablets and applications and ancillary services. Gender equality is also at the focus of recent changes in the legal framework. There was progress in ensuring adequate funding for the implementation of the dedicated strategy, and a new strategy on gender equality 2021-2030 was developed.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, which is the leading institutions in the health care sector and managing policy on people with special needs has convened the National Council of Accessibility to help it to understand the issues of people with disabilities, and each ministry that executes the Action Plan also has a coordinator for accessibility issues. The ICT directorate in MHSP operates as a unit which converts the plans into programs. The MHSP and AKSHI have initiated a process of cooperation related to the redesigning of public institutions' websites, in order for them to be accessible by persons with disabilities. The structure of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, in charge of the coordination of Roma-related policies needs to be strengthened. The Decision of the Council of Ministers No.456/2012 on Gender Mainstreaming in Mid-Term Budget Programming and the respective implementation guidelines include gender equality as a core principle of the budget. Despite the effort to cover all eligible vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, the responsible agencies in charge of social protection and social services lack the capacities and resources (technical capacity and financial allocations). The social protection expenditure in Albania accounts for about 9 percent of the GDP and consist of 40 percent of the national budget, however, is still lower compared to European countries²⁶. In financial terms, there is an increase in the budget, mainly for staff salaries, while other activities related to awareness activities, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation processes are carried out with the support of international organizations. One of the main partners of MHSP is the Swiss Development Cooperation that financed the LNB Program (2017-2021). This Program was implemented by the UN with the aim at empowering vulnerable people and groups to have equal access to public services and opportunities. GIZ has a regional program for the Western Balkans 'The Social Rights of Vulnerable Groups', which aims to improve the

²⁶ Social protection budget brief, United Nation Albania

provision of social services at the local level. There is no mechanism for monitoring the situation of those who are vulnerable and/or excluded.

There is a gap between central government requirements and local government. LGUs have the obligation to report every 6 months to the MHSP on accessibility, but municipalities prepare reports only on disability payments and social services provided at local level and do not report on all obligations of LGUs to implement the NAPPWD. Furthermore, it is still a problem that municipalities do not report to MHSP on the needs of persons with disabilities in their territory. In the Social Insurance Institute, the collection of documents is cumbersome due to lack of digital archives, leading to prolonged waiting periods for citizens and an overall user experience that is unsatisfactory.

The action Plan on Education Strategy 2021-2026 also contain clear activities to be implemented till 2026 related to digital transformation (Specific Objective 5 of the strategy), such as; establishment of appropriate infrastructure for the use of ICT in schools and its maintenance; setting of standards for ICT equipment in schools; Installation of wireless networks and investment for increasing the number of digital devices in schools; development of digital competence through increased use of ICT. The Ministry of Education is the responsible institution for achieving the objectives, with the contribution of AKSHI. Financial budget of the Ministry for achieving the objectives is limited and some of the actions are planned to be implemented with foreign funds. To support achievement of the objective, the construction of the network infrastructure and electrical works have started for 1000 schools in Albania. Some efforts are done by AKSHI and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to develop customized SmartLab models as an education technology solution to teaching and learning at early elementary grades.

The legislative framework of Albania in relation to public access to information is in line with international standards. A revised model for the institutional Transparency Program as well as for the Register of Requests and Responses was approved. A system was established in 59 public institutions to record the overall number of requests made and to enable citizens to submit online requests for public information. Regarding transparency and citizen participation, there is a high discrepancy between the standards of the laws No. 119/2014 “On the Right to Information” and the Law No. 146/2014 “On Notification and Public Consultation” and strategies and their actual implementation especially in local level.

Lack of awareness and understanding of open data persists both in government institutions and public officials and among citizens. Albania's Open Data Portal currently provides open data from several sectors such as: health, treasury, customs, education, business <https://opendata.gov.al/>. The portal <https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/> established by AKSHI serves for consultation between citizens and decision-making institutions in Albania for a transparent and accountable government. There are other platforms, such as; Ask the State (<https://www.pyetshtetin.al>) which help citizens and various interest groups to have greater access and to find more easily public information and ‘Improve Your City’ (<http://www.permiresogytetin.al/>). There are limitations in the scope and depth of public consultation in reform design and implementation (insufficient mechanisms for citizen engagement and grievance redress).

With regard to the complaints mechanism, citizens can submit complaints through one-stop shops at local government units and address their concerns and problems through complaint letters, web pages of the institutions or a dedicated phone number created for this purpose. In addition, there are online tool platforms in place to file complaints, such as Stop Corruption (established at the website of the institutions). E-Albania portal has a complaint form on the website that references Law no. 119/2014 “On the Right to Information, where complaints can be directed from each citizen to the Commissioner for the

Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, in accordance with this law and the Code of Administrative Procedures.

The General National Complaint System²⁷ was established within the Prime Minister office in order to control the administrative activity of state administration institutions. In the platform, citizens can file complaints regarding corruption, law violation/lack of law enforcement, bad or lack of services or other grievances related to public institutions, including the grievances relating to services provided from e-Albania. The coordinators of the Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government (under the Prime Minister) continuously monitor the whole process from application to the delivery of a certain public service, as well as the complaints about the delivered services. There is good progress on handling complaints through the mechanism.

With regard to transparency, there are insufficient mechanisms for citizen engagement and grievance redress). Transparency has increased with all Ministries, and they have published their transparency program, governmental decision-making is not transparent enough. Internal checks and inspection mechanisms within the public administration remain weak and ineffective.

The Information and Data Protection Commissioner's effectiveness suffers from shortcomings in the legislative framework. Public authorities are not even required to report to the Commissioner with basic statistical data. It lacks mechanisms to enforce its decisions and has limited use of sanctions stemming from a flawed concept of "liable person". Additional staff is necessary in order for it to fulfil the increased duties foreseen in the legislation on personal data protection. Currently, the Information and Data Protection Commissioner is trying to draft a new law to transpose the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), adopted in 2018.

In general, the Program operates within a policy and institutional framework that is largely conducive to address the types of social issues likely to emerge from the Program's activities. Albania has made significant efforts to improve the functioning of its social systems in recent years. However, some capacity efficiencies and improvement are necessary to such a framework. There are gaps and weaknesses in the GovTech policy enabling environment, which need to be fixed in order to accelerate the digital transformation and include the following: Interoperability framework is still not updated in line with the new EU inter-operability framework; Universal Accessibility Reforms is not yet transposed and implemented; The new Open Data Law has been approved (Law no. 33/2022, dated 31.3.2022 "On open data and reuse of public sector information") but need further implementation; The Paperless Government (EDRMS) is not upgraded and adopted across institutions; E-Albania data privacy protection measures are insufficient and it needs to be aligned with GRPD regulation. All activities proposed under Result Area 3 of the PforR include adoption of the above Gov Tech policy reforms, in order to ensure improvement in the access and quality of public services through GovTech.

The main areas for improvements are associated with: improved access by targeting the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups; improved quality and giving voice to beneficiaries to express their views and concerns and improved public trust and data protection. In summary, critical areas where knowledge and capacity could be strengthened include the following:

- a. Enforcing and ensuring high level inter-institutional coordination across Program institutions (AKSHI, helpdesk, line ministries) and intra-institutional coordination (between line ministry back-

²⁷ Co-governance platform '<https://www.shqiperiaqeduam.al/>'

offices and front-offices). Strong coordination between AKSHI, the MHSP, the National Council of Accessibility, Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination to complement the general policy on accessibility of public services for special-needs users, with concrete policy measures and metrics to improve social inclusion issues.

- b. Ensuring that ICT specialists work in a balanced manner with sector/service delivery specialists
- c. Strengthening mechanisms in line ministries on standards for citizen feedback and the use of quality management tools to allow for the continuous improvement of e-services
- d. Information disclosure could be strengthened. There is a need to ensure information outreach on Policy reform regarding the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Policy directive for updated Open Data standards.
- e. The quality control function on public consultation also needs to be strengthened
- f. Further efforts are needed to collect statistical data for PWD, but also for other vulnerable groups (elderly, women, and girls especially those in rural areas and with low educational level, Roma minorities, people living below the poverty line).
- g. Citizens' data should be protected, following the highest standards of data protection and awareness of citizens on their entitlements should be increased. Employees' capacity in AKSHI should be strengthened in order to be legally compliant with the new European Union's Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- h. There is also a need to raise the awareness of the general population, ensuring that citizens and businesses understand their rights regarding administrative procedures.
- i. There is a need for to strength investments in digital skills and digital literacy upgrading for the public sector and population at large
- j. Efforts are needed to improve overall accessibility in services and information technology and adopting/implementing Web accessibility standards (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines [WCAG]) for public web pages and e-service channels.
- k. Exploring whether administrative units (former communes) in the most rural areas have capacities and are available to assist remote citizens in processing their online applications or, if possible, defining budget sources to implement specifics requirement on additional employees in these units to address service provision in rural/remote areas.

Program Initiatives Addressing Social Risk

The Program incorporates certain measures to mitigate the social risks identified in subchapter 3.2. The Program has already built in a number of measures to address some of the social risks outlined above, which are summarized below:

More equitable and inclusive service delivery through GovTech. Improved accessibility for users, especially for vulnerable groups will be achieved through a range of activities proposed under (Result Area 1). Those include improved user interface; functionalities for access for special needs (for example, languages, disabled access), and so on.

Service delivery information and increased access to services will be transmitted through multiple channels in addition to the e-Albania portal (Result Area 2). These will include; I) a New/Upgraded Electronic Helpdesk System and Contact Center will provide real-time in-person troubleshooting to users applying for e-services;; II) A Chatbot with Albanian Virtual Assistant would assist citizens and businesses in utilizing public e-services; III) Establishment of a kiosk/desk into Youth Innovation centers, in at least 10 centers, will support service users with information on e-service applications as needed. Program will also consider outsourcing help to the segments of the population who would be excluded based on digital

divide principle, through the CSO (Civic Society Organizations) working with the marginalized communities.

Adoption of the necessary regulatory reforms (under RA3), such as: adoption of the Paperless Government and Universal Accessibility Reforms would address reducing the digital divide and access to the other electronic services, and standards for information safety.

Improved quality and efficiency of public services, improved data privacy protection and increased transparency to promote user trust. The activities proposed under Result Area 1 such as: improvements of the E-Albania portal and E-services, defining of the e-services standard based on best practices, upgrade, strengthening, and automation improvement focuses on some of the services that are often critical to marginalized (elderly, disabled, women under social protection), and youth. Expanding the central Government cloud to a Hybrid Government Cloud will enable the improvement of available e-services, also at the local level. Automation improvement will reduce time travel for citizens and administrative cost for government and businesses. The Program will mainstream the latest and most relevant citizen engagement tools and approaches selected from innovations in GovTech and CivicTech, in order to ensure that citizen engagement closes the “accountability loop”. This will be achieved through; Albania portal citizen feedback function to ensure closing the accountability loop; New Helpdesks to improve grievance redress (RA 2); and Open Data for improved transparency in service delivery (under RA 3). Open government Data and better use of it under RA 2 will increase transparency and address issues related to public trust.

Adoption of a data privacy and protection policy reform (under Result Area 3) to ensure full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation will strength data privacy protection in combination with additional training on data privacy and protection to be financed through the IPF part of the loan.

Fostering changes for citizens and service providers. The Albanian Government envisages institutional reforms, such as the establishment of Youth Innovation Centers. Activities proposed under the sub-component Technical Assistance (Result Area 3) intends to address introduction of new change management for service providers and other institutional stakeholders with user-friendly institutional and digital solutions. A strong strategy for change management will be developed for the above-mentioned institutional changes including the development of a roadmap for the implementation of such change. The implementation of the change management will address the following: support with the transition of the ADISA centers into multi-functional Info Points and Youth Creativity/Techno-Innovation Centers; (ii) support to the public officers in the transition towards a “paperless public administration”; (iii) outreach and communication activities to raise public awareness on the benefits of digitalization and the importance of data privacy.

Risk Assessment

As mentioned above, the Program will not invest in civil works therefore no land acquisition will be needed, nor land expropriation, relocation of people or loss of access to natural resources. With regard to the Bank’s PforR Policy principles, the main social risks of the Program are related to:

Core Principle 1: Program E&S management systems that: (a) promote E&S sustainability in the Program design; (b) avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts; and (c) promote informed decision-making relating to the Program’s E&S effects.

Core Principle 5, which focuses on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups' access to and inclusion in Program activities; and

The risk rating has considered the social indicators, the focus of the Program and activities proposed to address the risks related to digital divide and quality of services. It also has considered the existing capacity and performance of the regulatory framework and institutional framework.

The main risks from the Program activities include:

- The Program activities risk not targeting all vulnerable/disadvantaged groups and areas thus leading to a digital Exclusion of those groups/areas to access e-services. **The risk is assessed as Moderate to Substantial** considering the percentage of certain groups against the total population who do not have good access to certain ICTs, do not have the skills, knowledge, and so on, due to their abilities and capacities²⁸. There is a risk that education SmartLabs in schools located in rural areas will not be fully functional due to infrastructure, facilities and connectivity. However, the Program envisages infrastructure upgrades (strengthening electricity stability and space adaptation), where needed, which will help all schools gain equal opportunities to be beneficiaries of the SmartLabs. Slow progress in digitalization of education could potentially widen the digital divide and further weaken the education sector's resilience and capacity to deliver quality learning during crises.
- **The possibility that the quality of the services may not be improved is assessed as Moderate.** Certain users will not be able to provide feedback due to a lack of digital skills, educational level or lack of ICT means. Therefore, it is possible their feedback may not be included in the management decision and the service not improved. There is the risk also that quality in the aspect of data privacy protection and staff capacities may not improve. Some users may continue to not trust e-Albania to keep their data private, and that standards of privacy and security are not clearly communicated to the public. Despite the range of CivicTech tools proposed under the Program to deepen citizen engagement and to close the accountability loop, the risk of not achieving a high-level improvement of citizens' trust remains. This judgment is based on two aspects: some groups/people (vulnerable groups, those with limited Internet access, those not having smart phone/computer and with low digital skills and education) may be excluded from activities related to citizen engagement and also from transparency; some users are unaware of their service entitlements;²⁹ or, some people are not interested in participating in decision-making, as they do not believe in the process³⁰.
- **The risk that stakeholders beyond the Government and employees/service providers will not support the proposed reform processes is assessed as moderate.** The GoA envisages institutional reforms which may face resistance to change. Thus, certain citizens may also need re-sensitizing as they are used to ADISA centers and physical services windows. Employees also might not willingly adopt the new system or certain service providers, as they wouldn't want to be subject to more

²⁸ According to the social baseline data; age group 60-85+ years old occupies 22.6%; the population living in rural areas counts for 38 %; about 21.8 % persons lives in households where the equalized total disposable household income is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold; about 1.6% of people are illiterate; about 43.4 % of individuals are at Risk Social Exclusion; Roma population accounts for 0,30% of the total population in Albania; gender inequality Index was 0.06; only 3.7% of rural areas are connected to the internet; 51.1% of the individuals of the age- group 65 - 74 years never used internet during 2021; in 2021, 80.3 % of men and 78.3% of women in the age-group 16-74 were internet users

²⁹Despite that the Law for the right of Information exists, only about 64.1% of Albanian are informed for the existence of the law.

³⁰ almost half of Albanian Population do not believe in consultation process and 1 in 4 Albanians believe that institutions' listen 'and handle citizens' complaints properly, according to results of Public Opinion Poll, Trust in Government 2020

rigorous monitoring and may oppose its effective implementation. However, the Program proposes a Change Management Strategy to address this issue.

With regard to capacities and performance, Albania has made significant efforts to improve the functioning of its social systems in recent years. However, some capacity efficiencies and improvements are needed. On the other hand, the Program includes a range of activities which are aimed at addressing the digital divide, poor quality, accountability and user orientation and some other assistance to foster changes.

Considering the above said, the overall social risk assessment is assessed and judged as Moderate.

DRAFT

4. DISCLOSURE AND CONSULTATION

Disclosure

This draft ESSA will be disclosed in-country and at the World Bank's external website, prior to formal appraisal of the relevant PforR, to serve as the basis for discussion and receipt of formal comments. Following incorporation of the feedback received from different stakeholders, the revised ESSA will be disclosed in-country and on the World Bank's external website.

Stakeholder Consultations

ESSA will be consulted upon with relevant stakeholders with respect to institutional capacity for environmental and social aspects of the program.

During consultations, stakeholders will be briefed about the findings of the Environmental and Social Systems Assessment (ESSA) and get their feedback.

5. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

This section summarizes the recommended actions to be taken during Program implementation to address important gaps identified above between the Program system and the PforR core principles and key elements as well as to address any capacity shortcomings to the social and environmental management systems where appropriate.

5.1. Recommended Environmental Actions

- **Recommendation 1:** Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for environmental management of e-waste under the Technical Assistance component

AKSHI will work closely with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) and the National Environmental Agency (NEA) in developing SOPs for the management and disposal of e-waste. The SOP will follow the current World Bank's Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) Guidelines, based upon general and industry specific examples of Good International Industry Specific Practices (GIIPs). The support on preparation of SOP should be part of the activities under the Technical Assistance, activities for capacity development. The SOP is expected to include procedures for: inventory-based record keeping of ICT equipment by the departments at the time of procurement of new equipment and sale of used equipment, material safety data sheets of new and old equipment, terms and conditions for the repurchase of new equipment at the end of life of the equipment, NEA licensed buyers of used equipment, proposed conditions for the environmentally sound recycling and disposal arrangements, and so on

- **Recommendation-2:** Training on e-waste SOPs

The program teams in AKSHI and partner departments, along with MoTE and NEA staff, should be made aware of the SOPs by organizing e-waste management training as part of the capacity-building activities under the program.

5.2. Recommended Social Actions

➤ Recommendation 3: Social risk assessment of vulnerable people

A social assessment should be carried out in order to assess the overall vulnerability, impediments and susceptibility of vulnerable people in Albania (that is, low income, slum dwellers, landless, ethnic and religious minorities, elderly, disabled, women, and so on) Recommendation 2: Employee training on the use of ICT

The employees of the implementing departments should be trained in the use of ICT and smart technologies under the TA component. This training will be particularly beneficial for the employees lacking digital knowledge and enable them to avoid a digital social divide and distress among them. This training will be needs- based and appropriate to the requirements of each department.

➤ Recommendation 4: Preparation of Program Specific GRM

It is recommended that the PIU should prepare and implement a GRM for the program. The GRM should be communicated to the public and particularly the affected communities through print and electronic media and during public consultations and community engagement events. The PIU should engage E&S specialists to implement environmental and social management and GRM activities. The role of Environmental specialist could be part time as consultant, focused on the e-waste/SOP management aspects only, A Social specialist will be full time required throughout the program implementation.

- *Continue and expand service delivery in all remote areas.* Based on the citizen-centric approach, it is recommended that additional focus should be paid to the citizens in remote areas, especially to vulnerable groups (that is, the elderly with low mobility, population who lack resources and lack internet connection and so on). The upgrading and enhancing of the e-Albania native app that would grant access to e-services using their mobile aims at facilitating access to e-services, by these categories of beneficiaries. Furthermore, during program implementation, other solutions will be studied and provided, if needed.
- *Explore the idea of piloting facilitation centers* in more rural/remote areas of Program implementation. One option is to re-evaluate the capacity of the staff or possible defining budget sources to implement specific requirement on additional employees in all Administrative Units in Albania (former communes) or provide training for the existing staff on the use of information and communication technology to assist vulnerable groups in rural/remote areas for processing their online applications. The offices of administrative units have internet connections and means; otherwise, AKSHI could equip them.
- *Develop and implement across all government departments a brief Program Strategy for mainstreaming social inclusion issues.* Identify discrete inclusion issues to be addressed for each vulnerable group as part of its strategy. This strategy would detail the knowledge-sharing and partnership-building activities and outline the main tools that departments can use to ensure due concern for sharing benefits equitably during Program implementation.
- *Continue strengthening cooperation and continuity of work between AKSHI, MSSS and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the National Council of Accessibility, central and local/regional institutions and civil organizations* that protect the rights of different categories of vulnerable groups to help raise accessibility of government websites and adherence to web

standards, including identifying the most common accessibility issues across government websites and supporting agencies to prioritize and remediate their key web accessibility issues.

- *Establishing a model Accessibility Statement* in accordance with Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Such a statement on the accessibility of the websites and mobile communication applications for public sector bodies would demonstrate commitment to accessibility and to users with disabilities. The Accessibility Statement should be reviewed and updated regularly, and at least annually.
- *Address affordability to improve uptake services and connections.* Responsible Governmental bodies should develop an investment framework to support the setting of priorities and making decisions on how to invest, what to invest in, and when to invest. This could include funds in the budget funds to compensate the part of the population living below the poverty line to get appropriate ICT tools (smart phone/tablets) for digital communication. Also, it may lead to a joint dialogue and collaborative from other agencies, civil society and private sector organizations to address affordability as a barrier to improve the uptake of services and connections.
- *Addressing ICT literacy targeting different age groups (adults who do not have ICT skills and for the elderly, youth), by gender and people with disabilities.* Though some activities proposed under the Program do pay special attention to the vulnerable groups and to gender issues, it is however recommended that:
 - Future activities should be focused on the development of relevant training materials targeting different age groups. Such initiatives can be coordinated with the education institutions in the targeted areas
 - Establishing and financing digital literacy program for adults who do not have digital skills (individuals and or employees of small to medium enterprises) to help them develop such skills so that they can engage the digital world from home.
 - Raising initiative from the Government, such as a senior-friendly courseware learning hub with a set of programs established to provide older residents who do not use ICT or the Internet and are therefore digitally marginalized. Developing a comprehensive curriculum that includes learning materials and practical applications to provide participants with basic ICT skills. The learning material should be available in both Roma and Albanian.
- *Information dissemination that caters to the unique informational needs of poorer and/or more remote groups.* This involves the following:
 - Proactive communication on the existence of facilitation centers and contact centers through low-cost grassroots advertising (such as the use of cloth banners, chalk graffiti, painted milestones, and local village and government gatherings), so that people are aware of them, and the contact centers are effective.
 - Proactive communication on service delivery information in a user-friendly format through one or two grassroots channels other than the Internet or mobile phones that will reach lower income quintiles and/or women (such as by publishing information on notice boards, broadcasting it on radio, or producing printed materials). These activities may be most appropriate in the poorer areas of Albania and could draw on partnerships with existing civil society outreach.
 - Communications to citizens on the ongoing reforms need to be enhanced and citizens should be aware of their rights regarding administrative procedures
- *A nation-wide campaign* could be launched to provide information on universal accessibility for vulnerable groups. The campaign would aim to provide equal opportunities for vulnerable groups in all aspects of life and to live independently, including through the utilization of information and communication ecosystems.

- *Focus group discussions* to identify the key barriers to women, the poor, the elderly and the disabled, low income households, illiterate, and households living in rural areas in obtaining access to information and use of technology in the program's areas of interventions.
- *Conduct a Social Assessment* to establish baseline data and monitor the digitalization progress of sluggish digitalization. According to the baseline data, the Ministry of Education prepares plans to improve the education sector's resilience and reduce the digital divide in case Education SmartLabs in the remote areas progress only a little.
- *Training of school staff* on the issue of children's online safety. Promotional materials for Internet security will be drafted and awareness activities will be organized following the best European practices. Providing support to teachers, including access to resources, training and workshops to enable them to give effective guidance and support to students and parents on privacy, personal data protection and child protection issues online so as to increase students' awareness of Internet security.

Measure to Further Improve the Quality of Services, Data Privacy Protection and Users Satisfaction

In addition to current Program measures, some extra steps are recommended below to improve quality. Steps could be taken in order to: strength the Program implementers' overall knowledge and capacity in facilitating the effective involvement of poorer and marginalized groups in the activities proposed; make the relevant information user-friendly for poorer, less educated groups (that is, by communicating it in a language and form that they will find comprehensible and useful); and make the information available through selected channels to reach a broader base of the population to provide their feedback; to raise awareness throughout service providers; and, to provide high level improvement in handling and managing data privacy.

- **Share knowledge to build capacity among the institutions/ departments involved.** This will involve:
 - A training Program: who to involve; learning & development; leaders; staff. This would have to ensure: all the staff are provided with digital skills; ethics and behavioral issues for employees dealing with customer care; ongoing privacy training for all staff; provision of targeted privacy training for staff who handle sensitive personal information; usage of the e-Albania portal; preparation of an open data for publication; improvement of digital literacy connected to usage of various systems in users' daily job, and so on. DoPA (Department of Public Administration) and ASPA (Albanian School of Public Administration, the institution responsible for organizing training courses benefitting public administration) could be involved to reach out to all targeted groups and effectively tailor the training modules.
 - Encourage a culture in which everyone views privacy as their responsibility in order that personal information is not used or disclosed in an unauthorized manner. Involve: staff; service delivery/operations; program team; ICT; information security; learning and development; information management; and HR teams through a yearly workshop between departments that combines training and information-sharing.
 - Sharing knowledge on national and international best practices in targeted areas through the production and dissemination of an annual "how-to note" on selected social inclusion issue; and building partnerships with relevant stakeholders working on these issues.
- **Conduct a user experience map** to better understand the implications for people of being digitally included or digitally excluded- to understand the user needs of specific communities; Also, to

understand the impact that not being digitally included has on an individual (looking at different persons); to understand any negative impacts on people and to advance work on digital inclusion.

- **Measurement frameworks** of the digital transformation's impacts on social goals and people's well-being and in relation to the quality of online services. Implementation of the Survey on ICT Access and Usage by Households and Individuals (OECD, 2018) to develop subjective well-being and mental health questions for inclusion. Include detailed ICT-use variables in household surveys (such as general social surveys and labor force surveys), in order to better understand the causal relationships between Internet use and well-being outcomes over time. The measurement of service delivery access and quality will be mainstreamed by gender, age, rural/urban, PWD, and level of education. Analysis of data will achieve digital inclusion outcomes and inform the future development of initiatives; it will also help set criteria and priorities for future investment and effort. This will help to improve quality management. Test end-to-end, early and often with users, and continuously improve services in response to user feedback.
- **Monitor effectiveness, value and consequences of the service throughout its lifetime, key inclusion issues for the midterm review and report publicly.** The purpose of this action is to monitor some of the key inclusion issues during Program implementation with a view to discussing them and adjusting implementation at the midterm review. A midterm report will be presented to the Program steering committee on these issues. This monitoring will have two main functions: (i) to report any key social inclusion issues, progress, and challenges that have emerged during implementation, gathered through consultations with the implementing departments; and (ii) to present the results of monitoring certain key inclusion trends (such as the number of people calling from the poorest region in Albania or the number of women callers, alongside relative qualitative information gathered from various sources). The precise indicators to be monitored will be decided in the first year of Program implementation.
- **Developing a data privacy plan** that leverages people, processes and technologies and helps establish standards for data collection, access, management, use and more.
- **Training and certification from EU of AKSHI employees on GDPR.** The training will fulfill obligations and ensure compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The trainings will provide specific regulations to ensure accountability, maintaining data quality principles and implementing appropriate measures to protect data. Training courses with exam and certification on Data Protection according to GDPR that will help to:
 - Protect government and responsible Agency (AKSHI) reputation
 - Minimize security incidents
 - Build customer trust
 - Retain existing customers and attract new customer
 - Facilitate data access
 - Ensure a stronger enforcement of rules
 - Enable accurate storage of customer data
 - Enable adequate access control
- **Awareness sessions on cybersecurity issues and threats** necessary for effective response to data breaches and cyber attacks

Some other extra actions are proposed for better monitoring of service quality information, disclosure and citizen engagement in order to increase user satisfaction with e-Albania for selected e-services. It includes the following recommended actions:

- **Strengthen tracking mechanisms** to ensure transparency in implementing accessibility and inclusion. Review the performance of the existing Ministry of Health and Social Protection, MES, AKSHI, and other central/local governmental bodies dealing with social issues, civil organization engagement on Social Protection and Inclusion in order to improve and promote equity and inclusion of vulnerable groups. By reviewing their performance, implementation of Program activities will be more inclusive and responsive towards the vulnerable people.
- **Develop a communications and information outreach strategy.** This should outline a strategy to ensure information sharing and outreach, including mapping stakeholders in Albania and their information uses and preferences. This strategy should be updated annually, and funds allocated for the implementation of selected activities every year. The standards of privacy and security to which the Government adheres in relation to e-participation activities should be clearly communicated to the public.
- **Broad information dissemination and outreach.** This could include the following areas: (i) regularly sharing information with the public on Program activities (such as through a biannual newsletter and by proactively sharing Program reports with partners, the Government, and civil society); (ii) outreach to and partnerships with civil society and the media to disseminate Program activities and service information with selected willing departments; (iii) holding an annual multi-stakeholder workshop to share information; (iv) collecting and publish data on users to better understand whether or not solutions are being accessed by all citizens and formulate policies and solutions based on the data; (v) Conducting campaign to promote a culture of engagement as standard practice across the public sector in support of ongoing public participation; (vi) Promoting transparency in the way electronic consultations are managed and in the way people's input is addressed. (vii) Promoting citizen's entitlement on the right of information to open data portal; and (viii) Promoting the importance of using feedback mechanism to improve service quality

Fostering Change

- **Implementing a stakeholder change management plan.** The Program will identify the individuals and groups who will be affected by the changes or have the ability to impact the change process. The plan will be developed to enforce engagement and raise awareness among women, and vulnerable groups, youth, low-income households, illiterates, disabled persons, elderly, households in rural/remote areas) and to identify the barriers to technology use. It will also help develop a strategy to manage these stakeholders. The Stakeholder Plan will include techniques for generating new options for decision-making and implementation in order to ensure stakeholder participation and brainstorming for innovation. This plan will be elaborated in the first month of the Program. Due to the multiple stakeholders involved in achieving a single result, it is important to keep everyone involved regularly throughout the life of the Program to ensure their support.
- **Continue developing adaptive leadership skills and improving capacities on technical expertise/staff.** This will include joint work by the political authorities, service providers and staff for the functional definitions, with strong commitment from technical teams. Promoting values in public administration that are conducive to participation. Providing government department leadership and staff with training on the benefits and risks of the new system reform and mandating and enforcing openness and transparency requirements in order to better respond to the dynamics of the reform's implementation. Outreach and communications by the public sector to demonstrate to civil servants how these changes can improve their work and job satisfaction.

- **Building user trust** to facilitate change acceptance. This can be achieved by using digital channels, such as media, newspapers, radio, television and the Internet and informational presentations for interested groups, agents and mobile applications, all with the potential to enhance the user experience with the institution and to manage resistance. Stakeholders have a right to know the facts and to be assured that the change process is proceeding in a transparent manner.

Implementation Support

AKSHI is the primary GoA agency responsible for the implementation and achievement of Program results. To ensure significant coordination between the AKSHI, AKSHI staff within the selected line ministries and the service delivery staff of the selected line ministries inter-institutional “technical working groups” will be established and will be responsible for day-to-day implementation. Key institutions include the following: (i) the selected line ministries involved in the re-organization of digital services according to life events and involved in the first phase of the roll-out of the Albania virtual assistant, (ii) the entities involved in the roll-out of the Education SmartLabs (notably, the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Minister of State for Youth and Children) and, (iii) the other government entities and stakeholders that deal with relevant issues, such as Service Standards (the Minister of State for Service Standards) and grievance redressal (the Co-Governance Agency).

Technical Working Groups. To ensure deployment of all necessary competencies and know-how, the creation of dedicated technical interinstitutional working groups/implementation teams, focused on different components/subcomponents of the program to ensure the day-to-day oversight and implementation of their respective activities, is foreseen. In addition to day-to-day oversight of implementation, these teams will provide technical content for the procurement documents and will be held accountable for the achievement of results in their area.

To ensure high-level interinstitutional coordination, political visibility and ownership, in support of the Program implementation, A high-level Steering Committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister will be established. The role of the Steering Committee will be to overview the Program from a strategic and policy perspective, ensure alignment with the GoA’s Strategic Committee, watch over potential overlapping with other strategic projects and facilitate interinstitutional co-operation and coordination. The SC will be composed of the ministers of the relevant line ministries, directly or indirectly involved in the Program, SASPAC and AKSHI.

A Technical Committee led by AKSHI and made up of high officials of the entities involved in the implementation of the Program will be established. The Committee will meet monthly to oversee Program management at the technical level, report on progress, identify problems and discuss corrective measures to overcome delays and potential bottlenecks. The AKSHI will lead and support the interinstitutional coordination and stakeholders’ management, among all involved ministries and institutions at central government level. Support for communication and stakeholders’ engagement activities will also be included under the IPF. The TC’s conclusions will provide the basis for the reporting at the SC level.

A Results Monitoring Unit (RMU) will be set up at the level of the AKSHI to support the overall results monitoring of the proposed P4R to strengthen the achievement of the Program’s objectives. Specific responsibilities of PMU for this Program will comprise, but will not be limited to: liaising with the beneficiary to promptly react in support of all issues connected to technical assistance, training and capacity building, communication and outreach, policy reform and more generally, monitor progress of

results; collecting and disaggregating data for multipurpose analysis (pertinent to various Results Areas of the Program, such as access to e-services by gender, vulnerable persons, elderly; citizens' engagement, baseline data for the DLIs, economic analysis, and so on); facilitate internal audit procedures and manage DLIs verification protocols; supporting AKSHI in strengthening its ability to develop robust fiduciary systems; supporting AKSHI in setting up a strong monitoring and evaluation system; assisting AKSHI in preparing FM reports; preparing the Program's Operations Manual; managing the TA Component, preparing and updating the procurement plan, preparing terms of reference and bidding documents, publishing procurement notices and contract awards, negotiating contracts with consultants; preparing contract amendments; working closely with the Task Team to support successful missions, prepare ad hoc and interim reports, and so on. Specific expertise in the PMU will include: a procurement expert, a financial expert, a monitoring and evaluation expert, an ICT/business analyst expert (?), a project manager.

Summary of Key Risks and Recommendations

The following table (Table 5.1) summarizes the Program's main social risks and recommended extra actions to address them. It also includes the timelines and responsible Agency/Institutions for implementation of recommended actions. Whereas, following one (Table 5.2) summarizes Key Program Measures incorporated in the Project Design to Close the Digital Gap and improve the data privacy and protection

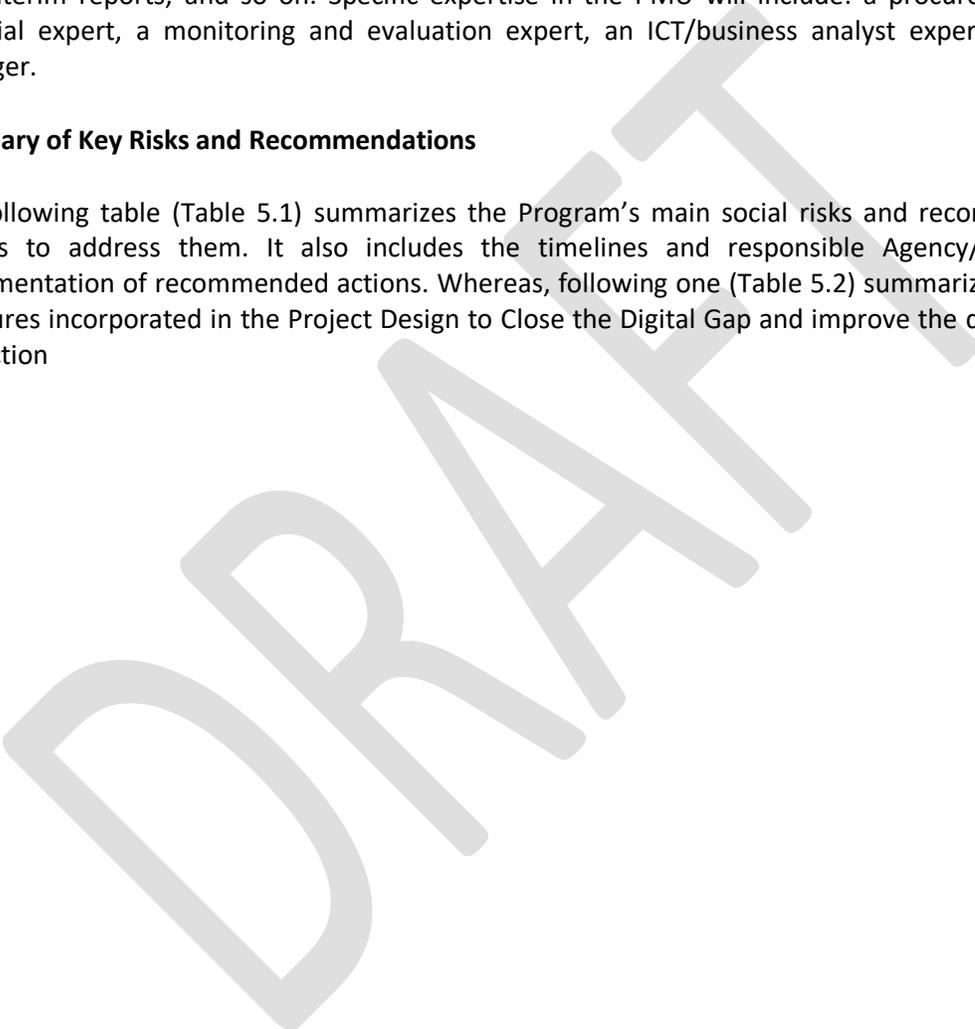


Table 5. 1: Summary of Main Risks and Social Recommended ESSA Actions

Theme	Main Risks	Mitigation measure	Time of implementation of mitigation measure	Responsible for implementation of mitigation measures
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Universal access, equitable and inclusive</p>	<p>Groups with limited Internet access, those not having ICT equipment have low digital skills and education risk being excluded Some groups may be unaware that the new helpdesk/ Youth Innovation center exist Some groups may not be able to chat with the virtual civil servant due to literacy or Educational constraints Certain poorer or Remote geographical areas will not have a Youth Innovation center Some users are unaware of their entitlements to feedback Some groups may not be able to articulate grievance well due to literacy or educational constraints Actions not taken accordingly to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the idea of piloting facilitation centers in more rural/remote areas of Program implementation (re-evaluate the capacity of the staff or possible defining budget sources to implement specifics requirement on additional employees in all Administrative Units in Albania (former communes), or provide training for the existing staff) 	<p>Before Program implementation</p>	<p>GoA, Ministry of Finance, AKSHI</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening cooperation and continuity of work between MSSS, AKSHI and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the National Council of Accessibility, and other public institutions and civil organizations 	<p>As soon as possible and Throughout Program</p>	<p>Steering Committee MSSS, , AKSHI, MHSP, the National Council of Accessibility (NCA) and other public institutions and civil Organizations</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a brief Program Strategy for mainstreaming social inclusion issue and implement across all government departments 	<p>First year of the Program</p>	<p>AKSHI in Coordination with MHSP and other regional and local institutions</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing ICT illiteracy targeting different age groups, by gender and people with disabilities. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishment and financing of digital literacy programs for adults 2. Raising initiatives from the Government such as senior-friendly courseware learning hub 3. Launching a nation-wide campaign • Focus group discussions to allow identifying the key barriers for vulnerable groups 	<p>During Program operation</p>	<p>AKSHI, MSSS, MHSP, DoPA in Support from regional local government and civil organization (MSSS will prepare and implement Protocols to explain available Program benefits to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. These Protocols will be available in minority languages, and in a form accessible to PWDs.)</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include an Accessibility Statement on all GovTech service websites 	<p>During Program operation</p>	<p>AKSHI</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information dissemination that caters to the unique informational needs of poorer and/or more remote groups. This involves: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proactive communication on the existence of facilitation centers 2. Proactive communication on service delivery information 3. Communication to the citizens on the ongoing reforms needs to be enhanced 	<p>First year of Program implementation</p>	<p>AKSHI in coordination with line ministries and in partnerships with civil society and the media</p>

	<p>grievance to improve services For a variety of reasons Some citizens (especially those vulnerable) still lack adequate information on how to access digital services People may be unaware that the Open Data Portal exist</p>			
	<p>Slow progress in digitalization of education in rural areas could widen the digital divide Indirect impact on children to the dangers of the virtual world</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a Social Assessment to establish baseline data and monitor functionality of educational SmartLabs • Training of school staff on the issue of children's online safety 	<p>Starting from first quarter of Program implementation Before program implementation</p>	<p>MES in coordination with AKSHI Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education in coordination with General Directorate of Pre-University Education GDPUE</p>
<p>Quality of Service delivery and data privacy protection, User satisfaction</p>	<p>Adverse impacts on those office employees and field staff who have low level of IT literacy Some users are unaware of their entitlements, some citizens' feedback not collected due to lack ICT access, limited Internet access or low digital skills Data not collected in un-served area Some users are</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share knowledge to build capacity among the departments involved. This will involve: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A training Program 2. A yearly workshop to encourage a culture in which everyone views privacy as their responsibility between departments that combines training and information-sharing. 3. Sharing knowledge on national and international best practices 	<p>First year of the Program Annually Annually</p>	<p>AKSHI in coordination with Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA) and DoPA</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a user experience map to evaluate what is working and not working to achieve digital inclusion outcomes 	<p>Starting from first quarter of Program implementation</p>	<p>AKSHI</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of Survey on ICT Access and Usage by Households and Individuals 	<p>Quarterly and annually basis surveys</p>	<p>INSTAT in coordination with AKSHI, AS and MHSP</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor effectiveness, value and consequences of the service throughout its lifetime, key inclusion issues for the midterm review and report publicly 	<p>Quarterly and annually</p>	<p>Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government MSSS</p>

<p>unaware of their entitlements and their feedback Some groups may not be able to articulate feedback due to literacy or Educational constraints Risk that feedback is not efficiently considered and not integrated into management decision-making Some users continue to not trust e-Albania to keep their data private, the standards of Privacy and security not improved and Clearly communicated to the public Concern on data privacy as citizens give their username and passwords of their e-Albania accounts to either service center clerks or third-party kiosks or notaries which may be irresponsible and not comply with personal data privacy regulations</p>			Other implementing agencies to be determined during program development
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a data privacy plan • Training and certification from EU of AKSHI employees on GDPR to ensure compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). • Awareness sessions of cybersecurity issues and threats 	<p>During First year of Program implementation During Program implementation</p>	AKSHI
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a communications and information outreach strategy 	<p>First year and updated each year</p>	AKSHI in coordination with line ministries and central/local institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength tracking mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in implementing accessibility and inclusion 	<p>First year of the program</p>	GoA, Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad information dissemination and outreach. This could include the following areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. regularly sharing information with the public on Program activities 2. outreach to and partnerships with civil society and the media to disseminate Program activities and service information 3. holding an annual multi-stakeholder workshop 4. Conduct campaign 5. Promote transparency and promote usage of open data portal 6. Promote citizen's entitlement on the right of information and importance of feedback mechanism to improve digital service delivery 	<p>Intensive during first year of Program implementation and throughout</p>	AKSHI in coordination with DoPA MSSH, line ministries and with civil society and the media Other regional and local institutions

	Departmental unwillingness to implement proactive disclosure			
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Based on the social inclusion analysis conducted for the ESSA, additional activities will be mainstreamed into the PforR design to ensure that target groups – including the poor, rural and elderly women, and the disabled – are not excluded from and can benefit from digital service delivery. The activities will: (i) improve the access to and usage of selected digital services by these target groups; and, (ii) tailor digital service application interfaces to cater to the special needs of such target groups. Table 5.2, below, summarizes the key agreed actions to address these digital divide issues

Activities	Where integrated in PforR
Accessibility to Digital Services. Integration of the latest EU and international digital service accessibility requirements into: (i) online and mobile E-Albania; and (ii) the new multi-channel contact center (which includes the Helpdesk interface). This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.	Results Indicator in Results Framework (RF); action reflected in a DLI.
Expanded Channels of Delivery and Assistance. Expanded and improved channels to accessing digital services. Primary measures: (i) the upgraded mobile e-Albania will reach additional groups in areas of Mobile penetration; (ii) the new multi-channel Contact Center/Helpdesk system, call center and Albania Virtual Assistant will provide additional support to service users in their digital service applications and follow-up; (iii) the multi-functional Youth Innovation Centers will include an “ <i>Infopoint</i> ” that will provide information to help users resolve problems related to their online application. This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.	RF, DLI. Program Action Plan: the InfoPoint’s will be provided, at a minimum, in 10 locations (in the Youth Innovation Centers). During Program implementation, it is a strong recommendation that InfoPoint’s (if effective) should be expanded to un-served geographical areas. In considering the expansion of the InfoPoint’s, the Program could also consider using selected rural municipal offices who could potentially fulfil this Infopoint function in un-served geographical locations.
Leveraging CSOs. The Program will identify, reach out to, and provide training to selected Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations that are <i>already</i> engaged in supporting the targeted vulnerable groups. This training will focus on how to support such groups in making digital service applications and using existing digital interfaces provided by the AKSHI.	Program Action Plan. To map CSOS; to develop and implement and action plan for training
200 Education SmartLabs. The inclusion aspects will be dealt with by the following: (i) some of the selected schools will be in rural, poorer areas (including a collective school) and additional resources	DLI and verification protocol will ensure such inclusion aspects are addressed.

<p>will be provided to those schools to ensure the labs are fully functional (e.g., additional electricity, connectivity, additional capacity building and so on); and (ii) the teachers in the SmartLabs will be provided with the tools and skills to provide additional support to students with learning difficulties (so they can make full use of the SmartLab facilities).</p>	<p>Program Action Plan: the client will develop a short action plan to ensure that inclusion issues are monitored and addressed effectively in the SmartLabs implementation.</p>
<p>Information, Education and Communications (IEC). This will include: (i) information campaigns to raise digital literacy of the population (e.g., on how to use new E-Albania functionalities), with tailoring to specificities of vulnerable groups (namely rural and elderly women); and (ii) dissemination of user-friendly and actionable information on how to apply for e-services (available in appropriate channels and languages). This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.</p>	<p>Program Action Plan. Part of the IEC will also be funded via the IPF Sub-component which includes communications.</p>
<p>Public Servant Training. InfoPoint and Call Center staff trained in methods/tools to support the target groups. This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.</p>	<p>Program Action Plan. Training plan develop and delivered for selected staff. Part of this to be funded under the IPF Technical assistance sub-component.</p>
<p>Data Protection and Trust. Includes: (i) measures to increase data protection and data security; and (ii) financing trainings on data protection and data security for public sector staff. This leads to increased data privacy and trust building in the population.</p>	<p>RF, PAP, On-demand capacity building (IPF sub-component)</p>

Environmental and Social Inputs for Program Action Plan

Measure	Action	Party Responsible	Financing Sources
Supporting digitally illiterate with the online application	<p>The multi-functional Youth Innovation Centers will include an “<i>Infopoint</i>” that will provide information to help users resolve problems related to their online application.</p> <p>In considering the expansion of the InfoPoint’s, the Program could also consider using selected rural municipal offices who could potentially fulfil this Infopoint function in un-served geographical locations</p>	AKSHI	Program
The Program will identify, reach out to, and provide training to selected Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations that are <i>already</i> engaged in supporting the targeted vulnerable groups. This training will focus on how to support such groups in making digital service applications and using existing digital interfaces provided by the AKSHI.	To map CSOS; to develop and implement and action plan for training	PMT at AKSHI	Program
200 Education SmartLabs. The inclusion aspects will be dealt with by the following: (i) some of the selected schools will be in rural, poorer areas (including a collective school) and additional resources will be provided to those schools to ensure the labs are fully functional (such as, additional electricity,	Development of a short action plan to ensure that inclusion issues are monitored and addressed effectively in the SmartLabs implementation.	AKSHI	Program

connectivity, additional capacity building and so on); and (ii) the teachers in the SmartLabs will be provided with the tools and skills to provide additional support to students with learning difficulties (so they can make full use of the SmartLab facilities).			
Awararance raising measures	TA for the(i) information campaigns to raise digital literacy of the population (e.g., on how to use new E-Albania functionalities), with tailoring to specificities of vulnerable groups (namely rural and elderly women); and (ii) dissemination of user-friendly and actionable information on how to apply for e-services (available in appropriate channels and languages	AKSHI	IPF loan
The Youth Innovation Centers (YICs) will support inclusion of lower-income youth by the following: (i) the geographical locations of the YICs means they will reach youth outside of the more affluent Tirana; and (ii) some stipends will be given to low-income youth so that they can benefit from the YIC digital skills training.	To define the business plan for ensuring that a selected number of low-income youth groups receive the stipend for accessing the YIC digital skills training.	AKSHI	IPF TA
. InfoPoint and Call Center staff trained in methods/tools to support the target groups. This will include a gender dimension as outlined in the gender section.	Training plan develop and delivered for selected staff	AKSHI	IPF TA
(i) measures to increase data protection and data security; and (ii) financing trainings on data protection and data	Training plans develop and deliver for selected staff. On demand capacity building	AKSHI	IPF TA

security for public sector staff. This leads to increased data privacy and trust building in the population.			
Work closely with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) and the National Environmental Agency (NEA) in developing SOPs for the management and disposal of e-waste. The SOP will follow the current World Bank's Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) Guidelines, based upon general and industry specific examples of Good International Industry Specific Practices (GIIPs).	Develop procedures for: inventory-based record keeping of ICT equipment by the departments at the time of procurement of new equipment and sale of used equipment, material safety data sheets of new and old equipment, terms and conditions for the repurchase of new equipment at the end of life of the equipment, NEA licensed buyers of used equipment, proposed conditions for the environmentally sound recycling and disposal arrangements, and so on.	AKSI, NEA	IPF TA
Training on e-waste	Develop the training materials	PMT at AKSHI and NEA	IPF TA

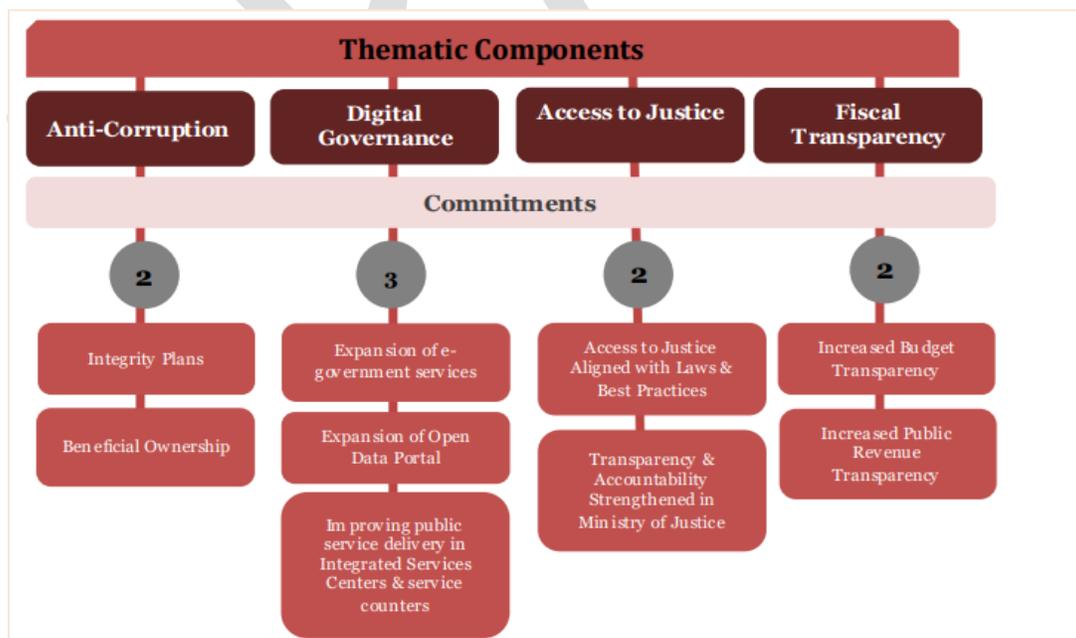
ANNEX 1. INFORMATION ON ALBANIAN GOVERNMENT PROGRAM 2021-2025 AND OPG ACTION PLAN 2020-2022

Albanian Governing Program 2021-2025 aims to materialize in every cell of government the "Albania 2030" vision, a major project that embodies the ambition to take Albania to the next level of developing. Albanian GP relies first on five main pillars:

1. Economic recovery from the earthquake and the pandemic;
2. Welfare for all, which will translate into a developed economy that creates opportunities for all;
3. Modernization for the development of productive economy, tourism, energy, agriculture, digital economy, transport and services;
4. Family as the foundation on which we build the future; and
5. Strong Albania, with a strong state, attention for every Albanian and with dignity in the world.

Modernization for development is related not only to technological progress or the dissemination of information, but is related to the creation of systems that create new and equal opportunities, increase the speed of interaction and the quality of production in key areas for economic growth.

Albania's fifth action plan 2020-2022 aligns closely with pre-existing government strategies and priorities toward EU accession, including commitments to prevent corruption in public institutions, introduce beneficial ownership transparency, and improve access to justice. The OGP 2020-2022 Action Plan consists of 9 commitments which are focused on increasing access to public services and increasing accountability through coordinated approaches to improve the quality and quantity of publicly available information. Enabling frameworks and initiatives to promote civic participation and public trust underpin all commitments selected. The following figure presents Thematic Components and Selected OGP 2020-2022 Commitments.



Source: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/>

In relation to Digital Governance, Accessibility in Public Service, the following commitments are specified in the OPG Action Plan 2020-2022.

1. Commitment 3

The specific Objective of this commitment is the development of e-government through provision of interactive electronic public services for citizens & businesses to increase efficiency and quality of public service delivery, and for changing citizens' mind-set towards electronic communication with public institutions. The commitment will contribute to:

- Expansion of public services on e-Albania
- Increasing the accessibility of the e-Albania portal focused on facilitating the implementation of the expanded portal and the creation of a citizen focused improvement mechanism and undertaken of an awareness campaign
- Promoting public accountability through an online electronic platform and assessments of the expansion of the e-Albania platform in coordination with civil society and awareness campaign to capacitate citizens and businesses and its feedback mechanism

2. Commitment 4

The Specific Objective of this commitment is the Expansion and increased accessibility of the Open Data Portal to increase transparency. The commitment will contribute to:

- Sharing government data through open data portal to strength the governance of and trust in the public institutions, reinforces governments' obligation to respect the rule of law, and provides a transparent and accountable foundation and enhance the provision of public services
- An accessibility strategy and awareness campaign will be designed and implemented

3. Commitment 5

The specific objective of this commitment is to improve and strengthen the Youth Innovation Centers and the accessibility in e-services information provided to service users, by means of the info points. The commitment will contribute to:

Guarantee the provision of information on what is needed and how to access e-services (including technical information on passwords, e-mails, registration on the portal, where to find the produced e-documents, and so on), by targeted groups of citizens. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 also promotes that no one be left behind. It calls for action to ensure everyone is included and also puts the focus first on those that are in most need of action. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the crucial role that GovTech can play in the achievement of many of its goals.

ANNEX 2. E-ALBANIA PLATFORM

Albania today is the country with the most advanced digital services in the entire region. 1226 services are provided online through the E-Albania. The remaining of public services cannot be digitized and provided electronically due to the need for physical presence of the individual.

The portal provides detailed information about services for the public (licenses, permits, authorizations, certificates, certifications or other similar services), the necessary documentation, the procedure to be followed, operating hours and the location of administration offices, contacts, as well as the address of the official website of the institution that provides the relevant service, where it can be oriented for further details.

The unique government portal e-albania.al is administered and developed by the National Agency for Information Society, serves as a gateway through which any interested person can receive via the Internet, electronic services provided on public institutions in Albania, 24 hours a day/7 days a week. The government portal e-Albania is connected to the Government Interaction Platform, it offers electronic services of level 3 and 4 and is fully in line with government policies in the field of ICT.

For any ambiguity, questions or problems regarding the registration or the services provided on the portal, there is a possibility of communication through the portal forum, mail, comments and messages on social networks. The portal serves to all Albanian citizens; businesses registered in the Republic of Albania; public administration employees in active directory and is offered 100 percent in the Albanian language.

Electronic services payments are made securely through the Government Electronic Payment Platform, which is affiliated with banking and non-banking institutions.

The authentication and identification process are based on the "Single-Sign-On" strategy, to create a unique identity for each user, using NID for the citizen and NUIS for businesses. It is compatible with the latest versions of web browsers such as Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Safari, and so on;

Access to mobile web versions, iOS and Android mobile app.

ANNEX 3. PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL RISK SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Preliminary Environmental Risk Screening

Risk	Screening outputs
Generic environmental and social risks	Generic risk assessment for environmental effects
Environmental effects	Environmental Screening Results
Potential loss or conversion of natural habitats	Not risk for significant impacts in natural habitats
Potential pollution or other Program externalities	Not any significant pollution
Changes in land or resource use	Not change on land use
Potential Environmental benefits	
Improved governance could potentially enhance the effectiveness and compliance of environmental protection laws and regulations	
Environmental context	Initial environmental risk assessment
Does the environmental setting of the Program pose any special challenges that need to be considered?	The program doesn't pose any special challenge.
Program activities in or near sensitive habitats?	The program activities do not impact any sensitive habitats
Potential cumulative or induced effects?	Not cumulative effects or induced effects are expected
Program strategy and sustainability	Initial environmental risk assessment
Strategic context: what is the long-term vision of this Program in relation to the country's development strategy?	The Program will indirectly support and facilitate sustainable development, which is one of the key objectives of the country's Environment Policy, national cross cutting environmental strategies and so on.
Does it include explicit environmental management objectives?	The Program does not include explicit environmental management objectives. However, improved governance could potentially have other indirect benefits, such as improved environmental governance.
Do Program activities commit, constrain, or alter the decisions of future generations?	Reforms in governance are likely to promote sustainable development, which ensures protecting the rights of future generations while also benefiting the present-day population.
Are there any potential roadblocks to ensure the environmental and social sustainability of the Program after implementation?	Not any roadblock to ensure the environmental and social sustainability of the program implementation. The Program aims to promote more inclusive access, especially for rural inhabitants, and more transparent government to promote citizens' trust in the state.
Institutional complexity and capacity	Initial institutional environmental risk assessment
Does the Program involve multiple jurisdictions or implementing partners?	The Program has crosscutting objectives and involves all institutions in national and local level. The executive agency is AKSHI and implementing instrument e-Albania.
Capacity or commitment of counterpart to implement regulations and procedures?	In general, the national and regional/local government has the full capacity to implement regulations and procedures. Still, the limited capacity of regional/local government, may affect indirectly by mismanagement of e-waste.
Is there a track record of commitment to and implementation experience of environmental aspects?	From 2008, when has started the program for digital communication, there are good experiences, which step by step has committed the implementation of environmental and social aspects. Data delivered from INSTAT, NEA (Yearly Environmental Statement), other entities shows that efforts should be done by environmental and social institutions (For more please refer to the preliminary social risk screening)

Is there sufficient institutional capacity to address the environmental impacts of this Program?	Lack of funds, know-how and employees for management and inspection of e-waste in each municipality, remains the main insufficient institutional capacity in country level.
Are there any known institutional barriers that might prevent the implementation of this Program?	There are not identified Institutional barriers that might prevent the implementation of the program
Reputational and political risk context	Initial environmental risk assessment
Potential governance or corruption issues	Improved governance and transparency are among the key objectives and core elements of the Program.
Are there any political risks associated with this program?	There is not any political risk associated with the program. The program was approved and developed by several governments, leaded from both biggest and main political parties/actors
Is the Program known to be controversial?	Not any controversial issue of the program is defined in the present or expected in the near future
Overall Assessment	Overall initial environmental risk assessment
Is the proposed Program suitable for PforR or would it be better suited to a Specific Investment Loan?	PforR is best suited to the Program.

Preliminary Social Risk Screening

Risks	Assessment
Associated or likely social effects	Initial risk assessment for social effects
Nature and scale of involuntary resettlement or land acquisition required?	The Program provides for investments in small scale such as refurbishment/renovation of the Helpdesks, but does not foresee any activities involving high social risks, such as extensive land expropriation, relocation of large numbers of people
Changes in resource access?	The Program will not finance any activities that will require conversion of land or the restriction of access to resources
Potential impacts on vulnerable communities	Despite the fact that the program is based on the principles of universal access to public service delivery, quality and accountability, there may be residual social risks associated with digital exclusion of vulnerable groups and unequal benefits from the program, the risk for data privacy leakage and the risk that citizens' trust will not be improved without high level improvement of transparency and accountability mechanism
Impact on indigenous Peoples?	There are no Indigenous Peoples in the Program area.
Potential Social benefits	
Improving universal access to public services, increasing efficiency and quality on public service delivery, reducing time and travel cost for the citizens to access service delivery. Improving data privacy protection and promote citizen's trust in the government. Increasing transparency of the government	
Contextual Risk Factor	Initial social risk assessment
Does the Program implementation involve any sensitive social area such as: indigenous peoples, vulnerable groups, conflict zones settings that may intensify potential impacts?	Albania is not considered a fragile state, or a post-conflict zone and no overt social conflict is anticipated due to the program. However, unequal benefits from the Program activities such as establishment of smart lab may cause discontent, social friction and aversion if they will be placed in urban areas (which currently are better covered with ICT tools). The same reasoning holds for the poor community, those living in rural areas, illiterate, elderly, PwD, women and other vulnerable groups in case they will be excluded from gaining access to and receive public services. Any leakage of personal data may cause distress, psychological problems among the population, friction between employers and employees, confusion and foster instability. This will deepen the aversion to and distrust of the government.
Are Program activities likely to interact with existing or other planned activities that may modify or increase the	The geographical coverage of the Program does not envisage any negative activity or potential cumulative or induced effects in any area of social sensitivity.

likelihood of adverse impacts?	
Program strategy and sustainability	Initial social risk assessment
Strategic context: what is the long-term vision of this Program in relation to the country's development strategy?	The Program aim to; ensure universal access, usable and accessible for all citizens and businesses to high-quality electronic services; leverage digital solutions for innovation and accountability as vehicles for improving access to and the quality of public services; and to support the necessary reforms to the digitalization enabling environment and in this way will reduce time and travel costs of citizens, administrative costs of the Government and reduce losses from fraud and corruption and also improve citizen trust in and satisfaction with the Government
Does it include explicit social management objectives?	It includes explicit social objective of providing universal access through GovTech, improving quality and increasing accountability and transparency.
Do Program activities commit, constrain, or alter the decisions of future generations?	Program activities do not constrain or alter the decisions of future generations
Are there any potential roadblocks to ensure social sustainability of the Program after implementation?	Social behaviors leading to disparities in society, whether region- or gender-based, age and economic level, are a potential roadblock to the Program's intended social impact and could negatively affect the sustainability of any gains it might achieve with respect to social sustainability.
Institutional complexity and capacity	Initial institutional social risk assessment
Does the Program involve multiple jurisdictions or implementing partners?	The Program has crosscutting objectives and involves several institutions and agencies within the country. AKSHI is the primary agency for the implementation of the Program. The Program involves multiple national and local institutions and organizations such as the new Helpdesk Agency and Authority for Standards, MSSS, MHSP and MES with its responsible department and regional directorates and local offices, municipalities, IDP Commissioner, Peoples Advocate, Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government.
Capacity or commitment of counterpart to implement regulations and procedures?	Insufficiencies in inter-institutional cooperation between the implementing agency (AKSHI) and line ministries and limited capacities to coordinate and implement the next wave of digitalization reforms and expected resistance are some of the key barriers to achieving social sustainability.
Is there a track record of commitment to and implementation experience of social aspects?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some progress was achieved by AKSHI regarding inter-institutional cooperation to address the accessibility issues of vulnerable groups. Some progress was achieved to address some concerns of vulnerable groups, especially for PWD. AKSHI is in contact with some organizations regarding the accessibility of PWD and is making efforts with other donors such as UNDP to implement some projects for people with disabilities, and also regarding practices/mechanisms to be applied for the inclusion of vulnerable groups, people who lack ICT equipment, connectivity and digital knowledge for obtaining electron services, and data are being collected to address different issues. It is planned to implement an accessibility statement on the e-Albania website to communicate and demonstrate commitment to accessibility and to users with disabilities. AKSHI is also in collaboration with MHSP and interest parties to enable the addition of the necessary functionalities for PWD for all websites it hosts. AKSHI has also set up a working group since 2018 with the MHSP and representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities to determine the standards that should have the website and the e-Albania portal in order to continue with the implementation of these standards and another working group for accessibility. AKSHI experienced to establish some special functionalities dedicated to facilitating access for people with disabilities on the websites of the line ministries are such as: zoom (for the visually impaired); contrast (which helps categories of dyslexic persons); sailing with TAB (helps categories of paraplegic persons). There is also good progress on handling complaint mechanism. Over the last four and a half years, the co-governance platform has tackled a total of 153.469 problems and complaints filed by citizens over the public services, providing real-time replies and providing final solution to more than 61 percent of them. The System of Circulating the Documents bearing e-stamps has helped public institutions, the citizens and businesses in their daily work. This system is overseen by

	<p>the Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government coordinators, who continuously monitor the whole process from application to the delivery of a certain public service, as well as the complaints about the delivered services. Continuous efforts are being done to address the social impacts for that category of vulnerable population (residents of rural and remote areas, the elderly, people with reduced mobility, without internet connection and digital knowledge, low resources and so on). The upgrading and enhancing of the e-albania native app that would grant access to e-services using the mobile aims at facilitating access to e-services by these categories of beneficiaries.</p>
<p>Are there any known institutional barriers that might prevent the implementation of this Program?</p>	<p>Insufficiencies in intra-institutional and inter-institutional coordination between line ministry back-offices and front-offices, insufficient mechanisms for citizen engagement and grievance redress, insufficient technical and budget resources of line ministries and other public institution to sufficiently implement their digitalization efforts prove detrimental to achieving the planned social impact goals.</p>
<p>Is there sufficient institutional capacity to address the social impacts of this Program?</p>	<p>To achieve the intended social impact, an Environmental and Social (E&S) Risk Management Focal Point will be appointed within the PIU established in the AKSHI to raise any relevant environmental issues. The PIU will support the day-to-day management and overall coordination and monitoring responsibilities. The high-level Steering Committee will ensure high-level political visibility and ownership and inter-ministerial coordination. AKSHI also has a strong and technically competent team which is highly committed to advancing the digitalization agenda. AKSHI ICT units in line Ministries follow the implementation of specific projects/programs and identify new opportunities to improve the services. The policy, legal framework and institutional capacities on social protection and social inclusion and non-discrimination are in place and further elaborated with the vision of providing integrated social services, but some improvements are needed to such a framework.</p>
<p>Reputational and political risk context</p>	<p>Initial social risk assessment</p>
<p>Potential governance or corruption issues?</p>	<p>Improved accountability and transparency are among the key objectives and core elements of the Program which will reduce losses from fraud and corruption. Though the main focus is on service delivery digitalization, the Program also focuses on greater transparency and accountability by creating internal and external pressures for reform and implementation.</p>
<p>Are there any political risks associated with this sector or proposed Program?</p> <p>Is the sector or Program known to be controversial?</p>	<p>Gaining recognition, acceptance, and support at the political level is vital for the success and sustainability of the initiatives envisaged under the Program. There is high strategic relevance of the digitalization agenda, including commitment from the highest political and bureaucratic levels. The political program of the new government, laid out for 2021-2025 envisions a fully digitalized Albania by 2030 for all citizens, businesses and government. The government digital program will contribute to the overall political objectives of the government, indicating a high political priority of the program. However, efforts should be made to achieve wider recognition and acceptance for the Program through an effective communication strategy, framework leadership, stakeholder change management plan, information dissemination, and confidence-building measures. Also, to overcome potential tensions between AKSHI and line ministries and aligning service delivery and digitalization policy priorities and systems processes. At the bureaucratic level, while AKSHI has an embedded presence in all ministries, through a AKSHI representative in its IT departments, there remains a need to build consensus on the roles and responsibilities of IT and service delivery teams, including within the Ministry of Education for the SmartLabs. Political incentives must strengthen the adoption of selected reforms via results-based financing.</p>
<p>Is the proposed Program suitable for PforR or would it be better suited to a Specific Investment Loan?</p>	<p>The overall social risk rate is assessed as Moderate; However, it should be mentioned that the Program provides opportunities to improve social behaviors as an indirect benefit and outcome of the various Results included. Strong and efficient implementation of additional mitigation measures proposed in the action plan will address the negative impacts on the digital divide, poor service quality and limited user orientation and accountability. Thus, a PforR is best suited to the Program.</p>

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