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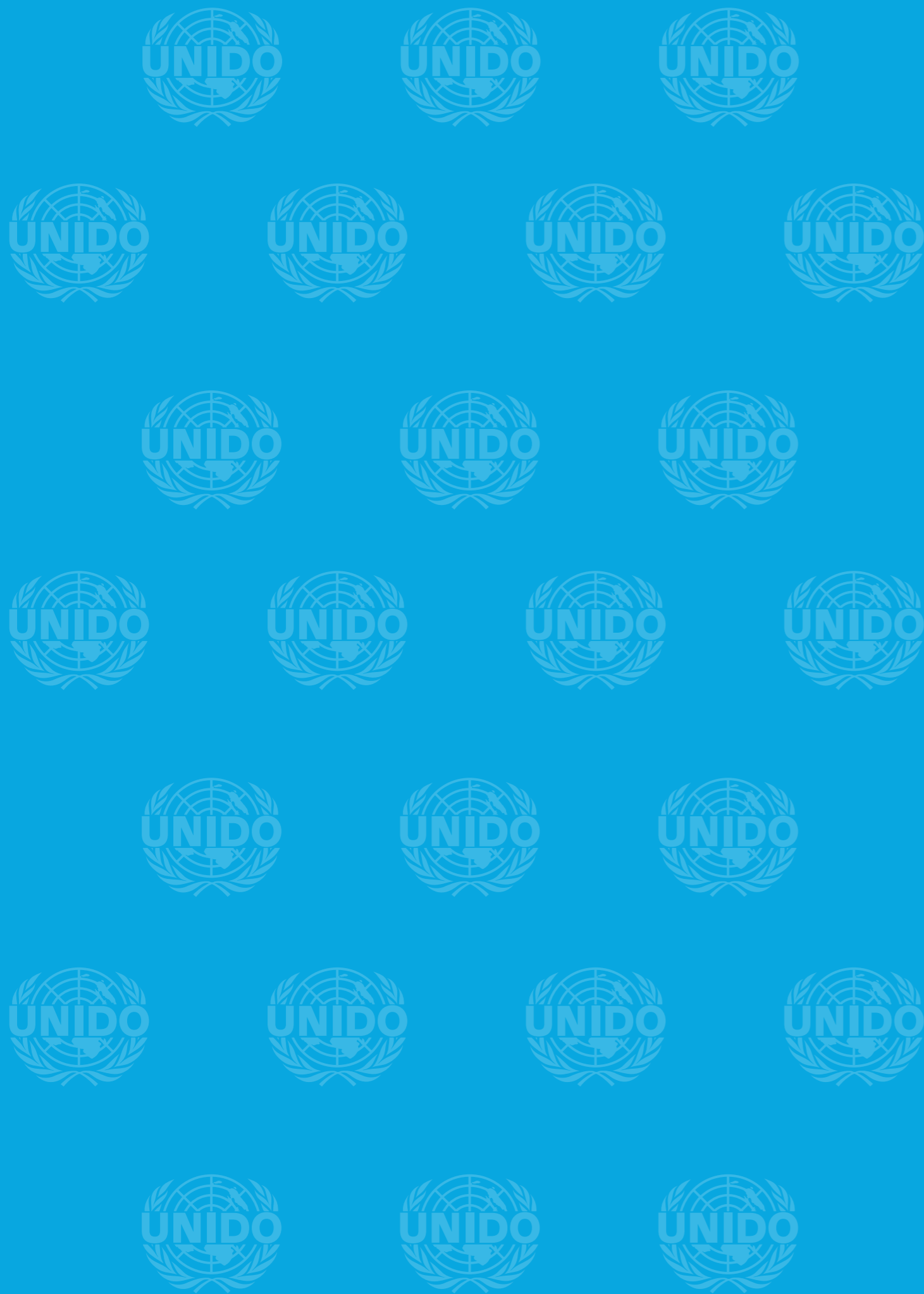


GLOBAL QUALITY
AND STANDARDS PROGRAMME



Paving the Way Towards The EU for Albania

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE GLOBAL QUALITY AND STANDARDS PROGRAMME (GQSP)



Paving the Way Towards the EU for Albania

The Contribution of the Global
Quality and Standards Programme



**Advancing Albania's EU Integration:
The GQSP Pathway to Excellence**

Aligning with EU Standards

The Global Quality and Standards Program (GQSP) in Albania plays a crucial role in the country's journey towards EU integration by:



Harmonizing Quality Infrastructure

Strengthening key institutions to provide state-of-the-art services aligned with EU requirements.

Enhancing SME Competitiveness

Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in meeting international standards, crucial for accessing EU markets

Fostering Sustainable

Promoting practices that align with EU's emphasis on environmental sustainability and responsible production.

Key Focus Areas for EU Alignment



Free Movement of Goods

Improving standardization, certification, and market surveillance to ensure Albanian products meet EU market requirements.



Food Safety and Agriculture

Enhancing standards in the agri-food sector to comply with EU regulations, crucial for agricultural exports.



Enterprise and Industrial Policy Development

Creating a competitive business environment that adheres to EU standards, attracting investment and fostering innovation.



Environmental Protection

Implementing EU-aligned environmental standards to support sustainable economic growth.

Impact on EU Integration Process

- Facilitates market access for Albanian products in the EU
- Enhances the competitiveness of Albanian businesses in the European market
- Aligns Albanian regulatory frameworks with EU norms
- Supports the adoption of EU best practices across various sectors

By focusing on these areas, the GQSP is instrumental in preparing Albania for EU integration, ensuring that its quality infrastructure, business practices, and regulatory environment are compatible with EU standards.



Albania faces significant challenges in aligning its standards, certification, and regulatory frameworks with those of the European Union, which is essential for gaining access to EU markets. Non-compliance with safety, quality, and environmental standards risks excluding Albanian goods from the EU, thereby limiting trade opportunities. Outdated agricultural practices, insufficient industrial innovation, and weak environmental protection measures further reduce the country's international competitiveness. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are the backbone of Albania's economy, face additional difficulties due to their limited resources, making it harder for them to meet these EU standards and threatening their growth and market access.

For more than 20 years, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Government of Switzerland through its State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) have been supporting partner countries to increase their competitiveness through quality and compliance with standards, resulting in an extremely active partnership. Given the continued and growing relevance of standards compliance, and the solid and positive track record of cooperation projects, SECO and UNIDO decided to continue their efforts within the programmatic approach of the Global Quality and Standards Programme (GQSP).

The Global Quality and Standards Program (GQSP) plays an important role in addressing Albania's challenges by developing a robust quality infrastructure that aligns with EU standards. Additionally, the program focuses on supporting SMEs, assisting them in adopting international standards, facilitating access to certifications, and strengthening their ability to compete both locally and globally. By building essential skills, resources, and frameworks, GQSP enables SMEs to meet EU requirements and succeed in larger markets. This targeted support enhances their export capacity, fosters sustainability, and promotes long-term competitiveness, which is crucial for Albania's overall economic development and successful integration into the European Union.

The overall objective of the GQSP is to strengthen quality and standards compliance capacity to facilitate market access for SMEs by working in selected value chains in partner countries.

GQSP programme elevates its focused approach on trade to encompass topics of global relevance and aims at making a positive contribution to sustainable trade, climate resilience, and women empowerment, while also driving digital transformation. A strong focus on global knowledge adds value by elaborating transversal solutions to common challenges through the development of global public goods.

The widespread adoption of standards and best practices can positively affect various aspects of life. This includes promoting more sustainable and environmentally friendly industrial practices by enhancing resource efficiency, supporting circular economy business models, and utilizing renewable energy sources, while ensuring that workers are treated fairly, thus meeting the increased demand for due diligence along supply chains. By supporting its target countries in strengthening their quality systems and their adoption of international as well as voluntary sustainability standards, the GQSP contributes to sustainable trade.

The GQSP actively works to bridge the gender gap as demonstrated by its promotion of gender mainstreaming in many areas. In its advocacy of participatory governance structures for national quality frameworks, the GQSP contributes to the women's empowerment cross-cutting theme of economic governance. Establishing an appropriate quality policy to guide the QIS can lead to increased prosperity, providing more opportunities for men and women across social groups. In addition, the GQSP aims to foster the role of women in target value chains by enabling them to proactively shape the sector, contributing to enhanced quality of production and trade.

Digital transformation is affecting all spheres of life, and quality and standards are no exception. Quality infrastructure service delivery is transforming and will significantly change. In the future, the QIS will also have to adjust to keep pace with technological acceleration to ensure it remains relevant and meets the needs of the market, producers, and consumers. Ensuring and proving quality will be essential for the adoption and acceptance of new technologies and a requirement for small producers to meet market requirements. The potential to innovate is no longer an option but has become a necessity, also in quality infrastructure and production, particularly in view of market access. The GQSP helps its target countries leverage the opportunities presented in this new digital age.

Protecting and nurturing the environment is vital for human well-being and survival. To achieve this, we must adopt a new economic development approach that prioritizes environmental sustainability. Standards have a crucial role to play in this, particularly in the implementation of policies and actions for sustainable resource use and ecosystem protection. Quality infrastructure institutions and services are also essential for promoting sustainable consumption and production. This is in terms of measurement capabilities, sharing best practices, supporting management, and monitoring, reporting, and verifying compliance, which the GQSP supports.

Albania's journey toward European Union (EU) integration is a complex process requiring comprehensive alignment of its legal, economic, and technical frameworks with EU standards. The selected chapters in this document—focusing on critical areas such as the free movement of goods, food safety, agricultural development, enterprise policy, and environmental protection—are pivotal to achieving the country's economic and trade objectives. However, various challenges need to be addressed to ensure successful alignment with EU requirements, and UNIDO in partnership with the Swiss Government are strongly contributing to the EU accession process for Albania.





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FREE MOVEMENT OF GOODS



Chapter 1: Free Movement of Goods

The free movement of goods is a critical aspect of Albania’s economic integration with the European Union. However, to achieve this, Albania requires robust infrastructure in standardization, certification, metrology, and market surveillance. These systems are essential in ensuring that products meet consistent quality, safety, and regulatory benchmarks across borders, which are necessary for international trade and competitiveness. Without harmonized standards and reliable conformity assessment processes, Albanian goods would face significant barriers in accessing the EU market.

To address these challenges, the GQSP program plays a pivotal role in building and strengthening these critical infrastructure elements. In terms of standardization, GQSP supports the harmonization of Albanian standards with EU requirements. By aligning local standards with those in the EU, GQSP ensures that Albanian products can compete on an equal footing with European goods by meeting the same quality and safety standards.

For conformity assessment, the program strengthens the capacity of accredited conformity assessment bodies, ensuring that products are thoroughly evaluated for safety, reliability, and quality before entering both domestic and international markets. This provides assurance to consumers and businesses that the products meet necessary requirements.

In addition, GQSP enhances the accreditation processes to ensure that conformity assessment bodies are impartial and competent. This accreditation process builds confidence in the product evaluations carried out by these bodies, thereby supporting reliable trade relationships and enhancing trust in Albanian goods.

Metrology is another critical area where GQSP contributes. By ensuring the availability of reliable and accurate measurement systems, the program

helps to strengthen consumer protection, improve product quality, and ensure legal compliance. This, in turn, facilitates fair and transparent trade transactions.

The program also addresses the need for effective market surveillance, ensuring that products on the market comply with legal regulations. By reinforcing the market surveillance system, GQSP helps protect consumers from unsafe products and ensures that businesses adhere to mandatory safety and quality standards.

The overall impact of GQSP’s work is significant. By aligning Albanian standards with those of the EU, the program enhances the country’s ability to participate in European markets and increases export opportunities. The improved quality and safety of products not only protect consumers but also strengthen the credibility and competitiveness of Albanian goods on the international stage. Moreover, effective market surveillance ensures that all businesses operate under fair market conditions, safeguarding both compliant companies and consumers from unfair practices or unsafe products.





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AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 11: Agriculture and Rural Development

In the context of Albania's agricultural and rural development, standards, certification, and conformity assessment are essential for improving trade opportunities, promoting sustainable farming practices, and enhancing rural livelihoods. The challenge for Albania lies in overcoming barriers such as import restrictions, tariffs, and limited market access, which can hinder the ability of rural producers to fully participate in international markets.

Import restrictions and tariffs are influenced by whether agricultural products meet the required safety and quality criteria. By aligning with international standards, Albania's agricultural products can reduce these barriers, facilitating better market access. This allows rural producers to benefit from lower tariffs and fewer import restrictions, enabling them to compete more effectively in global markets.

The GQSP program addresses these challenges by supporting rural communities in meeting agricultural standards, which helps products from these areas meet both domestic and international market demands. This alignment improves economic opportunities for rural producers, particularly those from low-income communities, by providing access to new revenue streams and enabling them to command higher prices for their goods.

Standards also promote income diversification by opening doors to niche markets. For rural producers, certification for organic or premium products creates opportunities to produce higher-value agricultural goods. This reduces reliance on traditional, lower-value crops and allows them to tap into specialty markets where demand is growing for sustainable and high-quality products.

Expanding market access is another critical aspect of how GQSP helps rural producers. By complying with agricultural standards and obtaining certification, producers are able to reach a broader range of buyers, including international customers. This not

only drives income growth but also contributes to regional economic development by integrating rural communities into larger trade networks.

The promotion of sustainable agriculture is an important component of GQSP's approach. Standards that include sustainability criteria encourage farmers to adopt practices that conserve natural resources and support long-term agricultural viability. Certification programs, such as those for organic farming, provide incentives for environmentally friendly techniques that are increasingly in demand in global markets.

Furthermore, by meeting specific standards related to processing, packaging, and branding, rural producers can add value to their products. This value addition enhances their competitiveness in the marketplace, while also contributing to income diversification and improving livelihoods in rural areas.

Finally, achieving compliance with agricultural standards increases the credibility of rural producers, which in turn improves their access to credit and investment opportunities. Certified producers are viewed as more reliable and less risky by financial institutions, making it easier for them to secure financing. This support enables rural producers to upgrade their agricultural infrastructure and practices, further contributing to rural development and economic growth.

In summary, GQSP's initiatives play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges faced by Albania's rural producers by helping them meet international standards, improve market access, and promote sustainable agricultural practices. The impact is not only seen in increased trade opportunities but also in the enhanced livelihoods and long-term development of rural communities.



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FOOD SAFETY, VETERINARY AND PHYTOSANITARY POLICY

Chapter 12: Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy

Ensuring food safety and maintaining high standards for veterinary and phytosanitary policies are critical to Albania's alignment with international trade agreements and EU regulations. These mechanisms are essential for consumer protection, agricultural sustainability, and maintaining the overall health of the food supply chain. The challenge lies in establishing a robust framework that addresses various aspects of food safety, from contaminants to labeling, and hygiene to plant protection.

Albania's food safety regulations define acceptable levels of contaminants and additives in food products, ensuring that the items meet rigorous safety criteria. These regulations address issues such as pesticide residues, microbial contamination, and chemical additives, safeguarding consumer health and ensuring access to international markets. Proper labeling, packaging, and storage techniques further enhance food safety standards, contributing to a well-regulated food industry.

In terms of consumer protection, the regulatory framework establishes clear safety and quality guidelines, allowing consumers to make informed choices about the products they purchase. These standards foster trust in Albania's food products, both within the country and on the international stage, by ensuring that all products meet stringent safety benchmarks and provide transparency in product information.

Hygiene also plays a critical role in the safety and presentation of food products. Regulatory requirements ensure that foodstuffs remain clean and appealing from production to sale. This approach covers everything from cleanliness in processing facilities to proper labelling and packaging, ensuring that food remains safe for consumption and meets export criteria.

Enforcing these food safety regulations requires a robust system of audits, inspections, and compliance mechanisms. Through regular inspections at various stages of production, potential hazards are identified and addressed, ensuring a high level of

safety and reliability in Albania's food supply chain. In addition to general food safety, Albania's policies include specific hygiene requirements for products of animal origin. These regulations ensure that slaughterhouses and meat processing facilities maintain high standards of cleanliness and safety, reducing the risk of contamination and ensuring the integrity of meat, dairy, and other animal-based products.

The regulatory framework for plant-based products focuses on preventing the spread of harmful organisms, enforcing pesticide use limits, and adhering to international phytosanitary regulations. By controlling pesticide residues and authorizing plant protection products, the policies ensure that plant-based foods are safe for consumers and meet international market requirements.

Plant passports and phytosanitary standards are essential for maintaining traceability and compliance when trading plants intended for planting. This system helps prevent the spread of pests and diseases by ensuring that all plants meet the necessary health standards. Residue control and pesticide limits further protect consumers by ensuring that food products are safe for consumption, reinforcing Albania's reputation for producing safe and high-quality agricultural goods.

Finally, the regulation of seed and seedling marketing ensures that farmers have access to disease-free, high-quality planting materials. By defining clear criteria for the marketing and qualification of seeds, the regulatory framework supports sustainable agricultural practices and contributes to rural development.

In conclusion, GQSP's support in enhancing Albania's food safety and phytosanitary policies has a profound impact on public health, consumer trust, and the country's ability to meet international trade standards. The improvements in these areas lead to safer food products, more reliable supply chains, and greater access to international markets for Albania's agricultural sector.



SOCIAL POLICY AND EMPLOYMENT

Chapter 19: Social Policy and Employment

Standards play a critical role in shaping social policies and employment practices that promote equality, health, and safety in the workplace. The challenge lies in ensuring that Albania aligns with international best practices while fostering an inclusive and protective work environment. These standards establish clear guidelines and frameworks that are essential for creating fair and equitable employment conditions, addressing disparities, and protecting workers' rights.

Equality

Promoting equality in the workplace is one of the key challenges Albania faces. Standards provide a solid foundation for fair employment practices, ensuring that hiring and promotions are based on merit and not influenced by gender, race, age, disability, or other discriminatory factors. By defining clear criteria for equal opportunity, these standards create an inclusive environment where every individual has a fair chance to succeed.

Pay equity is another important issue addressed by employment-related standards. Albania's labor force can benefit from guidelines that ensure compensation is tied to qualifications and performance rather than discriminatory practices. This fosters transparency, fairness, and trust within the workforce, contributing to a more balanced workplace where employees feel valued and fairly compensated.

Health and Safety at Work

Occupational health and safety (OHS) is also a crucial area. Standards related to health and safety ensure that workers are protected from potential hazards in their working environment. By setting clear requirements for safety equipment, working conditions, and employee training, these regulations reduce the risk of accidents and occupational illnesses, ensuring that companies prioritize the well-being of their employees.

Emergency preparedness is another key aspect addressed by workplace standards. Businesses

are required to have comprehensive emergency response plans to handle unforeseen events like natural disasters or industrial accidents. These plans minimize risks and ensure swift, effective responses during crises, protecting both workers and business continuity.

Employee health and wellness initiatives are also encouraged under these standards. Companies are urged to implement wellness programs that address both mental and physical health. By doing so, organizations can improve overall employee well-being, leading to higher productivity, reduced absenteeism, and a more motivated workforce.



Social Policy

Ensuring alignment with labor laws and protecting worker rights is another focus of employment standards. These frameworks ensure compliance with national regulations and safeguard workers' rights, contributing to a stable and productive work environment. Standards help companies ensure that employees are treated fairly and that their rights are upheld, which, in turn, fosters a more engaged and satisfied workforce.

Employee benefits and social security are also covered under these standards. Minimum requirements for benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and retirement plans provide a safety net for workers, ensuring that their basic needs are met even in times of illness, injury, or retirement. These benefits contribute to overall job satisfaction and provide long-term security for employees.

Strengthening worker representation is another vital aspect. Standards encourage businesses to include worker representatives in decision-making processes, ensuring that employee voices are heard. This enhances employee engagement, fosters collaboration, and promotes mutual respect within organizations, leading to better social policies and improved workplace relations.

In addressing these challenges, the GQSP program provides critical support by helping businesses implement these employment and social standards. The impact of these efforts is seen in more equitable workplaces, improved health and safety conditions, and stronger worker protections. This contributes not only to employee well-being but also to the broader social and economic development of Albania, aligning the country with international labor and employment practices.





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ENTERPRISE AND INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Chapter 20: Enterprise and Industrial Policy

The challenge in Albania's enterprise and industrial policy is the need for a regulated and competitive business environment, where standards play a critical role. Standards provide a framework for regulating the quality and safety of products and services, which helps establish a predictable and transparent business environment. By adopting these frameworks, Albania can ensure consistency in product quality and align with international market demands.

GQSP addresses this challenge by fostering a better business environment through adherence to established standards. This compliance enhances consumer trust, boosts enterprise reputation, and increases customer satisfaction and loyalty. Consequently, a standards-based regulatory environment supports both short-term business success and long-term sustainability.

To attract domestic and foreign investments, GQSP promotes meeting international standards as a signal of high-quality production. Compliance with these standards makes enterprises more appealing to investors, facilitates access to foreign markets, and drives investment inflows.

For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), GQSP supports the adoption of standards, allowing them to compete on equal terms with larger companies. This compliance opens broader market opportunities and integrates SMEs into global supply chains, thereby strengthening their sustainability and growth prospects.

In terms of research and development (R&D), GQSP provides benchmarks that guide companies in improving product quality and fostering innovation. Standards offer clear objectives for R&D efforts, ensuring that innovations are competitive and compliant with international regulations. By encouraging entrepreneurship, GQSP helps innovators and entrepreneurs use standards as guidelines for developing new products and services. This alignment contributes to Albania's growing industrial base.

Furthermore, GQSP focuses on building administrative capacities required for the effective implementation and enforcement of standards. Regulatory bodies ensure that businesses comply with these standards, fostering accountability and consistency across industries.

Finally, the application of standards across various sectors helps promote uniform policies that support enterprise and industrial development, making standards a versatile tool for a wide range of products and services.





27 ENVIRONMENT

Chapter 27: Environment

Environmental protection is a crucial aspect of Albania's path to EU integration. Achieving sustainable economic growth and compliance with environmental regulations requires adherence to standards, certification, and strong conformity assessment practices across various sectors. These elements ensure that Albania effectively manages its natural resources while meeting international obligations. The challenge lies in establishing a regulatory framework that balances economic development with environmental sustainability.

Water and air quality are key areas where environmental standards play a significant role. Establishing clear benchmarks for pollutants in water bodies and the atmosphere is essential to safeguard ecosystems and public health. Environmental standards define acceptable pollutant levels, while regular conformity assessments ensure compliance. Businesses that obtain certification in areas such as water management or emissions control can demonstrate their commitment to meeting these environmental requirements, helping to mitigate environmental harm.

In waste management, effective practices depend on well-defined standards that regulate the handling, disposal, and treatment of waste materials. Certification programs encourage businesses to adopt responsible waste management practices, ensuring that waste is processed in a way that minimizes its impact on ecosystems. This not only protects natural environments but also contributes to broader efforts to reduce pollution and manage waste sustainably.

For chemicals and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), safe handling and regulation are critical. Specific standards govern labeling, packaging, and the assessment of these materials. By obtaining certification, companies can demonstrate their compliance with regulations designed to prevent harm to both the environment and human health. This is essential for reducing the risks associated with hazardous materials and promoting responsible environmental stewardship.

Nature conservation is another area where standards and certification are essential. Standards for conservation efforts help preserve biodiversity and protect endangered species and ecosystems. Certification in nature conservation allows companies and organizations to contribute to these efforts while meeting international sustainability criteria, ensuring long-term protection for valuable natural resources.

In forestry, sustainable practices are guided by standards that promote responsible logging, reforestation, and forest management. Certification under schemes like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) validates that forestry operations are sustainable and environmentally friendly. This helps to protect forest ecosystems for future generations, ensuring that Albania's natural resources are managed in a way that balances economic needs with environmental preservation.

Risk management is another critical area where environmental standards play a role. By integrating environmental standards into risk management processes, businesses can proactively address potential environmental hazards related to their activities. Adhering to these standards helps companies assess and mitigate risks such as spills, emissions, or deforestation, reducing the likelihood of environmental accidents and contributing to overall sustainability.

The administration and enforcement of environmental regulations are essential for effective environmental protection. A strong regulatory framework at both national and local levels is required to ensure compliance with environmental standards. Market surveillance allows authorities to monitor and enforce these regulations, ensuring that businesses operate within legal frameworks and adhere to environmental policies. This enforcement is vital for maintaining the integrity of environmental protection efforts and ensuring that economic activities do not compromise Albania's natural resources.

Through the support of the GQSP program, Albania addresses these challenges by promoting adherence to environmental standards, enhancing certification processes, and improving conformity assessment practices. The impact of these efforts is seen in improved water and air quality, responsible waste management, better handling of chemicals and GMOs, strengthened nature conservation efforts, sustainable forestry practices, proactive risk management, and effective regulatory enforcement. These measures not only protect Albania's environment but also support the country's economic integration with the EU by ensuring compliance with international environmental regulations

By focusing on these areas, the GQSP is instrumental in preparing Albania for EU integration, ensuring that its quality infrastructure, business practices, and regulatory environment are compatible with EU standards. This comprehensive approach not only enhances Albania's readiness for EU membership but also contributes to the country's overall sustainable development and economic growth.





A TRULY GLOBAL INITIATIVE

GQSP helps small producers to enhance the quality of their products, meet international standards and export around the world



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