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# Poverty and its measurement: the case of Albania

***Abstract***

*This study examines poverty through the lens of a set of approaches mostly used by economists that identifies poverty in terms of a monetary indicator and which derives an 'objective' poverty line. All indicators of poverty, regardless of whether they are based on material deprivation or human capital, or whether they are multidimensional or unidimensional, try to gauge the welfare of the individual. The most popular method is financial poverty, which takes into account control over marketable products and services. Indicators that are simple to grasp allow for comparisons across time and geographies and are connected to a household's current situation. This analysis for Albania is based on INSTAT data using surveys such as the Household Budget Survey and Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). The latter provides two types of data: a. cross-sectional data pertaining to a given time or a certain time period with variables on income, poverty, social exclusion and other living conditions; and b. longitudinal data pertaining to individual-level changes over time, observed periodically over a four-year period.*

***Keywords:*** *poverty, social exclusion, social development, monetary approach, non-monetary poverty, data sources, surveys*

Each country defines its own poverty line, based on the estimated cost of a defined minimum of food and non-food consumption. Poverty data is not comparable between two groups, because they are based on different surveys for data collection and because the poverty analysis uses different methodology.

## What is poverty?

Poverty is not a notion that defines itself. Poverty is a complex, multifaceted problem that extends beyond its material manifestations. It is associated with poor economies, poor human resources, poor social services provision and weak socioeconomic development.

A person (or a household) is considered poor if the person's (or the household's) income is insufficient to acquire the basket of goods and services used to define the poverty threshold. The monetary value of the basket is the poverty line and the population of people and households whose incomes are below this line is then derived through a head count.

Social development may make only sluggish progress as long as poverty and social exclusion persist because some demographic groups are unable to engage fully in a nation's economic and social life. In order to offer effective anti-poverty relief and essential services, and to guide initiatives intended to eliminate poverty and

achieve an equitable distribution of prosperity, it is important accurately to identify both who is poor and where they are living. Furthermore, access to thorough knowledge about the differences in wellbeing across families is necessary for funding and the targeting of fundamental services and programmes to alleviate poverty and social exclusion within a nation.

## Why do we need to measure poverty?

Following Birdsall (2011), the purpose of welfare indicators can be classified as follows:

- poverty indicators help define more effective policies
- indicators should have technical specifications that allow policymakers to:
  1. compare the poverty levels of different households/individuals and regions within a country
  2. compare the evolution of poverty over time
  3. compare poverty levels between countries
  4. assess the impact of public policies.

There are some key questions to ask when measuring poverty, as set out in the following sub-sections:

### *Income or consumption aggregate*

- which module of the household survey is better developed, income or consumption?

The majority of authors recommend using monetary indicators alone or in combination to gauge poverty. The official variable for the compilation of statistics on poverty and social exclusion in Europe for the last few years has been income.

a. annual income gives only a partial picture of a household's economic capacity. Along with money, households also have products, investments and other possessions that contribute to their overall wealth and which affect the lifestyle they can maintain. However, income is seen as a reliable indicator of a household's resources and potential access to particular living arrangements
b. the expenditure variable is more stable; rather than being dependent on actual income, expenditure is more influenced by the idea of permanent income (i.e. predicted future income or revenue that will allow families to continue living in the same conditions without changing their wealth).

### *Poverty line*

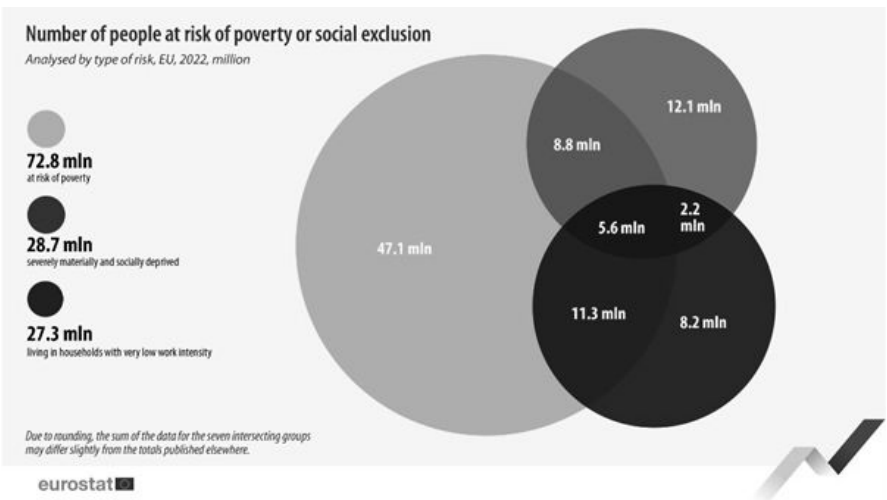
- Does a poverty line already exist in the country? Which poverty line is used: absolute or relative?

a. the term 'absolute poverty' refers to the minimum income level below which people are unable to achieve even the most basic requirements for survival. The concept of an absolute poverty line was introduced for the first time by Mollie Orshansky (Orshansky 1965). Absolute and extreme poverty, as well as severe poverty and occasionally chronic poverty, are terms used to describe populations or households that are below the poverty line

b. relative poverty measures how well an individual or family's income (or expenditure) compares to the national income distribution. As an illustration, Eurostat employs a relative poverty metric based on 'economic distance' equating to an income level set at 60% of median household income. Peter Townsend (Townsend 1979) was responsible for developing this measure of poverty.

In 2022, there were 95.3 million people in the EU at risk of poverty or social exclusion, representing 21.6% of the population. This information comes from data published by Eurostat in an article presenting a handful of findings from a more detailed 'Statistics Explained' article on living conditions in Europe (Eurostat 2023). That year, there were 72.8 million people at risk of poverty in the EU, including 28.7 million who were severely materially and socially deprived with 27.3 million living in households with low work intensity (on top of which there was some intersectionality between these groups, as Figure 1 highlights):

Figure 1 – Number of people in the EU at risk of poverty or social exclusion

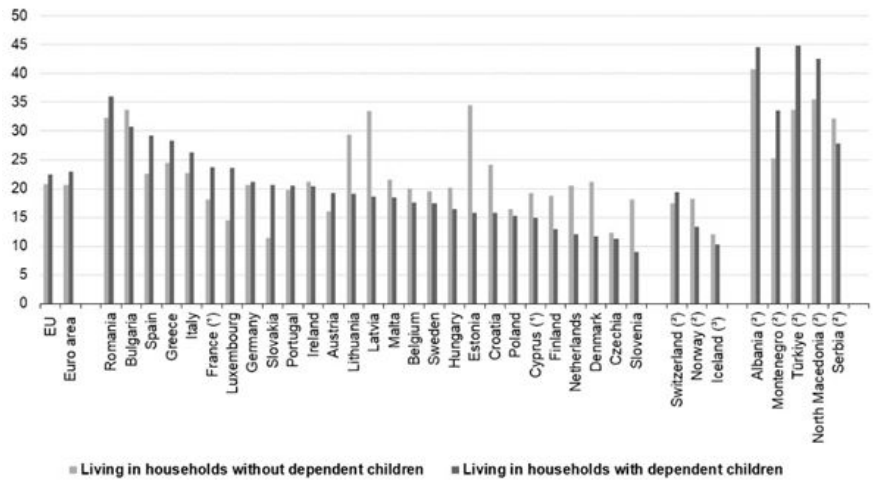



More than a quarter of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in four member states where 2020 data was available: Romania (35.8%), Bulgaria (33.6%), Greece (27.5%) and Spain (27.0%). In contrast, the lowest shares of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion were recorded in Czechia (11.5%), Slovakia (13.8%), Slovenia (14.3%), the Netherlands (15.8%) and Finland (15.9%).

Albania has the highest share of households at risk of poverty among EU countries, candidate countries and EEA members, according to Eurostat data which shows that the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion for households without dependent children was just over 40% in Albania as of 2020, rising to 44.6% of households with dependent children (Figure 2). North Macedonia was next highest in terms of households without dependent children (35.5%) while Turkey was slightly higher than Albania in terms of the percentage without dependent children. In

candidate country Serbia and EU member Romania, the share of households at risk of poverty or social exclusion without dependent children stood at 32.2%. There was also a relatively high risk in Turkey (33.7%), as well as EU member Bulgaria (33.8%). Across the EU, the rate was 20.8%. The lowest risk of poverty or social exclusion was in Slovakia (11.4%), followed by Czechia (12.3%), Luxembourg (14.5%), Austria (16.1%) and Poland (16.4%).

Figure 2 – Share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion for households with and without dependent children (2020)




Note: ranked on households with dependent children.
(1) Provisional.
(2) 2020.
(3) 2018.

*Source:* Eurostat (online data code: ilc_peps03n)

eurostat

## Traditional measures of poverty

Some measures of poverty are more frequently used in the literature than others.

a. Poverty Gap Index – this measures the depth of poverty; that is, how far, on average, households/individuals fall below the poverty line. This indicator presents the minimum cost for eliminating poverty via monetary transfers
b. Squared Poverty Gap Index – this is used to measure the severity of poverty; that is, the degree of inequality amongst the poor themselves
c. Gini Coefficient – a measure of the level of income inequality within a country, this is frequently captured by a Lorenz curve, which is a cumulative frequency curve comparing the distribution of a specific variable (in this case, income) against the population with the aim of highlighting the spread of inequality

d. Growth Incidence Curve – this illustrates the decomposition of growth across different income groups by presenting the impact of growth on poverty. The GIC plots the growth rate at each quintile of per capita income
e. Watts Index – this was proposed by Watts (1968) and it is the average difference between the logarithm of the poverty line and the logarithm of incomes.

### *Alternative tools for poverty evaluation*

a. The Human Poverty Index, introduced by the United Nations (UN 1997), consisted of three dimensions: 1) a long and healthy life; 2) access to education; and 3) a decent standard of living. However, the HPI was replaced in 2010 by the Multidimensional Poverty Index
b. The Multidimensional Poverty Index, used for the first time in the 2010 UNDP Human Development Report (UN 2010), complements monetary measures of poverty by taking into account multiple deprivations and their overlap. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was created using the multidimensional measurement method of Sabina Alkire and James Foster (OPHI, no date) and examines deprivation across the same three indicators – health, education and standard of living – as the HPI, divided into several sub-categories (see Table 1). The global MPI covers 105 countries in total, which are home to 77 per cent of the world's population, or 5.7 billion people. Of this proportion, 23 per cent of people (1.3 billion) are identified as multidimensionally poor. The MPI can also be constructed by region, ethnicity and several other groupings.

A household is identified as multidimensional poor only if the person's weighted deprivation score is equal to, or higher than, the poverty cutoff of 33.33%. The MPI combines two aspects of poverty:

a. the expansion of poverty, shown as the percentage of poor people (H); and
b. the intensity of poverty poor people, shown as the average percentage of dimensions that poor people are deprived of (A).

Following the AF methodology, the MPI is calculated by multiplying the incidence of poverty (H) and the average intensity of poverty (A), reflecting both the share of people in poverty and the degree to which they are deprived.

For each of the sub-regions of Albania, the headline and summary MPI data is shown in Table 2 (further data is available for each region in regard to the ten indicators that make up the MPI).

There is a major link between being at risk of poverty and work intensity – that is, how much household members of working age have worked compared to their full potential. Generally, the higher the work intensity within a household (i.e. the closer people are to full employment), the lower the probability to of being at risk of poverty. Eurostat reports work intensity at three different levels, ranging from very low, medium and very high. In the EU, the at risk of poverty rate for people aged less than 65 living in households with very low work intensity stood at 64% in 2020; whereas in Albania, it was much higher: some 74.7% of the working age population with very low work intensity are at risk of falling into poverty (Figure 3).

Table 1 – Structure of Multidimensional Poverty Index

| Dimension | Indicator | A person in a household is deprived if… |
|---|---|---|
| Health | Nutrition | Anyone in the household for which there is nutritional information is under-nourished |
| | Mortality | Any child in the household has died |
| Education | Schooling | No household member has completed five years of schooling |
| | Attendance | Any school-aged child in the household is not attending school up to class 8 |
| Standard of living | Electricity | The household has no electricity |
| | Sanitation | The household's sanitation facility is not improved or it is shared with other households |
| | Water | The household does not have access to safe drinking water or safe water is more than 30 minutes walk on a round trip |
| | Flooring material | The household has a dirt, sand or dung floor |
| | Cooking fuel | The household cooks with dung, wood or charcoal |
| | Assets | The household does not own more than one of: radio, telephone, tv, bike, motorbike or refrigerator, and does not own a car or truck |

Source: OPHI (2011).

## Types of data

There are several sources of data useful for analysing the background to a country's incidence of poverty:

a. national-level data – including national accounts: GDP, consumption, investment, exports, imports, public finance data, consumer and producer prices
b. local-level data – including consumer and producer prices, national accounts at regional level
c. individual and household-level data – household consumption and income; living conditions; social indicators. Population Statistics (census), household living standards (health survey), household priorities, perceptions of wellbeing (qualitative studies).
d. administrative data – can often provide an important entry into poverty analysis, especially if such data are used to compare the need and demand for services. However they do not allow for cross-tabulating or analysing poverty across different dimensions.
e. population census – this uses data on a nation's whole population. To gather fundamental data on the population, its demographic make up and its location, a census is conducted on every household. Since the census involves the entire population, it is expensive and most nations therefore only carry one out every ten years, supplementing in the meantime with various subject-based sample

surveys. In general, data on household income, consumption, illness trends and perceptions of poverty are not provided in census data; however, when paired with census data, the value of sample surveys can be significantly boosted, for example when creating poverty maps.

Table 2 – Albania sub-national results of Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), 2023

| Region | MPI | Head-count ratio (H) | Intensity of poverty (A) | Vulner-able to poverty (% of pop.) | In severe poverty (% of pop.) | Total pop. | | No. MPI poor (000) | No. MPI severe poor (000) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Share | 000 | | |
| Berat | 0.002 | 0.47 | 35.22 | 2.49 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 131 | 1 | 0 |
| Dibër | 0.007 | 1.76 | 42.67 | 11.62 | 0.50 | 0.05 | 130 | 2 | 1 |
| Durrës | 0.004 | 1.17 | 35.48 | 1.46 | 0.11 | 0.10 | 280 | 3 | 0 |
| Elbasan | 0.002 | 0.46 | 40.50 | 4.66 | 0.10 | 0.10 | 283 | 1 | 0 |
| Fier | 0.004 | 0.84 | 42.47 | 4.33 | 0.15 | 0.11 | 304 | 3 | 0 |
| Gjirokastër | 0.002 | 0.44 | 37.29 | 3.04 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 66 | 0 | 0 |
| Korçë | 0.000 | 0.08 | 33.33 | 7.20 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 251 | 0 | 0 |
| Kukes | 0.008 | 1.96 | 42.73 | 14.00 | 0.29 | 0.03 | 81 | 2 | 0 |
| Lezhë | 0.002 | 0.64 | 33.33 | 7.64 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 127 | 1 | 0 |
| Shkodër | 0.003 | 0.62 | 43.09 | 4.56 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 205 | 1 | 0 |
| Tirane | 0.003 | 0.68 | 37.44 | 4.25 | 0.00 | 0.29 | 836 | 6 | 0 |
| Vlorë | 0.000 | 0.12 | 38.89 | 5.06 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 181 | 0 | 0 |

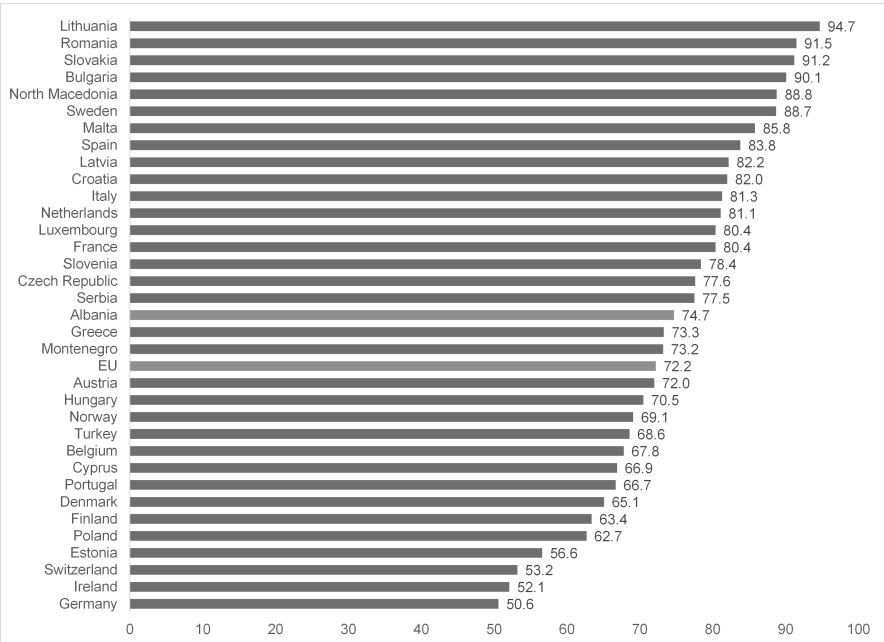
Source: Humanitarian Data Exchange, available at: https://data.humdata.org/dataset/albania-mpi (date of download: 20 October 2023).

Countries of EU member states and those aspiring to EU membership collect data through EU surveys on income and living conditions and use relative poverty measurement, where the 'at risk of poverty' threshold is determined as 60% of median disposable household income. Meanwhile, other countries in this group use Household Budget Surveys (HBS).

### *Household surveys*

In any analysis of benefit distribution and the features of poverty, household surveys are crucial. A limited proportion of all households are included in household surveys and the sample must be carefully chosen to ensure that the survey's findings appropriately reflect living circumstances across the nation and in various of its regions. The sample size – the number of homes contacted – will change depending on a number of variables, including the indicator being measured. A multitopic

Figure 3 – Population at risk of poverty in households with very low work intensity (%)




Source: Eurostat data (ilc_li06)

survey is an essential instrument for measuring and comprehending a broad variety of topics related to poverty, despite the fact that many other surveys can be employed for poverty and welfare studies.

Inevitably, different types of household survey exist:

a. Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS) collect information on household expenditure and income, health, education, employment and the ownership of assets such as housing or land
b. expenditure and income surveys are useful to measure the different dimensions of poverty, such as income or education poverty
c. employment surveys – deal with questions about household income, demographics and housing features
d. demographic and health surveys also contain basic data about housing conditions, educational attainment and employment patterns, although they do not include income or expenditure data.

## Poverty data collection in Albania

Since 2014, the Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS), now EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions), and the Household Budget Survey

(HBS), which has been conducted continually, have been used to compile Albania's poverty indicators. Member states of the European Union have been collecting data on living standards and poverty levels through EU-SILC since 2003. EU-SILC seeks to measure poverty based on the income method, but the Albanian version of the LSMS had its notion of poverty measurement based on the cost approach.

Up until 2012, the only data source for assessing the living conditions, poverty and general wellbeing of households in Albania was indeed the LSMS. This gathered a number of financial and non-financial variables, delivering diverse users a range of information and offering a crucial tool for policymakers and strategists. The first LSMS was done in 2002, and more surveys were undertaken every three years; that is, in 2005, 2008 and 2012 (INSTAT 2013).

The new statistical resource called EU-SILC was developed in response to the growing demand for highly comparable data within the European Union and was certainly an advance on the European Community Household Panel surveys which had preceded it. This source ensured a higher level of data harmonisation and allowed for the better measurement of poverty and living conditions. With this objective in mind, the European Parliament and Council devised a regulatory framework, together with multiple Commission directives, that governs every step of the procedure up until the final data collection stage (regulations cover the sampling frame and fieldwork, definitions, variables and quality reports). Via these regulations, good data quality and a high level of comparability between countries is ensured. In Albania, EU-SILC began to be carried out annually as from 2016.

### *EU-SILC in Albania*

An INSTAT pilot survey was conducted in December 2014 based on a sample of 600 families, before INSTAT conducted the first full SILC in 2016 using paper questionnaires. The champion was selected by lot using the two-stage selection. In the first step, 768 census areas were randomly allocated to urban and rural areas. In the second step, based on systemic choices, 12 families were selected in each census area chosen in the first step.

As for the interviews, there are four different ways to collect the data which are in use in different proportions throughout the EU: paper-assisted personal interview (PAPI); computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI); computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) and self-administered questionnaire. After piloting the computer-assister personal interview (CAPI) method in 2017, INSTAT concluded that, for a panel survey, it was more efficient to use this method, used by the largest number of EU states. At the end of 2017, INSTAT conducted a second wave of SILC using CAPI. In April 2018, INSTAT conduct a third wave, in 2019 a fourth, in 2020 a fifth, in 2021 a sixth and in 2022 a seventh wave.

The reference population of EU-SILC is all private households and their members residing on the territory of the country at the time of data collection. The size of the sampling frame for Albania is as follows:

| Year | No. of families |
|---|---|
| 2016 | 9216 |
| 2017 | 7539 |
| 2018 | 7791 |
| 2019 | 8378 |
| 2020 | 8878 |
| 2021 | 9136 |
| 2022 | 9103 |

SILC provides two types of annual data:

- cross-sectional data pertaining to a given time or a certain time period, with variables on income, poverty, social exclusion and other living conditions;
- longitudinal data pertaining to individual-level changes over time, observed periodically over a four-year period.

In Albania, the survey is conducted using two types of questionnaire:

a. household questionnaire
   - dwelling and housing conditions
   - expenditures on the dwelling in which the household lives (repayments of loans and credits for purchasing the dwelling, costs of electricity, heating, repairs and others)
   - household wealth (possession of durable goods, capacity to face unexpected financial expenditure and others)
   - income at household level: income of persons up to 16 years old; social transfers received (social benefits and allowances); given and received resources in cash or in kind; income from agricultural activity.

b. individual questionnaire directed to each member of the household aged 16 and over
   - working life
   - economic activity, employment and unemployment at the time of the interview
   - information on main and additional employment (second or third jobs) of those who work
   - current monthly income from employment
   - information on the last job of unemployed and inactive persons
   - gross and net income for the previous year, received from different sources (employment, pensions, benefits, sale or rental of movables or real estate and others)
   - self-perceived health and access to healthcare.

### *HBS – Household Budget Survey in Albania*

The Household Budget Survey is a statistical survey carried out in usually resident households in Albania and gives a clear overview of their socioeconomic situation. The main purpose of the collection of the data is to estimate the level and structure of income, consumption and expenditure in the country as a whole and as aggregated to prefecture level. HBS data is also used for the calculation of the Consumer Price Index and to estimate the private final consumption expenditure of the household sector in the national accounts. The maintenance of a detailed diary of household expenditure over a two-week period was the case up until 2019; meanwhile, since 2019 this has been over a one-week period among surveyed households.

Table 3 identifies the structure of monthly consumer expenditure broken down by sectoral group.

#### Sector coverage

The headline level sectoral groups analysed within the framework of the HBS are as follows:

- food and non-alcoholic beverages
- alcoholic beverages and tobacco
- clothing and footwear
- housing, water, electricity and other fuels
- furnishings, household equipment
- health
- transport
- communications
- recreation and culture
- education
- restaurants and hotels
- miscellaneous goods and services

#### Comparability over time

The Household Budget Survey was conducted by INSTAT in 2006-07; 2008-09; and, since 2014, has been continuous in each year.

#### Data collection

Data collection is based on two different ways of collecting information: compiling a diary of purchases; and conducting a direct interview through specialist interviewers in the first week of the month following the reference period.

#### Sample selection

Sample selection is done in a two-step procedure. Units identified in the first step are homogenised census areas with a probability of selection proportionate to the size of the census area. In the second step, within each of the areas selected in the first step, a fixed number of twelve census areas is selected according to a

systematic random selection method. Choice in both stages is carried out at random by providing a representation at regional level. The total number of sampled areas is divided into four three-month samples that are geographically distributed homogeneously throughout the year to include seasonal changes.

Table 3 – The structure of average monthly consumption expenditure, 2020-21

| Sectoral group | HBS 2020 expenditure value (Lek) | % | HBS 2021 expenditure value (Lek) | % | Difference (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Food and non-alcoholic beverages | 34 713 | 41.6 | 34934 | 41.3 | 0.6 |
| Alcoholic beverages and tobacco | 3130 | 3.7 | 3221 | 3.8 | 2.9 |
| Clothing and footwear | 3875 | 4.6 | 3893 | 4.6 | 0.5 |
| Housing, water, electricity and other fuels | 8357 | 10.0 | 8496 | 10.0 | 1.7 |
| Furnishings and household equipment | 5794 | 6.9 | 5772 | 6.8 | -0.4 |
| Health | 4487 | 5.4 | 4542 | 5.4 | 1.2 |
| Transport | 5150 | 6.2 | 5293 | 6.3 | 2.8 |
| Communications | 3128 | 3.7 | 3298 | 3.9 | 5.4 |
| Recreation and culture | 2315 | 2.8 | 2388 | 2.8 | 3.2 |
| Education | 2607 | 3.1 | 2766 | 3.3 | 6.1 |
| Restaurants and hotels | 4669 | 5.6 | 4689 | 5.5 | 0.4 |
| Miscellaneous goods and services | 5250 | 6.3 | 5256 | 6.2 | 0.1 |
| Total average consumption | 83 475 | 100 | 84 548 | 100 | 1.3 |

Source: INSTAT (2022).

## Conclusion

Reducing poverty by removing at least 20 million people from the risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2020 is one of the five main goals of the Europe 2020 strategy. The at risk of poverty or exclusion indicator (AROPE), which shows persons who are in at least one of the following circumstances, is one of the headline targets of the EU in monitoring this aim:

- after receiving social payments, people may be at risk of living in poverty where equivalised disposable income is lower than the national at risk of poverty criterion, which is set at 60% of national median equivalised disposable income

- they are severely materially impoverished because they cannot afford a minimum of four out of nine essential things
- they reside in homes with very low work intensity, defined as those with adults aged 0-59 who worked at less than 20% of their potential during the preceding 12 months (excluding students aged 18-24).

Albania has been switching away from a reporting regime based on LSMS to one based on SILC. The World Bank and INSTAT are looking into the possibility of estimating absolute poverty rates using the annual HBS, and Albania is also attempting to minimise differences between the two surveys in terms of thematic and geographic coverage, level of representation, non-response rate and periodicity. This could potentially aid in the continuity of monitoring and evaluating national policies that have been planned and implemented based on the absolute poverty line measured through the LSMS. It would also make it easier to produce consumption-based poverty data and satisfy the need for longer time series.

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