

Albania – Country Report



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1. Key Findings

- Data collection on a range of issues occurs, but storage remains chiefly non-electronic;
- Significant efforts are being made to disseminate environmental information in spite of limited internal exchange;
- No systematic approach exists to data storage and exchange, though some attempts have been made to introduce indicator-based reporting;
- NGOs feel authorities respond poorly to information requests, 83 percent were semi or dissatisfied with the range of topics and documentation available, 50 percent found it to be poorly presented, and 33 percent indicated a wish to access clearly presented information online via the web.
- Future priorities include legally binding frameworks, staff trainings, technical infrastructure improvements and demonstration projects.

2. Current Status of Environmental Information Systems

Data Collection and Management

The primary agency responsible for environmental issues in Albania is the Ministry of the Environment. The Institute of Hydrometeorology monitors water and air quality, and relies on some 100 hydrological stations nationwide for water quality sampling and about 100 meteorological stations for air quality measurements. Water and air monitoring, particularly in urban areas, is also conducted by the Institute of Public Health, part of the Ministry of Health. Biodiversity and ecosystems within national parks, water bodies and forests and pastures are monitored by the Institute of Biology

and by the Directorate of Pastures and Forests, a part of the Ministry of Agriculture. Soil sampling is the responsibility of the Institute of Soils (Ministry of Agriculture) and includes assessment of various concentrations of nitrate, phosphate, potassium, calcium, magnesium, HCO₃ and organic mass.

In spite of this impressive network, data collection and management systems remain weak, with some geographical regions and pollutant types not monitored. Heavy metals in drinking water, for example, are seldom monitored. Urban areas receive more attention than rural areas. Once data has been collected, it is typically archived in hard copy at the Ministry of the Environment. There is no electronic storage of data either locally or centrally. However, the Institute of Statistics of Albania does maintain a limited amount of its own environmental data in electronic form.

Interagency Cooperation

There is only limited coordination between those involved in monitoring, and no methodological standards for either data collection, management, or scientific analysis. Agencies engaged in monitoring and analysis follow their own protocols, set by their individual governing councils. Attempts are being made to integrate European Environment Agency (EEA) reporting standards, but this has yet to become operational. The strengthening of Albanian relations with the EEA (REReP project 1.6) is addressing the issue of data management, and has provided the Ministry of Environment with equipment related to information systems, including servers, a computer for web publishing, etc.

No central electronic database is in place for sharing environmental data among those inter-governmental committees with mandates for assessing the state of the environment. The exchange of environmental information among government officials seldom occurs, and in decision making is common only during the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process, as and when required by law.

Public Accessibility

Albania is a signatory of the Aarhus Convention¹. Its constitution states that everyone has the right “to be informed of the state of the environment and its protection” and to a healthy and ecologically sound environment. A ‘State of the Environment’ report is issued every two years by the environment ministry. This details the status of water, air, soils, urban areas, waste, biodiversity, existing environmental institutional capacities and financing mechanisms. The report is published in hardcopy as well as electronic format. From 2003, the ministry will also publish an ‘Environmental Bulletin’ three times per year. This will report on current environmental protection measures and concerns, and will seek to foster the more active exchange of environmental information and dialogue with the public. It is planned to be made available in electronic format and via the website of the environment ministry, once this page will be operational late summer 2003. Hundreds of copies of each Bulletin, and thousands of ‘State of the Environment’ reports will be distributed to a mailing list, consisting of research and academic institutes, other governmental bodies, Regional Environmental Agencies and NGOs.

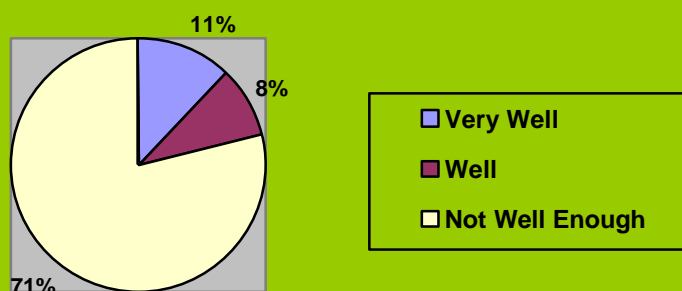
¹ UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

An Environmental Information Center has recently been established within the environment ministry, and maintains a physical collection of various studies and details on those projects implemented by the ministry. It is intended to serve as the main gateway for accessing environmental information, but its capacity is limited due to the fact it employs just one environmental specialist. The Information Center will also host a portal for official environmental information within the website (currently under construction) of the environment ministry at: <www.moe.gov.al>. This site will provide full text access to many ministry of environment documents, including the latest state of the environment report, environmental monitoring reports, compliance reports submitted to Convention secretariats, environmental laws, etc. It will also link visitors to other Albanian and international organisations.

To date, the state Albanian Telegraphic Agency has served as the main institution responsible for the distribution of official information. Some of its environmental information is made available electronically at: <www.ata-al.net> and is distributed in hardcopy for instance, free of charge at fairs.

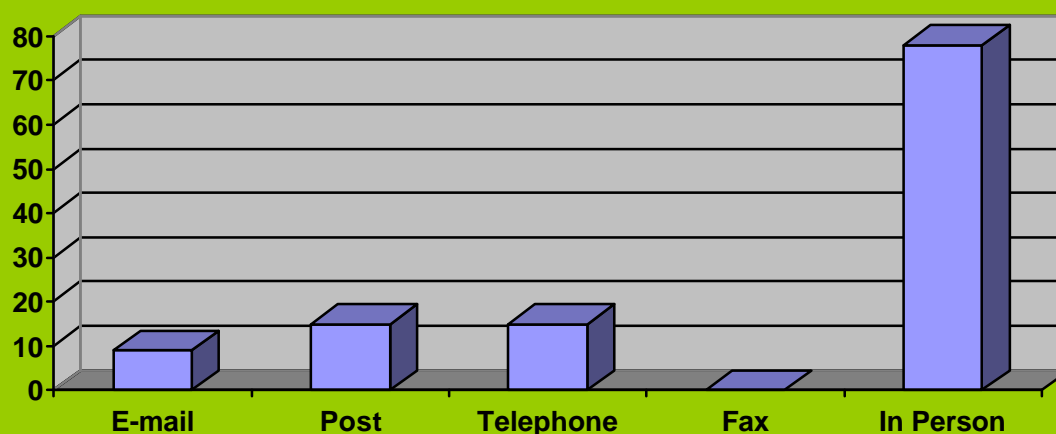
What NGOs had to say about the usefulness, accessibility and reliability of official environmental information

NGOs depend on government bodies for current and reliable environmental information. Of 34 surveyed, 93 percent have requested information from the environment ministry or another relevant authority, and 32 percent of these submit more than three requests per year. Seventy one percent of NGOs felt, however, that authorities are not adequately responding to their requests (see pie chart below), noting in particular slow administrative procedures and incomprehensive or less than useful information. Only 50 percent said that responses were generally provided in time, and 22 percent claimed that responses never arrive. Twenty five percent indicated they have been denied information at least once.



As regards the range of information (topics) and documentation made available, 83 percent were dissatisfied or semi-satisfied. Respondents requested better access to all main types of environmental data, as well as legislation and policies, state of the environment reports, decisionmaking processes, environmental impact assessment reports, and contacts, particularly in electronic form and over the Internet. Concerning the quality of official information, 50 percent found it generally useful and informative, though the same number found it to be poorly presented, and 67 percent of respondents considered the information to be only “somewhat up-to-date.” Among the improvements recommended were collaboration and fora with NGOs and think-tanks in the field, clear explanation of facts and figures, professional verification, as well as recruitment of staff qualified to manage environmental data.

Concerning the methods used to request environmental information, the following chart indicates an overwhelming majority (78 percent) of NGOs make enquiries in person. Not surprisingly, email and fax tend to be the most infrequently used. In the future, 33 percent indicated a wish to access information online via the web.



3. Obstacles and Challenges for the Future

The lack of clear responsibilities in the environmental information management field has prevented the development of any formal exchange, reporting or distribution system. The research institutions, which are chiefly responsible for collecting environmental data do not follow common guidelines, which limits their cooperation and renders successful progress (e.g. a shift toward formal data exchange, and electronically stored information) negligible.

Compounded by the Ministry of Environment's lack of funding, it is forced to rely on limited human resources – both in terms of numbers of staff, and their capacity – to compile and process information which is collected and stored manually.

The Environmental Information Center is well equipped in terms of computer equipment and hardware infrastructure (unlike many government departments and non-governmental organisations who cannot easily access the Internet or who still rely on outdated laboratory processes). However, these tools are not yet adequately developed or utilised: its server, capable of supporting a Local Area Network (LAN) is under utilised for exchanging or publishing information. Electronic information dissemination is hampered by the lack of adequate national telecommunications services.

4. Needs and Priorities

The National Environmental Action Plan of 2001 defines a number of priorities regarding the management of environmental information:

- Establishment of environmental units in the main ministries and municipalities;
- Improvement of the environmental inspection system;
- Distribution of environmental information through local authorities;
- Targeted information dissemination to NGOs, mass media and schools, and promotion of their participation in environmental policy/legislation formulation;
- Provision of full access to environmental impact assessment reports.

In addition, with respect to the challenges outlines above, the following priorities are highlighted.

The **legal framework** for data collection, reporting and management must be strengthened together with the integration of procedures and **codes of conduct** regarding the relevant organisations. Adapting standards for environmental reporting will facilitate cooperation between the environment ministry and scientific institutions, and between the Ministry of Environment and the EU and its institutions. Legal mechanisms also need to be developed supporting the **implementation of the Aarhus Convention** and information dissemination.

Capacity building of environmental personnel is necessary to ensure they are capable of meeting new standards. **Training** of the relevant staff in data validation, storage, database management and dissemination to the public is necessary. Training on media outreach, cooperation with school teachers, and on how to host community meetings are essential steps towards ensuring targeted dissemination of useful information to

increase environmental awareness. Some of these can be conducted by national institutions such as the Training Institute for Public Administration (see: <www.itap.gov.al>), while others should be conducted through relevant international organisations.

The **technical infrastructure** needs strengthening with the installation of a Local Area Network between the Ministry of Environment and Information Center to enable the more efficient internal exchange and accessibility of data. For the country as a whole, modern telecommunications networks and Internet access would enable cooperation between the environment ministry and the country's scientific institutions. Those institutions involved in data collection (e.g. the Institute of Hydrometeorology's 'Observatory') require new monitoring equipment and measurement devices.

Pilot projects demonstrating and promoting best practices with regard to one selected environmental media are required. These are expected to catalyse the much-needed cooperation within the country and with other countries, international organisations, donors, support agencies and partners.

Further details on priorities and foreseen actions are detailed in the National Action Plan included overleaf drafted with the REReP 1.8 project team.

5. Case Study on Donor Funding

<<To be completed >>

Objectives

Expenditures

The budget clearly indicates how money was divided between these actions:

ITEM	SUM (Eur)
Computer equipment	
Data management system design	
Trainings	
Web portal design, launch and maintenance	
Workshops	
TOTAL	

Benefits

Contact Person

Albania – Action Plan for National Environmental Information System Development

(prepared by Eno Dodbiba, Environmental Center for Administration and Technology/ECAT, Ahment Mehmeti, NGO representative, Mihallaq Qirjo, REC Country Office)

PRIORITY NEEDS	CURRENT STATUS	FORESEEN ACTIONS	EXPECTED BENEFITS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS	REQUIRED RESOURCES	MATCHING RESOURCES	TIMELINE
Institutional establishment of the environmental information system (EIS)	<p>Paper archives and manual processing of environmental data</p> <p>A recently established (Jan. 2003) Inspectorate of Environmental Protection now contributes to monitoring of pollutant emissions.</p>	Design [and install an electronic] exchange system according to user needs (including a data collection subsystem [and front end portal])	Modern functioning system for both electronic and hardcopy information transfer	<p>Hardware and software installed fully utilized and properly maintained</p> <p>Satisfied end user community</p>	<p>Fulltime technical expertise to assist know-how transfer</p> <p>Hardware and software solutions</p> <p>Training of staff on how to use the system (i.e. shift from paper archives to electronic, use of intranet, manipulation of documents in network)</p>	<p>REReP 1.6 REReP 1.7 REReP 2.2</p> <p>Action completed by environment ministry with the support of ECAT</p>	<p>Conceptualisation of the system within 6 months</p> <p>Functioning web portal within 12 months</p>
Legal framework	<p>Environmental issues are covered by the Constitution</p> <p>National Law on the Environment enshrines the public's right to information</p> <p>No legal act establishing environmental monitoring system</p>	<p>Pass a law mandating an environmental monitoring system</p> <p>Establish and publish reporting standards that conform with those of the EU/EEA.</p> <p>Enforce laws pertaining to EIS</p>	<p>Compliance with EU standards</p> <p>Improved quality of and access to information</p>	New laws and standards entry into force	Expert assistance in legal drafting	<p>REReP 1.6 REReP 1.7 REReP 2.2</p>	Within 2003

**Snapshot of Environmental Information Systems in South Eastern Europe:
Current Progress and Future Priorities**

Data collection and management	Environmental quality monitoring is carried out by scientific research institutes or ministry directorates without clear assignment of responsibility or guidelines	Review and improvement of national monitoring practices Standardisation of laboratory sampling, storage and reporting practices	Modern and integrated environmental monitoring and data exchange system	Environmental data collected according to agreed standards and properly archived	Hardware and software solutions Internet connectivity via dedicated lines Training of staff on techniques and methodologies for systematic data collection	REReP 1.6 REReP 1.7 REReP 2.2	1.5 years
Dissemination of Environmental Information	State of the Environment report Monthly Bulletin; Frequent information packages for media and NGOs (press releases, leaflets, brochures, memos, and so on) National environmental web portal under construction	Distribution system aimed at delivering key environmental information in a timely and efficient manner to NGOs, media and public	Information on environment accessible to all stakeholders (national and international)	No complaints regarding lack of environmental information Public participation in decisionmaking	Hardware and software solutions	REReP 1.6 REReP 1.7 REReP 2.2	1 year
Use of environmental information in policy setting and decision making	Reports and materials made available upon request to ministries and local authorities	Implementation/ preparation of EIA and SEA processes /statements Provision of useful information to governments at various levels	Use of information by decisionmakers Effective policy making Long-term environmental improvements	Consideration of environmental issues within improved state policy	Political willingness to consider environmental issues	REReP 1.6 REReP 1.7 REReP 2.2	2 years

REReP 1.6: Continuation of Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and FYR Macedonia and Extension to Croatia

REReP 1.7: Strengthening National Environmental Protection Agencies and their Inspectorates in the South Eastern European Region

REReP 1.8: Developing National Environmental Information Systems in the SEE Countries

REReP 2.2: Support Developing Strategies for Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in South Eastern Europe