



Post COVID-19 in Recovery in Informal Settlements in the UNECE Region
Emergency response and building back better

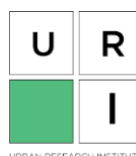
ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR TIRANA (ALBANIA)



24 December 2020

Prepared by:

Urban Research Institute



URBAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADISA - Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services Albania
ADRF - Albanian Disability Rights Foundation
AITPP - Agency for the Inventory and Transfer of Public Properties
AITPP - Agency of Inventory and Transfer of Public Properties
ALBPOS - Albanian Positioning System (CORS)
ALBSREP - Albanian System for Immovable Property Registration
ALL - Albanian Lekë
ALUIZNI - Agency for the Legalization and Urbanization of Informal Areas
ASHK / SCA - State Cadaster Agency
ASIG - State Authority for Geospatial Information
ATP - Agency for Treatment of Property
COVID-19 - Coronavirus disease of 2019
EU - European Union
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
GDT - Directorate of Territorial Planning
GLP - General Local Plan
GoA - Government of Albania
ICT - Information & Communication Technology
IPRO - Immovable Property Registration Office
ISO - International Standards Organization
LADI - Land Administration Data Improvement
LADM - Land Administration Domain Model
LAMP - Land Administration Management Project
MEF - Ministry of Economy and Finance
MoT- Municipality of Tirana
OSCE - Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
TAP - Trans Adriatic Pipeline
UN - United Nations
WV - World Vision



1. INTRODUCTION

The project “Post COVID-19 Recovery in Informal Settlements in the ECE Region” aims to strengthen the capacity of national and local governments in UNECE countries to address the needs of the most vulnerable population groups living in the informal settlements. This would enhance the socio-economic recovery following the pandemic and contribute to urban resilience in participating cities and countries. It will also build capacity in national and local authorities in the four pilot countries for recovery, as well as upgraded informal settlements plans.

The project will result in the development of a Post COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements for countries in the ECE region. It will also give concrete recommendations for the four pilot cities for upgrading informal settlements and supporting the cities in the recovery from COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the most vulnerable people the hardest. This includes those living in informal settlements in the ECE region, especially women, old people, young people and migrants. Informal settlements are particularly vulnerable to disease outbreaks, as disease monitoring and containment can be challenging due to lack of adequate data to use for an appropriate policy response. Such data would include the number of inhabitants per household, details on access to healthcare facilities and basic services, as well as means of employment and stability of work which could indicate the ability to enforce a quarantine. Urgent action is needed to enable residents to stay safe and healthy and so increase resilience to future pandemics and natural disasters.

The UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 states that “The crisis will exacerbate inequalities especially in vulnerable settings and fragile locations such as informal settlements and slums, which are already underserved by social services, and where information and strategies such as testing, hand-washing, self-isolation and quarantine will be particularly difficult due to lack of space, water, resources and services.”

Post COVID-19 recovery plans need to address the issue of informal settlements as a priority. Such plans should start with the urbanization and legalization of informal buildings. Integrating informal constructions into formal urbanized land markets provides clear ownership and security of tenure and so gives economic security to residents as they can access credits and mortgages. In addition, security of tenure encourages residents to invest in their homes. Urbanization and formalization is therefore a tool to increase security of tenure and ownership rights but also to protect and promote human rights. Furthermore, such newly formalized settlements should be upgraded and connected with basic services and infrastructure through a viable urban plan to ensure residents have access to sanitation and facilities to safeguard them against post COVID-19 and future pandemics. They should then be made habitable – energy efficient, healthy, with habitable and well-planned urban spaces, accessible services, and good transport links.



The Urban Research Institute has been contracted to prepare the Assessment Report for Tirana, and coordinate and oversee the work of the local consultants in the pilot cities of Skopje and Podgorica.

The objective of this Assessment Report is to identify the challenges faced by informal settlements in Tirana, in particular the one of Lapraka, and to assess impact and responses to COVID-19 pandemic in this selected informal settlement. It will also assess the needs of its residents, through data and information collection and assessing analysis. In addition, it will provide recommendations for upgrading selected informal settlements and supporting the city in recovery from COVID-19 pandemic. This will be done with data, statistics and other relevant information that will be used as a baseline for the elaboration of a Post COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements for countries in the ECE region.

For the preparation of this report the following methodological approaches were used:

- Data collection from open sources: internet media, web sites of public and municipal authorities, legal database of the Cadastral State Agency.
- Requests for information, reports and other information from municipal authorities.
- Request for information, reports etc. from the Local Administrative Unit Lapraka, Tiranë.
- Interviews with a representative of urban and social sectors in Administrative Unit 11 – Lapraka.
- Two focus groups, with 8 participants each. The focus groups were conducted with residents from Lapraka informal settlement. Participants were part of social-economic assistance schemes, unemployed, with social housing bonus, and so on. Data gathered by these focus groups are presented in boxes throughout the report.
- Desk review and recommendations development.
- Validation of data with Tirana Municipality and the Administrative Unit 11 – Lapraka.



2. COUNTRY INFORMATION

General country information



Albania	2020
Population, million	2.9
GDP, current US\$ billion	15.3
GDP per capita, current US\$	5,325
Life Expectancy at birth, years	78.2

Albania is a small Western Balkans country, spanning the sunny coasts of the Adriatic and Ionian Sea, surrounded by mountainous regions in the east. Although it has been emerging as a new tourist destination, and the economy is relatively opened, it still largely relies on low to moderated agriculture production, while the industrial base is narrow, present mostly in low value-added segments. The Government of Albania since September 2013 started implementation of an ambitious administrative and territorial reform aimed at reorganizing local government units (LGUs). On July 31, 2014, the Parliament approved law 115/2014 "On the territorial and administrative division of local government units in the Republic of Albania" reducing LGUs from 384 to 61 municipalities.

In June 2014, Albania was awarded candidate status by the EU. In April 2018, the Commission issued an unconditional recommendation to open accession negotiations. In its June 2018 Conclusions, the European Council (EC) set out the path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019, depending on progress made in key areas such as the judiciary, fight against corruption and organized crime, intelligence services, and public administration. The European Commission then reiterated the recommendation to open accession talks in the Enlargement Package, adopted in May 2019. In its June 2019 Conclusions, the EC took note of the Commission's recommendation. In March 2020 the members of the European Council endorsed the General Affairs Council's decision to open accession negotiations with Albania and in July 2020 the draft negotiating framework was presented to the Member States

Data on the progress of legalization in the informal settlements

In the 1990s, over two-thirds of the population of Albania lived in rural areas. Radical political changes brought about new phenomena, such as the dismantling of agricultural cooperatives, the economic bases for livelihood in rural areas, which boosted an extensive internal population migration to urban areas. Virtually no urban private land or housing market existed, and the public sector financed almost all new urban residential construction and related infrastructure provision.

The removal of control over population movement within the country and establishment of a market-based economy, led to Albania being faced with uncontrolled internal migration into cities in the central and coastal zones. This unexpected situation led to a rise in different settlements. Cities were not prepared to receive the newcomers due to a lack of serviced urban land, limited house stock or a rental housing market, as well limitations on other infrastructures.

Figure 1: Population movement. Source: RSA Central and Eastern Europe Conference

Many of the migrants could not afford regular housing (UN Habitat 2010). In the absence of affordable or social housing policies, they moved to informal settlements at the urban fringes.



Meanwhile the quality of existing housing stock did not satisfy city dwellers' increased demand for better living standards. People occupied state land, or undeveloped private land, and often built illegally without a development plan.

Different types of informal development in Albania, based on level of violation:

- i. Illegal occupation of public or private land - usually found in areas without a study, not urbanized, agriculture land in rural areas: for example, Bathore and Kamza.
- ii. Illegal / irregular transaction of land ownership to newcomers from persons that do not hold the title, and construction of housing and working facilities without permission.
- iii. Construction without permit on owner's own land.
- iv. Construction with permit with regular land transaction, but infringement of the permit - mostly in urban areas.
- v. Extension of existing buildings without permit.
- vi. Changes in the facades of the existing buildings: for example, closure of balconies and windows.

The approval of Law 7693 in 1993, "On urban planning" and the relevant regulation with DCM no. 593, date 13.12.1993, did not fully control these territorial developments. It did not clearly define the role and responsibilities of local and central authorities, or provide rules for the coefficients of land use and construction, for example distances between buildings higher than five floors, distances from property border, road widths or construction lines. Lack of clear rules for treatment of free spaces often led to occupation by informal facilities. Furthermore, the law lacked effective monitoring and penalizing instruments concerning abusive land use and illegal construction.

Most informal constructions are not connected to basic infrastructure, causing supply problems for fresh water and electricity, as well as lack of sewerage systems. Many important planning aspects are overlooked when providing services such as spaces for recreation, education facilities, health care, parking, or traffic management. Illegal connections for water and electricity create urban management problems, while the hygiene of the water supply system is questionable. Most jobs are within the cities, so settlers must commute daily. The poor quality of the road network and public transportation encourage dependence on private cars, increasing traffic, commuting costs and time, as well as air and noise pollution.

The law 8405 in 1998 "On urban planning" was a first attempt to locally distribute decisions about new settlements after a long period of centralized control planning. In accordance with Law 9304/2004 "On Legalization and Urban Planning of Informal Zones", 54.000 self-declaration applications had been filed asserting the location, size and boundaries of land parcels and buildings (World Bank, 2006).



In 2006, the Government created the Agency for the Legalization, Urbanization and Integration of Informal Areas/Construction (ALUIZNI) to spearhead the regularization of rights in informal settlements and their integration into urban planning. However, there was still a high number of illegal buildings, around 400,000, occupying about 40,000 hectares of land (UNECE, 2015). Approximately 6 to 8 billion USD was invested in informal constructions. The Albanian labour force, especially those working outside the country, had invested their earnings in homes in Albania; about 60 per cent of the total new construction in Albania was financed this way. By 2006, over 52per cent of houses in rural areas had no fresh water supply, more than 70per cent of the population suffered from long daily power interruptions, and more than 50per cent of had access to fresh water for only six hours per day.

In 2013, the legalization effort was far from complete. Many families did not have the financial capacity to get legal advice and lacked information to deal with the legalization processes. Also, land titles were often unclear and cadastre records overlapped (Požani, 2013). Area maps were often poor, and the transfer of info between institutions was slow and inaccurate.

During 2018, ALUIZNI issued around 30,151 legalization permits, with a monthly average of about 2,500 permits. The following table presents the total number of applications for legalization, the total number of buildings exempt from legalization, and total number of facilities that meet the criteria for legalization.

Based on an analytical study conducted for each region, it is estimated from the total number of constructions included, 94,131 constructions cannot follow the procedures with the current legislation as they do not meet the criteria to be legalized.

Table 1: Performance of procedures for legalization of illegal constructions during 2018, SCA

Region	Application	Facilities not subject of legalization	Facilities subject of legalization
BERAT	11,490	1,693	9,797
DIBËR	2,967	108	2,859
DURRËS	51,189	9,795	41,394
ELBASAN	32,925	226	32,699
FIER	39,731	9,805	29,926
GJIROKASTËR	3,710	352	3,358
KORÇË	12,709	7,216	4,493
KUKËS	2,692	747	1,945
LEZHË	16,565	4,042	12,523
SHKODËR	24,596	1,993	22,603
VLORË	26,594	10,925	15,669
TIRANË	97,916	47,229	50,687
TOTAL	323,084	94,131	227,953

Albania has 286 informal settlements, as defined by the Decision of National Territory Council in 2015¹ and there are more than 280.000 informal objects identified (SCA, 2019). If we

¹ DCM No. 2, date 30.12.2015 "For the approval of the border of new informal areas and the revision of some existing areas"

assume a median of 3 inhabitants for a dwelling in an informal settlement, then one-third of the Albanian population is affected by non-recognition of housing tenure.

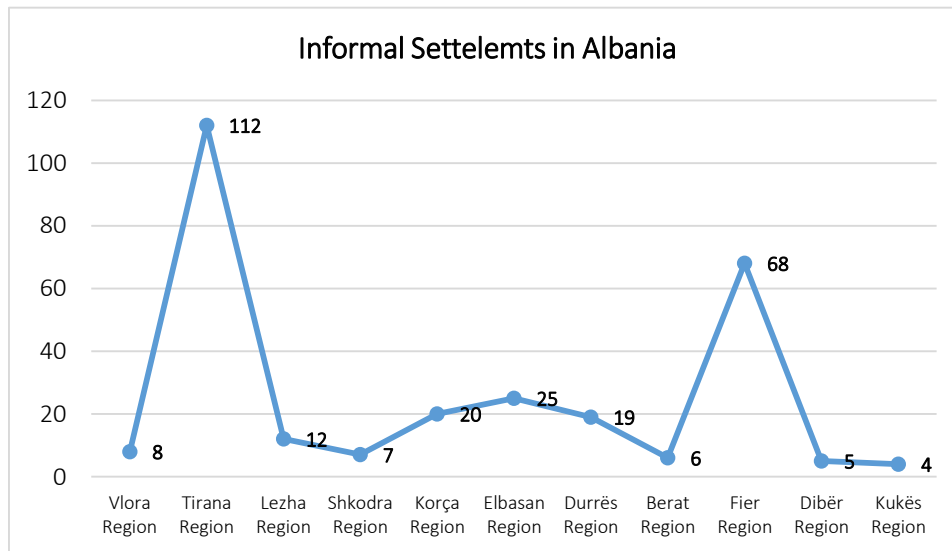


Figure 2: Informal settlements in Albania

According to the last assessment report of the new State Cadastral Agency (SCA)², in 2019, there are about 62,206 illegal constructions being administratively treated for legalization. However, this is 2.5 times lower than the 2018 figure; this increased value was indicated due to the implementation of point 3 / c, article 27, of Law 9632 in 2006, "On the local tax system", which requests the payment of the infrastructure impact tax before that the legalization permit is issued.

Table 2: Number of legalizations permits for period 2006-2019

2006-2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1,583	1,821	4,006	57,698	8,571	15,294	24,748	48,351	26,451	30,151	12,018

As can be seen from the table above, the largest number of legalization permits was issued in 2016, with 48,351 permits.

Up to the end of 2019, 16,804 people applied for ownership of facilities built before November 1991. During 2019, decisions were made for 249 dwellings. The following table shows the progress of this process at the county level.

² According to the new Law "On Cadaster" explained in the sections below, has now the responsibilities of ALUIZNI.

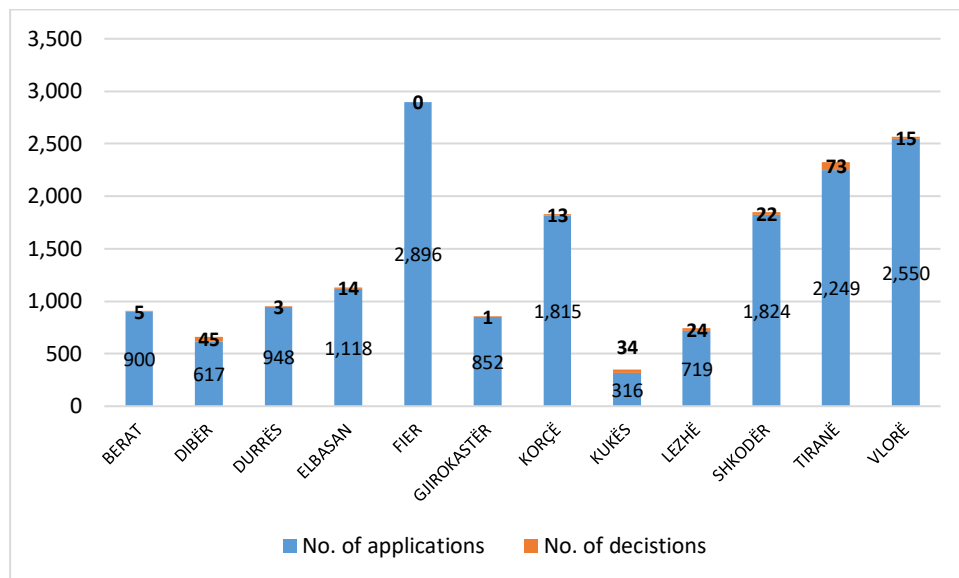


Figure 3: Applicants to obtain ownership for facilities built before 31.10.1991

In the first quarter of 2020, 184 approved building permits were issued for new buildings, 24.9 per cent down from 245 building permits issued and approved in the first quarter of 2019.

In the second quarter of 2020, approved 209 building permits were issued for new buildings, 38.3 per cent lower than the 339 building permits issued and approved in the second quarter of 2019. In the third quarter of 2020 262 building permits were issued for new buildings, down 14.9 per cent from 308 building permits issued and approved in the third quarter of 2019.

The total area of the building permits issued for new buildings in the second quarter of 2020 is 322,294 m², from 508,106 m² approved in the second quarter 2019, decreasing this indicator by 36.6 per cent (INSTAT, 2020).

The approximate value of building permits issued for buildings and civil engineering works, in the second quarter 2020, is 14,8 billion ALL, from 18.1 billion ALL approved in the second quarter 2019. This indicator, in the second quarter of 2020, compared with the same quarter of the previous year, decreased by 18.0 per cent.

Table 3: Building permits issued for buildings, Q1-2020 and Q2-2020

Construction Types	Q1-2020		Q2-2020	
	Number	Total area m ²	Number	Total area m ²
I. Buildings	184	333,645	209	322,294
1. Residential buildings	128	256,687	136	271,896
a. With one dwelling	38	3,050	45	6,263
b. With two dwellings	59	17,065	56	14,289
c. With three or more dwellings	30	231,141	32	231,592
d. Residences for communities	1	5,431	3	19,752
2. Non residential buildings	56	76,958	73	50,398
a. Hotels and similar buildings	3	4,290	6	6,969
b. Office buildings	1	240	1	164
c. Wholesale and retail trade buildings	16	11,069	20	5,206
d. Industrial buildings	21	49,730	21	29,358



e. Other buildings	15	11,629	25	8701
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From 2016 to 2019, following the establishment of the Agency for the Treatment of Property (ATP), financial assessment of 26,091 decisions has been completed resulting in recognition of the right to compensation for property worth around 818,000,000 EUR. The ATP has further completed 678 claims out of 2,128 with a financial value of around 47,000,000 EUR, and distributed about 612.3 ha from the physical compensation land fund. In 2019, 1,249 decisions out of 1,480 applications have been completed for informal constructions - worth around 13,346,078 EUR. The process is ongoing for the remaining 1,450 claims. In 2020, there were 615 cases pending before the ECtHR, many of which are related to property and due legal process in property-related cases.

3. CITY INFORMATION

Although its existence as a settlement can be traced back to the 1600s, Tirana was little more than a town with 17,000 inhabitants and an area of 3 sq. km when it became the capital city of a still largely rural Albania in 1920. Between 1923-1939, four regulatory plans were introduced. These straightened the main radial axis and created grids in the south and west of the city. They also led to the construction of the main square with administrative buildings and the boulevard.

The 1990 regulatory plan sought to relocate and concentrate industrial areas to separate areas north, west, and east of the city, away from residential areas. The southern part, with its recreation areas, was excluded from industrial developments. This relocation restored the city to a living area of 75 ha. The plan also provided for the reconstruction of industrial and economic facilities which remained within the city borders; industrial areas would increase by 158 ha. The plan also envisioned the placement of about 14 new socio-cultural centres within residential areas, equidistant from the city centre. Also, it was proposed that the axis of the Boulevard "Zogu I" and "Street of Durrës", would take on the character of urban centres.

Tirana's population has quadrupled in 20 years, from around 200,000 in 1992 to 800,000 today. Such severe urbanization resulted in serious problems such as shortages in infrastructure, particularly housing. Many rural migrants illegally settled in the surrounding areas of the urban centre or in protected green areas. These have insufficient water and power supply systems, and poor solid waste management, resulting in significant degradation of the urban environment.

After 1990, the slow process of recognition and return of properties to original owners, as well as occupying land with illegal construction, brought serious obstacles to urban development. The ownership situation was extremely complicated due to the lack of relevant legal documentation in mortgage offices.

This period was accompanied by high residential development, with little space left for buildings with economic, commercial, administrative, cultural or sports functions. The engineering and social infrastructure to support housing remained essentially the same, failing to adapt to the rapid pace of urbanization.

The adoption of Law no. 7843 in 1994, "On the registration of immovable property" marked the beginning of initial registration of immovable property. This process, with the main objective of collecting data on state of ownership of land and other immovable facilities, divided the city of Tirana into different cadastral zones. The new immovable property



registration system was based on precise identification criteria such as the legal origin of the property and its divisions (property title), and the location area of the property (cadaster map).

The development of this process has been rather easier in those central areas of the city, where land ownership was clearer because ownership documentation still existed. However, this contained many inaccuracies, especially on the location and definition of areas which were expressed in functional environments not square meters. The minor number of illegal constructions in these territories also helped significantly speed up the process. However, in the former communes around the city (now part of the Municipality of Tirana) the situation was more complicated due to unplanned developments. Whilst arable land ownership was allocated to former members of agriculture cooperatives and state farms, significant areas were occupied by illegal constructions. The former commune of Kashar, for example, due to its strategic position west of Tirana and near the Tirana - Durrës development corridor, became subject to rapid uncontrolled development.

In accordance with Law 9309 in 2004 "On the legalization and urbanization of informal areas", the Municipality of Tirana followed the stages as follows:

The process of self-declaration of illegal constructions by citizens

This process took place from 24 December 2004 to 24 March 2005. It turned out that citizens showed an interest in legalization, a fact that was confirmed by the self-declaration of 17,521 illegal constructions.

The process of legalization of informal areas

This process would conclude with the inclusion of all self-declared illegal constructions, respecting the partial urban studies to be approved for informal areas, and solving the problem of land ownership. As one of the main objectives of the legalization process, the law at that time allowed legalization to be preceded by urbanization, which is important for integrating these areas with the urban part of the city. Considering urbanization as the key point, the Municipality preceded legalization with several approved studies of the road network. These studies also defined zoning, and criteria for each area. Things were made simpler after 2007 when ALUIZNI digitized the built form of Albania on the GIS platform, including good resolution imagery.

In 2012, informal areas in the urban area of Tirana comprised approximately 900 ha and a population of 75,000 inhabitants. Eighty per cent of the buildings have one or two stories and about 20 per cent are three, four or five story buildings. The total number of illegal constructions identified in these areas is about 25,000, with 17,521 self-declared.

In these areas there is generally a lack of road and engineering networks, and these are often spontaneously organized. The road network is dictated by the needs of the community, with narrow unpaved roads without sidewalks, with both sides bordered by high walls with concrete blocks. The engineering network is not adapted to appropriate standards. There are no green spaces, social facilities, premises for kindergartens - day care, primary and elementary/middle schools.

For informal areas, the Urban Plan of 2012 worked on the following basis:

- A. Classification of functional zoning depending on the new socio-economic conditions of informal areas:
 - Analysis of the existing situation and the changes that occurred after the '90s.



- Zoning according to a new functional scheme of existing territories. Forecasting territories with socio-cultural functions.
 - Defining urban criteria for each functional area as well as defining new green spaces and sports fields.
- B. Review of the traffic scheme and definition of a functional road system.
- C. Determination of engineering infrastructure:
- Analysis of the existing condition and its reconstruction.
 - Development of a functional engineering system in these areas.
- D. Proposing models of development, including urban fabric for residential areas according to how they are grouped around common or public spaces to increase community life and opportunities for cooperation.
- E. Implement a modern formula for managing private territories by formulating precise regulations to define the relationship between owners and community, and the owner-state.

Today, informal areas in the urban area of Tirana have reduced to approximately 175 ha³, from 2,512 ha³, approved by ALUIZNI in 2014. So far in 2020, SCA has issued around 5,235 legalization permits in Tirana Qark, and the number of self-declared developments is 100,141.

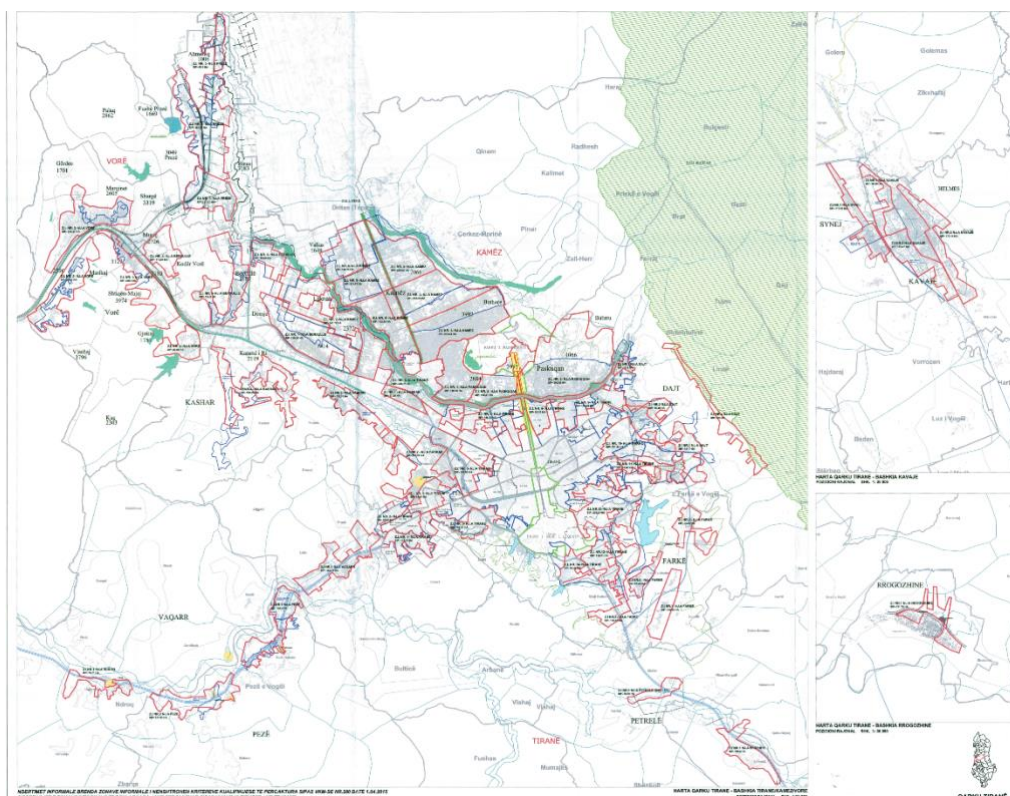


Figure 4: The informal settlements for Tiana Qark, 2020. Source: ALUIZNI

³ Tirana General Local Plan TR030.



4. INFORMAL SETTLEMENT DESCRIPTION

Typically, informal areas in Tirana are characterized by residential structures organized as family units, two or three floors high. Mostly built after 1990s they generally lack land ownership, building permit, and proper access to city infrastructure. The Road Network has an organic matrix and is weakly related to urban and other social services. It services 41 per cent of the total living area in Tirana while carrying 34 per cent of its population.

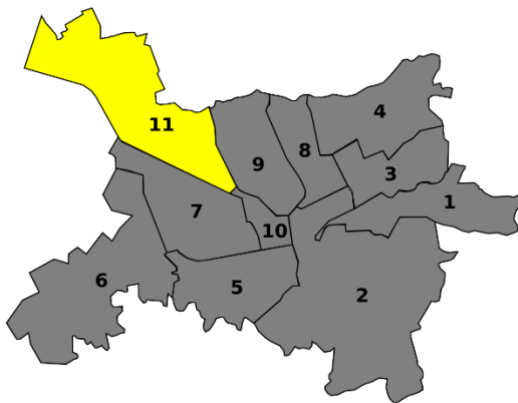


Figure 5: Administrative Unit 11, Lapraka

Most of the informal areas in Tirana are not connected to wastewater collectors, and the 1960's wastewater sewage system is insufficient to cope with the informal areas developed throughout the last decades. There are also issues with billed energy as there is a lack of functioning meters, theft, and insufficient receipts for billed energy. Illegal water-supply connections mainly come from informal areas, which, if compared to the total area where UKT (the Water Supply and Sewage Company) operates, account for over 26 per cent of connections.

The Administrative Unit no. 11 otherwise known as “**Lapraka**” has long been known as one of the most problematic areas in the city concerning informal areas. Lapraka lies north-west of Tirana and is bordered by Administrative Unit no. 7 in the south-west, Administrative Unit No. 9 in the east, the Paskuqan Administrative Unit in the north-east, the Municipality of Kamza in the north, and Kashar Administrative Unit in the north-west.

Lapraka is around 4km from the centre of Tirana and has an area of 5.2 km². The area is crossed by the Tirana River. Prior to the 1990s, only the area bordered by Durrës Street, Don Bosko Street, Tirana-Fushë Krujë National Road and Tirana River were part of the Lapraka area.

The population before 1993 was 10,642 inhabitants while now, according to 2019 data provided by the General Directorate of Civil Status, it has reached at 65,354 inhabitants with a population density of 12,555 inhabitants/km². The population is heterogeneous and came from different regions of Albania, mainly the north-east but also from the south of Albania.

There are about 22,090 families or 4,244 families per km² with about three members per family. The average age is 35 and there is a balanced gender ratio of 101 males for every 100 females. While in general the population of Tirana has a yearly increase of over 10,000, the



population of this area during the last year has decreased by -114 inhabitants or approximately -22 inhabitants/km².

As it was inside the yellow line that represents the old borders of the city before the administrative-territorial reform of 2015, Lapraka was considered mainly a peri-urban area, with affordable house prices and well connected to the city centre. The average reference⁴ prices of sale and purchase of buildings for residential purposes in the Administrative unit 11 areas are as follows:

Table 4: Reference prices of sale

Administrative Unit 11 (areas)	Reference Price (ALL/m ²)
11/1 - Zogu i Zi, former Party School	87,000
11/2 - Ferluti, former Tirana Factory, FIAT, Descent to Lapraka	75,000
11/3 - Lapraka, Customs Directorate, Military Hospital, River Bank, Fushë Mëzes, Don Bosko	70,000

Typology of informal constructions

The abovementioned features made Lapraka a preferred settling areas for families moving to Tirana, so the high demand for residences resulted in the chaotic uncontrolled developments that can be observed today. **In this area there are usually three main types of informal land violations:**

- Cases in which the land belongs to the user, but with no building permit obtained or the building does not conform to a permit. For example, when it exceeds the approved number of floors or building area.
- Constructing on state land.
- Constructing on private land belonging to another person, such as the former owner, or people who received land under the post-1991 privatization process.

Most of the informal housing is on the river bank and includes spontaneous buildings. They are built without a project design but rather designed by the needs of the inhabitants who own them. In addition, the geometry and volume solutions are based on these needs and functions as well. Some examples of the individual informal housing in this area include:

⁴ DCM No. 168, 27.3.2019, for some changes in decision no. 132 dated 03.07.2018, "On the methodology for determining the value of the real estate taxable" buildings "of tax base for specific categories, nature and priorities of information and data for determining the base taxes, as well as alternative evaluation criteria and rules of tax liability".

Figure 6: Type of informal individual housing



One floor building



Two floor buildings



Two floor buildings with the second floor build with walls



Four floor building, last floor under construction



Four floor building, ground, second floor with support system only

Electricity network

All facilities in Lapraka are connected to the city electricity network.

Water supply

Concerning water supply, since the commissioning of the new Bovilla Plant, as well as the transmission line coming from the Bovilla Aqueduct to the Water Treatment Plant, the water inflows treated by this plant for the city have increased by 700 liters/sec. Many areas now benefit from a 24-hour supply including "Don Bosko" and "Lapraka". The increased amount of treated water ensures uninterrupted supply through the plant, eliminating supply interruptions for a good part of the area. However, due to the pressure, in high-rise buildings or the network end points it may be necessary to operate booster electric pumps to help water reach the upper floors. Also, while a 24-hour supply is provided through the network for a good part of these area, there are houses beside the river bank that have to collect water through individual wells.



Waste management and cleaning service

The waste management service in Lapraka area is covered by “Fusha Ltd” operator which provides the following services:

- Waste collection and transportation (containers 1.7 m³), 3 times/day;
- Washing and disinfection of containers;
- Wiping of roads and sidewalks;
- Wiping roads with machineries;
- Main road maintenance;
- Special pressure washing of roads (forecast for 10 months of the year);
- Street washing once a day (forecast for 10 months of the year);
- Washing the secondary roads (forecast for 8 months of the year or 240 days).

Participants in the focus group discussions were critical of the collection infrastructure hygiene during the pandemic: bin-washing, disinfection, and regularity of service delivery. Some concerns and suggestions included cleaning being done several times a day and containers being washed more often, especially in summer.

Only during quarantine, for 2-3 months, was there an increase in bin-cleaning from three to five times per day in all areas of Tirana, due to the large flow of waste. Given the emergency situation, the Municipality of Tirana has approved an amendment of the private operator’s contract, increasing the frequency of collection and transportation of urban waste and the washing and disinfection of containers.

Public transport

The Administrative Unit 11, Lapraka area is covered by three main public transport lines:

- L5B – Institut - Qendër
- L6 – Lapraka
- L4 – Qendër-QTU-Megatek-City Park

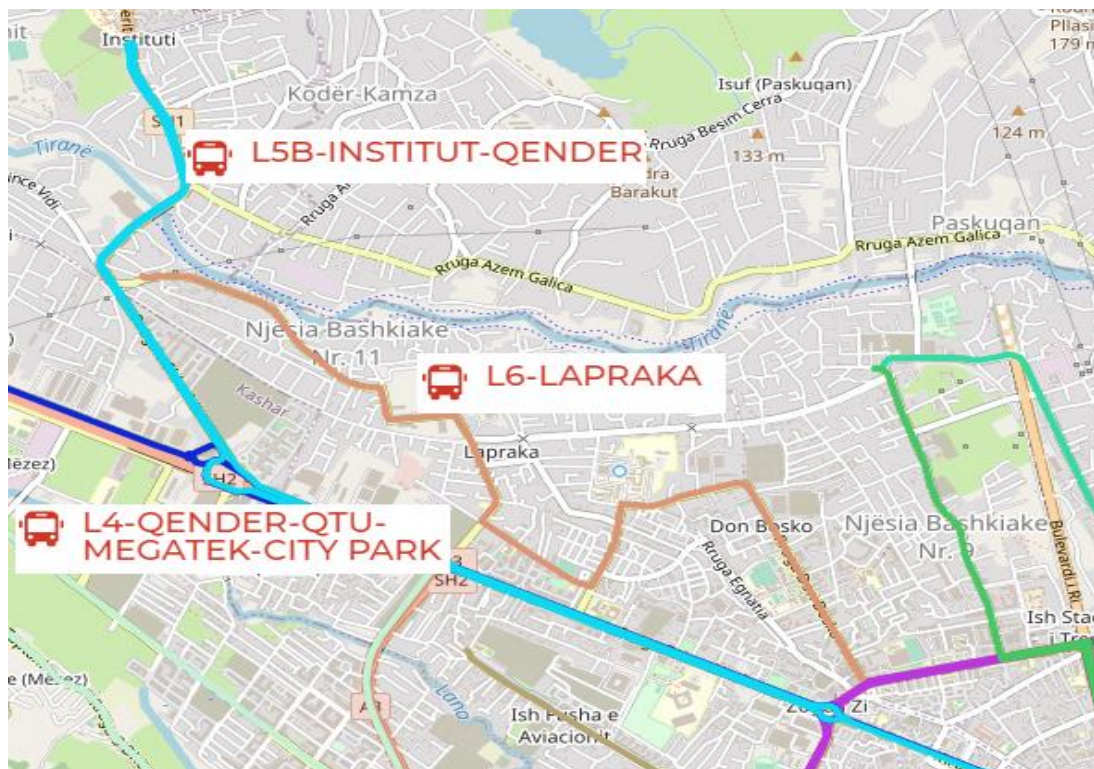


Figure 7: Public transport lines in Lapraka informal settlement

During the pandemic, the Municipality of Tirana suspended urban public transport for a three month period. After it reopened, operators were required to implement the protocols and measures issued by authorities to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

Most of the participants from the focus group discussions raised the issue of overcrowded buses and are not comfortable with using public transport. Most of them have stated that do not have a private car, but would prefer to walk than use busses.

Schools and kindergartens

In Administrative Unit 11, there are 5 elementary and secondary schools, 1 high school, 4 kindergartens and 4 nurseries to serve 65,354 inhabitants.

Internet connections

Most of the participants from the focus group discussions have stated that do not have access to internet connection; while raising the issue of high internet access cost. This has made children unable to attend online classes.

Health centres

In Administrative unit 11 there are 3 health centres: Kodër-Kamëz, Laprakë and Breg-Lum. The Lapraka primary healthcare centre was reconstructed and equipped with contemporary medical equipment and tools. I also provided capacity building for medical staff as part of the project “Access to health and nutrition services for children and women in the peri-urban areas of Tirana” supported and implemented by Save the Children in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Municipality of Tirana in 2018.

Starting from October 1, 2020, this health centre was expanded to a 24-hour service, to cope with the autumn-winter period for paediatric emergencies. This was the result of a Ministry of Health decision, aimed to avoid and lower the influx to the main hospital centre in Tirana (QSUT) at night, especially during the pandemic.

Among participants from the focus group discussions, there were persons suffering from non-COVID related diseases who stated that despite the need for treatment during the pandemic, they would prefer not to go in any health centre, fearing infection.

Public green spaces and environmental issues

Apart from the fast urbanization resulting in lack of public or green space or services like playgrounds, Lapraka is also one of the most flood prone areas in the city. This can be seen from the hot spot map of ASIG, for this area.

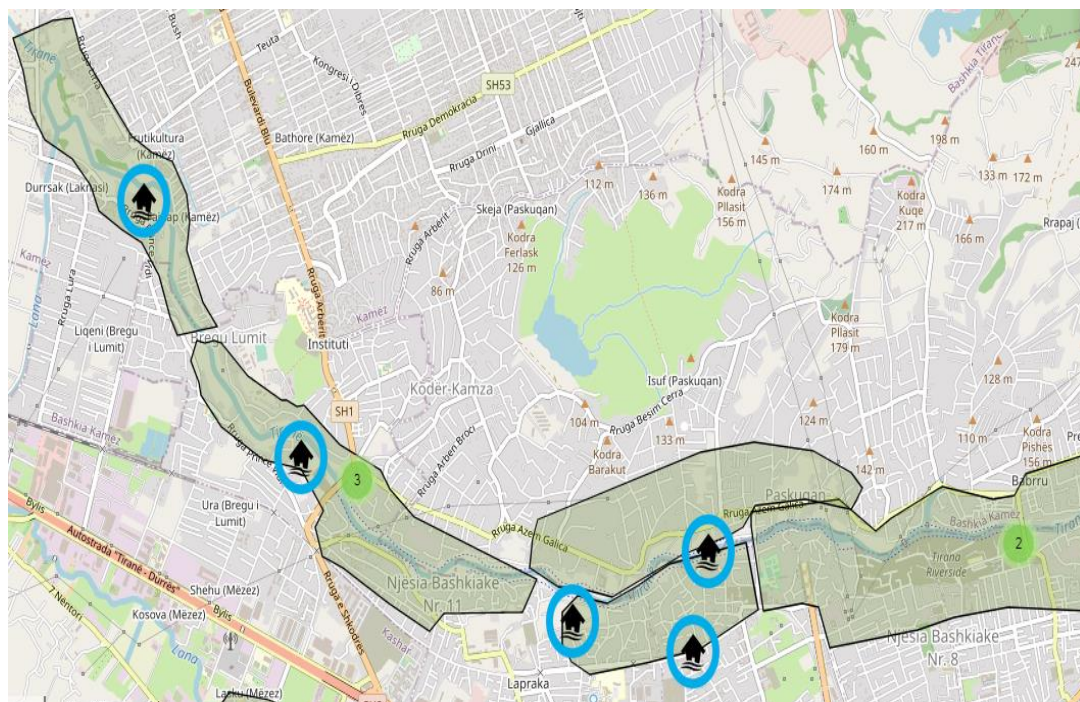


Figure 8: Hotspot map in Administrative Unit 11, Lapraka. ASIG

For example, the “Don Bosco” neighbourhood is well known for its problems during heavy rainfall, but the highest flooding risks are from the outflow of the Tirana riverbed in the north. However, there are ongoing investments for this part of the river. As it is one of the main city



corridors, Lapraka is one of the five strategic poles in the development of a Polycentric Tirana (Polycentrism strategy proposed in the General Local Plan “Tirana 2030”, approved in 2017). Therefore, this area is experiencing some major infrastructure investments especially in its south and north. In the south west of Lapraka, the great ring road is being developed, connecting the city with the Tirana - Durrës highway.

Since 2016, in Lapraka there have been about 8,000 applications for legalization permits, and around 2,000 are in the process of legalization. During 2019 in Lapraka issued about 240 permits were issued, which in the last two years sums up at a total 1,100 permits. However,



Figure 9: Lapraka Cadastral Zone, ASIG

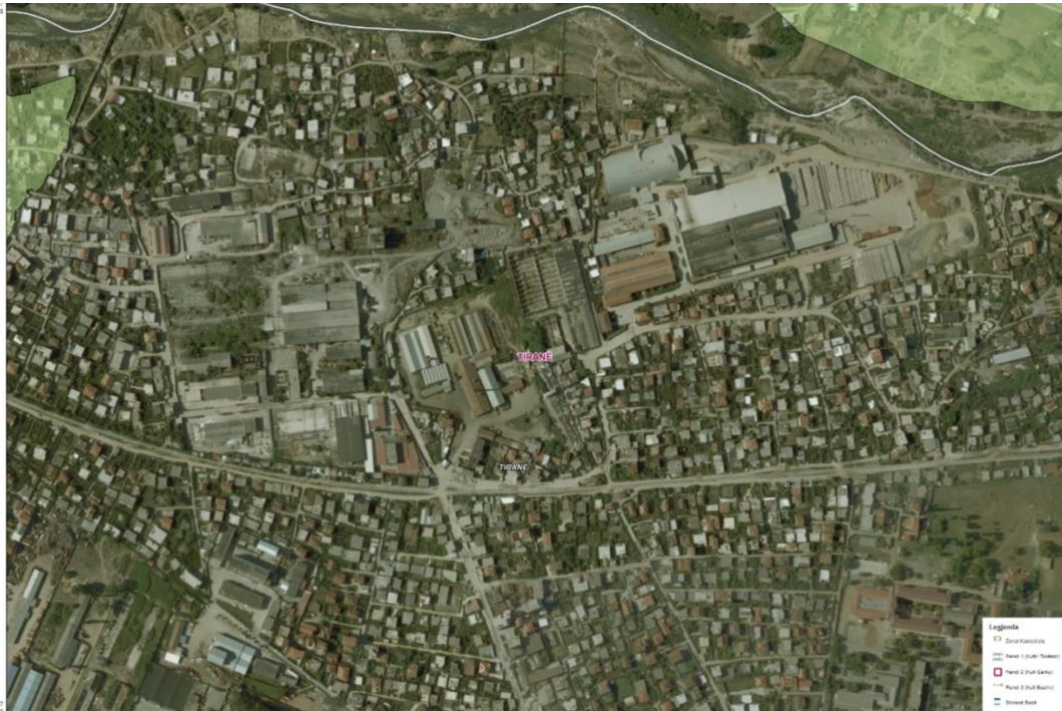


Figure 10: Lapraka informal settlement, ASIG

more than 400-500 apartment units awaiting legalization were affected by the construction of the Great Ring Road in this area in 2020. There were major project delays due to disputes and protests by owners whose property was in the legalization process or not legalized at all.

Families affected by this project will be relocated or given information on housing programmes. The Municipality of Tirana has set up a structure in support of individuals in emergency situations called the “Community Center Streha Tirana”, providing 30 beds for short-term accommodation. Referrals and arrangements are made at the National Transit Centre of Emergencies.

5. INSTITUTIONAL SETUP RELATED TO INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

The Law on Registration of Immovable Property (1994) set up a new property registration system based on land parcels. It established the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO), to manage the process.

Before 2015 there were over eight institutions dealing with property titles under the authority of different ministries and regulated by different pieces of legislation. Each institution had its own, sometimes uncoordinated, processes for title registration:

- The Agency of Restitution and Compensation of Property for expropriated persons.
- The Immovable Property Registration Office.
- ALUIZNI.
- The Judicial Bailiff’s Office for decision enforcement.
- The state Advocacy for the protection of State property interests, and representation before the European Court of Human Rights.
- The Agency of Inventory and Transfer of State-owned Immovable Properties.



- The Land Governmental Commission on the Validity of Property Titles.
- The National Housing Entity for social housing.

To streamline the property management process, In April 2019 the GoA established the Cadaster State Agency (SCA), uniting several major agencies responsible for property registration, compensation, and legalization. These included the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO), the Agency of Inventory and Transfer of Public Properties (AITPP), and the Agency for the Legalization and Urbanization of Informal Areas (ALUIZNI). All the duties and the responsibilities of the Agency of Legalization, Urbanization and Integration of Informal Zones/Constructions and of the Agency of Inventory and Transfer of Public Properties are charged to the SCA.

The SCA is organized at the central level, through the General Directorate in Tirana, and, at the local level, in subordinate directorates and offices. The governing bodies of the SCA are the steering council and the General Director.

Table 5: Institutions and relevant allocation of responsibilities with regard ownership

Institution	Responsibility
Council of Ministers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Determines documentation and detailed rules for the identification of illegal constructions . ▪ Determines the procedures, documentation and qualification requirements for legalization. ▪ Determines procedures, rules and documentation for implementing legalization criteria. ▪ Determines the model and rules for issuing the legalization act. ▪ Approves detailed rules for transfer of ownership rights, payment, favourable price, categories of benefiting subjects, and rates of use of privatization bonds. ▪ Approves the value of financial compensation for meeting surfaces for non-possessing owners, whose assets are occupied by legalized construction plots. ▪ Determines the manner of distribution of the compensation fund created by the transfer of ownership of construction plots, as well as applicable criteria and procedures. ▪ Determines how to manage financial compensation for buildings excluded from legalization, as well as deciding alternative forms of treatment, and rules and deadlines for implementation.
National Territory Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decides the approval or amended approval of the 8 planning documents required by planning authorities, or modifies or postpones them for subsequent review as defined by law. ▪ Decides on the approval of sectoral planning documents which affect the territory, determined by special legislation. ▪ Determines the national importance of a territory, area or building in territory planning, and approves detailed plans for areas of national importance, when required by the General National Territorial Plan (GNTP).
Minister of Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Propose immovable property registration policies.



Institution	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose to the council of ministers the annual draft budget of the immovable property registration office. Approve, by joint decision with the minister of finance, fees for the immovable property registration office services and operations. Propose to the council of ministers the appointment of the head of the management board of the immovable property registration office. Appoint two representatives of the Ministry of Justice to the management board. Propose to the prime minister the appointment and dismissal of the chief registrar. Appoint the registrars of local immovable property registration offices.
State Cadastral Agency (SCA)	<p>The State Cadastral Agency is a public legal entity established with the law "On the Cadastral", and is answerable to the Prime Minister. It functions as a self-funded institution.</p> <p>The State Cadastral Agency budget is proposed by the minister responsible for finance and decided by the Council of Ministers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperates and unifies of procedures with central state bodies and local governance units for legalizing, urbanizing and integrating zones, dwelling areas or blocks of dwellings with legalized buildings. Programmes funds from the State Budget to legalize and urbanize informal zones. Issues legalization permits. Organizes a national information and awareness campaign in collaboration with public mass media; Establishes a database on illegal constructions and the progress of the legalization process; the Council of Ministers will determine its content, completion methods, data processing, issuing of extracts, and methods of interacting with other state databases. Prepares the manual of procedures, instructions and forms. Keeps evidence of illegal constructions by updating construction records to reflect actual building work; Administrates illegal constructions for which the possessors did not apply for legalization until the date of the new law, mainly during the initial registration processes or improvement of the cadastral zone, or through registration of constructions without permit. Updates the construction situation on the ground, and administers construction permit documentation for illegal constructions, including them in the category of buildings with violations of construction permits. Performs the qualification procedures for legalization of illegal constructions. Determines the area and configuration of the construction plot for whoever disposes of the legalized construction.



Institution	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notifies local self-government of the termination of ownership or use for construction plots with illegal constructions located in assets transferred to local self-government units. ▪ Adopts rules on the internal organization and function of the immovable property state database. ▪ Adopts the division of registration zones in the Republic of Albania. ▪ Develops programmes for first registration, development and improvement of service quality by the immovable property registration offices, to promote investment in the sector. ▪ Adopts division into cadastral zones. ▪ Performs inventory, and transfer processes of state real estate to local government units. ▪ Directs the inventory process of public real estate administered by central government institutions. <p>At local level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintains immovable property registers. ▪ Maintains cadastral maps of the immovable property registration zone; ▪ Ensures the legality of judicial decisions, administrative acts, contracts, other acts, and documents which affect legal immovable property, which must legally be registered in the immovable property registers; ▪ Maintains survey plans and registration indexes in the immovable property and other registers created or administered by local immovable property offices. ▪ Maintains recorded and electronic information; ▪ Provides documentation for property administrative procedures.
Agency for the Treatment of Property (ATP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accepts, follows, completes, reviews or investigates the needs of people affected by property expropriation. ▪ Announces publicly through the official website of the institution, the Bulletin of Official Notices, or in the media, the list of entities benefitting from the Property Compensation Fund for the respective period, orienting them to open accounts with one of the second-level banks.
Local government units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishes structures for receiving, dealing with and checking illegal building declarations, and for monitoring implementation of the legally-defined duties needed to accomplish the legalization process. ▪ Identifies illegal buildings with no self-declaration, and all illegal buildings built following approval of this law, and beginning procedures for demolition in compliance with law No. 9780, "On the construction inspection". ▪ Collects payments from people legalizing their constructions, except for the building site of the construction parcel. ▪ Manages collected revenues and monitors their daily use in accordance with this law, and coordinates this with the Regional



Institution	Responsibility
	Council, ALUIZNI, the responsible ministries and CTA to continue legalization, urbanization and integration of informal zones.
The urban planning unit at the local government unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verifies the actual situation of constructions in the field and draws up or commissions cartography, then builds the necessary information systems. Technically updates the location plan of unauthorized buildings and the territory they occupy within the boundaries and layout of the formal dwelling area, as well as of the informal zone ; Draws up or commissions urban planning studies, as well as drafts or designs tasks for them. Collects documentation during the self-declaration process and delivers it to the respective office of ALUIZNI to examine and issue the legalization permit.
National Inspectorate of Territorial Defense – IKMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigates and fines violators, taking corrective action such as demolition.

6. NATIONAL LEGISLATION REGARDING INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

While Albania continues with economic and legal reforms and prepares to join the European Union, issues around property rights remain one of the major barriers that impede its integrated economic development. According to the EU's 2020 Progress Report more progress is needed in advancing the process for registration, digitization and compensation. Albania should prioritize concluding the first registration of immovable properties and titles.

A new law on cadaster service was approved in February 2019 and the newly-established State Cadastral Agency, merging three existing agencies, became operational in April 2019. The Law on Finalization of the Transitory Process of Property Deeds was adopted by Parliament in May 2020, taking into account the recommendations of the Venice Commission Opinion of October 2019.

Implementation of comprehensive land sector reform and to consolidation of property rights continues. In the last two years Albania has approved two important laws for sector regulation: the Law on the Finalization of the Transitory Process of Property Deeds, which aims to finalize land allocation and privatization processes previously contained in 14 various laws issued between 1991 and 2018, and the law on Cadaster. However, the process for registration and compensation still needs to be finished.

Law 20/2020 “On the Finalization of the Transitory Process of Property Deeds in the Republic of Albania”

The purpose of Law 20/2020 is to establish a simplified and harmonized legal framework for finalization of transitional registration procedures of state and private land consisting of:

- Registration of agricultural land ownership titles.
- Finalization of transfer of ownership of agricultural land agricultural land previously owned by cooperatives and agricultural enterprises to its current users.



- Legalization and registration of illegal constructions, constructions without an ownership title, and yards granted for use.
- Specification of ownership rights of individuals and entities which have benefited from the repealed Law no. 7665 “On development of economic zones with touristic priority”.
- Finalization of the inventory update process of public real estate.
- Handling the problems related to the overlapping of immovable property titles.
- Finalization of the process of transfer of ownership over:
 - i. non-privatized construction land plots of privatized buildings;
 - ii. non-privatized construction land plots of buildings sold from state enterprises prior to law no. 7512 “On protection of private property, free initiative and privatization”;
 - iii. non-privatized construction land plots of constructions built based on permits issued by competent authorities.

One new provision of Law 20/2020 is the right of SAC to process illegal constructions for which no application or self-declaration has been made until the date this law, during initial registration, improvement of the cadastral zone or tracking process.

Article 18 states that constructions which affect the following are not eligible for legalization:

- Main public infrastructure constructions
- National roads
- Public buildings’ functionality or territory
- Cultural heritage
- Territories destined for strategic investments
- The coastline as regards public interest and touristic development

This article also provides for the value of non-legalized constructions to be registered in the database for identification purposes, via procedures that will be decided by the Council of Ministers (article 33).

Under the new Law, deadlines for legalization are shorter compared to the previous legislative acts. According to article 21, this is 60 days from verification of the qualification criteria. Moreover, the possessor may request an accelerated 30-day procedure, subject to an additional fee.

During the legalization procedures, if two or more applicants apply for the same illegal construction, the Law favours the first filed application. If constructions violate their construction permit, or the investor is unable to fulfil the obligations of the legalization procedure, legalization approval is granted to the owners of the construction units who contracted the investor or builder. The detailed rules on applications will be approved by special decision of the Council of Ministers.

Regarding constructions without an ownership title built before October 1991 and plot yards in use, article 34 allows the possibility of registration. Detailed procedures will be approved by the Council of Ministers. Article 78 imposes on the Council of Ministers the obligation to issue decisions or sub-legal acts within 12 months of its entry into Law, to make it applicable in all aspects.



With Law 20/2020, the following laws are repealed:

- Law no. 7501, dated 19.7.1991, "On land", as amended;
- Law no. 8053, dated 21.12.1995, "On the transfer of ownership without compensation of agricultural land", as amended;
- Law no. 9482, dated 03.04.2006, "On legalization, urbanization and integration of illegal constructions", as amended;
- Law no. 9948, dated 07.07.2008, "On the examination of the legal validity of the property titles on agricultural land" as amended;
- Law no. 10 186, dated 05.11.2009, "On the regulation of ownership over state land in areas with tourism priority", as amended;
- Law no. 171/2014, "On the completion of legal procedures for the transfer of agricultural land of former agricultural enterprises", as amended.

The following by-laws regulating this sector are still effective:

- DCM no. 488, 22nd July, 2014, "On the determination of the favourable price for the sale of the construction parcel for illegal constructions with residential and mixed function of the entities benefiting from the payment forgiveness, as well as the payment methods and terms" as amended.
- DCM no. 589, 10th September, 2014, "On the procedures of factual identification of the construction situation in the field, and of the time period within which the illegal buildings were constructed", as amended.
- DCM no. 860, 10th December, 2014, "On the determination of the manner of collection and administration of income for illegal constructions and the values applicable to legalization" as amended.
- DCM no. 280, dated 1st April, 2015 "On the definition of criteria, procedures and documentation applicable to qualify for illegal constructions, lateral and/or elevation extensions, in legal constructions", as amended.
- DCM no. 954, dated 25th November, 2015, "On the determination of the criteria, procedures and the legalization permit form" as amended.
- DCM No. 465, dated 22nd June, 2016, "On the determination of the procedures and rules for the 10 transfer of ownership over the construction parcel of informal buildings".
- DCM No. 332, dated 12th March, 2008 "On the determination of the general rules for the storage and management of cartographic information obtained by aerial, digital photography of the territory of the Republic of Albania" (as amended by DCM No. 688, dated 29th July, 2015).
- DCM No. 19, dated 11th January, 2017 "On the determination of the rules for the legalization of buildings with construction permits, in which lateral and/or elevation extensions or changes in the function of spaces and in illegal multi-story buildings have been carried out; intended for the transfer of the ownership right or rent".

Law no. 111, 7th February, 2019: "On Cadaster"

Another initiative is the new Law on Cadastre adopted by the Albanian Parliament on February 2019, entered into force on 21 March 2019. It supersedes Law no. 33/2012 dated 21st March, 2012 on "Registration of Immovable Properties".

The Law governs registration of immovable property transactions which occur after its entry into force. In addition, it introduces new registration-process principles, rights to immovable properties, and related documents.



Establishment of the Cadaster State Agency

The new Cadaster State Agency now has the responsibilities of three current state authorities:

1. The Immovable Properties Registration Office
2. The Agency of Legalization, Urbanization and Integration of Informal Constructions
3. The Agency of Inventory and Administration of Public Properties

Mandatory notification and registration of public authorities' deeds

The Law requires that all deeds relating to immovable properties must be registered and undergo a primary registration. This preliminary registration is initiated with the online declaration of deeds by courts, notaries, bailiffs and other state authorities with the digital national cadaster, and must be done upon formalization of the deed. Any subsequent deed or transaction for disposal of the immovable property which creates an chronological overlap will be refused by the Agency. After the online declaration, the authorities must submit hard copies of the deeds to the Regional Cadaster Directorate within 10 days.

Extension of the mortgage on the land into the new building

The mortgage on the land may be extended only to a future building or parts of it that are free from any preliminary transfer agreement. In addition, landowners are not allowed to transfer their rights over their future building parts in case a mortgage is registered on the land. The above provisions aim to improve practice and solve disputes about mortgage extensions.

New rules to register mortgages over building units in the structure construction phase

The Law sets out new mandatory procedures on mortgage registration, aiming to avoid conflicts between land owners, investors, creditors and customers who have entered into preliminary agreements for future acquisition of building units.

In case of a mortgage on the land, the landowning investor is not allowed to enter into preliminary agreements with third parties for future acquisition of any building units without the consent of the mortgage creditor. Otherwise, if no mortgage is registered on the land, the mortgage might be registered only on those building units that are free from any preliminary agreements. In case of violation of such requirements, the mortgage will not be registered.

Compulsory enforcement over a building in process of construction will be extended only to those parts that are free from any preliminary agreements, save for the liability secured by an mortgage on the property established before the preliminary agreements.

Law no. 111/2018, and its completing by-laws, has established the basis for the online digital cadaster for access and use by physical and legal persons, domestic and foreign, to enable the real-time verification of the legal status of an immovable property. Specifically, Article 28 paragraph 3 of the Law states that: *“Legal entities/individuals who have the right to have access to the electronic system or to the single multifunctional government portal can obtain electronic property ownership extracts/documents directly after having obtained the consent of the subjects, who appear as owners of immovable property.”*

This law was accompanied by the approval of following regulations and bylaws:

- DCM no. 175 dated 4.4.2019 *“For the appointment of the Board of Directors members of the State Cadaster Agency”*
- DCM no. 244 dated 24.4.2019 *“To determine the rules of operation of the council heads of the State Cadaster Agency and for the measure of remuneration for the activity of members”*



- DCM no. 245 dated 25.4.2019 “For the approval of the structure and levels of salaries and salary supplements to the administrative employees in the State Cadaster Agency”
- DCM no. 329 dated 22.5.2019 “To determine the rules of work coordination of the municipalities with the State Cadaster Agency, for the construction land registration given by local government units and for the regulation of legal ownership relations of these lands, for the purpose of registration”
- DCM no. 356 dated 29.5.2019 “For the release and appointment of a member of the board of directors of the State Cadaster Agency”
- SCA order no. 1150, dated 3.6.2019 “For the procedure of correcting the assets cards of real estate that is marital property”.

Law no. 133/2015, “On the treatment of property and completion of the compensation process of properties

This law provides and regulates compensation for property rights issues arising from expropriations, nationalizations or confiscations in line with Article 41 of the Constitution, and Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. It establishes and manages the Compensation Fund as well as the procedures for treatment of property and finalization of the property-compensation process. Finally, it manages the administrative bodies in charge of applications.

The purpose of this Law is:

- To legally finalize the property-treatment process through recognition and compensation for properties which have been expropriated, nationalized or confiscated under any legal acts, criminal court decisions or expropriation by any other unfair means by the state since 29th November, 1944.
- To regulate and fairly compensate, enforce final compensation decisions, and finalize the compensation process through the compensation fund within legally-specified deadlines.

Subjects granted the right to compensation in accordance with the amended 2006 Law no. 9482 , for "legalization, urbanization and integration of illegal constructions", receive it relative to the income received from transfer of ownership, defined in paragraph 4 of the Law.

7. MAJOR FORMALIZATION EFFORTS AND PROJECTS REGARDING INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS AND UPGRADING OF THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS AT A COUNTRY AND CITY LEVEL – MUNICIPALITY

The main projects⁵ relating to informal settlements and property rights in Albania are presented here chronologically:

1990-2000s: First Registration, funded by EU and USAID, mostly in rural areas.

⁵ Albania: Status Review of the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO) (Now Superseded by the State Cadaster Agency (ASHK) Services and Data Quality, 2019.



- The software “Pasurite” was developed for alpha-numeric data - AutoCAD was used for graphic data. The World Bank financed the Agricultural Services Project.
- Central IPRO and Tirana offices were reconstructed, refurbished and equipped .
- During this project more than 2,500 Cadastral Zones were registered, mostly rural. Digital registration was accepted, but maintenance has been paper-only. In some rural zones only agricultural land was registered but not forest or pastures.

2007-2014: World Bank financed LAMP, Providing IT system ALBSREP:

- This developed the ISO-standard compliant Land Administration Domain Model (LADM), fully centralized, web-based system.
- Archives for 11 major cities were scanned, and 125 priority cadastral zones were registered for the first time.

2007-2010: EU-financed project (implemented by OSCE) including First Registration of southern coastline.

- The EU-funded First Registration was not completed: IPRO rejected the data because it was not compliant with the legal/regulatory framework or quality control procedures.
- LADI South Coast Report⁶ confirmed government findings for not accepting the data but offered suggestions for use of mapping fieldwork for the data update and improvement process.

2015-2018: The World Bank Environmental Services Project supported some forest and pasture registration, while using ‘Pasurite’ software for registration.

2016-2019: IPRO data digitization and improvement programme:

- Law 33 made IPRO self-financing.
- The In-house massive data digitization improvement programme for both “kartelas” and maps used old programmes rather than following the ALBSREP data model.
- Sporadic “Kartelas” were opened using ALBSREP.
- More than 50 e-services were enabled through AKSHI and the link to the ASIG geoportal.
- The notary module was developed.
- ADISA front office registration was adopted for the Tirana office.

2013-2018: Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) project:

- This developed regulation for data updates.
- It completed the data update and improvement along a large infrastructure corridor in 6 districts (parts of 138 cadastral zones).

2016-2019:

⁶ Land Administration Data Improvement Technical Assistance (LADI TA) Phase II Report: South Coast data (2016), financed under the EC - World Bank Partnership Programme for Europe and Central Asia, CRIS Contract No. 2014/350-393.



World Bank, Technical Assistance on Integrated Land Management and Geospatial Infrastructure (ILMGI):

- This developed the ILM Road Map with key reforms for government priorities including the land market, tourism, agriculture and FDI.
- It integrated land management and the geospatial infrastructure programme.

In cooperation with the State Authority for Geospatial Information (ASIG), the "shapefile" of cadastral zones located in the ALBSReP system has been created to be uploaded to the ASIG geoportal. The "shape file" for cadastral parcels has been created in accordance with the 2016 DCM no. 321 "Regarding the State Standards for technical specifications of geospatial information in Albania - Cadastral Parcel Theme". Furthermore, the "shape file" for buildings has been created in accordance with the 2016 DCM no. 359 "Regarding the State Standards for technical specifications of geospatial information in Albania - Topic: Buildings". Geospatial data such as cadastral zones, parcels and buildings are updated to the geo-server and sent to ASIG.

2018-2020: The government initiated reforms based on ILMP roadmap Institutional reform:

- Law 111/2018 "On Cadastre" created the State Cadastre Authority;
- Law 20/2020 "On the Finalization of the Transitory Process of Property Deeds in the Republic of Albania".

8. PROCESS OF REGISTRATION OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE PILOT CITY

Like any other administrative act, the legalization permit requires certain criteria and procedures. SAC conducts the qualification procedures for legalization of illegal constructions, based on the non-prejudiced criteria of:

- main works of public infrastructure
- national road alignments
- the territory or functionality of public buildings
- the integrity of cultural monuments
- territories intended for strategic investments, according to the legislation in force for strategic investments in the Republic of Albania
- coastline, in the sense of public interest in the development of tourism

Illegal constructions that violate the above criteria are excluded from legalization.

If there has been to a construction permit violation, these criteria exclude only the areas in excess of the construction permit if they are divisible from the main legally-constructed building. In cases when they are not divisible, the whole structure or parcel is legalized.

The new law has eliminated unnecessary stages, providing fast procedures and simplified documentation and so easing the bureaucratic burden on stakeholders.



The required documentation for legalization

The required documentation for legalization of illegal construction has been simplified and includes:

- a. the construction layout
- b. the layout of each construction floor and respective areas in m²
- c. expertise acts by a licensed expert with subject 'the construction sustainability of buildings with a height of over 4 floors'

If there is a construction permit violation in the legalization documents, the SAC also administers the agreement with the landowner for the main construction, if it is built on private territory, and the agreement on any extensions. In the absence of an agreement on the extension, the rights and obligations of the parties for the main construction are aligned with the rights and obligations of the parties in the illegal extension.

Legalization of construction

Within 60 days of finalization of the qualification procedures, the SAC legalizes the construction, respecting the provisions of the applicable legislation on marital property regimes. The possessor of an illegal construction can request finalisation of administrative proceedings within 30 days from submission if they pay an additional service fee.

During administrative proceedings, the possessor of an illegal construction may waive the right to obtain legalization through a notarial declaration. By administering this statement, SAC excludes the construction from legalization.

Construction plot and ownership transfer

SAC determines the plot surface and configuration for owners of legalized constructions. When the construction owner does not own the construction plot, legalization of construction by the SAC also serves as an act of ownership transfer.

The determination of the construction plot surface to be transferred in ownership is made as follows:

- a. In the case of illegal housing constructions, the surface of the construction plot can be up to three times the construction base, but never greater than 500 m².
- b. For illegal constructions with a socio-economic function, only the criterion of the construction plot surface is used, up to three times the construction base surface. The price for sale of a plot for constructions with socio-economic function is specified as "land" property from the map of property value.
- c. When, due to the size or layout of the construction plot, free spaces are created that cannot be used separately for construction, ownership is transferred to the owner of the illegal construction. This is done at the price shown on the property value map, approved by the Council of Ministers. This is only done if the owner of the illegal



construction makes a written request for it. In any case, for residential constructions, any area up to 500 m² is charged at a favourable price.

For construction plots located in properties under the administration responsibilities of state institutions, upon transfer of ownership this responsibility is ended. The SAC then notifies the relevant institution.

For illegal constructions on plots which include assets transferred to local self-government units by the state, SAC notifies the local self-government unit for the revocation of ownership or use. The local self-government unit has the right to request a replacement from the Council of Ministers.

For construction plots located on private land owned by third parties, ownership transfer occurs when the Council of Ministers decide compensation for the non-possessing owners. Until that moment, the construction is registered while the ownership over the land plot remains unregistered. Land rights of third parties do not impede ownership transfer of the construction plot.

The sale price of a construction plot for illegal residential buildings with a residential function is a favourable one. For mixed-use constructions, partly residential and partly socio-economic, two different prices are applied, according to the ratio between “residential” and “socio-economic” areas.

Payment of the construction plot amount is made in full monetary value via privatization bonds. Privatization bonds, acquired by former politically persecuted persons and other subjects during the process of privatization of state property, are treated as other privatization bonds.

Until the full amount of the financial liability for the construction plot is paid, the legal mortgage is burdened over the legalized property.

Cases when the subject possesses more than one illegal construction

In cases where someone possesses more than one illegal construction, they can choose, by a notarial act, for which one they will get construction plot ownership at the favourable legalization price. For other constructions, the price is determined by the property value map approved by decision of the Council of Ministers, plus service fee. This is regardless of construction function or surface of the construction plot.

If the person does not present a notary declaration, the SAC gives the favourable price to the construction plot with the smallest surface. When someone possessing more than one illegal construction transfers, by a notarial act, the right to legalization of constructions to a third party, none of the constructions get the favourable price.

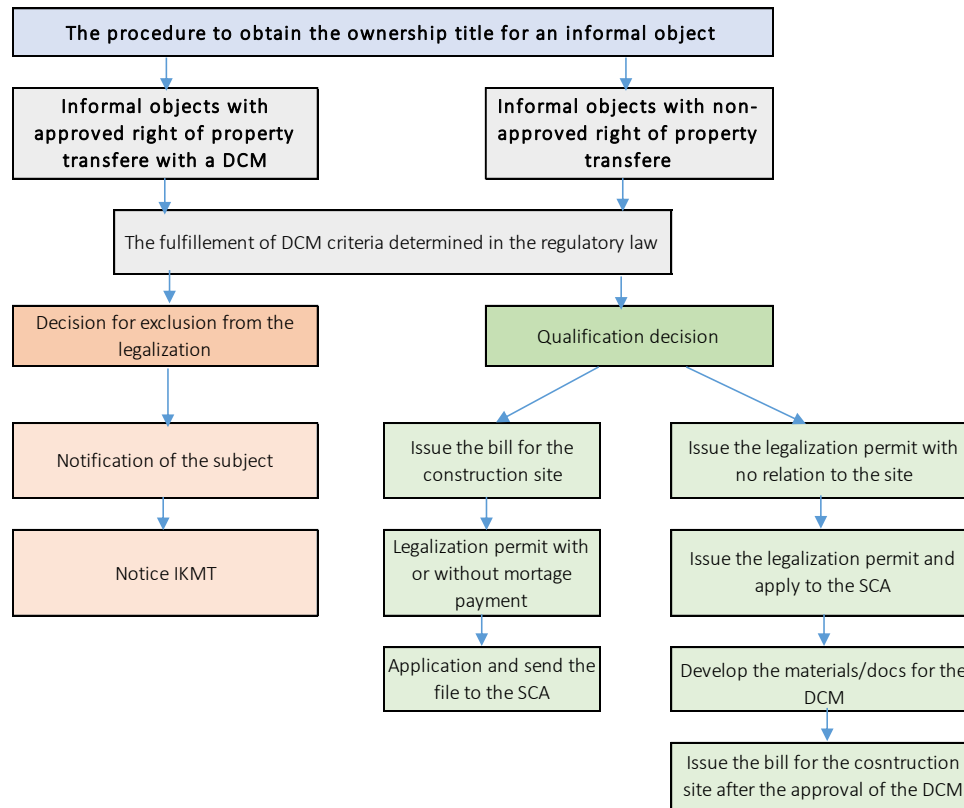


Figure 11: The flow chart of the procedure to obtain the ownership title

Compensation of non-possessing owners

For non-possessing owners whose properties are occupied by legalized construction plots, the Council of Ministers approves financial compensation for the relevant surfaces already legalized. Compensation value is based on the price shown on the property value map for the type of property. The manner of compensation fund distribution created by transfer of ownership, as well as the criteria and procedures, are determined by the Council of Ministers.

If the construction plot owned by the non-possessing owner burdens the mortgage, it does not obstruct the legalization and compensation process. The mortgagee creditor is entitled to a guarantee on the amount of financial compensation, decided by the Council of Ministers. The SAC sets the financial compensation in a special bank account which is not available to the beneficiary subject without the creditor's agreement.

When several ownership titles overlap for the construction plot land the extent and amount of financial compensation can be approved without specifying the beneficiary. Upon approval, the SAC registers construction plot ownership in favour of the owner of the legalized construction. The compensation is set in a special bank account and made available after a court decision resolving the overlap.



Special arrangement for those who possess the plot, according to a legal unregistered act

If the owner of illegal construction has an administrative act, a court decision or contract on transfer of ownership of a construction plot approved by a notary public, with the lawful possessor, they submits this documentation to the SAC for ownership registration. This can be done, regardless of the number of transactions made on the property. Registration of construction plot ownership is realized by paying only the fee for registration, without penalty interest and other applicable taxes. The previous owner of the plot who has transferred right of ownership, is deprived of the right to compensation.

Disputes over the rights on the construction that is legalized

If there are applications from two or more people for the same plot, the legalization procedure favours the subject that applied first. Disputes between applying subjects and third-party claims on illegal construction rights, or ownership ratios of the construction are resolved by a court. For illegal constructions subject to court dispute but qualified for legalization, the SAC does not suspend the administrative procedure but approves the legalization without determining beneficiaries. Upon completion of the lawsuit, registration of ownership goes to the winner of the court case.

Claims for item's return

When SAC is informed that a lawsuit has been filed to restore land occupied by illegal construction to its original owner, it suspends the legalization procedure until conclusion of the lawsuit. In if the lawsuit is successful, SAC decides on the exemption of the illegal construction from legalization.

Special treatment

Illegal constructions are not legalized if they have more than 50 per cent of the surface (construction base) on third-party private land or approved territorial planning documents for constructions over 6 storeys. For residential illegal constructions in this situation, the following actions are taken:

- a. Administrative proceedings are suspended until the land is developed according to the approved territorial planning documents.
- b. A notarial agreement must be made between the possessor of the illegal construction and the owner of the land (or the investor), to give the possessor a construction surface when the building is completed. This is submitted to the territory development authority and the SAC. If agreement is not reached, the landowner or investor submits a notarial declaration to the territorial development authority and SAC, specifying the obligation to transfer residential property to the family possessing the illegal construction. In no case should the area made available be less than that legally required for housing homeless families.

- c. Illegal construction is excluded from legalization after the approval of the construction permit and the fulfilment of this last condition. Up to this point, the illegal construction is used by the possessing subject.
- d. For illegal constructions with a socio-economic function, the procedures of exclusion from legalization apply immediately.

In all cases, legalization procedures may follow and possessors may benefit from legalization if the landowner expresses his consent through a notarial act.

Effects of legalization in the cadastre regime of the land

Legalization of illegal constructions automatically changes the type of property in the registers of public immovable properties, turning the surface of the construction plot into “land”.

Buildings excluded from legalization

Possessors of illegal constructions that are not legalized under Article 18 and Article 29, point 4 of the new legalization Law are dealt with by the state through social housing programmes, financial compensation programmes or other measures.

Objects without ownership title and yards in use

For objects without ownership titles, their functional lands and yards in use, the SAC approves the ownership document in favour of the possessors. If the possessor of property has also made illegal constructions in the same property, the procedure goes as follows:

- a. For objects without ownership title, the SAC approves the ownership document, based on the actual construction situation.
- b. For yards in use, the SAC identifies illegal constructions from the object with ownership title. Illegal constructions are legalized if they do not violate the criteria set out in Article 18 of the new law.

For objects without ownership title, their functional lands and yards in use, approval of the ownership document for an area of up to 300 m² is free of charge, regardless of whether the possessor has also constructed illegally upon it.

The service fee for legalization⁷

- For constructions with residential function, the service fee is covered by the State Budget.
- The service fee for legalization, illegal constructions with a socio-economic function, and second objects, is 8,000 ALL for each construction floor.

⁷ No. 860, dated 10.12.2014 “On the determination of the method for the collection and administration of revenues for illegal constructions and values applicable to legalization”



- For illegal constructions with a mixed function, the service fee is 8,000 ALL only for the floors used for socio-economic activities.

The local tax on infrastructure impact for legalized constructions, regardless of their function, is calculated, collected and administered by local government units, under Law No. 9632, 2006, “On the local tax system”, article 27.

9. COVID-19 IMPACT ON THE SELECTED INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

Economic and social impact on the residents

There is global evidence that COVID-19 is exacerbating the poverty, inequality and vulnerability experienced by families and their children, in particular those living in informal settlements. Social protection schemes are among the most effective interventions in the fight against vulnerability. However, the crisis has revealed the inability of social protection systems to provide adequate assistance.

Paid leave and unemployment insurance have been available only to the formally employed, which effectively excludes farmers, rural areas, and many informal workers. Although social assistance programmes have proved effective at targeting the poorest, they can still exclude vulnerable groups such as informal workers, minorities, and those with assets and income just above the eligibility threshold.

Like all other social centres in Tirana, the only Social Center “Bregu i Lumit⁸” in Lapraka had to close during the initial lockdown for security reasons. This impacted daily care and assistance to families and elderly people frequenting it.

In Lapraka there are 67 families benefiting from the social-economic scheme in the following categories.

Table 6: Number of families in the social-economic scheme, Lapraka

Families in need	Children custody service	Domestic violence	Orphan status	Families with triplets & quadruplets
47	6	1	10	3

The economic assistance scheme was supported with a second payment during the pandemic, available only for the three months of the emergency: April, May and June 2020. There are 1,566 people with disabilities and 204 caregivers receiving disability payments.

Table 7: Number of people benefiting from the payment of disability, Lapraka

Type of Disability	Number
Blind	98
Caregivers	32
PWD - Mental & physical	510
Caregivers	110

⁸ These center is not administrated by the Municipality of Tirana.



Para/tetraplegia	64
Caregivers	62
Invalids of work	894

Local authorities were able to distribute around 1,600 food and hygiene packages, but only during the three-month lockdown period. These were for the worst affected vulnerable people, such as people with disabilities such as blind people, paraplegics and tetraplegics and other categories of disabled people with limited economic resources. Furthermore, people with disabilities or unable to work during the lockdown period, have received monthly entitlements without going through evaluation commissions.

According to participants in focus group discussions, distributed packages were not sufficient to cope with needs caused by the lockdown. Several of them had lost jobs during the pandemic, facing great difficulties with economic survival.

While some benefitted from economic assistance payments, there was still a necessity to raise the amounts, as payments are quite low considering how food and hygiene prices increased during the pandemic.

For families benefiting from the economic scheme, the payment is 1,800 ALL for the first family member, 1,260 ALL for other family members over 18 and 900 ALL for those under 18. For children attending elementary and secondary education, an additional 300 ALL per month is provided. Furthermore, an additional 100 ALL is given for each child who has been vaccinated according to the set calendar.

Regardless of composition, the maximum full amount for the family cannot be higher than 8000 ALL per month. The guidelines⁹ for payment calculation do not allow for inflation. However, according to the November 2020 'Consumer Price Index'¹⁰, compared to November 2019, food and non-alcoholic drink prices have increased by 4.9 per cent. Housing, water, electricity and other fuel have increased by 0.3 per cent.

Social housing

The housing bonus is for families with insufficient income to afford their rent. One of the criteria is the lease contract between the property owner and the tenant. This document must be legal and notarized, setting conditions and rights as well as the requirement that the property owner must pay 15per cent of the amount received from the tenant as rent tax.

According to participants in focus group discussions, it is difficult to apply for the housing bonus as landlords often fail to issue lease contracts to avoid paying rent tax. Others delayed up to 6 months in taking the bonus, fearing to be forced out of the house by the property owner.

⁹ Guideline no. 4, dated 17.02.2017 "On the Calculation of the Benefit of Economic Assistance"

¹⁰ INSTAT, "Consumer Price Index" November 2020 Report



The amount of the subsidy depends on the family income level. It can cover up to 100 percent of the rent for families receiving, or eligible for, economic assistance.

The household contribution should not exceed 25 per cent of the household income. The subsidy is paid directly to the property owner, while the tenant only benefits from the right to use the rented apartment.

However, in the last few years, Lapraka house prices have risen faster than wages. This has also been raised as an issue in focus group discussions.

According to participants in focus group discussions, houses and apartments in Lapraka now have higher prices, making it difficult to pay the difference between market rent and rent subsidy value.

Impact on minority groups

There are around 66 Roma and Egyptians families living in Lapraka, and only 15 of them are part of the economic scheme or assisted with a social payments or electricity compensation payments. However, these communities have been some of the hardest hit by lockdown. Many of their income-generating activities, such as scrap collection and sale and selling used clothes¹¹, are impossible under current restrictions.

For these groups, recommended measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission such as hand washing, physical distancing, self-quarantine, self-isolation or community-wide lockdowns are often impossible. Most Roma families in Lapraka live in apartments in barracks and cannot benefit from the legalization process to get secure housing.

Their dwellings generally do not have necessary facilities. Often the same room serves many functions: living room, bedroom and kitchen and may house 4 to 10 people. In most cases their accommodation does not have running water so it must be fetched from wells. They also lack proper toilets, instead having septic tanks.

According to Roma participants in focus group discussions, compliance with personal hygiene recommendations is difficult as their dwellings lack adequate sanitary facilities. For example, It is almost impossible for them to wash their hands with warm water as a prevention measure.

Impact on Gender and Women's Rights

The impacts of COVID-19 and other natural disasters are exacerbated for women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty. Many women in Albania are employed in informal, low-wage activities that have been disrupted by COVID-19 quarantine measures (UN Women, 2019). This has a direct economic impact which could be long-term and widespread. Women engaged in care and domestic work are experiencing grave economic consequences.

¹¹ UNDP, "Mapping the Skills, Employment and Entrepreneurship Opportunities of the Roma and Egyptian Communities"



Gender-based violence also tend to rise during emergency situations (UN Women, 2019). Domestic violence may be the most common type of violence that women and girls experience during emergencies, resulting in profound physical and psychosocial harm.

Among female participants in focus group discussions, 2 out of 16 were included in the domestic violence programme during the lockdown.

Impact on the businesses

There are about 2,000 registered businesses in the Lapraka area, mostly restaurants, bars and cafes. These are among the most affected categories in the pandemic. Despite assistance provided by the government during quarantine, they face challenges as the pandemic has significantly reduced their clientele.

Health Situation

In general public health services at inpatient level, with suspension of many services, and out-patient level, through minimization of personal contact were significantly reduced during the pandemic (UN 2020b). In particular, people with non-COVID related diseases have suffered. At in-patient level, all services were suspended except emergency and follow-up treatment for certain categories of patients. At the outpatient level, contact of health personnel with patients was minimized.

Numerous services allowing accessibility and medicine provision have been affected. These include difficulties in circulation of locally-produced goods, importation, increased lead times, and access of people to medicines was restricted due to hesitancy in going out and lack of public transport. However, so far there has not been any specific data about health impact on informal settlements.

Costs for medical care

A recent analysis of the WHO for Albania reveals that out-of-pocket payments for healthcare are a major source of financial hardship for citizens. About eight per cent of households are impoverished, or further impoverished, after paying for health services and 12 per cent experience large health expenditures.

Cash expenditure on health services is considered fatal by the WHO, as it causes failure to meet basic living needs. In adding costs for COVID-19 cures and treatment the situation becomes even more difficult.

Based on the Ministry of Health latest Guideline of 19th of November 2020¹², all Covid-19 patients treated at home will receive reimbursement for their treatment whether or not they are part of social security schemes.

¹² Guideline No.12, date 19.11.2020 "On anti-COVID outpatient treatment at home by the family doctor of persons positive with SARS COV2"

Table 8: The basic medicine package for COVID-19 treatment - Guideline

Medicaments	Price ¹³ (ALL)
Azithromycine 250 mg	42.8
Acid Acetylsalicylic 100 mg	4.7
Rivaroxaban 15 mg	309.8
Apixaban 5 mg	149.6
Dexamethasone 0.5 mg	39.8
Ibuprofen 400 mg	5.6
Levofloxacin 500mg	91.8
Paracetamol 500mg	2.8
Vitamin C, 1000 mg - effervescent tablets	26.6
Vitamin C, 1000 mg - soluble powder	26.6
Vitamin C, 1000 mg - Capsule	26.6
Vitamin D, 2,000 UI - Capsule	24.4
Vitamin D, 2,000 UI - Softgels	24.4

Generally, family doctors determine what treatment a patient diagnosed with COVID-19 should receive. After obtaining a positive test result, a prescription will be passed directly to pharmacists to provide free medication for the patients.

The reimbursed package of medicines for the first treatment scheme for those affected by mild COVID-19 will be not more than 1,650 ALL, while reimbursement for the second package of medicines for severe COVID will be no more than 10,900 ALL.

However according to some observations prior to this Guideline, a seven-day treatment at home for COVID-19 could cost up to 58,500 ALL¹⁴, often through inappropriate prescriptions from private hospital doctors, as presented below.

Table 9: The basic medicine package for COVID-19 treatment

Medicaments	Price (ALL)
A Roxipime	1,100 ALL
Ravio	840 ALL
Vitamin	120 ALL
Xarelto	7,676
Dexametazon	492
Syringe	20 ALL
Oxymeter	650 ALL
Rented oxygen equipment	18,000 ALL
Oxygen cylinder	500 ALL

Costs for precaution facilities such as alcohol, masks, cleaning and disinfecting materials are as presented in the following table.

¹³ According to the Health Insurance Fund, 2019

¹⁴ <https://euronews.al/en/albania/2020/09/09/the-cost-of-1-week-of-covid-19-treatment-at-home>

Table 10: Costs for precaution items for COVID-19

Items	Price ¹⁵ (ALL)
Alcohol 90per cent	496.9
Surgical gloves	10.1
Mask ffp2	140.5
Surgical masks	50
Disinfectant gel 250 ml	490
Disinfectant gel 50 ml	375
Disinfectant gel 500 ml	1,475

Most participants in focus group discussions said they would have difficulty buying medicines for COVID-19 treatment; those on the social assistance scheme would find it impossible. They also pointed out the high price of hygienic products - often they use home-made masks with few filters and protection layers.

Health prevention behaviour

According to the 2017-2018 Albania Demographic and Health Survey (ADHS), there are no data regarding the knowledge, practices and prevention of the population towards infectious diseases (INSTAT, 2018). There are no data published either regarding the accessibility to information for the COVID-19 virus and the preferred channels for accessing information. Accessibility to information is of particular concern for people with disabilities. About 68per cent of people with disabilities reported that they lack communication opportunities tailored to their needs (ADRF, 2019).

According to most participants in focus group discussions, information related to COVID-19 prevention and treatment is mostly accessed through TV rather than social media. Another important information was the family doctor.

In general, they stated that they are aware of the prevention measures but find them difficult to implement given cost of hygiene products or poor living conditions.

Regarding the vaccination, they are sceptical, uncertain and fearful, with different information received from different sources.

Impact on efforts/plans/progress made to formalize informal settlements

There is no specific municipal strategy on formalization of informal areas, but gradual formalization is being affected by priority investments or development projects for specific areas subject to the development of detailed local plans. The General Local Plan “Tirana 2030”, approved in 2017, guides the National Cadaster toward legalization of certain settlements,

¹⁵ Market reference



depending on the strategy for specific areas. The GLP also guides the Urban Planning Department in the Municipality of Tirana to consult the rules of planning and development for an area/structural unit (part of which is the property / properties which the developer is interested to construct, before applying for a detailed local plan (DLP)). The DLP is the document that details the definitions of the GLP at the level of one or several structural units, setting out the conditions for the development of an area through building permits.

The GLP identifies new regulatory tools for flexible implementation, as well as for simplified regulation¹⁶, in order to benefit from private initiative interventions; it also sets limitations and parameters for controlling the development of the city.

For areas that are subject of transformation, the developers have the possibility to address to the Municipal Council a proposal for its development. This proposal may be subject to master plan preparation procedures, to facilitate comparison with different options through a tender procedure, in order to improve the provision of service utilities and select the proposal with highest quality.

The construction and planning interventions in a structural unit, subject to the development of a detailed local plan as mentioned above,, may benefit from a bonus in order to increase the volumetric intensity if they are evaluated positively toward a list of performance and quality criteria in the rules set by the Municipality.

The Directorate of Territorial Planning (GDT) is the main municipal Planning Body dealing with development of detailed local plans and the development of informal areas.

Detailed local plans are drafted on public or private initiative in areas which are:

- a. a structural unit
- b. several structural units together
- c. any priority area for development defined as such in the GLP

A declaration of consent from owners of over 51 per cent of the structural unit area is required to become a subject for the development of the DLP. After the expression of interest for drafting the DLP of the structural unit, the Municipality of Tirana sends the Land Register Office a request to clarify the legal status of properties that make up the unit. If the information received from IPRO is not complete, then the Municipality of Tirana sends an additional request for the missing information.

When having to solve a land ownership conflict for development of an area or a strategic project, the Municipality considers only the parcel borders and not the building. When the Municipality plans and designs a part of the selected area, development rights are decided on the basis of the parcel. However, final decisions are made by the current situation of that property, for example if a construction was built without a permit or in violation of a permit on the adjacent plot.

¹⁶<http://planifikimi.gov.al/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=2106&token=04234b8c1b0c719683db09c3a9564c6859d06eb8>



Public Consultation about the DLP is defined in Law No. 146, 2014, “For Public Notice and Consultation” and is carried out by publishing the document in the territorial planning register. Then stakeholders and the public are informed, if necessary by organization of a public meeting. In any case, the complete final documentation of the DLP is published in the register and remains available for consultation for at least 30 days before the Mayor’s final decision.

Urban Upgrading

Lapraka has recently undergone some formalization because of the plans for the development of the Great Ring Road connecting the city with the Tirana – Durres Highway, a major strategic government investment. Another formalization effort, mainly expropriation and reallocation, was also carried out to adjust the Tirana River settlements along the whole Tirana northern border, including Lapraka. In Lapraka, these settlements were mainly Roma Communities of Bregu i Lumit.

Current and ongoing urban investments and strategies for Lapraka include:

1. Road infrastructure, bike path and the Great Ring Road



Figure 12: Demolished constructions for the rehabilitation of the Great Ring road



Figure 13: Planned intervention for the rehabilitation of the Great Ring road

2. Improvement of the Tirana River Infrastructure and adjoining environment, which included improvement works for the riverbed and flooding problems, greening of the riverbanks to create a green corridor through the whole river trail and adjoining neighbourhoods. Additionally, the new green corridor along the river will be the northern part of the projected “Orbital Forest” one of the main strategic projects of the city.
3. Five new Elementary and Middle Schools are being constructed to relieve school overcrowding.
4. Lapraka will be one of the main “New Poles” of the city according to the Polycentric strategy of the General Local Plan “Tirana 2030”. Investment in sport terrains and spaces are seen as strong possibilities for this area.
5. The area surrounding the Agricultural University of Tirana within the borders of Lapraka is one of the transformation areas marked for development in GLP TR030. In addition to its main functions, it should provide primary functions such as schools, squares, parks, community centres and shopping centres. This should transform it into a pleasant resource for the whole city.
6. Investment for a recreational square in St. Gjergj Legisi will provide decorative vegetation, green spaces and recreational environments for all age groups.

Some delays in formalization of settlements are caused by current uncertainties of the extent of the proposed green area of the Tirana river rehabilitation project, or by uncertainty about positioning of the new tracks for the Tirana-Durrës railway. This has delayed the process for over 400-500 apartments, which still await legalization. The development of the Great Ring Road also caused major delays due to protests by property owners whose properties were in legalization process or not legalized at all.



10. RESPONSE MEASURES TO COVID-19 AT NATIONAL – CITY – COMMUNITY LEVEL

Since the first cases of COVID-19 infection among the Albanian population at the start of March, the total number of cases has¹⁷ reached 34,300. Of these, 48.5 per cent recovered and 2.1 per cent were fatal. The average trend of daily new cases has been increasing, most significantly from September, with a maximum reached in November at about 795 new cases.

The immediate response of the GoA to the pandemic was lockdown of domestic movement and economic activity, and declaration of a state of natural disaster. Both the lockdown and the state of natural disaster ended in June. Starting on November 12, 2020:

- Public movement is restricted between 10:00pm and 6:00am; except for work, health care emergencies or urgent needs.
- The e-Albania portal must be used for permission to move during this time. Bars, restaurants, fast food, and similar activities cannot operate between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am, except for delivery services.
- Public administration will telework, except for those providing essential services who will work under strict security protocols.

While these restrictive measures were necessary for containing the virus and saving lives, they have taken a heavy toll on the population, particularly economically vulnerable individuals and households. Direct consequences have been felt by those living in informal settlements, working informally, daily-waged, self-employed, and socially marginalized.

The shutdown of several public services first hit marginalized and vulnerable groups, who already had difficulties in accessing such services and were less reachable by other communication channels. Even the cadastral services were only available through e-Albania, but informal settlements often lack internet access.

Although alternative online learning option were available, the closure of educational facilities affected learning quality, especially of vulnerable groups lacking connectivity and adequate equipment. Households also needed to adjust to new childcare responsibilities, with added burdens especially for women. The adoption of social distancing and forced confinement also became a real threat to social cohesion and a challenge to social norms, which in turn placed a significant psychological burden on individuals, affecting individual behaviour, well-being, and mental health.

Measures of the GoA to address the impact of the pandemic

Based on the national official data and the impact assessment reports of international development partners, the GoA has developed supporting policies to the COVID-19 pandemic, which consist of:

¹⁷ Statistics as of 24 November 2020, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Albania



- i. *Monetary intervention*: the Bank of Albania (BoA) decreased the base and loan interest rates, and postponed loan repayment from BoA and commercial banks.
- ii. *A financial intervention*: a set of supporting packages amounting to 2.8 per cent of GDP, targeted the public health sector, the business enterprise sector¹⁸, unemployed people, and families needing economic aid.

Supporting package 1a: financial support to the public health sector.

Supporting package 1b: financial support to small business enterprises which closed during March, April and May due to the restrictions established by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. This consisted of paying the national minimum wage to all employees of small business enterprises, and doubling unemployment and economic aid benefits. In addition small businesses had their profit taxes postponed for 7 to 10 months.

Supporting package 2a: financial support to medium and large business enterprises which closed, and all business enterprises with decreased economic activity during March, April and May due to restrictions established by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. This consisted of 40,000 ALL (330 EUR) distributed to everyone who became unemployed during March and April.

Supporting package 2b: financial support to the tourism sector consisting of 40,000 ALL to all employees.

Supporting package 2c: financial support to the oil refinery industry, consisting of 40,000 ALL to all employees.

Sovereign guarantee: the GoA has guaranteed all financial supporting packages. It has also guaranteed loans for investments up to 300 million ALL (2,460,000 EUR) in the production, trade, construction, service and health service sectors.

Due to the closure of public and non-public educational institutions and day-care, many citizens lost their jobs as they had to take care of their young children and could not work remotely. Unfortunately, they could not benefit from other measures which could have improved their situation during the pandemic. For example, postponement of rent obligations in April and May for tenants with annual incomes up to 14.000.000 million ALL, or who had lost employment due to COVID-19 measures, was not available for citizens living in the informal areas as most of them do not have a rental contract.

The table below presents the support approved and disbursed until 3 November 2020.

Table 11: GoA support for covid19, approved and disbursed, MoF

¹⁸ The sectors of telecommunication, pharmaceuticals and retail food are excluded throughout the supporting packages



Financial Packages	Approved Requests			Disbursed Requests		
Package 1	No of Requests	No of Businesses	No of Employees	No of Businesses	No of Employees	Total Disbursed Fund
Package 1- 1st Tranche ("War Salary")	39,384	39,068	65,689	38,971	65,539	1,703,546,000
Package 1- 2nd Tranche ("War Salary")				38,921	65,395	1,700,270,000
Package 1- 3rd Tranche ("War Salary")				38,784	65,062	1,691,612,000
Package 1- Double payment of unemployment payment – First tranche	Automated procedure		3,100	Automated procedure	2,257	58,682,000
Package 1- Double payment of unemployment payment – 2nd tranche			3,100		2,349	61,074,000
Package 1- Double payment of unemployment payment – 3rd tranche			3,100		1,921	49,946,000
Package 1- Double Economic Aid			62,960		58,531	276,654,675
Package 2- Double Economic Aid			62,840		58,097	278,993,987
Package 3- Double Economic Aid			10,504		41,430	198,610,840
Sub- Total 1	39,384	39,068	211,293	38,971	126,327	6,019,389,502
Package 2	No of Requests	No of Businesses	No of Employees	No of Businesses	No of Employees	Total Disbursed Fund
Package 2 – Measure 1	1,207	834	9,434	820	9,434	377,360,000
Package 2 – Measure 2	15,066	10,506	65,658	10,471	65,659	2,626,360,000
Package 2 – Measure 3	33,095	31,757	68,364	31,729	68,365	2,734,600,000
Package 2 – Measure 4	1,199	1,014	4,927	1,006	4,927	197,080,000
Package 2 – Measure for oil companies' employees	3	2	721	2	721	28,840,000
Package 2 – Complaints	4,465	3,746	23,795	3,560	23,784	951,360,000
Sub-Total 2	55,035	47,859	172,899	47,588	172,890	6,915,600,000
Total Disbursed Fund						13,831,200,000

Response measures to COVID-19 at local level

The most significant intervention from the Municipality of Tirana is the adoption of a supportive fiscal package from March until August. Municipal Council Decision no. 28, 2020, decided the following:

- postponing the application deadline for social housing programmes
- postponing the payment of selected taxes for businesses from April to August
- reducing the payment of selected taxes for businesses for a two month period
- exemption of business from the payment of selected tariffs for March and April
- exemption of public transportation operators from the payment of selected tariffs from March until December

Covid-19 response measures taken at local level have had a bigger impact on citizens living in informal settlements than those living in formal residential areas. Since people who live in the



informal areas tend to have a worse economic situation, the Municipality of Tirana made use of a new database of 36,000 families who were not part of a social assistance programme. These were aided by grocery delivery, medicines or daily meals through an in-house delivery network of social service workers and community volunteers. In Lapraka over 334 families received this assistance during the quarantine period.

The MoT also initiated the *"Adopt a Grandparent"* initiative, where youngsters volunteered and supported their lonely elderly neighbours by sharing a home-cooked meal or offering to deliver their groceries and medicines. The engagement of citizens, youth, and volunteers was unprecedented and pivotal in helping the city to overcome the crisis and become more robust and resilient. In Lapraka there are over 280 elderly people living alone who were assisted with food and medicine by the network of volunteers set up by the Municipality of Tirana.

The prohibition on public and private transport for urban, intercity and suburban passengers has made it more difficult for citizens of informal settlements, especially in peri-urban areas, to go to work and access the services which are mainly situated around the city centre or in the most populated areas. This did not mean citizens could not have the most necessary services, as most were offered online, or postally in the case of retirement pensions, if so required. The Municipality also had a role in monitoring movement restrictions in terms of hours and social distance in markets and other public spaces.

The Municipality managed to continue delivery of basic public services, except public transportation, which was closed by ministerial order during the lockdown period, and remained closed for about one more month after reopening. Administrative services in one-stop shops were also not provided through lockdown.

During the pandemic, the municipality of Tirana increased the frequency for collection and transportation of urban waste as well as washing and disinfection of containers in both formal and informal areas as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection.

Regarding public transportation security, the Municipal Police Services have exercised controls every day at different times in the urban transport lines of Tirana, including Lapraka, on the implementation of the protocol of anti-Covid measures. This has led to the measures generally being respected by citizens and drivers. During July 2020 and September 2020 there were 1,860 such interventions, with only four administrative measures issued against citizens.

While central government ordered the closure of bars, nightclubs, restaurants, fast food establishments and so on, the MoT exempted them from payment of public space occupancy fee, as well as postponing the deadline for payment of local taxes and fees for a few months.

The Municipality's existing communication channels with citizens, as well as new ones, have been the most important medium of intervention for authorities and volunteers. They have also been a way of identifying vulnerable individuals or families. One example is the "green" free phone number providing 24/7 telephone hotlines and online platforms for psychological counselling or to address inquiries, concerns, complaints, and other need for aid. Another is the dedicated internet application (www.covid.tirana.al) which provided updates and



instructions about Coronavirus, as well as e-mail addresses, electronic platforms, and cooperation with the National Postal Office.

11. CHALLENGES, GAPS, AND NEEDS IN THIS CONTEXT

At central level

Lack of trust from citizens

Citizens tend to distrust their government to provide security of tenure through this time. For many years the property and legalization sector has suffered from fragmentation of work in a series of institutions (IPRO, ALUIZNI, AITPP). These were not only less productive than they could have been, they also were not renowned for quality of work. The errors associated with initial property registration led to the creation of a new “upgrade/update” process in the immovable property registry which corrects these errors. The same is true for the inventory of state property and its transfer to local self-government; processes also have had many problems due to errors in inventory and lack of cartographic presentation of the property. All this has weakened the trust of citizens in the cadastral and land administration system. However, the last law on Cadaster merged all the above institutions into the SCA, making it the main responsible actor in the sector.

The approval of the new law on legalization No. 20/2020 has eliminated many unnecessary links, providing fast procedures and simplified documentation and easing the bureaucratic burden on stakeholders. Improvements have also come in the form of the SCA’s right to process ex officio during the initial registration, and improvement of the cadastral zone or tracking process of illegal constructions for which no application or self-declaration has been made until the date of entry into force of this law.

Urban rehabilitation/legalization

There is an ongoing need to escalate urban rehabilitation and improve infrastructure and services in Lapraka informal settlement. In Albania there are 280.000 constructions not legalized, of which 8,000 are in Lapraka. There are several factors that put the informal settlements at high risk for contracting infectious diseases such as COVID-19:

- a. overcrowded living conditions within households, such as the case of Roma communities in Lapraka settlement
- b. limited access to basic services particularly water, sanitation and health services
- c. reliance on crowded transport services
- d. specific aspects of working in the informal sector, for example in crowded places or no social protection to fall back on.

Insufficient social-economic assistance schemes

Social protection schemes are among the most effective interventions in the fight against vulnerability, but the pandemic crisis has an inability to provide adequate assistance as it still excludes several vulnerable groups, such as those working in the informal sector.



A recent study of World Vision Albania¹⁹ shows that 75.5 per cent of families do not fully meet food needs, 83.3 per cent of them do not fully meet needs for disinfectants and face masks and 71.9 per cent of families do not fully meet needs for necessary hygiene which are essential in a pandemic.

In addition, the focus group discussions with people from Lapraka settlement raised the issue of the insufficient payment received from economic assistance. Only 1,800 ALL/person per month makes it hard to obtain the necessities to take precautions against COVID-19. Furthermore, regardless of family composition, the maximum amount cannot be higher than 8,000 ALL per month. This has not changed from 2017 when it was first approved and has not been corrected for inflation. Meanwhile the consumer price index has increased by 4.9 per cent on food and non-alcoholic beverages compared to November 2019.

There have been delays in receiving the housing bonus, and difficulties in paying the difference between the market rent and the rent subsidized from the municipality. These expose the most vulnerable groups continuously to the risk of homelessness, which in turn leaves them indifferent to recommendations of precautions about COVID-19.

Lack of interest for galization given the socio-economic effects of COVID-19

Due to social-economic problems created by COVID-19, legalization of houses may not be a priority for families living in houses without a regular legal status.

Inadequacy on learning through digital education

Remote learning through digital education is often not accessible or affordable for people living in Lapraka informal settlement, notably people in the economic aid scheme and marginalised Roma children, lacking adequate IT equipment or an internet connection. This could further deepen inequalities in education.

Lack of trust on vaccination of population

Focus group discussions indicate there are concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine, particularly amongst particular the most vulnerable groups. There are multiple possible reasons for this suspicion, including safety concerns, lack of transparency from the scientific community, lack of trust in the government and the desire to wait until a longer track record of vaccine safety can be established. Furthermore, fake news on social media may be more easily accepted by vulnerable groups.

At local level

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Tirana was facing an emergency situation caused by two earthquakes which struck the region of Durrës on 21 September and on 26 November 2019. Both had epicentres around 35 km from Tirana, causing serious damage to many dwellings; the Municipality of Tran estimate of 1,220 damaged dwellings in need of reconstruction were

¹⁹ WV, "Impact assessment of the COVID-19 outbreak on wellbeing of children and families in Albania", May 2020



identified after the second earthquake, according to the Municipality of Tirana. For three months before the start of COVID-19 pandemic, from December 2019, the municipality of Tirana had been facing the challenge of identifying and estimating the level of damage in dwellings, and providing local financial resources for the affected families.

At the same time it showed that the quality of construction was very poor especially in the informal settlements, as it was constructed without a building permit and have largely not gone through the process of verifying the applicability of standards, both during the design and the execution of works, especially from the aspect of seismic risk.

Decline in tax revenue

According to official local government data, during the first quarter of 2020 the collected own revenues of the municipality of Tirana have decreased by 14per cent in comparison to the same quarter of year 2019. The major part of this decrease has come from local taxes and local fees; among the most important local tax revenues decreasing is the tax on infrastructure impact, with around 21.4per cent, while the small business income tax has exceptionally registered an increase in comparison to the same quarter of year 2019. According to the most recent study on the local government in the COVID-19 pandemic situation, conducted from of Co-Plan and the Association of Local Autonomy in Albania, generally across all municipalities the collection of revenues is expected to be difficult throughout 2020, for households – principally due to unaffordability but also unwillingness to pay; and for businesses - due to closure and unwillingness to pay; the increased number of households with need for social aid and the closing of businesses are perceived as major challenges ahead.

The fall in tax collection will result in lower local budgets, thus affecting the implementation of necessary measures and actions toward addressing COVID-19 impacts at informal settlements.

Lack of an emergency preparedness plan

The Municipality of Tirana does not have an emergency preparedness or disaster response plan, nor any strategic document approaching crisis management. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis was from the start managed solely from the central government.

With the lack of a plan, during the pandemic the role of the Municipality of Tirana was mostly limited to engaging volunteering groups to carry out activities as defined by the relevant Council of Minister's Decision on March 2020, which included among others delivering food and non-food supplies at home for people belonging to vulnerable groups (people with disabilities, elderly living alone, single mothers, households loving on social aid etc.), also bill payments, purchase of medicines and COVID-19 prevention measures.

Insufficient local financial resources

The current law on local self-governance in Albania entitles local government units with a significant role in terms of strategic planning of recovery measures for civil protection in case of emergency, however, the inadequacy of local financial resources constitutes one major cause of the limited fulfilment this function: its exercise is not currently charged to citizens by fee, therefore, the local government cannot generate own revenues, while transfers from the central government are very limited. It is important to note, that the inadequacy of local



financial resources limits principally the building of local human capacities for strategic planning for civil protection and emergency response.

Lack of data or unclear data

Providing the right assistance to informal settlements is even more difficult, as informal settlements are hard to know. The informal or illegal status of deprived settlements often undermines both the collection of data and the implementation of policies to improve health. Data is not usually disaggregated, or it is simply not collected, especially for health issues for the most vulnerable groups (such as informal workers, Roma community). This makes difficult to develop preparedness and response plans when data are missing or are not certain.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendations for urbanization/ legalization

- The search for policy solutions is very crucial to address illegal settlements with multi-dimensional complexities, as so far the informal settlements have not been critically addressed and generally the solutions have been very fragmented.
- The Municipality of Tirana should further raise efforts in upgrading urbanization and improving access in a sustainable way for the vital public services such as water and sanitation facilities waste management, transportation, etc. Upgrading of this informal area also helps to put settlements and the city on the path to sustainable, low carbon development and reduces risk from flooding and other climate hazards.
- Allocate more funds for improvement of the infrastructure conditions related to streets, water supply, electricity and sewerage network in the selected informal settlement.
- A closer collaboration between the Municipality of Tirana and the State Cadastre Agency is fundamental in order to advance the legalization process in the informal settlements.
- Establishing a closer communication with the citizens in the light of meeting the needs of citizens related to their housing rights and urbanization (with particular focus the most vulnerable groups).
- Strengthening the capacities at municipality level to facilitate the formalization procedures initiated by citizens pursuant to the new Law on treatment of illegal constructions.
- Closer cooperation with central government to find ways and means for providing favourable financial instruments (loans, subventions) through which the population will be able to renovate their homes and provide decent homes to their families.
- Planning and organization of wide public information/awareness campaign in Lapraka settlement for the possibilities and procedures for legalization of illegally constructed objects.
- Find ways and means to engage civil society organizations to provide assistance to citizens in terms of completing the documents for legalization procedure and preparing requests for determination of legal status of their homes.



Recommendations to address the socio-economic conditions of people in informal settlements

- Increase the payment of the economic assistance in order to meet the necessary recommendations of precaution about COVID-19.
- Improve the calculation of the economic assistance payment by correcting it with inflation rate.
- Improve the administrative procedures for the housing bonus distribution in order for it to accrue regularly every month as prevised.

Recommendations for COVID-19 response

- For the local government in Albania to fulfil a more significant role in emergency crisis management it is critical that the central government consolidates (i) the institutional framework and provides (ii) the national plans on which local plans may be elaborated. This would open the way to building cross-sectorial multi-level governance, including economic, financial and also technical governance.
- Support local government from central government through unconditional or even conditional transfers should be considered to make executing the function of civil emergency plan.
- Design an emergency preparedness plan for the Municipality of Tirana addressing the issues of the informal settlements: common coordination, information tools and support services- environmental health (including water, sanitation and hygiene); management of chronic diseases (including mental health), etc.
- Design specific packages for informal settlements that address meeting the needs to prevent the spread of pandemic (food, disinfectants and face masks and necessary hygiene sets - shampoo, toothbrushes, feminine hygiene products, and other personal care items) and ensure distance during distribution of the support/donations.
- Support families with children's in school with free internet and IT equipment's, in order to follow the online learning.
- Continue with the awareness raising campaigns about COVID-19 health impacts and prevention measures, targeting especially the category who are sceptic on the existence of the virus.
- Following the developments in distribution of the vaccine, in cooperation with the health institutions inform the citizens about vaccination process and benefits.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations

- Be vigilant in monitoring the implementation of government assistance in informal settlements;
- Engage with policy-makers with a view to ensuring the effective ways of distributing food and hygienic packages by local and central authorities;



- Step up efforts in educating and providing information to people in informal settlements about Covid-19 and their human rights;
- Assist people in informal settlements to seek redress for human rights violations that occur during the lockdown; and
- Provide psychosocial support services to community members in need.

ANNEX I. FOCUS GRUPS IN LAPRAKA SETTELEMNT

PHOTOS DURING THE FOCUS GROUP





QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

The purpose of this focus group is to assess the situation of residents in the selected informal settlements in the area of Lapraka focusing on livelihood security, issues of housing, urban infrastructure, green public spaces and social services, etc.

Livelihood security

- Were you employed before the pandemic? If so, in which sector?
- Did you lose your job or reduce your working hours during the pandemic period: during the closure, or afterwards?
- Have you been forced to leave your job due to the closure of kindergartens?
- Has any member of your household taken a loan in the 7 past months? If yes, for what purpose? (food purchases, mask/soap/hand sanitizers, repayment of loans, pay rent on housing, home improvement including water supply, business investment, etc.)?
- Have you received any assistance during the COVID-19 lockdown (from Government, non-profit organizations national/international)?
- If yes, what type of assistance have you received (food, mask/soap/hand sanitizers, reimbursement for the salary, facilities on the payment of taxes for the public services/electricity, facilities to take loans, etc.)?

Security of tenure

- Does you feel secure from eviction in your current house? How strongly do you feel the authorities would protect you if somebody tried to evict you from your house?
- Are you allowed to sell your house?

Access to public services

Access to Electricity

- Are you connected to the electricity?
- What are the problems encountered in receiving this service (frequent power outages, approximate billing, amortized meters, etc.)?
- Have you been assisted with facilities regarding the payment of electricity?

Access to sanitation system

- Are you supplied with drinking water from the water supply network? If not, do you use well water, purchased water?
- Are you connected to the sewer system (toilet inside the house or outside the house)?
- Have you had any concerns about water supply and sewerage during the quarantine period?

Waste management service

- Are there containers near your houses? How often are waste collected?
- Have you had any concerns with waste management during the pandemic? What can be improved?

Access to public transport service

- Which bus lines cover this area?
- What are the problems most often encountered in accessing this service (delays, overcrowded, difficulties in distancing, etc.)?



- Were the buses used during the pandemic period? What have been the difficulties related to this service, how did you managed to go to work?

Access to public parks and green spaces

- Are there parks in the Lapraka area? What is their number? Are these parks easily accessible? How far from your apartment are they?
- Were the parks in this area used during the quarantine / pandemic period?

Access to schools / kindergartens

- How many schools and kindergartens are there in this area?
- What are the challenges and problems encountered during the quarantine / pandemic? For those who have children, are they able to attend distance learning regularly?

Access to health centres

- How many health centres are there in this area? What are the challenges and problems encountered during the quarantine / pandemic? Have you contacted and had difficulty in contacting the family doctor / accessing the family doctor service?

Access to technology

- Are you connected to the internet network?
- If you have children in schools, have you encountered difficulties in attending online lessons? What have been the challenges (lack of laptop, telephone, poor internet, internet payment, etc.)?

Knowledge, attitudes and practices related to COVID-19

- Are you aware of key COVID-19 prevention actions?
- What are the main barriers for your household to practice key COVID-19 prevention measures (No space for physical distancing, No money to buy mask, No money to buy soap/hand sanitizers, No hand washing practice / no water supply system, etc.)?
- What is your main source of information about COVID-19 (television, government notices and announcement, Facebook friends, relatives, or acquaintances, etc.)?

Health care during the pandemic

- Have you or your family members had any case of infection? Was the monthly income sufficient to receive treatment according to the family doctor / recommendations of private / family doctors? On average, how much did the treatment cost you?

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE COOPERATION!

END OF INTERVIEW



ANNEX II. LIST OF SOURCES

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