

STUDY OF EVANGELICAL CHURCH MINISTRY TO VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

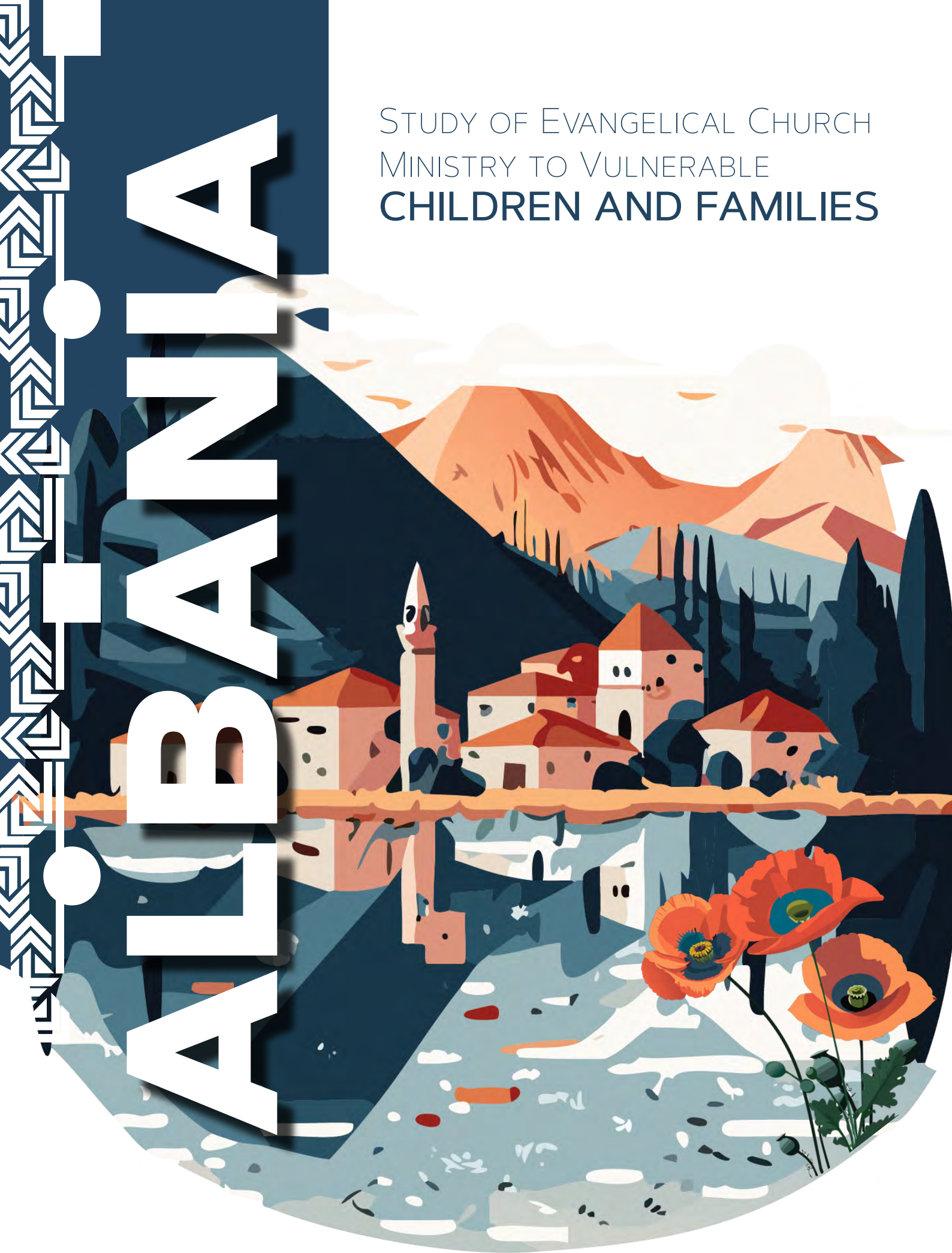




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INTRODUCTION

Different communities around the world have their own unique strengths and challenges. Research helps us understand how things look in different times and places. **THIS RESEARCH LOOKS AT THE SITUATION OF ALBANIA'S EVANGELICAL CHURCHES—SPECIFICALLY HOW THEY ARE SERVING VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.**

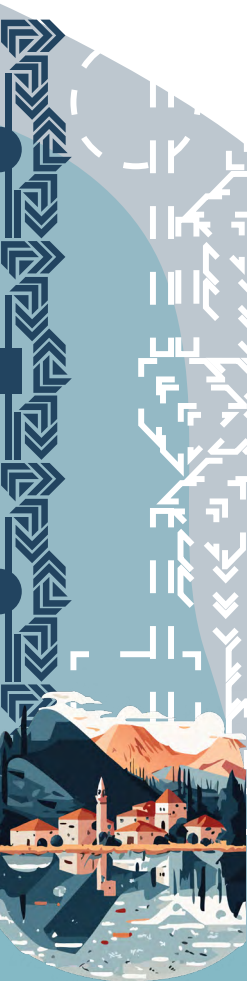
Although Albania has emerged as one of the leading countries in Balkan geopolitics, it was not long ago one of the poorest nations in Europe. Since the fall of its communist regime in 1991, the country has undergone significant political and economic transitions, deeply impacting Albanian society, particularly family structures and child welfare systems.

Many families continue to face economic hardship, and vulnerable groups—such as children without parental care, Roma and Egyptian communities, and victims of domestic violence—often lack adequate social support. In response to these challenges, the Evangelical church, one of five officially recognized religions in Albania, is increasingly stepping into a vital role offering practical assistance and spiritual care to vulnerable children and families.

Understanding Albania's unique cultural, social, and religious context is essential for developing effective and sustainable ministry approaches. The church has the potential to be a transformative agent in supporting children and strengthening families across the nation.

Ruth Vergnon works with vulnerable children through Alo ! Mik, an organization in Albania that supports children with complex trauma or who have lost a caregiver (<https://alomik.org/>). In 2023, she approached OneHope with a desire to systematically explore how churches in Albania are supporting vulnerable families. In response, we interviewed 90 evangelical church leaders about their church's efforts to help vulnerable families and children. This report, created by Alo ! Mik, World Without Orphans, and OneHope, analyzes those responses, highlighting current ministry activities and areas for growth.

As you review the findings, please keep in mind that these results are drawn from interviews with church leaders. The estimates provided, such as the number of children served or programs run, reflect one leader's perspective rather than in-depth program evaluations. Our primary goal is to shed light on the key challenges vulnerable families face, rather than to offer definitive figures on the number of vulnerable families or the full scope of church programs. The numbers shared are just one piece of a larger exploration of the needs and opportunities within vulnerable communities in Albania.





Data was collected between November 2023 and July 2024. Please note that totals throughout the report may not always add to 100% due to decimal rounding. For some “select all that apply” questions, totals may exceed 100%.

We hope this report sparks open discussions about the challenges and opportunities in supporting vulnerable children and youth.



KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How are churches in Albania caring for vulnerable children and families?
- How are churches in Albania discipling vulnerable children and youth?
- How can we better equip churches to meet the needs of vulnerable children, youth, and families?

DEFINITIONS

This report focuses on **HOW CHURCHES IN ALBANIA SUPPORT CHILDREN WHO COME FROM VULNERABLE FAMILIES**. There are many issues that can make a family vulnerable. The specific topics we asked about in our survey included:

- Economic hardship (poverty and/or unemployment)
- Experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect
- Witnessing violence in the home or community
- Mental health problems (parents)
- Substance abuse (parents)
- Household members in jail or prison
- Instability due to parental separation/divorce
- Having a family member attempt or die by suicide
- Death in the family
- Children/youth with special needs (for example developmental disabilities or chronic physical illness)
- Caregivers with a limited understanding of children's needs or development
- Abandonment (including for work abroad)





In addition to these challenges, children who have been deprived of parental care or separated from their primary caregivers often face additional issues and need different kinds of support.

While many people think first of **ORPHANS** as children whose parents have died, there are many different circumstances that can lead to a child or youth being deprived of parental care:

- **Biological orphan:** One who has lost one or both parents.
- **Social orphan:** One who has been removed from their home and put in other placements due to family circumstances.
- **Orphan in spirit:** One who may have physical caregivers but because of neglect, abuse, or exploitation do not feel emotionally safe or able to solicit care from the adults in their life.



“Not knowing the needs and stages of the child’s development, parents leave many gaps in their children’s lives. The child has emotional and psychological deficiencies and feels like an orphan with living parents.”

- Pastor



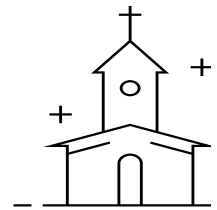
KEY FINDINGS

STAND-OUT STATISTICS



89% of church leaders identify economic hardship as a critical issue affecting their church's children and youth.

61% OF CHURCHES have a policy specifically related to protecting vulnerable children, but only 13% (11 churches) actively use their policy.



4 in 10 report that more than 40% of their congregation's children and youth come from vulnerable families.

The LEAST common types of support offered by churches are:



Meals:
21%

After-school
programs: 27%



Psychological
support: 32%

61%
of church leaders say
the majority of children
attend church
without their
parents.



MINISTRY LANDSCAPE

Most churches report having between 11 and 50 children involved in their ministry. Youth attendance is slightly lower on average, but the majority still report between 11 and 50 attending.

Rural and smaller churches are more likely to have children and youth attending without their parents.



COMMON ISSUES FACING CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Economic hardship

89%

Violence or neglect

33%

Caregivers with limited understanding of children's needs

29%

Challenges related to parental separation

25%

62 churches say they currently serve vulnerable families. Most provide support monthly, with smaller numbers serving weekly (11) or as needed (23).

The most common ways church leaders support vulnerable children, youth, and families are through aid distribution, family visits, and mentoring.

15% of churches have formal agreements with local authorities to collaborate in their ministry.

THINGS TO CELEBRATE



HIGH INVOLVEMENT

Church leaders report a high level of involvement from the vulnerable children attending their ministries. They say that more than half of these children are very involved or highly involved. This highlights the strong potential of churches to provide support for these children and youth.

96% OF CHURCHES interviewed serve vulnerable families through the distribution of aid.

GOOD ALIGNMENT

Providing meaningful care for vulnerable children and families is a priority for church leaders. Interviewees emphasize the importance of community integration. They are also working to meet basic needs and offer emotional support through visits, prayer, and attentive listening.

Half of church leaders say their church has members who are supporting children without parental care.

80% of church leaders say that local authorities are aware of the ministry work they are doing.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT



ISSUES AT HOME

When thinking about critical issues vulnerable children and youth face, church leaders emphasize challenges at home including **divorce, domestic violence**, and more hidden issues like **abuse and addiction**.

What role can or should churches play in addressing family dysfunction experienced by their members?



HEAVY TOPICS

Two very challenging themes in this report are the prevalence of **violence and addiction in many communities**. Experiences of violence, abuse, or neglect were selected by one-third of church leaders as a critical issue facing vulnerable children.

These are not simple issues to address. What hopeful or helpful strategies have you seen for approaching challenging issues like violence in your community?



PARENTS NEED HELP

Church leaders frequently note a lack of parental awareness about their children's needs. Yet **only 46% of churches have any kind of dedicated support for parents**. This points to an opportunity to help parents become better caregivers and role models.

What, if any, support do you provide for parents who may be struggling in your context?



VARIED CHALLENGES

Church leaders highlight the diverse challenges vulnerable children, youth, and families face, stressing the **need for a range of support—from economic and social to psychological and spiritual**.

With so many needs present at the same time, what are some of the most strategic or high-impact areas for intervention from churches and other caring institutions?



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS



Your title or role	%	Count
Pastor	71%	64
Ministry coordinator/worker	14%	13
Elder	10%	9
Children's worker	9%	8
Youth worker	6%	5
Other	9%	8

Because participants could select multiple answers, the total exceeds 100%.

ABOUT THE CHURCHES

Survey sites:

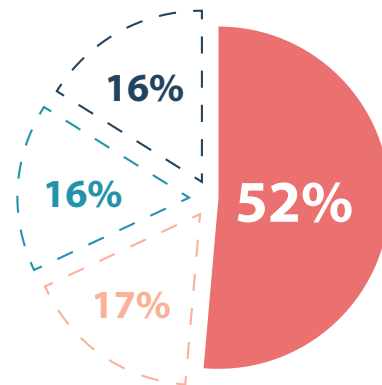
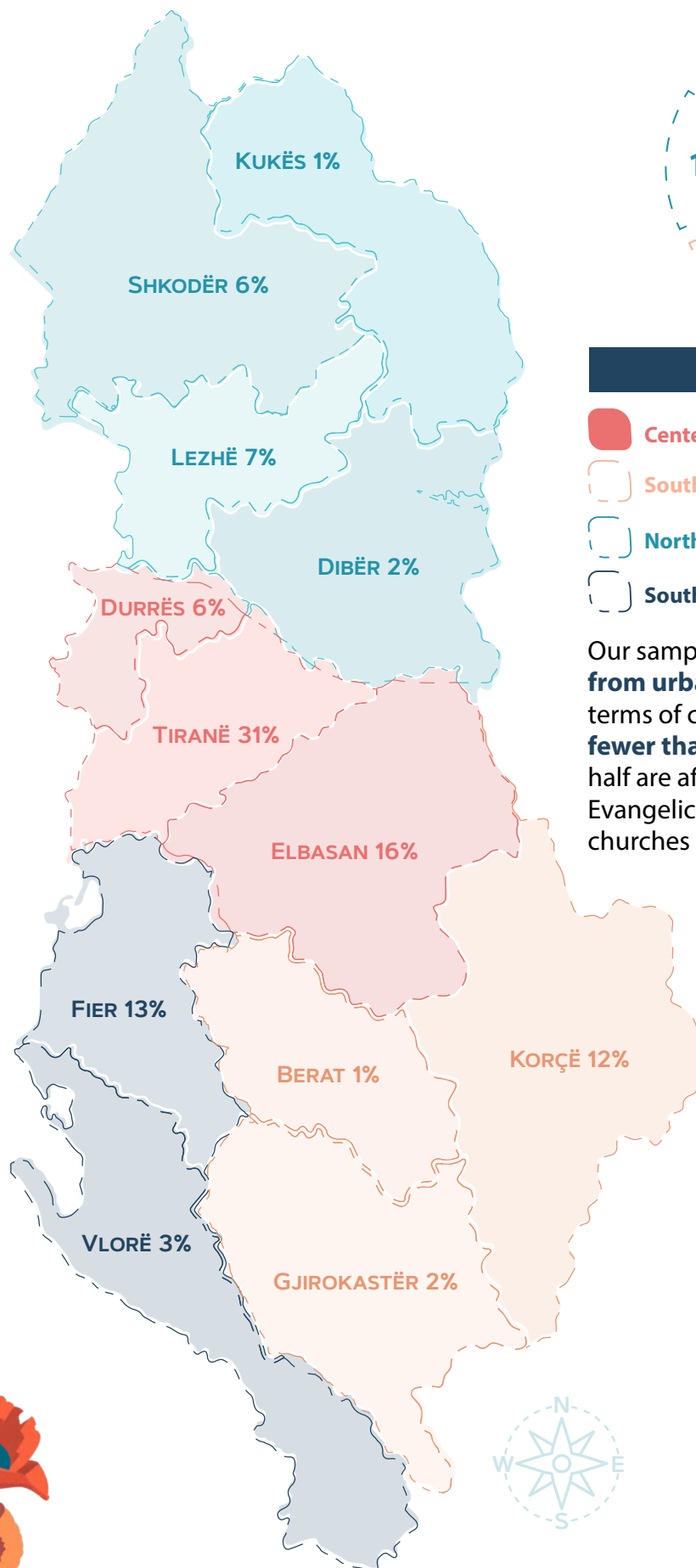
Albania is divided into 12 regions (districts), with churches from each district represented in this survey. In this report, we refer to four main regions, which group these districts as follows:

- **Center:** Tiranë, Elbasan & Durrës
- **North:** Shkodër, Lezhë, Dibër & Kukës
- **Southwest:** Fier & Vlorë
- **Southeast:** Korçë, Gjirokastër & Berat

In each interview, we collected insights from a church leader. Some churches operate across multiple locations. More than half of these branch congregations were in rural areas. Overall, the study reflects input from approximately **154 individual church locations**. For more details on church branches, refer to Appendix B.



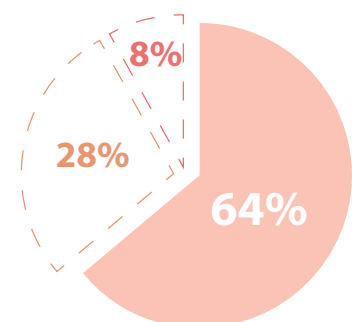
SURVEYS COLLECTED BY REGION



Regional Distribution

- Center – 47 churches
- Southeast – 14 churches
- North – 14 churches
- Southwest – 15 churches

Our sample represents **more churches from urban centers** than rural areas. In terms of church size, most **(84%) have fewer than 80 members**. More than half are affiliated with the Albanian Evangelical Alliance (VUSH), but smaller churches are less likely to be members.



Churches by Location

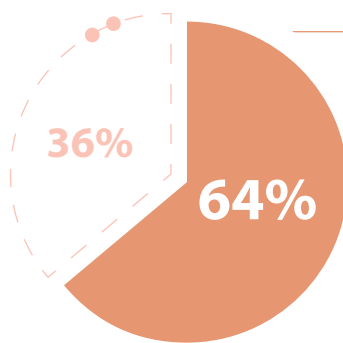
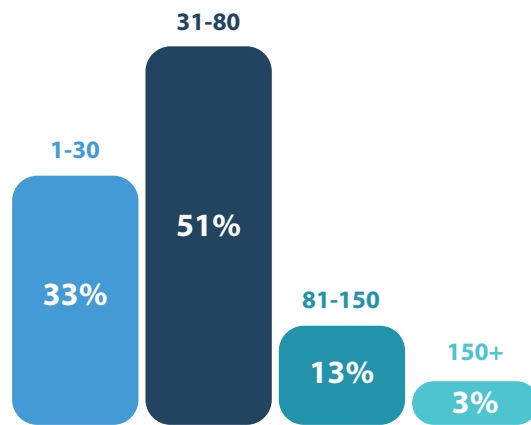
- Urban – 57 churches
- Capital City – 25 churches
- Rural – 7 churches





CONGREGATION SIZE

(APPLIES TO MAIN BRANCH)



Are you a part of the Albanian Evangelical Alliance (VUSH)?

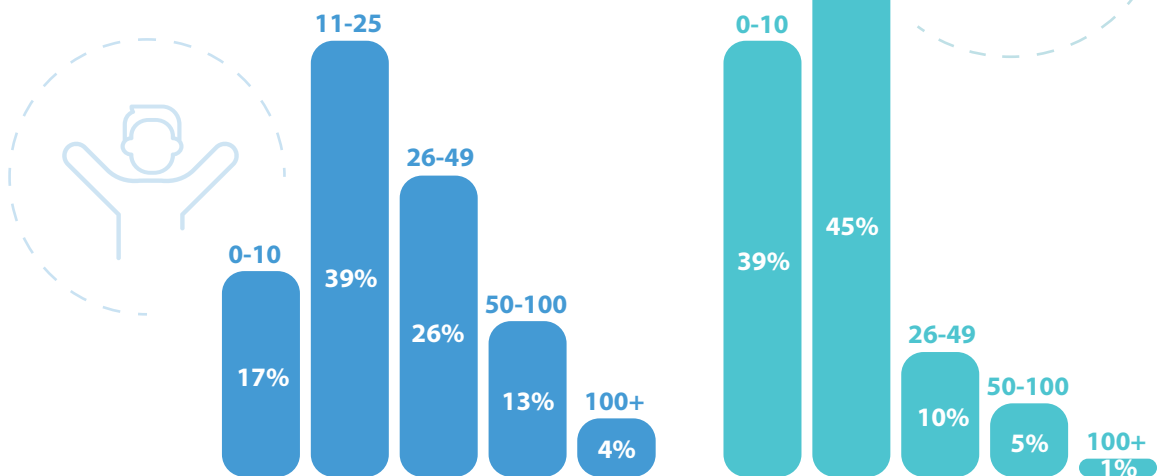
☒ Yes

☐ No

Churches in the capital city were most likely to say they were a part of VUSH (76%), small churches were the least likely (41%).

ABOUT MINISTRIES TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

How many children and youth are part of your children's or youth ministry, including your branches?



CHILDREN (5-12 YEARS OLD)

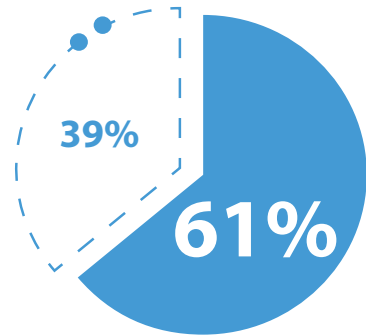
YOUTH (13-19 YEARS OLD)

We were interested to find out **how many children and youth are attending church as part of a family unit**. Church leaders report high percentages of children and youth who come to church without parents. They also report a slight increase in these unaccompanied minors in the past year.

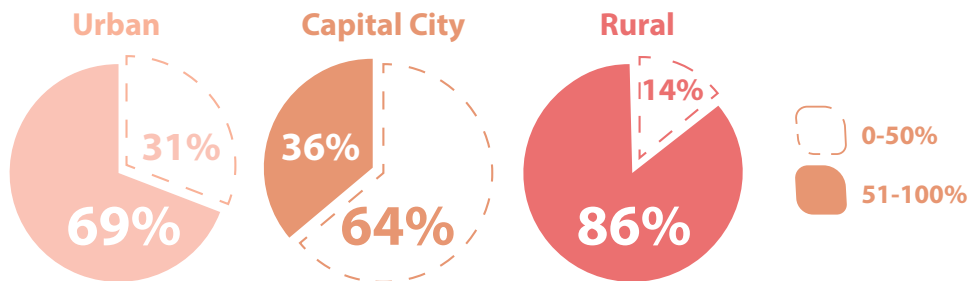
WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR CHILDREN COME WITHOUT PARENTS?

Children (5-12)

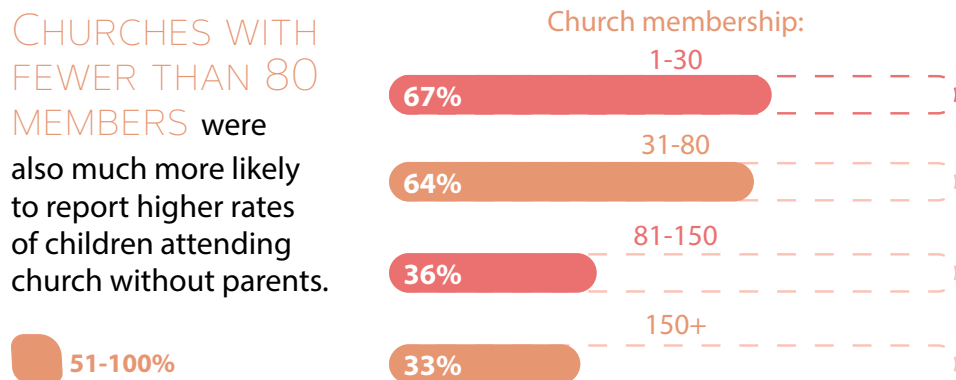
0-50% 51-100%



Urban and rural church leaders were more likely to report that more than half of their children attend church without parents.



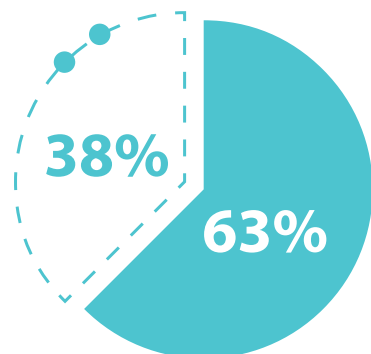
CHURCHES WITH FEWER THAN 80 MEMBERS were also much more likely to report higher rates of children attending church without parents.



WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR YOUTH COME WITHOUT PARENTS?

Youth (13-19)

0-50% 51-100%



Rates for youth attending without parents were similar to rates for children.



Over the past year, has the number of children and/or youth who come WITH parents:

DECREASED 19%

STAYED ABOUT THE SAME 59%

INCREASED 22%

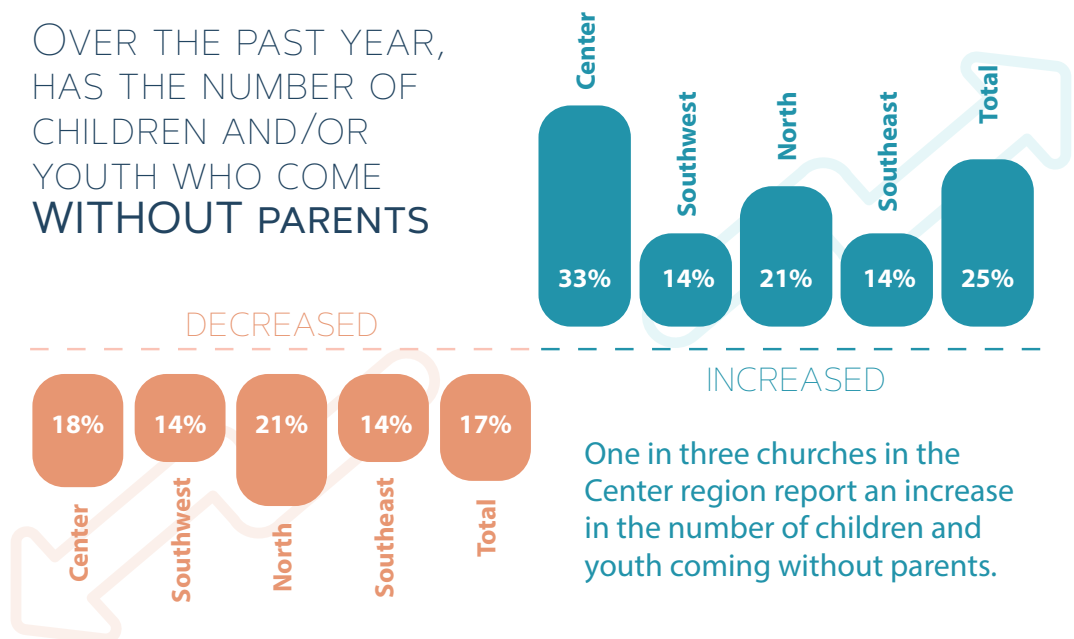
Over the past year, has the number of children and/or youth who come WITHOUT parents:

DECREASED 17%

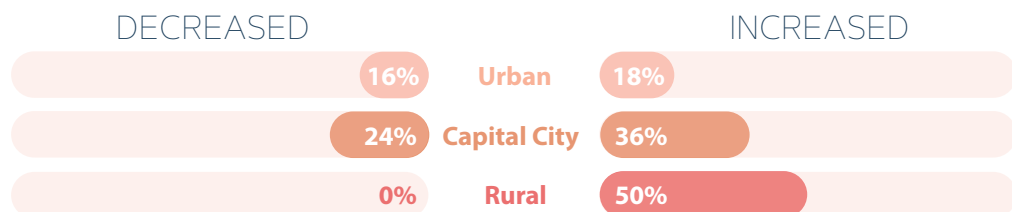
STAYED ABOUT THE SAME 57%

INCREASED 25%

OVER THE PAST YEAR, HAS THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND/OR YOUTH WHO COME WITHOUT PARENTS



RURAL CHURCHES report that the number of children and youth coming alone has either increased or stayed the same, with none reporting a decline.



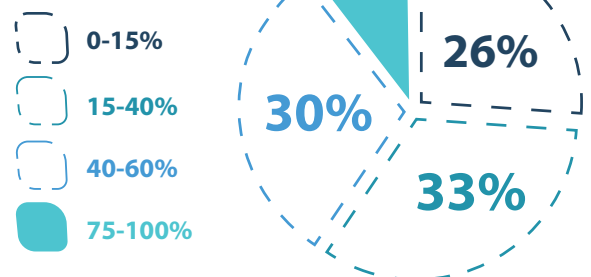
This is a small sample of only six rural churches and may not be fully representative of all rural congregations.

MINISTRY TO VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The heart of this research is a desire to better meet the needs of vulnerable children, youth, and families. To do that, we first need to understand what they need and what is already being done to support them. Assessing current ministry activities helps identify where we might sustain, deepen, or initiate new efforts.

We start by examining the specific challenges Albanian families face. Many factors can make a family vulnerable. In this section, respondents shed light on the critical issues facing the families of children and youth in their church.

What percentage of
your children and
youth would you say
COME FROM
VULNERABLE
FAMILIES?



ENCOURAGING NOTE: CHURCH LEADERS REPORT THAT MORE THAN HALF OF CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE FAMILIES ARE VERY OR HIGHLY INVOLVED IN THEIR MINISTRIES. THIS HIGHLIGHTS HOW WELL-POSITIONED CHURCHES ARE TO OFFER SUPPORT AND HEALING FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH.





WHAT IS THE ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION of vulnerable families that your church is in contact with?

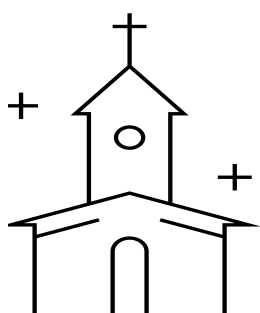
■ Majority Albanian
 ■ Egyptian
 ■ Roma

66%

19%

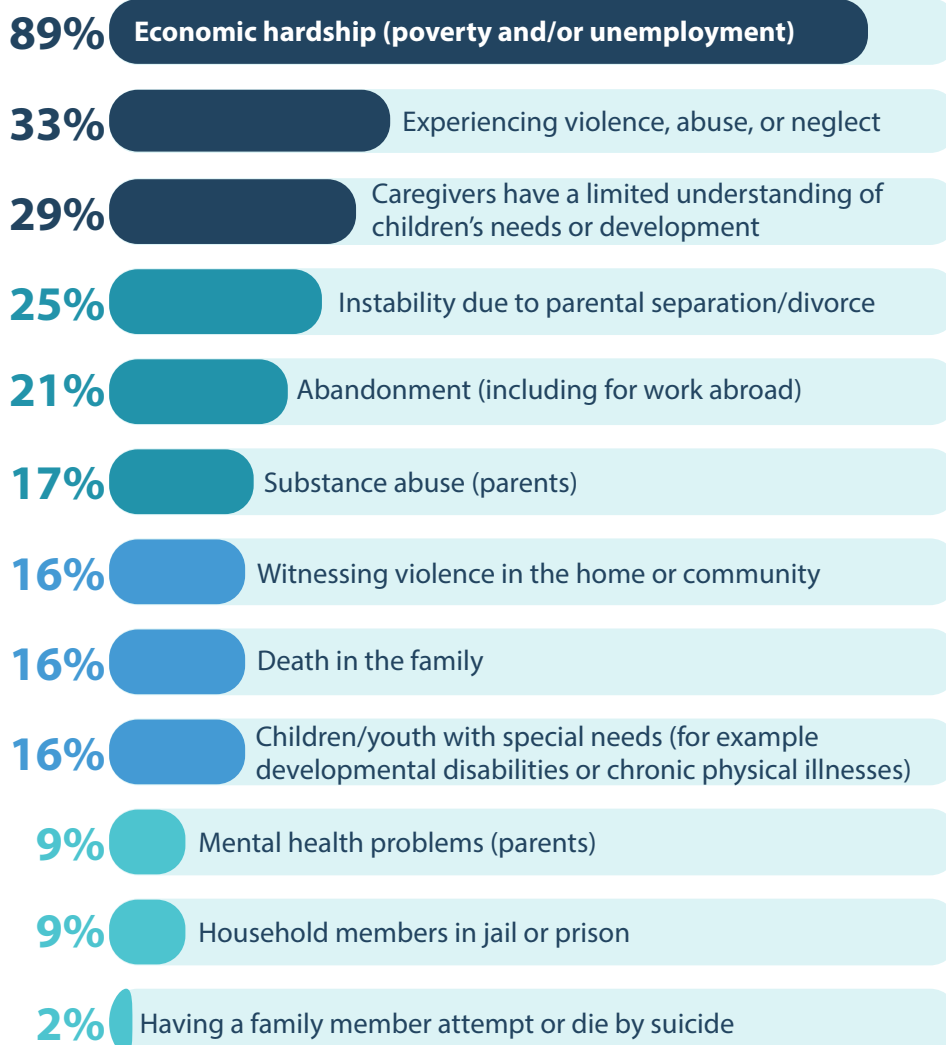
12%

The Southwest and Central regions, along with rural areas, report serving higher percentages of Roma families, while urban churches report more Egyptian families. However, it is important to note that many in Albania find it challenging to distinguish between Roma and Egyptians, so these impressions may not fully reflect demographic realities.



ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY CHURCHES

Based on the items in this list, what would you say are the 3 most critical issues experienced by your church's children/youth?



Because participants could select multiple answers, the total exceeds 100%.

WHY DID YOU IDENTIFY THOSE THREE AS THE MOST CRITICAL?

Many respondents selected their top three critical issues based on their experiences working with children in their community. Some provided specific reasons for their choices, which have been organized into major themes below. Each theme is paired with direct quotes from church leaders, offering further insight into their community's most pressing needs.

+ + COMMON THEMES



ECONOMIC HARDSHIP was frequently identified as a root cause that intensifies other challenges for vulnerable families. Church leaders emphasize that many issues faced by families and children stem from financial difficulties.

"Economic difficulty brings side effects. Parents go abroad for work but abandon their children."

"Poverty brings a small worldview—it has brought divorces, separated families. When the husband does not work, then other problems come."



Respondents frequently noted a **LACK OF EDUCATION AND AWARENESS** among parents, particularly when it comes to the emotional and psychological support that children need. They emphasize the importance of improving parenting skills to better meet these needs.

"Not knowing the needs and stages of the child's development, parents leave many gaps in their children's lives. The child has emotional and psychological deficiencies and feels like an orphan with living parents."

"We have encountered parents who are content with providing the basic needs of life for the child and do not ask for more than that."



DIFFICULT FAMILY SITUATIONS were a recurring theme. Some pointed to parental absence due to immigration—a longstanding issue in Albania—while others highlighted divorce—a newer trend contributing



to family instability. Overall, there is a sense that many children are growing up with only **one parent or in challenging family conditions**.

"It is common for the father to go outside Albania to work and the mother has a very difficult time raising the children."

"Divorce of parents brings uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and trauma to children—also financial difficulties. We have cases of children where the father is in prison and this affects the life of the family, leading to a chain of consequences."



VIOLENCE was described as a widespread cultural issue, perpetuating cycles of **trauma and abuse**. Its prevalence can make it seem normal and even necessary in the eyes of young people.

"We are a violent society and this affects the growth of children, increasing bullying and aggressiveness. They see violence as a means to achieve what they want or to solve an issue. Violence becomes an integral part of their lives."

"Perhaps 70% to 80% of the population experiences violence and economic hardship. We live in a society where violence is very high."



Other responses pointed to less visible issues, including **"HIDDEN" CHALLENGES** like mental health struggles and family abuse. There seems to be **a culture of silence surrounding difficult topics** in family life, which makes it hard for families to seek help and support.

"There is also a problem with the mental health of the parents, but this is not so obvious. It is hidden."

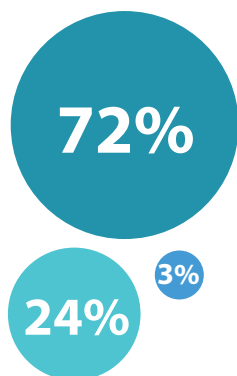
"Suicide attempts ... one of the reasons is economic difficulty. Families can not meet the necessary expenses and it leads to such attempts. Another reason is the violence and abuse that husbands inflict on wives and children."

"We deal with young people and children who are abused by their family. We also have some whose family deprives them of going to school in order for them to take care of needy relatives. We also have underage young people and children whose families force them to work."



SUPPORT NEEDED FOR VULNERABLE FAMILIES

Understanding broader social issues is important, but knowing how to provide effective support is crucial. In this section, church leaders discuss the types of assistance they believe vulnerable children, youth, and families need in order to thrive.



DO CHURCH LEADERS UNDERSTAND WHAT VULNERABLE FAMILIES/CHILDREN NEED IN TERMS OF SUPPORT TO EMPOWER THEM?



Yes



Partially



I'm not sure

Church leaders feel confident that they understand the support vulnerable families require. They identified various types of assistance needed to address problems like poverty and family issues.

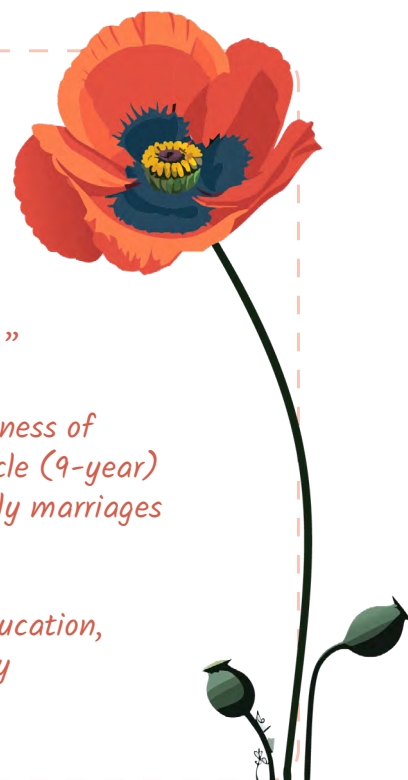
When asked to share more about what kinds of support they think vulnerable children, youth, and families need, most church leaders emphasized the variety of challenges this population faces. They mentioned many different kinds of support needed including economic, social, psychological, and spiritual.

Examples of their many-layered responses:

"There are basic food needs for minimum monthly life insurance. [They] need help with the learning process; the constant giving of the message of hope that the gospel gives; a fatherly, brotherly, and masculine figure."

"1. Employment 2. Schooling/Education 3. Awareness of domestic violence 4. Children finish the lower cycle (9-year) and then go abroad to work. 5. Awareness of early marriages (married at 13)."

"In my opinion, empowerment comes through education, housing arrangement, inclusion in the community (social integration)."



From these kinds of detailed answers, we identified five common themes that emerged across many responses. Below, we summarize these ideas and include a few direct quotes to help dive deeper.



COMMON THEMES



ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Vulnerable families often face critical financial challenges, primarily due to unemployment and low wages. Poverty leaves many struggling to meet basic needs. Church leaders highlighted the importance of providing immediate help, such as food, clothing, and financial aid, to fill these gaps. For long-term stability, they emphasized the need for better employment opportunities, financial planning, and higher wages to set families on a stronger economic path.

"We see unemployment and the need for food and clothing."

"Creation of jobs. Support to strengthen opportunities for self-employment."

"We have been supporting some families with material things ... but also training for the labor market."



EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

Children from vulnerable families often miss school or lack educational support at home. Church leaders stressed the importance of programs that promote learning, literacy, and continued education. Educational initiatives, such as parent training and after-school programs, can help children succeed academically and inspire a love of learning.

"Education is a great need for the community where we work; and so is training for parents related to children's education."

"They need education, as they are almost at the level of illiteracy."

"There is a need for training in the school where we have an after-school service and help for children who have difficulties in school."



PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Many church leaders highlighted the diverse emotional, relational, and psychological needs of vulnerable populations. They emphasized the importance of support systems that promote mental health and emotional well-being. While some stressed the role of professional counselors, others underscored the value of everyday relationships with trustworthy, empathetic listeners. Overall, there was a clear sense

from these leaders that many different kinds of psycho-emotional support are needed.

"There is a need for psychological help for children."

"They need encouragement, financial and spiritual support, trust and sometimes discipline in order to know and respect each other."

"They need to be heard and talk to someone."

"Social integration and a caring model of listening and loving them."



PARENTING SUPPORT

Many of the challenges children face stem from a lack of support or even abuse from their parents. Church leaders identified supporting parents as a key way to improve the lives of vulnerable children and youth.

This support would focus on **building parents' skills and confidence, improving family dynamics, and strengthening child-rearing practices.** By increasing parental engagement and awareness of their responsibilities, parents would be better equipped to create supportive environments for their children.

"Parents do not spend time with children; children spend most of the time on social networks."

"Greater family attention to children ... The biggest commitment is to be involved in society."

"It is necessary for parents to be aware of the responsibility they have towards children and for children to be taught with better models than those of social networks."



SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

Spiritual support is essential for fostering a sense of community and belonging among vulnerable families. Church leaders emphasize that vulnerable children and youth need not only material assistance but also spiritual encouragement. They especially need to experience Christ's love and understand their value and worth in His eyes.

"The spiritual part is the primary need. We also focus on the educational and health side through courses, physiotherapy, and various therapies."

"Our goal is to guide them with advice and examples towards a life dependent on God and not so much on others."

"Our mission as a church is not only to provide services or material goods, but to provide them with spiritual support to show you the love of Christ."

PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION BY CHURCHES

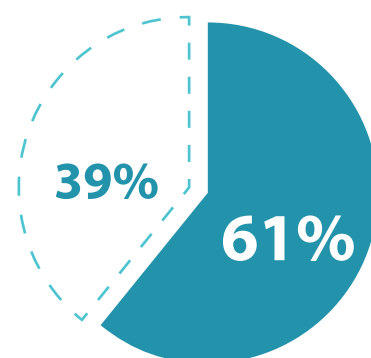
After asking church leaders to identify areas of need and to reflect on the ideal support for vulnerable families, we examined what churches are currently doing through their policies and programs. Our goal was to assess the prevalence of specific policies protecting vulnerable populations and to identify areas of alignment and potential gaps in how churches are responding to the needs of their community.

DOES YOUR CHURCH HAVE ANY POLICIES SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO PROTECTING OR SUPPORTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN?

For example, do you have training for children's ministry volunteers, contact protocols for reporting concerning observations, etc.

☒ Yes

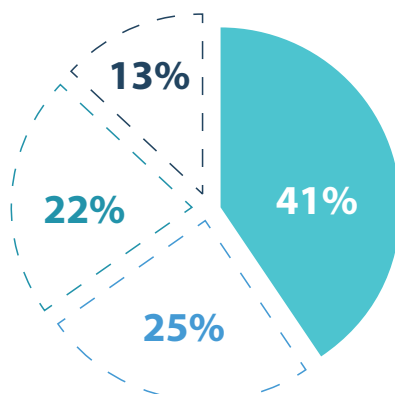
☐ No



Out of the 55 churches that have a policy, 41% use the safeguarding policy recommended by the Albanian Evangelical Alliance (VUSH).

Churches in the Northern region are far less likely to say they have policies for protecting vulnerable children. Only 36% said yes to this question, much lower than the average. (see Appendix B)

Having a policy, of course, is not the same as actively applying it in a ministry setting. When we asked church leaders how their child-protection policies were being implemented, the responses varied widely. Among the 90 churches surveyed, only 11 reported actively using their policies to guide ministry decisions.



HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE YOUR POLICY'S ROLE:

- ☒ 36 churches – Not available
- ☐ 22 churches – Present but not actively used
- ☐ 19 churches – Regularly referenced
- ☐ 11 churches – Actively used to guide choices



SPONTANEOUS SUPPORT BY CHURCH MEMBERS

Vulnerable children and families may be members of a church and community, but that does not mean that other congregants are aware of their challenges or seeking to help them. Church leaders were confident that most or all church members recognize the reality of families experiencing trauma or other issues in their church. They also felt confident that most congregants would want to help (64%) or be willing to help somewhat (29%).

When asked **how** they saw church members showing support, the most common responses included offering material aid, providing emotional or spiritual care, volunteering with church programs, and seeking to create an inclusive and welcoming environment.

CHURCH MEMBERS VS. CHURCH PROGRAMS

Church members play a crucial role in church programs by supplying the labor or material goods needed to run them. However, it is important to note the differences between the support provided by church members directly to vulnerable families and the support offered by the church as an institution.

MEMBER SUPPORT

Most commonly mentioned

Welcoming attitude and inclusion in church activities.

“Church members try and care to make you part of the church.”

Spiritual and emotional support such as prayer, counseling, and encouragement.

“Visiting them, supporting them spiritually and emotionally.”

Material support/donations such as food, clothing, and shelter.

Volunteering time.

Occasionally mentioned

Advice and help with practical needs.

“Practical help (with various jobs).”

“Offering advice and ideas for their life and social needs.”

CHURCH SUPPORT

Most commonly mentioned

Food assistance such as food packages.

After-school programs.

Spiritual resources such as literature, pamphlets, visits, etc.

Occasionally mentioned

Counseling services.

Health and rehabilitation.
Services such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, etc.

Financial support/distributions.

Programs for special needs/
populations including autism, blindness, etc.

Skills development for employment.



CHURCH PROJECTS AND INTERVENTIONS

The focus of our survey was the role of church ministry in supporting vulnerable children, youth, and families. In this section, we explore questions about the number of people served by churches. This helps us better understand the reach of Albania's churches and identify which areas of ministry are well-supported and which may require more attention.

All the numbers below are based on estimates from church leaders at the moment of their interview, not systematic program reviews or attendance rosters.



HOW MANY VULNERABLE FAMILIES DO YOU SERVE ...

✓ **62 Responded** — **28 Blank**

Church leaders who did not provide a response to this question may not be serving any vulnerable families at this time.



Some churches responded in multiple categories. Three weekly responses also serve monthly (1) or punctually (2). 10 monthly responses also serve punctually. 49 responses picked only one category.

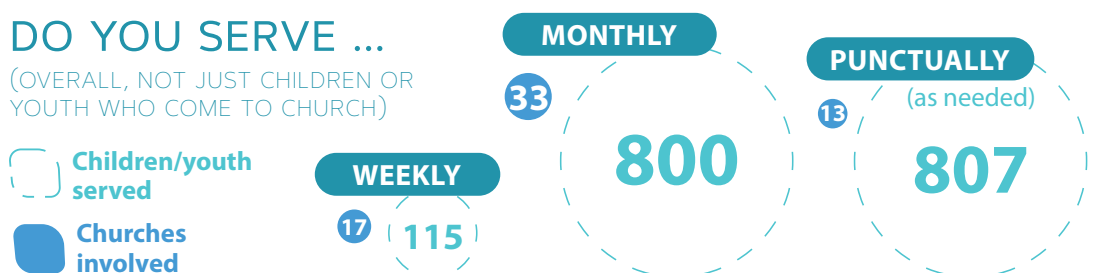
 Families served
 Churches involved

HOW MANY VULNERABLE CHILDREN/YOUTH DO YOU SERVE ...

(OVERALL, NOT JUST CHILDREN OR YOUTH WHO COME TO CHURCH)

✓ **59 Responded** — **31 Blank**

Church leaders who did not provide a response to this question may not be serving any vulnerable families at this time.



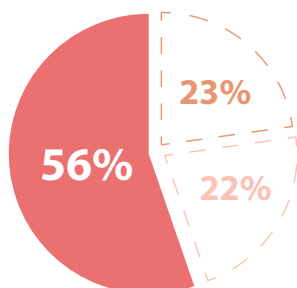
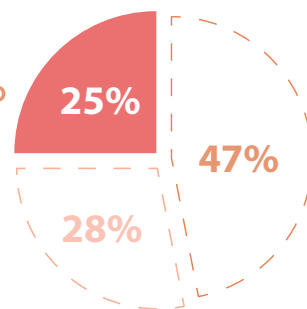
Some churches responded in multiple categories. Three weekly responses also serve monthly (1) or punctually (2). One monthly response also serves punctually. 55 responses picked only one category.



HOW MANY VULNERABLE FAMILIES REGULARLY ATTEND YOUR CHURCH?

(are active members in the spiritual community with your congregation)

0-4 5-10 11 or more



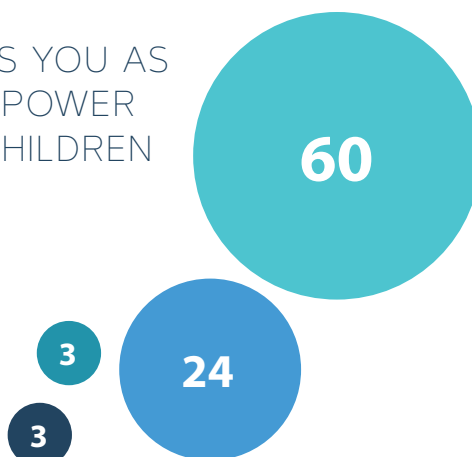
HOW MANY VULNERABLE FAMILIES ARE CONNECTED TO YOUR CHURCH THROUGH MINISTRIES, RESOURCES, OR PROJECTS BUT ARE NOT ACTIVE MEMBERS?

0-4 5-10 11 or more

Churches are generally connected to more vulnerable families through projects than they are through their congregations.

TELL US SOME OF THE WAYS YOU AS A CHURCH SUPPORT OR EMPOWER VULNERABLE FAMILIES OR CHILDREN (select all that apply)

- 4 or more categories
- 2-3 categories
- 1 category
- Nothing (3 church leaders did not choose any categories)



Church leaders received a list of support categories and selected which ones their church participates in. 66% of leaders chose four or more categories. Many also shared details about their support efforts, which we have summarized along with selected quotes to highlight key themes.

96%

DISTRIBUTION OF AID



Distribution of aid primarily referred to food packages and other material goods, with varying frequencies and methods of distribution. While some churches provide aid regularly—such as monthly—others offer assistance sporadically depending on available resources. Collaborations with organizations such as food banks were also mentioned.

“Our goal is to alleviate the financial burden on families by offering critical support for rent, heating, and school supplies.”

“We support 70 to 80 families every month with food, clothing, detergent, etc.”



81% — FAMILY VISITS



Some family visits are planned and occur regularly, others are spontaneous—driven by specific needs or circumstances. These visits usually focus on building relationships, providing emotional support, and bringing aid packages.

“We visit 5 to 10 families once a month. Interest in children and family, prayers.”

“Visits for encouragement, prayer, etc.”

62% — MENTORING OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Mentoring typically occurs in one-on-one sessions or group meetings, with a focus on offering guidance, support, and encouragement.

“There are 4 mentors who meet once a week either individually or in groups.”

“I have a group of children with whom I talk, teach and encourage in different areas of life.”

46% — PARENTING SUPPORT



Parenting support, when provided, typically occurs through occasional meetings and informal interactions rather than structured programs. These efforts are often focused on mothers or take place within women's groups.

“... especially for mothers (who are alone), we also helped with practical work and advice.”

“We sometimes hold meetings where the focus is parenting.”

42% — FINANCIAL SUPPORT



Financial support is limited and case-by-case, focusing on specific needs like rent, medicine, and utilities rather than direct cash assistance.

“We focus on empowering them ... not directly giving finances, but with the purchase of materials they need.”

“We rarely provide financial help; only in urgent and specific cases, like medical issues or rent.”

32% — PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT



Psychological support usually means pastoral care. A few leaders mentioned making referrals to professionals, usually in the context of trauma or disability.

“We have referred cases because professionally I cannot do this as a pastor.”

“... trainings with psychologists and psychiatrists, which are held from time to time.”

“We directed and supported people to go to a Christian counseling center.”

27% — AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS



After-school programs focus on tutoring and enrichment, with sessions in subjects like English, math, and chemistry. Programs are generally available 2 to 5 days a week but are limited due to lack of staff and volunteers.

21% — MEALS



Meal support may be offered 2 to 5 times a week, often alongside children's activities or community gatherings. Meals are typically cooked by church members or in partnership with organizations.

“After the children's meeting, we also offer a meal for them.”

“We cook it ourselves and invite vulnerable families.”

18% — OTHER



Other types of support include spiritual support, job orientation, and social events. A few leaders mentioned practical aid like school supplies, heating assistance, and emergency healthcare, as well as recreational activities, such as sports, excursions, and free courses in music and languages.

Specialized support is sometimes offered to families facing disabilities, addiction issues, or single parents, often through partnerships with local and international organizations.



MINISTRY ALIGNMENTS AND MISALIGNMENTS

Up to this point in the report, we have gathered insights from church leaders about what they see as the most pressing needs of vulnerable families in their communities. They also shared perspective on the types of support these families require and described the programs and interventions their churches currently offer.

In this section, we take a step back from the survey responses to examine some emerging themes. Our goal is to offer clarity and encourage discussion about how Albania's churches are succeeding—and where they may be falling short—in addressing the unique needs of the country's most vulnerable children and youth.



CELEBRATING ALIGNMENT

There are several areas where the needs of vulnerable families are being met by the support churches offer. These strengths are worth celebrating and building upon to strengthen Albanian churches' care for vulnerable children and youth.

Community Integration

Vulnerable children, youth, and families may feel isolated due to shame or judgment. They need to experience the truth that they are loved and belong to their community.

Albanian churches can play a key role in meeting this need. Many leaders reported that their congregations actively invite vulnerable children and youth into church activities. Social events, spiritual engagement, and mentoring are ways churches are integrating young people into community life and battling feelings of isolation.

Relationship Building

Regardless of their family situation, children need support and encouragement from other adults in their lives. External affirmation is especially crucial for young people who face a lack of support at home.

Churches play a key role in helping young people form relationships with caring adults outside of their family. Many church leaders shared examples of relationship-building, ranging from formal mentoring programs to after-school activities that pair young people with caring volunteers.

Emotional Support for Families

Challenges faced by vulnerable families, such as violence, addiction, and hunger, leave deep emotional scars. People in these situations need encouragement, empathetic listening, and positive feedback. Pastoral care is a key type of support leaders are providing. Through home visits, prayer, and being available to listen, pastors and other church members affirm the worth of individuals and offer kindness to those in pain.

Support for Basic Needs

Vulnerable children and youth often face material needs that make life difficult, such as hunger, lack of clothing, or an unheated home in winter. Churches can play a crucial role in addressing these basic needs. Food packages and occasional meal programs help meet nutritional needs, while financial assistance for urgent medical care or winter heating can extend families' limited resources.

Although many leaders highlighted the limited capacity of their churches to provide concrete support, it was encouraging to see their desire and commitment to offering basic material comforts to the vulnerable when possible.

EXPLORING MISALIGNMENT

We observed several areas where the needs of vulnerable families exceed the support churches are offering. We hope Albanian churches will consider these key areas as opportunities for growth and deeper ministry.

Economic Challenges and Employment

There is widespread agreement that economic challenges are at the core of many issues facing vulnerable children and families. Some churches provide material aid, such as food packages, essential supplies, and occasional financial assistance, but their capacity to support these programs is limited.

Addressing immediate needs helps in the short term, but ultimately better employment opportunities are needed for long-term sustainability. Church leaders may be aware of this, but there is a gap in their ability to help with these complex challenges. Very few churches mentioned initiatives related to employment or job training, despite recognizing these as key needs earlier in the survey.

Partnerships with NGOs, civic institutions, and government programs could foster future improvement in this area.

Abuse and Psychological Support

Church leaders frequently identified violence, family dysfunction, and substance abuse as critical issues facing vulnerable communities. While some church activities indirectly address these challenges by providing emotional and community support, few initiatives tackle them head-on.

Psychological support was among the least common services offered by churches. When provided, it often focused on disability services rather than trauma or abuse. We were surprised by how few leaders mentioned they are taking steps to address the “hidden” challenges of family abuse, domestic violence, and mental health struggles.

While these are sensitive topics, we see this gap as an opportunity for churches to take more courageous, intentional, and direct steps to address the issues of domestic violence and a culture of abuse.

Support the Whole Child

While some churches offer after-school programs and educational services, our interviews highlighted the need to prioritize children’s overall well-being. This includes addressing psychological issues and broader developmental needs like peer relationships, emotional attachment, age-appropriate sex education, and future goals. Though this may seem daunting, a community effort where everyone contributes can make a difference.

Supporting vulnerable children requires more than meeting external needs; it involves creating safe spaces to heal deeper wounds. This approach calls for trusting relationships, creative programming, and an understanding of trauma’s impact. Addressing this gap is challenging but offers a meaningful opportunity for churches to expand their impact.

Parenting Support

Many church leaders expressed concern about parents’ lack of awareness regarding their children’s emotional, psychological, and developmental needs. This was a discouraging trend noted in numerous interviews with church leaders.





However, we observed that fewer than half of churches reported having programs dedicated to parenting support. Many of these were inconsistent or informal efforts, often limited to occasional meetings or advice, primarily directed at mothers.

While informal parenting guidance has value, there is a clear need for more intentional, well-resourced support for parents of vulnerable families. Developing structured parenting programs, especially ones targeted at the specific issues facing vulnerable youth, could strengthen family dynamics and help reduce issues affecting children and youth.

Substance Abuse Programs

Substance abuse is a particularly pressing but under-addressed issue. Church leaders identified parental substance abuse as a significant concern and a critical challenge for vulnerable families.

The problem is recognized, but support is lacking. Most churches do not have formal substance abuse treatment programs or targeted interventions for families affected by addiction. While some informal support may be provided through counseling or pastoral care, the absence of widespread, structured programs highlights a critical gap in addressing this issue.

Raising awareness and working to destigmatize substance abuse within church communities could also encourage more open dialogue and create opportunities for effective intervention.



MINISTRY TO CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF PARENTAL CARE

While many children and families experience a range of challenges, children who have been deprived of parental care or separated from their primary caregivers often face additional issues or need different kinds of support. In the report introduction, we shared three different kinds of situations that can lead to a child or youth being deprived of parental care.

- **Biological orphan:** Lost one or both parents.
- **Social orphan:** Placed outside the home due to family issues.
- **Orphan in spirit:** Has caregivers but lacks emotional support.

*“They live
to survive.”
- Pastor*



The majority of church leaders (70%) said they were already familiar with these definitions of the different kinds of orphans. A few (30%) said that these ideas were new to them.

ALMOST ALL CHURCH LEADERS (93%) SAID THEY WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION OR TRAINING ABOUT THESE TOPICS.

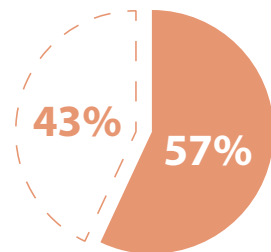


ORPHAN SUNDAY

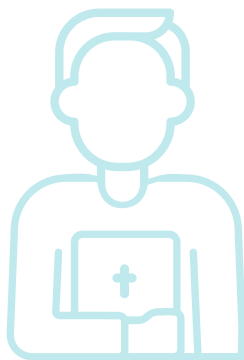
For more than 20 years, churches all around the world have rallied together each year on the second Sunday in November to draw attention to God's heart for orphaned and vulnerable children and families. This event is an opportunity to invite local congregations to respond in deep and meaningful ways.

Orphan Sunday is an initiative from the members of the Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO). The project aims to inspire and equip God's people to live the "pure religion" described in the book of James and proposed throughout scripture. Albania Without Orphans has been promoting this special event since 2020, providing materials, ideas, and inviting churches to organize it in their own way.

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT **ORPHAN SUNDAY** OR ORGANIZED SOMETHING ON THAT DAY IN THE PREVIOUS YEARS?



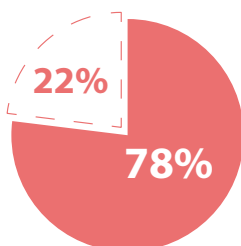
Awareness of Orphan Sunday varies widely by region. Church leaders in the North and Southwest seem generally aware of this event:



OVER 70% of leaders in both regions said they were familiar with it. In contrast, **FEWER THAN 50%** of leaders in the Central and Southeast regions said they knew what it was. Church leaders in the capital city are less likely to be familiar with this event.

ONLY 44% SAID THEY KNEW ABOUT IT, COMPARED WITH 60% OF URBAN LEADERS AND 71% OF RURAL LEADERS.

(see Appendix B)



IF YES, HAVE YOU ORGANIZED SOMETHING ON THAT DAY IN THE PREVIOUS YEARS?



Total Responses: 51

IF YES, CAN YOU
TELL US WHAT
YOU ORGANIZED?

19

Church service
focus and/or
sermons

9

Prayer focus

TYPES OF
ACTIVITIES

17

Awareness
and information
distribution

6

Material
or financial
donations

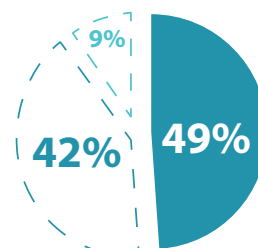
ORPHAN CARE

Is your church or any church members supporting children without parental care (for example foster care, adoption, orphanage/ family home, involved with orphanage)?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I'm not sure



Churches in the North are least likely to report that their members are supporting children without parental care (29% said yes compared with 49% overall). Many rural church leaders said they are unsure if this kind of support is taking place in their churches (43% unsure).

(see Appendix B)

IF YES, WHAT ARE THEY DOING ?

The four themes below show the responses to this question. In terms of numbers, however, they only total **around 20 responses**, representing less than one-quarter of the total sample. It is encouraging to know that there are Christian families pursuing orphan care, but this picture is only true for the small number of families captured in this report.



x5

FOSTERING OR
ADOPTING FAMILIES
IN THE CHURCH

A few church

members actively participate in fostering, both formally and informally. Some families adopt, while others engage in weekend or emergency foster care.



x6

MENTORING OR
INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT
OF ORPHANS

Orphans in some

church communities receive mentoring, counseling, and spiritual support. Some may receive financial help for education, food, and other essential needs.



Some church members organize regular activities for children in orphanages, including sports, holiday celebrations, and mentorship. Individual members also provide one-on-one support for children in local orphanages.



Some church communities support kinship caregivers and single-parent families. This may include both provisions for material and moral support. Church members may help extended family members caring for children.

DO YOU THINK THAT CHURCH MEMBERS
WOULD BE INTERESTED IN BECOMING
FOSTER OR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES OR
LEARNING MORE ABOUT IT?



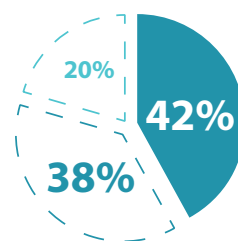
I'm not sure



Yes



No



This is what pastors think about their church members, not direct data from church members themselves.

Children deprived of parental care face significant challenges that often require unique and intentional support from their communities. Church leaders generally understand the categories of orphans—biological, social, and spiritual—but express [a desire for more training and resources on the topic](#). While some churches are actively involved in fostering, adoption, or supporting orphanages, these efforts represent only a small number of churches surveyed. Many church leaders believe there is potential for more families to engage in orphan care, though they are uncertain about the level of interest among their members.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How can churches better equip their members to understand and address the needs of children deprived of parental care?
- What barriers might be preventing church members from engaging in fostering or adoption, and how can these be addressed?
- How could awareness campaigns like Orphan Sunday be expanded to reach more regions or communities?

GOSPEL INTEGRATION

This section explores the role of scripture and the gospel in churches' ministry efforts. Often, **vulnerable children need to engage the Bible in ways that go beyond basic preaching.** Ministries may need to explore different methods and points of entry for helping them connect with the gospel.

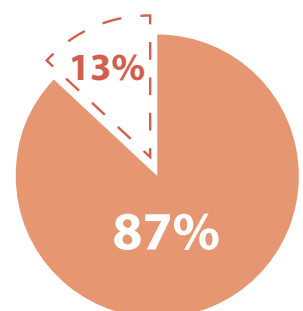
The church leaders we surveyed overwhelmingly affirmed that they work to integrate the gospel into their programs. This emphasis is clearly important to them and part of how they understand their ministry purpose. As they talked about what that looks like in practice, they highlighted strategies that include:

- Distributing evangelism materials such as Bibles and literature
- Incorporating prayer or spiritual encouragement into programs
- Presenting the gospel creatively through stories or skits

WHAT RESOURCES OR TOOLS DO YOU USE FOR SHARING SCRIPTURE AND HELPING KIDS ENGAGE?

 **Materials we buy or get for free**

 **Curriculum/materials we create or translate**



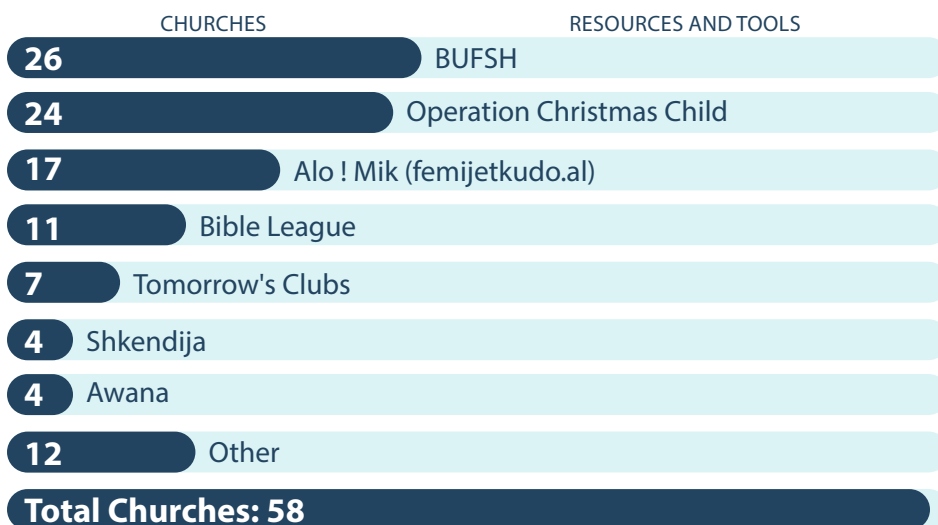
RURAL CHURCHES (100%) reported exclusively using materials they purchased or were given.

CHURCHES IN THE NORTH (21%) are most likely to create or translate their own materials.



MATERIALS WE BUY OR GET FOR FREE

Here are some of the specific resources and tools churches use to share scripture with kids.

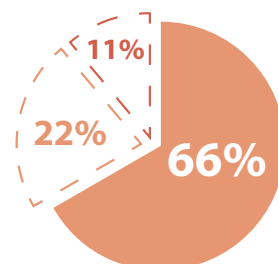


Other responses included:

- Asambleja e Perendise
- OM
- Royal Rangers
- ICF
- Jeta Plus
- SHKBSH
- ZGG

DO YOU USE ANY RESOURCES ADAPTED FOR REACHING VULNERABLE CHILDREN/YOUTH WITH GOD'S WORD?

☒ Yes
 ☐ No
 ☐ I'm not sure



Upon reviewing these findings, we recognized that this question could have been more clearly worded. Many church leaders seemed to respond with general ministry to children in mind, rather than focusing specifically on resources for vulnerable children and youth.

For example, when we asked about specific tools or materials they used, responses included:

- Using visual tools like videos, cartoons, or images.
- Using interactive approaches like music, games, crafts, or practical examples.
- Building relationships with kids.
- Adapting or searching out materials appropriate for particular age groups.

While these responses are valuable, they often addressed all children rather than focusing specifically on vulnerable ones, and some were more generally supportive than explicitly aimed at sharing the gospel. We see an opportunity here to develop more targeted resources that address the unique needs of Albania's vulnerable children and families while integrating the gospel message. This might include translating and contextualizing existing resources for vulnerable populations from other contexts worldwide.



RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

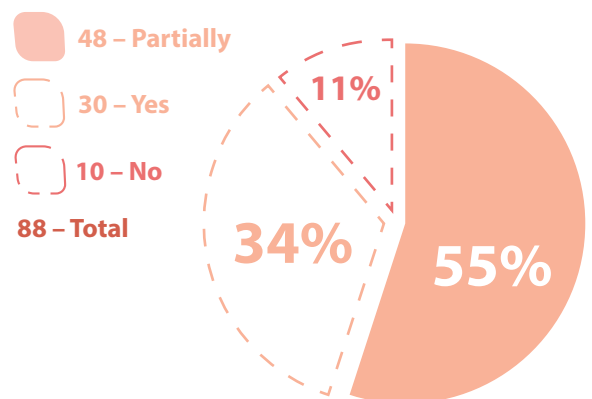
This section focuses on the resources churches have or would like to have to help support vulnerable children and families. We explore staff resources as well as partnerships.

TRAINING AND VOLUNTEERS

Some of the most important resources a church has are the people who keep it running. This includes both paid staff and volunteers. We wanted to see how church leaders evaluated the training, skills, and capacity of their people.

Many church leaders appear to have answered the questions below with children's ministry in mind, rather than focusing on specialized training for working with vulnerable children.

Do you believe that your workers or volunteers are well EQUIPPED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICAL SKILLS NEEDED to minister to vulnerable children/youth?

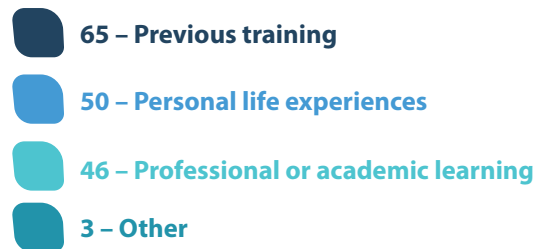


RURAL CHURCH LEADERS ARE LEAST LIKELY TO FEEL THAT THEIR WORKERS ARE WELL EQUIPPED (ONLY 14% SAID YES), WHILE CHURCH LEADERS IN THE NORTH ARE MOST CONFIDENT (57% SAID YES).

(see Appendix B)



HOW AND/OR WHY ARE YOUR WORKERS/ VOLUNTEERS EQUIPPED TO MINISTER TO VULNERABLE CHILDREN/YOUTH? (select all that apply)



Other responses:

- We test them in ministry before we trust them in ministry.
- Orientations and skill building in the church as needed.
- Bible school

WHAT TRAINING DID THEY RECEIVE? WHO PROVIDED IT? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)



Total Responses: 59

When it came to operating their programs, most leaders said that both church members and staff are involved. A few also mentioned volunteers who may be non-church members. Churches in the Southwest are far less likely to rely on **CHURCH STAFF** (36%) and more likely to use **CHURCH MEMBERS TO RUN PROGRAMS** (91%).

In terms of the kinds of resources churches are devoting to ministry for vulnerable families, the most common resource used is special funds (75%). Church budget allocations and physical spaces were also mentioned by more than half of respondents.

PARTNERSHIPS

We have seen throughout this report that the challenges facing Albania's vulnerable children, youth, and families are complex and multi-layered. One way churches can work within their limited resources is through partnerships with other churches, NGOs, or local authorities.

The majority of church leaders said they work with a range of partners to support vulnerable families.

DO YOU WORK WITH ANY PARTNERS TO HELP ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF YOUR VULNERABLE FAMILIES? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

58 – NGOs

34 – Other churches

33 – Local authorities

4 – Other

Total Responses: 75

Four other answers included:

- 3 who mentioned individuals
- 1 who works with local businesses to help provide/find jobs

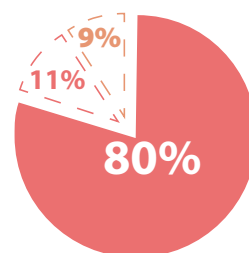
Churches in the Southeast (90%) are far more likely than those in other regions to say they work with local authorities. Rural churches (57%) were also more likely to partner with authorities than urban churches were. (see Appendix B)

ARE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AWARE OF THE WORK YOU DO?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

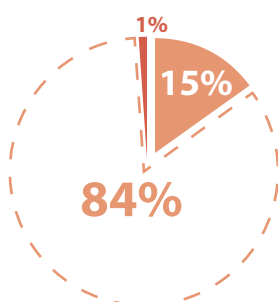


DO YOU HAVE A FORMALIZED AGREEMENT WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Unsure



81% of church leaders who said local authorities are aware of the work they are doing did NOT have a formal agreement in place with them.

82% who work with local authorities also said they do not have a formal agreement.

CHURCH NEEDS

The final questions in our survey focused on identifying the primary needs that Albania's church leaders see for their ministry to vulnerable children. Their responses offer valuable insights for anyone looking to support churches more strategically and effectively in reaching some of society's most vulnerable populations.

WHAT ARE YOUR **GREATEST NEEDS** FOR MINISTRY TO VULNERABLE FAMILIES AND/OR CHILDREN/YOUTH WITH TRAUMA?

PICK YOUR TOP TWO PRIORITIES.



TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS AND/OR STAFF

42%

37 CHURCHES

NETWORKING WITH OTHERS DOING THE SAME THING

39%

35 CHURCHES

MORE VOLUNTEERS AND/OR STAFF

34%

30 CHURCHES

MATERIALS OR CURRICULUM WITH BETTER CONTENT

27%

24 CHURCHES

A GOOD MINISTRY MODEL OR PROGRAM

22%

20 CHURCHES

ADVOCACY AND VISION FOR PRIORITIZING CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY

17%

15 CHURCHES

COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

7%

6 CHURCHES

OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE)

7%

6 CHURCHES

Because participants could select two answers, the total exceeds 100%.



DIGGING DEEPER

Some church leaders provided additional details for certain categories. While not all their responses added new information, here are some that did.

TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS AND/OR STAFF

- Learning to identify abused and abandoned children
- Help addressing technology addictions and online safety
- Better communication and training to prevent domestic violence
- Topics including: bullying, trauma, autism, hygiene, and teamwork



A GOOD MINISTRY MODEL OR PROGRAM

- Models that are adapted to their context
- Renewal of ideas in the grind of ministry
- Innovation and fostering an inclusive environment



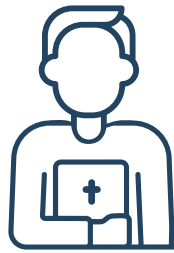
OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE)

- Financial resources/fundraising
- People with a calling and desire for this ministry
- Professional help for the service we have
- Cooperation with educational institutions
- Legislation
- Physical space
- Knowing what to do if we suspect a child lives in a difficult situation



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

This report is intended to inspire conversations and guide meaningful change for Albanian church leaders and others who care about the well-being of vulnerable children and families. The data presented here is not the conclusion of the story, but a starting point for deeper discussions and innovative ideas for progress. This final section, therefore, does not offer recommendations or instructions, but instead poses questions for reflection, discussion, and collaboration.



FOR CHURCH LEADERS

It is important to celebrate good things that are happening in your community so they can expand and stay strong. We pointed out several patterns of strength that we saw in our data, like **community integration, emotional support, and a willingness to help** fill gaps in basic needs for vulnerable families.

- What areas of strength do you want to celebrate and strengthen in your church community?
- Is there a person or team you want to name doing this work well? How might you do that in an appropriate way that would encourage them?

WHILE MANY CHURCHES HAVE SOME KIND OF **CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY (61%)**, ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE ACTIVELY USE THAT INFORMATION TO GUIDE DECISIONS (13%).



- What barriers keep your church from robustly implementing a child safeguarding policy?
- How might a more active engagement with something like this concretely improve or enhance your ministry to vulnerable children and youth?



The report revealed a clear pattern: church leaders often identified **underlying family dynamics** as central to children's challenges, yet discussions about support primarily focused on interventions for the children themselves. This suggests a **potential gap** between addressing the root causes—frequently tied to family circumstances—and providing supplemental resources like educational programs or church-based relationships.

- Does this pattern reflect what you've observed in your community?
- If so, what do you think contributes to this focus on child-centered interventions rather than family-centered solutions?

- How might your church and community adopt a more holistic approach, addressing the core needs of both vulnerable children and their families?
- What practical steps can you take to strengthen and support the families within your sphere of influence?



One of the major gaps we identified between needs and actual support was the vital importance of **better job opportunities and training**. While vocational training is not the calling of the Church, we wonder if there is more attention and energy that could be offered by churches in this area.

- What do you think of this idea? Is it intriguing to you? Offensive? Overwhelming? Take a few minutes to process how it makes you feel and consider why.
- Do you know of any organizations already working in this area that you or church could come alongside and support?

One of the most sensitive moments in our report was the misalignment focused on **abuse and psychological support**. We suggested that church leaders might view this as an opportunity for churches to take more courageous, intentional, and direct steps to address issues like domestic violence and a culture of abuse.



- Are you aware of any situations or families in your sphere of influence who might fall into this gap? Are there children or youth you suspect are experiencing abuse or violence that has not been acknowledged by members or leaders of their church?
- How do you imagine the silence of their church leaders makes them feel?
- What barriers do you feel or see to bringing these kinds of “hidden” issues more into the open?



Around half of the churches we surveyed say that someone in their congregation is **supporting orphan care**. This may take many forms, from fostering to activities in orphanages to mentoring individual orphans.

- Are you surprised by this number? Is it higher or lower than you would expect? Why?
- What, if any, orphan care do you see happening in your congregation?
- Could there be a more intentional effort to mobilize support in this area?

FOR NGOS AND OTHERS SUPPORTING CHURCHES



The data underscores the critical need for **equipping church staff and volunteers** with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively minister to vulnerable children and youth. While many church leaders recognize potential in their teams, only 34% believe their workers are fully equipped, with 55% indicating partial readiness. Additionally, training for volunteers and staff was identified as the most pressing need for ministry contexts, highlighting a widespread desire for improvement in this area.

- What additional training opportunities could be developed to support churches in underserved areas, such as rural regions, to address disparities in preparedness?
- What underlying issues or needs might be reflected in the desire for more training, beyond skill acquisition?
- What types of mobilization or education strategies have you observed to be effective in your context?

Churches are acutely aware of the prevalence of **family abuse, domestic violence, and mental health challenges** within their communities. Despite this awareness, many churches lack the necessary resources, training, and structured programs to tackle these complex and sensitive issues effectively. Efforts to address these problems are often limited to informal support, such as counseling or prayer, rather than comprehensive or specialized interventions.



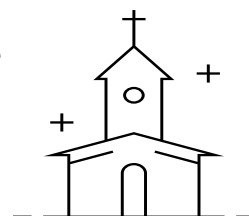
- How can your organization provide churches with training, tools, or partnerships to tackle sensitive issues like domestic violence, abuse, and mental health more directly?
- How might you work with churches to provide psychological support to children and families in crisis?
- Are there mental health professionals you could connect with churches to enhance their ministry?



One of the significant gaps we identified between needs and existing support is the critical importance of **better job opportunities and vocational training**. While providing vocational training may not be the Church's primary role, there could be opportunities for greater focus and collaboration in this area. This seems like a space where local partners could step in, leveraging church relationships and community connections to foster long-term support.

- What role might your organization play in equipping churches to support job training or employment initiatives?
- Are there existing job training programs that you could connect to churches to address gaps in support for vulnerable families?

Beyond the issue of employment, this report highlights the reality that **church resources** are often stretched thin. Much of the aid and financial support churches provide is sporadic and handled on a case-by-case basis. However, churches have unique access to and insight into vulnerable families through home visits and ongoing relationships. This presents an **opportunity to focus on resourcing and strengthening** churches, rather than building entirely new programs or networks from scratch.



- Are there opportunities for your organization to facilitate partnerships between churches and other organizations focused on vulnerable children and families?
- What role can you play in connecting churches with local resources to address community needs?



Substance abuse is a critical issue impacting many vulnerable families, contributing to a range of challenges such as family instability, financial hardship, and mental health issues. Despite the recognition of its importance, few churches have developed targeted programs or interventions to specifically address substance abuse within their communities. This presents an opportunity for collaboration with NGOs and local authorities to provide churches with the tools and training needed to address substance abuse more effectively.

- How can your organization support churches in developing structured programs to address substance abuse and its effects on families?
- What strategies could help destigmatize substance abuse within church communities to encourage open dialogue and effective intervention?



ABOUT THE PROJECT

Ruth Vergnon works with vulnerable children through Alo ! Mik, an organization in Albania that supports children facing trauma or loss of a caregiver. In 2023, she reached out to OneHope to explore how churches in Albania are supporting vulnerable families.

In response, we interviewed 90 evangelical church leaders about their efforts to help vulnerable families and children. The interviews were conducted in person by volunteers and staff from Alo! Mik, in Albanian, and were translated for analysis by the OneHope research team. We especially thank Elona Deliu and Frederik Qokaj for the time they gave to the data collection including traveling, listening and data entry.

Data was collected between December 2023 and June 2024. Not all church leaders answered every question, but the sample sizes were sufficient for all questions in this report. Researchers transcribed and reviewed the interviews, identifying key ideas and recurring themes. These themes were refined through multiple review cycles to reflect the pastors' perspectives. The analysis considered both direct responses and deeper meanings, highlighting differences in context to capture the diversity of church experiences. This process provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities Albanian churches face in supporting vulnerable families.

ABOUT ALO ! MIK

Alo ! Mik is an Albanian NGO inspired by Christian faith to serve vulnerable children and families. Alo ! Mik has been operating in Albania since 2003, running different projects to ensure holistic well-being of children, especially for the more vulnerable. Alo ! Mik's area of expertise ranges from direct interventions with vulnerable children and their families, to empowerment of local actors through training, networking and resources sharing. alomik.org

ABOUT ONEHOPE

In partnership with local churches, ministries, and governments around the world, OneHope has reached over 2 billion children and youth with God's Word. Based on in-country research OneHope conducts, Scripture programs are designed to be age and culturally relevant. Since 1987, OneHope has helped kids experience God's Story, sharing the life-changing message of hope with children and youth in every country. onehope.net

ABOUT WORLD WITHOUT ORPHANS EUROPE

WWO Europe is part of a global movement pursuing a world where every child is cared for in a safe and loving family and reaches their God-given potential. They call and equip national Christian leaders to enable Christians and churches in their country to address the needs of orphans, children-at-risk, and their families. WWO Europe partners with Alo ! Mik and Albania Without Orphans in realizing this vision in Albania. europe.withoutorphans.org





APPENDIX A: FUTURE PROJECTS PLANNED

While primarily focused on the present situation in Albania, we did also want to hear what churches are planning for the future, if anything.

WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU PLANNING OR HOPE TO OFFER BUT HAVE NOT YET DEVELOPED? WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THIS PROJECT?

59 church leaders answered this question.

When looking to the future, church leaders have a wide range of dreams and plans. We summarized the main themes here with the same categories from above.

ECONOMICAL SUPPORT

- **Basic Needs:** Food packages, clothing, and hygiene support for vulnerable families, including widows and orphans. Plans for meal programs and a community care center.
- **Employment Assistance:** Advocacy for the employment of individuals with disabilities; plans for job training and professional development in technology and crafts.
- **Financial Literacy:** Projects aimed at promoting financial independence and literacy among families.

EDUCATION SUPPORT

- **After-school Programs:** Various after-school initiatives targeting children's education to prevent dropouts and address literacy issues.
- **Specialized Education:** Plans to assist children with autism and provide courses in English and other subjects.
- **Parenting Training:** Training aimed at educating parents on child-rearing practices and strengthening family relationships.

PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- **Support for Divorced Families:** Social projects focused on helping families affected by divorce and strengthening family bonds.
- **Youth and Family Centers:** Initiatives to create safe spaces for youth engagement through sports and arts, aiming to foster friendships and emotional well-being.



PARENTING SUPPORT

- **Parent-Child Relationship Camps:** Camps focused on improving relationships between parents and children, with an emphasis on parenting education.
- **Specialized Care for Caregivers:** Development of services for parents of children with special needs, including babysitting services to give caregivers respite.

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

- **Community Engagement:** Various church initiatives designed to integrate families into the church community through social and spiritual activities.
- **Evangelization Efforts:** Programs targeting families, especially through children, to promote Christian teachings and values.

APPENDIX B: DETAILED CHARTS

This appendix contains detailed charts with breakdowns of information summarized in the report.

ABOUT THE CHURCHES

Some churches (43%) represented in this report operate across multiple locations. Altogether, the study reflects input from approximately 154 individual church locations.

MULTI-SITE CHURCHES:

Multiple church branches/sites

57% – No

43% – Yes

If yes, where?

8%

37%

55%

3 – Capital city

14 – Urban

21 – Rural

How many other locations?

63%

13%

13%

11%

24 – One

5 – Two

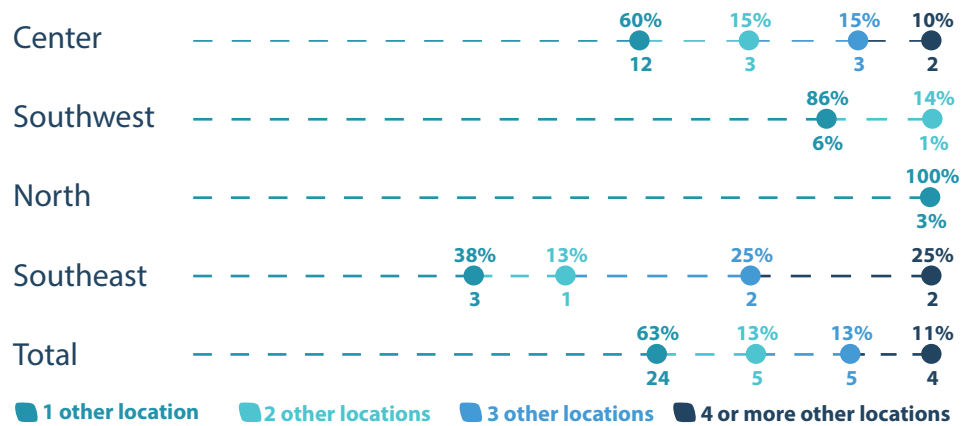
5 – Three

4 – Four or more



Churches in the Center and Southeast were the most likely to have multiple locations and to have more than one other branch.

BRANCH COUNT BY REGION



Urban churches were the most likely to report having multiple locations.

BRANCH COUNT BY LOCATION

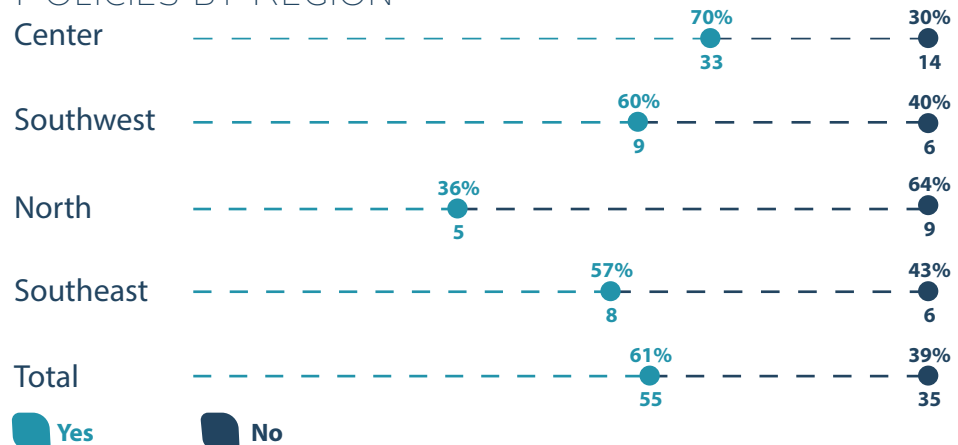


PREVENTION & INTERVENTION BY CHURCHES

Does your church have any policies specifically related to protecting or supporting vulnerable children?

Churches in the Northern region were far less likely to say they had policies for protecting vulnerable children. Only 36% said yes to this question, much lower than the average or any of the other regions.

POLICIES BY REGION

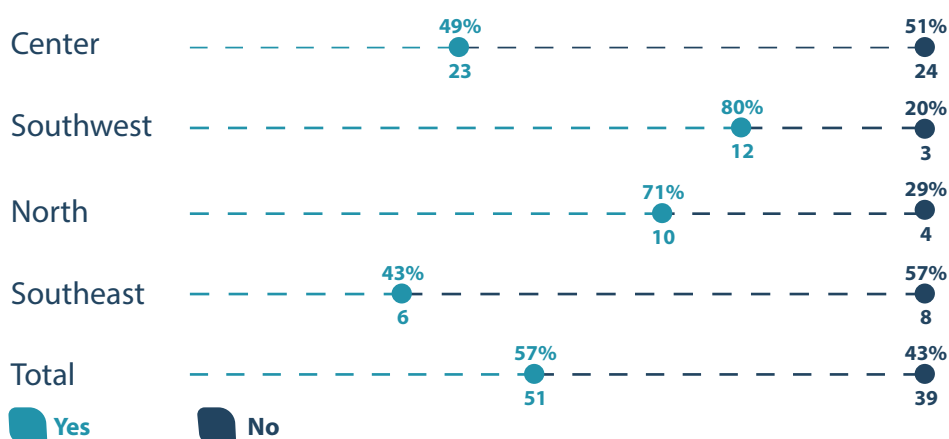


ORPHAN CARE

Have you heard about Orphan Sunday or organized something on that day the previous years?

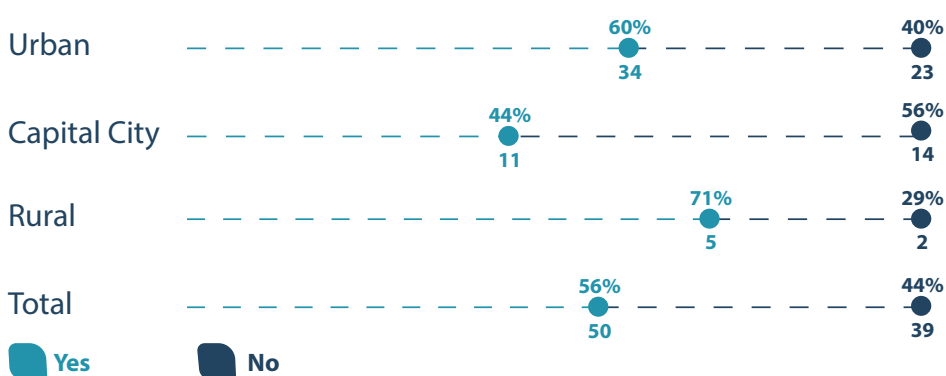
Awareness of Orphan Sunday varied widely by region. Church leaders in the North and Southwest seemed generally aware of this event: over 70% of leaders in both regions said they were familiar with it. In contrast, less than 50% of leaders in the Central and Southeast regions said they knew what it was.

ORPHAN SUNDAY BY REGION



Church leaders in the capital city were less likely to be familiar with this event. Only 44% said they knew about it, compared with 60% of other urban leaders and 71% of rural leaders.

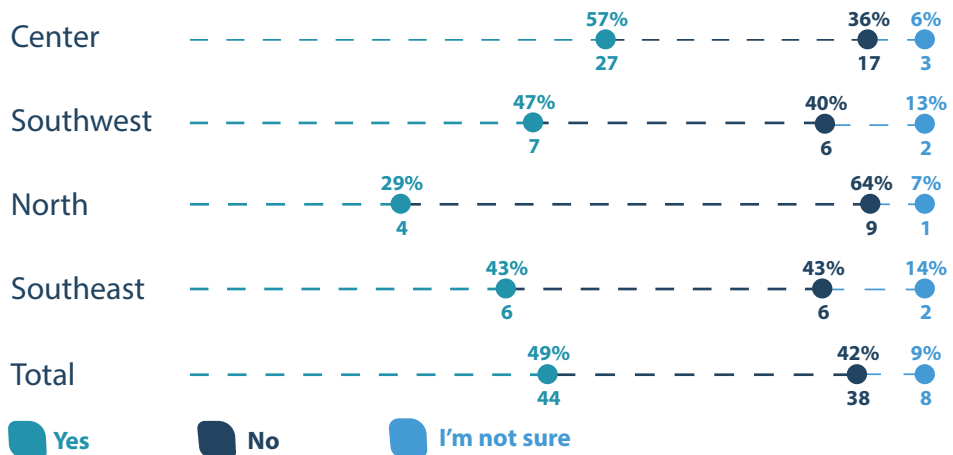
ORPHAN SUNDAY BY LOCATION



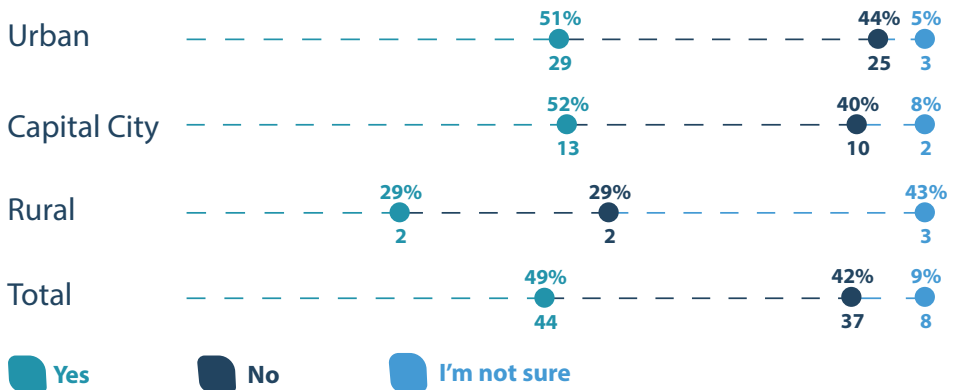
Is your church or any church members supporting children without parental care (for example foster care, adoption, orphanage/family home, involved with orphanage)?

Churches in the North were least likely to report that members are supporting children without parental care (29% said yes, compared with 49% overall). Many rural church leaders said they were unsure if this kind of support was taking place in their churches (43% unsure).

CHURCH SUPPORT BY REGION



CHURCH SUPPORT BY LOCATION



What resources or tools do you use for sharing scripture and helping kids engage?

Rural churches (100%) reported exclusively using materials they purchased or were given. Churches in the North (21%) were most likely to create or translate their own materials.

RESOURCES BY REGION



RESOURCES BY LOCATION

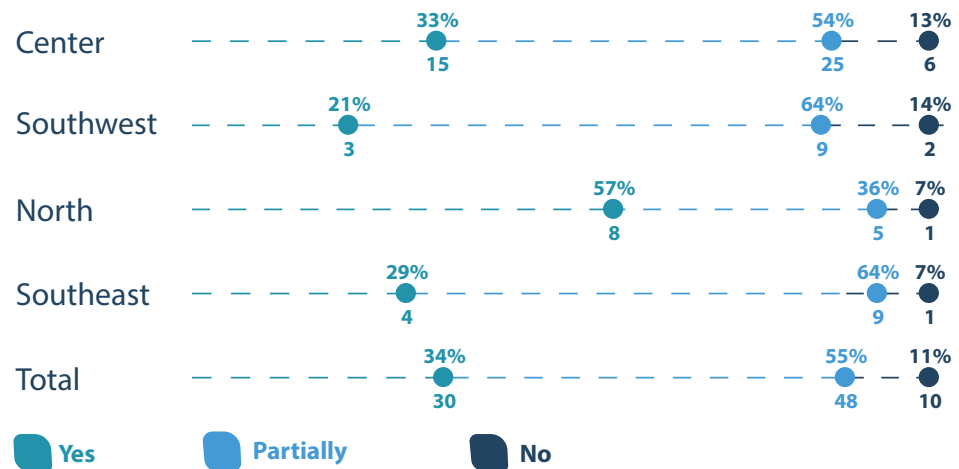


RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

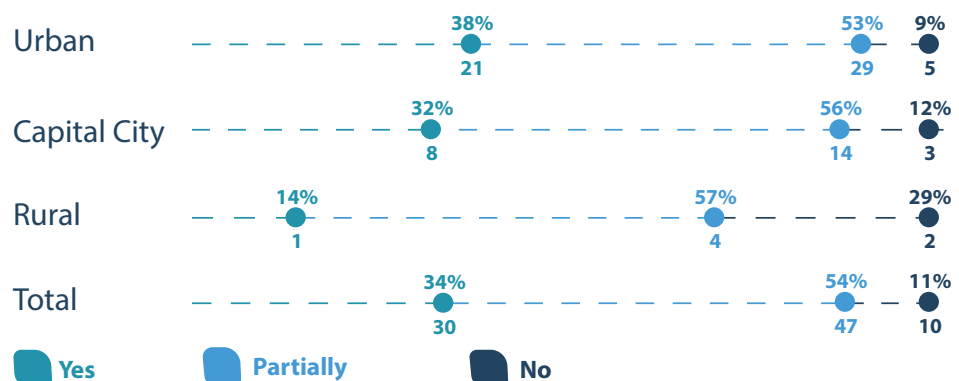
Do you believe that your workers or volunteers are well equipped with the knowledge and practical skills needed to minister to vulnerable children/youth?

Rural church leaders were least likely to feel that their workers were well equipped (only 14% said yes), while church leaders in the North were most confident (57% said yes).

EQUIPPED WORKERS BY REGION



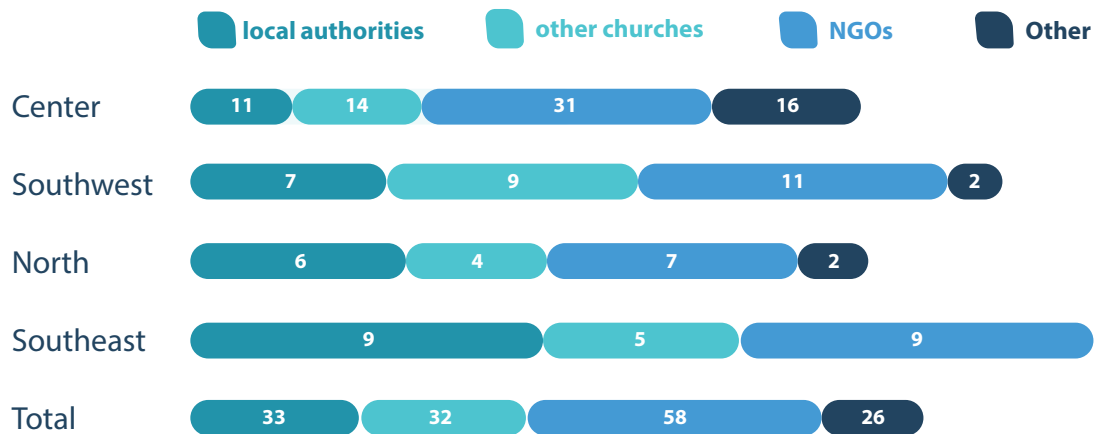
EQUIPPED WORKERS BY LOCATION



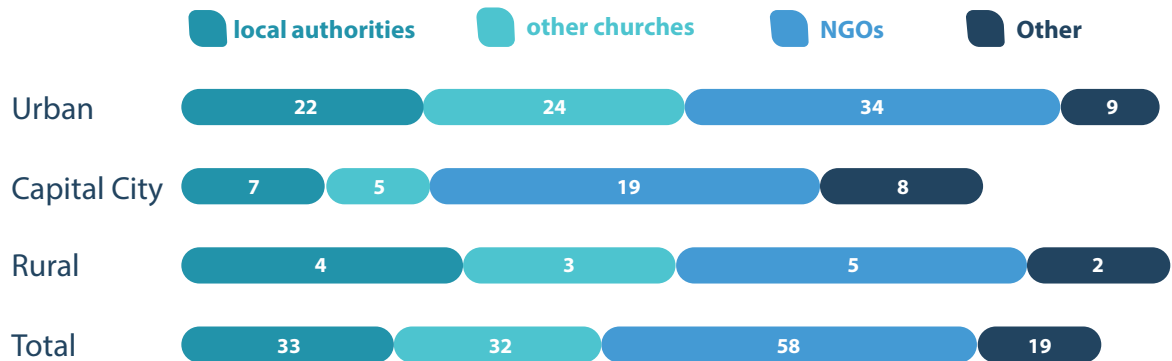
Do you work with any partners to help address the needs of your vulnerable families?

Churches in the Southeast (90%) were far more likely than those in other regions to say they work with local authorities. Rural churches (57%) were also more likely to partner with authorities than urban churches.

PARTNERS BY REGION



PARTNERS BY LOCATION





ALBANIA

STUDY OF EVANGELICAL CHURCH
MINISTRY TO VULNERABLE
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



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