

COMMENTARY OF THE 2024 BUDGET FOR ALBANIA FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

1. Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) is an Albanian non-profit organization that operates throughout Albania. GADC is a voice and force for change for Albanian women. Our organization works throughout Albania to empower women and to create an equal and equitable future for women and girls with low income to come out of poverty and exclusion.

2. **Albania has turned from one of the poorest countries in Europe to a country with middle incomes.** The country is implementing important reforms in order to revive economic growth and the creation of jobs, simultaneously advancing the agenda of integration into the European Union.

3. **The State Budget for the year 2024 was approved on December 7, 2023 based on law no. 97/2023, "For the Budget of the Year 2024"** by the Parliament of the Republic of Albania. The Budget for Citizens is prepared every year by the Ministry of Finance. According to the Budget for Citizens (BfC), during 2024 have been planned 674.7 billion ALL, with an increase of 4.1% compared to the year 2023. About 9.3% of the general public expenses will be dedicated to gender-based public policies, which aim to reduce gaps. This part of the budget aims to support girls and women and to reduce gender gaps in all areas of life, so that no one may be left behind.

4. In the Albanian state budget for 2024, **about 9.3% of the general public expenses will be dedicated to gender-based public policies**, which aim to reduce gender gaps in different fields.

5. **The implementation of gender-responsive budgeting has continued to improve in Albania.** Increasingly year after year, the Albanian government has implemented a series of measures with the aim of supporting families, women and girls, and vulnerable groups.

6. The economic **assistance for victims of domestic violence has increased** significantly.

7. Nonetheless, implementing and updating the law on gender equality must be a priority of the Albanian government.

8. Furthermore, the 2024 budget does not specify whether budgetary gaps in the action plan of the national strategy for gender equality have been filled or will be filled.

9. In the official website of the Ministry of Finance and Economy there are **no updated documents on gender budgeting**. The documents date from 2021.

10. Mr. Ervin Mete, the current Minister of Finance (and of Economy until the end of 2023), has not yet released an official statement that addresses the Ministry's focus on critical issues such as gender sensitivity, vulnerable populations, or larger topics of social inclusion. Such lack of engagement is concerning as it suggests a step back in the official discourse regarding gender equality issues, compared to the involvement of **previous women ministers, who have often spoken about the abovementioned issues.**

11. **Local budget expenses for 2024 are predicted at 71.1 billion ALL**, with an increase of 10.4% compared to the 2023 budget. These expenses will constitute 2.9% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However there is no gender analysis that shows how this budget affects the lives of marginalized groups, which women constitute a considerable part of.

12. The 2024 budget for the pensions scheme will finance about 185.8 billion ALL, ensuring the necessary funds for the indexation of pensions and the annual bonus for pensioners, but there is **no information regarding elderly people who live in poverty** and who receive a pension "just enough to survive".

13. The education sector will be financed with 78.8 billion ALL in total, or 3.2% of the GDP, however there is **no gender analysis regarding many problems related to investments in the education sector** where most of the teachers are women and girls and where pupils/students face many deficiencies related to health and hygiene, as well as other important issues for both girls and boys. The investment of 78.8 billion ALL or 3.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the education sector is a meaningful commitment which shows that the government prioritizes education. This level of investment is crucial for addressing the various needs in the sector, including improvement of infrastructure and technology, teachers' wages and students' resources, which are essential for improving the quality of education. However, there are no gender analyses regarding this investment, which raises concerns about important details. A comprehensive gender analysis is vital for several reasons: Firstly, it ensures that funds are allocated efficiently and effectively, targeting areas of the education sector that need them most. Without detailed analysis, there is a risk of unfair distribution of resources, which can lead to inefficiency or neglect of critical areas that need support. Secondly, an analysis helps define clear objectives and measure results, enabling stakeholders to assess the impact of investment on education quality, accessibility and equity. Finally, it ensures transparency and accountability, allowing the public and other stakeholders to understand how and why decisions are made and what benefits are expected.

14. **The Health sector will be financed with about 72.2 billion ALL in 2024 or 3% of the Gross Domestic Product.** A comprehensive analysis of the state budget focused on gender issues within the health sector is essential for promoting gender equality in healthcare. By ensuring that budget allocations reflect the diverse needs of the population, the Albanian government can make significant progress towards improving health outcomes for all genders, thereby contributing to the overall well-being and development of society.

Analyzing gender issues within the health sector in relation to state budget allocations involves examining how budget decisions affect men and women differently and ensuring equal access to health services for all genders. This analysis is essential for identifying and addressing inequalities in health outcomes, availability of services, and quality of care.

15. The 2024 budget further supports the justice reform, allocating 26.8 billion ALL for this sector, 4.8 billion ALL more compared to the 2023 budget.

16. **Handicrafts are a thriving sector in Albania** and the gender analysis carried out by GADC provides a concrete roadmap for their support at the central and local level. In the Albanian state budget for 2024, it is mentioned that women artists and artisans will be assisted, however there is **no figure, indicator or percentage dedicated to these women**. Without these it is impossible to measure achievement.

17. **The 2024 state budget is clear in several priority areas**, where direct assistance to women and girls is clearly defined as in the following examples:

a. 500 women and girls will benefit from targeted **agricultural information and advisory services** with a fund of 2,300,000 ALL, increasing the number of women who benefit from agricultural information and advisory services.

b. Health policies will continue to **support new mothers with primary and secondary health services**, where investments in new maternity hospitals are of particular importance with around ALL 39.5 million.

c. **Breast cancer screening services**, provided through mobile mammography units, will reach 100 more women each year in the period 2024-2026. This expansion, at a cost of 12,500,000 ALL, aims to improve breast cancer prevention by increasing screening coverage among women aged 50-60 from 15.2% in 2023 to 30.3% by 2026.

d. The 2024 state budget includes an amount of 25,000,000 ALL, with the **aim of women and girls benefiting from cervical cancer screening services**, giving free screening opportunities to about 13,000 women and girls for the period 2024-2026 against 11,000 of them in 2021. This investment also aims to reduce mortality from cervical cancer from 2.5/100 000 people in 2023 to 2.4/100 000 people in 2026.

e. At a cost of 342,000,000 ALL, new programs will be developed for **women and girl's employment promotion programs**, increasing the number of employees to 1,520 from 2,000 in 2023.

f. **Employment after completion of Vocational Training** of 7,015 women out of 11,500 total beneficiaries (or 61%) at a cost of ALL 142,600,920.

- g. Creating various **employment opportunities through vocational education** for 18,000 girls and boys, of which 2,750 are girls (or 15% of the total) and the cost of education is expected to be 284,084,625 ALL.
- h. The **budget for social protection programs** guarantees the support of over 64 thousand families, part of the economic assistance program, where about 45% of the beneficiaries are women victims of violence.
- i. The financing of the policy of reviewing the benefit measure for Economic Assistance will be increased, as well as the policy of support for the price of energy for the beneficiaries of the **disability payment category, where about 44% of the beneficiaries are women;**
- j. The financing of the **special support policy for unemployed women with 3 or more children** up to 18 years of age, with a family income of up to 100 thousand ALL per month, continues, supporting them with the payment of social and health contributions, for the period of caring for a child up to 5 years old.
- k. For the year 2024, **8,000 women are expected to benefit compared to 5,580 women** beneficiaries in 2023, at a cost of 800,000,000 ALL;
- l. **Family pension support** for 41,831 women at a cost of ALL 8,726,044,066 (contributors + transfers from the budget).
- m. **Maternity leave** payment for 14,993 mothers or fathers with a value of 5 billion ALL.
- m. The financing of the **"Baby Bonus" Program** for each newborn continues, guaranteeing a financial reward of 40,000-120,000 ALL for over 45 thousand children/year, as a way to help especially new mothers and fathers who have never been part of the labor market, to cope with the first months of having a child.
- o. Investment schemes for the **improvement of living conditions for women and men from social groups** are foreseen for an average of 295 beneficiary families in need, with a cost of 295,000,000 ALL.
- p. For women and girls victims of violence, or single-parent families, support with **social housing** will continue. The cost for social housing for 850 women and girls of the category defined by law will be ALL 47,562,600, calculated as a proportion of the two main products of the schemes.

18. However, the **2024 budget lacks performance indicators** in important areas according to the examples below:

a. Support for 60 projects with calls in support of creative industries, **respecting gender equality**, human rights, marginalized groups and cultural diversity at country level.

b. During 2024, **issues related to gender equality** will continue to be addressed, mainly in the field of education, healthcare, social protection, justice and public order.

c. Increasing the number of **athletes** licensed in the Albanian sports federation to 34,000 by 2026, in accordance **with the principles of gender equality**.

d. The 2024 budget for citizens **does not mention the main directions** as the 2023 budget did. However, in the 2024 budget for citizens, Ministry of Finance foresees a significant increase in expenditures on social support, where about 238 billion ALL, from 50 billion ALL in 2023, will be allocated in the budget only for social support in 2024.

e. In the 2024 budget, there is **no information about how many budget programs are related to gender equality issues**, while in the 2023 budget for citizens there were 47 (forty-seven) budget programs where gender equality issues would be addressed mainly in the field of education, health, social protection, justice and public order.

Albania ranks first in the region in terms of financial support for gender responsive budgeting, so the Albanian Government should at least maintain the same approach or strengthen it and not ignore such important indicators as the number of responsive budget programs from gender perspective.

GRB has been in place in Albania since 2008, when Albania introduced a new organic law that made budget programming mandatory and added performance-based indicators to medium-term budget programs that focused on goals, objectives and results. As a result, gender responsive budgeting (GRB) began to be implemented in programs in 2016.

Civil society involvement is essential, in educating and guiding ministries to include and disseminate gender-disaggregated data as part of the effort to advocate on gender equality issues.

In conclusion, the **2024 budget has a gender perspective, however, the lack of accompanying gender analysis or the post-legislative review of the implementation of laws** or strategies does not help in the proper allocation of funds that will serve the practical and strategic needs of different genders. It is essential that the investments foreseen in the state budget are guided by thorough research and analysis to ensure that they give the best results to the targeted groups and especially the marginalized strata. Also, the state budget should be accompanied by a gender analysis of the previous budget.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender Responsive Budget Analysis

An in-depth gender analysis of the implementation of the 2023 budget should be conducted to identify areas where gender differences exist and to understand the differential impact of budget policies by gender. This analysis should examine spending patterns, revenue sources and economic policies.

Key gender considerations

Gender considerations should be integrated into all stages of the budget process, including planning, formulation, implementation and evaluation. This includes establishing mechanisms to systematically assess the gender implications of budget decisions in all sectors.

Allocate resources to address gender gaps

Sufficient resources should be allocated to address specific gender gaps in areas such as education, health care, employment and social protection. This could include increased funding for programs that promote women's economic empowerment, address gender-based violence, and improve access to important services for marginalized groups.

Invest in data collection and research

Efforts to cover data by gender should be improved in order to track progress towards gender equality. This may include collecting gender-disaggregated data on budget documents and conducting gender impact assessments of budget policies.

Promote women's economic empowerment

Policies and programs aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment should be implemented, including access to finance, skills development, entrepreneurship support and promotion of women's participation in decision-making processes related to budget matters.

Support for unpaid care work

Unpaid care work, mainly carried out by women, should be recognized and valued by implementing policies such as parental leave, flexible working arrangements and investment in childcare services to enable greater participation of women in the workforce and to reduce the burden of unpaid care work.

Addressing gender-based violence

Adequate and comprehensive resources must be allocated for the National Gender Equality Strategy to fulfill its mission to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including funding for support services, legal aid and awareness campaigns aimed at changing attitudes and social norms that perpetuate violence against women and other genders.

Gender Responsive Agricultural Policies

It must be ensured that agricultural policies take into account the specific needs and contributions of women farmers, such as access to land, credit and agricultural extension services, to increase their productivity and promote food security and rural development.

Strengthen institutional capacities


The capacities of employees must be built to integrate gender issues into their policies and programs, this can be achieved through training on gender responsive budgeting and the creation of a special office that deals with data collection and monitoring the implementation of gender responsive budgeting principles.

Engage civil society and interested stakeholders

Partnerships with civil society organizations, women's groups, and other stakeholders should be fostered to ensure their meaningful participation in the budget process and to leverage their expertise and advocacy efforts to advance gender equality goals.

Monitor & evaluate progress

Mechanisms should be established to monitor and evaluate the impact of gender responsive budget initiatives, including setting targets and indicators to track progress towards gender equality outcomes and making budget policy adjustments as needed.



By implementing these recommendations, the Ministry of Finance can take important steps towards creating a more gender-oriented state budget that advances gender equality and social inclusion.



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