

# Social Problems, Risks, and Management Related to Gender and Diversity in Albania

Prof Dr Sokol AXHEMI<sup>1</sup>

*Department of Geography, University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania*

**Abstract.** Social problems related to gender and diversity are contested topics in Albania. However, the geographical distribution of these social problems and their diversity in the socio-geographical space of Albania appear as interesting issues. Among the main social problems are violence against women; domestic violence; trafficking of persons, in particular women's trafficking; limited participation by women in decision making; limited access to employment; and limited access to educational services. In this paper, we present a data analysis on this geographical distribution, according to separate administrative divisions and influencing factors from the perspective of social geography. At the same time, we also present information about the evolution of these issues over certain periods, as well as trends for the future. A special issue is the presentation of suggestions for considering the risk management of such social problems in Albania. We also draw attention to the identification of social planning and social policies intended to reduce or solve these social problems in the socio-geographical space of Albania in the future.

**Keywords.** Social problems, gender and diversity, socio-geographical space of Albania, risks and management

## 1. Introduction

The latest scientific research has addressed a wide array of social topics and analysed them from different perspectives and insights. This is due to the expansive nature and scope of social studies. Today, the social and human sciences involve diverse social topics, problems, and analyses in the framework of posing scientific goals and objectives. There has been a noteworthy and ongoing increase within many scientific disciplines pertaining to social studies, specifically economic and historical disciplines. Geographical studies have also focused their area of interest on many social topics. In this context should be mentioned the contributions of social geography and population geography, especially studies on major social problems presented in a certain socio-geographical space. Analyses of social groups, their features, and their evolution in the context of geographical distribution are present in many scientific areas [1].

Social problems related to gender and diversity are contested topics in Albania. However, they are emerging with an ever-growing trend, with many effects and impacts in different socio-geographical spaces of our country. They are closely linked with the main factors which influence the emergence and development of these social problems. Among the main influencing factors are tradition, historical development, and sociocultural development, of which the most significant factors are schooling and education,

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author, Sokol Axhemi, *Department of Geography, University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania.*  
E-mail: saxhemigraphy@yahoo.co.uk.

economic, and political factors. The relationship among these factors in the framework of the socio-geographical space of Albania has created premises conducive to social problems related to gender and diversity [2]. Among the main social problems are violence against women; domestic violence; trafficking of persons, in particular women's trafficking; limited participation by women in decision making; limited access to employment; and limited access to educational services.

The geographical distribution of these social problems and their diversity in the socio-geographical space of Albania appears very interesting. In this paper, we provide important data analysis on this geographical distribution, according to separate administrative divisions and influencing factors from the perspective of social geography [1]. At the same time, we also present information about the evolution of these issues over different periods, as well as trends for the future. A special issue is the presentation of suggestions for considering the risk management of such social problems in Albania. Also, we draw attention to the identification of social planning and social policies intended to reduce or solve these social problems in the socio-geographical space of Albania in the future. Tables, graphs, and data analysis are provided in this paper in regard to these social problems.

## **2. Current Social Problems in the Context of Gender and Diversity in Albania**

In a general overview, we can conclude that these types of social problems that are related to gender and diversity are manifold and diverse. Their presence is accompanied by many features and characteristics that have created an interesting physiognomy to analyse. Among the most distinguished features of these social problems in Albania are the dynamics of their emergence, on the one hand, and their geographical distribution in the framework of the socio-geographical space in our country, on the other hand. The main social problems are violence against women, domestic violence, trafficking of women and girls in Albania, limiting the involvement of women in decision making, limited access to employment, and limited access to educational services. They represent great complexity in addition to great importance.

The basic dynamics of these social problems have displayed an upward trend in recent years. There is also a dynamic characteristic in that in many cases a specific social problem, for example, domestic violence, is gradually associated with other elements, such as gender violence, preventing adolescent girls from attending high school or higher education, trafficking, and limited access to employment. At the same time, the dynamic feature is also closely related to an increase in the incidence of such social problems. We estimate that such social problems were limited years ago, while in the last decade there has been an intensive and significant increase. Data published by INSTAT show that there has been a significant increase in domestic violence in the last 3–4 years. In 2015, there were 3,650 reported cases of domestic violence, and in 2016 the incidence increased to 3,900 cases [3].

The dynamic feature that is accompanying social issues related to gender and diversity is also closely linked to the social evolution that is happening in Albanian society as a whole. It is a society in transition, characterized by a social space which is progressively diversified by groups, ideas, and thoughts; an active social life in some areas, mostly urban ones, but passive and limited social life elsewhere, such as rural areas; and the emergence and development of disparities for Albanian families. The complexity of these elements is evidenced by new dimensions of social conflict across generations, between men and women, and among different social groups.

On the other hand, the geographical distribution of these types of social problems in the socio-geographical space of Albania is also very interesting. Although during the first decade of the transition period there were limited numbers of occurrences, in the last two decades there has been an expansion that has involved changes in geographical distribution. Social problems mentioned above were evident in the early 1990s in areas such as Shkodra, Kukësi, Dibra, and Lezha, but in the last two decades the affected areas have expanded [4]. Statistics from INSTAT (Albanian National Institute of Statistics) show an increase in numbers and occurrences in the regions of Tirana, Durrësi, Korça, Fieri, and Vlora [4]. It seems that the population migration towards these socio-geographical spaces has been clearly influenced. A significant decrease in the above-mentioned social problems has been noted especially in the counties of Kukësi and Dibra, where the current incidences are very low, both numerically and geographically [4].

### **3. Factors Regarding the Emergence and Development of Social Problems**

The influencing factors in the emergence and development of gender-based social problems are very diverse. Among the main influencing factors are strong traditions; historical development; the level of social development of many Albanian families, in which education is the most important component; and economic and political factors. Along with these factors are integrated social problems related to gender and diversity. The tradition and historical development of Albanian society and the family represents an important factor in the emergence and development of social problems related to gender violence, domestic violence, and access barriers for women and girls to educational services and employment. Inherited patriarchal relations, especially in remote rural areas of Albania, have meant that many girls and women still remain submissive to the males of the family: husbands, fathers, or brothers. The dominant mindset is that only the males of the family can give orders and make decisions on the lives and activities of women of the family, including their employment or education and even extending to sex selection for children. We recognize in many cases the termination of pregnancy if the sex of the child is expected to be female rather than male, calling it not a natural inheritance to the family. Relationships between women and men in the family in some cases degenerate not only into verbal and psychological abuse but also to physical violence against spouses, daughters, and sisters. Such situations often involve women who want to have access to educational services or other social activities.

Another factor that plays an important role in the emergence and development of social problems related to gender and diversity in Albania is the level of social development of the family. Illiteracy, the low rate of educational and cultural development, and limited access to cultural, media, and human communication have often fostered a closed patriarchal environment that increases the authority of fathers, brothers, or spouses toward wives, daughters, and women in general. Moreover, migration across socio-geographical spaces, especially from a closed environment to an open one, has great influence on the emergence and development of gender-based social problems. Social factors have made it possible for girls to be subject to national and international human trafficking. Living a closed life and without a clear perspective, the lack of education and cultural development is another indicator which makes these marginalized social groups an effective target of traffickers' networks.

Many scholars, analysts, and researchers consider that in the complexity of the factors influencing social problems of gender and diversity in Albania, the economic factor

is the most predominant. This factor in Albania is manifested in different shapes and dimensions, and in many cases it goes hand in hand with the social factor. Unemployment, lack of individual and family economic prospects, lack of job opportunities, and an inability to provide a normal individual and family standard of living are important factors leading to family conflict, which can degenerate into psychological violence and further into physical violence against women [5]. Secondly, the presence of these economic problems has directly and negatively affected many men through behaviours involving alcohol, gambling, or the stakes. Economic factors are often at the root of family relations where men violate their wives, where there is an increase in divorce, and where debts and loss of income destroy family life. Although such cases can be found in many socio-geographical spaces of Albania, they are especially prominent in Tirana, Durrësi, Fieri, Shkodra, Vlora, and Elbasani [5]. Thirdly, economic factors are closely related to migration. During the transition period the Albanian population underwent mass migration. In this migratory process along with younger ages in the framework of sex ratios a major cause of migration is focused on male gender. In many cases when men return from unsuccessful economic migration there is greater incidence of spousal abuse and divorce. This phenomenon is widespread in some rural areas of Pogradec, Gjirokastra, Erseka, Korça, and Fieri.

The political factor has a very important impact in the presence of social problems related to violence against women, domestic violence, trafficking, the limited involvement of women in decision making, limited access to employment, and limited access to educational services. The impact of this factor needs to be seen from two sides. On the one side, it plays a role in preventing such social problems in the Albanian socio-geographical space. In this sense, it is important to undertake measures to mitigate poverty; to open job opportunities so as to increase individual and family income; to provide access to social, health, and educational services; and to undertake social and policy planning toward marginalised groups. On the other side, legal and legislative improvements are required to achieve greater protection against violence, gain greater respect for women, increase access of girls and women to education and employment, and establish more effective policies for gender equality. The steps in this direction have led to an ever-growing representation of women and girls in central and local administration. Women currently hold important governmental positions as leaders and deputies of the Albanian parliament and as part of local governing councils.

#### **4. Social Problems in Albania in the Context of Diverse Facets of Gender and Diversity**

Domestic violence is one of the most predominant social problems, with incidences evolving from verbal and psychological abuse to physical violence. Partnership violence has escalated into a growing trend of gender-based killings, where a husband kills his wife. What is concerning is that the geographical distribution of this social phenomenon extends not only to peri-urban or rural areas but also to the main urban centres. Severe incidents of physical violence and murder have been recorded in Tirana, Shkodra, Vlora, and Korça.

Violence against women and girls has increased since 2010. Reports were submitted for about 2,780 incidents of domestic violence in 2012 and about 3,900 in 2016 [5]. But many cases go unreported because of shame, fear, or patriarchy. In geographical distribution, INSTAT data show that such reports prevail in the main urban centres. Tirana

represents roughly 35.2% of the national total, Durrësi 15.5%, Korça 7.9%, Fieri 7.2%, and Vlora 6.6%. The lowest incidences are seen in the Kukësi district (1.6% of the total) and the Dibra district (1.4% of the total) [6].

Among other social problems for Albania in the post-1990s transition is the trafficking of girls, which has been present in different types, dimensions, and geographical distributions. We estimate that it was a very widespread and increasing phenomenon from 1992 to 2000; in the following two decades the trend has fluctuated and decreased to some degree, but has also reflected new means [6]. While during 1992–2000 this was a well-known but generally hidden phenomenon, the years since 2010 [6] have seen a shift. Nowadays, more and more random incidences of this phenomenon are seen. In addition, besides trafficking that involves gender-based violence, coercion, force, and fraud, there has been a recent increase in a particular social group of girls who are lured to and willingly join prostitution networks in Albania and Europe. At root of this phenomenon are the low level of girls' social and educational attainment, their origins from rural areas, and the low level of economic development in the families of origin. Sociologists, psychologists, and geographers also identify the role of new influential factors in the Albanian social space, such as episodes of depression and other mood disorders among different social strata, the lack of life prospects, opportunities for quick economic profit, the distribution and use of narcotic drugs, and the empowerment of criminal groups and various trafficking networks.

From data collected by Albanian institutions, NGOs that have been intensively involved in trafficking issues, academic studies, and the media, it is estimated that the orientation of the trafficking of Albanian girls is mainly towards the main EU countries, with high incidence for Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Switzerland [8]. Albanian authorities have identified from 28 years of trafficking data that changes can be seen over time. In the early 1990s, using governmental data, Prifti estimated that the number of trafficked Albanian girls ranged from 198 in 1992 to around 413 in 1994 [10]. The phenomenon had increased significantly by 1997, when there were about 1,504 cases; this relates closely to difficult economic-social-political problems for Albania in that year [10]. In 2000 there were about 302 cases, followed by 86 cases in 2003, 123 in 2006, and 33 in 2010. In 2013, among the 98 official cases of trafficking in human beings, 73 were female victims. As published by the Albanian Ministry of Internal Affairs in its October 2016 Report on the Implementation of the Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Persons and Action Plan 2014–2017 [9], there were 125 victims of trafficking and potential victims of trafficking in 2014 and 109 cases in 2015, among which 87 cases were trafficking in women. With regard to geographical distribution, we estimate that the highest incidences were in Elbasan's districts (24 cases), followed by Tirana (18) and Berati (12). There were 0 incidences in the district of Gjirokastra.

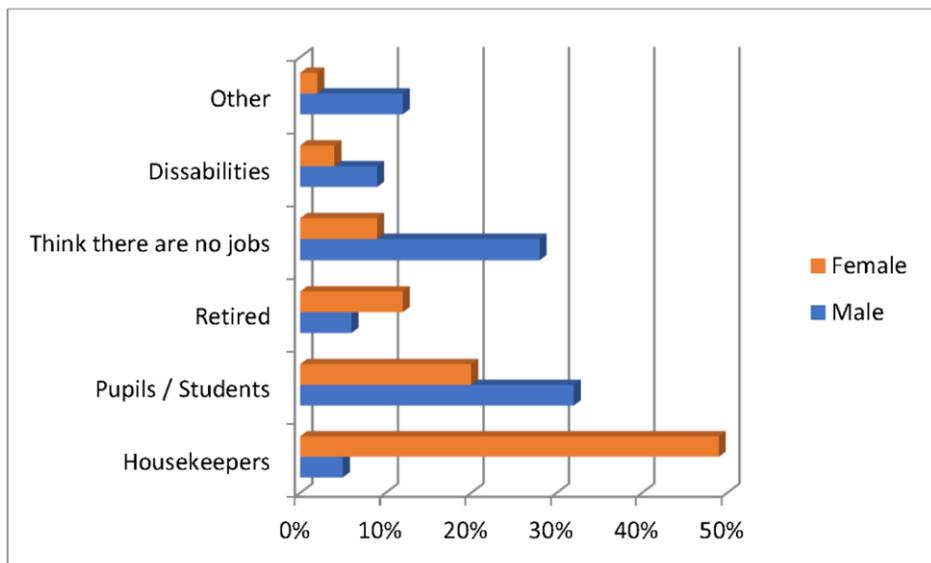
Low access to educational and employment services is another social problem that is quite remarkable in the context of gender and diversity in the socio-geographical space of Albania. Although there have been fluctuating tendencies during the transition years, the concern has primarily been for girls at their last year of compulsory education, in high school, as well as more generally for women and girls in their access to employment [7]. Limited access to education is more evident in rural areas. An important change occurred in the transition from a compulsory 8-year educational system to a 9-year system. There was a dropout in the 9th class from girls largely in rural regions. Their main physical and age development was delaying from the parents to allow them to attending the school. Notable areas included Hasi, Kukësi, Dibra, Mati, and Korça [11]. Girls are

often not allowed to continue their studies in high school. Even when parents have agreed to allow their girls to attend secondary education, there is a lack of educational infrastructure in many areas, mainly rural ones, and parents are reluctant to send their girls to another middle school away from their residential area. The situation of negative access for girls to attend higher education is more limited because of sporadic findings. The problematic situations are found in the districts of Lezha, Dibra, Korça, and Fieri. Limited educational access is also a problem in the Roma community and in other marginalized social groups, such as those with disabilities [11].

Low access to employment by women and girls has been a concerning issue in the context of gender and diversity at different periods in Albania. However, in the framework of the phenomenon of 'façon' businesses in peri-urban areas, there is an ongoing increase in their employment, although payments are very low. Analyses and observations show that women's wages are generally lower than men's wages in the private sector.

In most cases façon businesses (the manufacturing of shoes, etc.) are dominated by women's and girls' employment. The state sector represents an important employment opportunity for women and girls. They have a considerable presence in public administration, education, and health care. Their presence is lower in other public sectors such as in the military and police units, although recent years have seen a tendency toward inclusion, in particular in the state police. Private business has recognized new opportunities for employment of women and girls, especially in the tertiary sector. The 2011 census estimated women's participation in this sector at a rate of 42%. However, among all economic activities, the presence of women still remains limited. Statistical data show that in 2005 about 17% of private businesses were run by women (85% of these in urban areas and only 15% in rural areas). The 2011 census showed levels of economic activity at 37.1% for women and 62.9% for men [4].

**Table 1.** Reasons for Inactive Economic Status, by Gender, Albania, 2011.



Source: Population and Housing Census 2011 in Albania [4].

Statistical analyses point to the high presence of women as housewives and family caregivers. In the overall total of women out of the workforce, about 49% of them deal with household activities and take care of their families. There are noticeable changes between urban and rural areas.

The occupational framework of men and women is an interesting element to be analysed. It is important to distinguish the close linkage between rates and inequality in the context of both gender issues and the complexity of socio-geographical spaces in which activities take place, most importantly the difference between urban and rural areas. The 2011 census has provided statistical information and analysis in this regard.

**Table 2.** Percentage of Men/Women in Each Profession, Albania, 2011.

|   | Urban area |       | Rural area |       |
|---|------------|-------|------------|-------|
|   | Men        | Women | Men        | Women |
| Albania   |            |       |            |       |
| Lawmakers, senior officials and managers          | 75.5       | 24.5  | 85.0       | 15.0  |
| Professionals                                     | 38.2       | 61.8  | 42.6       | 57.4  |
| Technicians and associate professionals           | 50.4       | 49.6  | 63.0       | 37.0  |
| Workers for administrative support                | 50.7       | 49.3  | 65.0       | 35.0  |
| Service and sales workers                         | 59.1       | 40.9  | 71.9       | 28.1  |
| Workers in agriculture, forestry and fishing      | 68.6       | 31.4  | 66.0       | 34.0  |
| Crafts and related trade                          | 78.3       | 21.7  | 91.2       | 8.8   |
| Operators and installers in factories & machinery | 78.5       | 21.5  | 87.7       | 12.3  |
| Common professions                                | 48.9       | 51.1  | 69.5       | 30.5  |
| Armed forces                                      | 89.1       | 10.9  | 95.7       | 4.3   |
| Not specified                                     | 61.8       | 38.2  | 54.8       | 45.2  |

Source: Population and Housing Census 2011 in Albania [4].

In addition to the analysis outlined above, we can clearly see gender inequalities in overall sectoral employment.

**Table 3.** Percent Distribution of Employment by Major Sectors, Albania, 2011.

|                        | Employed Men<br>Age 15+ | %<br>part | Employed Women<br>Age 15+ | %<br>part | Total   |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Agriculture            | 118,570                 | 67.1%     | 58,175                    | 32.9%     | 176,745 |
| Nonagriculture sector: | 314,208                 | 62.7%     | 186,997                   | 37.3%     | 501,205 |
| (Industry)             | 103,267                 | 74.7%     | 35,000                    | 25.3%     | 138,267 |
| (Services)             | 210,941                 | 58.1%     | 151,997                   | 41.9%     | 362,938 |
| Total                  | 432,778                 | 63.8%     | 245,172                   | 36.2%     | 677,950 |

Source: Population and Housing Census 2011 in Albania (4).

Limited participation by women in decision making remains a major social problem in the context of gender and diversity in Albania. The evolution of this social topic has followed different curves over the transition period of 1990–2018. The participation of women in central government has changed. From 2000 to 2010 there was a low presence of women (specifically in the context of the Albanian parliament, where they reflected only 7% out of the total; in central government, where only nine women held leading positions; and in local government, where only 2% of positions were held by women). The periods of 2013–2017 and 2017–2021 showed a significant increase in women’s

participation in parliamentary administration and the central government. Moreover, by legislative changes and the electoral code, women were statutorily involved in the electoral lists of political parties to be represented in the Albanian parliament and in local governments. From 2013 to 2017, women represented about 20% of members of parliament (out of 140 members, 29 were women), and about seven women held appointments as government ministers. In 2017, women represented 28% of parliamentary seats [11]. A considerable number of women are present in local government councils and in various administrative positions. However, we think it is crucial for women to hold an increased number of decision-making roles. This should be attempted through legislative mechanisms. The lack of women in these roles is especially evident in small and peripheral administrative units.

## **5. Risks and Management of Social Problems About Gender and Diversity**

In most scholarly studies about the topic of social problems regarding gender and diversity in Albania, such issues are presented and understood as a family matter, enclosed within the walls of Albanian homes. This represents one of the main risks for this type of research.

It has been noted that there are trends toward breaking these walls as a result of increasing social awareness, the growing role of various NGOs, some sort of emancipation of Albanian society, and the role of the media, especially the visual media. The complexity of these factors tremendously affects the development of a more solid and promising view for a greater public awareness and mindfulness of the recognition and identification of such social problems that have affected the socio-geographical space of Albania in general, and its social space in particular.

One of the most notable risks comes from the limited access of women and girls to education and employment. Future attempts to change this will come from providing school infrastructure and facilities, social policies related to teaching aids, and improvement of conditions for attending basic education. On the other hand, the application of vocational training courses and modules and the opening of job opportunities in administrative units would not only have an impact on creating economic opportunities but at the same time would create other social, cultural, communication, and more consolidated social status for girls and women, not only within the family but also within the society.

An effective and more concrete role is expected from the Albanian state institutional point of view. This is one of the main elements of the risks related to gender and diversity. In the commitment of Albanian institutions, the cooperation among them at all phases in the framework of prevention, and in the fight against the trafficking of persons, the application of strict legislative measures would significantly affect the development of positive trends towards minimizing such social problems. In addition, it is also urgent to undertake the fastest and most powerful steps for the reintegration of the victims of human trafficking and for their social care. Social geography provides methods and approaches to social planning that involve important tools for diagnosing, identifying, intervening, and guiding policy towards positive outcomes in prevention and avoidance of negative impacts.

## 6. Conclusions

All of the above should be considered with regard to the budgeting of central and local governmental institutions so as to focus on social problems around gender and diversity in Albania. In our opinion, in general Albanian institutions have targeted these kinds of social problems, in the framework of compiling both general and sectoral strategies. At the same time, there is a positive commitment of cooperation between local and central authorities in this regard, which is expressed in programs and activities being performed in different administrative units. Nevertheless, it would be important to increase the state budget to focus on gender and diversity issues.

Also, a number of NGOs have to be appreciated which have been involved within their framework of professional and scientific expertise; they have applied and are currently dealing with grants from Albanian and foreign institutions in many areas related to these social problems. An important task for Albanian institutions is to continue their ongoing support and advocacy; this could not only expand their partnership but also help to develop a solid front against the negative social effects of gender and diversity issues in Albania.

## References

- [1] Axhemi, S. (2008). *Social geography*. Tirana, Albania: Alsa.
- [2] Axhemi, S. (2016). Applied social geography. Lectures in manuscript, Tirana.
- [3] Allkanjari, I. (2017, 10th October). Domestic violence. *Gazeta Shqiptare*.
- [4] INSTAT, *Censuses of Population and Housing 1989, 2001, 2011*.
- [5] National strategy on gender equality and action plan 2016–2020, approved by the Council of Ministers Decree No. 733, 20th October, 2016.
- [6] Koha.net (Tirana). (2015, 2nd November). Albania as a country of origin subjected to prostitution trafficking.
- [7] Council of Europe. (September 2017). Fighting school segregation in Europe through inclusive education. Position paper.
- [8] Muca, S. (2014, 24th January). Visa liberalization has increased the number of women's trafficking. *Gazeta Shqip* (Tirana).
- [9] Albanian Ministry of Internal Affairs. (March 2016). Report on implementation of the strategy for combating the trafficking of human beings and action plan 2014–2017.
- [10] Prifti, A. (2015). *Trafficking in persons: Human dimension and legal issues*. Doctoral dissertation, Tirana.
- [11] UNICEF Albania & INSTAT Center for Social Research (Tirana). (2007). Women and children in Albania: Double dividend of gender equality.

The author(s) of this publication is/are solely responsible for its content. This publication does not reflect the opinion of the publisher. The publisher cannot be held liable for any loss or damage that may occur because of this publication.