

ALBANIA

PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT LESSONS LEARNED FOR A MORE SECURE FUTURE

Romario Shehu



PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT LESSONS LEARNED FOR A MORE SECURE FUTURE ALBANIA

Publisher:

Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)
Rr. Shenasi Dishnica, Nd. 35, H. 1, Tirana, Albania
www.idmalbania.org, info@idmalbania.org

Author:

Romario Shehu

Design:

Srđan Ilić

March 2023



Rockefeller
Brothers Fund

Philanthropy for an Interdependent World

This report was made possible with support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF).
The opinions and views of the authors do not necessarily state or reflect those of the RBF.



Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim

Introduction

This research looks at the COVID-19 pandemic management in Albania. It specifically delves into the health capacities and government response in Albania; the geopolitical aspects of the pandemic; and the role of international organizations and mechanisms in the management of the pandemic. The analysis in this report considers primary and secondary sources of information. Primary data were obtained from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Institute of Statistics through Freedom of Information requests, for information that was not publicly available. Secondary sources include official statistics, studies and investigations on COVID-19 from government agencies, research reports, and media publications.

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease discovered in December 2019, which has caused health and economic crises, generating severe setbacks and disruptions. Countries around the world have taken measures to address this threat, including declaring the state of the pandemic, closing their borders, imposing lockdowns or restrictions of movement, or suspending most activities in their countries. Since December 2020, different types of COVID-19 vaccines have been developed and administered worldwide.^[1] The COVID-19 pandemic is still not over, and the possibility of new waves cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, most countries have lifted pandemic restrictions, as the perception of the health risk of the virus has changed, particularly for the vaccinated population. The pandemic had a staggering impact on our societies, claiming human lives^[2] and adding to the global economic, political, health and social challenges.^[3]

The first COVID-19 cases in Albania were registered in March 2020. Like other countries in the world, Albania took immediate measures to address the threat, which included declaring the state of the pandemic and later the state of natural disaster in the country, closing its borders, imposing lockdowns, restricting movement and suspending most activities in the country. Those measures partly continued until June 2020 when most restrictions in Albania were lifted, followed by opening of all borders with its neighboring countries.^[4] The country started its COVID-19 vaccination on 11 January 2021.^[5] In the period 2020 to 2022, a total of 332,941 cases and 3,596 deaths from COVID-19 were registered in Albania.^[6]

Analysis

After being hit hard by the 2019 earthquake, Albania's struggling **economy** was further weakened by the pandemic. The World Bank's Western Balkans Regular Economic Report noted the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020 contracted by 4%^[7] – although less than initially expected – the government incurred additional public debt to mitigate the economic losses through increased spending. Following the contraction in 2020, a stronger-than-expected economic recovery pushed the real growth of GDP to 8.3% in 2021.^[8] The unemployment rate has remained the same since 2019, except for a slight increase in 2020.

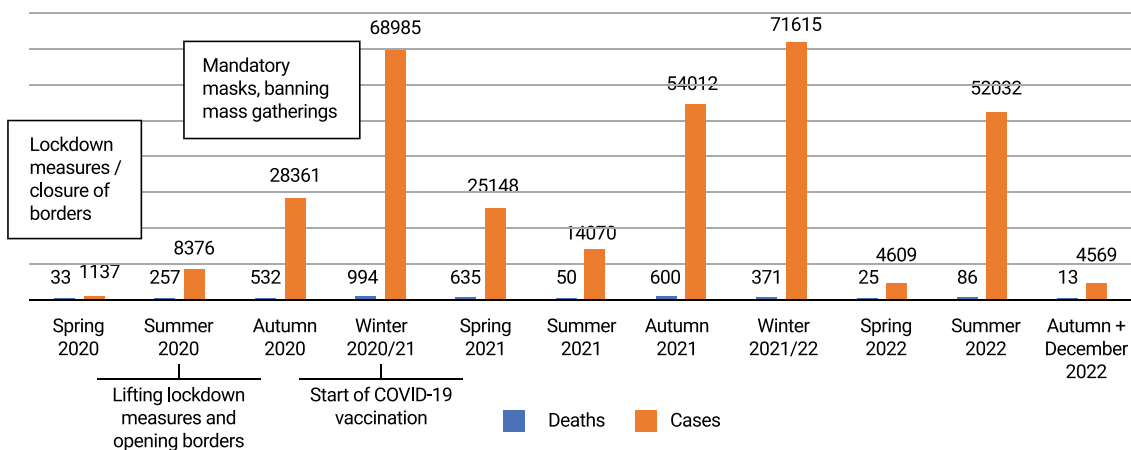
There is an incremental life expectancy decrease in Albania (see Table 1), which coincides with COVID-19 in the country's timeline. Whereas the total number of **inhabitants in Albania** has been in constant decline since 2019, the number of deaths has been increasing. There were 5,668 more deaths in 2020 compared to 2019, and 8,643 more deaths in 2021 compared to 2019. If those numbers are subtracted from the total number of registered COVID-19 deaths in 2020 and 2021, there were still 11,094 more deaths in 2020 and 2021, compared to 2019. Some reports^[9] indicate that those excessive mortalities were also related to COVID-19 implications, although they were not registered as such.

ALBANIA	2019	2020	2021	2022
Population	2,862,427	2,845,955	2,829,741	2,793,592
Life expectancy	79,1	77,4	76,5	-
Total deaths	21,937	27,605	30,580	-
COVID-19 deaths	-	1,181	2,036	379
Hospital beds	8,189	8,334	8,501	-
Unemployment (15-64 years old)	12%	12,2%	12%	-

Table 1: Data are derived from the webpage and FOI requests from Institute of Statistics and Coronavirus.al

Graph 1 shows the **total number of COVID-19 deaths and new cases** in the country. Winter 2020/21, spring 2021 and autumn 2021, are the seasons when COVID-19 took the highest death toll in the country. March 2021 (425), February 2021 (423), December 2020 (364), and November 2020 (304) were the months when COVID-19 claimed most lives in the country. On the other hand, autumn (including December) 2022, spring 2022, and spring 2020, were the seasons with the lowest number of COVID-19 deaths in Albania. In terms of months, July 2021, May 2022, November 2022, with one death each, and May 2020 and December 2022, with two deaths each, were the months with the

lowest number of COVID-19 deaths in Albania. Regarding new COVID-19 cases, winter 2021/22, winter 2020/21, autumn 2021 and summer 2022, were the seasons with the highest number of new COVID-19 cases. In terms of months, January 2022 (48,319), July 2022 (31,619), February 2021 (29,040) and September 2021 (24,198), were the months with the highest number of new COVID-19 cases. On the other hand, spring 2020, autumn (including December) 2022, spring 2022 and summer 2020, were the seasons with the lowest number of new COVID-19 cases, whereas the months with the least infections were June 2021 (206), March 2020 (243), and May 2020 (364).



Graph 1: Source: Cronavirus.al

Ranked 74th (out of 89) on the list of countries with the best health care systems in 2021,^[10] **Albania's healthcare system** struggled to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. With regards to the masks and tests availability at the beginning of the pandemic, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that as of July 2020, the tests availability in Albania was 90,000, while more than 30,000 persons had been tested until then.^[11] There was a shortage of masks at the beginning of the pandemic, partially caused by the panic buying of masks by citizens. The situation was stabilized later in April, as Albania received personal protective equipment for medical staff, which improved safety of doctors and nurses in dealing with COVID-19.^[12] COVID-19 had a positive side effect, as it encouraged more investments in improving the healthcare facilities in the country. The number of hospital beds *per capita* in Albania (see Table 1) had an incremental improvement, from 2.86 beds per 1,000 residents in 2019, to 2.92 in 2020, and 3.0 in 2021. The number of ventilators in Albania before the pandemic was around 200,^[13] and in the following period, the number of ventilators in hospitals increased by about 2.5 times, surpassing 500 ventilatory devices.^[14] The public healthcare institutions have employed additional 61 epidemiologists, 128 assistant epidemiologists, and 124 anesthesiologists^[15] while dealing with the pandemic.

On 26 February 2020, the Albanian government amended the law on **public procurement**,^[16] allowing public institutions to contract companies without public tendering if those companies were able to provide the required services and goods in cases of urgent need. This included situations like the pandemic, “caused by exceptional circumstances beyond the control of the contracting authority,” and when “the time available for resolving the urgent need is not sufficient for the normal conduct of other proceedings.”

Since the promulgation of this decision until June 2021, a total of 214 contracts were procured by the health institutions, of which 193 were executed.^[17] According to independent monitoring, 89% of the estimated value of procurement of COVID-19 supplies undertaken by the Albanian authorities was distributed through risky procurement procedures, revealing issues related to the competitiveness of the process.^[18] During this period, the Albanian government signed 15 secret contracts related to COVID-19 (without open competitive procedure) totaling around €37.6 million.^[19] The decision to declare all contracts as “essential interests of the state” triggered warnings about the possible misuse of state funds, favoritism, suspected corruption and violation of public interests...^[20] Moreover, vaccine supply contracts, signed by the Albanian government with various pharmaceutical companies, were also considered a state secret, and some members of the Albanian Parliament who voted on these contracts through special laws claimed they were provided with minimal information before casting their vote.¹ When the pandemic was at its peak, Albania concluded four agreements for the supply of COVID-19 vaccines. These contracts were classified as confidential; therefore, the details of these contracts are unknown. In regards to their costs, the data from the 2021 report of the Ministry of Finance and Economy^[22] reveal that the total amount of funds spent for the purchase of vaccines in 2021 was 3.4 billion Albanian Lek (€29.6 million).

COVID-19 vaccination in Albania started on 11 January 2021, and by December 2022, a total of 3,029,614 vaccine doses have been administered, of which 1,327,179 first doses, 1,273,485 second doses, and 386,011 third doses.^[23] Albania has administered the following vaccines against COVID-19: Comirnaty (Pfizer–BioNTech), Vaxzevria–AstraZeneca, Covishield–AstraZeneca, CoronaVac–Sinovac, and Gam-COVID–Vac–Sputnik V.^[24] Albania was among countries engaged in COVAX, which is a worldwide initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.^[25] Since 2021, a total of 331,800 doses have been reportedly delivered to Albania through the COVAX initiative, of which 188,400 were donations.^[26] Asked about the quantities of vaccines donated to Albania per donor country, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection responded that Albania has received 947,880 COVID-19 vaccines as donations from the European Union (EU), Portugal, Greece, Croatia, Sweden, Latvia, as well as from the United Arab Emirates,^[27] without mentioning the specific numbers of vaccine doses received per donor country.

Although Albania has mainly been on the receiving end of foreign assistance, it did not brush aside its **diplomacy efforts during COVID-19**, as it strived to support other countries by posting healthcare professionals and vaccine administration to front-line professionals of neighboring countries. Earlier on, Albania decided to donate vaccines

to Kosovo due to Kosovo's struggle to obtain vaccines. Kosovo is not recognized by two of the main vaccine-producing states (China and Russia), and it could only obtain vaccines produced in the United States or the United Kingdom, which were very difficult to acquire at the time. Against this backdrop, Albania offered to help administer vaccines to Kosovo's first-line responders in a demonstration of the closeness between the two countries and potentially in a bid to improve bilateral relations at the government level after some trivial disagreements...^[28] Numerous healthcare workers of the Republic of Kosovo were vaccinated in Albania.^{29]} Although the official response of the Ministry did not reveal the number of vaccines that were administered to Kosovo's healthcare workers, media articles indicate that around 500 vaccines were administered to them.^[30] Albania also offered to administer vaccines to Kosovo's teachers. However, the vaccines that Albania could provide at the time were China's Sinovac, and the Government of Kosovo declined the offer over the argument that Kosovo would only accept vaccines that were produced in countries that recognized the Republic of Kosovo.^[31] In March 2020, 30 doctors and nurses from Albania were sent to Italy, as the country was coping with the hospital capacity strain.^[32]

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, along with its subordinate institutions, had the key role in **informing the public about pandemic management**.^[33] Representatives of these institutions held daily press conferences to inform the public about the ongoing situation.^[34] Journalists also did not have any restriction of movement like most of the citizens, hence they also communicated all the related news to the public. Nevertheless, press conferences were inaccessible to journalists during the national lockdown, and the COVID-19 pandemic saw an increased usage of social media by political authorities to disseminate health information to the public.^[35] This led to a deterioration of the freedom of the press and impacted the way citizens perceived pandemic management. As elsewhere, Albania was affected by conspiracy theories regarding the pandemic, which contained overlapping and often contradictory theories. In the early phase, fake news ranged from portraying the pandemic as a hoax, an exaggeration, or even as a bioweapon of a 'globalist cabal', to providing 'natural cures' to recover from the virus and strengthen the immune system.^[36] With the beginning of the vaccination process, disinformation was shifted to conspiracies against the vaccines, questioning their worth, or hinting at their negative consequences on human bodies.^[37] A concerning issue for Albania in this regard is that such conspiracies were also promoted on popular TV channels,^[38] in addition to social media and online portals. Albanian healthcare institutions developed a system to manage the "pandemic of disinformation" by identifying and addressing fake news that was spread to create public panic.^[39] The World Health Organization (WHO) also arranged two 'Infodemic Management' trainings to tackle rumors and misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination in Albania.^[40] Nevertheless, their response had a limited impact considering that Albania is assessed as the country with the highest number of supporters of COVID-19 conspiracy theories in the Western Balkans.^[41] In addition, less than half of Albanians trust healthcare institutions in the country. The level of trust in healthcare institutions in Albania slightly decreased in 2020 compared to the previous

year,^[42] and they were perceived as the second most-corrupt institution in Albania in 2020.^[43] Therefore, the lack of access to press conferences; unrestricted publication of countless conspiracy theories on social media and online portals; promotion of conspiracies on popular TV channels; low trust in healthcare institutions, along with the suspicious government contracts^[44] and low government transparency during the pandemic, might have proven a fertile ground for conspiracy theories in the country.

Albania introduced tough lockdown measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The measures imposed included curfews, administrative fines for breach of lockdown, quarantining and criminalization of breach of quarantine and intentional infection, and the use of police and military forces to enforce the measures.^[45] The pandemic highlighted the **fragility of democracy in the country**. The right to protest was suspended and movement was significantly restricted. Most state measures were centralized and introduced by the Prime Minister through normative acts, without the approval of the Parliament, and without public consultations.^[46] The declining public confidence in the government's ability to handle the pandemic was evident when citizens and civil society repeatedly gathered to protest against the government's anti-pandemic measures—including the amendments to the Criminal Code, mandatory use of masks, and the alleged mandatory vaccination – in the summer and fall of 2020.^[47] A joint declaration by CSOs noted that the proposed penalties in the Criminal Code for violating measures to prevent the spread of the virus infringe on the rights and liberties of citizens.^[48] On 8 December 2020, a police officer killed a twenty-five-year-old male in Tirana for violating the normative act on the prohibition of movement. Although the police officer was arrested and charged with intentional murder, the public outcry was huge. Several violent and non-violent protests took place in Tirana and other cities, resulting in the resignation of the Minister of Interior.^[49] During the state of emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, the Ombudsman raised concerns about democratic participation, freedom of movement and assembly, restrictions on the right to family life and privacy, and proactively promoted principles of legality and proportionality with regards to legislation regarding the pandemic.^[50] There were no elections at any level in Albania during the state of emergency caused by the pandemic. The general elections took place on 25 April 2021, when only some pandemic restrictions were in place. Overall, the preventive measures against COVID-19 were not sufficiently implemented and social distancing was not always respected during the voting process.^[51] The status of democracy in the country had a very slight decrease in 2020, as Albania scored 67/100 in the Global Freedom Score in 2019,^[52] and it scored 66/100 in 2020.^[53]

Support for the COVID-19 response to Albania by international organizations was ensured by the United Nations, mainly through the WHO Office in Albania,^[54] delivering support across multiple pillars, including: (i) Leadership, coordination, planning, financing and monitoring of the pandemic situation; (ii) Risk communication, community engagement and infodemic management; (iii) Logistic support to the surveillance and outbreak investigation teams; (iv) Support for the assessment of the priority needs at the Albanian points of entry, travel, transport and gatherings; (v) Support for the

assessment of the diagnostic capacities at the laboratories and diagnostics of hospitals; (vi) Assessment of the training needs for the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), and the training of more than 20,000 health staff and volunteers; (vii) Operational support and logistics received support from WHO for procurement concerning diagnosis of COVID-19, IPC, case management, laboratory equipment, kits, reagents, materials, IT equipment, vaccines cold chain equipment, vehicles, personal protective equipment, and COVID-19 Ag rapid tests; (viii) Support for strengthening essential health services and systems; and (ix) Facilitation of vaccination through technical support provided to the National Immunisation Technical Advisory Group. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Albania also came to Albania's aid in combating the pandemic. From the beginning, UNDP contributed to the immediate response by raising awareness about COVID-19 risks and prevention, as well as through the provision of medical and protective equipment and capacity-building for civil servants and other specialists to help transition their operations online, without interrupting their services to those most in need.^[55] As part of its long-term assistance, UNDP also supported labor market performance analysis and assessment of the pandemic's negative impact on the economy and helped design active labor market measures which aimed to quickly transition the recently laid-off workforce into employment.^[56] The EU has provided the biggest assistance to Albania for addressing COVID-19 pandemic. The European Commission redirected €50,65 million in grants to Albania for meeting the most immediate needs and providing a socio-economic response to the pandemic.^[57] The Commission also provided macro-financial assistance of €180 million through a soft loan, which was fully disbursed in 2021 following Albania's fulfilment of the policy conditions attached to the assistance.^[58] Albania also received €11,2 million in grants from the Instruments of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) II for the Western Balkan partners to reimburse the Member States for the resale of doses they obtained under the EU Advance Purchase Agreements with COVID-19 vaccine producers or bilateral orders of EMA authorized vaccines.^[59] It is worth mentioning that, regardless of all the assistance provided to Albania in the aftermath of the pandemic, the beginning of the COVID-19 was associated with uncertainties, which pushed states to look after themselves. Against such backdrop, the European Commission adopted a regulation (valid from March to April 2020) that banned the exportation of personal protective equipment and medical equipment to other countries.^[60] This 'selfish' approach was not taken well by the Albanian PM, who referred to the actions of the EU as a "shameful mistake" as they "only thought about themselves", while praising Türkiye for offering to sell vaccines to Albania and for providing the first shipment of medical supplies at a time of great need.^[61] A survey conducted in September 2021 revealed that 39.2% of Albanians believed that Türkiye had provided the biggest financial/humanitarian support to Albania in dealing with COVID-19 pandemic.^[62] Considering that the EU provided the most help to Albania during the pandemic, including donation of vaccines, Rama's criticism against the EU and the public perception, implied that in times of need, the Western Balkans could be subjected to foreign influence, when the EU fails to deliver.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Since COVID-19 was first registered in Albania, there has been a significant decrease in life expectancy in the country. Whereas the total number of **inhabitants in Albania** has been on constant decline since 2019, the number of deaths has been increasing. It is important for the public health authorities in the country to examine the factors contributing to excessive mortalities.

There has been a lack of transparency in public procurement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The practices of 'secret contracts' and allowing public institutions to contract companies without public tendering might be perceived as possible misuse of state funds, cronyism, suspected corruption and violation of public interests. These practices erode public trust in institutions, and harm good governance and democracy in the country. As such, it is important for the Government to avoid these practices to the extent possible, or at least, to maintain proactive and transparent communication with the public.

As the country with the highest number of supporters of COVID-19 conspiracy theories in the Western Balkans, Albania needs to address this issue of disinformation in a coordinated approach with all relevant actors. The transparency of state institutions and their public communication are of vast importance to ensure public trust. Leading media channels and sites should adopt stricter rules against the promotion of conspiracies. International actors and civil society need to be involved in campaigns against disinformation, by raising awareness, building media literacy skills and programs, and supporting independent journalism and fact-checking organizations to ensure that accurate information is widely available.

The measures taken by the Government to stop the spread of COVID-19, must be adjusted to the threat level, thoroughly explained to the public, should not ignore public consultations, and must not infringe on the rights and liberties of citizens, unless justified by the state legislation and decided by the respective state authorities.

While it is understandable that the EU may need to prioritize its own needs during a crisis, failing to assist the Western Balkans or other regions can create a perception that the EU is not a reliable partner and may leave room for external actors to strengthen their influence in those countries. Therefore, the EU should carefully consider the potential consequences of suspending support to other countries in times of need, particularly in regions such as the Western Balkans, and to continue to prioritize global solidarity and cooperation in its response to global crises.

Annex 1

Timeline of the measures taken by Albania to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the country (Spring 2020 – Winter 2020/21)	
8 March 2020	(i) Suspending the export of medicine and medical equipment to other countries; (ii) Banning public and non-public activities and prohibiting mass gatherings in closed or open spaces;
9 March 2020	(i) First case of coronavirus is registered; (ii) Closure of all education institutions;
10 March 2020	(i) Suspending all flights to / from Italy;
11 March 2020	(i) The state of the pandemic was officially declared in the country. Albania becomes the first country in the region to impose partial lockdown measures; (ii) Prohibition of mass gatherings and closure of public places for entertainment activities; (iii) Limitation of contacts in public and non-public institutions; (iv) Mandatory two-week quarantine for passengers coming to Albania from COVID-19 red-states;
12 March 2020	(i) Closure of bars, restaurants, hotels. This order lasted until 15 May 2020.
14 March 2020	(i) Closure of all land borders to/from Albania; (ii) Suspending all aerial flights to/from Greece;
15 March 2020	(i) Restriction of movement within the country;
16 March 2020	(i) Suspending all aerial flights to/from Great Britain; (ii) Restriction of the movement of pedestrians in urban areas after 18:00;
18 March 2020	(i) Restriction of the movement of pedestrians in urban areas, allowed only from 06:00 – 10:00 and from 16:00 – 18:00;
24 March 2020	(i) The state of the natural disaster was declared in the country as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
18 May 2020	(i) Albania lifted lockdown measures. All public and economic activities were open, except public transport, sports activities, schools and mass gathering activities;
1 June 2020	(i) Albania lifts the border closures with the neighboring countries; (ii) All movements in all territory are free without time restrictions;
13 October 2020	(i) Masks become mandatory outside the house;
9 November 2020	(i) Restricting the activity of bars, restaurants, hotels, allowed only from 06:00 – 22:00; (ii) Restricting the free movement of people, allowed only from 06:00 – 22:00.
17 November 2020	(i) Banning mass gatherings in open or closed spaces;
21 December 2020	(i) Restriction of the movements of pedestrians, allowed only from 06:00 – 20:30. This order was in place from 24 December 2020 to 4 January 2021; (ii) Suspending all aerial flights to/from Great Britain from 22 December 2020 to 6 January 2021.
11 January 2021	(i) Albania starts COVID-19 vaccination;
10 February 2021	(i) Restricting the activity of bars, restaurants, hotels, allowed only from 06:00 – 20:00. This order was in place from 11 to 25 February 2021; (ii) Restricting the free movement of people, allowed only from 06:00 – 20:00. This order was in place from 11 to 25 February 2021.
Source: Data are derived from the webpage of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Prime Minister's Office	

Endnotes

1. World Health Organization, "The different types of COVID-19 vaccines," 12 January 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/the-race-for-a-covid-19-vaccine-explained>.
2. From December 2019 to December 2022, globally, there have been around 7 million deaths. World Health Organization, "WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard," accessed on 18 January 2023, <https://covid19.who.int/>.
3. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trade and Development: Lessons Learned," 24 June 2022, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osg2022d1_en.pdf.
4. Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations, "Albania 2020 Report," *European Commission*, 6 October 2020, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/albania_report_2020.pdf.
5. Prime Minister's Office, "Albania smiles: COVID vaccination is underway," 11 January 2021, <https://www.kryeministria.al/newsroom/konferenca-per-shtyp-e-kryeministrit-edi-rama-pa-nisjes-se-jetesimit-te-fushates-shqiperia-buzeqesh/>.
6. Coronavirus Albania, "Statistics: COVID-19 deaths in Albania during 2020-2022," accessed on 6 January 2023, <https://coronavirus.al/statistika/>.
7. World Bank Group, "Western Balkans Regular Economic Report No.20: Greening the Recovery," 2021, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36402/Greening-the-Recovery.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
8. Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations, "Albania Report 2022," *European Commission*, 12 October 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en.
9. Monitor.al, "Albania with the highest mortality from Covid-19 in Europe in 2020, record increase," 2021, <https://www.monitor.al/raporti-i-ke-konfirmon-shqiperia-me-vdekshmerime-te-larte-nga-covid-19-ne-europe-me-2020-rritje-rekord/>.
10. Sophie Ireland, "Revealed: Countries With The Best Health Care Systems, 2021," *CEO World Magazine*, 27 April 2021, <https://ceoworld.biz/2021/04/27/revealed-countries-with-the-best-health-care-systems-2021/>.
11. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "The COVID-19 crisis in Albania," 27 April 2020, <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Albania-archive.pdf>.
12. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "The COVID-19 crisis in Albania," 27 April 2020, <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Albania-archive.pdf>.
13. Information received through a freedom of information request, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 30 January 2023.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. Decision by the Council of Ministers, "On procedures to be used for signing Contracts dictated by the State Essential Interest," 26 February 2020, https://portavendore.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/VKM-nr.203-dt.-26.2.2020-P%C3%ABr-procedurat-q%C3%AB-p%C3%ABrdoren-p%C3%ABr-lidhjen-e-kontratave-q%C3%AB-diktohen-nga-interesa-thelb%C3%ABsor%C3%AB-t%C3%AB-shtetit_compressed.pdf.
17. Denis Tahiri, "Secret tenders to hide violations?! Experts: They are used to cover up corrupt acts," *Albanian Center for Quality Journalism*, 26 February 2022, <https://www.acqj.al/tendera-sekrete-per-te-fshehur-shkeljet-ekspertet-perdoren-per-te-mbuluar-aktet-korruprive/>.
18. Open Data Albania, "Decay of Health sector, AIS uncovers: 89% of the funds tendered during the pandemic, were awarded without competition," 16 March 2022, <https://ndiqparate.al/?p=15517&lang=en>.

19. Alfred Zylyftari, Elsa Dautaj, and Seth Facey, "The Covid pandemic and the obscurity of government expenses," 8 August 2022, *Albanian Center for Quality Journalism*, <https://www.acqj.al/en/the-covid-pandemic-and-the-obscurity-of-government-expenses/>.
20. Fjori Sinoruka, "Concern in Albania over String of Secretive COVID-19 Tenders," *Balkan Insight*, 7 October 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/07/concern-in-albania-over-string-of-secretive-covid-19-tenders/>.
21. Alfred Zylyftari, Elsa Dautaj, and Seth Facey, "The Covid pandemic and the obscurity of government expenses," 8 August 2022, *Albanian Center for Quality Journalism*, <https://www.acqj.al/en/the-covid-pandemic-and-the-obscurity-of-government-expenses/>.
22. Ministry of Finance and Economy, "Report on the implementation of the annual budget: Macroeconomic and fiscal situation during 2021," May 2022, https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/b_Raporti-per-zbatimin-e-buxhetit-vjetor-situaten-makroekonomike-dhe-fiskale-gjate-vitit-2021-final.docx.
23. Ministry of Health and Social Protection, "COVID vaccination/ 3,029,614 vaccinations," 1 January 2023, <https://shendetesia.gov.al/vaksinimi-anticovid-3029614-vaksinime/>.
24. Institute of Public Health, "Stay updated with the latest information on COVID-19 vaccines, questions and answers," May 2022, <https://www.ishp.gov.al/zgjidh-jeten-vaksinohu/>.
25. Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "Albania and the World Health Organization," 24 December 2021, <https://www.punetejashtme.gov.al/en/organizata-boterore-e-shendetesise-obsh/>.
26. UNICEF, "COVID-19 Market Dashboard," 16 January 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/supply/covid-19-market-dashboard>
27. Information received through a freedom of information request, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 30 January 2023. The vaccines that were donated to Albania were: Pfizer-BioNTech, Vaxzevria-AstraZeneca and Gam-COVID-Vac-Sputnik).
28. Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance, "Public Perceptions towards bilateral relations, cross border cooperation and identity issues in Albania," March 2022, http://csdgalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final_Barometer-2021-Albania-3-ENG.pdf.
29. Information received through a freedom of information request, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 30 January 2023.
30. Zëri i Amerikës, "Albania administers vaccines to the medical personnel of Kosovo," 20 March 2021, <https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/mjek%C3%ABt-nga-kosova-vaksinohen-n%C3%AB-kuk%C3%ABs/5822226.html>.
31. Abcnews.al, "Kosovo does not accept Chinese vaccines from Albania, Kurti: We will only receive vaccines from countries that have recognized us," 5 April 2021, <https://abcnews.al/kosova-nuk-pranon-vaksinat-kineze-nga-shqiperia-kurti-do-marrim-vetem-nga-shtete-qe-na-kane-njohur/>.
32. European Union External Action, "Albania – an example of European solidarity against the coronavirus," 31 March 2020, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/albania-%E2%80%93-exam-ple-european-solidarity-against-coronavirus_en#:~:text=%E2%80%9Cstrong%20and%20coordinated%20action%20is,country%2C%E2%80%9D%20underlined%20Josep%20Borrell.
33. Parliament of Albania, "Law No. 15/2016 "On the prevention and control of infectious diseases," accessed on 21 October 2022 <https://www.parlament.al/Files/Integrimi/ligj-nr.-15-dt.-10.3.2016-1.pdf>.
34. Institute of Public Health, "Daily communication on coronavirus," 27 October 2020, <https://www.ishp.gov.al/komunikimi-i-perditshem-per-koronavirusin-27-tetor-2020/>.
35. Laylo Merali and Ena Bavčić, "Cybersecurity and Human Rights in the Western Balkans: Mapping Governance and Actors," *Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance*, September 2022, <https://www.dcaf.ch/cybersecurity-and-human-rights-western-balkans-mapping-governance-and-actors>.
36. Inva Hasanaliaj, "Fake news during COVID-19," *Faktoje*, April 2, 2020, <https://faktoje.al/lajmet-e-rreme-qe-qarkulluan-me-shume-per-covid-19/>.
37. Joel Çela, "Fake news and vaccination that has "stuck" globally," *Faktoje*, 8 August 2021, <https://faktoje.al/lajmet-e-rreme-dhe-vaksinimi-qe-ka-ngecur-ne-nivel-global/>.

38. Alfred Çako, "This is what will happen after 1 year to the people who get the vaccine today...", *Top Channel*, December 2, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP7f3p80_MQ.
39. Ministry of Health and Social Protection, "COVID - 19 Action Plan for Albania: Prevention, preparation and response against COVID-19," March 2020, https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Covid_AL-spreads.pdf.
40. United Nations Albania, "A Special Covid-19 Response Newsletter Issue No. 14," January 2022, https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/UNALB%20Covid%20Response_Issue%2314_1.pdf.
41. Florian Bieber, Tena Prelec, Dejan Jović and Zoran Nechev, "The Suspicious Virus: Conspiracies and COVID19 in the Balkans," *Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group*, 2021, July 2021, <https://biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Conspiracies-and-COVID19-in-the-Balkan-English-2.pdf>.
42. Leonie Vrugtman and Marsela Dauti, "Opinion Poll 2020: Trust in Governance," *Institute for Democracy and Mediation*, November 2021, <https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/IDM-OpinionPoll-2020-EN.pdf>.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Alfred Zylyftari, Elsa Dautaj, and Seth Facey, "The Covid pandemic and the obscurity of government expenses," 8 August 2022, *Albanian Center for Quality Journalism*, <https://www.acqj.al/en/the-covid-pandemic-and-the-obscurity-of-government-expenses/>.
45. Arjan Dyrmishi, "Democracy and the state of emergency: Easing Measures and Rising Tensions in the Struggle with the Corona Crisis in Albania," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, 15 June 2020, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/16286.pdf>.
46. Evelina Azizaj, Romario Shehu and Iliada Korçari, "The 2020 CSO Sustainability Index for Albania," *United States Agency for International Development*, September 2021, <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-europe-eurasia-2020-report.pdf>.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Albanian Helsinki Committee, "Statement from Civil Society Organizations: "On the penalties proposed in the Criminal Code for the prevention of the #Covid19 pandemic," 11 April 2020, <https://ahc.org.al/deklarate-e-perbashket-per-median/>.
49. Evelina Azizaj, Romario Shehu and Iliada Korçari, "The 2020 CSO Sustainability Index for Albania," *United States Agency for International Development*, September 2021, <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-europe-eurasia-2020-report.pdf>.
50. Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations, "Albania Report 2022," *European Commission*, 12 October 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en.
51. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, "Final report on 2021 Parliamentary elections in Albania," *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*, 26 July 2021, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/c/495052.pdf>.
52. Freedom House, "Freedom in Albania in 2019," accessed on 23 November 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2019>.
53. Freedom House, "Freedom in Albania in 2022," accessed on 23 November 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2022>.
54. United Nations Albania, "2021 Progress Report: In-depth results," 13 April 2022, <https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/UN%20Albania%20Annual%20Progress%20Report%202021%20-%20In%20depth%20results.pdf>.
55. United Nations Development Programme, "COVID-19 pandemic: UNDP Albania response," <https://www.undp.org/albania/covid-19-pandemic>.
56. *Ibid.*

57. Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations, "Albania Report 2022," *European Commission*, 12 October 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en.
58. *Ibid.*
59. Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations, "Albania Report 2022," *European Commission*, 12 October 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en.
60. European Commission, "Commission implementing regulation (EU) 2020/402: Making the exportation of certain products subject to the production of an export authorization," *Official Journal of the European Union*, 14 March 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020R0402&from=EN>.
61. Alice Taylor, "Albanian PM: EU's vaccine policy, 'shameful mistake'," *Euractiv*, 30 August 2022, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/albanian-pm-eus-vaccine-policy-shameful-mistake/.
62. Arjan Dyrmishi, "Public Perceptions towards bilateral relations, cross border cooperation and identity issues in Albania," Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance, March 2022, http://csdgalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final_Barometer-2021-Albania-3-ENG.pdf.



Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim