



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Albania: Domestic abuse and violence against women

Version 3.0

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in [the basis of claim](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment on whether, **in general**:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- Claims are likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation’s (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI’s relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the ‘cut-off’ date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion.

Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

5th Floor

Globe House

89 Eccleston Square

London, SW1V 1PN

Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 12 December 2018

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Women in fear of persecution or serious harm due to domestic abuse.

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1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 Domestic abuse is not just about physical violence. It covers any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. It can include psychological, physical, sexual, economic or emotional abuse. Children can also be victims of, or witnesses to, domestic abuse. Anyone can experience domestic abuse, regardless of background, age, gender, sexuality, race or culture. However, to establish a claim for protection under the refugee convention or humanitarian protection rules, that abuse needs to reach a minimum level of severity to constitute persecution or serious harm.

1.2.2 Where a claim is refused, it must be considered for certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 as Albania is listed as a designated state.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check whether there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Convention reason and particular social group

2.2.1 Women at risk of domestic abuse in Albania are not considered to form a particular social group within the meaning of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Although they share an immutable (or innate) characteristic – their gender – which cannot be changed, and although traditional views of their subordinate position in society are still prevalent in parts of the country, the Country Guidance case of [DM \(Sufficiency of Protection – PSG –](#)

[Women – Domestic Violence\) Albania CG \[2004\] UKIAT 00059 \(1 April 2004\), heard 15 March 2004](#), concluded that women do not form a particular social group (paragraph 10) and that the state offers sufficiency of protection (para 18).

- 2.2.2 In the absence of a link to one of the five Convention reasons necessary for the grant of refugee status, the question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of serious harm as a result of domestic abuse, sufficient to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP).
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on particular social groups, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#); on gender issues, see the [Asylum Instruction on Gender Issues in the Asylum Process](#); and on HP, see the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#).

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2.3 Assessment of risk

- 2.3.1 Albania has traditionally had a macho and patriarchal culture, and such values have contributed to domestic abuse being widespread. The Home Office fact-finding team (HO FFT), who carried out a fact-finding mission to Albania in October/November 2017, were informed that one in two women in Albania had experienced at least one form of domestic abuse during their lifetime, whereas the results of the latest Crime Survey for England and Wales, published in October 2018, indicated that 26% of women aged 16 to 59 had experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16. A study carried out in 2013 by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) indicated that in Albania:

58.2% had experienced psychological violence

23.7% had experienced physical violence

7.9% had experienced sexual violence

24.6% had experienced both physical and sexual violence

Although sources indicate that domestic abuse can affect all women, the INSTAT survey showed that women educated to degree level or above are less likely to experience domestic abuse, whereas women in rural areas are more likely to experience domestic abuse (66.9 per cent) than women in urban areas (53 per cent) (see [Statistics](#) and [Societal attitudes](#)).

- 2.3.2 The HO FFT were further told that domestic abuse is a taboo and is therefore under-reported, although reporting has been increasing, with a 30 per cent increase since 2006, which would suggest that actions taken to increase reporting have been effective. There are also signs of a positive change in attitudes towards women and domestic abuse. As of November 2017, half of the ministerial seats in the government were occupied by women. In November 2017, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) reported that the authorities were aware of remaining challenges and were keen to work with GREVIO to address them (see [Increased reporting of cases](#) and [Societal attitudes](#)).

- 2.3.3 Domestic abuse is a widespread issue in Albania. An assessment of risk to a person will depend on the specific circumstances of each particular case.
- 2.3.4 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#).

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2.4 Protection

- 2.4.1 In the country guidance case of [DM \(Sufficiency of Protection – PSG – Women – Domestic Violence\) Albania CG \[2004\] UKIAT 00059 \(1 April 2004\)](#) the Tribunal held that the state offers a sufficiency of protection against domestic abuse (paragraph 18).
- 2.4.2 Since then, a number of measures have been adopted to improve both the law in regard to domestic abuse and services and support for victims. For example, the Criminal Code was updated in 2012, with domestic violence recognised as a specific offence, and the Council of Europe’s Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) came into force in Albania on 1 August 2014. As a result of further changes to the law, from September 2018, women and girls will be granted immediate protection in a shelter as soon as they report cases of violence, and protection will not depend on having formal ties to the perpetrator, such as marriage or cohabitation. Albania has a National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2016-2020, which is the third consecutive strategy addressing gender-based violence (see [Domestic violence](#) and [Government initiatives](#)).
- 2.4.3 In November 2017 GREVIO commended the authorities’ work on raising awareness of issues related to gender-based violence (GBV), particularly its work with men and boys, and also the increase in governmental funding in recent years on shelters. GREVIO further noted that ‘considerable investments’ have been made in recent years to train professionals dealing with victims of domestic abuse, including judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, health professionals and social workers. The police themselves also work with local communities, including schools, in areas where levels of GBV are high in order to raise awareness and reduce the rate of violence (see [NGOs and funding](#), [Police action](#), and [Schools](#)).
- 2.4.4 In November 2017, GREVIO reported that there are high satisfaction levels with the way police respond to cases of domestic abuse and suggested that special units set up at police stations to handle cases of GBV and training for law enforcement officials are at least partly responsible for this. Although the HO FFT were told that police professionalism could vary, the attitude and understanding of the police in regard to GBV has clearly improved greatly since the Country Guidance case of [DM](#) (see [Police](#)).
- 2.4.5 Protection orders (POs) are widely used. The European Commission reported that 3,243 cases of domestic violence were reported in 2017 (against 3,700 in 2016) and 2,593 POs were issued (against 2,207 in 2016). Emergency POs may also be issued, depending on the severity of the case. The HO FFT were told that violation or lack of enforcement of POs could be a challenge. However, there were cases of imprisonment for those who had

breached a PO, with the minimum sentence being three months (see [Protection orders: obtaining an order](#), [Protection orders: numbers](#), [Protection orders: effectiveness](#)).

- 2.4.6 The HO FFT were informed that sentences for domestic abuse could be lenient. GREVIO reported that of the 516 perpetrators punished in 2014, the vast majority (492) received a prison sentence of up to two years, and eight were sentenced to a prison term of up to five years (see [Sentencing](#)).
- 2.4.7 Since November 2016, there has been a national hotline for women needing help with GBV, which is free of charge and available 24 hours a day (see [Telephone helpline](#)).
- 2.4.8 GREVIO reported that there are eight shelters for female victims of domestic violence, with a total of 153 beds. This constitutes a shortage of 137 beds, according to the guidelines of the Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence, which recommends one family place per 10,000 persons. However, this does not indicate that sufficiency of protection is therefore not available; indeed, the HO FFT were told that the combined capacity of the shelters is sufficient to meet needs. The Human Rights Officer from the US Embassy stated that the shelters were very good, particularly those run by the NGOs, which are among the best civil society organisations in Albania. Shelters are located in Tirana, Elbasan, Vlora and Shkodra, meaning that women in more rural and remote areas will need to relocate to access shelter (see [Numbers and location](#)).
- 2.4.9 GREVIO reported that suitable emergency shelter is not always available, with women occasionally being housed in facilities such as hospitals. Stakeholders told that HO FFT that there is a lack of emergency provision in Kukes. However, the HO FFT were informed that there are numerous small emergency centres throughout Albania which provide short-term assistance, including emergency accommodation. There are plans for every municipality to have an emergency centre in due course (see [Emergency crisis centres and shelters](#)).
- 2.4.10 Every person seeking shelter is given a mental health assessment, which is in line with legislation. Treatment is provided either within a shelter or at a mental health centre. Shelters usually have a psychiatrist. Women are offered ongoing psycho-social treatment on leaving a shelter, if required, and there is no time limit on how long they are monitored within the community (see [Mental health](#)).
- 2.4.11 On leaving a shelter, social housing is available if required. Economic assistance, including social welfare payments and free nursery places for single mothers with children, are available. The Ministry of Interior told the HO FFT that basic needs are met (see [Social housing](#) and [Other economic help](#)).
- 2.4.12 GREVIO noted that, due to the law's main focus on domestic violence, the care for women dealing with other types of GBV, such as sexual violence and forced abortions, is lacking. There are no rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres in Albania, although medical and forensic examinations are offered in hospitals and other healthcare settings. According to the Ministry of Justice, the number of convictions for rape was only 3 in 2014 and 4 in

2015; it is likely that the great majority of cases go unreported due to social attitudes surrounding sexual violence. GREVIO expressed concern that victims are at risk of not receiving the appropriate protection or medical care (see [Other forms of violence against women](#)).

- 2.4.13 The authorities are in general willing and able to provide effective protection for women experiencing domestic abuse, especially given both the law and the support and services available for women have improved since the Country Guidance case of [DM](#).
- 2.4.14 See also the country policy and information note on [Albania: Background information, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).
- 2.4.15 For further guidance on assessing the availability or otherwise of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Internal relocation

- 2.5.1 There is freedom of movement within Albania. The HO FFT were told that women can internally relocate to Tirana, where it is possible for women to live alone, working and paying rent. The Municipality of Tirana reported that about 67 people go to Tirana each day, looking for a job. It was acknowledged that it is easier for younger women to live alone, rather than older women, and that it would be harder for a woman to live alone in rural areas, although some women manage to do so (see [Women living alone](#)).
- 2.5.2 The British Embassy in Tirana reported that single women/mothers returned to Albania are assisted in finding employment by the regional employment offices. They are entitled to receive state benefits, and this would include a payment for victims of domestic abuse if the case has been reviewed by a Court and a restraining order issued. They are also entitled to receive social housing and children are given priority in the school registration system and offered language lessons if required (see [Annex B](#)).
- 2.5.3 A person moving to a different part of the country must transfer their civil registration to their new community in order to receive government services. The FCO in Tirana spoke to State Social Services, the Albanian State Police and National Centre for the Victims of Domestic Violence in 2017 in order to obtain information about the security of data provided via civil registration. They were told that police access is limited and leaves an electronic audit trail, and so data could not be accessed for dubious reasons with impunity. If a police officer accesses data illicitly, he/she can be prosecuted, and this has happened. When registration is moved from one area of the country to another, the previous municipality is informed that the person has moved, but is not given the new address (see [Freedom of movement](#) and [Civil registration and data security](#)).
- 2.5.4 Decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation on a case-by-case basis, taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they believe they would be unable to relocate to a specific location to mitigate any risk.

- 2.5.5 See also the country policy and information notes on [Albania: Background information, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#) and [Albania: Trafficking](#).
- 2.5.6 For further guidance on internal relocation and the factors to be considered, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Certification

- 2.6.1 Where a claim is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. This is because, following the Country Guidance case of [DM](#), and the subsequent improvements to the law, provision of shelters and other awareness-raising programmes, effective state protection is generally available.
- 2.6.2 For further information on certification, see the [Appeals Instruction on Non-Suspensive Appeals: Certification Under Section 94 of the NIA Act 2002](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 11 December 2018

3. Law

3.1 Domestic violence

- 3.1.1 The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) is an independent human rights monitoring body, mandated to monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated that, 'Albania has developed a solid legislative framework to address domestic violence, in the fields of both civil and criminal law.'¹ GREVIO further noted that Albania signed the Istanbul Convention, which entered into force in Albania on 1 August 2014². For further information about the Istanbul Convention, see the [GREVIO report](#), pages 10 and 12.
- 3.1.2 A Home Office fact-finding team (HO FFT) undertook a fact-finding mission (HO FFM) to Albania from 31 October to 7 November 2017. The FFM spoke to a wide range of sources which are all identified within the report. They noted that, 'The Criminal Code was updated in 2012 and domestic violence (DV) was provided as a specific offence.'³ Article 130/a of the Albania Criminal Code, which covers domestic violence, states:
- 'Battering and any other act of violence against a person who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant, close relative or close relative in-law to the perpetrator of the criminal offence, resulting in violation of his or her physical, psycho-social and economic integrity, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to two years.
- 'A serious death threat or serious injury, against a person who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant, close relative or close relative in-law to the perpetrator of the criminal offence, resulting in violation of his or her physical, psycho-social and economic integrity, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to three years.
- 'Intentional injury committed against a person who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant, close relative or close relative in-law to the perpetrator of the criminal offence, resulting in a temporary disability for work for more than nine days, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to five years.
- 'The same offences which are committed repeatedly or in the presence of minors, shall be punishable by one to five years of imprisonment.'⁴
- 3.1.3 UN Women noted changes to the law in September 2018:

¹ GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 8, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

² GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 10, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

³ HO FFM, Section 1.3, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁴ Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, compiled 11 June 2015, [URL](#)

‘Starting from September this year, women and girls who experience violence in Albania will be granted immediate protection by the police as soon as they report violence cases. With the recent amendments to the Law "On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations", women will no longer have to wait for two days to receive a protection order, usually without a place to go, after reporting their perpetrator. They will now be placed in a safe shelter immediately, along with their children, including in cases where the children experience violence indirectly.

‘On 23 July, the Albanian Parliament approved the amendments to the domestic violence law, which entered into force on 1 September. The amendments strengthen protective and procedural measures for a more effective response to domestic violence and protection of survivors.[...]

‘For the first time, the law protects women and girls in intimate relationships, without having formal ties to the perpetrator, such as marriage or cohabitation. In addition, the new changes ensure better services not only for survivors of domestic violence but also for the provision of rehabilitation services for the perpetrators.’⁵

3.1.4 The HO FFT further stated:

‘The UN said that since 2006 the Albanian government had made a lot of progress and had put in place a legislative framework to tackle DV, but there are organic laws which need to be improved, especially related to definitions, in line with CEDAW (Convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) and the Istanbul convention. The UN commented that although there is legislation in place that addressed domestic violence in family relations, it required some amendments and they were in discussions with all the relevant stakeholders under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection with a view to adding support and expertise. [...] Urgent cases [of domestic violence] are brought before the court without delay making it easier for the perpetrator to be arrested and charged.’⁶

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3.2 Rape, including spousal rape

3.2.1 The US Department of State’s Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2017 (USSD HR Report 2017) stated:

‘Rape, including spousal rape, is a crime. Penalties for rape and assault depend on the age of the victim. For rape of an adult, the prison term is three to 10 years. The law includes provisions on sexual assault and sexual harassment and makes the criminalization of spousal rape explicit.

‘The government did not enforce the law effectively. Officials did not prosecute spousal rape. The concept of spousal rape was not well understood, and authorities often did not consider it a crime.’⁷

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⁵ UN Women, ‘Amendments to domestic violence law [...],’ 17 September 2018, [URL](#)

⁶ HO FFM, Section 1.3, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁷ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 6, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

3.3 Sexual harassment

- 3.3.1 The USSD HR Report 2017 stated, 'The law prohibits sexual harassment, although officials rarely enforced it. The commissioner for protection against discrimination generally handled cases of sexual harassment and may impose fines of up to 80,000 leks (\$700) against individuals or 600,000 leks (\$5,300) against enterprises.'⁸

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3.4 Discrimination

- 3.4.1 The USSD HR Report 2017 stated:
'The law provides for the same legal status and rights for women as for men. Women were underrepresented in many fields at the highest levels. The law mandates equal pay for equal work, although many private employers did not fully implement this provision. In many communities, women experienced societal discrimination based on traditional social norms depicting women as subordinate to men. There were reports of discrimination in employment.'⁹

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3.5 Early and forced marriage

- 3.5.1 The USSD HR Report 2017 stated that, 'Although the legal minimum age for marriage is 18, authorities did not always enforce the law. Underage marriages occurred mostly in rural areas and within Romani communities. According to data released by the Albanian Institute of Statistics, the number of early marriages (under the age of 19) decreased significantly in 2016 from 2015.'¹⁰

- 3.5.2 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

'The CCA [Criminal Code of Albania] introduced a specific offence targeting ... forced marriage in Article 130 which criminalises the behavior of coercing someone to conclude a marriage and of requesting the victim to leave the territory of Albania for the purposes of forcing him or her to enter into marriage. Whilst this wording conforms to that of the Convention, the applicable penalties of a fine, or imprisonment, up to three months are very low.

'As for the civil consequences of forced marriages, Articles 33 and 44 of Albania's Family code provide that a marriage concluded without the full and free consent of one or both of the spouses or as a result of a threat is null and void. The right to request the invalidation of a forced marriage belongs to the spouse, whose consent was not freely given, provided such request is filed no later than 6 months from the date the threat ceased and in any case no later than 3 years after the conclusion of the marriage.

⁸ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 6, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

⁹ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 6, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

¹⁰ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 6, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

‘The continuous cohabitation between the spouses lasting 6 months since the time the victim gained full freedom forfeits the right to file for the invalidation of the forced marriage.

‘GREVIO notes that the conditions under which the invalidation of a forced marriage may be requested appear quite restrictive.’¹¹

3.5.3 The same report stated:

‘In Albania marriage under the legal age (18) is regulated by law and can be authorised by courts. Available reports show, however, that the practice of courts could be largely improved to ensure that a thorough verification of the minor’s free will to enter into marriage is conducted. The state report points to shortcomings in the relevant civil legislation, in respect in particular to the absence of any provision setting the minimum age under which derogations to the legal age to marry would not be permitted.’¹²

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3.6 Other forms of violence against women

3.6.1 For information about legal provisions in relation to psychological violence, physical violence, stalking, and sexual violence, see the [GREVIO report](#) (page 13 onwards).

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Section 4 updated: 5 November 2018

4. Prevalence

4.1 Societal attitudes

4.1.1 The HO FFT noted:

‘Albania is small country which emerged from Communist isolation at the end of the 1980s. It has a macho male culture with deep rooted patriarchal values where traditionally women are not regarded as the equal of men. It is a poor country with high unemployment, particularly in rural areas. These circumstances and values have contributed to a culture where domestic abuse is widespread and sometimes regarded as acceptable by both men and women. Domestic abuse is [...] seemingly not defined by class or education. Attitudes to women are gradually changing and the government is seeking to address domestic abuse both through legislation as well as increased police awareness of the issue and a professional response to it.’¹³

4.1.2 The HO FFT further noted, ‘Several sources agreed that gender-based violence is a national problem, particularly in the rural areas in the north east. The reasons for this included a macho male Balkan mentality, low standard of education, the economic situation and gender based inequalities. Poor court functioning and inadequate police training were other contributory factors.’¹⁴

¹¹ GREVIO, ‘Baseline Evaluation Report,’ Albania, page 48, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

¹² GREVIO, ‘Baseline Evaluation Report,’ Albania, page 48, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

¹³ HO FFM, Executive summary, February 2018, [URL](#)

¹⁴ HO FFM, Section 1.1, February 2018, [URL](#)

4.1.3 The HO FFT further reported:

‘The FFT was informed that [...] patriarchy is particularly rooted in the poorer parts of the country. [...] There is a prevailing culture of acceptance of domestic violence, and women are usually pushed to breaking point before they file a complaint, which they will often subsequently withdraw due to family pressure. Many women don’t report DV as they don’t like to publicly air their problems and become the subject of gossip and a percentage of women accept DV or emigrate instead. However, in the past decade things have changed and new generations are becoming more open minded. [...]

‘The WCSSC [Women’s Counselling and Social Services Centre, Kukes] went on to say that although old attitudes remain in Kukes changes are happening: “[...] The situation is improving; more people are taking a more equal role. [...] now men are doing what were traditional female jobs – like cleaning. Men are now sometimes also nurses, teachers.”¹⁵

4.1.4 The GREVIO report of November 2017 noted:

‘At the time this report was under preparation, half of the ministerial seats in Albania’s government were occupied by women. The reported rate of women in senior positions in public administration was nearly as high. The recent national elections served as a testing ground for Albania’s commitment towards ensuring women’s representation in the national assembly. Women parliamentarians have come together under a unified alliance – the Alliance of women deputies – bridging their political divisions under the common goal of promoting women’s rights and combating violence against women.

‘These developments have opened up discussions in the public sphere on the topic of violence against women. Public officials in their daily work, youth in schools, men and boys as actors of change have started to talk publicly about a matter hitherto regarded as a taboo. Authorities thus aim to encourage women victims to name violence and let their voice be heard.

‘[...] The authorities are aware of the remaining challenges and have entered the evaluation process [with GREVIO] as an opportunity for critical self-examination.’¹⁶

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4.2 Statistics

4.2.1 The USSD HR Report 2017 noted that, ‘Domestic violence against women remained a serious problem.’¹⁷ In the 2018 report on Albania, the European Commission stated that, ‘Domestic violence remains a serious concern. During 2017, 3 243 cases were reported (against 3 700 in 2016)...’¹⁸

4.2.2 The HO FFT reported:

‘The UN said domestic violence (DV) was the biggest gender issue they faced in Albania and the last survey conducted in 2013 showed that 1 in 2

¹⁵ HO FFM, Section 1.2, February 2018, [URL](#)

¹⁶ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 65, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

¹⁷ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 6, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

¹⁸ European Commission, Albania 2018 report, 17 April 2018, page 29, [URL](#)

women had been exposed to at least one form of domestic violence during their lifetime (in Europe the average is 1 in 4). They also said that sexual violence was under-reported by both the victim or family member, it still being a taboo issue. [...]

'The UN also stated that the number of cases of DV and GBV [gender-based violence] reported to the police is higher than the number of convictions (for example, in 2014 out of 1189 cases only 476 were convicted). Although in the last two years the number of cases going to court has increased, the total number of convictions still remains low. However, the data collected from the police, prosecution service and the judiciary are not always compatible.

'The UN also noted that in the period January to August 2017, 2963 cases of DV were reported to the police. Of these 962 were not convicted and the rest have pursued Protection Orders (POs). A small number of cases go on to prosecution. During this period, DV led to nine people being killed of whom seven were female.

'Sources reported that the number of reported cases of DV had gone up in recent years and this was seen as a positive thing; people know where they can get support and are more trusting in the criminal justice institutions and processes.

'However, the Albanian Ombudsman commented that their figures do not show an increase in the numbers. They said that although information presented by the media shows an increase, their statistics don't show this. Two judges from the Family Section of the Tirana District Court however, told the FFT that during the last 6-7 years, the volume of cases brought to court has increased but they were not able to judge whether that is a result of social conditions or not.

'In October 2017 Kukes Police Department noted that so far this year, they had identified 26 cases of DV and 11 had been issued with a PO. The others have been prosecuted as criminal proceedings, of which 2 had been put on remand in prison and the others acquitted.

'The Director of the Centre for Youth Progress in Kukes noted that there were 15 cases of DV in the area that went to court last year (2016), but he didn't know the numbers for this year [2017]. He commented that findings from different projects developed in the region by a local NGO, show very high figures and that government statistics might not be accurate.'¹⁹

4.2.1 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

'Following the introduction of a dedicated offence for acts of domestic violence, administrative data on reporting rates of domestic violence have steadily increased. Yet, GREVIO is particularly alarmed about prevalence data showing that very few victims – less than 10% - seek help. A continuing upward trend in reporting and conviction rates is therefore to be expected as more and more victims have the courage to turn to law enforcement and courts.'²⁰

¹⁹ HO FFM, Section 1.1, February 2018, [URL](#)

²⁰ GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 42, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

4.2.2 The Institute of Statistics in Albania (INSTAT) provided the following statistics on domestic abuse for the year 2016:

‘554 Men

462 Adult persons damaged

92 Juvenile persons damaged

1.204 Female

1.154 Adult persons damaged

50 Juvenile persons damaged

1.758 Total²¹

4.2.3 Quoting various sources, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (Canadian IRB) stated the following in April 2014:

‘In a 2013 study conducted by the Albania Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), women between the ages of 18 and 55 in 3,589 households from all 12 prefectures of Albania were interviewed regarding their experiences with domestic violence by a spouse or intimate partner. Of the women who participated in the survey, the following had experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives:

58.2% had experienced psychological violence

23.7% had experienced physical violence

7.9% had experienced sexual violence

24.6% had experienced both physical and sexual violence (ibid., 33-34).

‘Within the twelve months prior to the survey (2012-2013),

52.8% had experienced psychological violence

14.7% had experienced physical violence

5% had experienced sexual violence

16.2% had experienced both physical and sexual violence (ibid.).

‘Sources report that domestic violence affects women of all levels of education. However, the INSTAT survey indicated that women with a university or "post-university" degree experienced lower percentages of all types of domestic violence than those with less education. According to the survey, women in rural areas were more likely to experience domestic violence: 66.9 percent of rural women had experienced domestic violence compared to 53 percent of urban women.’²²

4.2.4 See [Sentencing](#) for further statistics related to domestic violence.

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Section 5 updated: 11 December 2018

²¹ INSTAT, ‘Women and men in Albania 2017,’ [URL](#)

²² Canadian IRB, 30 April 2014, ALB104859.E, [URL](#)

5. State protection and assistance

5.1 Increased reporting of cases

5.1.1 The HO FFT reported:

‘Josif Shtembari, the Director for Crimes, at the General Directory for Police in Tirana commented that although the victim may go straight to court, the social services or the Prosecutor’s Office, in 99% cases they come to the police. He said that they connected the rise in cases (thirty per cent increase in reporting since 2006) to the increased sensitivity of the police. Also the change in the law in 2006, which made it easier to report cases and that people have a better understanding of the law and are more confident in coming forward.

‘The Social Services Department of the Municipality of Tirana noted that in Tirana:

- There is a rising trend in the cases of DV which are reported and then managed in Tirana
- there were 580 “demands for issuing Protection Orders” between Jan & Sept 2017 (474 demands between Jan & Sept 2016)
- 76 cases of DV had been managed by the CCR (Coordinated Community Response Mechanism) in 2017 (compared to 43 cases in 2016)²³

5.1.2 The GREVIO November 2017 report stated:

‘Limited data exists regarding violence against women and vulnerable groups of women in Albania, although more than one report provides information concerning the heightened difficulties they encounter in reporting violence and accessing adequate protection and support services. In Albania, disadvantaged and marginalised groups of women include in particular older women, Roma and Egyptian women, women with disabilities, migrant women, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, as well as asylum seeking women.’²⁴

5.1.3 See [Protection orders](#) for further information on this subject.

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5.2 Telephone helpline

5.2.1 In the report of November 2017, GREVIO stated:

‘GREVIO congratulates the authorities for their recent move to enter into an agreement with the women’s NGO, the Counselling Centre for Women and Girls, to launch a single national hotline (116 117) covering the entire territory devoted specifically to violence against women, operating free of charge and 24/7. Until November 2016, the national women’s helpline in Albania (Phone no.: +355 4 22 33 408) had not been available 24 hours a day due to limitations in funding. By complementing the services provided by the municipal helplines, the new hotline will allow meeting the requirements of Article 24, especially in terms of round-the-clock accessibility. GREVIO understands from the recently adopted operating standards that the new

²³ HO FFM, Section 1.41, February 2018, [URL](#)

²⁴ GREVIO, ‘Baseline Evaluation Report,’ Albania, page 13, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

national hotline is designed to serve all victims of violence against women, although it tends to be advertised as being dedicated only or mainly to victims of domestic violence.²⁵

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5.3 Police

5.3.1 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

‘Based on its interviews with those working in this area, GREVIO finds that satisfaction levels concerning the law enforcement’s response to violence against women stand generally high. The setting up, at police departments, of special units to handle domestic violence cases, together with consistent initial and on-going quality training are credited for ensuring that law enforcement officials treat violence against women as seriously as any other violent offence. GREVIO welcomes the indication in the state report that more and more women are joining the police, thus increasing the possibility for victims to be heard by women police officers. GREVIO recalls in this respect that compliance with the obligation laid down in Article 50 of the Convention requires inter alia providing for an adequate number of female law enforcement officers, including at high levels of responsibility. It further requires hearing victims without delay by specially trained, and where appropriate female, staff in premises that are designed to establish a relationship of trust between the victim and the law enforcement personnel. This is an area where GREVIO finds that improvements could be made by ensuring the presence of trained professionals, including women psychologists, in police districts and providing them with adequate facilities for accepting victims and their children.’²⁶

5.3.2 The USSD HR Report 2017 noted that, ‘Police often did not have the training or capacity to deal effectively with domestic violence cases.’²⁷

5.3.3 The HO FFT stated, ‘Josif Shtembari, the Director for Crimes, at the General Directory for Police in Tirana noted that the new law, introduced in 2007, had created an organised structure to tackle the problem of DV. This legislation set out a structure with coordination between the local police office, district police office, social services and NGOs in the particular region. [...] Since 2006, an entire chain of law enforcement institutions follow up on incidents of DV.’²⁸

5.3.4 The HO FFT further reported:

‘Josif Shtembari [...] described the process for dealing with claims of DV once the victim has notified the police:

- The police officer looks for visual signs of physical injuries
- The victim is referred immediately to a doctor who will make a report
- Either a claim is made to a court for a PO, or

²⁵ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 40, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

²⁶ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 56, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

²⁷ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 6, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

²⁸ HO FFM, Section 1.3, February 2018, [URL](#)

- Proceedings are started for further evidence and the case is referred to the Prosecutor's Office
- Once sent to court an urgent PO will be decided in 24 hours, others take up to 15 days

'The law requires that when a VDV [victim of domestic violence] is interviewed by the police a psychologist or social worker is present.

'Mr Shtembari told the FFT that the police will take control of the scene of violence looking for weapons, as well as photographs or videos of it, and they will also talk to witnesses.

'He said that the police regard the moment the person makes a declaration as the crucial point in the case and they recognise that the victim may be in shock when they first arrive at the police station so they have tried to create a friendly environment in which victims can make their statement.

'Mr Shtembari told the FFT that any person who has knowledge of violence or crime must report it. This can be neighbours but this does not happen very often. Usually it is member of the family, and in particular the victim themselves.

'Mr Shtembari noted that the Albanian law does not provide that the victim can have a copy of the police report but a record of court proceedings is available. CLCI said the police are obliged, by law, to give a copy of the lawsuit to the victim, although they often don't.

'Mr Shtembari further noted that if the person withdraws her claim, it usually stops there but if the person is subject to repeated violence, the police will continue with the investigation. If the case was initiated by the court, then it continues until the court decides the outcome.

'He said they do not have a figure for the number of cases that are withdrawn. It usually happens at the court, when the person doesn't show up, or at the Prosecutor's office.'²⁹

5.3.5 The HO FFT also spoke to the Police Department in Kukes, a town in the north-east of the country, and reported:

'The Kukes Police Department confirmed the details given by Mr Shtembari, in that the law provides for a set practice on how to deal with VDV, and that they follow this in Kukes: "When the victim first comes, and they are usually women, there is a medical check if needed. Then it is referred to the psychologist under the municipal social services, if necessary. We emphasise very much the first moment of contact, or first communication with the victims to create a warm environment to make them feel confident, safe and if there is a need for medical treatment, we send them to the hospital.

"After the victim has come to us, we interview them in the presence of the psychologist and ask them about the incident, the background etc. After that, we fill in a form for a Protection Order and lodge it in court. Depending on the PO issued by the court, we either accompany the person to the Centre for VDV in Tirana, or to their accommodation and explain to the perpetrator

²⁹ HO FFM, Section 1.7, February 2018, [URL](#)

his obligations under the law... The person gets a copy of the report. It is the right of the victim to read and get informed of what was written in the report. They get this automatically. It is a legal obligation and procedure to give a copy to the victim.”

‘The Kükes Police Department stated that the offence is based on the word of the victim and treated as “beating” and if the victim withdraws her case then the case is closed. However, in serious or high risk cases, they ask the community police officer to keep the case under close supervision as well as the specialist for DV cases in Kükes to have close contact with the victim and check how the situation has progressed. The community police specialist would also meet the perpetrator.’³⁰

5.3.6 The HO FFT also spoke to other stakeholders:

‘The Director of Social Services in Kükes noted that there is a round-table committee on issues surrounding DV headed by the mayor of the municipality and that such a committee is required by law: “We are trying to coordinate our work with the police. Sometimes cases are referred to the municipality unit for DV; some are referred to the police. In most cases, the police doesn’t follow-up these claims of DV to the prosecution office or to bring them to the municipality office. They try to bring the conflicts to a close in their own way. In cases where the problems are very pressing, the police contact us and we [...] try to resolve them together.

“The head of DV unit has accompanied the women to court. They have to bring a complaint and apply for a Protection Order. In most cases, the police don’t have enough information and capacities to follow-up the cases in court. Because the administrator of the village (appointed by the municipality) doesn’t give enough information, it is mostly based on the victim’s allegations. This means that when the claim goes to court, there isn’t enough evidence to issue the PO. The court, most of the time, they tend to work on reconciliation between victim and perpetrator.”

‘The Director of the WCSSC in Kükes noted that there has been a change in the reporting of DV cases over time, and the victims now go more readily to the police, although often it is when they have reached breaking point. She said that she sometimes asks the prosecutor and the police to continue with cases, even where a woman withdraws her case.’³¹

5.3.7 The HO FFT were also informed about trust in police and police attitudes:

‘Several sources noted that the number of reported cases of DV showed an increased awareness and increased trust in the police to investigate cases. The police are usually the first institution a VDV approaches. They are now more receptive to complaints and more likely to follow up on them; helping women get an EPO [emergency protection order] and PO; also advising them about how to pursue a case. The Albanian Ombudsman said every case referred to the police is followed up.

‘However, traditional values do impact on police thinking sometimes. Several sources commented that there have been cases where police have tried to

³⁰ HO FFM, Section 1.7, February 2018, [URL](#)

³¹ HO FFM, Section 1.7, February 2018, [URL](#)

negotiate with the victim to go back to the perpetrator of the violence. They said that there is still a lot to be done on capacity building, attitude changing and professionalism – and also enforcing POs properly. [...]

'The FFT was told that sometimes the police take the side of the male, but that is not always the case, and is becoming less common.'³²

5.3.8 The FFT further reported on a meeting with the UN:

'Whilst recognising that the government has made efforts to increase the capacities of the police, and making clear that the role of the police in the fight against violence has improved over the last year, the UN stated that the professionalism of the police varies a lot, and that they have supported the Police Academy to update their curriculum. [...]

'The UN also noted that a positive development is the amendment to the criminal code which includes provisions for the protection of victims of gender-based violence and human trafficking. In particular, the new provisions require that that victims of sexual violence and human trafficking communicate with the same gender officers. The new amendments have been in force since July 2017.'³³

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5.4 Protection orders: obtaining an order

5.4.1 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

'GREVIO welcomes the introduction in the LDV of a mechanism to provide victims of domestic violence with court orders shielding them and family members from immediate threats to their security, health or well-being. Available data show that that the mechanism is widely used and that victims are willing to seek the protection it affords, regardless of whether or not they pursue other legal proceedings. [...] The judicial decision pronouncing an EBO [emergency barring order] or PO constitutes an executive title from the moment it is adopted and is thus immediately enforceable.'³⁴

5.4.2 The HO FFT stated:

'The FFT were told that a person goes to the desk of the police office, and immediately fills out a form to get a PO or an EPO, depending on the severity of the case. The PO can also be requested by the police or social services and is decided by the court.

'We were told that an EPO is easy to obtain, but a long-term PO can sometimes be more of a challenge – the courts sometimes say there is not enough proof for one to be issued.

'The Albanian Ombudsman noted that, usually, an EPO is given before the full process is before the court. Then the PO is decided and, if issued, usually lasts for a year.

'The law provides that a wide range of subjects can apply for a protection order, for example the victim, a minor (with the involvement of a NGO),

³² HO FFM, Section 1.17, February 2018, [URL](#)

³³ HO FFM, Sections 1.18 and 1.19, February 2018, [URL](#)

³⁴ GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 57, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

family lawyers, the prosecution office, but the main source is the police. There is a standard form that is filled in and that is presented to court. Time limits for POs are: for minors - 24 hours, for adults - 48 hours.

'Tirana court judges added that 90% of protection orders are granted.'³⁵

5.4.3 The HO FFT also spoke to the Tirana Family Court, who explained the procedure for obtaining a protection order:

'As per Albanian law, the courts start from the rule of law principle. The judges start from the criteria within the provision of the law. There is not any concrete or specific requirement to provide specific proof; it comes from the police or the victim.

'Usually the first phase when protection is given, on the file there is data or reports or statements or evidence from the police, third parties or the victim. Can also be visual proof.

'It has two phases: Urgent, to decide whether to have a PO based on the proof that is on the file. Second, further information - phone calls, medico-legal reports, more info from police possibly on perpetrator - then they decide on what to do.

'90% accepted at the first stage. Then investigate further.

'As well, during the 2nd stage, is a request given to the police to provide a psychological report in the case of minors. This is to determine whether to apply a stronger reaction from the court if necessary.

'Also, a source for getting proof of the violence is the Social Services Office, and also the statements of the other family members. But this latter one is a problem, given the strong family ties that exist here in Albania. Depending on the full access and the statements on the file will determine how long the PO will remain in place. There are also cases where the victim is a repeat person, and the length of time is one year. Sometimes the evidence is not so strong, but the judge believes that the person is a victim, in which case they give a shorter time (e.g. 3 months).

'The Ministry for Health and Social Protection said the main stakeholder is the local courts and once the proceedings have taken place, a copy of the order is sent to the victim, the police and the local municipality social services.'³⁶

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5.5 Protection orders: provisions

5.5.1 The GREVIO report stated:

'The protection granted provisionally under an EBO can be extended on condition that a request for a PO is submitted to the court within 20 days from the issuance of the EBO. The court deliberates within 15 days whether the effects of the EBO should be prolonged, modified or cease and decides accordingly whether to grant or not a PO. The available measures which can be decided include, inter alia, the removal of the perpetrator from the family

³⁵ HO FFM, Section 1.12, February 2018, [URL](#)

³⁶ HO FFM, Section 1.13, February 2018, [URL](#)

home, the order for the perpetrator to stay a certain distance from the victim or other family members and the placement of the victim and her children in temporary shelters.³⁷

5.5.2 The HO FFT spoke to the Tirana Family Court, who described the usual conditions attached to a PO:

- No violence
- No contact, including by phone
- Perpetrator to leave the house
- In extreme cases, to pay for the rent of the victim
- Stay a certain distance away from the victim

‘If there are incidents involving the breach of a PO it is the police and local social services who are responsible for resolving them.’³⁸

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5.6 Protection orders: numbers

5.6.1 In its Annual Report 2017/18, Amnesty International stated that 420 immediate protection orders had been issued by 1 June [2017].³⁹ In the 2018 report on Albania, the European Commission stated that, ‘During 2017, 3,243 cases [of domestic violence] were reported (against 3,700 in 2016) and 2,593 protection orders were issued (against 2,207 in 2016).’⁴⁰

5.6.2 The HO FFT reported:

‘The Tirana Legal Aid Society stated that around 2000 POs had been issued in 2017 up to the end of October [2017].

‘The Tirana Family Court said that the reason for the rise in number of POs is because there is an increased belief in the criminal justice system: “With evolution of society, information, social media – they understand there is a solution. They also see themselves less as just victim, but with a solution available and the belief that the court will do something, the law is more on their side.”

‘The Director of Social Services in Kukes noted the number of POs issued in the Kukes municipality was 16 in 2016 and so far, to end of October 2017, 7 for women plus 2 for minors. [...] Kukes Police Department stated that 11 POs had been issued so far in 2017.’⁴¹

5.6.3 See also [Increased reporting of cases](#) for further information on this subject.

5.6.4 The HO FFT were told by the Social Services Department of the Municipality of Tirana that in Tirana there were 580 ‘demands for issuing Protection Orders’ between January and September 2017 (there had been 474 demands between January and September 2016)⁴².

³⁷ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 57, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

³⁸ HO FFM, Section 1.14, February 2018, [URL](#)

³⁹ Amnesty International, Annual Report 2017/18, 22 February 2018, [URL](#)

⁴⁰ European Commission, Albania 2018 report, 17 April 2018, page 29, [URL](#)

⁴¹ HO FFM, Section 1.15, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁴² HO FFM, Section 1.41, February 2018, [URL](#)

5.7 Protection orders: effectiveness

5.7.1 In the 2018 report on Albania, the European Commission stated that, ‘During 2017, 3 243 cases [of domestic violence] were reported (against 3 700 in 2016) and 2 593 protection orders were issued (against 2 207 in 2016). For 2017, 129 of these protection orders were not respected (against 119 in 2016).’⁴³

5.7.2 The HO FFT reported:

‘Many sources observed that a challenge in the area of DV is the violation and lack of enforcement of protection orders. Often the courts decide to leave the victim and the offender in the same household for economic reasons which has led to further violence and, occasionally, murder.

‘Courts blame the police for not enforcing the POs, whereas the police blame the courts for issuing POs that are not enforceable.

‘The Social Services Department at the Municipality of Tirana commented that POs do work, but effective social services were needed to make that happen. Their opinion was that if a victim doesn’t get support (including housing and a job) then it is difficult for a PO to be effective. Tirana has a lot of services, NGOs and international agencies to help people, but it is more difficult for people in the regions outside of Tirana which don’t have these resources.

‘The Tirana Legal Aid Society noted that lawyers are allowed to ask for a Protection Order: “A Protection Order is free of charge; but the expert is not free. This is why we are involved. We also cover the costs of judicial process. We ask for the most effective actions from the court. In some cases, I have asked for parental custody orders.

“[...] Once a person hasn’t respected a Protection Order, it switches from a civil to a criminal matter. But it depends on whether it is reported. Don’t really think these are effective. They need other things to accompany it. For example, if the person is to stay away from the other person, you need to provide that they can. Or, subsequent meetings should be supervised or monitored. But these don’t happen often. And there is a problem with people being encouraged to report breaches of a Protection Order. When the cases are reported, the police are effective and do respond.” [...]

‘The Director of the WCSSC in Kukes stated that POs were a big step ahead and were really necessary but the infrastructure to implement them was not fully in place. She said the state is obliged to give women victims food, education, accommodation, employment, but they don’t. However, POs were generally reviewed by women judges who have been very considerate.’⁴⁴

5.7.3 The HO FFT also noted that, ‘There are cases of people going to prison for breaching a PO. The minimum sentence is three months.’⁴⁵

5.7.4 In November 2017, GREVIO noted:

⁴³ European Commission, Albania 2018 report, 17 April 2018, page 29, [URL](#)

⁴⁴ HO FFM, Section 1.16, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁴⁵ HO FFM, Section 1.16, February 2018, [URL](#)

'GREVIO has been apprised of a number of difficulties regarding the application of this mechanism [i.e. protection orders], which for the most part do not relate to deficiencies in the law but rather to its ineffective implementation. The major issue is the weakness of protection orders, such as those ordering the perpetrator to live in one part of the family dwelling leaving the victim to live in the other. Available reports explain these decisions in terms of "a combination of discrimination and pragmatism on the part of the judiciary" which is reluctant to leave the perpetrator homeless. Thus, considerations relating to the scarcity of housing and the low socio-economic status of the perpetrator have at times prevailed over the prime consideration which should underpin any decision to issue an EBO/PO: the victim's safety. Moreover, in taking this approach, rather than protecting the victim, protection orders have at times become the ante-chamber to more violence.'⁴⁶

5.7.5 GREVIO further stated:

'Other obstacles [besides victim and perpetrator remaining in the same house] standing in the way of an effective implementation of the EBOs/POs mechanism relate mainly to the lack of reactivity of responsible officials. These concern (a) the non-compliance with procedural deadlines, such as the 24 hour deadline to notify the victim, law enforcement, bailiffs and social services of the issuance of EBOs, or the absence of clear deadlines applying in case of appeals against the decision to issue an EBO/PO; (b) the scarce use by law enforcement and prosecution of their power to set in motion the procedure for the issuance of an EBO; (c) the failure of the responsible enforcement agencies, in particular bailiffs, to execute or to ensure the enforced implementation of EBOs/POs. GREVIO is further informed in this respect of cases where bailiffs have required payments from the victims in order to enforce EBOs or POs. Both perpetrators acting in violation of protection orders and officials failing to execute them can be held accountable under the relevant provisions of criminal law. Although the state report [drawn up by the Albanian authorities and submitted to GREVIO] offers data concerning the number of violation of protection orders, no information is provided as to the sanctions which might have been applied as a consequence thereof.'⁴⁷

5.7.6 In its Annual Report 2017/18, Amnesty International stated that, 'In August, Judge Fildeze Hafizi was shot and killed in her car by her former husband. She had been granted a protection order in 2015 after he had beaten her. He was convicted and imprisoned in April 2016, but released in early 2017 under a general amnesty.'⁴⁸

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5.8 Protection orders: children

5.8.1 In November 2017 GREVIO stated:

'GREVIO welcomes recent measures taken to enshrine in the Albanian legislative framework the duty for the relevant authorities to provide child

⁴⁶ GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 57, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

⁴⁷ GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 58, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

⁴⁸ Amnesty International, Annual Report 2017/18, 22 February 2018, [URL](#)

witnesses of domestic violence with the appropriate psychosocial counselling support, including when they are party to judicial proceedings. It further welcomes the creation of the new Order of Psychologists which represents an assurance of professionalism and quality service in this field.

‘Against this background, there are nevertheless areas of concern where the best interests of the child risk being undermined, in particular in the context of protection orders. GREVIO is informed that the situation of children is not systematically examined whenever court decisions for protection orders are taken in situations of domestic violence. Furthermore, even when a request is submitted for a protection order to cover children, the principle that the Parties should cover the expenses related to the obligatory psychological report means that in cases where they are unwilling or unable to pay, the default solution which prevails is that there is no psychological report and the children remain with the violent partner. Psychological fees can be particularly prohibitive compared to standard living conditions.’⁴⁹

- 5.8.2 The HO FFT noted that, ‘Children of 12 are given a psychological evaluation and asked which parent they would prefer to live with, however it is the psychiatrist’s and court’s decision which prevails.’⁵⁰

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5.9 State protection mechanisms

- 5.9.1 The HO FFT reported:

‘The UN have supported the government to develop a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) which brings together all the local and regional actors to tackle DV. Victims of violence can enter the system from any of these points, and once in, it is a coordinated local mechanism. CCRs only operate in half of the country at present (36 out of 61 municipalities) although there are 5 more coming soon.

‘The UN commented that it had done a study on the functionality of CCRs at local level and found that financial and human resources were lacking.

‘The Director of Social Services at the Municipality of Tirana listed the members of their CC Local DV Coordinator in the municipality:

- Police Department
- District Court
- Prosecutor’s Office
- Bailiff’s Office
- Forensic Institute
- Regional Directory of Public Health
- Mother Teresa Hospital
- Directory of Social Services

⁴⁹ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 59, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

⁵⁰ HO FFM, Section 8.2, February 2018, [URL](#)

- Regional Education Directory
- Employment Office
- Shelter for Women and Girls
- Community Development Centre ‘Today for the Future’

‘The UN supported the former Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth to establish an online database – REVALB – that enables local authorities to record and track every case of violence against women and girls and this is coordinated and monitored centrally by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.’⁵¹

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5.10 Referrals

5.10.1 The HO FFT stated:

‘The FFT were told that the law provides that the victim can come and make their case at the local police station, or at any office at municipality level – it then gets referred to the local board level to determine the best course of action – this is called the Mechanism for Case Referral.

‘The Department of Social Services at the Ministry of Tirana stated that they have 24 administrative units and a DV case is referred to them after it has been through the police, prosecutor and EPO. They have a 24-hour free phone number and a national number (which women in Tirana can also use) which can be used to notify or refer cases of DV. There is also an NGO which refers cases. This is usually in the 24-48 hours it takes for an EPO to be issued by the court.

‘The same source said they try to encourage people to report the perpetrator, but leave it up to the individual. However, if they think the woman’s life is in danger they will refer the case to the police.’⁵²

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5.11 Sentencing

5.11.1 The HO FFT noted:

‘Sentences are often lenient and this can lead to re-offending. The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) commented that the court system is quite corrupt and many don’t see VDV as important and it is unlikely a woman would have the money to influence the outcome.

‘Two judges from the Tirana family court told the FFT that if a person breaks the conditions of the PO imposed by the court, they can go to prison. Even if the perpetrator has an open criminal case or is already in prison, it doesn’t stop the civil court proceedings from going on.

‘The Director of the WCSSC in Kukes noted that men have been imprisoned, but not enough such that it can serve as an example to other men.

⁵¹ HO FFM, Section 1.10, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁵² HO FFM, Section 1.11, February 2018, [URL](#)

‘The Kukes Police Department noted that out of the 11 POs issued this year, two men had continued to violate the victim, but they had taken measures against these men and put them in prison. In the other cases: “these have been treated with constant supervision; going to the accommodation; speaking to the perpetrator; making sure he understands the red line.”⁵³

5.11.2 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

‘Article 45 of the [Istanbul] Convention requires Parties to match the criminalisation of the offences defined in Articles 33 to 41 [which cover various forms of violence, including psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence including rape, forced marriage, and sexual harassment] with the imposition of sanctions which are “effective, proportionate and dissuasive”. The analysis of the CCA [Criminal Code of Albania] confirms that this is the principle which the Albanian lawmaker has largely upheld, with the exception of forced marriages (punished by a fine or imprisonment of up to three months). Whether, in practice, courts have effectively sanctioned the seriousness of the offences in accordance with the spirit of the law is a question which only data can answer.

‘The data provided in the state report [drawn up by the Albanian authorities in response to a questionnaire from GREVIO] do not tie convictions to the specific offences they are related and so do not allow GREVIO to reach any definitive conclusion in this respect. The report indicates that out of 516 perpetrators punished in 2014, the vast majority (492) received an imprisonment sentence of up to two years. Similarly, nearly all the convictions handed down in 2015 (804 out of a total of 821) carried imprisonment sentences of the same duration. Only eight condemned persons in 2014 and in 2015 were punished with a term of imprisonment of up to five years.

‘In their report, the authorities state that there were 22 women victims of domestic murder in 2014 and 20 in 2015. They do not specify how many cases of murder in the domestic unit were either prosecuted or adjudicated by courts. Under the CCA, punishment for “murder with intent” ranges from 10 to 20 years. Following an amendment in 2013 which introduced Article 79/c regarding “murder because of family relations”, punishment for “murder of the person who is the spouse, former spouse, cohabitant, or former cohabitant, close kin or close kin of the spouse of the offender” has been increased and now stands at no less than twenty years or life imprisonment. [...]

‘According to [the Statistical Yearbook of the Ministry of Justice], there were 19 convictions under Article 79/c in 2014, of which 13 with sentence terms ranging from 10 to 25 years, and 30 in 2015, out of which 19 with sentence terms of the same duration. It should be noted that the statistics reported by the Ministry of Justice do not allow identifying murders involving specifically women and girls.’⁵⁴

5.11.3 See [Statistics](#) for further data regarding violence against women.

⁵³ HO FFM, Section 1.8, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁵⁴ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 52, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

5.12 Other forms of violence against women

5.12.1 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

'[...] forced marriage, sexual harassment and sexual violence, have received little legislative and political attention. Available data regarding these other forms of violence against women - however limited - corroborate the need to address them comprehensively. Hence, more efforts are needed, notably in the areas of data collection, multi-agency co-operation, awareness-raising, education, training of professionals, general and specialist support services, as well as restraining or protection orders, to cover effectively all forms of violence against women and girls.'⁵⁵

5.12.2 GREVIO further reported on sexual violence:

'There are no rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres in Albania, although [...] medical and forensic examinations are offered in hospitals and other healthcare settings. Other types of support such as trauma support, counselling for victims, support during court proceedings by woman to woman advocacy are rare. Available administrative data record very few cases of sexual violence against women. According to the Statistical Yearbook of the Ministry of Justice, the number of convicted persons under the criminal offence of rape (Article 102 of the CCA) was only 3 in 2014 and 4 in 2015. However, given the taboo which very much still enshrouds the phenomenon of sexual violence, it is likely that the great majority of cases go unreported. The prevalence of sexual violence in domestic relations was rated at 7.9 % in the 2013 national survey on domestic violence conducted by INSTAT, a figure which is considered an under-representation of the actual occurrence of sexual violence in intimate partner relationships. In light of these figures, GREVIO is extremely concerned that the majority of victims of sexual violence are likely to receive little or no protection.'⁵⁶

5.12.3 GREVIO further stated:

'As a reflection of the law's main focus on domestic violence, specific standards for the treatment and care of other forms of violence against women, such as sexual violence and forced abortions, are lacking. The absence in Albania of any sexual violence referral centres, be they in a hospital or other setting, leaves victims at risk of not receiving the appropriate medical care. Moreover, the restrictive regulations subjecting forensic examinations to a request by the law enforcement agency or prosecution office are at odds with the best practice requiring forensic examinations to be carried out without delay in case of sexual violence regardless of whether the matter will be reported to the authorities. GREVIO is further informed in this respect that, in part due to the low fee paid for carrying out forensic examinations, victims have at times been required to pay additional amounts in order to receive an examination.'⁵⁷

⁵⁵ GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 8, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

⁵⁶ GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 12, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

⁵⁷ GREVIO, 'Baseline evaluation report,' Albania, page 37, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

6. Shelters

6.1 Numbers and location

6.1.1 The USSD HR Report 2017 noted that, ‘The government operated three shelters to protect survivors of domestic violence, and NGOs operated six others.’⁵⁸

6.1.2 The HO FFT stated ‘There are four NGO shelters that can handle VoT [victims of trafficking] and two more specifically for VDV. [...] There are two shelters for VDV in Tirana, one of which is the state run National Reception Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence (NRCVDV). The Albanian Ombudsman stated that they have an inspection strategy, that they regularly inspected the national centres [...].’⁵⁹

6.1.3 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

‘In relation to the coverage and geographical spread of refuges, [...] there are currently 8 shelters offering safe immediate, short and longterm accommodation to women victims of violence and their children, with a total of 153 beds. This places the provision of this sort of service at 137 beds short of the number required in accordance with the standards set out in the Final Activity Report of the Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence which recommended safe accommodation in specialised women’s shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10 000 head of population. The report acknowledges further that the concentration of shelters in the capital and in a limited number of other localities (essentially, Elbasan, Vlora and Shkodra) leaves a wide portion of the population, especially in rural and remote areas, without sufficient protection.’⁶⁰

6.1.4 The HO FFT further stated:

‘Although women in the more rural and remote areas of Albania may find it difficult to access services locally, women who relocate to Tirana can obtain help and shelter there. Shelters are provided to house victims of domestic abuse (both state- and NGO-run) which: have sufficient capacity, are professionally run, have effective safeguards against being detected; and a re-integration programme to help women re-establish themselves into the community. Women are increasingly aware of the services available to them and how to access them.’⁶¹

6.1.5 The HO fact-finding report continued:

‘The director of the NRCVDV told the FFT that there is a plan for another shelter for VDV (this is projected to be in the north part of Albania, but is not finally settled). The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare said that the government is undertaking a feasibility study to look at the possibility of

⁵⁸ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 6, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

⁵⁹ HO FFM, Section 4.1.1, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁶⁰ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 39, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

⁶¹ HO FFM, Executive summary, February 2018, [URL](#)

opening three new shelters for VDV before 2020. However, the UN doubted the state had the budget for new centres, and felt they needed to consolidate what they had got.

'The shelters operate in close cooperation with each other to prevent over reach. Their combined capacity is sufficient to address the need from adults and there is no national capacity problem. The centre in Elbasan is just for children, which can house 15-20, and when it is full they are referred to orphanages. The Municipality of Tirana said they have a good relationship with the shelters, referring cases to each other. The Albanian Social Services confirmed this, stating that an initiative created ten years ago by the Ministry of Interior effected cooperation between the state and the NGO run shelters.

'The shelters are licensed and regulated by the Inspectorate of Social Services so they must adhere to the official standards regarding the level and quality of care and the standard of security they provide for clients. The Human Rights Officer from the US Embassy thought the shelters were very good, particularly those run by the NGOs who are among the best civil society organisations in Albania. He commented that once the girls are there they are generally happy and well taken care of.

'The UN said it had worked with the government to set up the NRCVDV which now takes women without a PO. Several sources noted that the government now funded the salaries of staff in NGO shelters and there had been efforts to use the funds from confiscated, seized assets. The government also funds food and support for vocational training and health care. The Albanian Red Cross told the FFT that they support both VoT and VDV in shelters with such things as food, blankets, clothes and toys for children.'⁶²

6.1.6 The GREVIO report further stated:

'Whilst acknowledging efforts made to step up support to shelters, GREVIO is seriously concerned about information indicating that emergency sheltering in Albania is occasionally provided by municipalities in hospitals, dormitories and geriatric/elderly care homes, without any proper consideration for the needs of the victim in terms of safety and specialised protection. The actors in the field interviewed by GREVIO concur that there is a pressing need to establish easily accessible shelters for short accommodation periods, also referred to as emergency or crisis shelters. This need stems from the fact that access to public and non-public residential social welfare institutions (shelters) can depend on meeting eligibility criteria. More particularly, according to the legal provisions applying to admission in these institutions, only victims benefiting from the protection of an emergency barring order or a protection order are entitled to access them. GREVIO understands that the authorities rely on the issuance of a court decision granting protection as proof of the woman's condition as a victim. This however entails that during the interval of time needed for courts to examine applications for an emergency barring order, women can be left without any protection. GREVIO can therefore endorse stakeholders' request

⁶² HO FFM, Section 4.1, February 2018, [URL](#)

for the establishment of emergency or crisis shelters, which would comply with the principle that access to shelters should not be dependent on any legal or other requirement and should be possible at the time of the need.

‘Another issue of concern is the limitations to access to the shelters for women victims of domestic violence who come from marginalised groups and/or have special needs, such as women with health problems or disabled women, owing to the lack of specialised services offered in shelters.’⁶³

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6.2 National Reception Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence

6.2.1 The HO FFT reported:

‘The Albanian Ombudsman said that they had done an inspection of the National Centre on 27 October 2017 which was an update of their previous February inspection:

“The conditions and infrastructure were optimal, and the care and attention of staff perfect. The resources are stretched, because they do a lot of things: accompanying people to court, taking children to school.

“There were 12 staff working there which is on yearly contract, which is renewable. Legal advice and a psychologist was not available at that time; it was being provided from the Centre of VoT. The mechanics of each centre – how many staff etc. – are decided by the Prime Minister’s Office. They underestimated the legal support and psychologist need here. The PM’s Office said it is provided by the other shelter, but we pointed out that they have their own needs at that centre.

“The NGOs also provide support. But NGOs provide support only with funding. So, we cannot rely entirely on these. Our concern is about making this sustainable.”

‘Usually the period of stay in the NRCVDV is decided by the court, up to a maximum of one year. However, if the Centre thinks it is necessary to extend the woman’s stay, it can apply to the court for an extension. The obligation of the shelter is only to implement the court order and a person can leave when they wish.’⁶⁴

6.2.2 The HO FFT were also informed about capacity at the NRCVDV:

‘The NRCVDV has capacity for 32 people. Since 2011, when the centre opened, it has treated 370 people. [In 2016], it treated 95 people (including children).

‘Since the NRCVDV opened in 2011, there has been only one occasion – in January 2016 – when it had more people than capacity, but the situation was successfully managed by sending some people to the NGO-run shelter. The UN thought there had never been a situation where it had been over capacity. However, two judges from Tirana family court said that capacity for

⁶³ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 39, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

⁶⁴ HO FFM, Section 4.3, February 2018, [URL](#)

families with minors within the state-run shelter was lacking and they often had to send women with children to NGO run shelters.⁶⁵

6.2.3 The HO FFT were also informed about security at the NRCVDV: '[...] security is provided by private police contracted by the centre and that victims are accompanied by officers from the shelter if they are visiting, for example, a doctor. However, when attending court the shelter or the court will do an evaluation and usually request that the police provide security as it is likely the perpetrator of the violence will be present.'⁶⁶

6.2.4 The HO FFT further reported that, 'The age limit for children remaining in the centre with their mother is 18. There are also cases where the victim of DV is the child who is accompanied by their mother. This is usually provided for by the court.

'The FFT were told that a person can stay at the NRCVDV, work outside it and come back. [...] The same applies for children who may need to go to school. But some of this depends on the severity of the case and the security of the person.'⁶⁷

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6.3 NGO-run shelters

6.3.1 The HO FFT reported:

'The UN commented that there is need to increase funds and support to NGO shelters, which are the main providers of services for VGBV [victims of gender-based violence]. It is also trying to create a network of women's organisations to lobby the government on this and the implementation of other international human rights obligations in relation to violence against women.

'Different and Equal (D and E), an NGO operating in Albania since 2004, runs a shelter in Tirana which is open to women from all over Albania suffering from sexual abuse, DV or trafficking. It can house 15 women plus 4/5 accompanying children. It can also house pregnant women. They also support people outside of the shelter and can provide support to men by paying for apartments. D and E said they had been able to accommodate everyone who had been referred to them: they cooperated with other NGO and the state run shelter to ensure capacity.

'D and E described the shelter saying they decided support needs on an individual basis and build a bespoke reintegration plan. The shelter included:

- Case managers (their background is on social work mostly)
- A psychologist
- A doctor
- A lawyer

⁶⁵ HO FFM, Section 4.4, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁶⁶ HO FFM, Section 4.5, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁶⁷ HO FFM, Section 4.10, February 2018, [URL](#)

- A teacher

'D and E estimated they had supported 200 (70 VoT) people, including children throughout 2016, with 40 cases still on going.'⁶⁸

6.3.2 The HO FFT were also informed about security at NGO-run shelters:

'Whereas the police provide armed security for the state shelters, the NGO run shelters employ a private security company which operate 24/7. Cases are risk assessed and, for high risk cases, victims will be accompanied by security guards to court, school etc.

'To enhance security D and E said that that they put the following in place:

- Victims only communicate with their families via the office phone in the staff room at the shelter so the location cannot be traced
- Family members, even trusted ones, are not allowed to know the location of the shelter
- The victim's civil registration is the NGO's office address rather than the shelter address so that even a corrupt or unprofessional police officer with access to the civil registration system cannot compromise the victim's location.'⁶⁹

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6.4 Emergency crisis centres and shelters

6.4.1 The HO FFT reported:

'There are numerous small emergency DV centres throughout Albania which provide short-term assistance including the provision of immediate emergency accommodation.

'There are plans that every municipality in Albania will have an emergency centre so everyone can get their first treatment there. The UN is working with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) to draft standards for emergency facilities for VDV and have had discussions with Ministry of Interior and state police on establishing centres for the victims of sexual assault.

'The Kukes Police Department noted that although they have an emergency centre for VoT there is a lack of premises where a possible victim of DV could be accommodated whilst the initial administrative procedures take place. The Director of Social Services in Kukes confirmed this, stating:

“The municipality doesn't have capacity to accommodate and employ these women (victims of DV). This means that there are no emergency shelters; this is a big problem. A regional shelter should be in the area to deal with the emergency cases. The most pressing, the most high-risk cases are sent to Tirana. But it isn't very helpful, because to get accommodated in Tirana you need a PO. These are issued in 72 hours.

“Now we are working on a day centre, mostly aimed at VoT and VDV. We have renovated the building. We are now furnishing it. The capacity will be

⁶⁸ HO FFM, Section 4.12, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁶⁹ HO FFM, Section 4.13, February 2018, [URL](#)

ten women a time to be assisted. We have problems with human resources; not enough staff; not enough education, skills or professionalism to deal with the issues. In this centre, we will have a 24/7 telephone service for victims of DV to use. The centre is just waiting to be furnished and will be opened soon. We are very hopeful that centre will be open soon and will be a message for the victims of DV so they have a place to go, and men have a message that women have a place to go.”⁷⁰

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Section 7 updated: 5 November 2018

7. Support and reintegration

7.1 Reintegration

7.1.1 The HO FFT reported on support provided:

‘The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare told the FFT that an executive agency under its ministry is directly involved with re-integration programmes.

‘The UN said it had been involved with reintegration programmes: the NRCVDV cooperates with the local directorates of employment, education etc. and is helping VDV to apply and benefit from the social housing schemes available from the Tirana municipality; cooperation with businesses to get women immediate work opportunities and support for children as many of victims have children (mostly teenagers).

‘D and E described their three-stage programme of support:

- Crisis intervention, typically for the first 3-6 months
- Transition to independent living, typically for at least a year
- Full independence, up to 3 years

‘The support they provide included arranging education/vocational training, in cooperation with both government and private industry, supporting job searches – including arranging internships and subsidising salaries and (with donor support) assisting in the set-up of a small business. [...]

‘The Director of Social Services in Kukes spoke about the centre and said he wanted it to help reintegrate families who are being returned (see also education and young people). He also said that they don’t offer accommodation because of lack of funds - even though Kukes is one of the most problematic regions for DV, they don’t receive sufficient funds. “We don’t have many possibilities to help these women. We can’t provide housing and accommodation.”⁷¹

7.1.2 The HO FFT further noted that, ‘At a meeting with the NRCVHT, NRCVDV and Albanian Social Services, the FFT were told that they try to provide women leaving the shelters with social support and social housing from the state – both VDV and VoT receiving the same levels of support. They

⁷⁰ HO FFM, Section 4.14, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁷¹ HO FFM, Section 5.1, February 2018, [URL](#)

commented that state-run processes are sometimes more bureaucratic than that the NGOs can offer.⁷²

- 7.1.3 The HO FFT noted that, when talking about the return of women to Albania, the Director of Social Services in Kukes stated, '[...] for young adults, the challenges are related to employment, while for women and girls it is more complicated, because they are also facing cultural challenges, as they have to find a man to marry, which after emigration is very difficult.'⁷³

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7.2 Monitoring

- 7.2.1 The HO FFT were told that, '[...] the government tries to build up women leaving the shelters to become independent, although that is sometimes difficult especially when there are children involved. However, government focus is in this area and they are monitored for two years after they leave the shelters to check on the re-integration process with the social services operating as a watchdog on the services that are provided once the woman starts the process of re-integration.

'The Social Services Department at the Municipality of Tirana said that they monitor all the adult cases they manage every six to twelve months, and this currently continues for two years. They are going to move to monitoring for as long as people need them.'⁷⁴

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7.3 Mental health

- 7.3.1 The HO FFT were informed about mental health provision:

'There are four psychiatric hospitals in Albania: Tirana, Shkoder, Elbasan and Vlore. Stay is limited to three weeks. The two largest in Vlore (St Patrick's) has 180 beds and Elbasan has 310. Around 75% of people in St Patrick's have chronic illnesses and have been there for many years. The other two facilities are psychiatric wards of larger hospitals, Tirana has 90 beds (10 for children/adolescents) and Shkoder 35.

'The FFT were told that there is a ratio of 1.5 psychiatrists per 100,000 of the population.

'The FFT were told that Albania's reform of mental health is trying to change the situation to a more community based approach. There are community support clinics which are aimed at rehabilitating and supporting the transition from hospitalisation to home. D and E commented that the community centres are always full. Some religious organisations also have spaces but these are also always full. There are very few chances for long term support for really serious cases. There are nine mental health community day centres around the country which offer multi-disciplinary services with psychologists, psychiatrists, a psychiatric nurse, social workers and occupational therapists.

⁷² HO FFM, Section 5.1, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁷³ HO FFM, Section 5.6, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁷⁴ HO FFM, Section 5.5, February 2018, [URL](#)

‘People who live in remote areas are usually referred to specialist teams by their GPs. Primary health care is offered for free whether or not the person has insurance. If a person follows the referral system, they can access the secondary health services for free. Mentally ill people have been positively discriminated against so they get access and treated for the associated social issues.’⁷⁵

7.3.2 The HO FFT were also told about mental health provision within shelters:

‘At the meeting with the Directors of the NRCVHT, NRCVDV and the Albanian Social Services the FFT was informed that, as in line with Albanian legislation, every person who approaches the shelters is subject to a mental health assessment and a report is produced. Depending on the level of treatment required and severity, it can be dealt with in either the shelter or the person can be sent to a specific centre. The Director of the NRCVHT spoke of a specific example of a person who has mental health issues, and they have been undergoing treatment in the centre for two years now.

‘Normally, the shelters are equipped with a psychiatrist. The law provides that every person in a shelter has the right to the same level of treatment as any other citizen. The Head of Mental Health and Addictology at the Ministry of Health said psycho-social support is offered to people who come out of shelters, they will get more support than others and there is no time limit on how long they are monitored in the community – it depends on the diagnosis.’⁷⁶

7.3.3 A representative from the NRCVDV told the HO FFT that, ‘We offer a range of support, including the psychologist. It depends on the person and their needs.’⁷⁷

7.3.4 The HO FFT further reported:

‘The director of the Women’s Counselling and Social Services Centre in Kükes stated: “We are part of the regional network to protect VDV... We have accompanied the women when they go to report the cases with the police. Because the law requires that when the police interview a VDV, a psychologist or social worker needs to be present, the police call us. We have been there to help them psychologically. We have always been very active in calling for the NRM [National Referral Mechanism] to function and we have always made clear to the state apparatus that they need to give free services to these women.

“We have been very present with the violated women because we don’t have a reintegration centre or shelter here in Kükes. So, we want to tell the women about the infrastructure available in the country so they know what is available. These centres have always been very collaborative and have come to collect women to take them to Tirana. We have always been very careful to include the stakeholders in this. Our focus has always been to include the state authorities. We have approached them on many times to say we cannot do this without their authority.

⁷⁵ HO FFM, Section 7, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁷⁶ HO FFM, Section 7, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁷⁷ HO FFM, Section 4.2, February 2018, [URL](#)

“... We have used venues where women and girls can come together, like dormitories, schools and health centres. At first, they were very ashamed and lost. So, we would start to talk about situations where we, as women (from the centre) felt violated. When we told our stories, they identified. They didn't have a concept that what they were being subjected to was violence. This is because of the mentality and how they are educated. It is always the fault with women. So, we used media, leaflets, with teachers, tried to be available for the free hours they have in civic education to talk about rights. We were being called around Kukes ‘those women of the violence’”.⁷⁸

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7.4 Social housing

7.4.1 The HO FFT reported:

‘In some cases, as a result of social stigma, victims may be reluctant to return to their home community, or may be rejected by their families. If no family support is available to the victim when they leave the shelter, D and E assist with/subsidise payment of rent for their new accommodation, typically for 6-12 months. The Municipality of Tirana also assists with this (this is the only municipality which does). This “Lease Bonus Programme” is paid for a year and if the woman's situation is still the same after a year the Municipality carries on paying it, but they try to empower the woman to become independent. The Municipality of Tirana said that they don't have a minimum level of rent and they have a scoring formula to work out how much help a woman needs; 18 VDV had benefited from the Lease Bonus Programme in 2017 (up to 6 November) with eight in 2016. The Ministry for Health and Social Welfare said that the ministry which deals with social housing deals with the payment of rent bonuses.’⁷⁹

7.4.2 The FCO explored the position of a single woman, previously the victim of domestic violence, returning to Albania with a child. In a letter dated January 2017, they noted, ‘During a meeting with the senior official of the Ministry of Social Welfare, the British Embassy was told that the municipalities have housing offices, where returned citizens who do not have accommodation can register to benefit from the status of a homeless person and subsequently to benefit social housing. We therefore conclude that social housing would be available to the subject.’⁸⁰

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7.5 Other economic help

7.5.1 The HO FFT were informed of economic assistance available:

‘The Municipality of Tirana offers support to daily centres which provide lunch for women and their children. A food package for use at home can be provided for women who do not want to be identified.

‘VDV have benefitted from economic aid in October 2017 (59 in October 2016).

⁷⁸ HO FFM, Section 5.1, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁷⁹ HO FFM, Section 5.2, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁸⁰ Letter from FCO, 30 January 2017, [Annex B](#)

'The Ministry of Interior told the FFT that the state can and does support women with children. For example, there is financial support to pay for kindergarten; they can also support paying for food/meals. Although acknowledged as not perfect, the basic needs are met. A single mother can send a child to nursery for free.

'The Director of Social Services in Kukes noted that the Municipality of Kukes is one of the poorest in Albania, with extreme poverty and crime. More than 50% – 10,000 out of 18,000 families – that make up the population in Kukes are supported by social welfare. The social welfare element is around 35 EUR per month.

'The Albanian Ombudsman commented: "One of the recommendations of the Ombudsman is that there is not a legally recognised living standard as a benchmark. Based on our knowledge, it has become understood it is more a political will. Most of the claims are by economic reasons. The women don't define themselves as suffering because of being a woman but as the head of a large family with husband outside of Albania, or as single mothers."⁸¹

- 7.5.2 The FCO explored the position for a single woman, previously the victim of domestic violence, returning to live in Tirana with a child. In a letter dated January 2017, the FCO reported:

'According to Directive No. 8, dated 23.6.2004 "On the calculation of the social welfare benefit" of the Minister of Social Welfare and Youth, to receive social welfare benefits the returned citizen should apply at the Offices of the Social Services situated within the municipalities. The amount of the social welfare benefit in the case [of a single woman, previously the victim of domestic violence, with a child would be]:

'ALL 5,700/ £ 36 per month:

'ALL 1800 the first member of the family

'ALL 900 for children under 18 years old

'ALL 3000 for victims of domestic violence (the status of domestic violence victims is given by a court decision which has reviewed the case and has issued a restraining order).'⁸²

- 7.5.3 The FCO conducted an open-source internet search, to establish whether a single woman with a child would be able to live on this level of benefits. They concluded that, 'Sources [...] vary with regard to the proportion of the Albanian population believed to be living in poverty – ranging from 14.3%, to almost a quarter – but it is clear that all sources agree the proportion is extremely high. Moreover, the various sources consulted consistently maintained that a) poverty is worst in rural areas and that b) women are disproportionately affected by it.

'We therefore must unfortunately conclude that a significant number of Albanian families survive on incomes comparable to, or less than, the ALL 5,700 per month which the subject of your query [a single woman, previously

⁸¹ HO FFM, Section 5.3, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁸² Letter from FCO, 30 January 2017, [Annex B](#)

the victim of domestic violence, with a child] would receive in social welfare benefits were she to return to Albania.’⁸³

7.5.4 See [Female returnees](#) for information about assistance with employment.

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7.6 Education and young people

7.6.1 The HO FFT were told:

‘[...] there is a directive from the Ministry of Education which requires that all educational facilities must accept people back into schools who have returned from the diaspora abroad – whether a VoT or just as a migrant.

‘The Ministry of Education said they also support returning migrants by providing special help with teachers or free books to help them get back into education. This might include women who left school or are older than schooling age – but it is also done alongside working: they can do both half and half.

‘The Ministry of Education told the FFT that it works with the shelters. “It’s a full-scale collaboration. The Ministry gets constant requests from the shelters from women who want to go to school. The same level of collaboration exists with the VoT shelters.” [...]

‘The Director of the Centre for Youth Progress in Kukes said that they were seeing quite a few returnees, but they haven’t identified where they are coming from. He said it was a difficult situation for them to integrate into the education system and that there are no specific programmes for young returnees who are struggling with the language and reading and writing.

‘However, the Director of Social Services in Kukes said they have had many children who have gone through education abroad but this isn’t recognised in Albania; or they have forgotten the Albanian language, so they have language courses available for them and he is hoping they will be able to use the centre that the FFT visited to accommodate this.’⁸⁴

7.6.2 In a letter dated January 2017, the FCO reported:

‘According to the Strategy [‘On the Reintegration of the Returned Albanian Citizens,’ introduced in 2010 (the Strategy was meant to be in effect until 2015, but according to a senior official at the Ministry of Social Welfare it is still the document they used as guidance)] and [a] senior official from the Ministry of Social Welfare, children of returned Albanian citizens will have priority to be registered in schools in Albania and extra lessons of Albanian language will be offered to them. Any previous diploma/qualifications earned abroad will also be recognized.’⁸⁵

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7.7 Legal aid

7.7.1 The HO FFT reported:

⁸³ Letter from FCO, 30 January 2017, [Annex B](#)

⁸⁴ HO FFM, Section 5.6, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁸⁵ FCO letter, 30 January 2017, [Annex B](#)

'The UN said that it had just finalised the "Access to Justice" assessment with a particular focus on women who are VDV. They and several other sources said women face barriers and discrimination to an equitable access to justice system including lack of free legal aid services and that the lack of such services have left women without legal representation. The UN said it was partnering with four NGOs who provide free legal aid services and running a small pilot, offering free legal services at four district courts in Tirana, Fier, Durres and Lezhe. They are also supporting the drafting of the new legal aid law in parliament which they hope will allow marginalised communities to access the court system.

'Several NGOs noted that the state offer legal aid, that there is legislation for this and a state commission that should be providing support. But in civil cases, reports show this is not being fulfilled.

'The UN stated that lack of legal aid for VGBV has been highlighted by CEDAW (2016) as one of the reasons of the low number of reported cases. The lack of services and legal aid keep women victims of violence from coming forward. Last year, a recommendation of the Ombudsman to the Ministry of Justice was to extend the categories who can access legal aid. The new categories include VDV; victims of discrimination and a draft law has been presented to parliament.

'Both the Tirana Legal Aid Society (TLAS) and the Centre for Legal Civic Initiatives (CLCI) offer free legal services to women, particularly victims of domestic violence, to increase their access to public institutions – in particular the justice system. The CLCI has provided support for 15 VDV a day and also monitor the court sessions and court decisions on DV cases and prepare monitoring reports to suggest recommendations to institutions to improve VDV's rights.'⁸⁶

7.7.2 The HO FFT further reported:

'The Tirana Legal Aid Society said they work closely with shelters, cases being generally referred to them from the shelters and they provide legal support and also other legal advice on things such as divorce and parental custody.'⁸⁷

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7.8 Support in dealing with the justice system

7.8.1 The HO FFT reported:

'Several sources noted that one of the major recent changes to the justice system has been in the position and role of the victim. The victim can now make claims and has expanded rights.

'The Social Services Department of the Ministry of Tirana said there are 24 administrative units in Tirana who have the responsibility of supporting women through the justice system. Of these 24, 13 are new and have been set up in villages outside the city where DV has not been viewed as a serious issue, and that this is a big challenge for them.

⁸⁶ HO FFM, Section 1.5, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁸⁷ HO FFM, Section 5.1, February 2018, [URL](#)

‘Two judges from the Tirana family court told the FFT that there were no court fees charged to a victim and the legal report is paid for by the state. Normally, the fees are charged to the perpetrator at stage 2 and the state at stage 1. They commented that good work has also been done by the NGOs to make the system accessible.

‘CLCI [Centre for Legal Civic Initiatives] said that the police and the Tirana District Court will sometimes approach them to make representations on behalf of a victim when a case is in court.

‘The Director of the WCSSC in Kukes noted that they have always accompanied women in court, and have also compiled psychological reports. Even where the court has engaged others, they have always been present during the public trials and have been part as interested parties. There is only one woman lawyer in Kukes and she has helped them on a pro-bono basis.’⁸⁸

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Section 8 updated: 5 November 2018

8. Life as a single woman

8.1 Divorce

8.1.1 The HO FFT reported:

‘Divorce is becoming more and more common in Tirana, although generally among younger people, however there is societal prejudice against divorce in northern Albania.

‘The Tirana Legal Aid Society noted that last year, they handled 173 divorce cases; 28 involved domestic violence. ‘...You can get it [divorce] through the courts. But if you are not represented, it is difficult. You need support from civil society organisations. [...] ‘Only have to prove to the court that you want a divorce. The law is quite easy, but it depends for example, if there are children involved. It can take 36 months, but there are complex ones that can take longer. However, a man still may have visitation/access rights. But if a man is subject to a protection measure, these are in conflict – but they have happened in some cases.’

‘In 2017, up to the end of October, in Kukes state, but mainly in the town, there had been 30 divorces, of which the predominate reason was DV.

‘The Albanian Ombudsman noted that even where a court order is issued difficulties exists for mothers to get maintenance for their children from the children’s father.’⁸⁹

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8.2 Women living alone

8.2.1 The HO FFT were told by several sources that ‘women can live alone in Tirana and women can internally relocate to Tirana to get away from violence in their home town or village. Social media is allowing more women

⁸⁸ HO FFM, Section 1.6, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁸⁹ HO FFM, Section 8.2, February 2018, [URL](#)

to realise that they can live alone in Tirana, working and paying rent. The Municipality of Tirana said they see about 67 people a day coming to Tirana from all over the country looking for a job. It is easier for young women to live alone than older women.

‘It was acknowledged though, that in rural areas it was more difficult for women to live alone without family or social support, although there are some women who do live alone successfully.

‘The Director of Curriculum in Kùkes said that if a woman wanted to become independent, there are ways to achieve it. For example, there are women who work on carpets or as seamstresses or in other similar small entrepreneurs which can be done at home. They also work in a family business or elsewhere.’⁹⁰

- 8.2.2 The FFT added that the Director of the Women’s Counselling and Social Services Centre had commented that, ‘Kùkes is in the poorest region in the country with unemployment officially at 36%, although in reality its much higher, with half of families on social welfare of 50EUR per month per family. She said that even if a woman had the economic means, it would be “very scary” to live alone; she wouldn’t be subject to physical violence, but the psychological pressure would be there.’⁹¹

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8.3 Stigma

- 8.3.1 The HO FFT reported on this subject:

‘The Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination noted that they had not had any complaints brought by divorced women. Discrimination might be socially-based, but not specifically against divorced women or single mothers.

‘Several sources said that although in some parts of Albania there may be a stigma to living alone, this is not true of Tirana.

‘The Director of Social Services in Kùkes noted, that in rural areas, there is a stigma for women to get divorced and live alone. He said that sometimes there is reluctance to employ a divorced woman and the social stigma also accompanies the children in their school and neighbourhood. He said the cases of bullying in these cases have increased. [...]

‘Many sources said that Albania is a patriarchal society and victims of GBV are often blamed for what happened to them; communities are small and people don’t want to become subject of gossip with an accompanying sense of dishonour of leaving their family.’⁹²

- 8.3.2 However, ‘The Ministry for Health and Social Welfare said there is no prejudice in Albania against women from different areas.’⁹³

- 8.3.3 The HO FFT were told by the Directors of the NRCVDV and NRCVHT that, ‘[...] prejudice against people who have been in shelters has decreased a lot

⁹⁰ HO FFM, Section 8, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁹¹ HO FFM, Section 8, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁹² HO FFM, Section 8.3, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁹³ HO FFM, Section 8.3, February 2018, [URL](#)

due to a change in mentality and it is now a very manageable issue. There are no problems for people who want to reintegrate and work – the only thing that could hold people back are medical issues. [...]

‘Regarding families who have unsuccessfully claimed asylum abroad the Director for Curriculum at the Regional Education Department in Kukes said that there is absolutely no stigma attached to their return. They were a “bit sad” to come back, particularly the parents who had sold their belongings in Albania to fund the journey, but that is it.’⁹⁴

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8.4 Contact with the father of children

8.4.1 The FCO spoke to contacts at the State Police, who stated that:

‘[...] cases in which the victim and perpetrator have a child/children together can be further complicated as, in the absence of a divorce or any legal order to the contrary, the husband [...] would have a right of access to the child. Taking a child out of the country required the permission of both parents. So if the mother had left Albania with the child, without the father’s consent, upon her return to the country the father could take legal action against her for child abduction. When cases of this kind are referred to the State Police, they are able to establish how the child was taken out of the country, including whether consent was given.’⁹⁵

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8.5 Female returnees

8.5.1 In a letter dated 30 January 2017, the FCO in Tirana advised that they had consulted various stakeholders (a senior official at the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, the Director of Social Services, and officials at two Employment Offices in Tirana), besides open-source material, to examine the position for a single woman, who had previously been the victim of domestic violence, returning to Tirana with a teenage child.

The FCO reported that in 2010, the Albanian Government adopted the Strategy ‘On the Reintegration of the Returned Albanian Citizens’ (which was meant to be in effect until 2015, but it remains the document used as guidance) and adopted its institutional infrastructure to address the needs of persons returning to Albania after having lived abroad. The FCO stated that, ‘[...] returned Albanian citizens have the opportunity to be given information regarding their rights and benefits at the border. According to the Strategy, the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its Embassies around the world informs Albanian citizens that plan to return about the possibilities they have upon returning.’⁹⁶

8.5.2 The FCO further reported on employment opportunities and welfare support:

‘According to the official from the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Director of the Albanian Social Services [...], in order to benefit from social state support every Albanian citizen upon returning based on his/her place of

⁹⁴ HO FFM, Section 9, February 2018, [URL](#)

⁹⁵ Letter from FCO, 6 October 2017, [Annex A](#)

⁹⁶ Letter from FCO, 30 January 2017, [Annex B](#)

residence, should register in one of the Employment Offices. According to the website of the National Employment Service there are currently twelve Employment Offices in Albania (one for every region). According to the senior official of the Ministry of Social Welfare, these Employment Offices will assess the person's professional capabilities and will try to find him/her employment; when necessary the applicant will be asked to attend free of charge a professional course offered by the Albanian Government.

'During a visit conducted on 25 January 2017 to the Employment Office of Tirana, an employee working on migration issues said that, upon registration at the Employment Offices the applicant will be given written confirmation attesting their unemployment status and with this document returnees will be able to register to benefit from health services free of charge.'⁹⁷

- 8.5.3 See [Other economic help](#) for information on welfare payments and other economic assistance. See [Education and young people](#) for information about educational assistance for children. See [Social housing](#) for information on this subject.

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8.6 Freedom of movement

- 8.6.1 The USSD HR Report 2017 stated that, 'The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.'⁹⁸

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8.7 Civil registration and data security

- 8.7.1 The USSD HR Report 2017 stated:

'In order to receive government services, individuals changing place of residence within the country must transfer their civil registration to their new community and prove the legality of their new domicile through property ownership, a property rental agreement, or utility bills. Many persons could not provide proof and thus lacked access to public services. Other citizens, particularly Roma and Balkan-Egyptians, lacked formal registration in the communities where they resided. The law does not prohibit their registration, but it was often difficult to complete. Many Roma and Balkan-Egyptians lacked the financial means to register, and many lacked the motivation to go through the process.'⁹⁹

- 8.7.2 The FCO in Tirana spoke to State Social Services, the Albanian State Police and National Centre for the Victims of Domestic Violence in 2017 in order to obtain information about the security of data provided via civil registration. The General Director at Social Services '[...] was aware of one case in which the perpetrator had approached a policeman, whom they knew personally, and the policeman had then taken the perpetrator to the shelter at which the victim was being housed. It was not clear from the Deputy General

⁹⁷ Letter from FCO, 30 January 2017, [Annex B](#)

⁹⁸ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 2.d, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

⁹⁹ USSD HR Report 2017, Section 2.d, 20 April 2018, [URL](#)

Director's account whether the policemen had located the victim at the shelter via the civil registration system, or through some other means. In any case, legal action was then taken against the perpetrator and police officer.¹⁰⁰

8.7.3 The FCO reported that, '[...] some, but not all, police officers have access to the civil registration system. Access to the system requires use of a personal login code, and all of their lookups on the systems are electronically recorded. The Deputy General Director [of Social Services] made clear that whilst some police officers could access the system for illicit purposes, they could not do so with impunity – their access would leave an electronic audit trail and there would be repercussions for the officer.'¹⁰¹

8.7.4 The police told that FCO that, '[...] some, but not all, police officers have access to address data. They have this access via their TIMS system, the same system which is used for border control purposes; to record that has entered the country. If a victim identifies an officer they claim to fear, that officer will be denied access to the system. Anyone who accesses the system leaves an electronic trace. The State Police can identify who has accessed the information held for any subject on the system.

'An officer found to have accessed information improperly will be prosecuted; there have been cases of this kind (N.B. they did not state how many), in which both administrative measures and criminal investigations have been undertaken against the culprits. The State Police believe that claimants in the UK exaggerate how easy it is to access the system and that, though the claimants cite genuine cases as evidence of these assertions, they do so selectively to create an inaccurate picture. It is very easy for lawyers in the UK to say that the situation in Albania is a dark one.'¹⁰²

8.7.5 With regard to whether the victim would be checked against the municipality record of her last place of residence, 'Social Services commented that her previous municipality would come to know that she had moved to Tirana if she asked for her registration to be moved there. If she were residing at a shelter in Tirana, there would be no need for her to do this, so her previous municipality would not be notified. [...] If the victim is accommodated at a shelter elsewhere in the country, their civil registration is not moved with them but stays at their original location. [...]

'However, if/when she eventually left the shelter she would then be required to move her registration to her new municipality within one month, and in any case would need to do so so that she could rent accommodation. At this point, her old municipality would be made aware that she had moved to Tirana's administrative area, though they would not be told her address within that area.'¹⁰³

8.7.6 With regard to whether a person can be traced anywhere in Albania, the State Police told the FCO that, '[...] Albania is a small country, some people

¹⁰⁰ Letter from FCO, 6 October 2017, [Annex A](#)

¹⁰¹ Letter from FCO, 6 October 2017, [Annex A](#)

¹⁰² Letter from FCO, 6 October 2017, [Annex A](#)

¹⁰³ Letter from FCO, 6 October 2017, [Annex A](#)

may know each other and talk to each other, and they could not prevent people from encountering each other or seeing each other by chance. However, Albania aims to accede to the European Union and has therefore adopted standards, and introduced legal safeguards, for the protection of data and privacy which are in line with EU norms.¹⁰⁴

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Section 9 updated: 11 December 2018

9. Strategies to address domestic abuse

9.1 Government initiatives

9.1.1 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

‘Numerous legislative and policy measures adopted in Albania over the last decade offer a clear manifestation of the country’s commitment to combat violence against women. [...] Civil society [...] stands firmly united with the authorities in providing a holistic response to violence against women built on promoting gender equality. In Albania, there is a clear sense that women’s empowerment is key to putting an end to the violation of women’s right to live free of violence, as much as it is instrumental to advancing society and enabling sustainable economic development.’¹⁰⁵

9.1.2 GREVIO further stated, ‘Albania’s on-going National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2016-20 is the third consecutive strategy addressing gender-based violence and domestic violence in correlation with gender equality. This approach attests to the authorities’ clear focus on the need to integrate preventive measures against violence against women and domestic violence in a wider, holistic response challenging social norms. [...]

‘GREVIO commends the authorities’ efforts to promote awareness around the issues of violence against women. In particular, it expresses its appreciation towards the authorities’ initiatives in this field linking the issues of gender equality and violence against women, and involving men and boys as actors of change in combating stereotypes and rejecting all forms of violence.’¹⁰⁶

9.1.3 The HO FFT reported:

‘Government sources told the FFT that the Government is planning between 2016-2020 to enhance the legal framework. It will replicate the same system as VHT [victims of human trafficking] so that the first denunciation can start the proceedings.

‘There are plans to further improve women’s participation in decision-making.

‘The Social Services Office drafts a yearly report which outlines the needs of the government shelters and reintegration programmes which goes to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from FCO, 6 October 2017, [Annex A](#)

¹⁰⁵ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 65, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

¹⁰⁶ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 26, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

'The Ministry of Health and Social Protection told the FFT that there are several government mechanisms in place to monitor the implementation of strategies relating to DV. This starts with the National Council headed by the Minister in charge of the new Ministry of Health and Social Protection and nine vice-ministers from other ministries.'¹⁰⁷

9.1.4 The HO FFT further reported:

'The Albanian Ombudsman said that they have seven regional offices and these work not only on prevention and detection, but also on identifying issues of DV and VoT. At an institutional level, there have been many developments on this and in each institution, they have someone who deals with DV and children and family issues.

'Several sources noted that October has been the month of action against VHT and November is now the month of action against VDV. These awareness-raising campaigns (for which the government has specific funds) are a key factor in bringing forward victims of trafficking and domestic violence.'¹⁰⁸

9.1.5 In the 2018 report on Albania, the European Commission stated:

'While the number of local mechanisms for reporting gender-based violence has increased, efforts should be stepped up to establish them in all municipalities. The Ministry of Justice established a new office to coordinate efforts against domestic violence. There is also a need to ensure cross-sectoral coordination with child protection and anti-trafficking mechanisms at local and regional level. [...] Overall, more work is needed to ensure that women have access to justice.'¹⁰⁹

9.1.6 In a press release on 1 October 2018, NGOs Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA) and the Albanian Network 'Act for Children' reported on a recent case of violence of a young woman in Fushë-Krujë that they 'urged Sub-Parliamentary Commissions for Gender Equality and Domestic Violence and on Local Government, to open an urgent investigation into the accuses[sic] that an MP of the Albanian parliament was involved in the case and why the local referral mechanism on domestic violence failed to provide the protection required by law to the victim. On behalf of the Albanian National Child Rights Network and CRCA Albania, Altin Hazizaj highlighted that:

"Social and community services for children and women who have survived violence are almost non-existent. There is no investment for social services and almost all of them are offered only by civil society. Government and Municipalities should be legally obligated to finance community based social services! Asked by MPs attending the hearing session, CRCA Albania underlined major bottlenecks and shortages that the current system faces. For domestic violence cases, there are no standard protocols and procedures yet in place. The knowledge and training of staff in the municipalities on the current laws remains very low and their efforts uncoordinated, often leading to violations of the rights of women and girls. On the other hand, the basic compulsory social services that every

¹⁰⁷ HO FFM, section 1.22, February 2018, [URL](#)

¹⁰⁸ HO FFM, section 6, February 2018, [URL](#)

¹⁰⁹ European Commission, Albania 2018 report, page 29, 17 April 2018, [URL](#)

municipality has to offer to victims of domestic violence do not exist. Gender stereotypes and prejudices on the role of girls and women in society influence the implementation of the law, especially by police but also social services; [...]

‘The Government and the municipalities, although are aware of the lack of services for the victims of domestic violence since years, still do not invest for new and better services. Consequently, existing services either are closed or are in a very difficult situation due to the lack of budget.’¹¹⁰

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9.2 NGOs and funding

9.2.1 The GREVIO report of November 2017 stated:

‘If international donors are highly important sources of funding, nevertheless, it is the NGOs in Albania who are to be credited for operating most, if not all, counselling and support services for victims of the various forms of violence covered by the Convention. They include inter alia the NGOs running the shelters for victims and their children, the centre responsible for managing the new national telephone helpline, entities offering free legal assistance and legal aid and those providing services for perpetrators. Through their consolidated networks, NGOs are also active in supporting victims to achieve economic autonomy and facilitating their access to the labour market. Another area which relies predominantly on the work of NGOs is that of training of professionals. Moreover, NGOs have spearheaded the establishment of the first referral mechanisms at the level of municipalities and are often one of the cornerstones of any functioning co-ordinated community response. Awareness campaigns largely owe their success to NGOs’ initiative and/or involvement. International inter-governmental organisations active in the country seek their expertise and knowledge of the situation on the ground to produce studies and research reports.

‘Co-operation with government agencies exists in many forms and at various levels, some more institutionalised than others. [...] The duty of the MSWY [Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth] to support NGOs is also clearly spelled out in the LDV [law on domestic violence]. [...]

‘The strong reliance on dedicated and specialist non-governmental support services undoubtedly ensures quality support to victims and is one way of discharging the obligation to provide services as required by Chapter IV of the Istanbul Convention. However, the dependency of Albanian NGOs on international funding raises an issue of long-term sustainability, unless the authorities are ready to provide the necessary funds. GREVIO notes with satisfaction the increase in governmental spending devoted in recent years to shelters. [...]

‘GREVIO urges the Albanian authorities to take further appropriate measures, such as the establishment of suitable programmes and grants, and adapted and transparent procurement procedures, to ensure stable and

¹¹⁰ CRCA, ‘CRCA asks Parliament and the Government to seriously invest for community services to support the victims of domestic violence,’ 1 October 2018 [URL](#)

sustainable funding levels for women’s NGOs working to support victims and prevent violence and thus enabling them to meet fully the needs of all victims.’¹¹¹

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9.3 Training of professionals

9.3.1 In the report of November 2017, GREVIO stated:

‘Considerable investments have been made in Albania to train professionals who deal with victims, particularly since the enactment of the legislation on domestic violence. Certain categories of professionals have already incorporated knowledge on the Istanbul Convention and the topics referred to in its Article 15 (namely prevention and detection of violence, equality between women and men, the needs and rights of victims and the prevention of secondary victimisation) in their professional curricula and university study programmes, as well as in-service training modules. This is the case for judges and prosecutors, as well as for law enforcement officers, as attested by the numerous training manuals in use by the School of Magistrates and the Police Academy. In the area of healthcare, a vast capacity-building initiative involving more than 4 400 health professionals and social workers was carried out from 2009 to 2013, based on a system of “training the trainers” and the development of practical tools, with the aim of strengthening local institutional capacity to address gender-based violence, as well as child abuse.

‘GREVIO welcomes progress made in this field, which is bound to improve the nature and quality of support provided to victims, as well as changing the outlook and conduct of professionals towards them. Nevertheless, GREVIO considers that there is further room to consolidate and expand the capacity of professionals to deliver an effective and sensitised response to violence against women through training.’¹¹²

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9.4 Police action

9.4.1 The HO FFT reported:

‘Mr Shtembari, the Director of Crimes at the General Directory for Police, noted that during the last year, they have been implementing a strategy called “Policing in the Community” in which they discuss DV with interested parties, such as schools, within the community. He explained that when the cases of DV exceed the national average in a particular area, the national police force arrange a meeting with the local schools, local police, universities and the prosecutor’s office to discuss it. Part of this strategy is also use of the media for which the government provide special funds.

‘The Kukes Police Department provided more information about this at a local level: “We have a collaboration with the regional education department. We have a plan. We identify and visit some of the schools and speak, not only with this – the community police – and the specialist who deals with DV

¹¹¹ GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 19, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

¹¹² GREVIO, ‘Baseline evaluation report,’ Albania, page 12, 24 November 2017, [URL](#)

here also goes and gives talks or training to the school. But this is not enough. More needs to be done with the community in general, as they are the ones who are the potential victims.

“There is a need to go into the community to raise awareness, but there are so many other issues we try to tackle [...] We would like to do more, even things like drafting leaflets, but only have so much capacity and resources. It is hard to go in depth into these issues. We just work on the surface.”

‘The same source also said that they have advertised phone numbers which victims of domestic violence can use to contact the police.’¹¹³

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9.5 Social Services

9.5.1 The HO FFT were told by the Director of Social Services in Kukes that, ‘[...] awareness raising is a challenge as since an administrative territorial reform two years ago, their jurisdiction has expanded to cover all of the outlying villages as well as Kukes town itself. Because of the size and remoteness of the area, it is quite difficult for them to effectively raise awareness.’¹¹⁴

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9.6 Schools

9.6.1 The HO FFT were further informed about initiatives in schools:

‘The Director of Curriculum in Kukes noted, regarding violence in school, there has been a decrease because of the measures against the teachers who are violent towards the children. She continued: “We have had training with the teachers and students about gender equality, domestic violence. We have organised meetings between parents and teachers to talk about the issues. Regarding specific material in the curriculum about violence in the home, there are three topics which deal with DV: Civic education, Psychology and Social sciences. These lessons have free hours where they talk about particular topics around violence in general, including DV (but others, like inter-personal violence in the streets). They make projects about this. We have also invited police officers into the school to talk about violence about how to reduce it, how to address it and how to report it. Violence is not widely reported. [...] We also talk about things like drugs, alcohol and smoking. These are phenomena that lead to violence [...]”

‘In relation to awareness raising in schools, the Director of Curriculum in Kukes said that they were seeing an impact and although there are cases of violence involving young people these are mainly due to economic reasons. Things are changing and young men are treating their wives better than their fathers did.

‘The FFT met with Zamira Gjini, the Director of pre-University Education at the Ministry of Education. She spoke about a special programme started in 2015, implemented in cooperation with NGOs, called “Stop Violence in Schools” and another started in 2016, in cooperation with the Council of

¹¹³ HO FFM, section 1.21, February 2018, [URL](#)

¹¹⁴ HO FFM, section 6, February 2018, [URL](#)

Europe, to tackle bullying which is being trialled in 21 schools. These are quite broad programmes encompassing all kinds of violence.’¹¹⁵

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9.7 Work with perpetrators

9.7.1 The HO FFT stated:

‘Several sources said that there are no rehabilitation programmes or shelters for perpetrators of violence. However, the Centre for Legal Civic Initiatives (CLCI) said that when they represent cases of VDV in court they ask for the perpetrator to undergo a rehabilitation programme. CLCI said there is an NGO in Tirana and one in Shkoder who run rehabilitation programmes. [...]

‘The Ministry for Health and Social Protection (MHSP) said that the state social services are fully focussed in order to help perpetrators. They have established that often a lack of employment is behind DV and perpetrators are, in some cases whilst in prison, trained to get a job. The Department of Mental Health and Addictology (DMHA) said that although there are no specific provisions for working with perpetrators of violence, they do offer support for the general population on addiction which might cover alcoholism and toxicology and there is a toxicology clinic in Tirana.

‘There is an NGO “Action Plus” which the DMHA said helps treat addiction with free Methadone. There are specific units across Albania and people can be referred or self-refer.’¹¹⁶

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¹¹⁵ HO FFM, section 6, February 2018, [URL](#)

¹¹⁶ HO FFM, Section 1.9, February 2018, [URL](#)

Annex A

Rruga Skanderbej Nr12
Tirana
Albania
Tel: + 355 4 223 4973/4/5
Fax: + 355 4 224 7697
www.ukinalbania.gov.uk



British Embassy
Tirana

6 October 2017

To Whom It May Concern

On 20 July 2017 the British Embassy, Tirana was contacted by the Home Office, who requested that we undertake research, on their behalf, in relation to a Country Guidance case on the subject of domestic violence. The following questions were posed:

- Is it possible for someone to access personal data for illicit purposes through the civil registration system?
- Are policemen or other officials able to gain access to personal data for illicit purposes through the civil registration system?
- Is it possible for someone to use bribery to gain access to personal data through the civil registration system?
- Are you aware of any cases where a person has been tracked down by someone accessing their personal data provided for registration?
- Is it true that she would be checked against the municipality record of her last place of residence?
- Is it true that her former partner could be alerted to her presence in the country through such a check? (She would be returned to Tirana and he lives in Burrel in the north.)

- Is it true that a person can be traced anywhere in Albania, as described? She would be returned to Tirana and he lives in Burrel, in the north.

To obtain answers to these queries we approached State Social Services, the Albanian State Police and National Centre for the Victims of Domestic Violence. Their responses are recorded below. All of the information which we record below was obtained from these sources; we did not rely upon our own knowledge or expertise, nor indeed do we claim to have any such knowledge or expertise on the subject of domestic violence. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office therefore cannot speak to the accuracy or reliability of the information provided to us.

All of the questions above were put to all of the sources we consulted. However, some sources did not answer some questions, or gave partial answers, or gave a single answer to cover several questions. All sources also provided further, unsolicited information. In the interests of completeness, and because the sources themselves apparently considered this additional information to be relevant, we have attempted to record their responses fully below.

Social Services

On Tuesday 3rd October 2017, two officers from the British Embassy, Tirana met with the Deputy General Director of State Social Services, and with a domestic violence specialist of the same service, at their office in Tirana. Their account follows -

With regard to the use, or misuse, of the civil registration system, the Deputy General Director was aware of one case in which the perpetrator had approached a policeman, whom they knew personally, and the policeman had then taken the perpetrator to the shelter at which the victim was being housed. It was not clear from the Deputy General Director's account whether the policemen had located the victim at the shelter via the civil registration system, or through some other means. In any case, legal action was then taken against the perpetrator and police officer.

We were advised that some, but not all, police officers have access to the civil registration system. Access to the system requires use of a personal login code, and all of their lookups on the systems are electronically recorded. The Deputy General Director made clear that whilst some police officers could access the system for illicit purposes, they could not do so with impunity – their access would leave an electronic audit trail and there would be repercussions for the officer.

With regard to whether the victim would be checked against the municipality record of her last place of residence, Social Services commented that her previous municipality would come to know that she had moved to Tirana if she asked for her registration to be moved there. If she were residing at a shelter in Tirana, there would be no need for her to do this, so her previous municipality would not be notified. When the authorities become aware that an individual is a victim of domestic violence they are obligated to remove the victim from a location at which they are at risk. If the victim is accommodated at a shelter elsewhere in the country, their civil registration is not moved with them but stays at their original location.

The victim could remain at the shelter until satisfied that the risk had passed. However, if/when she eventually left the shelter she would then be required to move her registration to her new municipality within one month, and in any case would need to do so so that she could rent accommodation. At this point, her old municipality would be made aware that she had moved to Tirana's administrative area, though they would not be told her address within that area.

Social Services did not comment on whether a person can be traced anywhere in Albania.

They additionally stated that in order to be recognised as a victim of domestic violence – specifically, they referred to having “status” as a victim – the victim must lodge a complaint against their abuser to either the Police, the municipality, or to Social Services. These authorities then work in cooperation with each other. The police investigate to verify the claims made by the victim. If the victim's claims are substantiated, they then go to court to obtain a restriction order which might include, for example, a condition that the perpetrator not be allowed within 100 metres of the victim. Social Services provide shelter and assistance with integration into the community when the victim leaves the shelter. Several NGOs also run shelters, but the highest security shelter for victims of domestic violence is the one run by Social Services. In cases in which the victim is a minor, and is overseas, Social Services will compile a family assessment report, to assess whether the child can be safely returned to Albania. They provide advice to the police and produce a mitigation plan for such cases.

State Police

On Tuesday 3rd October 2017, two officers from the British Embassy, Tirana met at the General Directory of the State Police with the General Director of Public Security and Order and the Chief of Department for the minors and domestic violence. Their account follows -

With regard to the use, or misuse, of the civil registration system some, but not all, police officers have access to address data. They have this access via their TIMS system, the same system which is used for border control purposes; to record that has entered the country. If a victim identifies an officer they claim to fear, that officer will be denied access to the system. Anyone who accesses the system leaves an electronic trace. The State Police can identify who has accessed the information held for any subject on the system.

An officer found to have accessed information improperly will be prosecuted; there have been cases of this kind (N.B. they did not state how many), in which both administrative measures and criminal investigations have been undertaken against the culprits. The State Police believe that claimants in the UK exaggerate how easy it is to access the system and that, though the claimants cite genuine cases as evidence of these assertions, they do so selectively to create an inaccurate picture. It is very easy for lawyers in the UK to say that the situation in Albania is a dark one.

With regard to whether the victim would be checked against the municipality record of her last place of residence, and/or whether her former partner would become aware of her presence in the country, the State Police advised that in order to be considered a victim of domestic violence the victim must lodge a

complaint against their abuser, which the Police would then investigate - they cannot be treated as a victim of domestic violence, and the police cannot arrest the abuser, if they do not lodge a complaint. If a victim lodges a complaint, the alleged abuser will become aware of it.

The victim can lodge such a complaint at any police station in the country, including the station at Rinas Airport upon their arrival back into Albania. Upon receipt of the complaint the Police investigate, to establish whether the complainant genuinely is/was a victim of domestic violence. If their findings are positive, they will refer the case for prosecution of the abuser, and will go to court to obtain a restriction order. Once the case goes to court, the former partner will be notified. The complainant will be required to give evidence in court. If an order is issued, it will be copied to the victim, the perpetrator and the Police.

If the victim is then accommodated in a shelter, their children can remain with them up until the age of fourteen. N.B. We queried whether the State Police were sure this age was correct – they responded by reasserting that the child may remain with the parent in the shelter until the age of fourteen.

The State Police additionally stated that cases in which the victim and perpetrator have a child/children together can be further complicated as, in the absence of a divorce or any legal order to the contrary, the husband (N.B. throughout the interview the State Police consistently referred to the abuser as the husband – there appeared to be a presumption on their part that the abuser in domestic violence cases would be the male partner rather than the female) would have a right of access to the child. Taking a child out of the country required the permission of both parents. So if the mother had left Albania with the child, without the father's consent, upon her return to the country the father could take legal action against her for child abduction. When cases of this kind are referred to the State Police, they are able to establish how the child was taken out of the country, including whether consent was given.

With regard to whether a person can be traced anywhere in Albania, the State Police said that Albania is a small country, some people may know each other and talk to each other, and they could not prevent people from encountering each other or seeing each other by chance. However, Albania aims to accede to the European Union and has therefore adopted standards, and introduced legal safeguards, for the protection of data and privacy which are in line with EU norms.

National Centre for the Victims of Domestic Violence

On Wednesday 4th October 2017 one officer from the British Embassy, Tirana met with the Director of the state-run Centre for the Victims of Domestic Violence in Albania, at her office, to discuss the assistance given by them to the victims of domestic violence. The officer and the Director then visited the premises of the centre. The Director's account follows -

The centre was opened in 2011 and its location is secret so that the perpetrators and their families cannot locate the victims. The Centre accommodates the victims together with their children where they are offered free of charge professional courses, and psychological assistance. Until recently, children up to the age of fourteen could be accommodated at the Centre along with their parent,

but this has now been raised to eighteen years of age. Whilst the victims are resident at the Centre their presence there is kept secret, and this information cannot be accessed through the civil registration system. A victim's civil registration would remain at her last place of residence until, or unless, she moved it.

As per Article 7 of the law 'On the measures against the violence in family relations', special units have been set up in every Police Department which deal with cases of domestic violence. Police officers in these special units know the location of the Centre, but they are not permitted to enter its premises without a legal purpose.

The Director opined that it would be impossible to entirely prevent someone from using bribery to learn the location of the Centre. However, improperly divulging that information would constitute an offence and in any case the Centre is protected by the State Police, who provide physical security and have a permanent presence there, and no one unauthorized can access it.

The Director stated that there have been cases when the perpetrator or his family had learned the location of the centre but they could not access it. In one case, in 2012, the brother of the perpetrator had attacked a victim of domestic violence residing at the Centre when she was accompanying her children to the school near the Centre. Therefore, since then, physical security has been provided to victims by the Police whilst outside the Centre; children are taken to school in a car, accompanied by Police officers.

This letter has been compiled by staff of the British Embassy in Tirana, Albania entirely from information obtained from the sources indicated. The letter does not reflect the opinions of the author(s) nor any policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The author(s) have compiled this letter in response to a request from the Home Office and any further enquiries regarding its contents should be directed to the Home Office.

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Annex B



British Embassy
Tirana

Rruga Skanderbej Nr12
Tirana
Albania
Tel: + 355 4 223 4973/4/5
Fax: + 355 4 224 7697
www.ukinalbania.gov.uk

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The information required concerns whether a single woman, who has previously been the victim of domestic violence, would be able to live in Tirana with her 13-year-old son, and how she could support herself and her son.

The information below was received from:

- A recent meeting with a senior official at the Albanian Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth;
- The Director of the Albanian Social Services;
- Visits to two Employment offices in Tirana;
- By consulting the relevant Albanian legislation and the Strategy 'On the Reintegration of the Returned Albanian Citizens' (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy);
- An open-source internet search

After the economic crisis of 2008 in countries like Italy and Greece, many Albanian illegal economic emigrants mostly residing in these countries, started to return to Albania. In 2010, in order to meet these challenges, the Albanian Government adopted the Strategy 'On the Reintegration of the Returned Albanian Citizens' (the Strategy was meant to be in effect until 2015, but according to a senior official we met at the Ministry of Social Welfare is still the document they refer to and use as guidance) and adopted its institutional infrastructure to address their needs. Presently, according to the Strategy and the senior official (whom a British Embassy official met on 24 January 2017), returned Albanian citizens have the opportunity to be given information regarding their rights and benefits at the border. According to the Strategy, the

Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its Embassies around the world informs Albanian citizens that plan to return about the possibilities they have upon returning.

According to the official from the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Director of the Albanian Social Services (met on 20 on January 2017) in order to benefit from social state support every Albanian citizen upon returning based on his/her place of residence, should register in one of the Employment Offices. According to the website of the National Employment Service there are currently twelve Employment Offices in Albania (one for every region). According to the senior official of the Ministry of Social Welfare, these Employment Offices will assess the person's professional capabilities and will try to find him/her employment; when necessary the applicant will be asked to attend free of charge a professional course offered by the Albanian Government.

During a visit conducted on 25 January 2017 to the Employment Office of Tirana, an employee working on migration issues said that, upon registration at the Employment Offices the applicant will be given written confirmation attesting their unemployment status and with this document returnees will be able to register to benefit from health services free of charge.

According to Directive No. 8, dated 23.6.2004 'On the calculation of the social welfare benefit' of the Minister of Social Welfare and Youth, to receive social welfare benefits the returned citizen should apply at the Offices of the Social Services situated within the municipalities. The amount of the social welfare benefit in the case you refer to would be:

ALL 5,700/ £ 36 per month:

ALL 1800 the first member of the family

ALL 900 for children under 18 years old

ALL 3000 for victims of domestic violence (the status of domestic violence victims is given by a court decision which has reviewed the case and has issued a restraining order)

We conducted an open-source internet search, to establish whether a single woman with a child would be able to live on this level of benefits. This search returned the following evidence –

“Albania is one of the poorest countries in Europe. The effects of the transition from a centralized economy in a rigid communist state to a free market economy in a democratic republic have weighed heavily on Albania's people, and particularly on its poor people. Despite the economy's robust growth in recent years, almost one quarter of the population lives below the poverty level of US\$2 a day...

The income gap in the country is relatively small. Because of low incomes and a low employment rate most people's average incomes hover close to the poverty line...

Almost half the poor people in Albania are under 21 years of age. Larger families tend to be poorer. Fifty per cent of families with seven or more members live below the poverty line. The effects of poverty among women and young people in Albania are closely related to the problem of human trafficking across national borders...

Rural, northern and mountainous areas are the poorest areas in the country. The incidence of poverty is highest in the north-eastern districts of Kukes and Dibra, where almost half of the population is poor and 80 per cent of families' income comes from social protection schemes, economic assistance and disability payments..." (source: <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/rural-poverty-portal/country/home/tags/albania>)

"Poverty in Albania remains a problem throughout the country. Albania is currently one of the poorest countries in Europe. Nearly one quarter of the national population lives in extreme poverty, surviving off of two US dollars a day. That is a total of over 800,000 people." (source: <http://borgenproject.org/poverty-in-albania/>)

*"Albania is facing **widespread poverty and social adversities**. The unemployment rate in Albania is 28.7%, and 15% of the population are living below the poverty line. In rural areas there are low rates of poverty reduction, aside from the numerous factors contributing to poverty, woman's inferior social and economic position has also had a strong impact. The current status of women bears specific significance in the stagnation and prolongation of poverty in Albania."* (source: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/countries/albania>)

"Poverty rate: 14.3 per cent...

Unemployment rate: 17.3%" (source: <https://www.un.org.al/about-albania>)

Sources therefore vary with regard to the proportion of the Albanian population believed to be living in poverty – ranging from 14.3%, to almost a quarter – but it is clear that all sources agree the proportion is extremely high. Moreover, the various sources consulted consistently maintained that a) poverty is worst in rural areas and that b) women are disproportionately affected by it.

We therefore must unfortunately conclude that a significant number of Albanian families survive on incomes comparable to, or less than, the ALL 5,700 per month which the subject of your query would receive in social welfare benefits were she to return to Albania.

During a meeting with the senior official of the Ministry of Social Welfare, the British Embassy was told that the municipalities have housing offices, where returned citizens who do not have accommodation can register to benefit from the status of a homeless person and subsequently to benefit social housing. We therefore conclude that social housing would be available to the subject.

According to the Strategy and the senior official from the Ministry of Social Welfare, children of returned Albanian citizens will have priority to be registered in schools in Albania and extra lessons of Albanian language will be offered to them. Any previous diploma/qualifications earned abroad will also be recognized.

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Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

Legal position

Prevalence of domestic abuse

- Statistics
- Societal attitudes

State protection

- Police
- Judiciary
- Protection orders
- Sentencing and prosecution

Support services for women, both state and NGO

- National Referral Mechanism
- Shelters
- Emergency crisis centres
- Telephone helpline
- Legal support
- Social support
- Healthcare, including mental healthcare
- Education/awareness raising

Marriage and divorce

- Early/forced marriage
- Statistics on divorce
- Legal situation
- Parental responsibilities

Life as a single woman

- Freedom of movement
- Stigma regarding being single/divorced/a single mother, including variation between rural/urban areas
- Education

- Employment
- Accommodation
- Healthcare
- Financial assistance
- Children of single women
- Childcare

Civil registration

- Registration requirements
- Data protection

Strategies to tackle domestic abuse, both state and NGO

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **12 December 2018**

Changes from last version of this note

Updates to country information, including information from the report of the Home Office fact-finding mission to Albania of October/November 2017, and resulting amendments to the assessment.

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