

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	74
Land:	Albanien
Kilde:	British Home Office
Titel:	"Operational Guidance Note"
Udgivet:	3. april 2007
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	25. januar 2008

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE NOTE

ALBANIA

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1. Introduction

- 1.1** This document evaluates the general, political and human rights situation in Albania and provides guidance on the nature and handling of the most common types of claims received from nationals/residents of that country, including whether claims are or are not likely to justify the granting of asylum, Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave. Caseowners must refer to the relevant Asylum Instructions for further details of the policy on these areas.
- 1.2** This guidance must also be read in conjunction with any COI Service Albania Country of Origin Information at:
- http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html
- 1.3** Claims should be considered on an individual basis, but taking full account of the guidance contained in this document. In considering claims where the main applicant has dependent family members who are a part of his/her claim, account must be taken of the situation of all the dependent family members included in the claim in accordance with the Asylum Instructions on Article 8 ECHR. If, following consideration, a claim is to be refused, caseowners should consider whether it can be certified as clearly unfounded under the case by case certification power in section 94(2) of the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. A claim will be clearly unfounded if it is so clearly without substance that it is bound to fail.
- 1.4** With effect from 1 April 2003 Albania is a country listed in section 94 of the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. If, following consideration, a claim made on or after 1 April 2003 by someone who is entitled to reside in Albania is refused, caseowners should certify it as clearly unfounded unless satisfied that it is not. A claim will be clearly unfounded if it is so clearly without substance that it is bound to fail. Guidance on whether certain types of claim are likely to be clearly unfounded is set out below.

Source documents

1.5 A full list of source documents cited in footnotes is at the end of this note.

2. Country assessment

- 2.1 Albania is a parliamentary democracy with a population of approximately 3.5 million. Legislative authority is vested in the unicameral People's Assembly (parliament), which elects both the prime minister and the president. The prime minister heads the government, while the presidency is a largely ceremonial position with limited executive power. In 2006, the civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces.¹
- 2.2 The latest Parliamentary elections were held on 3 July 2005. After a lengthy appeals process and re-runs in three of the 100 constituencies, the results were announced on 1 September 2005 (in total, there are 140 seats in Parliament, the additional 40 are allocated on a party basis). The leader of the Democratic Party, former President Dr Sali Berisha, was then invited to form a new government. In early November 2005, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) released their final report on the elections and noted that although Albania had enjoyed its first peaceful transfer of power since the end of single party politics, there were still shortcomings to be addressed.²
- 2.3 The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens during 2006, however, there were serious problems in several areas including police beating and abuse of suspects, detainees, and prisoners, arbitrary arrest and detention, lengthy pre-trial detention, police corruption and impunity, societal killings and an atmosphere of fear in some areas due to traditional blood feuds, societal violence and discrimination against women and children, and societal discrimination against Roma, Balkan-Egyptians, and gay men.³
- 2.4 The law prohibits torture and ill-treatment, however in 2006 the police at times beat and abused suspects. The Albanian Helsinki Committee and the Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG) continued to report that police nationwide used excessive force or inhumane treatment. According to the AHRG, most mis-treatment took place at the time of arrest or initial detention.⁴
- 2.5 Amnesty international has reported allegations that police officers or prison guards beat detainees during arrest or subsequently in detention during 2005. Prosecutors did not always investigate complaints of ill-treatment or did so only after a delay. Even when an investigation was formally opened, it was often inconclusive. Prosecutors were reluctant to apply provisions of the Criminal Code dealing with "torture and any other degrading or inhuman treatment", preferring to invoke lesser charges, such as "arbitrary acts", which usually resulted in non-custodial sentences. Amnesty International was not aware of any convictions for these offences, although there were several reports that police officers had received disciplinary punishments for ill-treating detainees.⁵
- 2.6 The law provides for an independent judiciary; however, political pressure, intimidation, widespread corruption, and limited resources prevented the judiciary from functioning independently and efficiently in 2006.⁶

¹ U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices (USSD) 2006 (Introduction), The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile 2007: Albania & CIA – The World Factbook 2007: Albania

² FCO Country Profile 2007: Albania

³ USSD 2006 (Introduction)

⁴ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

⁵ Amnesty International (AI) Annual Report 2006: Albania

⁶ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

3. **Main categories of claims**

- 3.1** This Section sets out the main types of asylum claim, human rights claim and Humanitarian Protection claim (whether explicit or implied) made by those entitled to reside in Albania. It also contains any common claims that may raise issues covered by the Asylum Instructions on Discretionary Leave. Where appropriate it provides guidance on whether or not an individual making a claim is likely to face a real risk of persecution, unlawful killing or torture or inhuman or degrading treatment/ punishment. It also provides guidance on whether or not sufficiency of protection is available in cases where the threat comes from a non-state actor; and whether or not internal relocation is an option. The law and policies on persecution, Humanitarian Protection, sufficiency of protection and internal relocation are set out in the relevant Asylum Instructions, but how these affect particular categories of claim are set out in the instructions below.
- 3.2** Each claim should be assessed to determine whether there are reasonable grounds for believing that the claimant would, if returned, face persecution for a Convention reason - i.e. due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The approach set out in *Karanakaran* should be followed when deciding how much weight is to be given to the material provided in support of the claim (see the Asylum Instructions on Assessing the Claim).
- 3.3** If the claimant does not qualify for asylum, consideration should be given as to whether a grant of Humanitarian Protection is appropriate. If the claimant qualifies for neither asylum nor Humanitarian Protection, consideration should be given as to whether he/she qualifies for Discretionary Leave, either on the basis of the particular categories detailed in Section 4 or on their individual circumstances.
- 3.4** This guidance is **not** designed to cover issues of credibility. Caseowners will need to consider credibility issues based on all the information available to them. (For guidance on credibility see para 11 of the Asylum Instructions on Assessing the Claim)
- 3.5** All Asylum Instructions can be accessed via the IND website at:
<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/asylumpolicyinstructions/>
- 3.6 Blood feuds**
- 3.6.1** Some claimants will apply for asylum or make a human rights claim based on ill-treatment amounting to persecution as a result of a 'blood feud'. The term blood feud can often be used in a very loose sense, which does not always refer to the strict code of honour and shame and related provisions in the *Kanun* and as such the reasons cited for involvement in a blood feud can include disputes with neighbours over land, accidental death caused by traffic accidents or fights, or resurfaced pre-communist disputes.
- 3.6.2 *Treatment.*** Albania continued to experience high levels of violent crime during 2006 with many killings occurring as the result of individual or clan vigilante actions connected to traditional 'blood feuds' or to criminal gang conflicts. According to the interior ministry, at least five persons were killed during 2006 in blood feuds based on the medieval Code of Lek Dukagjini (the *kanun*). In 2006, the National Reconciliation Committee (NRC), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that worked on blood feud issues, estimated that there were as many as 78 deaths from feuds nationwide. Corruption also remained a major problem during the year.⁷
- 3.6.3** Under the *kanun*, only males are acceptable targets in blood feuds; however, women and children were often killed or injured in attacks in 2006. According to the National

⁷ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

Reconciliation Committee, approximately 860 families were effectively self-imprisoned during 2006 due to blood feuds. Property disputes accounted for four-fifths of formally declared blood feuds during 2006, with the remainder pertaining to issues of honour or violations of the home (e.g., theft, trespassing, etc.). The NRC estimated that there were several hundred additional blood feuds stemming from trafficking, which are typically not formally declared out of shame. Of the 738 families reported effectively self-imprisoned in 2005, 166 left the country, including 93 families that sought formal political asylum in other countries. The NRC claimed that fear of revenge prevented approximately 182 children from attending school in 2006, 86 of whom were permanently confined to their houses.⁸

3.6.4 Police investigations into the 2004 murder of Emin Spahija, head of the NGO Peace Missionaries League that worked exclusively on blood feud issues was still on going in 2006. A suspect was arrested but has not yet been formally charged.⁹

3.6.5 In May 2005, parliament approved a law establishing a co-ordination council, chaired by the president, to develop a national strategy against blood feuds and co-ordinate activities of government agencies. However, the council was inactive during 2006. The court of serious crimes tried blood feud cases in 2006 and the law provides for 20 years to life imprisonment for killing in a blood feud.¹⁰

3.6.6 **Sufficiency of protection.** In September 2005, the Ministry of Public Order was transferred to the authority of a new Ministry of the Interior. Local police units report to the Ministry of the Interior and are the main force responsible for internal security. The Albanian State Police (ASP) employed approximately 12,000 officers. As noted above, the law provides for 20 years to life imprisonment for killing linked to a blood feud. There is no evidence to indicate that individual Albanians fearing the actions of those seeking to carry out a blood feud cannot access protection from the Albanian police and pursue these through the legal mechanisms that have been set up to deal with blood feuds.

3.6.7 **Internal relocation.** The law provides freedom of movement within Albania and in 2006 the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, due to significant internal migration, many citizens no longer had local registration and status, leading to a loss of access to services such as education and medical care.¹¹ Whilst there may be some difficulties accessing local services internal relocation to escape the localised threat of a blood feud will not generally be unduly harsh. Whether internal relocation would enable an individual to avoid a threat in an individual case will depend on the tenacity of those attempting to enforce the blood feud.

3.6.8 **Caselaw.**

KOCI [2003] EWCA Civ 1507 found that there was generally not a sufficiency of protection in blood feud cases.

TB (Blood Feuds – Relevant Risk Factors) Albania CG [2004] UKIAT 00158 The tribunal found that a number of factors will be relevant in determining the nature of the risk on return:

- (a) whether the dispute can be characterised as a “blood feud” at all;
- (b) even if it can, then the extent to which its origins and development (if any) are to be regarded by Albanian society as falling within the classic principles of the Kanun;
- (c) the history of the feud, including the notoriety of the original killings and the numbers killed;
- (d) the past and likely future attitude of the police and other authorities;
- (e) the degree of commitment shown by the opposing family;
- (f) the time that has elapsed since the killing;
- (g) the ability of the opposing family to locate the alleged victim anywhere in Albania
- (h) that person’s profile as a potential target for the blood feud; and

⁸ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

⁹ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

¹⁰ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

¹¹ USSD 2006 (Section 2)

(i) the prospects for eliminating the feud, whether by recourse to the payment of money, a reconciliation organisation or otherwise.

The tribunal noted that whilst it is plainly too early to say that any potential victim of a blood feud of the "classic type" can now look to the authorities for a sufficiency of protection....the governments initiatives are particularly likely to make themselves felt, in terms of institutional attitudes within Tirana itself.

Skenderaj [C/2001/1336 promulgated 26 April 2002] the Supreme Court of Judicature held that families involved in the Blood Feud were not a distinct social group and that the threat to Skenderaj was "a private matter." The critical factor in cases where a victim of non-state persecution is unwilling to seek state protection is not necessarily whether the state is able and willing to provide a sufficiency of protection to the *Horvath* standard, though in many cases it may be highly relevant to the victim's well-founded fear of persecution. The test is whether the potential victim's unwillingness to seek it flows from that fear.

3.6.9 Conclusion. In general, the Albanian Government is able and willing to offer effective protection for its citizens who are the victim of a blood feud; however, there may be individual cases where the level of protection offered is, in practice, insufficient. The level of protection should be assessed on a case by case basis taking into account what the claimant did to seek protection and what response was received. Internal relocation may be appropriate in some cases.

3.6.10 In general, as outlined in the case of Skenderaj (see above) victims of a blood feud are unlikely to be members of a particular social group (PSG) and a grant of asylum will not usually be appropriate. In cases where there is no sufficiency of protection and internal relocation is not an option, claimants may qualify for a grant of Humanitarian Protection. in line with the position of the UNHCR¹² there may be some individuals who, because of the circumstances of their case, may be considered to be a PSG and where a grant of asylum may be appropriate. However, the majority of claimants from this category of claim will not qualify for either a grant of asylum or Humanitarian Protection and where there is a strong internal relocation argument supported by a previous successful relocation some claims may be certifiable, though most cases are unlikely to be clearly unfounded.

3.7 Organised crime

3.7.1 Some claimants will apply for asylum or make a human rights claim based on ill-treatment amounting to persecution at the hands of organised criminal gangs and that law enforcement agencies, such as the police, are not able to offer sufficient protection. Some claimants will claim that the police are linked to criminal gangs and that that they face unlawful arrest and detention.

3.7.2 Treatment. Albania continued to experience high levels of violent crime during 2006. Many killings occurred as the result of individual or clan vigilante actions connected to traditional "blood feuds" or to criminal gang conflicts. According to the interior ministry, at least five persons were killed during the year in blood feuds based on the medieval Code of Lek Dukagjini (the *kanun*). The National Reconciliation Committee (NRC), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that worked on blood feud issues, estimated that there were as many as 78 deaths from feuds nationwide. Corruption also remained a major problem during 2006.¹³

3.7.3 In 2006, the serious crimes court and serious crimes court of appeal focused on the fight against organised crime and serious crimes and on improving the quality of adjudication. The law mandates the sequestration and confiscation of assets derived from organised crime and trafficking. The Agency for the Administration of Sequestered and Confiscated Assets administers sequestered and confiscated assets, including those of persons found

¹² UNHCR position on claims for refugee status under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees based on a fear of persecution due to an individual's membership of a family or clan engaged in a blood feud.

¹³ USSD 2006 (Introduction, Section 1 & Section 3)

guilty of trafficking related crimes. Despite several court-ordered seizures during 2006, however, there were no cases of forfeited assets successfully liquidated and the agency did not distribute any funds to victims.¹⁴

- 3.7.4** During 2006, the Government expanded implementation of the witness protection law by upgrading the witness protection unit to a Directorate for Witness Protection and Collaborators of Justice, located within the state police. In 2005, the Government also named a commission, comprised of a prosecutor, a judge, and police officials to evaluate applications for admission to the witness protection programme. The Government budgeted approximately 21,000 lek (\$208,000) for witness protection during 2006, representing a twenty-fold increase over the 2005 appropriation.¹⁵ It has been reported that by the end of July 2006, 11 cases, covering 54 persons (witnesses and their extended families) had been provided with special protection measures. Between January 2005 and the end of July 2006, 15 witnesses were provided with temporary protection for a period of one month.¹⁶
- 3.7.5** In the first nine months of 2006, the prosecutor's office dealt with 480 cases of abuse of office and other types of corruption resulting in the criminal conviction of 107 government officials. In May 2005, the chairman of the Durres property restitution commission was sentenced to 20 years in prison for abuse of duty and corruption.¹⁷
- 3.7.6** During 2006, the Council of Ministers adopted several anti-corruption internal regulations. In January 2006, the Government created an Anti-Corruption Task Force and in February 2006, the parliament approved new broadened conflict of interest legislation. The law provides that government ministers may not own a company that is directly tied to their official responsibilities. Approximately 6,000 public officials and close relatives must submit financial declarations; another 1,500 officials of the previous administration were obliged to file declarations in 2006.¹⁸
- 3.7.7** ***Sufficiency of protection.*** In 2005, the Ministry of Public Order and the Ministry of Local Government was combined as a new Ministry of the Interior. In 2006, local police units reported to the Ministry of the Interior and were the main force responsible for internal security. The Albanian State Police (ASP) employed approximately 12,000 officers in 2006. However, the overall performance of law enforcement remained weak during 2006 and unprofessional behaviour and corruption remained major impediments to the development of an effective civilian police force.¹⁹
- 3.7.8** Impunity remained a problem in 2006, although on the decline. In 2006, the Ministry of the Interior's Office of Internal Control engaged in the prevention, discovery, and documentation of corruption and other criminal activity committed by police. Between January 2005 and October 2006, the Office of Internal Control received 127 complaints from the public and conducted 132 investigations. Of these, charges against 2 officers were dismissed as baseless. In 35 other cases, there was sufficient evidence for the authorities to arrest officers on suspicion of having committed criminal acts. A total of 98 police officers (including 37 of middle to high rank) were charged with offences, including counterfeiting and illegal issuance of travel documents and assistance to illegal border crossing. Approximately 70 officers were dismissed during the period for professional misconduct, including corruption. In 2005, the ombudsman received 30 complaints against police officers for use of excessive force or mistreatment. Out of these, the ombudsman determined that four were valid and the remainder were dismissed as baseless. The ombudsman's recommendations were accepted and the prosecutor's office brought charges against the four police officers.²⁰

¹⁴ USSD 2006 (Sections 1 & 5)

¹⁵ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

¹⁶ USAID: The State of Efforts to Combat Trafficking of Persons in Albania (page 13)

¹⁷ USSD 2006 (Section 3) & USSD 2005 (Section 3)

¹⁸ USSD 2006 (Section 3)

¹⁹ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

²⁰ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

- 3.7.9** The Albanian Government has made attempts to deal with organised and serious crime and there are mechanisms in place to deal with police officers who are corrupt. However, some links between rogue officials and organised crime have been found to remain and where there are links to serious organised crime or corruption the state may not always be able to provide sufficient protection to individuals.
- 3.7.10 *Internal relocation.*** The law provides freedom of movement within Albania and in 2006 the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, due to significant internal migration, many citizens no longer had local registration and status, leading to a loss of access to services such as education and medical care.²¹ Whilst there may be some difficulties in accessing services, internal relocation to escape the attention of invariably-localised threats from organised criminals/gangs or the attention of provincial rogue police will not be unduly harsh.
- 3.7.11 *Caselaw.***
- XM [2004] UKIAT 00178.** The IAT concluded that on the facts of the case the Albanian authorities were able and willing to provide protection to the appellant. The authorities had acted on the appellant's report helping to secure the release of his daughter and arrested one of the kidnappers. The IAT accepted that the Albanian authorities are making significant efforts to combat organised crime and corruption.
- 3.7.12 *Conclusion.*** The Albanian authorities have undertaken various measures to combat organised crime and corruption and as a result are able to provide sufficient protection in some cases. However, there are high levels of organised crime within Albania and such protection may not be available in all cases particularly where the corruption of state officials is an issue. Internal relocation may be available to individuals seeking to escape a localised threat from members of organised criminal gangs. Taking into account sufficiency of protection or internal relocation, which will be available in most cases, a grant of asylum or Humanitarian Protection will not generally be appropriate, however cases should only be certified as clearly unfounded where it is clear that in the individual case there is a sufficiency of protection or internal relocation is clearly available.

3.8 Involvement with opposition political parties

- 3.8.1** Some claimants will apply for asylum or make a human rights claim based on ill-treatment amounting to persecution at the hands of members of a rival political party.
- 3.8.2 *Treatment.*** Albania is a parliamentary democracy with legislative authority vested in the unicameral People's Assembly (parliament), which elects both the prime minister and the president. The prime minister heads the government, while the presidency is a largely ceremonial position with limited executive power. The major political parties are the Socialist Party, Democratic Party, New Democrat Party, Social Democratic Party, Republican Party, and the Socialist Movement for Integration.²²
- 3.8.3** The latest Parliamentary elections were held on 3 July 2005. After a lengthy appeals process and re-runs in three of the 100 constituencies, the results were announced on 1 September 2005. The leader of the Democratic Party, former President Dr Sali Berisha, was then invited to form a new government. In early November 2005, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) released their final report on the elections and noted that although Albania had enjoyed its first peaceful transfer of power since the end of single party politics, there were still shortcomings to be addressed.²³

²¹ USSD 2006 (Section 2)

²² (USSD) 2006 (Introduction), FCO Country Profile 2006: Albania & CIA – The World Factbook 2007: Albania

²³ FCO Country Profile 2007:Albania

- 3.8.4** Individuals and parties were able to freely declare their candidacy and stand for election during 2006. A political party must register with the Tirana District Court and declare an aim or purpose that is not anti-constitutional or otherwise contrary to law, describe its organisational structure, and account for all public and private funds it receives. The court routinely registers new political parties.²⁴
- 3.8.5** **Sufficiency of protection.** In 2006, local police units reported to the Ministry of the Interior and were the main force responsible for internal security. The Albanian State Police (ASP) employed approximately 12,000 officers in 2006.²⁵ The Democratic Party is currently in power in Albania and although the authorities do not legislate, prosecute or persecute against opposition political parties some rogue elements of its local/regional organisation may do so. However, there is no evidence that individual members of any political party would not be able to access protection from the authorities should they need it.
- 3.8.6** **Internal relocation.** The law provides freedom of movement within Albania and in 2006 the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, due to significant internal migration, many citizens no longer had local registration and status, leading to a loss of access to services such as education and medical care.²⁶ Whilst there may be some difficulties accessing local services, internal relocation to escape the invariably-localised threat from members of an opposing political party will not be unduly harsh.
- 3.8.7** **Conclusion.** Albania is a parliamentary democracy and political parties are able to register and contest elections. Whilst political campaigns in Albania can be heated and rancorous there is no evidence to suggest that the treatment meted out to members of opposing political parties amounts to persecution or a breach of Article 3 of the ECHR. In addition, those facing threats from political opponents should be able to seek protection from the authorities or internally relocate to escape a localised threat. Therefore, a claim based on fear of members of opposing political parties is unlikely to qualify for a grant of asylum or Humanitarian Protection and is likely to be clearly unfounded.
- 3.9** **Trafficking of women**
- 3.9.1** Some claimants will claim asylum or make human rights claim based on their fear of being trafficked or their fear of those who trafficked them if they return to Albania.
- 3.9.2** **Treatment.** The law prohibits trafficking in persons and provides penalties for traffickers; however, persons, particularly women and children, were trafficked to, from, and within Albania during 2006. Poverty, lack of education, family breakdown and crime networks at home and abroad contributed to the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation and cheap labour. There were reports that although the numbers of Albanian women being trafficked were decreasing many women were being re-trafficked.²⁷
- 3.9.3** The law provides for penalties of 5 to 15 years' imprisonment for trafficking in persons; 7 to 15 years' imprisonment for trafficking women for prostitution; and 15 to 20 years' imprisonment for trafficking in minors. Aggravating circumstances, such as the kidnapping or death of a victim, can raise the severity of the punishment to a maximum of life in prison. Prison sentences may be supplemented by fines. The law provides that a government official convicted of exploitation for prostitution receives 125 percent of the standard penalty. The law also mandates the sequestration and confiscation of assets derived from organised crime and trafficking. The Agency for the Administration of Sequestered and Confiscated Assets administers sequestered and confiscated assets, including those of persons found guilty of trafficking related crimes. Despite several court-ordered seizures

²⁴ USSD 2006 (Section 3)

²⁵ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

²⁶ USSD 2006 (Section 2)

²⁷ Amnesty International (AI) Annual Report 2006: Albania, USSD 2006 (Section 5) & U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons Report June 2006 (pages 56 & 57)

during 2006, however, there were no cases of forfeited assets successfully liquidated and the agency did not distribute any funds to victims.²⁸

- 3.9.4** Prosecution of traffickers has improved, but in 2006 the authorities often released arrested traffickers because of insufficient evidence or, if they were prosecuted, charged them with lesser crimes or gave them less than the minimum sentence for trafficking. By the end of 2006, 10 traffickers of women were convicted and 27 new cases of suspected trafficking were detected leading to the arrest or detention of 32 persons. Four persons were convicted of organising, directing or financing trafficking. Six persons were convicted on child trafficking related charges and three new cases of suspected child trafficking were detected, leading to the arrest of four people. In a matter closely related to trafficking, 66 persons were convicted for providing assistance to illegal border crossing and 132 new cases were detected leading to the arrest or detention of 168 persons in 2006. In addition, in 2006 37 persons were convicted for aggravated exploitation of prostitution within the country, and 24 new cases were detected leading to the arrest of 29 persons.²⁹
- 3.9.5** During 2006, the Government expanded implementation of the witness protection law by upgrading the witness protection unit to a Directorate for Witness Protection and Collaborators of Justice, located within the state police. In 2005, the Government also named a commission, comprised of a prosecutor, a judge, and police officials to evaluate applications for admission to the witness protection programme. The Government budgeted approximately 21,000 lek (\$208,000) for witness protection during 2006, representing a twenty-fold increase over the 2005 appropriation. It has been reported that by the end of July 2006, 11 cases, covering 54 persons (witnesses and their extended families) had been provided with special protection measures. Between January 2005 and the end of July 2006, 15 witnesses were provided with temporary protection for a period of one month. One of the special protection cases was a victim of trafficking. However, in 2005 victims were usually unwilling to testify against their traffickers for fear of reprisal. There were also concerns that traffickers or their families were using bribes or threats to induce relatives of those victims who did testify to persuade them to withdraw their testimony.³⁰
- 3.9.6** In February 2005, the Government approved a national strategy to combat child trafficking. In November 2005, the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, following a visit to Albania, welcomed the legislative measures, but called on the authorities to 'develop a national child protection system aimed at combating the poverty that drives exploitation.' In 2005, the Government also signed a bilateral anti-child trafficking agreement with Greece and in July 2005 the Serious Crimes Prosecutor's Office charged a man with trafficking six children to Greece.³¹
- 3.9.7** The Albanian Government has a child trafficking strategy and action plan based on UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) guidelines that are intended to prevent recruitment of potential victims and protect victims, including those returned from abroad. In an effort to move anti-trafficking efforts out of the capital and into rural areas that are most heavily affected, the Government also established an institutional structure to implement the strategy and action plan in July 2006.³²
- 3.9.8** The Government provided limited services to trafficking victims during 2006. For example, the Government operated one shelter near Tirana and a national referral mechanism that enabled authorities to share data confidentially on victims returning to the country. However, several NGOs were active in addressing victims' needs in 2006, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) operated a re-integration centre in Tirana that provided

²⁸ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

²⁹ USSD 2006 (Section 5) & U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons Report June 2006 (pages 56 & 57)

³⁰ USSD 2006 (Section 5), USAID: The State of Efforts to Combat Trafficking of Persons in Albania (page 13) & AI Annual Report 2006: Albania

³¹ AI Annual Report 2006: Albania, U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons Report June 2006 (pages 56 & 57) & USSD 2006 (Section 5)

³² USSD 2006 (Section 5)

counselling and medical services, job training, and some legal assistance. The Vatra Hearth Shelter, an NGO in Vlora, provided similar services. Police treatment of trafficked women continued to improve during 2006, however, foreign women who were detained by police at times lacked translation services or were not given a choice of lawyers.³³

3.9.9 Victims of trafficking often faced significant stigmatisation from their families and society in 2006. Re-trafficking was a significant problem, with 85 out of 288 victims sheltered at the Vatra Hearth, Tieter Vision, and Different and Equal Shelters during 2006 reporting that they had been trafficked at least twice previously. Of the 288 victims at the shelters, 28 were internally trafficked and the remainder were Albanian citizens returned from other countries.³⁴

3.9.10 Sufficiency of protection. Whilst trafficking and re-trafficking of persons and especially women is clearly a problem in Albania, the Government has taken steps to curb this, introducing increasingly stringent laws and safeguards for those who may face trafficking. There are a number of examples of the prosecution and conviction of traffickers, though some receive the minimum sentence. Considering the above and taking into account the caselaw quoted below in general there is a sufficiency of protection for victims or potential victims of traffickers.

3.9.11 Internal relocation. The law provides freedom of movement within Albania and in 2006 the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, due to significant internal migration, many citizens no longer had local registration and status, leading to a loss of access to services such as education and medical care.³⁵ Whilst there may be some difficulties accessing local services internal relocation to escape a threat from invariably-localised traffickers will not be unduly harsh.

3.9.12 Caselaw.

VD (Trafficking) Albania CG [2004] UKIAT00115. The IAT considered whether in general it is likely that an individual would be trafficked, and found that it is not reasonably likely that an individual Albanian girl or woman would be at risk of being trafficked even if the individual falls within the 14 to 17 year old age group. The tribunal also considered whether there is in general a sufficiency of protection for women who may be at risk of being trafficked and held that in the totality of evidence before them that there is in general a sufficiency of protection against trafficking in Albania. The Tribunal noted the 2003 case of **UKIAT 00023 K** (see below) but found that this turned on the particular facts of that case and should not be relied upon in support of the proposition that, in general terms, there is a real risk that a particular individual would become a victim of trafficking or that there is in general insufficient protection for trafficked victims.

K [2003] UKIAT 00023 the IAT found that women from the north east of Albania who claim to have been or to be at risk of being trafficked for prostitution do form a particular social group.

3.9.13 Conclusion. Trafficking continues to be a significant problem in Albania; however the Government has taken steps to curb the activities of traffickers and to ensure that victims or potential victims can obtain protection from the authorities. There are a number of examples of the prosecution and conviction of traffickers and while some have received the minimum sentence others have been jailed for 10-20 years. As defined in the caselaw noted above, some, but not all, trafficking victims from Albania will be members of a particular social group. Generally there is a sufficiency of protection for individuals in this category and most applicants will be able to relocate to escape localised threats from traffickers. Therefore, in most cases a grant of asylum or Humanitarian Protection will not be appropriate. However, claims will only be clearly unfounded where the claimant clearly has access to sufficiency of protection or internal relocation is clearly available.

³³ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

³⁴ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

³⁵ USSD 2006 (Section 2)

3.10 Victims of domestic violence

- 3.10.1** Some women claimants will apply for asylum or make a human rights claim based on ill-treatment amounting to persecution at the hands of members of their family due to domestic violence and that the authorities are not willing or able to offer sufficiency of protection.
- 3.10.2 *Treatment.*** Domestic violence against women, including spousal abuse, remained a serious problem during 2005 and 2006. In traditionally male-dominated Albanian society, social norms and lax police response resulted in much abuse going unreported, and it was difficult to quantify the number of women who were victims of rape, domestic violence, or sexual harassment. However, surveys indicated that domestic violence was common, affecting up to 40 per cent of women and affected women of all ages. From January to September 2005, the centre for Civil Legal Initiative's received 180 complaints of domestic violence.³⁶
- 3.10.3** In 2006, many communities, particularly those from the north-eastern part of the country, still followed the traditional code, the *kanun*, under which, according to some interpretations, women are considered to be, and were treated as, chattel. Some interpretations of the *kanun* dictate that a woman's duty is to serve her husband and to be subordinate to him in all matters.³⁷
- 3.10.4** On 18 December 2006, parliament enacted the country's first law against domestic violence. The Government developed and introduced the law with the assistance of the Women's Legal Rights Project. The law allows victims of violence to obtain protection orders from the courts in civil proceedings, orders that will then be served to the alleged abuser. If the abuser violates the order, then he can be arrested and prosecuted. The law also requires the government to set up services for victims and to raise public awareness of domestic violence throughout the country.³⁸
- 3.10.5** The Government did not have programmes to combat domestic violence or assist victims in 2006. The Women to Women organization, a Sweden-based NGO, reported that there were approximately six domestic violence hot lines that operated throughout the country. The hot line that served mainly the northern part of the country received approximately 20 calls per month from women reporting some form of violence. Shtreheza, an NGO that operated two shelters for battered women in Tirana, reported an increase in cases of domestic violence and that both facilities were at maximum occupancy, mainly due to better awareness and access to help.³⁹
- 3.10.6** The law criminalises rape, including spousal rape, however in 2006 the concept of spousal rape was not well established, and often neither the authorities nor the public considered it to be a crime, subsequently spousal rape was often not reported or prosecuted in practice.⁴⁰
- 3.10.7** Women were not excluded, by law or in practice, from any occupation in 2006 and the law mandates equal pay for equal work. However, this provision was not fully implemented in 2005, although women continued gradually to gain economic power. Women enjoyed equal access to higher education in 2006, but they were not accorded full and equal opportunity in their careers, and well-educated women were often under-employed or worked outside their field of training.⁴¹

³⁶ USSD 2006 (Section 5), USSD 2005 (Section 5) & AI Annual Report 2006: Albania

³⁷ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

³⁸ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

³⁹ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

⁴⁰ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

⁴¹ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

3.10.8 The law provides equal rights for men and women under family law, property law, and in the judicial system. In practice, cultural traditions resulted in men often being favoured over women during 2006. In May 2006, the Government abolished the State Committee on Equal Opportunity, which was responsible for drafting, promoting, and monitoring governmental gender equality programs, and replaced it with a new Directorate of Equal Opportunity within the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunity.⁴²

3.10.9 Sufficiency of protection. The law guarantees equal rights for men and women and promotes equal opportunities in order to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination and in general the authorities are willing to offer sufficiency of protection to women in Albania. However, discrimination and violence against women persist especially in the north of the country and individuals may not be able to access sufficiency of protection due to cultural constraints. In some cases, the actions of individual police officers may not be appropriate and therefore may not amount to sufficient protection.

3.10.10 Internal relocation. The law provides freedom of movement within Albania and in 2006 the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, due to significant internal migration, many citizens no longer had local registration and status, leading to a loss of access to services such as education and medical care.⁴³ Whilst there may be some difficulties accessing local services internal relocation to escape an invariably localised threat from a husband or other members of a family will not be unduly harsh.

3.10.11 Caselaw.

DM (Sufficiency of Protection – PSG – Women – Domestic Violence) Albania CG [2004] UKIAT 00059 Heard on 15 March 2004, promulgated on the 1 April 2004.

The appellant fled Albania because her ex-boyfriend threatened to kill her. The police considered the threats. The IAT found that the Adjudicator was wrong to construe the judgments in **Shah & Islam v. Secretary of State for the Home Department [1999] Imm AR 283** as providing any broad basis for saying that women generally are to be regarded as capable of forming a particular social group for Refugee Convention purposes. **Shah & Islam** dealt with very specific circumstances under which it can be held that there is lack of sufficiency of protection for women generally in Pakistan. The situation in Albania is entirely different from that in Pakistan and there is no evidence to suggest that the position of women is actively undermined by the provision of law. The Tribunal found that there is sufficiency of protection for women in general and that their position in society is not actively undermined by the provision of law.

As regards sufficiency of protection the IAT referred to **Osman v UK [2002] 29 EHRR245** – and concluded that in connection with Article 2 one has to bear in mind the difficulties involved in policing modern society, the unpredictability of human conduct, and the operational choices which have to be made in terms of priorities and resources. An obligation to provide protection had to be interpreted in a way which does not impose an impossible or disproportionate burden on the authorities.

3.10.12 Conclusion. There is social discrimination and violence against women in Albania particularly in the north of the country and although in general the authorities are able and willing to offer sufficiency of protection there may be individual cases when the attitude of individual police officers may limit the protection offered. However, the Government has passed legislation that outlaws discrimination against women and women are not excluded from any employment or occupation. In addition, there are also a number of NGOs who work to promote women's rights and campaign against discrimination and violence. Most claimants will be able to internally relocate to escape localised threats from members of their family. Therefore, in most cases a grant of asylum or Humanitarian Protection will not be appropriate and cases are likely to be clearly unfounded.

3.11 Gay men

⁴² USSD 2006 (Section 5)

⁴³ USSD 2006 (Section 2)

- 3.11.1** Some claimants will apply for asylum or make a human rights claim based on ill-treatment amounting to persecution at the hands of the Albanian authorities or ordinary Albanian citizens due to their sexual orientation.
- 3.11.2 *Treatment.*** Before 1995 homosexuality in Albania was illegal with Article 137 of the Penal Code reading simply: 'Homosexuality is punishable by: up to ten years of imprisonment'. However on the 20 January 1995 after a campaign by the Gay Albania Society within Albania, and international pressure orchestrated by the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the Council of Europe consensual homosexual acts between adults became legal. Under Article 116 of the Criminal Code, the age of consent for same-sex sexual acts is set at 18, with a maximum penalty for infringement of five years imprisonment.⁴⁴ However, despite this law change the US State Department reported that societal discrimination against gay men persisted during 2006.⁴⁵
- 3.11.3** NGOs claimed that the police targeted the country's gay community for abuse during 2006. According to the general secretary of Gay Albania, the police often arbitrarily arrested gay men and then physically and verbally abused them while they were in detention. In August 2006, police arrested the secretary general of Gay Albania, a gay rights NGO, and three others on prostitution charges. The Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG) carried out an investigation and reported that while in detention the four were mistreated by other prisoners and insulted by prison forces.⁴⁶
- 3.11.4** According to the ombudsman's office, in June 2005 police at the Tirana police commissariat detained, insulted, and physically mistreated a member of the Gay Albania association. Medical experts verified the mistreatment, and the ombudsman's office started an investigation. No action had been taken against the police by the end of 2006.⁴⁷
- 3.11.5 *Sufficiency of protection.*** Although homosexuality is legal in Albania there is continuing societal discrimination against gay men and in some circumstances the attitude of individual police officers may limit the effectiveness of any protection offered by the state.
- 3.11.6 *Internal relocation.*** The law provides freedom of movement within Albania and in 2006 the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, due to significant internal migration, many citizens no longer had local registration and status, leading to a loss of access to services such as education and medical care.⁴⁸ Whilst there may be some difficulties accessing local services internal relocation to escape an invariably localised threat from a rogue local police or ordinary members of the Albanian population will not be unduly harsh.
- 3.11.7 *Caselaw.***

IM (Risk – Objective Evidence – Homosexuals) Albania CG [2003] UKIAT 00067 Heard 15 July 2003, promulgated 8 September 2003. After a review of the available, albeit limited, objective evidence the Tribunal had regard to the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the presence of an officially registered gay rights group and the almost entire absence of any reported ill-treatment of homosexuals in Albania since 1994. The IAT concluded that there was also no evidence to show that the police or the Albanian authorities ill-treat Gay men.

- 3.11.8 *Conclusion.*** There is societal discrimination against gay men in Albania and the police may not be able to offer sufficient protection in all cases. However, this discrimination will generally not amount to persecution. The IAT found in **UKIAT 00067** that there was no evidence to support the view that gay men would be subject to any actions from either the authorities or the populace that would amount to persecution or breach Article 3 of the ECHR. However, there cannot be said to be an openly gay and lesbian community in

⁴⁴ The International Lesbian Gay Association (ILGA) World Legal Survey: Albania

⁴⁵ USSD 2006 (Introduction)

⁴⁶ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

⁴⁷ USSD 2006 (Section 5)

⁴⁸ USSD 2006 (Section 2)

Albania and there is no evidence of national protection specifically in relation to gay men and lesbians. In the circumstances, where such a claim is refused it will not normally be appropriate to certify as clearly unfounded.

3.12 Prison conditions

- 3.12.1** Claimants may claim that they cannot return to Albania due to the fact that there is a serious risk that they will be imprisoned on return and that prison conditions in Albania are so poor as to amount to torture or inhuman treatment or punishment.
- 3.12.2** The guidance in this section is concerned solely with whether prison conditions are such that they breach Article 3 of ECHR and warrant a grant of Humanitarian Protection. If imprisonment would be for a Refugee Convention reason, or in cases where for a Convention reason a prison sentence is extended above the norm, the claim should be considered as a whole but it is not necessary for prison conditions to breach Article 3 in order to justify a grant of asylum.
- 3.12.3 *Consideration.*** Conditions inside Albania's prisons and detention centres remained poor during 2006 and were marked by overcrowding, poor food quality, physical abuse of detainees and lack of medical care. In September 2006, detainees at the Ministry of Interior-run detention facility in Berat rioted and set fire to their bedding materials to protest about the poor treatment and conditions. In December 2006, there were 3,060 persons held in prisons designed for 2,718 and 752 persons in pre-trial detention facilities designed for 671. However, pre-trial conditions at Lezhe prison improved significantly during 2006 due to foreign donor support and human rights training for prison guards and administrators.⁴⁹
- 3.12.4** According to the General Directorate of Prisons, there were 80 women serving in Prison 325 for women in Tirana and 47 women in pre-trial detention. A nursery was constructed at Prison 325 and in September 2006 it housed two children. Juvenile convicts and detainees were separated from adults in prison and all convicted minors were held in the juvenile wing of the Vagarr prison where they received basic education.⁵⁰
- 3.12.5** Physical abuse of prisoners and corruption of prison guards and officials was a major problem during 2006. 178 guards and officials were dismissed for corruption or misconduct and charges were pending against five high-level prison officials for corruption. In 2006, the Government permitted international human rights observers to visit both pre-trial detention centres and prisons; there were no reports of refusals to permit access for inspections by domestic independent human rights monitors.⁵¹
- 3.12.6 *Conclusion.*** Whilst prison conditions in Albania are poor with overcrowding and a lack of food and medical care being particular problems, conditions are unlikely to reach the Article 3 threshold. Therefore, even where claimants can demonstrate a real risk of imprisonment on return to Albania a grant of Humanitarian Protection will not generally be appropriate. However, the individual factors of each case should be considered to determine whether detention will cause a particular individual in his particular circumstances to suffer treatment contrary to Article 3, relevant factors being the likely length of detention, the likely type of detention facility, and the individual's age and state of health. Where in an individual case treatment does reach the Article 3 threshold a grant of Humanitarian Protection will be appropriate.

4. Discretionary Leave

- 4.1** Where an application for asylum and Humanitarian Protection falls to be refused there may be compelling reasons for granting Discretionary Leave (DL) to the individual concerned. (See Asylum Instructions on Discretionary Leave) Where the claim includes dependent

⁴⁹ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

⁵⁰ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

⁵¹ USSD 2006 (Section 1)

family members consideration must also be given to the particular situation of those dependants in accordance with the Asylum Instructions on Article 8 ECHR.

- 4.2** With particular reference to Albania the types of claim which may raise the issue of whether or not it will be appropriate to grant DL are likely to fall within the following categories. Each case must be considered on its individual merits and membership of one of these groups should *not* imply an automatic grant of DL. There may be other specific circumstances related to the applicant, or dependent family members who are part of the claim, not covered by the categories below which warrant a grant of DL - see the Asylum Instructions on Discretionary Leave and the Asylum Instructions on Article 8 ECHR.

4.3 Minors claiming in their own right

- 4.3.1** Minors claiming in their own right who have not been granted asylum or HP can only be returned where they have family to return to or there are adequate reception, care and support arrangements. At the moment we do not have sufficient information to be satisfied that there are adequate reception, care and support arrangements in place.
- 4.3.2** Minors claiming in their own right without a family to return to, or where there are no adequate reception, care and support arrangements, should if they do not qualify for leave on any more favourable grounds be granted Discretionary Leave for a period as set out in relevant Asylum Instructions.

4.4 Medical treatment

- 4.4.1** Claimants may claim they cannot return to Albania due to a lack of specific medical treatment. See the IDI on Medical Treatment which sets out in detail the requirements for Article 3 and/or 8 to be engaged.
- 4.4.2** A 2002 report by the European Observatory on Health Care Systems noted that Albanian health care services are delivered in poor facilities with inadequate equipment. Eligibility for health care is based on citizenship and payment of insurance contributions, and access to free primary care and pharmaceuticals is in theory restricted to individuals who have paid their insurance contributions. Access to health care services remains restricted by the country's inability to afford a full range of services and to replace facilities and services damaged during civil unrest. The 2002 report concluded that Albania's health care system is facing huge challenges, yet the basic infrastructure for health care delivery is being maintained, despite the difficulties, and rationalised.⁵² Hospitals in Albania are reportedly not able to provide high quality services due to a limited budget and according to World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates, expenditure as a percentage of GDP was 6.6% in 2004. The World Health Organization also noted that there were approximately 301 hospital beds per 100,000 of the population in 2004 and there were 118 physicians per 100,000 of the population.⁵³
- 4.4.3** The Albanian pharmaceutical industry produces a number of essential drugs, whilst other drugs are imported but are more expensive for consumers. In 2002, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that there were over 500 private pharmacies which were well stocked and better managed than government pharmacies. WHO also noted that there was no shortage of essential drugs, but the lack of a good regulatory framework allowed poor practices, even in private pharmacies, such as poor quality drugs, selling after expiry dates and the sale of unregistered drugs.⁵⁴

HIV/AIDS

⁵² World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe: Health Care Systems in Transition - Albania 2002

⁵³ WHO Regional Office for Europe: Selected Basic Statistics - Extracted from Health for All (HFA) Database

⁵⁴ WHO Regional Office for Europe: Programmes with activities – Pharmaceuticals

4.4.4 23 AIDS deaths were reported in Albania by mid-2003, and by December 2004, Albania had just 141 confirmed cases of HIV/AIDS with 22 new cases being reported during the year. In March 2004, the Government allocated \$150,000 to purchasing anti-retroviral drugs and signed an agreement to purchase them through UNICEF. An infectious diseases specialist at Tirana Hospital said that in Albania HIV treatment was a multi-disciplinary intervention including home care of the patient, psychosocial support, nursing care, and end-of-life care.⁵⁵

4.4.5 Caselaw.

[2002] UKIAT 00060 C (Albania) Heard 10 March 2003, Promulgated 4 September 2003.

The case centres on the question of whether the psychological condition of the father and his eldest son is such that it would breach their rights under Articles 3 & 8 of the ECHR if they were to be returned to Albania. The IAT considered the harm that return would cause and whether there was any direct responsibility of the contracting state for the infliction of harm and found in this case that there was none. The Tribunal found that there was appropriate medical treatment available in Albania for the appellant and his son and there would not be breach of Article 3. The IAT also considered Article 8 following the case of **Devaseelan** and **Ullah**. On the basis of the ratio in **Ullah**, which binds the IAT, the Article 8 claim must fail, even though the IAT do not consider that there would be the flagrant denial or gross violation necessary under the ratio of **Devaseelan**.

4.4.6 Where a caseowner considers that the circumstances of the individual claimant and the situation in the country reach the threshold detailed in the IDI on Medical Treatment making removal contrary to Article 3 or 8 a grant of discretionary leave to remain will be appropriate. Such cases should always be referred to a Senior Caseworker for consideration prior to a grant of Discretionary Leave.

5. Returns

5.1 Factors that affect the practicality of return such as the difficulty or otherwise of obtaining a travel document should not be taken into account when considering the merits of an asylum or human rights claim. Where the claim includes dependent family members their situation on return should however be considered in line with the Immigration Rules, in particular paragraph 395C requires the consideration of all relevant factors known to the Secretary of State, and with regard to family members refers also to the factors listed in paragraphs 365-368 of the Immigration Rules.

5.2 Albanian nationals may return voluntarily to any region of Albania at any time by way of the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and co-funded by the European Refugee Fund. IOM will provide advice and help with obtaining travel documents and booking flights, as well as organising reintegration assistance in Albania. The programme was established in 2001, and is open to those awaiting an asylum decision or the outcome of an appeal, as well as failed asylum seekers. Albanian nationals wishing to avail themselves of this opportunity for assisted return to Albania should be put in contact with the IOM offices in London on 020 7233 0001 or www.iomlondon.org.

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⁵⁵ UNAIDS: Albania & UNICEF, Albania - Real Lives Stories: Helping Her Family, a Woman Fights HIV/AIDS Stigma

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