

May 2011

Case study summary - Albania

Legislation and disaster risk reduction at the community level



High water levels in the Buna and Drini rivers due to severe rainfalls

Risk Profile

The natural and man-made hazards and risks to which Albania is prone include earthquakes, torrential floods, dam burst floods, forest fires, droughts and industrial accidents. The most recurrent disasters are major floods, which regularly occur, especially in the north-eastern and south-eastern regions of the country. The impact of disasters in Albania -- and the vulnerability of its citizens affected by them -- are significantly compounded by a relatively high degree of poverty, lack of infrastructure maintenance, unsafe building and land use practices linked to rapid urbanization, of natural resources as well as by the various consequences of the transition from a state-controlled economy to a free-market one.

The forthcoming full report was commissioned by the IFRC and prepared by Paul Martin, legal consultant. It is one of several case studies the IFRC is undertaking to learn about how legislation can support (or impede) disaster risk reduction, particularly at the community level. For more information about the project and various case studies as they become available, please visit our website at <http://www.ifrc.org/idrl>.

Snapshot of the legislative framework

The primary legislation dealing with natural and made-made disasters in Albania is the 2001 Civil Emergency Law. As its name implies, the main focus of the Civil Emergency Law is on the response and recovery stage. However, this focus will be significantly widened with the passage of the draft Civil Protection Law, prepared in 2009 and pending adoption by the Albanian Legislative Assembly. If enacted as drafted, that law would more clearly encompass a number of important aspects of disaster prevention and risk reduction.

Selected best practices

- The adoption in 2004 of the National Civil Emergency Plan -- a comprehensive practical guide which covers in detail all stages of the disaster cycle, including the prevention, mitigation and preparedness phases -- addressed on some level the lack of specific provisions for DRR in the current legislation. While the plan is not yet fully implemented, it nevertheless highlights Albania's will to gradually promote such practices.

- The National Civil Emergency Plan clarifies and clearly identifies the role of all governmental institutions and civil society organisations in regards to prevention, risk reduction and management of natural and man-made calamities, and specifically assigns responsibilities to and amongst them. Moreover, it expressly recognizes the importance of local initiatives and resources in preventing hazards and actively reducing disaster risks.
- Most importantly, the draft Civil Protection Law contains several provisions that formally recognize the importance and the need to promote prevention and risk reduction as fundamental components of disaster management, not only at all levels of government - central, regional and local - but in the private sector as well. Overall, the current draft law also supports the clear allocation of responsibilities.

Key remaining gaps

- The emphasis in Albanian legislation relating to natural and man-made disasters, in particular the Civil Emergency Law of 2001, is essentially on the response and recovery aspects of the disaster cycle, rather than on risk prevention and reduction.
- Management of major disasters remains highly centralised, while those powers and responsibilities assigned to the regional and local governments are often not accompanied by sufficient funding to permit or facilitate their exercise.
- There appear to be major discrepancies between what the law says and how it is implemented, complied with and enforced. The case of illegal settlements in densely populated urban areas, which place their residents at great risk in the event of a major disaster, but which are scheduled for retroactive legalization without addressing these risks, is a clear example.
- Legislation does not yet specifically encourage the dissemination of information, education and participation in disaster risk reduction at the community level, nor does it actively promote community involvement in decision-making or facilitate the work of community-based organizations.



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