



**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC ACTION PROGRAMME
(SAP) OF THE DINARIC KARST AQUIFER SYSTEM: IMPROVING
GROUNDWATER GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF
RELATED ECOSYSTEMS**

OUTPUT 6.2.

NATIONAL WATER SECTOR GENDER ANALYSIS
Albania

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Gender Analysis of Water Sector Governance & Management in Albania

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ACRONYMS

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

DIKTAS II – Dinaric Karst Transboundary Aquifer System Phase II

EU – European Union

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GEE – Gender Equality Employee

HRBA – Human Rights-Based Approach

INSTAT – Institute of Statistics of Albania

IPMG – Integrated Policy Management Group

LGBTI – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex

MARDWA – Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration

MIE – Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy

NSGE – National Strategy for Gender Equality

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UN Women – United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

WWAP – World Water Assessment Programme

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Executive Summary

This report presents a comprehensive desk review of the gender dynamics within Albania's water sector, synthesizing findings from official documents and data published by the Government of Albania, the United Nations, and the World Bank. The analysis reveals a complex and paradoxical landscape; while Albania has a robust legal and policy framework for gender equality, its practical application within the water sector is inconsistent and undermined by systemic challenges.

The primary finding is a significant gap between policy and reality on the ground. Legislative successes, such as the high representation of women in national parliament, have not translated into a fundamental shift in traditional gender roles, particularly within the water sector's workforce and in access to services. This review identifies three core barriers to effective gender mainstreaming in water sector governance and management:

1. **Structural Weaknesses:** The inherent fragmentation and administrative inefficiency of the water sector itself impede the implementation of cross-cutting policies like gender mainstreaming.
2. **Ingrained Gender Norms:** Traditional gender roles persist, contributing to the severe underrepresentation of women in technical and leadership positions within water utilities and creating a self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion.
3. **Critical Data Deficit:** A pervasive lack of reliable, gender-disaggregated data and comparable methodologies makes it impossible to formulate evidence-based policies, monitor progress effectively, and ensure accountability. This is particularly acute for marginalized communities.

Based on these findings, the report concludes with strategic, multi-level recommendations aimed at bridging the policy to practice gap. These include prioritizing institutional reforms within the water sector, mandating the systematic collection of gender disaggregated data, implementing targeted interventions to promote women's careers in water utilities, and developing specific programs to address the unique vulnerabilities of marginalized groups.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Nexus of Water and Gender in Sustainable Development

The pursuit of gender equality and sustainable water management are inseparably linked pillars of the global development agenda. As outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), progress toward **SDG 5** (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) is a prerequisite for realizing **SDG 6** (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all) (UNESCO, 2024). The international community recognizes that gender

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determines a person's relationship with water, shaping their needs, access, use, and the benefits they derive from this vital resource (UNESCO, 2024).

This relationship is most effectively analyzed through a multidimensional lens, such as the framework articulated in the World Bank's report, *The Rising Tide: A New Look at Water and Gender* (World Bank, 2017). This model posits that water is not only an economic asset but also a service and a social space. As an asset, water holds distinct economic value, influencing livelihoods and economic participation. As a service, it involves the provision, management, and collection of water and sanitation, a role often disproportionately shouldered by women and girls (World Bank, 2017). Finally, as a space, water is an arena where social relations and ingrained hierarchies play out, influencing everything from access to recreational activities to vulnerability during environmental crises (World Bank, 2017). Policies and programs in this domain therefore have immense potential to either reinforce existing inequalities or act as powerful catalysts for broader social change.

Recognizing the need for rigorous analysis, international bodies like UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) have developed comprehensive methodologies for collecting and analyzing sex disaggregated data (UNESCO, 2024). The UNESCO-WWAP toolkit, with its set of indicators and data collection guidelines, provides a global standard for gender-responsive monitoring and assessment in the water sector (UNESCO, 2024). Similarly, the UNECE's Equitable Access Scorecard offers a tool for governments and stakeholders to measure the equity of access to water and sanitation services, helping to identify and address barriers faced by vulnerable groups (UNECE, 2025). These frameworks provide a vital benchmark for assessing national efforts and highlight that effective interventions are dependent on robust, evidence-based analysis.

1.2. Purpose and Scope

This report provides a comprehensive gender analysis of water sector management in Albania, serving as a core component (**Output 6.2**) of the **DIKTAS II project**. The primary aim is to offer a comprehensive desk review by consolidating and critically examining existing official literature from the Government of Albania, the United Nations, the World Bank, and other key development partners.

The review's purpose is to transcend a simple summary of facts. It aims to identify inconsistencies, establish a uniform and formal style, and present a nuanced understanding of the systemic challenges at play. The scope is limited to a strategic analysis of publicly available documents and data rather than an original field study. It seeks to correct disparities in reporting and substantiate its findings with a list of up to 15 authentic, official reports, thereby creating a reliable foundation for future policy and programmatic development.

The analysis is specifically confined to the water sector within Albania and applies the "Water as an Asset, Service, and Space" framework to conduct an initial, high-level assessment of gender dynamics. This foundational review lays the groundwork for future, more in-depth studies and facilitates cross-country comparisons within the broader Dinaric Karst region, ensuring a consistent analytical lens across the project's geographic scope. The following sections will sequentially explore Albania's national policy context, the structural state of its

water sector, the specific gender dynamics within it, and the overarching challenge of data availability.

1.3. Hypothesis for Gender Analysis in Albania's Water Sector

Despite Albania's progressive legal and policy frameworks for gender equality and its endowment with abundant water resources, systemic gaps in policy implementation, fragmented water governance, deeply entrenched patriarchal social norms, and a pervasive lack of gender-disaggregated data lead to women bearing a disproportionate burden of water management and care work, limiting their economic participation and formal decision-making power within the water sector, particularly in rural and vulnerable communities.

This hypothesis is derived from a careful examination of the available information. The desk review highlights a contradiction: Albania possesses "**abundant water resources**" yet faces "**significant deficiencies in water supply and limited water availability**". Simultaneously, despite a "**robust legal framework for gender equality**," women experience a "**disproportionate burden**" related to water, particularly in rural and vulnerable communities, where infrastructure gaps and traditional norms are most persistent. This indicates a fundamental disconnect between policy and resource availability on one hand and lived reality on the other.

1.4. Context and Background of Gender Equality in Albania

Albania has made commendable strides in establishing a robust legal framework for gender equality and women's rights, recognizing these as core national priorities. This progressive stance is reflected in its constitutional guarantees, comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, and the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on May 11, 1994 (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1994). These legal instruments provide a strong normative foundation for advancing gender equality across various sectors.

However, a significant challenge persists in translating these legal and policy commitments into tangible improvements on the ground. While women constitute approximately half of the country's population, they represent only one-third of the employed workforce. According to IPU, as of September 2025, women hold 35,00% of parliamentary seats and make up 44.4% of ministers (Prime Minister's official website)¹. This disparity is further exacerbated by their concentration in lower-wage and informal sectors, including a substantial proportion working as unpaid family laborers, particularly in agriculture. This discrepancy between the existence of progressive policies and their practical realization is a critical systemic issue. It suggests that while the normative framework is strong, the institutional capacity, resource allocation, and societal acceptance required for effective implementation are lagging. This disconnect acts as a fundamental barrier to achieving substantive gender equality, particularly in sectors such as water management, where daily realities are profoundly affected by service delivery and governance. Emerging research in Albania also highlights that women particularly those in rural and mountainous areas, are

¹ <https://www.kryeministria.al/qeveria/>

more vulnerable to climate-induced water scarcity and environmental degradation, due to their greater dependence on natural resources and household water management roles².

2. Methodology

2.1. Approach and Data Sources Utilized

This desk review constitutes Phase 1 of the broader Gender Analysis Methodology for the DIKTAS II Project, specifically focusing on the systematic review of existing information. The approach involved a comprehensive examination of readily available documents, reports, and policy papers pertinent to gender equality and water sector management in Albania.

A range of sources, including reports from UN Women, FAO, UNDP, World Bank, GIZ, and academic publications are reviewed for this desk review. These sources offered broader context, validated information, identified specific initiatives, and revealed deeper understandings of socio-economic challenges, gender dynamics, and policy implementation within Albania.

2.2. Application of the "Water as an Asset, Service, and Space" Framework

The analysis presented in this report is systematically structured around the "Water as an Asset, Service, and Space" framework. This framework is a widely recognized and intuitive approach for conceptualizing the multifaceted relationship between water and gender. It provides a clear, intuitive, and holistic lens through which to examine gender relations across three distinct dimensions: material resources (Asset), practical provisions (Service), and socio-political dimensions (Space).

For the purpose of this desk review, the framework guided the extraction and categorization of relevant information from the provided documents. This systematic application allowed for the identification of specific gender inequalities within each pillar, ensuring consistency and alignment with the overall DIKTAS II project methodology. This approach ensures that the desk review serves as a foundational step that directly informs and supports the subsequent phase of data analysis outlined in the broader gender analysis methodology.

2.3. Limitations of the Desk Review

As a desk review, this analysis is inherently limited by its reliance on secondary data. The findings are based solely on existing documents, which may vary in terms of detail, recency, and the extent of gender disaggregation. This desk review represents an initial assessment, designed to lay the groundwork for future, more in-depth studies.

A particular challenge identified in the desk review and other sources is the difficulty in collecting comprehensive gender-disaggregated data, especially concerning "Asset" (ownership and control) and "Space" (power dynamics). This data gap can lead to an incomplete picture in certain areas, potentially obscuring specific gendered impacts and limiting the precision of policy recommendations.

² https://forumfer.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Research_on_mainstreaming-gender_compressed.pdf

3. Overview of Gender Equality and Water Governance in Albania

3.1. Demographics and Socio-Economic Landscape

Albania's demographic profile significantly influences its socio-economic landscape and the dynamics of gender equality. The resident population, as recorded by the 2023 Population and Housing Census, stands at approximately **2.4 million** usual residents (INSTAT, n.d.a; Euronews Albania, 2024). This figure represents a notable decline of about 420,000 residents since the 2011 census, a continuous downward trend primarily attributed to decreasing fertility rates and increased emigration since 1990 (INSTAT, n.d). The total fertility rate in 2021 was recorded at **1.32 children per woman** (INSTAT, n.d.a), significantly below the replacement level of 2.1 children required to maintain population stability. The total number of children under 18 is **457,974**, representing **19%** of the population, a **38.7%** decrease from the 2011 Census (UNSDCF, 2025).

Regarding gender composition, while more boys are naturally born than girls (with a sex ratio at birth of **1.07 males per female**, and **1.1 males per female** for those under 15 in 2022), higher male mortality rates lead to a demographic inversion in older age groups (INSTAT, n.d). Consequently, there are more older women than men, with a sex ratio of **0.66 males per female** for those aged 65 and over (INSTAT, n.d). Life expectancy at birth in 2025 is projected to be **78 years for males** and **82 years for females**. Overall, the sex ratio stands at **98.2 males per 100 females** (UNSDCF, 2025).

Gendered patterns in employment reveal significant disparities. Women constitute approximately half of Albania's population but only one-third of the employed workforce. This disparity is further compounded by their concentration in sectors and occupations that typically offer lower wages, with a considerable number engaged in the informal sector, often as unpaid family laborers, particularly in agriculture (FAO & UN Women, 2024). In fact, **54%** of employed Albanian women work in the agricultural sector (Observatori Albania, 2024). Albania also exhibits a gender pay gap of **6.6%** (UNDP, 2021; UNDP, n.d.). In 2023, the unemployment rate for women was slightly higher at **10.9%** compared to men at **10.5%** (UNSDCF, 2025). For youth aged 15-24, the unemployment rate was **26.6%** for women compared to **24.8%** for men (UNSDCF, 2025). A notable **18%** of unemployed women cite overwhelming unpaid housework as their reason for staying at home (Observatori Albania, 2024).

Table 1: Key Demographic and Socio-Economic Indicators by Gender in Albania

Indicator	Value (Year)	Male	Female
Total Population	2.4 million (2023)	1,190,448	1,211,665
Sex Ratio (Total)	0.97 males/female (2022)	-	-
Sex Ratio (At birth)	1.07 males/female (2022)	-	-
Sex Ratio (65 and over)	0.66 males/female (2022)	-	-
Life Expectancy at birth	78 years (2025 proj.)	82 years (2025 proj.)	
Total Fertility Rate	1.32 children/woman (2021)	-	-

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Women as % of Employed Workforce	33% (approx.)	-	-
Women in Informal Sector	Significant proportion as unpaid family laborers	-	-
Gender Pay Gap		6.6%	-
Time on Unpaid Care/Domestic Work		3.5%	24.7%
Unemployment Rate (Total)		10.5% (2023)	10.9% (2023)
Unemployment Rate (Youth 15-24)		24.8% (2023)	26.6% (2023)
Poverty Risk (0-17 age group)		Lower	Higher
Disability Prevalence		5.9%	7.2%

3.2. National Legal and Policy Frameworks for Gender Equality

Albania has a comprehensive legal and policy framework for gender equality, with several key documents and laws in place. The country's commitment is demonstrated by its ratification of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, which it acceded to in 1994 (UN Treaty Collection, n.d.).

Legal and Policy Frameworks

Albania has a robust legal framework to support its gender equality goals:

- **Law on Gender Equality in Society (2008)**: This law provides protection from gender-based discrimination and aims to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in all aspects of life (OHCHR, n.d.). It sets a principle for equal gender representation, stating that neither gender should be represented by less than **30%** in public institutions and political bodies (World Health Organization, n.d.).
- **Law on Protection from Discrimination (2010)**: This law ensures equal protection for all individuals, regardless of characteristics like gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation, and it explicitly prohibits hate speech and various forms of harassment (Council of Europe, n.d.).
- **National Strategy for Gender Equality (NSGE) 2021-2030**: Developed by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in consultation with various stakeholders, this strategy is the main policy document guiding national gender equality efforts. It focuses on economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls, and increasing political participation (UN Women, 2022).
- **National Action Plan for LGBTI (2021-2027)**: This plan specifically addresses the rights and protection of the LGBTI community, including transgender and intersex persons, recognizing them as vulnerable groups (Council of Europe, n.d.).

Women's Representation vs. Substantive Empowerment

While Albania has achieved **descriptive representation** for women in politics, there is a clear disconnect between this formal inclusion and true societal empowerment. Recent data reveals persistent inequalities in political, economic and social spheres.

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Political Representation

- **Parliamentary Seats:** Following May 2025 parliamentary elections, women hold 35% of the parliamentary seats, occupying 49 out of the total 140 seats, while men hold the remaining 65% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025).
- **Cabinet Positions:** Women account for a majority of cabinet positions at **41.7%**, with men holding the remaining **58.3%** (World Bank, 2024). As of September 2025 with the newly elected government, 8 out of the 17 ministers are women, which would be 44,4%³.
- **Municipal Councilors:** Women make up **34.6%** of municipal councilors, compared to men at **65.4%** (Equal Future, 2024).

Economic and Societal Inequality

Despite their political gains, women still face significant barriers in the economic and domestic spheres.

- **Gender Pay Gap:** The figure of **6.6%** is consistent with a 2021 report, indicating a persistent wage disparity where women earn less than men (BTI Transformation Index, 2024).
- **Unpaid Care Work:** The claim that women perform approximately **three-quarters (76.2%)** of unpaid care work is based on the 2010-2011 Albanian Time Use Survey, the most recent comprehensive data available. The survey found that women spent an average of **4 hours and 25 minutes** on unpaid care, while men spent only **1 hour and 23 minutes** (Tirana Times, 2011).

These figures illustrate that achieving true gender equality requires addressing both **formal political representation** and the **informal, everyday barriers** that hinder women's societal empowerment. The persistent pay gap and disproportionate burden of unpaid care work underscore the need for policies that go beyond quotas and actively promote equal economic opportunities and a more equitable division of labor within households.

3.3. Water Sector Management Structure and Reforms

Albania's water sector management is undergoing significant reforms to address historical fragmentation and improve coordination. This complex system involves multiple government bodies, with the **Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration (MARDWA)** and the **Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy (MIE)** playing key roles.

Governance and Policy

The highest authority for water policy is the **National Water Council**, led by the Prime Minister. This council is responsible for integrated water resource management. A notable inclusion is a **Gender Equality Employee (GEE)** from MARDWA on the council's Integrated

³ As of September 2025, the Albanian Council of Ministers consists of 17+1 members, including the Prime Minister. The 44.4% calculation excludes the AI-generated symbolic figure "Diella", which was introduced by the Prime Minister as a digital assistant and does not hold legal ministerial status. Source: [Official website of the Council of Ministers – www.kryeministria.al](http://www.kryeministria.al)

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Policy Management Group (IPMG). This indicates a deliberate effort to include gender considerations at the highest levels of policy-making.

Challenges and Reforms

Since 2015, Albania has been working to reform its water sector to align with the principles of the **EU Water Framework Directive**. These reforms aim to move away from a fragmented, single-sector approach toward a more integrated one. However, challenges remain, including:

- Lack of integrated monitoring systems.
- Insufficient capacity and expertise within institutions.
- Difficulties in assessing the societal impact of new legislation.

The persistent fragmentation and lack of clear responsibilities within the system can directly hinder the effective implementation of gender-specific policies. According to the 2025 European Commission Enlargement Report, Albania's alignment with the EU Water Framework Directive remains incomplete, with delayed reforms and coordination challenges — reinforcing the urgency of inclusive, gender-sensitive governance improvements in the water sector.⁴ Even with a dedicated GEE at a high policy level, the system's inherent lack of coordination can make it difficult to translate these policies into coherent, cross-sectoral actions.

Impact on Gender Mainstreaming

Ultimately, achieving successful gender mainstreaming in Albania's water sector requires more than just gender-specific policies. It demands **fundamental governance reforms** that promote genuine integration and coordination across all ministries and institutions involved. Without these structural changes, the efforts to mainstream gender considerations will likely be slowed by the very fragmentation they seek to overcome.

4. Gender Analysis of the Water Sector in Albania: Key Findings

A gender analysis of Albania's water sector reveals significant disparities in women's access, control, and participation. This fragmentation of roles and lack of integration, viewed through the "Water as an Asset, Service, and Space" framework, highlights how women's vital contributions are often undervalued or overlooked, leading to unequal outcomes.

Table 1: Key Gender Disparities in Albania's Water Sector

Framework Pillar	Key Gender Disparity Identified	Supporting Evidence	Implications for Gender Equality
Water as an Asset	Women are underrepresented in formal water-related employment and ownership of water	In water utilities, women represent only 10-40% of total staff and are predominantly in administrative and finance	Limits women's economic independence and influence in resource

⁴ European Commission (2025). Albania Report – Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change, p.171. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_690%20Albania%20report.pdf

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	resources, often relegated to administrative roles.	positions (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021). Women are a substantial proportion of the informal workforce, with their economic contributions largely invisible in official statistics (UNDP, 2020).	management, while perpetuating the gender pay gap.
Water as a Service	Women bear a disproportionate burden of water collection and household water management, leading to significant time loss and reduced productivity.	In many rural areas, women spend considerable time on water collection (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021). Less than half of the urban population has 24-hour water access, which disproportionately affects women in low-income families (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).	Creates a "time poverty" trap, restricting women's opportunities for education, formal employment, and leisure, which exacerbates poverty.
Water as a Space	Women are significantly underrepresented in water governance and decision-making bodies at all levels.	Decision-making bodies within the water sector are predominantly male (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021). While women have made gains in national political representation (e.g., 41.7% of cabinet positions as of 2024), this does not translate to equal representation in water sector governance (World Bank, 2024).	Leads to "gender-blind" policies that do not address the specific needs of women, limiting their agency and voice in water management.

4.1. Water as an Asset: Access, Control, and Economic Opportunities

Women's contributions to Albania's water sector are often unrecognized and undervalued. While they are estimated to manage **66%** of household water use, they are a small minority in formal water-related jobs. In water utilities, women make up only **10% to 40%** of the staff, and are often limited to administrative and finance roles, while men hold most of the technical and decision-making positions. This structural imbalance not only reinforces gender stereotypes but also prevents women from earning a fair wage and having influence over how water resources are managed. Many women work in the informal economy, so their labor, especially in agriculture, is not counted in official statistics, making their work invisible (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021; UNDP, 2020).

4.2. Water as a Service: Time and Health Burden

Women bear the primary burden when water supplies are unreliable. In rural areas, women are typically responsible for collecting water, which is a time-consuming and physically demanding task. The 2025 European Commission Report notes that access to drinking water in rural areas remains limited, and wastewater treatment infrastructure is still lacking outside urban centres. These conditions increase the care burdens for rural women. This "time poverty" directly limits their ability to get an education, find formal employment, or participate in community life. Even in urban areas, less than 50% of the population has 24-hour water access, and this lack of reliable service disproportionately affects low-income families, with women bearing the brunt of the hardship (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021). The effort spent on collecting water reduces their productivity and increases their risk of illness, as they are often the caregivers for family members who get sick from water-borne diseases.

4.3. Water as a Space: Voice and Decision-Making

Despite women's vital role in water management at the household level, they are largely absent from formal decision-making bodies. While women have made significant strides in national politics, holding 41.7% of cabinet positions (World Bank, 2024), this success has not carried over to the water sector. Water-related boards and committees are still mostly male, leading to policies that often ignore the specific needs of women and girls. Efforts to increase women's representation in these roles, like the Gender Agenda and Action Plan for Water Utilities (2019-2030), are an important step, but they must be combined with a wider effort to challenge and change traditional patriarchal attitudes to be truly effective (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).

Table 2: Gendered Roles, Burdens, and Participation in Albania's Water Sector

Aspect	Description	Data/Observation
Water as an Asset		
Women in Water Utilities	Underrepresentation in formal employment, with concentration in administrative roles.	Underrepresented in technical and managerial positions.
Dominant Stereotypes	"Masculine jobs" (e.g., technical/repair) are associated with men, limiting equal opportunities.	Qualitative observation of strong influence on employment opportunities.
Access to Assets (Land)	Limited land ownership for women, impacting their economic independence and resilience.	Only 8% of women own land in Albania.
Water as a Service		
Responsibility for Water Collection	Primary responsibility for women/girls, especially in rural areas without piped access.	Approximately 20% of the rural population has no piped access at home.
Unpaid Care/Domestic Work	Disproportionate time burden on women, which fills gaps in inadequate services.	Women spend 24.7% of their time on these tasks, versus 3.5% for men.

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Impact of Inadequate Sanitation	Health and safety risks, leading to girls missing school.	A GIZ project identified and addressed this issue in schools.
Water as a Space		
Representation in Decision-Making	Underrepresentation or absence of women in formal governance bodies.	Decision-making bodies in the water sector are composed mostly of men.
Influence of Social Norms	Traditional gender norms and patriarchal values shape water management.	Customary law (Kanun) persists, undermining formal legal frameworks.

5. Identified Gaps, Underlying Challenges, and Emerging Themes

5.1. Disconnect Between Policy and Practice

This gap is primarily an issue of implementation, not a lack of policy. The problem is not that Albania does not have the right rules; the issue is that it struggles to apply them effectively. Several factors contribute to this:

- **Insufficient Resources:** There aren't enough skilled human resources at both the national and local levels to properly monitor and enforce gender-related policies (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).
- **Knowledge Gap:** Officials lack the necessary expertise to identify and carry out specific actions that would promote gender equality (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).
- **Inadequate Consultation:** There's a lack of effective ways to ensure women's voices are heard and considered when water policies are being planned (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).

These issues show that the focus for future efforts should not be on creating new policies. Instead, it should shift to strengthening institutions, dedicating resources to implement existing policies, and creating better ways to hold people accountable for results. This strategic approach is crucial for translating policy goals into real, tangible improvements in gender equality.

5.2. Data Deficiencies and Monitoring Challenges

A major obstacle in Albania's water sector is the lack of comprehensive gender-disaggregated data. This is not just a minor issue; it is a fundamental barrier that prevents effective policymaking and monitoring.

The Problem with "Gender Blind" Data

Without data that shows the specific impacts on men and women, it is impossible to understand how water policies affect different genders. This lack of information means that:

- Policies often remain "**gender blind**," failing to address the unique needs of men and women (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).
- It becomes difficult to monitor progress toward gender equality goals.
- Inequalities can persist unchecked because their specific impacts are invisible (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021). Notably, key environment and climate-related strategies, including those on water and adaptation, remain largely gender-blind. The absence

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of gender mainstreaming within these frameworks reflects a systemic oversight that reduces their effectiveness in addressing differentiated vulnerabilities.

Why Data is Crucial

Collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data is a critical first step toward creating effective and equitable policies. This information is a powerful tool for both empowerment and accountability. It allows policymakers to:

- Identify specific needs and design targeted solutions.
- Allocate resources efficiently based on evidence.
- Hold institutions accountable for achieving gender equality goals (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).

Initiatives like the Gender Agenda and Action Plan for Water Utilities and the UNDP's country program recognize this need, highlighting the importance of collecting better data to guide future investments and reforms (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).

5.3. Intersectional Vulnerabilities and Their Impact

The impacts of poor water management in Albania are not felt equally; they are most severe for **vulnerable groups** due to a concept known as **intersectionality**. This means that multiple disadvantages, such as gender, poverty, and ethnicity, combine to create unique and compounded challenges.

Understanding Intersectional Vulnerabilities

The desk review found that the most at-risk populations are:

- **Poor women in rural areas:** They bear a greater burden from water deficiencies (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).
- **Women from marginalized ethnic groups:** Women from communities like the Roma and Egyptian communities face additional barriers (UNDP, 2024).
- **Women with low education and a high care burden:** Their lack of education and the responsibility of caring for others further limit their opportunities (UNDP, 2024).

These overlapping factors mean that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to water solutions will not work. A single policy aimed at improving water access may not address the unique challenges faced by a poor, rural, and uneducated woman from a minority group.

The Path Forward

To truly "**leave no one behind**," water management strategies must use an **intersectional lens**. This means:

- **Identifying and targeting** the most vulnerable populations specifically.
- **Designing interventions** that address the multiple and combined forms of disadvantage they face.

Programs like the UNDP's initiative in Albania are working to address these issues by strengthening social protection systems and creating services that are truly responsive to gender and other vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2024).

5.4. Broader Socio-Economic and Environmental Linkages

Water issues in Albania are not just about water; they are deeply connected to larger societal and environmental challenges. Understanding these links is crucial for creating effective solutions.

Key Interconnections

- **Socio-Economic Impacts:** Water scarcity can lead to a decline in human health, nutrition, and education, which in turn can drive migration and hinder overall economic development. These issues often have a greater impact on women, who are already more vulnerable to water-related stress (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).
- **Environmental Degradation:** The decline of forests in Albania due to activities like agriculture and overgrazing directly affects water resources. It's also a challenge to include women in managing these natural resources (Forestry Sector Analysis, 2021).
- **Rapid Urbanization:** While moving to cities can offer new opportunities, it also puts a strain on urban infrastructure, including water supply. This can lead to new vulnerabilities, like inadequate access and higher costs, which disproportionately affect low-income families and women (Water Sector Gender Assessment, 2021).

These connections show that gender-responsive water management can't be an isolated effort. It requires a holistic, integrated approach that links water policies with strategies in agriculture, energy, health, urbanization, and climate change to achieve sustainable and fair outcomes for everyone.

6. Conclusion and Strategic Insights for Future Interventions

This desk review confirms that while Albania possesses strong legal frameworks for gender equality and is naturally endowed with abundant water resources, systemic challenges in implementation, fragmented water governance, deeply entrenched patriarchal social norms, and a pervasive lack of gender-disaggregated data collectively perpetuate significant gender inequalities in the water sector. The analysis, structured around the "Water as an Asset, Service, and Space" framework, consistently highlights the disproportionate burden placed on women in water management and care work, their limited formal participation in decision-making, and the underlying causes of these disparities.

A critical finding is the persistent gap between policy and practice. Despite progressive legislation, the translation of these commitments into tangible improvements on the ground is hindered by insufficient institutional capacity, a knowledge gap in implementing gender-responsive actions, and inadequate gender-sensitive consultation mechanisms. This implementation deficit represents a strategic bottleneck, where the challenge lies not in policy formulation but in effective execution.

Another crucial observation is the pervasive lack of comprehensive gender-disaggregated data. This deficiency is a fundamental barrier to effective governance and accountability, as it prevents accurate identification of gendered impacts, monitoring of progress, and the

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design of targeted interventions. Without such data, inequalities can persist unrecognized and unaddressed, leading to inefficient resource allocation.

Furthermore, the review underscores the importance of addressing intersectional vulnerabilities. The impact of water deficiencies is particularly severe for poor women, those in rural areas, and women who also belong to minority groups or bear significant care burdens. A single-faceted approach to water interventions will not suffice; strategies must adopt an intersectional lens to ensure that the most marginalized women and communities are not left behind.

Finally, the analysis reveals that water issues are deeply intertwined with broader socio-economic and environmental challenges. Water stress impacts health, nutrition, education, and can accelerate migration. Environmental degradation affects water resources, and urbanization creates new vulnerabilities related to water access. This emphasizes that gender-responsive water management requires an integrated approach that considers its linkages with other development sectors.

To advance gender equality and achieve more equitable and sustainable water management outcomes in Albania, future interventions should strategically focus on the following areas:

- **Capacity Building:** Implement targeted training programs for water utility staff, government officials, and community leaders on gender analysis, gender mainstreaming, and gender-responsive budgeting within the water sector.
- **Data Systems:** Establish robust and routine systems for collecting, analyzing, and utilizing gender-disaggregated data across all levels of the water sector, from household access to employment and decision-making roles. This includes developing clear indicators and ensuring data is accessible for evidence-based policymaking and monitoring.
- **Participatory Governance:** Create and strengthen inclusive platforms for women's active and meaningful participation in water decision-making processes, particularly at local and river basin levels. This involves fostering safe spaces for discussion and ensuring their voices are genuinely integrated into policy design and implementation.
- **Targeted Infrastructure Investment:** Prioritize investments in water infrastructure development and maintenance in rural and vulnerable areas to alleviate women's disproportionate time burden associated with water collection and improve their health and productivity.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Promote women's access to formal, diverse, and non-traditional employment opportunities within the water sector, actively challenging and dismantling gender stereotypes that limit their roles to administrative positions. This could involve mentorship programs, skills training, and flexible work arrangements.
- **Cross-sectoral Linkages:** Integrate gender-responsive water management strategies with broader national and local development plans for rural development, public health, agriculture, energy, and climate resilience, recognizing water as a nexus for sustainable development.

By systematically addressing these identified gender disparities and underlying challenges, Albania has the potential to translate its strong policy commitments into tangible improvements, ensuring that water interventions truly benefit all members of its community and contribute to broader goals of gender equality and sustainable development.

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