**Albania’s Institutions response to the questionnaire from the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons on “the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on** **human rights of older persons: the causes, manifestations and prevalence of ageism and age disrimination ".**

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the elderly people

As in other countries of the world, pandemic have affected some social groups more than the others. In terms of health consequences, in Albania it has been documented a higher risk of getting sick or dying from COVID-19 among older people, those with chronic diseases, men and urban communities. The elderly and those chronically sick remain among most vulnerable in society.

The older people are suffering disproportionally from the disease. This is especially true when observing the data about serious cases, and especially deaths. 15% of deaths are in the age group 50-59 and 66% are over 60 years old. Although, since June, there is an increase in the infection rate of younger age categories and there are reported more deaths among younger people, still the older age remains the most affected by the pandemic.

*Distribution of COVID-19 cases and deaths according to age groups (%).(in color blue: the affected cases; in color red: the deaths)*



1. Albania has taken measures to not allow outbreaks in its residential institutions. As soon as first COVID-19 cases were confirmed, Ministry of Health issued an order to isolate the residential care institutions for the elderly. It was not possible to visit the homecare for the elderly without a special permission.

2. Specific guidelines were issued for preventing the infection among community dwelling elderly.

MoHSP approved the Order No. 290 on 5th of May issuing a dedicated protocol to ensure undisrupted provision of services by elderly shelters during the COVID-19 crisis.

3. During the lockdown following the declaration of state of emergency, an interministerial committee chaired by Ministry of Defense was established to organize and deliver food and other support items for about 600,000 individuals identified by local governments as vulnerable.

4. Municipalities were made responsible for identifying the vulnerable and lonely older people and providing basic services for them, including distribution of food/non-food packages and medicine, and pension. This was done to minimize the need for the elderly to get out for essential activities. The program of support was carried out by social workers and voluntaries at the municipalities.

5. In the re-opening phase protocols were envisaged to continue to protect the elderly while keeping the basic services for them. Grocery stores were recommended to provide door to door distribution of food and other essentials for lonely or frail older people.

6. As of 29 May 2020, the total number of families assisted during the pandemic is 73,287. Tirana (15,801) has the largest number of assisted families. In the remaining eleven regions the average number of assisted families ranges from 5,900 to 2,200 (Durrës). Overall, 68.8% of assistance was provided to families in need, where 31.2% was provided to the elderly.

Ageism in the society- causes and effects

The impact of poverty and other social problems of the albanian society, together with the "age barriers", the state of health or the poor infrastructure of services, hinder the full and effective participation of the elderly in society, deny them from some rights, like the possibility of benefiting from the general welfare, just like other members of society. As a result, the elderly are among the most excluded groups of the population.

1. Social exclusion in Albania is defined as "denial of equal opportunities by some groups of society over others, which leads to the inability of the individuals to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of the society." The elderly in Albania face very critical problems, which affect multidimensional exclusion, which is confirmed by studies, data and discussions with interest groups.

2. In accordance with the theoretical definitions, as well as the methodology developed in the framework of the preparation of the "Political Document of Social Inclusion", the dimensions of exclusion are defined as:

* Economic dimension: inability to create and / or own income, means of production, property, capital, including housing.
* Social Dimension: inability to use services (all types), social contacts, impossibility of a peaceful life in the community, security from theft, robbery, violence, crime.
* Cultural: inability to use entertainment, rehabilitation and cultural services.
* Ethical, human: the isolation of the elderly , "forgetfulness" from the society.
* Political: inability to exercise political rights and participate in decision-making.

3. The most critical problem of the elderly is the economic poverty caused by lack or insufficiency of the incomes. Despite the reforming of the pension scheme, the system faces challenges related to demographics and the economy. The age dependency ratio almost doubled from 8.6% in 1989 to 16.7% in 2011. By 2030, this ratio will be doubled again to reach 32.9%.

4. About 30% of albanian seniors live in apartment blocks built before the 90s, where a significant limitation of mobility for 80% of them is the lack of an elevator. The vast majority or 93% of seniors have access to adequate bathrooms, but only 76% have this indoors.

5. The health status of the elderly is the second most important problem. The elderly suffer from more than one chronic illness. They say they can not afford to buy medicine and are often forced to take only part of the medicine, mainly those that are reimbursed. On the other hand, the public health care system is unprepared to meet the growing need of the elderly.

6. Abandonment by society: the elderly, after terminating their employment, also terminate their social contacts, which deepens the danger of social exclusion. During this period, older people should be able to share their experiences and achievements in life, contributing to activities appropriate to their qualifications and health status. This requires the society to create mechanisms, which use the voluntary work of the elderly, to realize the necessary community services.

At the end of the description, it is estimated that the lonely elderly, in need of services and with insufficient income, are the most deprived of participation in the basic political, economic and social functioning of society. Exclusion and denial of rights are closely linked. The elderly are denied the following rights:

* The right of older people to be free from discrimination, through denial of access to services or other factors such as gender, ethnicity or disability.
* The right of older people to be free from violence, because older people, men and women, are often subject to abuse, such as verbal, sexual, psychological and financial.
* The right of the elderly to social security, due to the inability of the public sector to provide special protection to the elderly and reintegrate or provide a minimum income.
* The right of the elderly to health due to the denial of proper health care and the inability to obtain the necessary medical treatment.
* The right of older people to contribute due to being considered "incapable of employment".

Legal policy frameworks related to ageism

* Law no. 104/2014, “On some changes and additions to law no. 7703, dated 11.5.1993, "On social insurance in the Republic of Albania".
* Law No. 121/2016, "On social care services in the Republic of Albania".
* Law no. 57/2019 "On social assistance in the Republic of Albania"
* Law No. 10 107, Dated 30.3.2009, "On health care in the Republic of Albania".
* Law no. 105/2014, "On drugs and pharmaceutical services"
* Law No. 7870, dated 13.10.1994, "On health insurance in the Republic of Albania".
* Albania has also approved Law no. 8137, dated 31.07.1996 On the ratification of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (FZ 20-1996).
* The analysis of the above laws, as well as the decisions that accompany their implementation, proves that the "elderly" are not treated as an excluded group or in special need, especially "according to the criteria of needs for care and health services."
* According to the criterion of "needs for protection and social services", Law No. 121/2016, "On social services in the Republic of Albania", stipulates that the category "elderly in need" is entitled to receive financial assistance and social services, in other legislations, the elderly are treated as all members of society. While Monetary Assistance is determined on the basis of income, regardless of age, social services can benefit only the elderly, identified as individuals in need, for various reasons such as: the elderly alone, the elderly without income, the elderly without support.
* DCM 864/2019 “On the approval of the national policy document on aging, 2020–2024, and the action plan for its implementation”.