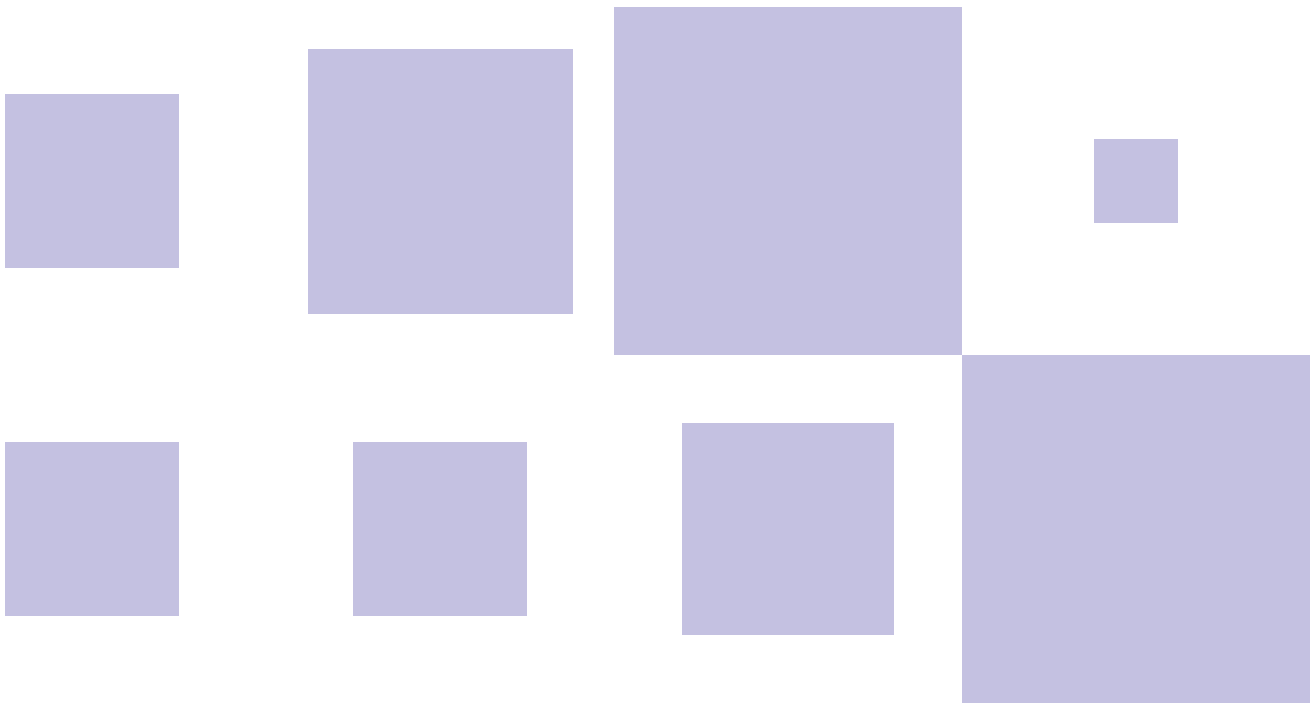




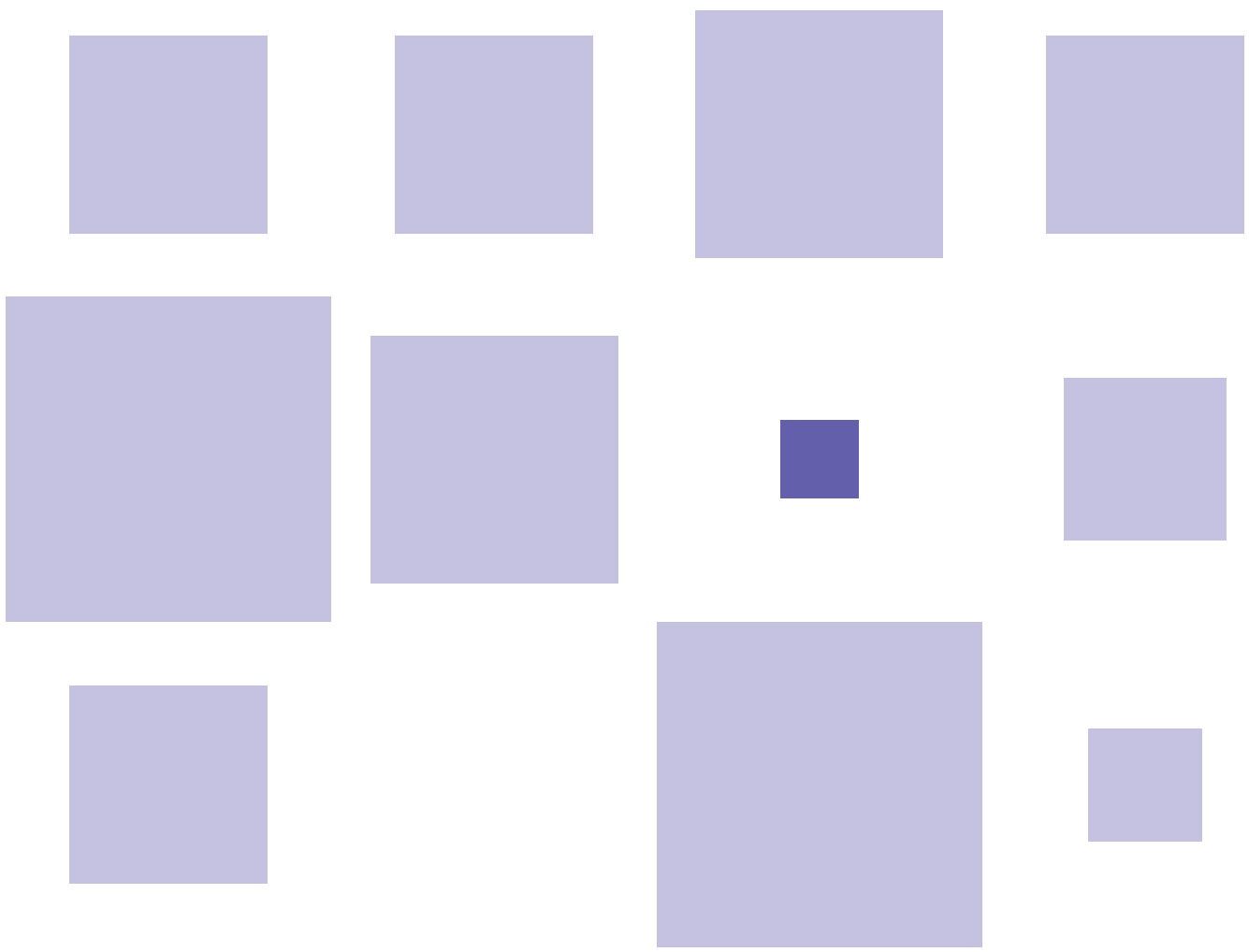
ICTD Best Practices and Country Profiles

How to Build Open Information Societies

A Collection of Best Practices and Know-How



ALBANIA



Albania



UNDP Albania—ICTD Country Profile

Albania

<http://www.undp.org.al/>

Population (millions):	3.2
Adult literacy rate (% ages 15 and over):	85.9
GNI per capita (WB Atlas method, 2002, \$):	1,380.0
Telephone mainlines (per 1,000 people):	50
Mobile phones (per 1,000 people):	88
Personal Computers (per 1,000 people):	7.6
Internet users (thousands):	10
Human Development index rank (out of 173 countries, 2003):	95
National ICT Strategy (Y/N):	Yes, completed (2002)
E-assessments (0,1,2...N):	0

UNDP staff in ICTD

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ICTD Partners

- **International:** Open Society Foundation of Albania, European Commission, Italian Government / UNDESA ICT for Development Trust Fund
- **Government:** Prime Minister's Office, Minister of State for Anticorruption and Reforms (overall Government ICT Focal Point), Ministry of Transport and Telecom, Ministry of Local Governance, Ministry of Public Order, INIMA
- **National NGOs:** Albanian Information Society Technologies Centre; NGO "International Community Assists – Albania"

ICTD Activities

- National ICT for Development Strategy Project (*stand-alone project*)
- Public Access Centres Project (*stand-alone project*)
- Government Electronic Network and Data Exchange Backbone Project (pipeline)
- MIS for coordination, monitoring and reporting on EU integration, National Strategy for Social and Economic Development and MDGs (*component of Economic Management Function Project*)
- FORAID database for monitoring and reporting on foreign aid and donor assistance (*component of Aid Management Project*)
- GIS/Monitoring System for Local Governance (*component of Local Governance Programme*)
- MIS and GIS and electronic database for mine fields (*component of Mine Action Project*)
- Electronic weapons registry for the Ministry of Public Order (*component of Small Arms and Light Weapons Project*)
- Information systems for assessment of risks and disaster preparedness (*component of Disaster Management Project*)
- Approximate yearly funding of UNDP-supported activities in ICTD: USD 500,000

Albania on the Road to Fulfilling Millennium Development Goals using ICTD

Gent Strazimiri, Yevgeny Korneev and Melanie Reimer¹

Abstract

Albania, one of Europe's worst-off countries, is recovering from political and social conflict, a Communist regime and 55 years of isolation. While contending with poverty, infrastructure devastation and underdevelopment, and the aftermath of violence, the country nonetheless aspires to EU integration and overall social, economic and democratic development. Prioritising ICT-related development activities has been influenced by participatory dialogue, including local participation in agenda setting, and municipal ownership and benefits from the programmes have helped the process. The main UNDP programmes in Albania, Human Security and Democratic Governance, reflect the particular information and communication technology for development (ICTD) needs resulting from war such as tracking and reclaiming weapons, disarming minefields, and supporting official activities to confront organised crime. Information management and access across these different areas have been key for effective law enforcement. Millennium Development Goals are generally integrated with ICTD programmes providing a framework for development to build and improve infrastructure, to develop human capacity, and widespread access to ICTs for social, economic and democratic governance development.

Overview

Thirteen years ago, the majority of Albanians were oblivious about technologies such as computers, the Internet, mobile phones, and even remote controls for television sets. Only a handful of Albanians were aware of these various technologies due to their specialisation in this area or from visits to other Central European countries.

At this time, Albania was one of the most isolated countries in the world. Most Albanians did not have television sets, let alone the opportunity to watch foreign programming. A few foreign programs were aired in some of the larger cities,



Newly-reconstructed Lana River in Tirana, the capital of Albania

such as Tirana, Durres and Shkodra, but the Communist government generally restricted access to foreign programs which might risk raising dissatisfaction with the Communist government and the economic situation of the country. In 1990, after the toppling of the Communist dictatorship, major changes occurred in Albania.

The vacuum created by disintegration of governance, civil society, financial, and other structures, had led to the focus on day-to-day existence. Today, still one of the poorest countries in Europe with infrastructure development in only one-third of its territory, Albania is a country of extreme social polarities and conflicting realities, with regards to information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure across both urban and rural areas.

Basic telecom statistics for Albania

Conventional telephone lines: 6.7 telephones per 100 inhabitants – the lowest in Europe. The growth rate is about 35%.

Mobile: 3,100 (1999), 187,000 (September 2001), 515,000 (June 2002); Currently, there are more than 700,000 subscribers, equally divided between two national operators – Vodafone and AMC.

Box 1

Development in urban areas has increased since the fall of the Communist regime, particularly in terms of recognition and use of ICTs, which are mainly possessed by the younger generation. Development in rural areas basically remains dormant. There are clear distinctions in development of every type when comparing rural areas to urban ones. Rural areas are characterised by lack of infrastructure in roads, electricity, and landline telecom services, whereas urban areas have experienced recent development in all of these domains.

Assistance from other governments and international organisations, such as UNDP, has been vital. Through both short and long-term development projects they have processed and put in practice necessary strategies for achieving realistic but also ambitious results.

Internet Access

Internet access was first brought to Albania in 1995 when UNDP and the Soros Foundation began operating a non-profit Internet Service Provider (ISP), offering free e-mail services to Government institutions and universities and limited Internet access. The first private ISP was established in 1997, and today all ISPs are owned by private Albanian companies. In June 2002, there were 23 ISPs in Albania, servicing more than 100,000 users around the country.

Box 2

Millennium Development Goals

Albania has endured a period of isolation lasting over 55 years during the Communist regime and has had regularly occurring political and social conflicts throughout history. Albania is a developing country, yet a common national aspiration is to join the European Union (EU). Using the EU integration as an overall political and development priority, the government has developed support frameworks to ensure timely actions and a consistent approach for reforms. Most important among these are the National Strategy for Social and Economic Development (NSSD), the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), and fulfilling Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Human Security and Democratic Governance are the main UNDP programmes that correspond to the national priorities in Albania; both programmes have recently been interwoven with the MDG Support Programme.

UNDP Albania was one of the first UNDP offices world-wide to develop an overall national MDG programme and to re-engineer its portfolio to ensure that every component of its work in Albania is linked to the MDG agenda. New information and communications technologies are viewed as important for achieving virtually all goals and targets, through deployment of technological tools and the creation of enabling the environment, particularly in fields such as health, education, employment, HIV/AIDS, gender and poverty. For a developing country such as Albania, ICTs help in facing transitional

and development challenges through information exchanges, the deepening of knowledge, and exploitation and development of institutional and individual capacities.

National ICT Strategy and Support to a Participatory National ICT Strategy Process

During 2002–2003, UNDP, with assistance of the Open Society Foundation, has supported the Government of Albania, as well as other national and international stakeholders, to formulate a comprehensive National ICT Strategy that addresses such issues as bridging the digital divide, defining mechanisms for creating legal and fiscal frameworks for implementation of e-government, e-education and e-commerce initiatives, and the continued development of telecommunications infrastructure. A series of participatory events and education campaigns were organised to advocate the improved use of ICTs and to generate public debate on national ICT policy priorities. These activities culminated in November 2002 with a conference to present the draft National ICT Strategy for Albania.

With approval of the Strategy in early 2003, UNDP has continued to serve as a facilitator and supporter of common efforts to implement the Strategy at the national, regional and local levels, through its portfolio of projects in Human Security and Democratic Governance Programmes.



H.E. Prime-Minister Nano visiting the exhibition of leading Albanian companies, organised for the ICT Summit.

National ICT Strategy: Outline of Sections, Goals and Sub-Goals

To download full text and attachments, please visit <www.ictd.org.al>.

Section I: Government as Promoter, Legislator and User of ICT

Goal 1: Pro-Active, Well-Coordinated National ICT Policies

Goal 2: Creation of ICT-Supportive Legislative Environment

Goal 3: More Effective, Transparent, Responsive Government and Public Services

Sub-Goal 3.1: E-government services of government institutions at central level

Sub-Goal 3.2: E-government services of administrations at regional and local levels

Section II: Use of ICT for Education, Research, Health and Social Services

Goal 4: Promoting Basic Computer Literacy

Goal 5: Creating a Cadre of Advanced ICT Specialists

Goal 6: ICT in Health and Social Services

Goal 7: Supporting Development of Locally Relevant Content and Applications

Section III: Building Infrastructure needed for an Open Information Society

Goal 8: Creation of a competitive, liberalised telecommunications sector

Goal 9: Development of ICT infrastructure throughout Albania

Section IV: Generating Economic Growth in the Private Sector

Goal 10: Development of the ICT Sector as a Production Sector

Goal 11: Supporting Electronic Business

Section V: Ensuring Relevance of ICT Strategy within a Regional and European Context

Goal 12: Active participation in SEE regional Initiatives

Goal 13: Active participation in EU Initiatives

Goal 14: Monitoring of Albanian ICT Developments in Regional and European Context

Box 3

ICTD Supporting Human Security

Following the 1997 social unrest, Albanian law enforcement authorities have been faced with a difficult challenge: in a country of 3.5 million inhabitants, there are more than half a million small arms and light weapons that are reported to be missing. Further, while Albania has demonstrated a solid economic growth during the past year, there is also a large and growing grey sector of the economy. This grey sector is controlled by local organised crime and involves a broad range of illegal activities, including human trafficking, arms dealings and money laundering. In a country where there is still no electronic population registry, no land registry and a lack of communication between various branches of law enforcement, it is becoming increasingly clear that ICTs can play a central role in streamlining data collection, storage, exchange and access to improve personal safety of Albanian citizens and combat organised crime.

UNDP, as well as other donors, have been providing tech-

nical and financial assistance to the Ministry of Public Order and the Ministry of Justice, assisting the authorities in tackling their most urgent problems. UNDP has focused its work in this area on the collection of small arms and light weapons from the local population, by offering development projects and assistance to communities in exchange for the hand-over of illegal weapons possessed by their inhabitants. The project has been very successful and is reflected in more than 77 development projects awarded to nine regions across Albania, worth nearly USD one million. As a part of this on-going assistance, UNDP has been working with the Ministry of Public Order to establish a comprehensive database and Geographic Information System (GIS) that will store information on all registered and collected arms and will allow real-time access to police officers throughout the country.

Minefields along the northern border of Albania are grim reminders of the recent Kosovo conflict. UNDP's Mine Action Programme and the Albanian Mine Action Executive, established to help solve the mine problem, use a sophisticated information system called the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), which consists of up-to-date data concerning mine fields and their geography. IMSMA is regarded as a key tool for preventing future mine accidents and for tracking progress of the demining process. IMSMA directly benefits the local population of the Kukes region by helping improve the security situation in the north-east of Albania.

UNDP is also working with the Ministry of Local Government and the Academy of Sciences to set up a system for data collection and assessment of environmental risks (such as earthquakes, landslides and floods) and disaster preparedness. At a central level, UNDP is working closely with the Council of Ministers and line Ministries, with ICTs present in virtually every project.

ICTD Supporting Democratic Governance

One of the largest UNDP interventions, the Local Governance Programme (LGP) is at the forefront of activity in the field of democratic government. ICTD is prevalent throughout this programme, with the creation and development of local databases and GIS systems and the internally connected network of local government with the central government. In 2001, UNDP provided technical and financial assistance to the Ministry in setting up their internal local area network and e-mail communication facilities to enable better dissemination of information and collection of essential data from local government offices throughout Albania. This has led to an improvement in the development and support for municipal and community authorities.

As previously mentioned, low levels of ICT penetration and continued power shortages are common in rural Albania. Thus, the UNDP Public Access Centers (PAC) Project is a concrete and successful effort to showcase best practices and develop sustainable and replicable models of rural public access; it is currently being implemented in five pilot regions of Albania. To-date, there are eight functioning PACs that have been opened in three pilot regions, with assistance provided by local governments, civil society and libraries. UNDP plans to establish four new PACs before the end of 2003. The Centers have been a source of information,

communication, participation and education for the inhabitants living in these regions, allowing Albanians to attain computer literacy, learn new and existing communication tools enabling active participation in the development of Regional Development Strategies, and evaluation of the country's progress in fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals.



Training of local government employees in the Fier Public Access Center

Finally, UNDP is supporting the establishment of a Management Information System in the Council of Ministers for coordinating and monitoring policies involving the MDGs, EU integration and the National Strategy for Social-Economic Development. This will be used across ministries and other central structures. Other assistance includes IT training, improving the current specialised monitoring software within ministries, and supporting efforts to track and report on donor support as part of a broader effort to improve national policies and their implementation.

During the past ten years of UNDP's presence in Albania, many impressive developments have been made regarding all aspects of life. However, there remain many challenges for the country to overcome in order to become a true democracy and join the European family. UNDP is a true believer that ICTs can help to achieve greater progress and leapfrog many traditional development problems. UNDP will continue to showcase the potential of ICTs by connecting policy interventions with pilot ICT Projects, thus encouraging people like Elvis (see Box 4) to continue to live and work in Albania making a positive difference in the development of their country.

About Elvis

Six years ago, Elvis, a 28-year old Albanian, opened a graphic design office in the capital city of Tirana. At the time that Elvis started his small business, computers were basically an unknown piece of machinery to the majority of Albanians, and therefore, quite mysterious. Prior to opening his office, Elvis had used his free time to experiment with his computer and to learn more about how it operated. He compared his computer to a television and was awed by how the computer was able to provide so many more uses.

Through experimentation Elvis taught himself many computer skills long before computer courses were available in Albania. Since his days of self-education, Elvis has taken an official computer course, held two jobs working with computers and opened his own office. Elvis is now one of the best graphic designers in all of Tirana and makes a good average income working from his office. Elvis is not only passionate and dedicated to the computer, but he jokingly believes his success lies in the "wonder making mechanism," the Internet. For it was on the Internet that he found and purchased a film-printing machine for graphic design, which helped him further extend his computer-oriented activities. After seeing the film-printing machine on the Internet, Elvis decided to contact the company to inquire further about the use of the machine. A few weeks after his inquiries, he purchased, installed and started operating this new machine from his office.

From his Tirana office, Elvis watches his business grow each day and is starting to look at the computer business in a new light. He sees how quickly ICTs are developing in Albania and believes there may be a future for him in designing Internet webpages. Elvis believes there may be market demand for such work from private Albanian or foreign businesses in this domain. He thinks that the time is near when even children and students will believe that having a personal webpage is desirable, accessible and inexpensive. Elvis has started organising and teaching computer and Internet courses to share his knowledge with new and upcoming graphic designers. "We have many requests," he says, "work is going very well". Elvis never would have guessed a few years back that he would become one of the most knowledgeable men in his country about computers and instruct others on the subject. On a daily basis, other Albanians are also beginning to share Elvis' passion for computer knowledge and the number of students attending his courses is increasing rapidly.

Box 4

¹ **Gent Strazimiri** is a free-lance journalist working with a variety of Albanian daily newspapers. He holds a law degree and also works as a lawyer and partner in the Lex Consulting Studio law firm. He regularly lectures on issues of European integration, economic and cultural development, minorities' issues, promotion of information and communication technologies, etc., both in Albania and abroad.

Yevgeny Korneev is an ICT Policy Expert currently working with UNDP Albania. He has more than eight years of ICT experience working for UNDP and other international organisations in Central Asia, South-Eastern Europe and the US and specialises in National Strategies for Information Society and e-Government applications.

Melanie Reimer is an independent consultant from Canada currently residing in Albania. She has worked with the UN and the World Bank in Kosovo, Sri Lanka and Albania. She specializes in Human Security and Community-based Rehabilitation in post-conflict countries and countries in transition.

