

CHALLENGES FACING ALBANIA¹

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In 2005, the population of Albania was some 3.1 million, with 45 percent residing in urban areas. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Grid Arendal, this represents a 3 percent rise over their 2000 assessment, the largest in the region. Albania's Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) estimates that 58 percent of migrants have settled within the hinterlands of Albania's larger cities. These include: Tirana (650,000), Durrës (85,500), Elbasan (83,500), Shkodra (82,000) and Vlorë (80,000). Among the current challenges facing their urban environments are the following:

Poorly Planned and Regulated Construction Boom

Over the last two decades there has been a dramatic increase in construction activity. Although this mainly occurs within existing urban areas and in the coastal zone, many houses have been built on small plots in other scattered locations, for instance on agricultural land. A large number of homes are being built without the required permits in districts such as Bathore (Tirana) and Keneta (Durrës) and as a consequence the provision of community infrastructure and services such as water supply, wastewater collection and treatment and solid waste collection and disposal is patchy. This leads to groundwater contamination and illegal waste dumps. Certain places (such as the national route between Fushe Kruje and Lezhe) also witness roadside construction without respect for proper distancing. This hinders traffic route extension and possible greening.

Poor Air Quality

Monitoring indicates that pollution standards are being exceeded in most urban areas. Increasing volumes of traffic, especially on the main Tirana crossroads, and the lack of end-of-pipe filters within some industries (e.g. in Elbasan and Fushe Kruje) are contributing to high levels of particulate pollution, which increases the incidence of respiratory diseases. Noise is also a common urban problem. This is caused by transport, construction, industry and certain private activities such as bars and clubs (e.g., in Tirana and during the summer in Plazh Durrës and Vlorë). However, to date, no standards for noise emissions have been issued.

Access to Clean Water, Inadequate Wastewater Disposal

Despite 80 percent of Albania's urban population enjoying access to piped water, drinking water is not provided in all settlements on a full-time basis, while the quality is below internationally accepted standards. Recent epidemics in Ura Vajgurore (during spring 2008) and Polican (early summer 2008) were caused by contaminated water. Furthermore, the inadequate maintenance of the water supply network and the absence of metering and operational control result in the loss of over 50 percent of the water produced within Albania's cities, according to the 2006 National Environmental Strategy. Regarding wastewater disposal, the existing collection and treatment infrastructure in almost all large cities complies with neither national or European legal requirements, resulting in sewage and industrial wastewater being directly discharged into the environment without treatment. Slight improvements have occurred in Kavaje, Pogradec and Korce thanks to the construction of plants to international standards with foreign assistance.

Insufficient Collection, Treatment and Disposal of Urban Waste

Urban waste is poorly managed across Albania. While urban solid waste is collected, their disposal in designated locations generally occurs without any form of treatment. Despite all municipalities operating



¹ Map is available online at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

waste disposal sites, almost none meet the necessary environmental standards, the few exceptions being Sharra (Tirana), Korca's regional landfill and in the Shkodra region, thanks to investment.

Soil Contamination

In places like PVC Vlore, Patos-Marinze and Rubik, large areas of industrially contaminated land remain unrehabilitated. Some of these areas (e.g. PVC Vlore and Porto Romano) have been occupied by migrants who construct dwellings and expose themselves to serious health-related risks. Furthermore, unsustainable forestry and agricultural practices have contributed to soil erosion, for instance in Mat, Peshkopi and settlements along the Shkumbini river. This threatens the livelihoods of nearby urban settlements.