



Albania tests a new administrative procedure aiming to improve access to and adequacy of benefits for the disabled

ESPN Flash Report 2018/73

ENKELEJD MUSABELLIU – EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK

DECEMBER 2018

The disability benefit reform introduces a shift to a bio-psychological-social model, differentiating by degree of disability. The aim is to improve access, transparency and efficiency, whereas social and labour market re-integration of persons with disabilities remains marginal in the system.

Description

The social protection scheme, taking up around 1.4% of GDP, is a cash-transfer mechanism targeting families in need as well as persons with disabilities and their caregivers, for cases of full disability. 69,005 persons with disabilities benefit from this scheme, while another 73,429 persons with work-related disabilities benefit from the Social Insurance Scheme. Out of the 142,434 persons with reported disabilities, only 19,157 are eligible for a caregiver.

Prior to the recent changes, the decision on eligibility for benefit was mainly based on a medical assessment focusing on the ability to work, without considering the degree of disability or differentiating benefits according to the degree of functionality.

Following the adoption of the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2016-2020 adopted in June 2016, there have been several legislative amendments aimed at easing procedures, improving access to the service and fighting corruption. These amendments, which will be piloted in two administrative units in Tirana until the end of 2019, introduce:

1. A radical change in the evaluation methodology and criteria, shifting from a medical to a bio-psycho-social assessment, and widening the evaluation criteria to include the various barriers to equal participation in society faced by persons with disabilities, in line

with the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. In two words, a bio-psycho-social assessment consists of a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on the interaction of functional disability with other psychological and social factors.

2. A new evaluation process with simple procedures and improved access, making it easier to apply, be examined and benefit from the scheme. The process will be decentralised and based on a National Electronic Register (NER) for beneficiaries of social services, administered by the State Social Service and updated by the regional Social Administrators. It will contain all information on applicants and will crosscheck information online with other institutions and agencies, eliminating almost all the documents previously requested when submitting an application.

3. A differentiation system for cash benefits, depending on the degree of functionality, and an extension of the services provided to persons with disabilities, by combining cash transfers with other social services such as medical and social rehabilitation, vocational training and employment opportunities.

The newly established Multi-Disciplinary Commission (MDC), made up of physicians and social workers, decides on the type of benefits and gives recommendations on the services that need to be provided to the beneficiary.

LEGAL NOTICE

This document has been prepared for the European Commission. However, it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Instead of evaluating only ability to work, the new regulations evaluate the ability to carry out activities of everyday life and measure the degree to which this ability has been affected: light (5-24%), moderate (25-49%), heavy (50-95%) or full (96-100%) disability .

The Government has not officially estimated the financial impact of the new legislative changes, yet the expectation is that the reform will cut the costs of the scheme by 10%.

The legislative changes adopted between 2014 and 2016 were opposed by the associations of persons with disabilities, which demanded a special status, an increase of benefits and improvement of re-integration mechanisms through employment. As implementation has started, the system for differentiating cash benefits in accordance with the degree of functionality and cutting cash transfers to persons with light disabilities, and replacing them with other services and job opportunities, is expected to be highly unpopular.

Outlook & commentary

Compared to the previous scheme, which divided persons with disabilities into two groups (eligible for cash transfers or not eligible) irrespective of the degree of disability, the new scheme proposes several improvements by

widening the evaluation criteria and adding re-integration mechanisms to cash transfers. Nevertheless, several challenges remain to be addressed.

The improved access to services, eliminating regular re-assessments, is welcome, but little has been done to improve access in schools and other public institutions (Dauti, 2015: 10)

The continuous demands to increase the amount of cash benefits, which reach a maximum of €101 for persons with full disabilities, were not met, even though several studies have found that the benefits are insufficient and do not meet the needs of persons with disabilities (Voko 2018: 45).

Policies for the inclusion of persons with disabilities remain at an early stage. As regards the provision of other non-cash benefits, it is not clear how the government and other institutions intend to finance them, as the number of community and social centres remains very low and central and local infrastructure is relatively underdeveloped. There are also concerns and doubts about the new mechanisms for the employment of persons with disabilities. Legislation requiring 1 in each 25 employees to be a person with disabilities has been in place since 1995 but has not been implemented, not even by the government institutions and agencies.

Further reading

Legislation on Social Inclusion and Social Protection (available <http://www.shendetesia.gov.al/mbr/ojtja-sociale-2/>)

Albanian National Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities 2016-2020, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (available <http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/national-action-plan-persons-with-disabilities-2016-2020.html>)

Dauti, M. (2015), The Social Exclusion Profile of Persons with Disabilities, UN Support to Social Inclusion Programme in Albania. Published by UNDP. (http://www.al.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/Profile_PWD_ang_web.pdf)

Voko, K. (2018), Prevalenca e aftesisë së kufizuar, aksesit të shërbimeve dhe cilësia e shërbimeve [Prevalence of disability, quality and access to the services], Save the Children Albania and World Vision Albania (https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/PV_FINAL_ALB.pdf).

Author

[Enkelejd Musabelliu](#) (Abkons)